

These answers have not been through the AQA approval process.

# 4 THE MEDIA

## Example answers

1 Outline and explain **two** ways in which screen violence may affect audiences.

[10 marks]

### STUDENT RESPONSE

There are two views on the impact that violence in the media can have on its audience. Some theorists believe that violence leads to a copycat effect, thus increasing violent attributes in its audience. However, other theorists believe that this view is too simplistic and that audiences are not that passive.

Bandura's bobo-doll experiment is a classic study which shows that children will copy what they see, especially if the act is carried out by an adult or a person in a position of authority. The theory suggests that people become desensitised by violence in the media and therefore less shocked by violence in real life. The study, however, has been criticised for being rather outdated and not in line with how the media has changed in the postmodern world of media saturation.

Feshbach and Singer, for example, suggest that violence in the media actually causes catharsis theory. This means that the media violence gets violent thoughts out of the viewer's system and therefore the viewer is less likely to be violent. However, this catharsis theory does not explain why there has been a large spate of copycat violence, especially in places such as the USA where the media is so powerful.

### TEACHER COMMENTS

On first viewing, this answer looks pretty strong and there is good application of classic studies. However, the question asked specifically about screen violence rather than media violence in general. Can you identify how to adapt the answer to be more specific to what is being asked in relation to screen violence? Also, the final evaluative point is brief. How can it be expanded?

2 Read **Item A** below and answer the question that follows.

### ITEM A

Curran argues that owners of media curtail editors' freedom of action by an implicit understanding of how owners expect the newspaper to develop. Journalists tend to be selected on the grounds that they will fit in. Conformity to the owner's vision brings rewards in terms of good assignments, promotion and peer group esteem. Resistance, on the other hand, invites punishment. Dissident reporters who do not deliver what the owner expects suffer professional death.

Applying material from **Item A**, analyse **two** ways in which owners influence the content of the media.

[10 marks]

## STUDENT RESPONSE

One way in which owners influence the content of the news is through their own political viewpoints. For example, Rupert Murdoch owns many TV stations, newspapers and publishing companies under the News Corporation company. It is often suggested that his stations, such as Fox News, represent only his right wing, conservative views and anything that does not fit in with this agenda is edited. Of course, many people believe that the world of media should be open to present whatever it so wishes.

Another way in which an owner can influence content is through censorship. If the owner does not agree with a television programme or article written for their media outlet then they can stop it being published or produced. Many companies are self-regulated in terms of what they put out to the public: for example the British press is 'free' and so there is no obligation to be impartial. Of course, many people are increasingly becoming aware of this and view certain types of media with a degree of caution.

## TEACHER COMMENTS

This answer is quite a common response, representative of what lots of students tend to produce, in that the answer is accurate but it has not applied or referenced the item in anyway. The question asks you to apply the item and the mark scheme is also specific in saying that the item needs to be applied. Can you identify how to reword this answer by incorporating and building on the item?

3 Read **Item B** below and answer the question that follows.

## ITEM B

Research suggests that ethnic-minority audiences want to see more realistic representations of ethnic-minority people on television and less stereotyping in the news media. Asian viewers are particularly fed up with being represented as extremists and as victims of religious discrimination, while African Caribbeans are disgruntled with news media because it disproportionately focuses on Black boys as violent or as gang members. Ethnic minority groups want to see realistic media portrayals of their everyday real world and the problems they face, which are often completely unrelated to race.

Applying material from **Item B** and your knowledge, evaluate the view that the media portray ethnic minority groups in a stereotypical way.

[20 marks]

## STUDENT RESPONSE

A stereotype refers to an over-simplified or narrow view of a particular group. Many sociologists believe that the media frequently stereotypes ethnic minorities into a limited set of roles and portrayals. In particular this can be linked to the interactionist ideas on the labelling theory.

As mentioned in Item B, many African-Caribbeans, along with other black groups, are often represented in negative terms relating to violence or gang members. For example, it is notable that often a criminal or drug dealer in a film/television programme is black, such as in famous TV shows such as *The Wire*. Van Dijk also found in his study of British newspapers that there was a frequent association between black groups and violence or negative language.

However, some post-modernists believe that this portrayal of black groups is beginning to change. There are now more positive black role models shown in positions of politics, power or in leading roles. One such example has been the increasing number of black presenters on television shows and news programmes. However, the lack of black nominees at recent Oscar and film presentations would suggest the contrary to the post-modern view.

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Shah believes that all we are really seeing in the media is what is known as 'tokenism'. This means that often a television programme will just use the odd black character in an attempt to be politically correct. This character is often not in a lead role but simply there to make up the numbers. Shah also notes that there continues to be a distinct lack of black producers, executives and directors in the profession. This is often referred to as the 'white gaze', that television is filmed through the eyes of the mainly white production staff.

A further stereotype of black culture can be seen in rap music, particularly gangsta rap, which often focuses on lyrics about drugs, gangs and violence. This representation has caused a moral panic according to Zylinska, as it causes a public fear amongst some that this is how all black people behave and act. Former prime minister David Cameron also criticised the genre of music in the media for glamourising crime, guns and misogyny.

Best and Keller, however, criticise this view and say that rap music is simply articulating the experiences that many black youths face, and that it is highlighting the oppression and racism that many individuals face. Therefore, they would say that black youths are not being stereotyped in the media but rather that they are portraying an accurate representation of the lives that they live.

Another example of stereotyping can be seen in the portrayal of Africa which is frequently presented in the media as all being poor and dependent. Many programmes about Africa focus on the poorest parts of the continent and ignore the progressive, developing cities such as Cape Town and Nairobi. Pambazuka is particularly critical of the British press and its representations of Africa for often portraying the view that many of the issues in the continent are the fault of the countries themselves rather than due to exploitation of other nations.

Many of these views can be linked to the interactionist ideas on labelling: Cicourel, for example, notes that the public is more likely to report a black crime and police are more likely to arrest a black person. This could be linked to the stereotypical portrayal of black groups in the media, which has led to the public having attached negative labels to these groups. For the black groups themselves, their negative media representation could lead to a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Despite these issues, however, it should be noted that attitudes towards issues of race have changed massively in the post-modern period. Although there is still an under-representation or misrepresentation of many black groups, the situation has certainly improved considerably. The chances of finding a leading black actor in a film, or a show centred on a black family, has become much higher in the last decade.

Stereotypes amongst black groups still exist in the media but likewise these stereotypical portrayals also seem to exist for males, females, the rich, poor, Jews, disabled, etc. Stereotypical portrayals of certain groups appear to be an issue across all types of subcultures and are not just a concern in relation to ethnicity.

## TEACHER COMMENTS

There are some strong ideas, theories and analysis points in this essay. However the answer falls into the trap that lots of students tend to fall into when answering a question on ethnicity: the answer only really focuses on black groups.

Remember, the question is asking about all ethnic minorities, so in order to gain a top band answer this needs to be explored a little more. Can you identify how to develop this answer to include stereotypes of a range of ethnic minorities and not just about black groups in the media?