"I'm proud to be a Redskins": Is Stakeholder *Apologia* Influenced by Organizational Crisis Response?

A Thesis submitted to Southern Utah University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts Professional Communication

August 2015

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Southern Utah University, August 2015

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Abstract

In the current social media landscape organizations and corporations are utilizing relatively young tools to increase brand awareness, sell products, and conduct public relations campaigns. Often these campaigns include crisis responses and apologia. Organizations with highly invested stakeholders, like fans of an NFL football team, have an audience of individuals who feel strongly about their team/organization and demonstrate a willingness to defend attacks against it. Current research concerning social identity theory and situational crisis response theory have been reviewed in order to better understand the influence of these theories on organizational crisis response and stakeholder support. In the attempt to save face organizations will employ a variety of strategies to ensure that the brand image is only minimally injured when an unfavorable event occurs. The Washington Redskins have faced increasing criticism concerning the perceived offensive nature of their team nickname. Through the analysis of Facebook replies to an ESPN *Outside the Lines* Interview with Washington Redskins owner Daniel Snyder, this research has been able to ascertain that invested ingroups will take up the "company line" and will often contribute to it with their own defense strategy.

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Chapter One

Introduction

Since 1933, the professional American football team located in Washington D.C. has been known by the nickname "Redskins." Originally the Boston Braves, the team name was changed in 1933 in order to differentiate between the professional baseball team and the professional football team which were playing in the same stadium. Using the name Redskins during the 1930's was likely not intended by team ownership to carry any racial prejudice. Anecdotal claims made by the Washington Redskins organization on its website state that the name was intended to utilize the "Braves" logo and honor both the coach William Henry Deitz and several of the players who claimed Native American heritage (History by decades). The past eighty-two years has seen a handful of attempts to identify the nickname as offensive or to call for its removal. Recent efforts have been more concerted and better publicized.

Within the last year, Washington's nickname has occupied a prominent place in the national news landscape. On September 5th 2013, the Oneida Indian Nation ran radio ads in Washington D.C. markets, which called upon Redskins ownership to change the name (Brady, 2013). The ads compared the use of the name Redskin with the use of another racial epithet commonly eschewed in society today as racially insensitive. NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell decried the use of that term by NFL players as "obviously wrong, insensitive and unacceptable" (Brady, 2013 para. 12). Since that time, the debate between those who oppose the nickname and those opposed to changing it has been passionate and intense. Even though the frequency and publicity of protest has been more consistent in later years, this is not a new issue. In the late 1960's and early 1970's,

American Indian organizations actively campaigned to get offensively stereotyped Native

American themed mascots changed (NCAI Report, 2013). As recently as 2008, studies were

conducted which were aimed at determining the psychological impact of Native American

Mascots on high school and college students (Fryberg et al., 2008). In 2010, Kim-Prieto,

Goldstein, Okazaki, and Kirschner (2010) researched the tendency of individuals exposed

to Native American mascots to stereotype other minority groups. The National Congress of

American Indians commissioned a report in October of 2013 entitled "Ending the Legacy of

Racism in Sports & the Era of 'Harmful' Sports Mascots", which represented an attempt to

present a unified stand against "harmful" American Indian stereotypes used in sports in

general and by the Washington Redskins in particular.

On August 5, 2014, Washington Redskins owner Daniel Snyder recorded an

interview for later broadcast on ESPN's *Outside the Lines* television show. When asked

about the controversy surrounding the team nickname he responded passionately and

insisted the moniker was honoring Native American heritage. He attempted to re-define the

term Redskin and attributed its definition to a football player; a term of honor and respect;

and representative of a winning attitude. He claimed that any assertions that the team

nickname is racist were taken out of context. Fan response seemed to agree and used

reasoning similar to Snyder's when defending their team. Fans cite tradition as justification

for the continued use of the nickname. "The Washington Redskins should not change their

name because first its (sic) been with them for over 80 years." (Should the NFL Redskins

change their name?) They also rationalize its use by claiming some form of relationship to

Native American groups or culture. "I'm proud to be a Redskins (sic)." (Edgewater, 2014)

One can see the passion fans have for their beloved team by simply searching the term "Redskins" on Twitter.

Other groups are not as willing to allow justification and do not buy into Mr. Snyder's retelling of the origin of the term. The hashtag, #changethename, has a robust following of its own and decries the name as offensive and racist. The role of social identity as it relates to a member of a community plays to the arguments formulated on both sides. Daniel Snyder and his proponents consider their own lives, growing up as Washington Redskins fans, and place themselves in a large fan community for which changing the name represents a difficult alteration to something many of them have associated with in their familial and social lives. Native American groups and their sympathizers, who are advocating for the name change, cite a misrepresentation of their ethnic identities as well as reminders of broken promises and mistreatment of their ancestors by the United States government. Many point to the use of the nickname as a form of racism.

In order to understand the attack on the nickname and its defense, an understanding of Situational Crisis Communication Theory will be explored. It will also be useful to consider social identity theory as it relates to fan ingroups and detractor outgroups. Understanding crisis response and ingroup/outgroup dynamics will help in understanding both the attack on the nickname and its defense by Snyder and Redskins fans. It is anticipated that by analyzing these defenses there would be evidence of agreement between Snyder and the fans. Agreement would suggest an effective defensive strategy (or at least a strategy that fans find viable) and indicate a potential value in organizations strengthening fan or stakeholder loyalty in order to aid in crisis response if ever needed.

Organizations looking to meet their goals are looking for as many advantages as they can get. If there is evidence of agreement between the arguments made by Daniel Snyder and those made by fans in defense of the Redskins nickname, it may be possible for other groups to foster a defensive strategy that would include loyal stakeholders. As will be demonstrated through the current research, passionate fans will defend their organization passionately. Organizations could also add credibility to their cause due to the perception of everyday people coming to their defense. If there is evidence of a link between the defense used by an organization and the defense adopted by its vested stakeholders, proxy crisis defense may be a valuable tool in the overall toolbox available to organizations experiencing crisis.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

In order to understand Daniel Snyder's responses to the demand for the name change, it is necessary to first evaluate the crisis response strategies employed in the organization's defense. This literature review will set a foundation of crisis response strategy through Timothy Coombs' (2006) Situational Crisis Communications Theory (SCCT). Once an understanding of SCCT is established a review the literature related to Social Identity Theory will be pursued. Social identity theory will support understanding of the group response of the Redskins organization and the fans that consider themselves members of "Redskins Nation" It will also aid in the search of common themes. Social identity themes as particularly demonstrated in sports contexts will then be addressed. This will build a solid structure for the exploration of identity issues from all sides, but will, more importantly, build a framework for understanding the social mentality of defending a controversial social identity in the face of criticism. This exploration will then aid in establishing the perceived success of Daniel Snyder's defense of the nickname by the observation of similar defense strategies by fans. It is reasonable to assume that individuals would only emulate what they perceive to be correct and so any evidence of mimicry between Snyder and Redskins Nation would indicate that the defense by Snyder was seen by fans as successful.

Crisis Management

Crises arise in many forms and represent different things for different people. Events like war, economic depressions, famine, disease outbreaks, and natural disasters usually have a more equalizing effect in that they touch all people somewhat similarly.

