

# Introduction

In 1954, Dame Enid Lyons, the first Australian woman elected to the House of Representatives, remarked in an interview with *ABC Weekly* that radio had ‘created a bigger revolution in the life of a woman than anything that has happened any time’, as it enabled women to engage with world affairs while doing the housework. According to Lyons, radio had given women the ‘confidence’ to accept ‘responsibility in public affairs’, resulting in a marked improvement in women’s social and political standing.<sup>1</sup> Taking this claim as a starting point, this book shows how a cohort of women used broadcasting to contribute to the public sphere and improve women’s status in Australia from the introduction of radio in 1923 until the introduction of television in 1956. It traces the changing role of radio as a tool for women’s activism and its wider significance to the history of women’s advancement in Australia.

Australian women broadcasters were active citizens who contributed to public debates on a range of issues, worked to educate and empower their listeners, and normalised the presence of women’s voices in the public sphere, both literally and figuratively. While women broadcasters were often given roles, timeslots, and programs that continued to perpetuate women’s lowered status in the workplace and public life, many recognised the potential of the medium and used it to advance women’s status by strengthening their claims to a public voice. Women’s equality requires real cultural change, which includes the opportunity for women to be heard and have a chance to influence society. From the 1920s, radio provided a platform for Australian women to speak and be heard in public on a scale not previously experienced. Further, radio bridged the public and private spheres as it was a public medium heard primarily within a domestic setting, and women made up the majority of listeners, especially during the day. The ability to reach a large, diffuse audience of female listeners

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1 ‘Dame Enid Lyons: ABC Commissioner’, *ABC Weekly*, 27 March 1954, 20.

made the medium especially suited to advancing women's position by providing them with a tool to integrate themselves into the public sphere. In this book I tell the story of professional women broadcasters who used the medium to improve the status of women, as well as leading women activists and politicians who used broadcasting as a platform for their advocacy. These women used their skills and the tools at their disposal to contribute to public discourse and break down barriers to women's participation in the public sphere.

## Radio in Australia

The first official radio broadcast in Australia occurred on 13 November 1923 under the sealed set system, which restricted listeners to only one pre-set station. After a substantial amount of pressure from radio dealers, enthusiasts and the general public, coupled with the low take-up of sealed set licences, the Australian Government abandoned this policy in 1924 and replaced it with the dual system of A-Class and B-Class stations. A-Class stations received their revenue from listeners' licence fees, although in the earliest years they were allowed small amounts of advertising to improve their ability to produce quality content. B-Class stations were financed privately, largely through advertising.<sup>2</sup>

In 1932, the Australian Government set up the Australian Broadcasting Commission (ABC), which took over and nationalised the A-Class licences, ostensibly to increase quality programming in the smaller states. Radio was largely a middlebrow cultural form that featured programming that fell between high and popular culture, and often aimed to cultivate the general population.<sup>3</sup> However, what constituted the right balance between education and entertainment became a point of disagreement between A- and B-Class stations and their audiences. The ABC aimed to broadcast programs that 'educated, enlightened and entertained', and they projected their claim to cultural authority through the use of announcers with cultured voices.<sup>4</sup> But many listeners appreciated

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2 Bridget Griffen-Foley, *Changing Stations: The Story of Australian Commercial Radio* (Sydney: UNSW Press, 2009), 6–15; John Potts, *Radio in Australia* (Sydney: New South Wales University Press, 1989), 18.

3 Anna Johnston, 'Becoming "Pacific-Minded": Australian Middlebrow Writers in the 1940s and the Mobility of Texts', *Transfers* 7, no. 1 (2017): 91.

4 Griffen-Foley, *Changing Stations*, 11.

the lighthearted approach of the B-Class stations over the ABC, and the number of commercial stations steadily increased over the 1930s.<sup>5</sup> Australia's dual system of commercial and public broadcasting also meant that radio developed differently than in Great Britain, which only had public broadcasting until the mid-1950s, and the United States, which had a commercial network system.<sup>6</sup> Australian listeners could easily switch between the authoritative style of the ABC and the intimate style of commercial stations, which placed the divergent styles of commercial and public broadcasting in close proximity.

The unique conditions of World War II (WWII) stimulated Australian commercial radio throughout the 1940s and 1950s. In 1939, the Australian Government banned the importation of non-essential goods from non-sterling countries. This meant that copies of American programs, which were largely dramas and comedies, were no longer available. The Australian radio industry had to develop its own programs and production infrastructure to make up the shortfall, which led to significant growth in the industry during the 1940s.<sup>7</sup> Further, newsprint rationing meant that advertisers flocked to commercial radio at a time when audiences also came to rely more heavily on radio for news and entertainment, particularly in regional areas. The production of locally made dramas, including a large number of daytime soap operas, continued to grow in the postwar years, and many of these programs were exported internationally.<sup>8</sup> However, the introduction of television in 1956 changed many types of radio programming, as soap operas, quiz shows and even women's sessions moved onto the new medium, and music increasingly became the dominant form of radio programming.<sup>9</sup> Some talk radio remained, and the legalisation of talkback radio in 1967 provided a boost to the genre, but these programs were presented by provocative, and usually male, hosts.<sup>10</sup> By the 1970s, the role of radio as a central space for women to perform citizenship had receded, replaced

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5 Ibid.

6 For more information on the radio industries of the United States and Great Britain see: Michele Hilmes, *Network Nations: A Transnational History of British and American Broadcasting* (New York: Routledge, 2012).

7 David Goodman and Susan Smulyan, 'Portia Faces the World: Re-Writing and Re-Voicing American Radio for an International Market', in *Radio's New Wave: Global Sound in the Digital Era*, ed. Jason Loviglio and Michele Hilmes (New York & London: Routledge, 2013), 163–79.

8 Potts, *Radio in Australia*, 70–73; Goodman and Smulyan, 'Portia Faces the World'.

9 Richard Waterhouse, *Private Pleasures, Public Leisure: A History of Australian Popular Culture Since 1788* (Melbourne: Longman, 1995), 212.

