

Mediating the Red Zone: Tracing Sports Media's Coverage of the Ray Rice Case and the Continued Influence of Traditional Media

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"This is not sports, it's storytelling" – Larry Novenster¹

Introduction

On Sunday, February 1, 2015 the National Football League ran a public service announcement during the first break of the second quarter of NFL Super Bowl XLIX. This public service announcement was composed entirely of the following dialog, set over the scene of the interior a house in disarray:

"I'd like to order a pizza for delivery."

"Ma'am, you've reached 911. This is an emergency line."

"Yeah, a large with half pepperoni, half mushrooms."

"Um, you know you've called 911? This is an emergency line."

"Do you know how long it will be?"

"OK, ma'am, is everything OK over there? Do you have an emergency or not?"

"Yes"

"...and you're unable to talk because?"

"Right, right."

"Is there someone in the room with you? Just say 'yes' or 'no.'"

"Yes."

"OK, um, it looks like I have an officer about a mile from your location. Are there any weapons in your house?"

"No."

"Can you stay on the phone with me?"

"No. See you soon. Thank you."²

Though the woman speaking in the commercial initially appeared to be ordering a pizza, it quickly became clear that she was reaching out to 911 for help and pretending to order a pizza so that her abuser would not be aware of what she was actually doing. This commercial ran in stark contrast to the other Super Bowl ads, which one usually thinks of as centering around such

¹ This quotation is from Larry Novenster, whose Deutsch Inc. advertising agency bought significant Olympic time from CBS (as quoted in Martzke, 2004, 7F)

² Transcript of this commercial from Huffington Post, 2014.

weighty topics as beer, fast food, and horsepower (using female-nudity as a frequent sales tool for all of the aforementioned categories).³ The airing of the No More domestic violence PSA was particularly extraordinary because it marked the first time ever that a commercial had run during the Super Bowl addressing domestic violence and sexual assault (No More, 2015a). Even a year before, this would have been a profoundly surprising event. However by the time Super Bowl XLIX rolled around, few who had been paying attention to football during the 2014-2015 season were particularly startled that the NFL chose to address this issue in such a high profile way.

The airing of the NFL's No More campaign ad during Super Bowl XLIX – as well as other ads aired as part of the No More campaign – marked a stark recognition on the part of the NFL that domestic violence is not just a problem for the individual victims of this type of crime, or even just the perpetrators. Instead, these ads adopted a frame that depicted domestic violence as a larger cultural issue. This campaign also clearly made the case that those who need to concern themselves with solving the problem of domestic violence are also not just women and/or victims, but all of us.⁴ This series does not only highlight the use of the “societal” frame, but the use of NFL players in the “Speechless” PSAs also underscores the NFL's complicity in the adoption of this frame.

As studies of the media's coverage of domestic violence have demonstrated, this “cultural” framing of domestic violence is rare. Typically, media discussions of domestic abuse

³ Indeed, in at least one media market, this sobering look at domestic violence was followed by an insurance ad joking about “deflategate” and testicles. It was centered on a blue rubber ball joking that, “So, I heard that guys balls were deflated. At least they didn't look like me.” The insurance company in question was Cure.com, which ran two ads during the game, both referencing “deflategate” and testicles (NJ.com, 2015) and was obviously and deeply incongruous with the tone of the domestic violence PSA that had run immediately before it (Jezebel, 2015).

⁴ It did so quite explicitly in the “Speechless” series of PSAs, which depicted current and former NFL players rendered speechless by the domestic violence information, in order to highlight “the powerful impact these issues have on everyone, and underscore why we, as a society, must start the conversation about these issues to end them for good” (No More, 2015b).

use an “individual” frame, which places “responsibility for domestic violence on one or more individuals in the abusive relationship or on the relationship itself” (Berns, 1999, 89). Since the NFL-supported No More campaign deviates so sharply from conventional coverage, we wondered: how did we get to a point where domestic violence, NFL players, and the handling of the nexus of the two by the NFL itself has become the topic of such widespread conversation – not only among feminists, but also by members of prominent sports and regular news media outlets – that the NFL felt the need to run a commercial during the Super Bowl condemning this type of violence? And how did the “cultural” frame⁵ – which focuses on how “social attitudes, sexism, socialization, violence in the media, societal tolerance of violence, poverty, and family structure all help to foster an environment that may encourage or at least tolerate violence” (Berns, 1999, 97) – become such an ingrained part of the discussion, that it was the backbone of the NFL’s campaign on the issue?

This paper begins to answer these questions by looking at how similar frames to that eventually were used by the No More Campaign emerged across the media over the course of 2014. It explores these key questions by looking at the attention a single case of domestic violence received by traditional media, sports media, and online sources: Ray Rice’s 2014 domestic violence case. Taking this as our starting point we examine the way that powerful elites within media outlets framed issues of gender, violence, and race over time in this single case, and postulate that the way non-sports media outlets framed this case spread to sports media – basically, that in this case study we can see directional intermedia agenda-setting of attribute salience. We argue that initially, sports media covered the Ray Rice case largely using the “individual” frame. But, after the adoption of more critical frames – including the “sociological”

⁵ Rather than the more common “individual” frame.

frame – by other media bodies (including traditional and “new” media), this change in coverage changed the media agenda for how this case was going to be covered. Looking at shifts over time and across media types, we argue that this process pushed the dominant sports media (ESPN, in particular) to incorporate cultural, rather than, exclusively individual, frames to their coverage.

By looking at the shifts in framing that occurred at several critical junctures in this case from February to October 2014 we test two hypotheses: firstly, that we will see a shift over time in how the media framed the Ray Rice case, and that they coverage will evolve from primarily using frames that depicted the incident of violence as one that was largely an individual matter, to incorporating discussions of societal and cultural factors in addition to an individual centered-focus. Secondly, following research on intermedia agenda-setting and the uniquely gendered attributes of sports media as compared to other media, we predict that other news sources (including well-read blogs as well as more “mainstream” news sources) will be the first ones to have adopted these broadened frames and that the sports media’s inclusion of these frames will have occurred after the rest of the media set the agenda about the usage of these frames. In doing so we make several key contributions to the literature. We build upon the extant literature on framing by incorporating a gendered analysis, which examines how media frames change over time. Further, we analyze how this change can be traced across media types and how frames spread from one type of media to another, and in doing so we incorporate new media types – the sports media – into the literature on intermedia agenda-setting. Further, we highlight how in today’s fracturing media landscape although sports media’s huge and loyal audience gives them increasing influence, when it comes to *how* an issue is going to be covered, traditional media

outlets continue to have an important agenda-setting power, and that they continue to powerfully transmit attribute salience to other media outlets.

Literature Review

In this paper, we test the hypotheses that a) the frames used in the coverage of this case evolved from a focus on the individuals involved in the case to a more broad focus on society and sports as they are implicated in the culture that fails to challenge violence against women (VAW), and b) that specific media types (mainstream and major online news blogs – our “new media” sources) were the first media institutions to adopt these broader frames while sports media’s adoption of broader frames lagged behind. To do so, we investigate media discourse as it depicted and described the Ray Rice domestic violence case, and we examine how some media outlets set the intermedia agenda for other media outlets by leading the way in the usage of the types of coverage – or frames – that are used to discuss this story. In forming our first hypothesis, about overall media frame change over the course of media coverage of the Ray Rice domestic violence story we draw together several key bodies of literature: that examining gendered frames used by the media to cover VAW, and that which examines media frame changing over time. By connecting these literatures, we contribute to them by examining Berns’ (1999) “frames of responsibility” not as static, but as evolving over time, and in patterns analogous to the spatial frame evolution found by Chyi and McCombs (2004).

Framing and the Media

A number of definitions of “framing” exist in the extant literature on this issue, but a commonly used definition which we also adopt states that a frame is “a central organizing idea or story line to a controversy that provides meaning to an unfolding series of events, suggesting

what the controversy is about and the essence of the issue” (Nisbet, Brossard, and Kroepsch, 2003, 38 & 42; paraphrasing Gamson and Modigliani, 1989). With the Ray Rice domestic violence case, we employ this concept by analyzing how the frames used by the news media over the course of 2014 provided evolving story lines to the viewing/reading public and also influenced others within the media through intermedia agenda-setting. In focusing upon the process of framing we build upon a rich theoretical tradition that emphasizes the power that framing has in a variety of institutional locations, including the printed media, television (Iyengar, 1994) the judiciary, and others. Within these diverse locations, framing is a process in which many actors engage, including government and industry sources, those in the media, and other social elites (Nisbet, Brossard, and Kroepsch, 2003). While framing is a useful conceptual tool through which to understand how issues are discussed in a variety of institutions, and to study the discursive hegemonic power that dominant frames can have within and across these locations, in this study we focus primarily upon framing and the news media. Many scholars have previously highlighted how “[t]he news is a highly refracted version of reality” (Patterson, 1993, 29) and have used the concepts of framing and agenda setting in order to better understand these refractions. Following this literature we conceptualize media influence “in terms of telling people what issues to think about and how to think about those issues by presenting them within certain frames” (Easteal, Holland, and Judd, 2015, 104).⁶ In particular, we examine how during several critical periods in 2014, certain parts of the American media told other people – including others in the media – not only that they should think *about* the Ray Rice case and also told them *how* to think about these issues. McCombs, Lopez-Escobar, and Llamas (2000) illustrate the

⁶ As others have argued, agenda setting and framing are linked, and “[t]hinking of frames as attributes of an object [or, in this case, a story] provides the theoretical link between agenda-setting and framing research” (Chyi and McCombs, 2004, 24).

difference between these two levels of media agenda setting, describing the former as the transmission of “object salience” (highlighting issues as visible). They describe the latter as the transmission of “attribute salience,” which highlights certain aspects of these issues as particularly important for understanding these issues. Because the Ray Rice case was so widely covered in all types of media during 2014, it is the latter form of agenda setting – intermedia attribute salience agenda-setting – with which we are most concerned. And, in exploring this process with a study of the media’s treatment of the Ray Rice case, we demonstrate that over the course of the year, the salient attributes of this story, as highlighted by the media shifted from a focus on individual frames to broader cultural ones, and that this was driven by certain media outlets while others followed.

