

WOMEN IN NEWS: HOW VIEWERS PERCEIVE FEMALE BROADCASTERS AND  
WHAT THAT LOOKS LIKE ON SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS DURING THEIR  
ON-AIR CAREER

By

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## DEDICATION

This research is dedicated to the women who had to relive stalking, sexual harassment and other experiences they believe they have “grown numb to.” Hearing the scary, real-life situations women have been forced to endure has instilled in me the continued desire to help create an environment where women feel safe in their workplace and community. I applaud the women who stood their ground against sources, catcallers on the street and bosses while still doing their best to produce unbiased, factual reporting. Thank you. I am so sorry about those women who had to fight those battles behind closed doors.

This research hopes to take the lived experiences of women in broadcasting and communicate them in a way that will help us understand how to protect women from egregiously inappropriate behavior and how to protect their well-being in the workplace.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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## ABSTRACT

This qualitative study explores and gives a voice to women in television newsrooms who are more often than their male counterparts subjected to sexual harassment in the field and online. Online trolls have plagued the careers and mental health of many women working in television news. Female news reporters and anchors have found themselves as the targets of that personal criticism, inappropriate, or sometimes violent comments from social media users. The female participants in this qualitative study represent nearly all 50 states and television markets. All participants in this study reported negative interactions with social media and audiences.

This research is part of a growing body of knowledge of how negative and sexually explicit viewer messages affect female broadcasters on multiple levels. Results suggest female news reporters and anchors are at the forefront of heavy criticism and inappropriate comments from social media users. This has forced some women out of the industry or created a workplace they deem toxic and unsafe.

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## INTRODUCTION

Men comprise the majority of local broadcast television newsrooms in the United States, especially among management. A 2022 study commissioned by the Radio Television Digital News Associated (RTDNA) reported the average percentage of women working in all local television news stations was 44.7%. Only 40.5% of news directors were women (Papper, 2022). The same RTDNA study found only 26.8% of general managers across all television news markets were women, representing an increase of four percent from the previous year's report (Papper, 2022). Pew Researchers found over half of all reporters are male; In 2022, 46% of reporters were women (Tomasik & Gottfried, 2023). Over a decade before, women made up a third of the entire journalism workforce; this includes jobs off-air (Byerly, 2011).

While the percentage of women working in television news, and perhaps more salient, working in management roles, is increasing, the numbers are not stopping harassment faced by women broadcasters on the job or creating more support for those who are targets. Online trolling is a gendered problem. While both men and women in television news are the targets of harassment and online attacks, women are more often affected. They are the primary targets of deliberately inappropriate, violent, and often obscene comments. A 2017 study found female journalists received an average of one abusive tweet every 30 seconds, with Black women the target of abuse at a higher percentage than white women (Amnesty International, 2017).

In her survey of female and gender non-conforming journalists in the United States and Canada, Westcott (2019) found 90 percent of respondents from the U.S. saw online harassment as the biggest safety issue. A 2018 report by The International Federation of

Journalists (IFJ) revealed that 64 percent of female respondents have been subjected to online abuse, and only 47 percent of the women who were harassed online reported the abuse to management. Perhaps just as troubling, many women in the study reported they do not get support. The same IFJ survey found that when women reported online harassment to management, unions, or law enforcement, in two-thirds of the cases nothing was done (IFJ, 2018).

Online trolling will continue to be problematic for women in television news as social media continues to be ubiquitous. Millions of online accounts have created an abundance of content on every social media platform. As of January 2024, Data Reportal indicated there are 5.04 billion social media users, accounting for 62.3% of the global population. 266 million of those accounts were created in the last 12 months.

This study explores the lived experiences of some women working in television newsrooms who are being subjected to online vitriol and harassment on the job. The goal of this research is to add to a growing body of knowledge of how this harassment affects female broadcasters: their mental health, career longevity, and reportage. This abuse has forced some women out of the industry or created a workplace they deem toxic and unsafe. The results may be useful in starting or continuing a dialogue in television newsroom across the United States, in which male and female journalists and managers can work together to understand and ameliorate this abuse, an abuse that has the potential to affect press freedom and diversity overall. As Carlson and Witt (2020) assert, “The concern raised by online harassment is that it places an unnecessary restraint on women journalists, prohibiting them from covering issues or topics that may yield negative online responses from the audience” (p. 5).

## **Women in the Industry**

Creswell and Clark (2011) suggested an audience member's understanding of the world comes through a series of lenses. These can include class, race, gender and other connections. A postmodern approach posits everything humans react to will be thought of through specific lenses and lived experiences. Those experiences would then be judged accordingly and acted on. Western issues including empowerment, marginalization, hegemony and patriarchy however put different categories of people below or above others (Creswell & Clark, 2011). Hegemony is a means of gaining and maintaining power. Antonio Gramsci peddled the idea of cultural hegemony, meaning this state of power is built around a capitalistic society. Hegemony implies a willing agreement by people to be governed by principles, rules and law they believe operate in their best interests. In true practice, this may not always be true.

Representation and hegemony both play a part in what the dominant ideologies are in societies. A continual push of negative representation can contribute to the hegemony of "othered" groups and minorities. The same mindset of inferiority in the news industry pushes the idea that women are on air to appear a certain way physically next to their male co-anchors rather than report, anchor or relay crucial meteorological information.

An onslaught of negative messages and continual feedback can be mentally, physically, and emotionally harmful to women in the industry. Eventually, there may come a time when a woman in news begins to think the continual negative content is true. In many cases, job performance suffers, and career longevity is also threatened. Men, specifically white men, are more likely to advance in their careers. Those statistics cannot

be replicated for women who, in larger numbers, are out of the industry before the six-year mark (Coddington & Lewis, 2022). Kempton (2007) reports a higher number of women noting gender biases when leaving the industry.

Some women do eventually attain management positions, but that is where they may run into the “glass cliff,” which puts them primarily in positions “appointed to risky or precarious and in problematic organizational circumstances” (Ashby, Ryan & Haslam, 2007). Long (2014) used prior research around the phenomenon to explore the different workplace environments women face compared to men. This includes actions that lead to “job dissatisfaction, feelings of disempowerment and higher turnover.”

For women in television news, issues including burnout, work-life balance, and poor management can lead to a career change. But online harassment from viewers also plays a role in women leaving the industry. This comes in the form of messages, sexually explicit images or even physical harassment involving law enforcement. This ongoing abuse at the hand of anonymous keyboard warriors has forced many women out of the industry or created a workplace they deem unsafe.

### **A Gendered Space**

As noted, many studies report men outnumber women in the television news industry (Tomasik & Gottfried, 2023). However, the gender gap exists in more than simply numbers. The difference in reporting assignments and coverage by a journalist’s gender has been documented. Prior research had found male reporters dominating coverage in government, politics, science and tech. There was a less than 10-point gap between economic stories, crime, local and state news. Environmental stories were nearly equal. Travel is an area of coverage where women cover stories more frequently than

their male counterparts. Women dominated in other pink topics including social issues, education, family and health. This is in line with the hegemonic role that women are placed in a western ideological scope.

This makes it hard for women to branch out or feel they are equal when the audience continues to see them in softer roles compared to men. This hegemonic style of reporting can also engrain internalized hate within the women themselves or “imposter syndrome.” In this case, even though someone may have the skills and credentials to do a job, nearly 75% of women feel as if they do not belong (Knopp and Newinski, 2022).

A gender gap also exists for women who are sports journalists. Tomasik and Gottfried (2023) found that men account for 83% of sports reporters while that number drops significantly to 15% for women. This is the largest gender gap among journalists. Many women in sports journalism report harassment and toxic workplace environments and experiences. This abuse often comes at the hand of sources, including communication directors for teams, athletes, and coaches. Fear of sexual harassment by potential contacts and interview subjects can prevent women sports journalists from effective reportage (Kremer, 2023).

### **Parasocial Relationships**

Looking at the parasocial nature of social media from a uses and gratifications perspective, Chen (2010) argued that “Twitter allows people to gratify their intrinsic need to form relationships with other people through the habitual process of using Twitter...Gratification of the need to connect with others through the process of using Twitter is a para-social gratification” (p. 756).

Parasocial relationships with television news personalities are one-sided relationships built around a person of some form of heightened public figure. The public figure is not aware of the details about the civilian in the “relationship” (Bennett et al., 2020). Broadcasters are aware of the audience on the other side of the camera, but they usually do not know their names or personal details. Anchors, reporters and meteorologists often share personal details about their lives in the newsroom and with their families. While this humanizes the talent, it also can become dangerous.

Viewers create their perfect version of a relationship between themselves and the men and women they turn on the television to watch and relay their daily headlines. These relationships are most common with celebrities, television stars, musicians and high-profile athletes. These reporters and anchors are different from the latter because they are people in their local communities. They mimic a local celebrity in the eyes of the public.

Hoffner and Bond (2022) look at this as a “nonreciprocal socio-emotional connection with media figures.” Influencers or those in some form of public space can benefit from this form of relationship if they are profiting financially from the clicks online.

Social media has heightened this form of relationship due to the ability to communicate with ease. Because many anchors are taught to act as if they are speaking to one person, this can fuel a certain person’s desire to “spend time” with the women on screen. This type of relationship can turn dangerous if a viewer feels they are being ignored. This can lead to stalking or even assaults on women in the industry.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Studies on the online trolling of women in television news have begun to grow over the last decade as social media becomes a more prominent part of society. Kempton (2007) argued, the harmful nature of the newsroom creates a space for co-workers to bond. She recalled confiding in other colleagues and hearing her hardships parroted back to her. The group of women she worked with all experienced similar troubles at the hand of online commenters. She noted that women are more likely to experience sexual harassment online than men. Women learn in the beginning of their career on television what type of attention they get and are forced out or to learn how to minimize damage.

