Flag on the Play: A 5-Year Analysis of the Kategoria and Apologia That Combine to Incite Journalistic Antapologia in Sports Reporting

Jennifer L. Harker

Follow this and additional works at: https://researchrepository.wvu.edu/faculty_publications

Part of the Communication Commons, and the Sociology Commons
Flag on the Play: A 5-Year Analysis of the Kategoria and Apologia That Combine to Incite Journalistic Antapologia in Sports Reporting

Jennifer L. Harker¹

Abstract
This study examines the presence of journalistic antapologia (JA) in newspaper-reported sports apologies over a 5-year period (2010–2015). Results from this analysis offer a comprehensive assessment of the current landscape of JA in sports journalism, specifically, by rhetorically analyzing the kategoria and apologia that combine to trigger an antapologic response. A new presence categorization for JA is offered by examining the role enactment of adversarial journalism. This study furthers our knowledge of the rhetorical cycle and the ways in which apologetic rhetoric commingle in adversarial news reporting in sport-related social dramas.

Keywords
journalistic antapologia, apologetic rhetoric, sports journalism, adversarial journalism, kategoria

¹ School of Media and Journalism, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Chapel Hill, NC, USA

Corresponding Author:
Jennifer L. Harker, School of Media and Journalism, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 117 Carroll Hall, Campus Box 3365, Chapel Hill, NC 27599, USA.
Email: jlharker@live.unc.edu
Sports figures are sometimes involved in serious moral transgressions that require public apologetic efforts for reputational repair. The story line for such events offers journalists a fresh new spin on an old beat. Coverage of a reputational threat results in a much less favorable angle that subsequently necessitates social remediation on the part of the sports figure (Kruse, 1981). Rhetorical self-defense, or apologia (Ware & Linkugel, 1973), offered by a public figure is a phenomenon heavily reviewed in sport, although usually in the singular case study format or compilation thereof (Benoit & Hanczor, 1994; Blaney, Lippert, & Smith, 2013; Frederick, Burch, Sanderson, & Hambrick, 2014; Glantz, 2013).

What has not been as widely studied is the kategoria (Ryan, 1982), or the rhetorical accusation of the initial transgression carried out by the public figure, to necessitate the rhetorical self-defense or apologia. A trilogy of the apologetic rhetoric speech set emerged when Stein (2008) posited that the apologetic story line does not end with the remediation attempt. Instead, antapologia, or the responsive discourse to what is perceived as an insufficient rhetorical self-defense, will continue the story line by challenging the offered apologia and enhancing the original kategoria. To better explain, antapologia is present when the offered self-defense is challenged or minimized, and the persuasive attack is enhanced or additional accusations are offered to strengthen the kategoria. In newspaper reports, the combination of these rhetorical acts constitutes journalistic antapologia (hereunto, JA; Husselbee & Stein, 2012; Stein, Barton, & Turman, 2013; Stein, Larson, & Grady, 2006; Turman, Stein, & Barton, 2008). This study examines 153 instances of newspaper coverage of sports-related rhetorical self-defense, the kategoria that triggered those efforts, and any antapologic response over a 5-year period.

This study argues that there is also a categorical presence of adversarial journalism (Carpenter, Boehmer, & Fico, 2016) that aids in a more precise analysis of JA. Adversarial reporting is noted as an expression of opinion that places the journalist as a “conflict antagonist” in reporting on social dramas (Carpenter et al., 2016, p. 593). This study investigates how adversarial journalism and JA commingle around the rhetorical trilogy.

A more universal approach is taken in this analysis of apologetic rhetoric by examining kategoria, apologia, and antapologia outside of a singular case study format. This rhetorical analysis reviews reported sports apologies over a 5-year period in American newspapers. The examination of all three forms of apologetic rhetoric as a continuous rhetorical story line offers key considerations for reputational repair efforts, especially for practitioners.

This analysis specifically sets out to examine which self-defense attempts by sports personas spur an antapologic response in newspaper reporting. Furthermore, this research project sought a more precise categorization of the presence of JA in response to Stein’s call for further examination of antapologia (Stein, 2008, p. 33). This study more intricately categorizes the rhetorical phenomenon by capturing an adversarial categorical presence of its existence in news articles. Finally, this study digs one analytic step deeper by examining the rhetorical trilogy in sports newspaper
journalism, specifically. Controlling for any inflated opinions by excluding columnists and other first-person opinion articles, this project offers a more stringent, in-depth review of the adversarial role of the sports journalist in reporting sport-related social dramas.

