

Anna Ford, 'Women in Media' and Celebrity/Feminism in UK Second Wave Feminism

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Introduction

This chapter interrogates a key moment in the history of UK second wave feminism as it intersected with celebrity culture and the British media. In July 1980 a noteworthy media flashpoint occurred at this intersection following the outspoken public excoriation by newscaster Anna Ford of sexism and misogyny in UK media culture, but especially in UK television. Famously, Ford made considerable waves in the pages and on the airwaves of the very media in question, when she lambasted them (and by implication their audiences) as what she referred to as 'body fascist' toward women. Already a key figure in British feminist television history by virtue of having become the first woman to read the news regularly on independent television, this flashpoint moment elevated the status and changed the stakes of Ford's existing public profile in ways that, as explicated hereafter, served to cement what Anthea Taylor terms her 'feminist celebrification' (2016, p. 65). This had been in process since her appointment to ITN in 1978 saw the UK press launch an aggressive campaign of sexualised objectification in its cultivation of her celebrity status.

Taylor (2016) draws an important distinction between feminists who undergo celebrification and then use the attention capital they acquire to intervene in feminist debates on an ongoing basis, versus celebrities with pre-existing high levels of attention capital who can and do then align or publicly identify with feminism in ways that maintain, augment or enhance their public profiles in different ways. Correspondingly, the distinction is drawn between *celebrity* feminists and *celebrity feminists* (Taylor 2016). The distinction is somewhat less clear cut in the case of certain public-facing figures, including Ford, for whom feminism and celebrity

were mutually constitutive states of being (i.e. her activism predated her celebrity but her celebrification then became important to her campaigning, and this both/and dynamic persisted throughout her life as a public figure in increasingly intersectional ways over time) and in relation to who both, arguably, apply. This chapter therefore argues that the conditions which led to the ‘body fascism’ media moment and its aftermath illustrate the extent to which Ford’s public profile sat (and sits) at something of an intersection of both *celebrity* feminism and *celebrity feminism* and thus, can be understood equivalently in terms of its status as a form of *celebrity/feminism*.

As feminist media scholar Jane Arthurs has observed, ‘Pressure for change in the treatment of women within television has been pursued at regular intervals [...] since the Sex Discrimination Act of 1975 opened up many jobs in the industry to women for the first time’ (2014, p. 144). Moreover, she continues, many of the trailblazers, especially the early women newscasters on flagship UK news bulletin programmes, ‘attracted a lot of commentary when they were appointed in the late 1970s’ (Arthurs 2014, p. 144). This, as the discussion below illustrates, is something of an understatement. As is well known and widely acknowledged in celebrity studies, the work of television studies pioneer John Hartley has played a noteworthy part in the theorisation of some formations of ‘ordinary’ television celebrity (1999, 2004) as well as in the conceptualisation of some types of early ‘DIY’ internet celebrity (2008, 2009).ⁱ Less widely known in the field though is Hartley’s use of British second wave feminist celebrity newscaster Anna Ford as an emblematic instance, at his time of writing, of how the image of the television personality lends itself to the semiotic communication of meaning. And thence to a semiotic reading of image, persona and celebrity (2005 [1982]), in accordance with Richard Dyer’s earlier theorisation of stars as signs and social phenomena with ideological meanings attached to them (1998 [1979]).

Introducing the idea of television images as motivated and multi-accentual signs to be interpreted and negotiated by the viewer, and of the necessity of iconicity in signifying meaning from a television celebrity's visual image, Hartley states baldly that 'a picture of Anna Ford looks like Anna Ford' (2005, p. 30). However, and as the July 1980 flashpoint moment that occurred in the UK news media around her feminist critique of its 'body fascism' and the aftermath that ensued from this illustrates, this is far from all it does. Describing an example from a tabloid newspaper that was typical of the UK media's cultivation of Anna Ford's ostensibly unwanted status as a celebrity sex symbol in 1980,ⁱⁱ and referencing Daniel Boorstin's (1962) well-worn definitional starting point for understanding celebrity alongside early media studies understandings of newsworthiness and news values, as they relate to celebrity, Hartley uses Ford as a platform from which to exemplify and illustrate the semiotic conceptual bulwarks of connotation and myth. In elucidating this example, Hartley explains how ideological values are negotiated through discourse in print news media, semiotically, through the combination of visual imagery and written text, and in so doing he shines a light on the then recent high-profile sexualisation and celebrification of Ford at that time:

