Boosters or Watchdogs?
American Sports Journalists' Perception of their Professional Roles

Sada J. Reed

Arizona State University

Abstract

In the mid-nineteenth century, media generated sales based on their sports coverage, and sport grew in popularity, due to the media attention it received. This historically symbiotic relationship distinguishes sports journalism routines and practices from its news counterpart. Though David Weaver and his colleagues have conducted a national study of journalists' perceptions of their roles and responsibilities since the 1980s, these studies did not isolate sports journalists. It is not clear how sports journalists perceive their roles, let alone if they align differently in Weaver and his colleagues' measures of journalist role perception. The following study addresses this gap by using Weaver, Beam, Brownlee, Voakes, and Wilhoit's 2007 measure of journalists' role perception to survey 116 American sports journalists working for daily, weekly, and biweekly newspapers throughout the United States and to determine how their perception of their journalism roles differs from their "news" colleagues. This study also examines the relationship between newspaper circulation size and perceived journalism roles, as well as determines if characteristics, such as sex, race, circulation size, and years at current news organization, can predict sports journalists' perception of their professional roles.

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Introduction

Sports journalists traditionally have a different purpose than their "news" counterparts. In the mid-nineteenth century, media generated sales based on their sports coverage and sport grew in popularity due to the media attention it received (see Enriquez, 2002; McChesney, 1989; Reinardy, 2005a; Reed, 2015). This earned sports journalism some unflattering monikers. As Garrison and Salwen (1989, p. 57) put it, sports reporting is frequently viewed as "conceived out of journalistic wedlock" (Dwyre, 1981) or "the toy department" of news media (Garrison & Sabljack, 1985).

David Weaver and his colleagues at Indiana University have conducted a national study of journalists and their perceptions of their roles and responsibilities each decade since 1982. The insights these surveys have given the scholarly community about journalists' attitudes have been immeasurably significant to the field. A downfall of the studies, though, is that they are broad. It is not clear how sports journalists perceive their roles, let alone if they align differently in Weaver and his colleagues' measures of journalist role perception. The following study attempted to address this gap in the literature by using Weaver, Beam, Brownlee, Voakes, and Wilhoit's 2007 measure of journalists' role perception in order to survey 116 American sports journalists working for daily, weekly, and biweekly newspapers throughout the United States and to determine how their perception of their journalism roles differed from their "news" counterparts. This is important because sports journalism has changed. Unlike in the past, sports journalists cover more subjects previously considered taboo, like doping, spousal and sexual abuse, and gambling (e.g., English, 2016; Suggs, 2016; Garrison & Salwen, 1989; Garrison, 1989; Salwen & Bernstein, 1986; Salwen & Garrison, 1987; Schillinger & Jenswold, 1987).

This study also examines the relationship between newspaper circulation size and perceived journalism roles, as well as determines if characteristics, such as sex, race, circulation market size and years at current news organization, can predict sports journalists' perception of their professional roles.

Literature Review

Print Sports Journalists

Sports journalism differs from its news counterparts because sports historically have a symbiotic relationship with media: sport's popularity is the result of media attention and media generated circulation and advertising sales because of sports coverage (e.g., Enriquez, 2002; McChesney, 1989; Reinardy, 2005a). When the first American sports magazines debuted in the 1820s, sport was generally considered "vulgar and disreputable" among a large portion of the American reading public (McChesney, 1989). In fact, many journalists writing about sports used pseudonyms to protect their professional reputations (Berryman, 1979). This changed because of several mid-nineteenth-century-factors: the first great wave of immigration and American industrialization, increased literacy rates, decreased printing costs, and increased urbanization and leisure time (Everbach, 2008). Fitness facilities, such as parks, pools, tennis courts, golf courses, and athletic fields, proliferated (Everbach, 2008). When Knickerbocker Ball Club established rules for a game it called "base ball" in 1845, *Spirit of the Times* editor William Trotter Porter took interest, printing the first rules, scores, pictures, and box score (Reinardy, 2005a).

