

ABSTRACT

No Women in the Press Box: A Case Study to Compare the Experience of Women in Print Sports Journalism from the 1980s and 2000s

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This case study examines women sports writers in the 1980s and 2000s. The purpose of the study was to describe the perceptions of women sports writers' in relationship to their professional and personal experiences in sports journalism, and how the field has changed in terms of gender relations, sexual harassment, and gender discrimination. Participants agreed that men and women are equal in terms of job duties, and they do not experience discrimination and harassment in the field. There is still progress to be made in terms of the number of women in sports journalism.

No Women in the Press Box: A Case Study to Compare the Experience of Women in
Print Sports Journalism from the 1980s and 2000s

by

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CHAPTER ONE

Leading Off

Introduction

A national controversy erupted in September 2010 when sports reporter Ines Sainz of TV Azteca in Mexico was harassed by members of the New York Jets football team during postgame interviews in the locker room. The incident sparked a nationwide debate about the presence of women in the male hegemonic world of sports media. Women, who have always been present in the sports department of newspapers, entered the field in larger numbers than ever before until the late 1970s and early 1980s. Once known as a “boy's club” and the “toy department of the newsroom,” (Brennan, 2006), some argue that women have broken down those barriers in sports journalism and are treated as equals. But just as sports journalists have struggled to legitimize their field, females have struggled to define their role within it (Miloch, Smucker, & Whisenant, 2005).

This case study examines the experiences of two print journalists, Christine Brennan and Lynne Snierston, who began their careers in the 1980s, and compares and contrasts it with experiences of two emerging sports writers, Sally Sexton and Lindsey McKissick. The goal of the case study is to examine whether those who pioneered women in the role of a sports journalist perceive equality with men in the newsroom. It is also to examine challenges they faced during the early years of their career, and to examine how their roles changed. The research will build upon previous literature that

tends to be quantitative in nature. It is important to get in-depth responses to truly understand where women started in the field and how much progress and change has occurred since that time.

Sainz, who refers to herself as the “hottest sports reporter in Mexico,” (Shapiro, September 15, 2010) was dressed in a black mini-dress with a plunging neckline and matching black stiletto high heels – “while insisting she felt very uncomfortable when Jets players allegedly made salacious comments about her in their locker room after practice” (MSN/Fox Sports, September 14, 2010). According to the Fox Sports report, she said one Jet shouted to her, “I want to play with a Mexican,” and, “Eres muy guapa,” which means “you are very beautiful” in Spanish.

Earlier during practice, Jets head coach Rex Ryan and a defensive coach, Dennis Thurman, purposely overthrew passes to players on the field so the footballs would land near Sainz, who on that day was wearing tight blue jeans and a white blouse. The coaches, players and staff were investigated and reprimanded by the NFL. Team owner Woody Johnson called Sainz to apologize (MSN/Fox Sports).

“I didn’t want any part of it,” Sainz said at the New Meadowlands Stadium before the Jets’ heartbreaking 10-9 season-opening loss to the Baltimore Ravens. “I heard the noise. I knew they were talking about me. I was just focusing on my job and hoping that [quarterback] Mark Sanchez was coming soon so I could interview him” (MSN/Fox Sports).

Many critics were hesitant to side with Sainz, although this was not the first time a woman in the locker room caused a controversy. Previous behaviors, manner of dress and internet presence were called into question in regard to her credibility as a reporter. For example, she was photographed during Super Bowl XLIII media day using a tape measure to ascertain the size of several players’ biceps (Shapiro, September 15, 2010).

Because Sainz clearly was playing up her sexuality for fans and players, it's difficult to make a comparison to other cases of harassment, like that of Boston Herald reporter Lisa Olson, and other serious sports reporters. Some critics argued that Sainz' lack of professionalism set women back in sports journalism, while others blamed the athletes for their inappropriate behavior. Most of the literature shows that while women believe significant progress has been made in the field, reporters still face discrimination and frustration with their "second-class" status in the newsroom (Hardin & Shain, 2006).

"Succeeding in this business as a woman is so empowering if you can hold your own in a newsroom or locker room full of testosterone-laden men who are skeptical of a female. I have always felt that the jury is still out on women in sports until they can talk the talk," wrote former local and national TV sports producer Pamela Modarelli Hegner in an article about how women can thrive in the industry (Hegner, 2010). The article also said appropriate work attire and a professional demeanor is key in gaining and maintaining credibility as a reporter.

A study by Hardin and Shain (2005) found that 75% of their participants strongly agreed or agreed that opportunities for women in sports media careers are better than ever. However, female sports journalists, especially younger ones, are "more inclined to resent women they consider as playing up their sexuality in professional sports journalism – women who weren't 'real' journalists but were instead 'pretty faces'" (Hardin & Shain, 2006, p. 330). The Sainz scandal ignited a debate about women's role in sports media, and if women with pretty faces are to be taken seriously as sports journalists (Shapiro, September 15, 2010).

A huge step forward in the fight for equal access to the locker room came during the World Series in 1977, when Sports Illustrated writer Melissa Ludtke was barred from the New York Yankees locker room and baseball commissioner Bowie Kuhn refused to overrule Yankee management (Creedon, 1994). Ludtke and Time, Inc., parent company of Sports Illustrated, filed a federal sexual discrimination suit against the Major League Baseball commissioner's office, the New York Yankees, the president of the American League, the mayor and other New York City officials (as owners of the stadium) ("Woman Sportswriter," 1978; cited in Creedon).

The suit was based on the notion that Ludtke could not perform her job duties without access to the players for postgame interviews and that exclusion was based on her gender, "which violated her rights of equal protection and due process under the 14th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution" (Creedon, 1994, p. 88). Time, Inc. argued that if one reporter was not given the same opportunity as another reporter to ascertain information, that reporter was being denied equal access.

The case was assigned to New York Federal District Court Judge Constance Baker Motley, the only female judge in the southern district of New York at the time ("Woman Sportswriter," 1978; cited in Creedon, 1994). She ruled that all reporters, regardless of gender, should have equal access to athletes and the locker room (Boutilier & SanGiovanni, 1983; cited in Creedon, 1994, p. 88). Judge Motley's rule was interpreted as specific to the Yankees, not binding to other baseball teams or professional sports; "in practice, it only opened the door to one locker room ... it was only open when the Yankees played in New York" (Creedon, 1994, p. 88-89). However, locker rooms

finally included women and all professional sports mandated equal access. The Ludtke case set the precedent for future gender bias cases in sports journalism (Fuller, 1992).

Another highly-publicized incident of sexual harassment occurred in the New England Patriots locker room in 1990. Twenty-six year-old Boston Herald reporter asked defensive back Maurice Hurst for an interview in the media room. Olson said Hurst insisted that she go to him in the locker room because he was icing his ailing leg. As she interviewed him, other players allegedly ran by, flashing her and taunting her, while others stood by and encouraged them (Stofer et al., 2010, p. 225). She was subjected to an onslaught of verbal abuse from multiple players, including a naked Zeke Mowatt, who stood inches away from her, making lewd suggestions (Fuller, 1992). Other players reportedly lined up behind him, naked and gesturing. Olson was accused of sheer voyeurism rather than professionalism. “She described her reaction to the experience as feeling violated, a victim of “nothing less than mind rape”” (Fuller, 1992).

Initially, Olson and her management sought a private solution against the team, similar to the manner in which Mary Garber and her editor solved her press box access issue in the 1940s. However, the *Herald's* rival, *The Boston Globe*, chose to run the story about Olson's treatment. Olson soon became the center of a media firestorm (Creedon, 1994).

Some sports reporters, women's groups, and others rushed to defend her, but she reached her limit of tolerance after being verbally attacked by Patriots fans. After receiving death threats, the abuse had escalated to the point that she moved to Sydney, Australia, to escape the harassment (Stofer, Schaffer, & Rosenthal, 2010). At that time,

National Football League locker rooms had been fully integrated for five years (Brennan, 2006).

In the '90s, collegiate and professional sports implemented the use of interview rooms to conduct post-game interviews. The rooms were utilized as a way to combat scenarios where harassment and discrimination would arise, and also to make athletes and journalists more comfortable. This would allow players to shower and dress before talking to the media (M. Parrish, personal communication, March 4, 2011). Although the National Collegiate Athletic Association allows universities to decide where interviews are held -- either locker room or interview room -- most large universities opt for the latter. The NCAA mandates a 10-MINUTE "cooling off" period after the game before athletes speak to reporters to get emotions under control (NCAA, 2010).

