

WMSN Newsletter 2006

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The Women's Media Studies Network has been busy since last we contributed to the newsletter. There continues to be a steady expression of interest from colleagues keen to host a WMSN event. Academics, practitioners and students in Media and Cultural Studies and related areas have used the space that the Network provides to exchange ideas and importantly to network with colleagues.

Events

In March 2006 – a seminar was held to celebrate International Women's Day at De Montfort University organised by Margaret Montgomerie. Titled '**Just Joking? Positioning Humour in Contemporary Life**' it addressed the relationship between gender, performance and comedy. The event led with Shazia Mirza, an award winning stand up comedian, who talked about how she interacts with and negotiates different audience groups and their expectations of her as a female comedian. Becky Findlay, (De Montfort) responded to Mirza by working through different academic approaches to analysing contemporary stand up comedy. In the panel discussion, Kim Akass (London Metropolitan) and Janet McCabe (Manchester Metropolitan) spoke on 'Samantha Jones as Post-Feminist Clown: Humorous Performance, Post-Feminism, Sex and the City'. Deborah Chambers (Newcastle) discussed 'Comedies of Sexual Morality and Female Singlehood' in British and American TV comedy and Sharon Lockyer (De Montfort) spoke on 'The Ethics and Aesthetics of "Having a Laugh" '.

The June 2006 network seminar, 'Teen TV: Audience, Industry, Identity', was organised by Dee Amy-Chinn and Michele Paule, and was held at Oxford Brookes University. The event attracted women from institutions as far apart as Lancaster and Brighton and included a number of people who had not previously attended a WMSN event – so the chance was taken to promote the Network and encourage new colleagues to become involved.

Sue Turnbull (La Trobe, Melbourne) opened with her discussion of the parallels between the contemporary teen drama and the 1950s-early 1960s teen show. She drew fascinating parallels between *The OC*, *Rebel Without a Cause* and the late 1950s-early 1960s teen show *The Many Loves of Dobie Gillis*. Rebecca Feasey (Bath Spa) spoke on the adult appeal of the long-running series *Charmed*. Stepping back to consider the cultural context of the series she related this appeal to the emerging phenomenon of the 'quarter-life crisis'. Milly Williamson (Leicester) brought this exploration of teen TV up-to-date by analysing modes of femininity and fandom in contemporary teen TV. She proposed that young women characters are now driven by a sense of duty and sacrifice rather than a straightforward desire to have fun. In the final paper of the day Michele Paule (Oxford Brookes) looked at the 'super slacker girls' from shows such as *Dead Like Me*, *Wonderfalls* and *Joan of Arcadia*.

In December 2006 a seminar on '**Women, Sex and Media**' was held at Sheffield Hallam University to explore some of the ways in which women's sexuality is produced, represented and consumed in the media. The event was organised by Feona Attwood and Rosalind Brunt and included talks on women's rights, charitable campaigns and sex trafficking; consumer research on women and soft-core pornography and third wave feminism. The event was very well attended with around 40 participants and new participants included members of women's rights campaign groups.

Jane Arthurs (UWE) gave a paper developing her earlier research on the impact of multi-channel digital television on sexual portrayal in *Television and Sexuality: Regulation and the Politics of Taste* (2004). Her current research investigates the media strategies used in global charitable campaigns against sex trafficking, such as UNICEF or MTV's Exit Campaign, and the challenging aesthetic and ethical issues these raise. Clarissa Smith (Sunderland) drew upon research for her new book *One for the Girls! The Production and Readership of Pornography for Women* (2007) to discuss 'Emotional Vibrations and Physical Sensations: Women Reading Porn Fictions'. Smith was keen to debunk the commonplace that women have little taste for pornography. Drawing on readers' responses to pornographic stories and images aimed at women she explored the way that pornography is a social product subject to a range of institutional practices and open to diverse styles of representation and consumption. Her paper opened up a provocative discussion about the relevance of established feminist theories about transgression, ideology, consumption and the value of empirical research.

Rebecca Munford, (Exeter) has researched and published on 'Third Wave Feminism' and 'Post-feminism'. She tapped into her research to open out current debates about the new types of empowerment offered to women via contemporary feminist and post-feminist theory and popular culture. Her talk, ' "If it feels good, screw it": Girlie Feminism, the Sex Wars and Raunch Culture' led to pointed discussion on contemporary gender, generation, girl power, sexual equality and empowerment in relation to the promise of freedom to be sexually provocative or liberated offered by some brands of popular culture and current theory.

Consultancy and networking

The WMSN steering committee was contacted in November 2006 by Fiona Duffy, Head of Development at The Women's Library, London. The Women's Library was planning to fully catalogue a number of their valuable archival collections on women and journalism. We were asked to consult with colleagues in a range of universities and to advise on the relevance of the selected archives for research and teaching on gender and media/journalism. The subsequent positive report we produced fed into the library's bid for funding and future planning on how to make the material fully available to researchers in the field.