

PROGRESSION TOWARDS EQUALITY: AN ANALYSIS OF  
PAST AND PRESENT EXPERIENCES OF FEMALE ON-  
CAMERA SPORTSCASTERS

by

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A THESIS

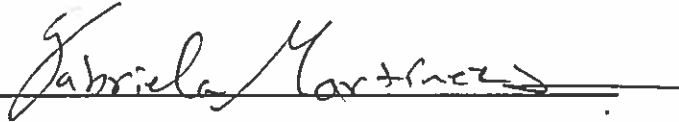
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## **An Abstract of the Thesis of**

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Female On-Camera Sportscasters

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The American sports landscape has long honored the male figure both on and off the field. This societal gender preference has played to the disadvantage of females. Though females have successfully desegregated the male-dominated field of sports broadcasting over the past four decades, the market still lacks gender equality. An increase in the female presence does not mean that marketplace equality has been reached; though progress has been made. Through research on the history of sports broadcasting in the United States, the history of the female presence in sportscasts, and a review of academic literature, this project sought to provide background on the development and perception of the female presence in sports broadcasting. One-on-one interviews with current female sportscasters and other sports media professionals provided context to the modern involvement of females in sports broadcasting. Through research and analysis of interviews, comparisons were drawn between the academic projections of the current female sportscaster experience and the reality of the position. This thesis argues that while females are making significant advances in gaining roles in sports broadcasting and the overall workplace environment for females has improved, there still remain areas in which improvements could occur.

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## Introduction

“Women in sports television are allowed to read headlines, patrol sidelines, and generally facilitate conversation for their male colleagues. Sometimes, they even let us monitor the Internet from a couch. And while the Stephen A. Smiths, Mike Francesas, Dan Patricks and Keith Olbermans of the world get to weigh in on the issues of the day, we just smile and throw to commercial.” - Katie Nolan<sup>1</sup>

The decision to focus my senior thesis research on gender disparities in sports broadcasting stemmed from personal observations during my pursuit of a career in sports reporting. During my time as an undergraduate at the University of Oregon, I have been an active staff member in numerous student groups that produce sports media for varying platforms. Participation as a sports reporter and anchor with Duck TV Sports, the sports department of the University of Oregon’s student-run television network, and The Daily Emerald, the University’s student-run media group prepared me for an intern position at Comcast SportsNet Northwest.

As an intern (and eventually employee) at Comcast SportsNet Northwest, I was exposed to numerous situations in which I was limited due to my gender. In terms of specific limitations, one incident is particularly memorable. My assigned mentor denied me access to a minor league baseball locker room in order to “protect me from the locker room commentary,” as the team consisted of mostly young men under the age of 25. I was ostracized from the all-male media scrum<sup>2</sup> in the clubhouse because my boss felt that my gender would be a distraction to the athletes. I instead had to have the athletes and coaches escorted out for one-on-one interviews with me. My final product was significantly altered simply due to my gender.

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<sup>1</sup> *Why Boycotting the NFL Because of Ray Rice is Not The Answer*. Dir. Katie Nolan. Fox Sports, 9 Sept. 2014. *YouTube*. Web. 20 Mar 2015.

<sup>2</sup> An impromptu press conference

At other times, I was offered the same opportunities as my male colleagues. Following Portland Timbers soccer matches, I was allowed full access into the team's locker room for interviews. The athletes were respectful of my position as media, and were never disrespectful or degrading.

The wide range of situations that I have experienced has led me to question the current state of gender discrimination in sports media. I have experienced both segregation and freedom during my work as a sports reporter, and I wanted to further understand the experiences of fellow female journalists working in the field today, as well as the history behind their contemporary freedoms as sports broadcasters. Fully utilizing the freedom provided by the Robert D. Clark Honors College to select a research topic, I was able to explore a realm often outcast by academia, and attempted to compare the realities of current female sportscasters with academic findings. Why this is important: females play and watch sports thus gender should not be a limiting factor in the pursuit of a career in sports broadcasting.

## **Research Questions**

General curiosity about the history of sports reporting intertwined with determination to uncover the roots of gender inequality in sportscasting led me to develop a set of final research questions:

1. What is the history of females in the sportscasting role?
2. How does audience preference impact the placement of females in certain on-camera roles in a sports broadcast?
3. What scholarly research has been conducted on the perception and placement of female on-camera sportscasters?
4. Do conclusions reached in the academic realm match the experiences of sports reporters currently working in the field?

## The History of Sports Broadcasting in the United States

BBC broadcast the first live television sports report on June 21, 1937 at Wimbledon.<sup>3</sup> But May 17, 1939 marked the birth of the relationship between sports and television in the United States. The nation's first televised sporting event was documented for an NBC station on this date, on a single camera, at Columbia University's baseball diamond.<sup>4</sup> Red Barber announced three months later that the first NBC "network" play-by-play for a major league baseball telecast was to be picked up by a few dozen receivers across New York.<sup>5</sup> These early sports broadcasts started a social phenomenon that has incorporated its way into American culture: "televised sports permeate modern life from the family room to the newsroom and boardroom"<sup>6</sup>

Major networks began placing sporting events in primetime programming slots in 1946.<sup>7</sup> By 1948, one-third of network programming was live sports broadcasts.<sup>8</sup> The draw to televised sports was simple: watching sports on television offered a better view of the game action than the viewer would be able to experience in person. The entire United States entertainment culture shifted to honor the broadcasting of sporting events. Forms of amusement such as movie theaters and live sporting events experienced

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<sup>3</sup> Beck, Daniel. "Sports and Media." *Communication Research Trends* 22.4 (2003): 43. Web. 5 May 2015.

<sup>4</sup> Rader, Benjamin G. In its own image: How television has transformed sports. New York: The Free Press, 1983. Print.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>6</sup> Bryant, Jennings, and Arthur A. Raney. "Sports on the screen." *Media entertainment: The psychology of its appeal*. (2000): 21. *American Psychological Association*. Web. 4 May 2015.

<sup>7</sup> Neal-Lunsford, Jeff. "Sports in the land of television: The use of sport in network prime-time schedules, 1946-1950." *Journal of Sport History*. 19.1. (1992). 20. Web. 5 May 2015.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid*



massive declines in attendance as Americans opted to stay home and watch from their living rooms.<sup>9</sup>

To keep up with the high demand for sports coverage, local NBC, ABC and CBS television affiliates across the country assigned news departments to provide steady sports coverage.<sup>10</sup> It was, in fact, a CBS news anchor that hosted the first television broadcast of the 1960 Winter Olympics in Squaw Valley, Idaho.<sup>11</sup> The addition of instant replay to sportscasting in 1964 provided another engaging component to the sportscast, visually stimulating viewers.<sup>12</sup>

It was not until late in the 1960s that the first cable sports network was established. Howard Hughes funded the launch of Hughes Sports Network (HSN) in 1968, and provided sports programming and video content to smaller television affiliates across the United States.<sup>13</sup> The brand now recognized as “The Worldwide Leader in Sports,” ESPN, was launched by the father-son duo of Bill and Scott Rasmussen on September 7, 1979.<sup>14</sup> There were numerous bidding wars between the three major networks and sports-only networks over the broadcasting rights to high-profile sporting events throughout the 1980s, and by the 1990s, the majority of

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<sup>9</sup> Creedon, Pamela J. "From whalebone to spandex: women and sports journalism in American magazines, photography and broadcasting." *Women, Media and Sport*. Ed. Pamela J. Creedon. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc. 1994. 108-158. Print.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>11</sup> Klatell, David A. & Marcus, Norman. *Sports for sale*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1988. Print.

