AN ANALYSIS TO DETERMINE FRAMING OF THE
MICHAEL VICK DOGFIGHTING CONTROVERSY
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BY
CANDACE MOORE
ROBERT PRITCHARD, CHAIR
BALL STATE UNIVERSITY
MUNCIE, INDIANA
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To my family who has consistently supported me throughout this process.

This could not have been done without your faith, prayers and encouragement.

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Michael Vick was hailed as one of the top professional athletes of our generation. A quarterback for the Atlanta Falcons and six year veteran of the National Football League (NFL), he was one of the highest paid and most endorsed athletes (ESPN.com 1 2007). In fact, with statistics over the past six years steadily improving and 2006 being one of his best seasons (National Football League 2007), many fans looked forward to the promise he showed in the future, until April 2007; allegations of dogfighting—a felony—arose on Michael Vick’s property in Surry County, Virginia. This discovery led to an intense investigation that shed light on the athlete’s underground business, personal affiliations and background. By the end of the year, with the world watching, Vick’s life changed drastically, causing the man who seemed invincible on the field to fall from grace and lose everything.

*The Michael Vick Story*

Michael Vick was born in Newport News, Virginia. Raised in the Southeast area of the city, referred in the urban community as “Bad Newz,” “Ookie,” as he was known among his family and friends, was surrounded by an environment of drugs, gangs and violence in the Ridley Circle housing project. In this area of the city, police officers and cruisers regularly frequent the streets.
Residents also tend to “beware nightfall when activity picks up” because making money and obtaining a well-known reputation the “easy way” take a back seat to getting a respectable, hard-working—legal—job (Squires 2007).

To steer clear of the menacing factors around him, Vick frequented the local Boys and Girls Club where he developed and honed his football skills. Quickly, he became a recreation league standout in good company with other well-known professional athletes such as NBA-star Allen Iverson and Aaron Brooks, a former NFL quarterback, who also spent some of their childhood in this area.

Into his high school years, Vick would continue to excel on the gridiron and set records as a quarterback for Ferguson and Warwick High Schools. Known as a dual-threat quarterback who could beat you with both his arm and his feet, Vick was recruited to play at Virginia Tech on a full scholarship in 1999.

As a freshman at Virginia Tech in Blacksburg, Virginia, Vick passed for over 1800 yards with 12 touchdowns and scored eight times on the ground, racking up over 500 yards. These feats placed him third in the race for the Heisman Trophy and gave him First Team All-American honors as a freshman.

After two years of collegiate football, Vick entered the 2001 NFL draft and was selected as the number one pick by the Atlanta Falcons. As a result, Vick became one of the highest paid players in the NFL and earned several lucrative endorsement contracts.
In his first year with the Falcons, Vick played in eight games, throwing for 785 yards and rushing for 300 yards. By 2004, the Falcons decided to secure the quarterback’s future with the franchise by signing him to “the richest contract in NFL history at the time” — a 10-year extension worth $130 million (ESPN.com 1 2007). At this time he also signed endorsements with Nike, Reebok, Donruss Card Company, Upper Deck and AirTran Airways.

In April 2007, after six years in the league and several accomplishments later, investigators allegedly found evidence of dogfighting—a felony—on Michael Vick’s property in rural Surry County, Virginia. About three months later, in July, Vick was indicted with Purnell Peace, Tony Taylor and Quanis Phillips, three of his associates and alleged co-conspirators in a dogfighting operation called, “Bad Newz Kennels.” According to court documents, the operation—bearing the urban moniker for Vick’s hometown—was created in 2001 and organized at least 14 dogfights on the Surry property and in other states between 2002 and 2007. The indictment explained that Vick was charged with bankrolling the operation, as well as killing some of the dogs himself. The federal guidelines for these actions called for a term of 18-months to two years in prison.

After denying the allegations of his involvement, Vick—facing federal and state charges—confessed to his participation in the dogfighting ring and entered a guilty plea in August. As a result, he was suspended indefinitely by the NFL and lost all of his endorsement deals. To make matters worse, Vick tested
positive for marijuana use and then gave conflicting accounts of when he used the drug, violating the terms set for his release. In November, he surrendered to authorities to begin serving his sentence early and receive credit for time served. However, federal prosecutors opposed giving Vick the credit, and on December 10, 2007, he was sentenced to 23 months in jail.
PROBLEM AND PURPOSE

With this understanding, the problem of this study is: Does cultural proximity and amount of embedded interest in Michael Vick affect how newspapers frame his dogfighting controversy?

The study incorporated the framing theory, specifically, human interest, conflict, episodic, and thematic framing to show how newspapers in different regions frame Vick’s situation. A content analysis illustrated if the newspapers’ relationship and cultural proximity to him impacted their coverage of the controversy.

This study is a connection between media framing and crisis communications. Media framing observes any differences in the way that media outlets, such as print or broadcast, frame controversial situations. The study findings may cause journalists to re-evaluate the way they choose to report news, as well as the stories they choose to show to the public because frames in their stories could present a biased perception of the athlete, instead of fair and balanced news coverage.

Crisis communication manages the internal response of an entity when unexpected situations occur (Center and Jackson 2003, 319). From a public relations standpoint this study will be useful in helping practitioners respond
better in times of crisis. Actually, knowing the way that newspapers frame controversial situations could help practitioners represent clients in crisis because they would have an understanding of how the client is being portrayed to the public. As a matter of fact, before his indictment, Michael Vick hired a public relations firm in Atlanta to refine his image (Gorley Chufo 2008) and if they knew how the media framed his situation and personality to the public, it could have helped them know how to better represent him.

Furthermore, this research will add to the body of knowledge because it will increase the minimal amount of information about media framing of sports controversy (Schwenzer 2004, 5).

The value of this study to the public is that it could change the way they view the news and how controversies are portrayed in the news. After this study, people may not internalize situations they see in the media because they realize that it may portray aspects differently based upon their culturally proximity, specifically the concept of embedded interest, in the situation.
LITERATURE REVIEW

Media and Sports

Sports are found in every mass media source—print, television, film, radio and internet—however, the existing literature on media and sports is very limited in terms of finding studies related to public relations and journalism (Schwenzer 2004, 5). In the book, Sport, Culture and the Media, Stuart Allen explains, “this neglect may be attributable, in part, to the difficulties associated with achieving a sufficient degree of critical distance to investigate something which is such a familiar part of everyday life for so many people” (Rowe 1999, xi).

After examining the history of sports in America, Coakley (1994, 75) describes sports as a “social phenomena” in his book, Sport in Society: Issues and Controversies. He states: “Sports have never been so pervasive and influential in the lives of people as they are in many societies today. Throughout human history, games and sport activities have always been integrally related to the social, political, and economic relationships between people in any given society.” In regard to the present state of sports, Coakley adds, “Organized sports in the United States have become a combination of business,
entertainment, education, moral training, masculinity rituals, technology transfer, and declarations of political allegiance” (Coakley 1994, 75).

Sports, combined with media, play an integral role in our society. In fact, their relationship is based upon a mutual dependency that is critical to the success of both entities among audiences. Lever and Wheeler (1993, 126) explain that this relationship began with the print media through sports coverage in magazines in the 1830s. This coverage then developed into the sports page as the feature of many newspapers, beginning in the 1880s. By the late 1920s, the sports page grew into its own section and resembled the sports section of today’s newspapers. Today, in most major North American newspapers, more daily coverage is given to sports than any other single topic of interest, including business or politics (Coakley 1994, 337).

