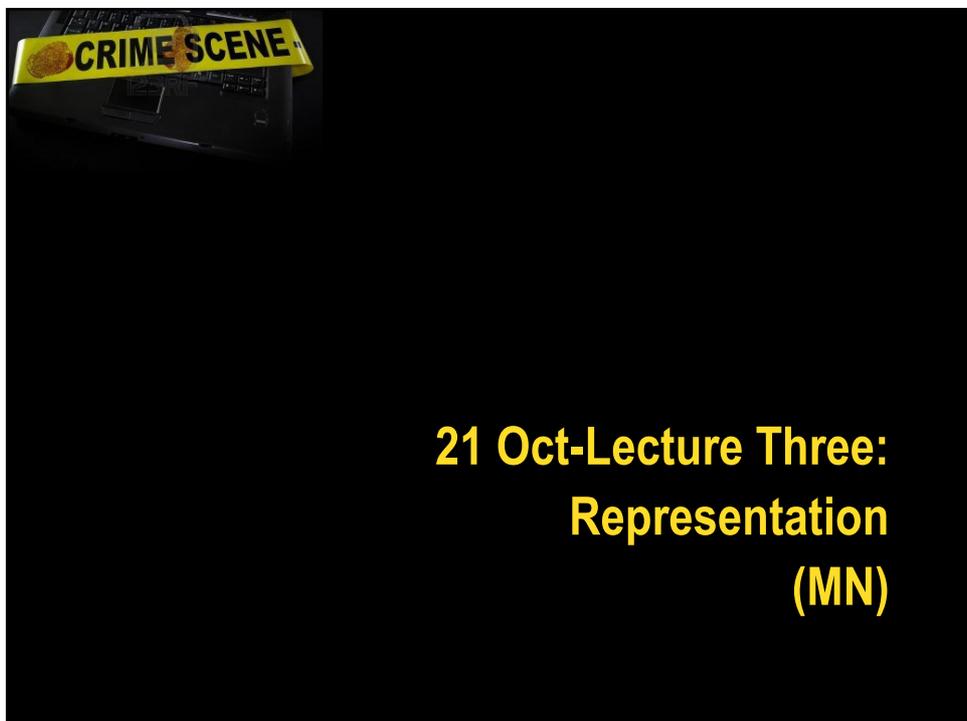


**Understanding Media and Communication:
A Life of Crime**

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**21 Oct-Lecture Three:
Representation
(MN)**

Syllabus

	Week 1 Mon 7 Oct	Week 2 Mon 14 Oct	Week 3 Mon 21 Oct	Week 4 Mon 28 Oct	Week 5 Mon 4 Nov	Week 6 Mon 11 Nov	Week 7 Mon 18 Nov
9.30 - 10.30	Introduction (all) Lecture: ETG34	Narrative (ML) Lecture: ETG34	Genre (ML) Lecture: ETG34	Representation (MN) Lecture: ETG34	Intertextuality (MS) Lecture: ETG34	Transmediality (MS) Lecture: ETG34	Conclusions (all) Lecture: ETG34
11 - 12	Seminar - groups formed - seminar activity; - essay writing guidelines CCM: ET130, ET135 Journalism: ET103	Seminar - activity on narrative - assign lunch task on narrative CCM: ET130, ET135 Journalism: ET103	Seminar - activity on genre - assign lunch task on genre CCM: ET130, ET135 Journalism: ET103	Seminar - activity on representation - assign lunch task on representation CCM: ET130, ET135 Journalism: ET103	Seminar - activity on intertextuality - assign lunch task on intertextuality CCM: ET130, ET135 Journalism: ET103	Seminar - activity on transmediality - assign lunch task on transmediality CCM: ET130, ET135 Journalism: ET103	All day tutorials CCM: ET130, ET135 Journalism: ET103
12 - 1.30	No tutorials this week	Students perform lunch task on narrative	Students perform lunch task on genre	Students perform lunch task on representation	Students perform lunch task on intertextuality	Students perform lunch task on transmediality	
1.30 - 3		Group tutorials - review lunch task on narrative CCM: ET130, ET135 Journalism: ET103	Group tutorials - review lunch task on genre CCM: ET130, ET135 Journalism: ET103	Group tutorials - review lunch task on representation CCM: ET130, ET135 Journalism: ET103	Group tutorials - review lunch task on intertextuality CCM: ET130, ET135 Journalism: ET103	Group tutorials - review lunch task on transmediality CCM: ET130, ET135 Journalism: ET103	

<http://mafaldastasi.com> (go to teaching/undergraduate/205MC)



Please sign
attendance sheet

Representation: Women Who Kill

Why do we study media representations?