While the body of knowledge on online trolling continues to grow, there is a considerable amount of existing research on the problem surrounding the gendered space of television news and overall hostility towards women in the television news workplace. This environment can affect how a woman responds to online abuse and is supported when it occurs. The NewsGuild researched pay disparities and saw similar results across the country. One comment in the survey stated, “I remember the punched-in-the-gut feeling I had the moment I learned that a young male reporter with just a few years of experience had nearly the exact same salary that I had, despite my two decades as a working journalist” (TNG Gannett Caucus, 2021). This research was specifically at Gannett stations. Replicated studies showed, in many cases, men were making up to 10,000 dollars per year more compared to their female co-workers for similar duties. This disparity in earnings has the ability to negatively affect women’s standard of living as

well as mental health as they are continually told they are not worthy of what a man makes.

A 2017 study conducted by the Women's Media Center highlighted the division of men and women on air. The study, "Divides 2017," found that men report three times as much news than women. This combined with their previous research shows women actually declined on the anchor desk from 2015 to 2016 at over 6%.

The researcher noted major newspapers are included in this study, not strictly broadcast television:

"The survey consisted of broadcast news from ABC, CBS, NBC, and PBS; the online news sites of CNN, Fox News, Huffington Post, and The Daily Beast; and 10 of the nation's most widely circulated newspapers. They are: Chicago Sun-Times, Los Angeles Times; New York Daily News, New York Post, San Jose Mercury News, The Denver Post, The New York Times, The Wall Street Journal, The Washington Post, and USA Today."

Those numbers at the time showed "men Overall, men report 74.8 percent of the broadcast news; women report 25.2 percent" (Women's Media Center). These findings suggest that while men are covering hard news, female journalists are more often relegated to softer news. Features and lifestyle stories may be the types of content that solicit more responses on social media.

### **The Social Media Trap**

Journalists are expected to make social media posts about stories and engage with their audience. This can be useful for getting user-generated content and news tips, but it can also end with uninvited, unsolicited comments. Research to date has shown how



women are negatively affected by hateful comments about topics other than the story they are reporting or posting about.

Kang, Han, & Ki (2014) found social media also has the ability to impact what viewers think about a person or object. The way someone is treated does not have to be seen only in person. Because there are no repercussions, many reactions towards talent will be harsher. This leads to the question of why audiences may act this way. Social cognitive theory sheds some light on human behavior. If a viewer sees other people commenting a certain way on someone's social media, they may feel it is okay to do the same. This collaboration of minds saying and acting the same way continues the hegemony of how certain people should be treated.

A report from the International Center for Journalists report found that 20% of out of their 119 participants, 20% reported being abused or assaulted in person from someone who had communication with them online (Huang-Menders, 2023). The abuse ranged from stalking to physical assault and even legal harassment.

Miller (2023) conducted research to understand why newsrooms need to protect journalists from online harassment. Miller noted women and journalists of color are more vulnerable to negative reactions from viewers. One journalist shared the news about her pregnancy on Facebook. She was thrilled by the thousands of positive comments at first, but when some of her followers realized she wasn't married, people attacked her for being a "bad role model." "They wished death upon my child because I wasn't married. They were so absolutely horrendous and that emotionally took a toll on me" (Miller, 2023).

Carlson and Witt (2020) broke down how online harassment happens online against women in the news industry and why it has become normal, noting “Enduring harassment from anonymous posters or ‘trolls’ online has become an informal part of the job description for many women working in journalism.” A 2017 study by Amnesty International showed women politicians and journalists in the United States and the United Kingdom received an average of one abusive tweet every 30 seconds. Much of this content is not about the story being reported on, but about personal livelihoods and appearance. Stories typically received more hate when the audience felt a man could have done better.

Women are scrutinized over their appearance on television. Catherine Bliss (2025) broke down this phenomenon using Patricia Hollands’ “When A Woman Reads the News.” Hollands’ work emphasized feminist values and visual culture theory when it comes to how a woman dresses to deliver the news. Comments on appearance are frequently the subject of vitriol from viewers and trolls.

Brendon Kleen (2021) notes that as of 2021, only 11.5% of sports reporters are female. This shows that marginalization adds to the chance of women being attacked in their direct messages or online platforms due to a lack of representation and protection. Similar research by Boczek, et al. (2022) found data confirming this low number to be true.

The problems women face when reporting on sports were dramatized when the 2016 #morethanmean video was released on YouTube. The campaign featured men reading abusive tweets to women sports journalists in person. The video posted by Just Not Sports (2016) was received with the raw emotion and disgust that women face

insulting messages, harassment and threats daily. The men were physically uncomfortable before having to read hateful and sexually explicit threats to the women to whom they were originally tweeted. The men reading in the video were not the men who made the original comments. They reacted saying they could only imagine waking up and seeing these things said about them. While it was very eye-opening about what women deal with at work, it was in video form rather than through peer reviewed research.

### **The Feminist Lens**

Steiner (2014) noted, “Feminist media theory takes gender seriously – as a factor that structures identity and experiences – without assuming permanent or static gender differences.” Catherine Lutz (1995) raised the question as to why theory is looked at in terms of gender and why masculinity is perceived as superior. This inherently puts females in a lower level of power and status. This problem can span from viewer biases to unequal attraction and attention for on-air talent.

Feminism can be defined as:

“The movement, set of beliefs, and commitment to economic, political, and social equity for women. Historically, the two main branches of feminism have been liberal feminism and radical feminism. Liberal feminists believe that the most important goal is that women have access to their fair share of the economic, political, and social pie. Radical feminists believe that the American “pie” is structurally inadequate and needs to be restructured so that gender equity is fundamental” (Holtzman, 2015, p. 133-134).

There are some who believe that feminism is synonymous with being “anti-man.” However, turning a feminist lens on the gendered nature of this study allows the voices of the participants to be heard in an authentic manner and highlights the impact of gender in relation to online abuse. “Research becomes ‘feminist’ when one applies theoretical perspectives that focus on women’s lives—their concerns and experiences. A feminist perspective expands understanding of gender differences and social problems...by including gender as a distinct category of analysis” (Hesse-Biber, 2010, p. 172). About the methods employed by feminist researchers, Wolf (1996) asserted, “Feminists may raise more questions about the ethics of research because they often ‘are moved by commitments to women’” (p. 2).

### **Research Questions**

This research aims to study viewers’ comments to discover how they specifically affect women in on-air television roles to better understand the disproportionate impacts and how this can be reversed. Informed by the literature reviewed, the following research questions are posed:

RQ 1. Why are women on-air typically viewed with more importance to their looks than to what content they are producing?

RQ 2. How do women in the industry respond and cope with harsh criticism and inappropriate messages from viewers on social media and overwork email?

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **METHODOLOGY**

Qualitative analysis for this study involved personal interviews conducted with female anchors and reporters who are still in and have left the industry. These interviews allowed the participants to provide a rich description of their lived experience with online harassment and gives the reader a better understanding of how these participants' emotions and mental health are affected.

Participants were recruited using two forms of sampling, typical case and snowball or chain sampling. The typical case participants either had a personal connection to the researcher or were contacted via online email (Appendix C) or social media direct messaging. Inquiries were also published to professional pages so those interested in helping could. This is where over 50% of the interviews were discovered. The researcher recruited participants in nearly all 50 states' major television stations in multiple cities to gain the largest and most varied sample possible.

Participants were asked a series of questions by the researcher about their experiences with online harassment including types of comments by trolls and viewers and reactions to those comments (Appendix A). The interviews were recorded by the researcher and transcripts of all the interviews were analyzed for emerging themes.

#### **Quantitative Data**

While this is a primarily a qualitative study, some quantitative data was gathered by using an online Qualtrics survey. The instrument collected demographic and occupational for the purposes of descriptive statistics. Some of the questions were designed for gaining information on the type of women in the industry, their work

environment and anecdotal data relating to the treatment from audiences. Survey data is less robust, of course, than the narratives collected in the personal interview. However, some organizational studies have used this type of data collection for occupational research. argue that open-ended questions provide a minimal amount of data, lacking rich description. However, Jackson and Trochim (2002) note that this type of qualitative data is often used in organizational research, so employees can relay details about job experiences in their own words, offering “somewhat rich description of respondent reality at a relatively low cost to the researcher” (p. 307).

### **Participants**

The research involved 19 qualitative interviews and 110 online surveys. All participants were women. 93% of the survey participants are still active in the industry. This ensures the data is timely and shows an active issue. The women range from the first few months of their career to decades in the industry. All women were either reporters, multi-media journalists, meteorologists, anchors or some form of on-air talent. This includes lifestyle hosts and traffic anchors. 7% chose to leave after feeling unprotected from viewer threats, wanting a better work-life balance. Some participants left the business for a variety of reasons, including treatment, pay and work-life balance. Digital reporters, digital producers and line producers were excluded from the research. This sample aims to only study those consistently seen on television by the viewers. All women were reached out to via email, social media or those who the primary investigator works with.

The personal interviews and open-ended survey responses provide a rich description of the situations and experiences faced by the participants. Respondents

include not only female anchors and reporters but also multi-media journalists, sports reporters, traffic anchors, meteorologists and lifestyle hosts. The women in this sample represent nearly all 50 states, with a variety in age, race, and experience in the industry. 76% of the participants identified as white and 15% Black or African American. 9% totaled American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander and others. This nearly mimics the sum of America's census totals from 2020 (U.S. Census Bureau. (n.d.)).

Most of the participants fell into the working age of 26-34. That was 43%. 16% were 21-25. 20% were 35-44. 21% were 45+.

Respondents also represent a wide range of television Designated Market Areas (DMA). 58% of the participants work in large markets, 25% are in medium markets and 17% work in small markets. Large markets range 1-49, medium 50-99 and small 100+. Shifts the talent works give a new set of viewers. 41% of talent work the morning shift. 13% work midday. Many news stations have the same set of talent for both morning and midday shows. 27% of participants work dayside; a more traditional 9a-5p. 30% work nightside; typically, 2p-11p. These times can shift.

This research is based on not only anchors, but reporters and multimedia journalists, sports anchors and reporters, meteorologists and other, including lifestyles shows at news stations and those who have left the industry entirely. 44% are anchors. 40% are reporters and multimedia journalists. 6% work in a sports department. 19% are meteorologists. 7% said other.

