

The Leaky Pipeline Between Journalism Students and Female Journalists: Reasons Women Stay
and Leave Newsrooms

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University of Washington

June 2016

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of a Bachelor of Arts Degree (With Honors) in Communication

Acknowledgements: I would like to thank my thesis advisors Dr. Randal A. Beam and Dr. Leilani Nishime. Thank you to my family for their support. Lastly, I would like to thank my study participants for their insights about the gender imbalance in the newsroom.

Abstract

This thesis examines factors that contribute to the “leaky pipeline” between journalism programs and the newsroom. University journalism programs are predominately composed of women, yet 60 percent of journalists who work in newsrooms are men. Semi-structured interviews were conducted in person and over the phone with 20 women from the Seattle area – four journalism students, five recent graduates currently working in journalism, five experienced journalists, and six journalists who left the profession. Participants were located through snowball sampling and searches of newspaper bylines and social media sites, such as LinkedIn. Questions centered around the women’s career-path choices and the rationale for their career decisions; their motivations to remain in journalism or to leave the profession; and the challenges women face working in the newsroom. Many women stated that they went into journalism because of their passion for storytelling and writing. Some suggested that women still experience unintentional discrimination as journalists, while others believe that women are treated equally in the newsroom. Issues were raised surrounding the challenge of balancing family and a journalism career, the emotional toll of sexist comments from sources, and a lack of opportunities for women in some newsrooms. Gender inequality in the workplace is an issue at the forefront of contemporary American politics. It is an important topic for discussion, especially for female journalists trying to break into reporting.

Keywords: female, women, journalism, graduate, gender bias, sexual discrimination,
reporter

Introduction

For the past two decades, gender imbalance has remained virtually unchanged in newsrooms. A census conducted in 2015 by the American Society of News Editors (ASNE) reveals only 37.1 percent of newsroom staffs in the United States are composed of women; this statistic has fluctuated between 36 and 37 percent over the past 15 years. Additionally, only 37.9 percent of reporters are women. Yet, female journalists make up a majority of journalism university graduates. A study conducted by Becker, Vlad, and Simpson reveals that female students comprise 64 percent of the enrollment in journalism and communication programs (2013, 317).

Journalism has fallen behind in the advancement of women in comparison to other professions in the United States. In the 1970's, females represented less than 10 percent of physicians and lawyers (Nicholson et al., 2009, p. 11). According to a 2013 U.S. Census, 33.4 percent of lawyers and 32.9 percent of physicians were female. Little progress has been made to attain sexual equality in the newsroom in the last decade. In 1971, 22 percent of newsroom employees were female (Nicholson et al., 2009, p. 11). The percentage increased to 33.8 percent in 1982, and has remained largely stagnant since (Willnat and Weaver, 2014, p. 4).

Gender discrepancy in the newsroom has implications that can affect all Americans. According to the SPJ Code of Ethics, a journalist has a duty to "seek truth and report it" (Society of Professional Journalists, 2014). To achieve this, a journalist must communicate a complete story with differing perspectives, which entails interviewing multiple sources on a subject or event. A study in 2015 revealed that male sources are three times more likely than women to be mentioned in articles (Shor et. al, 2015). Their research found this was largely due to societal

structures (Shor et. al, 2015, p. 976), but also suggests that coverage imbalances stem from male-dominated editorial boards, newspaper policies, and newsroom culture (Shor et. al, 2015, p. 977). The coverage of female names increased by 9 percent when newspaper copy editors were women (Shor et. al, 2015, p. 969). Media are influential in many ways, but particularly in their ability to convey the message of an individual or a group. When men are the dominant voice in journalism, women cannot fully contribute their point of view.

The main focus of my research is concerned with the lack of women journalists working in newsrooms. More specifically, this research project will attempt to determine why a relatively low percentage of female journalists exist in the newsroom when female students make up the majority of their respective university journalism and communication programs. Using confidential interviews, I studied women's experiences as journalists at different stages within their respective careers. Questions were asked of the participants in an attempt to determine how their personal experiences within the journalistic field impacted their professional paths. My research specifically answered the following questions:

- ◆ What do women experience in different stages of their journalistic career (i.e., during their university programs, shortly after becoming a professional journalist, later in their careers)?
- ◆ What influences career decisions made by female journalists?
- ◆ What challenges do women face as journalists?

To answer these questions, I conducted 20 semi-structured interviews with female journalists over the course of three months. Semi-structured interviews are broadly focused on a set of questions or topics that may expand or shift based on answers or statements given by the interviewee. The study participants were broken into four groups, which include current female

journalism students, recent female journalism graduates, experienced female journalists, and past female journalists. Questions posed to interviewees inquired about their career path choices and concerns related to being a female in journalism.

Women from all four groups spoke about the positive and negative aspects associated with a journalism career. The positive aspects conveyed by study participants centered on the profession as a whole and the advantages of being a woman in journalism. Participants stated their appreciation for the social justice aspects of the profession and the writing opportunities provided to them. Women expressed that female journalists are able to connect more deeply with sources and are trusted more often with confidential information than male journalists.

