

A Study On Challenges Faced By Women In Sports Journalism

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Abstract

This research paper is an exploration of women in sports journalism and the challenges they face when entering the locker room. It begins with an introduction focused on the history of women in sports journalism. Following the introduction, there will be a discussion in literature review format of the various challenges the women have faced. Many of the early female sports reporters encountered various levels of treatment upon entering the locker room. Some were physically assaulted. Others were sexually abused or challenged by the players in sexually inappropriate ways. The literature review focuses on those types of moments in journalism history and explores how they shaped the industry and the character of women working in sports journalism. This paper also includes research and interviews with women currently working in sports journalism in order to find out the differences between those early years and today. The study collects both data for international, national, organizational and individual levels. The methodology incorporates a mixed-methods approach.

Keywords: sports journalism , women journalist , media

Introduction

Before the 1960s, women were a rare sight in the world of sports reporting. If there were women reporting on sports, it was primarily for women's sports teams. When Title IX took effect in the 1970s, more women began playing sports, which enabled more women to report on sports. They soon discovered the success and prestige was not in reporting on women's sports, but in reporting for the big money-making sports such as men's professional football, baseball, cricket and basketball. As time passed, women started to use their sports reporting expertise to get into reporting on major sports. Unfortunately, some newspaper editors did not want women reporting on those professional sports. Too much money was invested in them, and there was a general sense that women did not belong in male-dominated sports. One major hurdle women journalists faced was getting into the locker room. Some sports organizations had firm rules about women in the men's locker rooms, while others simply had unwritten rules. Women who attempted to report on teams that enforced these rules were stopped at the locker room door and told to wait outside for their interviews with the players and coaches. The problem with this policy was that their male counterparts were allowed to go into the locker room to conduct interviews. Once the players conducted their interviews with the group of waiting male reporters, they were reluctant to go outside the locker room to give an interview again to one individual reporter. Women were often left with no option but to do their articles without quotes from the stars of the game. In the late 1970s, newspapers and magazines began to insist the teams allow reporters to enter the locker rooms regardless of gender. In 1978, Time Magazine sued the New York Yankees, forcing them to allow its female reporters into the locker room. After this action, it became almost fashionable to have women on the sports-reporting staff. The case had an affirmative-action-type effect on the demographic of the reporters on many sports staffs. However, as more and more women began to enter the locker rooms, reports of abuse of female reporters by players began to surface. Throughout the 1980s, there were many cases of players acting out negatively against women reporters. The literature review section of this research paper has been written to study the treatment of women working in sports journalism in the industry. It will focus primarily on the court cases that allowed women to enter men's locker rooms and the abuse endured by some of the first women working in sports journalism. It is important to look at these early years so there is a sense of

understanding of how far the industry has come since allowing women into the locker rooms. This study will examine personal testimony from people who worked in sports journalism. Also, this paper will also look at prior research on this topic. It will also review cases that directly affected women in sports journalism. The second part of this research paper is an examination of the current treatment of women in sports journalism through a series of interviews with women currently in the industry. The over-arching focus of the research project is on women sports journalists coverage of national, international events. This issue encompasses major elements such as the types of content covered by women journalist in various publications, and methods used by them to cover a sports event. Previous research has shown exploitation of women sports journalists at various levels. New approaches continue to emerge and bring out ways in which women have forced their way in making a place for them in this field of sports.

Significance

This research is the study of the women working in sports journalism and environment they go through in sports journalism, and also includes an innovative, international comparative element. As a result, this project has practical, theoretical and methodological significance. The practical significance centers on the examination of what is happening in women sports journalism at the nations with different geographic, cultural and media-system traits. The working of women in sports journalism is a specialized area of news collection. Despite this, there has been a lack of experiences of women sports journalists in sports journalism. Sports also holds significant importance to the community at local, national and global levels. This occurs through the economy with the amounts of money sports can generate and the developing of national identity. That this research is primarily focusing on women in sports journalism, which has a limited corpus of literature, enhances its innovativeness. Another practical significance is that by analyzing, through national, organizational and individual levels, what happens in women in sports journalism in the research will highlight important developments, techniques and outlook that has changed toward women sports journalist at micro and macro levels. This is particularly important in relation to women in sports journalism. The findings could assist in encouraging more women to accept this challenge and make a mark in male dominated field. Therefore, this research will be highly valuable to the young women journalist graduates and women role in sports journalism industry. The study analysed how women sports journalists have adapted themselves to challenges and how important women sports journalism has become wherein women participation in sports has increased manifolds.

