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Race, Crime and Athletes: A Qualitative Analysis of Framing in Local Newspaper Coverage of NFL Quarterbacks Michael Vick and Ben Roethlisberger

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RACE, CRIME AND ATHLETES: A QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS OF
FRAMING IN LOCAL NEWSPAPER COVERAGE OF NFL
QUARTERBACKS MICHAEL VICK AND BEN ROETHLISBERGER

by

Kristi Grim

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ABSTRACT
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QUARTERBACKS MICHAEL VICK AND BEN ROETHLISBERGER

by

Kristi Grim

The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2013
Under the Supervision of Professor David S. Allen

The present study researched the positive, negative, thematic and episodic framing contained in local newspaper coverage of two criminal investigations of National Football League quarterbacks: the Ben Roethlisberger rape case and the Michael Vick dog-fighting case. A qualitative analysis revealed stories about Roethlisberger were more likely to feature positive framing supporting the message that Roethlisberger was a good person who was innocent of criminal activity. By contrast, Vick articles were more likely to feature negative framing supporting the message that Vick was a criminal. In addition, articles on Roethlisberger were more likely to use thematic frames as a way to move blame away from Roethlisberger, while articles on Vick were more likely to feature episodic framing as a way to focus blame on Vick. In articles on Vick that featured thematic framing, the framing often served to reinforce the seriousness of Vick's alleged crime while thematic frames in articles on Roethlisberger trivialized his alleged crime. Adding to this trivialization of Roethlisberger's alleged crime was the frequent portrayal of the NFL, Pittsburgh Steelers, fans and Roethlisberger as the victim. The alleged victim in the Roethlisberger case was also much more likely to be framed negatively than the alleged victims in the Vick case.

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Chapter I: Introduction

Michael Vick, a talented African-American athlete, was drafted number one overall in 2001 by the National Football League team the Atlanta Falcons. He signed with the Falcons for six years and \$62 million. The pressure to perform well is immense for a first-round draft pick and Vick did see some early career success. His first year starting for the Falcons, Vick led the team to the playoffs and was selected for the Pro Bowl. Then in 2004, he was given a 10-year, \$130-million contract extension. It was at this point that the Falcons' record began to deteriorate, leaving the team with only a .500 record for the next several years. Vick began to face questions about his maturity level and whether he could handle pressure. In 2004, two men were arrested for transporting marijuana in a truck owned by Vick (Biography.com, 2012). Although Vick was not charged, it did reinforce questions about his maturity and the company he was keeping. In 2005, he faced another legal dilemma when a woman sued him for allegedly knowingly giving her herpes. Although he settled with the woman out of court, his biggest legal battle was still ahead of him (Biography.com, 2012). In 2007, his cousin was arrested for drug possession and gave the address of a property owned by Vick as his residence. When the police executed a search warrant of the premises on April 25, 2007, they found 66 dogs and evidence of a dog-fighting ring (including dog-fighting equipment, rooms with blood and a bloody rug). It was this evidence that led to accusations that Vick was running a dog-fighting ring, and he was indicted for the crime on July 17, 2007 (ESPN.com News Services, 2007).

When news first broke of Vick's dog-fighting ring, I was immediately caught up in the story. As a sports fan, I was already familiar with Vick but had no previous feelings of animosity or allegiance to him. My immediate reaction was one of disgust and outrage that he could have participated in dog fighting, and like many other people, I immediately decided he was guilty and should go to prison. My reaction to Vick's alleged criminal activities were a sharp contrast to my reaction a few years later when another NFL quarterback was accused of criminal activity.

Ben Roethlisberger, like Vick, had a bright football career. He was drafted number 11 overall by the Pittsburgh Steelers in the 2004 NFL draft. He led the Steelers to a Super Bowl title in 2006 and 2009. In July of 2009, only five months after his Super Bowl victory, a woman alleging rape filed a civil suit against Roethlisberger (USAToday.com, 2010). The case did not result in criminal charges, but on March 5, 2010, a 20-year-old college student filed a sexual assault complaint against Roethlisberger. Unlike Vick, Roethlisberger was never indicted and the Georgia district attorney announced on April 12, 2010, that criminal charges wouldn't be filed in the case (USAToday.com, 2010).

I was also already familiar with Roethlisberger when the sexual-assault complaint was filed in 2010. However, that background knowledge of the two players was the only thing my reactions had in common. Whereas with Vick I had neither liked nor disliked him before his story broke, I already slightly disliked Roethlisberger before I ever heard the word rape associated with his name. Still my immediate reaction to the breaking of the Roethlisberger rape allegations was one of disbelief. For some reason, I believed he was innocent and that the charges were a ploy by the alleged victim to get money.

Months later, I read parts of the police report and I was bothered by the fact that I had drawn such immediate and strong conclusions. I wondered what led to my hastily drawn conclusion that he was innocent while I had reacted the opposite way to Michael Vick's case. In hindsight I had stepped back and my opinions on Roethlisberger had changed, but it was this experience that started me thinking about whether the way these two issues were framed by media coverage affected my initial reactions. This thesis is an attempt to better understand how media frames might have influenced my thinking.

Framing research has proven to be a critical piece of media studies. If indeed frames are present in the media, as most researchers agree they are, they are a key to understanding how the media can set up a story to be interpreted in a certain way. In addition, frames can begin to reinforce existing stereotypes that in the long run are harmful to society. As Andrea M. Eagleman suggests, "When sport communication professionals use race and/or nationality to inappropriately construct and deconstruct realities of athletes of differing race and nationality, they contribute to the danger of creating and reinforcing a discriminating culture for individuals who may identify with the race or ethnicity of the offended athlete" (Eagleman, A.M., 2011). This is most certainly true of racial stereotypes, but framing has the potential to reinforce many other stereotypes as well.

I chose to look at two NFL players because football is arguably the most popular of American sports. One study found that over the course of three years, *USA Today*, the *New York Times* and the *Los Angeles Times* more frequently covered the criminal activities of football players over any other athletes (Mastro, D.E., Blecha, E., & Seate, A.A., 2011). I chose to study Vick and Roethlisberger because, as well-known

quarterbacks, their stories were some of the biggest controversies the NFL had seen. In addition to this, the different types of crimes they faced can provide important information about media attitudes toward different types of crimes. Athletes are people looked up to in American society and the way they are framed in news stories can play an important role in shaping society's meanings. Research shows that frames used in news articles can vary depending on the race of the characters involved, which can serve to reinforce racial stereotypes and impact how the audience perceives a story. There is also research that suggests the way the alleged victim is portrayed in sexual-assault stories can impact how the audience reacts to the story and how they perceive the alleged perpetrator (Franiuk, R., Seefeldt, J.L., & Vandello, J.A. and Markovitz, J., 2006). Studying the use of framing in the Roethlisberger and Vick cases provides a prime opportunity to explore these issues.

The next chapter will review existing research in the areas of sports, race, crime and sexual assault. In addition, it will explain my hypothesis and methodology. Following that will be a chapter examining the establishment of positive and negative frames and a chapter examining the establishment of thematic and episodic frames in the Vick and Roethlisberger cases. The final chapter will summarize my findings and discuss the limitations of this research.

Chapter II: Literature review, hypothesis, research questions & methodology

Media frames play an important role in how journalists construct media content as well as how the audience interprets the content. This chapter will define frames, discuss how journalists use frames to structure their stories, the influence these frames have on the audience's interpretations and the dominant types of frames used in media stories about athletes and criminal activities. The chapter will end with the presentation of the hypotheses, research questions and the methodology that will guide this study.

What are frames and framing?

James K. Hertog and Douglas M. McLeod advise that “frames... are cultural structures with central ideas and more peripheral concepts and a set of relations that vary in strength and kind among them.” These frames come from experiences and knowledge that is shared by a society, and they allow members of that society to communicate easily and effectively (Hertog, J.K., & McLeod, D.M., 2001).

Frames are produced and shaped by the political economy of the society. In their everyday interaction with powerful organizations and institutions, individuals, groups, and organizations are forced to adopt certain beliefs and behaviors in order to be effective. Beyond personal experience, portrayals of human/organizational/institutional interactions permeate the popular culture, further disseminating and reinforcing frames and at the same time shaping and molding them (Hertog, J.K., & McLeod, D.M., 2001).

Hertog and McLeod go on to advise that these frames are often made of “myths, narratives, and metaphors that resonate within a culture” (Hertog, J.K., & McLeod, D.M.,

2001). These ideas which are widely spread and known to members of the culture make up frames.

These frames exist within society and organizations, and journalists, often without even realizing, utilize these frames in their media pieces. Audiences also use the existing frames within culture to interpret media. Stephen Reese defines framing as “the way events and issues are organized and made sense of, especially by media, media professionals, and their audiences” (Reese, S.D., 2001). The media often use frames to determine what information is and is not important to include in a news story. Robert M. Entman offers a very similar definition, but also adds that frames often promote a specific interpretation of the story (Entman, R.M.,2007).

One example of how a societal frame can affect media coverage can be found in the Duke University lacrosse players’ rape scandal. Anna Kimberly Turnage explains how the frame that was widely present in the community shaped the early media coverage of the rape accusations. The community had experienced issues with Duke students in the past and there was a widely held idea that Duke students (and especially Duke athletes) were privileged elitists frequently mistreating blue-collar, hardworking Durham, N.C., residents. When an exotic dancer accused several Duke lacrosse players of raping her during a party where she was hired to perform, this community frame immediately colored both the angles the media took on the story and the reaction of community members (who immediately assumed the players were guilty). The accusations also played into frames of racism as members of the Durham community frequently referred to Duke University as “the plantation,” comparing the mostly white and wealthy student body to slave holders of the past. The fact that the alleged

perpetrators were white and a year's tuition at Duke cost more than an average Durham resident's salary, combined with the fact that the alleged victim was not wealthy and was African-American, played further into this "plantation" frame. Beyond the local community, this issue played into issues of "class, privilege and race" which spoke to frames widely recognizable across the United States. The actors involved in this drama, from the district attorney to the media, all played directly into a frame of "white privilege/wealthy privilege" taking advantage of the minorities and lower classes and created coverage of the incident that presumed the guilt of the players (Turnage, A.K., 2009).

Journalists and Frames

Frames serve an important role in shaping how journalists work by helping them decipher what information and sources to include in a story. When a story is first pitched, the reporter must immediately determine what "angle" he or she will take in the story. This angle is an important part of the frame of the story. By choosing that "angle" or frame, the reporter has already taken a big step in determining what information he or she will use and seek out for the story before he or she may even know the full story (Pavlik, J.V., 2001).

Hertog and McLeod note that by classifying a dominant frame, some details and actors automatically become marginalized. For example, if drugs are framed as a crime issue, then the health effects of drugs and doctors as sources are no longer relevant to the story being written. On the other hand, police officers or lawyers may be considered important sources to shed light on things like crime rates, sentencing, etc. This also

serves to make some “values” more important than others. Taking the drug example, the important goal or value may be ridding streets of drug-dealing criminals. If the issue were instead framed as a health concern, the important concern might rather be getting medical help for drug users. While utilizing a crime frame for this issue doesn’t mean getting help for drug users isn’t important, it does prevent it from being the focus of the story (Hertog, J.K., & McLeod, D.M., 2001). Journalists themselves did not create the crime or public health frames that might be used in these stories, but the frames are a part of the culture in which journalists and the audiences live.

A story’s frame also impacts the words used in a story. Hertog and McLeod provide the example of a “prolife” or “prochoice” story. If a story is framed as a “prolife” story, words like “baby, abortionist, pro-abortion forces, unborn, mother, and murder” would be commonly used. These words serve to portray the “prolife” movement in a more positive light. On the other hand, if the story is framed as a “prochoice” story, words like “fetus, doctor, woman, and freedom” would be prevalent. These words would serve to portray the “prochoice” movement in a more positive light. Many organizations and movements (like the “prochoice” and “prolife” movements) work to change public opinion and even public policy by pushing these frames into a culture (Hertog, J.K., & McLeod, D.M., 2001).

Examples of how this type of framing affects the way subjects are portrayed can be found in previous research. Donna L. Dickerson conducted a study of *New York Times*’ articles covering two professors involved in racial controversies. The first professor, Dr. Leonard Jeffries, was an African-American professor who made negative racial remarks about Jews, Italians, and whites. The second professor, Dr. Michael Levin, was a white

professor who made negative remarks about African-Americans, women, and homosexuals. Based on the standard news values (timeliness, proximity, impact, and prominence), the story of Dr. Levin's controversial remarks should have been more widely covered; however, Dr. Jeffries' remarks were covered in more and longer articles than Dr. Levin's. In addition, the newspaper covered the two professors differently. In stories about Jeffries, elite sources were frequently quoted painting Jeffries as "deviant," and in stories about Levin positive words were more often used to describe him (*e.g.* "brilliant" and "riveting"). Dickerson writes:

For Jeffries, the *Times* told the story of a discredited Black professor who targets Jews with his peculiar brand of virulent racism – a 'delegitimizing' frame. For Levin, the frame de-emphasizes his race and conservative affiliations and instead paints the picture of a stereotypical bespectacled White professor who writes about Black/White issues – a 'legitimizing' frame (Dickerson, D.L., 2001).

Although the two stories were very similar, the issues were portrayed quite differently. Neither professor's racial remarks were praised. However, the way they were framed legitimized the white professor while delegitimizing the black professor.

Another example of how frames can shape a story can be found in the story about the boxer and former Olympic champion Sugar Ray Leonard. Michael A. Messner and William S. Solomon found that when documents were leaked from Leonard's divorce proceedings, it was his admitted drug abuse that became the primary frame of the news stories. At the time, athletes and drugs were already a dominant cultural frame so most journalists focused on this angle of the story and only briefly mentioned his admitted physical abuse of his wife. As the story continued to be covered, this only became more prevalent with the wife-abuse angle being covered even less or not at all in many stories. While his violent treatment of his wife was no less important than his drug abuse, the

way the story was portrayed made the drug aspect the much more important piece of information. This also meant that the domestic violence was covered in far less detail, and no doubt influenced which sources were interviewed for the stories (Messner, M.A., & Solomon, W.S., 1993).

Frames and the Audience

Framing also plays an important role in how audiences will interpret issues. As Entman writes:

Framing works to shape and alter audience members' interpretations and preferences through priming. That is, frames introduce or raise the salience or apparent importance of certain ideas, activating schemas that encourage target audiences to think, feel and decide in a particular way (Entman, R.M., 2007).

Frames have been shown to have an impact on both the immediate and long-term interpretations of issues. Sophie Lecheler and Claes H. de Vreese conducted a study to learn the short-term and long-term effects of political frames on audiences. Their study found that frames had an immediate impact on how the audience felt about a political issue. Their study also demonstrated that after two weeks individuals with a moderate level of political knowledge were still more heavily influenced by the frame than individuals with a low- or high-level of political knowledge. The reason for this is individuals with lower political knowledge are susceptible to immediate framing affects but don't have the knowledge to "lastingly integrate the new information into their overall mental stockpile." Individuals with a higher-level of political knowledge are able to integrate the framing into their "mental stockpile," but are also more likely to resist a frame because they already have a wide range of political beliefs and knowledge they can draw upon. Those individuals who fall somewhere in between (*i.e.* moderately-

knowledgeable individuals) are susceptible enough and have enough political knowledge “to integrate the framed message” (Lecheler, S., & de Vreese, C.H., 2011).

