

The Roadblocks Women in Virginia Face in Sports Media

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Abstract

Roadblocks for women in Virginia sports media were explored. The study helps provide guidance to improve opportunities for women in Virginia sports media and allow the the same opportunities as their male counterparts. The literature review examined the theoretical framework needed to help further explain the needs of women in sports media and how roadblocks they face affect them. The theoretical framework applied within the study was Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. Study participants included two women who have over 20+ years of experience within sports media. The interviews were semi-structured providing feedback that gave insight into personal experiences within their individual career paths. Qualitative interviews were collected and analyzed, and five themes emerged leading to the recommendations. The recommendations were aimed toward women looking to become sports journalists in Virginia. The results determined that women in sports media in Virginia should focus on five distinct themes: Work Ethic, Be Who You Are, Experience, Diversity, and Giving Back. Women already working within the field of sports media and young aspiring journalists should be transparent throughout the process. People placed in leadership positions should understand how important opportunities are, how to focus on improving leadership/decision making, creating more work-like experiences, and understanding diversity for the young aspiring journalists entering the field.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The purpose of this project was to describe the roadblocks that women will face within the field of sports media in Virginia. Interviews were conducted to help identify the roadblocks and describe scenarios that other women may face, and the best ways to confront them. This evaluation will provide insight into the aspects of sports media that are not readily available to women aspiring to work within the field. The expected outcome of this evaluation is to present findings and recommendations to the women aspiring to work within the field of sports media so that they are prepared for what is to come and what they may face.

Background

The roadblocks that women in Virginia face in sports media are more challenging than those faced by their male counterparts. Literature has shown that a content analysis of *Sports Illustrated* covers determined there is in fact an under-representation of female athletes in print media, and due to the sexualized manner in which female athletes are portrayed, they suffer from inadequate depiction (Shaller, 2006). Even today, sports media leaders remain largely white and male (Lapchick, 2018). Across various mediums we are still seeing a lack of women in sports media. The purpose of this study is to explore what barriers participants have faced, how they conquered them, and how to allow others wanting to take the same path a better opportunity. There is literature that supports these deficiencies exist within women in sports, and many of these deficiencies are related to how society views the two genders and their expected roles. Bernstein states that, “Indeed, while the male performance is often linked with power metaphors (such as war) the coverage of female athletes was often framed within stereotypes that emphasized their appearance and attractiveness rather than athletic skill” (2002, p. 420). This applies to female athletes, but as more women move into the field of sports media these same

issues are applying to them in their roles as journalism. The issues female athletes face is not limited to only them, and unfortunately spread beyond just the sport itself. One of the most significant contributing factors to the deficiencies women in sports media face is media framing (Palmeri, 2001). Media framing is a way for professionals to skew ideas so the public interprets one idea as being more important or more acceptable than another (Palmeri, 2001). Women are frequently under-represented because of the way they are portrayed to their audiences, and due to this women have yet to gain leverage on their male counterparts, “they are forced to deal with issues relating to their gender and fighting against biases within society and within their field. Additionally, when a female athlete was featured, the focus was most often placed on the traditional feminine roles and behaviors she exhibited (Bishop, 2003), her physical appearance (Kim, Sagas, & Walker, 2011), or sexualized images (Cranmer et al., 2014). This potentially trivializes female athletic ability (Harrison & Secarea, 2010; Kim, Sagas, & Walker, 2011) and reinforces hegemonic masculinity ideals (Bishop, 2003).” And due to this, women are always forced to deal with more issues than their male counterparts because of their gender.

The audience that would be most interested in this topic would be young women studying sports media as a major in college looking to start their careers within the field upon graduating. This study would help prepare them for what barriers they may face in the future. The purpose of this study is to begin filling a gap for those interested in understanding why there is a lack of representation of women in sports media, and within the field of sports media particularly compared to the path their male counterparts face. At this stage in the research, the under-representation being studied will be generally defined as why women in sports media need more opportunities just as their counterparts have (Lapchick, 2018). To gather data, interviews will take place with two female participants that have taken different paths to their current careers,

but have all cemented their skillsets as very influential, successful journalists within sports media. The interviews will be transcribed and analyzed, and this data will help provide answers to the research questions being asked the key terms that this research will be centered around are six basic words; sports, sports media, journalism, media, Title IX, and roadblocks.

Definition of Terms

Journalism- The activity or profession of writing for newspapers, magazines, or news websites or preparing news to be broadcast.

Media- The main means of mass communication (broadcasting, publishing, and the internet) regarded collectively.

Roadblocks- A barrier or obstacles that can lead you to a better path in life through force.

Sports Media- A form of writing that reports on matters pertaining to sports topics and competitions.

Title IX- Is a federal civil rights law in the United States of America that was passed as part of the Education Amendments of 1972. It prohibits sex-based discrimination in any school or other education program that receives federal money.

Women- An adult female human being.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this project was to describe the roadblocks that women will face within the field of sports media in Virginia. Interviews were conducted to help identify the roadblocks and describe scenarios that other women may face, and the best ways to confront them. This evaluation will provide insight into the aspects of sports media that are not readily available to women aspiring to work within the field. The expected outcome of this evaluation is to present

findings and recommendations to the women aspiring to work within the field of sports media so that they are prepared for what is to come and what they may face.

Limitations of the Project

The first limitation to this project was the sample size. The study only recruited participants within Virginia who have tallied many years within the field of sports mediums. This limited the number of participants that could be recruited for participation. Of the three participants that had been recruited, only two were able to participate in the interviews because of time constraints on their busy schedules.

When the study first began to culminate the initial intent was to interview six participants, three from a rural area (Southwest, Virginia), and three from an urban area (Mid-Atlantic). Only two of the six participants responded. There was an oversaturation of information between those to continue down that path, so we narrowed it down to six participants within Virginia, however that changed the landscape of the rural and urban areas theme because of conflicts only two of the six participants were willing and able to commit to conducting the interview. The two participants that were able to give the interviewer feedback were located within North Carolina and Georgia. Geographically the intent was to stay within Virginia but due to the constraints and time sensitivity of the study those were the geographical areas that prevailed.

Another limitation is personal bias. The interviewer is a current collegiate female athlete and aspiring journalist wanting to work within sports media. The participants chosen in this study are women that the interviewer looks up to and aspires to be one day. This personal bias could influence the interviews used to gather data since the interview has a personal stake in the outcome of this study.