10 Griffen-Foley, *Changing Stations*, 383–86.

by the very public and transformative activism of the women's liberation movement. Nevertheless, its importance to earlier generations of women was significant, and deserves historical attention as a key part in the fight for women's equality in Australia.

## Women on the Air

Women's radio programming has largely been presented as reinforcing domesticity, and restricting women's roles to those of wife, mother and homemaker. Lesley Johnson, for instance, has argued that through designating separate women's programs, Australian radio 'worked to produce a sense in which all women were commonly defined by one thing: their relationship with the private, domestic sphere of family life'.<sup>11</sup> Women were taught to be efficient household managers and their daily routines were structured around the radio program by creating set times for breaks.<sup>12</sup>

While women's sessions certainly did devote airtime to talks on mothercraft, cookery, homemaking, fashion and beauty, the assessment of the women's sessions as solely reinforcing domestic ideals of womanhood neglects that they provided platforms for various women, and men, to speak on a wide variety of topics.

From its earliest days, the ABC broadcast educative programming such as well-selected music, informative talks, church services and the occasional play.<sup>13</sup> While ideals of authority and the norms of media employment meant that announcers on the ABC were often male, this perspective only interprets radio's educative function in a very narrow way and neglects the role that female speakers on the ABC played in educating fellow women to be citizens. That they often did so within the confines of the daytime women's sessions has led to their work being neglected.

In contrast to the ABC, Johnson has argued that Australian commercial radio's educative function in the interwar years was geared towards fostering a new type of citizen who sought fulfilment in the private realm

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11 Lesley Johnson, *The Unseen Voice: A Cultural History of Australian Radio* (London: Routledge, 1988), 101.

12 *Ibid.*, 101–04.

13 K. S. Inglis, *This is the ABC: The Australian Broadcasting Commission, 1932–1983* (Carlton, Vic.: Melbourne University Press, 1983), 25–29.

of domestic consumption. Although radio provided new opportunities for these citizens to learn about politics and high culture, for Johnson they were still consumers of that culture rather than active participants.<sup>14</sup> This was particularly so in the case of women. Radio addressed women as a united group with common interests, which Johnson argues belatedly contributed to women's awakened public consciousness in the 1960s, as by that point they had been publicly addressed as a unified group for over 30 years. In the interwar years, however, women's ability to be more informed about politics through radio reinforced the divisions between the political public sphere and the consumerist private sphere: women could eavesdrop on political conversations, but they could not take part in them.<sup>15</sup>

In this book, I demonstrate that women were, in fact, active participants in radio's education of new citizens in the interwar years on both the ABC and the commercial stations. Indeed, the commercial stations often offered greater opportunities for women to discuss important issues on air as they were not subject to the same level of editorial scrutiny as the ABC.<sup>16</sup> Throughout the period covered by this book, the commercial stations and the ABC took turns at being more welcoming to women's broadcasting. From its earliest days, the ABC adhered to stringent editorial and personnel policies, including a marriage bar for women, which often limited women's opportunities to broadcast their ideas. Commercial stations had the freedom to make their own hiring and programming decisions, and increasingly offered more opportunities for women to broadcast throughout the 1930s and during WWII—including those in regional areas. But, in the postwar era, as commercial stations increasingly broadcast serial dramas in place of women's sessions, the ABC largely took over as the key medium for women's broadcasts on social and political issues.

This difference in focus between the ABC and commercial stations shaped their programming content and presentation styles, with the ABC positioning itself as a more highbrow offering, and commercial stations promoting entertainment and intimacy. Yet, class distinctions were still drawn among the commercial stations—Sydney station 2CH,

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14 Johnson, *The Unseen Voice*, 203–05.

15 *Ibid.*, 204–05.

16 Jeannine Baker, 'Woman to Woman: Australian Feminists' Embrace of Radio Broadcasting, 1930s–1950s', *Australian Feminist Studies* 31, no. 93 (2017): 293.

for example, promoted itself to advertisers as a station that appealed to a 'better class of homes'.<sup>17</sup> As we will see, the women broadcasters themselves were almost always white and usually middle class or wealthy, and often made use of their personal connections to claim their spots on the air. In many cases, they imagined that they were speaking to an audience of women similar to themselves. There are notable exceptions to this, however, such as Depression-era and regional women's sessions that were particularly focused on helping working-class women, and political broadcasts targeted at working-class women voters.

Women's programming on both Australian commercial radio and the ABC during the early to mid-twentieth century was complex and varied in its content. This was demonstrated in the response to an opinion piece by Eva Linn published in the *ABC Weekly* in February 1941. In the piece, titled 'Women's Sessions Turn Me Sour', Linn bemoaned the domestic focus of many women's sessions, and asked: 'Are all women (except me) exclusively interested in Food, Face, and Floors? Would it not be a pleasure to hear about some other subjects and objects than our daily work?'<sup>18</sup> This article sparked a strong response from readers, some of whom wrote to the *ABC Weekly* to point out that many women's sessions did, in fact, include discussion about topics other than 'Food, Face, and Floors'. Gladys Moore, compere of the ABC national women's session, wrote that 'our material includes the latest news from overseas, and items of general interest for women. Very little "domesticity" finds a place in our Women's Hour'.<sup>19</sup> A listener wrote to describe the women's session on Sydney commercial station 2KY:

Eva Linn wouldn't be turned sour if she discovered the woman's session which is my daily tonic. The announcer speaks in a clear, quiet, unaffected voice and doesn't assume that we are either snobs or nit-wits.<sup>20</sup>

Another listener wrote of the 3LO women's session in Melbourne:

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17 Johnson, *The Unseen Voice*, 104.

18 Eva Linn, 'Women's Sessions Turn Me Sour', *ABC Weekly*, 10 February 1940, 20.

19 Gladys Moore, 'Women's Sessions Turn Me Sour', *ABC Weekly*, 2 March 1940, 63.

20 'Emily', 'Her Ideal', *ABC Weekly*, 2 March 1940, 63.

