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Teen Identity and Marketing: Constructing Cool

By Barry Duncan and Carolyn Wilson



There can be little doubt about the importance of "coolness" to teens. Much of what it is to be cool is internalized from the values and attitudes of family and peers, but teens may also be influenced by the notions of coolness that are promoted by marketers. To help educators get kids to think about how coolness has been commodified in popular culture, this unit provides information about teen culture and its close relationship with target marketing, pop culture trends, the rise of celebrities and our lifestyle choices. The favorite categories for teen shopping are clothing (jeans and sneakers), entertainment (movies, music), food (fast food and groceries) and personal-care products.

Brands and Logos: They're Everywhere

Logos are everywhere, from the chain restaurants we eat in (The world's best-known commercial symbol is McDonald's golden arches) to the designer clothes we wear. Logos are inescapable and are an integral part of popular culture.



- What logos do you and your classmates wear? List them and discuss the results.
- What logos do your parents wear?
- What do you like and/or dislike about logos and designer clothing? Give some examples.
- "For many teens, logos are more important than what's underneath." "Brands are the new rock stars." To what extent are these comments true of your friends?
- What are the brand images associated with Nike, the Gap, Tommy Hilfiger, Levis, Polo, Calvin Klein?
- Working in groups, determine the characteristics of a good logo as well as an ineffective logo. Try creating an original brand. Share your examples.



"Corporations may manufacture products but consumers buy brands."

Brands and Branding

The brand is the essential meaning of a corporation and advertising is the method of conveying those meanings. What would be good examples of the essential meanings and emotions associated with a brand?

Effective brands deliver a messages clearly and quickly to their target demographic. They make concise statements and register an emotional response.

"The effect of advanced branding is to nudge the hosting culture into the background and make the brand the star. It is not to sponsor culture but to be the culture."

Naomi Klein, *No Logo*

Branding a product requires effective marketing skills and media savvy.

- Come up with a new product or a new venue (e.g. a restaurant) and try creating an effective brand.
- Include some examples of how you would create synergy through arranging extensive cross marketing deals. (TV, magazines, radio, sponsorships.)
- Design a logo that will be suitable for your brand image.

Follow the Logo

"Follow the logo" means locating the origin of production – often an Asian sweatshop – and joining many groups who monitor the success and failure of making corporations such as Nike morally accountable.



Cool Hunting and the Art of Being Cool



Most teens are obsessed with being cool: looking right, knowing how to use the latest slang, having the right friends, liking certain kinds of pop music and consumer goods and adopting a cool attitude. The media and popular culture and today's marketers are largely responsible for deliberately constructing images of cool, a quality that is inevitably very personal and subjective

- What is your response to the recent "For every Generation" campaign from The Gap which uses celebrities such as Lauren Hutton and Willie Nelson?
- Who or what do you consider cool? What do you believe constitutes a cool fashion look? cool music? cool atmosphere? Who is cool in the world of celebrities?
- Compile and explain your choices. Who is cool among your friends?

"Cool hunting" is all about tapping into the interests, mindsets and special perception of teens in order to predict the next big trend likely to become a marketing breakthrough. A "cool hunter" has to look in a lot of places to discover what is really cool. (See the PBS video *Merchants of Cool* – to be rebroadcast in late November 2002.)



Media Identity vs. Personal Identity

- Can coolness simply mean being true to yourself or is it all about hearing the same music and dressing like everybody else?
- Teens are quite prepared to dump on the media, yet still feel they have to conform and buy the newest fads. How would you reconcile these contradictory views?

You can contact Carolyn Wilson at carolyn.Wilson@hpcdsb.edu.on.ca.

Jamie Lee Curtis: Looking Real and taking the Consequences

Forty-three-year-old star Jamie Lee Curtis created a sensation in September thanks to her appearance in *More* magazine showing herself as she really is. In her words: "ve ry big breasts and a soft, fatty little tummy." The photo story showed her all gussied up, but was juxtaposed with pictures of her unadorned body. Wow! The truth will out. Revolutionary! "60 Minutes" took up the story. Who knows where all this truth-telling will end?





Source: *More*, September 2002

We have had so many stories of the mainstreaming of cosmetic surgery and retouching that this outing/public confessional might challenge women to part with all that artifice. Or possibly not. Join the discussion/debate below.