The sign in this case is Anna Ford – in both the picture and the report. But what is signified is not only the real historical individual, it is also two or three distinct but related *myths*. They include, first, the showbiz myths of glamour and celebrity – Anna Ford is “well known for being well-known”. The news as a whole is structured around the ‘newsworthiness’ of ‘elite personalities’, who are available to signify other myths. In this case, the other myth is a sexist one in which a woman is, as Charlotte Brunsdon points out (1978), defined

“through her procreative ability and her sexual attractiveness to men – *a definition through her body*” (p. 21). Or, as the *Sunday Mirror* puts it: “Lovely Anna Ford”. She is made to signify the myth of female sexuality, even though the person Anna Ford explicitly objects to such myths, and is quoted as doing so in the report... But to no avail, it seems. Her social function as the signifier of sexist myths is something she can contest, but not by herself overcome. (2005, p. 28)

In this way, as Hartley goes on to explain, news media imagery of Anna Ford “is not ‘really’ Anna Ford, it is Anna Ford captured, imprisoned in and made to serve as a signifier” (2005, p. 28), and in ways that are ideologically at odds with her publicly professed values as a feminist. He continues, ‘Anna Ford does not “mean” what the signifier “Anna Ford” says’, and when imagery communicates meaning in combination with written text ‘We read them simultaneously, and this is where a picture can indeed be worth a thousand ideological words... Anna Ford[’s]... picture thus validates the headline and story’ (2005, p. 28) as they appear. And moreover, as they do their ideological work together, to negotiate and contain the feminism that Ford’s celebrity persona signified in 1980.

Anna Ford’s objection to the kind of sexist and misogynist cultural myths of femininity to which Hartley here makes mention, refers to her by-then well-established status as a feminist *agent provocateur* within (and without) the UK media industries. This is a status which, as Hartley’s example illustrates, those industries and the content they produced went all out to negotiate, usefully aligning it, despite her outspoken feminism, with patriarchal logics, and in service to patriarchal ends, operationalising one of the many containment strategies for feminism that were enacted by the media during the second wave feminist women’s

movement of the 1960s and 1970s and its aftermath. As the following analysis and discussion of UK media reportage on the (anti-)feminist media moment that Ford's celebrity experienced in July 1980 illustrates, the feminist voice that characterised her public speech in pushing back against 'body fascism' was, in this moment, treated with the contempt and dismissiveness that was, and remains, typical of what Jilly Boyce Kay (2020) has termed the 'communicative injustice' to which women, our speech and our voices have fallen foul throughout the history of patriarchy.

Building upon work by scholars such as Lisa Stead (2021) and Taylor (2025), this chapter underscores the importance of archival methodologies for feminist studies of celebrity. Analysis of the press discourse about Anna Ford in 1980 was conducted using a sample of articles compiled, in the main, from two principal archival sources (one physical, and one digital) and later supplemented slightly following a range of *ad hoc* discoveries of pertinent material that came about after further secondary research. Principally though, the entries in the sample were selected firstly from a collection of press cuttings that gathered any known instances of UK news media coverage of the campaigning efforts of the 1970s-1980s feminist pressure group 'Women in Media', and specifically of their attempts to combat patriarchally stereotypical images of women and femininity in advertising and elsewhere. This press cuttings collection forms part of the 'Records of Women in Media' archive, which is held within The Women's Library Archives at the London School of Economics and Political Science (GB 106 6WIM/P/01/01). Within it are copies and cuttings of a range of articles reporting on Women in Media's media-facing tenth anniversary celebration event at which Ford made her incendiary 'body fascism' remarks about sexism and the sexual objectification of women in UK media.

