

A FIELD THEORY ANALYSIS OF SPORTS JOURNALISTS'
COVERAGE OF SOCIAL JUSTICE PROTESTS IN SPORTS

by

RYAN BROUSSARD

WILSON LOWREY, COMMITTEE CHAIR

CORY ARMSTRONG

ANDREW BILLINGS

ALYXANDRA VESEY

JOHN VINCENT

A DISSERTATION

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
in the College of Communication & Information Sciences
in the Graduate School of
The University of Alabama

TUSCALOOSA, ALABAMA

2019

Copyright Ryan Mark Broussard 2019
ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

ABSTRACT

Sports journalists have historically been anathema to covering socio-political issues related to sports, even as some high-profile athletes have crossed that boundary from sports to socio-political issues. But that is changing as new generations of sports reporters come into the profession with more professional development and education in journalism practices and ethics than previous generations. Using a mixed-method approach of content analysis and semi-structured qualitative interviews and employing Bourdieu's field theory as the theoretical prism through which to view their responses, this exploratory study aims to better understand why and how sports reporters cover socio-political issues related to sports. Results indicated that a number of factors play into whether sports reporters cover socio-political issues related to sports, such as having the time and resources to properly report on those complex issues, wanting to be seen as more than a sports reporter, and having reporters in other beats who can jump in when the story veers into fields outside of sports. The respondents also identified four story types—"humanity" stories, investigative "deep dives," off-the-field issues, and "hot takes"—that are used to cover socio-political issues, with each story type having its own factors, contexts, and conditions as to whether that story type will be used on socio-political issues.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to all the people who have helped me, pushed me, and encouraged me to follow my dreams.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND SYMBOLS

- α Krippendorff's alpha for internal reliability
- F F statistic as calculated for an Analysis of Variance
- M Mean: sum of a set of measurements divided by the number of measurements in the set
- SD Standard deviation: the value of variation from a mean within a set of data
- p Probability value: whether the null hypothesis of a value would be greater than or equal to the observed results
- X^2 Chi square: whether categorical variable distributions differ from each other

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First, I want to thank my fiancée, Emily Henagan, who has encouraged me for years to pursue my doctorate and who has been a continuing source of inspiration, guidance, and compassion throughout this entire ordeal. This would not have been possible without her. I also want to thank my mother, Mary Landry, for her continued inspiration and encouragement.

Throughout this process, I have been grateful to have the guidance and wisdom of Dr. Wilson Lowrey, who has been my adviser, my dissertation chair, and mentor. He has been enthusiastic, patient and understanding, and the reason this research project turned out as well as I think it did. I also want to thank the other members of my dissertation committee—Drs. Cory Armstrong, Andrew Billings, John Vincent and Alyx Vesey—for their time, knowledge and contributions. Their assistance to this document has been invaluable and cannot be measured. Drs. Armstrong and Billings also deserve many thanks for answering my plethora of questions about the grad program, classes, and teaching. I am also grateful to Dr. Matthew Barnidge for helping make me a better researcher. And I want to thank my grad school colleagues—especially Bumsoo Kim, Will Heath, Zach Arth, Lindsey A. Sherrill and Jason Zhou—who have helped me through the tough times, making me laugh during the bad times and providing support during all the other times.

CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	ii
DEDICATION.....	iii
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND SYMBOLS.....	iv
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....	v
LIST OF TABLES.....	viii
CHAPTER ONE INTRODUCTION.....	1
CHAPTER TWO LITERATURE REVIEW.....	8
2.1 Intersection of Sports and Politics.....	8
2.2 Public-Issue Reporting and Sports Journalism.....	13
2.3 Field Theory and Sports Journalism.....	18
2.4 The Journalistic Field.....	24
2.5 Social Protests.....	26
2.6 Hypothesis and Research Questions.....	27
CHAPTER THREE METHODOLOGY.....	34
3.1 Overview of Method.....	34
3.2 Preliminary Content Analysis of Stories.....	36
3.3 In-depth Interviews with Sports Journalists.....	40
CHAPTER FOUR RESULTS.....	44
4.1 Content Analysis.....	44
H1a.....	44

H1b.....	44
RQ1a.....	45
RQ1b.....	45
RQ1c.....	45
RQ2.....	46
4.2 In-Depth Interview Findings.....	47
RQ3.....	48
RQ4.....	50
RQ5.....	71
RQ6.....	84
CHAPTER FIVE DISCUSSION.....	92
5.1 Summary of Results.....	92
5.2 Implications for Journalism.....	106
5.3 Limitations.....	110
5.4 Directions for Future Research.....	111
5.5 Conclusion.....	112
REFERENCES.....	115
APPENDIX A.....	122
APPENDIX B.....	123
APPENDIX C.....	126
APPENDIX D.....	127
APPENDIX E.....	129
APPENDIX F.....	130

LIST OF TABLES

Table 4.1: Means and standard deviations of the two frames in each of the time periods.....	45
Table 4.2: Means and standard deviations of the two frames by news outlet type.....	46
Table 4.3: Frames found during open coding.....	47
Table 4.4: Frames found from open coding during each time period.....	47

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

On Aug. 26, 2016, San Francisco 49ers quarterback Colin Kaepernick sat alone on the bench during the National Anthem for the team's first two games. Jennifer Lee Chan, a 49ers beat reporter, took a photo of the team during the anthem of the third preseason game to post on her social media accounts. It was in that photo that people first noticed Kaepernick, the team's once-star quarterback fighting for his job that preseason, sitting during the singing of the anthem. After the game, Kaepernick said he sat because he wanted his actions to start a conversation about the way black people are treated in the U.S. and the cases of police brutality against black men (Wyche, 2016). Kaepernick was neither the first nor the last athlete to face scrutiny from the public and reporters for trying to bring about meaningful, progressive social change, but he was one of the first of this generation to speak out. This new age of athlete activism and the growing emphasis on political and social issues in sports may be changing the routines and ways in which sports journalists cover sports, athletes, and sports leagues.

But that change in coverage is coupled with the fact that athletes today are viewed more as celebrities than their predecessors, with some pitching products and services (e.g., Hambrick & Mahoney, 2011; Wilson, Van Luijk & Boit, 2015). Their celebrity status means they are sometimes covered in the celebrity press. And as Conboy (2014) noted, celebrity-focused journalism does have financial benefits for news organizations, not just the tabloids. With the declining ad revenue forcing print news organizations to try to do more with less, sports

journalists are having to cover sports differently than they have in the past, especially in light of the competition of some online sports news sites like *The Athletic* and *Bleacher Report* (McCollough, 2018). Sports journalists working for newspapers and legacy sports magazines are having to fight for the audience's attention more so than they did in the past century, when were the only game in town.

In the late 1960s and '70s, many sports reporters stood against Curt Flood when the African-American all-star outfielder challenged the reserve clause that bound players to one team for the duration of their career (Khan, 2012). The reporters and news outlets opposing Flood bought the owners' argument that eliminating the reserve clause would destroy baseball. Though many reporters weaved stories of racial integration into baseball (Khan, 2012), most sided with the owners in this conflict as they have traditionally done (Bryant, 2018). There were exceptions -- writers for *The Sporting News*, *The New York Times*, and the black press generally supported the players in their fights against owners (Khan, 2012). But most commonly, public perceptions were unfavorable toward Flood. Flood lost his battle in 1972 when the U.S. Supreme Court ruled against him in *Flood v. Kuhn*, though his fight set the stage for later players to gain their freedom in arbitration (Khan, 2012, Bryant, 2018).

Around 25 years before when Jackie Robinson broke the color barrier in Major League Baseball during the fight for civil rights for black citizens, reporters from across the country reported on the historic moment, though in different ways. Members of the black press pushed hard for Robinson, seeing in him an opportunity to attain a goal both they and the Negro Leagues had long sought: the opportunity for a player to be acknowledged for their skill, not just their skin color (Weaver, 1979; Lamb, 1997; Carroll, 2008; Khan, 2012). In the Civil Rights era in the 1960s, many black Americans began idolizing Muhammad Ali as their hero, for his legendary

exploits in the ring, his equally legendary statements on civil rights, and his incarceration for defying the U.S. government's quest to have him serve in Vietnam. Reporters covered Ali in droves, in the good and bad times, and they covered both his athletic achievements and his political statements, in varying ways.

Those athletes and others who pushed for equality faced tremendous backlash, from owners, fans and many in the press (Bryant, 2018; Khan, 2012). Following that generation, athletes from the 1980s through the first decade of the 21st Century largely stopped using their platforms to advocate on social-political issues, and many sports journalists returned their gaze to the games (Coombs & Cassilo, 2017). Cunningham and Regan (2012) said the fall-off of activism by athletes came from laws passed in the 1960s and 1970s that lessened the overt racism subsequent athletes faced. Other scholars attributed this lack of activism by athletes to those who headlined this generation and corporate influence on them – athletes like O.J. Simpson and Michael Jordan (Cook, 2018), and Tiger Woods (Bryant, 2018) -- who discarded black identity to reap the rewards of their fame from corporations looking to market them as stars--a move Bryant (2018) dubbed “greenwashing” because, he said, they essentially had sold their racial identity to corporate America. Rhoden (2006) theorized that black athletes of these generations suffered from a loss of “mission” or loss of “a sense of responsibility to the legacy of struggle that made possible this generation’s phenomenal material success.” (pp. 2-3). Bryant (2018) quoted sociologist Harry Edwards as saying there was no “defining ideology or movement that informed and framed activist positions for athletes” (p. 65).

However, contexts and events have changed over the last decade. There are a variety of reasons for these changes, but some (Cooky, 2017; Zirin, 2013) have pointed to the spate of unarmed black men killed by police officers and the ensuing public confrontations amplified by

social media. Black athletes LeBron James and Carmelo Anthony in the NBA and Colin Kaepernick in the NFL began taking public stands to spotlight the issue of continued killings of unarmed black men by police officers (Bryant, 2018; Zirin, 2013). Given the growing protests by athletes across a variety of sports on a plethora of topics, the support this has garnered, as well as the public vitriol hurled toward these athletes, it is important to understand how sports journalists are documenting these events, and the factors and contexts that shape this documenting. Much like the athletes they cover, journalists are inundated with the “stick to sports” chant by parts of society that want to keep sports and politics separate (Kang, 2017), despite evidence over the years that “sports are politics” (Strenk, 1979, p. 129). As journalist Dave Zirin notes: “... sports and politics have always done an uneasy dance so any effort to be shocked today [by the prevalence of social and political issues in sports] ... is ignorant at best and fatuous at worst” (King, 2008, p. 339). One justification for this study stems from its timeliness. Despite the fact that sports and politics have always mixed, the current political climate in the country is especially intense in the vilification of those who challenge the boundaries of the militaristic and nationalistic rituals occurring at sporting events in the U.S., even when the intent is to draw attention to social and racial injustices occurring every day in the U.S. (Bryant, 2018; Butterworth, 2014).

Journalism is considered “the first rough draft of history” (Shafer, 2010, ¶1), and because sports journalists are charged with covering sports events, they are in position to observe any and all activities that take place during these events, whether they fall within the boundaries of what they have traditionally defined as “sports” (the game itself, the score, the key plays, etc.) or fall outside of it – for example, activities that fall within the socio-political area, like a political protest. This can present sports journalists with a normative conflict. Do they report what they

see, and if so, how do they report it? Or do they “frame out” the “non-sports activity” and not report it (ignore it, or let non-sports journalists report that aspect)? However, scholars have long had concerns about the poor quality of sports journalism by traditional journalism standards (see Forde & Wilson, 2018). This study aims to answer questions about what factors and conditions may lead to the type of reporting sports journalists conduct related to socio-political issues such as social justice protests.

The goals of this study are as follows: (1) To identify the shifting cultural, political and journalistic contexts that are shaping how sports journalists cover sports and sporting events in which athletes participate in political and social protests, (2) to help understand how these contexts may be shaping the decisions the sports journalists make in how they cover sports and sporting events in which athletes participate in political and social protests, and (3) to explore the nature of the socio-political reporting that is being done by sports journalists.

To accomplish these goals, the author employed field theory, a theoretical framework conceptualized by sociologist Pierre Bourdieu to aid the analysis of complex social worlds and situations. Bourdieu theorized that the people in these metaphorical social worlds – the “agents” -- and the institutions for which they work will be guided by social rules and assumptions in their interactions (Webb, Schirato & Danaher, 2002). These persistent taken-for-granted practices, these “rules of the game,” or “habitus,” in Bourdieu’s terminology, are reinforced by those in positions of power for other agents in the field to follow. Bourdieu’s metaphorical fields have boundaries, but those boundaries of where one field or institution begins and another ends are the sites of conflict within the field, the “stakes of struggles” where agents in the field take up and maintain various positions. The habitus of sports journalists in relation to non-sports journalists (i.e., political or “public issue” reporters) and the boundaries that separate sports journalism

content and practice from political, public-issue, or hard-news journalism will be explored. A rising number of scholars have employed field theory in studies of journalism and journalism practices (for example, Benson, 2006; Schoch & Ohl, 2011; Benson, 2013; English, 2014, 2016), but little research is available on sports journalists and how they perform their job of covering socio-political issues as they relate to sporting events, athletes, and other aspects of sports. Bourdieu's approach is especially helpful in explaining the complicated boundary conflicts and negotiation that are likely to arise in the current era in which we find the political field so obviously overlapping the sports field, after many years of the two seemingly being treated as separate in the generations following Ali, Flood, and Robinson.

The study's design is as follows: The researcher first conducted a preliminary content analysis of articles from one specific event that meshed sports with socio-political issues, as a step toward understanding how the events was covered and to find authors who both engaged in socio-political reporting and those who did not. Those stories were coded for episodic and thematic framing, and for orientation toward sports journalism vs. orientation toward "public interest" journalism, to see to what degree socio-political context or background (thematic aspects) is emphasized in these stories vs. just coverage of sporting events (episodic).

Secondly, authors of the stories found through the content analysis and through snowball sampling from the first group of authors were interviewed, but few authors found through the content analysis responded, so the author sought contacts from colleagues, longtime sports journalists and again, through snowball sampling. Questions for journalists were constructed so as to be informed by relevant field theory concepts in the analysis: *habitus* or taken-for-granted ways of doing things, various forms of *capital* that motivate sports journalists, sports journalists' career *trajectories*, the *field of power* (economic and political influences), *boundaries* and

shifting boundaries of the journalism and sports journalism fields, and *position-takings* within the space of struggles (types of stories written). While multiple field theory concepts were used in the analysis, *habitus* and the various forms of *capital* were central concepts to this study. Questions were also designed to encourage unexpected, emergent ideas and themes. Sampling of the journalists for interviews was guided by an effort to gain responses from many different types of positions within sports journalism. Journalists were sampled from sports-only outlets (ESPN, Sports Illustrated), national newspapers and local, smaller newspapers, and the journalists varied by gender, race, ethnicity, and professional role. These comparisons were made in order to provide various contexts for analysis that are likely to help reveal and explain the terrain of socio-political reporting by sports journalists.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

This section includes an overview of published literature related to the intersection of sports and politics, and public-issue reporting and sports journalism. Studies that have used field theory and its related concepts to explore the practice of sports and public-issue journalists are also examined.

2.1 Intersection of Sports and Politics

Scholars argue that sports and politics are intrinsically linked. There are multiple reasons, but the popularity of sports and resulting massive amounts of money that sports generate are key reasons (Gift & Minor, 2017; Schmidt, 2018). Examples of sports and politics interacting run from dry policy making, to accusation of scandal, to socio-political protest: team officials lobbying state and local governments for tax cuts and public money to build state-of-the-art sporting stadiums; lobbyists working to provide women and handicapped people the opportunities to play sports; federal and international investigators probing allegations of bribery and corruption in national and international sports organizations, like FIFA and the U.S. Olympic Committee; countries spending tax dollars to build infrastructure improvements in hopes of landing national and international sporting events; and publicly funded universities being mired in corruption related to college athletics or crimes against athletes (Gift & Minor, 2017).

In the United States, the marriage of sports and politics goes back more than a century to the early days of professional sports when teams and athletes were used by politicians and

leaders to project certain values and attitudes (Schmidt, 2018; Zirin, 2005). Other examples of social and political issues intruding into sports go back more than 120 years to professional baseball's refusal to integrate black players onto their teams, leading to the formation of the Negro Leagues. And in 1905, President Theodore Roosevelt brought college football teams to the White House to discuss ways to reduce violence in the sport (Gorn & Goldstein, 2004). For most of that time, there have been athletes – often black athletes -- willing to speak out against racial and social injustices in this country. One of the first activist black athletes was former Rutgers University All-American Paul Robeson, who later went on to become a prolific poet, singer, and actor (Von Blum, 2008). For decades, Robeson advocated for rights of colonial Africans, but he was harassed and ostracized in America for his association with the U.S. Communist Party and for saying he felt more comfortable in the Soviet Union than he did in Mississippi or Alabama (Bryant, 2018). Robeson would not be the last black athlete to suffer for his public statements on social issues.

On the whole, activist athletes who challenge norms in society and society's expectations of athletes receive pushback from all corners of society -- pushback that is intended as a warning to other athletes of what could happen to them should they, too, decide to become involved in political and social issues (Kaufman, 2008). Some backlash comes from fans who conclude that the financial wealth that athletes often make for playing a game precludes those athletes from having a voice on political and social issues. Many also feel that the sports team should come first, overriding any individual voice these athletes may have (Butterworth, 2014). An example of that came from Bob Broeg, the baseball beat writer for the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* in the 1960s and '70s, who wrote that Curt Flood made too much money to complain about baseball's reserve clause: "Broeg said, in essence, that Flood was not poor, and therefore should not be

talking about race” (Khan, 2012, p. 91). Others feel black athletes should be especially grateful for the money they make playing a game -- more grateful than their white counterparts -- and should not criticize the country that allows them the opportunity to become rich (Rhoden, 2006). But despite their wealth, those athletes who push for equality generally come from underprivileged backgrounds where many of those same issues of poverty and lack of a quality education are still relevant (Kaufman & Wolff, 2010). Despite continued, contested claims that we now have a post-racial society, as Zirin (2013) says, these athletes still have voices and opinions on socio-political issues and the right to express their voices and opinions like their activist athlete predecessors. The same issues persist:

Today, many people regard [Tommie] Smith and [John] Carlos [sprinters from the 1968 Mexico City Summer Olympics], like Jackie Robinson, as heroes and images of their protest appear on various artifacts of popular culture. Despite mainstream acceptance of these activist athletes, racial inequality is still part of the social landscape. So while we idolize early activists for fighting for racial justice we continue to reproduce the conditions they sought to eradicate. Even today there is little patience or interest when socially conscious athletes call attention to racial disparities. (Kaufman, 2008, p. 230)

Studies have shown that today’s fans lashing out on social media at athletes engaging in social and political protests have renounced their fandom of the team for which the athlete plays, used racial slurs, threatened to call the team office to demand the players be disciplined, and posted general criticism. Sanderson, Frederick & Stocz (2016) found in their research that people reacted negatively online to athletes’ protests – in this case, five NFL players raising their hands in a ‘don’t shoot’ gesture to protest the no true bill returned against police officer Darren Wilson in the fatal shooting of Michael Brown. Dissent from the prevailing opinion was criticized and those who sided with the minority opinion, in favor of the players, were attacked. The authors concluded that these fans’ attacks came from perceptions that players were undermining values that the team shared and that fans shared with them. The fans perceived athletes were doing this by (a) using a sporting event as the vehicle for their protest, and (b) questioning law enforcement

and those who wear a badge. “Once these values were violated, fans took to Facebook and Twitter to mitigate the perceived stigma associated with this advocacy, including severing ties with the group (Rams)” (p. 315).

As multiple authors have observed (Strenk, 1979; Kaufman & Wolff, 2010; Zirin, 2013; Gift & Minor, 2017; Schmidt, 2018), the intertwining of sports and politics is not new. Black athletes have always been linked to politics and what constitutes patriotism, and America’s complicated history with slavery and Jim Crow laws is a major reason (Bryant, 2018). Jackie Robinson and Muhammad Ali are both linked to the Civil Rights movements, but they were not alone, as other outspoken athletes at the time, like legendary footballer and lacrosse player Jim Brown and Lew Alcindor, who later changed his name to Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, soon joined Ali in his crusade (Cooky, 2017; Coombs & Cassilo, 2017). The demonstration by Olympic sprinters Smith and Carlos, who stood shoeless with bowed heads while holding up black-gloved fists in Black Panther salutes was perhaps the most visually arresting protest of the inequalities that black people faced daily in America (Kaufman, 2008; Coombs & Cassilo, 2017; Bryant, 2018).

Cooky (2018) noted that as acts of resistance have attracted more and more media attention, those who do not want to face the issue of police brutality and the murders of unarmed black men and women by police officers are trying to change the narrative to one that questions the patriotism of those involved in the protests. According to Cooky, the same people who question the patriotism of the players are also blaming the players for destroying sports by erasing the integrity and honor from sport, and they are labeling the players’ behavior as deviant. But, according to Kaufman (2008), that line of thinking is ironic, as he says athletes act with “integrity, honor, and sincerity” in voicing their viewpoints on a public issue – yet, they are

criticized and receive torrents of “hate-filled backlash of scorn and contempt from teammates, coaches, fans, and sponsors” (p. 216).

While Rhoden (2006) had lamented black athletes’ “loss of mission” (p. 2), he said Kaepernick “returned them home” (Bryant, 2018, p. 24) to the responsibilities their forebearers laid out. Nearly two years since Kaepernick took a knee, numerous athletes have continued to take stands and use their cultural power to make political and social statements--so much so that *The Undeclared*—a website under the ESPN banner that was developed to explore the junctions of sports, race, and culture—has dedicated part of its site to “Athlete Activism.” Former NBA player Etan Thomas told *The Undeclared* in an interview that “many athletes are using their positions and platforms to speak out on different things and different topics that are dear to their hearts, and doing so in a way that’s unprecedented since maybe the 1960s” (Bembry, 2018, n.p.). Kaepernick gets the credit for being the first to resurrect the mantle of the activist-athlete, but NBA megastar LeBron James and other NBA stars began speaking out against injustices in 2012 after Trayvon Martin’s murder. Other athletes have picked up the activist flame from the previous generation. Andy Roddick boycotted a 2010 tennis tournament in Dubai because the government would not allow an Israeli player into the country (Butterworth, 2014). Members of the University of Missouri football team boycotted the perceived inaction by university administrators to racist incidents on campus in 2015 (Frederick, Sanderson & Schlereth, 2017). And the first instance of an entire team engaging in a protest during this era of activist athletes was the Phoenix Suns NBA organization in 2010 (Zirin, 2013), who protested immigration legislation by wearing “Los Sons” jerseys during warmups.

Zirin (2013) pointed to social media as a reason for more athletes speaking out on social and political issues because they can say what they want without relying on reporters whom they

may not trust. Another reason is that agents and marketing personnel may be encouraging athletes to create their own brand for marketing purposes. James is one athlete who is prominent on social media and has used it to build his brand, while also employing the medium to express his grievances (Coombs & Cassilo, 2017). His penchant to be outspoken on social and political issues led FOX News host Laura Ingraham to tell James to “shut up and dribble,” and to say that his comments about Trump during a taped TV segment were “ignorant” (Yuscavage, 2018).

