Research Analysis

Research Topic

Women have been entering the world of sports journalism in growing numbers. From ESPN to the local news, it has become hard to find a sports newscast without a female presence. This presence marks a victory for women, but it is also the beginning of new obstacles. Fighting for total equality has been a long battle, and it is one that may not be solved for many years to come.

In sports journalism, the issue goes beyond inclusion. Women have begun to make the cut, but they are being recognized in many cases for the wrong reasons. These females are being hired as "token" hires. They are put on the screen because of what their looks have to offer as opposed to their knowledge of sports. This is an objectification of the women. This puts females in a lose-lose position: choosing to be included seems to mean choosing to be objectified based upon your looks.

When conducting research into this prevalent and troubling social issue, I will take a feminist perspective. Feminism is the "theory that men and women should be equal politically, economically and socially" (Feminist Theory, p.1). Within this theory there are three relevant branches to the women in sports journalism objectification issue. The first is gender feminism. This states that there are fundamental differences between the sexes and that those differences aren't bad or shouldn't be equated. They should instead be "celebrated" and enhanced to benefit that individual (Feminist Theory, p.1). The next branch is moderate feminism. This is the perspective of feminism by the younger generation. Females at a younger age recognize that there was once discrimination, but they themselves have not
experienced it (Feminist Theory, p.2). The last offshoot of feminism that is relevant to this topic is cultural feminism. This is the idea that men and women have personality differences that navigate their roles in society (Feminist Theory, p.1).

This research study would be important because it would enhance the current research. There is a large amount of research done about what women in sports journalism think about their role. A number of researchers have conducted surveys, interviews, and focus groups about what these women perceive their career paths to be and what they think that their roles mean in a newsroom. The following proposed research would add to the current literature in that it would ask a different group - news directors and executive editors - what they see women as offering to their newsroom.

This research would offer real world relevance because it is something that is an increasing issue. According to research by Hardin, Dodd, and Laufer (2006), sports journalism is growing rapidly (p. 429). They found that this growth is the fastest it has ever been since the enactment of Title IX in the 1970s, and as a result universities are offering more and more programs in sports journalism (Hardin, 2006, p. 437). This will just keep the industry growing. With such growth it is important to understand the social implications it is having on the issue of gender discrimination. If women are choosing to pursue this as a career they deserve to be taken seriously and not objectified as a visual object.
Literature Review

Lack of Equality in the Newsroom.

For the women who aren’t turned away from pursuing sports journalism by the perceptions and the training biases there is a common understanding amongst their female peers. Hardin and Shain (2005) conducted a focus group of women in the Association for Women in Sports Media. They found that women in sports journalism feel that they need to support each other and form a network of communication and common struggles (Hardin, 2005, p. 28). Although that may help them in certain situations, this study also had found that there are characteristics bred from public perceptions of the industry, and they were things that a support system wouldn't always be able to remedy. This study found that women felt a lack of respect from not only their male counterparts, but also from sports fans (Hardin, 2005, p. 28). The women interviewed reported "feeling constant pressure to prove themselves" (Hardin, 2005, p.29).

In another study conducted by Hardin, Shain, and Shultz-Poniatowski (2008) they interviewed professional women in the field and found that women feel the constant need to prove why they are there. They found that this feeling stems from the general belief by female sports journalists and their colleagues that each woman is a "quota" hire (Hardin, 2008, p. 69). Females were put in positions that made them feel insignificant and that they were a "quota" hire instead of a "merit" hire (Miller, 1995, p.887). Hardin et al. (2008) reported that women were treated as being ignorant to sports in general and that when they were a part of any office conversations it was about things such as dating issues or other "off-color"
discussions (p. 74). The overall consensus was that being a woman got these journalists the job, but being a woman also left them at the disadvantage when it came to performing it (Hardin, 2008, p. 74).

