



Blurred lines: Exploring contemporary attitudes to gender portrayal in the media

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MTM and BBC Television

Gender and society

Despite major changes in the circumstances and attitudes of both men and women over the last 50 years the issue of gender is still very much alive in British society today – and not just in the realm of the media. There are still significant gaps in pay (women currently earn, on average, £2.53 less per hour than men do, which equates to 80 pence for every pound a man is paid¹) and the British Social Attitudes survey shows that there is still a lot further to go in pursuit of equality in the home (60% of women report doing more than their fair share of the housework compared with just 15% of men²)

For women in particular, our qualitative research identified a range of areas in contemporary life where gender-related problems were a cause for concern for. These include:

- Life balance – a societal expectation that women should be able to 'have it all' in terms of a career and family, which can put immense pressure on working mums (and, to a lesser extent, dads)
- Body image – a pre-occupation with physical appearance and body size (e.g. in gossip magazines), which can impact negatively on feelings of self-worth amongst younger women (in particular)
- A sense of a growing contemporary culture of sexually offensive or abusive language and behaviour towards females – e.g. from misogynistic lyrics in pop songs (e.g. Robin Thicke's Blurred Lines) to rape jokes on social media to real world examples of sexual harassment on public transport

Men can also feel insecurities in relation to gender in the world today, with some sense that their traditional societal roles (e.g. as provider) have been diminished. Some men (particularly 18-24s) also feel that there is a pro-female bias in society, with, as an example, women having an unfair advantage in the terms of career progression.

Gender and the media

The broadcast media is an important part of the story when looking at the issue of gender – it's where the audience see reflections of themselves and others and clearly plays a key role in shaping, reinforcing and challenging wider societal attitudes. As David Gauntlett says:

"In modern societies, people typically consume many hours of television each week, look at magazines and other

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publications, surf the internet, pass billboards, go to the movies, and are generally unable to avoid popular culture and advertising. It seems obvious and inevitable, then, that we will be affected by these experiences somehow. The media shows us situations and relationships from other people's point of view – indeed, it is part of the eternal fascination of drama that we can see 'how the world works' in lives other than our own. This could hardly fail to affect our own way of conducting ourselves and our expectations of other people's behaviour"

There are clear gender differences in the way the media is consumed across all the major platforms, both in terms of the *amount* and in *what it is* that men and women choose to watch, listen to and read. For example, in a typical week women watch over 3 hours more television than men and listen to nearly 2 hours less radio³.

And there is evidence that the way men and women are represented in the broadcast media is far from equal. Content analysis shows that men outnumber women on television by around 2:1 and this imbalance is broadly similar across almost all genres of programmes. We also know that radio has far fewer women than men in presenting roles. This is not just a BBC or even just a UK issue – there is evidence that these kinds of imbalances are present across TV and radio in the UK and in many countries throughout Europe.

It's not just a question of a numerical imbalance. Portrayal monitoring also shows some differences in the way men and women are portrayed on TV. For example, a higher proportion of women have no observable occupation (a third didn't – compared to only one in seven of the men) and there can be a tendency for men and women to be portrayed as having quite different occupations, with women more likely than men to be in roles such as that of homemaker, shop assistant or manager, or working in the travel and leisure industry. Women are also more likely than men to be seen carrying out such tasks such as housework, childcare, cooking and grocery shopping; and more likely to be seen showing emotions such as affection, dependence and anxiety, in contrast to men's aggression, arrogance, and a tendency to patronise. Some of these differences (though clearly not the numerical balance) may well reflect authentic differences in the wider society, but there is no doubt that seen through the media lens there are some very clear differences in the way men and women are reflected back to themselves.

The issue of gender and the broadcast and online media is also a salient issue for the press and amongst professionals in the media industry. For example, in recent years the BBC has been criticised for the dominance of male presenters on the panel show *Mock the Week* or Radio 4's *Today* programme, a lack of older women on TV in general and reading the news in particular, and even *Topsy and Tim* on CBeebies has been accused by some parents of reinforcing 'out of date' gender stereotypes⁴.

The BBC has already made some significant policy changes and statements in this area. In August 2013, the BBC Director General Tony Hall set a target to boost the representation of women on the radio by moving towards half of all local BBC breakfast shows having a 'female voice'⁵, and the BBC Trust has also set senior management new gender representation objectives⁶.

The BBC, as a licence-fee funded public service broadcaster, is committed to serving all audiences, and needs to ensure that its content truly reflects modern life in all its diversity and richness. It has a strong track record in research of this type, having previously commissioned major pieces of work looking in depth at a range of audience characteristics.⁷

So in 2014 the BBC decided it was time to delve deeper into the complex issue of how the audience feel about the issue of gender and the media they consume – asking the question 'how do men, women and trans audiences (people who are

transgender) feel about how they are represented and portrayed in the media?'

What did the BBC's gender research involve?

A key part of the BBC's 2014 gender research project was a piece of bespoke qualitative research into audience attitudes & perceptions of gender portrayal – but this was only part of the story. The research also included extensive desk research into previous research in this area, interviews with media professionals and pressure groups, extensive analysis of current media consumption patterns and an attitude survey amongst a large sample of the population⁸. A key part of the research design also involved using a measure of 'perceived gender' using the BEM sex role inventory to get beyond simple binary gender to help understand how media habits are influenced by where people sit on a wider gender 'spectrum' (the results emerging from this work are covered in some detail in the latter section of this paper).

The aim of the research was to gain a deep understanding of how men and women feel they are represented and portrayed in the media – not only by the BBC but also by the wider UK media-offer. It was primarily about television, radio, and online – for example, we didn't attempt to cover the issue of gender in newspapers, magazines, advertising or gaming – and we concentrated on adults rather than including children. We wanted to answer such questions as:

- What drives some of the observed differences in media consumption and behaviour between men and women?
- How do men and women feel about gender imbalances on TV and radio? Do they notice them? Do they expect them and are they surprised? Do they care? Are there any particular genres where the gender mix bothers them more/less than others?
- Are certain subjects/genres/services in the media space perceived as being more 'masculine' or 'feminine' in their outlook and appeal, and what kinds of considerations drive this kind of opinion in the audience?
- Is there a sense that the BBC should differ from the rest of the market in some way in terms of the amount of gender portrayal? Should it be leading or just reflecting society?
- What is seen as 'good' portrayal/'bad' portrayal?
- What is 'authentic' portrayal? Do people even want it to be authentic?
- Is the character of gender portrayal felt to have changed over time? In what ways?

The main qualitative phase was carried out in June/July 2014 and consisted of:

- 15 extended group discussions with a wide cross-section of the audience – some were pre-briefed on the topic, some came to it 'cold'
- Interviews with 3 generations of the same family to explore how they feel about how gender portrayal in the media has changed over time
- Focused work on transgender audiences (discussions and one-to-one interviews)

More details of the research design can be found in the appendix.

Why do men and women watch and listen to different amounts of tv and radio?

Before embarking on any primary research we analysed media consumption patterns by gender to understand what was driving the observed differences in the amounts of consumption – are TV and radio biased in some way towards men or women in their overall appeal?

At first glance there are clear differences in the amount of TV consumed. Women account for nearly 55% of the hours of television watched each week and it's not just because there are more of them – they also consume more hours than men *per head* each week (27 hours 22 minutes per week on average compared to 24 hours 1 minute for men⁹). The imbalance is also not just because there are more older women around as they live longer - when we looked within specific age groups the gender gap in consumption narrowed but still existed. However, when we took into account such variables as the differences in working patterns between men and women and whether there were children in the household the gap between men and women narrowed considerably, and there was virtually no difference in the amount of TV consumption between men and women at the weekends - **so it seems that a lot of the observed gender difference in consumption is just about simple availability**. (Indeed, amongst those aged over 25 who don't work full time men watch more television than women of the same age and situation).

What about differences in the amount of radio consumed? Here we find the opposite picture to television – men listen to more radio per head per week than do women (20 hours and 8 minutes per week compared to 18 hours and 14 minutes)¹⁰.

But like television this total picture hides some key differences in availability between men and women. The gender gap in amounts of listening isn't really there at the younger and older end of the age spectrum (where people are less likely to be in full time work) and the biggest gender gap is amongst manual workers where men listen to a lot more radio than women (presumably because the types of manual male work roles are more amenable to being able to listen to the radio at work). And a lot of the male bias in listening is also accounted for by their greater propensity to drive to work where there is a lot of opportunity to listen to the radio (and like television the gender differences in amounts of consumption decrease at the weekend when the availability to listen is similar, and in the home environment women actually listen to more radio than do men of the same age and social grade).

So differences in the **amount** of gender consumption of broadcast media are largely accounted for by differential availability. But what about **attitudes** to the media – do they vary by gender and if so in what ways?

General attitudes of men and women to how they are portrayed in the media

Before undertaking the main qualitative study we carried out a survey asking some gender-related questions about the media¹¹ to gauge the audience's 'top of mind' views about this issue. The questions covered views on both the amount of coverage of men and women on TV, radio and online and also their views on the quality of that coverage.

