

An Extra Slice of Jo Brand

Sharon Lockyer

ABSTRACT

In this candid interview Jo Brand, one of Britain's most popular and successful comedians, discusses her comedy career. Brand shares experiences and critical reflections on a wide range of comedy, from her first stand-up gig in the 1980s through to presenting the *Great British Bake Off: An Extra Slice* [2014-present]. She discusses the inspiration and motivation for her comic material, explains the highs and lows of working in television comedy and offers pragmatic advice for comedians wishing to pursue a career in comedy today.

KEY WORDS: Stand-up comedy, television comedy, gender, politics, identity, feminism

Jo Brand is one of the most popular and successful comedians working in Britain today.

Following a career as a psychiatric nurse, Jo moved into performing on the live comedy circuit, becoming a key figure in the alternative comedy movement, and then regularly writing for, and appearing on, a range of comedy and factual television programmes as either a presenter, panellist, judge, narrator, character or commentator.

Jo Brand has won a number of awards for both her stand-up and television comedy. These include British Comedy Awards in 1992 (Top Comedy Club Performer), 1995 (Best Stand-up Comic), 2010 and 2012 (both for Best Female TV Comic), and the Female Performance in a Comedy Role BAFTA award in 2011 for the BBC Four sitcom *Getting On* (2009-2012). In Channel 4's 100 Greatest Stand-Ups 2010 public poll Jo Brand was one of only two women to appear in the top 30 (Jo was positioned 30th and Victoria Wood in 10th). In addition, Jo Brand's services to the media and entertainment industries have been

acknowledged in honorary doctorates awarded by Brunel University London (2006) and Southampton Solent University (2010), and Jo's successful career was recognised in an honorary doctorate from University Campus Suffolk (2009).

I was delighted when Jo Brand agreed to talk to me about how her colourful comedy career highs and lows, the motivations behind her comedy material, how she made the transition from the live stand-up comedy circuit to television comedy, how to develop a comedy career in the current competitive television context, and much more.

Here's what Jo had to say when we met at the British Library in London on 27 January 2015.

Figure 1. Jo Brand

(photograph by Sally Trussler, Brunel University London).

SL= Sharon Lockyer

JB= Jo Brand

SL: How long have you been performing comedy?

JB: I started in 1986, so in a year that'll be 30 years.

SL: How did you get into comedy?

JB: I'd always wanted to do it from when I was a teenager, but I never had any idea whatsoever about how you went about it, and I used to talk to my friends and say I really want to do comedy. And then the alternative comedy scene started in the early 1980s and that perked me up, because that seemed a bit more appropriate to me because I was left wing, and it seemed to have an emphasis more on women getting a say, and

that sort of thing. So I started looking around then and thinking: what's the best thing to do? And I discovered there were open mic nights starting up. But, in fact, what happened in the end was I moaned to a friend of mine about it so much that when she set up a benefit - which was for Greenpeace I think in a room in Soho on which there were comedians performing - she said to me: 'Look, I'll put you on for five minutes at the end, so shut up and stop moaning about it and just do it.' I agreed to that. So that was my first ever gig.

SL: Is there anything about comedy as a form of expression that attracts you to it, or not?

JB: There's loads about comedy as a form of expression that attracts me. One of which is, as a very basic tenet of life, people with a sense of humour are much nicer people. For example, I don't think Margaret Thatcher ever had a sense of humour. And I think that that's quite dangerous, because not having a sense of humour, to me, is about vanity; not being able to take the piss out of yourself, it's about being uptight, it's about wanting power. It's about lots of things like that, so I've always loved people with a sense of humour. I've always thought that the world was a bloody miserable place and that if you can't have a laugh, then your life is miserable.

I always thought it would be a brilliant job because it was such short hours and I like to think I'm quite a lazy person in a lot of ways. Also, I wanted to do a job that I had control over and not have a boss, because I've never been terribly good with authority.

