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**Policy Statement and Call for Papers**  
**Journal of the Speech and Theatre Association of Missouri**  
**Fall 2018 – Volume 48**

The editor of the 2018 Journal of the Speech and Theatre Association of Missouri is presently accepting manuscripts. Scholarly articles, book and resource reviews, and teaching resources are all encouraged. Scholarship from a diversity of areas from the discipline encompassing communication, speech, and theatre will be considered. These areas include, but are not limited to: Speech, Debate, Theatre Instruction and Performance, Communication Theory, Interpersonal Communication, Intercultural Communication, Health Communication, Rhetoric, Persuasion, Organizational Communication, Political Communication, Family Communications, Listening, Communication Ethics, Mediation, Public Relations, Film, Mass Media Theory, Mediated Communication, and New Communication Technologies.

All submissions should be in Microsoft Word, and emailed to the editor. References should follow the latest edition of the American Psychological Association style manual. A separate page with abstract, author affiliation and bio(s) should be included. All submissions should be received by February 16, 2018, to ensure full consideration for publication.

Updated submission information for volume 48 will be available in October of 2017 at the website for the Speech and Theatre Association of Missouri – **[www.speechandtheatre.org](http://www.speechandtheatre.org)**

Submissions can be sent to:

Gina L. Jensen, Director of Publications

Speech and Theatre Association of Missouri

Webster University

Department of Communication & Journalism

470 E. Lockwood Ave.

(314) 968-7164

St. Louis, MO 63119

[jensen@webster.edu](mailto:jensen@webster.edu)

## **Image Repair, Image Prepare, Competing Civic Responsibilities, and High School Football**

*Josh Compton & Jordan Compton*

### **Abstract**

*The Camden Hills high school football season was cancelled mid-season after multiple injuries to current team members led to not having enough participants to safely field a competitive team. The decision to cancel the team came from school administrators. This paper offers a rhetorical analysis of the image repair strategies used by Superintendent Libby in her attempt to help explain the decision-making process used by administrators to come to this decision. Additionally, this study focuses on aspects of community and sport, examining potentially competing interests of safety and community.*

My take on this is not whether there are minimum roster sizes but more how do we continue to maintain this sport and whether we want to maintain this sport as a society.<sup>1</sup>

-Dr. Paul Berkner, director of the Maine Concussion Management Initiative

While the sport of football remains the most popular sport in the United States, the game has come under fire for safety reasons. The recent movie, *Concussion*, details the struggles that medical professionals have faced attempting to get the National Football League to recognize the dangers of playing the sport, particularly with head injuries. Media reports continue to highlight post-mortem diagnoses of brain injuries of former players, including recent confirmation of chronic traumatic encephalopathy (CTE) in Tyler Sash, former Giants safety who died at the age of 27 from an accidental pain medication overdose (Pennington, 2016). Additional professional athletes, Brandi Chastain (soccer) and Kevin Nash (professional wrestler), have agreed to donate their brains for study following their deaths to gain a better understanding of CTE (Gonzalez, 2016). As more professional and

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<sup>1</sup>Cited in Clark, 2015, para 13

collegiate athletes like Adrian Coxson (Heck, 2016) withdraw/retire from the game, a trickle-down effect of safety concerns and precautions appears to be affecting the high school level of football, too.

On September 23, Nick Ithomitis, principal of Camden Hills Regional High School, Steve Alex, athletic director of Camden Hills Regional High School, and Maria Libby, superintendent of Five Town CSD, cancelled the school's football program in mid-season. Within days, it became a widely covered story, not only in the region, but across the nation, including the Boston Globe ("High school cancels football season," 2015, headline) and the New York Times (Belson, 2015).

The 2015-16 Camden Hills Windjammers was comprised of between 20 to 30 players (Grossfeld, 2015; Warner, 2015); an exact number is difficult to determine as the reported number fluctuated during the run-up to the season and injuries mounted during the season. During the previous week's game, prior to the cancellation of the program, the Windjammers lost 53-14 against Bucksport, and four starting players were injured (Warner, 2015), with one taken directly to the hospital by ambulance after the game, and another taken to the hospital later that night by his parents (Hawkes, 2015). The Windjammer roster for the next game was comprised of more freshmen than juniors and seniors combined. "Because of injuries, only 11 players showed up for the last Monday practice" (Grossfeld, 2015, para 35). These low numbers combined with a looming game against state powerhouse Maine Central Institute – boasting 57 players and a history of outscoring opponents 327-30 – formed the context for the decision to cancel Camden Hills football (Grossfeld, 2015). As with any instance of image repair discourse, the local context mattered, too. Maine saw a decline in high school football participation of 14 percent from 2006-2014, according to the Maine Principals' Association (cited in Thomas, 2015b).

On the one hand, the cancellation of Camden Hills' football season is a story of a small community in a small state. But on the other hand, the cancellation of Camden Hills' football season is a story with potentially important repercussions beyond the region. Indeed, one of the things that distinguishes this case study as particularly important and worthy of rhetorical analysis is that it took place in a context of a nationwide conversation about safety and youth sports – a dialogue strongly motivated, at least in part, by the deaths of five student-athletes in New Jersey, Louisiana, Oklahoma, Washington, and Georgia in the weeks before the cancellation of the Windjammers' football program

(Grossfeld, 2015). Additionally, the decision to cancel a football program is not unique to Camden Hills. In a move that received national attention, including from the New York Times, Maplewood Richmond Heights High School cancelled its football program the summer before – even after winning the state championship five years earlier (Belson, 2015, para 1). In that national story, like others, Camden Hills’ story was mentioned (see also Smith, 2015).

But perhaps most importantly, this case study is situated in a growing interest in a sense of community in sport – a focus of research, theorizing, and conceptual model building that moves beyond specific psychological and social benefits (e.g., Eime, Young, Harvey, Charity, & Payne, 2013), toward larger frameworks of cohesion, support, and identity. A good deal of this theorizing and scholarship focuses on intercollegiate athletics (e.g., Warner & Dixon, 2011; Warner, Shapiro, Dixon, Ridinger, & Harrison, 2011; Wolf-Wendel, Toma, & Morphew, 2001), and more recent attention has focused on youth sports (e.g., Warner & Leierer, 2015; Warner, Kerwin, & Walker, 2013). Scholarship has considered sports and sense of community campus-wide (e.g., Warner, Shapiro, Dixon, Ridinger, & Harrison, 2011), from the athlete’s perspective (e.g., Warner & Dixon, 2011), and from parents’ perspectives (Warner, Dixon, & Leierer, 2015). Indeed, the National Communication Association calls for directed attention toward communication’s civic calling (see <http://www.natcom.org/convention/>). Education scholars call for more attention to conceptualizations of schools as communities (e.g., Higgins-D’Alessandro & Sadh, 1998; Strike, 2004). Sport and exercise scholars call for more attention to community and sport, in general, and community and football, in specific (e.g., Warner, Shapiro, Dixon, Ridinger, & Harrison, 2011). Our careful look at this case study, then, is intended to speak to issues of sport, community, and image. We posit two key points of departure from extant work on sport and sense of community. First, our method is of rhetorical analysis. Second, instead of looking at benefits to community during or after participation or exposure to sport (e.g., Warner & Leierer, 2015), we look at an instance when sport was taken away.

## **Image Repair and Image Prepare**

### *Image Repair*

Benoit's (2014) image repair theory provides a typology for identifying and classifying image repair rhetoric after an image has been tarnished by a perceived transgression. For years, scholars have employed Benoit's typology to analyze image rhetoric in politics (Benoit, 2014), entertainment (Compton & Miller, 2011), commerce (Stone, Erickson, Thorwick, 2015), and other contexts, including more recently a number of analyses of sport communication rhetoric (e.g., Compton & Compton, 2015).

Once a rhetor is considered 1) responsible for 2) an offensive act, a rhetor engaged in image repair discourse (Benoit, 2014). The typology is comprised of five main strategies, with some divided into specific tactics. Denial can be attempted in two forms: a claim that the offensive act did not even occur (simple denial) or a claim that it did occur, but that someone else is responsible for it (shifting the blame). Evading responsibility has four possible tactics: (1) provocation: the act was a response to another offensive act; (2) defeasibility: the act was beyond the rhetor's control; (3) accident; and (4) good intentions: the rhetor meant well. Reducing offensiveness has six possible tactics: (1) bolstering: a refocus on good qualities of the rhetor; (2) minimization: an attempted downgrade of the perceived offensiveness of the act; (3) differentiation: comparisons of the act in question with more offensive acts; (4) transcendence: moving toward a larger philosophical frame from which to view, and judge, the offense; (5) attacking the accuser: questioning the credibility (or motives) of the attacker; and (6) compensation: reimbursing those harmed by the act. The strategy of corrective action can either try to fix harms caused by the act or to change so that the act will not happen again. Mortification involves the accused expressing regret. (See Benoit, 2014, for an extensive treatment of his typology.)

### *Image Prepare*

Image prepare was proposed by Compton (2012) as a way of looking at image repair as a preemptive strategy by combining Benoit's (2014) typology with the premise of McGuire's (1964) inoculation

theory. Compton argues that inoculation theory – an approach to resistance to persuasive influence that parallels a body’s resistance to virus through pre-exposure to a weakened form of that virus, e.g., a flu shot – can employ image repair strategies and tactics prior to persuasive attacks as a way of preemptively protecting an image.

### **Image Prepare/Repair Discourse**

#### *Maria Libby’s Open Letter*

Maria Libby, superintendent of Five Town CSD, posted a letter/essay to explain the decision to cancel the school’s football program. Libby’s letter begins with a series of pro-football statements. “I always considered myself lucky that I could throw a nice spiral,” she began (Libby, 2015, para 1). She talks of “toss[ing] a football with students at recess” (para 1) when she was a middle school principal, attending youth football games, and being a fan of the New England Patriots. She speaks of “admir[ing] the [middle and high school] players’ fortitude and grit” (para 1).

Libby’s strategy here seems clear: She is bolstering herself through speaking of her admiration for and support of football – in general, and more to the point of the current issue, youth football. Indeed, Libby explains why she shares these details as part of the letter:

I am sharing this because it is important to know that I appreciate the game, I have supported our players, and I have every interest in trying to figure out how to keep football alive and well at Camden Hills. (Libby, 2015, para 1)

Libby also offers some third-party bolstering (see Benoit, 2014) of her administrative colleagues, noting: “In fact, every one I know on the ‘inside’ ...deeply appreciates the value of the football program at our high school” (para 1). By offering this analysis, Libby emphasizes the pride in the hard work/effort of the football team to suggest that the issue is not with the team or the players, but that the season’s extenuating circumstances are forcing the school’s hand.

Libby’s next lines – and still in the first paragraph of her letter – extols the virtues of participating in high school football, including offering “an important niche for some players who otherwise would not participate on a sports team” (para 1), “a sense of belonging, self-

discipline, and determination,” (para 1), and that football “means a lot to the families who have been involved in football in our community” (para 1). In some ways, this rhetoric extends the bolstering begun in the opening lines – moving from a display of her appreciation of the game to an acknowledgement of the strength of the sport and its benefits to the players, coaches, and, in an even broader sense, the community. Additionally, we argue that such lines also form a preemptive effect against anticipated arguments against the decision – and criticism did, indeed, follow the decision.

Libby’s final line in this opening paragraph is short but important: “We didn’t make the decision lightly” (para 1). This simple statement characterizes the effort that went into the decision, which could further bolster Libby’s and the other administrators’ images.

Next, Libby gives a bit of history to the decision, noting that the 2014 season “had ended with low numbers – in the teens” (para 2) and that during the summer, she had checked with the athletic director on the numbers. She recounted that the athletic director and coach had recruited, getting the team number to the upper 20s. “I still had some concerns, because I knew the team was young and didn’t have the experience level of most varsity teams, but quietly let it be” (para 2). Libby then recounts the game against Bucksport:

During that game, we were overpowered and had a tough time competing. Our players sustained numerous injuries, two of which landed in the emergency room. Some of our players were afraid to go in, although that won’t be admitted publicly, and I understand why. (para 2)

With the number of players available dwindling, the school was forced with a difficult decision: Cancel the season or allow their students to be placed in a difficult situation that could have led to further injuries. “On Monday after that defeat,” Libby continued, “only 11 players showed up ready for practice” (para 2). With this many players injured, simulating game situations in practice was not an available option for the coaches, further increasing the chance of injury in actual game situations.

Additionally, the number of players available listed in this statement is important as this is the number of players needed on the field for both sides of the ball. Only having 11 active, healthy players means the team would not have had any substitutes available to enter the game for injury reasons or to give a player a moment to rest.

Up to this point in the letter, there had been very few mentions of the coach, besides the fact that he had helped recruit more players over the summer to get the team's numbers up. But next, Libby makes reference to the coach: "The AD [athletic director] had been in contact with the coach throughout the season, and the coach had also expressed numerous concerns along the way" (para 2). Libby summarized the context as: "These factors, taken together, gave cause for the administration to convene and have a serious conversation about whether it was safe to field a football team" (para 2).

Libby continued her narrative in paragraph 3, recounting how she met with the principal and the athletic director, talking "for almost two hours about the situation, the possibilities, and the implications of various decisions" (para 3). By noting the amount of time spent discussing the issue, Libby emphasizes the serious nature of the decision.

Libby added: "We had information from the coach and the MPA [Maine Principals' Association] to bring to bear on that conversation" (para 3). Libby noted that

[m]ost of the conversation focused on whether or not we could safely go against MCI in two weeks, a team known to be strong and physical. Given everything we knew, we all determined that the safety risk of playing against MCI was too high. We could not knowingly put students in that situation. (para 3)

Libby then provided an extended argument and risk and responsibility, offering not only a preemptive justification, but also, an extended analogy:

Even if players and parents would be willing to assume that risk, the school administration could not. There are many times in the course of our lives when a public system cannot tolerate the same level of risk that an individual can. For instance, I would have let my then 14-year-old drive a car on the road, but the state deems that unsafe until the age of 16... Likewise, many students would willingly take the risk of climbing onto the roof of the middle school to retrieve a ball and then jumping down, but that is a safety risk we cannot allow. At the most fundamental level, that is what this decision was about. As school administrators, we did not feel it was safe to put a young team, compromised by injury, with relatively low numbers on the field knowing it was likely

they'd be hurt, possibly seriously hurt. (para 3)

We find a repeat here of earlier explanations for the rationale of the decision, only this time, the reasoning is characterized as collectively emerging with the other administrators. Libby ends her third paragraph with: "All three of us felt the same without an inkling of doubt" (para 3). This final statement attempts to show that the administration was unified in making this controversial decision.

Next, after making the case that safety, risk, and responsibility guided the talk, with the upcoming game against MCI acting as the catalyst, Libby seemed to shift toward argumentation more based on logical conclusions that followed from their decision about MCI. She began:

Then the question became what to do about Ellsworth. That was trickier. We recognized that we would be more competitive against Ellsworth, but our team was not at its peak. The number of healthy players was low and we knew we were going to cancel against MCI. We reasoned that if we were going to forfeit the MCI game, it was not prudent to compete even against Ellsworth. We couldn't take the chance, knowing that our team was compromised in numerous ways. (para 4)

Libby then noted that MPA "doesn't allow a varsity team to forfeit a game, or to pick and choose opponents. The consequence of forfeiting a game is ending the entire season" (para 4). We find a number of repair strategies here, including a type of shifting the blame to MPA rules and, with shades of defeasibility, their compliance with MPA. Libby clarified next: "There are some exceptions to that general rule, but it was unlikely we'd be one of them. I have talked at length to MPA and it is clear the dye was cast with a forfeit," Libby added. Libby ended paragraph 4 with an observation that, since the MCI game was their homecoming game, they "needed to let them know with enough time to develop an alternative" (para 4). Here, Libby turns to the notion of being a good member of the high school community, allowing MCI to make alternative plans in order to still have a vital part of the community building tradition of homecoming.

Characterizing their decision as one made with careful thought and awareness, Libby's next section began: "We knew the costs of canceling were high. We had seniors on the team, the football community has worked hard and invested a lot to build a program, and

we knew parents and players would be upset” (para 5). Libby then counters these considerations with:

Safety had to trump those realities however. We are entrusted to keep students safe and naturally are relatively conservative about that. We acted on what we felt was our responsibility. Nothing else. (para 5)

Here, Libby uses transcendence to note that even though there was a great deal of hard work put forth by the seniors and other players on the team, the administration had to make the difficult decision that player safety had to trump the players having a few more chances to participate in their remaining scheduled games.

Her next paragraph returned to the coach and his lack of involvement in the decision-making meeting. “In retrospect,” Libby noted, “I wish we had included the coach in that Wednesday meeting” (para 6). Next, though, she gives a quick reason why they did not: “He doesn’t bear the responsibility of decision making that building and district administrators do...” (para 6), but then countered her own counterargument with: “[B]ut it would have been helpful to have his additional input, for him to understand the decision better, and to help strategize about how to best communicate the decision” (para 6). Here, Libby admits to seeing the fault in not including the coach in the decision-making process – if not for the decision itself than for the communication of the decision.

In paragraph 7, Libby talks about the planned timing of releasing the news about the cancelled program, and how that planned timeline was disrupted by an early leak on social media. She also noted that, by Thursday evening, “emotions were running high” (para 7). Libby then gets readers up to speed on the previous week and attempted to shift the focus to the future. “In the past week,” she wrote, “I have met at length with the coach and a couple of parents to address concerns about the decision” (para 8). She then assured readers that she and the school board chairman “are both open to continue talking individually to parents who want to focus on the decision (outcome, process, implications, etc.)” (para 8). Even though the decision has already been made, Libby is standing by the administration’s decision and hopes to alleviate any concerns that could come from members of the community.

