

The Pennsylvania State University

The Graduate School

College of Communications

PRETTY AND PLASTIC: THE REAL LIFE PRESSURES TO BE NEWS ANCHOR

BARBIE

A Thesis in

Media Studies

by

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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements
for the Degree of

Master of Arts

August 2014

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the current role of women in the television news industry. Women are increasingly getting more opportunities in this historically male-dominated career, but does inclusion mean equality? Through in-depth interviews with female newscasters, I explore challenges facing women in the television news industry today. Using a feminist lens of analysis, I tease out themes common among these women. These themes include: pressure to meet unattainable beauty standards, being placed in secondary or sexualized roles in the newsroom and in the field, and balancing credibility and intelligence with attractiveness and sexuality to build audience rapport. These female broadcasters take their roles as credible public servants seriously, yet are forced to negotiate through gender-biased challenges each and every day. These are challenges not faced by male newscasters, thus adding to the social power imbalance in the industry. The hope for this research is to spark a conversation that can lead to positive change for women in the broadcast news business.

Keywords: female broadcasters, gender inequality, credibility, appearance, feminism, power

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, a huge thank you to my wonderful advisor, Dr. Colleen Connolly-Ahern. You “get me” on so many levels--academically, professionally, and personally--and for that I am incredibly grateful. I am so thankful to have you as an advisor, role model, and friend.

To my committee members, Dr. Michelle Rodino-Colonino and Dr. C. Michael Elavaksy, it has been an absolute pleasure getting to know you and learning from you. You’ve both taught me so much and I cannot thank you enough for sacrificing the time to guide me through this process.

A heartfelt thank you to my long-time mentor, Jeff Brown. You’ve been my go-to for advice at Penn State since I was a freshman. Thank you for your selfless guidance and encouragement.

And finally, thank you to my family. Mom and Dad, thank you so much for supporting me and encouraging me to chase my dreams no matter what. I hope I make you proud. To my brother, Brian, who beat me to a Master’s degree at Penn State, thanks for pushing me to catch up with you. And to the last of the Penn Staters, my little brother, Greg, thanks for always being a positive influence. It’s your turn now, kid!

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

“A flair for journalism...and power pink.” Branded with this motto, News Anchor Barbie made her debut in 2010. Dressed to impress with a power pink blazer, skin-tight pencil skirt, and sky-high black pumps, this journalist is truly all dolled up. Microphone in hand, this modern news queen is ready to scoop the competition...in style.

Sadly, this pretty-in-plastic perception of female television broadcasters has taken root firmly in newsroom culture. Barbie news queens are taking the spotlight all across the country. But what does this say about the role of women in the television industry?

Today, women are more present than ever in the news media. In fact, 52 percent of television news stories are presented by female talent (Global Media Monitoring Project, 2010). It's fair to say the number of opportunities for women in the news media industry is greater now than ever. But at what cost have women earned their airtime? Does inclusion mean equality?

This thesis argues that the debate over gender inequality in the news media industry is connected to the debate over postfeminism. Postfeminism would suggest that because women are now allowed in historically male-dominated industries (like journalism), the fight is over. Female journalists have earned their place and the battle has been won. However, a routine viewing of nightly newscasts underscores the engendered roles still performed by anchors and reporters (Cann & Mohr, 2001). Applying a feminist perspective on the situation will be useful in understanding the delicate balance women broadcasters must negotiate between advancing in the industry and exploiting their feminine identity.

Rationale for Study

The topic of this thesis is one that is very personal for me. My undergraduate degree is in Broadcast Journalism. Through my coursework, I learned all the skills necessary to get a job as a television news broadcaster. I was taught how to shoot and edit video, write scripts, and stack show lineups. I was taught about the ethics of journalism and media law. I graduated feeling fully prepared to enter into the rough and tumble world of television news, and make a career as a serious and credible journalist. But, within mere days at my first job, I realized that no amount of coursework could have prepared me for the challenges I was about to face as a young female in this industry.

My first job in television news was in a small town in Northeastern Pennsylvania. I was eager and excited to uncover injustices, shine a light on corruption, and serve the community as a conduit of accurate and meaningful information. I was ready to use all of the skills I learned in school to make an impact as a journalist. But, I soon found out none of that really mattered, at least to my boss.

My first week on the job was like a makeover show. Countless hours were spent in front of the mirror with an image consultant. I was told exactly how to do my hair, how to apply my makeup, and which clothes to wear. It was quite clear that deciding which shade of lipstick to use was more important than deciding which story to cover. I quickly realized image was everything.

As I progressed up through bigger television markets, the focus on image got more intense. My stations spent thousands of dollars flying in image consultants from across the country to work with us. Straighten your hair. Use this type of mascara. No sleeveless dresses. Pre-approved jewelry only.

It was stressful and demoralizing having every detail of my physical appearance picked apart. The female newscasters were given three hour time slots for our consultations. The men only took about a half hour. But, all of the women had to do it, and no one ever complained, except to each other. We'd never dare address the issue to our male news director.

I worked under this pressure for years, until one day, one of my news directors pushed too hard. I had only been working at my new job for a few months as a reporter when my boss asked me, at the last minute, to anchor the noon newscast. It was around the holidays and most of the main anchors had the day off. The fill-in called in sick and I was the only one left who knew how to anchor. I was working in a satellite office and drove almost two hours to the main station to anchor the show. I had zero prep time and didn't even get to read the scripts before I went live on the air. I was nervous and unsure, but I solo anchored the entire noon newscast.

It went well. All of my co-workers applauded me and my general manager thanked me for my efforts. I was eager to get feedback from my news director, hoping he would give me the same positive encouragement. He called me over and said, "Nice job. But next time, can you make your bottom eyelashes a little less clumpy?" I nearly lost it.

During the two hour drive back that afternoon, I thought a lot about my place in the newsroom. I made all of those sacrifices to help out and the only feedback I got was on my eyelashes. I was so angry and embarrassed. I knew if I had been a man, it would have played out in a completely different manner. I wondered if other women shared in similar experiences. I began to ask around and realized that they did.

I then decided to study this issue from a scholarly perspective. The pressure of appearance is just one of the many gender inequalities in today's television news industry. These injustices, however, are rarely discussed, if at all. And so I feel it's important to shed light on the

challenges female newscasters face. Women broadcasters are being placed in secondary and sexualized roles, and it's a topic that needs to be addressed in order to move towards a solution of equality.

Significance of Study

Most female journalists take their jobs very seriously. They hit the streets every day to expose corruption, injustice, and prejudice. They work to advance their credibility as a journalist and make a positive impact on social justice. In my experience, women are just as competent, aggressive, and sharp as their male counterparts, but they are seldom placed in lead reporter roles. Female broadcasters are also expected to fit into a strict standard of beauty not imposed on men. It places women journalists in a difficult position, one they deal with every day: being a smart, savvy, serious journalist...but looking like News Anchor Barbie.

There has been scholarly work done on the issues of gender, credibility, and appearance in the television news industry, but most of the research is quantitative in nature and tackles the topic from an audience perspective. Viewer surveys are a common approach.

While this type of work is valuable and sets a foundation, I want to approach the issue from a different angle. How do the female broadcasters themselves feel about the situation they are in? How do they negotiate this struggle and how does it impact their view of themselves and the industry as a whole? What insight can they offer to move towards a solution of equality and inclusion?

This study aims to fill that gap in the literature by conducting in-depth interviews with female newscasters across the United States. I hope this unique perspective will add valuable depth to the previous research to attempt to better understand the complex relationship between

gender, appearance, credibility, and social power. I hope this research sparks a conversation towards positive change for females in the television news industry and pushes towards real, tangible solutions for gender equality.

Chapter 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Credibility

Credibility is an essential concept in television news. It is key to the commercial and journalistic success of the news outlet (Schweiger, 2000). Credibility is a factor that not only draws in audiences, but keeps them as loyal viewers. Now, more than ever, capturing and maintaining viewership is critical. The saturation of media sources is the highest it's ever been (Meyer, 2012). That means consumers have more media choices now than any other time in history. People can get the news in their cars, at their desk, or right in the palm of their hand. But, they continue to choose the news on television. Television is the public's number one daily news source and has held that title for the last two decades (Pew, 2012). Viewers find the source credible, but there are complex factors that play into the overall concept of credibility.

News media credibility is multi-dimensional in nature (McCroskey and Jensen, 1975). First, the information presented must be believable to be deemed credible (O'Keefe, 1990). Accurate and truthful facts that make sense to the viewer are expected. This is true across any news medium. However, the visual nature of television adds another dimension to this sense of credibility that is not present in newspapers, radio, or the Internet. Through visual cues, the newscaster's competence, extroversion, and composure are assessed and impact judgment (McCroskey and Jensen, 1975). The importance of "seeing" is critical to television as a medium. Image and television news credibility go hand in hand.

Television broadcasters enter into their viewers' living rooms each and every evening. They form a connection with their audience. Horton and Wohl (1956) suggest this connection can turn into the illusion of an actual relationship. They deemed this phenomenon a "para-social"

relationship. The authors suggest this connection can be as real to the audience member as any other face-to-face relationship. And so, just as in any other personal relationship, personal judgments are made. Due to the visual impact of television, many of these judgments are based on image.

