Doctoral Dissertations

Graduate School

12-2010

Integrated Impression Management: How NCAA Division I Athletics Directors Understand Public Relations

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To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Angela N. Pratt entitled "Integrated Impression Management: How NCAA Division I Athletics Directors Understand Public Relations." I have examined the final electronic copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in Communication and Information.

<div align="right">Sally J. McMillan, Major Professor</div>

We have read this dissertation and recommend its acceptance:

Margaret Morrison, Michael J. Palenchar, Robin Hardin

<div align="right">Accepted for the Council:
<u>Carolyn R. Hodges</u></div>

<div align="right">Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School</div>

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Integrated Impression Management: How NCAA Division I Athletics Directors
Understand Public Relations

A Dissertation
Presented for the
Doctor of Philosophy
Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Angela N. Pratt

December 2010

Dedication

To my husband

David Gregory Weddle

To my parents

Larry Charles Pratt and Connie Lee Pratt

To my grandparents

Charles Robert Pratt and Sarah Janice Lavonne Pratt

and

Walter George Ahlm and Ellen Esther Ahlm

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my gratitude to my advisor and dissertation committee chair, Dr. Sally J. McMillan, for her guidance, dedication and encouragement throughout my dissertation process and graduate career. Most sincere thanks as well to my dissertation committee for their wise counsel, direction and insight: Dr. Margaret Morrison, Dr. Michael J. Palenchar, and Dr. Robin Hardin.

Words cannot adequately express how grateful I am for the loving, patient support of my family during my graduate career and dissertation work, especially my husband, Greg Weddle, and my parents, Larry and Connie Pratt. Many thanks as well to my University of Tennessee and Bradley University colleagues, Knoxville Track Club and F.A.S.T. running buddies, Dr. Stephenie Chaudoir, Cindi Holcombe, Dr. Jennifer Robin, Dr. Brody Ruihley, Dr. Stacy Warner, and many other dear friends and family members who have helped and inspired me to stay the course and finish the race.

Abstract

The sport industry has become an enormous cultural and economic force across the globe. Yet it is one that is largely understudied in regards to public relations. In the United States, intercollegiate athletics—particularly football and men's and women's basketball—garners a tremendous amount of attention from media, the government, sports fan communities, merchandisers and scholars. However, there is scant research on public relations within intercollegiate athletics departments.

Therefore, the purpose of this study is to learn how intercollegiate athletics directors (ADs) from National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Division I institutions with major basketball programs understand public relations, overall and in the context of men's and women's basketball coaches. For this study, a phenomenological approach was used. Twelve ADs were interviewed, and their transcripts were analyzed using comparative analysis procedures.

The findings show that the overall understanding of public relations to the participants is integrated impression management: a combination of image, message, and action/interaction. The ADs associated public relations with marketing, branding, communication, media relations, community/university relations, fundraising and crisis management. They expressed a range of responsibility within their organizations for public relations, as well as related issues and challenges. They also associated some specific responsibilities and challenges regarding public relations to the context of men's and women's basketball coaching. The results of this study imply that despite some scholars' insistence that public relations is a distinct discipline from marketing, executives do not necessarily separate the two.

The findings of this study aid in understanding how public relations might be evolving within intercollegiate athletics. Learning how those with power and influence in this industry understand public relations can help intercollegiate athletics departments with the root and ramifications of some major challenges. For scholars, this presents an opportunity to test and develop theory, as well as to identify trends, changes and solutions for public relations in an industry with cultural power and influence.

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Chapter One: Introduction

Public relations, as a relatively new academic discipline, has evolved from a single focus on applied knowledge to a field grounded in diverse theoretical perspectives (Botan, 1993). The past three decades have seen prolific scholarship that has led to the development of a strong body of knowledge (Gower, 2006). Public relations scholars have developed a variety of theoretical approaches, which have been used to research and attempt to influence industry (e.g., Hallahan, 1993; Heath, 2006).

While some of these approaches have risen to dominance, Gower (2006) cautioned that early approaches and assumptions of public relations theory should continue to be tested and challenged by newer perspectives so as not to "close off other ideas or stultify thinking" (p. 178). Heath (2006) suggested that different approaches to public relations research—namely, systems theory, rhetoric, and social exchange theoretical premises—are beneficial to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the study, teaching and practice of the field.

Theoretical Approaches to Public Relations

The dominant theoretical approach to public relations is systems theory (e.g., Gower, 2006; Leichty & Springston, 1993). Excellence theory, in particular, has been called a "dominant paradigm" of the field (e.g., Cottone, 1993; Everett, 1993; Sharpe, 2000). It asserts that public relations is a management function, and that the most successful organizations practice two-way symmetrical communication with their publics (e.g., J. Grunig, 2006; J. Grunig & L. Grunig, 1989, 2000; J. Grunig & Hunt, 1984; Kelly, Laskin, & Rosenstein, 2010).

However, the increase in public relations scholarship has given rise to other approaches. Within systems research, relationship management scholars have become rivals of excellence theorists with a new model emphasizing the organization-public relationship (e.g., Bruning,

2000; Bruning, Castle, & Schrepfer, 2004; Hung, 2005; Ledingham, 2003). Rhetorical

approaches to public relations emphasize the salience of messages and texts in determining the

motives and influence of public relations (e.g., Benoit, 2006; Heath, 1993, 2000; Kruse, 2001;

Liu, 2007; Livesey, 2001; Marsh, 2003; Porter, 2010; Reber & Berger, 2005). Critical scholars

challenge normative concepts of public relations—including the notion of symmetry—through

their emphasis of power disparities between organizations and their publics (e.g., Berger, 1999,

2005; Ihlen, 2007; Lawniczak, 2009; Roper, 2005). Feminist critical scholars examine the study

and practice of public relations through the lens of gender and struggle for equality (e.g., L.

Grunig, 2006; L. Grunig, et al., 2000; Hon, 1995; Toth & L. Grunig, 1993; Wrigley, 2002).

Social constructionist and semiotic approaches study meaning through words, interactions, signs

and symbols (e.g., Botan & Soto, 1998; Hale, Dulek, & Hale, 2005; de Lange & Linders, 2006;

Molleda & Suarez, 2005; Prasad & Mir, 2002; Schultz & Raupp, 2010). Scholars who take an

integrated marketing communications (IMC) approach see public relations as working in tandem

with (and intractable from) marketing and advertising (e.g., Caywood & Ewing, 1991; Ewing,

2009; Hutton, 1996; Kitchen, Kim & Schultz, 2008; Miller & Rose, 1994; Moriarty, 1994;

Schultz & Patti, 2009).

Despite this variety of theoretical approaches to public relations, academic research has

been accused of being irrelevant to and out of touch with the practice of public relations in the

"real world" (e.g., Broom, Cox, Krueger, & Liebler, 1989; Gower, 2006; Miller & Rose, 1994;

Moriarty, 1994). Some theoretical approaches insist that public relations is a discipline distinct

from advertising, marketing and journalism (e.g., J. Grunig & L. Grunig, 1991); others advocate

a profession integrated with those same three fields (e.g., Caywood & Ewing, 1991). A search of

titles across any industry reveals that there is little consensus outside of academe regarding what public relations is, much less how it should be studied and practiced.

Intercollegiate Athletics and Public Relations

Intercollegiate athletics is a good context for study of these varying meanings of public relations. A highly visible, emotional and influential part of the American cultural fabric, intercollegiate athletics has characteristics similar to most other athletics organizations. Intercollegiate athletics administration has been examined from the perspectives of race, gender, management styles, advancement issues, work-life balance and organizational structure (e.g., Dixon & Sagas, 2007; Quarterman, Dupree, & Willis, 2006; Sagas & Cunningham, 2004; Scott, 1999; Smart & Wolfe, 2000; Whisenant & Pedersen, 2004; Wolfe, 2000). As TV contracts, licensing agreements and multimedia marketing approaches have become a major part of the business side of intercollegiate athletics, scholars have studied the resulting financial, relational and ethical implications (e.g., Burden & Li, 2002; Gladden, Milne, & Sutton, 1998; Humphreys & Mondello, 2007; Judson, Gorchels, & Aurand, 2006; Kennedy, 2007; Maher, 2007; Mahony, Hums, & Riemer, 2005; O'English & McCord, 2006; Roy, Graeff, & Harmon, 2008; Stahley & Boyd, 2006; Trail & Chelladurai, 2002).

However, intercollegiate athletics is also an understudied context of public relations research. Most studies in this field have associated public relations exclusively with media relations/sports information (e.g., McCleneghan, 1995). Some studies have profiled the intercollegiate media relations profession through gathering demographic data (Hardin & McClung, 2002; Neupauer, 1998; Stoldt, 2000), information about roles (e.g., Stoldt, 2000) and personality traits (e.g., Neupauer, 1999), and statistical analysis of advancement potential (e.g., Swalls, 2004) from sports information directors (SIDs). Other studies have assessed SIDs

through surveys of their supervisors, namely athletics directors (ADs) (Stoldt, Miller, & Comfort, 2001).

However, ADs and head coaches are high-profile spokespersons for their programs, departments and institutions; new administrative roles are integrating multiple functions; and new media are blurring the lines between marketing, media relations, fundraising and even journalism. Scholars are beginning to explore the implications of these changes through case studies and survey research about operations, and marketing and public relations activities, roles and perceptions (e.g., Burden & Li, 2003; Covell, 2001; Ruihley & Fall, 2009).

What is the understanding of public relations in intercollegiate athletics? Can the answer to that question tell us something about the relevancy of any of the major theoretical approaches to the practice of public relations? To answer those questions, it is crucial to learn how directors of intercollegiate athletics departments understand public relations.

Purpose of Study and Research Question

The purpose of this study is to learn how ADs of NCAA Division I institutions with major basketball programs understand public relations, overall and also in the context of expectations that they have of their head basketball coaches. ADs are the CEOs of their departments (e.g., Whisenant, Pedersen, & Obenour, 2002). They have power over finances, structures, priorities, policies and management (e.g., Plourd, 2009; Whisenant & Pedersen, 2004). Therefore it is important to find out how they understand public relations as representatives of their industry.

High-profile head coaches assume a similar position in relation to their own programs. Basketball coaches are among the best known—if not the best known—representatives of their universities' athletics programs. Men's basketball has historically garnered more revenues,

media attention, and event attendance than women's basketball in NCAA Division I athletics overall (e.g., Billings, Halone, & Denham, 2002; Kian, Mondello, & Vincent, 2009). According to the NCAA Revenues/Expenses Division I Report for 2004- 2009 (Fulks, 2010), the median salary for men's basketball coaches at Football Bowl Subdivision (FBS) institutions is $911,000, and $308,000 for women's basketball coaches (which is about twice that of any other women's sport). The same report shows that generated revenues for FBS men's basketball programs are about $5 million, and $278,000 for women's basketball (which is more than twice that of any other women's team).

While these figures are nowhere close to equal, studies show that men's and women's basketball together bring in more revenues—though it must be noted that revenues do not always cover expenses, so they do not always mean "profits"—media attention and event attendance than any other intercollegiate sport with male and female counterparts (i.e., football makes more money, but has no female counterpart) (e.g., Anderson, 2007; Fulks, 2010). It makes sense, then, to learn whether ADs have a specific place for these especially high-profile personnel within their understanding of public relations.

Therefore, the primary research question driving this study is: How do ADs of NCAA Division I institutions with major basketball programs understand public relations, overall and in the context of expectations they have for their basketball coaches?

Framework of Study

Because this study seeks to understand a phenomenon from the perspective of those who experience it—in this case, the understanding of public relations among intercollegiate athletics directors—it uses qualitative approaches to research. This study begins with a review of relevant literature. The literature provides insight into how other scholars have approached public

relations theory, public relations in industry, and this specific phenomenon. Next, the researcher

will discuss the research questions and qualitative methodology. The findings of the study and

discussion of their contribution to current public relations scholarship and practice will follow.

Finally, the study will conclude by addressing its limitations, and suggestions for future research.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

The following literature review will discuss theoretical approaches of public relations and their relationship to industry, including intercollegiate athletics. These approaches include systems, rhetoric, critical, social constructionist and integrated marketing communications. In addition to noting the advancement of knowledge in these areas, the gaps in the literature will be discussed, as well as the ways that the current study will contribute to filling these gaps.

Theoretical Approaches to Public Relations

Public relations has been studied with a variety of approaches. Though systems theories have a dominant place in public relations scholarship, non-systems viewpoints that are rhetorical, critical or phenomenological have also contributed to the literature (e.g., Hallahan, 1993; Heath, 2006). In addition, integrated marketing communications has emerged as a theoretical approach to the public relations discipline (e.g., Hutton, 1996; McGrath, 2005; Schultz & Kitchen, 2000; Swain, 2004).

   Systems approaches.

A dominant approach in public relations research currently is systems theory. Toth (2002) characterized systems theory as one that emphasizes individuality, objectivity, dominating ideology, social science/positivism, rationality, linearity, and progression from one stage to the next. According to Toth (2002), systems researchers have focused on goals and management by objectives, breakdown of public relations process to achieve outcomes, positive social force, symmetry, and an excellence standard. Systems theory has been called the "dominant paradigm" of public relations since the 1990s, and therefore has generated a large amount of research, especially regarding corporations (e.g., Berger, 1999; Gower, 2006; Hallahan, 1993; Leichty & Springston, 1993; Roper, 2005).

Systems theory addresses how organizations respond to their environments through the terms "open" and "closed" (e.g., J. Grunig & L. Grunig, 1989). Open systems actively engage in exchanges with their environment, while closed systems do not respond or adapt to changes in their environment. According to J. Grunig and L. Grunig (1989), public relations contributes to "organizational success through systematic monitoring of relevant external constituencies" (p. 29). The function of public relations in an open system is to identify publics and engage in two-way communication with them (symmetrical or asymmetrical) (Creedon, 1993). The definition and development of two-way symmetrical communication has been one of the hallmarks of the most normative systems perspective of the past two decades, excellence theory (e.g., J. Grunig & L. Grunig, 1989; Cancel, Cameron, Sallot, & Mitrook, 1997; Kelly, et al., 2010).

Excellence theory.

J. Grunig and L. Grunig established excellence theory as a result of a major research initiative called the Excellence Project (e.g., J. Grunig & L. Grunig, 1998, 2000; J. Grunig, 2006). The study involved a large number of corporations and their officers, including public relations practitioners. Their results suggested that "excellent" organizations were characterized by two-way, symmetrical communication and an open systems orientation (e.g., J. Grunig, 1992; J. Grunig & L. Grunig, 2000). This applied to external communication programs as well as internal communication systems (J. Grunig, 1990).

According to J. Grunig and L. Grunig's (1989, 1998) research, two-way symmetrical is the ideal form of communication between an organization and its publics. Two-way communication involves research about publics, their feedback, and/or other means of dialogue (J. Grunig, 1990). Symmetrical communication involves negotiation and compromise between the interests of an organization and its publics (J. Grunig, 1990). The result of this dialogue is

supposed to be "change…in the ideas, attitudes and behaviors of both" (J. Grunig, 1990, p. 21).

Public relations departments practicing two-way, symmetrical communication "use bargaining, negotiating, and conflict-resolution strategies to bring symbiotic changes in the ideas, attitudes, and behaviors of both the organization and its publics" (J. Grunig & L. Grunig, 1989, p. 31). Grunig (1990) claimed that symmetrical public relations is also ethical and socially responsible "because it manages conflict rather than wages war" (p. 20-21).

Strategy is another important aspect of excellence theory. According to J. Grunig (1990), organizations strive to be autonomous from their stakeholders—internal or external—so that they will be free to pursue their goals. While this type of autonomy is an "idealized goal," organizations practicing excellent public relations can work toward it by managing "interdependence by building stable, long-term relationships with key publics" (J. Grunig, 1990, p. 18).

Other scholars have used excellence theory to study public relations. For example, Kelly, et al. (2010) tested models of public relations theory to learn how investor relations specialists practice public relations. They found that the investor relations officers surveyed primarily practice the two-way symmetrical model of public relations; the researchers claimed that this refutes the criticism that two-way, symmetrical communication is a "utopian ideal" (p. 182).

Excellence theory has also been applied to public relations studies involving cultural contexts. Rhee (2002) found that in South Korea, excellence theory combined with cultural and philosophical norms and ideas (such as collectivism and Confucianism) to explain public relations practice. Culture and excellence theory combined again in the results of Guiniven's (2002) research on how public relations and activism interact in Canada. He concluded that there

is actually greater acceptance of two-way symmetry in Canada than the United States, due to a stronger cultural tradition of compromise in Canada.

Four generic principles of public relations based on excellence theory—involvement of public relations in strategic management, empowerment of public relations in the dominant coalition, use of two-way symmetrical model, and knowledge potential for managerial role and symmetrical communication—Lim, Goh, and Sriramesh (2005) analyzed public relations practice in Singapore. They found that these principles are applicable in another culture (i.e., outside the West); but that public relations has not yet developed a strong strategic role among those surveyed and interviewed.

Crisis research and excellence theory have also crossed paths. For example, González-Herrero and Pratt (1996) used the concept of symmetry to develop a four-step model for crisis management. Their steps included issues management, planning prevention, crisis and post-crisis; and they McDonald's "hot coffee spill" and Intel's "Pentium flaw" cases to illustrate these steps (p. 79).

Other aspects of public relations within organizations studied using excellence theory and its tenets include organizational identity and organizational worldviews. Sha (2009) explored how public relations can be used to "create, maintain, and strengthen" organizational identities (p. 295). The study revealed that organizations would be better able to maintain positive relationships with stakeholders—such as donors, members and employees—by using symmetrical communication, rather than focusing on the conservation of organizational identity.

Deatherage and Hazleton (1998) used excellence theory to develop and test three hypotheses about symmetrical and asymmetrical organizational worldviews. Specifically, they sought to determine relationships between these two worldviews, Grunig's four models of public

relations, and public relations effectiveness. Their results showed that the two-way

symmetrical model was a significant predictor of public relations effectiveness, and that there

was some relationship between asymmetrical worldviews/asymmetrical models and symmetrical

views/symmetrical models. However, they also found that there was some association between

symmetrical worldviews and asymmetrical models as well, which contradicts ideal excellence

theory. The researchers posited that these results might indicate flaws in the models, or that

maybe press agentry and persuasion are not truly asymmetrical after all.