2.2 Public-Issue Reporting and Sports Journalism

Sometimes referred to as the “toy department” (Rowe, 2007; Hardin, Zhong & Whiteside, 2009) or the “sandbox” (Oates & Pauly, 2007) of the newsroom, the sports department has long been subject to criticism by scholars because of concerns about the quality of journalism coming from sports reporters (Lowes, 1999; Boyle, 2006; Forde & Wilson, 2018). Some scholars believe sports journalists fail to uphold the journalistic standard for reporting on social and political issues of importance, and that they too often violate ethical norms because of their close relationships with sources (Oates & Pauly, 2007). They also note that boosterism of teams the reporters cover still exists, especially in the case of inexperienced reporters at smaller newspapers, though some members of the younger generation of sports reporters seem to be shunning that practice as professionalism and ethical practices grow (Hardin, 2005; Reed, 2018). However, these shortcomings are often overlooked because sports pages in daily newspapers are popular with audiences and advertisers (Lowes, 1999). To remedy some of these perceived shortcomings, some scholars have called for ‘sports media activism’ in which sports journalists engage in more sports-related social and political reporting (Forde & Wilson, 2018), while others have called for more investigative, critical reporting in the sports field (Rowe, 2007) and additional ethical standards and training for younger sports reporters in school and the newsroom

(Hardin, 2005). Schmidt (2018) called 2016 a ‘turning point’ for sports journalism in that the issues that began receiving attention that year—racial injustice, domestic violence, and other issues regarding race and LGBT rights—received more coverage in the sports media than regular news media during times of heightened activism about those issues.

The professional and ethical question marks in sports journalism led Ramon-Vegas and Rojas-Torrijos (2018) to create a new code of ethics for sports journalism. According to the code reporters should adopt a public-service approach to sports journalism; avoid conflicts of interest, freebies from teams, boosterism, and using warlike language in articles; promote equality in sports; and draw distinct lines between hard news and opinion. Similarly, Weedon, Wilson, Yoon and Lawson (2016) identified seven advocations to which sports journalists should adhere: (1) provide more or more appropriate contextualized reporting on issues, (2) perform more critical journalism, (3) conduct more balanced, unbiased and neutral reporting, (4) provide more coverage of different sports and athletes, (5) establish more diversity in the newsroom, (6) provide morally responsible and educative coverage, and (7) be more reflexive in reporting. These advocations were compiled from journalism handbooks, of which few had chapters or portions devoted to best practices in sports reporting.

One of the first sports journalists to understand that sports journalism could do more than cover games and be a vehicle to battle social injustices was Lester “Red” Rodney, who began writing for the U.S. Communist Party newspaper, *The Daily Worker*, in the 1930s (Bryant, 2018; Zirin, 2005). Rodney advocated for integration in baseball, highlighting the best players in the Negro League even after Robinson broke the color barrier, and got white players to advocate for the inclusion of black players (Zirin, 2005). Members of the “black press” also used the sports pages for advocacy for more than eight decades (Khan, 2012).

Since then, some reporters have delved into the intersection of politics and sports, but most have avoided politically charged topics or investigative stories. Hardin, Zhong and Whiteside (2009) argued the lack of critical and investigative sports journalism could be attributed to sports reporters not wanting to jeopardize their position in the “boy’s club” that permeates the sports world. They argue that reporters’ allegiance to the “boy’s club” has led to breaches of ethical and professional practices and has likely contributed to the *nom de plume* of sports departments as the toy department in American journalism. Hardin, Zhong and Whiteside (2009) noted, however, that this atmosphere within sports departments may be evolving as technology changes the way journalism is practiced, and as young reporters differentiate themselves from the older generation and the ‘sportainment’ model of reporting by practicing public-issue sports journalism.

Other scholars have suggested that many members of the older generation still working as editors, the gatekeepers of the profession, try to avoid sensitive issues and topics – and that this perspective filters down to rank-and-file reporters who also avoid sensitive issues to avoid upsetting the boss (Weedon & Wilson, 2017). According to Boyle, Rowe and Whannel (2009), the idea of sports journalists performing a unique journalistic function, apart from journalists in other departments in the newsroom, is crumbling. Sports and sports stars are moving into many different sections of society, and therefore, stories about them are now appropriate in non-sports sections of the news media. “Sports as a subject has found itself spreading beyond the confines of sports journalism and, indeed, often beyond the territory of sports journalists themselves” (p. 250).

Weedon and Wilson (2017) perceived a new sense of professionalism in sports departments, which they say can be attributed to two factors: (1) with the drop in advertising

revenue across the board at newspapers, sports content still brings in revenue, especially on the digital side, and (2) journalistic training has become more formalized through colleges and universities, which generally teach ethical frameworks and thinking. This idea partially fits with English's (2016) model of the journalistic field, which places sports journalism closer to the market side of the field than to the "pure" journalism side.

Scholars have examined the routines and practices of sports writers and found a lack of context in stories with cultural, racial, social and political implications. An analysis of major sports journalism textbooks found little advice on how to cover social issues related to sports, and found that ethical discussions on sports journalism were often vague and placed in the back of the book or in the appendices (Weedon & Wilson, 2017). Lowes (1999) argued that sports media have been too cozy with the sports leagues and have had a vested interest in the success of those leagues, so they avoid critical stories that might negatively influence the sport entertainment industry while staying true to their job as "head cheerleaders for major-league sports business" (p. 104). Hardin and Ash (2011) found evidence of boosterism in an analysis of media coverage of Rush Limbaugh being part of a bid to buy the St. Louis Rams in 2009. In that study, the researchers found that only slightly more than half of columnists and sports bloggers mentioned Rush Limbaugh's previous racist comments about black people. Also, only about one-third of columnists and sports bloggers attributed a racist quote to Limbaugh and mentioned his disparaging comments about former Philadelphia Eagles quarterback Donovan McNabb during Limbaugh's brief stint as a host for ESPN's *Sunday NFL Countdown* pregame show. Hardin and Ash noted in their conclusion that columnists and bloggers stopped before getting into questions about race and society in their coverage. Hartman (2007) in his critical study on Limbaugh's McNabb comments noted that "the discourses and ideologies that perpetuate White

cultural power and social privilege are in the American sporting establishment and its attendant media” (p. 56).

Although there are still issues in the profession, change may be coming. In the public fight over the use of Native American mascots in sports, research has found that the sports press supports the elimination of Native American caricatures as sports mascots, especially when sports journalists are familiar with the issue (Whiteside, 2016). In a survey of 285 sports reporters in the U.S., only around 10 percent said they took free tickets to games for friends, more than a quarter said they took free tickets for their supervisors, and around 5 percent said they had gambled on the outcomes of games they cover. According to the authors, “...those who believed more investigative reporting was needed tended not to accept free tickets,” and “to believe more strongly that taking freebies hurts objectivity of sports journalism...” (Hardin, Zhong & Whiteside, 2009, p. 333). The researchers posited that a belief in traditional objective norms may lead to a reporter thinking that traditional sports reporting must include public-issue or investigative reporting:

The results of this research ultimately suggest that adherence to the idea of journalism as a public-service endeavor, wherein reporters are “watchdogs” who are willing to maintain independence from those they cover and take on an investigative role, is related to the rejection of [poor] ethical and professional practices that have contributed to the toy-department status in U.S. sports journalism (p. 336)

Zirin noted that fans and athlete activists “get left out in the cold” (p. 341) when sports reporters simply cover teams in exchange for access (King, 2008). Other scholars also point to the “New Journalism” of the ‘60s and ‘70s as a time when journalists, some of whom came from covering politics, began seeing sports not just in terms of games, wins and losses, but as a strong cultural influence that needed to be analyzed without using the “hero” and “epic event” narratives created

by older journalists, in which athletes were often idolized and even deified (Oates & Pauly, 2007).

2.3 Field Theory and sports journalism

In sports journalism, there are roadblocks to covering socio-political issues that arise related to sports, such as journalists never learning how to cover those issues; having weak ethical and professional codes, being discouraged from covering socio-political issues; growing up in a time when socio-political reporting was discouraged; being too close to powerful officials, owners, and university administrators with a stake in the game; being scared to lose access over critical, investigative work; and facing a lack of time or resources for beat writers to conduct investigative work. Those potential causes can be described and mapped using concepts from the sociological theoretical framework called field theory.

First conceptualized by French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, field theory follows the work of Max Weber, Émile Durkheim, and Karl Marx in framing modern society as a social space with different spheres of action in communities (Benson & Neveu, 2005). The seeds for field theory sprang from Bourdieu's time in Algeria as part of the French Army during the 1950s as he observed "the social cataclysm wrought by the clash between imperial capitalism and homegrown nationalism" (Wacquant, 1998, p. 215). This experience, along with his studies on the dwindling of France's peasant society following World War II led Bourdieu to craft his sociology and research method of "activist science" (p. 215) that is critical of "inherited categories and accepted ways of thinking" and of "established patterns of power and privilege as well as the politics that support them" (p. 217).

Field theory is a theoretical framework with a critical orientation that helps explain both change and stasis in social space. The theory assumes "a field of forces within which the agents

[individuals who take action in the field] occupy positions that . . . determine the positions they take with respect to the field.” The positions they take – for example, embracing the traditional ways of doing sports journalism, or doing sports journalism in a new way -- are aimed at either “conserving or transforming the structure of relations of forces “ that hold the field together (Bourdieu, 2005, p. 30). Bourdieu’s field theory is composed of numerous concepts that are intertwined to create a metaphorical social world. This world encompasses people, or “agents,” from various walks of life as well as the social structures that shape the behavior of agents, and that the agents, in turn, shape -- for example, journalism schools, news outlets and source institutions, typically with hierarchical structures (Webb, Schirato & Danaher, 2002). Field theory also provides a way to incorporate history into media analysis because fields are not situated in a static bubble, but are built over time (Benson & Neveu, 2005).

Fields are not physical places or areas, but are instead a spatial metaphor that describes the social relationships with a given part of society. Webb, Schirato and Danaher (2002) define fields as “a series of institutions, rules, rituals, conventions, categories, designations and appointments which constitutes an objective hierarchy, and which produces and authorises certain discourse and activities” (p. x). A field, therefore, structures accepted ways of doing things. Each field is dynamic and interacts with, and puts pressure on other fields and their *boundaries*. Bourdieu refers to a boundary as a “stake of struggles.” However, all structures and institutions in fields are social – in other words, they are produced by people, and therefore they can be reshaped by people. This allows the groups in the field to confront and negotiate with each other about where one boundary begins and another ends. The societal hierarchies in a field also help create and maintain boundaries for the field (Ryfe, 2016).

Each field has what Bourdieu refers to as the *autonomous* and *heteronomous* principles. The autonomous principle favors agents at the autonomous “pole” of the field (metaphorically, “poles” are similar to magnetic poles that pull or attract). The agents near the autonomous pole tend to operate with some independence from the powerful *economic field*, though they have limited *capital*. In the journalism field, these might be agents who abide more purely by journalistic professional principles as opposed to prioritizing revenue or influence. The economic field is combined with the political field (the realm of government) to form the *field of power*, which exists at a more macro level.

At the other side of the field, near the heteronomous pole, lie the agents and institutions who dominate the field economically and politically (Bourdieu, 1983; Webb, Schirato & Danaher, 2002). In the journalism field, these would tend to be large news media outlets or powerful individual journalists with large audiences, more money, political clout, and, perhaps, a greater interest in political-economic gain than in professional goals or scruples. Powerful source institutions also lie at this end. The tensions between the two poles help shape the positions in the field.

English (2016) mentioned the tension in the journalistic field between what he calls the market pole and the “pure” pole (see Bourdieu, 2005). In the journalistic field, the market pole is the heteronomous pole. It represents forces that exert external pressures, such as economic pressures that result in commercial concerns for news outlets. The “pure” pole is the autonomous pole, and near it lies “cultural capital” that is unique to professional journalism – for example, professional knowledge of how to achieve accuracy and reveal societal problems. Journalists who cover “serious” public-issue news, like politics and crime, and newspapers with public-issue journalism sit closer to the pure, or autonomous pole of the field. Generally, however, Bourdieu

believed that in comparison to other fields, the journalistic field is largely heteronomous, heavily influenced by powerful economic and political pressures (Benson, 2013).

Beyond the field of power and the two “poles,” field theory features a number of concepts created or identified by Bourdieu to help explain the interactions and complexity of the field. One of the major concepts is *habitus*, defined as a “matrix of schemes, judgements, and behaviours, and thus an organizing principle of practices” (Neveu, 2007, p. 339) that people accumulate through history and which stay with us throughout our lives (Webb, Schirato and Danaher, 2002). Habitus is a kind of “muscle-memory” understanding about the taken-for-granted “rules of the game” within a given field. It is a product of people’s past influences and their present situations (Wacquant, 1998). Habitus is shaped through a person’s socialization – i.e., the interactions with others and with social structures -- but habitus also guides decisions and behavior as people recreate social structure. As such, there is a chicken-or-egg quality to the concept, and habitus concept is key to Bourdieu’s effort to resolve the dichotomy of social structure vs. human agency. The process of socialization for the formation of habitus begins with the family and continues through each level of education the agent completes (Benson & Neveu, 2005). An agent needs a habitus to enter a particular field and appropriately “play the game” within that field, as opposed to playing the game in another field (Johnson, 1993). Habitus is a major concept in this study.

Another field theory concept in this study is *capital*, which is a resource that comes in various forms, including *cultural*, *economic*, *symbolic*, and *social* capital. Cultural, economic and symbolic capital have received the most attention in Bourdieu’s work and in field studies of journalism (Benson, 2013), and received the focus in this study. Cultural capital is capital that derives from familiarity with the “rules of the game.” It can be acquired through early childhood

education; and from knowledge constructed through cultural production (books and other materials); and through education earned at cultural institutions such as colleges and universities (Bourdieu & Nice, 1977; Siisiainen, 2003) Economic capital is money and financially based commodities (English, 2016). Symbolic capital is reward for success in one's field, such as peer recognition, awards and esteem (Webb, Schirato & Danaher, 2002; Willig, 2013). Capital is built from practices, values, and vocabularies that develop in a given field, and one field is differentiated from another field by differing value of different kinds of capital (Ryfe, 2016). The capital of one field may be recognized as less or more valuable within another (Webb, Schirato & Danaher, 2002). According to Benson (2006), Bourdieu theorized that the social world revolves mostly around economic and cultural capital. Economic capital is the more powerful of the two, but cultural capital -- knowledge gained over time about the "rules of the game" in the field -- can be transformed into economic capital. In the journalism field, capital is the resources and forces journalists and news organizations can deploy in the field, which are recognized by other journalists as valuable.

Any new agent or new organization that enters the field with appropriate capital seems legitimate within the field (Willig, 2013). Agents and institutions in a given field that are successful are generally those able to transform one type of capital, such as economic capital (money), into another form, such as symbolic capital (e.g., prestige), or vice versa (Benson & Neveu, 2005). An example is a news organization that puts large amounts of resources (i.e., economic capital) into its news services, and thereby gains prestige within the field (i.e., symbolic capital). Conversely, high prestige (symbolic capital) may attract audiences and advertisers and their money (economic capital).

A third concept relevant to this research project is *trajectory*. Bourdieu thought of trajectory as the history of an agent, including a particular habitus and place within the field, and where that agent can end up over time, similar to the concept of social mobility and “career” (Webb, Schirato & Danaher, 2002). In an interview with Wacquant (1989), Bourdieu said that a true field theory analysis needs to include consideration of how the habitus in the field affects the trajectory of agents in that particular field. He added that a person’s interest in the field in which they participate, or what a person is likely to do while in the “game,” may be understood by understanding both their position in the field -- for example, they may be either a dominant or dominated position – and the trajectory they traveled to arrive at that particular spot. The trajectories that individuals travel prior to taking positions in the field may also reshape habitus, though it does so slowly. Again, it can be seen that the structure of the space shapes agency (the ways agents act and behave in the field), which in turn reshapes the field’s structure.

Lastly, the concept of *position-takings* in the cultural field occurs in a “space of possibles” that opens up – often, from struggles between the established, traditional power and the new “modes of cultural practice” (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 16). Position-takings can be cultural works or genres. In journalism, a “position-taking” may be a new way of doing a particular kind of journalism or merely a particular story. But it may also be an older, traditional way of doing journalism – a more traditional journalist may take a position by holding on to traditional practices in the face of change. Position-takings have history in the sense that fields contain systems of “differential stances in relation to other possible position-takings, past and present” (p. 17). Bourdieu noted that where and how an agent “takes a position” is shaped by that agent’s habitus, or the “sense of the game” they developed through socialization. The stake of struggles is where the position-takings happen and those stakes of struggles occur when there are boundary

disputes in the field or between the agents of two fields, and where agents attempt to distinguish themselves by “marking difference” with what was in the field before.

2.4 The Journalistic Field

Scholars generally portray the journalistic field as having low levels of autonomy because outside forces exert considerable pressure on it (Hesmondhalgh, 2006), and the field is responsive to moves made by agents and structures in other fields (Benson and Neveu, 2005). Champagne (2005) noted a contradiction within the journalistic field: Journalists try to work within the confines of the ethics of the field, but those practices may not be the most profitable for the organization itself, which is faced with economic forces, competition and the urgency to report news. Champagne (2005) demonstrated that statement by noting how the so-called “gutter press” in England thrives, while serious news organizations are barely getting by. News organizations in democratic societies face political pressure, but less so than state-sponsored or state-controlled media systems. However, these media systems tend to be more rooted in commercial systems (though this varies), and so it is the other part of the field of power, the economic field, that exerts especially heavy pressure. The opposite is true for news organizations that operate under authoritarian political regimes; these news outlets may face less economic pressure but more pressure from the government field.

One reason the journalistic field sits close to the heteronomous pole, the field of power, is because its agents, journalists working for the news organizations, work regularly around people within the field of power who have large amounts of capital. The journalistic field is largely responsive, rather than proactive, to events that occur and issues that take shape in other fields, including the field of power. Bourdieu argued the journalistic field sits in the middle of the field of power next to other fields, such as the political subfields and the science field. Government

agencies, political parties, professional associations, universities, official experts, all compete with each other to put forth the “legitimate vision of the social world” through the news media (see Benson & Neveu, 2005, p. 6). That means transformations in other fields affect the journalistic field and the journalistic field’s power relations with other fields change. These transformations can open “space of possibles” for news organizations and journalistic agents to play new roles and do things in new ways, such as the roles and practices of a public-issue sports subfield, studied here.

Legacy institutions in the journalistic field that have large amounts of economic and symbolic capital, such as the *Wall Street Journal* and *The New York Times*, dominate the field and are known as gatekeepers or regulators of the field because they tend to set the rules to which other agents and institutions must adhere (Benson, 2006). Those sets of rules encourage internal homogeneity within the field. However, all agents and institutions under economic constraints – such as news outlets -- are continuously struggling for the same thing: gaining and/or retaining audiences for market purposes, which Bourdieu (2005) argued is accomplished by getting scoops and by providing the most thorough information about people, events and issues.

There are numerous types of journalism—hard news, travel, entertainment, sports, etc.—and people have different motivations for choosing the “beat” (topic of coverage) in which they want to work. A study by Hanusch and Mellado (2014) found that university students who want to work in hard news, like political journalism, will possibly favor the watchdog role of journalism, while those who want to work in the softer news sections may favor a consumer-oriented role. Their classification of sports in the soft news forms of journalism under the consumer-oriented role, which focuses on “logic of the market, what the public ‘wants to know,’

and on entertaining the public” (p. 1164) fits with the model put forth by English (2016). In English’s model, detailed later, the sports journalism subfield is placed near the market (heteronomous) pole of the journalistic field, and near a midpoint between positive and negative total capital. According to this model, the sports journalism subfield inside the journalistic field does not hold large amounts of capital when compared to the other journalistic subfields, like politics and entertainment journalism.

2.5 Social Protests

Economic and political pressures can influence the role journalists play in giving voice to marginalized groups in society in their coverage of social protests and social movements, such as the NFL players protests during the national anthem. Social protests are one way the people in a democratic society can make their voices heard. The forms of social protests range from mass demonstrations to rallies and strikes. Social protests are also a way to move a topic forward in the public consciousness without waiting for politicians to bring it up during the infrequent election cycles (Boyle, McCluskey, Devanathan, Stein, & McLeod, 2004).

Research on social protests has shown that reporters who cover social protests often employ what researchers call the ‘protest paradigm’ (i.e., McLeod & Hertog, 1992; McLeod, 2007; McCluskey, Stein, Boyle & McLeod, 2009). The ‘protest paradigm’ is a combination of news attributes used by reporters and editors to marginalize the protestors and treat them as deviants (McCluskey, Stein, Boyle & McLeod, 2009), and certainly, the paradigm would be relevant to sports journalists’ coverage of protest. That paradigm used in covering social protests is shaped by journalism routines and places an emphasis mostly on the actions of the protestors, marginalizing the issue raised by the protestors (McLeod & Hertog, 1992). Social protest groups generally have a hard time attracting the public’s attention and exerting influence, and often find

themselves in a double-bind: be ignored by the media, or resort to drama and risk that these events might be used to delegitimize the group” (McLeod, 2007, p. 186).

Research has found that coverage of a social protest varies depending on the structural characteristics of a community. News organizations in less pluralistic communities (communities with smaller and less diverse populations and fewer commercial and governmental institutions and organizations) may have a lower tolerance for social protests and social conflict than organizations in more pluralistic communities (McCluskey, Stein, Boyle & McLeod, 2009).

2.6 Research Questions

The literature on sports reporting shows sports journalists have historically struggled to uphold the journalistic standard of performing investigative reporting of socio-political importance (Oates & Pauly, 2007). A number of reasons are given. According to this literature, some sports journalists do not want to jeopardize their position in the “boy’s club” in the sports world (Hardin, Zhong & Whiteside, 2009), and older reporters and editors try to avoid sensitive issues and topics (Weedon & Wilson, 2017). Close and dependent relations with the sports industry (Lowe, 1999), the level of athletes’ activism, and concern about reactions from sports fans (Butterworth, 2014) are other factors. Reporters who favor the watchdog role of journalism have also been shown to favor hard news beats, not soft news, like sports (Hanusch & Mellado, 2014).

But there is evidence that professionalism and ethical practices in the industry have strengthened as younger generations of sports journalists have ascended (Hardin, 2005; Reed, 2018). Scholars have called for more sports-related socio-political reporting (Forde & Wilson, 2018) and more investigative reporting in the field (Rowe, 2007). The following research questions set the stage for an exploration of the conditions within which sports journalists are

likely (or not likely) to pursue socio-political reporting, and of the nature of such reporting. The first two questions relate to the content of the sports journalism that is produced -- or, the “positions that journalists “take” in the “space of possibles” in the field: In what contexts is socio-political reporting more likely to be found, and how does the nature of that reporting change across contexts?

These questions were first addressed in a preliminary way, in an exploratory content analysis, which is used primarily to inform the selection of interview respondents and guide interview questions. The preliminary content analysis focuses on the presence of episodic and thematic frames in the body of the stories, and the degree to which stories are oriented toward sports journalism or oriented toward public-issue journalism. Episodic framing occurs when reporters do not use background or context in their reporting on socio-political issues or events, such that the issue or event is portrayed as an isolated occurrence, while thematic framing occurs when the occurrence is linked with context and background, as is often done in socio-political reporting. For example, a story about Kaepernick kneeling without any mention of why he knelt -- or a story that focused only on the game at which Kaepernick kneeled -- is considered episodic. A story about the events and contexts that led to the protest is considered thematic.

The content analyzed came from topics across three different time periods, different time points of the same overarching story: Colin Kaepernick’s social protests and the aftermath of his actions. Prior research (Iyengar & Simon, 1993) on episodic and thematic frames has found coverage of an event over a period of time leaned heavily episodic. Episodic frames tend to dominate despite the fact that reporters generally have the context and background needed to more thoroughly explain the event or issue that has been in the news over a long period of time. That background and context would generally be thematic in nature, which suggests the stories

would more likely adopt thematic framing. However, some scholars (Hardin, Zhong & Whiteside, 2009; Oates & Pauly, 2007; Zirin, 2013) have noted the lack of investigative sports journalism into socio-political issues related to sports, meaning the factors and contexts that led to players deciding to take a stand or protest would probably be barely touched, or glossed over completely. Based on those findings, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H1a: Across all three time periods in aggregate, the use of episodic frames will differ significantly from the use of thematic frames.

H1b: The use of thematic and episodic frames will differ from one time period to another.

Next, little research has been conducted in sports regarding the different frames used across different types of news outlets – for example small newspapers vs. large newspapers vs. magazines. With this in mind, the author proposes the following research questions:

RQ1a: Will thematic or episodic reporting be more evident across the type of news outlet in the coverage of socio-political issues in sports journalism?