These judgments can be so strong that they impact the degree of intensity of para-social relationships. Hartmann and Goldhoorn (2011) performed a between-subjects experiment to come to this conclusion. The researchers found that the more viewers perceived the television personality to be attractive, the more intense their para-social experience. This para-social experience impacts trust and believability in the television personality.

Trust and believability are major components in overall credibility. Research shows image affects para-social relationships (Hartmann & Goldhoorn, 2011), and para-social relationships affect perceptions of trust and believability (Horton & Wohl, 1956). So, image affects credibility indirectly. Dumdum and Garcia (2011) expanded upon this relationship. They suggest image directly affects credibility. By analyzing television viewer surveys, the researchers found that judgments made about the physical appearance of the newscasters significantly impact the perceived credibility of that newscaster (Dumdum & Garcia, 2011).

The most noticeable physical characteristic of any person is their gender (Weibel et al., 2008). Before assessing whether someone is attractive or unattractive, professional or unprofessional, audiences instinctively assess whether that person is male or female. Based on this most basic assessment, they choose the proper criteria for judging that person's appearance. For example, the criteria for an attractive female are much different than the criteria for an attractive male. Gender is the most inherent characteristic on which viewers make judgments on

newscasters (Weibel et al., 2008) As previous research shows, those judgments impact perceived credibility.

Gender

The foundational studies on gender, credibility, and television newscasters were done in the 1970s. Sanders and Pritchett (1971) mailed out surveys to television audiences to get their opinion on local newscasters. They found most preferred well-dressed and clean-cut white men to deliver their news. The research suggested that non-verbal cues could be just as important, if not more important, than the verbal dialogue of the newscast. That is, the physical characteristics of the newscaster communicate just as much to the viewer as the actual words spoken. The researchers thus imply appearance had a significant impact on perceived credibility. “If a newscaster image is positive, it is more likely that what he has to say will be believed” (Sanders & Pritchett, 1971, p. 294). When comparing local news markets, the researchers found the more successful station had all white, well-dressed, clean-cut male newscasters. The lesser station had newscasters that did not fit this mold; specifically, they employed the only female newscaster in the market.

Goffman (1977) suggests that even when females are present in industry, they are still placed in sexualized roles, specifically in jobs where women meet the public, like television. In these types of industries, selective employment tactics are used to hire a female workforce that is “relatively young and attractive beyond what random selection ought to allow” (Goffman, 1977, p. 318). Goffman (1977) argues that this enables men to live in a social construct. Because this construct is male-created and regulated, the female employees are at a disadvantage and forced into subordinate and often sexualized roles.

Balon et. al (1978) advanced the idea of gender impacts. They also used a quantitative survey to find that race and gender and the interaction of the two had significant results on audience perceived credibility. As time moves on and cultural and social attitudes about race and gender change, so will the research. But these early pieces lay the foundation for a research topic that, because of its complex and intriguing nature, is still being studied today.

Moving forward into modern times, research shows little has changed. Though the number of female professionals in the news media has increased, the roles they take on have relatively remained constant since the 1970s (Ryan et. al, 2007). Females are still viewed as less credible (Brann & Leezer Himes, 2010) and are expected to do more feature stories, while their male counterparts deliver the hard news. Cann and Mohr (2001) acknowledge a “lasting association of men” who report on higher status and hard news stories and have more source authority than their female colleagues.

The promotion of Katie Couric to CBS Evening News anchor is a concrete example of gender bias. In such recent history as 2006, Couric was named the first solo network anchorwoman. And the decision was talked about across the country. New York Times writer Jill Abramson explored this phenomenon in her article, “When Will We Stop Saying ‘First Woman to_____?’” Abramson (2006) questions why allowing a female to solo anchor on network news is such a culture shock. She says the surprise over Couric’s promotion suggests gender roles have remained quite the same in television since its inception—women are subordinate to their male counterparts. Katie Couric breaking through the barriers is a major accomplishment, but should it be in modern times? Shouldn’t women expect to be treated equally?

Appearance

Television newscasters do their work and live their professional lives in the public eye. That being said, more and more newscasters of both genders are being viewed as local celebrities (Bainbridge & Bestwick, 2010). Most people can probably name at least one local television news personality and give a brief description of what they look like, yet they most likely haven't actually met the newscaster in person. Some viewers take this connection to another level, sending letters and emails to their favorite local talent, and asking for autographs or personal appearances.

And so, television newscasters act out a dual personality as trusted news anchor and relatable public figure with whom audience members develop para-social relationships. With this dual status comes enormous pressure on personal appearance, especially for women. Female newscasters are coached on every aspect of image--from color of their clothing to shade of mascara. Even the smallest stations spend a lot of money to employ image consultants to help mold their talent.

The intense focus on female image in the news is nothing new. In an interview with the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette (Rouvalis, 2006), WTAE anchor Sally Wiggin says she's been criticized on her appearance since she started at the station back in 1980. Wiggin says not much has changed, in fact, the criticism has gotten more intense for women in the television news business. Several other female news anchors also acknowledge the double standard. They say men will be reprimanded if they look "sloppy," but females are picked apart. Wiggin said, "The type of scrutiny that female broadcasters undergo for their appearance would make most of us want to crawl back into bed and hide under the pillow." The article notes all of the fuss and frustration over female image boils down to one thing---developing credibility.

It's understandable why image is of extreme importance for station management, the audience, and the newscasters themselves. But female talent find themselves in a particularly unique situation. They must balance the allure of an attractive local celebrity with the professionalism of a credible newscaster. This is an issue seldom experienced by male talent (Tan & See, 2009), if at all, thus, tipping scales of social power even more towards the male gender.

Most television ads and network programs prefer to show young attractive women to capture the highly sought-after young male demographic. But this tends to be the case in many local news station as well (Tan & See, 2009). The stereotype of the older, seasoned male newscaster with the sexy female co-anchor is instilled even in undergraduate journalism students—a stereotype that's actually pushing prospective students away from the field (Densem, 2006). With this expectation comes enormous pressure on female newscasters to look a certain way.

The sexualization of females is common throughout television in general, and so it's no surprise local news affiliates follow suit. Women are typically underrepresented across a wide range of media, and when they are shown, they are portrayed in sexualized roles (Collins, 2011). Collins (2011) suggests this trend may lead to increasing negative or stereotypical views of women by a broader audience. One of these negative impacts could be an overemphasis on the physical and less focus on professionalism, intelligence, and credibility.

Davis and Krawczyk (2010) suggest there is actually a credibility threshold for female attractiveness. That is, audiences find attractive female newscasters more credible than unattractive females, but only to a certain point. Once the female crossed the attractive threshold into "highly attractive," she is no longer perceived as credible. It's a very slim margin that

female newscasters are forced to fit into to retain or establish credibility--one that their male counterparts do not have to adhere to.

This delicate balance is also noted in other studies. Grabe and Samson (2011) find the pendulum of female sexuality has very narrow space to swing in on the television set. Female sex appeal's power or detriment to power even changes as story topics change, forcing the woman newscaster to make constant adjustments. "Among male audience members, sexual attractiveness in a female anchor boosts perceptions of her professionalism, in general terms. Yet, when it comes to assessments of specific competencies for reporting on masculine news topics (e.g., war and politics), sexualization emerges as a detrimental factor" (Grabe & Samson, 2011, p.490).

The same power struggle is noted in sports news media. Female sportscasters feel pressure to be "one of the guys" to assert their credibility (Hardin, 2009). They have to talk the talk and even look like one of the guys to prove they are competent about a male-dominated field—sports. What does a girl in stilettos know about fourth downs or power plays? However, female sportscasters must also be the sexy young sideline reporter to get access to interviews with hyper-masculine athletes (Hardin, 2009). Big burly football players want to talk to the attractive young lady with the short skirt, not the female reporter dressed in a three-piece suit like her male colleagues. This puts the female sportscaster in a high-pressure situation concerning a sensitive and emotional topic—appearance.

In most television stations, females are expected to do the same amount of work as males. Though the focus of their stories may be "softer," female news reporters still do the same "hard" labor as the men. Each and every day, female journalists come up with story ideas, set-up interviews, shoot, edit, and write the story and then go live during the newscast. And they do this

work for less pay. In 2012, women still only earned 77 cents for every dollar earned by their male counterpart (U.S. Census).

A Feminist Perspective: Femininity as a Bodily Property

Television news is, by its nature, a visual medium. The focus is more on image than any other source of mass communication. This intense focus on the physical body reduces the complex notion of femininity to simply a bodily property (Gill, 2007). Female journalists have been fighting an uphill battle to prove themselves since they first stepped onto the scene in the mainstream television news media in the 1970s. Journalism is historically a male-dominated profession. Not only must female journalists fight to prove themselves as credible professionals, but they also must fight against being constantly coded sexually based on their body. “In news media all women’s bodies are available to be coded sexually- whether they are politicians, foreign correspondents or serious news anchors” (Gill, 2007, p. 150). This is a pressure male reporters do not have to face (Tan & See, 2009).

This sexual coding of the body is problematic in that it introduces a troubling dichotomy for women in the media. On one hand, female reporters can use their bodies (because they’ve been coded sexually) as a source of power. Female reporters can seduce male newsmakers to give them information and interviews that their male competition would not be able to get. For example, a young male police officer is more likely to be willing to speak with and give information to a young female news reporter in a skin-tight dress and high heels than a middle-aged male reporter in a suit. Though the male reporter may have more experience doing interviews and a better-known name in the community, the police officer’s basic male intuition

will most likely draw him to the young woman. Audiences also tend to pay more attention to female bodies, thus giving the female talent an advantage when attracting viewers.

