Marxism, Hegemony and Representations

AQA/OCR/WJEC?

Relevant to each exam board, students are expected to have an understanding behind the power of representations and the ideologies that lay within them. By taking an example such as a newsreader and identifying that they arguably embody hegemonic ideals, it can be recognised that audiences are being lead to accept a particular viewpoint. You will need this fundamental understanding, in order to begin deconstructing any representations found within coursework or exams.

The aims of this Factsheet are to:

- Provide a brief overview of Marxism

- Introduce the concept of Hegemony

- Apply the concept of Hegemony to Representations

- Discuss how Hegemonic Representations are evolving

Marxism

Before discussing hegemonic representations, it is recommended that students hold an understanding of the perspectives of Marxism in order to create a basis for further understanding.

At its core, Marxism is a body of works which criticise societies governed by capitalist principles. Karl Marx (1818 – 1883) alongside Fredrich Engles (1820-1895) felt that through the implementation of **capitalism** the working-class members of a society are heavily exploited for their labour force by the ruling classes. Marx highlighted that, despite the working class being of far greater number, there were many ways that the ruling class were able to ensure this power relationship remained and that those who worked and lived under capitalism accepted this arrangement. One of the ways that Marx explained this relationship was that those in the higher class own what he called the **means of production:** the ruling class employ individuals from the working class to operate their machinery, work in their offices, outlets and factories. The workers therefore put in the physical efforts needed to produce goods and services, whilst the owners see the majority of the financial gain. Marx predicted that capitalism was unsustainable and that eventually the working class would protest via revolution.
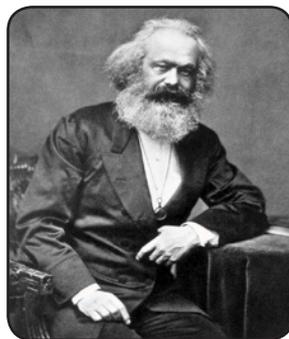
Many types of variations exist but Vocial class categorisation can generally be described as the following:

Upper Class: The social class composed of those who are rich, well-born, powerful, or a combination of those.

Middle Class: The broad group of people in contemporary society who fall socio-economically between the lower and upper classes.

Lower (working) Class: Those employed in low-paying wage jobs with very little economic security. The term lower class also refers to persons with low income.

Activity: Highlight and explain any recent ways that a revolution has taken place where people from the working class have taken back a form of control? Consider recent technological advancements.

Due to the affordability of some of the means of production seen in creative software packages such as iMovie/Photoshop or even mobile phone apps, combined with the accessibility and proliferation of the internet, many people have now been able to break with their dependency on large and powerful individuals and institutions. By creating and distributing their own content, audiences have (somewhat) escaped from the capitalist restraints seen in the days of Marx and Engles. This recent shift in audience power has been termed by some as a **'digital revolution'.**

Activity: Explain how Karl Marx would have viewed this 'digital revolution'? Would he be pleased with it? If yes, why. If no, why not.

Exam Hint: When responding to essay style questions it is recommended to make arguments, when possible, that are well balanced and contain both points and counter points for discussion. For example, reasons Marx would be both pleased and displeased about the digital revolution-such as people having the means of social media to promote their own products being a positive but being critical of the fact that most media platforms are still owned and operated by powerful media conglomerates.

Hegemony

When those in power influence the public consciousness, through methods such as representations, in order to maintain and normalise their own views and ideologies, this is referred to as hegemony. Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937), a follower of Marxism, developed **cultural hegemony:** a perspective that highlights the dominant ideologies within a society that maintain the capitalist state.

Raymond William's work on ideologies can be surmised as the following:

Dominant Ideologies: The attitudes, beliefs, values, and morals shared by the majority of the people in a given society (which reflects the ideology of the dominant class)

Residual Ideologies: Ideologies which were once considered dominant, but that are now shifting out of favour with the dominant view

Emergent Ideologies: Where cultural practices are seen as alternative to those of the dominant ideologies grow in popularity, to the point of becoming dominant

Activity: *Identify and discuss any examples of ideologies that would fit into each of the classifications above. Useful consideration may be found within topics such as the environment (emergent), interracial relationships (residual), and materialism within popular culture (dominant).*

A crucial aspect of hegemony is the fact that it is not achieved by force. People are convinced that it is in their best interest, or that it is simple commons sense, achieved through a scope of influential factors such as the mass media. In modern day societies, the influence of these cultural innovations are so powerful that they have 'normalised' the ideologies of the ruling elite to such an extent that they are no longer questioned. **Eagleton** explains, 'Gramsci normally uses the word hegemony to mean the ways in which a governing power wins consent to its rule from those it subjugates. In contrast to authoritarian rule, cultural hegemony is hegemonic only if those affected by it also consent to and struggle over its common sense.' This raises the question as to how the ruling class are able to convince a majority in society that theirs are the naturally accepted views and should therefore remain unchallenged. One of the ways, as espoused to earlier, is through the use of representations. Specifically, representations that normalise the views of the ruling classes.

