

Cambridge AS & A Level · Sociology 9699 · Notes

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

A2

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Read first: [Theories of the media and influences on media content](#), [The process of learning and socialisation](#)

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What you need to know

By the end of this topic you should be able to explain and evaluate:

1. **How different social groups are represented in the media:** social classes, men and women, ethnic groups, and age groups (children, young people, older people). Who appears, in what roles, and in what light.
2. **How the media contributes to gender socialisation:** how media images teach children and adults what it means to be a man or a woman.
3. **Moral panics about class, gender, ethnicity and age groups:** how the media can whip up exaggerated public fear about a group, and what follows.
4. **How the media and popular culture are related:** how the media produces, spreads and shapes popular culture, and how popular culture shapes the media.

A **representation** is the way the media portrays a group, idea or event: what it picks, leaves out and stresses. A **stereotype** is a simplified, fixed image of a group, applied to all its members. Why media content looks the way it does (owners, journalists, news values, audiences) is covered in *Theories of the media and influences on media content*; whether audiences are changed by what they see is the next topic, *Different models of media effects*.

Every tagged exam question on this topic so far has been a 35-mark Paper 4 essay, and six of the seven were about **women and gender**. Class, ethnicity, age, moral panics and popular culture are all syllabus outcomes too, so learn them; they also give you evidence and comparisons for the gender essays.

Understand it

Why representations matter

Most of what we know about groups we never meet comes from the media. If a group is shown again and again in the same narrow way, that image can come to seem natural and true. Sociologists ask three questions about any representation:

1. **Who is visible?** Under-representation is itself a message: a group that rarely appears seems unimportant.
2. **How are they shown?** In what roles, with which traits, as heroes, victims, villains or jokes?
3. **Who benefits?** Whose interests does the picture serve, and who made it?

Each theory answers the third question differently.

Theory	Why groups are represented as they are
Marxism	Media owned by the capitalist class spreads ruling-class ideology : it makes inequality look natural and fair, and blames the poor and minorities for social problems (divide and rule)
Feminism	Media made mostly by men reflects patriarchal values: women are shown as objects, carers or decoration, men as active and in charge
Pluralism	Content reflects what audiences want to buy and advertisers want to reach; as audiences change, representations change
Postmodernism	There is now so much media that no single image dominates; people pick and mix identities from many representations
Interactionism	Representations are labels : they simplify, and can produce the very behaviour they describe (self-fulfilling prophecy, amplification)

Practical reasons matter too. **News values** reward conflict, negativity and drama, so groups appear in the news mainly when something goes wrong. Stereotypes are **quick**: a writer can signal a character in seconds. And the people who **make** the media (editors, writers, executives) have historically been mostly white, male and middle class.

Gender

How women have been represented

1. **Missing or minor.** **Gaye Tuchman** (1978) described the **symbolic annihilation** of women: they are **omitted** (left out), **trivialised** (shown as unimportant) or **condemned** (criticised when they step outside traditional roles). The Global Media Monitoring Project found that in **2020** women were only about **25%** of the people seen, heard or read about in the news worldwide.

2. A narrow set of roles. Women have been shown mainly as wives, mothers, carers, girlfriends and sex objects; men as workers, experts and decision makers. **Marjorie Ferguson** (*Forever Feminine*, 1983) studied women's magazines and found a **cult of femininity**: the same themes over and over, namely finding and keeping a man, being a perfect wife and mother, and improving your looks. **Angela McRobbie's** study of the teenage magazine *Jackie* (1978) found girls being taught that romance, fashion and beauty were what mattered. **Guy Cumberbatch** (1990), studying TV adverts, found men appeared far more often than women, women in adverts were usually younger and more conventionally attractive than the men, and the authoritative voice-over was usually a man's.

3. Judged by their bodies. **Laura Mulvey** (1975) argued that films are shot through the **male gaze**: the camera looks at women as men would, lingering on their bodies, so women are objects to be looked at while men act. **Naomi Wolf** (*The Beauty Myth*, 1990) argued that the media sets an impossible ideal of slimness, youth and beauty that keeps women anxious, spending and less powerful. Edited images and beauty filters on social media extend this.

4. Different media, different pictures. Representations vary by genre, outlet and country. Tabloid newspapers have traditionally been more sexualised than quality papers; some women's magazines and drama series now centre independent, career-focused women.

How men have been represented

Men are stereotyped too. **Raewyn Connell** (*Masculinities*, 1995) called the dominant ideal **hegemonic masculinity**: tough, competitive, unemotional, heterosexual and in control. **Antony Easthope** (*What a Man's Gotta Do*, 1986) found popular media celebrating men as strong, aggressive and self-reliant. Men are typically breadwinners, action heroes, sports fans and leaders. Fathers in comedy are often shown as useless at housework and childcare, which also reinforces the idea that these are women's jobs.

Has it changed?

There is good evidence of change.