Crises in the business, political, and advertising realms seem to affect a more isolated group or to affect different groups with varying degrees of severity. Seeger, Sellnow, and Ulmer (1998) define crisis in the corporate world as an unexpected event that results in uncertainty and jeopardizes an organization's goals. Coombs (2010) boils many complicated definitions of crisis down to "a risk manifested" (p. 35). For example, American energy company Enron experienced a financial collapse in 2001 due to errant accounting practices and corporate arrogance. The unexpected event or risk, for Enron accountants must have been getting caught. This crisis affected management, employees, stockholders, and their customers with varying levels of devastation, but not in the fairly equalizing way that a hurricane devastates a city. The broad definition of crisis is important to note due to the nature of this inquiry, but in order for an event or threat to be considered a crisis, the terms of the aforementioned definition must be met, even if it is not a widespread threat or event. A personal crisis can be just as devastating to an individual as a corporate crisis may be to those affected by it.

Organizations experiencing crisis must be able to communicate with stakeholders and organizational members effectively. Protecting the organization's goals and reputation is vital to its continued success. Coombs and Halloday (2010) define crisis communication as "the collection, processing, and dissemination of information required to address a crisis situation" (p. 52). When a crisis is perceived by organization stakeholders, management undertakes the task of reputation maintenance through prescribed strategies (Brown & Billings, 2013). These strategies attempt to mitigate the effects of the crisis and minimalize reputational damage (Coombs, 2006). An organization's reputation, face, or image is considered a valuable resource worth preserving (Benoit, 2011; Coombs, 2006; Coombs,

2012) and studies have demonstrated the value of good crisis communication (Bruce &

Tini, 2008).

Crisis response then becomes an attempt to alleviate harm done to the corporate

"face" or image and restore good faith in the organization by its stakeholders. Image repair

strategies involve the response of an accused organization to allegations of impropriety so

that the damage to the organization's reputation and the severity of punishment are

minimized (Kramer, 2014). Simply stated "one important goal of discourse is to establish

and maintain a positive image or reputation." (Benoit, 1995, p. 70). Examples of image

repair strategies include William Benoit's image repair theory (Benoit, 1997) and Timothy

Coombs' situational crisis response theory (SCCT) (Coombs, 2006). The former seeks to

preserve or repair an organization's image based upon five broad categories including

denial, evasion of responsibility, reducing offensiveness of event, corrective action, and

mortification. SCCT seeks to understand the organizational image threat and match the

most appropriate organizational response. When negative events arise there is a tendency

for those affected to attribute blame for the cause of the event. It is by these potential

attributions of blame or responsibility that Coombs seeks to assign appropriate response

strategies using SCCT (Coombs, 2012). (For a more in depth explanation of attribution

theory see Ahluwalia, Burnkrant, & Unnava (2000), Dawar & Pillutla (2000), Dean (2004),

and Folkes, Koletsky, & Graham (1987).) The three response options Coombs identifies are

classified as deny, diminish and deal (Coombs, 2006). Because it is expected that the

present research will find evidence of each of the three response options and their several

response strategies, it will be helpful to explore each of them as explained by Coombs.

The Denial response option seeks to disclaim the crisis in question. Three strategies are available under the deny response in SCCT. First, Attack the Accuser; redirects criticism of the organization towards the organization's accusers. Second, Denial; asserts the crisis does not exist. Third, Scapegoat; identifies something outside the organization that is to blame for the crisis. This final response option acknowledges a crisis, but denies the organization's responsibility for it (Coombs, 2006).

The SCCT Diminish response options are calculated to reduce the perceived seriousness of the crisis. Two response options are available in the diminish strategy. First, Excuse; the organization can excuse the crisis or minimize organizational responsibility by disavowing any intent to cause harm or by claiming that the crisis was the result of an accident. This response can also cite a lack of control in preventing the crisis from happening. Second, Justification; the organization asserts that the damage caused by the crisis is minimal (Coombs, 2006)

The third SCCT response option is to Deal with the affected stakeholders. In this option the strategies involve acknowledging the crisis and seeking to assuage stakeholder feelings about the crisis. The first strategy is Ingratiation; the organization reminds stakeholders of the past good that they have accomplished and/or offers praise for those efforts. The second strategy is Concern; the crisis manager expresses the organization's concern for the victims affected by the crisis. The third strategy is Compensation; the organization attempts to offer financial or other gifts to the victims of the crisis. Fourth on the deal list is Regret; there is organizational remorse that the crisis occurred. The fifth and final strategy is Apology; the crisis manager apologizes to the victims on behalf of the

organization and seeks their pardon. The organization also acknowledges full

responsibility for the crisis (Coombs, 2006).

The three SCCT crisis response options provide classifications of strategies that

organizations can and do use to preserve their image and maintain positive relationships

with stakeholders (Coombs, 2006; Coombs, 2010). The current research will attempt to

determine the viability of organizational proxy crisis response by finding evidence of fan

adoption of a similar crisis response strategy. Though they are not considered a functioning

part of the organization themselves, fans tend to link themselves emotionally and socially

with an organization who contributes to that fan's sense of self.

Social Identity

Social identity theory takes the stance that individuals define a portion of their

sense of self through their connections to a social group or an organization (Tajfel &

Turner, 1979, Tajfel 1982) and that those group memberships are created and altered

through interaction between and within groups (Koller, 2012). The importance of group

memberships and their relevance to the individual are important contributors to social

identity (McKinley, Mastro, & Warber, 2014). The theory also stipulates that the social

comparisons one makes are influenced by the individual's desire for positive identity and

esteem (Tajfel and Turner, 1979). This tendency creates positive associations for ingroup

approved comparisons and potentially negative or dismissive associations for outgroup

comparisons (McKinley, Mastro, & Warber, 2014; Tajfel 1982). It represents a "we vs. they"

mentality and leads to a tendency to trivialize ingroup disparities while exacerbating

outgroup differences (McKinley, Mastro, & Warber, 2014), but the tendency to be ingroup

biased is greater than to be outgroup critical (Brewer, 1999). It has also been noted that

intergroup conflict can strengthen ingroup identification and positive attachment (Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

The extent to which a person's social identity is strengthened or diminished through membership in the ingroup depends upon the strength of the individual's identification with the group as well as the way the media portrays the group (Appiah, Knobloch-Westerwick, & Alter, 2013). Group behavior exists as a cognitive representation of the self, based upon group membership, which leaves little separation, psychologically, between the group and the individual self (Phua, 2008; Turner & Oakes, 1986). Those who claim membership in an ingroup maintain that membership as a part of their sense of self. Little wonder then, that those in the ingroup will be selective in seeking affirming information about their group in order to bolster their self –concept (Hewstone, Rubin, & Willis, 2002).

Advertisers often play into the idea that consumer brands are relationship partners important to the consumer's private self, as a part of personal identity. They also lay claim to the partner relationship with consumers as it relates to the social self, as a member of an ingroup of like-minded consumers (Lam, Ahearne, Hu, & Schillewaert, 2010; Koller, 2012). Customer brand identification refers to a customer's sense of belongingness with a brand based upon the perception of identifying with that brand, emotions regarding the affective investment in the brand, and valuing the sense of belonging (Lam et. al., 2010; Sierra, Hyman, & Torres, 2009). Advertising threats to social identity can serve to strengthen ingroup identification, as in the case of more interdependent personalities or weaken those ingroup ties for independent personalities (White, Argo, & Sengupta, 2012). Social identity theory provides insight into the manner in which individuals attach themselves to a brand, organization, team, or social group in order to enhance self-worth through belongingness.

Social Identity for the Sports Fan

        Due to the nature of the present research, it seemed necessary to devote special

attention to sports fan social identity. The extant literature provides valuable insight into

the way sports fans associate with their teams in fanatical ways that are often in excess of

what is found in other social identity realms.