Scholars of sport and culture believe female entrance into the masculine domain of sport challenges the hegemonic masculinity that is often associated with sport as a cultural institution (Miloch et al., 2005). In the mid-90's, about 10,000 sports reporters worked in print and broadcast journalism; about 250 to 300 of them were women (Stofer et al.). By 2005, that number had grown to about 500 women (Stofer et al.). The locker room proves to be a place, time and again, of divisiveness between male and female sports journalists.

Journalism as an occupation is a skewed profession, that is, most journalists are White men (Claringbould, Knoppers, & Elling, 2004). Both male and female sports reporters endured hazing upon entering the field, especially during the 1970s and '80s. The difference was, it didn't take as long for men to prove themselves, and once they did, they were a lifetime member of the "good ol' boys" club (M. Parrish, personal

communication, March 4, 2011). Women endured the same troubles as men, with the addition of sexual harassment and discrimination, thus making their barriers to entry much higher.

A 2005 survey by researchers Hardin and Shain investigated women in sports media as they perceive their everyday work experiences and factors that discourage them from staying in sports media careers. The researchers used 144 surveys to produce their results. The majority of respondents worked “in print media as either reporters (40%), copy editors (17%), assigning editors (9%), or designers (2%)” (2005, p. 809). The average age was between thirty-one and forty years old, and the majority had been in the field more than ten years (61%) (2005, p. 809).

The researchers found the longer participants worked in the field, the more likely they were to report verbal abuse. Seventy-two percent reported that they've considered leaving their career, all for assorted reasons. Eighty-five percent of women surveyed in the study believed that sexual discrimination is still a problem, and 87 % believed females have a tougher job than males in sports media (Hardin & Shain, 2005). The researchers concluded that respondents “accept discrimination and harassment as something they must endure to go about their job duties” (Hardin & Shain, 2005, p. 814).

Miloch et al. (2005) found that age and experience appeared to have an influence on perceptions regarding opportunities to enter and advance in the field. Younger journalists and those newer to the field reported fewer instances of discrimination. Furthermore, all subjects said they saw no disadvantages related to gender in relation to athletes or coaches (Hardin & Shain, 2005).

In the 2005 study, Hardin and Shain found that 73% of their participants were satisfied with their current jobs, but more than half of the respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed that they had never felt discrimination in job duties or at the workplace.

Understanding the perceived role of women in sports journalism is essential to assessing whether they have gained equality, and why or why not. Women should not be discouraged from entering the field because they feel like they won't be taken seriously or that they'll always be considered second-rate to men (Hardin & Shain, 2006). The purpose of this study is to investigate the following questions:

1. How do female sports journalists describe their experiences as sports journalists in the 1980s compared to the 2000s?
2. How do participants describe instances of harassment and discrimination? Does it occur less frequently now than it did in the 1980s?
3. How do participants describe their relationships, as females, with male colleagues, bosses, and sources?
4. How do sports writers describe the changes in the field during the past 30 years?
Do women sports writers feel that equality with men has been achieved in the field, and what were the factors that led to these changes?

CHAPTER TWO

Stealing Second

Pioneers: History of Women in Sports Journalism

While women have been sports writers since the advent of sports sections of newspapers in the 1800s, the career path did not gain popularity as an option until the late 1970s and early '80s, which coincided with the national feminist movement in the United States (Creedon, 1994). Once a predominately male domain, some argue that women have broken down those barriers in sports journalism and are treated as equals.

Researchers Hardin and Shain (2005) found that 75% of their participants strongly agreed or agreed that opportunities for women in sports media careers are better than ever.

Theoretical Framework: Boys vs. Girls

Liberal feminist theory provides the theoretical framework for this research. Feminist theory is a dynamic set of theories that analyze gender as a category of experience within society (Birrell, 2000). Liberal feminism, based on the humanist ontological notion that women and men are more alike than different, asserts that women should take their place next to men in societal institutions (Hardin & Shain, 2005; Birrell, 2000). Its main purpose is to theorize about gender relations within a patriarchal society as they emerge through sport, and it advocates changing the dynamics of gender in sport (Birrell, 2000).

Liberal feminism sees the root of women's oppression as the lack of equal civil rights and educational opportunities (Boutilier & SanGiovanni, 1981). The theory

postulates that when women are given equal opportunities, they will actualize their potential and should be rewarded for their achievements. Boutilier and SanGiovanni also believe that “elimination of discrimination based on gender can be accomplished by reform within the structure of American society; they believe that reform can be achieved by the extension of political, legal, and educational opportunities for women” (p. 99). The theories attempt to examine experiences not on a purely personal level, but as part of a “greater pattern of oppression experienced to some extent by all those who share the same life situation” (Birrell, 2000, p. 62). She also posits that despite inherent similarities, men and women will live different lives with different experiences, different opportunities and expectations, because society puts a barrier that restricts equal participation (p. 64).

Gender values also are at the core of the media system, which includes broadcast and print news (Creedon, 1994). The gender and skin color of the person bringing the news shapes our values, which traditionally has been a white male. Americans view the world through the lens of patriarchy and male domination. Women who challenge this norm are seen as threats. Because the media form a powerful institution that not only reflects, but also shapes perceptions and behaviors, its treatment of women is important to the larger struggle for advancement (Coakley & Dunning, 2000). The myth of female passivity and frailty is manifested in barriers to women’s participation in traditionally male activities, i.e., sports, and perhaps most crucially in traditionally male occupations, i.e., sports reporters (Coakley & Dunning, 2000).

According to Gill (2001), the term “feminist” carries many meaning that not all scholars accept. It typically emphasizes subjective interpretations and rejects the illusion

of objective reality. Gill asserts that the best working definition comes from bell hook's book, *Feminism Theory: From Margin to Center*, which states that "feminism is a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression" (hooks, 1984, p. viii; cited in Gill, 2001, p. 364). The definition is focused on action to end oppression. Men have power in a sexist system, but also are restricted by the societal barriers in place and can be a part of the movement (Gill, 2001).

Gender relations scholars acknowledge the pervasive, dynamic role of gender in all our interactions and behaviors (Gill, 2001). "Biological sex is related to gender, but biology does not explain gendered sport" (p. 367). All meanings, expectations, social roles, standards of appropriate behavior, beauty, status, and power are constructed in the culture of sport, according to Gill. She also said that gender is such a pervasive influence in society that it is impossible to pinpoint. Sport is no exception, but the sport world has unique characteristics (Gill, 2001).

In the realm of sports culture, the ongoing competition among teams and athletes serves as a mechanism for constructing, validating and commemorating manliness. Sport as a cultural institution nurtures the masculine self. It is a dominant culture in the U.S. where men and women are marginalized and objectified (Grubb & Billot, 2008). Feminist and cultural studies perspectives call for consideration of gender within the wider context of diversity. Sport is not only male, but it is white, young, middle-class, and heterosexual (Gill, 2001).

It is important to understand why women started becoming sports journalists. Some argue that one event that made sports journalism a viable career option was the passage of the Patsy T. Mink Equal Opportunity in Education Act, more commonly

known as Title IX, in 1972. The act states that “no person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving federal financial assistance” (Brennan, 2006; TitleIX.info.com, 2010). Liberal feminists assume that increased media visibility leads to greater power and access for women (Hardin & Shain, 2006). The theory was that if women were going to play sports, women also would and should be able to cover sports.

“Just as sports journalists have struggled to legitimize their field, females have struggled to define their role within it” (Miloch, Smucker, & Whisenant, 2005, p. 220).

Historical Background

Women have been covering men’s and women’s sports almost since sports reporting became a regular feature of newspapers. However, women’s involvement has not been well-documented because research on women in the history of journalism is relatively new, with most of the work completed in the past 35 to 40 years, and sports journalism as a scholarly field was not taken seriously due to the “toy department” stigma (Creedon, 1994).