- **New producers.** Women now create content directly on YouTube, Instagram and TikTok, and run campaigns against sexism: Laura Bates's **Everyday Sexism Project** (from **2012**) and **#MeToo** (from **2017**) used social media to expose harassment, including inside the media industry itself.
- **Wider roles.** **David Gauntlett** (*Media, Gender and Identity*, 2002) argued that modern media shows women as confident, independent and successful, and men as more caring and less certain, so traditional images now sit beside many alternatives. **Helen Wilkinson** (1994) described a **genderquake**: a shift in young women's values towards independence, which the media both reflects and spreads.
- **Rules and pressure.** *The Sun* stopped printing topless "Page 3" models in **January 2015** after a long campaign. The UK's Advertising Standards Authority banned adverts with **harmful gender stereotypes** (for example a man failing at a simple household task because he is a man) from **June 2019**.
- **The market.** Women make or influence a large share of spending, so advertisers lose money by insulting them. Dove's "Campaign for Real Beauty" (from **2004**) used women of different sizes, ages and ethnicities, and many brands followed.

But there is also good evidence that change is limited or only skin-deep.

- **Postfeminism. McRobbie** (*The Aftermath of Feminism*, 2009) argued that today's "empowered" woman is still judged by her looks and consumption: freedom is shown as the freedom to shop, diet and look sexy. A new image can be "positive" and still be a stereotype (the superwoman who has a career, a family and a perfect body).
- **Who decides.** Men still hold most senior jobs in media companies, and radical feminists argue that this is why male priorities set the agenda.
- **Online misogyny.** Social media has also spread "**manosphere**" influencers who promote male dominance; Andrew Tate was removed from the major platforms in **2022** only after his videos had reached millions of boys and young men. Women who speak out online face harassment.
- **Still visible in numbers:** the 25% figure above is from 2020, after decades of change.

Feminist views compared. **Liberal feminists** see the problem fading as more women work in the media and laws change. **Radical feminists** see media sexism as part of patriarchy that changes form rather than disappearing. **Socialist (Marxist) feminists** link it to profit: sexualised images sell products and magazines. **Postmodernists** (and Gauntlett) reply that audiences pick and mix identities rather than absorbing one image.

The media and gender socialisation

Gender socialisation is the process by which people learn the behaviour their society expects of their sex (see *The process of learning and socialisation*). The media is a **secondary agent** of socialisation alongside school, peers and religion, and for many children it is with them for hours every day.

The media teaches gender in five main ways:

1. **Role models and imitation.** **Albert Bandura's** social learning theory (1977) says children copy behaviour they see rewarded. Children see heroes, princesses, sportsmen and influencers, and learn which behaviour wins approval for their sex.
2. **Toys and advertising.** Adverts aimed at children divide products by colour and activity: pink dolls, make-up and caring toys for girls; construction, vehicles and weapons for boys.
3. **Stories.** Children's films and books often give boys the adventure and girls the romance. A study of Disney princess films by **England, Descartes and Collier-Meek** (2011) found the earliest princesses mostly passive and domestic, with later ones more active and brave, but romance still central.
4. **Magazines and social media for teenagers.** McRobbie's *Jackie* and Ferguson's cult of femininity show teenage girls being taught what to care about; today's beauty influencers and filters teach the "right" body and face, while gaming and sports content often teach boys hegemonic masculinity.
5. **Normalising a division of labour.** Adverts showing women cleaning and cooking, and men as experts, present the domestic division of labour as natural.

Evaluation. The media is one agent among many: family and peers usually matter more. Audiences are **active**: **Stuart Hall's** encoding/decoding model (1973) says audiences may accept, negotiate or reject the intended meaning. Children also see many contradictory images, so postmodernists argue they build their

own identity from a mix. Measuring the media's own effect, separate from all other influences, is very hard.

Social class

- **The upper class** is often shown favourably or as glamorous: royal weddings, lifestyle shows about wealthy homes, celebrities' lives. **Tom Nairn** (*The Enchanted Glass*, 1988) argued that coverage of the British royal family presents them as a symbol of the nation, hiding class privilege.
- **The middle class** is the media's "normal": most presenters, journalists and drama characters live middle-class lives, and middle-class concerns (house prices, schools, careers) fill lifestyle sections.
- **The working class** is under-represented and, when shown, often appears as comic, lazy, criminal or a problem. **Richard Butsch** (2003) found American sitcoms repeatedly showed working-class fathers as lovable fools, Homer Simpson being the best-known example. **Owen Jones** (*Chavs*, 2011) argued that British media turned the working class into a figure of contempt (the "chav"). "Poverty porn" programmes such as *Benefits Street* (2014) were criticised for showing benefit claimants as idle.
- **Workers in conflict.** The **Glasgow Media Group** (*Bad News*, 1976) found that TV news reporting of strikes used management's language and framing: managers made "offers", workers made "demands"; strikes were shown as causing disruption, with little on the workers' reasons.