In this Session I have heard talks by a Woman Journalist, Talks on Life in Holland, Life in an Indian Reservation, Other People's Studios ... One should not condemn all women's sessions, because of a few.<sup>21</sup>

As these letters indicate, the hosts of the programs were especially important to their success, as a good compere both selected good content and presented it in a professional and engaging style.

While it is widely believed that the opportunities for women to have careers as radio announcers were very limited, there is evidence to suggest that there were greater opportunities than previously recognised. There has been a widespread perception that there was a bias against women announcers because the announcer's voice was seen to be a public one, and the public sphere was a masculine domain.<sup>22</sup> Evidence from the time suggests that the term 'announcer' had a much broader application, and simply referred to the presenter of a program, not exclusively as a news or inter-program presenter. In 1934, for example, Muriel Sutch noted that there were increasing numbers of women announcers who were no longer considered to be unsuitable for the job.<sup>23</sup> Announcing was certainly a highly gendered activity, and women announcers were predominantly heard on daytime radio sessions, but the claim that announcing was a male preserve neglects that the women who presented women's sessions were very much considered to be announcers as well.

## Debates over Radio Speech

Australian radio provided women with a range of opportunities to speak over the airwaves, which was a crucial way in which women participated in the public sphere as citizens during the mid-twentieth century. The sound of the voice differentiated radio speech from the written word, and this sonic dimension made radio especially significant for women's advancement as it normalised the sound of women's voices in the public sphere. The proliferation of newspaper women's pages in the nineteenth century and women's magazines in the twentieth century certainly created important spaces for women in the mass media and new careers for

21 'Another Housewife', 'Women's Sessions Turn Me Sour', *ABC Weekly*, 9 March 1940, 63.

22 Potts, *Radio in Australia*, 106.

23 Muriel Sutch, 'Broadcasting from a Woman's Viewpoint', *Broadcast Year Book and Radio Listeners' Annual*, 1934, 89.

women in journalism.<sup>24</sup> Print media publications created communities of women through the use of specific types of language that signal membership of a particular group. However, the addition of the sonic voice made radio a more intimate and immediate medium that captured the personal qualities of oral communication. As such, listeners praised both the content and the style of the speaker's presentation and appear to have viewed the quality of both as crucial to meeting the criteria for a good radio talk.

The advent of radio in 1923 provided 'a new benchmark of correct Australian English', and broad Australian accents were generally not heard on the airwaves.<sup>25</sup> There was a divide between the formal voices of the ABC, and the more intimate and conversational style of the commercial stations.<sup>26</sup> However, this distinction between the overly formal ABC and the intimate commercial stations has been somewhat exaggerated, as all radio speech in this era exhibited a level of formality.<sup>27</sup>

The perception of women's voices as too shrill or lacking in authority was common in the early decades of Australian radio.<sup>28</sup> Yet, it is apparent that these criticisms formed part of a more nuanced discourse of appropriate radio speech, which was closely linked to changing notions of Australian identity, particularly in terms of the creeping Americanisation of popular culture and, later, resentments over the influence of visiting American troops during WWII.<sup>29</sup> This evidence indicates that women's voices on the air were criticised by those who believed that there was a decline of spoken English in Australia, and that they were by no means the sole targets of listeners' ire. This is particularly well demonstrated by the frequency of letters decrying the use of faux-American accents on the air, particularly from the mid-1940s, as well as the regular contributions of listeners correcting the pronunciation of specific words and even particular vowel and consonant sounds, such as the 'cult of the extra r'.<sup>30</sup>

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24 Patricia Clarke, 'Women in the Media', in *A Companion to the Australian Media*, ed. Bridget Griffen-Foley (North Melbourne: Australian Scholarly Publishing Ltd, 2014), 495–98.

25 Joy Damousi, *Colonial Voices: A Cultural History of English in Australia 1840–1940* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 240.

26 Johnson, *The Unseen Voice*, 73.

27 Damousi, *Colonial Voices*, 244.

28 Inglis, *This is the ABC*, 32; Damousi, *Colonial Voices*, 251.

29 Julie Coleman, *The Life of Slang* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 218; Pam Peters, 'Australian English', in *Americanization in Australia*, ed. Philip Bell and Roger Bell (Sydney: UNSW Press, 1998), 32–44.

30 J. T. Fawcett, 'The Cult of the Extra R', *ABC Weekly*, 20 January 1945, 8.

Women speakers could, and did, exhibit good radio voices that conformed to the highest standards of elocution.<sup>31</sup> This was, for example, a key aspect of the early success of the first woman announcer on Australian radio, Stella Hume, who ran B-Class station 5DN along with her husband Ernest from their Adelaide home in the 1920s.<sup>32</sup> The *Listener In* described her as ‘one of the best announcers in Australia’, which was ‘largely explained by her elocutionary skill and meticulous care in her position at the microphone’.<sup>33</sup>

Listeners assessed women speakers using these criteria of ideal feminine speech. For every listener who criticised a female announcer, there were usually several others who wrote in to defend and praise her, and even compare her favourably to male speakers. For example, in March 1945, the *Listener In* published a letter that criticised a woman announcer on the ABC: ‘Axes to Jane for her loud voice and the affectation of her broadcast at the welcome to Melbourne of the Duke and Duchess of Gloucester.’<sup>34</sup> Two weeks later, the magazine published a letter from another reader who defended Jane’s broadcast:

Imagine anyone calling Jane of the A.B.C. affected. I don’t know of any more natural or unaffected announcer on the air. I considered that she was the only one worth listening to in the otherwise dreary repetition that we heard from the male announcers on the occasion of the arrival of the Duke and Duchess.<sup>35</sup>

The following week another letter was published: ‘A special axe to “Anti-Jane” for his/her most unkind comments about Jane, who is as fine a woman as ever breathed.’<sup>36</sup>

Understanding attitudes to women’s speech on the air needs to take into account the broader discourses of ideal speech. If they used speaking styles that conformed to certain ideals, women could use radio to disseminate their ideas, experiences and agendas to a receptive audience—both male and female. A pleasant speaking voice could, therefore, help women to engage in public discourse and to have their place taken more seriously.

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31 Damousi, *Colonial Voices*, 254.

