

The Sociology Of the Mass Media

Revision Book
Exam June 13TH 2012

Topic 1: Trends in the ownership & control of the mass media

- Key Issues:
 - Ownership & Control
 - Pluralist View
 - Marxist View
 - Neo-Marxist View
 - GUMG
 - The Fallacy of Choice
- Essay Title
 - Assess Marxist explanations of the relationship between ownership & control of the mass media.

Examples of the media

Print media
Audio Visual media
Cyber or Digital media

Do we have more choice today?
More channels
More free papers & magazines
We've got the internet
Some sociologists say no

The Mass Media

Agencies of communication that transmit information, education, news & entertainment to a mass audience

Factors that have contributed to this decline

Concentration of ownership
Horizontal Integration (Cross-media ownership)
Vertical Integration
Diversification
Global conglomeration
Synergy
Technological Convergence

Concentration of ownership

The Mass Media is owned/controlled by a small number of individuals & companies

Factors that have contributed to this decline of choice

Horizontal Integration

This is when large media companies own various types of media

Diversification

This is when companies branch out into new areas to spread risk

Global conglomeration

This is where media companies operate in the global market producing for example newspapers in many countries - they also control more than one

Vertical Integration

This is where companies want to maximize their profits by controlling all aspects of the industry.

Synergy

This is where media companies sell their product in different formats - e.g. a film will also be a game, have an album, action figure etc.

Technological Convergence

This is a relatively new concept; it's where several technologies are put together in one product.

Neo-Marxist

Controlled by Journalists

Media emphasises the power of hegemony –

This ideology is spread because they accept it & believe it to be reasonable to do so.

The diversity of the mass media products, the different platforms for broadcasting & the range of pressures that influence the production of the media serve to ensure that ideological domination cannot take place

Marxist

Owned & Controlled by the ruling class

Those who own the media will directly influence the content to reflect their interest.

Journalist will go along with owners views as they depend on them for their jobs

Owners want profit – need an audience – so provide what the audience wants

The Media Reinforces the dominant position of the ruling class in a capitalist society & affirms the patterns of power that exist.

This creates an 'ideological smokescreen' that persuades the working class to accept their position

Journalist are socialised in the dominant ideology so therefore will reflect the values of the ruling class

Journalists have independence & are not manipulated by the owners

Consumer choice will dictate content of media – all tastes catered for.

Pluralist

Owned by different organisations, regulated by government & content controlled by consumer choice

Economic Pressure

Need to keep advertisers sweet so avoid offensive or controversial story's
Many are on temporary contracts so comply in order to keep job

Media content supports the interest of owners

It is a byproduct of the social backgrounds of the journalists & broadcasters they are generally White / Middle Class/ Male - just like the owners

GUMG: hegemonic approach to media ownership & control.

Agenda setting

The media decide what issues we discuss & what issues are avoided - we are not presented with the information that would change our lives. So we have 'cultural hegemony' - the principles of capitalism are presented as normal.

Barnett & Weymour (1999)

The quality of TV has reduced.

Aim is to have large audiences so they go for high entertainment for the masses

The Fallacy of Choice

Not really more choice on TV just repeats & reality TV.
More of the same mindless rubbish.
Cheap American Imports
Less serious TV

Public Service Broadcasters

Pluralist use the PSB as proof of media integrity

However the BBC are becoming more commercialized;
Developed their own digital channels & set up an internet news site.

Criticisms

Curran: Print Media in last 10 years

Reduction in serious news reporting & an increase in human interest stories & celebrity news.
This has led to a fall in journalistic standards, we have witnessed a rise in cheque-book journalism & the paparazzi.

The press are not reflecting the diversity in public opinion on subjects such as the Euro or the monarchy

Topic 2: New media, globalisation & popular culture

- Key Issues:
 - What is the ‘new media’?
 - Characteristics of the ‘new media’
 - Who is using the ‘new media’?
 - Neophiliacs & Cultural Pessimists perspective
 - Postmodernism
 - Globalisation of the media
- Essay Title
 - Assess the impact of the media & globalisation on popular culture.

New media refers to the evolution of existing media delivery systems and the development of new digital communication technologies.

