

## Candidate 7 evidence

The Mass Media

Hypothesis: The mass media is influential in forming attitudes and therefore social behaviour.



### Relevance

Many members of society are influenced by the mass media from an early age. This is due to the mass media being one of the main agents of secondary socialisation. Lots of Sociologists are interested in exploring the extent of power the media has. Some Marxist Sociologists claim that the 'media is now the opium of the people', where Marx had referred to religion as the opium of the people.

The mass media is a form of communication that reaches a large audience. In contemporary society there are various forms of communication, the internet including social networking sites, radio, television and newspapers. Even although the vast majority of people are using the internet and social networking sites, television continues to have the greatest impact on peoples' social behaviour. For some sociological theorists this is a concern, for example Marxists believe the bourgeoisie have the power to control what gets out into the mainstream media and can influence the way it is reported and consequently promotes the dominant ideology of capitalism. The mass media is used for entertainment, news and communication via social media. Examples of this is Facebook and Snapchat they are all used for entertainment and communication even television and newspapers are seen to be there for giving information and entertainment. The relevance for Sociologists is that many people will not even consider the full powerful extent of the media and therefore unaware of the way they are being socialised or even brainwashed into thinking and behaving. For Marxists the media is the new opium of the people.

### Studies

#### Douglas Yu (1998)-The Matsigenka

Douglas Yu was researching the powerful influence of the media to do this he carried out a comparative study between people that have had contact to the media and people that haven't. The Matsigenka Tribe, from Peru had never been exposed to the media. The Matsigenka men were shown a picture of what we would call a 'perfect size 8/10' woman in our society, they were also shown a picture of a woman which we would regard as being overweight and unattractive, the Matsigenka men said they preferred the look of a plumper, fatter more rounded shaped women, the men said the women that we would call 'perfect' in our society looked unhealthy thin, under fed and sick. The two photos had also been shown to men who had been previously part of the Matsigenka tribe but moved into a town/city, they said they preferred the woman in the photo that were slimmer. Douglas Yu concluded that the media had changed the perceptions of the Matsigenka men that had moved away from their tribal area and were now exposed to the media. (Douglas Yu (1998)-The Matsigenka (Research Evidence, Cultural Diversity/ Cross Cultural Comparison) ([https://www.researchgate.net/publication/13442803\\_Is\\_Beauty\\_in\\_the\\_Eye\\_of\\_the\\_Beholder](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/13442803_Is_Beauty_in_the_Eye_of_the_Beholder))

### McRobbie and Thornton(1995)- Boy Racers

McRobbie and Thornton (1995) study focused on the clashes between the Boy racers. McRobbie and Thornton analysed the way in which the media reported the events. He also interviewed some of the youths, local businesses, local people and the police. He found that the media exaggerated the trouble caused for example there was an over reporting the activities, they were exaggerating the seriousness of the events that occurred, the numbers taking part in the car enthusiasm and also the numbers involved in deviant behaviour also the amount/ effects of deviant or illegal behaviour. An example of the exaggerated headline would be "'boy racers' in 'battle' with concerned residents and police operations were a 'crackdown'". The media referred to them by using these symbols and referred to them as rival gangs, this further divided them and they did become rival groups. All this reporting created moral panic in society and the situation was amplified. The police presence became stronger at expected meets, they also responded more forcefully. This raised the status of the Mods and Rockers in society albeit in a negative way. This led to many young people becoming part of one of the groups and they attracted 'trouble makers' that were not interested in the genuine ideas behind the Mods and Rockers.  
([https://www.researchgate.net/publication/237841173\\_Fuelling\\_the\\_Panic\\_the\\_Societal\\_Reaction\\_to\\_'Boy\\_Racers'](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/237841173_Fuelling_the_Panic_the_Societal_Reaction_to_'Boy_Racers'))

