

Asian Male Broadcasters on TV: Where Are They?¹

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“Follow the Money”

Old American Saying

Introduction

The Columbia News Service distributed an article titled “Asian Men Find Television Anchor Jobs Elusive” (Ho, 2002) earlier this year. This report gave voice to the growing concern that there are few Asian males in on-air broadcast positions. The Ho article primarily lays the blame for the lack of Asian men on stereotypes in American culture that white men command authority while Asian men are seen as more passive. Asian women were not similarly discriminated against, suggested several people interviewed for the article, because they were more likely to be perceived as attractive. The article goes on to cite a study conducted by Martilla Communications Group and Yankelovich partners that purportedly found that almost 43% of respondents held somewhat negative or very negative views about Asians (Committee of 100 survey, 2001)—more about this survey later. In this same article, however, a different hypothesis was posed by a CBS producer in New York who suggested that the problem was a lack of

applicants, prominent role models, and an unwillingness to undergo the “grooming” that begins in smaller markets.

The range of potential explanations for the obvious lack of Asian male broadcasters on the air is both startling and intriguing. This study was designed to help analyze some of these issues and to document the actual numbers of Asian male broadcasters in the major television markets in the U.S. Thus this project had three goals: 1) To analyze the participation of Asian males in broadcasting historically; 2) To examine the major TV markets in the U.S. and determine the number of Asians in on-air positions and the gender breakdown; and 3) To evaluate the reasons for the apparent low percentages of Asian males on-air through interviews with station managers and news directors and journalism educators.

Literature Review

Last year it was estimated that there were approximately 11,279,000 Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders in the U.S., or about 4.1 percent of the population (U.S. Census, 2001). Discussing Asian Americans as a group has always been problematic because of the extreme differences between the many cultures (e.g., the Japanese with their long literary tradition and the Hmong people who had no tradition of written language). The term is generally used to refer to a number of nationalities and ethnicities from Eastern and Southeastern Asia and the Pacific Islands and sometimes to the

Indian subcontinent. In this report, Asian American refers to those whose roots can be traced to East Asia, Southeast Asia, the Malay Peninsula and Archipelago, and the Indian subcontinent. Among Asian Americans, ethnic Chinese are the largest group, comprising approximately 23%, followed by the Filipino, Indian, Japanese, Korean, Vietnamese, Cambodian, Laotian, Thai, and Hmong (Kent, Pollard, Haaga & Mather, 2001; Siu, 1996).. Besides being the largest group, the Chinese have the longest history in the U.S. Japanese Americans are the only group with a larger U.S. born than immigrant born population (Siu, 1996).

Asian Americans span the economic spectrum but many are now highly educated and middle class and they are concentrated in the sciences—medicine, engineering and computers—which are now totally dominated by Asians (Evans & Morita, 2002).

Asian Americans are concentrated in six states: California, Hawaii, Texas, Florida, New York, and Illinois (Siu, 1996). The large media markets with significant Asian American populations are (in descending order): San Francisco (28%), Seattle (12%), San Diego (11%), Los Angeles (10%), and Boston (6%) (Content Counts, 1998). The Radio-Television News Directors Association and Foundation has been tracking the percentages of women and minorities in television broadcast news for the better part of a decade. In 1994 Asian Americans made up 2.2% of the workforce, up to 3% in 2000 and

up again in 2001 to 4.1% (RTNDA, 2001). This year, the results indicate a drop in all minorities with Asians down again at 2.7% (RTNDA, in press). The issue that is not readily apparent from these statistics is that while Asian Americans have on-air percentages that in the past have not been significantly different from their percentage in the population (this past year may be an aberration), Asian males are somewhat underrepresented across all job categories (1% versus 1.7% for Asian females) (RTNDA, in press).

There is a great deal of research on discrimination against minorities in general and Asian Americans in particular (see Siu, 1996, and Corey, 2001). One way Asian families have dealt with prejudice has been to insist on an excellent education and to seek occupations that are “objective” (e.g., engineering, chemistry) and do not depend on communication skills, appearance or other potentially dangerous characteristics. Most of these studies are self-report studies and do not actually attempt to measure prejudice and the previously mentioned Committee of 100 survey (2001) conducted by Martilla Communications Group and Yankelovich Partners shows why this is so difficult. The survey is a list of both positively and negatively loaded stereotypes, not the more neutral language of controlled studies. Mixing in issues regarding the countries of China, Russia, and Iraq

further confounds this poll.³ This study wants to look at many possible issues surrounding the low numbers of Asian men in broadcast news.

