Critical Media Project

Why Media Matters: *Key facets of personal identity — like gender, social class, age, sexual orientation, race and ethnicity, religion, and disability — play prominent roles in the media we consume and create, determining how we see, understand, and experience the world and those we encounter in it.*

By Alison Trope & DJ Johnson

Critical Media Project (CMP) is an educational initiative grounded in social identity and justice. It is designed to identify and tackle systemic and normalized identity constructs that come to us through everyday life — specifically, our interactions with media. CMP introduces media norms and problematizes stereotypes; it contextualizes them historically and in relation to institutional structures; it opens up the possibility for counter-narratives.
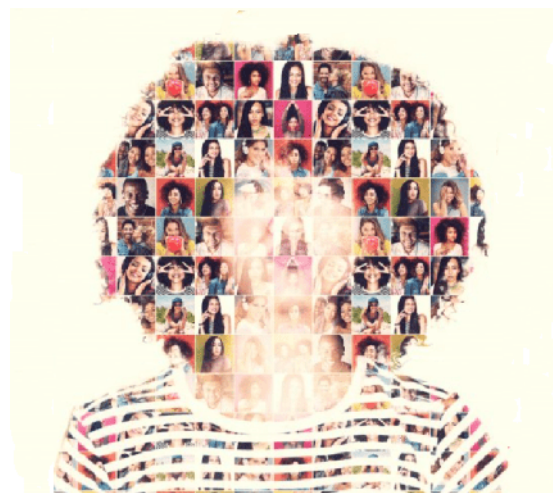
In turn, CMP gives youth opportunities to rewrite themselves and generate new perspectives that affirm their lived experiences and promote self-efficacy. Created to bring both critical pedagogy and critical media literacy into middle and high school classrooms, CMP puts theory into practice with functional, accessible tools and resources. CMP is founded on the principle that the best way to encourage critical media literacy is to provide the actual media examples for critical analysis, and use them as tools to identify, reorient, and challenge harmful representational practices and ideologies. In addition to critical analysis, the site therefore centers critical creation of media. CMP's website, supplemental curricula and programming help youth see and understand across differences, enhancing their perspectives on justice.

CMP originated as an online repository, providing a curated and accessible selection of media examples that educators and youth can use to critically analyze and discuss media representa-

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tions of social identities. The site focuses on seven broad identity categories: race and ethnicity, gender, LGBTQ+, socio-economic class, religion, ability, and age. Foregrounding the intersectional nature of identity, a single media artifact may be tagged with multiple subcategories of identity. The site's extensive collection of media includes over 700 examples from movies, television and streaming, advertisements, news and documentaries, online viral videos and user-generated content (also tagged by media type). The website archives a wide array of examples that are historically and culturally contextualized through descriptive annotations as well as questions to promote critical engagement. For each of the broad social identity categories, we also offer a text-based overview and lesson plan, as well as a curated playlist with select media examples.

While the site as a whole serves as a media repository open to teachers or youth, we also have developed curricula that align with our mission and provide opportunities for youth that align with emerging formulations of 21st century civic education and literacy. It is with this mindset of civic engagement tied to social justice that our youth think, create and collaborate. *The work of CMP creates multiple avenues to develop agency and voice amongst its youth through intersecting processes of critical digital consumption, critical digital production, and critical digital distribution.*

Hyperlinks for this article at https://bit.ly/47cSMA0

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Key Concepts

- Identity is a socially and historically constructed concept. We learn about our own identity and the identity of others through interactions with family, peers, organizations, institutions, media and other connections we make in our everyday life.
- Key facets of identity—like gender, social class, age, sexual orientation, race and ethnicity, religion, age and disability—play significant roles in determining how we understand and experience the world, as well as shaping the types of opportunities and challenges we face.
- Social and cultural identity is inextricably linked to issues of power, value systems, and ideology.
- The media uses representations—images, words, and characters or personae— to convey specific ideas and values related to culture and identity in society.