**Literature Review**

Apologetic rhetoric was distinguished as its own set of generic criticism within the body of critical theory in the early 1970s with the birth of the theory of apologia (Ware & Linkugel, 1973). Close to a decade later, Ryan (1982) extended the study of apologia to include kategoria and noted that the two are a speech set operating in tandem. Stein (2008) later extended the speech set into an apologetic rhetoric trilogy with the addition of antapologia. This section will explain how kategoria, apologia, and antapologia each emerged in the discourse literature and the ways in which each has been applied as assessment tools for remediation strategies.

**Kategoria**

The precluding element of the trilogy is kategoria (Ryan, 1982). Kategoria is the accusation that requires the self-defensive effort. Kategoria is the rhetorical attack that another has carried out some form of wrongdoing. Kategoria and apologia should be treated as a speech set, Ryan argued, because in order to rhetorically apply an effective self-defense, the accusation must fully be known. Therefore, one speech act cannot be wholly weighed without consideration of the other.

Benoit and Dorries (1996) expounded upon Ryan’s kategoria by more precisely measuring kategoria as a persuasive attack. The authors offered four rhetorical strategies for increasing perceived responsibility and offensiveness for an accused act, which include convincing others that the accused has carried out the same wrongdoing at sometime in the past, that the wrongdoing was planned, that the individual knew the consequences but carried out the wrongdoing anyway, and that the individual likely benefitted from carrying out the wrongdoing. Six additional aspects were offered to assess increased negative perceptions. These include focusing on the extent of the damage, persistence of negative effects, highlighting the effects on the audience, inconsistency, noting innocence of victims, and highlighting the obligation to protect victims (Benoit & Dorries, 1996, p. 469).

**Apologia**

Persuasive attacks, accusations, and increased negative perceptions all necessitate some form of self-defense. Ware and Linkugel (1973) argued that apologetic rhetoric had long been applied yet had not been classified within critical research. The researchers introduced apologia in a political context and noted that apologia could contain an apology but is not an actual apology. Apologia is instead a distinct form
of public address made up of four rhetorical self-defense strategies: bolstering, denial, differentiation, and transcendence. Harrell, Ware, and Linkugel (1975) later paired these concepts into four “rhetorical postures” which include absolution, which is made up of the combination of differentiation and denial; vindication, transcendence and denial; explanation, bolstering and differentiation; and justification, bolstering and transcendence. These categorizations can be both useful and limiting, depending on application, and have since been expanded.

In sum, apologia is an offered self-defense in response to kategoria, a persuasive attack that communicates an accusation of wrongdoing. Kategoria-based apologia has been coined a counterattack and blame transfer by Hearit and Hearit (2011), who later took the concept a step further in their claim that kategoria-spurred apologia is typically “journalism-based” (p. 68). This means that the journalistic reporting of the kategoria increases the public’s knowledge and therefore the need for rhetorical self-defense. This is better explained in the next section that includes the emergence of antapologia and more specifically, JA.

**Antapologia**

The rhetorical trilogy of apologetic discourse emerged when Stein (2008) added a third rhetorical form coined antapologia. Antapologia is defined as a countered response to an offered, ineffective act of apologia. Stein (2010) later noted, “When the discourse addresses the wrongdoer’s explanation or account of the act, it constitutes an instance of antapologia” (p. 2). Antapologia is carried out by both the public and the media (Husselbee & Stein, 2012) and has two functions—it strengthens the original attack, or kategoria, and it weakens the offered self-defense, or apologia (Stein, 2008; Stein, Barton, & Turman, 2013; Stein et al., 2008; Turman et al., 2008).

Antapologia extends beyond the simple restatement of the original kategoria (Stein, 2010). Instead, antapologia is an enhancement of the persuasive attack, which sometimes includes additional accusations. As Stein continued to develop antapologia, the strengthening of the attack became intertwined with the critique of the offered apologia.

Antapologia argues that an offered apologia is incomplete, untrue, or lacks sincerity. Even an act of no offered self-defense can result in an antapologic response (Stein, Barton, & Turman, 2013). Antapologia strategies used to strengthen an attack can include pointing out the concessions in the apologia and refining the persuasive attack based on the offered apologia (Stein, 2008). Antapologia strategies used to weaken the apologia include claiming it is false, contradictory, does not take adequate responsibility, reflects character flaws, or claims the apologia to be harmful. Antapologia also is a defensive response to any attacks made in the apologia (Stein et al., 2008). Stein’s typology was later extended to include that the apologia attributes motive and that the apologia mirrors earlier speeches or events (Husselbee & Stein, 2012; Turman et al., 2008). Studies that rhetorically analyze antapologia
generally follow along this typology as guideposts for analysis. However, this list is still underdeveloped for offering extensive guideposts on kategoria enhancement, as its main focus is on challenging the apologia.

