

Lecture Representing women in popular culture

Slide 2 Ideologies

1. Ideologies about femininity focused on relationships/romance
2. Popular culture tends to represent women in terms of romance and relationships.

McRobbie and Jackie Magazine

1. McRobbie conducted a study into the popular magazines Jackie which was around from 1964 to 1993 and suggested that the magazine promoted an ideology of very conservative and traditional teenage femininity
2. It revolved very much around two issues – how to get a boyfriend and how to look good
3. Romance was the essence and meaning of life for girls
4. So it was about femininity which was domestic and personal

Marriage

1. Marriage was portrayed as a key goal

McRobbie

1. McRobbie argued that there were three factors that made this ideology dominant
2. Firstly – it fitted with preparing girls for adult femininity (still present in magazines for women) (Adult femininity conforms to dominant norms of what women should do and be)
3. Secondly – readers were encouraged to consent or to agree with the ideology of adult femininity
4. Thirdly – the ideology of teenage femininity is promoted across other areas and so is reinforced in other areas of life including other media/popular culture.

Changes in representation

1. There has been a shift towards new femininity which is more socially and sexually assertive, confident, aspirational and fun seeking
2. Which encourages girls to seek success and pleasure and to get drunk or go shopping
3. And the new femininity is premised on a new sexuality –

Others cultural texts are critical of new femininity e.g. Ladette to Lady

1. There are many cultural texts which are critical of the new femininity highlighted in programmes such as the Ladette to Lady, which revolve around the premise to teach women who behave like men to become more feminine

Slide 3 Feminist viewpoint

1. Intense critique of women

2. From a feminist viewpoint, the intense critique of women represents an exercise in **patriarchal control**
3. If women do not conform to behaviours prescribed as appropriate by emphasised femininity they **will be symbolically punished**.

Romance still valued in new femininity

1. Whilst the media targeted at female consumers – such as girl's and women's **magazines** - **promote a new femininity**,
2. **Romance, relationships and men** though – still **remain central even within new** femininity

Time and ageing

1. Being **feminine means living in a state of crisis** – trying to combat the problems associated with an **ageing** body
2. women are presented as running out of time to achieve the milestones of womanhood – getting married and having children
3. Women become **essentialised as** a natural species driven by inherent uniform needs and desires

Representation of women in contemporary media is complex

1. So the representation of women in contemporary culture is **complex**
2. There are historical **changes and continuities**,

Differences across media

1. Representations, however, **do matter** but it is argued that the **type of images/words used** may encourage certain ways of **thinking about and acting** in relation to women
2. Representations of women have **diversified**, taking into account new roles and offering new identities
3. But **traditional norms** and images continue to **exist and exert powerful** influences!

Popular culture themes

1. Popular culture tends to **delegitimize career** women
2. And their lives by presenting them as **unhappy, problematic and unfulfilled**
3. E.g. the increasing equality between men and women is often portrayed as **causing romantic conflict**
4. Women's devotion to their careers is presented as **standing in the way of their femininity**
E.g. Films such as the Proposal, Mona Lisa Smile (2003) and the Wedding Planner (2001)

Women are essentialised – portrayed as possessing same inherent nature

- Women are **essentialised** – they are portrayed as possessing the same inherent nature, marked by conventional ideas of femininity such as **caring, loving, considerate, being emotional**
- **Unreal women** are portrayed as **tough, inconsiderate, ambitious and ruthless**
- Women with these characteristics may stay as they are because they are compatible with the world of work – more male than female
- The better person (the one we identify more strongly with is more feminine, caring etc.

The domestic in popular culture

Renewed focus on domestic

1. There has been renewed focus on the **domestic**
2. For example, television has been marked by a rise of genres focused on the domestic sphere E.g. childbearing, super nanny, cooking programmes, cleaning programmes, home improvement programmes
3. So the domestic has become a topic of interest
4. And thus the domestic is reaffirmed as the place for women

Class element

1. There is also a **class element** here –
2. Laypeople tend to be **working or lower class women** who are instructed on how to look after the domestic, **by middle class, educated women**
3. **Women are portrayed as homemakers** – the people responsible for turning the house into a tasteful, aesthetic, comfortable sphere

