A photograph of three women from behind, standing on a beach. They are wearing denim jackets and holding bouquets of white flowers. The image has a purple tint. A white circle is overlaid in the center, containing the text.

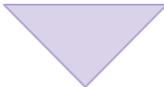
**WOMEN IN  
ADVERTISING  
PHASE II:  
RESEARCH  
SUMMARY**

# PROJECT BACKGROUND & OBJECTIVES

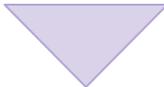
We wanted to gain a deeper understanding of our News UK's female audiences. With **3 key business objectives** that we wanted to explore:

- **UNDERSTANDING:** To demonstrate to both our commercial and editorial teams who our female audiences really are
- **KNOWLEDGE & INSIGHT:** To elicit a competitor advantage by gaining rich insights into the modern female consumer - what they want to see/read/hear and how to communicate effectively with them
- **FUTURE:** To look to the future and identify up and coming trends – what women hope (and fear) for the future and how the media can play a role in shaping this for the better

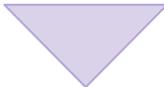
## RESEARCH GOALS



To understand the impact of **lifestyle** on women and gender equality – differences / similarities in terms of views and priorities, to help increase the relevance and appeal of targeted content



To explore the **current role of the media**: how it performs in terms of representing women and promoting / supporting gender equality – what are the gaps and areas it could do better



To identify what it means for **the media to behave 'responsibly'** in the context of female representation and communication / language, etc. to inform future work

# RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

## 2 hour online groups with News UK female readership:

	Sun Readers	The Times Readers
25 – 34 (no children)	1 x Manchester group	1 x London group
35 – 49 (no children)	1 x Scotland group	1 x Manchester group
35 – 49 (children)	1 x Manchester group	1 x London group
50 – 65 (older children and no children)	1 x London group	1 x Scotland group
30 – 49 (LGBTQ)	1 x mixed Manchester / London group	1 x mixed Manchester / London group

## 1 hour online interviews with opinion formers

Shonagh Dillon: CEO of Aurora New Dawn, a charity supporting women who suffer abuse / violence / stalking

Kate Dale: Feminist, former journalist and campaign lead for #thisgirlcan Sport England campaign

Chloe Roberts: COO of Y-o-u-n-g Record Label and founder of Lapbaby

Aasmah Mir: TV and radio broadcaster (currently co-presenting Times Radio breakfast show)

- This was a purely qualitative research project as this gave us an opportunity to conduct a deep dive into our female audiences. We conducted a mixed approach of female readers and female opinion formers.
- All respondents were pre-tasked with WhatsApp video messages to pre-determine certain priorities
- Our respondents are all BC1C2, have a mix of ethnicity/political views and an interest in gender equality

## YEARS OF SOCIAL CONDITIONING NEED TO BE BROKEN DOWN

The first conclusion from phase II of our research highlights the vast and complex history of gender equality, and the impact it still has today. Many women feel that there are still numerous disadvantages to being a woman, and there are years of social conditioning that need to be broken down in order to see further progress unfold. Despite some wins in recent years, there is still a long way to go, as inequality is ingrained and often insidious.

The general consensus is that there are high expectations of women - they are to work full time, raise happy and fulfilled children, look good on the outside and feel great on the inside, while being strong and capable as opposed to weak and 'needy'. These unrealistic expectations are worlds away from a reality in which there are still limited opportunities for women, particularly in traditionally male industries and at senior level in businesses. Women are still less likely to get promotions and equal pay but are expected to take the lion's share of childcare and domestic duties.



## INCLUSION MEANS ADDRESSING MEN, TOO

Diversity and inclusion are particularly important when it comes to readdressing the gender equality balance. With this, it's clear that men need to be more directly addressed and made aware of the problems that do exist and how they have a role to play in alleviating them. This does however need to be done in a way that avoids judgment and accusation, as this can risk defensiveness and further division. The women in our research are clear that their priority is for discussions to include men and bring them on the journey. This is because any change needs to have buy-in from everybody, because it will affect everybody. They also want men as well as women to call out the low lying, everyday misogyny as well as the systemic inequalities – this is about addressing the whole and not just parts of a problem.