Vanessa A. Baird and Amy Gangl also found that the frame used in stories about the U.S. Supreme Court strongly impacted audience reaction about whether the Court’s decisions were fair. Bair and Gangl conducted an experiment where some participants read stories which used a political frame to discuss Court decisions by describing some of the political aspects that go into the Court’s decisions. Other participants received stories where the Court’s decisions were described as being guided purely by the Constitution. Their findings suggest that those who read articles which showed only the legal reasoning behind the decisions were more likely to view the decision as completely fair while participants who read the other article were less supportive of the Court (Baird, V.A., & Gangl, A., 2006).

In their study, “An experimental test of the effects of fictional framing on attitudes,” Kenneth Mulligan and Philip Habel found that even framing in fictional media can have an impact on audience opinion. Habel and Mulligan conducted an experiment to study the effects of watching the *Cider House Rules* on attitudes toward morality and abortion in cases of incest. The film features a pro-choice frame in cases of incest and a frame suggesting morality is about following an individual’s conscience rather than rules established by others. Mulligan and Habel found that participants who had watched the movie were far more likely than those who hadn’t to support abortion in cases of incest. They also found that participants who watched *Cider House Rules* were more likely to say people should follow their conscience even if their actions were against the law. These findings suggest that even in cases of fictional media, where participants know that

what they are watching is not factually based, framing has an impact on opinion formation (Mulligan, K., & Habel, P., 2011).

Thematic & Episodic Framing

In addition to the many different frames that circulate in any culture, there are different kinds of frames that can play a role in how the story is written and interpreted. The use of thematic and episodic framing can impact how an audience reacts to the story. Thematic framing focuses on issues and events in a broader context, for example discussing murder statistics in Milwaukee rather than just telling the story of one person who was murdered. Episodic framing, on the other hand, focuses on a particular example of an issue. Shanto Iyengar notes:

The episodic news frames takes the form of a case study or event-oriented report and depicts public issues in terms of concrete instances (for example, the plight of a homeless person or teenage drug user, the bombing of an airliner, or an attempted murder). The thematic frame, by contrast, places public issues in some more general or abstract context and takes the form of a “takeout,” or “backgrounder,” report directed at general outcomes or conditions. Examples of thematic coverage include reports on changes in government welfare expenditures, congressional debates over the funding of employment training programs, the social or political grievances of groups undertaking terrorist activity, and the backlog in the criminal justice process. The essential difference between episodic and thematic framing is that episodic framing depicts concrete events that illustrate issues, while thematic framing presents collective or general evidence. Visually, episodic reports make “good pictures,” while thematic reports feature “talking heads” (Iyengar, S., 1991).

An important point to note is that most stories are not fully thematic or episodic. Iyengar points out that most stories have at least some element of both thematic and episodic framing; however, it is usually clear whether the dominant frame is thematic or episodic.

In practice, few news reports are exclusively episodic or thematic. Even the most detailed, close-up look at a particular poor person, for instance, invariably includes lead-in remarks by the anchorperson or reporter on the scope of poverty nationwide. Conversely, an account of the legislative struggle over budgetary cuts in social welfare programs might include a brief scene of children in a day-care center scheduled to close as a result of the funding cuts. For most stories, however, one frame or the other clearly predominates (Iyengar, S., 1991).

In the case of televised political news, Iyengar advises that episodic framing makes viewers less likely to hold public officials responsible for existing issues and fixing those issues. In an experiment testing the effects of episodic and thematic framing of television news crime reports, Iyengar found that episodic framing also increased an emphasis on individual responsibility for stories about white criminals and the judicial process. However, he found that the effects of episodic framing on stories about black criminals and illegal drugs were more limited. He attributed this to the fact that audiences were already more likely to hold individuals responsible in cases of illegal drugs and crimes committed by African-Americans. Iyengar also found, however, that participants who read an episodic frame about a crime committed by an African-American were much less likely to even mention societal causes for crime in their responses (Iyengar, S., 1991).

Lene Aaroe found that episodic frames that effectively create an emotional response in the audience are the most effective at influencing audience opinion; however, when there isn't a strong emotional reaction to stories, thematic frames are more influential (Aaroe, L., 2011).

In 2005, Kimberly Gross conducted an experiment to test whether episodic frames had a different emotional impact than thematic frames. To test this effect, she gave participants three articles written about mandatory minimum sentences. One of the stories was an episodic story about Janet Smith, a white woman facing a long mandatory

sentence for assisting her drug-dealing boyfriend. The second article provided the same story but with a black Janet Smith. And the third article was a thematic story on the topic. What she found was that the emotional response was far greater in the episodic stories, and there was no significant difference in the emotional response from the groups reading about the white or black Janet Smith (Gross, K., 2005).

In 2008, Gross repeated her experiment, but added in a test to account for the emotional reaction of the audience. Her second experiment still demonstrated that episodic framing was more emotionally engaging and more influential at influencing opinions when used in an opinion news piece. Both the thematic and episodic pieces were designed to sway opinion against mandatory sentencing. However, Gross also found that when the emotional response to the story was taken into account, thematic frames were more persuasive than episodic frames (Gross, K., 2008).

Gross' other finding that the race of the character in the story does not impact the reactions is interesting when considering the many studies that found that African-American athletes are framed quite differently from their white counterparts. If people have the same reaction to a story framed the same way for a white and black character (as in this Janet Smith story where the only detail changed was race), it is also possible that if athletes were framed the same way regardless of race, public reaction to them would be similar.

How are frames studied?

Media framing is studied using both quantitative and qualitative methods. Some quantitative studies review and count the use of certain frames while others study how

images impact media framing and interpretations of news stories. Still others use qualitative analysis to look at smaller samples in greater depth in an attempt to determine their meaning for society (Matthes, J., 2009).

Quantitative studies often look for the use of certain words in a story to determine how it is framed. Stephen Reese notes that while quantitative research is often the preferred method of study because of its precise measurements, the most frequently occurring frame is not always the most important frame in a story (Reese, S.D., 2001). Because of this, a qualitative analysis looking for the most dominant frame in a story is an equally important method for studying frames.

Researchers use “a combination of text analysis, review of informed writings or discussions, depth or focus interviews and ethnography” to study frames. To study frames, qualitative researchers must “identify the central concepts that make up varied frames.” These central concepts are often conflict, a master narrative or myths. While in quantitative studies, it is important for researchers to develop a full list of these concepts and frames before they begin the research, in qualitative studies researchers cannot be “overly constrained by them.” To complete a qualitative study, a researcher should have frames he/she is looking for before beginning, but must be open to new frames being discovered as the texts are analyzed (Hertog, J.K. and McLeod, D.M., 2001).

Framing Athletes

Most of the existing literature on athletes and media framing deals with the issue of race. In their study, “Roughing the Passer: The Framing of Black and White Quarterbacks Prior to the NFL Draft”, Eugenio Mercurio and Vincent F. Filak studied

how these frames were applied specifically to black and white quarterbacks during the draft. This is interesting because quarterback is the most prominent football position and the person who plays the position is generally viewed as “intelligent.” Their findings supported past studies (Bruce, T., 2004; Buffington, D., 2005; Eastman, S., & Billings, A., 2001; Rainville, R., & McCormick, E., 1977) by showing that black quarterbacks were described as having more innate, athletic abilities while white quarterbacks were described more by intelligence or knowledge of the game. The study also found that white quarterbacks were often described as both athletic and intelligent (or an “athletic quarterback”), while black quarterbacks were generally treated as “athletes who happened to play quarterback”. They noted:

This description seemed to assume that Blacks were out of position because they only possessed athletic abilities, whereas a White player could be both athletic and a quarterback, since, based on the stereotype, he would have the mental abilities to handle the position as well (Mercurio, E., & Filak, V.F., 2010).

Maureen Margaret Smith and Becky Beal studied how MTV’s *Cribs* portrays successful male athletes. Their qualitative analysis of the episodes revealed that the show portrays masculinity as aggressive, competitive and tough. However, the white, upper-class men were portrayed as “high culture” while the African-American men were more likely to be classified as “low culture.” They noted:

Representations of high culture individuals are often the educationally elite and white, which have historically been translated into cultural assumptions. ... On the other hand, masculinities of the lower classes have been associated with manual labor where power is derived from muscularity and physical bravery, which are often contrasted to intelligence (Smith, M.M., & Beal, B., 2007).

This type of framing serves to reinforce class and racial stereotypes which is a disservice to racial minorities and those of lower economic means. As Mastro, et. al noted, “Media exposure, through the framing of race-related messages, has the potential

to provide an identity advantage to White/majority consumers by offering intergroup messages that support White self-concept and positive distinctiveness” (Mastro, D.E., Blecha, E., & Seate, A.A., 2011).

Framing Athletes, Race and Crime

There is quite a bit of existing research regarding athletes and crime in the media. Most of this research also focuses on race and the ways that African-American athletes are covered compared to white athletes. Since many racial stereotypes exist, it is an important area of research. In addition to the overall stereotype that athletes are more prone to violence, especially against women, there are many stereotypes about African-American athletes. According to the National Opinion Research Center Survey, 56% of whites believe that African-Americans are more violent, 62% believe African-Americans aren't as hard-working as whites, 77% think most African-Americans are on welfare, and 53% think African-Americans are less intelligent (Lapchick, R.E., 2000). Because these types of racial stereotypes exist, media framing of race issues becomes an important issue in reinforcing or breaking these stereotypes.

Given that the prominence of characters involved in a crime make the story more newsworthy, the criminal activities of athletes are bound to be covered in ways that the average person's wouldn't be. Jeffrey Benedict and Alan Klein found that collegiate and professional athletes accused of a sexual assault are much more likely to be arrested and charged than the rest of the population; however, they are less likely to be convicted (Benedict, J., & Kline, A., 1997). Because the majority of professional and collegiate athletes are African-American (77% of NBA players, 65% of NFL players, 15% of MLB

players, 57% of NCAA Division I basketball players and 47% of NCAA Division IA football players are African-American), it also stands to reason that the criminal activities of African-American athletes would receive more coverage than the criminal activities of white athletes (Lapchick, R.E., 2000). However, Dana E. Mastro, Erin Blecha and Anita Atwell Seate found that black athletes were overly represented in media crime reports, even when the greater number of black athletes was taken into account. In addition to receiving greater coverage, the authors found: 1) that crimes committed by black athletes were talked about in more detail and portrayed more negative consequences of the crime than crimes committed by white athletes; 2) that in coverage of black athletes, the tone of the story was more supportive toward the victims and accusatory toward the athlete; and 3) that stories about white athletes featured more thematic framing, which tends to place less blame on the athlete by placing the story in a larger context. By contrast, stories about black athletes featured more episodic framing which places the blame squarely on the athlete by focusing only on the specific story of the athlete. The authors noted, “For white consumers, the picture that is likely to emerge is that black athletes are criminals, by disposition, and the best way to deal with those offenders is to disparage and punish them” (Mastro, D.E., Blecha, E., & Seate, A.A. (2011).

Bonnie Berry and Earl Smith assert that white men, and especially athletes, are socialized to be aggressive.

Aggression by athletes, overall, is viewed as being worthy of respect; one might add that men, not just male athletes, have been socialized to be and are expected to be aggressive. Although there are many downsides to men being aggressive, aggression by men has typically been accepted as “normal” and even positive. This is far less true of African American men, however, African American men, from a racist perspective, are not only considered highly sexed but dangerous (Berry, B. & Smith, E., 2000).

This racial myth may have played a key role in public reaction to the rape case involving professional basketball player Kobe Bryant, one of the most prominent criminal cases involving an athlete. Markovitz noted:

A USA Today/CNN/Gallup poll conducted in August 2003 showed that white respondents were nearly twice as likely as black respondents to see the charges against Bryant as “probably true,” while blacks were nearly five times more likely than whites to be “very sympathetic” toward Bryant (Markovitz, J., 2006).

With racial myths already being so widely spread, the reinforcement of these myths through media framing is an important area of study.

In addition to race playing a part in how crime is reported, sexual assault cases are subject to framing as well. Renae Franiuk, Jennifer L. Seefeldt, and Joseph A. Vandello studied the headlines from the Bryant rape case, looking for the presence of rape myths.

They found:

Rape myths include suggestions that the victim is lying, deserved the sexual assault, or asked for it because of how she was acting or what she was wearing. Other rape myths excuse the perpetrator by suggesting that he couldn't help himself or that he isn't the type who would commit a sexual assault. Finally some myths downplay the seriousness of the sexual assault that occurred by suggesting it was a trivial, or even natural, event (Franiuk, R., Seefeldt, J.L., & Vandello, J.A., 2008).

They also reviewed the headlines for word choices that would prejudice the readers for or against the alleged victim. For example, journalists often use the word “accuser” instead of “alleged victim”, which puts the “alleged victim” in the role of the aggressor (the person who is doing something to another person). The results of this study showed that 23.1% of headlines used the word “accuser” compared to only 1.1% that used the words “alleged victim”. Overall, 141 articles used the word “alleged victim, victim, or accuser” in the headline, and 90.8% of these used the word “accuser.” Of the headlines

reviewed, 9.6% featured at least one rape myth, of which 6% were the “she’s lying myth” (Franiuk, R., Seefeldt, J.L., & Vandello, J.A., 2008).

Franiuk, Seefeldt, and Vandello also conducted an experiment to find whether the rape myths impacted audience opinion. They found that women’s opinions weren’t altered by the presence of rape myths, but men who read a headline that contained a rape myth were less likely to say Bryant was guilty than men who read headlines without a rape myth (Franiuk, R., Seefeldt, J.L., & Vandello, J.A., 2008).

Although Franiuk, Seefeldt and Vandello’s study is not a framing study, myths are often the central concept in a media frame. Hertog and McLeod suggest that of all the central concepts that can make up frames, myths are very effective (Hertog, J.K., & McLeod, D.M., 2001).

They are widely shared and understood within the culture, and are especially prone to drawing in a wide array of additional beliefs, feelings, expectations and values. That is, they are especially efficient in making meaning. ... They may not need to be mentioned often to have a profound effect in the process of framing. ... By calling up a metaphor such as “dog fight” to describe competition among candidates in the week before a Republican primary, for example, the rest of the coverage of the story is interpreted within the terms of the metaphor (Hertog, J.K., & McLeod, D.M., 2001).

