ON THE SAME TEAM? A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF FEMALE SPORTSWRITERS' ATTITUDES ON COVERING WOMEN'S ATHLETICS

A Dissertation

by

BRYAN CHRISTOPHER BUTLER

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of
Texas A&M University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

May 2008

Major Subject: Kinesiology

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Approved by:

Chair of Committee, Michael Sagas
Committee Members, Gregg Bennett
George Cunningham
Arnold LeUnes
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ABSTRACT

On the Same Team? A Qualitative Study of Female Sportswriters' Attitudes on Covering Women's Athletics. (May 2008)

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Women's athletics regularly receives less media coverage than men's athletics, and female athletes are often portrayed in ways that de-emphasize their athletic abilities. Previous researchers have suggested that increasing the number of women who work in sports media might improve coverage for female athletes. Ten women sportswriters who work at daily newspapers were interviewed to explore how they perceived covering women's sports.

Most of the sportswriters said that they did not feel any preference toward covering women's athletics. They said they were more interested in finding good stories to write than pursuing stories based on gender. The sportswriters also suggested that men's sports received more coverage because sports fans were more interested in men's sports. Most of the women said that their bosses do not expect women to cover women's sports because of their gender, but that newspapers' use of the beat system encourages sportswriters of both sexes to cover the top men's professional sports and college football.

The widespread use of beats to cover sports and the acknowledgement of what sports constitute the top beats suggests that the profession and the larger field of sports journalism can influence what sports sportswriters want to cover. Organizational culture, new institutionalism, and Bourdieu's field theory can help explain how the sportswriting profession and sports media practices influence sportswriters' decisions on what sports are desirable to cover.

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Thanks are also due to Vicki Michaelis, the president of the Association for Women in Sports Media, who helped me find sportswriters willing to be interviewed, as well as to the sportswriters who took the time to tell me their experiences. Dr. Marie Hardin at Penn State University and Elaine Sharpe of *The Houston Chronicle* provided insightful advice that helped guide my research. Fellow students, faculty, and staff at Texas A&M University provided valuable assistance by keeping me focused and on track throughout this process.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Congress passed Title IX of the Educational Amendments Act in 1972 with a goal of providing equal educational opportunities for women and girls (Taylor, 2005) and, as a result, sport participation among these persons has increased (Salter, 1996; Theberge, 1985). However, despite the growing numbers of female athletes and an increase in the numbers of sports in which they compete, many studies support the claim that men's sports receive more media coverage than women's sports, by sport and by medium, and that female athletes are often portrayed in ways that downplay their athleticism (Billings & Eastman, 2002; Eastman & Billings, 2000; Higgs, Weiller & Martin, 2003; Lumpkin & Williams, 1991; Pedersen & Whisenant, 2002).

Journalism also has long been a male domain (Hardin & Shain, 2005), and it was not until the 1970s that journalism departments really started to accept women in large numbers (Lavie & Lehman-Wilzig, 2003). Researchers have only recently studied sports media using feminist perspectives when compared to other media research (Creedon, 1994), starting at roughly the same time that research started looking more closely at sport and its effects in society (Theberge, 1985). One reason researchers overlooked sports journalism as an area of research is because of the low status of sports departments in newsrooms – sports departments were frequently called the "Toy Department" or "Toyland" (Creedon, 1994, Wanta, 2006). Another reason that scholars might have overlooked sports is that opportunities in sports were limited for women

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This dissertation follows the style of the *Journal of Sport Management.*

when those scholars were growing up, thus limiting their exposure to or interest in sports (Theberge, 1985). As the importance of sport in society has become more apparent, especially since the 1970s when women have taken more active roles in sport and journalism (Lavie & Lehman-Wilzig, 2003; MacNeill, 1994; Smucker, Whisenant, & Pedersen, 2003), sports media research gained more attention from scholars. One aspect of sports media that has only recently started to be explored is women's roles in sports media coverage.

Previous researchers suggested that the differences in coverage are caused by male domination or male hegemony (Schell & Rodriguez, 2000). A look at history suggests that women were denied access to positions of power and control in most societies (Dubois, Kelly, Kennedy, Korsmeyer, & Robinson, 1985). According to some researchers, a dominant order perpetuates hegemony through the use of social or ideological norms that reinforce the dominant order's ideology (Hardin, Dodd, & Lauffer, 2006; Schell & Rodriguez, 2000). Sports and sports media have both been used as examples of ways in which male dominance can reinforce roles that men in dominant positions wish to perpetuate (Hardin et al., 2006; Schell & Rodriguez, 2000).

Sports can play a role in the continuation of male hegemony, particularly sports that are male-dominated, such as football or rugby (Hundley, 1983). Male dominance is perpetuated through sport by reinforcing the notion that physical dominance, aggression, and violence are ideals in society and, by extension, suggest that individuals or nations are justified in using dominance and violence to oppress others (Hundley, 1983). Women are expected to not be interested in sport, or if they choose to participate,

accentuate their femininity in their appearance (Washington & Karen, 2001). Some wrote that this might be because many sports have been created by men (Salter, 1996) and thus are used to reinforce their dominance in society.

Some researchers have suggested that for women to receive equal treatment in sport media, they must first make inroads into the sports journalism profession, as writers, editors, and in management positions (Creedon, 1994; Staurowsky & DiManno, 2002). Staurowsky and DiManno (2002) wrote that for women to reach their potential in the sport experience, they must have a strong and respected voice in sport. Interestingly, since the 1970s, more women have entered sports journalism than ever before (Hardin et al., 2006), thereby seemingly providing more female voices in sport. Even so, coverage of women's athletics lagged behind coverage of men's sports (Coakley, 2004; Hardin et al., 2006).

Researchers started to look for reasons to explain the lack of women in sports media and the lack of coverage of women's sports. Hegemonic concepts have been used as a framework to help explain the exclusion of women in sports media (Hardin et al., 2006; Kane & Buysse, 2005; MacNeill, 1994). However, other researchers have growing concerns about the use of hegemonic concepts in research. Mumby (1997), for instance, wrote that hegemony sometimes was too narrowly delineated, and many times used in one of two ways. First, some researchers suggested that because organizations function in the dominant ideology, organizations work to appropriate moments of resistance that take place inside them. This limits the importance of resistance by making acts of resistance seem ineffectual. Second, some researchers put too much emphasis on

resistance itself and not enough focus on the place that that resistance had in the wider political context. Mumby looked to reinterpret hegemony according to the wider philosophy of its creator, Antonio Gramsci.

Gramsci was a Sardinian socialist, journalist, political figure, and Marxist thinker (Levy, 1986). One of the areas he studied was how capitalism could be overthrown and a socialist state created (Levy, 1986; Mumby, 1997). The theories and concepts he devised, which included hegemony, were intended to move society toward socialism. Mumby wrote "I believe that our complacency about hegemony as a heuristic construct has led us to overlook many of the radical implications embedded in Gramsci's theorizing about this concept" (p. 370). In Gramsci's writings, hegemony is seen as the way that a dominant group convinces other groups to accept its leadership. Resistance becomes possible as subgroups become aware of their situations under the dominant group (Mumby, 1997). In that way, hegemony has a role as part of a larger, more specific political aim.

Pringle (2005) suggested that it was problematic to use the concept of hegemony without acknowledging the theory the concept came from or to use the concept outside of that theory. Pringle (2005) wrote that hegemonic concepts applied to sports research suggest that male athletes, as the dominant group, should be held responsible for creating or maintaining dominance over female athletes. This use of hegemonic concepts to describe male dominance in sport is commonly called male hegemony or hegemonic masculinity (Hardin & Shain, 2005; Pringle, 2005). However, research into sport suggests that male athletes each have different motives and beliefs, which makes it

difficult to consider male athletes as part of one coherent, dominant class. Male hegemony, he wrote, combines different discourses to unite the concept, but the discourses are not equally dependent on each other. Therefore, the broad concept of male hegemony becomes more difficult to keep together when researchers attempt to study individual athletes and their attitudes on sport (Pringle, 2005). He wrote:

> My reservations relate not just to the possibility that such dominance risks repetition and redundancy within future research, but that the concept of masculine hegemony does not simply refer to a dominant form of masculinity but is underpinned by select ideas of the workings of power that I find questionable. I am concerned, for example, that the concept of hegemonic masculinity is linked to a clear division between ruling groups and the dominated, a binary conceptualization of the workings of power, and notions associated with intentional rule (p. 273).

The concept of male hegemony has been used to study gender and sports media (Hardin et al., 2006; Schell & Rodriguez, 2000). While hegemony might be one explanation for a lack of coverage for women's sports, some researchers have called for re-evaluations of how the construct of hegemony is used in research (Mumby, 1997; Pringle, 2005). Also, hegemony could be one of many factors that influence the decision-making process of women in sports media. In this study, I intend to explore women sportswriters' attitudes about covering sports, in particular, the sports women wish to cover and whether they feel compelled to write about women's sports, to look for any factors that might influence those attitudes.

Problem Statement

Current research strongly supports the fact that women's sports do not receive as much coverage in sports media as men's sports receive, and the portrayals of female athletes often deemphasize their athleticism, despite the fact that more women are entering the sports media profession (Hardin et al., 2006; Hardin & Shain, 2005; Messner, Duncan, & Cooky, 2003). Some scholars have suggested that increasing the numbers of women in the profession would lead to an increase in the amount of coverage women's sports receives in the media (Creedon, 1994; Staurowsky & DiManno, 2002). Recent research, however, suggests that many women sportswriters hold similar opinions as their male colleagues about women's sports and the amounts of coverage they receive (Hardin & Shain, 2006). Research into how women sportswriters or editors feel about covering women's sports could help further our understanding of why women's sports continues to receive less coverage than men's sports.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore female sportswriters' attitudes about covering women's sports, with the ultimate objective of exploring whether increasing the number of female sportswriters will affect the amount or type of coverage that women's sports receive. I used qualitative methods as a way of directly accessing the discourses taking place among and about female sportswriters and editors. In this way, I sought to examine the idea that the addition of women to sports departments would lead to increased coverage for women's sports.

Research Questions

The following research questions were devised to create a framework for exploration. Chapter II reviews the literature that relates to these questions.

1. Do women sportswriters consider covering women's sports desirable?
2. Do the sports or sport media industries discourage the coverage of women's sports? If so, in what ways?
3. What factors play a role in determining the sports female sportswriters want to cover?

Significance of the Study

Sports media research looking at the attitudes and experiences of women in sports media and their effects on women's sports coverage is relatively lacking. Research into women sportwriters' attitudes on covering sports, particularly women's sports, has been relatively overlooked until recently. Thus, I sought to find discourses related to women's sports and sports writing, and looked at the organization as place where those discourses take place.

Researcher as Instrument

For 10 years, I worked in the newspaper business, first in news and business, then in sports. When I was first approached about moving from news and business and becoming assistant sports editor at the newspaper, I had mixed feelings. I've been a participant or fan of sports for as long as I can remember. Sports were important to me. At the same time, I did not feel that I was a "typical" sports guy, spouting statistics or keeping up with the very latest in sports. My fantasy teams are always a mess. Also, I

was afraid of losing my love of being a fan. One negative aspect of working in the news business is that you are constantly exposed to the bad side of whatever area you happen to cover. I was worried that scandals, abuses, bone-headed fans, and just plain over-exposure to sports would ultimately lead me to lose my interest in sports.

As it turns out, I need not have worried. As with any job, sometimes the irritations listed above, combined with the stresses of deadlines and space limitations, led to bad days and nights at work. However, one thing that working in sports gave me was access. My work was done in the office, editing stories and designing pages, but I was able to make it to various games and matches. Working in sports means working when games happen, so I was not able to make every event I wanted to attend. But because I was working in a college town, I had plenty of choices available on my off days. And what I discovered was that I enjoyed women's sports.

I have long been a soccer fan. I played when I was younger, but rarely watched the sport, mostly because of a lack a professional league in the United States when I was growing up, and international matches were rarely shown. However, while working in the sports department, I could now go watch the women play at the local college, and I found myself wanting to watch more. Next it was women's volleyball. Then it was softball and basketball. I would meet up with one or two of the sports reporters every chance I got. But the interest in women's sports by an editor and couple of reporters did not translate into more coverage of women's sports in our paper. The influence of the main gatekeeper, in this case the sports editor and the support he had of editors above him, kept other members of the staff from changing the way the newspaper covered

women's sports. I suspect that other newspaper sportswriters might experience similar barriers to increasing their coverage of women's sports.

My interest in qualitative research stems at least in part from my experience as a journalist. I worked for ten years as a newspaper copy editor, doing more editing than writing. However, I wrote a few feature stories, and I quickly became interested in hearing others tell their stories. I also grew frustrated at the limitations of journalism in telling those stories – particularly the lack of space to adequately tell those stories. A course on naturalistic inquiry started me on a course of developing my journalistic training into academic research by questioning journalistic objectivity and by introducing me to inquiry paradigms and their related assumptions.

Delimitations

The aim of this study was to investigate whether women in sports media want to cover women's sports. In particular, female sportswriters at newspapers in the United States were selected to serve as participants. They were members of the Association for Women in Sports Media, selected from a list provided by the organization's president. The initial participants were asked to provide names of other women sportswriters who might be interested in participating in the study, and membership in AWSM was not a requirement for participation.

As outlined briefly above, my work in sports media and interest in women's sports helped lead me to this area of research. Lincoln and Guba (1985) wrote that inquiry is not and cannot be value-free. As a qualitative researcher, I recognize that I bring biases based on my life and work experiences into this study. I have worked,

however, to recognize my biases and, through the use of reflexive journaling, recorded and reviewed them. I also brought with me expectations to learn and grow, and expected this project to challenge my assumptions.

Some scholars in women's athletics and in sports media conduct their research from feminist perspectives. I do not support any particular feminist perspective, but my personal convictions lead me to believe in fair treatment and equality for all people. I feel that I come closest to what Walby (1990) describes as a liberal feminist perspective.