<sup>12</sup> Barnouw, Eric. *Tube of plenty: The evolution of American television*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1975. Print.

<sup>13</sup> Sterling, Christopher H. & Kittross, John M. *Stay tuned: A concise history of American broadcasting*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1978. Print.

<sup>14</sup> Miller, James Andrew, and Tom Shales. *Those Guys Have All The Fun: Inside the World of ESPN*. New York, NY: Little, Brown and Company, 2011. Print.

“marquee” sporting events had been purchased.<sup>15</sup> In the early 2000s, ESPN purchased the television rights to broadcast Monday Night Football, the Masters, the British Open, Wimbledon, and the BCS Playoffs.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Creedon, 1994.

<sup>16</sup> Sherman, Ed. "Bodenheimer Q&A: Culture of Innovation, risk-taking, passion for sports." *National Sports Journalism Center*. Indiana University. 18 May 2015. Web. 18 May 2015.

## The Evolution of the Female Role in Sportscasts

The wife of Harry Johnson was a sports commentator during her husband's broadcasts for Central States Broadcasting in Omaha, Nebraska in the 1930s and 1940s, earning recognition as one of the first female pioneers in the field of sports broadcasting.<sup>17</sup> Despite her achievements, Johnson's first name was not available on record. The first network program featuring both female athletes and a female sportscaster aired in 1948. NBC's "Sportswoman of the Week" was a 15-minute sportscast, featuring Sarah Palfrey Cooke, 13-time national women's and mixed doubles tennis champion, who interviewed female athletes deemed "outstanding" by producers.<sup>18</sup> Jane Chastain is another trailblazer; in the mid-1960s, Chastain started her career as the first woman to call play-by-play coverage of a live sporting event.<sup>19</sup> In 1965 at the age of 18, Donna de Varona signed a contract with ABC to become the first female sportscaster under a network contract.<sup>20</sup> Lesley Visser was the first female to do sideline reporting for the 1974 Super Bowl.<sup>21</sup> Visser would later become the first female broadcast analyst for an NFL broadcast in 2001.<sup>22</sup> Visser has been vocal about many of the situations she faced during her times as a sportscaster, including moments when male athletes or coaching staff tossed food and jockstraps at female reporters, yelled abusive obscenities, denied interview requests from female reporters, and walked around nude in the locker room as a blatant attempt to make females feel

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<sup>17</sup> Schwartz, L. (1999). *Women in sports broadcasting: A brief history*. American Sportscasters Association. Web.

<sup>18</sup> Neal-Lunsford, 1992.

<sup>19</sup> Schwartz, 1992.

<sup>20</sup> "Donna de Varona." *The Paley Center for Media*. n.d. Web. 24 Apr. 2015.

<sup>21</sup> Sobel, Rachel K. "Breaking through an NFL barrier." *US News and World Report*. (2001). Web. 24 Apr. 2015.

<sup>22</sup> "Lesley Visser." *The Paley Center for Media*. n.d. Web. 24 Apr. 2015.

uncomfortable.<sup>23</sup> In the late 1970s, Jeannie Morris was barred access to the press box during an NFL football game between the Minnesota Vikings and the Chicago Bears when the game's press passes read "no women or children;" Morris still completed her broadcast from the bleachers in blizzard conditions.<sup>24</sup> Ann Meyers was the first woman to provide color commentary for an NBA team (the Indiana Pacers in 1979), and was later the first woman to call an NBA game on network television in 1997 (NBC).<sup>25</sup> Mary Carillo was the first female to break into the coverage of tennis, and was the first female to deliver play-by-play tennis analysis at the network level, as well as the first female announcer on a Davis Cup telecast in the 1980s.<sup>26</sup> Leandra Reilly was the first woman to do play-by-play of an NBA basketball game on February 14, 1988.<sup>27</sup> In the sport anchor position, Hannah Storm made history on two fronts in the 1980s; Storm was the first full-time female sports anchor for CNN and role the first female host for a pregame show for a major sport.<sup>28</sup> Linda Cohn, now a staple anchor on ESPN's flagship program *SportsCenter*, made groundbreaking history when she became the first full-time American female sports anchor on a national radio network (ABC from 1987-1989).<sup>29</sup> Robin Roberts made history as both a gender and racial minority in sports media when she became ESPN's first on-air female African-American sports reporter in 1990.<sup>30</sup> Gayle Gardner was the first female to do television play-by-play of a baseball game on August 3, 1993 during a matchup between the Colorado Rockies and the

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<sup>23</sup> "Lesley Visser," 2015.

<sup>24</sup> Schwartz, 1999.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>26</sup> "Mary Carillo." The Paley Center for Media. n.d. Web. 24 Apr. 2015.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>28</sup> "Hannah Storm." *The Paley Center for Media*. n.d. Web. 24 Apr. 2015.

<sup>29</sup> Sorce, Nicole. "The Best Phone Call Ever: How Linda Cohn Broke Into the Boys Club." *The Double Play*. 31 Oct. 2013. Web. 2 May 2015.

<sup>30</sup> "Robin Roberts." *The Paley Center for Media*. n.d. Web. 24 Apr. 2015.

Cincinnati Reds<sup>31</sup>; Suzyn Waldman was the next female to break into baseball broadcasting in the mid-1990s. As recently as the late 1990s, CBS publicly acknowledged a decision to employ only male reporters for Professional Golf Association events, arguing that since the players were all male, the reporters covering the event should be male as well.<sup>32</sup> These female sportscasters laid the groundwork for future generations to achieve success in the world of sports broadcasting. Instead of merely summarizing the accomplishments of a select few female sportscasters, each female who broke through a tremendous barrier in sports broadcasting has been mentioned in order to properly attribute their accomplishments.

The roadblocks faced by early female sportscasters have not hindered younger generations of females in their pursuit of a career in sports broadcasting. In 1991, there were only fifty women sportscasters out of the 630 affiliate stations, and by 2003, 127 women were in on-air sports positions.<sup>33</sup> In 2003, 30% of female journalism students across the nation stated they were interested in sports reporting.<sup>34</sup> One-third of the sports audition tapes received at the Frank N. Magid consulting firm and talent agency in Marion, Iowa in 2005 were from female applicants.<sup>35</sup> In 2006, women made up almost 64% of students in journalism programs; one department reported that 40% of students enrolled in its sports sequence were women.<sup>36</sup> At ESPN and the three broadcast

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<sup>31</sup> "Gayle Gardner." *The Paley Center for Media*. n.d. Web. 24 Apr. 2015.

<sup>32</sup> Creedon, 1994.

<sup>33</sup> Hanson, Katherine, Sarita Pillai, and Vivian Guilfooy. "More Than Title IX: how equity in education has shaped a nation." *Journal of Interdisciplinary Feminist Thought* 6.1 (2012): Web. 6 Apr. 2015.

<sup>34</sup> Becker, L. (2003, December 15). "Gender equity elusive, surveys show." *Freedom Forum*. Retrieved Sept. 12, 2005.

<sup>35</sup> Schwanbeck, B. (2005, June). "Who's on first? What's on second?: A look at where women stand in local TV sports." *RTNDA Communicator*. (2005). Web.

