

SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF REALITY BY MEDIA

The concept of the social construction of reality is clearly stated by Peter Berger. According to him,

“ persons and groups interacting together in a social system form, over time, concepts or mental representations of each other’s actions, and that these concepts eventually become habituated into reciprocal roles played by the actors in relation to each other. When these roles are made

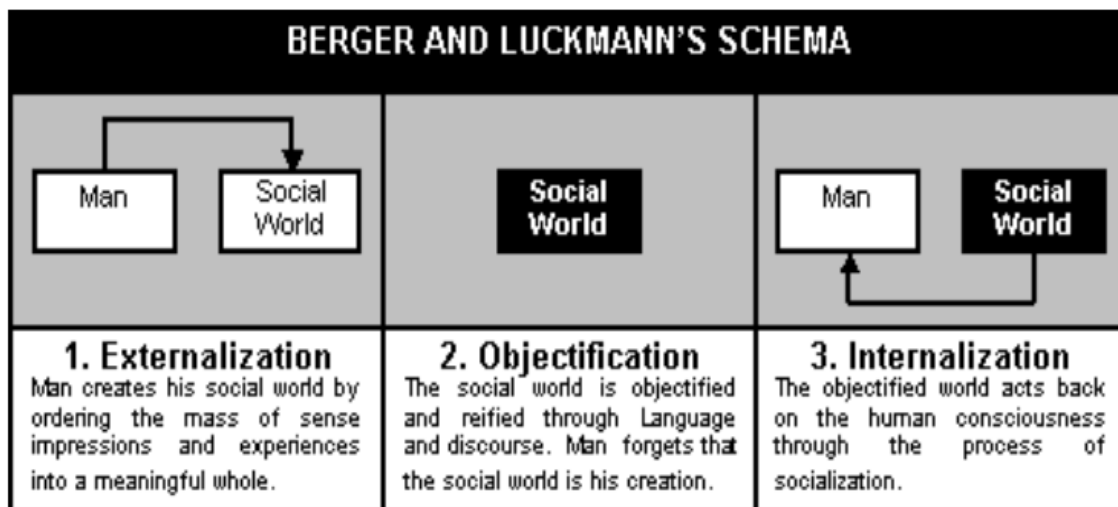
available to other members of society to enter into and play out, the reciprocal interactions are said to be institutionalized. In the process of this institutionalized, meaning is embedded in society. Knowledge and people’s conception (and belief) of what reality is becomes embedded in the institutional fabric of society. Social reality is therefore said to be socially constructed.”

The media’s role in the social construction of everyday reality cannot be ignored. Traditional communication media, especially the mass media influence our view of the world and affect human behavior and response patterns. They operate both in the objectification and subjectification of reality in constructing human reality in such ways as they represent factual details and information and the persuasive use of language and information to promote subjective positions and responses suitable to events. It is not easy to dismiss our reliance in the media especially in terms of getting a glimpse of the “reality” of the world beyond our actual lives and experiences. We also form our own judgments to that “world reality” based on our values, culture, and beliefs that are in fact coincide with what the media feed us. For example, the Western media depicts Asian women as naïve, submissive and helpless which is way opposite to their generalization of Western women as liberated, strong, and career-minded. Certain behavior and response patterns of people are also correlated with the manipulation and control of mass media. The ways the news portray a certain dictator and mean world leader do escalate the hate the people throw at that leader and his/her race or nationality in general. Also, violence that is depicted in the media can be the root and even intensifies the actual violence in societies.

Peter Berger and Thomas Luckman derived Theory that assumes that understanding, significance and meaning are created not within the individual, but in coordination with other human beings.

- **Human beings rationalize their experiences by creating a model of the social world and how it works.**
- **Language is the essential system to help us establish that reality.**
- **What we believe is real is shaped by our social interactions and our life experiences with other people.**

According to Berger and Luckman , society is constructed through three stages:



- **Externalization- we create cultural products (values, beliefs, material products) through social interaction. These products become external to those who have produced them.**
- **Objectivation- is when products created in the first stage appear to take on a reality of their own, becoming independent of those who created them.**

- **Internalization-** we learn the supposedly "objective facts" about the cultural products that have been created. This occurs primarily through socialization, the process of social interaction in which one learns the ways of society.
- **Thomas Theorem (W. I. Thomas)**
 - **“If a person perceives a situation as real, it is real in its consequences”**
 - **Our behavior depends on our subjective interpretation of reality.**
- **Definition of a Situation**
 - **The idea that people create of what is expected of them and others in a given situation.**
- **Definition of a Situation (3 parts to it)**
 - **Framing: understanding the context of the situation.**
 - **Roles: understanding the appropriate identities for the situation**
 - **Leeway (Freedom): understanding how much leeway there is to enact each role. There are limits to the identity a person can claim**
- **If parties disagree about the definition of the situation, conflict arises.**
- **While reality exists, media users negotiate the meaning of that reality.**
- **The same media product may mean very different things to different people. • Example: A music video may elicit different responses from a 15-year-old fan of the band and a parent concerned about stereotypically inappropriate images that may be present in the video**

