

TESTING THE TWIN CITIES: A TEXTUAL ANALYSIS OF  
FRAMES SURROUNDING DAILY MINNESOTA-ST. PAUL  
NEWSPAPER COVERAGE OF THE 2017 MINNESOTA LYNX

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by  
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TESTING THE TWIN CITIES: A TEXTUAL ANALYSIS OF FRAMES  
SURROUNDING DAILY MINNESOTA-ST. PAUL NEWSPAPER COVERAGE OF  
THE 2017 MINNESOTA LYNX

presented by Ryan Owens,

a candidate for the degree of master of arts,

and hereby certify that, in their opinion, it is worthy of acceptance.

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## DEDICATION

I want to dedicate this thesis to my beautiful fiancée, Holly Sturek. Without your love and undying support, I wouldn't have been able to make it through the long nights and countless hours spent working toward this life-changing goal. With your support, I feel like anything is possible. I love you with every fiber of my being.

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## ABSTRACT

Perception often is reality, and that is of particular importance to those in journalism. Previous research illustrates that the language journalists use to describe the subjects they cover has the ability to impact public perception of those subjects, as well as the perception about the groups to which the subjects belong.

The purpose of this research project is to determine how the frames used by beat reporters differ from, or are similar to, the frames used by those covering national-scale women's athletics for national outlets. This will be accomplished by studying coverage of the 2017 Women's National Basketball Association (WNBA) champion Minnesota Lynx from two outlets in the same local market — the *Minneapolis Star-Tribune* and *St. Paul Pioneer Press* — through textual analysis and analyzing the coverage against the backdrop of previous research into the subject, which overwhelmingly focuses on national coverage of women's athletics.

This textual analysis found that many of the same frames found in coverage of male and female athletes exist in a beat reporting setting. However, the reporting analyzed here utilized the frames more stereotypically associated with coverage of men's athletics in their work covering a women's professional team. The majority of the coverage in both the *Star-Tribune* and *Pioneer Press* centered on the performance of this team and its players, choosing to center their accomplishments, the results of their games, their statistics, their awards and their win-loss record more than any other aspect.

Simply put, the bulk of the work done by the four reporters focused on frames that were traditionally associated more stereotypically with male athletes, presenting a more equitable level of coverage than previous research indicated.

## Chapter 1: Introduction

Perception often is reality, and that is of particular importance to those in journalism. The language journalists use to describe the subjects they cover has the ability to impact public perception of those subjects, as well as the perception about the groups to which the subjects belong (Goffman, 1974). This applies to news content of all kinds. Zhongdang Pan and Gerald Kosicki said that the way information is received has to do with the way it is framed by all three players in an intricate dance — sources, journalists and news consumers (1993). Each brings a unique viewpoint to the proceedings, shaping how the story is told and received along the way.

The language we as a society use to describe individuals or groups of people is an important aspect in terms of fostering gender equality and equity. The language our society uses to describe women, for example, is under intense scrutiny in an era where ensuring true equality and equity is growing in importance. The words our media outlets choose to use to describe people shapes cultural perception of these groups. If we seek to change those frames for the better, analyzing the language that informs those frames is as important now as it has possibly ever been.

Those frames take on particular importance in terms of either breaking down or reinforcing stereotypes because often, stereotypes guide our processing of information (Entman, 1993). One of myriad stereotypes comes from the sports world. If you're a sports fan, how many times have you heard someone say they don't watch women's sports because they're "boring," "slow," or the athletes "aren't as athletic as the men?"

These stereotypes may be prevalent because editors of such programs and print pieces may be loath to actively cultivate social change or don't understand their role in

building excitement for an event with an audience can extend to both men's and women's sports (Messner, 2015). Michael Messner (2015) points out that editorial decisions don't appear to be keeping up with the exponential growth in terms of live event coverage of women's athletics, particularly in terms of NCAA events and the Olympics. Messner goes on to posit that highlight shows are part of an apparatus that is good at building audiences for men's sports through coverage, but has yet do to the same for women, stunting knowledge of women's sports despite increases in live event coverage.

From the perspective of Robert Entman's theory that audiences don't fill in the gaps on their own (1993), this argument has merit. In this case, the hypothesis is that audiences don't draw on the increase in live events and view women's athletics through a less-enlightened frame because they aren't given the same importance on highlight shows or in print as men's sports.

But what about more localized coverage, meaning coverage in a daily newspaper read mostly by a local audience rather than media aimed at a broader, nationwide audience? Does the language, and therefore potential perception, remain the same for beat writers covering professional women's leagues such as the Women's National Basketball Association (WNBA)? Are reporters who are around female athletes on a regular basis more prone to describing the athletes in the same way reporters who cover men's sports do? The expectation is that a more constant, daily presence and working relationship could beneficially erode some of the framing issues that have stymied coverage by more broadly-focused outlets producing content for a nationwide audience.

## Definitions

Before going any further, I would like to define some journalistic terms that are commonplace throughout the rest of this introduction and research (News Manual, 2008). *Sources* are the subjects of journalism, the people and materials from which reporters glean important information and, often, quotations. *Local media outlets* in terms of this research means media outlets whose focus is informing an audience within the geographic region in which it resides rather than a broad national market. Outlets that focus on informing a broad, national audience are *national media outlets*. A *beat* is specific, specialized subject matter — in this case, a WNBA team in Minneapolis called the Minnesota Lynx — that a reporter covers regularly, hence the term beat reporter (News Manual, 2008). *Beat reporting* is coverage of said specific subject matter (News Manual, 2008), and I am defining *coverage* as reporting through the production of content for consumption by an outside audience.

The different types of stories are important to this research and its explanation. A *game story* is defined in this instance as a story that focuses mainly on a recap of the action of an individual basketball game. A *news* story is one that focuses on important events or accomplishments of the team, but outside of a game setting — such as awards, trades, injuries and more. A *feature* is a longer kind of article which tends to focus more on a person and their background, one that involves a greater sense of storytelling and as such uses more colorful language. *Analysis* is a story that takes a deeper look at game action, breaking down performances either in a single game over time and working to decipher the reason behind said performances.

## **Purpose**

The purpose of this research project was to determine how the frames used by beat reporters differ from, or are similar to, the frames used by those covering national-scale women's athletics for national outlets. This was accomplished by studying one season's coverage from two outlets in the same local market through textual analysis and analyzing the coverage against the backdrop of previous research into the subject, which overwhelmingly focuses on national coverage of women's athletics.

Using content analysis and applying framing theory to news content, various researchers have attempted to investigate how female athletes are covered, particularly in the years since Title IX's passage in 1972, when participation in sports by girls and women began to skyrocket. These studies focused on a wide variety of topics covered by national outlets.

Some studies measured the amount of column inches or television time granted to female athletics in comparison to men's (Messner, Duncan and Cooky, 2003; Messner, Cooky and Musto, 2015). Additional research focused on the language used to describe the athletes (Nicely, 2007; Vincent, 2004; Knight and Giuliano, 2001; Killoran, 2017).

Others use framing theory to discuss, and sometimes challenge, the rationale for editorial decisions in relation to female athletics and athletes (Hardin, 2005; Messner, 2015). Additional studies look at the staging and type of photographs used with feature stories for male and female athletes (Hardin, et al, 2002), and still more look at female sports reporter representation as a frame affecting coverage (Kaiser, 2011; Kian and Hardin, 2009).

This research picked up where previous studies left off by looking at the coverage of a specific league — the WNBA — and how the Minnesota Lynx are covered by their beat reporters from the two local newspapers in their area — the *Minneapolis Star-Tribune* and *St. Paul Pioneer Press*.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review: Framing Theory and Women's Athletics**

Use of framing theory to illustrate the differences in how our culture discusses women and men is far from novel. Framing theory itself had its beginnings as far back as 1974, when Erving Goffman posited in his book, *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience*, that people have natural and social frameworks through which they view the world, and interpret what's going on around them through this primary framework.

Naturally, according to Goffman, the way people view gender and gender norms would be influenced through the primary frameworks through which they view the world, whether an individual is aware of the existence of these frameworks or not (1974). And the way members of a culture set their gender stereotypes further applies to the way they view athletes of different genders, and how reporters cover athletes of those genders provides another frame through which those stereotypes are either challenged or reinforced (Messner, 1988).

### **Framing Theory**

Goffman (1974) laid the groundwork for framing theory in his discussion of primary frameworks. He put forth the idea that our primary frameworks fall into two broad classes — natural and social. Natural frameworks are, as one might expect, environmental — the weather, biological and physical sciences, genetics, etc.

Social frameworks are the ones that are discussed at length here. Goffman (1974) argued that social frameworks aren't rigid, but rather they can be altered through various methods, including persuasion, flattery, threats and more. He goes on to further argue that



individuals, whether they are aware of the frameworks or not, are capable users of them on a daily basis. Drilled down to its simplest form, this is a basic argument that the way we view the world is directly tied to our environment, our experiences, and what we allow to influence us, either consciously or subconsciously.

One of a multitude of influences on our primary frameworks is the media we consume (Pan and Kosicki, 1993). The information we take in and the way in which that information is presented to us — the amount of time given to a topic, the language used to discuss the topic, the placement of a topic on the page or within a program, etc. — influences the way we view that topic and the level of importance we give to it (Entman, 1993).

That is why research into the frames used when covering specific groups of people are so important.

Now, back to the discussion of framing theory. Robert Entman's 1993 work, "Framing: Toward Clarification of a Fractured Paradigm," expands on the concept of frames in terms of how they affect communication. The goal of his article was to improve communication studies by creating an all-encompassing piece that discussed how frames embed themselves in texts and thus influence interpretations of a given work.

Entman (1993) points out four areas which would benefit from application of the concept of frames. He begins by discussing frames in terms of audience autonomy, and astutely points out that while the obvious assumption is that people will bring their own experiences and facts to the table to fill in gaps and draw further conclusions from a text, studies show that readers tend to be less "cognitively active," and are frequently influenced heavily by the text itself.

Journalistic objectivity is Entman's next focus area, and he leans on his vast experience in media studies to point out that journalists, consciously or subconsciously, often convey a dominant framing of the news, and by doing so, keep their audience from making a fair assessment of a given situation (1993). He argues that a greater understanding of frames by journalists would allow them to challenge dominant frames and create a more balanced journalism (Entman, 1993). In other words, he challenges journalism's notion of objectivity, pointing out that balance, while still filtered through a dominant cultural frame, doesn't allow for a wide array of conclusions to be drawn and doesn't challenge dominant cultural stereotypes (1993). For the purposes of framing theory studies on coverage of female athletes, this means reporters and their superiors at their media outlet largely do not challenge the assumptions that audiences simply aren't as interested in female athletics and often cover female athletes using terms highlighting their femininity or don't cover them anywhere near as often as male athletes.

Finally, Entman (1993) discusses framing theory in terms of content analysis. He argues that framing theory would allow researchers using content analysis as a method to not only measure the occurrence of positive and negative messages, but dig deeper to gauge how these messages are framed and how that affects the audience. Entman (1993) argues that drawing conclusions about the dominant message received based simply on the number of positive and negative messages has little value.

Frequency of message can lead to a certain set of conclusions, as does clustering and framing of those messages (Entman, 1993). Frequency of message can help make a basic comparison, noting that women's sports tend to be covered far less frequently than men's, while framing theory can uncover if the two are discussed in similar terms or

through vastly different lenses.

### **Editorial Decisions: “Chicken or the Egg?”**

When delving into the wide array of framing studies on the coverage of female athletics, one of the more pervasive themes is the amount of coverage given to women’s athletics as opposed to men’s. Something as simple as frequency of appearance and location in the hierarchy of stories provides a particular frame of coverage. Going further, these studies tend to tackle a version of the classic “which came first, the chicken or the egg?” dilemma. In this case it’s a matter of audience attitudes or editorial decisions. Do editors run stories about female athletes less frequently or in less prominent positions because the audience genuinely is less interested in female athletics, or is that lack of audience interest caused by the lack of content about women’s athletics? In other words, would audiences be more interested in women’s athletics if they were exposed to more stories and game coverage?

Michael Messner is one of the more prolific researchers on the topic of media coverage of women’s athletics, and he has done a series of ongoing studies into the quality and quantity of television coverage of women’s sports (Messner, Duncan and Cooky, 2003; Messner, Cooky and Musto, 2015). In 2003, he built off similar studies conducted in 1989 and 1993 to look at changes in quality and quantity in the lead-up to and aftermath of the 1999 U.S. Women’s National Soccer Team’s dramatic World Cup championship. Messner and his team analyzed six weeks of televised sports news coverage in the Los Angeles area, spreading the analysis out over three separate two-week periods, and three weeks of ESPN’s flagship highlight show, SportsCenter. Los

Angeles was chosen both for continuity and because it was where the World Cup final was held in 1999 (Messner, Duncan and Cooky, 2003).

Approximately 88 percent of the airtime on the network affiliates was devoted to men's sports during those periods, while 97 percent of SportsCenter's coverage was devoted to men's sports (2003). The study also addressed the suggestion that there simply were more men's sports to cover during these periods (2003). This is a valid concern and argument, as sports for which there is no female counterpart (baseball, football) received the bulk of coverage in July and November. As it turns out, NCAA women's basketball in the March period received far less coverage than men's, and the WNBA received very little attention in July. Additionally, there was little follow-up on the Women's World Cup despite its popularity (Messner, Duncan and Cooky, 2003).

Messner would further his longitudinal study in 2015, and instead of a growth in coverage of women's athletics and a variety of sports as a whole, he found that coverage skewed even more heavily toward the big three of pro/college football, men's basketball and baseball than it had in 2010, his most recent iteration of the study (Messner, Cooky and Musto, 2015). While the coverage increased in quality and focus on simply the athletic exploits rather than previously sexualized coverage, the depth and frequency of coverage hardly changed despite increased participation in women's athletics.

