ABSTRACT

GENDER AND POWER IN THE MEDIA COVERAGE OF PROSTITUTION AND TRAFFICKING IN WOMEN

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Issues like prostitution/trafficking in women are easily subjected to sensationalist and unethical reporting considering the sensitive character of the issues as well as the high profile which crime stories as well as stories involving sexuality and women enjoy in (commercial) media. At the same time sensational reporting often fails to provide in-depth analyses of these issues and do no address underlying causes. As this particular issue involves transnational criminal networks combined with a gender dimension and tragic personal stories of the victims, the challenges are even greater when it comes to good media coverage. In prostitution and trafficking in women the issue of gender discrimination, female subordination and male domination, unequal gender and power relations is very essential, but at the same time so difficult to detect in journalistic reporting on these issues. This unequal gender and power relationship as basis for prostitution has a long and uninterrupted tradition in the (western) culture and is so obvious and common that it is no longer visible or questioned. In the media discourse on prostitution/trafficking the women are either "the silent victim" or "the happy hooker". On the other side the "customer", usually a man buying sex from a woman, is often the invisible person in the mediatext. The pimp or the trafficker is often not personalized but an abstract network or organization which also is invisible. According to Norman Fairclough journalists carry the dominant cultural images and myths in the every day language with them into their media constructions of these social relations, upholding and reinforcing the myths and prejudices, in this case about women in prostitution and the sex-buyer. The power of the media, by Fairclough called signifying power, to represent things in particular ways is a matter of how language is used as a form of social practise. Based on Faircloughs discourse analysis of media language I will discuss the representations of gender and power in some news texts about prostitution and trafficking. I will draw on Nordic research in this field as well as findings in other European media studies and identify dominant media discourses on prostitution and trafficking.