Female news reporters are encouraged to look hyper-feminine on the job. This is a big change from just about 15 years ago when females were encouraged to wear pantsuits and jackets to mirror their male counterparts. In today's news media, female reporters may be trudging through flood waters, covered in smoke and soot from a house fire, or standing out in the hot sun all day waiting for a perp walk, but they are still expected to have perfect hair, make-up, and outfits no matter what. This pressure is so ingrained in female television journalists that the women themselves attach their femininity and self-worth to the body and the body's appearance. One participant in this study said stilettos make her feel more powerful than anything else when she's out in the field.

However, this sexual power is nothing more than a façade—a thin veil that covers the sexual objectification of female talent. It gives the illusion of control and subjectivity. “What the media have given us then are little more than fantasies of power...that we are stronger, more successful, and more sexually in control, more fearless than we actually are” (Douglas, 2010, p.5).

McRobbie (2007) coins the term “postfeminist masquerade” to describe this illusion of power. Women, especially young women, are fooled into believing it's their choice to dress, look, and act a certain way in the workplace (in this case in the media industry). They think they are being empowered by using their sexual premise to get a position in a male-dominated environment. However, this empowerment is a false sense of control. It's a unique dichotomy of subject-object that only applies to females. Men do not harness such a duality. “On the one hand,

young women are hailed through a discourse of 'can-do' girl power, yet on the other their bodies are powerfully re-inscribed as sexual objects" (Gill, 2007, p. 163).

McRobbie (2007) argues that women's bodies in the media are being coded sexually by men whether women like it or not. By wearing stilettos and skin-tight clothing to the workplace and attempting to adhere to the media's portrayal of beauty and femininity, women are actively giving up control over their bodies and submitting to gendered and sexualized roles. This postfeminist masquerade is a way for men to keep women in traditional gender roles without overtly exercising their power to do so. It's a much more subtle approach. Douglas (2010) sees the masquerade as a candy-coating, pleasing and pacifying, which acts as an outer layer to something much more cynical and degrading. "We will see that slithering just below the shiny mirage of power is the dark, sneaky serpent of sexism" (Douglas, 2010, p.6).

This false sense of control is what allows the postfeminist gaze to continue to exist. If women believe they are in control of our own bodies, then there is nothing more to fight for. There is no one to rise up against. They have won. However, as Gill argues, this postfeminist lens is scuffed by ignorance. By putting themselves in sexualized roles, women are unknowingly making themselves the object under the ruse of empowerment and independence. It's a more subtle, yet still powerful form of sexism. "In the last decade, it has gone from being a new and deliberate representational strategy used on women (i.e. for depicting young women) to being widely and popularly taken up by women as a way of constructing the self" (Gill, 2007, p. 152).

McRobbie (2007) acknowledges the establishment of a new sexual contract for young women in the labor force. Young women are now in the workplace and making their own money. They are financially independent and able. But, this new economic freedom is becoming more important to young women than their political freedom and social identity. They are using

their new financial power to reconstruct their bodies through consumer spending. However, this reconstruction is not by their own standards, but by standards set up by the media through men. “The new sexual contract for young women inscribes such features within its over-arching terms, and we could read this as a feminist tragedy, the ‘fall of public woman’” (McRobbie, 2007, p. 734).

The female body as a place of consumerism is also troubling for Gill. The media shows having a sexy body, ornamented by consumer goods, as the key to a woman’s identity. The body is femininity. They are one in the same. The female body is held to impossible standards, not of the self, but set forth by the other. “The body is presented simultaneously as women’s source of power and as always already unruly and requiring constant monitoring, surveillance, discipline and remodeling (and consumer spending) in order to conform to ever narrower judgments of female attractiveness” (Gill, 2007, p.149). The ideals of consumerism attack women at a very young age. As early as their pre-teen years, girls are bombarded with media messages that consumerism is empowering and is a celebration of postfeminism. “[The] ideology of powerful, smart and independent girls is rendered problematic in popular culture where it is largely mobilized within a commodity market that produces girls as consumers” (Jackson, 2010, p. 359).

A concrete example of focus on the female body and the female body as a site of consumerism is the media coverage of the 1999 U.S. Women’s Soccer Team. The media’s coverage of sports used to be sexist in that they simply would ignore women’s sports in favor of men’s. But this sexism, explored in the media cover of the 1999 U.S. Women’s Soccer Team, is less obvious, however, much more problematic. Shugart (2003) performed an in-depth analysis of the oversexualization of the female athletes on the 1999 U.S. Women’s Soccer Team. The media referred to the athletes as “pin up girls,” “blonde and buff,” and always mentioned they wore

ponytails (identifying their long hair as femininity). The camera angles were close-ups of their pretty faces, rather than full body shots of them in action. Though the women are engaging in something historically coded as male (sport), the treatment of these athletes is gendered to the point of sexual objectification (Shugart, 2003).

One of the most vivid examples of this sexualization was Brandi Chastain's famous goal celebration. Chastain was so excited with her goal that she took off her jersey and ran in celebration down the field in her sports bra. The episode exploded in the mainstream media, with news outlets commenting on her "rock hard abs" and "hot body." Shugart (2003) says this type of subtle sexualization, disguised as a celebration of the female athlete, is even more dangerous than overt sexual oppression. At least when the problem is out in the open, women can deal with it and react to it. This lurking sexism, however, can fly under the radar, while still perpetuating gender stereotypes. Gill (2011) agrees, and says the power of sexism lies in its unspeakable attribute and hidden agenda. "Here, just using the word sexism, naming it, opening up a conversation about its novel forms, would be an important political act—at a moment when the recession and economic downturn are disproportionately affecting women in media and cultural industries" (p. 63).

This same example of Chastain also highlights the troubling issue of women's bodies as a site of consumerism. Chastain's sports bra was not a generic unbranded bra, it was Nike. The episode became a huge promotional campaign push for the brand, as they used Chastain's celebration as a form of advertisement. Shugart (2003) says this double-edged sword of sexual objectification of the female body and using the female body as a site of consumerism was allowed in the mainstream media because the coverage was masked as a celebration of the female athlete. Again, this subtle, less overt, type of sexual objectification, hidden in the

postfeminist gaze of sexual power and celebration, is a dangerous trend in the media. This trend extends to women covered by the media (i.e. female athletes) and the women who produce the media themselves (i.e female reporters and anchors.)

Gender stereotypes, in and outside of media portrayals, are often overlooked because of postfeminist ideals (Kelan, 2008). Women are now included in the workplace, in the media, yet they are still put in stereotypical gender roles. Sometimes women just don't see it because they are celebrating their inclusion in a historically male-dominated environment. "Often stereotypes lurk in the dark and we are not aware of them. However, on a conscious level, we find them irrelevant. If we spell out gender stereotypes, this brings stereotypes to the conscious level. If the stereotype is voiced, it becomes obvious and women react to it" (Kelan, 2008, p. 3).

Self-Surveillance

Gill's theme of femininity as solely a bodily property goes hand in hand with her next theme of self-surveillance. Women are under tremendous pressure to keep their bodies in check at all times, and this is especially true for female on-air talent. Female television reporters are under the constant supervision of image consultants, news directors (usually male), and audience members. Every detail of their appearance is under watch and so the women must watch themselves constantly to make sure they are keeping up to standard. The threat of failure or falling short is always looming. "Surveillance of women's bodies (but not men's) constitutes perhaps the largest type of media content across all genres and media forms. Women's bodies are evaluated, scrutinized and dissected by women as well as men, and are always at risk of 'failing'" (Gill, 2007, p.149). One participant in this study said she feels her day's work is worthless if she doesn't look good when presenting it. It's an incredible pressure female news

reporters deal with every single day. “A sleek, toned, controlled figure is today normatively essential for portraying success” (Gill, 2007, p.150).

This alarming trend of female self-surveillance is seen in popular media as well. Makeover shows are a huge success. Women are told they have a “problem.” That problem is always some aspect of their physical appearance (Gallagher, 2007). Then, the women go through a grueling and emotional process to fix said problem. Many times, the women have emotional breakdowns because the stress and the pressure to succeed is so high. “Women’s bodies are also being held to traditional and hegemonic discourses of beauty— standards that are socially prescribed and nearly unattainable for most women” (Gallagher, 2007, p. 58). After the women are made over, they are presented to their family, friends, and most often husbands or boyfriends as a success story. Female news reporters go through this intense emotional process on a yearly basis. Image consultants critique every detail from eyelash curl to sleeve length. They then spend an enormous amount of time, energy, and money to transform the female talent.

But this transformation process is not over when the image consultant leaves. The women must perform self-surveillance, paying careful attention to follow directions precisely, as they will be checked in on and reprimanded by their news director if they misstep. Self-surveillance is seen as a necessity for females, but this is not the case for men.