## **Operationalization**

Quantitative data was received through a 41-question survey. (Appendix B) The survey began with registered consent before the ability to move on. Sections involved background information, excluding names, job descriptions, careers and current market types. The survey also details the type of comments and reactions they receive from viewers on social media and in person. This can range from appropriate messages about content to sexually explicit material and images. The survey was on a five-point Likert scale and some short answer options. The Likert questionnaire uses a psychometric scale to understand the participant's level of agreeance or frequency (Barua, 2013). The five-point scale includes a variety of Agree/Disagree, Never/Always, None at all/A great deal, Definitely Not/Definitely Yes, Strongly Disagree/Strongly Agree. This in addition to the interviews gives another layer of quality control in the understanding of how successful the research is.

Those who have left the industry could make that known and not answer questions that no longer apply to them. They were not specifically asked what profession they do now. The survey concluded with a thank you message and the option to send photos or other messages from viewers to be used in research.

Different strategies were used for qualitative interviews. There were approximately 26 questions used in the personal interviews. (See Appendix A) This research uses a series of "semi-structured interviews," described by DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree (2006) as "organized around a set of predetermined open-ended questions, with other questions emerging from the dialogue between interviewer and interviewee." This type of reaction and resulting thick description provide the qualitative data that the



surveys could not. This also allowed for a stronger rapport between the researcher and participant which was desired considering that sensitive information was discussed. All interviews were conducted over Zoom due to the location of participants and the researcher.

The answers provided during the interviews sometimes generated response questions unique to one specific interviewee as follow up was participant specific. The women who were interviewed also took the survey. Confidentiality of participants was maintained by limiting descriptions to market size and broad job description. Exact roles or locations were not divulged when attributing comments to participants.

### **Data Validation**

One form of external validation in qualitative research is achieved through the thick or rich description of the topic by the participants in the study. Lincoln and Guba (1985) described thick description as a means of validity through the detailed description of a phenomenon in such detail that the reader can draw conclusions that are transferable to other settings and people.

Self-reflexivity as a validation strategy was also utilized by the researcher. Naples (2003) argued that as researchers, “We need to understand our own cultural biases and assumptions in order to examine the ways they influence the research process and analysis” (p. 380). Aside from being a researcher, I am also employed within broadcast television. I acknowledge my ties to the industry off-screen as a producer, specifically at a Nexstar, ABC Affiliate in Nashville, TN. I kept myself involved in student media during an undergraduate student, including on air work. Being in university, I never personally saw the attention my professional colleagues receive daily. Much of my

female talent has been very forthcoming with their experiences as we have worked together for years. Working in the industry showed me there was a lack of research and acknowledgement surrounding the topic, pushing me to pursue it. During the qualitative interviews, I did my best to be a listener, rather than a guide for the women I spoke with. I offered condolences when necessary and added moments of relatability when necessary. My education as a journalist aided in having rich conversations with the participants.

Creswell and Clark (2023) describe reflexivity as something the reader has a right to know about the researcher. I am not an outsider but a member of the workforce. This study is a responsible reflection of my interpretation alongside a body of firsthand experiences through testimony and data. I am surrounded by a select group of the anonymous participants. I write their scripts and I tell them where to stand on set. I see a glimpse into how they are affected by inappropriate comments and sexually explicit photos.

Due to the familiarity of the researcher, some Nashville talent was not allowed to participate. Some news directors believed no matter the amount of anonymity, speaking with someone working at a competition in the same market was not allowed. As a researcher and someone in the industry, there was a priority to make sure women felt comfortable. Still, some women believed they should not speak about their experiences at current jobs or with viewers and serial commenters. This hindered a small portion of the journalists available.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### FINDINGS

#### Results

Results of this study reinforce previous research that most women are under the assumption viewers are more critical of their appearance compared to their male co-workers. Participant 18 said “I just feel like women can’t win in this industry.” This is reflected in the imbalance in the number of comments towards women surrounding content and work versus inappropriate messages. Several themes emerged during the study including adversity over gender, physical safety concerns, sexual harassment, social media’s role, abuse within the industry, management’s role and how women cope with said abuse.

Comments against women typically involved the journalist’s attire, physical appearance and sexuality. 41% of the qualitative participants revealed that they had to involve police in their concerns about some viewer comments. Female anchors, reporters and other on-air talent said they are forced to figure out their own ways of coping with threats, sexual violence and harassment. That is on top of the already stressful workload that comes with being a television news professional. These factors pushed many women out of the industry while their many of their male counterparts are expected to have decades long, fruitful careers.

#### Respondent Profiles

As a feminist approach to the study was taken, the participants in the study are exclusively women. Out of the surveyed participants, a majority said they have faced challenges due to their gender. This begins to answer RQ 1, which asked why women on-

air are typically viewed with more importance on their looks than the content they are producing. 38% said a little. 36% said a lot. 7% said they face a great deal of challenges. Only 8% said none at all.

When breaking down the type of comments faced, participants could choose multiple categories. Harmless/Appropriate, Sexually Explicit, Sexual Harassment, Content, Character or Other.

**Table 1**

*Overall Type of Comments Sent to Women*

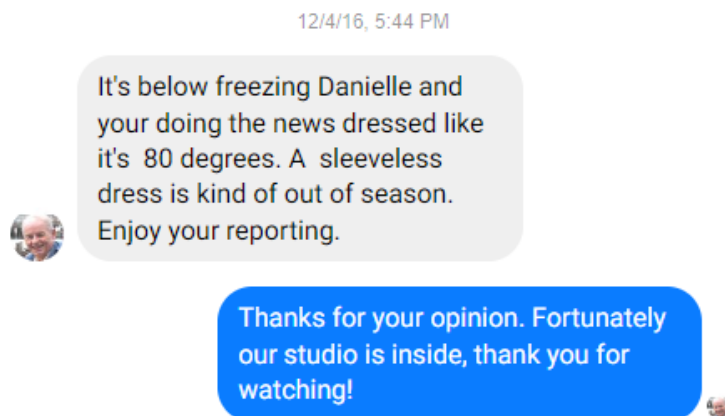
Harmless/Appropriate	61%	58 Participants Selected
Sexually Explicit	32%	30 Participants Selected
Sexual Harassment	19%	18 Participants Selected
Content	16%	15 Participants Selected
Character	7%	7 Participants Selected
Other	22%	21 Participants Selected

As can be seen in Table 1, 61% of harmless comments seem somewhat innocuous, but sexual comments total 51%. 58 individuals said they receive harmless messages while a close 48 also noted sexual messages. Some participants said they do not

feel harassed by messages but do deem them inappropriate in a workplace setting. Figure 1 shows an example of the less harmful conversations they are forced to have.

## Figure 1

### *Viewer Message*



This includes messages that read “I like how you sit up straight and shoulders back. Wow.” This builds a lot of the ‘other’ percentage. One message sent to participant 19 anchor read only “Wow!!! Great look.” Other say “You look scrumptious,” “perfect hour glass,” while other push the line of ‘not harmful’ such as “I really like your huge blossoms this AM. I would like to take a full deep breath.” There was no further substance to the emails. A simple comment as such would not be directed to a man. The imbalance of physical criticism versus work and content critiques reinforces RQ 1.

### **Adversity Over Gender**

From the beginning of their careers in television news, many women report experiencing mistreatment because of their gender. There was never a time during this

study where participants said it got better; most reported that they just learned to work around their unfortunate circumstances. This pushes back against the feminist agenda and the idea that gender should not be a factor when deciding someone's ability. Every journalist, male and female, completes some type of journalism-specific education and training. There should be no suggestion of worth based off gender. Patriarchal standards have enforced the idea that reproductive organs and outward appearances decide worth and trustworthiness.

Participants 12 expressed how "it is difficult as a woman because you have to prove your worth." From the moment a little girl is born, society forces her to prove her worth. It does not end when you get the degree, the job or the promotion." For many women, it starts and ends with how they look.

Many audience members and news consumers may get uncomfortable when they see women who defy the patriarchal and illusionary standard of beauty in western society. Women in the United States in particular are often portrayed in entertainment television with perfectly smooth hair, a flawless complexion, and pleasant curves. This is not what every woman looks like, nor should it have to be. But there can be negative and vile reactions when they do not.

Participant 12 spoke on how, when working in front of the camera, every change is seen by what tens of thousands to millions of people could be. She said, "Any little physical changes you go through in your life, you are not going to go through them quietly." Many anchors, reporters and meteorologists brought up disorders created and enforced during their time in news. Participant 13 said, "Leaving television was the first time in two decades that I could eat what I wanted." She went on to say she still sees

negative impacts to her confidence from her time in news due to the negative experience from viewers. Another former meteorologist said, “I had struggled with eating disorders in the past, but it really made me struggle even when I thought I had cleared that hurdle.” That woman left the industry.

While men working in roles as on-air personalities in television news can face physical appearance scrutiny just as their female counterparts, there is no current research indicating the outward criticism and vitriolic viewer responses exist at levels anywhere near the amount in which it does for women. Sexism in western society has normalized the toxic behavior of scrutinizing everything from a woman’s body and hair to clothing and makeup. This behavior is magnified by sexists who have developed parasocial relationships with women in television news and feel empowered to make vile comments from their keyboards.

Participant 16 received a message about her meteorologist’s appearance on air during severe weather coverage. The message read

“Please have {sic name} fix her hair, it looks unprofessional.” The woman responded saying she, “woke up in the middle of the night and came into work to track life threatening conditions, as a solo meteorologist, for non-stop 4.5 hours, to keep you and your family safe. It’s intense and grueling. Maybe give us grace? We aren’t models. We’re professional broadcasters.”

She followed that up to the researcher saying in her 20 years in the industry, she has never witnessed a male meteorologist or anchor receive a similar message. These are not phenomena reported by men further emphasizing the sexism within viewers.

Some viewers use looks and gender to question the validity of a woman on television. Participant 12 received a message questioning “who did you have to sleep with to get this job.” This type of wildly inappropriate and sexist question does not take into consideration the years of education, training and effort required to work in television news. It assumes women can and frequently do use their sexuality to gain employment or promotion. This once again pushes back on the feminist perspective that skills are skills, and gender is not a factor in how skills are acquired or used. Biological gender does not equip a person with the ability to better handle a job on television which includes requires such as reading a teleprompter or understand meteorological forecasting. Perhaps one exception is that in television news, some positions do require the ability to lift certain amounts of weight. These are usually for videographers or multimedia journalists who must be able to lift and a carry a relatively light video camera.

