

The Representation of Women in Television Series

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Abstract

With the advent of cable television and the changes that have occurred regarding the dissemination of digital and mobile technologies, television has become an effective vehicle for intercultural exchange. Within this framework, fictional narrative television, through its stories, settings and characters plays a key role. Whereas nowadays TV series has been gaining the status of, as it were, works of art, becoming identified as the "future of cinema". This paper aims to bring to the discussion the contemporary woman, based on three series of success - Sex and the City, Homeland and The Fall -where the main characters are women to understand their representations in the culture and media, and the reflection in production of Brazilian television series.

Keywords: Women in Culture and Media, Pay Television, Television Series

Introduction

In contemporary times, television has been presented as an effective vehicle to convey cultural expressions of a country. Among television programs, one can say that fictional narratives, through their stories, their dialogues, scenarios and characters, offer a portray of the authentic mode of expression of certain population. Every work of fiction - literary narrative, film, theater, television narrative - appropriates elements of reality in the construction of their fictional universes, acting as a mediator between the subject and the existential world. As Umberto Eco says, "the fictional assertions are true within the framework of a possible world of a particular history" (Eco, 1994, p. 94).

About television

Since its inception in the mid-twentieth century, television has earned numerous aesthetic and sociological theories, from the model of Adorn, who considered its nature "bad", to the *mchulaniano* model that considered its nature "good".

Nowadays, passed on these conjectures, we must consider it as an audiovisual device through which a civilization expressed itself.

In fact, television has undergone transformations not only in terms of its technological support, as well as their role in contemporary society. With the development of satellite transmission facilities, television came to be seen as a mean of democratic communication, given more people access to information, culture and fun.

With the advent of Pay TV, emission technology which allows the movement of a large number of channels from different countries, dedicated channels to specific subjects and in the face of digital distribution to smartphones, tablets and computers combined with the service system video on demand, which offers programs to be viewed at any time and any place, it opens an unlimited universe of distribution of television material. So, the pay TV space has been therefore the space of visibility of the issues experienced in contemporary times.

What interests us about the investigations of the historical processes of training and TV identity is that, without any doubt, it has contributed to legitimize it as an audiovisual device, equipped with the latest technology in sound field and image, with a significant penetration in the people daily life in many countries, through which a civilization is expressed in its various modalities. In the case of television fictional production must consider that it is a rich material of analysis of interests, customs and relevant question of certain society.

Television Fictional Narrative

In contemporary times, television products exert the function of transmitting the cultural expression of a people. Unlike news programs, television news, auditorium program, the television fictional narratives, through their stories, their dialogues, settings and characters, show the everyday life of their country.

The German philosopher Jürgen Habermas would review the concepts of the effects of media as producers of symbolic codes, admitting that cultural products allow the individual to make a reflection on what he is receiving. Following that thought, Leonardo Avritzer proposed the concept of reflexivity caused by cultural production

(Avritzer, 1999, p.168). Introduction of this concept, in the case of television fictional narratives, would bring the idea of no longer passive reception, but endowed with possibility of interpretation and experimentation. Among the various aspects that exist on the subject, for our study it is worth mentioning the conception of Thompson when he said:

A guy reading a novel or watching a soap opera is not just consuming a fantasy; he is exploring possibilities, imagining alternatives, new experiences with himself. (Thompson, 1998, p. 202).

The reflexivity studied by Antony Giddens, in his book *Modernity and Identity* (Giddens, 2002), is understood as susceptible to most aspects of social activity and highlights the importance of the media in this process.

In the case of television fictional narratives, in mediated contact with realities and different experiences, individuals are urged to reassess their own life, helping creatively in the construction of identity.

(...) Images of other ways of life are a resource that individuals have to critically judge their own living conditions. (...) The mediated experience is an experience of the other, she cultivates the imagination of the individual, which becomes increasingly able to see over the other person in a new situation. (Thompson, 1998, p.157 - 167).

Thus, we would be assuming that the narrative fictions, whether literary, audiovisual or media, by the device of narrating a story, to entertain, would be helping the receivers in the production of new meanings for their conception of the world and about themselves.