Perceptions of the amount of coverage of men and women

- A majority of both men and women actually thought the gender mix on television was balanced (despite the fact as mentioned earlier it's actually a ratio of 2:1) – and only around a quarter correctly thought there were more men than women on television
- Most people were happy with the status quo in terms of the numbers, whatever their view on the direction of the current balance
- Views about the gender balance in numbers were broadly similar across the age/gender range (though concern was higher amongst older people and amongst women aged over 55 as many as 24% were 'unhappy' with the current gender balance for women of their age or older)
- There was more of a recognition of a male numerical bias for genres like sport and 'serious factual', whereas for genres like 'lighter factual', 'reality' and soaps there was a feeling that on balance there were more women than men

- There was a much higher sense of a numerical male bias in radio (and the imbalance was particularly noticed by women) – but there were almost identically low levels of concern about this imbalance
- There were very low perceptions of numerical gender bias for 'the internet' and almost no concern.

Perceptions of the quality of portrayal of men and women

- Most of the audience of both genders were broadly satisfied about the portrayal of men on TV (though young men were a bit more dissatisfied). However this satisfaction was a bit lukewarm - not many were 'very' satisfied (perhaps suggesting room for improvement?)
- Most thought the way men were portrayed on TV is much the same as it used to be, or on balance was a bit better than before (this improvement was particularly felt by older men)
- There was slightly higher concern about the portrayal of women on TV, and few said they were 'very' satisfied
- There was much more of a sense of there having been an improvement for female portrayal on TV than was found for men, and this improvement was particularly felt by older women.

So at the superficial level the issue of gender didn't seem to be one that exercised the audience very much – differing consumption levels can be explained by availability, not many noticed a numerical imbalance, and even fewer seemed to be worried by it - and overall there was a sense of an improving situation. But was this the whole story? This was something the more in-depth qualitative phase of the research was designed to investigate.

Findings from the qualitative stage of the study – A more complex picture emerges

By allowing us to explore the impact of gender portrayal in a more personal and contextualised way, the qualitative stage of the study uncovered a number of important insights and further progressed our understanding beyond the general attitudes that had emerged in the BBC's data.

As reflected in the findings from the BBC's quantitative survey, gender portrayal was often not a top of mind issue across our qualitative sample. We identified a number of reasons for this low-key initial response:

- Gender is not something that is instantly or consciously perceived – it is difficult for audiences to judge the exact balance of men and women in programmes, particularly as...
- Positive content examples have a disproportionate impact on perceptions – high profile personalities such as Sarah Millican and Miranda Hart in comedy or Clare Balding and Gabby Logan in sport can create a sense of increasing equality, even though roles for women are still limited (compared to men) within these genres
- The nature of contemporary media consumption – today's fragmentation of platforms, channels and content, makes it much more difficult for viewers to feel that they have any sense of 'the whole' and make any personal judgement on how well different genders are represented (i.e. compared to 20 years ago, when the focus was much more on 4 terrestrial channels)
- There is an overall perception of a 'positive direction of change' – i.e. audiences assume that gender portrayal today is better than 10 years ago and will be further improved in 10 years' time.

However, given the time to explore audiences' feelings about gender portrayal in a more in-depth way, a number of areas of dissatisfaction emerged – predominantly with women, but also some men.

It's important to note that this did not involve 'hot housing' gender as an issue, but rather asking respondents to think about

how gender is portrayed across specific platforms (i.e. TV vs. radio vs. online) and different content genres/examples (e.g. drama vs. comedy vs. sport etc.), as well as exploring how it impacts on both their self-perception and wider social attitudes.

This gentle probing uncovered a number of consistent themes in relation to both the **amount** and **character** of gender portrayal – specifically:

In terms of **amount**:

- A lack of older women
- A lack of 'real' women - this refers to both appearance (e.g. body size/shape, dressed down clothing) and situation (e.g. successfully balancing family and work life)
- A lack of women from ethnic minorities

In terms of **character** and how portrayal of gender can create negative feelings:

- A focus on how women look over their ability and achievements
- A preoccupation with body image (particularly felt by younger women) – as reflected in the broader social attitudes to gender, referenced earlier
- The increased sexualisation of content (from music videos to The Apprentice)
- One dimensional characterisation of men (e.g. man's man, abuser, idiot/buffoon)

Our exploration also illuminated concerns at how these issues relating to gender portrayal in the media impacted on society:

"It makes people believe that that is their role, that's how it should be – it filters into their brain that that's the way it should be all the time" (Women, 18-24, ABC1, Belfast)

"I think for younger women to be constantly being seeing those things, the message it's sending out about this how you should look and this is what matters" (Women, 45-69, ABC1, London)

We will now further explore these themes as we look specifically at attitudes to gender across television, radio and online.

Gender portrayal on television – key findings

Attitudes to the amount and character of gender portrayal differed by genre of programme. Whilst some types of programmes were more positively perceived as providing a more balanced portrayal of gender (e.g. drama, soaps, children's), audiences could generally identify positive and negative examples within each genre.

Drama and soaps

Overall, drama was perceived as representing gender in a more balanced and positive way – with a number of high profile female lead characters influencing audience perceptions.

"Recently a lot of programmes have had lead female characters – before that wouldn't have been a thing. The Fall, Call The Midwife, The Good Wife... the female characters have more of a presence on screen. They're strong, and they're showing they can be powerful but in a feminine way, not in a manly way" (Women, 18-24, ABC1, Belfast)

A range of drama programmes were also seen as providing more nuanced and interesting portrayal of gender in their

characterisation. For example, Olivia Coleman's character in Broadchurch (DS Ellie Miller) was positively perceived as displaying a mix of masculine and feminine attributes and challenging stereotypes by generally being stronger than her male detective partner (David Tennant's DI Alec Hardy):

"The main female character is a really strong role and it's got a real mixture of types of people in it, women and men. It's David Tennant's character who has the underlying issues, the weakness. She has to support him" (Women, 25-44, ABC1, Watford)

Similarly, in Happy Valley, Sarah Lancashire's character (Catherine Cawood) was perceived as a complex, but authentic mix of masculine and feminine attributes:

"She's taking on a very masculine role as a police officer, which you don't usually see, but a lot of the storyline is about her family – that's a more feminine side" (Women, 18-24, ABC1, Belfast)

We also discovered that audiences accept a degree of negative portrayal of men and women if perceived as accurate and authentic (e.g. men are more likely to be murderers and women victims in real life crime) or necessary in terms of character or plot development (i.e. happy, problem free lives generally don't make very good drama):

"Downton Abbey was a good example of a wealthy family and the way women were treated in those times. It was representative of the time that was being portrayed" (Men, 45-69, C2DE, Belfast)

"(In Homeland) Carrie had her mental problems but that was part of her character - the story wouldn't have worked without it. She's not always positively perceived in the programme, but the audience knows she's right" (Women, 25-44, ABC1, Watford)

However, across drama and soaps some audiences felt that programmes can fall back on clichéd gender stereotypes that can feel tired or even undermine characters strengths in terms of portrayal. Examples include the bossy female and comedy male buffoon in soaps, the sexualisation of strong female lead characters in drama (e.g. The Fall, Homeland), and not showing professional female characters who successfully balance having a family and career (Scott and Bailey stands out for attempting to do this).

There was also some sense that other countries address gender in a more contemporary and complex way (based on exposure through imported series) – for example the more nuanced portrayal of both male and female characters in Scandinavian drama (e.g. The Killing, The Bridge, Borgen) and the strong female leads in some US drama series:

"The Good Wife is completely believable – she's brainy, she's clever, she's sensitive, she's actually worked her way up, and she's done it herself" (Men, 45-69, ABC1, Watford)

Comedy

Comedy was positively highlighted as having high profile examples of 'real women' – primarily Miranda Hart, Sarah Millican and, to a lesser extent, Jo Brand.

However, as previously referenced, these personalities have a disproportionate impact on perceptions and, below the surface, there was some negativity and concern amongst certain audiences (particularly female/ABC1 audiences) about women being under-represented in comedy:

"I think women in comedy have a hard time. Men tend to think women just aren't funny – it's a very sexist comment" (Women, 25-44, ABC1, Watford)

Even with Miranda and Sarah Millican, there was some perception that their success involved laughing at themselves in a way that wasn't necessary for their male counter-parts.

Some female audiences also found the male-centric environments or style of humour on some comedy panel shows either disengaging or even uncomfortable to watch:

"Have I Got News For You does seem a bit 'boisy' to me. They're the big shots and the women are secondary. It's a bit of a boys club. I can get a bit fed up with it because of that. Mock the Week falls into the same category" (Women, 25-69, ABC1, London)

"Celebrity Juice is sexist. I can't understand why two beautiful, intelligent women would want to be on that show. I like to think that I'm fairly open-minded, but I can't stand it" (Women, 45-69, ABC1, London)

Documentaries

There was some perception of a positive movement in terms of women now presenting more on documentaries, with this influenced by a few higher profile presenters (e.g. Stacey Dooley, Mary Beard).

