

Institution: City, University of London (City)		
Unit of Assessment: 34 Communication, Cultural and Media Studies, Library and Information Management		
Title of case study: Expert Women on Air: Achieving greater gender parity among experts appearing on leading UK radio and television news programmes		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: Phase one, 2012 to 2014; Phase two, 2014 to 2020.		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s): Lis Howell Suzanne Franks Jane Singer	Role(s) (e.g. job title): Howell, Franks and Singer all hold the title of Professor	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI: Howell: 2002 to 2018 Franks: 2012 to present Singer: 2013 to present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2014-2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		
1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words) <p>Department of Journalism research into gender representation in the six flagship UK news programmes revealed significant under-representation of women as experts (i.e. specialists in their field), who were outnumbered by men by a ratio of 4.4:1 in 2013. The Expert Women survey research and subsequent campaign (2012-2020) for better representation held the industry to account and changed the faces and voices of British broadcasting by the late 2010s. Twice as many women interviewees now appear on radio and TV flagship news broadcasts in the UK compared to 2014; hence, broadcast news better reflects the expertise and authority that women contribute to UK society. Moreover, the Expert Women project is credited with inspiring the BBC's 50:50 Equality Scheme, BBC Training Academy's Expert Women days, a training initiative for women medical scientists at the Academy of Medical Sciences (UK) and Australia's world-first Superstars of STEM programme, as well as influencing the House of Lords Select Committee on Communications.</p>		
2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words) <p>The research, which draws on ongoing work by Franks on the roles, experiences and visibility of women in UK news [3.1], specifically explores how women feature as on-air experts in broadcast news reports. It rests on multiple data sets including analysis of the gender representation of expert interviewees on flagship UK broadcast news, focused interviews with broadcast journalists, questionnaire surveys and responses of expert women in various fields [3.2, 3.3].</p> <p>Baseline data collection began in 2012, with Howell examining the role and prominence of women experts on UK broadcast news programmes. Preliminary findings were disseminated in regular articles for <i>Broadcast</i> magazine, a UK trade publication read and respected by industry practitioners.</p> <p>Systematic monthly data collection was then undertaken from 2013, with a focus on collecting data from four leading UK news programmes that reach total audiences of approximately 6 million per day: BBC News at Ten, ITV News at Ten, Sky News at randomised times, and the 'Today' programme on BBC Radio 4. Data from 2013 revealed an overall ratio of 4.4:1 male to female experts on these flagship UK news shows. This compares with a ratio of 2.5:1 of men to women experts overall in the UK public sphere, for instance at senior levels in law, academia and politics, along with expert court witnesses.</p>		

In 2014, the study was widened to include Channel 4 News and Channel 5 News. Three further sets of data also were gathered to complement the counting of on-air experts [3.3]. An email questionnaire was distributed to a subset of British broadcast journalists/producers holding junior positions in their news organisation; such people frequently serve as “bookers” for external contributors. In addition, 25 in-person interviews were conducted with British broadcast journalists of diverse newsroom ranks. A further email questionnaire asking mainly open-ended questions was distributed to 164 women experts across the UK. All the experts had attended the BBC Academy’s Expert Women training days – an initiative which itself was a direct response to the work undertaken by Howell assisted by colleagues in the Journalism Department. Obtaining the views of women experts themselves and the content producers who booked them provided insights into the reasons for the wide gender disparity in on-air contributors; notably the reluctance of female experts to put themselves forward and the exasperation of time-pressed producers who felt they had to work hard to persuade qualified women to participate, frequently to be turned down after a lengthy conversation with the response that “they somehow felt unqualified to appear.” Findings were published in *Journalism Practice* in 2017 [3.2a], an article selected by the editors for adaptation and re-publication in a form intended to speak directly to media practitioners [3.2b], and subsequently in a book chapter [3.2c].

In addition to informing the research outputs in section 3, both the quantitative data analysing the proportion of experts and the qualitative data providing the views of producers and expert participants were disseminated widely via parliamentary testimony, conferences, media appearances and press commentary [3.4]. This public dissemination commanded attention to the disparity between genders in the use of experts on broadcast news programmes and provided an impetus for industry initiatives to address this problem.