In addition to rape myths and word choices in headlines and stories, there are other things that can affect how the audience views rape allegations. Amy Rose Grubb and Julie Harrower found that women are more likely to be blamed (or partially blamed) if they know the alleged rapist or if they have alcohol in their systems. Grubb and Harrower also found that male participants were more likely to sympathize with the alleged rapist than women (Grubb, A.R., & Harrower, J., 2009). The way these issues are presented in a story can lead to the presence of the rape myth “she was asking for it” and create a frame which portrays the alleged perpetrator as the victim of these accusations.

Conclusion

Because frames are widely present in society and journalists use them to construct news stories (Turnage, A.K., 2009; Dickerson, D.L., 2001; Messner, M.A., & Solomon, W.S., 1993), framing is one of the most important areas of continued media research. Past research has shown that frames can affect public opinion (Iyengar, S., 1991; Lecheler, S., & de Vreese, C.H., 2011; Baird, V.A., & Gangl, A., 2006; Mulligan, K., & Habel, P., 2011). Even utilizing an episodic frame over a thematic frame changes how the audience will interpret an issue and assign blame (Iyengar, S., 1991; Aaroe, L., 2011; Gross, K., 2005; Gross, K., 2008).

The importance of framing when combined with issues of race, stereotypes and crime becomes very clear. Previous research has demonstrated how African-American athletes are overly represented in media crime reports and portrayed more negatively than white athletes. Past research has also demonstrated that stories about black athletes and crime feature more episodic framing, which emphasizes the personal responsibility of the individual. The reinforcing of these negative stereotypes toward minorities only serves to give white audience members an “identity advantage” over black audience members (Mastro, D.E., Blecha, E., & Seate, A.A., 2011).

While previous research has demonstrated the disparity in framing of black and white athletes accused of crimes, there has not been an in-depth, qualitative analysis comparing the media framing of a white and black athlete accused of a crime. In addition, past research has not addressed how frames are established in stories about the alleged crimes of professional athletes.

Hypotheses and Research Questions

Previous research has suggested that the story of black athletes involved in criminal activities will be different in tone than a story about a white athlete involved in a criminal activity. In short, research suggests that the tone of the story will differ, with black athletes being subject to a more negative frame and white athletes enjoying a more positive frame. Hypothesis 1 then is:

H1: Stories about Roethlisberger will include more positive frames than stories about Vick.

Research, however, has done little to investigate how these positive and negative frames are established within news reports. This research will be guided by the following research question:

R1: How do stories about the criminal activities of athletes employ positive and negative frames?

Research also suggests that stories about the criminal activities of black athletes are more likely to be told through an episodic frame, putting more of an emphasis and responsibility on the individual actor. On the other hand, stories about the criminal activities of white athletes are more likely to be told through a thematic frame, putting more of an emphasis on larger institutional or societal influences. Thus, the second hypothesis for this study is:

H2: Stories about Roethlisberger will be more likely to be told through a thematic frame, while stories about Vick will more likely be told through an episodic frame.

Once again, little research has looked at how these frames have been established within the context of professional athletes. The second research question, then, that will guide this study is:

R2: How do stories about the criminal activities of athletes employ episodic and thematic frames?

Methodology

Given that previous research has demonstrated how prevalent framing of race and crime is in media works and how framing can have a large impact on how the audience views an issue, framing continues to be an important area of study. While past studies have reviewed the ways in which the media frames race and crimes, none have looked at a specific example of a black and white athlete accused of crimes to see whether/how the media frame them differently. Mastro, Blecha and Seate furthered research into race, crime and framing in their broad study on the media coverage of athletes and crime. This study will further that research by focusing on specific cases and examining the coverage of Vick, a black NFL quarterback accused of running a dog-fighting operation, and Roethlisberger, a white NFL quarterback accused of sexual assault. The Mastro, Blecha and Seate study was a quantitative analysis, while this will be a qualitative study examining the dominant frame in each article. In addition to determining what the dominant frame in the story is, I will be focusing on how the journalists establish that frame in the story.

Instead of studying three national publications as Mastro, Blecha and Seate did, I will look at the local newspapers for the two athletes. The reason for this is the national

papers had only a limited number of articles on each of the stories while the local newspapers carried far more coverage. While national papers and magazines would likely treat the two athletes differently than local papers, the additional coverage provided by the local papers allowed me to view the progression of the framing as the story emerged. I reviewed the *Atlanta Journal Constitution (AJC)* for stories involving Vick's dog-fighting scandal and the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette (PPG)* for stories involving Roethlisberger's rape scandal.

An important distinction to note in these two cases is that Vick was eventually charged and convicted of running the dog-fighting ring while formal charges against Roethlisberger for sexual assault were never filed. To avoid this having an impact on the framing of the athletes and crime, I only included articles written before Vick was charged and articles before the district attorney announced Roethlisberger wouldn't be charged. For Vick, this meant examining articles from April 25, 2007, (the day his Virginia home was raided by federal officials and media coverage began) to July 17, 2007, the day he was indicted. For Roethlisberger, this meant examining articles from March 5, 2010, (the day the alleged sexual assault took place) to April 12, 2010 (the day the district attorney announced he wouldn't try the case).

To locate the *AJC* articles, I searched for any article containing the word "Vick" on the newspaper's website. This included opinion stories and columns. I then eliminated any articles that did not focus primarily on the dog-fighting story. If a story mentioned the dog fighting but that was not the focus of the article, I did not include it for this study. These articles tended to focus on NFL Draft coverage, where the only mention of Vick was one to two sentences on whether his legal troubles would impact his ability to play in

the upcoming season. After eliminating the articles that were not about the dog fighting, 42 articles remained for consideration.

To locate the *PPG* articles, I used the Newspaper Source Plus database to search for every article containing the word “Roethlisberger.” Like with the Vick articles, I kept opinion pieces but eliminated any articles that were not primarily about the rape case. After eliminating these articles, 34 remained for consideration.

In both the *PPG* and *AJC* articles, nearly all of the articles were written by male journalists. Female journalist Moriah Balingit wrote or co-wrote three articles for the *PPG*. Sandra Eckstein, a female reporter for the *AJC*, wrote one article focusing on dog-fighting legislation, and Angela Tuck, a female editor, wrote one article to the readers apologizing that the paper had reported rumors about Vick.

My first hypothesis suggests that Roethlisberger’s story will be told through a more positive frame, while Vick’s story will be told through a more negative frame. I will determine whether the tone of the coverage varied between the coverage of Vick and Roethlisberger. Mastro, Blecha and Seate’s study found that the tone of stories regarding the criminal activities of black athletes was more negative because they contained a more accusatory attitude toward the athlete and more defensive attitudes toward the victim. They also found that in stories about black athletes accused of crime, the stories contained far greater detail about the crime which generally paints a more negative picture of the athlete.

To determine the tone of the stories and how those frames are established, I will look at several factors: the level of detail provided, attitude toward the athlete and attitude toward the victim. To assess these, I will consider whether the story gives a lot of detail

about the crime, whether the attitude toward the athlete is defensive or accusatory and whether the attitude toward the victim is defensive or accusatory. I will look at the types of information that are used and the sources of that information. While looking at whether the attitude toward the victim is accusatory or defensive in the Roethlisberger stories, I will also look for the presence of rape myth framing which places blame on the victim and relieves the athlete of blame. Providing a more detailed description of the crime tends to portray a more negative image of the athlete involved, which will play an important role in the overall tone of the story. Whether the story is more defensive or accusatory toward the athlete or the victim also has a large impact on how the story is interpreted and whether the tone will be positive or negative toward the athlete (Mastro, D.E., Blecha, E., & Seate, A.A., 2011).

The negative frames are those frames that feature a more negative tone toward the athlete and are likely to leave the reader with a negative impression of the athlete. This negative tone could be established with accusatory quotes, providing information that implies the athlete's guilt or negative comments about the athlete's personality or career. Positive frames are those frames that feature a more positive tone toward the athlete and are likely to leave the reader with a positive impression of the athlete. This positive tone is often established through defensive quotes and/or writing positively about the athlete's character, personality or career. Neutral frames are those that are neither dominantly negative or positive toward the athlete. These are most often news briefings that provided only a short update on the cases and don't provide any additional information about the athlete.

The second hypothesis suggests that Roethlisberger's story will be told through a more thematic frame, while Vick's story will be told through a more episodic frame. Because all the stories are really about a specific instance of a crime, the use of thematic framing will come into play when the article situates the story in a larger context. For example, instead of just focusing on the rape accusations against Roethlisberger, a thematic article might discuss the wider issues and statistics of sexual assault in the United States. A thematic article on the Vick case might discuss the culture surrounding dog fighting.

Whether an article uses thematic or episodic framing to cover the Vick and Roethlisberger cases is important when combined with Mastro, Blecha and Seate's study which found that thematic frames minimize an individual's responsibility for a crime by placing some blame on societal or situational factors. By contrast, episodic frames maximize an individual's responsibility for a crime by focusing primarily on that individual and his actions (Mastro, D.E., Blecha, E., & Seate, A.A., 2011). In addition to placing blame solely on the athlete, episodic frames create a more emotional response (Aaroe, L., 2011; Gross, K., 2005; Gross, K., 2008), potentially leading the audience to have a much more negative and emotional reaction toward the athlete. I will also look at the types and sources of information to establish how journalists were able to establish the frames.

Chapter III: The establishment of positive and negative frames

Previous studies have found that media stories about black athletes accused of crimes generally have a more negative tone than stories about white athletes accused of crimes (Mastro, D.E., Blecha, E., & Seate, A.A., 2011). These negative frames were established through a more negative tone toward the athlete, a more defensive tone toward the alleged victim and a more detailed depiction of the alleged crime (Mastro, D.E., Blecha, E., & Seate, A.A., 2011). This chapter furthers Mastro, Blecha and Seate's research by examining the media coverage of Vick's alleged dog-fighting ring and Roethlisberger's alleged rape. To determine whether H1e is correct, that Roethlisberger articles will feature more positive frames than Vick articles, I reviewed the amount of detail provided in each of the stories. My expectation was that stories about Vick would feature more details leading to a more negative portrayal. Because this study looked only at early coverage of the two stories, I found the level of detail to be low in nearly all of the stories on both Vick and Roethlisberger; however, articles about Vick were more likely to include references to his past behavioral issues.

In addition to reviewing the amount of detail provided, I considered the dominant tone toward both the athlete and the alleged victims in these stories. Previous research suggested that the tone toward Roethlisberger, a white athlete, would be more positive than the tone toward Vick, a black athlete, and the tone toward the alleged victim would be more negative in Roethlisberger articles than in Vick articles (Mastro, D.E., Blecha, E., & Seate, A.A., 2011). In addition, past research on the coverage of sexual assault

stories indicated that there would likely be the presence of rape myths in stories about Roethlisberger, which would also contribute to a more positive tone toward him (Franiuk, R., Seefeldt, J.L., & Vandello, J.A., 2008). While both Vick and Roethlisberger had dominant positive, negative and neutral stories written about them, Roethlisberger was the beneficiary of more positive stories. The Roethlisberger stories were also more likely to feature a dominantly negative tone toward the alleged victim. In addition, there were three rape myths which were frequently present in the Roethlisberger stories: “he’s not the type,” “she’s lying,” and “rape is trivial,” all of which serve to reinforce a positive frame toward Roethlisberger.

Level of Detail

In looking at whether the dominant frame of a story is positive or negative toward the athlete, I considered several factors. The first aspect of what I considered was the level of detail the author provided in the story. A more detailed depiction of the alleged crime generally leaves a more negative impression of the alleged perpetrator (Mastro, D.E., Blecha, E., & Seate, A.A., 2011). Upon reviewing the Roethlisberger and Vick articles, I found the level of detail provided in the stories was similar. In the early coverage of the stories, there were not a large number of details available regarding either case. The most detailed *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette (PPG)* stories on the Roethlisberger incident generally included a description of where Roethlisberger’s group went throughout the night, the people who were with him and very general descriptions of the alleged assault. Examples are as follows:

Also present were Steelers tackle Willie Colon and several other friends whose identities Mr. Santicola [a lawyer for two policeman who were with Roethlisberger] did not know. Both Officer Barravecchio and Trooper Joyner

were inside the Capital City club in Milledgeville, the night spot where Mr. Roethlisberger is accused of sexually assaulting a 20-year-old student at Georgia College & State University late March 4 or early March 5 (Silver, J.D., 2010, March 11).

The incident report indicates that the victim was with two female friends, ages 19 and 20. Mr. Roethlisberger's name is obscured, but the "offender" is listed as 6-foot-5 and 241 pounds with brown hair and eyes. A section of the report indicating whether the incident was "stranger to stranger" is checked "No." "They had all been together earlier that evening in other establishments just as a group," the deputy chief said. "We've tried to identify as many people as possible, but Mr. Roethlisberger had a party with him. There was, I believe, himself and three other people, and there were other people in the party." ... Proprietors at other establishments on the strip near Capital City said Mr. Roethlisberger had visited earlier in the evening. Among his stops were Amici Italian Cafe, The Brick and The Velvet Elvis (Silver, J.D., 2010, March 6).

Like the Roethlisberger articles, the early *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* (AJC) articles about Vick also lacked a lot of detail. The details included in the Vick articles generally included a short list of items taken from Vick's Virginia property.

According to a police report obtained by the Journal-Constitution, a drug investigation involving Vick's cousin Davon Boddie led authorities to the house in Smithfield, Va. The Virginian-Pilot reported that, according to court records, police found about 30 dogs, some heavily scarred, and various paraphernalia associated with dog fighting while conducting a search of the home, which Vick owns but does not live in (Wyche, S. 2007, April 27).

A magistrate issued a search warrant for evidence of dog fighting. Evidence cited to obtain the search warrant included treadmills used for conditioning, a scale to weigh dogs, vitamins and dietary and red-blood-cell supplements and drugs and antibiotics to treat wounds (Knobler, M. & Wyche, S. 2007, April 28).

In both stories, it appears there were not additional details available as the investigations were ongoing and the details were kept private by the investigating police departments. The following AJC articles regarding Vick's dog-fighting ring were written after additional police reports were released detailing the dog fighting. They included many of the more gruesome details about the dog-fighting operation.

At the end of the fight, the losing dog was sometimes put to death by strangulation, hanging, gun shot, electrocution, or some other method," according to the document. Members of the group would also "test" dogs to see if they were "game" -- meaning it would be a good fighter. Dogs not deemed "game" were put to death. Investigators uncovered the graves of seven pit bulls who were killed by members of Bad Newz Kennels during the execution of the first sealed search warrant on June 7 (Ledbetter, D.O., 2007, July, 7).