The key argument put forth by Messner throughout the longitudinal study was that even in an era — the 1990s and 2000s — in which women's sports participation was growing exponentially, coverage of said sports didn't grow with it. Growth was almost stagnant during the period, much less proportional to participation (Messner, Cooky and Musto, 2015). More women playing sports could equal more women interested in sports,

and that coverage of women's sports would reach a potentially untapped audience interested in more than just major men's athletics (Messner, Cooky and Musto, 2015).

National sports programs, particularly SportsCenter, are a typical focus of study, both in terms of amount of coverage and content of coverage, the latter of which is explored in the next section. Terry Adams and C.A. Tuggle did identical studies in 1997 and 2002 looking at the amount of women's coverage on SportsCenter and CNN's Sports Tonight. What they discovered was that about 5 percent of programming on both shows was devoted to women's athletics, a number that saw little change in a five-year period (Adams and Tuggle, 2002). The context provided was that the expectation was the growth of the WNBA and popularity of the U.S. Women's National Soccer Team, with their solid television numbers, would lead to greater coverage on national sports shows. Despite documented growth in participation and fan interest as noted by game viewership and attendance (National Federation of State High School Athletic Associations, 2002), coverage didn't grow (Adams and Tuggle, 2002). As Entman (1993) suggested, this study didn't simply rest on amount of coverage as its only point of reference, digging additionally into length, quotes from female sources, placement and providing other additional context.

Adams and Tuggle's biggest question begging future research was how much, if any, research ESPN had done into the network's assumption that its audience wanted mainly men's sports, and that the audience's tepid interest in female sports led to slow increases in coverage. They then argued that broadcasting Baseball Tonight immediately after SportsCenter provided an avenue for fewer baseball highlights and more room for coverage of women's sports on SportsCenter. It also is interesting to note that ESPN as a

network devoted significant coverage of women's sports by airing WNBA games and additional programming, but showed very little on SportsCenter (Adams and Tuggle, 2002). While the researchers suggest that the lack of women's highlights on SportsCenter shows an editorial view that women's athletics simply aren't as deserving of coverage, it leaves the door open to the possibility of poor audience data or the idea that those interested in women's sports will find them on the network in full-game form in lieu of a highlight show. There is room to draw potentially different conclusions from the data.

Research into newspaper sports editor attitudes suggests that the problem is one of record keeping and analytics rather than bias. Marie Hardin (2005) went to editors from sports departments at daily newspapers in the Southeastern U.S. to survey the following: 1) how they determine audience interests and how interested they believe their audience is in women's sports; 2) if they feel an obligation to cover women's sports or hire female reporters; and, 3) if their worldview reinforces or rejects the prevailing viewpoint of women in sports. The survey used an geographic area with a wide variety of daily newspapers with different amounts of subscribers while maintaining a number good enough for a random sample, though there are valid concerns about regional hegemony.

Only half of the daily newspapers surveyed used formal methods to determine demographics, and less than half used formal methods to determine reader interests. About 44 percent of editors claimed readers had no or little interest in women's sports, with nearly half claiming readers had moderate interest. Eight in 10 agreed with the idea that there is an obligation to cover women's sports (Hardin, 2005). The study shows a willingness among a large group of editors to cover women's sports (Hardin, 2005). However, a more in-depth framing theory study likely would be able to discern how

much importance is placed on women's sports in the hierarchy of coverage and how editorial decisions frame coverage and by proxy, audience reaction.

A frequent response to these coverage questions is that men's sports are simply more popular than women's sports. Stacey Nicely (2007) even puts this forth as irrefutable fact, that male readers prefer to read about men's sports. But as Messner (2015) and Hardin (2005) suggest, this assertion by editors has not been adequately examined.

### **Descriptions/Language**

Whether coverage of women's sports occurs at an appropriate frequency is a key question in terms of framing theory. Another question is the content of that coverage and the frames through which that coverage is presented. Language is a critical component of framing theory, painting a picture for readers and leading them to draw conclusions about the topic at hand. The language aspect of framing theory is the lens through which this study looks at coverage of the Minnesota Lynx.

Peppered throughout the array of frame-based studies of coverage of women's sports are articles that delve into the sexualization and stereotyping of female athletes through perceived gender norms (Nicely, 2007; Vincent, 2004; Knight and Giuliano, 2001; Jones, Murrell and Jackson, 1999). Vincent (2004) used the theory of gender power relations coupled with textual analysis to uncover that the amount of coverage of each gender by the British tabloid press during the 2000 Wimbledon Championships was equitable. However, a group of predominantly male reporters placed more value on the pure athletic accomplishments of the male athletes, while framing their female counterparts through sexual innuendo as well as cultural and racial stereotypes. Stacey

Nicely (2007) studied the three most popular sports magazines in the U.S. and discovered that the themes of mental weakness, comparison/references to men, motherhood/sisterhood and celebrity were most stereotypically attached to female subjects, all aspects that have very little to do with the athletic prowess of the team or individual in question. Ray Jones, Audrey Murrell and Jennifer Jackson (1999) looked at 769 passages from print media about the 1996 and 1998 Olympics and discovered that female athletes were compared to male athletes in the same sport, as well as through commentary based on outside items beyond the sport or athlete's performance.

Although these researchers differed in theoretical basis, methodologies and worldviews, they reached similar conclusions. This supports the idea that even as participation and live-event coverage of women's sports have skyrocketed, media coverage of women's sports occurs all too commonly through the lens of a patriarchal hierarchy and Western gender norms (Parker and Fink, 2007). Heidi Parker and Janet Fink's 2007 study, which used an experimental analysis to research the effects of commentator framing during WNBA games on attitudes toward a variety of items about the female athletic experience, backed this viewpoint. Male participants had a less positive view of female athletes than their female counterparts in their study. Although in this case, the difference between male and female viewers (participants) occurred even given a positive frame, suggesting that these views might be more inherent than something created in the moment by the media coverage.

Jennifer Knight and Traci Giuliano (2002), however, looked at the influence of negative frames in terms of gender-stereotypical portrayals in print media, taking into account both male and female athletes in stories framed by physical attractiveness. The



study was conducted among mostly white students at one small university, limiting severely the generalizability of the results. However, the findings at least open the door to potential further study into the topic for purposes of more universal extrapolation. In that limited sample, the research team discovered that, regardless of the gender of the subject, framing the story in terms of attractiveness rather than athletic ability led to negative views of the subject of the story (Knight and Giuliano, 2002).

Since studies almost universally discover that women are more typically the subjects of overly sexualized coverage, Knight and Giuliano's research suggests that female athletes are disproportionately harmed in terms of how they are perceived by consumers of sports media relative to their male counterparts. Moreover, the negative views translate both to female and male sports media audiences.

One of the more interesting framing theory studies is an unique case study of the tennis player Anna Kournikova (Harris and Clayton, 2002). Kournikova rose to fame as a tennis player, and during her prime, she received perhaps more media exposure than any other female athlete of her era (2002). However, much of this coverage had little or nothing to do with her skills on the tennis court. Kournikova rarely won tournaments and never any of the four major tournaments, and she was far from the most prolific tennis player of her generation. The study looked at sports coverage in the tabloids the *Sun* and *Mirror* in Great Britain during Wimbledon 2000 and the Euro 2000 soccer tournament and found that female-related sports articles accounted for 5.9 percent of coverage. Kournikova was mentioned in a high proportion of those pieces, mentioned mostly for her looks, her relationship with hockey player Sergei Federov and the attention she received from male fans. In other words, most of the coverage focused on a particular

female athlete for almost every conceivable reason other than her skills on the court. Even that year's Wimbledon champion, Venus Williams, received coverage based more on her lifestyle and activities off the court than on it, illustrating further the skewed frame through which female athletes are often portrayed (Harris and Clayton, 2002).

### **Female Representation on Sports Desks**

Goffman (1974) suggested we all have primary frameworks, and some of those are natural, based in science and unalterable. Biology is one of those natural frameworks, and so, with any discussion of frames and gender, one must discuss the possibility that a different gender could view these issues differently and thus provide a different frame.

Messner is a staunch proponent of the idea that greater female representation on sports desks nationally would lead to a shift in the frames through which female sports are viewed. He is highly critical of what he calls "locker-room humor" in broadcast sports media, questioning the networks' assumptions that their audiences are predominantly heterosexual men who want sexualized portrayals of women in sports. Further, he suggests an increase of respectable coverage of women's athletics would better fit what he believes is a more diverse audience than the networks believe they have (Messner, 2003). In his 2015 study, Messner acknowledged that the respectfulness of the coverage had increased, but said that including anchors of both genders who have a healthier respect for the quality of women's athletics would lead to increased coverage and a shift in the way women's sports are discussed in a national broadcast capacity.

Kent Kaiser (2011), in a longitudinal study about coverage of Title IX, suggests something similar in discussing a somewhat tangential result of his study. What he uncovered was that female reporters tended to cover Title IX differently, feeling

seemingly freer to use advocacy frames through the assertion that the decision promoted gender equality.

What Kaiser (2011) also alludes to is one of the potential pitfalls of Messner's argument. While not necessarily the case, there is the possibility that even if there were more female sports reporters, that they would fall into similar cycles as their male counterparts, succumbing to a cultural pressure that helped cement such viewpoints. In other words, to fit in in a world in which they're still outnumbered, there's the possibility that female reporters would, to use a turn of phrase, "go along to get along." Again, this isn't necessarily the case, but Messner's hypothesis is based on the assumption that female reporters would not conform to social pressure, but that more women would buck the trend. A substantial increase in female reporters, as well as male reporters with a more broadly minded view of female athletics, would no doubt tip the scales. But the needed numbers to stem the tide might be more than Messner may believe.

In fact, Hardin and Edward Kian (2009) found some evidence of this, based upon the value placed on men's athletics. They hypothesize that while more female reporters could potentially lead to more coverage of female sports, the typical view that men's sports are more valuable beats might lead more women to cover men's sports if given the choice. Where they note a key difference is in the way female reporters frame female subjects in terms of the language used. The female reporters covering the NCAA women's basketball tournament in their study focused more on their athletic abilities and competitiveness, while those covering the men's tournament applied descriptors typically reserved to frame women as less athletic — including family ties and attractiveness. They also suggested that an increasing number of male writers are rejecting stereotypical

framing of sports, both in terms of male and female characteristics, a departure from previous research.

### **Literature Review Conclusion**

Studies that use framing theory as the grounding framework in studying coverage of female athletics touch on a wide array of possibilities and illustrate not only ways to further previous research, but also potential pitfalls to avoid. Gender representation in newsrooms, amount and placement of stories and the general language used in regards to the subjects of said stories are all critical areas for study in the field.

One of the biggest potential pitfalls to avoid in this case is looking to validate a previously held belief. Avoidance of confirmation bias is critical in an area that deals ostensibly with gender equality. For example, Messner has sound, well-conducted research that helps shed light on a key area in terms of sports media coverage, and he and his colleagues draw consistent conclusions from it. However, at times, the suggestions at the end of the studies ignore potential arguments to the contrary. Tackling those arguments head on rather than ignoring them would lead to potentially more sound conclusions. The goal is to draw appropriate conclusions without overreaching what the data and/or analysis has uncovered.

A critically underexplored area for research is the degree to which framing affects the reporters who interview and write about the same group of female athletes on a daily basis. Many of the studies of framing theory and coverage of women's sports look at national programs and publications. But what of beat reporters who spend time talking with these athletes on an almost daily basis? Are the frames they apply different than those at a broad, national level? And how does that impact a more local population?

Looking at frames through the lens of local beat coverage, in this case, local reporters covering one team in their market, may yield results similar to those found in previous research. But there's also the possibility that the frames evolve or are generally different when it comes to reporters who cover these athletes and subjects on a daily basis. Does building rapport and being in close proximity on a recurring basis matter? Past studies of national coverage have laid the groundwork for how to conduct studies of framing effects. But there is plenty of new terrain to be explored by examining how frames shape local coverage by beat reporters in the city they call home.

## Chapter 3: Methods

The goal of this study was to identify themes in the framing of beat reporting coverage of the Minnesota Lynx basketball team. The goal was to see if the beat reporters covering the Lynx — Kent Youngblood and Aaron Reiss at the *Star-Tribune* and Jace Frederick and Mike Cook at the *Pioneer-Press* — made greater use of stereotypically male themes rather than female themes given the difference in proximity and style of local beat reporting compared to national magazine, newspaper and television coverage.

Since the aim of this study was to describe how frames are used in terms of daily coverage of a professional women's team in the United States rather than the frequency of appearances of themes, it lends itself to a qualitative method of research. This research project sought to uncover prevalent frames and to describe them rather than to understand the effects of the frames on the athletes or news consumers. Consequently, textual analysis was chosen as the primary method over interviews, surveys or focus groups.

Textual analysis is a common research method used to study framing theory when applied to women's athletics, and it has effectively uncovered common themes in the media coverage of women's sports (Malik, 2016). It also is an easy way to gather data and study social behavior without directly affecting it (Babbie, 2014). While it can't predict how the audience will interact with the content, textual analysis helps researchers better understand what messages are disseminated. Thus, this method is suitable to this research study, as the primary goal was to understand how daily newspaper coverage of the WNBA is framed and how those frames compare to previous research that has looked at how women's athletics have been framed by national media outlets or publications.

Robert Entman (1993), among the most cited researchers in the area of framing theory, argues that the point of using content analysis in terms of framing theory is to go beyond simply the amount of positive and negative messages received to get at deeper conclusions, to posit the meaning of those messages and how they could potentially affect an audience. While this study did not uncover exactly how frames affect a given segment of readership, previous work has shown that the way media coverage frames athletes affects how those athletes and their sport are perceived, making research into discovering and describing those frames valuable to the overall body of scholarship on the topic (Hardin, Lynn, Walsdorf & Hardin, 2002).

Entman (1993) illustrated that to understand the meaning of a text — the main purpose of a textual analysis — identifying and describing the frames are crucial. The study sought not just to identify how often a given frame or frames are used, but to thoroughly investigate the texts to identify the frames and see if there are differences and similarities between frames uncovered in national coverage and those found in daily beat reporting.