To be effective, all communication has to be inclusive – both in terms of what's said, i.e. relatable, empathetic content, and how it's said i.e. demonstrating the spirit of collaboration vs. accusation. Ideally everybody needs to stand up and be accountable for their discourse and be aware of ways they treat people differently. Perhaps having men address other men is the way forward here, as opposed to leaving it to women explain these issues.



## CHANGE IS REQUIRED IN THE EARLY, FORMATIVE YEARS

Childhood is a pivotal period of learning and development - what we see and hear during our impressionable years often has a lasting impact on the way we perceive the world. Both boys and girls need to be educated in how to speak to and about women, as well as how the world can be made a more comfortable and safer place for them.

Stereotypes and labelling from a young age are unhelpful as they create aspirations that do not allow for individuality or personal growth. Homogenised 'ideals' create unrealistic expectations and set women up to fail, particularly around looks / body image, but also in other areas like parenting. Encouraging young girls to conform to patriarchal norms also stunts progress and limits opportunity – this can be seen in many contexts such as the choice to have a family, sexuality, etc.



## SYSTEMIC REFORM IS REQUIRED FIRST AND FOREMOST

In order for educational changes to make a difference, there first needs to be much broader, systemic changes implemented by the state. These include around topics like childcare, such as how it is divided between partners, what it costs & how it is paid for, as well as equal pay and work opportunities, female health provision, and safety & protection (to include both hard and soft end abuse).

The women in our research felt that things have plateaued (especially around work opportunities / pay, etc), and it is widely felt that campaigns and protests can only go so far and feel temporal, as if offering lip service only. Even more concerning, issues such as violence against women have got worse, with events such as the murders of Sarah Everard and Aishling Murphy highlighting a lack of continued pressure that is required to instigate real change.

## MORE WOMEN AT THE TABLE REQUIRED TO DRIVE DISCUSSION AND CHANGE

There continues to be uneven representation when it comes to women in positions of authority and power. It is clear that we still need more women in senior roles and roles of influence to ensure voices are being heard and accounted for as much as possible. Women in such positions can help to direct discussion and influence decision and change. The more apparent this becomes, the more likely it is that we will see women being represented in a way that truly reflects their needs and how big decisions can impact their health, family lives and career progression.

However, positively discriminating in favour of women when it comes to representation can bring about resistance. Some men (and women who are more exposed to or influenced by male rhetoric) are sceptical about females in certain roles. This group view them as ‘tick box’ exercises, potentially gaining positions unfairly at the expense of “better qualified” males. More needs to be done to convince and reassure that the rationale behind positive discrimination is valid, ie. women are equally trained / skilled / competent in these positions and that we need to have more women in particular areas to create impact and enable them to stand out against very male backdrops.



## THE MEDIA CAN PLAY A HUGE ROLE

The media is well-positioned and could be said to have a responsibility to promote and sustain change. It has a duty to lead by example, meaning more women in editorial positions, challenging headlines and content, as well as reviewing, questioning and making suggestions for the better. This applies to a range of topics but particularly to issues concerning body image, ageing, and diversity.

Not only this, but representation through advertising can have a profound effect when it comes to progression in this space. On average, less than 1 in 2 of our Times and Sun readers say they see themselves represented in advertising, and what they do see doesn't reflect what they'd like to see more of. Our female readers ultimately want to be represented as intelligent, strong and brave. Ultimately the media can help steer the narrative around equality and encourage us all to think about (and become aware of) ways in which we might treat people differently even if we do so subconsciously, and the reasons why this might be unfair.



**KEY VERTICALS**



## **FAMILY LIFE: REDRESS THE GENDER BALANCE IN TERMS OF DOMESTIC AND FAMILY DUTIES**

There was a real sense from our audiences especially our Sun readers that Covid had set the balance back a number of years. This was true across a number of life stages, even those with no family priorities. With our female audiences putting an extreme amount of pressure on themselves to “win at life” - earn a good wage, look after the home, and bring up happy, well-adjusted children. As females are natural nurturers they actively want this role but then find it hard to deliver amongst everything else, with the media and advertising seen to be perpetuating the issue.

We should be seen to be helping to shift the narrative away from female based expectations; challenging and calling out old-fashioned stereotypes and assumptions. We should actively support all primary givers regardless of gender and promote this narrative in a more positive way, as well as encouraging men to take a more active role.

