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**The Credibility of Female Sports Broadcasters:  
The Perception of Gender in a Male-Dominated Profession**

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### **Abstract**

Research suggests that there is a gender bias towards female sports broadcasters, with females being seen as less credible than males. In this study, both quantitative and qualitative methods were used to gather data. A focus group and focused interviews were conducted that determined there is in fact a bias towards women in the sports broadcasting business. The results from a structured survey produced opposite results. An independent t-test was run to determine whether or not the survey respondents found male and female sports broadcasters equally credible, and the results concluded the majority found them to be equally knowledgeable.

Keywords: gender, credibility, authoritativeness, gender bias, sports broadcasting

The landscape of American sports has traditionally honored the male figure, to the clear and inherent disadvantage of females. Indeed, the passing of legislation such as Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, which attempted to decrease levels of sexual discrimination in sports and academics around the nation's high schools and colleges, is proof enough of the divide between the sexes. Scholarly research has been conducted for years on the inequalities facing men and women when concerning news reporting, covering various topics ranging from inherent societal sexism to hiring practices and media portrayal. Fewer studies have been conducted on women who seek careers by men, for men, such as in the realm of sports (Toro, 2005). It is essential to examine this area of study to determine if there is a bias against female reporters because of their gender in this male domain.

### **Literature Review**

Historically, men were more dominant in the realm of reporting, whether it was news reporting or sports related. While times have changed, allowing women to play more dominant roles in broadcasting, sports broadcasting has lagged behind when it comes to equal representation of both genders. Until recently, there was little opportunity for women to hold a role in sports broadcasting, especially beyond the range of serving as a sideline reporter. Pam Ward, noted ESPN sideline reporter since 2000 and a pioneer for women interested in sports broadcasting, stated in a 2008 *USA Today* article that "More than 90% of [women who ask me for career advice] want to do sidelines [sic][...] That's what they see as possible[...] They see it as a female role" (p. 8). When she was asked to gauge the potential for women to receive jobs calling men's collegiate basketball games for various media outlets, she responded "I don't think the opportunity is there. Maybe I shouldn't have said that" (Trumball, 2003).

### **History of Women in Sports Journalism**

Although it is not uncommon to be watching a sporting event on television and see a female on the sideline today, it was not always a common occurrence. There have been several females that have paved the way for other women in the sports broadcasting field. Mrs. Harry Johnson was a sports commentator during her husband's broadcasts for Central States Broadcasting in Omaha, Nebraska in the 1930s and 1940s. Johnson is considered to be one of the first female pioneers in the field (Grubb & Billiot, 2010). Jane Chastain is another notable female pioneer, beginning her career as a sports broadcaster in the mid 1960s as the first woman to conduct play-by-play coverage of a live sporting event (Schwartz, 1999). Shortly after came Lesley Visser, the first female to do sideline reporting for the 1974 Superbowl and provide NFL broadcast analysis (Sobel, 2001).

While Johnson, Chastain, and Visser paved the way for females to enter the sports broadcasting field, women were frequently hired to fill the part as a "hostess," many of whom were former beauty queens and cover girls (Creedon, 1994). Phyllis George was hired as a sportscaster in the mid 1970s. Even though George was a hard worker, most viewers only saw this former Miss America as a sex symbol, not a reporter (Schawrtz, 1999). According to Schwartz (1999) George was not hired for her knowledge at all; her job was to add femininity to the male-dominated broadcasts.

### **Discrimination and Obstacles**

Regardless of the position these women held as reporters, even the most talented continued to be challenged because of their gender. In the 1970s when Lesley Visser approached Terry Bradshaw of the Pittsburgh Steelers for an interview, Bradshaw took her notepad and signed his autograph, then walked away (Sobel, 2001). Women were almost always made to stand outside the locker room to wait to speak with the coaches and star players, while male

reporters were able to walk right in immediately following the game. Some male reporters intentionally took their time, knowing that the females would have less time to meet their deadline. It wasn't until 1978 that it was ruled that male and female reporters had equal access to the locker rooms after Melissa Ludtke took Major League Baseball to court after not being permitted in the locker room upon completion of the 1977 World Series (Druzin, 2001). Even after this court ruling women still had difficulty gaining access to locker rooms for some time (Grubb & Billiot, 2010). Years after, females were still being faced with scrutiny because of their gender.