Mary Garber was one of the first to challenge the rule prohibiting women in the press box in 1946 at a Duke University football game (Creedon, 1994; Crothers, 2000). Garber took the job as a sports writer at what is now the *Winston-Salem Journal* when the previous reporter enlisted in the Navy and “there wasn’t a man to take his place” (Crothers, 2000). During that time, the press box was off-limits to women. “Once, I was sent to cover a football game at Duke, but they stuck me in the wives’ box,” Garber

recalls. “All through the game the wives blabbed and the kids screamed, and I thought I would lose my mind” (Crothers, 2000).

She was one of the first women assigned college football and basketball beats, and she often was stereotyped for her gender. But she was willing to endure the discrimination because she loved her job (Crothers, 2000). She went on to cover prominent sports figures of the day, but is perhaps best known for her desire to cover overlooked athletes, many African Americans, during a time when it was not popular to do so.

Garber shed her underdog status in the late 1970s when she was elected president of the ACC Sportswriters Association, which had denied her membership in the '50s. “I appreciate the honor,” she said at the podium. “More than anything else, it tells me that I am accepted” (Crothers, 2000).

“The road to acceptance for women is lined with the men declaring, “We don’t want you here.” When women respond, “Too bad, I’m here,” then the tests of manhood begin” (Fornoff, 1993, p. xvi-xvii). Michele Kaufman, a reporter for the *Detroit Free Press*, had to tolerate a dancing football player who gyrated naked behind her back while she conducted interviews. Rachel Shuster of *USA Today* recalls a Green Bay Packer “vigorously fondling himself” (Fornoff, 1993, p. xvii).

Sacramento Bee reporter Susan Fornoff received a rat in a box in 1986 from Oakland A’s player Dave Kingman. “His idea, he said, of a hilariously clever practical joke – for a woman sportswriter who covered his team, the Oakland A’s. He didn’t want that woman in the clubhouse, didn’t think any women belonged where players might be undressing” (Fornoff, 1993, p. 1). Although Fornoff shrugged it off with humor, she still refers to herself as “the rat lady” (susanfornoff.com, 2010).

Fornoff wrote for the *Baltimore News American* after college. Three years later, she joined the original staff at *USA Today*, serving on the sports copy desk and then covering soccer and general assignment sports and sports features until 1985. From there, she worked at the *Bee*, covering the Oakland A's until 1992. She held various positions at the *San Francisco Chronicle* for the next 15 years, some sports-related, some not (susanfornoff.com, 2010). Fornoff also co-founded the Association for Women in Sports Media in 1987 (Gross, 1988).

In her 1993 book, *Lady in the Locker Room*, which chronicled her experience as a sports writer, Fornoff wrote, “When the initiation period came to an end in 1987 – after *eight* years in the business – I found the biggest surprise of all awaiting me: We *could* get it right! We could do our work in spite of the gender gap” (p. xvii). Fornoff recalled having to wait outside of locker rooms in the late 1970s and early 1980s with other female sports writers, like Lesley Visser of *The Boston Globe*, Betty Cuniberti of *The Washington Post*, Robin Herman of *The New York Times*, Jane Gross of *Newsday*, and many others (Fornoff, 1993, p. 28).

In the 1970s, access battles broke out in all major sports. By 1976, both the National Hockey League and the National Basketball Association mandated equal access to their locker rooms. However, the National Football League did not allow women into their locker rooms in 1985, “when it finally began to hear the word “lawsuit” from some sports editors” (Fornoff, p. 28). The American League of Major League Baseball complied with the 1977 ruling in Melissa Ludtke and *Sports Illustrated*’s lawsuit against the New York Yankees. The National League set did not their own policies until 1984. “It took the launching of a national newspaper, *USA Today*, to force the issue in the NFL,

and probably only a publication with as wide a scope would ever dare to call the NCAA on the carpet” (Fornoff, 1993, p. 30).

Description of Field and Experience

A study by Hardin and Shain (2006) examined factors that discouraged or drove women out of their careers and their attitudes toward women's sports coverage. They assert that women still face a patriarchal environment that discourages them from pursuing long-term tenures (cited in Schell & Rodriguez, 2000). They believe the most problematic assumption of the feminist theory “is that women who work in media institutions will become immune to the hegemonic, ‘commonsense’ gender relations that permeate and govern media environments” (Hardin & Shain, 2006, p. 323). Cultural hegemony has been used to explain power relations and dominant ideology in cultural institutions, including sport and media (Hardin & Shain, 2006). Hegemony is defined as a form of control based on persuasion, not coercion, and is the result of people’s responses to values that support social relationships and power structures (Hargreaves, 1994; cited in Hardin & Shain, 2006).

In another study, Hardin and Shain (2005) used nominal and ordinal level data, such as age, education level, work experience, and satisfaction in the work place and with job duties, to obtain their results. They ended up with 144 usable surveys. They found that 73% of participants agreed or strongly agreed that they were satisfied with their current job (2005, p. 809). They also found a significant relationship between the industry experience of respondents and agreement with statements about discrimination in the workplace and while performing their job duties (2005, p. 809). Seventy-three

percent agreed or strongly agreed with the statement “I am satisfied with my current job” (p. 809).

A study by Miloch, Pederson, Smucker, and Whisenet (2005) aimed to provide an analysis of the current state of women journalists within the sports department at U.S. newspapers. They surveyed 78 women, all who were members of AWSM. Demographics, job status, rationale for entering the field, and advice for younger women following in their footsteps were analyzed and compiled.

Miloch et al. found the majority of women have faced discrimination in some form while working in sports media, but also believe improvements have been made toward equality with men (p. 219). They indicated facing discrimination from athletes and coaches, and have experienced limited access at times. However, younger women indicated fewer instances of discrimination than their older and more experienced counterparts (p. 228).

Participants reported they typically were satisfied with the assignments they were given, but that they were assigned to cover females more than their male counterparts. Some responses showed dissatisfaction with their positions, specifically sports editors, who reported they were not as happy with their assignments as writers were with theirs (p. 226). Participants also believed improvements had been made in the field, but that the large majority of women still faced discrimination (p. 228). Respondents noted that “talent counters most discrimination,” and that “you advance if you're good, not if you're a woman” (p. 228).

Gender Relations

The women interviewed in Hardin and Shain's (2006) study articulated several tensions in balancing their conflicting identities as women and as professional journalists. Researchers sought to understand the journalists' roles and values, how they assess their status in their profession, how they judge their value and contribution to sports journalism, and how they see their loyalties and responsibilities in relation to women's sports (Hardin & Shain, 2006).

Most participants said their status in the field improved during the past ten years because of the efforts of news organizations during that time to diversify (p. 329). Participants almost unanimously expressed frustration with their consistent "second-class" status in the newsroom. They spoke of tokenism, the failure to be taken seriously and failure to be promoted. Also, almost all participants expressed frustration at the burden of chasing male-defined standards, and feeling the need to "prove" themselves to gain respect from colleagues and readers (p. 329).

In Hardin and Shain's research, younger participants were more likely to resent women they believed to be playing up their sexuality in the profession – "women who weren't "real" journalists but were instead "pretty faces" (p. 330). Others saw "bimbos" as giving other reporters a bad name by flirting with male colleagues or athletes while not having adequate knowledge about sports.

Journalists under the age of 40 tended to express concern about the ways their gender limited opportunity, including being pigeonholed into covering women's sports. The discourse of the participants showed they struggled to reconcile identities of being a woman and of being a sports journalist (Hardin & Shain, 2006, p. 334).

“The challenges these females face could be due in large part to hegemonic masculinity, which theorizes that males, in order to maintain a sense of dominance in sports, exert their authority over females” (Miloch et al., 2005, p. 229).

Discrimination and Harassment

Several women in Hardin and Shain’s study mentioned locker room incidents that took place earlier in their careers. Many downplayed potentially offensive behavior as “boys being boys” (2006, p.332).

Sixty-five percent of women said their decision to enter print media was based on their love for sports and writing (p. 227). Their advice for younger women wanting to enter the field was to “know your stuff,” (22%), work hard (22%), be strong-willed (16%), versatile (9%), and to find a mentor (7%) (p. 228).

Similar to Miloch et al.’s study, Hardin and Shain (2005) also surveyed members of AWSM to explore factors that discourage them or drive them out of their careers, and their values in relationship to women’s sports coverage (p. 805). They framed their study using the “liberal feminists assert that more women working in sports media would lead to better coverage of female sports” (p. 804). They said women still face a patriarchal environment that discourages them from pursuing long-term tenure.