        Sports fan personal identity has been associated with the level of identification the

fan feels with their team, or individuals within the sport (Brown, Devlin, & Billings, 2013).

Phua (2008) noted that a fan's decision to associate him/herself with a specific team is

simply a means of identification because the fan is not connected with the team to the

extent that they could participate directly, but this identification does not preclude the fan

from claiming membership within the team's circle of fans. Highly identified fans are more

likely to claim glory with their team after a win (basking in reflected glory) and seek to

restore positive social identity after a loss (cutting off reflected failure) (Bernanche-

Assolant, et al. 2007; Phua, 2008). Sport has a unique way of bringing together fans from

divergent social, economic, and political backgrounds (Guschwan, 2011) without limit as to

their geographic location (Aden et al, 2009). It is seemingly ironic that devoted fans for a

team can be found scattered around the world and still be considered part of an ingroup

but the players on a team are loyal to the team only while contracted to play for that team.

Indeed, Guschwan (2011) noted a similar dilemma occurring when a sports team is used to

symbolize a local identity, but the players on the team are from various backgrounds, cities,

and nations and often play for multiple teams throughout their careers. In a similar vein,

Jacobsen (2004) wondered if sports fans are invested in the team, the players, or merely

the team's laundry.

Communities of sports fans may be seeking to find balance and their place in an increasingly globalized world with the more collectivist and locally cultural phenomenon of sports fandom (Guschwan, 2011). Fans may draw upon available cultural resources in constructing deep civic identities (Guschwan, 2011). Often the playing fields and courts of sports, transform into stages where the symbolic struggles of diverse communities are acted out and displayed (Spaaij & Viñas, 2013). Fans construct identity through social interaction using various communicative acts, including posting to social media (Sanderson, 2012) and rituals incorporating their bodies (wearing team apparel or body painting), voice (songs, cheers, or chants), and/or by utilizing expressive media like flags (Guschwan, 2011; Dauncey & Hare 2013). This community inclusion creates an "us versus them" lens assisted by the aforementioned rituals utilized in most sports (Dauncey & Hare, 2013).

This "us versus them" mentality comes with some inherent problems. Guschwan (2011) contends that when a group is classified by a single aspect of its identity, there exists a risk of "masking and distorting" other relevant aspects of their identity. There is abundant literature that explores this tendency from Native American perspectives, including stereotypes, in greater detail (see Coward, 2014; Flynn, Olson, & Yellig, 2012; Fryberg, 2004; Fryberg, Markus, Oyserman, & Stone, 2008; Verbos & Humphries, 2013; & The National Congress of American Indians report, 2013). Highly identified fans tend to be more passionate about their team and express that passion in public ways (Sanderson, 2012) which is what many teams wish to encourage in order to drive ticket and merchandise sales (Watkins, 2013). Individuals' familiar with fans of the National Football League (NFL) Oakland Raiders knows that they have a reputation for being unruly, but not

all Raiders fans act out this perceived role. Highly invested individuals continue to act out

their identities as expression, performance, or communication in order to achieve social

affirmation as well as individual authenticity (Guschwan, 2011). Fan performance consists

of a performer seeking attention for him/herself in order to claim responsibility for a set of

communicative acts (Richard Bauman as cited in Guschwan, 2011). The fan who dresses in

team gear, puts team decals on car windows, posts opinions about the team on social

media, or acts out in an ingroup prescribed way is communicating his/her fandom and

claiming a place within the fan community (Guschwan, 2011). They are also enacting para-

social relationships; one sided social interactions used to create a sense of belonging for the

fan (Cummins & Cui, 2014). Sports fans have demonstrated social identity theory in very

visible and loud ways. A fan will identify with a team and take an amount of pride in being

associated with the team of choice. Once he or she is associated with the team the fan will

begin to assimilate some of the fan-group rituals and mannerisms in order to validate their

membership in the group and to differentiate themselves from their rival. Teams and

sports organizations will foster this kind of interaction through programs and tactics

designed to reinforce the sense of community they desire; incorporating the city name

within the team's name, for example (Heere & James, 2007).

　　Divisions among groups in this context may cause those outgroups who feel slighted

to seek methods for improving their status (Brown, 2000). This is carried out both on and

off the field of play. On the field as an intense rivalry, like the one that exists between the

Dallas Cowboys and the Washington Redskins. As melodramatic and dated as a battle

between cowboys and Indians may seem, it has been the crux upon which the rivalry was

built. Some of the resentment from the way Native Americans have been portrayed in

cinema may be the slight for which some anti-nickname advocates are seeking to improve

their status, as is happening off the field of play in the call for the Washington Redskins to

change their nickname.

Chapter Three

Rationale

While it is clear that social identity and crisis response have both received much attention in academia, the assimilation of these two subjects in understanding the possible social constructs of crisis communication has been virtually untouched. The main questions I sought to answer were; is it possible for an organization to receive help in the crisis communication process from their highly identified fans? Do the statements and defensive strategies employed by the organization appear in the language used by vested ingroups to defend the organization? In the case of this research I specifically wanted to know if the arguments presented by an organization leader would be taken up by the fans and be used to defend the team organization. It is also in the aim of this research to determine if the fans responding to outgroup criticism will fall in line with their organization's response or if they will craft crisis responses based upon strategies not used by the organization.

While I recognize the societal implications of the debate surrounding stereotypical mascots, the efforts produced here are not an attempt to settle the moral or ethical question regarding the team nickname. The discussion has raised intriguing questions on the subjects of sports and race, but I will leave that for others to research. The inclusion of the sports identity literature sought to facilitate the understanding of the types of fans and fan issues encountered in the arguments for or against the use of the team nickname.

Research Questions

The research associated with social identity theory has created a platform for this research. It is anticipated that the results of this research will provide insight into the ways individuals identify themselves with certain sports teams, defend the use of social

identifiers at odds with current cultural norms, and seek to understand the defense

strategies employed to maintain the cultural identifiers traditionally used.

RQ1:   What are the rhetorical strategies used by opponents of the Redskins nickname in

       calling for a name change?

RQ2:   Which crisis response strategies does Washington Redskins owner Daniel Snyder

       use in defense of the continued use of the nickname?

RQ3:   What crisis response strategies do Washington Redskins fans adopt when defending

       the use of the nickname?

Chapter Four

Method

To evaluate the call to change the nickname as addressed in RQ1, I will be

conducting a rhetorical analysis of comments made by individuals who replied via

Facebook post to an ESPN *Outside the Lines* video which highlighted a portion of the Daniel

Snyder Interview. The comments of those who consider the Redskins name offensive or

demeaning will be evaluated for their defensive strategy from a rhetorical perspective. In

order to determine the answers to RQ2 a rhetorical analysis of Daniel Snyder's defense of

the Redskins nickname, namely the *Outside the Lines interview*, will be conducted using

Coombs' SCCT. To answer RQ3, a portion of the posts in favor of keeping the nickname

taken from the Facebook thread will be analyzed and grouped according to SCCT strategies.

The findings of the analysis of RQ2 will then be compared to the results of the analysis of

RQ3 to look for evidence of agreement between the crisis response strategies of the

organization and the fans/stakeholders. If it can be demonstrated that fans adopt

organizational crisis response strategies, an organization could develop strategies for

employing their fans in helping to mitigate the effects of a crisis.

