

Media and Mothers' Matters

A half- day round table conference for parties with an interest in media and women's issues

21 October 2011

1-5pm

The Boardroom

University of Winchester

King Alfred's Campus

**Organised by School of Media and Film Studies,
supported by MeCCSA Women's Media Studies Network and the Mothers' Union**

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Papers and Speakers

Media and Mothers' Matters: Stella Roberts, Mothers' Union

The Mothers' Union in the Winchester Diocese is part of a worldwide Christian organisation that supports marriage and family life. Over the years Mothers' Union has addressed issues around the media, including through its Media Awareness pack and more recently through its Bye Buy Childhood campaign. Through its practical programmes across the world, Mothers' Union provides parenting groups, marriage support and literacy and financial education.

Stella Roberts is the President of The Mothers' Union in the Winchester Diocese. In her keynote she will reflect how the Mothers' Union sees the media. It will demonstrate the media's capacity for both positive and negative influences on family life.

Mothers and the Media: Dorothy Hobson, University of Wolverhampton

There are many aspects to this subject and the keynote will identify some important areas that would be worth developing through research, teaching, advocacy and policy. In some ways it is difficult to identify and separate areas of interest to mothers, because for various reasons, they are interested in everything that is on television, not just programmes which are targeted at them.

We could be asking 'What are Women's Programmes?' But it is as important to think about 'What Issues are of Interest to Women across a range of Media?' Another way of considering the topic is to look at the way that mothers and issues which matter to women are handled in programmes.

I would hope to discuss some of the genres where there are positive images and others where the representation and the themes are not the most positive But I note that not all programmes are negative. Some stand out for their positive representations.

What is positive, what is inevitable and what should be criticized about Mothers and the Media is a fascinating topic and I hope that we can identify some of the areas which are of concern, interest but also of delight to us all.

Dorothy Hobson is well known for her scholarship and has taught in a number of academic institutions in the British Midlands. She is currently at the University of Wolverhampton, where she specialises in Drama, Soap Opera, Popular Television, Television Audiences, Television News and Public Service Broadcasting, Channel 4 Television, Research Methods. Dorothy has also worked as a broadcasting consultant for various broadcasts and cultural organisations including Channel 4 Television, BBC Drama, British Film Institute, BBC Birmingham. She is a Fellow of the Royal Television Society and Vice Chair of the Midland Centre of the Royal Television. There she heads the Events group and organises regular programmes concentrating on programmes, technology, production and digital futures. Dorothy has written many books, academic and journalistic articles and she has also featured in broadcasts on various aspects of television in Britain and abroad. Her current work is a new book on Adolescents and the Media.

From Here to Maternity – Motherhood in the Media: Kim Akass, *Critical Studies in Television*

Despite the passing of sexual discrimination legislation, the difficulty of combining work and motherhood repeatedly hits the headlines. This paper looks at the American media phenomenon known as the 'mommy wars' and asks if British mothers can expect to face the same issues and attitudes as their American sisters.

Kim Akass has published widely on US TV, is a co-founding editor of *Critical Studies in Television*, co-editor of the *Reading Contemporary TV Series* (I.B. Tauris) and webmistress of CSTonline. She is currently writing a book on the representation of motherhood on US TV.

States of Confusion: Sarah Palin and the Media Politics of US Mothering: Janet McCabe, Birkbeck, University of London/University of Glamorgan

Rarely has someone emerged so unexpectedly and sensationally on to the American political scene as Sarah Palin. In August 2008, the 44 year-old, mother of five Alaskan Governor joined the Republican ticket as only the second woman in US presidential history to become a vice-presidential nominee. Her place on the GOP platform electrified the election cycle in ways no one could have predicted, provoking an avalanche of media visibility followed swiftly by scandal and Internet rumour. With Palin came what had rarely, if ever, been seen before on a presidential trail: hockey moms, Caribou-hunting, pitbulls in lipstick parcelled as political weaponry. And let's not forget those five children, including Track 19, set to deploy to Iraq, Bristol, and her unplanned pregnancy at 17, and Trig, a six-month-old infant with Down's syndrome.

Never before had motherhood been so finely balanced with US presidential politics. Biological vigour translated into political energy, motherhood transformed into an intoxicating political ideal. This contribution focuses on Sarah Palin and how her brand of "rugged Alaskan motherhood" (PunditMom 2008) is central to her media image, as well as what this representation has to tell us about the relationship between mothering, politics and the media.

Janet McCabe is Honorary Research Fellow in TV Drama at Birkbeck, University of London, as well as Research Assistant (*Critical Studies in Television*) at the University of Glamorgan. She writes on US television and the politics of the feminine, and her book, for the TV Milestone Series, on *The West Wing* is forthcoming.

Teen Drama: Absent, Inept and Intoxicated Mothers, Rebecca Feasey, Bath Spa University

Children's literature, the Disney franchise and the Hollywood teen movie clearly and deliberately leave motherhood and the maternal role out of the youth picture. Moreover, teen television situates problematic motherhood as a key trope in the genre, focusing on the ways in which these women routinely and repeatedly dismiss, disappoint and deride their children. With this in mind, I will present a brief overview of motherhood, mothering and the maternal role in the contemporary media marketplace before looking at the roles, responsibilities and restrictions of motherhood in the popular *90210* (2008-).