Self-surveillance is an up and coming trend for men as well, but it is not seen as a duty, rather a benefit, a treat. The popular show *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* is a popular media example of this. “*Queer Eye* presents the male makeover as a privilege: in an increasingly progressive sexual environment” (Sender, 2006, p. 144). The move towards male self-surveillance and the metrosexual movement was fueled by the labor industry. Sender (2006) highlights the crisis of masculinity happening in the work force. She argues that heterosexual

men must now be more aware and concerning with their image, relationships, and overall appearance to be considered a good employee. Sender (2006) explains this as the “culture of the ornament” (p. 136) in which men are increasingly being judged on their appearance. However, this judgment is in no way equal across the sexes. Clarkson (2005) understands makeover shows as inherently gendered. Makeover shows place women’s bodies in the position of objects. Something is being done to them to improve them. However, these same makeover shows place men’s bodies in the role of subject, giving men the tools necessary to make improvements on their own bodies. They are placed in the role of subject. Male-based makeover shows like *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* “give his [male] agency a boost instead of objectifying him” (Clarkson, 2005, p. 240). The self-surveillance of men exaggerates and emphasizes the extreme self-surveillance already in place by women. “What is so striking, however, is how unevenly distributed these quasi therapeutic discourses are. In magazines, in contemporary fiction and television, in talk shows, it is women and not men who are addressed and required to work on and transform the self. Significantly, it appears that the ideal disciplinary subject of neoliberalism is feminine” (Gill, 2007, p.155).

Natural Sexual Difference

Many gender stereotypes are deemed acceptable due to the natural sexual difference between men and women. Based on nothing more than biology, men are deemed more capable in the news media industry. Male reporters tend to get harder hitting stories, while females are left with the feature pieces. Females are still viewed as less credible (Brann & Leezer Himes, 2010) and are expected to do more feature stories, while their male counterparts deliver the hard news.

Cann and Mohr (2001) acknowledge a “lasting association of men” who report on higher status and hard news stories and have more source authority than their female colleagues.

A concrete and eye-opening example of this natural sexual difference is Gill’s qualitative study on male DJ’s. She asked the men why there were very few women DJs at their station. Gill (2011) finds the men are well aware of the lack of women, but try to justify the problem by making it an issue out of their control. They say women don’t apply to be DJs, and even if they did, they wouldn’t have the skill set necessary to succeed and they would be subject to ridicule. This assumption is based on nothing by biological gender. “But finally, the problem is not one for the men at the radio station, nor for the radio station as a whole to deal with, but rather it is up to each individual woman to 'assert herself pretty definitely if she's working on radio'" (p. 79).

However, the men were sure to be clear that they themselves were not sexist. The decision on whether or not to hire female DJs was not up to them. Gill coins this “new sexism,” expanding upon “new racism.” “They were keen to point out their lack of sexism ('there's certainly no prejudice') and that they were 'looking hard' for female presenters. However, what they produced were accounts which justified the exclusion of women. In providing these accounts for why there are so few female DJs now, the broadcasters also provided justifications for the continued absence of women in the future” (p. 90). The news directors or the audience members prefer men. This preference was based on nothing more than natural sexual difference, including pitch of a female voice to a male voice.

The natural sexual difference also enhances the male fantasy of control over the female. Social power dynamics are completely unequal and based on nothing but sex. The combination of this idea with the emphasis of femininity as a bodily property serves to perpetuate the

problem. “Sexual difference discourses also serve to (re-)eroticise power relations between men and women” (Gill, 2007, p. 159).

A Difference Engine

Mass media is so connected to the feminist movement because mass media has incredible influence over cultural, social, and political protocol. Djerf-Pierre (2011) coins the term “difference engine” to describe the mass media. That is, the trends in mass media highly influence the trends in other areas of society. “As media are the prime vehicles for the construction and circulation of cultural values in the current era of mediatization, the relationship between gender equality in journalism and the fundamental political, social, and economical institutions in society, for instance, becomes a subject worthy of rigorous study” (p. 43).

McRobbie (2007) argues that changes in mass media and changes in the feminist movement go hand in hand. She uses the example of women’s magazines to explain the evolving dynamic of feminism from the 1970s to the 1990s. McRobbie (2007) argues that the changes in women’s media are directly connected to the changes in the feminist movement. “So established is this interest (media), that it can be read in its own right as part of the history and development of feminism in the academy” (p. 190).

McRobbie (2007) suggests we need to study not only the media content, but the media producers. The women who work in the news media have incredible influence on women in the public. Mass media is seen as an extension of society, and so the gender roles the women in the mass media take on are seen by many as the norm. If these gender roles are problematic, it’s spreading an unhealthy idea about gender roles in society as a whole, whether they be a reality or not. “Traditional gender constructs long have been a staple of the mass media, which in turn are

a primary, if not the primary, means by which those constructs are reified and articulated to the public today” (Shugart, 2003, p. 1).

Jackson (2010) suggests that the media has influence on shaping the sexual identities of women at a very young age. “This underlined the significance of [media] as a postfeminist sexual ‘learning tool’, magnifying the salience and importance of examining it as a resource around negotiating sexual identities” (p. 364). If the media portrayals of women (in this case, the news media) are objectifying and submissive, then the development of young women’s sexual identities are victim to fall under the same pretenses. Messages perpetuated by the media have major impacts on women in the real world. That is why it’s so important to examine and dissect these gendered representations and understand how we can make them more positive and fitting of a feminist dialogue.

A review of the literature leads to several research questions on this topic. The research questions focus on perception of female newscasters from different points of view.

RQ1: How do female broadcasters perceive themselves?

RQ2: How do female broadcasters feel they are perceived versus their male counterparts?

RQ3: How do female broadcasters understand how audiences perceive them?

RQ4: What are the necessary steps to change these perceptions for the better?

Chapter 3

METHODOLOGY

Eight female television news reporters were recruited as participants in this study. In-depth interviews were conducted with each participant based on a 30-question format. Please see Appendix A for the complete interview questionnaire. Some questions were changed, added, or excluded depending on the natural progression of the interview, but the overall theme of the interview remained constant across all sessions. Seven of the interviews were conducted via telephone and one was conducted in-person. The interviews lasted about 30 minutes.

Before the interviews began, participants heard a generic message relating to verbal consent taken from the IRB website. They were assured that their identity would be protected, and in accordance with that promise, every participant's name has been changed. Each interview was recorded using a voice recorder and saved onto a flash drive. The interview participants ranged in age, work experience, and geographic location. Please see table 1 for a breakdown of each participant.

The participants were recruited using snowball sampling. The researcher had previously worked in the television news industry and had relationships with female broadcasters. Those broadcasters led the researcher to other women working in the industry who would be willing to be interviewed for this study.

A transcription of each focus group was made from the recordings and saved in a Word document to better facilitate analysis. The transcription therefore served as the first round of analysis. During subsequent readings of the transcripts, general patterns and common themes were identified and placed into categories for further explanation as seen in this paper.

The qualitative interview was chosen as the methodology for this thesis for several

reasons. First, the topic involved sensitive issues including sexuality, gender inequality, and self-worth. Glaser (1965) explains that these types of issues benefit from the personal touch of qualitative interviews. He argues that only an involved and active researcher can gather this type of personal data in an accurate and fair manner. Numbers alone will not suffice, as the researcher must build a trusting relationships with the participants who will supply the data. This thesis' topic of the engendered role of women in the news industry is a topic that is seldom discussed. Glaser (1965) notes the importance of qualitative methods for taboo topics. "These areas raise problems of secrecy, sensitivity, taboo topics, stigma, and legality...and so often the only way a researcher can obtain data that is accurate...is talking in loose, sharing fashion with the people in the situation" (p. 436).

Glaser's constant comparison method proved a useful tool of qualitative analysis. This fluid method allows the researcher to see the big picture, while teasing out individual themes and categories. It takes into account personal experiences of the participants, while bridging the gaps in experiences to create overarching themes. "It especially facilitates the generation of theories or process, sequence, and change which pertain to organizations, positions, and social interaction" (Glaser, 1965, p. 444). The constant comparison method also allows the researcher to keep track of all of the data in a clear and concise way. Glaser (1965) argues this builds the credibility of this type of qualitative research.

This purpose of this research is to better understand the culture of the newsroom and the ways in which gender roles are developed and negotiated. McCracken (1988) suggests that qualitative interviews allow for access to cultural phenomenon that are typically constricted to that specific environment. "The purpose of the qualitative interview is not to discover how many and what kinds of people share a certain characteristic. It is to gain access to the cultural

categories and assumptions according to which one culture construes the world” (p. 17).

In addition to the research topic, the individual researcher was also a factor in choosing the methodology of the qualitative interview. McCracken (1988) explains that in qualitative research, the investigator acts as an instrument. That is, the investigator must use their own experience and skill to facilitate a successful qualitative interview that develops a rich data set. The researcher’s personal experience as a former television news reporter allowed the investigator to act as an instrument because of previous experience conducting interviews. The skill set was already in place and so it served as beneficial to choose a qualitative research method that would allow the investigator to use those skills.

The qualitative method of conducting interviews was also used because of its uniqueness in relation to this specific topic. The majority of the work done in the area of gender, appearance, and credibility in the television news industry is quantitative in nature. An alternative qualitative method was used to gain a different perspective on the issue at hand. Because of the personal nature of the topic, individual interviews were chosen rather than focus groups. This conversational approach led to honest, open, and sensitive responses that add value to this field of research. McCracken (1988) suggests only qualitative interviews can elicit these types of responses. “The method can take us into the mental world of the individual, to glimpse the categories and logic by which he or she sees the world. The long interview gives us the opportunity to step into the mind of another person, to see and experience the world as they do themselves” (p. 9).