When I began looking at the Facebook comments and replies written in response to

Daniel Snyder's interview there were over one thousand comments. I chose to examine

two hundred of them, which constitutes roughly 20% of the total comments posted (at the

time of inquiry) in response to the *Outside the Lines* interview. I selected the first two

hundred, partially out of convenience and partially out of a desire to include some of the

criticism and defense interchanges between fans and critics. While these interchanges were

not preserved in context during the analysis I feel I was able to gain better samples of

defenses and criticisms overall. Unfortunately, I have found that the video (and the

Facebook comments associated with it) have been deleted from ESPN's website and the

Facebook link redirects to an error page. This frustrating turn of events prevents me from

providing an exact number of total responses or even of providing access to the source of

my subject matter. I do have a word document which contains the comments that I cut and

pasted from Facebook, but they are grouped according to my analysis and not in their

original order and context.

 Of the comments sampled, there was close to an even split of those favoring the

Redskins nickname and those opposed, with a slight majority to those favoring the

nickname. Some of the replies were not considered crisis defense or calls for change and

were therefore omitted from the analysis. The rest consisted of original comments and

replies to original comments. These comments and replies will provide the text for the

analysis.

I will analyze the comments from detractors of the nickname first to identify themes

of rejection. Mr. Snyder's interview response will then be analyzed using Coombs (2006)

SCCT response categories deny, diminish, and deal and their further sub-categorical

responses. Once a clear understanding of his response strategy is achieved, the fan

responses will be similarly analyzed. I will then compare Daniel Snyder's response to the

crisis response themes found during the fan defense portion of the analysis in order to find

evidence of the influence of his defensive strategy on the fans. No attempt was made to

correct for grammar, punctuation, or spelling as these responses were taken directly from

the source.

Chapter Five

Analysis

A grounded theory approach was used in analyzing the comments made by those who believe the nickname should be changed. A grounded theory approach allows a researcher to identify key themes the data suggests, rather than analyzing the information with ideological frameworks in place. Without any preconceived idea as to the types of rhetorical criticism that would be found, it was felt that categorizing the critical posts based upon emerging themes would be the best way to proceed. This portion of the analysis was intended as background information and so an in depth analysis was not attempted. Analysis began by grouping similar arguments and the open coding of these arguments alluded to five distinct themes that represent an attack on the Redskins nickname and further distinctions were found as a part of each theme. The five themes found were, in order from most responses to least; Cultural, Historical, Personal, Exasperation, and Other. Each theme represented a different strategy the critics of the nickname would employ to persuade others that change was necessary. Cultural arguments made culture, ethnicity, and race the central argument point. Historical arguments sought to show how the Native American experience within the last three hundred years necessitates fairer treatment by the dominant Euro-American class. Personal themes while encompassing some of the other themes elements were included as their own category because the rhetorical tool used was to argue by citing a personal experience. Exasperation was utilized by people who were tired of hearing about the controversy for a variety of reasons including wanting to focus on football and fatigue due to the constancy of the name change issue. Arguments in the Other category did not fit into the four previous themes and did not even fit well with each

other. They were, however, still seeking to criticize the Redskins nickname and so were

included here. Overall, some overlap in arguments did exist within individual posts and

where overlapping arguments were found the distinct arguments were separated and

grouped appropriately. For instance one critic used two related but noticeably different

argument styles to convey his point.

> Snyder continues to bury himself. A racial term is a term of honor and respect. I also
>
> like to see a bunch of white people arguing that it's not a racial slur. Maybe you guys
>
> can also go tell black people to not be offended by the N word too.

During the axial coding phase multiple arguments out of single posts were separated. In the

case of the above quote the first three sentences were placed in the cultural insensitivity

category under the Cultural theme and the last sentence was assigned to the sarcasm

category under the Personal Attacks theme.

Criticism

    Cultural Themes.

    Cultural themed criticism of the nickname included outgroup misrepresentation,

racism, cultural insensitivity, experience, and evidence. Those responses that claimed the

defense of the nickname demonstrated an outgroup misrepresentation of Native American

culture followed a pattern of limiting the ability of one group to define or identify aspects of

another group. "I can see both sides of the dilemma, however I can see how people get

upset when they see a rich, privileged white guy establishing the definition of what it

means to be Indian." Other responses cited ingroup/outgroup disagreement even among

Native Americans. "And other tribes would disagree with the Blackfoot. Just bc (because) a

small group says it's ok doesn't mean it is. I'm sure there were groups of blacks that were

perfectly fine with segregation." And similarly, "Lol (laugh out loud) a term of honor and

respect.... I doubt all Native Americans feel that way." Other responses identified the

cultural forces at play in the debate. "You're absolutely right about it being white people

telling Native Americans they should be offended in most cases. It's also white people

telling everyone it's not offensive......"

The comments demonstrating cultural insensitivity were rather pointed in using examples

that were easy to understand "Would you go to an Indian reservation and explain to them

why they shouldn't be offended? Yeah, me neither, that's kind of the point." Comparing the

term Redskin to derogatory terms for other races was a common strategy as is

demonstrated by another individual.

> Would anyone support a team called the Blackskins? The Negroes? How about the
>
> Beaners? The word "redskin" is just as offensive as those terms. Imagine meeting
>
> someone that appeared Native American: would you ask them if they were a
>
> redskin?? Of course not. Because its obviously offensive, and that's why it should
>
> never be used by the NFL.

Some attackers did not pull any punches when discussing the nickname in racist terms.

""Appeal to tradition." Google it. In 1933, racism was totally fine and all races other than

whites were completely second class citizens. That's when they thought it was okay."

After one fan cited context as a defense for the team name one respondent claimed "a racial

slur is a racial slur no matter how you contextualize it." At several points in the exchanges

where the claim of racism is used, the responses became heated.

> The original owner was a segregationist and proud racist. That's where the team
>
> name comes from. George Preston Marshall. They were the last team to integrate.

That's the legacy you all are defending. But then again, why wouldn't you, you're

doing it because you're racist to begin with.

One respondent accuses a Redskins defender of being a minority who is justifying the use

of racism in the acceptance of the team nickname. "So you're THAT guy. The minority who

validates the racism. There's always one "I'm black..I'm Latino...I'm Native American...and

I'm not offended by (insert whatever the offense is)" per online discussion..."

The experience subheading identified similar themes as the other headings but the

use of a personal experience seemed like a more concerted rhetorical strategy in citing

cultural problems with the name. "I know a lot of people offended by the football team with

the name Redskins. It is actually a VERY serious matter." Another use of personal

experience was to invoke the stories of family and friends who had experienced pain due to

cultural insensitivity or outright racism.

My Great-grandmother was a Blackfoot Indian - When I was a boy I remember

getting a pair of NC Tarheel shorts with the "Black Foot" emblem on the front of the

waist. When I went to her house with them on she saw it and got so angry she nearly

had a panic attack. She told me her experiences with the people who shot her father

and kicked her family off the land they were living on. I took off the shorts and never

wore them again. You dont understand how people feel about something until youve

had a chance to hear their story. All you people parading Snyder's version of

Redskin like its Gospel, please refer to the MANY, MANY, other people who abhor

the name, for reasons you will simply never be able to grasp.

Critics whose responses reflected a cultural tone also utilized reference material, public opinion polls, and government documents in presenting evidence to the nickname defenders. Some utilized this strategy to highlight the feelings of Native Americans about the name. "Check the Cal State San Bernardino poll from two months ago - Native Americans have a big problem with the name. It's the difference between anecdotal evidence (2 guys in jackets) and empirical evidence (a national study)." Others identified the government trademark report that re-ignited the nickname debate which prompted the questions asked during the Daniel Snyder OTL interview. "Read the findings in the Trademark office decision revoking the trademark. Lays out all the evidence you need to see the name is offensive to a large segment of the Native American population and has been for decades." One critic looked no farther than the dictionary for the proof needed to decry the nickname. ""Redskin" is a term for Native Americans. Its connotations are a subject of debate, although the term is defined in current dictionaries of American English as "usually offensive", "disparaging", "insulting", and "taboo.""

