

Year 12 Media Studies A Level Holiday task

“Body Matters”

Read and highlight the following, researching the areas in bold so that you know who/what they are.



The representation of the human body has provoked much debate about its meaning, whether in the advertising we see as we walk down the streets, or in the images we see as we watch television, surf the internet or flick through a magazine or newspaper. Media images of the body may also mediate the individual's perception of his or her own body. This individual's sense of 'body self' is, of course, also contextualised by variables like gender, ethnicity and age.

There is a body of work on the gender politics of this, from **Laura Mulvey's notion of the 'male gaze'**, through **Naomi Wolf's 'beauty myth'** to **Judith Butler's notions of gender as a performance**. For Butler, **"Gender is not passively scripted on the body...Gender is what is put on, invariably, under constraint, daily and incessantly, with anxiety and pleasure..."** The human body here is seen as a social construct, a means of social expression or performance. Attempts have been made by different regulatory bodies to intervene or set boundaries for representations of the body and for the ways in which these are distributed (and to whom). Examples include historical examples such as the **Hays Code in Hollywood in the 1930s to 1950s as well as contemporary Ofcom and ASA guidelines**. There have also more recently been attempts to ban or restrict the distribution of idealised representations of the body e.g. size zero, on the grounds that they will encourage eating disorders, reduce self-esteem or stigmatise certain conditions.



Representations of the body can be read ideologically and can even be seen as forms of propaganda. Body representations in western media often represent bodies as free from constraint. On the other hand, images of oppositional ideology may focus on bodies as a 'hive', bodies acting in unison, bodies in which individual differences have been ironed out. This may be seen for example in sports coverage as well as fiction in which the tension between covered and uncovered bodies or between dehumanised groups versus individuals is explored. Powerful vested interests are at play in the various representations of the body. These include both manufacturers of body-related products and services (skin creams, make-up, diet foods, cosmetic surgery and so on) and the manufacturers of body images. Examples of the latter include the Hollywood studio system where almost all of the bodies 'produced' by this system and its contemporary equivalents are idealised and conformist. Non-conformist bodies (often 'too large') tend to be found in genres such as comedy where the quirkiness of unconventional stars is signalled by the nonconforming body.

In general terms, media producers play an important role as the enforcers of a dominant set of body norms. However, the media also provide the arena for discussing and challenging these norms. In this way the media contributes to a culture of the body which is dynamic and powerful.

Potential stimulus material:

France's plans to ban size zero models are noble - but pointless By Gareth Platt March 17, 2015 11:58 GMT <http://www.ibtimes.co.uk/frances-plans-ban-super-skinny-models-are-noble-pointless-1492311>

Barbie's Sports Illustrated swimsuit campaign is #unapologetic trolling By Adi Robertson on February 12, 2014

<http://www.theverge.com/2014/2/12/5405002/barbie-sports-illustrated-swimsuit-campaign-isunapologetic-trolling>

Amazon's Transparent Is Damn Near Perfect by Margaret Lyons September 26, 2014

<http://www.vulture.com/2014/09/tv-review-transparent-is-damn-near-perfect.html>

Your task is to put together a 5 minute presentation in which you argue one of the following:

- A: That media industries are responsible for perpetuating negative body image
- B: That media industries are responsible for challenging society's images of the perfect body
- C: Comedy is the only genre that promotes plus sizes
- D: The American TV industry focuses too heavily on female body image
- E: E-media has perpetuated/challenged the dominant ideology (hegemony) of "perfect bodies"

You can use powerpoint, make a video or use handouts, but there must be evidence in support of your argument.

You will be presenting in your first week of media lessons.