The media cover much more than sports, but an analysis of newspapers and television in North America shows that they have come to depend on sports nearly as much as sports depend on them (Coakley 1994, 342). According to Greendorfer (1983, 2), it is reasonable to resolve that “sports’ involvement with all the media, strongly suggests that the relationship is at the very least mutual, but most likely symbiotic.”

Sports’ role in the “symbiotic” relationship is the ability to provide mass media with large audiences of loyal readers, listeners and viewers (Rowe 1999, 30). As documented in the book Out of Bounds—edited by Baker and Boyd—an
article from Working Press of the Nation reported that USA Today has created an unparalleled sports section, occupying more than 25 percent of the editorial space of each issue, to build the largest circulation of any daily newspaper in the United States (Working Press of the Nation 1993, 8-1). Furthermore, as documented in Out of Bounds, The New York Times reported that the all-sports network ESPN (then seen in 95 million households worldwide) was the most important asset in the 1995 Disney takeover of Capitol Cities/ABC. Executives of both ABC and Disney explained the value of sports programming is its “universal appeal” and ability to “offend no political position” (“The Trophy in Eisner’s Big Deal” 1995, 1 & 11).

The mass media’s role in the relationship simply provides promotion or publicity of these sporting events, which not only attracts an audience for them, but also advertisers and sponsors. Baker (1997) emphasizes the importance of media to sports by stating, “Sports and its presentation in the media has become a multi-million dollar entity. In addition, some scholars such as, Lever and Wheeler (1993), believe that sports have gained more than economically from the media, but also culturally. They state: “the mass media, more than anything else, were responsible for promoting organized sport from a relatively minor element of culture into a full-blown social institution.” However, the economic gain for both sports and media is what continues to sustain the relationship into the future.
Public Relations in Sports Controversy

Public relations—specifically the crisis communication function—plays a vital role in the issue of media scandal and framing of athletes in controversy because it manages the athletes’ image at a time when they are the most vulnerable to the public’s judgments and perceptions. In fact, in today’s society, public relations is not just important to athletes, but several individuals, groups and businesses because of its influence on the media and affect on the degree—positive or negative—of coverage an organization receives.

Public relations is a multi-faceted practice that encompasses several roles and responsibilities. Although it has various definitions, one of the best known is by Cutlip, Center and Broom, authors of Effective Public Relations (Swann 2008, 2). They define public relations as, “the management function that establishes and maintains mutually beneficial relationships between an organization and the publics on whom its success and failure depends on (Cutlip, Center and Broom, 1994, 6). In addition, another definition by Allen Center and Patrick Jackson (2003, 12) in Public Relations Practices: Managerial Case Studies and Problems, explains that public relations “evaluates attitudes, harmonizes the goals, policies and procedures of an individual or organization with the public interest, and executes a program of action to earn public understanding, acceptance and supportive behavior.”
Many individuals and organizations work relentlessly to build a positive, solid image among the media and public using public relations, ensuring their longevity and relevance to society; however, in times of controversy, crises can “disrupt employees and communities, damage corporate reputations, and cost hundreds of millions of dollars.” (Seeger et al. 1998, 231). Crisis communications—an aspect of public relations—is instrumental in managing the negative press associated with these events by influencing media coverage and regaining the public trust that may be affected as a result of these controversies.

According to Seeger, Sellnow and Ulmer (1998, 231), crises are “specific, unexpected, and nonroutine events or series of events that created high level of uncertainty and threat or perceived threat to an organization’s high-priority goals.” The Institute for Crisis Management (2008) associates crisis with the media by defining it as “a significant business disruption that stimulates extensive news media coverage.” The crisis communication function in public relations seeks to prevent the permanent effect that these situations can have on an individual or organization, especially as a result of media influence. This function does not have control to manage the external influences as a result of the controversy, but it does have the control to manage the response (Center and Jackson 2003, 319).

Crisis communication is a very detailed process within public relations that involves proactive and reactive strategies. Proactive strategies such as risk
and issues management have a role in identifying, prioritizing, and managing problems that can become serious issues (Swann 2008, 112). Reactive responses and strategies, such as apologia and justification, are used to decrease the effect of the controversy on the image of the individual or organization.

During an evolving crisis, a rapid response time is critical to the effect of the controversy in the media and public. Especially in reactive crises, “Experts suggest immediate response so that momentum of subsequent stories is minimized” (Wilcox and Cameron 2006, 592). Referring to an emergency medical metaphor, “the golden hour” is the term used in crisis management to describe the short and valuable amount of time that practitioners have to effectively manage a controversy (Garcia 2006, 4) According to Helio Fred Garcia (2006, 4), in Effective Leadership Response to Crisis, “the golden hour not only refers to a particular period of time, but to the observation that incremental delays in responding to a crisis have greater than incremental impact on the outcome.”

Overall, public relations assists the athletes and the media during controversial issues. In his book, Sports Illusion, Sports Reality, Leonard Koppett (1981, 144) explained that public relations maintains order among the public in potentially harmful situations to the athlete. He states: “Whatever you call it, the task remains the same: to give a business (or government agency, or individual celebrity, or anything else) some measure of control over its contact with the public.” In addition, Koppett explained that the main function of public relations
in sports, and in this case controversy, is to assist and service the media so they can ensure balance and fairness in coverage on behalf of their client. (Koppett 1981, 146) In return, the media should meet the public relations specialist’s demands by accurately covering the athlete and providing favorable coverage of the controversial events. (Schwenzer 2004, 16) This assures a “good friendship” between public relations and the media so that the audience can make their own logical decisions. (Schwenzer 2004, 16)

Framing

In order to explore the affects of framing on Michael’s Vick’s dogfighting controversy, the theory of framing must be understood.

Framing is used in various fields such as psychology, sociology, political science, journalism, and communications (Sieff 2003, 263). Goffman (1974) referred to the concept of sociological framing as “primary frameworks” and explained that it renders “meaningless aspects of the scene into something that is meaningful.” He identified two types of frameworks in his analysis: natural and social. Natural frameworks refer to occurrences seen as undirected, unoriented, unanimated, unguided, and “purely physical” while social frameworks provide background understanding for events that incorporate the will, aim, and controlling effort of an individual or organization.
Entman (1993, 51) referred to the idea of framing as a “scattered conceptualization.” He explained that previous studies lack clear definitions and ways to apply the theory stating, “Nowhere is there a general statement of framing theory that shows exactly how frames become embedded within and make themselves manifest in text, or how framing influences thinking.” Other scholars have defined the concept as an effect on an audience that tells it what will be discussed and how, (Altheide 1996, 31) and more specifically, how to perceive, organize, and make sense of incoming information (Pan and Kosicki 1993). This is similar to Goffman’s analysis that one or more primary frameworks or “schemata of interpretation of a kind” work when individuals imply responses to recognize particular events (Goffman 1974).

Entman (1993, 52) explained that the concept of framing consistently offers a way of communicating text. It involves selection and salience because frames take some aspects of perceived reality and make them more salient in communicating a text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, casual interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described. Thus, he explained that frames perform the following functions: define problems by determining what a casual agent is doing with what costs and benefits; diagnose causes by identifying the forces creating the problem; make moral judgments by evaluating casual agents and their effects; and, suggest remedies by offering and justifying treatments for the
problems and predict their likely effects. Together, these functions allow frames to work by highlighting bits of information about an item that is the subject of a communication, thereby elevating them in salience.

