

More Than Just A Game: Framing Crime and Scandal in College Sports
Laura Keeley, Duke University
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Abstract:

This paper uses a qualitative content analysis to explore the frames employed by the national media during the first three months of coverage of two recent alleged crime scandals involving the lacrosse teams at Duke University in 2006 and at the University of Virginia in 2010. The analysis focuses on articles written by *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, Time magazine and Sports Illustrated. While reporting on the Duke scandal, which later proved not to be a crime case at all, the media most often employed a conflict frame and highlighted the tension between many of the actors in the case, including the accuser, the team, the district attorney, the university and the city. For the Virginia case, the human interest frame was used most often, as the media highlighted the life of the victim, Yeardeley Love, and the effect of her death on her teammates, friends and community. The media also linked the story to the larger issues of dating and domestic violence, unlike in the Duke case where the coverage was completely episodic.

On March 13 2006, in Durham, North Carolina, the Duke University lacrosse team decided to throw a party in an off-campus house on their first night of spring break. One of the team captains who lived in the house paid for two exotic dancers to perform at the party for entertainment. By the end of the night, both of the women left the house amongst shouts of insults aimed at their African-American heritage and drove to the parking lot of a Kroger grocery store a few miles away. One of them, who was described by a security officer at the scene as “passed-out drunk,” was taken to the hospital where she alleged she has been raped by three of the lacrosse players (Wilson and Macur 2006).

For the next 15 months, the sensational story with its elements of race, sex, class, privilege and town conflicts dominated the news headlines, with the “privileged, white, thuggish” athletes pitted against the exotic dancer, who attended the historically black North Carolina Central University (NCCU), the now-disbarred district attorney, their school and the city of Durham. The media also extended the scope of their reporting to include tensions between Duke and Durham, emphasizing the differing racial and socioeconomic compositions of the university and its host city. The three athletes who were charged with first-degree rape, first-degree sexual offense and first-degree kidnapping were later exonerated.

Four years later, another lacrosse team found itself the subject of a sensational scandal, albeit one of a completely different nature. Once again, sex, crime, privilege and sports combined to attract national attention as Yeardeley Love, a fourth-year student at the University of Virginia on the womens lacrosse team, was beaten to death by her on-again, off-again boyfriend George Huguely, also a fourth-year student who played on the mens lacrosse team. Huguely, who had been drinking, entered Love’s unlocked

apartment and kicked down her bedroom door early in the morning. He grabbed her and shook her, repeatedly banging her head against the wall as blood started to ooze out of her nose. One of Love's roommates found her shortly after 2 a.m. and called the police. Love was pronounced dead at the scene, her head covered in bruises in a pool of blood on her pillow, with a swollen eye and scrapes on her chin (Flaherty 2010; Yanda, de Vise, and Johnson 2010).

While May 3, 2010 tragedy bore little similarity to the Duke case in its nature, that did not stop both commentators and reporters from linking the two together as violent crimes committed by privileged athletes under the general umbrella of scandal and sports. Following the examples of scholars in past studies, this paper explores the similarities and differences in the way both of these cases were framed by four national media outlets, *The New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, Time magazine and Sports Illustrated, through a qualitative content analysis.

Literature Review

Since the foundations of modern journalism in the United States were established with the penny press of the early 1800s, crime stories have been a staple of news coverage. More recently, during the 1990s, Americans began to focus on high-profile criminal and civil trials and investigations that bordered on becoming national obsessions driven by extraordinary amounts of mass media coverage (Soothill & Walby 1991; Fox, Van Sickel, & Steiger 2007). Existing research on the theoretical topics of agenda setting and framing provide a basis of understanding for how to approach the study of the coverage of sensational crime stories.

Agenda Setting

Simply put, the mainstream press tells us what to think about (Epstein 1973). Many shared misconceptions about occupational pursuits, ethnic groups, racial minorities, social and gender roles and crime and crime rates are at least partly cultivated through exposure to mass media (Page, Shapiro, & Dempsey 1987; Fox, Van Sickle, and Steiger 2007). McCombs and Shaw (1972) defined *agenda setting* in their landmark study as the idea that there is a strong correlation between the emphasis that mass media place on certain issues (i.e. based on the relative placement or amount of coverage) and the importance attributed to these issues by mass audiences. In the instances of both the Duke lacrosse case and the Virginia Lacrosse case, a plethora of national sources such as CNN Headline News's Nancy Grace and *The New York Times* kept the case in the spotlight for many months (Ghiglione 2008), keeping the case fresh in the mind of the general national audience.

Framing, or, "Second-Level Agenda Setting"

Along with agenda setting, framing is a popular model associated with the study of mass media. The term framing has been used repeatedly to label similar but distinctly different approaches, leading some researchers to draw close parallels between it and agenda setting while others view them as two distinctly different concepts (Scheufele 1999). It is McCombs (2004) who has argued that framing is simply a more refined version of agenda setting. From his perspective, framing means making aspects of an issue more salient (i.e. accessible) through different modes of presentation and therefore shifting people's attitudes. He calls this phenomenon "second-level agenda setting." Scheufele and Tewskury (2007) add an addendum by suggesting that attention to messages may be more necessary for a framing effect to occur than an agenda setting

effect. Mere exposure may be sufficient for agenda setting, but it is less likely to be so for framing effects.