Historical Themes.

The posts utilizing historical themed arguments made an attempt to draw attention to the history surrounding the team, the origins of the nickname, the historical significance of the nickname, and other contextual historical information (i.e. other Native American words and their meanings). The arguments presented by these critics used historical context, historical discomfort, and historical awareness to make a case for changing the name. Some of the responses sought to place the term "redskin" and other derogatory terms in their historical context in order to show the intended meaning behind them. ""Redskins" came from the cavalry offering bounty's for bringing in "RedSkins, as in

scalping. Yes the cavalry did id first!" Other responses sought to establish the context of

race relations at the time the team was named. "you just chucked out an opinion and tried

to camouflage it as fact. Nice try. The team was named in 1937. Not exactly an era known as

one of respect for Americas first man." The respondents also sought to clear up contextual

information regarding other terms used by nickname supporters to justify the use of the

Redskins nickname. "The cracker term came from slavery you moron. It refered to the man

with the whip. The "cracker" you know the sound the whip makes?" Another example

involved a U.S. state name. "Oklahoma is an Indian word that means Red People. Redskin is

an American word that means savage native. See the difference?"

Responses also sought to establish a historical discomfort with the name or at least

to attempt to document the efforts to change the name in the past. One of the common

defense comments asked why the nickname is "all of a sudden" such a big issue. Some of

the answers included statements like these. "There were protests about the name when it

first was used - the owner was pressured to reconsider the name - and there was a big

protest at a Super Bowl back in the 70's." As well as, "Uh…the first column on this subject

was written in The Washington Post in 1978. it's been a source of contention for some time.

Don't (know) where you've been."

The historical awareness responses represent attempts to counter a defense citing

the importance of keeping tragic events fresh in our memories so that society does not

repeat them. Two such examples will illustrate this attack strategy.

So you're saying that a name of a sports franchise should reflect the tragedies of the

city or country they represent? Nobody looks for that sort of meaning behind a team

name, but if they did would you be down with the German national Nazis? The

Huns? How about the Gypsies?

And.

Then the German soccer team should be called a racial slur for Jewish people,

correct? Because that would remind them of their sordid history? Dude . . .how can

you even make that argument with any kind of straight face.

The concept of these criticisms is good but the problem here is that the first critic has the

roles reversed in the example. The term Nazi is certainly a hurtful reminder of the

atrocities of World War II to those affected by it and the outlandish example is meant to be

so obviously improper that the point of the example is clear. But to be a legitimate

representation of the current issue the nickname should reflect the oppressed class not the

oppressor. If one uses Nazi Germany as an example in this context the German national

team would be named in a way that represented Jewish culture or heritage as the second

comment illustrates.

Personal Attacks.

These responses consisted of remarks directed at other commenters or the

Redskins organization. The responses here were predominantly intended to insult or

disparage other commenters and/or their logic in defending the nickname. Two strategies

evidenced here were criticism and sarcasm. Criticism reflected disparagement of the

arguments or argumentative style, and intelligence of the defender. "and Good response ----

--. Using the classic 2nd grade strategy of saying "No, you are!" Your debating skills are

officially on par with my 7 ur old nephew. Lol." There was similar venom for those not

immediately involved in the Facebook comment battle.

Under Daniel Snyder, a once proud franchise has been brought low. This 'defense' of

a disparaging term is contemptible. Snyder competes with Jerry Jones for the Al

Davis award, which goes to dumbest owner ever to ruin an NFL franchise. (Davis

had an excuse, in that he went senile. Snyder has no disease to hide behind, he's just

really, really dumb.)

One critic kept his personal attack rather succinct in response to a Washington fan. "Said

the fat, white, conservative, on the internet."

The sarcastic comments were mostly used in an attempt to illustrate the absurdity

of defense strategies used in defense of the nickname. One commenter extended the

historical awareness criticism outlined earlier to a heightened level of absurdity to make

his point. "We need teams named "Yellowskins," "Blackskins," "Brownskins," etc. lest we

forget to "honor" and "respect" all of our minority communities." Another directed sarcasm

at the notion that the nature of a disparaging remark can be altered by the intent with

which it is used. "When I call that player a 'little colored boy" I mean it with the utmost of

respect and honor." Another critic, seemingly with tongue planted firmly in cheek, called

the debate over the issue pointless. "No point in discussing this issue. All of those who

support the name are well-versed in Native American history and so disagreeing with them

is pointless." One commenter tried to inject some levity into the discussion.

I saw a great new logo, that an artist came up with, that would take the pressure off

the Redskins. It's the present Redkins logo with Washington on top and Redskins on

the bottom. Instead of the chief in the middle the graphic was a redskin potato.... :-)

Exasperation.

Some comments portrayed a sense of fatigue with the issue as a reason to change

the nickname. This theme was not large enough to subdivide, but the comments included

were a unique enough set that they deserved their own category.

> Washington Indians, Washington Warriors, Washington Rebels, Washington
>
> Renegades, Washington Natives. Washington Veterans.........as a Redskins fan,
>
> seriously, who cares anymore its a football team, arguing about the name every
>
> single day is boring, pick a new name move own, its not that big of a deal.

It is easy to see that these critics are so tired of hearing about the issue that they just want

it to go away. One even expressed an understanding of the opposition to changing the

name, but followed it up by questioning why a team mascot is causing such a big

controversy.

> Okay, I get why Snyder wants to keep the name, he'd have to spend tons on
>
> rebranding. I get why Native Americans want it gone, it's a racial slur. What I don't
>
> get is why the average Joe Washington-Football-Fan cares sooooo much about this
>
> name. Would it really change your rooting interest that much? My High School Alma
>
> Mater brings this issue up once every few years and everyone gets mad and I have
>
> no idea why.

Other

Other responses shared no common motive in their strategy. One cited positive

monetary reasons for changing the name,

> who is this guy actually defending though? His marketing department? His
>
> pocketbook? Frankly the launch of a new logo and nickname may be costly to
>
> execute but imagine the revenue generated, the number of people that will buy

anything associated with a team this popular. It seems as though he is being defiant

for defiant's sake.

Another declared the decision to not to support the team as a personal stand; "Until the

name changes they are the "Deadskins" to me!"

The criticism made by those who wish to see the Redskins nickname changed were

predominated by a sense of cultural injustice felt by the respondents as Native Americans

themselves or on behalf of Native Americans. The general call to a more culturally sensitive

treatment of Native American themes was overriding through most of the critical

responses. There was a fair amount of personal criticism which is to be found in a public

forum like a Facebook comment thread, especially where such an emotionally charged

issue such as this is discussed. In response to RQ1 the strategies used by opponents of the

Redskins nickname include citing cultural insensitivity of the nickname, calling upon

historical evidence of the insensitive nature of the term "redskins," personally attacking the

defenders of the nickname, expressing exasperation that the issue is such a big deal and

various other arguments such as personal statements and team monetary considerations.

Defense

These arguments against the nickname helped to contextualize the need for a

defense by supporters of the team and its nickname. For those who have a rooting interest

in the Washington Redskins organization and team, the nickname may represent

something to them that may be hard to explain to an outsider. The apologia used by

Redskins fans and the organization was found to incorporate various strategies to show

that detractors are somehow failing to understand the value or significance of the name

Redskin. In many cases argument and defense became about the failure of the out-group to

understand the meaning behind the in-group nickname.