Despite the illicit nature of the enterprise, the fights operated under a strict code, court records indicate. The two dogs entered in each fight had to be the same gender and weight. Participants would agree on a fighting weight in advance, and each dog had to weigh within a half-pound of that mark. Any greater deviation would result in a dog being scratched from the fight; its owner might have to pay the opponent's owner to make up for the forfeited purse. Bathing the dogs also was part of the pre-fight ritual. This prevented owners from gaining an unfair advantage for their dogs by placing poison or drugs on an animal's coat. Otherwise, when an opponent bit the dog, it might be sickened or sedated and lose the fight. Each fight, according to court records, would "last to the end" -- the point at which one dog surrendered or died. For defeated dogs, though, surviving the fight could lead to an even worse fate. "At the end of the fight," court documents say, "the losing dog was sometimes put to death by drowning, strangulation, hanging, gun shot, electrocution or some other method." Other dogs, though, died before they ever got to a formal fight. If animals belonging to Bad Newz Kennels did not test well in training, court records say, "the dogs deemed not to be good fighters would be put to death." Authorities say seven dogs were killed for that reason and buried on the property in April (Judd, A. 2007, July 15).

In addition to these alleged crimes, both Roethlisberger and Vick had experienced past brushes with the law. While Roethlisberger's past alleged sexual assault was mentioned in more stories than Vick's past alleged misdeeds (14 stories mentioned Roethlisberger's past sexual assault allegation, while only 11 stories discussed Vick's past allegations), there was a difference in how they were portrayed. In five of the stories, Roethlisberger's previous accusation was treated as a false accusation. For example:

He already stood accused of raping a Nevada resort hostess in his hotel room during a July 2008 golf tournament at Lake Tahoe. But the woman never went to the authorities. Instead she sued Mr. Roethlisberger in July in the absence of any police report or physical evidence (Silver, J.D., 2007, March 6).

When a Nevada resort hostess accused Big Ben of sexually assaulting her, there was a moment of hesitation -- and real terror across Steeler Nation -- though the quarterback's legal team vigorously denied the accusation. The woman sued him for big bucks in the absence of a police report to back up her story, which drew hostile public opinion, legal scrutiny and press skepticism (Norman, T. 2007, March 9).

In the *PPG* articles that mentioned the previous rape allegation but did not overtly portray the previous alleged victim as a false accuser, the author just outlined the case and pointed out that no charges were filed in the case.

In July 2009, a 31-year-old Nevada woman accused Mr. Roethlisberger in a lawsuit of raping her in his hotel room at Harrah's Lake Tahoe in July 2008 while she worked as a VIP hostess during a celebrity golf tournament. The woman also has sued several current or former Harrah's employees, alleging that they tried to cover up the incident. Mr. Roethlisberger denied the charges and the civil suit has been halted since late last year pending the outcome of an appeal to the Nevada Supreme Court seeking a change of venue by the Steelers quarterback and one of his co-defendants. No criminal charges were filed in the Nevada case (Silver, J.D., & Birdsong, T., 2010, March 5).

In addition, only one *PPG* story on Roethlisberger discussed his other previous indiscretion: a motorcycle accident he had while not wearing a helmet.

It seems like only yesterday that Pittsburgh Steelers fans were rushing to defend the honor of their young, Super Bowl-winning quarterback after a near-career-ending motorcycle accident. Though he wasn't wearing a motorcycle helmet during the 2006 crash, fans considered it a youthful indiscretion he wasn't likely to repeat (Norman, T. 2010, March 9).

By contrast, the *AJC* stories that portray Vick's history listed multiple indiscretions. These indiscretions included the confiscation of a water bottle that had a hidden compartment smelling of marijuana (ESPN.com news services, 2007, January 19), an accusation that Vick and two friends stole a Rolex from a TSA employee at an airport (Maske, M. & Goo, S.K., 2005, March 13), trespassing charges and missing a breakfast

with members of Congress. Although none of these incidents resulted in criminal charges, they are mentioned frequently in articles about Vick.

When word surfaced in January of Vick's water-bottle thing at the Miami International Airport, McKay called a news conference to speak of a "stressful" meeting of Vick and other team officials and to say Vick had "let a lot of people down" before adding Blank "was upset." Days later, Miami police dropped the investigation. Two months later, McKay suggested reports of his previous hard-line stance with Vick were figments of the media's imagination. McKay said he never spoke to No. 7 about the contents of the water bottle. Such flip-flopping by Falcons management just contributes to Vick staying out of control. The missing watch (not his, by the way) incident at a security gate of the Atlanta airport. Ron Mexico. That trick water bottle. Numerous parking-ticket issues. His one-fingered salute to fans at the Georgia Dome. Then came this week. It began with Vick missing his flight to Washington for a breakfast with those congressman and others involved with Vick regarding the funding of after-school problems. It continued on Thursday, when Virginia police searched a property owned by Vick but occupied by a relative. That relative was being investigated for drugs at the residence when the police discovered a possible dog-fighting ring. Vick also was due to appear in a Virginia court on Thursday on trespassing charges for a fishing violation. We're talking about minor stuff. But we're still talking about stuff, and there is too much stuff involving Vick these days (Moore, T., 2007, April 27).

Like this article, other articles provided a long list of mistakes Vick had made. A June 1, 2007, article discussed the circumstances of his missed Congressional meeting in great detail before going on to discuss two other incidents where Vick was suspected of transporting marijuana in a water bottle and one of Vick's companions was accused of stealing a TSA agent's watch. Another article, published on May 12, 2007, once again reminds readers of the "water-bottle incident", the missed Congressional breakfast and a trespassing charge leveled against Vick.

While both athletes had articles that portrayed them as foolish, Vick's incidents were discussed in greater detail and without the implications that he was the victim of false accusations. The greater detail provided on Vick's history portrays him as a player with a repeated problem of misbehavior. On the other hand, the detail provided on

Roethlisberger's history portrays him as either a young man who has been a victim or someone who naively made poor choices. In addition, the accuser in Roethlisberger's case is one woman. In Vick's case, the accuser is the government or police. Since institutional authority is often treated as more legitimate in news, this difference contributes to a more negative frame of Vick and a more positive frame of Roethlisberger.

Tone Toward the Athlete

Both Roethlisberger and Vick had negative, neutral and positive frames featured in articles about their alleged crimes. There were more negative *AJC* articles about Vick. Twenty-two, or 52.38%, of the articles about Vick featured a dominant negative frame toward him. On the other hand, only nine, or 26.47%, of the *PPG* articles about Roethlisberger featured a dominant negative frame about Roethlisberger. Fifteen, or 35.71%, of the Vick articles featured a dominant positive frame of Vick, while 18, or 52.94%, of the Roethlisberger articles featured a dominant positive frame of Roethlisberger.

Among the stories where the dominant frame toward Vick and Roethlisberger was negative, there was a key difference. While the Vick stories with a dominant negative frame treated Vick with suspicion or negativity about his actions, the negative stories about Roethlisberger all focused on how his poor judgment would affect his reputation while pointing to his innocence of any real crime. While the authors of the Vick stories did not directly say he was guilty, through the use of quotes and statements the articles do make his guilt seem apparent.

[Arthur] Blank said he did not know if Vick has any involvement but, "from the facts we have so far, it's not a pretty picture. It's clearly an issue, and we'll wait and see what revolves around it." (Wyche, S., 2007, May 11)."

Landry told the radio station that Buchanan told him at last month's NFL draft that Vick was definitely involved. "He tells me that Michael has been into this dog fighting for so long that . . . he not only knew about, he is behind all of it, he's paying for all of it. . . . Apparently, he's into it big time," Landry said (Ledbetter, D.O., 2007, May 14).

A May 20, 2007, article quotes a representative from The Humane Society of the United States saying they had information linking Vick to dog fighting in the past. The article also quotes the representative speculating that Vick's denial of being on the property will be refuted when a witness puts him in the town where the dog fighting took place. Another article, written on May 11, 2007, advises readers that a source close to Vick told SI.com that Vick was involved in dog fighting. These accusatory quotes reinforced the perception that Vick was guilty even before he was charged or police released official details. A May 28, 2007, article took it a step further by not only providing quotes from a source implicating Vick, but confirming the reliability of the information.

Michael Vick funded and gambled on dogfighting as far back as when he was in college, according to a confidential police informant who appeared on ESPN on Sunday. Vick is a "heavyweight" among dogfighters, according to the informant, whose identity was not revealed, his face not shown and his voice distorted in a segment of "Outside the Lines." Vick has fought dogs, funded dogfighting and gambled on the illegal activity as recently as last year, the informant said. The informant also said he witnessed Vick gamble and bring dogs to fight as far back as 2000, when the Falcons quarterback was a student-athlete at Virginia Tech. "I've seen Vick. We beat him back in 2000, yes," the informant said. "That dog was Michael's dog. Michael was not in the pit. Michael's thing is he came with all of the money. He was betting. He was betting with everybody. He was betting on his dog, \$5,000 on his animal. . . . A federal agent, whose identify was also withheld, told ESPN that the informant in the ESPN segment has been reliable in helping gain search warrants and convictions in multiple dogfighting cases (Wyche, S., & Ledbetter, D.O., 2007, May 28).

In addition to offering negative quotes regarding Vick's guilt, the negative *AJC* stories regarding Vick presented facts in a way that portrayed his guilt. While it was still unverified whether Vick had any connection to the dog-fighting operation at his property, D. Orlando Ledbetter wrote in an article that Vick's breeding website listed the property as the address for the company. The headline of his article was "Vick linked to breeder," and the article begins with the following sentences:

A Web site associated with a Michael Vick company, MV7, LLC, professes to be in the business of breeding pit bulls and other dogs as pets not for fighting. VicksK9Kennels.com states that, "We do not promote, support or raise dogs for fighting and will not knowingly sell, give, or trade any dog that may be used for fighting." The property Vick owns in Virginia where dozens of dogs were confiscated last week in a dog-fighting investigation is listed as the address for the Web site and the company, 1915 Moonlight Road, Smithfield, Va. (Ledbetter, D.O., 2007, May 3).

Another article notes that Vick hasn't been named as the target of the investigation, but then proceeds to draw a connection between Vick and the dog-fighting activity.

Prosecutor Gerald Poindexter has warned that even though dogfighting appears to have occurred in the two-story house on the property, at least six people could be involved and that Vick, who is only a periodic visitor to the property, might not be a target of the investigation. The *AJC* also obtained a list of items seized by police in the search of the property, where 66 dogs, mainly pit bulls, were found and removed from the property. Among the things taken as evidence were three envelopes addressed to "M. Vick" and a three-ring binder holding "contracts" or copies of contracts. There is no indication if anything was in the envelopes or what the content was inside the binder but according to the search warrant, the only written literature police could seize had to be related to dogfighting (Wyche, S., 2007, May 21).

An April 27, 2007, article points out that Vick does not reside at the property where dog fighting is alleged to have occurred, but then provides a quote from a Humane Society of the United States representative that says he was involved.

The Humane Society of the United States issued the following statement from Wyane Pacelle, president and CEO: "The Humane Society of the United States has heard troubling reports for some time that Michael Vick has been involved in organized dog fighting, and we fear that this investigation may validate that very disturbing allegation." "We have well-placed sources in the dog-fighting underworld," John Goodwin, deputy manager of animal-fighting issues, told the *Journal-Constitution*. "His involvement has been brought to our attention numerous times. We pay people for information that leads to arrests." Goodwin said The Humane Society was unable to report Vick because they did not have an exact location of the alleged dog fighting until Wednesday's investigation (Wyche, S., 2007, April 27).

The *AJC* articles treated the accusations against Vick as credible and coming from an institutional source. They also treated Vick as a potential criminal, responsible for his own actions. By contrast, the *PPG* articles that portrayed Roethlisberger negatively did not imply his guilt of rape. Instead, they focused on him making poor decisions that would hurt his reputation, portraying him, at least to some degree, as a victim.

Until the case is resolved, I'm presuming Roethlisberger's innocence. All of us are presumed innocent until proven guilty, right? This is a great country, America. But I don't have to wait for the legal proceedings to fully take their course for me to pronounce Roethlisberger guilty of poor judgment. What was he doing at a club -- a college bar, by all accounts -- at 2 a.m.? ... Even if he isn't charged, he still loses. His reputation has taken another big hit. There will be damage even if he is cleared of all wrongdoing. ... No matter how that turns out, a lot of people won't ever look at Roethlisberger the same way again (Cook, R., 2010, March 7).

The same article, while criticizing Roethlisberger for his poor decisions, still points to his innocence of criminal activity.

Investigators will determine what took place and decide if charges against Roethlisberger are warranted. But I do know that any big-time celebrity can't be too careful in public even if he is accompanied by friends, as Roethlisberger was Thursday night into Friday morning, according to Milledgeville police. There's always the chance of running into a guy who, perhaps bolstered by alcohol, is willing to challenge his toughness. There's also the chance of meeting a woman who is looking to capitalize financially on his fame. Sadly, not everyone in this world has honorable intentions (Cook, R., 2010, March 7).

The other negative *PPG* articles take a similar approach, treating Roethlisberger as a foolish guy who himself in a bad situation rather than as someone who might be guilty of rape.

The police say that Mr. Roethlisberger is cooperating with investigators and hasn't been charged. They plan to interview him, with his lawyer present, this week. Still, whether formally charged or not, this is a public relations disaster for Big Ben and the Pittsburgh Steelers. ... For all of his popularity here in Pittsburgh, Mr. Roethlisberger is a distinctly local deity. He seems to share our banalities and penchant for screwing up a good deal. Like so many people we know with far less money or opportunity, he has a habit of turning up at places that aren't good for his reputation. As we've gotten to know him, the pedestal has gotten lower and our exasperation with him has grown with each failure of judgment. At 28, Big Ben seems to be interested in partying like a frat boy during the off season instead of enjoying his millions in dignified obscurity like the overwhelming majority of his teammates (Norman, T., 2010, March 9).

That's just running out of patience with players who repeatedly embarrass and bring shame to the organization. Roethlisberger, for instance. Maybe especially Roethlisberger. How furious the Rooneys and Tomlin must be with Roethlisberger, to the degree that there has to be at least some sentiment inside the organization to get rid of him. How furious NFL commissioner Roger Goodell must be because of the way Roethlisberger has tarnished the league's brand on not one, but two occasions. "We are concerned that Ben continues to put himself in this position," Goodell said last week. At this point, it must be noted, Roethlisberger is guilty of nothing more than bad judgment, of hanging out with the wrong people in the wrong places at the wrong times (Cook, R., 2010, March 30).

Another area of difference between the two stories lies in how the authors set up positive frames. While a positive frame for Vick was primarily set up through the use of defensive quotes and information regarding his involvement in the dog-fighting operation, positive frames of Roethlisberger tended to rely more on the "he's not the type" rape myth.

A June 5, 2007, article giving an update on the status of the investigation once again points out that there isn't enough evidence to charge Vick. "Several weeks ago,

Poindexter and Brown met with local, state and federal investigators to review evidence. The investigation continues, but Poindexter said none of that evidence was enough to charge Vick” (Wyche, S., 2007, June 5).

Many of the *AJC* articles featuring a positive frame of Vick placed blame on others who had access to the property in Virginia. The headline for an April 28, 2007, article was “Vick: Family members are to blame,” and the article begins with defensive information from Vick.