New Media

3 Characteristics of the New Media

1. **Convergence**-combining different technologies

2. **Compression**-signals are digitals so can be sent down the same cable

3. **Interactivity**-where the audience can interact with the media

Age: 16-24 use most – old people the least

Used for: contact – work – gaming – shopping

Different ages use for different reasons

Social Class: middle & upper classes more likely to use it as they can afford it.

Used for: contact – work – gaming – shopping – feel like they can't live without it

WC: have mobiles but no contract

Who uses the new media?

Gender: Girls 12-15 more likely to have mobile phone, use internet, listen to radio & read papers & mags than boys. Women are less confident with using PCs
Boys & men are more likely to playing on their games consoles

Location: western world use it most
Poorest countries Unable to access it due to poverty, availability & language barrier as it is predominately in English
The USA & Western Europe generate most of the content of the web.

An e-commerce revolution-shopping online quick and easy.
Retailers offer exclusive internet deals

Commercialisation-increase in the commercial use of the net.

Domination by media conglomerates-internet is dominated by small amount of companies and they can direct you to what they want.

Neo-philiacs

Like the new media

Increased consumer choice-more T.V channels and increase in media output systems

Revitalizing democracy-people can seek alternative views than the ones presented in mainstream media

Decline in quality -not more choice, they are just full of repeats and trashy TV.

Reinforcing elite power-major corporations dominates the web with sites that ensure their view dominates.

Cultural pessimists

Believes that the revolution of the new media has been exaggerated by the neophiliacs

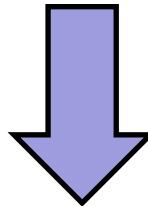
The media also defines our lifestyle, for example what we wear and eat. We buy labels not clothes.

Not part of real communities but proto-communities. (facebook, soaps)

The media has become more influential in shaping our identity.

We no longer look at grand theories such as science or Marxism to explain the world

Postmodernism



Criticisms- Exaggerate the degree of social change - Media does influence people but it is not the only thing - It ignores the fact that some people can't access the internet or TV.

Consequences of globalisation of the media:

Increased choice - Helps develop societies - Promotes different cultural styles around the world

Globalisation is the shrinking of the world!

Ownership of mass media - large organization own media across the world & in different formats

Satellite TV - opened up the worlds of TV - now view your favorite programs all over the world

The internet - allows us access to the world from where ever we are.

Advertising - certain brands are internationally recognizable - Coco-cola, Mc Donalds, Levis

Examples of globalization of the media

Entertainment - we watch the same films, TV programs, listen to the same music & support the same sporting events.

Disneyfication

The influence of American entertainment culture on the rest of the world
We all watch American sit coms
Listen to celebrity gossip
Creates consumerism
Which is creating a world of sameness rather than diversity.

They argue that it restricts choice
Local media & culture is being replaced by global culture
Which is dominated by a powerful few.

Marxists view of globalisation of the media

Postmodernist view of globalisation of the media

Disagree with Marxists -it offers more choices & opportunities
Local cultures are not swallowed up they adapt to global culture
They take elements of it & match it to their own culture.

Topic 3: The selection & presentation of news, & moral panics

- Key Issues:
 - TV news: the window on the world
 - News values
 - Ownership, ideology & bias
 - Moral panics
- Essay Title
 - Critically examine the factors influencing news production.

Why is TV news regarded as the most reliable?

Newsreaders : 'neutral' observers - dress smart - have eye contact

Body language suggest authority

Deliver even bad news in a friendly, reassuring manner - viewers see them as trustworthy 'friends'



This reinforces the image of formal, objective authority.

High-tech delivery shows the scientific lengths gone to, to gain the 'truth'



Composition

Do the events fit the style & politics of the news paper? Will there be a balance of items?



Unambiguity

Events which are easy to grasp/understand are more likely to be reported than those which are open to interpretation.



Extraordinariness

Unexpected or rare events have more newsworthiness than routine events because they are out of the ordinary.



Threshold

The bigger the event the more likely it will be nationally reported. E.g. World wars or natural disasters.



Reference to elite persons

Those stories which show coverage of the famous and the powerful are often seen as more newsworthy than those which feature the general public.



Personalisation

Events may be personalised by associating a particular celebrity or leader with the specific event.



Negativity

Bad news seems to be more exciting to journalists than good news.

Neo-pluralism

Pluralists argue that journalists are objective & impartial pursuers of the truth.

Neo-pluralists argue that in the modern world these goals are increasingly hard to achieve.