These entries were then supplemented with findings from digital archival research that used the online database Newspapers.com, applying the search terms ‘Anna Ford’, ‘body fascism’ and ‘Women in Media’, and limiting the scope of the search to articles published in July 1980 from the day of the anniversary event onwards. Targeted consultation of these archival sources along with the application of inclusion/exclusion criteria yielded a sample comprised of 45 articles: 24 from the press cuttings collection in The Records of Women in Media archive, a further 15 from Newspapers.com, and a further six sourced from elsewhere. Practical impediments such as accessibility of sources in physical archives and paywalls behind which digital archival sources lie placed bounds upon the potential extensiveness of the primary research and therefore limit the extent to which the sample can or should be considered comprehensive.

On 9 July 1980 the Independent Broadcast Authority of the UK hosted a media-facing event at its London premises in Knightsbridge to mark the tenth anniversary of the feminist pressure group Women in Media (Grant 1980; ‘Taking Anna Ford Seriously’ 1980).ⁱⁱⁱ The purpose of the event was twofold. As well as a celebration it was also a platform for Women in Media to take stock of their campaigning activities and achievements through the 1970s, and to lay the gauntlet for the continued necessity of its ongoing mission to combat discrimination against women in media industries and sexist stereotyping of women in media content into the 1980s (Grant 1980). Earlier that week, the UK’s Equal Opportunities Commission had published its fourth annual report, revealing a widening gender pay gap that had worsened for women since 1977 after a period of incremental improvement in the peak years of second wave feminism leading up to that point, and a disproportionately rising rate of unemployment amongst women (Davenport 1980; Gebler Davies 1980; Grant 1980; Morris 1980; Renshaw 1980; ‘Second Sex?’ 1980; Tweedie 1980; ‘Women wronged’ 1980).

At this event, in a meeting chaired by radio broadcaster Nancy Wise, several women, all accomplished figures working in the UK media industries at that time, and with intersectional identities that largely corresponded with the inherent unlikelihood of this in the context of white hetero patriarchy, related their ongoing experiences of being women in the UK media. These experiences, as related, were characterised by sexism and misogyny, discrimination against women in employment practices, being silenced by men, and of strategies of survival in UK media workplace contexts that were hostile to women (Grant 1980). Speaking alongside Wise at different points in the meeting were media women from across the UK, working in various media contexts, including Benton & Bowles advertising executive Pam Ings, Cardiff Broadcasting Company co-director Sonia Davies, film and television actor Jane Lapotaire, *Daily Mirror* newspaper columnist Bel Mooney and, most notably given the extreme height of her cultural profile (especially for a journalist)^{iv} in the two years that led up to the event, Independent Television Network newscaster Anna Ford (‘Anna Ford’s Pretty Protest’ 1980; Davenport 1980; Grant 1980; Mafham 1980; ‘Taking Anna Ford Seriously’ 1980).

Something marked Ford out as distinct and different from her equally accomplished feminist contemporaries though: She was a celebrity. She had unwittingly obtained that status as a result, firstly, of having made history by becoming the first woman to regularly read the news on independent television in the UK in 1978.^v Secondly and relatedly though, Anna Ford’s ascent to celebrity status came about due to the UK tabloid news media’s manufacture of a sexualised celebrity profile for her, and in the context of their own spurious reportage on the false rivalry that did not exist (at least, certainly not in the combative terms by which it was reported) between Ford, and BBC newscaster Angela Rippon. She too had herself made

history three years earlier when she was appointed to read the *Nine O'Clock News* on BBC One in 1975. Between them then, Ford and Rippon were the first women to read the news regularly on the main channels of UK television (Root 1986, p. 89; Holland 1987, p. 134; Thornham 2007, p. 97). This was during second wave feminism, a time when, as Jane Root notes, 'the social status of women was being hotly contested' (1986, p. 89). Consequently, she continues, 'Rippon and Ford became a focus for male uncertainty about the 'problem' of powerful, attractive women' (1986, p. 89).