I also bring a white, male perspective to my research, although this description is not entirely accurate. I was born in Indian Hospital in Claremore, Oklahoma, but was adopted by white parents. My biological parents were white and Native American. I've been raised as white, and treated as white, but I've never quite been comfortable describing myself as white or Native American. I prefer to identify myself as Native American – in part because I know more about that part of my ancestry – but because of my upbringing and treatment, my perspective is more from a white background.

Contents of the Dissertation

The dissertation is divided into five chapters. The Chapter I outlines the importance of the subject and introduces the tools used in the study and defines the scope of the study. Chapter II outlines pertinent literature related to the study, in particular research into sports media and women's sports. Chapter III outlines the research methods used to conduct the study. Chapter IV outlines the data collected in this study, specifically qualitative data gleaned from interviews, and contains the

analysis of that data. Chapter V presents conclusions based on data analysis and will outline areas for future research.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The purpose of Chapter I is to outline the relevant theories and provide a review of the literature that impacts this study. First, I review the literature on the coverage women's sports receives in sports media, then recent literature on women in sports media, which then leads to the research questions that were explored in this study.

Sports Media and Female Athletes

Research into sports media has shown that female athletes consistently receive less coverage than male athletes (e.g., Butler & Sagas, 2006; Messner et al., 2003; Pedersen & Whisenant, 2002; Sagas, Cunningham, Wigley, & Ashley, 2000; Urquhart & Crossman, 1999; Wann, Schrader, Allison, & McGeorge, 1998). Researchers have also shown that female athletes are portrayed differently than are male athletes, as they are shown less as athletes and more in stereotypical roles, such as wife and mother, or as sex objects (Knight & Giuliano, 2001; Lumpkin & Williams, 1991; Messner et al., 2003). The combination of lack of coverage and difference in portrayals marginalizes women's sports and downplays the accomplishments of female athletes (Messner, 1988; Messner et al., 2003; Pedersen & Whisenant, 2002).

A closer look at the research shows that women receive less coverage and distorted coverage in almost all mediums. Television network news shows and cable sports shows dedicate considerably more time to men's sports (Eastman & Billings, 2000; Messner et al., 2003). In addition, Messner et al. reported that much of the sports coverage shown on network news depicted women in overtly sexual ways, such as

wearing bikinis in the stands, or showing humorous features of non-serious sports instead of showing female athletes competing in traditional sports, such as basketball or soccer. The networks, however, did dedicate more time to women and sports than did ESPN's *SportCenter*, which allocated almost 97 percent of its airtime to men's sports (Eastman & Billings, 2000; Messner et al., 2003). NBC had the broadcasting rights for the Summer Olympics in 2000, and Billings and Eastman (2002) found that male athletes received significantly more coverage than female athletes. They also found that male speakers were shown more often than female speakers.

Other mediums also are less likely to dedicate time or space to women's sports. Lumpkin and Williams (1991) found that *Sports Illustrated* magazine dedicated more than 90 percent of its coverage to male athletes or male sports. Some research into athletics websites has found inequity at the high school and college level (Butler & Sagas, 2006; Sagas et al., 2000). At the high school level, high school internet sites in Texas provided more information about boys teams than girls teams, and provided the boys with significantly longer press releases (Butler & Sagas, 2006). A study of college websites also found that male athletes received more coverage than female athletes (Sagas et al., 2000).

Research into coverage by newspapers has studied coverage issues at papers of different types – from high school newspapers to major metro dailies – and levels ranging from high school sports to professional sports. At the high school level, Pedersen (2002) found that newspapers provided more coverage for boys sports than for girls sports, even after correcting for the larger number of opportunities for boys to play

sports. In the same study, boys sports also received statistically more stories that were accompanied with photos than girls sports received. In another study about high school sports coverage, the researchers found that smaller papers were more likely than larger papers to devote a greater percentage of sports space to girls sports (Pedersen & Whisenant, 2002). Research into collegiate newspapers found that men's sports received far more coverage than did women's sports in those papers, with greater inequity at the newspapers of larger schools (Wann et al., 1998).

Inequitable coverage has been documented at the highest levels, too. A study of a sample of sports sections from *The New York Times* and *USA Today* found that both predominantly covered males over females – with male athletes receiving 10 times as much space as female athletes (Eastman & Billings, 2000). A study of the Canadian newspaper the *Globe and Mail*'s coverage of the Winter Olympics between 1924 and 1992 found that four times as many stories were written about male athletes than female athletes, but that women had started receiving more coverage since 1964. A study that would seem to counter this trend compared the coverage by five newspapers of the Summer Olympics in Atlanta in 1996 (Kinnick, 1998). The researcher found that, proportionally, women received more Olympics coverage than men in those papers. However, both of the Olympics studies looked at Olympics coverage only, and failed to take into account the amount of coverage men and women received overall in the sports sections. While newspapers might cover female athletes well during the Olympics, that's an irregular commitment to women's sports, once every two years at most.

Another problem reported by sport media researchers relates to depictions of female athletes. Many times female athletes are not shown as serious competitors. Messner et al. (2003), as noted above, found that women shown on network news were more often depicted in a sexual way rather than shown as serious athletes. Eastman and Billings (2000) reported that, on ESPN's *SportsCenter*, top male athletes were described as god-like or superhuman, while top female athletes, instead of being compared to goddesses, where often compared to males in the same sport. They also reported that cable sports shows were more likely to make references to the families of female athletes or to their dating habits. Eastman and Billings (2000) wrote that even the tones of voice used to describe women's sports was more derogatory for women's sports.

Lumpkin and Williams (1991) studied *Sports Illustrated* magazine and found that women athletes not only were represented less than were men, but they were typically only shown in "sex appropriate" sports, such as tennis or golf. *Sports Illustrated* articles also made references to female athletes' attractiveness, appearance and manner of dress, while rarely making more than passing comments about the appearance of male athletes.

The research, taken as a whole, suggests that women are not receiving the same amounts or types of coverage as men. In a study of how Australian Rules football reinforces ideas of masculinity, Fitzclarence and Hickey (2001) wrote that sports companies looking to sell Michael Jordan-related products had to take into account "deep and complex cultural discourses that act to reinforce certain preexisting values and practices" (p. 121). Along similar lines, this study planned to look at the discourses related to sports coverage, with a goal of identifying ways in which "preexisting values

and practices" keep women's sports from receiving better coverage and how women in sports media relate to those discourses.

Women in Sports Media

Journalism as a profession, and sports journalism in particular, have long been male domains (Claringbould, Knoppers, & Elling, 2004; Hardin & Shain, 2005). After many journalism schools opened their doors to women in the 1970s (Lavie & Lehman-Wilzig, 2003), the profession saw an influx of women, but the numbers quickly leveled off, rising from about 20% to about 34% of the workforce in 1982, and remained relatively constant (Claringbould et al., 2004). In sports journalism, the numbers have been even lower – some estimates suggested that women only make up 13% of the workforce (Hardin, 2005).

After women enter sports journalism careers, many find it difficult to remain in the profession. One study found women in sports journalism said they were more likely to be subjected to sexist language from their coworkers than were women who worked in news departments (Miller & Miller, 1995). The study also found that the women who participated in the study felt that, when compared to men, their coworkers expected them to make more mistakes, and that their coworkers expected them to know less about sports. Researchers interviewing female college communications students who had experience in sports-related jobs found that many of them said their knowledge of sports was questioned by coworkers while on the job (Staurowsky & DiManno, 2002). Miller and Miller (1995) also found that female sports journalists said they felt there was not equal opportunity for them in the profession overall, but said they felt their own

situations were better than average in relation to equal opportunity. Smucker et al. (2003) also found that women in sports journalism were dissatisfied with their opportunities for advancement in the profession. The female communications students reported that many of them were made to feel like minorities or outsiders while on the job (Staurowsky & DiManno, 2002).

Another difficulty women face in sports journalism relates to the hours demanded by the job. Sports happen on nights and weekends, which leads to non-typical work hours and odd schedules. The long or unusual hours, combined in some cases with relatively low pay, can make it difficult for women to remain sports careers, especially if they have families (Claringbould et al., 2004; Miller & Miller, 1995). Alternatively, women who are prepared to work those hours might find herself limited because others believe that women have time limitations because of family obligations that do not exist (Claringbould et al., 2004).

Some researchers have suggested that the low numbers of women in sports journalism has been a factor in women's sports receiving less or different coverage than men's sports (Creedon, 1994; Hardin & Shain, 2006; Staurowsky & DiManno, 2002). However, current research has led to questions about that assumption. Research into whether having women in charge of the sports department of a newspaper increases the amount of coverage for women's sports has been mixed, with evidence supporting women's sports getting slightly more coverage in one study and no difference in another (Hardin & Shain, 2006).

Women sports journalists are entering into what has traditionally been a male occupation (Claringbould et al., 2004; Hardin & Shain, 2005). Researchers have written that many men working in media feel that they are objective – free of bias when it comes to sex and coverage issues (Claringbould et al, 2004; Hardin & Shain, 2006). They do not see any need for changes. Women who then enter the profession feel pressured to conform to these "objective" standards of covering sports (Claringbould et al, 2004; Hardin & Shain, 2006). Those women who plan to stay in the business may look for ways to fit in and adopt masculine values as a way to advance (Hardin & Shain, 2006).

Hardin and Shain (2006) used focus groups to talk to women who worked in sports media and found some – especially younger reporters and editors – were worried that they would get stuck covering women's sports. Some of the younger participants praised their papers' coverage of women's sports, justifying less coverage because of attendance figures or the lack of success by women's professional leagues (Hardin & Shain, 2006). This contradicts a previous survey by the researchers, where they found that 86% of the study participants agreed that women's sports do not receive enough coverage, and that 61% of the women surveyed agreed that female athletes are stereotyped (Hardin & Shain, 2005). The respondents in that survey seemed equally divided on whether they had a responsibility to give more coverage to women's sports (Hardin & Shain, 2005). In the focus groups, a few of the more experienced women said they felt an obligation to cover women's sports because it was part of an overall effort to support women's issues (Hardin & Shain, 2006).

The research regarding whether women sportswriters and editors want cover women's sports or feel as though they have stakes in women's sports seems to be contradictory. In some research, women working in sports media seem to agree that women's sports needs more coverage (Hardin & Shain, 2005). However, in focus groups, some women – especially younger ones – seemed to think that women's sports seemed to receive adequate coverage (Hardin & Shain, 2006). In this study, I aimed to discover if different discourses in sports media helped explain differences in opinion on women's sports. Following the research of Mumby (1997) and Pringle (2005), I aim to move away from hegemony as an explanation for differences in coverage, as was suggested by Hardin and Shain (2006), and look for an alternate theoretical framework.

Research Questions

The preceding conceptual framework outlined issues regarding women's sports coverage, and the role women in sports media might play in changing how much coverage women's sports receives. Recent research into women and sports media has shown that at least some women sports journalists are not interested in covering women's sports and do not feel like they need to champion women's sports in the newsroom (Hardin & Shain, 2005; Hardin & Shain, 2006). This runs counter to the expectations of many researchers, who wrote that inequalities in coverage and gender portrayal would be remedied by an increase in women sports journalists (Creedon, 1994; Hardin & Shain, 2006; Staurowsky & DiManno, 2002). The following research questions aim to study women sports journalists' attitudes on women's sports?

RQ1. Do women sportswriters and editors see covering women's sports as desirable?

Because the organization has a role in making story assignments and determining how stories are displayed, this study aimed to look at the role of the organization in female sportswriters' attitudes on women's sports. It also looked at the culture of the organization to find ways that it reinforces attitudes and beliefs.

RQ.2 Do the sports or sport media industries discourage the coverage of women's sports? If so, in what ways?

Other factors, outside the organization, might also influence female sportswriters to make certain decisions about what sports they want to cover. The following research question looks to find some of those factors and part they play in helping women sportswriters decide which sports they wish to cover.

RQ.3 What factors play a role in determining the sports that female sportswriters want to cover?

Summary of the Review of the Literature

This study aimed to explore female sportswriters' attitudes on women's sports. The French philosopher Foucault suggested that researchers work to look at widespread issues, such as racism or sexism, starting from the outside, where individual relations take place, rather than at the center, attempting to study a great phenomenon (English, 2005; Markula & Pringle, 2006). After learning how the relations of power happen at lower levels, those lessons could then be used to help explain happenings at higher levels, such as at the national level. The focus of this study is to find whether women

sportswriters see value in covering women's sports, and to find the discourses that play roles in those decisions. I attempted to approach these issues from the outside by talking directly to sportswriters who make decisions daily on what to write and how much to write.

CHAPTER III

METHODS

Chapter III outlines the methods used for this study. I begin with a description of the rationale for using qualitative methods to answer the research questions. In the next sections, I will discuss the research paradigm used in the study, the sample selection methods, and the procedures for data collection. In the final section, I focus on data analysis and trustworthiness.

Rationale for a Qualitative Study

When I decided to start this study, I knew that I wanted to gain insights into whether women sportswriters wanted to cover women's sports and what factors influenced their decisions. A review of the literature showed that there were few studies devoted to the topic. Creswell (2007) wrote that one reason to conduct qualitative research is when the researcher needs a complex and thorough understand of the topic. I felt that interviews would allow me gain crucial insights into the attitudes of women in sports media. In-depth interviews allow researchers to probe deeply and allow participants to give broad, descriptive answers or explanations about the research topic (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). An analysis of these answers can yield insights into the discourses of sports media and how female journalists work to reinforce or resist those discourses.

In this study, I wanted to look for insights from female sports journalists themselves. In order to study the working female journalists' views related to sports media and coverage of women's sports, I felt it necessary to ask women in sports media

to explain how they see their roles in what sports gets covered, what they feel is at stake for them in terms of women's sports, and to seek elaboration on the role of the organization and the industry on how these views came to be held.