32 Nancy Robinson Whittle, ‘Hume, Stella Leonora Hariette’, *Australian Dictionary of Biography* (National Centre of Biography, The Australian National University, first published in hardcopy in 1996), adb.anu.edu.au/biography/hume-stella-leonora-harriette-10571, accessed 9 May 2016.

33 ‘A Visit to 5.D.N Adelaide’, *Listener In*, 7 November 1925, 12.

34 ‘Anti-Jane’, ‘Voicing a Protest’, *Listener In*, 10 March 1945, 18.

35 ‘Mary Jane’, ‘Jane of the A.B.C.’, *Listener In*, 24 March 1945, 17.

36 ‘Sunny Jim’, ‘Unfair Attacks’, *Listener In*, 31 March 1945, 18.

This book reveals that women not only spoke on the airwaves, but also that their radio speech was a powerful tool for challenging the gender hierarchy of the public sphere. By using particular forms of radio speech, Australian women were able to speak on a wide range of issues with a measure of authority. In doing so, they were able to claim their place as active citizens in the early to mid-twentieth century. Radio provided opportunities for women to speak publicly in new ways and for the public to hear women's voices on both a much larger scale and in a more intensive way than ever before.

## The Australian Woman Citizen

This book restores a key part of female experience and political action in the mid-twentieth century to the historical record by focusing on the intersections between broadcasting, gender and citizenship. Radio was a transformative technology that had a significant impact on the lives of women and helped them to claim their voices as citizens in the mid-twentieth century. As such, it played a key role in the longer history of feminism and women's citizenship in Australia.

Women's ability to have an equal stake in Australian society was at the heart of the movement for women's suffrage in the late nineteenth century. They were taking equal part in the religious and moral development of the people, and doing more than half of the education, charity and philanthropic work of society, and, as a result, suffragists pointed to their already extant roles as social citizens as the basis for their enfranchisement.<sup>37</sup> Through campaigning for the vote, divorce law reform, the right to education and economic independence, first-wave feminists sought to claim their equality with men as citizens.<sup>38</sup> Suffrage-era feminists believed that women's enfranchisement and equality would bring much-needed new perspectives into civic decision-making, resulting in the betterment of society.<sup>39</sup> But non-white women were left out of this vision of female citizenship—for example, white activists completely ignored non-white

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37 Eva Cox, 'Feminism and Citizenship', in *Rethinking Australian Citizenship*, ed. Wayne Hudson and John Kane (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 56–65.

38 Patricia Grimshaw et al., *Creating a Nation* (Melbourne: McPhee Gribble, 1994), 176; Marilyn Lake, *Getting Equal: The History of Australian Feminism* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1999), 19–45; Susan Magarey, *Passions of the First Wave Feminists* (Sydney: UNSW Press, 2001), 172.

39 Lake, *Getting Equal*, 28.

women during the campaign for women's suffrage in South Australia in the 1880s and 1890s. Although the South Australian *Constitution (Female Suffrage) Act 1895* did enfranchise Aboriginal women (unlike those in Queensland and Western Australia), it would take several decades before white feminists would recognise and begin to address the unique and substantial oppressions experienced by Aboriginal women.<sup>40</sup>

The opportunities for women to be integrated into the equal citizenship of the independent worker were curtailed by the 1910s, replaced by a new conceptualisation of citizenship based on women's status as the mothers of the white race who could secure Australia's future as an Anglo-Celtic nation.<sup>41</sup> Although, as Susan Magarey has argued, maternal citizenship 'was for suffrage-era feminists a constricted and limited version of the citizenship for which they had struggled', in the post-suffrage era many feminists saw maternal citizenship as the means to free women from the violation of their bodies and their subjugation to men.<sup>42</sup> Marilyn Lake has shown that by emphasising their value as mothers, rather than wives, they lobbied the state to pay them a motherhood endowment to reward them for their work and protect them against destitution.<sup>43</sup> They argued that as their work as mothers was equal to men's paid work, they should enjoy the same financial security and independence available to working men. Although they were unsuccessful in winning a motherhood endowment, they were successful in creating a maternalist welfare state and eventually winning child endowment.<sup>44</sup>

Traditional women's organisations such as the Housewives Associations, the Country Women's Association and the Women's Christian Temperance Union enacted the ideal of maternal citizenship in a collective capacity. The Australian Women's National League, for instance, believed that women's 'civic duty was the defence of the home and the private sphere, and

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40 Patricia Grimshaw, 'Reading the Silences: Suffrage Activists and Race in Nineteenth Century Settler Societies', in *Citizenship, Women and Social Justice: International Historical Perspectives*, ed. Joy Damousi and Katherine Ellinghaus (Melbourne: University of Melbourne and the Australian Network for Research in Women's History, 1999), 30–42.

41 Magarey, *Passions of the First Wave Feminists*, 173.

42 Ibid.

43 Marilyn Lake, 'The Revolution in the Family: The Challenge and Contradictions of Maternal Citizenship in Australia', in *Mothers of a New World: Maternalist Politics and the Origins of Welfare States*, ed. Seth Koven and Sonya Michel (New York & London: Routledge, 1993), 379.

44 Lake, *Getting Equal*, 12.

autonomy could only be won within these limits'.<sup>45</sup> Maternal citizenship provided the impetus for the activism of these large organisations and was characteristic of women's sense of their unique responsibility in the post-suffrage era.

