

THESIS

“THE SEASON FROM HELL”:
THE GENRE OF CORPORATE SPORTS APOLOGIA

Submitted by

Caitlyn Jarvis

Department of Communication Studies

In partial fulfillment of the requirements

For the Degree of Master of Arts

Colorado State University

Fort Collins, Colorado

Summer 2016

Master's Committee:

Advisor: Carl Burghardt

Elizabeth Williams

Kirk Hallahan

Copyright by Caitlyn Jarvis 2016

All Rights Reserved

ABSTRACT

“THE SEASON FROM HELL”:

THE GENRE OF CORPORATE SPORTS APOLOGIA

In the fall of 2014 the National Football League (NFL) experienced a drastic rise in the publicity of player arrests for domestic violence. Not only did the case of Ray Rice, who was video taped brutally assaulting his fiancé, receive public attention, but this case was quickly followed up with arrests of Greg Hardy, Ray McDonald, and Adrian Peterson. Suddenly, domestic violence was a serious problem in discord with public values. This project examines the NFL's response to the domestic violence crisis during the 2014 to 2015 football season and its efforts to regain public legitimacy. Through combining the genre of apologia with research on organizational communication tactics, I present five theoretical ways in which sports corporations, like the NFL, can begin to rebuild their public image in the wake of a crisis. These five strategies help to inform the salience of apologia theory as well as the light it can shed on corporate communication when combined with studies on organizational discourse.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

There are countless people who have influenced my professional and personal development over the last two years.

I would like to pay a special thanks to my advisor, Dr. Carl Burghardt, whose patience and advice was a constant source of relief throughout the thesis process. As I read through the final product, I am forever indebted to your willingness to help develop my rhetorical insights and writing technique. These are skills I will carry far beyond graduate school. I would also like to thank my inside committee member, Dr. Kirk Hallahan, whose consideration and feedback throughout this process has provided me with a deeper understanding of the Public Relations perspective. Thank you for taking time, especially during your sabbatical, to help develop this project. And of course, I am beyond grateful to Dr. Elizabeth Williams, whose advice and guidance in the classroom and beyond has helped shape my experience at Colorado State University into far more than I could have imagined. Thank you so much, Elizabeth, for your help in developing my scholarly interests and introducing me to organizational theory, which ignited my passion for research. Thank you for your encouragement to pursue my interests and for the countless opportunities you have provided me. I do not believe I could have accomplished graduate school without your support.

I would also like to thank my friends and family, whose support was a guiding light throughout graduate school. To my friends, especially Katharine Lunny, thank you for listening to my countless grievances, for the two-hour phone calls, and for putting up with me over the past five years. To Karleigh Cameron, I'm so lucky that we met and that you

became my first real friend in my move to Colorado. To my brother, Matthew, thank you for your advice and humor, especially in times of stress—I truly appreciate it. And lastly to my parents, thank you for the encouragement you have given me, for visiting when you can, and for giving me the opportunities I have had to reach this milestone.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract.....	ii
Acknowledgments.....	iii
Chapter One: Introduction.....	1
Setting the Stage: The NFL’s Public Relations Problem.....	3
The Genre of Apologia.....	7
The Subgenre of Sports Apologia.....	10
The Subgenre of Corporate Apologia.....	11
Organizational Culture and Values.....	13
Moving Forward.....	15
Chapter Two: Context.....	17
February 2014.....	18
The Scandal and the Immediate Aftermath.....	18
Rice’s Pre-Scandal Public Image... ..	19
The NFL and the Raven’s Response.....	20
March 2014.....	22
April and May 2014.....	23
Rice’s Legal Outcome.....	23
Rice and Palmer’s Press Conference.....	24
Greg Hardy.....	24
June 20.....	25
Rice’s Meeting with the NFL.....	25

July 2014.....	26
The NFL Sanctions Against Rice.....	26
Playing Favorites.....	27
Raven’s Response.....	27
August 2014.....	28
NFL on Defense.....	28
The New Policy.....	28
September 2014.....	29
Hardy and Peterson.....	29
Criticism on Goodell’s Leadership.....	30
Initial Remedial Action.....	33
Goodell’s First Official Press Conference.....	34
October 2014.....	37
Continued Remedial Work.....	37
Support and Criticism for Commissioner Goodell.....	38
November 2014.....	40
Rice’s Suspension and Appeal Hearing.....	40
2015.....	41
Greg Hardy.....	41
Chapter Three: The Triumph of Teflon.....	44
Deploying Due Process.....	44
Discourse Content.....	48
Key Words.....	49

Rhetoric of Policies.....	50
Discourse on Legal Experts.....	51
Robert Mueller.....	52
Lisa Friel.....	53
Judge Jones.....	55
Strategizing Ambiguity.....	59
Questions of Evidence.....	60
Questions of Intent.....	63
Questions of Locus.....	64
Speaking to Stakeholders.....	65
Leadership Ethos.....	66
Unity Through Identification.....	68
Building Common Ground.....	70
Expressing Concern for the Individual.....	71
Recognizing the Individuals' Contribution to the Organization.....	71
Espousal of Shared Values.....	72
Advocating for Company Sponsored Activities.....	73
Highlighting Praise by Outsiders.....	74
Illustrating Remorse.....	75
Addressing Stakeholder Complaints.....	76
The NFL Cares About Women.....	77
Showcasing an Understanding of Domestic Violence.....	77
Addressing the Personal Conduct Policy.....	78

Reasserting Credibility.....	79
NO MORE.....	79
National Domestic Violence Hotline.....	82
Archetypes.....	82
The NFL Family.....	83
Family Members.....	84
Shifting Blame.....	85
Scapegoating.....	86
Kategoria-Based Apologia.....	88
Reframe Current Charges.....	89
Leveling New Charges.....	90
Challenging Ethics.....	91
Chapter Four: The Fourth Quarter.....	94
Traditional Apologia.....	95
Intersecting Organizational Communication Theory.....	97
Corporate Sports Institutions.....	98
Rhetoric of Domestic Violence.....	99
Further Research.....	100
Final Thoughts.....	101
Notes.....	102

Chapter One: Introduction

Sports in the United States are a big business. In 2013, PricewaterhouseCoopers LLP, a New York based research firm, reported that by 2017 sports revenue in North America would grow to an estimated \$67.7 billion.¹ Among the most powerful sports organizations in the country, the National Football League (NFL) consistently ranks as the most profitable and most popular sporting franchise, with estimated annual revenue reaching \$9.5 billion.² Beyond being an economic powerhouse, though, the NFL is also a major cultural institution in the United States. Sports impact culture through a variety of ways: from media coverage, to the experience of playing a sport, or even simply viewing the sport among friends and family.³ It is therefore important to analyze the communication expounded by the NFL, specifically through a rhetorical and organizational communication perspective. By analyzing how the NFL's discourse presents itself to the public, we can better understand the impact this may hold on our culture and national identity. After all, as Michael Butterworth claims in his book *Baseball and the Rhetoric of Purity*, in a post-September 11 America, baseball, the nation's pastime, was able to reaffirm the democratic promise and the idea of American exceptionalism that has long characterized the U.S.'s identity, but was threatened by the terrorist attacks of 2001.⁴ If baseball can reaffirm a lost sense of identity in a terror-stricken nation, the power of sports institutions should not be overlooked; rather we should examine how sports justify themselves to the public to better understand how they constitute their place in American culture.

Clearly, in recent years, the NFL has had serious problems that undermined its all-American, wholesome image. According to a survey done by *USA Today*, between January

2000 and September 2015, 97 of the 806 arrest of NFL players have been due to domestic violence.⁵ In 2014 alone, eleven players were arrested on assault charges, five of whom had assaulted a women or child.⁶ Yet domestic violence did not become a point of public criticism for the NFL until September 2014, when video footage surfaced of Ray Rice, running back for the Baltimore Ravens, hitting his fiancé and dragging her unconscious body through an elevator door.⁷ After the Rice scandal broke, domestic violence became a central feature of the 2015 season, leading *GQ* to call it “the season from hell.”⁸ During this time, the NFL was faced with a difficult problem: how does it continue to justify itself to a public whose values are incongruent with the behavior of the NFL players? My research seeks to answer this question by studying how the NFL employed its available rhetorical resources to mitigate public disapproval and improve its credibility.

In the Western tradition, rhetoric is most often categorized as the study of persuasion, which includes such topics as how a rhetor utilizes discourse to adapt to an audience, respond to a situation, or shape human motives.⁹ Given this understanding of rhetoric, I categorize the public relations statements delivered by the NFL as a form of rhetoric. Skerlep’s 2001 essay, “Re-evaluating the Role of Rhetoric in Public Relations Theory and in Strategies of Corporate Discourse,” makes the claim that public relations communication should be viewed through a rhetorical lens because rhetoric allows scholars to critique the persuasive elements of public relations communication and understand how such communication creates a beneficial relationship with the public.¹⁰ Through a rhetorical analysis of the NFL’s public relations campaign, my project underscores the importance of evaluating successful sports discourse during image management crises.

To introduce the salience of this project I first will provide an overview of the existing literature, which informs my project, with specific attention paid to apologia in corporate and sports institutions and how these theoretical constructs will help further our understanding of apologia in sports. Chapter two, Context, provides an in-depth review of the domestic violence scandal that occurred in 2014, the missteps of the NFL, and the ongoing debacle of domestic violence in the league. Chapter three, The Triumph of Teflon, provides a topical analysis of the NFL's use of apologia. And, finally, chapter four, Fourth Quarter, reviews the theoretical and practical implications of this project, with proposals for future research.

Setting the Stage: The NFL's Public Relations Problem

To begin, I will briefly introduce the NFL's public relations problem as it relates to existing literature on organizational communication and apologia theory. For any organization, the ability for its values to be communicated and aligned with its consumer base is incredibly important. After the Rice scandal, many people began to question the values purported by the NFL and football culture at large. Scholars have long explored the cultural repercussions and dangers of football culture, where, more than any other mainstream sport, the gender divide is most easily visible. Because football tends to encourage "toughness, heterosexuality, and subordinating one's own body to injury," football players will be more likely to privilege traditional notions of masculinity while simultaneously rejecting anything feminine as taboo.¹¹ The gender divide within football culture is even further emphasized by the visible imbalance between the action on the field and on the sidelines, where women only serve as hyper-sexualized cheerleaders or reporters.¹² Scholars have also identified how military rhetoric is imbued within sports

discourse, memorials, and rituals, which serve to only further highlight the violent ethos of professional football even more.¹³ The use of military rhetoric to construct masculinity in non-military persons is referred to as the masculine warrior narrative, where players are expected “to position their own bodies as expendable weapons of athletic war.”¹⁴ The gender divide and the military rhetoric, combined with the organizationally sanctioned violence on the field creates a context for highly masculine, violent values that are continually re-enforced through the NFL’s culture. These violent values, which are typically celebrated because of the on the field spectacle they provide, have also created the context for domestic violence to become a major problem within the NFL.

Many critics have sought to understand the relationship between the inherent violence of football culture and the high number of athletes who commit violent assaults. While there is no substantive research connecting on the field violence to violence off the field, studies have shown that football players who experience head trauma will be more inclined towards having a violent, aggressive personality.¹⁵ Concern over the high number of football players who suffer from severe concussions and head trauma has long been a significant strain on the NFL’s public image. Recent survey data shows that 30% of professional football players will suffer some form of brain trauma, including Alzheimer’s, depression, or dementia.¹⁶ Lineman and linebackers endure the most hits to the head during a football game; however, running backs and quarterbacks endure the most severe hits to the head.¹⁷ Furthermore, in a study done by Boston University and the Sports Legacy Institute, chronic head trauma was found to be a leading cause of brain disease and mood swings, highlighting the likelihood that football players may be more inclined to violence than the average person. The NFL, as an organization, has closely aligned itself

with the values of violence and masculinity enacted on the field.¹⁸ These values are enacted throughout the organizational culture both on and off the field and closely impacted the ways in which consumers choose to identify with the organization. For example, we know that the sport of football encourages a hyper-masculine attitude, which in turn rejects anything feminine as taboo. Recently, a group of cheerleaders, with the support of federal lawmakers, wrote to Commissioner Roger Goodell requesting support in their fight to receive minimum wage and fair working conditions. Among their grievances, the cheerleaders cited “jiggle tests,” conducted to test their weight gain, and fines for bringing the wrong pom-poms.¹⁹ The dehumanizing standards placed on NFL cheerleaders, with virtually no oversight by the league, has led to lawsuits reaching up to \$1.25 million.²⁰

The growing public awareness of the violent values of football culture and its problematic connection to health effects experienced by players caused a disruption in its fans’ ability to watch the game free of guilt. In one *Boston Globe* article, author and former professional football player, Stefan Fatsis, commented that despite the public’s love of football, “because we’re all so educated now--about suicide and early death and dementia for most sentient fans it’s very difficult to shut that out when you’re watching a game.” Fatsis goes on to comment in the article that “people watch football differently than they used to.”²¹ As the public began to criticize the high percentage of domestic assaults occurring in the NFL, more and more fans began to express awareness and concern over whether it was appropriate to continue to watch football. Fans were quoted as describing the Ray Rice scandal as “heartbreaking,” leading to the popularization of the “boycottNFL” hash tag on Twitter.²² Among the news agencies, bloggers, and editorialist who questioned the NFL’s dedication towards fixing their domestic violence problem, feminist blog, *Jezebel*,

was at the forefront of the crusade. *Jezebel* ran articles promoting the downfall of the NFL; with titles such as: “Face It, Women: The NFL Does Not Give a Shit About You” and “If You Care About Women and Still Support the NFL, You Are a Hypocrite.”²³

Most of *Jezebel*'s anger stemmed from the mishandlings of the NFL's initial public image restoration campaign immediately following the Rice scandal, particularly by Commissioner Roger Goodell. By the start of September, Goodell's reputation as a capable leader was embroiled in constant reports of contradictory statements, including sources asserting the NFL had seen the Rice video in April despite continued denial by Goodell, and new policies which were introduced with conflicting results. By late August, Goodell announced a new policy designed to combat domestic violence by suspending first-time offenders for six games.²⁴ A few days later, however, when the video of Rice hitting his fiancée was publicly released, Goodell suspended Rice indefinitely, drawing criticism for his conflicting policy implementation.²⁵ Shortly thereafter the NFL received increased criticism after Minnesota Viking's running back, Adrian Peterson, was indicted in front of a Grand Jury on charges of child abuse.²⁶ These continued instances of domestic violence, the inconsistent statements concerning the video, and the illogical policy implementation, meant that the call for Goodell's resignation, and likewise anger at the NFL's perceived misunderstanding at the severity of domestic violence, had gained renewed, and boisterous, support by early September.

Despite *Jezebel*'s attempts to persuade people away from watching football or even Fatsis's predictions that people would remain at least conscious of the problematic nature of football culture, the NFL survived its public relations nightmare and grew its fan base by the time Super Bowl XLIX aired in February 2015 to a record number of viewers.²⁷ The

2015 Super Bowl game was the most watched television program of all time, with 114.4 million viewers, and women constituting one third of the viewing audience, a substantial increase over previous years.²⁸ While these statistics do not speak to the immediate success of the NFL's apology, the popularity of Super Bowl XLIX does illustrate that the public was willing to support the NFL regardless of its domestic violence problem and this may, in part, be attributed to the NFL's apology strategies.

The Genre of Apologia

To understand how the NFL utilized its rhetorical resources to reconstruct its public image, it is best to view their strategies through an apology framework. Sports apology mirrors many of the similar strategies of the traditional apology genre, so it is important to define the basic genre of apology. In Western communication scholarship, the concept of apology has traceable roots to Aristotelian theory and concerns how speakers might defend themselves when their credibility, honor, or moralities are called into question.²⁹ In short, apology is a "speech of self-defense" however, it is not simply an apology, but rather a speech designed to reaffirm credibility and provide a compelling justification of a person or organization's action.³⁰ In addition to defending a speaker's personal credibility, apology theory can also be applied towards understanding defense-of-policy speeches.³¹ While, typically, defense-of-policy speeches were not considered part of the apology genre, scholars have begun to apply apology theory towards defending policies as well.³² In policy defense speeches, accusations deal with past action or continuing practices; however, they can also occasionally concern future policies as well.³³ Apologia is viewed as successful when it accomplishes two goals: first, the apologist must acknowledge and

justify their association to the alleged offense; and, second, they must illustrate that they have taken the necessary acts of correction.³⁴

While apologia is often considered an ancient rhetorical tool, scholars have begun to investigate how modernity has changed the requirements for an apologia statement. Ellen Reid Gold, in particular, highlights the role of the media in altering the requirements of defensive strategies in her essay, "Political Apologia: The Ritual of Self-Defense." Gold underscores how "the unflagging presence of media representatives reshapes campaign apologies from a single speech into a process of interactions."³⁵ Therefore, in evaluating a speaker's apologia, scholars must view the entire body of apologia discourse produced as part of the rhetorical situation.³⁶ In times of high media attention, like today, "no single explanation is allowed to stand; it is reevaluated and reappraised daily."³⁷ If the media are unsatisfied with the initial apology delivered, they may pressure a speaker to reveal the "truth" until a satisfactory answer is reached.³⁸

Many scholars turn to B. Lee Ware and Wil A. Linkugel to understand the structural tenets of apologia theory. Ware and Linkugel propose four factors that a rhetor can use in their public statements. These factors are divided into two overarching methodologies: reformatory strategies, which do not attempt to change the audience's perception of an event, and transformative strategies, where the speaker aims to manipulate the audience's perceptions and position himself or herself away from the event in question.³⁹ Within the reformatory and transformative strategies, there are likewise two corresponding factors. If a rhetor chooses to adopt a reformatory argument, they may deny their participation in the event or may bolster their reputation through reminding the audience of the many accomplishments they have made. These strategies are referred to as either denial or

bolstering, respectively.⁴⁰ On the other hand, if a rhetor employs transformative methods, they may attempt to change the audience's meaning of the event through a differentiation strategy, where they create a new context through which to view the event or through a transcendence strategy, in which the rhetor attempts to link the event with another event the audience had not previously considered.⁴¹ In analyzing apologia discourse, scholars seek to identify both the reformatory and transformative strategies used to form an overarching understanding of how the rhetor chose to construct his or her speech. In considering the different ways in which rhetors can build their apology, Ware and Linkugel also identified four potential sub-genres that are most commonly employed when a rhetor combines a reformatory strategy with a transformative strategy: absolution, vindication, explanation, and justification.⁴² The absolute defense, which combines the differentiation and denial factors, is one where the accused attempts to "clear his name" through focusing on particular details. On the other hand, a vindicative address goes beyond the minute details of a case and focuses on recognizing the accused's worth as a human being, separate from the scandal. Additionally, an explanative address utilizes theories of bolstering and transcendence and assumes that if the audience can understand the accused's motives or beliefs then the audience will not be able to condemn them. A justificative defense is similar to the explanative defense, however in addition to seeking understanding, the speaker also seeks the audience's approval.⁴³ Over the course of time as scholars have adopted the theory developed by Ware and Linkugel, other sub-genres have also become part of the apologia genre, like the genre of sports apologia.

The Subgenre of Sports Apologia

Sports apologia, in particular, is not a genre that has been widely researched by scholars. Early research has focused on sports apologia as it applies to the individual athlete. Kruse highlights a number of scenarios in which an athlete may be required to deliver an apology to the public. For example, if a player is believed to have put him or herself before the team, whether that is in the form of a personal error that jeopardizes the team's success or choosing to leave the team, a player must defend himself or herself to fans and the community.⁴⁴ Likewise, if fans believe that a player is apathetic towards the team's success or not working to the best of their ability, the player must defend himself or herself to prove dedication through apologia.⁴⁵ However, tensions arise within sports apologia when a player commits a fault that would be considered morally or ethically wrong in both the socio-political world and the sports world. While sports are often paraded as imbuing strong moral character, society also tends to believe that those who commit morally wrong acts are not of good character, which can disrupt the sanctity of the athlete's image.⁴⁶ Despite this, morally wrong acts are more accepted by fans and society when they aid in winning. Kruse identifies the difference between a cheat, who cheats to win, and a spoilsport, who disrupts the fan's constructed reality of the sports world, thereby ruining the sports viewing experience. Kruse argues that in comparing the two, a spoilsport would be required to deliver an apology, while the cheat's offenses could be excused from public condemnation.⁴⁷

In sports apologia, athletes will adopt many of the general strategies introduced by Ware and Linkugel, but use them in specific ways geared towards rectifying their image as an athlete. For example, when athletes use the reformatory strategy of bolstering, they will

nearly always emphasize their participation in the game because they are speaking to the fans that view the game in a favorable way.⁴⁸ Likewise, athletes will seek to demonstrate their good character by describing concrete actions, whether through illustrating a change in behavior or speaking of a renewed dedication to the game.⁴⁹ As previously illustrated, the crux of an athlete's need to deliver an apology is because the fans have begun to view said athlete's character in a bad light, which can be rectified through explicit, identifiable examples of change. However, in these statements athletes tend to be brief and general, verbalizing remorse or regret in the most evident terms.⁵⁰ Less scholarship has given attention to the role of sports institutions in delivering apologies after public image crises, yet just as an athlete must ask forgiveness from his or her fans, so too much a corporate sports institution seek to re-establish the sport as a morally upstanding establishment. Therefore, my analysis seeks to add to the scholarship existing on sports apologia, by analyzing how the corporate institutions of sports construct their apologies.

The Subgenre of Corporate Apologia

When approaching the discourse produced by the NFL it is important to understand how sports apologia is constructed from a corporate point of view. Corporate apologia is a broad term that includes the public statements made by organizations and individuals on behalf of an institution or company. Through this definition, scholars can analyze public statements made by professional athletes and commissioners as a form of corporate apologia because there is often a large team of people who work to produce the script and considerations are made for the larger corporation and its reputation beyond just the individual.⁵¹ Therefore, any statements made on behalf of the corporation, either by individuals or as press releases, can be considered a form of corporate discourse. While the

corporation may not have any level of direct responsibility for the incident, the organization must often make a public statement of defense if they are presumed to hold any level of involvement.⁵² This is why the NFL must often make public apologies, even when its role in the scandal may be negligible, because the player is still associated with the organization and therefore the public views the player's actions in conjunction with that of the organization.

Keith Michael Hearit identifies five main strategies used by corporations to defend their actions or displace guilt: denial, counterattack, differentiation, apology, and legal defense.⁵³ While some of these qualities introduced by Hearit share similarities to those included in the broader apologia genre, some distinguishing characteristics exist as well, such as a reliance on the legal system to prove guilt and the requirement of remedial work to repair the consequences of the corporation's actions.⁵⁴ At the core of all corporate apologia, however, is a concern for image repair and image maintenance. Image repair refers to how the corporation is perceived in relation to its wrongdoings, while image maintenance is concerned with the general perception of the corporation.⁵⁵ Depending on their wrongdoing, corporations are likely to either privilege image repair or image maintenance in their apologia.⁵⁶ Understanding the image purported by an organization is incredibly important because the image created by organizational insiders is formed out of what they believe consumers use to form their assessment of the organization's reputation.⁵⁷

There are a number of different strategies corporations can adopt when attempting to maintain their image, including demonstrating concern for the victim and bolstering organizational values; however, during the image repair phase of an apology, past research

has shown that there are no generalized strategies because each case is beholden to the specifics of the situation.⁵⁸ While the strategies of sports corporations have never been studied in their own right, these unique settings of organizational apoloia do offer an interesting context through which to examine the strategies of an organization faced with the distinctive challenge of both speaking to their status as a corporation and as an institution of sports in America. The development of a corporate sports apoloia subgenre would also help to elucidate the particulars of organizational apoloia while adding to the existing scholarship on the many different situations that create new subgenre categories. Angela M. Rowland and Robert C. Jerome make the argument that we must examine potential sites for new subgenres within organizational scholarship to better understand apoloia as a whole.⁵⁹

Organizational culture and values

In order to effectively bridge the gap between apoloia rhetoric and organizational studies, it is important to understand how the values and culture promoted by a corporation can impact the effectiveness of the organization's public image campaign. Organizational scholars often categorize a corporation's organizational culture as involving the values communicated to internal and external organizational members. While values can be hard to identify on their own, scholars seek to understand what types of values comprise an organization's culture through examining the underlying, often unconscious, assumptions of an organization that contribute to the behavior enacted by organizational members. Scholars will often also rely on visible artifacts, such as public documents, employee orientation material, and the constructed environment of the organization, including its architecture.⁶⁰ Additionally, organizational culture has also been shown to be

a direct product of the industry in which the corporation exists, meaning that customers, competitors, and society at large can contribute to developing the structure and values of an organization.⁶¹ Therefore when we analyze the culture of the NFL, the emphasis placed on valuing traditional notions of masculinity, the gender divide, and the high amount of violence enacted on the field, are among the most easily identifiable values. And as Gordon highlights, often times these values are products of consumer expectations; yet, problems arise when public opinion shifts, and values that were at one time acceptable to the consumer base no longer are tolerable. In the context of the NFL, while fans may expect and enjoy the violence displayed on the field, they are becoming increasingly critical of the violence occurring off the field, a constraint I refer to as the violence paradox.

In light of the previous scholarship I have discussed, the study seeks to describe and evaluate how the domestic violence scandals forced the NFL to address some of its more problematic values, while still maintaining its core principles, by negotiating the violence paradox.⁶² Organizational scholars have shown that when consumers fail to identify with the organization's purported values, it can be incredibly problematic for the organization's continued success. Scholars have also investigated how difficult it can be for an organization to adapt to external demands, such as consumer concerns, when it the organization is constrained by its internal culture.⁶³ Among the considerations an organization must make when taking a stance on social issues is how their chosen symbols will interact with the other corporate symbols an organization uses in their daily public relations.⁶⁴ For example, symbols used in image restoration campaigns can become problematic when they are too fragile or too dependent on other corporate symbols to provide adequate meaning.⁶⁵ Therefore, it is incredibly important to investigate the ways in

which the NFL was able to overcome this paradox and utilize effective symbols to communicate new values and a change in organizational responses to acts of domestic violence.

