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Those Women Have All the Headaches: Inside the World of Sports Broadcasting

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Review of Literature – Women in Broadcasting

The field of sports broadcasting is flourishing and becoming more popular every year. However, with the growth of the profession, we are seeing a minimal amount of women holding the positions. There are many theories surrounding why this may be, but truly no set reason. Why is it that women are underrepresented throughout the profession as compared to men? The research provided on this topic goes in depth as to whether women are just not interested, or whether people are not interested in hearing sports coverage from women.

Barbara Coventry (2004), takes in an in-depth look, with logit log-linear analysis to examine particular job classifications and who (by sex/gender), holds these positions. Coventry thoroughly conducts a study that explores supply and demand concerning women in 'lower' (reporter) positions, or not holding sports media positions at all. Coventry's results contained information based upon 356 sportscasters. In her study, only 12% are women (Coventry 2004). More significant data surrounding the topic comes with Coventry's cross-tabulation of sports broadcasting job and sex. Anchoring positions (those most significant in media) were 84.4% men/15.6% women, Reporters 72.7% men/27.3% women, Host 82.2% men/17.8% women. Play-by-Play analyst 95.3% men/4.7% women. The closest range of a held position came with the competition-level reporter 70.6% men and 29.4% women (Coventry, 2004). Finally, she stated, "Women are severely underrepresented as play-by-play announcers, especially for NFL games" (Coventry, 2004, pg. 336).

Coventry asks the question, "Are women's play-by-play and analyst opportunities limited to women's sports?" (Coventry, 2004, pg. 337) Three sources, coming from Gender and Women's Leadership Reference Handbook, all analyze the idea behind how much women have 'power' within the media, particularly in broadcast. While these studies don't analyze sports
particularly, they do allow for viewers to see a pattern of how women are represented in the broadcast media field.

Coventry’s article is much like Parker and Fink (2008), the two authors both describes the commentating framework differences between men’s and women’s sports. The analysis displays a large difference between the two genders coverage in sport.

Lynne Perri (2010), author of Overview: Women in the Media, highlights how far women have come in the media industry. "Their high achievements took the shape on multiple platforms - stories, pictures, online video - and reinforced the sense of what the media can do when storytelling is so remarkable" (Perri, 2010, pg. 765). She goes on to discuss how representation still lags, especially in concerns with women's influence on news coverage. "Women are not always represented when it comes to talking about topics or being quotes as experts either. Despite rising numbers of women in the workforce ... reporters tend to rely on male sources" (Perri, 20120, pg. 767)

Perri tends to take the path less traveled and proclaim that employment prospects for women are being created and women are beginning to play a larger role in the industry.

Another study coming from the resource handbook, is authored by Jane Hall (2010), Women as Leaders in Broadcast TV News and Print Journalism. Her data consists on quantitative research that clearly represents the differences between men and women's positions in the TV industry.

Her results (in relation to sports positions) are as follows:

Sports Anchor: 92.2 % Men - 7.8% Women
Sports Reporters: 81.3% men - 18.7% Women
It's extremely intriguing to look at the difference between women as news/sports reporters: 56.7% News/18.7% Sports (Hall, 2010, pg. 773) There has to be an explanation for these astonishing figures. Same job as a reporter, but the topic is different -- does that completely change the amount of women represented?

The final research from this particular handbook is Natalie Greene's, *Women as Leaders in Television*. This research highlights the past representation of women in the TV industry. The history of the representation of women is significant to look at because it gives an idea as to where women are headed, as well as where women have come from. Throughout the quantitative study, a great margin between men's and women's significant roles in TV media is relevant. She states, "Regardless of the reasons why, there is an overwhelming lack of leading women in prime time" (Greene, 2012, pg. 798) Prime time television being the most popular time aired.

An article title *RANT, RANT, RANT* by Winchester (2012) and “*Naturally Less Exciting*, Greer (2009), speaks upon the issue of lack of coverage in women’s sports. Winchester describes the poor work done on ESPN-W (ESPN for Women), as compared to ESPN which covers all sports, primarily male sports. She finishes the article with descriptions of how more women’s coverage would shorten the inequity gap between men and women.

