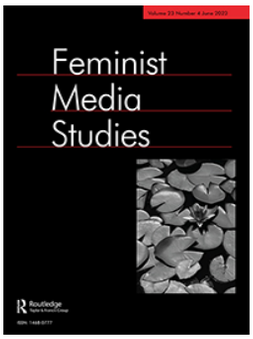

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The Hidden Work of Women: Commissioning and Development in British Television Drama

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ABSTRACT

The British horror television series *Bedlam* (2011–2012) was made by RED Productions and created and written by a trio of male screenwriters, David Allison, Neil Jones, and Chris Parker, with RED's Richard Fee as Script Editor. However, this team was supported through the development process, from initial idea to final broadcast, almost exclusively, by women. Drawing on original interviews with practitioners, this article explores the creative contributions of the women working in commissioning and development roles on *Bedlam*, including Anne Mensah (Vice President of Content UK, Netflix), Caroline Hollick (Head of Drama, Channel 4), Nicola Shindler (Chief Executive, Quay Street Productions) and Claudia Rosencrantz (former Controller of Entertainment, ITV). This research illuminates the work of women who carry out a hidden labour of commissioning and development almost never recognised beyond the television industry itself.

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Television commissioning; script development; production studies; screenwriting studies; horror television; gender

Introduction

In this article, I explore the creation of *Bedlam* (2011–2013), a horror television series made by RED productions for the British satellite channel, Living. In 2018, the Writers' Guild of Great Britain revealed that "the percentage of television episodes written predominantly by women" is only 28%' (Alexis Kreager with Stephen Follows 2018, 9), and Directors UK disclosed that the number of UK television episodes directed by women had fallen to just 24% (Directors UK 2018, 2–4). This demarcation of men in the traditional "creative" roles is confirmed by *Bedlam*'s production. In series one, men hold all the writing, directing, cinematography, music, editing, and production design positions. Nonetheless, women now account for around 45% of the workforce of television production in the UK, so where are the women working?

Since the late 1990s, the number of women working at senior roles in British broadcasting has significantly increased, which resulted in women having "direct control of a significant percentage of public service broadcaster's commissioning" (Ruth McElroy 2016, 39). As RED founder, and former CEO, Nicola Shindler explains, "there are so many more women in senior … commissioning, in decision roles, producing roles" [as compared to those working production] and that "with a lot of the development process and

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commissioning process, it is possible to have a normal life" (quoted in McElroy 2016, 39–42). In *Bedlam*'s case, season one was led at the production company by two women executives (Shindler, and script executive Caroline Hollick), and, at the satellite channel by three women executives (Claudia Rosencrantz, Amy Barham and Jenny Reeks). This is typical of longstanding industry working practices that reinforce a gendered distinction between working on set and working in the office; a distinction that reinforces a traditional patriarchal understanding of creativity as something that the men do (in the male–dominated on–set spaces of production), while the women "toil" in the office, or, increasingly, remotely, undertaking the emotional, legal, and administrative labour required to set up and maintain creative projects.

However, as this article will make clear, commissioning, and development roles are not simply support roles. They are, in fact, a particularly rich area of analysis for feminist media studies. Commissioning is defined here as the activities of a person or a team "with decision–making powers around commissioning [original] content", where "power is exercised through relative creative autonomy and budgetary control" (Catriona Noonan 2018, 2). Channel commissioners and development executives wield a huge amount of power over screen storytelling. However, case studies of commissioning roles are rare in television studies (Florian Krauβ 2020; Laura Mayne 2012) and appear only occasionally in production studies (Marilyn Tofler, Craig Batty and Stayci Taylor 2019; Hanne Bruun 2021; Anna Zoellner 2022). By examining the contributions of women to the commissioning and development of *Bedlam*, this research offers an alternative way of thinking through women's work and television. Since the 2000s, most academic work on gender and television has tended to "rely heavily on textual analysis and theorisation", and there have been "few attempts to understand the ways in which female creatives, defined here as producers, writers and directors, influence the depiction of female characters and their issues and concerns on the small screen" (Julia Hallam 2013, 256–7). In more recent years, there has been a substantial increase in the explorations of creative practitioners in European film and television industries (Kristyn Gorton and Joanne Garde–Hansen 2019), yet studies of women practitioners remain a relatively small percentage of this research (Mary Harrod and Katarzyna Paszkiewicz 2018; Natalie Wreyford 2018).

This article asks, how much input do the women commissioners of *Bedlam* have in shaping its content? What form does this input take, and at what stage in the development and production process do the commissioners get involved? What role did genre play in commissioning the series? How do commissioners perceive the audience of their channel, and how is this perception translated into their expectations for the structure of their original content? To what extent are production company and channel executives involved in the writing and rewriting of the scripts?