The mass media also display the concept of framing because they select and shape messages to send their audiences. Media framing is defined as “the central organizing idea for news content that supplies a context and suggests what the issue is through the use of selection, emphasis, exclusion, and elaboration” (Tankard et al. 1991). Mass media actively set the frames of reference that readers or viewers use to interpret and discuss public events (Tuchman 1978, ix). According to Neuman, Just and Crigler (1992, 120), media give “the story a ‘spin,’ . . . . taking into account their organizational and modality constraints, professional judgments, and certain judgments about audience. They do this “by framing images of reality. . . . in a predictable and patterned way” (McQuail 1994, 331) and in return, the audience accepts this presentation, unknowingly, and takes it for “news” (Ericson et al 1989).

Altheide (1997, 651-652) introduces the dimensions of frame, theme and discourse in the explanation of framing as it relates to the media. Frames, the first dimension, are broad and have a generally descriptive purpose, focusing on “what will be discussed, how it will be discussed, and above all, how it will not be discussed.” Themes are points that are quickly delivered to the audience, just enough so that they have a grasp on the message the journalist is trying to
communicate. Discourse, explained in Altheide’s definition, explains the way the audience receives information. The researcher explains that audiences find out about information in a shorter amount of time due to the increase of information technology, such as the use of obtaining news through the internet and television. Because of this, frames are amplified in the news coverage, affecting the message that audiences receive over time.

Media framing is a part of second-level agenda setting, which is explained by McCombs, Llamas, Escobar and Rey (1997, 78) as the way that media tells us how to think about some objects. It is derived from the concept of agenda setting which is explained as media’s ability to tell people to what think about (Cohen 1963), as well as the importance assigned to issues and personalities in the media (Winter & Eyal 1981, p. 376).

McCombs and Shaw (1972, 180) was one of the earlier empirical studies about agenda setting in their study on the 1968 presidential campaign. By comparing 100 undecided voters’ perceptions of issue salience with the amount of coverage of these issues, they determined “that media appear to have exerted a considerable impact on voters’ judgments of what they considered the major issue of the campaign.”

In a later study, McCombs et. al (1997) explored second-level agenda setting while exploring candidates’ images in Spanish elections. They found that attributes of candidates such as personality, stands on issues, negative and/or
positive images presented in the mass media influence the image of the candidates to voters. This led them to conclude that beyond first-level agenda setting, objects have numerous attributes that portray a picture to the audience, referred to as attribute salience and ultimately, second-level agenda setting.

Many scholars identify different types of framing; however, this study will focus on human interest, conflict, episodic, and thematic.

Valkenberg et. al (1999, 551) explained that human interest frames bring an individuals’ story or an emotional angle to the presentation of an event, issue or problem. Personalizing an issue contributes to the narrative character and tone of news. In fact, framing news in human interest terms is a way to personalize, dramatize, and emotionalize the news and the media use the human interest frame in order to capture the hearts and interest of readers. However, research on this frame has shown that news using human interest frames can have a negative effect in the recollection of information (Valkenberg et. al 1999, 556).

The conflict frame, used previously in political research (Neuman et. al 1992, Jamieson 1992, Capella and Jamieson 1996), emphasizes conflict between individuals, groups, or institutions (Neuman et. al 1992). The conflict frame, also called strategy coverage, makes winning and losing the central concern, as well and features the language of wars, games and competition, with an emphasis on the performance and style of a party or an individual” (Jamieson 1992).
Episodic framing seeks to personalize issues as opposed to thematic framing, which presents collective or general evidence about issues. Episodic frames in the media add influence or color to a story. They create what many people consider “hard news” because they develop stories from a personal angle and perspective. Overall, they “are essentially illustrative of issues” (Iyengar, 1996, 59-70, 62) and would require in-depth, interpretive analysis to be considered a “hard news” story. Episodic frames are presented in the form of a case study or event-oriented report and highlight the dilemma and personal struggles of individuals or public issues. Iyengar explains that examples of episodic frames are a personal story of a homeless person or teenage drug user, the bombing of an airliner, or an attempted murder. Visually, episodic frames are compelling and add “good pictures” in packages (Iyengar 1991, 14).

In contrast, thematic frames are in a summary form. They present general or collective evidence, such as in the form of a backgrounder, as well as more “in-depth, interpretive analysis” (Iyengar 1991, 14). Thematic frames depict issues “more broadly and abstractly by placing them in some appropriate context—historical, geographical, or otherwise” (Iyengar 1996, 62). Visually, they are represented by “talking heads” or anchors in television news casts without any personal angles (Iyengar 1991, 14).

News reports generally do not contain just one frame. As Iyengar (Iyengar 1991, 14) explained the media will use general references or “lead-ins”
even in a personal profile or story about an individual. This is because episodic frames are actually an extension of themes if they are given “angles,” which could be considered the leads, in thematic messages (Altheide 1996, 652). Despite this, there is still one frame that generally predominates a story and the news story is classified by the dominate frame when analyzed.

*Media Framing of Athletes in Controversy*

Media framing of sports controversies is an issue with very few studies; however, there is general knowledge about this concept that indicates its presence in our society.

Media performs the functions of informing the public, interpreting issues and entertaining, but they also direct our attention to specific items of information, specific types of experiences and people, exposing the public to limited ideas and perspectives (Coakley 1994, 331). In sports controversies, the media is able to choose the details the public is given about athletes as well as the events of the controversy that will be emphasized. When they do this, they help construct the overall frameworks that we in media audiences use to define and explain sports in our lives (Clarke and Clarke 1982). Coakley (1994, 342-43) explains this idea, stating:
“The media provides selective versions of sports. In societies where media are privately owned and depend on financial profits, sport events are selected for coverage on the basis of their entertainment value. The images and messages emphasized in that coverage are edited so they fit with the perceived interests of both audience and sponsors.”

When many people think about sports controversies, they think that these scandals mostly occur during an actual sporting event, however, according to Rowe (1999, 91), “the transgressive behavior does not have to occur in the pursuit of sport.” In fact, sports’ “cultural prominence and visibility of its celebrities make it a useful vehicle for carrying news stories ‘outside’ itself and its routing audiences.”

A study entitled, “Outside the Frame: Newspaper Coverage of the Sugar Ray Leonard Wife Abuse Story,” by Messner and Solomon (1993) provides an example of a study conducted on framing of an athlete in sports controversy. The study analyzed the 1991 story of boxer, Sugar Ray Leonard, who admitted to physically abusing his wife and abusing cocaine and alcohol. It consisted of a content analysis of two major daily newspapers and one national sports daily to determine framing in the situation. In all three papers, the results concluded that the story was framed as a “drug story” while ignoring or marginalizing the physical abuse of Leonard’s wife. These frames revealed to the researchers that individual cases of controversy, in this case “jocks on drugs,” overlooked the
structure and values of the institution of sport, only showing the negative, “moral drama of individual sin and public redemption” (Messner and Solomon 1993, 126).

Another study conducted by John Sloop (1997) on the 1992 criminal rape case involving boxer, Mike Tyson, found that the media directly connected his actions with his performance in the boxing ring, as well as being an African American male. He states: “Moreover, in that many of the articles about the trial appeared in the sports section of newspapers and during the sports portion of news broadcasts, the case itself was positioned as a sports event” (Sloop 1997, 115). In addition, Grochowski (2004) explained the framing of another athlete controversy in his essay, “Gender, Race, and the O.J. Simpson Case: How the Media “Framed” O.J,” by studying the murder trial of O.J. Simpson, a former professional football player and sports analyst, accused of his killing his ex-wife and her friend. In the end, Grochowski argued that race was a central factor in the trial and that portrayal of Simpson in the media was used against him as a central means to understand the murders (Grochowski 2004, 158).