Moving Forward

Because of the violence paradox, a tension that the NFL has had to incorporate into its discourse more than any other sports corporation, the NFL is a particularly salient institution to examine in developing the subgenre of corporate sports apologia. In order to properly examine the NFL's public relations campaign I examined the press conferences, public statements, and memos released by the NFL at large, Commissioner Roger Goodell, and the individual athletes who were involved in the scandals. In total I analyzed thirteen documents released between August and November 2014. I chose these dates specifically because it was not until August 1, 2014 that the NFL made any statement in reference to the Rice scandal. By November, most of the criticism ended when Rice's lifetime suspension was lifted. I also examined one statement released by the NFL in 2015, in reference to the Greg Hardy scandal, which began in 2014 but did not come to resolution until November 2015. Because the Hardy scandal began in 2014 it gained increased public notoriety as a part of the larger problem of domestic violence facing the NFL, yet it did not fully come to head until 2015, which is why I have chosen to include this statement. In order to understand the effect of the NFL's public relations campaign I relied on news articles and polling data to understand the public's reaction to the NFL's attempt at defending their policies.

Additionally, as we have seen in corporate communication scholarship, individuals' actions and statements are often taken as part of the organization's public relations

campaign. Throughout this project, I often reference the statements made by Goodell as a spokesperson of the NFL. As perhaps the most notable non-athlete in the league, many of Goodell's leadership missteps were taken as representative of the entire NFL community.

Chapter Two: Context

Early in the morning of February 15, 2014, Ray Rice, running back for the Baltimore Ravens, and his fiancé, Janay Palmer, got into a fight in a hotel elevator that ended with Rice striking his fiancé and dragging her unconscious body through the elevator doors. Acts of domestic violence are nothing new among professional football players; in fact, between January 2000 and September 2015, 97 National Football League (NFL) players were arrested on charges of domestic violence.⁶⁶ While the alcohol, drug, and assault arrests are all important, there is something especially heartbreaking to know that men so revered on the football field are committing acts of violence in their personal lives. Domestic violence is a national problem and by no means exclusive to the NFL; however, through understanding the public conversation surrounding instances of domestic violence and the subsequent response delivered by the NFL to these tragedies we are able to develop insight into how the sports institutions navigate public image crises.

February 15 was the start of what would become an eight-month media blitz on the NFL's ability to successfully navigate a public relations crisis. Over the course of the eight months, the NFL was continually renounced for its inability to fully acknowledge the severity of domestic violence. Commissioner Roger Goodell's judgment was called into question again and again, as reporters highlighted that, in an uncharacteristic approach, he chose not to immediately investigate and address the Rice problem. Unlike the past scandals that rocked the NFL's public image, Goodell did not actively seek out all relevant information, a very unusual move for the typically the vigilant, hands-on commissioner. While Ray Rice was not the only professional football player to be arrested for domestic violence in 2014, his case was the most famous. Unlike Greg Hardy, Ray McDonald, Quincy

Enuma, Jonathan Dwyer, and even Adrian Peterson, who was arrested for child abuse, the Rice case had accompanying video footage that graphically depicted the violence inflicted on Palmer. This sets the Rice scandal apart from other occurrences of domestic violence within the NFL because, once the video footage was released and replayed continually on news programs across the country, the public had evidence it could not ignore. In order to fully conceptualize the development of the NFL's response to the Rice scandal, and the other scandals that occurred during the same time period, I will first outline what happened over the course of those eight months.

February 2014

The Scandal and Immediate Aftermath

Rice and Palmer were arrested in the early hours of February 15, in Atlantic City, New Jersey, at the Revel Hotel and Casino. The couple had traveled to New Jersey with close friends to celebrate Valentine's Day, and, over the course of the night consumed at least two bottles of liquor. In the early hours of the morning, the couple got into a fight over their upcoming wedding details and a text message Rice had received from a young female Ravens employee. According to police reports, Rice and Palmer both engaged in a physical altercation; they refused medical services, and were charged with simple assault. A few hours later, the NFL's director of security, Darren Sanders, received a call from the Atlantic City police department in which an officer, a self-proclaimed Raven's fan, described the surveillance footage. The footage showed Rice delivering a left-hook punch to Palmer that sent her careening backwards, hitting her head on the elevator wall and collapsing. According to reports, Sanders immediately contacted the Ravens' top executives: owner Steve Biscotti, general manager Ozzie Newsome, and President Dick Cass. Soon after the

phone call, Biscotti, Newsome, and Cass began a public campaign to push for leniency for Rice, reaching out to the Atlantic City judicial system, Commissioner Goodell, and even members within their own league who insisted Rice be immediately released from the team.⁶⁷ Two days later, on February 17, Newsome was asked if Rice would remain a part of the team. He told reporters simply, “Ray Rice is still a big part of what we do in 2014.”⁶⁸ The executives worked closely with Rice’s defense attorney, Michael J. Diamondstein, as well. While none of the executives saw the surveillance footage, Diamondstein did, and he described it as “f---ing horrible.”⁶⁹ However, the domestic assault was not Rice’s only problem. The 27-year old, six-year Ravens’ veteran was coming off one of the worst seasons in his career, and many wondered if Rice’s declining performance, coupled with his arrest, would weaken the Raven’s desire to keep him on the team. In fact, it was reported that Jim Harbaugh, the Ravens’ head coach, recommended cutting Rice’s contract, a suggestion that Biscotti, Cass, and Newsome swiftly rejected.

Rice’s Pre-Scandal Public Image

Despite Rice’s dwindling performance on the field and added off the field violence, he had always been a key figure in the Ravens’ community image, which many argue is why the Ravens’ executives were so willing to speak on his behalf. As ESPN reporters put it, “No player did more for the community than Rice, and no player on the team embraced the city of Baltimore the way he did.”⁷⁰ Rice did not just take personal pride in his team, such as when he tattooed “Baltimore” on his forearm or when he named his daughter Rayven, after the team’s mascot, Rice was also a fixed part of the Baltimore community. Rice was a regular at charity events, alongside Baltimore’s Mayor Stephanie Rawlings Blake; he also hosted charity events on his own, including ones that fundraised millions of dollars for sick

children, urged the state legislature to pass anti-bullying laws, and he hosted an annual football camp for hundreds of underprivileged children. Rice had also dressed up as Santa Claus for a fundraising event for House of Ruth, a shelter for domestic violence victims.⁷¹ After the initial arrest, very few people were concerned with Rice's misbehavior, and there was visibly no public outcry against him. In part, this could be because of Rice's past positive presence in the community. Throughout the scandal, NFL officials would call upon Rice's character to demonstrate his good will. In such instances, these examples, of Rice's service to the community and love of Baltimore, would be what were highlighted as evidence of his morality.

The NFL and Ravens' Response

Goodell was steadfast that no one within the NFL organization had seen the video of Rice punching Palmer. While the Ravens and the league both had copies of the police report, which accused Rice of "assault by attempting to cause bodily injury to J. Palmer, specifically by striking her with his hand, rendering her unconscious, at the Revel Casino," they allegedly did not request the surveillance camera footage.⁷² Critics were surprised by Goodell's decision not to initially obtain the videos; as ESPN reporters put it, "why did his multibillion-dollar corporation, with its vast national network of former FBI agents and law enforcement officials, flat-out fail in the most basic investigatory tactics?"⁷³ Goodell had always been a strong, stern leader, quickly disciplining players who deviate from "his often-stated moral compass." Goodell's decision to not obtain the videos at the start was one of the first instances of many where his leadership would be called into question. Despite Goodell's claim that no one in the NFL had seen the video, within a few hours of the arrest, a Ravens' employee was describing the attack in graphic detail to a friend as "really bad."⁷⁴

Someone within the organization had seen the video, although precisely who continues to remain unknown. The organization worked hard to keep the tape hidden. Cass pushed for Rice to be accepted into a pre-trial intervention program that guaranteed the video would never be released. On February 19, hours before the deal to keep Rice out of jail was finalized, celebrity gossip website TMZ released the first of the two damning videos that would condemn Rice and turn public opinion against him.⁷⁵

In the February 19 elevator video, Rice is shown attempting to carry Palmer's unconscious body out of the elevator, before laying her face down in the lobby, her legs still partially inside the elevator and her skirt upturned. As Rice attempts to move her legs from the doorway, nudging her with his feet and jostling her, a security guard, who saw the violence over surveillance cameras, approached Rice and Palmer.⁷⁶ Over the next few days, the Ravens and NFL both announced their plans to review the incident, yet most people still felt Rice's position with the Raven's was secure. In comments to reporters during the NFL Scouting Combine, Harbaugh, who had previously petitioned for Rice to be let go, stated he was not worried about Rice's position with the team and reasserted Rice's good character, saying "There are a lot of facts and a process that has to be worked through in anything like this. There are a lot of question marks. But Ray's character, you guys know his character."⁷⁷ Rice's lawyer also made a public statement asserting the ambiguity of the facts and urging the public to withhold condemnation, stating they would "not try this case in the media."⁷⁸ Despite the video, few people voiced objection to Rice's continued part in the NFL organization.

March 2014

Over the course of the next few months, the Rice scandal continued to be a featured part of the daily news and Rice continued to be a featured player with the Ravens. On March 27, Rice was indicted on charges of third-degree aggravated assault, a crime that carries a three-to-five year imprisonment term. As Rice's legal team continued to "vehemently deny" Rice's involvement, the Ravens released a statement, saying "This is part of the due-process for Ray. We know there is more to Ray Rice than this one incident."⁷⁹ Both Rice's and Palmer's lawyers stressed the speculative nature of the charges. Rice's lawyer told reporters, "There's a significant set of facts the public does not know about yet. As soon as those facts come to light, we believe the public will have a different opinion."⁸⁰ Palmer's lawyer told reporters, "No party committed any crime."⁸¹ One day later, Rice and Palmer married in a ceremony the couple asserted had been planned for weeks. However, many legal experts speculated that the wedding would allow Palmer to claim spousal privilege, and the prosecution would be forced to drop their case without her crucial testimony. Yet, with the indictment, came increased criticism of Rice. On March 29, Buffalo Bill's linebacker Brandon Spikes posted a series of disparaging tweets about Rice, writing, "I don't see how anyone can respect him. Put your hands on a woman. The woman that had ur child . . . Someone should choke him out. See how he likes it."⁸² While Spikes was one of the only people to criticize Rice after his indictment, many more would follow in the months to come. The NFL was also relatively quiet concerning the Rice scandal during March 2014, they made no comments concerning law enforcement's investigation or Rice's playing status with the Ravens.

April and May 2014

Rice's Legal Outcome

Both the NFL and the Ravens allege they stopped trying to obtain a copy of the video footage from inside the elevator by the spring. However, Rice's lawyer, Diamondstein, continued to fight for the video footage, believing it could help Rice's defense. On April 1, Diamondstein was delivered a copy of the video footage and soon thereafter called Cass. Over the phone, Diamondstein told Cass the footage was "f---ing horrible," and it was clear "Ray knocked her the f--- out." Diamondstein and Cass both agreed the best way to avoid the video's public release was for Rice to apply to the pre-trial intervention program for first-time offenders who commit "non-violent," "victimless" crimes.⁸³ In early May, Rice was accepted to the program and his charges were cleared. A few media outlets highlighted the favoritism that may have occurred in placing Rice into the program. After all, between 2010 and 2013, less than 1% of the program's total participants had been domestic abusers. Legal experts criticized Rice's placement into the program, saying the program was an "inappropriate response to the case" and "surprising."⁸⁴ Prosecutor McClain told reporters, "The decision was arrived at after careful consideration of the information contained in Mr. Rice's application in light of all the facts gathered during the investigation." Rice's application consisted of letters written by former coaches, teammates, friends, and even a sick eight-year-old boy for whom Rice had hosted a fundraiser. With Rice's acceptance into the pre-trial program and the video footage concealed from public view, the Ravens were able to make a strong argument to Goodell to grant Rice a lenient suspension.⁸⁵

Rice and Palmer's Press Conference

A few days following the announcement that Rice had been accepted into the program, Rice and Palmer held their first press conference. In his speech, Rice calls upon his faith, his family, and his reputation to position the assault as a fleeting lapse in judgment. Both Rice and Palmer commented on the assault as a joint experience, one in which both parties were responsible. Rice concludes his speech saying, "I think my wife has something to say . . . We're in this together." When Janay spoke briefly at the end, she reaffirmed this sentiment, telling the audience she "deeply regrets the role [she] played in the incident that night," a quote the Ravens later tweeted to publicize the press conference.⁸⁶ Critics called the tweet "tone-deaf" and "terrible," yet the Ravens did not delete the tweet until September 8, nearly three months after its initial publication.⁸⁷ With the Ravens' key executives determined to displace blame away from Rice, they attempted to shift the focus to mutual responsibility. Months later, Janay would appear on NBC's *Today* show, where she would tell reporters that the Ravens had provided a "general script" for the press conference.⁸⁸ Through all of this the NFL remained silent on the Rice scandal.

Greg Hardy

While the majority of public attention was focused on the unfolding saga of Rice, another player, Carolina Panther's defensive end, Greg Hardy, was also arrested for domestic violence. His case, while not as public as Rice's, did add to the general demand for the NFL to address domestic violence as an organizational problem. Hardy was arrested on May 13, 2014, after his girlfriend, Nicole Holder, reported to police that Hardy had tossed her onto a futon covered with rifles, ripped off her necklace, threw the necklace into the

toilet and slammed the toilet lid on her arm when she tried to retrieve it, and chocked her. Holder told police, “He looked me in the eyes and he told me he was going to kill me.”⁸⁹ The Hardy’s case, as well as Peterson’s and McDonald’s, are significant to view in conjunction with the Rice case because they only serve to further emphasize the NFL’s inability to properly sanction against domestic violence, especially early on. Hardy, Peterson, and McDonald’s cases all run parallel to Rice’s.

June 2014

Rice’s Meeting with the NFL

In June Rice was finally called to NFL headquarters in New York City to meet with Goodell and tell his side of the story. Rice traveled to New York with his wife, Newsome, and Cass, as well as representatives from the National Football League Players Association (NFLPA), the labor organization for NFL players. Some former executives and lawyers highlighted how unusual it was for a player to arrive at a disciplinary hearing accompanied by team executives; however, the NFL insisted it has happened multiple times before, despite failing to provide examples of when. When they arrived in New York, the Ravens’ executives urged Rice to be honest and forthcoming about the event because they believed that Goodell had already seen the elevator video. It is well known in the NFL community that Goodell will not tolerate anyone lying to him and will harshly punish people whose lies are discovered. It is not surprising that the Ravens assumed the NFL had seen the video. Twice, during his eight-year term as commissioner, Goodell has dealt with potentially incriminating video evidence, and both times the commissioner has obtained the videos. While we cannot know for certain why Goodell chose not to obtain the video, reports say

that he told league officials it would be “illegal” to try to get the video from the casino, an assumption many experts say is untrue.⁹⁰

On June 16, Ray and Janay sat side-by-side in a conference room at NFL headquarters, where Ray disclosed to Goodell that he had hit his wife and knocked her unconscious. Later, in September, when the second video from inside the elevator would be released, Goodell’s recounting of his meeting with Rice would be called into question over conflicting reports concerning whether Rice did tell the whole truth in their June meeting. During the meeting, Cass, Newsome, and Janay also spoke up in defense of Rice.⁹¹ Peter King wrote a detailed report on Janay’s testimony, stating, “she made a moving and apparently convincing case to Goodell . . . that the incident in the hotel elevator was a one-time event, and nothing physical had happened in their relationship before or since. She urged Goodell . . . to not ruin Rice’s image and career with his sanctions.”⁹² According to all reports, the meeting was successful. After the meeting, Goodell spoke privately with both Ray and Janay. A month later, Rice’s punishment was announced.

July 2014

The NFL Sanctions Against Rice

The NFL announced that Rice would be suspended for two games and receive an additional \$58,823 fine.⁹³ In a letter Goodell penned to Rice, he wrote: “I believe you are sincere in your desire to learn from this matter and move forward toward a healthy relationship and successful career. I am now focused on your actions and expect you to demonstrate by those actions that you are prepared to fulfill those expectations.”⁹⁴ Public criticism swiftly followed the announcement. Senators Richard Blumenthal, Tammy

Baldwin, and Chris Murphy sent letters urging Goodell to reconsider the punishment, writing:

The decision to suspend Mr. Rice for a mere two games sends the inescapable message that the NFL does not take domestic or intimate-partner violence with the seriousness they deserve . . . Mr. Rice's suspension reflects a disturbingly lenient, even cavalier attitude towards violence against women. We therefore urge you to take two steps immediately. First, reconsider and revise Mr. Rice's suspension to more adequately reflect the seriousness of his offense . . . Second, as it has done regarding drug offenses, the NFL must develop procedures to ensure that allegations and evidence of domestic violence are addressed appropriately.⁹⁵

Indeed many public figures spoke out against Goodell's punishment and their criticism was not without warrant. For example, in 2011, Goodell suspended rookie quarterback Terrelle Pryor for five games after Pryor accepted a free-tattoos service--an action in violation of NCAA rules and perhaps morally wrong, but which breaks neither federal nor state law.⁹⁶ However, Goodell's failure to grasp which crimes merit a more serious reprimand was not the only criticism waged against him. Many also wondered if Rice's two-game suspension was the outcome of Goodell playing favorites once again.

Playing Favorites

It is not unusual in NFL dealings for critics to claim Goodell plays favorites. In 2007, after evidence showed the New England Patriots secretly videotaping their opponents, Goodell only levied a \$250,000 fine, which many say was a merciful slap on the wrist in light of Goodell's close personal friendship with Patriots' owner Robert Kraft. Again, in 2010, tensions arose when Goodell conducted a closed-door coin flip to determine who would play at home in a Jets/Giants game. Goodell's coin flip came out favoring the Giants. However, many questioned the fairness of the decision, considering that Giant's owner, John Mara, is also a close friend of Goodell's. Following the announcement of the Rice punishment, many felt Goodell was again paying homage to his friendships with the

Ravens' executives, who had been campaigning for leniency since the early hours of February 15.⁹⁷

Raven's Response

Within the organization, many Ravens executives defended Rice's suspension by calling upon his good character. Harbaugh told reporters, "I stand behind Ray. He's a heck of a guy. He's done everything right since."⁹⁸ Newsome called the punishment "significant" but "fair."⁹⁹ A week after his suspension was announced, Rice met with the media again, where he delivered a heartfelt apology that received positive feedback from the public: "I take full responsibility for what happened. My wife can do no wrong. What happened that night was something that should've never happened . . . The last thing I want my wife to do is ever live in fear."¹⁰⁰

August 2014

NFL on Defense

On August 1, Goodell addressed the media at the Pro Football Hall of Fame to defend his decision. During his press conference, Goodell told reporters:

We have a very firm policy that domestic violence is not acceptable in the NFL, and there are consequences for that . . . When we're going through the process of evaluating the issue and whether there will be discipline, you look at all the facts that you have available to us. Law enforcement has more – on a normal basis – has more information, facts, than we have. We'll get as much as we possibly can. And then you also have the opportunity to sit down with the individual, maybe others, to determine how that individual is reacting to it . . . I think what's important here is Ray is being accountable for it. He recognizes he made a horrible mistake and he knows what he did is unacceptable by his standards and by our standards . . . I was also very impressed with Ray in the sense that Ray is not only accepting this issue but he's saying 'I was wrong.' I want to see people, when they make a mistake, I want to see them take responsibility and be accountable for it.¹⁰¹

Yet, according to some reports, privately Goodell was questioning his choice. *ESPN* reported that within his inner circle, Goodell was regretting that someone had talked him

out of leveling a tougher punishment.¹⁰² This in part may be why, on August 28, Goodell penned a lengthy letter to the league's thirty-two team owners to introduce a new policy for domestic violence offenses.

The New Policy

In his letter to team owners, Goodell was adamant: "I didn't get it right," he wrote. "Simply put, we have to do better. And we will . . . Domestic violence and sexual assault are wrong. They are illegal. They are never acceptable and they have no place in the NFL under any circumstance." The new policy was a drastic change in treatment of domestic abusers: for first-time offenders, it mandated a six-game suspension; for a second incident a player would be barred from the league.¹⁰³ While the policy represented a dramatic shift in the NFL's treatment of domestic violence cases, some critics felt the policy remained ambiguous and discretionary. For example, when the policy states that "violations . . . will be subject to a suspension without pay of six games for a first offense, with consideration given to mitigating factors, as well as a longer suspension when circumstances warrant," many read this as "couching simple penalties with weasel words and qualifications."¹⁰⁴ "What," *The Bleacher Report* asked, "sort of mitigating factors make it somehow less abhorrent that one of the biggest, strongest, fastest men on earth would find it necessary to hit someone off the football field? What is supposed to make it more OK? Who decides?"¹⁰⁵ Only a few days after its public release, Goodell's new, more stringent policy would be put to the test with the arrest of San Francisco 49ers' defense tackle Ray McDonald on felony domestic violence charges. With McDonald's arrest, Goodell placed emphasis on the importance of due-process before rendering any sanctions.¹⁰⁶ Ultimately, no formal

charges were filed against McDonald, and he received no official reprimand from the NFL.¹⁰⁷

September 2014

Hardy and Peterson

By mid-September, Goodell was faced with a mounting laundry list of public-relations scandals. In addition to the conflicting rumors surrounding the NFL's possession of the elevator video, Goodell was also forced to justify his inconsistent policy implementation for Rice and the other players arrested for domestic assault that season. In addition to the recent events with McDonald, September also saw the indictment of Minnesota Vikings' Adrian Peterson, who was accused of the reckless injury of a child after he physically disciplined his four-year-old son, as well as the deactivation of Hardy.¹⁰⁸ Hardy was initially charged on July 15, 2014, but he quickly filed an appeal on the charges. However, with his indictment Hardy was placed on the commissioner's exempt list. The commissioner's exempt list is similar to a suspension in that players are removed from all team activities, however they continue to receive pay.¹⁰⁹ For Hardy this meant he was continuing to earn his \$13.1 million salary.¹¹⁰ Peterson was also placed on the commissioner's exempt list and continued to receive his salary while he awaited a decision in his child abuse arrest.¹¹¹ Many were critical that the players were continuing to receive millions of dollars. These two cases, and McDonald's, only further solidified the NFL's inability to sanction against domestic violence.

Criticism on Goodell's Leadership

Shortly after the announcement of the new policy and McDonald's arrest, the NFL was faced with an even bigger public-relations crisis. On September 8, one day after the

first official NFL game of the 2014-2015 season, the inside the elevator video was released through TMZ. The violent video of Ray delivering a left-hook punch to Janay was repeatedly played over national news cycles, and the public outcry was loud. Immediately, people began to question Goodell's two-game suspension, alongside the other domestic violence incidents that had occurred in the past.¹¹² A few hours after its publication, the Ravens released a statement saying they had voided Rice's five-year, \$35 million dollar contract and the NFL followed suit, announcing they had suspended Rice indefinitely.¹¹³ Despite Goodell's attempts to rectify his earlier, more lenient punishment through delivering an indefinite suspension, the public was not satisfied. Critics and fans alike began to question Goodell's perception of the seriousness of domestic violence and his credibility to handle such important issues.

Throughout the course of the previous seven months, both the NFL and the Ravens maintained they had not seen the video. Brian McCarthy, the NFL's vice president of corporate communications maintained the NFL had not seen the elevator video, telling CNN: "We requested from law enforcement any and all information about the incident, including the video from inside the elevator. That video was not made available to us." Yet, Atlantic City law enforcement officials gave a starkly different report. In an interview with the Associated Press, one unnamed official said they had sent the NFL a copy of the video in April and received a confirmation on April 9 with a voice message that said, "You're right. It's terrible," confirming at least one person had watched it. That same day, Goodell sent a letter to NFL owners stating the league had asked for a copy of the video on multiple occasions but the ACPD had maintained releasing evidence during a criminal investigation was illegal in New Jersey.¹¹⁴

Inconsistent reports concerning the video were not the NFL's only problem. Questions also began to arise concerning the accuracy of what Rice had told Goodell during their June meeting. As the league had already suspended Rice for two games, Goodell needed to justify the indefinite suspension to the NFLPA, which he did by saying Rice gave a "starkly different" account of events on June 16.¹¹⁵ However, multiple sources, including the three Ravens' executives, did not support Goodell's statement. On September 10, Biscotti, Newsome, and Cass gave an in-depth interview to *The Baltimore Sun*. The three executives who had pushed for leniency did say the video "changed everything," yet they had difficulty confirming Goodell's statements that Rice had been untruthful. Newsome told reporters, "You know. Ray had given a story to John [Harbaugh] and I. And what we saw on the video was what Ray said. Ray didn't lie to me. He didn't lie to me."¹¹⁶ Yet Cass gave a different account from Newsome, saying "There's a big difference between reading a report that says he knocked her unconscious or being told that someone had slapped someone and that she had hit her head. That is one version of facts. That's what we understood to be the case. When you see the video it just looks different from what we understood the facts to be."¹¹⁷ In addition to the accounts of the Ravens' executives, ESPN's *Outside the Lines* spoke to four sources that disputed Goodell's claim that Rice had been "ambiguous" in their meeting.¹¹⁸ Goodell's mismanagement of the Rice facts only further solidified the public outcry for his resignation.

