

Eduqas A Level Unit 8A Close Study Products Student
Workbook 2024 Exam Onwards
Group 1
Formation, Turntables and Underdog

This is the Workbook for use with **Edusites Eduqas Set Products UNIT 8A Group 1 A Level Media Studies**. All of the notes refer to the content of this unit of work. They are designed to help you create a useful set of notes to help you with understanding the ideas covered in this examination, to support you in your Home Learning and be a clear revision aid in your preparations for the final examinations that you are required to take. You need to always keep in mind the examination board Assessment Objectives that your work is to be assessed with.

Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of:

- the theoretical framework of media, contexts of media and their influence on media products and processes.
- Analyse media products using the theoretical framework of media, including in relation to their contexts, to make judgements and draw conclusions.
- Create media products for an intended audience, by applying knowledge and understanding of the theoretical framework of media to communicate meaning.

Create products for intended audience and evaluate communication of meaning

- Demonstrate K&U of theoretical framework – *the Key concepts*
- Contexts of media products & production
- Analyse products by application of the framework/concepts/context

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Teacher's Standards

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Lesson 1

Component 1 Set Products

Section A: Music Videos

Analysing Media Language and Representation

In this section, learners will analyse media language, considering how elements of media language incorporate viewpoints and ideologies, the significance of genre and how audiences may respond to media language. Learners will consider the factors that influence representations and will explore representations of events, issues, individuals and social groups in the media, using relevant theoretical perspectives or theories in their analysis of media products. In addition, learners will consider how representations relate to relevant contexts of media.

- analyse critically and compare how media products, including products outside the commercial mainstream, construct and communicate meanings through the interaction of media language and audience response
- use a range of complex theories of media studies and use specialist subject specific terminology appropriately in a developed way
- debate key questions relating to the social, cultural, political and economic role of the media through discursive writing
- construct and develop a sustained line of reasoning which is coherent, relevant, substantiated and logically structured in an extended response.

The focus of study is not simply the products, it is the theoretical framework and contexts of media.

1. For the music video set products, examination focus has been on music videos as products whose study tell us how products relate to their contexts. This has been done by EDUQAS setting questions that require an analysis of the representation of groups shown in the video and the way these representations are indicative of the influence of social, political, economic and cultural contexts on artists and producers.

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2. EDUQAS may – as they have in previous examination series – not require you to compare or analyse the music videos that you have studied. Instead, they may require you to watch an unseen music video product and then use the skills and understanding acquired in your studies to discuss ideas of representation in the unseen product.
3. EDUQAs may also require you to compare a music video with the Audio-Visual advertising and marketing product. In 2024 this will be the Super.Human. product studied in EDUSITES Unit 1B.

Lesson 2

Music video products

Many articles on the internet cover the history of the music video. Here it is sufficient to note some ideas of its evolution.

The linking of moving image to music – outside of musicals - was happening as long ago as the late 1920s with artists such as Bessie Smith.

The use of film as backdrop as a promotional device for new music campaigns re-surfaced in the early 1960s. It was brought to wide attention by the Beatles use of it for Strawberry Fields/Penny Lane and later took off with the iconic images of Queen's Bohemian Rhapsody which brought such a platform into the TV mainstream. Soon many artists were making such products, realizing that they made possible the ability to promote their music in areas where they couldn't always tour.

MTV – the American TV channel devoted to playing such videos - provided a voracious platform for such material in the 1980s. Soon it became essential for acts to have videos for their singles.

Michael Jackson is one of many artists who were key in the evolution of the form. Billie Jean is noteworthy as the first major music video with a sense of narrative – simple as it is – that laid the template for the mighty Thriller and Beat It videos that followed and

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thus spawned the modern format. Dire Straits Money For Nothing was another landmark video.

MTV was formed in 1981 to take advantage of developing satellite TV platforms that were opening new audience markets around the world. In its early years, MTV's target demographic was young adults – a tech aware and music buying audience. The mainstay of the channel were music promotional videos by established stars such as Police; Dire Straits; ZZ Top; Tina Turner etc. These were played in what was termed 'heavy rotation' – being played 5 or more times a day in different shows.

The format was so successful that it became an expectation that acts would release videos to promote their singles.

The advances in videotaping and camera technology meant such productions could be made relatively cheaply, though competition soon sent costs spiraling as artists sought new ideas to grab precious airtime.

A music video is a short clip of film integrating a song with imagery. They are produced for promotional rather than artistic purposes and are intended to promote the sale of music recordings. They are an industry product rather than artistic.

The music video as we have come to know it, was kick-started to its current ubiquity by the launch of MTV creating a demand for such products to fill its airtime. It was instrumental to the global success of artists such as Adam and the Ants, Duran Duran, Ultravox, Madonna, and Dire Straits.

The channel's appeal was global – the music and images were universal in their appeal and understanding.

The success of YouTube in promoting artists such as Ed Sheeran, Jay-Z etc. has mirrored and evolved the format.

It is a form relying for its growth on:

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1. Developments in technology of making videos (the cost of making videos has fallen)
2. Ambition (special effects translated down from film as in 1 above)
3. Access (the wealth of platforms/social media now available for marketing artists)
4. Availability (24/7; global)

Performance:

live concert footage or the artist presented performing in a location or wandering around locations deemed to be meaningful or of adding pathetic fallacy to the mood/tone/lyrics. Often the realm of heavy rock (performance) or Rap songs (tone/setting) that offer the performer in their social context.

Linear narrative:

the song soundtracks a story with plot that mirrors the lyrics of the song or is empathetic to the story and mood of the song. The narrative has a resolution – often the domain of pop or romantic songs such as Ed Sheeran

Meaningful symbolic:

A mix of images that offer some hinted at ‘meaning’ of the song, yet with no perceptible narrative to glue it together. They create enigmas with no resolution as to what it is about. The mix of symbols create discussion – do they have a meaning or are they simply intriguing images with no connected message. Often the domain of the ‘serious’ work of Madonna; Jay-z; Beyonce

Artistic aspirations:

The song is part of a piece that attempts to create a deeper link to the ideas of the song. Often bands such as Chilli Peppers; Radiohead

Hybrid: combining elements of artist performing and one other category such as Foo Fighters

Lesson 3

Beyonce

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In considering the Beyonce set product we cannot untangle any interpretation from Beyonce herself. More than any of the other EDUQAS set video products, Beyonce is a global star. Such celebrities find their every word and gesture interpreted by popular culture commentators and mediated to her audience. In an age of 24/7 social media hungry for content, the words, actions and cultural output of such stars are analysed for every possible meaning.

- The audience for Beyonce is, for the most part, comprised of fans. Fans are far more committed to the work of those they follow than simply being part of an audience. Audiences may or may not download or buy a song, watch a video. Fans download, buy, and watch everything. Fans copy hairstyles and fashion trends. Fans identify with the star; will espouse the values and ideas of the star they follow.
- Stars are influencers. They make or break other products and brands by their reaction to those products and brands. They can endorse ideas or deny them.
- Some celebrities see their role to use this position to point out issues they feel strongly about. This may be simple ideas of encouraging their fans to 'be nicer' or to use their celebrity status to highlight issues of ecology or to give their weight to campaigns they feel strongly about.
- Some come to see their role as one to speak out, highlighting issues of social inequalities, especially those oppressing sections of society such as racism or gender identity.

Audiences find their reporting fits in with how they too see the world (the reader feels they share a set of values; confirmation bias)

Their content is engaging (shocking; sensationalist; exciting; creates debate)

A star is a human being, possessing all the emotional and behavioural attributes of the rest of society – they represent their gender and ethnic identity, they respond to the ideas and attitudes of the times they live in.

