AREA OF STUDY 2

**Media texts and society’s values**

In this area of study students focus on the relationship between society’s values and media texts.

Media representations reflect and mediate ideas from particular economic, social, cultural, political or

institutional points of view. Students undertake the study of an identified significant idea, social attitude

or discourse located in a range of media texts to critically analyse its representation in the media.

Media texts are subject to multiple readings by audiences. Society’s values shape the construction and

reading of texts. These values are in a state of constant evolution, and tension always exists between

dominant, oppositional and emerging values. The media play a significant role in the construction,

maintenance and conduct of social knowledge and discourses through the process of making and

reproducing meaning using the representational tools of language, image and sound to construct and

distribute ideas and attitudes in texts. This process reflects the structures of power and knowledge in

society and may take the form of ongoing discussions or be specific to particular ideas, events, people

or times.

Society’s values or attitudes may be linked to particular moral, political or other views. These may

include, for example, attitudes held about or directed towards particular individuals or groups, forms

of social organisation (such as the family, political or social structures), institutions or organisations,

the natural or built environment, events in which individuals, particular social groups or nations are

involved or participate, or forms of behaviour attributed to factors such as age, class, gender, subculture,

region and ethnicity.

**Outcome 2**

On completion of this unit the student should be able to discuss and analyse the construction, distribution and interpretation of society’s values as represented in media texts.

To achieve this outcome the student will draw on key knowledge and key skills outlined in Area of Study 2.

**Key knowledge**

• the nature and form of an idea, a value, an attitude or a discourse evident in selected media texts

• the construction of representations in media texts and how these reflect values in society

• values held in society as represented and distributed through media texts

• the relationship between dominant, oppositional and emerging values represented in media texts

• the relationship between discourses or social issues and media texts

• appropriate media language and terminology.

**Key skills**

• describe a social issue or discourse that is constructed, represented and distributed through media texts

• identify, compare and contrast representations in media texts

• analyse the relationships between dominant, oppositional and emerging values in society and media texts

• discuss and analyse the relationship between a discourse or issue, society’s values and media texts

• apply and use appropriate media language and terminology.

**Discourse**

For the purposes of this study, discourse in the media is the social process of producing and organizing meaning through the interrelationship of media organisations, media texts and audiences within a culture.

The creation of media texts occurs within the context of the social, industrial and political frameworks of society. Audiences are similarly embedded within these frameworks. Stuart Hall (Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices, 1997, Sage, London) termed this process the circuit of culture, which sees representation interact with production, consumption, identity, and regulation in a continuous cycle.

Media discourse analysis involves a study of the discourse practices used in the creation and distribution of media texts which contain visual, aural, language and other textual codes and conventions that represent ideas in media products. Media discourse includes an analysis of how texts are read by audiences within a culture. For example, representations of technology in a text will suggest meaning based on the discourses about technology existent at the time and place of the text’s construction and its intended audience. Attitudes to technology in America across time may be analysed through studying representations in texts that may include The Jetsons (1962), Aliens (1986) and Tron: Legacy (2010) or print texts such as advertisements contained in magazines and newspapers. Equally such texts could be used to study discourses of gender, family or the workplace.

**Discourse is simply the social production of meaning.**

Because meaning is socially produced, people 'inside' a particular community / social group will have shared understandings that people outside the group do not have. This might be a community or group of 2, or of thousands, or even millions.

These shared understandings are often the product of social values

**Social Contexts and the Text**

All texts are produced via a society. Art and culture are products of that society, and the creators of art and culture are products of that society too. A text Is a cultural artefact; it is a construction that happens in a particular place at a particular time.

Furthermore, a text exists as a site of created meaning. Meaning is created not just by the author or producer of the work, but also by the reader or viewer (the audience). The meaning or interpretation of a text is therefore twice influenced or mediated by the discourses and values of the societies in which it is produced and viewed.

Some cultural theoreticians argue that a text does not really exist as a text until it is read, viewed or experienced by an audience. They say that until the text is interpreted, it is only words or images.

In other words, discourses and social values surrounding the text influence its making, and discourses and social values surrounding the audience influence its reception.

It is important to remember that a text is not necessarily a book, a film or a piece of music.

A text can be any cultural product. All texts tell us a great deal about the society that produced them.

**SOCIAL VALUES AND CONTEXTS**

How can a text can tell us about the society that produced it? In general, a text will contain the values that its society believes in and holds to be ‘true’ or ‘normal’. These are social values. For example, a politician or journalist who calls an action ‘un-Australian’ is expressing a social value.

