

# Late Night Woman's Hour

('Home' October 28, 2016)



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<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b0801ql5>

### AS Component 1: Investigating the Media A level Component 1: Media Products, Industries and Audiences

#### Focus areas: Media Industries Audiences Media Contexts

#### PRODUCT CONTEXT

- *Late Night Woman's Hour* is a spin-off from the long-running BBC Radio 4 daily magazine programme, *Woman's Hour*.
- *Late Night Woman's Hour* is broadcast once a month, late at night, is presented by Lauren Laverne and features a number of female panellists.
- Each episode focuses on a particular theme relevant to its female audience e.g. 'home' and 'forgiveness'.

#### PART 1: STARTING POINTS - Media Industries

##### Historical Contexts:

*Woman's Hour* was first broadcast in the 1940s, so it worth considering the historical and social shifts that have occurred since the show's inception. The original show reflects possible tokenism (a show set aside for women might imply all other radio content was oriented towards men). *Late Night Women's Hour* features frank and open discussion, and demonstrates societal shifts and increased gender equality although some of the issues raised reflect the fact that society is not yet completely equal.

##### Consider the specialised and institutionalised nature of media production and the significance of economic factors to media industries and their products:

- Explore issues relating to **Public Service Broadcasting** and consider the extent to which *Late Night Women's Hour* meets the BBC remit

to **inform, educate and entertain**. Consider whether the broadcast is typical of products created for the BBC and explore the hallmarks of productions made for this institution.

- Consider the significance of **license fee funding** and compare this to the financial considerations of commercial radio e.g. would this broadcast be too "**niche**" for commercial radio? The broadcast has only female contributors, is made up predominantly of unadorned dialogue (without music, sound effects etc.) and the topic is explored using intellectual and specialised vocabulary. Learners might discuss why purely commercial institutions would be less likely to produce similar products.

##### Consider recent technological change and media production, distribution and circulation and the impact of digitally convergent media platforms:

- The broadcast offers a number of ways to explore recent changes to the radio industry in relation to digital technology such as the profound changes that have been brought about by switching from analogue FM radio to digital audio broadcasting (**DAB**).
- A brief **history of radio** before the mid 1990s should allow learners to appreciate the significance of **podcasting** and listening to broadcasts on **digitally convergent platforms** such as computers and smartphones.
- **Scheduling** - *Late Night Woman's Hour* has an 11 p.m. broadcast timeslot. Consider how this slot might limit audience share prior to DAB. Audiences can now listen on devices other than radios and download podcasts to enjoy at their leisure which means the time a broadcast airs live might be less significant.
- It might also be argued that DAB technology affords broadcasters more **freedom**. The late night slot (after the watershed) allows broadcasters freedom to make challenging or controversial content in the knowledge that it can still reach audiences.

##### Consider how media producers maintain varieties of audiences:

- Lauren Laverne is an interesting **host** for a Radio

4 broadcast. She is more readily associated with alternative music (both from her career as a musician and her links with Radio 6 and BBC music festival coverage) than with Radio 4.

Candidates might compare her to other female presenters on Radio 4 (such as Kirsty Young on Desert Island Discs with her experience as a news reader) and consider the ways in which she might appeal to a wider range of listeners.

- Laverne's relative youth and reputation for being outspoken and irreverent might be seen as a deliberate attempt to court the relative **controversy** (at least in comparison to other Radio 4 content) surrounding some use of bad language and the content in some episodes of this show. Laverne's credentials also extend to being a published author.
- Consider the extent to which *Late Night Woman's Hour* has been designed specifically to suit Laverne's **persona** rather than being a broadcast she has been asked to present. Some other radio presenters (often white males) have carried a status that means their personalities dominate broadcasts (Chris Evans, Chris Moyles et al.); might Laverne be considered in the same way?