Why? Marxists say this serves the ruling class: if poverty looks like the fault of the poor, inequality seems fair, and workers blame each other or minorities instead of the system (**ideological hegemony**, Gramsci). **Ralph Miliband** (1969) argued that the media helps legitimise capitalism by presenting its values as common sense. Pluralists reply that media firms show what sells, and that working-class audiences enjoy and choose these programmes; some soaps and dramas present working-class communities with warmth and respect.

Ethnicity

- **Under-representation and tokenism.** Ethnic minorities have historically been under-represented in drama, news and advertising, or appear as a single **token** character.
- **Stereotypes.** **Stuart Hall** (1981) identified three old stereotypes of Black people in Western media: the **slave figure** (loyal and dependent), the **native** (primitive or threatening) and the **entertainer** (there to amuse). He also distinguished **overt racism** from **inferential racism**: unquestioned assumptions built into seemingly neutral reporting.
- **Minorities as a problem.** **Teun van Dijk** (*Racism and the Press*, 1991) found minorities appeared in the news mainly linked to crime, conflict, immigration and social problems, rarely as ordinary citizens or experts.
- **Muslims and the "other".** **Edward Said** (*Orientalism*, 1978) argued that Western culture portrays the East as backward and dangerous. **Elizabeth Poole** (*Reporting Islam*, 2002) and **Moore, Mason and Lewis** (2008) found most British news about Muslims linked them to terrorism, extremism or cultural difference.
- **The Global South.** Developing countries appear mainly in disaster, war and famine stories, which can make whole continents seem helpless.

Change. There are now many more minority presenters, actors and journalists in some countries; films such as *Black Panther* (2018) put a mostly Black cast at the centre of a global hit; Bollywood and Nollywood produce their own representations for huge audiences; and the new media lets minority groups represent themselves. Critics reply that change is uneven, often limited to entertainment, and that news about minorities still leans towards crime and threat.

Age groups

- **Young people** are often shown as a **problem**: violent, drunk, lazy, addicted to phones, or members of gangs. **Geoffrey Pearson** (*Hooligan*, 1983) showed that every generation for over a century has believed young people were worse than in the past, which suggests the panic says more about adults than about youth. Youth are also shown positively, as consumers, trend-setters, sports stars and campaigners.
- **Children** are shown as either innocent and in danger (from strangers, the internet, junk food) or, less often, as frighteningly evil.
- **Older people** are under-represented, especially older women, who disappear from screens sooner than older men. They are often stereotyped as frail, forgetful, grumpy, lonely or a burden (**ageism**). **Carrigan and Szmigin** (1999) found advertisers largely ignored older people. **Featherstone and Hepworth** (1995) noticed a newer image of **positive ageing**: active, healthy, fashionable older people, especially in magazines aimed at them, partly because older people have money to spend.

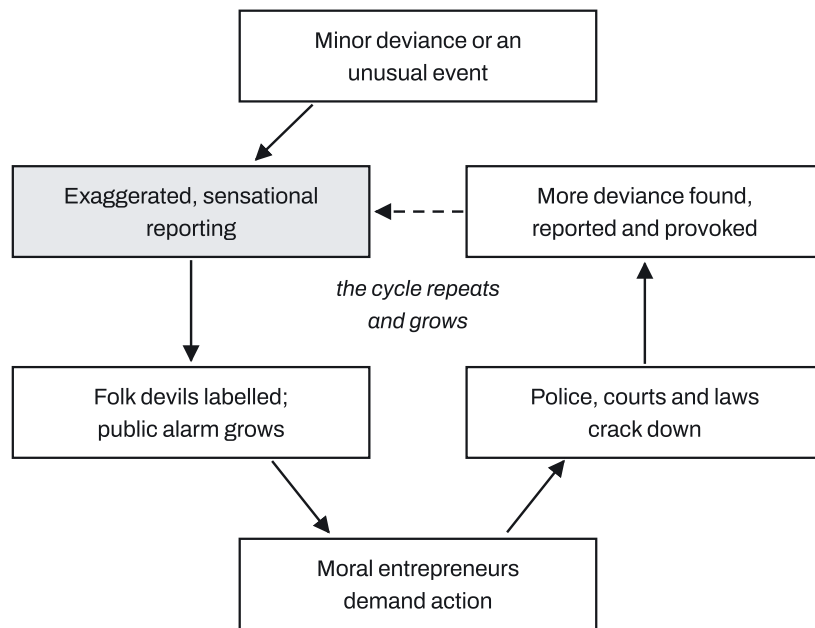
Moral panics

A **moral panic** is an exaggerated public reaction, stirred up by the media, to a group seen as a threat to society's values. **Stanley Cohen** (*Folk Devils and Moral Panics*, 1972) studied the reaction to fights between youth groups, the **Mods and Rockers**, at Clacton and other seaside towns in **1964**. The press exaggerated a few scuffles into a "riot", and the youths became **folk devils**: a group blamed for society's ills.