Being a 'star', is to become much more a construct, an institutionally built image that comes to be seen as representing ideas and values of their time and culture, often at

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the forefront of this construction. Stars provide a focus for ideas of 'what people are supposed to be like.'

The content of many media products revolves around how stars compare to the current dominant cultural norms and, in turn, make audiences consider how they compare to these celebrities.

Richard Dyer:

it can be argued that stars are representations which reinforce, legitimate, or alter the prevalent preconceptions of what it is to be a human being in this society.

Society suggests that certain norms of behaviour are appropriate to given groups of people. Stars are one of the ways in which conceptions of such persons are promulgated.

Music videos are an industry creation. They exist for two commercial reasons:

- Awareness of impact of digital platforms to promote products with a mass youth audience requiring content to fill its schedules.
- In a global market performer cannot tour everywhere to promote their music – videos offer the chance to create and sustain a presence in different markets.

Beyoncé by 2016 was a global superstar. Her record company would have had at the forefront of their thinking the careful maintenance and expansion of her brand image, one they had cultivated over the years. As such, the music video had a lavish budget. Whilst Beyoncé may have seen it as a platform to promote social and cultural agenda, the music institution had as its intention the objective of promotion of Beyoncé, the new single and album and the chance to ensure they could maximise profits from these.

We might consider the models of Curran and Seaton and Hesmondhalgh here regarding the commercial imperatives that drive media organisations and the effect this has on the construction of products. Beyoncé's political ambitions for the product might conflict with those of the record label or her wider commercial sponsors. This

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might be used to explain why the video includes overt political messages and iconography yet retains much of the conventional, sexualized representations of her career – costume; shots; dance routines etc. - that objectify both Beyoncé herself and women. We might also interpret these as Beyoncé seeing her representation to now be one demonstrating her as a powerful and successful woman comfortable in her sexuality and offering a contemporary role model.

Formation, was the first single taken off Beyoncé's album Lemonade. The video and single were both released the day before Beyoncé performed at the Super Bowl final in February 2016. Her performance of the song at that event was controversial, and though it is the Melina Matsoukas video that is the product EDUQAS have selected for study, consideration of her performance at the Super Bowl and its reception offers insight into her intentions/objectives in the use of media language and representations in the film to create her message.

The video went on to win a CLIO for innovation and creative excellence and was Grammy nominated.

Set against the backdrop of the flooding in New Orleans following Hurricane Katrina, the film counterpoints images of the flood with iconography closely linked to slavery, as it strives to make a 'meaningful' point. The racial tension of the time in America – the Ferguson riots; the outbreaks of violent protest at police shootings of black Americans, the #blacklivesmatter movement and #oscarssowwhite campaigns - infuse the video with added meaning for audiences.

The video offers a tangled weave of messages and possible meanings. Many of the references in the video require not only an awareness of issues and events linked to the floods and the subsequent racial tensions, but to issues arising from slavery, natural hair, feminist movements, and wider pop cultural contexts of Beyoncé's career and relationships.

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The film has stoked debate and widespread acclaim in equal measure. It is unarguably an overtly political statement, especially in the wider context surrounding its release emphasised by her Superbowl performance. Praised by many in the black community, detractors on the right alleged that the video — and Beyoncé's subsequent Malcolm X Black Panther inspired Superbowl halftime show performance of it — were not simply challenging of the police but sought to undermine policing of crime. Critics, both in the black and the white communities, felt that many elements in the video have conflicting ideas (binary oppositions) such as the focus on her newly embraced overtly feminist stance being at odds with images offering support of the misogynistic Panthers. The criticism was of an overblown product that tried so hard to say something important and serious that it had become confused in the encoding of its meaning. Critics saw it offering an incoherence mistaken for artistic depth.

The set product falls into the meaningful/symbolic format. Beyonce is asking the audience to consider the ways in which inequalities in society permeate the social structures of contemporary America.

The images offer a fractured narrative, a series of visual sequences linked to protests and the tragedy of poverty and oppression. Slavery is referenced in location and dress codes (the antebellum costumes), stressing that inequality is historically built into American society. The presentation of these interlinked visual codes suggests that action is required to end it, the intention is for the audience to question why such things still happen.

We need to be aware that Beyoncé at that time had come to embrace feminism. She had moved from a previously superficial image focused on ideas of glamour and sexualization to one speaking out against the exploitation of women. The video was very much a platform for her outrage at the social chaos of the period – the Ferguson riots, the impact of Hurricane Katrina on poor black Americans and the burgeoning movements against social injustice. That her newfound political ideology embraced historical movements such as the Black Panthers of the 1970s – whose 'uniform' and

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salute she homage in her Superbowl performance - carried a degree of irony given the Panthers were renowned for the misogynistic treatment of women.

Lesson 4

Representations: Formation

Discussion of representation is likely to focus predominantly on ethnicity, gender, age, celebrity, stereotypes.

- The effect of social and cultural contexts on representations of race – history of racial conflict in the US
- How representations invoke discourses and ideologies and position audiences
- Representation of political contexts within the video
- Theories of representation, including Hall, Van Zoonen, Gilroy
- Theories of gender performativity, including Butler

Baudrillard's model sees society having lost the sense of what is real and what is image - audiences are unable to decide what is 'real' and what 'fiction'. What he termed simulacra is the way successive media products raid existing media products to copy their representations. The confused audience sense of what is real is reinforced by this widespread saturation of repeated messages – images of images, a succession of images that appear real, so that life comes to resemble a room of mirrors: all reflection and no defining sense of what is real.

Baudrillard's ideas invoke consideration of the hyper-reality of Beyoncé's image and the use of modern technology to create and sustain this.

How real are the images of Beyonce on magazine covers? They are highly controlled; the make-up; styling; lighting; use of Photoshop constructs an image that is not real. However, the audience believe it to be 'real'. All later shots of her serve to cement this image in the audience mind until she becomes seen only as the image.

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We must be aware that Beyoncé exists on several levels. There is the human being, of whom we know very little, and the media and industry construct of whom we feel we know everything.

Beyoncé the construct is an example of Baudrillard's model of simulacra and hyper-reality.

Beyoncé is a multi-million-dollar industry: she has fashion and fragrance brands who rely on her image for sales (and she in turn needs the continuation of such sponsorship to help promote her music career). Her rise to such wealth and fame has been on the back of a very carefully crafted career that follows the star template laid out by Dyer. Her image is constructed to exploit her audience, targeting their needs, desires, and values (Blumler & Katz). Any decision about choice of music or video is subject to scrutiny by her management to ensure she maintains her core audience and enhances her commercial value. In this light, the release of the video - and its inextricable link to her Superbowl performance the next day - as a sales and promotion tool for Beyoncé's career forces us to consider whether she was intent on making valid social comment or in reducing important social issues to nothing more than a means to promote her career by maintaining her standing and relevance to her core fan base.

Van Zoonen's model focuses on discourse – the narratives and spheres of action presented in media products. Van Zoonen holds that repeated use of stereotypical images reinforces dominant societal views. Media producers use tropes, feeling they offer a greater chance for the commercial success of their products.

Discourse is changeable, moving to follow changes in societal ideas from era to era and culture to culture. They are only understood by consideration of context.

The key issue is that of women objectified by media products – represented with their sole value residing in being looked at. The commodification of women's bodies in mainstream products creates a sense that women do not need to be heard or their needs understood.

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Beyonce can be seen to demonstrate the voyeuristic objectification of women, exploiting her obvious glamour and sexuality to reinforce her brand. Beyonce the brand is a commodity. In this theoretical model even powerful presentations of her as a leader, the images of her sitting on the police car, are seen as simply reinforcing a persona cultivated to sell records and products rather than overt statements of feminism or political commentary on American society.