Observational documentaries showing professionals at work (e.g. 24 Hours in A&E, Midwives, Coppers) were also widely felt to portray women (and men) positively.

However, there was also some feeling that most well-known documentaries are generally presented by men (e.g. David Attenborough, Brian Cox, Andrew Marr).

News

The under-representation of older female news presenters was a top of mind issues for audiences, particularly those who are older women:

"Where are all the older female news presenters? It's difficult to think of many... they reach a certain age then disappear" (Women, 45-69, ABC1, London)

"The men don't have a shelf-life; they go on for years" (Men, 25-44, ABC1, Edinburgh)

Some audiences also felt that the familiar/established approaches of news production can reinforce negative gender roles – for example:

- An older male and younger female presenter
- The male presenter being the lead anchor
- Male presenters/correspondent covering more serious and heavyweight topics like politics, the economy, international news and females covering topics like entertainment and fashion

News was perceived by audiences as having more equal representation of men and women than other genres and there was, therefore, greater surprise and dissatisfaction (compared to other genres) when the current imbalance (e.g. four men for every

one woman on BBC news programmes¹²) was explained.

Sport

Across audiences there was some expectation that sport presenting and reporting would be male-weighted to reflect the audience who consume it.

In addition, a few high profile and well-respected female sports presenters are having a disproportionate impact on perceptions – creating a perception that there are already lots of women working in sport on TV (when the content analysis suggests this is still a predominantly male environment).

Female sports presenters such as Clare Balding, Gabby Logan and Hazel Irvine are widely respected and liked across male and female audiences:

"I really value her as a presenter because she's so informative – she knows what she's talking about. It's women like that that I actually enjoy listening to or watching" (Men, 45-69, C2DE, Belfast)

"Gabby Logan's one of the best sports presenters, man or woman" (Men, 25-44, C2DE, Cardiff)

Partly as a consequence of their appeal, there was an acceptance (amongst males) of seeing more female presenters on sports programming, including on some of the most high profile properties (e.g. BBC's MOTD and Sky Sports' Super Sunday)

"It should just be whoever's best for the job. If a woman is as good, for football you could have female pundits and journalists there, but they tend to have ex-footballers who are a bit thick" (Men, 25-44, C2DE, Cardiff)

However, there was less acceptance of female pundits, where experience playing the relevant sport was expected.

The BBC was perceived more positively than other broadcasters in promoting female sports presenters (e.g. by being associated with a number of high profile female presenters and having female sports correspondents on news programming) and promoting interest and participation in female sport was seen as part of its remit.

Entertainment

Audience attitudes to gender portrayal across entertainment programming were mixed.

From a more positive perspective, there were seen to be a number of identifiable examples of men and women in non-traditional gender roles, including *The Hairy Bikers*, *The Great British Bake Off*/*The Great British Sewing Bee*, and *Fifth Gear* (a car show with a female presenter) – although some felt that there were fewer opportunities for women in stereotypically male environments, than vice versa.

There was also a sense that 'real' women are better represented across entertainment programming than in other genres, with highlighted examples including Holly Willoughby, Claudia Winkleman, Davina McCall, Lorraine Kelly and Mel and Sue.

These personalities have a number of attributes that increase their relatability to female audiences - including being a mix of ages and shapes/sizes (i.e. not just glamorous, thin, younger women); talking about their role as parents and being perceived as successfully balancing their career and family life; and being positive role models through expressing more traditionally 'female' characteristics (e.g. being warm, caring, compassionate).

However, more broadly there was some perception of women being under-represented across a range of entertainment programmes e.g. they are unlikely to be presenting quiz shows, chat shows and talent shows – all of which are predominantly male hosted.

Youth-oriented reality TV was perceived as being particularly problematic in terms of portraying gender (particularly from a female perspective), with issues highlighted including:

- Negative gender stereotyping and labelling – men are seen as 'lads' and women as 'slags' for sexually promiscuous behaviour
- Female behaviour and ambition – overly defined by their value and attractiveness to men
- Body image – creating unrealistic expectations of a desirable body size/shape

"Lucy from TOWIE has a figure to die for - she's so toned, while a lot of normal girls aren't. It makes you feel self-conscious; it's depressing" (Women, 18-24, C2DE, Cardiff)

There was a broader sense of there being an increased focus on younger and attractive women across programming in general – perceived by some as a creeping sexualisation of mainstream entertainment shows:

"Inappropriately short skirts, pushed up boobs. It's not like it was when I was that age. It's scary. Even X Factor, what some of the performers wear – even the famous people. Even on Strictly – it would worry me if my kids were like 'I want to be like her'" (Women, 25-45, ABC1, Watford)

"There seem to be far more young attractive women (on The Apprentice) than there used to be, then one was on Celebrity Big Brother this year – the original premise was obviously different, now it's a stepping stone to other reality shows" (Men, 25-44, C2DE, Cardiff)

Children's TV

Children's TV was positively perceived for its portrayal of gender – particularly how this intersected with age, ethnicity and disability in terms of presenters (e.g. Cerrie Burnell on CBeebies).

Across children's programming there was a sense of gender being portrayed in a variety of interesting and different ways (i.e. challenging traditional stereotypes) with specific programmes examples highlighted including:

- Nina and the Neurons – a female presenter for a traditionally more male topic (science)
- Peppa Pig – showing authentic portrayal of parental roles

Gender portrayal online – key findings

Overall, audiences perceived online as a more gender-neutral medium (compared to TV), with a number of different factors influencing this. These included:

- The nature of online consumption – because this is more personal and active, the individual is able to shape and control their own content experience i.e. 'if you don't like it, don't click on it'
- The breadth of content available online – related to the previous point, there is a sense of there being something for everyone

"On YouTube you choose what you're watching – almost every type of person can be represented in any way" (Men, 18-24, C1C2, London)

- Less awareness and emphasis on the gender of content creators – e.g. the lack of visual and audio reinforcement of gender identity reduces engagement with the sex of contributors on news sites (even when this is signposted with thumbnail pictures) and user comments are often posted anonymously, with little or no indication of gender

"You don't really know or think about who's writing it – you read it but not from a woman's POV or a man's perspective" (Women, 25-44, C1C2, Watford)

However, this doesn't mean that gender portrayal wasn't an issue for audiences online – the qualitative exploration still uncovered a number of issues that impacted on how people felt about themselves and society.

A wide range of news websites were highlighted as having a role in reporting on women in a negative light. This was particularly an issue with female-oriented gossip and lifestyle content and its preoccupation with women's size and looks. However, there was a sense that this also often seeped into more serious news reporting (e.g. politics) and that women are judged on their appearance to a much greater than men.

"With AOL news and Huffington Post, there's usually tedious things about a wardrobe malfunction or someone being caught without their make-up" (Women, 45-69, ABC1, London)

"I read an article about Theresa May talking to police officers, and it was all about how she looked and how her hair was a mess. It really annoyed me because if it had been David Cameron they would never have been talking about his suit" (Men, 25-44, ABC1, Edinburgh)

Social media was also associated with a number of issues relating to gender – particularly amongst younger audiences. These included:

- A general sense that it can enable and encourage more misogynistic views through the anonymity of comments (e.g. posts on Facebook, Twitter) and by providing a space for more niche content to be seen and shared (e.g. Uni Lad, Lad Bible, Dapper Laughs)

"On Facebook you get posts from things like Uni Lad where it's always slagging women off – jokes about how women should be in the kitchen and stuff – sometimes everyone just agrees with it..." (Women, 18-24, ABC1, Belfast)

- Contributing to body image pressure amongst teenagers – younger audiences highlighted the growing trend of young people sharing photos and videos of themselves on social media (coinciding with the growth of more visual platforms like Instagram and Vine), often with the intention of showing off their looks/appearance. This issue affects both young women (e.g. super-skinny selfies, the use of the hashtag *#thinspiration*) and young men (e.g. pressure to have muscles, the rise of the spornosexual male) and is often influenced by the behaviour of celebrities (e.g. The Geordie Shore cast).

"Because you can edit your photos online you can make yourself more girly than you are – you can improve yourself. It always used to be in magazines but now people can edit themselves and put it on Instagram" (Women, 18-24, ABC1, Belfast)

"It makes you feel fat because you don't look like these perfect celebrities – you can feel rubbish about how you look

sometimes" (Women, 18-24, C2DE, Cardiff)

However, the role of social media in relation to gender attitudes is complex - we are only able to touch the surface in this paper - and audiences were also able to identify examples of where it can have a positive impact on society. One example of this is how social media can highlight and shame misogynistic attitudes and behaviour, by enabling audiences to share and comment on content – as happened with the UCL rugby and Stirling University hockey teams:

"I go to Stirling University and there was a story that got into the national news about the hockey team singing sexist songs on a bus...that only happened because of people sharing on Facebook and Twitter" (Men, 18-24, C2DE, Bristol)

Gender portrayal on the radio – key findings

There was a more conscious awareness of a gender imbalance in the amount and roles of presenters on the radio, in comparison to TV and online.