Falcons quarterback Michael Vick blamed family members for the mistreated dogs and other evidence of illegal activity police discovered this week at a property he owns in Virginia. ... "I'm never there. I'm never at the house," Vick said Friday in New York. "I left the house with my family members and my cousin. They just haven't been doing the right thing. The issue will get resolved.” (Knobler, M., & Wyche, S., 2007, April 28).

April 29 and 30, 2007, articles also placed the blame on the people around Vick. The April 30, 2007, article provided further quotes from Vick blaming those around him and promises from Vick that he would change the company he kept. Falcons President Rich McKay was quoted in the April 29, 2007, article blaming the people around Vick for the trouble. In another article, Wyche writes: “[Surry County prosecutor] Poindexter said there is evidence that dogfighting occurred on the property. He said, to his knowledge, there is not enough evidence to single out Vick for charges and that up to 10 people had access to the property” (Wyche, S., 2007, June 6).

An earlier article suggested there was no evidence that Vick had been previously involved in as had been alleged.

No, he didn't hear, see or suspect anything involving Michael Vick and illegal dogfighting during the three seasons they were together. No, he never had a significant problem with the suddenly trouble-filled Falcons quarterback either on or off the field. No, he hasn't a clue about how this will end. Here's what former

Falcons coach Dan Reeves does know: Before he maneuvered in 2001 to make Vick the No. 1 pick overall in the NFL draft, he did what most of his peers would have done. That is, he called those in charge of the league's security staff to check for anything strange in Vick's past, dogfighting or otherwise. Nothing, the NFL told Reeves. Still, last week an unidentified police informant told ESPN Vick was present and betting heavily on dogfighting in 2000, when he played at Virginia Tech. "I spent a lot of time talking to [Virginia Tech football coach Frank Beamer], and he certainly didn't know anything about [Vick and dogfighting]," said Reeves, now an NFL analyst for Westwood One radio when he isn't helping Georgia State with its football ambitions. "I never heard anything about any misdoings by [Vick] coming out of college, and the league certainly didn't know of anything. I mean, Michael was like a son. I enjoyed being around him, and he was fun to be around... Michael was very much involved in wanting to be the best he could be and trying to do the right things," Reeves said. "He had a great heart. Now there is no question he had some things you had to talk to him about, involving his associations. He was greatly influenced by what people would say, because he was young. There were several things that happened, but it was more about, 'Michael, you got to be careful about who you associate with.' And I think that's a little bit of what's happening now. It's just gotten out of hand" (Moore, T., 2007, June 3).

Although there is a quote from Reeves saying he's hoping Vick isn't guilty, the rest of the article has already set up a positive frame. The article also went on to give Reeves credibility by telling the reader not only that he is a reputable NFL source, but also a dog lover.

Which brings us to this: Reeves has been around the NFL awhile. He went to Super Bowls as a player and coach in Dallas, Denver and Atlanta. He even froze as a player during the Ice Bowl in Green Bay. So what's going to happen here? "I have no idea, but I'm hoping and praying Michael's not going to be involved and that the only thing he's guilty of is making some poor decisions as far as letting people on his property and so forth," Reeves said. "I mean, [dogfighting] is a felony. It's not like you not knowing this is illegal. It's illegal most everywhere you go." Then Reeves paused, before mentioning his love affair with golden retrievers, Cavalier King Charles spaniels, and other types of canines. "Shoot, man. You don't mess with my dogs," said Reeves, easing into a chuckle. His chuckle got louder, when the Americus native added, "Dogs are the only things that you can count on that will love you when you come home. No matter what the score is" (Moore, T., 2007, June 3).

Some *AJC* articles on Vick did feature positive frames through the positive portrayal of Vick as a person. For example, a June 1, 2007, article focused on how Vick's new haircut was one of the positive changes he was making in his life (Wyche, S., 2007, June 1). Another story included very little detail regarding the dog-fighting investigation, but did positively paint Vick as a football player.

As far as Vick's on-the-job performance goes, Petrino had no complaints. "He's worked very hard," Petrino said. What Petrino said he's looking for from Vick is "consistency"; not building up to one terrific practice as he did in a previous mini-camp, but nailing his tasks in every practice. To summarize the swirl of speculation around Vick, Petrino said: "It's motivated him more" (Walton, S.A., 2007, May 11).

A dominant positive frame focusing on Vick as person or player, however, was not the most prominently featured positive frame in the Vick articles. By contrast, this type of positive frame was the most common in *PPG* Roethlisberger articles. The positive frames of Roethlisberger were much more likely to set up a positive frame through quotes and information portraying Roethlisberger as a good guy. This type of positive frame also reinforces the "he's not the type" rape myth. A March 6, 2010, article reinforces this positive frame with quotes from other club owners.

Proprietors at other establishments on the strip near Capital City said Mr. Roethlisberger had visited earlier in the evening. Among his stops were Amici Italian Cafe, The Brick and The Velvet Elvis. ... Mr. Roethlisberger was "friendly, courteous, didn't cause any trouble here," said Phillip Joiner, marketing promotions director at the Amici cafe in Milledgeville and a city councilman. Mr. Joiner said the quarterback's house is on nearby Lake Oconee. He is known as a low-key resident who poses for pictures -- as he did Thursday night -- and mingles with the locals both on land and water. "He's thrown the football from boat to boat," Mr. Joiner said. Mr. Joiner, who was not in the cafe Thursday night, described Mr. Roethlisberger as "affable and charming. We were happy to have a celebrity in our restaurant." News of the allegation took the college town by surprise. ... "I talked to him a little bit. I told him I appreciated him coming down and bringing the business. He said, 'Nice place,' and he went off to hang out with his friends. He was a typical customer. He was surrounded by people all the time taking pictures and asking for autographs," Mr. Pendergast said. "He was polite.

His buddies were kind of giving him his space and he was talking with my customers. They were talking about how they were golfing today. They looked like a bunch of college buddies hanging out. They just happened to be 250 pounds” (Silver, J.D., 2010, March 6).

A March 8, 2010, story uses a very similar approach, providing information about Roethlisberger’s kindness.

Since purchasing his summer vacation home at Reynolds Plantation, an upscale community near Greensboro, Ga., Steelers quarterback Ben Roethlisberger has cultivated a reputation similar to the one he has in Ohio and Pittsburgh, the two other places where he has lived. Those who encounter him say he is friendly, but not necessarily outgoing. He is generous with his time and money, posing for photographs and donating to charity (Majors, D. 2010, March 8).

While this article does offer one negative aspect of Roethlisberger’s personality, it also excuses the flaw with a reasonable explanation.

But some people grumble that he can be curt if he doesn't want to be bothered and there are members of the service industry who share stories of his walking out on checks or losing his temper over poor service. ... Mr. Pickett said he is aware of Mr. Roethlisberger's reputation of occasional rudeness, but he has seen no evidence of it. "Anywhere he goes, he's under the spotlight 24/7," he said. "We all get angry sometimes when service isn't what we expect. When he does it, it's possible that people blow it out of proportion” (Majors, D. 2010, March 8).

The other tales about Roethlisberger’s good-guy personality, from buying a beer for a stranger to signing autographs while running errands, also greatly outweigh this one mention of Roethlisberger’s flaws.

"A buddy of mine was there in Milledgeville that night," he said. "He walked up to him and said, 'I just turned 21.' And Ben Roethlisberger bought him a beer." ... "He's always been nice to everyone," she said. "When we see him, he's quiet and he wears his baseball cap down low like he doesn't want to be recognized. But I know people who have socialized with him on the water, and they say he's nice and he's a lot of fun." ... Mr. Webb, 22, a student at Georgia Military College in Milledgeville, works at the Publix supermarket in Eatonton. He said Mr. Roethlisberger once stopped in for groceries and wound up signing autographs for almost 30 minutes (Majors, D. 2010, March 8).

A March 13, 2010, article advises the readers that Roethlisberger posed for pictures with police officers that night because he likes police dogs and points to another of Roethlisberger's charities. "Mr. Roethlisberger has a fondness for police dogs. Since 2006, his foundation has given several hundred thousand dollars to dozens of K-9 agencies in the Pittsburgh area and in cities where the Steelers play" (Dunlap, C., 2010, March 13). Ed Bouchette provides a defensive quote from the Steelers coach in another article: "Tomlin went on to describe Roethlisberger as 'a ridiculous competitor, a good guy, a guy who wants to win. A guy who doesn't mind toting the burden that comes with being the quarterback of our football team. Really what you see is what you get from my perspective'" (Bouchette, E., 2010, March 23). And a March 30, 2010, article notes that Roethlisberger's teammates are also behind him.

"I've always kind of enjoyed Ben and got along with him," [Aaron] Smith [Steelers defensive end] said. "I honestly didn't see much difference in his personality at all. You show up and do your thing. He's kind of a fun guy. He enjoys having fun, joking around and going about his business. He's just a jovial kind of person when he's around here" (Bouchette, E., 2010, March 30).

As was the case with Vick, there were stories that set up positive frames of Roethlisberger in other ways, but portraying him as a good guy was the most common way journalists established positive frames. The other most common way authors set up a positive frame was through the use of quotes from Roethlisberger's lawyer denying that Roethlisberger sexually assaulted the alleged victim: "But Attorney Edward T.M. Garland said he believes that Mr. Roethlisberger 'is absolutely innocent of criminal misconduct. The fans and the people that believe in him should be patient. ... The truth

will come out,' he said Tuesday in a telephone interview" (Balingit, M., 2010, March 10).

Other stories featured similar quotes.

Mr. Roethlisberger has denied the accusation through his Atlanta-based attorney, Edward Garland, who Friday reiterated his client's innocence. "From the very beginning, Ben has maintained that he is not guilty of any criminal conduct, and we believe the district attorney should reach the same determination," Mr. Garland said (Majors, D., 2010, April 10).

A March 24, 2010, article set up a positive frame toward Roethlisberger by providing a quote from a forensic expert. After noting that Roethlisberger had volunteered to provide a sample of his DNA and had even returned to Georgia to do so, the article provides an expert quote explaining what the dropped request may mean. This not only provides a defensive quote, but also lends an air of credibility to the claim of Roethlisberger's innocence.

Forensic expert Dr. Cyril Wecht said the fact that police have declined to take a DNA sample from Mr. Roethlisberger means that it's likely there is no forensic evidence to back up the woman's claims. "When you don't have any biological evidence, you have to decide whether you want to proceed with what the purported victim has stated," he said. The woman who made the accusation, a student at Georgia College & State University, was examined at Oconee Regional Medical Center just hours after she told Milledgeville police that Mr. Roethlisberger sexually assaulted her. Dr. Wecht said it's likely she was examined for signs of sexual assault there. If police have no comparable sample, it's likely that the exam of her and her clothing yielded no foreign biological specimens such as semen, hair or saliva, he said (Balingit, M., & Bouchette, E., 2010, March 24).

Contributing to this positive good-guy portrayal of Roethlisberger was a certain familiarity that was present in many of the stories. One *PPG* article really demonstrates this familiarity when it compares Roethlisberger to fans and talks about getting to know him.

For all his popularity here in Pittsburgh, Mr. Roethlisberger is a distinctly local deity. He seems to share our banalities and penchant for screwing up a good deal. Like so many people we know with far less money and opportunity, he has a habit

of turning up at places that aren't good for his reputation. As we've gotten to know him, the pedestal has gotten lower and our exasperation has grown with each failure of judgment (Norman, T., 2010, March 9).

This familiarity was also demonstrated with the different ways the papers addressed Roethlisberger. While Vick was referred to in a traditional manner, as Michael Vick or Vick, Roethlisberger was frequently called Mr. Roethlisberger, Big Ben or Ben. The use of Mr. Roethlisberger seems to indicate a certain level of respect while the use of Roethlisberger's first name or nickname indicates a familiarity. This is how people address friends and using it reinforces the idea that the readers know Roethlisberger. The picture painted is of someone the readers have gotten to know as young, foolish and susceptible to being taken advantage of, but still not the type to commit rape.

In addition, the progression of coverage was such that early stories on Vick were more likely to feature a positive frame regarding Vick, while later stories became more likely to feature a negative frame. Sixty-four percent of the stories with a dominant positive frame about Vick were written between April 27, 2007, and May 16, 2007. This was not the case with stories about Roethlisberger, which featured more of the negative frames in the first 10 days of coverage. Between March 5, 2010, and March 14, 2010, nearly 56% of the negatively framed stories were written. It is possible this happened because as coverage of Vick continued, a few new sources claimed Vick was involved with dog fighting whereas in the Roethlisberger case, the only sources speaking throughout the coverage were pro-Roethlisberger. The early coverage of Roethlisberger may have been negative because this was the second time Roethlisberger had been in trouble; however, as the only sources available to the press were pro-Roethlisberger, the coverage started to become more positive toward him.

Tone toward victim

It was expected that the Vick and Roethlisberger articles would treat the victims differently, which was confirmed by the results of this study. However, what I found is that the victim was only a small side note in most of the stories on both athletes. In *PPG* Roethlisberger articles, most authors only barely mentioned the alleged victim other than to mention she was a 20-year-old college student and to give a very brief account of the events.

A 20-year-old student in Milledgeville, Ga., has accused Steelers quarterback Ben Roethlisberger of sexually assaulting her at a dance club early this morning. ... "She approached the officer. The officer spoke with all members of her party, and then she was given the opportunity to go to the hospital, and that was our main concern at that point," Deputy Chief Malone said. ... The alleged victim was treated and released at the Oconee Regional Medical Center in Milledgeville (Silver, J.D., & Birdsong, T., 2010, March 5).

Police in Milledgeville, Ga., are investigating an accusation brought by a 20-year-old woman who said Mr. Roethlisberger sexually assaulted her in the bathroom of a club in the early morning hours of March 5 (Bouchette, E., 2010, March 19). Milledgeville police Chief Woodrow W. Blue Jr. and representatives of the Georgia Bureau of Investigation early this week concluded their monthlong investigation into the accusation made by a 20-year-old woman who said Mr. Roethlisberger assaulted her in a nightclub. ... A police officer was approached in the early hours of March 5 outside Capital City, a popular dance club in Milledgeville, by a young woman who said she had been assaulted by a man fitting Mr. Roethlisberger's description. Witnesses said the woman, a student at nearby Georgia College & State University, had been in the company of Mr. Roethlisberger, some of her friends and several of his companions, including two off-duty police officers who sometimes serve as the quarterback's bodyguards. ... The woman was taken to a nearby medical center, where she was treated and released (Majors, D., 2010, April 8).

Only six of the stories featured either a dominantly negative or positive frame toward the alleged victim in the Roethlisberger case. Only one of those featured a dominant positive frame toward the victim and five of them featured a dominant

negative frame. The positive frame gave the alleged victim an air of credibility by pointing out she went to the police.

"Their daughter has done the right thing and reported this matter to the police. She has been, and will be, available to the authorities to assist them in the criminal investigation. While the matter is under investigation, we ask you to respect her privacy, keep her name out of the press and allow the family space and time to heal" (Birdsong, T., 2010, March 9).