<sup>36</sup> Hardin, M., Dodd, J., & Lauffer, K. (2006). Passing it on: The reinforcement of male hegemony in sports journalism textbooks. *Mass Communication & Society*, 9, 429–446.

networks combined (NBC, ABC and CBS), women held less than 20% of all on-camera sports reporting positions in 1991 (Jenkins, 1991). Today, women make up just 15% of all 380 on-air positions on ESPN.<sup>37</sup>

### **Legal Changes In Favor of A Female Presence in Sports**

While females fought the battle to acquire careers in sports broadcasting, legal decisions were being made to advance gender equality in sports that would eventually benefit on-air sports broadcasting. In 1972, an Educational Amendment to the Civil Rights Act of 1964 was passed in Congress. Referred to as Title IX, the amendment states: “No person in the United State shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, or denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any educational program or activity receiving federal assistance.”<sup>38</sup> Following the passing of Title IX, female participation in athletics began to rise. Prior to Title IX, the average ratio of high school girls participating in sports was 1 in 27; by 2002, that ratio changed to about 1 in 2 ½.<sup>39</sup> In 2006, more than 40% of athletes at the high school and college level were female.<sup>40</sup> The passing of the amendment was monumental for female participation in sports. The legal decision also provided a wider acceptance for female involvement in the world of sports that eventually benefited female sportscasters as well. Former female athletes such as Mary Carillo, Donna de Varona, Ann Meyers, Cheryl Miller, and Robin Roberts are all examples of females that utilized their

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<sup>37</sup> "Commentator Bios." ESPN MediaZone. ESPN, n.d. Web. 4 May 2015.

<sup>38</sup> United States. Department of Labor. Office of the Assistant Secretary for Administration and Management. *Title XI, Education Amendments of 1972*. 23 June 1972. Web. 8 May 2015.

<sup>39</sup> Garber, G. (2002, June 6). Landmark law faces new challenges even now. ESPN. Retrieved September 23, 2005. Web.

<sup>40</sup> Blackistone, K. (2006, June 23). Papers' sports staffs not as diverse as coaching ranks, front offices. Dallas Morning News. Retrieved June 23, 2006

knowledge and athletic experience through the pursuit of a career in sports casting after the end of their athletic career.<sup>41</sup> De Varona became a swimming analyst following her appearance in two Olympics and two gold medal wins; Roberts and Meyers were able to use their college basketball experience and knowledge during their coverage of the 1992 Men's NCAA Final Four and the 1992 NCAA Women's Final Four, respectively; and former tennis player Mary Carillo also provides tennis expertise to her commentary on tennis broadcasts.<sup>42</sup>

Court decisions lifting limitations on female access to locker rooms followed over a decade later. In 1978, the U.S. District Court for Southern New York ruled that women should have equal rights and access to the locker room after an incident occurred with the female *Sports Illustrated* sports reporter Melissa Ludtke was denied access into the Yankees' clubhouse.<sup>43</sup> Time Inc., Ludtke's publisher, sued Major League Baseball (MLB) in 1977 for refusing to allow her to interview Yankees players in the locker room during the World Series, therefore barring her from completing her job.<sup>44</sup> Ludtke was a young woman on assignment, trying to complete a story for her assigned beat.

"I was 26 years old, and it was pretty heady stuff," Ludtke said.<sup>45</sup>

A NFL locker room was the setting for a sexual harassment incident involving a female sports journalist twelve years later. Boston Herald reporter Lisa Olson was

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<sup>41</sup> Schwartz, 1999.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>43</sup> Bell, Melissa. "Ines Sainz and a Short History of Female Reporters in Locker Rooms." BlogPost. The Washington Post, 15 Sept. 2010. Web. 02 May. 2015.

<sup>44</sup> Clift, Eleanor. "Let Them Wear Towels." *The Daily Beast*. Newsweek/Daily Beast, 10 Aug. 2013. Web. 02 May. 2015.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid*

sexual harassed by players in the New England Patriots locker room as she attempted to interview them for a story. Players verbally harassed Olson and held their genitals near her face. The Patriots' owner, Victor Kiam, publicly called Olson a "classic bitch."<sup>46</sup> Members of the sports community accused Olson of just being a "looker," condemning her of wanting to be in the locker room to see naked men.<sup>47</sup>

Legally granting locker room access to female journalists was one of the biggest and major battles in the history of the female sportscaster.<sup>48</sup> The popular public stance at the time, which carries over to today, against allowing female reporters in the locker room was that it would violate the players' privacy.<sup>49</sup> Others also wonder why the conversation of males in the female locker room is less prevalent. Michelle Kaufman, a female sportscaster who has covered events such as the Olympic Games, multiple World Cups, Super Bowls, NBA Finals, Stanley Cups, and World Series, offered insight to the situation of males in a female space:

"Critics of women in the locker room often ask why women's locker rooms aren't open to male reporters. Truth is, they often are. The WNBA and Women's Final Four have open-locker-room policies. The difference is that female athletes don't generally disrobe in front of reporters. They stay in their uniforms until interviews are complete, and once the reporters are gone, they shower and change."<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Sherry Ricchiardi, "Offensive Interference," *American Journalism Review* 26, 6 (December 2004/January 2005), 54.

<sup>47</sup> Lisa Disch and Mary Jo Kane (1996). "When a looker really is a bitch: Lisa Olson, sport and the heterosexual matrix." *Signs* 21, 2, 278-308.

<sup>48</sup> Gunther, Amanda, Daniel Kautz, and Allison Roth. "The Perception of Gender in a Male-Dominated Profession." *Human Communication. A Publication of the Pacific and Asian Communication Association*. 14.2 (2011): 71-84. Print

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>50</sup> Fuller, Linda K. *Sportscasters/Sportscasting: Principles and Practices* (New York: Taylor & Francis Group [2008]), 190.



Betty Cuniberti, the first woman in the Los Angeles Dodgers press box, said that the locker room experience was not an experience that any reporter looked forward to; it was simply part of the job: “I don’t know a reporter, male or female, who likes to go in the locker room. It is unsexy, smelly, sweaty and awful. Not really a place you would want to go, but it is part of the job, and it’s where the stories are.”<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Clift, 2013.

## **Public Perception of Female On-Camera Sportscasters**

Networks make decisions on whom to put on-air based on the qualifications of each broadcaster and what demographics make up their audiences.

In the case of sports programming, males make up a large percentage of the viewing audience. Females compose under half of ESPN's overall viewership.<sup>52</sup> According to a survey completed in 2011, the average man age 35-49 spends 227 hours a year watching sports on television; in contrast, the average woman spends just 92 hours a year viewing sports on television.<sup>53</sup> This data reveals that there are more males viewing sports television on a regular basis than females. Females are still watching some of sport's biggest programs. The No. 3 television program watched by females ages 18-49 in January of 2011 was NBC's "Sunday Night Football"; the football show came in behind "Dancing With the Stars" and "Grey's Anatomy."<sup>54</sup> Though not the primary show viewed by females, there is a demonstrated opportunity for the network to grow its audience.

Because the audience for sports programming has been established as predominantly male, decisions in on-air talent will mirror the preferences of that audience.