Fourthly, there was an overall lack of previous research studies in this particular area. While completing the literature review, the researcher had to find many articles in regards to obstacles and roadblocks women face in sports as a whole (not just women who work in sports media) because of the lack of available research. The information gained within this study will optimistically lead to more research in this particular field of study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The purpose of this project was to describe the roadblocks that women will face within the field of sports media in Virginia. Interviews were conducted to help identify the roadblocks and describe scenarios that other women may face, and the best ways to confront them. This evaluation will provide insight into the aspects of sports media that are not readily available to women aspiring to work within the field. The expected outcome of this evaluation is to present findings and recommendations to the women aspiring to work within the field of sports media so that they are prepared for what is to come and what they may face.

The data that will be collected will be qualitative. Rowley (2012) reveals that interviews when conducted face-to-face make way for verbal exchanges in which one person, the interviewer, attempts to acquire information from and gain an understanding of another person, the interviewee. Rowley also states that choosing to question an interviewee creates big advantages within their responses because the data gathered will generate findings that are more generalizable (p. 261). Based on this information it was determined that face-to-face interviews would be the best method for gathering data and gaining an understanding of the personal experiences of the interviewees.

Statement of the Problem

More than ninety-percent of anchors, commentators, and editors within sports media are men. To put this into perspective, Serazio notes that, “not until 2017 did a woman announce a men’s March Madness or Monday Night Football game” (2019). Many viewers of large male sporting events assume that women are unable to speak knowledgeably about male-dominated sports because they were not participants in these sports themselves, and therefore society do not think they should offer commentary. Kane and Buysse mention, “A popularly held belief by

sports-media decision makers is that framing female athletes in a sexual way will increase viewership and interest in women's sports" (2005). There needs to be a change in mindset that women can bring value to the game rather than this belief that they are taking value away. While there has been some progress within the realm of sports media, it is not moving as quickly as other areas within media. "On a positive note, though still predominantly focused on male athletes, these data showed higher-than-reported averages in gender media representation of women at 2%–4% in overall media coverage" (Cooky, Messner, & Hextrum, 2013). The data reflects that there is a desire within females to play sports, however they are still not given nearly enough coverage compared to their male counterparts, according to Mudrick and Lin (2017), "In 2014, 42 years after the enactment of Title IX, 9,581 women played for intercollegiate varsity athletic teams in the NCAA and 13,963 women worked in intercollegiate athletics. Both of these figures represent all-time highs...However, coverage of female sports in the media has been disproportionately lacking, relative to their male counterpart" (p. 79). There is noticeable progress in certain areas of women in sport since the passing of Title IX, but sports media is progressing at a slower rate.

When Title IX was passed to allow women the same opportunities as men, women immediately became a target for scrutiny. Title IX challenged certain gender roles established in society, and "Although few would argue that, for the most part, women and men conform to these gender role expectations...We are suggesting that gender difference is translated into gender hierarchy, because in existing social arrangements females are defined not only as "other than" but as "less than" their male counterparts" (Kane & Greendorfer, 1994, p. 29). Fast forward to year 2021, women trying to progress within sports media are still dealing with the same issues that occurred decades ago. Title IX helped make waves in providing opportunities

for women to participate in sports, but the increased opportunities have still not been seen within sports media and women are still fighting to be seen as equal within the field. Even with increased opportunities, women that have made their way into the field still face obstacles that are unique to their gender such as harassment. Harassment against female journalists come in different forms but the most prominent is cyber-bullying, according to Citron (2009), “online harassment is not taken seriously in the present. The trivialization of online harassment puts the responsibility on the victim to respond to “trolls” and ignores the physical and emotional harm inflicted upon them” (p. 374). This harm can be significant and forces women in these situations to find ways to combat the harassment. According to Everbach (2018), women have to find unique ways to fight against online trolls. Some of these strategies have included joining organizations or online communities of women in similar situations.

Media framing (p. 54) plays a huge role in how women in sport are viewed by society, which becomes a cycle. If media plays a role in how women are perceived by society, then it continues to make it more difficult for women to break through in this same media that is responsible for society's viewpoints of them. Here is how the media shapes the views of their audiences, “*Media Framing* – The concept of media framing exhibits a reporter and editor’s choice as to what aspects of a story in the news are emphasized the most, what characteristics of individuals are popular of as well as participation in women’s sports” (Shaller, 2020). Women are seen as fragile, gentle, and feminine in the public view which translates to women not being “allowed” to play a sport that is perceived as a masculine. Sport is the nectar that nurtures the masculine self. It is a culture; the dominant culture in the United States where men rule and women are marginalized and objectified (Grubb, & Billiot, 2010). Media professionals argue they are simply providing what the public wants, and supporting the belief that the public is not

interested in watching women as competitors, but rather is interested in watching them as sexual beings. It matters because men want to watch women play sport for the sexual arousal it gives them, not for the love of the game they would get from watching a male sporting event. Research has shown that, "...scholars found that the media tend to focus on the female athletes as sexual beings, rather than serious performers. According to this argument, the sexualization of female athletes trivializes them and in fact robs female athletes of athletic legitimacy..." (Bernstein, 2002, p. 421-422). Objectification theory holds that "girls and women are typically acculturated to internalize a viewer's perspective as a primary view of their physical selves" (Harrison, & Fredrickson, 2003). Since the beginning of time, societally a woman is not supposed to speak unless spoken to, eat until they have provided for their husband, and are not supposed to work, except around the house. Decades and centuries later, all of these norms are being challenged on larger scales. This explains why there is major pullback on fan viewership of women, and media coverage of women within the world of sports and sports media. Despite societal changes – increased participation and opportunities among female athletes – coverage and portrayal are still lacking in quantity as well as quality (Shaller, 2020). While progress has been made, it is not yet enough to overcome current obstacles women in this area face.

Psychological Needs

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs is a motivational theory in psychology comprising a five-tier model of human needs, often depicted as hierarchical levels within a pyramid (McLeod, 2018). Maslow's hierarchy of needs are as follows: psychological, safety, belongingness/love, esteem and self-actualization. Within each stage the needs lower down in the hierarchy must be satisfied before individuals can attend to needs higher up (McLeod, 2018). Most women within the field of sports media are more than likely to have psychological concerns simply due to the

treatment they receive. (Harrison, 2020). A dedication to meeting these needs throughout their tenures working in sports media could be the difference in women in sports media staying mentally healthy or succumbing to mental instability.

The literature that already surrounds this topic is the challenges women face that discourages them from staying in the business of sports media, race and ethnicity and how it has an effect on how far that woman in particular can move up the totem pole, and overall the mental toll all of these contributing factors take on women in sports media.

