

## **Framing Tiger's Troubles: Comparing Traditional and Social Media**

**Jimmy Sanderson**

Arizona State University, USA

This research explored how press outlets and fans framed professional golfer Tiger Woods's marital infidelity. A textual analysis of newspaper reports and discussion postings on Tiger Woods's official Facebook page was conducted. Analysis revealed that press accounts framed Woods's actions as a tragic flaw that precipitated his fall from grace, while also reveling in the salacious details of the extramarital affairs. Conversely, fans primarily framed these incidents as private matters that demonstrated Woods's human nature. The analysis suggests that social-media sites are valuable public relations tools that athletes can use to quickly generate support that counteracts perceived negative media framing. Social-media sites also enable fans to enhance perceptions of closeness with athletes as fans interject themselves into athletes' media narratives.

**Keywords:** media framing, Facebook, Tiger Woods, sports media, parasocial interaction

Social-media sites such as Facebook and Twitter are drastically reconfiguring sports media and the sports world. One of the foremost changes introduced by these technologies is the ability for athletes to more actively manage their public presentation and counteract perceived negative media framing (Sanderson, 2008). Through framing, sports journalists highlight or diminish aspects of stories about athletes to guide public interpretation (Entman, 1991; Kian & Hardin, 2009). Framing also occurs as sports reporters interject their personal opinions into stories, prompting readers to perceive the athlete in favorable or unfavorable ways (Bishop, 2005). Social media enable athletes to contest perceived negative media framing by directly confronting journalists in these digital spheres (Sanderson & Kassing, in press). However, the interactive features offered by social media also allow fans to construct and distribute competing frames about athletes' behavior. Accordingly, social-media sites possess tremendous public relations utility for athletes. Athletes can use these sites, both directly and indirectly, to foster support for their actions—particularly for actions that occur in their private life.

---

The author is with the Hugh Downs School of Human Communication, Arizona State University, Tempe, AZ.

There is no shortage of athletes whose private actions have been distributed for public consumption, but perhaps no athlete has experienced more intense media scrutiny for his private behavior than professional golfer Tiger Woods. In November 2009, news broke that Woods had been involved in a single-car accident outside his Florida home. This incident triggered a chain reaction of events that drastically altered the public's perception of Woods, including reports of multiple extramarital affairs. As alleged mistresses came forth with details of their sexual liaisons with Woods, his tightly controlled public persona came crashing down. The extensive media coverage of Woods's infidelity via traditional media and the vast commentary on these events posted on social-media sites provided diverse framings for his marital infidelity.

### **Tiger Woods's Precipitous Fall From Grace**

Professional golfer Tiger Woods is arguably the most recognizable and popular athlete in the world. Since joining the Professional Golfers Association (PGA) in 1996, Woods has enjoyed tremendous success, winning 95 tournaments including 71 PGA events (Tigerwoods.com, 2010). In 2001, Woods became the first golfer in history to hold all four major PGA championships concurrently (Masters, U.S. Open, British Open, and PGA Championship). Woods also is the leader in career victories among active golfers and is currently third on the all-time victory list. As a result of this success, Woods is the PGA's all-time earnings leader, having amassed \$111,433,044 (U.S.; Tigerwoods.com, 2010). These achievements netted Woods lucrative endorsement deals with corporations such as Nike, Gatorade, Gillette, and Electronic Arts, providing revenue that far exceeds his golf winnings (Tigerwoods.com, 2010). Given his tremendous marketability and earning power, it was not surprising in 2009 when Woods became the first professional athlete to accumulate career earnings of 1 billion dollars (U.S.; ESPN.com, 2009).

Both Woods's athletic success and his corporate sponsorships made him a very profitable "brand" that required a strategically constructed and intensely managed public persona (Hutchinson, 2010). Indeed, Woods was widely considered to have a squeaky-clean public image, one that was free from scandals and problematic behaviors that at times beset other professional athletes (McShane, 2009). Thus, Woods was frequently framed in the media as exemplifying the "consummate professional," one who consistently performed under pressure—a highly desirable character trait (Surowiecki, 2009). Woods was "riding high," enjoying exceptional career success and vast public popularity, standing on what appeared to be the pinnacle of personal and professional success—until November 27, 2009. On that date, an early-morning car accident sparked a flurry of events that dramatically altered Woods's public image.

On November 27, 2009, news broke that Woods had been injured in a single-car automobile accident while leaving his home. Later that day, reports began to surface that Woods's wife, Elin, had used a golf club to break one of the vehicle's windows, causing law enforcement to be called to the scene (ESPN.com, 2010a). These reports ignited speculation that there was more substance behind the accident, yet public details remained scarce, prompting sports columnists to declare that Woods needed to provide a public explanation (Davis, Lucas, & McShane,

2009; Lupica, 2009). Nevertheless, Woods remained silent, and speculation soon emerged that his marriage was experiencing trouble. On December 2, 2009, the first of many allegations about Woods's marital infidelity was launched. Jaimee Grubbs, a former cocktail waitress, revealed that she had had a 31-month affair with Woods. In response, Woods issued a written statement indicating that "I have let my family down, and I regret those transgressions with all my heart" (ESPN.com, 2010a). By February 2010, the number of women contending that they had had affairs with Woods grew to approximately 14. Amid these growing and often lurid reports, Woods held a 13-minute, publicly televised press conference on February 19, 2010, wherein he apologized for his actions and requested privacy while he dealt with these issues (Roberts, Epstein, & McShane, 2010).