In order to properly code the content, this study used a similar coding key to that found in a study of female athletes during the Rio Olympics (Killoran, 2017). Killoran's work used the previously established frames/themes of Physical Appearance, Mention of Family, Coach or Male Given Credit, Female Compared to Male Counterpart, Emotion and Belittling Language — meaning language such as “the first female to...,” which focuses specifically on the gender component of the accomplishment. This study utilized them, as well. This research also utilized previously established frames/themes related to male athletes to see if the frames typically used in coverage of female athletes changed

when the reporting was done by reporters from local outlets who covered them frequently. Those frames/themes were: Athletic Ability, Strength and Performance.

## **Materials**

This study focused on local newspaper coverage of the Minnesota Lynx for the 2017 season, beginning with the WNBA Draft in April and running through October 5. These dates were chosen because the WNBA does not specify an official start and end date to its league year, and these dates allow for inclusion of preseason coverage and postseason awards coverage. In terms of subject, the WNBA was chosen because of its unique longevity and popularity among women's team-sport professional leagues in the United States.

The two largest papers covering the team are the *Minneapolis Star-Tribune* and *St. Paul Pioneer-Press*. Two reporters at each newspaper were responsible for the majority of the coverage of the Lynx in 2017: Youngblood and Reiss at the *Star-Tribune* and Frederick and Cook at the *Pioneer-Press*. This study focused solely on their work, excluding additional reporting from stringers, fill-ins or wire services in order to draw reliable, consistent results.

The reasons for choosing these two newspapers specifically were multiple, beginning with the need to narrow the focus to complete the research project in a timely manner. Analyzing coverage of the entire league would have been an extremely broad endeavor. Additionally, finding reliable, regular coverage of teams in the WNBA was difficult, because regular beat writers for WNBA teams aren't a constant around the league (D'Arcangelo, 2017). The Lynx have been in the league since its third season, making them a staple league franchise. The Lynx also have won four championships



since 2011, including in 2017, and their following merits regular coverage by both of these newspapers, while their success allowed for a wider span of coverage from the start of the season to its conclusion, including playoff coverage.

Other outlets in the market do cover the team but were excluded for various reasons. Both Fox Sports North's website and the website of the team's radio partner, 106.1 and 107.5 BOB FM, use Associated Press wire reporting rather than their own reporters. The coverage on the Lynx website is a de facto public relations arm for the team. And local independent press, including *MinnPost*, cover the team only sporadically and not on a day-to-day basis.

The Minneapolis-St. Paul region also has two newspapers that consistently and reliably cover the team, which allows for a comparison between frames utilized by two newspapers covering the same team. While the reporters covered in this study also serve on other beats, they provide regular coverage of the Lynx throughout the season. It is important to note, however, that these reporters are all male. Coverage by a female reporter under similar circumstances would be a strong candidate for future research.

The Twin Cities market was selected because of its unique combination of competing coverage from a consistent group of reporters of a team that played long enough to generate frequent coverage throughout the entire season, including the playoffs. Many markets defaulted to Associated Press or other wire service coverage (Los Angeles, Chicago, New York, Atlanta, Washington), had just one major avenue of coverage or a multitude of reporters assigned throughout the season (Indiana, Phoenix, San Antonio) or simply did not go far enough to warrant consistent postseason coverage,

when the greatest number of eyes presumably would be on the team (Connecticut, Seattle).

This study focused on daily reporting coverage, including game stories, feature stories and additional items, such as analysis of the team's performance and team-related news. Since this research project is focused solely on local beat reporting, columns and pieces composed by wire services such as the Associated Press were not included. Shorter, transactional items also were not included, since the aim of the research deals in part with discovering if familiarity with the athletes can impact prevalent frames.

The study used web versions of the articles in question. This was done with cost and feasibility in mind. The *Minneapolis Star-Tribune* does not sell print copies past 30 days after publication, making tracking down hard copies over the course of an entire season difficult. The cost of print copies, when available, was \$6 for weekday editions and \$10 for Sundays, and the cost of daily back issues for six months' worth of coverage would have become cost prohibitive to conducting the study.

By contrast, a web subscription to the *Star-Tribune* is much more financially feasible, and both websites include tabs directing users directly to coverage of the Lynx, making the finding of a complete catalog of coverage of the team over the course of an entire season more organized and timely.

## **Analysis**

Barbara Stern (1996) lays out the path for completing a thorough textual analysis, a path with three critical landmarks. First, the researcher must identify the attributes within the text, including the descriptive language used. Next, the researcher must use

these attributes to construct meaning from the text. And finally, the researcher must deconstruct a more thorough meaning from the text.

By utilizing the method outlined by Stern, this research can uncover themes and suggest cultural assumptions associated with elements in the analysis. Similarly structured projects, such as a study into media frames in popular sports magazines, have utilized this method, which fits the goal of this project well (Nicely, 2007).

Uncovering prevalent themes allowed this study to answer its research questions. Comparing the results with previous studies illuminated which themes have been found in previous research into this area, and analyzing the data from each of the newspapers allows for easy comparison to see if themes remain consistent based on the team or differ based on the reporter and/or outlet.

This analysis also allowed the researcher to discover if new themes emerge when beat reporting is studied rather than national outlet coverage.

To ensure validity, reliability and to avoid bias, textual analysis studies often employ peer debriefing to review the project (Creswell, 2009). John W. Creswell (2009) defines peer debriefing as using another person who “reviews and asks questions about the qualitative study so that the account will resonate with people other than the researcher.” Members of my committee served in this capacity, asking questions about my conclusions and helping to ensure that the coding process remained consistent. Their input ensured that the textual analysis process remained reliable.

### **Conclusions/Research Questions**

There are many unanswered questions regarding framing in media coverage of women’s sports, as the literature review shows. This study focused on the textual analysis

of one team over the course of one season through the lens of framing theory, and it sought to answer the following questions:

- Which themes, if any, from prior research into coverage of women's athletics are found in the daily coverage of the Lynx?
- Which new themes, if any, emerge from this coverage?
- Are themes consistent or do they differ between the two newspapers?

This research gives further insight, picking up where previous studies have left off, by investigating what, if any, differences in frames exist in daily beat reporting. Because the Lynx are covered by a pair of local newspapers, this study allowed for comparison between outlets to see what similarities and differences arise. What this study did not do was take a quantitative look at the pieces, or number of pieces, put out on the Lynx or study for placement, hierarchy, etc. The study also focused mostly on the actual text content rather than the photography and other content associated with the story itself. The goal was to uncover themes in the coverage and see how said themes are similar or different from previous research into national coverage of women's athletics.

## Chapter 4: Results

*RQ1: Which themes, if any, from prior research into coverage of women's athletics are found in the daily coverage of the Lynx?*

This research focused greatly on the themes outlined by Killoran (2017), which drew heavily off of previous research into framing theory and coverage of women's athletics in her study of articles from *ESPN the Magazine* and the *New York Times* about the 2016 Rio de Janeiro Olympic Games. Those, as stated earlier, were the previously established frames/themes of Physical Appearance, Mention of Family, Coach or Male Given Credit, Female Compared to Male Counterpart, Emotion and Belittling Language — meaning language such as “the first female to...,” which focuses specifically on the gender component of the accomplishment. This study utilized these frames, along with previously established frames/themes related to male athletes. The goal was to see if the frames typically used in coverage of female athletes changed when the reporting was done by reporters from local outlets and reporters who covered the female athletes most often. Those frames/themes were: Athletic Ability, Strength and Performance. The findings are organized by first reviewing the frames that were most utilized by the reporters in this study.

### **Performance**

This research defines performance as words and phrases relating to how well a player or team did in a given contest or over a period of time. This includes statistics, descriptions of game action, awards, win-loss records, individual records and more (Killoran 2017).

First and most obvious of all was the score of a given game. The most basic example of discussing performance is outlining how one team out-performed another, and in basketball, that is shown most readily by the final score of a given contest. Each and every single story discussing a game in both the *Star-Tribune* and *Pioneer-Press* contained the game's final score, and coverage referencing past contests, which happened often in analysis pieces in both newspapers, also recounted recent scores or the scores of games from previous matchups between the Lynx and a particular opponent.

Hand in hand with the score comes description of game action. A multitude of game stories and analysis pieces sought to describe pieces of the game as a means of recounting it to an audience that may not have seen it. This is best illustrated through example, such as this block of text from the *Star-Tribune's* Kent Youngblood from May 29, 2017:

*“Playing their third consecutive game against a winless opponent, the Lynx were a little out of sorts to start the game. Struggling to guard the Stars’ pick-and-roll game early, the Lynx were down seven late in the first quarter.*

*What followed was the first of two key stretches. A lineup of mainly bench players came in and — with a tweaked defensive scheme that stressed switching on the pick-and-roll — went on a 12-0 run that started with Plenette Pierson’s three-pointer to end the first quarter.”*

Alongside the score of a game and description of game play, another measure of performance utilized heavily by both papers was statistics. Stories of all different types

mentioned items such as points, rebounds, steals, assists and more. Phrases such as “Player is averaging XX points and ZZ rebounds this season,” “player tallied XX points in Friday’s win,” “player one had ZZ points and XX assists, while leading scorer player two had YY points,” are incredibly common throughout game and analysis stories, as well as features about individual players.

Performance also is often explained in terms of accolades and awards. During the 2017 season, Lynx center Sylvia Fowles won the league’s most valuable player award for both the regular season and the WNBA finals, and such awards are given based on which player performs best over the course of the season. She started the season so well that stories began referring to her as an MVP candidate as early as June in the *Star-Tribune* (Youngblood, June 9) and August in the *Pioneer Press* (Frederick, August 2). It became a common discussion point in various pieces throughout the season, with the reporters consistently asking Fowles and her teammates about her MVP chances and her performance. The *Star-Tribune* tandem of reporters Kent Youngblood and Aaron Reiss made it part of their pieces with a far more often than did their counterparts from the next city over.

Eventually, the award came to fruition. Fowles was named MVP in September, and reporters Youngblood of the *Star-Tribune* and Cook of the *Pioneer Press* both penned articles that were very descriptive in terms of her overall performance using the metrics laid out in the preceding paragraphs, in particular her stats.

Another high-level accolade that earned mention was Lynx guard Lindsay Whalen breaking the career WNBA wins record for a single player. *Star-Tribune* reporter Youngblood (June 7) marked the occasion by compiling numbers that showcased her

career highlights, including a nearly 68 percent winning percentage, 422 starts in 423 games played, and 11 playoff appearances in 13 seasons. The *Pioneer Press*' Frederick (August 2), meanwhile, discussed how she's been a main component of every team, not simply riding the coattails of impressive teammates, while also mentioning her three WNBA championships.

Other references to past and present accolades included Fowles landing on the All-Defensive Team, mentions of previous MVP awards won by players such as Seimone Augustus and Maya Moore, player of the week or month awards, discussions of Lynx players' previous and extensive Olympic experience (for which only the top players from a country are chosen) and previous awards. The latter of those was discussed extensively in terms of Whalen and her collegiate performance at the University of Minnesota. Since the Lynx were forced to move to Williams Arena on the UM campus for the playoffs because of construction in their home arena, multiple references were made to Whalen's accomplishments in the building, including leading Minnesota to a Final Four and building the Golden Gophers from an also-ran into a powerhouse.

Team win-loss records also were a common indicator of performance, both past and present. Each team's record was mentioned in game stories in both newspapers, typically in parentheses, and they also appeared in nearly every analysis piece. Results from past years were a key focal point, as well, particularly in stories in the lead-up to the WNBA Finals, which was a rematch from the prior year between Minnesota and Los Angeles. Those pieces often made references to the season series, such as when the *Pioneer Press*' Frederick wrote that "In three games against Los Angeles this season, Moore averaged 10.7 points, shooting 39 percent from the field and 22 percent from three



— all significantly below Moore’s season and career averages. Not coincidentally, the Sparks won two of those three matchups” (September 20). The reporters also often alluded to the fact that the Sparks beat Minnesota in five games in the previous year’s finals throughout the season and particularly before the rematch, as it provided a narrative thread explaining Minnesota’s main point of inspiration as it rolled to a record-setting season, earning the top seed in the WNBA for the playoffs and eventually winning a championship.

Finally, perhaps the most important measure of performance is championships. Throughout the season, many mentions were made of the Lynx’s quest to win title No. 4 in seven seasons, with multiple discussions of a dynasty and the amount of winning done to get to such a lofty position, as well as the skill and ability it takes to win at such a high level over such a sustained period of time. Take, for example, this bit from a piece Frederick (September 23) did on the eve of the WNBA Finals in the *Pioneer Press*:

*“But does Minnesota even need another title to enter that “dynasty” realm? ESPN WNBA reporter Mechelle Voepel doesn’t think so. Having already won three WNBA championships in a five-year span and advancing to six finals in seven years is probably enough to have secured the Lynx’s legacy.”*

Or take this example from the *Star-Tribune* (Youngblood, September 29):

*“At stake? A WNBA championship, of course. But, perhaps, even more than that. For the winner, it will be a record-tying fourth title, matching the Houston Comets, who won the first four championships in league history (1997-2000). The Sparks can become the first back-to-back champions since they won titles in 2001 and 2002.”*

This quest for dominance became a central theme of coverage, particularly in analysis and feature pieces.

Previous research as outlined in the literature review indicated that less emphasis was placed on performance in articles about women athletes as compared to coverage of male athletes. That was not the case with the two newspapers or the four reporters studied for this research. Performance was far and away the most commonly occurring theme, and it occurred in both papers in a handful of contexts. Given the prevalence of game stories, which by their nature are intended to recap the performance by two teams and describe the performance of both the players and coaches, the common utilization of performance in stories about female athletes is not necessarily surprising.

### **Strength/Athletic Ability**

Though separate frames, both strength and athletic ability were discussed outside of the context of performance almost as often as the other and came up in contextually similar situations, so it makes sense to look at them together.

