

# Written evidence submitted by Media Woman (COM0012)

## 1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 Women in science need more encouragement to engage with the media.
- 1.2 No matter how senior or knowledgeable they are, women often lack the self confidence to take part in public debates.
- 1.3 Impostor syndrome and a fear of being “caught out” or appearing stupid appears to be far more prevalent amongst female experts.
- 1.4 In our experience, training groups of senior women together enables them to share, to exchange insecurities and build their confidence.
- 1.5 Unless more women rise to the challenge of putting themselves in a public arena, school girls of today will continue to lack strong, inspiring role models.

## 2. Background

- 2.1 Media Woman was founded by Julia Barry - a former senior BBC news editor, with the goal of encouraging more women in STEM to take part in media interviews and debates. This evidence is being submitted in the hope of giving more insight into the insecurities that hold women back in the field of science communication, and to give a deeper understanding of why women are still outnumbered by 3:1 in media interviews.
- 2.2 News and current affairs outlets are under increasing pressure to feature more expert women but our experience is that women, no matter how senior or authoritative, are not always willing or confident to put themselves forward. Media Woman works with some of the UK’s most senior female scientists and academics, equipping them with the skills and confidence to deal with the demands of the broadcasting and media world. Attendees have included fellows, professors and other senior academics from The Academy of Medical Sciences, The Royal Society, Medical Research Council, The Institution of Engineering and Technology, GSK, BNFL, Zoological Society of London, Manchester Business School and L’Oreal Women in Science.
- 2.3 Female experts in media and broadcasting outlets is currently estimated at 3:1 according to the latest research from City University. However, that figure may well understate the gender disparity when it comes to STEM subjects. Media Woman has succeeded in encouraging more women in these areas to engage with the media.

## 3. Comments from senior STEM women

These comments from some of the UK’s leading female academics prior to they training, give some insight into why women may be so reluctant to come forward

### 3.1 *I’m concerned about looking stupid and/or incompetent, being misquoted out of context.*

Professor at Kings College London

### 3.2 *I am concerned that I am going to say the wrong thing or convey a message in such a way that it gives the wrong impression. In live interviews I worry about questions I haven’t prepared for.*

Group Leader in Fusion Energy, UK Atomic Energy Authority

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### 3.3 *I am nervous about babbling and not coming to the point or saying stupid things.*

Research Fellow in Mathematics, Imperial College

### 3.4 *I fear being caught out. I am very quietly spoken and dislike aggressive bullying behaviour.*

Leader of 50 scientists at GlaxoSmithKline

### 3.5 *My main concern is having to state or defend a “position” and have a debate. I feel relatively comfortable speaking about a narrow field of expertise ....but worry about being caught out, drying up or saying something stupid.*

Professor and Dame of the British Empire

### 3.6 *I worry about being “caught out” or sounding stupid. If asked to do a TV interview tomorrow, I would refuse.*

Professor, University of Oxford

### 3.7 *I have two major, inter-related fears: making a fool of myself, and either getting something wrong or not being able to give an answer.*

Professor in Medical Sciences and OBE

## 4. Impact of Training

4.1 Media Woman undertook a survey of women who had attended the training course from The Academy of Medical Sciences to assess the impact of specific targeted media training for women. The survey suggested that 69% of senior professional women working in STEM would have refused or have tried to get out of doing a live TV interview before receiving training. After attending the course 46% said they would be very willing to do such an interview, with almost all the others saying they would do it if persuaded.

4.2 Before attending the Media Woman course the vast majority (76%) said they never sought out media opportunities or engaged with their communications department. Since being on the course almost all (94%) said they are now more open to seeing out those opportunities, 95% said they are more equipped to take them up and 78% have said they are now actively engaging with their media and communication departments where they didn't before with 63% saying they have worked on stories with their communications departments since being on the course.

4.3 In terms of highlighting women in STEM, 89% said since being on the course they are now more aware of the importance of highlighting women in STEM with 72% saying the course has helped them become a role model for young women and girls being interested in STEM subjects and industries.

A staggering 100% of respondents said they have recommended this type of training to other women colleagues and friends.

## 5. Conclusions

5.1 We believe that more training and group sessions specifically aimed at women is the way to encourage greater participation by females in science and technology communication and the big important public debates.

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5.2 Allowing women to gather, share experiences and learn new skills in a female environment builds confidence and allows women to see more clearly not only their own insecurities but their real abilities and potential.

5.3 If women sit on the fence, they are marginalising themselves and leaving the next generation with no credible and inspiring role models.

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