The media are a source of easily retrievable data

They portray and influence society's use of language

Representations in the media reveal much about social meaning and stereotypes shown through language and communication.

The media portrays and wields influence on the creation and expression of culture and socio-political life.

What is representation?

Representation is a way of communicating which means to depict or describe something or someone.

re present i.e. to present it again suggesting that something already existed but has through the media been re-presented

Language (both written and spoken) and images are key symbolic systems through which representations are made in the media

The language and images stand in for something or someone

The ways in which a group of people are represented, shape the meanings of these people e.g. Romanians and asylum seekers spoken of in particular ways

What is representation?

Investigative programmes, news or documentaries tend to have a claim to truthfulness and objectivity giving them persuasive and ideological power e.g. Panorama- they appear to be showing things as they really are to their audiences –

However when a story is presented in the media it is only a slice of the story suggesting that there is bias as the story is told from a particular viewpoint. Media representations are often criticised for being a distortion and/or misrepresentation of the truth

What is representation

Hall (1997) argues that representation is ideological i.e. it cannot exist outside ideology. Ideology is central to the study of representation. Hall postulates that media messages are embedded with presuppositions about beliefs and practices that shape everyday perceptions of reality. These presuppositions operate to reproduce hegemony.

Effectively this argument challenges the claim of transparency in communication and objectivity in media research replacing it with a politicized approach to the media (Rojek, 2003).

Theoretical approaches to the study of representation

There are three basic theories of how language and culture connect with representation.

First there is reflective theory. This states that language reflects the meaning that already exists. This may be the view held concerning news i.e. that news producers try to present news as accurately as possible.

The weakness of this theory is that it does not take into consideration alternative readings or different uses of codes –can something mean the same thing to everyone?.

Theoretical approaches to the study of representation

The second is intentional theory which contends that the author of the text intends it to represent certain ideas. They present their view of something and the words/images that they use mean what they intend them to mean. This suggests/presupposes that each communication is unique in some way.

The shortcoming of this theory is that because we have to enter rules of a social system to be understood by others, the individual communication must lose uniqueness and have a shared meaning. People actually read meanings differently and not necessarily in the intended manner.

Theoretical approaches to the study of representation

The third one is constructionist theory which has two major versions. The first version is semiotics

Semiotics looks at how language –visual, verbal and non verbal works and creates meaning in society. This includes the idea of myth/ ideology and context e.g. the red rose-a certain type of flower –on Valentine’s day would symbolise love,- on the shirt of a rugby player it would indicate that it is the English team and symbolise patriotism. So it has multiple meanings in different contexts. Other signs too have multiple meanings e.g. V sign and the cross.

Theoretical approaches to the study of representation

The second constructionist theory is discursive and was propounded by Foucault. This dwells on issues of power and knowledge with an emphasis on cultural understanding and shared meaning.

It highlights the production of knowledge through a network of relationships (discourse) rather than just the meaning of the text. It is inclined to historical specificity rather than linguistics or semiotic approaches that tried to find trans-historical roots.

Theoretical approaches to the study of representation

Discourse attempts to define and produce knowledge. It decides how we talk about something and influences our ideas and practices. Discourse has something to do with power relations as it governs the how we regulate others' behaviour and we talk and think about certain subjects/objects/ideas.

Discourse can be defined simply as ways of talking (how we talk about something). However the way we select our language often reveals beliefs that are subconscious and this is why Foucault contends that discourse is a factor in the exercise of power

Theoretical approaches to the study of representation

This is consistent with Hall's (1997) thesis that communication is always linked with power and that those groups who wield power in a society influence what gets represented through the media.

Certain discourses (ways of talking about something) reproduce social domination -includes those to do with race, class and gender . Dominance is seen as the 'exercise of social power by elites, institutions or groups that results in social inequality, including political, cultural, class, ethnic, racial and gender' (Van Dijk, 1993: 249-250).

The media can be seen as playing a constructionist role in promoting some narratives and meanings at the expense of others hence exercising power and dominance.

Factors influencing representation

Ownership of British media/newspapers is in the hands of a few individuals. Access to satellite TV is predominantly in the hands of Murdoch (BskyB) and Richard Branson (Virgin).