According to the research, performing well is not the biggest concern for women in this industry. They are more concerned with lack of promotional opportunities. A survey of women in the Association of Women in Sports Media conducted by Smucker et al. (2003) found that women in sports journalism encountered a glass ceiling very quickly once they started their careers (p. 405). They found that younger reporters were not as skeptical about their advancement opportunities as their older colleagues. This was because when they were first in their role they had small, quick promotions, which stopped coming and left them at a place that did not satisfy their career ambitions long-term (Smucker, 2003, p. 405). They tied this directly into hegemonic ideology when they said:

"In such structures, men will often allow women to break into the male-dominated profession through entry level positions and early promotional opportunities. However, the resistance to women moving up becomes greater and women find their promotional opportunities more limited as they attempt to progress upward in their careers. The male hegemonic structure of sport and sports journalism is such that entrance can be gained and initial promotions obtained, but the glass ceiling is still firmly in place in terms of upper editorial positions within the sports department" (Smucker, 2003, P. 405).
This study found that other than dissatisfaction with promotion, women were overall doing well. They were satisfied with their level of pay, supervision, the work itself, and they had a general satisfaction with co-workers (Smucker, 2003, p. 406). The big problem was promotion and most women reported that when they hit the point in which their career had reached its peak, they felt forced to change jobs and/or organizations rather quickly (Smucker, 2003, p. 407). This caused a lot of instability in their lives, which posed another major issue - family life.

Women in sports journalism reported in many of the surveys and research that family life and stability are a major drawback to choosing this profession. Women in sports reporting feel that they have a "socially constructed responsibility to sacrifice career mobility for childrearing" (Hardin, 2008, p. 75). Women also revealed in a survey the feeling that their employers were not flexible with hours and assignments and that they weren't being helpful in coordinating schedules for their reporters that would work with traditional childcare responsibilities (Hardin, 2005, p. 31).

A more general study about women and the alignment of their careers and their family lives puts this into perspective. Hite and McDonald (2003) conducted focus groups with women in non-managerial positions. They reported that women who set goals often change them as their lives go through a major transition such as marriage or having a child (p. 228). Even for monetary reasons women in other fields had to choose whether to devote more time to their families or to building their careers (Hite, 2003, p.229). This study found that women working for organizations that were willing to help them to plan and coordinate both aspects of
their lives had happier employees who stayed at the same company for longer periods of time (Hite, 2003, p. 232).

**Stereotypes and Assumptions of Male/Female Roles.**

There have been many issues raised as more women have become active in covering national and international sporting events. The first of which is the sexualized comments and the harassment that has been tied to it. Research conducted by Mastro et al. (2012) found through participant response that women who work on sports shows are few and that they are evaluated on their looks as opposed to their knowledge (p.459). But, they also found that race and gender played a major role in perception of the effectiveness of the sports reporter. They found that in white, female-dominated sports, white female reporters were more trusted by their audience (Mastro, 2012, p. 469).

They also found that black female reporters were viewed most favorably when they were reporting about the WNBA (Mastro, 2012, p. 469). The connection between positive view of the reporter being tied to a similar race and gender of the majority of athletes in the sport was a commonly found factor for both male and female reporters, until it came to evaluating the NFL. The group that was surveyed said that they trusted white male reporters because they are usually in the "high-profile" position in that sport (i.e., quarterback) (Mastro, 2012, p. 469). Other than the difference in the NFL, the results show that people view someone most similar to the athletes to be most knowledgeable about the sport. The issue with this is the lack of coverage that women’s sports receives which ties back to the audience seeing women reporting revenue sports with less belief in their credibility.
One possible solution to this issue was to ask the editors. Editors have access to data about their audience and they also have more of a role in determining the direction of a publication. Hardin conducted an interview with 285 editors about women's sports coverage. Only four of these editors were female. The results showed that these editors were basing their opinions on their own sense of audience interests. They reported viewing female athletes as less athletic and less interesting than men (Hardin, 2005, p. 73). They reported that around half of the editors felt that Title IX put too much pressure on expectations of news coverage for women's sports and they viewed female athletics with resentment (Hardin, 2005, p. 73). Hardin (2005) suggests that this view of athletics could be alienating potential readers (p. 72). The author ties in hegemonic ideology to the decisions and beliefs of the editors. She reports that these beliefs and preconceived notions are justifying the decisions of the editors (Hardin, 2005, p. 72).

In all areas of news, women are being assigned the human-interest pieces. The Routledge Handbook of Sport Communication evaluates assignments of female sports reporters in broadcast news using the post-structural theory. It says that assigning female broadcasters to working on the sidelines at sporting events as opposed allowing them to be a part of in booth analysis is forcing them to cover "human interest" stories (Whiteside, 2013, p. 35). It continues on to read:

"Not only is she doing what might be characterized as "woman's work" (for example, reporting on the "softer," off-the-field stories), but she is occupying a space that is less valued in the profession compared with the television booth where the announcers authoritatively inform and explain the game to
the viewer. From a post-structural perspective, these types of practices are a technology through which gendered identities are produced; in other words, it is not that female reporters are relegated to working in certain spaces, but that we come to understand the category of a female reporter through seeing her work in those spaces” (Whiteside, 2013, p. 35).