In answering these questions, this research reveals just how much the television text is shaped by the senior women working on the programme. It also sheds new light on how these practitioners operate in relation to each other within and across different institutions. Ruth McElroy and Beth Johnson have both undertaken original interviews with Shindler to study her working practices. McElroy states that "as scholars we need better to understand *what television means for the women who make it* as well as for those who watch it" (2016, 34, emphasis original), while Johnson reflects upon the importance of acknowledging practitioners in our research, that "the voice" of Shindler is "integral" to her article (Beth Johnson 2019, 329). Johnson and McElroy's research signals the direction

of the journey we undertake here, but I wish to situate Shindler's experience as one voice within a wide range of women occupying executive roles. This interest in individuals and relational intra-institutional perspectives is informed by Eva Novrup Redvall's work on the "beliefs and understandings" that inform the judgements of the practitioners and gate-keepers who guide "decisions around the script" (Eva Novrup Redvall 2013, 7), and Annette Hills' work on the "affective qualities" of commissioning and development: that is, "the attention paid to both individual and social relations, so that these ways of addressing subjective experiences allow us to consider the individual–personal and the collective social affective practices within popular culture" (Annette Hill 2019, 9).

Methodology

The data for the research is generated by qualitative unstructured interviews, which took place between March 2018 and December 2019. The interviewees included the screen-writers/creators of *Bedlam*, the development and production team at RED and the commissioning team for Living. The interviews took place face to face, via Skype, or on the telephone, dependent on practitioner location. Each person was allocated a single, one-to-one unstructured interview, which lasted between forty–five minutes and two hours. The data gathered was then situated as "personal narrative evidence," that is, "retrospective first-person accounts of individual lives," motivated by a desire to "examine varieties of selfhood and agency" in practice, "as constructed in people's articulated self–understandings" (Mary Jo Maynes, Jennifer L. Pierce and Barbara Laslett 2008, 1). In the social sciences, personal narratives are traditionally conceived of as "a retrospective first-person account of the evolution of an individual over time and in social context" (ibid, 4). But here I limit the temporality to explore one moment in these people's lives when they made an original drama series together; the plurality of the accounts creating moments of crossover and moments of discrepancy to build a story of *Bedlam*'s commissioning and development. The ethics of this research was also carefully considered, given that "an interview by its very nature is based on a power relationship and where there is power, there lies a potential for the infraction of human rights" (Irit Mero–Jaffe 2018, 241). I sent the interview transcripts to the practitioners and allowed them to redact or amend any sections they felt were misunderstood in the transcription process. However, once the interviewee was satisfied that the text was an accurate reflection of their experience, I did not share any further work. Sharing drafts "can produce unanticipated results because participants may find it to be overly academic," or participants may "disagree with important parts of the draft, especially parts that might have been unrelated to their own contributions" (Robert K Yin 2016, 291).

Commissioning Practices

In the early 2000s, American drama dominated British screens (Ruth McElroy and Catriona Noonan 2019, 26), and by the mid 2000s, large UK broadcasters such as ITV significantly increasing their buying at the annual Los Angeles pilot showcase. During this period, Claudia Rosencrantz took on the role of Director of Television for Virgin Media, managing Virgin's portfolio of digital entertainment channels, including Living TV, Bravo and Virgin 1. These channels ran, in the words of Amy Barham, Virgin's Head of Acquisitions, on "big–

ticket" US, Canadian, and Australian acquisitions (Amy Barham 2018). At the Los Angeles showcase, Barham and her team were "trying to find [a big drama series] before anybody else in the UK and license them before anyone else, for as low a price as we could." However, with the entry of ITV and other big channels into pilot season, the market was undergoing radical change. Barham and Rosencrantz discovered that, while they were still able to secure US imports, retention of those imports proved to be increasingly difficult. Shows were renewed every three years, and, as Barham explains, other channels such as ITV, would come in "with a bigger offer on renewing and you've lost one of your key shows." She reveals "Claudia said, 'this is insane, why are not making our own drama. Then we would own it. And then it would never be able to go anywhere else'".

Due to the high cost of commissioning, developing and producing original drama, Rosencrantz's decision was a major outlier for commercial British television in the 2000s. Her vision demonstrates an early recognition of original television drama as a "premium" product for a subscription channel, a premium that "enhances the value proposition of subscription services" because "distinctive content helps secure viewers' willingness to subscribe" (McElroy and Noonan 2019, 29). Rosencrantz confirms this, adding that making television drama "transforms a channel: it is a massive piece of branding" (Claudia Rosencrantz 2018).