That media representation of ethnic groups is based on ideas of ethnicity established during the days of colonialism and Empire.

The media offer a simplistic binary representation of ethnic groups based on long established stereotypes. Minority ethnic groups are seen as 'other'.

Black Atlantic explores the hypothesis that modern Black identity was forged in the slave trade – seen as a watershed of cultural exchange. Black music articulates diasporic experiences of resistance to white capitalist culture.

Beyonce's representations in the video run counter to the conventional image Gilroy's model saw of black Americans in the media shown as socially deprived, politically weak, and disenfranchised. Beyonce revels in demonstrating her power – at the forefront of the dancers, the image of sitting on the police car, the low angle shots framing her as powerful and strong. Her repeated direct address to camera stress her independence as a woman in contrast to the images she uses of the past – slavery, the ethnic struggles of the sixties and seventies. She celebrates her hair, her black culture and ethnic facial features.

hooks model of intersectionality - the point where the interests and legitimate concerns of different 'outside' , 'excluded' or marginalised groups meet - sees the oppressive nature of the patriarchy controlling society creating disadvantaged groups.

The theory widens the ideas of second wave feminism by identifying the levels of oppression at work even within this group that add social disadvantage to that of biological identity.

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Feminism is not the struggle to end sexist/patriarchal oppression but part of a wider struggle to end the ideology of domination of any one group or faction. She embraces all groups perceived as victims or outsiders to a dominant hegemonic ideology.

In Formation we see this adopted as a key element in the message of the product. Beyonce's feminist credentials and fierce independence and power are a starting point of the debate over social inequality in American society, an inequality most often linked to ideas of ethnicity and political weakness.

Many of the images are assert the value of the lives of disadvantaged and oppressed groups. Beyonce sees such oppression only ends when it is confronted by protest and violent opposition. The video celebrates her ethnicity – its culture and struggles to be heard – and her gender. She sees personal awareness, the acceptance and celebration of identity, as the means to liberate everyone.

Gender behaviours represented in mainstream media define how women see themselves and are seen by others. These representations are neither natural or biological. They are behaviours learned by repetition. Butler sees gender as performance, a series of actions based on conventions absorbed by individuals through contact with media products.

As a social construction, gender can be viewed as open to change and to being challenged. These adopted beliefs force us to conform to fixed standards for our identity but gender is seen by Butler as a scale rather than fixed immutable positions.

Beyonce can be seen as celebrating individuality, a refusal to accept socially imposed norms of gender or of ethnicity. The shots of protests present defiance of the blind acceptance of authority captured in the iconic image of her lying on the police car as much as the hooded child in front of the police line. In this way she can be seen as offering values of challenge to her fans, of acting rather than submissive acceptance as happened in the past. Beyonce can be seen to be defining herself as a woman of

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power, she is politically aware, her sexualization being on her own terms for her own pleasure rather than meek acceptance of those exploitive ideas imposed by others.

TASK 1

Consider Beyoncé as a construct How does the video – the images and sequences - shape this understanding of her (Hall; Baudrillard; Dyer).

You might consider the frequent shots of her direct gaze, standing in powerful poses in front of the dancers that connote an identity of strength and power. What other examples a can you find?

TASK 2:

Consider how the video is reinforcing/subverting attitudes and values in relation to gender (Butler; hooks; Van Zoonen). Does the representation of Beyoncé in the video reinforce and possibly condone the objectification of women or does she challenge these?

Consider the sequences wearing revealing outfits and the video's realisation of sexualised lyrics. What other examples can you find?

TASK 3:

Consider the video in terms of ethnic relations and binary opposition based on 'otherness'.

Does the film challenge racial hierarchy by subverting expectations and placing a black woman in a position of power and dominion (Gilroy; Butler; Van Zoonen; hooks) or perpetuate a sense of binary opposition between races by perpetuating Gilroy's sense of cultural 'otherness'. Consider the racial/ethnic divide represented in the video by the images of plantations and slavery, the rioting etc.

Lesson 5

Contexts: Formation

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As we have seen with other set products, consideration of the element of context must be considered when thinking about the representations present in media products. As products of a particular era, music videos contain the ideologies and values that are widely circulating in that society. Their representations will seek to either support these or to challenge and evolve them.

EDUQAS state 'learners will consider how representations relate to relevant contexts of media'

Produced in 2016 the Formation music video reflects a society immersed in the origins and causes of the BLM movement, a political and social movement highlighting racism and racial inequalities.

As we have noted, the work of hooks and Gilroy, theorists whose models' origins and ideas are shaped by the same views of cultural Black experience that forms the focus of Beyonce's video are, on the surface, those models most relevant to consider. However, we must also be clear that the product is influenced by those ideas of Fourth Wave Feminism seeing the power of social media as a means of change. The Fourth Wave seeks greater gender equality by focusing on gendered norms* and the marginalization of women in society but remains true to hooks' view that such issues are those of intersectionality, the unifying experiences of those marginalised and oppressed by society. Those who lack a voice by which to express their opposition. Fourth-wave feminists advocate for greater representation of these groups in politics and business and argue that society would be more equitable if policies and practices incorporated the perspectives of all people.

The video has also been controversial with the admission that it in part constructed its arresting mise-en-scene by lifting shots from another project and initially passing it off uncredited as its own footage. The documentary 'That B.E.A.T.' is an independently made film about the Bounce music genre scene in America that is based in the New Orleans area. The documentary was released the year before Formation. Beyonce's

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video lifts sections of footage as well as the narrative idea of the opening scenes of New Orleans.

- Some supported her gesture in the light of the Formation video released the previous day
- Some thought it inappropriate for a mass audience family event
- Some were hostile to her using her celebrity in this way
- Some thought she was hypocritical:
- Her wealth and influence place her in a position of responsibility
- She is rich and privileged and so shares little of the suffering of the black community
- The Panthers were openly misogynistic and hostile in their treatment of women
- Malcolm X was openly dismissive of women's rights
- She is someone whose image promotes and exploits values that objectify women why should she be suddenly so 'political' and 'aware'
- Some saw it as a promotional tactic to get attention for her new song (the next day she announced a 40-date tour of America).

The Panthers opposed the capitalist economy that created her and made her rich – they would have hated her for what she is seen as representing – wealth; power; materialism

Lesson 6

Janelle Monae Turntables

Analyse media language, considering how elements of media language incorporate viewpoints and ideologies, the significance of genre and how audiences may respond to media language. Learners will consider the factors that influence representations and will explore representations of events, issues, individuals, and social groups in the media, using relevant theoretical perspectives or theories in their analysis of media

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products. In addition, learners will consider how representations relate to relevant contexts of media.

Janelle Monáe goes by both they/them and she/her pronouns.

Winner of Billboard's 2015 Women in Music Rising Star Award with 8 Grammy Awards.

In addition to singing and producing music, Monae is an actor starring in Hidden Figures, and Moonlight.

In 2012 the song Turntables was nominated for an Oscar for Best Original Song.

Monáe is signed to Atlantic Records but Wondaland, their own independent record Label is now signed to Sony Music Publishing.

The song was written for the 2020 Amazon documentary All In: The Fight for Democracy,

Focusing on the issue of voter suppression in Georgia. The documentary based on the 2018 elections for the Governor of Georgia, drew attention to the tactics used to suppress voting rights to ensure the election of the Republican candidate at the expense of the black Democrat candidate. Tactics included removing over a million black voters from electoral roles.

The song widens its focus to highlight the erosion of democracy in many other aspects of society in America and across the world.