"Audience demographics are always a key factor in hiring decisions about who will be on camera for programming," said Dr. Marie Hardin, the dean of the College of Communications at Pennsylvania State University and an expert on women in sports media, in a personal interview. "We know, for instance, that a show aimed at young

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<sup>52</sup> McBride, Kelly. "Letter of Intent." *ESPN*. ESPN, 27 Dec. 2011. Web. 3 May 2015.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid*

people will use young faces as the way to attract and speak to that audience. Sports programming attracts, and is designed for, a primarily male audience. Decisions about on-air talent will be impacted by that.”<sup>55</sup>

There are seven main on-camera roles for sports broadcasters: the positions of an anchor, reporter, host, play-by-play announcer, game (or color) commentator, studio analyst, or a competition-level reporter, commonly addressed as a sideline reporter. Each position offers different opportunities to the sportscaster that fills the position. While the female desegregation of each of these roles has garnered attention, the role of the sideline reporter has particularly drawn criticism due to the perceived value placed on physical appearance and the position’s dispensability.

Sideline reporting is a fairly new addition to the sports broadcasting team. In 1974, as a move to appeal to college audiences during NCAA football telecasts, ABC hired then-college-students Jim Lampley and Don Tollefson to report from the sidelines.<sup>56</sup> In 2001, Lampley publicly commented on his feelings towards the job, saying that though viewers have come to expect to see reporters on the field, the position is far from essential to a sports broadcast: “Sideline reporters should play little or no role; 99-percent of the story should be told from the booth.”<sup>57</sup> ABC sideline reporter Jack Arute seconded this statement: “The networks view sideline reporters as

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<sup>55</sup> Hardin, Marie. Personal interview.

<sup>56</sup> Craggs, Tommy. "Why Do We Have Sideline Reporters? The Original Sideline Reporter Says The Job Is "Just Nonsense"." *DeadSpin*. 2 July 2012. Web. 3 May 2015.

<sup>57</sup> Quindt, Fritz. “A Primer on Sideline Reporting.” *The Sporting News*. 2001.

dispensable. Like a kicker, I am the flake on my team.”<sup>58</sup> In 2012, females were 3.91 times more likely to be a competition-level reporter than a male.<sup>59</sup>

Critiques of female sideline reporters regularly focus on two main points: the attractiveness of a sports reporter and the quality of the content in their reports. A Google search “female sideline reporters” will provide links to articles listing the “hottest” and “sexiest” female sports reporters. Females have long been hired to sportscasting roles due in part to their appearance. Despite her athletic achievements, sports reporter Sarah Palfrey Cooke was often regarded as a “beautiful” Boston socialite, and was not critiqued positively for her sports commentary.<sup>60</sup> The role of females hired for their beauty was, primarily, to please the male-dominated audience, rather than provide a well-informed perspective. Phyllis George, for example, was hired as a sportscaster in the mid-1970s. Viewers only saw the former Miss Texas as a beauty and sex symbol, not as a reporter.<sup>61</sup> According to Schwartz, George was not hired for her knowledge at all; she did not participate in athletics during high school or college. Her duty was to add femininity and an aesthetic attractive element to the male-dominated broadcast. In 2014 Pam Oliver, following her replacement with Erin Andrews in the NFL sideline reporter position for FOX, spoke of her observations of

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<sup>58</sup>Molori, John. “When Done Right, Sideline Reporting Does Have Its Place.” (2001). *Eagle Tribune*. 4 Feb 2015.

<sup>59</sup>Roessner, Lori Amber. “Sideline by Gender: Examining the Representation of the Female Sideline Reporter.” (2006): 78. Web. 10 May 2015.

<sup>60</sup>King, Billie Jean (With Cynthia Starr). (1988). *We Have Come a Long Way*. New York: McGraw-Hill. Print.

<sup>61</sup>Schwartz, 1999.

current sideline reporters: "It's not difficult to notice that the new on-air people there are all young, blond and 'hot.'"<sup>62</sup>

In 2002, former CBS *60 Minutes* personality Andy Rooney made waves in the world of sports journalism with his commentary on the credibility of female sideline reporters: "The only thing that really bugs me about television's coverage is those damn women they have down on the sidelines who don't know what the hell they're talking about," said Rooney on MSG Network's *The Boomer Esiason Show* in 2002.<sup>63</sup>

A survey conducted by Dr. Marie Hardin and Stacie Shain in 2004 provided evidence that credibility was one of the key concerns held by audiences while viewing female sportscasters. The majority of respondents stated that though opportunities for women were better than ever at the time of the survey, female sports journalists have a tougher job than do men and that women in sports media are not taken as seriously by fans as are men doing the same jobs.<sup>64</sup>

Jim Willi, a researcher who has focused studies on public reactions and perceptions of female sports reporters, said that females are at an automatic disadvantage when they enter the field of sports broadcasting: "Most female sportscasters start with an 0-2 count on them just because men, for the most part, feel they just don't have the knowledge of the sports they want from their sportscaster."<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Oliver, Pam. "Game Change: Pam Oliver Breaks Her Silence on Her Career Shake-up." *Essence*. 3 Sept. 2014. Web. 10 May 2015.

<sup>63</sup> Gross, Andrew. "CBS' Rooney angers women with remarks." *USA Today* [Westchester, NY]. 9 Oct. 2002. Web. 6 May 2015.

<sup>64</sup> Hardin, Marie, and Stacie Shain. "Female Sports Journalists: Are We There Yet? 'No.'" *Newspaper Research Journal* 26.4 (2005): 35. Web. 8 Nov. 2014.

<sup>65</sup> Parker, D. (1998). A Sporting Chance. *Electronic Media*, 17(39), 26.

Robin Roberts publicly shared that in 1986 when she started a job as sports reporter at WSMV-TV in Nashville, she had not even made it on-air when a man called the station and said he did not like Roberts. He went on to say: “I don’t like any woman sportscaster. They don’t know what they’re talking about”<sup>66</sup>

In responses to a study conducted by Mary Lou Sheffer and Brad Schultz in 2007, a female news director commented on the pressure of expectations set on females in sports broadcasting: “Women must have an extremely strong knowledge of sports or they will be rejected by viewers. They are put to tougher standards by men who watch sports.”<sup>67</sup> In the same study, a male news director added: “Viewers as a whole hold women to a different standard than men when it comes to on-air positions. They [females] are sometimes perceived as having less sports knowledge than their male counterparts.”<sup>68</sup>

The questioning of knowledge and credibility often comes into play when people question female analysis or commentary. The thought is: “She never played in the league, so why should she be allowed to comment on the game?” An excellent example of the flaws in this thought process can be seen in the case of ESPN sportscaster and NBA play-by-play announcer Doris Burke.

Burke played college basketball at Providence College, where she was named the school's female athlete of the year and later inducted into its Hall of Fame. She has been calling basketball games for more than 24 years; women's college basketball since 1990, men's college basketball since 1996, the WNBA since 1997 and the NBA since

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<sup>66</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>67</sup> Sheffer, M., & Schultz, B. “Double Standards: Why Women Have Trouble Getting Jobs in Local Television.” Conference Papers – International Communication Association, (2007). Web. 16 May 2015.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid*

2000.<sup>69</sup> Unlike Burke, whose credibility is regularly questioned due to her gender, the following prominent male NBA play-by-play announcers never played a second of basketball at the college level: Marv Albert, Dick Stockton, Bob Costas, Mike Breen, Dan Shulman and Al Michaels.<sup>70</sup>

Female sideline reporters also have to face limitations set by the teams they report on, which can lead the public to believe that their reporting lacks solid content.