Ultimately, the way issues like these are framed is important because “[b]y selecting certain facts from a continuous flow of information, emphasizing specific issues or events over others, and presenting issues or events in specific orders, journalists have the ability to influence attitudes, beliefs, and behavior in a number of ways” (Li, 2007, 672; Carlyle, Slater, and Chakroff, 2008; Eastal, Holland, and Judd, 2015).⁷ The news’ ability to shape popular opinion is well-documented (Sellers et al., 2014) as in a “‘mediated democracy,’ the events that take place in the policy sphere and the groups that compete in the political system are not only mirrored⁸ (or covered) in the media, but also shaped by the media” (Nisbet, Brossard, and

⁷ Though we examine these effects as they occur within the media, the effects of framing are as widespread as the actors who engage in framing are diverse. Much has been written about the importance of this process for ensuring a well-informed population and electorate, and for democracy more generally. For instance, “[t]heorists posit that a public—unlike a mass of individuals—forms its opinions through a communicative action (Habermas 1984). Whereas a mere aggregate of individuals forms its political preferences privately without any necessary awareness of others’ choices, a public forms its preferences by airing disagreements over collective courses of action, through societal-level discussion” (Nir, 2011, 504).

⁸ Indeed, they may not only be mirrored, but others have observed how “the process is cyclical in nature: Public interests and attitudes influence media coverage, and media coverage, in turn, influences public

Kroepsch, 2003. See also Bennett and Entman, 2001). Beyond the media's effects on public opinion, the media's use of frames and agenda setting is critical because "media logic becomes central in the definition of social issues and the practices of other social institutions in such a way that the reality that is presented in the media is taken-for-granted as representing the way things are and/or what is to be done about them" (Easteal, Holland, and Judd, 2015, 104. See also Altheide & Snow, 1979). When it comes to gendered issues in particular, certain framings that replicate hegemonic patriarchal institutional understandings can be seen as normatively problematic, because media storytelling occurs within a gendered landscape and can be influenced by cultural gender biases (Easteal, Holland, and Judd, 2015). Building on this, we now turn to an examination of how this is profoundly true for the impact that framing has on the way we understand violence against women and who is responsible for dealing with VAW, in particular.

*News Coverage and the Framing of Violence Against Women*⁹

Previous research has begun to examine how news reports frame issues of domestic violence and violence against women (Berns, 1999; Bullock & Cubert, 2002; Carlyle et al., 2008; McManus & Dorfman, 2003; Wozniak & McCloskey, 2010; Sellers et al., 2014).

Reflecting the more general findings about the iterative process of framing and the impact it can have on society explored above, studies such as Bullock (2007) and Berns (1999) have

importantly highlighted how media content echoes broader societal beliefs about intimate partner

interests and attitudes; however, framing defines the ways in which these issues are presented in the media." (Sellers et al., 2014, 261. See also Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007).

⁹ It is important to note that, "both men and women engage in a range of abusive behaviors in intimate relationships, consistent with IPV [intimate partner violence]" (Sellers et al., 2014, 260). However, in this paper we will frequently be using gendered terms for victims – hence the focus on violence against women – not only because this reflects the majority of incidents of domestic violence and because the specific case study we are examining herein (the Ray Rice domestic violence case) is gendered in this way, where Ray Rice was the aggressor and his wife the victim of physical abuse.

violence (Sellers et al., 2014, 262. See also Bullock, 2007; Demers, 1996; Dunwoody & Griffin, 1999; Easteal, Holland, and Judd, 2015). Ultimately, understanding the ways that the media frames violence against women is particularly important because “it tells us how society views male acts of violence directed at women, delimiting what may be acceptable or unacceptable behavior” (Meyers, 1997, 3 as cited in Rothman et al., 2012, 734) and because “news media reporting contributes to the cultural context in which judges, other legal and law enforcement professionals, victims/survivors and the wider community negotiate and seek to advance their particular frames and viewpoints” (Easteal, Holland, and Judd, 2015, 105).¹⁰

Overall, the American news media has been framing VAW since at least the mid-1970s. When social awareness of domestic violence started growing as domestic violence shelters were established in the US alongside a feminist push to get these issues on the media agenda, it culminated in “news media’s ‘discovery’ of domestic violence in 1973” (Enck-Wanzer, 2009, 4). During the 40-year period since this “discovery,” a multitude of frames have been used by various media outlets to explore this issue, as “journalistic accounts of domestic violence have surfaced in news sections spanning from ‘human interest’ to the ‘crime beat’” (Enck-Wanzer, 2009, 4) reflecting how “[e]ven within patriarchal systems, competing views exist” (Bullock, 2007, 34).

10 Other scholars have noted that the impacts of media framing as it relates to domestic violence and violence against women, in particular, go beyond the ones noted above. Bullock (2007) makes the case that problematic or inaccurate coverage “may serve as a comforting signal to readers that domestic violence couldn’t happen to them, that the proper authorities already have domestic violence under control, and that no individual or public action is necessary” (Bullock, 2007, 52-53) – and thus undermine efforts to build a more effective and strong response to this problem. Similarly, Sellers et al. (2014) effectively points to the diffuse impact this might have in noting that this type of coverage could well “undermine efforts to change public policy and consciousness and potentially reduce funding for IPV research and prevention campaigns...[and for readers who are victims of IPV] victim blaming through individually framed newsprint reports can only serve to reduce the likelihood they will seek help” (Sellers et al., 2014, 273; see also Bullock & Cubert, 2002; Carlyle et al., 2008; McManus & Dorfman, 2003).

Despite this wide variance, and the variety of frames that could be used to frame domestic violence, scholars studying how the media frames the issues of VAW and domestic violence have converged upon the importance of several key frames related to violence against women: those that relate to culpability, or that frame the issue in a way that points to who bears responsibility for domestic violence.¹¹ This is a particularly important frame to explore because it is reflective of how all discussions of violence against women incorporate “implicitly or explicitly, specific ideas about who is responsible for domestic violence and what, if anything, should be done in response to the violence” (Berns, 1999, 86). In his analysis, Berns notes that there are four different ways to attribute responsibility for domestic violence, and lists four corresponding frames examined in his analysis, which broaden from least inclusive (attributing responsibility for domestic violence solely to the individuals involved) to the most inclusive (attributing a wider range of actors responsible for domestic violence to include not only the individual, but also more societal level institutions).

“Those four frames are: (1) individuals, i.e., the victims and/or abusers involved, (2) institutions, such as the legal and medical systems, (3) cultural and structural factors, such as societal attitudes, gender role socialization, and the economy, and (4) an integrated analysis focusing on the interactions among individual, institutional, and cultural and structural factors. I use the term “frame of responsibility” to describe the way responsibility is assigned in these articles” (Berns, 1999, 87)¹²

11 It should be noted that these are not the only frames related to media coverage of violence against women that have been explored in the literature. For instance, an alternate set of frames is identified by Bullock (2007), who found “three frames used by the media in its storytelling: a dry and impersonal ‘law enforcement/legal system’ frame; a second frame suggesting ‘those involved in domestic violence are inherently different from other people’; and a third frame which ‘emphasises that these deaths affect people other than the victim and perpetrator, such as their children, other family members, and friends as well as members of their community’ (Bullock, 2007: 46–49; cited by Easteal, Holland, and Judd, 107). Similarly, Rothman et al. (2012), “conducted a content analysis of the media frames of the articles using 5 frame categories: (a) abuse is objectionable, (b) victim-blaming, (c) abuse is sexualized/romanticized, (d) myths about abuse perpetration, and (e) abuse is normalized” (Rothman et al., 2012, 733). We focus upon Berns (1999)’s frames in this analysis because of how commonly they are used in the extant literature, and because they are particularly relevant to the Ray Rice case.

12 The use of these frames is not only illuminating as far as understanding media portrayals of domestic violence are concerned, they’re also important for praxis, as “[t]he frame of responsibility impacts what

Importantly, for the purposes of this study, Berns (1999) explicitly includes sports culture in the third type of frame – those that hold “culture and structural factors” responsible for domestic violence:

“Another theme in the cultural frame of responsibility is the “sports culture.” In the midst of the media blitz regarding the O.J. Simpson case, *Redbook* featured an article on athletes and wife abuse. In “Why Sports Heroes Abuse Their Wives,” Joan Ryan reports cases of prominent athletes involved in domestic violence and the connection between their professional and private behaviors. She also points out that the sports culture makes it easier for abusers to “get away with abuse” because of their celebrity status.” (Berns, 1999, 98)

Berns’ research into culpability-related frames found that these four frames of responsibility are not distributed equally among news coverage. Rather, these stories overwhelmingly tend to frame gendered violence using individual frames, as they simultaneously obfuscate the institutional components of this violence (Enck-Wanzer, 2009).¹³

Since Berns (1999) published his seminal exploration into these culpability frames, much of the research focusing on the media’s framing of violence against women as a private, rather than a societal problem, has followed suit. Berns (1999) looked exclusively at the coverage this issue received in women’s magazines and, as noted above, demonstrated that the majority of articles in these types of magazines depict domestic violence as a private problem.¹⁴ But this finding – that the individuals involved in the specific cases (victims and assailants) of domestic violence are the overwhelming focus of news reports on VAW, rather than underlying cultural or

solutions are suggested (e.g., women leaving the abusive relationship, tougher punishment for abusers). Therefore, even though there may be similarities in articles across the frames, the solutions that are called for—either explicitly or implicitly—point to who is being held responsible for stopping domestic violence” (Berns, 1999, 87).

¹³ They usefully reformulate this to note that “news accounts typically minimize any focus on hegemonic masculine entitlement and thus, deny a demand of wider cultural urgency” (Enck-Wanzer, 2009, 4).