Daniel Snyder. Daniel Snyder's defense of the name can be divided into all three of

Coombs (2006) SCCT categories; deny, diminish, and deal. He uses the deny strategy,

denial, to claim there is no issue with the nickname. He was described as adamant that he

does not have to change the name because "it is not disparaging to Native Americans but

instead is a term of honor and respect." He went on to provide an example of the way that

respect is expressed. "We sing 'Hail to the Redskins.' We don't say hurt anybody. We say

'Hail to the Redskins. Braves on the warpath. Fight for old D.C.'" He also pointed to

outgroup misunderstanding of the intent and tone of the mascot contextually. "Taken out

of context, you can take things out of context all over the place. But in this particular case, it

is what it is. It's very obvious." This statement seems rather vague but his assertion here is

that Redskins fans are not racist or insensitive. As members of a group of fans and former

players they are more concerned with winning football games than disparaging a culture.

Many of them think of the mascot name as an honor to the idea of a fierce Native American

warrior as Snyder goes on to state. "It's just historical truths, and I'd like them to

understand, as I think most do, that the name really means honor, respect." Snyder goes on

to ask and answer his own question. ""*What is a Redskin?* "A Redskin is a football player. A

Redskin is our fans. The Washington Redskins fan base represents honor, represents

respect, represents pride. Hopefully winning. And, and, it, it's a positive." Snyder here uses

the diminish strategy, justification, to show that the crisis surrounding the use of the

nickname is being blown out of proportion. Specifically he attempts to redefine the term

redskin in a way that puts it in a favorable light.

His last defensive strategy is to deal. He uses the ingratiation strategy to point to all the good the organization has done in the past as a means of deflecting criticism for the use of the nickname. He brings up the team's first coach who claimed Native American Heritage and indicates that the team was named in his honor. He also mentions the coordinated effort between the Redskins organization and Walter "Blackie" Wetzel who helped design the Redskins logo. Wetzel was once President of the National Congress of American Indians.

Daniel Snyder's strategy in defending the team nickname covers all three of Coombs (2006) SCCT crisis response strategic categories. In answering RQ2 it is apparent that he uses deny, diminish, and deal to shift the criticism surrounding the team name issue. The subtlety in which he utilizes these strategies seems to indicate that he is attempting to cover all possible modes of offense without actually admitting there is anything wrong with the nickname.

Redskins Fans. Redskin fan response to Daniel Snyder's defensive strategy was not as deft, but also covered all three SCCT strategies. There was not the same level of attention paid to each strategy, but each one was represented. The preponderance of argument in favor of the nickname sought to diminish the controversy through justification and excuse. However excuse was by far the least popular strategy because most of the commenters were not willing to admit that the nickname was overtly offensive until recently.

----, im aware of the arguments, to me, the better argument is that it became more recognized as a derogatory sometime around the time after the 70s. Up until the early 1900s, natives regularly used it to distinguish themselves from europeans, whom they called whiteskins. See the Goddard Ives essay. There being many tribes, i

can easily see some natives who agree with your reasoning, and others with mine. I

mean there is by no means a consensus on whether its a derogatory word today.

Another fan used an old bit of playground philosophy to deny the derogatory nature of the

nickname or to at least accuse critics of being too sensitive. "Don't hate me because I'm

white, but whatever happened to 'sticks and stones may break my bones, but names will

never hurt me?'"

The diminish strategy, justification, was by far the most popular defensive strategy.

It was also the strategy most utilized by Snyder. In an effort to diminish the offensive

nature of the nickname respondents crafted arguments that pointed to tradition and sought

to show the term Redskin as a term of respect. These fans illustrated that point by calling

attention to the practice of reservation high schools in adopting similar mascot names.

"There are loads of high school sports teams on reservations throughout the US called

"Redskins". Lots and lots of them." And "On the reservations, one of the most popular team

name for high schools is Redskins." Fans also justified the nickname through association

with Native American peoples who support the team or use the term themselves. "The polls

show they are ok with it." One defender put it this way.

> The majority of native americans think it's a joke of an issue. And believe people are
>
> wasting too much energy on changing a team name, when there are so many more
>
> important issues to tackle within in the native american community.

One fan cited historical interpretations of the context in his defense of the name.

> We don't have to "celebrate" the name Redskins, but it serves as a reminder of what
>
> happened here. I think some of these people who want the name changed want to

do it because they'd rather not think about what happened, but even changing the

name won't fix what happened.

Other strategies claimed that the nickname is not that bad based upon common sense or

reasoning. "Except a rich white guy isn't defining what it means to be an Indian, he's

defining the name of a football team." And this example which goes on to a rather insightful

semantic defense.

Words ARE about meaning. Would I go up to a native american on a reservation and

scream "Redskin!"? No, of course I wouldn't because in CONTEXT it would be used

as a slur. That DOES NOT mean the term's only meaning (or as I said, ORIGINAL

meaning) is a slur. There are many words in our society that we use regularly that

we do not intend as slurs,...

The use of the deny defense by fans employed all three of the strategies it includes.

The use of this strategy, while also undertaken by Daniel Snyder, seemed to adopt its own

course by the fans in that the 'attack the accuser' strategy was the most popular. These

defensive measures sought to invalidate the opinions and values of the critics (Benoit,

1996; Coombs, 2006). We could consider this strategy in its relationship to the attacks from

those opposed to the nickname, but that may turn into a chicken vs. egg argument. Suffice it

to say that attacking one's detractors is a popular social media tactic and while those who

utilize it on both sides may not quite understand that they are doing so, it is a recognized

defense strategy. In crisis communication attacking the accuser represents an effort to take

focus off the organization under scrutiny and place it back on the one making accusations.

In social media circles it could almost be considered a sport. The main objective seemed to

be discrediting the critic in order to validate one's own point or belief. This was done in a

variety of ways, but sarcasm seemed the most convenient vehicle for delivering disdain to

discredit the outgroup. "Really, please enlighten all of us as to how many years and how

many letters you have written and protest that you have taken part in regarding this

Redskin controversy?" Another one resorted to name calling. "OK Mr. Self-Righteous." Still

another made generalizations about the critic based upon a previous comment. "So Indians

resolve their differences with violence? Talk about a racist statement." This fan seeks to

discredit some of the biggest liberal politicians in Washington D.C. and specifically targets

Hillary Clinton. "Just look at the people who are trying to strong arm Snyder? OWEBAMA,

Holder, Reid and Clinton? Hilary Clinton defended a child rapist for crying out loud and

now these morons want to elect her president?" In an effort to expose one critic's use of

generalization to make a point this fan goes to an unexpected and slightly disturbing

extreme.

> You have a picture of a small boy as your profile pic. Therefore, you must support
>
> pedophilia. Oh yeah, because you are a pedophile. (I don't believe the junk I just said
>
> any more than you believe the crap that you were spewing. Stop trolling so hard.)

One of the tactics utilized by fans was to counteract the critics call for more sensitivity by

claiming less sensitivity was actually needed. "If you're the type of person that constantly

gets offended by everything, you need to blame your parents... because they raised a p*ssy."

As you can see the comments here held nothing back and the range of topics available to

attack with was broad. This finding was not consistent with Daniel Snyder's defense unless

you count the accusation of people taking things out of context. He did not directly attack

any individual or group however, unlike the fans posting here who almost seemed to enjoy

it.