Rebecca Feasey is Senior Lecturer in Film and Media Communications at Bath Spa University. She has previously published work on the celebrity gossip sector, contemporary Hollywood stardom and the representation of gender in popular media culture. She is the author of *Masculinity and Popular Television* (2008) and the forthcoming *From Happy Homemaker to Desperate Housewives: Motherhood and Popular Television*.

“Setting the Media Agenda for Maternal Mortality in Nigeria: A long road to travel” (work in progress): Racheal Agbonkhese, Cardiff University

Maternal mortality is defined as the death of a woman while pregnant, during delivery or within 42 days of termination of a pregnancy due to complications. It is an indication of the dire state of maternal health, and was designated as millennium development goal 5 which aims to reduce global maternal deaths by at least two thirds by 2015. In spite of this mandate, the situation remains almost unabated in some countries for over a decade. Nigeria is one of such. With a GDP of \$194 billion it has the highest maternal mortality rates in the world, second only to India.

This paper discusses the agenda setting role of the media in generating political priority for maternal mortality in Nigeria. It presents data from a series of source interviews as well as newspaper publications in discussing the various factors which influence the salience of maternal mortality on the media and political agenda, and the implications of these factors for future interventions.

Racheal Agbonkhese is an integrated marketing communication consultant. She is in the final year of her doctoral research at Cardiff University where she also serves on the teaching team. This paper stems from her doctoral research which explores Media Agenda Setting and Maternal Mortality, with a goal of identifying a useful framework for successful media interventions. She has also worked with non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and with government and private sector initiatives. She remains actively involved in maternal mortality issues especially in her role as a trustee for the 'Life for African Mothers', the Welsh Assembly charity of the year.

The Widening Gender Gap in the UK Creative Media Industries (CMI): Tamsyn Dent, Bournemouth University/Skillset

This presentation will introduce research carried out to date on the current gender gap amongst media practitioners employed in the UK's Creative Media Industry (CMI). The results are quite revealing of the situation of women aged 35 and over, particularly in the TV sector and those with dependent children compared to their male counterparts. It is from a PhD project which is a collaboration between Bournemouth University's Centre for Excellence for Media Practice (CEMP) and Skillset, the skills council for the creative media industries.

Since 1999 Skillset has been gathering demographic data on the industry's workforce providing a snapshot of the employment patterns and trends relating to practitioners.

Starting with the trends of gendered employment that emerge from statistical data the study explores why, despite past industry interventions, women are still under-represented in certain job roles and age groups. In particular it investigates the position of working mothers within the industry's workforce.

The project considers what conditions exclude working mothers from these industries and the potential impact of these on creative output. It does this by examining changes in working structures: including the increased reliance on freelancers, the specific structure of the UK broadcasting and media system, other factors in the political and social contexts, alongside evidence from working mothers who work (or have worked) in creative media industries.

Tamsyn Dent joined the Centre of Excellence in Media Practice (CEMP) in Bournemouth University in September 2010 as a doctoral researcher, researching the widening gender gap in the UK creative media industries and exploring ways that the industry can support and hold on to its female workforce. She started her career in the UK TV and film industry in 2004, working as a freelance runner and researcher on documentaries, feature films and TV drama. After studying for an MSc in Gender and the Media at the London School of Economics (LSE) in 2007, she started work as Development Manager for the Birds Eye View Film Festival, an annual festival that celebrates the creative talent of women filmmakers.

Tamsyn is based in London and has one son. She writes about her research and experience of juggling work, motherhood and study on her blog: <http://tamsyndent.wordpress.com/>

See next page for directions to The King Alfred Campus.

How to find the University of Winchester (King Alfred Campus)

Travelling by car, Park and Ride and on foot

Visitors should approach Winchester along the Romsey Road. If driving on the M3, come off at junction 11 and pass through Badger Farm Road and turn right at the second roundabout to proceed along Romsey Road. After passing the West Downs Campus on your left and the Royal Hampshire County Hospital on your right, turn right into St James Lane. After a sharp corner turn right into Sparkford Road. The King Alfred Campus is halfway down the hill on the right hand side.

During term, visitor parking on campus is limited. If parking is available please report to Main Reception to collect a permit. However, visitors are encouraged to park at the South Winchester Park and Ride or in the city centre public car parks, which are a short walk away from the campus. The South Winchester Park and Ride is accessible from Junction 11 of the M3. There are Park and Ride bus stops along Romsey Road close to the King Alfred Campus. Please see the map opposite for the location of the Park and Ride, city centre public car parks and for directions on foot to the King Alfred Campus.

By train

The King Alfred Campus is less than one mile (approximately 15 minutes walk) from the railway station. Leave the railway station by the main exit and turn right into Station Road leading into Upper High Street. Turn right over the bridge and left into Clifton Terrace. Cross Romsey Road and walk along St James Terrace.

At the end of the terrace turn to your right and cross the road. Then follow the path through the middle of West Hill Cemetery (note: do not take the path to the left of the cemetery). The University is situated opposite the far gate of the cemetery.

Bus and coach

Main bus and coach routes stop at King Alfred's Statue in central Winchester. The walk to King Alfred Campus takes approximately 20 minutes. On alighting proceed along Broadway and through the pedestrianised High Street. Turn left at Southgate Street. Cross St Clements Street and take the next right turn into St James Lane. Proceed up the hill and just after the railway bridge go through the gates of West Hill Cemetery and take footpath through the middle of the cemetery. The University is situated opposite the far gate of the cemetery.

