

FASS3333 – Industry and Community Project

Changing Bylines: A Mentorship for Diverse Voices

ABC – Levelling the Playing Field and Increasing Diversity in
Sports Media

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Contents

Executive Summary	2
1 Introduction & Project Aims	3
2 Approach & Methods	5
3 Findings & Results	7
4 Discussion	8
4.0.1 The Mentorship	8
4.0.2 Schedule & Programming Plan	9
4.0.3 Challenges	9
4.0.4 The Recruitment Process	10
4.0.5 Research Constraints	10
5 Conclusion	12
References	13
Appendices	16

Executive Summary

As the national broadcaster, the ABC is capable of playing a pivotal role in diversifying the sports media landscape and enhancing the accessibility of the field of sports reporting. Our report reflects on the barriers to a career in journalism experienced by women, POC, CALD, LGBTQIA+, and disabled candidates. It argues that the key to intersectional representation throughout sports media is the empowerment of underrepresented voices.

In order to address this inequality, our report recommends the provision of accessible and equitable pathways to a career in journalism - specifically through a 6-month paid mentorship program. Using an evidence-based approach, we were able to identify the value of mentorship programs in providing professional networking opportunities and valuable work experience for participants. The mentorship would be accessible and geared towards including intersectional voices, therefore meaningfully generating diversity in sports coverage.

After the commencement of the program, there is a need to assess its efficacy through qualitative means - conducting interviews with mentors and mentees - and quantitative means - recording the number of instances in which the mentorship successfully leads participants to a career in journalism. The future of the mentorship should incorporate partnerships and alternative funding sources, both to ensure that these studies can be longitudinal and therefore reliable, and to guarantee a lasting impact on the diversity of sports news media.

Chapter 1

Introduction & Project Aims

Our report analyses the issues with the current landscape of sports journalism, which fails to represent intersectional identities in the field of sports, especially regarding gender, race, and disability.

A study from Women in Media looked at 18,436 reports across Australian media over 14 days, finding that males wrote 82% of bylines and composed 84% of sports media sources. Only 10% of sports experts were female even though the industry is comprised of 53% women (Women in Media and Isentia, 2022).

There was also a disparity in the racial background of newscasters. Anglo-Celtic reporters appeared on screen 78% of the time compared to 6% for reporters from non-European backgrounds across Australian news and TV, presenting a skewed representation of Australian society and decreasing the visibility of sportscasters from certain backgrounds.

Inclusive media is crucial because it mirrors culture and shapes public opinion. Inadequate reporting on minority groups can reinforce negative racial stereotypes and legitimise racism and racist acts (Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, 1991; Senate Environment and Communications References Committee, 2021) and can detrimentally impact how minority groups perceive themselves, leading to lower self-esteem and adverse health and well-being outcomes (Stoneham et al., 2014; Vargas et al., 2020). Furthermore, an analysis by Rodrigues et al. (2019) of Australian media coverage on minority issues found a consistent 'othering' of minority cultures.

The lack of equal visibility in sports media stems from the barriers that prevent diverse candidates from embarking upon careers in journalism. Marginalised identities are provided with fewer opportunities to enter the industry, being negatively viewed in their application before it is even reviewed (Adamovic, 2023).

The elitism of the industry is compounded by its issues with accessibility. Applications for journalism can involve logistical and psychological challenges that deter disabled appli-

cants (Halpin, 2024). Additionally, stigmas and negative stereotypes persist, surrounding the capabilities of athletes with disability. These stigmas are compounded by the underrepresentation of disabled athletes in mainstream sports media, limiting the visibility of potential role models and making the field appear unwelcoming (De Cosemo, 2020).

Journalism is also inaccessible to applicants who do not have tertiary education, directly affecting 'aspiring journalists from low-income backgrounds' (Daily Free Press, 2020). Before candidates can earn their place in newsrooms, they often require experience from internships, 'vital for building resumes and gaining skill' (Daily Free Press, 2020).. Heterogenous newsrooms are a result of discrimination against applicants based on education and socioeconomic status 'which are often interlinked' (Daily Free Press, 2020). As such, our group focused on ways to address the lack of accessibility for applicants without tertiary education, finding novel approaches to include capable candidates that aren't enrolled in university.

Considering the variety of inequalities that present themselves throughout sports newsrooms, our research questions included: What are the barriers to the representation of diverse voices in sports news media? How diverse is the current sports reporting landscape? How might the ABC increase the number of intersectional identities in their newsrooms? What is best practice for diverse recruitment processes? Who are journalism education opportunities accessible to?

