Be sure to challenge and question media messages

CABLE CONNECTION

CAREN COLLINS

Do you know how to watch TV? Sure, you know how to grab the remote, plop down on your favorite chair and surf through "Cosby Show" reruns, "The Nightly News," "NYPD Blue" or "Days of Our Lives." But, do you know how to be an informed media consumer – or media literate, and why you should want to be?

Every time you see or hear a media message, you interpret and create personal meaning from it. If you are media literate, you can take it one step further: You are able to challenge and question the messages you are seeing and hearing. You can also control your own interpretation of what you see and hear.

Most of us are passive media viewers, but we don't have to be. We just have to know how to raise the right questions about what we are seeing. There are a few important things we all need to know about media messages, whether the message comes packaged as a TV sitcom, music video, video game or movie.

The most important thing to know is that most media messages are constructed by someone, or by a group of people. Think back to the last Ford commercial you saw. Do you know how it was created? Someone wrote the script, then someone else went out and taped the footage, and yet another person put the commercial together. The truth is, we only see what the creator of the commercial wants us to see. We don't get to see or hear the images that were not selected to be part of the commercial. What happened to the footage that was not selected? How would the message have been different if the other footage and images were included? Secondly, each media message is created using a unique set of rules, or conventions.

The next time you watch a horror movie, pay attention to when you hear the scary music. You will probably hear it just before something bad is about to happen. The music serves as a clue to the next part of the story. Or try counting the number of laugh tracks you hear in a sitcom, like "Friends" or "Roseanne." Notice that each time the studio audience laughs, it sounds the same. These bits of laughter are called laugh tracks and are meant to tell us that a particular part of the scene is supposed to be funny. How many times have you heard that "canned" laughter and didn't find the joke particularly funny, but the "studio" audience was laughing hysterically?

This is where the next important fact about media messages comes in. Everyone experiences the same media message differently. You may have laughed at a joke on a "Friends" episode, but your roommate didn't. We view the same media message differently depending on our age, education, and upbringing. You may even view the same news story differently than your family if it is about a topic that is important to you or even presented by someone you like or dislike.

Now that you know what to look for while watching TV, reading the newspaper or surfing the net, you can ask the following questions about each media message you see: Who created this message, and why are they sending it? What techniques are being used to attract my attention? How might different people understand this message differently than me? What is omitted from this message? When you have asked these questions about the message, you are able to interpret the message for what it is, and not be passively influenced by it. Once you are able to consciously interpret media messages, you can make educated choices about what messages you want to see and hear, and which you do not.

Unfortunately, this is a lot of information to include in a small space in a newspaper, but SWOCC can help you learn to understand media messages better. Call us to schedule a media literacy workshop for your group or organization. We offer several different types, and all deal with different types of media messages. Some of the workshop topics include instruction on how to deal with stereotypes in the media, how to watch television news, how to teach kids to be good media consumers, how to watch TV with the family and many others. We can also tailor a workshop to fit the needs of your group.

If you would like more information about these workshops, including how you can incorporate them into your group's mission, give us a call at (248) 473-7266 Ext. 14.

Caren Collins is executive director of the Southwestern Oakland Cable Commission. The next SWOCC meeting is 7 p.m. Tuesday, April 27, at Farmington City Hall. The next Access Forum begins at 7 p.m. Tuesday, May 4, at SWOCC.

Libertarians to meet April 28

Oakland County Libertarians will hear from the Federalist Society at the 6 p.m. dinner meeting Wednesday, April 28, in East Side Mario's, Southfield Road north of 12 Mile, Southfield.

Speaker will be Kenneth Chadwell, president of the Federalist Society and assistant U.S. attorney since 1990. Chadwell is a graduate of Wayne State University's law school.

Stop by OCC winter art show

Oakland Community College's Orchard Ridge Campus is presenting its Winter Student Art Show through April 30.

Located in the campus' Smith Theatre Gallery, the show will feature student work in a variety of mediums including paintings, drawings, sculpture, ceramics and jewelry.

Admission to the show is free and open to the public.