In a research article written by Gunther, Kautz, and Roth (2011) they found that historically women have been seen as less credible sport broadcasters and although, times have changed, the representation of women in sport broadcasting has lagged behind. Men have almost always dominated the world of reporting sports on the news or just reporting sport in general. An example stated early in the article, Lesley Visser a female reporter in the 1970s approached Terry Bradshaw with just her notepad to conduct an interview. Terry proceeded to grab her notepad and sign it with an autograph. Female reporters were forced to stand outside the locker room
after a game while male reporters were able to just walk right into the locker room as soon as the

game was completed and some of them intentionally took up a lot of the time because they knew
the female reporters would have less time to meet their deadlines. An internal study done by

Hardin and Shain (2005) found that 85% of female reporters working in the sports journalism

field feel they are the victims of inequality and do not see themselves as equals because of their
gender.
Introduction To Project

First Semester at Bowling Green State University

It was summer of 2009 when I entered my first semester at Bowling Green State University. I remember that summer well – full of long, hot days in Anderson Arena for basketball workouts, living out of a tiny dorm room, daily class and, of course, trying to decide what I was going to do with the rest of my life. It seemed like a lot for a young 18-year old at the time. Coming into college I wasn’t a big fan of school or studies. In high school, I went to class so I could play basketball when the bell rang at the end of the day. Sports was my life, always has been, always will be.

I hated when people entered college with an “undecided major.” It just sounded dumb. Did you never get asked what you wanted to do when you grew up? I always answered, “I don’t know. I don’t like anything.” So, as a young 18-year old, I chose Early Childhood Education as my major. My roommate was an education major and BGSU was known for their education department, so I was going to be a teacher.

My first fall semester I enrolled in one education course and I’ll never forget it: Education Technology. We spent the whole semester learning how to use a SMART Board and putting together lesson plans. I quickly realized this wasn’t for me. I decided to meet with my advisor. He asked what I was interested in – math? Science? Business? My response: ‘sports.’ It was then when I found out I could actually major in Sports Broadcasting. I always laugh at myself looking back; not realizing people actually went to school to be on ESPN and ‘talk about sports.’
Learning The Grind

When I began journalism classes I felt right at home. I immediately became involved in BG24 News and internships at the local TV stations. Fortunately, I knew many of the Toledo-area sports anchors because I grew up just outside town, so they welcomed me with open arms. It was during my internships that I learned the most about working in television sports. At FOX Toledo and WTOL, I worked on my on-air skills, but more importantly improved my shooting, editing and writing – this would help my career skyrocket early.

Balancing college basketball, class, internships and my Sports Director position at BG24 was challenging. At times I felt like I couldn’t give my all to every aspect of my life. I’m forever thankful to my coaches, teachers, and employers for the opportunity to do it all. Sometimes I had to leave practice early to catch my weekly BG24 shows, or vice-versa. We were on the road every week for basketball and I often missed class, resulting in a “C” in Broadcast Journalism. Looking back, I’m grateful for that professor who told me I’d never make it in the television business after narrowly passing her class. Funny how things work out, huh?

My first part-time job in broadcast television was at Buckeye Cable Sports Network in Toledo, Ohio. I was still in school, playing basketball when I was offered the sideline reporter position and my life got even busier. I would go to morning workouts before the sun came up, class, basketball practice in the afternoons, and rush off to Toledo to call a high school basketball game in the evening, but I quickly fell in love with the grind of television news.
**A Woman In Sports**

I’ll never forget the day I was offered my first REAL sports broadcasting job. It was my 22nd birthday when the News Director at FOX10 News in Mobile, Alabama called me and offered the Sports Director position. I was jumping up and down on the phone and wanted to immediately accept! Instead, I listened to everything he said, wrote down some notes, and told him I’d take a day to talk it over with my family.

Flashback about a month before that phone call, I had made 50 copies of my resume reel to send all over the country, I sent out more than 50 emails to television stations with no return, and I cried in my bedroom thinking I would never get “my break.” I finally decided to reach out to my old General Manager, Gary Yoder, at FOX Toledo where I interned. I saw that he was now the GM at FOX10 News in Mobile and had a sports job opening. When I emailed him, he immediately responded saying he’d pass my info along to the News Director and remembered me from Toledo. The rest was history. Within a couple weeks I was down south interviewing and driving around the beach, and a week after that I was hired! Without my BGSU coaches and professors giving me the ability to “do it all,” I would never have met Gary at FOX Toledo and ultimately gotten my first big time job. The old saying is true, it’s not always ‘what’ you know, but ‘who’ you know and the impression you’ve made on them.