Woods's rapid descent from public icon to unfaithful husband was a world event that played out on media channels across the globe. While these forums offered their views of Woods's behavior, fans performed similar functions using Woods's official Facebook page, using the site to promulgate their interpretations for Woods's behavior.

## Literature Review

### Athletes and Media Framing

Through framing, mass-media outlets report news stories in specific ways that shape public interpretation (Kuypers & Cooper, 2005; Paxton, 2004; Tian & Stewart, 2005). More specifically, scholars have contended that framing occurs when media organizations (a) strategically emphasize certain aspects of a news story to promote particular definitions, interpretations, evaluations, or recommendations and (b) employ socially shared meanings that, over time, symbolically structure and organize the social world (Entman, 1993; Reese, 2001; Tian & Stewart, 2005). Through such techniques, news stories become vehicles to reinforce ideology (Caruthers, 2000; Wolfsfeld, 1997).

Framing processes are prominent in the sports media (Bishop, 2005; Sanderson, 2008). For instance, Bishop chronicled local press coverage of Seattle Seahawks wide receiver Joey Galloway during his 1999 holdout as he attempted to renegotiate his contract. His analysis revealed that media accounts framed Galloway as an immature individual who was abdicating his team responsibilities. Conversely, these stories positioned the head coach as a revered organizational figure whose authority is never to be questioned. Thus, readers were prompted to think about Galloway as a selfish and immature individual, with little consideration for the rationale behind his holdout. Such framings are frequently invoked on athletes who voice their displeasure with their contractual status, and sports reporters eagerly paint these players as "selfish" individuals who signify the antithesis of the "team player."

Because athletes are often framed as being motivated solely by money, it would seem that an athlete who eschewed salary for the opportunity to be more competitive would be lauded. However, a recent example suggests otherwise. On July 8, 2010, National Basketball Association (NBA) superstar free agent LeBron James announced that he was leaving the Cleveland Cavaliers to sign with the Miami Heat (joining two other premier players Dwyane Wade and Chris Bosh). James received

widespread criticism for his decision (some of which was rooted in the grandeur of his nationally televised broadcast announcing his plans), and reporters suggested that James's decision would ultimately tarnish his legacy. For instance, "as a legacy guy, he needs to know: His decision to spurn the Cavaliers for more talent and hope in Miami forbids LeBron from ever being one of those all-time greats" (Wise, 2010, p. D1), and "Time will no doubt, heal many of the wounds James opened last Friday. However the deepest ones will last, and, most importantly, leave scars on his legacy regardless of his achievements from here on end" (Cuaycong, 2010, p. S6). Apparently, James's perceived inability to win a championship without other superstar players has severe consequences for his legacy.

In addition to framing by sports journalists, Cavaliers owner Dan Gilbert framed James as a traitor in an open letter to Cavalier fans that was posted on the team's Web site shortly after James's announcement. In describing James's departure, portions of Gilbert's proclamation declared that "our former hero, who grew up in the very region that he deserted this evening, is no longer a Cleveland Cavalier," and "This shocking act of disloyalty from our home grown 'chosen one' sends the exact opposite lesson of what we would want our children to learn. And 'who' we would want them to grow-up to become" (ESPN.com, 2010b). Cavalier fans were quite upset with James, feelings that vividly manifested as they gathered across Cleveland to burn his jersey. These framings only enflamed perceptions that James had betrayed both the Cavaliers and the city of Cleveland, reinforcing the contempt and hostility directed toward him by fans and journalists.

Traditionally, athletes have had little recourse to combat perceived negative media framing. Sympathetic journalists could certainly be sought out, but this option is limited, particularly if an athlete has a combative history with sports reporters. With social media, athletes now possess valuable communicative tools that can be employed to contest perceived negative media framing and media inaccuracies, which also allow fans to participate in this process.

## **Social Media, Athletes, and Fans**

Social media are inherently designed to facilitate interpersonal connections. They have been conceptualized as "media that is architected by design to readily support participation, peer-to-peer conversation, collaboration and community (Meraz, 2009, p. 682). Others have posited that social media refer to

activities, practices, and behaviors among communities of people who gather online to share information, knowledge, and opinions using conversational media . . . Web-based applications that make it possible to create and easily transmit content in the form of words, pictures, videos, and audios. (Safko & Brake, 2009, p. 6)

There are a plethora of social-media sites on which a person can participate. Many of these sites offer users a number of tools to selectively manage their self-presentation and identity, capabilities that have contributed to the expansive growth of sites such as MySpace, Facebook, and Twitter. In addition, celebrities are increasingly joining the social-media world, using these platforms to connect with fans, and athletes are arguably the foremost celebrity group using social media (Sanderson & Kassing, in press).

Social media also provide an athlete with tools to quickly solicit fans to take tangible action against his or her detractors. Social media enable athletes to be more assertive sports media participants and give them a viable forum to contest perceived media inaccuracies. For instance, in an examination of former Boston Red Sox pitcher Curt Schilling's blog, I (2008) noted that Schilling used his blog to counteract media framing by directly attacking sports reporters and proclaiming his commitment to the Red Sox. Fans were effusive in their praise for Schilling's critiques and responded by emphatically declaring Schilling's legacy in Red Sox history. These expressions reinforced Schilling's behavior as fans encouraged him to continue blogging his media critiques (Sanderson, 2008).