The five articles which featured a dominant negative frame did so by questioning the credibility of the alleged victim. The stories did this by questioning the motivations behind the accusation.

Late Friday afternoon, the quarterback's agent, Ryan Tollner, issued a statement: "Last night, Ben and his friends met a group of women and everyone mingled together throughout the evening. We have spoken to law enforcement. Based on information currently available, an allegation was made against Ben, which appeared to be dismissed after a preliminary investigation last night. Obviously, given the prior accusation against Ben, we are skeptical of motive, but we will continue to cooperate with everyone involved" (Silver, J.D., 2010, March 6).

In an opinion column, journalist Ron Cook wrote that Roethlisberger needs to be careful going out in public because he might encounter women looking to "capitalize financially on his fame" (Cook, R., 2010, March 7). Another article written on March 8, 2010, questioned the credibility of the alleged victim by noting the police would not say whether she was a credible witness. Even asking whether the victim is credible can implant doubt in the reader's mind. Another article quotes Roethlisberger's attorney calling into question anyone pointing a finger at Roethlisberger. It also questions the integrity of the investigators for not dismissing the charges already.

"It's very dangerous for someone of a celebrity status to have even inference of impropriety," he said. "It's easier for some investigator to bring the charge than it is to simply dismiss it because they might be accused of being influenced by the celebrity status. Therefore, sometimes they proceed with cases that simply should have been closed without merit in order to avoid the claim that the case was

dismissed because the person was famous, rich, had a fancy attorney.” ... And he added that the fact that his client is a high-profile athlete might make witnesses unreliable. "Witnesses come out of the woodwork ... they are motivated by a desire to get in front of the camera," he said. "Evidence is therefore very unreliable" (Balingit, M., 2010, March 10).

Roethlisberger had been previously accused of sexual assault. While many of the stories mentioned this and briefly discussed the previous case, there were several stories in the first week of coverage that very negatively framed the previous alleged victim. These stories set up this negative frame by portraying the first alleged victim as dishonest and using Roethlisberger for profit.

He already stood accused of raping a Nevada resort hostess in his hotel room during a July 2008 golf tournament at Lake Tahoe. But the woman never went to the authorities. Instead she sued Mr. Roethlisberger in July in the absence of any police report or physical evidence (Silver, J.D., 2010, March 6).

He also has been accused of raping a Nevada resort hostess in his hotel room during a July 2008 golf tournament in Lake Tahoe. In that case, however, the woman who accused him did not go to authorities. Instead, she sued Mr. Roethlisberger in July in the absence of any police report or physical evidence (Majors, D., 2010, March 7).

When a Nevada resort hostess accused Big Ben of sexually assaulting her, there was a moment of hesitation -- and real terror across Steeler Nation -- though the quarterback's legal team vigorously denied the accusation. The woman sued him for big bucks in the absence of a police report to back up her story, which drew hostile public opinion, legal scrutiny and press skepticism (Norman, T., 2010, March 9).

Like many of the Roethlisberger articles, many of the *AJC* Vick stories only briefly mentioned the dogs. Fifteen of the stories did not address the dogs at all, other than to say there was a dog-fighting investigation. Of those stories that did discuss the dogs at all, many only briefly talked about the dogs. Several other stories only mentioned the number of dogs removed from the property but did not set up either a positive or negative frame for the dogs. Although there is a stereotype that pit bulls are naturally

aggressive and fighting dogs, which could be used to set up a negative frame of the dogs and defend Vick's actions, none of the stories set up that frame.

Most of the *AJC* stories that did discuss the dogs set up a positive frame of the dogs, treating them sympathetically. In many cases, the authors set up a positive or positive frame of the dogs by using words like "mistreated," "damaged" or "heavily scarred" as adjectives to describe the dogs. Although these stories did not go into much detail about the dogs, these adjectives tend to illicit a sympathetic response in people and therefore create a positive frame for the dogs.

The *Virginian-Pilot* reported that, according to court records, police found about 30 dogs, some heavily scarred, and various paraphernalia associated with dog fighting while conducting a search of the home, which Vick owns but does not live in (Wyche, S., 2007, April 27).

Falcons quarterback Michael Vick blamed family members for the mistreated dogs and other evidence of illegal activity police discovered this week at a property he owns in Virginia. ... Dozens of dogs have been taken off the property to animal control facilities (Knobler, M., & Wyche, S., 2007, April 28).

Along with damaged pit bulls among the 66 dogs found at Vick's old home, there was a slew of dog-fighting paraphernalia and blood splatters on the floor of a room above the garage (Moore, T., 2007, May 26).

Other *AJC* stories that discussed the dogs in greater detail set up even stronger positive frames through the use of defensive quotes and imagery that paints the dogs as helpless victims.

Among the nearly 70 dogs discovered at the property, where police were called initially in a drug investigation involving Vick's cousin Davon Boddie, were five dogs with scars and other injuries. According to the affidavit, three heavily scarred pit bulls were seized. ... The care of the dogs was also questioned in the affidavit. "The majority of the dogs either had no water or very dirty water in bowls that were coated with a green slimy substance consistent in appearance with algae," Smith wrote (Wyche, S., 2007, May 22).

"At the end of the fight, the losing dog was sometimes put to death by strangulation, hanging, gun shot, electrocution, or some other method," according

to the document. Members of the group would also "test" dogs to see if they were "game" -- meaning it would be a good fighter. Dogs not deemed "game" were put to death. Investigators uncovered the graves of seven pit bulls who were killed by members of Bad Newz Kennels during the execution of the first sealed search warrant on June 7 (Ledbetter, D.O., 2007, July 7).

Another article sets up a defensive frame of Vick's victims by defending the pit bull breed as a loyal breed that is forced to fight by unscrupulous owners. The overall image that emerges from these articles is that Vick was cruel and abusive while the pit bulls were innocent victims.

Looking at the dominant frame toward the victim, an interesting point frequently came up in the Roethlisberger articles, but was much rarer in the Vick articles. Many of the *PPG* Roethlisberger stories, while barely mentioning the alleged victim of the sexual assault, set up the team, NFL, fans, town and even Roethlisberger himself as victims. This plays into rape myths by trivializing the alleged sexual assault, but it also sets up a negative frame of the alleged sexual assault victim by pushing her out of the victim role.

Articles that treat the team as the real victims set up this frame by referring to the amount of money Roethlisberger is paid and/or the way his actions have damaged the Steelers' reputation.

He has brought shame and embarrassment on the Steelers. We're talking about an organization that, in Roethlisberger's case, has invested \$102 million in him and made him the face of the franchise. It's not hard to imagine the disappointment and anger that team president Art Rooney II and coach Mike Tomlin must have felt when they heard about Roethlisberger's situation Friday. It's also not hard to imagine that anger turning to fury if Roethlisberger is charged and then perhaps suspended by NFL commissioner Roger Goodell for conduct unbecoming of a pro football player (Cook, R., 2010, March 7).

Here's the best part for giddy Ravens fans: All of this leaves the Steelers in a – terrible spot. Franchise quarterbacks don't come along often. The Steelers have one in Roethlisberger – a two-time Super Bowl winner -- and have invested \$102 million in him, making him the face of the team. The Rooneys [team owners] hardly could have imagined that Roethlisberger twice would make these kinds of

headlines. If it were a marginal player involved, the Steelers almost certainly would have released him. They cut wide receiver Cedrick Wilson in March 2008, after he was involved in a domestic abuse case. But the team can't release Roethlisberger. It needs him to win games (Cook, R., 2010, March 9).

A March 25, 2010, article features the headline "Big Ben's trouble's tarnish Steelers' image." The article goes on to tell readers how Roethlisberger's situation will negatively impact the team.

"I think it's well known that we're very, very conscious of how we do business," [Head Coach Mike] Tomlin said in Orlando, Fla., this week, "that we're very highly concerned about our image, perception, how we conduct ourselves. Our standards of conduct I think are above and beyond those of our peers. We embrace that." ... The organization's best minds now have time to stew over the damage his presence can bring to the brand they've so expertly crafted lo' these many years (Collier, G., 2010, March 25).

An article treating the fans as the victims takes a similar approach to these articles, noting how the Roethlisberger situation has worn on the patience of Steelers' fans. The title of the article, "Big Ben's off-field calls test fans' patience," is an appropriate title based on the body of the article.

As we've gotten to know him, the pedestal has gotten lower and our exasperation with him has grown with each failure of judgment. At 28, Big Ben seems to be interested in partying like a frat boy during the off season instead of enjoying his millions in dignified obscurity like the overwhelming majority of his teammates. Perhaps this latest accusation is a wake-up call to a city busy reinventing itself on so many levels, suggesting that it move beyond the era of elite athletes as role models and fantasy buddies. Too much psychic energy goes into celebrating them as if they were a higher species of humanity (Norman, T., 2010, March 9).

Still another article treats the town where the alleged sexual assault occurred as the victim of this story.

For as hospitable as Mr. Bentley has been since Mr. Roethlisberger came to town and the media followed -- in an aside, he mentioned he's a fan of Steelers wide receiver and former Georgia Bulldog Hines Ward -- the mayor understands, nine days later, how Milledgeville might want to get back to, well, being Milledgeville. "For a while it was a novelty," Mr. Bentley said. "But then I believe for many of the students, it became a bit of aggravation and then turned into what they viewed

as an invasion of privacy." ... He [Milledgeville police Chief Woodrow Blue] also spoke of how the aftermath of Mr. Roethlisberger's visit continues to be trying for a town already shaken by recent closings of a Rheem heating and cooling products plant and a Shaw carpet mill, and by an unemployment rate that has hit 14.2 percent (Dunlap, C., 2010, March 14).

PPG articles that treat Roethlisberger as a victim generally set up this frame by noting how this accusation, even if proven false, will have long-lasting repercussions for his reputation. A March 9, 2010, article noted, "No matter the outcome of the case, Roethlisberger will lose to at least some degree. His reputation has taken another big hit" (Cook, R., 2010, March 9). Other stories had the same general idea but discussed it more in-depth.

But forget about what this incident could do to the Steelers. That seems irrelevant compared with what it means to Roethlisberger. Even if he isn't charged, he still loses. His reputation has taken another big hit. There will be damage even if he is cleared of all wrongdoing. ... No matter how that turns out, a lot of people won't ever look at Roethlisberger the same way again (Cook, R., 2010, March 7).

While the case can be made that the town, team and fans are all victims of Roethlisberger's actions, the articles treating them as the primary victim of the story trivializes rape and the alleged victim herself. By trivializing rape and the alleged sexual assault victim, the story creates a negative frame toward the victim.

Conclusion

There were more stories with dominant positive frames toward Roethlisberger than Vick, as well as more stories with dominant negative frames toward Vick. A more detailed history of past indiscretions in *AJC* Vick articles contributed to the more negative framing of Vick's dog-fighting case than Roethlisberger's sexual case. Although the amount of detail available on Roethlisberger's and Vick's alleged crimes was limited

for the majority of the stories examined, the two *AJC* articles on Vick released after more details became available were heavily detailed. While it is impossible to draw conclusions about how much detail the Roethlisberger articles might have gone into if more details were released, the greater detail provided on Vick's past brushes with the law and other behavior issues does set up a more negative frame on Vick. Both athletes had previous controversies, but Vick's were covered in far greater detail in more articles.

Positive frames toward Roethlisberger and negative frames toward Vick were also established through the tone used toward the athletes and their alleged victims. Earlier coverage of Vick tended to be more positive by providing quotes and information which suggested he was not directly involved in the dog-fighting. As the story's coverage progressed, the dominant tone of the articles became more accusatory of Vick even though charges had not been filed. The *AJC* articles that featured a more negative tone toward Vick tended to provide information and quotes that pointed to his guilt in the dog-fighting operation. By contrast, *PPG* stories featuring a positive tone toward Roethlisberger tended to rely heavily on the "he's not the type" rape myth, which relieves Roethlisberger of responsibility for the alleged crime (Franiuk, R., Seefeldt, J.L., & Vandello, J.A., 2008). The *PPG* articles that featured a dominant negative tone toward Roethlisberger, rather than pointing to him as guilty, treated him as foolish and guilty of making poor decisions but not guilty of sexual assault. The fact that not only did more articles on Roethlisberger feature dominant positive frames and more articles on Vick featured dominant negative frames, but the articles also set up the negative and positive frames in very different ways raises some interesting questions about the how our culture handles issues of race and crime, as well as different types of crimes.

Vick's alleged victims, the dogs, were not portrayed negatively in any of the stories. While the majority of the Roethlisberger stories also did not feature a negative tone about his alleged victim, there were a few that did. In addition, there were several stories that while not directly portraying the current alleged victim in a negative light, did set up a very negative frame of Roethlisberger's first accuser. The question of whether this negative portrayal of the first alleged victim will impact how the audience reacts to even neutral information regarding the second alleged victim should be raised. In addition, nearly one-third of the *PPG* articles on Roethlisberger trivialized rape by treating the team, NFL, fans or even Roethlisberger as the primary victim. The presence of this rape myth, that rape is trivial, contributes to an overall positive frame of Roethlisberger.

Chapter IV: The establishment of thematic and episodic frames

Like the use of positive and negative frames, thematic and episodic frames have important implications for how the audience views the subject of a story. Particularly in the cases of stories about crime, episodic stories emphasize personal responsibility while thematic stories, by placing a crime into a larger context, relieve the alleged perpetrator of some blame (Gross, K., 2005 & Iyengar, S., 1991). Based on H2, I expected that more *PPG* stories about Roethlisberger would feature dominant thematic frames, while more *AJC* articles on Vick would feature dominant episodic frames. While both stories had featured mostly episodic framing, Roethlisberger did have more thematic frames. In addition, as Iyengar's research suggested, there were many episodic stories which still featured some thematic framing. However, the frames of these stories were still dominantly episodic and did not serve to place the story in a larger context or shift the blame for the alleged crimes off of the quarterback.

Thematic vs. episodic frames

When it came to thematic versus episodic framing in the Roethlisberger and Vick stories, H2 suggested that articles about Roethlisberger would feature more thematic frames than articles about Vick. What I found was that stories on both men were predominantly episodic, but Roethlisberger did receive more thematic framing than Vick. Of the 34 *PPG* articles on Roethlisberger, six, or 17.65%, featured purely thematic frames and 21, or 61.76%, featured purely episodic frames. The remaining seven, or 20.59%, had a dominant episodic frame but featured some thematic framing as well. Of

the 42 *AJC* articles on Vick, five, or 11.9% were thematic and 31, or 73.81%, were episodic. Six, or 14.29%, of the articles were dominantly episodic but with some thematic framing.