Davies (2008) argues that they fail in their basic function to check facts

Churnalism

The uncritical over-reliance on 'facts' produced by government spin doctors & PR experts

Davies looked at news papers over a 2 week period in 1997 - 80% of stories came from PR & PA companies - Only 12% were generated by reporters themselves - 70% of the 'facts' presented were not checked

Ownership, ideology & bias

Why do we have Churnalism ?

Commercial pressure

More space to fill & less time

Official sources are cheap & quick

Give the people what they want

Attract readers & revenue from advertisers

Journalists are uninterested about the truth

Criticisms

Marxists suggest that Davies ignores the role of owners & advertisers in this process

They want to make money so need advertisers & audiences

They need to promote the facts, ideas, values & aspirations of elite audiences, advertisers & journalists

Rather than presenting the truth news is manufactured

This benefits powerful groups & has a negative effect on the rest of society

Concentration of ownership of news organisations

Media ownership is concentrated into 6 corporations

How do media owners influence the content of the news?

Give direct instructions

Control resources available

Promoting their political slant

Promoting their own Business interest

Attracting Advertising

The power elite

The media leaders are part of the wider power elite from industry, finance & politics.

The news reflects this connection

The public expect reporters to be impartial

But they are employed by the corporations & want to keep their jobs so tow the line

A very bland view of the world is presented that tries not to offend or be controversial

- does not want to lose sales or advertising

Ownership, ideology & bias

The propaganda model of the media

Herman & Chomsky (1988) argue that the media participate in propaganda campaigns that are helpful to the elite

The media relies on the capitalist system to service so it can manipulate them

They need the advertising contracts

Go along with the dominant political ideology

Stories that go against this are suppressed

The hierarchy of credibility

Stuart Hall (1973)- 'primary definers'

Due to news values, journalists rank the views of 'primary definers', politicians, police officers, civil servants & business leaders as more important than pressure groups, trade unionists or ordinary people

Reports are often what people say about events rather than the events themselves

Minority groups are therefore ignored or portrayed negatively as threats to society

The social background of media professionals

The GUMG argue that the way the news is gathered & presented is the result of journalists social background

They see nothing wrong with society so do not criticise

They side with the rich & powerful because they have more in common with them

Semiotic analysis

GUMG looked at the language & images used

They are more sympathetic to the interests of the powerful & devalue the points of the less powerful

E.G. Reporting on Iraq war & miners' strike

Ownership, ideology & bias

Criticisms

The media does not always act in the interest of the powerful

The media can shape public opinion & the way they vote

Media companies are in competition with each other

Price wars

Pluralists argue that the news contains many views

Bias is not consistent

Conclusion

So the news may not be as impartial as we think it is due to:

Bureaucratic constraints

News values

Churnalism

Primary definers

Social backgrounds of journalists

So the news is socially manufactured & reflects interest of powerful groups

Undermines democracy & prevents informed choices

The media's reaction to social groups or activities which are defined as threatening societal values. As a result they create anxiety amongst the general public.

News papers play a key role in creating a moral panic

Marxists argue that they serve capitalist ideology

Remember Stan Cohen's study of Mods & Rockers in the 60s:
Folk Devils & Moral Panics

Moral Panic or Deviancy Amplification

Why do they happen?

Because society fails to adapt to dramatic social changes
There is a sense of a loss of control over certain groups
Journalists assume a shared moral concern - so by reporting these issues they are giving the public what they want
Some argue that the motivation is profit - Moral panics sell news papers

5 distinguishing features of a moral panic

Increased public concern over the behaviour of a certain group
Increased hostility towards the group
A certain level of public opinion agreement that there is a real threat & that it is caused by the group
Public concern is out of proportion to the real harm caused by the group
Moral panics appear & disappear very quickly

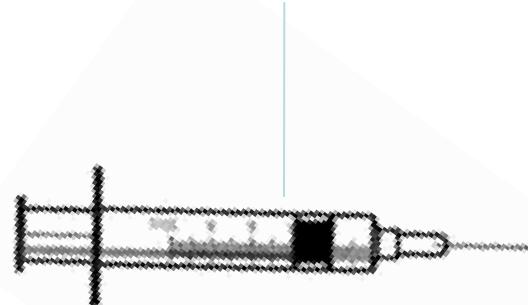
Topic 4: The mass media & audiences

- Key Issues:
 - Hypodermic syringe model
 - Active Audience approaches:
 - Two step flow model
 - Selective filter model
 - Uses & gratifications model
 - Cultural effects model
- Essay Title
 - Assess the usefulness of the Hypodermic syringe model of the mass media.

