The history of women sportscasters & their struggle for equality

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A Thesis

entitled

The History of Women Sportscasters & Their Struggle for Equality

by

Allyson B. Clifton

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

Master of Liberal Studies Degree in Communication

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May 2012
An Abstract of
The History of Women Sportscasters & Their Struggle for Equality
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Due to the early prejudices against women, today (particularly in the field of sports broadcasting) we constantly see reflections of the discriminations that women have faced throughout history. It wasn’t until the nineteenth century that women gained “rights,” which gave them some of the privileges that the male gender has always enjoyed. Much to the credit of Title IX, women today receive equal opportunity in many arenas of everyday life. This thesis analyzes the advancement of women in sports broadcasting as part of the broader frame of the history of gender equality. Based on academic research and personal one-on-one interviews, I conclude that even though the acceptance of female broadcasters is rising, the constant struggle still remains. Just as women fought for acceptance in what was once considered an “all boys club,” women have persevered until sports media has given at least some of them the benefit of the doubt that they do belong in a man’s world.
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Chapter One

Literature Review

Based on my research, I was able to draw conclusions about the impact of technology on the advancement of women journalists and the gender credibility of female sports broadcasters: Are females accepted in this male-dominated profession of sports broadcasting? According to the research I did, I realized that technology over time has not affected the advancement of females or their ability to hold their own in a workplace traditionally reserved for men as greatly as I initially expected. My research also reveals how Title IX has created equal opportunities for women in what was once a world run solely by males. In the rest of this chapter, I will review the literature by describing the results of my investigation. I have broken my subject down into these categories: the impact of Title IX on the lives of women, the gender credibility of female sports broadcasters, and female acceptance in sports broadcasting.

Impact of Title IX towards the Opportunity for Women Sportscasters:

Women began with very few rights in the world, and so for a long time women struggled to attain the “right” to hold many positions in the workplace and professions were “rights” women struggled to attain. In 1972, a new law, Title IX proclaimed: “No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation, or be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance” (Title IX 5). Therefore, this statute decreed that women could not be barred from taking responsibilities in the workplace that previously had been reserved for men. However, few applied this law to sports. The Title
*IX Legal Manual* depicts Title IX applied to all aspects of educational programs or activities operated by recipients of federal financial assistance (*Title IX* 3).

Regardless of whether Title IX made a difference in sports media at first, it has continued to affect the equality of both men and women. A recent article in the *Toledo Blade*, addressed a Toledo public school providing a baseball field for the boys at its brand new high school, yet forgetting about the girls’ softball field. Families in the school system took the issue to the U.S. Federal Government, thus linking the unfair decision to Title IX. “The U.S. Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights requested the district build the field so that facilities for girls and boys were comparable, according to school officials and a board of education resolution regarding an agreement reached with the federal office” (Rosenkrans, n.pag.).

The Toledo school case illustrates why the review of the literature included newspaper articles as well as books, government documents, scholarly journals, and Web historical pages. The next chapter traces the historical factors that have affected women who have sought careers in sports broadcasting. The works of Eleanor Flexner (author of *Century of Struggle: The Women’s Rights Movement in the United States*) and Janet Zollinger Giele (who wrote *Two Paths to Women’s Equality: Temperance, Suffrage, and the Origins of Modern Feminism*) provided historical context for understanding the experiences of modern female sports journalists. Several Web sources also proved invaluable for understanding women’s history. Perhaps the best was the National Women’s Rights Project page, which featured Bonnie Eisenberg and Mary Ruthsdotter’s “Living the Legacy: The Women’s Rights Movement 1848-1998.”
By aiming at general readers those publications examined the plight of female broadcasters. Therein, my sources reflect this dichotomy. For example, the *Newspaper Research Journal, Sports Illustrated, the Canadian Women’s Studies journal* all offered invaluable insights into the issues and accomplishments of women pursuing sports broadcasting careers.

**Gender Credibility of Female Sports Broadcasters:**

From the very beginning of time when women realized they wanted a shot at broadcasting, research shows that men have dominated the empire of reporting, whether in news or sports. Some studies like the work of Gunther, Kautz, and Roth point out that although industrialization and Title IX have empowered some women to narrow the gap a little in the disparity between the genders, only a few female reporters have landed jobs in sports broadcasting (74).

Gunther, Kautz, and Roth also wrote about the credibility of female sports broadcasters as well as examined the obstacles and discrimination that women have had to face to earn equality. The researchers concluded that no matter how talented or what position these women held in the broadcasting field, they continued to be challenged because of their gender (Gunther, Kautz, Roth 73). Sobel offers a case in point: During the 1970s, when ESPN reporter Lesley Visser, who now also works for ABC Sports, approached Terry Bradshaw (planning to do a story about the Pittsburgh Steelers), he took her notepad, signed his autograph, and then walked away (Sobel 12). Furthermore, women reporters who needed to speak to coaches and/or the starting athletes were forced to stand outside the locker room after a contest while men were allowed to speak to them immediately. In the same year, Druzin noted that the courts did not grant women equal
opportunity to be in a locker room after a contest until 1978 (Druzin n.pag.). The rules changed only because Amanda Ludtke took Major League Baseball to court after not being permitted in the locker room at the end of the 1977 World Series.

Despite that court case, in 1987 when Paola Boivin – the president of Women in Sports Media – went into the St. Louis Cardinals’ locker room, a player asked her whether she was there to actually do a report or just look at guys. Then, a jockstrap landed on her head (Druzin n.pag.). Just over 10 years later when Boivin entered the Arizona Diamondback locker room someone pulled on her jacket, and the son of a player, Steve Finley said, “Miss, miss…you can’t be in here. This is a place only for boys” (Druzin n.pag.).

Grubb and Billiot note that even in 2002 journalists were still commenting on gender as an issue in sports reporting. In fact, Gross recalled Andy Rooney, an anchor of 60 Minutes, saying: “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 n.pag.). Rooney claimed he was not a sexist person; however, he concluded, “a woman has no business being down there trying to make some comment about a football game” (Gross n.pag.).

Grubb and Billiot’s Credibility of Female Sports Broadcasters (2010) documented the obstacles, which females in this male domain have had to face. Another study concluded that most women in the field have experienced poor treatment due to their gender (Gunther, Kautz, Roth 73). For example, McNeill learned in 1995 that just men covered the 1990’s Professional Golf Association events simply because since only
males were participating, therefore, the officials reasoned that the reporters should also be male (MacNeill 122).

Just like the incident of Boivin being struck on the head with a jockstrap as recently as 2010, publicized events continued to prove that women are still facing harassment and credibility issues. For instance, Bishop commented that in September of 2010, Ines Sainz, who is a female reporter for TV Azteca, a Mexican TV network, requested the NFL investigate harassment from Defensive Backs Coach Dennis Thurman, including balls that were thrown “purposely” at her and sexually suggestive comments made in the locker room after practice (Bishop n.pag.).