Methodology

Several different methods were used in his study. Following a literature review, the top 25 TV markets in the U.S. were identified using Nielsen and Arbitron figures and the affiliate stations for NBC, CBS, ABC and FOX were contacted in each market. The markets included: New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, Philadelphia, San Francisco-Oakland-San Jose, Boston, Dallas-Ft Worth, Washington DC, Detroit, Atlanta, Houston, Seattle-Tacoma, Minneapolis-St Paul, Tampa-St Petersburg-Sarasota, Cleveland, Miami-Ft Lauderdale, Phoenix, Denver, Sacramento-Stockton-Modesto, Pittsburgh, Orlando-Daytona Beach-Melbourne, St Louis, Portland, Baltimore, and San Diego. A phone interview was conducted to determine the number of Asians in on-air positions and the gender-breakdown.⁴

Following that survey, a sample of program managers and news directors were asked to participate in an interview regarding the results of the

³ Although the vast majority of non-Asians who responded to the poll were positively disposed toward Asians, an index was created in order to group people who responded positively to either 1-3 items as somewhat prejudices and over 5 items as very prejudiced when the items contained double-barreled statements (a no-no) like “hard to get close to, make friends with” (that may not be prejudicial at all) and “always like to be the head of things” (which would be a positive statement on a leadership survey). There is no reliability study of the questions and the index has no independent validity.

⁴ Often those who answered the phone on the news desk or newsroom delegated the request and not always to someone in the newsroom. The news director was frequently unavailable or unable to return calls or e mail because of time demands, and often we were referred to the office of human resources for the figures.

phone survey in order to develop contextual understanding of the results. This was not a random sample but instead was a snowball sample: an initial list of executives from the major markets was developed and they often recommended other individuals to call. It was also suggested that we interview a few male Asian American on-air reporters for added background information and three were conducted. Next a survey of three regional subsamples of the top (by reputation—an average of the rankings by the *Gourman Report*, *U.S. News & World Report* and insights from *ASJMC*) journalism schools in the U.S. was conducted to look at the number of Asian students “in the pipeline” and their gender breakdown. We surveyed nine universities with Broadcast Journalism programs: Arizona State University School of Journalism and Telecommunication, University of Southern California Annenberg School for Communication and University of California at Berkeley Graduate School of Journalism located in the western region of the U.S., and Northwestern University’s Medill School of Journalism, the University of Missouri and The University of Texas College of Communication in the central region of the U.S., and the Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism, Syracuse University’s S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications, and Boston University College of Communications in the eastern region of the U.S.⁵

⁵ Again, the source of the information provided varied from program to program yet each

In order to supplement that analysis, a small student career survey was conducted with only male Asian students at the University of Southern California to check for any recent changes in the literature on career aspirations in Asian American college students. This was followed with phone interviews of a series of “power players” in the television industry—the major research firms and major agents in the television industry. These were added for additional contextual information for the study. Finally, we examined the starting salaries of on-air broadcast journalists from both phone interviews of small market television news station managers and from published accounts.

Results

Television Station Survey

The perception that there are few Asian male broadcasters (i.e., reporters or anchors or reporter/anchor or reporter/producer or reporter/web site) on the air is correct. In the top 25 markets there are a total of 20 on-air Asian males and 86 Asian females for a total of 106. This also means that 81% of the Asians are female and only 19% are male (see Table 1).

The survey also investigates the on-air job assignments currently held by Asian American Females and Asian American males (see Table 2). In the top 25 markets, the number of Asian American females in news anchor

school with the exception of one provided the requested information.

positions far outnumbers Asian American males. More than two-thirds of Asian American males are in on-air news reporter assignments and another 20% are sports reporters or news/sports reporters. In fact the study found only one Asian American male news anchor (and he was assigned to an afternoon news broadcast) and one male sports anchor while there were 13 females in the news anchor position. Of the 104 employees who are identified as Asian Americans on the air in the top 25 markets, 85 are Asian American and 19 are Asian American males (a ratio around 5 to 1).

The television news operations located in markets with larger Asian American populations (viewing audiences) tended to have a larger number of Asian Americans employed in on-air anchor or reporter positions (See Table 1--i.e., San Francisco 16 Asian American females and 4 Asian American males, Seattle 10 females and 2 males, Los Angeles 5 females and 5 males and Houston 3 females and 2 males).