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

- 3.1** Franks, Suzanne. 2013. *Women and Journalism* (Reuters Challenges series). I.B.Tauris. ISBN 9781780765853.
- 3.2a** Howell, L. and Singer, J.B. 2017. “Pushy or a Princess? Women Experts and British Broadcast News”. *Journalism Practice* 11 (9): 1062-1078.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/17512786.2016.1232173>
 [Shortlisted for Article of the Year by Journalism Practice]
- 3.2b** This paper was selected for the 2019 special issue of *Journalism Practice*, “Journalism Research in Practice: Scholarly Inquiry for Journalists,” showcasing scholarly research of particular interest to news workers. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17512786.2019.1643252>
- 3.2c** A revised version also was published in a book marketed to journalists, *Journalism Research in Practice: Perspectives on Change, Challenges and Solutions*; Routledge, 2020; ISBN 9780367469665.
- 3.3** Franks, S. and Howell, L. 2019. “Seeking Women’s Expertise in the UK Broadcast News Media.” Chapter in: *Journalism, Gender and Power* (Cindy Carter, Linda Steiner and Stuart Allan, editors), pp.49-62. Routledge. ISBN: 978-1-138-89532-4.
- 3.4** Website launched in 2020 to showcase research data: <https://expertwomenproject.com/>

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

In 2012, Howell began counting the number of women experts on six flagship news programmes for one week each month. Findings were regularly disseminated, first in *Broadcast* magazine and then through academic articles, press releases and media appearances, notably on the BBC Radio 4 Media Show, which devoted a programme to City’s research in January 2013. Three ‘Women on Air’ conferences in 2014, 2016, and 2018 were

attended by politicians, academics, and, crucially, the editors of the programmes monitored. At the first Women on Air conference in April 2014, the figures showed 4.4 men to every woman interviewed across leading UK news programmes. By the second conference in 2016, this was just over 3:1, and by 2018 it was 2:1 – much more reflective of the prevalence of women experts in UK society.

Industry professionals, academics and politicians all attributed this improvement to City research and the pressure on broadcasters that resulted from it. Participants discussed the figures produced by City, seeking to explain them or account for the disparity and, importantly, publicly committing to improvement. In 2018, for example, the Editor of BBC News at Six and Ten pledged additional steps to increase the proportion of women used as experts after the City survey showed his programme had made progress but still trailed its rivals. Reacting to the figures, the Editor stated: *“I’m frustrated, disappointed ... and I’m going to have to work harder to make sure that doesn’t happen again”* [5.1]. He was as good as his word. In February 2020, BBC News at Ten had a ratio of just 1.5 male experts to 1 female expert – compared with 3.7:1 in 2012-2013. Also on the panel was Ofcom’s Director of Standards and Audience Protection who said tackling diversity concerns in the media was a gradual process. *“I think there’s a frustration that no-one has fixed the problem yet, and I don’t think you can with diversity,”* she said. *“A bit like your report, Lis, you have to keep shining a spotlight on the same issues over and over and over again”* [5.1]. The Minister of State for the Department of Digital, Culture, Media and Sport at the time remarked at the event how supporting women across the whole workforce was *‘a top priority for the government’* and how *“increasing our representation in the media is especially critical because [those of you in the media] really do have the power to have a big influence on the changes in society”* [5.1].

Institutional change within the BBC was affected as a result of publicising the research findings [3.4] which were widely disseminated, e.g. Radio 4 Media Show [5.2] and at various City conferences [5.1]. The BBC Academy (the training arm of the BBC) started Expert Women days in 2013. To date, these dedicated training days, which the organiser described as *“a direct result of Lis Howell’s research”* [5.3], have recruited nearly 500 women subject specialists, who between them have made more than a thousand media appearances [5.3]. The BBC further committed to change by way of the 50:50 Initiative, which was described by the Academy’s training organiser as *“the biggest BBC project to result from Lis’s research”* [5.3]. Under this grassroots project, BBC producers seek to achieve gender equality across the range of BBC programmes. The originator of the 50:50 Initiative also attributed the momentum behind this initiative to Howell’s work: *“Thanks Lis! As you know, you were and are a huge inspiration for what we do”* [5.4].

In 2014, the House of Lords Select Committee on Communications held an inquiry into *“Women in News and Current Affairs Broadcasting”*, bringing in Howell as Specialist Adviser and Franks as a witness; the then-Committee Chair said the resulting report *“spelled out the slow progress in achieving proportionate representation of women in broadcasting and has proved influential. Much of the success of this Inquiry is attributable to the guidance and support by Professor Howell ... and has had an enduring impact, as witnessed by the substantial improvement in the representation of women in news and current affairs broadcasting which is now evident”* [5.5].