Negative aspects of a journalism career as described by study participants included discrimination, low pay, lack of job security, and negative impacts on family life. Women described incidents where they said they were discriminated against by employees within the newsroom. They expressed their loneliness and isolation in a male-dominated newsroom and their inability to advance in their career.

When interviewing sources, female journalism students and journalists felt that male sources, specifically those in authority positions, questioned their intelligence and skill. Women of color and younger women also described discrimination that was related to their age or gender. Study participants cited journalism's low wages and unpredictable job security as reasons why journalists leave the field. Women also pointed to the challenges of balancing the unpredictable hours of the newsroom and raising children.

Literature Review

Prior studies have been conducted related to gender discrepancy and journalism. Their findings have shown that female journalists represent a disproportionately small percentage of newsroom staff despite the greater number of women graduating from college with a journalism degree. This may be attributed to the tendency for female journalism graduates to seek employment in fields other than journalism or to other factors that influence women to leave the newsroom. These studies have contributed to the larger conversation about sexual inequalities found within the field. Although prior studies have recognized this gender discrepancy, they did not identify the underlying causal factors, which I explored in my research project.

Alternative Careers

Some studies and reports have suggested that female journalism graduates are more likely to choose careers outside of the newsroom (Becker, Vlad & Simpson, 2014; United States Census Bureau, 2014). According to a 2014 study by the U.S. Census Bureau, 60 percent of public relations and fundraising managers were female. A study by Becker revealed that women with a bachelor's degree in journalism or mass communications had greater success in securing a job than men did in 2013 (Becker, Vlad & Simpson, 2014). Women were more likely to choose careers in advertising and public relations, while men were more prone to seek an occupation in traditional journalism or telecommunications (Becker, Vlad & Simpson, 2014, p. 4). While women dominate the public relations field, they are vastly underrepresented as news reporters (ASNE 2015).

Employment rates are higher in the public relations fields vs. journalism. For every reporter in the United States, there are 4.6 public relations specialists (Williams, 2014). A combination of cultural connotations associated with the public relations field and the success

rate of employment may offer female journalist graduates motivation for an occupation outside traditional journalism.

Women may be drawn to public relations because of higher pay, flexible hours, fewer sexist barriers, and better promotion opportunities (Creedon and Cramer, 2007, p. 86). Reskin and Roo believe that public relations is viewed as "women's work" because public relations specialists are involved in "emotional labors" by dealing with people's emotions (2007, p. 139). She writes, "Traditionally women have been seen as sensitive to their environment, naturally empathetic, and uniquely capable of dealing with human problems" (Reskin and Roos, 2007, p. 140). Therefore, women are valuable to a public relations firm because of their ability to convince the public the organization is trustworthy, especially if the company is partaking in activities that are viewed unfavorably (Reskin and Roos, 2007, p. 139). Employers believe their opponents will be easier on female public relations specialists, which works to the company's advantage (Reskin and Roos, 2007, p. 139).

Journalism's low wages may also push women to pursue careers in other fields. A typical journalist earns an annual salary of \$35,600 while someone working in public relations earns close to \$55,000 (Williams, 2015). In 23 states, journalists earn less than their state median salary. In Washington State, a journalist's salary is 20 percent less than the median salary. In comparison, public relations officers were paid 28 percent more than the median salary in 49 states (Williams, 2015).

Leaving the Newsroom Sooner

Women are more likely to quit the journalism profession earlier than their male counterparts. In 2014, 44.3 percent of journalists with five to nine years of experience were

women. The gender gap became larger with more years of experience. Women only comprise 39.7 percent of journalists with 15 to 19 years of experience (Willnat and Weaver, 2014, p. 7).

Various studies have shown that sexual discrimination and burnout are factors influencing women to leave the newsroom. In a 1996 survey by Walsh-Childers, Chance & Herzog, indicated that female journalists believed they were discriminated against through “salaries, assignments, and promotions” (Walsch-Childers, Chance, & Herzog, 1996, p. 84). Most participants expressed the view that sexual discrimination had been a problem at some point in their career (Walsch-Childers, Chance & Herzog, 1996, p. 74) and they believed male counterparts were advantaged through higher salary, more opportunity for promotion, and coveted story assignments (Walsch-Childers, Chance & Herzog, 1996, p. 75).

Unequal treatment in the newsroom may have led some female journalists to look for another job. Walsh-Childers et al. wrote, “The extra stress caused by sex discrimination may be enough to send experienced talented women journalists looking for other jobs” (Walsch-Childers, Chance & Herzog p. 85). Reinardy also contends that burnout is a reason female journalists are seeking work outside of the newsroom; survey results revealed women felt a higher level of exhaustion than their male coworkers (Reinardy, 2009, p. 52).

