

Text study

Representation

Objective : This lesson aims to explain the meaning of representation in media texts .

What is 'Representation'?

Representation is the way the media RE-PRESENT individuals, groups, events and issues.



What does representation in the media really mean?

Representation is the action of speaking or acting on behalf of someone or the state of being so represented.

It is the description or portrayal of someone or something in a particular way . *Oxford dictionary* .

The basic definition of representation in the media is simply how media, such as television, film and books, portray certain types of people or communities. There are a number of groups who are underrepresented in most Western media. They include women, people of color, people with a range of body shapes and types, people of non-Christian religions, and differently-abled people.

A- Tokenism :

the practice of making only a perfunctory or symbolic effort to do a particular thing, especially by recruiting a small number of people from under-represented groups in order to give the appearance of gender or racial equality within a workforce. *Oxford dictionary*.

There are a few major ways producers of media can misrepresent a community, under the guise of creating diversity. The first is tokenism. **Tokenism** is when the inclusion of a minority or other underrepresented group is no more than a symbolic effort to make a story or environment seem equal or diverse.

B- stereotyping and typecasting :

Another way to misrepresent people is through **stereotyping and typecasting**, which are two concepts that are very closely related. Stereotyping can be seen in media through the assumptions of how a certain type of person is supposed to be due to their racial, ethnic, gender, or religious identity. Stereotypes, even those that seem harmless or even positive, can have a profound effect on society as they create unrealistic, and often negative, expectations and assumptions. **Common stereotypes of Arabs in Western media include the Arab man as a terrorist or an oil-hungry sheikh.** Typecasting, which generally refers specifically to actors, is when a person is repeatedly assigned the same type of role due to success with that role in the past or because they “look like” a specific stereotype. This can happen to all types of people, but underrepresented people tend to find themselves **pigeonholed** into the same roles again and again.

Actor and comedian Aziz Ansari wrote a piece in the New York Times about the struggles he’s experienced as an Indian actor, and he touched specifically on typecasting. He wrote, “Even though I’ve sold out Madison Square Garden as a standup comedian and have appeared in several films and TV series, when my phone rings, the roles I’m offered are often defined by ethnicity and often require accents.”

What’s the importance of representation?

Strong and positive representation can help fight and break down stereotypes that can be detrimental to individuals and limiting to society.

When a group of people is only ever represented in negative ways, it adversely affects the way others see them, as well as the way they see themselves. Which means, positive representation can build self-confidence in individuals. It offers them role models to look up to and people and characters to be inspired by and reinforces that they are not lesser than. They

can be the superhero, the doctor, the actor or whoever they want to be. The benefits of better representation are also not limited to the people represented. We all benefit from learning about different experiences and expanding our notion of what is “normal”, isn’t this one of the fundamental purposes of art?

More diverse representation also opens up new and better opportunities. For example, there is a specific lack of acting opportunities available to non-white actors, simply because scripts insist on white characters. More diverse scripts, create more diverse roles which create more opportunities for non-white actors. And when this diversity goes a step further, beyond tokenism, it also opens the door for more interesting and complex roles for these actors. All of this ultimately leads to richer stories, new voices and new perspectives in the media.

Draw me picture of a....



So why do we have these images in our heads? Where do they come from?

Be the first to clip this slide

Definitions

- **Stereotypes**
 - Media Industries use stereotypes because the audience will instantly understand them. Think of stereotypes as a 'visual shortcut'. They're repeated so often that we assume they are normal or 'true'.
 - **Archetypes**
 - This is the 'ultimate' stereotype. For example, the white stiletto wearing, big busted, brainless blonde bimbo
 - **Countertype**
 - A representation that challenges traditional stereotypical associations of groups, people or places
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Representation

- The way in which people, events and ideas are presented to the audience.
- To break it down, the media takes something that is already there and **re-presents** it to us in the way that they choose.

- These representations are created by the **producers** (anyone who makes a media text) of media texts.
- What they choose to present to us is controlled by **Gatekeepers...**

Gatekeepers

- A media 'gatekeeper' is any person involved in a media production with the power *to make a decision about something the audience are allowed to read, hear or see – and, of course, not get to see*; for instance, a newspaper editor has the final say on what goes into his or her newspaper, where it goes within the pages, next to what other piece, with which pictures, strap-lines and headlines, etc.

Moguls

- But in the example of the newspaper editor's decision, this will not be made freely: it will have been affected by technical issues, by the kind of person who owns the newspaper, for example (i.e. the so-called **media moguls**, such as Rupert Murdoch), and by many other things.

Who, What, Why, Where

When you're analysing representation, think about the following questions:

- **Who** or what is being represented? Who is the preferred audience for this representation?
 - **What** are they doing? Is their activity presented as typical, or atypical? Are they conforming to genre expectations or other conventions?
 - **Why** are they present? What purpose do they serve? What are they communicating by their presence? What's the preferred reading?
 - **Where** are they? How are they framed? Are they represented as natural or artificial? What surrounds them? What is in the foreground and what is in the background?
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