youths as many people find mass media being their only source of information, this is especially true for the home-based elderly as their impressions are more likely to be formed strongly by media.

Cohen (2002) argues that young people are relatively powerless and find it hard to alter the stereotypes that they are the cause of society’s ills. Due to this, they- especially young African Caribbean males- are often used as scapegoats to create solidarity in society (by creating a moral panic against these teenage folk devils-people posing imagined/exaggerated threat) and unite the public against a common enemy. These media-generated moral panics label all youths as anti-social and a problem group, when this is not true.

Can this stereotype be challenged?

Young people who are the major consumers of media are the same people who are stereotyped as folk devils. This means they themselves can challenge the stereotypes thrust upon them through citizen journalism (texting, tweeting etc.) which can lead to traditional media being forced to change the way they portray and stereotype this group.

Useful Studies to Remember

- A 2005 analysis of press conducted by MORI showed that 57% of stories about young people were negative and 40% about crime/anti-social behaviour, compared to just 12% positive.
- Women in Journalism (2009) found that teenage boys are described using “yobs”, “scum”, “thugs” and other such words.
- White et al (2012) found broadcasters negatively stereotyped young people, of which 40% were dissatisfied with the way they were portrayed on TV as ‘illicit’.


Older People

This often covers the demographic that are 50+ years old who are largely invisible or presented as comedy (negative) in the media. For example, Cuddy and Fiske (2004) found that US TV portrayed just 1.5% of characters as elderly (mostly in minor, supporting roles) and that elderly people are the most likely to be used for comedic purposes, especially based on physical capacities. Biggs (1993) supported this in the UK, with older people being shown as difficult and forgetful.

Old people are almost negatively stereotyped the most out of any group, coming just behind youths, as old age is seen as poor, grumpy, a burden and generally “undesirable”. However, older men are more likely to be seen as positive, with younger love interests in films or as wise, rich businessmen, whereas women are symbolically annihilated (lack visibility and are underrepresented) as they are expected to be forever youthful and do not fit this image when they age.

Useful Studies to Remember

- White et al. found that older viewers agreed that they were stereotyped and women underrepresented.