Sports journalism's style and philosophy formed during the rise of "yellow journalism," a type of journalism based on sensationalism. During the circulation war between Joseph Pulitzer's *New York World* and William Randolph Heart's *New York Journal*, Pulitzer published sports stories in a new, separate sports department run by its own sports editor (e.g., Campbell, 2006; Swanberg, 1967). Hearst and other newspapers followed suit, expanding newspapers' audiences and establishing sports "as a respectable pastime for the middle classes" (Everbach, 2008, p. 187). Sports writers' use of colorful, entertaining styles of writing are still part of modern sports jargon and "hero creation."

The hero became a dominant myth in sports journalism during the "Gilded Age:" "the first period in American history when sports and games moved away from casual amateurism in the direction of organization and professionalism" (Isenberg, 1988, p. 206). In his 1988 work on the first Heavyweight gloved boxing champion, John L. Sullivan, Isenberg showed how sports journalists helped create Sullivan's hero status through prose. According to Everbach (2008), sports journalists' use of myth eventually allowed sports, particularly those taking place on the international stage, to symbolize America. By 1910, virtually every newspaper gave prominent coverage to major sporting events.

Numerous scholars, through a variety of theoretical perspectives and disciplines, have analyzed the influence these events and perspectives had on shaping modern sports journalism practices and how this group is distinct from its news counterparts. Sports journalists still use myth-making in their narratives. In fact, many *believe* the myths they help create. *Sunday Times* sports writer David Walsh (2012) said most journalists chose the field because they love sport: "Enthusiasm for the game is what drives our work. When doubts about the worth of the performance arise, they drain our enthusiasm. This is why many refuse to ask the obvious questions" (Walsh, 2012, p. 24).

Refusing to ask "the obvious questions" warrants concern because the divide between the news and sports departments is not as wide as it once was (Garrison, 1989). Unlike in years past, sports journalists do cover hard-hitting subjects, such as doping, spousal and sexual abuse, and gambling (e.g., English, 2016; Suggs, 2016; Reed, 2015). Though the field has changed, it is unclear how sports journalists' perception of their roles has changed.

Theoretical Framework

Scholars have examined American journalists' roles since the late 1930s. Modern role research, however, can be traced to Johnstone, Slawski and Bowman's 1976 interviews with 1,313 journalists. The authors determined that journalists fall into two camps: those who see their roles as "neutral" and those who see their role as "participant." Journalists who see themselves as "neutral" view their jobs as mere channels of transmission: getting information to the public quickly, avoiding stories with unverified content, concentrating on the widest audience, and entertaining the audience (Shoemaker & Reese, 2014). Those who see themselves as participants believe journalists need to sift through information to find and develop stories, investigate government claims, provide analysis of complex problems, discuss national policy, and develop the audience's intellectual and cultural interests (Shoemaker & Reese, 2014).

Weaver and his colleagues expanded this research, conducting the first of many national surveys of journalists in 1982. In telephone interviews, journalists rated, on a 5-point Likert scale, how important they thought a variety of objectives were. Examples included "get information to the public quickly" and

"provide analysis and interpretation of complex problems." These surveys were administered again in 1992, 2002, and 2013, each time by Weaver and his colleagues at Indiana University. By the 2002 study, which will be referred to as its publication year, 2007, for the remainder of this study, four perceived roles emerged:

Interpretive function. This was the strongest perceived role in the 2002 study. Journalists who embrace the interpretive role tend to work on large staffs, have higher levels of education ("well-educated liberals"), and learn from their immediate bosses, not their owners (Weaver et al., 2007, p. 151).

Disseminator function. Journalists who most saw themselves as disseminators are "ethically cautious and traditional" (Weaver et al., 2007, p. 151). They tend to believe high profits are important to their organization and that their organizations do a good job informing the public. Job security is important to this group, as is having a journalism degree. Their news judgment is shaped by wire-service budgets and they frown on using unauthorized official documents, hidden microphones, or rape victims' names in stories.