Other scholars reject the idea of framing as second-level agenda setting. Empirical work by Nelson, Clawson and Oxley (1997) suggests that the perceived importance of specific frames, rather than their accessibility, or salience, among audiences, is the key variable. As Scheufele (1999) points out, they do not completely reject the idea of frame accessibility, or salience. For his part, Scheufele coins the phrase *frame setting* to refer to what McCombs called second-level agenda setting, the idea of the salience of issue attributes. For the purposes of this paper, the connection between framing and agenda setting will be accepted as valid, and this paper will narrow its focus to what are known as *media frames*, or “a central organizing idea or story line that provides meaning to an unfolding strip of events...The frame suggests what the controversy is about, the essence of the issue” (Gamson and Modigliani 1987).

Journalists actively build frames to structure and make sense of incoming information and to provide a framework for people to help in determining truth (Fishman 1980; Scheufele 1999; Kosse 2007). Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) enumerated five generic frames: attribution of responsibility, human interest, conflict, morality and economic consequences. De Vreese (2001) added the idea of issue specific frames that must be dealt with on a case-by-case basis. Constantinescu and Tedesco (2007) expand Semetko and Valkenburg’s idea in the opposite direction, saying additional macro-frames, such as cynicism frames, speculation frames and meta-communication frames, serve as “universal thematic organizing structures” at the foundation of generic frames.

Previous studies of scandals in sports

Most of the research on scandals in sports centers around the use of illegal performance-enhancing drugs (see Carstairs 2003 for an example) instead of the relationship between sports teams and alleged violent crime. Thelin (1996) chronicled the history of intercollegiate athletics from 1910 to 1990 and their subsequent controversial rise to power within the university system. He found that universities and the public have come to accept illegal and unethical activities within college sports, citing two separate academic scandals that occurred at the University of Southern California 10 years apart as an example. As Thelin said, “what had been a shocking story in 1980 became standard athletic procedure in 1985.”

Hughes and Shank (2005) examined the impact on corporate brands when a scandal erupts around an athletic endorser such as a team, coach, or player. They found respondents generally identified four consistent characteristics that make an event in athletics scandalous or not. These characteristics included actions that were illegal, actions that were legal but unethical (for example, the use of performance-enhancing drugs in baseball prior to their ban in 2002), actions that involved multiple parties over a sustained period of time, and actions whose impact affected the integrity of the sport with which they are associated.

Crime Coverage

Both the Duke and Virginia lacrosse cases are connected to the idea of violent crime. While it was eventually proved that no rape occurred in the Duke case, it was initially covered as if the rape had occurred. For this reason, it is worth examining research on how the media approaches violent crime as a topic. Violent crimes have long captivated journalists (Benedict 1992). In reporting on sex crimes, the media again tend

to focus on the spectacular rather than the substantive, reporting on a few unusual cases rather than providing information about serious crimes trends and legal reforms (Soothill and Walby 1991).

Barnett (2008b) examines the relationship between violence and masculinity. Research dating back to the 1970s shows that masculine behavior is not biologically determined but rather socially constructed; masculinity is often defined in terms of separation from social “others,” including women and racial minorities, exclusion rather than inclusion, and that masculinity must be “performed” and, thus, proven over and over again (Barnett 2008b). Sports are an area in which hypermasculine values are encouraged and rewarded and demonstrations of on-the-field ferocity may spill over into off-the-field aggression (Sabo and Jansen 1992; Brackenrigde 2002).

In cases where the alleged crime is rape, Kosse (2007) concluded that race and social class have an effect on coverage. She determined that in cases involving white participants, the media’s focus shifted more toward scrutinizing the women and reiterating numerous patriarchal myths about sexual violence. Additionally, she summarized previous research and stated that generally in interracial cases, the victim was blamed more if she was the minority and from a lower class than the offender. Feminist scholarship has been working to shift attention in rape cases to justice for victim (Barnett 2008b), a potential explanation for why the media was so quick to take the exotic dancer’s accusations as facts in the Duke case. Additionally the pressures of a 24/7 news cycle has fueled the news media’s interest in crime, encouraging journalists to cover more stories in greater detail and transforming what previously would have been classified as local stories into national events (Barnett 2008a).