As made apparent by these situations and others involving professional athletes, framing can be shown through various sports controversies and scandals. There are countless numbers of professional athletes and incidents where their behavior out-of-play receives more attention than their actions in their respective sport. The media thrive on this athletic status in controversy,
using it to add “background” and “colour” to their story (Rowe 1999, 91). Rowe indicates, “the media sports scandal is no more than a spectacular instance of the everyday product of the sports media (Rowe 1999, 92).” Cohen (1980) also adds to this idea and explains the media’s mindset. He states:

“In coming to an understanding of the political economy of the media sports scandal, it is necessary to appreciate how the hunger for content, the power of celebrity, and the ready transportability of images and information within and across media, create the conditions for a full-blown media phenomenon, but that to prosper they must articulate with social questions that are of importance to media audiences and ‘moral entrepreneurs’.”

Cultural Proximity

In addition to framing, cultural proximity is also one of the major concepts that will be examined in this study. However, although the term is widely used in communication and a number of other scholarly fields, it lacks a precise definition and scale to accurately measure it (Trepte 2003, Park and Hwang 2002). Accordingly, only a few authors even offer detailed thoughts on their understanding of the term (Trepte 2003, 7).

Without a clear definition from previous research, cultural proximity in communication is understood as the audience in the local region’s preference for
media that relates to their culture — specifically meaning, from the same traditional region, ethnic, religious, or social background, as well as sharing the same language, values or other elements. Straubhaar (1991, 39) supports this idea by stating, “audiences make an active choice to view international, or regional, or national television programs, a choice that favors the latter two when they are available, based on a search for cultural relevance or proximity.”

Straubhaar never gives an exact definition of cultural proximity, but according to Trepte (2003), alludes that it is the audience’s need for a cultural and historical reference as well as local tastes. Straubhaar illustrates this concept in his study about how cultural proximity influences audience’s choices to view international and national television programming. The scholar found new research that pointed to a greater traditionalism and loyalty to national and local cultures by lower or popular classes. This indicated that lower or popular classes seemed to prefer nationally or locally produced material that is closer to and more reinforcing of traditional identities, based in regional, ethnic, dialect/language, religious and other elements. Although this study related cultural proximity to class and interdependence, it still emphasizes its importance to the native region, providing specific factors to aid in understanding this concept.

In addition to the audience’s behaviors toward the media, previous literature also explains cultural proximity as news decisions made by the media
based upon their audiences’ preferences. In fact, Galtung and Ruge (1965) identify cultural proximity as “an essential event to the determinance of newsworthiness,” while Ostgaard (1965, 46) refers to it as “a major asset for a news story” when using it as one of the factors in a theoretical explanation for news flow. Both studies explored proximity in terms of geographical, cultural and social distance and how they impact the value of news prominence in a region.

Galtung and Ruge (1965, 68) explained that the transition from events to news is based upon “culture-bound factors.” Although they explained that there were several factors that influenced newsworthiness, they believed that the following events were the most important and most probable in becoming news: news concerning an elite nation or elite people; events viewed in more personal terms, based upon the action of a specific individual; and events viewed as more negative in consequence. The scholars also explain that elite nations, such as Britain and Germany, are more culturally proximate to their audience. Harcup and O’Neill (2001, 263), also explain that Galtung and Ruge’s definitions of elite nations are also “culturally determined” and “vary from country to country.”

Ostgaard (1965) explained the difference between cultural proximity and proximity in the geographical sense by showing that internationally, news was chosen by the media based upon the culture of the people in that region or the culture they predominantly identified with. On page 46 he explained, “the news media in any given country will tend to present the picture of the outside world..."
as seen through the ethnocentric eyes of the receiver of the news.” This alludes to the idea that cultural proximity is heavily based upon the actual culture—including race or ethnic group—customs and values, as well as the beliefs and views as stated by Ostgaard, of people in a news organization’s coverage area.

A study by Zaharopoulos (1990) entitled, “Cultural proximity in International News Coverage: 1988 U.S. Presidential Campaign in the Greek Press,” further revealed the importance cultural proximity plays in the selection of news coverage. Through a content analysis of a conservative and liberal Greek newspaper during the final three months of the 1988 U.S. Presidential campaign, Zaharopoulos showed that Democrat, Michael Dukakis—a Greek American—was given more space, length, photos, headlines and overall favorable coverage in the newspapers than his Republican challenger, George H.W. Bush. Previous studies showed that news selection was influenced by economic, social, political and geographic factors, but this study illustrated the importance of cultural proximity in news coverage. Although this additional coverage did not help Dukakis’ campaign against Bush, it did reveal how much of a part cultural proximity could play on the perception of issues to the audience.

In addition to media, cultural proximity has also been used in various scholarly fields as well. As a tool for business, it has been used to define retail practices between White and Hispanic consumers in marketing (Hasty et. al.)
For example, in asserting their belief that cultural proximity was a factor in determining management’s choice of control systems and level of delegation, Baliga and Jaegar defined the concept as “the extent to which the host cultural ethos permits adoption of the home organizational culture.” They explained that those who permit easy adoption of the “home” (headquarters) culture would be considered high in cultural proximity. The scholars also note that physical proximity is of value in facilitating this concept.

In a few studies, researchers have attempted to operationalize cultural proximity. Adams (1986), in furthering the research of Galtung and Ruge, operationalized the concept using social and geographic factors, while Park and Hwang (2002) used economic and geographic factors. Using another means to measure this concept instead of solid categories Trepte (2008) conducted a study operationalizing cultural proximity based upon Hofstede’s cultural dimensions of power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism/collectivism and masculinity and femininity. His results showed that using the solid categories was more conducive in creating a scale to measure cultural proximity.

Embedded interest, which is having vested, fixed or rooted attention in a specific entity, complements cultural proximity in this study. It can play an important role in how news is reported to the public because of its fixed “ties” to what is being covered. The term “embedded interest” derives from the concept
of “embedding” which refers to journalists who assume the lifestyle of military soldiers to accurately explain the experiences they have in combat. Previous studies on this concept are limited, but have shown that embedded interest produces positive coverage as a result of these ties.

Pfau et. al (2004) examined this issue when studying how embedding journalists—who live with soldiers and experience daily routines with them in military combat units—impact story’s frames and tone in newspapers. Through a comparison of embedded news coverage of the first days of “Operation Iraqi Freedom” to the first days of U.S. ground operations in Operations “Enduring Freedom” and “Desert Storm,” the results showed that embedded journalists in “Operation Iraqi Freedom” produced news stories that featured more episodic frames compared to the other two operations. The results also indicated that embedded print coverage was more favorable in overall tone toward the military and individual troops than non-embedded reporting. Ultimately, these findings revealed that embedded interest or fixed “ties” to certain situations and/or individuals can impact the coverage of news even if it is not done intentionally.

Linder (2009) also found similar results to the Pfau study by conducting a study of print news articles by embedded journalists during Operation Iraqi Freedom. He found that articles by embedded journalists were more “available” and “prominent”, as opposed to articles by independent reporters. While he dispelled the idea that embedded journalists covering the war told positive
stories aimlessly, he did find that independent reporters were more successful in presenting both sides— the soldiers’ and Iraqi civilians’— perspective of the conflict.

