

# **GENDER IN SPORTS WRITING BY THE PRINT MEDIA: AN EXPLORATORY EXAMINATION OF WRITERS' EXPERIENCES AND ATTITUDES**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Mass media portray the dominant images in societies of the industrialized world and depict life in our society (Creedon, 1998). Media have the potential to shape, change, and re-enforce values and attitudes (Bandura, 1986; Fink, 1998; Kane, Taub, & Hayes, 2000). Many authors have argued sport helped create and now helps uphold a masculine hegemonic order in society, where men occupy positions of power and masculinity is more cherished than femininity (e.g., Dworkin & Messner, 2002; Sabo & Jansen, 1992; Trujillo, 1991). Several researchers contended mass media assist in maintaining sport as a masculine hegemonic domain (Davis, 1997; Duncan & Messner, 1998; Hardin, Dodd, & Chance, 2005; Pirinen, 1997).

Numerous studies have shown sport media provide considerably less and different types of coverage to female athletes and women's sports than to male athletes and men's sports (e.g., Bishop, 2003; Elueze & Jones, 1998; Vincent, Imwold, Masemann, & Johnson, 2002). However, few researchers have examined the individuals who produce media content to determine their attitudes toward gender, as well as their gender-related experiences, both of which could affect their writing styles and decisions on what to cover.

Understanding that sport and the sport media are masculine hegemonic domains, in-depth interviews were conducted with both female and male sportswriters representing varying experience levels and employed by different newspapers across the country. Data from the interviews were coded. In the search for primary themes, theoretical and definitional memos were written on reoccurring concepts, and the constant comparative method was employed. Three primary themes emerged from the interviews.

## **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

### **HEGEMONIC MASCULINITY AND SPORT MEDIA**

Italian revolutionary Antonio Gramsci coined the term hegemony to describe the dominance of one social class over others (Gramsci, 1971). Pedersen (2002) defined hegemonic masculinity as the general acceptance of masculinity as the primary characteristic of Western society that places women in positions below men. In hegemonic masculine societies, masculinity is the standard from which everything else is measured, and masculine traits are the most desired and valued in society (Connell, 1995). Numerous scholars have contended sport serves as a hegemonic institution to preserve the power of men over women (e.g., Bryson, 1990; Hargreaves, 1994).

Elueze and Jones (1998) wrote mass media have reinforced the differences between the sexes by presenting a masculine sports hegemony. This has been accomplished in at least four different ways. First, media serve to perpetuate a male-dominated sports hegemony by simply refusing to cover, or very minimally providing coverage to female athletes and women's sports. Second, the limited overall coverage of female athletes, in turn, results in the general public under-estimating the number of women participating in competitive athletics. Furthermore, sport media often only cover sporting events that help reinforce stereotypical feminine images

and portrayals of women athletes. Finally, when sport media professionals do cover female sporting events, they often minimize or trivialize women's athletic accomplishments through their use of language or commentaries (Duncan & Messner, 2000; Kane, 1996; Theberge & Cronk, 1986; Vincent, Pedersen, Whisenant, & Massey, 2007).

Since media members are alleged to help uphold masculine hegemony in sport, it is important to examine female representation in the sport media profession, as well as research on sport media members' attitudes and experiences.

#### **GENDER OF SPORTSWRITERS: FEMALE REPRESENTATION**

The lack of women in the sport media profession, particularly in positions of power (i.e., editors, producers, managers), supports the notion the sport media is a masculine hegemonic institution (Hardin, 2005; Pedersen, Whisenant, & Schneider, 2003; Trujillo, 1991). Back in the early 1970s, the Associated Press estimated only about 25 women were employed as full-time sportswriters at American daily newspapers (Creedon, 1994). The Association for Women in Sports Media (AWSM), which represents female sports journalists from a variety of fields, estimated in the early 1990s that women comprised just 3% of the United States' roughly 10,000 professional print and broadcast sports journalists (Creedon, 1994).

A 1998 survey of the top-rated newspaper sports sections by the Associated Press Sports Editors (APSE) showed papers with larger circulations generally had a higher percentage of females on staff in their sports departments. For the top-10 rated papers with daily circulations under 50,000, 9.2% of sports employees were women (Etling, 2002). Those figures increased to 13.5% for circulations between 50,000-175,000 and 18.5% for the top-10 highest rated papers with circulations of more than 175,000 (Etling, 2002).

In the most recent and most thorough study on female representation in newspaper sports departments, Lapchick, Brenden, and Wright (2006) surveyed more than 300 daily newspapers, finding women comprised 12.6% of newspaper sport staff employees. However, women were most represented in lesser positions. Women made up 24% of the support staff and clerks, while men accounted for 95% of sports editors, 87% of assistant sports editors, 93% of columnists, 93% of reporters, and 87% of copy editors/designers in U.S. newspaper sports departments (Lapchick et al., 2006).

In recent years major newspaper corporations have made attempts to diversify their staffs, which include the hiring of women in sports departments. However, there is a small talent pool being developed to choose from even when newspapers do make a conscientious effort to hire female sportswriters. Wann, Schrader, Allison, and McGeorge (1998) discovered females wrote only 3% of sports articles in selected college newspapers. When they learn that sports sections of college newspapers are almost entirely comprised of males, the authors contended potential female sports journalists may be swayed to work for another section of the student newspaper or simply lose interest in sport journalism (Wann et al., 1998).

#### **GENDER OF SPORTSWRITERS: ATTITUDES AND EXPERIENCES**

Some authors have placed the blame for the disparities in coverage directly upon members of the sport media (Coakley, 2004; Cohen, 1993). However, few researchers have examined media members' attitudes toward women's sports. Most of these studies have either focused entirely on the attitudes and responses of female sport journalists, or on media members in positions of power, such as newspaper editors.