Sideline reporting trailblazer Jim Lampley confessed that athletes and coaches often do not want to break away from their competition-focused mentality to interact with sideline reporters, and because of this, the content reporters are able to report is limited: “You ask a questions that will be avoided or tossed aside. Exceptionally rare is the moment when the coach enlightens or says something of interest.”<sup>71</sup>

Unbeknownst to the majority of sports television viewers, major league teams give limits to sideline reporters on what they are allowed to publicly report without clearance from the given team’s public relations team. Three key rules established in the NFL Broadcast Fact Book, as relayed by an NFL spokeswoman to journalist Aaron Gordon:

1. "During game action, the Network sideline reporter may remain on the field, behind the broken yellow line. The Sideline reporter is not allowed to go into the bench area at any time."

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<sup>69</sup> Spain, Sarah. "Women as Sports Analysts? Yes, we can." *ESPNW*. ESPN, 8 Mar. 2013. Web. 14 Nov. 2014.

<sup>70</sup> Spain, Sarah. "Women as Sports Analysts? Yes, we can." *ESPNW*. ESPN, 8 Mar. 2013. Web. 14 Nov. 2014.

<sup>71</sup> Tierney, Mike. 2002. "Is It Time For Sideline Reporters to Go Away?" *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*. 2 Jan 2015.

2. "The sideline reporter may do live reports at any time during the game. The sideline reporter should be assisted by a designated Club PR representative in gathering pertinent information regarding such topics as equipment changes, weather-related issues, and unique game happenings. Accurate and timely injury information should be given directly to the Sideline Reporter from each team's on-field representative after clearance from the team's PR Director in the press box."

3. "The sideline reporter may not comment on or report conversations overheard from the bench area. The reporters shall be limited to what the reporter visually observes and not what he/she hears."<sup>72</sup>

Criticized by audiences for the content of their reports, sideline reporters are in reality very limited in what information they are allowed to provide during their brief moments on-air. If the rule set given to sideline reporters was made public knowledge, perhaps the perception of the female sideline reporter's talents would be altered.

Fellow journalists attribute a portion of the questioning of the sideline reporter's credibility to the amount of airtime they actually receive. In a Forbes article published in 2012, Anne Doyle, a former female on-air sports reporter, expresses her apprehensions for female sideline reporters from her own experiences as a reporter: "Despite their increasing numbers, even the most skilled, female sports broadcasters are usually limited to brief, sideline updates and interviews with coaches during games, while their innumerable male peers are on the air for hours . . . and hours."<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Gordon, Aaron. "The Plight of a Sideline Reporter." *Sports On Earth*. 17 July 2014. Web. 14 Mar. 2015.

<sup>73</sup> Doyle, Ann. "It's Time For Sports Broadcasting To Stop Relegating Women to Sideline Eye Candy." *Forbes*. 21 Jan. 2013. Web. 28 Mar. 2015.



## Academic Literature Review

History has honored the male figure as athletic and conducive to strong performance in athletic competition. Due to the prevalence of males in both participation and coverage of sports, males are considered to be fixture in sportscasting. Males today are much more likely to exceed in the sports world, both with participation and reporting. Meanwhile, public perception of female participation in professional sporting contests is limited to “largely stereotypical support roles, such as cheerleader, spectator, hostess for a Super Bowl party.”<sup>74</sup>

It is cultural male hegemony that is largely to blame for this mentality. Sociologist R.W. Connell developed the concept of hegemonic masculinity over 25 years ago.<sup>75</sup> According to Connell, “masculinities are configurations of practice that are accomplished in action and, therefore, can differ according to the gender relations in a particular social setting.”<sup>76</sup> Though some female characteristics are culturally accepted through Connell’s model, no femininities are considered hegemonic because “all forms of femininity in society are constructed in the context of the overall subordination of women to men.”<sup>77</sup> This theory translates into sports through a cultural acceptance of male dominance in the world of athletics that is perceived as natural. According to researcher Michael Messner, “the expansion of organized sport in the 19<sup>th</sup> century has served to bolster a faltering ideology of male dominance in the face of countervailing

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<sup>74</sup> Creedon, 1994.

<sup>75</sup> Connell, R.W. and James W. Messerschmidt. “Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept.” *Gender & Society* (2005). 19(6):829-859.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>77</sup> Connell, R.W. 1987. *Gender and Power: Society, the Person, and Sexual Politics*. Cambridge, Blackwell.

social developments, such as rising female labor force participation.”<sup>78</sup> Male dominance in sport in administration, participation and journalistic coverage therefore indicates that females are in turn naturally excluded from the activities that are, “culturally valued, publically supported, and economically profitable.”<sup>79</sup>

Symbolic annihilation is defined as “the under representation and/or lack of representation of a social group in the media based on their race, sex, sexual orientation or socioeconomic status.”<sup>80</sup> Females in on-camera sportscasting positions have experienced symbolical annihilation since the beginning stages of sports broadcasting. The media’s portrayal of female sports broadcasters has aided in the negative perception of females in the male-dominated role. Media has a large amount of power to sway public opinion, and through the continued production of content that places emphasis on the attractiveness of female reporters, the mentality towards females in the role will continue to perpetuate. The sports industry continuously annihilates women journalists by stereotyping and generalizing the entire group.<sup>81</sup> Because of this, the public is unconsciously trained to stereotype female sports reporters. This sexist perception is likely maintained through the majority of executives in the sports industry, which are predominantly males: In 2002, women accounted for only 14% of the top executive spots, and 13% of board members at 10 major entertainment companies, including Walt Disney Co. (ESPN), Viacom (Owner of CBS Sports), Time-Warner, and USA

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<sup>78</sup> Messner, Michael. *Power at Play: Sports and the Problem of Masculinity*. Print. Beacon Press. 1992.

<sup>79</sup> Theberge, Nancy. “The Construction of Gender in Sport: Women, Coaching, and the Naturalization of Difference.” *Social Problems*. 40: 301-13.

<sup>80</sup> Klein, Hugh, and Kenneth Shiffman. "Underrepresentation and Symbolic Annihilation of Socially Disenfranchised Groups (“Out Groups”) in Animated Cartoons." *Howard Journal of Communications* 20.1 (2009): 55-72. Print.

<sup>81</sup> Hardin & Shain. 2005.

Networks.<sup>82</sup> At 120 national broadcast and cable channels, men accounted for 84% of top executive positions.<sup>83</sup> A market controlled by male executives has the power to maintain a traditional hegemonic male society and simultaneously continue to socially annihilate females from the world of sports reporting.

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<sup>82</sup> Romano, A. "Dearth of women' in top spots." (2002) *Broadcasting and Cable*. 11 April 2015. Web.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid*

## **Interviews with Sports Journalists and Sports Media Professionals**

Following extensive background research and reviews of published interviews with females in sports media, this project included the collection of responses from in-depth, one-on-one interviews with a wide range of individuals involved in the world of sports media. The goal in collecting personal interviews from professionals currently working in the field of sports journalism was to gain first-hand accounts of the modern landscape. The majority of academic analysis of the female position in sports broadcasting was completed at the millennium or shortly following it. Perspectives of current reporters who followed the path forged by the original female pioneers in sports broadcasting rounds out a study that seeks to report both the past and present experiences of females in on-camera sports reporting roles. This form of qualitative research is not intended to broadly generalize the experiences of a few people as the experiences of all sports reporters, but rather to deepen understanding of how the world of sports broadcasting is becoming more accepting to the female figure through the sharing of stories and experiences.

