

# EDITORIAL

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Women have historically played a significant role in shaping media output, both as producers or contributors to media production, and as members of an audience. Women have also produced their own alternative and feminist media, as part of specific campaigns or communities struggling for equality, citizenship and a political voice, as part of the wider women's movement. Women's contribution to – or use of mass media has in the last decade or so received a growing attention from the academic scholarship with studies emerging from a range of disciplines such as film, media and communication, history, media history and women's/feminist history (Badenoch, 2007; Bell, 2010; Bingham, 2004; Chambers et al., 2004; Delap and DiCenzo, 2008; Forster, 2010; Lacey, 1996; Mitchell, 2000; Ross and Byerly, 2004, 2006; Tusan, 2005). Furthermore, recent conferences dedicated, for instance to the historical role and contribution of women to film production, and feminist alternative media in the 1970s respectively, suggest that historical research on these subjects is gaining further momentum.<sup>1</sup> The outlook is positive; however, there is still much scope and need to advance and underline the study of women's or feminist media history.

Women are still often marginalized in general media histories, as broadcast historian Michele Hilmes has argued: 'it is history writing that has consigned women to the sidelines, not historical events themselves' (1997, 132). Adding to this, events in the contemporary media landscape suggests that women in media production still face discrimination and inequality,<sup>2</sup> and a recent report by the Global Media Monitoring Project (GMMP, 2010) shows that women's voices in news media are still fairly under-represented in delivery (news reporting) as well as in the representation (news content).<sup>3</sup> In the recent 10th anniversary of *Feminist Media Studies* it was acknowledged by the editors that although recognizable change has occurred, 'there has also been an entrenching of gender-based cultural and economic inequalities: a growing global digital divide; an explosion of media sexism' (Carter and McLaughlin, 2011, 2). Understanding women's relationship to mass media in the past consequently helps us to understand present developments, and future challenges. This new issue of *Westminster Papers in Communication and Culture (WPCC)* is therefore dedicated to the historical relationship between mass media and women in the hope of highlighting and uncovering developments and future challenges in the historical study of media for and by women.

One such challenge is the interdisciplinary nature of the work. As noted, the work on women's media history and feminist media history comes out of a range of disciplines. There have been attempts to bridge disciplinary boundaries, for example between communication and history (Zelizer, 2008), but studies on women and media are still very spread out, and it is difficult to obtain a complete overview, which can add to a lack of 'coherence' (see the Skoog and DiCenzo interview in this issue). Interdisciplinary collaboration and engagement should thus be further

encouraged. Being interdisciplinary also means that methodological factors will vary and shape the approach. The study of mass media has developed out of various fields, such as history, sociology and media studies, and has therefore raised various issues regarding how media history should be studied and written (O'Malley, 2002). The growth of women's history and its development as a field has been described as an 'evolution from feminism to women to gender; that is, from politics to specialized history to analysis' (Scott, 2001, 44). These historiographical and methodological debates consequently influence the study of women's and feminist media history. Writing about media and women therefore opens up further questions about approaches and frameworks used, raising challenges but also new opportunities.

The interdisciplinary nature of the work is also linked to another challenge: the perceived 'narrowness' of the field. Although scholarship has expanded, feminist media history or women's media histories appear to struggle to be integrated in both wider histories of the mass media, but also in contemporary discussions in media and communication studies. In fields such as women's history or feminist history, attention has been drawn to the mass media, but this has tended to be of a secondary nature. So why have an entire journal issue specifically on this 'narrow' subject? This might seem like a contradiction to what has just been said. I hope, however, that the articles (and interview) demonstrate the value of the uncovering or analysis of women's and feminist media history, and how this adds to our wider understanding of not just women's position in society historically, but also our knowledge of media history and contemporary issues in media and communication studies.

The aim of this issue is to offer pointers to the latest research and new directions in writing or thinking about women's and feminist media history, and also to throw further light on areas that have previously been neglected. Recovery work is still important and, as many of the articles highlight, the field is still 'patchy' in some areas, and there are gaps that need further exploration. Geographical location is another dilemma. In the call for papers the issue was specifically dedicated to include work that offers a more international perspective, and, although the contributors in the issue do cover a range of national contexts, it is clear that this perspective is a very (north) European and North American one. Consequently the issue failed in engaging and highlighting a more global, and particularly non-Western, perspective, which arguably should be a key concern for future scholarship.

Although the writing about women's/feminist media has tended to be (and still is) of cross-disciplinary interest (see the Skoog and DiCenzo interview in this issue) most (if not all) contributors in this issue are based in media or communications departments. In keeping with the aims of *WPCC*, contributors are from a range of backgrounds – some early career others more established. The articles are placed in chronological order and, although they span national contexts (Britain, Germany, Austria, US and Canada) and time, they all cover a range of issues and themes of

common ground such as historical recovery, employment, institutions, production, social movements and feminist/alternative media.

It has been suggested that feminist media history is now the fastest emerging version of media history (Curran, 2009) hence we start this issue with an interview with Maria DiCenzo, whose work covers late 19th- and early 20th-century women's print media. The aim of the interview was to locate feminist media history in contemporary scholarship and to find out what challenges and future directions are emerging. The interview further discusses her latest book *Feminist Media History: Suffrage, Periodicals and the Public Sphere* (2011), co-authored with Lucy Delap and Leila Ryan, which aims to 'offer a different lens on suffrage media and activism, to encourage a new look at something we think we know'. The discussion with DiCenzo therefore highlights complex methodological and disciplinary debates shaping feminist media history, and how existing material now allows further analysis and critical examination. This, as she argues, is of interest to a wider readership and not just 'gender' or 'feminist' historians.