Until recently, Cramer (1994) was the only known researcher to explore female sport journalists' beliefs and attitudes toward media coverage of women's sports. Cramer (1994) found carrying a women's sports beat drastically hinders opportunities for professional advancement. Therefore, many female sport journalists do not seek to cover women's sports, in large part due to a lack of career enhancement opportunities and a perceived lack of interest in women's sports from newspaper readers (Miloch, Pedersen, Smucker, & Whisenant, 2005).

Hardin and Shain (2005a) found similar results in recent interviews with female sport journalists. This implies female sportswriters may help uphold masculine hegemony in sport. Pedersen et al. (2003) concluded, "...hegemonic masculinity is entrenched in the sports media regardless of the gender of the persons making the decisions, writing the stories, or taking the photographs" (p. 388).

Researchers (Hardin & Shain, 2005a; Smucker, Whisenant, & Pedersen, 2003) found female sport journalists expressed a high amount of overall job satisfaction but were frustrated by a lack of promotion opportunities. Women may also be less likely to try to alter the norms of a newspaper sports staff, since a high number of women believe their gender helps them initially get hired at some newspapers (Hardin & Shain, 2005a).

Hardin and Shain (2005b) noted most female sport journalists described a lack of respect directly related to their gender from male colleagues and fans as a regular part of their work experience. In addition, most female journalists feel they have to prove themselves as competent more than their male colleagues. This would be difficult to do through primarily covering women's sports, which are not generally held in high esteem by most employees in newspaper sports departments (Hardin & Shain, 2005a).

Female sportswriters also believe they are more likely to be pigeonholed into covering women's sports or writing human-interest stories (Miloch et al., 2005). Hardin and Shain (2005b) found 58% of surveyed female sport journalists disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement, "If more women worked in the sports media, women's sports would get more coverage" (p. 813).

It is difficult and unjustified to blame exclusively sportswriters for the lack of coverage of women's sports in daily newspapers because those in managerial positions often make decisions regarding which sports receive coverage. Salwen and Garrison (1998) learned participating sports editors ranked diversity issues last among the nine major problems facing the field of sports journalism, while Hardin (2005) discovered only 59% of surveyed sport editors felt they had any obligation to have female representation on their staffs.

Hardin (2005) did find, though, female sports editors may be slightly more likely to include coverage of women's sports in daily newspapers, although the sample size of five female editors out of 283 responding sports editors was too low to generalize. Pedersen et al. (2003) found female editors did not provide more equitable coverage of women's sports than male editors in a study on the 43 largest daily newspapers in Florida.

Many of these cited studies examined the statistical representation, attitudes or experiences of female sportswriters, or sports editors in general. However, no known academic study has included interviews with both female and male sportswriters. Since males make up 93% of both sports columnists and sportswriters at daily newspapers, it would seem logical to find out their gender-related attitudes and experiences, in addition to those of female sportswriters (Lapchick et al., 2006).

### **GUIDING QUESTIONS AND RATIONALE**

No researchers have attempted to examine the experiences and attitudes of both female and male sportswriters to discern similarities and differences. This is important since the gender-related experiences of sportswriters, as well as their attitudes towards men's and women's sports, likely impact the quality and possibly the quantity of coverage given to various men's and women's sports. Therefore, there are two guiding research questions for this exploratory study:

**RQ1: What are the gender-related experiences of sportswriters pre- and post-entrance to the profession?**

**RQ2: Are there attitudinal differences between female and male writers with regards to women's sports?**

### **METHODOLOGY**

This research drew principally from hegemony theory (Bocock, 1986; Gramsci, 1971), recognizing that sport serves as a hegemonic institution to preserve the power of men over women (Duncan, 2006; Hargreaves, 1994). Semi-structured interviews were conducted with six sportswriters from across the United States. These semi-structured interviews followed oral history protocol as described by Sommer and Quinlan (2002). This meant that all interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed in full, and then the sportswriters interviewed were given copies of the transcription to check for accuracy.

An interview guide was created to gauge the experiences and gender-related attitudes of these sportswriters. During the construction of the interview guide, the researcher recognized that masculine hegemony is prevalent in sport and sport media. However, questions were left open-ended and were not slanted in an attempt to reinforce the notion that the sport media industry is a masculine hegemonic domain (Hardin & Shain, 2005b).

These six sportswriters were purposefully selected to represent a diverse sample in terms of experience, gender, and geographic location. It should be noted the author of this study worked as a professional sports journalist for nearly 10 years, primarily in newspapers. However, the researcher attempted to employ more of an etic perspective for this study, meaning that he attempted to discard any attitudes formed during his experiences as a member of the sport media.

Furthermore, he employed the qualitative technique of bracketing, listing any pre-conceived assumptions he had before the interviews and then setting them aside, only mentioning them in this study if they emerged from the data (Husserl, 1964; Patton, 2002). Ironically, of the five pre-conceived major assumptions, only one emerged after coding as a theme. Three were actually refuted.

However, the researcher did use some of the contacts he had formed from his professional experiences as a sportswriter working at newspapers and in magazines in four different states across the country to approach each of these writers about participating in the study. All six interviewees were employed in the United States during the interview process. Two were employed in the South, one lived on the East Coast, another in the Midwest and two more resided on the West Coast.