One of the more notable examples of this capability occurred with professional golfer John Daly. On March 2, 2010, Daly responded via Twitter to an article written by journalist Gary Smits that disclosed Daly's past disciplinary issues—data that Smits obtained from Daly's PGA Tour file. Daly tweeted, "Here's the JERK who writes NON-NEWS article on debut of my show—CALL & FLOOD his line and let's tell him how WE feel." The calls to Smits started around midnight—minutes after Daly's tweet appeared (Gola, 2010, p. 73). Although most callers hung up, Smits reported that approximately 25% of callers left messages, some of which were quite abusive. Although it is unclear how many of the callers were following Daly on Twitter, it is noteworthy that immediately after Daly broadcast this message, calls began pouring into Smits's office.

As fans rise to defend athletes on social-media sites, alternative framings and explanations for athletes' behavior, many of which are favorable, are broadcast for consumption by large audiences. Such outcomes are meaningful for athletes, especially when their personal issues are attracting significant media attention. Accordingly, this piece now turns to an investigation of how both mass media and participants on Tiger Woods's official Facebook page framed his marital infidelity.

## Method

### Data Collection

To explore how Woods's extramarital affairs were framed in the mass media, a convenience sample of press articles was obtained from the Lexis-Nexis Academic Database. A search of articles was conducted using the terms *Tiger Woods and affair* between the dates of December 2, 2009 (the date that reports of Woods's infidelity began breaking), and February 20, 2010 (the day after Woods's televised apology), which yielded 985 articles. The sample was then selected using the following periodicals: *New York Daily News* ( $n = 35$ ), *The New Zealand Herald* ( $n = 32$ ), *USA Today* ( $n = 20$ ), and *The London Times* ( $n = 13$ ). Articles ranged in length from 28 to 2,273 words ( $M = 570$ ). (A full list of the articles that were used in the study's analysis is available by contacting me at james.sanderson@asu.edu)

To examine how fans were framing these events, discussion-board postings on Tiger Woods's official Facebook page were selected for analysis. Facebook is arguably the most popular social-media site, with over 500 million active users, 50% of whom use Facebook on any given day. Collectively, these users spend 700 billion minutes per month accessing this site (Facebook.com, 2010). Once a person

registers for a Facebook account, he or she can create "official" Facebook pages for businesses, brands, products, organizations, artists, bands, or public figures. Facebook require creators to denote that they are legitimately affiliated with the entity and are authorized to create an official page. These pages mimic a standard Web page, and users have a number of configuration options available to help them design the page.

These tools include an "info" section with descriptive data about the page subject, a section where discussion forums can be created, and a section where photographs and videos can be uploaded, and the page can be linked to other social-media channels and Web sites. All pages are configured with a "wall," a Facebook feature that allows both page creators and Facebook users to write commentary about the page subject, to which other Facebook users can respond. Facebook users also have the ability to indicate that they "like" the page, and when this action is taken, this decision is broadcast to all the user's Facebook friends. In addition, Facebook provides page creators with data that record how many people each day "like" the page, the number of daily postings on the page, and the number of daily and monthly active users.

Woods's official Facebook page is linked to his Web site, and in addition to the wall, info, photo, and video sections, it contains a "store" option that allows people to purchase Woods apparel, memorabilia, and electronics (e.g., Tiger DVDs). At the time of this writing Woods's official page was "liked" by 1,422,801 Facebook users. Data were obtained from the discussion-forum postings on his Facebook page covering the same time period as the newspaper articles (December 2, 2009, to February 20, 2010). The discussion forums on Facebook pages are similar to discussion forums on other computer-mediated sites; users can start new discussions (threads), as well as respond to other people's postings. During the selected time period, there were a total of 128 discussion threads containing 650 postings, and the number of postings in each thread ranged from 1 to 79 ( $M = 7.34$ ). Postings ranged from 1 to 822 words ( $M = 71.73$ ).

## Data Analysis

To explore the underlying meanings in the newspaper articles and Facebook postings, I conducted a textual analysis (Fairclough, 2003; Paek & Shah, 2003; Potter, 1996). Researchers use this method when they are interested in ascertaining how terms are used to create meaning rather than the frequency with which they appear in a text (Gill, 2006; Hardin, Kuehn, Jones, Genovese, & Balaji, 2009). The newspaper articles and postings were initially read to obtain a general sense of the larger macrolevel themes. To identify and understand the salient themes in the articles and postings, qualitative measures outlined by Strauss and Corbin (1990) were followed. Thus, through multiple readings of the articles and postings, descriptors used to frame Woods's extramarital affairs were extrapolated and placed into inductively derived thematic categories. Because the analysis was comparative, thematic categories for the newspaper articles and Facebook postings were kept distinct from one another, and descriptors were not counted because I was only interested in thematic categories (Kim, Walkosz, & Iverson, 2006). After the descriptors had been placed into initial categories, the categories were developed, clarified, and refined until new observations did not add substantively to existing categories.

## Results and Interpretation

Analysis revealed that, in press reports, Woods's infidelity was framed as a tragic flaw and evidence of a lurid sexual lifestyle. Fans framed Woods's extramarital activity as a private matter, a manifestation of humanness, and evidence of true moral character. These frames are now explored with exemplars drawn from the data. To indicate the descriptors in the data from the newspaper articles, the following abbreviations are used: *London Times* = LT, *USA Today* = US, *New Zealand Herald* = NZH, and *New York Daily News* = NY. Each abbreviation is followed by a number. Thus, a descriptor followed by the code (US-3) represents the 3rd article in the *USA Today* set. For the fan descriptors, the number of the posting in the discussion board follows the exemplar. Accordingly, a descriptor followed by the number (253) indicates the 253rd posting in the data set. Postings were taken exactly as they appeared in the data; spelling and grammatical errors were left intact.