This shows that females are assigned a role within their gender and their career. It shows that they are following that direction despite feelings that it is narrowing their chances of advancing in their careers.

Although females in sports journalism face these challenges, they are not alone; others in communications roles face similar hardships (Oakley, 2000, p.321). The book titled Strategic Sport Communication (2007) suggested networking as a means of overcoming the setbacks that women face in their roles in the industry (p. 40). Pedersen et al. (2007) stressed the need for women to communicate with other women following the same career path, as well as those in other roles in the industry. The authors stated that “to advance in sport communication, professionals must be willing to build relationships and network with colleagues in the field and in those fields related to the discipline” (Pedersen, 2007, p. 40). By related fields they are referring to journalists in print and broadcast, as well as women in sports operations, marketing, management, and sales. The unity of the women pursuing these roles in sports allows for them to “amass a significant level of personal power and loyalty, which can ensure a successful and fulfilling career in sport” (Pedersen, 2007, p. 40). So, although women in sports journalism feel that they have a glass
ceiling, they are not alone in the industry, and their ability to connect and collaborate will only help to provide additional opportunities for their career.

**Methods**

One of the most effective methods will be conducting interviews. Due to the fact that all previous research on this topic has used information gathering from the journalists themselves, the proposed research is focusing on interviews with news directors and editors in newsrooms, as well as individuals working in sports promotion. This is because these individuals are responsible for hiring, and that means determining the effectiveness of men and women at completing the jobs being filled.

The sample size for this research will be three. I chose this number because this will allow me to talk to one person in every hiring capacity for sports journalism. Choosing the company, and the employee of that company, from each category of the sample will be random selection.

The first individual that is important to interview is a news director at a broadcast outlet. This person will be able to answer questions as someone who interviews and hires on-air talent. They can speak to what qualities they are looking for. This perspective will allow for the interviewer to assess what the attributes are that the individual looks for in both male and female reporters, and also what is something that would deter them from hiring a candidate.

The second individual that will be interviewed is a talent agency representative. This person has experience working with media and media placement. They know what a client is looking for to represent their brand. They
will have experience working with the selection of reporters and media outlets. This perspective will allow for a clearer picture of the impact that the selection of a specific journalist can have on a brand or company.

The third interviewee will be a sports editor of a print publication. This individual, much like the news directors, has input relative to the selection of reporters and anchors at the outlet they are working for. This individual also assigns story ideas to each reporter. The editor has experience with the direction that their publication is looking to go, and the public feedback or reaction to certain reporters. They have the ability to work with recruiters to find individuals that meet the qualities they are seeking. These leaders will offer a perspective that is different than the other two being interviewed, in that they will need to address not only the newsroom's immediate needs, but also a need to fulfill what the reader reacts with the most.

The interviews will be unstructured. This is because I am attempting to understand the behaviors of these individuals and their social thinking in terms of gender. Fontana & Frey (1994) stress the importance of unstructured interviews in attempting to "understand the complex behavior of members of society without imposing any a priori categorization that may limit the field of inquiry" (p.366). Understanding the interviewees responses without making them feel attacked or using accusatory questions is the goal of using unstructured interviews in this research. The comfort level will be extremely important. These individuals are being asked questions to understand their level of comfort in hiring women for roles in sports journalism. They are going to want to give socially acceptable answers. The
interviewer is going to have to ask questions that are not accusatory at all - wording will be crucial. The interviewee can’t feel attacked or accused of sexism in any way or the results will be inaccurate.

With this in mind, it will be a productive strategy to ease into the specific gender-based questions. This will assist in building rapport with the interviewee. The interviewer will start with more broad questions about hiring and then narrow them down to get to the base of the interviewee’s thoughts regarding gender differences in these roles.

