



Nurses, nursing and British television hospital drama and hospital based comedy.

IMPLICATIONS FOR NURSING

Martina Balaam
MSc PgCert Prof Ed Ba (Hons) RGN RNT
Programme Leader/Lecturer

School of Health Sciences – Nursing, Queen Margaret University

The proposed thesis will explore contemporary representations of nurses in British television hospital dramas. This investigation will in particular utilise detailed textual analysis to consider representations of nurses within this genre from 1986-2006. Interviews will consider what, if any implications these representations may have on nurses/nursing.

The aims of the investigation are

1. To identify and explore representations of nurses in British hospital dramas during the period 1986-2006.
2. To critically evaluate any significant shifts in these representations over that period.
3. To critically evaluate the extent to which these representations are linked to discourses of femininity.
4. To explore the significance of these representations for nurses as individuals and nursing as a profession.

The power of the media is well documented and television in particular is considered to be a pervasive and influential medium of communication (Curan & Seaton 2003, Eldridge Kitzinger & Williams 1997). It is likely therefore that, as some literature suggests, recent media representations of nurses are shaping and maintaining the public views of nurses and the nursing profession.

'Unrealistic' and 'degrading' images of nursing as a profession, such as the portrayal of nurses in the 'carry on film' genre, it is asserted could have negative implications for nursing as a profession and nurses themselves (Salvage 1983, Holloway 1992). This in turn, some argue, may be impacting on the status of nursing, recruitment into nursing (Bridges 1990) and nurses own self worth (Kalisch and Kalisch 1983).

"the problem for nursing is that its major stereotypes are so unrelentingly negative in their connotations and so wholly untenable in their relationship to the reality of nursing" (Darbyshire and Gordon 2005 p.73).

Other commentators have focused on the extent to which the way nurses are represented is governed by their gender (Holloway 1992). Nursing is seen as a symbol of caring and duty and Hallam (2000) maintains that this is situated within a discourse of white femininity. Hallam (2000) in particular asserts that nursing and female identity are difficult to separate, arguing that male dominated economic institutions construct and project male fantasies of women.

Whilst, as Darbyshire (2005) maintains, there has been a "burgeoning interest" in images of nursing and nurses in the media since the 70s, research to date has predominately focused on American media pre 1980's. In light of the above the author believes there is now an increasing need for a critical appraisal of contemporary representations of nurses in the media. The purpose of this thesis is therefore to examine the extent to which these claims about media representation of nursing and concerns about their impact on the profession are either empirically justified or conceptually sound.

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Background and Rationale

This thesis was proposed in response to both the increasing prevalence and popularity of hospital dramas and hospital based comedy on British television (cf. Hallam 2000, Jacobs 2003, Revill 2006), and of concerns expressed by the nursing profession about the nature of the representation of nurses in the media. (Berry 2004). Dissatisfaction with these representations suggests the need for a change from outdated images of nursing in the media to more up to date images of nursing careers.

Coming from



Hattie Jacques and Joan Hickson in Carry on Nurse 1959. Directed by Gerald Thomas

Going towards



PHASE ONE

The author will address aims 1-3 by utilising textual analysis, an interpretative and exploratory approach (McKee 2003) to analyse a cohort of prime time British hospital dramas and hospital based comedies from 1986-2006.

British Television Hospital Dramas and Hospital Based Comedy (1986-2006) (A cohort of the highlighted titles will be analysed)

TITLE	YEAR	EPISODES/SERIES	LENGTH	CHANNEL
	1986----- (06.09.1986--	511-----/20--	50 minutes	BBC1
	1994-1996 (21/4/1994- 21/6/1996)	27/3	30 minutes	BBC1
	1999- (12.01.1999-)	412----/19--	50-60 minutes	BBC
	2004-2006 (03.09.2004- 19.05.2006	17/2 Christmas episode 04.01.2007	65minutes	Channel 4
	2004-2004 (30.01.2004- 17.02.2004)	6	30 minutes	BBC
	2004-2006 (02.03.2004- 11.04.2006)	26/3	50 minutes	Channel 4

PHASE TWO

The author will address aim 4 by conducting a literature review and semi-structured (qualitative) interviews. The interviews in phase 2 will explore the significance of representations for nurses as individuals and nursing as a profession and allow a more detailed examination of the subject (Hansen 1998 Hallam 2000).

In conclusion this thesis will

- Contribute to existing knowledge of representations of nurses from 1957-2006 in British hospital drama.
- Provide an original interpretation of a sample of British hospital dramas and comedy from 1986-2006
- Provide new information on any significant shifts in these representations.
- Provide an original account of the extent to which such representations are bound up with particular discourses of femininity.
- Clarify the impact, if any, of these representations on nurses' senses of themselves and their profession.
- Explore the significance of these representations for nurses as individuals and nursing as a profession