Researchers found a significant relationship between the respondents’ industry experience and agreement with statements about discrimination in the workplace and while performing their job duties. The longer subjects worked in the field, the more likely they were to report verbal abuse (p. 810). Seventy-two percent of participants said at one point or another, they’ve considered leaving their career because of factors like long hours, lack of advancement, limited opportunities, and low pay (p. 810). They saw

no disadvantages related to gender in relation to working with athletes and coaches as sources.

Thirteen percent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the notion that their gender had “pigeonholed” them into coverage of women’s sports (p. 812).

However, three-quarters of participants agreed or strongly agreed “opportunities for women in sports media are better than ever” (p. 812). The vast majority, 85%, believed sexual discrimination still was a problem in their field. Eighty-seven percent believe they have a tougher job than males (p. 812).

However, respondents were somewhat divided on the idea that more women in sports media would consequently bring more exposure to women’s sports. Fifty-eight percent disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement “If more women worked in sports media, women’s sports would get more coverage” (p. 813).

Hardin and Shain’s findings indicate that although some women still face serious obstacles to advancement and tenure in the field, many of them find their work satisfying enough to offset them. They seemed to accept harassment and discrimination as something they had to endure to go about their daily job duties. The two most prominent reasons for women leaving sports media careers seem to be the lack of advancement in their career and negative consequences on their lives outside work (p. 815).

Another study by Hardin and Shain (2005) found that while female sports journalists had made their way onto sports desks and into locker rooms, some say they still hadn’t gained acceptance. Their study sought to understand why women stayed in the profession if those sentiments were true. They said although the workplace had been desegregated, it has not been integrated (Hardin & Shain, 2005, p. 24).

They found that many women characterized their choices to practice sports journalism as gratifying and rewarding (p. 27). They expressed a desire to encourage other women to make the same career choices because of the positive feelings they associated with it. Respondents also “expressed the belief that interpersonal support and solidarity with other women in the industry were important, and they expressed a sense of duty when describing their role in supporting younger women” (p. 28).

But participants made a clear distinction between career satisfaction and job satisfaction. They saw the job site as a source of discrimination and potential harassment and a gender-related lack of respect from male colleagues and fans as a routine part of the work experience (p. 28). Most cited discrimination and harassment as a continuing, serious problem, but not the reason to leave sports journalism as a career. They found that frustration over sacrificing time and family relationships, compounded by “tokenism,” as reasons for leaving (p. 31).

One participant, a sports editor who worked in the industry for 30 years, said she was disappointed with the progress of women in sports departments:

I firmly believe that women in sports media are not as far along as I thought we would be when I first started, and it continues to be very discouraging. And I think that it's because you have a problem with retention. We lost a lot of people. You should have seen more advancement when it comes to women – when it comes to women moving on up into positions of authority in sports (Hardin & Shain, 2005, p. 29).

A study by Eberhard (1988) found about one-third of their respondents felt they had been employed originally as “token” or “quota” female employees (p. 597). Eighty-three percent said they were satisfied with their assignments. Nearly 75% indicated they did not feel their editors were using them instead of male peers to cover female sports. Almost 60 % said they had faced discrimination from male colleagues in their sports

department, and although it was not as severe as it had been in the past, it was still a concern. Some discrimination was attitudinal, like condescension and assumption of incompetence, but also included denial of access to locker rooms, sexual harassment, and physical threats (Eberhard, 1988).

Almost 80% of the respondents agreed there were not enough women in newspaper sports writing. Although impatient for progress, women in newspaper sports journalism were optimistic about their lot and possibilities for the future (p. 599).

CHAPTER THREE

Drawing up the Plays

Methodology and Research Instruments

The purpose of this case study is to describe the perceptions of women sports writers' in relationship to their professional and personal experiences in sports journalism and how the field has changed in terms of gender relations, sexual harassment, and gender discrimination.

The Ines Sainz controversy that erupted in September 2010 after a New York Jets football game sparked a national debate about women's presence in the locker room, on the sidelines, and in sports journalism.

This case study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. How do female sports journalists describe their experience as a sports journalists in the 1980s compared to the 2000s?
2. How do participants describe instances of discrimination and harassment?
Does it occur less frequently now than it did in the 1980s?
3. How do participants describe their relationships with male colleagues, bosses, and sources? Do they feel pigeon-holed into covering women's sports?

4. How do sports writers describe the changes in the field during the past 30 years? Do participants feel equality with men has been achieved in the field, and what were the factors that led to these changes?

The Line Up

Four participants were surveyed for a case study: Christine Brennan, Lynne Snierston, Sally Sexton, and Lindsey McKissick. The first group, “pioneer” participants Brennan and Snierston, entered the field before 1985. Brennan is still a sports writer, but Snierston moved from print to TV sports reporting after six years. Although she is no longer in the industry, her opinions are still valid because she was key player in pioneering women as sports writers. She worked in Boston, which is the fifth largest media market in the U.S. (proadvance.com, 2006), meaning she worked with some of the best talent in the country. The other two participants, the “new reporters,” entered within the past five years. Two different set of cases were utilized to provide comparison not only between the groups but within the groups as well.

The pioneer participants are those who entered the field before 1985, when major leagues mandated open locker rooms, and must have worked for at least four years as a sports writer at a print news organization, although it didn’t have to be the same news organization. In other words, the participant must have stayed in print journalism, as opposed to switching to television or radio. The new reporter participants must have entered the field within the past five years. All participants must have worked at separate news organizations. News organizations are defined as a daily print publication with either local or national circulation.

Print journalists were selected over television and radio journalists for two reasons. Television and radio reporters thrive on sound bites, while print journalists must interpret the story for the readers and give them a fresh spin. Many TV reporters enter and leave quickly because they simply wanted to be on TV. Both fans and others in the industry can tell when a reporter has knowledge and passion and will dismiss people quickly who don't have one or both (Hegner, 2010). Television reporters can be fed questions via headsets or cue cards, whereas print journalists cannot. Appearance is an important factor for reporters on TV, but not in print journalism. This is a facet of TV journalism which was too extensive for the scope of this research.

Contact information for the participants was obtained through AWSM's LinkedIn.com's group page. A request for participation was extended, and members responded. AWSM is an advocacy group for students and professionals in sports media careers. AWSM was created in 1987 as a professional organization for women in sports media. It was created by three California journalists: Michele Himmelberg of *The Orange County Register*, Kristin Huckshorn of *The San Jose Mercury News*, and Susan Fornoff of *The Sacramento Bee* (Gross, May 26, 1988).

The questions posed in this case study were structured, but answered using open-ended responses, as the study is qualitative in nature. SurveyMonkey.com was utilized as the medium for survey, since many participants are employed full time and live in different time zones. Follow up questions were conducted via telephone if deemed necessary by the researcher to clarify participant's answers. Only one telephone interview was utilized, with Brennan.

Participants agreed to have their names used in the study, since their names are used in print on a regular basis and it adds to the depth of the research to have their names identified with responses. All subjects signed consent forms to participate in the study before completing the survey.

Themes

From the literature, four overarching themes that describe the field of sports journalism for women were extracted to be investigated: job description; harassment and discrimination; gender relations; and progress and changes in the field.

Each theme then was broken down into sub-themes to further define the categories. The description of the field includes name of news organization; length of time spent working there; job title; job duties; rationale for entering sports journalism; and number of women in sports department of news organization (questions 3-9). Specific instances of harassment and discrimination and reasons to stay in the field fulfill the second category (questions 11-14). Gender relation themes encompass relationships with male colleagues, bosses, and sources and women's sports coverage (questions 10, 15-16; 10, 14-15). Progress and changes in the field include description of changes; current problems with harassment and discrimination; current gender equality in the newsroom; factors that contributed to change; and current/recent circumstances that have hindered women (questions 17-21; 16-20).

Pioneer journalists were asked an additional question, "Do you still experience harassment/discrimination in your work place or in the field?" This changed the number of questions for new reporters, but the questions still were essentially the same. Verb

tenses were altered to reflect current conditions for new reporters, as opposed to past conditions for the pioneers.

Participants' answers were collected from Survey Monkey. Responses were read carefully multiple times by the researcher before analyzing. With previous literature and liberal feminist theory in mind, responses were compared between participants, as well as between groups.