For an audience to understand and accept a text, the text will need to reference a ‘reality’ that the audience shares, and this shared reality includes a shared set of social values. Audiences may not consciously notice many of the social values expressed in a text, because these social values will simply seem natural and normal. ‘I think that nowadays you have to show them [audiences] the way they themselves behave most ofthe time,’ said Alfred Hitchcock in a 1962 interview with film critic François Truffaut.

**SOCIAL VALUES**

A social value can best be described as a value that a society holds to be true, important or valuable.

A social value manifests itself as an attitude or stance. Social values are not ‘of’ race, gender or violence: the social values are of society’s attitudes towards these things.

Social values are never stable; they are as dynamic and changeable as the society that produces them. Furthermore, the reception of the social values in a text is always changing: because the text exists as a site of constructed meaning, the meaning changes as the audience changes. A text from 1940s Germany, 1950s Russia or 1960s South Africa will be received and interpreted very differently in 2010s Australia.

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|  | **http://laurenchapin.com/fatherknows_files/fatherpix.jpg** |
| Renaissance artists usually depicted Biblical characters in contemporary clothes, rather than the authentic dress of Biblical times. Contemporary clothing gave the audience cues to understand relevant information about the characters, such as their class. | Father Knows Best" ran from 1954 to 1962. It was and will always be the original family sitcom. the Anderson's were America's favorite 50's family. "Father Knows Best" was so popular that when production ended, it continued to be shown in primetime for the next three years, and then ran another five years after that on ABC's daytime line-up. |

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| [http://t0.gstatic.com/images?q=tbn:ANd9GcRFglxb7uiGvkqnZpfg6yJVEnzkicZE1pJwKxQ9g7BT2YmFZMxy](http://www.google.com.au/imgres?q=the+brady+bunch&hl=en&sa=X&biw=1388&bih=955&tbm=isch&prmd=imvns&tbnid=n0WoUjb4I_YjGM:&imgrefurl=http://subtlekate.wordpress.com/tag/the-brady-bunch/&docid=dPFjlKSD1qZkQM&imgurl=http://subtlekate.files.wordpress.com/2012/04/the-brady-bunch.jpg&w=500&h=375&ei=HYbZT4KSGoakiAfAhpj-Ag&zoom=1&iact=hc&vpx=543&vpy=183&dur=682&hovh=194&hovw=259&tx=172&ty=124&sig=108378337631663029656&page=1&tbnh=134&tbnw=179&start=0&ndsp=34&ved=1t:429,r:2,s:0,i:144) | [http://t1.gstatic.com/images?q=tbn:ANd9GcQmrAcaYWeL5MczYrx1lRlljb6Wg4V30P2DJU5JGFeNuVyuk6fj](http://www.google.com.au/imgres?q=Dallas&hl=en&sa=X&biw=1388&bih=955&tbm=isch&prmd=imvnsuz&tbnid=AP4RYPyPpnxKbM:&imgrefurl=http://entertainment.wikia.com/wiki/Dallas&docid=r7Iml6EUiamgmM&imgurl=http://images.wikia.com/entertainment1/images/a/ab/Dallas.jpg&w=312&h=312&ei=7ofZT_3QBqqUiQe--qCMAw&zoom=1&iact=hc&vpx=180&vpy=173&dur=4011&hovh=225&hovw=225&tx=131&ty=149&sig=108378337631663029656&page=1&tbnh=136&tbnw=136&start=0&ndsp=30&ved=1t:429,r:6,s:0,i:157) | http://img.metro.co.uk/i/pix/2010/04/18/article-1271612612073-00103EF400000258-442002_636x461.jpg |
| When it debuted in 1969, The Brady Bunch was a series that celebrated traditional family values at a time when these seemed to be eroding in America as the country was seeing a surge in divorce and remarriage rates. The series revolved around a blended family created when Mike Brady (a widower with three sons, married Carol a widow with three daughters. The series focused on the typical childhood and adolescent problems encountered by the children, such as first crushes, dating and sibling rivalry, while avoiding explicitly dealing with the political and social issues of the day such as racial equality and women’s liberation | Dallas is an American prime time television soap opera that revolves around the Ewings, a wealthy Texas family in the oil and cattle-ranching industries. Throughout the series, Larry Hagman stars as greedy, scheming oil baron J. R. Ewing | Kylie Minogue and Jason Donavan star in Australian TV series Neighbours 1988 when their TV characters marriage was named  TVs best wedding by The Radio Times. Neighbours was hugely popular in Australia and England and launched many careers of future TV and film starts such as Kylie Minogue played Charlene Mitchell, Guy Pearce played Mike Young, Natalie Imbruglia played Beth Brennan, Delta Goodrem played Nina Tucker |

**DISCOURSES , SOCIAL VALUES AND SOCIAL ISSUES**

The terms ‘discourse’, ‘social value’ and ‘social issue’ can be interpreted in a variety of ways and can hide a host of ideologies and positions. At its simplest,media discourse can be seen as the interrelationship between media texts and those who create and consume them. Discourses in this sense resemble social values, but may exist over a longer time frame or may cover a broader area of interest. Media texts are shaped by and form part of these discourses, which will also have relationships to social values, such as an attitude towards gender or technology.