Previous Scholarly Research Focused Specifically on the Duke Lacrosse Case

Due to the complex nature of the Duke lacrosse case (three “privileged” white defendants, one black exotic dancer, a disbarred district attorney, a prestigious university with strained town relations, etc.), several different fields have studied its implications. The media itself has evaluated its coverage of the event (Kristof 2006; Taylor & Johnson 2008), legal scholars have examined it from the perspective of their discipline (Ghiglione 2008; Elder, 2008), public relations scholars have studied the response of Duke University to the crisis (Fortunato 2008; Jin, Park, and Len-Ríos 2010), and finally communication scholars have viewed the case through different lenses, most prominently from a feminist perspective that evaluates the evolution of “rape myths” (Kosse 2007; Barnett 2008a). Surprisingly little research has been done by communication scholars looking at other possible frames. Since the Virginia case happened only a few months ago, there is no existing research on the topic.

Ghiglione (2008), a law scholar, detailed the shortcomings of the media’s coverage of the case and concluded that the media failed to report accurately and fairly, admit what they did not know, reject assumptions, treat sources with skepticism and verify facts. Additionally, she concluded that the media played up the stereotype of the lacrosse player as a “white, rich, conceited and thuggish” male.

Fortunato (2008) and Jin, Park, and Len-Ríos (2010) examined Duke’s public relations response to the allegations. Fortunato emphasized the fact that so long as the case continued, media coverage was certain to continue, so Duke had to continue to frame, and in some cases re-frame the story. Jin, Park, and Len-Ríos concluded that media coverage emphasized the University’s expression of hope, while highlighting the

various expressions of anger. While Duke expressed hope, the publics showed anger toward Duke, with the victim and her representatives, faculty and staff, and the local community showing the most anger.

From a feminist perspective, Barnett (2008a) concluded that initial coverage from March through May 2006 in four newspapers (*The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *The Raleigh News and Observer* and the *Durham Herald-Sun*) framed the rape allegations against the lacrosse players as a “sex scandal,” not a violence scandal. She noted that Duke players did not speak to the media during this time, which the media read as non-cooperation, while the woman who brought the allegations was present as a sympathetic victim of sexism and racism. Additionally, she found that the news stores focused on Duke and its status as an outsider in its own community instead of focusing on how the allegations affected students at NCCU or on the larger issue of rape or sexual assault.

Research has shown that the media takes an active role in deciding how news is presented and that scandals involving athletes and sports are not considered rare events. Scholarship from the legal, public relations and feminist perspectives, show the media wrongly framed the Duke lacrosse case as a violent crime in its initial stages. What, if anything, changed during the reporting of the Virginia lacrosse case four years later? The Virginia lacrosse case, which occurred in May 2010, involved an actual murder, not an alleged rape, yet several different news organizations linked the two together. Because the Virginia case occurred so recently, there is no existing research on the topic. This begs the question:

RQ1: What factors affected the similarities and differences in the framing and media coverage of the Duke lacrosse case and the Virginia lacrosse tragedy?

Methodology

As noted earlier, this paper will narrow its focus to what are known as *media frames*, or “a central organizing idea or story line that provides meaning to an unfolding strip of events... The frame suggests what the controversy is about, the essence of the issue” (Gamson and Modigliani 1987). Media frames do more than categorize—they also identify problems, diagnose causes and make moral judgments (Entman 1993). This qualitative framing analysis will use a content analysis, similar to Barnett (2008a), which she based on frameworks by Gamson and Modigliani (1989) and Altheide (1996), and also similar to Barnett et. al (2008). Stempel (2003) defined content analysis as “a formal system for doing something we all do informally rather frequently—draw conclusions from observations of content” (p. 209). Qualitative analysis allows for an examination of meanings and emphasis (Altheide 1996), and it situates human action as text and aims to understand social order; therefore, it is an appropriate method for analysis of journalistic stories of crime (Barnett 2008a).

This paper begins by asking a broad question: What factors affected the similarities and differences in the framing and coverage of the Duke lacrosse case and the Virginia lacrosse tragedy? To examine the question, an analysis of national media texts was conducted. The *New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, Time magazine, and Sports Illustrated are four national publications that covered both cases. The analysis focused exclusively on news coverage, excluding editorials and opinion columns. A consistent

time frame of three months was used, so for the Duke case, the coverage period was from the beginning of March through May 2006 and for the Virginia case, the coverage period was from the beginning of May through July 2010. As previously stated, the analysis was predominantly qualitative, exploring the nuances and meanings in the news stories.

LexisNexis was used to find articles from *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*. For the Duke lacrosse case, the search term “Duke Lacrosse” was used for the period between March 1, 2006 and May 31, 2006. Neither Time magazine nor Sports Illustrated archives are found in the LexisNexis database. To find articles from these sources, the archives were searched on www.time.com and www.si.com. The same search terms and time frames were used. Excluding editorials and opinion columns, 23 articles were found from *The New York Times*, 10 from *The Washington Post*, five from Time magazine and two from Sports Illustrated, for a total of 40 articles. For the Virginia case, the search term “Virginia Lacrosse” only yielded five results (including two opinion columns) from *The New York Times*, so the search was expanded to include the search terms “Yeadley Love,” the name of the victim, and “George Huguely,” the name of the attacker. The expanded search yielded 24 articles from *The Washington Post*, nine from *The New York Times* and one from Sports Illustrated, for a total of 34 articles.