The following questions were posed to the pioneer participants:

1. Name
2. Age
3. City
4. State
5. Name of news organization
6. Time (in years) spent working there
7. Job title (name all if more than one)
8. Please describe your job duties (beat coverage, etc.), including how long you've been in your current position/were in you last position
9. What year did you enter the field of journalism? Sports journalism?
10. Why did you go into sports journalism?
11. How many women were employed in the sports department of your first news organization?
12. Describe the first few years of your career in relation to male sources, colleagues, and editors.

13. Did you encounter harassment and/or discrimination? If so, how did this impact your abilities to perform your job?
14. Please describe a specific instance of harassment.
15. If/when you faced discrimination, why did you decide to stay in the field? Did you ever feel like leaving?
16. Do you still experience harassment/discrimination in your work place or in the field?
17. Did you feel you were expected to cover women's sports more so than your male colleagues?
18. Did you cover more women's sports than your male colleagues?
19. During your time as a sports journalist, did you feel the field was changing for women? If yes, how so?
20. In your opinion, is harassment and/or discrimination still a problem today?
21. In your opinion, have men and women gained equal status in the sports department of the newsroom? Why or why not?
22. What factors contributed to the changing landscape for women in sports journalism?
23. Are there events or circumstances you think have set women back in sports journalism?

Case Study Design

A case study format was deemed the best method by the researcher to conduct this particular research project after comparing all five qualitative research designs. Case study research involves the study of an issue explored through one or more cases within a

bounded system (Creswell, 2007), i.e., settings of different news organizations. It is a qualitative approach in which the investigator explores a bounded system or multiple bounded systems over time through detailed, in-depth data collection which includes multiple sources of information, and reports descriptions and case-based themes (Creswell, 2007, p. 73). This study utilizes a collective case study design, where an issue is selected but multiple case studies are used to illustrate the issue (Creswell, 2007, p. 74). The participants were selected purposefully, as they typically are in collective case studies, to show different perspectives on the issue. This design also uses the logic of replication, meaning procedures will be the same for each case (Yin, 2003; cited in Creswell, 2007).

Procedures for conducting a case study are outlined clearly by Creswell. He states that first, the researcher must determine if the case study is the best approach to the research problem. A case study is a good approach when the researcher has clearly identified cases with boundaries and seeks to provide an in-depth comparison of several cases (p. 74). In this case, pioneer participants were compared not only to each other, but also to the new reporter participants to gain a full understanding of how sports journalism has changed for women during the past three decades.

Next, the researcher must identify their cases. There are a few different ways to conduct purposeful sampling, but this research utilizes cases that are similar to show consistencies and commonalities in the field of sports journalism as experienced by women who worked in it. Embedded analysis will be used to identify specific aspects of the case (Yin, 2003; cited in Creswell, 2007). A detailed description of the case emerges in which the researcher details the history of the case, the chronology of events, or a day-

to-day rendering of daily activities (Stake, 1995; cited in Creswell, 2007).

The pattern-matching and constant comparative analysis process led to the development of themes (Creswell, 2007, p. 75) to understand the complexity of the case, identify issues within each case, and then look for common themes. A “within-case analysis” will provide a detailed description of each case, as well as themes within cases, followed by “cross-case analysis,” a thematic analysis across cases (p. 75). In the final phase of interpretation, the meaning of each case is reported as an instrumental case, whereby the meaning comes from learning about the issue of the case (p. 75).

Responses from subjects were analyzed for patterns and themes. The detailed description of each case, the journalist and her news organization, are found in chapter four.

The researcher used categorical aggregation to determine issue-relevant meanings from the data. The researcher then established patterns in the data to find instances of similarities between cases and experiences of the journalists (Creswell, 2007). The data was generalized, using previous literature, so that their experiences may be similar to those who have endured a similar path in the field of sports journalism. The researcher also looked for differences in the data, and attempted to interpret why those differences exist using cross-case analysis (Creswell). It also was important to take into account facts and events that happened during the time period that the journalists were working in the field. The patterns will be combined into overarching themes (Creswell) that describe women's experiences as a sports journalist for a print news organization in the 1980s, and how that has changed throughout the past three decades. Secondary sources of data, such as memoirs, newspaper columns, and articles will be used to triangulate the results of the

data (Creswell, 2007). Constant-comparison analysis will be utilized in the data analysis process, meaning that data will be compared to emerging categories (p. 64).

CHAPTER FOUR

Box Score

Results and Analysis

As with any case study format, this study explored the issue of equality with men in sports journalism using four cases within a bounded system (Creswell, 2007). The intent is to describe the perceptions of women sports writers' in relationship to their professional and personal experiences in sports journalism and how the field has changed in terms of gender relations, sexual harassment, and gender discrimination. Participants were selected purposefully to ensure a well-rounded and diverse analysis would take place.

In accordance with previous studies of women sports writers, the subjects in this study said they believe the field is better than ever for females and reported minimal instances of harassment. Reporters who entered sports journalism in the early 1980s reported instances of harassment early in their careers, but did not indicate they had faced harassment and discrimination since then. Younger reporters had an optimistic outlook on the field, acknowledging the road that was paved for them by the pioneers, and also did not report instances of harassment or discrimination in the workplace.

Participation Description: Pioneers

Christine Brennan, 52, is one of the best-known women sports writers in the United States. Her first job was at *The Miami Herald* in 1981, where she was the first

woman in the sports department. She was the University of Florida beat writer for three years. She also covered the Miami Dolphins and the Summer and Winter Olympic Games when it wasn't football season. She then moved to cover the Washington Redskins for *The Washington Post* from 1984 to 1987. After moving off the Redskins beat, she covered the Olympics for the *Post* until 1996. She has been a sports columnist for *USA Today* since she left the *Post*.

In addition to being a sports reporter, Brennan has written seven books, including two on figure skating and a sports memoir. She is a regular on-air contributor for ESPN and ABC News, and is a commentator on NPR's Morning Edition. Brennan was the first president of AWSM. She holds numerous writing awards and was inducted into the Ohio Woman's Hall of Fame in 1995.

Lynne Snierston, 58, was the first woman reporter at the *Boston Herald* in 1981. She was the New England Patriots and NFL co-beat writer, but also covered horse racing, college football and basketball, tennis, and auto racing. Prior to joining the *Herald*, she worked for an ABC-TV affiliate in Manchester, N.H.

New Reporters

Sally Sexton, 27, is a sports reporter for the *Weatherford Democrat* in Weatherford, Texas. She has worked there for two and a half years. She writes features and also covers various sports. Previously, she worked at the *Palestine Herald-Press*, also covering sports, for two and a half years. She currently is the only woman in the sports department of her news organization.

Lindsey McKissick, 24, works at the *The Denver Post* as a writer and covers prep (high school) sports. She has worked at the *Post* for three years. As a freelancer, she

covers everything from high school to professional sports. On the sports prep desk, she assists the editor in maintaining the website and archiving daily news. She became a journalist in 2005. At the *Denver Post*, there are two full-time women who write sports. McKissick is one of three on the sports prep desk, but she said the other two “have zero interest in sports journalism and just input scores.”

Description of Field

Understanding how subjects describe the field of sports journalism is important for comparing the field in the 1980s and today. Similarities between participants in each group mean they have a shared experience of what it means to be a sports writer. Description of the field includes references to job satisfaction, job duties, rationale for entering sports journalism, number of women in sports department of news organization, and other details that describe current conditions.

Both Snierston and Brennan entered sports journalism in 1981 as beat writers for large print organizations. They were both the only women in their sports departments, however, more followed at the *Boston Herald* where Snierston worked. Brennan was the only woman at *The Miami Herald* until she left to go to *The Washington Post* three years later. This illustrates how few women were working as sports journalists during that time. And still, 20 years later, the Association of Women in Sports Media estimated, via an informal survey, that women constituted just 13 percent of reporters in sports departments in 2001, which equals about 500 women working in sports media (Hardin & Shain, 2005).

Minorities also make up approximately 11 % of working journalists. There are increasingly more women are entering the field of journalism. It is surprising, therefore,

that the percentage of women and ethnic minorities who work in the sport media tends to be much smaller than in other types of journalism (Claringbould et al., 2004).