Relationship theory/relationship management.

Similar to excellence theory is relationship theory. Also called "relationship

management", this systems perspective advances the idea that public relations is a management

activity instead of simply a communications activity, and that communication is used

strategically (Ledingham & Bruning, 1998). Relationship management shares post-positivistic,

power-free and idealistic traits with other systems theories like excellence (Ledingham, 2003). It

is based on social science research on relationship dimensions and their operationalization

(Ledingham, 2003). Some scholars, such as Ledingham (2003) view relationship management as

having potential as a public relations paradigm, and defined its components as effective

management types and processes, common interests and shared goals, time, mutual

understanding and benefit, organizations and publics.

Relationship management scholars use the organization-public relationship (OPR) as

their primary unit of measurement (e.g., Hung, 2005; Ledingham, 2003; Ledingham & Bruning,

1998). An OPR is defined as "the state that exists between an organization and its key publics

that provides economic, social, political and/or cultural well-being of the other entity"

(Ledingham & Bruning, 1998, p. 62). According to Hung (2005), OPRs arise when organizations

and their strategic publics are interdependent, and this interdependence results in consequences to each other that organizations need to manage constantly.

For relationship management scholars, OPRs affect relationship outcomes, such as satisfaction and behavior (Bruning, et al., 2004; Hung, 2005). Ratings of relationship dimensions define the state of the OPR, and act as a predictor of public perceptions and choice behavior (Ledingham, 2003). The outcome of effective (ideal) relationship management is mutual understanding and benefit – resulting in gains for both organizations and publics (e.g., Bruning, et al., 2004; Ledingham, 2003). Ledingham and Bruning (1998) showed that when public relations is viewed as relationship management, public relations programs can be designed around relationship goals, with communication strategies employed to support their achievement.

Rhetorical approaches.

The rhetorical tradition has a long history, dating back to the fourth century B.C., when the Greek scholars Aristotle, Plato and Isocrates debated approaches to communication and persuasion (Marsh, 2003, Porter, 2010). Rhetoricians study public relations through texts and narratives, which are used persuasively by organizations and individuals (e.g., Kruse, 2001; Porter, 2010).

Heath (2000) stated that rhetoric is "the rationale of the suasory process of asserting and contesting propositions – perspectives of fact, value, policy, identification, and narrative" (p. 72). It studies the impact of words and symbols on publics (e.g., Benoit, 2006; Heath, 1993; Liu, 2007). Rhetoric is an intellectual process that can be used for good or bad ends, and assumes that ideas are subject to scrutiny and change—by publics or scholars (e.g., Leichty, 2003; Livesey, 2001). The goal of "good" rhetoric is to achieve a better quality of discourse by constructing

stronger arguments, evidence and ideas, which will hopefully lead to better policy decisions (e.g., Heath, 2000).

Rhetoric's relationship to public relations also ties into the assumption that all facts, values and policies are subject to being promoted or argued against; therefore, rhetoric can underpin the values of PR as being those of a good organization communicating well (Heath, 2000). In addition, the rhetorical perspective helps to explain how public relations practice conforms to or creates values in societies, which can influence commerce and policy (Heath, 2000).

Case studies are also often tied to rhetorical approaches. For example, Kruse (2001) used a rhetorical approach to study how the Brent Spar oil platform crisis was portrayed in German and French newspapers. She used comparative analysis to examine the coverage, and found that the different rhetorical devices used by the newspapers created an entirely different perception of the crisis in Germany than in France. These different media portrayals influenced public opinion and politics in each nation in very different ways.

Critical approaches.

Power issues in public relations research and practice are most often examined from critical perspectives (e.g., Frohlich & Peters, 2007; L. Grunig, 2006; Hon, 1995; Krauchek & Ranson, 1999; Toth, 2002; Tsetsura, 2007; Wrigley, 2002). Researchers such as Creedon (1993), Hon (1995), and L. Grunig, et al. (2000), have criticized the use of normative, positivistic theoretical perspectives to study public relations, because they ignore power and gender, and support Western, capitalistic values.

Public relations scholars have explored power issues in the field through critical approaches. L. Grunig (1990) examined power from a structural standpoint to learn its role in

public relations practice. Personal interviews and survey data revealed that while public relations practitioners believed that executive leadership supported and understood their work, they did not necessarily value it. This lack of value was shown through the limited authority afforded to practitioners by the power elite.

Roper (2005) examined power issues through the concept of two-way symmetrical communication, a tenet of excellence theory. She used the lens of hegemony—which involves negotiation of power relationships between entities—to explore whether two-way symmetry represents ethical public relations practice. Roper (2005) used examples such as the World Bank, International Monetary Fund, Shell Oil and British Petroleum to argue that, while the efforts of organizations to communicate and negotiate with stakeholders have some positive value, it is questionable to consider these efforts truly collaborative because they benefit the corporations more than their stakeholders.

Identities and stereotypes among publics and public relations practitioners—especially women—have been analyzed for meaning, prevalence and consequence (e.g., Creedon, 1993; L. Grunig, 2006; Hon, 1995; Wrigley, 2002). For example, Creedon (1993) used the context of sport to show how systems theories work against true excellence in public relations by "uncritically accepting the norms" that help to keep discrimination, such as gender privilege, in place. Hon (1995) showed that female public relations practitioners face marginalization of their field by others, male dominance in the workplace, struggles to balance work-life issues, and gender stereotypes. She developed a feminist theory of public relations, and solutions for combating discrimination, from societal, organizational, gender and professional perspectives.

The concept of a "glass ceiling" in public relations was addressed in a study by Wrigley (2002). Wrigley used in-depth interviews and focus groups to identify factors contributing to the

glass ceiling (denial, gender role socialization, historical precedence, women turning against other women and corporate culture) and strategies that can be used to overcome it (i.e., negotiated resignation, radical feminist strategies, liberal feminist strategies). L. Grunig (2006) developed a feminist phase system to analyze the evolution of women in public relations, and concluded that the current phase involves women and men as communication professionals and human beings who are struggling to balance work-life issues.

Scholars have also used critical scholarship to reveal Western philosophical bias in public relations' dominant theoretical approaches. For example, Fuse, Land, and Lambiase (2010) challenged the "ethnocentrism of ethical reasoning prevalent in Western public relations practices" by discussing and applying two non-Western philosophical approaches to a U.S.-based case study to demonstrate their use and value. Curtin and Gaither (2005) recognized that normative theories of public relations privilege Western economic realities, and developed a circuit of culture model of public relations that redefined public relations as culturally relativistic.

Social constructionist approaches.

Social constructionist approaches to public relations research holds that "all perspectives of reality…are constructed through communication" (Hearit & Courtright, 2003, p. 80). Words have meanings that are multiple and conceived through interpretations of society and situation; therefore it is possible for them to be used to mask reality. Therefore, a social constructionist's objective is to remove the terminological mask and reveal "a more accurate conceptualization of what is present" (p. 87). These conceptualizations include realities of the public relations profession, cultural phenomena and organizational issues, which can be used to build theory and

inform practice (e.g., Molleda & Moreno, 2006; Sallot, Porter, & Acosta-Alzuru, 2004; Schultz & Raupp, 2010).

Social constructionist approaches have been used to study crisis. For example, Schultz and Raupp (2010) examined governmental and corporate crisis communications from the 2008 financial crisis. They analyzed how crisis communicators made sense of the crisis, made decisions about the crisis, and how they did both of these things at individual, corporate and societal levels. Results demonstrated "that the financial crisis is mostly inter-systemically and inter-organizationally co-constructed" (p. 112).

Molleda and Moreno (2006) used a social constructionist approach to study how national context—particularly the socioeconomic and political environment—influences public relations practice in Mexico. Sallot, et al. (2004) used focus groups to learn about the Web use of public relations practitioners. While the researchers brought in the dimension of power to the focus group discussions, the study is not critical because the study assumed that the practitioners had knowledge and agency regarding the meaning of the power definition in their workplaces.

Public affairs aspects of public relations and reality construction were explored by de Lange and Linders (2006). Their study was a reaction to a perceived need for a stronger theoretical foundation for public affairs, which they define as "the strategic management discipline that addresses the political-government environment in which the organization (sic) is situated or will be situated" (p. 131). They analyzed the use of constructionism as a possible paradigm for research and practice in the field, using examples from prior studies of the characteristics of public affairs.

Crisis communication has also been explored through social constructionist approaches. Hale, et al. (2005) used in-depth interviews with 26 crisis decision-makers to examine crisis

communication challenges experienced in the response stage of crisis management. Themes

from their participants indicated four common response steps: observation, interpretation, choice

and dissemination.

Despite their differences, most systems, rhetorical, critical and social constructionist

public relations scholars assert that the discipline is (or should be) distinct from other fields,

particularly marketing, advertising, journalism and organizational communication (e.g., J.

Grunig & L. Grunig, 1989, 1991, 1998; Hutton, 1996; Lauzen, 1991, 1993; Rose & Miller,

1993). However, other scholars have moved toward a theoretical approach to public relations

tied directly to those fields: integrated marketing communications (IMC) (e.g., Caywood &

Ewing, 1991; Ewing, 2009; Kitchen, et al., 2008; Miller & Rose, 1994; Moriarty, 1994; Schultz

& Patti, 2009; Schultz, Tannenbaum, & Lauterborn, 1993).

Integrated marketing communications.

IMC came to the forefront of academic discussion in the early 1990s. Schultz,

Tannenbaum, and Lauterborn (1993) led the way with the publishing of *The new marketing*

paradigm: Integrated marketing communications, which is now considered to be a germinal

work in the theoretical evolution of IMC. IMC has been defined as "the merger of all

communication functions under a single unit" (Rose & Miller, 1993, p. 20), which "accounts for

all types of messages delivered by an organization at every point where a stakeholder comes in

contact" with that organization (Moriarty, 1994, p. 38). The IMC approach to public relations is

that it works in tandem with marketing and advertising to accomplish organizational goals and

interact with publics who can impact those goals. Scholars who embrace IMC tie its evolutionary

roots to "radical marketplace changes" (Kitchen, et al., 2008, p. 531). Many of these changes

have occurred in the past 30 years, and include media mergers (both on the business and user

ends), message consistency and corporate/managerial structures and implementations (e.g.,

Kitchen, et al., 2008; Schultz, et al., 1993). New technology has had the greatest influence and

impact on the adoption of IMC theory and practice, as direct, active, and instantaneous

interaction between marketers and publics became possible through the Internet and its

manifestations (i.e., social networks, apps, blogs) (e.g., Schultz & Patti, 2009).

IMC and its relationship to public relations has been examined by scholars from different

perspectives. Hutton (1996) conducted a meta-analysis of literature from marketing, advertising

and public relations perspective to track and model the evolution of IMC. He found that while

IMC is a practical reality, its theoretical implications have been received and debated differently,

especially between the fields of advertising and public relations. He suggested that the value of

IMC to public relations theory and practice is that it might help to provide a better understanding

of the "appropriate relationship between public relations and marketing" (p. 155).

Griffin and Pasadeos (1998) studied the impact of IMC on education in public relations

and advertising. They surveyed public relations and advertising faculty about their perceptions

and feelings regarding IMC and how it has influenced curricula in their fields. Results showed

evidence that advertising faculty were more comfortable with IMC as a concept than public

relations faculty; and that advertising faculty responded that their coursework was influenced by

IMC, whereas public relations faculty said that theirs was not. Overall, while advertising faculty

viewed IMC as having potential to enhance their curricula, public relations faculty saw IMC as

having potential to dilute or take away from their curricula.

Perceptions of leadership and measurement of IMC among public relations, advertising

and marketing executives and academics was studied through survey research by Swain (2004).

He found that, while there was no overall agreement on who should lead IMC efforts within

organizations, there was a preference for marketing managers among corporate and advertising executives surveyed, while public relations executives and academics favored committee or top management leadership of IMC. Swain (2004) also found that academics, especially in public relations, were more receptive to use communication outcomes rather than business outcomes (such as revenues, and repeat sales) to measure IMC success.

Robinson (2006) looked at public relations as a component of IMC, along with mass media, direct promotion, personal selling and sales promotion. He organized modern public relations activities into four categories: event sponsorship, stunt marketing, charitable donations and product placement. Robinson (2006) defined the long-term goal of these activities as "to encourage positive consumer perceptions of the firm, its brands and its products" (p. 249). These activities accomplish this goal by promoting word of mouth references and media attention.

Other scholars have explored the relationship between IMC theory and practice, as they relate to public relations and advertising. Kitchen, et al. (2008) reviewed the best IMC advertising and public relations practices of Great Britain, the United States and Korea (where each scholar resides, respectively). They found "cultural divergence in adoption and practice" (p. 531) regarding conceptual change, strategic evaluation, and evaluation according to operation. However, they also found that a majority of agencies surveyed have the experience to implement IMC programs, and that in all three nations, advertising and public relations agencies are in fact developing and implementing such programs. The authors believed that their study showed the IMC was not merely a theoretical concept, but an industry reality.

Theoretical approaches vs. industry practice.

Each of the aforementioned theoretical approaches to public relations have been used to study the discipline within industry contexts. Clearly, public relations scholars take great interest

in analyzing, evaluating and even advising the practice. What is less clear is to what extent

scholarship has influenced industry practices, and whether the industry has influenced academe.

> ***Organizational leadership studies in public relations.***

Public relations researchers have discussed roles of organizational executives and

advancement issues for practitioners (e.g., Aldoory & Toth, 2004; Choi & Hon, 2000; J. Grunig,

1992; Hon & Brunner, 2000; Marken, 2004; Tsetsura, 2007; Wrigley, 2002). Specific issues

within corporations, non-profits, and their departments have included diversity (e.g., Hon &

Brunner, 2000), ethics (e.g., Tilley, 2005), leadership (e.g., Aldoory & Toth, 2004; Genschaft &

Wheat, 2004), roles and power (e.g., Marken, 2004; Sallot, et al., 2004), and strategic

management (e.g., J. Grunig & L. Grunig, 2000).

Leadership is a particularly important area of public relations research, as it ties into

behavior, decision-making, status, power and organizational structure—all of which affect how

public relations is practiced and valued. For example, Berger and Heyman (2005) interviewed 97

public relations executives about success in public relations leadership, and identified 10 themes

or patterns among participant responses: power of performance, diversity of experiences,

networks of relationships, complex communications skill sets, and passion and a proactive nature

in work. Choi and Choi (2008) looked more closely at behavioral dimensions of public relations

leadership within organizations by testing a measurement tool that they developed, and found

that "providing vision" and "acting as a change agent" were strong determinants of how much

public relations is valued within organizations.

Werder and Holtzhausen (2009) examined how leadership styles relate to problem

solving strategies of public relations practitioners. They surveyed PRSA members and found that

two leadership styles are most prevalent in public relations environments: inclusive and

transformational. Their results indicated that inclusive leadership "is positively related to use of facilitative and cooperative problem solving strategies," while transformational leadership "is positively related to power strategies and effectiveness of persuasive and cooperative problem solving strategies," (p. 404).

Jin (2010) explored one dimension of public relations leadership: emotional leadership. Jin found that emotional skills such as empathy influenced public relations leaders preference of the transformational leadership style. Together, empathy and transformational leadership style "were found to be significant predictors of public relations leaders competency in gaining employees' trust, managing employees' frustration and optimism" as well as taking a stand in conflicts and decision making (p. 159).

Aldoory and Toth (2004) also studied leadership styles. Through a survey and focus groups, they examined sex differences in preferred leadership styles, as well as the relationship between leadership and gender in general. They found preferences for transformational and situational leadership styles, and few differences between the sexes in terms of perceptions of leadership style. However, while focus group participants indicated that women made better public relations leaders because of their perceived transformational leadership qualities, they perceived that the public relations industry is still dominated by males, who tend to exhibit transactional leadership styles and qualities.

One of the most prolific areas of public relations leadership research has been crisis, both from management and communication perspectives. While not necessarily public relations experts, presidents, CEOs and other senior management officers are ultimately the ones who have to make crucial decisions—and then face a variety of publics to explain and justify those choices (Modzelewski, 1990). Whether or not a public relations professional is at hand, Ressler

(2001) advised management to act as spokespersons, especially if public relations counsel is from an outside agency. Organization and community leaders should recognize the importance of their roles as crisis communicators to the media and other stakeholders.

Penrose (2000) maintained that perception of management plays a major role in determining crisis outcomes. Schoenberg (2005) noted that while leadership is one of the most important factors in crisis management, it receives scant attention from researchers. He stated that the emphasis of public relations crisis management studies should shift to "analyzing the leadership traits and qualities of individuals within the context of organizational crisis planning" (p. 3). He also noted that different crises call for different leaders and leadership styles. Coombs and Holladay (2002) concurred, suggesting that crisis leaders should choose their communication strategies based on crisis type, personal control, and crisis responsibility.

Cagle (2006) noted examples of crisis leaders who put the communication needs of their employees at the top of their priority lists, and reaped rewards of loyalty, productiveness, resumed services, and efficient performance of crisis-related duties. In a case study of a Connecticut hospital's crisis management response during an anthrax incident, Wise (2003) showed how successful crisis leaders are committed to their teammates and institutional values. He discussed the two individuals responsible for key decisions, and noted their attribution of their teamwork to their positive working relationship. Their choice to uphold their trust relationships–even under pressure to do otherwise—resulted in a successful internal handling of the crisis that led to external praise from the media.

Mullin (2003) recounted the visible crisis leadership of former New York City mayor Rudy Giuliani during the anthrax crisis that followed the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001. Mullin (2003) wrote that at the mayor's first press conference following the anthrax diagnosis of

a local NBC employee, Giuliani "stood clearly at the helm, displaying both empathy and mastery over information" (p. 16). During the televised conference, Mullin (2003) stated that Giuliani stood shoulder to shoulder with spokespersons for public health and law enforcement. The message was clear: Local leaders were working together as a team to handle the crisis, and were asking the public to trust them with that responsibility.

Organizational leadership studies in intercollegiate athletics.