Volz exposed the lack of opportunity women experience in winning the Pulitzer Prize (2013). She analyzed the winners from 1917 to 2010 and reported that only 13.9 percent of Pulitzer Prize winners were female. Percentages rose significantly between the 1970’s and 1980’s; in the 1970’s only 6.6 percent of Pulitzer Prize winners were women while women composed 16.7 percent of Pulitzer Prize winners in the 1980’s (Volz, 2013, p. 254). In the 1990’s, 24.8 percent of winners were female journalists, this percentage increased to 28.3

percent between 2000 and 2010, which was a far less dramatic change than in prior years (Volz, 2013, p. 254).

The challenge in balancing family life and a career in journalism was also cited as a strong factor as to why women may leave the newsroom earlier. In 2012, 577 female journalists in Australia responded to a survey that inquired about gender discrimination within the newsroom. Though this is not an U.S. study, this research produced results that may have implications for U.S. newsrooms. One key finding was the difficulty that women experienced working as full-time journalists and full-time mothers. Seventy-three percent of survey participants did not have children under 15 years old (North, 2016, p. 324).

Journalism requires flexibility and dedication to work irregular hours (North, 2016, p. 320). Sixty-five percent of participants responded that their “workplace arrangements” were not accommodating to women with childcare obligations (North, 2016, p. 324). This lack of accommodation makes it difficult for mothers who are required to work overtime. When women work fewer hours in the newsroom to take care of their children, they are less likely to be promoted (North, 2016, p. 320).

Tracy Everbach and Craig Flournoy also concluded that women leave journalism because of unequal treatment. They asked the question “why do some women who study journalism in college later decide to leave full-time newsroom job” (Everbach & Flournoy, 2007, p. 52). To answer this question they administered individual, standardized-question interviews to 17 women over the phone. These women had gone into full-time journalism work after university and later left their jobs.

The women reported that they had succeeded in university journalism programs, but lost confidence when they entered the “real world of journalism” (Everbach and Flournoy, 2007, p.

59). Their results indicate that the “lack of opportunity, low salary, lack of mentors (and) unwillingness by management to offer flexible work schedules” led many women to believe they were part of a “subordinate class” in the patriarchal news organizations where they were employed (Everbach and Flournoy, 2007, p. 59).

Many women also expressed the difficulty of balancing family with a demanding journalism career (Everbach and Flournoy, 2007, p. 55). Their study also illustrates that many of the interviewees left their job in the newsroom to pursue a career in public relations and advertising, a point mentioned earlier (Everbach and Flournoy, 2007, p. 56). Financial expenses, such as children and the cost of living, drove them to find a higher paying job (2007, p. 57).

Anticipated Significance

Previous research studies were more limited in scope than the present study and did not examine gender bias. Although surveys can gather data from a larger group of subjects, they cannot produce the same in-depth, detailed information that interviews reveal. As previously discussed, Becker’s data revealed a larger proportion of women with a bachelor’s degree were more likely to go into the public relations field than men (Becker, Vlad, and Simpson, 2014, p. 4). However, his data do not indicate the reason(s) or factors as to why more women chose this career path.

Though Reskin and Roos’ research contributes good background information on the reasons why women may go into public relations, her research does not focus on the female public relations officers themselves (Reskin and Roos, 2009). By gaining the personal accounts of recent journalism graduates, this research will further the understanding of why females do not tend to choose the journalism as a career. Through surveys with 715 U.S. newspaper journalists, Reinardy gathered information about the burnout faced by female journalists

(Reinardy, 2009, p. 42). More in depth-interviews with female journalists would likely provide more detailed information on specific problems female journalists encounter. Not all female journalists will have the same experience regarding sexual discrimination and burnout. This information could be valuable in revealing the specific why women leave the newsroom.

Like Everbach & Flournoy's research, my study used interviews to gain insight into why a large number of females are obtaining journalism degrees, but leaving the field after initially working in the newsroom. However, I posed different research questions and spoke with women in different phases of their journalism profession. Everbach & Flournoy only focused on female journalists who quit their career in the newsroom and questioned them about their reasons for leaving journalism and their current profession. Speaking with women in different stages of their career provided me with a clearer understanding of factors within each process that could be contributing to the "leaky pipeline" between female journalism students and female journalists. My research will contribute to the conversation of gender equality in journalism and introduce updates to past research and discussion.

Methods

My research examined the career paths journalism students and journalists intend to follow, women's overall experience as journalists, and challenges female journalists face. Although other research studies have used interviews to determine why female journalists are underrepresented in the newsroom, this research specifically looks at women's experiences from different stages of a journalism career, including the insights of current female journalism students, recent female journalism graduates, current female journalists, and female journalists who left the profession to pursue another career.

Between February and May 2016, I conducted 20 semi-structured interviews with female journalism students, recent journalism graduates, women currently working in journalism, and women who had left the journalism field. The participants were limited to the Puget Sound area because of the proximity to the research institution and convenient access to the participants. Since my objective was to gain insight into female journalists' careers, males were not included in my study.