The denial strategy was also utilized to claim that there was no controversy. Fans wanted to set the record straight about common misconceptions surrounding the nickname issue. Specifically, that there really is no controversy to speak of, especially right around the Washington D.C. area.

Thats not true at all. Ive lived in the DC area my whole life and this is one of the most common made up lines about this whole thing. It really got a head of steam a couple of years ago but there have been people talking about the name my entire life.

One individual denied ever hearing the term used in a derogatory manner and claimed the nickname was of NA origins. "Uneducated....Native Americans created it. It's not a slur. Have you ever even heard it used as a slur? I never have." It seems many Redskins fans see the controversy as some sort of political or financial scheme. That the motivation is due to political interference or that someone on one side of the issue or the other will benefit financially if the name is changed. "In context, Redskins is no more derogatory than any other NFL name. This is a non-issue except for political or monetary gain." The first part of that last comment includes a sentiment that many try to use to justify the team nickname. It is usually stated in such a way so as to ask if we should just remove other nicknames because someone is likely to be offended by them. Statements similar to these examples are most common. "Nobody is offended by the Patriots nickname" or "soon we will need to change the Fighting Irish nickname because not all Irish people like being associated with drunken fighters." The assumption by those defending the nickname that the terms redskin and patriot carry equal offensiveness is odd because Patriot is generally assumed to be a positive term whereas redskin is defined as derogatory in the dictionary. Snyder and Redskins fans feel strongly that their name is honoring Native American culture as well. But

more people would agree that patriot is not considered offensive than would agree that

redskin is not offensive. I would not be researching this otherwise. The Fighting Irish may

be an insulting nickname to some, but potentially not as insulting as if the name were

utilizing a cultural stereotype like the fighting micks. The argument that all mascots are

insulting to some segment of society is suspect at best and common sense lends itself to call

this tactic grasping at straws.

The final deny strategy, scapegoat, was used to place the blame for the controversy

on the shoulders of someone else. The goal here is to make someone else responsible for

trying to ignite a controversy where there one does not exist. Accusations were leveled

against a perceived political correctness campaign. "Snyder is right in not wanting to trash

the team's name just because the PC police are out" And frighteningly this fan showed his

racist tendencies in blaming the problems of the United States on African Americans and

communists.

It's a bunch of black politicians that want power now that OBAMA is in power. Black

historically have ruined nations. They try and sugarcoat it by saying they come from

kings. That's just not true. Africa is a poor poor third world continent. That's why

none I mean zero black Americans won't go back and Africans try so hard to stay in

America. African people are enslaved by those "Kings". White liberals who have no

business running a country and or voting in a president don't wanna be politically

correct so they are just jumping on this band wagon. Truth of the matter is America

has fallen and communism has risen in a country that's suppose to be free. Sooner

or later we will see the Muslim (flag) fly over the white house. It's gonna happen and

we are letting these communist people get away with it.

Fortunately even Redskins fans questioned this response as too over the top. They may want to keep the nickname but they are not THAT crazy. That being said, there were several responses that claimed Washington lawmakers were meddling in something they had no right to influence. "I just don't want to change something because a bunch of politically motivated, uppity senators and congressmen feel something doesn't sound right to them."

Of the five possible strategies available under the deal response only ingratiation was utilized. This follows the strategy set by Snyder by citing the historical beneficence of the team toward Native Americans. Where Snyder pointed to specific examples of the team's coach and several players as having ties to Native American heritage, fans tended to defer to the feelings of Native Americans who do support the team. "I look at it this way....1)...NAV's opinions matter most...I have met many that wear Redskins jerseys all the time...so that should not be taken away...from them or whites/blacks that support team ..." As well as:

> The funny thing is that Harry Reid and the politicians aren't doing anything for
> Native Americans, but Daniel Snyder is. There is a long history of giving to Native
> American causes and getting involved with the tribes to ask their opinion on what
> can be done to improve their situation. Instead, Harry Reid goes out, gets a tribe of
> 32 Native Americans from New York and tells the rest of the proud Native
> Americans what they should think. You should be offended little Indians. I will do
> your thinking for you. Forget that all the polls taken of the actual Native Americans
> show they are not offended.

They also noted charitable work conducted by the Redskins organization as evidence of a

good relationship between the team and some Native American Tribes.

> Why is that not clear or unacceptable, and why does it have to be construed as
>
> disrespectful despite no evidence of the organization doing anything to hurt the
>
> lives of native Americans? The Redskins organization in fact does more than the
>
> government (federal, state, local, or county) to help with the challenges currently in
>
> existence on several Indian reservations. Snyder, who somehow has managed to
>
> increase the value of the "losing" organization more than twice what he paid to own
>
> it, uses a percentage of the annual budget to put towards efforts to improve the lives
>
> of the people living on reservations.

Chapter Six

Discussion

The analysis of the comments made by this group of both defenders and critics of the Redskins nickname has yielded interesting results. The various responses of the critics of the nickname tended to group themselves around cultural sensitivity issues. When reading the attacks by critics on fans there is evidence of an underlying assumption that the Redskins fan was in some way being culturally insensitive. Similarly, most comments critical of the name adopted a rhetorical strategy that contained an element of cultural awareness. The goal of the critics seemed largely to point out the insensitive nature of the nickname and make an appeal toward discontinuing its use. This inclusion of cultural awareness may be influenced by events like the Treyvon Martin shooting in Florida and racial profiling debates accompanying illegal immigration issues which pre-date the Daniel Snyder Interview. Despite the successes of the civil rights movement in the 1960's many would say there is still much work to be done to improve race relations in this country. This is especially true when considering the overtly racist comment included earlier. There seems to be a growing awareness of racial insensitivity that some may derisively call political correctness or oversensitivity. That this conversation is taking place is encouraging though for without discussion cultural insensitivity continues to be a problem. The various strategies employed by critics in this group have assisted in establishing context for the defensive strategies used by Daniel Snyder and Washington fans.

It would seem that the defensive posture adopted by Daniel Snyder has been adopted by the fans. In denying there is a controversy, diminishing any perceived controversy, and dealing with those possibly affected by a perceived controversy, he

resonated with fans who in turn adopted similar strategies when defending their positions

to others. There are some deviations in the manner in which fans defend the use of the

nickname, but the similarities in defensive strategies were evident. Where most fans

denied that the name was offensive the rationalization used to demonstrate their

arguments included sarcasm, personal attacks, historical explanations, tradition, and

acceptance of the nickname by Native Americans. Fans also seem to have taken the

defensive message further than Mr. Snyder was willing to, but I view this as a measure of

propriety on his behalf. He may not have as strong a position to attack his organization's

accusers and utilizing that tactic could further alienate those opposed to the nickname and

some of the more moderate fans. His stronger arguments seem to be found in relying on

identifying the positive traits the Redskins organization is trying to emulate and associating

the team name with those traits. The fans, however, seem to have taken the responsibility

of attacking accusers upon themselves. Internet comment boards are notorious for

argument and vitriolic personal attacks. The various critical strategies found in answering

RQ1 may have played a role in shaping the defensive dialogue and prompting the adoption

of combative responses like attacking the accuser. Daniel Snyder very carefully avoided

direct attacks on those critical of the Redskins name, but he did imply that those who want

the name changed simply fail to understand what it means to be a fan of the Washington

Redskins or that they have taken things out of context.