Sexton is the only woman employed in the sports department of the *Weatherford Democrat*. McKissick, who has been a sports writer in Denver for three years, was the only participant who worked with other women in the sports department. There are two full-time writers, and “a handful of copy editors and designers.” She and two other women work on the high school sports desk, but she made an interesting delineation between herself and those two: “There are three of us on the Preps Desk, but the other two have zero interest in sports journalism and just input scores.” This statement expresses frustration that many women sports writers have towards women who don’t take their jobs seriously or care about sports.

In Hardin and Shains’s study of the fragmented identity of female sports journalists, younger participants were more inclined to resent women who aren’t in the business genuinely, but instead have ulterior motives, like meeting athletes or getting on TV (2006). Other journalists expressed similar sentiments and frustration against those who “give the rest of us a bad name” (Hardin & Shain, 2006, p. 330).

The resounding reason among participants in the study – as well as the majority of women sports writers in the United States – to become a sports writer extended from a genuine love for sports and a love for writing and journalism. This was seen with both pioneers and both new reporters.

Snierston said that “an absolute love of and respect for the sports and the journalism” is what inspired her to pursue a career in sports. Brennan grew up loving and playing sports as well, but did not consider a career as a sports writer until writing for her

The Daily Northwestern at Northwestern University. She said she had never heard of a woman sports writer until she got to her college paper and the sports editor was a woman. From there, she was hooked (Brennan, 2006).

Both Snierston and Brennan pursued sports writing shortly after the passage of Title IX, which secured equal opportunity in athletics for men and women. Brennan said that although it did not play a huge role in her life since she was done with playing sports by the time it passed, it was the key factor in acceptance for women in not only sports, but in many “untraditionally female” careers as well.

The thinking with Title IX was that as more girls started to play organized sports, more of them would want to cover sports as well (Hardin & Shain, 2006). Sexton and McKissick grew up during the time when playing sports was normal for girls. They themselves played sports growing up. Their love for playing sports translated into a love of writing about them, which provides evidence to the theory mentioned above.

I have loved sports for as long as I can remember. My dad and I used to sit and read the paper on Sundays. I was more interested in figuring out the box scores than reading the comics. There is something amazing about watching a game and then bringing it back to life in words for readers (McKissick, 2011).

Sexton, also an avid sports fan for as long as she can remember, was also a high school coach’s daughter, which reinforced the sporting environment while growing up. She also cites a love for writing as motivation to become a sports writer.

Harassment and Discrimination

Much like previous literature states, women who have been in the field longer were more likely to report instances of harassment and discrimination than their younger

counterparts (Hardin & Shain, 2005). Both Snierston and Brennan reported specific instances of harassment early in their careers.

Brennan's first locker room experience occurred during a preseason game between the Miami Dolphins and the Minnesota Vikings at the Orange Bowl in 1980. "The significance of the night was twofold: It was not only going to be the first time I had ever been in a men's locker room, it also was to be the first time a woman had ever been in the Vikings' locker room,"

Although Brennan made it through her first locker room scenario, and much of the rest of her career, unscathed, players taunted and jeered her. "We don't go in the women's bathroom!" one yelled. "What are you doing in here?" "Here for some cheap thrills?" screamed another. Some of the players heckled her for being there, but most of the players cooperated professionally. With the exception of one particular lineman, who didn't so much as reach for a towel while she interviewed him.

Brennan said she always acknowledges the fine line women sports writers had to walk in relation to the locker room. She said that the issue was about women having the same rights as men to do their job, which meant having equal access to the locker room. "It's like asking if women should have the right to vote," she said. She described *Sports Illustrated* reporter Melissa Ludtke's "watershed" moment, in which she and Time, Inc. successfully sued Major League Baseball commissioner Bowie Kuhn and the New York Yankees in U.S. district court for equal access to the locker room after the 1977 World Series (Brennan, 2006).

Although the Dolphins allowed women in their locker room, the University of Florida had a strict no women in the locker room rule. Instead of pursuing a lawsuit

against the school, she compromised and agreed to interview players in the hallway outside the locker room.

Snierson describes a similar, but more profane, experience in the Green Bay Packers locker room. In December of 1989, Snierson was assigned a take-out (supplemental feature story) on Brett Farve and an advance story for the big game. She arrived a few days before the Patriots-Packers Sunday match up, and all was fine until she entered the locker room to interview athletes. “I was the only reporter in there and it became instantly apparent the Packers were not accustomed to a woman in their domain. One big lineman yelled across the room that I should come over and perform oral sex on him. I gave him a snappy comeback that shut him up.”

After the incident, Snierson reported it to the Green Bay public relations director and the general manager. She said both were very apologetic and assured her that it would never happen to her – or any other woman – ever again.

Brennan and Snierson faced other minor forms of discrimination throughout the course of their careers. Brennan, along with other female reporters like Lesley Visser and Susan Fornoff, was made to stand outside locker rooms and wait for players to exit to get her interviews, while the male reporters were allowed inside. Sometimes she would be let in, sometimes she would not. The decision very much depended on the night and how management was feeling. Although discrimination did not prohibit her from doing her job, it impeded it and made it much more difficult to perform her job duties than it was for male reporters. Over the years, Brennan has received letters, e-mails, and comments on her articles that allude to her leaving her career, simply because of her gender. “Go

back in the kitchen where you belong,” one angry reader wrote to her after an article in *The Washington Post*.

Snierston also reported other minor instances of discrimination, but said it did not prohibit her from doing her job or discourage her from continuing her career. She said the adversity only made her tougher and more determined. “I always found a way to work around it, and for every jerk on the team, there were many others who were cooperative and kind.”

Neither pioneer participant wanted to leave their jobs because of discrimination or harassment. They both said incidents typically were isolated, and for the most part, had good working relationships and shared mutual respect with players, coaches, GMs, PR directors, and other writers.

Snierston and Brennan faced a patriarchal environment that discouraged them from pursuing long-term tenure (Hardin & Shain, 2005). Liberal feminism sees the root of women’s oppression as the lack of civil rights and education issues for women (Boutilier & SanGiovanni, 1981). It asserts that when women are given equal opportunities, they will actualize their potential (1981). At the time, open locker rooms were not mandated for equal access, so female sports writers faced oppression, which was a civil rights issue, in addition to a workplace issue. Even though the four major leagues – the National Football League, the National Basketball Association, Major League Baseball, and the National Hockey League - mandated open locker rooms by 1985, the residual effects of harassment were present for the next five years.

Mirroring recent research, neither of the two new reporters reported instances of harassment as sports writers. Although both conceded that discrimination and harassment

still exist on some level in sports journalism, they don't believe it's nearly as much of a problem as it used to be for women in the field.

McKissick acknowledged changes in the field, but said that "by no means does that indicate a complete lack of discrimination as some still believe women do not belong in the profession, but it is getting better." Sexton echoed her sentiments with: "I think (harassment and discrimination) can be (a problem). I'm sure there are still some people that don't look upon women as being capable of doing duties in a sports news field. However, I still feel that is steadily improving."

Brennan and Snierston also said that although instances of harassment probably do still exist on some level, the instances are rare. People have accepted women as sports writers.

These instances of harassment and discrimination mirror others that have been spoken of publicly by other women who entered the field in the 1980s. Furthermore, the fact that new reporters did not report instances of harassment and discrimination illustrates the normality of such – the reason the Ines Sainz scandal was such a big deal, according to Brennan, was that a similar situation hadn't happened since the New England Patriots locker room incident with Lisa Olson in 1990. "While you would rather have zero occurrences, two (instances of harassment) in 20 years shows the acceptance of women," she said.

Gender Relations

Feeling singled out because of gender was another theme that emerged through previous literature. Some research found tense relationships between women sports writers and male colleagues, bosses, and sources were another obstacle for women to

overcome in performing their daily job duties. Feeling pressured to cover more women's sports than a male reporter is often a problem for female sports writers. Miloch, Smucker, and Whisenet (2005) found that challenges women sports writers face could be due in large part to hegemonic masculinity, which theorizes that in order to maintain a sense of dominance in sport, men exert their authority over females. Female entrance into that domain challenges the hegemonic masculinity most often associated with sport.

However, liberal feminist theory asserts that women and men are more alike than different, so women should "take their place alongside men in society" (Hardin & Shain, 2005; Birrell, 2000). Despite these inherent similarities, society puts barriers that restrict women's equal participation.