My time in Alabama was possibly the most important year of my career. I had a lot of fun learning about the television business and living in the South was a new experience. Personally I
grew more than I ever could’ve imagined. I lived alone for the first time, paid my own bills, I was completely on my own and handling a job in the public eye was pretty overwhelming for a 22 year old. I created some fantastic television for my first year in the business; covering the BCS National Championship Game, getting to anchor the weekly 6 and 10pm sportscast in the 59th market in the country, I was on top of the world. Mobile was big enough, yet small enough that I didn’t feel in over my head. I made some mistakes professionally as I was still learning how to “do” TV. I would get positive and negative feedback from our viewers on a daily basis. Whether it emails, calls into the station, or social media posts. The “trolls” never let a mistake go unnoticed. (*Note: trolls are viewers who like to voice their opinions about how you do your job, while hiding behind a computer screen. I really like using this term.)

After signing a 3-year contract at FOX10 News, I spent just less than a year there until I was onto “bigger” things. Four months into my time in Alabama and out of school, I received a LinkedIn message from Jerry Martin, General Manager at KPRC 2 in Houston, Texas. Jerry simply complimented my work and told me he’d have a sports job open in less than a year. I responded to Jerry’s message, but didn’t think much of it. Surely I wasn’t going to work in a Top Ten television market at age 23… right? Wrong. In June of 2014, just a year out of school – I was off to NBC in Houston, Texas as the Weekend Sports Anchor. That’s where this Master’s Project really begins. Structurally based off the ESPN book, *Those Guys Have All The Fun – Inside The World Of ESPN*, I tell my story of life in sports broadcasting at one of the highest levels in television, in a market with four professional teams, the fourth biggest city in the country, and a population
of more than 4 million. Here is my story: *Those Women Have All The Headaches – Inside The World of Sports Broadcasting*. In the upcoming journal entries I have chronicled my time in Houston, covering the 2015-16 Texans (NFL) and Astros (MLB) season. Although it’s an often-rewarding career, I expose some of the ‘headaches’ women face in sports broadcasting and discuss the challenges and stereotypes associated with women working in sports. My journal entries are summed up and divided into four main points: Gender Bias in Knowledge of Sport, Injustice Inside the Locker Room, Clothing Expectations: Dress or Judgment, and Social Media Sexism. Following each journal entry is an analysis that breaks down the issues women face in the sports broadcasting field.
Method

After nearly six years in sports broadcasting, I’ve experienced the highs and lows as a woman in the business. Since I was a young girl I loved sports and now, as an adult, ‘talking about sports’ is my passion. When considering a topic for my Master’s Project, I felt that telling my story as a woman in sports broadcasting would be eye opening and beneficial to other women considering the business. However, while putting together my project, I discovered that my experiences reveal fundamental issues regarding gender-bias, sexism and issues in the hiring process of women in sports broadcasting. The primary goal of my project was to tell my personal experiences, expose the issues women face daily and analyze those problems.

The first step in writing about my personal experiences was finding a way to structure them. The structure of my Master’s Project is based off the book, *Those Guys Have All The Fun: Inside The World of ESPN*, which tells multiple stories, scandals, and tales of life working at the network. The book is constructed from more than 500 interviews with people who have worked and still work at ESPN. In the book, each page has a bolded name and a quote from his or her interview with the authors. For example, there are seven pages of the book that are dedicated to the Erin Andrews peephole video scandal. In those seven pages there are quotes from Andrews herself, her dad, Rece Davis and many others, including sports anchor Michelle Beadle who has admitted she doesn’t care for Andrews and has watched the peephole video. This was part of Beadle’s published interview regarding Andrews’ peephole video:

“I felt bad for her. She looked fabulous but it was such a violation. I mean, I've had moments in my apartment in New York when the blinds were up for one brief second and you think, "Ugh!" but that's nothing compared to what happened to her. Nothing. I think
things might have been handled differently, but she seems to be moving on. Sometimes these things turn out better for people.”