Scholars have also examined organizational leadership in the context of intercollegiate athletics. For example, Doherty (1997) investigated the effect of leader characteristics on leader behavior by looking at the relationship between directors and head coaches. Scott (1997) linked traditional corporate concepts of organizational culture to management of intercollegiate athletics programs, such as creating a positive culture. Kellett (1999) explored leadership from the perspectives of professional coaches. Significantly, she noted their descriptions of close relationships with their assistant staff and players; and commented that the coaches "facilitate and empower to achieve player development" (p. 150).

Geist and Pastore (2002) focused on assessment of athletics directors (ADs) according to the transactional and transformational styles of leadership. Transactional leaders offer rewards based on meeting set expectations; transformational leaders motivate subordinates to do more than expected—to move the organization toward a new vision. Implicitly or explicitly, these studies showed that athletics leadership must employ communication strategy to achieve goals, in the same way that communication strategy is essential to successful crisis leadership.

Organizational leadership, public relations and intercollegiate athletics.

Some researchers have examined public relations within the context of intercollegiate athletics. Studies in public relations and intercollegiate athletics have delved into understandings

of industry phenomena, such as crisis, communication with stakeholders, sports information directors and some gender issues (e.g., Barnett, 2008; Beyer & Hannah, 2000; Bruening & Dixon, 2008; Choi & Hon, 2000; Hardin & McClung, 2002; Neupauer, 1998; Sallot, et al., 2004; Trail & Chelladurai, 2000, 2002; Wahlberg, 2004; Wigley, 2003; Worley & Little, 2002).

For example, Barnett (2008) and Leonard (2007) examined the handling of allegations of rape and racism involving the Duke University men's lacrosse team in 2006. Wahlberg's (2004) crisis case study chronicled the University of North Dakota's handling of a major conflict with a multi-million-dollar donor over the implementation of new NCAA mascot regulations. Wigley (2003) examined the crisis of the 2001 Oklahoma State University plane crash (which involved members of the men's basketball team and coaching staff) from a relationship management perspective.

Regarding stakeholder communications, Trail and Chelladurai (2000, 2002) studied university students and faculty as stakeholders of their intercollegiate athletics programs. The authors suggested that athletics administrators should link emphases on specific processes and decisions to relevant values held by important stakeholders to gain support for their programs (Trail & Chelladurai, 2002). Worley and Little's (2002) case study about Coaches vs. Cancer showed how a charity organization teamed successfully with an athletics department to achieve its goals.

Gender has been addressed in regards to public relations positions and activities within intercollegiate athletics contexts. Neupauer (1998) discussed the realities of being a female in the male-dominated field of collegiate sports information with women working in those contexts. Hardin and McClung (2002) profiled the demographic characteristics of collegiate SIDs and established that the field continues to be overwhelmingly male, especially beyond entry-level

positions. These statistics were confirmed by the NCAA's own study a few years later

(DeHass, 2007).

Other aspects of gender equity studied in intercollegiate public relations are the influence

of internal and external communication and relationship building on men's and women's careers

(e.g., Sagas & Cunningham, 2004; Whisenant & Pedersen, 2004), the impact of women donors

on women's athletics (Staurowsky, 1996), and a stakeholder profile of spectators of

intercollegiate athletics' best-drawing women's sport: basketball (Kerstetter & Koovich, 1997;

Koo & Hardin, 2008).

Studies that address public relations within intercollegiate athletics from systems

perspectives tend to focus on the "what" (demographic statistics) and not the "why" (meaning).

For instance, research about collegiate sports information directors primarily deals with profiling

the profession (e.g., Hardin & McClung, 2002), gender disparity (e.g., Neupauer, 1998), or

determining the statistical likelihood that an SID will become an athletics director (e.g., Swalls,

2004). Research that looks at public relations as an attribute of coaching efficiency (MacLean &

Chelladurai, 1995; MacLean & Zakrajsek, 1996) or university-community relations (Kim,

Brunner, & Fitch-Hauser, 2006), has focused on establishing scales or determining numerical

relationships.

Studies that address public relations in intercollegiate athletics from critical approaches

focus on both "what" and "why," but only the "what" comes from research participants. The

"why" is based on the researcher's perspectives about power and gender, not the participants'

words, shared meaning and experience. For example, crisis studies on the University of Colorado

football program (Crosset, 2007) and the Duke University men's lacrosse program (e.g., Barnett,

2008; Leonard, 2007) examine these situations—including media relations, internal and external

communication practices, and policy decisions—from critical perspectives related to race and gender.

Public relations and intercollegiate athletics departments.

As NCAA Division I athletics departments have grown to the size and scope of midsized corporations—many with annual budgets above $50 million and a few above $100 million—so has the importance of public relations to those departments and their institutions (e.g., Ruihley & Fall, 2009). Athletics administrators—particularly SIDs—are under pressure to respond to the demands of the 24-hour news cycle for their departments' web sites and external news outlets (e.g., Hardin & McClung, 2002; Stoldt, et al., 2001). As media coverage and fan bases extend across the globe, and corporate sponsorships and TV rights packages make up an ever-larger piece of the intercollegiate athletics budget pie, department administrators are finding themselves with an increasing number of stakeholders (e.g., DeSchriver, 2009; McCormick & McCormick, 2008).

Each new group of stakeholders raises the level of scrutiny for athletics departments. Activities of administrators, coaches and athletes are monitored and analyzed by news media, fans on Internet message boards, university administrations, the NCAA, and even federal and state governments (e.g., Barnett, 2008; McConnell, 2007; Plourd, 2009; Ruihley & Fall, 2009).

While this scrutiny can be disastrous when negative information is revealed, it can also be a welcome opportunity for departments to promote their programs and tout their accomplishments. The dissemination of positive information across an array of stakeholders can benefit athletics departments by attracting sponsors/donors, fans and recruits, as well as creating community goodwill (e.g., Drape & Thomas, 2010; Ruihley & Fall, 2009).

Public relations, in its many forms and facets, can therefore play a crucial role in an intercollegiate athletics department's success. Communicating with fans and media, building relationships with stakeholders, and managing issues and crises are components of public relations that are essential to achieving and maintaining stability, profitability and popularity, as well as recovering from problems (e.g., Fortunato, 2008; Ruihley & Fall, 2009). At the center of these endeavors are the highly visible figureheads of any athletics department: ADs and head coaches (e.g., Bruening & Lee, 2007; Drape & Thomas, 2010; Judson, et al., 2006; Robinson & Miller, 2003; Ruihley & Fall, 2009; Whisenant & Pedersen, 2004).

Public relations and ADs.

ADs are the supervisors of intercollegiate athletics departments. As CEOs of multi-million-dollar enterprises with scores—even hundreds—of employees, they bear great responsibility for the fiscal health of their organizations (e.g., DeSchriver, 2009; Drape & Thomas, 2010; McConnell, 2007; Plourd, 2009; Whisenant et al., 2002). Their financial responsibilities include the equitable distribution of budget dollars and revenues from donations, ticket sales and merchandise (e.g., Brown, 2010). ADs are representatives of their institutions, as well as groups of institutions, on local, regional and national levels, among a variety of stakeholders. They are also accountable for the academic progress and well-being of athletes, as well as compliance with conference and NCAA regulations, and other laws, such as Title IX (e.g., Whisenant & Pedersen, 2004).

There is scant research related to intercollegiate ADs and public relations. Studies about ADs and public relations typically focus on their attitudes toward their sports information departments (e.g., Doherty, 1997; Swalls, 2004). These studies tend to focus on management

roles and technical responsibilities of sports information directors, but do not extend to other types of employees (e.g., Stoldt, 2000; Stoldt, et al., 2001).

Ruihley and Fall (2009) recently transcended the traditional sports information focus, and surveyed ADs about whom they perceived to be responsible for public relations, what they perceived those individuals' roles to be, and which activities they associated with those roles. ADs did connect public relations responsibilities to sports information/media relations personnel, but they also connected them to communications, marketing and external operations directors. While this study did not limit ADs' responses about public relations to sports information directors, it did limit ADs' responses about public relations perceptions and roles to pre-selected categories and options based on pre-established scales, which were not developed for use in researching ADs.

Occasionally case studies explore athletics directors and crisis, but the perspective is limited to one department at one time (e.g., Leonard, 2007; Wigley, 2003). Some crisis case studies discuss the roles of athletics directors in specific situations (e.g., Wahlberg, 2004; Wigley, 2003), but do not bring in outside perspectives. Other case studies, such as Worley and Little's (2002) Coaches vs. Cancer study, mention involvement of ADs in fundraising campaigns. Taken together or separately, current research does not address how athletics directors understand public relations.

Public relations and coaches.

There are few studies about public relations and coaching. Coaches are mentioned in some crisis case studies, for example, but are rarely the focus. The closest that scholarship involving coaches comes to public relations is in the context of communication, management and marketing.

Communication studies about coaching focus on the use of communication in aspects of a coach's job, such as legal issues regarding new technology for contacting recruits (e.g., Maher, 2007), mentoring (e.g., Avery, Tonidandel, & Phillips, 2008) and motivation (e.g., Frederick & Morrison, 1999). Management issues in coaching research include perceptions of administrative support (e.g., Pustore, Goldfine, & Riemer, 1996), satisfaction and commitment (e.g., Chelladurai, 2003; Inglis, Danylchuk, & Pastore, 1996); efficiency (e.g., Fizel & D'itri, 1996), and overall performance (e.g., MacLean & Chelladurai, 1995; MacLean & Zakrajsek, 1996). Vallée and Bloom (2005) combined management with gender to determine how top-level university coaches build successful programs in their sports.

Perhaps no intercollegiate coach from any sport has been scrutinized more than Robert Montgomery "Bob" Knight. Knight, the former head men's basketball coach at Indiana University and Texas Tech University, has inspired a plethora of popular press articles and reports over his controversial behavior, coaching tactics, and dramatic exit from Indiana University (e.g., Associated Press, "After Bob Knight's exit", 2010; Lisheron, 2000). However, he has also been analyzed from the perspective of promoting his basketball programs. Robinson and Miller (2003) studied Knight's impact on donations and ticket sales at Texas Tech University. Their case research, which included university reports and interviews with administrators, showed that Knight had a positive, tangible financial effect on the athletics department as a whole, even before coaching his first game (Robinson & Miller, 2003).

Only a few other scholars have looked at the promotional aspect of a coach's job. Judson, et al. (2006) investigated the communication of the "university brand" to college coaches. According to the authors, college coaches regularly have an opportunity to communicate their university's brand to outside audiences, but are often overlooked regarding involvement in their

universities' academic cultures. The authors looked at branding differences between public and private institutions, as well as major and mid-major athletics programs. Results indicated that coaches from major programs feel stronger about brand communication efforts from their universities and also have a better understanding of their institutions' brand values, and how to incorporate those values into their work and lives.

Public relations and basketball coaches.

Many of the studies about intercollegiate coaches examine men's and women's basketball coaching contexts. Men's and women's basketball are ideal to study in many ways, due to their media coverage, game attendance, and revenue generation (e.g., Associated Press, 2008; Fulks, 2010). For example, the 2010 NCAA Division I men's semifinal games averaged a 9.7 percent rating and a 19 percent share on CBS (Associated Press, "Ratings up", 2010). According to *Inside INdiana Business*, combined attendance for the 2010 men's NCAA Division I Final Four games in Indianapolis was 142,228—second only to Detroit's 2009 attendance of 145,378 ("2010 Final Four", 2010). The 2010 women's NCAA Division I Final Four games drew 48,753 ("2011 Women's Final Four", 2010). The highest attended women's Final Four was in 2002, with more than 60,000 in attendance ("2010 NCAA Women's Final Four", 2010). All 63 games of the women's NCAA Basketball Tournament are broadcast on ESPN and ESPN2.

Men's and women's basketball coaches are some of intercollegiate athletics' most visible personnel. They are highly recognizable in their communities, not only because of their positions, but also because of their community involvement and the role their university's athletics programs play in local culture. The media coverage that coaches of major programs receive at the national level exposes them to a high degree of scrutiny. This exposure can work in coaches' favor when their teams are performing well, but can work against them if anything goes

awry in their programs, such as NCAA violations or other misconduct (e.g., Associated Press, "Jim Calhoun says", 2010; Katz, 2008; O'Neil, 2010; Voepel, 2010). Even the personal life of a high-profile collegiate basketball coach is not off limits to analysis or criticism (e.g., Associated Press, "Rick Pitino testifies", 2010; Evans, 2010; Leung, 2010).

Although there is limited research regarding intercollegiate basketball coaches and public relations, there are a few case studies that look at public relations in that context. Genshaft and Wheat (2004) reported on a crisis case at the University of South Florida that involved alleged discrimination on the part of a women's basketball coach toward one of her student athletes. Worley and Little's (2002) case study on the fundraising aspects of Coaches vs. Cancer included the men's and women's basketball coaches at Indiana State University. Clearly, there is a dearth of research regarding public relations aspects of basketball coaches' jobs, including the aspects of promotion and publicity, media and community relations, and crisis management and communication.

ADs' Understanding of Public Relations

Public relations research within the context of intercollegiate athletics has been limited in two ways. First, the systems approach of most public relations studies within intercollegiate athletics has provided description, frequencies and statistical predictions without understanding. Second, while case studies within intercollegiate athletics have provided interesting examples of public relations practice, they are situation-specific and lack insights into how public relations understanding and/or practice extends beyond the analyzed case.

ADs are in powerful positions as CEOs of an industry that commands the attention of journalists, fans, community members, scholars, sponsoring corporations and even the U.S. government (e.g., Clark, Apostolopoulou, Branvold, & Synowka, 2009; DeSchriver, 2009;

Hechinger, 2009; Kahn, 2007; McConnell, 2007; McCormick & McCormick, 2008; Plourd, 2009). Constantly on display to numerous publics, accountable for multi-million dollar budgets, and either credited or blamed for an institution's level of athletic success (not to mention scandal avoidance), these executives have potential to benefit from and contribute to public relations. Yet there remains a gap of knowledge regarding their relationship to the field. Similarly, scholars have not adequately considered ADs' public relations expectations of head coaches' activities, especially what head coaches do "outside the lines," such as in their communities.

The current study works to fill these voids through the perspectives of the athletics directors themselves. Through in-depth interviews, this study has endeavored to learn how athletics directors from NCAA Division I institutions with major basketball programs understand public relations, overall, and in the context of expectations they have for their basketball coaches.

Chapter Three: Method

Context

To understand the realities of NCAA Division I intercollegiate athletics directors (ADs), it is important to gain understanding directly from the ADs themselves. Therefore this study has been conducted from an emic perspective; that is, understanding comes from within a culture (e.g., Borman, LeCompte, & Goetz, 1986). The culture of interest in this study is NCAA Division I athletics departments with major basketball programs.

Defining "major" basketball programs.

The concept of what constitutes a "major" program vs. a "mid-major" program has been much debated and differently defined (Brennan, 2010). One way to evaluate whether a program is "major" is to look the voting power of its conference on the NCAA Division I Leadership Council. According to Article 4 of the 2009-2010 NCAA Division I Manual, there are seven conferences that hold three votes—at least twice as many as any other Division I conference (NCAA, 2009). The seven conferences are: Atlantic Coast Conference (ACC), Big East Conference, Big Ten Conference, Big 12 Conference, Conference USA, Pacific-10 Conference (PAC-10) and Southeastern Conference (SEC).

Another aspect of power that can be used to evaluate NCAA Division I programs is their membership on the Board of Directors. Article 4 stipulates 11 conferences that must each have one president or chancellor on the Board. In addition to the seven conferences listed above, this group includes the Mid-American Conference, the Mountain West Conference, the Sun Belt Conference and the Western Athletic Conference (NCAA, 2009).

However, the NCAA does not use the terms "major" or "mid-major" to describe programs, departments or conferences (Brennan, 2010). Therefore, the terms have historically

been left to sport media and fans to define subjectively. While some sport media outlets view any conference outside the top six Bowl Championship Series (BCS) conferences (Atlantic Coast (ACC), Big East, Big Ten, Big 12, Southeastern (SEC), Pacific-10 (PAC-10)) as "mid-major," others have challenged the application of this standard to basketball programs (Brennan, 2010).

A more precise and measurable distinction between "major" and "minor" basketball conferences was developed in 2007 by Kyle Whelliston, a sportswriter and proprietor of *The Mid-Majority* basketball blog (Whelliston, 2010). Whelliston (2010) used data from the NCAA and the U.S. Department of Postsecondary Education to show that institutions in conferences whose athletics departments' budgets averaged $20 million or more won more than 85 percent of their basketball games against institutions in conferences whose athletics departments' budgets averaged less than $20 million.

Whelliston (2010) has tested this theory, which he has named "the red line", each season for the past three years, and results have been consistent. ESPN.com's Brennan (2010) cited Whelliston's (2010) theory during the 2010 NCAA Men's Final Four, when "mid-major" Butler University was making headlines for its unexpected national semi-final and final appearances.

The conferences above Whelliston's (2010) so-called red line are (from highest-dollar budget to lowest): Southeastern, Big Ten, Big 12, PAC-10, ACC, Big East and Mountain West (Brennan, 2010; Whelliston, 2010). There are 82 institutions among these seven conferences. Therefore, participants selected for the current study represent athletics departments that fall above Whelliston's (2010) red line.

There are several reasons for choosing this context in which to learn how athletics directors from NCAA Division I institutions with major basketball programs understand public relations, overall, and in the context of expectations they have for their basketball coaches. First,

these institutions receive a tremendous amount of media exposure (Billings, et al., 2002;

Coward, 2010; Herbert, 2010; Staurowsky & Sack, 2005). Second, resources are typically much

greater than at other types of institutions (Burden & Li, 2005; DeSchriver, 2009; Drape &

Thomas, 2010; Fulks, 2010; Plourd, 2009). Third, coaches and athletics directors at these

institutions are well-known, well-paid and well-connected individuals on a national level (Davis,

2007; Fulks, 2010; Turner & Chelladurai, 2005; Whisenant & Pedersen, 2004; Whisenant, et al.,

2002).

Role of prior research and theory.

Prior research is useful in qualitative research to explain the context of a study and

provide sensitizing concepts—or, theoretical sensitivity—and secondary sources of data (e.g.,

McCracken, 1988; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Previous literature can also "provide ways of

approaching and interpreting data" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 51), as well as questions to ask

and ways to find participants to answer those questions.