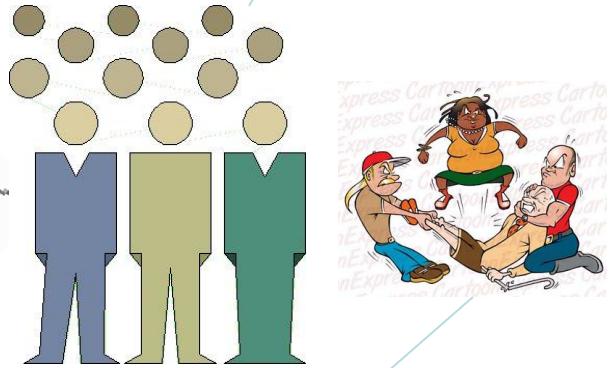
The Mass media through news, TV programmes, films, news papers, video games etc are able to 'inject' whatever content, ideas, images etc into the audience.



The 'syringe' is full of the media content & 'injects' this directly into the audience.



Violence, pornography, war, knife crime, muggings, horror....



The audience are unthinking, passive receivers of these images & messages. They are unable to resist the messages that are 'injected' into them

Hypodermic Syringe Model

The audience are filled with the dominant ideology, sexist & racist images, scenes of violence etc & they immediately go out and act out what they have seen. They are violent, racist, sexist & sometimes killers.

Catharsis - Can provide a safe outlet for people's aggressive tendencies. Fesbach & Sanger (1971)- teenage boys. just violent TV Vs a mixture of violent & non violent TV . The group that watched only violent TV showed less aggressive behaviour. Conclusion - by immersing themselves into the violent films their aggressive energy was released in a safe way

Sensitisation: Jock Young (1981) argues that seeing the effects of violence can make people more aware of the consequences & less likely to commit them. He suggests that violent scenes can be so graphic & so shocking that they put people off violence.

Methodology: Gauntlett (2008) criticises the methodology of studies like Bandura's. Conducted in a laboratory which is artificial & therefore children are unlikely to behave 'normally'. Violence is not defined - is it real or fictional/cartoon violence -It fails to acknowledge that the context of the violence can affect the affect it has on the audience

Critique of the Hypodermic Syringe Model

Children as sophisticated media users: People are not as vulnerable as the HSM suggests. We are able to distinguish between real violence & 'cartoon' violence from a very early age. We are also aware that the violence watched should not be imitated. Demonstrated in a study by Buckingham (1993). Another study by Wood (1993) showed how watching horror movies was a rite of passage & not a corrupting influence on their behaviour

Audiences are not homogenous: They have different social characteristics in terms of age, maturity, class, education, family background etc. These differences will influence how people respond & use media content. They are, therefore, not the passive receivers of information that the HSM assumes

Scapegoating the Media: The HSM uses the media as a scapegoat for everything wrong in society. But there are other factors that could be causing the violence & antisocial behaviour e.g. Peer group, drugs, childhood trauma & mental illness.

Active Audience Approaches

Sees the media as far less influential

They believe that people have considerable choice in the way they use & interpret the media

There are 3 main versions of this view

The two-step flow model

The uses & gratifications model

The cultural effects model

Plus the selective filter model



Here is
the 9
o'clock
news.



Two Step Flow
Model

If Ms
Carpenter
says its true
then it must
be

That's very
interesting I
must tell my
Sociology
Group.

Y13
Sociology A2
group

The uses & gratifications model

The audience use the media for different reasons.

Personal relationships and companionship, through identification with communities like those in *Coronation Street* or *Eastenders* are main conversation starters in many communities.



Background whilst doing other things.