With the increasing publicity of both Hardy and Peterson's arrests, domestic violence quickly shifted from a singular instance to a league problem, with public attention focused on Goodell. Criticism of Goodell and calls for his resignation came from all varieties of opponents. UltraViolet, a women's group, flew banners reading "#GoodellMustGo" over

football stadiums throughout the nation, as well as circulating a petition for Goodell's resignation.¹¹⁹ *Daily Show* host, Jon Stewart, criticized Goodell's "coddling" of Rice and lack of transparency concerning the video. Like many other critics, Stewart questioned how Goodell could not have seen the video with his "billions of dollars and the most high-powered team of lawyers in the history of man."¹²⁰ *Deadspin.com*, an independently run sports blog, ran a story covering the release of the Associated Press report which contradicted Goodell's statements with a not-soy-coy title of "Hey, Roger, Get the F--- Out."¹²¹

Initial Remedial Action

In an attempt to appease critics, Goodell called for an independent investigation of the Rice scandal, led by former FBI chief, Robert Mueller. However, as *ESPN* reported, there were various problems with Mueller's credibility, including his relationship with Cass and his law firm's past legal work for the NFL. Additionally, two of Goodell's closest confidants, Steeler's owner Rooney and Giant's owner Mara would oversee the investigation. Goodell also created a domestic violence initiative within the league that would be led by four women. Moreover, he vowed, once again, to overhaul the personal conduct policy.¹²² In his letter to team owners, Goodell highlighted the credibility of the four women overseeing the commission and their specific expertise with working with victims of domestic violence, as well as the plan of action to revise the personal conduct policy. Goodell also briefly mentioned the role of two men, Tony Porter, and former NFL player, Joe Ehrmann, who would provide education and training to people within the organization "at all levels."¹²³

However, many, including UltraViolet, the women's group that flew banners demanding Goodell's resignation, were not satisfied. The group's co-founder, Nita

Chaundry told reporters, “Roger Goodell may have taken a crisis communications 101 class over the weekend, but his actions are simply too little too late. Goodell must resign, and the NFL needs to seriously step up its commitment to ending violence against women in the league.”¹²⁴ Additionally, top NFL sponsors, including Nike and Anheuser-Bush, were expressing apprehension at further association with the league. Anheuser-Bush was reportedly concerned that the public failings of Goodell were overshadowing the action on the field and Nike removed all sponsorship of Peterson.¹²⁵ The unwillingness of the public to so easily forgive and forget the actions of the NFL required Goodell to make his biggest press conference of that year.

Goodell’s First Official Press Conference

On September 19 Goodell appeared in his first press conference to defend his suspension of Rice, and more importantly, his position in the NFL. In his opening remarks, Goodell focused on taking responsibility for the mistakes that occurred over the past several months. By positioning himself as the face of the organization’s failures, Goodell likewise showed himself as a leader who has not only learned from his past mistakes, but has actively sought to effect change within the organization. Much like the President of the United States would seek to establish himself as the face of the nation, Goodell attempted to represent himself as the face of the NFL. In forming this connection, any faults incurred by the NFL are largely attributed to Goodell’s effectiveness as a leader.

Within the first few minutes of his speech, Goodell’s aim to take responsibility for the good and bad actions of the NFL becomes clear. The September 19 press conference was the first time that Roger Goodell had publically appeared to state the mistakes made were his own. Prior to this Goodell had released a written public statement to NFL team

owners taking responsibility for the miscommunication and inconsistent policies, but by September Goodell made the decision to appear before reporters and apologize in person, in part due to the increasing attention Peterson had begun to garner, as well as the reports concerning the video.¹²⁶ Out of the forty-three minutes reserved for the press conference, Goodell's opening remarks comprise just over ten minutes, and, through the remaining thirty-minute question and answer session, Goodell repeats the theme of accepting responsibility in an attempt to apologize for the mistakes made while also disputing any idea of his impending resignation.

Beyond merely the reporters in attendance at the press conference, or even members of the broader NFL organization, much of the country would be tuned in to listen to Goodell's address because the call for his resignation had gained considerable public notoriety. Goodell, however, failed to solve many of the problems that had plagued his administration over the course of the preceding eight months, including the controversy concerning the NFL's alleged viewing the elevator video, the inconsistent policy implementation, and increased publicity over other domestic violence arrests. Instead, the rhetoric and arguments used were ambiguous, repetitive, and left many audience members feeling disenchanted by Goodell's leadership as they continued to call into question his capabilities to effectively oversee the NFL. Thus his capabilities to effectively manage the NFL and address many of the most pressing concerns of the audience resulted in continued questions regarding his capabilities of leadership.

During the question and answer period, questions asked by reporters and the subsequent news reporting it became clear that the reporters in the audience did not feel satisfied with the statement made by Goodell. Most of the questions asked by reporters

centered on whether or not Goodell would resign as a consequence of his mistakes. Goodell employed a strategically ambiguous answer, referring back to his opening remarks in which he stated, “nothing is off the table.”¹²⁷ Perhaps one of the most highly talked about reporter confrontations came from *CNN*’s Rachel Nichols. Nichols received wide praise from media outlets and fans alike for “grilling” Goodell on the tough issues he had avoided addressing during his opening remarks. Nicholas questioned Goodell’s willingness to relinquish power, interrogated Goodell on his claim that the NFL had requested the video of Rice from law enforcement officials, and finally, she questioned the legitimacy of hiring Muller in spite of his close relationship with members of the NFL community. Commentators on Twitter and in the media heralded Nichols as the “real MVP” and jokingly claimed that she should take over Goodell’s job as commissioner.¹²⁸

Immediately following Goodell’s address, the media outlets released a flurry of articles citing the failure of Goodell’s public statement. *Deadspin.com*, a sports commentary website, parodied Goodell’s speech, summarizing his apology as “I suck at my job. Now trust me.”¹²⁹ Leading sports magazine, *Sports Illustrated*, titled their recap of the press conference as “Goodell finally speaks, but he still doesn’t get it,” satirizing Goodell’s response to reporter’s questions as insincere and uninformed.¹³⁰ Sports news website *SBnation.com* accused Goodell of dancing “around hard questions for roughly 45 minutes” and providing ambiguous answers to many of the problems plaguing the league.¹³¹ Furthermore, Twitter provided instantaneous reactions of fans and NFL players alike, which deemed the press conference as pointless, ignorant, and vague. For example, Darius Butler, cornerback for the Indianapolis Colts, tweeted “this press conference is pointless,” while Derrick Mason, a retired receiver for the Baltimore Ravens, accused Goodell of

“hiding behind the ‘appeals process’ kinda like ‘due-process.’”¹³² As players past and present criticized Goodell, it became increasingly obvious that Goodell did not just fail to meet expectations of reporters, or even fans of the NFL, but members of his own organization as well. By publically reprimanding Goodell, these players, past and present, added a great deal of legitimacy to the rest of the community, which was also admonishing Goodell. Despite an attempt to recognize and fix his mistakes, the public continued to denigrate Goodell’s reputation within minutes after his speech concluded.

While the September 19 press conference did not sedate cries of dismay with Goodell’s leadership, he continued to promote the NFL’s work on domestic violence. About a week following his press conference, on September 26, Goodell released a memo to all NFL chief executives and presidents to provide an update on the NFL’s actions to address domestic violence and sexual assault. The memo was brief and pragmatic, outlining the people and organizations Goodell had spoken with, addressing a new partnership with the Domestic Violence Hotline, and introducing the NFL’s new public awareness campaign produced by advocacy group NO MORE.¹³³ Unlike the press conference, the new memo did not receive widespread denunciation; however, a week later Goodell would publish another similar memo which would gain more censure.

October 2014

Continued Remedial Work

On October 2, Goodell released another memo to the NFL chief executives and club presidents titled “Re: Actions in Support of Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Efforts,” which contained many of the same thematic elements as the previous week’s memo. In the memo Goodell outlined eight measures the NFL had taken to address domestic violence

within the organization, including: visiting with the National Domestic Violence Hotline in Austin, Texas; speaking with former NFL players and college athletic programs to discuss the NFL's standards of conduct; the addition of a new senior advisor to their domestic violence commission; meetings with family members of NFL players to expand family resources; meetings with advocacy groups; and, promoting awareness through their televised PSA campaign, *NO MORE*. The memo also highlighted an important aspect to the continuing Ray Rice saga: the NFLPA, on behalf of Rice, had filed an appeal to his suspension.¹³⁴ However, Goodell continued to face admonishment from public critics and journalist alike.

Following the release of the October 2 memo, many news agencies continued to call attention to Goodell's ambiguity and lack of concrete action. *Deadspin.com* ran an article entitled "Goodell: Look at all the Talking I'm Doing about Domestic Violence," in which they outlined how Goodell's statements lacked details on the specifics of the NFL's financial support for the various domestic violence organizations. For example, *Deadspin* highlighted that while Goodell made the promise of a "multi-million dollar, multi-year commitment" to the National Domestic Violence Hotline, he had not yet provided specific details on what the NFL would do to aid the organization. Criticism also honed in on Goodell's tendency towards highlighting the many people and organizations he had talked to without specifying the impact said conversations would have on the NFL's domestic violence policy.¹³⁵ *SB Nation*, a leading sports news outlet, also ran stories discussing how many of Goodell's promises of change in the personal conduct policy were "just talk."¹³⁶ The media was unwilling to accept Goodell's statements at face value, rather than continued to push for detailed accounts of the NFL's involvement.

Support and Criticism for Commissioner Goodell

As the controversy dragged on, the commissioner continued to receive unwavering support from NFL team owners and fans alike. In late September the Associated Press conducted a poll that found 66% of professional football fans said Goodell should not lose his job because of his handling of domestic violence. Yet, the poll also found that 53% of fans continued to believe Rice should never return to playing or should serve an even longer sentencing.¹³⁷ In early October, around the same time the poll results were released, many NFL team owners also made statements of support for Goodell. Houston Texan owner Bob McNair told *USA Today*, “You don’t can somebody for making one bad decision. He recognized that he made the wrong decision, and he corrected it. That’s what you want an executive to do. I think he’s being honest with us; he’s working hard and providing good leadership. That’s why he has the support.”¹³⁸ McNair was not alone in his feelings. Jonathan Kraft, president of the New England Patriots, maintained support for Goodell as well, telling reporters, “Roger is our commissioner and we are very happy with him.”¹³⁹

Yet, despite the public statements of support, former NFL executives began releasing details of Goodell’s past secrecy in cases of domestic violence. Jerry Angelo, former general manager to the Chicago Bears, was among the first former NFL executives to speak out. Angelo told reporters that NFL teams hid “hundreds and hundreds” of domestic abuse cases and did not discipline players.¹⁴⁰ Additionally, two New Jersey senators petitioned the owners of the New York Jets and the New York Giants to call for Goodell’s firing, citing Goodell’s “lack of leadership and an absence of true understanding of how serious an issue domestic violence is in our society.”¹⁴¹ Former wives of NFL players also spoke out against the NFL’s handling of domestic violence, telling reporters they felt

pressure to keep quiet. In one emotional recounting, an unnamed ex-wife of a New Orleans Saints player told *The Washington Post* after she was severely beaten by her husband she received a call from an NFL representative: “[The rep] said she called to ‘check on me.’ . . . I knew what the call meant. I think every wife knows innately what that call means: ‘Your husband needs this job, and you don’t want to take his dream away now do you?’ I lost more than my dignity. I lost my voice, m confidence, my identity. I was just a football player’s wife, collateral damage.”¹⁴² Despite Goodell’s attempts to rectify his image as a fair and vigilant leader, these stories severely impacted his public campaign of defense.

November 2014

Rice’s Suspension Appeal Hearing

In many ways, November represented the end of the Ray Rice saga. While Goodell would continue to face criticism, it was vastly undercut after Rice won his appeal and was reinstated to the NFL. On November 5 and 6, Rice appeared alongside Janay, the NFLPA, Goodell, and their attorneys during his appellate hearing. Goodell was the first witness to take the stand under oath, where he delivered a two hour testimony in which he was pressed for information concerning when he saw the video and the veracity of Rice’s statement to him during their June meeting. Goodell testified that Rice had admitted to “slapping” Janay but did not tell the commissioner that the force of his hit was what caused her to collapse. Later, Rice testified that during the June 16 meeting Goodell never asked him follow-up questions about the altercation. No one presented evidence that the NFL or Goodell had seen a copy of the video prior to its public release, yet many questioned exactly why Goodell did not pursue the ACPD or the casino for a copy during his investigation. While the trial and transcript were subject to a confidentiality order by Judge Barbara S.

Jones, *ESPN* obtained a copy of the transcript. In their reading of the transcript, *ESPN* drew a portrait of Goodell that paints him as:

a chief executive who is comfortable with delegating to his leadership team and who relied on his security staffers to come to him with information about the Rice case; of a leader who could not recall several key details of the Rice matter or prior disciplinary cases he oversaw; of a self-described disciplinarian who didn't ask Rice any questions about the altercation during the player's June 16 disciplinary hearing; of a CEO who more than once contradicted himself on key questions during the hearing.¹⁴³

The hearing did nothing to aid in Goodell's reputation restoration. Many news outlets highlighted the inconsistencies in Goodell's testimony and the lack of effort he put into the original investigation into Rice's conduct.

2015

Greg Hardy

By the end of 2014 the scandal of Ray Rice was ending, yet other domestic violence arrests continued to plague the NFL, especially the case of Hardy. In February 2015 Hardy appealed his conviction of assault. His case was only dismissed after Holder failed to appear in court. A month later, on March 4, Hardy met with NFL officials to petition for his removal from the commissioner's exempt list, where he provided legal documents from his successful appeal case and was reinstated into the league. A few weeks later, on March 18, Hardy was signed with the Dallas Cowboys for \$11.3 million, a deal which critics called a "gamble" considering Hardy had yet to receive an official reprimand from the NFL.¹⁴⁴

On April 22 the NFL appointed neutral arbitrator, Harold Henderson, to review the details of the case. Henderson initially suspended Hardy for ten games, in-line with the NFL's revised stance on domestic violence. However after meeting with Hardy and hearing his suspension appeal, Henderson revised the suspension to four games. Henderson made

the announcement, in July 2015, arguing that a ten-game suspension may have been too harsh, writing:

I find that the conduct of Hardy clearly violates the letter and spirit of any version of the (personal conduct policy) since its inception, and the NFL Constitution and Bylaws long before then. The egregious conduct here is indefensible in the NFL. However, ten games is simply too much, in my view, of an increase over prior cases without notice such as was done last year [2014], when the 'baseline' for discipline in domestic violence and sexual assault cases was announced as a six-game suspension.¹⁴⁵

And while the reduced suspension was announced prior to the release of the images, the NFL received nearly no public criticism for lowering the suspension. However, a four-game suspension is the same as a suspension for marijuana use in the recently revised drug policy, or allegedly cheating; as *TMZ* wrote, "allegedly beating up your girlfriend nets you the same suspension as allegedly deflating footballs," yet none of the usual critics seemed particularly outraged.¹⁴⁶ Most of the public response to the announcement, rather, focused on why Henderson had made the decision to lower Hardy's suspension, with most commenters agreeing it came in response to the federal judges in the Rice and Peterson cases revoking both players' suspensions and chastising the NFL for implementing sanctions that seemed too harsh.¹⁴⁷ Despite what may have been a controversial policy reduction, the continuation of the Hardy scandal into 2015 marked little of the debate it may have a year earlier.

The height of the Hardy scandal came about in November 2015, when *Deadspin.com* released graphic photos of the injuries inflicted on Holder by Hardy. In the article, titled "This is Why NFL Star Greg Hardy Was Arrested for Assaulting His Ex-Girlfriend," the authors recounted Holder's relationship with Hardy, starting with her arrival at the police station, where she told a police officer, "It doesn't matter. Nothing is going to happen to him

anyway.” Despite the release of the photos, which depicted Holder’s bruised neck and back, Hardy did not become a public pariah like Rice.¹⁴⁸ This is not to say that Hardy was without public reprimand, in fact both Hardy, and his new team, the Dallas Cowboys, faced public censure during November 2015 for their apparently lax view of domestic violence. However, unlike Rice, Hardy continues to play professional football and earn well over \$1 million dollars.¹⁴⁹ Many sources have speculated why Hardy received minimal criticism when compared to Rice, focusing on the lack of visible public knowledge and Hardy’s stellar on the field record. Both the Dallas Cowboys and the NFL declined to comment on the photos release. Hardy joins the eight other NFL players who currently still play in the league despite domestic violence arrests.

Chapter Three: The Triumph of Teflon

Recently, Dr. Josh Boyd of Purdue University's Brian Lamb School of Communication commented on the NFL's public relations strategy:

The NFL is the Teflon league. It does not seem to be damaged by negative issues that have tarnished other professional sports organizations. While performance-enhancing drug use harmed baseball's image, the NFL has an incredible ability to thrive even when faced with multiple controversies, ranging from concerns with concussions to player's behavior on and off the field. The NFL's PR approach would not be sustainable for other corporate entities--even other professional sports organizations – but as football is the most popular spectator sport in the United States, people are more forgiving. It's a remarkable case study in that the regular rules of corporate public relations don't apply.¹⁵⁰

Boyd's comments are not unfounded. In fact, Super Bowl XLIX was one of the most viewed events in television history, with a record number of female viewers tuning into the event, despite the communication fumbles made by Goodell and the rest of the NFL institution just a few months prior.¹⁵¹ However, the events of 2014 tested the NFL's impermeability and dramatically changed the image of the NFL within the public conscious.

Regardless of the impact, or lack thereof, of the domestic violence scandals on the NFL's financial success, polls conducted by Public Policy Polling did find that a majority of women held a less favorable view of the NFL and 55% of women did not approve of the NFL's handling of the problem. And while this poll was commissioned by UltraViolet, the same organization that flew "Goodell Must Go" banners across football stadiums, many other polls found similar findings. A Seton Hall Sports Poll, for example, found that 51% of men and women disapproved of the league's handling of the situation and Goodell earned only a 12% approval rating following the scandals. Similar opinions were echoed in an Associated Press-GfK Poll, which found only 15% of participants approved of Goodell and the NFL's handling of the case.¹⁵² What these numbers show, is that while the NFL may be

as durable as Teflon, the domestic violence crises altered public's perception of the organization. What these numbers signify, coupled with the knowledge that the NFL continued to rake in revenue, is that the sport of football may be more enduring than the organization itself.¹⁵³ The public, it appears, is adept at separating the faults of the organization from the sport itself. While there is no doubt that the NFL's discourse was successful, as I will explain throughout the analysis, much of the NFL's success was derived from its ability to construct a narrative of football, which strongly aligned with its audience's already preexistent love of the sport.

Understanding how football works as an institution, which is then adopted by the NFL, can enlighten to the intersection of rhetorical and organizational studies. Institutions are well-established features within a society and football serves as an important cultural institution. It does not simply exist in at the professional level, but at the semi-professional, collegiate, high school, and youth levels as well. Importantly for communication scholars, institutions are inherently communicative, and this communication works to align the institution with the organization, like football to the NFL.¹⁵⁴ In turn, the institution can constrain the rules and norms the organization follows and hierarchical assumptions of the institution are implanted on the organization.¹⁵⁵ In the NFL, Goodell's leadership becomes rhetorically aligned to that of a head-coach or quarterback, his leadership style is the preeminent source of authority for the league. When we examine the rhetoric of the NFL, therefore, it is incredibly important to consider the role of Goodell and the criticism he likewise receives.

The NFL's approach to addressing its many exigencies, which included rectifying Goodell's credibility, managing perceptions of care for its employees and stakeholders, and

addressing questionable policy implementation, largely succeed. The NFL's discourse managed to minimize the problem and allow the NFL to continue to thrive as the most prominent sports institution within the United States. Beyond simply the success of Super Bowl XLIX, much of the public criticism centered on the NFL was diffused after November 2014. Even though domestic violence continues to be a problem within the NFL, very little media attention has been paid to the NFL's handling of the scandals that occurred outside of the 2014 season. The discourse the NFL produced during 2014 seemingly nullified the critics and continued to allow the NFL to prosper.

The NFL approached the construction of their statements in five prominent ways. First, the NFL utilized due-process rhetoric, associating their own goals and values with those of well-respected legal institutions in their discursive content and structure. Second, the NFL used techniques of strategic ambiguity, following the methodology first introduced by Ulmer and Sellnow. Third, the NFL consistently sought to connect with various internal and external stakeholders, during which they employed various techniques to construct common ground, improve identification, and communicate remorse. Fourth, the NFL sought to shift blame, utilizing Kenneth Burke's theory of scapegoating and constructing their apologia from a kategoria-based approach. And finally, the fifth way the NFL overcame its many exigencies was through minimizing the problem of domestic violence. Together these five techniques allowed the NFL to succeed in its defense.

The five techniques also contribute to our understanding of the developing form of corporate sports apologia. As a sports organization, the NFL must consider its dual identity as a corporation, whose needs may be grounded in profit and customer satisfaction, and a sports institution, which may alter the perceived legitimacy of its function as well as change

the emotional connection with stakeholders. Depending on the goal of its communication strategy, the NFL chooses to call upon these varying identities to different degrees. To best introduce the burgeoning genre of corporate sports apologia I will next review each of the five techniques in systemic detail, reviewing how they grant the NFL the ability to overcome its existing exigencies and defend itself during the domestic violence crises.

Deploying Due-Process

Most of the statements produced by the NFL emphasize the need for a legal procedure and due-process. Hearit does make the claim that organizations will often emphasize the role of the legal system in proving or denying guilt. However the NFL capitalizes on their close connection with the legal system through adopting the apologia technique of bolstering. According to Ware and Linkugel, bolstering is used to reinforce existing relationships with organizations already viewed favorably by the audience. In this way, the rhetor does not have to invent the identification, nor “change the audience’s affect towards those things with which [the rhetor] can identify himself.”¹⁵⁶ The relationship between the legal system and the NFL functions as a way for the NFL to redeem its credibility with the audience.

Furthermore, in the statements produced by the NFL, the focus is placed not only on the role of the legal system, but in providing a clear explanation of the investigative process. Through this the NFL seeks to emphasize the role that both the public officials and the NFL play in arriving at a decision on the athlete’s guilt and subsequent sanctions together. Additionally, by employing a structuring technique that is similar to the well-respected judicial and legal systems, the NFL is able to align itself with these valued, public institutions. I term the NFL’s reliance on law enforcement’s public reputation and their

replication of the content and structure of legal documents as due-process rhetoric. As we know, the public often expects sports to imbue a strong moral or ethical character, and when players or organizations act out of accord with these expectations, criticism can arise. Employing due-process rhetoric, aligning themselves with institutions that are valued for their ethics, helps to rebuild this lost sense of morality.

To illustrate how the NFL utilizes due-process rhetoric, I will first begin by overviewing the ways in which discourse of the legal system is incorporated into the content of the apologia, focusing both on the NFL's adoption of legal rhetoric as well as their constructed rhetorical relationship with members of law enforcement. Next, I apply the theory of due-process rhetoric to the structure of the NFL's public statements, analyzing how the rhetorical structure used by the NFL seeks to replicate the expected forms of legal documents. Together, these two forms of due-process rhetoric work to address one of the NFL's most pressing exigencies: reestablishing its credibility.

Discourse Content

Within its discourse the NFL applies due-process rhetoric in three significant ways. First, the NFL reiterates key words that are often associated with institutions, like law enforcement or the judicial system. Second, throughout their discourse the NFL highlights their decision-making and investigatory process, including emphasizing the Personal Conduct Policy, which allows them to frame their organization as a neutral arbitrator. And third, the NFL emphasizes its relationship with a number of law enforcement and legal experts; seeking to rhetorically link its credibility with those well-respected institutions through bolstering these relationships. Together these three forms of due-process content

aim to enhance the credibility of the NFL and defend themselves against calls of impartiality.

Key words

First, throughout their discourse, the NFL relies on repeating key words and phrases that provoke association with legal and judicial institutions and thereby function as a form of due-process rhetoric. For example, almost every statement placed an emphasis on illustrating a thorough investigation and constantly reiterated the NFL's Personal Conduct Policy as a way of justifying past decisions. Within their public statements these investigations were referenced again and again in an attempt to imbue feelings of neutrality and bolster credibility. To illustrate this endeavor I turn to August 2014, when Goodell was facing increased reprimand for his inconsistent policy implementation and perceived weakness in punishing Rice. Within his first official public statement concerning the Rice case, Goodell sought to assuage the critics by placing an emphasis on facts and consistency above all else. On August 1 Goodell addressed the media for the first time since Rice's controversial suspension was announced. In his statement, Goodell emphasized how "consistent" and "firm" the NFL's policy against Rice was when compared to past sanctions, telling reporters, "We can't just make up the discipline."¹⁵⁷ Between Goodell's first statement on the Rice scandal, released August 1, and the NFL's final memo concerning Rice, released November 29, the word "consistent" was repeated only four times, but references made to general policies occurred twelve times, with more specific reference paid to the Personal Conduct Policy occurred over twenty times. Through constantly reiterating the importance of previous policies and standards the NFL aimed to displace any notions of individual decision-making and instead focus on the standards that guided

Goodell towards these sanctions. Furthermore, whenever the NFL made references to its policies it typically used words like “consistent,” “firm,” “fair,” or “standards,” to bolster the credibility and legitimacy of its policies.

Rhetoric of policies

Next, the NFL consistently recalls their policies and the procedure through which they arrived at decisions by repeating the functionality and integrity of their policies. The reliance on policies, in both a general and specific sense, as a form of due-process rhetoric also granted Goodell the ability to briefly overview the process through which he arrived at decisions. Within these statements Goodell would often mention the considerations made for a player’s personal history as well as the facts considered and verdicts made at by the legal system. Additionally, in many of these instances, especially the more publicized cases of Rice and Hardy, the NFL conducted a separate investigation from that of the police, likely to illustrate thoroughness and accountability. The NFL used statements like, “you have to look at all the facts,” and “we can’t just make up the discipline,” to stress the importance of following their policies standards.¹⁵⁸ Even during later parts of the scandal, where the NFL focused on revising their Personal Conduct Policy, they continued to stress the importance of the policy as guiding all investigatory and decision-making process. Goodell made many statements in which he stressed the importance of the Personal Conduct Policy and his role in its revisions, including such things as, “I have reviewed all aspects of our Personal Conduct Policy,” and, “Our Personal Conduct Policy has long made clear that domestic violence and sexual assault are unacceptable.”¹⁵⁹ These continued reiterations of the importance of policies helps both to alleviate any personal blame that may have been attributed to Goodell, as well as reinforce the due-process nature of the NFL’s rhetoric. By

stressing the role of policies the NFL further rhetorically links itself to common features of the legal system. Just as the judicial system implements standardized sanctions, so too, Goodell argues, does the NFL. This rhetorical connection helps to position the NFL as similar to the judicial system and therefore deserving of the same expectations. Positioning their decision-making processes as similar to those of a judge encourages the public to read their decision-making processes as universal, impartial, and standardized.