This decision-making also emerged from gendered contexts. Rosencrantz's decision to create original drama came at the same time as her decision to re–brand Living. She wanted to shift Living's focus from its schedule of "weight–loss programmes, soft features, daytime content that people go 'oh, women like that'". She was not amused by these presumptions, "I don't think women do like that in the evening. I think they like incredibly intelligent programmes because, guess what, women are incredibly intelligent. The idea that women liked all this nonsense was rubbish". Rosencrantz's plan was to retain Living's woman–focussed audience but to make it "*the* destination channel for women in pay TV". She wanted to make Living "very valuable' to its audience, so that "in a household where there was a discussion about how money was spent, there would be something compelling for women".

Horror, science fiction and fantasy series were particularly attractive genres for UK broadcasters during this period. This was due to the popularity of *The X Files* (1993–2018), *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997–2003) and *Angel* (1999–2004) (Janet McCabe 2000, 144). The American acquisitions had aesthetic and narrative appeal for British audiences, appearing "much faster, glossier, and more exciting than their British counterparts" (Lez Cooke 2003, 177). These acquisitions also possessed financial attraction for UK broadcasters, as they "attracted a fair size audience while costing far less than commissioning domestic productions" (Paul Rixon 2007, 98). The American paranormal series *Supernatural* (2005–2020) and *Ghost Whisperer* (2005–2010) were two of Living's most popular shows and represented what Rosencrantz and Barham was looking for in an original commission, in Barham's words, "sexy and paranormal for a 16 to 34" audience. This demonstrates the extent to which the executives were driven by the industrial contexts of the period of production. The American television drama that dominated British satellite and terrestrial channels in the 1990s and 2000s had a significant impact on the channel's decision to make their first original British television drama.

Rosencrantz put Barham in charge of the project and then hired Jenny Reeks, former Head of Drama at ITV, as an Executive Producer. Reeks was keen because "this was the first time I had the opportunity to work for a young, Channel 4 type audience"(Jenny Reeks 2018). Reeks reached out to her extensive network of contacts in UK independent television and over 60 scripts and outlines were submitted for her consideration. RED submitted several projects, including the pilot script for *Bedlam*. Reeks whittled the 60 submissions down to nine and wrote long reports on "seven or eight," including *Bedlam*, for which she noted "with a good look and a sophisticated approach [*Bedlam* could be] a winning show. Needs snazzy central casting for Jed and Kate. I can't see it being as scary as *The Ring*, although it could do with more deaths". Reeks laughs, "I was obviously anxious to escape the shackles of ITV. It's quite . . . *more deaths*, more shocking deaths." Reeks placed *Bedlam* at the top of her shortlist and sent her reports to Barham and Rosencrantz. Barham read the *Bedlam* pilot and emailed Rosencrantz, stating "we've found it, it's brilliant, it's exactly what we wanted." Rosencrantz concurred, "this is absolutely perfect for Living."

There are many reasons why *Bedlam* was such a strong fit for the channel. First, Living's existing American television acquisitions guided their decision-making in several ways. Living served its audience's demand for horror television with *Charmed* (1998–2006), *Ghost Whisperer* and *Supernatural* but *Bedlam* presented an opportunity to create home–grown content. Rosencrantz confirms, horror was a "very good" genre for the "first ever scripted series on Living". In addition, the pacey and sexy style of the story of the week script "felt American" to quote Barham: it was "young people, it was sexy, there was sex in the first episode, and edgy sex as well not just boring sex", with "a really good female character".

In addition, commissioning a drama that "felt American" also meant a show with the potential "longevity" of American supernatural television in the 2000s. As Barham explains, Living wanted a "show could run for multiple seasons, in the vein of *Supernatural*, in the way that you have your core cast but they keep developing and different storylines keep coming up." The *Bedlam* pilot was built upon a self-contained story of the week, populated by "returning regular characters," thus appealing to both "a loyal, watch–every–week audience and a floating audience, who only watches sometimes" (Anne Dunn 2012, 132).

The story of the week was generated by a franchise, that is, "the central element of a genre or concept—frequently a vocation or avocation (i.e., a kind of job or hobby)—that generates a number of stories; a kind of story engine" (Bob Levy 2019, 2). Police, medical, legal, and private investigator series are the "big four" franchises with a case–of–the–week format, which creates a "story–generating problematic" (Trisha Dunleavy 2018, 99). The franchise provides cases, which creates individual stories, which can then be built into episodes. The goal of the franchise is to develop a "series that generate many . . . even hundreds of episodes" (Levy 2019, 74).