University Journalism programs

The University survey reflects a troubling lack of Asian American males choosing journalism as their field of study. Asian American females majoring in journalism at Universities surveyed in the study outnumber Asian American males four to one (see Table 4).

Example: At Arizona State University School of Journalism and Telecommunications, over 80% of the total number of Asian Americans in

both the graduate and undergraduate programs are female while just 16% are Asian American males (some students were not gender identified).

Station Manager/News Director Interviews

A content analysis of the most common responses from TV managers and news directors regarding the absence of Asian males on the air is that they receive very few “applications” from Asian males (i.e., tapes and resumes). A few also said they had not really thought about it because there did not seem to be much of a “lobby” for Asian males. A few people indicated that lobbying was more effective from Hispanic or African American groups but they also indicated that those ethnic groups made up a substantial share of their audience.⁶ All said that if they received tapes from an agent or received a great recommendation on an Asian male that the individual would be checked out just like someone from any other ethnic group. It was interesting that none could think of a breakthrough role model for Asian males (i.e., a male counter-part for Connie Chung who has high name recognition) although several mentioned James Hattori.

Rather than see Asian men as passive, a number of interviewees found that to be an “old-fashioned” stereotype. They thought that Asian men were perceived as savvy businessmen, very smart, and aggressive—“the Asian tiger” and “Jackie Chan.” One manager noted that any minority might have

⁶ Hispanics and African Americans each constitute about 12% of the population of the U.S. (Kent, Pollard, Haaga & Mather, 2001).

difficulty in some smaller markets in the South but that might also be true of a “blue-eyed guy with a New York accent.”

Current Student Statements

A group of male Asian students currently attending college at USC did not evidence any differences with respect to the traditional issues surrounding career choice in Asian American families. They reinforced the literature that Asian males are highly motivated by parents to go into jobs that are prestigious, have high starting salaries, and they are likely to go into science related occupations. This is consistent with research that has found that Asian American students were more likely to have their occupational choices influenced by their families than white students (Tang, 2002). It also supports findings in the literature that indicates Asian American parents believe that science related careers are perceived to have a double benefit—they are high-paying and their children are less likely to be discriminated against in those types of positions (Corey, 2001).

Supplemental Interviews

The audience researchers and consultants who were interviewed did not believe that Asians were actively being discriminated against through market reports that were prejudicial (e.g., no research reports indicated that these people as a group would be less successful on the air than another group). They were all asked about market data that supposedly shows that

Asian men do not test well in certain markets and the response was that they were unaware of any such research and that current methods of testing would make that type of research impossible to conduct.⁷ Also, they knew of no research data that suggested that Asian women were preferable to Asian men.

Conclusion

This study displays a sharp contrast in the number of Asian American females and Asian American males employed in on-air positions and significant on-air positions in the top 25 television markets in the U.S. The findings also reflect the potential exacerbation of the problem because Asian American males are not currently enrolled in University broadcast journalism and/or communication programs in numbers significant enough to change this employment pattern.

Thus we believe the problem is complicated, systemic, and reinforcing itself. As Wang (2001) notes:

While the Latino and Asian populations have grown by about 50 percent in the last 10 years, some news executives say it is hard to find qualified minorities to hire at stations in large markets, mainly because they aren't being hired at the small market level. The demand is

⁷ Because testing on-air personalities has become so expensive, only actual candidates will be tested and they are not tested by ethnic group but individually. For example, it is highly likely that two blonde women will test very differently and two brown-eyed men will test very differently in the same market. Thus there would not be the data available to discuss Asian men as a group, or any other group for that matter.

higher than the supply for experienced, high-potential minorities, said one general manager in a top 10 market. In the smaller markets, station management has to cultivate it. It is really hard to find a diamond in the rough, but you just keep trying. (p. 1).

The broadcast industry is going to have to target males in general and Asian males in particular because the industry is undergoing a “feminization” --women seem less concerned at this point in their lives with starting salaries, which are astoundingly low. As Kodrich (2002) states:

New journalists are more educated than any previous group of journalists, yet they are among the lowest paid of any college-educated workers, according to a 1996 Freedom Forum report by Betty Medsger. Average annual starting salaries are \$20,154. About 22 percent of new journalists 25 and under earn less than \$15,000, according to a survey of 1,041 print and broadcast journalists conducted for the study by the Roper Center. An additional 35 percent of those journalists make between \$15,000 and \$20,000. This means that more than half — 57 percent — of all journalists age 25 and under make less than \$20,000," she wrote in the report, *Winds of Change: Challenges Confronting Journalism Education*. About 70 percent of journalism educators said low salaries were an important

reason why student interest in journalism has declined over the past 10 years.