Strength in this study is defined by the researcher to physical strength and additional items such as toughness and aggressiveness, among others. Athletic ability is defined by the researcher as words and phrases that describe a player's capabilities in a given sport — things such as speed, passing and shooting ability, athleticism and additional skills that allow a player to perform well. It does not, however, describe the performance — rather, what makes the performance possible.

It is important to note at the outset that both frames appeared commonly in quotes, with teammates and coaches talking up the abilities of athletes alongside their strength, both physical and mental. The quotes are important, and the reporters' choices to use quotes about athletes' abilities and strengths in particular to add a bit of seasoning to a given story is important. As such, a brief mention of those quotes is worthwhile at

the beginning of this section. The reporters would go on to reinforce their choice of quotes through their own words and in their writing process.

The WNBA draft provided the *Star-Tribune's* Youngblood with plenty of opportunities to break down the ability and strength of draft prospects and players currently on the roster. He referred to Temi Fagbenle, a draft pick from the previous year who was trying to make the team, as being an “athletic, 6-5 post player” and as being “impressive” in a workout (April 12). In a feature on Fagbenle (May 3), he notes her potential, her athletic ability, athletic skills she honed as a track star in high school and how her abilities, both positive and negative, showed during her appearance with Great Britain at the 2012 London Olympics.

Youngblood also talked about Chantel Osahor, who the Lynx traded for the day after the draft, referring to her “rugged rebounding, surprisingly good three-point shooting and adept passing out of the post” (April 14). Youngblood would go on to talk about Lynx draft pick Alexis Jones’ mental strength, versatility, athleticism and shooting range in a piece on April 17.

Youngblood (April 25) would go on to refer to a practice the Lynx held with just its rookies as “rigorous,” implying the players had the physical strength to make it through a taxing practice. He described Plenette Pierson as someone who “love(s) contact,” “physical,” and someone who had “toughness” (April 27). He mentions her physical play again in an article on May 3.

Youngblood and his colleague Reiss refer to individual players on multiple occasions for the specific reason of pointing out their unique skill sets. Rather than

breaking them down individually, they will be listed here as a list of general themes of coverage, proof of which can be found in the example articles cited below:

- Sylvia Fowles (best example is Youngblood, May 29): athleticism, aggressiveness in the post (the area near the basket), skill at working against double teams, ability to draw the defense and create openings for other players to score, shot blocking, improved mental toughness
- Maya Moore (best example is Reiss, June 24): shooting ability, ability to score in the transition from defense to offense, ability to open up the defense for other players to score
- Lindsay Whalen (best example is Youngblood, September 7): toughness, improved perimeter shooting, ability to score close to the basket for someone who doesn't play close to the basket, ability to run the offense as a point guard
- Rebekkah Brunson (best example is Youngblood, June 9): defense, versatility, ability to get low and generate leverage against bigger players on both offense and defense
- Renee Montgomery (best example is Reiss, July 25): shooting accuracy, defense, ability to draw fouls

Those examples were peppered throughout the entire season to the point where it became predictable, particularly in the case of Fowles, who had a dominant season that lead to MVP honors.

Many of those same themes showed up in coverage by the *Pioneer Press*, though they were less liberally applied, possibly due to the fact that the two reporters in

Minneapolis handled a larger bulk of the coverage than their two counterparts in St. Paul. Most of it came via reporter Frederick, because most of what his counterpart Cook handled were game stories that focused more on performance and an isolated game rather than larger skills and trends.

The first serious mention came from reporter Frederick, who discussed Seimone Augustus' growing strength coming off of knee surgery in the offseason and recalling her past explosiveness while mentioning that Maya Moore was still working back into game shape (May 1).

On October 6, Frederick noted Sylvia Fowles' improved mental toughness, post dominance, passing ability and general level of skill.

Frederick would go on to discuss Lindsay Whalen's ability and strength in a feature on the veteran guard (May 10). He noted that at the end of 2016, she had "broken down physically," before going on to discuss her improved jump shot, ability to score near the basket and indefatigable work ethic (May 10).

Reporter Frederick would later laud Maya Moore's passing ability, ball handling and jump shooting, mental toughness and fresh legs (May 12). He would go on to devote an analysis story to discussing the team's level of fatigue (May 25).

Frederick also went in-depth on Whalen's skill and physical ability, noting that while she's been on good teams while setting a record for wins, she's also been one of the main reasons those teams have been so good (June 8). As part of a piece about Fowles' great season, the reporter also noted that Moore's abilities also make her the focal point of opposing defenses and noted that Fowles is tremendous at catching passes in traffic (August 2). He would later note Brunson's versatility and broad skill set in a game story

following a Minnesota victory (August 18) and note that despite being an old-for-an-athlete 35, Whalen still has plenty of ability and strength left in the tank (September 6).

In a feature on Augustus, reporter Frederick called her “automatic” shooting the ball in particular situations and noted how her improved three-point shooting has helped improve all areas of her offensive game (September 9).

It was noted by all four reporters in both newspapers that Augustus, Whalen and Moore all opted not to play overseas in the offseason, a practice frequent among WNBA players both to stay sharp and because of the higher overseas salaries compared to the WNBA. The decision was mainly lauded as a positive, allowing them to conserve strength and perform better during the 2017 WNBA season.

Both newspapers also noted the defensive abilities of L.A.’s Alana Beard in WNBA Finals previews, discussing how Moore would have to utilize all of her scoring skills to be effective. They also both noted the scoring capability of Washington’s Elena Delle Donne before the teams’ second-round series.

The *Star-Tribune* and *Pioneer Press* both utilized the frames of strength and athletic ability to a similar degree. Both newspapers also used them in a manner that previous research suggested would be most typically applied to coverage of male athletes. Women, per previous research, rarely had as much attention placed on their physical strength or their skillsets.

### **Physical Appearance**

Now, we will look at the themes that Killoran (2017) referred to as the stereotypical themes used to describe female athletes in a negative way, starting with

physical appearance/age. In this study, these are items such as height, weight, perceived level of beauty, physical features unrelated to strength, etc.

What was discovered was that most of the mentions of appearance were made in a sports-related context, rather than in a sexual or non-athletic context. For example, as is common in coverage of men's basketball, the most typical category of appearance mentioned was height. Height gives taller players a strategic advantage in basketball, making it easier for them to score over smaller players, rebound over smaller players and more. Therefore, height is an intrinsic part of the game of basketball (Nall, 2011). Mentions of appearance in the context of height are more akin to discussing one's athletic ability, similar to how well players shoot, run, change direction and pass.

There were several mentions of the age of players, as Minnesota is a team that has several stars who are reaching an elevated age for an athlete — i.e., their late 30s. Reporter Youngblood mentioned that the average age of Minnesota's guards is 33 and quoted head coach Cheryl Reeve discussing Whalen and Brunson being 35 when breaking down the need to draft guards who could replace them in a few years (April 13). He would mention Plenette Pierson having been in the league for 15 years, which speaks to her longevity but also to the assumption that she is nearing the end of her career, as Reeve indicated with her mention of Whalen and Brunson's age (April 27).

Youngblood would go on to note that Minnesota's Moore is 27 and that Augustus discussed "dueling with Father Time" (May 14). Youngblood noted Brunson's age in a piece about her selection to the all-star team (July 19). *Star-Tribune* colleague Reiss mentioned Whalen's age in a piece about Montgomery's abilities as a backup point guard, noting that because of her age, Whalen's minutes are down (July 25). The Lynx's

Jia Perkins was mentioned by Reiss in a way that indicated she's still fast for her age, perhaps the most negative connotation of any age mention in either newspaper (August 4).

The *Star-Tribune's* Youngblood mentioned that the Lynx's Brunson doesn't think her age is a factor and that her teammate Augustus has mitigated her age by adding aspects to her game at 33 (June 23). Both occasions seem to indicate a lack of belief in athletes in their mid to upper 30s, but not necessarily in a way that's different from how men of a certain age are viewed in media.

It also came up in a lengthy feature about Whalen's career, in which she compared herself to NBA player Jamaal Crawford, who is 37 (Youngblood, September 10). It was part of a larger discussion about how much longer her career would last before she opted for retirement. While she indicated a willingness to play several more years, Whalen ended up retiring after the 2018 season.

As far as the *Pioneer Press* goes, most of the appearance mentions also dealt with age with the exception of mentions of height. Reporter Cook noted that only three key Lynx were under the age of 30, noting it in the context that the team is heavily experienced, which was framed as a positive (April 13).

His colleague Frederick, meanwhile, devoted an entire feature to the topic of age and how the Lynx believe their advanced average age was not a negative factor. In the piece, head coach Reeve joked that "Obviously, age is not a factor. It's almost a requirement to be at least 30 to be on the team" (May 13). Driving home the different nature of the piece, Frederick wrote:



*“That’s why it’s tough to see Minnesota’s run ending anytime soon. There’s no mandatory age limit or expiration date for championship runs. This incredible ride doesn’t have to pull into the station just yet. This team likely won’t let it.”*

Like his Minneapolis counterpart, Frederick also mentioned Whalen’s age in a feature about her career (June 8).

The mentions weren’t all negative and mostly centered around either height or age, in a way not necessarily unique to coverage of women’s athletics. Previous research in this area, particularly in studies of national broadcasts and articles, suggested that many more mentions of physical appearance or sexuality would appear.

In studying the content of both newspapers over the course of the 2017 season, appearance and age were mentioned on occasion, but not to the same frequency as were found in similar studies done on national publications, such as those completed by Killoran (2017) or Nicely (2007). This suggests a change in frame usage for the beat reporters studied here.

### **Mention of Family**

Mention of family in this context means any discussion of relatives of a player or coach. Previous research suggests that coverage of female athletes is too often framed through their relationships with relatives, children and/or spouses in comparison to coverage of male athletes (Killoran 2017).

The first mention was by the *Star-Tribune*’s Youngblood. He was writing about Minnesota’s Fagbenle and discussed the path she took to the WNBA, mentioning that she was born in Baltimore to a Nigerian family that eventually moved to Great Britain. The family is made up of 12 people, and her brothers are described as working in the music

industry with highly famous performers, while another brother is in the film industry. Her father is a retired journalist. (April 13, April 14, May 4).

The same occurred during a piece the *Star-Tribune* ran about draft pick Jones, where Youngblood mentioned that she learned to deal with adversity after her father, David, was paralyzed in an automobile accident when she was 12 (April 17). Moore, meanwhile, brought up her own family in a feature written about her (May 14).

Youngblood also mentioned Augustus' grandmother. The Lynx guard mentioned that her grandmother wanted to see her play more aggressively and shoot more before a playoff win over Washington, and that tidbit made it as a colorful anecdote in the story (September 13). Meanwhile, something similar took place in a story Youngblood about Fowles, with this anecdote being that her mother would not approve of her hairdo (September 2).

The *Star-Tribune's* Reiss mentioned in a feature on the Lynx's Fowles that she typically played on a team opposite her brothers during neighborhood pick-up games in the driveway when she was younger, which helped her develop the ability to catch tough passes against tough defense (August 11).

The only other mention of family came on June 22, when reporter Youngblood noted that Washington coach Mike Thibault and his son and assistant coach Eric would miss a game against Minnesota because of the death of Mike's father.

The *Pioneer Press* was far more limited in terms of family mentions, with many of them coming via quotes. Reporter Cook also referenced the Augustus-grandmother anecdote (September 12). Beyond that and one or two quotes, there were no family mentions by the St. Paul newspaper of record.

This frame was far more commonplace in the *Star-Tribune*. Family was mentioned far less than previous research such as that done by Nicely (2007) and Killoran (2017) would suggest. Unlike in those studies of nationally-focused publications, the two newspapers studied here never mentioned motherhood, spouses or the women's roles as such. No mentions were made of their children and scant few mentions were made of family of any kind. Those were mostly confined to features, which often take a closer look at the personal lives of their subjects.

### **Coach/Male Given Credit**

For the purposes of this research, this frame is defined as a member of the coaching staff or a male of any kind being noted as either a reason or the reason for the success of the Lynx or their individual team members (Killoran 2017).

In one of the scenarios in which men or coaches were given credit, Augustus mentioned to Youngblood of the *Star-Tribune* that former NBA superstar Kevin Garnett was the impetus for her skipping playing overseas in the offseason, telling her that listening to her body was more important (Youngblood, May 1).

In a Youngblood piece from May 28, he wrote that Fowles was “challenged by Reeve” (the coach) to take her game to a dominant level, implicitly giving Reeve some level of credit for her (Fowles’) accomplishments for the season.

The reporter gave all three Lynx coaches credit for helping Fowles right the ship and dominate in a game (June 26), and the *Star-Tribune*'s Reiss wrote about how assistant coach James Wade helped her reach her potential (August 11). And Reiss

dedicated an entire story to the quality of Minnesota's assistant coaches and what they brought to the team during the 2017 season (July 20).

In the *Pioneer Press*, the reporter Frederick also discussed how Wade helped Fowles elevate her game in a feature about the star center (August 2) and how she helped Whalen improve her decision making over time (May 2). Frederick also mentioned that Garnett gave Augustus advice about taking care of her body. In a way, this tacitly gave Garnett some credit for Augustus being in better physical condition at the start of the season (Frederick, May 1).

In a September 3 game story, the *Pioneer Press*' Cook intimated that coach Reeve's concerted effort helped the Lynx's Moore get going on offense. And in a feature about Augustus, Frederick said that the head coach's ability to know exactly when to play Augustus and when to pull her for rest was critical in her solid season (September 10).

The reporter would go on to laud her strategy as a reason why the Lynx offense is such a high-performing unit in a playoff preview (September 13). Cook also gave her some of the credit for helping Fowles adjust her mindset, which allowed her to explode for an MVP season (September 14, October 4).