Bedlam was cannily created with a "monster of the week" franchise. The "A" storyline, that is, the primary storyline accorded the most screen time, was a ghost of the week haunting. In each episode of series one, a new occupant moved into a flat in Bedlam Heights. The new owner's arrival disturbs malcontented spirits of people who died in the building during its' former tenure as a psychiatric hospital. Once the new occupant—that is, the guest star of the week—moves in, the spirits make their displeasure known. Psychic

protagonist Jed Harper (Theo James), who works at Bedlam Heights, discovers that a haunting is taking place, and then, across the episode, researches and resolves the haunting. The episodic model is then supported by a serialised mix of core cast character and plot development across the B and C storylines. Barham loved the premise that converting the hospital had "woken up these spirits" as it would generate limitless monsters of the week; she "could just see infinite episodes".

In addition, the franchise model was paired with a precinct setting. Here, precinct refers to an important facet of long–running drama, in which the series' setting (e.g. hospital, police station, law firm) shares "the capacity to generate a potentially unlimited flow of episode stories" (Dunleavy 2018, 3). Every episode took place at Bedlam Heights, with little other location shooting. The majority of the scenes took place indoors, with the drama moving between the residential communal spaces, resident's flats, the staff flats, and the unfinished building work. Barham confirms, "we did need it to have a precinct. To enable us to build sets and to have one specific location that the majority of the action took place in" because "it would enable us to put the majority of our money on the screen, to really make that budget work." She laughs, "as soon as I see it's mostly taking place in this building, that's the icing on the cake".

The second important factor for commissioning was that *Bedlam* was a polished pilot script. *Bedlam* had been honed during years of prior development at the BBC, where it was originally developed for the BBC Three channel launch, before being rejected. If you pitch a script outline to broadcasters, Hollick explains, you must "twist their arm to try and find enough money to pay for the script" (Caroline Hollick 2018). And, if that broadcaster has worked primarily in "acquisitions or factual entertainment" the tariffs (that is, the price the broadcaster pays to screen a programme) "are much lower." It can be shocking to broadcasters "how much money you have to pay for a pilot script. You are talking thousands of pounds." Rosencrantz confirms: "the script existed. I was very happy about that. It was a shortcut for us to turn it into a quality drama".

The initial stages of commissioning raise interesting points about gender and power. The *Bedlam* story so far reveals the limits of the male writers' powers: writers can be proactive, taking the meetings, creating the pitches, deepening, and refining working relationships to secure their own networks of support and development, and, not least, writing scripts. But, ultimately, in order for the male writer–creators to get *Bedlam* on screen, a whole team of women push the project forward. And specifically, it is women working at an executive level. Rosencrantz's prior success as Controller of Entertainment at ITV enabled her to pitch for and secure the funding from Virgin for an original television drama. The decision to create original drama is still a high stakes activity today, more than a decade after the discussions at Living took place. This is born out in Barham's account of the working culture of Living at the time. She states that the rest of the team at Virgin had "come up" in cable and satellite, and had an "ooh but can we? ooh but" mentality. But Rosencrantz "just came in and was 'of course we can. We are not the underdogs. We are Living. Everyone should be wanting to work with us. Why would they not?'" The same principle applies to Reeks, as former Head of Drama for ITV; she has a proven track–record in working with independent production companies to seek, commission and then nurture long–running, and much–loved television drama for ITV, the largest commercial

channel in the UK. The depth and breadth of experience that Rosencrantz and Reeks brought to the project then created a culture of confidence that enabled high-risk, first of its kind, commissioning practices.

This leads to the third, and arguably most important rationale for commissioning: the cultural cachet of working with RED, and specifically, Shindler, RED's founder. Shindler has won eleven BAFTAs for British television drama and was awarded an OBE for services to broadcasting. As Anne Mensah, who originally commissioned *Bedlam* at the BBC, explains, "Nicola is one of the pre–eminent producers in the whole country," a rare person who can "run an entire company … deliver with lots of quality in high–end, factual drama right through to relationship shows to a number of different channels and outlets" including Netflix, Sky, BBC and ITV (Anne Mensah 2018). Shindler's attachment to *Bedlam* was a significant step forward in the likelihood of commission. Barham admits that a lot of *Bedlam*'s appeal was Shindler and her company, "because I knew who Nicola [Shindler] was and what she had achieved"; that RED "were the *créme-de-la-créme* of the people you could work with". In addition, RED had established good working relations with Reeks from prior ITV collaborations. Rosencrantz explains that "RED and Nicola had made a lot of television for Jenny [Reeks] at ITV and she absolutely trusted their ability to deliver". Working with RED (and thus Shindler) offered security and significant cultural capital for Living, making *Bedlam* a particularly prestigious first original drama.

