

Institution: The University of Leeds		
Unit of Assessment: 34		
Title of case study: Voices for Change: Transforming Cultural Understandings of Women in Media through Intergenerational Dialogue		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2014-2019		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s): Dr Melanie Bell	Role(s) (e.g. job title): Associate Professor in Film	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI: January 2016-Present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2016-2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? Y/N		
<p>1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)</p> <p>The research project that underpins this case study used oral history interviews with a generation of retired media practitioners to construct new histories of women's contributions to Britain's media industries. It also stimulated intergenerational debate between retired and practising media professionals that allowed current industry workers to engage more directly with gendered discrimination in the workplace. The impact of these histories, and subsequent debate, was four-fold: 1. it helped support the media trade union BECTU to create a Mentor Scheme for women; 2. it changed the attitudes of current women practitioners to their professional identities; 3. it changed film programming strategies in the cultural heritage sector of Yorkshire; 4. it extended public awareness of gender roles in media industries through Wikithons.</p>		
<p>2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)</p> <p>The research was conducted as part of a 4-year (2014-2018) project funded by the AHRC (£586,557) for which Melanie Bell (at Leeds since 2016; previously Newcastle University) was PI. The project brought together oral histories of women in media and archival study of labour records in a way that had not previously been attempted in histories of film industries, British or otherwise. The research materials revealed the complexity of women's labour at particular historical junctures and in different production contexts. Women emerged as leading figures in the field of foley sound (adding everyday sound effects in post-production) (1) and women editors in factual production were shown to have made significant interventions in documentary film production (2). The research community has recognised the innovation of this methodology and the importance of the research. For example, 'Learning to Listen: Histories of Women's Soundwork in the British Film Industry'(1) won the Best Journal Article Award (2019) at the British Association of Film, Television and Screen Studies, where reviewers described it as 'an outstanding piece of historiographical filmic research [... which is] very timely in its feminist reworking of herstory'.</p> <p>Significantly, this project emerged through Bell's collaboration with industry professionals at the media trade union BECTU, whose representatives later became members of the project's advisory board. Working both with BECTU's historical records and current membership cohort, Bell fostered intergenerational dialogue between women and shared strategies for managing workplace cultures. Using a diverse range of non-traditional evidence, including oral histories and trade union records, the project excavated the contribution made by women to British film and television production, across a range of production roles (including make-up artist, editor, animator, costume designer and production assistant) in the years after the coming of sound (1930) and before the demise of the unions through broadcasting legislation (1990).</p>		

Bell co-ordinated the recording of a number of 'life story' oral history interviews with women who had retired from media practice. Life story interviewing is a powerful method, providing space for women to describe their work histories in their own terms, and the testimony generated served to evaluate and critique the very systems that allowed a male-focused version of media history to prevail. The testimony was shared with women currently working in media production through a one-day conference co-organised with the project's partners BECTU in 2015. Bell and Sue Bradley (project RA) developed the 'Voices for Change' methodology, which uses a listening portfolio consisting of a suite of carefully-selected, themed interview extracts which were used to stimulate intergenerational reflection between women's historic experiences in media industries and the issues impacting women's current experience of media work.

Working again with BECTU, Bell also oversaw the digitisation of a complete collection of trade union labour records for the 1930-90 period (67,000 records), and the creation of a searchable database of these records, oral history recordings and contextual essays (available through a digital repository hosted by BUFVC/Learning on Screen). Trade union records provided hitherto unseen access to historical women (and men's) work in film and television production (and allied industries including radio broadcast and music recording).

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

1. Bell, M J (2017) 'Learning to Listen: Histories of Women's Soundwork in the British Film Industry', *Screen*, vol. 58, issue 4, 2-17 (pp. 437-457)
2. Bell, M J (2018) 'Rebuilding Britain: Women, Work and Non-Fiction Film', *Feminist Media Histories*, v. 4, no. 4 (pp.33-56)

Grants

'Women's work and working women: A longitudinal study of women working in the British film and television industries', Arts & Humanities Research Council AHRC, 2014-2018 (FEC £586,557), Melanie Bell (PI), Vicky Ball (CI, De Montfort University since 2015), Sue Bradley (RA, Newcastle University, 2014-2016).

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

Bell's research principally benefited three groups of people: women currently working in and on behalf of media industries, film curators, and audiences for, and users of, media produced by women. It achieved impact in four areas:

(1) The research led to a successful scheme for the mentoring of women media workers

BECTU's Equality Committee used the discussion and feedback generated by Bell's work at its 2015 Women's Conference and the 'Voices for Change' methodology, alongside pre-existing data from a membership survey, to develop a pilot mentoring scheme for women in the media industries (A). BECTU's Training Officer noted that Bell's research 'was instrumental in pushing the mentoring scheme forward' and that the scheme had been 'a great success'. The pilot ran from October 2017 to March 2018, trained 10 mentors and supported 15 women in industry, with particular emphasis on new entrants and career changers/returners. Participants in the BECTU Women's Conference (2015), where Bell originally collaborated with media practitioners using the 'Voices for Change' methodology, were followed up after six months (2016). This questionnaire elicited nine responses, all of whom reported continuing changes in attitude, behaviour and/or working practices. Women described themselves as 'more alive to the issues', 'less of an onlooker' and more likely to 'step up' and challenge inequality at work (B).