The head of an organization may have a more difficult time justifying the attack the

accuser strategy where the issue in question is difficult to clearly define. In my analysis of

these Facebook posts there was an almost even split between those opposed to the

nickname and those in favor of it. For Snyder to attack a minority group like Native

Americans would likely be the end of his career, as has been demonstrated by former Los

Angeles Clippers owner Donald Sterling. To risk the ire of politicians who work in relatively

close proximity to the team could also lead to trouble for Mr. Snyder. I believe his defensive

strategy intended to deny the controversy, put a positive spin on the nickname, and

demonstrate an organizational concern toward representing and honoring Native

Americans. This focus may have been intended to transcend the controversy by denying

any ill intentions. Snyder also has to consider the ramifications of his defensive strategy on

his ability to make a profitable business. Fans who post on Facebook are not under the

same restrictions when crafting their defense. Most respondents make a fair attempt at

debate but lack critical crisis communication skills and resort to simply attempting to

discredit each other. In an arena like Facebook, where little accountability is expected, the

defensive statements run the gamut from well thought out and sincere to absurd and

inflammatory. A more meaningful dialogue would be possible if the comments leaned more

to the well thought out and sincere and left the emotionally charged battle of wills to the

players on the football field.

Daniel Snyder utilized sound crisis response strategies in attempting to defend his

organization against attacks. The rhetoric he used resonated with the fan base well and

inspired the complimentary vein the fan arguments took. It is important for other

organizations to note the potential for their stakeholders to assist in the crisis response if

they are given a consistent message that is easily relatable to those not well versed in

defensive strategy. The fans did a fair job of taking up the banner for the Redskins

organization and attempted to defend the nickname based upon what they saw from the

organization in addition to their own defensive strategies.

The majority of actual arguments are seriously flawed however, even by modest standards. Some arguments tried to point to the hypocrisy of allowing the meaning of Oklahoma (Choctaw for "red people") to stand but calling for the Redskins name change. These comments attempt to either elevate the offensive nature of non-offensive terms or ideas, or to diminish the offensive nature of "redskin" by comparison. As stated earlier this tactic is often used by Redskins fans when they bring up other sports mascots in an attempt to reduce the offensive nature of their mascot by comparison. This is only an effective argument if the two examples are similar in their degree of offensiveness. Calling a state "red people" in a native language is vastly different than calling a football team by a name that has some negative connotations. Like the previously cited example comparing redskin to mick (Irish) or any other common epithet would lend to a more credible argument.

Arguments in the tone of the "sticks and stones" comment cited earlier seem to claim that words are not the divisive and hurtful medium that they have been shown to be. If this argument were valid then our present society would not have experienced the political correctness movement or the anti-bullying campaigns that have been prominently featured in today's media. There may be some people who do not let the hurtful words of others have an effect on them. There seems to be a larger number of people who feel the hurt caused by words and who are making an attempt to curtail their use. The "sticks and stones" mantra was intended to assuage the feelings of the target of the hurtful speech. Bullies love it because they can say what they want and claim that words are harmless. Sometimes the injured party has had enough and wants the name calling to stop. Accusing them of oversensitivity dismisses their feelings and their right to be treated fairly.

Other arguments focused on the premise of knowing someone of Native American ethnicity who was not offended by the name. As has been demonstrated by several of the critical responses the existence of individuals not offended by the nickname does not rule out the existence of individuals who find it offensive.

I believe that the analysis shows that the tenor of the fan arguments matched those made by Snyder, with the exception of the attack the accuser strategy. It would be interesting to see if similar proxy defenses occur with other NFL franchises or even within other major league sports. The current debate concerning the Cleveland Indians mascot would be a rich source of information on a similar topic from the perspective of a different sport. It may also provide an arena to take a closer look at the ready adoption of questionable arguments as well as argumentation strategies on social media.

This thesis sought to determine if the strategies used by the head of an organization in the defense of a commonly accepted offensive term as a professional sports team mascot are adopted by that organization's fans. The defensive posture of ownership and fans, and the justification the offended group utilizes in calling for improved status have been analyzed. Despite a philosophical argument that has fascinating possibilities all its own, there is enough evidence to suggest that the defensive strategy utilized by Snyder has been adopted and embellished by fans. This embellishment comes in the form of SCCT theories like attack the accuser and scapegoat that, while not appropriate for corporate heads to employ in this particular instance, can be frequently employed by fans in Facebook comments.

As has been demonstrated, the defensive strategies utilized by the team have been adopted by the fan base to a large extent. The team and the fans sought to deny a

controversy existed, diminish the severity of any perceived controversy, and deal with

those who felt maligned by citing past examples of good behavior. While the effectiveness

of the actual arguments varied, it is clear that when individuals who affiliate with an

organization are given a clear and consistent example to follow they will likely follow it.

This raises important questions for the viability of other types of organizations following

suit in order to successfully navigate times of crisis.

There are, however, limitations to consider when implementing this type of defense

by proxy. Sports teams generally have a fan base that encompasses a wide range of

followers, from casual fans to die-hard fans. It is likely that the die-hard fans could be

counted on to take up the organization's crisis defense, but the more casual fans may feel

less inclined to do so. This goes back to the social identity of sports fans discussed earlier.

Highly invested fans have a greater stake in the success and positive image of their team

than do casual team fans or even less invested fans of the sport in question. So

organizations may only be able to rely on their highly vested stakeholders to aid in the

organizations defense. Sports fandom creates an arena, especially in the social media age,

where those with a heavy rooting interest have a place to make their voices heard.

As was discussed in the literature review fans of a sports team and by extension,

loyalists to a cause, seek to elevate their social status through the object of their loyalty.

This was demonstrated by the extent to which Redskins fans defended their team and

sought to establish credibility for their arguments by siding with Daniel Snyder's defensive

rhetoric. It would seem that the fan feels as though an attack on their team is, in some

cases, an attack on them. In the case of the team nickname, and accusations of racism or

cultural insensitivity, Redskins fans are passionately distancing themselves and their team

from wrongdoing. Similar passion would be likely in devotees of organizations who are also accused of wrongdoing.

Political campaigns and religious causes may be other arenas where proxy crisis defense may be useful. Political candidates seem to collect followers who are passionate about their chosen candidate's platform and image. The usual debate of 'my candidate versus your candidate' would lead me to believe that the passion involved would be similar to that expressed in the realm of sports. Religion would be another topic that could quite possibly yield insight into crisis defense from devoted followers. Religious persuasion has been a contributing factor to many major conflicts in the history of the world and so the field may be ripe for the study of proxy rhetorical defense. Other areas where individuals may express devotion to a particular person, group, or cause and seek to defend the object of their loyalty could include, immunization debaters, breastfeeding advocates, global warming advocates (and deniers), and radical environmentalists just to name a few. If there exists a cause that has a loyal following there may also be evidence of a proxy defense in a time of crisis.

While it would be easy to assume that the above groups would be quick to jump to their preferred causes' defense it would be more difficult for consumer brands to pull off. It is hard to imagine a Tide laundry detergent user coming to a passionate defense of Proctor and Gamble during a scandal. Some brands may have passionate followings but further research would be needed to fully understand proxy defense from a commercial enterprise standpoint. I may be wrong and Tide users may be passionate about their laundry soap. If so proxy defense would be worth pursuing in the realm of consumer goods as well.

As was stated earlier the implications of this research demonstrate a possible advantage to organizations who capitalize on their supporters in crisis response. The organization, however, must have a devoted following in order for this to be effective. Passionate football fans have a vested interest in their team as was demonstrated in the review of the sports fan social identity literature. It would be worth investigating in the future to see how major corporations without a rooting interest in a sports franchise would be able to influence stakeholder participation in crisis response apologia. If done right their stakeholders may be a valuable public relations buffer against times of crisis.

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