

Shared Visions: Women in Television

Edited by *Annette Blonski*, Australian Film Commission, 1999, 135 pages. Recommended retail price \$20.00. ISBN number 0-642-48714-6

The Women's Program of the Australian Film Commission has been in existence since 1990 - it replaced the Women's Film Fund which was originally established in 1976. The Women's Program seeks to provide support for professional development aimed at enhancing the participation and career advancement of women in the film, television and interactive media industries. Programs have been targeted at assisting women in mid-career, and also to enhance skills. The most recent research project undertaken was an examination of the position of women in the television industry. One of the initiatives of the project was the publication of this book, *Shared Visions: Women in Television*.

The book is a collection of edited interviews and presentations given by a range of women including Janeen Faithfull, Lyndal Marks, Patricia Edgar, Dina Browne, Tarni Jones, Vivian Schenker, Pam Barnes, Rachel Perkins, Jan Chapman, Penny Chapman, Jacqui Culliton, Margot Phillipson, Louise McCann, Cheire Bottger, Jenny Brokie and Mary Kostakidis, Vicki Jones and Laura Zisken.

As they briefly discuss their careers, it becomes apparent that

there has been a number of recurring career issues which they have faced. These include the problems of juggling the responsibilities of family and work commitments, the difficulties of child care, the lack of networking opportunities and the barriers imposed on career advancement by male dominated management.

While these short glimpses into the career paths of these selected women are interesting from an anecdotal perspective, it is done in a retrospective fashion with little consideration for the future, or for future industry participants. None of the women interviewed have been asked about strategies for increasing, or maintaining, the participation of women in the film, television and new media industries, nor do they offer practical strategies for overcoming the perceived male domination in the management of these industries.

By focusing only on women who are in 'mid-career', the publication does not provide a balanced or representational image of the position of women in the industry, and as such, offers little to those who are not part of this 'category'. This appears to be a fundamental oversight. As all of the women included in the collection started their careers in previous decades this book is unable to provide motivation, encouragement or advice for women entering the industry, as the production and broadcasting environment has altered dramatically with the emergence of new media, and the introduction of

Pay Television in Australia.

There are some inspiring stories told which reflect the determination, ambition and abilities of the women included in this collection. Without detracting from the stories contained in this book, the basis of this research project seems flawed or at least exceptionally narrow in its scope - concerns of mid career females must differ from newly established participants. Similarity of gender does not equate with similarity of concerns or situation.

One wonders why the Australian Film Commission feels that the Women's Program (a seemingly curious unit for a funding organisation in Australia) should produce such internally and narrowly focused work. Certainly, control and ownership of media domestically and internationally is male dominated, but focusing only on supporting and developing mid-career women seems an increasingly irrelevant process. Surely a more important agenda is to develop the creativity of **all** Australians, regardless of gender, age or career stage and to support the development of the film, television and new media industries as a whole.

Shared Visions? Shared experiences maybe, but what this publication avoids is the development of a sustainable vision for continued female participation in the film, television and new media industries.

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