Examples of hegemonic representations and the **indoctrinating** of audiences can be seen by studying the concept of 'the professional'. Consider the representations seen across news channels and news programming. Viewed as a platform with the important role of informing audiences the world over of the most relevant and critical of events, the news is an esteemed feature within most cultures and societies. The people that appear within this type of programming are therefore understandably held in high regards, as they become associated with such an important service. Traditionally the types of people in front of the camera on news programmes (both presenters and those participating in interviews) would largely, if not often completely, fall into a certain type of classification: male in gender, white in ethnicity and from a well-established educational background. It should be noted that educational backgrounds are also viewed as indicators to a person's social class. This hegemonic representation therefore presents and normalises the understanding that in order to be considered as an intellectual, or someone worth listening to in an expert capacity, individuals need to be a member of this type of **demographic.**

Arguably if a person is not a part of this demographic, the ruling elite do not wish for them to be considered as someone who is to be referred to or listened to regarding matters of importance, because they do not conform with the ruling class's views of who is to be treated as important (namely themselves). In reference to contemporary newsreaders, the aforementioned demographic has begun to alter in some way-we have a larger number of female presenters (although attention should be drawn to the recent revelations that female presenters across many programmes are paid considerably less than males), and there is more diversity regarding the ethnic backgrounds of presenters and guests. However, one thing which still has largely not changed is the educational background and social class of both presenters and participants.

This table contains a range of contemporary newsreaders with basic biographical information. You will note that whilst there is variation in terms of ethnicity and gender, the educational backgrounds of all mentioned are consistently similar:

	George Alagiah was born in Colombo, Ceylon. His secondary education took place at St John's College, an independent Roman Catholic school in Portsmouth, England. George Alagiah is an Asian male.
	Fiona Bruce was born in Singapore. She attended Haberdashers' Aske's Hatcham College in New Cross, London, which was a grammar school from 1944-1979 (inclusive of when she attended). Fiona Bruce is a white female.
	Evan Davis was born in Malvern, Worcestershire. He grew up in Ashtead, Surrey. He attended Dorking County Grammar School. Evan Davis is a white male.
	Huw Edwards was born in Bridgend, Glamorgan, Wales. He was educated at Llanelli Boys' Grammar School and graduated with a first-class honours degree in French from University College, Cardiff. Huw Edwards is a white male.
	Matthias Frei is a German-born British television news journalist who was educated at Westminster School (independent), who progressed to read history and Spanish at St Peter's College, University of Oxford. Matthias Frei is a white male.
	Krishnan Guru-Murthy was born in Liverpool and educated at Queen Elizabeth's Grammar School in Blackburn, Lancashire, which was independent at the time but is now a Free School, followed by Hertford College at the University of Oxford. Krishnan Guru-Murphy is an Asian Male
	Emily Maitlis was born in Canada but raised in Sheffield, Yorkshire, where she was educated at the King Edward VII School (a merged Grammar school). Emily Maitlis is a white female.

> *Activity: Create a profile for a fictitious newsreader which would be considered even more alternative than the profiles on Page 2. Detail their demographics: include gender, ethnicity and educational background.*

Alternative representations

Since the advent of **Web 2.0,** the digital revolution, and with people from all walks of life now able to upload their own content, there has been a dramatic rise in **alternative representations**. Many of these do not conform to the conventional norms found in mainstream media texts. This development has therefore brought new and emerging ideologies. However, whilst a growing number of these alternative representations are available, when it comes to news programming, they have mainly been consigned to the internet and social media, meaning not a large number of alternative representations have made their way into mainstream news programmes.

Recently however there have been a growing number of examples where guests from different social classes are brought onto news programmes to provide their opinion, placed and speaking as experts, alongside other experts from the conventional demographics mentioned above. Most notably, in June 2017 on the BBC's Victoria Derbyshire programme a guest named as 'Elliott' debated the DUP and Conservative party coalition with Conservative MP James Cleverly. Cleverly was dressed in a suit and tie, whilst Elliot wore jeans, a sweatshirt and baseball cap and Elliott's spoken language was clearly more urban and colloquial compared to that of the well-spoken Cleverly. As a guest on the show Elliott was able to challenge Cleverly on a number of issues. This presented audiences with two representations from different classes, but with both participants being given equal opportunity to voice their views and opinions, meaning they were equally presented as experts on the subject. Other examples of note have also been seen recently, for instance when Joe Delaney, a survivor from the Grenfell Tower tragedy, was invited on to Channel 4 News in July 2017 to discuss developments with Kevin Hollinrake MP, once again presenting two different representations of experts for audiences to consume.

James Cleverly and 'Elliott', June 2017   **Joe Delaney, July 2017**

Could these examples indicate a shift in traditional guests, signalling an emerging ideology that sees people of alternative social classes now also regarded as noteworthy voices on matters previously reserved for only a certain type of expert? As students of the Media this is a contemporary area that should be followed with interest.

Glossary

Alternative Representations	Representations that advocate the interests of those excluded from the mainstream.
Capitalism	An economic and political system in where trade and industry are controlled by private owners for profit, rather than by the state.
Cultural Hegemony	The domination of a culturally diverse society by the ruling class who manipulate the culture of that society.
Demographic	A particular sector of a population.
Digital Revolution	A shift from analogue and mechanical devices to digital technology, which transformed the way information is dispersed around the world.
Ideology	A system of ideas and ideals, especially one which forms the basis of economic or political theory/policy.
Indoctrinate	Teach (a person or group) to accept a set of beliefs uncritically.
Web 2.0	The second stage of development of the Internet, characterised especially by the change from static web pages to dynamic or user-generated content and the growth of social media.