An **Ideology** is a world view, a system of values, attitudes and beliefs which an individual, group or society holds to be true or important; these are shared by a culture or society about how that society should function.

Dominant ideologies

Ideologies that are told to us repeatedly by important social institutions such as the church, the law, education, government, and the media are called dominant ideologies.

Dominant ideologies are ideologies or beliefs that we live by in our day-to-day lives and often do not question – they have become 'natural, common sense' things to do. This effectively dissuades people from rebelling against these beliefs, and keeps a sense of stability in society.

Dominant ideologies include beliefs about gender roles, about the economy, about social institutions.

Consumerism has been a dominant ideology in the western world since the industrial revolution. Consumerism is a world view that a person has more worth if she or he has more material possessions and that we are made happier by consuming more goods.

Media texts always reflect certain values or ideologies though sometimes we may not be aware of this. An example might be that in some texts, such as action films like the Die Hard or the Lethal Weapon series, solving problems with force is seen as an acceptable value and reflects a certain ideology.

The media is a successful carrier of ideology because it reaches such a huge audience. The study of the media allows us to consider and question dominant ideologies and look for the implications of different ideology and value systems.

When studying a media text you may look for the dominant ideology present and question whose world view is represented and which group(s) and their associated world view(s) have not been represented.

Some studies of the media concentrate on viewing texts from particular ideological perspectives, for example a feminist perspective.

**Media Stereotyping**

****Media stereotypes are inevitable, especially in the advertising, entertainment and news industries, which need as wide an audience as possible to quickly understand information. Stereotypes act like codes that give audiences a quick, common understanding of a person or group of people—usually relating to their class, ethnicity or race, gender, sexual orientation, social role or occupation.

But stereotypes can be problematic. They can:

* reduce a wide range of differences in people to simplistic categorizations
* transform assumptions about particular groups of people into "realities"
* be used to justify the position of those in power
* perpetuate social prejudice and inequality

Media Portrayals of Ethnic and Visible Minorities

Anyone who examines North American entertainment and news media will notice that members of ethnic and visible minorities are inadequately represented in entertainment and news media, and that portrayals of minorities are often stereotypical and demeaning.

This tendency is particularly problematic in a multicultural country like Canada, where 15 per cent of the population are immigrants and visible minorities comprise 25 to 51 per cent of the larger urban centres. Toronto is the first city in the Western world in which the majority of inhabitants are people of colour. "Without much fuss," says historian Gwyn Dyer, "We’ve become the most spectacularly diverse country in the world." Why, then, have the media not kept pace?

**Media Portrayals of Persons with Disabilities**

Persons with disabilities might best be described, in the media at least, as an invisible minority: though a large segment of the population has a physical or mental disability they have been almost entirely absent from the mass media until recent years. Moreover, when persons with disabilities appear they almost always do so in stereotyped roles. Scott Bremner, in the article “Changing Channels: Improving Media Portrayals of Disability” (*Abilities*, Spring 2008) writes that “Although 4.4 million Canadians – one in seven people – has a disability, we’re conspicuously absent from popular media. When we do appear, it’s often in roles that are stereotypical or degrading.”

**Ethnic and Visible Minorities in Entertainment Media**

When asked, in a 2002 poll, whether the government should preserve and enhance multiculturalism, 82 per cent of Canadians said yes. So why, asks Lionel Lumb, from Carleton University’s School of Journalism, "are the millions of minorities that are so visible on our streets and in shopping malls, our offices and health care centres, so invisible on our television screens?"

Seventy per cent of the dramas, sitcoms and series that Canadians watch are produced in the U.S. Images of minorities are lacking on those screens and they’re lacking on Canadian screens as well.

**The "White-Washing" of Entertainment**

Back in 1993, the American Screen Actors Guild (SAG) began to collect statistics on the number of ethnic and minority actors appearing in American television and films. The results were grim. Members of visible and ethnic minorities were significantly under-represented across the whole range of entertainment media. The face of North American entertainment was overwhelmingly white, mostly male and young.

Critics began to pressure the industry to produce shows and films that adequately reflect the racial and ethnic diversity we find in our communities and there have been significant gains. In its 2000 report, SAG announced a seven per cent increase in industry jobs and record numbers of roles for performers of colour, with African Americans accounting for 15 per cent of all characters in television and film. However, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) pointed out that of the four major networks’ 26 new prime-time shows for the 2000 season, none featured people of colour in lead roles.