### Consider theoretical approaches:

#### Power and media industries - Curran and Seaton

- It could be argued that *Late Night Woman's Hour* challenges the idea that media is controlled by a small number of companies driven by the logic of **profit and power**.
- Whilst the **BBC** is inarguably a large, significant company, the nature of **PSB** (discussed above) and the content of the broadcast seem to be at odds with the "logic of profit and power". Consider the funding of the BBC in comparison with commercial organisations. Candidates might explore the extent to which the **license fee** frees BBC producers from the pressure to generate profit and the way in which this impacts the content of their broadcasts.
- *Late Night Woman's Hour* (or at least the fact that it is available on podcast) might also be used to support Curran and Seaton's idea that **socially diverse patterns** of ownership help create conditions for varied and adventurous productions.
- Candidates might consider the proliferation of **podcasts** across a wide range of topics and genres in recent years. Do the relative low production costs of this medium and the inexpensive hosting/digital distribution

costs offer producers (and often prosumers) opportunities to take risks and develop adventurous content that still manages to reach **diverse international audiences**?

## PART 2: STARTING POINTS - Audiences

### Social and Cultural Contexts:

A gendered discussion of the broadcast is likely to benefit from some context regarding the **changing roles of women** in the UK over the past 70 years. *Woman's Hour* was originally broadcast in the 1940s and candidates might consider how different life in the UK is for women now (possibly focusing on shifts from the 1950s housewife towards the independence of young women in the 1960s and comparing this with present day).

Candidates may use this information to consider the way that **audience responses** to, and interpretations of, media products **reflect social and cultural circumstances**. Is there now an audience for a late night talk shown aimed at women specifically because of their social status? How might original 1940s women have responded to the broadcast?

### Consider how audiences are grouped and categorised by media industries, including by age, gender and social class, as well as by lifestyle and taste:

- *Late Night Woman's Hour* offers clear examples of audience grouping and content being developed for specific (possibly niche) audiences.
- The **audience** for Radio 4 can be **categorised** in terms of age, social class and expected levels of education. Candidates might consider if there is any institution more likely to target a highly educated, elderly, upper class audience than Radio 4.
- Then consider the extent to which *Late Night Woman's Hour* **challenges** the established audience of this channel. Some examples of these challenges to the Radio 4 audience might include the obvious gender bias, the presence of Lauren Laverne and the nature of the content.
- The **gender bias** of the show could be explored by considering the traditional male audience of Radio 4 and the likelihood that these men would listen to the show. Similarly the presence of Lauren Laverne (with her indie music background) and the "edgy" content of the show could be explored against the traditional demographic of Radio 4.

### Consider how audiences interpret the media, including how and why audiences may interpret the same media in different ways:

- Candidates might consider a **male response** to the content of the show. They might consider how many other media texts are composed of only female members (even *Loose Women* for instance has male guests) and how this might be unsettling or alienating for male listeners. They might compare this to a female audience and question whether or not this same gender composition might be appealing to some female audiences.
- Explore responses to *Late Night Woman's Hour* on **Twitter and other social media platforms**. *The Spectator* described the initial response to the show as a “twitter storm” and candidates might discuss the ways in which the broadcast has been designed to invite audience members to enter the discussion through social media platforms. Might the controversial nature of some of the episodes have been designed to invite strong responses and polarise audience opinion?

### Consider how media organisations reflect the different needs of mass and specialised audiences, including through targeting:

- A return to the remit of **PSB** here could invite discussion about the BBC and attempts to produce content for all audience demographics. Candidates might ask whether the broadcast

has been designed to explicitly appeal to a **specialised (educated, female) audience** as part of the remit of the organisation itself.

- An extension of this discussion might explore whether there are any other media products that appeal to this specific target audience on the radio (BBC or otherwise).

### Consider theoretical approaches:

#### Reception theory - Stuart Hall

- Discuss possible **different readings** of the broadcast. There may be some particularly interesting **oppositional** readings (largely in relation to a perceived masculine response). A gendered approach may consider the lack of male representation. Candidates might compare this to **preferred** readings along similar gender lines. They could be encouraged to consider how often this female dominance is reversed and the ways in which it is often likely that males will dominate a media text.
- In 2014 the BBC famously introduced a ban on all male TV and radio panels to offset this dominance. Candidates might use this as a discussion point to consider preferred readings of *Late Night Woman's Hour* and why it might be particularly welcome to some audiences.