This frame was utilized more often than some others, in part because of Reeve's reputation as one of the league's best coaches. As such, she frequently is given credit for certain aspects of the team's success. On several occasions, those accolades came from the players in quotes, which were noted in the coding process. However, the more elucidating information comes from words written by the reporters, and as such this section will focused mostly on that particular context.

### **Female Compared to Male Counterpart**

Simply put, this frame refers to a female athlete being compared to a male athlete (Killoran 2017). Previous research suggests that while male athletes are often compared to male peers, female athletes are often placed in the context of how they stack up to men, a framing device that is not typically seen when discussing male athletes.

In the *Star-Tribune*, Lynx players being compared to male athletes took place in only one instance. Youngblood, in a story comparing two of the WNBA's best centers, Minnesota's Fowles and Phoenix's Brittney Griner, compared their individual rivalry to that of NBA legends Kareem Abdul-Jabbar and Wilt Chamberlain and the boxing rivalry of Muhammad Ali and Joe Frazier (June 29).

The *Pioneer Press* had a handful of such instances. Cook, in a story about an August game against Atlanta, quoted Atlanta coach Michael Cooper. Cooper compared Minnesota star Fowles to Hall of Fame NBA center Shaquille O'Neal. It is important to note, however, that the comparison did not come from the reporter himself, but rather the opposing coach, himself a former NBA player (Cook, August 3).

What proved fascinating was the fact that more comparisons were made comparing female athletes to female counterparts. In the *Pioneer Press*, Frederick penned a piece about Seimone Augustus, and within it, he compared Augustus and her offseason regimen to that of Whalen, while head coach Reeve pointed out that while the situations were similar, some of the extenuating circumstances were different, such as resources (May 1).

Frederick again made a similar comparison when writing about Fowles' winning the WNBA Finals MVP (October 4). She was the first player to win regular season and postseason MVP honors since Lauren Jackson in 2010.

In the *Star-Tribune*, Youngblood wrote about how Rebekkah Brunson stacked up with her more renowned teammates in a feature focused on Brunson. He mentioned that she isn't an MVP candidate like Fowles or among the WNBA's all-time winningest players like Whalen but provides important contributions to the team regardless (Youngblood, June 9).

Youngblood also wrote the aforementioned article about Fowles and Griner. The entire premise of the feature was to talk about what makes both players great and how they stack up against one another as a preview of an upcoming game between their teams. Among the reporter's points of commonality:

- They both play close to the basket in an era where bigger players are increasingly playing farther from the basket.
- Both are aggressive and have grown into more dominant offensive players in recent years.
- Both are the focal points of their respective offenses.
- Both command the attention of opposing defenses (June 29).

The reporter also discussed how the two differed from other great centers in WNBA history, all of whom dominated more through versatility and the ability to stretch defenses by playing away from the basket, while Fowles and Griner overpower defenders near the rim (Youngblood, June 29).

His colleague Reiss, meanwhile, compared the styles of Whalen and Montgomery in a feature about Montgomery, who was filling in at the time for an injured Whalen (July 25). The comparisons were mostly made through the lens of their head coach, Reeve,

who called Whalen more focused and precise, while Montgomery was the more freewheeling of the two (Reiss, July 25).

The instances of women being compared to their male counterparts or mentions of male athletes were limited in comparison to what previous research put forth (Killoran, 2017; Nicely, 2007). Again, this illustrates a shift in the tone and focus of coverage of the Lynx in the case of the Twin Cities' two newspapers in 2017.

### **Emotion**

Emotion, for the purposes of this research, is defined as any mention of a player's mental state or how they feel mentally (Killoran 2017).

While not necessarily referenced in a negative context, it was the most commonly utilized of the “negative” frames. The players often referenced it, particularly in early season stories that talked about being upset at how the previous season ended — losing the WNBA Finals to Los Angeles on a last-second basket in the deciding game (Youngblood, April 23).

Youngblood referenced emotion early in the *Star-Tribune's* coverage, beginning by referencing the intensity of early-season practices (April 25), noting that head coach Reeve thought the rookies were “timid” around the veterans at practice (April 25), and often mentioned the disappointment team leaders Moore and Whalen felt in the aftermath of the unhappy ending of the previous season (May 1).

In a feature about Fowles posted May 8, Youngblood wrote about Fowles' “psycho mode,” the aggressive attitude she adopts during her best games. He noted that she described herself as more mellow off the court, but that she exhibits intensity and

patience on it. Reeve, in the same article, mentioned that sometimes she has to prod Fowles to get her into psycho mode, but once she's there, she's unstoppable.

In a feature about Moore, the reporter noted that the star athlete needed to find a sense of meaning to her on-court accomplishments, following it with a quote from Moore about finding joy in what she does and finding joy in the ups and downs of a season (May 14). And a piece on Fowles from May 28 referenced her ability to keep her composure.

There are a multitude of references to the coaching staff and players being “happy” with their play, in a manner similar to this line from Youngblood’s June 1 story: “Reeve is obviously happy her team is undefeated. But there are areas where she said she needs to see improvement.”

The *Star-Tribune* team of Youngblood and Reiss also make less detailed mentions of various emotions, including but not limited to:

- “Obsession” (June 3)
- “Competitive drive” (June 7)
- “Frustrations” (June 22, June 26, July 7)
- “Aggressive” (June 24)
- “(Moore) smiled” (June 24)
- “sent [Fowles] into a shell for the rest of the night” (June 26)
- “Joy” (June 26)
- “A trace of bitterness, some heat” (July 5)
- “Pain” (July 5)
- “Pressing herself into mistakes” (July 7)
- “Maybe nerves got the best of her” (July 7)



- “Superstition” (July 31)
- “Felt worried” (August 3)

Meanwhile, the *Pioneer Press* didn’t shy away from mentioning emotions, either. Reporter Frederick also brought up the emotions that the previous year’s defeat at the hands of the Sparks conjured in the *Lynx* (April 23). In another piece, Shao Ting referred to herself as “excited and nervous,” and Frederick wrote that she had the proper “demeanor” to be successful (April 24). Frederick also wrote that Augustus helps the rookies “feel comfortable” (May 1).

Frederick and his reporting partner Cook would go on to mention emotion in several more stories, including the following references:

- “Fire” (May 2)
- “Hunger” (May 13)
- “Competitiveness” (May 13)
- “Her confidence wasn’t there” (May 22)
- “Jubilation” (August 11)
- “Players who are full of personality and life” (September 22)

The context around all of these mentions of emotions wasn’t necessarily negative or dissimilar to how they may be discussed concerning male athletes, but they were commonly utilized frames in both newspapers. They were mentioned somewhat more often in Minneapolis than St. Paul.

### **Belittling Language**

Belittling language in this context refers to framing devices such as “impressive for a woman,” “first woman to ...,” and additional qualifiers that frame the conversation

in terms of gender in a way coverage of men's athletics typically does not. In other words, men are referred to as the "first," "fastest," "strongest," etc., but not limited to solely their gender in the way women often are (Killoran, 2017).

When defined in that way, neither the *Star-Tribune* nor the *Pioneer Press* had noticeable instances of this phenomenon. There were mentions made of successes being in the context of "WNBA history," but that isn't quite the same. The context in this case is that of the history of the league, and a casual glance of men's athletic records in a league-based context frequently puts them as the first or best in (insert league) history. Therefore, mentions of the league were not counted among this group.

*RQ2: Which new themes, if any, emerge from this coverage?*

Throughout the coding process, one new theme emerged with a great enough importance to be counted as its own new theme: Strategy. Strategy in this instance will be defined as the discussion and/or explanation of specific tactical decisions intended to improve a team's odds of winning a game.

Framing theory-based studies of coverage of women's athletics or men's athletics do not have a corollary or basis of comparison for strategy, but it appeared so often as to warrant mention in this research.

### **Strategy**

Both newspapers discussed in this research made regular mention of strategic decisions and tactics, mainly those employed by or credited to Reeve, the head coach. It was first noticed in the July 25, 2018, coding of the work of Youngblood and Reiss of the *Star-Tribune*. On that date, coding of a Youngblood story from May 17, 2017, noticed a

line that read, “Against a team that forces you to score from the outside and mucks up the paint, the Lynx cannot play the way they did Sunday and win.” The premise was that the Lynx’s next opponent, the New York Liberty, defend the area close to the basket well and force other teams to shoot from further away, and the Lynx’s most recent performance was not conducive to playing against a team of that style.

It became a fairly common theme in game and analysis stories in both papers. Youngblood in the *Star-Tribune* noted the need for Reeve to better manage her substitution patterns (May 25), Reeve’s desire to call plays that gave star scorer Moore a better chance to get high-quality shots (June 3), the Lynx’s attempt to score more before the opposing defense had time to get set (June 3) and the importance of feeding Fowles the basketball near the rim (June 17).

The reporter would later discuss Reeve’s rationale for setting up her practice schedule and off days a certain way (June 19), illustrate the Lynx’s work to improve defending “pick-and-roll” plays and their inability to get Fowles the ball in advantageous scoring positions thanks to high-quality defense from an opponent (June 19), adjusting their preferred defensive method (June 22), how Augustus’ improved three-point shooting allowed the rest of the offensive players find more room to make good plays and the decision to allow Brunson to defend the other team’s best player (June 23).

Cook and Frederick did not refrain from using the frame, either. One or the other would go on to write about the rationale behind utilizing a certain group of players to begin the game and others in other situations (April 13), keeping fewer players than allowed on the roster because of financial concerns (April 13), how best to use the Sparks’ flaws against them in future contests (April 23), making the rookies feel more

comfortable in order to better evaluate their talent (May 1), using Fowles as a bigger focal point of the offense to increase scoring (May 2), emphasizing the need for Whalen to get shots closer to the basket as part of a strategy to score more points (May 9) and Moore's focus on improving her passing as a means to increase scoring opportunities for other players while limiting her turnovers (May 12).

These lists are by no means exhaustive, but rather a microcosm of the common use of strategy as a theme from all the reporters in this research study. There were numerous instances in both newspapers even before the month of June ended, with the theme continuing throughout the season.

Strategy emerged consistently in both the *Star-Tribune's* and *Pioneer Press'* coverage, and would be attributed to different athletes and coaches in from instance to instance in the proper context. Discussion of strategy was commonly found in analysis pieces, which were written to illuminate and elaborate on how and why the Lynx performed in various games and throughout the season.

*RQ 3: Are themes consistent or do they differ between the two newspapers?*

The themes were consistent between the two newspapers. There were slight fluctuations in usage between the two, but for the most part, the themes were applied with a similar style and commonality throughout.

Performance was the most regularly utilized frame of those that came from previous research. All four reporters utilized game scores, game action, statistics, accolades, win-loss records, championships and awards with regularity.

Both used quotes that touted players' own strength and athletic ability or that of their teammates or subordinates in the case of coaches. While those mentions in both newspapers were less common than performance, both appeared often. A key difference between the two papers was how often certain frames were applied. Reporters Youngblood and Reiss with the *Star-Tribune* utilized those frames more often than Cook and Frederick with the *St. Paul Pioneer Press*. It should be noted that the main two Lynx reporters for the *Pioneer Press* traveled less frequently to road games and covered fewer games overall than Youngblood and Reiss, who only ceded the beat to coworkers for a stretch in August and had some help covering the WNBA Finals to get a more well-rounded perspective.

Both newspapers mentioned appearance similarly often and in an equitable manner. Many of the uses of this particular frame had to do with height, which is a common occurrence in both men's and women's basketball because of the nature of the game (Roland, 2017). However, on the more stereotypical side of things, age was a often-utilized frame, particularly because the Lynx had a roster that skewed older than many other teams in the WNBA. Reporters Youngblood, Reiss, Cook and Frederick all tended to handle age in the same way, however. Coverage in both newspapers pointed to older players defying their age, not dwindling in terms of performance. Similarly, the newspapers both discussed the age at times as a boon, giving the Lynx an edge in experience over their younger opposition. Both also mentioned the role Kevin Garnett played in helping Seimone Augustus take better care of her body as she reached the latter half of her career.

Family mentions were uncommon, appearing only a few times in the *Star-Tribune* because of features Youngblood wrote about Tami Fagbenle (April 12, April 14, May 3) and Alexis Jones (April 17).

Head coach Reeve and assistant coach Wade received fairly robust credit for their strategic decisions and for helping certain players reach new heights throughout both newspapers, which was common in previous research into women's athletics. Both had 1-2 comparisons to male athletes while comparing various Lynx players to female athletes at a far more common rate. And both utilized emotion often. The reporters did, in fact, utilize stereotypically female-focused framing devices on the Lynx. But these frames were very rarely the main focus of an article, if ever, and the manner in which they're used illustrated a potential evolution in coverage. However, those external topics are not wholly divorced from their coverage. They do still appear, even if they were utilized to less of a degree than previous research would suggest.

## Chapter 5: Discussion

### Findings

The four reporters from the two newspapers covering the Lynx on a daily basis — the *Star-Tribune* and *Pioneer Press* — were less likely to utilize stereotypical female frames. Instead, Youngblood, Reiss, Cook and Frederick gave frames — performance, strength, athletic ability — usually associated with coverage of male athletes more weight in their coverage. This is significant because almost all previous research points to reporters covering female athletes and women's teams through stereotypical frames. These reporters have provided opposite results in the face of a long trend.

One of the most commonly noted problems with coverage of women's athletics found in previous research was coverage that utilized sexualized language and stereotyped the athletes involved by perceived gender norms (Nicely, 2007; Vincent, 2004; Knight and Giuliano, 2001; Jones, Murrell and Jackson, 1999). While noting the previously mentioned nature of newspaper writing compared to other forms of media, what was perhaps most striking in this specific instance — beat reporter coverage in a specific pair of cities about a specific team over the course of one season — was that very little if any coverage even approached sexualization or gender-based stereotyping. The bulk of the coverage focused most often on the performance of the Lynx, their individual players and their opposition. And when the reporters in question utilized the frame of appearance, it typically was in a basketball-focused context — namely, their height.