As Patricia Holland writes, responsive to the sexualised celebrification to which these women were subjected in the UK news media in the late 1970s, Ford and Rippon were seen by the press as an 'opportunity for jokes, pictures and suggestive comments. Every detail of their dress and appearance was commented on, their styles were compared, their sexuality stressed' (1987, p. 134). For example, the gravitas that was seen to characterise Rippon's delivery of the news was used as a means by which to imagine her in sexual terms as a dominatrix in an April 1978 edition of *The Sunday Telegraph*: 'Angela is forceful, even dominant. In how many secret viewers' dreams does she deliver the *Nine O'Clock News* in black leather...' (cited in Holland 1987, p. 135).

Meanwhile, as Root observes, the circulation of discourse about Anna Ford in the news media contemporaneously saw her characterised in stereotypically sexualised terms as 'kittenish' and 'doe-eyed' (1986, p. 89).^{vi} This, as illustrated and exemplified further below, is indicative of the severely limited frames through which the UK media at that time was prepared to describe women like Ford and Rippon, who had attained positions of cultural authority heretofore restricted to men, and of the linguistic and semiotic strategies that were in operation to contain the threat that they posed as professional women granted cultural legitimacy by virtue of their appointments to their positions as mainstream national newscasters.

A particularly egregious example of the tabloid media's determination to manufacture an antagonistic and looks-based rivalry between the two women newscasters came with the publication in national daily *The Sun* in April 1978, soon after the commencement of Ford's tenure as presenter of ITN's *News at Ten*, of 'ANNA V ANGELA' (Forwood 1978, pp. 16-17). This double-page spread positioned them visually and discursively as 'contenders' in a boxing bout (Forwood 1978, p. 17). And it did so by depicting them as battling it out amongst viewership and readership in what it calls the 'Featherweight Championship of the Television World' for the best, or most desirable, "smile, style, eyes [and] thighs' (Forwood 1978, p. 17). The article thus pitted Ford and Rippon against one another in terms of patriarchal value judgements which it was inviting readers to make of fragmented parts of Ford and Rippon's bodies – body parts which ostensibly signified the extent to which they inhabited them in ways that adhered to normative understandings of femininity at the time. And in terms of whether and how they were seen as desirable to a presumed hetero-male readership. Moreover, it did so by framing them as engaged in a form of 'faux combat', in a similar vein to Susan Douglas' argument about how the mass media in the US had, that decade, positioned celebrity feminist Gloria Steinem and celebrity anti-feminist Phyllis Schlafly in news discourse during the second wave feminist era battle for constitutional equal rights for women, which she famously terms 'the ERA as catfight' (1995 [1994], p. 222; see also Taylor 2016, p. 100; Lawson 2022, pp. 76-77; Boyle 2024 [2019], pp. 51-52). The power that patriarchy was thereby granted to negotiate and contain a feminist interpretation and mobilisation of these women's respective appointments to their newscasting positions, by depicting them as engaged in combative competition with one another over their normatively feminine looks, thus comes into vivid view in this example.

This disingenuously tabloid-manufactured rivalry escalated the following year into the so-called ‘legs war’ (Root 1986, p. 89), in reference to what had been the earlier sexual objectification of Angela Rippon that manifested in hetero-male desire to see her legs emerge from behind her BBC news desk. This was a desire to which Rippon had very famously acceded in her guest appearance on sketch and standup comedy television series *The Morecambe and Wise Show* in 1976, much to the chagrin of some UK feminists, including television reviewers at the feminist *Spare Rib* magazine, who cited ‘Angela’s legs’ as one among several examples of television from the period which, they argued, ‘exemplified the poverty of feminine representations [in the media] in a male-dominated society’ at that time (McCrindle 1978, p. 40).

