

A CONTENT ANALYSIS
OF CINCINNATI PRINT MEDIA:
HUGS FOR HUGGINS
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Introduction

Basketball is the third most popular sport in America, with 9 percent of Americans identifying themselves as fans of basketball, according to a 2008 Gallup Lifestyle poll (Jones, 2008). College basketball, in particular, ranks as the fifth-most popular sport in the United States, with nearly 4 percent of those surveyed responding that college basketball was their favorite spectator sport (SportsBusiness Daily, 2009). More than 11 million households tuned in to watch the NCAA March Madness men's basketball tournament in 2010 (Reiher, 2010).

With college basketball's popularity and fans' desire to know all they can about their team, sports reporters and editors are compelled to provide that information. However, more and more of the media's audience believe that reporting is inaccurate and there is bias, according to the Pew Research Center for the People & the Press (Pew Research 2009). In order to understand professional pressures and to determine if sports reporters remain neutral, a two-phase study is being conducted. This first phase – a content analysis of University of Cincinnati men's basketball coverage – will evaluate all stories written during a season (2003-2004) when the team experienced success on the court, but its coach was arrested and charged with drunken driving. A second phase (not part of this paper) will include interviews with the sports writers of the stories that were analyzed.

The two newspapers used in this study – The Cincinnati Enquirer and The Cincinnati Post – were selected because both daily newspapers covered the team on a regular, full-time basis. A reporter, or reporters, were always assigned to the UC

basketball beat. The reporters also were surrounded by thousands of fans, as the arena at the University of Cincinnati can seat more than 13,000.

By living and working in a city enveloped by fans of the Bearcats, sports reporters could be influenced to be a member of the “in” group. Ingroups provide classifications for individuals (Allport, 1954). Allport writes that some ingroups are inherent through social status, religion, sex, race, family tradition and occupation. As result of influence by family and friends, it’s possible sports reporters are fans years before they start working on the men’s basketball beat. The fan aspect of their lives may interfere with the objectivity they strive for in their career.

This research is important on several levels. First, it could provide insight into the way sports reporters are currently reporting on teams. The practical application is that reporters and editors can learn to be vigilant in their efforts to report the news in articles and keep their opinions to columns. It could also help academics, as professors talk to students about reporting, they can emphasize the importance of remaining unbiased.

While this research examines a time frame that is more than six years old, the topic is more relevant than ever. For example, according to The Wall Street Journal, The National Enquirer held a story about Tiger Woods’ affair in exchange for an interview with the Enquirer’s sister publication, Men’s Fitness (Albergotti, 2009). While The National Enquirer denies it held the story in exchange for the exclusive with Woods, the idea exists that the media will “scratch an athlete’s back if the athlete scratches theirs.”

As Strupp put it, “Today, the sportswriting talent level is arguably down, the hero-worship approach has been replaced with a nonstop appetite for scandal, and many of the sports covered are of little interest to most hardcore fans,” (Strupp, 2001).

Additionally, more and more of the media's audience believes that reporting is inaccurate and biased, according to the Pew Research Center for the People & the Press (Pew Research 2009). Whether or not that is true is still being debated, but this research will shed some additional light on the subject. Very little academic research exists on the evolution of sports writing (Reinardy, 2009). Furthermore, if this research shows sports reporters treat the teams they cover with kid gloves, additional research can be performed to determine why this is the case. Is it because playing nice results in better access to the team and players? Or is it because the reporters have an affinity for the teams and athletes they cover? Is there pressure from other sources, e.g. companies that advertise both with the team and the newspaper? There could be other possibilities as well.

Literature Review

Social identity theory provides the framework through which this analysis will be conducted. Previous research in this area supplies insight into how sports reporters cover their team, athletes and athletic organizations. Covering a sports team can create intergroup bias, because the reporter must interact with the coach and his team while following strict instructions. If a reporter refuses, it can lead to public repercussions, thus creating intergroup bias (Reinardy, 2009). Researchers also have studied bias in the media by examining critiques and reviews of sports writing.

Even though the sports section of many newspapers makes up a large portion of the paper's total size, critics claim the sports section produces a small amount of credible journalism. In the late 1970s, newspapers and the Associated Press Sports Editors Association called for an incorporation of journalism standards into what had historically been mostly promotional sports writing. Norman Isaacs, then editor of the Louisville

Courier-Journal, criticized sports editors for “running the toy departments” of their newspapers — thus not being taken seriously by their peers — and for taking free tickets and accepting free travel. The APSE adopted a code of ethics, which prohibits deals, discounts or gifts of significant value and which strongly discourages the cheerleading of years past (Huenergard, 1979).