Adversarial role. Along with the interpretive role, journalists working on large staffs tend to embrace the adversarial role. Journalists in the adversarial role tend to influence not just public affairs, but public opinion: "They seem to embrace their 'watchdog' attitude from the security of a large newspaper or magazine, surrounded by colleagues whose judgment they trust" (Weaver et al., 2007, p. 151).

Populist mobilizer. Whereas journalists working at large newspapers tended to embrace the interpretive and adversarial roles, journalists at small news organizations more often embraced the populist mobilizer role (Weaver et al., 2007, p. 147). This populist mobilizer role was also associated with more predictors than any others in in the 2007 study. Populist mobilizers tend to be print journalists at publications smaller than average but not necessarily locally owned. They feel a greater sense of freedom than other journalists, in terms of what to emphasize in their stories. "They were the only group to display exceptional affinity with the media's opportunities to help people, as well as to influence public affairs and public opinion" (Weaver et al., 2007, p. 152).

Though Weaver and his colleagues' studies were extensive, they were also broad. They are an aggregated study of a wide range of individuals identifying as journalists. "Journalist" was defined as "those who had responsibility for the preparation or transmission of news stories or other timely information – all full-time reporters, writers, correspondents, editors, news announcers, columnists, photojournalists and other news people." Because it is unclear how sports journalists fit in Weaver and his colleagues' measure of role perception, the following research question is proposed:

RQ1: Using Weaver and his colleagues' measure of role perception, with which roles do American sports journalists most identify?

Since Weaver and his colleagues found that journalists at smaller news organizations more often embraced the populist mobilizer role, sports journalists who identify as populist mobilizers may also prioritize their roles as community members.

H1: Sports journalists working for smaller newspapers will rate themselves higher as populist mobilizers than sports journalists working for larger circulation newspapers.

Overall, little is known about which factors may best predict sports journalists' role identification. For this reason, the following research question is proposed:

RQ2: Which variables (i.e. sex, race, education, years employed by current newspaper, and newspaper's market size) have the greatest overall predictive power in explaining sports journalists' perception of their roles?

Method

Instrument Development

This study uses Weaver and his colleagues' survey measures of journalists' role perception to measure American sports journalists' perception of their roles (Weaver et al., 2007). This is a 5-point Likert scale, asking participants to rate, 1 being "not at all important" and 5 being "extremely important", how important items are. Weaver and his colleagues grouped these items into the four designated subcategories:

Interpretive. Three items measure interpretive roles, though initially there were four: "providing analysis and interpretation of complex problems" and "providing analysis and interpretation of international developments" were merged into "providing analysis and interpretation." Two other roles, "discussing national policy while it is still being developed," and "investigating claims and statements made by the government," were modified to make them more appropriate for sports journalists: "discussing national policy" was changed to "discussing athletic policy" and "investigating government claims" was changed to "investigating coaches' claims and statements."

Disseminator. Four items measure disseminator roles: "get information to the public quickly," "stay away from stories with factual content that cannot be verified," "concentrate on stories that are of interest to the widest possible audience," and "provide entertainment and relaxation."

Adversarial. Two adversarial items, "be an adversary of public officials by being constantly skeptical of their actions" and "be an adversary of businesses by being constantly skeptical of their actions," were modified. "Public officials" became "coaches," and "businesses" became "athletic directors and other sports administrators."

Populist mobilizer. Four of the five items were modified for the study: "give ordinary people a chance to express their views on public affairs" became "give ordinary people a chance to express their views on sports issues"; "develop intellectual and cultural interests of the public" became "develop public's athletic interests"; "motivate ordinary people to get involved in public discussions of important issues" became "motivate ordinary people to get involved in public discussions of important sports-related issues"; "set the political agenda" became "set sports news agenda"; and "point people toward possible solutions to society's problems" became "point people toward possible solutions to the world of sports' problems."