Literature Review

The literature of women sports journalism is expanding and includes analysis of many different sectors of the field at theoretical and more practical levels. However, women sports journalism is “a fast-growing field” that has developed into “a field of its own”. The current study focuses on the history of women sports journalism and this review of literature explores a range of instances to provide an extensive platform to help justify the approaches applied. Further, it highlights how the research is significant, unique and worthy of such in-depth examination. Firstly, a detailed analysis of women sports journalism is provided, including research, the state of the industry, convergence, interviewing techniques, and content. Another major focus is women sports journalism and women sports journalism research, with both areas being discussed for their triviality. A study involving the interviewing of journalists requires a background in studies of journalists, as well as knowledge of game, critical issues. The literature review section is designed to explore early research on the topic of female sports reporters and their challenges getting into men's locker rooms to interview athletes. This section discusses the people and events that took place within the sports journalism industry, both inside and outside the locker room, prior to 1993 when *Lady in the Locker Room* was written. *Lady in the Locker Room* was written by Susan Fornoff who spent the majority of the 1980s covering the Oakland Athletics. Her book is about the time she worked with the A's and her

experiences covering them as a beat writer for the Sacramento Bee. In this book, Susan Fornoff not only discussed her experiences working with the Oakland Athletics, but also her career in general working as a sports reporter in the early years of women in sports journalism. Her career began in 1977 on a chance encounter with someone who needed a typist to type the articles for the sports reporters at the Baltimore Orioles game that night. She was already in school pursuing a career in journalism and had a strong passion for sports. This encounter simply pointed her career in the correct direction. Her book and her career path were strong 5 examples of life as a female sports reporter in the early years after Title IX. According to the Association for Women in Sports Media (AWSM), Susan Fornoff and her peers working in sports journalism in the 1980s were far from the first women to venture into sports journalism. The AWSM Resource Center (2008) stated that Sadie Kneller Miller was the first known woman to cover sports when she reported on the Baltimore Orioles in the 1890s. Unfortunately, the AWSM reported that "her stories are bylined 'SKM,' presumably to hide her gender." The AWSM went on to say that in 1924, Margaret Goss began writing the first sports column written by a woman to appear on a regular basis. This information is supported in a book written in 1926. The book, *Women in Journalism*, by Genevieve Jackson Boughner (1926), was a how-to guide on journalism for the earliest reporters in the industry. She had one brief chapter on women reporting on sports. Her focus was on women reporting on women's sports, but she had a few initial comments on women reporting on men's sports: In California, where outdoor sports may be indulged in the year around, the various branches such as golf, swimming, tennis, etc., are important enough to justify a newspaper employing a special writer for each. There have been a few instances of women covering major baseball games and accompanying the home team of their city when it travels around the circuit. (Boughner, 1926) In 1971, Title IX was passed.

Title IX was an amendment designed to eliminate discrimination of women in sports. This amendment was meant to allow women to participate more often in sports, especially at the college level. What was not anticipated, along with the increased presence of women in sports, was the increased presence of women in sports journalism. In his book *Sports Media: Reporting, Producing, and Planning*, Brad Schultz (2005) explained: It has increased the importance, viability, and popularity of women's athletics, with a corresponding positive effect on women in the media. As female athletes became more empowered, so too did female reporters. This new-found empowerment caused a dramatic increase in the number of women hoping to report on sports, and not just women's sports.

There was an increase in women journalists reporting on professional male sports as well. At one point in the late 1970s, newspapers considered it fashionable to have a woman on the sports staff (Fornoff, 1993). 7 According to Fornoff, women reporters often found it challenging to get the players, coaches, and even the audience to see them as reporters first and as women second. Margareta Melin-Higgins argued that women reporters actually had the opposite problem. "They have in common that they (albeit to various degrees) adapt to the traditional view of women, that is, to accept that they will be seen as a woman first and a journalist second" (DeBruin& Ross, 2004). She explained, some women often revert back to the traditional views of women's roles and sometimes just stay there. This is often where the problems start. If women took a stronger stance to be seen first as a reporter, like Fornoff suggested, then the fact they are women could one day be a non-issue. On occasion, it was such an issue that it led to lengthy court battles. One of the first court battles women journalists had to fight was not a sports-related case, but one that eventually affected the landscape of sports journalism. In 1973, a suit was filed against The New York Times to acquire equal rights for women journalists. The suit: Functioned as a wake-up call for the entire newspaper industry, both because of the elite status of The New York Times and because the named member of the suit included an accountant, a telephone solicitor in the advertising department, and an African-American staff member. (Chambers, Steiner, & Fleming, 2004) The suit opened the door for women to pursue their rights as journalists on a number of different levels, including in the sports department. Fornoff noted in her book, one of the most significant court cases regarding women sports reporters took place in 1978. According to the court documents, Melissa Ludtke, a reporter for Time Magazine, was

