NordMedia 2017

23rd Nordic Conference on Media and Communication Research

Tampere, 17–19 August 2017

Abstracts

TWG 3

Gender and the Media
Friday, 18 August

10.30-12.00

Md Nabil, "Revenge porn" - how news media is constructing knowledge about revenge porn and representing these misogynistic practices

Isotalus Pekka, "Coverage of straight vs. gay spouses of candidates in newspapers during the Finish presidential election" - privatization of politics and how mainstream media is covering spouses of the presidential candidates

Ana Cristina Pereira, "Representations of black women in Portuguese post-colonial cinema" - how the Portuguese cinema represents women of African and Afro-descent

Jonita Siivonen, "Inverting as a working method for gender sensitive journalism" - exploring ways of alternative gender constructions in the press
"Revenge porn" - how news media is constructing knowledge about revenge porn and representing these misogynistic practices

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Abstract:

"Revenge porn" is recognized as a form of online misogyny causing severe harm to people especially women. Such online practices barricade social developments like eliminating oppression of women and ensuring gender equality. News media across the globe are increasingly reporting about ensuing damage of revenge porn devastating women’s social life, career and familial relationships. News in general plays crucial role to shape public knowledge and opinion, and also influences legislators and policy makers who ensure the wellbeing of individuals in a society. In this case, news media is constructing knowledge about revenge porn as an online as well as social phenomenon and is conveying it to the public. This construction of knowledge by media requires some scrutiny which is the aim of this analysis.

Not much has been done on this particular subject but mass media’s representation of this misogynistic practice has indeed become a subject of critical examination by few scholars. Mediated stories are allegedly found to be conveying a victim blaming message that women who participate in risky online sexual activities are personally responsible for the consequences they may face (Hasinoff 2015; Henry and Powell 2015; Salter and Crofts 2015). News media has also been criticized for disregarding sexual harassment of and violence against women (Carll 2003). One small scale study from North America explored news reports about revenge porn and accused those stories of failing to adequately capture the ordeal of the victims (Fairbairn 2015). On the contrary, Smith (2010) argues that news only depicting fear, trauma and sufferings can unnecessarily create a fear of vulnerability in women which eventually can legitimate a sense of responsibility of self protection in them. Thus both victim blaming and victim centered framing (in news) can potentially limit women from self-expressing and eventually promote a virtual gender power asymmetry (Milford 2015).

This criticism of media representation of victims and their ordeal by previous works tend to ignore the developments that has been made in recent years regarding issues of wellbeing of women in the society. According to Minic (2014), there are broader feminist communicative actions taking place in mass media through pro- feminist journalism and circulating feminist ideas in other media content. There are now significant efforts evident from advocacy agencies, online activists and bloggers to make society aware of the harms of online sexual harassment. Their versions are being included in mainstream news media. Such a changing media landscape does provide room for generating alternative media discourses which can address
complex issues related to revenge porn; thus can challenge the dominant discursive practice of victim blaming and victim framing in media. This present study is part of my PhD project that limits its focus on how news stories construct knowledge about revenge porn as a criminal offence.

Using a method of thematic analysis on 99 news reports published in 4 leading American news websites over a period of five years (2012-2016) the analysis examines and explains how revenge porn is portrayed in news. Three dominant themes emerge in the analysis in relation to the news construction of revenge porn (RP) – i) defining RP - as an act of female victimization through non-consensual distribution of intimate sexualized images; ii) criminalizing RP - news about revenge porn goes beyond mere representations of victims and includes various other parties (e.g. perpetrators, third party content distributors etc.) with their criminal liabilities for committing such act; and iii) critiquing laws and policies against RP - the loopholes in existing legal framework and law enforcement, and debate regarding laws criminalizing revenge porn and free-speech right are parts of a recurrent theme in these news stories.

References


Coverage of Straight vs. Gay Spouses of Candidates in Newspapers during the Finnish Presidential Election

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Politicians’ spouses, usually wives, have received increasing amounts of media attention in recent years. They have often been portrayed in public, primarily in a promotional capacity, by political candidates because they have no real political significance. This process is especially emphasised during election campaigning and is related to the trend of the privatisation of politics, which means a shift in media focus from the politician, as the occupier of a public role, to the politician as a private individual, a person distinct from his or her public role. Politicians sometimes exploit their personal lives, including marital relationships, as a promotional resource to form a given impression and image.