. . . Medsger said many new journalists would improve their economic situation by becoming waiters and waitresses. The low salaries aren't just with the young and inexperienced. About 25 percent of new journalists age 26-30 earn less than \$20,000 a year, and 12 percent of those age 31-40 earn less than \$20,000. The lowest salaries were in broadcast journalism, weekly newspapers and at small dailies.

Because the Wings of Change report was published in 1996, we contacted small market TV managers to find out what the starting salary was today. The range was \$18-23 thousand, which would make the mean almost identical to the Freedom Forum report and the same as one of the author's first TV job twenty years ago. If you look at a college summary of their graduates' starting salaries, Kodrich (2002) shows journalism at the very bottom and engineering at the very top. We suggest that Asian American males are following the money! The problem is obviously more complicated than that but there is no doubt that the pay scale is a significant problem.

Although numbers in journalism schools are not pure indicators since students in other majors can enter the job market, the trend is unmistakable. Men, and Asian men in particular, do not seem to be going into television broadcasting. The reluctance of males to enter a field could have another

outcome—the field might one day be seen as a “women’s job” and it would become even less likely that Asian men who already display more traditional career choices would choose to enter the field in significant numbers.

Recommendations

We recommend that concerned groups such as AAJA and the Unity coalition consider developing targeted scholarships and internships, determine how to lobby stations more heavily (e.g., we suggest setting up meetings with network presidents), and developing educational materials about journalism that are focused on Asian American students and their families. It will also be important to develop relationships with small market station heads who can help cultivate Asian male broadcasters and find that breakthrough reporter or anchor with “star” quality who will become a household name. Asian Americans males of the next generation need a role model who can inspire them to heed what is often referred to a passion or “calling” for the field of journalism. And serious consideration needs to be given to starting salaries, or this calling will be more analogous to the religious metaphor than was perhaps intended--if the first few jobs require a vow of poverty.

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Appendix

TABLE ONE -- ASIAN AMERICAN JOURNALISTS ON-AIR IN TOP 25 MARKETS BY GENDER

Top 25 Markets	ABC		CBS		NBC		FOX		Total		GRAND
	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	TOTAL
New York	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	2	0	2
Los Angeles	2	2	0	0	0	2	3	1	5	5	10
Chicago	2	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	5	0	5
Philadelphia	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	1
San Francisco-Oakland-San Jose	4	1	3	1	4	1	5	1	16	4	20
Boston	1	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	3	0	3
Dallas-Ft Worth	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	2	0	2
Washington DC	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	1
Detroit	0	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	3	0	3
Atlanta	0	1	1	0	0	0	2	1	3	2	5
Houston	1	1	1	1	0	0	1	0	3	2	5
Seattle-Tacoma	1	0	0	1	6	1	3	0	10	2	12
Minneapolis-St Paul	1	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	3	1	4
Tampa-St Petersburg-Sarasota	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	2	0	2
Cleveland	1	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	3	0	3
Miami-Ft Lauderdale	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Phoenix	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	2	0	2
Denver	1	0	1	0	2	0	2	0	6	0	6
Sacramento-Stockton-Modesto	1	0	1	0	2	1	0	0	4	1	5
Pittsburgh	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	1
Orlando-Daytona Beach-Melbourne	0	0	0	0	2	0	1	0	3	0	3
St Louis	(*)	(*)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Portland	1	0	0	1	1	1	2	0	4	2	6
Baltimore	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
San Diego	1	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	3	1	4
TOTAL	18	5	16	6	29	6	23	3	86	20	106
% of the Grand Total									81.1	18.9	100%
% in Each Network Affiliate	78.3	21.7	72.7	27.27	82.9	17.14	88.46	15	11.54		