(2) The research helped change women media workers' attitudes to their professional identities

The 'Voices for Change' method was presented, by invitation, to present-day media practitioners attending a one-day conference at Greenwich University, London (2017). Entitled 'Trailblazing Women', the event's remit was to share experience of gender discrimination and stimulate dialogue between different generations of women media practitioners. Feedback questionnaires were distributed amongst sixty delegates. Responses showed a dramatic increase in delegates'

understanding of women's issues in the workplace and intergenerational connectivity. Women reported having little prior knowledge about the contribution made by generations of women who had gone before them ('I had no idea there were women engineers at the BBC in the 1950s'), and described themselves as currently marginalised in the media industries through culture, status and language (C). Change was especially significant amongst young women in the 20-25 age group, who were just beginning to navigate gender discrimination in the media industries workplace and particularly welcomed hearing the testimony of earlier generations of women. Young women described how they had 'experienced the exact same problems' as their predecessors, and went on to reflect how this intergenerational dialogue effected attitudinal change: '[h]earing about women fighting for titles of "technician" or "artist" or "designer" inspired me to use terms that clearly indicate I am a professional and I owe it to those women to own it' (C). Respondents also reported being deeply touched by a sense of intergenerational connection which, in turn, fostered a new sense of personal investment in the media industries and its histories. One woman commented that she felt 'very moved today by the sense of female solidarity in the media industries', a statement which illustrates the individual and personal significance that the experience had on her professional identity and sense of belonging within her industry (C).

(3) The research informed cultural practice by changing film programming strategies to recognise women's film work, and enhanced audience understanding of such work

A presentation by Bell at an AudioVisual Heritage event in 2018 brought the research to an audience of cultural heritage institutions in the Yorkshire area (libraries, museums, galleries and cultural exhibitors). This inspired professionals working in the regional film community (D) who subsequently drew on the research to support their development of new cultural events for a cinema-going public interested in women's film history. These created new approaches to programming strands which were able to highlight overlooked contributions of female filmmakers to the UK's screen heritage collections. Furthermore, audiences at one event led by Bell (Halifax), noted that their understanding of the role of women in media production had increased as a result of Bell's research – some 'hadn't thought about it before' – and that 'I feel there are still problems. But awareness like this helps understand more' (E).

The demonstrable shift in audience understanding as a result of Bell's research precipitated wider programming changes at the Leeds International Film Festival (LIFF) (3-16 November 2019), which scheduled a strand of films edited by women (entitled 'Mother Cutter') as a result of Bell's research on Women and Film. The strand included films edited by women which Bell's research had recovered from a marginal position in film history, and shifted focus from a broad retrospective focus on cinematic history to instead focus 'on women's roles in the industry as well as the aesthetic decisions of individual editors'. A film screening and talk by Bell on the work of editor Thelma Connell at the film festival received 'relatively high' audience ratings 'with some individual responses on social media singling out the event as their favourite' (F).

(4) The research enhanced public awareness of gender roles in media industries

The online database created jointly by Bell and BUFVC/Learning on Screen granted new access to trade union records, oral history recordings and contextual essays about the lives of men and women in media. Since its launch in early November 2020, and 31st December, the online database has seen 1,207 unique visitors with each visitor spending just over 51 minutes on the site on average (G). A Wikipedia edit-a-thon, which took place on October 11, 2019, likewise brought new attention to women's roles in TV and film. Bringing together delegates from the academic and cultural heritage communities, the event was designed to build on the success that online campaigners such as 'Women in Red' had achieved in strengthening the visibility of women of historical and cultural importance on Wikipedia. Using research generated by the 'Women's work' project, Bell collaborated with the University of Leeds' Open Research team and the Programme Coordinator at Wikimedia UK to radically revise the entries of five women which the research had highlighted as neglected (Alma Reville, Gordon Conway, Sarah Erulkar, Jill Craigie and Shirley Russell). In the year following the Wikipedia edit-a-thon, visits to the Jill

Craigie page have increased by nearly 50 per cent, from 18,316 in October 2018 to 27,351 up to October 2019 (H). Furthermore, these data show that not only are more visitors accessing the page, but there is an increased amount of editorial activity on the page too, showing how intergenerational dialogue, the cornerstone of the research project, is being replicated digitally, further extending the reach of Bell's research and highlighting the impact that such intergenerational dialogues can effect.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

- A** Training Officer, BECTU. Testimonial letter/emails, May-November 2019.
- B** BECTU members follow-on, six-month questionnaire.
- C** Trailblazing Women attendee questionnaires.
- D** Cultural Engagement Officer, Hyde Park Cinema and freelance film programmer/event organiser (Scalarama; Left Bank Leeds). Testimonial letter 3 November 2019.
- E** Questionnaire responses from Women's Histories event, Halifax.
- F** Testimonial Letter from Programme Manager, Leeds International Film Festival, 28 May 2020.
- G** Website figures provided by BECTU/Learning on Screen.
- H** Wikipedia data snapshot.