Name	Age	Years of Experience
Amanda	37	16
Ashley	30	7
Bridget	27	6
Erin	25	3
Jessica	37	10
Julie	25	4
Kristin	29	7
Laura	25	3

Table 1: Participant Descriptions

***All of the participants worked in multiple television markets. The markets represented are: FL, NC, NY, OH, PA, TN, TX, WI, WV**

Chapter 4

FINDINGS

A Double-Edged Sword

The common theme throughout all of these interviews is the idea of the double-edged sword. RQ 1 prompts how female newscasters perceive themselves, and this metaphor explains their perception in a tangible way. When it comes to the pressures and expectations of women in the television news industry, you're damned if you do and damned if you don't. All of the participants are acutely aware of the injustices and inequalities they face. They hate having to look and act a certain way and completely understand that it is an issue their male counterparts don't have to deal with. However, all of them wisely understand they must work within the parameters set up for them (mostly by men) to get ahead. They willingly leave a little piece of themselves behind to advance their careers. And in an economy where more and more households must have two incomes to survive, it's a choice they must make. Julie said,

It's our job! It's disappointing for us because we take it so seriously. We want to report the stories and its unfortunate that viewers can't get passed what they see. It's frustrating. It's sad and unfortunate, and not fair, but that's the way it is. If you want to work in the business, you have to deal with it.

Intense competition among women in the field is fueling the fire. Simply being a good reporter is no longer enough. Women must be beautiful, thin, and fashionable, as well as smart, quick, and well spoken. The participants feel they must bring something extra to the table to grab that coveted on-air spot, and unfortunately, most of that "something extra" has to do with looks.

Bridget said,

It's a shame, but its more about how you look than what you're reporting. There are just too many avenues now to get your news, and I feel like you have to have something extra for

someone to turn the TV on and tune into your station. I went to school like everyone else and I worked my butt off and I try really hard to prove myself. There are a lot of pretty faces out there, so I was hoping something would allow me to separate myself from that. But at the same time, that's just the way the business is. You have to be attractive to move ahead. That's the way it goes.

Amanda said,

It bothers me a little bit because I hate that we put so much emphasis on how we look, but honestly, that's what you see. You're going to gravitate towards the red rose versus the plain daisy. You're going to look for something bold and stand out. It's a necessary evil of the job. We, as women, bust our butts, do what we can to do the story, get the job done, like everyone else. If you took away all the makeup and all the whatever and made us a little stick figures, it would be great, but that's just not the way it is. You have to look good.

Importance of Credibility

All of the female journalists agreed that credibility is a top priority in their field of work. They acknowledge credibility is a make or break concept in television news and every reporter, regardless of gender, age, or appearance, should work to improve their credibility. The participants said they take credibility very seriously and feel there is no substitute for having it. Even the most attractive women broadcasters must be credible in order to survive in the business. Kristin said, "Its one of my top priorities as a journalist. I think credibility comes first, especially when you're on-air." Uncovering the truth is why many of the participants got into the business in the first place. Amanda said, "Credibility is something that is very important to me, as a journalist, to have that integrity of what the truth is or the intention to get to the truth."

Credibility is also key in building relationships with viewers and keeping viewers tuned into the station. Bridget said, "If they don't believe what you're saying, then there's no connection, and they'll turn to another station." Being a credible reporter shows the audience that the reporter is working hard for them. Laura said,

Credibility is important because if you don't have credibility, you don't have respect. You don't have respect for others or yourself. Credibility is what you should aim for, its why viewers should watch because they can trust you. They know what you're saying is the truth and you did the right things to make sure it was the truth.

Many of the participants said they feel being credible is their duty as a public servant. As a reporter, it's their public service to provide the audience with true, factual, reliable information. It's a duty each participant is honored to have. Jessica said, "I always felt that my responsibility was to be a conduit of information between the newsmakers and the general public, so I take it very seriously."

The participants work each and every day to build their credibility and trustworthy reputation as a news reporter. They feel it is an on-going process that requires much work and dedication. Most of the participants believe building relationships with sources and viewers is the best way to earn their trust. Julie said, "When I go to interview people, I'm not just in and out, I'll talk to them for a while and kind of build that relationship so they know they can trust me." These relationships must not only be built, but also maintained. The trust factor can never fade and must be reinforced on a constant basis. Erin said,

It's all about building relationships. You have to build a relationship with a viewer to build trust and credibility. But most importantly its about your contacts. I think that's the key to a lot of this job, especially being out in the field, for them to trust you, and don't burn bridges because people will remember that.

All of the participants have worked in television stations all across the United States and so are sensitive to the changing perspective of credibility based on geographic location and the local culture. Kristin said,

I think being professional and learning about your surroundings and the city you're living in and the people you're dealing with because everyone's idea of what's credible and what's not can be very different. You have to be very safe.

The participants realize credibility isn't earned overnight. Jessica said, "I took my career very seriously. I was all about excellence. I had to build that over time and it was interacting in person with people in a polite and intelligent way." Credibility increases with experience and age. This also has to do with image, as audiences typically trust broadcasters who look like they have experience. Bridget said, "I think your credibility grows as you get older. People have a tendency to believe people who are older. It gives that look of them being a true adult with experience."

Credibility is also about checking the facts and reporting in a fair and accurate manner. Amanda said, "Never embellishing. That builds up over time. The more you report the correct facts, even if its 30 seconds, the more over time people will trust you." Credibility doesn't necessarily mean getting the story out first, but getting it right. Laura said,

I learned how to really check my facts and take the time to step back and say 'Is this something that needs to be reported because its true or it can advance the story or is it something I'm supposed to say because someone thinks its scandalous?' That's a decision I make every single day.

Fitting the News Barbie Mold

Every single one of the participants acknowledged that television is a medium based on image. Image is everything. While all of them disagree with how women are presented in the media, they all say they must work within those constructs in order to succeed and get ahead. It's a tremendous balancing act and a significant pressure unequal to anything men in the business have to face. It's emotional and stressful. Some of this pressure is self-imposed due to the extreme competition of women in the news media industry. Amanda said,

I feel pressure. Like I need to lose weight, to be thin, if I sit next to someone, am I going to look huge? Its always those silly comments that I know aren't meant to be hurtful, but they play over and over in my head.

Many of the participants are constantly reevaluating their self-worth based on their physical appearance. They notice every single flaw. This is an issue that impacts most women, even outside of the business, but imagine having these flaws broadcast to thousands of people each and every night. The stress of being in the public eye with such an emphasis on physical appearance causes powerful, smart, beautiful women to begin to question these characteristics in themselves. Self-esteem and confidence are constantly dangling over the edge. Kristin said,

I'm surrounded by all of these very attractive on-air personalities, and it made me wonder...wait a minute. It was the first time since middle school that I was a little insecure. I was like 'Alright should I have blonde hair? Should I be 10 pounds thinner?' Those questions would go through my mind. I think image is very important just as much for the viewers as for the reporter herself.

Laura said,

I feel if I don't look my prettiest and put together all the time then that takes away from all the work that I did. If I don't look like that then it's almost like I didn't do the work because someone's looking at me and thinking 'She doesn't look good right now.'

Some of the pressures the women face are internal, stemming from their own self-esteem issues and lack of self-confidence in certain situations. However, the majority of the pressures felt by the participants were imposed on them by someone else, usually a male news director. The women are expected to fit into an almost unattainable standard of beauty. Everything from hair length to lipstick color to jewelry is kept in close surveillance by news directors. Erin said,

I was told 'Oh you're hair is long, cut it. That necklace is too distracting. Your shirt is too low. Wear dark clothes because your boobs are kind of big. so you have to try to peg that down a notch because people are staring at your boobs and not listening to what you're saying.' Those are perfect examples and I have been told all of those things. It's a learning experience and I guess...You're getting it from a man so...

Much of this has to do with control. News directors are constantly controlling exact details of the female news reporters' appearance. They will allow or disallow the women to make

certain changes to their appearances and of course all changes must then be approved. This control is not imposed on the male reporters. The intense focus on image is a concern for every one of the participants. It's an issue that is a constant cause of communication between the women broadcasters and their superiors. Ashley said,

One day it was windy so I wore my hair up because it was stupid to wear it down. He [news director] told me that I didn't look like myself that day and the viewers expected me to look like myself everyday and I wasn't supposed to wear my hair up.

Julie said,

I cut my hair and he [news director] about died. He was like if you ever do that again, you have to tell me! And it wasn't even that much. It just made it look more professional. He freaked out and called me and said if you ever cut your hair again you need to tell me first!

Laura said,

I was told to die my hair blonde and I was told to always wear it down. Another part was to fit in the mold of the pretty blonde who laughs out loud on air and will grab viewers' attention.

Julie said, "He [a male co-worker] told me to quote 'Whore it up' a bit because I wasn't wearing enough makeup. He didn't mean it in a bad way, but that's what he told me."

Women newscasters are supposed to look just like News Anchor Barbie: pretty, petite, and plastic. External add-ons like hair and make-up, as well as physical characteristic like weight and figure, are all placed under a microscope on a daily basis to be criticized and commented on. If a woman does not fit the Barbie mold, she will have a lower chance of succeeding as a reporter. This is a fact of the business that the participants are not proud of or agree with, but they all agree that it is part of the game. To get ahead, women must conform to the roles they are being placed in by men. Because the competition in the industry is so fierce, if they don't conform to predetermined standard of beauty, there are 100 women in line behind them who

will. Jobs in the television news industry are few and far between and the time span of a female broadcaster's career continues to shrink. Jessica said,

Does that make me sad? A little bit. I'd like to say a journalist can be 130lbs or more but the truth is if this is something you want to do and you are not the skinniest person in the class, its hard.