In terms of topics to cover, the interviewer will ask questions about the interviewee’s thoughts on the changing role of women in sports journalism. They will ask questions such as “What changed that allowed women to break into this industry?” and “What is the ideal role for a woman in the newsroom?” They will focus on the ideal candidate for different jobs in sports (i.e., anchor, analyst, color commentator, reporter). Establishing what qualities makes each individual successful will help transition into questions about which of those qualities men have an advantage in, and also which women may have an advantage in.

After completing the interviews, this researcher will conduct a case study of two female sports reporters. The first reporter will be someone who has had significant success in the field. The subject will have had a career lasting longer than five years, and is now working at a major broadcast outlet (e.g., ESPN, FOX Sports, CBS). This person will also have success and recognition outside of the world of sports. For example, Erin Andrews has endorsement deals and hosts Dancing With The Stars. This will help to demonstrate that their broadcast career has surpassed
basic reporting and resulted in public recognition off of the field/court. The aforementioned research found that women in sports journalism felt they had a limited opportunity for promotion; this success beyond journalism will assist in refuting that and allow for the evaluation of why that was not true in this case.

The second person to be researched in the case study will be an individual who was not able to find lasting success or career satisfaction. This woman will have started out on a path to sports reporting, but will have switched to another profession along the way. The contrast of these two professionals will allow for the evaluation of the contributing factors in their differing outcomes.

This research will be credible because of the structure. Choosing the sample is specific. This sample shows the different characteristics that individuals in charge of hiring, but in various roles, value in a female sports reporter. It also covers different size organizations which makes the results applicable to all levels of journalism. This allows for it to be relevant to the entire industry. Also, the emphasis on individual hiring practices, as opposed to an institutional level approach, increases the likelihood that the results are representative to the industry and not just one station or agency. All of these factors increase validity, while also increasing transferability to the industry as a whole.

Using both interviews and a case study will also enhance the validity of the research. This triangulation methodology uses a qualitative and a quantitative approach, both of which are establishing the same thing. These methods are applied to recognize the motivating factors in the hiring and success of female sports journalists. Together, the results of these methods will help define what it takes for
a female to be hired in this industry, as well as key characteristics and/or requirements for these women to have a long and successful career in sports broadcasting.

One study that used a similar methodology was a study conducted by Cindy J. Price and Michael R. Brown in 2010. This study, titled "Adapting Small Market Rural Media to the Challenges of New Media: Interviews with Small Market Rural Managers," was similar in a few ways. The first is the method of interviewing. Price and Brown selected a group of small market managers and administrators at newspapers in rural areas to ask their thoughts on the changing media and addition of new media. Much like my proposed method, the researchers were looking to find out about the evolution of their targeted media group. This study was also the first of its kind. In the same way that my study is one of the first to interview the hiring personnel in sports journalism, this is the first to target the specific group that Price and Brown were studying. Although this study chose a semi-structured interview format, they were still looking for answers that could be built upon, making it not completely structured.

Results

Unstructured interviews were the first method used in this research study. As outlined in the methods, three individuals in the news industry were chosen. The first interview was completed with a talent agent for broadcast news personnel. The second interview was with the associate managing sports editor for a major Chicago newspaper. The third and final interview was with the assistant news director at a top-25 market size news station.
Unstructured interviews were chosen in order to make the interviewee feel more comfortable about gender-based questions. All of the subjects were aware of the topic of this research, so creating a discussion rather than a question and answer session was key in terms of not receiving unauthentic or “politically correct” answers.

The first interview – with the broadcast talent agent – was the longest of the three. The subject was very straightforward with his thoughts about what it takes to succeed in broadcast journalism, and more specifically in sports reporting. He described having presence and a good voice consistently throughout the interview. Also, from the beginning, he spoke about the importance of appearance. He referenced a number of his own clients that have had success primarily because of their appearance, but he also mentioned instances in which networks asked for specific characteristics relative to personal appearance.

The interview with the agent had the theme of appearance throughout. He put a high level of importance upon a journalist’s looks and their presence on-air and off. He described the process of acquiring clients – they send him tapes and he evaluates. During this process he focuses on the importance of the first few seconds of a candidate’s reel. He said that many news directors and others in a hiring capacity don’t have the time to sit through the entire tape, and they often make almost immediate decisions based on the first few shots that they see.

In regards to females in sports specific journalist roles, he said that knowledge is not necessarily what will carry a career. As with the beginning of the interview when the discussion was about news in general, he referenced the
importance of what a person looks like. He indicated that good presence is about a number of things (i.e., voice, setting, experience), but it is primarily focused on looks.

