

**Representation is a key Media Studies concept across GCSE, AS and A Level. This resource will look at representation in relation to ethnicity.**

## **What do we mean by the term?**

- Representation is the way in which social groups, issues, events, etc. are represented by different media texts.
- All representations in the media are **constructed**. The media is not a 'window on the world'.
- The producers of the text **select** the elements of the representation and leave out others.
- Some texts go through a process of **mediation** before they reach the audience.
- The representation in the texts is constructed through technical codes and **anchorage**.
- Depending on the media text the representation will contain messages (**ideology**).
- **Stereotypes** are used to transmit messages quickly. Not all stereotypes are negative.
- The representation will change according to the **context and purpose** of the media text.
- Audiences may respond differently to representations.

**Use the Interactive resource 'Key Terms' to reinforce these terms**

**Construction:** the way in which the text is put together to communicate meanings. For example, on a magazine cover the choice of central image, colours and cover lines to create glamour.

**Selection:** the choices made by the producer of the text about what to include and what to leave out. For example, the scenes selected to construct a film trailer in order to attract an audience but not give too much away.

**Mediation:** the process by which messages and meanings are added to the text, for example the role of the expert in a news story who explains a point or the news anchor who gives background information to put the story into context.

**Anchorage:** the words that go with an image and explain its meaning. For example, the headline accompanying a picture on a news website.

**Ideology:** the big messages that the text is trying to convey to its audience. For example, some newspapers try to persuade us that being a part of Europe is a bad idea.

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**Stereotypes:** this is where the media, across different texts, presents a group of people by exaggerating certain characteristics. For example, a situation comedy may represent a teenager as moody, messy and reluctant to take advice from parents.

**Context and purpose:** The representation changes according to the text in which it appears (context) and its effect on the audience (purpose). For example, a television advert may use stereotypical representations of gender to communicate messages about the product quickly to an audience.

## The Representation of Ethnicity in the media

### Definitions

**Ethnicity:** This is often confused with race but is more social than biological. Ethnicity is related to culture and customs, for example dress, food, religious practices, etc. Ethnicity may also relate to an ancestral place (in the case of Jews), ideology or religion. These elements may set you apart from those of a different ethnicity.

**Race:** This is a social construct and is a way of grouping people according to characteristics that are passed on from generation to generation. These characteristics may be related to the colour of your skin, hair or facial features.

## Ethnicity in the media Introductory Activities

### Ethnicity key questions

Use the Interactive resource 'Key Questions'

**Task:** Discuss the following questions in groups, supporting what you say with specific examples:

1. Is 'white' an ethnicity?
2. What role do the media play in constructing ideas about race and ethnicity?
3. Do you make assumptions about certain ethnic groups?
4. Do you think certain ethnic groups or races are more powerful than others?
5. Do you think about your own ethnicity on a regular basis?
6. Do you see people who look like you represented in the media? Are these representations prominent and/or accurate?

## Statements

Use the interactive resource 'Consider the Statements'

**Discuss the following statements about the representation of ethnicity. Try to support what you say with specific examples from the media:**

- The representations of ethnicity in media texts have changed over time to address sociological change.

**Hint:** In Britain we are now a much more multicultural society and there is an expectation that this is reflected in the media texts we consume.

- Representations of ethnicity differ according to the text in which they appear.

**Hint:** The representation will be different in, for example, *Citizen Khan* compared to a social realist film, e.g. *Kidulthood*, as the context and purpose is different. *Citizen Khan* uses stereotypes to create comedy through audience recognition. *Kidulthood* is raising awareness of social issues and is much more shocking and hard hitting.

- There is a hierarchy of representation with regard to ethnicity; certain ethnic groups are represented more often than others.

**Hint:** Representations of black and Asian groups are more frequent than those of, for example, Chinese and Eastern European groups.

- Ethnic groups are frequently stereotyped in the media and this leads to a misrepresentation of that group. This is more dangerous when dealing with ethnicity compared to gender, as the representation that is constructed may be the only experience the audience will have of that ethnic group.

**Hint:** If texts like, for example, *The Daily Mail* continually offer a negative representation of young black people or immigrants, then their readers may accept the preferred reading of the paper as they do not have any relevant personal experience to challenge this view.

- Young black people are often demonised by some areas of the media and are linked to violence and anti-social behaviour.