Craig Batty and Dallas J. Baker argue that script development is often guided by "the principle of improvement." This raises questions around quality, and Batty and Baker ask, is quality "speaking to the *content* of development (what makes a good drama)," or "the *context* in which is takes place (what is the budget; whose vision is it; under what set of rules is it funded)?" (Craig Batty and Dallas J. Baker 2018, 156). We can reappropriate these questions for the commissioning stage of television drama: is it the content of the *Bedlam* script that secures it commission, or is the context in which *Bedlam* emerges as a viable proposition for production? Here, content and context are intertwined. The script content (the genre, franchise, and precinct model) appeals to the broadcaster's intended demographic, but just as much, if not more, the importance of the weighting is on the context (the broadcaster's vision for channel, Living's perceived demographic, and the cachet of working with RED). Anamik Saha points out, "commodification is at the core of the work that the cultural industries do, transforming an aesthetic expression of culture into a commodity to be bought and sold" (Anamik Saha 2018, 27). Arguably, in this case study, the commodity is Shindler and RED's career history: this is what secures *Bedlam*'s sale to Living.

Development Practices

In recent years, Stayci Taylor and Craig Batty have argued that "there still exists a significant gap in academic and industry literature about script development as both a phenomenon and a practice, especially from the point of view of those engaging with screenplays according to the roles they play in developing them" (Stayci Taylor and Craig Batty 2016, 205). The following section contributes to the reduction of this gap by exploring the development practices for *Bedlam* series one. It considers how the writers work with the input of both production company and channel executives to rewrite the

scripts to prepare for going into production. It explores the contributions of the senior women working on the project, and how, when and why they collaborated with the writers.

Once Living greenlit the project, the writers had to deliver the remaining scripts for series one. As writer–creator Neil Jones comments, "episode one took *years*, and then all of a sudden Living went 'yes, we'll do it' and we needed five more episodes!"(Neil Jones 2018). The three writer–creators, Jones, Chris Parker and David Allison, congregated in Leeds, at Seven, a café in Chapel Allerton, with RED script executive Hollick and RED script editor Richard Fee. The five of them sat around a table together and talked through the serial storytelling, the world building, and where they wanted the series to end. Parker reveals: "Caroline [Hollick] and Richard [Fee] allowed us to kind of come up with crazy ideas and we knew if they said 'no' then that's that. We trusted them that they knew exactly what they were doing" (Chris Parker 2018). Parker admits this was tough though, noting "it was only six episodes" in total but "actually each one required so much thought and brainstorming" and "loads of our original ideas got thrown out, they didn't stand up".

Fee reflects that in the early days of development, "a lot of it was narrowing down exactly what the DNA of the series was. Because we were trying to match a number of briefs." He explains, "the intention was to do this horror supernatural show. That was also a young person's relationship drama. That had story of the week done in one episode that you could tune in and watch without necessarily having to … have seen the past four episodes" (Richard Fee 2018). This latter point is particularly significant. It relates to the rapidly changing dynamics of television storytelling in the first decade of the new millennium. In the 2000s, when *Bedlam* was first developed, episodic story of the week structures, as seen in *Ghost Whisperer*, were still at the forefront of how narrative was managed, and this was how the writing team initially envisaged the series. However, American serial/procedural hybrids such as *Fringe* (2008–2013) were also successful in the UK by the end of the 2000s. These programmes alternate "between a case–of–the–week episode and a 'mythology' episode that advances a long–term narrative arc," with the expectation that the mythology "becomes more dominant as the series goes on" (Daniel Calvisi 2016, 6). These hybrids were increasingly merging the serial and series format, with "some stories that 'close' (resolve) within an episode while other dramatic arcs continue" (Pamela Douglas 2011, 36). This shift in storytelling practices led to the rise of the "flexi-narrative," introducing "intricate and sophisticated layers of plot and subplot narrative levels which gradually enhance character and narrative density" (Glen Creeber 2004, 15). *Bedlam* was developed at the point that the flexi–narrative shift was being unevenly adopted across national television writing traditions, with a concomitant complex brief from the broadcaster.

The team then discovered that the already–complicated set of expectations around serialized storytelling were made even more problematic. This was due to their chosen genre. Allison initially understood *Bedlam* as a "ghost story *Play for Today*", that allowed for a standalone story each week, where you are able to "just enjoy all the tropes of the genre," but to set that anthology format within "a world where there is continuing story" (David Allison 2018). However, *Bedlam*'s lineage is more Amicus than Alan Clarke, and Living's desire for *Bedlam* to be what Fee calls "a young person's relationship show" required a jettisoning of the anthology premise and a focus on story of the week instead. The team eventually settled on a basic ABC storyline structure for each episode.