When discussing the importance of knowledge in sports reporting on the network level, he indicated that it was not as important in certain roles. He said numerous times that “knowledge is power,” but he also said that candidates in sports can often get away with a lack of knowledge as long as their looks are appealing. However, on more than one occasion, he did reference the fact that people who don’t have the sports knowledge may be caught in an embarrassing position when they are on the air. He felt that the passion that someone may feel about sports is not reason enough to pursue a sports career and certainly is not going to lead to a completely successful career in sports journalism.

The second interview, with the associate managing sports editor of a Chicago-based newspaper, highlighted many important factors when hiring candidates - many of which were different than those emphasized by the first interviewee. The most notable difference was that this interviewee did not mention the gender of the journalist at all. This interview was significantly shorter and it focused entirely on a candidate’s knowledge of journalism. This individual felt very strongly that a journalist who is to be successful in sports needs to have a strong ability to be a good writer, but, aside from that, there were no other universal themes. He repeatedly stressed the point that, to work in the Chicago market at a newspaper the size of the one he is at, the candidate must have a number of years of experience or internships in order to come in and work as a full-time writer. He didn’t stress experience in sports or expansive knowledge of sports. Instead he
stressed the ability to take a story and make it unique. He looks for people who can take the story for that day's edition and make it unlike the one that every other journalist covering that same event will be writing about.

This interview had a focus on technical skills in journalism. The interviewee wasn’t extremely interested in where a candidate went to school or their grades while they were completing their studies. Rather he was focused on their past work. When looking to hire a candidate he said that he will look at their past work and also their conduct in a fast-paced, newsroom environment. He will call upon past contacts that worked on the same team as the candidate. He will use that information to evaluate whether the individual that he is interested in can keep up with the Chicago sports news cycle, and whether they can write columns, features, or game recaps and previews that are going to grab the audience in a way that no other journalist at a competing outlet is able to.

One topic that became a focus near the end of the interview was this editor’s preference for those interested in news, and not just sports. He said that he would “prefer” someone that had done news before. He avoids candidates that only want to write about sports. He finds that a number of people pursue sports journalism simply for the opportunity to be near athletes or events. He said that the best journalists are those that are focused on journalism as opposed to being a fan.

The final interview was with an assistant news director in a top-25 market, and it was similar to the second in focus. The interviewee did not mention gender before being directly asked about it. She said that in hiring a candidate, her focus is on their ability to tell a story. She looks for people that can take a typical story that
other journalists are covering and make it something that is unique to their storytelling style. She finds that the most successful journalists are those that have an ability to connect a story to the audience they are speaking to.

She also spoke to the crossover between news and sports in broadcast journalism. She felt that people who pursue sports need a special kind of command, and that they need to be able to think quickly when they are going live on the air. She said that people in sports could be very successful in news with a lot of hard work to make that transition. In her experience, she has found that people who cover sports need to be aware of the community, and they need to be aware of the general news just as much as the journalists that aren’t covering sports. This is because they need to be able to discuss sports news with a more marketable lens. That is, they need to be able to make it relatable to the mass audience, and appealing to those who may already be familiar with the general aspects of that story. She felt that sports journalists need to be focused on what is happening in all news, not just the world of sports.

Following the unstructured interviews, a case study was conducted directly comparing the career trajectories of Kristen Ledlow, a sports broadcaster, and Paula Faris, a woman who started her career in sports journalism, but chose to accept a network position in New York City with ABC.

Ledlow, 27, is currently a host for NBA TV. She appears on the weekly show “Inside Stuff,” makes appearances during the NBA season on NBA TV’s “NBA Style” and “GameTime,” and also attends/hosts events as a Turner Sports representative (kristenledlow.com).
Ledlow, a Florida native, graduated from Southeastern University. During her undergraduate studies in broadcast and communications, she was also a key member of the women’s volleyball team and the women’s basketball team. She earned All-American honors in volleyball. Despite double majoring and being a very active student-athlete, Ledlow was able to hold two internships that would prove to be key in her future career. Ledlow was an intern in Orlando during the NBA Finals, and she also did some intern work at the 2010 ESPY Awards.