Sample

Ulrichsweb was used to search for English-language, American newspapers publishing sports content in print and/or online editions. This resulted in 3,281 print-edition newspapers. Because of the large number of newspapers, stratified sampling was used (Riffe, Lacy, & Fico, 2005). Of the 3,281 newspapers in the population, there were 1,865 weekly, 1,067 daily, 290 biweekly, 36 monthly, and 18 "other" (e.g., fortnightly, quarterly, twenty times a year) types of newspapers. The thirty-six monthly and eighteen "other" newspapers were dropped because a randomly selected sample from this relatively small group would not be a representative sample. This left 3,227 newspapers. To achieve a 95% confidence interval, 802 newspapers were selected. Random sampling was done within these categories: 464 weekly, 266 daily, and 72 biweekly newspapers.

Each website was searched for staff members designated as sports journalists (e.g., "sports writer," "sports editor"). Some of these newspapers listed only one sports-related email contact. Others, however, had several sports-related staff members. A list of every sports-related staff member (e.g., sports writer, sports editor) appearing on each of the 802 newspapers' website was compiled. Some sports journalists were listed as contacts on multiple newspapers' websites, resulting in duplicate email addresses. Duplicate emails were eliminated. A total of 1,104 emails were sent representing 802 newspapers.

Findings

Out of the 1,104 emails sent, 50 emails were returned undeliverable and 19 people opted out. Of the remaining 1,035 emails, 116 people participated, for a response rate of 11.2%. The sample was heavily male (87.1%) and white (83.6%), with participants' ages ranging from 21 to 80 years (M = 40.88, SD = 14.59). Most participants work for dailies (64.6%), the largest percentage working for publications with circulations of 10,001 to 50,000 (38.8%). They average 10.48 years (SD = 11.12) with their current news organizations and 15.70 years (SD = 13.47) of overall professional journalism experience. See Table 1 for descriptive statistics for these and other key variables.

Table 1. ***Descriptive statistics for key variables***

Variable	N*	M/%	SD
1. Age	110	40.88	14.59
2. Years employed by current news organization	113	10.48	11.12
3. Years of professional experience	112	15.70	13.47
4. Education[a]	112	2.95	.641
5. Journalism role			
Adversarial Populist	116	3.59	.758
Mobilizer	116	3.43	.833
8. Race			
White	97	83.6%	
Other	12	10.3%	
9. Sex			
Male	101	87.1%	
Female	12	10.3%	
10. Title			
Sports editor	46	39.7%	
Sports writer/reporter	56	48.3%	
Columnist	5	4.3%	
Other	6	5.2%	
11. Circulation			
Less than 5,000	19	16.4%	
5,001 to 10,000	19	16.4%	
10,001 to 50,000	45	38.8%	
50,001 to 100,000	9	7.8%	
More than 100,001	21	18.1%	

*Participants had the option of not responding to demographics questions.

[a] Education was analyzed as an ordinal variable: (1 = high school diploma/GED, 2 = two-year vocational/community college, 3 = four-year undergraduate degree, 4 = master's degree or higher, 5 = I prefer not to answer).

Research Questions and Hypotheses

RQ1 asked with which of Weaver and his colleagues' role measures American sports journalists most identify. Participants' answers in this study, however, did not group together in the same way response did in Weaver and his colleagues' mainstream journalism studies. For example, the Cronbach's alpha, which measures internal consistency, of participants' answers for the three items Weaver and his colleagues grouped as interpreter items was $\alpha = .241$ (M = 3.95, SD = .728). The disseminator measure was even less reliable. Its composite score of four items was $\alpha = .201$ (M = 4.01, SD = .820). The two adversarial items had a moderate, positive correlation, $r = .652$, $p < .001$, and the composite score of the five populist mobilizer items was $\alpha = .633$ (M = 3.41, SD = .938).