The mentions of performance, meanwhile, focused mainly on numbers-based results: Scores, statistics, etc. Many of these mentions carried a positive connotation in large part because of the fact that the Lynx were the best team in the league all season.

Their performance was rarely degraded except during rare losses or losing streaks, and even then, the on-court activities were the main focus of coverage. The reporting typically centered on what took place on the court either during a game or during a practice session.

The features, too, focused heavily on performance. While feature stories in an athletic context typically delve more into the humans that play the game, often the stories in both newspapers came back to on-court performance as an anchor. There were little to no stories that focused on life off the court as the main crux of the article. Fewer still were articles that talked about the athletes' love life or home life, focusing instead at a remarkable level on their athletic achievements of recent or past vintage. Previous research suggested an increased likelihood of articles that made mention or even focused on off-court topics.

The perceived negative frame that appeared most commonly — emotion — even comes with a bit of a caveat when considering coverage in the *Star-Tribune* and *Pioneer Press*. Killoran (2017) did a study that utilized the most frequent frames found in previous research, and this study applied them in a similar way to the way she did when studying coverage of the Rio Olympics in the *New York Times*, *ESPN the Magazine* and *Sporting News*. In those instances, mentions of emotion were discussed this way (Killoran, 2017, p. 9):

*“The fourth most common trend dealt with identification of female emotions (9.4%). These mentions pointed out and/or made assumptions about female athletes’ emotions before, after, or during their respective events. One article in The New York Times, Olympic swimmer Missy Franklin ‘not only lost her smile, [but] she broke down*



*in tears.’ Another instance was when Juliet Macur, a Times reporter, while describing a celebration of the American female Olympic gymnasts, painted a stereotypical image by writing that Aly Raisman ‘embraced her teammates in a happy, sparkly huddle.’ The language used in these descriptions is not only unnecessary, but it also takes away from female athlete performance.”*

Consider by comparison the emotional mentions utilized by the reporters from the *Star-Tribune*:

- “Obsession” (June 3)
- “Competitive drive” (June 7)
- “Frustrations” (June 22, June 26, July 7)
- “Aggressive” (June 24)
- “(Moore) smiled” (June 24)
- “sent [Fowles] into a shell for the rest of the night” (June 26)
- “Joy” (June 26)
- “A trace of bitterness, some heat” (July 5)
- “Pain” (July 5)
- “Pressing herself into mistakes” (July 7)
- “Maybe nerves got the best of her” (July 7)
- “Superstition” (July 31)
- “Felt worried” (August 3)

And *Pioneer Press*:

- “Fire” (May 2)

- “Hunger” (May 13)
- “Competitiveness” (May 13)
- “Her confidence wasn’t there” (May 22)
- “Jubilation” (August 11)
- “Players who are full of personality and life” (September 22)

Some hint at a level of weakness or vulnerability similar to what Killoran (2017) found. But many focus on a competitive nature, an anger, a drive to succeed not found often in previous research.

The rationale for the usage of certain frames cannot fully be deduced, and as such, it is up to future researchers to hypothesize whether the proximity and frequency of interaction to the players was the reason for a less stereotypical frame or if it was simply the nature of the work and the stories being written. For example, game stories are intended to be descriptions of what happened, placed in a proper context, and as such, lend themselves to a performance-centric focus. The goal of these kinds of stories is to retell what went on during a given game, which is difficult to do without describing the action and mentioning the statistics that helped lead to the result. Analysis, too, deals mostly with the performance, though it deals less with the “what” and more with the “why” — in this case, why the team is performing like it has.

However, game and analysis pieces have been discussed in previous research, and in those studies, frames that indicate sexualization and stereotyping of female athletes persisted in much the same way they did in feature stories (Nicely, 2007; Vincent, 2004; Knight and Giuliano, 2001; Jones, Murrell and Jackson, 1999). In all three genres of

article in this study, reporters mostly avoided using the same stereotypical frames as robustly as previous research would indicate.

Previous research has noted that how subjects of journalistic coverage are framed has the potential to shape the way news consumers view those subjects and, in many cases, the groups to which those subjects belong, either positively or negatively (Goffman, 1974). As part of understanding the how and why about people's feelings about women's athletics, studying the way they are discussed in mass media is critical. This research is the latest in a long line of scholarship that seeks to advance our knowledge of this important topic in our culture.

Previous research studied broadcast media as well as magazines, and newspapers often tackle subjects differently. Broadcast media are based more around immediacy and visual representation, and the limited amount of time broadcasters have to get their point across likely shapes the way in which they frame their stories. Conversely, magazine journalists have ample room to devote to a given subject or topic, which also affects how they frame stories. Since the stories in question here often appeared in the print edition of newspapers, they are often more utilitarian and more task-focused, getting to the point in an economical amount of words (Nicely, 2007). As such, their less-descriptive nature may contribute to some of the framing devices utilized, such as the increased focus on performance. Assuming that similar results would apply to local television coverage or to locally based magazines that may do coverage of women's professional athletics would not be wise.

However, it is important to note here that the articles used for this study were the online versions, where space constraints aren't necessarily the same as the print version

of the story, which both has to meet a time-based deadline and conform to the size of the page. Online versions have to deal with those restraints on a somewhat more relaxed basis.

### **Advancing Scholarship**

This research advances the field of framing theory research into coverage of women's athletics by looking at it through a unique lens — that of beat reporters from competing newspapers that cover the same team on a regular basis throughout one season.

As stated previously, this study does not illustrate exactly how frames may affect consumers of the *Star-Tribune* or *Pioneer Press*. Earlier research indicates that how athletes are framed can affect how they are perceived, and therefore conducting research that uncovers and describes those frames in greater detail is valuable to the scholarship at large (Hardin, Lynn, Walsdorf & Hardin, 2002). Understanding how two newspapers frame their coverage of a specific group of female athletes can help open the door for further research into how those frames affect readers and overall interest in the team.

There is little to no research on beat reporting in terms of framing theory and women's athletics. Perhaps the key reason: The WNBA is one of the few thriving and long-lasting women's professional leagues in North America, and beat writers are few and far between (D'Arcaneglo, 2017). This work opens the door for similar research, perhaps in the collegiate realm where reporters who cover a specific school, though not a specific team, are likely more common.

Additionally, it is important to note that in this study, the four reporters countered a trend illustrated by decades of research. Talking to Youngblood, Reiss, Frederick and

Cook in the context of this study could grow the research exponentially. While this research cannot discuss the why, it can discuss the how. There are several possible reasons for these results worth studying further, including:

- The reporters actively were aware of the pitfalls of stereotypically female frames and worked to avoid them.
- Being around the Lynx on a regular basis made them more likely to focus on their athletic accomplishments and prowess.
- Beat reporting inherently is more results-oriented, focusing on games and larger trends.
- The Lynx are one of the league's most dominant teams, and therefore, it is easier to focus on their on-court accomplishments, given that they are so vast.
- Minnesota also won the championship in 2017. A team being as successful as the Lynx were over a single season may have led to the utilization of different frames.
- The Lynx have one of the most devoted fan bases, as evidenced by their average attendance of 10,407 in 2017 despite playing in multiple different arenas (WNBA, September 6). Fan interest in the team carried over into attendance, which means fans are more focused on outcomes. The coverage matched the interest.

### **Limitations**

There were several limitations to consider with this research. First, financial constraints and lack of readily available print copies of both newspapers in the

researcher's location — Missouri — made studying the framing of where the content appeared in the sports section impossible. Research with better resources or the ability to have easier access to print copies of the material may be able to reach even deeper conclusions about the same or similar material, as well as an ability to study the nature of the photography and how that contributes to the research.

As a textual analysis, the research cannot by its nature predict how the audience will react to this content, despite the framing of these stories being different than what previous research would indicate.

This research also is narrowly tailored to a specific geographical area and specific team over a single season. The lack of readily available WNBA beat writers limited the choices of outlets for this study. Also, given the limited number of beat reporters covering this topic, all of the reporters studied for this project were men. Studies that focus on comparisons between male and female reporters and how they cover female athletes could yield different results.

While this study does mention frequency in an abstract sense, it is in no way a quantitative study. Frequency is only spoken of in comparison to the other themes discussed. A quantitative measurement of exactly how often each frame appears in a given context could prove useful for future research.

Also, given the lack of established women's pro sports leagues in North America, basketball was the central focus of this piece. As such, the results are not generalizable across sports, but are confined to a specific team in a specific sport over a specific period of time.

With more time and more resources, a longitudinal study could be completed that covers more than a single season to perhaps establish the evolution of frames over time. Additionally, columnists who would likely have a more opinionated take on the team and its performance were omitted here. While they may interact with players, they do not do so as often as their beat counterparts. Given that columnists are not required to be around a certain team players as often, they could prove more likely to fall into the same framing issues as previous research suggests.

### **Suggestions**

The frames chosen and utilized with regularity by the beat reporters in question in this research indicated a difference in approach to covering female athletes. An increase in beat reporter coverage of the WNBA and its various teams would likely go a long way toward continuing this possible trend, if it proves to be a trend. It would require a seismic shift in the way sports editors view women's athletics, however. As mentioned earlier in this thesis, roughly 44 percent of sports editors claimed that readers had little or no interest in women's sports (Hardin, 2005). Allocating increasingly limited resources to covering women's athletics, therefore, would appear to be something sports editors would be unlikely to do, even if it would potentially improve attitudes about women's athletics.

The frames that appeared in this study and in previous research are typically handed down through generations, and continuing to seek out reporters who have the ability to cover female athletes through a gender-neutral lens is paramount to utilizing more neutral framing in an attempt to have a less negative influence on news consumers' opinions of female athletes.

To accomplish this, more diversity on sports desks is likely a necessity. While previous research is mixed on the subject (Kaiser, 2011; Hardin and Kian, 2009), an increase in female representation on sports desks in newsrooms across the country could lead to an increased level of respect for women's athletics and perhaps growth in the amount of coverage they receive, which could in turn affect attitudes toward the product (Messner, 2015).

Short of that, finding ways to make reporters of all kinds aware of the frames utilized when covering women's athletics is paramount. Reporters who cover women's athletics both on a beat basis and a less-frequent basis may be unaware of the ways in which they commonly frame coverage of the women they're responsible for covering. The more conscious reporters and editors are of these potential pitfalls, the more likely they are to work to utilize more equitable language when covering both men and women.

### **Future Research**

This research has hinted at potential areas to build upon in this realm. First and foremost, a series semi-structured interviews with the four reporters could better discern why such frames were utilized and give much-needed context to this research. Since the reporters vary in age and experience, finding out why they made the language choices they did could illustrate an evolution in language or manner of coverage between age groups and whether or not it's a question of youth or just language evolving over time in a more general sense. It would help show if the reporters in question were making specific, calculated choices or if different factors led to these results.

Additionally, what impact do the frames utilized by these two newspapers have on their readership? The Lynx are one of the best teams in the WNBA and have been for



several years. Does coverage drive attendance and fan interest, or is that driven more by their stellar level of performance in the last decade? We know that the way in which media frames its subjects contributes to how those subjects and their groups are viewed by the public at large (Goffman, 1974). How much of an effect does less-stereotypical framing really have in Minnesota and beyond?

Also of interest is what, if any, effect a female reporter would have on the framing of a team she covered as a beat reporter. As previously stated, the reporters covering the Lynx in 2017 were all men. A couple of women made contributions to the overall coverage throughout the season, most notably in the *Star-Tribune*, but none with enough frequency to be considered a beat reporter. Would those women, if given the opportunity to cover the team for the bulk of the season, produce similar or different results?

The reporters in question in this research also cover other beats. Frederick covers prep sports, Cook covers politics and helps out covering other sports, and Youngblood also covers the NBA's Timberwolves and the NHL. Reiss, meanwhile, has since moved on to various different beats, covering University of Missouri athletics for the *Kansas City Star* for a period before landing at *The Athletic*, where he covers the NFL's Houston Texans. How do their framing choices stack up against their coverage of male athletes? Research could show differences or similarities.

One of the limitations of this research is lack of access to the hard copy material. How does the placement on the page perhaps alter the results? Knowing where editors decided to place Lynx coverage is a new avenue, allowing for the dissection not only of perceived importance, but also of photo size and selection. Much research has been done

in terms of placement and photo selection, and utilizing those methods in terms of daily newspaper coverage of a single team could provide fascinating results.

A comparison between beat reporters in different markets would be a fruitful endeavor. This research compares apples to apples, somewhat, focusing on coverage of similar events and the exact same group of players and coaches. Do regional attitudes affect coverage? Does covering a losing team reshape the frame? These are important points of comparison.

Looking at local television coverage on newscasts in a WNBA market also could yield fruitful results. Television is by nature a more condensed and more visual medium. But often, the same group of people are responsible for filming them and talking about their games on air. Does the frequency of interaction or nature of the work affect their framing decisions? Future research may yet produce that result.

## Chapter 6: Conclusion

This textual analysis found that many of the same frames found in coverage of male and female athletes exist in a beat reporting setting. However, beat reporters covering the WNBA's Minnesota Lynx for two area newspapers in 2017 utilized the frames more stereotypically associated with coverage of men's athletics in their work covering a women's professional team. The majority of the coverage in both the *Star-Tribune* and *Pioneer Press* centered on the performance of this team and its players, choosing to center their accomplishments, the results of their games, their statistics, their awards and their win-loss record more than any other aspect.

The Lynx often were lauded for their athletic ability and strength, and many pieces focused on strategy and how the Lynx went about winning and losing games as their centerpiece.

Simply put, the bulk of the work done by the four reporters focused on frames that were traditionally associated more typically with male athletes, presenting a more equitable level of coverage than previous research indicated.

Stereotypically female-focused framing still was a part of the coverage. Emotions were referenced in a multitude of features about these athletes. As an older team, the Lynx's age became a focal point of several articles, with the implication that the older players may soon lose some of their abilities.