**Hint:** Documentaries and television dramas, for example *Top Boy*, represent young black people living in inner city communities in a negative way to create a dramatic storyline.

- Some media texts under represent ethnic groups and so offer an unrealistic view of communities.

**Hint:** Soap operas like *EastEnders* have been accused of not reflecting the realistic ethnic mix of people that would be living in that part of London. The 'token' families they feature often have stereotypical cultural storylines, for example arranged marriage.

## Historical Overview

Use the interactive resource 'Consider the Statements'



Most of the early images of ethnic groups, particularly from Africa, were related to slavery. This representation of black people would influence media texts and audience perceptions for years to come.



The film *Gone With The Wind* (1939) featured the character of Mammy the black slave, thus reinforcing audience perceptions of the role of black people in America at the time.



The American film *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* (1967) is the story of a liberated white woman who returns home to announce her engagement to a black doctor (Sidney Poitier) to a mixed reception from both sets of parents. This film was ground breaking in its time as only five months before its release mixed race marriages were illegal in America.

# Representation



The *Black and White Minstrel Show* was a television entertainment programme that ran for 20 years from 1958 to 1978. Its content may seem shocking to a modern audience as it featured white artists 'blacked up' as singing 'minstrels' from the Deep South of America. Although it was very popular some audiences became very unhappy about how the programme portrayed this ethnic group, particularly as Britain was becoming a more multicultural society. On 18 May 1967, the *Campaign Against Racial Discrimination* delivered a massive petition to the BBC, requesting that the show be withdrawn for its misrepresentation of Black people.



*Mind Your Language* was a situation comedy that ran on London Weekend Television from 1977 to 1986. It featured an English teacher and his class of immigrants whose characters covered a range of racial stereotypes. How are visual codes used here to represent the different ethnic groups?

How may these representations be viewed by modern audiences?



Although we generally see more politically correct representations of ethnic minorities in the media today, stereotypes are still used in some texts to transmit messages quickly, particularly for the purpose of humour. Apu in *The Simpsons* brings together several aspects of the Asian stereotype for the purpose of comedy. He is a semi-legal immigrant, speaks with an accentuated accent, has a long unpronounceable surname, an arranged marriage, lots of children and works long hours in his store.

Is Apu a crude racist stereotype that is insulting to American Asians? Are we laughing at him or with him?

# Representation

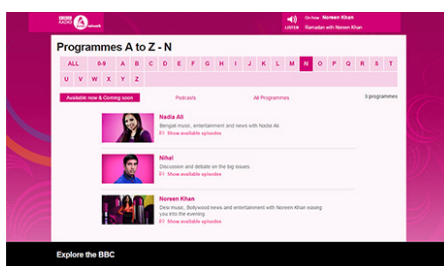


*Luther* (2010) is a crime drama featuring a black detective. Can the character of Luther be discussed in terms of a representation of ethnicity or is he just a detective who just happens to be black? Is it a positive representation because he is an example of an ethnic minority in a high position in an organisation, or does this accurately reflect our society today? Idris Elba himself said '...the fact that he (Luther) is black is neither here nor there. We all know someone from a different ethnic background, we all mix, so it's great to have a character that happens to be black in a central position.' (*Daily Mirror*, 27th April 2010).

Watch the trailer for *Luther* Series 2 – does this use any stereotypical racial aspects in its construction?



Despite the UK being a multicultural society, some ethnic groups are seen as more dangerous than others because of the threat of terrorism. An example of this is 'Islamophobia'. Some more right-wing newspapers like *The Sun* tend to represent certain groups in a negative way suggesting that all members of the group share the same characteristics and therefore are seen to be 'different' and, in some cases, to be feared. What do the visual codes on this front cover tell us about the ideology of this text?



BBC Asian Network is a digital radio station offering music and speech programming and appealing to those people interested in Asian lifestyles. It broadcasts in English and also other Asian languages and demonstrates the multicultural make-up of the UK.

## Stereotypes

What is a stereotype? It is a way of representing a group by exaggerating recognisable characteristics.

It is important to remember that whilst many media texts disseminate a range of stereotypes they did not always create them; the aim of such stereotypes is to:

- order and categorise
- provide a short cut to communicate messages
- offer a way of referring to the world
- express society's values and beliefs.

Stereotypes with regard to ethnicity are more dangerous as they play on preconceived ideas the audience may have which may not be accurate.

