

To what extent are
the representations of
the working class in
shameless harmful



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Shameless is a comedy drama set in the council estate of ??? Chatsworth??? a fictional location in the heart of Manchester. Produced by Channel Four and written by Paul Abbott its success has won the programme various comedy awards. Paul Abbott states the drama was inspired from his own real life experiences of living in an estate similar to ??? Chatsworth??? and being in the company of characters like the ones in the show.

The programmes creator lays claim for its authenticity by claiming to have grown up in the environment similar to Chatsworth. The main family unit in Shameless ??? The Gallagher??™s??? could be considered as dysfunctional, un-conventional, and closer to underclass than working class. Frank Gallagher the unemployed Father of nine children spends most of his days wasting his benefit money at the local pub, while his family and house fall apart around him in complete anarchy. In this essay I plan to explore the different opinions and gather research to investigate the idea that Shameless does nothing more than humiliate, embarrass and shame the working class, by depicting acts of ??? Shameless-ness.??? A Dictionary definition of the working Class: ??“ Lowest class in most social class systems, including factory workers, miners, and others. [www. regentsprep. org/Regents/global/vocab/topic](http://www.regentsprep.org/Regents/global/vocab/topic).

cfm 08/03/09Traditionally, the idea of being working class carried connotations of pride, craftsmanship and dignity, but in recent times rather than simply referring to the industry of work a person is in, it seems to connote much more of negative meaning, the term has now become blurred with the idea associated with Chav-culture and dependency, more accurately described as the underclass. It also conjures up the ideology of a person who <https://assignbuster.com/to-what-extent-are-the-representations-of-the-working-class-in-shameless-harmful/>

is unproductive, a failure, lazy etc. In an article that appeared in 1977 in the *Journal Of Communication* Lynne Berk wrote a feature article on an American drama called *Archie Bunker*, who was considered as a *Working class man*. Berk studied various episodes and argued that *Archie Bunker* the main character a *Blue Collar, working class, family man* was represented as, in her own words *A stupid bigot*, despite him being a provider he was characterized as hopeless, similar to Frank Gallagher, she claimed that society won't stand for obvious race misrepresentation or any form of racism, but that it accepts without criticism negative misrepresentation of social class, especially working class. Richard Butsch (1982) "In a piece called *Class and Gender in Four Decades Of Television Situation Comedies* Richard Butsch and Lynda Gleenons found outstanding similarities to be true found in situation comedies or (sitcoms).

They both claim that: *The prototypical working-class male is incompetent and ineffectual, often a buffoon, well-intentioned but dumb. In almost all working-class series, the male is flawed, some more than others: Ralph Kramden, Fred Flintstone, Homer Simpson. (FRANK GALLAGHER). He fails in his role as a father and husband, is lovable but not respected.* Heightening this failure is the depiction of working-class wives as exceeding the bounds of their feminine status, being more intelligent, rational, and sensible than their husbands.

In other words gender status is inverted, with the head of house, whose occupation defines the family's social class, demeaned in the process.

Class is coded in gendered terms. Working-class men are de-masculinised by <https://assignbuster.com/to-what-extent-are-the-representations-of-the-working-class-in-shameless-harmful/>

depicting them as child-like; their wives act as mothers.?????? Some writers fail to note that these male buffoons are almost always working class. They miss the message about class, and instead define it as a message about gender. These results indicate the importance of accounting for class along with gender.

??? [http://www.museum.tv/archives/etv/S/htmlS/socialclass/socialclass.](http://www.museum.tv/archives/etv/S/htmlS/socialclass/socialclass.htm)

htm Accessed 7th March. Working class people and in this instance men, engage with these texts because they are ??? funny??™, but the question still remains: Do working class people recognise themselves in these texts? These depictions of working class characters can be related to Shameless easily; Frank Gallagher fulfils the ??? Child-like buffoon, loveable character??? and so does his wife Monica Gallagher the ??? rational intelligent thinker??? which can also be applied to daughter Debbie Gallagher. There are other examples of where this character profile is fitting, the character ??? Jim Royale??? the father and patriarch of The Royale Family (also set in a British council house) Jim – a working class man who is an overweight, unemployed, quick tempered, ignorant individual. Although similar to Frank from Shameless he can sometimes share a softer, affectionate side. Most British comedy sitcoms conform to this male character profile more examples can be found in: ??? Only Fool??™s And Horse??™s ??? “Del boy Trotter ??? 1981 -1991??? Till Death Do Us Part ??? Alf Garnett ??? 1965 – 1975??? Steptoe & Son ??? Albert Steptoe ??? 1962 ??? 1965??? Bread ??? Joey & Jack – 1986 ??? 1991

Textual Description of Frank fulfilling buffoon stereotype in a short scene: Series 6 Episode 7

<http://www.>

<https://assignbuster.com/to-what-extent-are-the-representations-of-the-working-class-in-shameless-harmful/>

youtube. com/watchv= xQaKdPuG9xk&feature= related??? Scene begins outside pub in the morning time - drinking in the morning time is the kind of behaviour only alcoholics partake in. Frank is banging on the pub door before opening time.