The next lines are among the most assertive and definitive of the letter: That is the appropriate avenue for those conversations [meeting individually to explain the decision]

because the decision is not going to be revisited. It is a done deal. In talking to the MPA at length, we really don't have any options for this season. As such, it isn't productive to dwell on the decision. I have tried to share it openly and honestly in this column so that parents and players and other interested community members might have a better and more accurate understanding of how and why it was made.  
(para 8)

Libby then mentions a community forum “to discuss options for the future of football,” characterizing the forum as “an opportunity for meaningful input into how we move forward” and posing questions of “What are the possibilities for next year? What do we need in order to have a sustainable and safe program?” (para 9). She invites attendees to “come in the spirit of productively moving forward in collaboration with the school” (para 9). These lines create a sense of corrective action – not to solve the problem of the cancelled football program for that year – which was “a done deal” – but to prevent continuation of the problem in the future.

The school has announced that every effort will be made for the school to offer Junior Varsity football next season, assuming the team can reach 25 players (Clark, 2016). The decision to cancel the season dictated the necessity to only offer a Junior Varsity team as “[u]nder Maine Principals’ Association policy, if a school begins competition to start a sports season but does not complete it, the school is ineligible to field a varsity team in that sport for the next two years” (para. 13). Here, a form of corrective action is offered in opening up the opportunity for current underclassmen and rising middle school students the opportunity to play for Camden Hills.

Libby ends her letter with a note that, as superintendent, “I will have to make many difficult, and sometimes, unpopular decisions. That comes with the position and I am ready to take responsibility for that” (para 10). We conclude that, here, Libby is engaged in image prepare (Compton, 2012) – an account of future difficult, unpopular decisions, resting on the argument that it is part of her job and that she will not be attempting to evade responsibility for such decisions.

Libby shifted next to bolstering: “Know that as superintendent in our school districts I care deeply about our students and have been advocating for them in so many ways for nearly two decades. I am creative, thoughtful, and compassionate. I am ready to own my mistakes

and listen to feedback about how to improve” (para 10). Libby concluded with: “Together with this community that I hold dearly, I am hoping to build something truly special in our school system” (para 10). Libby continues to tie her decision to making the community a better, safer place for the students to reside.

### **Reactions to Image Prepare/Repair Discourse**

Media coverage highlighted the emotional toll the decision to cancel the football season had on the players and fans. The Boston Globe’s story began: “The tears of broken-hearted children may have dried up, but the death of the Windjammers football season is still as raw as a howling Maine nor’easter” (Grossfeld, 2015, para 1). But media coverage also framed the decision toward the focus pushed by administrators – safety. Bangor Daily News’ began its story with: “The safety of the student-athletes is the primary concern for the coaches and administrators at Camden Hills High School” (Warner, 2015, para 1). We next turn to the reactions from the public.

Reactions to the announcement were mixed (Hawkes, 2015). Students, and especially former players, were often cited as critical voices against the decision and explanation. One of the co-captains was cited as saying:

You shouldn’t take away something that someone has put so much work, effort, and heart into years of training. Even if we lose by 40 points and people are disappointed after the game. I ask them, “Did you have fun?” They all say, “Yeah, I had fun.” (cited in Grossfeld, 2015, para 6)

Such rhetoric displays an interesting shift in the metric for evaluating the football program – away from issues of safety, which was the prominent theme of Libby’s letter, and instead, toward issues of winning/losing and “fun.” In another interview, the co-captain said, “To have three people say that the program is shut down, it’s not right. It’s more than a sport. We love to do it” (cited in Waugh, 2015, para 9).

Indeed, in media reports, many players minimized concerns of safety, using emotional arguments to respond to the logical arguments from the administrators. In Grossfeld’s Boston Globe story, one player is quoted as saying he would risk death to play “[b]ecause I love it” (2015, para 21), and another added: “I can’t live my life under a rock. The odds are astronomical. I’m surprised it’s only four freak accidents” (para 22).

Another said: “No one thinks they’re going to die. I mean, it’s disappointing, but I could die walking out of this building right now and getting hit by a bus. I could die right now from a heart attack. I just hope for the best” (cited in Grossfeld, 2015, para 46). In another report, one student remarked: “If a kid feels unsafe playing football, he shouldn’t be out there” (cited in Sturgeon, 2015, para 7), and another said, “They said we had three girls and 13 freshmen so we were a weak team” (cited in Sturgeon, 2015, para 11). Students cited the safety measures the team was taking – including baseline testing for concussion monitoring and a no-head tackling approach (Grossfeld, 2015). Another parent said, “It was such a rash decision and we feel like we have no say in the matter” (cited in Sturgeon, 2015, para 9). Nevertheless, as Grossfeld (2015) reported, “many in this mountains-meet-seaside area agreed with the decision” (para 7). Though the decision was met with mixed reactions, the emotionally based pleas to continue playing the game received prominent attention.

One of the most interesting audiences for the rhetoric was the head coach – Chilton. Recall that he was not involved in the decision or the announcement of the decision. As Alex explained in a media report: “It was an administrative decision. Because of that, Thad [Chilton] was not brought into it. It was at our level [administrative]” (cited in Hawkes, 2015, para 17). Chilton was quoted as saying:

Our administrators felt like we were so thin that if anybody went down, we’d be reaching into our stock of very inexperienced young players and they were not comfortable with that. I have to respect that. Whether I agree with it or not, it’s a different thing. I don’t want to see my kids hurt, either, but this is a far-reaching decision. (cited in Warner, 2015, para 19-20)

In another report, Chilton said: “I know that our players and our families don’t share that same concern [about the safety risk of continuing the season] because they’re football people” (cited in Sturgeon, 2015, para 6), and in another: “I understand the administrators’ concerns, but I am a football coach and in football, we never give up” (cited in Hawkes, 2015, para 13). Later, however, media reports included quotations from Chilton that seemed more supportive of the decision and more consistent with the safety theme of the administrators’ rhetoric. “My linemen were dropping like flies. The attrition rate was killing us. And I have these young players next to me, standing alongside the girls. I can’t get them hurt,”

Chilton was quoted as saying (cited in Thomas, 2015b, para 2). This statement indicates that as time went by the arguments forwarded by the administration for cancelling the season became easier to accept and understand, as opposed to the immediate response of being disappointed with the decision.

Chris Audet, athletic trainer for Camden Hills, said: “It made me sad, but I think it was the right decision just because the numbers we couldn’t put on the field” (cited in Waugh, 2015, para 13). He continued: It’s a demanding game, and if they’re playing offense, defense, and special teams, as the athletes get more fatigued, their form tends to break down a bit. As their fatigue level increases, there’s that predisposition for an injury. (cited in Waugh, 2015, para 15).

Joe Russillo, president of Five Town Football (FTF), the feeder program for middle school and high school football, commented:

As the feeder program for the CHRHS Football Program, Five Town Football is obviously disappointed in the administration’s decision to cancel the high school’s 2015 season. While safety is of paramount importance to both of our programs, it’s still unclear why exactly this decision was made, and why Coach Chilton was not part of the decisionmaking [sic] process. No matter what happens at CHRHS, FTF will continue to provide a safe, fun, family-oriented environment where boys and girls can learn competition and sportsmanship through football, for this season and many seasons to come. (cited in Hawkes, 2015, para 20)

This response reads as a coach supporting another coach, again, questioning the decision not to include Coach Tilton in the decision-making process.

Not all of the media coverage characterized the school’s decision as positively as others. One editorial, for example, began: “A few days ago, Camden Hills High School administrators cried ‘Uncle!’ and quit on the remainder of the 2015 football season” (Lazarczyk, 2015, para 1). But even the more critical reports bolstered the theme of player safety: “Ithomitis’ safety concerns are legitimate” (Lazarczyk, 2015, para 3). Even though the decision to cancel the remainder of the season was met with some backlash, at minimum, a general understanding of why the decision was made was apparent.

Other reports recontextualized the story. Consider, for example, Smith's argument: "...[T]he point being made par exemplar is far more nuanced than what has most often been promoted publicly: Declining football numbers are about the increasing urbanization and erosion of American industry as much as they are about safety concerns" (2015, para 3). Clark (2015) explains: "Today, the paper mills that powered many of the state's traditional football powers are being mothballed at a rapid rate. With that, the population in those communities has decreased dramatically as young adults go elsewhere to find employment" (para 4). That, plus the legitimate health concerns, Smith (2015) argues, is "providing a longstanding threat if not an outright death knell to the long-term prospects of youth and high school football in America" (para 4).

## Discussion

Libby's open letter provided a generally detailed, lengthy narrative account of the decision to cancel Camden Hills' football program. The main focus of the letter, we argue, was to frame the decision with the metric of safety. Indeed, research suggests that safety is a core concern of parents' in regard to their children's sports involvement (Warner, Dixon, & Leierer, 2015), and safety can be intertwined with administrative dimensions. Warner, Dixon, and Leierer (2015) found that parents prioritized administrative concern for their children as a key factor – "absolutely essential to their own sense of community in a youth sport setting" (p. 58). Above all else, safety of the players must take the forefront for any decision about the future of the football program.

Some image repair strategies simply were not feasible in this situation. Consider, for example, corrective action of the existing problem. As one media report put it: "There is no saving the varsity football season ... There will be no varsity football next season, either" (Grossfeld, 2015, para 3). Of course, another option of corrective action is to set out a plan to correct the problem in the future (Benoit, 2014), which the school has ultimately done (Clark, 2016). However, some of the rhetoric explicitly rejected that avenue, too. Consider, for example, Alex's remark that closed the Portland Press Herald's report on the cancellation: "Down the road, I'm not saying we will solve that problem [of not having a varsity football program]. We will have to figure out

what we're going to do" (cited in Thomas, 2015a, para 14). Lazarczyk (2015) posited, "It's likely last week's loss to Bucksport was the final football game in Camden Hills history" (para 4). But in another report, Alex indicated that football was not necessarily over for Camden Hills and noted any long-term decision will be made by the school board (Hawkes, 2015). Similarly, in late November, Ithomitis spoke of a potential return of junior varsity level football (Waugh, 2015), which at the time of this writing is the current plan for the team (Clark, 2016). While the future of Camden Hills' football program is up in the air, the return of a team is certainly not out of the question.

We also did not find instances of mortification. The most explicit opportunity for mortification would be to express regret that the decision had to be made – a form of mortification and defeasibility. But there were other opportunities, too, including Libby's admission that she "quietly let it be" (para 2) over the summer despite her concerns about the football program. This could have been an opportunity to apologize for waiting until the season was underway before canceling the program. Then again, defeasibility demands acceptance of key situational elements. For example, consider Libby's strategy of shifting blame to MPA rules, while at the same time, introducing a reflection of defeasibility – that Camden Hills would be complying with the MPA rules. Accepting this line of reasoning demands accepting the decision to forfeit the upcoming game, which set into motion the cancelation of the program. Additionally, Libby failed to enact mortification towards the very individuals that their decision impacted the most, the players. Apologizing to the players for having to take away the rest of their season before explaining the decision process that was undertaken could have softened the blow for the current players. Additionally, Libby failed to include an apology to the coaching staff.

We also contend that there was a missed opportunity for image prepare (see Compton, 2012). Libby writes of having concerns over the summer. Effective messaging could have better prepared the community for the eventual cancellation of the program. We also argue that one of the biggest weakness of the rhetoric of this decision was not involving Thad Chilton, the varsity football coach, in the public relations effort and the decision-making process. As Grossfeld (2015) noted, he "was not involved in the final decision or in informing the players. That angered both parents and players, some of whom he has coached since youth league" (para 15). Chilton was also quoted as saying:

I think, had I been involved in the decision-making process, we might have been able to avoid some misunderstandings and hurt feelings. These kids have worked hard and have a strong commitment to football. To have their season cut short in such a seemingly abrupt fashion was painful for them. I might have been able to head off some of the resulting hard feelings if I had been more involved in the process. (Hawkes, 2015, para 19)

Libby did mention the coach in her letter: “The AD [athletic director] had been in contact with the coach throughout the season, and the coach had also expressed numerous concerns along the way” (para 2). By not more fully featuring Chilton into the public communication efforts, the administration failed to include an individual holding a good deal of credibility with the players to help explain why the decision had to be made, and this might have silenced, or at least dampened, the most vocal critics of the decision.

We contend that the Camden Hills story is representative of larger issues of the image of football, in general, and the role of football programs in communities. In some sport communities, administrative concerns might not have a particularly strong impact on participants’ sense of community (see Warner, Kerwin, & Walker, 2013). In other instances, administrative influence does seem to matter (see Warner & Dixon, 2011). In this instance, administrators certainly played a key role – not just in the decision, but in the rhetoric of their decision. Reactions to the Camden Hills story support this idea. For example, Paul Barkner, director of the Maine Concussion Management Initiative, commented: “...I think part of my worry here is that we’re vilifying football. And as we start looking at data...football is a high-risk sport, but women’s soccer is equally high risk” (cited in Clark, 2015, para 12). Other football coaches looked at Camden Hills as a cautionary tale. One coach explained:

You could replace their name with our name, that’s what our coaching staff was talking about one day. It would be awful easy to do that with a few bad breaks and kids getting hurt, but we’ve been real fortunate so far, and we’re working hard to keep the kids healthy and give them the best chance to compete that we can. (cited in Clark, 2015, para 8)

With growing pressure on the NFL and NCAA football players with regard to preventing head injuries, more focus will fall on the actions of high school football programs like Camden Hills.

### *Future Research*

We encourage continued attention to youth sport. As Warner and Leierer (2015) have argued, “[A]dolescents are important stakeholders to consider when evaluating the social impacts of sport” (p. 91). They continued:

If we can enhance the sense of community of our adolescents, carryover effects that benefit the wider community would also likely be achieved. After all, a strong sense of community among adolescents has been shown to result in less crime and delinquency, and their increased involvement in civic affairs – all of which benefit the wider community. (Warner & Leierer, 2015, p. 92)

Intersecting issues of sport, safety, and community should continue to drive future investigations of sport in general and high school football in particular.

We analyzed an important yet single attempt at image repair here – Libby’s open letter to the community. Others, however, also engaged in image repair efforts, including Nick Ithomitis, principal of Camden Hills Regional High School, and Steve Alex, athletic director of Camden Hills Regional High School. Their rhetorical choices would also be interesting artifacts to examine through the lens of image repair. Future rhetorical analyses should also look toward other types of sport programs under similar circumstances, including intercollegiate sport and sport clubs (see Warner, Dixon, & Chalip, 2012).

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*Josh Compton (Ph.D., University of Oklahoma, 2004) is an associate professor in the Institute for Writing and Rhetoric at Dartmouth College. His research explores image at two distinct points: before an image attack (inoculation theory) and after an image attack (image repair theory), with special attention to the contexts of health, sport, and political humor. His scholarship appears in leading journals, including Communication Monographs, Communication Theory, Communication Yearbook, Human Communication Research, Frontiers in Psychology, and PLOS ONE, among others. He has been named Distinguished Lecturer by Dartmouth College and has won the Outstanding Professor Award from the National Speakers Association, the Bob R. Derryberry New Forensics Educator Award, and the L. E. Norton Award for Outstanding Scholarship, among other recognitions.*

*Jordan L. Compton (M.A., Missouri State University, 2008) is an Instructor of Communication, Acting Chair of the Derryberry School of Communication, and Assistant Director of Forensics at Southwest Baptist University. His research interests include political and sport communication.*

**A Proto-theory for Understanding and Appreciating  
American Midwestern Public Address**

*Barry Cole Poyner*

**Abstract**

*Several lines of inquiry are raised by asking “Is there a distinctive Midwestern outlook and ethos evidenced in American public address?” First, historically, what sectional issues, movements, and themes define and distinguish the region? Second, analogically, what public address research in other regions has been conducted that might offer guidance? Third, rhetorically, which speakers have emerged from the Midwest? To answer these questions, geographical and historical texts were consulted as well as bio-critical source books (Brigance, Nichols, Ryan, Duffy, Reid) to arrive at a list of speakers from the Midwest. The researcher compared this speaker compilation to speeches included in a noted anthology, *Words of a Century: The Top 100 American Speeches 1900-1999* by Lucas and Medhurst. *Southern Public Address studies* (Braden, Logue, Dorgan) were used as an analogue. The author offers a tentative framework for understanding and appreciating Midwestern public address and discusses implications for future research.*

The Encyclopedia Britannica (2015) defines the American Midwest as a region in the northern and central United States, lying midway between the Appalachian and Rocky Mountains and north of the Ohio River and the 37th parallel. The Middle West comprises the states: Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, South Dakota, and Wisconsin. On occasion, the region has been called the “Great Plains” and “The Heartland.” Buffer states sometimes characterized as being Midwestern include Oklahoma, Kentucky, Tennessee, and Arkansas.

Several lines of inquiry are raised by asking “Is there a distinctive Midwestern outlook and ethos evidenced in American public address?” First, historically, what sectional issues, movements, and themes define and distinguish the region? Second, analogically, what public address research in other regions has been conducted that might

offer guidance? Third, rhetorically, which speakers have emerged from the Midwest?

### **Midwestern Oratory/Ethos Fashioned by Unique Themes and Features**

James R. Shortridge (1989) argues that a compelling image of “pastoralism” has been attached to the Midwest: “the fitting of a simplified, anachronistic image to an increasingly complex region has produced a host of contradictions, distortions, and misunderstandings” (p. 1). According to Shortridge, the image has defied revision even when faced with urban industrialization, in part because of the nation’s need to preserve a mythic paradise: the resulting contradictions have produced insecurities and uncertainties that have inhibited regional identity. An additional theme, maturity, is based on the human life cycle and views the Midwest as an egalitarian society, in the prime of life, not youthful and wild as the West, or old and in decline as the East. This intertwining of pastoralism and maturity led Shortridge to suggest another theme, a synecdoche—that the Midwest typified America—what is best about America (p. 33).