The song is clearly political in its intentions and forms an interesting comparison with the Beyonce set product Formation – as both are in the EDUQAS Music Video Group 1 they cannot be seen as a paired study piece.

The song constructs a series of political images of current American issues and refers to iconic Black American protests and protestors of previous eras.

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Turntables conforms to what Goodwin defines as the codes and conventions of the narrative/performance video.

The aim of Monáe is to interpret the lyrics through a narrative, in which the artist is an integral part.

The artist performs by singing directly to camera, involving the audience in the story and leading them through the narrative. The involvement of the artist in this style of music video allows them to present their star persona in a way that aims to influence her audience to watch and thus to become involved in the narrative and social-political intentions of the video.

In the case of Monáe, the use of the music video form raises awareness of societal inequalities and issues she sees should be of concern to black Americans and the wider democratic processes of the world.

Dyer's model is of stars as commodities manufactured by institutions to achieve commercial success. A star's image is artificial, constructed to make the artist/performer appeal to a target audience who will be persuaded by that image to consume products.

In constructing the appeal, it is essential that stars are represented as being just like their audience but possessing something making them different. They live lives out of the ordinary person's reach, but, in consuming their products, audiences are made to feel they can make the star present in their lives. In this way, stars influence their audience's style, identity, consumption habits, even friendship and cultural tribal groups.

Each star represents specific social groups and ideologies. This role as an icon gives them power to shape the ideas and views of that group.

Monáe fulfils Dyer's Star theory that a star's meta-narrative (meta-narratives encompass other "small stories" creating universal ideas and meanings) impacts on how a star's audience receive messages. The star's image is constructed to hold audience attention. As a variation on Hall's idea of preferred readings, Dyer's model has Monáe using this influencer status in a manner enabling her to lead that audience from the simple consumption of a commercial song to viewing the political ideas

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Monáe presents to them. Her obvious viewpoint on these matters presented in the product would thus be significant in aligning audience attitudes towards such issues as well as publicising them to wider groups.

Neale's model sees media products relying on the intended audience finding pleasure in difference and repetition - recognition of familiar elements and the way those elements are linked in an unfamiliar way or the way that unfamiliar elements might be introduced.

Genre is a meshing of audience expectations and hypothesis (what they believe the product to be about/contain based on prior knowledge of similar products) which interact with the products during consumption.

Turntable offers a number of genre pleasures to its audience. One is clearly that of the presence of Monáe. Monáe is a star both in an award littered music career and in film acting. Monae fulfils most of Dyer's Star theory that a star's meta-narrative impacts on the consumption by the audience. The star as an image manufactured to hold audience attention.

Neale's idea of genre products being a mix of repetition and change can be seen in the way that Monae uses the platform of performance video to lead the audience to a consideration of wider issues. Pop videos do not often feature images of rioting or political protest or repeated cultural references to protest leaders of previous eras. The images do not permit any other interpretation of the meaning of the turning of tables of the uplifting chorus. The encoding means that audience are pushed to only one reading.

Lesson 7

Monae Turntables – Media Language

In exploring the video you need to call on the knowledge you have been acquiring of those elements that structure products. In the case of Turntables, more specifically we need to focus on the fact that these elements of narrative structure also serve to structure the meanings and understandings of the artist and their work.

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Music videos create meanings through a genre defined structure recognisable to audiences.

The format of each specific music genre – R&B; Rap; Metal; Soul; Pop - retains familiar core elements regardless of the music genre. As we have noted, Turntables employs codes and conventions of the narrative/performance format. The narrative is not linear (it cuts between the past, the present, and the future) instead, cutting between archive clips as a constructed narrative of protest, and held together for meaning by shots of the performance of the song by the artist.

As a shortened form (compared to films or TV, music videos) music videos have only the length of the song, to construct meaning. This requires them to use recognisable conventions of costume, lighting, audio and iconography, to convey their message in as efficient a manner as possible.

One of the key elements of the construction of the video is its strong sense of purpose. This is evident in the very considered use of the montage of images – something you could compare to the Group 2 video of Riptide which appears to take a more frenzied approach to the use of a image selection. There is a strong narrative, though not a conventional linear one, that informs the audience how we are to see this succession of images of protest and protestors – the iconic figures and the ordinary people - and the injustices perpetrated against them that they stood up to oppose.

This construction enables the audience to consider their own assumptions. As such, the intention seems to be to align the audience to at first be aware of and then to come to understand the social-political issues. Monae presents the harm they perpetrate on not only against Black Americans but on a wider faith in democracy and democratic processes. From our viewpoint today, we know the claims of voter fraud that later came to dominate the 2020 election held a few months after Turntables release. Ironically, it was right-wing claims which almost toppled democracy in America with the January 2021 attack on the Capitol building.

Costume:

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Cultural codes are efficiently established through use of a range of stylings and colours. Fashion is used to evoke history by depicting eras. The clothing identifies both the scale and scope of the struggles of what Monáe presents as a continuing fight for equality and identity.

Monáe wears a 1940's army uniform evoking the sense of national identity – something the repeated backdrop of the American flag is used for – as well as implying her own love of America. The uniform indicates a time when Americans of all ethnicities united to fight for democracy and the promise of a more equal future. Monáe's protest is aimed at the structures and groups sustaining inequality not at wider America or Americans. Monáe seeks to unite America does not divide it, something the song suggests has gone on for too long. Remember, we are deep in the age of Trump and his notions of dismissing criticism that he always claimed to be fake news.

The music video locations shift the audience so that we come to see a continuing link between archive footage of the past eras of protest and the everyday lives of contemporary America. The shots of the family breakfast seem to evoke the ordinary and everyday. The child learns of the past through a VR reality. It might suggest that in the future the need for protest may be finished, consigned to history. It might also suggest a sense of complacency as the radical shifts of time and place push the audience to make comparisons of where they are now and the struggles of the past. The suggestion may be that we are settling for what feels like progress but neglecting the reality that the struggles and inequality continues. The call is to protest, to continue the fight for this future.

The video is book-ended by images of Monáe on a beach. This not only offers the audience a sense of narrative closure – the sense of freedom and calm the final shots present – but reinforces Monáe's presence as a star. This is her video. Her way of thinking.

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The use of close-up shots of Monáe in the music video further construct this idea as well as creating a sense of the message being a personal one. The determined expressions create engagement with the audience.

There is good use made of canted angles. These shots are combined with fast editing and the audio cue of the build of the music to construct a growing sense of disorientation – like the spinning of the turntable - reflecting Monáe’s belief of the need to disrupt the established order of things if the changes are to be made.

The use of repeated overhead shots of protest indicate the spread and strength in numbers of the feelings of taking action by standing up and protesting against inequality.

Each shot is edited into a considered sequence – a syntagmatic selection – composed of archive footage, contemporary footage and symbolically constructed images of Monáe. This editing enables each image – like the eras they represent - to be seen as clearly related to those preceding and succeeding it.

Foucault’s Archaeology Model is about examining the traces and forms left by the past in order to better understand what he termed a history of the present. Foucault is considered a post-structuralist thinker but is better thought of – like Barthes & Derrida– as neo-structuralist.

Foucault’s work influenced all subsequent theoretical models in approaching any analysis of contemporary media products. The model states that by accounting for the active influence of past products and past representations we may better understand current representations and meanings. Foucault believed analysis must consider more fully how earlier forms have contributed to the shape of media products today.

In simple terms, the past shapes the present and without understanding the past we can never fully understand current media products.

In Turntables we can see how the form of the product utilizes the audience ideas of music videos forms and intentions. They present stars in order to sell products. The form is of linear narrative or performance. Turntables subverts these, using the form to attract and appeal to its audience but then presenting ideas of protest rather than commodification of Monáe.