Because viewers have access to the social media accounts of most women in television news, something frequently required by the station ownership, they often know when women get into relationships, get engaged and married and have children. If they follow the talent consistently, they may even be able to figure out if a relationship were to end. About half the time, talent recognized a difference in treatment when they faced a major life change. 49% said they disagreed or were neutral with this idea. The other 51% somewhat or strongly agreed. Participant 14 said “I did notice a big change in how woman approached me when I was publicly married. Women were a lot nicer to me.” Another participant (3) said “Since I became a mother, the comments have not been as mean, still sexually inappropriate, but not as mean.”



Many women experience the even more harmful reactions return once a relationship ended. Participant 13 explained her experience having been engaged twice during her career. “I was no longer this attainable person that people could objectify and sexualize and make into pornography. I was suddenly someone else’s property and therefore off limits.”

It does not stop at the altar. Aside from non-pregnant women being asked if they are pregnant, many viewers had negative comments about when the women on screen was pregnant. Participant 5 expressed how “someone made a mean comment about how they could see my bellybutton through my dress because I had a bump and I didn’t have shapewear on that day.” 4% of women are pregnant at any given time in the United States (CDC). Clearly these are not things cis men go through. Their relationship status does also not appear to hinder their work or treatment online. However, aside from not getting pregnant, women do not choose how much they do or do not show. She should not have to wear shapewear to ensure her pregnant body is flattering to the viewer. While some pregnant women choose to wear maternity compression garments to reduce strain or swelling, those choices are personal and often for comfort or safety and not vanity.

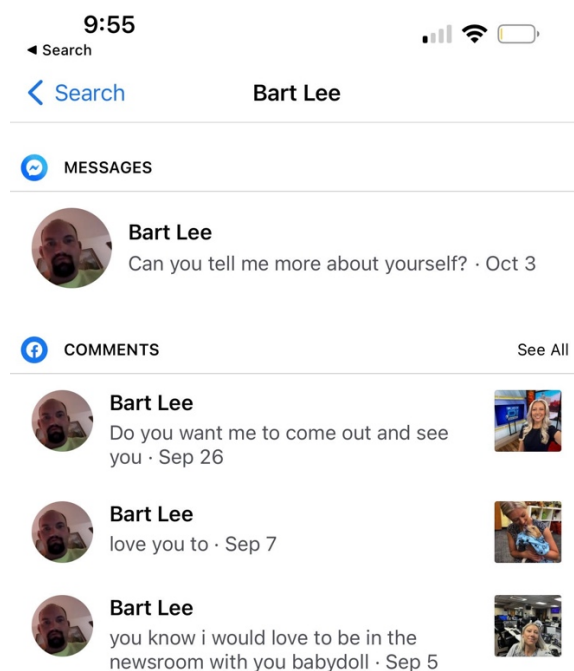
Some woman expressed how deeply the false pregnancy comments could cut in their self-worth not only because the viewers were showing excess weight in their mid-section, but because they were failing to get pregnant. Several participants announced this gut-wrenching experience. Participant 13 said, “I’m very openly infertile and very open about the fact that I’ve never wanted kids, and I can’t imagine being a woman who would be infertile and want children and have to hear every day, are you pregnant from people they’ve never met.”

Women also report getting backhanded comments from viewers about the industry as a whole. Participant 4 received a viewer email that read, “I’m sure all the men there love you. Making them look good and vice versa from the women. You are a standout. Aspire to do something better.” The anchor was met with confusion upon reading the email.

Some women report dozens of messages every day. Some women experience less messages but more from repeat offenders. One message sent to participant 18 from the same messenger multiple times read only “nice decolletage!!!” The comment was sent at least half a dozen times over a short span of time. Figure 2 and 3 shows a timeline of habitual messages towards reporters/anchors.

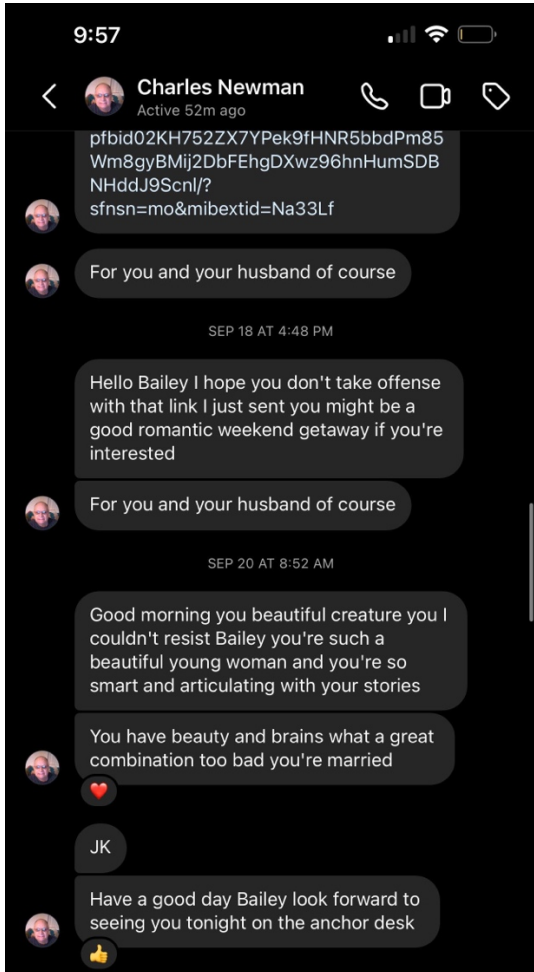
**Figure 2**

*Habitual Viewer Messages*



**Figure 3**

*Habitual Viewer Messages*



The men are often met with little reaction or response but that does not deter the commenters from continuing their conquest. 13% of participants say they get a majority of messages from habitual audience members. 35% are more habitable than new. 34% say it is about equal. 15% say they feel like they received messages from new commenters more than old. Participant 1 expressed how one man messaged her 12 times in one day to go on a date. This can create dangerous situations when the journalists

either says no or ignores them. Depending on the severity of the para social relationship being felt by the viewer, they could feel like a loved one is ignoring them. They may already think they are in a romantic relationship and lash out physically.

### **Physical Safety Concerns**

Much of talent must be reporting live in the field at some point in their career. Reporters and multimedia journalists can be live every day, many of them go on to be anchors. Meteorologists and lifestyle anchors have the chance to be live during a newscast. It fits into most on-air talent roles. During that time while being live or working outside of the station, 70% of women say they were made uncomfortable in the field a little or a moderate amount. 6% said none at all. 14% said a lot and 9% said a great deal. When asked how, the participants could elaborate on verbal and/or physical abuse. 89% said it was through comments and half of the women said it turned physical sometime in their career. Some of these comments and actions were not only from viewers or miscellaneous bystanders, but sources and trusted members of the community.

During morning or late-night live shots, the surroundings can be made more dangerous when considering the photographer is only focused on the reporter and the reporter has a bright light flashing in their face. This situation can be a safety hazard, as the crew cannot clearly see the area surrounding them. Someone could approach the crew without warning. This was the case during a morning live shot in Virginia in 2015. News reporter Alison Parker and her videographer Adam Ward of WDBJ-TV in Roanoke were killed when a gunman approached their live shot unseen and opened fire.

Participant 1 noted a man showing up during live coverage of severe weather damage. Local news viewers know their community very well. During live shots, the

anchors are 'tossing' to the journalist's exact location. The man told her and her photographer he recognized where they were in earlier hours of the show and wanted to say hi. She described this as the "epitome of crossing a line." The man went on to ask the news director for a station tour. The woman recommended to her boss that that not happen. Her boss acknowledged her request.

Most women reported being recognized while off the clock. Only 4% of participants said they had never been recognized. 30% said most or all of the time. These interactions can be harmless, but some raised concerns. Participant 12 said she received a message after grocery shopping one day. It read "I was the guy who helped you with the milk." She went on to say she received similar messages from the man about going to her church and trying to join her gym. She recalled feeling violated and expressed that to police who then told her the man most likely knows what she drives and a basic layout of her schedule. The man built a relationship with her over the television and slowly tried to start the romantic relationship in reality. This is another example of a parasocial relationship developing into a distorted and dangerous sense of intimacy.

Other interactions become overtly sexual in nature. The same woman said she was greeted by a man who shook her and said, "I love watching you in the morning with one." She said she felt disgusted after realizing what he said and meant. Once again, this further proves RQ 1 that women are objectified in their career rather than looked at for their professionalism.

Nearly half the women in this study have felt fearful of the viewers after receiving an online message or in person comment.

Some of the examples are as follows:

Participant 3: Prisoner Mail from man accused of bludgeoning woman to death because she would not date him

Participant 13: Rape threats after getting a forecast wrong

Participant 5: Sexual assault threats “if he ever found me”

For almost half of the participants, these concerns and scary situations are turned over to police.

Participant 7 said while it had not happened to her, she did recall having extra security at her job because of a situation involving a female co-worker and a stalker. The woman had been talking with police but the man had not acted on letters or threats at the time. Sometime later, the woman said, “he showed up at our station trying to get in and ended up smashing someone’s car door window.” Police acted shortly after.

Participant 13 said a man would “kill pigeons and send me pictures of their mutilated bodies.” She said she will never forget that man’s name because it was her first work related police report. She went on to seek psychiatric help. Multiple women from small and large markets told stories of stalkers and viewers finding their home addresses and showing up. Some wanted to say hello and others would leave gifts behind.

Participant 5 explained she drives a company vehicle to and from work and parks it on her driveway, not the garage. She said a viewer happened to live in the neighborhood. She said “he was standing outside my house with a coffee cup because he wanted to meet me.” This enforces the idea that the closer and better the relationship the anchor relays over the television, the more real it feels for the viewer. This allows them to be

comfortable going to their home, following them in the grocery stores and entering their gyms just to be close.