The author posed to advanced public speaking students and public address students at a Midwestern university, “what are dominant themes and concerns of the Midwest?” The following responses reflect various brainstorming sessions. Admittedly, student answers may be tied more to immediacy and not reflect the history of the region. These answers were then compared to Fry’s (1998) scholarly article written on the mythic Midwest. Further, various histories on the Midwest were consulted to arrive at possible master themes.

The number one theme among students has been **Midwestern Thrift**: frugality may be too strong a descriptor. Thrift is not limited to finances but may even be seen in the economy of language—plain-spoken, “man of few words”—conversational efficiency. When applied to business, valued are yard sales, coupons, blue light specials. Business leaders like J. C. Penney, Sam Walton, and Warren Buffet know the value of a dollar. The value may spring from rugged, pioneer individualism needed in the past to survive the harsh weather conditions of the region, such as drought or blizzard. Members are no-nonsense, desire to “get down to business,” express a demand to “show me” the facts. Harry Truman’s “The buck stops here” represents the theme: the

backside of the same placard “I’m from Missouri” encapsulates the Midwestern brand. Similarly the notion of “does it play in Peoria?” typifies the region. If Midwesterners accept it, then America will. If it makes practical/pragmatic sense to Midwesterners, then it should resonate with all Americans.

To some degree, the preceding myth suggests the Midwest is unspoiled by other influences, insulated, even provincial (but in a good way). Here “still waters run deep,” Wholesome, family-friendly, family, farm values comprise the **Agrarian Myth**. The Midwest is the heartland, the bread basket, the heart of America where core virtues like friendliness, fair play, hard work, duty, and courtesy are prized by the God-fearing inhabitants. There should be no wonderment that Hallmark Cards are located here bringing tears to consumer eyes through touching stories. The Temperance, Pro-life, and Restoration (Christian Church) Movements found wide-spread support in the region.

When applied to speech patterns, the Midwest, despite ethnic influences especially in the northern Midwest, offers the General American Dialect, valued for its purity and clarity. The sanitized news-anchor dialect is seen as mirroring the saving graces of the region.

Duty finds expression in military service. Indeed, land grants to Revolutionary soldiers helped settle the land. However, the region has been reluctant to support wars far from home and has embraced isolationist views.

**Migration and Transition (Progress)** also characterize the Midwest. The Midwestern experience can be powerful and contradictory: the fused raw muscle of urban industrialization vs. the sturdy conservatism of rural surroundings. In addition to the powerful Agrarian theme, it is also home for industrial giants and innovators in architecture and retailing. Perceptions of the Midwest are still shifting instead of solidifying. Moreover, the Midwest is a transitional consequence (not the ultimate destination) of the transition to the Western frontier: in a sense “Midwest” was created during the Western evolution and results in insecurities about worth—hence some like Truman State University in Kirksville, Missouri, describe themselves not on their own merits but as the “Harvard of the Midwest” or the “Princeton on the Prairie.” The Pony Express and The St. Louis Gateway Arch suggest migration and transition, both literally and figuratively.

The tornado may be symbolic of this whirlwind of contradictions. The plains give rise to both literal and figurative turmoil finding rhetorical expression in the Grange and Populist Movements. These movements brought issues of individual producers, federal regulation of businesses, banking and class to the forefront of the Midwestern conscience. In fact, an anti-Darwinian approach emerges that the government should help weaker citizens: its corollary distrusts the rich/powerful and may be susceptible to conspiracy theories. As such, the conservatism of the region is tempered by progressive tendencies to protect the rights of workers and the rights of individuals whether a factory worker, American Indian, or socialist.

### **Midwestern Oratorical Periods**

What is distinctive about Midwestern oratory? The quest for that answer leads one to consider public address studies on both the national and regional levels. Robert Oliver (1973) viewed American history through the lens of public speaking from colonial days to World War I:

What is brought to the platform on great public occasions is usually important and usually controversial. Perhaps nowhere better than in a history of public speaking can there be found a depiction of the pros and cons of history, the arguments for and against, by which the crucial decisions have been reached. (xviii)

Pertinent to the Midwest, Oliver drew attention to Congress' debates over expansion and particularly its implications on the expanse of slavery. Fond of the epithet, Oliver described Thomas Hart Benton as "The Magnificent Missourian" and abolitionist Theodore Weld as "The Tornado Out of Ohio." Illinois Senator Stephen Douglas was described as the "Apostle of Popular Sovereignty," and his debates with Lincoln, whom he defeated, propelled Lincoln to national attention. The theme of "Revenge, Reaction, and Reform" was noted in the oratory of Benjamin Harrison and Robert Ingersoll. Dwight L. Moody was described as a "Salesman of Salvation." Women also found a place on the platform: "Yelling Mary" Lease of Kansas advised farmers to "raise more hell and less corn," and Carrie Nation axed saloons in the Temperance Movement. William Jennings Bryan was king of Chautauqua and became known as "The Great Commoner." Albert Beveridge of Indiana

fought against child labor, and Robert La Follette of Wisconsin crusaded for governmental regulation of big business.

A similar effort to define issues in American history is found in DeWitte Holland's (1973) edited work. Holland and team divided American history into 24 units ranging from Puritan paternalism toward Native Americans to the concluding unit on the Peace Movement and the Vietnam War. Representative Joshua R. Giddings and Senator Thomas Morris, both from Ohio, were outspoken slavery opponents. (p. 107)

Southern public address studies by Braden (1970 & 1979) and Logue & Dorgan (1981 & 1987) provided a regional analogue. These scholars characterized public speaking (and the issue of slavery) in the South in four periods (Rhetoric of Desperation—roughly 1830-1865, Rhetoric of Accommodation—1865-1900, Rhetoric of Exploitation—1900-1954, Rhetoric of Optimism—1954-present).

Armed with these frameworks, the author contemplated Midwestern oratory, the top three themes that have been discussed previously, and possible oratorical periods. More analysis is needed before a definitive descriptor can be offered for the modern period. The following possibility was distilled from an examination of Midwestern histories by Clayton & Onuf (1990), Madison (1990), Etcheson (1996), Clayton & Gray (2001 & 2007).

I. 1787-1819 saw a Rhetoric of Progress/Expansion/Development marked by the Northwest Ordinance of 1787 to the Panic of 1819. During the period settlers tamed the wilderness, and the nation enjoyed acquisition including the Louisiana Purchase. By in large the region celebrated free labor and liberation from tradition.

II. 1820-1865 saw a Rhetoric of Ascendancy. This perspective argues that the Panic of 1819 had a significant impact for years and brought a market revolution. The notion that government should leave people alone gained acceptance. Additionally, the Missouri Compromise of 1820 allowed Missouri to enter the union as a slave state and allowed other states to make a choice: popular sovereignty prevailed. The Midwest ascended in importance and reached a pinnacle with Lincoln's election.

III. 1865-1914 saw a Rhetoric of Reform. The city conquered the countryside; increased industrialization occurred after the Civil War. However, something had been lost: economic justice sought was sought and found expression in the Grange Movement, Populist Movement, and

Temperance Movement. Growing tensions over private corporations such as the railroads and public control were articulated.

IV. 1914-1945 saw a Rhetoric of Isolationism. Isolationist viewpoints decried WWI involvement. This may be related to heavy German influence in the old Northwest because of migration patterns, but with world events as they were, cultural heritage was downplayed: banality and normalcy were exalted as Midwestern virtues.

V. 1946 to the Present is an undetermined period. Additional insights cannot be garnered from this effort which focused on pre-WWII oratory.

### **Method**

To arrive at a list of noted Midwestern speakers, the researcher examined bio-critical entries in standard American public address works by Brigrance (1955), Reid (1961), Duffy & Ryan (1987) and hypothesized that similar themes may resonate in the speeches of these Midwesterners. However, the researcher also realized that because these Midwesterners are included in American public address works or anthologies, there may be fewer Midwestern identifiers in their speeches. In other words, to appeal to national audiences, the speakers may have transcended regional distinctions and employed fewer Midwestern themes. Similarly, speeches with national appeal may have been greater candidates for selection by the rhetorical critics who assisted in the formation of great speaker lists like Stephen Lucas and Martin Medhurst's top 100 speeches. Acknowledging these shortcomings, the researcher, nonetheless, thought this approach would establish a baseline for future exploration.

While pondering Midwestern speakers and themes is in itself a satisfying intellectual enterprise, efforts must be borne out in individual analysis. Accordingly, the author set parameters and decided to look for themes, isolate images, and note artistic appeals in the speeches of notable pre-World War II Midwesterners included in Lucas' and Medhurst's (2009) top 100 speeches of the 20th century. Specifically the speeches of six speakers were analyzed: William Jennings Bryan, Carrie Chapman Catt, Eugene Debs, Robert La Follette, Clarence Darrow, and John L. Lewis. Bryan, La Follette and Darrow were included in all of the bio-critical resources. Catt was not included in any of them. Debs was included in Duffy & Ryan and Reid. Lewis was only in Duffy & Ryan.

Post-World War II Midwestern speakers in the top 100 list, though not the subject of the present study, would include President Harry Truman, Hubert H. Humphrey, Adlai E. Stevenson, President Dwight D. Eisenhower, Newton N. Minow, and President Gerald R. Ford. Possible additional candidates would be Malcolm X, President Ronald Reagan, Hillary Rodham Clinton, and Mary Fisher who hailed from the Midwest but who made their careers elsewhere: one could argue that Midwestern values and appeals guided their later rhetoric. From Oklahoma, Anita Hill may be questionably included.

### **Bryan**

William Jennings Bryan was born in Illinois, served as a legislator in Nebraska, ran for the presidency on the Democratic ticket three times, served as Secretary of State under Wilson and was the lead prosecutor in the Scopes Monkey Trial. His speech, “Against Imperialism” is ranked as #44 in the top 100 speeches.

Although Midwesterners are known for their military service, hearkening back to Revolutionary days when soldiers were given land for military service and settled the land, members of the region have been skeptical of military intervention outside the contiguous United States. Non-involvement and isolationist views can be seen in Bryan’s speech. Rhetorical critic Stephen Rendahl (1999) contrasts the competing scenic views. Bryan defines the U.S. actions as “imperialism;” Theodore Roosevelt defined the action as “expansionism.” Bryan’s views are couched more in terms of what a true American patriot might believe about colonization: in this respect Midwestern values of independence, self-rule, and fundamental fairness are depicted as core American values: “The Democratic Party is not making war upon the honest acquisition of wealth; it has no desire to discourage industry, economy, and thrift.” (All speech quotations are taken from the Lucas & Medhurst anthology). The Republican Party is contrasted as substituting “the worship of mammon for the protection of the rights of man.” Bryan utilizes authority appeals by referencing the Bible and especially Abraham Lincoln. He asserts that his policy will be direct, clear, humbly stated, trustworthy, and consistent – values recognized if not stated here as Midwestern and clearly identified here as Democratic! This moral unction is supported by a revered past, “for it was God himself who placed in every human heart

the love of liberty. He never made a race of people so low in the scale of civilization or intelligence that it would welcome a foreign master.”

Appealing to a national audience in another bid for the Presidency, Bryan must assert that his Midwestern values are American values: “The American people are not unfriendly toward the people of any nation... we believe in the principles of self-government and reject, as did our forefathers, the claims of monarchy.” This position is also supported from a practical point of view. Bryan values pragmatism and proclaims that the Democratic Party is not against expansion and land acquisition, but it only makes sense with the contiguous states. It is the plain duty of the United States to encourage self-sufficiency of the Philippines: indeed there is inherent “evil” in the colonial system, “no matter by what nation it is applied.” The responsible position does not ask whether the U.S. can govern colonies, but whether it should. Unrestrained greed and covetousness will lead to moral death: “and so with the nation. It is of age, and it can do what it pleases; it can spurn the traditions of the past; it can repudiate the principles upon which the nation rests.”

Bryan speaks to his political base by expressing concern over economic harm that could befall the farmer and the laboring man. Further, Bryan foresees economic woes as cheap labor in the Philippines translates into lost jobs in America. He dispels the argument that colonization advances the gospel: this peculiar argument appears as a straw man, given high estimates of Filipinos being Catholic. The argument does speak to the religiously-minded though and denounces “gunpowder gospel” if imperial impulses invade other lands. Bryan ends his speech by again aligning his views with those “foundation stones quarried by Revolutionary patriots.” The image of the working man endures.

## **Catt**

Carrie Chapman Catt has two speeches in the top 100. These include “The Crisis” ranked #66 and “Address to the Congress of the U.S.” ranked #73. Born in Wisconsin and educated at what is now Iowa State, Catt was a daughter of the Midwest who became a national leader in the Suffragist Movement and president of the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA). Both of these speeches were

delivered to national audiences in New Jersey and Washington, D.C., respectively, and therefore had fewer explicit Midwestern appeals.

A strength in Catt's speeches is her ability to set forth a clear plan. Midwesterners are credited with such forthrightness. In "The Crisis" Catt lays out a lucid argument that a crisis "calls for new considerations and new decisions." Midwesterners know about transition and adaptability and are watchers of the weather. Catt capitalizes on this theme and urges her audience to seize the moment. New ideas float as clouds but must be caught and crystallized into law: "I believe our victory hangs within our grasp, inviting us to pluck it out the clouds." Indeed the winds of change are in their favor, and "The Woman's Hour Has Struck."

Catt continues the theme of appropriate response to the changing times: "nothing after the Great War will be as it was before." Drawing upon the dignity of labor and fundamental fairness, women should be rewarded for their efforts while the men were away at war. "In every land, the people have reverted to the primitive division of labor, and while the men have gone to war, women have cultivated the fields." These efforts have been met with international praise: "their services were accepted without hesitation, but the experiment, once made, won reluctant but universal praise."

Catt, of course, recognizes that anti-suffragists will renew old prejudices and arguments, but believes that the change will be permanent. Weaving religious appeal into her conclusion, Catt argues "in the long run, all things work together for good, for progress, and for human weal." To her fellow suffragists, she pays tribute to past leaders and does so by employing masonry imagery: "those who came after only laid the stones in place. Yet what a wearisome task even that has been!" The Midwestern value of hard work is extended into an elaborate metaphor with the foundation having four cornerstones, capstones, and a cornice. Like a Midwestern barn-raising, those hoisting the roof chant "Ho! All hands, all hands, heave to! All hands, heave to! And while we chant, grasp the overhanging roof and with a long pull, a strong pull, and a pull all together, fix it in place for ever more."

Numerous religious appeals follow the erection of the building, almost akin to a blessing for the new structure. Catt reminds her audience that foes still abound, "Antis drove Moses out of Egypt; they crucified Christ." Like Jesus, the suffragists must "give to them a prayer of forgiveness, for they know not what they do, and prepare for the onward

march.” Part of the reason for their continued resistance is that “evil has ever been timorous and suspicious of all change.” With a return to change, Catt reminds them again that “The Woman’s Hour Has Struck.” These industrious, courageous women “only await the bugle call to learn that the final battle is on.”

This final battle will occur despite the despicable opposition who buy votes to keep women from voting: they have “no more comprehension of the sacredness of a vote than a wild man from Borneo.” Past efforts in other states yielded setbacks because of the triple alliance of the conservative vote, voter fraud, and liquor forces which feared the temperance vote of women. Women, Catt argues, should not have to endure this humiliation. They must arise and demand the vote.

In “Address to the Congress of the United States” Catt continued with the theme of transition and change noting “woman suffrage is inevitable.” Referring to fundamental fairness and the history of granting rights to citizens, Catt employs a rhetorical strategy of shaming. Mansolescu (2007) argues that Catt uses strong shame arguments when she responsibly forms her position and manifests responsible moral judgment. “With such a history behind it, how can our nation escape the logic it has never failed to follow when its last unenfranchised class calls for the vote?” She further points the finger of shame at men who would deny women the right to vote because these same men likely learned all they know about citizenship and patriotism at the feet of women public school teachers! Further, if America is to lead the free world it should give heed to the rights of women as many nations already have: “Any man who has red American blood in his veins, any man who has gloried in our history and has rejoiced that our land was the leader of world democracy, will share with us the humbled national pride that our country has so long delayed action upon this questions that another country has beaten us in what we thought was our especial world mission.”

According to Catt, “not an inch of solid ground is left for the feet of the opponent.” Relying on this metaphor she surveys the counter arguments. Believing all to have been answered, believing that New York’s passage of suffrage is akin to the Battle of Gettysburg victory, all that awaits is final victory which she insists is an amendment to the Federal Constitution. She employs shaming again, “Surely men of the land of George Washington will not require a longer time than those of the land of George III to discover that taxation without representation is

tyranny no matter whether it be men or women who are taxed! We may justly expect men to be as willing to grant to the women of the United States as generous consideration as those of Great Britain.”

Fundamental fairness is demanded. If the new federal income tax is to be applied to women, then grant the vote or exempt them from the tax. For too long state campaigns have ended with the dice loaded and the cards stacked. Catt demands justice. She feels assured that “every believer in fair play, regardless of party fealties, will approve our decision.” Past Congresses had seen brave souls pleading for the right: “The women who made the first appeal, brave splendid souls, have long since passed into the Beyond, and everyone died knowing that the country she love and served classified her as a political pariah.” Catt injected humor into the speech after the shaming by referring to a member of Congress, stating that the arguments were sound, but he would rather see his wife “dead in her coffin than going to vote.” Catt wondered about who was really being illogical and sentimental!

Returning to the theme of hard work, Catt equates Great Britain’s desire to give women the right to vote to gratitude for their service during the war. Traditional views cannot linger. The nation must embrace change: “The past is gone. We are living in the present and facing the future.” If America is to thrive and lead it must “catch pace.” Bringing the broad appeal of transition and change to an individual level, Catt asks the members of Congress to ponder whether they want to be counted among those who embraced change or resisted it: “Can you afford the risk? Think it over.” Relentless in her shaming, Catt argues that any theory, including states’ rights, that “prevents a nation from keeping up with the trend of world progress cannot be justified.” Members are left either helping or hindering.

