

Making class and self through televised ethical scenarios

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Contemporary social theory suggests that modern senses of self are increasingly formed through processes of self-reflection and inspection rather than older affiliations of group identity such as 'class'. These changes involve a greater emphasis upon things of symbolic value and some commentators suggest that the growth and invidiousness of the mass media has meant that it has a greater influence over self understanding than older forms of engendering citizenship such as religion. Our project aims to provide grounded material on the relationship between television and forms of self-identity as one of the most important sites for contemporary identity formation.

The project focuses on reality TV formats which capture the present attention to self and subjectivity by the observation of individuals' behaviour in a range of testing environments (in someone else's home e.g. Wife Swap, sharing a house with no outside contact with the world e.g. Big Brother, having moved to a new home in Europe e.g. A Place in the Country etc.). We suggest that these forms do indeed offer representation of class and gender re-routed by the popular focus on personal judgement, taste, moral decisions and ethical dilemmas. We are interested in how these representations are then worked out by various women from different social class backgrounds in order to explore the significance of the relationship of media representations in modern forms of self-making.

In order to investigate this phenomenon we want to develop an encompassing research model which can begin to trace those connections between representations in the media and people's sense of self in their lived environments. We offer an innovative multi-layered methodology specifically designed to get closer to comprehending the complex relationship between media forms and self-identity. This involves analysing programming, investigating informants' lives and their economic, social and cultural resources and developing innovative ways of exploring any inter-relationship between the two.

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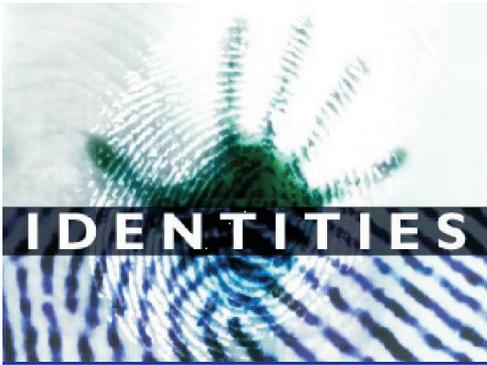
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In this way, we offer original analysis of contemporary television programming and consider its contemporary motifs on selfhood and identify where markers of class (with gender, race, nation, age etc.) come into play. We will consider the ways in which women viewers make sense of and appropriate the television material whilst viewing but more broadly in their own lives, and consider their comments in the light of what we have researched about their self-identity. We suggest then that we have designed a methodology tailored to investigate the actual mechanics of previously theorised assumptions about the media's impact upon social identity.

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