Because participants' answers did not align with Weaver and his colleagues' dimensional structure, a Principal Axis factor analysis with direct Oblimin rotation was performed to see what role structure would emerge from these data. A factor analysis allows researchers to explore underlying structures that drive participants' responses (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007). Factor analyses can help assess theories. Because the results of a factor extraction can be difficult to interpret, a factor rotation can be used. Orthogonal rotations are used when the researcher is confident the items are independent, while oblique rotations are used when the researcher believes underlying processes could be correlated (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007). An Oblimin (oblique) rotation was used for this analysis because it minimizes cross-products of loadings without attempting to load the majority of items into one factor (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007).

The first factor analysis was performed. Initially, five factors emerged. One item was spread relatively evenly across the third and fifth factor, while four loadings in the third, fourth, and fifth factors were below .35. Without these items, the third and fourth factors each had only one item, while the fifth factor had none. Because of their weak natures, these factors were not included in the analysis (they are, however, included in Table 2.) This resulted in two strong factors: the first factor (eigenvalue = 2.41) explained 17.27% of the variance. Two of the three items making up this factor were adversarial characteristics in Weaver and his colleagues' studies. This first factor will be referred to as the adversarial function. The second factor (eigenvalue = 2.17) explained 15.51% of the variance. Four of the five items were designated to be characteristics of populist mobilizers in Weaver and his colleagues' study. This factor will be referred to as the populist mobilizer factor. As stated earlier, Table 2 shows the resulting patterns.

Table 2.

Component	1	2	3	4	5
Be skeptical of athletic directors' and other administrators' actions.	-.909	-.031	-.063	-.100	.013
Be skeptical of coaches' actions.	-.758	-.246	-.076	.021	.331
Investigate coaches' claims and statements.	-.549	.047	-.292	.143	-.025

Motivate ordinary people to get involved in public discussions of important sports-related issues.	-.015	.691	-.325	.240	.052
Develop the public's athletic interests.	.138	.612	-.004	.146	.243
Point people toward solutions to sports' problems.	-.174	.553	-.270	-.271	-.023
Give ordinary people a chance to express their views.	-.026	.498	.042	.092	.199
Concentrate on stories that interest the widest possible audience.	.156	.442	.126	.128	-.032
Discuss athletic policy while it is still being developed.	-.135	.081	-.561	-.006	.049
Provide entertainment and relaxation.	.045	.070	.513	.199	.480
Get information to the public quickly.	.060	.130	.048	.698	-.055
Provide analysis and interpretation.	-.203	.074	-.018	.374	.286
Set the sports news agenda.	.024	.261	.226	.081	.351
Stay away from stories with factual content that cannot be verified.	-.035	.050	-.011	.012	.264
Eigenvalues	2.41	2.17	1.63	1.26	1.05
Percentage of total variance	17.27	15.55	11.67	9.00	7.53
Number of test measures	3	5	–	–	–

Based on the results of the factor analysis, sports journalists primarily see themselves as adversaries and populist mobilizers. The sample's majority (68, or 58.6%) had a stronger identification with the adversarial role, while 42 (or 36.2%) identified more as populist mobilizers. Six participants (5.2%) were tied between the two.

To complete further tests using the adversarial and populist mobilizer factors, composite scores were created. The three items pertaining to adversary were averaged into a composite score, $\alpha = .756$ (M = 3.70, SD = .655, range = 1.0 to 5.0). Loadings in excess of .71, or 50% overlapping variance, are excellent, .63 (40% overlapping variance) are very good, and .55 (30% overlapping variance) are good (Tabachnick and Fidell, 2007). Adversary's loading of .756 is excellent. The alpha for populist mobilizer, however, was very good, $\alpha = .678$ (M = 3.43, SD = .833, range 1.0 to 5.0). All five items were averaged into a composite score.

H1 predicted sports journalists working for smaller newspapers will rate themselves higher as populist mobilizers than sports journalists working for larger circulation newspapers. A one-way between subjects ANOVA was conducted to compare the effect of market size (independent variable) on populist mobilizer (dependent variable). Results were not statistically significant, $F(2, 109) = .151$, $p = .860$. The average populist mobilizer rating for participants at circulations of 10,000 and less was 3.48 (SD = .684), which is slightly less than the mean rating for journalists at circulations of 10,001 to 50,000, which was 3.54 (SD = .556). The mean rating for participants at newspapers with circulations of 50,001 and greater was 3.47 (SD = .646). An ANOVA was also conducted to compare the effects of market size (IV) on adversarial (DV), and results were also not statistically significant, $F(2,109) = 1.63$, $p = .200$. H1 was not supported.