denied access to the New York Yankees locker room following a World Series game in 1977. Bowie Kuhn, Major League Baseball's commissioner at the time, had an unwritten, but understood, policy with all the teams in baseball against women reporting from the locker room. When this order was applied to Ludtke following the most important baseball game of the 1977 season, Time Magazine took up the fight to protect the rights of their reporters. Unfortunately, Kuhn strongly believed women should not be allowed in men's locker rooms. He was quoted saying: To permit members of the opposite sex into this place of privacy, where players, who are, of course, men, are in a state of undress, would be to undermine the dignity of the game. (Fornoff, 1993) The court did not agree with Kuhn's sentiments. In May of 1978 they ruled: 9 The court holds that defendants' policy of total exclusion of women sports reporters from the locker room at Yankee Stadium is not substantially related to the privacy protection objective and thus deprives plaintiff Ludtke of that equal protection of the laws which is guaranteed her by the Fourteenth Amendment. (Motley, 1978) This case opened the flood gates for other professional sports to change their stance on women in the locker rooms. The ruling itself was technically applied only to the New York Yankees, but most of Major League Baseball abided by the ruling. "It was not until 1985 that Kuhn's successor, Peter Ueberroth, issued regulations requiring all teams to provide both equal access and open locker rooms" (Thomas, 1990). In 1982 the National Hockey League made it a formal rule to allow equal access to the locker rooms for all reporters. Although many teams already allowed such access, it was not made official until 1982 (Chambers, Steiner, & Fleming, 2004). In fact, hockey and basketball were two major sports that had allowed women in their locker rooms without question even before the ruling.) Although these court cases were important and significant, they were not the most important battle being fought at the time. Once women were allowed to enter the men's locker rooms, the battle was between the women reporters and the players. Some of the players had very strong opinions regarding women in their locker rooms. The examples so far have all centered around players who were sexually harassing the female reporters in their locker rooms. Most of the stories consisted of players who were naked, flaunting themselves around the fully clothed reporters. She explained how, possibly, if more women were outspoken about things they went through, maybe Olson would have been spared some of her embarrassment and harassment. If women had put up more of a fight instead of trying so desperately to be one of the boys, fewer women would have had to be reminded they were not one of the boys. The Lisa Olson—Zeke Mowatt incident took place in 1990 and was the last major harassment story in Fornoffs book. Fornoff said, "By then, women sportswriters had actually begun thinking, 'This is no problem anymore - we're just plain old sportswriters.' We were wrong."

Objectives

The main objective of this research project is to highlight the working of women sports journalists to cover sports news.

Research Methodology

A mixed-methods approach is used in the methodology. To find out how women in sports journalism has changed the practices of women sports journalism around the world, a questionnaire survey method was used. Between March 1st and March 13th, 2022, articles from the daily newspaper sports section and the sports homepage were coded for a total of 13 days. In total, 20 entries from Tilak Maharashtra Vidyapeeth's journalism and mass communication department professors were collected for study. The methodology involves a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods to provide a range of comprehensive data for analysis. The content analysis involved a two-week constructed sample of the sports sections of the broadsheet/quality organisations. This mix of methods allows for quantitative and qualitative data to ensure a comprehensive overview of sports coverage by women as well as gaining an understanding of how the women sports journalism environment has changed the participation and perception of women in sports journalism.