Cohen's process:

1. A minor or unusual event happens.
2. The media reports it in an exaggerated, sensational way and predicts it will get worse.
3. A group is labelled as **folk devils**, and the public becomes alarmed.
4. **Moral entrepreneurs** (politicians, campaigners, religious leaders, editors) demand that something be done.
5. Police, courts and lawmakers crack down.
6. Tougher control finds and reports more deviance, and the labelled group may act up to its label, which feeds more reporting.

This feedback is the **deviancy amplification spiral** (Leslie Wilkins, 1964): the reaction produces more of the deviance it set out to stop.



Erich Goode and Nachman Ben-Yehuda (1994) listed five signs of a moral panic: **concern** about a group's behaviour, **hostility** towards it, wide **consensus** that the threat is real, **disproportionality** (the fear is far bigger than the harm) and **volatility** (it flares up and dies down fast).

Moral panics about each group.

Group	Examples
Age	Mods and Rockers (1964); "video nasties" in the 1980s, leading to the UK's Video Recordings Act 1984; the murder of the toddler James Bulger by two ten-year-olds in 1993 , which the press linked, without evidence, to a horror film; "hoodies" (a shopping centre banned them in 2005); knife crime; teenagers and social media
Ethnicity	"Mugging" in early-1970s Britain, which the press linked to young Black men (Hall et al. , <i>Policing the Crisis</i> , 1978); asylum seekers; Muslims after the 11 September 2001 attacks
Class	"Chavs" and "benefit scroungers"; the August 2011 riots in England, which some papers blamed on a "feral underclass"
Gender	Single mothers as a threat to the family (UK, 1990s); "ladettes" and young women's binge drinking (2000s); fears that boys are in crisis

Why do moral panics happen?

- **Interactionists** (Cohen): labelling by the media creates folk devils and amplifies deviance.
- **Marxists** (Hall et al.): in a time of economic crisis, a panic about Black muggers distracted attention from capitalism's problems, divided the working class along ethnic lines, and justified tougher policing.
- **Functionalists**: a panic reaffirms shared values by marking a boundary around unacceptable behaviour.
- **Commercial pressure**: fear sells papers and gets clicks.

Are moral panics still useful as an idea? McRobbie and Thornton (1995) argued that the model fits a world of few media outlets better than today's. Folk devils can now answer back through their own media and pressure groups; panics are so frequent that audiences are less shocked; and some youth subcultures welcome a panic as free publicity. Others say "moral panic" is used too loosely: some fears (knife crime) are about real harm, and calling them a panic dismisses victims.

The media and popular culture

Popular culture is the culture enjoyed by most ordinary people: pop music, TV soaps and reality shows, films, sport, video games, celebrity news, memes. It is usually contrasted with **high culture** (opera, classical music, literature, fine art), traditionally valued by elites, and with **folk culture** (local traditions made by the people themselves).

The media and popular culture are tied together in both directions:

- **The media makes and spreads it.** Most popular culture is produced by media industries and reaches people through them; **celebrity** itself is a media creation.
- **Popular culture fills the media.** Soaps, sport, music and reality shows attract the audiences that advertisers pay for.
- **Audiences shape it.** Fans vote, share, remix and create; on social media, ordinary users can make a song or dance go global.

Theories.

- **The Frankfurt School** (Marxist): **Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer** (1944) called the media a **culture industry** producing standardised, formula entertainment, like factory goods. It keeps the masses passive and distracted, offering only the illusion of choice. **Herbert Marcuse** (*One-Dimensional Man*, 1964) argued that it creates false needs that keep people buying and working.
- **Neo-Marxists:** popular culture is a **site of struggle**. Subcultures create styles that challenge the mainstream; **Dick Hebdige** (*Subculture*, 1979) showed how punk's shocking style was soon turned into fashion and sold back to the mainstream (**incorporation**).
- **Pluralists:** popular culture reflects what people freely choose; its success shows it meets real needs. **John Fiske** (*Understanding Popular Culture*, 1989) argued that audiences actively make their own meanings and pleasures from it.
- **Postmodernists:** **Dominic Strinati** (1995) argued that the line between high and popular culture has collapsed (classical music in adverts, art made of soup cans), and that in a media-saturated society images matter more than reality. **Jean Baudrillard** (1981) went further: media images have become **hyperreal**, more real to us than the world they claim to show.

Link to representations. Most people meet representations of class, gender, ethnicity and age not in the news but in popular culture: soaps, music videos, adverts, games and influencers. So the debate about whether popular culture is passive entertainment or an active, chosen culture is also a debate about how much its stereotypes matter.

Key facts and formulas

There is no formula list in Sociology. "Learn it" means you must remember it.