Mass media, **Berger and Luckman** argue, operate in accord with other social agencies in defining and organizing reality. Similarly, stereotypes as the product of individual cognitive processes and group interactions are not influenced solely by the mass media; they are influenced by a variety of social forces. So much so that the process of forming stereotypes can no longer be viewed as an individual act of cognition, guided by internal factors, but should be critically examined as a process determined by multiple social agents, i.e., external factors. Therefore, it is important to discuss other factors, which the literature on stereotypes has recognized as contributing to the cognitive processes of constructing an idea of social life, of which forming stereotypes is one clear manifestation. Specifically, this study suggest the examination of two large groups of predictors of stereotypical content of foreigners—internal, namely, demographics, knowledge-based, and personality factors; and external factors, namely, information-mediating and mass media factors.

ROLE OF FILM EDITING

Editing can fictionalize and add new meaning by adding originally fragmented and unrelated images and events. Secondly editing falsifies the true dimensions of time- the real time and reel time. Thirdly editing involves wide range of selection, omission and compression of materials. Finally editing is carried out according to the narrative, thematic or aesthetic logic which can be a creation of maker rather than an inherent quality of the original events.

VISUAL CODINGS:

Whenever a news reader or presenters or interviewers give information, audience tends to take it as unbiased information; one of the reasons behind it is these people are presented in a dominant way. They are allowed to address the audience directly. They are shot in full face picture which shows that they have control and authority. Because the principle is to shoot from eye level not from above or below. It is important to note that VIP is always shown in medium close up which shows them from the waist up. And camera always keeps a respectful distance that we maintain in ordinary life when meeting prominent people. But the same camera zooms in on the intimate moments of joy and sorrow of a common man. These days we see many debates over television, and if we find the anchor standing in the middle it shows how neutral he is regarding the both views. All of the above are visual codings.

NARRATIVE:

Narrative is a chain of events; it can range from a fairytale to an advertisement to a newspaper article. It is a chain of events in cause-effect relationship occurring in time. We use narrative in order to make sense of variables-to try to establish relationship between one event and another. Narrative is present in every age and everyone is telling some story or the other, so is the media telling stories which may last a couple of second like ads or which may last a couple of years like soap operas.

Some basic techniques for studying narrative:

- a. **Narrative sequencing**: It is placing various narrative fragments into their correct sequence. While reconstructing we come close to media's dominant narrative structures.
- b. **Narrative prediction**: It involves prediction of how a narrative will evolve. Narrative prediction exercises can be helpful in guessing 'what happens next'?
These exercises can help us in decoding processes like how to read characters by their clothing, gestures, facial expressions etc. It also demonstrates the limitations of most media plots, and the ways in which successive scene narrows down the possibilities further.
- c. **Narrative close**: it is to find missing link in the narrative, like an image or word has been removed and we have to find the missing linguistic or visual content from the context in which it appears.

Conclusion: The media has influenced the culture and society extensively but has also had some negative characteristics which are as follows:

1. The manipulation of large groups of people through media outlets, for the benefit of a particular political party and/or group of people.
2. Bias, political or otherwise, towards favoring a certain individual, outcome or resolution of an event.
3. "The corporate media is not a watchdog protecting us from the powerful; it is a lapdog begging for scraps."

Some of the merits of media are that:

1. It has helped globalization across the world with broadcasts and news programs about different events all around the world.
2. Helps give information to the people through its various programs.
3. Media has given many people jobs and has become the lifeline for many people.

CONSTRUCTION OF FEMININITY

FEMALE MARGINALIZATION

Women figure prominently within media content as a whole, their role often is secondary to that of men. The number of blockbuster films with a female in the lead role- as opposed to one in which she functions as ‘companion’ and/or ‘love interest’ for a male star- remains low despite gradual improvements, a situation replicated across a range of other drama genres. The study, which consisted of content analysis of news content across the world, found that women depicted within news are outnumbered by men on a scale of five to one and that there was not a single major news topic in which women outnumbered men. Women also tend to be under-represented within key decision making roles in media institutions. Despite the importance of this continuing marginalization of women in management and media content, much of what has been written about gender representation has focused on an analysis of the particular roles in which women are represented. Often coming from an explicitly feminist perspective, such analysis has attacked media for reinforcing a patriarchal system in which women are subject to systematic male domination across society.