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Lesson 8

Monae Turntables - Representations

We have seen that the Turntables product is a tightly focused narrative/performance video with clear ideological intentions which shape its representations of:

- Ideas to Monae's large fan base to create an understanding of the issues of political inequalities and disenfranchisement of over a million Black American voters revealed in the documentary for which the song was written.
- Monae's celebrity to publicise the issues of inequality still prevalent in society.
- Promoting Monae's brand to a more politically aware audience, evolving her own stature as a mature, serious artist rather than a performer of hit songs.
- Music as a means to attract audiences and to then use the platform to promote change through audience awareness of key issues of inequality persisting in society.
- Awareness of the decades of struggle and sacrifice necessary to attain social justice.

The media language of the set product Turntables can be seen as that which challenges society's mainstream representations of Black American protest of presenting deeply troubling images of violence and aggression often with damage to property and creating fear in the minds of those not part of such protests. She challenges the representation of protest as the 'other' – seeing them instead as part of the mainstream ideas of fighting for democratic rights central to the American Dream.

The model of Hall argues that representations are about intentions – how the producer/encoder intended the audience to understand the product. This can be by agreement, opposition or negotiation with the intentions.

There is little doubting Monae's intentions. Here the representations are considered, carefully selected both in their content and in their sequence. They build to a powerful whole.

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Reception theory sees meaning residing in audience response rather than the product. We make considered assumptions about the intentions of the encoder based on what we understand of their motive. Most often this can be seen as the commercial intentions of appealing to an identified audience. How far the product might reflect the way members of the target audience are likely to think (most often we can assume that they align in taking the preferred reading).

Clearly, in Turntables the intention is clear from the images and media language used to construct its representations of values and ideologies as key to the attainment of democratic rights. Monae has discussed these intentions in interviews. In creating the song and the video, Monae sets not only the agenda (McComb & Shaw) but how it is framed to align her fan audience to take the preferred reading (Hall)

hooks model of intersectionality - the point where the interests and legitimate concerns of different 'outside', 'excluded' or marginalised groups meet - sees the oppressive nature of the patriarchy controlling society creating disadvantaged groups.

The theory widens the ideas of second wave feminism by identifying other disadvantages to add to that of female biological identity.

Feminism is not the struggle to end sexist/patriarchal oppression but part of a wider struggle to end the ideology of domination of any one group or faction.

In Turntables we could see similarities to the way that Beyonce's Formation product (Group 1 Video so CANNOT be compared to Turntables in the exam) sees oppression only finally ending when it is confronted by protest and civic opposition.

hooks idea of intersectionality is relevant here, Monae's video is concerned with not only feminist perspectives but seeing a wider struggle of groups who are victims of oppression of the dominant ideology prevalent in America. hooks ideas were widely circulated during the George Floyd protests of 2020 and 2021 with a resurgence of interest in her writing on racism, feminism and capitalism shaping the debate at the time of the video's production. Very much part of the Third Wave of feminist thinking, hooks has had an abiding influence in shaping the ideas of the Fourth Wave too with

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her view that the oppression of disadvantaged groups is culturally based and thus subject to change.

Van Zoonen's model focuses on discourse – the narratives and spheres of action presented in media products. Van Zoonen holds that repeated use of stereotypical images reinforces dominant societal views. Media producers use tropes, feeling they offer a greater chance for the commercial success of their products.

Discourse is changeable, moving to follow changes in societal ideas from era to era and culture to culture. They are only understood by consideration of context.

As a post-modernist model, Van Zoonen's ideas are very applicable to Turntables. Post-modernism sees the dominant ideologies sustained by media products as cultural constructs and thus susceptible to change. Turntables deploys images presenting the idea that protest against anti-democratic and oppressive ideologies is part of a legitimate line of opposition for those who lack of a voice of their own. The images reinforce ideas of the legitimacy of protest that attempt to break mainstream tropes of protest as destructive or anti-democratic. In the video Monáe subverts such ideas by claiming the founding ideas of America as their own, it is mainstream society which has betrayed the democratic ideals. The use of the American flag reinforces Monáe's views of America 'lyin' and that this will be revealed for the deception it is.

Gerbner's cultivation theory found that media products repeatedly expose the audience to ideas and behaviours. The constant repetition of ideas and behaviours with their consequences for characters in such products are absorbed by the audience and shape their beliefs.

It is often compared to the idea of water dripping on a rock, over time the rock is eroded and changed.

Exposure to modern media encourages standardised roles and behaviours - long term users of media are more likely to develop and portray the attitudes and outlooks contained in the products they engage with.

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Turntable supports Gerbner's ideas. The video challenges those ideas that mainstream media has for too long promoted to audiences in its newspapers, magazines, TV shows and films. The message is that the representation of protest as violent and anti-social that mainstream media has sustained is wrong. Monae uses influencer status to present an alternative view.

The video may be seen as a response to Gerbner's Mean World Syndrome as the images selected and the lyrics of the song oppose the idea of being fearful of the BLM protest movements. They are not to be feared as indicative of a violent society but should be understood as the legitimate protests of groups who have suffered decades of oppression and whose rights are being denied.

Lesson 9

Monae Turntables - Contexts

As we have seen with other set products, consideration of the element of context must be considered when thinking about the representations present in media products. As products of a particular era, music videos contain the ideologies and values that are widely circulating in that society. Their representations will seek to either support these or to challenge and evolve them.

EDUQAS state 'learners will consider how representations relate to relevant contexts of media'

Produced in 2020 the Turntables music video reflects a society immersed in the origins and causes of the metoo and BLM movements.

The work of hooks and Gilroy, theorists whose models' origins and ideas are shaped by the same views of cultural Black experience that forms the focus of Monae's video are, on the surface, those models most relevant to consider. However, we must also be clear that the product is influenced by those ideas of Fourth Wave Feminism seeing the power of the internet and social media as a means of change. The Fourth Wave

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seeks greater gender equality by focusing on gendered norms* and the marginalization of women in society but remains true to hooks' view that such issues are those of intersectionality, the unifying experiences of those marginalised and oppressed by society. Those who lack a voice by which to express their opposition. Fourth-wave feminists advocate for greater representation of these groups in politics and business and argue that society would be more equitable if policies and practices incorporated the perspectives of all people. We can see added relevance of such models here as since 2018 Monáe has identified as 'beyond binary' in gender identification.

We have to be aware that Monáe's output and brand image has not always been that of protestor or of being socially or politically engaged. Her earlier career was a commercial brand designed to make her a fashion icon, a star whose concern was clothing and style. Of course, whilst it might be seen as the lipstick feminism of the latter Third Wave, Monáe's early career gave little hint of politics or of feminist concerns. In Monáe we see her protest as the evolution of their own ideas, a point at which an influencer platform can be used to social effect.

In 2015, Janelle Monáe released "Hell You Talmbout," a song of raw protest of Black lives lost at the hands of law enforcement and vigilantes.

"Turntables" came out five years later, a more sophisticated a sound, more mainstream. It employs a sound and a message that is much more palatable to the mainstream.

Monáe invokes symbols of freedom. The U.S. flag, an emblem whose identity of an icon of democracy had by 2020 transformed in protest marches in protests to a mark of oppression for Black Americans: "I'm kickin' out the old regime: Liberation, elevation, education / America, you a lie / But the whole world 'bout to testify."

By the end of the song, the "I" becomes "we," as she urges surrender to uniting to the collective need of the many oppressed if there is to be real change.