Female Acceptance in Sports Broadcasting

Throughout history, women have been viewed as the uniquely creative source of human life. According to an article, “Women's History in America” from the Women’s International Center, women have been measured not only as intellectually inferior to men but also a main source of temptation and evil. In Century of Struggle: The Women's Rights Movement in the United States, Eleanor Flexner makes these same points (Flexner passim). Overall, according to research, since 1960, many women, including those with children, have joined the workforce and are now working outside the home, which is considered “normal” if not essential for women (Women's History in America” n.pag.).

In 2001, women constituted just 13 percent of employees, mostly in the ranks of clerks, copy editors and reporters (Hardin and Shain 22). A more recent report shows that just 11 percent of employees in sports departments are women (Book, Little, and Jessell 149). If one looked at the number for women on the “news” side of broadcasting, the
percentages would not be as substantial. Hardin and Shain report that although it is not equal to the number of men employed, it is much higher than in sports (Hardin and Shain 23). The exact number for women who work in sports media is not known although the Association for Women in Sports Media estimated it to be around 500 in the early twenty-first century (Hardin and Shain 22).

All five of my interviewees seem to believe that the participation of women in sports broadcasting has increased and has become more universally accepted. Hardin and Shain completed a study in 2004, in which they surveyed 144 women working in sports media. Most respondents believed that while the opportunities for women in sports media were better than ever; however, female journalists often did not feel accepted and were not taken as seriously as their male counterparts (Hardin and Shain 24).

Therefore, both the literature and the experiences of women now active in the sports media world indicate the percentages of female opportunities are rising. According to Book et al, the last twenty years has witnessed a substantial increase in the presence of women, and many of which received recognition in the trade press were because of on-air talent rather than from the executive suites (Book, Little, and Jessell 152).

This chapter began with the admission that nobody seemed to consider technology a major factor in the advancement of women into the profession of sports broadcasting. It is appropriate to end noting that the books, journal articles, magazine features, and newspaper reports all point to cultural dynamics as the sources of gender discrimination in journalism as well as in many other arenas of community life. The next
chapter will investigate women’s progress in proving themselves capable of excelling in politics and professions as well as on-air places once reserved just for men.
Chapter Two

Women’s Struggle for Equality in Society & the Newsroom

Up until the nineteenth century, women had struggled to gain the rights inherent in equality. Women were expected to fulfill only two tasks: child-rearing and housekeeping. For example, it was unacceptable for women to serve in government, speak freely, or simply cast a vote. People assumed that only men could handle political responsibilities (Flexner 3-21). During the early history of the United States a man practically owned his wife and children as he did his material possessions. For example, if poor men chose to take his children to the poorhouse, sell them into an indentured apprenticeship, or simply give them away, technically the mother was defenseless to object (Flexner 3-21). For many decades, laws did not protect her paternal rights. Throughout most of history, women generally had fewer legal rights and career opportunities than men. Wifehood and motherhood were regarded as women’s significant and natural professions (Flexner n.pag.). However, as we look more in depth at the history of women, we realize that perhaps most importantly, from the very beginning, women fought for and accomplished inspiring the reevaluation of traditional views of American life.

As time went on, one of the greatest things that happened to this world, and for women in particular was the Industrial Revolution roughly between 1820 and 1870. This cultural shake up resulted from replacing homemade goods with factory-produced wares. With the invention of machines, the discovery of steam and other sorts of power that replaced the strength of humans and animals, and lastly the establishment of the factory system, men suddenly viewed women and children as potential cheap labor. With this
new status, women became freer than ever before in such a male-dominated society. The Industrial Revolution factories enlisted women in full-time employment, therefore, eventually, lead them to opportunities of participating in large organized meetings with other females to discuss political and social issues. The conditions in the early factories: low pay, sun-up to sundown hours, brutal working conditions, and lethal safety hazards compelled workers to organize unions. Therein, at some of these meetings, patriotic women planned for their future with the vision of creating what they hoped would become “The New Republic” (Eisenberg and Ruthsdotter n.pag.).

For the first time in U.S. history, on July 19 and 20 of 1848, Susan B Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton convened a Women’s Rights Convention. They organized women at this Seneca Falls (New York) conclave to campaign for equal rights. They based their *Declaration of Sentiments* on “The Declaration of Independence.” Stanton, tied together the two manifestos because the *Declaration of Independence* embodies a powerful symbol of liberty and expresses the birthright of Americans that she believed should not be reserved just for men. Stanton compared these two documents to show the “history of mankind is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations on the part of man toward woman having in direct object the establishment of an absolute tyranny over her. To prove this, let the facts be submitted to a candid world” (Eisenberg and Ruthsdotter n.pag.). That summer Stanton was hopeful that this movement would make the future brighter for all women.

After decades of often bitter and sometimes violent struggle, the women finally won the right to vote in the U.S. elections in 1920. This triumph allowed the Women’s Rights Movement to continue in several directions since most suffragists considered the
victory part an ongoing struggle for equality. Although securing the right to vote and participate in the political process expanded women’s rights profoundly; nevertheless, problems in equality arose over time that the Declaration of Sentiments could not anticipate. A second wave of activism redefined the “Women’s Rights Movement” to reflect the realities of the 1960s. This second wave of events brought a different segment of the population into the movement.

In 1961, the director of the Women’s Bureau of the Department of Labor, Esther Peterson, considered the government obligated to actively address discrimination against women. Although women could vote, attend universities, and seek professional careers (particularly in teaching and nursing), social barriers still denied them most opportunities men enjoyed. Although they had steadily increased in numbers in many occupations following their “Rosie-the-Riveter” achievements in jobs normally performed by men during World War II, the cultural expectation remained that women belonged in the home raising children, not out in the workplace. By 1963, Peterson had issued a report that documented every act of discrimination against women in almost all areas of American life. Then, later that year Betty Friedan published a landmark book, The Feminine Mystique, which documented the emotional and intellectual oppression that continued to shackle educated middle-class women to low expectation. Finally, the push for equality generated a change that not only revolutionized attitudes towards women, but also correlated directly to this piece of work: Title IX of 1964 Civil Rights Act. Title IX prohibited employment discrimination based on sex as well as race, religion, and national origin (Eisenberg and Ruthsdotter n.pag.).
This law was not the final step in completing “The Women’s Rights Movement.” Many equality issues remain to this day that need to be addressed. From the time of the second wave and in particular the passing of Title IX, new issues have arisen. Those which include revisiting the Equal Rights Amendment, which Alice Paul proposed in 1923 and as early as 1776 Abigail foreshadowed with appeals to her husband, John, to remember the ladies and free them from the absolute tyranny of their husbands. Of course, the Declaration of Independence only protected white male property owners. Several centuries later in 1972 and 1986, women tried to pass Paul’s amendment granting their sex equal treatment in all ways under the U.S. Constitution. Their efforts kept consciousness of inequality alive but failed to pass legislation because of the controversy over gender roles in extreme conditions, like combat. Such issues inspired grassroots activists, to establish women’s newspapers, bookstores and cafes (Eisenberg and Ruthsdotter n.pag.). Feminists also sought to open shelters for those women who were victims of battery and rape, as well as sexual and domestic abuse. These advocates for change came together to build child care centers, birth control clinics, family counseling facilities, and other proactive resources. The list of changes to improve women’s lives has grown phenomenally over time.