Data Analysis

Research Question1:

Has Women sports journalism been able to face challenges in male dominated field

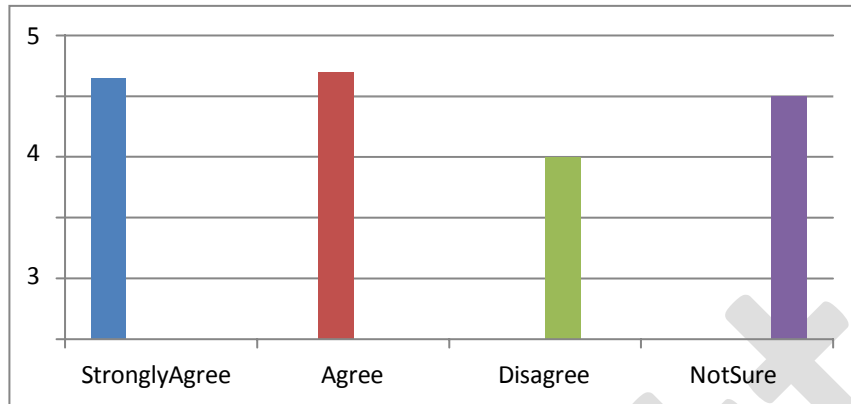


Figure1:existence of women in sports journalism

Interpretation: The interpretation of the above question is that the maximum strength is either agree or strongly agree with the question that women in sports journalism have been able to make their existence count in male dominated field

Research Question2:

Does women face exploitation while discharging their duty in sports journalism

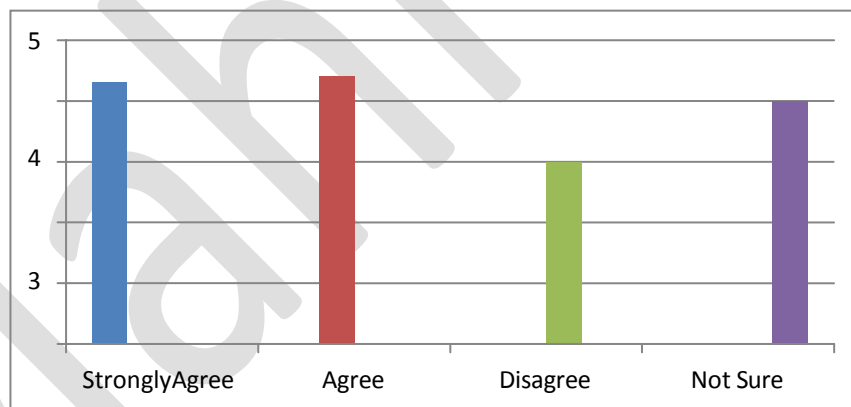


Figure2: exploitation of women in sports journalism

Interpretation: Maximum people either agree or strongly agree that women are subjected to some sort of exploitation while collating reports

Research Question3:

Do you think that women are now accepted more easily then earlier times due to education and social media awareness.

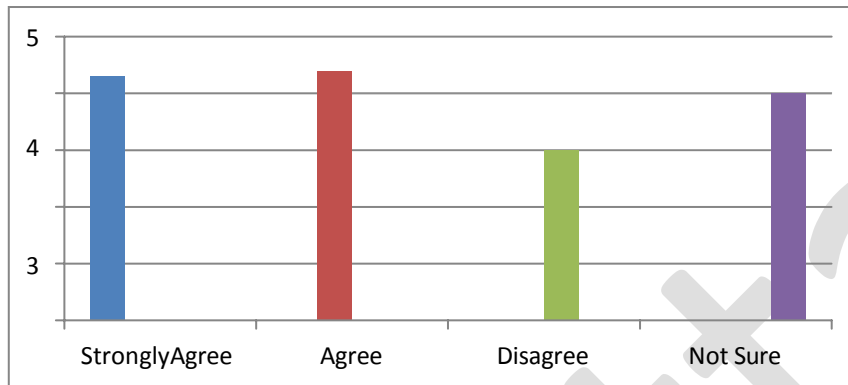


Figure3:Acceptance of women in sports journalism

Interpretation: It is interpreted that maximum people either agree or strongly agree that women are now accepted as sports journalists more easily due to advent of education and women shouldering equal responsibilities in society.