Later, when subjected to similar entreaties, Anna Ford chose to publicly and vocally resist them. She was not as compliant nor as biddable in responding to press entreaties to, for example, ‘SHOW A LEG, ANNA, PLEASE’ (1979, p. 30). Rather than ‘playing the game’ to enable the hegemonic negotiation of women newscasters on UK television in the manner that Rippon was arguably doing, Ford pushed back and spoke back. Moreover, she did so in ways that suggested, contrary to the picture painted in news media discourse, not a ‘catfight’ rivalry (Douglas 1995 [1994]) with Rippon, but rather, a sense of sisterly solidarity between them regarding the forbearance required to do their jobs as women in broadcasting in the context of their respectively sexualised celebrification in the tabloids. For example, speaking at an earlier Women in Media event in 1979, Ford reportedly said: ‘Angela and I have had to put up with this divisiveness for a year... It’s all about “show us your legs” and prove they are better than hers. These are stupidities’ (Prentice 1979, page unknown). Anticipating the escalation of her remarks to all out feminist critique in the ‘body fascism’ flashpoint the following year, she lamented that ‘All that legs business with people more interested in

comparing mine with Angela's made me bloody sick. It has nothing to do with our ability to do the job... We should be judged on the way we do the job and not on our looks' ('I'm bloody sick about all this legs nonsense' 1979, p. 1).

At the following year's tenth anniversary event, Ford expounded upon her own experiences, and on the larger problem of gender-based inequalities in broadcasting. And more specifically, about images of and attitudes towards women, explaining her views to the assembled members of Women in Media, and to the gathered members of the UK press (whose interest in the event was, of course, largely as a result of Ford's celebrity, which they had manufactured themselves) as follows:^{vii}

I meet eminent men who tell me: "I am not listening to the news when you read it. I am just looking at you... A man at a party came up to me and said did I realise I only got my job because everybody in the country wanted to sleep with me..." (cited in Lynas 1980, p. 1; Morris 1980, p. 6; Summers 1980, p. 2, 6)

Throughout the 1980 'body fascism' episode Ford left these men unnamed. Decades later however, in her appearance on BBC Radio 4's *Desert Island Discs* she names the man who diminished her professional credentials and sexually objectified her at the party as broadcasting luminary Sir Robin Day (2012). Ford continued, posing the question:

Why are there no plain women in TV? Because they are all chosen by men and men like to have dolly birds and pretty women around. It's all so disgusting. There are plenty of plain and even ugly men in broadcasting and I

like to listen to them because they have something interesting to say... (cited in Lynas 1980, p. 1; Morris 1980, p. 6; Summers 1980, p. 2, 6)

In these ways, Ford made a clear point of plainly highlighting the gendered inequalities that informed the recruitment practices and decision making that took place in UK television's cultures of production at that time, and the unselfconsciously gendered double standards of expectation that were in place vis-à-vis the physical appearances of male versus female on-camera talent. Moreover she emphasises the extent to which it was accepted (although not, of course, by her) as par for the course that women in broadcasting were subjected to sexual objectification by their male colleagues and by television's presumed hetero-male viewership. She continued further, detailing her experience of sexualised celebrification in terms, ultimately, of its status as 'body fascist':

When I joined ITN two years ago, I expected three- or four- days' nonsense about being Angela Rippon's rival – but it has gone on much longer than that and it has been a surprise to me. It's been a surprise because of the way I've been described in the newspapers. It's mostly all to do with my body... The other thing I've been described in terms of is my friendship with men – except they don't call it friendship but 'who she is with at the moment' It's all in sexual terms. They do not accept you may have a genuine friendship with a man. That is just as annoying and irritating for the man as it is for me. I do not hate men or want to cut them up. I like men immensely and spend a lot of time with men. I think men have as many problems as we have in the stereotype field. I think it is **fascistic** [*my emphasis*] to see someone by the way they look

rather than the way they are... (cited in Lynas 1980, p. 1; Morris 1980, p. 6; Summers 1980, p. 2, 6)

