

Honors Thesis Proposal:

A Gender and Racial Analysis of Broadcast TV Meteorologists

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Brigham Young University

Working title: A Gender and Racial Analysis of Broadcast TV Meteorologists

Project Purpose: This thesis will research and analyze the current representation and location of women and minorities in the broadcast TV meteorology industry.

Project Importance:

The research that will be gathered in this study is crucial to the field of broadcast meteorology, because there is not substantial current research that shows where women and minorities are being represented in the industry. The TV news that viewers see has an agenda setting affect. If viewers are seeing the same people, the same gender, the same look – then TV stations are shaping the news to fit certain perceptions rather than gathering a truly appropriate sample of meteorologists. What we see on TV impacts our world, and the data analysis that will come from this thesis can help future news directors¹ make better decisions in their market size².

On a personal note, this project is important for me because I plan on being a woman in the meteorology field. I want to know more about where women and minorities are represented across different TV markets. This thesis project will allow me to dive in deep and create knowledge that doesn't currently exist in my field and has not been researched before at BYU.

Project Overview:

¹ The “boss” of a newsroom. The news directors recruit and choose who is hired at a TV station, as well as assign stories and shifts for different talent.

² Market size is determined by population of the viewership in that area. For reference, Salt Lake City is the market # 30, while New York is the #1 market.

As part of this proposal, I started a preliminary literature review of articles both on the history of women and minorities in TV meteorology. There is a good number of articles that review the stereotyping women face in the industry, but not necessarily how well they are represented across geographical areas. The other research I've read so far looks at the perceived credibility of women vs. male news anchors (not in the weather field). I've also studied the history of female meteorologists through several articles. There is not a substantial amount of current literature on minorities, if any. The findings in the majority of these studies show that women meteorologists are more trusted than male meteorologists, but not that a certain gender or minority are underrepresented now and there is no modern literature about the location of where certain cohort groups might be more prevalent. Thus, my thesis will focus on three hypotheses:

1. Minority meteorologists are underrepresented across differing TV market places and sizes
2. Women meteorologists will be evenly represented compared to male meteorologists across differing market places and sizes
3. Minority meteorologists and female meteorologists are underrepresented in severe weather markets

In this thesis, I want the data to be information that news directors can use to improve the equal representation while hiring meteorologists in their market. This particular focus to collect and analyze data that can help news directors will offer insight into the patterns that may be negatively impacting the TV news industry. Many people refuse to watch the news today because it's too depressing, or sad. The "weather" segment of TV broadcasts is often the most watched part of the newscast, and since it holds a higher viewership, the weather segment needs to be the part that shares representation equally. Weather will be the one part of a broadcast that

keeps people tuning into news, and it's vital that the TV meteorology industry has research to show where gaps may be in representation.

Data will mostly be collected for this study from the news station's websites. On every news station website, there is a bio for each weather anchor which will be the main the tool for our data collection. I will use a random TV market generator to get 10 TV markets for our sample variables. From these 10 TV markets, I will look at each station in the local market, as there is always a NBC, FOX, ABC, and CBS³ local stations. If the market does not have all 4, we will generate another market that does have all 4 stations. Then with each station, in each TV market, I will look at these variables on each website bio/photo:

- Gender
- Race
- Hometown/where they grew up
- Market location
- Market number
- College degree obtained/where obtained
- Number of weathercasters at that station
- Classified as a severe weather market

This information will be recorded on a spreadsheet already designed for the data input. After collecting the initial data, we will then analyze the variables with the lens of our hypotheses. The results will be written in the final thesis with suggestions on the patterns extracted from the data collection.

³ These four stations are referred to the "Big Four".

Along with the data collected via the news websites, we are hoping to conduct interviews with some of the meteorologists from the randomly selected markets. At this time, we cannot confirm if these interviews will happen, but they would be a qualitative addition to our quantitative research. These taped interviews may become a component of my capstone project, while the research for this project is being conducted purely for my Honors thesis.