Many types of antapologia have been identified since Stein’s (2008) inception of the theory. These typologies of antapologia include fan antapologia (Turman et al., 2008), international and intergovernmental antapologia (Stein, 2008), public- and religious-based antapologia (Stein, 2010), antapologia carried out in social media (Sanderson & Hambrick, 2016), and JA (Husselbee & Stein, 2012; Stein, Barton, Ault, & Briscoe, 2013; Stein et al., 2013; Stein et al., 2008).

The four studies that have examined JA examined the reputational and crisis discourse concerning political and sport personas including two presidents (George W. Bush and Barack Obama), one professional golfer (Tiger Woods), and one college football coach (Mike Leach). The latter two sport-focused studies are reviewed in the next paragraphs to provide clearer context for the current study.

Husselbee and Stein (2012) investigated coverage from eight national newspapers on Tiger Woods’s rhetorical self-defense following his highly publicized extramarital affair. The news articles were collected by searching ProQuest for articles preceding Woods’s speech offered on February 19, 2010, as well as coverage the day of and thereafter. Each newspaper’s reporting on Woods was quantitatively and rhetorically analyzed for the presence of “newspaper antapologia” (p. 11). The study dissected the specific challenges to Woods’s self-defense and found the majority of antapologia focused upon concessions in the self-defense and Woods’s character flaws.

Another case study focused on the media coverage of Mike Leach, a head coach from Texas Tech University (Stein, Barton & Turman, 2013). The authors collected articles from ESPN.com and the Lubbock Avalanche Journal in an effort to assess both national and local coverage on Leach. The study analyzed first the kategoria, defined as persuasive attacks (Benoit & Dorries, 1996), and then investigated the attack on Leach’s offered apologia. This study offered the strengths and challenges of analyzing together the rhetorical trilogy.

The problem with these studies, however, is that they are chock-full of rhetorical analyses of opinionated articles. For example, a Washington Post article is quoted in an analysis on tone in the Tiger Woods’s study: “Sorry, but I just don’t buy it” (Husselbee & Stein, 2012, p. 14). Most journalistic opinion articles and sports columns are adversarial by nature. This aspect therefore inflates the findings of antapologia. This current study tests JA in a more stringent manner by excluding articles written in first person or marked as opinion in an effort to minimize such blatant and overt accounts. The next section explains this stance in more detail and offers an additional tool for analysis.

Adversarial Journalism

This study reaches to journalistic role perceptions to better frame and categorize the presence of JA. Adversarial journalism manifests from the study of journalistic role
perceptions and is operationalized as an enactment of that perception (Carpenter et al., 2016). Adversarial reporting is an enactment of a journalistic role as a conflict protagonist. In its earliest measurement, journalists were asked about their level of skepticism and willingness to report in an adversarial manner when reporting on public officials and certain types of businesses (Beam, Weaver, & Brownlee, 2009).

Adversarial journalism is expressed in reporting by specifying a particular target, explicitly placing blame on that target, and clearly demonstrating societal conflict that is communicated as disagreement (Carpenter et al., 2016). “Journalists who enact this role challenge the integrity or credibility of an individual in an attempt to hold them accountable” (p. 593).

In newspaper reporting, adversarial journalism is presented in one of the two ways: as a quoted source challenging the target (i.e., an adversarial source) or as the journalist’s own voice in the body text of the article. The latter is most commonly found in newspaper opinion articles (Carpenter et al., 2016) including those written by sports columnists.

In sum, this study explores whether adversarial journalism is present in sports news reporting, excluding opinion or sports columns written in first person in an effort to examine its presence in other forms of reporting. This study also analyzes how adversarial journalism might commingle with JA and the other components of the rhetorical trilogy. As such, the following research questions guide the rhetorical analysis that follows:

**Research Question 1:** Which kategoria and apologia combine to incite JA in newspaper sports journalism?

**Research Question 2:** In what ways does adversarial journalism commingle with JA in newspaper sports journalism?

**Research Question 3:** What can practitioners learn from coupling the rhetorical trilogy with adversarial journalism?

**Method**

American newspaper articles were pulled from four academic databases (Lexis-Nexis, Factiva, Newspaper Source Plus, and America’s News) using the key word search combinations of “apology” or “apologize” or “sorry” and “sport” or “athlete” or “player” or “coach”. The time period searched included the years 2010–2015. All articles identified as opinion, bylined or titled as “sports columnist,” or written in first person were excluded from study to minimize any inflated findings of JA or adversarial journalism.