As an example of discourse, audiences may identify conflicted attitudes towards technology in some US texts. The television series The Jetsons (1962–63) presents a utopian view of technology, where it is represented as aiding humans and providing a great benefit to society. However, audiences also recognize the dystopian view in the film Blade Runner (1982), where technology is not portrayed as a saviour forhumanity, but rather a threat to its existence.

Conflicting attitudes towards the discourse of technology can also occur between different societies within thesame era. The US utopian view of technology in The Jetsons can be compared to the dystopian attitudes seen in the first episode of the Japanese anime series Astro Boy (1963). These discourses may be explained in terms of the effect of one society benefiting from technology in creating and dropping atom bombs on the other society, who, as a consequence, may view technology from a very different perspective.

The relationship between discourses, social values and social issues can also be seen in this way:

**Discourse:** The product of broader social, political and economic formations or systems of thought that are composed, among other things, of social values—e.g. ideas or concepts such as liberty, equality, authority, science and so on, which may run over extended periods of time. Theorists such as Michel Foucault see discourses as the means by which power may be created distributed or resisted within a society. A discourse is an abstract concept.

**Social value:** A social value can be seen, among other things, as an attitude towards a discourse that a society has at a particular place and at a particular time. Social values may remain in a society over a number of years and generally change or evolve slowly.

**Social issue:**

A social issue can be thought of as a concrete expression of a discourse or social value. By its nature, a social issue is linked to a specific place and time. While discourses and social values may exist as abstract concepts, social issues can be seen in the fabric of a society.

In the film text of To Kill a Mockingbird (1962), audiences can see the relationship between discourses, social values and social issues as:

·· the discourse of justice, which is enshrined in the US Constitution

·· the social value that people should be treated justly across and within the USA

·· the social issue that it was hard to find or receive justice for African Americans in the Southern states, both before and at the time the film was made.

The texts that you have been studying were created under certain conditions that will, to a greater or

lesser extent, have a bearing on what kinds of discourses the texts were produced under and what

social values are present in the texts. The texts may also be a result of or response to a social issue.

The period when a text was produced is obviously important; there is a great deal of difference between

a television series that was produced in 1956 and one that was produced forty years later in 1996; for

example, The Honeymooners (1955–56) and Friends (1994–2004).

**DISCOURSES . DOMINANT. EMERGING AND OPPOSITIONAL SOCIAL VALUES**

Of course, not everyone in a particular society holds the same social values, and not all texts reflect the same social values. Also, social values are never static; as societies change, various social values often evolve in conflict with each other. The social values involving attitudes towards slavery are a good example of how discourses can change over time and also how a society can hold what appear to be conflicting values.

In many ancient societies, slavery was considered neither good nor bad; it was simply normal, the way things were, and this attitude can be seen in the cultural artefacts and products of the time.

When most people in a society hold the same social value, it is called a dominant social value. In ancient societies, this attitude to slavery could be called a dominant social value. Over time, a variety of new discourses evolved to challenge this dominant social value. In Europe in the eighteenth century, discourses involving religion, the Enlightenment, the French Revolution and the ‘Rights of Man’ created new ideas and groups opposed to slavery. When a new social value emerges against or alongside a dominant social value, it is called an emerging social value.

The idea that slavery was wrong had become an emerging social value.

Emerging social values sometimes fade away, but sometimes they grow to become oppositional social values. An oppositional social value is strongly positioned against dominant social values and discourses. In the case of slavery, the emerging social value soon became oppositional: the dominant social value held that slavery was good and normal, and the oppositional value held that slavery was evil and unnatural. Over time, the oppositional social value grew to overwhelm old attitudes, so that eventually it became the new dominant social value. This change in attitudes towards slavery followed a common path for social values: from the dominant ‘this is normal’, to the emerging ‘something is wrong’, to the oppositional ‘this must change’, untl the oppositional succeeds to become the new dominant.