In Beadle’s quote she is implying that Erin Andrews benefitted from being taped naked in her hotel room. This is one of the many gender-bias excerpts from the ESPN book.

My Master’s Project is an autoethnography, an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze personal experience in order to understand cultural experience. Autoethnography combines two characteristics: autobiography and ethnography. In an autobiography, the author selectively writes about his or her own past experiences. Typically, the author does not live through those experiences to later write about them, but instead compiles them in reflection. When researchers do ethnography, they study a culture's relational practices, common values and beliefs, and shared experiences for the purpose of helping insiders (cultural members) and outsiders (cultural strangers) better understand the culture (MASO, 2001). So, my autoethnography, stems from my personal experiences and are retrospectively and selectively written to identify cultural issues for women inside the world of sports broadcasting.

The ESPN book is the structure for my Master’s Project titled, Those Women Have All The Headaches: Inside The World of Sports Broadcasting. My data collection was based on a personal journal I kept over months of my broadcasting career. The journal spans from the beginning of the 2015 Houston Texans season (NFL) and the 2015 Houston Astros season (MLB), while I was a Sports Anchor at KPRC 2 (NBC) in Houston, Texas. Some of my journal entries consisted of just a few sentences, whereas others were a few pages long. During the 2015 seasons I traveled with each professional team. I often wrote in my journal while on the road in
hotel rooms or sitting on plane rides back to Houston. My journal helped keep my thoughts in one place.

When compiling information from my personal experiences for my Master’s Project, I went through my journal and found main points and issues I faced repeatedly. With these experiences, I was able to come up with four primary examples of gender bias in sports broadcasting. I gave a title to each of the four topics and shared personal experiences that described how each issue played a role in my career, typically more than once. So, similar to the ESPN book, my project breaks down experiences in the business; the difference is that I was both in the interviewer and interviewee.

My first topic is labeled: Gender Bias in Knowledge of Sport. This part of the project is the basis for many challenges to come during my broadcasting career. In this section I reference my role as the only female in the sports department at KPRC, as well as Houston’s only local TV female sports anchor. These personal experiences proved how my management assigned a male sports reporter to our football coverage instead of me, based on him being a former college football player. This experience shows that women are often considered incompetent when covering sports that are predominately played by men, hence ‘Gender Bias in Knowledge of Sport.’ In my reflexive self-analysis, I explain how athletic ability can supplement journalist skill, but it cannot replace it. In my analysis, I reference my college basketball experience and admit that it ‘helps’ my understanding of the game, but it does not make me a journalist. I also referenced previous research I’ve done of gender inequality in sports broadcasting: “In 2014, my findings included an issue in the hiring process. Data showed that on a national scale, 92.2% of sports anchors and 81.3% of sports reporters are men. (Coventry 2004) So, not only are women
not being considered for assignments that seem unfit for a woman, the hiring process is already putting women behind the eight ball and creating an imbalance in the sports broadcasting field.”

Another primary topic in my project is Injustice Inside the Locker Room. This part of my research includes multiple personal experiences inside NFL and MLB locker rooms. My experiences include sexual harassment, embarrassing moments, and frustration throughout my career. Women entering the broadcasting business are always ‘warned’ about rules in the locker room: never look down or athletes will think you’re checking them out, don’t wear anything too tight or low cut because it may distract the athletes, the list goes on. I labeled this “injustice” because that word truly describes the environment inside locker rooms for women. Women are held to a different standard than their male counterparts while conducting interviews and doing the exact job. During my reflective self-analysis, I describe having to stick up for myself while in the locker room. I watched a competing journalist (male) interview a partially naked male athlete whom I wasn’t allowed to speak with until he was clothed. My reflection describes the cultural issues of “the good ole boys club” that undermines women in the business.

After describing the harsh spotlight women face about knowledge of sport, I dive into the reality of clothing expectations for women on television. My journal includes an overwhelming amount of times I’ve been ridiculed, harassed, flirted with, and disrespected all because of something I wore. I cannot count the number of times viewers have said, “I’m not even listening to what you say when you report, I’m just staring at you.” That comment, as well as many others, is a fundamental concern of sexism in sports broadcasting. Whereas men are limited to their suit, shirt and tie look; women are often expected to ‘dress for the occasion’ and it’s typically inappropriate. My self-analysis includes being called ‘gay’ or ‘homosexual’ based on wearing pantsuits. I was later told I was no longer allowed to wear pantsuits because it wasn’t ‘very
flattering’. I go on to explain how television management controls what their talent wears on-air, including a list full of do’s and don’ts for both women and men. I use those lists to help collect data for my research on discrimination and unfairness in dress for women in the television business.