Participants were sent a recruitment message with information about the logistics and purpose of the study. A follow-up email was sent a week later. Interviews were conducted in person, when possible, and over the phone when the participants were unavailable. I requested permission from the participants to record the interview and I assured them that their answers would remain confidential. Questions were administered individually and the participant was given sufficient time to answer. After each interview, the individual's remarks were transcribed for analysis. Identifying information was removed to ensure that the participant would not be identified from the transcript.

I interviewed four journalism students who are currently in school, five recent journalism graduates, five current journalists, and six former journalists. The students had to be currently enrolled in a journalism program or strongly involved in their university newspaper. Recent graduates had received a journalism degree in the last two years or had worked for the campus news outlet. Question topics included the subject's intended career and reasoning behind their choice, prior experience in journalism, and perceptions about the newsroom. Interviewing students and graduates who have less experience in journalism revealed if these younger women aspired to a journalism career and whether their perceptions about the field had influenced this decision. Participants were found through LinkedIn, snowball sampling, and recommendations from journalism professors.

I asked current and past journalists to reflect upon their careers in journalism to determine which factors have influenced their decisions whether to continue in journalism or seek a new career path. Both groups of women were located in the Puget Sound area. Interviews with current reporters included questions about overall experience, challenges faced, and satisfaction with current job. Questions posed to past reporters were concerned with their current career, past experience in reporting, and reasons for leaving their previous employment. These interviews determined how conditions have changed over time and if the current journalism climate has an impact on a woman's likeliness to leave her career in journalism. LinkedIn and contact information from newspaper websites were used to compile a list of potential participants.

During the data analysis process, I read each transcript two times and identified themes that became part of a coding tree. Initially, I developed a coding tree that included 17 codes. In the second transcript reading, I condensed the codes to reflect five key themes, which included: "Positives about journalism as a career choice," "Negatives about journalism as a career choice,"

“Attributes of being a successful journalism,” “Ways to keep women in a journalism career,” and “Why it’s important for women to be in journalism. “Positives about journalism as a career choice” contained the child code, “Positives specific to women.” “Negatives about journalism as a career choice” was categorized into the child codes, “Impact on family life,” “Discrimination,” “Job security,” and “Low pay.” “Discrimination” was narrowed down to the grandchild codes, “From outside the workplace,” “Within the workplace,” and “Discrimination related to group.” Then, I highlighted study participant excerpts that strongly illustrated the key themes of my data.

Results

Twenty female journalism students, female journalism graduates, current female journalists, and past female journalists were interviewed over the course of two months.

Common themes that arose during these interviews included: positives aspects about journalism as a profession, negatives about journalism as a profession, attributes of a successful journalist, and the importance of women in journalism. These dialogues provide a stronger understanding of a woman's experience in journalism and illuminate factors that persuade some women to choose a career path outside the newsroom, whether this decision is made after they graduate or during the course of their career in journalism.

Positives About a Career in Journalism

Members of each group identified positive attributes of journalism as a career. Many women said that their choice to pursue journalism was mainly based off the positive impacts of the profession. A female journalism student explained that journalism is a platform for change: "If you do it right and if you do it with integrity, and do it with honest, rigorous reporting, then it can do a lot of good." Many of the women have a passion for writing and enjoy the interesting and often unpredictable aspects of a journalism career.

Positives Specific to Female Journalists

Study participants also expressed positives associated with being a woman in journalism. A former journalist felt she was able to connect with sources on a deeper level. Many of her male colleagues used aggressive interviewing techniques to get their information. Her polite approach gained her the trust of a police officer who provided her off-the-record information that he would not share with the female journalist's male colleagues. A recent graduate expanded on this: "We tend to be really good at listening, and sort of hearing what people are saying and yeah I think

there is sort of an interpersonal quality that women bring to journalism, that's really important.”

Both journalism students and current female students touched on the above interpersonal qualities that they say women journalists often possess.

Negatives About a Career in Journalism

The women also spoke about the challenges they faced in journalism, which include discrimination, job security and low pay, and impact on family life.

Discrimination Within the Workplace

Nineteen out of 20 women felt they had experienced what they considered discrimination. In offices where the majority of the staff was composed of men, women often experienced feelings of exclusion and isolation. A former journalist remarked, “There were certainly times when the guys, the managing editor and the guy reporters, were going out for beers, and I wasn't invited... so I'm sure that there was information transmitted that could have helped me.” Similarly, a journalist recalled a time when she worked for a male-dominated publication. Although the men would try to include her in their social conversations, she could not always relate to what they were talking about and began to feel alienated. This was not the deciding factor that led her to pursue a career at another publication, but played a great part in her decision.

Women said that they had difficulty in advancing through the ranks as a female journalist. A former journalist, who worked in the field for almost 20 years, noticed this problem at the first publication where she was employed. She estimated only 20 of the approximately 100 employees were female. Additionally, no women were in leadership positions.

A journalism student elaborated, “If there's six girls to one guy in a journalism class, I feel like it's the guy you are going to see in the leadership role.” Although one journalism

graduate works under a female managing editor in a newsroom where a majority of the journalists are women, she still questioned if there is a “glass ceiling” for women. As far as she knew, both the editor-in-chief and the publisher of the publication had always been male.