During her senior year of college, Ledlow earned titles outside of sports and sports broadcast. She competed in, and was crowned, “Miss Capital City USA” (2012), and she placed in the top 5 at the Miss Florida USA competition. During this time, she served as the in-game reporter for the Southeastern University men’s basketball games. She conducted interviews and did the play-by-play work (kristenledlow.com).

As soon as she completed her degrees, Ledlow was hired as the host of the “Good News Show.” This was a daily program on WTXL-TV in Tallahassee. After working on this show for two years, she entered the sports industry. She began working as a team member for 97.9 ESPN Radio station in Tallahassee. Her primary reporting responsibility was coverage of Florida State athletic events (kristenledlow.com).

The following year Ledlow made the move to Atlanta where she still lives and works today. She accepted a position with FOX Sports as a Southeast Field Reporter. She focused her reports on SEC and ACC football and basketball. After only a year in that position she moved into the role of host when she began work for 92.9 The
Game. She was the host of “The Opening Drive with Rick Kamla, Randy Cross and Kristen Ledlow.” Within 13 months, she began working for NBA TV in the same capacity that she does today (kristenledlow.com).

Similar to Ledlow, Paula Faris also served in a number of newsrooms before accepting her current network position. Faris, a Michigan native, graduated in 1997 with a degree in broadcast journalism from Cedarville University in Ohio. Upon graduation, Faris began working behind the camera. She was responsible for shooting, producing and editing at WKEF/WRGT-TV. In 2002, Faris began working on-air full-time. She continued at WKEF/WREG-TV as a sports reporter, but she also worked as a weekend sports anchor at WPCO-TV in Cincinnati for three years. Following this assignment, Faris moved to Chicago to begin working at WMAQ-TV as a sports reporter. She worked in this market and at this station for six years (ABC News).

Since she and her family’s move to New York, she has served as a co-anchor on “Good Morning America’s” weekend show. She has also spent time as co-anchor of “World News Now” and “America This Morning.” In September of 2015 she began working as a co-host on “The View.” In addition, she is a reporter for ABC’s online platforms (ABC News).

Although Faris left sports reporting, she has been able to cover a few major sports scandals/developments for ABC programs. She has done some reporting of the head trauma issue that is currently a focal point in both amateur and professional athletics. She also reported on the New England Patriots when the
“Deflate-gate” scandal surfaced. However, the majority of her on-air presence is focused in general news (ABC News).

**Discussion**

There are a number of key findings in this study when considering female sports journalists. The initial research questions were as follows:

1. *What characteristics are decisive in the hiring of a female sports journalist?*
2. *Once hired, why are women unable to advance beyond entry-level sports journalism positions? (For this study, advancement is referring to upward movement within newsroom management.)*

The three interviews revealed valuable information when considering the first research question. All of the interviews had entirely different focal themes throughout (appearance and knowledge, journalism skills, storytelling), but one theme was consistent: the idea that a prospective sports journalist has to have more than a passion for sports; they must instead have a passion for journalism. The interview with the broadcast talent agent addressed this when he spoke to the idea that many of the individuals that he works with have a desire to be on TV. He stated numerous times that it takes more than that to be successful in broadcast journalism. He indicated repeatedly the importance of looks in sports in order for a woman to stand out. He even went so far as to negate the importance of knowledge specific to sports, but he repeatedly referenced the desire to succeed as a journalist. He gave the examples of the women that he has worked with in the general news-reporting arena of journalism. When discussing these examples he talked about the need for them to have a presence, and for them to be well spoken. He spoke to the
fact that these women need to be commanding when they are off camera as well. His discussion of the need for him to be able to “sell” their abilities to news directors is indicative of the need for a woman to be able to have skills aside from appearance. Although he did focus much of his interview on looks, he seemed to only speak to that when asked questions directly related to women. He emphasized the need to be able to be a good on-air personality and a good in-person interview in order to achieve the network level of success.

These characteristics of presence and personality were also mentioned in the second interview, however the print editor was very adamant that success is directly related to good technical journalism skills. Although he spoke about print, he also mentioned that a candidate that is able to provide television, radio, or other multimedia clips is someone that he will give additional consideration to. He looks for someone that practices journalism and has the ability to take a story and make it his/her own.

This skill directly relates to the final interview’s emphasis on storytelling. She said that this fundamental journalism skill is one that is often missed. She pointed out that it requires a person that has the training, but also the desire to mine for, and tell, a story. The assistant news director that was interviewed spoke to the presence and the “command” that were referenced in the first interview as well.