Throughout the music video is footage of past and present protest. Angela Davis, Muhammad Ali, Toni Morrison, Stacey Abrams, and Maxine Waters feature

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prominently. These icons of Black culture pushed for social change. Monáe urges the audience to be unafraid of pushing for the equality promised to all Americans.

Monáe is in the position of now being considered an influential artist. Her career encompasses screen roles playing empowered and powerful black women seen as part of the struggle for equality of ethnicity and gender – these have come to be defining ideas in her music too. Monáe uses conventions of music with deep roots as Black cultural expressions of soul, Jazz, and R&B to explore social inequalities and the oppression of minority groups.

We must keep in mind that Monae is defined as a black, non-binary female concerned to present positive representations of all genders but in particular that of black women. Turntables attempts to engage the audience with those issues Monae sees as key to achieving social and political changes beneficial to all. As such, the images selected are all positive. There is no attempt to present any group as ‘other’ or an enemy. The challenge is the embedded inequalities of the social and political structures of America. Monae is politically involved and committed, understanding how systems of representation work to align audiences.

As a feminist, Monae sees the movement in terms of the Third and Fourth Waves, a political commitment to promote change and challenge oppression rather than a movement concerning individual lifestyle choices. The lyrics evolve to ‘we’ not ‘I’, Monae wanting to engage the audience with those ideas of change in the video. The audience are aligned to understand these ideas through invoking the experiences of other generations, causes that requires their own action.

The video challenges perceptions of gender, ethnicity, and inequality. In terms of Hall, it attempts to align the audience by its subversion of those tropes of the mainstream that have a vested interest in promoting a different, negative view of ‘otherness’ through sustaining tropes of ethnicity, gender, protest, and social inequalities.

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Ideology is a world view, a system of values, attitudes and beliefs which an individual, group or society holds to be true or important. They are shared ideas of a society about how society should function.

Ideologies are promoted by important social institutions such as the media. Those most often applied are called dominant or Hegemonic ideologies.

Dominant ideologies are mainstream beliefs accepted in our day-to-day lives. According to Barthes they have become 'natural, common sense'. What he calls myths.

Dominant ideologies include beliefs about gender roles, the economy, social institutions such as marriage etc.

Turntables cannot be isolated from the contexts that directly led to its production. It is a song of protest and its non-linear narrative form as a music video places it as a protest that focuses on the ideas of inequality for non-white ethnic groups in American Society. The repeated use of those icons of Black American culture, in particular icons of Black American protest make this evident. This means we must apply our post-structuralist models to any evaluation – Barthes, Foucault, Derrida, Hall, hooks, Gilroy. Black Atlantic explores the hypothesis that modern Black identity was forged in the slave trade – an event seen as a watershed of cultural exchange. Black music articulates diasporic experiences of resistance to white capitalist culture.

Monáe's representations are rooted in the context of 2020 America, a protest of a socially deprived, politically weak, and disenfranchised culture. Monae celebrates the traditions of protests – applying ideas of cultural archaeology of Foucault, that we must understand the present by seeing its link to the past.

The video applies Gilroy's notion of the experience of a diasporic culture evolving as Black Atlantic culture that reunites these elements forging an artistic expression of identity. The experience of slavery and the oppression are reimagined as the roots of identity. They challenge the audience to grasp their identity and to carry it forward to make the change.

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Lesson 10

Alicia Keys Underdog - Overview

Analyse media language, considering how elements of media language incorporate viewpoints and ideologies, the significance of genre and how audiences may respond to media language. Learners will consider the factors that influence representations and will explore representations of events, issues, individuals and social groups in the media, using relevant theoretical perspectives or theories in their analysis of media products. In addition, learners will consider how representations relate to relevant contexts of media.

The product conforms to the narrative/performance format. The narrative is linear in that it highlights key moments in a day of the stories of individuals of different gender and ethnicity. These are hung together under the umbrella of master shots of Keys singing the song.

At the end of the song, they all come together to dance and sing.

The use of Keys in the video performing the song enables the video to draw in audiences through Keys star status as a performer and influencer with fans.

Rather than a political statement in the manner of the two other Group1 music video products Formation and Turntables, Underdog is clearly designed to be an uplifting statement of faith, one comforting individuals going through difficult and challenging times. It highlights elements of social inequality and the humanity of those caught up in it but states Keys belief that, like her, they should believe they have the capacity to rise and overcome current circumstances. It forms an interesting comparison with the Beyonce and Monae set products – as both are in the EDUQAS Music Video Group 1 they cannot be seen as a paired study piece for the exam.

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The song constructs a series of narratives of people facing tough times. It ends with Keys celebrating with them as each finds comfort in the belief that, through determination and keeping faith in themselves, things will get better.

Underdog conforms to what Goodwin defines as the codes and conventions of the linear narrative/performance video. Keys video interprets the lyrics through inter-linked stories that liberally present the 'man at the bus stop' and others mentioned in the lyrics.

The aim of Keys is to interpret the lyrics through a narrative, in which the artist is an integral part.

The artist performs by singing directly to camera, involving the audience in the story and leading them through the narrative. The involvement of the artist in this style of music video allows them to present their star persona in a way that aims to influence her audience to watch and thus to become involved in the narrative with its social intentions.

In the case of Keys, the use of the music video form raises awareness of social issues of inequalities in society but rather than urge protest or action as a group, she sees hope in personal qualities of determination and the capacity to seek personal improvement. In this way, it tends to being apolitical rather than a statement of any support for social movements or political change.

Dyer's model is of stars as commodities manufactured by institutions to achieve commercial success. A star's image is artificial, constructed to make the artist/performer appeal to a target audience who can be persuaded to consume products.

In constructing the appeal, it is essential that stars are represented as being just like their audience but possessing something making them different. They live lives out of the ordinary person's reach, but, in consuming their products, audiences are made to feel they can make the star present in their lives. Stars influence their audience's style, identity, consumption habits, even friendship and cultural tribal groups. This role as an icon gives them power to shape the ideas and views of that group.

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Underdog fulfils Dyer's Star theory that a star's meta-narrative (meta-narratives encompass other "small stories" creating universal ideas and meanings) impacts on how the star's audience receive messages. The star's image is constructed to hold audience attention. Dyer's model has Keys using influencer status to lead her audience from the simple consumption of a commercial song to assuming the values and beliefs presented. Her views are significant in aligning audience attitudes towards issues. She is not urging action, the intention is to uplift spirits, to put forward a hope in a better future offering little indication as to how this might be achieved other than through self-belief. In some sense it epitomises the American Dream and ideologies of the Conservative right and of religious faith. There is nothing referencing the social and political unrest of the era.

Neale's model sees media products relying on the intended audience finding pleasure in difference and repetition - recognition of familiar elements and the way those elements are linked in an unfamiliar way or the way that unfamiliar elements might be introduced.

Genre is a meshing of audience expectations and hypothesis (what they believe the product to be about/contain based on prior knowledge of similar products) which interact with the products during consumption.

Underdog offers a number of genre pleasures to its audience. One is clearly that of the presence of Keys. She is a star, her music career littered with awards and riches. Keys fulfils Dyer's Star theory that a star's meta-narrative impacts on the consumption by the audience. The star as an image manufactured to hold audience attention and one conforming to well established norms of appeal – her looks; her style; her manner. Neale's idea of genre products being a mix of repetition and change can be seen in the way that Keyes uses the platform of performance video and loinear narrative in quite a well-established structure that will be familiar to her fans. The image is of joy and of personal values of humanity. There is a comforting and familiar warmth to the whole. There is no lecturing or efforts to convince an audience alignment to anything beyond a faith in yourself and in not undervaluing others who may be struggling or who appear less fortunate.