## Debs

Eugene V. Debs has two speeches in the top 100. These include “The Issue” ranked #80 and “Statement to the Court” ranked #34. Born in Indiana, Debs left home early to work on the railroad. In 1893 he founded the American Railway Union (ARU). Later he embraced socialism and was nominated five times for President on the Socialist Party ticket.

“The Issue” was delivered extemporaneously in 1908 as Debs was warmly greeted home by the citizens of Girard, Kansas. Debs likens

his reaction to that of a rose budding to sunshine and rain shower. He applauds their hospitality, a quality often associated with the Midwest. He admits that he reluctantly accepted the Socialist nomination, but “I was taught that the desire of the individual was subordinate to the party will and that when the party commanded it was my duty to obey.” While not every Midwesterner might agree with the Socialist party, he/she understands duty, and in Debs’ case it is coupled with humility in accepting the nomination in order to “serve the working class.”

Debs offers a variety of biblical appeals to sustain his position that socialism is for the betterment of humans. He references the infamous line of Cain, “Am I my brother’s keeper?” Debs affirms we all are and aligns socialism with this task. Gradually he believes that citizens are emerging from darkness and seeing the light: in fact “a new era dawns for the human race.” That socialism is misunderstood is to be expected: “mankind have [sic] always crowned their oppressors, and they have as uniformly crucified their saviors.” Rhetorical critic James Darsey (1988) describes Debs as an ethical presence, a prophet, and the martyr theme central to Debs’ rhetoric.

He clearly states “I am in revolt against capitalism,” but quickly adds that does not mean that he hates those that disagree. He calls the audience “my friends” and describes the working man as his friend, but admits he is often misunderstood. Until the working man understands that he is being “enslaved” by the wealthy few, he will continue to crucify his savior.

An agrarian, almost anti-city theme, emerges in the speech. Debs holds that “nature has spread a great table bounteously for all the children of men,” but the cities only offer an “artificial, crowded, and stifled relationship.” He says dignity in work as a Midwesterner would, but senses humiliation in the cities as people have begged for work. Industrialization has come at the expense of the common man. In the past “your grandfather could help himself anywhere.” Lincoln, the patron saint of Midwesterners, sprang from this primitive state: “he was in partnership with nature. He associated with flowers, and he was in the fields, and he heard the rippling music of the laughing brooks and streams. Nature took him to her bosom. Nature nourished him, and from his unpolluted heart there sprang his noble aspirations.” In contrast, the child in the city has never seen a live chicken! Debs asks his Midwestern audience to envision a bee hive, and declares that pictures the worker drones found in the city.

Debs continues to pound the theme: industrialization and capitalism have brought wealth to a few and has brought misery to multitudes. “With the machine came the capitalist.” In the past the tool was individually owned, and employees were well paid lest they set up shop themselves. Debs declares there are four million tramps—something unheard of 50 years ago—the result of capitalism. Even Midwestern Girard and its handcrafted production are not safe, “your production is flickering out gradually. It is but a question of time until it will expire entirely.” The only salvation is emancipation. Debs compares the Social Party to the Republican Party under Lincoln, fifty years prior, a theme he will tap again.

In addition to the common laborer, Debs also declares that he represents the farmer. The hardworking farmer, like the laborer, is unaware of his plight. Debs walks a fine line between insulting the farmer and arousing sufficient dissonance. He insinuates that the uneducated farmer cannot enjoy literature or music. His satisfaction of his station in life is his calamity. In some ways, this appeal seems antithetical to traditional Midwestern values. Debs seems to be saying that traditional work ethic is being taken advantage of by others: “I want to awaken that farmer to the fact that he is robbed every day in the week, and if I can awaken him to the fact that he is robbed under the capitalist system, he will fall into line with the socialist movement.”

One might attribute some antithetical features of the speech to its impromptu nature. At one point Debs says “I venture the prophecy,” but later says “I am not a prophet.” While there are some religious appeals, Debs expresses skepticism about church stances when regional economics are involved. Perhaps his own wavering prophetic vision simply mirrors what he sees in the pulpits of his day. What he is certain about is the “sacred soil” of Kansas where Free-Soilers refused to believe in the divine ordination of slavery. Similarly, the refusal of Massachusetts citizens to obey the Fugitive Slave Law must have caused God to smile when the citizens essentially exclaimed “God Damn the Commonwealth.” One wonders how the audience regarded the cursing, but Debs links this passion to eradicate human slavery to the present endeavor to free the common laborer, farmer, and tramp. He further aligns the Socialist Party with an evolutionary impulse to further the rights of individuals. He rails that 80% of the people of the United States own no property: “a few have got it all. They have dispossessed the people, and when we get into power, we will dispossess them.”

Another antithetical appeal is found in describing the common man as merely living like an animal in one instance and then later alluding to his divine attributes. “Release the animal, throw off his burden, give him a chance and he rises, as if by magic, to the plane of a man.” Suspicion is again levied against organized religion that might preach “love each other” on Sunday but condones capitalism the other six days. Debs implies that true Christianity would be unlike Cain. Joining this cause, “we will be comrades, we will be brothers, and we will begin the march to the grandest civilization that the human race has ever known.”

Ten years later, Debs found himself being “crucified” for his anti-government remarks. In “Statement to the Court” delivered in 1918 Debs recounts his boyhood, his own familiarity with hard work, and reaffirms his allegiance to benefitting the working class which he equates with fundamental fairness. His position has been a consistent, persistent one, not born solely of anti-war sentiment. As such Debs views the case against him as “a despotic enactment in flagrant conflict with democratic principles and with the spirit of free institutions.”

Debs used the occasion of his sentencing to say little about the conduct of war but instead the conduct of “an outgrown social system that ought to be abolished not only in the interest of the working class, but in a higher interest of all humanity.” In this system “gold is god and rules in the affairs of men.” Despite America’s fertile soil, eager workers, and the influence of the Almighty, child labor and other social ills result from “the remorseless grasp of Mammon.”

Debs closes the speech still seeing “the dawn of a better day of humanity.” The conclusion waxes poetic, envisions the mariner sailing on in troubled sea with a belief in the Almighty, and biblically expresses that “joy cometh with the morning.” Debs received the maximum sentence of 10 years, but also received nearly a million votes, despite incarceration, in the 1920 election.

### **La Follette**

Robert M. La Follette’s speech “Free Speech in Wartime” was ranked #57. La Follette showed a flair for the dramatic when he won an oratorical competition as a college senior in Wisconsin in 1879. Rhetorical critic Carl R. Burghardt (1985) argues that a recurrent “Iago” motif drawn from Shakespeare’s Othello appears in La Follette’s

speeches, including his earliest one. Through the motif, he simplifies complex themes by painting them in a melodramatic scene and contrasts good and evil: the villain must be identified, condemned, and the public outraged to punish the wrong.

He was one of only six senators that voted against declaring war in 1917. This speech defends the right of dissent. In 1924 La Follette ran for President on the Progressive Party ticket and won 16% of the popular vote. In 1959, as part of Senator John F. Kennedy's research interest, La Follette was named among the five greatest senators, following only the triumphant Webster, Clay, Calhoun, and then Robert Taft.

La Follette was not alone in his opposition to the war; indeed, Senator William S. Stone of Missouri also dissented, but they certainly were in the minority. Their vote was in some quarters labeled traitorous. La Follette rose to defend his opposition to the War. He began his speech by sharing a letter from a judge that alerted him to threats and that also praised his past record: "The Kaisers of high finance, who have been developing a hatred of you for a generation because you have fought against them and for the common good, see this opportunity to turn the war patriotism into an engine of attack."

In his apologia, La Follette repeatedly emphasizes that fundamental fairness and justice side with his right to freely discuss matters. This fierce independence will not be silenced: "Neither the clamor of the mob nor the voice of power will ever turn be by the breadth of a hair from the course I mark out for myself, guided by such knowledge as I can obtain and controlled and directed by a solemn conviction of right and duty." Indeed, the man who seeks to limit those rights, in La Follette's judgment, "aims a blow at the most vital part of our government."

La Follette aligns his position with Lincoln, Clay, Webster, Sumner and others who spoke out against the Mexican War. Contrasting the views of these great senators (remember La Follette is later ranked among them) with the current rhetoric of the Secretary of the Treasury William McAdoo, La Follette is aghast! "In these times we had better turn the marble bust of Charles Sumner to the wall. It ill becomes those who tamely surrender the right of free speech to look upon that strong, noble, patriotic face.

Appreciating candor, La Follette comments that Mr. Webster used "plain language" in condemning an unjustifiable war. Those that seek to restrict free speech today "little understand the value which the

average citizen of the country places upon the liberty guaranteed to him by the Constitution.” That Constitution is the chart for the country’s course. Indeed, those rights are drawn from English Common Law, and La Follette notes distinguished members of Parliament who opposed unpopular wars. The extensive section on England seems peripheral, but La Follette uses them as a backdrop to contend that present American liberties have never been so threatened in the entire English-speaking world as now.

One principal argument against the war is offered late in the speech: those that pay for a war should be able to comment on its conduct. The argument represents a core Midwestern value of thrift and accountability: “It is a strange doctrine we hear these days that the mass of the people, who pay in money, misery, and blood all the costs of this war, out of which a favored few profit so largely, may not freely and publicly discuss terms of peace.” Later he stresses the costs of the present conflict: “We have been six months at war. We have incurred financial obligations and made expenditures of money in large amounts already so large that the human mind cannot comprehend them.” La Follette further claims that he understands hard work; despite “the hardest work of my life” to raise funds through the revenue bill, he reports that the war is unfunded.

In many respects there are similarities to Bryan’s speech against imperialism. The Midwest, in particular, seemed reluctant before WWII to engage in warfare far from home. Again, similar to Bryan, he references Madison’s fear of maintaining a large standing army. La Follette notes, “Throughout all Europe the armies kept up under the pretense of defending have enslaved the people.” It may be noteworthy that Clay, Bryan, Debs, and La Follette used similar tactics, ran several times for high office, and also had similar disappointing Presidential results.

Midwesterners understand harsh weather, and La Follette uses weather both literally and metaphorically to underscore his opposition to the war: “The first chill winds of autumn remind us that another winter is at hand. The imagination is paralyzed at the thought of the human misery, the indescribable suffering, which the winter months, their cold and sleet and ice and snow, must bring to the war-swept lands, not alone to the soldiers at the front but to the noncombatants at home.”

Invoking religious appeal, La Follette maintains that the average citizen should be able to “pray aloud that our boys shall not be sent to

fight and die on European battlefields.” In fact, “common honesty and fair dealing” in his estimation requires full and free discussion.

Not everyone may have seen the world as La Follette did, but his most loyal supporters did. Burghardt concluded, “The dairy farmers and rural-dwellers of Wisconsin, who formed the backbone of La Follette’s support, feared the social changes of industrialization, urbanization, and the rise of large, complex organizations. They believed that the wholesome, good old values of rural America were under attack by insidious villains—political machines, big corporations, railroads, and money trusts. They feared having their lives controlled from afar” (Burghardt, p. 452).

### **Darrow**

The rhetorical efforts of Clarence Darrow in his “Plea for Leopold and Loeb” August 22-25, 1924, received a ranking of #23. This series of speeches is an anomaly in that it is a forensic effort designed almost exclusively for the sole judge to determine whether the defendants, who plead guilty, should be executed. Despite growing up in the Midwest, the defendants are the antithesis of normalcy and Midwestern values.

Darrow begins his remarks with a strong appeal to duty and the weighty responsibilities that fall to both lawyers and judges alike. This sets the stage for him to provide advice as a counselor to the judge whom he speaks to as a friend, noting that both of them have had anxiety with this case. In his pragmatic estimation, this case would have been already settled if the clients’ parents had not been wealthy: the implication is that the prosecution seeks to make a lesson of the clients. Darrow will repeatedly turn to the fairness argument throughout the speech: namely that the young clients who plead guilty should not receive the death penalty. As for his part, “We believe we have been fair to the court; we believe we have been fair to the public. Anyhow we have tried, and we have tried under terribly hard conditions.” Darrow further maintains, though, that he strategically had his clients plead guilty because he was afraid to submit the case to a jury: “I am aware that a court has more experience, more judgment, and more kindness than a jury.” Admittedly, though this strategy place more burden on the judge. Darrow apologizes, “I have always meant to be your friend. But this was not an act of friendship.”

Throughout the speeches, Darrow references the young men as Dickie and Babe to underscore their youth. In classical stasis theory, he readily admits the facts of the case, but in equal measure he vividly depicts hanging as likewise “cold-blooded.” Truth be told, he insists that the murder though heinous was over in fifteen minutes and therefore “was one of the least dastardly and cruel of any that I have known anything about.”

Darrow dismisses the prosecution’s motive for the crime. While \$10,000 in ransom was demanded, neither boy needed the money. In fact, to their detriment, they did not know the value of a dollar or how to earn one—they had been deprived of *Midwestern Thrift*: “They took a little companion of one of them, on a crowded street, and killed him for nothing and sacrificed everything that could be of value in human life upon the crazy theme of a couple of immature lads.” Darrow instead accepts a motive that they were deranged. “They killed him as they might kill a spider or a fly—for the experience. They killed him because they were made that way.” Later he adds, “their plans were the diseased plans of a diseased mind.”

The circumstances, in Darrow’s estimation, call for charity not hanging: “wouldn’t it be a glorious illustration of Christianity and kindness and charity?” To do otherwise is a return to barbarous days when numerous offences called for capital punishment. Darrow expresses dismay that the Christian community shows such antipathy toward his clients. At length, he apologizes to the judge for the length of his remarks and adds, “I have become obsessed with this deep feeling of hate and anger that has swept across this city and this land. I have been fighting it, battling with it, until it has fairly driven me mad, until I sometimes wonder whether every righteous human emotion has not gone down in the storm.”

Darrow likens the two boys to “hothouse plants” who were urged “to learn more and more and more.” This incessant pressure turned them into “freaks.” As such they should not be blamed but pitied. Theirs was not a normal *Midwestern* upbringing, but a freakish one. Speaking of Dickie Loeb, “he had no pleasures such as a boy should have, except in what was gained by lying and cheating.” In contrast, Darrow recounted his own wholesome childhood memories of swimming and wholesome dreams. Deprived of this *Midwestern* normalcy the boys’ lives should be spared and society blamed including parents and teachers. Speaking of Babe Leopold, Darrow argued, “Your Honor, it is hardly fair to hand a

nineteen-year-old boy the philosophy that was taught him at the university.”

Independently, the boys may have never acted violently, but in collusion, they were deadly. Darrow uses nature to illustrate: “Take the rabbit running through the woods, and a fox meets him at a certain fence. If the rabbit had not started when it did, it would not have met the fox and would have lived longer.” The correspondence between the boys only underscores their abnormal relationship.

In his closing, Darrow makes multiple direct appeals to the judge; for example, “If Your Honor can hang a boy of eighteen, some other judge can hang him at seventeen, or sixteen, or fourteen.” Perhaps “progress” will one day render capital punishment obsolete, but until then this judge will have to render judgment. Darrow believes change is happening: “But in Chicago and reaching out over the length and breadth of the land more and more are the fathers and mothers, the humane, the kind and the hopeful, who are gaining an understanding, are asking questions not only about these boys, but about their own.” Having exhausted every imaginable appeal, Darrow ends with this appeal to transition, progress, and change and asks Judge Caverly to render his own legacy: in the end, Judge Caverly imposed life imprisonment.

### **Lewis**

John L. Lewis’ “Labor and the Nation” was rated #61. Delivered on the radio a few days before Labor Day, 1937, the speech is a brief but graphic case for organized labor. It is viewed today as representing Lewis at the height of his career.

Lewis takes little time to assert that the Committee for Industrial Organization should be greeted as the “dawn to the night watcher.” He uses vivid imagery to describe the plight of average Americans. They have been “exploited without stint by corporate industry and socially debased beyond the understanding of the fortunate.” Indeed, the labor movement exists because workers demand fairness: “Despairing of fair treatment, they resolved to do something for themselves.” In his estimation this represents “progress” and “enlightened corporation.”

Many of the cases Lewis uses to document his claims find origination in the Midwest: namely, Chicago and Youngstown, Ohio. His striking imagery is graphic: “during this strike eighteen steel workers were either shot to death or had their brains clubbed out by police or

armed hirelings in the pay of the steel companies. In Chicago, Mayor Kelly's police force was successful in killing ten strikers before they could escape the fury of the police, shooting eight of them in the back." Lewis demonstrates that he is able to describe and be specific to the point of condemning by name his adversaries, whether mayors like Edward Kelly or governors like Martin Davey of Ohio. He asserts that Kelly's police force engaged in a "bloody orgy" and that Davey is a "steel puppet."

In contrast, labor seeks peace and justice, not strife. The sacrifices of the fallen add strength and moral imperative for labor's cause. "Workers have kept faith in American institutions" and believe that justice will prevail. Despite the atrocities, the CIO has not turned to communism as a solution. Lewis suggests that those accusations come from a "shabby pretext." Those that spread those rumors are "the real breeders of discontent" and "have hatched this foolish cry" to undermine labor claims.

It is true that labor desires to participate in the "fruits" of achievement. Lewis aligns labor's grievances with the farm population. Both have suffered. Industry pamphlets and "sinister propaganda," he asserts, are trying to pit farmers vs. labor as if to say that farmers are paying more for products because of labor demands. Actually, the CIO "seeks cooperation and mutuality of effort with the agricultural population."