“Sports writers were cheerleaders for so long that coaches and players have come to expect newspapers to be a source of scrapbook material for them and a litany by which hero worshipers can stoke the fires of the hot stove leagues,” Associated Press General Manager Wick Temple said in 1979. “It is going to take another decade for sports reporters to gain acceptance as journalists and put an end to the conception that they are publicity men and women” (Huenergard, 1979, p. 11).

Nearly three decades later, sports writers still want the same level of respectability as their news brethren. Sports reporters are spending more and more time working on enterprise, feature and investigative stories and less time on basic game coverage (Strupp, 2001).

Sports is big business, especially in the new millennium. The value of the four major American sports leagues alone has grown to more than \$47 billion (Levin, 2009). At the college level, it is not unusual for universities to have annual athletic department budgets that exceed \$35 million (DeSchraver, 2009).

With the dominance of sports programming on cable television, sports talk radio and the Internet, the way the media covers sports has changed. Instead of working to get access to players and coaches before and after games, sports reporters are spending more and more time chasing stories off the courts. With the explosion of Internet coverage by

major media players such as the Entertainment and Sports Network, or ESPN, and bloggers, sports reporters are constantly digging into rumors and quips made about the teams they cover (Stubb, 2001).

Powerhouse National Collegiate Athletic Association universities bring in millions of dollars from athletic events. Division I schools, such as the University of Cincinnati, generate as much as \$5 million in revenue from a single football home contest and have revenue in excess of \$40 million (DeSchrive, 2009).

Financial pressure on teams, athletic departments, players and coaches, may even prompt them to demand positive coverage. Coaches and administrators are not above threatening reporters who have focused on negative aspects of their programs. For example, when reporter Alan Robinson quoted a disillusioned West Virginia University athlete who was unhappy with the athletic program, a coach threatened to cancel his press credentials. The coach also told a television audience that Robinson had flunked out of journalism school at West Virginia and was upset with the university. In truth, Robinson was an “A” student at West Virginia before transferring, (Huenergard, 1979, p.11).

College coaches have said bluntly that they want beat writers to cover the team in a positive light, or remain as neutral as possible. Barry Switzer, the coach at the University of Oklahoma from 1973 to 1989, once said, “If you’re a reporter, be neutral or be for us, but don’t be against us” (Henderson, 1987, p. 96). With huge pressure from the universities, athletic boosters, and even sponsors, objectivity can be replaced by biased reporting that supplements the press releases sent out by the universities’ sports information offices.

Social Identity Theory

Social identity processes are fundamental to understanding how people behave collectively. As Turner wrote in 1975, social identity is “the individual’s knowledge that he belongs to certain social groups together with some emotional and value significance to him of this group membership” (p. 17). Social identity theory, a term first coined by Turner and Brown (1978) to explain the work of Tajfel – who developed social identity theory with Turner – began as an attempt to explain intergroup discrimination in the minimal group paradigm. A minimal group paradigm is a popular method of testing intergroup phenomena that suggests any grouping of people will result in intergroup discrimination (Crano and Dobbs, 2001). Socially categorizing people into distinct groups produces intergroup behavior in which subjects favored in-group over out-group members (Turner, 1980). As members of both groups want to view themselves as having a positive social identity, they will work harder for their group. At the same time, when another group is present, they will work harder still, not just to make their group better, but to beat the other group because it is there.

Work on the social identity theory started in the late 1960s and early 1970s. One of the seminal works on social identity theory was completed by Tajfel, et. al. in 1971. In this first series of experiments, Tajfel found that the subjects favored their own group in the distribution of rewards and penalties in a situation in which nothing but the variable of fairly irrelevant classification distinguished between the in-group and the out-group (Tajfel, et. al. 1971). The subjects, students randomly divided into different groups, were given tasks to complete in a situation where there was a limited amount of resources to gain. The subjects tried to get the most rewards for their group and the least penalties,

even if it meant sacrificing other objective advantages. In these experiments, even when the subjects were not in a situation where it was clear ingroup membership was taking place, they still acted in terms of ingroup membership and intergroup categorization.