### The Tragic Flaw

Press reports consistently postulated that Woods's behavior had knocked him off his lofty public perch. Some articles conveyed this sentiment by framing Woods as a "flawed icon" (LT-4), a "Tarnished Tiger" (NY-8), a "shamed sports star" (LT-10), whose "shame knows no end" (NY-22), thereby causing Woods to lose "control of his carefully crafted image" (US-15). Other accounts bolstered this frame by emphasizing Woods's efforts to shield his mortal flaw from both his family and the public. Accordingly, Woods had a "manipulative approach to dealing with his serial transgressions" (LT-11) characterized by his "secret serial flings" (NY-8) with women he "bedded behind the back of his wife" (NY-4). Moreover, despite Woods's sending "hush money to his honeys" (NY-30), his "sordid secrets started spilling out" (NY-35), prompting one report to emphatically declare, "OMG you are so busted" (NY-33). Such were the consequences for Woods's "playing away from home" (NZH-4), as he found himself "in the dog house with the missus" (NY-16).

These accounts further reinforced Woods's fall by manipulating his name to vividly depict this flaw. His infidelity evidenced that Woods was "IM-PURRFECT" (NY-8) and had been transformed into a "c[r]ouching Tiger" (NY-34) who "tucked his tail between his legs" (NY-16). Woods's fallibility was also situated in religious discourse, as he had become a "self-confessed transgressor" (NZH-23) trying to atone for his wrongdoings by "confessing his sins" (NY-13) to the public and asking "for forgiveness" (NY-13). These framings cast Woods as a fallen hero whose flaws had been exposed despite his efforts to mask them from public view. These indiscretions gave the press a prime opportunity to foster perceptions that Woods was fallible, a framing that had rarely been available given Woods's stellar athletic performance and previously unblemished personal life. Moreover, once Woods's private behavior became public knowledge, it was imperative that he publicly "repent" for his transgressions and seek forgiveness. Thus, extramarital affairs became the means to transform Woods from an immortal athlete to a mortal human, a tragic flaw that the press salaciously reported to the public.

## The Lurid Lifestyle

Tiger Woods's athletic accomplishments have long been considered to derive from his intense motivation to succeed. This same passion was conveniently transferred to his infidelity, as vibrant descriptors were used to frame Woods as a sex-craving individual whose extramarital conquests were driven by an insatiable sexual appetite. Some press reports employed vivid characterizations to describe Woods's alleged mistresses. These women were collectively described as a "harem of hotties" (NY-33), a "bevy of babes" (NY-16), and "busty babes" (NY-35) who constituted a "tawdry parade of porn stars, cocktail waitresses, party girls, and one cougar" (NY-3). In addition to collective imagery, spicy references also were applied to the women individually. Thus, Woods's alleged stable of mistresses included a "busty head-turner" (NY-29), a "hardcore porn actress" (LT-4), a "buxom brunette" (NY-18), and a "former employee of Trashy Lingerie" (LT-4). Reports further dramatized the affairs with lucid details that salaciously depicted Woods's sexual behaviors. For instance, one encounter involved a "brunette who reportedly romped with Tiger in a church parking lot" (NY-29), and there were other women he "squired during a serial cheating spree" (NY-23). These illustrations led to Woods's behavior being broadly framed as "sexual escapades" (US-19) and "serial sex romps" (NY-21), achievements marked by the "growing notches on Tiger Woods' bedpost" (NY-26).

These portrayals also included sultry descriptions about potential evidence his mistresses possessed. Reports noted the existence of "'explosive' answerphone recordings" (LT-3), "'racy' text messages" (NY-29), and a "horde of damaging emails and messages" (NZH-27) that revealed Woods's "titillating tabloid lifestyle" (US-2). Other accounts invoked golfing parlance and allegories to illuminate Woods's behavior. Examples included "two more blondes and a brunette were added to Tiger Woods's sultry scorecard" (NY-29), carrying "the married father of two to six over par on his betrayed supermodel wife" (NY-29), while another report observed that Woods had been with "at least 14 women, one for every major golf crown he has won" (NZH-17).

In salaciously framing Woods's extramarital affairs, the grandeur and pageantry surrounding these incidents was significantly elevated. Although the merits of reporting athletes' private behavior can be debated, the lurid terms that were used to enhance perceptions of Woods's mistresses framed him as a sexual deviant who was incapable of controlling his lust. These descriptors trivialized what may very well be a sexual addiction (for which Woods has sought treatment) and extremely dramatized this personal issue. Athletes' engagement in extramarital affairs is certainly not a new phenomenon, and Woods's stature surely contributed to the intense reporting of these events, but enticing readers with sordid descriptions of his sexual behavior perpetuates problematic ideological assumptions that position Black athletes as being instinctually driven by sexual prowess (Hall, 2001; Vertinsky & Captain, 1998).