In all three interviews those in hiring positions in the world of sports journalism were focused on the need for a candidate to be a journalist first. The focus on presence and command of the room or area was something that makes candidates stand out from the pack. The ability to capture the attention of the
audience during the first few seconds of a clip in both broadcast and in print was crucial to being hired at a mid-major or major outlet. Also, the desire to dig for a story within something that may be reported by numerous outlets was so important in these three interviews. For a candidate to know that their story needs to tell a different angle in order to make the game of the day or the trade of the week more of a story was something that the three interviewees noted not every candidate has.

During the literature review of this research, not much attention was given to the technical or reporting skills of females in the industry. One study referenced the fact that women were being assigned to human-interest pieces when working in the sports department.

The Routledge Handbook of Sport Communication evaluates assignments of female sports reporters in broadcast news using the post-structural theory. It says that assigning female broadcasters to working on the sidelines at sporting events as opposed to allowing them to be a part of in-booth analysis is forcing them to cover "human interest" stories (Whiteside, 2013, p. 35). It continues on to read:

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that we come to understand the category of a female reporter through seeing her work in those spaces” (Whiteside, 2013, p. 35).

This analysis of the work that women are assigned may have been conducted without giving much weight to the idea of telling the story behind the game. Two of the three interviewees emphasized the importance of storytelling and finding the untold angle. The Routledge Handbook of Sport Communication focusing on the idea that females working the sideline is “soft” news reporting is ignoring the fact that these are often the audio clips and quotes used in highlights. People are interested in the athletes or coaches and what they think. Calling this “soft” news is using a feminist lens to evaluate the journalism as opposed to more broadly considering what the audience is interested in, and the storytelling side of journalism.

The second interview question asks about what may hold women back from advancing in their careers. The case study highlighted those challenges when discussing the different career and family lives that Faris and Ledlow have.

When directly comparing the successful journalism careers of both Ledlow and Faris, a few differences are key. The first is promotional opportunities. As discussed in the Literature Review, a survey of women in the Association of Women in Sports Media conducted by Smucker et al. (2003) found that women in sports journalism encountered a glass ceiling very quickly once they started their careers (p. 405). They found that younger reporters were not as skeptical about their advancement opportunities as their older colleagues. This was because when they were first in their role they had small, quick promotions, which stopped coming and
left them at a place that did not satisfy their career ambitions long-term (Smucker, 2003, p. 405).

This research draws attention to the age difference between Ledlow (27) and Faris (40). When Faris began her career she worked off the air because of a lack of opportunities for on-air work in sports. Once she did acquire an anchoring job, she spent three, and then six years, at each station before moving on. Ledlow spent an average of one year in each role that she held leading up to her current position with NBA TV.

When Faris left her sports reporting job in Chicago in October of 2011, she was quoted by the Chicago Tribune as saying [of the career move], “Sometimes you have to leave to be seen in a different light. I’ve always felt that if you can be a sports reporter, you can be a news reporter.” She stated in other interviews after announcing the move, that she is passionate about sports, but that this network opportunity was one that she could not pass up.

This drastic career move aligns with what Smucker et al. (2003) stated when they addressed skepticism about advancement opportunities. Faris had been working in the Chicago market for six years covering sports. This market is a larger one, but the opportunity to move to a network would take her to the national stage. As a woman over 35 years of age at this time, it could be seen as her taking her once in a lifetime opportunity to work for a network.

Another difference between Ledlow and Faris are their responsibilities outside of the newsroom, more specifically related to familial duties. Women in sports journalism reported in many of the research that family life and stability are
a major drawback to choosing this profession. Women in sports reporting feel that they have a "socially constructed responsibility to sacrifice career mobility for childrearing" (Hardin, 2008, p. 75). Women also revealed in a survey the feeling that their employers were not flexible with hours and assignments, and that they weren't being helpful in coordinating schedules for their reporters that would work with traditional childcare responsibilities (Hardin, 2005, p. 31).