Difference was a key feature of white feminists' conceptualisation of citizenship in the interwar years. If equality meant that women were the same as men, they reasoned, then they would need to articulate their demands in the same way as them. Yet, understanding women's claims to citizenship as gendered acknowledged their difference to men, which in turn enabled women's voices to be heard in a limited way as they were not perceived as a threat to male superiority but as representatives of women's niche interests.<sup>46</sup> The centrality of difference to feminists' conceptions of the woman citizen resulted in women being viewed as representatives of their sex, rather than as fully fledged citizens.<sup>47</sup>

Although the interwar years saw the dominance of maternal citizenship as an ideology, it did not go unchallenged. According to Marilyn Lake, in the 1930s, the 'feminist platform began to be reformulated to accommodate the new emphasis on women's right to work, the sameness of women and men as human beings, as workers and as citizens'.<sup>48</sup> Much of this rhetoric was a continuation of the vision of first-wave feminists to integrate women into equal and independent citizenship. WWII was the first serious test for Australian feminists, who sought to capitalise on women's contributions to the war effort by pushing for permanent rights in the new postwar society. But, as the politics of the Cold War set in, the feminist movement became increasingly divided and its potency as a mass movement lessened as many adherents focused on their own interests.<sup>49</sup>

Formal equality in public life became a key focus of feminist activism in the 1950s. Campaigns for women's right to work and receive equal pay, women's right to sit on juries and women's representation in parliament were all fought in the period before the advent of the women's liberation

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45 Marian Quartly, 'Defending "The Purity of Home Life" against Socialism: The Founding Years of the Australian Women's National League', *Australian Journal of Politics and History* 50, no. 2 (2004): 179.

46 Elizabeth van Acker, *Different Voices: Gender and Politics in Australia* (Melbourne: Macmillan Education Australia Pty Ltd, 1999), 194–95.

47 Marilyn Lake, 'Personality, Individuality, Nationality: Feminist Conceptions of Citizenship 1902–1940', *Australian Feminist Studies* 19 (1994): 30.

48 Lake, *Getting Equal*, 173.

49 Zora Simic, 'A Hall of Selective Mirrors: Feminism, History and Identity, 1919–1969' (PhD Thesis, University of Sydney, 2003), 1–2.

movement in the 1960s and 1970s.<sup>50</sup> This change over time has not been adequately explained; rather, there is a sense of inevitability about the shift in focus from maternalism to equality from the 1930s onwards. Between 1919 and 1969, feminists utilised a dual rhetoric that emphasised both women's equality as citizens and 'the special contributions of mothers'.<sup>51</sup> They wanted to legitimise their movement by demonstrating that it could be incorporated 'into the political, social and cultural fabric of society'.<sup>52</sup>

Radio was an important part of the political, social and cultural fabric of society in this period. Women's use of it to spread their messages and to speak directly to a large audience of other women was key to the legitimisation of feminism as a political movement as well as the legitimisation of women's voices in the public sphere more generally. The women featured in this book believed that broadcasting could affect a deeper cultural change that would encourage and support women's social, economic and political advancement in Australia, and they worked to help it live up to its promise.

## Radio and Public Spheres

There has been significant work on the history of broadcasting across the world, including in Australia, where Bridget Griffen-Foley has produced a substantial work on the history of commercial radio, and K. S. Inglis has done likewise for the ABC.<sup>53</sup> Jennifer Bowen has examined how many different groups of people enthusiastically embraced early Australian spoken-word radio as a way to have their voices heard in public.<sup>54</sup> Histories of radio audiences and the construction of the listening subject have also been published in recent years, most notably the work of Lesley Johnson for Australia and Susan Douglas for the United States.<sup>55</sup> Some histories of radio have recognised the importance of radio magazines in educating listeners, particularly Johnson's work on interwar Australian radio, and

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50 Lake, *Getting Equal*, 206.

51 Simic, 'A Hall of Selective Mirrors', 1–2.

52 Ibid.

53 Griffen-Foley, *Changing Stations*; Inglis, *This is the ABC*.

54 Jennifer Bowen, 'A Clamour of Voices: Negotiations of Power and Purpose in Australian Spoken-Word Radio from 1924 to 1942' (PhD thesis, University of Melbourne, 2018).

55 Johnson, *The Unseen Voice*; Susan Douglas, *Listening In: Radio and the American Imagination* (New York: Times Books, 1999).

Lacey's work on women's radio in Weimar and Nazi Germany.<sup>56</sup> Although limited source material makes researching the responses of radio audiences difficult, there has been some fruitful work done on this topic in recent years. For example, Elena Razlogova has shown the significant role that listeners played in shaping interwar American radio programming, while Anne F. MacLennan has examined the ways in which Canadian audiences shaped their own ways of listening to the radio in the 1930s.<sup>57</sup> Rebecca P. Scales has examined the intense debates that accompanied the rapid spread of broadcasting in France following World War I. She has argued that France began to understand itself as a 'radio nation' where radio listening became an important, if contested, citizenship practice.<sup>58</sup> Several historians have examined the role of radio in the construction of American culture and notions of citizenship in the interwar years, including Douglas Craig and David Goodman.<sup>59</sup>

The gendered development of radio has also received considerable attention both in terms of women as the major audience and target of advertisements, as well as the place of women as announcers and actors.<sup>60</sup> Many historians have argued that women were relegated to traditionally feminine roles on the air, including as presenters of women's and children's

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56 Johnson, *The Unseen Voice*, 78; Kate Lacey, *Feminine Frequencies: Gender, German Radio, and the Public Sphere, 1923–1945* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996), 11.

57 Elena Razlogova, *The Listener's Voice: Early Radio and the American Public* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), 55–72; Anne F. MacLennan, 'Learning to Listen: Developing the Canadian Radio Audience in the 1930s', *Journal of Radio & Audio Media* 20, no. 2 (2013), 311–26.

58 Rebecca P. Scales, *Radio and the Politics of Sound in Interwar France, 1921–1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 15–20.

59 Douglas B. Craig, *Fireside Politics: Radio and Political Culture in the United States* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000); David Goodman, *Radio's Civic Ambition: American Broadcasting and Democracy in the 1930s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); Jason Loviglio, *Radio's Intimate Public: Network Broadcasting and Mass-Mediated Democracy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005).