The episodic frames for Vick and Roethlisberger were both established through a focus on the quarterbacks and the cases each was facing. The authors did not write about other players or issues going on. For example, a March 5, 2010, article about Roethlisberger begins with this lead sentence, “A 20-year-old student in Milledgeville, Ga., has accused Steelers quarterback Ben Roethlisberger of sexually assaulting her at a dance club early this morning” (Silver, J.D., & Birdsong, T., 2010, March 5). The article then continues by providing the known details about the previous night’s events and a brief summary of the other pending sexual assault case for Roethlisberger. An episodic article from April 2, 2010, likewise provides a summary of the case and an update on the case’s status (Majors, D., 2010, April 2).

Episodic *AJC* articles on Vick also focused on Vick and the dog-fighting case, as well as his past brushes with the law. An April 27, 2010, article began with a reference to the Congressional breakfast Vick had missed and continued with a list of the other mistakes Vick had made in the recent past (Moore, T., 2010, April 27). Another article set up an episodic frame by beginning with a statement from the Falcons’ owner.

Atlanta Falcons owner Arthur Blank, concerned that quarterback Michael Vick could be suspended by the NFL, has had another meeting with his embattled star where “I could not have been more stern.” Blank spoke to Vick in person about a series of recent off-the-field incidents, most recently an ongoing investigation of illegal dog fighting at a property he owns in Virginia (Wyche, S., 2010, May 11).

The article continued this episodic frame by providing more quotes regarding the situation, from Vick as well as additional details about the investigation.

Dominant episodic frames with thematic secondary frames

Articles on Vick that established a dominant episodic frame but still brought in secondary thematic frames generally focused on the specifics of Vick's situation. For example, a May 17, 2007, article begins with a discussion of the Vick case, which is the primary focus of the article. The article provides quotes from investigators and an update on the status of the Vick case. However, the end of the article briefly discusses a previous dog-fighting case the investigators had worked on.

Strouse assisted in the dog investigation of the Benjamin Butts case in Surry County in 2000. A total of 33 dogs were removed and later returned after he was not prosecuted. Butts died Feb. 17. ... Virginia is a hotbed for dogfighting. There have been recent convictions in Richmond, Chesapeake and Spotsylvania. The most notorious Virginia case was of "Fat" Bill Reynolds, publisher of a dogfighting magazine, who spent 30 months in prison on federal charges of sending images of pit-bull fights across state lines. "We think that it's very prevalent. That's why the task force has been formed, because it's a serious problem in Virginia," Strouse said. "The rural localities don't have the resources to work one of these cases on their own. We provide investigators, housing for the dogs and experts to testify" (Ledbetter, D.O., 2007, May 17).

The introduction of this thematic frame at the end of the article does give the Vick situation some cultural context; however, the dominance of the episodic frame throughout the rest of the article keeps the focus of the article on personal responsibility. Other stories took a similar approach. A May 25, 2007, article begins with a discussion of the current state of the investigation and the NFL offering help to investigators before discussing briefly other cases.

NFL security has contacted investigators in Surry County, Va., to offer its services in the investigation of illegal dogfighting at a property owned by Falcons quarterback Michael Vick, a person with knowledge of the situation told *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*. ... Investigators met Monday to examine evidence in the case. Charges have not yet been filed. Vick has denied knowledge of dogfighting at the rural property. ... In a recent federal dogfighting case in Ohio, it took investigators 14 months to file charges. It took 11 months for investigators

to gain the conviction of Stacey A. Miller of Richmond, Va., for dogfighting and animal cruelty. ... The USDA was involved in the investigation that led to charges in the Ohio dogfighting case. "We don't comment on, confirm or deny whether we've got any investigative activity ongoing pertaining to a particular situation or incident," said Paul M. Feeney, Deputy Counsel for the Office of Inspector General, U.S. Department of Agriculture (Wyche, S., 2007, May 25).

This secondary frame, while offering some cultural context, does more to provide expectations about what will happen with Vick's case rather than relieving him of blame in the situation. Other stories brought in secondary thematic frames by discussing football or other players who have been disciplined under the new NFL conduct policy even though the majority of the article focuses on Vick.

Michael Vick funded and gambled on dogfighting as far back as when he was in college, according to a confidential police informant who appeared on ESPN on Sunday. ... Police initially went to Vick's Surry County, Va., property in late April on a drug investigation, stemming from the arrest of Vick's cousin, Davon Boddie, a week earlier. Boddie claimed the residence as his permanent address. When police arrived, they found 66 dogs, mainly pit bulls, and evidence of dogfighting. ... Though the NFL appears to be waiting for the legal system to run its course, commissioner Roger Goodell could discipline Vick without a conviction, under the more-stringent player conduct policy. Goodell has already suspended Tennessee's Adam "Pacman" Jones for the 2007 season and Cincinnati wide receiver Chris Henry eight games for repeated offenses, some of which did not result in criminal charges (Wyche, S., & Ledbetter, D.O., 2007, May 28).

Another article focused on how the team (coaches and other players) was dealing with the Vick situation. The article then proceeded to shift the focus from this episodic frame on Vick's situation to other issues the team was dealing with.

Falcons coach Bobby Petrino said Wednesday he has faith that quarterback Michael Vick has been truthful with him in conversations about the circumstances regarding a dog-fighting investigation at a property Vick owns in Virginia. ... Tailback Warrick Dunn followed up on Petrino's request. "Right now everybody's really been concentrating on football and not talking about anything that's dealt with our quarterback," Dunn said. "Obviously those are his issues, and he has to deal with them. Every day he has to come to work and leave all that behind him." ... Outside of Vick's situation, Petrino said the recent injuries to starting linebacker Demorrio Williams (torn pectorals) and defensive tackle Rod Coleman (ruptured quadriceps) are concerns, but both are believed to be on a timetable to

be back before the fourth game of the season. Both players had surgery to repair their injuries, suffered the final week of April. Petrino said Williams is expected to begin football drills in June and could be ready to play in the season opener at Minnesota on Sept. 9. Coleman might be ready to play by Week 1, but Petrino said the pass-rushing specialist could be out until Game 4, Sept. 30 against Houston at the Georgia Dome (Wyche, S., 2007, May 10).

While these stories which bring in thematic frames for a brief portion of the article do shift the focus away from Vick, the dominant frame is still episodic. Stories with dominant episodic frames, in spite of the presence of secondary thematic frames, still emphasize personal accountability and responsibility in issues of crime (Iyengar, S., 1991).

The *PPG* Roethlisberger articles that had a dominant episodic frame but brought in a secondary thematic frame followed a similar format to the Vick articles. They begin with discussion of Roethlisberger and the cases he's involved in and then explore other issues. In several, this frame was set up through a discussion of the NFL player conduct policy and how it has impacted past athletes with personal issues.

Steelers quarterback Ben Roethlisberger finds himself in more hot water today, this time with the National Football League. NFL commissioner Roger Goodell sounded an ominous tone Tuesday for Mr. Roethlisberger during a news conference at the NFL meetings. ... A player -- or any NFL employee -- does not have to be convicted of a criminal charge to be disciplined by the league. For example, Mr. Goodell suspended Denver wide receiver Brandon Marshall last season for one game and docked him two weeks' pay for violating the league's conduct policy after he was charged with several misdeeds, including domestic abuse. Mr. Marshall later was cleared of all charges (Bouchette, E., 2010, March 23).

Even though Georgia authorities have confirmed they're no longer seeking Ben Roethlisberger's DNA, the quarterback's situation remains fluid. So to speak. Take the matter of conflicting reports involving Ed Garland, Roethlisberger's legal ace and a litigator with a capacious reputation for getting tough guys out of tough spots. ... Here's what else is fluid. The Philadelphia Eagles are suddenly entertaining offers for all three of their quarterbacks, Donovan McNabb, Kevin Kolb, and former dogfighting commissioner and convicted felon Michael Vick.

... Miami Dolphins coach Tony Sparano, also attending this week's NFL meetings in Orlando, noted with evident disgust the arrests of three wayward fish in the past seven weeks. Asked if any of those players would be cut, Sparano said this: "I think you've got to look at the player's history. If the history was chronic and there was a lot of problems there in the past or any of those types of things, I think that's something you could consider" (Collier, G., 2010, March 25).

Other Roethlisberger articles shifted focus to the community. A March 8, 2010, article began with an episodic frame focusing on Roethlisberger and his reputation in the Georgia community, but then went on to bring in a thematic frame with a discussion of the community where Roethlisberger owns his vacation home.

Since purchasing his summer vacation home at Reynolds Plantation, an upscale community near Greensboro, Ga., Steelers quarterback Ben Roethlisberger has cultivated a reputation similar to the one he has in Ohio and Pittsburgh, the two other places where he has lived. Those who encounter him say he is friendly, but not necessarily outgoing. He is generous with his time and money, posing for photographs and donating to charity. ... There are 2,200 homes in Reynolds Plantation, ranging in price from \$500,000 to \$10 million. Sixty percent of the properties are owned and occupied by year-round residents. The rest are weekend getaways or vacation homes owned by people from all corners of the world. There are all the amenities one would expect, including pools, tennis courts, hiking trails, marinas, restaurants and six championship golf courses. ... "This is a pretty new area, and a lot of people come down here for the summer," said Eddie Webb, who is not related to Ms. Webb. "We see license plates from all over, especially up north. And you can tell by the cars that the people are really well-off. This is a resort, a place to get away, so you see a lot of celebrities" (Majors, D., 2010, March 8).

The journalists did establish the secondary thematic frames in the Roethlisberger and Vick stories in very different ways. While all the secondary thematic frames in Roethlisberger articles focused on something other than rape (the community, NFL personal conduct policy, other players with controversies), several of the secondary frames in Vick articles focused on dog fighting. This could place Vick's situation into the larger cultural context of dog-fighting and therefore relieve Vick of some culpability, but instead it seems to serve the opposite purpose. The information provided on other dog-

fighting cases seems to emphasize the seriousness of Vick's alleged crime, while the secondary thematic frames in the Roethlisberger articles emphasized things other than his alleged crime. More specifically, articles that feature secondary thematic frames on the community and the personal conduct policy push Roethlisberger into a victim role and trivialize rape. The March 8, 2010, article notes that the community is a haven where celebrities come to get away and yet it seems Roethlisberger still can't get away as he is approached for photographs and now embroiled in this controversy. The secondary thematic frames that discussed the NFL's personal conduct policy remind the readers that Roethlisberger does not have to be guilty of anything to be punished by the NFL commissioner. If harm to Roethlisberger's personal life, reputation and career is the true cost of this alleged sexual assault as these stories convey, then rape itself must be trivial.

Thematic framing

Roethlisberger articles that featured a dominant thematic frame tended to highlight other player controversies, although they did not specifically discuss sexual assault cases.

A March 9, 2010, article begins with a discussion of Roethlisberger and his controversies, but quickly places it in a thematic frame by noting how Roethlisberger is no different than normal people. The article positions Roethlisberger's mistakes as just another in a line of celebrities, or typical Steelers' fans, making bad decisions.

Previous sex scandals involving celebrities and elite athletes have taught us that their appetites tend to match their sense of entitlement. Tiger Woods took that standard to operatic heights, of course. As the biggest athlete in history in terms of endorsement earnings, there was something appropriate about the Promethean scale of Tiger's fall from grace. For all of his popularity here in Pittsburgh, Mr. Roethlisberger is a distinctly local deity. He seems to share our banalities and penchant for screwing up a good deal. Like so many people we know with far less

money or opportunity, he has a habit of turning up at places that aren't good for his reputation. As we've gotten to know him, the pedestal has gotten lower and our exasperation with him has grown with each failure of judgment. At 28, Big Ben seems to be interested in partying like a frat boy during the off season instead of enjoying his millions in dignified obscurity like the overwhelming majority of his teammates. Perhaps this latest accusation is a wake-up call to a city busy reinventing itself on so many levels, suggesting that it move beyond the era of elite athletes as role models and fantasy buddies. Too much psychic energy goes into celebrating them as if they were a higher species of humanity. They really aren't, folks. Most of them would agree that they aren't particularly complicated compared to the rest of us. They're motivated by the same terrible human passions that bedevil their legion of fans -- if not more so (Norman, T., 2010, March 9).

A March 30, 2010, article focuses on how the Steelers have had a recent string of problems with their athletes and discusses several examples, including Roethlisberger.

A week ago, Steelers coach Mike Tomlin talked of the franchise's standards of conduct being "above and beyond those of our peers" in the NFL. It seemed like a bunch of baloney, the height of arrogance from a man who is running what appears to be an out-of-control team if you believe the newspaper headlines. ... Star quarterback Ben Roethlisberger is facing sexual assault allegations in two states. Things are such a mess with the second case involving a 20-year-old college student in Georgia that the Steelers, at least for the moment, don't want Roethlisberger around their South Side practice facility to work out with his teammates because he would cause a distraction. ... In February, the Steelers put their franchise tag on kicker Jeff Reed, assuring that he will make \$2,814,000 next season. They did so after he had been involved in two incidents involving the police in the previous 13 months. In April 2009, the team gave linebacker James Harrison a six-year, \$51,175,000 contract. They did so after he had been involved in a domestic violence case 13 months earlier in which the charges were dropped after he underwent anger-management counseling. ... News broke Monday that he [Santonio Holmes] has been named in a civil lawsuit because of an alleged incident involving a woman March 7 at an Orlando, Fla., club. According to the suit filed by Anshonae Mills, Holmes threw a glass in her face, cutting her above the eye and temporarily blinding her because of the alcohol in the glass (Cook, R., 2010, March 30).

Vick articles with a dominant thematic frame did tend to focus more on dog-fighting than just other NFL players involved in legal battles. A May 20, 2007, article focuses on new dog-fighting legislation in Georgia and only briefly ties the story into the Vick case in the middle of the article.

On May 3, President Bush signed legislation making it a felony to transport animals across state lines for fighting. But in Georgia, attempts to strengthen the state's anti-dog-fighting legislation have failed. Again. ... Falcons quarterback Michael Vick is under investigation for animal cruelty and dogfighting in Surry County, Va. Dog-fighting equipment and nearly 70 dogs, mainly pit bulls, were discovered at a property near Smithfield, Va., that Vick has since sold. Many of the dogs showed signs of injury and starvation. (Dogfighters believe that starving pit bulls makes them more aggressive, officials say.) ... Nationally, opponents of animal fighting have been working since at least 2000 to make interstate trade of animals for fighting a felony. The bill Bush signed passed the Senate by unanimous consent and the House by a vote of 368-39. Two members of the Georgia delegation voted against it: Republicans Lynn Westmoreland and Jack Kingston (Eckstein, S., 2007, May 20).

A June 12, 2007, article focused on the veterinarian who was assisting with the Vick case. The article set up a thematic frame by focusing on the veterinarian and other animal cruelty cases she had helped investigate.