Study participants experienced forms of covert discrimination related to their gender. A woman currently working at a small publication described a situation where she came to her male boss to express her frustration about the unprofessionalism of a female employee. He implied the conflict resulted from the female employees attacking each other, because women are “catty.” The female journalist felt this was a sexist comment. A recent journalism graduate received criticism from her male boss that she believes was directed at her gender. She said, “I did have a boss imply one time that I could not take photographs as well while wearing a dress [or] tights.”

Discrimination Outside the Newsroom

The women I interviewed said that people outside of the newsroom also discriminated against female students and journalists, specifically when they were interviewing sources for a story. A woman working at a smaller publication explained that men in authority talk down to her or they over explain certain topics. She believes she would be treated differently if she were a male reporter. Similarly, a female journalism graduate remembered when a high-profile individual reached out to her and extended the opportunity to write a piece about him. He requested that the journalist bring her well-established male boss to the interview and also asked to see her biography. She concluded the high-profile individual and his employees did not believe she was qualified to interview him and she would not be able to hold a conversation.

Online sexist and discriminatory comments are directed at women. When a journalism graduate wrote an opinion piece surrounding a female service women’s ability to fight on the

front lines, she received feedback that was targeted at her gender. Some commenters wrote that she would not understand what combat experiences were like because she was a woman. During an internship, a journalism student's editor wrote a story concerning vaccines and autism, which initiated commentary that accused her of being a "terrible mother."

Discrimination Related to Race and Age

In addition to their gender, women of color face discrimination related to their race in and out of the newsroom. An Asian American journalism student expressed her apprehension about going into the field. Some of her journalistic role models, who were also women of color, told her they had encountered certain struggles because of their race. A former journalist, who is African American, said that her colleagues who were people of color left the newsroom because of feelings of loneliness and lack of opportunity. She said, "They [the people of color] got tired of feeling alone [and] isolated. They got tired of wondering, 'Am I not getting this assignment or promotion because the managing editor sees the white kid as almost a familiar, like 'my son' or 'my daughter?'" A recent graduate who is Asian-American has witnessed people writing "truly awful things" in comments on the stories of female journalists with "Asian-sounding" names.

Seven women thought they were treated differently as journalists because of their age, particularly those who had just entered the journalism field. One recent journalism graduate remembered being called a "good little journalist" by male journalists in the office. She could not imagine her male counterparts being referred to as "good little journalists." One implication of being labeled as a "good little journalist" is that the recent journalism graduate may have been demeaned and her work might not have been taken as seriously. Another journalism graduate shows the intersectionality of gender, race, and age. She said, "Sometimes I feel like I have two things working against me, maybe three things sometimes: that I'm young, that I'm a woman, and

that I'm a woman of color... I think those three things kind of come into play in different mixes and different doses.”

Job Security and Low Pay

Women in my study mentioned job security and low pay as challenges faced by both male and female journalists. Securing a job was the first hurdle that female journalists needed to overcome. Many study participants graduated from their journalism programs right before the economy crashed in 2008.

After graduation, one current female journalist worked at a bookstore for seven months before finding a journalism job that could financially support her. A current reporter was fearful she would not be able to hold a job in journalism because of layoffs and shrinking newsrooms. During an internship, a recent graduate was recalled, “I remember someone I was close with who got laid off came to me and was like, ‘You need to switch your major now. Newspapers are dying; you're not going to have work. This is the time to exit.’ ”

Women from each group agreed that journalism is not a lucrative career. Therefore, journalists may have an economic incentive to pursue jobs in higher-paying fields.

A current journalist said the women from her university journalism program who entered the public relations field are more successful financially. A recent graduate explained that public relations is more attractive than journalism as a career because the wages are higher and job security is better.

Women may also seek a higher income to support their families. A past journalist observed, “There are so many fewer opportunities than there were even 10 years ago and for sure fewer opportunities than 15 years ago to see a career path that actually is going to take you somewhere and make a living wage and support a family.”

Impact on Family Life

The challenge of balancing a career in journalism and motherhood was a concern mentioned by many of the women.

A journalist who is in her late 20s expressed her apprehension about how the irregular hours of journalism can affect family life. Her mother left journalism after having children. The journalist is not sure how having a family will influence her career path. Many women echoed this sentiment.

One past female journalist thinks inflexible journalism schedules drove many women to leave her newsroom. “I mean basically I just saw a lot of women quit because they couldn't work part time or they couldn't scale back and they couldn't predict that they'd be able to pick their kids up at [indecipherable]. I mean you could never be sure you could get out the door at a certain time. It just doesn't work.”

Journalists must be dedicated to their job. A female journalism student said journalists must be married to their jobs in a way, which makes it difficult for women who want to devote time and energy to raising their children.

