

How is gender represented in the media?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tTRk3Y6BnqA>

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DJ3VbrEo_z4

Theories of identity: David Gauntlett

One of the issues that you will need to consider as you study media texts is the effect of social, cultural and historical context on the representations they offer.

David Gauntlett's theory of identity is particularly relevant in this regard. A key element of this theory is the idea that *'in contrast with the past (...) we no longer get singular, straightforward messages about ideal types of male and female identities'* (2008).

Gauntlett therefore suggests that since the 1960s *'the mass media has become more liberal (in terms of sex and gender issues), and considerably more challenging to traditional standards'*. He also argues that the media not only reflects changing social and cultural attitudes, it is involved in *'actively disseminating modern values'*.

Evaluating Gauntlett's Theory

These are some of the ideas that you will need to evaluate as you analyse and compare the representations in media texts. For example, you will need to consider the extent to which the products support the idea that representations of gender today are more fluid, complex and varied than they were in the past.

- Do the representations in contemporary products appear more liberal than those that are historical for instance?
- How traditional are the representations in historical products? Are they *'singular and straightforward'* as Gauntlett's theory would seem to suggest?

Gauntlett's suggestion that the media does not just reflect social and cultural attitudes but actively disseminates modern values is also worth exploring. For example, some theorists argue that changes in media representations generally lag behind changes in society. This is commonly referred to as a **culture lag**.

For example, although over half of all working-age women were in some form of paid employment during the 1950s and 1960s, it took far longer for this social change to filter down into women's magazines.

Activity One: Discuss the following theory in relation to a contemporary lifestyle or fashion magazine cover (for example: Vogue, GQ, Pride or Cosmopolitan).

Home learning: Apply the theory to another media text of your choice and write a response containing embedded quotes (the theory) and examples of your chosen text using media language (i.e. framing of images/shots, mise-en-scene, typography, language in the coverlines, etc)

- **Point** – make a clear point
- **Evidence** – use media language to refer to an example
- **Theory** – introduce the theory – Gauntlett's idea that...
- **Explain** – To what extent do you agree? Does the text conform to or challenge the idea?
- **Link** – Link back to the question/context