However, many of these perceived negative framing devices were mitigated. Emotion was usually framed through the lens of competitiveness and a drive to be the best. Age often was brushed off as something the Lynx overcame or defied and as an experience advantage. The comparisons to male athletes were comparisons to the best of

the best, and still, more of these comparisons were of female athletes to their female counterparts in the same or a different sport.

There are different possibilities for why these four reporters utilized more male-typical frames when covering the Lynx. Limited space and the results-focused nature of beat reporting may have led to an increased centering of performance over other frames, as could the fact that the Lynx were a championship team that performed exceptionally well all season. A shift in attitudes and the frequency of interaction between reporter and player may have also contributed — the theory being that the more they are around each other in a purely athletic context, the more likely the reporters are to focus on their athletic achievement rather than off-court topics.

Regardless of the rationale, the findings are different than what previous research into more nationally-focused, individually-focused coverage would suggest. In this specific instance, beat reporting created an atmosphere where performance was king.

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# Appendix

## Coding Instructions

Unit of Analysis: Coverage of the Minnesota Lynx in *Minneapolis Star-Tribune* and *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, excluding brief items that don't extend more than 5-7 paragraphs.

Date: Between April 1, 2017 and October 11, 2017 (a week after the WNBA Final)

Coder Name: Ryan Owens

Date: Date of publication. Enter actual date as mm.dd.yy with only periods in between (ex. 7.10.17 = July 10, 2017)

Coding done in chronological order by newspaper. First the Star-Tribune, then Pioneer Press

Story will be read once through without coding before coding process begins

## **Variables**

Paper:

- Newspaper name: Note in which paper it appears
- Article title

Phrase: Will be marked on hard or digital copy of article, with number of theme next to it

Frame/Theme: Note which frame the language connotes. These are frames that prior research has shown to be common in coverage of female and male athletes

- Historically female themes
  - 1 = Physical appearance
  - 2 = Mention of family
  - 3 = Coach/Male given credit
  - 4 = Female compared to male counterpart
  - 5 = Emotion
  - 6 = Belittling language
- Historically male themes
  - 7 = Athletic ability
  - 8 = Strength
  - 9 = Performance
  - 10 = Strategy (added as official theme 7.25.18)

Additional Notes: Brief explications as to why particular theme is applicable to a given phrase, to be written in the margins

## Coding Examples

### 6.23.17 Augustus expands her skills and remains a WNBA force for the Lynx (feature)

Seimone Augustus was joking around after a recent practice, days after she had dished out nine assists in the Lynx's victory at Dallas. She was asked what stood out for her about that game.

"I should have gotten that 10th assist," she joked. "I think the scorers might have messed up."

This is significant.

Think of Augustus, and the first thing that comes to mind is still that killer crossover move, the one she's used to score 5,250 points in 303 games over 11-plus seasons. The visual is still of Augustus, hair flying, ball in hand, breaking down a defender.

Ryan Owens  
1

Ryan Owens  
7, skills on the offensive end

It might be time to alter that image.

Through 10 games and a 9-1 record, Augustus is having one of her best and most well-rounded seasons. Ever. Still one of the team's best shooters, she has become one of its better facilitators.

Because of the talent around her, she is not scoring like she did in her early seasons, when the Lynx were essentially a backup band and she was the lead singer. But she is more efficient, more dangerous from more areas, and she has become the team's best at feeding high-scoring center Sylvia Fowles.

"Syl's success is coming from her patience," Lynx coach Cheryl Reeve said. "But it's also coming from teammates giving her the ball in better spots. And that's led by Seimone."

Of Augustus' 35 assists, 17 have been to Fowles, whose game has gone to a new level.

There are a lot of ways to gauge how well a player is performing.

Here are a few:

With the exception of her injury-shortened six-game season in 2009, Augustus is having one of her best statistical seasons, with career highs in shooting percentage (52.7), three-point shooting (47.1), assists (3.5, more than a full assist over her career average), offensive rating (111.5), defensive rating (92), effective field goal percentage (57.1) and true shooting percentage (60.4).

OK, take a breath.

Effective shooting is a stat that takes into account the value of a made three-pointer. True shooting takes into account two-point shooting, three-point shooting and free throws.

Translation: This has been a good start.

Ryan Owens  
9, discussing both her statistical output and her adaptable skillset

Ryan Owens  
6, referring to team's abysmal record in her early seasons

Ryan Owens  
9, adaptable skillset over the years

Ryan Owens  
9, statistics



Translation: This has been a good start.

Augustus shrugged. "Our offense has been flowing well," she said. "I've been in position to distribute the ball a little more than in prior years. [But] with Syl playing the way she is, you can't deny her the ball."

But Augustus is helping herself — and her other teammates — every time she feeds the post.

Before the season Reeve challenged Fowles to become dominant. She pressed veterans Lindsay Whalen and Augustus to shoot the open three more often. Pretty much all of the above has happened.

"The way she's playing, what she's getting done — embracing a variety of ways to score — she's having a great season so far," Reeve said. "I think Seimone giving of herself in that way has allowed our team to be successful in a different way."

Ryan Owens  
3

Help the team, help yourself. By taking — and making — more three-pointers, Augustus has helped the team's spacing. By forcing opponents to close out on that three-pointer she has made it easier for Augustus to get to her bread-and-butter spot, the midrange jumper.

"They don't know if you're going to shoot [the three] or drive it," said Augustus, who is shooting 54.1 percent on two-point shots. "And my midrange game is the best part of my game, and it helps me get there. They have to close out hard, so it pushes me to where I want to be."

Reeve can tend to bristle a bit when the subject of age comes up. But Augustus, 33, has added elements to her game that have continued to make her relevant — and dangerous — even north of 30.

"As you get older, you try to hone in on polishing your skills," Augustus said. "I feel I've settled into what I need to do to help my team."

Ryan Owens  
10, shift in focus has allowed new offensive opportunities to emerge

Ryan Owens  
Age — hasn't emerged as a theme but worth keeping an eye on going forward. Appears frequently in sports in ways that are commonplace, but would be seen in a more negative light in different kinds of entertainment coverage.

### 6.29.17 Lynx' Sylvia Fowles, Mercury's Brittney Griner go head to head for first time this season (feature/analysis)

There was at least one person who, taking a look at the Lynx schedule when it first came out, was a little disappointed.

For center Sylvia Fowles, the waiting was the hardest part.

Thirteen games and a month and a half into a 34-game season, the Lynx and Mercury will finally play Friday night in Phoenix. For Fowles, that means going against center Brittney Griner. And that's a good thing.

"I do love that matchup," Fowles said, "because Brittney is a true 5. I love playing true 5s, who get into the paint, who like to bang, who like to smack you around a little bit. I look forward to it. BG is the one. I know it will be a challenge, and I like a challenge."

Said Griner: "I always look forward to the matchup, because me and Syl are basically the same height, wingspan. We both want to post up and go to the basket. So I always look forward to that."

When two great heavyweight boxers meet, people take notice.

It's kind of the same thing in basketball.

Whole article brings up a unique perspective — dominant female athletes being compared to other dominant female athletes rather than men, which had been a theme of national coverage in years gone by.

No question the game is changing. More and more it's about three-pointers, position flexibility. But there is still something about two great centers going against one another.

**Ryan Owens**  
10, a shift in the way the game is played compared to the past

Which brings us to Friday.

**Ryan Owens**  
7/8/9 meld – greatness connotes athletes that are athletic, strong and perform at the highest level

Both teams are playing new-age basketball with old-school centers. Both teams are creating space on the perimeter by drawing defenders inside. And in this case, it's not just two dominant centers. In terms of back-to-the-basket, feet-in-the-paint centers, Fowles and Griner might be giving fans the two best performances in WNBA history.

**Ryan Owens**  
10, explication of how the game has changed

"I would agree with that," ESPN analyst LaChina Robinson said. "You look at the way the game has evolved, how players with size have become more perimeter-oriented, Sylvia and Brittney are low-block, dominant centers."

**Ryan Owens**  
9, best of the best

When the WNBA selected the 20 best players in the first 20 years of the league, three centers were named: Lisa Leslie, Lauren Jackson and Yolanda Griffith. All great, dominant players. But none of the three was a classic center. Leslie and Jackson, in particular, liked to stretch the court with their shooting range.

Lynx forward Rebekkah Brunson guarded Leslie and Jackson and was Griffith's teammate when Sacramento won a league title in 2005 and Griffith was finals MVP.

"Two feet in the paint, every play, every time down the court? Those two are the best the league has seen," Brunson said of Fowles and Griner. "Setting the tone down low? Yeah, it's those guys."

### Playing at their peak

Already very, very good, both players have taken big jumps this season.

**Ryan Owens**  
9, statistical rankings

Fowles is the only player in the top five in the league in field-goal percentage, scoring, rebounding, steals and blocks. Griner leads the league in scoring and blocks.

**Ryan Owens**  
3, coaches given partial credit for improvements made this year

Both are responding to coaches who wanted more. After last season, Lynx coach Cheryl Reeve sat down with Fowles and asked to go from great to dominant. In Phoenix, knowing there would be a huge turnover on the team — Griner and guard Diana Taurasi are the only returning starters — coach Sandy Brondello told her center she would have to do more, too.

"We have a whole new team," Brondello said. "I wanted her taking a bigger role."

**Ryan Owens**



The point is Fowles would sometimes take herself out of a game with a lack of aggressiveness. That hasn't been a problem this year. "Now Syl is hitting that beast mode," Augustus said. "Now I don't know who can guard her. It's going to be a great matchup to see her and Brittney."

**Ryan Owens**  
8, lack of an aggressive, strong mindset

It is, in a way, a heavyweight matchup. Like Ali vs. Frazier, perhaps. Or Chamberlain vs. Abdul-Jabbar.

**Ryan Owens**  
4, compared to men in other sports who were dominant

Since Fowles came to Minnesota in July 2015, the two have faced each other 11 times overall, five times in the playoffs. The Lynx lost the first two games but have won the past nine. Fowles has

**Ryan Owens**  
9, stats

averaged 14.2 points and 10.2 rebounds overall in those games, 11.6 and 10.4 in the playoffs. Griner has averaged 10.5 and 5.5 overall, 10.2 and 4.6 in the playoffs.

But both have improved so dramatically it's like the slate has been wiped clean.

"I hope they get a chance to play against each other as long as each coach wants to play 'em, 30 minutes or so," Reeve said. "Hopefully nothing gets in the way. Because I think this matchup is going to be fun. Fun to strategize, fun to watch."

Fowles was asked if she and Griner might be the two best ever. "We definitely can be there," she said. "We have some things to work on. But I think we can be two of the best post players of all time."

Both centers have become more aggressive, relentless. Both are demanding the ball. Both are playing with greater confidence.

Ryan Owens  
8, mentally tougher and stronger mindset

And both have become the crux of their respective offenses.

"Right now, both teams are running everything through their center," Reeve said. "We mirror each other in that way."

Both create space for their teammates by drawing so much attention. "What happens with players like Sylvia and Brittney is you have to change your entire offense," Robinson said.

Ryan Owens  
10, explaining how the offense works with dominant centers

Rebecca Lobo played in the WNBA and now works for ESPN. She sees two players who have taken huge leaps in their game.

"Since she got into the league [as the top overall pick in the 2013 draft], a lot of people have been waiting for Brittney to have that breakout season," Lobo said. "She has now taken it to another level, and it's been fun to watch."

And what about Fowles? "You look at Sylvia. You always wondered, she's such a sweet person, does she have it in her to have that beast mentality people talk about? Well, she has it this year. She wants the ball. She's burying defenders on her back, getting position. It seems the game is coming easier for her."

When talking about the best post players ever, Lobo was more noncommittal. She mentioned Leslie and Jackson and put Tina Charles in the conversation. Not surprisingly, Brondello and Reeve were far more certain.

"It doesn't get any more classic than Fowles and Griner," Brondello said.

Said Reeve: "Our league hasn't seen 6-8, 6-6, dominant-in-the-interior centers. I know people reference Lisa Leslie. She was not that. Not that she wasn't tough. But there was more finesse in her game. From a center standpoint, there is no question Sylvia and Brittney are the two best in the history of our game."

#### 'Fun to strategize'

It has always been Seimone Augustus' contention that there is only one woman in the WNBA — really, only one in the world — who can stop Fowles on a basketball court:

Fowles.

7.7.17 Sylvia Fowles shakes off slow start to finish with double-double vs. Sparks  
(game/analysis \*Aaron Reiss)

|   |  |
|---|--|
| <p>Sylvia Fowles admitted after the Lynx's 88-77 win over the Los Angeles Sparks on Thursday that she was pressing herself into mistakes in the face of double and triple teams. She was 2-for-6 shooting in the first half and had three turnovers.</p>  | <p>Ryan Owens<br/>5, frustration</p>   |
| <p>Maybe nerves got the best of her. The reigning Western Conference Player of the Month wanted to show her success this season wasn't a fluke. And by the end of the game, she proved that.</p>  | <p>Ryan Owens<br/>9, stats</p>   |
| <p>After averaging 13 points in last season's WNBA Finals against the Sparks, who deployed the same defense against Fowles then, the center dominated Los Angeles. She finished with 20 points and 13 rebounds.</p>   | <p>Ryan Owens<br/>5, pressure/nerves</p>   |
| <p>"I don't know who was more excited, me or Syl, for this game to show it's for real how far she's come," coach Cheryl Reeve said afterward. "We didn't have that last year. We didn't have the ability to run so many plays and have her double- and triple-teamed."</p>  | <p>Ryan Owens<br/>8, dominating takes strength of a certain kind</p>   |
| <p>Even when she struggled in the first half, she drew so much attention that it created opportunities for others, including backup Renee Montgomery, whose four three-pointers helped her produce a season-high 20 points. Reeve said Seimone Augustus' 10 first-half points, most of which came from the forward running off screens, were the result of Fowles sucking defenders away from other Lynx.</p> | <p>Ryan Owens<br/>9, stats</p>   |
| <p>"You're not thinking about defending ball screens," Reeve said. "You're kind of going, 'Where the heck is Fowles?'"</p>  | <p>Ryan Owens<br/>10, when Fowles isn't shooting well, using her as a decoy to free up other players is successful</p> |
| <p>Fowles was a top-level WNBA center before this season. But she's currently averaging a career-high for points (20.7) while shooting the best percentage of her career, 66 percent. That makes defending her -- and, as a result, the rest of the Lynx -- a greater quandary than ever.</p>   | <p>Ryan Owens<br/>9, statistics</p>  |
| <p>"The way she's playing now, she's just elevated her game to where it's a really hard decision for the defense," Maya Moore said. "If you send two at her, she can split it, or she can find a teammate. And if you don't come, she's going to get and-one's scoring it most of the time."</p>  |  |

**5.1.17 After an offseason of rest, Seimone Augustus feels like herself again (feature, Frederick)**

Cheryl Reeve makes it a point in the first few days of training camp to make the rookies and younger players feel comfortable. The Lynx coach might slow things down and over explain, just to make sure everyone is on the same page.