Not only was there a recognition that there are more male presenters, but also a perception that women are more likely to have secondary or supporting roles e.g. presenting in non-primetime slots, co-host, presenting news/traffic, stand-ins.

However, whilst there was some frustration at this situation (e.g. a sense of men 'talking down' to female co-hosts on specific stations and programmes), this gender imbalance was often also more accepted than on other platforms. A factor in understanding this is how different age-groups engage with the radio:

- Younger (18-34) audiences are more likely to listen to music radio, where the presenter's role is diluted by the music itself. Whilst the overall music policy of the network can give it a more masculine or feminine feel (e.g. commercial stations with a more mainstream pop sound tend to be perceived as more feminine compared to stations like XFM or 6 Music, which play more guitar-based music), it didn't generally create negative or positive feelings in relation to portrayal – the role of gender was, therefore, side-lined to a degree. In addition, music radio often fulfils a background listening role, further reducing the impact of gender for audiences

"Sometimes you zone out when you're listening to the radio, it's there in the background while you're doing something else. So I wouldn't notice how men and women are described" (Women, 25-39, C1C2, London)

- Older (45+) audiences, who generally listen to more speech radio (e.g. Radio 4), as well as music stations like Radio 2, tend to be more engaged with radio programming, but also value the familiarity of the established (predominantly male) voices on their preferred stations – whilst not averse to hearing more female presenters, there isn't generally dissatisfaction with the current situation.

Although these findings suggest that radio currently reflects traditional (and male-oriented) roles, it's worth noting that audiences also highlighted a number of examples of high profile radio presenters who didn't conform to gender stereotypes – e.g. Lauren Laverne and Kirsty Young - both were perceived as strong female presenters, who combine traditionally masculine and feminine attributes in their presenting style) and Nick Grimshaw:

"When Grimmy interviewed Tom Cruise he said he wasn't interested in action movies. He positively represented males who aren't afraid to be different" (Women, 18-24, ABC1, Belfast)

Attitudes to gender portrayal amongst Transgender audiences – key findings

Transgender audiences generally felt under-represented across the media, particularly in comparison to the LGB community which was felt to have made significant strides in the past 5-10 years:

"When you compare it to the gay community, we're a small fish in a big ocean. I feel like we're in the same place now that the gay community were in the 1980s" (Telephone depth interviewee)

At an overall level, there was a sense that portrayal is too focused on the 'transition narrative' and physical change, which was perceived as repetitive and overly simplistic:

"The preoccupation with transition and surgery objectifies trans people. And then we don't get to really deal with the real lived experiences" (Laverne Cox, on Katie Couric, 2014)

There was some difference in attitudes to representation across media platforms:

- TV portrayal was seen as low in volume and varied in quality – whilst there are some positive programme examples and characterisation (e.g. Laverne Cox's character Sophia in *Orange is the New Black*, Hayley in *Coronation Street*, Blessing in *Hollyoaks*), there was a feeling that representation of transgender audiences can often reinforce negative stereotypes such as 'a man in a dress', an association with social and mental health problems, or a sexual context (e.g. prostitution). There was also an issue with programme titling, which can undermine sometimes positive content examples (e.g. *My Transsexual Summer*) and comedy was seen as being particularly problematic, as it could often have social implications for audiences:

"On Celebrity Juice, they pan under the table to look between Fearne's legs to see if she's a man. Then people in public will look between my legs because they've seen that on the show" (Telephone depth interviewee)

- Radio portrayal was also generally seen as low in volume, but sometimes higher in quality – with some transgender people giving interviews and making documentaries (e.g. Paris Lees, MEP Nikki Sinclair) and a sense of a positive shift towards correct terminology. Certain local and digital radio stations were also seen as positive spaces for transgender people to have a voice. However, there was still a sense that there was a need for much more representation on the radio
- Online was generally seen as being a positive platform by providing a space for transgender people to share experiences and content in like-minded communities (e.g. on social media) – although their open nature means abuse can also be posted. Also, whilst there was a sense of some improvements in the terminology used in relation to transgender people on news sites, the language can still often be seen as sensationalist and reinforcing negative stereotypes.

Despite these very evident issues, there was also a sense that there has been a small, but positive shift in the representation of transgender audiences over the last few years, with these becoming more realistic and diverse in their nature. This was felt to reflect a wider social trend in awareness and attitudes:

"More and more trans people have a public voice now, and are actually being listened to. We are on the top of a tipping point right now" (Expert seminar attendee)

Moving forward there was a strong desire for the media to portray transgender audiences in a more authentic and representative way in order to educate and inform and, ultimately, to encourage social normalisation. Specific desired actions

included:

- Showing transgender people as real and layered characters (and not making transition the focus)
- Ensuring more transgender actors are given opportunities to play characters
- Integrating trans people into programming as incidental characters
- More focus on positive stories to shift societal attitudes
- A better reflection of the diversity and intersectionality of the transgender population – e.g. variation in race, gender identification, disability, age etc.
- Greater sensitivity when it comes to terminology across programming and reporting:

"Focus on what makes us similar rather than what makes us different. The key to representing well is allowing the viewer to relate to the person" (Telephone depth interviewee)

"Changing the ethos towards trans people through education will change the way that trans is viewed. If something becomes unacceptable within a community (e.g. TV programmes) because the ethos is changing then those positive attitudes will infiltrate into wider society" (Expert seminar attendee)

Moving beyond binary gender to better understand attitudes to the media

Before the 1970s, behavioural scientists (and most people) generally assumed a mutually exclusive view of gender; a person's gender identity was seen as either masculine or feminine, with masculinity and femininity seen as opposite ends of a one-dimensional gender scale. Popular belief held that people would be most well-adjusted in life if their 'gender matched their sex'; that boys should display masculine characteristics and attitudes, and that girls should display feminine characteristics and attitudes.

An article written in 1973 by Anne Constantinople challenged this notion, and claimed that masculinity and femininity are best described as two separate dimensions on which a person's gender identity can be measured. This argument was developed by Sandra Bem of Stanford University in 1974, when she published the Bem Sex Role Inventory (BSRI). She proposed that, rather than fitting into a predominantly feminine or masculine gender identity, a more balanced and well-adjusted person would exhibit both masculine and feminine behaviours. Bem explained her reasoning in this way:

"The highly sex-typed individual is motivated to keep [his or her] behaviour consistent with an internalized sex-role standard, a goal that [he or she] presumably accomplishes by suppressing any behaviour that might be considered undesirable or inappropriate for [his or her] sex. Thus, whereas a narrowly masculine self-concept might inhibit behaviours that are stereotyped as feminine, and a narrowly feminine self-concept might inhibit behaviours that are stereotyped as masculine, a mixed, or androgynous, self-concept might allow an individual to engage freely in both "masculine" and "feminine" behaviours"

To support this theory, Bem developed a method for measuring gender on a two-dimensional scale, and subsequently coined the term androgynous (from 'andro' meaning male, and 'gyn' referring to female) which defines a person who exhibits both masculine and feminine characteristics. The BSRI and other validity studies have confirmed Bem's argument by illustrating low correlations between masculinity and femininity.

As part of this project we decided to utilise the Bem Sex Role Inventory in both the qualitative phase and subsequent analysis of television viewing behaviour to look at the issue of gender beyond the binary nature of male/female and look at whether

media behaviour and attitudes varied by where people identify on this broader masculine/feminine spectrum. Around 10,000 of the BBC's Pulse panel¹³ (around half the total panel) completed a reduced version of the BEM sex role questionnaire so we could classify them into where they sit on this more subtle gender spectrum. We could then look at how attitudes and behaviour varied by people along a 6 point categorisation of gender, namely:

- Feminine Women
- Androgynous Women
- Masculine Women
- Feminine Men
- Androgynous Men
- Masculine Men

What did BEM tell us about sex role identity in the UK?

Before looking in detail about what this approach can tell us about the media it's worth setting out what we found about how gender identity seems to vary across some other key demographic characteristics such as age, social grade, sexuality and geography.

For example, we found that:

- 'Femininity' appeared to be a more coherent category than 'masculinity' – 58% of the women asked the BEM questions were classified as 'feminine', compared to only 37% of the men being classified as 'masculine'. Does this provide evidence of the talked-about 'crisis in masculinity' where men aren't as clear about what it means to be a man in modern society?