THE MALE GAZE

The most famous critique of the depiction of women in media is perhaps a short article by Laura Mulvey on 1970’s cinema. Drawing on developments of Sigmund Freud’s theory of psychoanalysis, Mulvey argues that cinema reflects ‘the unconscious of patriarchal society’ and reinforces the subjugation of women to heterosexual male control and desire. Cinema, she argues is centered on scopophilia - a Freudian term for childhood voyeurism or the pleasure of ‘taking other people as objects, subjecting them to a controlling and curious gaze’. Crucially, this process is gendered, so it is females in the films who are set up as object of scopophilia (*is deriving sexual pleasure from looking, erotic pictures*) and males who bear the controlling and sexually objectifying gaze. This is ensured by the emphasis on visual sexual appeal in the construction and presentation of female characters.

This role, as visual object, operates partly within the fictional world of the film, but its ultimate orientation is towards the male gaze of the cinema audience. Sometimes the audience gaze is mediated through the orientation of male characters in the film, while in other sequences this mediating role is avoided and the female display is addressed directly to the camera. For

Mulvey, cinema replicates the role of this superior mirror image, constructing idealized onscreen images of human subjectivity for audiences to identify with and aspire to while females characters are optimized in their function as sexual objects for the male gaze, the cinematic depiction of males is as subjects of audience identification and aspiration: ‘a male star’s glamorous characteristics are thus not those of the erotic object of the gaze, but those of the most perfect, more complete, more powerful ideal ego conceived in the original moment of recognition in front of the mirror’. The male cinema goer, then, projects his identity on to the active, powerful male star, colluding in his possession and objectification of women. **Mulvey argues that cinema is systematically patriarchal: men are active, independent and in control of their destiny, while the role of women is to satisfy the male gaze and, ultimately, to be possessed.**

PATRIARCHAL ROMANCE AND DOMESTICITY:

Theorists have focused on more every day, **mainstream media depictions, which presented women as subordinate to and dependent on men, particularly within the domestic roles of wife and mother.** A study by Erving Goffman identifies a series of themes pervading the representation of men and women in magazine advertisements. When heterosexual (opposite sex) couples were presented together, men were either taller or higher up than women and the implied power difference was reinforced by an admiring gaze from the latter. Also, women were frequently represented in submissive postures- lying down, bending knees, canting their heads or smiling deferentially. **Goffman notes that, while men’s use of objects tended to be functional and definite- grasping the shaving foam purposefully, using the toothbrush in the most efficient manner- women frequently were shown caressing objects in a distracted, emotional or sexual way.**

Goffman concludes that men are presented in adverts as independent, purposeful and clear thinking, while women appear subordinate, dependent, emotional and absent-minded. The depiction of women in magazine representations, meanwhile, has been focused on by a range of feminist commentators, who have regarded such depictions as part of a broader patriarchal system of male dominance. **Women were disproportionately represented within the home, reinforcing their association with the cooking and child-rearing, as well as their financial dependence on men. Even within female- orientated media, such as soap operas, women’s sections of newspapers and women’s magazines.** While more prone to respond to progressive social change than television, the latter ultimately are deemed to have retained a clear emphasis on marriage, motherhood and domesticity.

POST- FEMINIST INDEPENDENCE?

Representation of women has changed considerably since the 1970s. In particular, the emphasis on domesticity, deference and traditional romance identified by Tuchman and others

has been partially replaced by more independent, assertive versions of femininity- something that can sometimes include a proud and explicit quest for sex. Magazines such as Cosmopolitan and Glamour have for some time constructed as image of women who, on the face of it, go out and get what they want- something expressed in their careers, disposable income and ability to have sexual relationships on their own terms. Such magazines even sometimes feature objectifying pictures of naked men. Sometimes referred to as 'post- feminist', this more confident, independent female also appears frequently in advertising. Championing of female independence also extends to cinema and television. One of the most talked about recent examples, on both the small and big screen.

THE ENDURING GAZE

In comparison with earlier representations, the presence and popularity of images single, financially and sexually autonomous women should not be underestimated. It both illustrates and contributes to changing social attitudes about what it is to be female and what role women should play in society. She may be a professional success story rather than a domestic goddess and she may be sexually assertive rather than romantically admiring, but two elements identified by earlier theorists remain: the need to look good and the need to get male attention. magazines link together the two themes of looking attractive and consuming fashion and beauty products with a third one: (hetero) sexual attention and relationships. Similar consumption, most of which is orientated towards themes can be identified in Sex and the City (film). The main characters are united by an emphasis on using their considerable wealth to indulge in extensive clothing and accessories and, hence, the priority of looking attractive.