Our project seeks to address the aims of inclusion by promoting intersectionality in reporting. This means addressing the systematic barriers in place that prevent intersectional candidates from entering and succeeding within the industry.

Our report is structured to include the approach we took to addressing our problem statement, the resources we utilised to inform our approach, the findings of our research, the application, program, future, and our conclusion on how our program will address the inequities in sports reporting.

Chapter 2

Approach & Methods

To achieve the aims and research objectives of this project we adopted an evidence-based approach, which consists of “making decisions through the conscientious, explicit and judicious use of the best available evidence from multiple sources” (Barends, E. et, al, 2014). According to Barends, E. et, al, there are 6 parts involved in evidence-based research: reshaping practical issues into answerable questions, searching for evidence systematically, critiquing the quality of evidence and sources, combining the evidence together, utilising the evidence in decision-making situations, and finally assessing the outcome of the decision. Through the establishment of research questions, we were able to define the parameters of our research and select impactful and reliable sources.

Our research focused on qualitative primary research, buttressed by secondary research. The primary research involved corresponding with previous members of the ABC’s cadetship program. They were asked questions about their experience in the program, particularly pertaining to the application process, their learning and mentorship opportunities, the impact of the program on their career prospects, and any improvements that could have been made to the program. This allowed us to accurately understand the current landscape of similar training opportunities, assessing their accessibility and effectiveness from participants’ perspectives. Despite using secondary case-study research to support our analysis of the strengths and limitations of such programs, we found that it was difficult to design thoughtful and equitable mentorship through secondary resources alone.

Furthermore, we utilised a risk register and SWOT analysis to help identify and mitigate any issues encountered in the project. We used a risk register (see appendix 1) to identify “possible risk events that ha[d] the potential to impact [our] project” (O’Connor 2020), direct our research and highlight mitigation strategies. Additionally, we conducted a SWOT analysis (see appendix 2) to “evaluate the ‘strengths’, ‘weaknesses’, ‘opportunities’ and ‘threats’ involved” in our project (Namugenyi et al. 2019). This technique allowed us

to observe the internal and external positives and negatives of our project.

A hurdle that we had to overcome in this project was groupthink affecting our research, “a phenomenon that occurs when a group of well-intentioned people makes irrational or non-optimal decisions spurred by the urge to conform” (Psychology Today 2024). Early in the project, our group came to a premature consensus when we attempted to tailor our research to a preliminary project plan. Overcoming groupthink meant broadening the subject of our research questions and addressing the problem statement more directly. This allowed us to organically arrive at a recommendation for the project.

Our approach to this project was interdisciplinary. Joaquin’s focus on marketing allowed him to identify the program’s strengths and weaknesses, particularly through SWOT analysis. Gracie’s recent experience in an internship provided insight into aspects of the proposed mentorship including involvement, duration and pay. Abbi has previous work in the entertainment industry and her experience in the field gave the group an insight into how these mentorship programs were run, allowing her to aptly reflect on the content of the program. Emma’s background in International Relations and Anthropology allowed her to reflect on the theories and frameworks being able to critically analyse society and inequalities. Furthermore, her background as a professional female football player brought an athlete’s perspective to the perceived inequalities off the field in the media. Bella is an English major who ensured fluency throughout the process, improving the legibility and flow of our presentations. Finally, Jonny’s science background helped in designing a reliable method and approach for the project as well as accurately assessing the quality of sources. By communicating our disciplinary strengths, we were able to delegate and volunteer for appropriate tasks.

Chapter 3

Findings & Results

At the beginning of the project, Amanda Shalala (2024) outlined the lack of diversity across the ABC sports newsrooms nationwide. Of the 32 members of the ABC sports team, 40% are women, 6% Indigenous Australians, 9% disabled individuals, and 9% CALD staff (Shalala 2024). Shalala describes the complexity of getting journalists to adhere to diverse interviewing practices, arguing that the bulk of intersectional perspectives are recorded by those journalists who themselves come from diverse backgrounds. As such, our research approaches the diversification of sports reporting via the diversification of the newsroom itself. Davidson (2016) highlights how increasing skill sets in the journalism industry through mentoring and development programs is a key strategy to increase representation in the media.

Chapter 4

Discussion

After reviewing our findings, we were able to identify the usefulness of mentorship and portfolio-building opportunities to foster a more diverse and inclusive newsroom environment, thereby enhancing intersectional representation in sports news media. As such, we propose a mentorship program that addresses the pressing need for diversity by providing hands-on experience for candidates. It improves their employability by creating a structured and encouraging environment that grows their journalistic skills and provides them with industry connections.