However, in this study, prior research is not used to predict responses. To do so would

risk concealing the life-worlds of participants under a theory "mask," as Gurwitsch suggested

(1974, p. 17). Previous studies serve to suggest categories, provide some areas for discussion and

aid in understanding what the researcher might hear (e.g., McCracken, 1988).

Instead of using prior research as the foundation on which to build through the research

findings, the lived realities and experiences expressed by the participants in their own words are

the data used for "grounding" the theory that emerges from the study (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p.

4). This study has been conducted in a manner consistent with constructivism, a philosophy of

inquiry that affirms realities as multiple and socially constructed, as well as context dependent

(e.g., Guba, 1990). For this research project, being the director of athletics for an NCAA

Division I institution within a major basketball conference is the social construct that creates the cultural context within which the understanding of public relations has been explored.

Data

According to Guba (1990), reality is a co-creation of the knower and the known—or in the case of this study, the researcher and the participants. As part of this co-creation, the researcher asked questions to gain understanding from the participants about the realities of their life-worlds (Gurwitsch, 1974).

The co-creation continued beyond the interviews, as the researcher used comparative analysis to further the discovery of grounded theory (e.g., Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Specifically, the researcher looked for "conceptual categories" within the text of each interview transcript, and then for shared meanings (confirmation of the conceptual categories) between the texts of all interviews. The researcher illustrated each conceptual category with evidence in the form of quotes from participant interviews. The goal of these reference points is not to "provide a perfect description of an area, but to develop a theory that accounts for much of the relevant behavior" (Glaser & Strauss, p. 30).

Phenomenology is also reflected in this study through the researcher's choice of "social worlds" to explore (Lofland, 1976, p. 8). The researcher has included the social worlds of NCAA Division I athletics, major basketball conferences, athletics directors, and head coaches. Other intercollegiate athletics associations, divisions, conferences and administrators were not included in the study. These social worlds have unique qualities, and deserve to be examined on their own merits before folding them in with the other worlds mentioned.

Participants

        Recruitment and interviews.

        The researcher began by contacting potential participants via e-mail. She explained the study, asked if they were willing to participate and set up interviews with those who agreed. The goal of the researcher was to attain redundancy—or "mutual consistency" and "saturation" of data—as described by scholars such as McCracken (1988) and Jensen (2002). Determining redundancy also means listening for "negative cases," or responses that differ substantially from those of other participants. Once a negative case has been identified, the researcher should listen for that viewpoint in subsequent interviews, to see whether the negative case is distinct or shared by others. Shared viewpoints with the negative case would indicate that the researcher has found a new theme, which should be pursued to redundancy/saturation like the others (e.g., Spiggle, 1994).

        McCracken (1988) suggests that at least eight interviews be conducted toward reaching this goal. For this study, the researcher found mutual consistency of the data and had pursued all negative cases by the time she reached 12 interviews. Analysis took place as the researcher conducted and transcribed the interviews, as well as after all interviews and transcriptions were completed.

        Description of participants.

        Participants will not be identified with any specific comments in this study. Participants are identified by number only (e.g., P1), and these numbers were assigned in a way in which only the researcher can determine. All were interviewed between April 2009 and July 2009.

        Participants were recruited through the researcher's personal industry contacts (including non-participant athletics directors, associate athletics directors, and alumni), as well as through

their athletics department websites. All selected participants represent NCAA Division I athletics departments that are members of the major basketball conferences mentioned previously, and are included in Whelliston's red line definition of major basketball programs.

Specific descriptors that would identify participants have been eliminated from all quotes and analysis. However, the following general descriptions are offered to aid in understanding participants' life worlds.

Participant 1 (P1) leads the athletics department at a private institution in a large metropolitan area. His institution is highly regarded for its undergraduate and graduate academic programs. Athletically, P1's institution is best known for basketball. Its men's program has a national following, and is a perennial NCAA Basketball Tournament contender. P1 has a graduate degree, and is a former student-athlete.

Participant 2 (P2) hails from a large public university. The university is located in a midsize metropolitan area, and is considered to be the state's flagship institution. P2's athletics department includes NCAA championship teams in a variety of men's and women's sports. Historically, football is the university's most popular sport, with a long tradition of success at the conference and national level. However, men's and women's basketball have also become high-profile sports over the past two decades, with the women's team as a perennial NCAA Basketball Tournament contender. P2 has a graduate degree, and a professional background in marketing and development.

Participant 3 (P3) heads up the athletics department at a public university located in a small metropolitan area. Renowned as one of the nation's most elite academic institutions, P3's university also has a long history of top-tier athletic programs. While its Olympic sports have dominated its conference and national championship success in recent years, the university's

men's and women's basketball programs have been rankings leaders and NCAA Basketball tournament contenders at various times over the past few decades. P3 is a former coach and student-athlete.

Participant 4 (P4) also leads an elite public institution. His university is located in a midsize metropolitan area. Athletically, P4's institution is best known for its success in men's and women's basketball, as well as some of its Olympic sports. The men's and women's basketball programs have won national titles, and have national followings. P4 has a professional background in student affairs and academic administration.

Participant 5 (P5) represents a private university in a midsized metropolitan area. His university is best known for its academics. Basketball is its highest-profile sport for men and women, and its women are perennial NCAA Basketball Tournament contenders. P5 holds graduate degrees, and is a member of his university's academic administration and faculty.

Participant 6 (P6) is the AD at a large public university in a small metropolitan area. Football is his university's flagship sport. However, men's and women's basketball have demonstrated prowess at the national level over the course of the past decade, including success at the national championship level. P6's Olympic sports have a long history of achievement at the conference and national levels as well. P6 holds a graduate degree, and is a former coach and student-athlete.

Participant 7 (P7) leads the athletics department of a large public university. P7's institution is located in a midsized metropolitan area. While football is its most popular and perennially successful sport, the university's basketball teams have also experienced periods of success, including appearances in the final rounds of the NCAA Basketball Tournament. P7 also

has a role in university administration. Prior to his career in athletics administration, P7 was a coach and student-athlete, and also holds graduate degrees.

Participant 8 (P8) heads up the athletics department at a private institution in a large metropolitan area. Its football program has a national following and is a perennial championship contender. Its basketball programs, like its Olympic sport programs, have also experienced a high level of success at the conference and national levels. P8 is a former student-athlete and holds a graduate degree.

Participant 9 (P9) is at the helm of the athletics department of a state institution in a midsize metropolitan area. Basketball is the highest-profile sport at his institution for men and women. The men's basketball team is perennially strong in conference and national competition, and the women's team has experienced similar success in recent years. P9 is considered to be a member of his university's administration. He is also a former coach and student-athlete.

Participant 10 (P10) leads the athletics department at a private university in a large metropolitan area. P10's university is best known for its academics at the undergraduate and graduate level. Football is the highest-profile sport at his institution, though its Olympic sports have historically achieved success at the conference and national levels. P10's institution is in a strong basketball conference, so its basketball teams receive a great deal of attention as well. P10 holds graduate degrees, and has a professional background in coaching and development.

Participant 11 (P11) heads up the athletics department at a state institution in a large metropolitan area. His university is considered to be the state's flagship, and has achieved conference and national success in a wide range of athletic programs. Basketball is one of its most prominent sports, nationally, for men and women—though not necessarily its most

successful in terms of conference and national championships. P11 holds graduate degrees,

and is a former coach.

Participant 12 (P12) is the AD at a private institution in a small metropolitan area. Best

known for its football program, his institution's basketball programs are highly regarded. Its

women's basketball teams are perennial NCAA Basketball tournament contenders. P12's

Olympic sports have achieved national success as well, but receive less media attention than

basketball and football. P12 is a member of his university's administrative cabinet. He holds a

graduate degree, and has professional experience in business outside athletics administration.

Conducting a Quality Study

The researcher took several precautions to conduct a quality study. These included

bracketing of prior knowledge, manufacturing distance, context of interviews, discussion guide,

data collection and protections for participants.

Bracketing.

Because constructivist philosophy asserts that knowledge is a co-creation between the

knower and the known (Guba, 1990), the researcher is also an active participant in her study.

Therefore, the researcher must actively consider and acknowledge her own experiences,

perceptions, biases, and meanings before the study begins, and in the process of her data

collection and analysis. Following this consideration and acknowledgement, the researcher can

better work to temporarily suspend her own understandings so she can better listen to her

participants (Hamill & Sinclair, 2010).

This process is known as "bracketing," and a researcher should do this so that she is

aware of how her own understandings might affect her interpretation and analysis of data. In

keeping with an emic perspective, in which participants are viewed as co-researchers, bracketing

allows the investigator to hear and gain understanding from participants' own realities, and collaborate their data with her own to "collectively illuminate the phenomenon of interest" (Hamill & Sinclair, 2010, p. 17).

In the case of the current study, the researcher must acknowledge her academic and industry knowledge of her subject and participants' life worlds (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Academically, the researcher has studied public relations for several years at the undergraduate and graduate level. She has also studied sport administration, marketing and sociology at the graduate level. Besides coursework, she has conducted research in both of these areas, including studies on crisis communication and management in intercollegiate athletics, roles of intercollegiate men's basketball coaches, and advancement of female intercollegiate athletics administrators.

The researcher also has industry experience in her area of study. Following internships in the public relations department of an art museum and the media relations department of a National Basketball Association (NBA) team, the researcher worked as public relations director for a professional soccer team, assistant director of marketing for an NCAA Division I athletics department, and a sports sales manager for a convention and visitors bureau. As part of these positions, the researcher gained experience in media relations, advertising, marketing and promotions, event planning and management, and hospitality.

Honesty about expectations is an important aspect of bracketing. Entering the current study, the researcher anticipated that many participants would associate public relations with media relations and/or sports information, due to the number of studies focused on that aspect of public relations within intercollegiate athletics. She also considered that what she knew about a

participant, the structure of a participant's athletics department, or the basketball coaches of a participant's institution might indicate how they would respond to the research question.

Recognizing possible assumptions about the responses of her participants to the research question allowed the researcher to develop strategies to help her to temporarily suspend those assumptions. One strategy had to do with how the researcher asked the questions of the participants. She used a discussion guide with each participant, so that her questions would reflect the purpose of the study, and not her knowledge of specific individuals. (Note: The discussion guide is explained in greater detail in the "Discussion guide" section within this chapter.)

Also, during the interviews, the researcher took time to follow up on jargon, terminology and clichés used by participants to describe their realities (e.g., Hamill & Sinclair, 2010). Even though the researcher might have had an understanding of these terms from her prior experience, it was important to explore the meaning of any terms that might affect her interpretation of their realities.

Another strategy was the way the researcher transcribed the interviews. She transcribed each interview herself, so that she would have the opportunity to hear the words of the participants and the participants' voices together. This would serve as a reinforcement of how the participants emphasized and expressed their thoughts, as well as the actual words they said. The researcher also transcribed each interview word for word, as opposed to only transcribing "relevant" portions of dialogue. This allowed the researcher to recall the context of responses, including the questions asked to the participants by the researcher.

In her analysis of the findings, the researcher once again considered to what extent her conclusions were based on the words of her participants, or her own prior knowledge. Sometimes

it was beneficial to connect data from participant interviews to relevant prior research; other times the words of the participants expressed ideas that were better served to be discussed in relationship to their own life-world contexts.

During and after her analysis of her findings, the researcher demonstrated what Hamill and Sinclair (2010) referred to as a "willingness to be wrong" (p. 18). First, she had to accept that the realities of her participants reflected their lived experiences, even if they contrasted with her own. Second, she gave participants an opportunity to assess and—if needed—correct her interpretation of their words in her findings and analysis. She did this through a member check, which allowed participants to review themes of the study in connection with their individual comments, and respond as to whether the researcher's analysis accurately reflected their meaning.

Manufacturing distance.

Manufacturing distance was needed to ensure that, 1) the interviews focused on the participants' life-worlds, and not the researcher's preconceptions, 2) the respondents did not feel so familiar with the researcher that they censored or altered their responses (to the best of the researcher's knowledge), and 3) the analysis reflected the participants' realities, as they stated them to be, not the researcher's own experience (e.g., McCracken, 1988).

To help manufacture distance, the researcher followed McCracken's (1988) recommendation to be careful not to give so many details regarding the purpose of the study that the participants might feel as if they need to "serve up" what they think the researcher wants to hear. Instead, the researcher focused her comments, questions and explanations on her desire for the participants to share their experiences as they have lived them out.

Context of interviews.

The second way the researcher ensured a quality study was to consider the context of the interviews, and the realities of the participants. Participants were interviewed individually by the researcher. Only one interview was conducted in-person. The in-person interview took place in the participant's office, which allowed the researcher to observe other aspects of his realities besides the ones communicated orally.

Considering the realities of the participants' schedules, which often changed without notice and included heavy travel, interviewing in person was, in all but one case, not possible or feasible. Therefore, the researcher interviewed most participants via speakerphone, which still allowed hearing and recording of their voices. In addition, telephone interviews allowed for more geographical diversity among interviewees, so that participants were not limited to areas within a few hours of the researcher (Hon & Brunner, 2000). Though in-person interviews are most often recommended, and certainly ideal, researchers have established the legitimacy of a telephone interview when an in-person interview is not an option (e.g., Chen, 2007; Hon, 1997; Hon & Brunner, 2000; Neupauer, 1998).

Discussion guide.

The third way the researcher ensured a quality study was to develop and use a discussion guide (see Appendix: Discussion Guide). The guide provided a loose and flexible framework to help the researcher build trust and rapport with participants, and encourage them to talk about their life-worlds. It began with a general "Tell me about you," question, and then worked into some planned prompts to give the participants something to "push off against," i.e., "What does public relations mean to you?" and "What does public relations mean in the context of basketball coaching?" (see Appendix: Discussion Guide). These conceptual categories were derived from

the literature, but were asked in an open-ended way so as not to suggest a response (e.g., McCracken, 1988).

As the interviews proceeded, new prompts were added spontaneously as participants introduced their own issues and concepts. In some cases, prompts were changed to correspond with categories suggested by other participants (i.e., "Some participants have commented about 'x.' Has that been a part of your experience?").

Data collection process.

The researcher also ensured a quality study through the data collection process. Because the participants' words were the data for this study, the interviews were recorded using an iPod with an iTalk recording device. This provided a verbatim account of the interviews, with minimal distraction to the participants (McCracken, 1988). The recordings were downloaded onto the researcher's laptop for transcription.

The process of looking for themes and categories within and between the transcripts is known as analytic induction, the emphasis in this process should be on "category construction rather than enumeration" (Haley, 1996, p. 26). The researcher transcribed all of the interviews. Some scholars, such as McCracken (1988), do not advocate this due to concerns about "familiarity" with the data. However, transcribing one's own interviews was beneficial to the analysis, because hearing the participants' voices again reinforced the context and emphasis of their comments, which the researcher might not have recalled from words alone.

Protection of participants.

Finally, the researcher ensured a quality study through the protections she offered and upheld for her participants. She assured confidentiality to the participants in several ways: first, by explaining the study and confidentiality agreement; second, by attributing comments to

participants only by number in the final report; third, by keeping all notes and transcripts under password protection in a secure location; finally, by keeping identifying details out of the final report in connection with participants' comments.

All participants and the researcher signed the confidentiality agreements. The participants were also given the opportunity to review their transcripts prior to compilation of the final report. The participants were asked to check the transcripts for any errors and alert the researcher if any changes were needed. As mentioned previously, the participants were given the opportunity to review themes from the researcher's analysis of their words, and correct—or affirm—the researcher's interpretation of their comments. Once the researcher received their replies, she addressed any needed changes or noted affirmations accordingly.

Conclusion

The current study was guided by the methodology explained in this chapter. The findings from this study, organized thematically, are presented in the following chapter. Excerpts from participant interviews are included in the findings for illustration and justification. However, in accordance with participant protection procedures outlined in this chapter, the researcher has taken care to ensure that all identifiers (i.e., mascots, employee names, locations) have been removed from the ADs' comments.

Chapter Four: Findings

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to show the major findings of this study in answer to the question, "How do athletics directors (ADs) from NCAA Division I institutions with major basketball programs understand public relations, overall, and in the context of expectations they have for their basketball coaches?" The findings are organized into themes, sub-themes and supporting evidence. The themes and sub-themes represent shared understanding among participants regarding public relations and what it means within both an NCAA Division I intercollegiate athletics department and basketball head-coaching context. The names of the themes come from the words of the participants as well. Supporting evidence includes direct quotes, summaries of direct quotes and paraphrased quotes from participants.

Participants described their understandings of public relations in themes of image, message, and action/interaction. They also described publics/constituents (interchangeable terms to the participants) with whom they associated their understandings of public relations. In addition, participants identified the athletics department employees to whom they attribute the actualization of their understandings of public relations (i.e., whom they believe carries the public relations mantles for their departments). Participants also noted challenges that relate to their understandings of public relations, as well as distinctions between men's basketball coaches and women's basketball coaches regarding public relations expectations.

Understanding of Public Relations

The overall understanding of public relations to this study's participants can be explained through three themes that emerged from their interviews: image, message, and action/interaction. These themes came from a combination of participants' terminology, their explication of that

terminology, recurring concepts and points of emphasis, and relevant stories. First noted in each participant's transcript, the commonalities and differences between interviews were studied, and shared understanding took shape. The individual comments associated with each theme and category were selected as illustrations of either shared understanding, or a negative case. While these themes represent the understanding of public relations for participants overall and regarding their basketball coaches, it is important to note that the manifestations of these themes discussed by participants are, at times, specific to ADs, basketball coaches or other athletics employees.

Image.

Image emerged as a theme early and consistently in participant interviews. It was the first term given by several participants when asked, "What does 'public relations' mean to you?" In the overall scope of their social worlds, image is a crucial component. "To me, it's how you work, and how you co-exist, with the public, so you create an image that's very positive. That to me is the most important thing, the image," said P9.

Image as front porch.

Visual and emotional connotations can provide a fuller understanding of image. One manifestation, which was used by some participants, is the "front porch of the university." Just as in a front porch to a house, athletics is often the first aspect of a university that external publics notice, or with which they are familiar. This is especially true for local communities with no connection to the educational aspects of an institution. According to P2, athletics might not be "the most important part, but it's the part that a lot of people see first, and we've got to keep the porch clean and all that kind of thing." (P2)

For ADs, keeping the porch clean means taking care of unsightly transgressions or crises, and doing things that make their universities look good. In addition, front porches are supposed to be approachable, welcoming places. Several ADs emphasized the importance of making sure their front porches were perceived as such, primarily through educating employees to be accessible and friendly.