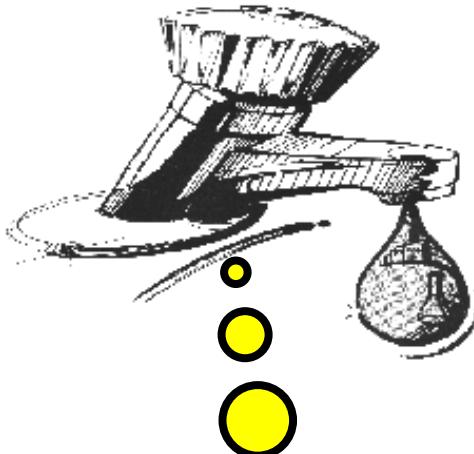
Information, such as news

Leisure, entertainment and relaxation, as an escape from daily routine.

Personal Identity: The use of media for their own identity, e.g. Latest clothing fashions.

The 'cultural effects' model.

(AKA the 'drip drip' effect)



Associated with Neo-Marxism
Does not view the audience as 'simply passive'
People interpret the media they 'consume'
But, producers of media 'expect' the audience to respond to it in a particular way.
Or, as Neo-Marxists call it a 'preferred (or dominant) reading'

Ruling class ideology constantly 'bombs' the public through the media.
Because they have power they can 'filter' their ideology into society via the media.
The public (proletariat) will eventually believe the ruling class ideology to be natural & true. This is called 'cultural hegemony'
Thus, the proletariat will consent to bourgeoisie ideology without even realising it!

*The more an ideology is 'dripped' into society by the media, the more people believe it & accept it as true!
(George Orwell)*

Examples:
Many OAP's believe the media message about 'dole scroungers' so much they are too embarrassed to claim the benefits they are entitled to. (fear of being stigmatised as scroungers)

The more material possessions you own, the happier you will be.
To feel attractive/confident, women must imitate the body shape of Supermodels.

Most asylum seekers are really 'welfare scroungers'

THE SELECTIVE FILTER MODEL

1. Selective exposure

A message must first be chosen to be viewed, read or listened to.

These choices depend on people's interests, education commitments etc.



2. Selective Perception

The messages have to be accepted. The audience may choose to take notice of one message but reject another.

For e.g. a heavy smoker may choose to ignore a Television programme which focuses on the link between smoking and lung cancer.

3. Selective Retention

Messages have to stick. People have a tendency to remember only things they broadly agree with.

Postman (1986) argues that we now live in a 'three-minute culture' i.e. the attention span of the average member of society is only 3 mins long!



Topic 5: Representations of the body: gender, sexuality & disability

- Key Issues:
 - Media representations of femininity
 - Media representations of masculinity
 - Media representations of sexuality
 - Media representations of disability
- Essay Title
 - Assess the sociological explanations of the ways in which the mass media represent any two of the following: gender, sexuality, disability.

Traditional media representations of femininity

Housewife and mother
Domestic servant
Domestic consumer
Sex object

Feminists argue that when women are shown to be working they experience problems



Media Representation of Femininity

Male gaze - The camera 'eyes up' women in a sexual way to provide erotic pleasure for men



Symbolic annihilation - Tuchman et al used this term to describe the way women's achievements are not reported, trivialised or condemned by the media. If they appear in the news they are either celebrities or declarations.

Things are changing, there are many examples of more positive images of women. This reflects the cultural change in women's positions in society over last 25 years.

Traditional media

representations of masculinity -

The joker
The jock
The strong silent type
The big shot
The action hero
The buffoon

New man - an 80's

phenomenon.
GQ, Maxim & FHM aimed at middle class males
Showed men getting in touch with their feminine side

The 'metro

sexual' male

Wears designer clothes, has skin care products - it is argued that this reflects changes in social attitudes to masculinity

Media Representation of Masculinity

Over the past 20 yrs we have witnessed a move from the traditional to new forms of masculinity.

Retributive masculinity

Newer mags, Zoo & Nuts appear to reject metro sexuality & reassert traditional masculinity 'birds, booze & football'

Liberal feminists: The media plays a major part in the social construction of gender roles

Socialist & Marxist feminists: The male & female images in the media are driven by money

Radical feminists: The media reproduces patriarchy

Popular feminism : 'girl power'

Postmodernist : There is now greater diversity of gender identities in the media

Pluralism: Women can see through gender stereotyping & manipulation

Sexuality: refers to peoples sexual characteristics & their sexual behaviour

Sexual orientation: refers to the type of people that individuals are either physically or romantically attracted to.