Furthermore women, who are both journalists and mothers, experience a more difficult time advancing their careers. After a couple of maternity leaves, one past female journalist found it challenging to “bounce back in a male-dominated newsroom.” Although she is only one year into her career, a recent female journalism graduate can imagine the anxiety some female journalists must undergo when they take a maternity leave. She fears if she uses her vacation time, she may miss an opportunity that could further her career. “I can imagine that expectant

mothers feel the same way and maybe they feel they have to compete more,” the journalist said.

The financial burden and the time required to raise a family are both factors that compel women to leave the profession.

Discussion

Interviews with 20 female journalism students, journalism graduates, current journalists, and former journalists revealed the advantages and challenges women experience during their career as journalists. My research focused on the discrepancy between the high number of female journalism students and the low number of female journalists, which is why I refer to as the “leaky pipeline.” To determine what factors influence the leaky pipeline, I asked the following questions of the study participants:

- ◆ What do women experience during the phases of their journalistic career?
- ◆ What challenges do women face as journalists?
- ◆ What influences career decisions made by female journalists?

My interviews reveal that there are positive and negative aspects to being a woman in journalism. My interview subjects mentioned advantages female journalists have over their male colleagues, which included a woman’s dexterity in connecting with her sources on a personal level. They also expressed that women are able to obtain information through interviews that male journalists would have a more difficult time accessing. I did not anticipate the benefits of being a female journalist would be such a large theme in my interviews. These findings reveal the value women bring to the journalism profession and demonstrate the importance of repairing the leaky pipeline between female journalism students and female journalists. With their strong interpersonal skills, female journalists can build rapport with sources, gain access to important facts and information, and write stories that are more comprehensive.

The challenges that women journalists discussed during our interviews suggested factors that influence women to pursue careers outside of the newsroom. Difficulties include

discrimination, job security, low pay and impact on family life. Many forms of discrimination were mentioned, involving experiences within and outside of the newsroom. I did not foresee the importance that race would have in my conversations. Women of color said that people treated them differently because of their race and their gender, which made it more difficult to advance in the job ranks. Merely 12.76 percent of American newsrooms are composed of minority journalists (ASNE 2015). Additionally, there has been a 40 percent decline in the number of black journalists working for newspapers, compared with a 34 percent drop in the quantity of white newspaper employees (ASNE 2013). The women in my study cited job security as a challenge many journalists may face. However, it is more prevalent for people of color. It is imperative to create a newsroom that is diverse in both gender and race to ensure that news media reflects our society as a whole.

How to Repair the Leaky Pipeline

Potential solutions that may inspire more women pursue a career in the newsroom after graduation and ensure that they stay, involve educating aspiring journalists about the challenges female journalists face, promoting more women into journalistic leadership roles, and creating more flexibility for mothers. Furthermore, including curricula about the issues of discrimination in existing journalism courses would create awareness of this problem and help prevent discrimination in future newsrooms. By teaching female journalism students to recognize unfair treatment, they will become aware of the issues and be better prepared to address discrimination when they enter the professional world. Female journalists may feel more empowered, which would potentially keep them working in the newsroom. Educating male students to become more conscious of discrimination, especially covert or subtle communications that may not appear to

be discriminatory, would also help provide a more positive environment for female journalist in the newsroom.

Some female journalists said that women in higher positions within the newsroom, such as editor, were more likely to hire female journalists. According to a study by the American Society of News Editors (ASNE), only 35.3 percent of supervisors in U.S. newsrooms were female in 2015. Increasing the number of woman in hiring roles may subsequently result in more female journalists being hired. A recent journalism graduate working in a predominately female newsroom concurred with the importance of promoting women into leadership positions. “So I think that's definitely true and I think a big reason that we have so many women in our newsroom is because the person who is making those hiring decisions, so everybody who has been hired is a woman and was hired by women.”

Many women left the newsroom after starting a family because of the incompatibility of rearing children and the erratic work hours that many journalists have. One solution may be that newsrooms need to do a better job of accommodating working mothers and to provide more flexible hours for them. That also means allowing women to accommodate their children’s schedule without jeopardizing their ability to be promoted. If childcare were made available near the newsroom, women could work overtime if needed and would not need to worry about being late to pick up their children.

Additionally, journalists must be paid a salary that allows them to provide for their family or support themselves with an adequate standard of living. A past female journalist explained, “Women who are supporting families.... there are so many fewer opportunities than there were even ten years ago and for sure fewer opportunities than fifteen years ago to see a career path

that actually is going to take you somewhere and make a living wage and support a family. You can't work for \$20 an hour for the rest of your life.”

Limitations

My study was limited to 20 female participants in the Puget Sound Area. Completing in-depth interviews allowed me to gain more insight and understanding of female journalists' experiences, but prevented me from gaining the perspective of a larger group that a survey may provide. The experiences and challenges outlined in my research may only be limited to female journalists in the Puget Sound Area. Some of the study participants noted that Seattle is more progressive in regards to gender equality within the newsroom, which may lead women in this region to have a different experience than female journalists in other parts of the United States. Others who do research on this issue might focus on how discrimination varies in different areas of the country.