The final topic my research involves is social media and the Internet critics women face. My personal experiences include dealing with professional athletes on social media and their sexual advances. I once ignored an athlete flirting with me via social media and paid the price the next day when he refused to answer any of my questions during an interview. I also provide examples of harassment, stalking and irritation from viewers on my professional Facebook account. In my analysis I include: “Social media is a blessing and a curse – similar to this entire profession. With social media taking over the world, it’s given the world an unrestricted, direct line to those of us working in the public eye. The nasty comments and inappropriate words ‘come with the job,’ but it surely doesn’t make it acceptable. I add it to my journal to shed light on the reality of my career. Over the years I’ve developed many friendships with women in the same position I am in. Eventually we become numb to degrading words, but it’s unfair we’re put in the position to deal with the abuse to begin with.”

I conclude with hope that my stories of injustice, inequality, discrimination and sexism will evoke change for women in sports broadcasting. I concede that we have come a long way as society, accepting women covering sports, but there’s work to be done. My Master’s Project provided a platform to shed light on the daily challenges women face while simply doing their job; I am optimistic this autoethnography, combined with the endless stories from other women in the business, will aid in a better future for women in sports broadcasting.


Journal

Gender Bias in Knowledge of Sport

I begin this journal by saying that the 2015 NFL season was the first time I really covered the Houston Texans. Although my career in Houston began in June of 2014, I was only given the opportunity to cover Texans home games during my first year. The sports department at KPRC at the time consisted of a male sports director, Randy, a male sports anchor/reporter James, a male sports producer Evan, and myself – the lone female sports anchor/reporter.

There wasn’t much of a hierarchy in the sports department other than Randy’s role as sports director. James and I shared the same position and split weekly anchor days – he anchored Thursday, I anchored Saturday during the football season. James started a month after me in August of 2014 and we had similar backgrounds; both college athletes, both with a few years of experience in the business, both trying to take advantage of every opportunity management would give us. During the 2014 Texans season, James was sent to every away game. Our station covered away games ‘MMJ-style’, short for multi-media journalist. This meant the MMJ would have to travel entirely alone with all of the equipment, shoot the NFL game, shoot post-game interviews, edit highlights and sound bites, and finally shoot their own live shots with the camera on a tripod – A LOT of work!

Although James and I joined KPRC’s staff within a month of each other, he was sent to every Texans road game that first season. I felt slighted. As a woman in the business, who was
very capable of doing everything he did, I couldn’t pinpoint why management refused to send me on road trips. I finally asked. Was it safety? No. Money? No. I was told, “James is our football reporter because he played college football and understands the game. He knows what it’s like to be inside the lines and can analyze the game from a former-player perspective.”

**Analysis: Gender Bias In Knowledge of Sport**

My first example of gender bias in sports television is the perception that women lack knowledge about sports, specifically a sport she hasn’t played. It goes without saying that I find it very valuable to have a former-player perspective on-air. As a former D-I college basketball player, my experience on the court gives me an advantage in my career. I know what it’s like to be the athlete, to experience wins and losses, to practice every day, etc., making it easier to relate to the athletes I cover. However, my athletic experience is just that – athletic experience; it doesn’t make me a journalist. If I lack the talent and ability to deliver the news, my background in sports will not benefit me in journalism.

Upon analyzing this outright gender bias by management, I took a look in the mirror at my knowledge about football. No, I’ve never scored a touchdown, tackled someone flying down the field, or tried to block a 300-pound lineman; but even without that experience I am capable of reading an offense and defense, understanding schemes, positions and football terminology. So why wasn’t that knowledge enough to give me the opportunity to cover the Texans 2014 season? Why did James’ experience as a football player make him a better option as a journalist to cover the NFL?