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Lesson 11

Alicia Keys Underdog – Media Language

In exploring the video you need to call on the knowledge you have been acquiring of those elements that structure products. In the case of Underdog, more specifically we need to focus on the fact that these elements of narrative structure also serve to structure the meanings and understandings of the artist and their work.

Music videos create meanings through a genre defined structure recognisable to audiences.

The format of each specific music genre – R&B; Rap; Metal; Soul; Pop - retains familiar core elements regardless of the music genre. As we have noted, Underdog employs codes and conventions of the narrative/performance format. The narrative is linear (it follows each of the stories as they evolve, intercutting to the performance), cutting between the stories and Keys performance as a constructed narrative of struggle and hope held together for meaning by shots of the performance of the song by Keys.

As a shortened form (compared to films or TV, music videos) music videos have only the length of the song, to construct meaning. This requires them to use recognisable conventions of costume, lighting, audio and iconography, to convey their message in as efficient a manner as possible.

One of the key elements of the construction of the video is a strong narrative drive offering a sense of purpose. This is evident in the very considered use of the stories selected for the video – something you could compare to the Group 2 video of Riptide which appears to take a more frenzied approach in its image selection. There is a strong narrative, a conventional linear one, that informs the audience how we are to see this succession of images of struggle – the lyrics urge us and the subjects in them to believe as Keys did that she was being written off by those who could not see her sense of belief or her desire to make a life shaped to her own choosing by refusing to be deterred from reaching for her dreams and ambitions.

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This construction enables the audience to consider their own lives. Not just the idea that they too can find hope if they are struggling with circumstances or feeling underappreciated, but in the way they may look at others less fortunate and fail in seeing the potential there. As such, the intention seems to be to align the audience to deeper awareness of lives of struggle, that these are not the fault of those individuals trapped by circumstance. They should not be seen as victims, but as unfulfilled potential. The idea is that we come to understand the power of faith in oneself.

Locations:

The music video locations are familiar, part of the everyday lives of contemporary America. The shots of the mother and her children and the young girls riding to their prom evoke the ordinary and every day. These are familiar images from the lives of the audience. This is all about relating audience to the content. Of identifying.

The locations situate the narrative in reality. The de-saturated colour palette sustains the idea of reality rather than being glamourised or constructed. It strives to avoid the sense of the video as mediation of the stories. We might compare these location shots to the inter-cut dancing and celebration of the latter part of the video where vivid colour emphasises the joyousness.

The suggestion is that in a world full of social inequality, people's stories surround us. We go about life too often neglecting the reality that struggle and inequality continue. The objective appears to be awareness. For eyes to be opened to the lives of others. To see them as people rather than issues or statistics. That people are not defined by circumstance. That situations can be changed if we have the determination to do so. In each story we are shown love and courage, not victims.

The establishing shots of the urban location anchor the narrative in a relatable and recognisable setting, the audience understand that we are to be shown real life experiences. There use of tracking shots following the characters (man on the pavement; young woman on the bus) through their day is a tool to pull the audience into the narrative.

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Editing cuts move the narrative between individual stories and Keys performance, establishing a clear link between them; the considered cutting from the young mother spinning with the child in her arms to the street dancer spinning on the table reinforce this.

The repeated use of the shot of looking up to the sky through extended arms reflects the thematic idea of rising up, of overcoming adversity.

The video is inter-cut by images of Keys in the streets performing the song. The location is urban, inner city, connecting Keys to those whose story she tells. Keys herself grew up in a deprived inner-city urban area. By including herself in the narratives we are shown that this is her video. Her way of thinking.

The use of close-up shots of Keys in the music video construct the idea of the sense of the message being a personal one. Her determined expressions create engagement with the audience.

There is good use made of cutting. The narrative flicks between several stories, the fast editing and the audio cue of lyrics construct a growing sense of the interconnectedness of the stories and that of Keys own story and her faith of overcoming adversity – of the underdog winning through.

The use of different stories rather than any focus on one indicate the pervasiveness of issues of inequality but at the same time serve as a means of saying we are not alone.

Each shot is edited into a considered sequence – a syntagmatic selection – composed of the stories and constructed images of Keys. This editing enables each story and Keys to be seen as clearly related.

Foucault's Archaeology Model is about examining the traces and forms left by the past in order to better understand what he termed a history of the present. Foucault is considered a post-structuralist thinker but is better thought of – like Barthes – as neo-structuralist.

Foucault's work influenced all subsequent theoretical models in approaching any analysis of contemporary media products. The model states that by accounting for the

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active influence of past products and past representations we may better understand current representations and meanings. Foucault believed analysis must consider more fully how earlier forms have contributed to the shape of media products today

In simple terms, the past shapes the present and without understanding the past we can never fully understand current media products .

In Underdog we see how the construction of the product utilizes audience ideas by meeting well established expectations of music video forms. The selected form presents stars in order to sell products. The hybrid of linear narrative and performance is the most widely used format, one known to be of appeal to mainstream audiences. The video exploits the expectations and demands of Keys fanbase, fulfilling their need to 'see' her. The product follows genre expectations very closely. Audiences are positioned to feel uplifted and to feel good. The product makes commercial use of Keys status, at the same time reinforcing it.

Lesson 12

Alicia Keys Underdog – Representations

The Underdog product is a tightly focused narrative/performance video with clear values and intentions that shape its representations of:

- Key's values of humanity and equality and positivity to her fan base, creating understanding of the impact of social inequality on lives.
- Challenge misrepresentations and under representations of groups
- Challenge the mainstream media and audience tropes of those in challenging economic circumstances being labelled and seen simply as victims - they have dreams and aspirations.
- Challenge the tropes of representations of ethnic culture, celebrating the vibrancy of different cultures.
- Key's celebrity status publicises the issues of inequality still prevalent in society.
- Promoting Key's brand, evolving her own stature as a performer of hit songs.

Music as a means to attract audiences, using the platform to promote change through audience awareness

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The media language of the set product can be seen as challenging and subverting society's mainstream representations of social inequality and those caught in such circumstances. The product challenges the misrepresentation of those caught up in the tide of economic deprivation as the 'other' – Keys seeing them instead as much a part of the mainstream ideas of aspiration as her audience, of only needing an equal chance to become part of the American Dream.

The model of Hall argues that representations are about intentions – how the producer/encoder intended the audience to understand the product. This can be by agreement, opposition, or negotiation with the intentions.

There is little doubting Key's intentions. Here the dominant representations are considered, carefully selected both in their content (paradigmatic) and in their sequencing (syntagmatic). They build to a powerful whole.

Keys is a well-known campaigner for women's rights as well as for causes allied to social deprivations and the treatment of Black Americans. At the time of the release of *Underdog* she was an active campaigner for justice for Breonna Taylor, a young black woman killed by the police during a raid on her house. She had also announced plans to build a \$1 billion fund for black-owned businesses.

Reception theory sees meaning residing in audience response rather than the product. We make considered assumptions about the intentions of the encoder based on what we understand of their motive. Most often this can be seen as the commercial intentions of appealing to an identified audience. How far the product might reflect the way members of the target audience are likely to think (most often we can assume that they align in taking the preferred reading).

In *Underdog* the intention is evident in the images and media language that construct representations of individual value and worth. Each group is presented to celebrate their diversity and individuality whilst embracing they are part of the culture of America – most evident in the young girls in hijabs and prom dresses. Keys has discussed these intentions in interviews. In creating the song and its video, she re-sets not only

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the agenda (McComb & Shaw) but presents new ideas of how it can be framed to align the audience to take the preferred reading (Hall).

Media products provide information about ways of living which all of us actively integrate into our beliefs. This includes the manner that particular representation of people – their ideas, beliefs, values, actions - refine how we view those people or groups.