Thesis Committee:

1. Faculty Advisor: Dr. Miles Romney
2. Faculty Reader: Robert Walz
3. Honors Coordinator: Dr. Clark Callahan

Qualifications of Thesis Committee:

1. Faculty Advisor: Dr. Miles Romney
 - a. Dr. Romney received his B.S. in Broadcast Journalism at Brigham Young University, followed by his Masters of Professional Communication from Westminster College, and a Ph.D in Journalism and Mass Communications from the Walter Cronkite school at Arizona State University. He started as a sports journalist in different markets between Idaho and Utah, working as a producer, reporter, anchor, sideline reporter and talk radio host. He first began his academic career teaching at the University of South Carolina but returned to BYU in 2017.
 - b. His research as an academic focus on how sports networks present information to audiences on the traditional media and social/digital platforms.

- c. Dr. Romney is one of the few News Media teachers that conducts research in the News Media realm. The COMMS 486: Advanced Reporting class, which I took in Winter 2019, is taught by Dr. Romney. Although the area of meteorology is not his emphasis, his research methods in the broadcast field are easily translated into the weather area.

2. Faculty Reader: Robert Walz

- a. Brother Walz is an associate teaching professor who received his degree in Broadcast Journalism from BYU in 1982. He spent several years reporting and anchoring in markets around Idaho and Utah, covering stories about natural disasters like hurricane Ivan in the Cayman Islands. He worked in the industry for 20 years before deciding to teach writing and reporting classes at BYU.
- b. I've taken three classes during my time in the Broadcast program from Bro. Walz and he is a highly qualified writer as he spent 20 years writing scripts and pieces for KSL and ABC4. I feel he will be very important on my committee as he can help me with the drafting and writing process of my thesis.
- c. Bro. Walz has also been a part of previous Honors thesis committees from a student who was in the broadcast track. His knowledge of the process with Honors will also help make the thesis experience smoother for me.

3. Honors Coordinator: Dr. Clark Callahan

- a. Dr. Callahan currently works for the School of Communications as an Associate Director for Graduate Studies.

Project Timeline:

1. September 27th – Thesis Proposal Submitted to Honors
2. October 11th – Finish Preliminary Literature Review
3. October 25th – Begin Data Gathering
4. November 15th – Apply for Graduation
5. November 29th – Complete Data Gathering
6. December 13th – Analysis of Data
7. January 10th – First Draft Complete
8. January 24th – Second Draft Complete
9. February 7th – Final Draft Complete
10. February 21st – Turn in Thesis Defense Information Form
11. March 5th – Thesis Defense
12. March 5th – Advisor Turn in Thesis Submission Form
13. March 5th – March 11th – Final Thesis Edits
14. March 12th – Submit Final Thesis PDF, Final to Print & Mail, and Upload to Scholars Archive
15. March 20th – Turn in Thesis Poster

IRB Approvals: No IRB approval is necessary for this project, as all data will be gathered from media platforms that are already considered public. If the interviews do work out, then Dr. Romney and I will work together to submit IRB under the consenting adults category.

Funding: No funding is currently being requested for this project. However, if the taped interviews become a possibility in the Winter 2020 semester and can be included in the Honors written thesis, then I will request funding for travel to the selected markets.

Culminating Experience: Dr. Romney and I plan to use this initial thesis research to co-author and publish an article after my thesis is complete. I would also like to present this research at the annual Honors Conference. News Media is not a common major for academic research, and I think it would be important for other Honors students to see an intersection of academic, STEM (meteorology), and the arts (broadcast) at the Honors Conference.

References

Barnes, Dottie M. *Are Female Television News Anchors Still Judged by their Appearance: A Study of Gender Bias in Relation to Female Television News Anchors and their Perception of Age and Appearance Discrimination*, ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 2005.
Dissertations & Theses @ Grand Valley State University, <https://search.proquest.com/docview/305349891>.

This master's thesis from a Michigan student studies the bias viewers hold toward female news anchors based on their appearance. The researcher used surveys to see how female viewers perceive the reception of female anchors. In comparison to male anchors, females were expected by the viewers to have good cosmetic application skills and youthful appearances. The study also explores the age discrimination issues in the broadcast world with comments from different news directors and anchors with their experiences.

Brann, Maria, and Kimberly L. Himes. "Perceived Credibility of Male Versus Female Television Newscasters." *Communication Research Reports*, vol. 27, no. 3, 2010, pp. 243-252.
CrossRef, <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/08824091003737869>,
doi:10.1080/08824091003737869.