Research Paradigm

This study used a social constructivist paradigm to explore whether female sportswriters want to cover women's sports. Through this worldview, the researcher looks to explore individuals' experiences and their meanings, understanding that there are multiple realities based on subjectivities (Creswell, 2007; Lincoln & Guba, 2005; Toma, 1999). The researcher takes into account his or her own background, then attempts to create an understanding of the world based on the detailed accounts that individuals provide (Creswell, 2007; Toma, 1999).

Gaining Access

Choosing participants in a naturalistic study who have knowledge about and experience with the area to be studied gives credibility to the study (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). In this study, I contacting Vicki Michaelis, the president of the Association for Women in Sports Media, a professional group of which I am a member, to ask for a list of potential participants. She provided me with 14 names to start, and I contacted 11 of the women from that list. Of the three I did not contact, one worked for the Associated Press and not a newspaper; one worked at a newspaper that was geographically close to the newspaper where another woman I had interviewed works; and the third woman was not in the continental United States. The initial participants were contacted by e-mail to secure their approval of participation and to arrange times for interviews. I wound up

receiving the names of two women who might be interested participating in the study. I also sent one to a reporter at a newspaper in my state, and two to women who were members of AWSM. I was not sure how many women would respond, but 11 of 17 women contacted agreed to participate in the study.

Selecting Participants

Lincoln and Guba (1985) wrote that naturalistic investigations use purposeful sampling. They wrote that this type of sampling has four characteristics: (a) an emergent design, (b) serial selection of sampling units, (c) continuous adjustment of the sample, and (d) selection to the point of redundancy. Emergent design means that the sample cannot be selected in advance. Instead, the sampling units are selected serially. Many times, the initial participant selected has particular knowledge of the subject and is someone who can suggest others whom would be of value to the researcher because of special knowledge or experience (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Continuous adjustment of the sample takes place as the researcher uses information gained from previous interviews and personal recommendations to target new participants, which allows the researcher to delve deeper into the topic of interest or gain a broader perspective (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Rubin & Rubin, 2005). Onwuenguzie and Leach (2007) called a design like this "snowball" or "network" sampling (p. 112).

The initial participants were selected from different geographical locations. Additional potential participants were selected by asking the initial participants for recommendations, using the "snowball" sampling method (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). All of the participants had industry experience and were professional sportswriters at the

time of the study. The women I talked to seemed a little uneasy about recommending fellow sportswriters to participate in the study, so I invited two other AWSM members to participate, as well as one sportswriter other sportswriter from my region.

In qualitative research, the importance of sample size tends to be lessened as the researcher looks to gain insights about attitudes and practices within a specific location (Onwueguzie & Leech, 2007). Qualitative researchers should take into account the different types of qualitative research designs when considering the number of participants to include in a particular study (Creswell, 2007). According to Onwueguzie and Leech (2007), researchers have made different recommendations for the numbers of participants that should be included in qualitative studies. For this study, I interviewed 11 participants, 10 of which were included. The interviews were recorded, and during one interview a mechanical problem kept the recorder from functioning properly, so that interview was not included. I received different perspectives, yet at the same time I had overlap that led me to the conclusion that I reached saturation. Care has been taken to protect confidentiality, including safekeeping of recorded materials and notes, and the use of pseudonyms to protect the identities of the participants.

Procedure

The participants in this study were asked semi-structured main interview questions that were expanded with follow-up questions and probes to enrich the data from the original questions (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Rubin & Rubin, 2005). The initial interviews and follow-up questions were conducted by telephone. Telephone interviews were used for two reasons. The first takes into account the distances involved. There are

relatively few women in sports journalism – Hardin (2005) wrote that women make up as little as 13% of the workforce in sports journalism – so finding enough potential participants was difficult when narrowing the study to a particular geographic location. Also, interviewing women in any one particular area reduces the ability of the researcher to maintain confidentiality, as most of the women sportswriters in a particular region might be expected to take part in a regional study. Telephone interviews allow the researcher to broaden the number of potential participants in the study.

The interviews were recorded and transcribed, and copies of the transcriptions were sent to the participants for confirmation and clarification, a process suggested by previous researchers (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Many researchers suggest using field notes instead of recording interviews because participants in the research might feel less threatened if they are not recorded (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Rubin & Rubin, 2005). However, journalists commonly record the interviews they conduct, so I expected them to be comfortable with recorded interviews. One interview did not record properly, and was not used, but notes taken during the interview helped shape subsequent interviews. I was able to draw on my industry experience to help develop a rapport with the participants I interviewed. I used my industry knowledge to help guide me through this research, during the interviews and during the data analysis process.

Data Analysis and Trustworthiness

To analyze the data, each interview was first broken into identifiable, stand-alone pieces, then grouped by similarity (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The breaking-apart process, called “unitizing” or “coding,” involves sifting through the gathered material and

looking for pieces that stand alone but at the same time do not leave another piece without meaning if it is removed (Creswell, 2007; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). After the data were unitized, the units were grouped by similarity, which is called "categorizing" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). As a group start to grow, then rules for inclusion into a particular group were formed to help define the category (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

After the data were categorized, the categories were examined to develop broader themes, and then the themes were summarized (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). The themes were arranged by size to help determine importance or commonality and by the relative importance by the participants (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). In this study, the themes help to define the broader discourses that are found in the sports media industry in relation to women's sports, and in particular the affects of discourses on women sportswriters.

I used validation strategies, as outlined by Creswell (2007). Peer debriefing is a process of having someone outside of the research perform an external check on the process (Creswell, 2007; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The peer debriefer both challenges the researcher by asking the researcher to explain their methods and conclusions and works to support the researcher during the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Also, during my peer debriefing, it was suggested that I have another debriefing with someone who works in sports media. I was able to contact a woman who works in a newspaper's sports department for a face-to-face meeting. She was able to confirm parts of my analysis as well as offer suggestions and ideas for consideration.

Another way to help develop the trustworthiness and to attempt a greater understanding of the data collected is to triangulate it with other sources (Denzin &

Lincoln, 2005; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This means reviewing the data collected, then looking for other sources to help corroborate or elaborate the data collected from the interviews. Researchers suggest conducting second interviews, observation, or using other documentation to triangulate (Creswell, 2007; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I had the participants review the transcripts of their interviews.

Also, I kept two reflexive journals during the process – one to record my thoughts and feelings during the process, and another to keep track of the process itself, outlining decisions made and steps taken as the study progresses. Lincoln and Guba (1985) wrote that reflexive journals help to safeguard against investigator bias.

The Participants

I conducted 11 interviews, 10 of which were included. The participants were also called for follow-up questions, and eight of them responded. The Texas Associated Press Managing Editors classifies newspapers in Texas, with the smallest class of newspapers having a circulation of up to 9,999 and the largest class having a circulation of greater than 125,000. All of the women who participated work at newspapers in the largest circulation size. Only two of the women were not Caucasian. Because of the scarcity of women working in newspaper sports departments, I had to avoid providing too much information, which could make it possible to identify the participants. All of the participants' names used are pseudonyms.

The first interview I conducted was with Sara, who was the oldest of the participants. She works at a newspaper in the Midwest. She covers men's professional

sports, but works as a general assignments reporter when the season is out. Sara said she did not play sports in high school or college.

The second interview was with Ally, who is in her 30s and works for a paper in the Northeast. She said that she considered women's sports her niche, but that she also covers men's sports. Ally said she was a practice player for the basketball team and was a trainer for the women's team in college.

Lana is also in her 30s. She works for a newspaper in the Midwest. She covers men's professional sports. Lana played tennis on scholarship in college, and she played many sports in high school.

Rebecca was one of the younger reporters I interviewed. She is in her early 30s and works for a newspaper in the Southwest. She is a columnist. She played golf in high school, but decided not to play in college.

Ashley is in her early 40s, and she covers sports for a newspaper in the Southeast. She covers Olympics and two other sports. Ashley said she played sports for fun, but was not on any school teams in high school or college.

Gretchen is in her mid-30s and works in the Midwest. She covers primarily men's professional sports but works as general assignments reporter when the season is over. Gretchen said she played high school sports.

Kelli, is in her 40s and works at a newspaper on the East Coast. She covers Olympic sports. Kelli played field hockey and ran track in high school, but did not play in college.

Christy also works on the East Coast. She's in her late 30s. Christy covers college football in the fall, then works as a general assignments reporter after the season. She played soccer, softball, and basketball in high school. She also ran track. In college, she played soccer for one year.

Holly is in her early 30s, and was the youngest woman I interviewed. She works on the West Coast, primarily covering women's sports. Holly played basketball in high school.

Sharon is in her late 30s and works at an East Coast newspaper. She is the Olympic writer. Sharon said she did not play sports in high school or college.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Chapter IV provides an overview of how women sportswriters said they felt about covering women's sports and what factors they said affect the coverage of women's sports. My own experiences in the sports department I worked in, and the sports journalists I worked around, gave me to certain expectations about what these sportswriters would tell me during their interviews. I expected to hear the women I would interview describe their frustrations with their bosses over the lack of women's sports coverage. I also expected to hear them talk about wanting to advance in their careers or going along to get along. Perhaps I should've expected something different.

When I was assistant sports editor at a smaller newspaper in Texas, the only woman who was part of the sports department was a part-timer who helped take game results over the phone and organized local sports briefs. She was not trained as a sports journalist, but was very knowledgeable of sports. She always was interested in sports results from the local university, including women's sports. In her role at the newspaper, she was always knew what was happening in girls athletics. She never seemed particularly bothered by the fact that women's sports received less coverage than men's sports in our newspaper. She seemed to find women's sports interesting. She took her family to some women's sports events. Her main sports interests, however, were the local college football and baseball teams, as well as the sports her children played. At our newspaper, it was men who were unsuccessfully pushing for more women's sports coverage.

The women I interviewed speak here. Chapter IV is divided into sections that reflect recurring themes that became evident during the interviews. Because I started the interviews by asking the sportswriters how they felt about covering women's sports, Chapter IV starts with their responses. Thee next section reflects discussions about whether women sportswriters feel any expectations to cover women's sports and the sources of those expectations. The following sections look at the role of newspaper values and the role of outside influences.

'It's Part of the Job'

Only four women — Kelli, Christi, Holly, and Ally — said that they enjoyed covering women's sports or felt a particular kinship with women athletes. Kelli, who works at a paper on the East Coast, said, "I love covering women's sports. I mean, in general, women athletes are fun to cover. They don't get as much attention as male athletes, and so it seems to be just a friendlier exchange." Christi said covering women's sports was something she embraced. Most of the women who participated in this study, however, said that women's sports should be covered the same way as men's sports or that the gender of the athletes they covered made no difference to them. Gretchen, who works at a newspaper in the Midwest, said,

> "[Covering women's sports is] part of the job. It deserves to be covered as part of our newspaper sports section and, basically, I have that approach to it. I don't feel like I need to promote [women's sports] or anything like that."

Lana, who works at a newspaper in the Midwest, said. “I talk to a lot of people about this, that just because I’m a woman doesn’t mean that I have to be an advocate for women’s sports, you now? I mean, one is not connected to the other.”

Holly said she had talked with other women in the business about covering women’s sports. She said, “I know I’ve had discussions with women in the business who go, ‘I can’t find the balance between being a champion versus being the one who has to do it all and then feeling like ‘am I limiting my chances to do something else for myself?’ And it’s tough.’” Sharon, who also works at an East Coast newspaper, took a slightly different tack when defining the role of a sportswriter:

> I don’t like to think of sportswriters as promoters of sports, but in a way we are, albeit, probably unwillingly. … I still don’t think of myself as an advocate because that would, you know, give me some sort of subjectivity in what I do, since I am a reporter and not a columnist. I think of myself as someone who tries to be fair and objective and balanced in what I do, and I don’t, for instance, sit down when I have space in the paper for an Olympics story and say, ‘OK, well, the last time I wrote about a man, let’s write about a woman this time.’ You know, I don’t want to make those decisions based on anything other than what’s a good story out there.

The women voiced different degrees of support for covering women’s sports and for how much they should serve as advocates. And while most initially took what might be called an objective approach, some of the sportswriters seemed to soften their stances

during the interview. Ashley said that men's and women's sports should be covered the same ways. Later, however, she said, "I don't see myself as an advocate for women's sports, but I would say I'm more of a watchdog." Holly, one of the four who said she found covering women's sports enjoyable, initially said:

> I look at covering women's sports the same way I look at covering men's sports. To me, athletics is athletics, and that's how I approach it. I think there are nuances – obviously, you're dealing with a different gender of athletes – but really, when it comes to how I approach coverage, it's identical.

However, later in the interview, she said:

> I actually really enjoy covering women athletes. … And it's very inspiring, being a woman, to see these athletes because, as athletes progress, women in other careers related to athletics are also progressing. So we're all kind of all on the same team. So it's great to see them progressing at the same time as women in media, in athletic training, in sports medicine, and all these other places. The numbers and the prevalence of women in these professions have grown tremendously.

While Ashley and Holly do not directly contradict themselves in these statements, they seem to step back from their initial stance of complete objectivity to a position that is more sympathetic to female athletes. Lana seemed to be the most forceful

about maintaining objectivity. Gretchen, Sara, and Sharon took an objective approach to the topic during interviews, but came across less forcefully than Lana.

