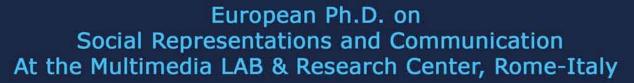






11th International LAB Meeting - Spring Session 2008



Social Representations in Action and Construction in Media and Society

"Identity and Social Representations: Cultural and Mythical Dimensions"

From 26th April - 4th May 2008 http://www.europhd.eu/html/\_onda02/07/13.00.00.00.shtml





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European Ph.D

on Social Representations and Communication
International Lab Meeting Series 2005-2008

### Purpose

- Describe representation of class
- Remarkably consistent
- Over 5 decades and 300 sitcoms
- Prime-time broadcast network tv

### Why tv situation comedies

- Broadcast nets have largest audiences 60% household any night; even today 25%
- Sitcom most common genre every season 10-20 shows every week for decades
- Large audiences often high ratings
- Roots in radio (Amos &Andy etc) and in vaudeville comedy sketches

#### What are sitcoms

- Half-hour series with continuing characters
- Built on weekly comic problem situation which controls and overwhelms character
- Resolved by end of episode to re-establish stasis
- My focus, domestic sitcoms about families choice of class is open.

### First finding: frequency

- Working class very under-represented, about 10% of sitcoms, 60% of population
- Concentrated in 1950s, 70s, 90s
- Yet high % of working class series are successful

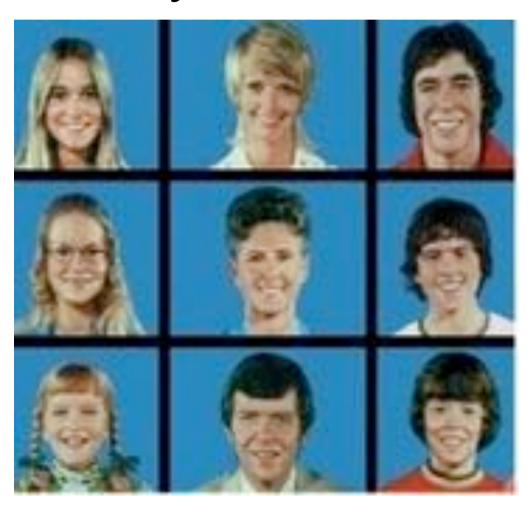
### Types of representation Type 1: Super-parents

- Innocent child gets into situation, parents help resolve
- Models of parenting; parents in sync
- Almost entirely upper middle class families
   managers or professionals
- Very many such shows through all decades
- Father Knows Best, Brady Bunch; Cosby



1950s: Father Knows Best Father is successful insurance salesman

1970s Brady Bunch Father is architect, Family have maid



### Type 2: Adult fool, woman

- Very few series
- Wife is fool "ditzy blonde stereotype
- Husband sensible, no small children
- All middle class series
- I Love Lucy; Green Acres;

### 1950s: I Love Lucy Husband is band leader



### Type 3: Working Class Buffoon

- Almost all working class series
- Man is fool; causes own problem
- Contrast to wife and kids:
  - wife is sensible
  - children outsmart/don't respect dad
- Honeymooners; Flintstones;
   All in the Family; The Simpsons
- Even in short-lived w.c. shows



1950s: Life of Riley Father is factory riveter

#### Is this about class or sex?

- Super-parents all middle class
- Wife as fool reconfirms sex status, preserves husband's class status
- Man as fool reverses sex status, confirms class status

#### Persistent

- Despite changes in society
- During 1960s turmoil, super-parents
  - Brady Bunch, My Three Sons
- Post-modernist 1980s
  - Cosby Show, Family Ties
- Working class buffoon each decade –
   Ralph, Fred, Archie, Homer, King (both)

### 1950s: The honeymooners Husband is bus driver



# 1960s: The Flintstones Father is quarry worker



# 1970s: All in the Family Father is loading dock worker



# 1990s: The Simpsons Father is power plant worker



# 2000: King of the Hill Father is propane salesman



### King of Queens Husband is UPS driver



#### **Breakwell**

- "Social Representations and Social Identity".

  Papers on Social Representations 1993
- 1. Production, differentiation and function
- a. "ownership/producers of a representation"
- b. "likely to be generated over great periods of time..from many different sources"
- c. "intergroup power differentials"
- d. "require a historical analysis of use of representations"
- e. "stereotypes serve social justification, differentiation"

### 2. Targets

- "target of the representation"
- "the power representation has to create an identity"
- "defines the boundaries of group identity"
- "effects may be long-term consequences, not immediately apparent"

#### 3. Salience, 4. Relations

- "how significant or salient for the group"
- "networking of social representations"