The articles ($N = 153$) were reviewed for the presence of JA. First, all news articles were examined for a challenged apology or apologia ($n = 43$). Then, all news articles were explored for enhanced or additional kategoria stated after the reported apology or apologia ($n = 12$). Finally, the 12 news articles that featured
enhanced or additional kategoria were compared against the 43 challenged self-defense efforts. All 12 of those articles were determined depictions of antapologia (Husselbee & Stein, 2012; Stein, 2010, 2008).

Antapologia \( (n = 12) \) was therefore present in 7.8% of newspaper-reported sports-focused self-defense attempts between 2010 and 2015. To further extend this research, the presence of adversarial journalism was also investigated.

The 43 news articles that contained a challenge to the reported self-defense effort were assessed for how the challenge to the sport persona’s rhetorical attempt was presented. To explain, the presence of adversarial journalism is demonstrated by the challenge in the body text of the article or by quoting an adversarial source. Adversarial journalism was found most often presented in the body text of the news article \( (n = 22) \). Challenges were also presented as an adversarial source \( (n = 15) \). This analysis enabled the classification of a third type of adversarial presence, which is a combined presence where both an adversarial source is quoted and the journalist in the body text of the news article challenged the offered self-defense \( (n = 6) \).

All 6 of the news articles that demonstrated a combination presence of adversarial reporting also were within the 12 articles categorized as antapologia. In other words, these six news articles challenged the self-defense effort by the sport persona by both quoting an adversarial source and challenging the self-defense effort in the body text of the news article, and all six articles contained an enhanced or additional kategoria stated after the reported self-defense effort. These six news articles are rhetorically analyzed in the next section for a deeper examination of this phenomenon.

**Rhetorical Analysis**

The six articles that featured the combination presence of adversarial reporting and JA are rhetorically analyzed in this section. The following rhetorical analysis examines the rhetorical trilogy. The transgression that triggered the original kategoria and the enhanced or additional kategoria—which extends “beyond the simple restatement of the original kategoria”—is studied (Benoit & Dorries, 1996; Ryan, 1982; Stein, 2010, p. 2). The apologia is also examined and categorized into “rhetorical postures” (Harrell, Ware, & Linkugel, 1975) for clearer dissection and assessment of why these particular self-defense efforts were so harshly challenged. The examination of kategoria and apologia includes the use of both Stein’s typologies of antapologia (Husselbee & Stein, 2012; Stein, 2008; Stein et al., 2008; Turman et al., 2008) and Carpenter, Boehmer, and Fico’s (2016) operationalization of adversarial reporting.

The format of this rhetorical analysis mirrors Stein’s prior research on Mike Leach (Stein, Barton & Turman, 2013). In that study, kategoria was first reviewed and then the challenging postures to the offered apologia. This current study follows along a similar flow of analysis, but the apologia section is categorized by rhetorical postures. This analysis begins with kategoria.
Kategoria

Responsibility and offensiveness are the two ways in which kategoria, or the persuasive attack, is increased through antapologia (Benoit & Dorries, 1996). All six of the cases rhetorically analyzed in this section feature responsibility or offensiveness in the persuasive attacks. This section highlights the four rhetorical attack strategies (happened in the past, was planned, knew it was wrong, or benefitted) and drills down one extra level to identify the journalistic attempts to increase negative perceptions of the sports persona. As a refresher, there are six ways to increase negative perceptions of the blamed individual: by highlighting the extent of the damage, the persistence of negative effects, the effects on the audience, any inconsistencies, that the victims are innocent, and that there was an obligation to protect victims (Benoit & Dorries, 1996, p. 469). Finally, the four aspects included in the operationalization of adversarial journalism are also applied as an analysis tool: a specified target where blame is placed, clear demonstration of societal conflict, and communicated disagreement (Carpenter et al., 2016).

Responsibility. Four of the six news articles focus on responsibility in the enhanced persuasive attack or kategoria. Two of the cases involve mismanagement concerning sexual abuse and two involve the use of performance-enhancing drugs (PEDs). The two news articles covering mismanagement of sexual abuse place blame on a person in a leadership role and not the actual perpetrator of the sexual abuse. Both of the news articles increase negative perceptions of the sports personas by highlighting an obligation to protect victims.