Showing clear desperation, and a lack of little else to do, like work. ??? Frank standing in the rain waiting for pub to open, looking like a homeless person, long greasy hair, a tired green Mac, and stained jeans. ??“ shows he??™s un-kept and takes little pride in his appearance.??? Frank ??? Whatever happened to the 24 hour drinking culture??? ??“ In disbelief that the pub is even shut.

??? Frank is then approached by a young disabled boy who tries to hug him, Frank pats him on the head patronisingly and then shuns him away insensitively. Showing ignorance and a lack of patience or empathy.??? As soon as the pub door is open he tries to storm his way in, only to be told the pub is closed for a ??? Private function???, where he reacts in amazement. He bangs on the door hoping for a response, only to be ignored.??? The young disabled boy from earlier in the scene reaches in for another hug with Frank only to be told to ??? F**K OFF SPACEMAN??? ??“ ??? Spaceman??? referring to the oxygen tank on his back, which shows his ignorance towards his disability.??? Frank then storms off in a strop, on his way home when he bumps into his wife Monica, who he shuns and ignores; only until he realises she is holding a pack of beer. He snatches them off of her and waddles off home to get drunk.

The white working class male representation is engrossed with alcohol, ignorance and selfishness in this scene. Textual analysis Debbie (the daughter) fulfilling her intelligent, rational, and sensible character profile in short scene: Series 6 Episode 5 <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hdMUkhpvCU4&feature=related> Scene starts in the

Gallagher's front room, with Frank in a drunken state on the sofa, and Debbie waking him up asking him to pay attention and listen to the arrangement regarding the youngest child Liam Gallaghers Trip. "She is taking responsibility for him and the arrangement similar to how a Mother would." Debbie has entered Liam into a competition and now he's in the final which is in Blackpool, again entering him into a competition was motherly and caring. After explaining the situation to the family and Frank she heads upstairs to talk to her brother who's in Ibiza via Webcam. Her conversation with brother Ian is interrupted when her mother Monica comes in and says "Stella's due a feed, bottle's in the fridge" again leaving Debbie responsible for her younger sister. Debbie doesn't refuse, as she is probably familiar with being dumped with the kids. Debbie tells her mother "Bye" calling her mother by her first name, showing a relationship breakdown, between them and a lack of even recognising her as her mother. Debbie often adopts the typical mother role, when looking after her younger siblings and her father, in a weird role reversal, throughout the series Debbie acts older than her years sorting out bills, etc.

Questions of patriarchy are raised, working class man is the last to become reconstructed even when they have more time on their hands than the <https://assignbuster.com/to-what-extent-are-the-representations-of-the-working-class-in-shameless-harmful/>

woman. The social class represented in *Shameless* could be categorised into C2, D&E, the people who fall into this category in actual life are some of the poorest and most vulnerable people in society, who rely or depend upon state benefit to make ends meet. Various characters found in *Shameless* talk freely about being on benefits and can be seen wasting it on drugs, alcohol and even prostitutes, rarely do we see characters paying bills or going for the weekly shop at the supermarket or spending their money constructively. But in reality do people have enough benefits to buy all this, without resulting in criminality? Of course many of the scenes that show the families struggles are turned into humour but are audiences that don't find themselves in as much financial difficulties as those in the show getting gratifications from watching mis-representations of working class people and truly laughing at the vicious cycle of poverty that poor people experience? An article which recently features in *The Daily Mail* entitled 'We'll get *Shameless* families out of bed and off to work in the morning' (by James Chapman) uses the title of the working class sitcom in the article name carelessly, making the intertextual reference freely as a petty insult and comparison of real life working class families and the family within *Shameless*. Within the article Community Secretary Hazel Blears says that 'It's increasingly clear that a minority of *Shameless* families were causing the majority of crime and anti-social behaviours, and using up a disproportionate amount of government resources in welfare benefits and state intervention' associating a relationship between the actual *Shameless* family to other working class families. The *Daily Mail's* readership is mostly formed from those social groups between the middle to higher social class and could consider *Shameless* as a true reflection of the

<https://assignbuster.com/to-what-extent-are-the-representations-of-the-working-class-in-shameless-harmful/>

working class. In other words The Daily Mail is quick to make a link between a sit-com fiction broadcast product that conforms to generic conventions and real life.