For example, Title IX has empowered girls and young women to participate on teams and, thus, discover firsthand the role that sports can play in the lives of the people all around the world. Title IX in the Education Codes of 1972 guarantees women equal access to higher education and to professional schools. Athletics, however, usually dominates discussions of Title IX. According to research, statistics show drastic changes in athletics and tremendous improvements, too. The rise in female participation in
athletics tells the story: One in 27 high school girls played sports 25 years ago; one in three do today (Eisenberg and Ruthsdotter n.pag.).

Overtime, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission ruled the act of denying women the right to apply for jobs that traditionally had been considered too rigorous for them illegal. Because many employers ignored the ruling, NOW (the National Organization for Women) argued this issue all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court, believing it possible that one day women would hold any job for which they were qualified.

By 1988, 150 years had passed since the first landmark Women’s Right’s Convention. Certainly, Stanton’s Declaration of Sentiments in 1848 had helped women advance and inspired them to demand their rights in the workplace and at school. In the world of work, women have entered the professions, trades, and business of every kind. Even though much remains to be done, women have accomplished a lot. Stanton and the legions of brave leaders who followed in her footsteps have made the Women’s Rights Movement clearly succeed in forever changing the circumstances and hopes of women.

More specifically, women in sports broadcasting today continue to reflect the prejudices their sisters have overcome from the earliest times. They have benefited from the progress that began with industrialization of the nineteenth century, which transformed the institution of work from cottage enterprises to commercial factories, and with the formation of unions dedicated to ending the exploitation of workers. However, some women (like those seeking careers in sports journalism) and men, too, have not benefited fully from the progressive reforms because their work situations have fallen outside of union protection or cultural biases prevailed over reason and fairness.
Therefore, the sexual and racial segregation within sports broadcasting remains part of a large ongoing pattern of discrimination within the American labor force (Coventry 3). Beyond nursing and teaching which did not provide fair wages, the few occupations open to women during much of the twentieth century; domestic, clerical, secretarial, and assembly-line work, offered low pay and poor working conditions (Padavic and Redskin, 2002). Just as social norms denied women opportunities to study law, medicine, and other professions, these same biases exacerbated prejudices against female journalists who wanted to cover hard news, business, science, and especially sports. Nevertheless, despite the attempts to marginalize rebels who dared to compete with men in sports broadcasting from the earliest generation up until now, the public perception of women fighting for their own rights in what was and continues to be, a male-dominated profession has changed.

Occasionally, a viewer would notice a female reporting from the sidelines of a televised sports event by the 1940s; however, women have had to surmount centuries of sexism to take their place in the ranks of sports journalists. Obviously, if it were not for the women who persevered despite the pressures on them to quit during the pioneering era of sports broadcasting, we would not have embodied role models for today’s aspiring journalists and helped them avoid the professional potholes that had made their road to success bumpy. Women across America continue striving to get their chance at sharing the limelight of such a male obsessed profession. In the article from *Newspaper Research Journal*, “Female Sports Journalists: Are We There Yet?” Joanne Grestner, president of the Association for Women in Sports Media (AWSM), points out that the average career
span for women in sports is 10 years; moreover, most never reach management ranks (Hardin and Shain 23).

These grim realities reflect the American sports tradition of honoring the male players and not recognizing the stellar female athletes’ accomplishments or giving them the opportunity to prove themselves interesting to the sports fans. Women who cheer their favorite male teams may realize that the traditional structure of competition continues to deny female players and broadcasters opportunities to pursue their careers. Indeed, this unfairness, favoring of males has precipitated legislation, such as Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, to decrease sex discrimination in sports and academics around the nation at high schools and colleges (Gunther, Kautz, and Roth 73). Pam Ward, an ESPN sideline reporter since 2000 and a groundbreaker for any women working toward a career in the mostly male field offered advice in a 2008 USA Today article. She stated the women interested in entering into this business expect to participate in one capacity. “More than 90% of them want to do sidelines [sic] That’s what they see as possible. They see it as a female role” (Trumbull 8). She noted that most media outlets will not hire women to do jobs such as calling a men’s college basketball game. “I don’t think the opportunity is there. Maybe I shouldn’t have said that” (Trumbull 7).

From the pioneering era to the present moment, the research indicates how the standards have changed as women have fought for equality. One of the pioneers, Gayle Gardner, once said, “For women especially, this profession will never stop being a struggle with constant blows which must be taken” (Schwartz n.pag.). Nevertheless, several groundbreakers have paved the way for future and present generations of women in sports broadcasting. Many paradigms competed in games, therein, defying the rules of
their culture. Some were powerful enough socially to evade consequences, but others risked sharing fate of all outcasts whose ideas will resonate in future eras but only bring them trouble in their own times.

For example, Greek women began competing with one another in the Games of Hera when they were excluded from the Olympics in 776 B.C., and Queen Mary (Queen of the Scots) coined the term “caddy” while playing gold in 1552. Most women participated in individual sports like hot-air balloon and horse riding or ice-skating until the 1860s. Men and women formed clubs to play croquet together in the 1860s and in 1866 Vassar College established the first women’s baseball team. Thus, until about 150 years ago, women were not allowed to participate in sports without risking social repercussions. This exclusion from physical games and matches complemented the destructive mythology of female weakness that justified their prohibition from society (without proper chaperones), the workplace (outside of the home), and politics (beyond their husband’s or father’s views). It was no wonder that Susan B. Anthony, the mouthpiece of the suffrage movement, declared in 1896, “Bicycling has done more to emancipate women than anything else in the world. I stand and rejoice every time I see a woman ride on a wheel. It gives women a feeling of freedom and self-reliance.” Perhaps, involvement in sports accomplished those same goals, and, thus, like the bicycle, threatened the patriarchal pecking order.

At any rate, the growth of radio and television in the twentieth century inspired women to venture into broadcasting. None of research or articles indicated what woman delivered the first sports broadcast. However, the wife of Harry Johnson is among the earliest females in the sports broadcasting limelight. Although she made history, her first
name was not recorded because she lived in a time when women were identified as wives, the socially accepted status. First names carried the shameful suggestion that they had not married at all or were divorced. Mrs. Johnson provided color commentary for her husband’s show with Central States Broadcasting in Omaha, Nebraska (Schwartz n.pag.). Along with Mrs. Johnson other women earned respect as pioneers of women's sports casting: Jane Chastin, Donna De Varona, and Jeanie Morris. From the very beginning these women faced tremendous challenges that emanated from treatment by male colleagues, working conditions on the job, and standards that seemed to increase just for them. Because of the unfairness that they encountered in nearly every direction, these women have fought for the right to equality in a male-dictated profession, and their courage has empowered each succeeding generation to continue the struggle for equal rights as sports journalists.