In 1987 Paola Boivin - former president of Association for Women in Sports Media - went into the St. Louis Cardinals locker room when she was approached by a player who asked her, "Are you here to interview somebody or to look at a bunch of guys[...]". As if that was not enough, a jockstrap landed on Boivin's head (Druzin, 2008). Only two years later the *Fort Myers News-Press* fought the Tampa Bay Buccaneers to allow Michele Himmelberg into the locker room for a post game interview. Rather than allowing her access to the locker room, the team banned all reporters from entering upon the conclusion of the game. As the reporters entered the designated interview area for post game interviews their deadlines grew nearer, and frustration began to show. Himmelberg was approached by two radio reporters who said, "What are you doing here anyway [...] You're just a pervert trying to get a look at these guys" (Druzin, 2008). Over a decade later, Boivin was surprised again when entering the Arizona Diamondbacks locker room when she felt a tug on her jacket as Diamondbacks player Steve Finley's son said "Miss, miss... You can't be in here. This is a place only for boys" (Druzin, 2008).

While women were slowly granted equal rights as female reporters, the obstacles and scrutiny they faced did not begin to let up. In 2002 *60 Minutes* anchor Andy Rooney gave his opinion about female sports broadcasters; "The only thing that really bugs me about television's coverage is those damn women they have down on the sidelines who don't know what the hell they're talking about" (Gross, 2002). When questioned about whether or not he really meant his remarks, Rooney responded that he was not being sarcastic, and that "a woman has no business being down there trying to make some comment about a football game" (Gross, 2002).

In a study by Grubb and Billiot (2010) numerous female sports reporters were interviewed about their experiences and the obstacles they have faced as females in this male domain. The majority of the results supported the evidence that most women in the field have experienced poor treatment because of their gender. WIVB-TV's sports reporter Robin Adams stated that she had applied for a job in Scranton, Pennsylvania and the news director had said that he would 'never put a woman on the air in sports' (p. 91). As recently as the 1990s, Professional Golf Association events were only covered by male reporters, with the argument that since all of the players were male, the reporters should be male, too (Creedon, 1994).

Even cat calling and derogatory, sexual comments by players towards the female reporters have continued to be problematic in the locker room and on the sidelines (Grubb & Billiot, 2010). Nelson (1994) believes male athletes react defensively to female broadcasters because the women have control and power over the athlete's image. Even after the incredibly publicized incident when Boivin took a jock strap to the face in the 1980s, over twenty years later women are still experiencing harassment. In September of 2010 an incident occurred in which the NFL investigated the behavior of Jets players upon reports of harassment of Ines Sainz of TV Azteca, a Mexican TV network. Reports stated that Dennis Thurman, the Jets' defensive backs coach, was throwing passes directly towards Sainz on purpose. It was also reported that

players made sexually suggestive comments about Sainz in the locker room after practice (Bishop, 2010).

### **The Question of Credibility**

There is no question that female sports reporters have experienced countless incidents in which they were harassed and criticized because of their gender. However, the question arises upon whether or not there truly is a perceived credibility gap between male and female sports reporters. A study done by Hardin and Shain (2005) determined that 85% of females working in the sports journalism field feel as though they are not seen as equals because of their gender. With the growing number of female sports broadcasters in this profession it is certainly a subject worth examining. Cole (1981) studied whether or not the gender of a byline influenced the perception of the credibility of a news story. The study determined that a fashion story was evaluated more favorably with a female byline, while a story on men's golf was deemed more credible with a male byline.

Not only does credibility come into question when it comes to female sports reporters, but authoritativeness as well. Some believe that females are less authoritative than men on the side lines and in the locker room. This idea is supported by Ordman and Zillmann (1994), whose research suggested that there existed a clear sex bias between men and women, with women being perceived as less authoritative than men. In conclusion of Ordman and Zillman's (1994) study, it was suggested "that gender is an asset for a man seeking acceptance as an expert sports reporter, but a liability for a woman" (p. 74). This discrepancy is significant because it may be directly indicative of the way society views the realm of sports through a gender-oriented focus; research supporting a clear bias against women's knowledge in such a field is eye-raising and worthy of attention.