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(*) No News Department

Table Two -- Asian Americans' Top 25 Markets Job Assignments									
		Female		Male		Total			
		Q.ty	%	Q.ty	%	Q.ty	%		
1. REPORTING									
	News Reporter	49		14		63			
	Consumer Reporter	3		0		3			
	Technology Reporter	1		0		1			
	Health Reporter	1		0		1			
	Traffic Reporter	1		0		1			
	News and Web Site Reporter	1		0		1			
	Weekend News Reporter	1		0		1			
	Sports Reporter	0		3		3			
	News and Sports Reporter	0		1		1			
	Total 1. Reporting	57	66.3	18	90.0	75	70.7		
	%	76.0		24.0		100.0			
2. ANCHORING									
	News Anchor	13		1		14			
	Weekend Anchor	7		0		7			
	News Reporter & Anchor	6		0		6			
	News Rep. & Weekend Anchor	1		0		1			
	Weekend Weather	1		0		1			
	Sports Anchor	0		1		1			
	Total 2. Anchoring	28	32.6	2	10.0	30	28.3		
	%	93.3		6.7		100.0			
3. HOSTING									
		1	1.1	0	0.0	1	1.0		
	%	100.0		0		100.0			
	TOTAL	86	100.0	20	100.0	106	100.0		
	%	81.1		18.9		100.0			

Table Three - Universities and Ethnicities (percentage by university)

(please note that unless differently indicated the figures refer to the whole school)

	Asian - Amer.	Amer.- Indians	African- Amer.	Hisp.	Euro- Cuac.	Unknown	Non - Resident
1. West							
Arizona State University - School of Journalism and Telecommunication (figure for Journalism only)							
Undergraduate	3.0	0.9	4.5	1.8	74.4	3.2	2.0
Graduate	8.3	1.4	1.4	8.3	75.0	n/a	5.5
UC Berkeley - School of Journalism							
Graduate	11.0	<1.0	13.0	8.0	n/a	n/a	n/a
USC - Annenberg School for Communication (figures for Journalism only)							
Undergraduate	3.8	1.7	7.0	5.7	54.6	2.9	4.0
Graduate	19.4	1.6	12.9	3.2	55.0	3.0	5.0
2. Central							
University of Missouri - School of Journalism							
Undergraduate	3.5	0.5	5.4	1.9	n/a	n/a	n/a
Northwestern - Medill School of Journalism							
Undergraduate	11.0	0.5	7.0	7.0	n/a	n/a	n/a
University of Texas - College of Communication (figures for Journalism only)							
Undergraduate	6.2	0.0	4.3	6.3	71.7	0.5	0.6
Graduate	1.3	0.0	4.1	2.7	56.9	1.3	33.3
3. East							
Columbia - School of Journalism (figures for Broadcasting Journalism only)							
Graduate	7.5	n/a	10.0	4.0	n/a	n/a	n/a
Syracuse - S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communication (figures for Broadcasting Journalism only)							
Graduate	3.1	0.0	15.7	9.4	62.5	3.1	6.2

Table Four --Asian Americans: Universities and Gender

(please note that the figures refer to the whole school unless otherwise indicated)

University	Female		Male		Total		
	Q.ty	%	%	Q.ty	%	Q.ty	%
1. West							
Arizona State University - School of Journalism and Telecommunication (figures for Journalism only)							
Undergraduate	37	84.1	84.1	7	15.9	44	100
Graduate	5	83.3	83.3	1	16.7	6	100
UC Berkeley - School of Journalism							
Graduate	12	85.7	85.7	2	14.3	14	100
USC - Annenberg School for Communication (figures for Journalism only)							
Undergraduate	60		75.9	19	24.1	79	100
Graduate	10	83.3	83.3	2	16.7	12	100
Subtotal 1.	124	80.0	80.0	31	20.0	155	100
2. Central							
University of Missouri - School of Journalism							
Undergraduate	22		81.5	5	18.5	27	100
Graduate	5		83.3	1	16.7	6	100
Northwestern - Medill School of Journalism							
Undergraduate (1)		90.0	90.0		10.0		100
University of Texas - College of Communication (figures for Journalism only)							
Undergraduate	31	68.9	68.9	14	31.1	45	100
Graduate	1	100.0	100.0	0	0.0	1	100
Subtotal 2.	59	74.7	74.7	20	25.3	79	100
3. East							
Columbia - School of Journalism (figures for Broadcasting Journalism only)							
Graduate	1		100.0	0	0.0	1	100
Syracuse - S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communication (figures for Broadcasting Journalism only)							
Graduate	0	0.0	0.0	1	100.0	1	100
Subtotal 3.	1	50.0	50.0	1	50.0	2	100
Grand Total	184	78.0	78.0	52	22.0	236	100