Jane Chastin is the first women in history who worked for a large network (CBS) and historians believe she is the first woman to do play-by-play analysis. Her ability to make her mark in such a field as sports broadcasting did not spare Chastin from all sorts of difficulties. For example, the men on her TV crew did not accept a female in what they considered to be only a “male's” position and would not help her in the ways they assisted each other (Schwartz n.pag.).

Another female, Jeanine Morris, got into the field unscathed, but experienced a different type of tough luck. Because she was a female, she was not afforded the same facilities as the males were given. For example, Morris sat outside in a blizzard covering an NFL game because she was not permitted inside the “booth” with men. Once women were finally allowed to sit in the “booth” area, they still faced issues such as walking long
distances to use the bathroom, because no proper facility was created for them.

Another instance in which women were treated unequally involved Phyllis George. As a former Miss America she worked the CBS Pre-Game show for the NFL in the mid 1970s, which meant she was hired to bring beauty queen glamour to football. When she surprised them by actually being able to do the work well, instead of accepting her “good on-air” talent and capabilities, they refused to let her do interviews because she had little journalistic background; thus, she often presented what someone else had documented. Jayne Kennedy, another attractive woman, replaced George. However, by the end of their tenures, insiders said neither was hired for her knowledge of football, but because she could add a feminine touch to the male-saturated airwaves.

The list continued to build, and in 1988, Leandra Reilly became the first woman to do play-by-play on a network men’s basketball telecast. She filled in for Steve Albert on the Sports Channel telecast of an NBA game between the New Jersey Nets and the Philadelphia 76ers. Lesley Visser, who began her career in 1974 with the Boston Globe moved on to TV, in her 30 plus years as a woman broadcaster has won many prestigious awards for covering major events in multiple sports, including being designated as the No. 1 Female Sportscaster of All Time in a poll of American Sportscasters Association in 2009 and being the first woman inducted into the Pro Football Hall of Fame. She currently works for ESPN and ABC Sports. Gayle Gardner, the first female sports anchor to appear on a major network, started as the main feature writer and an anchor for NBC in 1988. Sports Illustrated pointed out that her salary in 1991 as the highest paid woman sports broadcaster was nearly ten times less than the highest paid male anchors earned, and at least $100,000 less than men the magazine considered her professional peers took
home. Linda Cohn started with CBS and in 1992 joined ESPN as an anchor for Sports
Center and continues to appear regularly on that program. These women are just a few
whose passion, knowledge, and stamina have empowered them to endure the challenges
to get to the “top.”

A female sportscaster in the Northwest Ohio area, Natalie Taylor, a Van Wert,
Ohio Native also has endured many of the same hardships as the early pioneers who have
inspired her. Although she has never wavered from her goal to be a professional
sportscaster, she does admit even from her first days she faced skeptics who were not
sure she would ever make it in such a competitive field. While giving a speech in her
hometown one evening, Taylor noted how difficult it is to be a woman in the man's world
of sports broadcasting (Mosier n.pag.). She noted that it is not very easy to forget she is
competing in a man's world because whenever she makes a mistake, the fans interpret her
error as not knowing what she is doing; however, the fans simply pass off the same
misstep if a man makes it (Mosier n.pag.).

Women are criticized for their makeup and dress as well as for trivial errors.
Whether they are hired for their feminist views, or their knowledge, they continually face
negative, often illogical opinions from the crowd. Taylor, who has worked in sports
casting for eight years, said that the social media keeps her constantly under surveillance.
This public scrutiny means her wardrobe, hair, voice and looks in general, according to
Taylor “are food for comment” (Mosier n.pag.).

This chapter has reviewed the history of women in sports broadcasting, beginning
with the struggle for equality in social, professional, and political arenas that not only
resulted in women winning the right to vote but also in the freedom to explore
possibilities beyond marriage. The battle for equal rights has taken centuries and continues to this day as women seek careers in long-standing male-only fields, like sports broadcasting. The next chapter will focus on the memories of five pioneers in sports broadcasting whom I interviewed over several months in 2011 and 2012.
Chapter Three
Voices of the Pioneers

For my thesis I had the opportunity to conduct personal one-on-one interviews with five women currently employed in the broadcasting world. Combined with scholarly articles in journals, items in newspapers, and general magazine features; these one-on-one interviews with women, who have endured despite the struggle, will provide insights essential to interpreting how the past has shaped the present and the present will mold the future. My interviews included these personalities: Robin Roberts host of Good Morning America; Christine Brennan, a prolific sports journalist for USA Today; Chrys Peterson, a brilliant news anchor for WTOL-11 News; Stephanie White, a very knowledgeable coach for the Indianapolis professional basketball team, the Indiana Fever (WNBA) who also works as an ESPN and Big Ten Network sports analyst; and LaChina Robinson, a bright young ESPN analyst just three years into the business. In this chapter, I am going to analyze the parallels in the personal experiences these women have described, which have made them trailblazers for today’s generation of women seeking a role in sports reporting.

Under the leadership of Good Morning America's anchor, Robin Roberts, the broadcast has won three Emmy Awards for best morning program (Roberts Biography n.pag.). Robin Roberts didn't start her career on the news side of broadcasting, also known as, the “dark side.” She explained that she had not aspired to work on a TV news show. “It just kind of happened,” Roberts recalled. “Put it this way. GMA wasn't on the board of success, that wasn't on my board.” Little do many people know, when Roberts was a very young child she did more than dream; she set goals. In fact, one goal has
always remained a story for her to share with others. “My mom kept this poster I had made that said, ‘I want to be a success,’ and I miss- spelled success,” Roberts remembered. Although she could not spell the word, the idea inspired her to persevere until she had made her goals a reality. Robin believes that act of writing words motivates people to reach their potential. “I was just always one of those people that when you write it down there is something about the written word that is far more powerful than just thoughts in your head,” Roberts said. So while still a child, Roberts realized that she had to take action as well as dream. In her formative years, she found meaning in her life through athletics, high school, education, family and friends. Roberts learned success wasn’t going to happen if she just imagined herself advancing. Instead, Roberts distilled goals from her daydreams and watched them unfold.

My second woman broadcaster, Christine Brennan, does not fit any one specific title that effectively describes her accomplishments and everyday life-style up to this point in her career. She is a sports journalist for USA Today; has worked for the Washington Post; appears on CNN, ABC, NPR, and ESPN as well as other networks. Presently, she is also working on a documentary for ESPN, which had led her to coordinating her own work, “I am my own boss, and I love that,” Brennan said.