And though my study only focused on women in journalism, it would be useful to ascertain male journalists' perceptions about the gender imbalance in newsrooms too. It would be valuable to determine if men perceive discrimination against women in the newsroom and hear the male journalists' perceptions about the causes behind the imbalance of men and women in the newsroom. Future studies on this leaky pipeline might also include the insights of male journalists.

Conclusion

Gender imbalance has implications for what is presented in the news media. An editorial staff that is dominated by males, as well as masculine-oriented newspaper policies and newsroom culture, may contribute to lower numbers of females in the newsroom and female sources in media coverage. A current female journalist discussed the consequences of this: “ I

would say that it is important to have a fair and equal newsroom because... the stories that men choose to write about are different than what either a predominantly female or equal-female ratio would report about.”

Journalism allows people to get their message across and can initiate change. Every year there is the potential for thousands of female graduates to become journalists and a voice for women. I hope the themes discussed in my research will continue the conversation of gender equality in the newsroom, which will lead the way toward repairing the leaky pipeline between female journalism students and female journalists.

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Model Recruitment Letter for Human Subjects Application, Grace E. Swanson, PI

Dear [Prospective Interviewee],

I am writing to ask for your help in better understanding the career paths taken by female students, female journalists, and female communications professionals. You are one of twenty people selected for this study. Your confidential answers will be vital in better understanding of career opportunities available to women in journalism as well as improving advising for college-age women who are considering journalism.

Attached to this message is a document containing information about my study; please review it. Interviews will only take twenty minutes and will ask about your experience in journalism.

I will contact you again within a week to ask about your participation in the project.

Please feel free to contact me (gswan4@uw.edu) if you have any questions in the meantime.

Best wishes,

Grace Swanson
Honors Journalism Student
Department of Communications
University of Washington
Seattle WA, 98195
gswan4@uw.edu
425-244-2144

UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON CONSENT FORM**Research Study:**

Researcher: Grace E. Swanson, Honors Communications Student at the University of Washington,
gswan4@uw.edu

Faculty Advisor: Randal A. Beam, Ph. D, rabeam@uw.edu

Researcher's Statement:

I am asking you to participate in a research study. The purpose of this consent form is to give you the information you will need to help you decide whether to participate in the study. Please read the form carefully. You may ask questions about the purpose of the research, the procedures, the possible risks and benefits, your rights as a volunteer, and anything else that is not clear about this research. When all of your questions are answered, you can make the decision about your participation in the study. This process is called 'informed consent.'

PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY

The purpose of this study is to better understand the career choices made by female journalism students, female journalists, and women in communication-related careers.

STUDY PROCEDURES

For this study, up to 20 female journalism students, journalists, and communications professionals will be interviewed by phone and in-person about their experiences in journalism. The interview will take about twenty minutes and consist of primary questions plus follow-up questions and an opportunity to express your own views.

RISKS, STRESS, OR DISCOMFORT

Some people feel that providing information in interviews can be stressful or violate privacy. See "other information" below for an explanation of how information gathered in this project will be handled.

BENEFITS OF THE STUDY

You may not directly benefit from taking part in this study, but your answers will contribute to a better understanding of what career opportunities are available for women in journalism and improvements to advising for college-age women who are considering a career in the journalism field.

OTHER INFORMATION

Taking part in this study is voluntary. You can refuse to answer any question or stop the interview at any time.

Your interview responses will be confidential. Transcripts of your interview answers will be given a numerical code. Transcripts will be kept separate from identifying information about you. Identifying information will be in a password-protected file on a secure workstation and server. I will not use your name or describe your responses in a way that would allow you to be identified unless I subsequently seek your written permission to do so and you consent.

Participant's Consent

By scheduling this interview, I confirm that I understand my role in this study, have had any questions answered and that I volunteer to take part in this research and have my interview tape recorded and transcribed. If I have questions about the research later, I can contact the researcher or faculty advisor listed above. If I have questions about my rights as a research subject, I can call the University of Washington Human Subjects Division at (206) 543-0098.

PROTOCOL 1: FOR FEMALE JOURNALISM STUDENTS AND GRADUATES**[INTRODUCTION: READ VERBATIM TO OBTAIN CONSENT]**

Thank you for speaking with me today about your career plans. Your participation is voluntary and we can stop the interview or skip any questions. With your permission, I'll record this interview and offer you the chance to review the transcript. Do I have your permission to continue with the interview?

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW PROTOCOL**[CAREER PATH CHOICE]**

1. What type of career path are you looking for after graduation? (female journalism students)

[FOR STUDENTS STILL IN COLLEGE]

Possible follow-up/probes

- a. Why that path?
- b. Have you changed your mind about your career path during your time in college?
 - a. [IF YES] What had you been considering?
 - b. What led you to change your mind?
- c. Do you have any concerns about going into journalism?
- d. What advantages are there in this career choice?
 - a. What are the disadvantages?
- e. Have you spoken with women working in the same job? What do they say?
- f. What are your other journalism colleagues looking to go into?
 - a. Are they considering any jobs besides being a traditional reporter?
 - i. Are more of these students male or female?