To explore the media frames, a matrix was developed based on the five generic frames: conflict, human interest, economic consequences, morality and responsibility. Each frame was coded for and a dominant frame was indicated for each article.

Conflict: This frame emphasizes conflicts between individuals, groups or institutions as a means of capturing audience (Semetko and Valkenburg 2000). Neuman, Just and Crigler (1992) found that the media draw on a few central frames for reporting a

range of issues, and conflict was the most common in the handful of frames in U.S. news that they identified. For this study, coverage that emphasized conflict between the Duke lacrosse team and its accuser, Chrystal Magnum, the Duke lacrosse team and Mike Nifong, the now-disbarred former Durham County district attorney, the Duke lacrosse team and Duke University, Duke University and the city of Durham, Virginia lacrosse and the University of Virginia and the on-again, off-again romantic relationship between Yeardeley Love and George Hugueley was coded for the conflict frame.

Human interest: This frame brings a human face or an emotional angle to the presentation of an event, issue or problem (Semetko and Valkenburg 2000). Neuman, Just and Crigler (1992) described this frame as the “human impact” frame, and, next to conflict, found it to be a common frame in the news. As the market for news everywhere becomes more competitive, journalists and editors are challenged to produce a product that captures and retains audience interest. Framing news in human interest terms, in an effort to personalize, dramatize or “emotionalize” the news in order to capture and retain audience interest, is one way to achieve this (Semetko and Valkenburg 2000). Coverage that emphasized the potential well being of the accuser, Crystal Mangum, in the Duke case and of students at her school, North Carolina Central University (NCCU), as well as coverage memorializing Yeardeley Love and emphasizing the impact on both Virginia lacrosse teams and the student body, was coded under this frame.

Economic consequences: This frame reports an event, problem or issue in terms of the consequences it will have economically on an individual, group, institution or geographic region (Semetko and Valkenburg 2000). Neuman, Just and Crigler (1992) also identified this as a common news frame, noting that the wide impact of an event is

an important news value, and economic consequences are often considerable. Coverage emphasizing how the scandals may impact the economy surrounding Duke, Durham, NCCU, the University of Virginia or Charlottesville was coded under this frame.

Responsibility: This frame presents an issue or problem in such a way as to attribute responsibility for its cause or solution to either the government or an individual or group (Semetko and Valkenburg 2000). Iyengar (1991) argued that the media, by covering an issue or problem in terms of an event, instance or individual (episodically) rather than in terms of the larger historical social context (thematically), encourages journalists to offer individual-level explanations for social problems. Coverage emphasizing who is at fault for creating an atmosphere encouraging male athletes to do as they please in both of these scandals and whose responsibility it is to prevent sexual assault was coded under this frame.

Morality: This frame puts the event, problem or issue in the context of religious tenets or moral prescriptions (Semetko and Valkenburg 2000). Neuman, Just and Crigler (1992) found this frame to be more common in the minds of audiences than in the content of news, but they nevertheless identified this frame as among several used in reporting. Coverage emphasizing the ethics of those involved or attempting to characterize any of the subjects through the use of negative modifiers such as “hard-partying” was coded under this frame.

Additionally, several other themes used to capture audience attention were coded for, including: (1) emphasis on the violent nature of the crime or alleged crime, (2) references to any of the accused or the victim as privileged, (3) emphasis on the sports angle of the story (for example, reporting on any games or practices either team held), (4)

impact on the team, (5) impact on the campus and student body and (6) emphasis on the culture of mens athletics. For the Duke case, any racial emphasis was noted, and for the Virginia case, any reference to the Duke case was noted as well. Each article was read once so the reader could get its general sense (recorded as a one-sentence summary in a column titled “focus”) and then again to code for the different frames and themes.

Several independent variables, including each article’s author, publication and word count, were also recorded alongside the framing and theme variables in a spreadsheet.

Based on the literature review, it is hypothesized that:

H1: Conflict, the most commonly found frame in prior studies of U.S. news, will be the dominant frame in both cases.

H2: Because the Virginia case occurred while the debacle of the coverage of the Duke lacrosse case was fresh in the media’s mind, the Virginia case will have been framed more as a thematic case that examines the bigger picture of masculinity and sports and sexual assault.

H3: The media will still frame lacrosse players as “privileged white males” as they did in the Duke case.

H4: The media will make a connection between the Virginia case and the Duke case, and in order to make that connection, the media will revert back to framing the Duke case as crime case, even though it was proven no crime occurred.

H5: The coverage of the two scandals by *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* will be similar, while the coverage by the two magazines will be less objective and more critical in nature, highlighting negative perceptions of male athletes in a university setting.