¹⁴ Berns (1999) found three quarters of the articles used the individual media frame, only a fifth used an institutional frame, a paltry 5 articles used the cultural/structural frame and only 2 the integrated frame.

institutional factors – has been echoed across several studies that look at other types of media (Bullock and Cubert (2002); McManus and Dorfman (2003); Bullock (2007); Rothman et al. (2012); Sellers et al. (2014); Easteal, Holland, and Judd (2015)). Following the findings of these studies, we examine the prevalence of these four culpability-related frames: the individual frame, the institutional frame, the cultural and structural factor frame, and the integrated frame as they were used by the news media as it covered critical junctures¹⁵ in the Ray Rice domestic violence case during 2014. In doing so, our analysis, for the first time, addresses the way that sports media, in particular, has framed issues of domestic violence using culpability frames. While we examine other types of media as well, the investigation of this specific type of media contributes to the literature built by those such as Berns (1999), Bullock (2007), Sellers et al. (2014). It also expands the current literature by looking not only at the use of these frames at a single point in time as Berns (1999) and others do, but by assessing their use over time. Thus, this paper expands upon previous findings by looking at how traditional *and* sports-related media used these four specific frames in a way that changed and evolved over time.

Frame Evolution in the Media

Recently, the literature on framing and the news has begun to look at frames not as a constant, but, recognizing that journalists apply different frames over the life-span of a story, as evolving over time through a process known as “frame changing” (Muschert and Carr, 2006; Li, 2007). This nascent research has examined media frame changing as it has occurred on a variety of newsworthy issues, including police brutality (Lawrence, 2000) and key public policy issues

¹⁵ The use of critical junctures in this coverage, rather than looking at the entirety of 2014 reflects previous the episodic coverage that this story received. Indeed, as 2014 wore on, the Ray Rice case came into and out of media attention, generally as key pieces of information about the case – particularly, the release of videos of the incident – were released to the public, and as the NFL responded to these events.

(Gilens, 1999; Jacobs & Shapiro, 2000). Specifically relevant to media framings of VAW, several studies have found that coverage of this issue has changed over time. For instance, in examining how the use of a “best practices handbook on reporting domestic violence murders affected the coverage of this topic [Ryan, Anastario, and DaCunha (2006)]...found that the handbook helped media portrayals increase their depiction of IPV as a social problem warranting public intervention (Ryan et al., 2006, as cited in Sellers et al, 2014, 263). Other research has similarly found that “patterns of sexist discourse in news media reporting of rape may be changing as a result of more gender-sensitive journalism training and the presence of female journalists, but that problems persist (Worthington, 2008)” (Easteal, Holland, and Judd, 2015, 108). Results such as these importantly highlight how media treatment of VAW is not always unified, but that instead the “media can express alternative ideas about domestic violence and draw attention to it as a broader social issue” (Bullock, 2007, 41). However, this research has not examined this type of frame changing during the reporting of a single story, rather, it has focused upon broad VAW-related coverage over a significant amount of time. We, instead, focus upon shifting frame dynamics as they occur within coverage of a specific news event. While scholars of VAW have generally focused on framing at a single point in time or over the issues general evolution within the American media, they have largely ignored the temporal evolution of these frames as they relate to a single story.

In focusing our analysis upon frame evolution during a single news story, we build upon several key studies that have examined the dynamics behind media frame changing. Following Downs’ early study of the “issue-attention cycle,”¹⁶ scholars such as Muschert and Carr (2006)

¹⁶ Downs’ “issue-attention cycle” (Downs, 1972) described how “topics/problems emerge, gain public interest, and fade away, only to be replaced by other topics capturing the public interest” and is considered to be an early examination of “the temporal element in issue salience within the news”

and Chyi and McCombs (2004) have built upon this work, finding that the news media frames and reframes a news event over the course of its coverage, and arguing that this process is critical to understand because “by selecting and changing frames of coverage among and within news events, mass media producers influence the nature of reality presented to the public” (Muschert and Carr, 2006, 748). In this literature several classifications have been used to describe how frames evolve over time,¹⁷ but in this article we build upon Chyi and McCombs’ scheme for analyzing the frame changing process. It examines how news frames of an event change over time along two continua – spatial and temporal¹⁸ (Chyi and McCombs, 2004). They originally built this scheme to examine variations in coverage of school shooting events, and found, looking at the *New York Times*’ coverage of these types of events¹⁹ that it used a variety of frames over time, and engaged in frame-changing to keep the story fresh (Chyi and McCombs, 2004). Rather than examining both dimensions Chyi and McCombs use, we focus on the “space dimension” in our analysis. This is because it most clearly relates to the literature on media framing of VAW’s findings about the frequency of usage of culpability frames, and because the attribution of responsibility and risk mitigation for the future are also implicitly a part of the Berns (1999) frames. Specifically, Chyi and McCombs’ space dimension includes the following frames:

(Muschert and Carr, 2006, 748).

17 Iyengar, for instance, discussed frame evolution over time using episodic and thematic framing of public issues (Iyengar, 1994).

18 Though we will not incorporate it into our analysis, for readers that are curious: the “time dimension referred to the temporal focus of the discourse, whether an article discussed the past, present, or future relevance of a shooting event. Categories included the *past* orientation, including discussions of past events and history; discussion of *present* events, such as the incidents themselves or their immediate impacts; and predictions about *future* developments, including future steps that might be undertaken to mitigate the risk of additional incidents. Taken together, the spatial and temporal dimensions allow for the examination of changing frames of coverage over time” (Muschert and Carr, 2006, 750).

19 *The New York Times* is the only news source analyzed in Chyi and McCombs (2004).

“The space dimension referred to the spatial focus of the discourse, which ranged potentially from a micro focus on an *individual* to the macro scale of focusing on the *international*. For its application to school shooting incidents, the individual focus referred to a discussion of the individual participants such as perpetrators and victims. The international focus applied to discussions of the impact of the incident on countries outside the U.S. In addition to the micro and macro extremes on the space dimension, there were three intermediary categories, including, from smallest to largest, *community*, *regional*, and *societal*. These three categories applied to discussions involving their respective spatial foci.” (Muschert and Carr, 2006, 749-750)

Applying this scheme to an analysis of news reports about school shootings, they find a frame-changing pattern which “indicates a shift in focus from the specific to the general – from reports on personal details to discussion of violence as a social problem” (Chyi and McCombs, 2004, 29).²⁰ These frames – ranging from the narrow *individual* frame, and expanding to *community*, *region*, and *societal*, and to *international* – align elegantly with Berns’ (1999) frames about attribution of responsibility. In light of this, Chyi and McCombs’ findings, that the media’s usage of these frames is uneven as individual frames dominate at the start of coverage but other frames are increasingly used over time, lead us to ask the question of whether we will see a similar evolution when media framings of the Ray Rice case are analyzed. As such, we use Berns (1999) frames to build upon Chyi and McCombs findings, and our first hypothesis, also visualized in Figure 1, is the following:

H1: across news coverage, we will see an overall frame-changing pattern where initially individual frames are used, but later in the coverage of the Ray Rice case, broader frames will be adopted (though we also expect that there will be continued usage of the individual frames in later coverage)

Figure 1 about here

20 This is supported by Muschert and Carr (2006), who similarly found that “[t]he pattern of frame-changing suggests that immediately following a school shooting incident the media focus equally on the individuals involved, the community, and the social importance of the event, but over time, the focus increasingly shifts away from individuals to the societal level” (754).

Framing and Sports Media

Our first hypothesis tests the overall trajectory of media coverage of the Ray Rice story and whether we see a dominance of individual frames at the start of this coverage, followed by a shift over time to a greater focus on societal frames. Our second hypothesis builds upon this preliminary question. Here we take a more nuanced look at media frame change by disaggregating our data by media type in order to assess which media was responsible for driving the overall changes in coverage examined in Hypothesis 1. In formulating this second hypothesis, we turn to two main literatures: that which examines the gendered institutional culture and coverage of several prominent types of media (including “new” and “old” non-sports media and “new” and “old” sports media²¹), and the nascent literature on intermedia agenda-setting.

Gender and the culture of media institutions

Previous evidence assessing media coverage has found that it is often profoundly gendered (Devere and Davies, 2006),²² and that in particular, this is the case with coverage of women seeking public office (Kahn, 1994a; Kahn, 1994b; Kahn and Goldenberg, 1991; Aday and Devitt, 2001; Banwart, Bystrom, and Robertson, 2003; Gidengil and Everitt, 2000). This body of evidence has also demonstrated how this biased coverage is normatively problematic because it can reinforce preexisting gender stereotypes (Atkeson and Krebs, 2008; Carlin and Winfrey, 2009). Looking across media types, evidence is mixed concerning whether the traditional media bias against female candidates has been improving. Some studies indicate that

21 Definitions vary of what counts as “new” versus “old” media (for instance some studies make this division only according to method of access – online versus print; while others include level of editorial filtration (Heldman, Oliver, and Conroy, 2009). For the purposes of this study, we include newspapers and television broadcasts in the “old” media category, and internet-only news sources as “new” media.

22 Following Devere and Davies (2006) we define “gendered” coverage as that which highlights “a person’s gender, when this is not particularly relevant to the context” (Devere and Davies, 2006, 65).

while “media biases toward women candidates still exist, it does appear that coverage is becoming more equitable” (Banwart, Bystrom, and Robertson, 2003, 660; Rausch et al., 1999; Smith, 1997; Jalazai, 2006; Kittilson and Fridkin, 2008). Conversely, others have found that evidence of media gender bias remains (Cantrell and Bachmann, 2008; Ross, 2002; Fowler and Lawless, 2009). Reflecting the arguments of the latter, when looking at studies that assess gendered coverage of specific types of media, we continue to see evidence of gender-bias. For instance, in covering the 2008 presidential campaigns, both television and print journalists (“old” media) used problematically gendered language to discuss both Hillary Clinton and Sarah Palin, as anchors on CNN, ABC, and CNBC, as well as columnists from *The Washington Post*, all fixated on these candidates’ physical appearance rather than their policy positions (Carlin and Winfrey, 2009; see also Fortini, 2008). This gendered coverage was also found in “new” media coverage of this campaign, indicating that gendering of the news persists across media platforms (Heldman, Oliver, and Conroy, 2009). Indeed, though the most extreme sexist coverage that Sarah Palin received during the 2008 campaign was found in old media, the sexist coverage she received in the new media’s coverage of the 2008 election let Heldman, Oliver, and Conroy (2009) to remark that

“the advent of New Media is not a good omen for female candidates. Without editorial filters and the outward pursuit of objectivity, the misogyny quotient in new media increases significantly. Overt, antagonistic sexism and negative coverage are amplified for female candidates in this medium compared to print media coverage” (Heldman, Oliver, and Conroy, 2009, 25).