[FOR FEMALE JOURNALISM GRADUATES]

What type of career path did you intend to follow after graduation? (female journalism graduates)

- a. Why did you choose this specific path?
- b. [IF THEY CHANGED THEIR MIND ABOUT THEIR CAREER PATH]
 - a. What had you been considering?
 - b. Why did you change your mind?
- c. Did you have any concerns about going into journalism?

[HIRING PROCESS BIAS]

[FOR FEMALE JOURNALISM STUDENTS]

2. Have you applied for any jobs or internships?

Possible follow-ups/probes

- a. What was the process like?
- b. What qualifications were required for the job[s] you were applying for?
- c. Are you optimistic about finding a job after graduation?
- d. What worries you the most about this process?
 - a. Have you heard anything from someone else about the hiring process?
- e. Did you feel you were treated fairly in that process?
- f. Did anything occur that may be related to your gender?

[FOR FEMALE JOURNALISM GRADUATES]

How difficult was it to find a job?

- a. Are there any particular characteristics of the job that are really important to you?
- b. Ideally what would you like?
 - i. How important are things like flexibility?
- c. Did you feel you were treated fairly in that process?
- d. Did anything occur that might be related to your gender?

[OPENED ENDED PROBE]

3. Is there anything else you would like to tell me about the hiring process/your intended career path?

[PERSONAL INFORMATION/OTHER CONTACTS:]

4. It would be helpful to get a little more information about you for my study.
 - a. How long have you been looking for a job? When was your graduation date?
 - b. May I contact you if I have further questions about the interview?
 - c. Is there a female journalism graduate who received their degree in the last one or two years and is currently looking for their first job who would also be willing to speak with me about their experience with the hiring process and their career path aspirations?

[CLOSE: READ VERBATIM]

5. Do you have any questions?
6. Would you like to review a transcript of our interview?
 - a. [IF YES] Where should I email it to you?

[WHEN CONCLUDING, EXPRESS APPRECIATION AND LEAVE INTERVIEW LOCATION]

PROTOCOL 2 FOR CURRENT AND FORMER FEMALE JOURNALISTS

[INTRODUCTION: READ VERBATIM TO OBTAIN CONSENT]

Thank you for speaking with me today about your experience with in journalism or communications careers. Your participation is voluntary and we can stop the interview or skip any questions. With your permission, I'll record this interview and offer you the chance to review the transcript. Do I have your permission to continue with the interview?

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

[HIRING PROCESS BIAS]

[CAREER PATH CHOICE]

[FOR CURRENT REPORTERS]

7. Why did you pursue a career in journalism? What made that career choice appeal to you?

Possible follow-up/probes

- a. What were your perceptions about this field?
- b. Did they change once you got a job in it?
- c. Do you remember which fields your classmates went into? Did many go into other fields besides journalism?
 - i. Were more of these classmates male or female?

[SEXUAL BIAS/DISCRIMINATION] (FOR CURRENT AND PAST REPORTERS)

[FOR CURRENT REPORTERS]

8. Why have you remained in journalism?

[FOR PAST REPORTER]

What led you in a different career direction?

In your experience, do women get the same opportunities as men in the newsroom?

[FOR BOTH PAST AND CURRENT REPORTERS]

Possible follow-up/probes

- a. [IF NO] Why?
 - a. What makes you think that?
 - b. Do you feel that women are discriminated against in the newsroom?
 - i. Why?
- b. Is there an even amount of males and females working in your newsroom?
 - a. [If more males] How does this affect you as a journalist?
 - b. Do your colleagues treat you equally?
- c. What qualities do you think a journalist has to have?

- a. Some people say that a journalist must be assertive and speak up, which is why males are more dominant in the field. What do you think of this?
- d. Do you think that a woman's desire to have a family ever affects her job as a journalist?
- e. Do sources ever treat you differently because you are a woman?
- f. Have the opportunities for women changed in the newsroom or stayed the same?

[HIRING PROCESS BIAS]

9. In past job interviews, did gender come into play?

Possible follow-ups/probes

- a. In which way?
- b. Which jobs were these interviews for?
- c. I know it's not supposed to, but do you think being a man would have been an advantage?

[OPENED ENDED PROBE]

10. Is there anything else you would like to tell me about the hiring process/your experience as a reporter/your career path choice?

[PERSONAL INFORMATION/OTHER CONTACTS:]

11. It would be helpful to get a little more information about you for my study.

- d. How old are you?
- e. May I contact you if I have further questions about the interview?
- f. [FOR CURRENT AND PAST REPORTERS] Is there a current or past reporter who would also be willing to speak with me about their experience as a reporter?

[CLOSE: READ VERBATIM]

- 12. Do you have any questions?
- 13. Would you like to review a transcript of our interview?
 - b. [IF YES] Where should I email it to you?

[WHEN CONCLUDED, EXPRESS APPRECIATION AND LEAVE INTERVIEW LOCATION]