

WMSN Report for 2005

The WMSN has been busy since the last AGM. There continues to be a steady expression of interest from colleagues keen to host a WMSN event. Academics, practitioners and students in Media Studies and related areas have used the space that WMSN provides to exchange ideas, debate pedagogy, theory, representation and practice and to network with colleagues. We aim in 2006 to build on these successes and to encourage others to join in the conversations that are taking place in seminars and via email. We also welcome suggestions as to how we can expand the network or from those who wish to host WMSN events.

Events held in 2005:

- The first event - 'The Born Gender Supremacy: Challenges in Feminist Pedagogy & Research' - was held at University of Leeds on Friday 11th March 2005 and organised by Katharine Sarikakis, Institute of Communications Studies.

Approximately 35 scholars from across the country attended the symposium.

- The second event was organised by Natalie Fenton, Department of Media and Communications, Goldsmiths College on Tuesday 19th April.

The event was very well attended with approximately 45-50 colleagues attending. The invited speakers spoke on a diversity of gender-related theoretical, representational and practice-based issues.

- Tessa Perkins Memorial Event - the event was organised by Rosalind Brunt and Margaret Montgomerie to commemorate the work of Tessa Perkins. It was held at Sheffield Hallam University on Wednesday 14th September. The event had a range of speakers to cover the span of Tessa's interests in gay/lesbian theory and representation; gendered media representations, educational policy, politics and gender.

The event was an excellent tribute to Tessa and her work and a quick headcount revealed 55 people had attended.

MeCCSA conference presence:

- Karen Ross organised a panel for the conference entitled 'women and news'.

Karen Ross, Coventry University - spoke on 'Geese and Ganders: Reading the Voices of Women and Men in the Local Press'. She analysed the gendering of news sources in local press coverage during the 2005 British General Election. She argued that despite the greater attention to citizen voices in the media during election periods, that women are less visible than men as cited authoritative sources and, where tend to be allocated the role of source in human interest stories.

Rosalind Brunt, Sheffield Hallam University - presented on 'Abu Ghraib and the Trailer Park Girl'. She focused on provocative April 2004 tabloid media coverage of the involvement of American women in the abuse of Iraqi prisoners at Abu Ghraib jail. Her paper discussed the iconography of (originally 'trophy' and 'psy-ops') photographic images of sadistic punishment of prisoners. Comparing this coverage to the media myth-making surrounding the perceived heroism of Private Jessica Lynch in Iraq during 2003, Brunt considered how the media negotiated the shock of women as perpetrators of torture and pornographic imagery as a valuable starting point to think through media effects and 'decisive moments'.

Deborah Wilson, University of Lincoln - spoke on 'The Female Broadcast Journalist and the 'Journalism of Association': Framing the News Agenda for BBC Local Radio's 'Dave and Sue'. This paper interrogated the construction of Dave and Sue - a fictitious 55 year old married couple whom BBC, Local Radio had personified as their composite listeners.

Drawing on the perceptions of women journalist working in BBC Radio Lincolnshire's newsroom, Wilson analysed whether women journalists exercise the greater level of empathy associated with the now common newsroom practice of the 'journalism of association'. She asked whether female broadcast journalists can actually empathise better with the target audience and questioned whether this necessarily made for better journalism or simply a more marketable news product.

- **Vicky Ball** of the Postgraduate Network has collaborated with the WMSN to organise the debate 'Understanding New Femininities in Contemporary Popular Media'.

Julia Dane, University of East London spoke on 'Survival and Solidarity: Girls and Music Video'. Drawing on both recent feminist and post feminist debates about gendered power, she interrogated the representation of contemporary hypersexual autonomous femininity in music videos featuring popular female 'divas'. She then outlined her recent research with young girls in groups discussing these media femininities and their use of narratives of friendship, suffering, survival and financial independence to identify or disengage with different female media icons.

- **Dee Amy-Chinn**, Oxford Brookes University engaged with gendered representations on popular TV programming such as '*Sex in the City*', *CSI*' and '*Dr Who*' to open up recent debates about new femininities and cross-generational identification with feminist and post feminist scholarship.

She debated Angela McRobbie's recent argument that *Sex and the City* has given rise to "complicitous critique" - a mode of scholarship that engages in a feminist perspective but suspends critical engagement with wider political and economic conditions. In conclusion, she drew on the popular character of Rose Tyler in the 2005 revival of *Dr Who*, to suggest that she embodies an ethics of care that has strong roots in feminism and feminist philosophy, and that crosses age, class, gender, race, and even species, barriers. This may offer an alternative model for young women and could appeal to both feminist and post-feminist generations. She made the following key points were made with the intention of opening up the debate on new femininities in contemporary popular culture:

- In discussing femininities (new or otherwise) in contemporary popular media attention should be paid to those shows, such as the *CSI* franchise, that regularly attract audiences of over 20 million viewers, rather than focus on shows (such as *Sex and the City*) that have more limited appeal.
- Despite arguments that popular media now adopts a post-feminist stance, suggesting that equality has been achieved and that there are no battles left for women to fight, characters such as Catherine Willows (from *CSI*) do not take feminist gains for granted, nor does the show imply that there is nothing left for women to achieve.
- Although there is a current vogue for addressing questions of inter-generational feminisms, many women are likely to find it difficult to locate their thinking within any specific wave. Moreover, much feminist criticism seems (by decrying the lack of feminist/political awareness amongst today's young women) to hark back to a golden age where the majority of young women were happy to be labelled feminists. Yet it must be doubted whether such a 'golden age' has ever existed.
- McRobbie has recently argued that *Sex and the City* has given rise to what she has called "complicitous critique" - a mode of scholarship that engages in a feminist perspective but suspends critical engagement with wider political and economic conditions. This links with questions of scholar-fandom, and the current tendency for some feminist scholars to contribute to collections of essays marketed at well-educated fans. But aiming at the fan market inevitably limits the possibility for critique of the show under consideration, as fans purchase such books to have their fandom endorsed, not challenged.

- *Sex and the City* is located within the tradition of the carnivalesque - proposing that the New York milieu the show depicts is not the natural order of things, but a period of temporary liberation - a period of license before patriarchal order is restored. Should this temper post-feminist endorsement of the text?

- One of the UK TV sensations of 2005 was the revival of *Dr Who*. The success of this revival is due, in no small part, to the popularity of the character of Rose Tyler. Rose does not occupy a privileged location in terms of class and/or disposable income, nor does her identity centre around a heterosex-positive post-feminism. What she does embody is an ethics of care that has strong roots in feminism and feminist philosophy, and that crosses age, class, gender, race, and even species, barriers. In an age of what Ariel Levy has termed 'raunch culture' the popularity of Rose offers an alternative model for young women, likely to appeal to both feminist and post-feminist generations.

Events in 2006

- 'Just joking? Positioning humour in contemporary life' organised by **Margaret Montgomerie**, De Montfort University. Held on March 10th 2006 to celebrate International Women's Day.

Publicity

A postcard flyer has been designed and produced this year by the organising committee to promote the WMSN and encourage new members of the mailing list and potential seminar organisers.

Mailing List

The WMSN mailing list continues to be successfully used by members. Thanks to Ann Butler at Sheffield Hallam for her support mailing messages.

Heather Nunn, Chair WMSN 27.2.06