A2 LEVEL

FACT FILES

Journalism

For first teaching from September 2013
For first AS award in Summer 2014
For first A Level award in Summer 2015

Journalism and Representation

FACT FILE

journalism

in the Media and Communications Industry (JMC)

Learning Outcomes

Students should be able to:

• Analyse and evaluate issues related to the following key debate area, citing examples from their own study and practice throughout the course: Journalism and Representation.

Content

Advanced Media Concepts, Contexts and Debates in Online, Print and Broadcast Journalism
(page 12, specification)

'... like a map, a news report is still a selected and mediated representation of reality, rather than the reality itself.'

Harcup, T, (2009), *Journalism: Principles and Practice*, Sage Publications Ltd, p83

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Journalists do not simply reflect the world – they select, present and structure their work to represent events or people. A journalist's job is to be impartial – that is, not partial, biased or favouring one side over the other. They are expected to reflect differing viewpoints and present

information objectively, not allowing their own feelings or prejudices to influence what they write or the way in which they write it.

The National Union of Journalists' Code of Conduct says a journalist "strives to ensure that information disseminated is honestly conveyed, accurate and fair."

www.nuj.org.uk/files/NUJ_Code_of_Conduct.pdf

However, bias can creep in and create unfair representations of individuals and groups based on certain cultural or political assumptions. This bias may stem from the individual journalist or may reflect the underlying ideology of the media outlet's owners.

The way people or groups are represented or portrayed in the media is important because it helps shape our attitudes towards them. If they are underrepresented or unfairly depicted their concerns and viewpoints tend to be marginalised and they can even become the subject of public ridicule or hatred.

The NUJ Code enshrines the principle of fair representation in the media. It says a journalist "produces no material likely to lead to hatred or discrimination on the grounds of a person's age, gender, race, colour, creed, legal status, disability, marital status, or sexual orientation".

How are different groups represented in the media?

Because the news media in the UK continues to be dominated by dominant cultural groups, especially white, middle class men, it tends to reflect their view of the world, an issue that was addressed at the Leveson Inquiry into media ethics in 2012.

Groups that are most commonly the subject of unfair representation are those that are already marginalised in society such as disabled people, ethnic minorities and asylum seekers. However, women are also commonly

unfairly represented, most often being featured as celebrities or victims of crime. For instance, analysis of nine national newspapers over the course of four weeks in 2012 by the industry body *Women in Journalism* found that the only women to be featured regularly in the study period were the Duchess of Cambridge, her sister Pippa Middleton and Madeleine McCann, the toddler who disappeared from the Algarve in 2007. According to the study, when pictures of powerful women - such as German Chancellor Angela Merkel were used, they were often unflattering or awkwardly posed.

Brand X Pictures / Thinkstock.com

The Guardian, 14.10.12, *Sexist stereotypes dominate front pages of British newspapers, research finds* www.guardian.co.uk/media/2012/oct/14/sexist-stereotypes-front-pages-newspapers

Some of the factors which influence how people and events are represented include:

- **Structure** - How an article or report is structured may betray where the writer's sympathies lie, with one particular view presented as dominant, e.g. a government minister may be quoted extensively in the first half of an article on NHS cutbacks, with just a few lines from his political rival or trade unionists near the bottom.

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- **Sensationalist language and tone** may be used to paint a negative picture of a particular group. For instance, a right wing newspaper might use inflammatory language that fuels stereotypes about the unemployed, e.g. 'scrounging' benefit claimants, 'feckless' unemployed. In contrast, a more liberal/left wing newspaper might use language to convey sympathy for the welfare claimants. For instance, an article from the Guardian from 25/10/12 entitled 'Iain Duncan Smith targets families of more than two children for benefits cuts' www.guardian.co.uk/politics/2012/oct/25/iain-duncan-smith-benefit-cuts says Mr Duncan Smith is laying the ground for a "fresh assault on the welfare budget" and talks about parents being "penalised" by his plans.

iStockphoto / Thinkstock.com

- **Story angle** - What aspect of the story is given the most prominence? For example, is it loss of Palestinian lives in an Israeli airstrike or the view of the Israeli government that comes to the fore?

- **Interviewees/sources** - A story may prioritise a certain viewpoint in its selection of interviewees – it may not reflect everyone's point of view equally. News organisations tend to favour official sources, for example the government and the police, but in doing so may reflect the viewpoint of powerful elites and ignore the views of more marginal groups, for example, homeless people.

- **News agenda** - Prioritising stories about a particular group or individual that reflect a certain view of them can lead to unfair representations, especially if stories that show them in a different light are ignored or downplayed.

- **Imagery** - Picture selection or video editing may portray a positive or negative view of a person or group, e.g. a newspaper opposed to the government may select a 'bad' picture of the Prime Minister looking gormless.

1. How might journalists reflect differing perspectives on an issue?

2. How can language and tone be used to convey certain messages about a group of people?

3. What does the NUJ Code say about representing people fairly?