For example, Steve Alford is a college basketball coach who in 2002 allegedly shielded a player from disciplinary action when the player was accused of sexual abuse. A decade later, Alford was hired at University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) and in response to “mounting criticism” of his hiring, the university released a statement by Alford about that alleged shielding (Reid, 2013).

The journalist focuses on societal conflict by writing about Alford’s “mishandling of a player” in a “felony sexual abuse case” and that Alford’s “apology came 10 days after [he] unsuccessfully tried to deflect criticism.” The journalist also communicates disagreement from “a growing number of critics” concerning “Alford’s sincerity and truthfulness,” even questioning “whether athletic director Dan Guerrero and the university practiced due diligence in hiring Alford.”

USA Swim Team chief, Chuck Wielgus, is the focus of the second. Wielgus had been accused of covering up numerous reports of sexual abuse. He had maintained his innocence up until he was forced to address the issue publically when 15 victims came forward to contest his Hall of Fame nomination. The journalist penned the following lede:

“I’m sorry.” More than four years after saying he had nothing for which to be sorry, USA Swimming chief Chuck Wielgus finally apologized to victims of sexual abuse for the first time. (Denver Post, 2014)
The article highlights societal conflict in reporting that Wielgus was “forced to withdraw” from the Hall of Fame induction and how he “now acknowledges he should have done more.” Poor job performance was Wielgus’s additional kategoria, which was also conveyed by others quoted in the article, “…another example of this organization under Mr. Wielgus’ leadership being reactive and not proactive.” (Denver Post, 2014, p. 2B)

The other two news articles that focused on responsibility, as kategoria, involved two athletes in doping cases. Both news articles increased negative perceptions of the sports persona by highlighting inconsistencies and blame placement on the target.

Cyclist Lance Armstrong was featured in one of the two news articles. The journalist was reporting on Armstrong’s “apology” on Oprah Winfrey’s show: “This, despite vehemently denying the charges for years” (Rosenblum, 2013). The persuasive attack throughout the news article repeatedly refocused blame placement on Armstrong, highlighting that Armstrong knew what he was doing but did it anyway, and then focused on how the public was being victimized by Armstrong’s original denial. The journalist also quoted several sources to enhance the persuasive attack, including this quote to support increased negative perceptions:

He didn’t just allegedly dope. He vigorously denied it and made it a living hell for anyone who challenged him. I’m sure those people are feeling very vindicated.

Ryan Braun was also accused of PED use, and he too initially denied the doping accusations. When he finally admitted guilt, he claimed his drug use initially began when trying to heal a past injury. The journalist increased the persuasive attack by highlighting these inconsistencies and discussing how Braun benefitted. The additional kategoria in this article included legal woes and a claim that Braun had been doping since his college days (Associated Press, 2013). The article also increased negative perceptions by highlighting the extent of the damage and the persistence of negative effects by talking about all the ways in which Braun benefitted in place of other hardworking players.

Both the Armstrong and Braun news articles increased negative perceptions by focusing on inconsistencies due to the initial denial strategies. Denial was a common initial self-defense theme among all four of these cases within the persuasive attack of responsibility, but this will be discussed more in the Apologia section. For now, this section wraps up with a review of two articles that highlight the offensiveness strategy of kategoria.

Offensiveness. The final two news articles focused on offensiveness as kategoria. These persuasive attacks focus on the repeated offenses of a college coach and a major league team manager for repeated use of foul language.

Dave Doeren is a college football coach who released a statement of self-defense after making the unsubstantiated accusation to an opposing team of “faking injuries”
to slow his team’s offense during a game. The journalist was quick to point out times in the past that the coach had engaged in the same behaviors: “He did it again Monday . . . and had made similar comments earlier this season after a win against Georgia Southern” (Herald-Sun, 2014). Another source was quoted to convey disagreement and state the opposing team was innocent of such a claim by accusing Doeren “of not knowing what he’s talking about.”

Bryan Price, manager for the Cincinnati Reds, was the focus of an article printed in the Marin Independent Journal that reported on Price’s regular use of vulgar speech. To enhance the kategoria and increase negative perceptions, the journalist wrote about the innocence of those afflicted by Price’s outbursts. For example, one excerpt read:

Price was particularly upset over a Cincinnati Enquirer report that catcher Devin Mesoraco wasn’t available to play during a game in St. Louis because of injury. [Price was angry because] the Enquirer reporter tweeted that catcher Tucker Barnhart was on his flight to St. Louis for the series on Friday, an indication he was being called up from the minors. (Armas, 2015, p. 8)

Price’s past verbal outbursts are used as fuel to increase kategoria. For example, the journalist adds poor job performance to the list of accusations and leaves the reader with an account of Price’s past similar transgressions, like when he was ejected from games twice during the prior season and how he had been “thrown out of a game for causing a delay by refusing to leave the field.”