Commensurate with the level of fame already attained by Ford at this point thanks to the UK press's two-year campaign of sexualised celebrification, the news media acted with unsurprising alacrity to report, selectively, on her remarks. In the days that followed, headline writers across the UK leapt with enthusiasm upon the phrase 'body fascism' in particular, for example: 'Anna lashes out at body fascism' (1980); 'Ms Ford attacks body fascism' (Davenport 1980, p. 4); and 'Body fascism – Anna Ford hits back' (1980). Meanwhile, the articles varied in how unselfconsciously on the one hand or deliberately ironically on the other they made their perfunctory (were it not for the obvious ideological purpose being served to contain the feminist impulse underpinning her remarks) references to Ford's physical attributes and body parts in reporting her critical remarks of exactly this practice. Whether those parts were her 'thighs', 'eyes', 'legs' or 'hair'.^{viii} Or whether they were using descriptors like 'comely', 'lovely', 'good-looking', 'pulchritudinous' and 'perfectly-formed' (McKay 1980, p. 21),^{ix} in a manifest enactment of a gendered double standard so endemic in celebrity culture.^x

This flurry of initial media reportage honing in on the inflammatory nature of the term 'body fascism' in particular, prompted a knock-on wave of commentary, debate and opinion over the following weeks (including in industry trade press as well as in mainstream news media), some of which was supportive, offering feminist solidarity and reflective explanatory contextualisation and complexification, some of it in intersectional terms (e.g. Grant 1980; 'Second Sex?' 1980; 'Taking Anna Ford Seriously' 1980; Tweedie 1980; 'Women line up behind Miss Anna Ford' 1980). Much of it though, predictably constituted reactionary anti-

feminist excoriation; some of the more extreme and egregious instances of which include ‘Ah Well...’ (1980) which refers to Ford’s remarks as ‘moronic’ (page unknown), Callan (1980, p. 3) and ‘Without the benefit of her acquaintance...’ (1980, page unknown) which both call her ‘silly’, and Seligman (1980), who opines:

What I most enjoyed about watching Anna Ford on television was not her body, since I couldn’t see it. Rather, it was the impression she gave of a cool, detached adult intelligence – a quality that any professional broadcaster would be glad to own... After her recent outspokenness I can only see a not-very-bright and almost unbelievably conceited little girl behind her manner. Just another dolly bird in fact. Why did she have to open her mouth? (Seligman 1980, p. 9)

Seligman’s riposte to Ford’s remarks on ‘body fascism’ denies a desire to objectify her, but it remains the case that he feels emboldened to infantilise her (‘conceited little girl’), diminish her credentials in order to dumb her down (‘not-very-bright’ and ‘just another dolly bird’), police her speech and attempt to discursively silence it (‘Why did she have to open her mouth?’) in a typically patriarchal instance of what Boyce Kay (2020) calls ‘communicative injustice’.

There was also, apparently, a limit to the level of feminist solidarity that Ford could expect from fellow women journalists, and even, it later transpired, from her ostensibly feminist comrades in Women in Media. Co-founder and former editor of the *Guardian* women’s page Mary Stott for example, in her subsequent memoirs, ingloriously recalled Ford’s ‘body fascism’ media moment in the following way, making herself (in)advertently and

censoriously complicit in the patriarchal project to police the manner in which Ford chose to inhabit her femininity, and to stir discord between succeeding generations of feminists:

When Anna Ford... complained bitterly at a Women in Media press conference that when anything was written about her it was 'almost always to do with my body, and what I am wearing' (she called this 'body fascism'), it was this complaint that got all the headlines – which we resented, for she is a clever, professional woman who made a very good speech. But at the time she was wearing a deeply slit skirt. Did she expect that to be noticed or not? If not, why did she wear it? And if she did expect her skirt to be noticed, she surely can't have thought it would only be by women who would say how nice and comfortable it looked? (1985, pp. 192-193)