Etlings and Young (2007) concurred with Ordman and Zillmann's findings, noting that several hundred men and women had responded favorably towards male sports reporters (as opposed to females) in an experiment. Regression analyses conducted after the experiment showed weak but significant support for sexist attitudes predicting the authoritativeness rating of the female sportscaster (2007). Bryson (1987) reported that "negative evaluations of women's capacities are implicit in the masculine hegemony in which sport is embedded. [...] The effect is inferiorizing [sic] femaleness [sic] and female activities" (pp. 306-7). Consistent with these findings were the results of a study conducted by Toro (2005) which found that even the most attractive and knowledgeable female sports broadcasters were perceived to be less credible than male broadcasters that were visibly less attractive and less knowledgeable.

Some may argue that the gender of the individual receiving the message also plays a factor in the individual's measure of the credibility of male and female sports broadcasters. Feldman-Sumner, Montano, Kasprzyk, and Wagner (1980) found in a study of university students on gender specific issues that the degree of opinion conformity, for both men and women, depended upon the source's sex. On male-related issues, respondents of both sexes conformed more to a viewpoint espoused by males, but on female-related issues, both sexes conformed to a view of female speakers. The author concluded that "if knowledgability is perceived to be gender related, then the gender of the influence attempt will have a significant bearing on the outcome of the attempt" (p.319). Carocci (1998) found similar results reporting that college-aged males rated male speakers higher than females on expertness, when college-aged females rated both men and women about the same. Similarly, Caulk (1993) found when studying the opinions towards male and female play-by-play announcers that women did not have a more positive attitude towards the female broadcasters, but men tended to favor the male

sportscasters over the females. Given the masculine nature of broadcasted sports, it could potentially be theorized that men will be more likely to be perceived as more credible and authoritative than women (Etling & Young, 2007), especially by men.

How sports fans and television audiences view these numbers is still unclear. With the growing number of female professionals in this field, it could be possible that the more often an individual sees a female on the sidelines, the more comfortable they are with their knowledge. Opinions and attitudes change over time, and females have been reporting on sports for more half a century at this point. It is important to examine this topic to determine if there is in fact a general bias in existence against female sports broadcasters.

### **Research Questions and Hypothesis**

Hypothesis: “Female sports broadcasters are perceived to be less credible than male sports broadcasters.”

This hypothesis suggests that there is potential for a gender bias towards females in the profession. Etling and Young (2007) stated that “given the masculine nature of much broadcast sports, it could be theorized that men would be perceived as more authoritative than women” (p. 123). Although the stereotypical line between a woman and a man’s role in society is slowly starting to fade away, the question arises of whether the line is still visible when it comes to sports broadcasting. There were three research questions that were explored and answered throughout the study. These questions helped to define the methodology used in testing the hypothesis. The research questions were as follows:

RQ1: Do people think female sports broadcasters are less credible than males?

RQ2: Whom would men and women prefer to see on the sidelines/behind the desk?

RQ3: Do age and gender affect opinion of credibility?

The reason for formulating these specific questions was based on what is necessary in understanding and answering the hypothesis. The first research question relates directly back to the stated hypothesis. The second research question focuses on the gender individuals would rather view on television. The third question relates to how different demographics view the situation.

### **Methodology**

In order to obtain enough data to adequately answer the hypothesis and research questions, both qualitative and quantitative methods were used. For qualitative results both a focus group and focused interviews were conducted. For quantitative results a structured survey was distributed to a large number of participants. Both types of data were equally weighted in the final results.

### **Survey**

A structured survey was designed in order to gather quantitative information from 181 participants on their opinions regarding the subject of female sports broadcasters. Five demographic questions were asked including age, gender, race, marital status, and state & county of residence. The response field for “age” was broken up into eight groups, ranging from 18 to 74+. In order to simplify the SPSS analysis, ages were broken down into two categories; “41 and younger” and “42 and older”. The survey consisted of 19 statements that were answered using a Likert Scale ranging from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree”. The opening statements of the survey were simple in nature such as “I consider myself to be open-minded” and “I watch sports on a regular basis.” The statements then began to get more specific with statements like, “I believe male and female sports broadcasters are equally knowledgeable.”

The respondents' answers were analyzed in SPSS and were broken down into four categories; male and females "41 and younger" and male and females "42 and older."