Discourse on legal experts

The final way due-process rhetoric was employed through the NFL's discourse was in the reliance on other legal and law enforcement experts to add credibility to his own authority. In this way Goodell was able to make rhetorical links between his leadership and the expertise of other leading law enforcement persons. In many ways, Goodell's attempt to draw connections between the NFL's investigation and decision-making and the investigations and decision-making of legal experts not only helps reinforce the credibility and ethics of the NFL, but also serves as a way to displace blame, a feature that I will expand upon later. As I will illustrate through three examples, Goodell often calls upon the experiences and connections of these legal experts as a way to reinforce their connections to the NFL's own credibility. This rhetorical feature of due-process rhetoric was pervasive throughout the NFL's discourse, and can best be shown through three features: first, the introduction of Robert Mueller, the private investigator hired to investigate the Rice scandal; second, the introduction of Lisa Friel, a former detective; and third, through the NFL's introduction and discourse surrounding Judge Jones, who oversaw Rice's appellate trial.

Robert Mueller. To begin this conversation, I will first discuss the NFL's hiring of Robert Mueller, whose introduction proved a useful way to bolster the NFL's relationship to law-enforcement, specifically the FBI. On September 19, Goodell announced that former FBI Director, Robert Mueller, would "conduct an independent investigation to answer the questions raised about [the NFL's] process in reviewing Ray Rice's conduct."¹⁶⁰ This statement serves a three-fold purpose. First, it illustrated the NFL's committed desire to understand the conduct surrounding the Rice scandal. An independent investigation, led by a person outside of the NFL, helped create the appearance of neutrality surrounding the entire scandal. Of course, this announcement was made only after Goodell was criticized for his initial investigatory procedure and the impact was likely harmed by the apparent post-scandal concern of NFL leaders.

Second, Goodell's announcement of Mueller's hiring is significant in framing the Commissioner's personal defense against those calling for his resignation. As much of the criticism surrounding Goodell centered on his apparent apathy towards the scandal and the limited action he had initially taken towards understanding what occurred in February, Mueller's hiring seeks to alleviate some of this criticism. This is especially true because Goodell frames Mueller's hiring as his personal decision, saying, "I asked former FBI Director Robert Mueller to conduct an independent investigation."¹⁶¹ By taking personal responsibility of Mueller's hiring, Goodell aims to illustrate his leadership in overseeing the Rice scandal. Throughout his introduction of Mueller, Goodell aims to take personal responsibility in overseeing the scandal, saying things such as, "I pledged that Director Mueller will have full cooperation and access," and "I promise you that any shortcoming he finds in how we dealt with the situation will lead to swift action."¹⁶² Goodell's consistent

reiteration that he has been personally involved with guiding the investigation is a way for him to emphasize his leadership in times of public doubt. His adoption of the first person singular “I” to imbue responsibility is closely connected to Mueller’s own qualifications as an FBI investigator.

Finally, as I will illustrate with the two other law-enforcement experts called upon by the NFL, Mueller’s personal qualifications work to connect Goodell and the NFL’s authority to that of the FBI through emphasizing Mueller’s former position. As a former director for the FBI, Mueller not only brings an impressive set of qualifications as the newly appointed investigator for the NFL, but likewise the NFL can now claim connections to Mueller’s qualifications. Making a rhetorical link between the law enforcement experience of Mueller and the authority of NFL helps to bolster the NFL’s past and future actions as well. For example, as part of his assignment, Mueller is tasked with reviewing the conduct of the NFL throughout the Rice scandal. When Mueller’s report was completed, in January 2015, and it was announced that no one within the NFL, including Goodell, had seen the elevator video, it reinforces Goodell’s public testimony that he had not seen the video and helps position the Commissioner as a reliable source.¹⁶³ Mueller’s report, whose credentials have already been promoted by the NFL, reinforces Goodell’s trustworthiness.

Lisa Friel. The NFL’s hiring of Lisa Friel proved to be another example of how the NFL used a former member of the judicial system to bolster its relationship with due-process institutions. Many of the features introduced in Robert Mueller’s hiring are also apparent in the announcement of Lisa Friel, who joined the NFL in September. Friel’s position with the NFL was first announced in a memo released by Goodell on September 15, 2014; along with the hiring of three other women whose jobs would likely show the

NFL was committed to gender equality. Lisa Friel was touted as “the former head of the Sex Crimes Prosecution Unit in the New York County District Attorney’s office,” and her qualifications were touted in a similar way to those of Mueller.¹⁶⁴ As a lawyer, with connections to the District Attorney’s office, Friel’s credibility works much in the same way as Mueller’s does to build connections between Friel’s experience, the D.A.’s office, and the NFL’s authority.

What distinguishes the due-process rhetoric used to discuss Friel from the rhetoric surrounding Mueller, centers not only on her hiring but also on her investigation skills. Unlike Mueller, who was hired to investigate a scandal the NFL was already supposed to have completed, Friel is hired to investigate the Hardy case as part of the NFL’s initial investigatory process. In a statement released in April 2015, Friel was announced as the investigator of the Hardy scandal. In their statement the NFL not only stated that they would be conducting their own investigation, but they also reaffirmed the credibility of Friel as a private investigator, again outlining her past qualifications as a way to illustrate her perceived capabilities. In their press release, the NFL described Friel as a former “vice president of sexual misconduct consulting” and the former “head of the sex crimes prosecution unit in the New York County district attorney’s office.”¹⁶⁵ The NFL then went on to highlight the “numerous interviews with witnesses and experts, review of hundreds of pages of court records, documents and exhibits, photographs, police reports, medical records, and reports and opinions of medical experts” as a way to further illustrate her, and by extension the NFL’s, thorough and complete investigation.¹⁶⁶ Due-process rhetoric occurs in two ways through these statements. First, as has been done by the NFL in the past, Friel’s past experiences are used to highlight her credibility for leading an

investigation of this nature. The NFL seeks to illustrate that if Friel can lead investigations for such revered institutions as the New York County District Attorney's office, then she is aptly qualified to investigate the misconduct of NFL athletes. This enthymeme serves to link Friel and by connection the reputability of the District Attorney's office to that of the NFL.

Another way in which due-process rhetoric is employed is through validating the NFL's investigatory process. In their statement the NFL explicitly outlines how Friel conducted her investigation. In a similar vein to how the NFL illustrated their investigatory and decision-making process through explicitly detailing their Personal Conduct Policy, the NFL clearly outlines the process Friel took to investigate the Hardy case. Furthermore, Friel's capabilities to conduct interviews and review court documents, as mentioned in the April 2015 statement, is only further reinforced through her aforementioned credibility, where she worked not only as an expert prosecutor, but a prosecutor directly involved in cases concerning sexual assault and misconduct, making her uniquely qualified to conduct an investigation into Hardy's conduct.

Judge Jones. A third case study to illustrate the NFL's reliance on legal experts to bolster its own credibility and authority is shown through the NFL's communicative strategies surrounding the appointment of Judge Barbara Jones, the arbitrator in Rice's lifetime suspension appeal trial. The NFL released two public statements concerning Judge Jones, first when she was initially appointed to the case, and second, when she released her decision in Rice's favor. Judge Jones was initially introduced in an October 2 memo, however the statement paid more attention to the collective bargaining between the NFL and the NFLPA than Jones' qualifications. The relationship between the NFL and NFLPA is

an important rhetorical component in the success of the NFL's apologia and one that I address later, specifically in discussions on the NFL's attempts to displace blame.

The next time the NFL mentions Judge Jones is in a November 29 memo released by the NFL at-large, one of the few memos not signed by Goodell himself. Within this statement the NFL attempts to alleviate the criticism placed on Goodell by authorizing the credibility of Jones in relation to her decision. While the Judge did not find in the NFL's favor, and in fact revoked the lifetime suspension the Commissioner had placed on Rice, the NFL's statement on the decision focused most heavily on reaffirming Goodell's credibility and trustworthiness. The statement highlights that "no part of Judge Jones' decision questions the Commissioner's honesty or integrity, not his good faith consideration of the issue when he imposed the indefinite suspension on Mr. Rice."¹⁶⁷ The memo goes on to address how "Judge Jones' ruling underscores the urgency of [the NFL's] work to develop and implement a clear, fair and comprehensive new Personal Conduct Policy."¹⁶⁸ Unlike the statements released on Mueller or Friel, the NFL does not need to expand at length on the qualifications of the Judge. Simply her position as a federal judge, one that had been neutrally agreed upon by both the NFL and the players' association, serves to validate her credibility. Calling upon Judge Jones' judicial authority and emphasizing her findings on Goodell's conducts allows the NFL to reaffirm its authority through an impartial, well-respected third party. It becomes clear, therefore, that what becomes most important from the November 29 memo is not necessarily that Rice has been cleared of his indefinite suspension, but rather than for all intents and purposes the Commissioner's work to enhance the Personal Conduct Policy and address the problem of domestic violence has been approved by the Judge herself. The NFL's recitation of the role of Judge Jones', and her

position as a member of the judicial system, works to validate the NFL's work on domestic violence and negate any criticism the NFL had revived concerning impartial conduct.

Discourse Structure

Due-process rhetoric also works within the NFL's discourse to not only align the NFL with well-respected legal institutions, but to mimic the structure of legal documents in a very procedural manner. To best understand how the NFL constructs their statements along a due-process structure, I turn to Rhetorical Structure Theory. Rhetorical Structure Theory analyzes the hierarchical structure, seeking to understand how the text works as a functional tool to transition between points.¹⁶⁹ At its core, Rhetorical Structure Theory posits that just as the discourse functions as a persuasive tool, so too can the structure of the text work to persuade the audience of certain intentions.¹⁷⁰ For the NFL, their adoption of a clear, linear structure helps to connect their statements with the rationality and trustworthiness with particular legal documents that are publically regarded. Moreover, this strategy imbues a sense of transparency regarding the NFL's investigation and decision-making process.

As one reads the NFL's statements concerning their investigation and decision-making process, they may feel that the numerical structure, which so closely resembles that of legal documents, communicates a sense of reason, tradition, and trust. Significantly, this tactic appears over the course of time, as the NFL developed their apologia, and the ability to imbue trust and reason into their statements became of paramount importance. This need to communicate trust and rationality is seen prior to late August, when the NFL did not utilize a due-process structure, but rather simply glazed over their decision-making processes, leaving many critics questioning the NFL's ability to objectively view the Rice

scandal. However, by the end of August, in response to claims that the NFL was not truthful and did not perceive the Rice scandal as worth serious reprimand, nearly all of the NFL's memos and statements were structured in a numerical arrangement.

The first memo to utilize a due-process structure was Goodell's August 28 memo addressed to NFL teams and staff, used this strategic linear communication technique to address the NFL's goals, listing them as "to prevent violence, impose appropriate discipline, provide professional support resources when appropriate, and publically embrace a leadership role on this issue."¹⁷¹ Consequently, next in the memo, Goodell addresses these goals through explicitly numbering the six actions he has directed to "reinforce and enhance [these] policies."¹⁷² This approach is mirrored throughout many of Goodell's continuing press releases and public statements concerning the Rice scandal. In his September 19 press conference, Goodell structures his speech along four main points, which he addresses as "first . . . second . . . third . . . [and] fourth."¹⁷³ This technique is used throughout the continuing press releases and helps both to reinforce the idea of due-process, aligning the NFL with a well-respected judicial institution, and transparency.

In adopting a rhetorical structure that appears objective, systematic, and evidentiary, the NFL is able to quiet complains of bias and uneven policy implementation. Unlike their original statements, the revised protocol, which quickly became standard, helps the NFL to prove their rationality and trustworthiness, and likewise appear transparent. Sandra Borden makes the argument that especially in cases of ethical apologies, communicating transparency can aid in appeasing an information-based society. Transparency is defined as "clearly explaining one's choices so that they are readily understood."¹⁷⁴ Transparency, in turn, can often help reduce audience anxiety and

demonstrate good will from the speaker.¹⁷⁵ Through careful construction, such as the linearity of the NFL's public statements, transparency works to assuage criticism that the NFL did not fully invest itself in understanding what unfolded during the Rice scandal. However, as Borden also explains, transparency is only useful when a sufficient amount of information is provided, meaning a speaker should be cognizant of how much or how little information they make public. Like many organizations facing an image crisis, the NFL uses transparency strategically. Within their statements they made calculated choices to only release information that will bolster their credibility and limit critical push-back. Transparency, constructed through this systemic structure, granted the NFL the important appearance of appearing unbiased, just as the legal system may also use a systemic structure to convey their thought process and rational decision-making.

Strategizing Ambiguity

Next I turn to the use of strategic ambiguity, an important tool in apologia, and one that is used by the NFL throughout their discourse. Ambiguity serves an important role in corporate crisis management and, if performed well, can help organizations appeal to multiple audiences who hold a diverse set of needs.¹⁷⁶ However, many scholars have also highlighted the important ethical requirements surrounding strategic ambiguity. Ulmer and Sellnow make the argument that when the aim of communication is to manipulate the public's perception, especially through providing incomplete or unbiased information, strategic ambiguity is an unethical tool.¹⁷⁷ On the other hand, when the information communicated is complete and unbiased, yet presented in a new frame, strategic ambiguity is an ethical rhetorical tool.¹⁷⁸ This notion, of communicating through reframing, is closely linked to Ware and Linkugel's theory of transcendence in apologia, wherein the rhetor

cognitively joins the offensive event with some larger context with which the audience does not currently associate it.¹⁷⁹ In both the use of strategic ambiguity and transcendence there is an element of change in cognitive identification and meaning among audience members, which can both alter the perception of the event and unite divisive audiences. Robert R. Ulmer and Timothy L. Sellnow identify three questions that arise in understanding the role and ethics of strategic ambiguity during crisis apologia. These three questions hold a “profound impact on how various stakeholders are treated throughout the crisis,” and will guide the structure of my analysis on the NFL’s use of strategic ambiguity.¹⁸⁰

Questions of Evidence

The first question is a question of evidence, and must be addressed when an organization’s actions or products are the center of suspicion in the aftermath of a crisis. Communication involving evidence is often technical, involving a high degree of scientific or legal jargon, and as a result the media plays an important role in shaping the public interpretation of the evidence at hand. Significantly, questions of evidence often lend themselves to at least two plausible interpretations, which is where the role of ambiguity comes to fore, with stakeholders often choosing the most reasonable assertion.¹⁸¹

Throughout their discourse the NFL emphasized that they were not solely responsible for the criticized policy. To support this argument they often highlighted the role of the NFLPA in developing policies. While Goodell often highlighted the close relationship between the NFL and the NFLPA, especially as the rhetorical focus shifted to matters of reconstructing the Personal Conduct Policy this same emphasis also served an ulterior motive as well. By highlighting the co-construction of the policies, Goodell was able to confound public perceptions of responsibility for the so-called trivial policies. For

example, in his first public statement on the policy controversy, Goodell addressed critics who condemned the relatively short 2-game suspension Rice received, because, as many highlighted when compared to the 4-to-6-game suspension players received for drug related charges, the suspension for domestic violence seemed less consequential.¹⁸² In his justification Goodell drew explicit reference to the NFLPA, saying, “You’ve got to deal with the facts, ok? Now, when we have a drug program that’s collectively bargained, and it has a step process, it takes four incidents before you actually reach a suspension in a drug-related case. So you have to respond to the facts here.”¹⁸³ During the scandal the NFL often framed the NFLPA as a difficult organization that made passing important policy challenging and near impossible. For example, in his August 28 memo, where Goodell wrote that the NFL was working closely with the NFLPA to revise policies, he also highlighted that the NFL had “sought – unsuccessfully – for several years to obtain the NFLPA’s agreement to more stringent discipline for DUI, including mandatory deactivation from the game immediately following an arrest and a minimum two-game suspension for a first violation of law.”¹⁸⁴ By reminding the audience that the policy was “collectively bargained,” Goodell aims to reinforce the notion that the NFL is not solely responsible for the condemned policy, and in fact may not be liable for the lack of progressive policy development. Through emphasizing the evidence, specifically the process of collective bargaining, Goodell aims to de-emphasize the NFL’s internal responsibility and instead shift responsibility to an external third party.

However, while the NFLPA served as a source of evidentiary blame for the condemned policies, Goodell also sought to underscore the NFL’s work with the NFLPA as well. From emphasizing the process of productive collective bargaining, to developing new

aspects of the Personal Conduct Policy, to framing their work with the NFLPA as tenuous and difficult, the NFLPA often served as an external party to which the NFL could draw public attention. Statements to positively frame the relationship between the NFL and NFLPA included things such as: “In the past few weeks, I have reviewed all aspects of our Personal Conduct Policy and met with a wide range of experts (several of whom we have been working with for some time), as well as with the NFLPA and many of you. Those discussions will continue;” or, “I have discussed these challenges with the Player’s Association executive director, DeMaurice Smith. He shares my view that domestic violence and sexual assault have no place in the NFL. He and I will meet next week to bring together experts to help us establish and live up to the standards that our fans deserve and that we set for ourselves.”¹⁸⁵ As the NFL continued to emphasize their work with the NFLPA, this continued to blur the lines of responsibility and evidence and present multiple avenues for interpreting the rationale behind the policy implementation.

These framing techniques at times appear contradictory; is the NFLPA actually a sounding partner in the development of policies or does it simply deter and detract from the implementation of harsher penalties? These contradictions help to create a level of ambiguity surrounding the evidence available to critics. Additionally, as the NFLPA serves as a representation of player rights and player interests, through incorporating the NFLPA into its discourse the NFL aims to frame its failed policies as formed, in part, by the players of its organization. While seemingly no public criticism questioned the NFLPA’s role in the policy and investigation failures, this only further allowed the NFL to continue to blur the lines of culpability alongside a silent partner.

Questions of Intent

The second question centers on the intent or motive of an organization whose crisis has harmed their social legitimacy.¹⁸⁶ An organization's social legitimacy is based on the level of congruence "between the values implied by its actions and the accepted norms within its environment."¹⁸⁷ In the NFL's case, the initial policy implementation, where Rice received a comparatively paltry reprimand for his actions, was incongruent within the values of the general public. To overcome this crisis, the organization must justify their thoughts and intentions, which may necessarily require a degree of ambiguity. As Sellnow and Ulmer identify, "[a]ny organizational action, regardless of its merit, is likely to be criticized to some extent if it is seen as having contributed to the crisis."¹⁸⁸ Ambiguity of intent serves as an important tool in apologia by limiting the amount of pertinent information made available to the audience, to prevent further criticism.

Within the NFL's discourse, one of the most crucial steps taken in their apologia was to illustrate a change in attitude through financial contributions to charitable organizations. While the NFL briefly mentioned visiting charity organizations and that they would be providing financial support, it was never officially released how much money or time the NFL was investing in expanding their educational programs. These vague details were criticized by some reporters as "generic" and dissatisfying, especially with the knowledge that the NFL only typically donates 5% of its revenue to charity. However, these lapses in transparency did not garner the same public attention that, for example, the original lack of details in the Rice investigatory report did.¹⁸⁹ While a few news outlets highlighted the traditional lack of NFL charitable donations, without specific financial information reporters had less ability to criticize the exact details of the NFL's plan. In these statements,

the NFL made a strategic choice to release information of the intent to donate without specifying the exact contributions, which allowed them to avoid further criticism if fans began to believe they were not investing enough funds into their non-profit sponsorship.

Questions of Locus

The final question purported by Ulmer and Sellnow centers on how the organization assigns the locus of blame and responsibility.¹⁹⁰ However, it becomes difficult to assign blame to an organization on its own, because as Cheney explains, “organizational messages take on a relatively placeless, nameless, omniscient quality, even when a corporate identity is assumed and declared.”¹⁹¹ As Cheney asserts, organizations are a center of diffused reasonability where questions of direct blame remain ambiguous because of their external environment. As an open system, organizations are vulnerable to external influences, including the actions of stakeholders, which blurs the line between internal and external responsibility, leaving the locus of blame open for interpretation. This is the central argument the NFL makes throughout its discourse--the NFL cannot control the actions of individual players, and in fact domestic violence is a problem of only a select few individuals.

Through a continued emphasis on the problem of domestic violence among a select few players, Goodell reinforces the belief that the NFL cannot be responsible for the actions of individuals. From statements like, “with very few exceptions, NFL personnel conduct themselves in an exemplary way,” or “the vast majority of players, coaches, owners, and employees in the NFL stand tall, not only for their role in the game, but for what they do in their communities,” the NFL seeks to reaffirm the exclusiveness of Rice, Hardy, Peterson (and the many others’) conduct.¹⁹² Within these statements Goodell remains ambiguous

about the exact players responsible for domestic violence, choosing instead to refer to the generally positive NFL community and not the few people who have acted out of accord. Yet this is not the only way in which these statements create a sense of ambiguity. By calling to attention the external influences, including the players, coaches, and owners, whose actions are reflected within the NFL, Goodell blurs the line between who should be publically blamed for the domestic violence crisis, ultimately questioning if the NFL should even have a role in addressing what is framed as a very rare problem.

Speaking to Stakeholders

Addressing the stakeholders in corporate apologia is one of the most vital tasks to ensuring a successful reception of the message.¹⁹³ Stakeholder theory posits that there are alternative concerns a corporation holds beyond profitability, namely those individuals who have *stake* in the organization's success.¹⁹⁴ Stakeholders include both organizational members, like employees, and non-organizational members, like consumers, media groups, and the local community. Further, during crises organizations must be willing to both expand their stakeholder network and meet the needs of their stakeholders in a reasonable time frame.¹⁹⁵ Kruse reiterates the importance of this concept when discussing sports apologia; highlighting how, within their apology, players are expected to speak to the fans and express remorse for distracting their teammates from their focus on the game.¹⁹⁶ Positive relationships with stakeholders are crucial to an organization's success, as Seeger argues, stakeholders "might withhold resources and support, limit the firm's access to new markets and boycott the organization's products."¹⁹⁷ While Kruse's understanding of apologia is only applied to the apologia of individual athletes, I believe his criteria can be applied to understanding corporate sports apologia at large. Sports corporations face

unique challenges, unknown to most corporations, because they must preserve the sanctity of the game and their fans are typically emotionally and financially invested in their success. Of course, both the NFL as an institution and the players individually are compelled to address the stakeholders within their public statements; when they fail to do so, they face harsh criticism for showing a lack of true remorse. Yet, beyond acknowledging stakeholders, other considerations must be made as well. In order for stakeholders to accept an apology, they must feel they are connected to the organization's mission, goals, and values.¹⁹⁸ Therefore, within the apologia developed by the NFL, many critics also sought to hear the organization demonstrate a change in attitude.

To effectively illustrate the role of stakeholders in the NFL's apologia, I review four tenets apparent in their discourse. To begin, I will demonstrate how Goodell and the NFL addressed the stakeholders in explicit terms, as a method of building personal ethos, an important exigency. Second, I illustrate how stakeholder concerns become a central figure in the NFL's discourse through an emphasis on unity. Third, I review how the NFL constructs common ground between its external stakeholders and internal organization. Next, I discuss the relationship between remorse and stakeholders, demonstrating the necessity of adequate remorse to craft a successful defense. I then briefly introduce the prevailing archetypes of home and family; first introduced in the statements crafted by Goodell, these archetypes were then carried into the mediated public relations campaign.

Leadership Ethos

Throughout the NFL's statements, their discourse remained clear and directive. These qualities allowed for an improved communication between stakeholders and organizational leadership, allowing the NFL to regain some of its lost credibility and

reinforce dedication towards its stakeholders. Many organizational communication scholars have underscored how truly crucial a strong leadership ethos is to rebuilding relationships with stakeholders. Organizational scholars often approach understanding leadership from a discursive, social-constructionist point of view. As Gail T. Fairhurst highlights, leaders are constantly enacting their relationship with their followers, or stakeholders, through a performative lens.¹⁹⁹ Whether their aim is to establish credibility or legitimize their authority, leaders must take into consideration the role of their followers because, leadership is only earned when it is attributed by followers.²⁰⁰ The way in which Goodell constructs his leadership ethos, then, becomes of the utmost importance for validating his both his legitimacy as NFL Commissioner and the relationship between stakeholders and the NFL.

To being I turn to Goodell's September 19 press conference, where he remained forthright in admitting his fault, telling the audience, "I got it wrong in the handling of the Ray Rice matter. And I'm sorry for that. I got it wrong on a number of levels, from the process that I led, to the decision that I reached."²⁰¹ The September 19 press conference represents one of the only times Goodell delivered an upfront apology, yet it remains significant because of his chosen terminology. By accepting responsibility, and directly referencing the area in which he committed fault, Goodell is able to construct his leadership ethos through connecting with the opinions of his stakeholders. His September 19 press conference signifies an important shift in the rhetoric surrounding Goodell's leadership style. Through taking control of the situation and admitting fault, Goodell concedes to the concerns of his stakeholders, who believed he does not care or understand the significance of the event. As Rowland and Jerome highlight, stakeholders will only be willing to let an

organization “off-the-hook” when they can understand, and connect with, the values and goals of an organization.²⁰² Goodell’s concessions of fault work to address stakeholder concerns and subsequently rebuild his deteriorating credibility.

Unity Through Identification

Through addressing the concerns of stakeholders, Goodell does not simply attempt to regain his own personal credibility; he also seeks to refocus the public image of the NFL as a united, stakeholder-driven, organization. This method of uniting various stakeholders under a common identity can best be explained by the theory of Kenneth Burke, as well as concepts from George Cheney. To introduce this theory however I begin with Goodell’s September 19 press conference, where he promised stakeholders a renewed investigation into the Rice scandal, telling his audience, “I promise you that any shortcomings [Mueller] finds in how we dealt with the situation will lead to swift actions.”²⁰³ After this initial promise however, Goodell continues to address stakeholders as a united front. Throughout his discourse Goodell addresses stakeholders, which includes both non-organizational and organizational members, like the media, fans, athletes, and NFL employees, under a united “we.” The uniting “we” serves to stress the united action being taken to address domestic violence, and includes such statements as “we strongly, strongly condemn and will punish behavior that is totally unacceptable,” and “we cannot solve [problems of domestic violence and sexual assault] by ourselves.”²⁰⁴ These statements position the NFL as an organization united under a common mission. While members of the media and fans might not initially associate themselves as part of the NFL’s mission, the consistent reiteration of “we” begins to bridge the divide between organizational and non-organizational stakeholders.