A third thing is politics, because I've always been very interested in politics and if you're an entertainer, it's kind of a way into politics if you want to. I don't want to be a politician because I think I'm too old and tired, and I'm too badly behaved to be a politician. I think politicians these days have to toe the line. I wouldn't want to do that.

I would want to be able to say what I thought and I don't think you really can. You have to stick to a script, which I couldn't do, but I am interested in trying to help a particular type of politics thrive. I wouldn't describe myself as a political comic at all, but I would say that I mention politics, and that I think you can have politics with a big P or a small p. A big P would be someone like Mark Steel, whose act is completely political, or, God bless her, Linda Smith, who was very political but expressed it in a small p kind of way. I would say that my material is infused with political views, but they're not overtly obvious in the sense that I blah on about big political issues.

SL: Did anything, or anyone, inspire you to go into comedy, or not?

JB: I think when I was a kid there weren't any really massive women comedians, especially not stand-ups. I think Marti Caine is probably the nearest to a stand-up that I saw, and her stuff didn't really appeal to me that much, although I thought she was brilliant, as she was very generalised and I always wanted to use comedy to express my views. A lot of stuff I thought about centred around women not having a voice – as women, you're silenced a lot of the time. Not so much nowadays, things have changed, but you're just expected to be a very superficial individual that kind of looks nice and does things for men really, and – again, that's not now – but it sort of used to feel like that to me, and you never had any comeback. So lots of women I know and me, for example, were shouted at by people in vans, or comments were made to us on the street, and I used to feel terribly frustrated as a woman that I didn't have any comeback.

Also, when I was a nurse, I worked in a very highly volatile environment, and people would be very abusive to the nursing staff, either because they were very ill and disturbed because it was an emergency clinic, or because they couldn't get what they wanted. Perhaps it was someone with an alcohol problem who wanted to be admitted,

and the people who got it taken out on were nurses. So I got abused quite a lot and very personally, and in a professional sense I understand that there was no way I could go, ‘Shut the fuck up, you man with a small knob’, to an alcoholic who was having a go at me. So I held it inside, but I did always want to somehow come back at that world of men - and I don’t mean all of them, but that largish group of men that thought it was alright to abuse women about their appearance.

SL: You mentioned your experience of being in nursing and I know you’ve done a psychology and sociology degree at Brunel University London. To what extent do your experiences of the academic study of psychology, sociology, social sciences and your experiences from being a nurse inform your material?

JB: It informs my material a lot because I did certain courses at Brunel that I was really fascinated by, including a course called ‘Ethno-methodology’, in which you examine the minutiae of social exchanges and strip them right down to their barest, most ridiculous level. And I actually do think that society and the way we interact with each other is quite ridiculous, and to look at those very small ways that people interact with each other, I think always stuck with me. I always think about that because I think that’s what comics do to a certain extent. They strip down social mores to their ridiculous roots and go: Isn’t that ridiculous? And they make people think about something in a certain way that they wouldn’t have thought about before. So in a lot of ways there were similarities. I’m interested in human behaviour, and I’m interested in politics and social behaviour. So I think, to a great extent, everything I did with nursing and with the degree really informed the comedy – yes, very much so.

SL: *Gender has been a key and consistent focus of your comic material. Are there any specific reasons why this has been the case, or not?*

JB: Gender's always been an important issue in my life, and obviously that starts with your parents, and my parents are very interesting characters because my mum is very bright. She turned down a place at Oxford to get married to my dad and I could just shake her for that. But there you go. She could shake herself I think as well. They're not together anymore, and she's very feisty, very politically orientated. She's a graffitier, which I shouldn't really say. She's just a kind of 80-year-old revolutionary really. She was a social worker for years, who worked in child protection, and that's obviously had a huge impact on me as well, her job.

Whereas my father for a substantial amount of his life, and particularly intensely when I was a teenager, suffered from depression, which was untreated, and that resulted in him being an incredibly difficult person to live with. He was quite aggressive – verbally aggressive, certainly, and physically aggressive on a number of occasions, and just quite a scary person.