The journalists enhanced the persuasive attack in both of these cases of offensiveness by focusing on past incidences of the same or similar behavior. In sum, the sport persona’s wrongdoings were further highlighted with enhanced and additional kategoria. The wrongdoings that triggered JA and adversarial responses included leadership mishandling of sexual abuse cases, PED use, and foul language. Poor job performance was the most common additional kategoria applied. Focusing on past examples of the same or similar behavior enhanced the persuasive attacks. Finally, attempts to increase negative perceptions most often included the obligation to protect victims and by highlighting inconsistencies.

The next section focuses on the offered rhetorical self-defense and the challenges to those self-defense efforts.

**Apologia and Rhetorical Postures**

The apologia included in this section is categorized into rhetorical postures (Harrell et al., 1975; Ware & Linkugel, 1973). This section is split between the absolution and vindication rhetorical postures to assess the apologia that spurred JA responses. Stein’s antapologia typology is used for assessment, and the four aspects of adversarial journalism are also applied here as an analysis tool (Carpenter et al., 2016;
Absolution rhetorical posture (differentiation and denial). Denial is the featured apologia among five of the six cases analyzed in this current study. The contradictory process of first denying and then admitting any amount of guilt provides fodder to the adversarial journalist. This section moves beyond the sole focus on denial and includes discussion on differentiation. Both Braun and Price differentiated in their offered self-defense and that differentiation triggered JA.

The differentiation offered by Braun included statements such as “At that time, I still didn’t want to believe that I had used a banned substance”; “I was dealing with a nagging injury”; and “The products were a cream and a lozenge.” Braun also offered a partial apology:

I want to apologize for my actions and provide a more specific account of what I did and why I deserved to be suspended. I am deeply sorry for my actions, and I apologize to everyone who has been adversely affected by them. (Associated Press, 2013)

Unfortunately, the apology was overshadowed by the past denial and the sprinkles of differentiation that accompanied the partial apology. The antapologia used by the journalist in this wire report strengthens the attack against Braun by identifying concessions and refining the attack based on the apologia. The attack on the apologia claimed the apologia did not take adequate responsibility and that it was incomplete:

But he provided no specific details on what drugs he used, or how he got them. The statement does not specify the injury Braun refers to. Nor does it discuss performance-enhancing drugs, or Biogenesis. (Associated Press, 2013)

Several other sources are quoted in this article actively engaging in the societal conflict and expressing that Braun’s self-defense effort is contradictory and does not take adequate responsibility. An ESPN reporter is quoted in the news article as stating, “Inevitably, as players sit on their fat paychecks, the public debate will continue to swirl around the risk-reward ramifications of PED use.” The journalist quotes another ESPN commentator, saying that while Braun “used a lot of the right words in expressing his embarrassment and regret, we need more specifics than this.”

Price, who also extended the absolution posture, differentiated when he said:

I used a lot of bad language that I feel bad for in the aftermath. And I apologize for that. The content between the profanity is exactly how I felt, and I won’t apologize for that under any circumstances. (Armas, 2015, p. 8)
In response, the journalist challenged the apologia by refining the persuasive attack based on the offered apologia and noted that the apologia reflects character flaws and is contradictory. For example, the journalist offered, “but everything in between the bad words remains fair game,” in the body text of the article and then quoted a source as stating, “The *Enquirer* counted 77 uses of a common vulgarity during Price’s 5-minute, 34-second diatribe.”

Differentiation coupled with denial and extended in individualized instances received a variety of challenges. Next, the vindication posture is explored.

**Vindication rhetorical posture (transcendence and denial).** The vindication posture includes both of the cases that involved failed leadership regarding sexual abuse. The two sports personas, a college coach and the chief of the USA Swim Team, applied denial and transcendence. This section explores the ways in which JA emerged in response to the vindication posture.