Tajfel, et. al. found that even though the subjects had the opportunity to work for the greatest common good, at a relatively small cost to the in-group, they would not do it. The divided groups worked toward getting the most benefits for themselves, and viewed themselves as working against the other group. “It is the winning that seems most important to them” (p. 172).

Turner (1975) expanded on the work of Tajfel, by arguing that while Tajfel’s results were correct, Tajfel did not see the whole picture. He argued that the subjects didn’t make their decisions based on monetary reward, but on social comparison. In his study, he distributed “points,” to half the subjects and money to the other half. (The points had no real value aside from the experiment, but having the most points was considered better.) His results showed that the desire to “win” was even stronger when money was not a factor.

Turner looked to verify results that had been found prior to his work and the work of Tajfel. He writes in his 1975 study that one of the simple aspects of previous work that he was attempting to verify was that individuals feel the need to evaluate themselves, as was noted by Festinger in 1954 (Turner, 1975). Turner added that the individual evaluates himself in society, not just as an individual. An individual judges himself not on what he alone does, but compares himself to other members of society to determine who he is and where he ranks.

Earlier work by Turner also argued this point. In 1975, Turner was studying the relationship between perceived social identity and intergroup comparison. The result of his experiments showed that members of groups would attempt to create intergroup differentiation in a way that provides them with a positive self-evaluation (Turner, 1975). He also found from the standpoint of social identity, that groups aim to move to more positive value in comparison with other groups.

In a 1980 study, Turner showed that groups were always discriminatory when compared to another group. He found that in-group bias can represent attempts to achieve positive distinctiveness for the in-group over the out-group. By doing so, the in-group is able to obtain a favorable self-evaluation in terms of group membership (Turner, 1980). It was in this study that Turner finds that there is no evidence that different status groups attempt to reduce the imbalance between them. But, he did state that members of the low-status group seek a new balance that may be in their favor (Turner, 1980).

Prior research has shown that members of groups tend to form a group identity for themselves, but that this identity is not their only one (Turner, 1999). “The social identity analysis posits that people are both individuals and group members and display both individuality and collective identity” (p. 31). While it may seem the two identities are separate and different, that is not always the case. In fact, for some people, leaving a group for another group, or to leave as an individual, is as meaningful as trying to become someone else (Turner, 1999).

While being a member of a group has a strong psychological impact on the group member, being a part of a group is not viewed as being negative. Intergroup competition enhances intragroup morale, cohesiveness and cooperation (Tajfel and Turner, 1988).

Therefore, as groups compete against each other, each individual group grows stronger in its connections. There is a stronger identification with the group and a positive attachment to said group when there is a real conflict against another group.

It was assumed by Tajfel and Turner (1988) that the more intense the intergroup conflict, the more likely it would be that the individuals who are members of the opposite groups would behave toward each other as a function of their respective group memberships. Thus, as the conflict intensifies, so do the negative feelings toward members of the opposite group.

Tajfel and Turner (1988) also found that the role the group membership plays is extremely influential on the individuals in those groups. "Individuals will not interact as individuals, on the basis of their individual characteristics or interpersonal relationships, but as members of their groups standing in certain defined relationships to members of other groups" (p. 10).

Turner and others (Gaertner 2000, Brown 1979) have defended their work on the social identity theory, saying that it is much more complex than some believe. "There is a notion in many reviews that social identity theory is simply the assertion of a universal, irrational drive for ethnocentrism, unconstrained by social realities or the social meaning of intergroup attitudes, that this drive serves some individual, almost quasi-biological need for self-esteem, and that some simple, single factor which triggers or relates to this drive should be positively correlated with the intergroup discrimination, virtually independent of social context or the perceived nature of intergroup relations" (Turner 1999, 19).

The “basic and highly reliable” finding from Tajfel and Turner is that trivial intergroup categorization leads to in-group favoritism and discrimination against the out-group (Tajfel & Turner, 1988). Billig and Tajfel found the same results even when groups were assigned explicitly at random. Other researchers, including Brewer and Silver (1978), Locksley, Ortiz & Hepburn (1980) and Turner, Sacheder & Hogg (1983) have all replicated this finding (Tajfel & Turner, 1988).