Moreover, there also is a propensity for mass-media reports to exaggerate sexual encounters involving Black male athletes (Katz, 2006; Leonard, 2007). In these articles, this occurred by framing that transferred Woods's internal dedication and intensity from his athletic success to his sexual lust. Thus, Woods's insatiable sexual appetite became the predominant aspect of his public persona, shaping



perceptions that his primary ambition was sexual conquest, not athletic accomplishment. Although press reports emphasized Woods's tragic flaw and lurid sexual activity, fans, for the most part, countered these notions by offering empathetic framings to describe Woods's behavior. Thus, whereas press accounts centered on Woods's fall from grace, for many fans this descent made Woods more human and enhanced perceptions of their similarity to him.

### **A Private Matter**

Privacy was a prominent framing invoked by fans as they asserted that Woods's marital infidelity was irrelevant to those outside his immediate family. For instance, "what goes on in his life is none of our business" (3); "Let him work with his wife on this, and we should keep our noses out of it. It's really none of our business" (258); and "What has happened is no ones business except theirs" (234). Others contested notions that Woods "owed" the public an explanation for this behavior. Examples included "You don't owe anyone an explanation. It's between you and your wife" (192), "You owe no one an apology for your actions except your wife" (326), and "We do not need any explanation of the things related to you and your family" (96). Some advocated for Woods and his family to be given privacy so they could sort through their issues away from the public limelight. These sentiments were characterized by statements such as "Leave the man alone and let him be!" (413), "What we all need to do is leave you and your family to your privacy" (359), "the press and crap need to back off" (285), and "Tiger I think you and your family have the right to your private life and I find it hard to believe that people can't see that" (70).

With these framings, fans contended that Woods's marital troubles were a confidential matter that warranted a drastic reduction in media coverage. Although these people may have disagreed with Woods's behavior, they nonetheless lamented that these events were playing out in the public sphere. These individuals posited a distinct line of demarcation between Woods's private and public actions and framed those who merged these two domains as trespassing into Woods's private life. Although fans regularly clamor for news about athletes, these individuals seemed to reach a saturation point and declared that "enough is enough." In addition to advocating for Woods's privacy, fans further framed his infidelity as evidence of human nature. As these events unfolded, Woods became mortal and, therefore, more similar to his fans. Thus, fans resonated with his struggles and discovered human elements in his persona that up until this time had been difficult to detect.

### **Manifestation of Humanness**

Fans eagerly framed Woods's infidelity as evidence of human behavior. These sentiments were expressed through statements such as "nobody is perfect" (7), "To err is human" (195), "We're all human and we are bound to make mistakes... NO ONE IS PERFECT" (254), and "Yes you are human and WE ALL MAKE MISTAKES" (382). These frames also relied heavily on religious language, as fans emphasized themes such as sinning, redemption, and judgment. One prominent way this manifested was by people referencing a New Testament story involving a woman who had participated in adultery. This woman was brought to Jesus, who

was asked what punishment she should receive, to which he responded, "He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her" (John 8:7, King James Version). There are striking parallels between this story and Woods's situation, and people declared, "Like they say, let he/she who is without sin cast the first stone" (33); "Shame on all you people casting stones at Tiger! We are not here to judge him or anyone else for that matter" (72); and "I'm gonna go with the old adage that says 'You without sin cast the first stone'" (265). Others reminded Woods's critics that "we should not judge him for sinning when we all have sinned one or more times in our life" (296); "Some day you will all do something you regret and kick yourself for ever commenting about Tiger" (384); "We are all sinners, and he who is without sin is a liar" (277); and "get a grip, you have sinned, i have sinned, tiger has sinned, everyone has sinned" (302).

In attributing Woods's infidelity to human error—a condition that plagues all humankind—fans perpetuated framings that mortals were unqualified to judge Woods. For instance, "who are we to judge him, Jesus was, damned for less and they got that wrong too. Be careful in glass houses with rocks in hand! (338); "Do not judge, or you too will be judged" (209); "We the people can not pass judgement on Tiger the mans sins. That is in GODS hands" (348); and

Its easy for you or I to sit back and say these things but YOU walk in shoes for a week or even one day and go through what he does and has done for so long and see if you make the same JUDGEMENT you are so willingly making right now. (38)

Although Woods was largely condemned in press reports for his infidelity, for many people these events made him appear more human. These feelings fostered perceptions of similarity to him (Fraser & Brown, 2002, Jin, 2006; Soukup, 2006), because they, too, had made missteps in their lives. Woods, then, had become "like them" as he struggled with human frailty. Once these shortcomings appeared, fans seized the opportunity to defend him and chasten those who dared to judge him. Thus, there was a stark divergence between press reports and fans about Woods's behavior. The press contended that this tragic flaw tarnished his public persona, but for fans, this flaw evidenced his human shortcomings and enhanced rather than detracted from his public persona.

Although many fans ascribed Woods's behavior to fallibility, there were those who voiced their disappointment in his behavior. For these fans, Woods's behavior was framed as evidence of an authentic moral character that had now been exposed. Accordingly, these people disclosed that their esteem for Woods had been fractured and shared that Woods had "let them down" and betrayed their confidence and trust.