Further support for the impact of this research comes from news editors themselves: *“You have motivated an industry – and held it to account”* stated BBC’s Editor of BBC News at Six and Ten [5.6]. Channel 4’s News Editor, said of the research: *“I think the authority that you bring to it – to hold us all to account – it is a scary process. ... When you first started it, there was a massive spurt of shock, the figures were so bad”* [5.1]. The Channel 5 News Editor said: *“It’s a brilliant achievement – I think Ben (de Pear) put it best when he said how ‘nervous’ newsrooms feel when (your) data is due to be released!”* [5.7a].

This work also had impact beyond broadcasting and government. When the Academy of Medical Sciences won the Royal Society Athena Prize 2018 for a training initiative aimed at

women medical scientists, credit was attributed to Howell from the Academy of Medical Sciences' Communications Director: *"The judges' comments flagged that we had been awarded the prize for 'developing an evidence based approach to addressing the issue [the shortage of women experts commenting in the media]' and [that] Lis's research was very much at the heart of that evidence base."* [5.9] The individual who led the Academy of Medical Sciences' training programme, wrote: *"Lis Howell has in my view had a transformational impact on the media in the UK, and its attitude towards gender imbalance. The forensic nature of Lis's research in showing exactly which programmes were performing the worst in terms of female representation meant that this attitude was no longer tenable. I feel Lis has made a very real and important contribution towards shaping the role of women in the UK media – and beyond."* [5.8]. The Communications Director, in describing the Academy's proactive approach, wrote: *"As a result of Lis's research in 2014, the Academy of Medical Sciences began developing and implementing initiatives...not just to ensure journalists have access to the best experts available, but also to provide highly visible role models of senior scientists to inspire the next generation of women researchers and scientific leaders to say 'yes, I can do that too' ... [It has] also supported nearly 200 women to sign up to the Science Media Centre's database of experts"* [5.9].

This contribution also is evidenced in other countries. The former CEO of Science & Technology Australia, wrote: *"Lis Howell's research was one of the key factors in influencing my decision to establish the world-first Superstars of STEM program, in 2016/17. The program works with a small group of competitively selected women in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) over 24 months, equipping them with the skills, networks and opportunities to become public figures. It has won respect and acclaim from senior leaders in the sector, the media, business and government, in Australia and internationally ... The first pilot program of 30 women clocked up more than 2,500 news clips between them"* [5.10].

It is worth noting the success of several years' worth of applied pressure on the broadcasting sector to increase the visibility of women on air does not imply present or future success of showcasing women as specialists in their field. Monitoring during the early months of the Covid-19 pandemic revealed the ratio of male to female experts bucked the progressive trend and regressed in March and May 2020. However, even at its worst ratio of 2.7 male experts to each female expert in March 2020, the much wider disparity of 2014 has not returned. As Channel 5's News Editor describes the expert gender situation: Commitment *"is crucial in making sure we don't lose focus and reverse the progress that has been made"* [5.7b].

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

- 5.1 <https://www.city.ac.uk/news-and-events/news/2018/06/top-tv-editors-and-mps-praise-impact-of-city-research-into-gender-imbalance>
- 5.2 BBC Radio 4 (a) "The Media Show" <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b06pv1g8> (25 Nov 2015 at 16:30) and (b) The Guardian, June 2018 (<https://www.theguardian.com/media/commentisfree/2018/jun/17/tv-news-equality-abuse-bulletins>)
- 5.3 email (a) and spreadsheet (b) from the Events Editor, BBC Academy. 08.01.2020.
- 5.4 email from the Founder of BBC 50/50. 07.12.2018.
- 5.5 a) House of Lords Select Committee on Communications Report, "Women in News and Current Affairs Broadcasting": <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld201415/ldselect/ldcomuni/91/91.pdf>
b) email from the then-Committee Chair 22.01.2020.
- 5.6 email from the Editor BBC News at Six and Ten.
- 5.7 email from the Channel 5 News Editor (a) 22.06.2018 and (b) 01.05.2020.
- 5.8 email from the training organiser of the Academy of Medical Sciences' programme 20.01.2020.

5.9 email from the Academy of Medical Sciences' Communications Director. 22.01.2020.

5.10 email from the former CEO, Science & Technology Australia (now CEO, Australian Academy of Technology and Engineering). 25.01.2020.