Heterosexual: involves a sexual orientation towards people of the opposite sex

Homosexuality: involves a sexual orientation towards people of the same sex

Homosexuality - Illegal

until 1967 In Britain

Homosexuals are subjected to periodic moral panics regarding their supposedly 'unnatural' practices

Media Representation of Sexuality

Representation of homosexuality

Gay men:

effeminate &
camp
macho
deviant
flamboyant
funny

Gay women:

butch
short hair
aggressive
hairy
dungarees

Things are changing:

More gay and lesbian characters in dramas, films & soaps, such as; Brokeback Mountain, Holby City and Will and Grace.

It is the physical or mental impairment which has a substantial & long term adverse effect on a person's ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities involves a sexual orientation towards people of the same sex

Media Representation of Disability

Models of disability:

Medical model: This model views disability as a product of impairment (Bulsara 2005).

Social model: This model views disability as the outcome of social barriers. The main focus on this model is the obstacles and discriminatory that people with disabilities face.

How disabled people are seen

An object of ridicule: Disabled people are often laughed at in comedies for example little Britain ANDY.

As a burden: Television documentaries and news features often focus on carers rather than the disabled.

As sexually abnormal: It is assumed by media representations that the disabled do not have sexual feelings

As ordinary or normal: Barnes argues that the media rarely portray disabled people as normal and who happen to have an impairment

As pitiable and pathetic: Barnes claims that this stereotype has grown in popularity in recent years because of television appeals for example children in need.

As sinister and evil: disabled people are often portrayed as criminals or monsters.

As super cripes: Barnes notes that the disabled are portrayed as having special powers example the blind may be seen as visionaries with a sixth sense.

Topic 6: Representations of ethnicity, age & social class

- Key Issues:
 - Media representations of ethnic minorities
 - Media representations of social class
 - Media representations of age
- Essay Title
 - Critically examine sociological explanations of mass media representations of one of the following: ethnicity, age, social class.

In the media ethnic minorities are portrayed as a "problem" they are reported as the cause of crime and social disorder. They may be involved but so are white youth.

Van Dijk (1991): looked at the reporting of ethnic minorities between 1985 & 1989, White citizens were reported positively Non - whites were reported negatively. Van Dijk also showed that the voice of the British press was predominately white.

Racial Stereotypes in the media:

Ethic minorities are portrayed in a negative way;
As criminals, Sufferers of AIDS in Africa
Underachievers in school.

Media Representation of Ethnic Minorities

There have been many moral panics about ethnic minorities:
Muslims, immigrants and refugees.

Overt and Inferential racism:

Overt is when racist arguments are obvious.
Inferential is when arguments are balanced but based on racist assumptions.

There have been changes in the media representations of ethnicity.
Most research was done in the 70's and early 80's
Over time there has been an increase in the representations of ethnicity in the media.

A content analysis in the late 1990's revealed that most news items that dealt with racial issues conveyed an anti - racist message.
However, about a quarter of news items still convey a negative message ethnic minorities.

Media Representation of Age

Different ages groups tend to be represented in different ways in the media.
There are three main types of stereotypes:

- Childhood
- Youth
- Older people.

Childhood:

They are represented in a positive way
e.g.

Cute,
Brilliant,
Brave little angels.
Accessories

Youths: are seen as a problem group because the media portrays them as vandals.

The media tends not to praise youth for their good achievement. Cohen found that youths were blamed for all problems in society and were used as a scapegoat.

Older people: They are presented in the media in quite negative ways.

It is argued that older people are stereotyped more than any other group.

These include;
Grumpy,
Mentally challenged
A Burden
Enjoying second childhood

The media shows each social class in a different light and rarely focuses on the conflicts between them. The media often represent the working class in a stereotypical context such as on soaps such as Eastenders and Coronation Street.

The News & Social Class

GUMG: TV news is not unbiased but reflects the interest of the powerful group. The coverage of the miners strike in the 80's illustrates this. GUMG argue that the overall impression by the media was that the workers caused the strikes. This dominant views shows the working class in a negative way.

Media Representation of Social Class

Representations of social class receive little attention compared to ethnicity and age. Research that has been done is mainly on the working class. Ehrenreich says that in the news working class are likely to be witnesses of crime or sports but never the commentator.

British soaps show close knit working class communities - in reality they have collapsed. Dodd and Dodd argue that these communities are threatened by criminal and racist forces. Sitcoms portray WC as dumb & immature