Also, little research has been conducted on the differences in whether stories of a socio-political nature in sports are framed as a public-issue or sports-oriented, so trying to understand whether journalists focus on the public-issue or sports aspect of the stories is important. Public-issue news concerns issues are relevant to a democratic public because they provide information the citizens need for proper democratic governance. Generally sports coverage has fallen outside the socio-political arena where publicly relevant issues are discussed.

RQ1b: Will sports-oriented or public-issue reporting will be more evident in the aggregate across all three time periods?

RQ1c: Will the use of public-issue or sports-oriented frames differ from one time period to another and from one type of news outlet to another?

Lastly, the presence and prevalence of different frames used by the journalists, not just the ones mentioned in this section, are also measured and studied in this study.

RQ2: What other frames relevant to socio-political reporting in sports journalism will be found through open coding?

The next set of research questions ask about the extent and nature of socio-political reporting on issues related to sports and how field theory concepts examined earlier in the paper influence and explain the types of reporting on socio-political issues. These research questions are explored through in-depth interviews with journalists:

RQ3: How likely is it that sports journalists will pursue socio-political reporting in their sports coverage?

RQ4: In what contexts and conditions is socio-political reporting in sports coverage more or less likely to happen?

RQ5: What is the varying nature of this socio-political reporting by sports journalists?

RQ6: What factors, contexts, and conditions affect the varying nature of socio-political reporting by sports journalists?

Investigation of these research questions were guided by field theory concepts (Bourdieu, 1983, 1987, 1988, 1993, 2005) suggested by the literature: the economic and political poles, habitus, different forms of capital, trajectories, boundary negotiation, and position-takings in the stake of struggles. The concepts of *habitus*, *capital* and the *field of power* receive the dominant focus in the analysis. It is expected that, through interview questions with journalists, these concepts should help shed light on reasons sports journalists may, or may not, move to reporting on socio-political issues in sports, and on what form this reporting takes. Below are brief summary explanations of these concepts (discussed in more detail earlier in the literature

review), as well as preliminary thoughts, suggested by prior literature, about the relevance of the concepts to the research questions.

Habitus is the series of practices that we accumulate throughout our lives (Webb, Schirato & Danaher, 2002; Neveu, 2007), beginning with the family context and continuing throughout each level of education (Benson & Neveu, 2005). As discussed earlier, habitus is a kind of muscle memory made up of unconscious schemata (ways of thinking) that social agents (in this study, reporters, editors, etc.) acquire through exposure to past and ongoing social conditions (Wacquant, 1998). Social agents absorb into their own habitus the values of the fields as they move through different fields. Agents also recreate those values throughout their social interactions, over time (Webb, Schirato & Danaher, 2002). The concept of habitus is relevant because it influences the practices of the journalist and is also the result of their education and experiences. For example, it could be that older journalists may be less likely to pursue socio-political reporting because they were not exposed to socio-political reporting in their background, and so they do not embody these practices, and they are not (unconsciously) guided by them. Pursuing a socio-political angle on a story may not even occur to them, or they may be blind to the possibility. Younger sports journalists may be more likely to partake in socio-political reporting because of the more formalized training in colleges and universities (Weedon & Wilson, 2017), and because, the literature suggests, it may be modeled more often in professional sports journalism practice. It may be becoming part of their habitus, their “taken for granted” muscle memory.

In field theory, *capital* comes in various forms: economic, symbolic, and cultural (as well as social – not a focus in this study). In the journalistic field, capital can be economic capital – for example, the money and resources that an organization mobilizes to cover major breaking

news; symbolic capital, or the prestige, esteem, and the awards a journalist or news outlet accrues; and cultural capital, or knowledge -- used as a resource -- for how the game is played in a social agent's field. Prior literature suggests the sports department brings economic capital to the news organization, making it seem to some sports editors and their higher-ups that 'rocking the boat' with advertisers by publishing critical, investigative stories is not worth the trouble; (2) the symbolic capital within the journalistic field that a journalist accrues by functioning in the watchdog role could encourage some sports journalists to commit to socio-political reporting; and (3) knowing how "the game is played" could influence whether those journalists risk losing the cultural capital of traditional sports journalism by reporting on socio-political issues -- or may gain capital because of the esteem from reporting traditional hard news, and covering socio-political issues.

Bourdieu posits that the economic and political fields, together called the *field of power*, are autonomous and exert pressure on the other fields. According to Bourdieu, the journalistic field is particularly vulnerable, as it is highly heteronomous (low in autonomy) (Webb, Schirato & Danaher, 2002). Prior field theory research has shown that economic and political power and influence play a role in sports writers and editors' decisions about what type of stories to cover (Lowes, 1999; English, 2016; Weedon & Wilson, 2017). English (2016) placed sports journalism closer to the economic pole than the pure journalism pole in his visual depiction of the sports journalism field, meaning there are economic considerations in play when it comes to what types of stories to cover. These concepts are relevant, because as noted in the literature, journalists and editors are under pressure to conform their reporting. Powerful institutions such as teams and sports leagues can exert pressure on reporters and news organizations to spike unfavorable stories. Also social media companies that are publicly traded increasingly play a role in the news

industry. These companies and their products, and the ways fans use them, can exert pressure on news organizations, journalists and news decisions.

Other field-theory concepts may be relevant as well. The nature of the sports journalist's *trajectory* is shaped by the sports journalists' origins, previous socialization and varied experiences, sometimes spanning across multiple fields. Sports journalists have historically done little in terms of social and political coverage, and so the trajectory of older sports writers may trace a different arc than younger sports writers whose *habitus* (as consequence of schooling and work experience) may be different. Other contexts may vary journalists' trajectories, such as the types of publications in which they have worked over time: for example, local vs. national, general news vs. sports, digital vs. legacy. Every field and subfield has *boundaries*, demarking where one field or subfield ends and another begins. Boundaries are elastic, and are the "stake of struggles," because that is where agents and institutions in the fields struggle to impart their view of 'rules of the game' onto the other agents and institutions in the field and subfield. The boundaries of the journalistic field are theorized to sit adjacent to the boundaries of the field of power. The boundaries between the journalistic field and sports journalism subfield are evident from the pursuit, or not, of socio-political angles on sports-related stories. Within boundary disputes, spaces open up where agents can take positions within the field (Bourdieu, 1993). These *position-takings* generally occur between the established, traditional power on the one hand, and agents employing new practices on the other, and they tend to emerge in the "space of possibles" in the field – for example, where there is capital to support them, and where the powerful allow opportunities to be available. Position-takings may take the form of the types of stories the reporters write, such as socio-political reporting or other non-traditional ways of practicing sports journalism.

CHAPTER THREE

METHOD

This study utilized a mixed-method approach by combining (1) a preliminary content analysis of newspaper articles from three topics along the timeline of Colin Kaepernick's social justice protests and the aftermath, and (2) qualitative, in-depth interviews of journalists and editors from various kinds of news organizations. Field theory was used to guide the exploration in interviews, which took both an inductive and deductive approach. Weiss (1995) noted how interviews are effective research devices for developing detailed descriptions of phenomena being studied, incorporating multiple perspectives, describing processes in the phenomena being studied, and learning how events are interpreted by different people. Creswell (2009) added that mixed-method approaches using both inductive and deductive approaches can help overcome the biases or limitations found in one single method.

3.1 Overview of method

The preliminary content analysis employed the concepts of episodic and thematic framing first introduced by Iyengar (1990, 1996). The concept of framing comes from various scholarly sources (e.g., Goffman, 1974, Gitlin, 1980, Kahneman & Tversky, 2013), but the sociological concept of framing is attributed to Goffman (1974). One definition of framing sees frames as “organizing principles that are socially shared and persistent over time, that work symbolically to meaningfully structure the social world” (Reese, Gandy & Grant, 2001, p. 11), while Entman (1993) said to frame is “to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem

definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation...” (p. 52). This content analysis guided the sampling of interview respondents by allowing the researcher to see who writes about socio-political issues in sports *thematically* -- connecting events, statements and behaviors to deeper socio-political issues -- and where this is likely to happen (i.e., where the “space of possibles” are likely to be). The content analysis also allowed the researcher to see who wrote about socio-political issues in sports *episodically*, and where this is likely to happen – e.g., reporting of singular, disconnected events, statements and behaviors. Li and Liu (2010) found that stories framed thematically are more balanced than stories framed episodically, which they attributed to the use of more sources in thematic framing to provide a more well-rounded picture for the public. Today’s news cycle, however, may push reporters and editors to be more episodic in their coverage of societal issues, eschewing longtime news norms of providing in-depth coverage of issues that affect people (Mastin, Choi, Barboza & Post, 2007).

During and after interviewing a sample of reporters identified in the content analysis, the author engaged in snowball sampling, asking these respondents if they know other sports journalists who reported on the same issues they did or editors who helped shape the coverage. In the selection from the content analysis and snowball sampling, the author sought variability across race, gender, types of news organization and journalists. Political reporters who cover issues of a socio-political nature on a regular basis were also interviewed. This was helpful in exploring the field theory concept of *boundaries* between traditional journalism and sports journalism. The content analysis was conducted first because it provided an overview of varied types of reporting on these topics and the contexts in which the author could see certain types of reporting on the issues. In other words, content analysis results provided a broad understanding of the field’s topography, where the “space of possibles” are, and are not, and therefore where

new “positions” are likely to be taken by sports journalists – and where and how boundaries may be shifting (or not). Therefore, this exposure to the “landscape” of sports journalists’ reporting on socio-political issues informed both the sample and questions for the interviews. The results from the interviews are not generalizable, but are important because they provided first-hand, lived information, experiences and anecdotes that can be used to shed light on the study’s research questions.

3.2 Preliminary content analysis of stories

The content analysis centered on three story topics about Colin Kaepernick, his socio-political protests and the aftermath of those protests: (1) when the media first noticed Kaepernick sitting in 2016; (2) President Donald Trump’s remarks about the protests to supporters in Huntsville, Alabama, in 2017; and (3) Nike unveiling Kaepernick as part of the company’s 25th anniversary celebration of the “Just Do It” campaign in 2018. These events occurred around roughly the same time each year over a three-year period (2016-2018), they involve a variety of actors (a multi-billion dollar corporation and the president), they vary in terms of whether a political figure (like the president) or athletes are initiating the story, and they provide variety in terms of the different aspects of field theory: e.g., in these events it is likely there would be varying levels of power and influence exerted on journalists; different trajectories and habitus, given the different kinds of news outlets and coverage beats; variation in boundaries between sports and traditional journalism because of the different kinds of topics; and various types of capital.

The time frames for story collection were one week following the initial story of each of the three events: when Kaepernick was first seen to be sitting during the anthem, when Trump made his comments to a crowd in Alabama and when news broke that Kaepernick would be part

of Nike's anniversary campaign. To collect articles, the author conducted searches on the ProQuest online newspaper database and the websites of ESPN, Sports Illustrated and the Sporting News through Google using keywords specific to each story: (1) "Colin Kaepernick," "national anthem," and "social justice;" (2) "Donald Trump," "NFL," "Huntsville," and "Colin Kaepernick;" and (3) "Colin Kaepernick" "Nike" and "social justice." Articles were excluded if they were unrelated to the issues; were published outside the U.S.; if they duplicated another article in the sample; if they were opinion columns, editorials or letters to the editor; or were shorter than 75 words (see Billings, Moscovitz, Rae & Brown-Devlin, 2015). For any story that does not list the department (e.g., sports department), the researcher visited the news outlet website to find the writer's department in the news organization.

Using the search results for the first time period, a stratified sample was created to ensure that articles from each of the three categories—small newspapers, large newspapers, and magazine-based sports news websites—had a chance to be chosen. The sample for each of the three time periods consisted of 50 articles -- 20 articles from large newspapers, eight articles from small newspapers and 22 articles from magazine-based sports news websites. Therefore, the entire sample consisted of 150 articles.

The stratified sample for each time period was created by taking the total number of articles found for each of the three outlet types from story topic one, then dividing these numbers until a more manageable number was achieved. , This brought the final number to 20 large newspaper articles, eight small newspaper articles and 22 magazine-based sports news website articles. For example, the ProQuest results for story time 1 was 126 articles, 91 from large newspapers and 35 from small newspapers, after filtering out for foreign news outlets, opinion articles and choosing the stories in which Colin Kaepernick was the main subject, and 99

magazine-based sports news website articles. Those sum to 225, and since only 50 articles were to be chosen for the content analysis, the author divided 225 by 50, which is 4.5. So each of the three samples—91, 35, and 99—were divided by 4.5 to come out with the final ratio.

A circulation of 100,000 was chosen as the demarcation line between small and large newspapers, because an exploration of a newspaper list by circulation revealed that papers with approximately 100,000 circulation tend to be “papers of record” for their home state, such as the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* for Georgia or *Denver Post* for Colorado. Those “papers of record” are generally tasked with covering the statewide political news with experienced political reporters. The smaller newspapers may not have these political reporters, and thus may not be as well-equipped to handle reporting with a socio-political emphasis. The magazine-based sports news website articles were chosen randomly using a random number generator from the Google search results. The results of the ProQuest search for large and small papers returned a small number of hard news articles, after filtering out opinion articles—approximately the actual needed sample for the content analysis (28 articles)

The unit of analysis was the article, and only the first 200 words of each article were coded—not including the headline, subhead, photos, embedded tweets or photo captions. Research has found that people reading news articles tend to read or skim only the first few paragraphs (Purcell, Buchanan & Friedrich, 2013; Wastler, 2013). The coding sheet included questions about the main variables in the study: (a) type of frame (episodic/thematic); (b) whether the story is oriented toward public-issue news or sports; and (c) other frames found via open coding.

Each article was coded on a 1-to-5 Likert-type scale for the episodic/thematic and news/sports variables. The episodic/thematic scale is 1 = entirely episodic, 2 = mostly episodic

with some thematic elements, 3 = equal parts episodic and thematic, 4 = mostly thematic with some episodic elements, and 5 = entirely thematic. The news/sports scale is 1 = entirely news, 2 = mostly news with some sports elements, 3 = equal parts news and sports, 4 = mostly sports with some news elements, and 5 = entirely sports. News is defined as “public-interest news,” or “news relevant to people’s public lives in the context of democratic governance” (Lowrey & Kim, 2016, p. 703). A one-way ANOVA was conducted to compare the means of frames A and B across the three time periods and Tukey’s HSD was conducted post-hoc to understand where the significant differences, if any, lie.

The author also conducted open coding to identify new, emergent frames – frames that define problems, diagnose the causes of the problem, make judgments on the causal agents and suggests a way to treat or cure the issue (Entman, 1993). Open coding has been previously used in sports framing studies (see Billings, Moscovitz, Rae & Brown-Devlin, 2015). Here, frames revealed though open coding should uncover unexpected “positions taken” in the field in relation to socio-political issues in sports, helping to inform and guide interviews for the third and fourth research questions, which ask about the nature of socio-political reporting.

For the open-ended coding, a stratified random sample of 20 percent of the stories, 30 of the 150 total, were pulled from the larger sample and coded to identify frames used by reporters in the stories. Two coders coded those stories from the smaller sample. These emergent frames were identified, written down, numbered and then coded for in the larger sample.

The intercoder reliability file consisted of randomly selected stories -- 12 stories from the large newspapers, 12 from magazine-based sports news websites, and six stories from the small newspapers. After training on the protocol, two coders coded for reliability. Using

Krippendorff's alpha, intercoder reliability was measured at .81 for the first interval-level variable (episodic/thematic) and .84 for the second interval-level variable (news/sports).

3.3 In-depth interviews with sports journalists

Once the preliminary content analysis was concluded, the author moved on to the second method, the qualitative interviews. 20 interviews were conducted over the phone, with 17 sports journalists and sports editors working both full-time and freelance for U.S. media outlets, and three political reporters working full-time in the U.S. These selections were guided by particular contexts likely to offer meaningful variation in the study of socio-political reporting in sports journalism: sports-only outlets vs. general news outlets; small vs. large outlets, local vs. national outlets, and variation in topics covered (across the three selected topics). These different contexts offer potential for finding differences in the nature of, and the dynamics of, the field – in other words, different kinds of trajectories and habitus for sports journalists, different kinds of capital available, different relationships between sports journalism and traditional journalism, and different kinds of political and economic influences.

As mentioned, the content analysis was undertaken with a goal of helping identify potential interviewees. However, only three journalists selected from the content analysis responded to the initial inquiries, and only two agreed to participate. The author subsequently reached out to colleagues in the industry to identify possible interviewees and used snowball sampling following their suggestions. Most scholars agree there is no set, agreed-upon number, but 20 to 25 in-depth interviews falls within an average range of commonly recommended numbers (Baker & Edwards, 2012). Three non-sports reporters were also chosen for interviews in order to better explore the contested boundaries of the fields and six editors (managers) were interviewed in order to explore hierarchical power structures and the political/economic poles.

The author also asked respondents chosen by these criteria if they know of other sports journalists who covers socio-political issues in sports, thereby providing additional respondents via snowball sampling.

Of the 20 journalists interviewed, 13 were men and seven were women. Fourteen were white, three were black, two were of Middle Eastern descent and one was Asian American. Eleven worked as sports reporters, six are sports editors, two are political reporters, and one is a business reporter. They averaged 21.5 years of experience in sports journalism, with a range of seven to 45 years. The sample is geographically diverse with seven working in the Northeast, four in the Deep South, three along the East Coast, two each in the Midwest and Southwest, and one each on the West Coast and Canada.

IRB approval was obtained prior to securing the interviews. The interviews ranged from 27 to 64 minutes, and were recorded, with interview respondents' permission. The interviews were semi-structured with open-ended questions, so that the process was both inductive and deductive. The pre-planned questions allowed the interviewer to ask questions guided by the study's aims and conceptual framework, and unscripted questions and follow-up questions were used based on the interviewee's responses (Creswell, 2009). Each transcript was labeled SR with a number (SR7) to signify each as a sports reporter, SE for sports editors (SE5) and NSR for non-sports reporters (NSR2), while ensuring names were not associated with data, thereby protecting identity.

Interview questions were crafted around the main field theory concepts discussed in the literature review: habitus, various forms of capital, and political-economic power. Responses are also relevant to other field theory concepts, such as the "space of possibles" and positions taken, the field of power, boundaries, and the trajectory of the reporters.

The concepts of habitus and boundaries are latent concepts, meaning they are socially invisible, for the most part. The researcher approached these questions by asking about challenges to boundaries or to the normal ‘rules of the game.’ Challenging or violating latent concepts allows the concepts, their meaning and their impact to come to light, and to become evident.

Once the interviews were completed, they were transcribed and coded, and the coding was guided by field theory concepts. In addition, the transcripts were coded for possible emergent codes, in an inductive rather than deductive process. Each transcript was coded in its entirety and line numbers were added to each document to allow for more effective identification of the passages that fit with the field theory concepts. A second coder was taught the codebook and analyzed the transcripts based on the predetermined codes – the deductive process -- and coded every transcript to ensure “trustworthiness” of the coding, the qualitative version of reliability (Guba, 1981).

Following the recommendations of Creswell (2009), after the transcription of data, the coders gained a general sense of the data and possible interpretations prior to coding. This process involved reading each transcript multiple times to first “get a sense of the whole” (p. 186). Besides looking for the predetermined codes, the coders also looked for themes and frames that were not anticipated. It was expected that these “emergent codes” may include field theory concepts and more general concepts that were not anticipated. The researcher also followed Creswell’s recommendation of incorporating into the study a third person, a peer examiner, to examine a selection of the data, transcripts and code sheets to make sure the coders are coding the quotes and passages in a “trustworthy” way. Lincoln and Guba (1985) proposed four criteria for ensuring trustworthiness in a qualitative study: truth value, also known as credibility, which

is the ability for the findings to be believed; applicability, also known as transferability, is the ability for the findings to be applied to multiple contexts; consistency, also known as dependability, means the findings could be repeated, similar to the concept of reliability; and neutrality, also known as confirmability, is the ability to be true to the respondents and their words and meanings.

A positionality statement by the researcher is appropriate for qualitative research such as in-depth interviews, and is provided here. The positionality statement is part of the reflexive nature of qualitative work in which the researcher states where he or she stands in relation to the project at hand (Bourke, 2014). As a white male who previously worked as a reporter for more than six years, including four years at daily news organizations and some time covering high school sports on a freelance basis, the researcher has not experienced the systemic racism that has plagued the athletes whose actions are the basis of this study nor has he lived in the underprivileged neighborhoods where many of those players come from. The researcher has conducted socio-political reporting in the criminal justice and business realms, but not related to sports, and believes that more socio-political reporting is needed in sports. The researcher is conducting this study to understand the conditions under which socio-political reporting occurs and why that varies

Hypotheses 1a and 1b and research questions 1a, 1b, 1c, and 2 were addressed by the preliminary content analysis results. See Appendix A and B for the coding protocol. Research questions 3 through 6 were addressed through analysis of interview responses. See Appendix C for interview questions.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

4.1 Content Analysis Findings

For H1a, which states that across all three time periods in aggregate, the use of episodic frames will differ significantly from the use of thematic frames, the results show that overall, the articles were more episodic ($M = 1.98$, $SD = .886$) than thematic. Of the 150 total stories coded, 76% ($n = 114$) were coded as episodic, 1 or 2 (entirely or mostly episodic), while 7% ($n = 9$) were coded as thematic, 4 or 5 (mostly or entirely thematic). A chi square analysis of the results show significant differences, $X^2(1, N = 150) = 89.64$, $p < 0.001$, between the stories coded as episodic (1 or 2) and thematic (4 or 5). Therefore, H1a is supported.

For H1b, which states that the use of thematic and episodic frames will differ from one time period to another, stories in Time 1, which was the week after Kaepernick was first seen sitting during the national anthem, were judged to be more strongly thematic, ($M = 2.12$, $SD = 1$), than the stories in Time 2, the week after Donald Trump re-ignited the controversy over players kneeling for the anthem ($M = 2.04$, $SD = .78$) and Time 3, the week after Nike announced Kaepernick was the face of the company's campaign celebrating 30 years of the iconic "Just Do It" slogan ($M = 1.78$, $SD = .84$). A one-way ANOVA was employed to test whether the differences in the means across the time periods were significant. The results show that the differences for the first frame, episodic/thematic, across the three time periods were not significantly different, [$F(2, 147) = 2.04$, $p = 0.134$]. Therefore, H1b is not supported.

Table 4.1

Means and standard deviations of the two frames in each of the time periods

	Time 1		Time 2		Time 3	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Episodic or thematic	2.12	1.00	2.04	.78	1.78	.84
News or sports	2.12	1.02	2.52	.89	1.78	.93

For RQ1a, which asks will thematic or episodic reporting be more evident across the type of news outlet in the coverage of socio-political issues in sports journalism, the results showed articles from magazine-based sports news websites were more strongly thematic ($n = 66$, $M = 2.14$, $SD = .926$) than articles from large newspapers ($n = 60$, $M = 1.88$, $SD = .846$) and small newspapers ($n = 24$, $M = 1.79$, $SD = .833$). However, the results from a one-way ANOVA, [$F(2, 57) = .716$, $p = .493$] showed no significant mean differences between the three types of news outlets.

For RQ1b, which asks whether sports-oriented or public-issue reporting will be more evident in the aggregate across all three time periods, the results show overall that the stories were more public-issue ($M = 2.14$, $SD = .990$) than sports-oriented. Of the 150 stories coded, 66.7 percent ($n = 100$) were public-issue, 1 or 2 (entirely or mostly public-issue), while 9 percent ($n = 13$) were sports-oriented, 4 or 5 (mostly or entirely sports-oriented). A chi-square analysis of the results show significant differences, $X^2(1, N = 150) = 75.98$, $p < 0.001$, between the stories coded as public-issue, 1 or 2, and sports-oriented, 4 or 5.