In my previous studies of gender inequality in sports television in 2014, my findings included an issue in the hiring process. Data showed that on a national scale, 92.2% of sports
anchors and 81.3% of sports reporters are men (Hall 2010). So, not only are women not being considered for assignments that seem unfit for a woman, the hiring process is already putting women behind the eight ball and creating an imbalance in the sports broadcasting field. Research on this topic also sheds light on another issue: male viewers trust male sportscasters and would prefer hearing their sports news from a relatable man. A quote from the late Andy Rooney, a former host on 60 Minutes, is why this analysis is so important: “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.” (Coventry 2004) If a man in the broadcasting business is degrading his fellow woman in the broadcasting business, nothing will ever sway the public’s negative perception of women delivering sports news.

As a reaction to these findings, I decided to take small poll from the closest men in my life. I asked my boyfriend, my father and my two brothers a few simple questions: Would you prefer to hear football news from a man or a woman? Why? Do you trust one over the other? Why? What role should each gender play in a football broadcast, if any? All four of them had similar answers. They prefer a man delivering football news because “it’s the way it’s always been,” “women don’t play football,” and “men understand the game better.” All four men claim they trust men over women when discussing football. All four believe men should hold the primary roles in covering football and women should hold a secondary role, such as a sideline reporter. Needless to say, I had to remind each of them that I AM a woman in sports broadcasting.
Injustice Inside the Locker Room

When the 2015 season rolled around, I was told it was my time to shine. My News Director said I ‘earned’ the chance to prove myself as an MMJ. I wasn’t sure if that were really true or if James had disappointed management enough with this subpar work ethic that they were tired of sending him. Either way, I took my opportunity and made the best of it.

In all, I covered nearly every Texans home and away game in 2015. I traveled by myself to five games as an MMJ and was given a photographer to two away games, including Monday Night Football on ESPN for the Texans vs. Bengals in Cincinnati, Ohio.

My first road game alone was Week 2 of the season, Houston Texans at Carolina Panthers. I was so excited. I got on a plane with all my equipment and luggage, which is an achievement in itself. When one travels as an MMJ, he or she brings: a camera, tripod, laptop and laptop bag, a LiveU (a backpack-sized device that runs the live shot) and personal items like clothes, shoes, etc. Carrying this from my vehicle, into the airport, to check in, to the gate, onto the plane, off the plane, and to the rental car center is no easy task; but I was fueled by my belief that I was just as capable as any man to do this.

I arrived at Bank of America Stadium eager and ready to prove myself. I shot the entire game and was proud of how well it went. It was so hot down on the field and I quickly realized I was the only woman photographer. I didn’t have anyone to compare my outfit to; I was wearing a Nike T-shirt and jean shorts just like the rest of the photographers.
When the game ended I rushed into the locker room with the other photographers to get ready for post-game interviews. (Note: I had been in an NFL locker room all of last season during the Texans home games, so I was prepared) I huddled into a corner of the room, waiting for players to arrive; when they did, it was a different experience than when I was in Houston. The locker room was smaller, the shower area was wide open and players didn’t bother covering up. However, as a former college athlete I respected their area as a team, it was their space to unwind after the game, I understood that. But the respect from many players back to the media, especially the women, was limited. I constantly heard comments like: “Hey babe.” “What’s your Instagram name?” “I love your legs in those shorts.” “What hotel are you staying at tonight?” – it happened at every game I covered during the Texans season. I’m not sure what I had expected, but I certainly refused to compromise my professional morals for those athletes, so I ignored it.

As one can imagine, not a single male journalist was forced to deal with similar treatment while doing his job. Athletes answered the questions and kept things professional around the male journalists. But it never failed; athletes would often stand completely naked and laugh while answering my questions. This was and continues to be extremely frustrating as I try to do my job well and earn respect.
Analysis: Injustice Inside the Locker Room

When a woman enters the sports broadcasting business the horror stories about life inside a locker room ensue. Not until she actually experiences the injustice inside the locker room does the reality of this career come full circle. Similar to the way male viewers degrade female sportscasters, male athletes have proven to follow suit with their lack of respect. Instead of seeing just another journalist, many professional athletes see my gender, or legs, or anything other than my real purpose for being there.