The NFL's use of "we" as a method of identification is not a new method in organizational communication. Kenneth Burke first introduces the process of identification in his *Rhetoric of Motives*, and his theory has often been applied to organizational communication. Burke introduces identification as a "species" of rhetoric, focusing specific attention to the role of consubstantial identification.²⁰⁵ Burke views consubstantiality as "necessary to any way of life" because it allows for two persons to "be identified in terms of some principle they share in common" yet it "does not deny their distinctions."²⁰⁶ The rhetoric of consubstantiality therefore allows diverse groups to be unified through "common sensations, concepts, images, ideas, [and] attitudes."²⁰⁷ Burke's theory of consubstantiality is further expanded upon by Cheney, who extends Burke's theory of consubstantiality to organizational studies, illustrating how the persuasive elements of identification are used by organizations to promote cohesion among their employees, most prominently through use of a transcendental "we."²⁰⁸ I extend Cheney's theory on the transcendental "we" to not only include members of the organization, but those stakeholders who exist outside of the organization as well, who I refer to as non-organizational stakeholders.

Throughout the NFL's discourse, they make a strategic choice to frame their mission, value, and goal-oriented statements under a uniting "we," which functions as a way to consubstantiate non-organizational stakeholders as members of the organization. Through persuasion the NFL is able to unite non-organizational stakeholders with their mission, and this in turn works as a method of defense. As the NFL addresses major stakeholder concerns, like their desire for evidence of a change in attitude and a plan of action for rectifying their mistakes, they employ a transcendental "we" to further emphasize their ability consider the point of view of their stakeholders. This consideration

of the stakeholder's point of view could in fact be viewed in a similar light as Ware and Linkugel's theory of "bolstering" whereby the "speaker attempts to identify himself with something viewed favorably by the audience," however the transcendental "we" takes this a step farther.²⁰⁹ By not only seeking to identify with the audience's desires, but constituting members of the NFL as part of this mission to address those desires, the NFL is able to adequately prove its understanding of stakeholder opinions and further support its own credibility.

Building Common Ground

However the process of identification within the NFL's discourse extends beyond the transcendental "we." Cheney also proposes six approaches utilized by organizations to build common ground between internal stakeholders and the organization's identity. While Cheney's analysis focuses solely on internal communication, I argue we can extend this to better understand external communication habits as well. These six features are: expressing concern for the individual; highlighting the individual's contribution to the organization; expressing shared values between the individual and the organization; advocating for company sponsored activities; highlighting praise by outsiders; and, directly quoting employee dedication and affection for the company. Nearly all of these tactics, which improve identification between stakeholders and the organization are pervasive throughout the NFL's discourse with the exception of the last tactic: promoting "testimonials" from employees. While employee testimonials can be important, especially in asking audience members to see "what others like them have to say," this may also be the most difficult tactic to identify.²¹⁰ At very few times does the NFL call upon external or internal stakeholders to promote their organizational values. Next, I illustrate how the NFL

utilized five of Cheney's six themes of common ground identification to bridge the gap between the stakeholders' identity and that of its organization, all the while navigating those precarious communication techniques that are the hallmark of the violence paradox.

Expressing concern for the individual

The first way an organization builds common ground with an individual is through constructing the individual as "a member or an integral part of the organization."²¹¹ Within the discourse of the NFL, they consistently seek to include external and internal stakeholders as integral members of their identity. For example, in his September 19 address Goodell explicitly calls upon stakeholders to address the problem of domestic violence, saying "law enforcement, the criminal justice system, social service organizations and families are the cornerstone to addressing" problems of sexual assault and domestic violence.²¹² By including these various stakeholders, especially families, into the conversation on solving domestic violence, the NFL's rhetoric begins to build a common ground with stakeholders- now they feel included in the conversation and accounted for in the NFL's discourse and decision-making.

Recognizing the individual's contribution to the organization

Next, the organization will recognize the individual's contribution to the organization through "highlighting shared values."²¹³ Specifically, Cheney identifies ways in which organizations will single-out specific individuals whose work seems to be in line with the promoted values of the organization, especially when those employees are viewed as "doing more" within the organization.²¹⁴ Often within the NFL's discourse Goodell will call upon the specific work of individuals to illustrate productive change; however, Goodell also utilizes former NFL players whose charitable work has centered on addressing

problems of toxic masculinity to show an alliance with those purported values. In his September 15 memo Goodell recognizes “former NFL player Joe Ehrenmann and his organization Coach for America” whose work has expanded “the scope of life-skills training and education for those associated with the game of football at all levels.”²¹⁵ Part of the communication challenge for the NFL centers on the NFL’s ability to connect their violent sport with anti-violence messages. Goodell’s recognition of Ehrenmann’s charitable work, seeks to address this paradox. By illustrating the positive work former NFL players have accomplished to address the inherent violence and help solve the enduring problem, the NFL aims to show that the NFL is not an inherently violent organization despite the violence of the sport.

Espousal of shared values

The third approach taken by organizations to build common ground between themselves and stakeholders is to appeal to “*presumably* shared values.”²¹⁶ While value identification is a common approach in apologia, it becomes harder to communicate when the need for apologia may come as a result of value incongruence. One method utilized by the NFL to promote the notion of shared values is the use of archetypal metaphors, which I will expand upon later. However, the NFL also promotes shared values through simply existing as the preeminent football organization. Throughout their discourse the NFL calls upon the game of football as an institution as a way to connect with the values of their stakeholders. From the backdrop of his press conferences to the logo at the top of their memorandums, the NFL consistently reminds their audience and stakeholders of their institutional authority and prowess as the organization delivering your Sunday entertainment. Especially when an organization is successful prior to its scandal, which few

could argue the NFL was not, the organization is more likely to receive supportive group behavior through its existence.²¹⁷ In other words, because the NFL is so closely aligned with football, as a game void of the political or cultural consequences, the NFL is able to call upon football and remind the audience what service they provide. The NFL's status therefore, allows it to connect with stakeholders and build common ground through the presumed shared love of the game of football.

Advocating for company sponsored activities

The fourth theme Cheney introduces to building common ground is through the promoting company-sponsored activities. This can be seen in two prominent ways within organization discourse: first, organizations will promote services available to its members, and second, organizations will frame membership in the organization as a value in itself. In other words, organizations offer benefits and services to their employees that are framed as outweighing the harm of the scandal. Cheney makes the argument that organizations will emphasize these benefits in their discourse to build common ground with stakeholders and in turn overcome the harm of the scandal on their public image. Within the NFL's discourse, Goodell often calls upon the services and groups available to NFL employees as a way to illustrate care for both their employees and their employees' families. For example, among the resources Goodell lists are, "the NFL LifeLine and NFL Total Wellness Program, [which] are staffed with personnel trained to provide prompt and confidential assistance to anyone at risk of domestic violence or sexual assault – whether as a victim or potential aggressor."²¹⁸ These company-sponsored programs specifically address an existing exigence for the NFL. As discussed previously, the NFL came under attack for not providing mental health resources for its employees, including the players, which in turn critiqued

their amount of perceived care for their employees' wellbeing. As the statement posits, the NFL's two programs, available to employees and employee family members, grants resources that will help address the organization crisis and are titled to emphasize the NFL's own involvement. These programs are offered to members of the NFL community to help prevent domestic violence from occurring in the first place. The programs specifically address mental health concerns, and as Goodell emphasizes, do so in a confidential, professional manner. In turn, through highlighting the resources available to NFL family members, the NFL is able to address one of their major exigencies and appease stakeholder concerns.

Highlighting praise by outsiders

The fifth tactic identified by Cheney deviates from the previous four because it no longer represents the organization's perspective, but the perspective of outsiders.²¹⁹ This technique, Cheney argues, encourages stakeholders to identify with the organization through highlighting the positive views of others who exist outside the environment. As an enthymeme, Cheney's argument asserts that organizational insiders will be more likely to improve their view of the organization if they hear praise by people who are not internal members of the organization. Perhaps the strongest example of this rhetorical device comes in the NFL's reiteration of Judge Jones' decision during the Rice appeal. As I highlighted earlier, through emphasizing both the Judge's qualifications and her statement that Goodell had not seen the video, the NFL aims to change public opinion concerning Goodell's position during the scandal. When Judge Jones' reaffirms the NFL's argument that Goodell had not seen video, the NFL takes this statement and reiterates it in their press releases. Through this strategy, the NFL seeks to show both internal and external

stakeholders that since a valued and credible member of the judicial system, like Jones, finds in favor of Goodell, so too should the public. Theoretically, Jones' statement on Goodell should build unity between the organization and its stakeholders by bridging the gap of previous disbelief.

Illustrating Remorse

A third method through which the NFL is able to address its stakeholders lies in its ability to construct a narrative of remorse. Remorse, of course, is an important tool for healing relationships, yet it is rarely distinguished from other methods of defense in studies on apologia.²²⁰ Successful communication of remorse contains a number of requirements and framing techniques. As Simons highlights, the public will view remorse as insincere or insufficient if the apology is framed as a simply legalistic matter or a purely personal matter. It is important, as Simons notes, that statements of remorse appear truly contrite, without the speaker appearing to grovel.²²¹ At its core, a successful statement of remorse will pledge corrective actions and a change in attitude.²²² The NFL artfully navigates these many constraints, for while they do frame domestic violence as a legal and personal problem, their statements also make important claims of fault and pledge a change in action and attitude.

While the NFL utilizes due-process rhetoric to prove its credibility, they also incorporate statements of remorse and change to emphasize a shift in attitude. While Goodell made an explicit statement of apology in his September 19 press conference, other memos also make statements of remorse, albeit less directly. In a memo published August 28, Goodell wrote, "Although the NFL is celebrated for what happens on the field, we must be equally vigilant in what we do off the field. At times, however, and despite our best

efforts, we fall short of our goals. We clearly did so in response to a recent incident of domestic violence.”²²³ In this statement the NFL clearly admits to these mistakes, which involved the “recent incident of domestic violence.”²²⁴ This specificity is an important component to a successful statement of remorse, however, what is more effective in the statements that follow is how the NFL illustrates a change in attitude and action.

Throughout their statements, the NFL continually reiterates the steps they have taken to address the problem of domestic violence within their league. There are two major ways remorse works within the NFL’s discourse: first, the NFL utilizes remorse to address stakeholder complaints, and second, remorse is used to reassert credibility. As I will illustrate, in both instances successful statements of remorse are accomplished through showing a clear change in attitude and presenting a future plan of corrective action.

Addressing stakeholder complaints

The NFL used remorse, and as such attempted to show a change of attitude in three key ways. As one of the predominant exigencies facing the NFL throughout their scandal was the complaint from stakeholders that the NFL did not care about women or the severity of domestic violence, the NFL needed to show that they were taking measures to alter their perceived attitude. Throughout their discourse the NFL attempted to illustrate its care for both of these concerns through working with domestic violence organizations and emphasizing newly developed educational programs. The NFL also sought to address stakeholder complaints of inconsistent policy implementation by reiterating the continued work by the NFL to adopt a new, more progressive, policy on domestic violence. As I will illustrate these three areas of exigence, the NFL’s care for women, their understanding of

domestic violence, and their faulty Personal Conduct Policy, all served as areas to assert a demonstrable change in attitude.

The NFL cares about women. As a method of illustrating remorse the NFL took a number of actions in an attempt to showcase its care for women. Perhaps the most documented occurred in a letter released on September 15, in which Goodell announced a new women-led task force constructed to address the problem of domestic violence. Goodell, of course, did not refer to the task force as such, but rather his announcement centered on the NFL's commitment to "developing [their] talent and putting the best people behind [the NFL's] most important priorities."²²⁵ On October 2 the NFL made a second announcement focused on their work with women's groups, in which they "met with 17 members of the Black Women's Roundtable . . . [where] the discussion was candid and wide-ranging, and identified important cultural issues."²²⁶ In both of these statements the NFL attempted to change the discourse surrounding their position on women. Through working with women's advocacy group and hiring female employees, the NFL sought to show an explicit change in conduct. This represents an important component of remorse, wherein the NFL demonstrated both its recognition of prevailing stakeholder criticism and its willingness to change.

Showcasing an understanding of domestic violence. In an attempt to illustrate their willingness to learn about domestic violence, the NFL often made reference to their educational efforts. The discussion of education occurs a number of times throughout the NFL's discourse and includes statements that make reference to education programs, disseminating information, and conducting training courses for all NFL personnel and teams. In total, references made to educational efforts occur 24 times throughout the NFL's

four months of discourse. For example, in a memo released August 28 Goodell made clear the NFL's intentions to improve their educational efforts, writing, "We will invest time and resources into training, programs and services that will become part of our culture . . . we will continue working with leading experts to expand the educational scope of our education on domestic violence."²²⁷ The NFL expresses similar sentiments throughout their discourse in an attempt to connect with the concerns of stakeholders and illustrate remorse through a constructive process of change.

Addressing the Personal Conduct Policy. One of the major sources of criticism Goodell received during the scandal centered on his inconsistent policy implementation. In an August 28 memo, Goodell announced the NFL would be revising the out dated policy with a focus on new penalties that would have "enhanced discipline."²²⁸ Within the announcement Goodell emphasized the work he had done with "a wide range of experts (several of whom [the NFL] have been working with for some time)" in revising the Personal Conduct Policy. Further, Goodell made clear the ultimate goal of the policy revisions was to "better communicate [the NFL's] position and strengthen [their] policies on domestic violence and sexual assault."²²⁹ While the specific details of the policy, which was supposed to include "new elements of evaluation, treatment, and family support" in addition to the revised disciplinary standard, were not officially released until December 2014, the NFL often used key words such as "clear, consistent, and current" and "transparent, effective, and accountable" to frame the narrative surrounding the policy.²³⁰ Framing the narrative before its release granted the NFL leniency in how stakeholders would later interpret the new policy. Additionally, because much of the criticism lay with the inconsistent, and at times less severe, policy, the NFL's consistent reiteration of the new policy focused on how it

would both address stakeholders concerns and showcase a more progressive change in attitude concerning domestic violence and sexual assault.

Reasserting credibility

As the NFL attempts to reestablish its relationship with stakeholders through illustrating remorse, they in turn also further bolster their credibility. As has been evidenced by their consistent reiteration of change in attitude and policy, the NFL's attempts at communicating remorse come through an emphasis on change. This change is only further underscored by the NFL's attempts to legitimize its authority and reassert Goodell's leadership credibility. To accomplish change the NFL calls upon a number of expert resources whose qualifications help establish the reaffirm the NFL's change in attitude. Throughout their discourse the NFL made consistent reference to two main domestic violence organizations, NO MORE, a public service campaign to end domestic violence, and the National Domestic Violence Hotline, located in Austin, Texas. To illustrate how the NFL's rhetoric surrounding both of these organizations affirmed their remorse and in turn reasserted their credibility I analyze both case studies.

NO MORE. Just as Goodell attempted to connect the NFL's ethos with that of the judicial system, so too does he employ a similar rhetorical strategy in discussions on the NFL's relationship with non-profit, NO MORE. Beginning on September 15, when Goodell announced the new women-led task force created to revise the NFL's policy on domestic violence, Goodell also announced the NFL's partnership with NO MORE and its co-founder, Jane Randel. The NFL refers to Randel as "the co-founder of NO MORE, a national initiative to raise the profile of and normalize the conversation about domestic violence and sexual assault."²³¹ Within the statement Goodell goes on to highlight the specific tasks Randel will

focus on in her work for the NFL. Just as the NFL utilized members of the judicial system, like Lisa Friel and Robert Mueller, to bolster their relationship to well respected institutions, so too does the NFL use Randel. As a new hire, Randel's qualifications, which grant her authority to speak on domestic violence, are linked to the NFL's. With Randel a part of the NFL organization, the NFL can now say they have taken demonstrative measures to improve their understanding of domestic violence and add legitimacy to their ability to speak about domestic violence from a credible position.

However, the NFL does more than simply emphasize Randel's qualifications. As a way of underscoring their own, newly adopted domestic-violence organizations, they also emphasize their work with NO MORE. On September 26 the NFL announced its partnership, including its financial support, for NO MORE in a memo, which read:

Beginning with last night's game, we have provided NFL television promotional time for a PSA produced by NO MORE, a national campaign addressing domestic violence and sexual assault. This PSA ran during last night's CBS Thursday Night Football telecast which reached more than 16 million viewers. The spot will run during all NFL game telecasts this weekend. The value of this promotional time is close to \$3 million. We are evaluating how to use our broadcast promotional assets for the rest the season in support of our efforts to address domestic violence and sexual assault on a broader basis.²³²

This statement clearly illustrates both the NFL's attempts to establish a change of action and likewise showcase its growing credibility in addressing issues of domestic violence. To begin, the statement is highly detailed. As it underscore the financial donation made by the NFL, it publicizes for stakeholders important details, including--who produced the ad and when stakeholders can expect to see it played. The incorporation of such detailed information aims to bolster the NFL's credibility in understanding and advocating on behalf of domestic violence charities. In their continued statements, the NFL reiterated its partnership with NO MORE, announcing that their work with the non-profit "resulted in a

more than 400 percent increase in web traffic to www.nomore.org,” in just one weekend.²³³

In announcing their financial contribution, as well as the resulting success of their partnership, the NFL is not only able to illustrate its increasing credibility in addressing issues of domestic violence, but also its progressive actions taken to address stakeholder criticism.

National Domestic Violence Hotline. A second organization that the NFL called upon to bolster its credibility and reinforce its changing attitude was the National Domestic Violence Hotline and the National Sexual Assault Resource Center. Unlike their partnership with NO MORE, the NFL’s relationship with the hotline and resource center was not as publicized in public media campaigns, yet both organizations played a pivotal role in the NFL’s apologia. On October 2, Goodell announced that he and a group of NFL employees had traveled to Austin, Texas to visit the National Domestic Violence Hotline, where they “spent almost three hours with the leadership and staff of The Hotline, discussing the needs of the people they serve and the issues they face in providing those services.” Goodell reported that the experience was “deeply moving . . . [and] underscored the extent to which domestic violence and sexual assault are broad societal problems.” He then went on to highlight the partnership between The Hotline and the NFL, writing, “You will be pleased to know that the financial support provided by the NFL has already made a real difference in the number of victims/survivors The Hotline is able to serve. This week, they have reported to us that their staff is able to answer nearly 20 percent more calls, chats, and texts than a week ago.”²³⁴ While there are some similarities in the framing of this partnership as with their partnership with NO MORE, this statement serves a decisively different purpose. Rather than focusing on economic benefits gained through the

partnership, the NFL's partnership with the National Domestic Violence Hotline serves as a way for the NFL to emphasize its education ethos.

While the NFL's statement highlights their financial partnership, an important quality, it also underscores their continued educational efforts. The NFL makes the strategic decision not to disclose the amount of money they contributed to The Hotline, a choice that I explain earlier in my analysis, they do highlight the benefits of their partnership. The relationship between the NFL and the National Domestic Violence Hotline and the National Sexual Assault Resource Center is important, yet it is not as predominantly mentioned as their partnership with NO MORE. Education remains a predominant theme throughout the NFL's discourse, and the choice to highlight the time spent with The Hotline showcases their continued development. Through mentioning the partnership the NFL underscores both their willingness to learn about domestic violence and the subsequent actions they have taken to do so. As a large part of remorse includes showcasing a change in attitude and adopting an attitude that more closely mirrors that of the stakeholders, the NFL gains important educational credibility through its framing of its partnership with The Hotline.

Archetypes

The third way in which the NFL aims to identify with stakeholders is through the metaphor of family, which the NFL utilizes to connect with their audience and communicate similarities, bridging the differences between the purported values of the NFL and those of its stakeholders. Archetypal metaphors can be a useful tool within rhetorical criticism, and yet are rarely applied to studies of apologia. The "family" metaphor is an example of what Michael Osborne identified as archetypal metaphors, which are so

basic to human experience that they are easily understood by many types of people, across time and even culture.²³⁵ Osborne identifies six enduring features that serve to categorize an archetypal metaphor. Among those features, the most prominent include popularity across discourses, unaffectedness of differing cultures, and a grounded nature in universal, shared experiences, powered by basic human motivations.²³⁶ These qualities allow for nearly any potential audience member to identify with the archetype, a process in apologia that Ware and Linkugel refer to as bolstering. Just as the consubstantial “we” allowed Goodell and the NFL to transcend the differences in their address to organizational and non-organizational stakeholders, bolstering allows the speaker to build a connection with the audience through a reality to which they are already familiar.²³⁷ The NFL uses the family metaphor in two ways, both to frame the NFL as a family unit and to construct specific members of the NFL community as serving family roles, like mother, father, and son. To begin I will illustrate how the NFL employs the metaphor of family at-large within their apologia, before moving on to the smaller components of this archetypal address.

The NFL family

Family is no doubt a powerful metaphor that helps bridge the differences between the NFL and its stakeholders. In his August 28 memo Goodell promotes the resources available to player’s spouses and significant others and references the “NFL family,” where he states, “Our Player Engagement Directors and Human Resource Executive will meet with team spouses and significant others to ensure that they are aware of the resources available to them as NFL family members.”²³⁸ This statement is significant for two reasons; first, it frames the overarching NFL organization as a family, and second, it includes the women, people typically excluded from football culture, as significant members of this

family. By explicitly framing the NFL as a family, the NFL attempts to change the discourse surrounding the scandal. No longer is the NFL only a multi-million dollar corporation, but rather a family, which, like many families across the United States, faces problems of domestic violence. The idea that domestic violence is a problem across the United States is not simply an enthymeme, left to the audience to decode, but also a strategy to diminish the NFL's culpability. Throughout their statements the NFL frames domestic violence as a societal problem which exists "everywhere, in every community, economic class, racial and ethnic group."²³⁹ Families, Goodell argues, "are the cornerstones to addressing this problem."²⁴⁰ This rhetorical shift, between the NFL as a family to families at large, emphasizes the similarities between the two.

Family members

While the NFL frames the NFL as a family, in a general sense, Goodell also references specific members of the "family," to further enhance the role of this archetype within the discourse. On August 1, in his initial statement to the press, Goodell constructs Rice as the proverbial son, one who has made a mistake, but repents and is therefore deserving of redemption. In talking about Rice, Goodell frames him as "a young man who made a terrible mistake . . . we're very confident that this young man understands where he is and what he needs to do going forward."²⁴¹ In his brief remarks Goodell refers to Rice as a "young man" three times, emphasizing that Rice "really understands the mistake he made, and he's bound and determined to make a difference."²⁴² Framing Rice as a young man, who has made a mistake inconsistent with his past character, is a well called upon archetype throughout literature. As the proverbial son, Rice has made a singular, albeit deplorable, mistake, but has recognized the error of his ways and deserves forgiveness from the public.

Rice, a 28-year-old father, is not a young man, yet throughout the discourse Goodell continues to use this term as a way to claim Rice is worthy of compassion.

Furthermore, throughout his discourse, Goodell calls upon mothers and fathers as an important resource for reinforcing the NFL's values. On October 2 Goodell announced in a memo that he had "met with heads of the Professional Football Players Mothers Association and the National Football League Players Fathers Association to discuss how they can raise awareness of the family support resources offered by the NFL."²⁴³ While these organizations are not metaphorical, the NFL's choice to include them in their apologia serves as a way to highlight their family-centered approach. Beyond simply enforcing the family narrative, these associations also underscore the proverbial son narrative by introducing a mother and father figure as well. The choice to reference the mother and father organizations not only reinforces the family archetype, but it works to discursively illustrate the family driven culture of the NFL. The mother and father associations frame the NFL as not simply a profit-driven corporation, but one that has family values, and even family members, within its decision-making processes. As part of the broad NFL organization, reference to the mother and father associations suggests that the NFL is not making decisions alone; rather, mothers and fathers become important components of validating the NFL organization.

Shifting Blame

Avoiding or accepting blame is a central component of any apologia strategy. Ware and Linkugel introduce the role of denial, whereby the speaker disavows "any participating in, relationship to, or positive sentiment toward whatever it is that repels the audience."²⁴⁴ William L. Benoit adopts Ware and Linkugel's original theory of denial and apply it to the

act of shifting blame. When an organization attempts to shift blame, they seek to illustrate that another organization or individual is responsible for the offensive act and therefore separate themselves from association with the perpetrator.²⁴⁵ To best illustrate the process of shifting blame I highlight two important strategies employed by the NFL throughout their discourse. First, the NFL utilizes scapegoats to displace blame in an attempt to purify their public image. Second, the NFL uses a *kategoria*-based *apologia* approach when engaging directly with media representatives.

Scapegoating

The NFL uses scapegoats throughout its discourse to displace blame away from organizational leaders, like Goodell, and towards individual players. While much of the public criticism did not focus on the actions of the players, but rather with the NFL's organizational response and mistakes, the NFL continually calls upon players as somehow responsible for these mistakes. Burke provides an important apologetic tool, the scapegoat, which rhetors can adopt as a way to displace blame and unite an audience. The use of scapegoats works to unify a divided audience against a shared enemy.²⁴⁶ Scholars in leadership have also highlighted that leaders may often call upon lower-status individuals as scapegoats, who have the capability to diminish the hostility aimed towards the leader.²⁴⁷ In organizational research, scapegoating has been viewed as a method of dissociation, wherein the organization locates guilt, and assigns it to that of a few individuals.²⁴⁸ Hearit makes clear that in this process of scapegoating, the *apologia* is not aimed at repairing relationships but rather dissociating from a selected group of individuals as a method of illustrating mortification.²⁴⁹ Mortification is closely tied to the role of the scapegoat. As Burke describes, mortification works as "an extreme form of 'self-

control’,” wherein the scapegoat becomes a “sacrificial vessel” through which the organization can rebuild a purified public image.²⁵⁰ As I will illustrate, Ray Rice served the role of “sacrificial vessel” within the NFL’s discourse: his release from the Ravens and indefinite suspension functioned as a way for the NFL to scapegoat blame and further dissociate itself from Rice’s conduct.