For Discussion and Debate:

- Research the precedents for women throwing aside their cosmetics on their 40th birthday. Examples include Lauren Hutton and Isabella Rosselini. Were there any bad consequences? What was gained?
- A cynic could say that Curtis showing her real body and coming out is nothing but a media publicity stunt. As she launches a new children's book, she stands to gain financially in this presentation of self enterprise.
- Feminism said "no more masks." Madonna said "we are nothing but masks." Madonna is the future of feminism. – Camille Paglia
- The Guardian called her stance "a sad piece of therapeutic exhibitionism."
- This is a benchmark of post modernism: "a moment in which feminine artifice, and its enabler, insecurity, are bravely being tossed aside." – Karen Von Hahn, *The Globe & Mail*.

Some Relevant Footnotes on Gender Representation

A reporter from *Vanity Fair* told the *Globe & Mail* in August about the beautiful celebrities he peddles on the cover of the magazine. "Most of them are 27-years-old and they spend most of their time in a trailer. They don't read much. They're nice people and I think, why beat up on some poor little movie star? They're like baby seals. I'd rather take a club at someone bigger."

The current issue of *Sports Illustrated* has taken on the sex-kitten marketing of female tennis players. The problem is that their choice for "leading sex star" image is Anna Kournikova, who has had a disappointing career. Where is the next site of struggle?



John Pungente, Toronto's Popular Culture Jesuit



Those of us who have come to know John Pungente SJ in the last 15 years have much to celebrate. When John arrived in Toronto in 1985, we were rather insular in our media education perspectives. Soon, thanks to John's contacts, we started to think globally, turning to the important thinkers outside North America such as Len Masterman (UK), Robyn Quin and Barrie McMahon (Australia).

More important was the legacy accruing from his demanding Jesuit discipline – handy for keeping us on track in executive meetings of the Association for Media Literacy and essential for starting conferences sharp at 9 a.m.

After teaching and serving as the principal of St Paul's School in Winnipeg, he was called by the Jesuit Governing Council to investigate the status of media education around the world. Moving to Toronto to help set up the Jesuit Communication Project, John's achievements (let's face it; he is a workaholic) are considerable: running two major media ed conferences, the largest ever held, including the last one, Summit 2000; presenting keynote addresses and offering innumerable workshops around the world; serving as secretary to the Association for Media Literacy; and publishing several books including the critically acclaimed *More than Meets the Eye: Watching Television Watching Us*.

More recently, much of his energy is spent on hosting *Scanning the Movies* (On the Bravo Canada channel), a critical look at recent feature films, from *Harry Potter* to *White Oleander*. Among the satisfactions in this assignment: interviewing Robin Williams and, above all, Sarah Michelle Geller who stars in John's favourite show, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. (Even if you are a Jesuit, you are bound to have some guilty pleasures.)

Because of the depth and breadth of John experience and knowledge, I'm going to feature this interview in two parts. This month, John discusses his evolution as a media educator. Next month, John will share his thoughts on the present state of media education.

B.D. I recall watching a video project involving the music of the Beatles that was used as part of your Master's thesis at San Francisco State back in the 1960's. I even saw a photograph of you sporting sideburns. To what extent could you be described as a Jesuit hippie?

J.P. I've just finished reading a detective novel where the main character is told that the reason he – a Jewish atheist bigoted hardened cop (which is how he describes himself) – is able to talk to a Jesuit priest is because one of the Jesuits' major rules is that they are to be "all things to all men." I always laugh when I read what fiction writers think are the principles that guide Jesuits. Does that mean that if I were that Jesuit, that I would be "a Jewish atheist bigoted hardened cop"? Hardly. No more than I "became" a hippie just because I had sideburns (and you missed the Afro!) There is another supposed Jesuit saying: "Go in their door but come out your own."

I was studying film in San Francisco at the height of the 60's hippie movement and yes I did get tear gassed trying to go to classes and yes I did go to the Fillmore and the Avalon on many nights to see groups like Janis Joplin, the Cream, the Airplane, Jimmy Hendrix, the Doors, Country Joe etc. (and not only developed a love of that music but also learned first hand about the effects of second hand smoke – without inhaling!) I also went to Bobby Kennedy's rally in San Francisco the night before he was murdered and I even marched for peace with George McGovern.

But at all times I remained, as I do now, a Jesuit. And everyone knew that then as they do now. There is also another – and a final – Jesuit saying that may apply here, that Jesuits are to be in the world but not of it.