### **Focus Group**

A focus group was organized in which information and significant statements were gathered from participants for qualitative data. The participants were chosen based on two criteria: those who displayed enthusiasm about further helping us after learning about our topic, and those who had a background in sports or reporting. Included in the focus group were a sports editor, women's studies minor, and a former female sports reporter from Channel 6, WJAC Johnstown. It was decided it would be beneficial to conduct a small focus group because a comfortable and intimate setting would allow for a free-flowing discussion. The seven participants were informed that their names would not be used in the study and they would be described as "adult male" or "adult female," and "college-aged male" or "college-aged female". Four discussion questions were asked, as followed:

- 1.) Do you believe that there exists a credibility gap between male and female sports broadcasters, based solely on gender?
- 2.) Are women viewed as token sports reporters, without much expertise?
- 3.) We asked the participants to react and provide feedback to the following quote. "WIVB-TV's sports reporter Robin Adams stated that she had applied for a job in Scranton, PA, and the news director had said that he would 'never put a woman on the air in sports...'"
- 4.) If both a male and a female sports reporter were to make the same mistake on-air on the same subject, whom do you believe would be more scrutinized?

### **Focused Interviews**

The third form of data that was collected was from the focused interviews. Three local female reporters that have experience in the sports broadcasting field agreed to be interviewed about their experiences for the study. The three women were Neille Giffune, Channel 69 (WFMZ Allentown), a sports broadcaster since 2003; Kyla Campbell, Channel 6 (WJAC Johnstown), a sports broadcaster from 2006 to 2008; and Sharla McBride Channel 16 (WNEP Wilkes-Barre), a sports broadcaster since 2005. These women answered multiple questions regarding their stance on the issues women face in the field of sports reporting. Neille Giffune's interview was conducted over the telephone, Kyla Campbell's interview was conducted in person, and Sharla McBride's interview was conducted through email. The reporters were all asked the same questions, some of which were:

- 1.) What made you want to get into sports (broadcasting)?
- 2.) Do you feel as though female sports broadcasters are discriminated against because of their gender?
- 3.) Do you feel as though you must "prove yourself" more than your male counterparts because you are a female?

## **Results**

### **Survey**

A total of 181 people responded to the survey, a group composed of 86 men and 95 women. Of those men and women, 107 fell into the "41 and younger" category and 74 in the "42 and older" category. The survey asked 19 questions related to the study and six related to the respondent's demographic. Prior to the formation of the survey, several questions were identified as those that were found to be of critical importance with regard to answering the hypothesis and research questions:

- I consider myself knowledgeable about a variety of sports

- Question No. 15: I believe male and female sports broadcasters are equally knowledgeable
- Question No. 17: I am more likely to change the channel when a woman is speaking about sports than when a man is
- Question No. 19: I believe that females are generally less knowledgeable about sports than males

The Likert Scale was designed with “1” meaning “strongly agree,” “3” meaning “neutral,” and “5” meaning “strongly disagree.” The mean averages of the responses for men and women to those questions were as follows:

- Question No. 5:
  - Men: 2.198 / Women: 2.853
- Question No. 15:
  - Men: 2.419 / Women: 2.116
- Question No. 17:
  - Men: 3.895 / Women: 4.000
- Question No. 19:
  - Men: 3.349 / Women: 3.863

After the SPSS analysis significant results ( $p < .05$ ) were found for questions 4, 5, 6, 8, 12, 13, 15 and 19 when comparing the questions against the variable “gender,” but no results of any significance were found when comparing “age” against the questions.

### Focus Group

Four questions were asked to the focus group, which had seven participants. Some of the more significant responses gleaned from the focus group research:

Question No. 1: Do you believe that there exists a credibility gap between male and female sports broadcasters, based solely on gender?:

- I do think a lot of women who are on [television] who are hired because they are cute and their knowledge is so-so and they do need to catch up with their knowledge. I think to find a woman who has both the looks and the knowledge is sometimes hard to come by. It’s obvious too where you tune in. I’m hard on women because I’ve been there. I did sports at my last station and you have to know what you’re doing. - Adult female
- From a business aspect, equal opportunity [played a large role in the hiring of more women]. There is such an over-dominance of male broadcasters. They need to make it look like there is equal opportunity. Especially ESPN- look five years ago; you would never see a woman sportscaster. I’m saying this totally unbiased. I feel from a business aspect they are trying to fit in equal opportunity because there is a huge dominance of males. - Male college student

Question No. 2: Are women viewed as token sports reporters, without much expertise?