In this paper, the privatisation of politics is considered by analysing the newspaper coverage and images of two candidates’ spouses during the second round of the 2012 Finnish presidential campaign. During the campaign, the spouses were reported on more frequently than during previous campaigns because one couple was gay and one was straight. The paper conducts an investigation of what the newspapers reported about the spouses, how balanced the coverage of them was and how intimate issues in the relationships were described in public. The paper employed a qualitative content analysis method, and the data were composed of 112 articles and 106 pictures.

The results show that the spouses’ role was treated in a traditional manner in the newspapers; however, the gay spouse muddled the traditional gendered frames because he was posited in the traditional spousal role, which is more feminine than masculine. The coverage of the gay couple imitated the traditional coverage of straight couples in the campaign context. The tone of the coverage of the gay spouse was sometimes even more feminine than that of the female spouse, and it could even be said that he was placed in the ‘position of wife’. Further, the female spouse was met with conflicting requirements because the media presented her in the very traditional role of a politician’s spouse. At the same time, she could not be like a traditional wife and take responsibility for household chores.

The level of privatisation appeared to be high. Moreover, the couples used different strategies to protect their privacy in relation to the most intimate questions. This coverage was not just instrumental; it was also substantial in many respects. Based on the results, it is evident that the media used spouses as a means to drill down to the candidates’ relationships, lives and personalities. Thus, the role of information about a spouse was to influence a candidate’s image. However, the role of the spouse appeared to be even more
important. He or she is intrinsically significant and has an individual meaning in the campaign context, making his or her attractiveness potentially beneficial to a candidate.
Representations of black women in Portuguese post-colonial cinema

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Key-words: Portuguese cinema; racial representations; Miguel Gomes; Pedro Costa; Margarida Cardoso.

Abstract:

According to several authors Portuguese cinema lives in a dichotomy between its inability to assert itself as a cultural industry and an apparent international recognition of the structures that decide what art is. Even after the democratization of the country, Portuguese cinema had often a difficult relationship with the public and also with the political and economic powers. This aspect has limited its capacity of production in quantity and in diversity. On the other hand, cinema is a predominantly male medium, at least as far as filmmaking is concerned.

Recent studies on Portuguese cinema point to the persistence of gender and racial stereotypes, but also of filmic discourses that challenge hegemonic representations. Since the 1990s ethnic minorities and “marginal” realities previously ignored by the cameras emerged in Portuguese films. This decade gave birth to a generation of filmmakers heir to a tradition of purist, eclectic, and strongly ideological cinema who had as teachers, at Escola Superior de Teatro e Cinema, some of the directors of the Portuguese Novo Cinema, but who came with its own agenda. In the last decade of the twentieth century, some films were made with the purpose of producing an insight about the urban and often marginal daily life, challenging the concept of “nation” that excludes plural realities. In the twenty-first century the trend to include the African Diasporas in fiction and in documentaries continues. At this point there has been an accentuated experimental trend to expose social inequalities. Artistic proposals initiated earlier and the emergence of new directors interested in filming people who are part of the Portuguese reality, although still often seen as foreigners, are now becoming visible.

In this context one would expect different representations of black women in the films of the last 25 years to be found, but this does not appear to be true. Analyzing the Portuguese cinematographic production from the 1990s to this part we verified that the presence of women of African descent in the Portuguese films is rare, not very diversified and never as protagonist. Is Portuguese cinema reifying representations of African or Afro-descendant women who come from afar and who do not represent the social diversity of our day? If so, which movies would go against this logic? How does the public answer to films representations?
Based on data provided by the Institute of Cinema and Audiovisual (ICA) and on previously published Portuguese cinema works and continuing with the attentive watching of the films, we traced the evolution of the presence of non-white characters in Portuguese cinema since the 1990s, distinguishing the representations of female characters.

Focus groups were made, in Portuguese universities, on Tabu by Miguel Gomes (2012); Horse Money by Pedro Costa (2014); Yvone Kane by Margarida Cardoso (2015), trying to understand how these films are read by young audience.

This work is a critical discursive analysis on the representations of the blacks and concretely of the black woman proposed by the Portuguese cinema; and also on how the young public dialogues with those representations.

It is concluded that the representations of the black woman are rare and very little differentiated between themselves, reifying hegemonic representations, this except for some films made by women. Young audiences are sensitive to the realities portrayed by the films even if they often reify racist readings of the filmic texts.
Inverting as a working method for gender sensitive journalism.

A pilot study on the portrayal of two young politicians, one professor and one young medical doctor with a Ph.D.