Key term	Status
Representation (how the media portrays a group: what it picks, leaves out, stresses); stereotype (simplified, fixed image of a group); five theories: Marxism, feminism, pluralism, postmodernism, interactionism	Learn it
Women: symbolic annihilation, omitted, trivialised, condemned (Tuchman 1978); women about 25% of people in the news (GMMP 2020); cult of femininity (Ferguson 1983); <i>Jackie</i> (McRobbie 1978); TV adverts (Cumberbatch 1990); male gaze (Mulvey 1975); beauty myth (Wolf 1990)	Learn it
Men: hegemonic masculinity (Connell 1995); <i>What a Man's Gotta Do</i> (Easthope 1986)	Learn it
Change in gender representation: Page 3 ended January 2015; ASA ban on harmful gender stereotypes June 2019; Dove "Real Beauty" 2004; Gauntlett 2002; genderquake (Wilkinson 1994); Everyday Sexism 2012; #MeToo 2017; BBC pay row (Carrie Gracie 2018)	Learn it
Limits of change: postfeminism (McRobbie 2009); men in senior media jobs; online "manosphere" (Tate removed from platforms 2022); liberal, radical, socialist feminists	Learn it
Gender socialisation: secondary agent; social learning (Bandura 1977); toy adverts; Disney princesses (England, Descartes and Collier-Meek 2011); encoding/decoding, active audience (Hall 1973)	Learn it
Class: royal family (Nairn 1988); working-class buffoon (Butsch 2003); <i>Chavs</i> (Jones 2011); <i>Benefits Street</i> (2014); strike coverage (Glasgow Media Group 1976); hegemony (Gramsci); Miliband 1969	Learn it
Ethnicity: slave figure, native, entertainer; overt and inferential racism (Hall 1981); <i>Racism and the Press</i> (van Dijk 1991); <i>Orientalism</i> (Said 1978); <i>Reporting Islam</i> (Poole 2002); Moore, Mason and Lewis 2008; <i>Black Panther</i> (2018)	Learn it
Age: <i>Hooligan</i> (Pearson 1983); ageism; older people ignored by advertisers (Carrigan and Szmigin 1999); positive ageing (Featherstone and Hepworth 1995)	Learn it
Moral panics: folk devils, Mods and Rockers 1964 (Cohen 1972); moral entrepreneurs; deviancy amplification spiral (Wilkins 1964); concern, hostility, consensus, disproportionality, volatility (Goode and Ben-Yehuda 1994); mugging (Hall et al. 1978); McRobbie and Thornton 1995	Learn it
Popular culture: high, popular and folk culture; culture industry (Adorno and Horkheimer 1944); false needs (Marcuse 1964); incorporation (Hebdige 1979); active audiences (Fiske 1989); collapse of high/popular divide (Strinati 1995); hyperreality (Baudrillard 1981)	Learn it
Paper 4: two essays from different sections, each 35 marks: AO1 9, AO2 11, AO3 15, so $9 + 11 + 15 = 35$	Learn it

How to do it

We have tagged 7 questions for this topic (2021–2025), all 35-mark "Evaluate this view" essays from Paper 4, each fitting one type.

Question type	Questions
Evaluate how far media representations of gender are stereotyped or patriarchal	6
Evaluate whether the media serves the interests of the ruling class	1

Paper 4 lasts 1 hour 45 minutes for two essays, so allow about 50 minutes for each, including 5 minutes to plan. The other outcomes (class, ethnicity and age representations, gender socialisation, moral panics, popular culture) have not yet had their own question, so a new one could appear; the worked examples show how to plan for them.

1. Evaluate how far media representations of gender are stereotyped or patriarchal (6 questions)

Asked as: media representations of women reflect patriarchal values (2); media representations of women reflect gender stereotypes (1); media representations of women no longer reflect gender stereotypes (1); the media still portrays women in traditional gender roles (1); media representations of men and women are largely based on gender stereotypes (1).

First, decide which way the quotation points. Five of the six say stereotyping goes on, so the evidence of persistence supports them. One ("no longer") says it has ended, so the same evidence **challenges** it. Read the wording twice before you plan, and label your two sides with the question's own words.

- 1. Introduction** (3–4 sentences): define **representation**, **stereotype** and, if the question uses it, **patriarchy** (a system in which men hold power and their values dominate). Say the debate is between feminists, who see persistent inequality, and liberal, pluralist and postmodernist writers, who see change and choice.
- 2. The case that stereotyping persists.** Build it from five angles, each with a named study and a current example:
 - **Visibility:** Tuchman's symbolic annihilation; women only about a quarter of people in the news in 2020.
 - **Roles:** Ferguson's cult of femininity; McRobbie's *Jackie*; Cumberbatch's adverts; women's concerns framed as looks, romance and the home.
 - **The body:** Mulvey's male gaze, seen in car and aftershave adverts where a woman's body is the prop and the product is aimed at men; Wolf's beauty myth; filters and body pressure on social media.
 - **Production:** who holds senior media jobs, and why radical feminists say that shapes content.
 - **New forms of old ideas:** McRobbie's postfeminism ("positive" but still judged by looks); online misogyny and manosphere influencers.
- 3. Make patriarchy explicit** when the question names it: for each piece of evidence, say **whose interests** the image serves (men's power, men's pleasure, advertisers selling to men, women kept in the home). Examiners marked down answers that described representations without saying why they count as patriarchal.