- I think it’s unfortunate but there is a difference with the way that they are perceived generally. They are not viewed equally no matter how you slice it regardless of whether it’s ESPN or the local network. You just have people that don’t take them seriously. I guess they would be considered the token reporter. Until they can prove themselves like Dorris Burke and other people like that that are viewed on an equal plane, there aren’t that many. I don’t know if that’s an education background thing or more on the lines of them taking the initiative to better themselves, I don’t know how you can kind of compensate that. I think that the perception definitely exists. - Adult male



- I think one of the issues that's still at play, and there's no way to measure this or know this but when you're talking about broadcast journalism, there is still the issue of appearance playing a very significant role whether we want to admit it or not. When you think about the guys on the lineup on ESPN, well let's face it, Terry Bradshaw at his age doesn't look as good as the sideline reporters. We have no way of knowing when the issue of appearance is coming into play versus knowledge. There might be a number of really knowledgeable women out there who don't make the cut for the standards of appearance they have in broadcast. And that's where it gets tough because you don't really know what the pool of talent is really like in terms of knowledge. Are there women who are really knowledgeable who aren't making the cut? - Adult female

Question No. 3: Participant reaction to: "WIVB-TV's sports reporter Robin Adams stated that she had applied for a job in Scranton, PA, and the news director had said that he would 'never put a woman on the air in sports...'"

- Somebody who is thinking about his audience is going to be thinking about that his sports audience has traditionally been male. I think the gist is that we've seen that change and there is a greater awareness of women really being fans. There have been a growing number of women over the years that are true fans. I think that feeds into it too. There was a time when they thought well most of my audience was men and their not going to accept a woman but now they know the audience demographic has changed. It's going to take a while but that's going to play a role as well. - Adult female
- There is no reason to have that kind of quote. There is no reason to ever say I would never hire a woman. If someone's just as knowledgeable as a man in that field there is no reason for that. And it's illegal. - College-aged male

Question No. 4: If both a male and a female sports reporter were to make the same mistake on-air on the same subject, whom do you believe would be more scrutinized?

- I'm pretty hard on any announcer whether it be male or female. Whenever I hear someone say something that's blatantly wrong I'll call whoever that is, male or female, an idiot or usually just tune them out and stop listening. I'll even hit the mute button. I don't think it depends on the male or female question. If the person knows what they are talking about I'll listen to them; if they just make blunders that are blatant, then no. College-aged male

### **Focused Interviews**

The following female sports broadcasters participated in the focused interviews: Neille Giffune, Channel 69 (WFMZ Allentown); Kyla Campbell, Channel 6 (WJAC Johnstown); and Sharla McBride Channel 16 (WNEP Wilkes-Barre). These females provided critical feedback with regard to the study. A variety of questions were asked providing us with information about their experiences as female sports broadcasters. Some significant quotes were as follows:

Question No. 1: What did you do in order to become more knowledgeable about sports?

- "I asked a lot of stupid questions [...] If you level with people and say listen, I've never covered lacrosse before, give me a run-down of what I'm missing here, they will be more than happy to fill you in. It's when you come across as very arrogant and 'all knowing' that people get irritated with you." -Neille Giffune
- "[...] The only way a sports reporter can really become knowledgeable in ALL [sic] sports is to cover them. When I came to Pennsylvania, I had never watched a hockey game in my life, but was sent to cover a WBS Penguins game, live, on my very first day of work at WNEP-TV. By watching, and by doing A LOT [sic] of research, I was able to

catch on pretty quickly. A lot of my job is research. Everyday, I read the AP wires, and stories that come through on the internet. I also read newspapers, magazines, and research the specific teams I know I will cover.” –Sharla McBride

- “You have to figure out what your audience wants and pick and take and be smart about it. I did watch a lot more sports center in that time to get the national feel better but when it came to regional I just paid attention and listened to it everyday.” –Kyla Campbell

Question No. 2 Do you feel as though female sports broadcasters are discriminated against because of their gender?