4.0.1 The Mentorship

In this mentorship, we highlight the urgent need for measures to foster inclusivity. The proposed six-month internship program is designed to cultivate essential journalism skills, offer mentorship, and help mentees build a robust portfolio, directly tackling the challenges to advancing equality and diversity within ABC’s reporting team. Research suggests a 6-month internship is the ideal duration for professional growth. The mentorship correlates with students’ schedules and applicants without tertiary education, enabling mentees to complete large projects, receive thorough training, and develop a strong portfolio (Sharma, 2023).

This mentorship provides aspiring journalists who are women, POC, CALD, LGBTQIA+, and disabled with opportunities to address inequality in the newsroom. We aim to approach a diverse range of applicants, including people without tertiary education or journalism degrees. The objectives of this program are to develop practical skills, provide mentorship, and create a portfolio—all of which are critical for obtaining future employment opportunities. Applications may be submitted in written, audio, or video formats to guarantee inclusivity, answering a variety of questions. For example, “Discuss an aspect of women’s sport which is

not reported about enough.” The mentorship, supported and facilitated by ABC, guarantees that participants obtain practical experience in various areas of journalism, offering a structured route into the existing ABC cadetship program or other educational and employment opportunities. The program is designed to keep interns engaged and align with the schedules of ABC employees. Monthly events include orientation, resume workshops, digital media planning, portfolio fundamentals, off-site visits, and specialist seminars. Important elements of the program include shadowing, content creation, workshops and mentoring. Building upon skills acquired in workshops, interns will produce various works, including opinion and analysis articles, videos, in-depth reports, and social media posts. Workshops are led by ABC staff members and outside experts, covering networking, interviewing, research, social media tactics, and employability skills. Through shadowing, interns thoroughly understand the daily operations of various departments such as digital journalism, sports journalism, and social media strategies. They can gain insight into professional workflows, furthering their understanding and familiarity with the industry.

4.0.2 Schedule & Programming Plan

Over the course of one sample month in which social media is the focus, a mentee’s schedule would include participation in off-site visits, working with a social media producer, and attending workshops on social media coverage of diverse sports. Content creation sessions may involve developing a social media campaign, where mentees brainstorm, create content, schedule posts, and receive feedback to enhance digital storytelling skills. Workshops will also cover handling gender-sensitive topics in media. A crucial component of the program is mentoring. The mentee would engage in frequent check-ins with industry professionals such as Amanda Shalala, who could provide valuable feedback on their work, tracking and evaluating their progress.

4.0.3 Challenges

The issues that must be addressed in the planning of such a mentorship include the availability of resources including funding and mentors, the accessibility of the recruitment process, and the actionable achievement of both ours and the ABC’s goals. Resource availability is necessary to ensure our proposal and logistics are accounted for. According to Amanda Shalala (2024), the ABC has limited funding for a program such as ours. However, Shalala proposed that one intern could be paid on a part-time base salary (2024). As a result, our recommendation will be only available for one mentee per intake for the 6-month duration part-time. In addition, mentees will be partnered with existing ABC employees. Establish-

ing relationships with existing employees can be challenging, since successful mentorships depend on the exchange of knowledge in a manner that addresses mentees' concerns (James, 2015), requiring a level of familiarity. As such, it may be challenging to source suitable mentors for mentees' unique requirements and interests. Additionally, it may be difficult to tailor mentee timetables to ABC staff availability, thereby ensuring that funding is used as effectively as possible. A potential solution to this challenge is through partnering with other media companies in the industry, such as Siren Sport (Toffoletti, 2021) or commercial news platforms (Elizabeth, 2024).

4.0.4 The Recruitment Process

The equitable recruitment of applicants is a concern our recommendations directly address. We seek to bridge the gap in intersectional perspectives in the newsroom by diversifying the pool of journalists working for ABC sport. By allowing various application submission formats and removing the need for tertiary education, we enhance accessibility. The eligibility criteria encourage those eager to join the industry and passionate about sports to foster a diverse landscape and create unique stories. Scheduled times for mentor check-ins ensure that mentees' progression is logged and that they remain on track, as well as guaranteeing mentees timely support and feedback. In addition, the mentee creates a portfolio of original work, milestones for which guide the program's structure throughout its duration.

The ABC's next step is to approve the implementation of the proposed mentorship program and ensure resources are allocated effectively and efficiently. For example, ABC must ensure that everyone involved understands their roles and responsibilities and that the six month period of the mentorship occurs at an appropriate time of year.