I suppose my antipathy towards male power developed a bit, starting with him, and continued, to some extent, when I just, from looking around me, became aware of how men hold all the cards and how bloody irritating that is really. And how women were expected to fit into a certain role and because I didn't, I was frowned upon.

SL: *When did you first appear on TV?*

JB: I first appeared on TV in April 1988 on a show called *Friday Night Live* [1988], which was a live comedy and sketch show, compered by Ben Elton on Friday nights on Channel Four.

SL: *Was making the transition to TV a conscious decision?*

JB: Not necessarily. It hadn't really occurred to me, but what happened was once I started doing the clubs and building up a bit of a reputation, like everyone does that's developing, I got contacted via a comedy club via a TV producer who said: 'Can you audition for *Friday Night Live*?' I wouldn't have auditioned for it if they hadn't asked me to audition. I had to go in this room in the afternoon in front of a panel of three people just staring at me and do jokes. That was weird, and then when I did the first *Friday Night Live*, that's where the person – who's now my agent still after 30 years – approached me and said, 'Can I be your agent?' And I thought: she seems alright, yes, alright then. I didn't do any research whatsoever; it could have been an appalling decision, but you can always leave agents if you don't get on with them.

SL: *So after your appearance in Friday Night Live, when was your next appearance?*

JB: What happened, which was lovely – and I think Ben Elton was instrumental in that decision – was that they asked me back again on the same series, which was unheard of, because I don't think they'd done it before, and he said it was because he thought I was great and it was just funny and everything. So they booked me again for the end of the series. So I went twice on the same series. I think one other person did, (I can't remember who it was), and I think just the pure fact of doing that upped my profile a bit. Requests started coming into Vivienne Clore, who was my agent by then, asking me to do things. It was fairly slowly at first and I made some quite shit choices.

For example, I was asked to do a Christmas show called *Only Fools and Turkeys* [1990]. I didn't really suss out what it was and when I got there, I realised I had to dress up as a Christmas fairy, and I had to sit in a café in West London to be filmed doing a monologue. They didn't actually shut the café, and it was a builders'

café. So I'm sat at the counter dressed as a fairy with all these builders coming in to get their tea and their egg sandwich, and it was just excruciating. We were trying to film it and there were people coming in, saying, 'Look at the state of that', and all this sort of thing; it was awful and I just thought, oh well, now I know. It went out and I just thought no one will see it, because it's a kid's programme [and] on in the afternoon. Bloody Mark Lamarr, who's a friend of mine, saw it and just tormented me about it for months afterwards. You live and learn.

SL: What happened after these early TV appearances?

JB: What happened was it started to build, and there's always build-ups and you think it's going to happen, whatever that means, because actually you realise further on down the line that there doesn't come a point where suddenly you are a TV darling and work happens for the rest of your life. There're lulls and there're peaks and I did bits and pieces – not the big panel shows or anything like that – for a couple of years.

But I think what really helped me were two things: I did the Montreal Comedy Festival and appeared on that *Just for Laughs* [1987-1996] show on Channel 4; and I also did some shows in Edinburgh as well. In 1992 I got nominated for the Perrier Award, which was the comedy award. I didn't actually win it. Steve Coogan and John Thompson won it, but actually it was just the pure fact of being nominated and, in fact, a lot of people said to me a few years later, 'You won the Perrier, didn't you?' and I just used to go, 'Yeah.' Actually I think it did help me that on a lot of occasions I was a lone woman on things.

SL: What was your first TV series?

JB: The first series that I got was on Channel X which was actually a production company that Jonathan Ross used to run with a couple of other people, and he left it a couple of years after that and moved on. I did two series of *Jo Brand Through the Cakehole* [1993-1996], which was a sketch show with stand-up in it really, and there was so much money sloshing around in those days, it was incredible. You could do stuff that you just wouldn't be able to do these days. We had stand-up on it. We had sketches, which I wrote with another comedian called Jim Miller, and also there was a running series in it called 'Drudge Squad' which was about two policewomen, one of whom had young children, trying to manage their career. I loved doing that. That was one of my favourite things I've ever done actually.