Six months on from this 'body fascism' media moment, on 28 December 1980, a large photographic image of Anna Ford appeared on the front page of national tabloid weekly the *Sunday Mirror* to accompany that day's headline for its top story of the week. 'SEXY ANNA TOPS POLL', it goadingly, gleefully announced (Barker 1980, p. 1). The photograph in question was a head-and-shoulders shot of a smiling and open-mouthed Ford, looking directly to camera in partial profile with her hands raised to her neckline, playing with her jewellery. With these compositional details in mind, the image thus appears to connote the 'sexiness' that the publication (and the male readers who participated in the poll) attributed to Ford by the wording of the headline and the subject matter to which it refers. And thus, it works to (at least partially) contain the potential effectiveness of the feminist challenge to patriarchal UK media culture which Ford had been trying to leverage her celebrity status to make. That said, the headline works to fix a preferred reading that produces a connotation of

‘sexiness’ from the photograph which is negotiated by the (apparently unsubstantiated) claim made in an accompanying caption that Ford had chosen the image herself (Barker 1980, p. 1).

As indicated above, this front-page story heralded the outcome of an end of year readers’ poll undertaken by the *Sunday Mirror* which saw the so-described ‘lovely’ television newscaster win what it knowingly referred to as ‘the title she never wanted’ of ‘Sex Symbol of 1980’ (Barker 1980, p. 1). As my analysis of the ‘body fascism’ coverage of July that year makes abundantly clear, to describe the dubious title as unwanted was an understatement to say the least. By the time it was bestowed, Ford had, in line with her celebrity/feminism (see above, and Taylor 2016), been harnessing and leveraging her celebrity status to actively, openly and vocally campaign against the sexual objectification of women in and by the patriarchal media cultures and media industries of the UK, along with other forms of media discrimination against women both within industry practices and at the level of textual representation, both on her own behalf and as a member of Women in Media, for years.

Conclusion

As the above discussion has elaborated, Anna Ford’s appointment to her ITN newscasting position in 1978 rocketed her to an even more heightened celebrity status in the UK media landscape. This was one in which the patriarchally sexualised objectification of women was not only the accepted *status quo*, it was empowered to remain as such due to the obvious part played by the media in enabling patriarchy to reinforce itself through the creation of a feedback loop that repeated its own logics back to itself. In other words, men ran the media so that men could continue to thrive in a world set up to confirm and reconfirm their existing worldview, including their worldview regarding women’s status as less-than-human sex objects for their pleasure and consumption. The sexualised celebrification of women

newscasters (on this, see for example Chambers et al 2004; Nitz et al 2007; Holland 2014 [1998]) like Anna Ford was merely one example of this.

The years and decades that followed Ford's 'body fascism' media moment in 1980 saw a continued increase in the regular appearance of women newscasters on UK television, which went hand in hand with change over time in the address and mode of address of television news itself. Following second wave feminism and contemporaneous social justice campaigning by cognate causes and groups, it became incumbent upon producers to 'speak to a more varied and plural audience' than had historically been the case in the era of the universally male television newscaster with his usually unquestioned authority and ubiquity (Thornham 2007, p. 98). However, highlighting the ideological limitations and feminist stakes of the nature of some changes that were initially seen to take place, Holland (1987) reminds us, and the case of Anna Ford has here illustrated, that the early women newscasters in this context were subject to rigid policing of the ways in which they inhabited their femininities and that their role was tantamount to ornamental (pp. 133-150). This, as Thornham notes, operated in service to patriarchy by glossing over the exclusionary nature of news media and news discourse itself (2007, p. 98). However, Ford's efforts to publicly push back against her sexualised celebrification in the UK tabloids represented an important feminist effort on her part to exercise agency in the (re)shaping of her celebrity sign (see Taylor 2023). This took place in ways that aligned politically with the mutually constitutive nature of her celebrity/feminism, which, although her efforts were largely unsuccessful in the context of misogynist media cultures of the 1970s and 1980s, would steadfastly colour the intersectional feminism that continued to underpin her public profile for decades to come.