Being an anchor typically comes with having to have some number of public appearances. This can include Emceeing events, traveling to schools, etc. Participant 1 expressed that when she announced she would be at an event she received a comment asking why management “did not pick a prettier girl to do it.” The same anchor had previously mentioned already dealing with mental health issues within the industry.

Participant 14 was attending a Fall festival with her weather team. At the time of the event she was already dealing with an active stalker. During a live broadcast, she asked if the time she would be at the event could not be announced. However, it was, and the man showed up. The woman said he groped her in front of her co-workers, leaving her feeling embarrassed, violated and unheard. The man asked her to follow her to his car and when she refused, he became verbally hostile. Nothing further was done about the man from the station. The woman is now out of the industry.

### **Sexual Harassment**

Sexual harassment comes in many forms. It can be catcalls on the streets, ‘suggestive’ movements or sounds, jokes and continued unwanted attention. Women in the industry have experienced at least one of these. Many have been forced to deal with it far too often.

Participant 15 broke down long-form abuse at the helm of a source. She was in the process of a massive story at her local level during the interview. For her personal reasons, she did not announce details about the story. She did detail the mental abuse she underwent.

The male source said he was going to give the reporter exclusive interviews “because she was so hot.” During the production of one of the reporter’s stories, she went to an event to get video. She heard the same source telling the full room “he was going to take me to the back to film an x rated video and he would only last 15 seconds.” The same interactions continued at each interview and every event. The reporter felt getting the exclusive content made it worth it until it began taking a serious toll on her mental health. The abuse continued until she went to her news director. A man was later put on the story to get her away from the source permanently. She would later hear from the male journalist who took her place that the source would ask where “the hot one” went. The male journalists never reported any harassing behavior from the source, proving the actions were female-facing only. This puts an added emphasis on RQ 1 from the angle of not only viewers, but sources. No other action was taken against the source.

Alongside unsolicited messages and comments eventually turn into unsolicited images. Two-thirds of the women say they have received an image of a man’s penis. Nearly all the qualitative interviewees said they have received some type of masturbatory photo. Participant 14 described the ordeal as “a full-time job avoiding” the explicit photos. None of the photos were received consensually and all were sent across a variety of mediums including texts via work phones, emails and a variety of online social media platforms.

To keep anonymity, the next piece will not be recognized by a participant number. One woman was part of changing law in one state. During the end of her career on air, Texas made it illegal to send someone an explicit photo. House Bill 2789 said anyone who sends an electronic visual message that depicts “any person engaging in



sexual conduct or with the person’s intimate parts exposed and/or is not sent at the request of or with the express consent of the recipient” (Meyer 2019). The bill was signed into law by Governor Greg Abbott in 2019. Anyone accused is charged with a Class C Misdemeanor.

The participant said, at the end of her career, she had a city police officer’s phone number who she would send the photo and contact information to. The same woman said she also began sending the photo to female family members of the sender. This was her secondary way of ensuring consequences. Table 2 shows the negative treatment of women in a variety of environments.

**Table 2**

*Type of Messaging Facilitation*

	Email	In the Field	Social Media
None at all	16%	6%	6%
A little	49%	44%	31%
A moderate amount	29%	26%	27%
A lot	4%	14%	25%
A great deal	2%	9%	11%

The table shows frequency of comments grows when the audience has a discreet and anonymous form of communication. Participant 13 believed “anonymity allows people to show what is truly in their hearts.” While the first amendment right protects messengers from most, it does not when viewers are feeling rightfully uncomfortable and scared.

Participant 13 also expressed one of the grossest experiences during the research. She said, “someone baked their pubic hair in a cake and sent it to me.” This is appalling. Never as a researcher, have I heard of a man taking a razor, cutting and collecting their pubic hair, buying the ingredients to make a cake, making said cake and adding their own DNA to it. This was a moment in the research where the participant and researcher sat in the moment silently; taking in what was just released.

While this is one of the most extreme things a viewer can do to an on-air talent member, it shows it does happen. This also meant the viewer found of her address, putting her at risk for further abuse or attack.

Participant 14 explained how she would get phone calls every weekend from a male viewer. He would complement her and hang up. She said this was inappropriate, but not to the level that made her act with police or take it to management. The same participant expressed previously she had not been taken seriously by her management. That was until she found a YouTube channel of him filming her weather forecasts. “This man would sit in his living room every morning and film me with his camera phone doing the weather. He would zoom into my breasts and my butt every for more than a year.” Nothing was ever done about the man or the account. The meteorologist said it

made her feel gross and violated each time she saw a new upload. She would later express how it hindered her when looking for jobs.

Participant 9 received what she described as ‘incredibly gross’ messages from multiple male viewers:

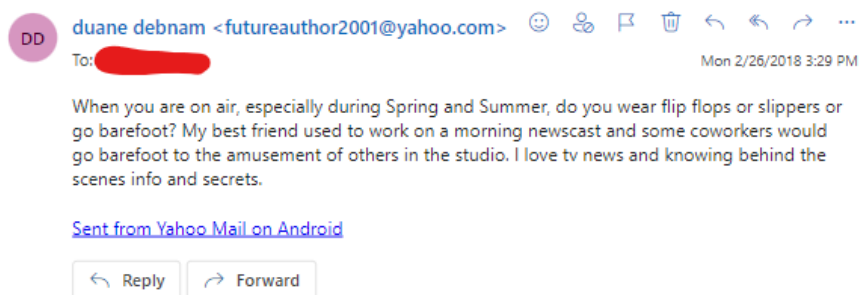
“omg miss irresistible and breathtaking picture prefect blonde hottie with the most beautiful and gorgeous and irresistible smoking hot foxy bare feet and delicious toes the world's sexiest hottest finest blonde bomb shell new lady alive and smoking hot body hottie over any woman on this earth you are sexier than any woman by far babe”

“I had to quit you for about a week but now my groins have over grown my pants so I must release the pressure. Basically I got a nut and I'm about ready to get rid of it. I pause your face and enjoy the news for a change”

Hundreds of women have been greeted by one same man. Figure 4 has found its way into many social media direct messages and email inboxes. It depicts an email asking women what/if any shoes they wear when on the anchor desk.

## Figure 4

### *Repetitive Email Hundreds of Women Report Receiving*



Many women assumed the man was a local viewer because he comments so frequently. It was not until anchors and reporters from all over the country began communicating about “the foot guy” that they realized it was the same man saying the same message each time. The email ends with “I love tv news and knowing behind the scenes info and secrets.”

When receiving this message, many women said they felt uncomfortable. The message is always the same and always from ‘Duane Debnam.’ One talent responded casually saying sometimes she will wear slippers if her feet hurt. Debnam responded again with a follow up question about wearing slippers in the Winter. That was the end of their email exchange. Another woman responded back to the repeat Facebook message saying, “Duane, all of the women you message this to realize who you are and that you send out these messages to literally hundreds of women (and not men) in the broadcast news industry. It is unacceptable to continue to harass women in this manner. It is an inappropriate question to ask, and I recommend you stop sending these messages. We're all tired of it. Thank you.” This message emphasizes the well-known idea that sexually harassing messages like Figure 4 go to women, not men.

### **Social Media’s Role**

The experience does not stop when the talent goes off air. Social media plays a large role in the abuse of women online. When women go off air, viewers take the relationship they have built and move it online. Some viewers act with their face on their accounts; others hide behind the generic profile picture and an anonymous username. Anonymity gives them power. Anonymity cannot be persecuted or punished. Participant 12 described social media as “giving people who don’t deserve a voice, a voice.”

Social media plays into how much time the audience feels they have with talent. This is due to the building of para social relationships with the audience and talent and the growing popularity in social media. 42% of participants said they are present on social media 'most of the time'. Even more so, 29% said always. 28% said half the time or less. Many jobs require it. Journalists must push their stories online and look like role models to the public.

The audience can get their news anywhere. Online or on television, even social media. This changed from a few decades ago. It was appointment news and television watching. Participant 3 compared that to how viewers used to complain about the news or talent they say online. It used to be through letters or phone call primarily. The woman said, "Now it's just so easy to shoot off an email or post a comment or to send a DM." The audience has a greater number of quick ways to get their message, no matter how gross, beneficial or insulting it may be, to the target. Participant 13 recalled a viewer calling her a racial slur over a Facebook live because of her curly hair. She said is still shocks her the boldness created over social media.

How frequent talent is on social media can show in how much they interact with viewers comments and public reaction. This can also include personal messages. 5% said they never interact. 38% said sometimes. 13% said half of the time. 44% said they choose to interact with viewers most or all of the time. This includes negative and positive reactions.

Some talent makes the decision to merge their home and work life on their profiles. Others choose to make two separate accounts to maintain a more private life

outside of work. 5% said they never merge the two. 43% said sometimes. 15% said half of the time. 33% said most or all of the time.

### **Industry Centric Abuse Online**

Social media eliminates a sense of privacy in one's life. No matter what is deleted or posted under a privacy wall, anything posted can find its way anywhere online. Over half the participants recall finding their own photos or self-published videos on other accounts without their permission or consent. 45% say they have not found themselves posted elsewhere. For those who did, many expressed their photos under Reddit channels titles “Sexy News Reporter,” Journalism Drama pages or Fetish Sites.

The following Reddit (n.d.) threads allow members to post photos they deem attractive. The thread has rules. Some include putting the station name and talents full name, keeping comments respectful and classy and the reporter must be 18+ in the photo.

A majority of the photos have audience interaction, including likes and comments. The comments range from what could be considered appropriate and as far as sexual harassment and threats of assault. The photos posted are a variety from the user's social media feeds, stations social media and some are recordings and photos from newscasts.

Participant 16 found herself on the thread of “hot reporters.” The photo was of her getting ready in the makeup room at her station (TurbulentPollution68 2023). Some of the comments included “nice rack honey” and “that makeup isn't a deal breaker...I'll gladly help her scrub it off in the shower” Other comments began to attack her character at the workplace.

Another photo on the thread was of participant 12 at the desk with her anchors. The woman was wearing a pencil skirt and peplum top, focusing a majority of the comments towards her bust (Local\_News\_Guy 2023). One said, “those side profile views” with a ‘sweating emoji’ and others tried to guess her bra size.