Theoretical Framework

The theory that will be used to help identify the needs of a women in sports media in Virginia is Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (1954) (Appendix A). This theory helps describe the needs of women in sports media. Maslow's theory proposes five categories and stages: physiological needs, safety needs, belongingness and love need, esteem needs, and self-actualization. At once other (and "higher") needs emerge and these, rather than physiological hungers, dominate the organism. And when these in turn are satisfied, again new (and still "higher") needs emerge and so on. This is what we mean by saying that the basic human needs are organized into a hierarchy of relative prepotency" (Maslow, 1943, p. 375). Each stage builds onto one another until the individual reaches the final stage of self-actualization. Each stage in Maslow's theory as it relates to this research is presented below.

Physiological Needs

Physiological needs are biological requirements for human survival, e.g. air, food, drink, shelter, clothing, warmth, sex, sleep (McLeod, 2018). When these basic needs are not met the human body is not able to function. When functioning as a woman in sports media this is one of the first things taken into consideration when looking for a working environment that is

conducive to all of these needs. An example of this could be when the individual is offered a job within that allows all of these needs to be met will be considered and researched before the job offer is either accepted or denied. This could be viewed as a healthy work life balance, or a job that will allow someone to meet all their physical needs or give them the means to. A job that makes someone feel as though they need to sacrifice their physical needs would create an environment of high stress if this foundational aspect of Maslow's theory is not met.

Safety Needs

Protection from elements, security, order, law, stability, freedom from fear. (McLeod, 2018). The second level of Maslow's pyramid becomes more complex. Within this aspect security is the most important aspect to women within sports media as a female because of the uncertainty the work environment creates. In this sense, security in other words means financial stability, and as Bernstein states, "This under-representation, in turn, is also viewed as creating a vicious circle since the growth of women's sport is hindered by the lack of funds which nowadays come primarily from sponsorship. Since sponsors are interested in investing in sports and teams which feature regularly on television and women's sports do not qualify as such, they do not get big cash injections" (2002, p. 417). This cycle continues to create an environment where women are not compensated fairly. This shows how women's opportunities within the field of sports media are not equivalent to their male counterparts, and how this shows even more so financially.

Belongingness and Love Needs

After physiological and safety needs have been fulfilled, the third level of human needs is social and involves feelings of belongingness. The need for interpersonal relationships motivates behavior. Examples include friendship, intimacy, trust, and acceptance, receiving and giving

affection and love. Affiliating, being part of a group (family, friends, work) (McLeod, 2018). In this profession women have difficulty finding their way or where they “fit in.” Women and people in general thrive when they feel they are accepted within whatever interpersonal relationships they build. In this case, women within sports media feel at their best when they are accepted by their employers, counterparts, and friends working towards the same goals. Examples of this could be networking and allowing your relationships to grow themselves to ensure that belongingness and love being to organically intertwine itself into these relationships.

Esteem Needs

The fourth level of Maslow’s Hierarchy is the esteem needs for appreciation and respect. Maslow classified esteem needs into two categories: (i) esteem for oneself (dignity, achievement, mastery, independence) and (ii) the desire for reputation or respect from others (e.g., status, prestige). Maslow indicated that the need for respect or reputation is most important for children and adolescents and precedes real self-esteem or dignity (McLeod, 2018). The importance of women in sports media needing to feel respected is so that the work environment is conducive to success. You cannot just allow the men in the workplace to feel wanted and not their female counterparts because of the divide it could create which will eventually spill into the product produced. The team is only as good as the sum of its parts.

Self-Actualization Needs

Realizing personal potential, self-fulfillment, seeking personal growth and peak experiences. A desire “to become everything one is capable of becoming” (Maslow, 1987, p. 64). In order for this need to be met by any person but specifically women in sports media you must first fulfill all the previous needs discussed. If and when women in the field make it to this stage it means that they have succeeded through their battles and have overall created a great situation

for themselves that will steadily allow their work ethics and learned behaviors to get them to the next level of their journeys.

Chapter 3: Methodology

The purpose of this project was to describe the roadblocks that women will face within the field of sports media in Virginia. Interviews were conducted to help identify the roadblocks and describe scenarios that other women may face, and the best ways to confront them. This evaluation will provide insight into the aspects of sports media that are not readily available to women aspiring to work within the field. The expected outcome of this evaluation is to present findings and recommendations to the women aspiring to work within the field of sports media so that they are prepared for what is to come and what they may face.

Designing and Planning Interviews

For this project, the most effective way to generate the best information for this research is through gathering qualitative data. Since this research involves the personal experiences of women in sports media, interviews were conducted because, “the interviewee may be invited to talk about their own attitudes, beliefs, behaviors or experiences as a citizen, user, consumer, or employee” (Rowley, 2012, p. 260). Continuing to follow Rowley’s research, this research was semi-structured to allow for variation of questions to accommodate the interviewee to answer in great depth and open-ended responses. The interviews conducted were intended to receive responses from the interviewees that were based on their own personal experiences about the challenges they faced and what they felt they did best to overcome them (p. 266). If the interview is conducted according to the guidelines set by Rowley, the findings and insights will reflect that. Staying consistent with Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs pyramid the interviewer must ask questions that reflects different types of needs according to Maslow’s pyramid.

Choosing Participants

Before any interviews were conducted, a Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board (IRB #21-401) application was submitted and approved (Appendix D) before contact was made with any potential prospects. Data for this research was collected through both sampling and recruitment. The sample for this research included three females who are employed within the field of sports media. Originally six females were asked to participate within this study, but due to time constraints, only two were able to participate. Each participant was contacted one time via email, or text. That was also how interview dates and times were set-up. This sample was focused just on women for obvious reasons but each interviewees perspective is different which will provide diversity within the data collected. A recruitment script was formed in order to present the research to the potential participant (Appendix A). Next, a consent form was created to guarantee the participants gave written consent to be a part of this study (Appendix E). Each potential participant was also sent a recruitment email that re-iterated what the consent form said. This email was sent out to each participant (Appendix B). This email ensured that the researcher would remain within confidentiality throughout the process of interviewing, After the participant agreed to participate, a second email was sent out with the scheduled time along with the zoom link. The goal of interviews was to gather adequate data on the roadblocks faced throughout their time working within the field of sports media.

Conducting Interviews

The interviews would begin with introductions of the interviewer along with a series ice-breaker questions to build rapport and comfortability between the interviewer and interviewee. Rowley (2012) explained the importance of building rapport within interviews, however the connections between the interviewee and interviewer were previously present through the

Atlantic Coast Conference. The interviews were a little over 60 minutes for each participant. The interviews had minor modifications based on the responses of the interviewees to allow for flow and continued comfortability of the participants. The interview focused on the roadblocks each interviewee faced during their tenures in the field of sports media and how they continue to persevere. A script of the entire interview and list of questions can be found in Appendix C and F. The interview process and questions pointed towards the participants focused on their personal experiences within their personal working fields. Some of which include their experiences with mental health, the rise and fall of female journalists, why men dominate this field, and more. For a female sportscaster or journalists, credibility will always be questioned and challenged. Regardless of the position of the talent level that a female journalist has, she will constantly be challenged because of her gender (Gunther, Kautz, & Roth, 2011).