The concept of the front porch is a natural fit with the marketing/promotions and development/fundraising backgrounds of some participants, such as P2, P10 and P12. Creating and maintaining a welcoming "entrance" to an athletics program and department, or institution, is vital to attracting and keeping sponsors and donors. A "clean" front porch also aids in university and community relations by reinforcing beliefs about a department's trustworthiness—key in justifying additional resources, expansion or decisions requiring administrative and/or local buy-in.

Image as persona.

Another way to look at image from the participants' perspectives is through the idea of "persona". In other words, publics look at an athletics department as a "who," not a "that." In addition, publics want to know "who" individuals—such as basketball coaches—are, as people, not just employees. ADs believe that their publics learn who athletics departments and coaches are by what they see, on or off the playing surface, in the media or in person.

According to P6, "You address that aspect of PR by—whether it's me or any of my coaches—by, again, image, by being a good person, by treating people the right way, by being an honest person. Not by being something, someone that you're not, not by being someone who worries more about image than substance."

The persona perspective also manifests itself in the way the ADs described the way high-profile basketball coaches represent their respective programs. "They're the people that are the professionals in terms of being the face, being the CEO of their programs," said P3.

P10 concurred, regarding basketball coaches: "You're the voice of it; you're really the face of the program."

For P3, P6, P7, P9, P10 and P11, the idea of image as persona might tie into their former coaching positions, in addition to their current ones. Having experienced the responsibilities and pressures of coaching, these ADs have a firsthand understanding of how image manifests itself in that role. Perhaps this also more easily enables these ADs to put themselves in their coaches' positions when considering the impact of image on coaches' career success, especially regarding public relations expectations.

Image-building activities, branding.

Whether image is a front porch or persona, participants said that it is created or enhanced by specific types of actions. For example, P8 said that image comes from an athletics department's "deeds" and "performances," which, for him, are graduation of student athletes and winning championships. P7 agreed that academic and athletic success is important to demonstrate, but took it a step further:

> One of our goals is to run a high-quality, successful program with wins and losses, but do it the right way, so that people see us with true student athletes that are going to class and doing the right thing. (P7)

Along this line of thought is that image is cultivated through intentional image-building activities. Participants used the terms "brand" or "branding" to describe how they want to project a desirable combination of tangible and intangible aspects of their athletics departments. Brands

also have a commercial connotation, as these types of images are associated with "selling"

some aspect of an athletics department or program. The sale might involve buying in, literally or

figuratively, to a program or person through tickets, sponsorships, or some type of association

(i.e., as a fan, student athlete, assistant coach).

For P11, a brand begins with consistent visual representation.

And I do think that we, even in our department, we now have consistency in our logo,

consistency in our appearance, consistency in our mascot, consistency in our colors, and

in things of this nature. And that's kind of needed today; it just is. We just want to make

sure that everybody, certainly in (our state) but hopefully even nationally, when they see

(our logo), they know that's (our university). (P11)

Knowing what kind of brand they want to associate with their image helps ADs to make

decisions about certain types of actions, such as promotional activities. "(F)or example," said P4,

"the marketing director says, 'A sponsor wants to do so and so.' But (if) that is not a part of our

culture, we're not going to allow them to do that."

The interpretation of what is appropriate "branding" for an athletics department or coach

might correspond with aspects of their prior career experience. For example, ADs such as P4, P5,

P7 and P11 who have extensive experience in academic or athletics administration might be

sensitive to whether activities by student athletes, coaches or sponsors suggest an athletics

department culture incongruent with university values. ADs with coaching backgrounds might

have a similar degree of sensitivity toward the ways these activities can reflect the culture—and

therefore affect the brand—of specific programs, such as basketball.

Image and basketball coaches.

Branding was also a way participants described how their head basketball coaches develop their images as individuals. Components of individual branding include: positive actions, treating people well, accomplishing work goals, and representing their universities honorably. For example, P2 described his men's basketball coach as having "developed a reputation as being someone who's extremely active in the community, and in the state, and does great work in the area of charitable initiatives and philanthropy."

The concept of treating people well includes the media, as P6 emphasized in his description of his men's basketball coach's brand.

> Are there some media guys who don't like (our men's basketball coach)? I'm sure, but I'll guarantee you more do because he gives them time, he answers their questions. He's polite: If a reporter asks him what the color of the sky is, he doesn't look at him like, "What, are you stupid?" I mean, he never does that. He would simply say, "Hey, it's blue." He treats people the right way. (P6)

P2 discussed how the development of a strong, positive brand is easy to maintain if it is consistent with whom a coach is as a person, as is the case with his women's basketball coach.

> And so her brand has been developed over a long period of time, and so what she does is continue that brand development, with some key principles that are part of her core values of who she is and what she's about. And, it doesn't, probably, take as much work to map that out, because she's at the top of the business in women's basketball, and she's achieved that through her success. And her brand is about who she really is, and people have—because she's been doing it so long—people know that. And so everything we do is a continuation of that. (P2)

In addition to developing their brands as individuals, coaches brand their teams to important publics, such as alumni, local communities, university groups and prospective student athletes. P8 described one way this has happened in his department:

And we're doing a pre-season deal right now, where we call our coaches to—both our football coaches and basketball coaches are going out—to our different alumni groups in (our state) and talking about what's going to happen next fall, in basketball and football. And that's what I see them doing, more just going out and telling their story, and sort of branding their team for what's going to happen this coming year, what's going to happen this year as opposed to teams of the past. (P8)

Some participants mentioned that personality is an important element of a basketball coach's image, which ties into the persona understanding of image. For example, P9—who has coaching experience—suggested that a gregarious coach who embraces public relations can affect how people feel about a program, its image and its culture.

I think you've got a great example down there. Look at Bruce Pearl, how he's hit the ground running. You know, he's done a great job, and I think he's done a great job with the public perception of Tennessee basketball. (Our men's basketball coach) here has done a sensational job with it. … And it's just, it's ramped up the high profile of it, and that feeds into ticket sales, of course, media appearances. (P9)

Along with being outgoing, participants said that a coach should project a positive attitude to foster a good image. For example, P9 suggested that others will notice if coaches show that they take pleasure in their work.

(H)ave fun, and enjoy what you're doing. And I'd say every time you enjoy what

you're doing, or every moment out that you enjoy what you're doing, it will permeate

through the community and through your fan base, and then be successful. (P9)

Coaches' images are also created by the way they respond to negative situations, such as

a difficult season or a loss. For coaches whose programs are flagships of their athletics

departments, this idea ties into the "front porch" understanding of image. "I don't think you can

be all things to all people, but I do think you can be civil, even when you've lost a game and

people are booing at you," said P6, who also has a coaching background prior to his work in

athletics administration.

I mean, that's what (coaches) signed up for. When we're not winning, we all get

criticized. And if we can't deal with that, then we need to do something else. But, at the

end of the day, it's not those people's fault we're not winning, OK? (laughs) It's our own

fault, or we need to get better. And I just think when you're in town, you have the

perception of the people, and they see you on TV or they read about you in the

newspaper, you should nod at them, and smile and say, "Hello," and, "Good morning."

(P6)

In addition, some participants, such as P9, posited that coaches who do not embrace

public relations—especially its image orientation—will not succeed in their careers: "And I think

from our standpoint … we've got two brilliant, brilliant PR people, who've done it, and really, I

think, embraced it. You know I've had coaches who haven't embraced it, and I think they tend to

fail."

According to ADs, coaches should be open and accessible, especially to the media and fans. Doing so works to establish a positive persona for the coaches, and aids in the overall maintenance (or improvement) of the front porch.

> So I think my advice to them is, always be very, very courteous and nice, answer questions, take the time to deal with them. … So if you don't want to stand there and answer the little 8-year-old's question that you might think is absolutely silly, you know, you created this! You are the ambassador of this university. This is not—as I tell everybody all the time—this is not about you. (P5)

Accessibility is a tangible and literal concept for athletics directors whose communities expect and desire personal interaction with high profile coaches. P2's community fits this description, which is a reality that his basketball coaches must embrace to develop or maintain a positive image.

> Our fans want to somewhat touch and feel our coach, our head coach, in basketball and football. … Folks in this state, in this region, take their athletic programs very seriously, and I think at some level they want to feel like they're a part of that family. And so, articulating who (the men's basketball coach) is allows them to feel like they're closer to him, and thus, to our program. (P2)

Sometimes accessibility means literally opening opportunities for certain publics to get closer to coaches and programs, such as what P11, also a former coach, described:

> But, an example of that is opening practices to high school coaches. Some coaches allow that and some don't. OK, to me, that's a positive thing. Some coaches are a little more superstitious, and some coaches are a little more suspect, you know, "Are they scouting for the other team?" All those kinds of things. But, I think overall it's far more positive

than negative, and I would encourage coaches to do that. And talking about our two basketball coaches, our basketball coaches allow that. (P11)

Another way participants characterized their basketball coaches' images is the way they establish their presence. For example, coaches can have a charitable presence outside their coaching roles.

> And I think on the other side, there's probably 30 percent of it that they initiate themselves, that they create, within their own foundations, whether it's within their own fundraising for their own budgets, whether it's goodwill. Imaging, like I said, is very important, and so goodwill becomes a big piece of that. (P9)

Participants said that coaches should reflect a positive image for their universities as a whole. P9 said that, "I think it's important for our coaches, they're so high-profile, to promote a good image, not only for athletic department or their individual sport, but for the university itself."

P12 indicated that representing the university's image well is an indication of overall success in a basketball coach's job.

> It doesn't matter what you say or what you do if you haven't built a program that reflects the values of the university. … (T)hey represent this institution in everything they do, and that their most important contribution they can make to both our public and community relations is to do that in a way that reflects the values of the university. (P12)

Message.

"Message" was another term that participants used to describe their understanding of public relations. At its base level, message has to do with verbal communication to internal and external publics, often through the media. Going deeper, it stands for the main ideas that ADs

and coaches want their publics to embrace. It also represents the main ideas that publics

interpret from what they see, hear and read.

P2, whose background is in marketing and development, explained that public relations is

"getting your message into the public forum, proactively and in a positive way. Though

sometimes it's obviously combating negative impressions and those kinds of things." He also

mentioned whose messages he has in mind when he thinks of public relations: "(I)n our case,

intercollegiate athletics and (our university's) athletics."

Message and values.

Some participants use messages to build internal consensus on university or athletics

department values, and to make decisions that affect the department or programs. For example,

P9, who is also a university administrator, talked about the importance of using messages to

"build consensus, (so) that we always live by the two things that we really preach around here,

and that's class and integrity."

P11 discussed how he incorporates the message of his department's mission, vision and

values into every department meeting, no matter the topic. "I know it's boring to some people,"

he said, "but, number one, we have turnover, and number two, I've learned that we're starting to

have success, because I hear our coaches and our staff speak those same words."

Several ADs mentioned that they communicate certain key messages to internal publics,

sometimes on their own, and sometimes with other administrators.

I don't want to micromanage them; I just want to send a big message that we return

phone calls, we don't get in a shouting contest with a booster even if they are wrong

(both laugh), we…I could go on. … And occasionally we'll meet with the ushers and the

ticket takers to talk with them about how we want to say hello to people and greet them when they come to our games. (P7)

Participants also spoke about balance in messages. For example, P12 emphasized that, while ADs should care about what their communities say, they should also let them know that they will not base decisions on public opinion.

I have to assure them that I want them to care about this place and the decisions we make; but I also have to make sure they understand that I'll make those decisions based on the information I have available to me, and not on the views of the public. (P12)

P11, whose professional background includes coaching as well as athletics administration, expressed a similar sentiment, especially when fan and department values clash:

But being at an amateur athletic level, and being at an educational institution, I do hammer home every time I get, every time I speak, every time we do what we do, that as much as we want to win, I'm not going to evaluate our programs, individually or collectively, solely based on the winning and the losing. That's completely contrary to, again, our mission, and our values and our vision, and what an academic, amateur, educational institution should be about. (P11)

Message and strategy.

Messages are rarely spontaneous, because they represent more than an offhand comment or reaction. Messages must be carefully crafted and thoughtfully delivered. This is the case for external publics as well as internal ones. P3, who has many years of experience in athletics administration, gave a detailed description of how developing messages to external publics works hand-in-hand with collaborative strategic planning in his athletics department:

(I)t probably starts with having a message to deliver, and it would be our senior staff

that would be involved with discussions along the lines of strategic planning and so forth.

Things would be, developing the critical goals, and then as a result of those goals, the

messages that we want to be able to put out there, and trying to get the different

constituencies to be able to solicit and support the program. … The media are just a small

part of that overall reach and the overall interaction, so, in other words, developing the

message, that message that goes to the full department. Our fundraisers have a certain

number of messages that come out of our strategic planning, and establishment of our

goals, that they're going to be taking to our donor base, and our alumni and friends, and

families of student athletes, etc. … But with every sport and with the department,

generally, in terms of the traditional media, there are going to be additional types of

messages that we're going to be making sure, through media relations, are out there as

well. (P3)

Messages to external publics can be used not only to educate regarding internal decisions,

but also to quell potential hostility. P11 advises ADs to not only tell publics about decisions in

advance of their implementation, but also to involve them in the decision if possible.

And, I don't care if I raise ticket prices or whatever it may be, that's not going to be

received positively by anybody. Nobody likes for ticket prices to be raised. But if we do

it in a manner … either focus groups or an understanding of why we have to do it, or an

advance notice of why we're doing it, usually I find out it's better received. (P11)

Along these same lines, participants said that athletics departments have to be proactive

about their messages; for example, by "providing information, and thereby diminishing the

possibility that you're reacting all the time," according to P3.

It's amazing how effective getting communication out ahead of the curve, out ahead of the story, can have the effect…can have a calming effect. And people…not react as severely, and I think it also has the effect of making a one-day story in fact a one-day story, instead of a one-week story. (P3)

P2 and P5 discussed how they prioritize their publics in the messaging process.

(W)e want to make sure we have the right kind of impact, and hopefully get the right story out on campus first, because the campus demographic is the one that's interacting with us daily, and making judgment calls on us daily. And then the next most important group is obviously that sort of next, outer core beyond that, that is our donor group, our season ticket holder group, who are still very key in our, in determining what our message is going to be, how it's going to be interpreted, and so forth. And then the third is more the general public, and maybe they aren't as informed about (our) athletics, but we still, you know, if there's an article in the paper about a particular topic, we want them to not formulate the wrong opinion about that. (P2)

So, it would be, it would be, Tier One—not in order of importance—but Tier One would be my university community, Tier Two would be the community that comprises (our part of the state), in this case, Tier Three might be the state, Tier Four is going to be (our conference), Tier Five is going to be the whole country, and Tier Six is going to be the world. … So I think you have to look at each of those different categories of external community, and try to determine what is—you know I'll use what I always hear from our PR—what is the message you want to send? And I think that depends on, what is the relationship that you have, or need to have, with those people, with that group of people? (P5)

Message and storytelling.

Some participants, such as P8, described how they, or their employees, tell the story of what is happening in their departments or programs.

We have sports information that tells the story of what happens with each sport and each event. And then we have a marketing department that tells people, our public, about our upcoming events. And then we have corporate people that go off to the corporate community to get corporate sponsorships; we tell them what we're doing too. (P8)

Storytelling is a way for athletics directors—or coaches, or departments—can not only disseminate their messages, but control its delivery and presentation as well.

I have to tell our story, and we can't trust, or hope, that traditional media will tell our story. So what asset do we have to do that? And the asset that we have is our own website. And a listserv of some 40,000 people. So, we often use our website to tell our story. … It's a very effective tool to use. Sometimes when we have announcements, we'll put it up on our website two or three hours before we release it to the public. Which is part of the educational process, to say to our friends, again, "Look to us for information." We want (our) people to know the facts. So what you're trying to do is to educate them to get their best source of information from (our) official site. (P4)

Similar to P4, P12 and P3 spoke about the need and ability for athletics departments to change and cope with the realities of new media by becoming their own media entities through broadcast and the Internet. Doing so has aided them in gaining more control over their messages. Their athletics departments have invested significantly in creating internal new media resources, which these ADs see as tremendous assets for all of their programs.

You have to be more skilled offensively now, because there's no way to play effective

defense. So we have to be more engaged and be more of a player in new media

ourselves. We have to become publishers and broadcasters in order to get our own

message out. (P12)

I think that through the technology that we have available, and the access we have to the

Web, and being able to produce sport-specific features that can be refreshed on a daily

basis, the ability to produce sport-program specific DVDs, and other, more

comprehensive sort of visual information, is certainly there. We're just getting into all the

other stuff with Twitter, and I can't even remember all of the other different capabilities

… We have a media services unit that's heavily involved in the application of all the

different technology that we have, and they're the people that are coordinating uplinks,

and all the different…exchanging of the video-generated inventory, coordination of that

stuff being developed in a central location, and then being transmitted to the different

facilities here, etc. We're involved in all those different types of delivery, and I think

we're probably a little bit ahead of the curve in that regard. (P3)

While most participants emphasized the importance of proactive, verbal messages, one

participant did not believe that was necessary. In fact, according to P8—whose athletics

department houses a football program with a national following—if an athletics department just

does the "right thing", the message will get out.

(T)he deal is that I don't look from the outside in, at how people perceive me, or how

they perceive our athletic department. I always look from the inside out, meaning, what

are we doing, how are we performing, how are we doing things? And we're always trying

to do the right thing, so that message gets out. The idea of these people looking and

waiting to see what they're going to get, what message they're going to receive from

us, I don't think that way. (P8)

P8 shows how an AD could incline toward a passive approach to message creation and

development when an athletics program receives a tremendous amount of "unsolicited" attention

due to its success, such as P8's football program does. This passive approach can extend to

technological development: P8 acknowledged that his department is using new media

technology, but his comments (i.e., calling Facebook, "Spacebooks") indicated that interaction

and familiarity with these developments is not his priority. While none of the other ADs

interviewed for this study indicated this attitude toward message development and dissemination

(including those with similar circumstances as P8), it is possible that there are other ADs who

take a similarly passive approach.