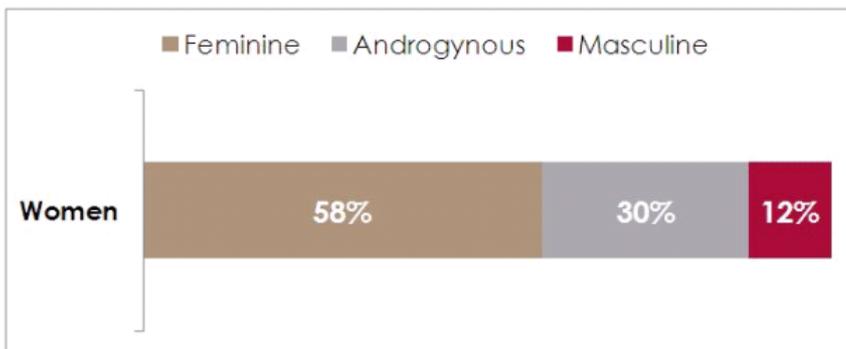


Figure 2: Distribution of gender identity by sex (females), BBC Pulse panel

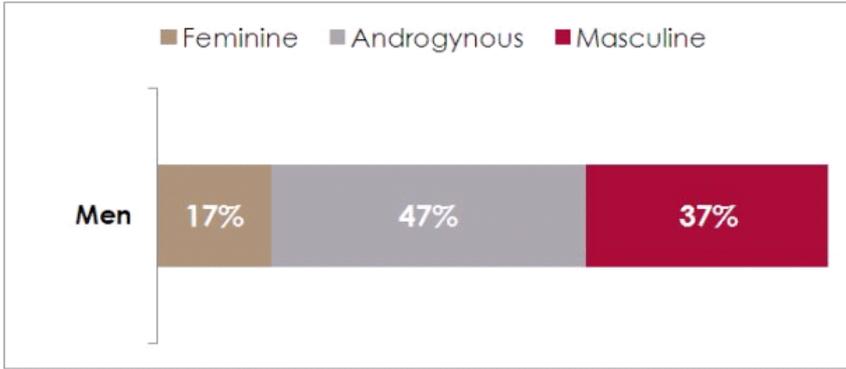


Figure 3: Distribution of gender identity by sex (males), BBC Pulse panel

- Younger age groups of both sexes were much less gender-typical than their older counterparts, suggesting that androgyny has been increasing over time (the Bowie versus the Bogart generation?)

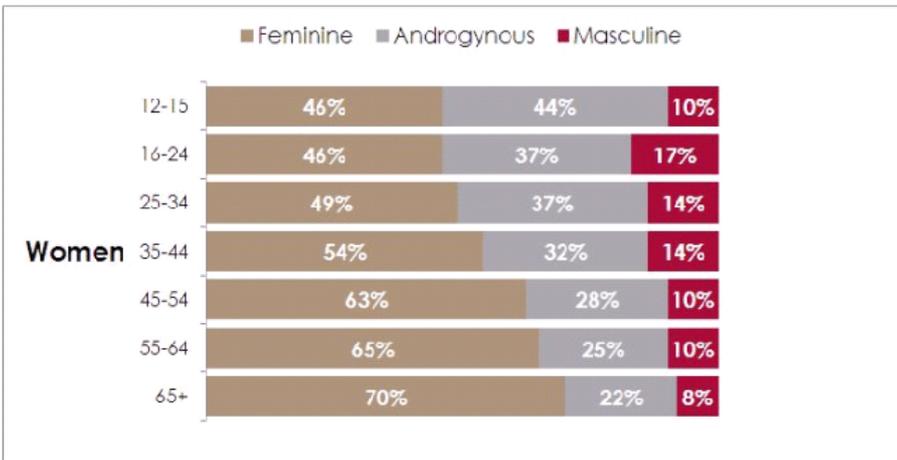


Figure 4: Distribution of gender identity by age within sex (females), BBC Pulse panel

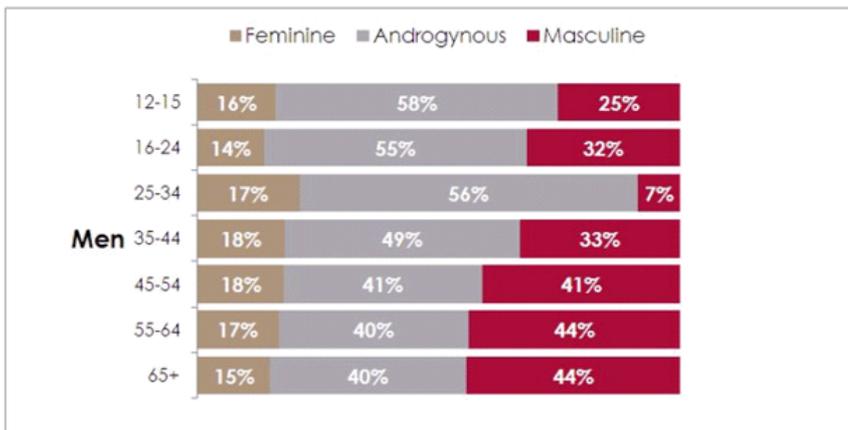


Figure 5: Distribution of gender identity by age within sex (males), BBC Pulse panel

- Masculinity was also more pronounced amongst ABC1 men (who are more likely to be in positions of leadership and so

identify with some of the so-called masculine characteristics of assertiveness and ambition) and less pronounced amongst C2DE men - which perhaps goes against stereotypical expectations of where 'real men' are to be found!

- We also found the stereotype of gay men being more 'feminine' than heterosexual men was largely a myth – the perceived gender profiles between the two groups weren't that different (though we did find a markedly more masculine identity amongst lesbians than amongst heterosexual women)
- Northern male stereotypes of greater masculinity also appeared to be largely untrue, though we did find a more prevalent androgynous identity in London and greater 'gender typical' identification in Northern Ireland
- Those in relationships also tended to have more gender-typical identities than people who are single – is that because people in partnerships are more likely to divide up their roles along expected gender lines?

Sex role identity in relation to the media

Societal considerations aside, the key point of this exercise was to see if attitudes to the media and actual consumption varied by people at different points on the gender spectrum – and to see if this approach had more explanatory power than using simple binary gender alone.

We first looked at responses to the broad gender attitude questions mentioned earlier by the six different gender types to see if their views differed in some way. It seemed that they did - we found that those of both sexes with 'non-typical' gender identities (e.g. androgynous and feminine men, and androgynous and masculine women) were more sensitised to the issue of gender representation and portrayal. They appeared to be:

- More aware of a gender imbalance on television and more accurate about the actual imbalance in favour of men (is that because they are less likely to take it for granted?)
- Less satisfied with the overall quality of portrayal of men and women

	Feminine ♀	Andro. ♀	Masculine ♀	Feminine ♂	Andro. ♂	Masculine ♂
More men than women on TV	25%	16%	34%	29%	20%	19%
Satisfied with quality of portrayal of men	43%	32%	28%	30%	38%	43%
Satisfied with quality of portrayal of women	35%	27%	12%	28%	28%	37%

Figure 6: Differences in media attitudes by perceived gender, Pulse

There was also some evidence that the less gender-typical were less likely to feel gender portrayal has got better over time – they have a less rosy picture of progress.

Is there an impact on actual consumption and appreciation?

Because the BEM questions were asked of the BBC's regular media feedback panel we were also able to analyse the actual

viewing choices and tastes of these six groups to see if they varied in terms of what they choose to watch and how much they enjoy it.

Overall enjoyment of the TV experience

There was evidence that for women in particular their perceived gender roles do impact on their programme enjoyment – average appreciation (or AI) scores across all the programmes consumed across all channels in a year were lower for 'non-conforming' women, while scores for men were consistent across the board:

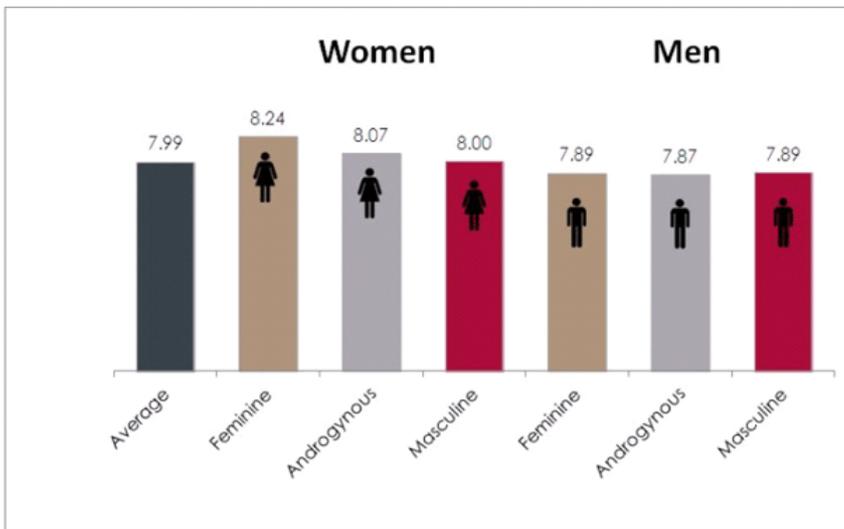


Figure 7: Average AI score by gender type, BBC Pulse panel

Analysis of channels and genres

This analysis also enabled us to identify where channels and genres get their core gender support and provided a more subtle lens than using binary gender alone. For example, here are the gender viewing profiles of some key TV channels:

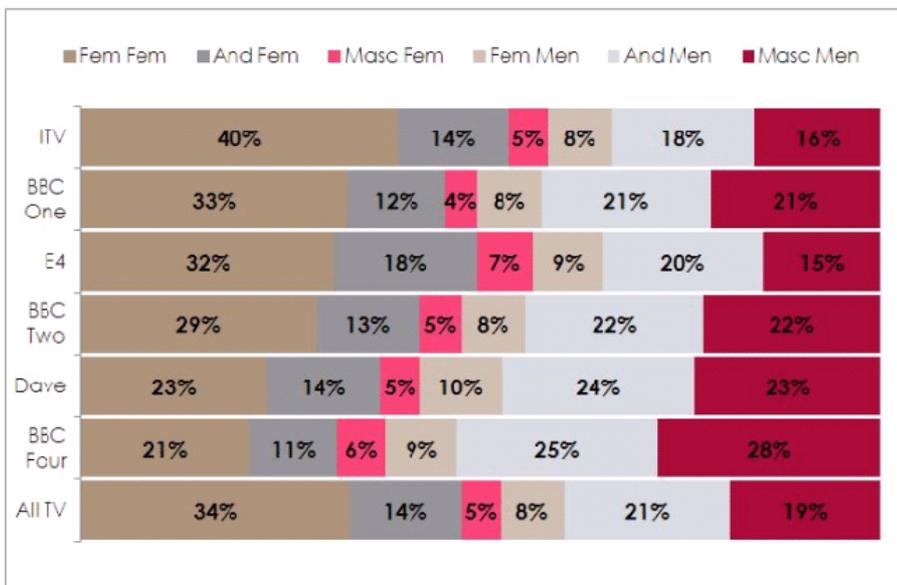


Figure 8: Perceived gender profiles of TV channels, BBC Pulse panel

Looking at gender consumption in this way raises some interesting questions and observations:

- Is the ITV audience potentially fragile with its over-dependence on 'feminine women'? In contrast BBC1's gender profile is more broad-based across the 6 gender types (perhaps reflecting its broader mix of genres). Should ITV explore increasing its appeal amongst the more non-typical gender types of both sexes (and maybe as a consequence tap more readily into the valuable younger audience)?
- Does this indicate why Dave has been successful?– it resonates with all three types of men and also performs adequately with all but the most feminine women – helping it garner a wide audience
- Is BBC Four too much focused on 'men's men' in terms of its subjects and tone?
- E4 clearly embraces androgyny but also manages to appeal to the core television audience of feminine women

It's not just channels that we can analyse in this way – we can also look at how TV genres are made-up in terms of this sharper gender lens:

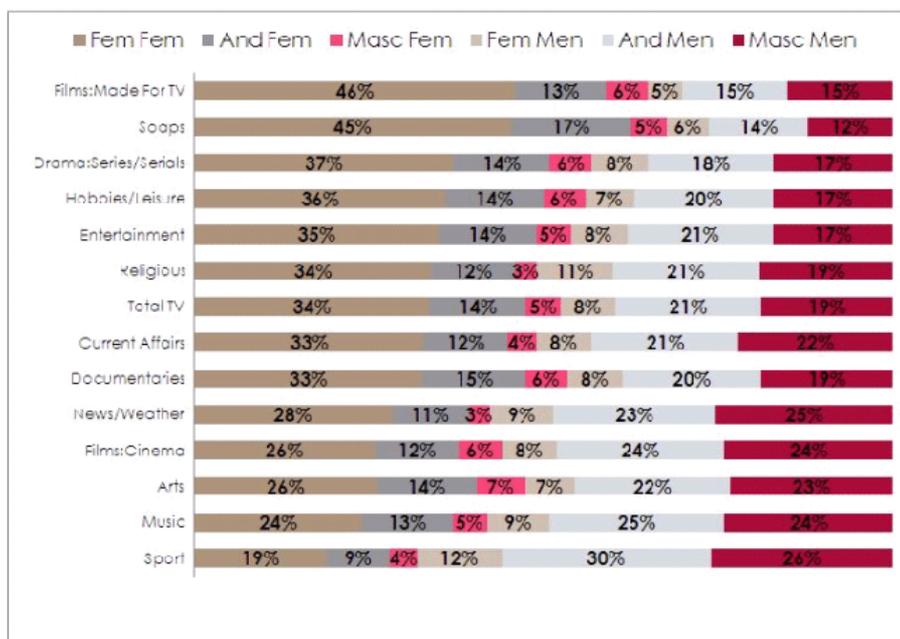


Figure 9: Perceived gender profiles of TV genres, BBC Pulse panel

This also highlights some interesting themes and observations:

- Sport appeals to all men, not just the masculine end of the male spectrum (though it does skew towards more masculine rather than feminine or androgynous women)
- News/current affairs tend to particularly skew to more masculine men – is this inevitable or a fault in production and presentation – does it need to reach out more beyond this base to thrive?
- Films tend to have higher appeal to the masculine side of both sexes – is this driven by the films that are offered on mainstream TV or is it because there is less for those with a 'male' outlook to watch on mainstream TV? (in contrast 'Made for TV' films tend to appeal more to feminine women, reflecting their different skew in subject matter)

- Arts and Documentaries also appeal to more masculine men and women – are they excluding others and could they broaden their base?
- Entertainment appeals to all 3 types of women but has a very low proportion of masculine men – could we address this? How would you 'masculinise' mainstream entertainment without alienating their core base?
- Drama has a good resonance for non-typical men and women – is this because this genre is good at showing a more rounded view of gender difference across its output?
- Soaps – feminine women are absolutely key to this genre (that's why their audiences are so large, as they appeal to the key driver of TV audiences). They also have particular appeal to men at the more feminine end of the spectrum.

Analysis of individual programmes

Where this analysis really comes to life is at the individual programme level – after all, the channel and genre profiles highlighted earlier are just made up of the viewing to the individual programmes within that channel and genre. Looking at how specific programmes skew in terms of their perceived gender appeal helps us really understand how some of these more subtle gender factors are driving their appeal. Figure 9 shows some of the differences we found for individual programmes:

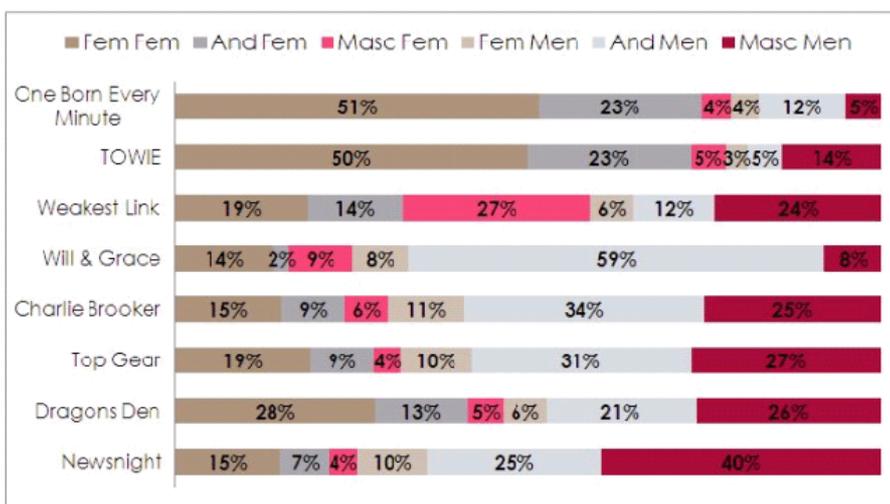


Figure 10: Perceived gender profiles of selected TV programmes, BBC Pulse panel

Programmes like One Born Every Minute on Channel 4 and The Only Way is Essex (TOWIE) on ITV2 have a strong 'feminine women' core to their support, whilst at the other extreme the Weakest Link appeals heavily to masculine women and Newsnight is very dependent on more masculine men. It also shows the importance of the androgynous audience to a comedy like Will and Grace (androgynous men make up over half the audience). It's also interesting that Top Gear, despite its perhaps 'macho' image, enjoys the broad support of both masculine and androgynous men.

This type of analysis has helped us explore a range of gender-related programme issues such as:

Understanding the factors underlying strong performance

- Hits like Downton Abbey and Call the Midwife appeal to all types of women – pushing them to another level in terms of audience volume
- Dr Who and Sherlock – unusually for drama they appeal to all types of men and so have managed to attract a larger than

average audience

- Doc Martin and Foyle's War appeal to the usual drama audience plus a decent topping of 'macho' men
- The Apprentice has broad gender appeal across the spectrum (down to good casting?)
- The Great British Bake-Off appeals to all types of women and also performs well amongst non-masculine men
- Britain's Got Talent shows the way for big entertainment shows – it appeals to more of the male types than other entertainment shows – is this partly a result of David Walliams' comfort with androgyny?

Understanding reasons for more limited appeal

- The BBC One dramas Musketeers and Atlantis didn't resonate with the core drama audience of feminine women – is that why the overall audience size was more limited?
- Similarly the BBC One drama In the Club with its pregnancy/childbirth focus, and the gymnastics entertainment show Tumble on BBC One were perhaps too focused on the core feminine women constituency – other gender types were perhaps more immune to their appeal
- ITV News tends not to appeal to more masculine men who we have seen are the core news audience – is this why ratings are lower than the BBC equivalents?