At the height of the criticism, when Goodell’s reputation was threatened because of the inconsistencies between his testimony and Rice’s, Goodell focuses more heavily on positioning Rice as a liar and drawing attention to Rice’s original crime. While at the start of the discourse Goodell often framed Rice as a positive community influence, one who had seemingly only made a single regrettable mistake, by early September, Goodell shifts frames in order to scapegoat Rice. In his public statements and letters, Goodell often drew attention to Rice’s alleged inconsistencies in his storytelling. In two different interviews Goodell positioned Rice as a liar, saying, “when we met with Ray Rice and his representatives, it was ambiguous about what actually happened,” and “What we saw was new evidence that was not consistent with what was described when we met with Ray and his representatives.”²⁵¹ In both these statements, Goodell’s frame of Rice changed dramatically, from a person deserving of redemptive forgiveness to one who lied to the NFL and was unfit to continue playing in the league. These alleged inconsistencies provided the NFL with a justification to remove Rice from the league. Just as Burke highlights the role of mortification in purifying a corporation’s image, so too does the NFL use its removal of Rice as a way to remove the alleged problem from its organization. Rice serves as a scapegoat for the NFL.

Through dissociating from Rice's negative public image, the NFL attempts to overcome the negative association with not only Rice, but domestic violence as well. In turn, this allows the NFL to address the violence paradox. By displacing blame onto Rice and dissociating from his public image, the NFL highlights where the violence exists, in individual players like Rice, and where it does not, in the NFL. The violent actions of its players are not rooted in the violent atmosphere aggregated by the sport, but simply a condition of individual predication, nullifying public complaint that the violence of football could lead to increased violence among its players.

Kategoria-Based Approach

A third way to understand the NFL's constructed apologia is through a kategoria-based approach, which allows researchers to understand how the NFL responds to specific accusations leveled against its organization by news reporters. Hearit extends the application of kategoria-based apologia to corporate image crisis, arguing that a kategoria-based apologia is different than traditional apologia because it tends to apply to journalism in particular, when corporations are accused of wrongdoing by a news source.²⁵² Within this subgenre, Hearit argues that corporations will most likely lodge three basic charges against the news source: first, the story was unfairly edited to obscure facts; second, news sources held a preconceived storyline and only sought 'facts' to support the storyline; or, third, that the story was produced to gain ratings, not to reveal the truth.²⁵³ Hearit also outlines the three basic responses a kategoria-approach tends to take: first, the accused will attempt to contest the authenticity of the chargers through reframing the event; second, the accused will level new charges against the accuser; and third, the accused will call into question the journalistic ethics of the accuser.²⁵⁴ Ryan calls for a kategoria-based

approach to analyzing speech sets specifically, which includes both the *kategoria*, or the accusations, and the *apologia*, or the defense.²⁵⁵ At its core, a *kategoria* approach incorporates aspects of scapegoating, but focuses on directly attacking the accuser.²⁵⁶ Both accusations and *apologia* yield different constraints on the speaker. Accusations, for example, must be centered on either an attack of a policy or an attack of an individual's character. The accused must then respond in an appropriate manner, addressing either the character or the policy that is under attack through defining the context and purifying their image.²⁵⁷ A *kategoria*-approach provides an important venue through which to analyze the question and answer portion of Roger Goodell's press conference, where he faced exacting questions from CNN reporter, Rachel Nichols. In my analysis of Goodell's September 19 question and answer segment my critique will follow the established schema, first introduced by Hearit, to better understand the way in which Goodell's defense is constructed as a specific response to Nichols' line of questioning.

Reframe current charges

Rachel Nicholas, the CNN reporter, asked a number of questions, ranging from Goodell's leadership capabilities to the authenticity of the NFL's investigatory process. One of her first questions centered on the NFL's attempts to obtain the Rice video from the Atlantic City Police Department, in which she said:

Also you mentioned on TV last week that you tried to get the Ray Rice video and any information. The Atlantic City prosecutors office in an open records check says they don't have any electronic communication from the NFL asking for those kinds of documentation or the video. Can you give us sort of the trail of how you guys did that investigation so people can know really what you put into it?²⁵⁸

Goodell, in turn, replied:

Our security department works with law enforcement. They are fully cooperative. We gather almost entirely all of our information through law enforcement, and

that's something else we're going to look at. That's something else, is that the right process? Should all of our information be gathered through law enforcement? We understand and respect what they go through and the job they have to do, and there are certain restrictions that they may be under.²⁵⁹

Goodell's defense did not introduce any new information, but viewed in conjunction with Nichols' question it clearly demonstrates the way in which the NFL attempted to reframe the charges and scapegoat blame. Goodell does not directly address Nichols' question, nor refute the evidence she supplies, but instead attempts to reframe the conversation as one that centers on questions of policy change within the NFL and legal restrictions, which exist out of the NFL's control and impairs their information-gathering processes. As Hearit identifies, one of the first ways a corporation will refute a charge leveled by a news source is to reframe the charge as not inherently linked to their organization. By drawing attention away from the NFL's responsibility, and instead critiquing the current legal restrictions, Goodell attempts to reframe Nichols' charge as one that should be directed to law enforcement.

Leveling new charges

As her last question, Nichols asked Goodell about the credibility of Mueller's investigation, specifically highlighting the former FBI director's close financial connections to the NFL:

Commissioner you mentioned Robert Mueller's investigation as key to solving all of these issues. I'm not going to sit here and discuss the integrity of the ex-director of the FBI, I can leave it as a given that he's a man of integrity, but the law firm that he works for and will help him carry out that investigation is a law firm with extremely close ties to the NFL. You guys paid that law firm recently to help you negotiate some television deals, the president of the Ravens who will be key in this whole investigation worked at that law firm for more than 30 years. Why hire someone with even the appearance of impropriety and how do you expect this to affect everything?²⁶⁰

Nichols' statement not only highlighted the potential conflict of interest in Mueller's hiring, but made exact reference to those areas of conflict within her statement. In his response, Goodell questioned Nichols' ability to conduct an investigation, and by virtue her journalistic ethics as well. In his reply Goodell was obviously frustrated and flustered by Nichols exacting questions and his reply took on a measured tone, in which he said:

Well Rachel, I would respectfully disagree because you now are questioning the integrity of the Director of the FBI. Yes that firm has represented us in the past, but they have also been on the other side in litigation against the NFL. So, this is a highly respected individual that served as Director of the FBI, longest serving director in the history of that position. His credentials are unparalleled and unquestionable.²⁶¹

His first statement, which charges that Nicholas does not have trust in public institutions, like the FBI, frames her as unpatriotic. Patriotism is often imbedded in public institutions, like the FBI. In fact the FBI has one of the highest levels of public trust, according to a survey completed by YouGov.²⁶² This is why, for example, the NFL attempts to align itself with the FBI through hiring Mueller. His credentials, and status as a well-respected public servant, add to the credibility of the NFL through association. Therefore, when Goodell claims that Nichols does not have trust in the Director of the FBI, he seeks to charge her as unpatriotic and out-of-touch with public opinion. While Mueller is the former Director of the FBI, Goodell retains the present tense, framing Mueller as a current public servant. This slight shift in language changes the immediate perceptions of Mueller, from the former director to the current director, and therefore heightens his association with the FBI.

Challenging ethics

Alongside this framing technique comes the assumption that Nichols is not willing to trust Mueller's report and likewise unwilling to accept the presented facts, even if they are incongruent with the journalist's preconceived notions. Hearit's analysis of kategoria-based

apologia identifies a common approach taken in organizational response, wherein organizations will frame journalists as unwilling to find the truth. Hearit argues corporations will attempt to portray journalists as only interested in finding a storyline that fits their preconceived story narrative, and thus journalists are often unethical. When Goodell rebukes Nichols statement that Mueller may not be able to perform a completely independent investigation, because of his close connections with the NFL, by saying, "I would respectfully disagree because you now are questioning the integrity of the Director of the FBI."²⁶³ In this statement Goodell asserts his belief that Nichols will not accept Mueller's report because she has a preconceived story in her head and will only seek out information that fits into that narrative. As a journalist, Nichols should be open-minded and willing to hear all facts from a variety of sources, but Goodell asserts his belief that Nichols will be unable, or unwilling, to do so.

Minimizing the Problem

The fifth and final technique used by the NFL in its defense centers on the way in which their rhetoric minimizes the problem of domestic violence through framing it as transcending the football league. Just as the NFL argues players who have committed domestic violence are a small subset of the larger organization, so too does the NFL's rhetoric avoid positioning domestic violence as its own institutional problem. The process of minimizing the problem is a tactic that is common within organizational crisis communication, yet does not have a strong theoretical backing. The tactic of minimizing the problem can be viewed in conjunction with Ware and Linkugel's theory of transcendence.²⁶⁴ For the NFL, their aim is to dissociate the problem of the domestic violence from the public's perception of the NFL and in turn position domestic violence as a societal problem

that is not an inherently pervasive problem throughout the NFL. To accomplish this, the NFL often focuses on how domestic violence transcends football and is instead a product of a society that values violence in young men.

The NFL's rhetoric minimizes the problem of domestic violence through reiterating the widespread influence of domestic violence throughout society. Goodell often frames domestic violence as a societal problem. In an August 28 memo, he writes, "we recognize that domestic violence and sexual assault are broad, social issues, affecting millions of people."²⁶⁵ Again, in his September 19 address Goodell reiterates his belief that domestic violence is not a problem exclusive to the NFL, saying "Domestic violence and sexual assault exist everywhere in every community, economic class, racial and ethnic group. It affects us all."²⁶⁶ Goodell constructs domestic violence as a problem that can be known and experience by any person, including stakeholders and audience members. In utilizing differentiation, Goodell separates domestic violence from inherently linked to the NFL's ethos and instead as part of the lived experience of every person. Domestic violence is not inherently linked to the NFL, as Goodell reminds the audience, but instead a problem of a society that has allowed it to transcend racial and economic barriers. Goodell is able to make an argument about the role of society in producing a culture of violence.

Chapter Four: The Fourth Quarter

At the start of the 2014 season, the NFL struggled to adapt their rhetorical strategies to the requirements of a domestic violence scandal. However, the NFL was eventually able to amend its rhetoric to fit the exigencies. Through understanding the NFL's application of traditional apologia theory, organizational communication tactics, and Burke's theory of mortification and scapegoating, the NFL constructed a defensive strategy that allowed the organization to not only continue but also prosper. These strategies, among others, have permitted the NFL's discourse to succeed: that season's Super Bowl was the most watched event in television history, and Roger Goodell continues to serve as commissioner, earning over \$44 million, despite the intense public criticism he received during the scandals. Overall, my analysis has outlined the "requirements, problems, and strategies" of an increasingly common genre of discourse: corporate sports apologia.²⁶⁷ In the next chapter I will assess my findings and discuss the theoretical implications that can be gained through a rhetorical analysis of the NFL's discourse of self-defense.

As I have argued, through the analysis of the NFL's rhetorical techniques, we can gain five important theoretical and practical implications. First, a study of the NFL's discourse confirms the enduring utility of Ware and Linkugel's theory of apologia. Second, through incorporating aspects of organizational communication theory into the rhetorical study of apologia, we can expand our understanding of effective and appropriate strategies employed by both individuals and corporations working in professional sports organizations. Third, through studying the NFL's public relations campaign, this study contributes to a more complete understanding of distinctive rhetorical situations faced by corporate sports institutions. Fourth, analysis of the NFL's domestic violence discourse

contributes to useful knowledge about the rhetorical requirements when speaking on such a challenging, emotionally wrought subject as domestic violence. And finally, this project highlights some further avenues of rhetorical and social scientific research that could potentially yield additional insight into the NFL's treatment of domestic violence scandals, as well as more general knowledge about the burgeoning genre of corporate spots apologia.

Traditional Apologia

What is apparent throughout an analysis of the NFL's apologia is that many of Ware and Linkugel's theoretical insights about historical genres continue to shed light on the contemporary form of sports apologia. These overarching strategies for apologia, including transcendence, bolstering, differentiation, and denial, are present throughout the NFL's discourse, even when employed under different names. It is important to view Ware and Linkugel's theory of apologia in conjunction with other theories as well, specifically organizational image repair. When combining rhetorical theory with organizational theory we are able to form a more comprehensive understanding of the communication strategies employed by the NFL.

One clear area of overlap concerns the well-developed organizational theory of the transcendental "we," which can be viewed in close conjunction with Ware and Linkugel's theory of bolstering. In both cases, rhetors use language to unite their audience through emphasizing an already existing, positive relationship. However, whereas the apologia theory of bolstering looks at the persuasive elements of a speech, organizational scholars approach transcendence through a social scientific lens, analyzing the measurable effect words have on stakeholder satisfaction. In my analysis, employing the "transcendental we"

allowed Goodell to bridge the differences between organizational and non-organizational stakeholders through unifying language. Once these differences were overcome, Goodell was able to employ the theory of bolstering, which similarly allowed the NFL's discourse to transcend differences by emphasizing a common similarity between the NFL and the stakeholders: the struggles of family.

However, when intersecting the rhetorical theory of apologia with theories developed in organizational communication, we must be critical of how similar terms can be confounded. The "transcendental we" is not to be confused with Ware and Linkugel's own theory of transcendence, which strategically unites the scandalous event with a larger context with which the audience presently does not view it.²⁶⁸ For example, in my analysis the "transcendental we" is used to build common ground with internal and external stakeholders, allowing critics to feel their opinions are valued by the NFL. On the other hand, the apologia strategy of transcendence is used by the NFL to help alleviate the focus of domestic violence as a league problem. Using the rhetorical perspective of apologia allows the NFL to frame domestic violence as a problem that transcends football and is produced by a culture that values violence in young men. Ware and Linkugel's assessment of the traditional genre of apologia is crucial to understanding not only the method behind the NFL's rhetoric, but the construction of defenses for any individual or organization undergoing a public-relations crisis. While many developments have been made within the field of rhetorical criticism, reviewing the NFL's most recent discourse only serves to emphasize the relevance of traditional apologia as an appropriate and important field of research.

Intersecting Organizational Communication Theory

As evidenced within the analysis, organizational scholars offer a number of unique interpretations for understanding public relations campaigns. Corporate communication is able to adopt a variety of rhetorical resources that are not particularly relevant to the rhetorical situations faced by individual speakers. One of the most prevalent features within the NFL's discourse is the use of legal, due-process rhetoric, which appears in both the content and structure of the NFL's discourse and helps to bolster the NFL's reputation as a trustworthy, credible institution. While due-process rhetoric has not been made an explicit feature of individual apologia, as evident from my analysis, it can serve a number of important purposes. At its core, due-process rhetoric allows a corporate entity to appear impartial by simply focusing on the facts. Further, this type of structure creates a sense of transparency for the organization, which helps assuage an information hungry society, assuage criticism, and reduce audience anxiety.

Burke's theory of identification also serves an important purpose within the NFL's rhetoric and has not been fully explored in relation to apologia. Identification, of course, should be considered when discussing apologia tactics because it can provide insight into how a speaker unites a diverse audience and bridges differences between the organization and the stakeholders. Especially in a case like the NFL, where value dis-identification became one of the most prevalent exigencies, the ability to build common ground among stakeholders and illustrate that the NFL's values were in-line with those of its audience was a vital rhetorical adjustment. As shown in my analysis, the NFL does this in a number of ways. From including metaphors of family, to including females in the conversation, the

NFL aims to show its audience that it identifies with their concerns and likewise their values.

Corporate Sports Institutions

Corporate sports apologia exists at the intersection of two subgenres of apologia: organizational apologia and sports apologia. Because of this hybrid position, large sports organizations like the NFL have distinctive rhetorical resources and constraints not encountered by typical organizations. My analysis highlighted two resources and one constraint that sports corporations must negotiate in their public relations campaigns.

One important resource the NFL has at its disposal is the cultural significance of the sport as an institution. It has been frequently maintained that professional sports are a widely consumed cultural resource that can lead to increased public goods such as community spirit and civic pride.²⁶⁹ As highlighted in my analysis, the NFL often reminded the audience of its important societal value through discursive and visual symbols, including through the ubiquitous use of the NFL logo on television broadcasts and press release memos, and reference to the importance of “the game” in American life.

However, while the sport of football itself constitutes an important resource for the NFL, sports corporations nonetheless face their own unique challenges. In part, because of the public’s emotional connection to a sport, sports institutions may have greater expectations of morality from the same public that cherishes them. When, for example, sports institutions fail to adequately convey a proper amount of sincerity, the public is more critical than they may be of a traditional corporation, whose product may not be so closely linked with the civic and community pride attached to a sports team. Furthermore, because sports corporations are so closely linked to youth teams, there is an additional

moral expectation to which they must adhere. For example, like many professional sports teams, the NFL often works with high school football squads. This close connection to young athletes may only bolster the need for a sincere display of remorse because the public is often hypercritical of poor ethics when young students are involved.

Rhetoric of Domestic Violence

In addition to highlighting the ways in which the NFL intersects apologia and organizational communication theory to improve the success of its discourse, this project also highlights a number of ways in which domestic violence scandals, specifically, should be addressed. In discussing domestic violence, the NFL's discourse was largely successful and was rooted in two main tactics: first, the NFL often called upon its education and training programs to show an initiative in changing its attitude towards domestic violence cases, and second, the NFL took measurable steps to illustrate how domestic violence transcends the organization and instead exists as a larger societal problem. While domestic violence can be a perilous crisis for any individual or corporation to navigate, through relying on education, which is generally viewed as favorable by the audience, corporations are better able to speak on the subject without engaging in emotional language. Similarly, a focus on the ways in which domestic violence transcends the NFL and is instead a product of American culture helps to alleviate the blame placed directly on the NFL.

While the NFL succeeded in many ways when discussing domestic violence, one area in which it could have improved was by more sensitively addressing the suffering of victims of domestic violence. Throughout the scandal many critics sought a more profound statement of remorse for Janay Rice, Nicole Holder, and the other women brutalized by the players. After the scandal, a select number of player wives came forward claiming the NFL

attempted to guilt them into silence.²⁷⁰ The article, published by *The Washington Post*, highlighted a dangerous trend among NFL spouses, where, as an anonymous ex-wife of a Saint's player said, "You get brainwashed. It's so ingrained that you protect the player, you just stay quiet. You learn that your role is to be a supportive NFL wife."²⁷¹ The article's publicity, combined with Janay Rice's statement that the Ravens' told her how to apologize during her first press conference, highlights the tendency in the NFL to ignore the needs of the victims of domestic violence.²⁷² It is important in speaking on domestic violence to not only discuss the changes being made to help the players, but to demonstrate assistance for the victims as well. Very rarely in their discourse does the NFL incorporate statements that express remorse or introduce resources available for victims, and this could be an important rhetorical direction in which the NFL, and other organizations facing similar crises, could expand. Although the NFL's discourse succeeded despite the minimal inclusion of victim-centered discourse, a stronger statement in support of the female victims could help counteract the public claim that the NFL does not care about women.

Further Research

This project analyzed the NFL's response to the domestic violence scandal, relying on well-grounded theories of apologia and organizational image management to evaluate the NFL's rhetoric and to account for its relatively successful public-relations campaign. However, there were many areas in which this project could have expanded, including a deeper investigation into the racial dimensions of the rhetoric surrounding football in the United States. Recently, two white quarterbacks, who were well respected in both their collegiate and professional careers, earned negative media attention for acts of alleged domestic violence and sexual assault. Because all of the NFL players in this study who were

publically accused of committing domestic violence in 2014 were African Americans, future research could evaluate the racial components of domestic-abuse accusations, as well as the public response to these incidents. Investigating the different language used when discussing the crimes of white players could highlight the disparate treatment of African-American players, especially in a sport that is composed of two-thirds African-American men.²⁷³

Final Thoughts

Domestic violence is an ongoing problem in the NFL, yet, not since 2014 has the NFL faced such loud, public outrage for its treatment of this problem. In part, this can be attributed to the NFL's largely successful public-relations campaign. By employing certain strategies and principles of apologia explained by theorists from rhetoric and organization communication, the NFL established its credibility in dealing with domestic violence scandals. However, scandals in sports institutions are an ever-present reality. Whether responding to controversies regarding concussions in football or steroid use in baseball, the genre of corporate sports apologia is a growing, ongoing type of rhetorical discourse that is worthy of further academic attention. As previous scholars have highlighted, sports constitute an important component of the American identity and thus serve a powerful role in signifying American ideology. Deconstructing the rhetoric of sports institutions can yield valuable insight concerning what it means to be an American in the twenty-first century.

Notes

1 Curtis Eichelberger, “Sports Revenue to Reach \$67.7 billion by 2017, PWC Report Says,” *Bloomberg*, last modified November 12, 2013, <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2013-11-13/sports-revenue-to-reach-67-7-billion-by-2017-pwc-report-says>

2 Darren Rovell, “NFL most popular for 30th year in a row”, *ESPN*, last modified January 26, 2014, http://espn.go.com/nfl/story/_/id/10354114/harris-poll-nfl-most-popular-mlb-2nd

Eric Chemi, “If the NFL Were a Real Business”, *Bloomberg.com*, last modified September 12, 2014, <http://www.bloomberg.com/bw/articles/2014-09-12/if-the-nfl-were-a-real-business>

3 Joyce D. Duncan, “Introduction,” in *From Ali to X-Games: Sport in American Culture*, ed. Joyce D. Duncan (Santa Barbara: ABC CLIO, Inc, 2004): xiiv.

4 Michael L. Butterworth, *Baseball and the Rhetoric of Purity* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2010): 2.

5 The database of NFL player arrests is updated as arrests are made, to see the entire list: Brent Schrottenboer, “NFL Player Arrests,” *USA Today*, last modified September 30, 2015, <http://www.usatoday.com/sports/nfl/arrests/>

6 Gregg Rosenthal, “Davone Bess Arrested at Airport on Multiple Charges”, *NFL*, last modified January 17, 2014, <http://www.nfl.com/news/story/0ap2000000314399/article/davone-bess-arrested-at-airport-on-multiple-charges>

Louis Bien, “A complete timeline of the Ray Rice assault case”, *SB Nation*, last modified November 28, 2014, <http://www.baltimoresun.com/sports/ravens/ravens-insider/bal-ravens-reserve-offensive-lineman-jah-reid-arrested-charged-with-misdemeanor-battery-20140309-story.html>

Jeff Legwold, “T.J. Ward says incident behind him”, *ESPN*, last modified May 28, 2014, http://espn.go.com/nfl/story/_/id/10997254/tj-ward-denver-broncos-says-recent-arrest-blown-proportion

Bryan Rose, “Details emerge in arrest of Carolina Panthers defensive end Greg Hardy”, *Sports Illustrated*, last modified June 14, 2014, <http://www.si.com/nfl/audibles/2014/05/14/details-emerge-greg-hardy-arrest-carolina-panthers>

Aaron Wilson, “Ravens’ Jah Reid arrested, charged with misdemeanor battery in Key West,” *Baltimore Sun*, last modified March 9, 2014, <http://www.baltimoresun.com/sports/ravens/ravens-insider/bal-ravens-reserve-offensive-lineman-jah-reid-arrested-charged-with-misdemeanor-battery-20140309-story.html>

Aaron Wilson, "Bears WR Josh Morgan arrested for assault", *National Football Post*, Last modified April 28, 2014, <http://www.nationalfootballpost.com/bears-wr-josh-morgan-arrested-for-assault/>

Michael David Smith, "Report: Eagle's Keelan Johnson arrested for assaulting police officer", *Pro-Football Talk*, last modified July 21, 2014, <http://profootballtalk.nbcsports.com/2014/07/21/report-eagles-keelan-johnson-arrested-for-assaulting-police-officer/>

"Jo-Lonn Dunbar arrested after fight with NBA free agent Donte Greene outside club", *ESPN*, last modified July 20, 2014, http://espn.go.com/nfl/story/_/id/11239131/st-louis-rams-jo-lonn-dunbar-arrested-fight-nba-free-agent-donte-greene-club

"Police: Jonathan Dwyer hit wife, son", *ESPN*, last modified September 18, 2014, http://espn.go.com/nfl/story/_/id/11547511/police-report-says-jonathan-dwyer-arizona-cardinals-head-butted-punched-wife-struck-young-son-shoe

Des Bieler, "The details of Adrian Peterson's arrest are disturbing", *Washington Post*, last modified September 12, 2014, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/early-lead/wp/2014/09/12/the-details-of-adrian-petersons-arrest-are-disturbing/>

Dan Hanzus, "Ray McDonald arrested on domestic assault charges", *NFL*, last modified September 1, 2014, <http://www.nfl.com/news/story/0ap3000000386508/article/ray-mcdonald-arrested-on-domestic-violence-charges>

7. "Key Events in the Ray Rice Story," *CNN.com*, last modified September 16, 2014, <http://www.cnn.com/2014/09/09/us/ray-rice-timeline/>.

8. Gabriel Sherman, "The Season from Hell: Inside Roger Goodell's Ruthless Football Machine," *GQ*, last updated January 19, 2015, <http://www.gq.com/story/roger-goodell-season-from-hell>

9. James A. Herrick, "An Overview of Rhetoric," in *Rhetoric: An Introduction*, ed. James A. Herrick (Boston: Pearson Education Inc, 2009), 8.

10. Andrej Skerlep, "Re-evaluating the Role of Rhetoric in Public Relations Theory and in Strategies of Corporate Discourse," *Journal of Communication Management* 6, no. 2 (2001): 182.

11. Jimmy Sanderson, Melinda Weathers, Alexia Grevious, Maggie Tehan, and Samantha Warren, "A Hero or Sissy? Exploring Media Framing of the NFL Quarterback Injury Decision," *Communication Studies* (2014): 4.

12. Nick Trujillo, "Hegemonic Masculinity on the Mound: Media Representations of Nolan Ryan and American Sports Culture", *Critical Studies in Media* 8, no. 3 (1991): 14.

13. Michael L. Butterworth, "Militarism and Memorialization at the Pro Football Hall of Fame," *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* 9, no. 3 (2012): 241-258.

Tricia Jenkins, "The Militarization of American Professional Sports: How the Sports-War Intertext Influences Athletic Rituals and Sports Media", *Journal of Sports & Social Issues* 37, no. 3 (2013).

14. Eric Anderson and Edward M. Kian, "Examining Media Contestation of Masculinity and Head Trauma within the National Football League", *Men and Masculinities* 15, no. 2 (2012): 156.