Kristin said, "I think unfortunately you can be the best reporter and 180 pounds and not have one Facebook like. You can be 140 pounds and be gorgeous and have 1000 likes."

Postfeminist Masquerade

Gender inequalities and unattainable female beauty standards run rampant in the television news industry. However, not one of the participants said they would be better off as a man. They feel while there are disadvantages to being a woman in their field, there are distinct benefits as well. Laura said,

There is a power to it when you can walk in a room and own a room. Women can take over that room and they do, especially with men and people in law enforcement. It's easier when you're a woman and you can just walk in there and smile. I've been known, as much as I hate to admit it, to talk a little softer, bat my eyelashes to get what I want.

All of the participants admit to using their sexual prowess to get information and interviews from men in positions of power. They feel it's an equalizer for all of the disadvantages they face as women. Erin said, "I think you can charm people into going on camera. I think a girl can convince a guy to go on camera much easier." Playing the damsel in distress or the flirtatious female is a tactical approach used by some of the participants. They will look and dress the part if need be. Ashley said, "I think a lot of it has to do with appearance. A guy is easier to talk with a girl. We can sweet talk our way into things." Julie said,

They are more likely to tell you things and it's easier to get man on the street interviews from men. There was a story everyone here was following last year and I had an "in" on it because I was the only female reporter and the news source was a man who I think had a crush.

McRobbie (2007) warns of the danger of using sexuality for personal gain and coins the term "postfeminist masquerade." She feels this illusion of sexual power is just a subtle form of sexism itself. Some of the participants are aware of this danger and don't feel comfortable with intentionally using their sexual power to get information. They don't see it as a tactical strategy, like some of the other participants, but an incidental event that happens sometimes. However, if it does happen, the participants admit to running with it, so to speak. This difference is linked to the ages of the participants. The younger women freely use their sexuality as a method of getting ahead, while the more experienced participants don't feel comfortable in doing so. This could suggest a shift in trends among women in the news media industry. Amanda said,

I wouldn't say I use my sexuality to get information, but if it happens, it happens. I'm not physically seeking it out, but if someone wants to come up to me because I'm a woman, okay.

Jessica said,

This is very nuanced. It is manipulative and persuasive because you're using your feminine wiles to get something, especially from a man, but I think in TV, the stress is so high and the demand for bites and information never stops, so if I could use that in my defense, I'd take it.

In addition to attracting male news sources, the participants say being a female can also attract audiences. A beautiful, young woman is more likely to catch someone's eye on the other side of the television screen. Building name recognition and a loyal following is a major benefit in the industry, and so in this perspective, women actually have the advantage over men. Kristin said,

Initially people see an image, and being a female, you can attract an audience. Maybe it's not the audience you want, but it's usually that single male group. You can attract more viewers initially as a female than as a male.

Gender Inequality

RQ 2 explores the difference between how female newscasters perceive themselves and how they perceive their male counterparts. Credibility remains constant across gender. That is, the participants feel solely being a woman does not impact their credibility or the audience's perception of their credibility. However, their gender identity has major impacts on other aspects of their careers. All of the participants feel it is challenging to be a woman in the television news industry, even today. They feel men are still given preferential treatment, while women are forced into secondary or supporting roles. Kristin said,

It's very hard. I noticed first-hand the differences in the way I'm treated compared to my male counterparts. There are specific examples of assignment editors and your boss...you can walk down the hall and say hi to your photographer or a male co-worker and they'll completely ignore you. I feel like as a female in this business, you have to prove yourself more than if you were a male.

This notion of inequality extends from the hallways of the station into the newsroom itself. Many of the participants feel they don't get assigned the hard-hitting lead stories, instead, their male counterparts do. Women are expected to do more feature pieces and be less aggressive. This decision is based on nothing but biology. That is, all of the participants believe they have the necessary education, skill set, and training to cover hard news stories, yet they are not assigned them simply due to the fact that they are women. Ashley said,

I remember a couple of times I had a really good story that should've been the lead and I was put in like seven minutes into the show. I felt because it was who I was, whereas someone else that had that story would've been put first. If there was a big lead story, it was automatically give to other people. I felt like Veronica Corningstone doing a cat fashion show. I feel like I wasn't taken seriously with the hard stuff.

Gender identity also impacts field reporting. The participants notice they are treated differently by sources and fellow media professionals when reporting on a story. They feel they are not given the respect they deserve in many situations. Men, especially men in positions of power, place women reporters in sexualized and objectified positions. All of the participants noted being catcalled or borderline sexually harassed while out in the field.

More and more women are working alone as multimedia journalists. That means they shoot and edit their own stories, as well as being in front of the camera. Because of this trend in the industry, young women are going on location by themselves, thus being placed into vulnerable positions. Erin said,

There are circumstances when you're on a story and you go up to a guy and say hey...and this happened to me...you say 'Hey can I get an interview?' And they say 'Well only if you give me your number first.' I'm sure he wouldn't have done that if I had a male cameraman with me. He wouldn't have had the nerve to say it.

In addition to being treated as sexual objects, the participants note being treated like fools out in the field. Men assume female reporters are incapable of understanding the topic at hand and were only hired because they are attractive. This especially applies to hard news issues like politics and infrastructure. The stereotype of the Barbie news reporter is a very real prejudice that many women face in today's news media industry. Jessica said,

Men would look at me and ask me the most asinine questions about my level of intelligence, my education. 'Oh deary how could you possibly understand this zoning issue?' I think the sad answer to that is there's always that feeling of sexism.

Many of the participants talked about the concept of the "pretty face in the crowd." Some of the men they encountered while out in the field viewed them as less intelligent and less cunning than male reporters. They understood the women's value to the station as being purely aesthetic in attracting audiences. Professional value and worth were linked to physical beauty.

The “seen and not heard” mantra was a common discrimination felt by many of the participants.

Laura said,

Some people are still stuck in the idea that women are meant to look pretty and don't have smarts. I've been in the field and asked a higher-up politician a question and he said 'There's a brain behind that blonde hair?'

Erin said,

[A male attorney] said 'Oh well you can just focus on what he [a male reporter] writes, you're just another pretty face.' People see you out there and they don't think you're the one behind it, asking the questions, doing the writing, doing the research, they think you're just a pretty face.

The participants are highly aware of gender inequality and must negotiate through it every day to be able to stay in their line of work. They work twice as hard to prove themselves because they feel they are already being set up to fail. Kristin said,

If I'm on a story with competitors and they happen to be male, I become even more ready to put together the best story I can because I want to prove something to others. It shouldn't matter who you are, what you look like, if you want the story you should get it, that's journalism.

The dichotomy between being a savvy, smart, female reporter, yet being attractive enough to hold onto a job, is a struggle faced by many women in the field. It's a perpetual balancing act that adds stress and anxiety to an already fast-paced and high-stress work environment. This is a gendered issue, only impacting women, thus tipping the scales of equality of the sexes in the television news media. Jessica said,

At what point do you abandon this femininity and turn on the intelligence and aggressiveness? That's a line that I personally teetered for many many years. Hey I'm smart and I'm beautiful, but women don't even get the chance to say that because it makes you feel like you're insecure, or the opposite, that you're full of yourself. What's difficult to deal with is that men are allowed to be aggressive and smart and savvy and no ones questioning that. But females have to really figure out what position they want to play.

Gender also impacts the shelf life of the reporter. It is much more common to see an older male co-anchoring with a young female. Very rarely do older women get the opportunities older males get in the business. The number of years a woman can work as an on-air personality is very limited and based on nothing but gender and the aging process. This is coupled with the fact that women get paid an average of 70 percent of what their male counterparts get paid. Bridget said,

My co-anchor is 61 years old. The chance of seeing a 61-year-old female news anchor is slim to none. Most female anchors get to their 50s, at the latest, and they're pushed out of the business. Men can get away with more. Men can gain weight and it's okay. Men can age well or not well. There is much more forgiveness in a man's appearance than a woman. Case in point, I'm 27 years old and my co-anchor is 61.

Audience Interaction

RQ 3 explores an audience perspective and audience interaction with the newscasters. What are audiences attracted to? How do they perceive certain on-air personalities, both male and female? These questions are valuable, and while not the main focus on my research, valuable enough to be included. However, I've tackled these questions from a different approach. Instead of asking audiences what they think, I've asked the participants about the reaction they've gotten directly from audiences. All of the participants agree that viewers focus more on what they look like than what they are saying. They all feel they are sometimes seen, but not heard. Kristin said,

They will know every second that I blink and breathe in that minute and thirty seconds, but by the end of it, they might not know what my story was about. They might know what I wore and what color shirt I had on, but I don't think they would understand the story.

Laura said,

I do think they believe more coming out of a man's mouth. I think they like looking more at women, but listening more to men.

Ashley said, “People want to look at pretty girls. People aren’t even listening half the time to what you’re saying, its what you look like. In all honesty, I’d rather look at a good-looking girl on television.”