The USA in the nineteenth century provides a good example of the interplay of social values and discourses surrounding slavery. Before the US Civil War of 1861–65, many of the Southern states relied on slavery as the basis of their economy. In the South, the idea that slavery was normal and necessary was a dominant social value, and the idea that slavery was wrong was an oppositional value. However, in the Northern states these social values were reversed: the idea that slavery was wrong was dominant, and the idea that it was normal was an oppositional value.

As a consequence of the Civil War between the North and the South, slavery was abolished in all states of the USA, and the idea that slavery was wrong eventually became a dominant social value throughout the USA.

The concept of dominant, emerging and oppositional social values is widely held, but more controversial is the idea that some social values are universal. Some cultural theorists argue that there can be no universal social values, because all social values are always created by a particular culture or society (even when they are influenced by others). Even social values that we may think are universal, such as ‘killing people is wrong’, are still culturally based.

For example, many ancient societies sacrificed humans to appease their gods; in those cases, the killing was believed to be necessary and not wrong at all.

Learning activities

1 What is a social value?

2 What are dominant, emerging and oppositional social values?

3 Do the social values held by a society always remain the same? Explain your answer.

4 Look at the images below

a Describe the representations of African- American men in each image, looking at the role of production elements.

b Label each image as dominant, emerging or oppositional and give reasons for your labelling.

c Briefly explain how these images track the changing social value of attitudes towards race in the USA.

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|  | Changing depictions of African Americans in  (a) The Birth of a Nation (1915), (b) Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner (1967) and (c) 2012 (2009) reflect the changing social values and discourses surrounding race in the USA. |

Social values do not find their way into texts by chance: they exist in texts because texts tend to reflect their society. Also, social values are not usually placed into a text deliberately by the author. However, authors are often conscious and aware of at least some of the social values in their texts; the film of To Kill a Mockingbird, examined later in this chapter, deliberately sets out to demonstrate certain social values. But even a ‘deliberate’ text will contain social values and discourses that the authors are unaware of—attitudes that to them seem simply ‘normal’ or ‘natural’.

Often, it is only when looking back at a text that the social values and discourses surrounding it are clearly apparent. The social values in a text are essentially related to the time period in which the text was made, rather than the time period in which the story is set. Audiences expect texts to appear ‘realistic’, and this includes a (usually unconscious)expectation that the text will reflect contemporary social values. For a variety of reasons, a film such as Gladiator (2000) is unlikely to contain the real social values of ancient Rome. Not only are many social values of that time unknown, but many of the values that are known would be unacceptable to a contemporary audience’s expectations. A story that depicted slavery as natural and that portrayed revolting slaves as despicable criminals would not sit well with contemporary social values of freedom and equality.

Perhaps the easiest way to think about social values in texts within non-contemporary settings is to consider a text set in the future, such as Aliens (1986).

The social values of the far future are unknown, so any social values in the text must be those of the time

and place in which it was made.

The times in the text It is often useful to consider the major events that occurred around the time of a text’s production. These can give clues and cues to the social values and discourses that were current and that may be found in the text. The links between current events and a text might not be simple cause-and-effect, but they may still indicate important influences. For example, although To Kill a Mockingbird was based on events that occurred in 1936, the film (of 1962) was clearly influenced by the US Civil Rights movement of the 1950s–60s.

By examining major social, political, economic and cultural events surrounding a text’s production, it can be seen how those events influenced the society that produced the text and therefore influenced the social values found in the text itself. A table can be a useful way of doing this:

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| **Event** | **Effect on**  **social values** | **Examples in**  **texts** |
| Cold War,  1940s–80s  ‘USA vs USSR’ | Fear of outsiders  bringing  destruction | Plague of foreign  rats and illegal  aliens bringing  disease and  undermining  society, Panic in  the Streets (1950) |
| Vietnam War\*,  1960s–70s  (Dominant  social values) | Increased  tolerance of the  use of violence to  eradicate ‘evil’ | Violent hero  struggles against  crime, Bullitt  (1968), Dirty  Harry (1971) |
| Vietnam War\*,  1960s–70s  (Oppositional  social values) | Decreased  tolerance of  violence | Pacifist  heroes, Alice’s  Restaurant  (1969), MASH  (film 1970, TV  series 1972–83) |
| Environmental  disasters,  1970s–80s  Three Mile  Island, Bhopal,  Chernobyl | Increased  awareness of  environmental  issues; distrust  of large  corporations | Heroes are  whistleblowers  or fighting  against an evil  corporation,  Silkwood (1983),  Aliens (1986) |

\* Note that a single event may trigger both dominant and oppositional values, and that clashes and contradictions may occur within texts.