Brennan credited her “atypical” childhood with paving what her life is all about today. In fact, she fondly recalls her adventures with her dad who inspired her first book, “The Best Seat in the House: a Father, a daughter, a Journey Together,” a New York Times best seller. “My role model was my dad,” she pointed out. “I couldn’t wait for him to get home from work so he could play catch with me. He taught me everything I knew about sports.”
Listening to LaChina Robinson tell her story emphasizes the importance of attitude and determination for many girls who grew up convinced they had been called to seek a career as a sports broadcaster. Despite the cold reception her dream received at home, Robinson persevered and today is known as an ESPN analyst. Robinson was the first female “athlete” on her mother's side. After all, back then, nice girls did not get dirty, sweat, or beat boys when playing games. In fact when Robinson told her mom that she wanted to play basketball, her mom’s answer wasn’t what one would expect since her daughter later graduated from Wake Forest College after paying for her education with a full-ride basketball scholarship. Her mother stated, “Oh, that sounds rough, and they're going to be stepping on your feet and stuff.”

Robinson did not see much of sports, especially featuring women players, either while watching television as a little girl. “It came across my radar, and I did know that women did participate in sports,” Robinson said. “Again it was the problem of only seeing women athletes on the Olympic level, and I very rarely saw women playing any basketball.”

Stephanie White, assistant coach for the Indiana Fever (a team in the Women’s National Basketball Association) and an analyst for ESPN and the Big Ten Network, has always been around the game ever since she was an infant. “I actually have a picture of me with my dad when I was first brought home from the hospital with him holding a basketball in one hand and me in the other,” White said. However, she noted that her interest did not just revolve around the game. Her parents taught her to appreciate the work ethic and life lessons that she could learn playing the game. White believes a lot of those family experiences have helped shape who she is and taught her what it takes to be
succeed in her chosen profession of sports broadcasting. “Now, in the broadcasting world, people do not last long unless they have the work ethic to continue and I think that [truth prevails in] a lot of life,” White pointed out.

Like Roberts, Robinson, and White, Chrys Peterson has triumphed in securing a place in a male-fixated world, TV news. Although she is not a sports broadcaster, she as the news anchor for a local Toledo, Ohio, station WTOL-11, and she has endured many of the same hardships as the sportscasters. Peterson has worked on the news side of broadcasting since the moment she got into this business.

“To be perfectly honest, I did think about sports casting when I first started out,” she said. However, just as life throws curve balls to people sending them in directions they may not have intended, Peterson said the opportunities fell outside of sports, and so news was where she landed. On the other hand, Peterson pointed out that she has like sports all her life. She thinks her mentality of an athlete who is not satisfied with coming in second has helped her succeed. Furthermore, working in TV in any capacity involves women in the struggle to reach equality.

“I think it's very funny that men who are the main sports watchers hold women to a higher standard than male sportscasters,” Peterson said. One thing Peterson said she learned at a very young age was the value of helping others. In fact, as a child seeing that altruism in an anchor-woman inspired Peterson years later to pursue the same career. “I kept thinking that it so awesome that she gets to anchor the news, which seems like a very cool, fun job, plus she also helps people – and that impression never really left me,” Peterson said.

With all five of these broadcasters, I discussed the struggles that women have
always and continue to face to prosper in a male-run on-air universe. The conversations
touched on the importance of Title IX, viewship responses toward females as opposed
to males, personal experiences of working in a male-centered profession, and the
emotional toll of being left out of the exclusive boy’s club that sports often comprises of.
We also considered whether a gender-based credibility gap still exists in the sports
casting profession, whether the level women hired matters, and whether their appearance
continues to matter more than their skills or knowledge. I think readers will be surprised
that while some interviewees believed things have drastically changed for the better while
others disagreed.

Title IX is the reason why woman can have a say in politics, why they are allowed
to contribute to many arenas in the work force, and so on. When President Richard Nixon
signed Title IX in June of 1972, the new law granted equality for both genders. As I told
my interviewees that Title was important to me, three of the five women either remember
it happening or definitely knew of its existence. They all agreed with me, that today's
generation takes it for granted. Although the fading of Title IX from public
consciousness is said to hear, according to Christine Brennan, it is almost a good thing.

“I always say we could not have what we did not know,” Brennan said. “I am glad
you don't think about it. The whole point is to not have to worry about it (equality).”
Robin Roberts, on the other hand, graduated from high school just seven years after Title
IX was enforced. She credits her basketball scholarship and the expanded role women
can hold in the world of sports today to Tile IV.

“The reason I got a college scholarship was because of Title IX. Title IX
was enacted in72, and I graduated in ‘79, so without Title IX I would not
have gotten a scholarship...I am always one to believe you should respect
your history and know your history. And for those who don't get it, I
would say, how would you like to play – say you are on a basketball team, in a unitard, with your number taped on your back? Just close your eyes for five minutes, and think about those things, then I think you would understand and appreciate Title IX, 40 years later.”

Chrys Peterson pointed out that Title IX continues to matter. “To me, Title IX, still is an issue,” she said. She explained that to provide equal opportunities schools have begun to cut men’s sports because they cannot afford to fund both. In her own life, Peterson explained, Title IX did not open closed doors. “To me, it was never an issue growing up,” she said. “I never felt like there was something a girl couldn't do that a boy could, and part of [the perceptions starts in the home.] It’s your upbringing, and your parents.”

According to The Toledo Blade, in 2012, the law still shaped public policy concerning equal opportunities at schools. The U.S. Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights requested the district build a field so that facilities for girls and boys were comparable. School officials and the board of education sent a resolution regarding their agreement to the federal office. The field must be completed by Feb. 1, 2013 (Rosenkrans n.pag.) As Roberts mentioned, today’s women sportscasters are concerned, and Title IX is the backbone that enables women to reach credibility in the sports profession.

Another problem that women continue to face is the constant negative remarks they hear from disgruntled viewers who degenerate into hecklers at the slightest provocation. Moreover, the criticism doesn’t just involve critiquing the coverage of the game or sports event; the viewer’s pay attention to the way women sportscasters look, sound, and act in front of the camera. The sportscasters pointed out that men and women can behave the same way but be perceived entirely differently. Moreover, spectators pay
more attention to the clothes, makeup, and hair of women than men broadcasters. “The funny thing about fans is they always have an opinion,” White said.

Lucky for White she is a sportscaster who has played the game at the professional level and also coaches at that level, so she realizes that she should not take the feedback too seriously. “Because I see the game from an athlete and coach’s perspective, they really like that angle and the matter of factness,” she said. “There are people though who would critique some of my country coming through, the way I pronounced certain words, or the way I said certain words. I didn’t get critiqued as far as what I said, as much as how I initially said it.”

On the other hand, from the very beginning of her broadcasting career, Peterson has received comments that a lot of times deal with her looks. “They want to talk about your hair, your eyebrows, and the suit you are wearing,” Peterson said. “They would never talk about those things with a man, NEVER.” “I wish I had had the confidence in my early twenties that I have in my late forties because the comments people can make about you are hurtful.” It doesn’t just stop with voice and appearance. Roberts said when she took a job in Nashville, Tennessee, no one knew her or her past, and so the feedback began right away. “When I started out, the local paper did an article about ‘woman joining the WSNB sports team.’ It was my first day at work, and I hadn’t even been on the air yet, and somebody calls me, and they’re saying well, I don’t like you.” Roberts hadn’t even shown her face, and she was being criticized. “It was a guy who said I don’t like any woman sportscaster; why do you have to do this?”