RQ2 asked which variables have the greatest overall predictive power in explaining sports journalists' journalism roles. A regression was done for both adversarial and populist mobilizer roles.

First, the data were examined for violations of regression assumptions. Little's Missing Completely at Random (MCAR) test was conducted to see if missing cases were missing at random, or in other words, to confirm that there is was no systematic pattern to responses participants left blank (Little, 1998). Results of the MCAR test were not significant (chi-square = 7.78, *df* = 8, *p* = .455). This suggests missing cases are as likely to be missing as any other case; that participant non-response for a particular question was random. However, "years of professional, full-time journalism experience" and "age" had Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) scores of 7.80 and 6.22, respectively. Scholars differ on their view of acceptable VIFs: Some suggest 10 (see Hair, Anderson, Tatham, & Black, 1995) while others suggest 5 or 4 (see Rogerson, 2001). Both factors were dropped from the analysis.

This left five predictor variables to be used in the models: sex, race, education, years employed by current newspaper, and newspaper's market size. Two variables, market size and education, were categorical variables with three and four groups, respectively. The regression model created dummy variables for these during its analysis. See Table 3 for full results.

Table 3. *Summary of multiple regression analysis for variables predicting adversarial and populist mobilizer roles*

	Adversarial			Populist mobilizer		
Variable	B	SE B	β	B	SE B	β
Newspaper circulation	.146	.085	.176	.000	.085	.000
Education	.410	.143	.270*	-.034	.143	-.024
Sex	.142	.198	.067	-.443	.198	-.220*
Race	.090	.204	.043	-.070	.204	-.035
Years at newspaper	.009	.006	.144	.003	.006	.044
R^2		.134			.053	
F		3.09*			1.11	

*p < .05

Adversarial. A test of the full model with these predictor values was statistically significant, F(5,100) = 3.09, p = .012, R^2 = .134, R^2 adjusted = .091. The R value was .366. The R^2 suggests the model predicts 13.4% of the adversarial function. According to the model, highest level of completed education (p = .005) was a statistically significant predictor of the adversarial role.

An ANOVA was conducted to further explore the relationship between education (independent variable) on adversarial (dependent variable). Results were statistically significant, F(2, 107) = 4.13, p = .019. A Tukey post hoc test showed a statistically significant difference (p = .014) between participants with a master's degree or beyond (M = 3.13, SD = 1.04) and those with a four-year degree (M = 3.74, SD = .552),

but not between two-year and high school degrees and master's degrees or beyond (p = .072). There was also no statistically significant relationship between two-year degree and four-year degree holders (p = .998).

Populist mobilizer. A test of the full model with these predictor values was not statistically significant, F(5,100) = 1.11, p = .357, R^2 = .053, R^2 adjusted = .005. The R value was .230. The R^2 suggests the model only predicts 5.3% of the populist mobilizer function. According to the model, sex (p = .027) was the only statistically significant predictor of populist mobilizer. The mean score for men was 3.45 (SD = .620), while the average score for women was 3.91 (SD = .478).

Discussion

Weaver and his colleagues created, and have continued to test, measures that have been a staple of journalism role research for decades. However, as this research showed, a specific portion of journalist, sports journalists, did not fit into these established measures. A factor analysis was done to see how sports journalists identified. Based on this refactoring, sports journalists in this sample identified as adversaries and populist mobilizers, the adversarial function being the stronger, more unified role. More than half of the sample's adversarial score was higher than their populist mobilizer score. As the composite adversarial score and its descriptive statistics showed, this sample felt strongly that adversarial items, being skeptical of coaches, athletic directors, and other administrators' claims, were important components of their journalistic role.