Clues about how to grow the audience

- No property shows we looked at had a skew towards feminine men – does this suggest a gap in the market or just an overall lack of interest?
- Could we get feminine women to science as well as the more usual audience of androgynous and masculine men – what about Brian Cox plus diets?
- BBC2 and Channel 4 drama are both quite masculine – could they break through by getting in the mind of the more feminine end of the gender spectrum as well as men with a less masculine outlook?

Androgyny – the opportunity to grab the middle ground?

In our sample those who were classified as androgynous (both men and women) made up just over a third of the total sample (21% men and 14% women). What kinds of television are they drawn to?

- In terms of genres they go for the more specialist genres such as music, arts, and films and their lowest skew is for soaps, TV films, and drama (all broadly 'mainstream' genres).
- They tend to be drawn to programmes with a more 'modern' sensibility (they are a bit younger than average) and a bit outside the mainstream - for example The Undateables, the comedy Inside Number 9, Later with Jools and The Trip to Italy.
- We also got clues from this viewing data as to what types of talent have particular appeal to this group – with names like Sarah Beeny, Alex Polizzi, Russell Howard, Sue Perkins, Stewart Lee, Charlie Brooker and Brian Cox resonating well

Is there an opportunity to revitalise and future-proof mainstream programmes by better understanding and reaching out to these less typical audiences?

Where next for binary gender analysis of consumption and appreciation?

These are all issues that we are planning to explore more fully. Moving beyond a sense of just 'men' and 'women' and

sharpening our lens in this area may help us all in the media business to think more creatively and in a more nuanced way – television in particular can sometimes be very binary in its thinking. 'Maleness' and 'Femaleness' are more authentic labels than just 'male' and 'female' and can apply to both sexes – and this thinking may help in the elusive task of attracting a younger, less stereotypical audience to traditional media. After all, as psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihaly states...

"A psychologically androgynous person in effect doubles his or her repertoire of responses and can interact with the world in terms of a much richer and varied spectrum of opportunities. It is not surprising that creative individuals are more likely to have not only the strengths of their own gender but those of the other one, too"

Final thoughts

This project, though by no means exhaustive, has shed real light on how the public feel about gender and the media in the UK today – their initial apparent indifference, the emergence of some real issues beneath the surface, and real evidence that how one sees one's own gender identity can affect your actual satisfaction and consumption.

From the BBC's perspective we are expected to be a leader in providing positive and balanced portrayal of both sexes – our public service remit means we are held to higher account. But the opportunities offered by better gender portrayal are not just about fairness and regulatory obligation, important though they are. A more authentic portrayal of the range of gender identities in society is really just another element of providing quality in what we do. Embracing range and difference in this way offers the potential for providing more fresh and new content to the audience, something they tell us they put a premium on in the crowded modern media marketplace.

Appendix 1 - How the bsri was designed

Bem gave a list of 400 traits to two samples of Stanford University undergraduates and asked them to rate the characteristics according to how desirable they are for each sex. For example, participants were asked, "how socially desirable is it for a man to be self-reliant?" on a scale of 1 to 7. Traits were selected for the inventory if both males and females rated a given trait to be significantly more desirable for one sex. 20 additional traits were chosen that were 'neutral' for males or females; 10 of which were positively valued (such as "conscientious" and "adaptable"), and 10 of which were negatively valued (such as "moody" and "jealous") to ensure that participants weren't influenced by seeing all masculine and feminine characteristics, or all 'desirable' characteristics.

There are two versions of the BSRI; the long form (60 items) and the short form (30 items, highlighted in bold in Figure 11). Whilst the long form BSRI is more detailed, many researchers have recommended using the short form BSRI due to its high reliability, as it shows good test-retest scores and internal consistency. The long form BSRI has been criticised for not being relevant to all cultures, specifically Asian populations. In terms of this study, the short form BSRI is a more pragmatic means of testing our qualitative respondents' self-perceptions of gender in light of the other commitments we're expecting from them.

<i>Masculine items</i>	<i>Feminine items</i>	<i>Neutral items</i>
Acts as a leader	Affectionate	Adaptable
Aggressive	Cheerful	Conceited
Ambitious	Childlike	Conscientious
Analytical	Compassionate	Conventional
Assertive	Does not use harsh language	Friendly
Athletic	Eager to soothe hurt feelings	Happy
Competitive	Feminine	Helpful
Defends own beliefs	Flatterable	Inefficient
Dominant	Gentle	Jealous
Forceful	Gullible	Likable
Has leadership abilities	Loves children	Moody
Independent	Loyal	Reliable
Individualistic	Sensitive to the needs of others	Secretive
Makes decisions easily	Shy	Sincere
Masculine	Soft spoken	Solemn
Self-reliant	Sympathetic	Tactful
Self-sufficient	Tender	Theatrical
Strong personality	Understanding	Truthful
Willing to take a stand	Warm	Unpredictable
Willing to take risks	Yielding	Unsystematic

How the BSRI is calculated

Participants rate themselves on each given characteristic using a seven-point Likert scale as follows:

- 1 – Never or almost never true
- 2 – Usually not true
- 3 – Sometimes but infrequently true
- 4 – Occasionally true
- 5 – Often true
- 6 – Usually true
- 7 – Always or almost always true

After completing the survey, respondents are given three scores; a masculinity score, a femininity score and an androgyny score.

The masculinity score is calculated by adding up all the scores for the masculine characteristics (highlighted in bold, in column 1, Figure 11) and dividing them by 10 so as to gain an average rating. The same is done for the femininity score (highlighted in bold, in column 2, Figure 11). Scores for the neutral items are not counted, as their purpose is solely to ensure participants aren't influenced by seeing all masculine and feminine characteristics, or all 'desirable' characteristics.

A person's score may fall in any one of four categories: if one is high in masculinity and low in femininity, then one is considered to be sex-typed masculine; if one is low in masculinity and high in femininity, then one is sex-typed feminine; a high score in masculinity and a high score in femininity is an androgynous score; and low scores in both masculinity and femininity results in an undifferentiated score. This last classification was introduced by Bem in 1977 when the model was criticised for not differentiating between individuals who scored low on both scales, and individuals who scored high on both scales.

Gender categories explained

Bem suggested that individuals who are categorised as masculine sex-typed are more likely to exhibit certain characteristics. This is similar for individuals who are categorised as feminine sex-typed, androgynous, and undifferentiated. Researchers have explored the specific characteristics that people in each category are more likely to display:

Masculine scorers:

Research suggests that masculine sex-typed individuals tend to be dominant, aggressive, self-reliant and to show 'personal control' in their lives. This makes sense in relation to many of the masculine items on the BSRI, such as 'competitive', 'forceful', 'dominant' and 'aggressive'.

Bem suggested that masculine individuals receive more favourable treatment by others, which in turn can increase their self-confidence and self-esteem. She wrote that 'in general, masculinity has been associated with an instrumental orientation, a cognitive focus on "getting the job done". Again, BSRI items such as 'makes decisions easily', 'assertive' and 'acts as a leader' would suggest these findings.

Feminine scorers:

Feminine sex-typed individuals tend to be "nurturing and other-oriented", and to show "interpersonal sensitivity and warmth". These descriptions support Bem's argument that "femininity has been associated with an expressive orientation, an effective concern for the welfare of others". Many of the feminine items on the BSRI such as 'sensitive to the needs of others', 'tender' and 'sympathetic' would indicate this trend.

Androgynous scorers:

Those who score highly in the masculine and feminine categories are characterised as being androgynous. Research supports the idea that androgyny correlates with a number of positive attributes, as Bem considered this category to be ideal when operating in society. Bem stated that androgynous individuals are "optimally equipped for behavioural flexibility and corresponding adaptability in varied, dynamic environments" as they are not bound by behaviours associated with traditional masculine or feminine gender roles, but may feel comfortable engaging in behaviours appropriate for either gender. Further research suggests that androgyny correlated with higher levels of identity formation in college students. It was found that androgynous children and adults tend to have higher levels of self-esteem, and are more adaptable in diverse settings. Other research indicates that androgynous individuals are most successful in heterosexual relationships, due to their increased ability to understand their partner's differences to them, and that people who score most highly for androgyny are psychosocially healthier and function more adaptively in modern life.

Undifferentiated scorers:

In contrast to androgynous scorers, research suggests that individuals who are given low scores for both masculinity and femininity, and therefore are categorised as undifferentiated, tend to be less adaptable.

Validating the contemporary relevance of the BSRI

Critiques of the BSRI

As with all academic theories, researchers have questioned the validity of the BSRI. These criticisms have been noted; however it is felt that the arguments in support of the BSRI outweigh these criticisms, particularly in the context in which this study will be undertaken.