As most of the news media is run by white, middle-class men, news is about men and seen through their eyes. This suggests that some categories are more likely to be misrepresented e.g. ethnic minorities, women, youth

Factors influencing representation

Ideology of the media organisation- Media organisations are more likely to employ discourses that promote and perpetuate their own beliefs/ideologies i.e. They define the boundaries of debate e.g. The Guardian (left of centre opposed to tough terror laws) as compared to The Telegraph (right of centre)

Sources of news

- News organisations privilege some opinions over others such as police- do not always verify these police crime reports
- Women are underrepresented either as news sources or as powerful journalists in hard news
- Studies of media sources suggest that journalists prefer to use white, middle-class, middle aged, professional males as sources, particularly when expert opinions are being sought
- By reproducing court proceedings without comment, journalists can strengthen stereotypical views about crime as the criminal justice system is perceived by some as patriarchal.

Representations of women

Routine images of women in news media have been socially constructed and limit women to the private sphere, which has a lower status compared to that of men who often feature in the public sphere .

Conboy identifies some distinguishing features of news of women in the news which include:

- marked over-representation of women in deviant roles, reference to women as part of family or as dependent on a relationship to a man, more frequent reference to the age, hair colour and dress or bust size in tabloids... informality of address compared to male equivalents, titles and forms of address differentially employed, over-lexicalisation and most offensive terms, and scripts which compress social expectations of women in certain roles, employed to logically frame women into expectations of social norms. (2007: 132)

<http://www.genderads.com/page3/page3.html>

Think of common ways/roles in which women are represented in the media

Stereotypes

Stereotyping can be defined as the selection and construction of undeveloped, generalised signs which categorise social groups or members of social groups.

Signs used to create the stereotypes represent the values, attitudes, behaviour and backgrounds of those people. Stereotypes do not acknowledge diversity among people but use general characteristics in identifying certain groups e.g. dumb blonde attractive but less intelligent than brunettes.

Whilst stereotypes can be used positively by societies they can often distort perceptions about some things.

By virtue of being built on the assumption of natural and visible differences they conceal the operation of inequalities in power distribution. It is in this sense that gender stereotypes may lead to social inequality as they have a hegemonic function that normalises power relations in society (Lacey 1998).

Stereotypes

Hall expresses this:

Stereotyping... is part of the maintenance of social and symbolic order. It sets up a symbolic frontier between the 'normal' and the 'deviant', the 'normal' and the 'pathological,' the 'acceptable' and the 'unacceptable', what belongs and what does not or is 'Other', between 'insiders' and 'outsiders', Us and Them (1996: 258)

Gender stereotypes associated with women portray women as nurturing, emotional, submissive, quiet, powerless, and irrational

Criminal Women

Women who engage in violent crime seem to provide the media some of their strongest images of crime and deviance. The fascination could be because of the rarity of the offence and because it is often in conflict with stereotypes about women's behaviour.

Women, who kill, transgress not only the laws of the land but also breach the boundaries of femininity

Based on the perception that crime is mostly viewed as masculine the representation of women's criminality is governed by normative and traditional stereotypes of gender and femininity.

Criminal Women

Myers and Wight (1996) argue that when a woman commits an act of criminal violence, her sex is the principal factor through which all her actions are seen and understood.

For example journalistic comment may give detail that is irrelevant to the crime such as the woman's abortion history, use of drugs and promiscuity

- Serial bride married four times by the age of 24 (including to her step-father) faces animal cruelty probe (3 October 2013 Daily Mail)
<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2442635/Serial-bride-married-times-age-24-faces-animal-cruelty-probe.html#ixzz2ghZe4VU1>

There is often sensationalised reporting of women's violence which can be viewed as a sign of social anxiety about women's roles and demise of traditional femininity.

Criminal Women

Female murderers are often portrayed as the 'other', doubly damned, because they have offended and have therefore breached the law of traditional female behaviour (Lloyd, 1995).

Rosemary West was convicted in 1995 of the murder of ten young women together with her husband Fred.