## Agree/Disagree

### Use interactive resource – 'Stereotypes'

**Tessa Perkins (1997) described and then challenged some of the assumptions that many people hold about stereotypes. She distinguished between recognising a stereotype and believing in it. What do you think?**

**All stereotypes are negative and pejorative.**

**Response:** stereotypes are quick ways of transmitting messages so are not always negative or insulting.

**Stereotypes are linked to individuals in society.**

**Response:** stereotypes tend to define a group; they are constructed by a set of shared, if exaggerated, characteristics that are easily recognised by audiences.

**Stereotypes are rigid and unchanging.**

**Response:** stereotypes change to reflect changes in society. New stereotypes may appear, e.g. chavs.

# Representation

**Stereotypes are based on fact.**

**Reponse:** audiences recognise stereotypical representations because, although they are exaggerated, they are often based on actual characteristics.

**They are about groups with whom we have little or no contact.**

**Reponse:** this is not always the case. Stereotypes often work because we do recognise the truth within them because of personal experience, even if it is exaggerated.

Use interactive resource – ‘Ethnic Group Stereotypes’

**Task:** Link descriptions to ethnic groups – **image/ name of text pops up of the stereotype in the media**

Members of this ethnic group are:



**Fast runners**

African Caribbean



**Privileged and wealthy**

White middle class



**A dangerous underclass**

White unemployed



**Poor and starving**

Black Africans



**Troubled youth**

Black British



**Gangsters**

Black Americans



# Representation



**Live in caravans and are not to be trusted**

Gypsies



**Very focused and clever**

Chinese



**Loud and demonstrative**

Italians



**Run corner shops**

Asian

Not all of these stereotypes are negative but they are generally narrow, one dimensional and lack complexity. Consider how the media reinforce/ challenge our assumptions about certain ethnic groups. Can you think of examples that reinforce/challenge the above?



**Black American**

Barack Obama



**British Asian**

Mishal Husain BBC newsreader

**Watch this short video about the representations of Africans in Hollywood:**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qSEImEmEjb4>

What points are made about how the film industry constructs stereotypes and the effect this may have upon an audience?

Can you think of other examples that fit how the young men think they are represented in the media?

## **Whiteness as an ethnicity**

- Most people do not consider being 'white' as an ethnic group.
- Whiteness as an ethnicity is constructed as dominant because it is linked generally with privilege.
- It becomes more apparent when it is linked with class.
- Whiteness is seen as the norm and therefore is not always recognised as an ethnicity. It becomes invisible.
- Just as with other representations of ethnicity the representation will change according to the media text in which it appears.

## **Use interactive resource – 'White as Ethnicity'**

**Task:** Look at the images below. What do they tell you about how 'whiteness' is represented in the media? Consider how it is constructed through visual codes.



1. What types of representation are they?
2. Are they stereotypes or more complex?
3. What do the visual codes tell us about what it means to be white?
4. Can you tell what they do for a living, how they speak, how they behave?
5. Where in the media would you expect to see these representations?

## Useful Theories and their application to media texts

### Use interactive resource 'Useful Theories'

*Remember it is important to understand and be able to apply theories to specific texts and not just to learn them.*

### **Alvarado (1948 – 2010)**

Alvarado was a Guatemalan-born English academic who specialised in Media Studies. His theories related to ethnicity are based on the idea that people from different cultures tend to be defined by how different they are, by their 'otherness'. These representations can focus on racial characteristics and on preconceived audience perceptions. These are often drawn from other media texts rather than from reality and therefore reinforce the stereotype. Alvarado believed that the representation of ethnic groups could be divided into four categories:

### **The exotic**

This stereotype links closely to what theorist Stuart Hall called 'the secret fascination of 'otherness' – the way in which the media represents people who are different from us. This can be viewed both positively and negatively but is usually a construction by the text. The 'exotic' stereotype presents the individual in terms of how they look, what they wear, what they eat and their 'different' customs.