B.D. What are the advantages of being a Jesuit pursuing the fine nuances of mass media? Can this also be a liability?



J.P. In 1973, about a year after I was appointed the chair of the Manitoba Film Classification Board, the head of one of the major motion picture companies requested a meeting with me in Toronto. He was not happy with the way I was classifying his pictures. He wanted me to attend one of his business lunches so that he could deal with me along with several other problems at once. We had never met. I arrived early for the lunch in a private dining room and was standing there chatting with about ten other people when the man himself came in late chomping on a cigar. He looked around – didn't see anything resembling a priest and said something to the effect that "if that (expletives deleted) ever gets here we can get this lunch started and I can kick his butt." Let's just say that instead of getting "dealt with" he was so embarrassed that I was able to get his agreement on several issues regarding classification.

Is being a Jesuit who doesn't always wear a collar an advantage or a liability? Does the incident I just described say anything one way or the other?

What I am sure is that the Germans were the first people to introduce media education when they began publishing daily papers in the 17th century and took those papers to the classroom so that students could learn in the context of their own society as reported in the papers.

What I am sure is that the Catholic church was among the first groups in the 20th century to encourage media literacy – in 1938, Pius XI wrote an encyclical (a letter to all Catholics) urging them to ensure that the young were taught about the motion pictures, since movies were so much a part of their lives. He neither condemned nor praised film.

And that is part of what I – as a Jesuit media educator – try to do: to give people the tools to deal with the mass mediated world in which we all live. It is not my task to condemn nor to praise the media as such. Based on this I guess you could say – in secular terms – that I try to do something similar to what the great film critic, Pauline Kael wrote about the role of a "critic"

" . . . to help people see what is in the work, what is in it that shouldn't be in it, and what is not in it that could be. He is a good critic if he helps people understand more about the work than they could see for themselves; he is a great critic, if by his understanding and feeling for the work, by his passion, he can excite people so that they want to experience more of the art that is there, waiting to be seized."

It's only part of media literacy, I know, but it is a starting point – and not only for Jesuits.

B.D. As a teacher and later as a principal at St. Paul's High School, the Jesuit run secondary school in Winnipeg, you taught a media studies course. Tell me about that course and how it influenced your views of studying the media with students?

J.P. The year is 1964, the place is a basement drama storage room in Winnipeg. About 20 students would gather on Sunday mornings to watch 16mm prints of such movies as *Hud* and *Lord of the Flies*. I was a young Jesuit and – as was common practice in those days – was told only a month before school started what I would be teaching and doing. The principal told me that I would be teaching Grade 9 Latin, Grade 10 Religion, Grade 11 and 12 English, directing the school plays, moderating the newspaper and the yearbook and – oh yes – because of my interest in film, running a film society which, if successful, might grow into an elective course.

And it then became sort of like *Topsy* and just grew on its own. The principal attended some of the sessions and must have liked what he saw because the next year I was told that I could offer a Grade 9 and 10 Film course – Grades 11 and 12 came a year later. I had to devise my own course. The Grade 9's would go from the very beginnings of film to the talkies; the coming of sound till the end of World War II would be the material for the 10's. The kids would also produce their own 8mm films and edit them on some very primitive equipment that the school bought.

I learned so much from the kids about how to and how not to teach media. And I also learned that there is no greater thrill for a media teacher than seeing an understanding of what film is all about suddenly light up the eyes of the students. The understanding that there is more to movies than



action scenes, that there is a reason why a camera is in this place and not that, that there is a reason why there are scriptwriters, that actors are more than just stars who go to a lot of parties and lead weird lives, and that film can do more than just entertain.

The Grade 9's, who at the beginning of the year balked at the thought of seeing movies with no sound were, by the end of the year, laughing at the amazing humour of Buster Keaton in *The General* and telling me that it was funnier than any Hollywood film – and they could tell me why.

The Grade 10's who stumbled their way through the first talkie, the *Jazz Singer*, could, by the end of the year, discuss not only enthusiastically but intelligently what it was that made *Citizen Kane* one of the greatest films of all times (and all this was reflected in the movies they made).

B.D. You were a member of the Manitoba Censor board. What did you gain from that role?

J.P. In 1972, the NDP government in Manitoba decided to move from film censorship to film classification. This was – in those days – considered a radical move. It was decided that the NDP could cover itself by having a priest chair the new board. I had all sorts of great ideas of applying what would be media literacy to what we were going to do.