Among the interviewees, three are males and three are females. One male and one female are relatively inexperienced, having served as staff writers and editors at college newspapers, with one of the two also having a minimal amount of professional experience through internships

and freelance work. One male and one female are veteran writers who worked for several newspapers, although both eventually left the newspaper industry to take other positions in sport media. The other two are both highly successful in the sport media profession by most standards. The male serves as an editor at a prominent national sports magazine. He has also held positions of staff writer and editor at several newspapers representing a variety of circulation sizes. The female is a general assignment reporter at a major metropolitan daily newspaper. She has also worked at multiple newspapers.

Both of the two highly successful writers have covered such prestigious events as the Bowl Championship Series national championship college football game, the National Collegiate Athletic Association men's basketball tournament, the Super Bowl, and the World Series. All six journalists were given aliases and assured that attempts would be made to keep their identities confidential. Two interviews were conducted in person, while four were completed over the phone. Interviews lasted between 45-95 minutes each.

In an attempt to search for key concepts, data from the interviews were coded following qualitative research guidelines set by Miles and Huberman (1994). Theoretical memos and eventually definitional memos were written on reoccurring concepts (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995). The constant comparative method was employed to decipher and define key concepts by unifying their supporting data (Glasser & Strauss, 1967; Turner, 1981).

#### **A CONCEPTUAL MODEL OF GENDER IN SPORTSWRITING**

From reoccurring trends and patterns in the codes and theoretical memos, three primary themes emerged, all of which had several reoccurring themes fall under each theme. These themes reinforced the notion that female and male sportswriters grow up in a masculine hegemonic sports world and that masculine hegemony remains prevalent after their entrance into sports journalism.

**PRIMARY THEME 1:** The socialization process of attitudinal formation toward men's and women's sports is similar for all sportswriters, but some of the gender-related personal experiences leading up to sports writing careers differ between men and women.

Three reoccurring themes supported this primary theme. First, society is structured so that males are steered into sports writing, while women are not. Second, all six reporters grew up fans of men's sports far more than women's sports, including the females, even though all three participated in organized sports through high school. Third, there is a general perception among the writers that attitudes favoring men's sports are ingrained into the general culture.

Research in sport gender issues has shown young boys are more likely to be socialized by their families and peer groups to participate in and follow sports (Adler & Adler, 1998). This pattern of socialization also appears to hold true for steering young boys into the male-dominated profession of sport journalism. All of the men interviewed in this study had aspirations of becoming sportswriters at early ages and they all started pursuing that career while in high school. More importantly, all three male reporters also cited external encouragement to pursue careers as sportswriters.

Sam Thomas, the most experienced of all the writers interviewed, started covering high school football for his local weekly newspaper when he was 14. Thomas, though, said he might have not been given that opportunity if he were female.

If I would have shown up as a ninth-grade student who is a girl and said I want to cover football at a really small paper with an old-time sports editor, I think there would have been some reluctance to hire me; or I think there would have been a greater desire to have me prove that I actually knew what I was talking about. I think as a ninth-grade boy, they kind of expected that I knew football and were okay with sending me out.

John Cox, one of the two college students interviewed in this study, actually started doing freelance work for a fairly large daily newspaper while still in high school. "It was sort of my way of being around sports even more and getting a profession out of it in a way," he said. Bill Jones only worked for his school newspaper while in high school, but all of his educational and career moves in subsequent years were made to improve his chances at a career in sports writing.

In contrast, none of the three women interviewed dreamt about a career in sports journalism as teenagers. Maybe this is because they saw few female role models in the profession or because no one ever discussed sports writing with them as a career option when they were younger. Moreover, two of the three dubbed their eventual entrance into the profession an "accident." Shelly Smith, one of the two more experienced of the women interviewed, was interested in pursuing a career in journalism but had never considered one in sports. She was working for her college newspaper when her school set up a career-day lunch for her with one of its alumni, a man who happened to be the sports editor at the major newspaper in her hometown.

At that time I thought I wanted to go into news or features, and then all the sudden I got a call probably about three or four months after the lunch saying they had an opening in the sports department. I thought well this might be a good way to get my foot at the door, or at least at the paper; so I started working there as kind of an editorial assistant/clerk in the sports department.

Kathy Jones, the female college writer interviewed, had a unique entrance into sports writing. She went to her campus newspaper to apply for a job in photography, but ended up a sportswriter even though she had never done any kind of professional or student newspaper reporting. In fact, she had never thought about doing such work. "The sports editor and the photography editor shared an office, and the photo editor was out," said Jones, who had only worked in the industry for 10 months at the time of this interview and thus was by far the most inexperienced writer among the six individuals interviewed. "The sports editor asked if I would be interested in writing for him and eventually he would - when the photo editor got back - he would talk to him and I could go over and work for him."

Pam Franklin, in contrast, was interested in writing, so she went to the campus-sponsored student newspaper at her university. They had her fill out a questionnaire on what she would be interested in covering and she listed sports as one of her top choices. "Sports was on the list and I've always liked sports, so I chose that," Franklin said. "But it's not like I always wanted to be a sportswriter."

However, these results should not be generalized to all female and male sportswriters. Obviously, some women dream of becoming sportswriters from a young age, while some men probably stumble into the profession by accident as well later in life. Cramer (1994) interviewed 19 female sport journalists, including 11 from newspapers. The author found several of these women discovered at a young age that they loved both sports and writing, and found the profession of sports writing as a way to combine the two. However, it should be



noted that these 19 women included some of the most successful and recognizable women sport journalists in the country. Therefore, their experiences may be significantly different than women sport journalists who work for lower-profile media outlets, such as the three interviewed for this study.