Dimitrova (2007) took another approach to embedded interest by connecting it to cultural proximity. The study showed their impact in the media, as well as how they create differences in the perception parties have of the same situation—the war in Iraq. The study explored the websites of prestige news media in the United States, United Kingdom, Egypt and Qatar by examining the frames used by news media in their coverage of the conflict, as well as the voices heard - and unheard - throughout the coverage. The results showed that Arab online news media were more likely to use the military conflict and violence of war frame, whereas Coalition media—considered the embedded party because of its invasion of Iraq—emphasized the rebuilding of Iraq frame. Through its observation that international media in proximity to the war constructs the conflict’s image differently than parties without proximity affecting the war, this analysis continues to support the theory of media framing, as well as how people perceive the same situation in various ways.

Building upon the previous research, this study will examine the theory of media framing of athletes in sports controversy and the effect of a newspaper’s
cultural proximity and embedded interest on its coverage.
RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND HYPOTHESES

Based upon the previous literature on media framing of sports controversy, the researcher proposed the following research questions and hypotheses:

- **RQ1**: Which frames are most prominent in newspaper coverage of the dogfighting controversy?
- **H1**: Coverage of the Vick controversy in newspapers with the most cultural proximity will produce more episodic, human interest frames.
- **H2**: Coverage of the Vick controversy in newspapers with the least cultural proximity in Vick will produce more thematic, conflicting frames.
- **H3**: Coverage of the Vick controversy in newspapers with the most embedded interest in Vick will produce more episodic, human interest frames.
- **H4**: Coverage of the Vick controversy in newspapers with less embedded interest in Vick will produce more thematic, conflicting frames.
- **H5**: Stories with a human interest frame will present a more favorable tone in coverage of the dogfighting controversy and his character.
• H6: Stories in newspapers with more embedded interest in Vick will present a more favorable tone in coverage of the dogfighting controversy and his character.
METHODOLOGY

To test the hypotheses of this study, a content analysis was conducted. The sample selection of this content analysis was internet articles dealing with Michael Vick’s dogfighting controversy in four newspapers—The Daily Press in Newport News, Va., The Atlanta Journal-Constitution in Atlanta, Ga., The Oklahoman in Oklahoma City, Okla., and The Oregonian in Portland, Ore. Internet articles were used because according to a Pew Research Center Study (2006), nearly one-in-three Americans regularly obtain their news online. Content analysis was used in this study because it is a quantitative way to measure a large amount of textual data. According to Berelson (1952), “content analysis is a research technique for the objective, systematic and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication.” It is used to view meanings, symbolic qualities and expressive content in research (Krippendorff 2004, 44).

The time period the articles were analyzed from was May 2007, the month after the dogfighting allegations began, through December 2007, the month Vick was sentenced. The reason articles did not begin in April, when dogfighting allegations began, is because there were no articles available to use in the newspaper sources at the time this research was conducted.
A census sample of approximately 128 articles was analyzed in each newspaper. Articles were obtained from a database of archived news stories about the Michael Vick dogfighting controversy in The Daily Press and Atlanta Journal Constitution, while a general search of articles about the controversy was conducted in the Oklahoman and Oregonian.

Both local and national (ex. Associated Press content featured on this controversy) articles that appeared in each newspaper were considered and articles had to be objective news stories. Opinion editorial articles were not included in the sample because they purposely contain a reporter’s opinion and are not generally unbiased.

Each newspaper involved in this study was chosen based on their perceived cultural proximity to Michael Vick and assumed embedded interest in his dogfighting controversy. To determine cultural proximity, one newspaper had to have close cultural proximity to Vick, one newspaper had to have some cultural proximity and the other two had to have little to no cultural proximity. Similarly for embedded interest, one newspaper had to have high embedded interest in the controversy, one newspaper had to have moderate embedded interest and the other two low embedded interest. Only one newspaper was needed for each of the categories, however, two newspapers were chosen to determine little to no cultural proximity and low embedded interest in order to gain better representation in the sample because there were few newspaper
articles in these categories compared to the other newspaper articles in the sample selection.

The Daily Press is the local newspaper of Newport News, Virginia—Vick’s hometown—and covers Southeastern Virginia. The cultural proximity of this newspaper to Michael Vick is close because he was born and raised in Newport News, Virginia, so it is assumed that The Daily Press’ embedded interest in the dogfighting situation is high because of the native ties Vick has to their area and “hometown hero” appeal he has to consumers.

The Atlanta Journal-Constitution is located in Atlanta, Georgia and covers the Southeast region of Georgia. Atlanta is the location of the NFL’s Atlanta Falcons, where Vick played professional football for six years. The cultural proximity of this newspaper to Michael Vick is some because he was the star quarterback for the team and played his entire NFL career in Atlanta. Vick’s association with Atlanta moderately interests consumers because of this sports-based relationship so The Atlanta Journal-Constitution’s assumed amount of embedded interest in Vick is moderate.

Lastly, The Oklahoman covers the Oklahoma City area and The Oregonian covers areas within and outside of Portland. The Oklahoman’s and Oregonian’s cultural proximity to Michael Vick is little to none because Michael Vick has no obvious affiliation or ties with this area. In addition, there are no National Football League teams within the coverage area of these newspapers.
For these reasons, the assumed amount of embedded interest in Vick of this newspaper is low.

Units measured in this study were internet articles themselves and the categories included were: types of frame present in the article—human interest or conflict and thematic or episodic—word count of the article, the article’s assigned reporter, tone of the article, tone of the headline, and tone of subject headline. The measurement of tone in this study was based upon general semantics. General semanticists examine how words, assertions, and their referents in nature affect human behavior (Hayakawa 1962). Each of the categories in the content analysis served as a measurement of the data because they determined salience of each article in the four newspapers so that they could be compared and test the hypotheses.

Data was entered into SPSS for analysis in answering hypotheses and research questions.
RESULTS

This study investigated if cultural proximity and amount of embedded interest in Michael Vick affected the way that newspapers framed his dogfighting controversy. Holsti’s intercoder reliability test was used to determine the agreement upon coders on the first 15 articles and based upon this formula, reliability was calculated at .86 percent.

To assess the study’s hypotheses, a series of frequency distributions were computed on the word length, article reporter and number of articles in each source to determine amount of embedded interest in each newspaper.

There were 56 articles in The Daily Press about the dogfighting controversy which comprised 43.8 percent of the sample selection. Three articles contained less than 100 words, 36 articles were between 100-500 words, 11 articles were between 500-1000 words and six articles had 1000 words and above. The Daily Press’s articles were covered by their own reporters in 47 of the articles (83.9%) and by the Associated Press in nine of the articles (16.1%) in the sample.

The Atlanta Journal Constitution contained 58 articles which comprised 45.3 percent of the sample selection. One article was less than 100 words, 24 articles were between 100-500 words, 26 articles were between 500-1000 words and seven articles had 1000 words and above. The Atlanta Journal Constitution’s articles were covered by their own reporters in 52 articles (89.7%), the Associated
Press in four articles (6.9%), and reporters from other newspapers in two articles (3.4%).

The Oklahoman contained nine articles, which comprised 7 percent of the sample selection. Each of the nine articles was between 500-1000 words. The Oklahoman’s reporter’s bylines were documented in eight articles (88.9%) and The Associated Press in one of their articles (11.1%).

The Oregonian contained five articles, which comprised 3.9 percent of the sample selection. One of the articles was 100-500 words, two of the articles were between 500-1000 words and the remaining two articles were 1000 words and above. The Oregonian’s reporter’s byline was documented in one article (20%) and The Associated Press in four (80%) of their articles.