Making Sense of the Interview Data

After the interviews concluded, the interviewer listened to the recordings to ensure that the data transcriptions were accurate. To protect the interviewees identities each speaker was given a façade name. There were two programs that recorded and transcribed the interviews called Zoom Meeting (Version 5.76; Yuan, 2011) and “Temi- Recorder and Transcriber (Version 2.4, Chicola, 2011) to guarantee quality data collection. Reviewing the interviews through (a) *open contexts* in which we can cautiously infer about other situations from the interview; (b) contexts that we should treat as hermetically *closed*; and (c) *refracted* contexts in which the relationship between the interview and other situations is patterned but not direct (Tavory, 2020). All of the interviews with the interviewees will be transcribed verbatim in a delicately detailed technique until the data has reached the point of saturation. Saturation means no new data is being revealed, or information is becoming repetitive. Throughout this process tedious notes will

be taken. Rowley (2012, p.267) article will allow the interviewer to de-code the interviews to extract themes and categories that were re-occurring through all interviews. The findings established ultimately emerged as the qualitative data of this research.

Reflexivity Statement

I have thoroughly enjoyed the project I have completed to better understand the needs of women in sports media in Virginia. I am passionate about this study because I have studied and completed my undergraduate degree in broadcast journalism. I began my collegiate career at Virginia Tech in the summer of 2017 to begin my studies as a student and my collegiate NCAA career as a basketball player. As I studied and learned all the intricacies of broadcast journalism as a whole, and as a female compared to a male I realized that a lot of odds would be stacked against me once I entered the field of sports media. Having known that information, I ran with it and decided to complete my master's study on the detailed research on what ways, shapes, and forms women are troubled throughout their journeys within the field of media in Virginia. It is not my intent to influence the participants in any ways, but to collect data that accurately reflects the weaknesses within sports media for women in Virginia. Survey questions were developed and the data analysis were completed having taken these potential flaws into consideration.

Chapter 4: Findings, Discussion & Conclusion

The purpose of this study is to describe the roadblocks that women will face within the field of sports media in Virginia. Interviews were conducted to help identify those particular roadblocks and describe scenarios that other women may face, and the best ways to confront them. This evaluation will provide insight into the aspects of sports media that are not readily available to young women aspiring to work within the field. The expected outcome of this evaluation is to present findings and recommendations to women aspiring to work within the field of sports media, so they are prepared for what they may face.

The data collected was qualitative. Rowley (p. 261) reveals that interviews when conducted face-to-face make way for verbal exchanges in which one person, the interviewer, attempts to acquire information from, and gain an understanding of another person, the interviewee. Rowley also states, that choosing to question an interviewee creates big advantages within their responses because the data gathered will generate findings that are more generalizable (p. 261). Detailed interviews with the two participants identified ways their physiological needs had or had not been met along with their personal experiences they faced when met with obstacles. Of the two participants that were interviewed they were both females that have respectively worked within their fields broadcasting men and women's professional and collegiate level basketball. Using semi-structured interview methods five themes emerged from the data and were considered to be significant needs of the women within sports media:

1. Work Ethic
2. Be Who You Are
3. Experience
4. Diversity

5. Giving Back

Theme 1: Work Ethic

Within theme one work ethic paved the way for interviewee Lindsey, and interviewee Danielle. These interviewees expressed how having a strong work ethic is the epitome of being a woman working in the field of sports media. Most women do not realize how much harder they have to work once they enter the field, because of the magnitude of obstacles you will face in the future.

Two examples illustrated Work Ethic. Interviewees Danielle and Lindsey discussed how they relied heavily on their work ethic to get where they are today: “I relied on my, my networking ability, my cultivation skills, my work ethic, my relationship building, you know...”

Interviewee Lindsey expressed her experience “I mean, it was a real grind because just think I had no education and there's no background, no experience. And every time I would go to a place and say, Hey, I want to be on your network and talk about what is basketball. They would look at me like I was nuts and like, okay, you're an administrator at a college and you think you're getting ready to jump on television, but I just kept working.” She continued talking about her experience, expressing why using her voice was so vital:

“Did I raise my voice in that room and speak towards what I’m passionate about? Those will be the moments that will really define how the journey feels. Those will be the moments that allow you to lay your head on the pillow at night, win or lose and be okay with it. And you probably understand that, like, as a player, if you put everything you have to be out on the floor and, you know you were there for your teammates and you did everything the way you would have wanted to, you realize those losses are a little bit easier to deal with. Of course, then when you just feel like you didn’t even try, you didn’t

even show up and you were scared. You let fear keep you from going out on that limb. So, I think that would be the advice that I give is to stay in touch with who you are, because at the end of the day, that is all you have, whether you are victorious in the meeting room or on or off the court, you will fare much better overall in life and be able to live in a place of peace.”

Theme 2: Be Who You Are

Theme two was focused on the importance of being true to yourself no matter the obstacles you face throughout your journey. Women in the field feel because there are many roadblocks already faced, you should avoid creating more issues. “In this way you’ll distinguish yourself from others who do similar work, affirm your true identity, highlight your talents, and establish your reputation...” (Roffer, 1962). Considering that work ethic and being who you are go hand in hand, you are able to identify why these are the first two themes that emerged. Some examples from the interviews will represent the theme of Being Who You Are. Interviewee Danielle discussed how being true to who you are created opportunities for her throughout her career:

“I’ve been doing this for a long time, but I, I tell my bosses at ESPN that I’ll stack up my work against anybody on our roster and you stack up your work against anybody else’s roster with the way you play. Right. Right. And it’s just a confidence you have to have, you don’t have to talk about it. You just have to have it, you know, and you need other people that understand it.”

Interviewee Lindsey also discussed how much she relied on her authentic self to get her to this point within her career and not being discouraged by the roadblocks she faced:

“You're going to hear a lot of no's, but if you go down and knowing that you were authentically yourself, then you learn to live through some of the disappointments and the ups and downs, like finding your voice and figuring out who you are, is the most important part of this journey.”