First, in the Alford case, transcendence was applied when Alford claimed he had since learned to allow the legal system to work before automatically discrediting a person’s claims:

> I instinctively and mistakenly came to his defense before knowing all the facts. I wanted to believe he was innocent, and in response to a media question, I publicly proclaimed his innocence before the legal system had run its course. This was inappropriate, insensitive and hurtful, especially to the young female victim involved, and I apologize for that. (Reid, 2013)

The journalist highlighted the societal conflict and weakened the offered apologia by writing:

> Instead of defusing the scandal, Alford’s apology, issued through the university, further fueled a controversy that has engulfed Alford, Guerrero and college basketball’s most storied program. (Reid, 2013)

The journalist also suggested that portions of the apologia were false by stating that Alford had contradicted previous apologia strategies (e.g., denial). The challenge to Alford’s apologia included the identification of concessions in the apologia and the refining of the attack based upon the apologia. For example,

> Alford’s apology came 10 days after Alford unsuccessfully tried to deflect criticism of his handling of the 2002 case by claiming he was following university instructions at the time.

The article goes on to quote others also challenging the apologia, expressing societal conflict and disagreement:
Interesting. Apparently [Alford] learned in one week what he didn’t learn 11 years ago. Too bad UCLA didn’t pay enough attention to the issue to prep him with this response beforehand. It just demonstrates how insensitive Alford was to the fact that it was a serious issue.

This adversarial source applied several areas of antapologia, including refining the attack based on the offered apologia, stating it was contradictory, that it does not take adequate responsibility, and it reflects character flaws. The article ended with two full paragraphs of Alford’s verbatim self-defense statement issued by the university.

Wielgus also extended the vindication posture in his combination of initial denial and then transcendence. The Denver Post journalist identified concessions in the apologia and pointed out how Wielgus contradicted his previous denial strategy with an offered apology that came years later.

I’m sorry. These are powerful words some people have wanted to hear from me for a long time. And so today, four long years later, I can truthfully say how sorry I am to the victims of sexual abuse. (Denver Post, 2014, p. 2B)

The adversarial journalist reported that Wielgus’ statement came too late and highlighted that Wielgus was “forced to withdraw from the International Swimming Hall of Fame induction class.” The journalist also featured adversarial sources throughout the article.

The victims’ attorneys are quoted, expressing that Wielgus’ self-defense effort is “nothing more than an attempt to stifle criticism” and was perceived by them and the victims as “too little, too late, and forced.” This antapologia challenge by an adversarial source pointed out the concessions in the apologia, refined the attack based on the offered apologia, claimed it contradictory, and pointed out that it does not take adequate responsibility.

The vindication posture was offered by two sport personas serving in leadership roles. Both offered only an apologetic attempt after their future successes were met with public criticism for past leadership transgressions.

A discussion follows on the presence of JA in newspaper-reported sports apologies, the kategoria and apologia involved, and the presence of adversarial journalism in these six combination cases. The benefit of this investigation for practitioners is also discussed.

**Discussion**

This rhetorical analysis explored the presence or absence of kategoria, apologia, JA, and adversarial journalism in newspaper-reported sports apologies. The kategoria and apologia that incite a combination presence of JA in adversarial newspaper sports reporting were triggered by the wrongdoings of leadership mishandling of sexual abuse cases, PED use, and foul language. The three persuasive attacks most often used to enhance kategoria in these news articles (from most often to least often
applied) claimed the sports persona knew what they did was wrong, had done it before, and had benefitted from the wrongdoing (Benoit & Dorries, 1996). Poor job performance was the most common additional kategoria applied.

The apologia that incited JA most commonly included denial, but differentiation, transcendence, and bolstering were also present. The rhetorical postures of absolution emerged as self-defense for personal wrongdoings (PEDs and foul language) and the vindication posture emerged as mismanagement, poor job performance, and a reemergence of those wrongdoings during times of success.

Several forms of antapologia were offered in these six news articles. For the absolution posture, the most commonly applied form of antapologia was a refined attack based upon the offered apologia and the journalist accused the sports personas of being contradictory. There are several reasons this response occurred. First, offering denial and then later conceding to truths or half-truths that the act in fact took place results in increased negative perceptions and reactions (Coombs, Holladay, & Claeys, 2016). Furthermore, differentiation offers an adversarial journalist an exacting counterargument. It provides direction to the journalist in other interviews and directs the journalist’s contextual research. In so doing, the journalist gathers countering information and quotes to construct the storytelling of these social dramas (Kampf, 2013).

The vindication posture (denial and transcendence) triggered antapologia that focused on concessions, being contradictory, that the self-defense did not take adequate responsibility, and again the refined attack. The vindication posture includes both of the cases that involved failed leadership regarding sexual abuse. Both only apologized after their future successes were met with public criticism. Transcendence is not an effective rhetorical self-defense in combination with denial when a serious societal transgression is involved. Interestingly, the adversarial source was an enhanced voice in expressing antapologia in the vindication cases too. The adversarial sources refined the attack, and noted it was contradictory and did not take adequate responsibility, while highlighting character flaws. This finding partially answers the second research question that asked how adversarial journalism commingles with JA.