Expectations on women sportswriters to cover women's sports

Some researchers who have studied the coverage of women's sports have written that inequalities in coverage and gender portrayal would be remedied by an increase in women sports journalists. To me, this sounded like an expectation that women sportswriters would want to cover or be expected to cover women's sports. The sportswriters I interviewed talked about different potential sources of expectations. The most influential source of expectations comes from inside the office, where sports editors control story assignments. Yet only three sportswriters, Ashley, Holly, and Sharon, said that at some point in their careers they worked for editors who seemed to assign them stories based on gender. "It seems like an easy fit to have girls cover girls," Holly said. "And I'm willing to do that. I'm fine with that." Ashley said that her current paper was an improvement over previous jobs, but sometimes it seemed editors fell into patterns:

> I do think that sometimes I get assignments because I'm a woman. Sometimes it's warranted; sometimes it's not. I have a pretty good relationship with my editors where, sometimes if I think of a women's sports story that would be good, but I don't want to do it myself, I'll just tell them, 'oh, you know what? Somebody should do a story on this woman who has done such-and-such. I'm personally not interested in

> doing that story, but somebody ought to do that story.' That's kind of how I deal with that.

On the other hand, Christy said that she never felt that editors expected her to cover women's sports, but that she often asked to cover them. "For years I had the choice between covering the men's NCAA Tournament or the women's NCAA Tournament in basketball, and I always picked the women. So there was no expectation, it was just something that I really enjoy doing." Beat assignments might be one reason that most of the women in this study did not feel that their editors made assignments based on gender. None of the women said that they felt their colleagues expected them to cover women's sports, and two said that the beat system was the reason. Sharon said:

> "I think I was always on pretty well-defined beats, but because I was on pretty well-defined beats, I think my colleagues expected that, for instance, I covered [a Division I universty's] sports for a while, and if there was a [university] women's basketball game that was of interest to us, that it would've been me to go do it — because I was the beat writer, not because I was the woman on staff."

The beat system defines the roles sportswriters play in the department. A woman assigned to cover the National Basketball Association would rarely be expected to cover women's college athletics because the NBA season overlaps most fall and spring college seasons. A woman assigned to cover the Olympics might not feel any particular expectations to cover women's sports – writing about female athletes is just part of working that particular beat. Outside of the regular season, though, assignments get shuffled. Sara said, "Obviously, in the off-season, anything goes. I've covered

everything from track and field to horse jumping. So I've probably covered everything there is to cover here." Overall, however, the beat system provides stability and predictability for sportswriters.

Expectations for women sportswriters to cover women's sports also can come from outside the office. Coaches, players, parents of players, and fans all have an interest in seeing their sports get covered. Readers have expectations about what should be in their sports sections, and sometimes about who covers their favorite sports. None of these stakeholders can directly affect a sportswriters' coverage the way a sports editor can. They can indirectly affect sports coverage by pressuring publishers or editors for more coverage, by providing encouraging or discouraging feedback to sportswriters, or by attending or avoiding particular sports events.

None of the sportswriters I interviewed said that they felt players applied any direct pressure on them to cover their sports. Sara, however, said that perhaps athletes hope that women sportswriters will provide them with more coverage than they currently receive:

> I was fairly well into my career before I realized that women athletes really depended on women's sportswriters to sort of champion their cause. And I had never really thought about that before. I had no idea that they would look to us to sort of be a sounding board and, you know, maybe be a link from them to our sports editors, most of whom are male. I guess I was a little bit surprised to find that they were so, I don't want to say dependent on that, but so encouraged, maybe, by or happy to see

> some women covering them. I guess they thought that we would be able to bring about more coverage — women sportswriters would be able to bring more coverage of women's sports. I guess I was a little surprised to see that they felt that way.

Sara went on to describe a conference that took place about 15 years ago in which female athletes told attendees at a conference that they were hoping women sportswriters would lobby sports editors on behalf of women's sports. Holly also said that there seems to be a hope among female athletes that women sportswriters will give better coverage to their sports.

While female athletes might be hoping for more coverage from women's sportswriters, coaches of women's teams are more likely to go ask for it. Five of the sportswriters I interviewed said they felt that coaches hoped for or expected better coverage from them. Two of the women cover the Olympics as a regular beat, two regularly cover women's college athletics, and the fifth covers women's college basketball and other women's sports after the professional football season ends. Because covering women's sports is part of their beats, these women would be most likely to encounter the coaches' of female athletes. Gretchen, who covers women's sports in the spring, said, "Regardless if the coach is a man or a woman, they tend to look at the female sports reporter and hope that you would be some sort of advocate for their sports team or their cause, and I have never really taken on that role." Holly, who said women's basketball and volleyball were two sports she regularly covered, said she had faced similar pressure. She described an encounter with one coach:

> I did have one coach who didn't appreciate a story I wrote … I think her feeling was that the role of a reporter covering a team was to kind of serve as a P.R. firm for it. And I wrote a story that was balanced, but probably a little too balanced, and the coach sent me a note that said, 'You of all reporters should understand what we're trying to do. We're trying to build a program for these women.' I sent her a note back and I said, 'You of all women should understand that I'm a reporter first, and that my job is being a reporter, and my gender is thrown completely out.' I was actually kind of hurt by that because I would think that would be, that she wouldn't come to me and use that.

Ally said that covering women's sports was her niche, and that perhaps had led to expectations that she would cover women's sports. She added, "I also think that regardless of what I cover, there's a certain comfort level where if coaches or parents or athletes or readers have a story that they want to tell or have coverage complaints or something they want to see more in the paper, and have to do with women's athletics, they're more apt to come to me regardless of what I cover because I'm female. And they feel comfortable or they feel like, they would assume I have some sort of sympathy for their cause."

Other sportswriters said they never heard from the coaches of female athletes asking for more coverage of their sports. Sara's primary beat is covering a pro sports team, but she previously worked as a general assignment reporter. She said,"I have never had a woman or a girl coach or athlete call me as a woman to help her get a story in the

paper." Christy, who covers football in the fall, then works as a general assignments reporter in the spring, agreed. "Throughout my whole career, I've covered both men and women, and I don't think there's any difference in terms of expectations."

Although not every sportswriter I interviewed has experienced it, some coaches of women's teams do have expectations that female reporters will give them more coverage. The sportswriters said these expectations did not affect how they covered stories. Perhaps this is because, with rare exceptions, those expectations are more implied than overt. Describing the expectations she felt some coaches of women's teams had of her, Sharon said, "I felt it wasn't hard pressure. It wasn't like they were vocalizing to me all the time. But I could just tell every now and then there would be a little side comment made that would lead me to believe that they were disappointed, maybe, that I wasn't covering them more." The women, like Holly, who did describe more overt pressure were likely to say they resisted it because it conflicted with their sense of objectivity. The most effective expectations seem to be those that are most subtle. Rebecca, who is a columnist, described it a general awareness of women's sports that her male colleagues did not share:

> I do know for myself, there definitely are times when I'm, I don't know if I'm more in tune or if people will make me aware of things related to women's sports, girls sports. I can't say it as though I can put a finger on it and that I have a calendar in my head, or a calendar written down somewhere that says, 'Girls and Women in Sports Day is coming up' or 'Title IX 30th anniversary is coming up' or whatever. But those events,

> whether outside people or inside people bring them to my attention, those things are out there, and I will occasionally do stories on those kinds of things.

Whether it comes from bosses, coaches, players, or other sources, there does seem to be some expectations that women sportswriters will want to cover women's sports. Not all of the sportswriters said that they noticed these expectations, and those that did said that they have little overall effect on what sports they want to cover. They are, however, one factor among many that have the potential to influence women sportswriters.

Beat Assignments

In the sports department, beats help to organize coverage by assigning reporters to particular coverage areas or teams. This gives the reporter an area of responsibility and a measure of stability. A sportswriter assigned to cover a team can look at the team's schedule and have a good idea of what hours she will be working, what days she will have off, and what stories she will need to write. Most writers will also wind up writing stories about subjects not on their primary beats or will have more than one beat. Ashley, for example, covers tennis, soccer, and Olympic sports. Gretchen covers football as her primary beat, but covers other sports outside of football season. All of the women I talked to either cover women's sports at least occasionally or have in the past.

Some of the sportswriters said that covering women's sports, especially as a primary focus, might be detrimental to one's career. According to Ally:

> I think that a lot of women sportswriters, and I know other people feel this way, too … you feel a kinship with women's athletics because you've participated in them or you've been around them or you feel very strongly about them, but it can be difficult from a reporters' standpoint because there're still sort of looked down upon in the hierarchy of the media and the newspaper world. So you sort of feel this pull that if I cover women's sports, I'm going to be ghettoized and that's all I can cover and I can't cover other things.

Ally later said that she covers men's sports and has covered pro sports, but that she feels primarily covering women's sports hindered her career. Most of the other sportswriters I talked to said that they thought covering women's sports would not hurt their career. Lana, who covers pro sports, said, "If you a do a good job, you do a good job. If you do a bad job covering men's sports, you're not going to advance, either."

A subtext became apparent as I progressed through my interviews. Most of the women said that covering women's sports would not hinder their careers. However, none of the women considered covering women's sports as a final destination for their careers. They all discussed covering women's sports as a stepping stone to covering higher-profile sports or pointed out that men's beats, particularly pro sports and college football, were considered the top beats in the profession. Gretchen was particularly emphatic about where women's sports stood in the hierarchy of sports beats when asked if covering women's sports would affect her career:

> Heck, yes! Are you kidding? Oh my God, it would be a demotion. And I hate to say that, but that's the darn truth. … Literally nobody ever asks me, ever, about the women's this or anything like that, whereas they always ask about the [local pro football team]. There is such an extreme prestige difference.

In the sports department hierarchy, covering women's sports is only a step toward covering a better beat. Kelli said, "Unfortunately the glamour beats are all men's professional sports. It's what pays better. It's kind of higher on the pecking order. That sort of thing. It's kind of the way of the world." Holly added the college football beat and the Olympics beat to her list of high-profile, high-status beats. Sharon agreed, and noted something in particular about the Olympics beat:

> When you look at what the most prestigious beats are, none of them are women's sports, outside of the Olympics. That's the only one. And if you look at how many Olympics writers are women, you'll see it's an interesting thing: we all get promoted to the Olympic beat. Among Olympic writers, men are a minority. That's the only place I can tell you that in sports journalism.

This might be an example of the type of subconscious gendered decision-making by editors that Ashley talked about earlier, or as Holly said, it is an easy fit to have "girls cover girls." The Olympics beat, however, might be up for interpretation by individual reporters or editors. Lana said that although the Olympics beat is the one major beat where women athletes receive coverage, the men who cover it do not view it as a

women's sports beat. "Any of the guys that cover the Olympics for the big papers, they'd fight you if you told them they cover women's sports," she said. "They'll say, 'no,' but they do." This might reflect an effort on the part of male sportswriters to distance themselves from any negative stigma associated with covering women's sports.

A few other women's sports beats were called desirable. The women's basketball beats covering the University of Connecticut, the University of Tennessee, and the University of Texas were mentioned, as was the U.S. women's soccer beat and the women's pro tennis beat. Although they were considered good beats to cover, they still did not measure up to the top men's beats. "I mean, name me three women's teams, anything," Gretchen said, "whether it's UCLA softball, the Women's World Cup soccer team in 2000 or whenever it was with the Olympic team, or even women's tennis, anything covering [women's sports] that is more prestigious, or more read, or more interesting from a fan's basis than men's sports. I can't think of any. It just doesn't exist."

Newspapers' Coverage of Women's Sports

Because previous research suggests that women's sports receive less coverage than men's sports, I expected that the sportswriters would be critical of the amount of coverage that their newspapers gave to women's sports. However, half of the sportswriters said that their papers do a good job. One of the sportswriters I interviewed, Sara, said that her boss had been criticized because there was too much coverage of women's sports in their newspaper's sports section. Four other women — Ashley, Gretchen, Christy, and Holly — said that their papers provided a good amount of

women's sports coverage. Christy said that her paper did better than most. "[Our paper] probably does the best job in the country," she said. "It would be great if everyone else in the country was like that, but that's not the reality, especially not at the small markets."

Of course, none of these women were saying that women's sports receive the same amount of coverage as men's sports in their sports sections. Instead, they were rating their coverage against their perceptions of coverage by other newspapers or against the sport participation opportunities afforded to women in the community. Gretchen said that her paper did a good job of covering women's sports, but that women's sports stories were in direct competition for space in the sports section with three men's professional teams, one nationally prominent college football team, and three or four good men's college basketball teams:

> So when you have so much interest, all that space is choked up by male athletics, you know what I mean? So there's very little room for women to sort of squeeze in there. It does happen, but it's not equal play, and it can't be, because these teams are the teams that draw the TV interest and the huge [numbers of] fans and readership. And for us, our paper is so concerned about making the readers happy, so that's the driving force behind what we do and what we cover.

The level of the sports in question can also be a factor. Lana was on the fence about how good a job her paper did. She said that the sports staff at her newspaper does a good job of covering the local high school girls teams, but its coverage of some

national stories or teams, such as the Women's National Basketball Association, was not very good. Overall, though, Lana said she thought her paper did an adequate job of covering women's sports. Rebecca said coverage of women's sports was improving at her paper, and that she had been part of that improvement. "So I feel like we do maybe not enough, but I feel like we do a lot," she said. "People outside may feel different, but I feel pretty good about what we do with women's sports."

Ally said her paper's sports department did not cover women's sports very well. It has four Division I colleges in its coverage area, and she said it will cover all four men's teams before it will cover any of the women's teams. "I hear all the time that it's so much better than it used to be, and I always say, 'that doesn't mean it's good, that just means it's better,'" Ally said. "Something is better than nothing."

Although she was disappointed in the way her sports department covers women's sports, she said she felt that she could make a difference. "I'd like to feel that I have input and that I influence decisions," she said. "I know that I do." Kelli also said that she could help improve the coverage of women's sports at her paper, but that there were limits to what she could accomplish. "My impact on how my newspaper covers things in general, those kind of 'bigger picture' decisions, is very limited," she said. Kelli and Ashley both said that reporters push or sell their stories to editors in charge. Kelli said her effectiveness in improving coverage for women's sports is limited because she's competing for space and attention with the rest of the staff. "I am one of twenty-something sportswriters at [our paper], and I don't have any great sway in what goes in

our paper every day," she said. The power to make those decisions rests with sports editors and senior editors in the newsroom.