Every woman in sports has heard the ‘rules of the locker room;’ never look down at your notepad or the players might think you’re trying to see their crotch, prepare yourself for the pickup lines and rude comments, don’t wear anything too tight, low cut, blah, blah, blah – the list goes on. But if you think that’s the ‘injustice’ women face in the locker room, you’re dead wrong. I have witnessed male reporters interview completely nude male athletes; whereas, it’s deemed inappropriate for a woman to do the same, I’ve tried it. I stood 15 feet away from a competing journalist interviewing a Texans player. He was getting an exclusive story simply because the athlete was naked and I was asked by public relations to back away. Of course I raised hell and eventually the male reporter was asked to stop his interview until the athlete was fully clothed and all members of the media could conduct the interview. The injustice lies in that I was forced to raise my voice and ‘ask’ that I don’t get beat on a story because the athlete has chosen to be naked.

I would be remiss to fail to recognize the progress that’s been made ‘allowing’ women inside the locker room. Many women before me were trailblazers in the movement for equality for women in sports broadcasting. However, it is our duty to continue to do better. We must do better. Progress has been made, no doubt – but full equality is still a ways off.
Clothing Expectations: Dress or Judgment?

I interviewed for my first real television job at FOX10 in Mobile, Alabama dressed in a pantsuit. Being a jock I loath getting dressed up for anything, so I figured that a pantsuit would be professional, comfortable and the perfect outfit for an on-air sports gig. Luckily, I got the job, but I’ll never forget what my news manager told me months after I began. He said, “Simone, please stop wearing pantsuits on-air. When you interviewed in that attire everyone thought you were gay, especially being a college basketball player.” Yeah, it’s safe to say I chalk that up as one of the insulting things someone has ever said to me.

When I began my job in Houston it was immediately out with the pantsuits and in with the dresses and heels. Everything I wore from head to toe was judged by everyone in the newsroom, in the locker room and in the city of Houston. I met with a consultant once a month to go over what I wore on air. The consultant (a man) would go through my shows and live shots pretty much telling me what to throw away when I got home.

Part of my journal includes a story from a luncheon we had at the station. That day I wore dress pants and a KPRC polo shirt (which was distributed by the station for the talent to wear). My general manager approached me with others around and asked, “Where did you get that shirt? It’s very unflattering, please quit wearing it.” I was stunned. I returned a very confused look and replied like a smartass, “YOU bought these shirts!” He ignored my comment and again told me to get rid of the shirt.
I spent the next few days watching our newscasts intently to see if other on-air talent wore the KPRC polo shirt. Many of them did – the men, that is. But nothing pissed me off more than when my male sports reporter counterpart wore his KPRC shirt. A man in the same position I held was allowed to wear his “unflattering” polo shirt because he didn’t have breasts to show off.

The discrimination didn’t stop inside the newsroom. With more than four million viewers in the Houston-area, a handful was bound to voice their opinion on a daily basis; whether it be an inappropriate comment or something plain rude. Here are a few:

• “Can someone please tell Simone Eli to attempt to not look like a homosexual on air every night?”

• “Damn Simone, those legs need some loving,”

• “Does anyone consult with Simone about her attire? She really needs help.”

I eventually figured out that it’s impossible to please everybody. Someone will hate you for wearing pants, a skirt, a dress or a bathrobe on television. I came to the realization that if I look in the mirror feeling good and confident, then it’s good enough for me.
**Analysis: Clothing Expectations**

I labeled this part of my journal “Dress or Judgment?” – indicating that if women in the sports broadcast business wear anything other than a skin tight, revealing, ‘sexy’ dress, she will be ridiculed and considered manly. But after thinking about it, I should have labeled the journal entry: “dress AND Judgment,” because really women are damned is they do or damned if they don’t. If I wear a dress I’m considered a slutty, cleat chaser; if I wear a pantsuit I’m *definitely* homosexual.

Most television station management now gives out an entire list of what’s expected of talent to wear. I’m pretty certain it’s given to both men and women simply so us ladies don’t speak up about the utter crap the list requires. I received one of these lists while at KPRC. It detailed the following: what I wear, the color I wear, when to wear it, jewelry allowed and not allowed, makeup expectations, gym expectations (aka, don’t be fat), the list went on. I compared notes with my male counterpart, his included: shirt and tie, makeup when necessary, clean facial hair. Extensive huh? My favorite part about our lists of expectations was that mine was a pretty pink and his was a manly blue, thank goodness they got the gender colors correct!
Social Media Sexism – The Good, Bad and Ugly

Oh social media, the root of all evil in the world nowadays. It’s challenging to pinpoint how social media affects my daily life because it’s such a useful tool for journalists, yet a dangerous tool for folks hiding behind their phones and computers.