As far as these women are concerned, this unreasonable scrutiny still occurs. LaChina Robinson advises women broadcasters to expect the criticism without being
devastated. “Yes, I do hear the good, the bad, and the ugly,” Robinson said. “You’re put into positions where people have an opinion on whether you should be in that position or not. The criticisms come along with the job.”

This thesis has discussed the struggles that women have had to face to reach equality in a man’s world. The gender-based credibility gap from when women first entered sports broadcasting has shrunk but still exists today. For example, Brennan believes that sports journalism has moved farther ahead in terms of respect than sports broadcasting. However, her work in front of the camera has convinced her that a gap definitely is apparent. “I wish women were treated as equal in sports broadcasting,” she said. “I wish we were in the booth calling games or play-by-play. I know they’re some women Pam Ward, Beth Mullens on ESPN with Football, but it is very rare.” Robinson believed that judgments about female broadcasters often depend on whether the woman had played the sport she was covering. “Yes, I do think one credibility gap still exists. I think people believe that if you did not play that sport, you cannot be an expert at it. I think you just have to continue to cross those lines and break down those barriers.”

According to Stephanie White, taking into account that she is dealing with two styles of viewership and that can make a difference. “Absolutely, the credibility gap exists,” she pointed out. A casual viewer doesn’t like to watch women’s basketball. Right? Because they are the casual viewer, they like the high flying, acrobatic, whatever. Now does a true hard core sports fan have that same feeling? I don’t think so. I think true sports fans, like listening to Doris Burke just as much as they’d like listening to Jeff Van Gundy because they’re sports analysts who understand their sports.”
White and Roberts took the same approach. Roberts, much to my surprise, does NOT think a gender-based credibility gap still exists, although there once used to be a gulf in equality. She explained with an anecdote:

“Not as much. Back in the day, I really felt that people would look at me at ESPN – the guys – viewers. If I started joking around and said ‘innings’ instead of ‘quarters’ – knowing that I knew the difference, but if they thought I had just slipped up, they would go, ‘Ha! Ha! Ha! I knew she didn’t know.’” But if ‘Boomer’ did it or one of the men, they would say, “Oh, you knuckle head, you’re so funny.” I always felt like I was fighting “for” credibility to prove myself. And so to some extent, it is still the case with women – to a certain extent. But there is NOT nearly the doubt today, that when see a women doing sports that your eyebrow goes up. It’s just more common place to see women now, and you give women more the benefit of the doubt that they know sports,“

After pondering the gender-based credibility gap, we consider whether women have been accepted as capable, skilled professionals in sports broadcasting or if the old prejudices against woman still pertain. Does beauty matter more than substance in determining if a woman is hired and at what level? The respondents wavered in their views on this subject. Nevertheless, a common theme my interviewees mentioned was, preparation, especially at the national level. “Phyllis George was Miss America, and then she’s on Monday Night Football,” Peterson recalled. “She was smart enough though to do her research and not make gaffs on the air. But I think now, in this business, things are so disposable that it is easy for people to say that if it doesn’t work out in three months we will just find another girl. You CANNOT rely on your looks. You CANNOT rely on who you know. You have to be prepared.”

White observed that hiring is based on the level of competence and is still in a transitional phase emphasizing looks. “I think it is a little bit of both, and the equation changes,” she said. “They certainly want women now a days who are knowledgeable,
but sex appeal is still there. I think you would be naïve to think it wasn’t.” In contrast, though Robinson values preparation as critical for success in sports casting, she thinks a lot of opportunities heavily rely on sex appeal. “If they had to choose between two people, and one was attractive, but the other knew a little bit more, I think because TV is such a visual field, they would navigate toward the more attractive person. This shallowness is unfortunate. I think we live in a society that unfairly values good looks beyond sometimes things like credibility or beyond knowledge.”

Roberts simply believes that at the national level, we have passed the ex-beauty queen stage and that substance is critical in today’s sports world. “They want knowledge,” she explained. “You have to back up comments with knowledge.” She pointed out that “looks” no longer are enough to compensate for superficial or flippant coverage. Roberts remembered the early days when producers emphasize sex appeal over professionalism and, therein, compounded the problem of qualified, talents female beginners. She said the Barbie doll image some networks insisted early women sports casters project was frustrating as well as insulting to women trying to establish themselves in the field. Roberts concluded with this anecdote:

“It is frustrating, I can remember, the first time I saw a woman on the sidelines in a tank top. She was a sideline reporter covering a college game. She was blonde and had on this tank top. I hit the roof. I felt like “what are you doing?” You can’t be doing this to us.” That’s just going to set us (women) back.”

Brennan noted that 1971 Miss America beauty queen, Phyllis George, proved herself to be far more than just a pretty face, despite the low expectations of the men who had hired her to add a bit of glamour and charm to the sports show. Since then, ESPN’s
Rachel Nichols, Suzy Kolber, and Michele Tafoya, have proven that success for female sportscasters does not depend on their appearances. Brennan offered this explanation:

“Again look at who is on ESPN now - I mean Rachel Nichols - I have mentored her and known her for years: she is WONDERFUL. But Rachel is not Miss America. Michelle Tafoya; Fabulous. Suzy Kolber; Fabulous. They rock on air, but they are not Miss Americas. They are there because they are solid and really great.”

Brennan commented on her experiences as well pertaining to sex appeal versus substance. “I am not there because of looks,” she concluded. “I am very comfortable with how I look, but my sports journalism is about content.” She summed up the perception of viewers about women’s sportscasters today. “I really think we have missed the point [by continually mentioning sex appeal] as we focus on those getting a lot of attention,” Brennan said. “[This emphasis on looks] is just awful. They are people doing sports broadcasting because they are really great.”

Lastly, these women sportscasters commented on just how tough it really is today to work in this profession. These women chose this career, and have established their credibility despite being a woman in a man’s world because of their passion, love for sports, as well as their skill and talent. Some of them said the job itself has affected them incredibly. In fact, Robin Roberts described her work as, “unbelievable, unpredictable, and satisfying beyond my wildest dreams and more powerful that I ever expected.” Her initial thought heading into this profession was that she was going to have tremendous fun just covering of games, but she later realized that her career thus far has involved much more than going to a bunch of games. “I realized through telling the public about my breast cancer diagnosis that the power of my role in sharing knowledge with people had far exceeded what I had expected early in my career.”
Christine Brennan compared herself to Dorothy in the Wizard of Oz: “I am truly living my dream – doing exactly what I love to do,” she explained. “I love it more today than the day I started.” Brennan told an interesting story, about her childhood she would go to the Olympics as a fan. She has far exceeded that goal. “It is so surreal,” Brennan said. “I almost just want to pinch myself. I have been to 15 Olympics in a row, from LA in 1984 to now in London. It is a dream come true.”

