

Survey finds social media contribute to increased sexist comments for women in television

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A national survey has found that social media have increased the amount of criticism television broadcasters receive about their appearance.

Researchers at South Dakota State University and the University of Missouri will present the findings of this exploratory study, which they conducted earlier this year, Aug. 6 at the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication Minneapolis Conference. Male and female broadcasters addressed comments they have received regarding their appearance, how it affected them and how they handled the comments.

"The broader implications of this study are the [unrealistic expectations](#) that still exist for women and that their overall worth or perceived competence is tied to their appearance," said Teri Finneman, an assistant journalism professor at South Dakota State. "Although some men in our study indicated they, too, receive criticism, this study makes clear that there remains another standard for women in the workplace that puts them at an unfair disadvantage."

Other survey findings include:

- More than 75 percent of broadcasters who responded to the survey said they had received viewer criticism about their

appearance.

- The majority said email/letters (64 percent) and Facebook (58 percent) are the primary ways they received this criticism although 33 percent said they have been criticized in person.
- Nearly 90 percent said [social media](#) increased the amount of viewer criticism about their appearance.
- Nearly 100 percent said women in television receive more criticism from viewers than men.

One female Midwestern morning show anchor said female viewers are just as critical, if not more so, of female television broadcasters' appearance as male viewers.

"I think women are programmed by our society to critique a woman based on her appearance because ... we're regarded as only having so much power," the anchor said. "If you can tear another woman's power down, there might be more left for you."

One California female anchor said she receives criticism weekly, some of which crosses the line into sexual harassment. A female Texas anchor said she's tried to get jobs in other markets but has been told she was "too fat to be on TV."

"The results of this study speak not only to a continued emphasis on TV reporters' appearance, particularly among women, but also to the ways that changing modes of communication complicate these dynamics," said Joy Jenkins, a doctoral candidate at the University of Missouri School of Journalism. "Although social media, email, online comments and other venues have allowed citizens to play a more active role in the news-creation process, audience members may also emphasize bodily standards over journalistic ones."

Provided by South Dakota State University

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