### **Method**

Current sports reporters (male and female) were interviewed in order to further understanding of the modern state of the field of sports reporting. While the majority of the interviewees were broadcast reporters, one interview was conducted with a senior editor at *Sports Illustrated*, a sports magazine. The interview with a female editor was included to provide the insight of females who work in sports journalism, yet have gained success in a different realm of the field. Another interviewee was the current director of digital media at ESPN, Ronnie Forchheimer. Though not currently a

reporter, Forchheimer is directly involved with the hiring of all talent that is broadcast on ESPN's digital platforms and has a history in media production. Finally, the input of one of the nation's most accredited scholars on the topic of women in sports media, Dr. Marie Hardin, was included in the analysis.

### **Respondents**

Interviews were conducted with the following (listed alphabetically by last name, followed by their job title, then place of employment):

Trisha Blackmar, senior editor, *Sports Illustrated*

Abby Chin, Boston Celtics sideline reporter, Comcast SportsNet New England

Neil Everett, anchor, ESPN

Ronnie Forchheimer, director of digital media, ESPN

Marie Hardin, dean of College of Communications, Pennsylvania State University

Joey McMurry, Oregon football sideline reporter, Oregon IMG Network

Samantha Ponder, college football sideline reporter, ESPN

Jordan Whitley, sports anchor and reporter, FOX 5 San Diego

Samantha Yarock, broadcast reporter and producer, Portland Timbers

Due to geographical location, most interviews were completed over the phone or via email. Interviews that were conducted over the phone or in person lasted between 20-30 minutes. Respondents currently work for sports networks and publications, including: Comcast SportsNet New England, ESPN, Fox 5 San Diego, IMG Sports

Network, and *Sports Illustrated*. Each interviewee was contacted to interview following personal research into their accomplishments or due to a peer recommendation. Contact with each interviewee was done independently. Following the completion of the interviews, each interview was transcribed and organized by response.

The following questions served as a beginning point for interviews, and allowed for open-ended responses and a more candid conversation with interviewees. Some questions served as more of “icebreaker” questions in order to encourage the respondents to think openly about the question set. Questions with responses that provided adequate points comparison to academic literature were selected for analysis.

### **Female/Male Sportscaster Question Set**

1. Are there any female sportscasters that inspired/continue to inspire you?
2. Have you encountered any challenges due to your gender in your career?
3. What do you think female sportscasters can do to gain credibility in their role?
4. Do you feel pressure to maintain a certain appearance in your profession?
5. Are there any positions in a sports broadcast that you feel females are limited in participating in?
6. Are there any positions in sports broadcasting in which you feel that your gender gives you an advantage? [Only asked of female reporters]
7. How do you view the sideline reporter position, as a positive or negative for female sports reporters?

## Sports Media Professional Question Set

1. What role does the demand of a predominately male audience play in the hiring process of women for on-camera positions in sports reporting?
2. Do you view the sideline reporter position as a good opportunity for women, or is it a reminder that women are not as present in other positions of a sports broadcast (such as in the play-by-play or color analyst role)?
3. What roles do you feel that females are limited in participating in?
4. One of the main points that audiences question about female sports reporters is their knowledge of the games they are covering. What do you think female sportscasters can do to gain credibility in sports broadcasting?
5. Do you think there are positions in which female sportscasters have an advantage over their male counterparts?

## Questions

### 1. Have you encountered any challenges due to your gender in your career?

Two of the five female reporters declined to answer this question to protect their current position. Others were very candid about interactions in which their gender played a role in the outcome.

“The only specific incident that sticks out to me was at a local station in Alabama,” said Chin. “I had been a production assistant at ESPN for three years at that point and was hoping to one day make the jump to work on-air. I applied for a producer position, willing to do whatever it took to work my way up. During the interview the Sports Director asked me something to the effect of, "Do you see this as a career?" To me it felt as if he was asking whether I would take the job seriously, or if this was just a hobby before I get married and have babies. I really don't think he would ask a man that same question. And, needless to say, I didn't get the job.”

Blackmar said she usually does not face gender biases or discrimination in her position, but is sometimes not assigned certain stories due to her gender. She also said she sometimes feels the separation between peers in an office setting that is largely male. “Mostly it's just the feeling of being out of the loop when I'm the only woman.”

Ponder did not detail specific incidents in which she faced gender discrimination, but discussed her mentality in facing negative interactions that were directly related to her gender.

“Men and women are inherently different...big shocker,” Ponder said. “So there are always going to be natural challenges that occur when they work together. There have been harassment issues, sexism and overall just inappropriate commentary. I choose to ignore most of it. If you maintain your integrity, you'll develop a reputation for not putting up with sexual harassment/discrimination and it will inevitably subside. It's not fair, but neither is an attractive woman getting a TV job over a male with the same qualifications. Its just reality.”

### *Analysis*

Responses to Question One agreed with literature analyzing gender discrimination in sports journalism. Abby Chin's experience in Alabama, where her career path was questioned, supported data that states males in hiring positions often question female priorities during the hiring process. Trisha Blackmar's sentiments of “the feeling of being out of the loop” provide real-world context to the effects of a male-dominated sports industry. Samantha Ponder answered one of the overarching issues facing female sportscasters today: inappropriate behavior is present, yet accepted and ignored in the name of preservation of reputation.



## **2. What do you think female sportscasters can do to gain credibility in their role?**

All interviewees had similar responses to this question. The key to gaining credibility as a sports broadcaster is to be fully informed of the storylines both in the game and off of the field.

“The best way for people to gain credibility as sports reporters is to study the subject matter, prepare, and practice good journalism. That's the key to credibility, regardless of gender,” said Forchheimer.

“Distinguish yourself by having great questions. That’s why you stand out,” said Everett.

Ponder stated that essential knowledge on sporting events is something that should be taught to females at a young age.

“Teach your daughters the game,” said Ponder, mother of a nine-month old daughter, Scout. “I was blessed to have a dad who is a coach, so I grew up being able to spot different coverages, alignments and other things that you inherently know if you play the game. It’s hard to teach that level of comfort to an adult. It’s a language you learn as a child and it just becomes second nature. The more we teach our daughters the game at an early age, the more they won’t have to “prove themselves” as an adult.”

“I think it is wrong that people would question their credibility. A very common misconception that I hear is that every single person who reports on football must have played it at a level that they would be able to explain it better than a female. I would argue that is not true. There are a lot of male sportscasters who cover football who only played through high school, like I did, then were trained to be a journalist during

college. The general public needs to understand that if the question of credibility is one of the biggest issues, then I would argue that a lot of the men have the same issue.”

McMurry did note that while having previously played a sport you are covering is not vital to success as a reporter, knowledge of the game from the inside assist in the production of a well-rounded report.

“You get to know the workings of the game being in the locker room and being around guys in a setting off the field that is only available to men,” McMurry said.

The question of qualifications comes into play again when discussing networks’ decisions to place certain on-air talent with athletic backgrounds to analyze particular events.

“I want Christian Laettner to tell me about Duke basketball. I don’t want Kara Lawson to tell me about it,” said Everett. “And that’s not because I think Kara Lawson doesn’t know what she’s talking about because she’s super good at what she does, but I think Christian Laettner knows better. But I don’t want Christian Laettner telling me about Tennessee women’s basketball, because in that situation, Kara Lawson knows more.”