Thus, we can see gendered coverage in both “old” and “new” media, especially when it comes to the coverage of female candidates for office (upon whom much of this research is focused).

While both old and new non-sports media display problematic gender biases in their coverage, sports media has been found to be even more gender biased in its reporting (Scott-

Chapman, 2012).²³ Critically, those researching gendered agenda setting and framing within the sports media underline that they seem to be the product of a cultural issue within the sports media establishment, rather than just caused by a few sexist reporters. Eastman and Billings (2000) perhaps put the systematic underpinnings of this sexist coverage of the sports media in the starkest of terms when they note that, “[a]lthough sexism of any kind is increasingly less acceptable in public discourse in America, there are sportscasts that seem to speak a private, male-only language and operate rather as private clubs for men” (192). Gendered inequities have been found in both the amount of coverage female vs. male athletes receive (object salience) as well as in the way that these athletes are covered (attribute salience). Regarding the former, a clear gap in the coverage of women’s versus men’s sports has been extensively documented, as women’s sports receive very little coverage compared to the huge amount of coverage men’s sports receive (Hardin & Shain, 2005; Women’s Sports Foundation, 2011; Duncan & Messner, 1994; Messner & Cooky, 2010; Schmidt, 2013).²⁴ Specifically, during ESPN’s *SportsCenter* and CNN’s *SportsNight* women’s sports only received 5% of all coverage within both programs (Tuggle, 1997).

As with non-sports media, the transmission of object salience (here, the salient objects being male athletes and men’s athletic competition, rather than all athletics and athletes) is not the only way that the sports media tells those that consume its products what to think. Evidence of framing effects (or attribute salience) as sports media organizations and journalists guide

23 This is not only true for sports media but also for American sports themselves, which have been found to be very androcentric, as “athletics represents a sexist male view of the world, thereby pontificating certain claims of male supremacy and perpetuating masculine hegemony” (Welch, 1997, 394).

24 To quantify this more specifically, a Pew Research study found that on an average day, a mere 3% of newspaper sports stories are about women’s sports teams, while 5% focus on individual women athletes (Pew Research Center, 2005).

public interpretation of sports-related events has also been found (Eastman and Billings, 2000; Bishop, 2005; Sanderson, 2010). The effect of this type of framing is especially evident when it comes to sports media's coverage of gendered issues. Scholars of sports media and framing have observed that media attention to women athletes often forces them into stereotypical gender roles (Schmidt, 2013), and supports the maintenance of sport as a masculine domain (Creedon, 1994; Toffoletti, 2007; Messner et al., 2000)²⁵ which empowers male perspectives while subordinating female ones (Scott-Chapman, 2012).²⁶ This type of gendered framing effect also extends to sports media's coverage of "off-the-field" issues, like athletes who are accused of committing acts of violence against women.

The Framing of Violence Against Women and In Sports Media

Perhaps unsurprisingly, given the strict gender roles reinforced by traditional sports media establishments, this media has not always been at the forefront of the ongoing public debate that has occurred in recent years related to the seeming frequency with which male athletes assault women (Crosset et al., 1996)²⁷. Much of the popular debate on the nexus of VAW and sports has been driven by high profile cases of VAW committed by famous athletes that

25 The enforcement of traditional gender roles is not exclusive to the way that female athletes are framed, this process also extends and boxes in male athletes. Observing this, Messner et al. (2000) have argued that, in particular, "televised sports, and their accompanying commercials, consistently present boys with a narrow portrait of masculinity, which we call the Televised Sports Manhood Formula...[that] presents boys with narrow and stereotypical messages about race, gender, and violence" (381).

26 Other researchers have also confirmed these findings. For instance, Eastman and Billings (2000) found that "personalities are attributed to men athletes, and thus they get nicknames, whereas women athletes usually do not" (206-8), "men's failure is proportionately more often attributed to a supposed lack of athletic skill, whereas women's failure more often (proportionately) was attributed to alleged lack of commitment" (208) and "the dating habits and families of women athletes were referred to more often than those of men" (208). Similarly, Daddario (1994) found that when discussing female athletes sportscasters used stereotypical descriptors that ultimately denigrated and undercut the athletic performances and achievements of these women.

have made headlines over the past couple of decades (Welch, 1997).²⁸ Observing the intersection of physical sports with off-the-field violence against women, scholars have argued that, “[b]eyond a focus on *athletes*, what is needed is a thorough examination of the relationship between *athletics* and violence against women. Such an investigation, we believe, should situate the problem in its historical, institutional, and interactional contexts” (Crosset et al., 1996, 175). Enck-Wanzer (2009) makes a similar argument, which connects sports to broader patriarchal and racist structures, and highlights how professional sports and sports media are “specific arms of a larger misogynist (and racist and classist) structure that serve to undermine women’s abilities to escape abuse on a variety of levels” (14). Here, Crosset et al. (1996) and Enck-Wanzer (2009) are fundamentally advocating for the adoption of the cultural frame on the part of the sports media in its discussions of violence against women. But, the sports media hasn’t picked up this torch²⁹ to critically investigate the way that sports culture has reinforced this violence against

27 This study usefully notes that this is not a phenomenon made up by the media. It argues instead, “the contention that athletes’ violence against women only appears by the media is not supported by the findings. The findings of this research indicate the existence of a problem” (Crosset et al., 1996, 175).

28 By focusing on *these* cases, rather than other cases of athlete violence against women, “news accounts of offenders focus largely on instances of black male sports figures who physically abuse their female (and often white) partners” (Enck-Wanzer, 2009, 2). This not only problematically allows white aggressors to often fly under the radar when they commit VAW, but further, “when black men and male athletes are cast repeatedly in the media as naturally more aggressive, a particular cultural production of knowledge about domestic violence is generated at the nexus of racism and sport as they are circumscribed onto the convenient villain of the black male athlete” (Enck-Wanzer, 2009, 3). We focus on a single, extremely high profile case of VAW in this paper, which has the effect of holding race constant. However, we note that the victim and perpetrator in what was undoubtedly the most highly discussed case of athlete-perpetrated VAW in 2014 were both African American, and that the media’s focus on this case *in particular*, while there were several noted cases where white players committed VAW were the source of almost zero media attention is, inherently, problematic because of the way that it reinforces the incorrect, and racist perspective that certain men “fit the mold of pathologized monster much more readily than others. And those who are left beyond suspicion in this model are those who embody hegemonic (white) masculinity” (Enck-Wanzer, 2009, 13).

29 Conversely, the sports media has sometimes used almost comically poor framings when discussing VAW. As Enck and Wanzer (2009) observed, “[i]n an effort to contextualize domestic violence for sports enthusiasts, a Sports Illustrated special report notes, ‘For years battering was perceived not as a criminal matter, like mugging and armed robbery, but as a phenomenon that belonged in the intimate realm of the hearth, like making love or Christmas cookies’” (7).

women. Conversely, sports media at home and abroad have excused male violence against women – including both domestic and sexual violence³⁰ – depicting violence as a largely excusable quality inherent to male athletes (Easteal et al., 2015), and an individual, rather than cultural phenomenon (Toffoletti, 2007).

While little research into the way that the sports media has framed specific incidents of male athlete violence against women has been conducted in the American context, several Australian studies are illuminating for their analysis of this matter. In particular, Toffoletti's (2007) study of the media coverage of Australian Rules football players who committed a high profile incident of sexual violence against women usefully depicts how sports media problematically treats not only female athletes, but also other women – which is relevant to the Ray Rice case as the victim in the case was his wife, and not an athlete. Looking at frames similar to Berns' (1999), she finds that, as was the case with types of media, including women's magazines (Berns, 1999), daily newspapers (Consalvo, 1998), and local t.v. news (Meyers, 1997), in the coverage of this incident of VAW, sports media's coverage was largely focused upon individuals and their responsibility, rather than changing broader attitudes towards VAW in sports (Toffoletti, 2007).

Taken together, we use this research to make predictions about when and why the four relevant media types – “new” and “old” non-sports media, and “new” and “old” sports media – will use Berns' (1999) frames of responsibility. We predict that the old non-sports media's shift away from individual frames will occur before new media outlets of both the sports and non-sports variety, though because of these media types' gendered structure of news production (van Zoonen, 1994; Gidengil and Everitt, 2003), we do not think the adoption of the institutional,

³⁰ Which can obviously, but do not necessarily, overlap.

cultural/social, or integrated frames will be immediate. Because of sports media's even more gendered news production environment we predict that it would be even more reticent to adopt these critical frames. Furthering the sports media's reticence to adopt a frame of responsibility that places blame for VAW going unchallenged upon sports culture or sports institutions is the "symbiotic relationship" (Pedersen, 2002, 304 as cited in Scott-Chapman, 2012, 109) between sports organizations and the sports media. Sports events – like NFL games – have become very lucrative for the media (Scott-Chapman, 2012). While their popularity means that they are important for drawing in viewers and readers to non-sports media (Rowe, 2007), for media organizations this importance is intensified. Sports media rely on their access to athletes, sports venues, and coaches in order to be able to report the stories which make up the bulk of their business, and as such, the economic imperatives to not lay blame for violence against women at the feet of those granting them this access is obvious.

Intermedia agenda setting

The literature on gendered media coverage and institutional structure, allows us to predict that sports media will be most reticent to incorporate frames other than the "individual" frame into their coverage of the Ray Rice story. Historically, this seems to have been the approach to covering VAW that the sports media has taken, as ESPN's coverage of VAW as it relates to prominent athletes has been problematic or minimal, and anecdotal evidence points to a predominant "individual" frame in their coverage.³¹ Yet, by September 2014 an ESPN-hosted

31 One particularly egregious example of this in relation to another high profile athlete (allegedly assaulting a woman) was the following comment from Skip Bayless: "Remember Kobe pre-Eagle, Colorado? He failed in his first sneaker deal because he was just too clean cut and I think it was Adidas that had him first, correct me if I'm wrong, but he couldn't sell sneakers because he didn't have enough edge," Bayless said. "But then post-Eagle, Colorado it brought a little attention to him, like it gave him a little bit of sizzle." (Waldron, "ESPN Commentator: Rape Allegation Gave Kobe Bryant 'Sizzle'" *ThinkProgress*, Oct. 21, 2014)

“*NFL Sunday Countdown* roundtable addressed the league’s responsibility in addressing domestic violence Sunday morning” (McMurry, 2014). Though problematic, this was a marked shift to the cultural/structural frame, and away from earlier coverage, where Stephen A. Smith discussed the case by blaming victims of domestic violence and noting that “[w]e also have to make sure that we learn as much as we can...about elements of provocation” (Ley, 2014). So, what changed during the Ray Rice case that caused the sports media to change it’s framing? Why, despite the incentives to stay away from these broader frames (noted above) do we predict that the sports media eventually incorporated the institutional, cultural/social, and integrated frames into their coverage?³² In evaluating this question we follow others, who have argued that “[a]udience size and exposure may be less the issue than the kind of subtle modeling that occurs within the field of journalism” (Eastman and Billings, 2000, 210). More specifically, we argue that the answers to these questions lie in the power of intermedia agenda setting.