Interpretation of masculine and feminine characteristics

It has been argued that Bem's perspective on gender does not allow for the possibility that an individual might interpret behaviours that she classifies as masculine, as being feminine, and vice versa. For example, women who identify as feminists might strongly identify with the item 'self-sufficient'. According to the BSRI, this is a masculine characteristic, and so they are unlikely to be labelled feminine by the BSRI classification system.

Cultural differentiation

Some studies have suggested that the BSRI does not effectively translate to other cultures, specifically Asian populations – which supports the idea that masculinity and femininity are cultural ideas, but does mean that using the study in a non-Western context may reduce its validity. Because Bem tested the study only on American students, the constructs of masculinity and femininity are perhaps limited only to people living in the American culture.

Validity of the BSRI

Overall, research supporting the reliability of the BSRI is impressive.

Bem gathered several large samples (723 undergraduate participants in her 1973 sample and 816 in her 1978 sample). Additionally, she collected samples for black students, white students, Hispanic students, psychiatric patients, and groups of several varying age categories.

Bem's 1974 samples produced strong correlations for internal stability for masculinity (at .86), femininity (.80 to .82), and social desirability (from .70 to .75). Androgyny difference scores showed alpha coefficients hovering at .86. The data Bem collected in 1981 produced similar results, and other researchers have also found comparable alpha coefficients. Bem re-collected the data after a four week interval, and found correlations to be extremely high (masculinity and femininity at .90, androgyny at .93, and social desirability correlations at .89). Again, other researchers have found similar results.

A 4-year interval test-retest study, however, sees correlations drop to .56 for masculinity and .68 for femininity. However, Bem contends that this decrease merely illustrates that the constructs of masculinity and femininity are fluid, slowly changing as people grow, mature, and change.

Appendix 2 – Additional detail on the research approach

The approach involved a number of different components:

Synthesis research and expert consultation

At the outset of the study we conducted a desk review of existing research/relevant information sources and a programme of expert interviews in order to shape and inform the study. This involved interviewing individuals from organisations/institutions including:

- City University London
- University of Sussex
- The London School of Economics
- Women in Film and Television UK
- Sound Women
- Creative Diversity Network
- Future Foundation
- Strange Digital
- Twenty Twenty
- ITV
- BBC
- BBC Trust

Qualitative approach

Overview:

- Core sample: 9 x 2 hour extended group discussions, with real world responses booklet pre task
- Control sample: 6 x 2 hour extended group discussions, with real world responses booklet post task
- 8 x 2 hour cross-generational triads
- BSRI online questionnaire

Detail:

In order to provide an authentic and balanced view of audience attitudes to gender portrayal, we split respondents into 'core' and 'control' samples.

The 'core' sample completed a pre-task to encourage them to think about gender portrayal in a real world environment prior to attending the group sessions and ensure that the discussion was as rich and informed as possible. This involved filling in a booklet over two weeks where they:

- Firstly (week 1), recorded any instances of portrayal (e.g. age, gender, ethnicity, region etc.) across TV, radio and online that they felt positive or negative about (and the degree of this feeling on a ten point scale) – this allowed us to see the extent to which gender emerged as unprompted issue in a wider context
- Secondly (week 2), they repeated this task, but more prompted to think specifically about examples of gender portrayal – this enabled us to build up a wide range of real world examples of how gender representation impacts on audiences (note – this second part of the pre-task wasn't sent out to respondents until they had completed the first week in order to disguise gender as the focus of the research).

The 'control' sample did not complete this pre-task, in order to provide us with the opportunity to speak to some audiences in a completely unprompted and uninfluenced way. For groups, the starting point for the discussion was within the session itself where the moderator probed around areas that create dissatisfaction or concern in relation to the media to see if gender naturally emerged. These groups completed the pre-task as a post-task in order to provide a wider range of content examples.

In all of the group sessions we adopted a similar approach of discussing gender portrayal more openly and then prompting respondents to consider how they feel about representation across different platforms and genres, before introducing specific content examples.

We also conducted cross-generational triads where we spoke to three generations from the same family (e.g. daughter, mother, grandmother) in order to help highlight differences in experiences and attitudes across age-groups and better understand the parent-child influence on forming gender views.

At start of the study (i.e. prior to any awareness that they research would be focusing on gender), all respondents were asked to complete the BSRI questionnaire online. The profile that we built up of our sample was used to provide a contextual understanding of the attitudes emerging in different groups (e.g. enabling us to compare a more masculine male group with a more androgynous/feminine male one). Individual BSRI scores were also cross analysed against pre-tasks to enable us to see if specific profiles could be consistently linked to specific examples of positive or negative gender portrayal.

An overview of the sample structure for the groups and cross-generational triads is illustrated in figures 12 and 13:

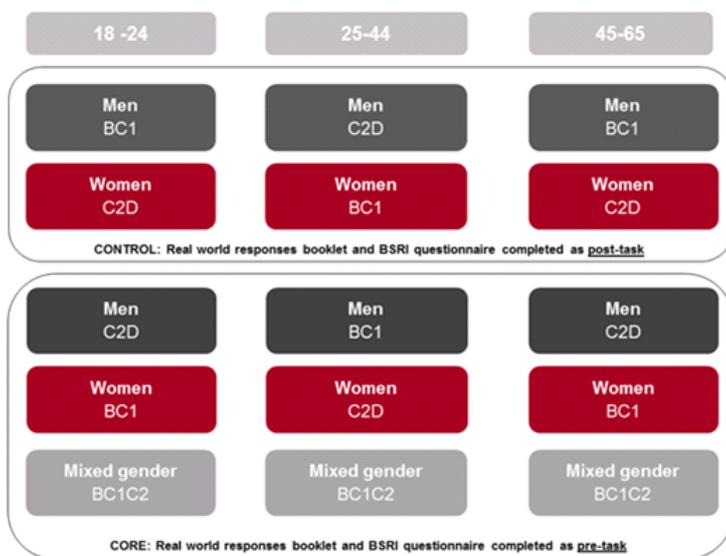


Figure 12: Qualitative sample structure for 15 x 2 hour extended group discussions

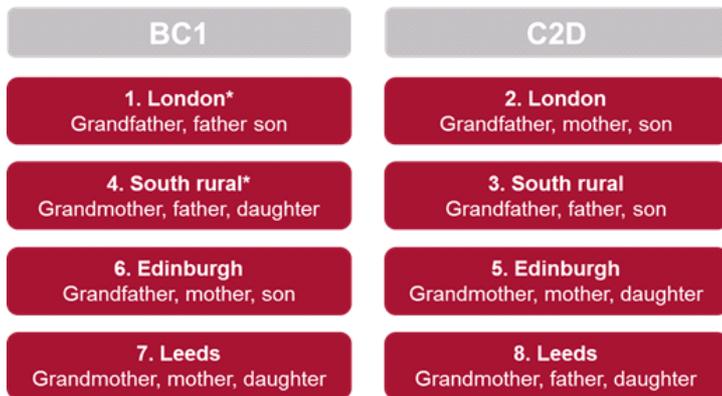


Figure 13: Qualitative sample structure for 8 x 2 hour cross-generational triads

The additional criteria was as follows:

- Representative mix of lifestage (by age group)
- Representative mix of UK ethnicity
- Mix of heavier and lighter consumption of BBC and competitor content (across TV/radio/online)
- Mix of genres/types of content enjoyed/consumed (as relevant to platform)
- Fieldwork conducted across mix of locations, covering North/Midlands/South and Nations.

Transgender audiences

In order to provide an in-depth understanding of how transgender audiences feel about gender portrayal we conducted:

- A half day consultation with BBC stakeholder and representatives from a range of Trans media related organisations (including Trans Media Watch and All About Trans)
- A sample of 10 x 1 hour telephone depths with transgender people (which involved the same pre-task and discussion guide as used for main qualitative approach).

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Footnotes

¹ ONS 2014

² BSA 2013

³ BARB, RAJAR, 2014 averages

⁴ <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/tvandradio/bbc/10464918/BBC-accused-of-sexism-over-new-childrens-show-Topsy-and-Tim.html>

⁵ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/mediacentre/latestnews/2013/local-radio-women>

⁶ http://downloads.bbc.co.uk/diversity/pdf/dap_trust_unit_2014_15.pdf

⁷ For example, in 2009 the BBC partnered with Channel 4 on Talking Disability, a research project that examined disabled audiences' perceptions of television, and in 2010 the BBC commissioned both quantitative and qualitative research to gain an understanding of how both the LGB and heterosexual audience view the BBC's portrayal of LGB people . Most recently, in 2011 the BBC commissioned work on behalf of the media industry's Creative Diversity Network looking at the issue of age, which resulted in the publishing of a report called Serving All Ages and some ground-breaking work looking at 'perceived age', which won the Best Paper at the MRS Conference in March 2012 .

⁸ administered on the BBC's own Pulse panel (an online panel of 20,000 viewers and listeners)

⁹ BARB, 2014 average

¹⁰ RAJAR, 2014 average

¹¹ BBC Pulse survey amongst 796 adults (from 15th-22nd September 2013)

¹² BBC Portrayal Monitoring 2012

¹³ BBC Pulse panel - 2014

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