When considering Faris’ decision to leave sports for a network anchoring and reporting position, her husband and three children were a factor. In every interview that she gave when announcing her decision to leave Chicago, Faris referenced the decision as one made by her and her husband. Working as a sports reporter/anchor means covering games on weekends or in the evenings. In one interview she specifically said, “I'll have Sundays off” (timeout.com). Although she does still work on Sundays in her current position, she now has a set schedule. This quote speaks to her ability to enjoy time that is traditionally (professional sports, particularly the NFL, are often aired on Sunday afternoons and evenings) a full workday for a sports journalist. As a mother of three, her choice to move to her current position gives her much more stability in terms of working hours.

In contrast, Ledlow is a 27-year old, unmarried sports reporter. Although she is based in Atlanta, her responsibilities take her nationally when she is reporting on-site at games or acting as a Turner Broadcasting spokesperson/personality.

A more general study about women and the alignment of their careers and their family lives puts this into perspective. Hite and McDonald (2003) conducted focus groups with women in non-managerial positions. They reported that women
who set goals often change them as their lives go through a major transition such as marriage or having a child (p. 228). Even for monetary reasons women in other fields had to choose whether to devote more time to their families or to building their careers (Hite, 2003, p.229). This study found that women working for organizations that were willing to help them to plan and coordinate both aspects of their lives had happier employees who stayed at the same company for longer periods of time (Hite, 2003, p. 232).

This study conducted by Hite and McDonald (2003) is applicable to Faris’ career change. She had served as a sports producer, photographer and editor prior to spending just short of a decade reporting on collegiate and professional sports. It could be stated that this was the path toward achieving her sports career goals. However, her goals had to be shifted to accommodate family life. The fact that she was able to obtain a network job, which is something that a number of journalists work their whole careers for and never achieve, can be seen as reaching an ultimate broadcast journalist’s career goal, however it is a slight variation from what she had initially aimed for. Her marriage and the birth of her three kids led her to make the adjustment toward something with more regular hours and traveling.

In the case of Ledlow’s career, she has not had to adjust her goals as she has not been married or had any children. That being said, many sports reporters can balance the irregular work and travel schedules (i.e., Sage Steele at ESPN), however, the referenced research found that this is not the case the majority of the time.

The research that was conducted during this study led to multiple conclusions. The first is that women need to approach sports journalism
assignments in a way that will tell a story. It isn't considered "soft news" if they are giving a commonly reported issue or event an angle that is engaging. These women, much the same as men in this field, need to find what is unique to their audience and report the news that way. The most effective sports pieces are those that walk a viewer through what is happening to the coaches or players. People want to read a story, and not just a straightforward recap of what they just saw during the game.

This research also found that women are most successful in sports journalism when they are not faced with the challenge of balancing their work life and their home life. Females that do not have familial ties to one specific region have more availability to travel and report on events across the country. These assignments are most often at the network level. If females hope to achieve the network level of sports reporting they need availability in time and location.

**Recommendations**

In the future, I would suggest that individuals studying the hiring practices of women in sports journalism make a few key changes to their methods. The first change would be focusing on the audience’s perception of the female sports broadcasters. Surveys or focus groups asking for feedback on male and females reporting in the field, conducting play-by-play analysis, and anchoring sports-focused shows, would give a better idea of what the key characteristics are that receive the most favorable response. Success in news, and sports news, is all about ratings and viewership. With a better understanding of how the audience sees those delivering the news, and what they value, there can be a better understanding of what is, and what is not, successful or effective. This, combined with findings as to
what individuals in hiring positions look for, would be crucial in identifying key characteristics for sports broadcasters.

Another angle that should be considered is viewer response on social media. In recent months journalists have been gaining media attention of their own for both positive and negative responses to fan criticism on social media. More specifically, women are being called out for their appearances and stereotypes. In fact, some male sports reporters have even criticized their female counterparts. With a textual/social analysis of the comments that are being directed at different females in their specific roles (host, analyst, anchor, reporter) research can better uncover what it is that makes specific reporters, both male and female, successful in the sports broadcast industry.

Future research should also focus more on advancement past the level of reporter or anchor. The researcher in this study did not ask any of the individuals interviewed for their thoughts about advancement within the newsroom hierarchy. This subject is important because it speaks to the “glass ceiling” that much of the current research highlights as being an issue for female sports journalists. The Status of Women in the U.S. Media 2014 report stated that over 150 print publications and websites with a focus on sports news are employing ninety percent male editors (p.32). Including this topic in future research will give a better understanding of the attitudes and experiences of those in the newsrooms concerning women moving up this historically male dominated hierarchy.
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