Stephanie White and LaChina Robinson both credited where they are today in the sports casting world to being prepared, knowing the right people, and simply being themselves. “It has been awesome. I don’t feel like I work.” Robinson said. She said that through her experiences thus far have taught her these things: “You have to be yourself. Be comfortable and never take shortcuts. There is no way to become good without doing your homework. Know that you’re a woman and you deserve to be there.” White also believes heavily in preparation and the work ethic. “If I could do it over, and really knew that I wanted to do this, I would watch and learn every sport, because there is that much more of a market and that much more to be exposed to,” she said.

Although Chrys Peterson is a news anchor and not a sports caster, she also shared the feeling that the broadcasting business is incredibly rewarding. Wanting to help people motivated Peterson, and each act of reaching out to other through her broadcasts increased her job satisfaction. “The need for human connection will never change,” Peterson noted. “That is why people tune into broadcasts; it’s why sports casters put people on the sidelines. They want to make a personal connection with people. Studies out there right now show that the need for a personal connection is the greatest right now.” I think Peterson made one of the boldest statements in my interviews with
these five women. In her final thoughts about females trying to succeed in this male-dominated profession, she pointed out, “You don’t have to prove you are better than a man; you just have to prove you can do the job.”
Chapter Four

Conclusions

Answering Questions about Women’s Role in Sports Broadcasting

This thesis began with these research questions:

1. What challenges stood in the way of women achieving their dreams of being sports broadcasters?
2. How did women overcome those challenges to receive the respect they deserved as sports broadcasters?
3. How has technology increased challenges for female sports broadcasters over the years and even in the present?
4. What have women done to reach the top of the sports broadcasting world?

Therefore, it is appropriate to end by directly addressing each inquiry. The literature review of books, dissertations, newspaper articles, general magazines, and Web documents revealed patterns worth exploring. Of course, absolute answers are never possible because situations evolve over time, especially in response to cultural and technological changes—some innovations (like computers) we call progress; other developments (like the invasion of privacy or increase of fraud that accompanied the expansion of the Internet) we later regret. Let’s begin by examining the first question:

Challenges Confronting Aspiring Women Sports Broadcasters

Of course, these frequently illogical problems motivated women to persevere, which reflects the next question: How did women overcome those challenges to receive the respect they deserved as sports broadcasters?

When I interviewed my five pioneers, I proposed a question that enabled them to offer advice to any young female trying to start a career in sports broadcasting. I believed that this approach would allow them to share how they had overcome obstacles that could
instantly turn them too many women today away from seeking opportunities in this profession. Chrys Peterson shared with me insights that helped her along the way. For example, she thinks sincerity is critical for succeeding. “Above everything else that you do, you have to be yourself on TV,” she said. “Because people will see right through it. I always say you have to be the genuine representation of yourself.” That encouragement to avoid putting on a mask, seemed to be a trending thought. LaChina Robinson expressed the same thought. “You have to be yourself,” she emphasized. “When you’re not comfortable with who you are, then other people see that [doubt] on TV, so you can’t appear to be saying with your body language, ‘Oh I am a woman and this is not my place.’”

**Hard Work, Determination, and Talent Empower Success**

Women pursuing a career in sports broadcasting face the challenges of finding opportunities to write about sports and make themselves heard. Their tools for success have included these tactics: networking with other women and sympathetic men, earning degrees in journalism, playing sports, learning from their experiences, and persevering despite the hardships.

The dream to succeed fueled the ambition and determination of successful female sports broadcasters. However, naturally, one would expect the ever-changing technology and the assumption that only men are mechanically minded to generate hurdles for women. However, the interviewees concurred that cultural biases far outweighed the barriers generated from the innovations. They all mention role models and formative experiences. For instance, Stephanie White and Robin Roberts both said that they understood the intangibles and life lessons learned from playing games as well as from
growing up around sports. Today, they draw upon their lifelong exposure to sports and career track record to survive today in this tough profession where emotions rather than reason often prevail in dealing with males versus females for promotions and other opportunities. Sports enthusiasts remember White as a prolific basketball player. During her years at Segar High School in Indiana, she logged 2,869 points and remains second on the all-time leading scoring list. At the University of Purdue, White finished her career as the National College Player of the Year and played on the team that won Purdue’s first national championship. Then she joined the Women’s National Basketball Association with the Charlotte Sting before returning to her home state to rule the court for the Indiana Fever. White explained that just as playing basketball was a “proving somebody wrong kind of thing,” and those ambitions transferred into her professional career. “I remember one teacher in middle school,” she recalled. “He said, ‘Well, you know, when you get offers from Tennessee, come show me because that is when I will believe you are any good.” White credits her work ethic and determination with motivating her to continue her high school basketball career to the next two levels. Now, she sees the same characteristics of diligence and dedication as vital to being great in the broadcasting world. “I always feel like I have to prove myself,” White said. “But for me, I think that just comes from being a competitor; I am always trying to get better.”

“Having It All” Is More Problematic than Mechanical Issues

The current push to educate women to enter science and technology fields might suggest that broadcasting innovations also would scare them away. However, like researchers before me, I found that women repeatedly have expressed more concerns over balancing their roles at home and at work than with mastering new equipment.
When I began this research, I wondered if the centuries of prejudices against women’s voices being inferior to men or assumptions that women were too frail to lift heavy objects still persisted. I think the issue of vocal quality might be hidden in arguments about the credibility gap, audience acceptance, and criticism of very minor errors of only female broadcasters. However, biases against women’s voices formed and undercurrent in Sally Jenkins’ 1991 *Sports Illustrated* article, “Who Let Them In?” She reported that in that same year, Gayle Sierens made history as the first woman to offer play-by-play commentary when executive producer Michael Weisman assigned her to cover the NFL game between Seattle and Kansas City for NBC. Sierens’ remark reflects the uphill battle women still face because of their vocal range. “Truthfully, even I thought it was strange to hear a woman’s voice doing it” (Jenkins n.pag.). Sierens left sports journalism to pursue hard news, a realm where women were more likely to be accepted. The sports agent who represented George and Leslie Visser, Ed Hookstratten, predicted women would not succeed in play-by-play positions until “the guy with the six-pack who wore spikes accepts them” (Jenkins n.pag.).

Although the women I interviewed did not mention vocal differences, Chrys Peterson commented on technology. She said that besides handling her assignments in the field, if she wanted to succeed and maintain her position, she had to do manual labor. She recalled hauling cumbersome tools of her trade:

“When I first began, everybody was a one-man band. The equipment was horrible. I had to carry 60 pounds of cameras, keep a tape deck on this arm, and a camera on the other arm. I walked around trying to talk to somebody as they were heading up the sidewalk. I was carrying all this stuff and trying not to trip. It was
kind of a comedy of errors sometimes that you even got anything on air in time.”