All of that really got put to the test I sat down to classify my first film. Two other board members – a nun and the wife of a friend of mine – were with me as the lights went down and the typical opening of the very first skin flick I had ever seen appeared on the screen. I had forgotten that we were to classify all the films that were to be shown commercially, which included a lot of soft core "baby blue" movies.

I learned a lot about the film industry and I hope that the film industry came to understand classification. We came to an agreement that they would not show "R" rated films at drive-ins, would put warnings about language and violence in newspaper ads, and would agree that I would do brief summaries of each film together with the reason for the classification and publish this in a weekly newspaper column.

B.D. Could you describe some of more satisfying projects emanating from the Jesuit Communication Project?

J.P. When the JCP was founded in 1984, I was asked to run the media literacy activities. I had just come back from London which had served as a home base for a two-year study the Jesuits had asked me to do about media literacy around the world. Once I met up with Barry Duncan and the other members of the AML, things started to happen all at once and never seemed to have stopped.

Working together with many other people across the country, so much has been done about media literacy. This includes:

- Working to ensure that media literacy is in the curriculum of all provinces as a mandated part of language arts.
- Helping to organize of conferences in Trent, Guelph, internationally, and – the biggest of all – Summit 2000.
- Adapting an Australian textbook, *Meet the Media*, so that there would be a text for middle school.
- Being part of the development of the Ontario Media Literacy Resource Guide.
- Helping in the formation of the Media Awareness Network in Ottawa.
- Developing the popular *Scanning Television* kits – both the original and the second edition – with filmmaker Gary Marcuse.
- Teaching summer schools and doing presentation across Canada, in the US, Australia, England, Japan.
- Serving as President of the Canadian Association of Media Education Organizations (CAMEO).
- Building the JCP library of some 4,000 books on the media.



- Developing and hosting *Scanning the Movies* for Bravo! Now in its 6th season, there are 40 half-hour media literacy programs available along with the great study guides written by Neil Andersen. The wonderful thing about the show is that through it, media literacy can reach a huge audience on a monthly basis.
- And one of the major accomplishments of the JCP has been to show that it is possible for media educators to partner with the media without compromising either. The JCP first worked with CHUM TV on the first *Scanning Television* kit and found a mutual interest between CHUM and media literacy.

For a number of years now, CHUM TV has shown their commitment to media literacy all across Canada in many ways, ranging from sponsorship of conferences and courses (they were the sole sponsor of the media education section of Summit 2000), to production of programs for use in media literacy classes (like programs on MuchMusic and *Scanning the Movies* on Bravo!), to commissioning study guides for many of its programs which appeal to young people, to funding teacher training programs, and to offering support to groups and individuals working in media literacy.

Most recently CHUM TV entered in partnership with the London Public Library to establish North America's first library based media literacy centre. In September, the federal government recognized this partnership as one of three innovative "Community Partnerships" across Canada.

Next Month: John's thoughts on Media Education

A Media Literacy Journey in a School of Education

By Stephanie Flores

While teaching high school I decided to further my education and pursue the penultimate degree, a Ph.D. I knew it would be in education (curriculum and instruction) since teaching is so important to me, but deciding on a particular academic focus early in the process, I found, was also a significant decision. I had already been dabbling in media literacy – before really knowing the term – within workshops and in my own teaching. I felt a passion for the topic, and so, media literacy it was.



Pursuing this focus in schools of education would not be an easy endeavor. Teacher education faculty in various well-known institutions where I applied found the topic quite interesting, but they admitted that I would not receive much mentorship in this academic area.

Ultimately I chose the Lynch School of Education at Boston College for their flexibility and my access to a tremendous wealth of academic resources in the Boston area. I took the curriculum and instruction requirements in the school of education and wrote papers on topics such as "media literacy research in education" and "in-school commercialism." I also took visual literacy courses with Ann Marie Barry in BC's communications department, worked with the PBS station WGBH's Teacher Center, and became a Felton Media Literacy Scholar, studying with Renee Hobbs at nearby Babson College. Through my own creative curriculum-building process and the research I conducted, I found that media literacy's dearth in U.S. teacher education was a glaring concern, which is why I made it the topic for my dissertation.

