6.2 The Media: Representations of Age, Class, Gender, Ethnicity and Disability

AQA 7192 · about 65 minutes · Write-in edition

Total Marks

Name: _____ Date: ____ / ____ / _____

Answer ALL questions. Write full sentences for questions worth 4 marks or more. Where asked, use Item A. Use sociological vocabulary and name relevant perspectives or studies where appropriate.

1 Using Item A, explain two limitations of applying Cohen's moral panic model to this report about moped thefts.

(Total for Question 1 is 4 marks)

2 Outline one criticism of the hypodermic syringe model of media effects, with a brief development.

(Total for Question 2 is 2 marks)

3 Compare briefly uses and gratifications theory with the hypodermic syringe model in terms of their view of audience activity and provide one practical implication for media producers from uses and gratifications.

(Total for Question 3 is 4 marks)

4 Item B: A short hypothetical research summary. "A study interviewed 30 viewers from the same city about reactions to a TV drama about teenage gangs. Middle-class viewers tended to interpret the drama as 'sensationalist' and blamed media bias, while working-class viewers emphasised 'real social problems' shown in the drama and described it as 'accurate'." Using Item B and your own knowledge, analyse how reception analysis helps explain these differing readings.

Using Item B and your own knowledge, analyse how reception analysis helps explain the differing readings of the same TV drama by middle-class and working-class viewers.

(Total for Question 4 is 10 marks)

5 Item C: An invented polling summary. "A survey of 1,000 residents in a large UK town found 62% felt 'young people are becoming more anti-social', and 70% said they heard about youth crime 'mostly' through local news reports. The local newspaper often ran front-page stories linking youth groups to moped thefts." Using Item C and your own knowledge, evaluate how far sociologists would agree that the media are responsible for creating negative public attitudes towards young people.

(Total for Question 5 is 12 marks)

6 Define the term 'under-representation' as used in media studies, in the context of the representation of disabled people in television and news.

(Total for Question 6 is 2 marks)

7 Identify and explain one common stereotype of young people in UK tabloid news coverage, giving an example of language or imagery used.

(Total for Question 7 is 2 marks)

8 Outline Cohen's concept of a 'moral panic' and the role of the 'folk devil', using the example of media coverage of moped crime in UK cities.

(Total for Question 8 is 4 marks)

9 Explain how the hypodermic syringe model and the two-step flow model differ in their assumptions about audience influence from media messages, using one example for each model.

(Total for Question 9 is 6 marks)

10 Identify one way ethnic minorities may be misrepresented in news coverage and briefly explain the potential social consequence of this misrepresentation.

(Total for Question 10 is 2 marks)

11 Item A: A short extract from a hypothetical local newspaper front page. "Rise in 'moped thefts' alarms residents. Police warn of 'youth moped gangs' targeting shoppers. Community leaders call for tougher stops and stop-and-search powers." Using Item A, identify two features of the report that suggest it may be contributing to a moral panic.

(Total for Question 11 is 4 marks)

Mark scheme · 6.2 The Media: Representations of Age, Class, Gender, Ethnicity and Disability

Question 1

identifies a limitation, e.g. Item A may reflect a genuine rise in offending rather than media exaggeration	**B1**
explains development, e.g. if crime is increasing the media reaction may be proportionate to real events rather than an exaggerated panic	**B1**
identifies a second linked point, e.g. local contexts and real victim experiences may be downplayed by a simple panic label	**B1**
explains implication, e.g. applying the moral panic label could ignore the need for practical policing or social interventions	**B1**

Answer: A limitation is Item A might reflect a real rise in offending rather than media exaggeration; if moped thefts are genuinely increasing the media coverage may be a proportionate response. Also, labelling the story as a moral panic risks downplaying real victim experiences and practical needs for policing or social interventions.

Question 2

identifies a criticism, e.g. it overstates media power and treats audiences as passive	**B1**
development, e.g. research shows audiences interpret messages differently and are influenced by social context	**B1**

Answer: A criticism is that the hypodermic model overstates media power by treating audiences as passive; research indicates audiences interpret messages differently and are influenced by social context, so effects are not uniform.

Question 3

identifies contrast in audience activity, e.g. uses and gratifications sees active audiences choosing media, hypodermic sees passive audiences being directly affected	**B1**
develops contrast, e.g. uses and gratifications focuses on motives and needs, hypodermic focuses on direct effects	**B1**
gives practical implication, e.g. producers should research audience needs and produce targeted content to meet gratifications	**B1**
develops implication, e.g. targeted marketing and genre tailoring follows from understanding specific audience uses	**B1**

Answer: Uses and gratifications treats audiences as active, selecting media to meet needs, while the hypodermic model treats audiences as passive recipients of powerful messages. A practical implication from uses and gratifications is that producers should research audience motives and create targeted content or marketing to meet specific gratifications, for example tailoring shows for relaxation or social identity.

Question 4

Level 1 Simple statements about audience differences with limited reference to reception analysis or Item B.	**1-3**
Level 2 Clear explanation of how social background can lead to different readings, with some use of Item B and relevant reception analysis concepts.	**4-7**
Level 3 Developed analysis linking reception analysis theory, social position, cultural capital and interpretive communities to the examples in Item B, with well-chosen supporting knowledge and implications.	**8-10**

Indicative content:

- Reception analysis sees meaning as produced by audiences, not simply encoded by producers; viewers interpret texts differently according to social background.
- Cultural capital and life experiences shape what viewers notice and how they interpret representation; middle-class viewers may have different expectations and be more likely to critique media bias.
- Working-class viewers may read the drama as realistic because it reflects lived experience or local concerns; this is an example of preferred versus oppositional readings depending on social context.
- Research methods used in reception studies include qualitative interviews and focus groups, as in Item B, which reveal individual interpretations and group patterns.
- Reception analysis highlights that disagreements about realism or sensationalism are not just about accuracy but about differing social positions and interpretive frameworks.