In the future, political parties and leaders who seek Labor's support must keep faith and redeem their pledges. He warns that members of Congress must stop skulking and hiding. "Those who chant their praises of democracy but who lose no chance to drive their knives into labor's defenseless back must feel the weight of labor's woe, even as its open adversaries must ever feel the thrust of labor's power." In a veiled threat, he even takes on the White House. Obviously, he has demonstrated his ability to name offenders in this speech, and all should take note: "it ill behooves one who has supped at labor's table and who has been sheltered in labor's house to curse with equal fervor and fine impartiality both labor and its adversaries when they become locked in deadly embrace." With religious appeal, Lewis warns of betrayal, and pictures labor as Israel with "many sorrows" whose women weep for their fallen husbands and worry about the future for their children. He associates labor with a righteous cause that should neither be annoying or offensive.

## **Conclusion and Implications**

What was the cutting edge of western civilization in 1800 became a cultural cul-de-sac by the 20th century! The dynamism of the Old Northwest was replaced by the cultural inertia of the Midwest. This banality, however, became reassuring ballast for the nation. Midwestern themes of Thrift and the Agrarian Myth were pieced together with Progressive and Transitional themes by public speakers from the region as evidenced in the top 100 speeches of the nation. These themes form the quilt of Midwestern public address. Future studies might focus on state histories to note issues, movements, and public speakers. Noteworthy would be what are similar and dissimilar themes as patterns of the region are argumentatively mapped. An analysis of speeches given to Midwestern audiences as opposed to those pitched to national audiences might reveal a different ratio of appeals. Additionally, analysis of the Midwestern speakers in the top 100 speeches since World War II would help characterize the oratorical focus of the contemporary period. A better barometer of Midwestern themes, isolation of rhetorical periods, and candidates for inclusion might be achieved by surveying members of the Public Address Division at the National Communication Association.

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*Dr. Barry Cole Poyner serves as a professor of Communication at Truman State University in Kirksville, Missouri. He is a life member of the Speech and Theatre Association of Missouri. Dr. Poyner serves as Parliamentarian for the National Communication Association. He received his M.A. and Ph.D. in Speech from Louisiana State University. He grew up in western Kentucky and obtained his B.A. from David Lipscomb University in Nashville, TN. He is married to Catherine Poyner, CPA, a senior financial analyst at A.T. Still University. They have two children. Dr. Poyner serves as an elder in the Kirksville Church of Christ.*

## **Comparing and Contrasting the Communication of Dark-Skinned and Light-Skinned African American Basketball Players**

*Andrew Dix*

### **Abstract**

*Contrasting the perceived communicative behaviors of dark-skinned African American basketball players against the perceived communicative behaviors of light-skinned African American basketball players was the main objective for the current investigation. A review of related literature was first undertaken in order to highlight societal perceptions of African American skin tone and to ground the present research in communication theory. Quantitative methods were subsequently administered in which study participants completed a survey that assessed their perceptions of African Americans whose skin tone was markedly stratified. Results indicated that skin color stratification did not influence overall perceptions of how African American athletes communicate as a basketball team. Findings also revealed that dark-skinned African American female basketball players were perceived to communicate similarly to light-skinned African American female basketball players. The discussion portion of this study concentrated on the intersection of colorism and muted group theory within a sports related context.*

Inputting the words “Sammy Sosa” in a Google images search will reveal pictures of the aforementioned athlete as a dark-skinned African American who was noted for his prolific homerun power. The same Google images search will also reveal pictures of Sammy Sosa as a now light-skinned African American who is noted for skin bleaching. It is unclear whether the pronounced change in his skin color was undertaken due to his cosmetic desire or because Sammy Sosa was looking to treat a non-publicized medical issue. It is however clear that skin color stratification amongst African Americans has been a recurring topic of interest for social scientists. For example, empirical scholarship has indicated that dark-skinned African Americans have been perceived to have more negative traits than light-skinned African Americans (Maddox & Gray, 2002), revealed that dark-skinned African American

females received lengthier prison sentences than light-skinned African American females (Viglione, Hannon, & DeFina, 2011), and claimed that dark-skinned African American females were less likely to marry a high-status husband than light-skinned African American females (Hamilton, Goldsmith, & Darity, 2009). Indeed, previous literature on skin color stratification amongst the African American community has been eclectic but there is still much to be learned on this topic via exploring it within new and unique contexts.

The current study was made up of five sections that collectively centered on the dependent variable of communicative perceptions and the independent variable of skin color stratification amongst African American athletes. The first section was the in-progress introduction that provided a general overview of this socio-cultural investigation. The second portion of this study was the review of related literature which centered on perceptions of dark-skinned African Americans and light-skinned African Americans as well as effectively grounded the current scholarship in communication theory. Outlining the quantitative methods that were employed was the third component of this analysis while presenting the results of the research questions was the fourth component of the current research. The fifth portion of this empirical investigation was an interpretation of the uncovered findings as they pertain to practical considerations within a sports related framework. In short, the central objective of this study was to determine whether dark-skinned African American basketball players were perceived to communicate differently than light-skinned African American basketball players.

### **Literature Review**

Colorism is a racially centered phenomenon that proposes light-skinned African Americans are associated with privilege and positive attributes relative to dark-skinned African Americans (Harrison & Thomas, 2009; Hunter, 2007; Hunter, 1998; Keith & Herring, 1991). Extant research on the subject has frequently centered on the ongoing narrative that claims light-skinned African Americans are perceived differently than dark-skinned African Americans due to cultural rooting and historical descriptions (Loury, 2009). It was along that particular line that Russell, Wilson, and Hall (1992) reported that white slave owners were more likely to award light-skinned African Americans an indoor assignment as a housekeeper or seamstress and that white slave owners

were more likely to award dark-skinned African Americans an outdoor assignment that involved laboring in the hot sun. They succinctly note: “the physically grueling field work was typically left to slaves who were dark skinned” (p. 18). Prior scholarship by Hughes and Hertel (1990) claimed that the strong negative associations tied to dark-skinned African Americans and the less offensive associations tied to light-skinned African Americans changed minimally from the start of the 19th century to the end of the 20th century. Taken together, historically rooted scholarship has indicated that negative perceptions have plagued dark-skinned African Americans but there appears to be a negligible albeit latent trend in which overall perceptions of dark-skinned African Americans and light-skinned African Americans are becoming more comparable to one another.

Extant research in which direct comparisons have been made between light-skinned African Americans and dark-skinned African Americans is heavily fragmented. It was within an electoral arena that Weaver (2012) reported that light-skinned African American political candidates were immune from the effects of race whereas dark-skinned African American political candidates were perceived with a negative bias amongst conservatives. Separate research by Dixon and Maddox (2005) found that the person associated with committing a crime was: “more memorable when the perpetrator was a dark-skinned Black male” (p. 1564). Additional findings revealed that negative word attributes were more likely to be ascribed to those of dark-skin compared to those of light-skin in an empirical analysis of pervasive stereotypes (Nosek, Smyth, Hansen, Devos, Lindner, Ranganath, Smith, Olson, Chugh, Greenwald, & Banaji, 2007). Nevertheless, it was in a sports related scope that Primm, Piquero, Piquero, and Regoli (2011) reported that skin tone variations between those of light-skin compared to those of dark-skin had no effect on the value of the rookie baseball card for that particular player. While the research of Primm and colleagues provided insight on nonverbal perceptions of colorism in a framework that is relevant to sports, other communication scholarship has regularly employed a media lens for exploring the variables of colorism and gender.

Communication scholarship specifically centered on analyzing the communicative behaviors of dark-skinned African Americans and light-skinned African Americans can be categorized as minimal. A study on journalism and media communication by Steele (2016) suggested

that: “because colorism is an internalized system of hegemonic control with the African American community, preference for lighter skinned Blacks is widely accepted in the media produced for African Americans” (p. 53). It was later in her examination of a popular television show for children that Steele (2016) reported: “the persistent reliance on light-skinned women as the only mediated images of beauty is especially troublesome in a show that aims to present a positive image of the African American community” (p. 63). A similar theme was noted in a mass communication study by Conrad, Dixon, and Zhang (2009) who found that African American females in rap videos were more likely to be light-skinned whereas African American males in rap videos were more likely to be dark-skinned. Although the aforementioned investigations suggest that light-skinned African American women were perceived in a more favorable capacity within a mass communication medium, no published literature specifically devoted to the communicative styles of dark-skinned African American athletes versus light-skinned African American athletes were found to exist within the niches of small group communication and interpersonal communication.

### *Effective Communication in Team Sports*

The scale for effective communication in team sports (SECTS) is a multidimensional measure that is used to analyze the small group and interpersonal communicative behaviors that occur within a team sports context. The four central factors of effective communication in team sports center on the sub-dimensions of (a) acceptance, (b) distinctiveness, (c) positive conflict, and (d) negative conflict for any situation in which a female or male sports team is said to interact (Sullivan & Feltz, 2003; Sullivan & Short, 2011). The acceptance sub-dimension concentrates on interpersonal messages that show consideration or support within an intrateam context (e.g., teammates share thoughts with one another). Distinctiveness includes messages that promote an inclusive team identity (e.g., using nicknames for teammates, incorporating slang that only teammates would understand). The third sub-dimension of positive conflict looks at emotionally controlled albeit constructive messages when intrateam differences are found to exist (e.g., speaking openly and honestly when a disagreement arises with a teammate, compromising when a disagreement with a teammate occurs). The final sub-dimension of negative conflict focuses on disparaging or

unproductive communication that occurs during a disagreement amongst a sports team (e.g., shouting at a fellow team member, demonstrating standoffish nonverbal behaviors). While the latter (e.g., negative conflict) is considered detrimental to effective team communication in sports, the previous factors (e.g., acceptance, distinctiveness, positive conflict) are conceptualized as positive communicative behaviors that are designed to produce effective communication in team sports (Sullivan & Feltz, 2003; Sullivan & Short, 2011).

The majority of existing research on effective team communication in sports has largely focused on the variables of cohesion and gender. For example, McLaren and Spink (2016) found evidence that effective team communication served as the precursor for feelings of team cohesion. A related study by Sullivan and Feltz (2001) suggested that social cohesion amongst teammates was positively related to the positive conflict sub-dimension of effective team communication in sports. More germane to the current study was the research of Sullivan (2005) who indicated that male and female athletes did not communicate differently with regards to effective communication in team sports. Additional research on gender and effective team communication in sports by Haslewood, Joyner, Burke, Geyerman, Czech, Munkasy, and Zwald (2005) revealed that female athletes perceived negligible difference between the effective team communication abilities of their male head coaches and the effective team communication abilities of their female head coaches. Collectively speaking, previous literature has indicated that minimal differences exist between genders with regard to effective team communication in sports but further research that systematically explores the intersection of gender and colorism would provide theoretical insight as to whether the voices of dark-skinned African Americans have been silenced in a sports related context.

### *Theoretical Considerations*

Muted group theory is a critical theory that posits the communication of certain groups is muted by empowered and dominant segments of a societal population (Ardener, 1975; Ardener, 1978; Kramarae, 1981). Seminal research on muted groups by Ardener (1975) centered on the experiences of African women in eastern Nigeria and Cameroon whose social and political communication were restricted by dominant males. She concisely summarized the notion of female

communication being muted by suggesting these African women are: “without a formal political voice, and socialized by male control into a dependent relationship with men” (p.135). While it was not specified whether the African women were of a dark-skinned or light-skinned stratification, the research of Ardener set a foundation for Kramarae (1981) to examine the relationship between language and theory as it pertains to muted female voices. Subsequent research by Kramarae and colleagues later revealed that women experience a “chilly climate” (Treichler & Kramarae, 1983, p. 128) in academic settings due in part to dominant males controlling academic conversations. Additional research also suggested that conventional dictionaries disregard the definitions and words created by women (Kramarae, 1992). The early work of Ardener and Kramarae cleared a path for muted group theory to be extended into other societal populations and contexts that involve the LGBT community, African Americans, and within the world of sports.

One of the newest applications of muted group theory involves the arena of sports communication. It was within that particular field that Sanderson, Weathers, Snedaker, and Gramlich (2016) highlighted a unique manner in which muted group theory could manifest. Their study on concussions provided evidence that a hierarchical sports culture exists whereby individuals who work within established power structures in sports (e.g., coaches, media personnel) were sufficiently empowered to mute athletes from reporting a concussion. A different study by Whiteside and Roessner (2016) examined the interconnectedness of gender and muted voices in journalism. It was in their sports communication analysis of the public memory associated with Title IX that they noted: “coverage generally positioned discrimination as an historic relic, simultaneously muting the contemporary experiences of myriad women” (p. 15). Additional gender related scholarship on muted voices and athletes was conducted by Perez, Hibbler, Cleary, and Eberman (2006) who investigated females who worked in the male dominated field of athletic training. It was in their analysis of language that they argued women must use: “terms anchored in male competitive sports because women do not have competitive terms of their own” (p. 67). All variables considered, previous scholarship that is germane to the present research has revealed that (a) different experiences exist for dark-skinned African Americans and light-skinned African Americans, (b) revealed four sub-dimensions for effective team communication in

sports, and (c) highlighted how different power structures can theoretically mute the voices of subordinate groups in sports.

### *The Present Research*

The current research was designed to systematically examine the socio-cultural issue of colorism within the African American sports community. A perceptual examination of the communication behaviors of dark-skinned African American athletes served as one condition for this study and a perceptual examination of the communication behaviors of light-skinned African American athletes served as the second condition for this study. Skin color stratification (e.g., dark-skinned versus light-skinned) and athlete gender (e.g., male versus female) served as the independent measures in the present research while perceptions of effective team communication in sports served as the dependent variable for the current investigation. Quantitative analyses were then utilized to uncover main effects and interactions while a post hoc manipulation check was completed in order to confirm that visual differences were observed between African Americans of dark-skin and light-skin.

The rationales for the current research are two-fold. The main rationale for this study was to build on the negligible amount of communication scholarship that has focused on colorism. As Orbe and Harris (2015) suggest: “colorism has been explored and addressed in the social sciences, yet remains an underresearched topic in the communication discipline. This is critical because communication, or message exchange, through relationships, society, and the media are at the core of how ideologies about race are maintained” (p. 169). Moreover, no communication scholarship that focuses on the intersection of colorism and sports was found to exist. This lack of available communication scholarship highlights the need for the current investigation.

A secondary rationale for the current research is to potentially extend muted group theory into the arena of colorism. Existing literature that is both empirically and historically rooted has provided evidence that dark-skinned African Americans have been relegated to the status of a non-dominant subgroup throughout the American cultural narrative (See Russell, Wilson, & Hall, 1992). As alluded to previously, the voices of dark-skinned African Americans were collaterally muted as a result of being consigned to fieldwork by the dominant power group that was

comprised of Caucasian plantation owners. However, some colorism scholarship has yielded anecdotal evidence that a trend is unfolding in which dark-skinned African Americans and light skinned African Americans are now being perceived on an equal level within isolated pockets of society (e.g., Hughes & Hertel, 1990; Primm, Piquero, Piquero, & Regoli, 2011). The combination of non-existent communication studies scholarship centered on the intersection of colorism and sports coupled with a strong theoretical basis and gender related findings that suggest light-skinned African American females are perceived differently than dark-skinned African American females (e.g., Conrad, Dixon, & Zhang, 2009; Steele, 2016) has led to the following research questions being put forth:

RQ1: Are the voices of dark-skinned African American basketball players muted in team sports communication relative to the voices of light-skinned African American basketball players?

RQ2: Are dark-skinned African American female basketball players perceived to communicate less effectively as a sports team than light-skinned African American female basketball players?

RQ3: Are dark-skinned African American male basketball players perceived to communicate less effectively as a sports team than light-skinned African American male basketball players?

## **Methodology**

### *Participants*

The participants in this study were 103 undergraduate students (N = 103) at a large southeastern university in the United States. Most of the participants were female (N = 60) in the present study as they represented 58.3% of the sample while participants who were male (N = 43) accounted for 41.7% of the current sample. Ages varied in the current research as the youngest study participants were 18 years old while the eldest study participant was 32 years of age. The median age of study participants was 19.85 years old (sd = 2.28). The majority of the participants in this study were Caucasian (62.1%) followed by African American (27.1%), Asian American (4.9%), Hispanic American (4.9%),

and Native American (1.0%). Extra course credit for was given to the participants who were involved in this study.

### *Instrumentation*

A modified version of the effective communication in team sports scale (SECTS-2) of Sullivan and Short (2011) served as the main instrument for this study. The sub-dimensions of (a) acceptance, (b) distinctiveness, (c) positive conflict, and (d) negative conflict were reflected in the SECTS-2 instrument that was used. Some of the items that were measured included whether the team uses nicknames, whether the team gets problems out in the open, whether team feelings are communicated honestly, whether the team compromises with each other, and whether teammates communicate directly when a problem occurs, and the like. Cronbach's alpha was .83 for the dark-skinned African American basketball players' condition and was .82 for the light-skinned African American basketball players' condition. A 7-point Likert response was applied to the SECTS-2 instrument that was utilized. The range of responses varied from strongly disagree (1) up to strongly agree (7) for the current investigation.

An open-ended qualitative instrument served as a secondary instrument for the current study. This particular instrument was administered to study participants after all of the quantitative data was collected and after the manipulation check was completed. The instrument instructed the participants in this study to offer commentary on the skin stratification of the basketball players who were featured in this study. More specifically, this open-ended instrument asked participants to discuss whether they felt any communication differences existed with regard to skin stratification within the African American sports culture. The open-ended form was used to obtain rich data on whether dark-skinned African American basketball players were perceived to communicate differently than light-skinned African American basketball players.