Despite the differences in how they entered the industry, all six reporters claimed to have grown up sports fans. But when asked to specifically name their favorite sports to follow as fans or to report on, all six also named primarily men's sports, supporting the notion of a masculine hegemonic sports world (Schell & Rodriguez, 2000). When a sport is played by both genders, such as basketball, writers always clarified after asked that they were referring only to men playing that sport. In fact, only three writers mentioned any women's sports among their favorites, with one male saying he likes to cover women's tennis, a female who enjoys women's swimming, and the most experienced female writer listing women's track among her favorites. None of the three listed a women's sport as their top choice to cover or follow as a fan.

These findings are particularly relevant in light of the quantitative differences that previous researchers have found exist in the amount of coverage given to women's and men's sports by daily newspapers, particularly since one constant trend in this study was that five of the journalists claimed a great deal of autonomy in deciding what events and athletes they wrote about (Duncan, Messner, & Williams, 1991; Lee, 1992; Vincent, Imwold, Johnson, & Massey, 2003). In fact, five of the six writers said they choose or chose their own assignments at least 60% of the time over their careers. The one exception was the most experienced female who said she was assigned stories 95% of the time over her career. This contrasted findings by Miloch et al. (2005) who found female sportswriters expressed frustration and a lack of control over the assignments they had received. However, findings from this research supported those by Hardin and Shain (2005b), who concluded scholars cannot simply blame the lack of coverage given to women's sports on newspaper management or on the mostly male writers who permeate the industry, since women are just as likely to aspire to cover men's sports as male writers.

Instead, this implies there is a societal difference in views on women's and men's sports that appears to be ingrained into attitude formation at an early age. Veteran reporter Shelly Smith elaborated, "It may still have something to do with some in society being sexist and thinking that a woman's place is in the kitchen, which is sad and horrible to even say those words, because I obviously don't believe that."

**PRIMARY THEME 2:** Once they enter the profession, female and male sportswriters have many different gender-specific experiences, which lead to different attitudes and views toward women in the profession. In general, men are treated as the "standard" in sports writing, while women are considered "the other" in the profession.

This primary theme was supported by seven underlying themes. First, male reporters believe that female sportswriters receive preferential hiring and treatment from management due to their sex. This, in turn, leads to some animosity toward female journalists amongst the mostly male sports staff members. Third, women reporters perceive they are treated well by co-workers so long as they act like one of the boys. Fourth, management gives different types of writing assignments to female staffers and these assignments appear to be based on psychological stereotypes. Fifth, women reporters are likely to receive different and often negative treatment from the subjects they interview, such as athletes, coaches, and team officials. Overall, there appears to be a general perception and expectation that readers and subscribers prefer to see copy from and interact with male sportswriters. Finally, despite their

claims that women have some advantages in the profession, all of the men interviewed said that from an overall standpoint women are disadvantaged in the profession. All of these reoccurring themes seem to imply that males represent the standard in sports writing, while women are considered the other, which was alluded to by several reporters in this study and had been discovered by previous researchers (e.g., Duncan, 2006; Staurowsky & DiManno, 2002).

The two veteran male reporters contended that some female sportswriters are hired and promoted strictly because of their gender. One of the veteran females, however, believed the opposite was true. Both of the veteran males claimed they had been passed over for jobs or promotions by newspapers that hired what they perceived as less-qualified female applicants. "I've seen it hurt some particular papers, where males have been passed over, basically because the job was mandated for a woman," Bill Jones said. "It was not advertised for a woman, but the position was created with a woman in mind." Sam Thomas, who as an editor is responsible for hiring writers, offered a similar account when he said, "There have been times I've known where in the push to make sure a staff has diversity, there have been female sports writers who have been hired probably beyond where they were really ready to be at that point."

Shelly Smith, who last worked in a 35-person sports department where she was often the only female on staff, has heard these claims before. However, she vehemently disagreed with the notion that women sportswriters have an overall advantage due to their minority status within the profession.

I have female friends who work at other papers and they are sometimes in the same situation where there are only one or two in a 30-plus sports department. We have all sort of talked about how we imagine there's a glass ceiling as far as getting promoted. A lot of people I remember would say, 'oh, you're a woman in sports. That's considered a minority and that's really cool, because you're going to end up getting whatever you want.' Well, actually for the most part at least in the last five or six years from what I've seen it hasn't worked that way at all. In fact, I feel that it has worked against women.

Smith's contentions of a lack of promotional opportunities or a glass ceiling for women in sport media have been supported by several studies (Hardin, 2005; Lapchick et al., 2006). However, Pam Franklin, the most experienced of the female writers interviewed, alluded to her gender possibly helping her attain one of the four full-time jobs she has held in the industry.

I've had people say that there are probably a lot of people who just get opportunities because they are female. In fact, my third job, I was with a friend (in that city) who knew the business and he said the paper is a looking for a sportswriter, and a female in particular. Well, I said that doesn't seem right, but I am going to apply and I did thinking if they hired me just because I am female, I'll show them I can do the job by virtue of my work here. I guess it's like a minority hiring, where people feel that they have a quota or that we need to get minorities in here.

Both veteran men interviewed also spoke of perceived favoritism exhibited by management toward women reporters, which they claimed include better opportunities to cover marquee events and a tendency to let mistakes by younger female reporters go unpunished. These contentions were best summed up in one example from Bill Jones.



Well, I remember the first night a girl actually came onto the staff one time. She got stuck with a triple-overtime (football) game of all things. It was a nice introduction for her. But she felt that she needed a cup of tea when she got back. She had to go make her hot tea, keeping in mind that this game was a triple-overtime football game in high school on a Friday night when the deadline was pretty pressing. They pretty much kind of bent the deadline for the girl. That was the first night and I guess she kind of had some other incidents where she was kind of allowed a get-out-of-jail card or a free pass on something that probably a male would have been ripped for right way. I can't say that for sure, but I felt like she was definitely given preferential treatment for that reason. It was a difficult thing to watch, knowing that if you had done the same exact same thing, there would have been no mercy given to you.