The Orchard Ridge Campus is at 27055 Orchard Lake Road, just south of I-696. Free parking is available in the campus lots near the Smith Theatre.

OBITUARIES

LILLIAN M. TOORONGIAN

Lillian Marlene Toorongian, 67, of Farmington Hills died April 15 in Howell.

Mrs. Toorongian worked for the FBI as a secretary at the Detroit Federal Building. She enjoyed golf.

She is survived by husband, Barkey; sons, Steven (Ann Marie), Jeffrey (Maureen) and David; sisters, Pauline (Ken) Sarut and Nettie Walters; and grandchildren, Jill, Colleen, and Derek.

Funeral services were held April 19 at Thayer-Rock Funeral Home in Farmington with the Rev. Chuck Sonquist officiating.

Memorial contributions may be sent to the Alzheimer's Association, 17220 W. 12 Mile, Suite 100 Southfield 48076.

OTTO W. H. RUMMEL

Otto William Henry Rummel, 88, of Southfield died April 15.

Mr. Rummel was a maintenance worker for Southfield Public Schools. He was a member of the Southfield Senior Citizens and played piano and Hawaiian guitar in a country western band. He also played on radio with the Tennessee Trailblazers.

He is survived by wife, Marjorie; son, Christian (Tina) of Southfield; brother, Walter; six grandchildren; and three great-grandchildren.

Funeral services were held April 19 at St. Paul Lutheran Church in Farmington Hills with the Rev. John Meyer officiating. Arrangements were made by Thayer-Rock Funeral Home in Farmington.

Memorial contributions may be sent to the Michigan Heart Association of Metropolitan Chicago 208 S. Lasalle St., Suite 900, Chicago, IL 60604-1197.

WILLIAM HALLER

William Haller, 75, of Farmington Hills died April 15 in Southfield.

He is survived by wife, Virginia; children, James (Kathleen), Patricia, Maureen, Catherine (Joe) Guzman, Leo (Donna), Mary (James) Mallett and William (Christy); one brother; and 10 grandchildren.

Funeral services were held April 19 at St. Gerald Catholic Church in Farmington. Arrangements were made by McCabe Funeral Home in Farmington.

Memorial contributions may be sent to Catholic Central High School.

JEANNETTE M. ZALEWSKI

Jeannette M. Zalewski, 60, formerly of Farmington Hills, died April 16 at Providence Hospital in Southfield.

Mrs. Zalewski was a deli clerk and cashier with Kroger for more than 30 years. She was a team member of the Celebrity Golf League for 15 years and enjoyed traveling.

She is survived by sons, Larry (Jane) and Terry (Laura) of Wayne; daughter, Sherry (Ed) Decker; mother, Frances Preniczky-Miser of Tarpon Springs, Fla.; brother, John (Thomasine); sister, Shirley (Enrico); and eight grandchildren.

Funeral services were held April 20 at Thayer-Rock Funeral Home in Farmington with the Rev. Leonard Partensky officiating.

ROLAND R. MCKEE

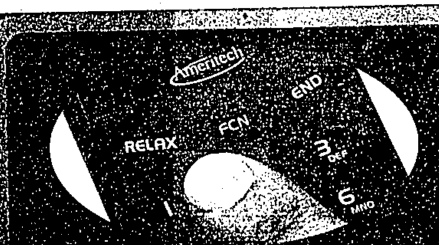
Roland Robert "Gabby" McKee, 83, of Farmington died April 15 at Providence Hospital.

Mr. McKee was a supervisor for Michigan Consolidated Gas Co. and a member of St. Gerald Catholic Church in Farmington.

He is survived by wife Elizabeth; children, Richard (Christine) and Lori (Terry) Respondek; brother, Raymond (Frances); and six grandchildren.

Funeral services were held April 19 at the Church of St. Alexander in Farmington Hills with the Rev. James Mayworm officiating. Arrangements were made by Heeney-Sundquist Funeral Home in Farmington.

Memorial contributions may be sent to St. Jude Children's Hospital or Karmanos Cancer Institute.



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