SL: *Was there anything in particular that you enjoyed about this series, or not?*

JB: I think first of all, the other person that I worked with on it was a stand-up called Maria McErlane, who's actually still around. She's on Graham Norton's radio show on Saturday mornings and she writes columns for newspapers and things. And we just had such a laugh doing it really and we would sort of pitch ideas to them and go, 'In this one we want to be in a car and we want to drive into the sea' – and they'd go, 'Okay.' We couldn't believe they'd said okay, so we actually drove a car into the sea and we just did loads of stupid things like that. Hopefully it was funny. I remember someone in *The Independent* saying this is the stuff that legends are made of and I wanted to go round to his house and kiss him because no one else said that. I'm hoping that it was funny. It wasn't just doing stupid things for a lot of money.

Obviously with sketch shows, it's quite hit and miss really, and I also tried to make certain points that I wanted to make. For example, we did this amazing thing – and I can't believe we did it now – but we populated a village in Kent with black

people and we got all the white people out of the way. So at the beginning of the sketch, I'm driving through in a car and I've got my hood up, and there's just all black people on the pavement and they're all looking at the car as if they're really shocked and frightened. Then I get out of the car and walk into the pub, and the pub only has black people in it and a black guy behind the bar, so surreal for a little English village because they're so relentlessly white, so we changed it around. And then I put my hood down and then the guy behind the bar goes, 'Thank God, I thought it was Bernard Manning'. So there were opportunities to make points like that and just point at things that I think are weird in society and we took the piss out of.

SL: What happened after this series?

JB: After that I went back every year pretty much and did Edinburgh and expanded my stand-up. Things started to come in like – and this is TV for you actually – I did a show which was all about taking the piss out of adverts around the world and it wasn't really me. But to be honest with you, it was quite easy to do. I'd just kind of phone it in, in a way. I know I shouldn't say that, but I felt: I'm working very hard, it's not a sin to do something that's easy. But I remember the producer saying to me after it went out, that it went really, really well and normally we use another comic for every series but you were so great, we're going to use you again. So anyway I didn't hear from them, and then next thing I see is it's on again with Ruby Wax presenting it.

But I think that's just an example. There's so much bullshit in TV. I never believe anything anyone tells me unless they've signed their name in blood on a bit of paper, because there is so much bullshit. I think the fundamental problem with TV is that people that work in TV cannot bear the thought that they have to tell people that

they can't work for them anymore because either their show got really bad ratings or they don't want to re-commission it.

So they have this really ambiguous relationship with what they rather pejoratively call 'the talent', and they're not calling us that in a nice way. I've heard runners talking about me when we're walking somewhere and they'll just say, 'travelling with the talent' as if you're like a big blob on a trolley or something. That's how they talk about people. They have this ambiguous relationship which means that they've got to butter you up to get you on their channel, but then if you're failing, then they've got to get rid of you. It's a cliché amongst performers that people are either hugging you and kissing you, or they're putting their eyes down on the floor in the corridor when they walk towards you so they don't have to look you in the eye. It's a very odd relationship you have with TV commissioners.

SL: Has this remained the same across your TV comedy career, or not?

JB: Yes, pretty much all the way through. There's a lot of very odd people that work in TV in my opinion, and socially a lot of them are very awkward, but I think that's because of the very fact that you have such a strange relationship with people. So you have to be able to encourage them and repel them all at the same time. It's horrible.

SL: What other TV programmes have you appeared on?

*JB: I did *Splash* [2013-2014]. I've done *Have I Got News For You?* [1990-present] and *QI* [2003-present] I used to do *They Think It's All Over* [1995-2006], which was a sporting panel show. I've done political shows like *Question Time* [1979-present]. I've also done *The Great British Bake Off: An Extra Slice* which was like a big present that landed in my lap. I loved doing that.*

SL: *When you're on these different types of programmes, do you alter how you present yourself, or not?*

JB: I try not to. First of all, I strongly believe that if you're invited onto a show and you're a comedian, you should do comedy. People don't want to hear your serious views all the way through *Question Time*, for example. You can do some, but you've got to try and lighten it with a bit of comedy of some sort: you're not a politician, so don't try and be one. I think that quite a lot of comics go on shows, and they think 'I'm naturally a very funny person so I don't have to do any preparation', and then they're not very funny on it, and people go, 'Hmmm' and they're slightly disappointed. I do always try when I go on a show to think of funny things and to do funny things on it, because it's beholden upon us to do that as comics.