Represented as a perverted mother and wife and a murderer- as criminal-not-woman

Typologies used in representing women offenders

In a study of the representation of female offenders in British newspapers, Naylor (1995:81) identified some of the most frequent images adopted by newspapers in representing women criminals:

Madonna/ whore

While male crime is viewed to exist on a continuum, crimes committed by women are polarised, as in 'Madonna/ whore, the gentler sex or the more deadly species: Snow White/ the Wicked Queen' i.e. good or bad

Typologies used in representing women offenders

Sexual passion/ love as an excuse for crime

- This refers to stories in which women are portrayed as having committed a crime because they were betrayed by love or where they offend for love.
E.g. Ruth Ellis the last woman to be hanged in England

Reproduction and madness

-This category suggests that women may kill due to hormonal imbalances brought on by their cycles that can affect their state of mind

-Women portrayed as 'mad' have been characterized as morally 'pure' women. Their crimes are considered irrational, uncontrollable acts, usually the direct result of mental illness.

-Women who commit infanticide are generally represented 'leniently' because they will often put in a plea of diminished responsibility. Such women are portrayed as mad mothers consequently denying them agency and portraying them as victims of their biology

Typologies used in representing women offenders

The figure of evil- witch- the monster –dehumanises them

The criminal woman as 'not woman'

- the female offender is portrayed like she is not a real woman because real women do not commit crime. There is emphasis on her failure to comply with heterosexual expectations, her unattractive looks, and poor mothering skills, in a bid to show that she is not really a woman e.g. Rose West and mother of Baby P.

Typologies used in representing women offenders

During her trial, a number of additional accusations were levelled against Rosemary West as described by Wykes (2001:177):

- Depraved, lesbian, aggressive, violent, menacing, bisexual, likes black men, likes oral sex, kinky, seductive, a prostitute, over-sexed, a child abuser, nymphomaniac, sordid, monster...

Baby P's mother was also portrayed as a lesbian

Baby P mum is a lesbian (The Sun 13 August 2009)

<http://www.thesun.co.uk/sol/homepage/news/2585418/Baby-P-mum-in-solitary-in-jail-as-she-fears-for-her-life.html>

Typologies of representation

Woman as devious and manipulative

- This description suggests that women are deceitful offenders.
- image of the temptress finds its roots in the Christian doctrine of Creation in which Eve was tempted by the devil to disobey God and to eat fruit from the forbidden tree e.g. Beverley Allitt , a nurse who killed her patients
- <http://www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/crimes-that-shook-britain-beverley-allitt-822277>
- Femme fatale fits this category-seductive woman whose ways lead men into danger

Typologies of representation

Victimism- another narrative used in the portrayal of women who kill

- Some portrayals of women who kill portray them as victims to such an extent that it cannot be imagined that they could have engaged in a wilful and murderous act
- Victim storyline is most obvious in cases of battered women who kill their abusive partners
- Representations of the victim:

...function to deny the woman her responsibility, culpability, agency and often her rationality as well, in their bid to explain her behaviour and secure her sympathetic legal treatment (Morrissey, 2003:25).

Domestic violence murders

Whilst for women it may be presented as an act of irrationality,, men on the other hand are presented as more rational making their violence appear to be more 'normal'

Events are explained in terms of the female's failure to conform to patriarchal norms of femininity, her nagging ways, drunkenness and infidelity. In this sense, a male partner's actions become justifiable because 'she drove him to it'.

Women who kill their children

Western ideology on mothering is rooted in patriarchy

This dominant ideology (patriarchy) reinforces the cultural hegemony by creating social expectations for a social group

Women who kill their children challenge expectations about the nurturing role of the mother . As such, they are perceived by society, and constructed by the media, as bad mothers, evil or insane (Naylor, 2001) and sometimes as 'as freaks of maternal nature

Women who can be shown to have suffered some form of mental instability during the crime are portrayed sympathetically in media, as mad mothers and not responsible e.g. women who commit the crime of infanticide .

Women who kill their children

Women whose children die from neglect or parental violence, are often demonized and condemned

- Baby P killers unmasked. Evil Mother Tracy Connelly....and the neo-Nazi boyfriend (11 August 2009 Daily Mail)

In news reports the woman's identity is often prefixed by the gender role 'mum' or 'mother' heightening the deviance

- Anguish of 'killer' mum on baby rap (The Mirror 26 October 1999)
- Mother 'killed her babies as they lay in their cots' (The Times 20 February 2002)

Summary

Women criminals are represented using discourses of femininity that heighten their deviance

Their identity is often prefixed by their gender e.g

- Woman kills eighty year old man

Represented in terms of their biology as depressed, mad or as evil and non woman

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