The perception that women are often hired due to their sex and are given preferential treatment by management created animosity and resentment toward female writers on many sports staffs, according to the two veteran men reporters, including this one account by editor Sam Thomas:

To be honest, and this sounds sexist, but I've read when I've picked up another paper - and this could have happened with a guy too - but it was a female sportswriter who I had heard disparaging comments about how she doesn't really know sports and she was being sent out to cover stuff that was over her head. Then, I read a game story where it was clear that she didn't have a comprehension of the basic rules of the sport and I don't even know how that actually even got in the newspaper. It should have been caught at the editing stage. But it's something where I've heard those kind of disparaging comments at times, where it's like, 'well, she got that job, because they needed a woman sports writer.'

Ironically, despite such claims, all three of the men interviewed said they believe that women are disadvantaged in sports writing, supporting previous researchers who concluded the sport media is a masculine hegemonic domain, where women are not welcomed (e.g., Hardin & Shain, 2005a; Pedersen et al., 2003). In fact, all three male writers in this study said they would probably or definitely not be in newspaper sports journalism if they were the other gender. John Cox cited a simple binary contrast based on appearances and stereotypes as to his gender's advantage.

When a boss has a male come in and says, 'I know a lot about sports and this is what I want to do;' Unfortunately that's different then if a woman walked in and said, 'I know a lot about sports.'

Somewhat surprisingly, all three of the women interviewed said they have always been treated well by their mostly male co-workers. This mirrored findings by Miloch et al. (2005), but contradicted other researchers (Hardin & Shain, 2005a; Staurowsky & DiManno, 2002). However, Shelly Smith and Pam Franklin did allude to occasional mistreatment from superiors, as did the veteran male reporter, Bill Jones. Both women, though, mentioned that they are not easily offended by raunchy male humor, which they claim is prevalent among newspaper sports department employees.

Therefore, based on these interviews, it appears women are more likely to be treated well by their colleagues so long as they act like one of the guys, assimilate into a masculine hegemonic social structure, and, apparently, do not drink hot tea near deadline. "I went out with the guys," Shelly Smith said of her male colleagues. "We'd go out after football games, and hang

out and drink. They would still tell dirty jokes around me. It wasn't like they acted like, 'Oh, there's a woman, we can't say that.' They pretty much treated me on an equal basis."

Shelly Smith believes the problems she had in dealing with management at her last newspaper would have been mitigated if she were male. Similarly, Franklin said she has been treated well by her superiors at three newspapers. But her sex made her very uncomfortable at one of her first papers, where she was the target of sexual jokes, treated differently by her sports editor due to her gender, and was the brunt of a lewd joke by the male assistant sports editor. "I want to make clear that there was only one paper where I heard a ton of (sexist comments)," Franklin said. "I certainly could have sued that paper for sexual harassment and probably not had to work again."

Franklin said the sports editor at that paper once sent another writer to a football coaches meeting, telling her that if she went to the meeting "then the coaches won't be able to fart, burp, or cuss, and you'll make them feel uncomfortable." But her most negative experience at this paper came when the assistant sports editor sent her an electronic message on a shared server used by all employees in the sports department, informing her that he had placed a story in her electronic folder that she needed to read.

He sent a story to my basket on breast implants and he titled it 'help for you.' I remember that I was pissed. I remember slamming my hand on the table and saying 'take that out of my basket now or I'm going to the main editor,' and he took it out.

Based on these interviews it appears management is also more likely to assign different types of stories to female reporters, often having them do heart-felt features or cover predominantly women's sports. "I've seen some female sportswriters who essentially get tagged to the female sports writing ghetto essentially of covering women's sports," Thomas said. "I've seen some who kind of get pegged to do features. They're not going to be a beat writer." Without getting the opportunity to serve as a beat writer and thus having better opportunities to break news, writers have fewer chances at promotion (Hardin & Shain, 2005a; Lowes, 1997; Theberge & Cronk, 1986). Shelly Smith's experiences substantiated Thomas' assessment.

I think women's sports reporters are treated differently. Sometimes editors want someone who is sympathetic and sensitive. Sometimes I think that others think that because I am a woman that I am more geared to cover the women's sports, which is kind of narrow-minded. I can't say this about every paper, but just from my experience at the last paper I was at, it's almost like the male management wanted to make you prove that you belong in the sports department at all, just giving, I'd say crap assignments. Assignments they know that other guys wouldn't want to do or would complain about, but I would take it and do it. For example, a lot of the local writers during the summer would get to do back-up on (name of a Major League Baseball team) games. All of them got to do it except for me, because I was the only female. These were the sort of things that were frustrating, because I saw the men were getting opportunities that I wasn't. It seemed like I was constantly having to bring that to their attention, but yet nothing was ever done about it.

Franklin said she has been fortunate to be assigned a wide variety of women's and men's sports to cover, but that Smith's assessment often holds true for many female sportswriters she knows. "One thing I hate and can't stand is that at some papers some of the women are pigeon holed into covering the women's sports beat or minor sports," she said. These claims support the findings of Cramer (1994), who after interviewing a variety of female sports journalists concluded, "Because women's sports on the whole receive the least amount of coverage, being

deemed not newsworthy, having a women's sports beat carries almost no weight for professional advancement" (p. 168).