For RQ1c, which asks whether public-issue and sports-oriented frames will differ from one time period to another and from one type of news outlet to the other, the stories in Time 2 were judged to be more sports-oriented, (despite containing mostly public-issue content overall) ($M = 2.52$, $SD = .89$) than Time 1 ($M = 2.12$, $SD = 1.02$) and Time 3 ($M = 1.78$, $SD = .93$). A

one-way ANOVA to test the significance of mean differences for the first part of RQ1c found significance, [$F(2, 147) = 7.620, p > 0.001$] between the three time periods. A Tukey's HSD test found specific significant differences between Times 2 and 3 ($p = 0.00$), but not Times 1 and 2 ($p = .09$) or Times 1 and 3 ($p = .18$).

For the second part of RQ1c, which asks about frames used across the different news outlets, articles in magazine-based sports news websites had more sports elements in their news stories ($n = 66, M = 2.24, SD = 1.02$) than the larger newspapers ($n = 60, M = 2.13, SD = 1.02$) and small newspapers ($n = 24, M = 1.88, SD = .80$). However, a one-way ANOVA, [$F(2, 57) = 1.493, p = .23$] found no significance between the three news outlets.

Table 4.2

Means of article counts, and standard deviations, of the two frames by news outlet type

	Large newspapers		Small newspapers		Sports news websites	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Episodic (1) or thematic (5)	1.88	.85	1.79	.83	2.14	.93
News (1) or sports (5)	2.13	1.02	1.88	.80	2.24	1.02

For RQ2, which asks what other frames relevant to socio-political reporting in sports journalism will be found through open coding, the top frames found were citizenship ($n = 56$ stories), which talked about a person's right to protest or obligation to stand for the national anthem; backlash, which talked about the pushback and vitriol Kaepernick and the other protestors received; education, which was centered on breaking down the reasons for the protest, (both $n = 23$); and business, which mainly focused on Nike's decision to employ Kaepernick for its ad and the business fallout ($n = 22$).

Table 4.3

Frames found during open coding

1. Citizenship (a person’s right to protest, whether to stand for anthem)
2. Business (why Nike chose Kaepernick for ad campaign)
3. Education (why Kaepernick and other players protested; reasons behind protests)
4. Politicization (politicizing the issues and protests)
5. Backlash (pushback against Nike, Kaepernick’s ad campaign)
6. Social justice (emphasizing social justice efforts of players)
7. Strictly sports (sticking strictly to Kaepernick’s play on the field)
8. Military (showing support to the military, anthem kneelers disrespecting military)

Table 4.4

Number of articles with frames found from open coding during each time period

	Time 1	Time 2	Time 3	Total
Citizenship	24	28	5	56
Backlash	7	1	15	23
Education	13	6	4	23
Business	0	1	21	22
Politicization	0	10	2	12
None	4	0	4	8
Social justice	1	2	3	6
Military	3	1	0	4
Strictly sports	3	0	0	3

As shown in Table 4.4, the citizenship frame was the top frame employed in both Time 1 ($n = 24$) and Time 2 ($n = 28$), while business ($n = 21$) was found the most in Time 3. Some articles made more than one frame salient, while eight articles were found to have no discernable frames. Those articles in which no discernable frame was found generally only brought up Kaepernick tangentially, such as articles about the 49ers hosting a benefit sans Kaepernick with no mention of his protest, a politician complaining to the NFL in 2013 about some stars not paying much attention to the anthem and some politicians in New York sitting during the anthem in the mid-2000s.

4.2 In-depth Interview Findings

Likelihood of socio-political reporting by sports journalists.

RQ3 asked how likely is it that sports journalists will pursue socio-political reporting in their sports coverage. Most of the respondents said they report on socio-political issues on a regular basis, with one end of the spectrum being one reporter claiming to cover those issues when they occur on her/his beat but not searching them out, to the other end of the spectrum, where a few reporters said their entire sports reporting portfolio consists of covering socio-political issues. There was no real difference in the likelihood of reporters covering socio-political issues between small newspapers, large newspaper and national sports publications, or in different parts of the country. Most writers interviewed who work mostly on a freelance basis said they had trouble finding a home for articles that veer into political territory, and one freelancer said he was told “no more political articles” by editors at a new national sports outlet. Two editors, one at a national sports publication and the other at a small newspaper in the South, each said there were specific issues they would have liked to cover but could not; those stories were impossible to do without the main subject’s cooperation, which they were unable to secure. Both stories dealt with possible substance abuse issues on the part of major athletes. Another editor at a national sports publication said there were socio-political stories he wanted to cover that were lost in the shuffle of all the other news, including stories about LGBTQ athletes, but those stories were done at other publications by other writers.

According to multiple editors and reporters, there was a time about 20-30 years ago when these questions would have been moot because most of the stories involving athletes off the court, like arrests or stories about athletes doing good work in the community, never made it to the sports desk. Instead, those stories were handled by other parts of the newsroom, like the

police and feature reporters. One national NFL reporter who has covered the game for more than 30 years said reporters used to travel, eat, drink and play cards with the players and team personnel, so there was no line of demarcation between the personal and professional lives of reporters and players and thus, there was no impetus for sports reporters to report anything that might be controversial about those players. A sports editor at a small Southern newspaper said when he started covering sports 30 years ago, stories like players getting arrested would have never made it to his desk because that was viewed as a news story, not a sports story. But that changed, he believes, when the players started making more and more money, and earning more fame. He mentioned the story of Kareem Hunt, an NFL running back who was caught on video allegedly pushing and kicking a woman in a hotel, as an example of an event that never would have made it into sports news during prior generations, but one that is now drawing more interest and reporting on the topic of violence against women because of who Hunt is and what he does for a living. He added:

Before, you would say, “Oh, it’s just a running back for an NFL team.” Now, it’s “Oh my gosh! It’s a running back for an NFL football team and this happened.” So yeah, I definitely think it’s changed over the years, dramatically.

One veteran national columnist said he was told 20-30 years ago to remember who his audience was when he began writing about social and political issues related to sports—meaning that people reading the sports section did not want to read about social or political issues related to sports -- they just wanted to read about sports. He said that today, generally the biggest sports story of any given year after who wins the Super Bowl, March Madness or World Series is something that bleeds off the sports page into other parts of the news cycle. In 2018, he surmised

that story would be the trial and conviction of Larry Nassar, who was convicted of sexually assaulting hundreds of young girls during his time at Michigan State and with USA Gymnastics.

Multiple respondents also talked about how much they enjoy covering socio-political issues related to sports, and find such coverage to be meaningful. One national sports columnist said he became a journalist to cover social issues and has applied that lens to sports. One editor at a national sports publication said being able to present the humanity in a person is one of the pillars of excellent journalism. And an editor at a small newspaper in the South said he would rather his reporters spend extra time on stories about socio-political issues related to sports than stories people can find everywhere.

Contexts explaining socio-political reporting by sports journalists.

RQ4 asked in what contexts and conditions is socio-political reporting in sports coverage more or less likely to happen. According to one sports editor at a small newspaper in the South, socio-political reporting by sports writers is simply the next evolution in sports journalism as a whole, because sports figures are increasingly placing themselves in the realm of political and social issues more than ever before. Because many news organizations have reporters cover a beat, which is a predetermined area of coverage handled by one or more reporters, that means sports reporters are covering what happens on their beat. Seven of the sports editors and journalists interviewed, as well as two of the three political reporters, each independently noted that reporters would generally cover socio-political issues related to sports if an incident, event or issue occurred on their beat or involved players, coaches, teams, leagues and league personnel on their beat. As one sports editor at a small newspaper said, “Things that happen on your beat need to be covered, good and bad.” A few specifically referred to beat writers covering the San Francisco 49ers when Colin Kaepernick began his protests. “It’s not like they’re choosing to

necessarily write about it, it's just this is a thing happening on their beat and they write about it, just as if the quarterback broke his leg or something," noted a sports writer at a national newspaper. "How can I stick to sports if I'm the 49ers beat reporter and covering Colin Kaepernick is part of my job as that beat reporter?" asked one sports editor at a small newspaper. Another national sports reporter echoed that sentiment, saying NFL reporters had to cover Kaepernick "because it had to do with football." He added:

The national anthem story had to be reported because it had to do with football. It may have had to do with declining ratings. It may have had to do with people turning away from going to the games and becoming disaffected with the sport itself. Whether you believe that has any place in the reportage of football, I would argue it does, so you have to report on it. I don't think there are any pros and cons, anything like that. It's just part of your job. If something influences the sport you're covering, you have to report on it.

He later elaborated more on his point:

In essence, the team is defining what you're going to cover. The fans are defining what you're going to cover. The players are defining it, they're talking about it. I don't know that the reporter ever chooses that. The reporter just covers what it is.

The news reporting habitus is evident here – the socialization and taken-for-granted following of the journalistic structure of beats influences whether or not the respondent is comfortable covering socio-political issues related to sports. It also suggests that economic capital, influenced by economic and political elite, has shaped this habitus, as beats are generally built around powerful institutions in a coverage area – government agencies, political offices, police departments, courts, large corporations – and the idea that the ways beats and news coverage are organized should correspond with these is taken for granted by most journalists

(Tuchman, 1981). Sports teams and leagues are also financially and politically powerful entities. In their education and across their career development, journalists typically come to see these coverage divisions as natural (and they are economically efficient for the organization), and reporters and editors who expressed this in the interviews came from all levels—small and large newspapers, and national sports publications—of sports journalism.

Of the 17 sports journalists and editors interviewed, only one—a sports reporter at a national sports magazine—said he only covered socio-political issues related to sports when they occurred relative to his beat and did not necessarily go out of his way to identify, report and write about the issues:

It's something I would rather not write about, when politics and sports meet. It's something I would rather avoid, just because you're always going to have, I guess, these two sides, these two factions. It's just one of the sensitive matters I guess I would rather avoid, but sometimes you can't."

An editor at a national sports publication said he believes more and more sports reporters are “delving into that cross section between politics and sports, not because it's something they want to do, but because that's sort of the national trajectory.” And a sports editor at a small newspaper in the South said he believes some news outlets are going to discourage their sports reporters from covering that cross section of sports and politics, and whether sports reporters cover socio-political issues related to sports may come down to their bosses steering them away from those stories, not the reporter's personal opinion on these topics.

Issues about access to players and coaches, which is closely guarded by team officials, arose as a possible counterargument about covering socio-political issues that occur on a reporter's beat. Some respondents argued that sometimes choices need to be made with the

desire to maintain access to players and coaches in mind. A few reporters and editors noted how important access is to sports writers and how they fear losing this access if they were to pursue politically charged topics. One political reporter at a large Southwestern newspaper said she wishes more sports reporters would handle the “hard news items” on their beat more often, adding that she thinks much of the reporting of the NFL players kneeling during the national anthem was covered by hard news reporters because some sports reporters may have been “afraid to cross” certain lines and boundaries in their sports coverage that could get their access revoked. A sports editor at a large Midwestern newspaper acknowledged the issue of access does play a role in deciding whether to do certain stories, but added, with feeling, that some stories are worth telling, regardless of whether a reporter could lose some or all access. “Does the reporter feel strongly about the story? Is this going to do us more harm than good?” she mused.

Reporters and editors rely heavily on social agents who are sources to provide access to key people for stories, a reflection of journalists’ challenged autonomy. These media relations personnel at the professional level and sports information directors at the college level can deny access to the reporters, who are relatively heteronomous in that they need the cooperation of the media relations and SID personnel to perform their duties.

Some respondents said they don’t cover socio-political issues because those stories are routinely handled by political, culture and police reporters. The respondents’ answers varied when they talked about when and why a reporter outside of sports would handle a socio-political story related to sports. One of the key factors, several noted, was who or what is the main focus of the story. One sports reporter at a large newspaper with a national platform said:

If you are talking about protests during the anthem and the main characters are this player, that owner, that GM, then it will stay a sports story, but if it becomes more of this

congressman or congresswomen said this, we're not really going to go over there necessarily and touch that. Things get passed [along] according to where the story is going and who the people are and how well the reporters know those people. I can't tell you how many times it always comes down to that.

One example was when Donald Trump criticized the NFL players for kneeling. A few respondents said that story was probably handled by political reporters because Trump was the main focus. Another example used is player arrests, which respondents said would likely be handled by the organization's police reporter with assistance from the sports desk or the beat reporter who may write a few paragraphs on the player's background or get quotes from teammates, coaches and management about the arrest and how that might impact the on-the-field product. "Is this more of a crime story that happens to involve a player, then I think it's a news story," an editor at a large Midwestern newspaper said. "If it is a sports story that has a news element to it, but it's surrounding a sports event or a sports player, then it goes to sports."

A national sports reporter at a large newspaper in the Northeast said another factor is the size and resources of the newsroom. His organization has a "robust political desk," and so he said reporters would be able to handle stories in the sports arena in which Trump or another prominent political figure is the main focus. Another national sports reporter at a competing national newspaper echoed that assessment, adding that after Trump made his comments about NFL players in Huntsville, Alabama, there were about 20-25 reporters covering that story at its zenith. Another factor, a few editors and reporters noted, involves strategies for deploying limited newsroom resources when major news hits or if there is a story that needs a reporter with specialized skills.

One national sports columnist said that when she covered a professional football team in the 1990s, the plan was to allow the cops reporter to handle DUIs and other arrests, especially if she had a practice to cover. She said she could get quotes from the coach and other players to add to the story, but the police reporter would cover the arrest and impending legal process. Several reporters and editors also noted how assistance on some stories can be beneficial because of the knowledge a political reporter or police reporter can bring to the table on topics related to their beat. A veteran reporter based in the Midwest said he would have been thrilled when someone with experience in business or politics jumped on to assist him with his stories because “that person would have the skills and background to ask questions that I might not have.”

The responses of the three hard news (non-sports) reporters varied in their responses to this topic. One veteran business reporter on the East Coast said she is called to assist sports reporters when the topic or event leaves the game field or court and moves into the real world. She talked about her stories on former NFL great Jim Brown working with former gang members and Kaepernick’s deal with Nike as examples. She added that she believes most “sports” stories that happen off the game field or court could be covered by a culture or feature reporter because she said she views sports as a microcosm of several facets of society, like race and gender. She added:

I think when it’s clearly away from the ballpark or the stadium or the field, that’s when there is a chance that someone like me will be called into do it, and I think that is now probably happening increasingly, because I do feel that there is a reawakening happening among a lot of athletes because of the social issues that are going on.

Conversely, one political reporter in the South said whether or not the story is passed off to another reporter depends on who has time to cover the event or issue. She said she offers to help

because a story that veers into the political arena may be easier for her to track down because of her connections. Another political reporter, this time in the Southwest, said she believes it depends on the organization whether the story gets passed off to another reporter, but added it sometimes depends on the focus of the story—whether it is a political story that touches on sports or vice versa—and that she has also offered to handle political stories that feature a sports aspect because she has the connections and sources that the sports reporter or another reporter may not have.

The comments above suggest each journalistic subfield sits in some relative proximity to the others and the boundaries are negotiated by the agents within the fields, the journalists, by what constitutes a sports story, political story, cop story, etc. The answers put forth by the journalists here indicate not necessarily a competition by agents to determine where the boundary sits, but that this determination could be made largely via the beat system of coverage in newsrooms and which reporter has the knowledge of the subject—or cultural capital—to cover the issue, as well as the level of complexity of the issue. The issue of “connections and sources” that was mentioned by at least three respondents also touches on a fourth form of capital not explored so far in this study, social capital. Social capital is defined by Bourdieu (1986) as capital accrued by a member of a group, and he says a social agent’s social capital is valued by the number of network connections that agent has. The reporters who accrue social capital are the ones with the ability to call upon any number of sources for a given story. In this instance, findings suggest the non-sports reporters have the social capital – source connections -- in addition to the cultural capital – knowledge, background and expertise -- to be able to call any number of political, cultural or business sources when a socio-political issues related to sports touches those specific areas.

Similarly, findings suggest that covering socio-political issues in sports requires you to have strong existing relationships with players and coaches—the requisite cultural and social capital—to the point where those key individuals are comfortable discussing sensitive issues. One sports editor at a national sports publication said it is difficult to get people to be “honest on demand” about complex and polarizing issues because it can take hours with older players who have developed and informed opinions on these topics to get the answers reporters seek. “It’s pretty tough to just dial up every woke rookie and expect them to be as thoughtful as Barack Obama on these issues,” he added.

Another editor, one at a small newspaper in the South, said relationships as well as “boots on the ground” can be the difference in whether a player or coach talks to a reporter. An editor, he continued, cannot just look at any reporter and tell that person to go find the story because that reporter does not have the relationships with the key individuals involved. “If you don’t have your feet on the ground per se, those particular stories are going to be harder and harder to complete because the person that’s the focus of the story is not going to have the confidence in you to do the story justice,” he added. That is part of having the “institutional knowledge” of knowing whom to call, a sports reporter in the South said. A third editor, the sports editor of a small newspaper on the East Coast, said having those long-lasting relationships with players and coaches sometimes pays off when socio-political issues come up, because the reporters have generally known the players or coaches involved for several years and can bring that institutional knowledge into their coverage. He said he would rather have the sports reporter who has been around that team for years, around those players for years, cover the issue, rather than let an outside reporter—who may have more experience covering social or political issues, but does not know the player or players involved—parachute into a situation. He added:

You have to have that expertise of like, I sat in the locker room with this guy, I've interviewed this guy, I've seen him interact with his teammates. I bring that context in where I understand what is happening here instead of just I read about this in this story or that story.

This highlights the importance of reporters having cultural and social capital, not only within the profession, but with the athletes, coaches and teams they cover. That capital comes with having interacted with these athletes and building relationships, sometimes on a deeper level than the typical reporter-athlete relationship. The strength of those relationships is critical because the reporter may be more likely to continue reporting on socio-political issues related to sports as more athletes – who, after all, live in the “socio-political” world when they are not on the game field -- are willing to tell those types of stories, which runs counter to the desire of powerful institutions and advertisers that sports reporters “stick to sports.”

A related finding: Some respondents highlighted the need for diversity in the newsroom, for example, saying black reporters are sometimes able to connect with the black athletes more than white reporters. One national columnist who is black said this era of socio-political reporting in sports began in the '90s when black reporters began becoming columnists and taking on systemic political and societal issues. “For too long, white sports writers and white columnists had interpreted the actions and behaviors and thoughts of black athletes who have slowly but surely come to dominate the major sports of basketball and football, and they didn't always do a very good job of that,” he said. An editor at a national sports publication agreed with part of that assessment, saying some of the best reporting that he has seen from sports writers during the Trump era has come from reporters of color and women reporters. He added:

Real talk, a lot of this has been about race and racism and a lot of sports desks are made up of white and whiter men. It was really difficult to send an old white guy into an assignment on young black men trying to change the perception of progress in this country. Diverse storylines are owning this storyline...Colin Kaepernick, when he gives his first big sit-down interview, it's not going to be to Scott Pelley of 60 minutes.

One white male sports writer from the South even acknowledged this when he talked about asking the right questions to college athletes: "I'm a middle-aged white guy and it would be silly for me to think that I understand what a 20-year-old African American college student has been through or expect them to view things or think the same way I do."

One reporter, a woman of Middle Eastern descent, said she believes minority reporters may handle socio-political issues related to sports easier than white reporters because to the minorities, the issues are not political. She cannot separate from her writing nor opt out of the fact that she is a Muslim woman, she said, before adding:.

People who think it's political are those who come from privilege. I've never heard someone who's black or who's queer or who's Muslim or who's Latino or Latina say, 'I don't want political,' because we don't have a choice. Sports writers and journalists from marginalized communities don't have that option to opt-out of politics or social realities or challenges. That's part of our existence...To you it's liberal. To me, it basically who I am. I can't separate the fact that I am a Muslim woman from my writing, that's not possible. And this whole idea of objectivity. Objectivity is an absolute social construct that was implemented by privileged men. I don't get to opt out of being a woman of color, I don't have that luxury and it is a luxury because I don't have that same privilege that they do.

An editor at a national sports publication echoed her opinion on objectivity, saying there is a difference between being objective and utilizing your lived experiences, and “the best sports journalists stay themselves, and reveal perspectives from athletes who are predominately, at least in America, at least in major sports, African Americans and would-be-progressives.” He said that even though some news outlets bypass the outspoken, thoughtful reporter for the “nice clean sideline reporter,” there is no “harm in being yourself” as a reporter and “no need to scrub things clean because we’re in a weird time in our world.”

And a business reporter said that especially in the current political climate, the “blind obedience to this edict that we have to be fair” sometimes leads to giving equal weight to “perspectives that are just not true, or are very disturbing...” She said that while having a second and third set of eyes on a critical, but complex story is important, having a diverse newsroom from which to draw that second and third pair of eyes is important.

This need for diversity does not apply only to men, but women as well. The reporter from Canada said she has seen many women support “white supremacy and toxic patriarchy” because they cannot understand the issues and prejudices she faces from not only being a woman, but being a “woman of color.” She said she gets comments and messages from women saying, “Why do you have to make us look bad?” She continued:

In my experience writing, I’ve been impacted by some of the most egregious types of feminism, meaning white feminism, women who will say to me, this isn’t about race, this is just about being a woman. I can’t tell you how many times (this has come up). Or,

“Why do you have to make this about racism and race. We’re all on the same team here.”

The national columnist later added that the breakup of the old boys’ club in sports journalism has been “huge for sports and all who have been involved with sports, no question.”

Another factor that plays a role in whether reporters cover socio-political issues, according to several reporters and editors, is that most newsrooms are not likely to be structured to pursue significant socio-political reporting. Newsrooms are shrinking, and reporters and editors are expected to do more with less. Several sports reporters and editors interviewed noted the time it takes to properly report and write about complex social and political issues may not be there—especially in-season for beat reporters who are asked to write 12-15 stories weekly, one national sports reporter said. Routine stories that occur frequently can be told easier and quicker than a socio-political story that takes deeper reporting and requires more care and scrutiny than the routine story. He added:

If you're writing more than once a day, like what does that do to the quality of your reporting on certain issues? Those are always concerns that you have, and you have to understand that if it becomes something that is the intersection of politics and race and culture and sports, that's different than if the Nats (MLB's Washington Nationals) are going to sign this second baseman and there is mutual interest... The concern is are you just going to look at yourself as a sports writer and do the bare minimum? And what's your workload like? Are you the person who should be doing this? Do you have time to go deep on this issue?

One sports editor, now at a small daily newspaper in the South, covered the NFL's Green Bay Packers in the mid-'90s, when the team made two Super Bowls, winning one. He spoke with some pride about writing roughly 15 stories per week for about six months of the year, from training camp to the end of the Super Bowl, but added that the work grind led him to feeling overworked to the point of leaving the beat. But he also said he would try to take time during that frenetic pace to work on project stories:

Even in that time constraint, what I would try to do is know there are certain stories I had to get done, do the best you could with the limited amount of time, but I would probably set aside one or two stories in that work week, and I would put in an abundance of diligence on this one because this one's got a chance to be really good.

A veteran sports writer based in the Northeast said what goes wrong and what goes right in journalism many times depends on the amount of time a reporter has to work on a piece, what their deadline is and what else that reporter may have on their plate:

I think everybody sometimes thinks we're just this well-oiled machine that is going to do everything perfectly regardless of the conditions every time and if we don't, we intentionally screwed it up and we have an agenda. But most of the time, it's way more human than that. It's like "Man, I had to file this thing by 7 o'clock and I got what I can get for the day."

One national magazine sports reporter who works in the Western U.S. told a story of a time when his deadline for a book on Roger Clemens was moved up dramatically. He admitted he cut some corners to finish on time and included an inaccurate comment he obtained from someone with second-hand knowledge of the situation in question. He added:

It was about the general manager of the Yankees witnessing something, a discussion, or the general manager of the Yankees saying something about steroids and I got that from a second-hand source and I was in such a rush to get this thing in, I didn't do my due diligence about confirming it, double-checking it and triple-checking, making sure it actually happened, and it ended up being false and made it into the book. I was rushed and I got sloppy.

An editor at a national sports publication said writing a preview of a game or reporting on the outcome of that same game can be done quickly, but “when it becomes something larger and not in the constraints of nine innings or 40 minutes of basketball or four quarters of an NFL games, it becomes more scrutinized, we take a little more time with it.”