Dr. Melinda Merck of Canton, one of the nation's top forensic veterinarians, is assisting the prosecution in the investigation of dogfighting at property owned by Falcons quarterback Michael Vick in Surry County, Va., she confirmed Monday. ... Merck, who founded the Cat Clinic of Roswell in 1990, is considered one of the top animal crime scene investigators in the nation, according to the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. In December, Merck was the forensic veterinarian who testified in the Fulton County case in which two brothers were charged with torturing a puppy and then putting it in a heated oven to die. The case ended in a hung jury, and the brothers then pleaded guilty and were given the maximum sentence of five years on the felony animal abuse charges. In April, she was part of a team that seized 45 dogs, including 44 pit bulls, in Pass Christian, Miss., and St. Bernard Parish, La., in a dog-fighting investigation. Merck and Randall Lockwood co-authored an award-winning book, "Forensic Investigation of Animal Cruelty: A Guide for Veterinarians and Law Enforcement Professionals" (Ledbetter, D.O., 2007, June 12).

Another article written on June 14, 2007, focused on how dog-fighting gives pit bulls a negative reputation. The article's main focus is on how misunderstood pit bulls are and ties the Vick case into the perpetuation of that image.

Sean Bailey always digests the news with the same disgust and disappointment. Another athlete, this time Michael Vick, allegedly involved in another dogfighting ring. And another blow to the reputation of a misunderstood group of dogs. "It's unfortunate, the misconceptions and myths that people have about pit bulls," said

the Georgia wide receiver, who breeds blue pit bulls. "Ninety-nine percent of owners take care of their dogs and understand that they are great dogs. The other 1 percent takes advantage of the loyalty of the dog and do these things that hurt its reputation" (Strickland, C., 2007, June 14).

Conclusion

While both the Vick and Roethlisberger stories featured mostly episodic framing, a small percentage of the stories did place their cases into a larger cultural context. Roethlisberger articles were more likely to feature a thematic frame, which is consistent with hypothesis two; however, the Vick articles that featured a thematic frame were more likely to place the Vick case into a larger cultural context that directly related to Vick's case. That is, the Vick thematic articles actually discussed dog-fighting, while the Roethlisberger thematic articles were more likely to discuss other NFL player controversies, but not sexual assault. The overall focus of the thematic framing in Roethlisberger articles was a "he's just like any other guy" thematic frame. By comparing Roethlisberger to other athletes (or even fans) who had been involved in controversies, but not rape, the articles portray him as just another athlete who has made poor personal decisions or been in the wrong place at the wrong time rather than someone potentially guilty of a violent crime. By contrast, thematic articles on Vick tended to focus on other dog-fighting cases and emphasized the seriousness and violence of the crime. While previous literature on thematic and episodic framing suggests that thematic framing in the coverage of criminal cases always lessens the personal responsibility of the alleged perpetrator, I found this was not always the case with the Vick coverage. The thematic framing in the Vick stories could have been used to discuss the culture of dog-fighting and humanize Vick by explaining how he, having grown up in a culture where dog

fighting was prevalent, became involved in it. However, none of the stories took this approach. Instead they focused on the consequences and gruesomeness of other dog-fighting cases, reinforcing the seriousness of Vick's alleged crime. Not only did the *PPG* Roethlisberger articles feature more dominant thematic frames than the *AJC* Vick articles, but the thematic framing in Roethlisberger articles did more to dispel guilt from Roethlisberger than the thematic framing in Vick articles.

Chapter V: Conclusion

The findings from this study show that the portrayal of Michael Vick and Ben Roethlisberger in local newspaper coverage was quite different. As predicted in H1, stories about Roethlisberger included more positive frames than stories about Vick. Perhaps even more importantly, the way that the positive and negative frames were established was quite different.

While most of the stories on both Roethlisberger and Vick did not include a lot of detail regarding their alleged crimes, most likely due to a lack of available detail in the first weeks of the coverage, the level of detail provided on their history of offenses was quite different. The articles on Vick were more likely to list all of Vick's previous mistakes, many of which were not legal issues. Fourteen of the Roethlisberger articles discussed his previous rape allegation; however, only one story mentioned his having a motorcycle accident while not wearing a helmet. In addition, more than one-third of the articles that discussed Roethlisberger's previous rape allegation blatantly discredited the first alleged victim. The end result of these details contributed to a negative frame of Vick, who was portrayed as a frequent wrong-doer, and a positive frame of Roethlisberger, who was portrayed as a victim of false accusations and being in the wrong place at the wrong time.

In addition to the details in the articles contributing to more positive frames of Roethlisberger, the tone toward the athletes contributed to more positive frames on Roethlisberger and negative frames on Vick. To begin with, there were more negative

frames of Vick and more positive frames of Roethlisberger. In addition, the positive frames of Roethlisberger portrayed him as a great guy, tapping into the “he’s not the type” rape myth. The positive frames on Vick relied on quotes and information that defended Vick by pointing out there was no proof that he was involved in the dog fighting. The negative frames on Vick treated him as guilty of being involved in dog fighting, while the negative frames on Roethlisberger treated him as merely a foolish guy, guilty only of putting himself in dangerous situations. The way these frames were established put Vick into the role of a criminal, while Roethlisberger was a great guy who simply made a few bad decisions, which have left him vulnerable to being taken advantage of by others. This framing also puts Roethlisberger in the role of a victim while keeping Vick responsible for his troubles.

The tone toward the victims was perhaps one of the most telling aspects of the stories on Vick and Roethlisberger. While there were negative tones toward Vick’s alleged victims, multiple Roethlisberger stories featured a negative tone toward his alleged victim. This negative tone was established through the discrediting and questioning of the motives of the alleged victim. This negative tone called upon a “she’s lying” rape myth, which when coupled with the “he’s not the type” rape myth present in many stories, leads to an overall positive frame of Roethlisberger. One thing which was common in Roethlisberger articles was the tendency to portray someone other than the alleged sexual assault victim as the primary victim. *PPG* articles on Roethlisberger frequently treated the team, NFL, fans or even Roethlisberger himself as the victim. This not only trivializes the rape, but once again contributes to the positive frame of

Roethlisberger as a good guy who is guilty of nothing more than putting himself in a bad situation.

As expected, the majority of stories on both athletes were episodic rather than thematic. This makes sense since this study was of two specific incidents. However, consistent with H2 and previous studies, stories about Roethlisberger were more likely to be told through a thematic frame than stories about Vick. The thematic frames on Roethlisberger also tended to focus on other celebrity scandals rather than sexual assault, while thematic frames on Vick tended to focus on dog fighting. The thematic frames tend to de-emphasize personal responsibility, but the way that thematic frames were established also tended to re-highlight the seriousness of Vick's alleged crime while trivializing Roethlisberger's case. For example, many of the thematic articles on Vick talked about previous dog-fighting cases and gave disturbing details about the cruelty involved. One thematic article on Vick noted "many of the dogs showed signs of injury and starvation. (Dogfighters believe that starving pit bulls makes them more aggressive, officials say.)" (Eckstein, S., 2007, May 20). On the other hand, one thematic article on Roethlisberger compared his case with that of Tiger Woods who cheated on his wife with multiple women (Norman, T., 2010, March 9).

Not only were the *PPG* articles about Roethlisberger more likely to have positive and thematic frames than *AJC* articles about Vick, but these frames were established in such a way that they maximized Roethlisberger's "good guy" image and Vick's "criminal" image. There are many factors that could have contributed to this disparity. Past studies have shown that black athletes are talked about differently in media coverage even when it does not relate to crime (Mercurio, E., & Filak, V.F., 2010 & Eagleman,

A.M., 2011). In particular, the crimes of black athletes are given more coverage and receive more negative framing than the crimes of white athletes (Mastro, D.E., Blecha, E., & Seate, A.A., 2011 & Berry, B., & Smith, E., 2000). This disparity in coverage further perpetuates the myth that “black athletes are criminals, by disposition, and the best way to deal with these offenders is to disparage and punish them” (Mastro, D.E., Blecha, E., & Seate, A.A., 2011). In addition to the races of the athletes themselves, Roethlisberger played for the Pittsburgh Steelers, a team which would more likely be associated with whiteness, while Vick played for the Atlanta Falcons, a team which would more likely be associated with blackness. With this racial frame readily available in our culture, it would take a conscious effort for journalists to discard this frame in their own writing.

The second reason for the more positive and thematic frames on Roethlisberger and negative and episodic frames on Vick may come from the prevalence of rape myths in our culture. While dogs can be seen as victims, incapable of making any decisions that lead to their victimization, women are often seen as at least partially responsible for sexual assault. One *AJC* columnist called dog fighting worse than rape.

Dogfighting is not steroids. Dogfighting is not drugs. Dogfighting is not bar fights, or spousal abuse, or sexual assault. In at least one way, dogfighting is worse than any of those things. Why? Because you're not going to find people -- particularly NFL players -- who publicly defend any of those other things. Understand this: Dogfighting is generally run and supported by the lowest common denominator of society. But some clearly believe there is nothing wrong with it. Some include Clinton Portis, the Washington running back who defended the indefensible, saying people should leave Vick alone even if allegations are true, and added: "It can't be too bad of a crime." No. Just a felony. Dolt. Do you think Portis is alone? Former NFL running back LeShon Johnson twice was arrested for dogfighting. Was he alone? Rape is a felony. But nobody needs to declare, "I don't believe in rape" (Schultz, J., 2007, May 29).

On the surface, Schultz is likely correct that no NFL player would publically say rape is acceptable; however, rape myths do promote a culture of tolerance toward rape. Some prevalent rape myths include the idea that a woman was asking for it because of how she dressed or behaved or that the perpetrator is not the type to commit sexual assault (Franiuk, R., Seefeldt, J.L., & Vandello, J.A., 2008). Defensive Attribution Theory suggests that the less a person perceives himself or herself to be like a rape victim, the more likely he or she is to place a higher amount of blame for the assault on the victim (Grubb, A.R., & Harrower, J., 2009). In addition, in cases where the alleged victim knows the alleged perpetrator or has consumed alcohol, the victim is more likely to be blamed (Grubb, A.R., & Harrower, J., 2009). In the Roethlisberger case, the alleged victim was not a stranger to Roethlisberger, and they were frequenting bars and clubs that serve alcohol. Although none of the news stories said the alleged victim had consumed alcohol, it is highly plausible many people would assume she had. Since most sports journalists are males and presumably older than a 20-year-old college student, it is unlikely they would consider themselves similar to the alleged rape victim in the Roethlisberger case. These issues could lead these journalists to easily, and without even realizing it, adopt a negative frame toward the victim and a positive frame toward Roethlisberger.

In addition, journalists frequently write about crimes against women. It is not unusual to hear stories about domestic violence or rape allegations involving athletes, nor is it unheard of for athletes to be falsely accused of rape. Unfortunately, the routine nature of rape allegations and the memory of false allegations made against other players (for example the Duke Lacrosse team), likely desensitizes journalists to the crime. Dog

fighting, on the other hand, is a much less routine topic. Most journalists covering the Vick story had likely never written an article about dog fighting and hadn't become desensitized to the topic.

Since this study only reviewed the local newspapers of the two athletes, the standings of the players and football within the local communities could also have had a big impact on how the stories were portrayed. The Pittsburgh Steelers are a more elite, storied team than the Atlanta Falcons, and Pittsburgh itself is a blue-collar football city, where the fans are staunchly devoted to their team. While Atlanta certainly has its share of devoted fans, the overall level of devotion to the Falcons isn't as strong as in Pittsburgh. Perhaps partially due to this level of importance football has in Pittsburgh, Roethlisberger was and continues to be a virtual deity in the city. By contrast, Vick had already begun to fall from grace in Atlanta when the dog-fighting case came up. Roethlisberger had been previously accused of rape, but the accusation had been largely discounted by the media and community as a ploy for financial gain. Vick had not faced serious charges, but had encountered multiple behavioral issues which had garnered media attention. Also playing into Roethlisberger's greater standing within the Pittsburgh community could have been his play on the field. While Roethlisberger had performed consistently on the field since his rookie year, Vick's future as the Falcons' starting quarterback was in question due to his inconsistent play.

This study was not designed to determine the exact cause of the differing coverage between the Michael Vick and Ben Roethlisberger cases. However, it is likely that race, rape myths and ideas about the victims, the standing of the team and players,

and the routine nature of the Roethlisberger case versus the unusualness of the Vick case all contributed to a more negative portrayal of Vick than Roethlisberger.

Limitations & future research

While telling, the results of this qualitative analysis are specific to two athletes and the coverage in two local newspapers. The use of local newspapers allowed for a deeper qualitative analysis and the consideration of how the story progressed over time, but it also limited the research by excluding national sources. A study which examines national sources and uses a qualitative approach could provide more generalizable data on how media outlets treat stories when the race of the alleged perpetrator and the type of crime vary. National magazines and papers would have reached more people and would potentially treat athletes the athletes in a different manner from their local papers. In addition, examining national sources would allow the researcher to examine the same source for stories on both athletes.

Because television is a popular way for people to get sports news, examining the framing in ESPN coverage could be a valuable addition to this study. In addition, television news would have the ability to make positive and negative frames even more distinct as well as potentially elicit even more emotional responses with the images shown. *AJC* reporter Jeff Schultz wrote on May 29, 2007, that ESPN coverage of Vick had become damaging to the NFL's reputation.

If you missed it this past weekend, ESPN, whose reporting on the Michael Vick/dogfighting investigation had been relatively tame to this point, took the story to a level that made Goodell's head hurt. They showed footage of actual dogfights. They juxtaposed it with words and images of Vick. They played an interview with a confidential informant, who pointed the finger at Vick as an

active and eager participant who raised fighting dogs, fought dogs and gambled on dogs (Schultz, J., 2007, May 29).

The video choices that television reporters and producers make could have a very large impact on the framing of the story and the way the audience interprets the information.

An additional area for future study might consider whether the fame of the alleged perpetrator makes a difference in coverage of crimes. Because celebrities are in the spot-light and fans can readily learn about their personal lives, this may lead to a feeling of comfort and familiarity with the athlete in addition to the awe many fans feel. The feeling in one *PPG* article is that Roethlisberger is just like his fans.

For all of his popularity here in Pittsburgh, Mr. Roethlisberger is a distinctly local deity. He seems to share our banalities and penchant for screwing up a good deal. Like so many people we know with far less money or opportunity, he has a habit of turning up at places that aren't good for his reputation. As we've gotten to know him, the pedestal has gotten lower and our exasperation with him has grown with each failure of judgment. At 28, Big Ben seems to be interested in partying like a frat boy during the off season instead of enjoying his millions in dignified obscurity like the overwhelming majority of his teammates. Perhaps this latest accusation is a wake-up call to a city busy reinventing itself on so many levels, suggesting that it move beyond the era of elite athletes as role models and fantasy buddies. Too much psychic energy goes into celebrating them as if they were a higher species of humanity. They really aren't, folks. Most of them would agree that they aren't particularly complicated compared to the rest of us. They're motivated by the same terrible human passions that bedevil their legion of fans -- if not more so (Norman, T., 2010, March 9).

This mixed feeling of familiarity and respect fans and journalists might feel for athletes and other celebrities may have an important impact on the framing used in stories and the way fans interpret stories. It is possible that the coverage of crimes by unknown people might be very different than coverage of celebrities accused of crimes.

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