Theme 3: Experience

Within theme three, it was explained that within this specific field you have to be willing to put yourself through different experiences to learn, adapt, and grow. You have to be willing to prepare for greatness before knowing you could become great. The interviews revealed that experience was extremely prominent in their journeys, because of the invaluable lessons they gained along with the connections they created through their experiences. Experiences allow you to grow and learn just as much as anything and interviewees Danielle and Lindsey expressed that tremendously:

“And the more opportunities that came along, the better chances I had, because I knew I didn't have the educational background of it.”

Interviewee Danielle exclaimed that more opportunities came about throughout her 34-year career and how every experience has allowed her to continue to excel no matter how big or small obstacle was:

“Well at the very beginning, because there weren't a lot of games just trying to get some games to call. And as you know, more games started to appear, more coverage, more expanded coverage. I got more opportunities to call games.”

Interviewee Danielle again explained what experiences were like during this period of time and how her approach has gained her access to life changing opportunities.

“I want you to come over to Ohio State. I want you to produce eight women’s basketball games. What would it cost to produce eight women’s games? And back then, this is like in 1993, they said \$50,000 to produce the games. Now you can’t even produce one game for that price. But \$50,000 for eight games, I said fine. As the director of marketing I’m to go out and sell it. So, I sold the inventory, the packaging, the commercials, everything around it, the \$50,000 so that we could produce eight games. And then I got to call the games that kept me on the air. So, I continued to create my own network while creating a platform for women’s basketball.”

Interviewee Lindsey explained how her non-traditional path of experiences allowed her to be in a class of her own as a female African-American sportscaster.

“One day at Georgia Tech, radio folks asked me to do a women’s basketball game. And I was like, oh okay. I’m sure. You know because I was working for the team, but during the game I really didn’t have anything to do. I would just set everything up and then during the game I really didn’t have anything to do. I would just set everything up. And then during the game I just wanted and they were like well, why don’t you come on the radio? And I was like okay, cool. I show up in my little khakis and my Georgia Tech polo and I’m eating popcorn, I’m not taking this seriously at all. And I put the headset on for my first game and my life has been changed ever since, I absolutely loved it.

Years later interviewee Lindsey had another opportunity presented to her that further ascended her career.

“I mean it was a real grind because just think I had no education and there’s no background, no experience. And every time I would go to a place and say, hey, I want to be on your network and talk about what is basketball. They would look at me like I was

nuts and like, okay, you're an administrator at a college and you think you're getting ready to jump on television, but I just kept working. And with some favor from God, you know I was doing some radio sending out my little DVDs and my little CDs. And eventually all it takes is for like one person to get sick. And they say, hey we need someone to fill in for this one basketball game on television. Are you available? And so that's what happened to me. I ended up getting a game on a network called CSS, which is a local station."

Once you get your first opportunity doors begin to open for you, but you have to be willing to put in the initial work and understand that everything is a process:

"And, everything really kicked off from there, but the obstacles are definitely getting experience on camera, representing yourself, you know, keep representing, watching your work, getting people to critique you. I was always asking for feedback on my stuff. You know really getting your foot in the door, convincing people to believe in you, it was definitely another obstacle, but also as a woman that loves women's sports, like people don't generally believe there's a place for us, right?"

Theme 4: Diversity

Theme four was organized around the knowledge of the interviewee's perspectives on diversity, and how they have advocated for their individual causes. Through these interviews both women discussed how diversity is extremely important in their respective areas of work and where diversity and inclusivity become imperative within the offices of the decision makers.

Interviewee Danielle has been in the industry for 34 years and counting. She feels that companies have really began to hone in on the D and I, diversity and inclusion because of the climate of the society:

“Much higher increase? Especially right now, there is, uh you know um all companies are looking at the D and I right now. The diversity inclusion, diversity equity and inclusion. So, there are a lot more women, women of color, a lot more women getting an opportunity right now. It seems to be a really good time.”

Interviewee Danielle also mentioned that she has a son who desires to coach but could be denied that opportunity just because he may appear different:

“But, especially my youngest son wants to coach. I want him to have a chance to if he wants to coach. I think that’s a pretty deep question, but I think mainly it comes back to who’s in charge and accepting and embracing diversity. I always say LeBron, if he had a woman on his team, when he made that statement “I’m taking my talents to south beach” he might not have said it like that. You know, he might’ve had somebody that could’ve softened it up a little bit better. he could have delivered a little differently. Not that it hasn’t worked out for him. I’m just using that example. But, I do think men and women think differently. We have different emotions. We have different emotional intelligence that we bring. I think that’s important when you’re making decisions.”

Interviewee Lindsey explained that diversity should be a goal that everyone no matter who you are should be working towards, but when you don’t see diversity how can you promote it:

“And everyone just being more accountable in whatever space you are in. See we have this idea that you have to be in some high position of like ultimate leadership and ultimate control to move the needle when it comes to diversity. No, it’s not whatever your job it. Every day you should be looking around and saying, you know, who’s in the room. and if everyone looks the same that should be a problem. And that’s, you know,

not everyone's all men, or all women, or you know everyone's all white. Like we've got to have more diversity at the table because that's what our world, which is what we should want to do. If the people sitting in the room, running those things and making the decisions and writing the checks, don't look like the rest of the world. So, to me, that's why we've had such a hard time over the years and they're starting to do some change, but it's not happening fast enough for me. Diversity in leadership is 100% where the conversation begins and ends."

Another aspect that interviewee Lindsey mentioned was an analytical fact that candidly interprets how women still have a long way to go in sports media to become as prominent as their male counterparts:

"You know, we're seeing more visibility for women overall, but compared to men it's not even close, I think less than 5% of all media coverage is for women's sports, less than 1% of all dollars invested in athlete's sponsorship goes to women, that is less than 1%, its absolutely unacceptable."

Theme 5: Giving Back

Theme five revealed how much interviewees Danielle and Lindsey are engulfed in their purpose which allows them to give back to their individual causes due to how much was given to them throughout their careers.

Interviewee Danielle believes in giving back through her podcasts that allows her to place student-athletes on a platform to become more visible to the professionals that may not understand who these young women are outside of their gifts and talents:

"I'm going to have you on my podcast. It's a great way for the WNBA, because all of the coaches listen. I talk to all the coaches, they'll call me about players. It's a great way for your

personality, for them to get to know you a little bit. Actually, that's how Dana Evans raised her draft stock. I had several coaches go, I had no idea that Dana was that smart. Right and what they meant is, we just never heard her voice. we didn't know. Yeah, so that the kind of stuff that's fun for me too because I can help you."

Interviewee Lindsey had a path that was quite un-traditional however she always knew that her purpose would be the gift of being able to help others in some capacity:

"I had watched television and saw people laying on someone's couch and talking about their life problems. And one thing I've always wanted to do was to help people. So, I was like, oh, I can do that. I can help people with their life problems."