4. **The case that things have changed.** Build it from a different five angles, starting with the hardest to dispute:

- **Variety:** images differ sharply between tabloids and quality papers, adverts and drama, one country and another; Gauntlett's diverse images; Wilkinson's genderquake.
- **The new media:** women producing their own content; Everyday Sexism and #MeToo.
- **Women in the newsroom:** as more women write, edit and commission, they push stories about harassment and unequal pay into the news, including their own employers' (the BBC's China editor Carrie Gracie resigned that post over unequal pay in 2018).
- **Regulation and campaigns:** Page 3 ending in 2015; the ASA's 2019 ban; papers and broadcasters running campaigns against sexism.
- **Money:** women's spending power means advertisers avoid insulting them (Dove's "Real Beauty").

5. **Evaluate the evidence, not just list it.** Useful moves:

- **Feminist disagreement:** liberal feminists see real progress; radical feminists see patriarchy changing form.
- **"Positive" can still be stereotyped:** the superwoman or the sexy, confident woman is a new ideal, not freedom from ideals.
- **The new media cuts both ways:** it gives women a voice and gives misogynists one too.
- **Audiences are active** (Hall; Gauntlett): even stereotyped content may not be taken at face value.
- **Men are stereotyped as well** (Connell; Easthope): useful whenever the question mentions men, and as evidence that gender stereotyping, not only sexism against women, persists.

6. **Conclusion:** answer the exact words. For example: blatant sexism has declined in mainstream media, so "still portrays women in traditional roles" is too sweeping for many outlets; but newer images still judge women by their looks, and men still control most media power, so patriarchal values persist in a changed form.

Variants.

- **"No longer reflect":** your "persistence" case is now the case **against**; give it at least as much detail as the changes, because an absolute claim ("no longer") falls to strong counter-evidence.
- **"Traditional gender roles":** focus on roles (home, caring, appearance against work and leadership) rather than sexualisation alone; advertising is especially useful.
- **"Men and women":** give men real space: hegemonic masculinity, breadwinner and action-hero images, and newer caring or uncertain men (Gauntlett).

2. Evaluate whether the media serves the interests of the ruling class (1 question)

Asked as: the media serves the interests of the ruling class (1).

This is the Marxist view; the theories behind it are explained in more depth in *Theories of the media and influences on media content*.

1. **Introduction:** identify the view as Marxist; define **ruling class** (those who own the means of production) and **ideology**.

2. **Explain how the media is said to serve them** (examiners marked down answers that never explained the "how"):

- **Representations:** strikes reported from management's view (Glasgow Media Group); the working class mocked or blamed (Butsch; Jones); the rich and royals glamorised (Nairn); moral panics that divide workers and justify control (Hall et al.).
- **Capitalism's rivals:** North Korea's leaders turn up in Western news mostly as figures of menace or fun, as Cuba's and the Soviet Union's once did, so alternatives to capitalism never get a fair hearing. Where the state runs the main channels outright (China, Russia), the people at the top write the message themselves.
- **Popular culture as distraction:** the culture industry keeps people passive (Adorno and Horkheimer).
- **Ownership:** owners and advertisers are capitalists, so content supports capitalism (Miliband; instrumental Marxism).
- **Hegemony:** journalists share ruling-class assumptions, so content presents capitalism as common sense (Gramsci; neo-Marxists).
- **Ownership on a world scale:** a giant such as Disney or Comcast sells the same films, news and adverts in dozens of countries; if one government tightens its rules the firm can move business elsewhere, so consumerist values spread with little check.

3. **Evaluate with other perspectives:**

- **Pluralism:** look at a commercial channel's week: a satire mocking billionaires, a drama about a strike, a documentary on tax dodging. Each earns ratings, so profit itself puts anti-elite content on screen. Campaigners also win changes to coverage, and impartiality rules for public service broadcasters (the BBC's charter, for example) block one-sided content, so no single class sets the agenda.
- **Feminism:** the media serves **men's** interests as much as a class's.
- **Postmodernism and the new media:** so many outlets and creators now exist that no single class controls the message.
- **Interactionism:** instead of reading motives off ownership, interactionists sit in newsrooms and watch editors pick stories day by day. What they see is deadlines, routines and guesses about readers, which a theory of class interest cannot predict in advance.
- **Active audiences** (Hall; Fiske): people can reject the intended message.

4. **Conclusion:** for example: much mainstream content does reflect the assumptions of the powerful, more through hegemony than direct control, but competition, regulation, audiences and the new media mean it does not serve the ruling class alone.

Worked examples

The first example is a short "explain" answer; the others are new 35-mark essays on the outcomes not yet examined on their own. The essay marks are given the way the levels mark scheme works: by assessment objective and level, not by points. In the exam, write each bullet as a full paragraph.