Results and Analysis

This paper was designed to answer the broad research question, “What factors affected the similarities and differences in the framing and coverage of the Duke lacrosse case and the Virginia lacrosse tragedy?” It was hypothesized that the media would utilize the conflict frame most often for the Duke case and portray the Duke lacrosse players as “privileged, thuggish” white males, emphasize the racial differences between the accuser and the accused, and fail to uphold the “innocent until proven guilty” tenet of the U.S. legal system. Furthermore, it was hypothesized that the Duke case would be referenced by the media in the coverage of the Virginia case, the stereotype of “privileged” athletes would continue to be used and that the media would frame this event more thematically. All of these assumptions proved to be true.

Conflict was, by far, the most common frame and dominant frame in the media’s coverage of the Duke lacrosse case (see Table 1).

Table 1: Prevalence of generic frames in media coverage in the Duke case

Frame	Conflict	Human Interest	Economic Consequences	Responsibility	Morality
% of articles present in (N=40)	90	15	8	25	28
% of articles as dominant frame	73	8	0	10	3

The New York Times and *The Washington Post* were the first of the four publications in this study to start reporting on the case. *The New York Times* wrote its first article on the scandal, titled “Rape Allegation Against Athletes is Roiling Duke” in

its March 29, 2006 paper, and *The Washington Post* followed one day later with a similarly titled article, “Rape Accusation Against Lacrosse Players Roils Duke” in its March 30 edition. News of the sexual assault, without any names, broke in the *Raleigh News and Observer* on March 18, and the paper reported the following day that the assault occurred at a party with “a mix of college students and nonstudents,” (News and Observer 2006) so the national papers had over a week to let the scandal develop before beginning their coverage.

There were several different conflicts that the media could choose from as it covered the Duke lacrosse case: Duke lacrosse vs. the accuser, Chrystal Magnum, Duke lacrosse vs. Mike Nifong, the district attorney at the time, Duke University vs. the city of Durham, to name a few. Many of the themes—privilege, violent crime, race and athlete culture—fall directly under the generic frame of conflict. Three of these, privilege, race and violent crime, were the most common theme emphasized in the coverage, as seen in Table 2 below:

Table 2: Prevalence of Different Themes in Duke Coverage

Theme	Privilege	Sports	Violent Crime	Team Impact	Campus Impact	Athlete Culture	Race
% of articles present in (N=40)	48	23	38	13	18	18	55
% of articles as dominant theme	20	8	3	3	3	3	20

Note: not all articles had one dominant theme

Several media outlets billed the Duke case as a “lightening rod” for the “underlying issues of race, class, sex and privilege” (Arenson 2006). From the beginning,

the case was framed as a conflict between the privileged white lacrosse players and Duke students versus the black working-class Durham residents. The first *New York Times* article billed the incident as bringing “into sharp relief the long-simmering tensions between the private university and the city. The woman is black, most of the team members are white, and law-enforcement officials say they are investigating allegations that racial epithets were shouted at the woman.” (Bernstein and Drape 2006). *The Washington Post* followed suit a day later, stating the case, “exacerbated the school’s relationship with residents of the town and raised disturbing racial concerns.” (Holley and Swezey 2006). A May 24 *Washington Post* article written by Lynne Duke went so far as to open the article with this lede: “She was black, they were white, and race and sex were in the air.”

The lacrosse players were often painted in a negative light, even before any formal charges were brought against any team members. In a Time magazine article on April 2, Sean Gregory does not mention that no charges had been brought in the case and focuses in on the athletes’ past legal history: “Fifteen members of the team have committed prior mostly frat-jock infractions, ranging from public urination to noise violations.” In a March 31 article, *The New York Times* reporter Rick Lyman also fails to mention that no charges have been filed. He describes the case as “straddling at once the quintessential social flashpoints of race, class and gender,” and Duke, “an especially elite and privileged institution” as having “a particularly bad case” of “friction between town and gown.” He ends his article with a quote from Duke student Venis Wilder: “Is this going to be a team of rich white men who get away with assaulting a black woman? People are really watching to see how Duke is going to respond.”

At the end of the designated time frame of this study, the media began to focus on more than just the many instances of conflict. Five of the seven final articles had a frame other than conflict.

Anne Hull wrote a 2,520-word article for *The Washington Post* on May 7 using a human interest frame. Her article, titled “Rape Case Is Seen as Symbol of Black College in N.C.; Charges Against Duke Lacrosse Players Underline Racial and Economic Divide on Two Campuses,” profiles the victim’s past (without naming her) and on the perspective NCCU students have on the case. The piece avoids assigning blame to the lacrosse players.

Lynne Duke’s previously mentioned *Washington Post* piece used the morality frame in her article titled: “The Duke Case’s Cruel Truth: Hateful Stereotypes of Black Women Resurface.” She states: “It is that the Duke case is in some ways reminiscent of a black woman’s vulnerability to a white man during the days of slavery, reconstruction and Jim Crow, when sex was used as a tool of racial domination.” She goes on to say, “Not spared in the game of image-battering, the lacrosse players have been portrayed by some as privileged, racist brutes prone to binge drinking, who preyed upon a troubled and struggling young women.” She doesn’t offer an alternate portrayal of them though, and goes on to quote a biased source and paint Duke University in a negative light for initially dismissing the victim as not credible.