Figure 4.1. Newspaper Frequencies
To further assess the study’s predictions, additional frequency distributions, a series of chi-square tests and one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) tests were computed on the frames—human interest, conflict, episodic and thematic—in each newspaper.

**RQ1: Which frames are most prominent in newspaper coverage of the dogfighting controversy?**

The results showed that the conflict frame was prominent in 57 articles (44.5%) as opposed to the human interest frame (17 articles, 13.3%), and the episodic frame was prominent in 88 articles (68.8%), as opposed to the thematic frame (37 articles, 28.9%).

![Figure 4.2. RQ1: Prominent Frames](image-url)
The Pearson Chi-square test was computed to determine if there was a significant relationship between the human interest and conflict frame in each newspaper. The analysis indicated that there was a significant difference (p< .05) between the two frames in the newspapers. The Pearson Chi-square test was also used to determine the relationship between thematic and episodic frames in each newspaper. The analysis indicated a significant difference (p<.01) between the two frames in these newspapers also.

Furthermore, the one-way ANOVA revealed significance between the human interest and conflict frame within each newspaper. The one-way ANOVA also revealed a statistical significance between the episodic and thematic frames within each newspaper.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 4.1. F Score Significance Levels</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Human interest &amp; Conflict frame</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Episodic frame &amp; Thematic frame</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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H1: Coverage of the Vick controversy in newspapers with the most cultural proximity will produce more episodic, human interest frames

In regard to the episodic frame, the hypothesis was not supported because the analysis indicated that The Oregonian contained more episodic frames.
(100%) than the Daily Press (60.7%) and The Atlanta Journal Constitution (82.8%), the assigned culturally proximate newspapers.

As far as the human interest frame, the hypothesis was supported, indicating slightly more human interest frames in the Daily Press (14.3%) than the Atlanta Journal Constitution (13.8%), yet the percentage of human interest frames in this category between the two newspapers was equal (47.1%).
H2: Coverage of the Vick controversy in newspapers with the least cultural proximity in Vick will produce more thematic, conflicting frames

This hypothesis was supported in one of the least proximate newspapers because The Oklahoman contained the most thematic frames (88.9%) of all of the newspapers. However, it was not supported because The Oregonian, the other least proximate newspaper did not contain any thematic frames. Following The Oklahoman, The Daily Press contained the next highest amount of thematic frames (35.7%), followed by The Atlanta Journal Constitution (15.5%).

In terms of conflict frames, the hypothesis was fully supported because The Oklahoman contained the most conflict frames (88.9%) of the newspapers,
followed by The Oregonian (80%), Atlanta Journal Constitution (46.6%) and Daily Press (32.1%).

H3: *Coverage of the Vick controversy in newspapers with the most embedded interest in Vick will produce more episodic, human interest frames.*

In regard to episodic frames, this hypothesis was not supported because The Oregonian contained more episodic frames (100%) than the Daily Press (60.7%) and The Atlanta Journal Constitution (82.8%), the assigned newspapers with more embedded interest.
In regard to human interest frames, the hypothesis was supported because there were slightly more human interest frames in the Daily Press (14.3%) than the Atlanta Journal Constitution (13.8%), yet compared to the total percentage (100 percent) of all four newspapers, the percentage of human interest frames between these two newspapers was equal (47.1%).

![Figure 4.8. H3: Human Interest Frames](image)

**H4:** *Coverage of the Vick controversy in newspapers with less embedded interest in Vick will produce more thematic, conflicting frames.*

This hypothesis was supported in one of the least proximate newspapers because The Oklahoman contained the most thematic frames (88.9%) of all of the newspapers. However, it was not supported because The Oregonian, the other least proximate newspaper, because it did not contain any thematic frames. Following The Oklahoman, The Daily Press contained the next highest amount
of thematic frames (35.7%), followed by The Atlanta Journal Constitution (15.5%).

In terms of conflict frames, the hypothesis was fully supported because The Oklahoman contained the most conflict frames (88.9%) of the newspapers, followed by The Oregonian (80%), Atlanta Journal Constitution (46.6%) and The Daily Press (32.1%).
H5: Stories with a human interest frame will present a more favorable tone in coverage of the dogfighting controversy and his character.

This hypothesis was supported in the overall article tone because articles with a human interest frame produced a positive tone in more than half (58.8%) of the articles. However, in the other tone categories, the hypothesis was not supported. In the headline tone, the human interest frame produced a positive tone in only 29.4% of articles, while the majority (41.2%) of headline tones could not be determined. Also, the sub headline tone produced a favorable tone in 35.3% of articles and the majority (52.9%) of sub headlines was not present.

H6: Stories in newspapers with more embedded interest in Vick will present a more favorable tone in coverage of the dogfighting controversy and his character.
This hypothesis was supported because The Daily Press contained one article more with a positive tone than the Atlanta Journal Constitution. However, according to Pearson Chi-square, there is no significance (p<.05) between article tone and the newspaper source. In terms of the headline tone, the analysis showed that The Daily Press also had more articles with a positive headline tone than the other newspapers. However, according to Pearson Chi-square, the analysis also indicated that this was not a significant relationship (p< .05). Subject headline tone was the only category that indicated a significant correlation (p< .001) between the source and tone. The analysis indicated that the Daily Press revealed more subject headlines, although only one more than the Atlanta Journal Constitution, with a positive tone than the other newspapers.

Figure 4.12. H6: Number of articles with positive tone
DISCUSSION

The dogfighting controversy surrounding NFL quarterback Michael Vick was one of the most popular news stories of 2007. Not just because it happened at the height of his career, but also because it associated a well-known face with the underground “sport,” yet illegal activity of dogfighting. Ultimately, this story transcended many geographical and cultural boundaries in the media however, the extent and depth of the story’s range, or stories similar to this, have never been determined.

Media framing is a concept that is constantly being developed and their impact on news stories has been minimally researched. This study intended to broaden the knowledge base of framing by asking which frames were more prevalent in newspaper coverage of the dogfighting controversy. The results indicated that the conflict frame and episodic frame were the most dominant in the sources analyzed. Although the most prominent frames were not predicted by the researcher, these results are to be expected because of the nature of this situation. The conflict frame is expected to be prominent because dogfighting is a very debatable issue in this society. Although illegal, some people do not believe this activity is wrong, causing them to be at odds with others about the actions of Vick as well as the result of his court proceedings.
This study also anticipated that stories in newspapers with a human interest frame would present a more favorable tone in coverage of the dogfighting controversy and Vick’s character. This was predicted because the researcher believed that the emotional angle exemplified in the human interest frame would cause people to be more sympathetic and sensitive to the circumstances surrounding Michael Vick. The results of this study supported that assertion because the articles with a human interest frame produced a more positive tone. However, in the other categories of headline and sub headline tone, the tone could not be determined or was not present.

In past research, cultural proximity has been very vague in its description and few attempts have been made to define its measurement. There have also been no systematic attempts to measure this concept in terms of people.

To further the research of this theory, this study predicted that newspapers with the most cultural proximity would present more episodic and human interest frames. This expectation was based upon the review of the previous literature on cultural proximity which explains the audience’s need for coverage that relates to them. This suggests that if newspapers in this study were culturally proximate, they would create more narrative, in-depth coverage about the Michael Vick and his dogfighting controversy in their coverage because it would specifically relate to their audience. However, the results did not support the hypothesis because The Oregonian, the assumed newspaper
with no cultural proximity and Atlanta Journal Constitution, the assumed newspaper with some cultural proximity, contained more episodic frames than The Daily Press; the newspaper with the most cultural proximity. The Daily Press and Journal Constitution also contained the same percentage of human interest frames within the category, which was statistically significant.