This is intriguing, considering sports journalists were not historically identified as being the investigative, adversarial type; as mentioned earlier, their department historically had an intertwined, cozy relationship with the sports organizations they covered. Sports journalists still use myth-making in their narratives and can struggle to investigate troubled athletes and coaches because of their belief in the myths they help create (e.g., Walsh, 2012; Reed, 2019).

With this in mind, the results from the current study can leave a person scratching their head. If sports journalists have a traditional reputation of being less-than-serious investigators, why did the sports journalists in the current study suggest the opposite? There are a few explanations for this. First, it could be that participants responded in ways that are normatively acceptable for journalists' roles. Second, it is unclear how perceiving their roles as adversaries or populist mobilizers influences content creation. For example, when the *Pioneer Press* (St. Paul, Minnesota) published a story detailing academic fraud within the University of Minnesota men's basketball program, then-*Pioneer Press* sports editor Emilio Garcia-Ruiz said he wondered if the story would have been broken if "the only sports staffers around had been the long-timers that dominated both papers' sports staffs" (Overholser, 2005). Overholser (2005) argued that Dohrmann, a then-relatively recent arrival in the Twin Cities, pursued the story particularly because he was not a long-time resident. In fact, Dohrmann and Garcia-Ruiz said they expected an "unusually high level of scrutiny" from the sports writing community, to the extent that they thought the sports journalism community would turn on them if their story was not "Sid-proof," a reference to long-time *Star Tribune* columnist Sid Hartman, who works for the *Pioneer Press*' competing Minneapolis-based newspaper and was assumed to be critical of the then-upcoming story. This suggests there is a level of "peer pressure" in the sports writing community that could influence sports journalists' *practical*, as opposed to theoretical, roles. This, however, was not tested in the current study.

With regards to the populist mobilizer role, Weaver and his colleagues found that journalists at smaller news organizations more often embraced this role. But this affinity for community was not replicated in this study. There was no statistically significant relationship between circulation size and populist mobilizer "rankings."

A limitation, and perhaps this study's most glaring, was the sample size and unknown population parameters. Of the email addresses to which the survey was distributed, only 153 surveys (21%) *were even opened*. Those who did participate made for a homogenous sample: the majority of participants (N = 89) had four-year degrees and only twelve were female. However, this matched the field's lopsided demographics: about ninety percent of sports journalists are male and white (e.g. Reinardy, 2005b; Schultz & Sheffer, 2010; Hardin & Shain, 2006). According to the Women's Media Center (2017), the number of female assistant sports editors at one hundred Associated Press Sports Editors-member newspapers and websites fell from 17.2 percent in 2012 to 9.8 percent in 2014. The minimum and maximum scores female participants had for the populist mobilizer function, for example, were between 2.80 and 4.60, respectively: a range of 1.80. For the one hundred male participants, this was between 1.60 and 4.80: a range of 3.20. How much the statistically significant relationship between the two can be credited to differences between male and female sports journalists' interpretation of their roles or lopsided sample size is unknown.

Finding a larger, more balanced sample size, however, is a current crux of sports journalism research. Adult males working nighttime hours, like sports journalists, are among the most underrepresented in survey research (Krosnick, 1999). Sports journalism scholars have compensated for this by surveying specific groups within the sports journalism population, like members of professional associations or working within a specific geographic region (e.g., Hardin, 2005; Salwen & Garrison, 1994; Miloch, Smucker, & Whisenant, 2005). In their attempt to nationally survey sports journalists in Australia, Nicholson, Zion, and Lowden's (2011) noted the difficulties in understanding their population parameters; many news organizations did not list email addresses for specific people, but instead had one generic email for sports departments. One person may be a sports writer for multiple publications, all with different email addresses. That person would take the survey only once, resulting in a deceivingly deflated response rate. This was also a problem in the current study. Improving survey methods, including a wide range of sample sizes accepted in sports journalism research journals, is the next area of research the author has undertaken.

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