She concluded that those experiences have helped make workdays now less stressful and increased her appreciation for technology. Not surprisingly, despite their diligence, craft, and persistence, comparatively few women have risen to the top echelon of sports broadcasting jobs. The last research question concentrated on how women have overcome the obstacles to serve in leadership roles.

How a Few Women Sports Casters Have Cracked the “Glass Ceiling”

The Book et al article, “75 Years of Broadcasting and Cable Magazine: An Examination of Women Featured in Broadcasting & Cable’s ‘Fifth Estater’ 1931–2006,” offers some recent relevant statistics about women in power in the cable and broadcasting industries. The feminists refer to the “glass ceiling” as the divider that allows women to see the power but never share it. Book explains that not many have gotten into the boys club yet. Robin Roberts recalled her early career: “My emotions were mixed. I was more excited than anything. I had been interviewed at ESPN a couple years before that, and in 1987 I had only been out of school for four years. I was just really overwhelmed. The network was still in its infancy. It was like an all-boys club, and I was thinking, “Ahh, I don’t know about this.” I think this example illustrates the influence of male dominance early in sports casting. Roberts remembered her hopes to build that initial offer from ESPN into a lifelong career. “I received an offer to go to Atlanta, Georgia, and be a sports reporter and anchor, and I was “SOLD,” she said. “I thought, ‘let me go there; that will be great. I can get more experience because I really want staying power when I make it to the network level.”

Women’s struggle to take their place in sports broadcasting began a long time ago
and reflects the expansion of their circle to include the workplace and professions as well as the home. Suffragists successfully demanded the vote over a century ago. Although on the surface women may seem to be equal, an in-depth examination reveals pro male discrimination generally in leadership roles and specifically in sports broadcasting. The interviews with broadcasting pioneers made me realize that women were not allowed to enter the field until recently. The prejudice against female sports journalists has inspired some to strive to be role models for the next generation. Robin Roberts explained, “I knew that when you’re a woman trying to do something, or you are anyone in a non-traditional role for your gender – or your race – that your margin for error is less. So I did feel some pressure and responsibility, but I internalized it and made it a positive factor.” Today, young women seeking a career in sports journalism can learn from the stories of Robin Roberts and the other predecessors, thus, benefiting from their wisdom.
Chapter Five

Further Research & Limitations

Just as with any research, I believe there is always more that can be done. I think one limitation for me on this study was time, sample size, and the continued growth of the sports-casting profession. For women in sports journalism, the profession is still a work in progress. It was hard for me to make a large number of connections with pioneers to get more information. Time did not allow for me to accomplish that objective. I think further research should expand the topic to compare radio and television or analyze programs where woman have prevailed, like cooking or advice shows. My research generally focused on women sports-casters’ struggle to find their identity and equality as opposed to men who have always controlled the field. I reviewed a great deal of information about sports journalism as well as history and conducted personal one-on-one interviews with trailblazers in the broadcasting world.

My research has prompted me to conclude that the history of women sportscasters and their struggle for equality forms an essential patch in the crazy quilt of democracy. The barriers to equal participation in our society will not tumble until the stories of those (including women sportscasters) who have prospered despite the oppression are told and people realize the fight for justice and equality is never over.
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[Note: this bit of information was retrieved from a British website regarding the history of women suffrage.

http://www.bbc.co.uk/scotland/learning/bitesize/higher/history/britsuff/suffrage_rev1.shtml]
Appendix A
Thesis Proposal

Beginning this thesis with the proposal provides an overview of the investigation and also a contrast with the in-depth analysis of issues in the chapters. The findings and conclusions reveal the viability of my research questions in the face of evidence that I gathered.

Allyson Clifton

Thesis – Purpose Statement

Dr. Kilmer – Advisor

November 22, 2011

Thesis Title: The History of Women Sports Broadcasters and Their Struggle for Equality

Thesis Topic Statement: This thesis will investigate how women broadcasters have overcome obstacles to pursue careers in a field dominated by men.

Committee Members:

Dr. Paulette Kilmer – Faculty advisor in the Master of Liberal Studies Program interested in sports media

Dr. Brian Anse Patrick – committee member, professor in the MLS Program interested in sports media

Kristi Zeller – Assistant women’s basketball coach at the University of Idaho. Kristi was a four-year lady Rocket on the women’s basketball team here at Toledo. She received her BA in social work in 2008 and graduated in 2010 with her Master’s degree in the MLS Program. I chose Kristi to be a part of my committee because she is a bright
young woman who is part of the sports world, and from this experience she understands the sports media from an insider’s perspective. In order to include her in this thesis process, we will communicate via Skype. Attached to this report is a copy of her resume for a more in-depth look into Kristi Zeller’s accomplishments as well as the goals she has set for herself and her career.

Statement of Purpose:

This thesis will investigate how women broadcasters have overcome obstacles to pursue careers in a field dominated by men. It is very common for one to turn on the TV today and find a female reporting on a sporting event. However, this process does not eliminate the need to take a look at how women have gained recognition despite working in such a male dominated business. This thesis aims to reveal the struggles and challenges women have had to face and still face today in order to claim the respect they deserve in sports broadcasting. Due to the intimidation of our complex, technology some women have given up on trying to pursue a sports broadcasting career.

Review of the Literature:

Here are the questions that I will investigate in this thesis:

1. What challenges stood in the way of women achieving their dreams of being a sports broadcaster?
2. How did women overcome those challenges to receive the respect they deserved as being a sports broadcaster?
3. How are the challenges different today based on the challenges arising from new technology?
4. Because technology has grown so much over the years, what have women done as
a way to reach the top of the sports broadcasting world?

Obviously, if it were not for the women who were a part of the pioneering era of sports broadcasting, the rocky road early in their careers would be the same if not filled with more curves for women today. Women across America continue striving to get their chance at sharing the limelight of such a male-dominated profession. In an article in the Newspaper Research Journal, “Female Sports Journalists: Are We There Yet?” Joanne Grestner, president of the Association for Women in Sports points out that the average career span for women in sports is 10 years; moreover, most never reach management ranks (Hardin and Shain 23).

Methodology:

I am going to support my point that women struggle to reach equality in sports broadcasting by researching scholarly articles in journals, items in newspapers and general magazines as well as through conducting personal one-on-one interviews with women broadcasters of today’s generation as well as from earlier generations. I believe that the academic research will provide perspective, whereas my personal interviews with women, who have endured despite the struggle, will contribute insights essential to interpreting how the past has shaped the present and the present will mold the future. The secondary syntheses of historical experience will enable me to provide a frame of reference for people to better understand the primary information that I will present.

Findings:

I have not completed my research, but I hope to learn how women sports broadcasters have overcome obstacles. These findings will show the ways these women persevered in meeting the challenges that threatened to scuttle their dreams. Hopefully, the example
these courageous journalists set will inspire young women to rise above their doubts about opportunities in sports broadcasting and demand their right to seek careers in this profession.