As Allison explains, the ghost story of the week was the A story, "which has to be half the episode for it to work." Parker confirms, "we've got guest characters every week. You have to give them plenty of screen time, establish them, work out their story." Allison continues, the B story is "the lives of the characters. Although it was probably like, B1 and B2. B1 is lives and love, and B2 is serial story as it impacts our characters that might have some supernatural bent. And then the C story is the serial arc." As Parker reflects, "there was quite a lot to do in an hour really."

Hollick admits, "it did take us a little while to . . . get the format of the stories right. How we were telling . . . ghost stories, that was the biggest challenge." This relates to the difficulties of creating horror within episodic series drama (the A storyline), because "the characters must continue from week to week, suspense is diluted; the viewer knows the hero is never in mortal danger" (Sarah Kozloff 1992, 91). Second, as Fee argues, serialised horror (*Bedlam*'s BC storylining) is also "hard to do," as you are "breaking the tension at the end of every episode".

The storylining was often led by Fee. As Hollick reveals, once the team had "a broad sense of a shape" for a story, they would create "a document with columns in—sometimes it would be Richard [Fee] actually making decisions about what could go into each episode [in a way] that felt balanced." Fee concurs, "and that's a changing document obviously, because—you might get halfway in and realise that something's going to become more important than you thought, or, or less important." Hollick concludes, "sometimes someone just has to make a decision, and go 'right, we'll do that, that, that and that.' And then you've got something written down." The writers were then assigned individual episodes, each writer wrote a first draft, and did notes for the other writers' drafts. As Allison says, they "edited each other's work and swapped back and forth". This is the collaborative working principle in action, Jones explaining that each script "was touched by all three of us before RED got to it", that "even though we had individual credits, all the scripts were team written".

This leads us into the final section of the development analysis, on how script feedback, commonly to refer to as "notes," moves between the women executives and the writers. When notes are discussed in screenwriting books, it is usually as practical advice to the prospective screenwriter on how to behave, or how to write and deliver notes to screenwriters as a script editor or development executive (Jules Selbo 2016; Peter Bloore 2013). What is often missing is a discussion of the "relationships that occur when collaborating with others in/through script development" (Craig Batty's, et al. 2018, 229). I now uncover the relational experiences of the salaried women inside major British media institutions, who deliver script feedback informed by their business expectations and negotiating capacities, and I consider their impact upon script development.

Once the Leeds team were happy with the draft, the script was sent to Shindler, who, as Hollick explains, was "very involved creatively from the beginning." For Hollick, Shindler's level of involvement "is great. Because you don't get that problem of working on something for four weeks and then having to go back to the drawing board." As the executive producer, Shindler was making sure that the script was achieving RED's "three levels of storytelling":

> So, you are telling . . . what I call plot. The plot is the 'ahhh: I found a dead body in the water and I had to report it to the police' and then, 'oh my god, is that person who's just run away, is that the killer?' End of episode one. That's the plot. But then the story is: the person who found the body, his wife has just walked out on him. He is conflicted because he wants to see his child but doesn't know how to. And then the policewoman who comes along just so happens to be an ex–lover from school. That's the story. And then you have got: what world does he live in? If he is a teacher, you go into the school and tell the story of the school and you set something up there which is going to kick off as well. And all three of those levels have to have hooks. And all three of them have to work through the whole series (Shindler 2019).

Given this, Shindler concentrated "less on the story of the week" because she relied "on the script team to know that inside out and to make sure that it works logically." She focussed on "character and big, overarching story"; making sure the required multiple levels of storytelling were "pacey." She acknowledges, "I get frustrated if things take too long." As such, Shindler's personal preference for pace played into the plotting of the series, which needed to move fast to satisfy the most powerful executive at the production company. Hollick explains, RED is "Nicola's company. She created it and so she's always the last creative voice—although we have a lot of creative freedom and a lot of say." Shindler agrees with Hollick's perspective, but with some reservations: "Yes, *but*. My job is not to impose my own voice over things. Sometimes when I don't like something, it doesn't mean it shouldn't happen". In her feedback to the writers, she will "keep saying if I don't think something makes sense or I don't think it is good enough. But if they think that there is a really good reason that the story goes in that direction then I totally listen". Meanwhile, as script executive, Hollick's job was to understand "exactly what Nicola wanted, work with her" and "try not to throw a spanner in the works as well". She reflects "it's a *kind* of hierarchy but with a lot of debate between us, rather than one person saying, 'right this is how it has to be done'". Given these collaborative working practices, even though Shindler is an executive producer, her point of view is stamped on the script from the first draft onwards, and her feedback continues to deepen and refine the draft scripts at every stage of development.