In the sports department, the sports editor makes assignments, sifts through stories and story ideas from the staff and alternate sources, and represents the department to the rest of the newsroom staff. The sports editor can recommend stories be moved to the front page of the newspapers. He (the majority of sports editors in the United States are male) also is responsible for how stories are displayed in the newspaper every day. Kelli said that getting sports editors to see the importance of covering women's sports is the key to improving coverage. "The problem is, and it's what I've explained to women's coaches and women athletes over the years, is that I'm not the one you have to convince," Kelli said. "It's my bosses you have to convince, because it's the editors who make the decision of what gets covered, not me." Six of the reporters I interviewed talked about the role of editors in the decision-making process. Three of them discussed the need for more women sports editors. Kelli said the road to becoming a sports editor is difficult, especially for women:

> The road to become a sports editor is hard. It's really hard work. Those assistant and deputy sports editor jobs are really grueling. You know, it's a tough schedule for people, and those are the jobs you have to go through to get to be a sports editor, and I think women, fair or not, women, if you have a family, you probably have the lion's share of the responsibility for that family, and it's hard to have jobs that take as many hours as those do. So I think sometimes a lot of it is a lifestyle issue.

> Women say, 'I have kids, and I don't want to work 12 hours a day.' That just eats up more women than men. It's culture; it's lifestyle. I mean, if you're an editor, there's hardly a day where you can be, 'OK, I'm going to leave at 7.' You know? I mean, there's stuff going on, you may not get out of there until about 9. It's really hard for people to deal with that kind of an uncertain schedule. If news happens, you get stuck.

Although the road to sports editor might be difficult, it is not impossible for women to reach those posts. Lana took a more optimistic approach. She said more progress could be made, but:

> We're breaking ground with more and more women getting into the business everyday as reporters and editors. We've just had four women named as sports editors in the last month. So progress is being made. I just don't know what the benchmarks are that we're trying to measure things by. As I explain to people that are frustrated that we are not allegedly making more progress, we're basically engineering a societal change. This, to me, is as big as the Civil Rights Act, be cause we are breaking into places that have been historically male dominated forever.

Holly was also optimistic about the progress women were making in sports departments. She said that improvements were being made in sports departments at the same time as women were advancing in other sports-related careers. Holly added that as more women participate in sports, more women might be interested in other sports-

related careers, including sport media, after they finish their playing days. She thought this might lead to more women sportswriters in the future.

A Good Story

Writers like to tell a good story. Sportswriters are no exception. Seven sportswriters at some point during their interviews talked about the importance of finding good stories. “I just want to tell good stories, have something different, and, you know, I got into this because I like to write, so I want something I can write the hell out of,” Lana said. The sportswriters said that sports editors are more willing to give good stories good play. According to Ashley, “I think editors want good, interesting stories, and they don’t care if it’s about a Martian, if it’s a good, interesting story, they’re happy to put it on the front, at least at my paper.” Rebecca said that many sports were pushing for coverage, which made finding good stories more important:

> So do we do daily coverage of volleyball or women’s golf? No. But we’re not doing daily coverage of men’s golf or wrestling, either. So you kind of pick and choose your spots. And when a team has a good year or there’s something that is either exceptional at the sports level or exceptional on the human-interest level, then I think you knock those out of the park.

For all of the talk about writing good stories about women’s sports, Christy noted that there were still plenty of good stories untapped. “There’s a lot of good stories to write about that you’d be writing about for the first time as opposed to a big event for the men that’s been written about a dozen times,” she said. For women sports reporters there

might be more opportunities to find good stories in women's sports. It might be easier for women sportswriters to develop a rapport with female athletes, particularly when the subject matter relates to women's issues. Rebecca talked about a particular story that she wrote:

> A couple of years ago, when [a couple female athletes] were freshmen at the [state university] on the women's basketball team, they were big deals before they arrived on campus. They were Parade and McDonald's and all that All-Americans, but different types of players than women's basketball had ever seen. Center girls, but very mobile, agile, and sort of not the tree stump that a lot of the taller gals had been over the years, I guess you could say. And they were unabashedly proud of their size. And they were both big in stature height-wise as well as muscular-wise. We decided to do a story on what it meant for females to not be the stereotypical picture of a woman. At a time when a lot of girls see images of 5-foot-10, 100 pound nothings, what did it mean for them to have to girls like [these two players] in their immediate vicinity? What did they say about what it was to be sort of looked at as role models? I did that story, and truthfully, probably anybody could've talked to [those two players] about that. They're both pretty good to deal with. I think if you put it in a way that wasn't demeaning, I think they were willing to answer just about anything. But I developed a better relationship with them. I think it may have been an easier interview to do being that I was also a

woman. So I think there are instances where it may be easier to develop that rapport with another woman and write the story.

Stories about body image, reproductive health, motherhood, or other challenges women face in sport can provide compelling reading. Other sportswriters also said that women might be in better positions to write about those women's issues in sports. Lana talked about a series she did on athletes and pregnancy that she wrote, said that it was a story that her male colleagues probably would not have written. She said the story talked about particular problems and issues, and that some female athletes might not have been comfortable telling a male reporter some of the details she described in the story. At the same time, she said that having female reporters on the sports staff does not guarantee that a newspaper will carry these kinds of in-depth stories about women's sports. Many women sportswriters are covering male sports at all levels, she said, and so they might not have the time to do these types of stories. Also, stories like that require time and resources, so sports editors must be willing to give reporters the necessary backing to make stories like that a reality.

This section has looked inside the sports department for forces that might influence what sportswriters cover and want to cover. Beat assignments outline expectations of what the reporter is supposed to cover and narrow the reporter's focus. Beats also bring different rewards. Higher-profile beats earn the reporter more pay, more prestige and more readers. For most large papers, the high-profile beats cover men's professional sports teams or college football. Those who cover other beats know that to

gain a high-profile beat is to get a promotion. Thus a hierarchy is established in the newsroom.

Senior editors assign beats as well as determine what will be covered and how it will be played in the sports section. Because very few women work as sports editors, some of the women who participated in this study said that having more women in management positions in newspapers could improve the coverage of women's sports. Other women said that their male editors worked to make sure that women's sports receive adequate coverage. This view would seem to conflict with previous research that has found women's sports coverage lacking. The differences could reflect local variations in coverage or differences in what constitutes fair coverage.

Sportswriters say that they enjoy finding and writing good sports stories. Also, writing a good story gives them more leverage to convince an editor to give a story more prominent play. Women sportswriters might have an edge in finding good stories related to women's sports. Female sportswriters might be able to communicate better with female athletes, particularly when the story relates to issues women face in sports. This advantage is sometimes blunted because many women mostly cover men's sports.

The next section looks at factors outside of the newspaper that can influence the amount of coverage given to women's sports.

External Factors

Factors inside the newspaper, and especially inside the sports department, can affect sportswriters directly, but the women I interviewed said that they also look at what is happening outside the newspaper to help them determine what is important to cover.

The influence that women sportswriters talked about most during their interviews was reader interest. The women said that determining which stories appeal to sports section readers was gauged in different ways and that not all of those ways were effective. Some said that their papers considered the numbers of phone calls they received about a story or topic. Others looked at the numbers of hits on Web sites. Still others conducted surveys to find out what their readers wanted. Despite differences in the ways it was determined, the sportswriters agreed that providing readers with stories that they wanted to read was one of their main goals. "We try to balance; we try to give everybody what they want," Lana said. "But, at least in print, space is finite, so you can only do so much."

Many of the sportswriters said that coverage of women's sports was rarely requested by readers. "I think a lot of what I can go on when it comes to women's sports coverage is what we hear from our readers, what they want more of," Rebecca said. "And we don't get calls from people saying, 'I want more WNBA coverage in your paper' or 'I want more volleyball in your paper.'" Gretchen agreed with that sentiment. "I just feel like I will cover whatever the readers are interested in, whatever the sports fans are interested in, and right now, in this day and age, it is predominantly men's athletics."

A few of the reporters seemed a little less certain that newspapers were meeting their readers' needs. "The thing is, people are really bad about telling you what they want in their newspaper," Kelli said. "It's kind of like a I'll-know-what-I-want-when-you-show-it-to-me type of thing. So it's a really inexact science of how you decide what

interest is." Ashley said that sometimes editors take advantage of the uncertainty to cover what they want or sometimes sports slip through the cracks. "I think our aim is, 'what do readers want?'" she said. "But sometimes I think there are editors that do like particular sports or don't like other sports, or just have no interest, or the sport just is not on their radar at all, and therefore it doesn't get covered."

Assessing reader interest might be an inexact science, but the women I interviewed seemed determined to provide their readers with the stories and sports they wanted. "Our paper is so concerned about making the readers happy," Gretchen said, "so that's the driving force behind what we do and what we cover." Christy also wanted to meet readers' needs, but she thought there was room for compromise. "I feel that there's a responsibility to sort of provide coverage [of women's sports] in hopes of getting more readers interested in it, so it's a little bit of both," she said. "Maybe [I can] help by giving the reader a greater awareness of something they didn't have an awareness of before." Ashley also felt that editors needed to be kept informed about women's sports that they might not have been aware of:

> That's what I was saying before about women's sports: in general, most of the guys who, as sports editors, are not that interested in women's sports unless it's Maria Sharapova in a short skirt, then they're interested. But when you're talking about women's basketball or other female athletes who aren't the hottie of the month, those are the stories that I feel – that's where I think it's my responsibility to bring it to their attention, and whether I'm going to write it or someone else is going to write it, just

> to kind of put it on their radar screen. Again, I don't think it's malicious. I never feel that my sports editors are degrading or saying 'we're not going to cover that because it's women.

Sharon, Ally, and Rebecca also talked about introducing readers to sports stories they do not ordinarily see or expect. They all called it "the chicken-and-the-egg" aspect of covering sports. Ally said:

> One of the discussions we often have in the newsroom as far as covering certain events is the chicken-and-the-egg syndrome with attendance. So if there's only 300 people at a women's game, people don't care about it. And then we can say, 'people don't care about it because they don't know about it, because we didn't do an advance about it.' And so it is kind of a circular argument.

Attendance at sporting events goes hand-in-hand with what reporters and editors perceive reader interest to be. If sports fans are the target audience of a newspaper's sports section, then attendance gives editors a way to gauge fan interest and direct their coverage. Gretchen said it was difficult to justify covering more women's sports at her newspaper when attendance was lower than for men's sports in the area. "I don't think the attendance and the viewership numbers match that of men's sports, and, until they do, I'm not going to my bosses and say, 'we really need to get this or that in the paper.'"

Community differences lead newspapers to cover sports in different ways. Rebecca said that the sports landscape for her paper in the Southwest was different than the sports landscapes for papers in the Midwest or East Coast, where some of her

colleagues work. Holly said that people on the West Coast tend to have active lifestyles, and that that trend was reflected in her paper's sports coverage. At her paper, covering health and fitness stories created led to more coverage of female athletes. Lana said that context plays a role in regional coverage as well:

> I've got to tell you that to me, it's all about context. I will argue that the Connecticut women's basketball team probably gets twice the amount of coverage as the Connecticut men's football team. So does that mean they're more enlightened about women's sports? Or is it because that a team that's been very good, so they've built up a culture of expectation that the women get covered that way? I don't know. I don't think there's a universal to say the way things are. I think it depends on where you are in the country.

One point Lana made is that the Connecticut women's basketball team has a history of winning. Five of the other women I interviewed also said that winning leads to more coverage, especially for teams that already receive occasional newspaper coverage. "For us, success in an indicator of coverage," Ally said. At the same time, losing can cause teams to be covered less — especially for women's teams. "A good program is going to be covered by men and women," Sara said. "And a bad program? You know, you could have a whole female [sports department] staff and you can't sell a [women's] basketball team that is 0 and 25 or something." Teams that receive occasional coverage have more to lose by losing than they have to gain by winning. "I think any time a team

gets good, that's their best way to get more coverage," Kelli said. "But even that has a ceiling to it. It can only get so good."

Lana went one step further, adding that sports that were financially stable received good coverage:

> I will argue this: If a women's sport makes money – a la the [Ladies Professional Golf Association], tennis, Danica Patrick in car racing – they get the coverage. So look at the dollar signs for the amount of [coverage]. I mean, they go from there, too. Do you see horse racing very much? Do you see even to some degree hockey? Look at the money. The more money there is in a sport, the more it gets covered.

For sports teams and leagues, financial success often is related to attendance or interest. In that respect, attendance might be seen as a way to estimate success. Success, then, measured either on the field or off, appears to be one way to gain more coverage.

To attract fans and to stay afloat, teams or leagues need to provide an entertaining product. Holly said that since the introduction of Title IX, women's athletics have been constantly improving. "It's really impressive to see over, since the birth of Title IX, the progress of women's athletics, and it's amazing the jumps it has been making within the last 10 years," she said. "The athleticism and the capability and the way that women push themselves , they really are playing in a way that has no limits." Sharon agreed that Title IX had let to improvements in women's athletics, but also said that changes in how women's sports were viewed would take time to achieve. "Title IX is a slow effect," she said. "It certainly isn't something you're going to see immediately,

obviously, because it's been around now for 35 years, but over it has had an effect. It will have an effect."

In the next section, I plan to look at the factors the women discussed during the interviews, paying particular attention to the external forces that affect how they feel about covering women's sports.