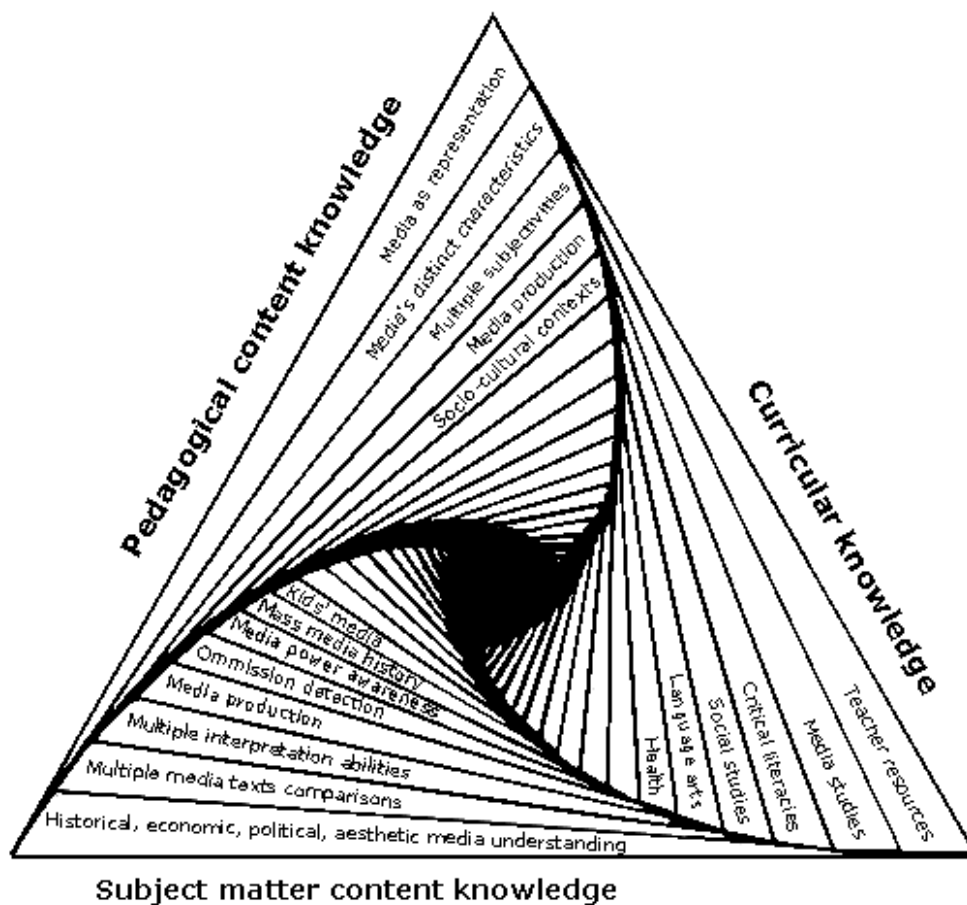
For my dissertation I examined the lives of twenty-five undergraduate elementary education majors to discover their histories and consumption, current knowledge and beliefs (critical and otherwise) regarding the mass media and popular culture – both at home and at school – and how that knowledge may or may not be integrated into their future teaching. The purpose of this



study was to develop a baseline that might help encourage the inclusion of media literacy education in U.S. teacher education, and subsequently, in K through 12 settings as well.

I supported my study by showing that the media and popular culture are a pervasive and persuasive force in our society. After laying out a description of media literacy education, I illustrated that the presence of this field in K through 12 schools here is limited – despite elements of it in 48 out of 50 states' curricula. Additionally, I showed that it is even less visible in schools of education. Utilizing an on-line descriptive survey with the large group, and in-depth interviews and discussion groups with a subgroup of five as data, this study, using critical ethnographic methods, introduced themes to encourage the expansion of the field of media literacy education into teacher education. In particular, I found that pre-service teachers considered themselves low media consumers at home who did not experience critical media analysis in school, which could have interesting implications for their teaching, particularly their teaching of media literacy. Their analytical abilities were strong in terms of spotting certain underlying values in media; however, they lacked a consideration for aesthetic and economic dynamics of mass media. They felt that the media are quite an influential force in everyone's life – particularly in children's lives – and so they felt that parents' awareness and involvement are crucial, but lacking. In terms of their future teaching of critical media literacy, they showed a basic awareness of the field, a strong desire, and budding pedagogical skills.