Intermedia agenda setting is based on the idea that there is no single media agenda, rather there are many (Walgrave et al., 2004), yet some media outlets are able to more powerfully shape these agenda than others. At its most basic, intermedia agenda setting “explains the flow of influence among media entities” (Meraz, 2011, 178). Studies have found that elite news outlets – particularly the *New York Times* – function as agenda setters for less elite outlets such as national television news (Reese and Danielian, 1989; Bartels, 1996; Golan, 2006; Atkinson et al., 2014), local television and print news (Protest and McCombs, 1991), and can even spill over to agenda setting in politics. Intermedia agenda setting can also function across the “new”/“old” media

³² Besides the well-publicized anecdotal evidence of this frame-change, like the ESPN round table, mentioned above.

divide; generally traditional media (newspapers, etc) set the agenda for non-traditional (e.g. “new” media like blogs), but studies have also found the reverse (Meraz, 2011; Wallsten, 2007).³³

As with media influence more generally, intermedia agenda setting can also happen at both the issue salience and attribute salience stages, though little research has been done in relation to the latter. Here, Denham (2014)’s exploration of intermedia attribute salience agenda setting in relation to coverage of horseracing is particularly instructive. Denham (2014) looked not only at which stories were being reported across media outlets, but at how prominent news organizations influenced the way that this story was covered in other outlets. Examining the way that coverage in the *New York Times* influenced reporting in the *Albuquerque Journal*, the *Los Angeles Times*, and the *Washington Post*, as well as broadcast radio and television outlets (CNN, NBC, and NPR), he found that the *New York Times* not only transferred object salience but it also affected *how* news organizations frame their stories, and ultimately offered “some evidence that a prominent news organization can transfer attribute salience to other outlets” (Denham, 2014, 30).

Curiously, though Denham (2014) investigated intermedia agenda setting on a story about sports, none of the news outlets examined in his analysis were sports media outlets. None of the influence measured was on horseracing – or other sports – news outlets. This is an important difference, because horseracing (and general sports) media probably have substantially more expertise in reporting issues related to horseracing, and thus potentially could have relied to a far lesser extent on the *New York Times* for information on this issue than the media sources Denham examined. He does, very briefly, mention that writers for both *Sports Illustrated* and ESPN cited the *Times* in online commentaries, which provides very anecdotal evidence that a similar exploration that includes sports media could be warranted, but does not look further into

³³ That there is much correlation and agenda setting found between “old” and the largest of “new” non-sports media outlets is perhaps unsurprising, as many former journalists have become bloggers in some of the most prominent online news sources, such as the Huffington Post (Meraz, 2011; Heim, 2010).

this expanded media landscape. Indeed, no research could be found on how non-sports media does or does not set the intermedia attribute salience agenda for sports media. Does the *New York Times*' agenda setting power carry over to sports stories and sports media, who are arguably more experienced reporters of this type of news than the *Times*? Currently, this is an unknown. Our study fills this gap in the literature by examining the influence of non-sports media (both "new" and "old") on sports media outlets that, at least in theory, should have greater expertise in reporting on sports-related stories, such as those that involve star football players like Ray Rice, and therefore should be more resistant to the *Times*' hegemony.

Intermedia attribute salience agenda setting and changing sports coverage

While not directly addressing intermedia attribute salience agenda setting, the work of scholars who study gendered sports media reporting leads us to be optimistic that old media's agenda setting power could impact sports media reporting. Some scholars, such as Eastman and Billings (2000) are not optimistic about sports media following other media's reporting to becoming less gender-biased.³⁴ However, it makes economic sense that the sports media would be sensitive to this type of reframing, and of criticisms that they are being gender-insensitive (to put it mildly). For one, women comprise a significant and increasing segment of the sports-viewing population (Hardin & Shain, 2005; Schmidt, 2013), so sports media outlets would be concerned at this potential loss of viewership. Further, though it may be even more gendered in its coverage than non-sports reporting, there are no overwhelming reasons to think that sports media – uniquely – won't evolve in their coverage of gendered issues. For instance, we predict

³⁴ They specifically note that the influence of some media coverage should influence other journalists to take a more gender-sensitive approach "except perhaps on certain programs with narrowly defined target audiences. Although ESPN claims that a large portion of *SportsCenter*'s viewers are women, the presence of this audience has not yet influenced the little-boy's club attitude revealed on *SportsCenter*" (Eastman and Billings, 2000, 210-211).

that like sports media, The *New York Times*' reporting of the Ray Rice story will also begin with predominant use of the individual frame. This reflects previous findings about frame-change, and which changes are typically used first, and the fact that like the sports media, the *Times* coverage of sports and gender has been sexist in its coverage of female athletes – in one study, it was found that “men received almost 5 times as much space as women in *USA Today* and a staggering 10 times as much space as women in *The New York Times*” (Eastman and Billings, 2000, 202). But, though the sports media has more incentives to avoid the use of broader frames than the *Times*, like the *Times*, sports media institutions and stories have been found to be flexible, and “can also function to resist, interrogate and transform dominant beliefs and attitudes” (Toffoletti, 2007, 435), rather than just reinforcing these narratives.

Based on the literatures about the gendered nature of media institutions – particularly sports media institutions – and about the powerful influence of intermedia agenda setting, we predict that forms of media outside the sports media will be the first to incorporate frames that hold others than the individuals involved with the specific case (the Rices) responsible for VAW, but that large sports media institutions will eventually follow suit. Further, based on Meraz's arguments that “though many elite political bloggers now gain first-hand access to sources, most elite traditional media entities still remain in a better structural position to break news and conduct investigative reporting on their online news websites due to their professional affiliation to the newsroom.” (Meraz, 2011, 179), we expect traditional non-sports news sources – particularly newspapers – to be the first to adopt cultural/social and institutional frames, and that because of the intermedia agenda setting power of these outlets, this framing will be adopted by “new” media sources (both sports and non-sports “new” media), followed by the eventual

adoption of these broader frames by the sports media. As such, our second hypotheses are the following:

H2a: Compared to other news, we expect non-sports “old” news outlets to be the first to shift away from an exclusive use of the individual frame of analysis, and to adopt broader frames earlier than the sports media.

H2b: We expect new media sources (both sports and non-sports) media to follow the incorporation of Berns (1999)’s broader frames by old non-sports media.

H2c: We expect old sports media to be the last of the 4 types of media outlet examined to adopt Berns’ (1999) broader frames (but we do expect these frames’ eventual adoption by old sports media).

****Figure 2 about here****

Data

At the time of writing, the Ray Rice story continues to unfold, and new information emerges and is covered by various media outlets on at least a monthly basis. Because of the dynamic nature of the story, and the continued attention of the media, we decided to undertake a smaller, preliminary examination of the media’s coverage in order to assess whether our hypotheses appeared valid before beginning a final exploration of the questions posed above. For initial hypothesis testing we chose to evaluate media coverage that occurred during the first six months of the story, beginning on February 15, 2014, and running through September 14, 2014. Because of the high profile nature of the case, particularly as additional information was released, there was an extremely high volume of articles focusing on Ray Rice that were published during this time period. Fluctuations depended on the salience of new information or events, such as press conferences and major decisions coming from the NFL, as well as reactions to these events coming from the public as well as media and sports elites. This episodic coverage of the ongoing story led us to identify several “critical junctures” (or key events and turning points in the story) to use as reference points for data collection. These events are outlined in

Table 1. They begin with the initial arrest of Ray Rice and his then-fiancé Janay Palmer (his now-wife, Janay Rice) on February 15, 2014 in an Atlantic City casino, and continue through the events surrounding the September 8, 2014 release of a graphic video of the assault including the subsequent reactions of the NFL and media.

****Table 1 about here ****

In order to create a sample representing the four categories of media we wished to test, five media sources were chosen to represent traditional (or “old”) non-sports media, new non-sports media, traditional sports media and new sports media. The goal was to include media outlets serving as opinion leaders within each category, an easy task for traditional non-sports media because of the well-established use of such leaders as the *New York Times*, *Washington Post* and *USA Today*. This became more difficult as we moved to other categories because there lacks a single source ranking the popularity of primarily online sources for new non-sports media, traditional sports media and new sports media. The sports media sources – both traditional and new – were chosen based on an assortment of online articles ranking sports websites by the number of page hits on their respective websites. This included well-known outlets such as ESPN, Yahoo Sports and CNN Sports, as well as the largest new media sources SB Nation and Bleacher Report. Our goal was to assess five sources per media category so that we would not pick a single source without knowing whether or not their coverage was representative of the genre. For instance, did the framing used by the *Times*’ deviate sharply from that of the *Post*, making its coverage unrepresentative of “old” or traditional non-sports media? In examining five sources, we attempted to mitigate this possibility. In order to achieve this number, the most popular sources that had already been identified were cross-checked for references to other sports media sites, with those most mentioned used to fill out the remaining

spots. New non-sports media was more difficult still, because of the dynamic nature of new and emerging news sources that do not fit the traditional model of news reporting, as well as the complicated web of ownership that connects many traditional and new media sources. A key goal of this paper was to observe a diverse group of sources in order to best identify whether our hypotheses could meet the bar of face validity, and the meeting of this goal would be questionable if all sources shared a parent company. Based on a report from the Pew Research Center on the growth in digital reporting, five new media sources were chosen based on their level of growth and their general news focus (rather than a more narrow focus, such as *Business Insider*). The media sources chosen for each category are outlined in Table 2.