Research Question One

One way to determine how much value women sportswriters put on devoting time and other resources to covering women's athletics is to find out if they want to cover women's sports. If sportswriters find value in covering women's sports, then they will be more likely to want to allocate resources to cover them. Therefore the first research questions was: *RQ1. Do women sportswriters see covering women's sports as desirable?*

None of the sportswriters said that women's athletics was unimportant. For most of the women, however, participation was more important than coverage. As I listened to them talk about covering women's sports, I noticed that only a few of the sportswriters seemed particularly interested in women's sports. Most of them described covering women's sports as a steppingstone. Sportswriters are often assigned beats that determine what they will cover. While beats many times cover a particular team or sport, such as the San Antonio Spurs or professional football, some reporters are given the catchall beat of general assignments, and sports or teams they write about vary on any given day based on what the sports editor wants covered. Gretchen said that she started as a general assignments sports reporter, then worked her way up to more defined beats. "I started

out covering everything," she said. As she progressed, she moved to covering primarily women's sports. Gretchen said her work covering women's sports was noticed, and she was moved to covering higher-profile beats, such as professional football and basketball. Other sportswriters also talked about covering women's sports as something they did early in their careers before moving up to cover primarily men's sports. Kelli talked about this hierarchy when she said, "Unfortunately the glamour beats are all men's professional sports. It's what pays better. It's kind of higher on the pecking order. That sort of thing. It's kind of the way of the world."

Covering men's sports also is the key to becoming a columnist or assistant sports editor. Sharon said:

> Well, part of it is [because] that men's sports hold the place they do in society and in the business, that's where the real pressure-cooker is. That's where reporters get made, really. A lot of young reporters come to me and say, 'Oh, I would just love to be a features writer.' But I always tell them, 'You're going to have to deal with a pro beat at some point if you want to get there for a major publication.' Because you have to earn their respect … the only way to do it is to be on a tough beat. And the tough beats are the men's sports beats, because [in] the women's sports beats you're not expected to break news everyday.

Advancing to a better beat is the way to be promoted to columnist or to a management position. For a sports reporter, that means covering the top men's sports. When a reporter moves to covering men's professional sports or college football, the

organization positions the change as a promotion, even though the basic duties of the job — gathering information and writing it for publication — remain the same.

Overall, I felt that most of the women I interviewed did not feel that covering women's sports was desirable. That does not mean that most women dislike covering women's sports. A few of the women said they preferred to cover women's sports, but most said that covering women's sports was just part of the job. Most of them said that covering the top men's sports led to increased status and rewards. Some said they were concerned that covering primarily women's sports as a career could limit their access to promotions, better pay, and more respect inside and outside the sports department.

Research Question Two

With the second research question I planned to explore whether newspapers or other sport entities followed practices that led women sportswriters to not want to cover women's sports: *RQ.2 Do the sports or sport media industries discourage the coverage of women's sports? If so, in what ways?*

The women I interviewed did not seem to express any explicit discouragement of covering women's sports, but certain practices in the sports department made covering women's sports less desirable. Again, the hierarchy of the beat system, with its rewards for covering the top men's sports, was one of the most evident ways that the sports department makes covering women's sports less desirable. Other factors also seem to play a role in encouraging sportswriters to cover men's sports.

Sportswriters prefer that their work be presented in the best possible way. They prefer to write good stories, then see them treated with prominence in the sports section,

preferably on the cover. Sports reporters often try to influence editors to give their stories more prominence. For those who cover the top three men's sports or college football, it is a much easier to pitch stories. "Everyone — every reporter — is always in there fighting for their beat, unless you have one of the premiere beats in your paper," Ally said. "The guy who writes about the [local National Football League team] never has to worry about getting his stuff in the paper or getting good play. He's going to. That's the money beat." Sportswriters who cover less dominant sports, including women's sports, often see the opposite happen. Gretchen described covering women's sports like this:

> When I cover a women's basketball game, you know, I can show up 10 minutes before a game – there's nobody there. There's no traffic hassle. The people bend over backwards to help you. You can write whatever you want. And you're going to be put on Page 8, 9, 10 maybe. You're probably going to get cut. You going to write a 15-inch story that's going to get knocked back to 10-and-a-half.

The sportswriters I talked to said that the people involved with women's sports were very easy to work with and were very accommodating. Yet for Gretchen, even though she knows that a women's sporting event will be easier to get to, that the staff at the event is more likely to be accommodating, and that she could avoid what Sharon described as the "pressure-cooker" of covering the top men's sports, she would still rather cover men's sports because it gives her an edge in how her story is played.

Previous research suggested that conditions in press boxes and locker rooms at men's sporting events might be hostile environments for female sportswriters. Ashley,

who has been covering men's sports for years, including the NBA and the NFL, said that there was still subtle discrimination, that players and coached sometimes treated her as if she did not know what she was doing, but that conditions had improved. "It used to be just guys saying disgusting things to you, brushing up against you naked in the locker room, being very lewd and disgusting — coaches making passes at you, players making passes at you," she said. "Now I think [having women' in the locker room is] a little more accepted."

Research Question Three

In the third research question, I wanted to find out more about how women make decisions on whether they prefer to cover men's or women's sports. The research question was: *RQ.3 What factors play a role in determining the sports that female sportswriters want to cover?*

I asked eight of the sportswriters what beats were desirable to women in the profession. Five of them said that the reasons for covering certain beats were individual. For example, women with families many times avoided the baseball beat because of the number of games and the time spent on the road. Others might be limited by the sports that their newspapers cover. Despite personal differences, the sportswriters said that most women want to cover the top beats at their papers.

As with the previous research questions, I feel the system of rewards plays a role in determining whether women want to cover men's or women's sports. Most of the women I talked to said the top men's sports offer the highest rewards in terms of pay and respect. Gretchen said that the top beats usually pay the best, offer the best chances for

marketing your name, and that industry writing awards most often go to reporters who cover the top beats. As writers, they are looking for the best stories to tell, whether they were about men or women. Stories about the top men's sports often get more space in the newspaper, and are presented more prominently.

Most of the women I interviewed said that this is because readers are more interested in men's sports. They suggested that readers drive newspaper sports coverage, whether it's measured through surveys, counting hits on stories posted online, by watching attendance figures, or even by counting the numbers of phone calls. Some of the sportswriters seemed to think that determining reader interest was as much guesswork as science, but all of them said that trying to reach readers was very important.

Chapter Summary

Covering women's sports does not seem to be particularly attractive for most women's sportswriters. The beat system seems to offer more incentives to cover men's sports, and only the coaches of female athletes are likely to push sportswriters to provide more coverage for women's sports. Most of the sportswriters were comfortable with the amount of coverage that their newspapers gave women's sports, and said that attendance or community interest justified their decisions. They said that their focus was on finding good stories, not the gender of the athletes they cover.

The sportswriters I interviewed offered examples of the ways that newspapers and the profession put an emphasis on men's sports. The beat system used by most newspapers organizes and structures sports departments. At the same time it creates a

hierarchy of importance that helps to reinforce the emphasis on men's sports. The amount of space dedicated to men's sports stories in the sports section also reflects the importance newspapers place on those stories relative to stories on women's sports. These practices seem to make covering men's sports more desirable for sportswriters.

In Chapter V, I will look at some organizational theories that might help to explain why most of the sportswriters I talked to felt comfortable with the status quo. I also look at limitations of this study and some areas for future research.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Some sport researchers have written that sports were created by men, and can be used as a way to keep men dominant in society (Salter, 1996). Some researchers also have said that this can be one way that a male-dominated society attempts to perpetuate male hegemony (Hardin, Dodd, & Lauffer, 2006; Schell & Rodriguez, 2000). The women I interviewed said their male bosses and coworkers were more enlightened about women's sports, yet systems already in place reward coverage of the top men's sports. To suggest male hegemony for perpetuating this situation, however, might be problematic. Pringle (2005) wrote, "I am concerned, for example, that the concept of hegemonic masculinity is linked to a clear division between ruling groups and the dominated, a binary conceptualization of the workings of power, and notions associated with intentional rule." Mumby (1997) wrote that using the construct of hegemony implies the need for a societal transformation consistent with the socialist ideals of its originator, Gramsci.

Before I started to conduct my interviews, I had certain expectations about what might affect women's decisions about what sports to cover. I expected most of the women I would interview would describe their conflicts with their bosses about covering more women's sports, or I expected to hear them talk wanting a career and wanting to cover men's sports. During the interviews, I heard a little bit of both. Yet I also heard the sportswriters say that influences outside of their newspapers played a role in what they wanted to cover. To explain how these influences inside and outside the newsroom play

roles in the decisions that women sportswriters make, I turned to research on organizational culture as well as Bourdieu's field theory and new institutionalism.

Organizational Culture

Organizational culture is system of beliefs and values that are shared among members of an organization and that guide what actions, thoughts, and feels are considered appropriate at that organization (Popper & Lipshitz, 2000; Shein, 1990). Organization culture works to integrate members of the organization and normalize behavior (Quick, 1992; Popper & Liptshitz, 2000) Organizational culture research took off during the 1980s, partly a result of the rise in influence of Japanese organizations and an interest in their ways of doing things (Schultz, 1994; Slack, 1997). Also, there was an interest in finding ways to increase productivity, quality, and efficiency (Schultz, 1994).

Research into organizational culture has led to the identification of some of the manifestations of culture, including stories and myths, symbols, language, and rites or ceremonies (Higgins & McAllaster, 2004; Slack, 1997; Trice & Beyer, 1984). Stories and myths are stories that are passed along and retold that help explain or reinforce organizational values or practices, and work to legitimatize them (Higgins & McAllaster, 2004; Slack, 1997). Symbols also help reinforce organizational values by helping provide meaning or context to the organization (Higgins & McAllaster, 2004; Slack, 1997). Language helps to create groups by using words or phrases that have certain meanings that only insiders would understand (Higgins & McAllaster, 2004; Slack, 1997). Rites and ceremonies show what the organization places value on by rewarding

or putting on display people or events (Higgins & McAllaster, 2004; Slack, 1997; Trice & Beyer, 1984).

Schein (1990) wrote about two ways to create organizational culture: reactions to critical events in the organization or identification with a leader. These elements have particular relevance to the current study. One particular critical event for female reporters is their access to locker rooms and press boxes, as male reporters, players, and leaders in sports organizations have been shown to take part in harassing women reporters (Creedon, 1994; Smith, 1999). However, Cramer (1994) interviewed 19 women working in sports media and reported that more than three-fourths of the women said that their supervisors were supportive when they ran into difficulties either in the locker room or gaining access. But, all of the women interviewed could recount problems related to working in locker rooms. This suggests that when, on one hand, women made gains in the field, they also faced new barriers to doing their jobs. Attempts were made to keep women from having access, and harassment took the forms of being thrown out of locker rooms, being taunted and ridiculed, and tarnishing of reputations. For many women in sports media, gaining access was a slow and uneven process.

The second way Schein (1990) suggested to create culture, identifying with leaders, also leaves out women. Research has shown that women are underrepresented in sports media, even as women have started to outnumber men in college journalism programs (Lavie & Lehman-Wilzig, 2003; MacNeill, 1994; Smucker et al., 2003). A woman in sports media looking for a leader in her department to emulate will probably

have only male supervisors at her office. This gives men the privilege of being able to choose organizational values and goals.

Schein (1990) wrote about five embedding mechanisms for culture: (a) what the leader pays attention to, (b) leader's reaction in critical events, (c) coaching and role modeling, (d) system for rewards and punishment, and (e) criteria for promotion, retirement, and excommunication. These five mechanisms are all ways in which patriarchy can be kept in place. In newspapers, leaders pay attention to space. It is many times in short supply, so leaders make particular judgments about what stories to cover, and where to put them on the page. Hardin (2005) wrote that senior editors function as gatekeepers, deciding what stories or pictures make it into the sports section, and how also deciding how much space to dedicate to them. Knoppers and Ellings (2004) found that experienced sports journalists in the Netherlands said they relied on objectivity, tradition, and reader interest to help determine what events should be covered and how much space to dedicate to them. Hardin (2005) found that sports editors in the Southeastern part of the United States mostly relied on their own judgment of reader interest rather than an independent method of determining reader interest. She also found that the editors' personals beliefs and hegemonic ideology play a role in determining what those editors considered reader interest. Journalists can see a representation of what leaders' value by looking at how space is allocated. Journalists can also get a sense of where they stand in the organization based on the beats they cover and where their stories are played.

A look at leaders' reactions to critical events can be seen by the relatively quiet response of leaders to harassment. In interviews conducted by Cramer (1994), some female sports journalists reported that their editors worked to help them with issues related to locker room access or harassment, but there is little in the literature to suggest that their male counterparts faced serious repercussions for their roles in harassment. And, all of the women interviewed could recount problems related to working in locker rooms. Some of this may reflect the nature of the sport industry. At the time, many in the sports industry, such as team owners and managers, were working to block women's access to the locker room (Creedon, 1994).

A third embedding mechanism is coaching and role modeling. Women in media have few women to emulate. In their offices, they might not have other women to follow. Also, Hardin and Shain (2005) found that some female sports journalists were more likely to attribute other women's success to their sexuality or for being too masculine. This might suggest that women are more likely than are men to seek male role models, and have male values passed to them. For women having male mentors, there can be positive and negative effects. Some research has shown that women who have male mentors are more likely to have mentors in higher organizational positions than women with female mentors (Gaskill, 1991; Burke & McKeen, 1996). Research into social capital suggests that having higher-placed connections in a person's network, particularly if the ties are strong, such as in a mentoring relationship, can improve one's career (Seibert, Kraimer, & Liden, 2001). Women with female mentors gain more psychosocial support, but might be more likely to leave their organizations (Burke &

McKeen, 1996). In the sport domain, Cunningham and Sagas (2005) found that assistant coaches who worked for female head coaches were less likely to want to advance to head coach than those working for male head coaches. They also found that assistant coaches working for female head coaches had less job satisfaction.