Economics also shapes the ways newsrooms’ sports operations are structured for producing socio-political reporting. One veteran newspaper sports reporter said the economics of the news business are different in 2018 compared to even three or four years ago, and greatly different from 10 and 20 years ago. He travels for much of his beat and said it is harder to get trips approved to cover events or games. He pointed to the increase in data-driven analytics that editors and executives use, saying those executives can now make decisions based on whether they get an expected return on investment from a trip or expenditure via the amount of page views or news engagement each story generates. Another veteran reporter who previously worked at a national sports magazine said that organization would previously fly reporters all over the country, even for half a day, but cannot financially justify that anymore. And an editor at a national sports publication said the availability of travel funds, or lack of funds, means sometimes they have to write stories based on what they know without being there physically. They must either gather information by phone or scrap the story.

A veteran reporter from the Midwest also brought up time as a factor, but in the context of news organizations now constantly wanting reporters to quickly finish stories, especially major breaking news, so those stories can be posted online and shared on social media ahead of the competition. “The richness of writing in many cases is not what it was,” he added. “The richness of just daily journalism writing [is not what it was] because there is such a rush to get stuff ready for online.” He used an example of a story he did in 1992 Summer Olympic Games in

Barcelona about British quarter-miler Derek Redmond. Redmond was in the Olympic 400m semifinals when he tore his hamstring about halfway through the race. His father jumped the barriers, pushed security away, ran down to the track and helped his son around the track in what became an iconic Olympic moment. This happened more than a decade before social media existed and the reporter said:

I was able to watch every second of that and able to spend an hour and a half downstairs in the mixed zone area where the athletes meet the media right after events, getting all the color and background from Derek Redmond's dad and listening to Derek and listening to other people. You couldn't do that today if you were a solo practitioner, meaning that if you were the only reporter on site, you were expected to write a story that gets posted online one hour later. The seven-hour time difference between Barcelona and Chicago meant that I could write until 5 in the morning Barcelona time and it also meant that I wrote a story that was an essay that's full of detail that I would never have been able to get today and I think that's something that's dramatically lost in the rush for those people who are working for a publication where deadline is dramatically important.

These accounts suggest the economic field, part of the field of power, exerts pressure on these news organizations, which are inherently heteronomous – in other words, they are subject to the needs of advertisers and the judgments of corporate owners (via online analytics, for example) and are weakly autonomous or buffered from this power, and so have little authority to justify reporting on socio-political issues.

Multiple respondents also acknowledged the need to be considered “more than a sports reporter” as one reason why they or their colleagues report on socio-political issues related to sports. A few noted how sports reporters are generally multi-faceted Swiss Army knives with

knowledge in several fields—including medicine, business and criminal justice—because all of those fields touch aspects of sports, teams and sports leagues. And now, add social and political issues to that stack, one sports editor at a large Midwest newspaper said. “It’s just another layer of things that sports writers have been asked to do for a very long time,” she said. One reporter based in the Midwest said he likes to tell people that “sports journalism is no different than journalism” and “journalism is journalism, I just write about sports.” One editor at a national sports publication said he often jokes with his brothers, one of whom is a doctor and the other is lawyer, that he can do both of their jobs because he and his reporters have to know medicine and law, among other things. “I think it’s unfair, and I think it has changed quite considerably, that sports journalists are considered sports journalists. I think we’re just journalists.”

One national sports writer based in the South said journalists should not be afraid to cover a “touchy topic” because covering those issues is part of the job, part of why so many people got into journalism. Another national sports reporter, based in the Northeast, said covering socio-political stories allows sports writers to “stretch their wings” more than a simple game story allows; they can show off a little or bring their own experiences into the narrative—a point echoed by other reporters and editors. One national columnist working in the Northeast said he views himself as a journalist, first and foremost, who just happens to cover sports:

It’s not ‘I’m a sports writer.’ I’m a writer comma sports. I’m a journalist comma sports. I’m a columnist comma sports. I would like to think I can cover the State of the Union address just as well as I can cover the (Washington) Redskins beating the Jacksonville Jaguars.

Another veteran sports columnist who works on the East Coast said journalists should and need to be able to cover social and political issues that enter the sports world because to avoid those

issues would be a “dereliction of duty.” She added that she does not write about Donald Trump, and did not write about Barack Obama or any former president, until that president enters the sports world. She added:

“When Donald Trump enters the sports world, I’m a sports columnist, so I take that very seriously. You would never know my opinion of Donald Trump, I never do that. I am a sports journalist, So anytime you see Donald Trump and my name, if I write about him, it’s because he’s entered the sports arena. He does that a lot and so there’s plenty to talk about and it’s often very controversial.”

The phrase “stick to sports,” often hurled at athletes and sports journalists who share their opinion on social or political issues, was also mentioned several times in the context of the claim that “stick to sports” is dead. “People want to keep sports and political and sociological issues aside, keep them separate. Stick to sports, right. It’s crap. It can’t happen,” a sports editor at a large newspaper in the Midwest said. One editor at a small newspaper in the South said it is hard to gain or keep a sports reporting job if you stick strictly to sports and ignore the other stories outside the arena. An editor at a national sports publication said sports writers who stick to sports will end up on the wrong side of history and he will not hire anyone who wants to stick to sports because “I don’t think there’s much of a growth path for the “stick to sports journalist.” He added:

I’m absolutely looking for an expanded mind who looks to expand the perspective of sports fans beyond the game. The last time I had a legit headcount open, there were people from traditional publications who would send me idea memos full of stories about coaches and championships and without fail, I turned them down in favor of people who

were looking to tell stories about human beings, women and the impact of athleticism on society.

He later added:

I think when people look back on the year 2018, they're going to remember LeBron James saying he was not more than an athlete, that he will not shut up and dribble, that he is a film producer and culture shaker who moved the power center for the most progressive sports of the world to Los Angeles. I don't think anyone is going to remember what happened in the playoffs, at least not in the text of history. There's record books and then there are history books. A sports writer who wants to be in the history books, and not just a score keeper, should see the sea change coming and embrace it and not be on the wrong side of history by sticking to sports.

A sports reporter with a national platform said if athletes stuck to sports, then the battle for civil rights in the 1960s and '70s may not have had the same outcome because towering figures like Muhammad Ali and Kareem Abdul-Jabbar would not have gotten involved. Another national sports reporter also mentioned how athletic stars like Jackie Robinson, Billie Jean King, Martina Navratilova and Arthur Ashe used sports as a vehicle to push for change. "So that means since we're the people who cover sports and serve as translators or bring sports to the people, we're part of it too," he added.

One national sports reporter noted the irony of people wanting athletes and reporters to "stick to sports," of sports reporters not wanting to "stick to sports and writing about socio-political issues, and then of news outlets cracking down on their reporters and employees making political statements on social media. He writes mostly books and does some freelancing, but said he is free to say whatever he wants on Twitter because he is not beholden to anyone—which he

said makes his colleagues jealous. He said friends who still work for major companies are told not to tweet politics because they represent that company and tweeting political comments can lead to “sports media pitchfork fights.” But he also understands why executives are cracking down on social media behavior, adding:

If I were running ESPN right now, I would tell my employees not to tweet politics also. If you want to work here, we are trying to build this brand and this company. I don’t want you tweeting about politics from your account. I would say the same thing and I’m as political as anybody. It’s not worth it. That doesn’t mean don’t cover social issues. That doesn’t mean don’t do a fantastic Colin Kaepernick piece. I just don’t need you tweeting “Fuck Trump” or “Fuck Pelosi, she’s a blah blah.” That’s not helping.

But this job is not for those with thin skin, as more than half of the sports journalists and editors said they have received, or know someone who has received, threats of some kind, including several death threats or threats of bodily harm not only to them, but their families, for moving into social and political issues. And some of the female respondents said they have received extremely graphic threats, like saying one reporter should “be raped with a hockey stick.” This by itself could be a reason why reporters do not dive into these issues. One sports editor at a small newspaper on the East Coast said people get angry when the hometown reporter writes something negative about their team, but the comments get worse when a reporter gets into social or political issues because you open yourself up to a different audience. This editor added that reading the comments of people who don’t agree with you will keep you up at nights. Reporters and columnists writing about socio-political issues receive threats, but the “volume is turned up on the threats and number of threats when you write about Kaepernick,” said a national

sports reporter. “The visceral emails you get when you touch that subject will make you puke in your mouth,” one editor at a large newspaper in the Midwest said, before adding:

So is it worth it? A lot of times it’s gonna be because if they hate you, that means you’re doing something right. But at the same time you gotta know that you’re diving into that water and are you ready for it. Sometimes you’re going to lose readers, just like how the NFL has maybe lost some fans because they didn’t like it or they’re losing (fans to domestic) violence and violence against women issues . . . Is it worth it? Many of the times, I say yes because those stories need to be told and we can’t ignore the news just because we’re concerned about losing 100 readers. For all we know, we could get 100 readers back because they appreciate how we’re covering that.

A reporter based in the Southwest said it can be easy to hold onto the threats and vitriol. But to one national sports writer based on the West Coast, covering socio-political issues, like Kaepernick, is worth it, despite the hate:

I think the Colin Kaepernick story is important and I think if you’re a columnist and you believe Colin Kaepernick is doing the right thing, he is moving a movement forward, you need to write about that. You’re going to get hate letters from people telling you to shut the fuck up, but I think it’s more valuable to write about it than pretend it’s not happening because your readers might get pissed at you.

One veteran reporter based in the Midwest said he even responds to some of the negative responses he receives, but only if they sign their name to the email or if their Twitter handle looks to be their real name, and they made an intelligent argument as to why they believe he was wrong in his opinion or made some type of error in his reporting. His rationale was that he attached his name to everything he wrote, so if a reader did—and bypassed the “gutless” route of

anonymity—then he felt that he owed that person a response. “If you sign the email and the email is full of racism and sexism and whateverism, I’m not going to answer it. But if you 1000% disagreed with my opinion and it was rational and you signed your name, you took the time to write this, I owe you a response.” He said he understands why some women will not use their real name on Twitter for safety reasons, but sticks to his rule about responses. “I’ve drawn a line in the sand that I will not reply to people who hide behind anonymity,” he said. He later added that technological advances have made it easier for readers to interact with reporters, which may not necessarily be a good thing:

Going back to the real old days, even before email, people would have to write you a letter. That requires a certain level of effort. Then the next level was email, which became a lot easier than writing and posting a letter in a mail box. Now social media has made it easy for people to express in a split second.

A business reporter at a national newspaper said she thinks sports reporters are in a tough place because sports is viewed as entertainment and people do not want their entertainment messed with. She continued:

If you send out a tweet that has anything that resembles a certain kind of an opinion or if you do a piece that has a perspective that somebody doesn’t want to see reflected, it can get you in a lot of trouble. And I think we’ve seen some sports journalists, at least initially pay a price for that. It’s harder for sports journalists because sports I think holds a very unique place in our culture and some folks just want to have fun with it and they don’t want to have to think or be challenged and if they feel they are being challenged, they get very upset and they let the editors and the producers know it.

This hate that the reporters and editors talked about can be seen as a context within the field where socio-political reporting does not allow the reporter to gain cultural capital because instead of getting plaudits and praise, the reporters are negatively affected by their decision to cover socio-political issues by a certain segment of the population. Or, we might see those who offer hate or harsh criticism through social media as a collective within the field, perhaps a subfield, who act as a boundary patrol, enforcing their norm of “stick to sports” for journalists and athletes who, in their eyes, break this norm and stray too far into political or social territory.

Types of socio-political sports stories.

RQ5 asked about the nature or types of socio-political reporting by sports journalists. The journalists and editors interviewed provide a plethora of examples of stories they wrote or edited that touched on various socio-political issues related to sports, such as mental illness and socio-economic disparities. Four types of socio-political reporting in sports emerged from the journalists’ responses: “humanity stories,” investigative “deep dives,” off-the-field issues, and “hot takes.”

Humanity stories

The sports editor of a large newspaper in the Midwest recalled several stories she worked on or helped edit that she said touched on the human spirit, including profiles of homeless former athletes, one of which she called an “inspiring story that made me believe in journalism again.” She added:

Just this past year, there was a (Detroit) Red Wings player, he was a former first overall draft pick and we found out actually through a Canadian news station that did a small news story on him, but he was homeless in Canada, just kind of like roaming around Canada. He was this former number one draft pick. He got mixed up in some stuff here

and there, had some criminal stuff, was estranged from his family, but we were able to go out there for two or three days with a photographer and columnist and tell this guy's story.

She continued, saying that being able to tell those “heart-warming stories and humanity stories” can set a journalist apart from their colleagues. Another editor who works at a smaller newspaper in the South recalled several “stories of impact, changing lives and humanity” that he wrote during his lengthy reporting career, including the story told in RQ1 about a football player who signed a multi-million-dollar extension, but still ate at all-you-can-eat buffets because he grew up extremely poor. Another of his stories involved a high school football coach who said he changed his players' lives through Christ while at a training camp-like atmosphere on Jekyll Island, Georgia, that began with a five-mile beach run at 4:30 a.m. and ended with an hourlong bible study at 10 p.m. He added:

So I did this 2-part series on it called “Heaven and Hell” ... this year that I was there, nine kids got baptized in the Atlantic Ocean. In doing this story, I talked over the 25 years of this camp, all the lives that were changed—I mean school presidents, bank executives—everybody on how this camp changed their life. I did this story and this story won first place in the state of Georgia that year. The sad and interesting part was the day after the story came out, he was at a public high school and the school board voted that he would no longer be allowed to pray with the team and at the end of that season they ended up firing him and they said it (the story) had nothing to do with it, but he knew it had something to do with it. And his career changed since then and he came up to me afterward and said he wouldn't change a thing. He said that was what needed to be said and needed to be done.

The sports editor said he thought the inherent humanity and positive qualities of those stories influenced readers. A third editor, who oversees a national sports publication in the Northeast, said he turns down idea memos containing ideas for profiles on coaches and famous teams in favor of human stories, which includes stories about women in sports, and analyses of sports' impact on society, because he believes the information side of sports can and will be handled by "robots" (e.g., stories created by algorithms and apps). He added that he believes "only humans can connect with the human side of the athlete as the role model. I don't see any future where athletes are less looked up to or less of a role model, especially the way our politicians and celebrities are acting." Other reporters and editors provided examples of this type of story—"inspiring" stories or "stories of impact," such as stories about an Alcorn State football player killed 15-20 years ago while protecting a woman from a man who pulled out a gun at a party and profiles of homeless athletes—while not necessarily calling them "humanity stories."

Such "humanity stories" are often apolitical, focusing on an individual's story rather than connections to public issues. It is a story type that would probably receive little pushback from powerful social agents and institutions, thus opening a "space of possible," in Bourdieu's terminology. These editors and reporters are taking a position to tell these stories, which are often positive – stories of coaches influencing young people or in a way that may not get into the socio-political issues that are at the heart of the story, and therefore may not be a threat to the those in the field of power.

Deep dives

A second category of stories involves investigative stories, referred by some of the sports journalists interviewed as "deep dives" or "digs." The phrase was used by journalists to refer to investigative stories that take long hours and hard work over a lengthy period of time. This type

of story could be a piece in which the reporter or reporters dig through thousands of court documents to detail an assault or attack alleged to have occurred by or against an athlete, or through financial records or SEC filings to paint a picture of a league or team's financial health. Compared to "humanity stories," investigative stories are more critical of powerful institutions and while they are more likely to face pushback, either from the economic field in economic pressure, or the political field, they are also more likely to gain cultural capital within the mainstream journalism field. That field has more autonomy from the field of power than the sports journalism field. In stories that look into the link between football and concussions and CTE, for example, the reporters and editors are taking a position within the "space of possibles" opened up by this issue gaining national attention. That position could be the opposite position to the powers-that-be in the political field. Such stories require more economic capital – time and staff, for example, and may be translated into symbolic capital in the form of awards.

A national sports writer at a large newspaper in the Northeast said most game stories constrain reporters in what they can write and how they write, but "diving deep" allows reporters to "stretch yourself and write a big piece that shows your abilities in a way that day-to-day reporting doesn't necessarily do." He added:

Some people have gotten plaudits for stories they've done about social justice issues because it gives you ways to stretch yourself in that writing about a football game—you can do beautiful writing and there's beautiful beat writers who cover football games, but it's gonna be a 1,000-word story, they're going to have to describe what happened during the game and get some quotes from people after the game. And so you're kind of constrained in what you can do.

Another reporter who works at a competing national newspaper in the Northeast talked about going “deeper” into reporting during the controversy ignited by President Donald Trump’s comments in Alabama about the NFL protestors, saying it allowed sports reporters to explore territory they do not normally enter. He said those deep dives allow reporters to be extremely thorough in reporting the who, what, when, where, why and how, and also that reporters may also have to take a step back from the story sometimes to truly understand the scope of the story they are trying to tell. He added:

It’s like there’s a fire and you go straight to the fire. As the story progresses, it’s like you back away from the fire and the greatest perspective is all the way back and you can see everything. You can tell a lot of times in telling stories when we were closest to the fire and just the perspective we gained and how we built and how we got smarter in doing things the farther we were the distance from it.

A third reporter, who previously worked at a national sports magazine, said there were times he and his colleagues were not allowed to “dig hard into stories” by editors into the steroid issue in baseball in the late ‘90s. He said the editors at his news organization viewed that reporting as too risky, possibly because of the substantial knowledge and cultural capital needed to report on that issue. “I wrote a lot of glowing profiles back then of a guy who didn’t deserve glowing profiles,” he added.

In addition to talking about investigative stories in general terms, a few respondents talked about them in the context of holding public officials and public figures accountable -- “fourth estate journalism,” as an editor of a national sports publication said. He had an example of a long-term project on how the NFL and law enforcement, respectively, handle domestic violence cases against players by charting several publicized cases brought against NFL players.

The reporter looked for patterns and trends, often finding dead ends because the NFL and players involved would “button up” during questioning. “We wanted to drop it on Roger Goddell’s Super Bowl week press conference so we could ask him about it and hold him accountable,” the editor said. One of the two political reporters interviewed mentioned holding the powerful accountable as a top criterion for excellence in sports journalism practice, but added that most stories do not live up to that bar and simply fill the news hole.

One part of these investigative “deep dives” is that they generally require a “dig” for “context” for why this particular topic is a story or background to help the reader understand the events that led to the article being written. Some respondents said that proper context provides the reader the “appropriate” position for interpreting the facts of the story; without the “proper context,” the facts are left more open to interpretation by the reader to fit their narrative or view of the issue at hand. One editor who works at a national sports publication said much of sports journalism lacks context and so is taken out of context, especially sound bites and quotes that are picked apart on sports-debate shows on networks such as ESPN and FS1. He used the Kaepernick story as an example in which some reporters eschewed printing the reasons laid out by Kaepernick for why he kneeled, which left his motives open for interpretation by readers. A national sports columnist based in the Northeast said reporters had to constantly remind the public why Kaepernick was kneeling, that this was not an anthem protest or protest against the military, but was, in actuality, a protest “against police lethality of men of color in this country.” Another editor added: “Like you might not agree with what he’s doing (kneeling during the national anthem), but if you understand the context of why he’s doing it, maybe that will change your mind or even if it doesn’t change your mind, at least say I understand why he’s doing it.”

And a national sports reporter at a large newspaper in the Northeast elaborated on the hazards in describing what Kaepernick was doing:

Is he protesting the national anthem or is he protesting during the national anthem? Is he sitting or is he kneeling?... If you say he protested the national anthem, thousands of people will say that is incorrect, like very incorrect. He said he's not protesting the anthem, he's protesting during it to raise awareness for these things and what is he raising awareness for? Well police brutality's different than racial injustice, which is different than social justice.

One national sports reporter based in the South said social media could be a good starting point or used for assistance in investigations by helping reporters find source material, statistics or sources. But he stressed that reporters cannot rely entirely on social media to report on a story, but must conduct the interviews and do the reporting like they would for any story.

Off-the-field story

The third type of story is the off-the-field story, which do not involve deep investigative “dives,” but which instead generally involve routine coverage of social agents in the sports field (players, coaches, managers, owners) wandering into nearby institutional areas that are outside of sports – for example, *criminal justice* stories that involve arrests of alcohol-related offenses, sexual assault or domestic violence, or *business* stories about teams and leagues. These are sometimes called “spot news.” It is generally a single news event or a series of events, such as an arrest and subsequent court case or public meetings about the merits of a publicly funded stadium, and can be placed on the front page of the newspaper, the inside pages or the business page—not just the sports section. Different from investigative “deep dives,” these stories are generally done with time constraints limiting the amount of reporting one can do, and sometimes

require a follow-up story the next day to fully report all the angles that need reporting. As respondents indicate below, these stories require expertise covering social and political institutions – they may serve as a “gateway” or opening of the “spaces of possibles” to more in-depth socio-political reporting.

While these stories occur off the field, they almost always impact what happens on the field. One sports reporter in the Southwest said this type of story is important because sports can be used as a way to understand how people think about issues like gendered violence, women in society and racism. She used the example of former Florida State University and current NFL quarterback Jameis Winston, who was accused of sexual assault while playing college football, but was essentially given a pass on his alleged behavior by fans of that program because the team was winning. She said the fact that Winston had been accused of sexual assault and for 11 months “no one had ever done anything about it” because of his personal and team success led her to start writing opinion pieces about sports and cultural issues, like gendered violence. A national sports columnist based in the Northeast said it is sometimes easy to focus too much on the previous or upcoming games and lose sight of larger issues off the field, like sexual assault in the Larry Nassar case or corruption in the Adidas trial. “I think these are some opportunities to tell some greater truths and ultimately, sports can be a platform to talk about some real-life issues.”

One example of this was brought up by a national sports reporter based in the Northeast who also teaches at a local college. One class, he discussed how stories about stalled labor negotiations between owners and players during lockouts and strikes has historically centered on which side is right and which side is wrong. He said:

Slowly, but surely over time, we also began to talk about the economic and social impact the lockouts have beyond the sport, the workers at the stadium or arena, the economic impact on the particular community in which those games might be played. So there are a lot of other things to consider when you are looking at something in terms of a social issue, rather than in terms of wins and losses.

Another national sports reporter at a competing large newspaper wrote several stories on Kaepernick off the field, like how his protests affected TV ratings, surveys about fans' responses to Kaepernick and how his deal with Nike got done. He continued:

Nike is a huge company. They have a contract with the NFL and here they were kind of embracing an athlete who is suing the NFL. An NFL partner is partnering with someone who is suing the NFL. My editors immediately said, "We want to know how this happened. Walk me through how did this come about. How did Nike sign him? What were the worries? Did they talk to the NFL? Did the NFL know ahead of time? So go find out."

Another national sports reporter said she feels off-the-field stories are important, but that her work covering practices and games would often take precedent.

But not all sports reporters have the tools to cover these off-the-field stories. A national sports reporter said he learned how to cover off-the-field issues during a hard news reporting internship in college. He said that particular internship was an important piece of his overall education because he learned skills that other sports reporters never learn, like how to read an arrest report, what questions to ask police and how to write a crime story, and it allows him to cover those off-the-field issues when they arise on his beat. "A lot of sports reporters don't have

that knowledge and background in news and I don't think they realize sometimes how sensitive that you have to be when you write things like that," he added.

Another issue with these stories, two female reporters said, is that most men "have absolutely no idea how to cover" sexual assault and gendered violence in sports. One woman who lives in Canada said most beat writers and sports desks "absolutely crucify" those stories, while pointing to stories about rape allegations against Cristiano Ronaldo that also contain his goal-scoring average. "The problem is when almost 90 percent of sports media and sports editors are white, able-bodied men who do not use media toolkits to write about sexualized violence, they have no idea how (to write about the topic)," she continued. She added that she is working on an article about sexualized violence and a male editor wanted to change "rape" to "non-consensual sex." These stories could also be covered by political, business or police reporters, as noted in RQ4. Several respondents said whether a sports reporter or other reporter covers political, business and police issues related to sports depends on who or what the main focus of the story is, the expertise of the reporter, and perhaps the demographic background of the reporter.