When Shindler signed the script off, it was sent to Living. Rosencrantz and Barham would, in Barham's words, "both read it that night if we could, or sometimes I would read it, give Claudia my thoughts and then she would read it that weekend and give me her thoughts on Monday and then we would collate." Then, Rosencrantz left "Jenny [Reeks] and Amy [Barham] to get on with it." Reeks and Barham spoke on the phone and by email. They shared and synthesized their feedback, reading the script from different perspectives. Reeks would approach the script from an "editorial" standpoint, what Barham defines as "the tone, the pace, the characters, the character development," and "how elegantly" the ABC storylines are interwoven, and whether they produce the necessary "emotional flashpoints for the characters." Barham's own focus was serving the story's needs in the context of a commercial channel, such as "at the ad break this needs to be happening in order to get people back." These concerns were not specific to the broadcaster though. As experienced makers of television drama, Shindler and Hollick were also finely attuned to the commercial imperatives of the script. Shindler explains, "you need to make sure that you are keeping people as hooked as possible. Especially on a channel like Living, when there were adverts, we had to hook into every advert break," while Hollick

concurs, "I like the fact that when we set this up with Living there were these commercial parameters that we had to make work. That's TV, it isn't like writing a poem. It's a commercial process".

Once the Living notes were consolidated, the broadcaster and production company would meet up. In her work on screenwriters and script editors, Bridget Conor writes that "confidence—for writers and development partners" is often linked to "notions of mutual respect"; notes are "to be given respect and attention, whatever their substance and motivation" (Bridget Conor 2014, 71). Respect is the crucial noun here, and we can see how Conor's reading of respect applies just as much at an inter-institutional level. Barham attended face-to-face meetings in Manchester with Shindler and Hollick. She reveals, "Nicola [Shindler] is a bit like Claudia [Rosencrantz], she comes into a meeting, tells you what's happening and you're like 'OK!'" But, Barham confirms that Shindler was "always very respectful" in conversations about the editorial required by the channel, especially when some of that requirement was not "exactly the way that they saw the show." The power dynamics of this interactions, while respectful, remained complex. Barham recalls sitting in Shindler's office "and us going backwards and forwards on something and I just remember looking up at her BAFTAs on her shelf above her head and thinking, 'who am I to tell you what to do?!'". On hearing Barham's memory, Shindler laughs, confirming that the BAFTA trophies are indeed "there for a reason." She explains "there is always a pull and push" in these meetings, and the skill of the executive is to "understand what people are *trying* for, even if it doesn't feel right for what you think the programme should be." For Shindler, good feedback sessions are about recognising that "there is always a reason *behind* what they are saying".

Reeks' experience of giving notes to Shindler was different to Barham's. Reeks wished to create a situation in which equal power dynamics were performed. However, her concern was not powering "up" to meet Shindler, as arguably, Barham is doing, but powering "down." Reeks was sufficiently experienced to recognise that she was representing the client, the client's money, and thus, actually had a great deal of control. Reeks describes these sessions as a "creative meeting with equals" and explains, "some people have a great desire to show their power. I have a great desire to hide my power if I have any at all." For Reeks, notes meetings are not about her saying "look here, here is teacher. You have made a mistake here because . . . ". Shindler confirms, "Jenny was quite hands–off but brilliant".

The differing experiences of Barham and Reeks demonstrate how the individual career history of the executive had a significant impact upon the tone and structure of the feedback meetings. It reflects the fact that Reeks was a very experienced, longstanding former ITV Head of Drama, who had worked with Shindler on a number of occasions, while Barham was in her very first commissioning role. Shindler acknowledges this dynamic. She points out that "if you are paying the money to make the show, it is your choice" but then reveals balancing these competing multiple levels of interpersonal and inter-institutional expectations are "the main part" of her job. She has to keep "the writers and the channel happy," while also keeping "true" to the programme'.

It is only after RED and Living agreed on an overall direction for the *Bedlam* episode that the feedback began to slowly filter down towards the writing team. *Bedlam*'s script editor, Fee, was delegated to collate the feedback from the broadcaster, and from Shindler and Hollick at RED. When the feedback was collated, Fee then worked with

Hollick to create a single, coherent set of notes. As Hollick explains, it is really important to "have the debates about what's right and wrong *away* from the writers so we can work out our coherent take on it". Or, as Rosencrantz puts it more succinctly, "you don't need too many sets of notes or everybody goes mad." After agreeing the direction for the notes with Hollick, Fee then relayed the notes to the writers, over the phone or in person. And finally, then, the writers began to redraft their scripts.