I’ll begin with a part of my journal from the Astros 2016 MLB season. I was on the road covering the Astros against the New York Yankees; it was Opening Day at Yankee Stadium. The game was postponed a day because of rain, but we were allowed locker room access to speak with the players about the postponement. I interviewed a few guys and went about my business.

Later that night I received a direct message on Twitter from an Astros star player telling me how good I looked in the locker room that morning. Anyway, I ignored his private message, but it continued. He followed up by asking where I was staying that night and for my personal cell phone number. Again, I ignored it.

I woke up the next day eager to get to the ballpark and for the game to begin. The media had availability with players in the locker room prior to the game. When I entered the locker room we began to huddle around this “star player’s” locker, waiting for him to arrive and be interviewed. When he did, he looked right at me and rolled his eyes. During the interview I tried to ask him questions; he was very short with me and at times just plainly ignored my questions and waited for a different reporter to speak up. I was confused, irritated and somewhat embarrassed. When the interview ended and we started to walk away, he muttered, “I’m mad at
you.” I looked over and said, “What the hell did I do to you?” He claimed, “You’re ignoring me on Twitter.” While shaking my head I responded, “It’s going to stay that way.”

I tell that story to say this; I’m fairly certain there isn’t a ton of male journalists getting sexually harassed on social media by professional athletes they’re assigned to cover. The harassment continues with our viewers and the “internet trolls.” Rather than writing out the awful, awkward, and sometimes comical messages, you can read them:

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**Facebook User**

- 09/09/2015, 3:51 AM
  - Send me pictures of Ur feet and I will leave u alone

- 09/09/2015, 7:34 AM
  - Send me a picture of Ur feet to 8324690729

- 09/13/2015, 11:40 PM
  - Ur toes look pretty tonight I seen u on tv tonight

- 10/18/2015, 10:59 PM
  - Hey

- 10/19/2015, 12:06 AM
  - Plz don't b mad I love ur feet

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**Facebook User**

- FEB 16, 10:32 AM
  - YOU do great things for the Pink !!!!!!!!!!

- MAY 16, 12:19 PM
  - Luv those Kissable Lips !!!!!!!!!!

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**Facebook User**

- FEB 8, 9:22 PM
  - You are probably a lesbian. You better hope your boss never gets wind of your message. They don't like their public persona dragged through the mud. As for me, I answer to me.
Social media is a blessing and a curse – similar to this entire profession. With social media taking over the world, it’s given the world an unrestricted, direct line to those of us working in the public eye. The nasty comments and inappropriate words ‘come with the job,’ but it surely doesn’t make it acceptable. I add it to my journal to shed light on the reality of my career. Over the years I’ve developed many friendships with women in the same position I am in. Eventually we become numb to degrading words, but it’s unfair we’re put in the position to deal with the abuse to begin with.

Two nationally recognized sportswriters, Sarah Spain and Julie DiCaro published a YouTube video earlier this year revealing public, grotesque tweets and comments they’ve experienced. It included death threats, threats of rape and other sexually explicit language,
humiliating and demeaning comments about their appearances, and beyond. My point is not that men “don’t have to deal with this,” but that NO human should be victim of this cruelty.

**Conclusion**

Ever since I could walk and long before I could shoot a full sized basketball, I loved sports. I loved all sports. And despite all of the headaches we women deal with in the sports broadcasting field, I LOVE MY JOB. However, I am far from proud of everything I’ve witnessed behind the scenes of covering sports. I feel a strong responsibility to tell my stories of gender bias, sexual discrimination and outright injustice in my career and I am thankful that my master’s project provided a platform to do it. The only way change will occur is when the truth is exposed and a collective decision is made to make a difference. No one woman or man can do it alone. I applaud Sarah Spain and Julie DiCaro’s courage to share their stories of harassment, abuse, and embarrassment behind the scenes of sports broadcast. It’s unfortunate that to evoke change and equality, women must relive these humiliating experiences … just another headache making us stronger, better, wiser women in our field.
References