4.0.5 Research Constraints

While conducting the study and developing this project, a number of constraints were discovered. One major obstacle was the lack of successful case studies, inherently making it challenging to compare the suggested mentorship program to other programs of a similar nature. The lack of primary sources further hindered the research because we could only get in touch with a small number of former cadetship participants for firsthand accounts. Furthermore, scheduling conflicts between facilitators and the mentees they are shadowing may occur due to logistical issues, causing problems for the program's seamless operation. The project's long-term impact and scalability may be hindered by a possible shortage of funds that would be necessary to complete the project or continue its development after the first year. Our capacity to completely comprehend the nuances and efficacy of comparable

initiatives was limited by this lack of primary data, necessitating our reliance on secondary sources. Despite these obstacles, the suggested approach is well-founded in research and strives to effectively address the concerns that have been identified.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

The ABC's 50:50 program seeks to address a lack of diverse engagement with sports media. Women, POC, CALD, LGBTQIA+ and disabled individuals are severely underrepresented in sports reporting, not only as subjects and informants but also as newsmakers. We argue that the solution for the lack of diversity lies in increasing the intersectionality of sports reporters and the newsroom environment. In order to do this, journalism education must be accessible and equitable, particularly for individuals without formal training. Our proposed strategy takes the form of a mentorship that provides a pathway for prospective journalists from underrepresented backgrounds to build skills, knowledge, and connections and commence a career in the industry.

Our program incorporates an inclusive application process which negates bias by emphasising practical, tangible, and collaborative assessments in place of traditional recruitment tools such as resumes. The program includes workshops, shadowing, mentorship and content creation, giving participants quality first-hand learning opportunities and feedback from industry professionals. Participants will emerge with professional contacts and a portfolio that showcases their skills and knowledges. The mentorship will foster professional development, making a career in journalism more accessible to intersectional candidates. Our mentorship has the potential to create an inclusive sports media landscape that more accurately represents the diversity of Australian society.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Risk Register

Threat description	Impact Description	Likelihood	Overall Risk	Treatment strategy
Existing journalists not being willing to participate in the program.	Major	Possible	High	Introduce an incentive program to encourage participation. Clearly indicate what work is required of them so that they can prepare and designate time.
A full-time mentorship for established journalists may cause a need to sacrifice their existing employment	Minor	Possible	Medium	Outline the commitments and timetable of the internship in the application process to ensure complete engagement and transparency throughout. ‘Hot Potato’ situation.
Unable to find (diverse) applicants for mentorship positions	Major	Possible	High	Approach sources with which potential emerging journalists with an interest in sports are already engaging e.g. schools, sports clubs, sports games, existing blogger/content creator.

Threat description	Impact Description	Likelihood	Overall Risk	Treatment strategy
Deemed unsuccessful or there was a reduction in funding (ends early, can no longer run)	Major	Possible	High	Ensure there is a go ahead from the ABC themselves regarding the funding and where they are receiving the funding from prior to commencing. Make sure everyone is onboard including stakeholders and the ABC with more than enough to cover the budget and possible flaws that occur.
Project does not lead to lasting employment or tangible industry change (due to funding restrictions)	Major	Likely	High	Incorporate potential solutions into the scope of the project, particularly regarding commercial industry and government funding partnerships that can help support prolonged mentorship/employment.
With a growing Diversity team, other journalists might feel less of a need to write about women's sports.	Minor	Possible	Medium	Reestablish in journalists and entertainment producers that just because the team is growing does not take away from the need for everyone to include women and non-binary people in their reports.
Amanda and Kate not having enough time to oversee the implementation of the program	Minor	Possible	Medium	Acquire assistance from other journalists. Create a schedule to clearly indicate when Amanda and Kate need to be involved so work is expected and can be prepared for.

Threat description	Impact Description	Likelihood	Overall Risk	Treatment strategy
Similar opportunities provided by other news networks (increased competition)	Insignificant	Unlikely	Low	Could work in partnership otherwise, may not even be seen as a risk as it encourages the same 50/50 goal.
Are there enough projects or sports stories to cover within the internship itself, where both the journalist and the intern can work together	Moderate	Unlikely	Medium	Broaden the range of sports and stories that are being reported about. Create new project for the mentee.
Women journalists who would apply for the mentorship/work experience do not feel as if they do not need mentorship to begin with (feel devalued)	Minor	Unlikely	Medium	Carefully word the job description to allow people in need of education in the field and avoid overqualified people who would be better suited for higher ranking jobs.

Appendix 2: SWOT Analysis

Strengths	Weaknesses
Strong institutional reputation	Limited funding capacity
Access to experienced journalists	Time constraints for mentors
Opportunities	Threats
Partnerships with media organisations	Industry budget cuts
Expansion into digital journalism	High competition for placements

Table 5.2: SWOT Analysis