Historically, the few women sport journalists were not allowed in male team sport locker rooms until Melissa Ludke of *Sports Illustrated* filed a successful sexual discrimination lawsuit against the New York Yankees baseball club, which had denied her the same locker room access that male reporters received at the 1977 World Series (Creedon, 1994). Over the next 15 years, there were several high-profile incidents of female reporters being mistreated by male athletes or coaches, most notably the mistreatment of *Boston Herald* reporter Lisa Olsen, who was sexually harassed in a locker room by players on the New England Patriots.

However, through her interviews with 33 female sports journalists, Bruce (2002) found that most women sport reporters judged the vast majority of their male-female locker room interactions to be positive or at least unproblematic. Miloch et al. (2005) discovered similar results. Therefore, these findings implied that a reporter's gender is no longer a major issue in professional male sport team locker rooms or at least not near the major issue it was up until the early 1990s.

Supporting that notion, the three women in this study generally said they encountered few problems in male team sports locker rooms. However, some of the most eye-popping quotes and anecdotes offered by writers from both genders had to deal with treatment women sports reporters receive from the subjects they interviewed. One may have surmised that athletes and coaches at the highest levels of sport would be less likely to offer sexist comments or direct lewd acts toward female journalists, particularly due to the negative media treatment given to athletes who had done so in the past. But Franklin said her experiences led her to believe that high-profile athletes were more likely to be sexist, possibly due to their egos or because they feel they have less to lose.

Franklin, who has covered Major League Baseball extensively, was once called a "pecker checker" after entering a clubhouse locker room. "One player was in (name of a MLB team's) locker room a few years ago," she said. "I don't know who that one was. I walked in and he yelled it." A year later, a well known pitcher uttered the same phrase as she and another female reporter approached his locker area. "There was a woman standing close to (name of player's) locker room and (name of companion sportswriter) and I both walked in while he was changing. He said, 'great, more pecker checkers.'" Franklin said that she has discussed these incidents with other members of the Association of Women in the Sport Media (AWSM) and found out that many experienced women at high levels of sport journalism have also had the phrase "pecker checker" directed toward them by athletes.

That's the term for male athletes who believe that female reporters are in there for one particular reason: to check them out. I've been (working) in (a major American city) for five years now and that's one of the few negative things that has been said to me. But that's nothing compared to what female sports journalists went through 20 or 30 years ago when they were fighting for the right just to get into locker rooms.

Franklin and Smith said such experiences impact their work styles. "I make sure I am always looking up and making sure I get my interviews done and then get out of there," Franklin said. "I definitely like to make sure that no one would ever be able to accuse me of looking at them." The male team sports locker room is a place for bonding, camaraderie, and rituals, but it appears from these anecdotes the locker room remains unwelcomed terrain for female reporters.

Shelly Smith said she encountered one incident where she felt that a minor-league hockey coach purposely made sexist comments in her presence. She said that was an extreme example, but that is common for male coaches to act as if she is a novice sports follower.

There have been a few instances where they don't think you understand the game or they'll try to break it down (laughs), which sometimes can almost seem condescending. They don't think I understand. I try to be like polite and say, 'oh, I know. I've been following the games for years. No worries. I totally understand.' I try to politely let them know they don't have to break this down for me.

Sam Thomas, who claims to have worked with or along side more than 100 women sport journalists, offered a similar perspective. But both Thomas and Bill Jones mentioned that they have personally seen incidents when male athletes appear to make sexual overtures at female reporters. "I've known some instances where a female sportswriter has to prove herself more that she understands the game," Thomas said. "I've also seen a female sportswriter who the athletes were more interested in hitting on her than they are in answering questions."

Interestingly, both of the veteran male writers claim to conduct their best interviews with female athletes, while the two veteran female reporters noticed no gender differences in their interviews with athletes. "(Women) are more professional even if it's at the high school level when you are interviewing them," Bill Jones said. "You're not as impressed by their physical skills, but in a lot of ways they make up for it in terms of drama or like I said, professionalism."

The female reporters in this study undoubtedly received more negative comments and innuendo from newspaper readers and subscribers than their male writing counterparts. Shelly Smith learned early in her career that individuals who phone newspaper sports departments are often surprised to hear a female voice.

I had to take calls from readers and they'd be like, 'oh, I'm trying to reach sports,' and I'm like, 'you are, this is sports.' Then, they'd be like, 'oh, but you're a woman,' and I'd be like 'yeah, but I work in sports.' There were actually a few people who refused to talk to me, because I was a woman and they wanted to talk to a male sports reporter.

Thomas said that women with non-gender specific first names receive fewer calls from readers who want to complain than writers with traditional feminine names. The opposite effect holds true for men, he said.

If readers see a name and it's Kathy, it's different than if it's John. I've actually known some female sportswriters who had gender-neutral names and they would not get as many of those negative comments. I've also known a couple of male sportswriters with gender-neutral names who would get those comments a little bit. Someone would call in to complain and say, 'I want to talk to so and so,' and you're like, 'well, you're talking to him,' and they say, 'I thought that was a woman.' So I do think from the public - especially depending on from what area you're from, especially in a smaller-town area - there is kind of an attitude that a female sportswriter has to prove something more than the male sportswriter does.

If experiences of these writers are similar for many other sportswriters, this indicates that some views toward women sportswriters have not changed much since the late 19th century when Sadie Kneller Miller - who covered the Baltimore Orioles for the now defunct Baltimore Telegram and may have been the first female sports beat writer in the country - published

under the byline SKM to disguise her gender from readers (Creedon, 1994). All of these themes combined indicate that males are the standard in newspaper sports reporting, while women are considered the other; both of which support the contention that masculine hegemony is prevalent within sport media (Duncan, 2006; Schell & Rodriguez, 2000). According to John Cox - in a theme that was echoed by three other writers in this study - this perception exists among most people in the sports world.

