International School

Media

6.4 Media representations of class, gender, ethnicity and age groups

How different groups are represented in media: Class

- Working class is represented through a narrow range of identities:
  - **Historical:** servitude, poverty and criminality
  - **Contemporary:** social problematic behaviour - crime, welfare dependency, unemployment, violence and casual sex.

- Recurrent themes (news reports, entertainment shows):
  - Dangerous - people to be feared of because of their unpredictability
  - Problematic - involvement in illegal/immoral behaviours
  - Dependent on state and generosity of middle and upper classes

- Middle class representation is broder: professional employment and cultural associations

- The Glasgow's Media Group's study

How different groups are represented in media: Class

- **Ehrenreich** argues that, for the media, to be working class means being:

  - Inarticulate, old-fashioned, uneducated, lazy and incapable

- She suggests that these representations silence working class voices (metaphorically and literally)

- For higher classes, problematic behaviour (greed, selfishness, criminality) is represented as indicative of individual human weaknesses rather than symbolic of a whole class.

- The 2008 global financial crisis

How different groups are represented in media: Gender

- Stereotypes relating to masculinity and femininity focus on physical and emotional.

- Physical representations of bodies
  - How they have changed
  - How they have not changed

- Body representation forms part of a wider set of ideas about beauty, attractiveness, how women should look and behave.

- **Mulvey (1975):** female beauty is both hetero sexual and largely for the benefit of the **male gaze**. It **objectifies** females seeing them only as objects of desire.

How different groups are represented in media: Gender

- **Grant et al. (2006):** women face a jeopardy of age and gender discrimination that has a different impact on women of different ages.
  - Younger women - pressure how to look, dress and behave
  - Older women - suffer from reduced identity once they lose certain characteristics

- Broder assumptions about male and female behaviour:
  - Women should be cooperative and submissive, if not - figures of fun or deviant sexuality - **Macdonald** (ladettes)

- Gender representations are not entirely static - women vs. men representation and how they changed

How different groups are represented in media: Ethnicity

- **Hall (1995):** while overt racism is no longer tolerated, it has been replaced by inferential racism - black ethnicities are represented in ways that stress their culture, rather than biological difference.

- Minorities are represented as a source of social problems rather than victims:

  - Over representation: both guilty (perpetrators) and victims - **binary opposition** (a pair of contrasting representations)

  - Under-representation: advertising and drama.

- **Carrington (2002):** white gaze extends to apparently positive black images (sport) - representations of hyper-blackness
- **Otherness** + cultural and physical threats

How different groups are represented in media: Age

- Ownership and control: middle-aged, middle class and male - representation of young through and 'adult gaze'. Children:

  - innocent and uncorrupted nature

  - Unruly, lacking self-control, requiring adult discipline and guidance

- In relation to internet - adult technological fear results in children being seen as victims of their own lack of control and discipline - this leads to moral panics.

- **Pearson (1983):** moral panics about the behaviour of young people and technology have been a persistent feature of media representations over the past century, involving traits such as: rebellion, disrespect, selfishness and obsession with self and sex.

How different groups are represented in media: Age

- Older people represented in a narrow range of roles with a particular emphasis on social problems. What are those?

- Their representation is largely unsympathetic> senility, illness and unattractiveness

- In TV dramas they are portrayed as grumpy, interfering, lonely, stubborn, not interested in sex and miserable.

- Older people watch more television than other social groups so they demand programming that reflects their interests.

The Institute for Fiscal Studies (2006): 80% of wealth in the UK is held by those aged 50+ and the 'global grey pound' (the spending power of older people) is attractive to advertisers who fund large areas of the media.

Ways that media contribute to gender socialisation

- Secondary socialisation: folk tales and children's stories - stereotyped roles or limited roles of women

- Studies of the influence of magazines on women and girls:

  - **Marjorie Ferguson (1983):** magazines socialise women into 'cult of femininity' by focusing on topics such as beautification, child-rearing, housework.

  - **Angela McRobbie (1981):** magazines rely on formula of written stories, photo-stories and problem pages. Central message is that girls should focus on capturing and thinking about boys. (male - dominant, female - passive)

- Change: old cartoons vs more recent films

- Gender identity is not influenced by media only - other agents of socialisation include family, peers and school)

Moral panics around class, gender, ethnicity and age groups

- Class: welfare claimants described as scroungers

- Gender: youth groups

- Ethnicity: gangs and knife crimes associated with Afro-Caribbean youth + Muslims

- Age: youth subcultures

The relationship between the media and popular culture

- Popular Culture - Frankfurt School - totalitarian societies

  - Geographic isolation - lack of daily face-to-face contact

  - Social isolation - lack of participation in larger groups and failure to develop strong community ties

  - Limited social interaction - people see themselves as anonymous individuals who are not part of functioning social group

- Mass culture is created through media so it can be manipulated to reflect the interests of a ruling class

- High culture vs popular culture