Example 1

Explain two ways in which the media contributes to gender socialisation. [9]

Point 1: role models and imitation. Bandura's social learning theory says children copy behaviour they see rewarded. Children's films and adverts show boys rewarded for bravery and strength and girls for kindness and looks, so children learn which behaviour gains approval for their sex. Disney princess films (England, Descartes and Collier-Meek) show this, although later princesses are more active.

Point 2: teaching what girls and boys should care about. Ferguson's cult of femininity in women's magazines, and today's beauty influencers and filters, teach girls that appearance and relationships come first; gaming and sports media teach boys Connell's hegemonic masculinity (toughness, competition, hiding emotion).

How it would be marked. Two clearly separate ways, each developed with a concept and a study: the top band. A list of examples with no sociology, or two points that are really the same (two kinds of advert), stays lower. "Explain" does not ask for evaluation.

Example 2

'Moral panics about young people are created by the media.' Evaluate this view. [35]

Introduction. Define a moral panic and folk devils; note that the claim gives the media the leading role.

For the view (AO1/AO2).

- **Cohen's Mods and Rockers** (1964): sensational press reporting turned scuffles into a national threat; the process starts with the media.
- **Amplification:** the deviancy amplification spiral shows media labelling producing more deviance and more reports.
- **Repeated examples:** video nasties, the Bulger case and the horror-film claim, hoodies, knife crime: the press set the frame each time.
- **Commercial motive:** fear and outrage sell papers and attract clicks.

Against the view (AO3).

- **Others take part:** moral entrepreneurs (politicians, campaigners) and the police drive panics too; Hall et al. saw the state and media working together.
- **Real problems:** some fears are about real harm; the media may report rather than create.
- **Pearson:** fear of youth is centuries old, older than mass media, so the media amplifies something already there.
- **McRobbie and Thornton:** young people now answer back through their own media, and some welcome the attention, so panics are harder to create.

Conclusion. The media is the main amplifier and usually the trigger, but panics need moral entrepreneurs and an audience already anxious about youth; "created by" overstates the media's role.

How it would be marked. Accurate knowledge of Cohen, the amplification spiral and named panics (AO1 7–9), every point tied to young people and to the media's role (AO2 10–11), and sustained evaluation using other actors, real harms and the changed media landscape to reach a judgement on "created" (AO3 12–15).

Example 3

'Ethnic minorities are represented negatively in the media.' Evaluate this view. [35]

Introduction. Define representation and stereotype; note that "negatively" covers both harmful images and absence.

For the view (AO1/AO2).

- **Old stereotypes:** Hall's slave figure, native and entertainer; inferential racism in apparently neutral reporting.
- **Problem framing:** van Dijk found minorities in the news mainly linked to crime, conflict and immigration.
- **Muslims:** Said's Orientalism; Poole; Moore, Mason and Lewis on links to terrorism.
- **Moral panics:** mugging and young Black men (Hall et al.); asylum seekers.
- **Under-representation and tokenism** in drama and advertising.

Against the view (AO3).

- **Change:** more minority presenters, actors and journalists in many countries; *Black Panther* (2018).
- **Varies by medium:** entertainment has changed faster than news.
- **Self-representation:** Bollywood, Nollywood and minority creators on social media.
- **Pluralism:** diverse audiences are valuable markets, so representation follows.
- **Active audiences** (Hall's encoding/decoding): minority audiences can reject and mock stereotypes.

Conclusion. Overt racism is now rarer in mainstream media and positive images have grown, especially in entertainment, but news still links some minorities to threat; "negatively" holds best for news and for some groups.

How it would be marked. Detailed studies on several groups (AO1 7–9), applied to "negatively" throughout (AO2 10–11), and evaluation that separates news from entertainment and old from new media (AO3 12–15).

Example 4

'Media representations of social class mainly benefit the powerful.' Evaluate this view. [35]

This is the hardest kind: you must link representations to **whose interests** they serve, not just describe them.

Introduction. Define social class and representation; identify the view as Marxist.

For the view (AO1/AO2).

- **Glamour at the top:** royalty and the rich shown favourably (Nairn), making privilege look deserved.

- **Blame at the bottom:** the working-class buffoon (Butsch); the "chav" (Jones); *Benefits Street*. If poverty looks self-inflicted, inequality looks fair.
- **Workers' disputes** framed from management's side (Glasgow Media Group).
- **Hegemony** (Gramsci): these images become common sense, so the working class may accept its position.
- **Distraction:** the culture industry (Adorno and Horkheimer) keeps audiences entertained, not critical.

Against the view (AO3).

- **Pluralism:** working-class audiences choose and enjoy these programmes; content follows the market, not a plan.
- **Positive images:** some dramas and soaps show working-class communities with warmth and dignity.
- **The media also exposes the powerful:** scandals involving the rich and royals are big stories.
- **Active audiences** (Fiske; Hall): viewers can laugh **at** the rich or reject the stereotypes.
- **New media:** working-class creators now represent themselves.