Television Series

In the United States, from the 80s, there was a boom in the production of series directed to TV. Television networks, such as Universal Channel, AXN, HBO, Fox, Warner and Sony offer a huge range of options ranging from realistic drama to sitcoms, criminal, action, supernatural approach serving a diverse audience, and following the different age groups. There are series that achieved an audience of over 10 million viewers, as was the case of *Friends* (1996), *Sex and the City* (1998), *The Sopranos* (1999), *House* (2004), *Heroes* (2006), *Breaking Bad* (2013).

Believing in this niche market, the production of series in the U.S. has become more sophisticated, winning new ranges of audience to the point of calling the attention of scholars in the field of communication.

Considered as a popular fun television, the American series acquired status of work of art. They have deep characters, challenge procedures, and address social issues. The majority of the intellectual public approves these series. In turn, the audience is now seen as "intellectual public".

"Hollywood is no longer the source of creative vigor of American entertainment. Intelligent life is now on TV," as mentioned in the article presented in *Veja* magazine, December 15, 2010, signed by Marcelo Marthe and Isabela Boscov.

No wonder that filmmakers of works of wide recognition came to recognize the importance of the television market, freeing it from the stigma of "mass culture," and considering it as a means to reach a wider audience than the film disseminating their work, as is the case of the series *Boardwalk Empire* (HBO) by Martin Scorsese, and *Terra Nova* (Fox) and *Falling Skies* (FXUK), both by Steven Spielberg.

Bernardo Bertolucci's, the Italian director, in statement published in *Veja* magazine, Editora Abril, on 1/06/2013, said: "American movies that I like now are not Hollywood, but the television series as *Mad Men*, *Breaking Bad* and *The Americans*."

And in this scenario, the contents provided by the television series assist creatively in identity construction process of questioning and structuring of social and individual conflicts. In a series format can be treated in more depth specific issues, such as: contemporary female sexuality, *Sex and the City*;

Big C, on character with cancer; *Looking*, which debuted in January 2014, displayed by the American channel HBO, addressing the gay male world.

The Representation of Women in Television Series

Since the 1950s when the *I Love Lucy* series, was a huge success bringing TV screen social issues experienced by the woman of the time, female gender has been gradually gaining space in TV series, occupying the central leadership role not only in sitcoms and drama genre, as well as in adventure and criminal drama. With the advent of cable TV, whose business model allows the introduction of issues before censored in public TV, this universe has been expanding audience with over million viewers.

In 1998, the North American TV launched the series *Sex and the City* on HBO channel, based on the book by Candace Bushnell. They live in Manhattan, in New York City, an icon in terms of social behavior of the Western world, the series is to plot the lives of four single women aged 30-40 years, their daily lives and their conflicts.

Sex and the City was a huge success, with over 10 million viewers, strengthening present in the television fictional narrative to seek expose female behavior on issues in society.

Carrie, the protagonist works in a column of a newspaper reporting stories about interpersonal and sexual relationships. Three friends are the companions with whom will share your questions: Samantha Jones works as a public relation and cultivate relationships without compromise; Charlotte York works in an art gallery, is the romantic and sensitive is looking for a lasting relationship; and Miranda Hobbes, lawyer, rational, oscillates between the two situations.

In the first episode, already outlines the universe that the viewer will find: the first scenes, appears on a billboard by bus, Carrie's program announcement with the following sentence: "Carrie Bradshaw knows what good sex is (and is not ashamed to ask) ".

And in her voice in *off*, Carrie begins to tell about an English woman who arriving in Manhattan, she met a man who for a few weeks demonstrate to be completely in love with her and suddenly disappears. Carrie then says the following phrases:

“She had not realized that there was no love in Manhattan. Welcome to the time of “non-innocence”; there is no “luxury dolls” (...). Instead, the dolls work and have relationships that try to forget quickly. Self-preservation and make good business are more important. How did this happen? There are thousands of women in the same situation in this city. They travel, pay taxes, pay \$ 400 for sandals by Manolo Blahnik and are solitary. It's like the riddle of the Sphinx”.

The series had six seasons, made between the years 1998 to 2004 and generated feature film in 2007. The four women living situations of work, love relationships, portraying the anxieties and conflicts of contemporary women. Worldwide success, the series would enhance the effectiveness of television fiction as space for female public better understand their conflicts.