Other examples of a socio-political event that touch sports off the field is the hiring of minority coaching candidates, especially in college, which one national sports reporter said is still a major issue, and when FIFA, the international governing body for soccer, rescinded its ban on players wearing the hijab on the pitch, or soccer field. The writer in Canada, a Muslim, said FIFA's decision to remove the ban is what got her into journalism because it was personal to her; her soccer career effectively ended when she started wearing the hijab. "I think this was a side of sports journalism that we really hadn't seen at the time, even though it was only five years

ago,” she said. “It was only a [person of color’s] experience, which is different than the average, typical sports writer in the US or Canada, who is an able-bodied straight man, white man.”

As sports departments begin handling more socio-political issues related to sports, sports reporters are acquiring a new habitus in that they are learning how to handle a story that may be outside their comfort zone. This occurs because the “space of possibles” has opened up in the field that allows sports reporters to take a position and decide they want to cover these issues because they want to cover everything that occurs on their beat, both on field and off the field.

Hot Take

The fourth type of stories that emerged is the “hot take” or “knee-jerk reaction,” which are generally when a writer gives their immediate reaction after a story breaks or an incident occurs. Sometimes these “hot takes” are written and posted before all the facts are available. One editor at a national sports publication said he is “very careful” to avoid these and noted that they are the opposite of investigative “deep dives.” He said there is a reaction of “hey, let’s get this out there because this is hot right now and in the next hour we have to react to it and we have to have it” when major issues come up.

An editor at a national sports publication cautioned against a type of “hot take” in which journalists call athletes and coaches to get comments on breaking news stories, like Trump’s comments in Huntsville. He called this “blob of fact reporting.” He said reporters get mostly “canned quotes” that do not really move the story forward and called it “incremental journalism” that advances the story “in the way that ‘stupid-shit-Donald-Trump-says’ journalism does.” He noted it is hard to properly do that reporting without spending a lot of time with the interview subjects, as this editor had previously mentioned in findings on RQ4. A fourth editor, at a small Southern newspaper, said he pushes his reporters to explain why a topic is worthy of being a

story, and while he understands that sports reporters have to analyze issues or incidents when they occur because that is their job, he stressed that reporters must have a plan of who they will call and what context they are including when writing these response pieces. Due diligence goes a long way, he added, and writing about a topic just because it is “hot” is not good enough.

This category is especially relevant to social media use. One editor at a small Southern newspaper said some reporters may feel a need to post a “hot take” because some athlete tweeted about a certain topic or said something inflammatory—an example also used by a national sports reporter. He used examples of old racist or homophobic tweets by athletes, saying:

There are some people in the journalism world, I think all they do is focus on social media aspect and that’s what one of their jobs is to look for those things. I would say in the newspaper side, yes, you are aware of those and that would help the decision process rather than being the immediate, oh boy something happened and hey we have to do it.

You say how does this affect us; how does it affect the entity that we’re covering.

A national sports reporter at a large newspaper in the Northeast said social media can be helpful to take the “pulse” of sports fans when deciding whether to write about an issue, but added that reporters must be careful to avoid the “bathroom graffiti of the Internet” on social media and “trust your gut and follow your reporting nose.”

A few editors also talked about the need for editors to sit down with their reporters and discuss how to respond if a player or coach posts on social media about a topic with socio-political implications or decides to protest during the national anthem. “You sit down with your reporters and say, listen, this could come up tomorrow, this could come up never, but we need to talk about what happens if (it does happen),” a sports editor at a large Midwestern newspaper said. An editor at a small newspaper on the East Coast said he had that conversation with his

reporters and columnists. He said he stressed to them in their coverage of NFL player protests during the national anthem to “let the story and the reporting tell the story” and that he did not want them to bring their opinion into their writing or spout their thoughts on Twitter. “I think it’s not as hard as we try to make it out,” he said. “We just need to report the news.” He continued:

I tried to explain to my daughter the other day what I do. I was standing in the kitchen and I held up the spoon. I was like, “What I try to do is I write about this spoon. If I’m telling you about this spoon, all I’m telling you is about this spoon. I’m not going to tell you it’s a good spoon or a bad spoon. I’m not going to tell you that spoons are the greatest things in the world or the worst things in the world. I’m going to tell you this is a spoon and this is what a spoon is used for and this is what a spoon looks like. It’s up to you if you want to use it or not.”

A sports reporter showing they can cover these types of issues and capably report on “humanity stories,” investigative “deep dives” and off-the-field issues builds cultural capital within the sports journalism profession. That capital comes from recognition from one’s peers about the quality of work they do, that they know the changing “rules of the game.” An editor at a national sports publication, said that being able to “disseminate information that a population can understand” is extremely valuable, not just to the news organization, but to a writer’s personal brand because when it comes time to negotiate a raise or get a new job, “you’ve proven I can cover basketball, but I can also look into an FBI investigation, I can contextualize a national anthem (protest), I can do more than analyze that a running back can find a gap on the left side of the offensive line and gain 15 yards.” Thus, cultural capital may translate to symbolic and economic capital for the reporter.

Also, some reporters said they felt they needed to write about these issues of racism, sexism, homophobia, sexual assault and domestic violence in sports because they felt that others could not do the stories justice, as mentioned in findings on RQ4. This was especially the case with respondents who were not white males, who said they view these issues as something they deal with daily—whether it is a black male dealing with racism or a female who knows someone who has been beaten or raped—and they do not view it as “political issues.” Their life experiences have shaped their predispositions toward the events they cover and toward the relationship of their journalistic work toward those events.

Contexts for story types

RQ6 asked what factors, contexts, and conditions affect the varying nature of socio-political reporting by sports journalists.

The first of the story forms discussed in RQ5, the “humanity story,” can be dependent on the relationships that journalists build with the players, coaches, team personnel and sports agents. As noted by multiple respondents in RQ4, players may be more likely to talk about sensitive personal or complex socio-political issues to a reporter with whom they have a good relationship, a reporter who has the requisite social and cultural capital. Some respondents also discussed the need for diverse newsrooms, because some of them believe that black athletes may be more likely to open up to black reporters than white reporters. A sports editor of a small Southern newspaper recalled a story he wrote in the 1990s while covering the Green Bay Packers about one of the team’s defensive backs with whom he had developed a good relationship. This story emerged from a simple question about Christmas memories that the reporter asked a group of players during some downtime:

One of the three defensive backs answered and one of them backed up and nothing, there was nothing that was going to come out of his mouth. He was actually one that I had known pretty well. I didn't say anything and then three to four months later after they'd won the Super Bowl, I brought up, I asked him about the Christmas memories and why he didn't respond. He said, "I had no good memories" and he started taking me on this journey of his life story, and particularly some of the destitute living he would live in. Even after he was drafted by the Packers, he would go to the all-you-can-eat buffets for every meal because he was afraid he would never get enough to eat because of the way he grew up. So in talking to him, I said I would like to come see your hometown after minicamp and I don't think he believed I would do it. It was like three different plane flights and a rental car from Green Bay to go to Haynesville, Louisiana, on the Arkansas-Louisiana border. I got there and met him and he drove me out into the country in the middle of nowhere and it was a metal shack that was dilapidated and had a hole in the front yard and then he told me the story about how that's where he lived for six years with six brothers and sisters, one room. He said he got rained on more when you stood inside than when you're outside. No electricity most of the time, they cooked out of the hole in the ground and he was choked up and this was a guy who signed this \$20 million contract. I go through this process and do this story with him and then it was one of those things later that he told me he said, "Thank you for allowing me to tell my story because it was a story I never thought anybody would let me tell."

For investigative "deep dives," key factors that influence whether a sports reporter reports on and writes enterprise stories about socio-political issues are time and money, consequences of news outlets' economic capital. As noted in RQ4, socio-political stories are

sometimes complex and require days, weeks and sometimes months to properly report, and smaller staffs at news organizations means less time for reporters to spend on projects because each reporter is generally beholden to provide copy for the daily beast from their beat. “That’s one of the things the normal public doesn’t understand in the newsroom setting is it’s almost like chess pieces on a daily basis,” an editor at a small newspaper in the South said. “What about this? I’m working in this, but can it be put on hold where you go do this?’ And that’s a constant.”

The sports editor of a national sports publication said asking socio-political questions to athletes in the “press gaggle” will lead to canned quotes from players who will treat the question as they would something at a televised press conference. Getting honest, meaningful answers about complex situations and issues requires one-on-one interviews, he said, adding they now mostly avoid going through the teams to talk to players and that “intimacy breeds honesty.” “You’re not really going to shift any tectonic plates in the way that people think about sports and society unless you really take your time to do something meaningful or have a really innovative angle,” he added. Some of the older, more seasoned reporters and editors also noted how it takes sometimes dozens of phone calls to properly tell a story, and making that many phone calls also takes time.

Part of the economic issue beside shrinking staffs is the shrinking amount of space in newspapers for content. One of the political reporters added that the dwindling space available in newspapers due to declining advertising also hurts project and investigative reporting because a reporter may write a 3,000-word story, but the paper may have only enough space for 1,800 words. A national sports reporter echoed the issue of declining space in newspapers, saying it is “frustrating” to properly report on a major story and write a 2,000-word article, then have an editor come back and say they need the story to be 1,200 words to “fit in a certain space.”

Another non-sports reporter, a business journalist at a national publication said there are not as many avenues for longform journalism as there used to be—an assessment echoed by a second national sports reporter who said while reporters his age or older would be happy to report on and write longform articles, the outlets are not buying or assigning those articles. “How many places are running 5,000-word stories about political sports issues? There’s not that many,” he said. While the rise of online-only publications where space is not an impediment has created more jobs in sports media, the East Coast business reporter said that does not necessarily mean an end to space woes. She added:

I think online, we all felt for a long time that “we can write forever, this is perfect,” but I think the attention span in the age of online is much more limited. So I think that while you have the space, people are not going to engage with it and read it in many cases the way they might have years ago. I think also part of the issue is mobile. Mobile is becoming the platform and people don’t necessarily want to read 20,000 words on a mobile device.

Another major factor, as noted by a few of the editors and journalists, that might may halt some investigative “deep dives” is the pushback they and their organization may receive from the sports teams and leagues based on their reporting. As mentioned in RQ4, some editors and reporters mentioned the possibility of losing access and the harm that losing access to players, coaches and team personnel could mean to their ability to do their job. This pushback also could also be in the form of economic retaliation. One editor at a national sports publication said his organization has received some pushback from leagues and teams due to financial agreements. Some news executives, this editor noted, are fine with rattling cages and others do not want to push too hard. “We have done stories on certain schools and that school has just said, ‘All right,

we're not giving access next time because you burned us or did a story we didn't agree with," that editor said. "It wasn't because we got it wrong, they just didn't like it." One editor at a national sports publication said he has even been "nudged in the direction" of stories that bring people together over what his bosses have deemed "stories that divide us," but not explicitly told to avoid certain stories. He has called this the "Kaepernick effect" because he thinks some advertisers are threatening the company over stories they have run about Kaepernick and social and political issues related to sports. He added:

We are living in divided times and there are divisive issues that deserve probing and deserve stories explored. Those stories about divisive issues can end up bringing us together as sports so often does. You can do a story about kids being influenced by Kaepernick. You can do stories about immigration, about LGBT rights, about cops killing people that ultimately bring people together because people agree on sports.

He later continued:

The judgment of history on outlets and large corporate sports media companies that bow to the pressure of advertisers and stockholders because they thought their journalists should stick to sports will not be a good one and I think the Jemele Hills of the world will be better for being themselves than for cowing to the unnecessary pressures of people who didn't want them to have a perspective.

One national sports reporter based on the East Coast said she wrote an "Alice in Wonderland" column about her first impressions from going to a NASCAR event in the early 2000s and detailed the racism and sexism she encountered. She said she learned years later that NASCAR executives were "furious" because her editor never let her know they were mad about her

column because he wanted “me to continue to write columns unfettered and unaware.” She continued:

Anyone who gets mad at me, that means I’m doing my job and I’ll double down on it, if in fact it is the truth and it is the right thing to do journalistically. So that makes me happy that NASCAR was mad. That’s not my goal, but I get nervous when people like my columns too much. I’ve got friends, I’m not looking for friends, I’m looking to do my job.

These answers point to the economic pressure exerted by the economic field. News organizations, as previously stated, as a whole have low levels of autonomy and rely on institutions in other fields for economic capital. If there are advertising contracts or economic partnerships with teams, colleges or leagues, then those entities could threaten economic retaliation for critical coverage—in addition to withholding access, as mentioned in RQ4.

For the third type of socio-political story identified in RQ5, the off-the-field story, one major constraint on sports reporters is their knowledge, or lack thereof, about criminal justice and political processes, and business matters—the three main areas where sports issues occur off the field. As one veteran national sports reporter said, “I can tell you a ton about how to throw a slider from years of writing about baseball, but if you’re going to ask me to explain to you the passing of a bill, the intricacies, the complications, I’m not your strongest guy.” Sports reporters would need the requisite cultural and social capital to be able to report on these off-the-field issues. They need to know the “rules of the game” and the skillset for reporting in those fields, like who to call, what questions to ask, and what information to include. A political reporter in the Southwest said many sports reporters don’t have the skillset, gained either through experience or education, to cover stories like arrests or politics. However, that reporter also

acknowledged that sports is not part of her reporter skillset. “If you asked me to cover a basketball game, it would be terrible,” she admitted. But one national sports reporter said sports reporters should be able to cover arrests and other off-the-field aspects that are part of their beat because sports reporters generally take the same classes, like public affairs reporting, that other student journalists take.

Whether a reporter employs a “hot take,” the final story type discussed in RQ5, is dependent on several factors, contexts, and conditions. An editor at a national sports publication mentioned two instances in which a reporter at his publication may write a “reaction” to an event or issue. The first is when they don’t have “boots on the ground” due to travel funding restrictions and the second is when an athlete posts their opinion on social media about a hot-button issue or topic and the editors want a reporter to write something so they can post it on social media. The latter can set off a chain reaction of how a “hot take” can impact multiple entities through the use of multiple forms of capital. The need to put forth their opinion and post it to social media pages speaks to a need for cultural capital. It can also bring the reporter symbolic capital if the information is shared on social media. Those stories posted and shared on social media drive engagement to those social media sites, and then to the news organization’s website. The more hits a news organization receives on its websites, the more economic capital it earns from advertisements. That economic capital could be used to fund investigative “deep dives” and other types of socio-political stories. That “hot take” could also be turned into an editorial, which could lead the reporter to accumulate cultural or symbolic capital.

“Hot takes” are often the epitome of “position taking” because a reporter is generally coming down strong on one side of a debate or issue. This is a way, as noted in RQ6, to acquire different forms of capital for both the reporter and the organization. The “space of possibles” that

may have opened or re-opened when athletes started becoming activists (again) also allows sports reporters to dive into these socio-political issues. These “hot takes” are one way that can happen.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

This chapter is divided into three parts: (1) a summary of the results from the qualitative interviews; (2) the implications for journalism; and (3) the limitations of the study and directions for future research.

5.1 Summary of Results

As stated in the introduction, the goals of this study were: (1) To identify the shifting cultural, political and journalistic contexts that are shaping how sports journalists cover sports and sporting events in which athletes participate in political and social protests, (2) to help understand how these contexts may be shaping the decisions the sports journalists make in how they cover sports and sporting events in which athletes participate in political and social protests and (3) to explore the nature of the socio-political reporting that is being done by sports journalists .

For hypotheses 1a, which posited that across all three time periods in aggregate, the use of episodic frames will differ significantly from the use of thematic frames, and 1b, which posited that the use of thematic and episodic frames will differ from one time period to another, the results follow prior results (Iyengar & Simon, 1993), showing media coverage of an ongoing event tends to be more episodic than thematic. In this study, coding shows that many of the journalists in the articles coded in Time 1 presented little context and background about why Kaepernick was protesting aside from “police violence and police brutality” and “racial injustice and other social issues,” and the journalists of the stories in Times 2 and 3 provided less context.

These results show that most of the journalists did not view the socio-political issues behind Kaepernick's protests as important—or at least important enough to put in the first 200 words of their stories. Multiple scholars (Hardin, Zhong & Whiteside, 2009; Oates & Pauly, 2007; Zirin, 2013) have noted that the lack of sports reporting on socio-political issues means that when a story occurs that requires some context or background, sports reporters will often avoid providing that context. These results provide some evidence to support those prior findings. Even the stories in Times 2 and 3, which occurred roughly one year and two years after Time 1, lacked the socio-political context of Kaepernick not standing “to show pride in a flag for a country that oppresses black people and people of color” (Wyche, 2016, ¶3). This shows that the sports journalists in the content analysis sample, along with political and business journalists who also covered these stories, mostly downplayed or omitted the socio-political issues that spurred on Kaepernick and the other NFL players to protest.

The accumulation of various forms of capital through the coverage of socio-political issues – cultural and symbolic capital, especially -- may not be as strong a factor as interviewees suggested, in terms of why sports reporters cover socio-political issues. Time and economic constraints may have also played a role since sports reporters have numerous deadlines to turn in copy and the reporters may not have had the time to properly focus on the socio-political issues at play. Economically, there also may have been pressure by the teams and NFL to downplay the socio-political issues behind the protest, and while the content analysis offered no evidence to support that for the Kaepernick stories, some interview respondents noted that economic pressure from powerful institutions had played a role in how issues are covered.

For research question 1a, which asked whether thematic or episodic reporting will be more evident across type of news outlets in the coverage of socio-political issues in sports

journalism, the results are not necessarily surprising given the differences in economic and symbolic capital that the news outlets at each of the three levels—sports publications, large newspapers and small newspapers—accumulate and convert. Bourdieu theorized that the top institutions in the journalistic field accumulate economic capital and tend to convert it to symbolic capital, and vice versa. The articles coded from the magazine-based sports news websites were more thematic than the large newspapers, which in turn were more thematic than the small newspapers.

This partially follows Bourdieu’s logic of forms of capital translating into other forms of capital. The outlets with higher amounts of economic capital -- here, the magazine-based sports news websites -- will use the economic capital, which in this case allows for more time and freedom on the part of reporters to thoroughly report on these issues. But in this case, the use of economic capital could be converted into cultural capital, the capital that comes from “properly” reporting on the socio-political issues related to sports. That cultural capital could be then converted into symbolic capital, such as followers on social media, or awards. Or it may be converted to social capital, because the reporters could have stronger relationships with players and coaches -- and players and coaches may be more likely to open up to that reporter because they may believe that reporter is able to do their “story justice,” as noted by one respondent.

For research question 1b, which asked whether sports-oriented or public-issue reporting will be more evident in the aggregate across all three time periods, the results show that the 150 stories coded were oriented mostly toward public-issue news, such as focusing on the impact of the protests, the response to Trump’s speech, and the reaction to Nike’s ad. There were some talk of the issues from a sports and football standpoint, such as how Kaepernick’s protest would impact his battle for the starting quarterback job, how the players would react with on-field

demonstrations following Trump’s speech, and how Kaepernick’s appearance in the commercial would affect his fight to rejoin the NFL.

For research question 1c, which asked whether the use of public-issue or sports-oriented frames differ from one time period to another and from one type of news outlet to another, there was a surprising finding. The time period with the highest amount of sports-oriented content was Time 2, following Trump’s speech in Alabama. This may have had to do with the fact that the NFL season had already started and the players decided to react to Trump’s statements with their own protest on the field. How these protests affected the games and the on-field NFL product was a hot topic that weekend, partially because of the proximity of the sporting event and proximity of the social agents of sports, which overshadowed the socio-political issues that led Kaepernick to protest, which in turn led to Trump’s criticism of the kneeling players. Time 3 had the least amount of sports-oriented news, which is not overall surprising given the fact that Kaepernick was not part of an NFL roster at this point—the ad came out in fall 2018—and there was minimal on-field impact to the ad. Most of the stories focused on how Nike chose Kaepernick and praise for the ad itself, neither of which influenced the on-field NFL product.

The results that magazine-based sports news websites focused more on the sports-oriented aspect of the issues and stories than did the large and small newspapers is also not surprising. The small newspapers had the least amount of sports-oriented content of the three outlets. While this group was the smallest part of the sample, some of the stories focused on local residents’ reactions to the issues at hand, which is an important task of local and community journalism. This speaks to the habitus of the journalists, as “person-on-the-street” stories are a hallmark of local journalism, employed across the country, and community journalists are generally socialized to this kind of story. Large newspapers were caught in the middle, trying to

focus on the sports content, particularly if there was a professional sports team in that market, while also trying to provide context and background to increase readers' understanding of the issues behind the stories.

For research question 2, which asked about other frames relevant to socio-political reporting in sports journalism, the "citizenship" frame was the predominately employed frame, with reporters framing the issues as one about whether the players had a right to protest during the national anthem and if protestors were "un-American." This could be evidence that this story transcended the boundaries of sports journalism and was being interpreted from a socio-political perspective. Reporters also framed stories about the "backlash" that Kaepernick, Trump and Nike received for their respective actions and statements. These stories mostly featured interviews and statements from players, coaches, politicians and people on the streets. The other major frames, "education" and "business strategy," are common journalistic frames that focus on explaining to the public why something is happening the way it is and walking the readers through a decision that a business made. These frames are common, suggesting the motivation of cultural capital, which reporters accumulate, sometimes unconsciously, by understanding the "rules of the game" and knowing how to do their job in a way that other journalists will expect and appreciate. Once again, time considerations and business interests of the news outlet could also be factors because the reporters could have defaulted to these frames as a way to save time and report on these issues quickly.

For research question 3, which asked how likely is it that the interviewed sports journalists will pursue socio-political reporting in their sports coverage, respondents' answers show that most of the interviewed respondents routinely report or edit stories that touch on socio-political issues related to sports, with some going as far as saying that reporting on socio-political

issues is all they do and others saying they got into journalism to report on social issues and just happen to cover those issues while writing about sports.

According to some older reporters and editors with 20-30 years of journalism experience, stories that suggested a socio-political story related to sports never would have made it to the sports desk or to the sports editor when they first started out in journalism. They started during a time when it was common for sports reporters to “stick to sports” and not venture into other areas. Now, respondents indicated that this has changed. One respondent noted that some reporters may not necessarily want to cover socio-political issues, but that the “national trajectory” of the sports journalism profession bends toward an acceptance of sports stories of a socio-political nature. This could mean the overall habitus of sports journalism as a profession is changing, following this national trajectory. One of the national sports reporters interviewed noted how even though he wanted to be a sports reporter, he still had to take the same classes, like public affairs reporting, as the other journalism majors. His comment touches on how more formalized training for journalists through colleges and universities may have an effect on the newer generations of sports reporters and their willingness or inclination to pursue stories on socio-political issues related to sports. That formalized training, the classes student journalists take and the knowledge they gain, also becomes part of their habitus. The rules of journalism, like AP style and grammar rules, tend to be drilled into students in school and into young journalists in newsrooms, encouraging development of these rules as muscle memory.

For research question 4, which asked why it is likely that sports journalists will pursue socio-political reporting in their sports coverage and in what contexts and conditions this is more or less likely to happen, the respondents’ individual viewpoints show numerous reasons. Prominent among these were two: that respondents emphasized that these issues come up during

their routine duties of covering their beat, and respondents had a desire to be seen as more than sports reporters. Both of those responses speak to the journalistic habitus, which was found to have a major bearing on the factors that influence whether the reporter covers socio-political issues related to sports. Habitus constitutes the values and dispositions gained from our past cultural trajectories, and these values and dispositions stay with a person as they grow, become educated and socialized, and move through different fields (see Benson & Neveu, 2005; Neveu, 2007; Webb, Schirato & Danaher, 2002). An example is the socialization of reporters and editors around the beat system, a system that is a journalistic norm that serves institutional powers and maximizes resources for the news outlet. The beat system routine has persisted through generations of journalists, suggesting that it is considered a given that journalists will follow their given beat in pursuing stories because that is what is expected of them.