## Evidence of True Moral Character

As news of Woods's affairs exponentially snowballed, people wrestled with a perceived incongruence between his genuine moral character and his previous public persona. This apparent contradiction prompted sincere consternation and distress for those who were sincerely shocked by Woods's behavior. In grappling with these newfound character traits, people stated, "Tiger looks more and more like a shallow person who just happens to play great golf" (232), "Power and money changes

people" (268), "How can he be so stupid as to let this happen?" (318), and "Tiger Woods—just another bad apple in the bunch" (431). Moreover, in stark contrast to those who attributed Woods's behavior to human failings, these people argued that the tenure and frequency of his actions exempted him from such a qualification. For instance, "ONE mistake?? One mistake can be forgiven sometimes, but really if it is true about 31 months with one 'lady' and other ladies possibly, how can a wife forgive so many times?" (265); "You speak of compassion??? Did he have any for her or his kids while he was pounding this girls brains into the next zip code?" (309); and "This wasnt a mistake. . . . Tiger was messing with this other chick for 3 yrs!!!" (236).

For others, Woods's perceived moral character discrepancy was so problematic that it prompted them to sever their fandom. Examples included, "IM THROUGH WITH THIS DUDE" (36); "I will never hold him again in the same light. I thought he was one of the good guys, it's too bad he couldn't be satisfied with a gorgeous wife and two healthy beautiful children" (50); "Can't watch someone who obtained our support partly because of his values then is totally the opposite" (306); and

Unfortunately, for me and my family adultery isn't taken as lightly as it seems to be today. I can forgive but my family can no longer support someone who has falsely represented himself to all the children and familys out there who were so proud to have someone to follow and hopefully learn a great sport from. (401)

Given the tightly controlled and structured nature of Woods's public persona, fans had little indication that his private actions were incongruent with his public persona. However, when news of his infidelity became public, it produced an expectancy violation (Burgoon, 1978) for some fans, and, as a result, their fandom was fractured or in some cases dissolved. As intense media scrutiny of athletes' private lives becomes more commonplace, fans may increasingly form, grow, or sever their fandom based on private behavior rather than athletic performance. Such couplings are likely to create divergences among fans, and competing dialectics about fans' right to be informed of athletes' private behavior will continue be debated—discussions that social-media sites are well positioned to facilitate (Plymire, 2008).

## Discussion

This research explored how press outlets and fans framed Tiger Woods's marital infidelity. Beyond the emergent themes, this study offers several important implications that are now discussed. First, scholars have observed that sports journalism is increasingly resembling celebrity journalism (Rowe, 2007; Whannel, 2001), and the press accounts here clearly confirm such assertions. In centering on the salacious details of Woods's behavior, press reports reinforced problematic stereotypes and fostered perceptions that athletes' extramarital behavior is newsworthy. Although it is certainly reasonable for athletes to expect some media coverage of their private lives, parading and dramatizing their relational issues in the public sphere has adverse effects. In Woods's case, he has lost several major sponsors and is repeatedly asked in media interviews and press conferences to comment

on his family affairs (Tiger and Elin Woods's divorce was finalized on August 23, 2010). Although some public backlash for behavior such as infidelity is to be expected, at what point does media coverage become excessive, and how much privacy should athletes be afforded to manage their personal issues? Currently, there appears to be an insatiable public appetite for lurid details about athletes' private lives. Thus, as athletes' private lives garner increasing media attention, the public is prompted to think about and expect coverage of this topic (McCombs & Shaw, 1972), thereby intensifying public consumption of athletes' private lives. These symbiotic processes coalesce to form a sports media cycle that merges sports reporting and tabloid journalism.

As these two journalistic spheres grow more alike, social-media sites become prime venues for athletes to counteract perceived negative media framing, a task that is bolstered by fan participation. Accordingly, a second implication emerging from the current study is that via social media, fans introduce and perpetuate framing for athletes' behavior that contests mass-media portrayals. In the current work, fans countered the lavish press details of Woods's infidelity by advocating that this issue was a private matter and merely reflected Woods's humanness. This frailty, previously unbeknownst to fans, prompted connection and feelings of similarity to Woods, as he appeared more like them than at any other time in his career. These perceptions facilitated people's intervening in Woods's troubles by participating on Facebook, thereby heightening opportunities to display parasocial interaction.

Parasocial interaction occurs as media users interact with media figures in ways that resemble actual social interaction but differ because they are mediated and one sided (Horton & Wohl, 1956). Previous research suggests that some people become so absorbed in media programming that they mentally transport themselves into media narratives (Dal Cin, Zanna, & Fong, 2004; Green & Brock, 2000), and scholars have argued that parasocial interaction and placing oneself into media stories are conceptually related (Green, Brock, & Kaufman, 2004; Greenwood, 2008). Through social media, fans have an optimal forum that by design invites them to enact this behavior; fans easily interject themselves into athletes' troubles by introducing and distributing frames that both support and condemn them. In the current study, fans clearly seized the opportunity to join the Woods saga, transforming his Facebook page into a venue where they introduced and perpetuated framings that both supported and condemned him. In addition, many participants seemed concerned about the stress these events were causing Woods, and Facebook provided a space where they could defend Woods and simultaneously alleviate their worry and anxiety (Sanderson & Cheong, 2010).

Thus, as fans intervene in athletes' media narratives, social-media sites become valuable tools for athletes to more directly manage their public presentation. These sites have rich public relations utility for athletes to counteract perceived negative media framing, both directly and indirectly (Sanderson, 2008). When fans enter these domains and promote positive framings that defend athletes' behavior, these narratives perpetuate norms that equate participation with positive and supportive communication (Sanderson, 2010). Athletes benefit greatly from these actions as fans voluntarily perform public relations work. With the large audience followings many athletes enjoy on their social-media sites, they have unprecedented means to generate support and promulgate favorable public representations.