- “I have run into people that automatically think that I am an idiot and don’t know anything about sports because I have different anatomy than they do. That’s fine, they can have those opinions[...] I think there is an overall perceived perception that women don’t know what they’re doing[...] I think some women get into sports casting because they’re like, ‘This is fun and I like sports,’ but when it comes down to it there is a whole lot more to being a sportscaster than there is to being a sports fan.” –Neille Giffune
- “I have never felt discriminated against in my field. In fact, I often feel privileged to be doing what I’m doing, and people in the field respect that. I am always respected by my peers, and fellow reporters/anchors for other stations. But, I didn’t always have that respect, I had to earn it, and that took some time. As a female, many people assume that I am not qualified to talk about male-dominated sports. When I first arrived in PA, many people thought I would not be a good sports reporter for THEIR [sic] area. But, within months, I had proved 99% of them wrong.” –Sharla McBride
- “No, I almost felt bad I fell like it was reverse discrimination. Everybody loved me no matter what. I could have screwed up and they would still love me. I almost felt bad about that sometimes. I never got nothing but positive feedback.” –Kyla Campbell

Question No. 3: Do you feel as though you have to “prove yourself” and your credibility and knowledge because you are a female?

- “When I first started working at WNEP-TV, I did feel like I had to prove myself. My employers were taking a leap of faith in hiring the stations first female sportscaster, and I wanted to show them that I was worth the hire! I will always be tested for the rest of my life in this career because I am female. Male co-workers will automatically assume that I am not as knowledgeable as they are, so I work very hard to show them that I am! I don’t mind having to prove myself on a daily basis because it makes me work harder, and makes me a better reporter.” – Sharla McBride

### **Discussion**

The results of the study were somewhat conflicting. The empirical data presented a clear case that there is no bias against female broadcasters, although it must be understood that the sample population was extremely small considering the scope of the question, and it came from a fairly homogenous area (the majority of results coming from Eastern Pennsylvania). There’s also the possibility that the Hawthorne Effect came into play. While every participant was assured of the anonymity of the survey, it’s quite possible that some responded in a positive manner in order to save themselves potential embarrassment.

With that being said, the quantitative results displayed a clear rejection of the notion that there exists a credibility bias against female sports broadcasters. The mean averages of the responses for men and women to Question No. 15 of the survey, which asked whether or not respondents believed male and female sports broadcasters are equally knowledgeable, were 2.419 and 2.116, respectively. Based on the way the Likert Scale was designed, with “1”

meaning “strongly agree” and “3” meaning “neutral,” it can be clearly deduced that the average response for men was “agree-to-neutral” while women were almost directly in the “agree” category. The mean averages of male and female responses to Question No. 19, which asked whether respondents believed females were generally less knowledgeable about sports than men, were 3.349 and 3.863, respectively. Based on these averages, it can be deduced that there is little-to-no attitude of sexism apparent in the body of respondents. Lastly, Question No. 17 of the survey, which asked whether respondents were more likely to change the television channel if a female reporter were on air than a male, produced male and female mean averages of 3.895 and 4.000, respectively. What this effectively illustrates is that not only was there no latent prejudice in the minds of the respondents against women, there was no active prejudice either; the respondents not only respected the knowledge of female sports broadcasters, they tuned in to hear their reports as often as they did the men.

Had those mean averages been on the other side of the neutral divide, it would have been possible to support the hypothesis. However, the available quantitative data makes it necessary to reject the hypothesis, at least from a purely empirical stance.

The qualitative data provided a more balanced host of responses, although it should be noted that the answers provided from the focused interviewees were decidedly in support of the hypothesis. Several younger members of the focus group spoke about how they were equally harsh on male and female sports broadcasters, and that they cared only for a reporters’ knowledge and not about their sex. They also identified several female sports broadcasters (Lisa Reynolds, Erin Andrews, and Pam Ward, specifically) whom they felt were especially good within the profession. One particular college-aged male was a bit more cynical, stating that while he had no prejudice against female broadcasters, he believed many stations hired the more attractive ones simply to retain their broadcasting licenses in order to stay in business. Indeed, this very notion was proposed and supported by Toro in 2005, who believed that stations began hiring women and minorities in the 1970s purely to be seen as politically correct and to remain viable from a commercial standpoint. When taken in context with the quote from the Scranton, Pennsylvania news director who said he would never put a woman on the air in sports, it is easy to see how this opinion could be formed (Grubb & Billiot 2010). One respondent, a female sports broadcaster herself, noted that she knows of several women whom she believed were subpar reporters, but received their jobs over men simply to fulfill such perceived quotas. Overall, however, the responses from the focus group participants indicated a liberal attitude that supported the empirical data more often than not.

