

Editorial

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Past studies of broadcasting histories sometimes excluded and rendered invisible the work of women, concerned as such histories often were with recounting the achievements of pioneering men or detailing institutional chronologies through themes of technology, bureaucracy, leadership and innovation (Abramson, 2003; Burns, 1986; Crisell, 2002; Herbert, 2004). Studies of individual broadcasting institutions largely followed suit, providing rich organisational histories that were consciously or unconsciously selective in their various foci (Briggs, 1995a, 1995b; Potter, 2022). Feminist media scholarship has adopted a different lens for the study of broadcasting histories by viewing institutions and organisations less as abstract structures and more as the setting for people and their activities. Organisations are understood as dynamic sites of human activity, in which women are crucial actors and participants (Bell, 2021; Hendy, 2022; Hilmes, 2013; Murphy, 2016a; Moseley et al., 2016). This issue, the third in *Critical Studies in Television's* special volume marking the centenary of the BBC, adopts this approach to examine the role of women at the BBC across its 100-year history.

In recent decades, feminist television scholarship, including studies of women and the BBC, has sought to map the macro, meso and micro level histories of women's labour, creativity, leadership and their experiences of television work. Various methodological tools have been used to document women's television histories. Archival research has been used to develop accounts of women's formal employment and wages (Murphy, 2016a), their activities within and movement across departments and their production work. Moseley and Wheatley (2008) have emphasised the importance of archival research in uncovering women's television histories and name the BBC Written Archives Centre (BBC WAC) as a particularly fruitful source of such histories. This issue on Women and the BBC is especially indebted to it. However, as Janet Thumim has argued, what

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institutional archives such as that of the BBC choose to preserve “is governed by the value structure of the period” (2002: 99), with women’s work often undervalued. Therefore, researchers have turned their attention to other sources of information about women’s role in British television history. These have included meso-level analyses of women’s role in organisations, such as that of Frances Galt (2020) and Melanie Bell (2021) who use trade union membership data to identify the roles, grades, salaries and career patterns of women working in British television, which has included women who worked at the BBC. Finally, micro-level analyses of individual women’s television work through methods such as interviews and oral histories have been especially useful in developing richer understandings of the contexts and experiences of women’s work at the BBC and have helped to map career patterns, acknowledge women’s creativity and identify issues regarding gender discrimination and structural exclusion as reported by women themselves (Baker, 2019; Jackson, 2016; Sandon, 2018). The working papers to be found in this issue variously build upon these established approaches to researching the working lives and contributions of female media workers.

Undoubtedly, the hardest to reach of women’s television histories at the BBC are those from television’s earliest years, given the lack of surviving television programmes and the lack of access to first-person histories of those working in 1930s–1940s television. The BBC WAC provides a valuable source of information on women’s employment and work at the BBC during these decades and this had allowed for a number of institutional and individual histories to be told (Arnold, 2021; Murphy, 2016, 2016b; Terkanian, 2019). Kate Murphy’s ground-breaking study of women’s work at the BBC during the 1920s and 1930s, while not exclusively focused on television, provides one of the most comprehensive studies of women’s work across a range of roles and departments at a time when the BBC had an ethos of gender inclusivity, albeit one that was selective and restricted to salaried women (2016a). In such an organisational context, salaried women were, at times, able to excel and, as has been shown elsewhere, women exploited opportunities afforded by the introduction of new technologies and departments like television (Arnold, 2021) as well as organisational change that resulted from British participation in WW2 and the need for more workers across the BBC (Terkanian, 2019). In this issue, Murphy develops her history of women working in the early years of the BBC television service, considering how individuals moved from radio to the nascent television department. She demonstrates how archival evidence requires careful interpretation to decode the euphemistic language associated with labour at the institution, arguing that women’s job titles especially could be deceptive in terms of their real-world importance and seniority. She speculates on how women’s careers in early television were affected by the hiatus imposed by the start of war in 1939, arguing that this moment decisively impeded the progress that women had made in the early years of the institution.

Women’s role in the BBC during these early decades was shaped by institutional and socio-political activities. What has, perhaps, been harder again to determine is women’s own understanding and sense-making of their role in the organisation during these decades, since institutional archives retain little by way of subjective experiences of employment and work. Researchers have worked to piece together more comprehensive

accounts of women's work or indeed women's own accounts of work in the early years of BBC television through production documentation (Terkanian and Chignell, 2020), publicity material (Geddes, 2020), press interviews and memoirs (Charlesworth, 2018) or, where possible, through research interviews (Baker, 2019). In doing this, scholars have mapped the wider place of women in early BBC television and provided individual biographies of women who contributed towards the development of early television. The working papers in this special issue attend to this effort of telling women's early television history. Kevin Geddes' work in this issue on the pioneering television cook Joan Robins, for example, uses a range of archival materials beyond the BBC WAC, including the British Newspaper Archive and the personal collection of Robins herself. Using these sources, he uncovers a story of an early television personality who, for complex reasons, proved to be a difficult 'fit' for the BBC in an experimental period in television history.