SL: Out of all the programmes that you've been in, which one are you most proud of and why?

JB: It's difficult to say. I was proud of *Getting On*. It was a tripartite effort with Vicki Pepperdine and Jo Scanlan, but I thought that hopefully that did something that not much comedy had done before, which was it melded together funny stuff and sad stuff at the same time, and I wanted people to laugh but also to be sad because it was an awful situation. Also when we pitched the idea, you could see that the commissioning person was, like, oh Christ, not another hospital idea because we've got *Holby City* [1999-present] and *Casualty* [1986-present]. It's such a cliché, isn't it? I think you can do comedy about anything, even something that's been done to death if you have a different angle on it. So I'm proud of that. I'm very much proud of *Extra Slice* as well, from the point of view that, to some extent, it all falls on me to keep it going. But I

think the fact that *Extra Slice* was just a surprise little gem. We didn't think many people would watch it and then the audience just grew and grew; it was really nice to have that happen, particularly as I'm someone that I think people put in a niche a bit. There's still a kind of whiff of 'man-hating feminist' about me and I think some people think: oh no, oh God, is she going to suggest castration for men that can't bake properly and all this sort of thing. So from that point of view, it was nice to do something that was just straightforwardly about something else and good fun.

SL: In the current climate, is there more support for women who want to go into TV, writing, producing, than there was in the late 1980s/early 1990s, or not?

*JB: I wouldn't say there's more support, but I would say that there's more awareness of the fact that there aren't as many women in TV, and you have various kind of incidents which I think trigger people's thinking about stuff. One of them was that Miriam O'Reilly from *Countryfile* [1988-present], who lost her job because she was too old [see, Plunkett 2011]. And that opens up the debate, and also there's been a huge amount of debate about women on panel shows. So all these sorts of things help, [but] also I don't think that there are any specific things: like there's no positive discrimination, and also I don't think that there are any particular courses specifically for women or anything like that.*

But because there's an awareness of it, and because I think that audiences are a bit more comedy literate these days, and I think in terms of Bridget Christie and women like her, there is a very definite resurgence of feminist feeling that has enabled her to have a voice really.

You don't tend to get misogynist heckling as a matter of course, which you did when I started. But I think what's happened is that a feminist kind of sensibility has

woven itself into the fabric of society. With Twitter and communication being so much quicker and better, I find it reassuring that trolls are jumped on immediately when they, for example, started having a-go at Caroline Criado-Perez, [and] feminists came down on them like a ton of bricks.

So you might well say the fault lines between supporters of women and old-fashioned misogynist men are widening in a way, but I think there's a much stronger ethos on the side of women than there used to be, that women are much more united again in some ways. I remember seeing something on *Celebrity Big Brother* [2001-present] a few shows ago where a woman was slagged off and people would have accepted that 20 or 30 years ago and not made a fuss about it, but now people do. But I wonder: is that because things have changed, or is it because the tools are more available these days to make a fuss about it?

SL: To what extent do you think what was happening on the live comedy circuit affects TV, or do you see the two as being quite distinct?

JB: The problem is that a lot of TV is set up to be quite male in the way that it operates so that actually panel shows are – I know they're not exactly the same – but in some ways they're like Prime Minister's Question Time. You've got two parties, and one's going, 'You're an arsehole' and the other's going, 'No, you are,' and I think a lot of women are uncomfortable operating in that way and that's why a lot of them won't go on them, full stop. Some will go on and have a terrible time and then not go on anymore.