What was most interesting about the results of this case study is that the pioneer sports writers did not face discrimination among their male colleagues and editors. Snierston and Brennan both reported feeling supported by their editors. Brennan, however, noted her first job was most likely a result of her gender. "To me, sports writing in the early to mid-1970s was (A) a man's world and (B) a sloppy man's world. It should come as no surprise that the sports section was called the Toy Department of the newsroom. I knew the main reason I had been hired was that the *Herald* wanted a woman sports writer. I was hired as a token, and I knew it from day one" (Brennan, 2006).

The idea of "tokenism" is very prevalent in sports departments, especially in the past 10 to 15 years, as news organizations have attempted to diversify (Hardin & Shain, 2006). Participants in their study unanimously expressed frustration with their consistent "second-class" status in the newsroom, tokenism and the failure to be taken seriously.

Although other studies have similar findings, this particular case study did not mirror that sentiment, aside from Brennan's first experience at *The Miami Herald*.

Snierston said her editors were "extremely supportive and my colleagues at the paper were accepting and supporting." However, some male writers at the time were not as supportive and made it clear they felt women did not belong in the press box. Reporters in Hardin and Shain's study made similar statements about men's disapproval of their presence in the press box. They mentioned situations that made them uncomfortable, like an athlete playing a sexually explicit video in the locker room during interviews, male colleagues looking at porn in the press box, and coworkers making jokes on the copy desk about female athletes and commentators (2006). This has been an issue for women as far back as pioneer Mary Garber, who in the 1940s was not allowed in the press box of college football games and was made to sit in "wives' boxes" (Creedon, 1994).

All of the sports editors at *The Denver Post* are males, according to McKissick, and she said she hasn't had any problems with them. "As far as I know, they treat me like any other person in the department." Sexton reported that most of the sports she covers, aside from some volleyball, softball, and basketball, have male coaches with whom she communicates on a daily basis. Other sports reporters at surrounding newspapers are generally male, with the exception of one or two. She did not report any problems with these colleagues.

These findings are not consistent with recent studies. Eighty-five percent of participants in Hardin and Shain's 2005 study believed sexual discrimination was still a problem, and 87 % believed females have a tougher job than males in sports media.

Although literature shows that many women feel “pigeon-holed” into covering women’s sports, none of the participants in this study agreed with that statement. Sexton said that although she does cover some women’s sports, she feels there is a healthy split between those and male sports. Neither Brennan nor Snierston felt they were expected to cover women’s sports more than their male counterparts, and no one said they did cover more women’s sports than their male colleagues did or do.

The main issue that surfaced in terms of inequality, especially for the new reporters, was the sheer number of women working in sports media, which is low. McKissick and Sexton both said the field is still male-dominated, but more options are emerging for women. The field continues to “get better” for women, according to both new reporters, but it is not equal because men still outnumber women. According to AWSM, approximately 11 % of sports departments are female, which supports the new reporters’ claims.

“Yes, I do feel like equality has been achieved. I do feel that in terms of women being able to do anything in sports journalism, that equality has been achieved. However, numbers-wise, 11 % of sports departments are female – that’s not equality,” Brennan said. She acknowledged that getting closer to 30 or 40 % female would be ideal, but doubted that would happen in her lifetime or in younger reporters’ lifetimes.

Progress and Change

The four subjects in this case study corroborated previous findings with optimistic views about the field of sports journalism for women. Both groups acknowledged the “pioneers (who) blazed the trail and proved that women sportswriters are just as talented as men” (Snierston, 2011). However, the overarching theme among their statements about

equality alluded to the fact that women first had to prove themselves as serious journalists before being accepted by men in their domain.

Each participant mentioned needing to prove themselves before being taken seriously, but once they did, they felt equal treatment. To Snierson, proving herself meant acting and dressing like a professional and being consistent in job performance. The factors that contributed to the changing landscape for women in sports journalism were “those of us who did a consistently great job and always acted with class and professionalism proved we belong in the business. Anyone who conducts herself like a true pro and proves herself a kick-ass journalist will be treated as such,” she said.

Brennan echoed Snierson’s statements. “The proof is that women are doing these jobs. Women are covering sports, women are on ESPN, women are anchoring, they’re on sidelines. ... It’s just so clear how acceptance has occurred. Equality is here to stay.”

‘Underdogs’ in the Newsroom

The new reporters also made similar statements about women proving themselves in the male domain of sports. Sexton said that ambitious women willing to go the extra mile has contributed greatly to the changing landscape of sports journalism. “I think the fact that they might be considered underdogs at the start makes them even more willing to work harder and get the job done, knowing they cannot rely on their gender or their looks.” Women have had to work against the inequality of their own gender, like liberal feminist theorists say, but they’ve done it successfully. McKissick said the field has changed a lot, and there is less of a stigma that follows women sports journalists. This

stems from women working hard and working against the naysayers to prove themselves in the profession.

There have been a lot of women sports journalists in the past that have paved the way. They are professional, produce quality work, and have a general love for what they do. Their examples have shown doubters that women in sports journalism want the same thing as men, to give the reader the best stories (McKissick, 2011).

Although participants feel that many barriers have been broken down, in large part because of the pioneering group of women during the 1980s who paved the way for future journalists, small barriers still exist. Both groups acknowledged that while instances of harassment and discrimination have diminished, they would probably never go away entirely. This is not specific to sports journalism or even journalism in general. There are still many fields where women face barriers because of they are women, especially in non-traditional roles.

The participants disagreed about whether or not there have been events that set women back in sports journalism. This question was asked with the notion that the Ines Sainz scandal might be mentioned. Snierston said that she believes incidents of harassment and sexual discrimination will always occur, and gave examples of the New York Jets incident. She also said that it can set women back when some choose to pursue romantic or sexual relationships with the men they cover. It is damaging when women dress inappropriately, again a problem with Ines Sainz, which reflects poorly on all women sports journalists. She said it is extremely damaging when women don't fully understand the games they cover. These notions all counteract all the hard work other journalists have had to put in to "prove" themselves in sports media careers.

Brennan said that although the field has gotten better, there are still barriers to come down. Barriers, to her, are the number of women working in sports journalism, and the sexism that is pervasive in online commenting on women athletes and journalists. “There has been tremendous accepting and understanding. ... There are a few moments when we scratch our heads and ask if we’re back in the 1950s, but those are so few and far between. The changes are very positive.”

McKissick didn’t see any issues that set women back, but instead acknowledged that there are still some barriers to be broken down. “We are seeing women covering the biggest games and events, but we are still outnumbered by a long shot.” Being outnumbered continues to be the number one issue in perceiving equality with men.

Sexton did not make any comments when asked if there were circumstances or instances that have set women in sports journalism back.

Despite all the obstacles women have had to overcome to make their way in sports journalism, the majority of women are optimistic about the field and future of women in sports journalism. Seventy-three percent of respondents in Hardin and Shain’s 2005 survey of women sports writers agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, “I am satisfied with my current job.” Seventy-five percent believed opportunities for women in sports media careers are better than ever (p. 812). Participants in a follow up study by the researchers characterized their choices to practice sports journalism as “gratifying and rewarding” (2005, p. 27).

CHAPTER 5

Leveling the Playing Field

Conclusions

The purpose of this comparative case study is to describe the perceptions of women sports writers in relationship to their professional and personal experiences in sports journalism, and how the field has changed in terms of gender relations, sexual harassment, and gender discrimination since the early 1980s.

Women have been sports writers since newspapers had a sports section, but many left the field after World War II and did not return in large numbers until the late 1970s and early 1980s. In 1972, Congress passed the Patsy T. Mink Equal Opportunity in Education Act, more commonly known as Title IX, a law that requires gender equity for boys and girls in every educational program that receives federal funding (TitleIX.info, 2010). This law opened the door for women to pursue not only sports, but many different non-traditional careers as well. As athletic participation among women grew, scholars theorized that the number of women who wanted to write about sports would grow as well (Miloch et al, 2005). And it did.

These “pioneering” sports writers faced a hegemonic patriarchal environment that often discouraged them from pursuing long-term tenure in the field (Hardin & Shain, 2005). Sexual harassment and gender discrimination were part of the daily job routine. As companies attempted to diversify, many journalists acknowledged that they were hired as the “token” woman to reach a quota (Hardin & Shain, 2006).