All of the participants have had direct interaction with viewers, be it in person, over the phone, through email, or through social media. Almost all of the feedback they’ve gotten has been positive, but troubling to them. Viewers almost always comment on the physical appearance of the female newscaster, rather than the content of their story. It’s disheartening because the participants say they work so hard on their stories. Bridget said,

90 percent of the emails I get have nothing to do with what I read on the news, but have more to do with how I look, what I was wearing, who did my hair, where I got my make up done.

Julie said, “Every comment they made was about the appearance of people. They weren’t even listening to the stories, just talking about this person’s hair and what this person was wearing.”

Viewers tend to focus on fashion when it comes to women broadcasters. Because many times these women can take on the role of the local celebrity, people are fascinated by what the women are wearing and where the viewers themselves can go to get that look. It’s more entertainment than information. Amanda said,

The majority of the positive and negative feedback is about looks. I love your hair, I love your dress, I love that color, where do you shop? Those are the big questions always. It is more physical than anything.

Erin said,

You get messages saying ‘We love what you’re wearing, we love that necklace, we can’t wait to see what shirt you’re wearing next.’ People focus more on our wardrobe because we’re more decorated than males. I think the majority of the feedback we get is based on what we look like than what we’re saying.

Real Steps Towards Change

RQ 4 aims to find real solutions to the inequalities faced by female newscasters. Many of the participants said doing these interviews made them reflect back on many aspects of their careers. They were happy to get some of the issues they face out in the open and relieved to know they are not alone in their struggles. Some of them even realized things about their own work-life balance that they are now working on changing. They told me they hope to have more of these conversations to try to come up with solutions to some of the common struggles women in the broadcast industry face. They used their reflections to give advice to young women who want to enter their field. I find it incredibly valuable and personal insight that I hope can spark a positive change for anyone who reads this paper. Laura said,

Please yourself. Make sure at the end of the day that you feel confident that you worked 100 percent towards making whatever you did that day happen and you're happy with yourself.

Kristin said,

If you are true to yourself, it's a little less painful when everything we've just talked about comes into play. When you're true to yourself, it's okay, it makes everything a little bit better. Be true to yourself—it works wonders in this business.

All of the participants admit it is very difficult to be a woman in today's news media, especially in television. They are constantly overcoming struggles, trials, and tribulations, but in the end, it only makes them a better reporter and a better human being. Erin said, "Look the part, sound the part, and keep your personal life personal." You have to know when to smile and nod and when to hold your ground. Julie said, "You have to have a tough skin. I learned that the hard way, but I learned it." Ashley said, "I'd never talk anyone out of doing it, because if you're passionate about it, do it anyways. It's tough. It's a very tough industry to be in."

The most common piece of advice given by the participants is encouragement. If a young woman wants to work in this field, then she can do it, despite what anyone says. It will be tough, but it will be worth it if its something you love. Chase your dreams no mater what. Bridget said,

You have to be an independent and strong woman. You have to say ‘You know what, I want this job in Wyoming. I know it’s in the middle of nowhere and I know I’ll get paid peanuts, but I’m going because this is my passion.’

Though competition between women in the televisions news industry is fierce, there is a bond between female newscasters all across the country. It’s a sisterhood that supports each other and wants the best for each other. The participants all want to see the younger generation of up and coming women broadcasters succeed and advocate for positive change in the industry.

Amanda said,

I still feel like men get paid more and men get better opportunities, however, I think we’ve made great strides. We’ve come a long way, but there’s a lot more to go. Always stay true to yourself. You can polish yourself up and take lessons to do hair and makeup, but always stay true to yourself.

Jessica said,

If you really want to be a television journalist and you are a female, you can do it! Don’t let anyone say you cant and don’t be intimidated by news directors who are male who may be intimidating to you or your co-workers or classmates who are males who say you cant make it.

The advice and reflections offered up by the participants is a good way to move towards a solution to the gendered problems female broadcasters face. But to elicit a real positive change, more must be done. This research has unearthed themes that can act as a starting point for women newscasters to begin from. First, women in this industry should take risks. They shouldn’t be afraid to speak their mind and tackle the inequalities they face head on. If they feel they are being treated unfairly, they should speak up and not fear the possible consequences. Of

course, this is easier said than done, but all of the participants discussed the spiral of silence encompassing the injustices they face. The only way to move towards justice is to shatter the silence. If enough women speak up and unify their voices, their male bosses will have to listen. Women make up a majority of many newsrooms (Global Media Monitoring Project, 2010) and so if they speak, their voice will be heard.

In addition to speaking, women can take action. A suggestion is to go after more hard-hitting news stories. Even if a female broadcaster is assigned a feature piece, do an extra piece focused on a more serious topic. It will be more work for the broadcaster, but it will also expand their resume and experience in covering hard news stories. Go out and do the stories you want to do.. There is always room in the line-up for a good piece of credible and accurate journalism. Be the journalist you want to be, even if it means doing double-duty.

No one is going to make the change for women, they have to do it on their own. These small suggestions will turn into results over time if enough female broadcasters join together to make a change. With more women speaking up and more women pursuing harder news stories, it will pave a new path for women in the industry. This generation of female broadcasters can be the pioneers that break the News Barbie mold and forge new roles for the young women to come.

These positive changes can start taking shape within collegiate journalism programs themselves. The participants all have degrees in Communications from four-year institutions. The schools represented are: Penn State, Kent State, Minnesota State University, Indiana University, Indiana University of Pennsylvania, and Millersville University of Pennsylvania. However, none of the participants felt they were prepared for the challenges discussed in this thesis during their undergraduate coursework. It would be beneficial to start talking about these issues during college, while preparing students for the real world.

A suggestion would be a course on newsroom culture that specifically highlights the issues of sexism in the work place. Sparking this conversation early on will give young women the knowledge, and therefore the tools, to go into their first jobs with the ability and understanding to make positive changes. Educating young men interested in journalism will also help them to break the cycle of gender inequality in the newsroom and out in the field.

Chapter 5

DISCUSSION

The present investigation explores the role of women in the television news industry today. Through in-depth and personal interviews with female broadcasters, this study is able to highlight and pin point the status of women in this historically male-dominated field. There are now more opportunities for females in the news industry than ever before. Postfeminism chalks that inclusion up as a victory. However, using a feminist lens, it is argued that inclusion does not mean equality. Women are getting opportunities, but at what cost?

Female broadcast journalists work diligently to earn credibility and act as public servants who deliver true, factual, and reliable information to the masses. They take their duties as conduits of information very seriously and work tirelessly to achieve their goals. However, these women face numerous hurdles, including gender inequality, sexual objectification, and enormous pressures to conform to an almost unattainable beauty standard. These are issues not faced by their male counterparts.

Most of the previous literature on gender, credibility, and appearance in the television news industry is quantitative in nature and taken from an audience perspective. While this research is valuable, using an alternate qualitative approach is helpful in sparking a robust conversation on this issue. It is a sensitive, personal, and emotional topic that deserves the same sensitive, personal, and emotional attention that can only be achieved through in-depth individual interviews with the women themselves.

A Double-Edged Sword

Women broadcasters are well aware of the injustices they face simply because of their gender identification. They are placed in sexualized and objectified roles. Yet, female reporters

still work hard to be seen as credible and trustworthy reporters. It's a necessary evil of the business. Ideally, it would be great if image didn't matter and each reporter was judged based on the content of their stories, rather than their appearance, but women going into this industry know that is not the case. They are not dumb to the fact that they are placed in a duality, instead they choose to work within it in order to get ahead.

Credibility

Credibility is the number one priority for all journalists, male or female. It is a critical concept in television news. With the flood of options the public now has to get their news, credibility is a key factor in grabbing and keeping audiences. Female journalists feel just as much pressure, if not more, as their male counterparts, to prove themselves as serious, credible reporters.

These women understand credibility must be built up over time and they work each and every day to do so. The biggest key to credibility, in the eyes of these women, is building positive relationships. These relationships are with the viewing public and news sources, like political officials and law enforcement. Female newscasters actively spend time building and maintaining these relationships and are careful not to burn bridges. They respect being told facts "off the record" and are resistant to sensationalizing stories just to grab viewers' attention. They make conscious decisions every day to build up their reputation as credible journalists.

The women newscasters feel they are just as credible as the men and feel the audience has the same sentiment. They don't believe that gender is a factor in earning credibility. However, there are numerous situations that come into play where gender identification is a major factor.

The Pressures of being Beautiful

Television is a visual medium, plain and simple. Image is everything whether you're working at a locally owned station in the middle of Kentucky or a national affiliate in New York City. However, the pressures to be beautiful are far more intense for women than for men. Some of the pressure is internal, self-induced by the female news reporters themselves. Because competition in the industry is so fierce, there is always going to be someone prettier, younger, and thinner. This pressure develops into self-esteem and self-confidence issues among many female broadcasters. They begin to question their own self-worth based on their physical flaws. Many women, in every line of work, feel these pressures, but this is especially meaningful for women on television. They are placed in the public eye where they are open to critic on every detail of their physical appearance. Their flaws are thrust into the spotlight for anyone to comment on.

Most of this pressure to fit the News Barbie mold, however, is placed on women by their news directors. These news directors are usually older males. They control every detail of the female talent, from their lipstick color to the length of their hair. Women are forced to make changes to their bodies in order to obtain or maintain a job. It's all about control...and the news director has it. Female broadcasters are often scolded if they do not live up to the beauty standards and norms set for them by their superiors. Men rarely face this type of punishment, if at all.