****Table 2 about here****

From these twenty media sources, articles were collected via LexisNexis for the *New York Times*, *Washington Post* and *USA Today*. For all other sources, an advanced Google search was utilized, an option which allows isolated searches within a specific website as well as within a specific date range. For each critical juncture, articles were collected within four days of the event, based on literature showing that within the episodic news cycle, new episodes in an ongoing story typically receive four days of attention from the media (Muschert and Carr, 2006). The sole search term used for both LexisNexis and Google was “ray rice,” and articles were included for analysis if the focus was on the Ray Rice domestic case specifically, or if Ray Rice was discussed in terms of domestic violence more generally. Most articles during this timeframe met these criteria, with only a handful eliminated for lacking a domestic violence context (e.g. Rice’s on-field talents without any mention of “off the field” or “off season” issues).

Including the articles collected from all twenty media sources, a total of 423 articles was compiled. Data collection consisted of the media source, date, article headline, critical juncture

with which it was associated, primary frame, secondary frame (if applicable), gender of the journalist listed in the byline (if available), and whether there was any mention of race in the article³⁵.

The frames utilized come from Berns (1999) and include Individual, Institutional, Cultural/Structural and Integrational. Articles were labeled with the Individual frame when the focus of the article was on Ray Rice and his fiancé/wife Janay, the details of the incident at the casino, questions of who was at fault, and often a discussion of the couple having “issues” they needed to work on and how they were doing so through counseling. Individually framed stories also often focused on the impact of the incident on Ray Rice’s career in the NFL, with references made to his “off the field” or “off season” troubles. An Institutional frame was applied when the focus of the article was on the legal system, and articles with this focus primarily concentrated on Rice’s entrance into a pre-trial intervention program that avoids time in prison without admission of guilt. These stories were critical of Rice’s inclusion in this program, noting it was intended for non-violent crimes, and all institutionally framed articles suggested Rice had been allowed to enter into this program because of his wealth and fame. The Cultural/Structural frame focused on domestic violence as a larger issue within a society that glorifies violence and reinforces traditional gender roles and sexism within a patriarchal culture. Interestingly, this took one of two iterations: in the first, the frame focused on modern society in general, and the gendered treatment of domestic violence (“Why did she stay?”) while placing the responsibility of a solution on the victim; in the second, these issues were brought up completely in the context of the NFL as a cultural institution, treating the NFL as a culture in and of itself that reflects societal norms and values. This divergence of the Cultural/Structural frame prompted the

³⁵ Gender of the reporter and mentions of race were collected, but not analyzed for the preliminary analysis. These will be analyzed and discussed in future iterations of this study.

inclusion of a secondary frame while collecting data, where the NFL-specific “Institutional” frame was coupled with the Cultural/Structural. This frame was seen across all media types, and became most prominent following the release of the full video of the Rice incident, from within the elevator where it occurred, with a focus on NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell, his view on women and domestic violence as minor issues (particularly in comparison of how players found to be using illicit drugs were given harsher punishments than domestic abusers), and in general a discussion of who knew what and when about the Rice case, with a suggestion there had been a cover-up of the full details, or gross negligence on the part of the NFL, which the articles suggested was indicative of the League’s dismissive view of the significance of domestic violence³⁶. Lastly, the Integrational frame was applied when multiple frames were used within one article, such as criticisms of the handling of the Rice case by the NFL as a “family affair” that placed blame on both Ray and Janay Rice.

Preliminary Analyses and Findings

Our preliminary analysis focused on descriptive comparisons of the distribution of frames by media source and critical juncture in the news narrative of the Ray Rice case. These comparisons support the expectations that 1) the dominant frame used in coverage of the Rice case shifted over time from an individual to a cultural/structural framing, and 2) traditional media sources are more likely than sports media sources to utilize the cultural/structural frame when reporting on domestic violence incidents. Subsequent analysis will delve further into these findings by examining variation across old and new media and temporal patterns in framing shifts over time.

³⁶ This divergence in the Cultural/Structural frame was not anticipated prior to constructing our current hypotheses, but is an area of interest which will be explored in future iterations of this study.

Table 4 shows the distribution of frames over the entire study period by news media source (traditional/“old” non-sports, new non-sports, traditional/“old” sports, and new sports). Out of a total of 423 articles, 91 are “old”/traditional non-sports, 103 are new non-sports, 125 are “old”/traditional sports, and 104 are new sports. For each source, the distribution of frames is presented both as a raw number and as a percentage within that source. When all sources are combined to show the total number of each frame throughout the study period, the Cultural/Structural frame is clearly dominant (54 percent of all stories) and this includes both the overall societal iteration and the NFL iteration of this frame. This dominance is followed by the prevalence of the Individual (27 percent), Integrational (17 percent), and Institutional (1 percent) frames. As expected, “old” sports media are generally most likely to utilize the Individual frame. This frame was used in 34 percent of old sports media and 33 percent of new sports media, as compared to 23 percent of old non-sports media and 17 percent of new sports media coverage. Also consistent with expectations, old sports media sources are the least likely to utilize the Cultural/Structural frame (44 percent of articles) and the most likely to use the Individual frame (34 percent of articles). Somewhat surprisingly, new sports media sources lead slightly in the use of the Cultural/Structural frame (59 percent of articles).

****Table 4 about here****

One explanation for this surprising finding is that Table 1 combines all coverage over the course of the study period. Tables 5 and 6 address this by disaggregating the distribution of frames for all news sources combined over time based on month (Table 5) and juncture (Table 6). Turning first to Table 5, there is a clear, striking pattern in the distribution of frames over time. Coverage clearly increases dramatically as the story progresses. There were only 27 articles in February, three articles in March, and 8 articles in May. By summer, coverage had increased to

39 articles in July, 40 articles in August, and a very large spike to 305 articles in September. Similarly, the distribution of frames shifted dramatically over time. From February to May, the Individual frame was clearly dominant (93 percent in February, 100 percent in March, and 63 percent in May). In contrast, the Cultural/Structural frame became dominant in the July to September period (64 percent in July and 58 percent in August and September).

****Table 5 about here****

****Table 6 about here****

A similar pattern emerges when coverage is disaggregated by critical juncture in the narrative of the story. As shown in Table 6, the Individual frame dominated early coverage – which is associated with junctures in February, March, and May. The Institutional and Integrational frames are essentially absent during this time. A major shift occurred, however, when Ray Rice received his initial two-day suspension on July 24. The Individual frame predominantly characterized coverage of the preceding juncture, Ray Rice’s news conference on May 23 (63 percent of articles). In comparison, coverage following the July 24 suspension shifted to the Cultural/Structural frame (63 percent of articles). In addition, after the suspension there was a notable increase in the use of Integrational frames. These trends peaked after the release of the second video of the incident, which the media received and began to cover on September 8. By this point, only 20 percent of articles utilized the Individual frame compared with 58 percent utilizing a Cultural/Structural frame and 19 percent utilizing an Integrational frame. Overall, we clearly see the frame shift that would be expected of an ongoing story based on the work of Chyi and McCombs (2004), and are able to clearly see the frame shift over time when assessing the Individual versus Cultural/Structural frames, which were developed by Berns (1999) to describe media coverage of VAW.

In Table 7, these patterns are further disaggregated by media source (traditional and new non-sports versus traditional and new sports). It is evident that while both media sources shifted the framing of the Rice story as it progressed, non-sports media sources were more likely in general to utilize the Cultural/Structural frame. Looking at coverage following Rice's July 24 suspension, 71 percent of non-sports media articles utilized a Cultural/Structural frame compared with 57 percent of sports media articles. By September, when the second video of the incident was released, this 14-point gap had narrowed to only 4 percentage points (61 percent of non-sports media articles and 57 percent of sports media articles). Figure 3 provides a visual depiction of these trends. This figure shows that while there was a shift towards increased use of the Cultural/Structural frame over time, there is also considerable variation in the distribution of frames by juncture. While these results do not definitively support our second hypotheses, it does provide initial observations that would indicate additional data from an expanded timeframe (i.e. beyond the critical junctures) may provide information regarding whether each of the four media sources serve as leader or follower of this shift.

Discussion

Our preliminary analysis provides some support for our expectations. Firstly, it demonstrates that in reporting the Ray Rice story, there was an overall shift in the distribution of frames towards an increased use of a Cultural/Structural frame and away from the Individual frame, which predominated at earlier stages of coverage. Previous studies have examined news coverage of VAW cases at single points in time, or generally over a period of time but independent from the narrative of a particular story, and have found that generally the Individual frame is overwhelmingly used. We add to this literature by looking at the coverage of a story of VAW over time, and find that (as the work of Chyi and McCombs, 2004 would predict) we no

longer see this stagnant pattern; in fact, we see frame change occur in the case of media reports of VAW, and as the coverage of this case progressed, broader frames were adopted by the media. This is a critical finding, because a focus on the Individual frame by the media is not only discursively hegemonic, it is also normatively problematic. This is so because “[b]y framing IPV as a private problem and ascribing responsibility to the individuals, the media neglects an opportunity to expose broader institutional failures among law enforcement agencies, the courts, corrections, education, and medical and mental health services that contribute to IPV” (Sellers et al., 2014, 272), and allows the role played by patriarchal cultural attitudes to be dismissed. However, it seems that with continued media coverage of a case of VAW, rather than merely episodic coverage, the possibility exists that media will evolve in their coverage.