Throughout her time, it became challenging to juggle her career and nonprofit but she managed to maintain both and has had a tremendous impact on young women because of it:

"I would say about four or five years ago, I just kind of had this epiphany that I felt like I had been so blessed and given so many opportunities to live my dream that I could. There's nothing else I really put back for now. Yes, I have a long list of things that I want for women's basketball and for the WNBA, but I found myself in positions where I was like, you know, now I want to help other people. And I wanted to make that my main focus. And so that's when Kevin Nixon and I who's the co-founders started rising media stars. And I had no idea how much work was going to have to be put in to starting a non-profit. But also, helping five young women figure out a way in life. So, there is a balance in figuring out time management, but when it's important to you, you find a way."

Summary of Themes

After identifying the roadblocks women face in sports media in Virginia five themes emerged: Work Ethic, Be Who You Are, Experience, Diversity, and Giving Back. Each theme

stated is not an exact match to the stages of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs theoretical framework, but there are similarities where these themes can fall within those stages. Each stage of Maslow's Hierarchy along the theme that best fits that stage are indicated in Table 1-1 below. The first theme, Work Ethic, demonstrated the importance of working extremely hard no matter what position you are placed in. This will allow you to stay hungry, humble, and ultimately help you want to continue to strive for greatness in every capacity. The second theme, Be Who You Are, illustrated that being who you are is deeply rooted in your character, principles, and values. These are the things that create your persona. Live in it because that is what got you where you are today. The third theme, Experience illustrated that in order to create your own network, and make yourself more appealing to the sports media decision makers you have to be willing to put yourself in uncomfortable situations, and attempt new aspects of the field to be comfortable in all aspects. The only way to create that path for yourself is to gain and create experiences that reflect all of your capabilities. Experience is extremely important within this field of work. The fourth theme, Diversity illustrates that diversity comes in many forms, but diversity needs to be seen and felt in more corporate places like sports media in order to create a fair opportunity for all individuals. The fifth theme, Giving Back, provided the blueprint for ways both interviewees used their platforms and networks to give back to those who are most in need. For both interviewees young women are their primary targets to help.

The five themes found within the study are centered around the roadblocks faced by women in sports media in Virginia. By applying Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (Cherry, 2020) the researcher was able to categorize the themes according to the framework. Maslow's framework proposes that the first three lower-level needs are exponentially more powerful than the higher-level needs (Lester, 2013, p. 15-17). Each theme drawn from the data correspond to

the first stage of Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs—more likely because most females within the field of sports media in Virginia have to be more concerned with their personal growth, and fulfilling their potential in order to rise in popularity as suitable candidates for the field. The two stages following self-actualization are safety needs, love and belongingness. These were prominent within the data that was collected from the interviews.

Table 1-1. *Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs Stages and Themes*

Stages (#)	Themes (#)
Self-Actualization (1)	Work Ethic (1)
Esteem Needs (2)	Be Who You Are (2)
Safety Needs (4)	Experience (3)
	Diversity (4)
	Giving Back (5)

Table 1-1 indicates which themes corresponded with the three levels of Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs for self-actualization, esteem needs, and safety needs. The themes of Work Ethic best correlate with, but does not perfectly match the first stage of Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs which focuses on self-actualization. Understanding that work ethic allows you access to more opportunities would be the best advice each interviewee could give to a young woman that could potentially be in their shoes. The theme of Being Who You Are correlates with the second stage of the hierarchy esteem needs because it allowed each interviewee to understand that it was okay for them to be comfortable with their personality even though they were women in a “males” world.

The themes of Experience, Diversity, and Giving Back best correlate, but does not perfectly match with the fourth stage in Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs which is safety needs. The theme that addresses Experience shows how within this level you need to build relationships

(Cherry, 2020). This is shown within the interviewees feedback because they both mentioned they would not have been in the position they are today if they had not learned from various experiences, friendships, and networking. Next, the theme concerning social groups is Diversity. According to Lester, “the lower needs were more powerful (prepotent) than the higher needs (Lester, 2013, p. 15).” Diversity is a key element in retrospect of the world, but also within sports media, women are faced with having to work much harder than their male counterparts because it’s still a battle to become adequate. The final theme that correlates with safety stage on the hierarchy is Giving Back. According to the interviewees giving back is one of the most imperative ways to show how thankful they are to be in their positions. According to Vardey & Costa, “across diverse cultures and beliefs, and despite many differences throughout history, the practice of generosity is universally revered as one of the highest qualities of the human heart (Vardey & Costa, 2009, p. 3-4). Being generous can come in many forms, and can be time consuming however, if you are gracious enough you will find time to work hard, create a platform for yourself, and be able to give back.

Conclusion

Five themes emerged from the interviews with women in sports media in Virginia: Work Ethic, Be Who You Are, Experience, Diversity, and Giving Back. The theme of Work Ethic best correlates with Maslow’s first stage self-actualization. The theme of Be Who You Are best correlates with hierarchy’s second stage esteem needs. The last three themes best tie into the fourth stage of Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs, safety. The three themes are Experience, Diversity, and Giving Back. There are significant benefits to understanding and reforming the way in which sports media is operated in Virginia.

As a researcher and a student-athlete looking to pursue a job within sports media, I am confident in the findings of this study through my own experiences within the understanding the intricacies of media. I was able to see and understand many of the areas that are deficient pertaining to women working within the field in Virginia. Additionally, the data reflected the topics discussed in the literature review and the importance of understanding where women still lack respect they deserve. Further, the themes uncovered in this study correspond with three fundamental stages of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (Appendix A).

Chapter 5: Recommendations

The purpose of this project was to describe the roadblocks that women will face within the field of sports media in Virginia. Interviews were conducted to help identify the roadblocks and describe scenarios that other women may face, and the best ways to confront them. This evaluation will provide insight into the aspects of sports media that are not readily available to women aspiring to work within the field. The expected outcome of this evaluation is to present findings and recommendations to the women aspiring to work within the field of sports media so that they are prepared for what is to come and what they may face.

The five themes found within the study were Work Ethic, Be Who You Are, Experience, Diversity, and Giving Back. After completing the study on the roadblocks women in sports media face in Virginia, there are a few recommendations I would like to propose. These recommendations flowed from the five themes found within the interviews and two recommendations focused on further research.

The first recommendation is to improve opportunities given to young women and young girls in Virginia to prepare them for the long road ahead of them. For women specifically, there are just seemingly less opportunities to get experiences to create a workflow for yourself that will be attractive to the people looking to hire you. From previous research and this study, it is clear that there is a lack of opportunity for women to break into this field and begin their professional journey to becoming a sports journalist. Creating more opportunities within schools and colleges for young women to develop their skillset in this field will help them be prepared when future opportunities present themselves.

