

# Book Review

Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly  
2023, Vol. 100(1) 1–2  
© 2022 AEJMC



Article reuse guidelines:  
[sagepub.com/journals-permissions](https://sagepub.com/journals-permissions)  
<http://journals.sagepub.com/home/jmq>



***Who Let Them in? Pathbreaking Women in Sports Journalism.*** Joanne Lannin.  
Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2022. 188 pp. \$34.00 hbk. \$32.00 ebk.

**Reviewed by:** Lucie Schoch , *University of Lausanne, Lausanne, Switzerland*  
DOI: 10.1177/10776990221142245

Despite the dramatic rise in the number of women in journalism over the past decades, sports journalism shows a different picture: it has historically been, and still largely remains, a male-dominated domain. The book *Who Let Them In? Pathbreaking Women in Sports Journalism* charts the progress female sports journalists have made over the past 50 years in the U.S. context. Written by Joanne Lannin—currently a freelance writer and editor, Lannin worked in sports reporting for many years—the book offers a fascinating glimpse of the major issues women face in sports media, and the changes that have occurred over time. Lannin also discusses how misogyny and sexual harassment continue to permeate the industry even today.

Based on exclusive interviews conducted by Lannin, as well as media sources, the book is written to be accessible to the general public. It consists of 15 chapters, with the first 13 being devoted to the portrait of pioneering women, a majority of whom have been important figures in sports journalism. The two last chapters are more transversal and deal, respectively, with the impact of the #MeToo era in sports journalism and an overview of the journey of women who joined the ranks of this male-dominated field of journalism from the 1970s to today.

One of the merits of this book is that it covers a fairly long period (five decades) and it situates the history of women sports journalists in relation to the social changes that marked the United States over this period, in particular, with respect to women, between Title IX (1972) and the #Metoo movement (2017). It is precisely this movement of liberalization of women's speech that this book is part of, one of the goals being to denounce verbal and sexual harassment and abuse from athletes, coaches, team personnel, and male colleagues, so that future women in this industry no longer have to experience them. This objective is shared by women who gave Lannin an interview, showing that the sisterhood between women sports journalists, which used to take discreet forms—such as women sportswriters privately sharing their lists of people to avoid or to be careful around—takes a more assertive form in 2022.

The book is full of anecdotes, sometimes very personal, which overall make it extremely vibrant. The quality of this material allows Lannin to proceed to a detailed description of the working conditions of women sports journalists: the unheard difficulties they encounter(ed), their coping mechanisms, and their overall battle to break down the gender-based barriers that affect(ed) their ability to do their job. In doing so, the book has the merit of both *not* victimizing women and simultaneously uncovering the facilitators of change, such as various male allies these women found along the way, or, at another level, ESPN that is described as a game changer for female broadcasters and sports journalists.

Despite all these qualities, the academic reader—student, researcher—will likely be left unsatisfied after reading this book. Although the book does not pretend to have a scientific approach, its absence is nevertheless felt in many respects. First, Lannin does not give any indication of methodology and does not, for example, explain how the interviewees were chosen. It is a selection that appears to be arbitrary and can therefore raise the question to what extent the testimonies are representative. Second, the book remains descriptive overall, a juxtaposition of various portraits—the two last more transversal chapters do not manage to compensate this flaw—without providing an in-depth analytical approach. Lannin refers to Dr. Marie Hardin’s work, with whom she also conducted an interview, and explains women journalists’ difficulties and struggles by their token position in this male-dominated field of journalism. Yet, she does not analyze enough the differences or similarities of the responses of the interviewees to their token position, according to their context (period of time, media, etc.) and profile (particularly educational/professional background and experience with sport). Scholars in the sociology of work have shown that a variety of responses from women in male-working environments can be observed: from women who do or do not conform to the dominant male professional norms and practices, to women who sometimes develop alternative professional practices and norms that lead occasionally—a perceived threat to both their male colleagues and the established order. More links between the different testimonies, to identify such rationales in the ways women adapt to their token status, would have added considerable value to the book. Finally, we can regret a form of U.S.-centric bias. The book focuses exclusively on the U.S. context, without making links to situations in other countries, and without providing any guidance to the U.S. media landscape and its evolution, presuming that these elements are known to the reader.

Despite these shortcomings, this book is a significant publication in the wake of the movement #MeToo. It symbolizes the voice of women in the sports industry, breaking the wall of silence that surrounded the hardships women have to face as well as the misogyny and sexual harassment in this industry, a subject taboo for so long. *Who Let Them In? Pathbreaking Women in Sports Journalism* is a legacy for future women sports journalists.

## ORCID iD

Lucie Schoch  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9278-775X>