Throughout the history of the West, trying to understand the differences between the nature of feminine and masculine, the idea that "men only want sex" while "women only want love," takes another form in contemporary as a result of the changes since women's emancipation in the mid-1960s. Feminist movements of the 1960s and 1970s, who had intended to dismantle the phallic registry by society in the political, economic and behavioral framework managed to open the field to the fight for women's rights, for their sexual freedom and its entry into the field of work.

The Sex and the City series shows this woman with good economic situation, independent, free for sex, questioning all the time if this woman would be happy in that model. "Women in Manhattan are giving up on love and climbing power?" Asks Carrie character. Regardless of the given approach the end, what matters is the fact of using a television series to explore the issues of the contemporary female universe.

In criminal drama series, many have woman as detective. In the case of this article, we analyze the British series *The Fall*, produced by BBC with Netflix and *Homeland*, produced by the North American channel HBO.

In *The Fall*, Stella Gibson is a detective called by the Police of Ireland, to lead the investigation into the murder of young women. Blonde, with a slender body, the character is strong and secure woman working with a group formed basically by men. Intelligent, shows that she has a different way of analyzing the problem, the result of a different sensitivity of the male. She does not stifle your

sensuality, wearing high heels, skirt and silk shirt. It is shown comfortable with her loneliness, fulfilling their wishes with "casual sex". In a board of her workroom have pictures of Chinese women where she tells:

"They're Mosuo women. They're a small ethnic group, living in China on the border with Tibet. They're a matriarchal society. They practice what's called "Walking Marriage". The partners live in different households. "Sweet night" is what the Mosuo woman call secret visits when woman asks the man to spend the night and then leave in the morning".

Phrases spoken by the character transmits the concern on questioning the inequalities still exists in the XXI century between men and women.

For example, in dialogue with one delegate man, when she felt that he is surprise when she claims to have spent the night with a man just for sex, she says:

"That's what really bothers you. Is not it? One night stand. Man fucks woman, man Subject, verb, fuck, object woman. That is okay. Woman fucks man. Subject woman, object man. That is not comfortable for you, is it? "

And an important point about her investigation is the fact that the characteristic of the serial killer's crimes is: they are young women with careers, found naked and strangled, i.e. involving violent and sex with women.

Stella Gibson would be representing the liberated woman more interested in your professional life than build a family life. Cold, calculating, nevertheless, in the second season of the series, we will see her cry sometimes with situations involving the investigations, with the suffering of women.

In *Homeland* series will have the character Carrie, an official CIA operation. Her purpose is to find out if Sergeant Brody, who she believed to be dead for eight years ago in Iraq would have gone over to Al-Qaeda group and planned to return to his country in order to promote terrorist attacks.

Woman in her forties, independent, living alone in a good house, she doesn't have interest on having a relationship. A night out to have fun with a guy who asks him: "You're married?" "No". She said. "But you wear the ring." "Oh! Weeds out the guys looking for a relationship".

Her profile follows the line of independent woman, obsessed with her work. However, during investigations, as she engages with Sergeant Brody, she suddenly falls in love with him. In these two series where women play detectives the question that will emerge is whether women are, or are not, able to keep a standoffish attitude ("sweet night") likes a man or they are more fragile and susceptible than men?

In the case of Brazilian television series that address the feminine universe, there is a tendency to portray divorced women and their situation in face of new life. As an example, *Divan*, *Dilemmas of Irene*, *Three phases of Teresa*. In 2015, TV Globo, the largest open TV network in Brazil, produced *Double Identity*, policies series where the detective is an independent woman within the profile analyzed in *The Fall* and *Homeland*.

Final Considerations

Focusing on the fictional narrative television, recognizing its importance as a representation of the culture and customs of a certain society, the objective of this article was to analyze some series whose main character is a woman, checking the issues concerning the contemporary feminine universe.

We could also provide new examples, but the point here is to understand the importance to analyze television series as means to understand the messages that are being passed on the profile of the contemporary woman.

What we can see in the examples presented is that women are still seeking a balance between the rights gained - as their academic education, financial independence, sexuality - and some female characteristics, like the sensitivity, vulnerability, and the maternal sentiments, aware that the differences are complementary features to the construction of a society without prejudice, without discrimination and without violence against women.

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