The idea of a constructed identity applies not just to how we see ourselves but to how we see others. Our perceptions are based on the constructed whole each media product contributes to. Keys sees the misrepresentations in mainstream media of swathes of society. The perception of the homeless as shiftless or victims might be one. That those struggling with social deprivation have only themselves to blame or should be pitied is another mainstream trope she challenges.

Underdog subverts misrepresentations. Keys sees the potential in each individual. The capacity for achievement, for living fulfilling lives requiring a chance to 'rise up'. The representations in the video challenge hegemonic assumptions, subverting audience understanding by its focus on individual stories rather than the presentation of symbols. Keys celebrates alongside these people. She has shared their struggle for acceptance, for a chance.

hooks model of intersectionality - the point where the interests and legitimate concerns of different 'outside' , 'excluded' or marginalised groups meet - sees the oppressive nature of the patriarchy controlling society creating disadvantaged groups.

The theory widens the ideas of second wave feminism by identifying other disadvantages to add to that of female biological identity. Feminism is not simply the struggle to end sexist/patriarchal oppression but part of a wider struggle to end the ideology of domination of any one group or faction.

In Underdog we see some similarities to the way that Beyonce's Formation product or Monae's Turntables (Group 1 Videos CANNOT be compared to Turntables in the exam) see oppression only finally ending when confronted by protest and civic opposition. For Keys, there is no call to action or protest. Her message is for

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awareness and understanding. To educate the audience to see people rather than issues or tropes of victimhood.

hooks idea of intersectionality is relevant here, Key's herself suffered sexual and ethnic discrimination in her path to the top, but Underdog is concerned with not only feminist perspectives but seeing the wider struggle of all those trapped by circumstance of deprivation and politics as much as gender or ethnicity. hooks ideas were widely circulated during the George Floyd protests of 2020 and 2021 with her view that the oppression of disadvantaged groups is culturally based and thus subject to change. Keys constructs representations that challenge the tropes of victimhood. Her stories are of white single mother as much as hijab proms and black male homeless. They can rise up.

Van Zoonen's model focuses on discourse – the narratives and spheres of action presented in media products. Van Zoonen holds that repeated use of stereotypical images reinforces dominant societal views. Media producers use tropes, feeling they offer a greater chance for the commercial success of their products.

Discourse is changeable, moving to follow changes in societal ideas from era to era and culture to culture. They are only understood by consideration of context.

As a post-modernist model, Van Zoonen's ideas are very applicable to Underdog. Post-modernism sees the dominant ideologies sustained by media products as cultural constructs and thus susceptible to change. Underdog deploys images presenting the idea that everyone is capable of dreams, of aspiration, looking for the chance to 'rise up'. The tropes that constrain them are often of perception of others. These perceptions are not immutable. To change they require awareness and understanding. The video is of stories, each one reinforce ideas of the possibility of people. Keys subverts dominant ideologies of those socially deprived, seeing their dreams and hopes and ambitions for themselves and those they love. The product is political as it engages the audience with the discourse around representations and tropes.

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Gerbner's cultivation theory found that media products repeatedly expose the audience to ideas and behaviours. The constant repetition of ideas and behaviours with their consequences for characters in such products are absorbed by the audience and shape their beliefs.

It is often compared to the idea of water dripping on a rock, over time the rock is eroded and changed.

Exposure to modern media encourages standardised roles and behaviours - long term users of media are more likely to develop and portray the attitudes and outlooks contained in the products they engage with.

Keys supports Gerbner's ideas. The video challenges those ideas that mainstream media has for too long promoted to audiences in its newspapers, magazines, TV shows and films. The message is that the representation of the socially deprived that mainstream media has sustained is wrong. Keys uses influencer status to present an alternative view. Her focus is on individual stories, seeing people not issues. Her belief is in the capacity for changing circumstance. To rise up.

Lesson 13

Alicia Keys Underdog – Contexts

As we have seen with other set products, consideration of the element of context must be considered when thinking about the representations present in media products. As products of a particular era, music videos contain the ideologies and values that are widely circulating in that society. Their representations will seek to either support these or to challenge and evolve them.

EDUQAS state 'learners will consider how representations relate to relevant contexts of media'

Produced in 2020 the Underdog music video engages with a society immersed in the origins and causes of the metoo and BLM movements.

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The work of hooks and Gilroy, theorists whose models' origins and ideas are shaped by the same views of cultural Black experience that forms the focus of Key's video are, on the surface, those models most relevant to consider. However, we must also be clear that the product is influenced by those ideas of Fourth Wave Feminism seeing the power of the media as a means of change. The Fourth Wave seeks greater gender equality by focusing on gendered norms* and the marginalization of women in society but remains true to hooks' view that key to such issues are those of intersectionality, the unifying experiences of those marginalised and oppressed by society. Those who lack a voice by which to express their opposition. Fourth-wave feminists advocate for greater representation of these groups in politics and business and argue that society would be more equitable if policies and practices incorporated the perspectives of all people whatever their culture or economic situation. We can see added relevance of such ideas here as Keys herself is a product of such identification.

Hall's model show us that the responses of different audiences will reflect social and cultural circumstances; audiences who may feel under-represented may be empowered by the messages encoded in this music video. Others may find their ideas challenged, provoking a re-imagining of those groups as the video explores issues related to the experience of living in contemporary America as a member of an under-represented social group.

Keys is in the position of now being considered an influential artist. As an empowered and powerful black woman she is seen as part of the struggle for equality of ethnicity and gender – a view that has come to be among the defining ideas in her music. Keys uses the conventions of music forms with deep roots of being Black cultural expressions - soul and R&B - to explore social inequalities and the oppression of minority groups.

Underdog attempts to engage the audience with those issues Keys sees as key to achieving social and political changes beneficial to all. As such, the images selected are all positive. There is no attempt to present any group as 'other' or an enemy. The challenge is the embedded inequalities of the social and political structures of America.

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Keys is personally politically involved and committed, understanding how systems of representation work to align audiences.

As a feminist, she sees the movement in terms of the Third and Fourth Waves, a political commitment to promote change and challenge oppression rather than a movement concerning individual lifestyle choices. The lyrics engage the audience with those ideas of change in the video. The audience are aligned to understand these ideas through invoking familiar relatable locations and the stories of individuals rather than presenting the power of groups or movements. She does not require action, simply awareness and correcting the mis-representations or under-representations so so many in society.

The video challenges perceptions of gender, ethnicity, and inequality. In terms of Hall, it attempts to align the audience by its subversion of those tropes of the mainstream that have a vested interest in promoting a different, negative view of 'otherness' through sustaining tropes of ethnicity, gender, and social inequalities.

Ideology is a world view, a system of values, attitudes and beliefs which an individual, group or society holds to be true or important. They are shared ideas of a society about how society should function.

Ideologies are promoted by important social institutions such as the media. Those most often applied are called dominant or Hegemonic ideologies.

Dominant ideologies are mainstream beliefs accepted in our day-to-day lives. According to Barthes they have become 'natural, common sense'. What he calls myths.

Dominant ideologies include beliefs about gender roles, the economy, social institutions such as marriage etc.

Underdog cannot be isolated from the contexts or issues that it contributes to. It is a song focusing on the ideas of inequality for certain groups in American Society. The use of individual stories construct the narrative of the impact on lives with stories that are under-represented in mainstream media. The focus is subversion of myths, challenging mis-representation. Challenging the audience to reframe understandings.

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This means we can apply our post-structuralist models to any evaluation – Barthes, Foucault, Derrida, Hall, hooks, Gilroy.

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