To get ahead as a women in this traditionally male-dominated industry, the broadcasters must conform to these almost unattainable standards of beauty. They are well aware of the injustice in this, but they understand they must play by the rules to advance their careers. It's a negotiation many women journalists find troubling, yet they work within it. They will be the first

to admit that being thin and beautiful is often more important than being smart and quick-witted. It's a sad fact of the business, but it is that—a fact.

Postfeminist Masquerade

Sexual power is one advantage solely allotted to female broadcasters. Men do not have access to this power. Women reporters can use their femininity and sexuality to get exclusive information or interviews with men in authority or power positions. Many female news reporters admit to using their sexual power to get what they want, giving them an upper hand over male competition. This is an especially common strategy among younger women broadcasters.

However, McRobbie (2007) warns of the danger of using sexuality for personal gain and coins the term “postfeminist masquerade.” She feels this illusion of sexual power is just a subtle form of sexism itself. Some of the participants are aware of this danger and are less willing to use their sexual power intentionally or tactically, but they still admit to using it. While younger women are more likely to go out and get sexual attention, more experienced broadcasters tend to hang back. If they are approached by a male who finds them attractive, they will use it to their advantage, but they are less likely to seek out this attention. Despite all of the prejudices against women in the news media industry, none of the women said they'd be better off as a man. The benefit of sexual power is a big reason for this way of thinking.

Gender Inequality

According to the participants of this study, gender equality is still only an aspiration in the television news industry. As far as women have come, they still play second fiddle, in most instances, to their male colleagues. Women are highly aware of these gender inequalities and actively negotiate through them every day.

Story assignment is one of the most striking examples of gender inequality in the newsroom. Women are still given less complex, more emotionally charged feature stories, while men are given the hard-hitting news. The hard-hitting news, of course, leads the newscast, while the feature stories are buried somewhere in the middle or towards the end. This is a phenomenon that bothers many women in the business. They feel they are being stereotyped as incompetent and unable to understand complex issues like politics and infrastructure.

Female broadcasters are also subject to gender inequalities while reporting out in the field. Some male newsmakers place them in sexualized roles and the women are subject to catcalls and borderline sexual harassment. If not placed in sexualized roles, the women are placed in subordinate roles. They are coined as “the pretty face” whose sole value comes from physical beauty. They are treated as intellectually inferior and even mocked by males in positions of power.

That being said, women broadcasters are still expected to do the same work as their male counterparts. With budget cuts and staff cutbacks throughout the television news industry, more women are becoming multimedia journalists. That means they shoot and edit their own stories, while also appearing in front of the camera. These women are heading out alone into what can be a hostile environment, leaving them vulnerable to even more discrimination and unfair treatment.

There is a unique dichotomy to being a female news reporter. It’s a delicate balance between being a credible, sharp, smart reporter and fitting into the traditional gender role of an attractive woman. This is a gendered problem not faced by men. Female broadcasters are well aware of this balance and work through it everyday. They are constantly negotiating through situations to play whichever role they are expected to play in that moment. It’s a stressful and emotional burden placed on women in the broadcast news industry.

Women also have a much shorter shelf life as an on-air talent than men do. The stereotypical news team of the seasoned male anchor with the sexy young female anchor is common across the country. Not only do women get paid less to do the same job, but they also aren't able to do it for as long as men do. Their salaries and their careers are both cut short.

Audience Interaction

Audiences tend to be attracted more towards female news presenters than males. Women are usually more aesthetically pleasing and eye catching. However, many female broadcasters feel they are seen and not heard. Almost all of the audience feedback they receive is about their clothing, make-up, or hairstyle. Viewers want to know where the women shop, get their hair done, or buy their jewelry. They don't really care about the story being presented, but instead, focus more on the image of the presenter herself.

This is disheartening to women reporters because they work just as hard to have truthful, factual, and timely reports as men do. Female reporters work tirelessly to build up their credibility and earn a reputation as being a good reporter, but their work is overshadowed by which shade of eye shadow they're wearing. Again, they are reduced to simply a "pretty face," while the men take the reigns as being the strong, aggressive, trustworthy journalists.

Real Steps Towards Change

Though they face tremendous hurdles and pressures, women in the news industry wouldn't be in it if they didn't love it. They would not put up with such injustices if they did not have a true passion for what they do. There are no regrets, only hopes, hopes to move forward and pave the way for another group of young women. Female broadcasters encourage young

women to follow in their footsteps, just as long as they understand the challenges they will undoubtedly face ahead. Women have come so far in the television news industry, but they still have a long way to go. Having an educated and realistic batch of young women reporters will do wonders for the role of women in the mass media in the future.

Implications

The goal of this thesis is to spark a conversation. Women face incredible inequality in the news media industry and its time to open up a dialogue in order to move forward. Many of the participants told me they began to realize things about their own roles only as I was interviewing them about it. It's easy to take situations for granted and think we are the only ones facing the challenges we do. This thesis was able to bring together a group of strong women, all tackling the same challenges, to spark a conversation about a personal, emotional, and sensitive topic.

Women have come a long way since the diffusion of television news back in the 1950s. Women are now allowed to do any job a man can do in the industry. However, as this research shows, inclusion does not mean equality. We are well on our way to balancing gender roles in the mass media, but we aren't there yet. Only by exchanging ideas and engaging in thoughtful debate can we come to a solution. I hope this research adds to a rich and robust conversation on the topic of the roles of women in the television news industry. By sharing stories and insights we can make a difference and advocate for a positive change for the young women who dream to one day be a role model, a conduit of information, and a truthful public servant.

In addition to speaking out, women can take action. A suggestion is to go after more hard-hitting news stories. Even if a female broadcaster is assigned a feature piece, do an extra piece focused on a more serious topic. Go out and do the stories you want to do. Be the journalist you want to be, even if it means doing more work.

No one is going to make the change for women, they have to do it on their own. These small steps forward can transform into cultural changes over time if enough female broadcasters join together to make a change. With more women speaking up and more women pursuing the stories they want to cover, it will pave a new path for women in the industry. This generation of female broadcasters can be the leaders that break the News Barbie mold and forge new roles for the young women to come.

These positive changes can begin within collegiate journalism programs themselves. The participants all have degrees in Communications from four-year institutions; however, none of them felt they were prepared for the challenges discussed in this thesis during their undergraduate studies. It would be beneficial to start exploring these issues during college, while preparing students for the real world.

A suggestion would be a course on newsroom culture that specifically highlights the issues of sexism in the work place. Sparking this conversation early on will give young women the knowledge, and therefore the tools, to go into this career with the ability and understanding to make positive changes. Educating young men interested in journalism will also help them to break the cycle of gender inequality in the newsroom and out in the field. Candid conversations on these sensitive issues in the classroom will only serve to benefit the newer generation of male and female broadcast journalists.

Limitations and Future Research

There are limitations to be noted in this research. The participants were all from similar socio-economic and racial backgrounds. All of the women interviewed were white and college-

educated. While the sample size elicited a variety of responses, more participants would be beneficial in gaining a wider perspective on the topic at hand.

Future research would benefit by having more variety in the participants. Recruiting female broadcasters from different racial backgrounds, education levels, and socioeconomic standings could provide for richer information and different insights. While these participants were somewhat geographically dispersed, there were none from the western half of the country. Interviewing participants from the west coast would be beneficial, especially since there seems to be more of a focus on image and appearance in that part of the country, at least that is the stereotype.

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Appendix

Credibility

1. What does it mean to be credible?
2. Tell me about a time when your own credibility had an impact on a story you did or an assignment you had.
3. How has your credibility developed since you first started reporting?
4. Can you give me a specific situation where a viewer commented on your credibility? Good or bad?
5. Why do you think credibility is so important to your field?
6. What would a credible reporter look like?
7. If high credibility was represented by a car what would it be? What about low credibility?
8. What are the different ways credibility is developed?
9. What is the difference between a credible reporter and a reporter who is not credible?
10. What do you do to increase your credibility?
11. Who is your ideal newsperson? Why?

Gender

1. What is it like to be a woman in the news industry?
2. Tell me about a time when your gender impacted the way you were treated on a story? In the newsroom?
3. From the time you started reporting until now, how has gender evolved as an issue?
4. Can you give me a specific situation where you thought you'd be better as a male reporter? Has it ever helped you to be a woman?
5. Why do you think male reporters and female reporters are treated differently?
6. Who do you think an audience member would find more credible—you or your male co-worker? Why?
7. If you could change one thing about your newsroom what would it be?

8. What are the different ways being female impacts how you're expected to act on the job?
9. What are the differences in the way viewers respond to female versus male newscasters?

Appearance

1. What does sex appeal have to do with reporting?
2. Tell me about a time you felt pressured to look a certain way.
3. How has your appearance changed since you first started reporting, aside from just aging?
4. Can you give me a specific situation where the way you looked impacted your work?
5. Why do you think there is such an emphasis on female appearance in the news media?
6. How does being attractive impact your credibility as a reporter?
7. If you could look any way you want on-air, how would you look?
8. What are the ways being attractive can hurt you as a reporter?
9. What are the differences in the pressures men feel to be attractive versus females? Is it equal?
11. Do you think audiences react differently to beautiful and not beautiful reporters?
12. What advice would you give to young women reporters or those who want to be reporters?