Research Question4:

Has the role of women sports journalists become more important then earlier times due to increased participation of women in different sports

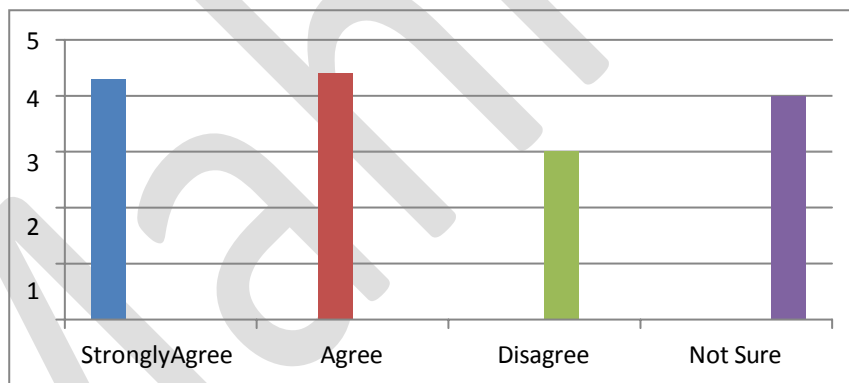


Figure4: Role of women in sports journalism

Interpretation: Maximum journalists either agree or strongly agree that women have increased roles in sports journalism as it gives them advantage to connect with women athletes more easily

Research Question5:

Do you agree that most of the cases are unreported by women sports journalists for the sake of their personal integrity

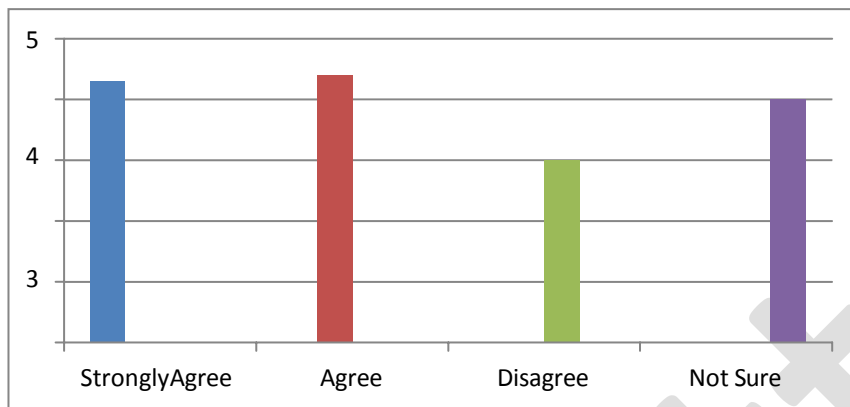


Figure5:Reporting of cases by women sports journalists

Interpretation:Maximum number of journalists either agree or strongly agree that women sports journalists hide the misbehavior cases meted out to them while they perform their job for report collection

Conclusion

This paper set out to answer the questions: What changes have taken place in sports reporting since the early days of women being allowed in the locker room? Was there another major turning point in the industry since 1992 when Lady in the Locker Room was written? All three of these questions were answered with this research. What changes have taken place in sports reporting since the early days of women being allowed in the locker room? The main change that has taken place is the general acceptance of women in the locker room. They are no longer looked at as a novelty or a threat. They are simply part of the work environment, and most of the players do not think twice about them being there, much less treat the women badly for doing their jobs. Was there another major turning point in the industry since 1992 when Lady in the Locker Room was written? No, there has been no new turning point, but only gradual change over time. The majority of the women interviewed stated that the last major event to take place that affected their treatment in the locker room was the incident with Lisa Olson. The incident that took place on September 16, 1990, between Lisa Olson and the players in the New England Patriots locker room was a major turning point for female reporters. It was also the last major incident the women interviewed for this report could think of as a turning point for them. How do players in professional sports currently feel about women reporting in the locker rooms, and is there a difference in opinion based on the age of the players? According to the women interviewed, most of the players are comfortable with them there. They are used to the women being in the locker room and very rarely express objections. The age of the players is a contributing factor. Most of the players are in their 20s and 30s and have grown up watching women report on sports and being on the sidelines. A woman reporting on sports is not a novelty to them. Women in unconventional professional roles do not seem odd to these athletes. Aside from the posed research questions, the most significant finding of this study was the discovery of the rift with the audience. The women still face major challenges dealing with the audience. With the Internet 64 and blogs, the audience is free to express themselves and their frustrations with their team of choice, and often that frustration is taken out on the reporters. The women are regarded as ignorant simply because they are women, or they are judged based on their appearance and looked at as sex objects, as became the case with Erin Andrews, sportscaster for ESPN, in the summer of 2009. Most of the women believe the

problems with the audience are not getting any better, and because of the Internet they might be getting worse. This study demonstrated that women are equal in the eyes of the players, but they have a long way to go to have the same acceptance by the audience.

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