### *Procedures*

The following procedures occurred in this study. First, an official team photograph of 13 African American male basketball players and an official team photograph of 13 African American female basketball

players were selected for this study based on similar picture quality, similar camera distance, similar facial expressions, and similar camera angle. The male team photograph and the female team photograph were the official team photographs of two different Division 1 universities. Both the male and female team photographs featured six basketball players seated in the front row and seven basketball players standing in the second row. The primary jersey color for both of the featured teams was white. The photographs of both the male and female team was taken at the center court of their respective college team arenas. All peripheral information that could have yielded insight as to university affiliation (e.g., secondary jersey colors, background seating color) was made a standardized gray color by a professional graphic designer with 11 years of professional experience. The same graphic designer then utilized a Photoshop program to systematically manipulate the skin tone stratification of the team photograph of the African American male basketball team and the team photograph of the African American female basketball team. The end result of the systematic manipulation of the skin stratification was four separate photographs. The first photograph was (a) a modified team photograph of an all dark-skinned African American male basketball team, the second photograph was (b) a modified team photograph of an all light-skinned African American male basketball team, the third photograph was (c) a modified team photograph of an all dark-skinned African American female basketball team, and the fourth photograph was (d) a modified team photograph of an all light-skinned African American female basketball team. The four separate photographs represented skin stratification and would subsequently be used during the data collection process.

The second procedural element that occurred in this study was administering the modified version of the effective communication in team sports scale (SECTS-2) of Sullivan and Short (2011). The four skin stratification photographs that featured (a) a modified team photograph of an all dark-skinned African American male basketball team, (b) a modified team photograph of an all light-skinned African American male basketball team, (c) a modified team photograph of an all dark-skinned African American female basketball team, and (d) a modified team photograph of an all light-skinned African American female basketball team were displayed to study participants. The participants in this study then assessed their perceptions of the effective communication in team sports for each skin stratification photograph using the SECTS-2 scale of

Sullivan and Short (2011). A 7-point Likert scale was supplied to assess the perceptions of study participants. The skin stratification photographs were displayed in random order on a computer. Study participants evaluated one photograph at a time. Study participants were not able to see or evaluate other skin stratification photographs until their current evaluation was completed. The evaluations of the four separate skin stratification photographs served as the collected data for the present study.

The third procedural element that occurred in this study was a manipulation check. This analysis was completed to ensure that study participants observed differences between the photographs that featured dark-skinned African American basketball players and the photographs that featured light-skinned African American basketball players. It was after the data for this study was collected that a random sample of 75 study participants were asked to indicate on paper whether they noticed a difference in skin stratification for the photographs that were utilized. It was at this point of the analysis that one of the two photographs of the dark-skinned African American basketball players was simultaneously displayed next to the photograph of one of the two photographs of the light-skinned African American basketball players. Participants were then asked to indicate on paper: Which photograph features African American basketball players with darker skin? The results indicated that 98.6% of study participants correctly identified the photograph of the African American basketball team who had darker skin. The aforesaid findings indicate that study participants visually perceived the dark skin condition relative to the light skin condition.

### *Data Analyses*

The data that was collected in this study was examined with the statistical program for the social sciences (SPSS). A series of factorial ANOVAs were conducted on the data that was collected in this study. Individual ANOVAs were completed on the sub-dimensions of (a) acceptance, (b) distinctiveness, (c) positive conflict, and (d) negative conflict as necessary. The variables of skin stratification and gender were also examined via the ANOVAs that were conducted.

## Results

The first research question for this study asked: Are the voices of dark-skinned African American basketball players muted in team sports communication relative to the voices of light-skinned African American basketball players? A factorial ANOVA was conducted on this research question in order to compare the condition that featured both photographs of dark-skinned African American basketball players against the condition that featured both photographs of light-skinned African American basketball players. No statistical difference was found to exist with regards to the communicative perceptions of dark-skinned African American basketball players and the communicative perceptions of light-skinned African American basketball players ( $F(1, 102) = .710$ ,  $p = .401$ , Partial Eta Squared = .007). Perceptions of the ability to effectively communicate in team sports for dark-skinned African American basketball players was 4.80 ( $sd = .58$ ) on a 7-point response continuum while perceptions of the ability to effectively communicate in team sports for light-skinned African American basketball players was 4.77 ( $sd = .55$ ) on a 7-point response continuum. Put differently, African American basketball players with dark-skin are not perceived to communicate differently than African American basketball players with light-skin in terms of effective communication in team sports.

The second research question for this study asked: Are dark-skinned African American female basketball players perceived to communicate less effectively as a sports team than light-skinned African American female basketball players? Study data on the photograph of the dark-skinned African American female basketball team was compared to study data on the photograph of the light-skinned African American female basketball team via a factorial ANOVA. Despite the fact a negligible difference was found, the findings were not strong enough to be classified as statistically significant ( $F(1, 102) = 3.601$ ,  $p = .061$ , Partial Eta Squared = .034). Dark-skinned African American female basketball players were perceived as a 4.83 ( $sd = .69$ ) on a 7-point response continuum in terms of perceptions of their ability to effectively communicate in team sports while light-skinned African American female basketball players were perceived as a 4.75 ( $sd = .65$ ) on a 7-point response continuum in terms of perceptions of their ability to effectively communicate in team sports. In other words, female basketball players who are dark-skinned African Americans are

considered to communicate similarly to female basketball players who are light-skinned African Americans in the realm of effective team communication.

The third research question for this study asked: Are dark-skinned African American male basketball players perceived to communicate less effectively as a sports team than light-skinned African American male basketball players? The emergent data from the photograph of the dark-skinned African American basketball team was compared to the emergent data from the photograph of the light-skinned African American basketball team in a factorial ANOVA. Findings indicated there was no communication difference in terms of the perceptions associated with the dark-skinned African American male basketball team relative to the perceptions associated with the light-skinned African American male basketball team ( $F(1, 102) = .344, p = .559, \text{Partial Eta Squared} = .003$ ). The ability of dark-skinned African American male basketball players to effectively communicate as a sports team was perceived at a 4.77 ( $sd = .66$ ) on a 7-point response continuum whereas the ability of light-skinned African American male basketball players to effectively communicate as a sports team was perceived at a 4.79 ( $sd = .65$ ) on a 7-point response continuum. Comparatively speaking, African American basketball players who are of a dark-skin variation are seen as more alike than different in comparison to African American basketball players who are of a light-skin variation with regard to effective team communication in sports.

A series of additional ANOVA analyses were also conducted on the effective team communication in sports sub-dimensions of (a) acceptance, (b) distinctiveness, (c) positive conflict, and (d) negative conflict. The factorial ANOVAs that were conducted on these subdimensions measured perceptions of the photographs of the dark-skinned African American basketball teams against perceptions of the photographs of the light-skinned African American basketball teams. Statistically significant differences were not observed on the acceptance subdimension ( $F(1, 102) = 3.029, p = .085, \text{Partial Eta Squared} = .029$ ), on the distinctiveness subdimension ( $F(1, 102) = 3.519, p = .064, \text{Partial Eta Squared} = .033$ ), on the positive conflict subdimension ( $F(1, 102) = 0.390, p = .843, \text{Partial Eta Squared} = .001$ ), and on the negative conflict sub-dimension ( $F(1, 102) = 2.224, p = .139, \text{Partial Eta Squared} = .021$ ). All things considered, the results for all of the quantitative analyses that were completed collectively suggested that dark-skinned African

Americans basketball players were not perceived to communicate in a different manner than light-skinned African American basketball players when it comes to effective communication in team sports.

### *Supplemental Results*

The open-ended qualitative instrument that was administered to study participants after the manipulation check yielded supplemental data that is noteworthy of mention. It should first be noted that the majority of the participants in this study indicated that skin stratification did not influence their perceptions of how African American basketball players communicate as a team regardless of gender. This recurring theme appeared in most of the qualitative responses. As one participant efficiently noted: “My perceptions did not change. Skin tone does not play a part in communication differences from my point of view.” However, some of the female participants in this study who were of Caucasian descent did indicate they believed differences existed with regard to skin stratification and communication. For instance, one female stated: “I believe a major communication difference exists with regard to skin tone and/or gender because my perceptions changed from male to female and with dark skin to light skin.” A different female participant who was also of Caucasian descent provided more specific details in stating: “I most definitely think skin tone and gender have a lot to do with communication. Darker skins are quicker to get angry and lose their temper.” While it is necessary to note that a negligible amount of recurring responses illustrated that skin stratification did influence isolated perceptions of communication within this sports related context, the most recurring and forceful theme for this portion of the study was that skin stratification did not influence perceptions of effective team communication. In summation, the results that materialized from the qualitative component of this study helped solidify and triangulate the quantitative findings that African American basketball players who have dark-skin are not perceived to be less effective team communicators than African American basketball players who have light-skin.

### **Discussion**

The central objective of this study was to examine colorism in a sports related context. Study findings indicated that African American

basketball players with dark-skin were not perceived to communicate differently than African American basketball players with light-skin in terms of effective communication in team sports. The results of this investigation also revealed that gender did not influence perceptions on whether African American basketball teams were conceptualized as being comprised of effective team communicators. It could be argued based on cultural assumptions and extant literature that African American basketball players with dark-skin would constitute a muted group being that dark-skinned African Americans have historically held less power and less social status relative to their African Americans counterparts with light-skin and relative to other ethnic groups (See Orbe, 1994; Orbe, 1995). The discussion portion of this analysis specifically addresses that notion and challenges theorems which foundationally posit that communication differences should exist at the intersection of colorism and sports. When taken together, the results of this investigation yielded several interesting discussion points that are applicable to practical considerations for sports communication and applicable to theoretical considerations concentrated on muted groups in sports.

The first research question for this study revealed that the voices of dark-skinned African American basketball players were not perceived as muted in the context of effective team communication relative to the voices of light-skinned African American basketball players. This particular finding is best analyzed within a theoretical context that draws on previous scholarship. One of the core assumptions that underlies muted group theory is that dominant groups in society impede the communication of the marginalized groups (Kramarae, 1981) and previous academic literature has highlighted several contextual and chronological examples in which African Americans with dark-skin represented a marginalized and non-dominant group (e.g., Maddox & Gray, 2002; Viglione, Hannon, & DeFina, 2011; Hamilton, Goldsmith, & Darity, 2009; Harrison & Thomas, 2009; Hunter, 2007; Hunter, 1998; Keith & Herring, 1991). The results of this study provide evidence that basketball is a specialized niche of society in which the conventional underpinnings of muted group theory are not applicable to the construct of colorism. It would seem from a perceptual standpoint that the voices of dark-skinned African American basketball players are on the level with the voices of light-skinned African American basketball players in terms of effective team communication within the sport of basketball.

Simply put, it appears there are no muted voices amongst a community of African American basketball players. The notion that dark-skinned African American basketball players are not placed in a muted group of subordinate status falls in line with the findings of Robst, VanGilder, Coates, and Berri (2010) who reported in their basketball study that: “those with darker skin tones had higher wages, more all-star votes, more experience, and play in the largest markets with the highest per capita income” (p. 6). Indeed, it appears that the marginalization and negative perceptions that have commonly plagued dark-skinned African American within larger society are not applicable to the specific society of basketball.

Findings from the second research question uncovered evidence that dark-skinned African American female basketball players were not perceived to communicate differently than light-skinned African American female basketball players with regard to effective communication in team sports. One possible reason why this result materialized is because individuals are becoming more knowledgeable and empathetic to the immeasurable number of factual narratives in which dark-skinned African American females have been unfairly victimized in the colorism arena. It would seem that some traction is being gained with regard to fostering a global dialogue that effectively promotes positive messages and perceptions being ascribed to the value and self-worth of dark-skinned African American females within the field of play as well as outside of the field of play. This subtle albeit gradual perceptual shift away from negative perceptions being consistently placed upon dark-skinned African American females is apparently taking root as a learned behavior within a familial structure. Evidence of this favorable perceptual shift occurring within the family is consistent with the scholarship of Wilder and Cain (2011) who saw burgeoning indications of favorably reframing perceptions of dark-skinned females in their focus group interviews where they noted of one female participant: “because of her family’s positive teachings about skin color, this young woman learned to have no qualms about her darkness and was able to effectively challenge normative ideologies of skin color in her life” (p. 595). Put differently, the positive lessons being instilled within young women of dark-skin coupled with more global attention being concentrated on the injustices that have haunted dark-skinned African American females has resulted in less unfavorable perceptions being stereotypically applied to dark-skinned African American females.

The third research question revealed that dark-skinned African American basketball players were not perceived to be less effective communicators in team sports in comparison to light-skinned African American basketball players. This finding is interesting because a robust amount of literature has provided evidence that African American males with dark-skin are at a societal disadvantage due to their non-dominant status (e.g., Maddox & Gray, 2002; Viglione, Hannon, & DeFina, 2011; Hamilton, Goldsmith, & Darity, 2009). Discovering that dark-skinned African American basketball players were not perceived as inferior communicators relative to light-skinned African American basketball players within a sports related framework suggests that progress is being made in the practical world in terms of the overall perceptions that are being ascribed to dark-skinned African American males. One plausible reason why this result emerged in this sports communication study is summarized in a single word: Jordan. The iconic Michael Jordan who would be categorized by most people as a dark-skinned African American basketball player has attained such a popular status in the world that overall perceptions of other dark-skinned African basketball players have been positively influenced in various other niches of life. It would seem that a Jordan carryover effect seems to have occurred in the present study whereby the favorable perceptions attached to Michael Jordan effectively spilled over to the communicative perceptions that were applied to the similarly dark-skinned African American male basketball players that were featured in the current study. While the facial features of the dark-skinned basketball players in this study were not compared to Michael Jordan, the similar dark-skin tone and applicable basketball connotation likely resulted in the dark-skinned basketball players in this study being perceived as not of a lesser status to the light-skinned basketball players featured in this study of effective communication in team sports. In summation, it could be argued based on the results of this study that basketball players with dark-skin are not perceived as subordinate communicators to basketball players of light-skin because of the popularity of the Michael Jordan brand.

### *Limitations and Future Research*

There are a couple of limitations that should be noted for the current research. One of the main limitations of this study was that a convenience sample of participants was utilized. It is conceivable albeit

unlikely that the findings that emerged from this relatively youthful sample may not be representative of how an elderly segment of society perceives the team communication behaviors of dark-skinned African American basketball players and light-skinned African American basketball players. A second limitation of this study was that basketball was the only sport that was analyzed within the scope of this investigation. This narrow focus makes it difficult to generalize the communication results of this study to various other sports. It would be interesting for future research to explore whether the voices of Caucasian basketball players are possibly muted by the voices of African American basketball players. A future line of inquiry that potentially exposes whether the communication of other ethnic groups are muted in team sports could be conducted on other popular sports such as football, hockey, or baseball where the once dark-skinned Sammy Sosa used to reign.

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*Andrew Dix, Ph.D. is currently an Assistant Professor of Communication Studies at Middle Tennessee State University in Murfreesboro, TN (USA) where he has been teaching for the last five years. He earned his Ph.D. in communication studies from the University of Southern Mississippi in 2012. Some of the main areas that he investigates include sports communication, humorous messages, and interpersonal attraction. He is a member of the Communication and Sport division of the National Communication Association.*

**From the Field to the Arena to the Classroom and Stage:  
The Case for Sports in Performance and Communication  
Pedagogy and Instruction**

*Scott Jensen*

**Abstract**

*One of the fastest growing areas in the communication discipline is sports communication. It is difficult, if not impossible, to find any single person whose life has not been at least indirectly influenced by sports. Research highlights the connections between what is inherent in any sports contexts and what is at the core of teaching performance and communication. This paper makes the case for integrating aspects of sports cultures into the teaching and practices in our formal and informal classrooms. It also reflects on the successful creation of a sports communication degree at Webster University. Along with a review of research and current trends regarding sports communication, the paper provides suggestions for incorporating sports into activities appropriate for both performance and communication at all levels of teaching.*

I was probably five in my first memory of watching the Chicago Cubs with my dad. My entire life has been shaped by that first moment sitting on his lap and watching the likes of Hall of Famers like Ernie Banks, Fergie Jenkins, and Ron Santo, along with the lesser knowns like Paul Popovich, Jose Cardenal, and Don Kessinger. I have been a life-long Cubs fan because of my dad. Beyond my love for the North Siders, I have been a life-long sports fan because I was the son of an athlete who was an all-state star in three sports. That I never had the talent to put me on any radar outside of a little league or freshman coach is irrelevant. My worldview is grounded in sports and all that surrounds it – competition, team, effort, heroes... And I am not unique. Billings, Butterworth, and Turman (2015) write that “for the overwhelming majority of Americans, sports occupy a key, if not central, place in their daily lives” (p. 1). Given its ubiquitous influence on our society, integrating sports into teaching and learning has infinite potential to make course content more immediate to all involved. This potential for connection is perhaps

greatest within communication and performance education. Billings, Butterworth, and Turman (2015) observe that “communication is central to how we play, watch, interpret, and evaluate sports” (p. 2). In the introduction to their top-selling book on sports communication, these authors note that communication practices are central to the success of sports, and sports strongly influence how we communicate and shape our identities. Few activities or interests in our society offer more promise for strengthening communication and performance education than do sports. This paper makes the case for integrating sports into communication and performance pedagogy, outlines the journey toward designing and implementing a degree in sports communication at Webster University, and offers suggestions for integrating sports into existing curriculum at all levels of teaching.

### **Sports and the Classroom**

The nature of games and sports compliments our culture of education at all of its levels. Billings, Butterworth, and Turman (2015), in defining “sport,” quote Guttman (1978) who differentiates between four levels of activity. Play is activity pursued for its own sake, games are organized play, contests are games that have winners and losers, and sports are contests with a physical component. Guttman defines sport as “‘playful’ physical contests, that is, as non-utilitarian contests which include an important measure of physical as well as intellectual skill” (p. 7). These activities are at the heart of the most essential aspects of a culture in education, and the culture of communication and performance education in particular.

Consider academic competition, both with others and within ourselves. In high school course selections include course offerings that contribute to higher weighted GPAs and prepare students for college. The burning question at the end of everyone’s junior year is “What did you get on the ACT?”