Christy Mesaros-Winckles recovers a fascinating (and neglected) history of early Free Methodist women and their use of denominational print culture in the 19th-century US, in their struggle for the ordination of women. The article demonstrates how these women, together with the denomination's founder, began waging a campaign in the weekly magazine *The Free Methodist*, and further shows how women were active in both publication and ministry, in the institutional battle over gender roles within the Free Methodist Church. Mesaros-Winckles thus argues that this material not only sheds light on women in American evangelical history but that the 'woman issue' was debated in American culture in a range of contexts as part of the wider social movement.

An example of how feminist media and the women's movement can help us understand the development of social movements and their transnational communication is provided by Susanne Kinnebrock. Her article analyses the interplay of social movements and the public sphere by exploring the organization and development of the early German suffrage movement and its particular relation to the British suffragettes (but also the wider international suffrage movement). The theoretical framework enables Kinnebrock to examine the transnational communication process in different stages, and she argues that the German suffrage movement gained from an international 'transfer of ideas' which formed new group identities in its initial stage, but, as Kinnebrock remarks, the analysis also suggests that the various publics (in this context the *national* public sphere), still played a crucial part in the later stages, in which, as she argues, national 'patterns of selection and interpretation' became crucial.

The next three articles foreground women's employment and women as media practitioners in media institutions such as press and broadcasting. Josef Seethaler

and Christian Oggolder uncover the participation of women in Austrian journalism in the interwar period (ca 1920–34). Drawing on concepts of power theory and empirical evidence the article demonstrates how socio-political changes and changes in media structure had an impact on the increase and promotion of women journalists in the First Austrian Republic. The authors conclude that the editorial line of the newspapers – left-wing or left-liberal – combined with the market position of a newspaper, did have positive effects in shifting the share of journalistic power to women.

The history of the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) has been documented in a range of publications (see Briggs, 1961–95; Crisell, 2002; Curran and Seaton, 2010; Scannell and Cardiff, 1991). The role and employment of women, however, and women's programmes within this institution is still fairly under researched. This is surprising considering the Corporation's place in British broadcasting history and society, and given the fact that, very early on, it had a 'progressive' attitude towards the employment of women. Consequently this issue includes two articles which focus on the BBC. Mary Irwin rightly brings to light a neglected key figure in the development for television programmes for women in the 1950s and early 1960s, namely Doreen Stephens. Using archival material, Irwin provides a detailed discussion of the production and institutional context of women's television programmes. It is evident that Stephens was innovative and clearly her interest in politics and social issues very much shaped the output, thus the material adds to a growing body of revisionist literature challenging the traditional stereotype of the 1950s woman. The article argues that to establish a critical analysis of contemporary women's television programmes, attention needs to be drawn to 'the old' and 'the new', as she argues that key formats and approaches to women's programmes developed in the 1980s and 1990s already existed in some form in this early period.

Suzanne Franks critically examines the BBC's attitude towards women's employment in the 1970s. The article demonstrates that, by this time, when legislation in Britain was implemented to improve gender equality in the workplace, it was evident that that BBC was lagging far behind; prejudice against women and resistance from management to promoting and encouraging female colleagues were present. Drawing on internal documents and surveys, as well as interviews with women who were employed by the BBC during the 1970s and early 1980s, Franks provide a detailed insight into the dynamics of (and struggles for) gender equality within a broadcasting institution. She argues that although cultural changes were starting to appear in the 1960s, it took many years for these to 'translate' into the workplace – in the case of the BBC, this did not really occur until the 1980s. Along with recent high-profile cases about women's discrimination in employment in British media (including the BBC), the article suggests that this long struggle is still very much a relevant one.

The final paper, by Barbara M. Freeman, brings us to the 1990s and Canada. This piece of feminist media history is about women's alternative media among the lesbian community in Victoria (British Columbia). Freeman charts the history and development of *LesbiaNews* (1988–98) – a local periodical that provided news and viewpoints on a range of women's issues (political, economic and sexual) from a female same-sex perspective. Freeman explores the editorial direction of the publication by analysing editorials, contributors' articles and readers' letters; she also uses oral history interviews with previous editors. The article argues that the publication worked as a good example of a 'counter-public sphere' but that this was far from coherent; the editorial agenda shifted over the years reflecting differences in feminist ideas and sexual identity politics. Different meanings of lesbian feminist identity, culture and politics were emerging, reflecting the fragmented and diverse community and its varied needs and demands.

The issue's book review, by Christoph Hilgert, a media history scholar, provides a rich analysis of *Juke Box Britain: Americanisation and Youth Culture, 1945–60* (2009), by Adrian Horn, which explores the juke box and teenage culture in Britain in the post-war period. As Hilgert suggests, the book is particularly useful for its prolific discussion of British youth culture, and especially teenage girls, and so a valuable contribution to the field.

A final word: the contributions are all detailed, drawing on archival and primary source material, some combined with theoretical concepts and frameworks – together they offer a rich and stimulating read, which shows the expansion and development of this field(s), which I hope will invigorate more debate and future analysis.