A number of studies have been done using different types of groups. For example, some studies have used students who all knew each other because they were in the same class. Others have used groups of people that didn’t know each other at all. Pfeifer et al., (2007), studied in-group and out-group behavior among immigrant children. By looking at 392 children attending the second or fourth grade, they found children with recent ethnic backgrounds, or those who were born in America to immigrants, evaluated members of their same background higher than children who were members of a different background.

Research in other areas shows a person’s identification with a group can be an important part of his or her self-concept. Research on sports has shown the relationship between the group and the individual is critically important. Sports fans who strongly identify with their sports teams, take losses as though they were the ones who were defeated (Sloan 1979, cited in Dietz-Uhler, 1999).

Sociologist Emile Durkheim (1965, cited in Dietz-Uhler, 1999) said individuals can become “lost” when they are with a group motivated by the same passion. This passion motivates behaviors on the part of an individual, which typically would only occur in a group situation. People on an individual level are motivated by positive social

identity and lean toward favoring members of their own group versus other groups. So, individuals attribute more positive traits to members of their group (Dietz-Uhler, 1999).

In the study conducted by Dietz-Uhler, 74 participants were asked about their perceptions of a college football team during the course of a season. The researchers found that fans who identified strongly with their universities rated the team more favorably throughout the season than fans with a weak connection. Fans who had stronger connections to the university ranked the team more favorably after a win than a loss, while fans who did not have strong connections to the university evaluated the team about the same throughout the season, regardless of wins and losses (Dietz-Uhler, 1999).

Sports journalists perform a balancing act between fan and impartial reporter. Newspaper beat writers, who cover the same teams day in and day out provide daily coverage in the sports section, update blogs about the team and appear on television and talk radio programs to provide insight. Criticizing the team they cover for a living could lead to repercussions that jeopardize their coverage while working their job. Negative questions, or even questions that aren't in line with what the coach or team wants to talk about, can result in problems for the reporter. For example, The Cincinnati Enquirer's Cincinnati Bengals beat reporter, Dustin Dow, was reassigned because of a confrontation about the types of questions he was asking Bengals head coach Marvin Lewis (Leahy 2008). Being a member of the "in-group" allows the reporter to have equal or greater access to the team, which enables the reporter to provide the best possible "positive" coverage for the readers. This, in turn, might violate objectivity (Reinardy, 2009).

Because reporters and newspapers try to reach out to their audiences, they form their work around the ideals of their readers and viewers. The immediacy of game scores

available online and on ESPN, and the ability of individual teams to publish original content on their Web sites, forces sports reporters to provide readers with something they want and can't get elsewhere (Strupp, 2001). To cater to fans, who view the team as a part of their identities, reporters take the same view of that in-group.

This study uses content analysis to examine how sports writers at two daily newspapers and the Associated Press covered the University of Cincinnati men's basketball team among the flood of pro-team, in-group sentiments.

Methodology

The content analysis examined a portion of the 2003-04 regular season, the 2004 Conference USA tournament, the NCAA tournament and a portion of the off-season from Feb. 11 to Oct. 11. Every article that focused on UC men's basketball coverage during that time period, including game coverage, feature stories, hard news stories and other coverage was selected. The stories come from The Cincinnati Enquirer and The Cincinnati Post, two newspapers in Cincinnati that operated under a joint operating agreement, sharing advertising and circulation services, but with completely separate editorial staffs and editorial control.

Analyzed content included pre-game coverage, game day coverage, post-game coverage, and general coverage of UC's men's basketball program. The author, date of publication, and section in which the story appeared was recorded for each story. It also was noted if the story appeared after a win or a loss. Associated Press coverage of UC's men's basketball team stories was analyzed in a comparative group.

The Associated Press stories were accessed via the Web site LexisNexis News, which catalogs AP articles. All articles that fell under the specified guidelines were

obtained from this site. The Cincinnati Post articles were accessed through News Bank, a searchable Web site. The Cincinnati Enquirer articles were accessed by visiting the paper's offices in downtown Cincinnati and using the paper's archive system to find all stories pertaining to the team.

To test whether the University of Cincinnati men's basketball team was receiving favorable media coverage and to examine difference in coverage between the two Cincinnati newspapers, a content analysis of the newspaper stories and Associated Press stories was conducted. A content analysis is defined as "a method of studying and analyzing communication in a systematic, objective and quantitative manner for the purpose of measuring variables" (Kerlinger, 2000). It allows the researcher to look at qualitative data in a quantitative manner.