15. Dan Diamond, "Does Playing Football Make You Violent? Examining the Evidence", *Forbes*, last modified September 16, 2014, <http://www.forbes.com/sites/dandiamond/2014/09/16/does-football-make-you-violent-examining-the-evidence/>

16. Dan Diamond, "NFL Player have 30% Chance of Alzheimer's or Dementia, New NFL Concussion Data Suggests", *Forbes*, last modified September 12, 2014, <http://www.forbes.com/sites/dandiamond/2014/09/12/nfl-players-have-30-chance-of-alzheimers-or-dementia-new-nfl-concussion-data-suggests/>

17. Anahad O'Connor, "Head Injuries on the Football Field", *New York Times*, last updated: September 8, 2011, http://well.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/09/08/head-blows-on-the-football-field/?_r=0

18. For reference see: Jimmy Sanderson, Melinda Weathers, Alexia Grevious, Maggie Tehan, and Samantha Warren, "A Hero or Sissy? Exploring Media Framing of the NFL Quarterback Injury Decision," *Communication Studies* (2014).

19. Julia Laurie, "Lawmakers to NFL: Cheerleaders Deserve to be Treated like Human Beings," *MotherJones.com*, last updated: September 9, 2015, <http://www.motherjones.com/mojo/2015/09/nfl-lawmakers-roger-goodell-cheerleaders-minimum-wage>

20. John Breech, "Cheerleaders reach \$1.25 million settlement in lawsuit against Raiders," *CBSSports.com*, last updated: September 4, 2014, <http://www.cbssports.com/nfl/eye-on-football/24694782/cheerleaders-reach-125-million-settlement-in-lawsuit-against-raiders>

21. Beth Teitell, "In wake of Ray Rice case, NFL's troubles weigh on fans," *Boston Globe*, last modified September 10, 2014, <https://www.bostonglobe.com/lifestyle/style/2014/09/09/footballunease/0CWpvgKKGPAHGdLam8D25K/story.html>

22. For fan quotes on the Ray Rice scandal, see: Gary Mihoces, “Ravens fans offer mixed reactions of Ray Rice’s release,” *USA Today*, last modified September 8, 2014, <http://www.usatoday.com/story/sports/nfl/ravens/2014/09/08/ray-rice-release-fan-reaction-maryland-baltimore/15303121/>

The twitter hashtag “BoycottNFL” can be viewed at <https://twitter.com/hashtag/boycottnfl>

23. Erin Gloria Ryan, “Face It, Women: The NFL Does Not Give a Shit About You,” *Jezebel*, last modified July 26, 2014, <http://jezebel.com/face-it-women-the-nfl-does-not-give-a-shit-about-you-1611011188>

Erin Gloria Ryan, “If You Care About Women and Still Support the NFL, You are a Hypocrite,” *Jezebel*, last modified September 8, 2014, <http://jezebel.com/if-you-care-about-women-and-still-support-the-nfl-you-1631903485>

24. Ken Belson, “N.F.L. Domestic Violence Policy Toughened in Wake of Ray Rice Case”, *New York Times*, August 28, 2014, <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/08/29/sports/football/roger-goodell-admits-he-was-wrong-and-alters-nfl-policy-on-domestic-violence.html>

25. Gregg Rosenthal, “Ray Rice released by Ravens, indefinitely suspended”, *NFL.com*, September 8, 2014, <http://www.nfl.com/news/story/0ap3000000391538/article/ray-rice-released-by-ravens-indefinitely-suspended>

26. Michael Rosenberg, “Goodell finally speaks, but he shows he still doesn’t get it”, *Sports Illustrated*, September 19, 2014 <http://www.si.com/nfl/2014/09/19/roger-goodell-nfl-press-conference-ray-rice-adrian-peterson-greg-hardy>.

27. Jay Busbee, “Superbowl XLIX was the most viewed television program in U.S. history,” *Yahoo Sports*, last modified February 2, 2015, <http://sports.yahoo.com/blogs/nfl-shutdown-corner/super-bowl-sets-viewership-record-161138960.html>.

28. Jay Busbee, “Superbowl XLIX was the most-viewed television program in U.S. history”, *Yahoo Sports*, February 2, 2015, <http://sports.yahoo.com/blogs/nfl-shutdown-corner/super-bowl-sets-viewership-record-161138960.html>.

Edwin Molina, “NFL News: 2015 Super Bowl Ads Sales Continue to Roll in Despite Ray Rice, Adrian Peterson Controversies”, *Latin Post*, December 26, 2014, <http://www.latinpost.com/articles/28402/20141226/nfl-super-bowl-ad-sales-ray-rice-adrian-peterson-controversies.htm>.

29. Ellen Reid Gold, “Political Apologia: The Ritual of Self-Defense”, *Communication Monographs* 23, no. 3 (1997), 307.

30. B. L. Ware and Wil A. Linkugel, "They Spoke in Defense of Themselves: On the Generic Criticism of Apologia", in *Readings in Rhetorical Criticism*, ed. Carl R. Burghardt, Fourth Edition (Pennsylvania: Strata Publishing, 2010), 462.

Keith Michael Hearit, "Apologies and Public Relations Crises at Chrysler, Toshiba, and Volvo," *Public Relations Review* 20, no.2 (1994), 115.

31. Halford Ross Ryan, "*Kategoria and Apologia: On Their Rhetorical Criticism as a Speech Set*," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 68, no.3 (1982), 255.

32. Keith Michael Hearit, "On the Use of Transcendence as an Apologia Strategy: The Case of Johnson Controls and its Fetal Protection Policy," *Public Relations Review* 23, no. 3(1997).

33 Ibid, 256.

34. Keith Michael Hearit and Jennifer Brown, "Merrill Lynch: Corporate Apologia and Business Fraud," *Public Relations Review* 30 (2004), 464.

35. Ellen Reid Gold, "Political Apologia: The Ritual of Self-Defense", *Communication Monographs* 23, no. 3 (1997), 311.

36. Lloyd Bitzer, "The Rhetorical Situation," in *Readings in Rhetorical Criticism*, ed. Carl R. Burghardt, Fourth Edition (Pennsylvania: Strata Publishing, 2010), 46-55.

37. Ibid, 311.

38. Ibid, 312.

39. B. L. Ware and Wil A. Linkugel, "They Spoke in Defense of Themselves: On the Generic Criticism of Apologia", in *Readings in Rhetorical Criticism*, ed. Carl R. Burghardt, Fourth Edition (Pennsylvania: Strata Publishing, 2010), 464.

40 Ibid, 464-465.

41 Ibid, 466-467.

42 Ibid, 469.

43. Ibid

44 Noreen W. Kruse, "Apologia in Team Sport," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 67, no. 3 (1981): 274.

45 Ibid, 277.

-
- 46 Ibid, 278.
- 47 Ibid, 279.
- 48 Noreen W. Kruse, "Apologia in Team Sport," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 67, no. 3 (1981): 280.
- 49 Ibid, 282.
- 50 Ibid, 281.
- 51 Keith Michael Hearit, *Crisis Management by Apology* (Mahwah, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2006), 3.
- 52 Robert C. Rowland and Angela M. Jerome, "On Organizational Apologia: A Reconceptualization," *Communication Theory* 14, no. 3 (2004): 195.
- 53 Keith Michael Hearit, *Crisis Management by Apology* (Mahwah, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2006), 15.
- 54 Ibid, 16-17.
- 55 Robert C. Rowland and Angela M. Jerome, "On Organizational Apologia: A Reconceptualization," *Communication Theory* 14, no. 3 (2004): 195.
- 56 Ibid, 196.
- 57 Jane E. Dutton and Janet M. Dukerich, "Keeping an Eye on the Mirror: Image and Identity in Organizational Adaptation," *The Academy of Management Journal* 34, no. 3 (1991): 548.
- 58 Ibid, 198.
- 59 Angela M. Jerome and Robert C. Rowland, "The Rhetoric of Inter-organizational Conflict: A Subgenre of Organizational Apologia," *Western Journal of Communication* 73, no. 4(2009): 396.
- 60 Edgar H. Schein, "Coming to a New Awareness of Organizational Culture", *Sloan Management Review* 25, no. 2 (1984), 3.
- 61 George G. Gordon, "Industry Determinants of Organizational Culture", *The Academy of Management Review* 16, no.2 (1991): 399.
- 62 Lloyd Bitzer, "The Rhetorical Situation," in *Readings in Rhetorical Criticism*, ed. Carl R. Burghardt, Fourth Edition (Pennsylvania: Strata Publishing, 2010), 46-55.

63. W. Randy Boxx, Randall Y. Odom, and Mark G. Dunn, "Organizational Values and Value Congruency and Their Impact on Satisfaction, Commitment, and Cohesion: An Empirical Examination within the Public Sector", *Public Personnel Management* 20, no. 1 (1991), 195.

64. George Cheney and Lars Thøger Christensen, "Organizational Identity: Linkages Between Internal and External Communication", in *The New Handbook of Organizational Communication: Advances in Theory, Research, and Methods*, eds. Frederic M. Jablin and Linda L. Putman (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications Inc, 2001), 243.

65. Ibid, 243.

66. The database of NFL player arrests is updated as arrests are made, to see the entire list: Brent Schrotenboer, "NFL Player Arrests," *USA Today*, last modified September 30, 2015, <http://www.usatoday.com/sports/nfl/arrests/>

67. Don Van Natta Jr. and Kevin Van Valkenberg, "Rice case: purposeful misdirection by team, scant investigation by NFL," *ESPN*, last modified September 19, 2014, http://espn.go.com/espn/otl/story/_/id/11551518/how-ray-rice-scandal-unfolded-baltimore-ravens-roger-goodell-nfl

68. Patricia Clark, "Ray Rice Arrested After Altercation in Atlantic City Casino," *Bleacher Report*, last modified July 24, 2014, <http://bleacherreport.com/articles/1962592-ray-rice-arrested-after-altercation-in-atlantic-city-casino>

69. Don Van Natta Jr. and Kevin Van Valkenberg, "Rice case: purposeful misdirection by team, scant investigation by NFL," *ESPN*, last modified September 19, 2014, http://espn.go.com/espn/otl/story/_/id/11551518/how-ray-rice-scandal-unfolded-baltimore-ravens-roger-goodell-nfl

70. Ibid.

71. Ibid.

72. Don Van Natta Jr. and Kevin Van Valkenberg, "Rice case: purposeful misdirection by team, scant investigation by NFL," *ESPN*, last modified September 19, 2014, http://espn.go.com/espn/otl/story/_/id/11551518/how-ray-rice-scandal-unfolded-baltimore-ravens-roger-goodell-nfl

73. Ibid

74. Ibid.

75. Patricia Clark, "Ray Rice Arrested After Altercation in Atlantic City Casino," *Bleacher Report*, last modified July 24, 2014, <http://bleacherreport.com/articles/1962592-ray-rice-arrested-after-altercation-in-atlantic-city-casino>

76. Robert Mueller, "Report to the National Football League of an Independent Investigation into the Ray Rice Incident," *NFL*, January 8, 2015, <http://static.nfl.com/static/content/public/photo/2015/01/08/0ap3000000455484.pdf>

77. CNN Staff, "Key events in the Ray Rice story," *CNN*, last modified September 16, 2014, <http://www.cnn.com/2014/09/09/us/ray-rice-timeline/>

78. *Ibid.*

79. Kevin Conlon, "Baltimore Ravens Ray Rice indicted on assault charge," *CNN*, last modified March 27, 2015, <http://www.cnn.com/2014/03/27/us/sports-baltimore-raven-ray-rice-indicted/index.html>

80. *Ibid.*

81. *Ibid.*

82. ESPN.com, "Sources: Ray Rice gets married," *ESPN*, last modified March 31, 2014, http://espn.go.com/nfl/story/_/id/10693847/ray-rice-baltimore-ravens-gets-married-janay-palmer-one-day-indictment

83. Don Van Natta Jr. and Kevin Van Valkenberg, "Rice case: purposeful misdirection by team, scant investigation by NFL," *ESPN*, last modified September 19, 2014, http://espn.go.com/espn/otl/story/_/id/11551518/how-ray-rice-scandal-unfolded-baltimore-ravens-roger-goodell-nfl

John Barr and Don Van Natta Jr., "Program Ray Rice is in rarely granted," *ESPN*, last modified September 12, 2014, http://espn.go.com/espn/otl/story/_/id/11514871/judicial-figures-show-ray-rice-deal-offered-rarely

84. John Barr and Don Van Natta Jr., "Program Ray Rice is in rarely granted," *ESPN*, last modified September 12, 2014, http://espn.go.com/espn/otl/story/_/id/11514871/judicial-figures-show-ray-rice-deal-offered-rarely

85. Don Van Natta Jr. and Kevin Van Valkenberg, "Rice case: purposeful misdirection by team, scant investigation by NFL," *ESPN*, last modified September 19, 2014, http://espn.go.com/espn/otl/story/_/id/11551518/how-ray-rice-scandal-unfolded-baltimore-ravens-roger-goodell-nfl

86. The Baltimore Sun, "Full transcript from Ray Rice news conference," *ESPN*, last modified May 23, 2014, <http://www.baltimoresun.com/sports/ravens/ravens-insider/bal-full-transcript-from-ray-rice-news-conference-20140523-story.html>

Don Van Natta Jr. and Kevin Van Valkenberg, "Rice case: purposeful misdirection by team, scant investigation by NFL," *ESPN*, last modified September 19, 2014,

http://espn.go.com/espn/otl/story/_/id/11551518/how-ray-rice-scandal-unfolded-baltimore-ravens-roger-goodell-nfl

87. Will Brinson, "Ravens delete tone-deaf Janay Rice tweet from May," *CBS*, last modified September 8, 2014, <http://www.cbssports.com/nfl/eye-on-football/24701630/ravens-delete-tone-deaf-janay-rice-tweet-from-may>

Barry Petchesky, "The Ravens *Just Deleted That Terrible Janay Rice Tweet*," *Deadspin*, last modified September 8, 2014, <http://deadspin.com/the-ravens-just-deleted-that-terrible-janay-rice-tweet-1632105673>

88. Jay Glazer, "Glazer: What's next for Ray Rice?" *Fox Sports*, last modified November 30, 2014, <http://www.foxsports.com/nfl/story/janay-rice-ray-rice-baltimore-ravens-today-show-interview-120114>

89. ESPN.com Staff, "Timeline of events in Greg Hardy case," *ESPN.com*, last updated: July 10, 2015, http://espn.go.com/blog/dallas-cowboys/post/_/id/4743265/timeline-of-events-in-greg-hardy-case

90. Don Van Natta Jr. and Kevin Van Valkenberg, "Rice case: purposeful misdirection by team, scant investigation by NFL," *ESPN*, last modified September 19, 2014, http://espn.go.com/espn/otl/story/_/id/11551518/how-ray-rice-scandal-unfolded-baltimore-ravens-roger-goodell-nfl

91. Don Van Natta Jr. and Kevin Van Valkenberg, "Rice case: purposeful misdirection by team, scant investigation by NFL," *ESPN*, last modified September 19, 2014, http://espn.go.com/espn/otl/story/_/id/11551518/how-ray-rice-scandal-unfolded-baltimore-ravens-roger-goodell-nfl

92. Peter King, "The Ray Rice Fallout," *Sports Illustrated*, last modified July 25, 2014, <http://mmqb.si.com/2014/07/25/ray-rice-nfl-suspension-ravens>

93. Matt Fitzgerald, "Ray Rice Suspended 2 Games: Latest Details and Reaction," *CNN*, last modified July 24, 2014, <http://bleacherreport.com/articles/2099575-ray-rice-reportedly-suspended-2-games-latest-details-and-reaction>

94. Marc Sessler, "Ravens' Ray Rice suspended two games by NFL," *NFL*, last modified July 24, 2014, <http://www.nfl.com/news/story/0ap2000000367971/article/ravens-ray-rice-suspended-two-games-by-nfl>

95. The full letter can be viewed on Senator Blumenthal's website, it is dated July 31, 2014: <http://www.blumenthal.senate.gov/newsroom/press/release/senators-call-on-nfl-baltimore-ravens-to-impose-stiffer-penalty-on-ray-rice-encourage-league-to-develop-procedures-to-handle-domestic-violence>

96. Marc Edelman, "Ray Rice Suspension is in Line with NFL Precedent for Domestic Abuse, But Not with Goodell's Other Punishments," *Forbes*, last modified August 4, 2014, <http://www.forbes.com/sites/marcedelman/2014/08/04/ray-rice-suspension-is-in-line-with-nfl-precedent-for-domestic-abuse-but-not-with-goodells-other-punishments/>

97. Don Van Natta Jr. and Kevin Van Valkenberg, "Rice case: purposeful misdirection by team, scant investigation by NFL," *ESPN*, last modified September 19, 2014, http://espn.go.com/espn/otl/story/_/id/11551518/how-ray-rice-scandal-unfolded-baltimore-ravens-roger-goodell-nfl

98. Don Van Natta Jr. and Kevin Van Valkenberg, "Rice case: purposeful misdirection by team, scant investigation by NFL," *ESPN*, last modified September 19, 2014, http://espn.go.com/espn/otl/story/_/id/11551518/how-ray-rice-scandal-unfolded-baltimore-ravens-roger-goodell-nfl

99. CNN Staff, "Key events in the Ray Rice story," *CNN*, last modified September 16, 2014, <http://www.cnn.com/2014/09/09/us/ray-rice-timeline/>

100. Don Van Natta Jr. and Kevin Van Valkenberg, "Rice case: purposeful misdirection by team, scant investigation by NFL," *ESPN*, last modified September 19, 2014, http://espn.go.com/espn/otl/story/_/id/11551518/how-ray-rice-scandal-unfolded-baltimore-ravens-roger-goodell-nfl

101. Lorenzo Reyes, "Roger Goodell defends Ray Rice's two game suspension," *USA Today*, last modified August 1, 2014, <http://www.usatoday.com/story/sports/nfl/2014/08/01/roger-goodell-ray-rice-suspension-baltimore-ravens/13468921/>

102. Don Van Natta Jr. and Kevin Van Valkenberg, "Rice case: purposeful misdirection by team, scant investigation by NFL," *ESPN*, last modified September 19, 2014, http://espn.go.com/espn/otl/story/_/id/11551518/how-ray-rice-scandal-unfolded-baltimore-ravens-roger-goodell-nfl

103. Ibid

104. Michael Schotkey, "Goodell's Domestic Violence Policy Gets First Test with Ray McDonald Arrest," *Bleacher Report*, last modified August 31, 2014, <http://bleacherreport.com/articles/2182433-goodells-new-domestic-violence-policy-gets-first-test-with-ray-mcdonald-arrest>

105. Ibid

106. Tom Pelissero, "Roger Goodell: NFL won't act rashly in Ray McDonald domestic violence case," *USA Today*, last modified September 4, 2014,

<http://www.usatoday.com/story/sports/nfl/2014/09/03/roger-goodell-domestic-violence-policy-ray-mcdonald/15049501/>

107. Tim Keown, “No charges in Ray McDonald case,” *ESPN*, last modified November 10, 2014, http://espn.go.com/nfl/story/_/id/11852824/ray-mcdonald-san-francisco-49ers-cleared-domestic-violence-case

108 Steve DiMatteo, “A Timeline of the Adrian Peterson child abuse case,” *SB Nation*, last modified September 17, 2014, <http://www.sbnation.com/2014/9/17/6334793/adrian-peterson-child-abuse-statement-vikings-timeline>

ESPN.com Staff, “Timeline of events in Greg Hardy case,” *ESPN.com*, last updated: July 10, 2015, http://espn.go.com/blog/dallas-cowboys/post/_/id/4743265/timeline-of-events-in-greg-hardy-case

109. Louis Bein, “What is the NFL’s exempt/commissioner’s permission list, and what does it mean for Adrian Peterson?” *SBNation.com*, last updated September 17, 2014, <http://www.sbnation.com/nfl/2014/9/17/6333759/nfl-exempt-commissioners-permission-list-explanation-adrian-peterson-greg-hardy>

110. ESPN.com Staff, “Timeline of events in Greg Hardy case,” *ESPN.com*, last updated: July 10, 2015, http://espn.go.com/blog/dallas-cowboys/post/_/id/4743265/timeline-of-events-in-greg-hardy-case

111. Louis Bein, “What is the NFL’s exempt/commissioner’s permission list, and what does it mean for Adrian Peterson?” *SBNation.com*, last updated September 17, 2014, <http://www.sbnation.com/nfl/2014/9/17/6333759/nfl-exempt-commissioners-permission-list-explanation-adrian-peterson-greg-hardy>

112. Don Van Natta Jr. and Kevin Van Valkenberg, “Rice case: purposeful misdirection by team, scant investigation by NFL,” *ESPN*, last modified September 19, 2014, http://espn.go.com/espn/otl/story/_/id/11551518/how-ray-rice-scandal-unfolded-baltimore-ravens-roger-goodell-nfl

113. Ibid.

114. CNN Staff, “Key events in the Ray Rice story,” *CNN*, last modified September 16, 2014, <http://www.cnn.com/2014/09/09/us/ray-rice-timeline/>

115. CNN Staff, “Key events in the Ray Rice story,” *CNN*, last modified September 16, 2014, <http://www.cnn.com/2014/09/09/us/ray-rice-timeline/>

Don Van Natta Jr. and Kevin Van Valkenberg, “Rice case: purposeful misdirection by team, scant investigation by NFL,” *ESPN*, last modified September 19, 2014,

http://espn.go.com/espn/otl/story/_/id/11551518/how-ray-rice-scandal-unfolded-baltimore-ravens-roger-goodell-nfl

116. Jeff Zrebiec, "Transcripts from interview with Ravens owner Steve Bisciotti, President Dick Cass, and GM Ozzie Newsome," *The Baltimore Sun*, last modified September 11, 2014, http://articles.baltimoresun.com/2014-09-11/sports/bal-transcript-of-interview-with-ravens-owner-steve-bisciotti-20140910_1_gm-ozzie-newsome-ray-rice-dick-cass

117. Ibid

118. Jeff Gray, "Ray Rice was honest with Roger Goodell about punching his fiancée, per report," *SB Nation*, last modified September 11, 2014, <http://www.sbnation.com/nfl/2014/9/11/6137789/ray-rice-admits-punch-roger-goodell/in/5191279>

119. Marissa Payne, "Women's group plans to fly #GoodellMustGo banners over NFL stadiums this weekend," *The Washington Post*, last modified September 12, 2014, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/early-lead/wp/2014/09/12/womens-group-plans-to-fly-goodellmustgo-banners-over-nfl-stadiums-this-weekend/>

120. Gael Fashingbauer Cooper, "6 best lines from Jon Stewart's scathing takedown of NFL, Roger Goodell," *USA Today*, last modified September 11, 2014, <http://www.today.com/health/marvel-superheroes-battle-bullying-special-comics-covers-1D80142409>

121. Drew Magary, "Hey, Roger, Get the Fuck Out," *Deadspin*, last modified September 11, 2014, <http://deadspin.com/hey-roger-get-the-fuck-out-1633264122>

122. Don Van Natta Jr. and Kevin Van Valkenberg, "Rice case: purposeful misdirection by team, scant investigation by NFL," *ESPN*, last modified September 19, 2014, http://espn.go.com/espn/otl/story/_/id/11551518/how-ray-rice-scandal-unfolded-baltimore-ravens-roger-goodell-nfl

123. Tom Pelissero, "NFL announces four women will help shape league policy," *ESPN*, last modified September 15, 2014, <http://www.usatoday.com/story/sports/nfl/2014/09/15/league-polices-women-roger-goodell/15664335/>

124. Darren Heitner, "The Women's Advocacy Group That Won't Give Up Until Roger Goodell Resigns," *Forbes*, last modified September 17, 2014, <http://www.forbes.com/sites/darrenheitner/2014/09/17/the-womens-advocacy-group-that-wont-give-up-until-roger-goodell-resigns/>

125. Bob Cramer, "Major NFL Sponsors, Anheuser Busch and Nike, React to Off-The-Field Trouble," *BidnessEtc*, last modified September 17,

2014,<http://www.bidnesstc.com/25839-major-nfl-sponsors-anheuser-busch-and-nike-react-to-offthefield-trouble/>

126. Ken Belson, "N.F.L. Domestic Violence Policy Toughened in Wake of Ray Rice Case", *New York Times*, August 28, 2014, <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/08/29/sports/football/roger-goodell-admits-he-was-wrong-and-alters-nfl-policy-on-domestic-violence.html>

127. Roger Goodell, September 19, 2014.

128. Laken Litman, "Rachel Nichols refused to let Roger Goodell off the hook", *USA Today*, September 19, 2014, <http://ftw.usatoday.com/2014/09/rachel-nichols-roger-goodell-nfl-press-conference>

129. Tom Ley, "Goodell: I Suck at My Job. Now Trust Me.", *Deadspin.com*, September 19, 2014, <http://deadspin.com/roger-goodell-finally-addresses-the-media-1636927907>

130. Michael Rosenberg, "Goodell finally speaks, but he still doesn't get it", *Sports Illustrated*, September 19, 2014, <http://www.si.com/nfl/2014/09/19/roger-goodell-nfl-press-conference-ray-rice-adrian-peterson-greg-hardy>

131. Jeff Gray, "Rodger Goodell spends 45 minutes mishandling questions", *SBNation*, September 19, 2014, <http://www.sbnation.com/nfl/2014/9/19/6538365/roger-goodell-press-conference-personal-conduct-policy-domestic-abuse>

132. Nina Mandell, "NFL players were unimpressed by Roger Goodell's press conference", *USA Today*, September 19, 2014, <http://ftw.usatoday.com/2014/09/roger-goodell-reaction>

133. Roger Goodell, "Actions in Support of Domestic Violence/ Sexual Assault Efforts," *NFL*, September 26, 2014, <http://static.nfl.com/static/content/public/photo/2014/09/26/0ap3000000401119.pdf>

134. Aaron Wilson, "In memo, Roger Goodell outlines actions taken against domestic violence, sexual assault," *The Baltimore Sun*, last modified October 3, 2014, <http://www.baltimoresun.com/sports/ravens/ravens-insider/bal-in-memo-nfl-outlines-actions-taken-toward-antidomestic-violence-sexual-assault-efforts-20141003-story.html>

135. Diana Moskovitz, "Goodell: Look At All The Talking I'm Doing About Domestic Violence," *Deadspin.com*, last modified October 3, 2015, <http://deadspin.com/goodell-look-at-all-the-talking-im-doing-about-domesti-1642133667>