Following that beat has become routine, almost to the point where reporters unconsciously stick to their beats because it is taken for granted and has become their habitus. In turn, the habitus of the sports reporters then helps shape the field: As young reporters see the older reporters sticking to their beat and not straying from those topics, they learn what is expected of them and how to conduct themselves within that beat. Again, this system is typically consistent with the goals of institutional power for both source institutions (teams, leagues, universities) and news institutions.

The trajectories of most of the respondents were similar: major in journalism in college, begin working in sports journalism at one or two small publications before moving up to the large publications. Such experience is consistent with the traditional “beat-oriented” habitus of sports journalists. But there were some who took the unconventional path to get where they are, and whose trajectories seem to be leading them to more autonomous positions. One interviewed

sports reporter at a national newspaper in the Northeast said he did not major in journalism, but rather worked in an office job after college and began his journalism career blogging with a friend. His work was eventually seen by a mid-level online journalism organization, where he started working part-time before writing there full time for two years before he was hired by his current employer. He attributed his success to having a specialized knowledge of one subject in the realm of sports business that most other journalists do not have, knowledge that can partially be traced to his business background. Two female journalists who are freelancers, one in the Southwest and the other in Canada, both also had nontraditional trajectories that help shape the way they view journalism. The freelancer in the Southwest was a doctoral student at a university in the Southeast when news of Jameis Winston's rape allegations surfaced. She had written a few articles for *The Atlantic* and decided to switch gears and pursue journalism, writing about gendered and sexual violence in sports. She specifically mentioned that she is very careful about not bringing harm to the people she writes about and that since she was not trained as a journalist, she does not have that "kill instinct" to "go after it and push people down to get the story."

This comment gives some insight as to how she views some reporters and how her specific trajectory may influence the way in which she reports certain subjects and views other reporters who report on the same subject. The other female freelancer, as previously stated in the Results section, is Muslim and of Middle Eastern descent, and she explained how that her particular background and cultural experiences influenced her trajectory and habitus by influencing what she writes about. A black reporter at a large newspaper talked about how he got into journalism to cover social issues—a byproduct of a trajectory shaped by being a black man in America.

Reporters view the coverage of these socio-political issues as admirable and enjoy reading good journalism. So when a sports reporter reports on a socio-political issue in a way that is perceived as professionally appropriate, and other reporters read it, state their respect for the reporter for understanding the “rules of the game,” and talk about how much they enjoyed the piece, the reporter gains some cultural capital. The desire to be more than a sports reporter and the ability to report and write about socio-political issues can therefore lead to symbolic capital for the reporter, and perhaps enhance their cultural capital in this area (knowing how to perform what is required in this journalistic field). According to Benson (2006), Bourdieu theorized that cultural capital could be transformed into economic capital, and a few reporters and editors interviewed reinforced that by saying some sports reporters could turn an ability to properly report on socio-political issues into new, better jobs. And in turn, that cultural capital could lead athletes and coaches to trust the reporter, feed that reporter information, and open up to that reporter about their personal opinions on socio-political public issues. While this path makes sense theoretically, and is suggested in interviews, it’s not clear that this desire to build cultural capital may translate into symbolic capital, such as awards, or translate to economic capital, because none of the reporters and editors interviewed said they dive into these issues to win awards or make money. To some, covering socio-political issues related to sports and bringing those issues to life is their *raison d’etre*, which suggests some degree of autonomy from the political-economic field of power.

The athlete or coach opening up about issues off the field or court, into the social and political arenas, could lead to the now-familiar refrain of “stick to sports” from trolls on social media to the athlete or coach. That could also lead to the reporter receiving death threats and threats of bodily harm from people who don’t appreciate the opinions put forth in the article by

the athlete, coach or reporter. That hate points to a context within the field where the reporter receives no cultural capital for their socio-political reporting.

Two main constraints that also play a role in whether reporters and editors delve into socio-political issues are time and economics. Shrinking newsrooms around the country and the general adherence to the beat system mean reporters no longer have the time to dive into lengthy stories that require time and resources. As several reporters noted, those stories take time and the economic capital that some organizations just do not have. Some organizations have the necessary economic capital, as noted by one national sports reporter at a large national newspaper in the Northeast who said his organization had 20-25 reporters covering President Donald Trump's comments in Huntsville, Alabama, and their aftermath, and by another national sports reporter at a competing large newspaper who talked about his organization's "robust political desk" that can assist when some sports stories veer in a political direction. But those organizations are currently the outliers. Also, the beat structure encourages the outcome that sometimes, reporters in other parts of the newsroom handle stories with a socio-political bent when, for example, the main subject is the arrest of a politician or an athlete. Some sports reporters cover these issues, but this is more likely to happen if they have the skillset to understand a police arrest report and have the appropriate source connections.

Economic pressure also comes directly from the economic field in the field of power. Some respondents provided evidence that some powerful institutions in the field—teams, leagues, conferences and advertisers—exerted pressure on their organizations to "stick to sports" or stay away from stories that divide us, as one editor at a national sports publication said. Those powerful forces can exert pressure on the news organizations, which have low autonomy in the face of this power. These news organizations may stay afloat strictly by advertising dollars.

English (2016) posited that sports departments sit closer to the market pole of the field than the pure journalism pole, and therefore are more vulnerable to pressure from the economic field. The respondents' answers provided some support for this idea. While some of the editors interviewed in this study worked at organizations without paywalls, almost all news organizations depend strongly on revenue from commercial advertising.

Of the respondents, only two sports editors and one sports journalist mentioned the possible influence that advertisers have on content and coverage. The sports reporter, a national sports columnist at a large newspaper, said if any advertisers had issues with her writing, that information never got to her; instead, the editors dealt with those issues. One sports editor at a large newspaper echoed a sentiment similar to the sports columnist, saying if advertisers had issues with coverage of the NFL player's kneeling during the national anthem, those complaints never made it to her desk. There has historically been a wall between the news and advertising departments, known in newsrooms as the separation of church and state, and these few answers show that wall may still be up in some news organizations; the economic pressure that may be placed on news organizations for their coverage of socio-political issues related to sports, as previously noted by a sports editor at a national sports publication, seems to have minimal direct influence on the content itself. Some respondents also mentioned the addition of online traffic metrics, which show editors which stories people are reading, as a factor that impacts content. One sports editor at a small newspaper said editors at his news organization make a lot of decisions based on the metrics. Those metrics are shown to advertisers when discussing advertising contracts.

News organizations also have low autonomy in the sense that government agencies, organizations and universities—or in this case, collegiate athletic departments, professional

teams, conferences and leagues—compete to put forth their “legitimate vision of the social world” (see Benson & Neveu, 2005, p. 6) to the news organizations. The sports journalists are left to try to decipher which visions to represent in their content. Eschewing one ‘elite’ version of the story for another version, or forgoing all ‘elite’ versions completely, especially in investigative “deep dives” or articles that are critical of the team, conference or league, could lead to the loss of access that some journalists fear and some respondents mentioned as something they have to weigh when making decisions about coverage.

The respondents also discussed how reporters in different parts of the newsroom decide who covers issues based on the main topic of that article or based on who may have the necessary contacts to do the story. In this study, the boundaries, or “stakes of struggle” between the sports journalism and political journalism subfields were analyzed through how news organizations decide what constitutes a sports story with political tones and a political story that touches on sports. Based on the interview responses, it can be inferred that the social agents who have the sources, capital and autonomy to be able to get the story done the easiest and quickest define the boundaries at the stake of struggles. The political reporter with legislative contacts for a story about legislation erasing tax breaks for teams whose players protest during the national anthem and has the institutional knowledge of how the lawmaking process works could tell that story more efficiently, and with fewer later repercussions, than the sports reporter. Conversely, the sports reporter who has phone numbers for a few key players can report on a story about players endorsing a certain political candidate faster and better than the political reporter because the sports reporter knows those players, knows what they are like in the locker room, and what causes they support. So, in the case of stories on socio-political issues related to sports, the boundaries are everchanging and constantly moving based on the main focus of the story.

These examples also highlight the need for reporters to obtain social capital, a fourth form of capital that was not purposefully examined in this study, but a concept that arose during the interviews. The social capital a reporter has accrued – i.e., connections and a high level of trust with sources -- can be a determining factor on if that reporter handles a story or it is assigned to another reporter who has the sources and connections—the social capital—to report on and write the story. For research question 5, which asked about the nature of socio-political reporting by sports journalists, the respondents provided information about four different story types that sports reporters report on and write when covering socio-political issues related to sports: “humanity stories,” investigative “deep dives,” off-the-field stories, and “hot takes.” These different story types can cover both different and similar events or issues, like an arrest being written as either an off-the-field story that covers just the arrest, an investigative “deep dive” using police and court records to paint a larger picture, or a “hot take” lambasting the athlete or coach about being arrested often before all the details come in. Being experienced in these types of stories could build a reporter’s cultural capital cache, but the ability to write these types of stories could be developed through the reporter’s trajectory, perhaps changing habitus.

These different story types identified in RQ5 are also, in field theory terms, position-takings. The reporter is taking a certain position on the issue by reporting on it and writing a particular kind of story, sometimes in opposition to traditional ways of producing sports journalism that is supported by capital and sanctioned by “the powers that be.” In this study, there were a few different instances of position-takings by various agents. Athletes committing themselves to activism and activist causes could lead to journalists, in turn, devoting time to understanding why the athletes are becoming involved in activism, which one respondent noted as one possible reason for sports journalists covering socio-political issues related to sports.

Results suggest the reporter's demographic background could also be a factor in why a reporter may engage in socio-political reporting on issues related to sports.

One editor at a national sports publication said he steered clear of journalists wanting to profile a coach or team, and instead favored stories about humanity, and more specifically about women in sports, and sport's place within society. This editor is taking a position within the journalism field about what he wants to feature at his publication. That decision is different from other organizations, which may not be as open to socio-political issue stories and may prefer the profile of a coach or team that is not going to stir anger or vitriol from people online, or from ownership or powerful sources. This may also be a case of a new, young news outlet trying to find its place in the field dominated by traditional powers, as the editor interviewed works at a publication that is much younger than some of the traditional powers in sports journalism. The social agents also took positions by covering certain topics, meaning they chose certain issues to highlight and stories to tell over other issues and stories. They took a position that one may be more important, and thus more worthy of coverage, than others. They took a position that a story may be better told using an investigative "deep dive" instead of a spot news, regular "off-the-field" story.

For research question 6, which asked what factors, contexts and conditions affect the varying nature of socio-political reporting by sports journalists, the respondents identified multiple factors, contexts, and conditions that influence which story type they employ based on the story types identified in RQ5. First, the conditions for reporting on "humanity" stories include having the social capital to build relationships with sources and cultivate those relationships.

Economics plays an important role in determining what type of story the reporter will employ. The constraints of time and economics are a large factor in why some journalists eschew investigative “deep dives.” Lastly boundaries are another factor, because as noted in RQ4, sports reporters may not cover off-the-field issues related to sports if the main focus is a political or business figure, or the arrest of a player, coach or team owner.

An overarching theme based on the respondents’ answers is that sports journalism as a field may be moving on from a habitus of covering simply the players and teams to one in which they focus more on issues and themes that arise on their beat, moving from player-centric to issue-focused coverage. These issues, mainly socio-political in nature, are similar to the issues covered by other reporters in other beats, such as political reporters diving into the issue of public housing before a pivotal vote. This could signal a move from covering strictly what happens on the field, court or arena into the public sphere where larger issues are discussed—from the “record book” to the “history book,” as one respondent noted. Institutions in the field of power would generally prefer sports journalists to “stick to sports” because of the general apolitical nature of sports, but the “space of possibles” opened up by journalists moving into this space could lead to reporters covering off-the-field stories or investigative “deep dives”—assuming they have the cultural and social capital to report on and write those stories. Sports reporters have developed a habitus for creating heroes and villains in sports, as one national sports reporter noted, but that muscle memory needs to be overwritten as they report on socio-political issues because there are often not clear-cut heroes and villains, as that reporter added.

5.2 Implications for Journalism

The journalistic implications for this study lie in the understanding gained about what leads sports journalists to cover socio-political issues, and break with decades of tradition among

sports journalists for eschewing or passing off these stories to other parts of the newsrooms.

Several of the sports journalists interviewed said they want sports journalists to simply be seen as journalists. Some pointed to being able to report on and write stories that touch on socio-political issues as one of the ways they shrug off the decades of jokes about the sports department being the “toy department” of the newsroom, or about the perceived lack of journalistic ethics. Some respondents said they believe that covering stories of socio-political issues related to sports can be one way for them to be seen as more than a sports reporter.

And a few even added that being able to properly write and report on socio-political issues can be one way for sports reporters to advance their careers. It helps them build their brand or reputation, as one respondent noted, and puts their work out there to people who don't normally read the sports section of the newspaper or magazine-based sports news websites. Some respondents said they use social media only to promote their work. This social media promotion can help the reporters accumulate followers, and accumulate cultural capital, as they can build a reputation for knowing how to properly report on and write about socio-political issues related to sports. One respondent said he has heard of reporters getting hired at certain news organizations simply because of the number of Twitter followers they have. This means that reporters can turn that social and cultural capital into economic capital through getting a raise or finding a higher-paying job

Also, a reporter putting their work before news readers can be a double-edged sword, as several noted, because of the hate the journalists receive from some corners of society when they stray from the sports pages. Putting themselves out there, outside the confines of the sports pages or sports publications, can also open them up to a new wave of vitriol from people who don't believe sports and politics, or sports and society, or sports and anything should mix.

This study sheds some light on the practical reasons why journalists cover socio-political issues, such as the fact that these issues happen on their beat. As a national sports reporter said, covering the NFL means you have to cover the players' protests because they are a part of the league. Unspoken in this line of thinking is the fact that much of the news media is homogenous, as Bourdieu stated (Webb, Schirato & Danaher, 2002). When one news organization breaks a big story, others rush to cover the same story and publish it on their website and post to their social media accounts. This means that beat reporters sometimes rush to confirm a story with socio-political implications that was broken by another outlet. Furthermore, it also means that because a reporter covers a certain beat, and because reporters are socialized to cover everything that happens on their beats, they may rush to cover a socio-political story that they otherwise would not have written. One editor at a national sports publication said the old system of working a beat for a few years before moving onwards and upwards to better beats and larger publications is not the only way sports reporters can advance their careers now. He said writing fearlessly and putting your voice out there through social media and pitching ideas to sports publications is one way to get a foot in the door.

But this phenomenon could also signal a possible change in how sports reporters handle their beat. Whereas previously, sports reporters covered certain teams and players, they could be moving closer in practice to how reporters in other parts of a newspaper cover their beat—focusing on the issues that arise through daily coverage, not just the people. For example, a police reporter may perform an investigative “deep dive” into domestic violence after noticing an uptick in domestic violence arrests, or a political reporter may investigate the use of third-party money for politicians to attend conferences after hearing of this practice becoming more widespread. Those hard news reporters are following the issues on their beat, following spot

news (“off the field”) stories, and noticing trends that could lead to investigative “deep dives.”. That could now be happening within the sports reporting realm as well, as reporters follow the athletes and coaches off-field, into the socio-political realm. Webb, Schirato, and Danaher (2002) said habitus is continually reformed through interactions in the field, becoming new common practices so this trend could grow: Sports journalists who start working their beat by focusing on issues, rather than the traditional way of focusing on teams and players, could be reforming the habitus of the field.

Another practical implication is that sports reporters may lack the requisite skills to cover certain issues off the field or court, such as arrests, court cases and business stories. There are toolkits online that could help remedy those issues, such as the ones available on the website for the Poynter Institute for Media Studies. As one respondent said, because of the Internet, there should be no excuse these days for sports reporters not to have the skills or the sources to cover socio-political issues. He said when he first came up through the ranks 20-30 years ago, it was harder to find experts for a story, but now he said he gets emails from companies offering to connect him or his reporters with experts in every field he can think of. However, reporters need to understand the tradeoff when they utilize these experts. Quoting these experts is free advertising for that person and their business, so while these experts are available and can help a reporter understand certain topics – topics that may seem like reading a foreign language -- reporters need to be judicious in employing these people on the record.

A third practical implication of these findings is the need for news organizations to hire more men and women of color for sports reporting jobs. As noted by some of the respondents, the black men and women, who have become prevalent in the professional sports leagues in the United States, may be more likely to open up on sensitive issues to reporters who looks like them

as opposed to another white man who seems to have no idea of the issues these black men and women deal with on a daily basis. One editor noted how diverse newsrooms “owned” the Kaepernick story and that Kaepernick will probably grant his first major interview to a man or woman who looks like him, not someone like Scott Pelley of 60 Minutes. Those reporters of color have the cultural capital in these situations because they understand how the world works for men and women like them.

5.3 Limitations

This study has several limitations that should be considered when considering the implications of these findings. The first limitation is that while the researcher tried to gather a diverse sample of sports reporters and editors across races and ethnicities, the author was unable to reach any black female sports editors or journalists. These women have a specific and unique viewpoint about sports and their place in society, and this study would have been enriched by their contributions. Several attempts were made to contact prominent black female sports journalists, but nothing ever materialized.

A second limitation is the small size of the sample used for the content analysis. A larger sample for the content analysis would have provided a substantial and robust set of data, from which this author could have possibly drawn more substantial conclusions from which to possibly generalize to the larger sports journalism field. The content analysis was set up to provide the author with a field from which to find respondents, and although that did not happen to the extent to which the author originally planned, the results from the content analysis to help paint a picture, albeit a small one, of how socio-political issues in sports journalism are covered by sports journalists.

A third limitation is the lack of data across time from the content analysis means that this study cannot make claims about changing practices across time. The stories analyzed during the three time periods are separate, individualized entities from each other, even though there is one social agent involved in all three (Colin Kaepernick). There is no way to say for sure how, or if, the practices of the journalists changed from one time period to the next.

Another limitation is the fact that coding for the content analysis was limited to the first 200 words for articles from the small and large newspapers, as well as the magazine-based sports news websites. Magazine-based sports news websites sometimes feature longform journalism from their respective magazines, and cutting off coding at the first 200 words for those articles means that context and background that may be much lower in the article would not be mentioned in the first 200 words, possibly skewing the results.

And last is that it is impossible to generalize the findings from the interviews. Of course, these findings are not meant to represent all of sports journalism, but to unearth deeper meanings about some reporters and editors feel about covering socio-political issues related to sports, why and how they cover those issues and the outcome and aftermath of covering that type of story.

5.4 Directions for Future Research

Future research can build upon these findings in a plethora of ways. First, a large-scale survey of sports editors and reporters in different parts of the country with questions built around their in-depth interview responses detailed to questions about why and how they cover socio-political issues related to sports would provide a generalizable data set that could be used to make assumptions about the sports journalism field as a whole. Second, one reporter talked about a news internship that helped him cover socio-political issues and another reporter said sports journalists should be able to handle anything because everyone takes the same classes. An

analysis of curricula at journalism schools, particularly ones that offer sports media degrees to understand what classes aspiring sports journalists at these schools have to take and how they are prepared to cover socio-political issues related to sports in this new age of sports reporting.

Third, several respondents talked about the “hate” they receive, especially from online trolls and people who tell them to “stick to sports.” Interviews or surveys with people who want journalists to stick to sports would help researchers understand the point of view of why they feel sports reporters should stick to reporting sports. And fourth, Champagne (2005) noted how the ethics of the journalism field and the choices that journalists make with ethics in mind may not necessarily be the best choices for news organizations—from a financial standpoint—that are competing for advertising dollars and eyeballs. And sports journalists have faced criticism for a lack of ethics (Oates & Pauly, 2007) -- so how do ethics fit into the decisions on which socio-political issues to cover and which to avoid?

5.5 Conclusion

This study examined how and why sports reporters cover socio-political issues related to sports using Bourdieu’s field theory as the prism through which to view the results. This research is a preliminary study in why and how sports journalists cover socio-political issues related to sports. It fits within an area of the mass communication field that is relatively new and, using the framework from the sociology of media production, joins a growing research field. . And as more athletes begin voicing their opinions on socio-political issues and more sports journalists begin following those athletes into that socio-political arena, and not just the sports arena, then the interview responses can be used to better understand how and why the journalists made the decision to cross the boundary.

In trying to understand how and why sports journalists cover socio-political issues, the author uncovered a number of interesting findings. First, most of the reporters and editors interviewed said they enjoyed covering socio-political issues related to sports, with a few saying covering those issues is why they got into journalism. Second, Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital, the need to acquire it and the benefits of having that capital, plays a role in the degree to which sports reporters cover socio-political issues related to sports. Reporters want to be seen, especially among their peers and perhaps even unconsciously, as someone worth reading and to whom they should pay attention. And as one respondent pointed out, more and more sports reporters seem to be covering socio-political issues related to sports, even if they don't necessarily want to, because they want to be seen as someone on par with their peers who do cover socio-political issues.

Third, time and economics, or more specifically the lack of time and resources, play large roles in whether reporters cover socio-political issues related to sports, and what type of stories they write. As stated previously, shrinking newsrooms mean fewer reporters to cover the everyday news to feed the daily beast and that leaves less time for reporters to work on longform journalism and projects, many of which touch on socio-political issues. That is the harsh economic reality for news organizations today and one area in which that is noticeable is when it comes to longform pieces and project journalism. Investigative "deep dives" require more time and resources than a standard off-the-field story. As a few respondents pointed out, sports reporters have historically taken pride in the volume of work they produce, but now some are focusing on the larger stories that make an impact—and possibly lead to better jobs.

Fourth, after a roughly 30-40-year stretch when the apolitical athlete reigned supreme and sports reporters followed their lead in staying away from socio-political stories, athletes today

are taking the lead in moving back to becoming activist-athletes and sports journalists are following them into that territory. Reporters cover these stories because those stories are a part of their beat, and in the process, they perceive that they may become “more than a sports reporter.” If these stories lead them down the path to socio-political reporting and the report receives pushback for going down that rabbit hole, then they can stand upon the routine and traditional journalistic practices of covering the events and issues that occur on their beat as their shield against that pushback. And lastly and maybe most importantly, the “rules of the game” appear to be changing for sports reporters in the field. After decades of sticking strictly to sports, to the athletes who play those games and the coaches who lead them, sports journalism as a profession may be moving toward an issue-based approach to covering their beats. This move could signal a shift in how sports journalists view their job and profession after more than a century of focusing on the athlete and game.