More attention has been paid to women in post-war BBC television, since the organisation assertively developed the television service from this point onwards and there were, therefore, more programmes and more staff working in television. Consequently, while women continued to work across organisations and media, a broader television-centred literature has developed that has included studies of the BBC as a gendered organisation as well as more focused profiles of women's work in particular departments or on specific programmes. Mary Irwin's (2011) work on Doreen Stephens' programmes for women and Rachel Moseley's (2008) work on Marguerite Patten's post-war cookery programmes both offer insight into the BBC's gendering of women's programmes as well as each woman's agency in producing meaningful programmes for a female audience. In addition, a body of literature on genres, programme series and formats has evidenced the contribution of women to the development of television, particularly in those often undervalued and overlooked category of women's programmes (Charlesworth, 2022; Irwin, 2015).

Two papers in this special issue pay close attention to the work of individual women in the production of BBC television in the mid-20th century. Hollie Price's paper examines feminist filmmaker Jill Craigie's work for the BBC, focusing on Craigie's attempts in the late 1940s and early 1950s to mark the achievements of the women's suffrage movement on BBC television. Craigie's vision for the project was a fusion of documentary and drama that foregrounded young women's voices. She had to contend with an institutional lack of confidence both in the subject matter and in her as a television producer, as opposed to an on screen personality, in which capacity she was regularly to appear throughout the 1950s and 1960s. Craigie's experiences as a documentarian struggling to work within an institutional structure suspicious of overtly progressive or political filmmaking would be repeated in the 1960s, as directors of such material found a formidable opponent in the assistant head of Talks and Features, Grace Wyndham Goldie. Mary Irwin's reappraisal of Wyndham Goldie's career at the BBC assesses her considerable achievements in the development of television Current Affairs, and her pivotal role in the creation of influential programmes such as arts strand *Monitor* (1956-65). Irwin also critiques Wyndham Goldie's practice as a manager at the BBC, especially her determined

exclusion of any voices that she deemed too radical to be ‘balanced’ and ‘neutral’, and her tendency to promote privileged male colleagues at the expense of women with whom she worked. Wyndham Goldie emerges from this appraisal a complex figure that in some senses exemplifies the BBC’s complicated relationship with its female workers, where a few exceptional examples both mask and can exacerbate systemic exclusions of women.

Indeed, despite the recognition of women’s active work in television production, a parallel narrative of exclusion and discrimination has emerged, whereby women were systematically undervalued and worked within a masculine culture that marginalised them. Both Madeleine MacMurrough-Kavanagh (1999) and Vicky Ball (2021) have detailed the limited opportunities for women writers on BBC prestige programme *Play for Today* (1970-84) which favoured male-centred narratives. As Ball notes (2021), further research needs to be undertaken to understand these production cultures and the exclusionary practices that women faced as well as women’s experience of working on productions. Tom May’s paper, an oral history of women working in various positions in BBC drama, develops this history. May interviewed women who have worked on *Play for Today* in a range of roles, offscreen, onscreen and above- and below-the-line. He uncovers working lives that were affected by implicit or explicit sexism, discrimination and unequal working conditions but whose work at the BBC was underpinned by an innate belief in the public service mission of the institution.

Studies of specific roles and jobs undertaken by women in BBC television have offered some indication of production cultures that were at once, open to women, yet could also devalue the work that women did. Sandon’s (2018) work on female engineers in the post war television service and Baker and Hall’s (2021) account of women’s experience of discrimination and exclusion when working as camera operators at the BBC in the 1970s and 1980s suggest ongoing biases against women’s technical work in BBC television departments. Both Sandon and Baker and Hall detail the strict conditions the BBC had set for women’s entry into technical or ‘masculine’ work. In interviews with women who took these roles, the women describe in detail how exclusion was put into practice by work policies and regulations as well as by co-workers and colleagues who questioned their abilities. Interview-based studies of women’s work at the BBC have also pointed to how women could experience both inclusion and exclusion within the same organisation or even department. As Heather Sutherland’s study of female producers in the BBC Light Entertainment Group has shown, women reported feeling pride in the BBC and fond of colleagues while also feeling that women had to work harder and were less respected than male counterparts (2013: 660). Such findings are echoed across the articles in this issue whereby we find women that are, at once skilled, capable and creative in their work in BBC television, but also face additional challenges in carrying out their work from the organisation and individuals because they are women. Kristyn Gorton and Mark Helsby develop some of these themes in their paper, which draws on interviews with women who have worked in the department in BBC North variously focused on Youth and Entertainment programming. Founded in the late 1980s by controversial broadcaster Janet Street-Porter, this department was a formative environment for a generation of female

television producers at the BBC and beyond. Gorton and Helsby explore how Street-Porter's management of Youth programming had a lasting impact on the culture of the department that was to influence the working style of these women. They also consider some of the specific challenges for women working in television at the BBC and beyond: the conflict between parental duties and working life when women become mothers; and the intersection between class and gender that can lead to discrimination, and ultimately can stymie careers. Indeed, the dynamic between gender and class as a crucial factor in television work underpins many of the discussions in these working papers, suggesting that this may be a particularly important arena for future research and debate.

This special issue extends the existing literature on women's work in BBC television. Like the feminist research on women and the BBC that has come before, these articles are careful to balance celebration of the achievements of women's work with recognition of the consequences of their gender on their careers and their ability to carry out work. Using a range of feminist methodologies that seek to identify gaps in our knowledge and understanding of women at the BBC and deploy feminist historiographic practices that help address these gaps, these articles cover a broad historical span of BBC television. This issue contributes to an ongoing discussion about the place of women in media institutions, and the BBC's ambivalent contribution to women's television work. Bringing these concerns, and these women, into the light, we hope that this special issue of *Critical Studies in Television* can go some way to making what was once invisible, visible.

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