Some videos also appear on the thread. Many on-air talents build a friendly relationship with each other. They often chat between breaks and outside of work. The video posted online was of participant 12 and a news anchor. The women took a video of them ‘chest bumping’ and it was posted to their Instagram stories (Glittering\_Proof1543 2022). That video made its way to the Reddit post. Much of the comments under the post could be labeled as sexual harassment including commenting on how much of the women’s body moved and how much their dresses lifted. This continues to push the idea that women are looked at physically and men are heard. There were no men posted to the “hot reporters” threads or physical attributes acknowledged by strangers online as found by the researcher.

Participant 13 recalled finding herself on another “boot fetish” site. She solemnly expressed how “invasive” it felt that others felt that power over her own body. She went on to say, “that was meant for masturbatory things so just me, even wearing high boots was a problem.” She went on to say she even had viewer reach out and request to buy her used underwear, shoes and dresses.

Does social media add to the overly negative criticism? Many women believe so. Only 2% of women surveyed said definitely or probably not. 15% were neutral on the question. A resounding 56% said probably yes and 25% felt it was a definite yes to social media perpetuating inappropriate comments.

## **Management**

During times of a high influx of negative treatment, journalists decide to take their issues to management. Participant 6 said when she was receiving threatening messages, her news director said, “if he contacts you again, we will go to the police, and you can tell him that.” She said at that moment, she felt that her newsroom had her back. Unfortunately, that is not the case for other participants.

Kempton (2022) found that while this phenomenon happens to women more, they are less likely to reach out for help. Women report going to family or friends before management. Women typically believe women more than men because they have been victimized or victim-blamed by men. This behavior is backed by the feministic idea of grouping women do in order to feel heard, valued and together. They understand each other when no one else does. Viewer messages are not the only place women feel they are not protected or valued. 25% report inappropriate comments coming from newsroom management. This is compounded when the abuse comes from within the newsroom. Due to the details, the following woman will not be identified by a number. She said a coworker left ‘semen soaked’ underwear on her desk. The male led management team brushed it off because the victor was the number one chief meteorologist in the market. The women stopped going to management all together before leaving the industry.

Race and gender have proven to be the biggest factor when receiving hate online. Women of color typically recorded a higher volume and more aggressive hate, primarily around their hair.

It is not always a better outcome with woman at the helm. Participant 13 faced repetitive issues with her female news director. She was forced to straighten her hair and



get permanent Brazilian treatments. She told the researcher her station would not allow her to wear her natural, curly hair. This was a common theme with roughly 1/4 of the participants. She was told her hair was “immature and unprofessional.”

Participant 17 shared her mother was diagnosed with Lupus. In solidarity to her mother, the reporter shaved her head. This was met with opposition from not only station viewers, but her managers. She was told if she was on air, she had to have ‘appropriate’ hair. She received pushback yet again when she changed her wigs weekly. She noted the wigs were always the same color, but there was slight variety in length. The wigs were loose curls or straight.

Society has made women believe they must wear Eurocentric hair to “fit in”, “look the part” or “be trustworthy. This is rooted in systemic racism across western ideology. Women of color have never held the power a white man does.

The CROWN Act was kicked off by Personal Care Brand “Dove” and the CROWN Coalition in hopes to protect curly-haired women from discrimination in the workplace and public schools.

The CROWN Act is law in the following states: Alaska, Arizona, Arkansas, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Illinois, Louisiana, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Nebraska, Nevada, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, Oregon, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, and Washington.

Despite “The Crown Act,” women are still being told they must change their natural hair for on air positions. It stands for “Create a Respectful and Open World for Natural Hair.” This need to force women to change how they look is built upon systemic racism. It is hair. The 2019 Dove CROWN Research Study found that “black women

Black women are 1.5 times more likely to be sent home from the workplace because of their hair.” 80% reported feeling the need to change their natural curly hair to fit into the workplace.

Participant 14 said, “There is a lot of news management completely out of touch and just does not understand how social media works and does not understand that you do not have to be doing anything to be objectified.” Others noted a similar idea saying, “There is just a complete lack of understanding of how dangerous it can be to be a woman and how uncomfortable it is to be a public woman.” This enforces the feministic battle of women being punished for being a woman.

### **Coping**

A majority of women in all regions of the country at all market levels are reporting some form of abuse. The higher the DMA market number, the more messages reported due to the higher amount of viewership. With a higher number of women facing similar issues and a high number of repeated messages, many are forced to learn to cope. This begins to answer RQ 2, which asked how women respond and cope with the onslaught of inappropriate messages from viewers. Women, like all traumas and people, cope and manage stress differently.

After being assaulted physically and mentally time and time again, participant 13 felt it necessary to bring a stun gun to her live shots. The woman said she would tuck it next to where her mic cords and earpieces were secured on her lower back.

For some women, coping means meditation and therapy. Therapy costs money that their work insurance may not cover. Women are forced to use their career income to deal with the hardships of said career. Some block negative viewers and take breaks from

social media. Participant 1 said “9 times out of 10 I am not going to respond” while participant 2 expressed that she is “going to rip you a new one because we are in the day and age of social media and you should be held accountable for your actions.”

A majority of the women said they have become used to blocking and reporting rude, inappropriate or sexual messages. However, some do respond. A majority of the women who respond to their commenters get surprised reactions. This came from all size markets. They described the “shock” when responding again. Participant 11 said the viewer was very nice after she responded and said they did not think anyone would ever see the message. Participant 13 said, “They do not see us as human. and went on to describe the job as an “abusive relationship.” This was a similar phrase when describing their relationship with their career. “A cog in the wheel” is another phrase that became common in the qualitative interviews. The participants felt they were not truly a person to the viewers and just a talking head on a screen. The viewers created their version of themselves and stuck with it.

Some women, when getting critiques on appearance rather than work, emphasize the imbalance of comments in their responses. Participant 8 responded to one viewer saying “Thank you for your feedback. Do you have any constructive criticism on the news story. I always added a, by the way, I’ll let my male coworkers know they should be sure to wear the proper amount of makeup.”

Some decide to take their responses on air. This was the case for one medium market reporter after whom she calls a stranger told her she “looked big on TV” (Deabler, 2019). She acknowledged the troll while on the anchor desk. When debriefing the

encounter later on her Facebook page, she said she was glad she did so and is lucky that after nine years in the business, she has thick skin.

When finding new ways to cope, women also report that time in the industry also eliminates some of the worry surrounding viewer messages. These include all negative or inappropriate comments. Table 3 indicates how women have changed how they are affected by the negative comments they endure.

**Table 3**

*How Women have Changed their Attitude Towards Harassing/Negative Messaging*

	Beginning of career	Current Moment in Career
None at all	11%	25%
A little	34%	53%
A moderate amount	23%	16%
A lot	16%	5%
A great deal	15%	1%

While they are forced to take the criticism and threats and get ‘tougher skin’, many women said they do not want to have to do that. Participant 15 said she wants to stay ‘an innocent little flower’ who goes to work, does the job and goes home without being scared of who or what is waiting for her at her door. Participant 15 said, “You just

shrug it off and keep working. But if I go through one day and I don't have a comment, it is surprising.”

Many participants said they wish they could go back in time and stand up for themselves. Participant 10 said, “We are clocking in and out of work and would like to do it without the harassment.” The participants looked back and said they were scared at the time about losing their job if they brought up any worries. Some career vets also said it is common for new journalists to be taken back by the harsh comments. It can be something education does not prepare them for, so they do not know how to deal with it during their first job straight out of college. Participant 12 explained how “your first year is so much harder. You are so much younger, and it is your first time being exposed to that kind of thing.”

Participant 13 expressed to the researcher that “this conversation is very therapeutic.”

Previously mentioned, one woman described her experience with a prominent male source. She said “It did not really hit me how inappropriate all of that was until I got in the car. I was just crying all the way back to the station.” Much of the current fix is reactive, rather than preventative.

“MMJane” is a Facebook group composed of female journalists to share experiences, trauma, story ideas and advice – one woman to another. This is how many women learned the shared experiences of “Duane” the man who asks woman about their wardrobe choices. This is how many women navigate life after news. This is how women cope.

This is not the only group circulating to give woman a place to be heard and seen. Participant 13 said “There were so many [messages] that I actually started a Facebook that ended up with over 3,000 news people in it called “Shit My Viewers Say.” The group was full of horrendous things viewers have said to them. She said it was their way of “taking back the power.” This is a very feministic mindset of dealing with adversity and trauma.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### CONCLUSION

#### **Discussion**

The themes that emerged in this study are lived experiences of the harassment, safety risks, cyberbullying, and other industry-based challenges women face in the television newsroom. The vile comments on social media, the frightening actions of some deranged or obsessed fans, and the less than robust support from law enforcement or management are the actual experiences of the participants in this study. These are the voices of professional women working in television news who are forced to deal with repulsive, deplorable, and potentially dangerous words and actions because they have chosen to work in an industry that requires them to put their image out to the general public.

These are educated, skilled, and talented journalists. However, their gender displays put them at the mercy of sexists, misogynists, and viewers who develop a distorted parasocial relationship. The onslaught of online attacks and other harassment weighs heavily on their feelings of safety and mental wellness. It leads some of these women who have invested in careers they love to reconsider their professional lives. All because they are women in a toxically masculine society who demand to be treated with respect and dignity. Or because they become the target of a warped parasocial relationship, such as a participant in the study who dealt with a man who showed up at a live shot. He felt that he had seen her on-air enough and felt comfortable enough to create an external relationship. Women almost always reported feeling uneasy and uncomfortable after such occurrences. Many felt it was an invasion of privacy. A

masculine society creates a space where men feel they should be able to walk up to someone and create the relationship they see fit.

Women are often seen as the change agents because they are breaking barriers and opening locked doors. This is not how it should be, but a patriarchal society requires it. The feminist agenda pushes for equality, choice, gender inferiority and freedom.