Each paragraph of each story was coded as being favorable, unfavorable or neutral. Those paragraphs that were coded as favorable had the following characteristics;

- excuses, ("This hasn't been one of the best rebounding teams the University of Cincinnati has fielded under coach Bob Huggins, but it's still formidable enough to cause opponents to gulp nervously over the prospect of banging with the Bearcats on the boards.") (Koch, 2004);

- boasting, ("The Bearcats have never lost to Wake Forest in five previous meetings.") (Koch, 2004);

- historical comparison of the current team with successful teams of the past, ("Matchups worked in UC's favor when the Bearcats burst onto the national scene after a long drought in Huggins' third season at UC in 1992.") (Koch, 2004);

- disregard of unfavorable information, (“He doesn’t run the Bearcats for outsiders. He runs it with the belief he has the best interest of the school in mind,”) (Katowitz, 2004); and

- complimentary (“The trash-talking issue aside, the Bearcats make no excuses for the physical brand of basketball that has been their trademark under Huggins, even if they’re not quite as good at it as they once were.”) (Koch, 2004).

Attributes of unfavorable paragraphs include:

- judgmental, (“That shortcoming hurt them badly Sunday in their loss to Illinois, where the three Illinois guards combined for 51 points, 24 assists and only two turnovers.”) (Koch, 2004);

- disparaging/critical statements, (“UC also failed to execute its free-throw shooting – again.”) (Williams, 2004);

- references to past criminal/legal/academic problems for players and coaches, (“The male basketball program at UC long has been plagued by the arrests of its representatives – although the representatives generally were players.”) (Houck and Horstman, 2004); and

- disregard of favorable information, (“Don’t put too much stock in that 90-65 University of Cincinnati victory over DePaul,”) (Koch, 2004).

The neutral category served as a catchall for paragraphs that were not classified as favorable or unfavorable, and were not quotes. For example, paragraphs about when and where games were scheduled to be played were coded as neutral.

Remaining paragraphs were coded as a home quote, an away quote or an other quote. Paragraphs coded as Quotes Home team included all paragraphs where the

majority of the words were direct quotes from the University of Cincinnati players, coaches, public/media relations' officials and other university employees. Those paragraphs coded as Quotes Opposing team were limited to quotes from the opposing team's players and coaches. Finally, Other Quotes were paragraphs that did not fall under the two previous quotes sections, such as quotes from fans, students, parents of student-athletes, alumni, high school coaches and others.

For this study, 3,678 paragraphs from 214 stories, including stories written by different reporters at each publication, were coded as being favorable, unfavorable, neutral, a home quote, an opposing quote or an other quote.

The following hypotheses may be true because college sports in general have such a large following that the reporters want to feel like they are a part of the fan ingroup. Also, reporters are doing everything they can to provide content others can't, even if it means favoring the team in their reporting. And the reporters who cover the team on a regular basis have the most to gain by maintaining a good relationship with the coach and the team.

However, the following hypotheses may also be false because reporters are aware of the bias that can be found in articles. Since the Associated Press Sports Editors Association adopted its code of ethics, sports reporters and editors have been encouraged to report objectively. Also, reporters are now trained to limit the amount of bias in their reporting.

The content analysis will test these hypotheses:

H1: Cincinnati Enquirer and Cincinnati Post reporters wrote more favorable paragraphs than unfavorable paragraphs over the 10-month period.

H2: Associated Press reporters wrote more neutral paragraphs than Cincinnati Enquirer and Cincinnati Post reporters.

H3: Prior to Huggins' arrest, The Enquirer and The Post wrote more favorable paragraphs than after his arrest.

H4: Enquirer and Post stories included more favorable paragraphs during the season, compared to stories written out of season.

According to Wimmer and Dominick (2006), "The goal of a content analysis is an accurate representation of a body of messages" (pg. 151). One of the most important factors in fulfilling that goal is quantification, because it aids researchers in their attempt to find precise information. Also, quantification allows researchers to summarize results and to report them in a concise manner. Finally, quantification gives researchers more statistical tools that can aid in analysis and interpretation.

Studies using content analysis are traditionally conducted for one of five purposes, even though it is difficult to categorize and classify studies as varied and diverse as those using this method. The five purposes are: describing communication content, testing hypotheses of message characteristics, comparing media content to the "real world," assessing the image of particular groups in society and establishing a starting point for studies of media effects (Wimmer and Dominick, 2006).