Motherhood idealised

1. **Motherhood** occupies a **contradictory position** in contemporary culture
2. **Undervalued** – by employers – seen as mentally unchallenging
3. But also **elevated** as an **important job in films** – portrayed as life changing
4. Motherhood has become **fashionable** – celebrities showing off their children or bumps is common in popular culture
5. Motherhood **celebrated on the surface** – suggesting that mothers are altruistic and do an enormous amount of work, but also creating standards of perfection

Sexual Morality and violence

1. Respectability is tied to being sexually innocent, modest, shy
2. Sexuality and morality have different meanings and implications for femininity and masculinity. For women, **respectability is still tied to appropriate sexuality**, where women have to **be sexually innocent, modest or shy** to be appropriately feminine

Presents a dichotomy - Women as vamps or virgins

1. This dichotomy is reflected in cultural representations which tend to categorise women as **vamps or virgins**,
2. Sexuality is central to women's standing

Language used to describe women has no male equivalent

1. The very language used to describe women – **such as tart, slut, slag, whore, hooker, prostitute** **does not have a male equivalent**

Katniss – not stereotypically feminine

1. we first meet Katniss, we see her providing food for her family, heading into the woods to hunt
2. Her clothing and actions and attitude suggest that she **is not a stereotypically feminine teenager**
3. Her **behaviour, attitudes, temperament** seem to fit more the norms of **masculinity**

Survive

1. She not only learnt at the age of 11, to provide for her family, She learned to **negotiate in the illegal** black-market Hob
2. Many would associate her **skills, like breadwinning, physical and mental** toughness, fighting with **masculinity**

Stereotypes

1. The stereotype of the **nurturing mother** is associated with **warmth and kindness**
2. Katniss's protectiveness requires actions associated with masculinity

Talking

1. She also has **few words** – and not emotional or flowery
2. She's often sullen and hostile

Theseus, Spartacus and Katniss

1. Collins (author of Hunger Games) said that Katniss was inspired by two famous male figures: **Theseus and Spartacus**

2. In Greek mythology, **King Minos of Crete** forced the Athenians to send fourteen children every nine years to face the **Minotaur** and Just as Katniss did for Prim, **Theseus took** the place of one of his countrymen
3. He slew **the Minotaur** and rescued his fellow tributes
4. **Spartacus famously** led a rebellion of **slaves against the Roman Empire**
5. Suzanne Collins notes that **Katniss follows the same arc or trajectory**, from slave to gladiator to rebel to face of a war

Prim V Katniss

1. The clearest example of a traditional feminine character is **Primrose Everdeen**
2. Named for a delicate flower, she is small, slender, with light hair and blue eyes
3. Her speech is described as **stereotypically feminine: speaks softly**, giggles, chatters
4. She is described as **fragile, and viewing adventures as ordeals** and has a knack for **cooking and flower arranging**

Gender Roles in Panem

1. In Panem there seem to be **fewer differences** between the role for women and men
2. Girls and boys **participate equally** in the Hunger Games
3. There's no alteration of the game for male and female tributes
4. The **Game makers** who devise the arena hail from **both genders**

Sexuality

1. In Panem, Finnick Odair is a sex symbol,
2. His body is sold to others by President Snow
3. and his lovers are **not referred to by gender**

Peeta

1. Peeta is the closest to **an androgynous blend** of the most desirable masculine and feminine traits
2. He's **confident and self-reliant** like Katniss, but also trusting and open
3. He's **physically strong but avoids violence** and aggression except in **self-defence**
4. His occupation of **baking** - matches his warm and nurturing personality

Emotional

1. Peeta isn't afraid to declare his love for Katniss before thousands
2. He **cried openly** when he took his leave of his family for the Hunger games

Katniss and Peeta

1. From the moment Cinna asks Katniss and Peeta to hold hands at the opening Katniss
2. We see her **blowing kisses, smiling and waving**
3. Initially sceptical, Katniss sees the merit in using a romance with Peeta to make **herself more likeable**. She adopts **femininity** as a **performance**
4. During the Games, Katniss reminds herself to act for the cameras in the way a girl in love would act
5. Butler – notes that **gender is always a kind of performance**. Something we do, not something we are
6. Katniss and Peeta are able to **use gender** to garner **power** for themselves
7. **Gender is a performance** – but in the sense of being both **political and personal**