Conclusion. Much class representation does make inequality seem natural, which benefits the powerful, but it is driven at least as much by profit and audience taste as by ideology; "mainly" is plausible for news and reality TV, weaker for drama and the new media.

How it would be marked. Knowledge of class representations at each level with named studies (AO1 7–9), consistent links to "benefit the powerful" (AO2 10–11), and evaluation through pluralism, active audiences and the new media to a reasoned verdict (AO3 12–15).

Common mistakes

- **Opinion instead of sociology.** The weakest answers give personal views about how women look on TV. Use concepts (symbolic annihilation, male gaze, hegemonic masculinity, patriarchy) and named studies in every paragraph.
- **Describing representations without saying why they are patriarchal.** When the question says "patriarchal values", define patriarchy and show how each example serves men's power or reflects male-defined roles.
- **Only listing stereotypes.** A few basic examples of sexist images, with no discussion of what has changed and what has stayed the same, stays in the low levels. Continuity against change is the heart of these essays.
- **Accepting the view uncritically.** Examiners criticise answers that simply agree the media still portrays women traditionally. Evaluate throughout.
- **Treating "the media" as one thing.** Strong answers separate tabloids from quality papers, advertising from drama, and traditional from new media.
- **Ignoring men** when the question says "men and women".
- **For ruling-class questions, not explaining how** the media serves the ruling class, or drifting into the media's general influence on individuals.

- **For class-identity questions, long definitions** of "media" and "social class" earn nothing; get straight to examples of representation and their effect on identity.

How to get the marks

- **"Evaluate this view" (35 marks)**: one long essay, marked by levels for each assessment objective.
- **AO1 knowledge and understanding (9)**: the top level (7–9) needs a wide range of accurate, detailed points using concepts, theory and research. Use terms such as representation, stereotype, symbolic annihilation, cult of femininity, male gaze, beauty myth, hegemonic masculinity, postfeminism, patriarchy, folk devils and hegemony, and name sociologists.
- **AO2 interpretation and application (11)**: the top level (10–11) needs material that is accurate and **consistently applied to the question**. Keep using the question's own words ("patriarchal values", "traditional gender roles", "no longer").
- **AO3 analysis and evaluation (15)**: the top level (12–15) needs evaluation that is **explicit, detailed and sustained**, with contrasting views. A brief outline of the other side stays in the 4–7 band; explicit evaluation that is not kept up reaches 8–11.
- **Use theory as structure**: feminist variants (liberal, radical, socialist, postfeminist) against pluralist and postmodernist views.
- **Use distinctions to evaluate**: old against new media; tabloid against quality; news against entertainment; one country against another.
- **Evaluate the wording**: "no longer" and "still" are claims about change over time; "largely" and "reflect" invite "how far".
- **Reach a judgement** that says where (which media, which groups, which countries) the view holds best and worst.
- **"Explain" parts** need two or three developed points with concepts and studies, and no evaluation.
- **Answer two questions from different sections**; the paper is out of $2 \times 35 = 70$.

Quick check

1. What did Tuchman mean by the symbolic annihilation of women? Give its three parts.
2. A student studies 80 TV adverts. A woman is the main character in 28 of them, and in 21 of those 28 she is shown cooking, cleaning or caring. What percentage of the adverts have a female main character, and what percentage of those show her in a domestic role? Which study's findings does this support?
3. Put Cohen's stages of a moral panic in order, and give one reason McRobbie and Thornton think panics work differently today.
4. How do the Frankfurt School and postmodernists differ in their views of popular culture?
5. Give one way media representations of older people are changing, and one reason why.

Answers

1. Women are made to seem unimportant by the media in three ways: they are **omitted** (left out), **trivialised** (shown as unimportant or decorative) and **condemned** (criticised when they step outside traditional roles).
2. $\frac{28}{80} \times 100 = 35\%$ have a female main character, and $\frac{21}{28} \times 100 = 75\%$ of those show her in a domestic role. This supports Cumberbatch's finding that adverts give women fewer, narrower roles (and Ferguson's view that women's concerns are framed as the home).
3. A minor event; exaggerated, sensational reporting; folk devils labelled and public alarm; moral entrepreneurs demand action; crackdown by police, courts and laws; more deviance found and reported (amplification). Today folk devils can answer back through their own media and pressure groups (or: panics are so frequent that audiences are less shocked; some youth welcome the publicity).
4. The Frankfurt School (Adorno and Horkheimer) sees popular culture as a standardised culture industry that keeps people passive and serves capitalism. Postmodernists (Strinati) see the high/popular divide as collapsed and audiences as free to pick and mix meanings and identities.
5. A newer image of positive ageing shows active, healthy, fashionable older people (Featherstone and Hepworth), because older people have money to spend and advertisers want to reach them.

Past questions to try

- **9699/42/M/J/22 Q4**: essay on whether the media still portrays women in traditional gender roles.
- **9699/42/O/N/21 Q4**: essay on whether media representations of men and women are largely based on gender stereotypes.