For this content analysis, the communication content technique will be utilized to review the content. Recent studies have catalogued the characteristics of a given body of communication content at one or more points in time. These studies use content analysis to identify what exists.

Content analysis will be appropriate for this study because as Daniel Riffe, Stephen Lacy and Frederick G. Fico state: “Individual news stories are the consequences of reporter news judgments, interactions with both purposive and nonpurposive sources” (Westley & MacLean, 1957), and decisions about style, structure, emphasis and language, among other areas. The content is the result of the journalistic practices, routines and values, not exactly the result of a mirror being held up to reality.

The content analysis was conducted at both the manifest content level and the latent content level. “Manifest content is what you actually see and count,” (Stacks, 2002 pg. 109). For example, the number of times a particular statistic is mentioned in the content (Huggins win-loss record, his players’ graduation rate) or the number of times Huggins’ arrest is mentioned. “Latent content is more qualitative and deals with the underlying or deeper meanings of the message. These themes become what is measured,” (Stacks, 2002, pg. 109). Latent content is typically more difficult to count and must be measured by a scale or some other measurement system.

Because this study is looking not only at the tangible and countable occurrences in the content, but also the overarching themes or each paragraph, it would be correct to use a combination of both levels of analysis to determine if a paragraph falls under the favorable, neutral or unfavorable category.

For a content analysis to be objective, its measures and procedures must be reliable. For a study to be reliable, repeated measurement of the same material must result in similar decisions and conclusions. Intercoder reliability refers to levels of agreement among independent coders who code the same content using the same coding device. Most published content analyses typically report a minimum reliability coefficient of

about 90 percent or above when using Holsti's formula, and about .75 or above when using *pi* or *kappa* (Wimmer and Dominick, 2006). As the content that will be analyzed will involve a certain amount of interpretation, reliability estimates will be on the lower end.

A second researcher coded 35 stories, containing 510 paragraphs, or approximately 14 percent of the total content analyzed. Intercoder reliability for this study was 71.2 percent, using Holsti's formula, where reliability equal twice the number of coding decisions on which the two coders agree divided the total number of coding decisions by the first and second coder, respectively. The intercoder reliability was below norms because of the nature of the articles being coded. The articles in this content analysis were written with sports fans in mind. The reporters used terms, phrases and sentence construction that can be viewed as confusing to those who do not regularly read the sports page. Also, basketball has a number of terms that are specific the sport, which could have confused the coders. Interpretation of this content analysis will not allow the researcher to draw claims about the impact of the content without a study that examines the audience.

Findings

The Associated Press stories that were coded served as a comparative group to the stories from both newspapers. The AP stories were used in this way because AP reporters do not typically have the same level of fan scrutiny as the local newspaper reporters because they are not covering the same team day in and day out. As a wire service, the AP provides its content to a national audience and a state audience, as opposed to the Cincinnati papers, which primarily serve a local audience. The Associated Press does not

rely on local advertising revenue to maintain its financial stability. The AP is responsible to its members.

Hypothesis 1 predicted that reporters from both Cincinnati papers would write more favorable paragraphs than unfavorable paragraphs during the 10-month period. After examining 3,678 paragraphs from the newspapers and the Associated Press, this study found that just under 4 percent of the Cincinnati Enquirer paragraphs were favorable and 9.5 percent Post paragraphs were favorable, compared with 13.32 percent of AP paragraphs. The hometown papers' neutral paragraphs were 56.9 percent for The Enquirer and 46.8 percent for The Post, while the AP was 44.7 percent. The AP had 20.3 percent unfavorable paragraphs, compared to 14.9 for The Post and 7.9 percent for The Enquirer. These percentages do not total 100 percent because they do not include the quotes paragraphs, which were coded separately. H1 was not supported. In fact, the opposite was found, as both papers had more unfavorable paragraphs than favorable ones.

Table 1: Hypothesis 1 not supported	Favorable (Percent)	Unfavorable	Neutral	Total
AP	110 (13.3%)	168 (20.3%)	369 (44.7%)	826
Enquirer	68 (4%)	135 (7.9%)	970 (56.9%)	1705
Post	109 (9.5%)	171 (14.9%)	537 (46.8%)	1147
Total	287 (7.8%)	474 (12.9%)	1876 (51%)	3,678

Hypothesis 2 built on the first hypothesis, predicting that the Associated Press would write more neutral paragraphs than either The Cincinnati Post or The Cincinnati Enquirer. The AP had 44.7 percent of its paragraphs coded as neutral. The Cincinnati

Post had a similar result, with 46.8 percent of its paragraphs coded as neutral. However, The Cincinnati Enquirer had 56.9 percent of its paragraphs coded as neutral. Since a notably larger percent of Enquirer paragraphs were coded as neutral, H2 was not supported.