I think in this business it's hard for you to be treated differently as a male, because I think the male is sort of the standard. I don't think I've ever been treated any differently because of my gender. I'd be lying if I said it would not be harder for a woman to do exactly what I've done in the last five years. It's just something that comes natural. It's just that the hypothetical fan is a male, the hypothetical athlete is a male, and because of that I think the hypothetical sportswriter is a male.

**PRIMARY THEME 3:** Once they enter the media profession, female and male sportswriters generally exhibit and convey similar overall attitudes toward women's and men's sports.

This primary theme was supported by four reoccurring themes: First, an overall negative attitude toward women's sports and female athletes permeates through most newspaper sports departments. Next, a perception exists among writers and editors that readers want to see mostly coverage of male sports, because they are deemed more important to the masses. However, additional coverage is given to female athletes who offer a wide stream sex appeal. Third, newspaper sport journalism is a competitive industry. Thus, sports staff members at these newspapers feel the need to publish mostly stories on men's sports, because that is what their primary competitor newspapers usually do. Finally, few writers from either gender seek women's sports beats because they believe that would hinder opportunities for career advancement and peer recognition.

Only the young college male writer interviewed in this study believes his staff exhibits a decent attitude toward women's sports. Kathy Jones, the college female writer, said, "Men's sports' get the better writers and (we) consistently send people to their games. The women's sports tend to be a little bit of joke when it comes to like who is going to cover it." Those negative attitudes toward women's sports appear to only become more pronounced in the professional ranks, although writers may not be so overt in expressing their views. "They were pretty down on it, I would say," Bill Jones said of his colleagues' overall views toward women's sports at his last newspaper, which incidentally did not employ a woman in the sports department and had not done so in at least 10 years.

There were a lot of Waspy type of guys, you know what I mean: old school, never had really been brought up with women's sports as viable entertainment, and I guess, as a media event. So I think they all kind of laughed and looked down upon their efforts, and found pretty much no news values in their stories; and I think that reflected pretty much in their coverage as well.

Both Jones and Shelly Smith said that male reporters were more inclined to cover women's professional sports if they found the athletes physically attractive. Jones admitted that he felt the same way when asked which gender of athletes he preferred covering. "Oh yeah, men's sports, unless maybe Anna Kournikova is playing or something than I would definitely say women's sports," Jones said before bursting into laughter.

Franklin said that as she moved into larger papers she heard less sexist language from her colleagues but also saw less coverage of women's sports in her newspaper. "You really - especially at my paper - have to struggle to get women's sports covered in the paper," she said. "At the beginning, you really push for it. But at this point, I don't even push for it anymore."

While admitting that as an editor he has assigned many more writers to cover men's sports than women's sports, Sam Thomas contends that he is just fulfilling the wishes of his readers. To put in bluntly, it's an interesting debate," he said about his last paper's coverage of women's sports.

You will hear people say that these sports are covered not as well as they should and if they were there would be more interest in them. I do understand at the same time from when I was a sports editor, I don't look at what sports I can get people interested in. When I am making out the budget for the day, I am looking at what stories do I have that people are most interested in.

Thomas has a wealth of experience in the industry, working at three daily newspapers as an intern, prep writer, college beat reporter, pro beat writer, assistant sports editor, and sports editor before moving over to magazines. He said all of his experiences have indicated to him that the vast majority of readers prefer seeing copy of men's sports more so than articles on women's sports.

In general, the places I've been, if I put a college football story on the front as a centerpiece 40 days in a row during college football season, I'm not going to hear many complaints. When (auto racer) Dale Earnhardt died at Daytona, we sold 20,000 more papers over the next five days, because we had Earnhardt on front. We had one of the (NCAA) Division I-A women's college basketball teams that we covered go the Final Four and we put it in on front, and we didn't sell more papers. When the local NFL team made the Super Bowl, we sold more papers. It comes down to that. I do think it is true that if we put the WNBA out on the front more often, more people would probably be interested in the WNBA. But the question becomes should you put it on the front in a prominent place on a daily basis to build interest if that means that other people are going to call you and complain, because you are putting something else inside or cutting space from what they already are interested in.

All of the writers cited various evidence that men's sports are more popular among their readers, including attendance figures, television ratings, and phone calls to the office from readers. Cox said that men's sports always receive precedent over women's sports at his newspaper.

When there's a men's basketball story and a women's basketball story and only one can fit, the men's is getting it. I don't think that has anything to do with the fact that I like men's sports better. But it's what the people want. What will we catch more flack for not having in, a men's basketball story or a women's basketball story? Since there is more demand for the men's sports that would get in first. It's definitely happened before where we've had to choose and we always choose the men's.

Cox and Thomas both noted their direct competitors cover predominantly men's sports, so they feel the need to do likewise or risk losing readership. But Bill Jones took more of a national perspective in his outlook. "It's just kind of the nature of the game," Jones said. "You look at



ESPN or any show like that, and they show 55 minutes of men's sports and five minutes of women's sports, maybe."

Finally, all the writers interviewed except for Cox said that covering mainly women's sports would significantly diminish or at least hinder a writer's chance of advancing their career.

Shelly Smith pointed out that there are no major beats covering women's sports at her paper, which does cover the local WNBA team but only sporadically. The general perception among these writers was that covering women's sports means fewer people read your stories, which Sam Thomas alludes to in this quote:

Say you're the women's college basketball writer at a major metro, your average story is probably going on an inside page, in general. Say you do a really good feature, it's less likely to get kicked to the front of the paper than if you did it on a Major League baseball player, or a major college men's basketball or a football player. I covered women's basketball and I enjoyed it almost as much as men's basketball. The reason why men's basketball is more enjoyable is the simple fact that more people care about it. Writing always is somewhat of an ego standpoint. With that being the case, if more people are interested in it, then you like writing about it more usually.