Journalistic Implications

This study’s purpose is not to argue whether a journalist should or should not enact the adversarial role when reporting on sport-related rhetorical self-defense but rather to identify the intricacies involved in these six cases that demonstrate the combination presence of such challenge. This study linked the rhetorical trilogy to adversarial framing in sports reporting and found the journalist as a conflict protagonist was demonstrated in all four ways in which it has been operationalized: a specified target as the focus, where blame is placed, within a clear demonstration of societal conflict, where communicated disagreement is present.

All four aspects of adversarial journalism were present in both enactments of JA—the enhancement of kategoria and the weakening of apologia. The only exceptions were
the absence of communicated disagreement in the enhancement of kategoria in the Wielgus news article and the absence of societal conflict in the weakening of the apologia in the Price article. Does this make adversarial reporting a broader operationalization to aid in the capture of JA? This study suggests it might. These findings should be further explored in researching the framing and multiple case assessments of rhetorical self-defense studies to examine how adversarial reporting might offer a clearer operationalization that more objectively captures JA’s presence in broader analyses.

Practitioner Benefits

The final question this research posited was intended to explore the key aspects that might assist practitioners in the future from this coupling of the rhetorical trilogy with adversarial journalism. This study highlights the importance of examining adversarial journalism and JA outside of opinionated articles or columns written in first person. Another key aspect of the marriage of the rhetorical trilogy and adversarial journalism is the presence categorization. The fact that adversarial journalism offers a more precise presence measurement, a quoted adversarial source, body text, and now the combination of both, nods to a severity or hierarchy of JA presence in the reporting of sports-related social dramas.

Practitioners can benefit from knowing what triggers the combination response, especially, and can refocus remediation attempts. For example, this study highlights the increased negative perceptions of denial as an offered self-defense strategy (Coombs et al., 2016). This is especially true in the absolution rhetorical posture where it became evident that a sports persona should not mix denial and differentiation when defending an individual-level transgression. Blame placement is inevitable in social drama and the need for blame placement increases if denial is present. It is best not to deny and differentiate in an attempt of absolution because these strategies will backfire due to no additional space to place blame. Absolution might be better left for larger, organizational self-defense attempts instead because an organization arguably holds more opportunity than an individual for abstract spatial blame placement.

Transcendence, coupled with denial, was not effective for leadership apologies in the sport-related cases in this study. This could be due to the fact that in both cases, a serious societal issue was at play. The vindication posture might be more successful in other cases, but Wielgus and Alford triggered serious adversarial responses using this posture. This reaction could have been amplified by the time that had passed between the original denial and the later transcendence offer but was most likely due to the perceptions of prior poor job performance, which negated the attempts of transcendence.

Conclusion

The current study extends past literature in numerous ways. First, this study sets out to provide a comprehensive view of the rhetorical trilogy by analyzing several cases and not focusing solely on one singular case study. While the case study format
certainly enriches the storytelling ability around the rhetorical trilogy, this current study provides a deeper dive into the triggers of JA in an attempt to extend practitioner insight on ineffective rhetorical self-defense strategies. This approach aided in a broadened exploration of the kategoria and apologia combinations that trigger JA. This study is also unique in coupling the rhetorical trilogy with an exploration of the journalistic role enactment of adversarial journalism. Furthermore, this research explored the similarities of JA and adversarial journalism and how the two commingled in the sports reporting setting. Adversarial journalism enhanced the investigation of JA by categorizing its presence and offered a more concise way to measure a journalist’s antagonistic framing attempts.

Future studies should explore ways in which adversarial journalism might better operationalize and clarify the abstract and subjective measurement of JA. Also, future research should omit opinion articles and sports columns written in first-person when assessing JA and adversarial journalism for a clearer view of the breadth of journalists acting as antagonists. Put another way, this research demonstrates that adversarial reporting reaches beyond editorial pages and diffuses into news and sports news reporting.

Taken together, JA and adversarial journalism commingle in the rhetorical social dramas of sports personas in newspaper reporting. This study demonstrates the need to explore the entire rhetorical trilogy in tandem as an effort to fully understand the intricate triggers of adversarial journalistic reactions.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests
The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding
The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

References


Herald-Sun. (2014, October 1). Wolfpack’s Doeren apologizes to Seminoles. *Herald-Sun (Sports)*.