The feedback of the focused interviewees was more indicting of the profession and its relationship with female sports broadcasters, which certainly raised red flags when compared against the survey data. The three respondents noted instances of simple prejudice in their pasts, such as particularly critical responses from viewers or hostility from interview subjects who felt more comfortable being interviewed by men. They all felt strongly that they had to prove themselves to be better than their male counterparts in order to retain their credibility. Indeed, Sharla McBride of WNEP-TV admitted that her boss “explained to me once that because I am a female, the television viewers will always test my knowledge, and when I make a mistake, it will reflect on my credibility,” a sentiment she readily agreed with herself.

Based on the results from the quantitative method, the hypothesis must clearly be rejected. Taking the qualitative results into account may prove the hypothesis to be true, in some respect. Upon examining the data the results were still unclear and did not provide cut and dry data. Had the study been entirely qualitative in design, it is unknown if they hypothesis would

be accepted or rejected. While the focused interview results of this study leaned towards acceptance of the hypothesis, it is unknown what more anecdotal evidence from female reporters would prove. This is because the word of three women (there would have been more respondents had the design been wholly qualitative) cannot be taken to speak for the entirety of the profession. As a result, the findings were a bit muddled.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

There are several different approaches that future researchers may take with regard to this study. The data collection was hindered by a small window of time (one semester) with which to conduct survey research; with more time, preferably the entirety of the academic school year, much more thorough survey research could have been conducted, and in a much broader area. A total of 181 surveys were distributed to a somewhat diverse body of students and adults, but the findings were frustrating because the majority of initial results were from people living within the area of Northeastern Pennsylvania. Another complication resulted from people incorrectly filling out the survey field in which their county and state were asked for. Many people either failed to fill it out; only wrote their state *or* county; or, in one case, wrote “USA”, which can only be interpreted as the respondent having read “county” as “country”. Two recommendations, therefore, would be to spend more time collecting a wider range of survey data with which to build conclusions, while also improving the readability of the survey. Consulting a research firm would be extremely beneficial with regard to the former.

Timing and the pool of available participants created problems with regard to the focus group. Had there been more time, additional focus groups could have been held and with a wider variety of respondents of different backgrounds. For the purposes of the study, it was vital to have a group of people who were knowledgeable about sports so as to make sure that nobody’s time was wasted. While it would have been more informative to have more than seven voices, November 30 was found to be the only date that worked for the majority of those requested to attend. It was also believed that a smaller group would lead to more candid and honest responses to the questions.

Additionally, focused interviews were utilized to receive anecdotal feedback from three female sports broadcasters in order to ascertain whether or not they perceived a negative bias existed when compared to their male counterparts. Once more, lack of time played a critical role in the ability to contact and interview these professionals. Had there been an additional semester with which to contact reporters and arrange interview dates, many more answers could have been pooled in order to provide invaluable qualitative data. Also, having an official platform to conduct this research could have led to more professionals responding to the study; the fact that it was three students from a small university who sent interview requests may not have moved many to answer.

If future studies were done on this subject it may be beneficial to focus on either strictly quantitative or strictly qualitative data. The combination of the different methodology did not provide a clear result, and focusing on one or the other may allow for clear evidence to be extracted from the study.

### **Conclusion**

The study was an interesting peek into a topic that demands additional research. The contrast in results from the quantitative and qualitative research found here begs for a broader national study to be conducted in order to come to more solid conclusions. As it stands, this particular study found that the public had little-to-no prejudice against female sports broadcasters, at least from the point of view of the empirical data. An educated sampling of

focus group participants argued for and against the existence of the bias, and those three women from the profession who chose to respond to the study said that there is indeed evidence of it. While the reach of the study was admittedly limited, the results gleaned from it point to interesting topics for future research.

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