- It is no surprise that, like fashion and beauty magazines, the franchise has made substantial amounts of money from clothes, cosmetics and other product placements.
- The increasingly dominant glamorous career woman representation exemplified by Sex and the City (film) is also vulnerable to criticism in terms of what it excludes.
- 'Progressive' mainstream representations of women in recent decades have entirely fitted into the wealthy, consumerist (hetero) sex- orientated stereotype. Most frequent depiction of women continues to centre on some variant of the love interest and/or sex object role, block- buster movies increasingly feature females as active, powerful lead characters in their own right.
- There are also representations of women who come across as more unambiguously objectifying. Publications have made much of their ability to persuade female pop stars, television presenters, actresses and others to pose for

them and a lad mag photo shoot has become a potentially valuable career move for female personalities seeking to climb the celebrity ladder.

- Women can be successful, intelligent and independent, it seems, but only if they don't lose their sight of their primary role as sexual object. *For Gill, this observation applies to images of women across media- in news, television programs, film and, particularly, advertising, where: "In the boardroom and in the bedroom, in the kitchen and in the car, wife and mother or executive or pre-teenager, women are being presented as alluring sexual beings."*

MEDIA AND MASCULINITIES

Partly as a result of the crucial contribution of feminism to the establishment of the study of gender and media, a good deal of what has been written on the subject is centered on women- something reflected in the structure of this chapter too. Yet, the ways in which masculinity is constructed in media, alongside the role of men as media producers and audiences, is every bit as important to discussions about gender, sexuality and identity. Over the past two decades, increasing academic attention has been devoted to this.

MASCULINITY OR MASCULINITIES?

As Lauva Muvley observes, the cinematic male lead is typically a dominant, powerful and sexually successful focus for male- centered audience identification. Despite important elements of diversity, the last four decades of popular film have been dominated by representations of active, powerful male characters who use their skill- whether physical or otherwise- to overcome the forces stacked against them and, often, win the love of the film's lead female. For John Fiske (1987), another key element of media representation of masculinity is a practical orientation towards the successful achievement of goals. *Thus, the narrative structure of male- orientated television series, he says, tends to consist of a one- dimensional plot progression towards a climax of achievement induced by masculine performance of some kind.* Most obviously, male power is emphasized, for Fiske, through both physical imagery of muscular bodies triumphing in fist fights and via male control of trucks, fast cars and guns. **Even when they are not portrayed in physically tough roles, men regularly are represented as active, goal- orientated and competitive and as occupying positions of power, authority and responsibility.**

The visual construction of extreme physical male prowess, for example, may lend itself in some cases to use as sexual objectification for the female or the homosexual male gaze. The clear and quite deliberate emphasis on the body of Daniel Craig walking out of the sea in swimming shorts in the marketing for Casino Royale represents just one example of this. The significance of representations of spectacular male physical power to heterosexual male audiences is also ambiguous. Sometimes the changing reality of everyday masculinities is itself the subject of media representations. At the beginning of the 1990s, there was much media

reference to the 'new man', presented as comfortable with gender equality and concerned about his appearance and style. This was reflected in the growth of male-orientated style publications, such as *The Face* and *ID* magazine, and in a rapidly expanding portfolio of advertisements for men's cosmetic and fashion products. Women's fashion and beauty magazines placed emphasis on the desirability for women of this more image-conscious, sensitive male. Orientated particularly towards young female and gay male audiences, the boy band combined some traditional elements of masculinity with style-conscious, highly sensitive, vulnerable and slightly built 'boy next door' features.

LADS' MAGS (Exclusive Men's Magazine in North America) AND CONTRADICTIONARY REPRESENTATIONS

Powerful stereotypes to one dominated by sensitive caring representations the development of masculinities is full of apparent conflicts and contradictions. Gill (2007) suggests that the identification of such a single dominant type is difficult, given the increasing range of competing and overlapping versions of what it is to be male. **The development of 'lads' magazines' in the 1990s and 2000s provides an illuminating illustration. Centered on sex, drinking, cars, sport, gadgets and 'male' popular culture, such publications presented themselves as a restatement of authentic masculinity in the face of the figure of the sensitive 'new man', who was ridiculed as feminine and/or homosexual.** Women, then, are a source of pleasure but also a threat to men's natural love for adventure, drinking and having a laugh with their mates. Fashion and personal grooming are a constant feature and, as with women's magazine, this connects with an array of cosmetic and clothing advertisements.

The stereotypical carefree male, with little concern for his appearance, may not be particularly profitable, making an emphasis on the need to look good a valuable modification from a commercial point of view. Furthermore, beneath their confident, cocky headlines, advice columns focus on health problems and relationship guidance, suggesting at least a degree of self-consciousness and insecurity. He successfully demonstrates that non-patriarchal readings of the publications are possible, but it is far from clear that most readers are liable to interpret the magazines through the prism of liberal views such as his own.