Participants discussed the concept of message in relation to their basketball coaches, both

in terms of communicating ideas and storytelling. Several ADs emphasized that basketball

coaches should send a consistent, positive and honest message to internal and external

constituencies, such as student athletes, recruits, the surrounding community and the media. ADs

such as P5 and P9, who are part of their universities' administrations, making sure their

basketball coaches send messages that are in step with their institution's priorities.

> (W)hen we pick coaches, we try to pick coaches who basically understand the uniqueness
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> of (our university) and what our strengths are. So, you know, we're always going to have
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> coaches who are going to be, from a public relations standpoint, singing the academic
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> song, because that's very important to us here. Now, we might help them shape that
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> message. There might be other messages that they might want to shape. … But they are
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> heavily involved in the messages we send out, in planning them on most things. … And

so, we do what we can to make sure what is going out there is a positive message. I

think you do that by basically making sure that as much as what happens in your program

is a positive message. (P5)

Action and interaction.

Finally, this study's participants understand public relations as action and interaction with

publics. Participants discussed that public relations requires everyone in their departments to be

mindful of how they build and manage relationships with publics. This includes intentionally

reaching out to publics, often through service-oriented initiatives (e.g., volunteering, fundraising,

special visits). It also includes engaging publics through conversation and involvement.

Relationships with publics must be mutually—though not necessarily equally—beneficial. In the

process, athletics directors, coaches and other employees must show themselves to be accessible

and accountable to their publics, both internal and external.

Building internal and external relationships.

P1, a former student athlete, emphasized the importance of the engagement aspect of

action/interaction in relation to student athletes' experience with his athletics department.

Yeah, the bottom line, overall, is, I will know when we're doing a proper job with our

student athletes when they walk away saying we've done right by them, and we were

engaged, and we cared and our coaches cared about leading them as young people and

learning something about life, and you know, hopefully having some success on the

playing field, that we provided enough support to do that. But overall, their impression is,

"Boy, this was a heck of an experience." (P1)

According to P6, who has had a long career in athletics administration, communication is crucial to ensure that those who represent his athletics department pursue positive interactions with publics.

> So spending as much time with your staff as possible, you know, setting that tone I talked to you about, about how we're going to do things, because if you're someone selling a ticket downstairs, PR's important to us: smile on your face, treating people the right way. You know, if you're a 22-year-old kid who just graduated, and nobody's ever had that conversation with you before, how would you know that? (P6)

According to P12, ADs have a responsibility to engage and reach out to those who have a strong interest in their athletics programs. However, this can be challenging, as these publics often have intense and disparate views about department decisions.

> What you are doing is dealing with the extraordinary passion that already surrounds the place. … And that's the way it is with a place like this: Half of my, half of the people who care about this place at any point in time think I should get rid of some coach, and half of them think I should keep him or her! And from a public relations perspective, I have to manage that, all of that passion. (P12)

For basketball coaches and ADs, the "how" in actions and interactions with publics is just as (if not more) important than the "what." P1 believed that the ability to build strong, positive relationships with student athletes and coaches can make up for a lack of some "bells and whistles" in terms of attracting people to his institution.

> And we don't have some of the toys that the other schools have, but one thing we should be able to compete with them on a neck-and-neck basis is just the overall PR and relationship building that is so important in this sector. (P1)

P6 recalled missteps early in his career related to how he interacted with internal and external publics. Looking back, he said that he now appreciates the value of gracious and considerate actions toward and interactions with those publics—and has changed his ways accordingly.

> So I've made all the mistakes, OK? (Both laugh.) And I saw how ineffective it was. So I would tell people that you've got to be professional at all times. I think you've got to rise above your emotions. I think you have to make sure that you're polite and respectful. You can disagree, and you can criticize, and you can write. I can call a newspaper person now and say, "You were wrong about what you wrote." But there's a right way and a wrong way to do that. … I would say the biggest key to future advancement—certainly it's success, and certainly running an honest program and everything like that—but I just think that if you don't treat people right, at some point it's gonna hold you back. (P6)

Along the lines of being accessible and accountable to publics, participants believed that getting to know publics and being a visible part of their communities helps ADs and basketball coaches to establish and maintain positive actions/interactions with publics.

> Each group is unique unto itself; they all have a direct impact on your organization and your athletic department. So I think you have to develop sound and productive relationships with each of those constituent groups, pay attention to them, spend time getting to know who they are and how they affect your organization. And I would tell you that's a part of my job that is high on my priority list of things that I want to make sure I'm connected to. (P10)

> And you know, at the end of the day, obviously people need to recruit and coach and go win some games. But you can't be on a college campus and have that type of profile—

certainly that (our men's basketball coach) has and I hope one day that (our women's basketball coach) has—and not be involved in the community, whether that's at your church, or whether that's in a fundraising effort, or if that's some charity situation. And the majority of my coaches are involved in those activities. (P6)

In fact, P5 said he would like to see his basketball coaches become even more accessible, particularly to underserved populations in his community.

We try to involve our coaches, and I think our coaches do a very good job. But I think that they do it in a—how should I say it—in a selective area. And I think what we have to do is get them more involved in a broader area. And I think that's a situation of getting people out of their comfort zones, and getting people to understand that we have a duty to that local community. So, I don't have any problem at all; my coaches will go out. But you know, it's to the Rotary, it's to the, you know, that sort of stuff. And what we try to do is get them into more things that are not related to the ticket sale. You know, maybe we can get you out to that inner city school where the fourth graders don't get to go anywhere. That's what we've got to work harder at. (P5)

Publics/constituents.

The second major aspect of the participants' discussion of how they understand public relations is that of "publics" and "constituents." These terms were used interchangeably by nearly all participants to describe people who are internal, external, influential and in relationship with their athletics departments. Participants' comments indicated that they see "publics" and "constituents" as having vested interests in their athletics programs, and therefore, need to be addressed consistently. However, the ADs made no distinctions between the terms, so for purposes of this narrative, the term "publics" will be used.

Internal publics.

Internal (sometimes referred to as "inside") publics are those within the participants' athletics departments. They defined their internal publics as coaches, administrators, staff and student athletes, as well as university administrators (for participants whose athletics departments are integrated with their universities).

P6, who has served in several different capacities within athletics administration over the course of his career, discussed how important it is for ADs to communicate with internal publics.

> I think it's really easy to spend a lot of time communicating with your boosters, your student athletes, your students, your season ticket holders, and all of those folks. Everybody does that. But, you know, you have, well, in my case, 350 employees that are equally important. They're on the inside and they need to know what's going on! So you've got to make an effort to do that, and I mean, I don't say that as if it's a chore. It's just that sometimes you can forget. (P6)

External publics.

External (also referred to by participants as "outside") publics were defined by participants as groups and individuals outside the athletics department and, for some, their universities. For example, P1 said that his external publics "(c)ould be faculty, could be other members of the student body, could be alumni, alumni within a particular program, parents— very vocal group, or can be very vocal (both laugh)—board of directors, board members, board of governors." P10 described his "outside constituent groups" as media, fans, alumni, donors and corporate sponsors. And according to P2, athletics departments might have external publics who are not even associated with their universities, such as national media.

Influential publics.

Participants said that internal and external publics are influential. Through involvement and input, participants said that publics feel ownership of an athletics department or program. Decision making for these ADs and their basketball coaches involves media pressure and public pressure, because both groups have a vested interest in those decisions. According to P3, these publics waste no time in letting others know what they think of an athletic program.

I would suggest developing a thick skin, understanding that not only is it the media that will have opinions about what to do and why, and how good a job that you're doing, but it's the casual fan. Some of who are people who are important to your program, and some of whom might not be quite as important; but yet, as long as they have a computer, they have the opportunity and the ability to express an opinion that could not be particularly flattering to the AD or to that athletics program. (P3)

Participants said that vocalization of these opinions can play a role in their decision-making processes, even influencing them to take courses of action they would prefer to avoid. P11 gave an example of a situation involving a former men's basketball coach who the AD wanted to retain, but with whom a major external public—the fans—were unhappy.

But in the end, I dismissed him, partly for his sake. And I think he realizes that now, because it was getting ugly: The fans were ugly; they were booing him at the introduction of our team when they announced their coach, and you know, we had half the people coming to the games than we used to. (P11)

P10 even went as far as to say, "You can be doing everything right, and you know it only takes five or ten fans who disagree with you to really turn the tables upside-down."

Relationships with publics.

Therefore, at high-profile institutions, such as those represented by the participants, public relations means, as P12 said, "trying to manage the passion and interest that already surrounds" an institution. Many participants in this study do this by developing and maintaining relationships with publics. As mentioned previously, some participants prioritize their publics into tiers, friends vs. non-friends, university interests vs. others, and circles (closest circles are staff and university; farthest circles are national audience).

Participants such as P12 said that managing these relationships is most difficult in the context of a problem. These problems do not have to be full-blown crises; they can be controversial decisions, or issues that need resolution. Participants discussed various relationship-building strategies for these situations. For instance, P11 discussed how inclusive decision-making with internal publics helped him and his department to avoid major controversy in a logo dispute.

> I had met our 25 sports' student-athlete representatives. I told them that we have three options: We could stay with the two logos … We could all go to the (one logo), because it did stand for (our university's name). Or we could create a new logo ... And I said, you go back and talk to your athletes, your teams, and come back, and each sport gets one vote. I did the same thing with all 25 head coaches. Now, what it amounted to is that the student athletes came back and voted 24 to 1 for the (one logo); the coaches came back and voted 23 to 2 for the (one logo). Well, it was pretty easy for us to make the decision to go to the (one logo). But I'm convinced, had I done it by myself, it wouldn't have been as well received. (P11)

For ADs, some participants said they must make a special effort to engage their publics when they are upset about something. ADs should not go into a shell and hide from publics, especially when there is controversy; that is a "dangerous way to live," according to P9.

P12 had to use engagement through communication to deal with repercussions of a controversy that occurred when his institution invited a speaker to campus whose political views were contrary to those of many of his university's students and alumni.

> (W)e really had to engage our community, because a significant portion of it was very upset with that. … And I try to make it really clear that I understand that they may not agree with us, and I understand that there may be consequences of that disagreement. … People are very surprised when I, you know, I have to do a lot of public speaking with this job, and I'll take any question. I want them to ask those questions in a public forum. It gives me an opportunity to explain, and it's one of the most effective ways for sort of disarming people … I'm giving a speech in Omaha tomorrow night, and I guarantee you I'll get a question about it. (P12)

Engaging with publics requires cultural sensitivity, especially in a sport with a large representation of minorities, played in diverse university communities. Some participants emphasized that basketball coaches need to be made aware of unique cultural issues in their university community, especially those that affect their relationships with specific publics.

> Well, they're high-visibility sports, and they tend to carry a fairly unique cultural dynamic with them, because of their importance in the African-American community, the importance of those sports in the African-American community of the United States. It's very important that the coaches be effective representatives of the university. They're highly visible, they travel a lot; they travel in different settings, frequently, than other

elements of the university do. And so they have to be well equipped to be able to do that. (P12)

Cultural sensitivity is especially important if there have been tensions or poor relationships with specific publics.

But we continue to try to tell them (our coaches) about the culture. The black culture, which exists in (our city), and certainly the negativity that I think that they've had towards the university. "They" is a general statement; certainly not all blacks, but there certainly has been some perception of that. … (W)e need the coaches to work hard to heal those wounds, whether they are former black athletes, or community members. And I just think there needs to be an awareness of the culture. And I think we try to have people share that with our coaches as they come to the university. (P11)

Many participants said that it is important for ADs and their basketball coaches to engage in service-oriented activities with local publics, even if the activities are not always directly tied to athletics or ticket sales. This strategy was most often brought up regarding the local community in which participants' universities exist.

Earlier this week, I served as a facilitator for a strategic planning process for the city, for an element of the city. Doesn't have anything to do, really, with my day job, but it's the sort of thing that, if you do, it helps build bridges and relationships with the community. (P12)

And I'll give you a good example here, is, you know, we have a growing Hispanic population. And we have a number of people who have moved here from the Middle East and Somalia. Now, none of our coaches go into those areas. And that is part of our community, and that's part of the community we need to be better serving, I think. (P5)

Some participants cited high-profile involvement in local charitable activities by their basketball coaches as a way to build positive relationships in their communities. Along those lines, some basketball coaches are ambassadors for their own foundations, such as P1 described:

> Well, our men's basketball coach has his own foundation in the (local) area. So he's done block parties and other functions to get people involved in his initiatives, whether it be a boys club, or a tennis foundation. You know, he's just done a remarkable job in the past few years of doing that kind of outreach. (P1)

Outside of charities, basketball coaches also reach out to their communities by delivering inspirational and motivational speeches to local sport entities. "They deal with local schools, local basketball entities of various kinds, and they have to be prepared to engage all those sport-specific entities as well as the more general ones," said P12.

Community members are not the only local publics with whom basketball coaches build relationships; on-campus publics are important too. Some participants, such as P7, who is part of his university's administration, discussed their coaches' engagement with academic and administrative leaders at their universities.

> We've had some different outings; we'll have a dinner with all of the vice presidents, and some of the deans and our head coaches, just to try to get them to know each other. And then, many times through the recruiting process, coaches will call on those deans and whatever to help them talk to a recruit about a certain area, or about certain academic areas that would be of interest to recruits. (P7)

Others, such as P12, talked about their basketball coaches' efforts to reach out to the non-varsity athlete undergraduates.

(T)hey speak in the dormitories: (Our university) is a very residential campus, so they have a very obvious and high-profile presence on campus. So they are…if you took all of the people that work for the university, and rank them in terms of university community engagement, our basketball coaches would be among the highest, more so than a typical professor. (P12)

Some participants described coaching as a lifestyle, in that even aspects of a coach's everyday life are opportunities to connect with publics. P12 and P11 talked about how important it is for their basketball coaches to recognize those opportunities and use them wisely.

They're very high profile; they're engaged in community relations when they go to dinner or the grocery store. And they can't, you think about the job otherwise. You have to know that you're always in the position of representing the university and building community relations when you're in a position like that. (P12)

And then, so we try to prepare them for that, in regards to it. And the high visibility that you have in a community like this. And (our men's basketball) Coach, I'm sure, knows that. You know, he can't go to McDonalds, and he can't go to the most fancy restaurant without people knowing who he is, and so on and so forth. And that high and excitement gets old, because sometimes you just want to be you. But you can't in this world of today, which is fine if you understand who you represent and what you need to be. (P11)

However, participants such as P6 and P10—both former coaches—cautioned that basketball coaches should have a balance between being accessible to publics, and focusing on their "day jobs" of coaching and recruiting. Basketball coaches should have an appropriate, realistic perspective regarding their priorities.

You have to make sure that you're accessible, very necessary, to different groups:

donor groups, alumni groups, media, etc. But, you know, it's easy to kind of get

distracted on the other hand, and forget about what your day job is. And your day job is

to coach basketball and recruit the best kinds of student athletes possible. And so, I guess

there's got to be a balance. (P10)

I think if you treat people right, you can have a positive PR. Now, if you go 0 and 20 as a

basketball coach, it's not gonna save you! (laughs) But you see a lot of successful

coaches who don't know how to treat people the right way, and I think that's wrong. (P6)

Responsibility for public relations.

Participants noted who carries the mantle for public relations within their athletics

departments in the process of explaining how they understand public relations. The comments

and terminology they offered led to the development of the following categories: 1) Everyone's

job, 2) everyone's job, but especially those who oversee image, 3) everyone's job, but especially

sports information, 4) AD sets the tone for public relations, 5) AD and executive staff make

public relations decisions, and 6) AD and executive staff make public relations decisions, with

consultation from public relations manager.

Public relations is everyone's job.

Some participants indicated that anyone in their departments who deals with publics is

responsible for public relations. According to P5, "I think that public relations is everybody's

job. At all points and times, you are relating to the public in some shape, form or fashion."

This description includes administrators (beyond the AD) and coaches. "(E)verybody in

the department who deals with people outside the department has a responsibility to be open and

honest and communicative with their constituents," said P7.

Regarding basketball coaches, participants said that public relations is part of their responsibility, too. Recruiting, for example, is about building relationships with prospects and their families. This includes following up with contacts, and being where they need to be to show interest in prospects. It also means that basketball coaches "have to be very effective in communicating with young people, especially prospective student athletes, about the nature of the university and the expectations of the place, should those student athletes choose to come here," according to P12.

Responding to public interest and pressure about recruiting, including media, is another aspect of public relations that coaches handle.

(T)here is going to be quite a bit of public relations that has to be done, both, very regularly in recruiting, scheduling…people will say you don't have a strong enough schedule, or too strong a schedule; (people will ask if you are) recruiting the right kind of kids to your institution, from the top 100 kids, according to the polls. (P10)

Another example of basketball coaches' public relations responsibilities cited by participants is combating destructive forces. Occasionally, this means dispelling rumors about their programs, including those from the anonymous Internet sources.

(T)here are a lot of things that go out there that, there's a tremendous sensitivity on campus because of the potential impact on recruiting. So it is important for a coaching staff to be attentive to many of the things that are out there. We don't want the head coach spending time of her day, or his day, reading everything that's out there. So it's important that somebody on staff has the time or has the role of monitoring things, so when there is something that might be bothersome, creates a negative view of the program, or the players, the coaches, etc., that we know what that is, we know what the

source of that is, and that we have a method of being able to respond to it in such a way that we're providing information, and setting the record straight, if you will. (P3)

In fact, sometimes coaches must interact with individuals with whom they have to be effective in communicating *non*-interest.

They have to be able to communicate with some populations that, frankly, we don't want to have much to do with. And saying, "I don't want to deal with you," is an important form of communications. We have to be clear about that, especially in men's youth basketball. (P12)

Public relations is everyone's job, but especially those who oversee image.

Media relations, marketing, and fundraising are the three areas most often mentioned by participants as the "keepers" of image. All of these groups deal with outside constituents. They oversee branding and promotions, and are involved in recruiting student athletes, donors and prospective employees. P8 described these departments as "telling the story" of their athletic programs' success.