Neil Postman (1985) has claimed that TV reality is THE reality, – suggesting that the mediated world has become the blueprint for the un-mediated version (e. g real life). This concept could apply to Shameless and newspapers & government minister's invocation of it and how some audiences accept the shameless family as a wider representation of the working class. K Woodward (1979) Discourse and systems of representations construct places from which individuals can position themselves and from which they can speak..

The media can be seen as providing us with the information which tells us what it feels like to occupy a particular subject position. e. g. Channel Four provides viewers with the information to allow them to be able to understand what it MIGHT feel like to live on a council estate according to Channel Fours representation of life in fictional Chatsworth.

Unfortunately this vicarious experience is very negative and trivialises important issues. It is also completely at odds with the British tradition of representing the working class which can be found in 1950's free cinema and 1960 Kitchen sink social problems. There are obviously a small minority of people who take advantage of the benefit system and find it comfortable to stay in the same routine of relying on dole money, but for the most part the people that are on it are because they simply can't work. With an exception of a few characters none of the main characters which are stable

to work, can be seen actively looking for work, which is not a true reflection in my opinion of the benefit underclass. Which could of course, have a knock on effect to how wider society make generalisations about the underclass.

Barbara Ehrenreich the author of an article names ??? The Silenced Majority??? states that ??? The Media??? in general seldom represent the interests or experiences of the working class.

When it comes to the representation of the working class often in news programmes and dramas the so called ??? experts??? or television producers of these texts are 9/10 times middleclass professionals, who have little experience or knowledge of the lives of the working class. They therefore base Drama??™s on stereotypes to make up for the little experience they have in the field, they use stereotypes which audiences can automatically identify, because they have been constructed as ??? The Working Class??? family before in other texts. This idea of middle class experts producing working class media texts to convey what they believe a working class family is truly like, conforms to Gramsci??™s theory of hegemony, which is a Marxist media theory. He protested that the dominant class or ??? Bourgeoisie??? project their own way of seeing the world, and other classes ??? below??? them so that audiences simply accept this way of seeing things or representing them as ??? common sense??™. The Shameless family could be considered as very stereotypical, holding many of the characteristics of a stereotypical working class family would have; More kids than it can provide for, un-kept council house, Dirty looking, etc, this stereotype according to Gramsci and the hegemony model would agree this is constructed by, the ruling class, and reinforced by conservative

newspapers like The Daily Mail and is now accepted. Media theorists argue that Gramsci's claim has obvious flaws, one being not everyone accepts the stereotypes or representations churned out by mass media institutions and there are oppositional views or in Gramsci's words, views that demonstrate good sense. The working class reactions viewing the stereotypes on televisions of themselves are not necessarily to sit back and accept or adopt them. Working class audiences can also construct their own alternative readings from media texts adding their own experiences using the television to their advantage to adapt the reading to suit them.

E. g Laughing at the constructed representations that they do not recognise, but simply find amusing. The cultivation model claims that the more you watch something the more you accept and embrace it, for example the more we see the typical working class stereotype the more we will be less sensitive to it.

George Gerbner and Larry Gross (Developed in 60's). I have talked about the negative representations such as drugs, violence, alcohol and prostitution, however there are elements in the programme that are more positive such as the montage of clips that accompany the theme tune of the several characters laughing and having fun with the family, showing strong family bonds. They also appear to hold some of the older working class values such as a sense of community and family ties. Although, often negative, the idea of community is retained, there are lots of scenes where characters are together, be it in the pub or at a bomb fire, showing again a sense of community, and togetherness that poverty, poor education <https://assignbuster.com/to-what-extent-are-the-representations-of-the-working-class-in-shameless-harmful/>

or irresponsibility can't take away. There is also a strong sense of irony within the opening text and during episodes, in spite of the families' struggles financially, they still all manage to stay together and carry on. Despite Lip, Franks' eldest son, leaving for university the family unit throughout the series has stayed together, Lip has essentially broken out from his 'Working class shackles' to better his life and the life of his daughter.

The fact that getting an education means leaving the working class, showing opportunities to get trades have disappeared and university is the path to a better life, but do you stop being working class if you get a degree? Maybe Paul Abbotts' misrepresentations suggest you do, but it's too simplistic to think this. Or is it? Ideas of social mobility suggest that social boundaries are disappearing and blurring giving anyone the chance to transfer their social class which is a postmodern grand narrative. If a person changes their clothes and the way they talk, even educate themselves is it possible for them to shift into a different social class? Is this common sense? Or will they always be a working class individual with the dress sense, degree, of a middle class man? The Shameless representations do hold some truths to a small proportion of the working class population, but these of course can't be applied to all, as with many stereotypes. It's the way in which audiences read Shameless which is key in my opinion, regardless of how media producers present something, it's an audience's opinions and experiences which makes sense of what they're being presented with.