The second recommendation is to place focus upon people placed in leadership to understand the importance in wanting to build relationships with women in the field so that they

can create a new normal that allows them to be comfortable within their own skin and not have to be forced to conform to what their male counterparts act and speak. Knowing the lack of women in sports media is a problem is one thing, but there is a need for women and leaders currently in the field to make a change. This kind of change happens from the top down, and young women aspiring to become sports journalist need those in power within the field to make the path easier.

The third recommendation for the leaders of sports media in Virginia is to create many more opportunities to allow young women to gain more experience in all facets of sports media in Virginia so that they are prepared for the new chapters they are about to enter. Being able to have experiences whether it's just as simple as watching, or listening. Having those opportunities to be around other females who are in the position they are working towards being in are invaluable.

The fourth recommendation is for those that work with young women that aspire to work within the field of sports media. The information gathered in this study will be helpful when preparing these young women for the roadblocks they may face so that they can begin to prepare for the journey years before instead of years after. This study can guide conversations so young women will understand what may face them when they move into this field.

The fifth and final recommendation is for future researchers to gain more insight in relation to women in sports media in each category of media (radio, print, and television). Future research in this area could potentially increase the amounts of women who receive opportunities within the field and overall increase retention of women in these positions.

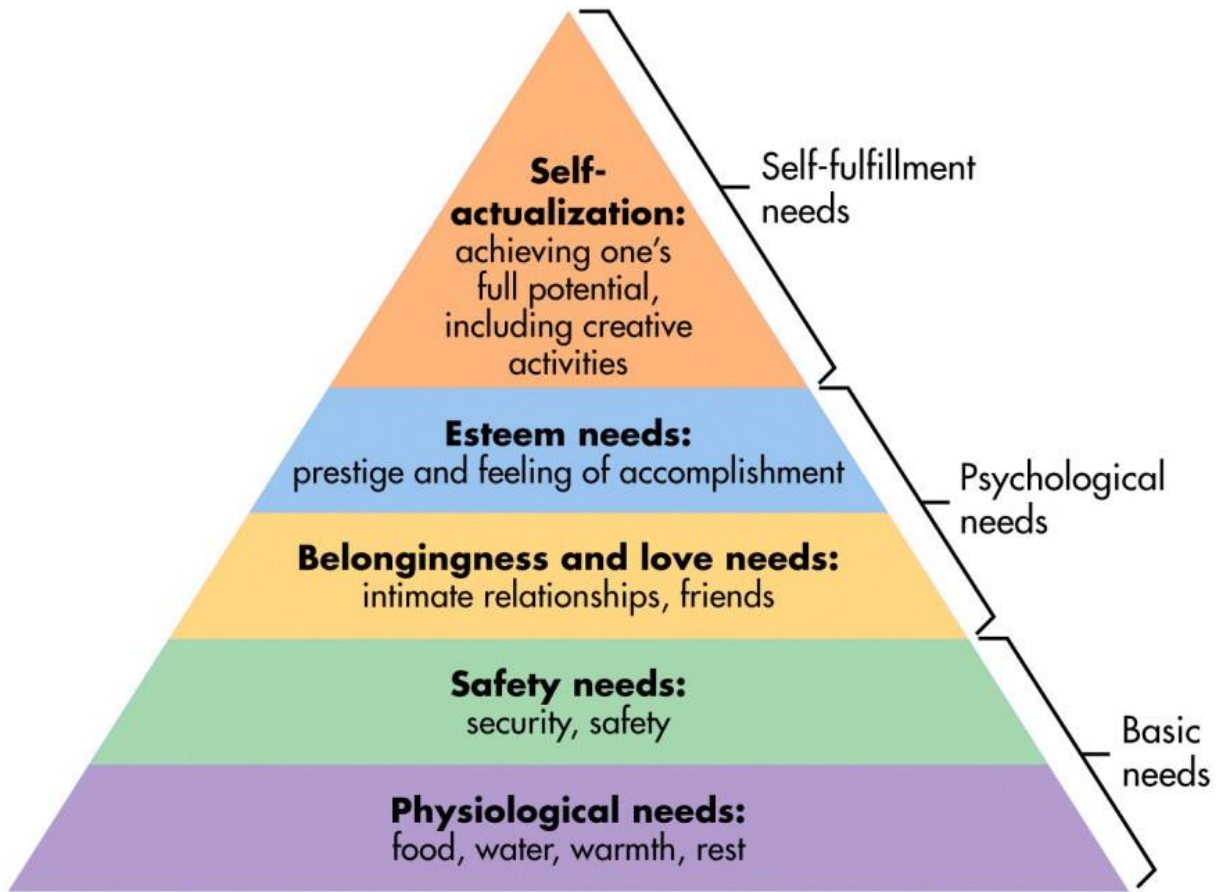
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San Jose, CA

Appendix A: Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Pyramid



Appendix B: Human Research Exemption Approval Letter
**Division of Scholarly Integrity and
Research Compliance**

Institutional Review Board
North End Center, Suite 4120 (MC 0497)
300 Turner Street NW
Blacksburg, Virginia 24061
540/231-3732
irb@vt.edu
<http://www.research.vt.edu/sirc/hrpp>

MEMORANDUM

DATE: July 8, 2021
TO: Richard James Rateau, Aisha Marie Sheppard
FROM: Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board (FWA00000572)
PROTOCOL TITLE: The Under Representation of Women in Sports Media in Rural versus Urban Areas
IRB NUMBER: 21-401

Effective July 7, 2021, the Virginia Tech Human Research Protection Program (HRPP) determined that this protocol meets the criteria for exemption from IRB review under 45 CFR 46.104(d) category (ies) 2(ii).

Ongoing IRB review and approval by this organization is not required. This determination applies only to the activities described in the IRB submission and does not apply should any changes be made. If changes are made and there are questions about whether these activities impact the exempt determination, please submit an amendment to the HRPP for a determination.

This exempt determination does not apply to any collaborating institution(s). The Virginia Tech HRPP and IRB cannot provide an exemption that overrides the jurisdiction of a local IRB or other institutional mechanism for determining exemptions.

All investigators (listed above) are required to comply with the researcher requirements outlined at:

<https://secure.research.vt.edu/external/irb/responsibilities.htm>

(Please review responsibilities before beginning your research.)

