

# MEDIA REPRESENTATION AND THE INVISIBLE MAJORITY

- ✓ 1. To help learners recognise that many groups are under-represented in the media.
- ✓ 2. To identify media messages about marginalised groups in society.
- ✓ 3. To understand how some messages reinforce problematic stereotypes.

🕒 45 Mins

★ Worksheet: 'Media representation and the Invisible Majority' (provided)

## PROCEDURE

- 1 Divide the class into small groups of 3-4 learners, and ask them to think of their favourite TV shows, movies, and books. Each group should come up with a list of their top 3 items for each category (TV, movies, and books) and fill them in on the Worksheet: 'Media Representation and the Invisible Majority' (provided).
- 2 Once learners have filled in their top choices on the worksheet, each group should identify the main characters from their book, TV show, movie choices and write them in the last column.
- 3 Once learners have completed their worksheets in their small groups, facilitate a discussion among the whole class by asking learners to identify by a show of hands:
  - a. Who has listed a character from their favourite shows, movies, and books that is a person of colour (black, mixed race, Coloured, Indian or Asian)?
  - b. Who has listed a **LGBTQIA** character?
  - c. Who has listed a person with a **disability**?
  - d. Who has listed a foreign character or someone who speaks a language other than English?
- 4 Where learners have identified characters fitting the criteria above, ask them to describe characteristics associated with those people.

### Expect answers like:

- Black characters are street-smart
- Black men are macho, tough, and violent
- Black men have no respect for women
- Black women are loud, 'ghetto', bossy, slutty
- Black people are either very poor or very rich
- Indian people are shrewd or mean with money
- Coloured people don't have any front teeth
- Coloured men are gangsters
- Coloured women are loud, bossy and matronly
- People of colour are uneducated or have unskilled jobs
- Gay men are flamboyant
- Gay men are promiscuous
- Gay men have HIV
- Lesbian women are butch/masculine
- Trans characters are troubled/depressed/self-harming
- People with disabilities are needy/dependent
- Foreigners/People who speak other languages are exotic/mysterious
- People who speak other languages are funny/comical when they speak English



Ask learners to reflect on the characteristics they have identified as being associated with a particular group.

Ask the following questions:

**a.** Does the media adequately or accurately represent the diverse groups of society?

**Expect learners to identify that:**

- These groups are under-represented or unrepresented in the media, or are represented in stereotypical ways.
- The media does not really represent the majority of South Africans, instead a rather idealised norm.

**b.** Which media does the best job of portraying diversity? Why do you think this is the case?

**c.** Which media does the worst job? Why?

**d.** Of the diverse groups we looked at, which were the most under-represented, and which were best represented? Why do you think this is so?

**e.** Why are these groups represented in **stereotypical** ways?

**Get learners to think about:**

- The way that media shapes society, and is also shaped by society.
- The way that the media creates and perpetuates stereotypes because these are the simplistic and caricatured representations that people expect, believe exist and want to see. In turn people continually expect, believe and anticipate stereotypes of these groups because that is what the media depicts.
- For some, it is often easier to over-simplify, or make fun of people, languages, cultures, ways of life that they do not understand, than to find out more, or engage with the complex reality of these identities.
- The way that the entertainment industry and the media panders to stereotypical representation. In turn people do not confront the realities of social complexities and diversity.

**f.** How do you think people who are of colour, **LGBTQIA**, with **disabilities**, foreigners, or who do not speak English as a first language, feel when they see caricatured or stereotypical representations of themselves in the media?

**g.** Can you think of shows, movies and books that accurately portray diverse groups of people?

**h.** Would you still enjoy the movies, books, and shows that you watch if the main characters were representative of diversity?

## TEACHER TIPS

### General

If learners are having trouble agreeing on their favourite TV shows, movies, and books, the teacher can provide a list of films and shows that have recently been popular in South Africa.

For some learners it may be a challenge to think of, or agree on books, and you could either remove the category from the exercise, or ask learners to think about their set works.

### Making the Link with Gender & Violence

Those groups of people that fall outside the norm that is portrayed by the media are often targeted for **violence** and **discrimination**, which is in part reinforced by the media's misrepresentation of these groups. Women within these groups may be especially susceptible to violence and **abuse** because of social isolation, or poor socio-economic circumstances.

### Assessment Ideas

- 1 Learners could write a reflection paper or research paper about **media** representation of society's diverse groups, under-representation and stereotyping.
- 2 Learners can write letters and emails to South African television networks, explaining the importance of representing the diverse populations of society. These letters should include summary of the findings of the exercise done in class.
- 3 Learners can also propose their own ideas for TV shows, movies, or books that put LGBTQIA, elderly people, or persons with disabilities in leading roles.

### References:

*Adapted from:* <http://www.advocatesforyouth.org/for-professionals/lesson-plans-professionals/1251?task=view>.



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Identify your three favourite TV shows, movies and books. Then list the main character from each.

MEDIA	CHOICE	MAIN CHARACTERS
TV SHOWS	1.	
	2.	
	3.	
MOVIES	1.	
	2.	
	3.	
BOOKS	1.	
	2.	
	3.	