With these basic findings I then created a conceptual model that might help teacher education departments integrate media literacy education within their existing curricula, and as well provide paths for future research.



As a new assistant professor of education at Loyola College in Maryland, I plan to integrate elements of media literacy in the courses I teach based on my dissertation findings. Thus, follow-up studies can evolve. Additionally, I will continue this conversation in teacher education forums outside my college so that hopefully, future U.S. teacher education students will engage in the pedagogy and curriculum of media literacy education, as will their future students.

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Media Clips

From mediapost.com:



More Kids on Cell Phones

Four out of 10 American kids own some kind of wireless device, up sharply from last year. More kids own a cell phone than any other device, but ultra-light laptops have also become popular. The number of kids aged 4 to 18 who own at least one mobile device grew from 32 per cent last year to 43 per cent this year. Devices include cell phones, Palms, PocketPCs, pagers and ultra-light laptops.

Recommended Resources

Fences and Windows: Dispatches from the Front Lines of the Globalization Debate

Naomi Klein, Random House, Vintage Books, 2002

At 31-years-old, Naomi Klein has had a short but memorable career. *No Logo*, published in 1999, became a bestseller around the world. Clearly she was the right person at the right time. (The snarky, tall poppies cognoscenti have dubbed her the champagne princess.) *No Logo* was, above all, a tribute to her extensive research, and superb journalistic talent. In my view her book is the most important study of global phenomena which tease out new paradigms for media studies. As the unofficial spokesperson for the anti-globalization movement, she has dedicated her last three years to helping activists become better in their radical critiques and in their style of protesting.



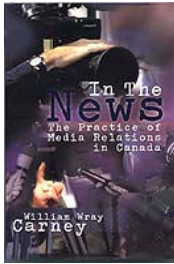
Fences and Windows begins with Kleins' admonishment, that her new book is not a follow-up to *No Logo*. Rather it is, as appropriately subtitled, "Dispatches from the Front Lines of the Globalization Debate" – largely *Globe & Mail* columns from the last two years, together with some longer pieces from magazines like *The Nation*. As such, the book is a series of fragments, some of them rather dated. Nonetheless, there is still plenty of good material here especially in the concluding section, "Windows to Democracy." With the anti-globalization movement gaining ground, we will need Naomi Kleins's advice and analysis. Her Web site is outstanding. (Check it out at: <http://www.nologo.org>.)

One might conclude that she has almost become a brand.



In The News: The Practice of Media Relations in Canada

William Wray Carney, University of Alberta Press, 2002.



The book fills a major gap – at least in Canada – for media relations practitioners in general and for journalism/communications students in particular. This is the stuff you don't learn unless you go behind the scenes, witness a press scrum or see how a PR flak from a corporation puts a positive spin on a crisis that the public might otherwise think about unfavorably. The author William Carney is an experienced journalist who is fully conversant with the ways newspapers write stories, how government officials explain new policies to the press and how we can stay on guard for other journalistic shenanigans. In the introduction Carney states:

"I also hope in this book to provoke deeper thought about the ongoing debate on the nature of news and the future of news gathering and reporting."

The author chooses to tell us how the system works as distinct from telling us if it desirable in the first place. It is hardly a radical critique, but should not be faulted for not taking a Chomskyite view of how news is created. Throughout, there is plenty of good advice, e.g. "Don't fall prey to bureaucratese! Always bear in mind that mainstream media write at about the grade eight level" and "When you are offered a leading question, stick to your agenda, not the reporter's."

Media teachers often stay clear of, or are ignorant of, the kind of media practices foregrounded in this book. In 225 pages, Carney has packed a wealth of information, providing us with the essential survival skills to communicate with the media world and its practitioners. For this we should be grateful.

Upcoming Events

Literacy and Liberty: Rights, Roles and Responsibilities in a Media Age

National Media Education Conference 2003

June 28-July 1, 2003

Wyndham Inner Harbor Hotel

Baltimore, Maryland

<http://www.amlainfo.org>

If you would like to make a presentation be sure to ask for the downloadable application form from AMLA, due at the end of October.

Barry Duncan is an award-winning teacher, author, consultant and founder and past president of the Ontario-based Association for Media Literacy. Co-author of the best selling text book, *Mass Media and Popular Culture*, he has presented workshops and keynote addresses to thousands of teachers in Canada and around the world. You can contact Barry at baduncan@interlog.com.