So what we're doing, like I mentioned, our sports information department, to our corporate side, to our marketing side: Those are kind of our faces, and then the way we perform, and the newspaper covers that. Those are the ways we touch everyone around us. (P8)

Basketball coaches are also involved with these groups, but their level of involvement varies among participants. For some, coaches only approved or disapproved ideas related to their programs. ADs in this case, said their coaches should focus on coaching alone. For these participants, their basketball coaches do not initiate anything related to promotion of their programs, and are not part of the process. "They may react to some things, and they may say,

'Can we do it this way?' But it's marketing and sports information that set up how we're going to communicate it," said P8.

For these ADs, some of whom are former coaches, marketing, media relations and fundraising directors simply let coaches know what is going on for informative purposes.

Yeah, I'm a big believer, Angela, in letting our coaches coach. That's what they're hired to do. I mean, we may run our promotions by a coach, or run an idea by a coach. But I certainly don't want my coaches involved in suggesting slogans; I don't want to have them sign off on every single marketing idea. It's not because I don't want their input; if they have some ideas, fine, we'll accept them. But at the end of the day, I have a marketing department; that's their job, just like a basketball coach is their job. It's not that it's territorial; it's just that it's hard to be a coach. And most successful coaches want to focus as much time as they can on coaching, recruiting and running their programs. And I understand some sports are different; I understand some schools are different. Meaning, they have to have their head coaches involved in those initiatives; they have to have them get out to speak to community groups, to sell tickets and do those things. So it's a matter of, to each his own. But at (our school), again, we're blessed to have a large staff, and with the expectations of this program and the pressures of this program, I need (the men's basketball coach) to be able to coach his team. And I won't take him into the marketing part of it. (P6)

However, other ADs said that their basketball coaches were involved in approval and discussion of image and branding related to their programs. Some of these ADs are former coaches as well. They believed that basketball coaches should be accessible to marketing staff, as well as sponsors and donors.

Well, I think, especially in the more high-profile sports, the coach has to be marketing-

savvy. Has to be speaking in places you want them to speak in, so you may send them in

those directions. They've got to understand the importance of building a crowd, and so,

yeah, they've got to be, not involved in the actual planning of everything, but have to be

accessible and valuable when we need to use them to excite the fans. At the same time,

we don't want to require them to be daily working on marketing. But we want them to

understand what we're doing. (P7)

While these ADs still do not advocate a lot of mandated public relations activities, they

do give some encouragement to participate in practices that will foster good rapport with publics.

For example, they might attend donor or alumni functions when asked, since accessibility to

coaches is important to program boosters. But coaches would not initiate most of these activities

since they are already asked to do so much.

We promote basketball pretty effectively. We use him as an element of that, so we will

have him make appearances and do things. But I don't expect him to lead the promotional

activity; I don't expect him to manage it. That's done through the athletics department

itself. (P12)

However, some participants said that their basketball coaches *are* part of the planning

process, and their involvement is encouraged and welcomed, from start to finish. These ADs—

who represent a mix of coaching and non-coaching backgrounds—said that coaches should be

asked for their input, ownership, ideas and approval regarding promotion of their programs.

I've always tried to integrate the coaches into the marketing plan. I have great confidence

in the marketing staff and promotions staff, but I also think that the coaches have a good

feel for the things they're being asked about, for important things to stress in the

program. Maybe it's a certain player, maybe it's a kid from a certain area, maybe it's a

style of play. And also, maybe they're less comfortable with putting themselves on the

cover of a media guide, or maybe they don't want to participate in some of those things.

So, I think you have to have them as part of the overall discussion. In the end, as an

athletic director, you make the ultimate decision. But for me, and my experience, I've

always wanted and encouraged them to be part of the process. (P10)

In fact, some participants cannot imagine their head basketball coaches not being a major

part of the promotional planning for their programs. "(T)hey're not only a part of the planning,

but many times they come up with the suggestions themselves," said P5. "I would think that you

miss the boat if you don't go to your coaches and get their ideas."

(I)f I'm putting together a marketing plan for men's basketball, we're nuts not to ask (our

men's basketball coach). Now, our people should put it together. And actually, in a

perfect world, I want our marketing department to go to (the coach) before that. I want

them to go to him now—or whenever it is—and say, "OK, what would you like to see?"

And then, put together a plan and bring it back. … In fact, I ask our marketing people to

do that with all of our coaches, not just our highly visible coaches. It's their program—

the head coach's—it's more theirs; they have more ownership over that program than

anybody. And so as a result, they—not that they make the final decision of how we

market—but they should have some input! (P11)

Some participants said that their basketball coaches' level and type of involvement in

promotion and outreach depends on circumstances. For example, P7 mentioned that the men's

and women's basketball coaches were more involved in public relations than their football

coaches because of a greater need to build support for basketball than football at their institution.

Public relations is everyone's job, but especially sports information.

Some participants said that while everyone in their departments has a part to play in public relations, none are more critical than sports information (which some, such as P3, referred to as "media relations"). P3 described his media relations staff as "the people who manage the messages that we feel as though are the important ones that are being consumed by mostly the traditional media: newspapers, TV, radio, etc."

Other participants, such as P1, emphasized the production of communication by sports information: "The publications, the vehicle that we use now, with the Internet, and expanding that, and that's ever changing."

While most participants said that building trust and rapport with the media falls on the shoulders of ADs and coaches as well as sports information, P8 said that at his institution, sports information *alone* has a relationship with the media.

> You know, I don't even think of myself as having a relationship with the media. As I mentioned, as we play games and the reports are always—you know people are always reporting on your APR, and they're reporting on the success or failure in your sports, and they may report on the behavior your athletes have in the community, all those things. And that's what is covered daily. And, I don't really think I'm having a relationship with them. Now I do have to, I do think their job is to report what is occurring on your campus. I would tell you that sports information does have a relationship, because their job is to communicate all those things. And our director of sports information, I would think would have more of a relationship than anyone else, because that's his job, to get things in the newspaper and have things covered. So if you're talking about a relationship, that would be with sports information. (P8)

AD sets the tone for public relations.

Many participants said that they are the ones who "set the tone" for public relations in their athletics departments. However, setting the tone for public relations meant a range of different ideas to each of them.

For P8, the AD sets the agenda for overall goals, and the achievement of these goals is the basis of public perception. For him, the AD deals with public relations through his department structure, delegating all communications activities to media relations and marketing. Therefore, setting the tone for him means that ADs should do their jobs well, and good things will come of it.

> I think the concept starts off with your athletic director, and what he wants to achieve. At our place, we're really interested in educating and graduating our student athletes, and then the other is winning national championships. And so, that's our goal, the two goals we have. And that helps us very much in how people perceive us … I do not set goals for public relations; that's not one we even think about. (P8)

For other participants, the AD sets the tone for department culture through his vision, decisions and communication. Everyone must buy into the vision for it to work well.

> I think more than anything else, to answer your question, if there's one person in charge of public relations, it's probably me, in terms of setting the tone that we're going to make sure we have positive public relations, and those things are going to be important. And it's not just, you know, they bought the ticket, and they can just show up whenever and not have a positive experience. So, I've got to set that tone, and I've got to pay attention. So when I go to an event, and I see traffic is backed up, we'll either fix it then, or we'll sure as heck fix it by the next time. Or if I go there and I see the stands are filthy, that's

going to be a problem for me. So, I think everybody's involved in the effort, and someone's got to set the tone and set priorities, and that certainly has to come from the athletic director. (P6)

Making decisions is another way that some participants set the tone for public relations. They said that department decisions should be considerate of their publics, but ultimately grounded in the AD's and university's values. "As long as we've made our decisions in a thoughtful way, and consistent with our values and our mission, you take the consequences that come," said P12.

Some participants also counsel or provide counseling regarding public relations—especially media relations—for their executive staff, high profile coaches and athletes, including basketball. For most participants, their basketball coaches solicit advice from them first. However, ADs will occasionally offer praise, criticism or suggestions to basketball coaches in regards to media relations without solicitation, depending on the situation.

Sometimes a coach will anticipate a question and call me about my opinion, or we talk about a situation anticipating questions … I think it may be because they know that they will get an honest response. They know that if I don't think it sounds good, or you could put a different tint on it, that that's what I'll tell them. And there's no down side to it; it's a risk-free situation. And they may feel more comfortable that I could tell them how the chancellor or the faculty or somebody might respond. They just may need that information. (P4)

For instance, new coaches might need guidance about handling certain aspects of media relations that seasoned coaches do not.

Yeah, I try to do it enough that I don't seem like I'm nagging them. You know, I don't

want to insult their intelligence. At the same time, I want to lead them in the right

direction and encourage them, especially early on. … I did invite, the coach I hired two

years ago, it was his first head-coaching job in Division I, and so we talked a lot about

that. He is really good with wanting to know what he could do to be better at things. So

often times, early on, I'd be really critiquing him on different ways to respond to the

media, both the negatives and positives. (P7)

AD and executive staff make public relations decisions.

Some participants expressed that while all of their employees are responsible for public

relations in some regard, the AD and executive staff make public relations decisions together.

Inclusive, well-informed decisions are best; inclusive means that executive staff—who represent

each facet of the department—and the AD act as the management of the department, especially

when contemplating major decisions.

But I'd say our senior staff—which is senior associate ADs, our associate ADs, our

assistant athletic directors, and our marketing staff—I think they're primarily the most

important. And then you also trickle down into the foundation, and the people that do our

(university's) athletic fund, and that's all the fundraising side of it, the development piece

of it, of the athletic department. And that's important because they're physically meeting

with all the people on a day-in, day-out basis. (P9)

AD and executive staff make public relations decisions with public relations manager.

Other participants share a similar perspective on public relations responsibility, with one

difference: the AD and executive staff are counseled by a public relations (sometimes called

communications) manager or director. For some participants, this person is not part of the

executive staff. He or she might be an assistant AD, or simply the director of public relations/communications. P2 explained that his public relations director has a major role in developing and delivering important messages on behalf of his department.

> (S)he helps from the standpoint of preparing for press conferences, looking at potential crisis events, how we're going to spin a message from a certain way, attacking a certain issue or something that's an untruth, you know, something that's not correct about us: "OK, what are we going to do to proactively approach that perception?" (P2)

Although they are not executive staff members, public relations managers are in close contact with university communications directors (vice presidents at some institutions), who have similar roles with the institution as a whole. Some participants involve their public relations managers in meetings with executive staff, so they might bring issues to their attention. For example, P3 described his public relations director as "analogous to a press secretary, who is responsible for keeping an eye on more global sorts of topics and issues that might emerge at a given point in time."

A variation on this manifestation of public relations responsibility is to have an executive staff member who is specifically responsible for public relations. This person is always part of the inner-circle of overall department management, while a non-senior staff public relations director might only be called in occasionally; or they might counsel but not have authority to make decisions.

Like some non-senior staff public relations/communications managers, this person was said to oversee media relations, and media and broadcast properties. They also oversee all communications of all sub-departments, and deal with mostly external audiences. However, this person might also oversee a director of communications who is not on senior staff. They also

work with all sub-departments in every aspect of planning and major messages to internal and external audiences.

Public relations issues and challenges.

Participants tied their understanding of public relations to specific issues and challenges that they and their basketball coaches face. These include media relations, crises, and evaluation of their programs and activities.

Media relations.

Media relations was most often described as "engagement" with the media. Participants mentioned several activities and duties that characterize their basketball coaches' media engagement. These included: post-game press conferences, responding to media calls, weekly reports and interviews.

Participants described approaches to media relations, from the standpoint of themselves, and also from that of their basketball coaches. Based on their comments about communication, interaction and relationship development, these approaches to media can be characterized as *relational* or *functional*.

In a relational approach, ADs and basketball coaches develop intentional, active relationships with writers and editors. "Open" was a term used by several participants to describe positive relational efforts toward media. Others mentioned were honesty, accessibility, consistency, returning messages, politeness, professionalism, and no favoritism.

P3 described a relational approach to media for a new basketball coach:

We would be starting with the obvious, which is…that media opportunity at which time the new coach would be introduced to the public, and as a result of that particular media exposure, then they would begin a relationship-building, with the beat writers, in

particular, and/or talent that would be associated with the radio network, or local TV

stations, sports departments, etc. I think from that point on, it is a relationship, and series

of interactions that are monitored or coordinated through media relations, between the

coach, coaching staff and the media. (P3)

ADs and basketball coaches with a relational approach to media make themselves

available for interviews, and are accessible beyond scheduled press conferences.

You know we sort of have an open door policy, in that most of the media have the cell

phone numbers of our coaches, and they can call. … I do believe it's very important to be

involved in that public, in that media, to be as open as you could be, to be very, very

accommodating, and understand that you are in a profession by your own choosing. (P5)

Even with a relational approach, some ADs said that basketball coaches still need to be

careful whom they trust, and use caution when dealing with media members.

I don't think a coach should become too cozy with the media: losing one's perspective,

potentially losing one's autonomy, etc. If the relationship is too cozy, the coach might

find herself or himself in a situation where they're being called constantly to be able to

respond to rumors and innuendo, and I don't think that you want that. (P4)

A functional media relations approach plays out differently. ADs and basketball coaches

focus on responding to direct questions at scheduled opportunities. There is little initiation,

except for one-way communication of information that might be of interest to a beat writer. A

"relationship" with media might be courteous interactions, but they are structured and distant.

This functional approach is best characterized by P8, in regards to his basketball coaches:

But the coaches are basically on a day-by-day basis as the season goes on, telling their

story, based on, basically the questions that they get asked. … And our sports information

director will make sure you have, will give you a chance to tell your story to the media.

… And if anything, we tell them to be positive and constructive, and have a good

relationship with those people who cover the beat. But basically it's more like, just run

your program well, and the story will be told. If you run it poorly, then that will be told

also. (P8)

Preparation, in the form of media training, was an important aspect of media relations to

some participants. Some participants characterized media training as extremely valuable and

important for ADs, the management team, coaches and student athletes. Internal staff takes care

of it for some participants; while for others external organizations have assisted in this area.

Some felt that media training was not immediately essential for certain coaches, due to

their level of experience. Still, some, such as P4, considered preparation helpful for certain

situations: "Our coaches are so skilled in public relations. Sometimes they prepare by

anticipating questions. 'You're going to get this question, and that question. How do you want to

handle that? What do you say?'"

The pros and cons of "new media" was a touchstone for participants. New media for

these participants include online newspapers, websites, blogs, message boards, YouTube,

Facebook and Twitter.

The publications, the vehicle that we use now, with the Internet, … that's ever changing.

And just trying to keep up with the new technologies that are out there, and ways of

reaching people is pretty important too. We try to do our very best to stay current … I

think with that exposure and that microscope, they've (Internet media) really honed in on

what is exactly happening with each of our programs, and that's definitely a key change

from many years ago. (P1)

Many participants, including those such as P3 who have been in athletics administration for more than a decade, said that familiarity with new media and what it can do—in-house and out-of-house—is a must for the modern AD.

> So we're in a situation where the emerging media and the technologies that allow for more information to be gathered, more information to be put out in the public domain, does require a level of savvy and a level of understanding and patience that 20 years ago, 30 years ago when I was coaching, we didn't have. So yeah, that has changed the dynamics quite a bit. (P3)

Participants believe that the new media are powerful. However, the lack of accountability, especially among bloggers, concerns many of them, including P9: "(T)he problem with that is that everybody's anonymous. You know, so nobody has to put their name to it; you don't know if there's a credible source. They can throw anything out there and it can run like crazy."

P2 described the lack of accountability on the Web as "a scary place to be" for an athletics department. Participants believed that athletics departments have less control of message than with traditional media. They are also concerned about what they see as the new media's penchant for fostering and feeding rumors.

> I think at times there's an oversaturation of information about an athletic department, or a program, or a specific team or student athlete. Because there are so many new ways, everybody's trying to compete with one another, and come up with the latest information about a particular program, or team or student athlete. I also think it's a challenge because there's a lot of misinformation out there: In the rush to be the first to come up

with that information, there's misinformation. And I'm talking about from a media

standpoint. (P10)

Some ADs believe that new media have added a major challenge to their jobs and

industry, even in the ways in which new media are helpful.

(I)t just makes everything more pervasive, and it makes you even more needing to be on

top of everything that goes on in your department. Because sometimes these people find

things out that we don't know. And they get reported over a non-traditional media outlet,

and we have to respond, which we don't like to have to do. And again, it speaks to us

getting really strong communication with our coaches, about any issues that are out there.

But it's hard to stay on top of the new media; you do the best you can, but there's

something that crops up every day. (P7)

However, these worries are not limited to new media, but can apply to traditional media

as well. There was concern among several participants about professional journalists who

publish stories before they have all the facts, for fear of getting "scooped" by another journalist,

blogger or publication.

I don't think that credible writers, like from *The New York Times*, are throwing half-truths

up on the Internet. I do think that young bucks who just got in the profession—and it's

very competitive, and they've got editors on them to come up with stuff—may float

things out there to see what the Net may drag in. (P6)

P3 used the phrases "I-gotcha journalism" and "ready-shoot-aim reporting" to describe

his belief that journalists in general have become so competitive that they focus more on being

first than being right.

And, there've been any number of situations where stories are created because of the desire to be the first to have what is believed to be credible information, but not having quite gone through all the due diligence needed to make sure that what is going to be reported is accurate. …. It's kind of a "ready, shoot, aim" approach. And, certainly that's not everybody; certainly there are very responsible reporters. But I think with the lack of accountability that there is with people that are in nontraditional media, where they can write stuff, and they don't have an editor breathing down their neck to make sure that they have researched thoroughly, whatever it is that they're reporting. So they're putting stuff out, potentially, in a method that's quicker than a newspaper reporter. The newspaper reporter doesn't want to get scooped, so there's a feeling of urgency, like, "I've gotta write something; this person that's doing this other sort of media is gonna get something before me. It's my job to be on top of all these things." So there's a tension that's there. And it all comes back to, making of a very uncomfortable situation for an athletic director, for a coach, for an athletic program, for an institution, etc. So again, instead of a "ready, shoot, aim" approach, it should be "ready, aim, shoot" (laughs). Get the information right and then report it. Don't report it, and then hope that the information's right. (P3)

Participants have found ways to respond to new demands from media, new or traditional, in the "age of the Internet."

I still have to deal with reporters the same way, in terms of being open and honest with them. But it may, I'm sure…you know reporters, they're always checking the Internet too, to see if there's some news on there they need to follow up on. So, at some point in

time, you just got to be honest with those folks, and say, "Folks, I'm not chasing every

single rumor." I mean, they'll call you every day about some rumor on the Internet. (P6)

Some felt that the financial struggles of newspapers and local TV networks have

impacted the entire media industry.