In addition to this finding about frame change over time, this preliminary analysis showed that traditional, non-sports media sources were more likely to utilize this frame at each juncture in the Rice story than were the other types of media outlets examined. But, equally importantly, there are indications that as the story wore on, that sports media outlets also adopted these broader frames in covering the story. However, these preliminary analyses mark only the first step in evaluating our hypotheses, and we plan to use the evidence gathered to propel our further inquiries into the questions raised. Regarding our first hypothesis, because we were able to see a frame shift over time using the limited and episodic data explored herein, we plan to focus our future analyses over the summer months of the study period because this is when the frame shift seems to have begun to occur. We will gather more stories published during the May-September 2014 time period so we can see precisely when these shifts occurred, and what unfolding events or published reports seemed to be the antecedents to the broader changes found in this paper. In order to make this more nuanced data gathering and the coding of this new data

manageable, the next step of our analysis will be to compare coverage from sources within media outlets – is ESPN’s coverage largely similar to that of other traditional sports media? Similarly, is *The Washington Post*’s coverage similar to that of the *New York Times*? If inter-media type frame shifts seem to have occurred at the same time, we will select the most prominent source within the 4 types examined and look at the universe of coverage given to the Ray Rice story, rather than sampling from all twenty sources used herein. We will also involve a second coder at this stage in order to ensure intercoder reliability.

While the above next steps will build importantly on the work we have done so far, the bulk of our plans for the expansion of this project relate to trying to more conclusively assess our second set of hypotheses – those that disaggregate between media types and which explore intermedia agenda setting. In this paper we have only begun the project of teasing out which types of media set the media agenda for attribute salience in the reporting of the Ray Rice story. The analyses completed up to this point highlight that the above-described frame changes do, indeed, seem to be occurring over time. But, the limited data explored do not allow us to determine with any level of conclusiveness if, as hypothesized, the “traditional” media, is indeed “setting the agenda.” This prediction reflects a) Bullock (2007)’s arguments that “newspaper content reflects the way journalists and news organizations work within and interact with the greater social structure” (38; See also Sanderson, 2010; Carruthers, 2000; Wolfsfeld, 1997), b) the reality that these organizations have varied – and gendered – institutional cultures, and c) that “new,” “old,” and sports media outlets have differing incentives to go easy – or not – on professional sports organizations. In all three of these ways, the culture in which sports media reporters operate is different than that of, for instance, *The New York Times*. We hypothesized that this will condition their use of Berns’ (1999) frames of responsibility, and in particular that

old sports media outlets will be disincentivized from adopting these broader frames. From these very preliminary analyses, however, it does appear that the “traditional” (or “old, non-sports” media) seems to be leading the way in terms of the adoption of these frames and thus that these are questions that merit further exploration.

In order to determine if we are truly seeing intermedia attribute agenda setting on this issue, we plan to conduct further analysis to examine these patterns at a more granular level by day of coverage. Building on these results, going forward we will gather data that allows us to track the the day-to-day coverage from May until September 2014 from the four primary sources discussed above, rather than focusing on the episodic coverage from all twenty. We expect that doing so will show clearer patterns in the shifting distribution of frames as well as a temporal lag whereby sports media coverage follows traditional media coverage. In addition, we expect that additional analysis of old and new media sources within media type (“sports” versus “non-sports”) will show that old sports media lagged behind all other media sources in shifting to a Cultural/Structural frame. This more nuanced analysis will allow us to also explore the four frames in more detail. In particular, by examining more closely the cultures and structures held responsible for VAW when the Cultural/Structural frame was used, we will evaluate whether sports culture itself, the NFL in particular, or society more broadly, are held to account by those reporting the Ray Rice story, and whether this was different between old/new and sports/non-sports media. Finally, we will explore possible alternate discussions for the frame shifts we found herein. Most critically, here we will assess whether shifts over time in attribute salience were not due to intermedia agenda setting, but rather driven by the gender of the reporter writing the story, or (by looking at social media sources like Twitter) if the media examined was instead responding to reframings occurring elsewhere.

Ultimately, an exploration of the media's evolving coverage of the Ray Rice case is important for two key reasons. Firstly, for those interested in the continuing influence of media sources such as the *New York Times*, it allows us to determine if their agenda-setting role continues even as media diversifies and responds to the Internet age, and whether this agenda setting influence extends to media outlets such as *ESPN*, which are highly experienced in covering sports-related news and may thus be more resistant to this type of agenda setting. And secondly, by continuing this project we can evaluate whether we see frame change over time when it comes to coverage of the critical political issue of violence against women, a question on which currently the literature is silent.

Figure 1. Primary Visualization of Hypothesis One.

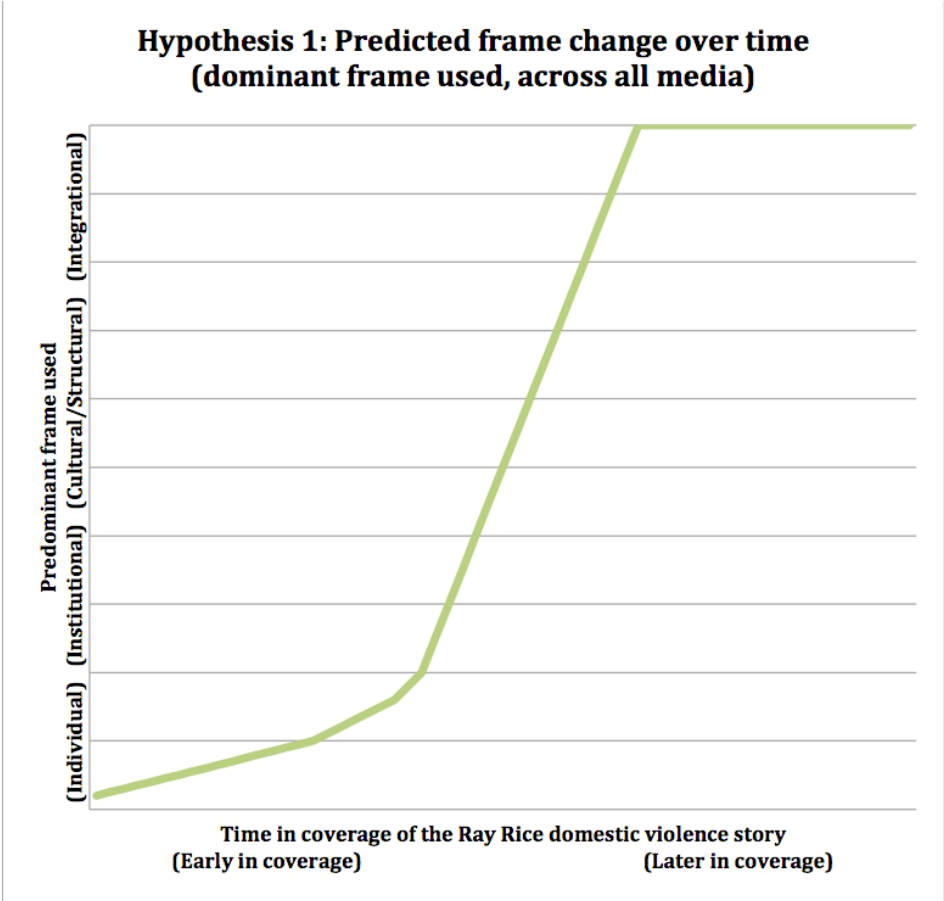


Figure 2. Primary Visualization of Hypothesis Two.

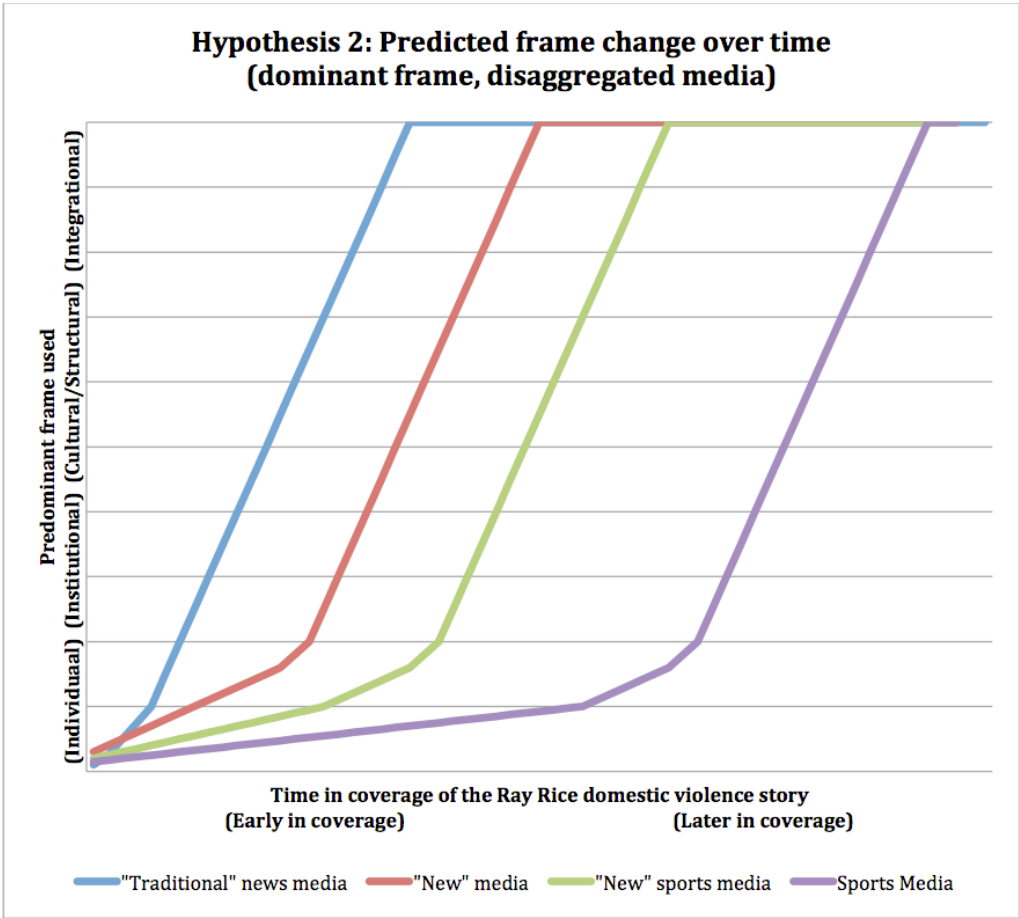


Table 1. Timeline of critical junctures in Ray Rice story

Date (2014)	Event
February 15	Ray Rice and Janay arrested after physical altercation at Revel Casino in Atlantic City, New Jersey
February 19	TMZ releases footage of Rice dragging limp body of Palmer from elevator
February 21	Rice defended by Ravens Coach John Harbaugh in press conference: states couple is in counseling, working on “a couple of issues they have to work through”
March 5	Ravens press conference where Harbaugh again defends Rice
May 23	Assisted by Ravens, Ray and Janay Palmer (now Janay Rice) hold press conference, where both apologize for the incident
July 24	Ray Rice suspended for 2 games by NFL
August 1	NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell addresses media in Canton, Ohio, responds to criticism for Rice only being suspended 2 games, defends decision
August 28	NFL admits missteps, announces new domestic violence policy: 6 game suspension without pay for first domestic violence offense, lifetime ban for second offense
September 8	Video showing full incident released by TMZ; NFL denies ever having seen the tape; Ravens terminate Rice’s contract, NFL hands down indefinite suspension from league
September 9	Janay releases statement admonishing media;
September 10	Commissioner Goodell denies having seen the full video, claims Rice was not truthful in his account of what happened; Ravens owner apologizes for team’s initial response Associated Press reports NFL received full video in April; Ravens General Manager Ozzie Newsome claims Rice was truthful in giving his account of the incident; NFL announces investigation by former FBI Director to ascertain the status of the video within the NFL