But what I would like to think is happening is that women are getting the opportunity to express themselves in the way that they want to express themselves, and that doesn't mean that men are better at it. It just means they're different in the sort of comedy they want to do. I've been on some panel shows and it's like rutting stags with

the two captains in each team. It's so exhausting. They cannot not come back at each other and you'll have this kind of build-up and, for anyone else on the panel, it's just so boring, that they're like two five-year-old boys competing with each other, and women don't want to do that and I don't blame them.

I'm ambivalent about it because I've got two brothers and I spent my early childhood either being hit by or hitting my brothers or telling them to 'fuck off' or them telling me to 'fuck off.' So I'm kind of used to it in a way. But I still sometimes feel exhausted by it, because the thing about being on TV, on that sort of panel show, is that you have to be on form every time you do it, and the fact of the matter is you're not. Some days I've got a headache or I feel a bit shit or I'm tired or I'm miserable, and I thought: I wish I wasn't booked on this today because I don't feel like it. That is just the way it is. I'm not trying to make an argument for women finding it more difficult because of their hormones but they bloody well do.

And also the other point I would make really strongly is there's a lot of male comics that don't like those shows, who are nice, gentle, cooperative sweet guys. They don't want to go on and shout at other people and compete with them. It's a particular sort of person that likes doing that and – dare I say it – there is a slightly public school bent to it in the sense that that's what Prime Minister's Question Time comes out of. It's like an Oxford debate Prime Minister's Question Time, and I know it is, because I've done one and I couldn't believe it when I did it how pathetic the boy was that was challenging. We had a debate about feminism and his opening salvo to me was – well, he said it to the whole audience – 'I know Jo Brand is a feminist because she's got hairy legs and she doesn't wash her hair.' I thought, fucking hell, have you been at the best university in the world for three years and that's all you've managed to come up with? It was unbelievable but there you go.

SL: *What are your thoughts on the BBC's drive to have more women on panel shows?*
(Thorpe 2014)

JB: It's a difficult one because it's like positive discrimination. It causes a lot of resentment but I can see the motive for them wanting to do it. But the reality of it is that when I started I vaguely counted that there were 20 men to every one woman. Now let's say that's gone down to two-to-one even. You still only have half the number of women comics than men. So where are you going to find all these women comics to go on [panel shows], because half of them don't want to go on them? That cuts it by half again. You just don't have the numbers, so either you will get the same women on all the time like Katherine Ryan, who's very good but everywhere. As soon as they find someone that can do those shows, they seize on them and put them on everything all the time. So you sort of lack variety, but then again you could say well, Hugh Dennis is on everything or whatever, and that is true. It is the same faces over and over again. I think it will be difficult because I know there's a lot of women comics that just don't like doing them and they won't do them, and I think that's perfectly understandable. Why put yourself through that when you've got a perfectly decent career doing comedy the way you want to do it? But it's reframed in the sense sometimes that people will go, 'You're too scared to go on it,' but that's pathetic really. Why, if you think you're not going to be good on something, put yourself through it?

SL: *What advice would you give a female comedian who's performing on the live circuit at the moment who wants to get into television comedy?*

JB: What I would say, interestingly, which I find has always been a massive help to me, is improve your general knowledge. My feeling about a lot of women comics is they tend

to address a very narrow slightly celeb-y kind of area, whereas men are probably a bit broader and I think it's a confidence thing really. I think that it's all well and good someone like Katy Brand, for example, doing a show where she impersonates celebs. But what gets you asked onto things like *Question Time* and *Have I Got News For You?* is proving that you've got more to offer than the contents of *OK!* magazine. And I don't mean it in a bad or patronising way, because I think there is a market for that sort of thing, and I think lots of women like reading about that sort of thing but in a very generalised sense. I think what's always stood me in good stead is that I do read the papers. I do know what's going on and I do have an opinion and I think you'd be surprised by the number of people that feel they don't know enough about something to have an opinion on it. I would also – because I think this happens quite a lot – say to women don't try and be like someone else. Have the confidence to express your own opinions on things. Don't think that people don't want to listen to your opinions, because as long as you make it funny, everyone's opinions are funny.