The Virginia case did not have this racial aspect that was one of the media’s favorite themes in the Duke case. The Virginia case also had an undisputed victim and attacker who had previously been in a romantic relationship, limiting the number of potential conflict angles that could be applied to the tragedy. Since there was no debate

about the crime itself (and the fact that a crime actually took place), the media could focus on the effects the crime had on the athletes and the community as a whole.

Consequently, the human interest frame was the most prominent dominant frame:

Table 3: Prevalence of generic frames in media coverage in the Virginia case

Frame	Conflict	Human Interest	Economic Consequences	Responsibility	Morality
% of articles present in (N=34)	65	56	0	44	24
% of articles as dominant frame	24	41	0	26	6

The New York Times' Adam Himmelsbach covered the first game the womens lacrosse team played without Yeardeley Love. The focus was not on the game itself, but instead on how both teams remembered Love. The story starts, "Penny Hagerman sat in the bleachers at Klockner Stadium on Sunday and wiped away tears with both hands." It goes on to describe how Hagerman, whose daughter played on the Virginia team, had traveled with two other mothers, including Sharon Love, to away games to watch their daughters play. The third paragraph contains a quote from Hagerman: "Yeardeley had a way of hugging her mother that showed how much she cared. She was just the most adorable child any parent would want." In the fourth paragraph, the game's final score is given, 14-12 Virginia (Himmelsbach 2006). *The Washington Post* covered both Love's funeral and the University of Virginia's commencement and used the human interest frame for both.

One of the two stories to use a morality frame was a general sports article produced for the web highlighting events in all major college and professional sports by

Lynn Zinser of *The New York Times*. The article, titled “Another Sad Turn,” appeared on May 8 and linked Love’s death with several other sports scandals brewing at that time:

The stories roll in as if propelled by some disturbing sports wave machine: Tiger Woods, Gilbert Arenas, Ben Roethlisberger, a college lacrosse murder and now Lawrence Taylor charged with rape. Each one prompted the Internet version of rubbernecking, vaulted to the top of search lists, stirred some measure of outrage and indignation about out-of-control celebrity, entitlement and so on.

The other article using a morality frame appeared in *The Washington Post* on May 29.

David Nakamura and Steve Yanda did a profile on Virginia mens coach Dom Starsia, leading off with remarks he made at the sport’s convention the summer after the Duke case broke. “I’ve always been a play-hard, party-hard guy,” Starsia said. “I’ve never been big on rules.” (Nakamura and Yanda 2010). The article goes on to describe his approach to discipline and his various alcohol policies with his team, which he establishes each year in conjunction with the student-athletes. Various outlets reported that the rules were regularly ignored.

Both *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* reported on the murder the day after it occurred. Initially, the incident was framed as a conflict between two privileged lacrosse players who had had an on-again, off-again relationship that was off at the time of Love’s death. *The Washington Post*’s initial article by Mary Pat Flaherty and Jenna Johnson included a reference to the Duke case, which occurred four years prior:

Huguely, a reserve for the Cavaliers who has four goals and three assists in 15 games, was quoted in a 2006 Washington Post story defending his former Landon teammates, who were among the Duke University players involved in a controversial sexual assault case. They were later exonerated.

Three other articles, written on May 17 (Sports Illustrated), May 23 (*The Washington Post*) and May 29 (*The Washington Post*) also referenced the Duke lacrosse case. The

Sports Illustrated article, a 2,897-word feature written by L. Jon Wertheim, titled, “Did Yearley Love Have to Die?” focused on who or what was responsible for Love’s death and examined collegiate lacrosse culture. Like coverage of the Duke case, this article wanted to make sure readers were aware of the stakes from the beginning: “Every outlet from ESPN to Inside Edition had arrived in pastoral Virginia to report a heartbreaking story that blended sports, privilege love and death.” Later in the piece, the reporter made the Duke connection:

While the circumstances in Charlottesville are altogether different from those in Durham, N.C., there’s a collective sense of here-we-go-again, a fear of a mainstream referendum on the sport with echoes of class and race, privilege and arrogance.

As with the Duke case, privilege was also a point of emphasis for the media (see

Table 4):

Table 4: Prevalence of Different Themes in University of Virginia Coverage

Theme	Privilege	Sports	Violent Crime	Team Impact	Campus Impact	Athlete Culture
% of articles present in (N=34)	21	56	38	38	24	27
% of articles as dominant theme	9	21	9	24	9	12

Note: not all articles had one dominant theme

Both Virginia lacrosse teams continued their seasons after Love’s death, leading to more sports reporting than in the Duke case because the Blue Devils did not play any games after the national media picked up the story. Also, in the Duke case, every member of the team (save the one black player) was a suspect until the third player was indicted on May

16, two months after the alleged incident. This could have made it harder to report on the impact the scandal was having on the team. This element was nonexistent in the Virginia case—the attacker was removed from the team within hours of the crime, and the rest of the mens team was left to cope with both the idea that a teammate had committed murder and that the victim was a person they all knew well.