This study also anticipated that newspapers with the least cultural proximity and embedded interest in Vick would produce more thematic, conflicting frames. This was based upon the expectation that newspapers without cultural proximity would provide more general information about Vick and the dogfighting controversy. Without specific details about Vick and basic, general information about events in the controversy, it was assumed that this portrayal would amplify the direct conflicts between groups in the news stories. The results supported this assumption and prediction because the Oklahoman and Oregonian contained more conflicting frames. In further support of the results, the Journal Constitution and Daily Press, respectively, had less conflicting frames, yet still contained more conflict frames than human interest frames in their coverage. The Oklahoman also presented more thematic frames but The Oregonian, one of the newspapers labeled without cultural proximity to Vick, did not present any thematic frames in their news stories.

Embedded interest, similar to the concepts discussed previously, has also been minimally researched. In fact, the concept of embedded interest, although
not new, is a theory recently examined by the Pfau et. al. study (2004), but only in terms of journalists covering war. This study planned to further research on this aspect of cultural proximity and its connection to framing, by predicting that newspapers with the most embedded interest would present more episodic and human interest frames. This expectation was based upon Pfau’s study that embedded print coverage of the Iraq War produced more episodic frames, as well as the assumption that embedded newspapers would present more personalized, contextualized coverage—characteristics of human interest frames. However, the results did not support this prediction. The Journal Constitution, the assumed newspaper with some embedded interest, contained more episodic frames than the Daily Press, the predicted newspaper with the most embedded interest. These two newspapers also contained the same amount of human interest frames, which produced statistically significant results as well.

This study also predicted that coverage of the Vick controversy in newspapers with less embedded interest in Vick would produce more thematic, conflicting frames. This prediction was supported in one regard because The Oklahoman contained the most thematic frames of all of the newspapers. It was also supported because The Oklahoman and Oregonian contained the most conflict frames of the newspapers and The Daily Press, the newspaper with the most embedded interest, contained the least. But, this prediction was only partially supported because The Oregonian did not contain any thematic frames.
To combine the theories of framing and embedded interest, the final prediction in this study was that stories in newspapers with more embedded interest in Vick would present a more favorable tone in coverage of the dogfighting controversy and his character. This expectation was based upon the Pfau et. al. study (2004) that embedded print coverage of the Iraq War was more favorable in overall tone, as well as the Zaharopoulos study (1990), which did not apply embedded interest but alluded to its impact because of Greek newspapers’ interest in Michael Dukakis and display of more favorable coverage than George H.W. Bush. The results supported the previous research by showing that both The Daily Press and Journal Constitution contained more articles with a positive tone than the other newspapers. However, between the two newspapers there was only a slight difference. There was also no significance between the article tone or headline tone and the newspaper source. Subject headline tone was the only category that indicated significance.

This study placed a great value on embedded interest and cultural proximity, but it was difficult to find previous research and specific definitions for them. To extend the knowledge of this concept, as determined by the results of this study, the researcher defines embedded interest as—“the rooted interest that a newspaper has in a particular individual, resulting in excessive coverage.” This definition is based upon the military concept of embedding journalists, explored by Pfau, as well as previous research by Linder (2009) explaining that
embedding produces more “available” and “prominent” stories. As observed in this study, word length, tone, headlines, and the number of times that an event regarding an individual repeatedly appears in the newspaper determines embedded interest. Other factors, concurrent with the Zaharopoulos study, such as space and photos in print newspaper editions would also be factors in determining the newspapers’ embedded interest in an individual.

Cultural proximity, the other concept discussed in this study, does not have a common definition or understanding in previous research. Based upon this study, the researcher defines cultural proximity to the individual as “the indigenous relationship between a newspaper and an individual.” This indigenous relationship is based upon the individual’s place of origin or their local residency within an area. This definition is based upon the “culture-bound factors” in the Galtung and Ruge (1965, 68) study as well as Ostgaard’s explanation that news is chosen by the media based upon the culture of the people in that region or the culture they predominantly identify with. The indigenous relationship in this definition of cultural proximity is not solely based upon an individual’s place of birth, but also upon the popularity of the individual and their contribution to an area. It is also based upon the area’s investment, financial and emotional, in the individual.

According to the results of this study, it is apparent that the Journal Constitution produced similar outcomes to The Daily Press; the newspaper
assigned with the most cultural proximity and embedded interest. This leads to the conclusion that the Journal Constitution, while labeled as the newspaper with some cultural proximity and moderate embedded interest in Vick’s dogfighting controversy, should also be considered as a source with the most cultural proximity and embedded interest instead.

While this is a discovery in the study, it is not necessarily surprising because of the relationship the Journal Constitution’s audience has with Michael Vick. Michael Vick made a major contribution to the Falcons as a successful quarterback, and the city of Atlanta, as a national superstar and well-known athlete for six years. This may not fit the terms of cultural proximity as far as the native aspect of the theory, but Atlanta is proximate because it was Vick’s home professionally and personally for six years as well as, in terms of the investment the Falcons franchise made into Vick and his popularity in the city of Atlanta.

Assigning cultural proximity to locations is a difficult task and has never been done in past research. This can be attributed to the minimal research conducted on this concept and developing understanding. To extend knowledge about this concept and further understanding based upon the results of this study, the researcher suggests that cultural proximity should actually be considered a news value. Current news values of: impact, timeliness, prominence, the unusual or bizarre, conflict, currency and proximity are each instrumental in determining the stories that the media choose to show their
audience, however, “cultural proximity” is a more appropriate value and term to use instead of “proximity.”

Proximity only describes distance or how close one entity is to another. Cultural proximity is a more specific label because it directly addresses the relationship between the media and the individual instead of just the distance.

Galtung and Ruge (1965, 70) listed cultural proximity as a subset of the news value “meaningfulness” when documenting their twelve news values, which are the foundation for the current model of values today. In fact, in their description of the news value meaningfulness, they state that news media is more likely to select news that is “culturally similar” because it is in their “frame of reference” (Harcup and O’Neill 2001, 263). While the frame of reference refers to distance, the clause about news being “culturally similar” extends this explanation to cultural proximity.

For further research, a study could be conducted to determine if news value prominence is the same for other celebrities, specifically celebrities famous for positive endeavors or contributions, in non crisis-related situations. The subject used in this study, Michael Vick, was predominantly known for his success in the NFL, but for further research, it would be interesting to conduct this study on other celebrities such as Madonna or Angelina Jolie, who are not only known for their music and acting careers, respectively, but also for their international activism and volunteer efforts, to see if their outcomes reflect this
Another suggestion for future research is to conduct this study on an athlete that is not in crisis to see if the outcome would also be the same.

Other suggestions for future study are to use print articles instead of Internet articles. While the researcher believes that Internet articles were a satisfactory sample selection for this initial study, print articles may be a better method to determine framing of this controversy. Although very similar, content is not the same in Internet articles as newspaper articles. Also, this study does not include all of the articles associated with the controversy because some of the Internet articles could not be accessed. They either contained missing or broken Internet links, or were absent in the database because they were in the paid archive. In fact, some of the more critical articles in the controversy were actually in the paid archive. The addition of these missing articles could have significantly impacted the results of this study. Another suggestion for further research when using print articles, are to include the categories of headline point size, quadrant of the article, photos included with the article, as well as the page in which the article appeared. These will assist in determining cultural proximity and embedded interest in additional research.