Everett stated that right now at ESPN, he feels that the company and its audiences are more accepting than ever. Aside from “wackos” who “feel the need to comment on everything,” Everett feels that public acceptance of female sportscasters has increased with a younger generation of viewers, and that discrimination towards female sportscasters is a mentality that is fading out.

“It might just be a case of older people dying,” said Everett on what it would take for gender discrimination in on-air sports talent to die out. “That’s not just women

in sports, that's intolerant views in general. You hope at some point that stops - but maybe that's Pollyanna on my part.”

### *Analysis*

Everett’s stance directly aligns with conclusions made by Mary Lou Sheffer and Brad Schultz following their analysis of female positions in television sports: “The data indicated that the strongest gender bias resides with older male news directors. Therefore, it is plausible to suggest that as this demographic retires or quits the business, this gender gap will continue to erode.”<sup>84</sup> As the presence of females continues to increase in the sports broadcasting market, their existence in the world of sports has the potential to become commonplace, and therefore more widely accepted.

As stated by Ponder, future generations of female sportscasters can improve their chances of public acceptance through expanding their knowledge of sports and sports culture. Learning a language at a young age increases efficiency with the said language as a person ages. Proper techniques as to how to communicate the central topics, rule sets, and general sports jargon should be similarly taught to females while they are young to encourage confidence in discussion, and therefore conviction in their journalistic coverage, of sports.

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<sup>84</sup> Sheffer, Mary Lou, and Schultz, Brad. “Double Standard: Why Women Have Trouble Getting Jobs in Local Television Sports.” *Journal of Sports Media*.

### **3. Do you feel pressure to maintain a certain appearance in your profession?**

For four female respondents, the answer was simple.

“Yes. No question. It often takes me two hours to get ready to go on-air, from hair to makeup to wardrobe,” said Chin. “On the other hand, it probably takes a man 30 minutes, at most.”

Yarock feels similar pressure on days when she knows she will be on camera.

“Days when I’m shooting, I have to look very put-together and professional. I’ve never been a ‘hair and makeup’ girl, so on the days I’m not shooting, I’m back to my no-makeup routine.”

For Whitley, there have been moments when her bosses critiqued her on-camera presence on an aesthetic level. But she recognizes these criticisms as part of the job.

“There were some challenges at Oregon where I felt some of the things that were required probably weren’t required for the guys” Whitley said. “In terms of things like you have to get your wardrobe approved, you have to get your hair done a certain way...but it is kind of part of it.”

Though Whitley says that these requirements have tapered in her new role in San Diego, she does still face regular commentary related to her appearance: “Even now, my boss will come up to me after a report and he won’t have any issues with what I said, but he’ll say something like ‘your necklace is too big, your hair needs to be more voluminous, you gotta do something with it...’”

29-year-old Ponder said that she does feel pressure to appear a certain way at her job, but she feels that the pressure is part of a larger societal issue.

“Our society puts so much pressure on women to look 25 forever. Every other commercial talks about “anti-aging”, as if we should be against aging. Our industry is saturated with women trying to hang on to their youth at any cost because there this notion that growing old as a woman is a negative thing. It’s absurd.”

Ponder also feels that the next generation of female sportscasters should not focus on their appearance as their most valuable asset, but rather their personality and intelligence.

“Teach them to dress like their beauty is just an addition to their knowledge and integrity... not the main thing.”

Everett addressed what he called the “Erin Andrews” effect. He explained that when the role of Erin Andrews on ESPN expanded to include college football coverage, the reporter became a household name. Due to the popularity of the tall, blonde, and attractive female reporter on the network, other networks followed suit in their hiring of sideline reporters.

“Clearly they hire women who are good looking to put on the sidelines” said Everett. “And anyone that says they didn’t is full of it. Hopefully we’re growing past that.”

While appearance does undoubtedly play a role in the hiring of on-air talent, Forchheimer provided insight to what large sports networks such as ESPN look for in on-air talent aside from physical appearance.

“Sports knowledge, reporting skills, ability to write, journalistic and editorial integrity, and charisma on camera,” said Forchheimer.

Everett agreed female sports reporters should not feel overwhelming pressure to be attractive. Strong reporting should be the priority.

“You don’t have to be blonde, you have to be good” Everett said. “That should be the standard.”

### *Analysis*

Interviewee responses to this question support the academic statements made about the maintenance of appearance being a large part of the job female broadcasters. Attractive appearance has long been associated with females in broadcasting, though today’s audiences claim to place more value on the quality and delivery of information. A 2014 survey of television audiences found that only 25% of female respondents and 28% of male respondents thought that female reporters should be attractive.<sup>85</sup> The value of female appearance could then be attributed to the academic theory that male hegemony still remains dominant in the American sports culture.

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<sup>85</sup> Mitra, Barbara, Mike Webb, and Claire Wolfe. "Audience responses to the physical appearance of television newsreaders ." *Journal of Audience and Reception Studies* 11.2 (2014): 13. Web. 10 Apr. 2015.

**4. Are there any positions in a sports broadcast that you feel females are limited in participating in?**

Question five drew two responses as to where in the sportscast there is a shortage of females.

One is in positions where females can voice their opinions on issues in the world of sports.

“I feel there is a serious shortage of women asked to give their opinion on sports issues,” Chin said. “I believe it would provide a different way of looking at things, bring different perspectives that have value that may often go over-looked.”

Ponder also voiced that she has noticed a lack of women in areas in which sportscasters can assert their opinions and provide analysis. She pointed out the lack of play-by-play analyst in the current sports media market.

“Play-by-play and analyst opinion roles are few and far between” Ponder said. “Some of that is due to the “good ol’ boys” club and some of that is due to a lack of qualifications”

Everett acknowledged the lack of females in the play-by-play role, and attributed the gender disparity to a societal mentality.

“Its a cultural thing that we’re sandpapering down and taking the rough edges off of as a society,” said Everett.

Following up this point, Everett stated that he is more accustomed to hearing a male conduct a play-by-play position. That being said, he would not be opposed hearing a female take over the role.

“I wouldn’t change the channel because a woman is doing play-by-play, but it’s different to hear a woman do it. Maybe it just sounds weird. Maybe you just have to hear it enough times to get over it and all of a sudden it doesn’t sound weird because you’ve heard it enough times.”

### *Analysis*

Key words and statements in the responses of the interviewees to this question reveal parallels between the real-world experience of sportscasters and academic theory. Abby Chin’s answer, stating that she feels there is a shortage of females in roles that contribute an opinion on sports, highlights one of the central points in the social theory of male hegemony: that males are more dominant in society, and therefore females occupy subordinate roles and are not entitled to the sharing of opinion in realms where masculinity is the governing force, such as sports. The same could be said about comments by Samantha Ponder and Neil Everett on the lack of females participating in play-by-play calling of sporting events. The hegemonic masculinity theory can once again be applied to this situation.



**5. How do you view the sideline reporter position, as a positive or negative for female sports reporters?**

The topic of sideline reporting brought varied responses from interviewees. While some made the argument that any position for a female in a sportscast should be considered positive, others stated that they felt like the sidelines reporting position is the most dispensable, and the fact that women are the overwhelming majority in the role should be noted.

“I absolutely see sideline-reporting positions as a positive,” Chin said. “Whatever it takes to get your foot in the door, woman or man. I believe the position has value if you do it right, bringing a perspective and inside look that you can't get any other way.”