The other thing I would say is even if you're dying inside, don't ever show it – on stage, on TV – because as comics we all die inside, but as soon as you let that little chink show, either to people in authority or an audience, they start to disrespect you. So I always used to really make an effort to act that I didn't give a shit, even when I was dead inside, because someone had said something so vile to me that I couldn't quite process it. Never let anyone see that they've really hurt you. People say to me, 'You're amazing. You love hecklers.' I bloody don't. And 'It's like water off a duck's back to you.' Well, it isn't actually. I just pretend that it is and I can deal with that when I get home. I can go home and say to my husband: 'Someone called me X, Y and Z and it really upset me.' I'd never do that when I was there because you don't want to give some arsehole the satisfaction of knowing that they've really upset you.

SL: Is there anything that you wanted to say and haven't had the opportunity to say so far, or not?

JB: My other advice about going into TV is that don't think that people who are above you have any more opportunities in TV than you do. There's absolutely no respect for anyone because of longevity, and I say that with authority, having been messed about so much. You make a series, which is really well received, and you think that gives you a bit of collateral. It doesn't. It is pretty equal. If you think you're being mucked about by a commissioning editor, don't worry, everybody else is as well.

I would say the other thing to do is get plenty of experience before you try and break into TV. I would say at least five years, if not 10, because actually having that much material and that much experience and hardening yourself up enables you to deal with the knocks much better, and you will get loads of them in TV because they don't really have much respect for anybody. They don't. It's so weird. It is depressing.

And another thing is it's hard to get anyone in TV to make a decision on their own because they're so terrified of their own position. So they're always looking above them, looking below them. It's like walking on eggshells sometimes. The other thing I would say is: don't think if you've had a successful series your career's made in TV, because it's not, because you've constantly got to prove yourself. So build up a lot of other strands to your career, because if you rely on one aspect of comedy and that falls apart, you've got nothing to go back to.

References:

100 Greatest Stand-ups 2010. 2010. Channel 4, Visual Voodoo Films.

Casualty. 1986-present. BBC One, BBC.

Celebrity Big Brother. 2001-present. Channel 4, Bazal/BBC/Channel 4 Television Corporation/Comic Relief.

Countryfile. 1988-present. BBC One, BBC.

Friday Night Live. 1988. Channel 4, London Weekend Television/Channel 4 Television Corporation.

Getting On. 2009-2012. BBC Four, Vera Productions

Great British Bake Off: An Extra Slice, The. 2014-present. BBC Two, Love Productions.

Have I Got News For You? 1990-present. BBC Two, Hat Trick Productions/BBC.

Holby City. 1999-present. BBC One, BBC.

Jo Brand Through the Cakehole. 1993-1996. Channel 4, Channel X.

Just for Laughs. 1987-1996. Channel 4, Various producers, UK/Canada.

Only Fools and Turkeys. 1990. ITV, Yorkshire TV.

Plunkett, John. 2011. 'Countryfile's Miriam O'Reilly Wins BBC Ageism Claim'. *The Guardian*, 11 January. Accessed 2 April 2015.

<http://www.theguardian.com/media/2011/jan/11/countryfile-miriam-oreilly-tribunal>

QI. 2003-present. BBC Two, Talkback Thames.

Question Time. 1979-present. BBC One, Brian Lapping Productions/BBC/Mentorn Oxford.

Splash! 2013-2014. ITV.

They Think It's All Over. 1995-2006. BBC, TalkBack Productions.

Thorpe, Vanessa. 2014. 'BBC Chief: No More Comedy Shows With All-Male Panels'. *The Guardian*, 8 February. Accessed 2 April 2015.

<http://www.theguardian.com/media/2014/feb/08/bbc-comedy-shows-male-panels-female-presence>

Sharon Lockyer is the Founding Director of the Centre for Comedy Studies Research (CCSR) and a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Social Sciences, Media and Communications at Brunel University London. Her research interests include the sociology of popular culture, critical comedy studies, identity politics and media representations.