Question 5

Level 1 Simple assertions about media influence with little sociological support, or a brief description of the item with minimal analysis. **1-3**

Level 2 Developed explanation of one or two sociological perspectives or studies supporting or challenging the claim, with some use of Item C. **4-6**

Level 3 Clear evaluation using competing perspectives, including evidence from Item C and relevant studies, and consideration of alternative causes of public attitudes. **7-9**

Level 4 A well-balanced, sustained evaluation that weighs multiple sociological perspectives and evidence, assesses the strength of alternative explanations, and reaches a supported conclusion about the media's role. **10-12**

Indicative content:

- Arguments that support media responsibility: moral panic theory (Cohen) and evidence in Item C that most people hear about youth crime via local news and correlate media coverage with fear.
- Hypodermic-type views may explain direct media effects on public attitudes, and agenda-setting theory suggests heavy news focus makes an issue appear more important.
- Studies showing media exaggeration of youth crime and stereotyped representations can fuel fear and calls for control, consistent with the polling results in Item C.
- Counterarguments: two-step flow and uses and gratifications suggest media influence is mediated and audiences select and interpret messages; people may be influenced more by local opinion leaders than directly by news.
- Structural and social factors: real increases in certain crimes, economic decline, cuts to youth services, or experiences with local youth may shape attitudes independently of the media.
- Methodological cautions: polling data may reflect survey framing, and media coverage might respond to public concern rather than create it; correlation in Item C does not prove causation.
- Perspectives: Marxist or New Right explanations could emphasise different causes, for example political agendas or social breakdown respectively; interactionism and reception studies stress varied readings among social groups.
- Conclusion should weigh the evidence and may argue that the media contribute significantly to negative public attitudes, but are not the sole cause; alternative social factors and mediated audience responses also matter.

Question 6

identifies under-representation as a group appearing less often than would be expected from their share of the population (oe) **B1**

development, e.g. disabled people have fewer visible roles in TV drama and fewer spokespeople in news than their population proportion suggests **B1**

Answer: Under-representation is when a social group appears less often in media than would be expected from their share of the population; for example, disabled people often have fewer visible roles in drama and fewer spokespeople in news than their proportion in society.

Question 7

identifies a stereotype, e.g. young people as criminal or disorderly **B1**

explains with example, e.g. headlines using words like 'yobs' or images of masked youths create a threat image **B1**

Answer: A common stereotype is that young people are criminal or disorderly; for example tabloid headlines may call them 'yobs' and show images of masked youths, creating a threatening image.

Question 8

identifies moral panic as an exaggerated public reaction to a perceived threat amplified by media **B1**

develops moral panic idea, e.g. media exaggeration increases public fear and pressure for action **B1**

identifies folk devil as the group labelled as responsible, e.g. 'moped riders' or 'youth gangs' **B1**

develops folk devil role, e.g. folk devils are scapegoated and portrayed as a threat requiring control **B1**

Answer: A moral panic is an exaggerated public reaction to a perceived social threat, often amplified by the media; this raises fear and pressure for action. A folk devil is the group blamed for the problem, such as 'moped riders' in media coverage, who are scapegoated and portrayed as a threat that must be controlled.

Question 9

identifies hypodermic syringe as model claiming media inject powerful messages directly into passive audiences **B1**

develops hypodermic point with example, e.g. panic after sensationalist news reports assumed to directly change public attitudes **B1**

identifies two-step flow as model claiming opinion leaders mediate and interpret media before wider public are influenced **B1**

develops two-step flow with example, e.g. celebrity influencers or local community leaders interpret news and shape how followers respond **B1**

explains key difference, e.g. direct injection into passive masses versus mediated influence via opinion leaders **B1**

further development, e.g. two-step flow allows for audience selectivity and discussion, while hypodermic assumes uniform effects **B1**

Answer: The hypodermic syringe model claims media inject powerful messages directly into passive audiences, for example sensationalist news triggering immediate public panic. The two-step flow model claims media influence is mediated by opinion leaders, such as celebrities or local figures who interpret messages for their followers. The key difference is direct, uniform effects on a passive mass versus mediated, selective influence through opinion leaders which allows discussion and variation in responses.

Question 10

identifies a misrepresentation, e.g. over-representation as criminals or troublemakers	**B1**
explains consequence, e.g. this can increase public prejudice and justify discriminatory policies	**B1**

Answer: One misrepresentation is over-representing ethnic minorities as criminals or troublemakers; this can increase public prejudice and help justify discriminatory policing or policy responses.

Question 11

identifies first feature from Item A, e.g. use of emotive language like 'gangs' or 'alarms residents'	**B1**
explains why first feature fuels moral panic, e.g. emotive language amplifies fear and suggests a social threat	**B1**
identifies second feature from Item A, e.g. calls from community leaders for tougher powers	**B1**
explains why second feature fuels moral panic, e.g. elite calls for action legitimise a strong response and increase public pressure	**B1**

Answer: Features: emotive language such as 'gangs' and 'alarms residents' which amplifies fear and frames the issue as a threat; and community leaders calling for tougher stop-and-search powers, which legitimises strong responses and increases public pressure, both contributing to a moral panic.