## Limitations and Directions for Future Research

This research is limited because it only examined framings applied to one professional athlete. Although Tiger Woods is perhaps the most prominent professional athlete in the world, it would be worthwhile to explore similarities and differences with other athletes. Framings may vary by popularity, and, thus, fans may be less likely to support an athlete who is perceived as less "talented" or who has consistent problems in his or her private life. In addition, it would be salient to explore what types of private behavior fans support and the degree to which they support or condemn athletes for these issues. For instance, there are a number of athletes who have admitted to using performance-enhancing drugs, and fans could potentially frame this behavior in several ways, including the collective good (e.g., drug use helped team win), justified (e.g., everyone was doing it), or a selfish act (e.g., hurting fans, harming perceptions of sport). Which framings become predominant and maintain consistency across issues will be an important question for future work. Finally, fans in the current study largely perceived Woods's infidelity to be a private matter, but his affairs continue to garner media coverage, suggesting that there is a sizeable market for sordid details about athletes' private lives. Athletes accept the media limelight that accompanies celebrity status, but at what point does privacy outweigh public desire? To what extent does the public have a right to be informed of athletes' private activities? Are items such as an athlete's extramarital activity newsworthy? Considering the fact that digital media have prompted increased competition in the sports media marketplace (Hutchins & Rowe, 2009), athletes' private behavior will continue to be fodder for sports reporting, necessitating researchers to attend to these issues and determine how private behavior continues to be framed by both the mass media and fans.

## Conclusion

Social media have introduced a number of compelling changes into the sports world. The ability of fans to easily intervene in athletes' media narratives using these communication tools is one of the more prominent outcomes to emerge. In taking this action, fans promote alternative frames about athletes' behavior, creating support that athletes can nurture to prompt further advocacy from fans on their behalf. Athletes now have sizeable audiences who can conveniently be accessed to assist them as they contest perceived negative media framing, a capability that will continue to reconfigure sports media and lead athletes to become more assertive sports media producers.

## References

- Bishop, R. (2005). The wayward child: An ideological analysis of sports contract holdout coverage. *Journalism Studies*, 6, 445-459.
- Burgoon, J.K. (1978). A communication model of personal space: Explication and an initial test. *Human Communication Research*, 4, 129-142.
- Carruthers, S.L. (2000). *The media at war: Communication and conflict in the twentieth century*. New York: St. Martin's Press.

- Cuaycong, A. L. (2010, July 12). Courtside; betrayal. *BusinessWorld*. Retrieved from the Lexis-Nexis Academic Database.
- Dal Cin, S., Zanna, M.P., & Fong, G.T. (2004). Narrative persuasion and overcoming resistance. In E.S. Knowles & J.A. Linn (Eds.), *Resistance and persuasion* (pp. 175-191). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Davis, R., Lucas, L., & McShane, L. (2009, November 29). It's crouching Tiger and hidden secrets. Holes up in mance [sic], rebuffs troopers in car-crash mystery. *New York Daily News*. Retrieved from the Lexis-Nexis Academic Database.
- Entman, R. (1993). Framing toward clarification of a fractured paradigm. *The Journal of Communication*, 43, 51-58.
- Entman, R.M. (1991). Framing U.S. coverage of international news: Contrasts in narratives of the KAL and Iran air incidents. *The Journal of Communication*, 41, 6-27.
- ESPN.com. (2009, October 2). Report: Tiger richest athlete in history. Retrieved from <http://sports.espn.go.com/golf/news/story?id=4524640>
- ESPN.com. (2010a, March 16). Tiger Woods event timeline. Retrieved from <http://sports.espn.go.com/golf/news/story?id=4922436>
- ESPN.com. (2010b, July 9). Letter from Cavs owner Dan Gilbert. Retrieved from <http://sports.espn.go.com/nba/news/story?id=5365704>
- Fairclough, N. (2003). *Analysing discourse: Textual analysis for social research*. London: Routledge.
- Fraser, B.P., & Brown, W.J. (2002). Media, celebrities, and social influence: Identification with Elvis Presley. *Mass Communication & Society*, 5, 183-206.
- Gill, R. (2006). *Gender and the media*. Cambridge, UK: Polity.
- Gola, H. (2010, March 4). Daly's tweet revenge. In snit, puts writer's cell number on the web. *New York Daily News*. Retrieved from the Lexis-Nexis Academic Database.
- Green, M.C., & Brock, T.C. (2000). The role of transportation in the persuasiveness of public narratives. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 79, 701-721.
- Green, M.C., Brock, T.C., & Kaufman, G.F. (2004). Understanding media enjoyment: The role of transportation into narrative worlds. *Communication Theory*, 14, 311-327.
- Greenwood, D.N. (2008). Television as escape from self: Psychological predictors of media involvement. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 44, 414-424.
- Hall, R. (2001). Shaking the foundation: Women of color in sport. *The Sport Psychologist*, 15, 386-400.
- Hardin, M., Kuehn, K. M., Jones, H., Genovese, J., & Balaji, M. (2009). "Have you got game?" Hegemonic masculinity and neo-homophobia in U.S. newspaper sports columns. *Communication, Culture & Critique*, 2(2), 182-200.
- Horton, D., & Wohl, R.R. (1956). Mass communication and para-social interaction. *Psychiatry*, 19, 215-229.
- Hutchins, B., & Rowe, D. (2009). From broadcast scarcity to digital plentitude. *Television & New Media*, 10, 354-370.
- Hutchinson, I. (2010, February 22). Dog and pony show; Tiger Woods reading from a prepared script left many questions lingering. *The Toronto Sun*. Retrieved from the Lexis-Nexis Academic Database.
- Jin, B. (2006). Viewing factors in public health entertainment-education programming. *Journal of the Northwest Communication Association*, 35, 79-94.
- Katz, J. (2006). *The macho paradox: Why some men hurt women and how all men can help*. Naperville, IL: Sourcebooks.
- Kian, E., & Hardin, M. (2009). Framing sports coverage based on the sex of sports writers: Female journalists counter the traditional gendering of media coverage. *International Journal of Sport Communication*, 2, 185-204.
- Kim, E., Walkosz, B.J., & Iverson, J. (2006). *USA Today's coverage of the top women golfers, 1998-2001*. *The Howard Journal of Communications*, 17, 307-321.