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This pilot study in journalism and communication studies explores means by which gender stereotyping practices can be revealed in order to promote gender sensitive journalism.

The aim of the pilot study is to explore ways in which inverting as a working tool can reveal gender bound constructions when describing persons in routine journalism. The material consisting of descriptions of young professional women is analyzed in order to find sequences that can be interpreted as being gender bound to femininity. The sequences are compared to the female and to the male portrait interview norms (Siivonen 2007) and then critically further close read. The analysis is conducted by inverting, or “turning around” the language of a text: Could this sequence refer to a male person as it now refers to a woman and why/why not is this so? In this pilot study of only four texts, gender is operationalized as a binary category (based on gendered name coding), but will further on develop a more diverse operationalization of gender. The aim is not only to reveal gender bound constructions, but also to reveal constructions ignoring the queer and intersectional readings of the portraits.

The material comprises four portrait interviews with young professional women of whom two are Finnish politicians, the third a Swedish professor and the fourth a Swedish medical doctor with a Ph.D. The Finnish material is from a women’s magazine “Me naiset” in 2016, the other from the tabloid “Iltalehti” in 2016. Both the Swedish portraits are from the morning paper “Dagens Nyheter”. One of the texts is from 2015, the other dates back to 2002.

The portrait interview is a genre of politeness and therefore the gender bound constructions can be interpreted as expressing society’s ideal, in this case the Nordic societies’ ideal, of how to do gender “correctly”. According to the genre conventions of the portrait interview the interviewee’s role is to produce unpretentious talk sequences, and the journalist’s role is to pay tribute to the interviewee and the interviewee’s achievements. When inverting the person descriptions and life story descriptions it is possible to sort out what themes most often construct gender bound and/or sexist ideals in society for women’s and men’s doing gender. The study will also aim at identifying the linguistic mechanisms that construct heterosexism in the descriptions of women and men.
These “ideal women” and “ideal men” as stereotypes have long been criticized, but there have been less pragmatic discussion on how to make alternative gender constructions. Therefore in this paper the focus will be on looking at ways of portraying persons in less binary gender bound ways, making possible also queer and intersectional constructions and readings.

The theoretical framework of the study is within social constructionism, critical discourse analysis and gender studies.

Carla Cerqueira, “The voices of gender equality: an analysis of communication strategies of NGOs” - What communication strategies are used by NGO’s working with social change and gender equality and how affective are they in conveying the messages they want to the mainstream media.

Elisa Vainikka, Agonistic online debate about gender and "the relationship market" - how participants of a Finnish forum are constructing their on-line alternative reality and communicating "geek masculinity" with each-other.

Elisabeth Eide, “Strategically Shameless" - young Norwegian women of Arab descent formed a movement to demand from the media to take their voices seriously. Did they succeed?
The voices of gender equality: an analysis of communication strategies of NGOs

Carla Cerqueira

Communication plays a central role in social organizations, namely non-governmental organisations (NGOs), in particular in what concerns publicizing the causes advocated and contributing to the mobilization of public opinion and social change. With the proliferation of digital social networks the issues of communication gain new attention in this area of research because they allow greater interaction with different audiences, are easily accessible and managed. Concerning Portuguese context there is a vast and heterogeneous group of NGOs and other (formal and informal) collectives operating in the field of human rights, women's rights, gender equality and feminisms. Research in this area has given particular attention to aspects related to external communication, namely how these organizations, which work around issues related to women's rights, gender and feminisms, are represented by the mainstream media. In this perspective, it is considered urgent to perceive, from a holistic view and attentive to the specificities, which communication strategies are defined by the organizations.

This communication aims to present the results of a research developed around the internal and external communication strategies of NGOs and other (formal and informal) collectives operating in Portugal in the area of human rights, women's rights, gender equality and feminisms. In this sense, interviews were conducted with these organisations, which were complemented by the analysis of digital platforms they use. First of all, the structure of these organisations demonstrates that they are so different that to classify them we can use the metaphor of the rhizome and its complexities. The dimension, mission and agendas are very heterogeneous. The results highlight the effectiveness of the use of traditional means of internal communication, although this is referred to as one of the areas of greatest challenge. Regarding external communication, we seek to articulate traditional media with new digital tools. However, the scarcity of human and economic resources seems to be a major hindrance to the professionalization of communication, with some organizations even feeling setbacks at this level. Digital platforms function more as means of information than as channels of communication abroad. Media representation remains an area of great attention but they do not always know how to contact with journalists and gain media attention. In a field marked by the heterogeneity of organizations, communication always appears as a strategic area, but in several cases the dilemmas of operationalization seem to be greater than the conquests.
Agonistic online debate about gender and “the relationship market”