In the influential French film magazine Cahiers du Cinéma, the writers Jean-Louis Comolli and Jean Narboni noted that all texts contain ‘gaps’ and ‘fissures’ in relation to social values—it is possible for a text to hold apparently contradictory social values and for a text to hold both dominant and oppositional values at the same time. We can see this even in a text that seems utterly radical and oppositional, such as Easy Rider (1969). Easy Rider follows two‘hippies’ as they take a motorcycle road trip across the USA, defying the dominant social values and middle-class social conventions of the time by taking drugs, discussing freedom and alternative lifestyles, and generally creating mayhem. Yet while the filmdeliberately positions itself as a source of oppositional social values, it also displays many dominant social values, for example in its attitudes towards gender.

Women in the film are generally defined by either their domestic function or their sexuality and are only portrayed in stereotypical roles, such as mothers orlovers attached to males.

Learning act viti es

1 Are social values always placed in a text by the author?

2 How may events happening at the time a text is produced influence its portrayal of social values?

Can you think of an example?

3 C an a text both support and challenge the dominant social values of its time? Give an example to support your answer.

**Social values in representations**

It is usually the representations in the text that display its social values. Representations candepict the following:

·· Individuals—these are usually the text’s

characters. They may be fictional characters, real people (as in a documentary), or a combination (as in a fictionalised version of real events—the representation of South African

President Nelson Mandela in Invictus (2009) is an example of this).

·· Institutions—these can be abstract institutions, such as ‘authority’ or ‘the law’, or concrete institutions such as the police or banks. Often these institutions are personified by particular individuals. Corporations are often depicted as evil, uncaring, obsessed with profit and money,and ecologically destructive, such as the corporations in Aliens and Avatar (2009).

·· Social groups—these are usually ethnic, racial or religious groups. Characters are often seen as representing an aspect of their entiregroup, rather than an individual. Examples of this might include representations of NativeAmericans in The Searchers (1956), Iraqis in

The Hurt Locker (2008), teenagers in Napoleon Dynamite (2004), or fictional/metaphorical groups such as the Na’vi in Avatar.

·· Ideas or concepts—these can be abstract ideas such as freedom, liberty, equality or independence, in films such as Cry Freedom (1987) or Gandhi (1982).

These representations are usually found in a particular character in the text, where that character represents an attitude or social value towards the institution or concept. In the case of the ‘evil corporation’, the contemporary social values or discourses surrounding corporations can be seen in the characters that represent the corporation in the text. Since the 1980s, such characters are often shown to be cold, uncaring, manipulative and evil.

Narrative theory shows that characters are composed of story and production elements, and it is via these elements that social values can often be identified. A character’s traits, narrative role and relations to other characters are all story elements that can reveal social values. Lighting, camera work and placement within the mise en scène are some of the production elements that may also help reveal social values.

**Learning activities**

1 Where are social values usually found in a text?

2 What are some of the representations that can display social values?

3 C omment on the social values you can see in the production elements in the scene in Figure

8.2.5 from American Beauty (1999). Consider the representations of gender, family and marriage.

**Examining texts**

Although film, television and print tend to be analysed more than other kinds of texts, when studying social

values it is valuable to look at a variety of cultural products. Remember that a text is not produced in isolation, but as part of a wide cultural field: it both influences and is influenced by all kinds of other cultural products.

The German word Zeitgeist represents a useful concept to consider when studying social contexts. It is made from the words for ‘time’ (Zeit) and ‘spirit’ (Geist): together this means ‘the spirit of the times’, or what might be called the ‘mood’ or ‘vibe’ of the times. The Zeitgeist of a time period can be felt in its cultural products.

Looking at various 1960s texts, it can be seen how the events, discourses, social contexts and social values of the time helped to shape the texts. In the 1960s, the Vietnam War (1955–75) was a major international event and played a large role in shaping the social values of many societies of the time. Hundreds of thousands of troops were fighting in Vietnam; the USA and Australia both instituted forms of ‘conscription’, which made military service compulsory for selected young men.

Learning activities



1 Look at the representations above

a What are the people doing in the image? The cover of a popular board game from 1967

b What are the dominant colours in the image?What values might you associate with these

colours?

c What is the text in the image? What connotations might you see in these words and in their selection? Consider ideas of patriotism and technology.

d What social values can you see in the representations of gender, war and family?

e Do you think these social values are dominant,emerging or oppositional?

At around the same time as this board game was released, there was a song in the music charts called ‘The Ballad of the Green Berets’.Back at home a young wife waits Her Green Beret has met his fate He has died for those oppressed Leaving her this last request Put silver wings on my son’s chest Make him one of America’s best He’ll be a man they’ll test one day Have him win the Green Beret

From ‘The Ballad of the Green Berets’.