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ⁱ On the significance of the work of John Hartley to the theorisation of 'ordinary' television celebrity, see for example Turner, Bonner and Marshall (2000, pp. 6-7), Turner (2004, p. 68), (Bennett 2011, p. 93), Marshall (2014 [1997]), Turner (2015, p. 114), Turner (2016, p. 86), Williamson (2018, p. 278), Moore (2022, pp. 33-34).

ⁱⁱ Hartley does not provide a citation for this source, but it is Barker (1980, p. 1).

ⁱⁱⁱ Women in Media was formed in 1970 with a membership comprised of women working across the spectrum of the UK media and cultural industries. Its principal activities were to campaign about discrimination against women in the industry, and to challenge problematic representation of women in media content.

^{iv} As film and television writer Jane Root notes, "even at the height of Anna Ford's fame she was rarely on screen for more than three minutes a night" (1986, p. 84)

^v As Anthea Taylor notes, it is, problematically, often the case that "women in the public spotlight are recruited into 'first woman to' narratives" and, vis-à-vis her role reading the ITN *News at Ten*, Anna Ford was no exception to this (2015, p. 178; see also Lilburn 1999).

^{vi} Root does not reference specific articles that contain instances of this discourse in use, but national newspaper the *Daily Express*, for example, referred to Anna Ford on 9 March 1979 as a "doe-eyed newscasterette" ("Anna's Lips are Sealed" 1979, p. 13), while the regional *Liverpool Daily Post* described her directly on 24 January that year as "obviously a kitten" ("TV" 1979, p. 2).

^{vii} As Root notes, Ford was a “glamorous television **star** [*emphasis in original*] whose popularity [thanks to the interest taken in her physical attributes by the UK press] threatened to overwhelm the importance of the news itself” (1986, pp. 89-90).

^{viii} For references of this kind to Anna Ford’s “thighs” see Bamigboye (1980, p. 3), Davenport (1980, p. 4), Mafham (1980, p. 12), O’Shea (1980, p. 6), and ‘Radio girls hit back at Anna’ (1980, p. 5); to her “eyes” see ‘Anna lashes out at body fascism’ (1980, page unknown), ‘Body fascism – Anna Ford hits back’ (1980), Davenport (1980, p. 4), McKay (1980, p. 21), Midwinter (1980, page unknown), ‘My body and men – by Anna Ford’ (1980, page unknown), Morris (1980, p. 6), and Horner (1980, page unknown); to her “legs” see Mafham (1980, p. 12) and Sparey (1980, p. 7), and to her “hair” see Harty (1980, p. 32), Davenport (1980, p. 4), McKay (1980, p. 21), ‘My body and men – by Anna Ford’ (1980, page unknown), Summers (1980, p. 2) and Seamark (1980, page unknown).

^{ix} For reference of this kind to Anna Ford as “comely” see Amps (1980, p. 8), as “lovely” see Midwinter (1980, page unknown), as “good-looking” see ‘Anna TV’s reluctant sex symbol wins support’ (1980, p. 45), as “pulchritudinous” see Harty (1980, p. 32) and as “perfectly-formed” see McKay (1980, p. 21).

^x Anna Coote and Beatrix Campbell’s explanation in their history of the UK women’s liberation movement and second wave feminism of what Ford meant by ‘body fascism’ elaborates this gendered double standard as it applied to women in television during Ford’s media moment: “For a woman to make it on TV, her body and her demeanour must conform to a rigid set of standards. Men can be short, fat, ageing, bald, have misshapen noses and crooked noses and crooked teeth, warts, specs and straggly beards – and still spend hours in front of television cameras. A woman who is neither young, slim nor even-featured is lucky to get a bit-part as a victim, a villain or a lunatic” (1982, p. 198).