Canadian television—both public and private—is well known for creating programming for children and young people that reflects our multicultural society. But critics of our adult programming echo concerns voiced in the U.S. A 1994 study by Magali Dupont and Fo Niemi found that minorities in Quebec-based dramas were cast in secondary roles, usually in poorly paid occupations and unstable domestic situations, and non-white men tended to be less heroic and virile than their white counterparts.

A small study released in 2002 by researchers at B.C.’s Simon Fraser University shows similar patterns. In the nearly 70 hours of Canadian programming examined, visible minorities made up 12 per cent of 1,200 characters—not far below the actual percentage of visible minorities in the national population. But again, it’s the way these minorities are represented that comes under fire.

"What we’re seeing is a very superficial level of inclusion, says researcher Shane Halasz. These characters aren’t too central to the story line," he points out; and the workplace "seems to be a convenient place to include a person of colour for cosmetic purposes—without being obliged to look at their culture or what happens in their homes."

According to Canadian actor Dhirendra, the problem of treating minorities like props is rooted in the producers’ discomfort, behind-the-scenes, with challenging the status quo. Nor, he adds, do writers like to write about things they don’t understand.

**Misrepresentation in Video Games**

Though television has established a learning curve with respect to fair minority portrayals, the video games industry seems not yet to have got the message. A 2001 study by the U.S. organization Children Now, entitled *Fair Play -- Violence, Gender and Race in Video Games* examined some of the most popular games to assess the extent of stereotyping. It found that:

* most protagonists (86 per cent) were white males
* non-white males were portrayed in stereotypical ways—seven out of ten Asian characters as fighters, and eight out of ten African-Americans as sports competitors
* nearly nine out of ten African-American females were victims of violence (twice the rate of white females)
* 79 per cent of African-American males were shown as verbally and physically aggressive, compared to 57 per cent of white males

**The Impact on Viewers**

Entertainment media say a lot to their viewers about who counts in society. Temple University professor George Gerbner is concerned that portrayals of minority characters in entertainment media affect the ways children see themselves and others.

Children Now’s 1998 study *A Different World: Children’s Perceptions of Race and Class in Media* supports that conclusion. Their research found that children associate white characters with various attributes: having lots of money, being well educated, being a leader, doing well in school, and being intelligent. Conversely, they associate minority characters with breaking the law, having a hard time financially, being lazy, and acting goofy.

Gerbner argues that if you are over-represented, you see many opportunities, many choices. The reverse is true if you’re under-represented. The media can grant legitimacy by including people and showing them respect, he argues, and so fair and equal representation is an essential part of a healthy and tolerant multicultural society.

**It Matters Who Makes It**

In 2002, a UCLA study concluded that "minorities are even more underrepresented in key behind-the-scenes creative and decision-making positions than they are on the [television] screen." Many analysts are concerned that the dearth of minority executives, producers, directors and screenwriters is fuelling the tendency to ignore or misrepresent ethnic groups.

The NAACP’s 2000 survey of Hollywood and Beverly Hills screen writers found that only 7 per cent of the 839 respondents were members of minority groups. Furthermore, says the NAACP, ethnic writers in the television industry are ghettoized—83 per cent of the black writers surveyed in 2000 wrote for shows starring primarily black people. It was almost unheard of for a black writer to "cross over" into shows with white stars—even though white writers often made the transition to black shows. As one network told black writer Jay Dyer, "This isn’t a black show. I don’t need a black writer."

The dearth of multicultural movie writers and producers can also directly affect how minorities are portrayed on the big screen. Actor Garret Wang reports that a casting director once told him he wasn’t doing a correct Japanese accent until he began using a Cantonese-Chinese accent—"you know … 'I give you two free egg roll if you bring laundry into my store.' And she said, 'That’s it. That’s the one.'"

Many advocates argue that it’s time for significant change. Lionel Lumb reminds us that the face of Canada has changed over the past 40 years. In 1961, visible minorities accounted for 3 per cent of the population of Toronto. By 1991, the figure was 30 per cent and today, it is over 50 per cent.

Lumb concludes, "It’s clear that Canada’s minorities have entered the mainstream, but Canada’s broadcasting mainstream still flows along blindly in some sort of self-created canyon from which it can’t see the Canadian reality… Diversity is not a drawback—it’s a treasure for Canada and Canadians to celebrate. There could be so much more to television and radio programming, and it’s time that broadcasters got the message that reflecting diversity is not a duty, it’s a delight."