Lyrics and music by Robin Moore and Staff Sergeant

Barry Sadler; ©1966 Sony/ATV Music Publishing

2 Do these lyrics reinforce or oppose the social values you have seen in the cover of the board game? How do you think these texts have been influenced by the social values of the time, and how might the social values have been influencedby these texts?

Also at around the same time, another—very different—song was in the charts. And he’s fighting for democracy

He’s fighting for the Reds He says it’s for the peace of all He’s the one who must decide Who’s to live and who’s to die And he never sees the writing on the wall But without him, how would Hitler Have condemned him at Dachau?Without him Caesar would have stood alone He’s the one who gives his body As a weapon to a war And without him all this killing can’t go onHe’s the universal soldier And he really is to blame His orders came from far away no more They come from him and you and me And brothers can’t you see This is not the way we put an end to war

From ‘Universal Soldier’.

Lyrics and music by Buffy Sainte-Marie;

©1964 Caleb Music

3 Considering your answers to the previous questions, do you think ‘Universal Soldier’ supports or challenges the dominant social values of its time?

‘Establishment’, anti-authority, pro-‘free love’ and against the ‘normal’ middle-class suburban lifestyle— at the time, these were all very oppositional social values. However, the film’s representations of gender are stereotypical, supporting the dominant social value that women should be attached to men and defined by their domestic function.



‘Dirty’ Harry Callahan in Dirty Harry (1971) seems to support dominant social values, but the film is also sensitive to the emerging social values of equal rights and respect for minorities.

**An Approach to looking at Society’s values in a Media Text**

Here are some general principles to consider when approaching a text, to see the text in the social context of its time and to examine the social values and discourses that shape it.

·· Look at major events that happened around the time of the text’s creation. Think about the effect these may have had on individuals and on society.

·· Research the era of the text (the time period in which it was produced) and try to identify the discourses and social values that were prominent then. Try to understand the Zeitgeist.

·· Look at how the characters have been constructed via story and production elements, and how social values may be reflected in these representations.

·· Examine other cultural products of the same era and society.

·· Decide whether you consider the text to generally support or challenge the dominant social values of the time. Remember, it is possible for a text to both support and challenge the dominant social values.

Films are good texts to analyse, both for examining the operation of social values in texts and for examining the influences of the production’s context. The extended conditions of film production and distribution provide a rich source for exploration: the time between the script’s first draft and the film’s final release is usually years, while the running time of a feature film allows it to cover a lot of detail and engage a number of different social values.

Social values are manifested in a film in the same way as in other texts: via representations. Social values

in the story elements can be seen in the methods of storytelling, the representations and motivations of characters, the relationships between characters, and the narrative’s point of view; social values can also be seen in the production elements of lighting, acting, sound, mise en scène and editing. These elements can give a startling insight into the social values that existed at the time the film was produced, including representations of different social values throughout different layers within the film.

CASE Study

**SHAME (1987)**

**SHAME is a text that clearly shows the social values of the production’s time and place, and where those values meet and clash.**

**Critical Review**

"A black leather clad figure on a motorcycle appears, a dot in the distance of the open road. The figure draws closer. The big engine purrs in the still open countryside. The motorcycle runs past us. The rider is ASTA CADELL..."

The film Shame, directed by Steve Jodrell is an influential and compelling film about the horror and acceptance of gang rape within a small community. The film begins with the arrival of Asta Cadell (Deborah Lee Furness) a tough, leather clad, witty female lawyer who is forced to stopover in the small country town of Ginaborak whilst waiting for her motorbike parts to arrive. From the very beginning, the gender differences in the film are apparent. The men are aggressive and portray ownership whilst the women are cowering and quiet. Although reluctant to stay in the town, Asta is offered lodgings by Tim Curtis (Tony Barry) a local mechanic and learns of the rape of his daughter Lizze (Simone Buchanan) the previous evening. As Asta befriends Lizze, she confesses that the local lad's repeatedly gang rape the women of Ginborak without any consequences. Even the law enforcement turn a blind eye to the youths who are 'highly spirited'. As the story unfolds we meet Ross and Penny, she has been ostracised from the town for speaking up about her rape and her husband is regularly harassed and beaten by the town's lads. Their mothers try to blame Lizzie for 'being too easy' and one mother tries to bribe her with clothes to stay quiet. The fathers condone their behaviour stating that 'boys will be boys'. So Lizze and Asta decide to fight back. This builds up to a huge crescendo which combines all the subplots of the film. The women of the town come together as they fight back against the rapists. Unfortunately it is all too late for Lizze. As she hides in the police station whilst the town fights the drunken lads attacking the Curtis household, two boys find her. Despite screams of help she is whisked away in their car. Lizzie tries to escape only to be thrown onto the road and killed. A tragic heart wrenching ending to this very powerful film. In the final scene the town of Ginaborak stands in silence as her body is placed in the back of a truck. The Sheriff looks at one of the women:

WAL CUDDY (Sherif): Well - I hope you're bloody satisfied.