60 For discussions of women as radio audiences see: Razlogova, *The Listener's Voice*; Donna Halper, 'Speaking for Themselves: How Radio Brought Women into the Public Sphere', in *Radio Cultures: The Sound Medium in American Life*, ed. Michael C. Keith (New York: Peter Lang, 2008), 77–93; Maggie Andrews, *Domesticating the Airwaves: Broadcasting, Domesticity and Femininity* (London, New York: Continuum, 2012). For discussions of women as announcers and actors see: Donna Halper, *Invisible Stars: A Social History of Women in American Broadcasting* (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 2001); Christine Ehrick, "'Savage Dissonance': Gender, Voice, and Women's Radio Speech in Argentina, 1930–1945", in *Sound in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, ed. David Suisman and Susan Strasser (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), 69–92; Lacey, *Feminine Frequencies*, 198–205.

sessions, as soap opera actors and as singers.<sup>61</sup> Several historians, including Damousi and Inglis, have identified instances of women's radio voices being criticised.<sup>62</sup> However, the focus on these criticisms has obscured the ways in which women broadcasters themselves claimed their voices on the air and built their careers.

American broadcasting historian Michele Hilmes has questioned these interpretations of women's roles on radio; according to her, women played a much greater role in the development of the American radio industry than has been recognised. She has argued that the women's sessions themselves were not solely vehicles for reinforcing a domestic ideal of womanhood, but in fact contained serious discussions about social and political issues and provided spaces within which women's dissatisfactions with domestic life could be aired.<sup>63</sup> Hilmes used the concept of the 'counterpublic sphere' to describe American women's radio programming, showing that this concept is useful for understanding the place of radio as a medium that bridged the private and the public. Jürgen Habermas argued that the public sphere was created by private individuals as a space for rational discussion and debate.<sup>64</sup> The public sphere is, therefore, a space created and sustained through communication—it became the 'designated theatre in modern societies in which political participation is enacted through the medium of talk'.<sup>65</sup> However, as Nancy Fraser has pointed out, this sphere is exclusionary; despite an assumption that all subjects can function *as if* they were equal, or somehow put aside their oppressions, this is not possible in practice. Thus, for Fraser, the hegemonic public sphere is a bourgeois, masculine and white ideal that masquerades as a space for all.

This does not mean that other groups have not constructed alternative public spheres. Fraser has posited the existence of a plurality of publics, or 'counterpublics', that can allow subordinated groups to create

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61 Bridget Griffen-Foley, 'Modernity, Intimacy and Early Australian Commercial Radio', in *Talking and Listening in the Age of Modernity: Essays on the History of Sound*, ed. Joy Damousi and Desley Deacon (Canberra: ANU E Press, 2007), 124–25; Ehrick, "'Savage Dissonance'"; Halper, *Invisible Stars*, 44; Amy Lawrence, *Echo and Narcissus: Women's Voices in Classical Hollywood Cinema* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 18.

62 Inglis, *This is the ABC*, 32; Lacey, *Feminine Frequencies*, 199; Damousi, *Colonial Voices*, 251.

63 Michele Hilmes, *Radio Voices: American Broadcasting, 1922–1952* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 131–32.

64 Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Burger (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1989), 27.

65 Nancy Fraser, 'Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy', *Social Text* 25/26 (1990): 70.

and disseminate alternative discourses 'to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests and needs'.<sup>66</sup> Several scholars have highlighted the existence of feminine counterpublics in modern media sources, including Hilmes on daytime radio programming for American women.<sup>67</sup> Hilmes's use of the counterpublic sphere is useful in explaining the significance of daytime programming as a space for women to discuss issues of importance to them and provide support to one another. However, the concept does not fully explain the broader significance of their broadcasts as contributions to public discourse nor their place in the broader story of women's advancement. As I argue in this book, women broadcasters also used their position to claim their own space within the hegemonic public sphere, and to encourage their female listeners to do the same. Therefore, radio provided not only a space for women to discuss their opinions among themselves, but also a platform for them to reshape the gendered hierarchies of society.

Several historians of radio in the United States, Western Europe and South America have pointed out that radio marked the emergence of a new type of public sphere that brought women into civic culture in new ways and changed how women's voices were heard. Donna Halper has argued that radio's importance in the United States lies not in its focus on a female audience, as the print media had already been doing this for decades, but rather in how it raised the profile of women broadcasters, who became well-known public figures.<sup>68</sup> Further, radio provided a public space in which various women could discuss their work and ideas, including controversial topics, with a wide audience.<sup>69</sup> In her study of women and radio in Weimar and Nazi Germany, Lacey has argued that the advent of broadcasting bridged the public and the private and, in doing so, brought women into a new public sphere, albeit one in which women were often confined to performing traditional forms of femininity, particularly in the Nazi era.<sup>70</sup> In her research on women's voices on Argentine and Uruguayan golden age radio, Christine Ehrick focused on case studies

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66 Ibid., 56–80.

67 Miyako Inoue, *Vicarious Language: Gender and Linguistic Modernity in Japan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 110–11; Hilmes, *Radio Voices*, 159–60.

68 Halper, 'Speaking for Themselves', 86–87.

69 Ibid., 89–90.

70 Lacey, *Feminine Frequencies*.

of a small number of women who used different types of radio speech and the ways in which they challenged the gendered hierarchies of the public sphere through their broadcasts.<sup>71</sup>

British scholars have begun to uncover the crucial roles that women played on British radio. According to Kristin Skoog, during the postwar era, British women were expected to participate in public discourse and did so through broadcasting.<sup>72</sup> Maggie Andrews has argued that the concerns of the female listener, as the radio stations imagined her, influenced the development of interwar broadcasting. The medium crossed the boundaries between the public and private, and the feminine realm thus effectively ‘domesticated the airwaves’.<sup>73</sup> Kate Murphy has produced a comprehensive history of early women at the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) in both behind the scenes roles and in front of the microphone. The BBC was ‘unusually enlightened’ as an organisation that allowed women to rise into senior roles and, in some cases, continue working after marriage if they were outstanding performers. Senior female producers, and the speakers they recruited, could also use their talks to engage in public debate. As Murphy argues, by researching the interests and agendas of the producers and speakers, as well as the working culture of the BBC, the choice of topics, presenters and speech styles can be better understood.<sup>74</sup>

Thus, much of the work on women’s radio has largely examined the role of women’s programming in creating an alternative public sphere for women over the airwaves, the criticisms of women’s radio voices, and the extent to which women in radio were able to forge successful careers and produce progressive programs. Less attention has been paid to the medium’s place as a key aspect of the struggle for women’s rights in the twentieth century, although there have been some brief considerations of this topic. Ehrick, for example, has argued that criticisms of women’s radio voices in the

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71 Christine Ehrick, *Radio and the Gendered Soundscape: Women and Broadcasting in Argentina and Uruguay, 1930–1950* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

72 Kristin Skoog, ‘Striving for Editorial Autonomy: BBC’s *Woman’s Hour*’, in *Women and the Media: Feminism and Femininity in Britain, 1900 to the Present*, ed. Maggie Andrews and Sallie McNamara (New York & London: Routledge, 2014), 99–112.