Online attacks and criticism often center around a woman's appearance rather than their journalistic work. Women are not forced to go to the police because a viewer does not like their story. They are heavily criticized because of the way their body looks and their gender. This may be the manifestation of western ideology in which sexism, racism, and misogyny often goes unchecked and unchallenged. Viewers use what they have learned through their personal experiences to judge and react to the women they see on-air.

When women are forced to face this unacceptable treatment, many then feel they have to react. Women cope in different ways, some put their head down and push through, others find different jobs. Journalists join the industry to tell stories and connect with their communities rather than being ridiculed by faceless accounts online and sexually harassed when doing their job. Many decide the pay and passion is not worth it.

This study indicates a problem for women more so than men in television news for mental and physical harassment from viewers. This idea is emphasized when women continually say they believe "women cannot win in this industry." This reinforces a sense of hegemonic masculinity. These results should be interpreted as an umbrella effect of society rather than blaming a specific person, media outlet or group.



Some journalists suggest protection from online trolls can start in the newsroom with protection from their management. This is something Jane Posetti and The International Center for Journalists (2022) have also pushed as a solution, but it is not a cure all. Regulation of online material would not only add another workload to already busy web teams, but some journalists say they do not want their jobs infringing on their personal accounts.

The preponderance of anecdotal evidence demonstrates that much of the problem is that keyboard warriors are trolling and sending abusive messages without much punishment or pushback. This is problematic if not criminal. The Texas House Bill that made sending solicit photos a Class C Misdemeanor is a start in holding cyberbullies accountable. If the deterrent of consequences existed in a robust manner, it may help to reduce some of the vile comments, threats, and harassment. This study suggests that many trolls do not think their messages are being seen. However, they are being read and having a massive impact on the woman's mental health and future. This research can serve as documentation of the voices of women who are on the receiving end of this appalling communication and who need validation and protection. Further research is needed to establish a better understanding of how to solve the problem. It is beyond the scope of this study to understand how to change not only the working newsroom, but the massive environment that is social media.

The change surrounding the solicitation of photos is unique to Texas. Not every state has similar laws. This could be the case with any change surrounding assaults and threats online. Social media is not confined to states or countries. This also hinders any change or protection to women. Faceless accounts and those with little digital footprints

will continue to harass without repercussion. If social media were to delete the account, another can be made. Online platforms would have to require a certain amount of trackable information if true consequences were the goal. This can be a massive and extensive change.

Journalists work in the communication field, yet so many women feel they have no voice. They get into the industry with a passion to give a voice to the voiceless but end up leaving because they find themselves without a voice.

Many women describe these open conversations as cathartic because outside of personal therapy and other women also facing similar problems, there is nowhere to go. Like Catherine Lutz examined, women are viewed as the ‘inferior’ gender. This has no scientific merit to back up the idea of one gender being better than the other, but it had societal merit. Women make up less than half of the journalism business but face much of the abuse within. Women are rarely taken seriously by their managers.

Male coworkers can say they feel bad this happens to the women they work around, but that is the surface level of acknowledging the problem. A solution can only truly begin once the masses are prepared to face the problem. Humans innately do not enjoy conflict. There is a choice between tackling it and pushing it to the side. For many, the women are seen as the conflict and are pushed to the side.

Some viewers feel like the talent owes them something. They “talk” to them every day about the top headlines of the day, philanthropic events and share details about their personal lives. This opens them up to heightened criticism from viewers along with an expectation to react to what they say when off-air.

The audience is not affected by every news story, but they are always impacted - negatively or positively - by the weather. Meteorologists described even more numerous and harsh experiences than their female news colleagues. The qualitative interviews show more intense threats physically and sexually against female meteorologists. In recent years, viewers have turned away from watching television news. Nielsen television ratings have been on the decline as they compete with streaming and social media content. July 2023 numbers show streaming captured 38.7% of total TV usage. That is nearly double the 20% broadcast television captured. Cable garnered 29.6% of total usage. They have social media, websites and tv station apps to tell them what is going on in their community, state and country. However, the driving force for local news is weather. This means more eyes are on the meteorologists, meaning they have a higher ratio of critics compared to their anchors, reporters and other on-air talent.

When consuming media around for daily headlines, breaking news, traffic and sports, the audience expects the talent to give little pieces of themselves. When media companies and news organizations require talent to maintain social media accounts, the audience expects anchors and reporters to post, giving more of themselves. As previously noted, Chen (2010) observed that social media such as Twitter (now X) allows people to satisfy a parasocial gratification. When they do so, the audience creates a bond, but that bond is primarily on the receiver. And sometimes, as participants in this study reveal, those false bond can become inappropriate and dangerous. It is essential that all television news managers acknowledge and address these problems, which are likely the biggest safety risk, both physical and mental, facing women in television news today. Further, all male colleagues must also acknowledge and support the challenges faced by the women

they work next to every day. Women cannot be agents of change in a vacuum. They must be supported. They must be believed. The hope is it that this research adds to the body of knowledge in that endeavor. If women continue to leave journalism in great numbers as the risks outweigh the rewards, the loss of diversity and the silencing of voice will result.

### **Limitations and Future Research**

One of the limitations of this study is the small percentage of participants representing women who have left the television news industry. These women may have left television news in part because of effects of online harassment. 93% of participants in this study are still employed in television news.

Another limitation may be the lack of male journalists' experiences with online trolls. However, the researcher wanted to focus this study on the experience of women in the industry. The male experience could be the subject of future research.

A further limitation is a slight sample bias. The participant's representation of regions was not evenly balanced. A higher number of participants are from the southern portion of the country.

Further research could focus on how to protect women or create specific strategies to help women cope after such harassment occurs. That cannot be answered with this research. This research notes the problem only and how individuals manage harassment. A change to support women in the industry would have to come from the top down of big media companies. Legislation would also have to be put into effect for social media and online platforms at a state or federal level to protect women online. This research does not begin to understand or relay that process. This type of research long-term could benefit from the perspective of men and management.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix A

#### Qualitative Interview

1. Give a brief description of the type of station you are at, your location, market and your day-to-day responsibilities.
2. Why did you join television news?
3. Why do you think people watch television news?
4. What do you believe people notice visually about television news?
5. What challenges have you faced in this profession that you believe are attributed to your gender?
6. Have you ever had a news director or someone else in the newsroom comment on what you look like or your appearance for the day?
7. Can you elaborate on some viewers' comments about your appearance?
8. Have you ever been posted to a separate page/website about industry news/fan accounts/ creepy pages/etc...
9. Do you have habitual "fans" or are they always new people?
10. Has it happened to you/ have you seen comments come from dramatic changes (pregnancy, marriage, etc...)
11. Have you ever been in fear after a comment?
12. Have you ever received an unsolicited photo from a man?
13. Have you been approached IRL inappropriately?
14. What would you say the ratio is of negative to positive feedback on social media or your work email?

15. How do these types of negative comments affect you now compared to at the beginning of your career?
16. How do you react/ do you engage with the comments?
17. If you respond, do they comment back or stop indefinitely?
18. Do you think the comments change with different markets/locations?
19. Do you think you are compared to your males more because you are a woman in (sports)?
20. Elaborate on if you did/ ever thought about leaving the industry about viewers' opinions.
21. Does your workplace do anything to filter out negative feedback from getting to the recipient?
22. If you believe it has gotten worse, how much "worse" since social media has become more popular?
23. Do you think newsrooms need to have a bigger role in protecting women?
24. Do you think viewers see men as more credible, why?
25. Do you have anything else to add or want to go back to a previous question?
26. Do you mind sending the survey you take to anyone else in the industry or who has left the industry?

## **Appendix B**

### **Quantitative Survey**

Study Title: WOMEN IN NEWS: HOW VIEWERS PERCEIVE FEMALE BROADCASTERS AND WHAT THAT LOOKS LIKE ON SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS DURING THEIR ON-AIR CAREER

Middle Tennessee State University IRB-FY2024-67

Principal Investigator: Kristi Jones

Institution: Middle Tennessee State University

Purpose of the research study: to better understand your experiences as a woman in television news surrounding viewer opinions.

What you will be asked to do in the study: at your convenience and the location of your choice is to answer a series of questions about your work and engagement with social media, viewers and their opinions on appearance/character/job."

Time required: 15 minutes or less to do.

Compensation: No compensation will be provided.

Here are your rights as a participant:

- a) Your participation in this research is voluntary.
- b) You may skip any item that you don't want to answer, and you may stop the research at any time. Note that if you leave an item blank, you will be warned that you missed one, just in case it was an accident. You can still click that you don't want to answer. Some items may be required in order to accurately present the study.

- c) There are no risks associated with your participation besides possible discomfort with some of the questions.
- d) There are no real benefits to you from participating besides possibly learning something about the research.
- e) You will NOT be asked to provide any identifiable personal information.
- f) All efforts, within reason, will be made to keep the personal information in your research record private, but total privacy cannot be promised. Your information may be shared with people at MTSU (such as the MTSU Institutional Review Board) or other agencies (such as the Federal Government Office for Human Research Protection) if you or someone else is in danger or if we are required to do so by law.

Contact Information: If you should have any questions about this research study please contact:

Principal Investigator: Kristi Jones

Contact Information: [kbj2z@mtmail.mtsu.edu](mailto:kbj2z@mtmail.mtsu.edu) or [kristibjones@gmail.com](mailto:kristibjones@gmail.com)

Faculty Advisor: Christine Eschenfelder, (615)-898-5301

Contact Information: [Christine.Eschenfelder@mtsu.edu](mailto:Christine.Eschenfelder@mtsu.edu)

For additional information about giving consent or your rights as a participant in this study, please contact the Middle Tennessee State University (MTSU) Office of Compliance at 615-494-8918 or via email at [irb\\_information@mtsu.edu](mailto:irb_information@mtsu.edu).

(<http://www.mtsu.edu/irb>)

If you're ready to get started, please make your choice below before clicking the arrow button.



Thanks again for volunteering your time to this project! I have read the information above. I am at least 18 years old. I believe I understand the purpose, risks, and benefits of the research, and I know what I will be expected to do as a study participant.