Another difference between the coverage of the Virginia case and the coverage of the earlier Duke case is that the media in the Virginia case more often connected Love's death to the broader theme of domestic and dating violence. Eight of the 32 articles (25 percent) tied the case to a larger theme. Seven of those articles mentioned either domestic or dating violence. The eighth, the first article published by *The New York Times*, included a focus on grieving. Starsia is described as telling his team “to use each other and don't be afraid to ask for help,” and the university president, John Cansteen, is quoted in a statement telling students to seek support from a counselor of dean (Thamel 2010).

The Washington Post published an article on May 15, titled, “Concerns on Hugueuly not voiced, U-Va. Says; ‘NO ONE CAME FORWARD’ TO HELP Students kept any signals of mixed behavior to themselves.” The reporters, Daniel de Vise and David Nakamura, detailed a press conference with Carol Wood, a spokeswoman for the university, in which she entertained questions about whether coaches or officials could have done more to prevent Love's May 3 death. She instead focused on teammates and students who did not come forward. “Unfortunately, no one came forward to anybody who could do anything. Fellow students kept it among themselves,” said Wood. Later in the article, she addressed the fact that Hugueuly's teammates and coach knew he had

gotten into a fight with a fellow teammate and punched him while he was sleeping:

“Other players might have known what really happened, but nobody was willing to come forward and tell the coach.” The article ended with a reminder that university president John T. Casteen III appealed that students be more vigilant to such warning signs (de Vise and Nakamura 2010).

Two *Washington Post* articles used the Love tragedy as a news hook for stories focusing on the larger issue of domestic violence. A May 24 article by Susan Kinzie titled, “Student violence in the curriculum; U-Va. Case raises awareness as high schools and colleges try to prevent and treat assaults” examined how technology has aided stalkers and how college campuses, with their false sense of security, can be surprisingly dangerous. A June 21 article by Donna St. George titled, “The silent weapon in dating violence: texting” detailed how unlimited texting plans can lead to harassment in which a victim can receive hundreds of messages each day.

The results help answer the broad research question of, “What factors affected the similarities and differences in the framing and coverage of the Duke lacrosse case and the Virginia lacrosse tragedy?” The first hypothesis stated the expectation that conflict, the most commonly found frame in prior studies of U.S. news, will be the dominant frame in both cases. This proved to be true only for the Duke lacrosse case, where it was the dominant frame in 73 percent of the media coverage examined. For the Virginia case, the conflict frame was used in 24 percent of articles, the third most often used frame, behind responsibility (26 percent) and human interest (41 percent). The human interest frame would have been easier to use in the Virginia case because there was a clear victim (Yearley Love) and an undisputed attacker (George Hugueley). Much of the Duke case

centered around the fact that the conflict was ongoing—it took more than one month after the incident occurred for any charges to be brought and two months for the prosecutors to say that no one else would be charged. Additionally, the media heavily emphasized the racial aspects of the Duke case, which were completely absent from the Virginia case.

Hypothesis two stated that because the Virginia case occurred while the debacle of the coverage of the Duke lacrosse case was fresh in the media's mind, the Virginia case will have been framed more as an thematic case that examines the bigger picture of masculinity and sports and sexual assault. This proved true. Only once in the coverage of the Duke case did an article link the incident to a larger social issue. A *New York Times* article on March 30 mentioned a Take Back the Night Rally on Duke's campus, an annual event held to raise awareness of sexual assault against women. A *Washington Post* article from the same day also mentioned the name of the rally but failed to note its purpose. In contrast, eight of the 32 articles (25 percent) tied the Virginia case to a larger theme, with one referencing the larger theme of proper grieving and the other seven domestic or dating violence, as discussed earlier.

Hypothesis three stated the media will still frame lacrosse players as “privileged white males” as they did in the Duke case. The Virginia players, and George Huguely and Yeardeley Love in particular, were framed as privileged in 21 percent of the articles. Since everyone involved in the case was white, their race was not specified. A May 23 profile of Huguely in the *Washington Post* by David Nakamura, Steve Yanda and Daniel de Vise described him in the title as being a “young man of privilege and rage,” golfing at the “exclusive” Farmington Country Club, growing up as a child knowing few deprivations, attending the Landon School, “an elite boys’ private school,” and living in a

“bubble of privilege” at the University of Virginia. Huguely’s high school, the Landon School, was written about and connected to Huguely four times in *The Washington Post* in the three-month time span of this study, with the last article being a 2,412-word profile on July 1 detailing Landon’s recent discipline issues and its perceived boys will be boys mentality (Birnbaum and Strauss 2010). Privilege was brought up twice as often in the Duke case, though, (48 percent of articles), so hypothesis three is only partially true.