136. Ryan Van Bibber, "NFL personal conduct policy are still just talk," *SB Nation*, last modified October 8, 2014, <http://www.sbnation.com/2014/10/8/6949091/nfl-domestic-abuse-policy-roger-goodell-ray-rice>

137. ESPN.com News Services, "Survey reveals NFL fans' opinions," *ESPN.com*, last modified October 8, 2015, http://espn.go.com/nfl/story/_/id/11662933/poll-shows-roger-goodell-stay-adrian-peterson-only-not-guilty

138. Jarrett Bell, "NFL owners unwavering in Goodell support," *USA Today*, last modified October 9, 2014, <http://www.usatoday.com/story/sports/nfl/2014/10/08/owners-meetings-roger-goodell-domestic-violence/16948139/>

139. Chris Cassidy, "Jonathan Kraft, defends Roger Goodell, admits concerns about season," *Boston Globe*, last modified October 3, 2014, http://www.bostonherald.com/news_opinion/local_coverage/2014/10/jonathan_kraft_defends_roger_goodell_admits_concerns_about

140. Josh Peter, "Former NFL exec: Teams hid 'hundreds' of abuse incidents," *USA Today*, last modified October 9, 2014, <http://www.usatoday.com/story/sports/nfl/2014/10/09/jerry-angelo-chicago-bears-national-football-league/16981865/>

141. Ryan Wilson, "New Jersey lawmakers call for Roger Goodell's resignation," *CBS Sports*, last modified October 16, 2014, <http://www.cbssports.com/nfl/eye-on-football/24754727/new-jersey-lawmakers-call-for-roger-goodells-resignation>

142. Simone Sebastian and Ines Bebea, "For battered NFL wives, a message from the cops and the league: Keep quiet," *The Washington Post*, October 17, 2014, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/posteverything/wp/2014/10/17/for-battered-nfl-wives-a-message-from-the-cops-and-the-league-keep-quiet/>

143. Don Van Natta Jr., "Transcript shows inconsistencies in Goodell's testimony on Rice matter," *ESPN*, December 10, 2014, http://espn.go.com/espn/otl/story/_/id/12009808/nfl-commissioner-roger-goodell-testimony-ray-rice-hearing

144. Ben Eagle, "Cowboys gamble on Greg Hardy, giving him one-year, prove-it deal," *Sports Illustrated*, last updated: March 18, 2015, <http://www.si.com/nfl/2015/03/18/dallas-cowboys-sign-greg-hardy-deal>

145. Dan Hanzus, "Hardy suspension reduced to four games," *NFL.com*, last updated: July 11, 2015, <http://www.nfl.com/news/story/0ap3000000500985/article/greg-hardy-suspension-reduced-to-four-games>

146. TMZ Staff, "Dallas Cowboys' Greg Hardy NFL Reduces Suspension to Just Four Games," *TMZ*, last updated: July 10, 2015, <http://www.tMZ.com/2015/07/10/greg-hardey-suspension-reduced-4-games/>

147. Mark Maske, "What does the reduction of Greg Hardy's suspension mean for future NFL disciplinary cases?" *The Washington Post*, last updated July 13, 2015, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/sports/wp/2015/07/13/what-does-the-reduction-of-greg-hardys-suspension-mean-for-future-nfl-disciplinary-cases/>

148. Diana Moskovitz, "This is Why NFL Star Greg Hardy Was Arrested for Assaulting his Ex-Girlfriend," *Deadspin.com*, last updated: November 6, 2015, <http://deadspin.com/this-is-why-nfl-star-greg-hardy-was-arrested-for-assaul-1739117634>

149. Mike Florio, "Clarifying Greg Hardy's Contract with the Cowboys," *NBC Sports*, last updated November 14, 2015, <http://profootballtalk.nbcsports.com/2015/11/14/clarifying-greg-hardys-contract-with-the-cowboys/>

150. Amy Patterson Neubert, "PR prof on NFL's winning image, 50th Super Bowl," February 1, 2016, <https://www.purdue.edu/newsroom/releases/2016/Q1/pr-prof-on-nfls-winning-image,-50th-super-bowl.html>

151. Kevin Patra, "Super Bowl XLIX most-watched show in U.S. history," last updated February 2, 2015, <http://www.nfl.com/news/story/0ap3000000467823/article/super-bowl-xlix-is-mostwatched-show-in-us-history>

152. Michael O'Keefe, "UltraViolet poll: Domestic violence controversy hurts NFL's standings with women," *New York Daily News*, last updated: January 28, 2015, <http://www.nydailynews.com/blogs/iteam/poll-domestic-violence-scandal-hurts-nfl-women-blog-entry-1.2095323>

153. John C. Lammers and Joshua B. Barbours, "An Institutional Theory of Organizational Communication," *Communication Theory* 16, no. 3 (2006): 358.

154. Ibid: 365.

155. Ibid, 467.

156. B. L. Ware and Wil A. Linkugel, "They Spoke in Defense of Themselves: On the Generic Criticism of Apologia", in *Readings in Rhetorical Criticism*, ed. Carl R. Burgchardt, Fourth Edition (Pennsylvania: Strata Publishing, 2010), 465.

157. "Roger Goodell defends Ray Rice ban," *ESPN.com*, last updated August 1, 2014, http://espn.go.com/nfl/story/_/id/11296028/roger-goodell-defends-suspension-ray-rice-baltimore-ravens-running-back

158. "Roger Goodell defends Ray Rice ban," *ESPN.com*, last updated August 1, 2014, http://espn.go.com/nfl/story/_/id/11296028/roger-goodell-defends-suspension-ray-rice-baltimore-ravens-running-back

159. "NFL commissioner addresses domestic violence," *CNN.com*, last edited August 28, 2014, <http://www.cnn.com/2014/08/28/sport/nfl-goodell-domestic-violence-memo/>

160. Roger Goodell's September 19, 2014 press conference transcript can be found at <http://edition.cnn.com/TRANSCRIPTS/1409/19/cnr.07.html>

161. Roger Goodell's September 19, 2014 press conference transcript can be found at <http://edition.cnn.com/TRANSCRIPTS/1409/19/cnr.07.html>

162. Roger Goodell's September 19, 2014 press conference transcript can be found at <http://edition.cnn.com/TRANSCRIPTS/1409/19/cnr.07.html>

163. Conor Orr, "Robert Mueller releases report on Rice investigation," *NFL.com*, last updated January 8, 2015, <http://www.nfl.com/news/story/0ap3000000455483/article/robert-mueller-releases-report-on-rice-investigation>

164. Tom Pelissero, "NFL announces four women will help shape league policy," *USA Today*, last edited: September 15, 2015, <http://www.usatoday.com/story/sports/nfl/2014/09/15/league-polices-women-roger-goodell/15664335/>

165. "League statement on Greg Hardy's suspension", *NFL.com*, last updated: April 22, 2015, <http://www.nfl.com/news/story/0ap3000000487506/article/league-statement-on-greg-hardys-suspension>

166. "League statement on Greg Hardy's suspension", *NFL.com*, last updated: April 22, 2015, <http://www.nfl.com/news/story/0ap3000000487506/article/league-statement-on-greg-hardys-suspension>

167. Ibid

168. Ibid

169. William C. Mann and Sandra A. Thompson, "Rhetorical Structure Theory: Towards a Functional Theory of Text Organization," *Interdisciplinary Journal for the Study of Discourse* 8, no. 3 (2009): 243.

170. Maite Taboada and William C. Mann, "Applications of Rhetorical Structure Theory," *Discourse Studies* 8, no. 4 (2006): 569.

-
171. "NFL commissioner addresses domestic violence," *CNN.com*, last edited August 28, 2014, <http://www.cnn.com/2014/08/28/sport/nfl-goodell-domestic-violence-memo/>
172. "NFL commissioner addresses domestic violence," *CNN.com*, last edited August 28, 2014, <http://www.cnn.com/2014/08/28/sport/nfl-goodell-domestic-violence-memo/>
173. Roger Goodell's September 19, 2014 press conference transcript can be found at <http://edition.cnn.com/TRANSCRIPTS/1409/19/cnr.07.html>
174. Sandra L. Borden, *Journalism as Practice: MacIntyre, Virtue Ethics and the Press* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 27.
175. Sandra L. Borden, "Press Apologia: A New Paradigm for the New Transparency?" *Journal of Mass Media Ethics* 27 (2012): 18.
176. Robert R. Ulmer and Timothy L. Sellnow, "Consistent Questions of Ambiguity in Organizational Crisis Communication: Jack in the Box as a Case Study," *Journal of Business Ethics* 25 (2000): 147.
177. Robert R. Ulmer and Timothy L. Sellnow, "Strategic Ambiguity and the Ethics of Significant Choice in the Tobacco Industry's Crisis Communication," *Communication Studies* 48 (1997), 217.
178. Robert R. Ulmer and Timothy L. Sellnow, "Strategic Ambiguity and the Ethics of Significant Choice in the Tobacco Industry's Crisis Communication," *Communication Studies* 48 (1997), 217.
179. B. L. Ware and Wil A. Linkugel, "They Spoke in Defense of Themselves: On the Generic Criticism of Apologia", in *Readings in Rhetorical Criticism*, ed. Carl R. Burghardt, Fourth Edition (Pennsylvania: Strata Publishing, 2010), 462.
180. Robert R. Ulmer and Timothy L. Sellnow, "Consistent Questions of Ambiguity in Organizational Crisis Communication: Jack in the Box as a Case Study," *Journal of Business Ethics* 25 (2000): 147.
181. Robert R. Ulmer and Timothy L. Sellnow, "Strategic Ambiguity and the Ethic of Significant Choice in the Tobacco Industry's Crisis Communication," *Communication Studies* 48 (1997): 219.
182. Dani Bostick, "What you need to know about the NFL's Substance Abuse Policy," *SB Nation*, last updated: August 28, 2015, <http://www.behindthesteelcurtain.com/pittsburgh-steelers-nfl-features-news-blog-long-form/2015/8/28/9218621/what-you-need-to-know-about-the-nfls-substance-abuse-policies-martavis-bryant-steelers>

183. "Roger Goodell defends Ray Rice ban," *ESPN.com*, last updated August 1, 2014, http://espn.go.com/nfl/story/_/id/11296028/roger-goodell-defends-suspension-ray-rice-baltimore-ravens-running-back

184. "NFL commissioner addresses domestic violence," *CNN.com*, last edited August 28, 2014, <http://www.cnn.com/2014/08/28/sport/nfl-goodell-domestic-violence-memo/>

185. "Re: Actions in Support of Domestic Violence/Sexual Assault Efforts," last updated September 26, 2014, <http://static.nfl.com/static/content/public/photo/2014/09/26/0ap3000000401119.pdf>

"NFL commissioner addresses domestic violence," *CNN.com*, last edited August 28, 2014, <http://www.cnn.com/2014/08/28/sport/nfl-goodell-domestic-violence-memo/>

Roger Goodell's September 19, 2014 press conference transcript can be found at <http://edition.cnn.com/TRANSCRIPTS/140919/cnr.07.html>

186. Robert R. Ulmer and Timothy L. Sellnow, "Strategic Ambiguity and the Ethic of Significant Choice in the Tobacco Industry's Crisis Communication," *Communication Studies* 48 (1997): 219.

187. Robert R. Ulmer and Timothy L. Sellnow, "Consistent Questions of Ambiguity in Organizational Crisis Communication: Jack in the Box as a Case Study," *Journal of Business Ethics* 25 (2000): 148.

188. Ibid

189. Ryan Reed, "John Oliver Criticize NFL's Vague Domestic Abuse Plan," *The Rolling Stones*, last updated, September 22, 2014, <http://www.rollingstone.com/tv/videos/watch-john-oliver-criticize-nfls-vague-stance-on-domestic-abuse-20140922>

Eleanor Goldberg, "NFL Makes Vague Pledge to Support Domestic Violence Groups," *Huffington Post*, last updated October 4, 2014, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/10/03/nfl-domestic-violence-groups_n_5928324.html

190. Robert R. Ulmer and Timothy L. Sellnow, "Strategic Ambiguity and the Ethic of Significant Choice in the Tobacco Industry's Crisis Communication," *Communication Studies* 48 (1997): 219.

191. George Cheney, *Rhetoric in an organizational society: Managing multiple identities* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1991): 5.

192. "NFL commissioner addresses domestic violence," *CNN.com*, last edited August 28, 2014, <http://www.cnn.com/2014/08/28/sport/nfl-goodell-domestic-violence-memo/>

Roger Goodell's September 19, 2014 press conference transcript can be found at <http://edition.cnn.com/TRANSCRIPTS/1409/19/cnr.07.html>

193. Timothy W. Coombs, Finn Frandsen, Sherry J. Holladay, & Winni Johansen, "Why a Concern for Apologia and Crisis Communication?" *Corporate Communication: An International Journal* 15, no. 4 (2010): 340.

194. R. Edward Freeman, "Stockholders and Stakeholders: A New Perspective on Corporate Governance," *California Management Review* XXV, no. 3 (1983): 91

195. Robert R. Ulmer and Timothy L. Sellnow, "Consistent Questions of Ambiguity in Organizational Crisis Communication: Jack in the Box as a Case Study," *Journal of Business Ethics* 25 (2000): 145.

196. Noreen W. Kruse, "Apologia in Team Sport", *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 67, no. 3 (1981): 277.

197. Matthew W. Seeger, *Ethics and Organizational Communication* (Cresskill: Hampton Press, 1997): 9.

198. Robert C. Rowland and Angela M. Jerome, "On Organizational Apologia: A Reconceptualization," *Communication Theory* 14, no. 3 (2004): 201.

199. Gail T. Fairhurst, "Two traditions," in *Discursive Leadership: In Conversation with Leadership Psychology*, (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications Inc., 2007): 5.

200. Ibid, 6-7.

201. Roger Goodell's September 19, 2014 press conference transcript can be found at <http://edition.cnn.com/TRANSCRIPTS/1409/19/cnr.07.html>

202. Robert C. Rowland and Angela M. Jerome, "On Organizational Apologia: A Reconceptualization," *Communication Theory* 14, no. 3 (2004): 201.

203. Roger Goodell's September 19, 2014 press conference transcript can be found at <http://edition.cnn.com/TRANSCRIPTS/1409/19/cnr.07.html>

204. Ibid

205. Kenneth Burke, *Rhetoric of Motives* (New York: Prentice-Hall, Inc, 1950): 20-21.

206. Ibid, 20.

-
207. Ibid, 20.
208. George Cheney, "The Rhetoric of Identification and the Study of Organizational Communication," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 69 (1983): 146-147.
209. B. L. Ware and Wil A. Linkugel, "They Spoke in Defense of Themselves: On the Generic Criticism of Apologia", in *Readings in Rhetorical Criticism*, ed. Carl R. Burghardt, Fourth Edition (Pennsylvania: Strata Publishing, 2010), 462.
210. George Cheney, "The Rhetoric of Identification and the Study of Organizational Communication," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 69 (1983): 153.
211. George Cheney, "The Rhetoric of Identification and the Study of Organizational Communication," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 69 (1983): 150.
212. Roger Goodell's September 19, 2014 press conference transcript can be found at <http://edition.cnn.com/TRANSCRIPTS/1409/19/cnr.07.html>
213. George Cheney, "The Rhetoric of Identification and the Study of Organizational Communication," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 69 (1983): 151.
214. Ibid
215. Tom Pelissero, "NFL announces four women will help shape league policy," *USA Today*, last edited: September 15, 2015, <http://www.usatoday.com/story/sports/nfl/2014/09/15/league-polices-women-roger-goodell/15664335/>
216. George Cheney, "The Rhetoric of Identification and the Study of Organizational Communication," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 69 (1983): 151.
- 217 Robert J. Fisher and Kirk Wakefield, "Factors Leading to Group Identification: A Field Study of Winning and Losing," *Psychology & Marketing* 15, no. 1 (1998)
218. "NFL commissioner addresses domestic violence," *CNN.com*, last edited August 28, 2014, <http://www.cnn.com/2014/08/28/sport/nfl-goodell-domestic-violence-memo/>
219. George Cheney, "The Rhetoric of Identification and the Study of Organizational Communication," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 69 (1983): 152.
220. Stephanos Bibas and Richard A. Bierschblach, "Integrating Remorse and Apology in Criminal Justice Procedure," *Penn Law: Legal Scholarship* (2004): 90

221. Herbert W. Simons, "A Dilemma Centered-Analysis of Clinton's August 17th Apologia: Implications for Rhetorical Theory and Method," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 86, no. 4 (2000): 441-449.

222. Herbert W. Simons, "A Dilemma Centered-Analysis of Clinton's August 17th Apologia: Implications for Rhetorical Theory and Method," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 86, no. 4 (2000): 441.

223. "NFL commissioner addresses domestic violence," *CNN.com*, last edited August 28, 2014, <http://www.cnn.com/2014/08/28/sport/nfl-goodell-domestic-violence-memo/>

224. Ibid

225. Tom Pelissero, "NFL announces four women will help shape league policy," *USA Today*, last edited: September 15, 2015, <http://www.usatoday.com/story/sports/nfl/2014/09/15/league-polices-women-roger-goodell/15664335/>

226. "In memo, Roger Goodell outlines actions taken against domestic violence, sexual assault," *Baltimore Sun*, last updated: October 2, 2014, <http://www.baltimoresun.com/sports/ravens/ravens-insider/bal-in-memo-nfl-outlines-actions-taken-toward-antidomestic-violence-sexual-assault-efforts-20141003-story.html>

227. "NFL commissioner addresses domestic violence," *CNN.com*, last edited August 28, 2014, <http://www.cnn.com/2014/08/28/sport/nfl-goodell-domestic-violence-memo/>

228. "NFL commissioner addresses domestic violence," *CNN.com*, last edited August 28, 2014, <http://www.cnn.com/2014/08/28/sport/nfl-goodell-domestic-violence-memo/>

229. "NFL commissioner addresses domestic violence," *CNN.com*, last edited August 28, 2014, <http://www.cnn.com/2014/08/28/sport/nfl-goodell-domestic-violence-memo/>

230. Roger Goodell's September 19, 2014 press conference transcript can be found at <http://edition.cnn.com/TRANSCRIPTS/1409/19/cnr.07.html>

231. Tom Pelissero, "NFL announces four women will help shape league policy," *USA Today*, last edited: September 15, 2015, <http://www.usatoday.com/story/sports/nfl/2014/09/15/league-polices-women-roger-goodell/15664335/>

232. "Re: Actions in Support of Domestic Violence/Sexual Assault Efforts," last updated September 26, 2014, <http://static.nfl.com/static/content/public/photo/2014/09/26/0ap3000000401119.pdf>

233. "In memo, Roger Goodell outlines actions taken against domestic violence, sexual assault," *Baltimore Sun*, last updated: October 2, 2014, <http://www.baltimoresun.com/sports/ravens/ravens-insider/bal-in-memo-nfl-outlines-actions-taken-toward-antidomestic-violence-sexual-assault-efforts-20141003-story.html>

234. "In memo, Roger Goodell outlines actions taken against domestic violence, sexual assault," *Baltimore Sun*, last updated: October 2, 2014, <http://www.baltimoresun.com/sports/ravens/ravens-insider/bal-in-memo-nfl-outlines-actions-taken-toward-antidomestic-violence-sexual-assault-efforts-20141003-story.html>

235. Michael Osborne, "Archetypal Metaphor in Rhetoric: The Light-Dark Family," in *Readings in Rhetorical Criticism*, ed. Carl R. Burgchardt, Fourth Edition (Pennsylvania: Strata Publishing, 2010), 348- 349.

236. Michael Osborne, "Archetypal Metaphor in Rhetoric: The Light-Dark Family," in *Readings in Rhetorical Criticism*, ed. Carl R. Burgchardt, Fourth Edition (Pennsylvania: Strata Publishing, 2010), 348- 349.

237. B. L. Ware and Wil A. Linkugel, "They Spoke in Defense of Themselves: On the Generic Criticism of Apologia", in *Readings in Rhetorical Criticism*, ed. Carl R. Burgchardt, Fourth Edition (Pennsylvania: Strata Publishing, 2010), 462.

238. "NFL commissioner addresses domestic violence," *CNN.com*, last edited August 28, 2014, <http://www.cnn.com/2014/08/28/sport/nfl-goodell-domestic-violence-memo/>

239. Roger Goodell's September 19, 2014 press conference transcript can be found at <http://edition.cnn.com/TRANSCRIPTS/1409/19/cnr.07.html>

240. Ibid

241. "Roger Goodell defends Ray Rice ban," *ESPN.com*, last updated August 1, 2014, http://espn.go.com/nfl/story/_/id/11296028/roger-goodell-defends-suspension-ray-rice-baltimore-ravens-running-back

242. Ibid

243. "In memo, Roger Goodell outlines actions taken against domestic violence, sexual assault," *Baltimore Sun*, last updated: October 2, 2014, <http://www.baltimoresun.com/sports/ravens/ravens-insider/bal-in-memo-nfl-outlines-actions-taken-toward-antidomestic-violence-sexual-assault-efforts-20141003-story.html>

244. B. L. Ware and Wil A. Linkugel, "They Spoke in Defense of Themselves: On the Generic Criticism of Apologia", in *Readings in Rhetorical Criticism*, ed. Carl R. Burgchardt, Fourth Edition (Pennsylvania: Strata Publishing, 2010), 462.

245. William L. Benoit, "Image Repair Discourse and Crisis Communication," *Public Relations Review* 23, no. 2 (1997): 180.

246. Kenneth Burke, *On Symbols and Society* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1989): 121.

247. Peter J. Burke, "Scapegoating: An Alternative Differentiation," *Sociometry* 32, no. 2 (1969): 160

248. Keith Michael Hearit, "Merrill Lynch: Corporate Apologia and Business Fraud," *Public Relations Review* 30, no. 4 (2004): 459-466.

249. Ibid

250. Kenneth Burke, *On Symbols and Society* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1989): 289-299.

251. "Did Ray Rice lie to Roger Goodell?" *Pro Football Talk* last updated: September 10, 2014, <http://profootballtalk.nbcsports.com/2014/09/10/did-ray-rice-lie-to-roger-goodell/>

252. Diana Berkshire Hearit and Keith Michael Hearit, "NPR Under Fire: On the Kategoria-Based Apologia of Juan Williams," *Journal of Radio & Audio Media* 18, no. 1 (2011): 68

253. Keith Michael Hearit, "The Use of Counter-Attack in Apologetic Public Relations Crises: The Case of General Motors vs. Dateline NBC," *Public Relations Review* 22, no. 3 (1996): 244

254. Diana Berkshire Hearit and Keith Michael Hearit, "NPR Under Fire: On the Kategoria-Based Apologia of Juan Williams," *Journal of Radio & Audio Media* 18, no. 1 (2011): 71

255. Halford Ross Ryan, "*Kategoria and Apologia: On Their Rhetorical Criticism as a Speech Set*," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 68 (1982), 258

256. Diana Berkshire Hearit and Keith Michael Hearit, "NPR Under Fire: On the Kategoria-Based Apologia of Juan Williams," *Journal of Radio & Audio Media* 18, no. 1 (2011): 68

257. Halford Ross Ryan, "*Kategoria and Apologia: On Their Rhetorical Criticism as a Speech Set*," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 68 (1982), 258

258. Laken Litman, "Rachel Nichols refused to let Roger Goodell off the hook," *USA Today*, last published September 19, 2014, <http://ftw.usatoday.com/2014/09/rachel-nichols-roger-goodell-nfl-press-conference>

259. Ibid

260. Laken Litman, "Rachel Nichols refused to let Roger Goodell off the hook," *USA Today*, last published September 19, 2014, <http://ftw.usatoday.com/2014/09/rachel-nichols-roger-goodell-nfl-press-conference>

261. Ibid

262. Nick Wing, "Most Americans Still Have Faith In The Police, Poll Finds," *The Huffington Post*, last updated April 22, 2015, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2015/04/22/law-enforcement-trust-poll_n_7118634.html

263. Laken Litman, "Rachel Nichols refused to let Roger Goodell off the hook," *USA Today*, last published September 19, 2014, <http://ftw.usatoday.com/2014/09/rachel-nichols-roger-goodell-nfl-press-conference>

264. B. L. Ware and Wil A. Linkugel, "They Spoke in Defense of Themselves: On the Generic Criticism of Apologia", in *Readings in Rhetorical Criticism*, ed. Carl R. Burghardt, Fourth Edition (Pennsylvania: Strata Publishing, 2010), 465.

265. Ken Belson, "N.F.L. Domestic Violence Policy Toughened in Wake of Ray Rice Case", *New York Times*, August 28, 2014, <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/08/29/sports/football/roger-goodell-admits-he-was-wrong-and-alters-nfl-policy-on-domestic-violence.html>

266. Roger Goodell's September 19, 2014 press conference transcript can be found at <http://edition.cnn.com/TRANSCRIPTS/1409/19/cnr.07.html>

267. Herbert Simons, "Requirements, Problems, and Strategies: A Theory of Persuasion for Social Movements," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 56, no. 1 (1970)

268. B. L. Ware and Wil A. Linkugel, "They Spoke in Defense of Themselves: On the Generic Criticism of Apologia", in *Readings in Rhetorical Criticism*, ed. Carl R. Burghardt, Fourth Edition (Pennsylvania: Strata Publishing, 2010), 465.

269. Bruce K. Johnson, Peter A. Grootuis, and John C. Whitehead, "The Value of Public Goods Generated by a Major League Sports Team," *Journal of Sports Economics* 2, no. 1 (2001): 6.

270. Simone Sebastian and Ines Bebea, "For battered NFL wives, a message from the cops and the league: Keep quiet," *Washington Post*, last updated: October 17, 2014, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/posteverything/wp/2014/10/17/for-battered-nfl-wives-a-message-from-the-cops-and-the-league-keep-quiet/>

271. Ibid

272. Tom Ley, "Janay Rice Said Ravens Told Her To Apologize at That Press Conference," *Deadspin.com*, last updated: December 1, 2014, <http://deadspin.com/janay-rice-says-ravens-told-her-to-apologize-at-that-pr-1665112586>

273. Jessica Luther, "The NFL's Domestic Violence Problem and Our Race Problem," *Vice Sports*, last updated September 25, 2014, https://sports.vice.com/en_us/article/the-nfls-domestic-violence-problem-and-our-race-problem