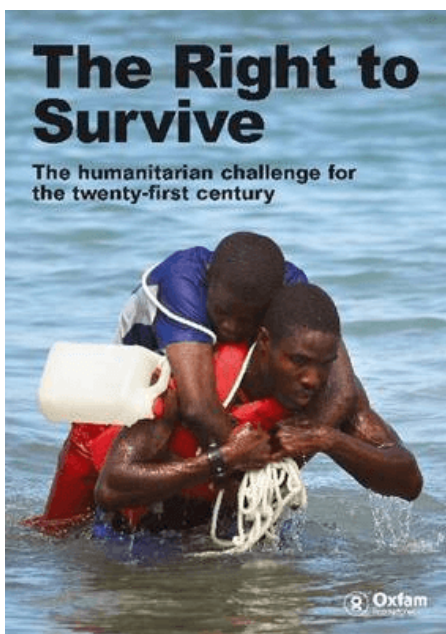
Beyoncé - *Run The World*: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VBmMU\\_ibe6U](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VBmMU_ibe6U)

How is Beyoncé's ethnicity represented as 'exotic' and 'other' in this music video?

## The pitied

In certain texts ethnic minorities are stereotyped as vulnerable and as victims. This is true of many newspaper and television news reports of developing countries; this is largely because the only time certain countries appear in the news is when they are linked to disasters, for example famine and earthquakes. Similar representations are used for charity campaigns in order to shock the audience into action.

## Questions



- How is the representation **constructed** through visual codes?
- Why have these images been **selected**?
- How does the **anchorage** affect the representation?
- How might different audiences **respond** to the representations?

## Where can I use this text?

- GCSE: The examples can be used for a Representation Textual Investigation.
- AS MS1: One poster can be used as an example for teaching representation of ethnicity or an issue in this unit.
- A Level MS4: the entire campaign can be used as an example for teaching the Advertising Industry.



## The humorous

In the context of certain texts, for example situation comedies and film, the audience is encouraged to laugh at the ethnic stereotypes contained within the text. These stereotypes have often been built up over time and, as with all stereotypes, they exaggerate recognisable features and attributes. In the early days of sitcoms racist humour was seen as an acceptable way of making people laugh. This is no longer the case but texts like *Citizen Khan* have attracted a range of views about the programme which was written by British Muslim Adil Ray. It was one of the most complained-about programmes to Ofcom with accusations that it stereotyped the Pakistani community in Britain.

Read the BBC article. How does it highlight how audiences may respond differently to representations contained within the text?

*Citizen Khan* link: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/entertainment-arts-19395994>

How does this image from the programme both subvert and reinforce ethnic representations?



- Alia Khan, the younger daughter both reinforces and subverts the stereotypical representation of the young Asian woman. She wears a hijab but in a very modern and 'over the top' way, she wears a lot of makeup and the rest of her clothing is very Western. She could be said to offer a rebellious representation of an Asian woman. This is further reinforced by the fact that, like most teenagers, she is more interested in her mobile phone.
- Her elder sister Shazia is represented as more conventional in some ways' in that she is getting married and here she is pictured looking at an *Asian Bride* style magazine with her mother. Mrs Khan's visual codes represent her as a more traditional member of the family.
- The domestic setting is conventional of a situation comedy where most of the narrative takes place in one 'situation'.
- Mr Khan's mode of address is direct, suggesting his role as the head of the family. His code of clothing is formal but links to the stereotypical attire of an older Asian man. His hat is a more obvious cultural code. There is also a narrative clue to the fact that the some of the humour comes from the fact that the rest of his family do not give him the respect he thinks he deserves.
- It is clear that the narrative in the programme will evolve from the conflicts between the characters. Shazia's boyfriend Amjad does not look as thrilled as his bride-to-be about the wedding!
- Consider how far the context of this programme affects the representations within it.

## Where can I use this text?

- GCSE: This text can be used as a case study or a 'wider example' for a Representation Textual Investigation based on ethnicity.
- AS MS1: An episode can be used as an example of a text for teaching representations of ethnicity or national identity in this unit.
- A Level MS4: The text could be one of the examples used for teaching the Television Industry

## Dangerous

Alvarado states that some texts represent ethnic minorities as a threat to society and they are often blamed for social problems. Immigrants are stereotypically represented as benefit cheats and scroungers. The ghettoization of some social groups reinforces the idea of difference as they become marooned communities who are seen as apart from the norm. Some newspapers manipulate the readers' fear of the unknown by grouping together individuals under the common title of 'immigrants'. This lack of personalisation makes it easier to blame them for a range of social problems.

How have these texts been constructed to convey messages to an audience?



Where can I use this text?

- AS MS1: one of the newspaper front pages can be used to teach representation or audience.

