

points of intervention. Don't let the overt political stance implied by that term escape you—remember the goal of critical/cultural scholars: They want to understand how social structures serve to oppress and repress certain social groups in order to end that oppression.

KEY CONCEPTS AND RECURRING THEMES

As you read this book, you'll begin to notice a pattern of recurring themes. Although these are typically defined when they're presented, it's important that you have a sense of some of the key concepts you'll encounter. In addition, these concepts often inform the readings even if they're not explicitly mentioned. Thinking about these concepts right up front will help frame the readings in a way that should prove beneficial. And speaking of framing . . .

Erving Goffman argued in his classic 1974 book that the framing of an event or activity establishes its meaning. In other words, framing is the process by which we make sense of the events around us. Frames are like story lines that allow us to interpret new information in the context of something we already understand. We use frames all the time, without even knowing it. For example, we might say to our friends that a new band is "like Nine Inch Nails with Kanye West." Or that a singer is the "next Lady Gaga." People pitching ideas for films or television shows often frame their ideas in terms of content the networks or studios already know and understand: "It's a Western set in outer space." (Star Trek)

Journalists use frames as they prepare news stories, too, whether they know it or not. Despite journalists' quest for the objective presentation of the "facts" to their audiences, Gamson (1989) claimed that "facts have no intrinsic meaning. They take on their meaning by being embedded in a frame or story line that organizes them and gives them coherence, selecting certain ones to emphasize while ignoring others" (p. 157). Because news stories always emphasize some facts over others, we should "think of news as telling stories about the world rather than as presenting 'information,' even though the stories, of course, include factual elements" (p. 157). A story might frame something as an economic or a moral issue, a local issue, or one with far-reaching consequences. A story might emphasize the "horse race" aspects of a political campaign or the important issues and stances held by the candidates. Framing is important because a great deal of research has shown that the frames employed by the media when telling a story can affect our attitudes and judgments about the issues and people involved in the story—especially, as Gitlin (1980) argued, when people don't have firsthand knowledge of and experience with the issue at hand.

In the case of this book, the information provided in this chapter should frame the readings in such a manner that you're on the lookout for certain concepts and that your understanding of the readings is bolstered by your knowledge of these concepts.

Symbolic annihilation is a concept often associated with sociologist Gaye Tuchman (whose 1978 work is widely cited, with good reason) but which was presented by George Gerbner in 1972 and George Gerbner and Larry Gross in 1976. The concept is rooted in two assumptions: that media content offers a form of symbolic representation of society rather than any literal portrayal of society, and that to be represented in the media is in itself a form of power—social groups that are powerless can be relatively easily ignored, allowing the media to focus on the social groups that really matter. It's almost like implying that certain groups don't really exist—even though we can't go out and actually annihilate everyone who isn't a straight, white, middle-to-upper-class male, we can at least try to avoid them in our mediated versions of reality.

Journalists
The News

Concept:
Universal
Subject