Asta stares at him. She can't speak.

TINA: No, Wal - we're not bloody satisfied - not by a along way - 'mate'...

This final scene is an interesting end to the film. After the death of a teenager the mentality of the Sheriff stays the same. However, it is resolved that the women will no longer stand for such opinions and that there has been communal recognition of a social problem. I felt very attached to the film as I was taken along this rough journey of oppression, hatred, ignorance and fear.

The public absorbed the film in many different ways, mostly agreeably. Women and feminists felt the film was encouraging women to speak out and seek justice. The only negative reviews I could find were by men. I think this is understandable as they are more likely to have a problem with the films politics. Most negative reviews praised the film in some way yet had a problem with Asta's feminist role and felt the film entertained feminist points of view. The majority of the public, especially the women, loved Shame. In central Sydney it was the 2nd highest grossing film of 1989 (Crofts sites Parer 1990: 179). Packed out theatres were known to clap and cheer in support of the women. It also gained an important role in the overseas market. When Jodrell and Furness promoted the film in the US it really hit a nerve. Furness claims that the women who saw Shame felt it was all too tragically familiar stating that she was almost seen as a rape counsellor (cited in Croft 1998: 179). The films American distributor, Majorike Skouras reported a screening where radical feminists urged men to leave the theatre (Crofts 1998: 57). Although Asta did have a boyfriend in the film, feminist took it on board as their film of the year. They loved Asta, who was a tough independent woman who stood up to the male preconceptions of a women's place in society. Yet the film was not produced for the feminist point of view. This was Steve Jodrell's reflection for the film

"Why do people subscribe to community attitudes about rape? Why should the person who is raped immediately be treated with suspicion? (Cinema papers 1998 )

There are many factors that should encourage sceptics to look beyond the feminist's discourse to see the real problem underneath. Firstly, a male directs the film. His vision was of an action adventure film, in the true genre of a western. Secondly Shame is now used as a class text to help understand and portray the consequences of rape and the mentality of some communities. There are two central male characters that also encourage a non-feminist reading of the film. This is important, especially as a class text so that male viewers have someone to relate to. Tony Curits has a strong role in the film, as he continues to strengthen his relationship with Lizzie. Ross, the roo shooter, is also portrayed differently from the towns' lads.

Shame was faced with pressure and criticism as it made its way to the big screen. It had trouble being funded for the original story and was unable to compete in the AFI awards. Shame was written by Beverly Blakenship and Michael Brindley in 1981. When they sought funding for the film they were encouraged to change the script. The UAA a Perth Finance company and the US encouraged them to add more graphic material. They wanted to change the lead to a man, have the rape scene present and make the men more prominent. They encouraged Blankenship and Brindley to have a male hero for Asta to love and to blow the boys head of with a gun, whilst he was raping Lizzie. The scriptwriters got support from Barron Films, and the UAA finally funded the film for $1.6 million dollars without the script changing. For Shame the biggest disappointment was being unable to compete in the Australian Film institute awards. It had been entered in 1987 then withdrawn due to poor print quality and therefore deemed ineligible. 'Shame should have scooped the pool at the 1988 AFI award...The film's box-office career undoubltly suffered as a result' (Crofts cites Stratton 1993:7)

**Some of the social values existing when Shame (1987) was made were:**

• That why women were gaining some rights they remained secondary to men in terms of opportunities in the workplace and were still seen as the home makers

This is represented through the women in Ginborak who are subservient to the men and hold menial jobs in the meatworks

Men had more freedom and social outlets through mateship groups- which were closed to women

• Whilst Law and justice were the right of all citizens the administration of the law was often selective. Police were not internally audited resulting in improprieties and injustices occurring. Police corruption was common

Lindy Chamberlain- sentenced for the murder of her baby Azaria-

The woman of Ginborak were discouraged from prosecuting the boys who sexually assaulted them

The police sergeant Wal Cuddy turns a blind eye to the violent actions of the boys

• That indigenous Australians were isolated and viewed as second class citizens to white australians

This is evident in the scene where Asta arrives at the Pub - one aboriginal drinker sits outside the pub alone and distant from the social groups. This is also evident in the representation of the aboriginal girls at the Meatworks who appear alone and segregated from the other women.