That, Reeve said, is so the coaching staff can make better evaluations of the younger players.

"Rather than losing them the first day," she said.

Those days might not be fun for the veterans, who have been through several camps and heard Reeve's lessons many times. Reeve said she asks the Lynx veterans to simply bear with her.

Most oblige, usually.

"I think it was Seimone that was like, 'Oh, all this talking,'" Reeve said. "That's just part of it. She's not used to being here this early. It's like, 'This is what we do, Seimone, when you're not here.'"

This was the first time in years that Lynx guard Seimone Augustus was around for the start of Lynx training camp. In past years, she was finishing up her season in Russia, most recently with Dynamo Kursk.

But Augustus decided to take this winter off, just as forward Maya Moore did, and guard Lindsay Whalen has done each of the past two seasons.

The offseason off marked her first since turning professional in 2006.

Signs that Augustus, a six-time all-star, three-time Olympian and 2011 WNBA Finals MVP, needed the time off were everywhere. She said she called her mom, agent and others after arthroscopic knee surgery, to say she needed a break. Then came conversations with former Timberwolves forward Kevin Garnett.

"He said, 'Youngin', you've got to listen to your body,'" Augustus said. "If you don't listen to your body, you don't listen to KG, I don't know what else to tell you."

The downtime came on the heels of Augustus' least productive season as a scorer; her 11.2 points a game easily marked a career low.

Watching Whalen also gave Augustus a reason to consider the rest. The point guard looked revitalized last season after deciding not to play overseas in 2015, when she literally limped to the finish line.


"She was healthy, she had a new spring in her step, she was very explosive last year," Augustus said. "She felt like the Lindsay Whalen of old. That definitely made me think twice about the possibility of taking a year off."


But Reeve cautioned against comparing Whalen's situation to those of Moore and Augustus. Whalen had a goal of making another Olympic team a year ago, and the Minnesota native had the luxury of working on her game at the nearby practice facility in Minneapolis.


"Seimone didn't have the same resources available to her. She wasn't here. She was in Baton Rouge (La.)," Reeve said. "Managing a WNBA offseason for the first time can be challenging for a player. They don't know what to do with themselves.


Still, Reeve said the time off was "great" for Augustus, and thinks the 32-year-old guard "looks really good." But she still thinks Augustus, like Moore, has a way to go physically to be in game shape. "Which is expected," she said.


"The first part of it is excitement that you don't have to go overseas and you're visiting family and you're eating and you're doing all that. Then you hit the reality


 **Ryan Owens**  
8:29 PM Sep 4 Resolve ⋮  
5, a level of ease and comfort

 **Ryan Owens**  
8:30 PM Sep 4 Resolve ⋮  
10, an interesting tactic to learn more about the players on the team


 **Ryan Owens**  
8:31 PM Sep 4 Resolve ⋮  
9, awards

 **Ryan Owens**  
8:31 PM Sep 4 Resolve ⋮  
2, asking a relative for advice alongside others

 **Ryan Owens**  
8:32 PM Sep 4 Resolve ⋮  
8, a lack of strength and endurance due to physical ailment


 **Ryan Owens**  
8:32 PM Sep 4 Resolve ⋮  
9, poor scoring stats

 **Ryan Owens**  
8:32 PM Sep 4 Resolve ⋮  
Comparison between female athletes


 **Ryan Owens**  
8:34 PM Sep 4 Resolve ⋮  
8, lack of strength while working back into game shape

"The first part of it is excitement that you don't have to go overseas and you're visiting family and you're eating and you're doing all that. Then you hit the reality

8, lack of strength while working back into game shape

 **Ryan Owens**  
8:34 PM Sep 4  ⋮

5, positive emotion in a quote

 **Ryan Owens**  
8:34 PM Sep 4  ⋮

2, but in quote about offseason

that January is hitting and you're kind of going, 'OK, I've got to get ready.' ... And most players don't understand how to do it at a high level."

Whalen said training camp is tough for everyone, with or without offseason rest. She expects Augustus to really start to feel the advantages of her time off as the season rolls along.

"When I really noticed was actually at the end of the season and the playoffs last year, when I still felt pretty good and pretty quick and pretty effective," Whalen said. "I think she'll definitely feel the benefits of that, as well."

Augustus was asked at the team's media day Monday if the explosiveness that's been such a key part of her game for the last decade was still there.

"If it's not there yet, it's coming," she said. "It'll be there before the first game. But I feel like myself. My jumper is there, my ball-handling, whatever it is I need to do to be effective on the offensive end, is there."

 **Ryan Owens**  
8:36 PM Sep 4  ⋮

7, explosiveness means ability to move quickly and change direction rapidly

#### 10.4.17 Sylvia Fowles completes 'perfect season' with championship, Finals MVP award (news/feature, Frederick)


As much as she said "last year is last year" and avoided talking with her team about the way 2016 ended, Cheryl Reeve did in fact watch Game 5 of last year's WNBA Finals – which Minnesota lost to Los Angeles – prior to Wednesday night's winner-take-all showdown between the same two teams.

And she had one major takeaway: "Sylvia Fowles was awful!" Reeve said. "She was awful in Game 5."


That game has haunted Fowles for the past year. Specifically, the rebound she didn't get has stuck with her. The Sparks won last year's Game 5 by one point, as Nneka Ogumike grabbed an offensive rebound and scored the game-winning put-back in the closing seconds.

Fowles felt that rebound should have been hers. So her form of redemption on Wednesday was simple.

"If I didn't do anything else, I just wanted to make it my business to make sure I just go out there and rebound," Fowles said. "That was my downfall last year.

 **Ryan Owens**  
8:28 PM Oct 4  ⋮

6, but an appraisal by a coach


 **Ryan Owens**  
8:28 PM Oct 4  ⋮

9, past game

Like I said, that haunted me for a long time. ... I just wanted to come in and I wanted to show my presence if that was rebounding, and rebounding it was."

Fowles grabbed a WNBA Finals record 20 rebounds to go with 17 points to earn WNBA Finals Most Valuable Player honors and lead the Lynx to an 85-76 win over the Sparks as Minnesota claimed its fourth title in seven years.

"Honestly, I didn't even know how often I was rebounding, so when I did an interview and they said 20 rebounds, I was like, 'Dang, that's why my knees hurt,'

 **Ryan Owens**  
8:28 PM Oct 4  ⋮

9, stats, award and final score

"Honestly, I didn't even know how often I was rebounding, so when I did an interview and they said 20 rebounds, I was like, 'Dang, that's why my knees hurt,'" Fowles said. "But I was tired the whole time.

"I just kept looking at Cheryl and I was like giving her the hand (to come out) and she was like, 'One more minute!' I was like, 'Oh my God, I'm about to fall down out here.' But it's just little things like that keep you motivated and keep you pushing, because without having my teammates just ride me every chance that I get, I don't think I'd be motivated to go out there and keep going."

That motivation is why Fowles forced a trade from Chicago to the Lynx back in 2015. She wanted to surround herself "with the best of the best."

"Minnesota has it," she said. "From the owners to the coaches to the teammates and everybody here, they just want to see you grow, and that's something you can always appreciate about an organization."

And grow Fowles has. She was good when she got to Minnesota and good throughout the second half of that 2015 season, earning WNBA Finals MVP honors as the Lynx beat Indiana. But the player she was back then looks like a shell of who she is now.

Fowles just capped off a season in which she won regular season MVP and Finals MVP, the first player to do so since Lauren Jackson achieved the feat with Seattle in 2010. She averaged 18.9 points and 10.4 rebounds during the regular season and 17.8 points and 15 rebounds in these Finals.

Fowles said the Finals MVP means more, because it means the Lynx were champions. It also provided the perfect ending to a perfect campaign.

"It is the perfect season," Fowles said. "I think everybody has their timing, and I did not think I would have my timing in my 10th year of my career. But I surrounded myself with good players and good coaches that were understanding

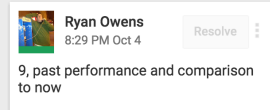
... and here I am. So a lot of credit goes to my teammates and them just pushing me and my coaches just making sure they're working me out every day."

Reeve and the coaching staff spent ample hours helping Fowles improve this year, making her a better passer, helping her become more effective with her post positioning and be more aggressive throughout the game.

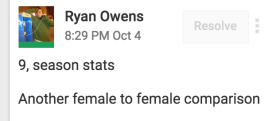
"My goodness gracious, did we have some success in transforming her into such a dominant presence that put pressure on their defense like nobody else could," Reeve said. "We were relentless."

In one year, Reeve said the team transformed from a unit that was centered on Lindsay Whalen, Maya Moore and Seimone Augustus to a team centered on its center.

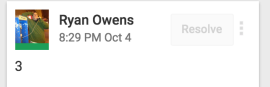
"At the end of the day, there's nothing like seeing the transformation of a player like Sylvia Fowles," Reeve said. "She's the reason we won this championship."



A social media post by Ryan Owens, dated 8:29 PM Oct 4. The post includes a small profile picture and a "Resolve" button. The text of the post is "9, past performance and comparison to now".



A social media post by Ryan Owens, dated 8:29 PM Oct 4. The post includes a small profile picture and a "Resolve" button. The text of the post is "9, season stats" and "Another female to female comparison".



A social media post by Ryan Owens, dated 8:29 PM Oct 4. The post includes a small profile picture and a "Resolve" button. The text of the post is "3".



**9.20.17 If Lynx are to beat Sparks, Maya Moore has to score against WNBA's best defender (analysis, Frederick)**

There are not many players on the planet who can make things difficult on the offensive end for all-world Lynx forward Maya Moore.


But Minnesota's WNBA Finals opponent has one of them.

Sparks wing Alana Beard – recently named the 2017 Defensive Player of the Year – might be the best perimeter stopper the league has to offer.


Her efforts this season led the Sparks to the league's second best defensive rating. Los Angeles surrendered just 96 points per 100 possessions during the regular season, second only to the Lynx (94.1). Beard – a 12-year veteran – is to the Sparks what Rebekkah Brunson is to the Lynx

"She's got physical gifts, for sure, but players like that, it's what they have on the inside of them," Lynx coach Cheryl Reeve said of Beard. "It's their relentlessness, it's their drive, it's their passion for what they're doing to be a great defensive player, knowing that she is the identity of that team in one of the most important aspects of that team, and she just embraces it. And it's contagious behavior. She's always done it, and it's just remarkable as a player toward the end of her career to play at that level on a nightly basis. And it was a hard-earned award that she got."


Beard – a seven-time WNBA All-Defensive Team honoree – led the league with 2.09 steals a game this season, but Reeve doesn't think her value is best represented in box scores.

 **Ryan Owens**  
5:09 PM Sep 13 [Resolve](#) ⋮


7, both the scoring ability of Moore and the defensive skills of Beard

 **Ryan Owens**  
5:17 PM Sep 13 [Resolve](#) ⋮


7, defensive ability

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9, stats

 **Ryan Owens**  
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Anti 4, compared to female athlete

 **Ryan Owens**  
5:18 PM Sep 13 [Resolve](#) ⋮

9, stats

“(The box score) doesn’t say that Alana held (Diana) Taurasi to 2 for 9 (shooting),” Reeve said. “That’s not the data that you guys are looking at. It’s what you should look at in terms of her matchups, but that’s why she earned Defensive Player of the Year, because she’s incredibly difficult to play against.”

Against the Lynx, Beard is matched up with Moore, a former WNBA Most Valuable Player winner, scoring champ and Olympic gold medalist. Yet, for all of Moore’s greatness, she didn’t get much of anything going against Beard this season.

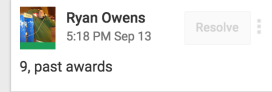
“She’s one of the most disruptive players with her activity on the ball and just her quickness and her strength,” Moore said. “She’s really good at just getting a low center of gravity and really trying to disrupt the ball handler, trying to get herself

in position even before her player catches the ball. Just a really smart player. She’s a vet, so she’s been around and seen it all.”

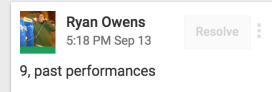
In three games against Los Angeles this season, Moore averaged 10.7 points, shooting 39 percent from the field and 22 percent from three — all significantly below Moore’s season and career averages. Not coincidentally, the Sparks won two of those three matchups.

“Some of it was Maya,” Reeve said. “Obviously, a lot of it was Alana. No question, it’s a key matchup.”

One Moore has to win, or at least come closer to tying, if Minnesota is to have success in these finals. But it won’t be easy – it never is with Beard. That’s how Moore prefers it at this stage.



A user profile card for Ryan Owens. It features a small profile picture on the left, the name "Ryan Owens" in bold, the timestamp "5:18 PM Sep 13", and a "Resolve" button. Below the card, the text "9, past awards" is visible.



A user profile card for Ryan Owens. It features a small profile picture on the left, the name "Ryan Owens" in bold, the timestamp "5:18 PM Sep 13", and a "Resolve" button. Below the card, the text "9, past performances" is visible.