Hardin stated that if a female's career goal is to report from the sidelines, then the position is fit. However it should not be ignored how easily interchangeable reporters can be in that role:

“The sideline reporter role can be a very good role for a woman if she aspires to that” Hardin said. “It's different enough from play-by-play or analyst that a woman might not see those positions as a "step up." On the other hand, the fact that women dominate that role (it's literally a "pink-collar sideline"), which it could be argued is the most "dispensable" and least important/visible of the on-air roles, should get our attention.”

Blackmar had negative, gender-neutral sentiments about the sideline reporter position: “I don't like the sideline broadcasters much at all- even the men who do it. I don't feel like it adds very much.”

Everett's response made the point that though reporting from the sidelines is often viewed as a worthless position, the role can provide excellent storytelling opportunities if reporters are properly prepared to engage with athletes and coaches.

"I don't think there is a job anymore thankless than being a sideline reporter," said Everett. Yet I think there are some people who are excellent at it. And it really comes down to, how prepared are you and how do you ask a question."

Everett further explained that the true definition of a sideline reporter is just what it sounds like: a position to report from the sidelines and offer storylines that broadcasters in the media booth are not able to complete. Game analysis should not play a large part of the role.

"Nobody wants to hear what you thought of the first half. I hate that when reporters decide to tell everyone what they thought of the game," said Everett. "The coach is right there, that's who viewers want to hear from."

As a male sideline reporter for the University of Oregon football team, McMurry noted that the only male sideline reporters that he interacted with during the 2014-15 football season were radio broadcasters. The only exception was when ESPN sent veteran reporter Tom Rinaldi to work as the designated sideline reporter for the Oregon Ducks at the 2015 Rose Bowl.

"Has it become the norm and almost an expectation to see females on the sideline; I would say yes," McMurry said. "Is that necessarily a bad thing...I am not sure."

### *Analysis*

In September of 2013, Sports Illustrated held a roundtable discussion that gave attention to the role of sideline reporters, specifically in NFL games. The final conclusion reached by the group was that sideline reporters should have an even smaller role in an NFL broadcast and provide little more than injury reports.<sup>86</sup> The unfortunate outcome to the minimized role of a sideline reporter would be a minimal female role in a sportscast. Reeta Hubbard, the founder and creator of TheNFLChick.com, added her perspective on the role of the sideline reporter to panel: “I’ve always viewed sideline reporting as one of the introductory platforms to have a voice in sports broadcasting.”<sup>87</sup>

There are mixed reviews, both from the professional and audience standpoints, as to if the sideline reporter role is truly valuable. Based on the heavy criticism and lack of a common stance, will the role of a sideline reporter cease to exist, as it is commonly known? Or will a societal adaptation of perspective and movement away from a mentality that supports male hegemony in sports broadcasting?

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<sup>86</sup> Gordon, Aaron. 2015.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid*

## **Potential Future Research and Limitations**

There are many elements of both sportscasting and the female experience that were identified as potential points for future research following the completion of this thesis. One major element that was not touched upon due to the research focus was the variance in experience due to race. Exploring the experiences of sportscasters who are a double minority, a female and a racial minority, would likely bring forth information that could provide additional background to the history of females in on-air sportscasting roles.

Though this thesis focuses on the challenges and advancement of female sports broadcasters in on-air positions, there are other jobs in the world of sports in which females have had to push for desegregation. Positions to investigate in a similar manner as that conducted in this thesis could be the roles of athletic administrators, coaching staff, radio broadcasters, and print journalists. Other new areas of sports journalism that could also provide interesting data are reporters on digital online sites and those on social media outlets; though data about these platforms could be minimally available due to their young age.

Limitations on this project were minimal. Through networking and research for contact information, the journalists and professionals selected for interviews were not difficult to get in contact with. After completing the interviews for this project, a peer did mention that he knew a female sideline reporter who would have been a good person to get in contact with to answer research questions. Because of this, I realized that inquiring with even more peers and professors would have likely benefitted the question-and-answer component in terms of selected interviewees.

## Conclusions

Through analysis of historical data, academic literature, and responses to carefully formulated research questions, this thesis sought to identify the realities of the modern female sportscaster.

What has been confirmed through the collection of one-on-one interviews is that degrading commentary and sexist interactions with peers still occur with female sportscasters. Generally, any comments or “disadvantages” are related to maintenance of appearance. The male sportscasters interviewed collectively agree that women are more prevalent on the sidelines of sporting events compared to other roles in a sports broadcasting. They also agree that the “glass ceiling” for women in terms of positions in sportscasting has been broken, and that as long as the public is willing to accept both seeing and hearing a woman as a play-by-play analyst or color commentator, then women will make their way into that position.

In terms of gaining credibility, all interviewees agreed on one central point: do your homework and be prepared for your assignment, and you can be considered credible. Interestingly, this directly contradicts survey responses, which report that the public automatically questions the credibility of a female sports reporter due to her gender.<sup>88</sup> The concept of male hegemony mirrors the recorded sentiments in the survey, and provides an explanation for the seemingly natural sentiments towards female sports reporters. According to Connell’s hegemonic masculinity theory, because “real” men

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<sup>88</sup> Sheffer & Schultz, 2007.

are active in all aspects of sport, it is the natural result that females should not be present in the sports realm.<sup>89</sup>

Though academic literature states that due to the presence of male hegemony and symbolic annihilation in sports culture females should have negative experiences reporting sports, the female on-camera sports reporters who participated in the interview component of this project did not agree. Generally speaking, the majority of the respondents' careers have been pleasant, aside from a small amount of negative interactions.

Since the rise in the presence of female sportscasters in the 1970s, females have slowly continued to gain respect in the field of sports media. Modern female sportscasters face fewer challenges and limitations than those who paved the way to today, but are still measurably a minority. From one-on-one interviews with current journalists and professionals, it can be observed that the current sports market has evolved to include and tolerate the female presence. The market still does present challenges to females, however, mainly through the sport television audiences' emphasis on the value of being physically attractive, discriminatory interactions with peers, and deeply enrooted societal values that encourage male dominance in all aspects of sport.

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<sup>89</sup> Bryson, Lois. "Sport and the Maintenance of Masculine Hegemony." *Women's Studies International Forum*. (1987). 10: 349-360.

## Glossary

**Anchor:** the main host or presenter on a television program; when two or more anchors host together, the position is then called a 'co'-anchor.

**Analyst:** examines and interprets the event in action, news, or another prevalent issue

**Clubhouse (Baseball):** A room where players gather before and after the game. Used for social purposes, and often for interactions with the press.

**Color commentator:** Member of a sports broadcast team that assists the play-by-play announcer. Regularly fills in time with anecdotes when play has stopped to supplement game coverage.

**Media scrum:** Impromptu press conference.

**Play-by-play announcer:** Member of a sports broadcast team that gives a running account of action in a sporting event as it takes place.

**Sideline reporter:** Journalist that assists the sports broadcast team by providing insight from the sidelines of a game and posing questions to coaches and athletes.

**Sportscast:** A radio or television program covering sports; either live coverage of an event or a program covering sports news.

**Sportscaster:** A broadcaster covering a sporting event or discussing sports culture. Used interchangeably with sports reporter and sports broadcaster when referring to an on-camera sports reporting role.

**Studio Host:** An anchor typically limited to the television studio space. While studio hosts often sit at a desk to complete a broadcast, it is also common to see studio hosts moving around a set for an interactive feel to a broadcast.

**Television broadcast:** The transmission of a signal to an audience simultaneously on the same networks channel.



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