## Case Studies/ Extended Examples

Use interactive resource 'Big Bang Case Study'

### *The Big Bang Theory*

**Genre/Context:** American situation comedy. It uses stereotypes of more than one ethnic group to create comic situations. An audience will recognise the stereotypes as they have been repeated in similar texts from the genre.

**Intersectionality:** in this programme more than one area of representation comes together, e.g. ethnicity, gender and class. Characters also demonstrate attributes of more than one group, for example Rajesh is Asian but also a 'geek'. He is self-reflective regarding his own stereotypical role which produces some of the comedy.

What does this quote from Rajesh tell us about ethnic representation?

*'Indian Monopoly's just like regular, except the money's in Rupees, instead of hotels you build call centres, and when you pick a chance card, you might die of dysentery.'*

### **Raj and FBI woman**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T0Bia7Fr3oE>

How does Raj's conversation with the FBI investigator reflect stereotypical views of American Asians? Why is it funny? What role does the canned laughter play – might some audiences feel uncomfortable with this representation despite the situation comedy context? Can you think of another context where this may not be viewed as humorous?

### **Where can I use this text?**

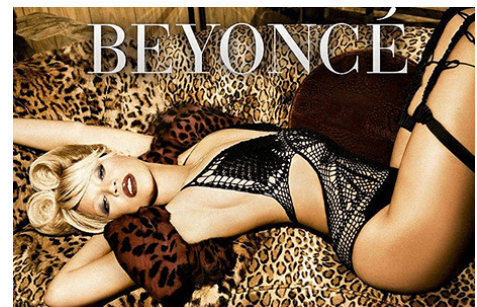
- GCSE: This text can be used as a case study or a 'wider example' for a Representation Textual Investigation based on ethnicity or gender.
- AS MS1: An episode can be used to teach representation in this unit.
- AL MS4: The text could be used to teach the Television Industry in this unit.



## Case Study: Beyoncé

### Use interactive resource 'Beyoncé Case Study'

The representation within a text usually relates directly to the audience. The audience must recognise and respond to the representation for meaning to be communicated. With regard to music stars, they often change their image in order to reinvent themselves for new audiences. However, Beyoncé's image is inextricably linked to her ethnicity and she appears to also manipulate her skin colour according to the audience. Beyoncé was born in Texas to an African father and a mixed-race mother. She is a good example of how to define the difference between ethnicity and race – she is of African descent (race) and of Black American ethnicity.



### Questions:

1. How is Beyoncé's representation constructed differently in these texts?
2. In being represented as paler than she actually is, what messages is Beyoncé giving out to those of a similar ethnicity?
3. Is Beyoncé's skin whitening linked to the audience that the text's producers want to appeal to?
4. Can you find other examples of how Beyoncé has presented her ethnicity in media texts?

### Watch the Beyoncé O2 priority advert

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-dppxXM7f9k>

## Where can I use this text?

- GCSE: This text can be used as a case study or a wider example for a Representation Textual Investigation based on ethnicity or gender.
- AS MS1: Any of these texts can be used to teach representation in this unit.
- AL MS4: The whole advertising campaign for either Heat or L’Oreal can be used to teach the Advertising Industry in this unit. Beyoncé as an artist can be used to teach the Music Industry in this unit.

## Case Study – Asian Woman Magazine

### Use interactive resource ‘Asian Woman Magazine Case Study’

Does having a magazine for a specific ethnic group reinforce the idea that this group are ‘different’?

How is ethnicity represented in this magazine?



## Points

- Use of colour and patterns reflects cultural links.
- The jewellery and sari have direct links to Asian culture although interestingly here it is worn quite seductively so challenging traditional ethnic assumptions.
- The target audience is young Asian women who have an interest in popular Western culture. It is interesting that Alesha Dixon is from Jamaican heritage and is not Asian but has been presented as such through the use of stereotypically Asian iconography and codes of clothing.
- The cover lines suggest that this magazine targets a more modern, Western Asian woman by including what would be taboo subjects in a more traditional Asian culture, for example infidelity.

- However, there is also evidence of content that is more culturally expected, e.g. Bollywood.
- The magazine's slogan also reflects a more rebellious, independent Asian woman.
- This website is specifically linked to the Asian music scene.
- Alesha Dixon is represented as exotic here so linking to Alvarado's theory.

## Where can I use this text?

- AS MS1: this text can be used as an example to teach representation in this unit.
- AL MS4: The whole magazine can be used to teach the Magazine Industry