The fourth mechanism for embedding culture outlined by Schein (1990) is allocating rewards and punishments. In newspapers, rewards can be reflected in not only rates of pay or bonuses, but also in awarding beats and assignments, by playing certain stories bigger than others, and by signaling out work for praise or criticism. The awarding of beats can be particularly rewarding. Beats not only determine the likelihood of having your stories played up in the paper, but other perks as well. Covering a high school basketball game might mean driving your car across town and maybe getting reimbursed for a meal. But covering college basketball or the NBA will probably mean the opportunity to travel, and probably a chance to fly out of state. It means covering games in nicer facilities, and perhaps a chance to tour new areas and to eat at nice restaurants at company expense. All of these factors work to reinforce the importance and desirability of some beats at the expense of others. For most newspapers, the best beats are related to men's sports.

Schein's fifth embedding mechanism is developing the criteria for promotion, retirement, and excommunication (1990). For female sports journalists, promotion might be most important. Research by Smucker et al. (2003) found that women working at newspaper sports departments scored high on five out of six factors relating to job

satisfaction. The only factor that women weren't satisfied with was opportunities for promotion.

According to organizational researchers, an organization's founder has the most influence in creating its culture (Slack, 1997). Most organizations existing today have been started by men, and the organizations reflect this in their adoption of masculine values, norms and definitions as the dominant culture (Meyerson & Kolb, 2000).

New Institutionalism and Field Theory

Studies of media support the suggestion that news outlets work in similar ways or under similar pressures, which pushes them toward producing similar news (Cook, 2006). New institutionalism and Bourdieu's field theory use the idea of groups or fields to explain why these organizations with similar missions do things in similar ways. New institutionalism researchers suggest that modern societies are made up of different semi-autonomous groups that are in competition (Benson, 2006). Organizations are built and maintained inside these social groups (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Kaplan, 2006). For example, Kaplan (2006) wrote that journalists who cover politics are parts of two different, and sometimes conflicting, social dimensions — the field of news producers and the field of politics. Successful organizations develop routines for doing their work that conform to social standards and reflect the pressures of the field (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Kaplan, 2006). Over time, these routines are seen as correct way of operating and become embedded in the organization. The routines that an organization follows do not necessarily represent the only or ideal ways for that organization to operate, nor do they reflect a conscious effort to find the best ways (DiMaggio & Powell,

1983; Kaplan, 2006). By having a standardized system of doing things, however, the field gains some autonomy from outside forces (Benson, 2006; Kaplan, 2006).

DiMaggio and Powell (1991) describe three mechanisms that lead organizations to be become more alike. The process, called institutional isomorphism, can occur through coercive isomorphism, mimetic isomorphism, and normative isomorphism. Coercive isomorphism occurs as a response to political influence or concerns about legitimacy. As organizations operate in society, pressures from society and from organizations with which they work can cause similar organizations to structure themselves in similar ways. Changes caused by government mandate are also examples of coercive isomorphism.

Mimetic isomorphism is a response to uncertainty (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991). Organizations that are new to an industry might choose to follow the practices of an organization that is already successful in that field. The researchers wrote that in some areas there might be few alternatives to choose from when organizing or restructuring. Also, some organizations might be unfamiliar with a change in the industry, such as one company's adoption of a more efficient computer program, and so they opt to follow that company as a way to reduce the uncertainty that comes with change.

DiMaggio and Powell (1991) wrote that normative isomorphism comes mostly from the professions rather than organizations. Professionals look to build autonomy for their occupation and have a collective say in how their work is accomplished. Professionalism is passed along through official instruction, such as at universities or trade schools, and through professional networks (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991).

Professional networks link individuals in different organizations and allow for quick transmission of ideas or information. The researchers also wrote that hiring practices can increase normative isomorphism. Organizations with similar missions might choose to hire individuals from other organizations in the same industry. Those individuals bring with them the ways of doing business from their previous organizations, and might try to implement those organizational practices at their new organizations.

Benson (2004, 2006) wrote about the similarities between the new institutional research and Bourdieu's field theory, particularly in journalism research. Bourdieu views increasing specialization and differentiation as a part of modern life (Benson, 2004, 2006; Bourdieu, 1985a). Like new institutionalism, Bourdieu suggests that each specialized group develops its own ways of functioning that become ingrained and that partially shield it from outside influences. Each group has its own capital, which primarily comes in the forms of economic capital, cultural capital, social capital, and symbolic capital, which comes in the form of prestige or reputation (Benson 2004; Bourdieu, 1985b). The place of agents, such as individuals or organizations, in these groups can be determined by the amount of capital each possesses and the makeup of that capital (Bourdieu, 1985b). While each field has its own systems of doing things and its own hierarchy of what it values or considers important, the field is not independent. The hierarchy of dominant groups tends to influence other groups, particularly when groups in different fields interact (Benson, 2004; Bourdieu, 1985b). Benson (2004) wrote that Bourdieu focuses the oppositional forces of economic power and cultural power, with economic power holding the position of dominance. Cultural power can be

used to help legitimize or help hide economic power (Benson, 2004). Washington and Karen (2001) wrote that Bourdieu looked mainly at social classes, but that in the United States, it was appropriate to broaden that scope to consider race or ethnicity or gender.

Benson, Kaplan, and others have used this sociological approach to study politics and journalism. Sparrow (2006) wrote that news organizations that cover politics operate in an interorganizational field that covers all political communication and all media. News organizations exist in an unstable economic and political environment (Sparrow, 2006), and so they look for ways to stabilize their positions in this environment and to dominate their competition, both other news sources and other media (Benson 2006, Sparrow, 2006). Sparrow wrote that this environment has three basic uncertainties: economic, professional, and informational. Economically, news organizations compete for attention for an audience. The more desirable the audience is to advertisers, the easier it is to secure revenue from advertisers (Benson, 2004; Sparrow, 2006). Professionally, news organizations need to remain a credible source of news while still developing relationships with sources who often have their own agendas (Benson, 2004; Kaplan, 2006; Sparrow, 2006). Third, Sparrow says news organizations need fresh and accurate information, often on sensitive issues. In politics, Sparrow says news organizations cultivate sources that are part of the news they cover, such as from congressmen or top bureaucrats. In response to these uncertainties, news organizations have developed similar ways to operate that help to shield the organizations from outside uncertainties, such as using press releases or news conferences to reduce informational uncertainty or

conducting market research to tailor their products to consumers' needs (Kaplan, 2006; Sparrow, 2006).

Accepting the Status Quo

Previous research into women's sports coverage suggests that women's sports receive less coverage than men's sports. Based on that, I expected that most of the women I interviewed to say that their papers need to improve their coverage of women's sports. I did not expect to find unanimous agreement on whether women's sports receive enough coverage. I did expect that a majority of women would find fault with the coverage that their newspapers provided women's sports or more discussion about industry trends. The women I interviewed were, at the time, all members of the Association of Women in Sports Media, an organization that aims to help and support women in sports journalism careers. I thought that they might feel a need to support women in sport as well by working in their field to promote them. Most of the women, however, said that their papers were doing at least a passable job covering women's sports.

However, five of the 10 women said that their papers do a good job of covering women's sports. Only two of the women I talked to said that they thought their newspapers did not do a good job. The sportswriters' view of how well their newspapers cover women's sports seems to conflict with research that suggests women's sports receives significantly less coverage than men's sports (Billings & Eastman, 2002; Eastman & Billings, 2000; Higgs, Weiller & Martin, 2003; Lumpkin & Williams, 1991; Pedersen & Whisenant, 2002). They both agree that female athletes receive less

coverage than male athletes, yet most of the women sportswriters said they were satisfied with their newspapers' coverage of women's sports. Hardin and Shain (2006) reported a similar founding during focus group research. They wrote that some groups of women, particularly younger women, said that they felt women's sports received a fair amount of coverage. The difference between the sportswriters' opinions that their newspapers covered women's sports enough and the researcher's suggestions that women do not receive enough coverage is based on determining how much coverage female athletes deserve.

Bourdieu's field theory and new institutionalism offers a different approach to studying male dominance in sport and sport media. Men have created sports, and in the United States, had it mostly to themselves until Title IX, which was enacted in 1972, led to widespread participation in sports by girls and women (Salter, 1996; Theberge, 1985). Similarly, men have had a hold on journalism. It was not until the 1960s and '70s that women were regularly admitted into journalism schools (Lavie & Lehman-Wilzig, 2003). Women still are not regulars in sports media, where they make up as little 13% of workers (Hardin, 2005). Sport and sports media have built routines over time that have become the accepted way of doing business, creating the workings of the field. The organization's culture, which is also built over time through the use of common practices, helps individuals adopt these practices (Schein, 1990). The organization builds the routines; the embedding mechanisms of organizational culture pass them along.

Most of the women I interviewed seemed to accept that men's sports were dominant in their newspapers, and said that conformed to the larger role of men's sports

in society. This echoes focus group research by Hardin and Shain (2006). The researchers wrote that some of the women sportswriters they talked to in focus groups said that they were concerned that covering women's sports might harm their careers. Hardin and Shain also wrote that most of the women in the focus groups were satisfied with their papers' cover of women's sports, and used attendance figures or the lack of success of women's professional sports leagues as justification. Eight of the women I interviewed talked about attendance or community interest, but only four suggested that those were reasons not to cover women's sports. Five of the sportswriters talked about team success rather than league success, saying that winning games will help women's teams, at least in better-known or accepted sports, receive more coverage. Hardin and Shain found that the sportswriters in their focus groups were divided on whether they had a responsibility to provide more coverage for women's sports. Five of the women I interviewed talked about this, and three of them said that they did not feel they had to be advocates for women's sports. Another, Holly, said she had conversations with other female sportswriters, who said they worried about finding a balance between covering women's sports while not limiting their careers. Ally echoed that sentiment.

Newspaper culture also appears to play a role in why the sportswriters I interviewed seemed to support the status quo. Of the five embedding mechanisms outlined by Schein (1990), three seemed to be particularly influential: (a) what leaders pay attention to, (b) the system for rewards and punishment, and (c) criteria for promotion, retirement, and excommunication. The embedding mechanisms are primarily influential through the beat system and the treatment of stories. The beat system

separates reporters into different areas of coverage. Different beats have different status, which is reflected by the pay, the experience level of reporters selected for that beat, and the prominence and space dedicated to stories from that beat. Many of the women said that men's pro sports and college football are the beats that garner the most attention and that carry the most status.

Covering women's sports is not necessarily a dead end for sportswriters. Sports editors do pay enough attention to stories on women's sports to promote the sportswriters who write them to bigger beats as they improve. Moving from covering women's sports to covering men's sports, particularly professional sports or college football, could be considered a reward for improvement or mastery of journalism skills, such as writing and developing sources, or for tenure at the newspaper. The message this sends is that covering women's sports is not a desirable beat, and that writers should strive to do better than cover women's sports.

Bourdieu (1985b) suggests that because a promotion would be a change in the capital that an agent possesses, there would be changes not only in how that agent is perceived in the field, but also in how that agent is perceived in other social spheres. Some of the sportswriters I talked to alluded to how covering men's sports improved their status outside of the newsroom. Gretchen, when asked if covering women's sports would limit her career, said, "Heck, yes! Are you kidding me? Oh my God, it would be a demotion," Instead of talking about getting a pay cut or about losing standing among her peers, she explained that in addition to having to write shorter stories, there would be fewer readers interested in what she wrote. Sara, who regularly covers the NBA, said

that when she goes to cover other sports, her status as an NBA writer garners her more attention. “I’ve covered the NBA a lot,” she said, “so sometimes if I go, let’s say, to a girl’s high school basketball game or call a high school girls coach, they’re sort of impressed that I’m calling. But I think that’s just because they know what I usually cover.” I saw firsthand the affect that covering different beats has on status when I worked as an assistant sports editor. Our high school beat writers regularly covered local university sporting events, yet their standing was lower than that of the university beat writers at our paper. The university beat writers were regularly called by media from out of town to discuss the local university team, giving those beat writers greater exposure in other markets. The university beat writers also were better known among other sportswriters from bigger media organizations. They also seemed to have higher status among fans of the local university because of their access to facilities, coaches, and players.

I expected the sportswriters to report that their bosses resisted covering women’s sports or perhaps that their sports editors or male colleagues would expect them to cover women’s sports because of their gender. Instead, most of the women talked about changing attitudes and a more open attitude to covering women’s sports. Lana said the “Neanderthals” — the older male sportswriters and editors who were against covering women’s sports — were leaving the business. The men who are replacing them have grown up with Title IX and are accustomed to women and girls playing sports, some of whom are their daughters, sisters, or wives. The personal connections that some male sportswriters have with women’s sports, combined with an improved level of play by

female athletes, might be winning some male sportswriters and editors over. Kelli said, "The nicest thing is that when women's sports do get covered, they're covered much less condescendingly. When I started, it was a lot of men looking down their noses at athletes and how inferior they were to male athletes." Many of the sportswriters I interviewed seemed to think that their male editors and fellow sports reporters were more accepting of covering women's sports.

Myth of Professionalism

Of particular interest to me was that the women I talked to attribute a rather large role to factors outside the newsroom in determining what went into the newspapers' sports section. The suggestion that outside forces influence what newspapers cover runs counter to the ideals of contemporary journalism (Kaplan, 2006). American journalists see themselves in a profession that values objectivity and view the news as something that is self-evident once one has received the proper training (Kaplan, 2006). Kaplan and others (Cook, 2006; Benson, 2006; Sparrow, 2006) have started to explore the myth of the professional, objective newsroom. They wrote that much of the previous research into media has focused on two areas: (a) the influence media has on society, and (b) how media organizations have institutionalized, creating standardized practices that govern newsgathering and presentation. One missing piece of research, they suggest, is that of society on the media. To study this area, they have turned to sociology, in particular new institutionalism in organizational theory (NI) (Kaplan, 2006; Cook, 2006; Benson, 2006) and Bourdieu's field theory (Bourdieu, 1985; Bourdieu, Wacquant, & Farage, 1994; Benson, 2004).