REFERENCES

- Baker, S. E., & Edwards, R. (2012). How many qualitative interviews is enough?: Expert voices and early career reflections on sampling and cases in qualitative research.
- Benson, R. (2006). News media as a “journalistic field”: What Bourdieu adds to new institutionalism, and vice versa. *Political Communication*, 23(2), 187-202.
- Benson, R. (2013). *Shaping Immigration News*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Benson, R., & Neveu, E. (Eds.). (2005). *Bourdieu and the Journalistic Field*. Polity.
- Bembry, J. (2018, March 7). Former NBA player Etan Thomas on his new book, athlete activism and college players getting paid. *The Undefeated*. Retrieved from: <https://theundefeated.com/features/former-nba-player-etan-thomas-on-his-new-bookathlete-activism-and-college-players-getting-paid/>
- Billings, A. C., Moscovitz, L. M., Rae, C., & Brown-Devlin, N. (2015). The art of coming out: Traditional and social media frames surrounding the NBA’s Jason Collins. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 92(1), 142-160.
- Bourdieu, P. (1983). The field of cultural production, or: The economic world reversed. *Poetics*, 12(4-5), 311-356.
- Bourdieu, P. (1986). The forms of capital. In J. Richardson (Ed.) *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, New York: Greenwood, 241-258.
- Bourdieu, P. (1987). What makes a social class? On the theoretical and practical existence of groups. *Berkeley Journal of Sociology*, 32, 1-17.
- Bourdieu, P. (1988). Program for a sociology of sport. *Sociology of Sport journal*, 5(2), 153-161.
- Bourdieu, P. (1993). *The field of cultural production: Essays on art and literature*. New York, N.Y.: Columbia University Press.
- Bourdieu, P. (2005). The political field, the social science field, and the journalistic field. In Eds. R. Benson and E. Neveu., *Bourdieu and the Journalistic Field*, 29-47.
- Bourdieu, P., & Nice, R. (1977). *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Vol. 16). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Bourke, B. (2014). Positionality: Reflecting on the research process. *The Qualitative Report*, 19(33), 1-9.
- Boyle, M. P., McCluskey, M. R., Devanathan, N., Stein, S. E., & McLeod, D. (2004). The influence of level of deviance and protest type on coverage of social protest in Wisconsin from 1960 to 1999. *Mass Communication & Society*, 7(1), 43-60.
- Boyle, R. (2006). *Sports journalism: Context and issues*. London: Sage Press.
- Boyle, R., Rowe, D., & Whannel, G. (2009). ‘Delight in trivial controversy’? Questions for Sports Journalism. *The Routledge Companion to News and Journalism*, 245-255.
- Butterworth, M. L. (2014). The athlete as citizen: Judgement and rhetorical invention in sport. *Sport in Society*, 17(7), 867-883.
- Butterworth, M. L. (2014). Public memorializing in the stadium: Mediated sport, the 10th anniversary of 9/11, and the illusion of democracy. *Communication & Sport*, 2(3), 203-224.
- Bryant, H. (2018). *The Heritage: Black athletes, a divided America, and the politics of patriotism*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Carroll, B. (2008). The Black press and the integration of professional baseball: A content analysis of shifts in coverage, 1945–1948. *Journal of Sports Media*, 3(2), 61-87.
- Champagne, P. (2005). The “double dependency”: The journalistic field between politics and markets. *Bourdieu and the Journalistic Field*, 48-63.
- Conboy, M. (2014). Celebrity journalism—An oxymoron? Forms and functions of a genre. *Journalism*, 15(2), 171-185.
- Cooky, C. (2017). “We Cannot Stand Idly By”: A Necessary Call for a Public Sociology of Sport. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 34(1), 1-11.
- Coombs, D. S., & Cassilo, D. (2017). Athletes and/or activists: LeBron James and Black lives matter. *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*, 41(5), 425-444.
- Creswell, J. D. (2009). *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches* (3rd Ed.). Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications.
- Cunningham, G. B., & Regan Jr, M. R. (2012). Political activism, racial identity and the commercial endorsement of athletes. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, 47(6), 657-669.
- English, P. A. (2014). The same old stories: exclusive news and uniformity of content in sports coverage. *International Journal of Sport Communication*, 7(4), 477-494.

- English, P. (2016). Mapping the sports journalism field: Bourdieu and broadsheet newsrooms. *Journalism*, 17(8), 1001-1017.
- Forde, S., & Wilson, B. (2018). Radical Sports Journalism?: Reflections on ‘Alternative’ Approaches to Covering Sport-Related Social Issues. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 35(1), 66-76.
- Frederick, E., Sanderson, J., & Schlereth, N. (2017). Kick these kids off the team and take away their scholarships: Facebook and perceptions of athlete activism at the University of Missouri. *Journal of Issues in Intercollegiate Athletics*, 10, 17-34.
- Gift, T., & Miner, A. (2017). “DROPPING THE BALL”: The Understudied Nexus of Sports and Politics. *World Affairs*, 180(1), 127-161.
- Goffman, E. (1974). *Frame analysis: An essay on the organization of experience*. Harvard University Press.
- Gorn, E. J., & Goldstein, W. J. (2004). *A Brief History of American Sports*. Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press.
- Gross, K. (2008). Framing persuasive appeals: Episodic and thematic framing, emotional response, and policy opinion. *Political Psychology*, 29(2), 169-192.
- Hambrick, M. E., & Mahoney, T. Q. (2011). 'It's incredible—trust me': exploring the role of celebrity athletes as marketers in online social networks. *International Journal of Sport Management and Marketing*, 10(3-4), 161-179.
- Hanusch, F., & Mellado, C. (2014). Journalism students’ professional views in eight countries: the role of motivations, education, and gender. *International Journal of Communication*, 8, 1156-1173.
- Hardin, M. (2005). Survey finds boosterism, freebies remain problem for newspaper sports departments. *Newspaper Research Journal*, 26(1), 66-73.
- Hardin, M., & Ash, E. (2011). Journalists provide social context missing from sports blogs. *Newspaper Research Journal*, 32(2), 20-35.
- Hardin, M., Zhong, B., & Whiteside, E. (2009). Sports coverage: “Toy department” or public-service journalism? The relationship between reporters’ ethics and attitudes toward the profession. *International Journal of Sport Communication*, 2(3), 319-339.
- Hartman, D. (2007). Rush Limbaugh, Donovan McNabb, and ‘a little social concern’: Reflections on the problems of whiteness in contemporary American sports. *Journal of Sport & Social Issues*, 31(1), 45–60
- Hesmondhalgh, D. (2006). Bourdieu, the media and cultural production. *Media, culture & society*, 28(2), 211-231.

- Iyengar, S. (1990). Framing responsibility for political issues: The case of poverty. *Political Behavior*, 12(1), 19-40.
- Iyengar, S. (1996). Framing responsibility for political issues. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 546(1), 59-70.
- Iyengar, S., & Simon, A. (1993). News coverage of the Gulf crisis and public opinion: A study of agenda-setting, priming, and framing. *Communication Research*, 20(3), 365-383.
- Kahneman, D., & Tversky, A. (2013). Choices, values, and frames. *American psychologist*, 39(4), 341-350.
- Kang, J. C. (2017, Feb. 14). Should Athletes Stick to Sports. New York Times. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/02/14/magazine/should-athletes-stick-to-sports.html>.
- Kaufman, P. (2008). Boos, bans, and other backlash: The consequences of being an activist athlete. *Humanity & Society*, 32(3), 215-237.
- Kaufman, P., & Wolff, E. A. (2010). Playing and protesting: Sport as a vehicle for social change. *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*, 34(2), 154-175.
- Khan, A. (2012). Curt Flood in the media: Baseball, race, and the demise of the activist-athlete. Jackson, Miss.: University Press of Mississippi.
- King, C. R. (2008). Toward a radical sport journalism: An interview with Dave Zirin. *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*, 32(4), 333-344.
- Lamb, C. (1997). 'I Never Want to Take Another Trip Like This One': Jackie Robinson's Journey to Integrate Baseball. *Journal of Sport History*, 24(2), 177-191.
- Lee, S., Kim, S., & Love, A. (2014). Coverage of the Gay Games from 1980–2012 in US newspapers: An analysis of newspaper article framing. *Journal of Sport Management*, 28(2), 176-188.
- Li, X., & Liu, X. (2010). Framing and coverage of same-sex marriage in US newspapers. *The Howard Journal of Communications*, 21(1), 72-91.
- Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. SAGE Publications.
- Lowes, M. D. (1999). *Inside the sports pages: Work routines, professional ideologies, and the manufacture of sports news*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Lowrey, W., & Kim, E. (2016). Hyperlocal news coverage: A population ecology perspective. *Mass Communication and Society*, 19(6), 694-714.

- Mastin, T., Choi, J., Barboza, G. E., & Post, L. (2007). Newspapers' framing of elder abuse: It's not a family affair. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 84(4), 777-794.
- McCluskey, M., Stein, S. E., Boyle, M. P., & McLeod, D. M. (2009). Community structure and social protest: Influences on newspaper coverage. *Mass Communication and Society*, 12(3), 353-371.
- McCollough, J. B. (2018, Oct. 9). Sports Journalists Battle for Relevancy. *Nieman Reports*. Retrieved from: <https://niemanreports.org/articles/sports-journalists-battle-for-relevancy/>
- McLeod, D. M., & Hertog, J. K. (1992). The manufacture of 'public opinion' by reporters: informal cues for public perceptions of protest groups. *Discourse & Society*, 3(3), 259-275.
- McLeod, D. M. (2007). News coverage and social protest: How the media's protect paradigm exacerbates social conflict. *Journal of Dispute Resolution*, 2007(1), 185-197.
- Neveu, E. (2007). Pierre Bourdieu: Sociologist of media, or sociologist for media scholars?. *Journalism Studies*, 8(2), 335-347.
- Nisbet, M. C. (2010). Knowledge Into Action: Framing Debates Over Climate Change and Poverty. In P. D'Angelo & P. Kuypers (Eds.), *Doing News Framing Analysis: Empirical and Theoretical Perspectives* (pp. 43-83), New York: Routledge.
- Oates, T. P., & Pauly, J. (2007). Sports journalism as moral and ethical discourse. *Journal of Mass Media Ethics*, 22(4), 332-347.
- Portes, A. (1998). Social capital: Its origins and applications in modern sociology. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 24(1), 1-24.
- Purcell, K., Buchanan, J., & Friedrich, L. (2013, July 16). The impact of digital tools on student writing and how writing is taught in schools. *pewinternet.org*. Retrieved from <http://www.pewinternet.org/2013/07/16/the-impact-of-digital-tools-on-student-writing-and-how-writing-is-taught-in-schools/>
- Ramon-Vegas, X., & Rojas-Torrijos, J-L. (2018). Accountable sports journalism: Building up a platform and a new specialised code in the field. *Ethical Space: The International Journal of Communication Ethics*, 15(½), 15-28.
- Reed, S. (2018). "I'm Not a Fan. I'm a Journalist": Measuring American Sports Journalists' Sports Enthusiasm. *Journal of Sports Media*, 13(1), 27-47.
- Reese, S. D., Gandy Jr, O. H., & Grant, A. E. (Eds.). (2001). *Framing public life: Perspectives on media and our understanding of the social world*. New York: Routledge.

- Rhoden, W. C. (2006). *\$40 Million Slaves: The Rise, Fall, and Redemption of the Black Athlete*. New York, N.Y.: Three Rivers Press.
- Rowe, D. (2007). Sports journalism: Still the 'toy department' of the news media?. *Journalism*, 8(4), 385-405.
- Ryfe, D. M. (2016). *Journalism and the Public*. Cambridge, U.K.: Polity Press.
- Sanderson, J., Frederick, E., & Stocz, M. (2016). When athlete activism clashes with group values: Social identity threat management via social media. *Mass Communication and Society*, 19(3), 301-322.
- Schmidt, H. C. (2018). Sport Reporting in an Era of Activism: Examining the Intersection of Sport Media and Social Activism. *International Journal of Sport Communication*, 11(1), 2-17.
- Schoch, L., & Ohl, F. (2011). Women sports journalists in Switzerland: Between assignment and negotiation of roles. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 28(2), 189-208.
- Siisiainen, M. (2003). Two concepts of social capital: Bourdieu vs. Putnam. *International Journal of Contemporary Sociology*, 40(2), 183-204.
- Strenk, A. (1979). What price victory? The world of international sports and politics. *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 445(1), 128-140.
- Valkenburg, P. M., Semetko, H. A., & De Vreese, C. H. (1999). The effects of news frames on readers' thoughts and recall. *Communication Research*, 26(5), 550-569.
- Von Blum, P. (2008). Paul Robeson: The quintessential public intellectual. *The Journal of Pan African Studies*, 2(7), 70-81.
- Wacquant, L. J. (1989). Towards a reflexive sociology: A workshop with Pierre Bourdieu. *Sociological Theory*, 7(1), 26-63.
- Wacquant, L. (1998). Pierre Bourdieu. In R. Stone (Eds.), *Key Sociological Thinkers* (pp. 215-229). London: Palgrave Macmillian
- Wastler, A. (2013, Aug. 10). Newspaper bane: Nobody reads the stories. *CNBC*. Retrieved from <https://www.cnbc.com/id/100952247>
- Weaver, B. L. (1979). The Black Press and the Assault on Professional Baseball's "Color Line," October, 1945-April, 1947. *Phylon (1960-)*, 40(4), 303-317.
- Webb, J., Schirato, T., & Danaher, G. (2002). *Understanding Bourdieu*. Australia: Allen & Unwin.

- Weedon, G., & Wilson, B. (2017). Textbook journalism? Objectivity, education and the professionalization of sports reporting. *Journalism*. doi: 10.1177/1464884917716503.
- Weedon, G., Wilson, B., Yoon, L., & Lawson, S. (2016). Where's all the 'good' sports journalism? Sports media research, the sociology of sport, and the question of quality sports reporting. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, 53(6), 639-667.
- Weiss, R. S. (1995). *Learning from strangers: The art and method of qualitative interview studies*. New York, N.Y.: Simon and Schuster.
- Whiteside, E. (2016). Politics in the Toy Box: Sports Reporters, Native American Mascots, and the Roadblocks Preventing Change. *International Journal of Sport Communication*, 9(1), 63-78.
- Willig, I. (2013). Newsroom ethnography in a field perspective. *Journalism*, 14(3), 372-387.
- Wilson, B., Van Luijk, N., & Boit, M. K. (2015). When celebrity athletes are 'social movement entrepreneurs': A study of the role of elite runners in run-for-peace events in post-conflict Kenya in 2008. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, 50(8), 929-957.
- Wyche, S. (2016, August 27). Colin Kaepernick explains why he sat during national anthem. NFL.com. Retrieved from: <http://www.nfl.com/news/story/0ap3000000691077/article/colin-kaepernick-explains-why-he-sat-during-national-anthem>
- Yuscavage, C. (2018, February 28). People Have Been Telling NBA Activists Like LeBron James to 'Shut Up and Dribble' for Years Now. *Complex*. Retrieved from: <http://www.complex.com/sports/2018/02/why-LeBron-is-the-greatest-nba-activist-of-all-time>
- Zirin, D. (2005). *What's my name, fool?: Sports and resistance in the United States*. Haymarket Books.
- Zirin, D. (2013). *Game over: How politics has turned the sports world upside down*. New York, N.Y.: The New Press.

APPENDIX A

Coding Sheet

1. Story #: _____
2. Date published: _____
3. Frame used:(entirely episodic) 0 1 2 3 4 5 (entirely episodic)
4. Frame used:(entirely news) 0 1 2 3 4 5 (entirely sports)
5. Open coding frame(s):

APPENDIX B

Code Book

For item #1 on the coding sheet, the story number, each story will be given a number that will identify it for coding purposes. The headlines are not considered for coding purposes, so they will not be written down.

For item #2 on the coding sheet -- the date -- simply write the date the story ran. If it has been updated and that update falls on a different date than the first published version, go with the original date.

For item #3 on the coding sheet, whether the story is framed episodically or thematically, read the entire story at least twice and make note of the issue at hand, the episodic portion of the story, and the context or background as to why the issue at hand is prominent, which is the thematic part of the story. Once the story has been read multiple times, determine how much of the story information is based on current news and how much is context or background info designed to allow the reader to understand the current news and put it into context. The current news is the episodic portion of the article; it is what is happening now. The context and background used by the reporter is the thematic framing of the article. Finally, mark on the scale how episodic or thematic the entire story is overall, with 1 = entirely episodic, 2 = mostly episodic with some thematic elements, 3 = equal parts episodic and thematic, 4 = mostly thematic with some episodic elements, and 5 = entirely thematic.

For item #4 in the coding sheet, identify what parts of the story are sports related and what is straight, hard news. Begin by reading the story at least twice. The sports part will refer to

player and their quotes, league news and standings, how the leagues and conferences are reacting to what is going on and how the news or statements in question will affect the games. The news part will encompass the socio-political issues or “issues of public interest” outside of the sports arena, statements by politicians and officials, and the impact of these events and statements outside the sports realm. Finally, mark on the scale how much, overall, the story is a news story or sports story, with 1 = entirely news, 2 = mostly news with some sports elements, 3 = equal parts news and sports, 4 = mostly sports with some news elements, and 5 = entirely sports.

For item #5 in the coding sheet, the open coding frame, the coders will read the story multiple times to identify the overarching themes emphasized in the story.

APPENDIX C

Interview questions

Sports reporters and editors:

First, a few questions about your sports reporting generally.

- Can you describe your career path to this point?
- Thinking back on your journalism experience and education, what would you say have been the top criteria for excellence in sports journalism practice? Can you give me an example of one of your own stories that possesses those qualities (if not, then ask them to provide an example written by someone else).
- On the other end of that, can you give me an example of a story that did not measure up to those qualities? Explain. (Or someone else's – and ask "why" it did not measure up, if they don't volunteer that.)
- At times when you have not had the independence or autonomy you wanted in selecting or writing stories, why was that? In other words, what have been the most common constraints on your work? Specific examples?

Now, some questions about covering social-political issues that are related to sports.

- Can you give me an example (or two) of a social political issue related to sports that you covered? How did you and your editor approach writing and reporting this story?
- When reporting on a socio-political story, how is it different than reporting strictly on a sports story?
- What are the positives or benefits for sports journalists doing this reporting? For example, beneficial to you professionally or personally.
- What are the negatives for sports journalists doing this reporting?
- Have there been stories that you've been uncomfortable reporting because they have strayed too close to social or political issues? Why? Example?
- Have there been social-political stories you've wanted to report but were unable to report? Why? Example?
- Is there a point at which a story that touches on social or political issues might be passed off or taken by the political reporters? Why? How is that decision made? Example?
- How would you say reporting on social-political issues is viewed among your colleagues in sports journalism? In the sports reporting profession in general? Is it perceived as acceptable? Admirable?
- How does the use of social media influence your reporting on sports? On socio-political issues?

Non-sports reporters:

First, a few questions about your sports reporting generally.

- Can you describe your career path to this point?
- Thinking back on your journalism experience and education, what would you say have been the top criteria for excellence in sports journalism practice? (IF THEY HAVE DONE SPORTS REPORTING) - Can you give me an example of one of your own stories that possesses those qualities (if not, then ask them to provide an example written by someone else).
- (IF THEY HAVE DONE SPORTS REPORTING) - On the other end of that, can you give me an example of a story that did not measure up to those qualities? Explain. (Or someone else's – and ask “why” it did not measure up, if they don't volunteer that.)
- At times when you have not had the independence or autonomy you wanted in selecting or writing stories, why was that? In other words, what have been the most common constraints on your work? Specific examples?

Now, some questions about covering social-political issues that are related to sports.

- Can you give me an example (or two) of a social political issue related to sports that you covered? How did you and your editor approach writing and reporting this story?
- What do you think are the positives and negatives for sports journalists reporting on social or political issues, as opposed to traditional political or hard news reporters? For example, beneficial to you professionally or personally.
- What are the positives or negatives for the quality of the journalism in those social or political stories when they are reported by sports journalists?
- Have there been in a situation where you know of sports journalists wanting to cover social or political stories, but weren't assigned the story? Why? Example?
- Is there a point at which a story that touches on social or political issues might be passed off or taken by the political reporters? Why? How is that decision made? Example?
- How would you say sports journalists reporting on social or political issues is viewed among non-sports journalists? Is it perceived as acceptable? Admirable? (Ask for specific examples)
- What is your perception of the role social media plays in reporting of social or political issues related to sports?

APPENDIX D

Interview coding procedure

1. First, both coders will read the transcription multiple times to gain an understanding of the themes and messages in the transcription. Each transcript will be coded in its entirety and line numbers will be added to each document to allow for more effective identification of the passages that fit with the field theory concepts.
2. Both coders will then begin coding the transcripts based on the predetermined codes (see below for the predetermined codes) and will code every transcript to ensure ‘trustworthiness’ of the coding.
3. Besides looking for the predetermined codes, the coders will also look for themes and frames that were not anticipated. Identifying these codes is also integral to this study, as finding the unexpected is important in the academic process.
4. The coding will be done on a spreadsheet, with each code listed at the top and the passages marked by line number will be written underneath each code. For example, when finding lines 57-62 from interviewee S4 are about habitus, the coder will write “57-62” in the cell under habitus on the line for S4.
5. After completing 4-6, both coders will meet to discuss the coding process and conduct an informal intercoder reliability measurement to determine how well the coders are understanding the concepts and coding the same lines for each concept. Once that is done and disagreements are discussed, another 4-6 transcriptions will be coded. The process will then be repeated until all transcriptions are coded.
6. At this point, a third person will be brought in, and will be given 4-6 of the transcriptions and the coding book, and allowed to go through the transcriptions to make sure the coders are actually measuring what they are supposed to be measuring and not straying from the meaning of each concept.

Codes

1. Habitus – role of education, learning, socialization to being a reporter
2. Boundaries – if they mention how it is decided whether a socio-political issue story is a sports or non-sports story
3. Position-taking – if they talk about the angle or wording of a story and how they decided on the angle or wording for that story
4. Economic and political pole – pertains to talk of outside powerful influences exerting pressure on report/news organization to change or kill a story

5. Cultural capital – talk of advantages of social media use in reporting; how or where the reporter learned to cover socio-political stories, or why they have not covered those stories, and perceived advantages of covering these stories.
6. Symbolic capital – the prestige, esteem among peers or awards that may come from reporting
7. Economic capital – the money and resources available for covering stories
8. Trajectory – the path the reporter took to get to where they are and where they may want to go in their career
9. Unexpected, emergent codes

Assessing trustworthiness of findings

1. Trustworthiness, the qualitative research version of validity, is found by:
 - a. Peer debriefing: Bring in a person (the third person in this study) and explain the premise to them, give them a copy of the codebook, and allow them to read the transcripts. That person can offer recommendations for changes for coding and make sure the coders are following the codebook.
 - b. Note discrepant information: Look for codes and themes not expected, identify those themes, and code for them. Those unexpected themes and codes are important to the findings.

APPENDIX E

THE UNIVERSITY OF
ALABAMA®

Office of the Vice President for
Research & Economic Development
Office for Research Compliance

October 31, 2018

Ryan Broussard
CCIS
Box 870172

Re: IRB#: 18-OR-404 "A Field Theory Analysis of Sports Journalists' Coverage of Social Justice Protests in Sports"

Dear Ryan Broussard:

The University of Alabama Institutional Review Board has granted approval for your proposed research.

Your application has been given expedited approval according to 45 CFR part 46. Approval has been given under expedited review category 7 as outlined below:

(7) Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies

Your application will expire on October 30, 2019. If your research will continue beyond this date, complete the relevant portions of the IRB Renewal Application. If you wish to modify the application, complete the Modification of an Approved Protocol Form. Changes in this study cannot be initiated without IRB approval, except when necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to participants. When the study closes, complete the appropriate portions of the IRB Request for Study Closure Form.

Please use reproductions of the IRB approved stamped consent form to provide to your participants.

Should you need to submit any further correspondence regarding this proposal, please include the above application number.

Good luck with your research.

Sincerely,



Carpantato T. Myles, MSM, CMM, CIP
Director & Research Compliance Officer

APPENDIX F

ID	Gender	Ethnicity	Role	Outlet type	Location
SE1	Male	White	Editor	National sports publication	Northeast
SE2	Male	Middle Eastern	Editor	National sports publication	East Coast
SE3	Female	White	Sports editor	Large newspaper**	Midwest
SE4	Male	White	Editor	National sports publication	Northeast
SE5	Male	White	Sports editor	Small newspaper*	South
SE6	Male	White	Sports editor	Small newspaper	East Coast
SR1	Male	White	Sports reporter	National news organization	South
SR2	Male	Black	Sports reporter	National newspaper***	Northeast
SR3	Male	White	Sports reporter	National newspaper	Northeast
SR4	Male	Black	Sports reporter	National newspaper	Northeast
SR5	Male	White	Reporter	National sports publication	South
SR6	Male	White	Reporter	National sports publication	West
SR7	Female	White	Sports reporter	Freelancer	Southwest
SR8	Male	White	Reporter	National sports publication	Northeast
SR9	Female	White	Reporter	National newspaper	East Coast
SR10	Male	White	Reporter	Large newspaper	Midwest

SR11	Female	Middle Eastern	Sports reporter	Freelancer	Canada
NSR1	Female	Black	Business reporter	National newspaper	East Coast
NSR2	Female	Asian	Political reporter	Large newspaper	Southwest
NSR3	Female	White	Political reporter	Large newspaper	South

**=newspaper with a circulation <100,000*

***= newspaper with a circulation >100,000*

****= newspaper with a circulation > 1 million*