## DISCUSSION

Prior to data collection, two guiding research questions were postulated for this study: (a) What are the gender-related experiences of sportswriters pre- and post-entrance to the profession? (b) Are there attitudinal differences between female and male writers on women's sport? From the data gathered, it seemed fairly clear that female and male reporters in this study had numerous different gender-related experiences prior to entering professional sports writing.

The men in this study were socialized into sport and sports writing more so and at a much younger age than the participating women, although all of the interviewees grew up more as fans of men's sports much more than women's sports. Those differences between men and women sportswriters become even more pronounced after entering the profession. Women reportedly received differential treatment from management, co-workers, the subjects they interviewed, and newspaper readers, many seemingly just because of their binary classification as female. These findings certainly reinforce the notion of both sport and the sport media as masculine hegemonic domains (Bryson, 1987; Connell, 1990; Schell & Rodriguez, 2000).

However, there was virtually no evidence in this study to support any notion that there are attitudinal differences toward women's sports between female and male sportswriters. This indicates that the structure and foundation of these attitudes must be altered among editors and writers before women's sports start receiving substantially more coverage and better quality coverage in daily newspapers. However, like most qualitative research, results from this study should not be generalized, particularly since a major limitation of this exploratory study was that only six journalists were interviewed, including no female managers at daily newspapers.

Future research on media members' attitudes and experiences should include interviews and surveys of more female and male sport journalists, representing different segments of the media industry (i.e., Internet, magazines, newspapers, radio, television). Moreover, studies should also be completed on the attitudes and experiences of sport media gatekeepers, such as television producers and newspaper sports editors.

Numerous content analyses have shown men's sports generally receive substantially more media coverage than women's sports (e.g., Eastman & Billings, 2000; Jones, Murrell, & Jackson, 1999), while qualitative analyses have revealed media content often portray female athletes differently through sexualizing their bodies, comparing their abilities and athleticism to men, and casting them in stereotypical gender roles (Christopherson, Janning, & McConnell, 2002; Vincent, 2004). However, there is a clear need for more research to see if quantitative and qualitative differences exist in media content based on the gender of sport journalists, since few studies have analyzed this area (Pedersen et al., 2003; Urquhart & Crossman, 1999; Vincent, 2004). Differences in gender-specific experiences and attitudes toward women's sports may affect the quality of coverage given to female athletes by sport reporters.

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**APPENDIX 1****DATA SOURCES**

1. Interview with “Kathy Jones” (alias for a young rising female from a college student newspaper).
2. Interview with “John Cox” (alias for a young rising male from a college student newspaper).
3. Interview with “Bill Jones” (alias for a male who recently left the industry after a fairly successful career working for several different newspapers).
4. Interview with “Shelly Smith” (alias for a female who left the industry after a fairly successful career working for several different newspapers).
5. Interview with “Sam Thomas” (alias for a highly successful male who has been a sportswriter and editor at several newspapers, and is now an editor at a national magazine).
6. Interview with “Pam Franklin” (alias for a highly successful female who has been a sportswriters at several newspapers and works as a staff writer at a major metropolitan daily newspaper).

**APPENDIX 2****INTERVIEW GUIDE**

NOTE: This was used as a guide to follow during interviews for sample questions. Not all questions were asked and additional ones were added as the interviewer probed for experiences and attitudes related to gender. Demographic characteristics and a moderate amount of career information were attained from each interviewee while setting up a date for the official interview.

1. How long have you been at your current paper?
2. Please tell me about your job duties?
3. What is that like?
4. What other positions have you held at your current paper?
5. Tell me about how you became a sportswriter?
6. Without providing any specific names or papers, what were some of the most encouraging experiences you had in your first few months in the profession?
7. Without providing any specific names or papers, what were some of the discouraging experiences you had over your first few months in the profession?
8. What were some of your most positive experiences as a sports reporter?
9. And your most negative experiences as a sports reporter?
10. What are your long-term plans in this profession?
11. Why do you want to stay/leave/unsure sports writing?
12. Overall, how satisfied are you as a sports journalist?
13. Has there ever been a time when you seriously considered leaving the industry?
14. What are your favorite sports to cover (Why)?
15. Have you ever been assigned to cover a sport that you didn't want to?
16. Tell me about that experience and your feelings?
17. How much individual choice do you have in what events/athletes you'll cover?
18. Overall, do you prefer covering men's sports or women's sports?
19. Has that always been your preference?
20. Tell me about your experiences covering women's sports?
21. Over your career, how much time have you spent covering women's sports?
22. What are the differences in covering men's and women's sports?
23. If you were to cover predominately women's sports, how would that affect your career advancement?
24. As far as you know, is sports writing helped or hurt by having women reporters?
25. Why?
26. In your experiences or things you've seen, do editors treat women and men sports reporters the same or different?
27. How about your co-workers, what differences do you notice in how they treat male and female sports reporters?
28. What about the athletes, coaches or other people being interviewed, what are the differences between how they treat male and female sports reporters?
29. When you do interviews, what do you differently when talking to women versus men athletes?
30. In your department, how would you describe the overall attitude toward women's sports?
31. Have you ever heard negative comments from your boss or higher-ups about women in sports journalism?
32. How about from your colleagues or reporters from other papers?
33. How has your gender impacted your career in this profession?
34. If you were the other gender, would your career in sports writing be different?
35. Is there anything I have not asked you about sports writing or sports reporters that you would like to add?