73 Andrews, *Domesticating the Airwaves*, iix–x, 4–7.

74 Kate Murphy, ‘From Women’s Hour to Other Women’s Lives: BBC Talks for Women and the Women Who Made Them, 1923–39’, in *Women and the Media: Feminism and Femininity in Britain, 1900 to the Present*, ed. Maggie Andrews and Sallie McNamara (New York & London: Routledge, 2014), 31–45; Kate Murphy, *Behind the Wireless: A History of Early Women at the BBC* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).

United States were a backlash against their federal enfranchisement in 1920. As such, arguments about the unsuitability of their vocal range sought to legitimise an argument for women's natural deficiencies in public speaking and political engagement, thereby reinforcing male hegemony in the public sphere. In Argentina, where women did not win the vote until 1947—over two decades after the introduction of radio—less emphasis was placed on the sonic qualities of women's voices and more on their excessively emotional and irrational ways of speaking.<sup>75</sup> Richard Butsch has also argued that, in the period immediately following women's enfranchisement in the United States, there was significant optimism that women's rights could be extended to other areas, including new technologies such as radio. However, he notes that this moment quickly faded due to a political backlash against women voters, and radio developed as a masculine technology and soundscape.<sup>76</sup>

There is also exciting work currently being done on women's radio in Australia, including Kylie Andrews's research on ABC women producers, Jeannine Baker's project on the history of women in Australian broadcasting and Justine Lloyd's work on mapping the geographies of women's radio.<sup>77</sup> These scholars have begun to reveal the stories of women in the Australian radio industry who actively used the medium to challenge the status quo. For instance, Linda Littlejohn, one of the founders of feminist organisation the United Associations (UA), was also a professional broadcaster—a position that was not incidental to her feminist work, but central to it. Through broadcasting, she reached thousands of women daily and claimed her place as a leading media personality and public figure.<sup>78</sup>

The UA made use of broadcasting as part of its activist toolkit and trained many of its members to be effective broadcasters. One such member, Irene Greenwood, went on to have a notable radio career in Western Australia. In her analysis of Greenwood's program *Woman to Woman*, broadcast in the late 1940s and early 1950s, Baker has argued that Greenwood drew

75 Ehrick, "Savage Dissonance", 76.

76 Richard Butsch, 'Crystal Sets and Scarf-Pin Radios: Gender, Technology and the Construction of American Radio Listening in the 1920s', *Media, Culture & Society* 20, no. 4 (1998): 559.

77 See for example: Kylie Andrews, 'Don't Tell Them I Can Type: Negotiating Women's Work in Production in the Post-War ABC', *Media International Australia* 161 (2016): 1–10; Kylie Andrews, 'Australian Broadcasting's Female "Pilgrims": Women and Work in the Post-War ABC' (PhD thesis, University of Technology Sydney, 2019); Baker, 'Woman to Woman', 292–308; Justine Lloyd, *Intimate Geographies: Gender and Media in the Broadcast Age* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019).

78 Baker, 'Woman to Woman', 297–98.

on her experiences of feminist broadcasting from her time in the UA to promote feminist messages and encourage her audience to actively participate in shaping the program's content.<sup>79</sup> Baker's work demonstrates that Australian feminists made use of commercial radio to disseminate their message in opposition to the 'narrow characterisation of women's interests and activities' supposedly found on most radio women's sessions.<sup>80</sup> This book builds on her work to show that the avowed feminists who used radio to fight against patriarchal norms were, in fact, part of a large and diverse cohort of Australian women broadcasters who were heard not only on commercial radio, but also on the ABC.

Rather than seeing feminists such as Greenwood and Littlejohn as a radical few who challenged the supposedly restrictive norm of women's broadcasting, I argue that many Australian women broadcasters used radio to contribute to public discourse, enact social and political change, help their communities, and legitimise themselves as informed and persuasive leaders in their chosen fields. Most importantly, by regularly speaking on the air, they legitimised the sound of women's voices in the public sphere as active citizens. There is a much broader and more complex history of women's contributions to Australian broadcasting than has been previously acknowledged.

## Researching Radio History

Like many histories of radio, this book is based largely on textual evidence, particularly radio periodicals, scripts, and institutional and personal correspondence. These sources provide important information about women's programming on Australian radio, as well as listener and management attitudes to women speaking on the air.

As the majority of radio programs themselves have not survived, radio periodicals are invaluable to anyone researching the history of Australian radio as they provide comprehensive program guides, news on radio stations, programs and presenters. They also demonstrate the close connection between broadcast and print media and, as Johnson has shown, they taught Australians how to 'listen in' to the new medium.<sup>81</sup>

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79 Ibid., 299–300.

80 Ibid., 298–99.

81 Johnson, *The Unseen Voice*, 70.

They also provide key evidence of reception, in the form of listener letters printed in the magazines. While the early magazines published in the 1920s were largely focused on wireless experimentation, the periodicals published in the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s contained sections dedicated to broader women's interests such as fashion, recipes and homemaking, and most featured advertisements aimed at female audiences. Some magazines, such as *Radio Pictorial of Australia*, profiled celebrity radio personalities. The feminisation of the content of radio magazines indicates the importance of radio as a medium that had a significant influence on the lives of women.