Hypothesis 3 suggested that the University of Cincinnati men's basketball team was covered less favorably after the arrest of Huggins. The hypothesis stated that prior to Huggins' June arrest for drunken driving, both The Cincinnati Post and The Cincinnati Enquirer wrote more favorable paragraphs than after his arrest. An analysis of the data shows that 12.95 percent of Post paragraphs before the arrest were coded as favorable, versus 5.7 percent after the arrest became public June 11, 2004. Similar results were found when looking at the paragraphs from The Enquirer. Before the arrest, 5.1 percent of the paragraphs were favorable; after the arrest, just under 2 percent were favorable. Hypothesis 3 was supported. However, coverage was not entirely favorable prior to the arrest.

Finally, Hypothesis 4 addressed coverage in season versus out of season. The hypothesis stated both Cincinnati Post and Enquirer articles written during the basketball season would have more favorable paragraphs than those written out of season. For both papers, this was the case, as 13.2 percent of paragraphs from in-season coverage by The Post were coded as favorable, compared with 5.6 percent after the season; and 5.8 percent of paragraphs from the season written by Enquirer reporters were coded as favorable, versus 1.6 percent outside of the season. However, there were more unfavorable paragraphs written during the season than after it in both papers. The Post had 116 unfavorable paragraphs, or 19.6 percent, during the season, compared to 55 paragraphs,

or 9.9 percent, during the off-season. The Enquirer had 101 unfavorable paragraphs during the season, 10.4 percent, compared to 34, 4.6 percent, in the off-season.

Also, when the team was not playing, more neutral paragraphs appeared in the articles. The Enquirer’s percentage of neutral paragraphs increased from 53.6 percent during the season to 61.25 percent out of the season. The Post’s increased from 36.9 percent in season to 57.4 percent after games had ended. Essentially, articles included less bias out of season than during the season. Hypothesis 4 was supported.

In-Season Vs. Out-of-Season Favorability	Favorable Paragraphs During Season	Favorable Paragraphs Out of Season
Enquirer	56	12
Post	78	31
Total	134	43

Winning played a role in coverage to be sure, as all three sources were more likely to give favorable coverage after a winning effort than after a loss. For every one unfavorable paragraph following a win, there was an average of 70 percent more unfavorable paragraphs in an article following a loss for Enquirer articles; 25 percent more for AP articles and 90 percent for The Post.

Discussion

This first phase of the study examined sports writers’ neutrality while covering the University of Cincinnati men’s basketball team. A number of interesting findings were made after the analysis of articles published by The Cincinnati Post and The Cincinnati Enquirer, as well as articles produced by the Associated Press.

First, the opposite of what was stated in Hypothesis 1 was found to be true. The hometown newspapers wrote less favorably about the UC men's basketball team than the Associated Press writers. The finding is surprising, given that AP reporters write for a national and state audience and not a local one and should have few attributes of the in-group. Plus, AP writers are not daily fixtures at practices, and don't usually work the beat to gain access to sources and better stories. Looking at the initial results of this study, it would seem as though the staff at The Cincinnati Post is about as neutral as the AP, but even that is not the case. Once quote paragraphs are removed from calculation, The Post's percentage of neutral paragraphs increases to more than 65 percent, compared to the AP's 57.3 percent. The Enquirer clocked in with nearly 83 percent neutral paragraphs, once quotes were removed.

This brings up a dilemma. Because the quotes are the exact words of those who spoke them, they were not coded as being favorable or unfavorable. They are quotes; the reporter can't change them. This then brings into question if the researcher should have evaluated and coded the quotes based on their content. The reporter still chose to use the quotes; why should that not be a part of judging bias? In this case, it would be impossible to determine if the reporters had other quotes they could have used. Therefore, the researcher did not code the paragraphs as favorable, unfavorable or neutral. There is editorial judgment involved in selecting quotes for a story.