Table 2. Media sources by category

Traditional non-sports media	New non-sports media	Traditional sports media	New sports media
New York Times	Vice	ESPN	Bleacher Report
Washington Post	Huffington Post	CBS Sports	SB Nation
USA Today	Politico	Sports Illustrated	Rant Sports
CBS (online)	Buzzfeed	Yahoo Sports	Deadspin
CNN (online)	Mashable	Fox Sports	Black Sports Online

Table 3. Media frames used for the Ray Rice story

Frame	Focus	Example	Solutions
Individual	Individuals within the relationship; victim and/or abuser	“Why didn’t she leave?” Couple is “working through their issues”	Counseling; ending the relationship
Institutional	Legal system	Abuse of wealth and fame to avoid legal repercussions	Limitation of privileges for abusers within the legal system
Cultural/Structural	Reinforcement of gender roles within a patriarchal and sexist society that glorifies violence	Discussing the #WhyIStayed response to criticism of Janay Rice for marrying her abuser	Public awareness of domestic violence, particularly in response to victim blaming
Cultural/Structural - Institutional	Treating NFL as “microcosm” of a society that diminishes severity of domestic abuse	New domestic violence policy as a public relations effort to repair image of a league that does not appreciate women	Harsher penalties; the resignation of Commissioner Roger Goodell.
Integrational	Combination of Individual, Institutional and Cultural/Structural	Ravens supporting Rice and efforts to deal with “family problems”	Combination of above solutions

Adapted from Berns (1999), Table 1, p. 88

Table 4. Distribution of Frames by News Source.

	Individual	Institutional	Cultural/Structural	Integrational
All (n=423)	115	6	229	73
%	27%	1%	54%	17%
Old (n=91)	21	3	53	14
%	23%	3%	58%	15%
New (n=103)	17	1	60	25
%	17%	1%	58%	24%
Old Sports (n=125)	43	1	55	26
%	34%	1%	44%	21%
New Sports (n=104)	34	1	61	8
%	33%	1%	59%	8%

Note: Percentages are computed within media source.

Table 5. Distribution of Frames by Month.

	Individual	Institutional	Cultural/Structural	Integrational
February (n=27)	25	0	2	0
%	93%	0%	7%	0%
March (n=3)	3	0	0	0
%	100%	0%	0%	0%
April				
%				
May (n=8)	5	0	1	2
%	63%	0%	13%	25%
June				
%				
July (n=39)	11	0	25	4
%	28%	0%	64%	10%
August (n=40)	9	0	23	8
%	23%	0%	58%	20%
September (n=305)	62	6	178	59
%	20%	2%	58%	19%
October				
%				
November				
%				

Note: Percentages are computed within month.

Table 6. Distribution of Frames by Juncture.

	Individual	Institutional	Cultural/Structural	Integrational
Arrest (Feb. 15) (n=11)	10	0	1	0
%	91%	0%	9%	0%
First video (Feb. 19) (n=13)	13	0	0	0
%	100%	0%	0%	0%
Harbaugh defense (Feb. 21) (n=3)	2	0	1	0
%	67%	0%	33%	0%
Harbaugh conference (Mar. 5) (n=3)	3	0	0	0
%	100%	0%	0%	0%
Rice conference (May 23) (n=8)	5	0	1	2
%	63%	0%	13%	25%
Suspension (July 24) (n=40)	11	0	25	4
%	28%	0%	63%	10%
Goodell conference (Aug. 1) (n=18)	3	0	9	6
%	17%	0%	50%	33%
New DV policy (Aug. 28) (n=22)	6	0	14	2
%	27%	0%	64%	9%
Second video (Sept. 8) (n=305)	62	6	178	59
%	20%	2%	58%	19%

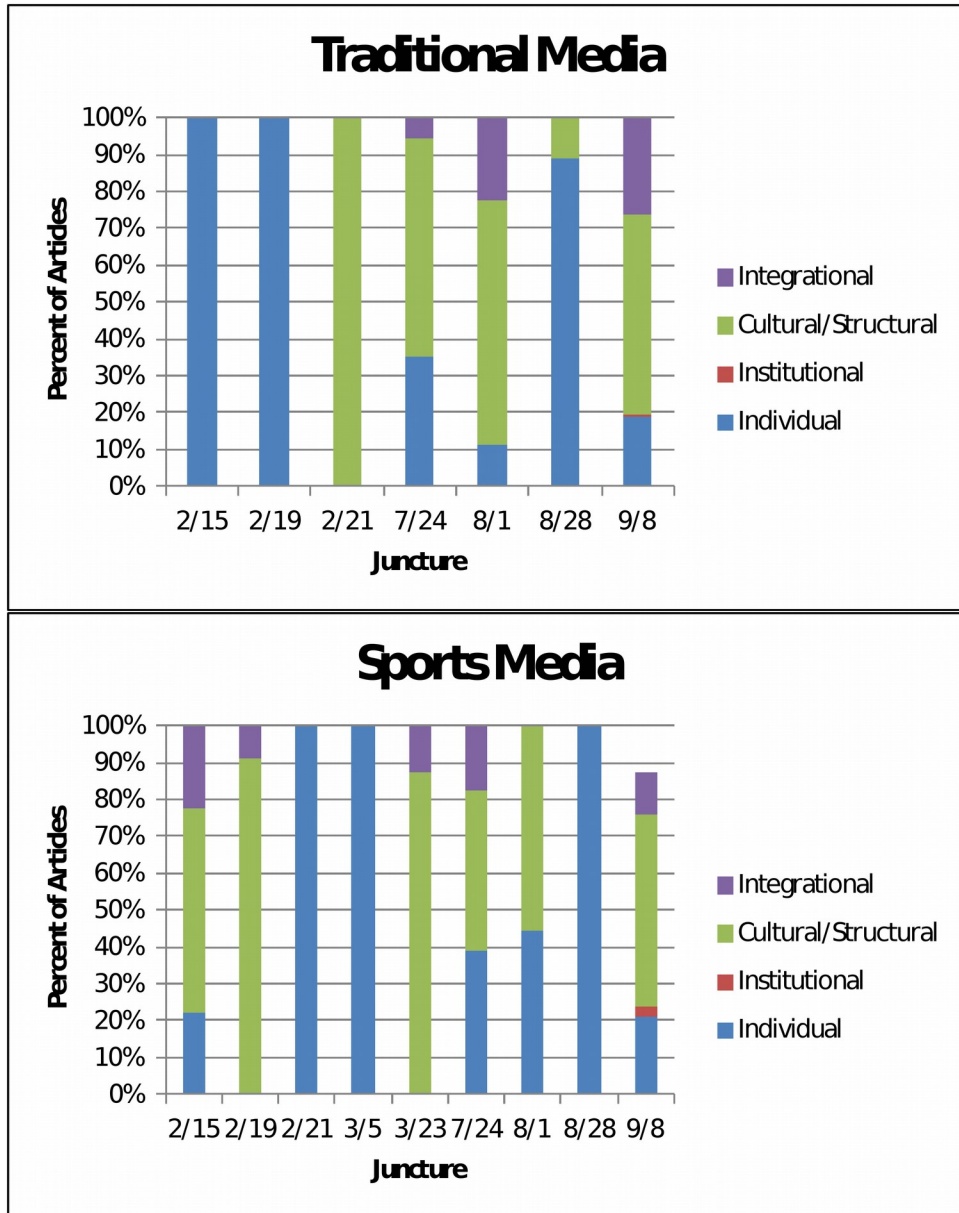
Note: Percentages are computed within juncture.

Table 7. Distribution of Frames by Juncture and Media Source.

	Traditional Media				Sports Media			
	Indiv.	Inst.	Cult./ Struct	Integ.	Indiv.	Inst.	Cult./ Struct.	Integ.
Arrest (Feb. 15) (n=11)	2	0	0	0	8	0	1	0
%	100%	0%	0%	0%	89%	0%	11%	0%
First video (Feb. 19) (n=13)	2	0	0	0	11	0	0	0
%	100%	0%	0%	0%	100%	0%	0%	0%
Harbaugh defense (Feb. 21) (n=3)	0	0	1	0	2	0	0	0
%	0%	0%	100%	0%	100%	0%	0%	0%
Harbaugh conf. (Mar. 5) (n=3)	0	0	0	0	3	0	0	0
%	-	-	-	-	100%	0%	0%	0%
Rice conference (May 23) (n=8)	0	0	0	0	5	0	1	2
%	-	-	-	-	63%	0%	13%	25%
Suspension (July 24) (n=40)	2	0	12	3	9	0	13	1
%	12%	0%	71%	18%	39%	0%	57%	4%
Goodell conf. (Aug. 1) (n=18)	1	0	5	3	2	0	4	3
%	11%	0%	56%	33%	22%	0%	44%	33%
New DV policy (Aug. 28) (n=22)	1	0	6	2	5	0	8	0
%	11%	0%	67%	22%	38%	0%	62%	0%
Second video (Sept. 8) (n=305)	20	1	80	31	42	5	98	28
%	15%	1%	61%	23%	24%	3%	57%	16%

Note: Percentages are computed within juncture for each media type.

Figure 3. Distribution of Frames by Juncture and Media Source.



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