• Conservation and respect for the land. Clean Up Australia and Keep Australia beautiful campaigns

* That is was good to become very rich any way that you could - one off the sayings at the time was 'greed is good'. This was taken from the Tom Wolfe novel Bonfire of the Vanities. That corporations or big business were more important and more efficient than governments; and were just as good at running things.

Rise of the entrepreneurs – Allan Bond- Christopher Skase Robert Holmes A Court- Kerry Packer- Rupert Murdoch

This is evident through the character of Mrs Rodolph who owns the towns main industry –The Meatworks. Mrs Rodolph’s son Andrew was involved in ther pack rape of women in the town. However her wealth is able to buy the silence of the woman- where no charges were successful against the boys.

* Mateship is exclusive to men- The town boys congregate at the Milkbar, the Dance Hall, The men meet at the pub- Mateship is closed to women

• Australian nationalism and patriotism where citizens are encouraged to be proud to be Australians. This is evident through advertising and the media in general. Accolades for Australians competing and having success on the world stage through sport and the arts affirms the growing independence of Australia from the previous paternalism of Britain.

**Emerging Social values ( values that were beginning to develop / grow)**

•That women should be treated equally to men and have equal opportunities. This social value, which had been emerging for a number of decades, was consolidating through the women's movement which was becoming more powerful and growing in strength

in Shame this is represented through Asta’s representation

* Reconciliation of aboriginal australians.

Land rights were beginning to be recognized. In Shame this is reflected through the two aboriginal girls at the Meat works who silently cheer when Asta punches Andrew Rodolph, one of the men involved in the rape of Lizzie Curtis

* That corruption in politics and the law should no longer be tolerated

When the Australian legal system was first set up the highest court was the Privy Council in Britain. This meant that the British court could make decisions about Australian laws. In 1985 this was changed so that the Australian High Court became the highest court.-proclamation known as the Australian Act,(meaning Australia is beginning to assert its own identity- No longer legally bound by the British –)

This is represented through Asta’s character who demands the boys who raped Lizzie Curtis are charged. She also confronts Wal Cuddy in the pub after being assaulted by 4 teenage boys

This is represented at the conclusion of the film when the community on discovering Lizzie Curtis’ death – turns on Sgt Wal Cuddy

For example in the Country town of Ginborak the discourse towards Gender roles in Ginborak is examined in the film

In the 1987 text Shame set in a rural Australian country town the men are dominant within the community even though many are unemployed and sit idle in their local pub, which is exclusive to men and closed to women. The towns women are expected to be subservient to the men. The dominant group of men within the community expect the women to serve them, be compliant and even silent when the men victimize and abuse them. Many of the towns women are employed in the local meatwork’s as factory workers or are stereotypically portrayed in supermarkets shopping for the family. The women’s acknowledgement of the men’s dominance is evident during a group conversation with the towns women where one reports her compliance with her husband’s order to make dinner so she want miss out on “getting any”

The discourse of gender is starkly evident through the women’s silence towards their victimization and violent sexual assault from the men. This appears conditioned from the attitudes of the men that has been passed down through generations The fathers in defending their sons actions, believe their sons who were responsible for the pack sexual abuse of Lizzie they were acting as nature intended. Younger unlicensed teens drive around the streets accosting women and attempt to attack Asta.

The violent behavior of the men is rarely brought to justice as the Country Police officer Wal Cuddy (whose name symbolizes a reversal of the law) fails to administer the law and sides with the towns men Mrs Rudolph who runs the towns only industry-the meat works uses her influence to protect the actions of her son and his friends by attempting to bride and pay off victims to prevent court action.

In Ginborak Men are the dominant gender and view women as subservient and to serve their sexual gratification. Women are forced to remain silent towards their vicious assaults otherwise they risk victimization and further torment. This deeply embedded culture of abuse also effects the men in the community who try to prevent it. – the brother of – who is abused by the towns gang is threatened by one of the gang leaders when trying to protect his sister in the takeaway café. Roo shooter Ross whose wife Penny has also been subject to the gangs sexual abuse is violently assaulted on the open road on the outskirts of town. The boys fathers turn on Tim Curtis in the local hotel when Lizzie finally agrees to press charges against the boys. Tim , Lizzies father is turned on in the local hotel This is evident by the shroud of silence that covers the town, where outsiders such as Asta are viewed with suspicion

Asta Caddel an independent assertive woman taking a break from her job in the city as a barrister , seeks refuge in the town of Ginborak to repair her damaged motorcycle after having an accident. The discourse towards gender