Bourdieu wrote that sports are a field, and that they have the same type partial autonomy from society as other fields (Washington & Karen, 2001). Sports journalism, then, is another interorganizational field, one that joins sport and media. In many respects, it mirrors political journalism. In the professional realm, sports journalism has been slow to reach equal status with news reporters. Until the 1960s and '70s, sports journalism was still considered "toy land" and outside the realm of serious journalism (Creedon, 1994). Sports journalism increased its professional reputation by stepping away from the role as team supporter and providing more objective coverage; reducing its acceptance of favors from teams, such as rides to sporting events on team buses or planes; and by covering more serious issues in sports, such as current reports on gambling and steroids use. Sports journalists, however, still face many of the same professional concerns that political journalists face. Sports journalists are many times dependent on teams to provide them access to games or to players. Sports journalists also need to develop sources in sports organizations that will give them information to print or broadcast. Managers of sports organizations are aware of the benefits that publicity, especially positive news, can provide their organizations, so they attempt to influence sportswriters to gain an edge in coverage. Sports journalists must balance professional ethics with keeping sources willing to provide them with access or information.

Sports journalists also need timely information to give to the public. While most of sporting events happen in public places, many of the stories that lead up to them or that analyze the game or its effects delve into what goes on behind the scenes. Injury

reports, trade deals or contract negotiations, and facilities planning are just a few of the areas in which journalists need timely information to give to the public. To get that information, sports journalists, like political journalists, work to develop sources that have access to valuable information.

Kaplan (2006) described the emergence of journalism's independence from party politics and partisanship into a field that values objectivity and independence. Kaplan wrote that the 1896 presidential campaign of populist William Jennings Bryan led newspapers to disassociate from the Democratic Party. The election and the political and social changes that followed caused newspapers move away from party affiliations and to embrace the ideals of public service and objectivity as a way to claim legitimacy (Kaplan, 2006). This movement coincided with and reflected progressive reformers' beliefs in having experts or authorities find scientific or informed solutions to social problems in society (Kaplan, 2006). In addition to showing the rise of objectivity in the news profession, Kaplan uses this example to show how the field of journalism can be influenced by other fields, in this case politics and social changes. As field theory and new institutionalism suggest, these changes led to new routines that news organizations have embraced and that have become the standard way of covering news.

Modern sports departments were slower to adopt these changes, but now accept the same ideals of objectivity and independence that news reporters and editors accept. At the same time, sports departments have been felt the affects of sport and sport organizations, which have traditionally been mostly male domains. Sports department employees are mostly male, and the routines that have developed over time and that are

firmly in place were set in motion to cover men's sports. Sports journalism now is starting to react to social changes enacted first by government with the passage of Title IX. More women and girls are playing sports than ever before. At the same time, the sportswriters I talked to said they've seen reductions in staffing and space. Newspapers' reactions to social and economic pressures and changes will likely affect coverage and the roles of sportswriters and editors.

Hierarchy of Men's Sports

I also started to notice that the women I was interviewing did not necessarily view differences in men's and women's sports the way I did. There seemed to be more of a focus between big sports and small sports. The four major men's professional sports and college football appear to be in a class all their own. The Olympic beat might also be considered a major beat — the only big beat that included coverage of women — but it didn't seem to have quite the exclusiveness of the top men's sports. The Olympic beat is also the only beat in which male and female athletes receive close to equal coverage. Ashley and Sharon both said that in their papers the Olympic coverage for men and women was approximately equal. But the Olympics are rarely front-page sports news except when they are in progress. Women's professional golf and tennis were also mentioned as sports receiving more attention, but they don't rival the top men's professional sports, and many times receive less coverage than men's golf or tennis.

That women across newspapers would pick the same sports as the main ones to cover reflects the effects of isomorphism, particularly from mimetic or normative pressures (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991). Newspapers have accepted the beat system as the

standard way to cover news or sports in the community. Mimetic pressures might play a role in why this system was adopted and why the hierarchy of importance exists (such as through rewarding the covering of certain beats). The women I interviewed said that the overall hierarchy of beats transcends newspapers. For example, women who worked at newspapers that did not cover a local NBA team still considered the NBA one of the top beats instead of another beat at their local paper. This reflects the impact of the profession on deciding what beats are considered the best. Moving from newspaper to newspaper is not uncommon, and there are many different professional organizations that journalists can join. These processes can spread ideas in the profession that help sportswriters decide what beats are the best to cover.

Because sports are so prevalent in our society, and because men participate in so many sports, many men's sports also receive very little coverage. Rebecca said, "We cover [state university] football with the full force of our staff. We cover [another state university] football and basketball with the full force of our staff because those are the things people are filling up stadiums for. You can look at men's golf or wrestling. Do we cover these as much as we cover football? Well, no. They're men's sports, just not as highly covered." There's little doubt that covering the top men's pro teams or college football is considered by most to be the top beats, followed by the Olympics, but after that, it's difficult to say what is better to cover. Men's college basketball was mentioned by a couple of sportswriters as a sport that garners quite a bit of attention, but there was little talk of other sports as being ones that sportswriters aspire to cover.

A few of the sportswriters said that context or geography can play a role in determining local high-profile beats. “I will argue that the Connecticut women’s basketball team probably gets twice the amount of coverage as the Connecticut men’s football team,” Lana said. “So does that mean they’re more enlightened about women’s sports? Or is it because that a team that’s been very good, so they’ve built up a culture of expectation that the women get covered that way? I don’t know. I don’t think there’s a universal to say the way things are.” Ashley lamented the lack of soccer coverage at her paper, despite the fact that soccer was important in some of the communities her paper covered. Holly said her paper on the West Coast did a good job of covering a community that was outdoors and sports oriented, including coverage of women who were involved in sports or health and fitness.

This also made me think of new institutionalism as described by Kaplan (2006) or Bourdieu’s field theory (Benson 2004; Bourdieu, 1985b), where outside factors influence the field. Part of the draw of professional sports, college football, and the Olympics beat is that these sports or teams have national or international recognition. These sports could be seen as part of a national sports sphere that influences newspapers’ sports coverage. Those who are familiar with sports are already aware of the status that those sports receive. Women in sports journalism accept this hierarchy because it seems natural. Most of the women I interviewed seemed to understand and accept this order. Six of the women I interviewed said that their newspapers did a good job of covering women’s sports overall. Lana said her newspaper did a good job covering girls high school sports and individual sports, such as golf and tennis. “But in

terms of did the [local WNBA team] get the same as the [local NBA team]? No," she said. "But our view is that is there the same interest level in the [local WNBA team] as there is in the [local NBA team]? No. So I don't have any problems with that."

Other sports fall into regional or local interest, and the pull that exert different amounts of influence based on prominence, proximity, and culture. They exert the same type of pulls on the individual sportswriter, who must then decide what career options are open to her and are achievable to her based on her own capital. The top men's sports, with their large followings and national stature, have the most pull for those who feel they have the ability to get there. After that, local considerations determine the best beats to take.

If beats below the big four, the Olympics, and college football are difficult to consider better or worse, perhaps this plays a role in the emphasis sportswriters placed on finding good stories. Finding and writing good stories shows the ability to work well in the craft. At the same time, writing good stories can help transcend lesser beats and help secure one's hold on a better one. It also confers higher status to the reporter, no matter what the writer is on. As Gretchen said, "A good story is a good story, regardless."

Another factor to consider is that to cover a professional team or college football team, or to be able to cover the Olympics requires, that a newspaper have large enough financial resources to pay for reporters to travel to cover events. Professional teams require large numbers of fans to attend games, so most pro teams are based in large metropolitan areas. Larger metropolitan areas are also where the largest newspapers are

located, so if a sportswriter covers a hometown professional team, more than likely that reporter works for a major metro daily with enough resources to cover the expenses of traveling with the team and the ability to pay top salaries. Aiming to cover a professional team means that you are aiming to work at one of the larger newspapers.

Specialty Coverage

Even if women sportswriters feel compelled to be advocates for women's sports, they still have an effect on how women's sports are covered. During my interviews, I caught bits that explained an important role women sportswriters play in the coverage of women's sports. The first is an awareness of what is happening in women's sports. Some of the sportswriters said that they did not regularly follow women's sports, but that they still had an awareness of what was happening in that community. Ashley said, "I think, as a female writer, that women's sports may be a little more on my radar." Rebecca echoed that sentiment. Others said that sometimes information about women's sports or sports in general finds its way to them. Ally said that she feels people with all sorts questions, complaints, or story ideas come to her because she's a woman and perhaps more approachable. Whether through their own awareness or through help from others, women sportswriters are more in tune with stories in women's sports and can help them make their way to print. Sometimes female sportswriters write those stories; other times they pass them along. Sharon said some stories, particularly if they are outside of her beat, she will pass along to male sportswriters for them to investigate or write.

Another way women in sports media improve the coverage of women's sports is by writing stories that particularly relate to a female perspective. Women's health issues,

pregnancy, and body image are just some of the areas in which women sportswriters might be able to write with more understanding or authority than male sportswriters. Rebecca talked about writing a story about two women's basketball players who, despite their size and stature, were at ease with their physiques. Ally said that coaches and female players seemed to have a comfort level with her because she is female. Writing stories about women's issues from their perspectives can provide a more accurate picture of female athletes. This could counter some of the stereotypes of women's athletes put more focus on women as athletes move away from the sexual depictions or talk about dating and families found by previous sport media researchers (Eastman and Billings, 2000; Messner et al., 2003).

Limitations

When I started to conduct this study, I contacted the president of the Association for Women in Sport Media, Vicki Michaelis, for help in finding women sportswriters. The membership of the group ranges from college students to sports media professionals at the largest media organizations, both male and female. However, by interviewing members of this organization, I might have missed other women in the field who might not be aware of the organization or who just are not members. Those that join this group might have particular views of sport and sport media that those outside the group do not share.

The women I interviewed also were at the 50 largest newspapers in the United States. Most women work their way up to newspapers of this size, and so have been influenced over time by the organizations they work for and the professions they have

chosen. For this study, I feel that this is a strength, because I wanted to get the perspective of women who understand the business and who are far enough into their careers to understand its workings. At the same time, those women might not be as critical of the routines of newspapers as women who are just starting out in the business.

I also believe that women at smaller newspapers might have different experiences in the business. For example, a couple of the sportswriters said that they had experienced bosses in the past who had been less willing to cover women's sports. The sportswriters said their current bosses were more in tune with women's sports and indicated that the improvement was a sign of changing times. If the newspapers that these women came from were smaller than their current papers, it might reflect that sports editors at smaller newspapers are less likely to appreciate women's sports.

Areas for Future Research

Field theory and new institutionalism appear to hold promise in research in sport and in political journalism (Benson, 2006; Kaplan, 2006; Washington & Karen, 2001). These also hold promise in the field of sports journalism. Sports journalism, like political journalism, is a field with its own set routines. Some of those routines mirror political journalism, such as a reliance on official sources for information and concerns about keeping the appearance of objectivity while working with sources that have their own agendas (Benson, 2006; Kaplan, 2006). Sport also has its own hierarchy of beats, which have been set over time and are part of the routine of sports journalism. Research is needed to study how different beats have developed and how regional differences have had an effect on how newspapers structure sports beats.

The women I interviewed suggested that lifestyle decisions, such as whether to have children, does play a role in what beats women want to cover. Research could help explain what lifestyle factors play a role in decisions on what to cover, and how much weight women sportswriters give to these factors.

Women do not enter sports journalism from a vacuum. Finding out how much women are socialized to see men's sports as being dominant before they enter the profession can help determine how much of a factor organizational culture is on how women determine how much coverage women's sports deserves. Not all of the women I interviewed expected to cover sports. Women might have different expectations on how much coverage women's sports deserves based on their prior experience to sports and sports journalism.

Conclusion

The women I interviewed described some of the forces inside and outside the newsroom that affected their decisions on what sports they want to cover. They particularly pointed to reader interest and finding good stories as driving forces behind what they cover. Most of the women in this study said that their bosses were supportive of covering women's sports, and that their sports departments did at least an adequate job of covering women's sports. They said that their male colleagues' attitudes towards women's sports was improving, or as Lana said, "I think the old Neanderthal philosophy has gone out the window, because, frankly, the Neanderthals are retiring and getting out of the business."

Sportswriters and editors might be more accommodating to covering women's sports, but the beat system still reflects a view that male sports dominate. With few exceptions, sportswriters who cover the top four sports receive the best pay, the most prestige, and the best display for their stories. The sportswriters said that was the result of reader interest. Men's sports had the highest attendance figures and the most interest from readers. This means that stories about men's sports are more desired by readers, thus making them higher profile. Editors assigned their best writers to cover these sports in response to their high-profile nature.

The sportswriters said they rarely felt any overt pressure to cover women's sports. Some of the women who cover primarily women's sports said sometimes coaches would apply subtle pressure. Others said they felt that players hoped that women sportswriters might give them better coverage. Overall, though, the women said that there was very little pressure put on them to cover women's sports.

Women sportswriters are part of society and a part of journalism. Those, combined with the culture of the sports department, have left their marks on how sportswriters view what is appropriate for their newspapers to cover. While individuals have their ideas of what they want to cover, the hierarchy of beats and the focus of sports fans on men's sports can influence sportswriters. New institutionalism and Bourdieu's field theory offer one way to explain the influence of society and the influence of sports journalism on women sportswriters. New institutionalism and field theory offer hope for increased coverage of women's sports as society becomes more comfortable with and accepting of women's athletics through the enforcement of Title IX and a new

generation of sports fans come of age who are used to seeing women compete in athletics.

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APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

How do you feel about covering women's sports?

Do you feel any expectations to cover women's sports?

Did you play sports in high school or college?

How long have you been in the business?

Do you feel that reader interest plays a role in what sports your newspaper covers?

What would you ask if you were me trying to find out more about what sports women want to cover?

APPENDIX B

FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS

What sports or teams do women want to cover? Why?

Do men's sports do anything to encourage or discourage women sportswriters from covering them?

Do women's sports do anything to encourage or discourage sportswriters from covering them?

VITA

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