As is common in radio histories, there is limited evidence about audience responses to women broadcasters. The available sources comprise letters to radio periodicals and some letters to broadcasters themselves (especially in the Dame Enid Lyons and Irene Greenwood collections). The history of the female audience for radio is also currently being researched by Baker, who has already shown that they were not just 'passive receivers', but were sometimes actively involved in content creation.<sup>82</sup>

Listening to surviving recordings of programs from the time is also important, as radio was a sonic medium that imbued this period of Australian history with a novel, consistent and specific sound. I have attempted to locate recordings of women's radio broadcasts; however, as most early radio programs were not recorded, and women's sessions were often not deemed worthy of preservation, the selection is limited. I have been fortunate that a number of recordings of Lyons's radio broadcasts have survived in the National Film and Sound Archive (NFSA). I have also located recordings of Street and (Dame) Dorothy Tangney (both held at the NFSA) as well as some other women's sessions including Newcastle women's session *Heart to Heart* (held at the NFSA) and a small number of ABC women's sessions from across Australia held at the National Archives of Australia.

## Chapters

This book traces the ways that specific women broadcasters articulated the value of radio and used it as a tool to contribute to politics and society. I cover the use of broadcasting by interwar feminists, women announcers

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82 Baker, 'Woman to Woman', 302.

and women's radio clubs during the troubled years of the Great Depression, and then examine the broadcast activism of women horrified at the rise of fascism and the role that women broadcasters played in boosting morale and disseminating propaganda during WWII. Next, the book assesses the medium's role in the political careers of early female parliamentarians before examining the decline of women's talk-based programming in the face of increased prosperity, new types of programming and, finally, the introduction of television. The history of Australian women's broadcasting reveals much about how women expanded their role as citizens within the context of major social, economic and geopolitical shifts during the turbulent decades of the early to mid-twentieth century.

Chapter 1 examines how radio became established as a platform for women to contribute to the public sphere in the interwar years. As a new medium, radio was a public space that had yet to develop clear norms and boundaries, and this flexibility provided opportunities for women to claim space on the airwaves. Australia's dual system of commercial and public broadcasting influenced programming and audiences, with the former airing popular entertainment programs, and the latter predisposed to educational or civic-minded content, usually delivered by well-credentialed speakers. Commercial stations, however, offered many opportunities for women to speak on the air, and were less encumbered by strict editorial policies. The leaders of radio clubs, women's session comperes, feminists and women's organisations all used the medium to foster communities of women and integrate them into public citizenship. The increasing number of professional women broadcasters expressed their belief that they possessed the authority to contribute to public debate. Further, during the Great Depression, women broadcasters used their positions on the air to help the community by providing practical support and empathy to their listeners. Women's sessions became an important public platform from which feminists and other women's activists could contribute to public discourse and perform active social citizenship during the interwar years.

Chapter 2 examines women's broadcasts on international political and social issues in the 1930s. During a decade when the Great Depression limited the ability of many to travel, and the increasing calamity of the rise of fascism and the descent into WWII brought foreign affairs to the forefront of public debate, discussion of foreign topics on the air provided both a form of escapism and an important means by which women stayed abreast of international developments. Women

broadcasters, including Constance Duncan, Irene Greenwood and Ruby Rich, saw it as their responsibility to use broadcasting on both the ABC and commercial stations to educate other women and contribute to public debate on major world issues. They believed that women needed to become more active on the world stage in order to shape a more peaceful and cooperative global order and used their broadcasts to encourage their female listeners to become active and engaged world citizens. Radio was a medium that bridged vast distances and thus had the potential to reduce barriers between countries, and, as such, they saw it as an ideal medium to foster internationalist sentiment.

Chapter 3 argues that broadcasting was an important means by which Australian women contributed to the nation as patriotic citizens during WWII. Through radio talks, women encouraged each other to participate in the war effort and relayed their own experiences of the conflict. They gave short-wave broadcasts to American and Pacific listeners to elicit public support for and faith in the Allied war effort. Women speakers on radio were the vocal embodiment of the ideal patriotic female citizen, actively supporting Australia's war effort at home and abroad.

Chapter 4 examines how women in federal parliamentary politics used broadcasting on both commercial and public radio to shape their engagement with the electorate and develop their public profiles. It particularly focuses on the years surrounding the 1943, 1946 and 1949 federal election campaigns, and three women who were major figures at that time: Enid Lyons, Dorothy Tangney and Jessie Street. These women used broadcasting as a key part of their election campaigns to legitimise their positions as political candidates and, in the case of Lyons and Tangney, elected representatives. This chapter also closely analyses surviving recordings of their election broadcasts, which provide rare insight into the complex relationship between gender, sound and content on radio during this period.

The 1940s and 1950s are often remembered as a golden age of Australian radio due to the proliferation of Australian serial dramas and light entertainment on the air, especially on the commercial stations. In many cases, these programs displaced talk-based women's sessions in their traditional mid-morning and mid-afternoon timeslots. Chapter 5 considers how three broadcasters—Catherine King, Ida Elizabeth Jenkins and Irene Greenwood—continued to view broadcasting as a platform from which they could exercise leadership to combat what they saw as the

threat of the increasing popularity of serial dramas to women's exercise of citizenship. They believed that radio was still a medium that could empower women and they used their programs to promote their ideal of the postwar woman citizen, with mixed success. King and Greenwood were both Western Australian broadcasters and their work ensured that women's talk-based programming continued to have a strong presence in that state well into the 1950s.

Chapter 6 uses several case studies of women's broadcasting in areas outside Sydney and Melbourne to examine the role of women's broadcasting in fostering distinctive regional identities and cultures, and as a tool for strengthening local communities. Women in regional areas used radio to meet their specific needs, such as bridging long distances between each other, fostering distinctive identities, and providing information and intellectual stimulation. Radio thereby integrated into the public sphere women who would otherwise have been left out of it due to their location and provided opportunities for them to engage in active citizenship in their local communities.

The book concludes with a brief consideration of the impact of the introduction of television in 1956 on the importance of women's radio speech as a central aspect of female citizenship. This study aims to restore a key part of female experience and political action in the mid-twentieth century to the historical record by focusing on the intersections between broadcasting, gender and citizenship. Radio was a transformative technology that had a significant impact on the lives of women and helped them to claim their voices as citizens in mid-twentieth-century Australia.

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