Again, building on the first hypothesis, the results of Hypothesis 2 also are surprising. The Associated Press was meant to serve as the baseline, yet both hometown papers were more neutral than the AP. However, The Cincinnati Post was nearly twice as likely to write a negative paragraph as The Cincinnati Enquirer and more than twice as

likely to write a positive paragraph. The researcher believes there is a reason for this finding. While both papers covered the team, The Enquirer clearly had an edge in breaking news. It is the morning paper and the larger paper, with a circulation that was about five times that of The Post at the time. Since The Post didn't have the luxury of being able to break news on the same level as The Enquirer, the researcher believes The Post took stronger stances in its reporting in an effort to get readers to peruse its version of a story that had likely been read earlier that day.

While Hypothesis 3 was supported, that is both papers wrote more favorable paragraphs before Huggins' arrest than after it, the meaning of this finding is not as clear. The reason being, Huggins arrest came outside of the season. Huggins, a beloved figure in the community because of his success with the basketball team, acted as a determining factor for the way the team was written about. In both the AP and Post articles, more unfavorable paragraphs were included than favorable ones.

Future research might focus on the coverage the men's basketball received from Feb. 11, 2005 to the end of the season and compare it to the coverage in the 2004 season, prior to the arrest. For the sake of this study, it was important to determine if the arrest had an impact on coverage, which it did, but additional studies could expand on this finding. This could be used to determine if winning truly is everything, and if the coverage is more favorable, even after the coach's arrest.

With sensitive stories, especially those regarding the arrest and charges against Huggins, The Cincinnati Enquirer appeared to have the most neutral coverage. For the articles written in the four-day period following news of Huggins' arrest, The Enquirer followed the code of the traditional hard news reporter, just the facts. Only three

paragraphs from the time frame were coded as unfavorable and four as favorable. The Associated Press had 22 paragraphs coded as unfavorable from the same time period. The Post had 19 coded as unfavorable, with 13 in one article alone. That article, surprisingly enough, was in the news section of the paper, rather than the sports section. It detailed a number of negative events in UC men's basketball history, dating back to Huggins' arrival as head coach.

Looking at the backgrounds of the reporters also is interesting. Bill Koch, the Enquirer reporter, has covered the Bearcats for more than a decade, grew up in the Cincinnati area, and is a graduate of the University of Cincinnati. But as the author of more than 90 percent of The Enquirer articles, Koch was the most neutral reporter.

On the other hand, both the Associated Press and The Post used a variety of reporters to cover UC men's basketball. Articles from eight different reporters and a number of articles filed as "The Associated Press" were included in the AP produced content. While the members of the Associated Press will often edit a story to fit their newspaper, essentially making multiple versions of the same story, different versions of the same story were not included. Only one version of each game story was coded. For example, only one story AP about UC beating Louisville in a low-scoring game was included. Additional versions of the same story were not coded. More than a dozen Post reporters filed UC stories. But The Enquirer, which produced the most content during the time period, only had articles from two additional reporters.

Despite these limitations, this study makes a contribution to the field of sports writing. The findings show sports writers are susceptible to falling into the in-group, but are able to remain unbiased. They must be conscious of the words they choose for their

articles, the information they gather and the way they use it. This study demonstrated that it is possible for the sports section to adhere to the same standards as the news section, but pressure from fans, coaches, and others will remain a constant burden sports reporters must shoulder.

In conclusion, this study looked at the way sports writers covered the men's basketball team to which they were assigned. By using the social identity theory, the researcher hypothesized that the reporters closest to the team, those covering the team on a regular basis, would write most favorable paragraphs about the team because of their desire to be a part of the ingroup. In fact, the opposite was found to be true. The reporters covering the team on a regular basis, more often than not, wrote about the team in a neutral manner.

However, the research shows that the reporters were not completely unbiased in their reporting. After wins, the reporters tended to laud the team, using phrases and terms to praise the team's abilities. After losses, the teams were described in terms a fan would use. While reporters strive to maintain their code of ethics, they still fall victim to the influences of the ingroup.

The second phase of the study will take the findings from this phase and dig deeper in an effort to find the reasons behind the results. The researcher intends to take these findings and conduct interviews with the sports reporters and editors to see if they felt pressure from outside groups. Was there pressure from the team and the university? Were the reporters influenced by their co-workers or other news professionals? Was there pressure to deliver stories the editors liked more than others? The second phase of this study will attempt to answer those questions.

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