### Analysis

Feminism is a structural conflict theory (macro theory), therefore believes that the institutions and systems shape social behaviour in a patriarchal way. For example Socialisation is based on whether a person is born male or female, therefore, for Feminists there is gender socialisation that creates sex role stereotypes. This is the cause of discrimination and inequality as this gender socialisation promotes and encourages patriarchy – male dominance. Therefore, Feminists believe that conflict is permanent within society as there is an ongoing conflict of interests as this behaviour comes from the institutions and systems particularly, the family, education and the media. Feminism is a belief that shares a common goal: to establish to define and achieve equal economic, political, personal and social rights for all women. The feminist view on the media look at the devolution of women. Feminist see the media as the centre of discrimination against women. Radical feminists believe that the media is owned and produced by men and therefore operate to benefit patriarchy. However Liberal feminist believe that the mass media portrays women in a stereotypical way such as mothers, daughters, girlfriends which are usually played by 'young' beautiful women. In addition to this all strands of feminism believe that the mass media promotes patriarchy and has the power to brainwash women to believe in the importance of the 'ideal' look (<http://feminism-boell.org/en/2016/04/08/women-and-mass-media>). My chosen study carried out by Douglas Yu supports the Feminist view as the mass

media portrays a stereotypical 'ideal' woman which most men now find attractive and many women strive to have the 'perfect body' because of this reinforced image by the media. This study proves this, as the men who had never encountered the influence of the media preferred the plumper women but when some of this tribal group had moved to the town and cities and had been subject to the media they preferred the slimmer women.

Labelling is strongly linked to the action perspective as it believes people have power over society when shaping social behaviour. This is because people can choose to follow the norms and values if they want. It is also believed that they are the ones who are powerful in making them, not the institutions and systems. Therefore this helps us to understand how some people may be socialised into identities with negative consequences. Labelling theorist Howard Becker pointed out that labels that are given consistently to people creates a master status meaning they can override all other parts of a person's identity which then creates a self-fulfilling prophecy (<http://openaccess.city.ac.uk/4263/1/2012%20-%20Greer%20and%20Reiner%20-%20Labelling%20C%20Deviance%20and%20Media.pdf>). McRoberts study supports labelling as the boy racers were labelled as deviant in the way the media reported the events, predicted further clashes and therefore amplified the situation. The deviant label then created reactions and responses from the public, police and the Mods and Rockers themselves. The police increased their numbers and their actions, the public became afraid and the Mods and Rockers became more deviant and attracted others to join. Labelling a group as an outsider in attempt to control then, significantly backfired on the government as this attracted much larger groups of youths and 'some' of them were just looking for a fight. This potentially could have caused an even bigger problem for the government/ law enforcement. The exaggerated media coverage was part of a new moral panic concept, which is used by sociologists to describe society's overreactions towards a certain social group or type of behaviour. Moral panics according to Cohen will emerge during public issues that are taken as sign of general social disorder, this is evident in modern society for example islamophobia. Islamophobia is racism towards Muslims, which has been on the increase since 9/11. After 9/11 happened the some parts of media labelled all Muslims as "evil" and "terrorists" this made many of the public believe they should be afraid of anyone who may be a Muslim. (<http://statecrime.org/data/2011/10/poynting2007a.pdf>)

#### Evaluation

Douglas Yu's study is strong as it was an ethnographic piece of research and therefor he found the information out first hand. However the study is criticised as it focused too much on the media as the only influence in the change of views of the men. The men were also likely to be influenced by other institutions and systems and the interactions of those around them.

McRobbie and Thornton study is strong in explaining the development of a moral panic. It is also good at explaining the role of the media and other organisations in creating this behaviour. It is therefore good at showing how this can be applicable to moral panics beyond the boy racers. ,

A weakness of this study is that in modern society it may be more difficult to identify a clear moral panic, ie behaviour considered unacceptable by all. Also Marxists are critical of the

focus on labelling as they would argue that the boy racers were all working class and the moral panic was created by the institutions controlled by the bourgeoisie.

### Conclusion

To conclude, from my findings I have come to the conclusion that the mass media is an influential institution that shapes the behaviours of members in society. My hypothesis has been proven using my chosen theories and studies. A study called Hoodies or Altar Boys (2009) – Women in Journalism further proves the information in my report. The research found that the newspapers referred to the boys with 'hoodies' as thugs, yobs, feral, louts and evil. This resulted in other young groups of boys (Altar Boys) being afraid of them as well as other people in society. Therefore this again shows the powerful influence of the media.

### Bibliography

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