Grade point averages and standardized test scores are measures success in current ventures, as well as potential for success after high school. Honor societies provide both membership for exemplary students, as well as opportunities to advance through competition, service, and other activities. Each of these represent core elements of the school experience that promote competition within one’s self. Within speech and theatre education, auditioning for roles and competing at

forensic tournaments reinforce the importance of competition as an interpersonal reality. Perhaps the most readily apparent element within any sports context is competition, or Guttman's idea of contest. Our students – athletes or not – are intimately familiar and experienced with competition products of our disciplines' curricula.

This competition and sports influence is not a negative influence by any means. While it is possible to become overly anxious about reaching goals, and competitive with others to a point of becoming too egocentric, these potential excesses are the teachable moments that are inherent in adolescence. The likely effect of a sports mentality in school is that learning is made more exciting, resulting in more engaged students. Even as young children, games provide motivation, including identifying outcomes for individual accomplishment and success that is within, as opposed to being at others' expense. At home we would motivate our sometimes lethargic children to do chores or fulfill other responsibilities by creating competitive frameworks such as setting time limits to beat or offering incentives to earn. For most people, games are fun. Games also have bright lines as to when they are done or when you do well, allowing for immediately measurable outcomes within learning environments, as well as motivation for students to engage in the learning process.

Ultimately the inclusion of sports and competition in schools blends the familiar and fun with the essential and sometimes less loved. Most of our families have integrated sports into their collective and individual lives. There are parents who played (or still play), children who play, events the family attends, backyard or kitchen table games, or shared adoration for a favorite team or player (or in my case, a mixed family with half declaring their loyalty to both the Cubs and Cardinals). The connection of education and learning with sports and competition is natural and infinitely promising as a way of improving the learning for our children.

### **Nature of Sports Communication**

Perhaps the fastest growing interest area within communication studies is sports communication. The inaugural meeting of the "Communication and Sport" division within the National Communication Association (NCA) was held at NCA's 2015 conference; attendees had to stand outside the door. A division-sponsored short

course on teaching sports communication was offered at the 2016 conference with a near full capacity attendance. Several colleges and universities throughout the country are offering sports communication courses, as well as both majors and minors in the field. High schools are offering courses such as sports journalism, sports literature, and sports management. These schools also provide co-curricular opportunities as sports announcers and journalists (Moore, 2016).

In a recent survey of select sports communication majors throughout the country, the interdisciplinary nature of the area of study was made clear. Core courses within these majors ranged from video and film production to sports marketing, and from public speaking to culture and sports. Courses most common across the spectrum were public speaking, introduction to sports communication, writing/sports print journalism, culture and society, and research methods. Most sports communication majors blend core communication courses with others specific to the study of sports. Ultimately, any communication program likely has the framework in place to add a handful of sports courses and create a program of study.

The value of a sports communication program is immeasurable. A critical number of our students have an interest in sports, and the potential for employment in sports-related fields is enormous. Sanderson (2011) writes about the growing influence of social media in sports, noting that communication about sports permeates our daily lives. Among the most watched television shows each year is the Super Bowl. The most frequent tweets, according to Sanderson, are about sports. On any given day our classrooms are filled with students wearing the colors, logos, and numbers of their favorite sports teams and players. In my own informal networking with sports communication educators I have found that many programs have had to institute enrollment caps to manage their growth. The added bonus is that sports communication students have the potential for employment after graduation. The interdisciplinary nature of sports communication creates a breadth of career opportunities, ranging from journalism (print or broadcast) to social media managers, and from sports information directors to marketing or public relations professionals.

The growing popularity of sports communication, coupled with a desire to create enticements for new students and teach what I have loved all of my life led me to design a sports communication major at Webster University in St. Louis. The process involved attending conferences,

researching existing programs, networking with colleagues who have created similar programs, and determining the viability of such a major within our School of Communications. A 2014 issue of *Spectra*, the newsletter of the NCA, originally sparked my interest with its focus on communication and sports. The relevance of the area of study, along with the breadth of its content, solidified my plans. The issue included articles on promoting college sports, the debate over Native American mascots, and managing social media as part of sports fandom (Shalala, 2014; Black, 2014; Earnhardt, 2014). It was clear to me that sports communication had the potential to be a high-quality and attractive program in our school.

I began by determining what constitutes a typical sports communication major, and I learned that while a core of courses exists, programs often reflect their own institutions. This realization only heightened my enthusiasm, because our School of Communication has 16 majors within three departments. This means our school has a number of courses in place that compliment a sports communication major. With the help of my colleagues, an eventual major was created that combined new courses specific to sports communication with existing courses that provide essential knowledge and skills for any sports communication professional. (You can reference appendix A for the current course of study and areas of concentration.) I shared our proposed major with colleagues at the 2015 NCA conference. While I received a wealth of praise for the program, one comment stood out as what I am now using as a marketing pitch to potential students. The combination of skill and knowledge, along with the potential for areas of concentration, create a liberal arts approach to studying sports communication. Students take core courses in presentations, sports economics, writing, ethics and law, research, culture, advertising or public relations, and critical sports messaging. Electives include courses that range from production to marketing. The first SPTC course, fully enrolled, was offered in the Fall, 2016 semester.

In the end, sports communication courses and learning opportunities are responsive to the needs and interests of our students. They can recruit to our programs. They can provide training for employment. They can also be integrated into existing non-sports communication and performance curricula in ways that enrich teaching and learning. The potential for sports communication to enrich our teaching and our students' learning is infinite.

## **Integrating Sports and Games into Speech and Theatre Teaching Spaces**

There are countless ways to integrate sports into our classrooms and teaching spaces. What follows is by no means an exhaustive list of suggestions that can be successful within what we already teach. (You can reference appendix B for selected assignments and course designs that help sports facilitate learning in performance and communication classrooms.)

### *Competitions*

Many schools sponsor programs that include competitions within their framework. Whether it be forensics, theatre, or journalism, our students are no strangers to competing. The motivation provided by contests can heighten learning within our students. While the content they present may not be specific to sports, the ethic behind the competition is central to our society's embracement of sports and competition. These students are often among the most successful at our schools, likely due in part to their heightened passion for learning and drive to excel within their competitive contexts.

### *Case Studies for Teaching Concepts and Theories*

We teach our students countless concepts in which sports provide a number of compelling examples. Students are tweeting about, watching, playing, and discussing sports on a daily basis. Encouraging an integration of what is familiar to many into unfamiliar concepts can help our students better understand by making learning more immediate to them.

Discussions of credibility and image can be grounded in any number of examples of sports figures who illustrate positive and poor character. These examples seem to make themselves available to us on a daily basis. Further, our students often have sports heroes and favorite sports teams that provide illustrations for competent communication and the power of image on audience. Lessons in marketing, branding, and the power of communication choices to shape impression management are grounded in individuals and groups with which our students are very familiar.

Studies of culture can benefit from illustrations from the sports world. National Football League players over the past two seasons have sparked a national dialogue about protest, privilege, and patriotism by “taking a knee” during pre-game playing of the national anthem. The most recent summer Olympics sparked conversation and critique about differences between men’s and women’s sports, ranging from the attire worn to the manner in which each gender was treated in interviews. Consider that the best woman’s gymnastic team in the world capped off their successful performances by a visit from Zac Efron, a celebrity admired by members of the squad. A discussion about the likelihood of such a promotion for male athletes would highlight critical dimensions of any study of gender communication.

### *Broadcasting, Print Journalism, and Media Production*

We teach journalism, and sports is a popular dimension of that field. Using school athletic competitions, or even live or previously played games, can allow students actual subjects to broadcast and report. These real examples provide students with opportunities to develop skills that will make them marketable for internships and employment. Further, as Moore (2016) notes, sharing resources between levels of teaching can create invaluable networking and learning opportunities.

### *Role Playing and Performance*

Character studies can be found in sports celebrities. Both the communication personalities, as well as the depth of sports’ characters can make for fascinating and meaningful discussion and role playing. Consider, for example, Reggie White and Mike Singletary. Each of these football players, Hall of Fame inductees, were tenacious defensive players. When not playing football, they were a preacher and lawyer – and each outspoken advocates for the Fellowship of Christian Athletes, despite being stars whose physical aggression made them exceptional. When notable participants balance their athletic personalities with very different personalities outside of sports, it displays a range of identity and communication that can be useful when working with performers.

## *Social Media*

Today's adolescents and college students rely on social media for much, if not the majority of their communication and daily activity. Helping our students understand responsible use of social media is an essential element in the communication classroom. Sports contexts provide terrific examples for teaching competent social media management and use. As Billings, Butterworth, and Turman (2015) note, irresponsible social media activity has led to countless problems for schools. Some universities exercise explicit control over their athletes' social media activity, ranging from disallowing some social media accounts to providing a list of words that may not appear in athletes' social media posts. Educators can bring these current and immediate examples into the classroom.

## *Encourage Sports Topics for Projects*

Clearly sports are a dominant part of our students' lives. We encourage selection of topics for papers, speeches, and projects that are of interest to our students. Educators can be deliberate about suggesting sports-related topics. Content within sports subjects is substantive, ranging from topics like social justice to abuse, and from eating disorders to philanthropy. Performers can select from an array of literary choices that capture their interest in sports. Speakers can focus on individuals or issues that are salient and positioned to spark rich discussion. When students are integrating their own interests into school projects, they are increasing the likelihood of being highly engaged in the learning process.

## **Summary**

Sports and games are an inherent and influential part of our society. The thrill of competition is at the heart of many of us, whether we are blessed with athletic talent or only dream of such skill. Issues central to the daily lives of our students are found in sports contexts. Embracing that reality and integrating it into our communication and performance classrooms can result in educational experiences for both teacher and student that are sincere, substantive, and enduring. The power of connecting students' interests with their learning is indescribable – and a certain win for all involved.

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***Scott Jensen (MA, University of Central Missouri) is a Full Professor  
of Sports Communication and Speech Communication Studies at  
Webster University. He is Executive Secretary and a past president of  
the Speech and Theatre Association of Missouri.***

## **Appendix A**

### **Sports Communication Degree Program Catalogue Copy**

## **Sports Communication (BA)**

This program is offered by the School of Communications/Department of Communication and Journalism

### **Program Description**

The many manifestations of sports constitute a large and growing industry with an expanding need for professional communicators stretching across--children's after school activities, adults' exercise, leisure, gym classes, and amateur leagues, the high school, college, and professional leagues that fill stadiums, newspaper columns, talk radio, and television channels, retail sporting goods, video games, fantasy sports, and sports betting. This major will prepare students for those professional roles and to be critically reflective audience participants. The Sports Communication degree explores the various aspects of the sports industry, focusing on communication strategies and media. The program provides a unique balance of theory and practice that spans the breadth of sports cultures. The sports communication curriculum also frames core and elective coursework in a way that builds a solid foundation with flexibility for the pursuit of individual interests within sports fields. The combination of a broadly framed curriculum and a senior capstone internship or thesis project equips students for a variety of careers as professional sports communicators.

### **Learning Outcomes**

Successful graduates of this program will be able to:

- demonstrate an understanding of the academic field of sports communication;
- communicate effectively about sports and related matters as they pertain to specific audiences and sports-related contexts; and
- apply communication skills as they connect multiple areas of sports communication in discussion, analysis, and/or the creation of academic and professional work.

### **Degree Requirements**

A minimum of 128 credit hours consisting of the following:

- 45 required credit hours
- Applicable University Global Citizenship Program hours
- Electives

### **Required Courses**

- EPMD 1010 Intro to Media Production for Journalism (3 hours)
- SPCM 1040 Public Speaking (3 hours)
- MEDC 1050 Introduction to Media Writing (3 hours)
- or- JOUR 1030 Fundamentals of Reporting
- SPTC 1800 Sports Communication (3 hours)
- ADVT 1940 Introduction to Marketing Communication (3 hours)
- or- PBRL 1010 Fundamentals of Strategic Communications and Public Relations
- MEDC 2200 Ethics in the Media (3 hours)
- MEDC 3190 Introduction to Media Research (3 hours)
- ECON 3737 The Business of Sports (3 hours)
- SPTC 4100 Culture of Sports and Society (3 hours)
- MEDC 4100 Law and the Media (3 hours)
- SPTC 4600 Sports Media Strategies (3 hours)
- MEDC 4950 Professional Media Internship (3 hours)
- or- SPTC 4620 Senior Overview

### **In addition, a minimum of 9 credit hours must be chosen from the following:**

- ADVT 3200 Sports Marketing Communication (3 hours)
- BUSN 4747 Sports Operations and Logistics (3 hours)
- FTVP 1000 Intro to Film, Video, & Television Production (3 hours)
- SPCM 3500 Presentations for Media Professionals (3 hours)
- JOUR 3050 Sports Reporting (3 hours)
- PBRL 4050 Special Events (3 hours)
- PBRL 4300 Crisis Communications Management (3 hours)
- PBRL 4800 Media Relations (3 hours)
- SPTC 3200 Communicating Baseball (3 hours)
- SPTC 3800 Topics in Sports Communication (1-3 hours)
- SPTC 4610 Readings in Sports Communication (3 hours)
- SPTC 4620 Senior Overview

### **Areas of Study**

Although any combination of these courses can be taken to fulfill the degree requirements, courses can be grouped by areas for students who want to focus on a particular aspect within sports communication.

*Journalism*

FTVP 1000 Introduction to Film, Video, and Television Production  
JOUR 1030 Fundamentals of Reporting  
ADVT 1940 Introduction to Marketing Communication  
**-or-** PBRL 1010 Fundamentals of Strategic Communications and Public  
Relations  
JOUR 3050 Sports Reporting

*Production*

FTVP 1000 Introduction to Film, Video, and Television Production  
MEDC 1050 Introduction to Media Writing  
ADVT 1940 Introduction to Marketing Communication  
**-or-** PBRL 1010 Fundamentals of Strategic Communications and Public  
Relations  
SPCM 3500 Presentations for Media Professionals

*Marketing*

MEDC 1050 Introduction to Media Writing  
ADVT 1940 Introduction to Marketing Communication  
PBRL 4050 Special Events  
PBRL 4300 Crisis Communications Management  
BUSN 4747 Sports Operations and Logistics

*Sports Information*

PBRL 1010 Fundamentals of Strategic Communications & Public  
Relations  
MEDC 1050 Introduction to Media Writing  
JOUR 3050 Sports Reporting  
PBRL 4300 Crisis Communications Management  
BUSN 4747 Sports Operations and Logistics  
PBRL 4800 Media Relations

*Theory/Education*

MEDC 1050 Introduction to Media Writing  
ADVT 1940 Introduction to Marketing Communication  
**-or-** PBRL 1010 Fundamentals of Strategic Communications and Public  
Relations  
SPCM 3200 Communicating Baseball  
BUSN 4747 Sports Operations and Logistics

## **Appendix B**

### **Introduction to Sports Communication Syllabus and Selected Sports Communication Assignments**

## **SPTC-1800 – Sports Communication (abbreviated) Fall 2016**

**Instructor** Scott Jensen, Professor and Director of Forensics  
243 Sverdrup  
(314) 968-7439 – office  
[jensensc@webster.edu](mailto:jensensc@webster.edu)

**Office Hours** MW 11:00-12:00, TR 10:00-11:30, and by appointment

### **Course Description**

This course provides an introduction to communication within sports contexts. Students explore the evolution and likely future of sports communication strategies and messages, along with how this communication is important within society. This includes examinations of communicating as media practitioners within sports contexts, as well as the culture of sport.

### **Learning Outcomes**

Students will:

1. Understand how communication principles apply to sports contexts;
2. Identify professional opportunities within the field of sports communication and skills necessary to compete for those opportunities;
3. Analyze the content of sport messaging within a variety of contexts and media; and
4. Evaluate the importance of sports within a society's culture.

### **Course Materials**

#### *Required Readings...*

Billings, A. C.; Butterworth, M. L.; Turman, P. D. *Communication and Sport; Surveying the Field*. Sage. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. ISBN: 978-1-4522-7913-8

Sanderson, J. *It's a Whole NEW Ballgame: How Social Media is Changing Sports*. Hampton. 1<sup>st</sup> ed. ISBN: 978-1-61289-053-1

Wertheim, L. J.; Sommers, S. *This is Your Brain on Sports: The Science of Underdogs, The Value of Rivalry, and What We Can Learn from the T-Shirt Cannon*. Crown Archetype. 1<sup>st</sup> ed. ISBN: 978-0-553-44740-8

Other readings will be provided throughout the semester.

#### *Films...*

*Bleacher Bums*

*Resurrecting the Champ*

## Assignments

Students will be graded on a variety of assignments, as well as their attendance and participation in class discussions. Each of these projects will be detailed when they are assigned. Their assignment dates are indicated with an “A” on the daily schedule. Due dates are indicated with a “D.” A brief description and point value of each is as follows:

**Sports Messaging Analysis** **75 pts**

Students will select a sports “message” and trace its messaging over the course of several weeks. The project will include two papers – a rationale and a completed paper that includes both the rationale and an analysis of the communication.

**Career Exploration Reports** **75 pts**

Students will complete three reports of potential careers in the field of sports communication. Reports will include both interviews and reports of researchable details about the career.

**Fandom Group Project** **150 pts**

Groups of students will select a fan base of their choice and trace its communication, along with its impact on the entity or context for which they are fans. Several area of analysis will be assigned as part of the project. It will culminate in both a paper and presentation. Grades will include individual presentation grades, a group presentation grade, a group writing grade, and a peer review grade.

**Greatest Moment in Sports Presentations** **50 pts**

Students will present a speech that provides a personal and researched reflection on what they deem to be “the greatest moment in sports.”

**Brain on Sports Presentations** **50 pts**

Students will be assigned a chapter in one of the course’s texts; *this is Your Brain on Sports*. Students will report on their chapter in terms of both its content, and its implications for what it suggests about dynamics of sports communication.

**Celebrations of Knowledge** **200 pts**

Student will have two “tests” during the semester. Each will have a combination of objective (true/false), multiple choice, matching) and subjective (short answers) items. Previews and study guides will be available.