Many locker room incidents became a national media circus involving harassment of a female sports writer and athletes. In 1990, *Boston Herald* reporter Lisa Olson was allegedly verbally assaulted by the New England Patriots during a post-game interview. The harassment and ensuing media exposure was so bad she received death threats and eventually moved to Australia to escape (Stofer et al., 2010).

Susan Fornoff received a rat in a box from an Oakland A's player. Christine Brennan was whooped at by Minnesota Vikings players in the locker room. Lynne Snierston was asked to perform oral sex on a Green Bay Packer. Clearly, the landscape of sports journalism has changed for women in the past three decades. The most recent incident involving Mexican reporter Ines Sainz from TV Azteca ignited a national debate about whether women had achieved equality in the sports department.

In order to investigate how sports journalism careers have changed for women since the 1980s, the researcher conducted a case study using four participants. Two of the participants entered the field in the early 1980s, and the other two participants entered the field within the past five years. The case study was designed this way to compare and contrast their experiences as sports writers.

The study sought to answer the following questions:

1. How do female sports journalists describe their experiences as sports journalists in the 1980s compared to the 2000s?
2. How do participants describe instances of harassment and discrimination? Does it occur less frequently now than it did in the 1980s?
3. How do participants describe their relationships, as females, with male colleagues, bosses, and sources?

4. How do sports writers describe the changes in the field during the past 30 years?

Do women sports writers feel that equality with men has been achieved in the field, and what were the factors that led to these changes?

Participants were contacted via AWSM's LinkedIn.com group page. Once consent was received from participants, a survey created on SurveyMonkey.com was sent for completion.

In order to participate in the study, the pioneers needed to have started in the field before 1985, and new reporters needed to have started within the past five years. They need to have worked or currently work at a print news organization, and no two participants could work at the same place. The four participants for the study were: Christine Brennan and Lynne Snierston, the pioneers, and Sally Sexton, and Lindsey McKissick, the new reporters.

Brennan worked for *The Miami Herald*, *The Washington Post*, and *USA Today*, where she is currently a weekly columnist. Snierston worked for the *Boston Herald*. Both participants were the first women in the sports department of their news organizations. Sexton, who had been a sports writer for five years, started her career at the *Palestine Herald-Press*, and currently works at the *Weatherford Democrat*. McKissick, who has been a sports writer for three years, works at the *Denver Post*.

This research was conducted using the theoretical framework of liberal feminism. Feminist theory is a dynamic set of theories that analyze gender as a category of experience within society (Birrell, 2000). Liberal feminism, based on the humanist ontological notion that women and men are more alike than different, asserts that women should take their place next to men in societal institutions (Hardin & Shain, 2005; Birrell,

2000). Its main purpose is to theorize about gender relations within a patriarchal society as they emerge through sport, and it advocates changing the dynamics of gender in sport (Birrell, 2000).

Liberal feminism sees the root of women's oppression as the lack of equal civil rights and educational opportunities (Boutilier & SanGiovanni, 1981). The theory postulates that when women are given equal opportunities, they will actualize their potential and should be rewarded for their achievements. Boutilier and SanGiovanni also believe that "elimination of discrimination based on gender can be accomplished by reform within the structure of American society; they believe that reform can be achieved by the extension of political, legal, and educational opportunities for women" (p. 99).

The theories attempt to examine experiences not on a purely personal level, but as part of a "greater pattern of oppression experienced to some extent by all those who share the same life situation" (Birrell, 2000, p. 62). She also posits that despite inherent similarities, men and women will live different lives with different experiences, different opportunities and expectations, because society puts a barrier that restricts equal participation (p. 64).

Case study research involves the study of an issue explored through one or more cases within a bounded system (Creswell, 2007), i.e., settings of different news organizations, explored over time through detailed, in-depth data collection which includes multiple sources of information, and reports descriptions and case-based themes (Creswell, 2007, p. 73). This study utilizes a collective case study design, where an issue is selected but multiple case studies are used to illustrate the issue (Creswell, 2007, p. 74). The participants were selected purposefully, as they typically are in collective case

studies, to show different perspectives on an issue. This design also uses the logic of replication, meaning procedures will be the same for each case (Yin, 2003; cited in Creswell, 2007).

In this case, pioneer participants were compared not only to each other, but also to the new reporter participants to gain a full understanding of how sports journalism has changed for women during the past three decades.

This research utilizes cases that are similar to show consistencies and commonalities in the field of sports journalism as experienced by women who worked in it. Embedded analysis will be used to identify specific aspects of the case (Yin, 2003; cited in Creswell, 2007). A detailed description of the case emerges in which the researcher details the history of the case, the chronology of events, or a day-to-day rendering of daily activities (Stake, 1995; cited in Creswell, 2007).

The pattern-matching and constant comparative analysis process will lead to the development of themes (Creswell, 2007, p. 75) to understand the complexity of the case, identify issues within each case, and then look for common themes. A “within-case analysis” will provide a detailed description of each case, as well as themes within cases, followed by “cross-case analysis,” a thematic analysis across cases (p. 75). In the final phase of interpretation, the meaning of each case is reported as an instrumental case, whereby the meaning comes from learning about the issue of the case (p. 75).

The researcher used categorical aggregation to determine issue-relevant meanings from the data and established patterns in the data to find instances of similarities between cases and experiences of the journalists (Creswell, 2007). The researcher also looked for differences in the data, and attempted to interpret why those differences exist using cross-

case analysis (Creswell). It also was important to take into account facts and events that happened during the time period that the journalists were working in the field. The patterns were combined into overarching themes (Creswell) that describe women's experiences as a sports journalist for a print news organization in the 1980s, and how that has changed throughout the past three decades. Secondary sources of data, such as memoirs, newspaper columns, and articles were used to triangulate the results of the data (Creswell, 2007). Constant-comparison analysis will be utilized in the data analysis process, meaning that data will be compared to emerging categories (p. 64).

The data was broken down into four main themes: description of the field, harassment and discrimination, gender relations, and progress and change. Responses were categorized under each of these themes, and then compared with one another during the analysis.

Women sports writers from the 1980s and the 2000s agree that the landscape of sports journalism has changed positively over the past three decades, and that many barriers women faced are gone. All of the participants cited a love for sports and a love for writing/journalism as motivation to become a sports writer. With the exception of McKissick, all were the only woman in the sports department of their first news organization. McKissick works with two full time sports writers, in addition to copy desk editors and sports clerks.

Prior to 1985, when the last of the four major sports leagues in the U.S. mandated equal access to locker rooms, women faced more instances of sexual harassment and gender discrimination. That is not to say harassment and discrimination disappeared, but

the tension between athletes and reporters generally diminished as more women entered the field.

Although both pioneering journalists mentioned instances of harassment earlier in their careers, both said they haven't faced any major incidents since then. Neither of the new reporters mentioned a harassment situation, and in fact said they had never encountered harassment or discrimination while performing their job duties. The silence, according to Brennan, is a sign of equality.

Today, women cover all sports from high school to professional, football to soccer to auto racing. The fact that women are on these beats show that their editors believe they can perform the job requirements, which is a sign of success, according to Brennan. Snierston said that the women who entered during the pioneer phase paved the way for younger women looking to enter the field by working hard and proving their professionalism and skills on a consistent basis.

According to participants, these barriers were broken down by women working hard, acting professional, and proving to men that they belong in the field of sports media. In order to prove themselves, pioneering sports writers acted and dressed professionally, were knowledgeable about sports, and did not engage in sexual or romantic relationships with the men they covered. Over the years, women have "realized their potential," according to Sexton, which has allowed them to overcome barriers in the workplace to achieve equality with men.

Although the landscape of sports journalism has changed drastically for women in the past 30 years, many feel that there is one area where progress needs to be made to achieve equality. Women cover the exact same sports as men, and are trusted to perform

their job duties as professional journalists. The one area that came up consistently across all participant responses was the number of women working in sports media, which is estimated at about 500 nationally, or 11% of sports departments (Hardin & Shain, 2005). Once women balance men in the sports department, they feel complete equality will be achieved.

In conclusion, the equality discrepancy of sports departments lies in the numbers. Women are covering games across the nation, big and small events, every single night without being harassed or discriminated against. This, according to Brennan, is the ultimate sign of progress. “This is not unusual anymore. There is nothing unusual about women writing and talking about sports as careers and I think that’s a great measure of success.”

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