This article studied the credibility of male vs. female talent by having the male and female read a weather-related VO and then asked a survey group to respond. The findings demonstrated a pattern of credibility and composure assigned to the male reader rather than the female. The article suggests that research could move further with this hypothesis and test for specifics within the sexes that influence viewer's perceptions of credibility.

Cranford, Alexandra. "Women Weathercasters: Their Positions, Education, and Presence in Local TV." *Bulletin of the American Meteorological Society*, vol. 99, no. 2, 2018, pp. 281-288. *CrossRef*, doi:10.1175/BAMS-D-16-0317.1.

Ebner, Daniel M. "A Study of the Connection between TV Meteorologists and their Viewers during Severe Weather Broadcasts.", 2013, <http://hdl.handle.net/10355/43060>.

Inspired by the severe weather events in Joplin, Missouri – this study examines the ability of TV weathercasters to persuade viewers to listen to requests like “take shelter” in times of severe weather. The study was completed via a survey sent to respondents in Missouri following the devastating tornado. The researcher reported that rather than sharing the information of severe weather by county, viewers want to know how their streets, local landmarks, etc. will be impacted. More social media presence was also requested from the viewers during a severe weather experience.

Elisangela Da Silva, et al. *The Weather Girls: An International Issue*. Unpublished, 2016, <https://search.datacite.org/works/10.13140/RG.2.1.4641.1768>, doi:10.13140/RG.2.1.4641.1768.

The Weather Girls is not a study based on original data, but it is an analysis of stereotypes that the media assigns to “weather girls”. This article sifts through the history of the American Meteorological Society to understand why the AMS was hesitant to give the first Meteorological Seal of Approval to women, and how this issue led to the “pretty-girl” stigmas today.

Henson, Robert. *Weather on the Air: A History of Broadcast Meteorology*. American

Meteorological Society, Boston, MA,

2010, [https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/\[SITE_ID\]/detail.action?docID=1115558](https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/[SITE_ID]/detail.action?docID=1115558).

This article follows the rise of the TV weathercaster. Historically, meteorologists were stuck in an office space where they would put together the weather forecasts, to give to the on-air anchors to read. Once the weathermen started to appear on TV, they've become one of the most valued assets to a newscast. Sports and news are important, but the author of this article believes that the weathercaster holds a special relationship with local viewers.

Julie L. Demuth, Jeffrey K. Lazo, and Rebecca E. Morss. "Exploring Variations in People's Sources, Uses, and Perceptions of Weather Forecasts." *Weather, Climate, and Society*, vol. 3, no. 3, 2011, pp. 177-192. *CrossRef*, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24907409>, doi:10.1175/2011WCAS1061.1.

The controls in this study focused on how frequent an individual watches a weathercast and what parameters they look for in weathercast to understand how weather providers can better communicate with their viewership. They first analyzed attitudes and behaviors towards variables like forecasts accuracy, weather variability, and also sought to understand sociodemographic characteristics. Their findings show that the most important part of a weathercast to the viewer was their perceived importance of temperature or precipitation.

Nix-Crawford, Brittney. *The Trust Factor between Meteorologists and Viewers and the Effects on Local Television Audience Retention*, ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 2017. *ProQuest One Academic Eastern Edition*, <https://search.proquest.com/docview/2014476891>.

The author of this thesis studied how the trust of a meteorologist affects the hiring process of weathercasters in Philadelphia, PA. She gaged the trust level by using surveys with 77 participants in the Philadelphia market. Recommendations include using social media with viewers to gain more trust, but the attraction of gender plays a large role in viewer attraction and trustworthiness of local weathercasters in this market. Weathergirls are more trusted than man, even though the study shows that people believe weathergirls have lower qualifications.

Nyssa Perryman, and Sandra Theiss. "Weather Girls" on the Big Screen." *Bulletin of the American Meteorological Society*, vol. 95, no. 3, 2014, pp. 347-356.

CrossRef, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26218891>, doi:10.1175/BAMS-D-12-00079.1.

"Weather." *Weather*, 1946.

Wulfemeyer, K. T. "The Interests and Preferences of Audience for Local Television News." *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, vol. 60, no. 2, 1983, pp. 323-328.

CrossRef, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/107769908306000218>,

doi:10.1177/107769908306000218.