**Participation and Attendance** **30 pts**

Students will receive consideration for being fully engaged during the semester. This means attending regularly and contributing positively I class sessions.

**Total Points Possible** **630 pts**

**SPTC 1800 – Introduction to Sports Communication**

*Daily Schedule*

*Fall 2016*

- M 8/22 Course Overview and Introductions  
W 8/24 Communicating Sports  
**R Billings et al, 1**  
**A Sports Messaging Analysis**
- F 8/26 Communicating Sports
- M 8/29 Characters in Sports  
**R Billings et al, 2**
- W 8/31 Sports and Media Messaging  
**R Billings et al, 3**
- F 9/2 Sports and Social Media-Overview  
**R Sanderson, 1**
- M 9/5 NO CLASS – Labor Day Holiday  
W 9/7 Sports and Social Media  
**R Sanderson, 2-3**
- F 9/9 Sports and Social Media  
**R Sanderson, 3-4**  
**A Career Exploration Reports**  
**A Fandom Group Project**  
**D Sports Messaging Analysis-Topic Selection and Rationale**
- M 9/12 Fandom  
**R Billings et al, 4**  
**A Greatest Moment in Sports” Presentation**
- W 9/14 Career Round Table  
F 9/16 Career Round Table
- M 9/19 **View Bleacher Bums**  
W 9/21 **View Bleacher Bums**  
F 9/23 **View Bleacher Bums**
- M 9/26 Heroes and the Sports Story  
**R Billings et al, 5**
- W 9/28 Gender and Sport  
**R Billings et al, 6**
- F 9/30 **Celebration of Knowledge #1**

- M 10/3 Race and Sport  
**R Billings et al, 7**  
**D Career Exploration Report #1**
- W 10/5 NO CLASS – WebsterWorksWorldwide
- F 10/7 **“Greatest Moment in Sport” Presentations**
- M 10/10 **“Greatest Moment in Sport” Presentations**
- W 10/12 **“Greatest Moment in Sport” Presentations**
- F 10/14 **“Greatest Moment in Sport” Presentations**

Week of 10/17- Fall Break

- M 10/24 Family and Sport  
**R Billings et al, 10**  
**A “Brain on Sports” Presentations**
- W 10/26 Coaching Dynamics and Sport  
**R Billings et al, 10**  
**D Sports Messaging Analysis Paper**
- F 10/28 Coaching Panel and Q/A
- M 10/31 Team and Sports  
**R Billings et al, 12**  
**D Career Exploration Report #2**
- W 11/2 Club Management Panel and Q/A
- F 11/4 Performing Sports Identities  
**R Billings et al, 9**
- M 11/7 **View Resurrecting the Champ**
- W 11/9 **View Resurrecting the Champ**
- F 11/11 **View Resurrecting the Champ**
- M 11/14 Politics and Sport  
**R Billings et al, 8**
- W 11/16 Crisis Communication and Image Repair  
**R Billings et al, 13**
- F 11/18 **Celebration of Knowledge #2**
- M 11/21 Commodifying Sports  
**R Billings et al, 14**
- W 11/23 **Group Work Day – Fandom Project**
- F 11/25 NO CLASS – Thanksgiving Holiday

- M 11/28 Gaming and Sports  
**R Billings et al, 15**  
**D Career Exploration Report #3**
- W 11/30 “Brain on Sports” Presentations  
F 12/2 “Brain on Sports” Presentations  
**D Fandom Group Project- Written Work**
- M 12/5 “Brain on Sports” Presentations  
W 12/7 “Brain on Sports” Presentations  
F 12/9 **Group Work Day – “Fandom Project”**

***Finals Week***

- W 12/14 **Group Presentation – “Fandom Project”**  
10:30-12:30

SPTC 1800 – Introduction to Sports Communication  
*Greatest Moment in Sports Speech Project*

PURPOSE

Few stories are more inspiring than ones that center on great moments. Great sports moments bring with them unique drama and excitement because of the competition, action, and characters that are frequently at the heart of these stories. This project employs all the traditional skills of public speaking with a tribute to what the student sees as the greatest moment in sports.

DESCRIPTION

For this speech, the student must select what they see as the greatest moment in sports. The speech is a tribute to this moment, including a reference to some aspect of how it was communicated. This involves speaking to the audience about the significance of the moment with a reference to a broadcast, story, etc. that is part of society's familiarity with the moment.

To further insure the widespread prominence of this moment, each speech must include at least one print source, such as a book, magazines, etc. While students may also use audio-visual sources or interviews, these may not count as the one required source.

*A bibliography of the source(s) used must be handed in the day the student speaks. The speech will not receive grade consideration until the bibliography is handed in.*

This speech must be 4 to 6 minutes in length. Students will receive a grade deduction of one point for every 15 seconds over or under that time frame.

Students will not be required to hand in any outline or manuscript for grade consideration. HOWEVER, students will be allowed only a single sided, 8 ½ x 11 page of notes, preferably in a key word outline forms. Students may, of course, choose to use less notes. However, this is the

maximum allowable number of pages to be used while delivering the speech.

*Students will be asked to hand in the notes they use after they complete their presentation. A ten percent deduction in the final project grade will be assessed to all students who use more than one page of notes.*

This speech will be worth 50 points.

NOTE: One source is not all excessive for a 4 to 6 minute speech. However, more sources were not required, so as to allow for the student to make use of his/her own personal insights and reactions. While this is highly encouraged, do not forget the elements of a sound speech discussed in class, such as the steps of an introduction and conclusion, distinct main points, etc.

***Tribute to the Greatest Moment in Sports Speech Evaluation***

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Time (4-6 minutes) \_\_\_\_\_

Subject: \_\_\_\_\_ Grade 50-45=A \_\_\_\_\_  
44-40=B  
39-35=C  
34-30=D

INTRODUCTION: (0-5) \_\_\_\_\_

Did the student effectively introduce the topic, making clear a relationship between the topic and the audience?

CONCLUSION: (0-5) \_\_\_\_\_

Did the student clearly focus the main idea of the speech? Was an appropriate mood evident?

BODY: (0-10) \_\_\_\_\_

Were main ideas clearly and logically organized? Were ideas fully developed?

CONTENT: (0-10) \_\_\_\_\_

Did the speaker clearly draw the relationship between the greatest moment and the audience? Did the presentation include a clear reference to well-known communication of the event? Was language appropriate?

DELIVERY: (0-20) \_\_\_\_\_

Were elements of effective physical and verbal delivery evident? Was animation purposeful and controlled? Was variety present in the delivery?

SPTC 1800—Introduction to Sports Communication  
*Sports Messaging Analysis Assignment*

This project asks students to identify any sports-related subject and monitor how it is communicated over the course of several weeks. It helps students understand the many ways single ideas are communicated, and how diverse messaging of a common idea may or may not vary the meanings people connect to what is being shared.

Each student will select a sports-related topic to trace through various messaging over the course of several weeks. This subject can be anything sports-related, including but not limited to an athlete, a team, a sports product, a general sport, a socio-political issue within a sports context, or a campaign. Students will observe and analyze the communication of this subject, writing a report that reflects specific observations and conclusions about the collection of messaging. Students will complete this project in two parts, each with the following requirements:

Topic Selection and Rationale

Students will write a paper, no less than one and a half pages, typed in a font no larger than 12 point, double-spaced, that answers the following questions:

1. What subject is being analyzed? What aspects of this subject are the focus for the analysis, and what, if anything, related to this subject is being left out of the analysis?
2. Why did you select this subject? What is its social significance? What is its personal significance?
3. What sources of messaging will be included in your analysis? In what contexts and through which media is this subject generally communicated?
4. What do you hope to better understand about this subject and the messaging of the subject as a result of your analysis?

This part of the project is due ***Friday, September 9<sup>th</sup>***. It is worth 25 points.

### Completed Written Analysis

Students will conduct an analysis of their selected subject over the course of several weeks. They will report results and conclusions of their analysis in a paper, no less than three pages, typed in a font no larger than 12 point, double-spaced, that adheres to these requirements:

- Students should identify a minimum of three different sources for the messaging of their selected subject. These sources should be used for the entirety of the analysis. Examples might include Facebook, ESPN or a specific ESPN show, a specific print source, or a particular reporter or sports analyst. While students are able to add unique messaging when available, these three (or more) sources must be analyzed for the duration of the period of analysis. Among these three sources, at least one must be a form of social media.
- Provide a brief rationale for the sources you selected. Why are these particularly appropriate for your analysis?
- For the duration of the period of analysis, students should monitor the messaging of their selected subject, looking at...
  1. When and how often is the topic messaged within each selected source?
  2. What is communicated about the subject?
  3. What is the tone of the messaging – positive, negative, emotional, informative...?
  4. How varied are the messages – the same things continually discussed or a variety of topics within the general subject area?
- When the analysis is complete, students should collect and review their observations, noting...
  1. What are the most significant topics that are messaged?
  2. What differences and similarities are seen when comparing the selected sources?
  3. Does one source emerge as more credible, entertaining, engaged with the subject, etc.?

4. Does messaging change over the course of the analysis period, and do changes exist within single sources or across all sources analyzed?
  5. What observations are made when looking at the messaging in social media?
- Students should write their paper, being certain to address, at minimum, the following:
    1. What similarities and differences exist among the analyzed sources in the messaging of the selected subject? (Consider, for example, differences in the tone of messaging, importance paid to the subject, and frequency of messaging.)
    2. What are the most common messages communicated about your selected subject?
    3. In what ways do you conclude different meanings about this same subject as a product of differences in messaging?
    4. Do you draw any conclusions about messaging that you find more or less credible than other messaging, and for what reasons do you draw these conclusions?
    5. What are specific examples that support the observations and conclusions you make within your analysis?
    6. What are the most important conclusions you draw from this analysis?
    7. What are the most important implications you draw from your conclusions and this analysis?

The final paper is due **Wednesday, October 26<sup>th</sup>**. It is worth 50 points.

## **Can We Build This School? Negotiation for Civic Involvement**

*David A. Wendt*

### **Abstract**

*Civic engagement is a recent focus in K-12 classrooms. There is a philosophical push in education to help students gain an understanding of just how our political system operates. Most teens do not feel they need to fully comprehend the system of government until it challenges them. This exercise gives students a realistic problem that could affect them on a real life level: building a new high school building.*

### **Objective**

Group consensus, through negotiation, is the projected outcome of this simulation. The goal of this simulation is to build a new high school building on donated land while taking into account four very different concerns from the population. There is no specific right or wrong answer as there have been numerous diverse correct answers in the past. If each group agrees to the outcome as their mandates have been met, then the process of negotiation has been successful. Students are placed in groups and will have the perspective of a specific interest of the “community”:

1. Pro New School Group,
2. Chamber of Commerce Group,
3. No New Taxes Group and
4. Board of Education Group.

Course: Fundamentals of Speech, Argumentation and Debate or any course that emphasizes critical thinking skills and/or civic engagement. For most class time schedules, this activity will take either two or three class periods depending upon the negotiation process and debriefing session.

### **The Activity**

Students are divided into four equitable groups. This will work for a class of eight students to forty students very easily. Each group will be given a handout that provides their group perspective with information

concerning the proposed new high school building. Each group will have common information that all groups have access and group specific information that only their group will have access.

Upon receiving their information, seven minutes will be given for all groups to prepare their opening statement and begin to develop their bargaining strategy. The selected speaker for each group will have three minutes to give their opening statement. A three-minute cross-examination period will follow each opening speech. (24 minutes for this part of the activity)

After the opening “city hall” session, groups will meet for ten minutes to discuss their strategy for the first negotiation session. Two members of each group will advance to the bargaining table for the first 15-minute session. Only those eight persons (two from each team) may voice their opinions, ask questions, etc. Group members may submit written notes to their team speakers during the negotiation session.

Two more ten-minute sessions will be held with a five-minute strategy session following each negotiation session. Different team members or the same two members may represent each round of bargaining.

If, at the end of the third session of negotiations, there is no decision, the facilitator (teacher) may suggest a small piece of information to encourage consensus or analyze the barriers that occur. If a consensus appears close, then another short session can be added for a successful decision.

### **Debriefing**

After the final round of negotiation, class members should be given several minutes to evaluate and analyze the results of this activity.

Questions to be considered:

1. What were the key points of the negotiation process?
2. Why was the negotiation successful? If failed, why did it fail?
3. Who provided the most effective compromises?
4. What pieces of information were the most important? Why?
5. Did certain styles of negotiation persuade you more heavily? Explain.

6. How realistic is this information? (This is based from a real situation as bond referendums failed numerous times.)
7. Would this process work on a regional level? State level? National level? International level?
8. Is this a career that you would like to pursue for the future?

### **Appraisal**

This activity has proven to be very successful in both high school and college classrooms. Speaking skills, listening skills, critical thinking skills and problem-solving skills are the foundation of this negotiation. Students demonstrate these skills constantly throughout the process. Student leaders will emerge and quiet reflective thinkers will have time to provide strategies and options for collaboration.

The creativity of each outcome is vastly different from class to class. No class has ever failed in the process. Several decisions were made during the final seconds of the last session, but all groups agreed to the final decision. The Facilitator Fact Sheet can provide last minute details that can guide the groups to success.

One possible evaluation procedure for this activity could be a 750-1000 word paper discussing the negotiation process. Each student could select the major points of argumentation that influenced their personal decision and briefly discuss the impact. Each student could analyze the actions of each team and how those actions influenced the success or failure of the simulation. Another possible topic for the paper could include the fundamentals of civic involvement and how it worked in this situation.

One possible concern occurs if this process cannot be completed in one class meeting. Group leaders might meet secretly, out of class time, to perhaps form covert deals that other groups are not included. This could be discussed in the debriefing session if this does occur.

#### *GROUP 1 Hand out*

You totally support a new high school complex being built on the edge of the city of Sutter. The Wendt Estate is donating 100 acres of land to the city of Sutter. This land will be given free of charge with only factor

citing that the school must have the name of Wendt in the name of the school. The current high school was built in 1950. Though the structure is solid, there are problems of overcrowding, computer wiring issues and parking issues. This school stands in the middle of the city with no opportunity to purchase surrounding land. Your group is highly supportive of this action. You realize that a new school will enhance the city to future business.

*GROUP 2 Hand out*

You are a group of business people representing the business interests in Sutter. You have heard that the school board will be proposing to build a new building on the edge of the city. What will this do the current economy of the city? If the students are on the edge of town, they will go to Conrad for their lunch and possibly to shop for other items. The chamber has strongly supported the school district in the past and this move will strain the relations. The current economy is not strong and any possible loss could close some businesses. You strongly support a quality education, but where are the limits? Sutter is a great place to live and we must use our public relations at all times. It helps that the people of the state know the name of Sutter as those past 15 state championships have brought the name of Sutter to the forefront of people's minds.

*GROUP 3 Hand out*

Your group is upset with the constant increase in taxes. This proposed new school will simply increase the property tax again. A new middle school was just built three years ago. The current school building and their problems are not that bad! Businesses will not relocate to the city of Sutter due to the high taxes. There is simply no reason to build a new school! The five elementary buildings were all built in the 1920's and will need to be replaced in the near future. You understand that the children will receive a quality education, but at what price to the community?

*GROUP 4 Hand out*

Your group is the Sutter Board of Education. One hundred acres of land have been donated to the city for a much needed new high school

building. The estate will give the land to the city with the only factor being that the name of the school must be changed to Wendt High School. The current high school is overcrowded, doesn't have enough parking and has severe wiring issues for computer labs and other technology. Frankly, the landscaping is unattractive and the budget does not allow money for future work. A new middle school was completed three years ago. The major problem is the fact that all five elementary buildings were built in the 1920's and will need to be replaced in the near future. The city has been very supportive of education in the past and you do not want to strain the relationship. This school has been very successful in the past with numerous state championships in athletics and academics. You consider this to be a progressive school system!!!!!!

### **FACILITATOR FACTS**

1. The name of the estate should be changed to the teacher's name that is running the exercise. The students will have some relationship and ownership if they know the name of the estate. Minor changes can be made by the owner (facilitator) of the estate.
2. One hundred acres of land is being donated. Current research states that a new high school complex should have 25 acres. Elementary schools should have around five acres. This is not to be shared with the negotiation teams unless they specifically ask for this information. (I have had many teams who wanted to sell off part of the land so no new taxes would be needed. Also some teams have suggested that fast food restaurants or other stores could be built on parcels of the donated land to increase business for Sutter. Some teams have suggested that a large new elementary school could be built on the remaining land.)
3. Conrad is the next town approximately five miles from the donated land. The Sutter business area is four miles from the donated land. Sutter has ten fast food restaurants and five gas stations. Conrad has two fast food restaurants and two gas stations.

4. Notice that the name issue is different in Group 1 and Group 4. This has been done for a specific reason. In the Group 1 handout, it states that Wendt must be in the name. The Group 4 handout states that name of the high school must be changed to Wendt High School. Hopefully this information will be discovered in the negotiation process. This allows for some possible creative thinking on how to meet the requirements of the estate.
5. Sutter has five years to pay off the current new middle school building.
6. Most of the state championships in athletics have been in football and basketball.
7. The graduation rate for Sutter is approximately 92 percent. Only 60 percent of high school graduates attend post-secondary options.
8. Statistics from the last ten years have shown a constantly declining enrollment for the Sutter School District.
9. Time limits are flexible. If the students are involved in intense discussion, then extra minutes can be given. If the students are highly uninvolved, then minutes could be subtracted to avoid potential behavior problems.
10. These facts are for the facilitator only to be used when teams ask questions concerning specific information. Do not hide this information, but do not offer it without questions.

***David A. Wendt is an Adjunct Instructor in Communication and English at Iowa Wesleyan University. He recently retired after many years as Director of Student Services and Forensics Coach at Keokuk (IA) High School. He also teaches courses at the University of Iowa and Southeastern Community College.***