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This study examines discussions about relationships in an anonymously used online image-board by using narrative analysis. Most of the discussions studied here deal with gender roles, relationship problems and the “relationship market”. Often the discussions reflect disputes around gender that seem to be more and more common recently (Jane 2016), and that Sarah Banet-Weiser and Kate Miltner (2015) have called the “new gender wars”, a war including echoes of previous backlashes against women and feminism. The research material comes from a Finnish online image-board Ylilauta, the Finnish equivalent of the American sub-cultural forum 4chan. In the /relationships sub-forum of Ylilauta, anonymous commentators engage in relationship talk, asking for advice and seeking support. They form an “intimate public” (Berlant 2008, viii) where they discuss matters such as friendship, relationship problems and moral dilemmas.

First, I observe what kind of online platform and public space does the /relationships-section of Ylilauta offer. What possibilities does it afford and what does it exclude? This is important to pin-point, because the space or platform itself does have a role in enabling certain public debates (Gillespie 2010). Secondly, I focus on the discussion about “relationship markets”. I examine how people posting in the forum position themselves in terms of gender and gender performances in narratives about relationships. What kinds of debates and conceptions of gender roles emerge?

The theory about market value in relationships is constantly referred to in the discussions of the Ylilauta forum. It is used to explain many common situations in relationships between men and women. In the discussions we see circulating discourses that are familiar from Anglophone online forums and blogs. For example, the “masculinist” (Saresma 2014) or men’s rights activist (MRA) discourses appear as well as influences by the pick-up-artist (PUA) (Dayter & Rüdiger 2016, Hendricks 2012) or “red pill movement” (Massanari 2015). The ongoing discussions about relationships and gender roles circulate many stereotypical and often misogynistic conceptions about relationships, sexuality, and gender roles. However, a minority of posters actively challenges these stereotypes and problematic generalisations, making the discussions an agonistic public (Mouffe 2005).

The image-board is a platform where other commenters have to be imagined, and therefore a space, on which every user can place their own interpretation of the imagined “we” of the forum. The dominant view of the forum relates to the stereotypical notion of “geek masculinity” (Massanari 2015). The culture of online image-boards is androcentric, privileging a male-centric world-view. The image-board also offers a “gamified” alternative reality, where public debate becomes a sort of a game, where various rhetorical tricks
and provocative speech is used. The provocations and dominant views, such as gender stereotypes, are challenged in the agonistic public of the forum. Unlike in Massanari’s (2015) study of the reddit forum, in the image-board the resistance does not happen collectively, but on an individual level.

Some attributes of the image-board forum, such as ephemerality, anonymity and “gamification” of the space, influence how the discussion itself is formed. The anonymously used forum may shelter various extreme views, such as the theory about market-value in relationships, and offer a fruitful soil for them to grow. Because the ideological position of the forum itself is open and vague, and because the users comment anonymously, the forum also invites opposite views. The agonistic discussions get more visibility due to the operation logic of the forum, where messages with most replies are rise up and those with fewer replies, go down and finally disappear.
In 2016 the «Shameless girls» occurred in Norwegian media as an initiative and a movement of young women with roots mainly in the Arab world. “We are not a concept. We are our own person and we demand to be taken seriously: both in Norwegian and in our mother tongue” (Initiator Nancy Herz 25.04.2016 in Aftenposten). The initiative seemed broad-based, including hijab-wearing “conservative” Muslims as well as “progressive” non-believers, but they all attacked the “culture of shame” prevailing in different Muslim environments in Norway and elsewhere.

This paper studies the media coverage of the “Shameless girls” from the first media occurrence in April, throughout 2016. The study is explorative, asking how the “Shameless girls” were represented in the national press. To what extent was the diversity of the group reflected in the media coverage? To what extent were they invited to speak for themselves? How do the initiators themselves evaluate the media coverage? These questions will be explored in three steps: 1. Content analysis of press coverage (96 units registered), focusing mainly on voice and genre. 2. In-depth discourse analysis of 4-5 feature reportages on “the shameless”. 3. Interviews with 4-5 of the “girls” themselves. A small study of Facebook representation will also be included (the “girls” do not have any open FB page, but some young Muslim men have voiced their support).