## THE WORKPLACE: OPPORTUNITIES FOR WOMEN ARE LIMITED BEFORE THEY EVEN START THEIR CAREERS

Amongst our audiences, particularly those from the North and readers of the Sun, the consensus is that society still deems certain industries less ‘appropriate for women’. They feel there are still not enough females working in these industries to normalise particular career paths. Confidence is a real issue for both our Sun and Times readers who are less likely to apply for jobs unless they possess all of the skills required.

While it isn’t all bad news and our readers do feel there is real change starting to happen for the better within bigger companies, our readers still want more female role models to positively discriminate the portrayal of women in business, eg. in more traditionally male industries and in senior positions.

There is real opportunity for both ourselves as a media owner and our clients to use our brands to showcase women in high ranking roles across traditionally male dominated industries, for example with science and tech content aimed at both our male and female audiences.



## SPORT: THE MEDIA NEEDS TO CONTINUE TO BE AN ADVOCATE IN COVERAGE OF WOMEN'S SPORT

As The Women's Sport Trust research shows a record number of people tuned in to watch women's sport from Jan-March this year (15m), our readers want to see even more of this and an increase in the involvement of women commentating and offering opinions on sport, too. It's important to our audiences that this isn't just a token gesture and that there is a real purpose behind it. Coverage would provide an opportunity to engage our audience not only in watching sport, but also encouraging them to gain confidence in taking part themselves.

*"Gyms are very 'male' places, you either feel like being you're judged as weak or objectified"*

(Times Reader, 25 - 34)

Women can have an uncomfortable relationship with physical activity which is closely related with pressures on appearance, often resulting in a number of negative attitudes and behaviours, especially for younger women. More needs to be done in communicating the mental health benefits of exercise and making women feel comfortable and confident in the gym.

## WOMEN'S HEALTH: AN OPPORTUNITY TO NORMALISE AND DESTIGMATISE WOMEN'S HEALTH

Women are of course fundamentally physically different, but at the same time are bound by a health service that has been designed and run by men. Whilst women's health is slowly being talked about more, it is still often a taboo, particularly in the workplace. As such, it can feel that women's health is misunderstood, that men's health is prioritised and that women's health services are seriously underfunded.

There is a real sense that we are moving forward in regards to women's bodies and overall health but there is still a long way to go, and this is particularly topical with recent controversy around abortion laws in the USA. We need more education and information around symptoms such as those stemming from pregnancy and the menopause, and there needs to be balanced focus on mental symptoms as well as physical. The Sun is leading the way in campaigning for "Menopause matters", yet areas such as fertility and contraception still very much seen as a woman's responsibility. We need to ensure that we are communicating in the right tone and educating our audiences - both female and male - in this area.

*"It's not helpful to be told you're making it up, or to get a grip!"*  
(Times Reader, 50-65)

*"Contraception messes with your physical and mental health and there's not enough advice if you want to come off it"*  
(Sun Reader, 25 - 34)

## REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN IN THE MEDIA: WE NEED TO GIVE WOMEN REAL ACCESSIBLE ROLE MODELS VS INACCESSIBLE IDEALS

Our readers feel that there is still a real issue in the presentation of body image in the media, with unrealistic body images still being utilised and a lack of female older women being represented. They have noticed a change in these areas, but still feel that much more should - and could - be done.

Diversity is also felt to be lacking – not helped by the perceived obsession with celebrity culture. Women still don't feel that they are well-represented as the media focuses on celebrity culture vs/ the voices of 'real' women. These feelings are exacerbated even further for women from different ethnic backgrounds, calling for a broader range of women to feel seen and heard in order to make progress. There needs to be a genuine shift away from promoting bland and homogenised celebrities. Creating more room to promote real and relatable women who can provide more authentic and meaningful inspiration.

*"Society has said women of a certain age have no worth.. how can you ignore it when you read it everywhere?"*  
(Sun Reader, 50 – 65)

*"I think it's a cultural thing too – in France older women are seen as wise and sexy!"*  
(Times Reader, 50 – 65)





# THANK YOU

FOR ACCESS TO THE FULL RESEARCH PRESENTATION, OR IF YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS, PLEASE CONTACT:

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