Hypothesis four stated that the media will make a connection between the Virginia case and the Duke case, and in order to make that connection, the media will revert back to framing the Duke case as crime case, even though it was proven no crime occurred. This was mostly true. Duke Lacrosse was mentioned four times in articles about the Virginia case. In the first reference, it was noted that the Duke athletes had been involved in a “controversial sexual assault case” but were later exonerated (Flaherty and Johnson 2010). The second reference was in the Sports Illustrated article, where it was referred to as the “Duke scandal” and it was noted the circumstances in Charlottesville were completely different (Wertheim 2010). The third reference came in the Huguely profile, noting how, as it was mentioned in *The Washington Post*’s initial story on the case, Huguely had previously spoke about the Duke scandal: “That same year, Huguely spoke about accusations of rape—later refuted—against the Duke University lacrosse team, whose roster included five players from Landon.” (Nakamura, Yanda, and de Vise 2010). The final reference was included in a Washington Post profile on the Virginia mens coach and mentioned he spoke at a time “when sensational allegations were swirling that some Duke players had sexually assaulted an exotic dancer.” (Nakamura

and Yanda 2010). The first and fourth reference did not make it clear that no sexual assault occurred in the Duke case.

Hypothesis five, the final hypothesis, stated that the coverage of the two scandals by *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* will be similar, while the coverage by the two magazines will be less objective and more critical in nature, highlighting negative perceptions of athletes in a university setting. This was mostly true. It was not anticipated that the sources would have differing amounts of coverage for the two scandals. *The New York Times* wrote 23 stories about the Duke lacrosse scandal during the first three months while *The Washington Post* only wrote 10 articles. It was reversed for the Virginia case. *The New York Times* wrote nine stories, and the *Washington Post* wrote 23 during the initial three months. This could be due to the fact that the University of Virginia is close to the local coverage area of the *Post*. Time magazine wrote five articles about the Duke case and none about the Virginia scandal (excluding opinion pieces). Sports Illustrated ran two articles on the Duke scandal and one on the Virginia case. While the number of articles differed, all of the publications used similar frames. All four of the sources used the conflict frame most often for the Duke case. Both newspapers also used the human interest frame most often in their coverage of the Virginia case. As stated earlier, the long Sports Illustrated feature on the Virginia case used the responsibility frame to examine who or what was responsible for Love's death and examined collegiate lacrosse culture. In general, all eight magazine articles highlighted the negative aspects of "privileged" athlete culture.

To summarize, Hypothesis one was not true, hypothesis two was true, hypothesis three was partially true and hypotheses four and five were mostly true.

Conclusion

This paper used a qualitative content analysis to evaluate the factors affecting the coverage of the Duke lacrosse case in 2006 and the Virginia lacrosse case in 2010. While the Virginia case and Duke case both involved the coverage of privileged male athletes allegedly involved in violent crimes, the coverage of the two cases were more different than they were similar. The conflict frame was used three times as often in the Duke case as it was in the Virginia case due to the differences in the nature of the two incidents. One was not a crime at all, but it took the prosecution several months to finish bringing charges against three players and then more than a year to drop all of the charges and exonerate the athletes. In the meantime, the media reported the story from a variety of conflict angles, including but not limited to Duke lacrosse versus Chrystal Magnum, the accuser, Duke lacrosse versus Mike Nifong, the district attorney at the time (now disbarred) and Duke University versus the city of Durham. Adding to this conflict was the fact that Magnum was black, almost the entire lacrosse team was white, and the student body at Duke University is much more white than the city of Durham. The race element was not present in the Virginia case, and the conflict was on a much smaller scale since the crime occurred before any of the reporting started and there was no dispute about who was the victim and who was the attacker.

Further research should look to add a quantitative aspect to this analysis to offer an additional perspective and possibly additional frameworks. While a qualitative analysis allows for an examination of meaning and emphasis, it lacks the strength of numbers and empirical data in a quantitative analysis. Additionally, further researchers

would be encouraged to include opinion columns and editorials in their content analysis because many of these pieces are the often-noted examples of coverage from the cases (especially in regards to the Duke case) and had an impact on the way that audiences perceived the media was covering the incidents. Another limitation of this project is the fact that there was only one coder for all the articles. It would have been helpful to have at least one other coder independently code the articles to ensure accuracy.

History and prior study tells us that further scandals will erupt in college sports. The media would be wise to learn from their successes and mistakes in the coverage of earlier scandals such as these so they are better prepared the next time a story breaks. In today's Internet and Google search-dominated world, the media must act carefully when young men and women's reputations and lives are hanging in the balance. The media should be especially considerate in cases where no charges have been brought and there are just he-said, she-said allegations. Imagine having that charge permanently attached to an innocent person's name. News coverage has long given potential victims privacy, and rightfully so, so maybe now it's time to consider withholding suspects names until there is solid evidence linking them to the crime.

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