

Content and Representation in the Media

Constructing gender, ethnicity and class

Name and date begun:

Time allocation:

2 lessons

Learning objectives:

- Students should understand that gender, ethnicity and class are social constructions which may or may not reflect the ideologies of the media companies.
- Are images constructed to reflect a media hegemony in that there is a deliberate conspiracy to control and dominate?
- Do the concepts of gender, ethnicity and class merely reflect the interests and prejudices of the audiences who buy newspapers and watch television?

Key Concepts and vocabulary

See your lesson notes for a list of ideologies and philosophies. These must be learned in addition to the following:

- Social construction
- Gender
- Ethnicity
- Social class
- Agenda setting
- Gatekeeping
- Representation
- Discourse
- Dumbing-down

Additional reading and references

Graeme Burton (1998) *Access to Sociology: Media and Popular Culture* Chapter 6 page 84 ff. Good theory, but thin on gender

Paul Trowler (1996) *Sociology in Action: Investigating the Mass Media (2nd Edition)* Chapters 9, 10 and 11 - all you will ever need and more!

Personal Development ideas

- Attempt your own content analysis of television advertising or of soap opera to recognise stereotyping in action.
- Read through popular magazines such as *Loaded* and *FHM* or *Sugar* and *Bliss*. Identify representations of gender, class and ethnicity.
- Collect information from the Internet where there is a vast amount of discussion. Look for Sarah Zupko's cultural studies site and follow some of her links.

Overview of the debate

- Can the media be trusted to be unbiased in their representations of 'minorities'?
- To what extent is bias determined by the make-up of the controllers of the industries?
- Do these simplified representations affect the social behaviour of people?
- Do media companies produce what we want?

Revision tips

- Be sure that you fully understand the key concepts of **representation**, **gender**, **ethnicity** and **social class**. Refer back to **symbolic interactionalism** for consideration of stereotypes.
- Revise and clarify your notes on **content analysis** as a sociological methodology. Make sure that you are aware of more than one study as a preparation for methodology questions.
- Make sure that you are fully aware of the work of Stuart Hall and others on ethnicity and that your notes are excellent. Refer to Mahmood and the 'black' debate in Haralambos.

What you should have in your folder when this work has been completed correctly:

- A clear explanation of each of the glossary terms
- Acceptable lesson notes.

An essay to the question:

Do the media present a realistic impression of women (or social class, or ethnicity)?