PROTOCOL INFORMATION:

Determined As: **Exempt, under 45 CFR 46.104(d) category(ies) 2(ii)**
 Protocol Determination Date: **July 7, 2021**

ASSOCIATED FUNDING:

The table on the following page indicates whether grant proposals are related to this protocol, and which of the listed proposals, if any, have been compared to this protocol, if required.

Invent the Future

Appendix C: Recruitment Script

Hello _____, it is Aisha Sheppard, and I am currently working towards the completion of my Master's degree **which requires me to complete a research study**. I will be conducting my research study on the roadblocks women in sports media face in Virginia **(IRB Protocol #21-401)**. Due to your involvement and knowledge within this program I am asking if you would like to participate. The interview would be no more than 60 minutes and will be conducted by myself. **If you are 18 or older and interested in participating in this research study or have any questions or concerns please email me at (Msaisha2@vt.edu) or contact me via phone (571-521-9801).**

Appendix D: Consent Form

Hello _____, it is Aisha Sheppard, and I am currently working towards the completion of my Master's degree and I will be conducting my research on the roadblocks women in sports media face in Virginia. As a part of my Virginia Tech Master's Degree project I will be conducting interviews. These recorded interviews will provide feedback that will not only guide my project, but will also allow for women wanting to go into this field to understand what barriers they may face moving forward. Please answer the following questions below to the best of your abilities.

Appendix E: Recruitment Emails

Rateau Sheppard IRB Recruitment Email 7-6-21.docx



Aisha Sheppard <msaisha2@vt.edu>
to Debbie ▾

Thu, Sep 2, 8:02 PM ☆ ↶ ⋮

Hello again Debbie,

Attached is the official email along with the zoom link for our interview on Saturday, September 4th at 8:30AM.

Aisha Sheppard is inviting you to a scheduled Zoom meeting.

Topic: My Meeting
Time: Sep 4, 2021 08:30 AM Eastern Time (US and Canada)

Join Zoom Meeting
<https://virginiatech.zoom.us/j/87428865181>

Meeting ID: 874 2886 5181

Sent from my iPad



↶ Reply ↷ Forward

Aisha Sheppard's Recruit Email/Zoom Link



Aisha Sheppard <msaisha2@vt.edu>
to Lachinarobinson ▾

Mon, Sep 13, 11:46 AM ☆ ↶ ⋮

Aisha Sheppard is inviting you to a scheduled Zoom meeting.

Join Zoom Meeting
<https://virginiatech.zoom.us/j/89994455345>

Meeting ID: 899 9445 5345

Sent from my iPhone



↶ Reply ↷ Forward

Appendix F: Interview Protocol and Script

Protocol

The interviewer will follow a standard protocol for each semi-structured interview session: •
Greeting

- Interview Guidelines
- Questions and Answers
- Final remarks

Greeting

Hello! I appreciate you consenting to be a part of my research project by agreeing to be interviewed. My name is Aisha Sheppard and I am currently working towards the completion of my Master's degree and I will be conducting my research on the roadblocks women in sports media face in Virginia. As a part of my Virginia Tech Master's Degree project I will be conducting interviews. These recorded interviews will provide feedback that will not only guide my project, but will also allow for women wanting to go into this field to understand what barriers they may face moving forward. Please answer the following questions below to the best of your abilities.

Interview Guidelines

The entire interview will be recorded and transcribed for data and analysis. I guarantee that your responses will remain anonymous. Do you have any questions about your participation in this interview? I will now turn on the recording device and begin the interview questions.

Interview Questions

Warm-up Questions

1. When did you realize you enjoyed sports media enough to take a career path within the field?
2. What drove you to want to continue to participate for all this time?
3. As far as the future, where do you see yourself in the next five years?

Structured Questions

1. Why are women in sports media so poorly represented?
2. How many women work for big time sports media companies like CBS SPORTS, FOX SPORTS, ESPN, ETC?
3. Why can't men and women have equal opportunity in the world of sports in all aspects?
4. Why when women are represented in the media it always has some sort of sexual orientation behind it?
5. Are women inadequate to men?
6. Why can't women who are clearly superior athletes break the mold of the common political, stereotypical, biases that are paraded against us daily?
7. Is society still not ready for the social change that women and men are equal in the working world?
8. Title IX was passed years ago, but still no change why?
9. When are women going to be important enough for the front page?
10. Now more than ever we need more female leaders in our society's represented, do you think that will change especially within today's social climate?

Last Minute Remarks

I greatly appreciate you taking the time to participate in this interview. Do you have any additional comments you would like to share?

Appendix G: Information Sheet for Participation in a Research Study

Information Sheet for Participation in a Research Study

Principal Investigator: Richard J. Rateau, Ph.D.

IRB# and Title of Study: 21-401 The Roadblocks Women in Sports Media Face in Virginia

Sponsor: [if applicable]

You are invited to participate in a research study. This form includes information about the study and contact information if you have any questions.

I am a graduate student at Virginia Tech, and I am conducting this research as part of my course work.

➤ WHAT SHOULD I KNOW?

If you decide to participate in this study, you will complete an *interview as part of the study*, you will the participants will be asked to thoroughly answer all questions that are asked of **youthem**. The information that will be collected is to identify potential roadblocks for future women who want to be a part of the same profession. The questions will be asked via interview. Describe the types of questions they will be asked in any survey/focus group/interview. The questions the participants will be asked are all pertaining to female sports media professionals, **they will also be asked to self-report their age**. The interviews will be recorded for audio and video via zoom. This will be required for participation. **You must be 18 or older in order to participate**.

The study should take approximately __6050__ minutes of your time.

We do not anticipate any risks from completing this study.

You can choose whether to be in this study or not. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind. You may also refuse to answer any questions you don't want to answer and remain in the study. The investigator may withdraw you from this research if circumstances arise which warrant doing so.

➤ CONFIDENTIALITY

We will do our best to protect the confidentiality of the information we gather from you, but we cannot guarantee 100% confidentiality.

Any data collected during this research study will be kept confidential by the researchers. Your interview will be audio-recorded using a digital recorder zoom and then transcribed. The researchers will code the transcripts using a pseudonym (false name). The recordings will be uploaded to a secure password-protected computer in the researcher's office. The researchers will maintain a list that includes a key to the code. The master key and the recordings will be stored for 3 years after the study has been completed and then destroyed.

➤ **WHO CAN I TALK TO?**

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact Richard Rateau, rrateau@vt.edu, 931-261-4466. You are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies because of your participation in this research study. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant, contact the Virginia Tech HRPP Office at **540-231-3732** (irb@vt.edu).

Please print out a copy of this information sheet for your records.

[If applicable: If you would like to participate in this survey, click yes to begin or no to exit].