

Gender in organisations and its representation in pop culture

Protected: Pop Culture Representation

Popular culture plays an important role in shaping the way people understand and interpret work, while increasingly becoming an area of academic research and critique. For a long time comedies such as *Scrubs* have satirically critiqued the practices and norms of workplaces, particularly the mostly unchallenged structures and hierarchies of power (Rhodes & Parker, 2008). More recently, with gender roles in organisations becoming a larger part of academic interest and social discourse, popular culture has also begun to more thoroughly deconstruct the gender imbalances present within work cultures and organisations (Bendl, 2008). *Scrubs* is no exception to this, attempting to deconstruct many aspects of gender imbalance within the American medical industry. However, in attempting to construct a realistic representation of a hospital working environment within the confines of its surreal comedic tendencies, it also reinforces many of the social standards it wishes to deconstruct.

In representing the standard practices and norms usually found in the hospital workplace, such as the majority of doctors being male and the majority of nurses being female, the show also reinforces these inequalities. Its representations of shifts in the imbalance are often individual females taking on masculine identities to push back against the masculine hegemony. While this is troublesome in itself, the use of humour and the parodying of these situations further undermines the message attempting to be sent (O'Sullivan & Sheridan, 1999). This can perhaps be interpreted as *Scrubs* being a product of its time in the early to mid-2000s, in which it attempts to show how individuals can fight against the system, rather than how the system itself should change (O'Sullivan & Sheridan, 1999).

Thus, the messages it sends to the audience are often reliant upon the audiences viewing pattern. The manner in which audiences view comedic television is complex and varied, with many viewers passively watching and waiting for the long established beats of the thirty minute sitcom, while others actively deconstruct the messages and hidden meanings within the jokes and fictional world the writers have created (Hearn, 1989). For *Scrubs*, this means audiences can interpret the show in two general ways. Firstly, a passive audience is more likely to interpret the show non-critically, that is, they see the world of *Scrubs* and its inequalities within the workplace as a genuine reflection of how the workplace is and should be. Secondly, an active audience is more likely to interpret the show in its intended state, as a satirical and surreal viewpoint on inequalities of the workplace that need to be changed. This shows both the strengths and weaknesses of comedies such as *Scrubs* in their ability to challenge organisational and societal constructs through the use of humour and the creation of fictional worlds designed to mirror the real one (Rhodes & Parker, 2008).