YES

NO

Job Description

News Anchor

News Reporter/MMJ

Sports

Meteorologist

Other

Region

Northwest

Southeast

Midwest

Southwest

West

Station Call Letters

Designated Market Area

1- 25

25 - 49

50 - 74

75 - 99

100 - 124

125 - 149

150 - 174

175 - 200

200+

Years at Current Station

Under 2 years

2 - 4 years

5 - 7 years

8 - 10 years

11 - 14 years

15+

Years in Industry

Under 2 years

2 - 4 years

5 - 7 years

8 - 10 years

11 - 14 years

15+

Anchor Format

Solo

Co-Anchor

Shift

Morning

Midday

Dayside

Nightside

Are you Present on Social Media?

Never

Sometimes

About half the time

Most of the time

Always

Do you merge home-life/work on Social Media?

Never

Sometimes

About half the time

Most of the time

Always

Do you Interact with Viewers on Social Media?

Never

Sometimes

About half the time

Most of the time

Always

Have you faced challenges because of your Gender?

None at all

A little

A moderate amount

A lot

A great deal

How often are you recognized in person off the clock?

Never

Sometimes

About half the time

Most of the time

Always

Has anyone ever made you feel uncomfortable in the field?

None at all

A little

A moderate amount

A lot

A great deal

How so?

Comments

Actions

NA

Other

How often do you get messages about your appearance over email?

None at all

A little

A moderate amount

A lot

A great deal

How often do you get messages about your appearance on Social Media?

None at all

A little

A moderate amount

A lot

A great deal

What platform do you receive a majority of the messages?

Instagram

Facebook

Twitter

Other

Do more comments come from 'habitual' commenters or new people?

Habitual

More habitual than new

About the same

More new than habitual

New

How would you describe these comments?

Harmless Compliments/Appropriate

Sexually Explicit

Sexual Harassment

Based on Content

Disrespectful about Character

Other

Do you think social media perpetuates negative/inappropriate comments?

Definitely not, why

Probably not

Might or might not

Probably yes

Definitely yes, why

Have you found yourself posted to an outside network/website? (Scoop, FTVLive, Random X Account, Fan Accounts, etc.)

Probably not

Probably yes

Definitely yes, which one(s) and why

Have you ever felt in fear about a viewer message?

No

Yes, when?

Have you ever had to involve the police in a viewer message/ action? (stalking, threats, etc.)

No

Yes, when?

Have you ever received an unsolicited photo? (through social media, work phone, email, etc.)

Yes

No

Do you believe comments change when a woman becomes a mother/wife?

Strongly disagree, why

Somewhat disagree

Neither agree nor disagree

Somewhat agree

Strongly agree, why

How did these messages affect you at the beginning of your career?

None at all

A little

A moderate amount

A lot

A great deal

How do these messages affect you now?

None at all

A little

A moderate amount

A lot

A great deal

How do you cope?

How have the comments changed over the years?

Are You Still in the Industry

Yes

No, why?

Have you ever thought about leaving the industry because of comments about viewer messages?

Definitely not

Probably not

Might or might not

Probably yes

Definitely yes

Has a manager/ person in the newsroom said something about your appearance?

Never

Constructive Criticism

Inappropriate

Does your workplace have any policy in place to protect female employees from comments/ aggressive viewers?

Definitely not

Probably not

Might or might not

Probably yes



Definitely yes

Does your workplace have a way to filter out negative feedback?

Definitely not

Probably not

Might or might not

Probably yes

Definitely yes

How do you think newsrooms should protect female talent?

Does your workplace have any policy in place to protect female employees from comments/ aggressive viewers?

Definitely not

Probably not

Might or might not

Probably yes

Definitely yes

Does your workplace have a way to filter out negative feedback?

Definitely not

Probably not

Might or might not

Probably yes

Definitely yes

How do you think newsrooms should protect female talent?

Do you think viewers see male reporters/anchors as more credible?

Definitely not, why?

Probably not

Might or might not

Probably yes

Definitely yes, why?

Age

21 - 25

26 - 34

35 - 44

45 - 54

55 - 64

65+

Race

White

Black or African American

American Indian or Alaska Native

Asian

Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander

Other

Sexual Orientation

Heterosexual

Homosexual

Bisexual

Other

Prefer not to say

Marital Status

Married

Widowed

Divorced

Separated

Living Together

Never married

Do you have anything to add? (experiences or comments on topic)

Please email any screenshots of viewer messages/comments [kristibjones@gmail.com](mailto:kristibjones@gmail.com)

Will do

I have nothing to send

Thank you for your participation in today's study. Our research explores the lived experiences of women working in broadcast journalism. We hope this work will help industry professionals and those outside of broadcasting what challenges women face. Your participation today is appreciated and will help researchers in journalism. If you have any questions or concerns, you are welcome to talk with Kristi Jones at [kbj2z@mtmail.mtsu.edu](mailto:kbj2z@mtmail.mtsu.edu) or Dr. Christine Eschenfelder at 615-8908-5301 or [Christine.Eschenfelder@mtsu.edu](mailto:Christine.Eschenfelder@mtsu.edu) of the MTSU School of Journalism and Strategic Media. If you have any questions about subjects' rights, you may contact the MTSU IRB Office 615-898-5010. If you would like to learn more about this research topic or read the

final report, please contact the researchers noted above. Thank you again for your participation.

## **Appendix C**

### **Recruitment Email**

Hello,

My name is Kristi Jones. I am based out of Nashville, TN. I am a graduate student at Middle Tennessee State University as well as a producer at the Nexstar ABC Affiliate here in Music City.

I am writing to ask you to be a part of my research study. I am working to learn how viewer comments and online trolls affect women in broadcast news. Specifically, the comments surrounding appearance. The purpose of this study is to understand more about how female broadcasters are perceived and treated by their audiences and what their experiences are. I have received permission from my own News Director to reach out along with proper academic research protocols per MTSU IRB-FY2024-67.

You will not be identified in any way in any publications and discussions between my committee will be kept anonymous.

The title of my study is “Women in news: How viewers perceive female broadcasters and what that looks like on social media platforms during their on-air career.” Again, the purpose of the research study is to better understand your experiences as a woman in television news.

You will be asked to, at your convenience and the location of your choice, answer a series of questions about your work and engagement with social media, viewers and their opinions on your appearance, character, and/or job.

It will take approximately 10 minutes or less to participate. No compensation will be provided.

Your participation in this research is voluntary. You can skip any item that you don't want to answer, and you may stop the research at any time. There are no more than minimal risks associated with your participation, such as the possible discomfort in answering some of the questions. There are no real benefits to you from participating, other than contributing to the body of knowledge on this research topic. You will not be asked to provide any identifiable personal information.

If you should have any questions about this research study, please contact me at [kbj2z@mtmail.mtsu.edu](mailto:kbj2z@mtmail.mtsu.edu) or [kristibjones@gmail.com](mailto:kristibjones@gmail.com). You may also contact my faculty advisor, Christine Eschenfelder, (615)-898-5301 or [Christine.Eschenfelder@mtsu.edu](mailto:Christine.Eschenfelder@mtsu.edu). For additional information about giving consent or your rights as a participant in this study, please contact the Middle Tennessee State University (MTSU) Office of Compliance at 615-494-8918 or via email at [irb\\_information@mtsu.edu](mailto:irb_information@mtsu.edu).

(<http://www.mtsu.edu/irb>)

If you're ready to get started with the survey, please go to [https://mtsu.ca1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV\\_3ZUB8ziM0wzr0VM](https://mtsu.ca1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_3ZUB8ziM0wzr0VM)

Thanks again for volunteering your time to this project!

## **Appendix D**

### **Participant Breakdown**

Participant 1: Medium Market Anchor/Reporter

Participant 2: Medium Market Meteorologist

Participant 3: Large Market Anchor

Participant 4: Medium Market Reporter

Participant 5: Large Market Meteorologist

Participant 6: Medium Market Multimedia Journalist

Participant 7: Medium Market Multimedia Journalist

Participant 8: Former News Reporter

Participant 9: Medium Market Reporter

Participant 10: Large Market Lifestyles Host

Participant 11: Small Market Meteorologist

Participant 12: Large Market Meteorologist

Participant 13: Former Large Market Meteorologist

Participant 14: Former Large Market Meteorologist

Participant 15: Small Market Reporter/Anchor

Participant 16: Large Market Morning Anchor

Participant 17: Small Market Multimedia Journalist/Reporter

Participant 18: Medium Market Multimedia Journalist/Reporter

Participant 19: Small Market Political Reporter

## **Appendix E**

### **IRB Approval**

Date: March 29, 2024

PI: Kristi Jones

Department: Middle Tennessee State University, Journalism and Strategic Media

Re: Initial - IRB-FY2024-67

WOMEN IN NEWS: HOW VIEWERS PERCEIVE FEMALE BROADCASTERS AND  
WHAT THAT LOOKS LIKE ON SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS DURING THEIR  
ON-AIR CAREER

The Middle Tennessee State University Institutional Review Board has rendered the  
decision below for the above referenced study.

Decision: Exempt

Category: Category 2.(ii). Research that only includes interactions involving educational  
tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview  
procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if  
at least one of the following criteria is met:

Any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research would not  
reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the  
subjects' financial standing, employability, educational advancement, or reputation; or

Findings:

Research Notes:



Please note that even though your proposed study is deemed exempt from further IRB review, the following apply to your approved study:

1. In accordance with 45 CFR 46.110, expiration dates do not apply to research eligible for Exempt Review under the Common Rule, and continuing review is not required by the IRB.
2. Any unanticipated harm to participants or adverse events must be reported to the Office of Compliance.
3. All modifications to the approved study must be submitted for review through Cayuse IRB for approval before their implementation. Adding new researchers constitutes a modification to the protocol. Per MTSU Policy, a researcher is defined as anyone who handles the data or interacts with participants. Everyone meeting this definition for this project must have completed the required CITI training and received IRB approval prior to becoming actively involved in the project.
4. Closure of the study must be submitted within Cayuse when the study ends or when personal identifiers are removed from the data and all codes and keys are destroyed.
5. All research materials must be retained by the PI for at least three (3) years after study completion and then destroyed in a manner that maintains confidentiality and anonymity.

Sincerely,

*The Middle Tennessee State University Institutional Review Board*