- Kuypers, J.A., & Cooper, S.D. (2005). A comparative framing analysis of embedded and behind-the-lines reporting on the 2003 Iraq War. *Qualitative Research Reports in Communication*, 6, 1-10.
- Leonard, D.J. (2007). Innocent until proven innocent: In defense of Duke lacrosse and White power (and against menacing Black student-athletes, a Black stripper, activists, and the Jewish media). *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*, 31, 25-44.
- Lupica, M. (2009, November 28). Tiger can't take a mulligan on story of crash. *New York Daily News*. Retrieved from the Lexis-Nexis Academic Database.
- McCombs, M.E., & Shaw, D.L. (1972). The agenda-setting function of mass media. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 36, 176-187.
- McShane, L. (2009, November 28). Woods cashes in on image as pure as his swing. *New York Daily News*. Retrieved from the Lexis-Nexis Academic Database.
- Meraz, S. (2009). Is there an elite hold? Traditional media to social media agenda setting influence in blogs networks. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 14, 682-707.
- Paek, H.J., & Shah, H. (2003). Racial ideology, model minorities, and the not-so-silent partner: Stereotyping of Asian Americans in U.S. magazine advertising. *The Howard Journal of Communications*, 14, 225-243.
- Paxton, M. (2004). Gone fishin': A framing analysis of the fight over a small town's city seal. *Journal of Media and Religion*, 3, 43-55.
- Plymire, D.C. (2008). The wiki defense: Contesting the status of knowledge in the Floyd Landis doping case. *International Journal of Sport Communication*, 1, 307-319.
- Potter, J. (1996). *An analysis of thinking and research about qualitative methods*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Reese, S.D. (2001). Prologue: Framing public life: A bridging model for media research. In S.D. Reese, O.H. Gandy, & A.E. Grant (Eds.), *Framing public life: Perspectives on media and our understanding of the social world* (pp. 7-31). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Roberts, D., Epstein, V., & McShane, L. (2010, February 20). Woods gets a low score on fans' card. *New York Daily News*. Retrieved from the Lexis-Nexis Academic Database.
- Rowe, D. (2007). Sports journalism: Still the "toy department" of the news media? *Journalism*, 8, 385-405.
- Safko, L., & Brake, D.K. (2009). *The social media Bible: Tactics, tools & strategies for business success*. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons.
- Sanderson, J. (2008). The blog is serving its purpose: Self-presentation strategies on 38pitches.com. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 13, 912-936.
- Sanderson, J. (2010). "The nation stands behind you": Mobilizing social support on 38pitches.com. *Communication Quarterly*, 58, 188-206.
- Sanderson, J., & Cheong, P.H. (2010). Tweeting prayers and communicating grief over Michael Jackson online. *Bulletin of Science, Technology & Society*, 30, 328-340.
- Sanderson, J., & Kassing, J.W. (in press). Tweets and blogs: Transformative, adversarial, and integrative developments in sports media. In A.C. Billings (Ed.), *Sports media: Transformation, integration, consumption*. New York: Routledge.
- Soukup, C. (2006). Hitching a ride on a star: Celebrity, fandom, and identification with the World Wide Web. *The Southern Communication Journal*, 71, 319-337.
- Strauss, A.L., & Corbin, J.M. (1990). *Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Surowiecki, J. (2009, December 21). Branded a cheat. *The New Yorker*. Retrieved from the Lexis-Nexis Academic Database.
- Tian, Y., & Stewart, C.M. (2005). Framing the SARS crisis: A computer-assisted text analysis of CNN and BBC online news reports of SARS. *Asian Journal of Communication*, 15, 289-301.
- Tigerwoods.com. (2010). About Tiger Woods. Retrieved from <http://web.tigerwoods.com/aboutTiger/bio>

- Vertinsky, P., & Captain, G. (1998). More myth than history: American culture and representations of the Black female's athletic ability. *Journal of Sport History*, 25, 532-561.
- Whannel, G. (2001). *Media sports stars: Masculinities and moralities*. London: Routledge.
- Wise, M. (2010, July 9). Having fun, but losing his legacy. *The Washington Post*. Retrieved from the Lexis-Nexis Academic Database.
- Wolfsfeld, G. (1997). Promoting peace through the news media: Some initial lessons from the peace process. *The Harvard International Journal of Press/Politics*, 2, 52-70.



Copyright of International Journal of Sport Communication is the property of Human Kinetics Publishers, Inc. and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.