After determining that the Journal Constitution would actually be characterized as a newspaper with the most embedded interest, there is an association that can be concluded from the results of this investigation. The results clearly indicate that newspapers with embedded interest produce more
episodic, human interest frames. This replicates the findings in the Pfau study, but extends knowledge about this theory because it reveals that embedded interest does not just apply to journalists in war coverage but also to newspapers with embedded interest in certain people and events.

In analyzing these results, it can also be concluded that more extensive coverage of controversy primarily results in episodic frames. The culturally proximate newspapers had more episodic frames than thematic frames, and although the Oregonian was not culturally proximate, it used more Associated Press articles than the other newspapers which could have had an effect on the amount of episodic frames it showed. The Associated Press has bureaus throughout the country, which gives them direct access and more extensive coverage, so it is assumed that this source contributed to the significant amount of episodic frames in the Oregonian, because Michael Vick has no cultural proximity to this newspaper.

This study illustrated that there is not a solid, consistent trend with cultural proximity and specific frames in newspaper coverage; meaning that the type of dominant frames in culturally proximate newspapers cannot be confidently predicted. It is assumed that this occurs because of the extensive reporting and variety of stories that appear in publicized, controversial situations. Despite this, the conclusion that can be made is that culturally proximate newspapers exhibit both, human interest and conflict frames in
coverage. While the newspapers without cultural proximity exhibit the most conflict frames, the newspapers with the most cultural proximity still produce more conflicting frames than human interest frames as well. Based upon this observation, it can be concluded that conflict frames are more prevalent in newspaper coverage about crisis situations such as the Michael Vick’s dogfighting controversy, but that when human interest frames are exhibited, that they produce a more favorable tone in coverage for the person or event.

This study is of value because it shows that cultural proximity can be a determinant of the amount of coverage a newspaper produces about an individual or event. The culturally proximate newspapers, The Daily Press and Journal Constitution, had a significantly greater number of articles—(56 and 58 respectively)—than the newspapers without cultural proximity (Oklahoman-9, Oregonian-5). However, this study also shows that just because an area is not culturally proximate to an individual, does not mean that there is not any interest in the individual. This can be concluded because even the newspapers without cultural proximity still published several articles about Vick and the dogfighting controversy even though they were not culturally proximate to him or the situation.

This discovery has great benefit to public relations practitioners, specifically in the area of media relations, because these findings show practitioners how to help their clients gain coverage in areas that are not
culturally proximate to them. Obviously, practitioners know how to gain coverage for a client within their coverage area, but they may be missing opportunities in other areas because they do not realize that areas without cultural proximity may also have an interest in their client.

A limitation of this study is that Michael Vick and the researcher share the same hometown of Newport News, Virginia. Knowing Michael Vick as a down-to-earth, “hometown hero” before he became a major football star is what drew the researcher to find out more about this situation and analyze how the media portrays him in their coverage of the dogfighting controversy. However, this could have presented some unintentional biases into the findings of this study.
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APPENDIX

Codebook

OPERATIONAL DEFINITIONS AND ABBREVIATIONS, UNITS OF ANALYSIS & SCORING MEASURES

AN - Article Number  1,2,3,4, etc.

SOU - Source  1 - Daily Press
          2 - Atlanta Journal Constitution
          3 - The Oklahoman
          4 - The Oregonian

ID# -- The month and day of newspaper (ex. 3/7)

AR - Article reporter/writer
        1- Newspaper’s reporter
        2- Associated Press
        3- Other

WL - Word Length of article

HT - Tone of Headline

1- Positive; supportive quotes about Vick, positive words/description of Vick’s character and/or actions

    Ex. “Cool down on Vick, coach says”

2- Negative; unsupportive/unpleasant quotes about Vick, damaging words/description of Vick’s character and/or actions
Ex. “Vick Indicted”

-References to dogs as Vick’s in a negative manner

Ex. “Signs point to dog fights at Vick house”

Other examples: Accusations made against Vick, an upgrade in criminal charges; consequences enacted by endorsement companies (a loss of endorsement deals), Falcons team owners, NFL commissioner, etc.; threats to enforce consequences upon Vick.

3- Both are evident

4- Tone is not evident

SLT — Tone of Subject line

1- Positive; supportive quotes about Vick, positive words/description of Vick’s character and/or actions

   Ex. “His former leader for Warwick High supports the NFL star against dogfight accusations”

2- Negative; unsupportive/unpleasant quotes about Vick, damaging words/description of Vick’s character and/or actions

   Ex. “Michael Vick is expected to say one thing in court tomorrow – “Guilty.”

   -References to dogs as Vick’s in a negative manner

   Ex. “Aggressive Vick dogs may die”

3- Both are evident

4- Tone is not evident

5- No subject line present
AT – Tone of article

1- Positive; supportive quotes about Vick, positive words/description of Vick’s character and/or actions

   Ex. “I think he was extremely sincere. I’m pulling for Michael Vick,” said a Falcons fan.

2- Negative; unsupportive/unpleasant quotes about Vick, damaging words/description of Vick’s character and/or actions; any upgrade in charges

   Ex. “Hopefully with the indictment of Michael Vick, who is far more of a household name than those that have been arrested in the past, this will put a spotlight on [dogfighting] and show that a stupid and cruel act that can end your career isn’t worth it,” said John Goodwin, manager of animal fighting issues for the Humane Society of the United States.

   - References to dogs as Vick’s in a negative manner

3- Both are evident

4- Tone is not evident

FR1 – First frame evident in article

1 – Human interest frames bring an individuals’ story or an emotional angle to the presentation of an event, issue or problem; personalizes an issue.

   Ex. "Your Honor, I am not the bad person or the beast I've been made out to be," Michael Vick said, in his handwritten note. "I have been talked about and ridiculed on a day to day basis by people who really don't know Michael Vick the human being."

   Other examples: Coaches, family, friends, fans or teammates describing Michael Vick’s upbringing or character in a supportive, emotional tone.

   Ex. “Michael is a great person and teammate and doesn’t deserve this type

2 – Conflict frames emphasize conflict between individuals, groups, or institutions; makes winning and losing the central concern; the language of
wars, games and competition is featured, with an emphasis on the performance and style of a party or an individual.

Ex. “Upon learning on Tuesday that Vick might be trying to negotiate a plea deal in the dogfighting investigation that has thrown his NFL career into jeopardy, Martin Mersereau -- manager of PETA's cruelty casework division -- wrote a letter to assistant U.S. attorney Michael Gill.

"One small but vital matter with regard to Michael Vick's possible plea bargain," Mersereau wrote. "We implore your office to include a provision prohibiting Mr. Vick from owning and/or harboring any animal."

Other examples: Animal protection/rights groups vs. Vick, Prosecutors vs. Vick, Fans vs. Vick

3- Both are evident

4 -Did not contain

FR2 -Second Frame evident in article

1 -Episodic frames personalize issues and give specific details about any aspect of the controversy in a narrative form. They include significant quotes from various sources and provide in-depth coverage of the event.

2 -Thematic frames present collective, broad/general facts and do not include any personal characteristics; a backgrounder or short summary of the controversy event.

Ex. Michael Vick's biggest endorsement deal is with shoe company Nike, which has stood by Vick throughout the dog-fighting investigation.

Following Vick's indictment on Tuesday, the company issued the following statement: "We are aware of the indictment and are reviewing the information. We have no further comment at this time."

Vick had an endorsement deal with AirTran, but the airline announced in May that it did not renew his contract once it expired May 8.

3 -Did not contain
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