Steven Price describes script development as a "paper trail" of "textual drafts, notes, revisions, memos and so forth" which create "a record of a larger process of interpersonal networks visible only to those" who work in the industry (Steven Price 2017, 323). This archival approach prioritises material culture in the service of concrete evidence of creative process. However, this kind of documentation is frequently absent in the television industry. Developments "notes" are Reeks and Barham talking on the phone about their first impressions of the script; they are Barham in Shindler's office, they are Hollick and Fee discussing how to compile conflicting feedback which Fee will *then* write up for Allison, Parker and Jones. In fact, the script development process is predicated, first and foremost, upon talk. In the case of *Bedlam*, this talking occurs primarily through the interactions and relationships between the women at RED (executive producer Shindler and script executive Hollick) and Living (executive producers Barham, Reeks and Rosencrantz); their collaboratively made decisions are then cascaded down to Fee, who takes them to the writers.

Give these findings, script development practices are perhaps better understood as experiential processes, a stage of creative practice composed of living, breathing interactions. This is why much of television development does not exist on paper (or email, or in Word); the lifeblood of television development *is* the talk, which is why it is largely invisible to those outside the industry. This accords with Steven Maras' position that the industry can be considered as a discursive entity, "constituted through ways of talking ... and constructed in the interaction and interface of different ideas about creativity, narrative, industry and production, theory and practice" (Steven Maras 2009, 23).

Conclusion

The case study of *Bedlam* has demonstrated how the popularity of American television on British screens in the 2000s—and the growing difficulty in securing and retaining big ticket dramas—directly led to Rosencrantz's decision to commission Living's first original drama. Rosencrantz wished to replicate what the broadcaster was getting from their American acquisitions, but also to then know that another broadcaster could not come and outbid them for later series rights. This research then demonstrated how *Bedlam*, as Living's first original drama, was shaped by many of these millennial television drama contexts. The *Bedlam* writing team were given an almost–impossible task: to create a horror television series that retained the story of the week, franchise, precinct premise that created the potential for hundreds of episodes, while at the same time responding to the rapidly changing and increasingly complex nature of serial television storytelling that emerged throughout this decade.

However, what is arguably most valuable about this research is its illumination of the work of the executives on *Bedlam*. These women demonstrate not only extensive knowledge of long form television storytelling (including act structures, storylining, episodic and serial narratives, and generic mechanisms) but also the ability to weight up these editorial issues against intended audience, budget, and timescales, while, at the same time, collaborating and compromising both within and across media institutions in order to secure a unified vision for the script that will enable the series to be made. In turn, the rich, complex and imaginative responses of women executives in the commissioning and development of television drama, extends the understanding of the remit of women "creatives" beyond writing or production roles to encompass women working at an executive level. This kind of research finding has power to transform how we think about the British television industry. As Doris Ruth Eikhof and Stevie Marsden observe, "female, non-white, disabled or working–class workers are still perceived as a deviation from that informal, but powerful blueprint of what a creative media worker does or should look like" (Doris Ruth, Eikhoff and Stevie Marsden 2019, 252–254).

While the distinction between roles deemed suitable for men and women remain insidious and unresolved, this research reveals that the women executives working "off–set" in commissioning and development roles have much to contribute creatively to the production of television drama. Furthermore, this article's focus on these women's "beliefs and judgements" (to return to Novrup Redvall), and their "affective qualities" (to return to Hill) sheds new light on how television stories come into being. In this sense, I situate these research findings in relation to Rachel Moseley, Helen Wheatley and Helen Wood's valuable *Television for Women* project, in which they ask "what kinds of decisions underpinned the production of programming addressed to a female audience? What was the discursive construction of that audience by the industry? What kinds of heretofore invisible (or under-attended) roles had been played by women in producing that programming?" (Rachel Moseley, Helen Wheatley and Helen Wood 2016, 2). I do agree with McElroy that "it is misleading when individual prominent women in managerial roles are used metonymically to stand for the whole workforce" (2016, 39), but what I hope to do here is illuminate precisely how creative these women in managerial roles are. They have developed extensive, high-level understanding of how long–form multi–layered storytelling works in a commercial context. They synthesise this ability with business acumen and create original commissioning opportunities. Then, their decision-making directly impacts upon the generation, revision and completion of episode scripts.

In short, without Hollick and Shindler, Barham, Rosencrantz and Reeks, *Bedlam* would not exist.

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