

Representations of gender in the media

Item C	
Over the past few decades there has been considerable interest in the relationship between the mass media and gender. For example, feminists have criticised television production companies for showing women in stereotypical roles. They argue that such representations have focused on women's looks and sexual attractiveness. Similarly, Ferguson (1983) argued that women's magazines presented a 'cult of femininity', where getting and keeping a partner was a major focus. Other sociologists have identified the mass media as important agents in the social construction of gender differences.	5
More recently, Cumberbatch (2010) found that, despite women featuring strongly in television programmes such as soap operas, men now fill 65 per cent of all broadcast roles. There are even differences in news and current affairs on-street interviews, where women are asked for their opinion only a third as frequently as men.	10
However, it is not simply the issue of representation that raises concerns. Some argue that women generally have less power and hold fewer key decision-making jobs in the media industries than men.	15

Using material from **Item C** and elsewhere assess the role of the mass media in the representation of gender. (20 marks)

Examiners report

This question was well answered by many students. Many made good use of material from the Item and elsewhere to present a wide-ranging debate. The issues and concepts most often explored were glass ceilings, the nature of patriarchy, organisational constraints, media ownership, advertising, male gaze, and the cult of femininity. A wider range of sources was used than in previous questions on this topic. However, as with responses to Question 08, some students wrote only about women.