Well, traditional media is certainly under siege. You know, the number of newspapers

that have gone out of business, the resources that are available by those who still practice

traditional media to cover you has changed completely. So, that's part of the reality. I

think we all feel a strong need to be as supportive as we possibly can of those forms of

media, because they serve a real important public function. And so, we do what we can to

help them, because I think if they disappear, we'll all be less for it. They're an important

part of it. So being even better partners of traditional media is part of what we have to do.

(P12)

These impacts are becoming long-term effects for ADs and their employees, including

basketball coaches.

(T)hey're (the newspapers in our state) doing sort of pooled coverage of (our) athletics

right now. … Now, they still have a columnist who will write an opinion about (our)

football, but what happens in that is, those people, those beat reporters that we used to

have, aren't on site with you every day, and they don't really know you, get to feel you,

get to see who you really are. The only folks who are gonna be with us regularly now are

going to be the (local newspaper's) beat writers. And so, how's that's going to change?

I'm trying to get a handle on how that's going to change. That's going to change the way

we're dealt with, a little bit. Is that common practice in Ohio and Alabama and North

Carolina and South Ca—I don't know. But that's what's happening in (our) state for cost-

savings measures, as papers evolve from what they've become to what they're

becoming. (P2)

Sometimes, different types of media require different responses from ADs, depending on

the perceived credibility of the medium or reporter. P5 explained that his response to false

information on sports talk radio differs from his response to misinformation on some Internet

sites.

> And our view of it is, people who are listening give much more credibility to hearing the
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> spoken word or seeing it on TV, as it must be legit, as opposed to, "I read it in the chat
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> room." I mean, most people realize that the chat room is that, I'm just reading what
>
> somebody else put in here. And I could look down here and maybe see something
>
> different. But when I hear it on talk radio, or I see it on TV, it's almost the Gospel. And
>
> so what we will do on those, is, if we hear something, it's not unusual that I'll pick up the
>
> phone, or our people will pick up the phone, and call the people (who host the show), and
>
> basically say, "That's just not true. You know, that's not what's happening here. You've
>
> heard a rumor that coach so-and-so has signed a contract to go elsewhere. No, I just need
>
> to let you know that we just signed her to a five-year extension," or something like that.
>
> (P5)

Crisis.

Participants said that "crisis" is a public relations challenge. ADs defined crisis in two

ways. In general terms, crisis was defined as a significant problem demanding an immediate

response, which should involve the AD and management team. This problem might be a student-

athlete arrest, coach misconduct or damaging rumors. Crisis was also defined as a situation that

involves immediate physical danger to internal or external constituents, such as a disease epidemic, a natural disaster or violence.

Participants emphasized that crisis management must be strategic and professional.

I think it's important to have mechanisms in place. First and foremost, make decisions. The analogy I frequently use is that there's nothing about the offense that football teams use in the last two minutes of a game that is the same as what they use the rest of the game. The plays are different, the way they communicate the plays are different. You know, they're not huddling; they're doing something else. The same is true for crisis communications: You can't use the same management system that you use to deal with normal problems. You have to have different and more effective management systems— not necessarily more effective, but more effective for the magnitude of the problem. (P12)

Regardless of how they defined crisis, ADs advocated honesty and authenticity with publics in explaining their crisis response.

I just think when it's a crisis situation, the public's watching how you handle it. And it you handle it in a less than forthright way, or if you handle it in a deceitful way, if you handle it, in my opinion, like you're trying to spin it, that can hurt your credibility and can hurt your public relations, and your public perception. I think at the end of the day, when you have a problem, it is what it is. I mean, certainly, you have to be protective of your students' rights, and you can't compromise investigations. There are so many things you need to think about! But you can't spin it; you have to tell people honestly and openly, "This is what happened, this is how we're dealing with it, this is what we decided." (P6)

However, participants acknowledged that whether the crisis involved physical danger, legal trouble or reputation damage, it is always difficult for all parties involved to make the right decisions quickly. This difficulty has led some participants to bring consultants to the table. Sometimes participants use internal consultants, such as compliance officers, legal counsel and public relations/communication managers. Some mentioned that if there was a crisis involving their basketball teams, coaches would be brought to the table to help make decisions. Other times, participants bring in external help to manage crises.

Well, from our standpoint, we look at each situation much differently. I've hired firms: I've hired national firms. I've hired local firms. I've done it myself. You know, I think it's just, we have to see how it plays out, and what it all entails. The important thing for us is to really get a handle on it very quickly, and figure out which way we're going, and try to project where the mushroom cloud is, so to speak. And once we figure that out, then I think we can attack it more efficiently. (P9)

Whatever approach, or combination of approaches, they use, participants said clear communication is crucial.

And so, that requires having the right people engaged, and no one other than the right people. And having communication systems set up, where they're, you know, the most extreme cases, that's a central communications headquarters where everyone gets themselves to, and you manage and work from there. Or something less physically proximate than that, but that still involves those people being in regular and direct communication. And knowing before it happens who's in that room and how does that work. (P12)

In addition, most ADs said that university administration involvement was typically an aspect of coordinating a response to a crisis. As P6 put it, "(W)e're all in this thing together."

> (W)e contact the person in public relations there, and let them know we have something coming down. Or we at least send them the information when we're sending it out. And I call the president if something's going to get in the paper. … They more or less let us do what we want, what we need to do. They'll sometimes critique it and say, "Have you thought of this or that?" depending on what kind of time we have. I would say that they have a chance to review what we're going to do if it's not an emergency situation. (P7)

Some of the participants—P5, P7, P9 and P12—are technically part of their universities' administrations, so not only are their non-athletics university counterparts involved in athletics department crises; the ADs are automatically involved in their *universities'* crises.

> I'm a member of the president's cabinet, and I'm sitting in on all the meetings that…you know I sat in on a lot of swine flu and (speaker) meetings this year. And those aren't the kind of things you think of when you start down this road. But, it's the only way I'd have it; it's so helpful for me to be integrated at that level. (P12)

Regarding preparation for crises, participants gave one or more of the following responses: tabletop exercises/case studies, internal communication, training for spokespersons, and no specific and/or formal plans. "Tabletop exercises"—a term offered by P5—are made-up crisis scenarios—based on potential disasters that could affect internal and external publics—that are used to help ADs and their staffs practice crisis management and communication.

> (W)e do it probably more so on the big sort of stuff that you hear about. Like, what if we got a notice that there was a terrorist, that there was a bomb at the football stadium? Those are the sorts of things that we run through. (P5)

Though he is not a university administrator, P10 participated in similar exercises with

his university counterparts when the threat of swine flu became imminent in the United States.

And that's something that not only affected athletics, but the entire campus, so we had an

overall university announcement. But, you have to be prepared for those things. And we

talk about those really crisis moments, about how you do formulate your plan, and how

effectively can you communicate the message coming out of it. So, case studies and

trying, for instance, situations that may come to fruition one day or not, but they help us

to be prepared at the utmost level to handle something of that nature. (P10)

P6 talked about the importance of using other universities' crisis scenarios as educational

opportunities.

(W)hen there's a huge academic issue somewhere, or maybe a huge agent issue

somewhere, or maybe a gambling issue somewhere, I think if you just hear that and say,

"Well, thank God that's them, not me," you're not being very smart. I think you've got to

pay attention to what they do, and how they handle it, and what the issues were, because

you can't be naive enough to think that that stuff couldn't happen at your place. (P6)

While participants were quick to point out that there is no way to prepare for every detail

of a potential crisis, some mentioned that a generic, pre-ordained crisis communication and

procedures plan can help with aspects of a crisis that are likely to occur, regardless of situation.

I think you can only prepare to a certain level for crises, because they have their own

DNA. And so you can have some aspects of it: Who will be picking up the phone and

calling? Who will read the statement? How will we mobilize this and that? … We had a

situation a couple of years ago where one of our football players went home and got shot,

and murdered, in a drive-by. And we had a plan, and to a degree that that plan is generic,

it works fine. But to a degree that it's very personal, you just have to work with that as

the time comes. … You know it's very interesting: I think you only start to adequately,

fully plan for crises once you have either experienced it, or somebody else has

experienced it and can come and tell you something about it. (P5)

Evaluation.

Finally, participants talked about the challenges of evaluation as it relates to their public

relations endeavors. Most of the ADs used either informal, formal, or a mix of informal and

formal forms of evaluation to gauge the success of their messages, and relationships or standing

with key publics.

Examples of informal evaluations were fan feedback through e-mail, exit interviews and

observation. While some of the participants' websites have a specific form available for publics

to e-mail ADs or coaches, comments are not always solicited, nor guided by questionnaires.

Sometimes individuals will even call to express an opinion, especially if they think they will

have influence.

(A) lot of it is based upon the number of complaints we get. You know? I mean if we

don't get a lot of complaints, then the area is doing what they're supposed to do. But,

that's a really hard thing; how to evaluate that is really a challenge. (P7)

Exit interviews are conversations that administrators and staff might initiate with fans as

they leave a sporting event.

We always want to be really focused in on personal service, and we try to make sure that

the people attending the games are having a good experience. You know, so I think

there's a lot to learn. We do a lot of exit interviews and exit strategies with fans. And

make sure, how do we get better, and what can we do*?* (P9)

Observation refers to what ADs see or hear at events or in meetings that might reflect on their department's reputation.

> But really what I mean is by observing, by listening, and just having a feel of it. And you can rely on others to do the same. And you can just know exactly what, when you look at it program by program, who's doing really well, who can we help and assist, and that's how get a good feel, just by being around and listening. And have a conversation, obviously. Communication is pretty important, to talk to the coaches and other groups, other constituencies. (P1)

Other participants conduct formal evaluations. These include overall university formal evaluations (of which athletics is one part), ticket office formal research, questionnaires, and internal self-assessments.

> I think you have to do a lot of self-assessments. I think that you have to, at the end of any particular year, whether it's a football season or a basketball season, or just your whole athletic season, I think it's important to reach back to different constituent groups, media groups. You know, radio and all the rest, your corporate sponsors, anybody that, again, you're affiliated with from a public relations standpoint, and get their feedback on what their perceptions are of the past year, as someone on the outside. And we do that and we're pretty aggressive with doing that, and it's worked. But we do have to have a strong self-assessment at some point in the course of the year, just to make sure that we are having the right impact. And we do it with our marketing people too, and when we market and promote our sports, we do reach back for questionnaires, for fan experience questionnaires. And when you buy tickets, we send a ticket questionnaire at the end of the year of how your experience was. (P10)

P4, whose career experience includes student affairs and university administration, discussed the benefits of evaluations by public relations experts—especially those who are professors or administrators at ADs' universities. He talked about how a group of those individuals, especially one of his institution's public relations professors, helped him to evaluate his messages and responses.

> I asked two people from the school of journalism and one person from communications, and one of the university's public relations persons to join me. And we met every six weeks. … I really, really valued her (a professor who was an expert in public relations) input. … She had the professional training, she had the faculty point of view, and then she was a sports fan. So I could get three for the price of one! I would use that group for two things. One, "How am I doing? OK, we had this situation, how did you think it played out?" And two, I would say, "I've got this coming up. I'm concerned about…." And, a lot of that was internal. I told you I am concerned about what the faculty, what the university community thinks. So I'd say about 60 to 70 percent of the conversation was about, "How is this playing on campus?" And the other part, not insignificant, was, "How is this playing out in the world?" So, "When you read the (local newspaper) story on," whatever, "what did you think? How did we miss it?" Or, "What's going on?" (P4)

Gender, basketball coaches, and public relations.

Finally, several participants drew distinctions between their men's and women's basketball programs, and how their different roles and audiences affected coaches' public relations responsibilities. For example, P1 called his men's basketball program the "flagship" of his athletics department. He and others said that their men's basketball teams receive more exposure than their women's basketball teams.

I will say that I have to look at them both a little bit differently, in that men's

basketball is our flagship, and will continue to be for many years. So the exposure that we

derive from that is unique, and the pressures are greater there for success. ... (H)opefully

our women will grow into that same vein. But the interest right now, and the history, …

has been more towards (our university's) men's basketball. (P1)

Sometimes, this exposure also creates more pressure from external publics for their

men's program than their women's program. P7 and P5 acknowledged that media tend to focus

more on their men's basketball teams than their women's basketball teams, which is a source of

frustration. "You know, in terms of dealing with the media and, you know, the media is more

interested--in our community—they follow men's basketball better than they do women's.

Which is disappointing to us," said P7.

And I would say that the vast majority of the media will spend much more time wanting

to talk to our men's basketball coach than our women's basketball coach. And I think

that's just a function of how they, unfortunately, value the sport. (P5)

Because of a smaller following and less exposure than men's basketball, some

participants said that it takes more work and strategizing to promote their women's basketball

teams than their men's basketball teams.

And we're trying to find creative ways to get interest. … So that is a program that is

certainly building, and we're trying to concentrate on ways to improve. Same thing as I

talked about media guides on the men, the women's have improved drastically in a four-

year period. And that's, again, we're trying to tell our story in a different manner, and one

that will be of great interest to not only recruits, but hopefully to people who have an

interest in (our university), and in building and enhancing women's leadership, and

this is a conduit as to do it. (P1)

Participants said it is even more essential for women's basketball coaches to get involved

in promotional activities to build the sport at their institutions and beyond.

I think generally, you will find that, because of the fact that the underlying interest isn't

as well grounded because the sport's newer, women's coaches tend to have more of a

responsibility in promoting the sport, trying to attract people to come to games. (P12)

This includes going the extra mile to build relationships with local media.

(S)o we kind of work with our women's coach to do different things and reach out in

different ways than our men's coach. But, with the same goal in mind, of getting interest

in our program and sending the right message of what our program is like. … I might

encourage our women's coach to have more of a working relationship with the sports

editor, rather, you know, including the beat writer. But also the sports editor, because

that's the person who kind of determines the amount of coverage you'll get. So I try to

have her build a relationship with that person. (P7)

Interestingly, when asked about public relations and basketball (with no gender offered

by the researcher in the question), most participants automatically referred to their men's

basketball coaches and programs. Some mentioned their women's programs later, as a

counterpart to their discussion about men's basketball. Only a few participants made a special

effort to discuss their women's basketball coaches and programs in detail, or distinctive from

their men's programs. And only one participant spent more time discussing his women's

basketball coach than her men's basketball counterpart, most likely due to the years of success

that his women's basketball program has enjoyed. While several of the other ADs have had

strong women's basketball teams from time to time, most do not consistently receive media attention equal to their men's programs, especially basketball and football.

Conclusion

The findings of this study answer the research question, "How do ADs from NCAA Division I institutions with major basketball programs understand public relations, overall, and in the context of expectations they have for their basketball coaches?" In summary, ADs understand public relations as image, message and action/interaction, with publics who are internal, external, influential, and in relationship with athletics programs. Image manifests itself in the ADs understandings through the metaphor of the front porch, and through persona and activities/branding. Message is understood as the strategic communication of ideas and values, often through "storytelling" by ADs and coaches. The primary action/interaction understood as part of public relations by these ADs is building relationships with internal and external publics, including staff, recruits, reporters, donors, faculty, fans and community members. Responsibility for these understandings of public relations falls in a range from everyone's job, to a collaborative effort between a public relations manager and executive staff.

The ADs also understand public relations as dealing with issues and challenges, most notably media relations, crisis and evaluation. Media relations challenges involve athletics departments learning to use the positive aspects of new media technology to their advantage, while balancing the demands of the 24-hour cable TV and Internet news cycle. This balance includes managing responses to media requests for information, which the ADs indicated are increasingly based on rumor rather than research. Several ADs in the current study expressed concern that competition among news outlets has led to a rush to be first rather than accurate,

leading to a careless, salacious style of journalism that P3 described as "ready-shoot-aim" reporting.

Crisis was described by ADs in two ways: 1) Any significant problem demanding an immediate response (i.e., facility problems during an athletic contest), and 2) A situation involving immediate physical danger to internal or external publics (i.e., bomb threats, natural disasters). ADs' crisis preparation and responses ranged in form and scope: Some discussed their communications plans, some explained how they practice with made-up scenarios, and some advocated watching how other schools handle crises. Some ADs—especially those with institutional roles—talked about the importance of their universities' administrations in handling crises.

ADs in the current study also had a variety of responses regarding the challenge of evaluating their public relations endeavors. Most preferred a mix of formal and informal evaluation strategies and tactics. Formal evaluation methods mentioned include survey research (often at games or with season-ticket holders) or exit interviews (after games with fans, or before graduation with student athletes). Informal evaluation techniques mentioned include personal conversations (with internal and external publics), and feedback through the Web, phone or letters. Some ADs prefer handling evaluation internally, while others are open to (and have used) external consultants.

While ADs' understanding of public relations overall and in the context of expectations they have for their basketball coaches was closely integrated, some participants made distinctions between *men's* and *women's* basketball coaches regarding public relations. These participants indicated that public relations for women's coaches often involves more effort,

responsibility and intentionality, due to being a newer sport, having a smaller fan following and garnering less media attention than their men's basketball counterparts receive on a regular basis.

The following chapter will extend these findings by discussing their place in current public relations scholarship, as well as implications for research and industry (both public relations and intercollegiate athletics). It will also discuss limitations to this study, and further questions to be answered in future exploration.

Chapter Five: Discussion

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the findings of this study, their relationship to public relations literature, and their implications for scholarship and industry. Limitations of this study will also be discussed, as they might aid understanding of the context of the findings, as well as planning for future research. Finally, considerations for continuing study will be offered within the closing remarks.

Discussion of Findings and Relevant Literature

The findings of this study can be summarized in two categories: the understanding of public relations to the athletics directors (ADs) overall, and the understanding of public relations to these ADs in the context of expectations for their basketball coaches. Emergent ideas within each of these categories will be discussed in correspondence with prior scholarship in public relations, as well as other areas of relevance. Previous studies and concepts are used to aid in understanding emergent ideas, to shed new light on prior scholarship, or to show where the findings of the current study diverge from those of the past.

How ADs understand public relations: integrated impression management.

Scholars have developed different approaches to study and define public relations, in order to build theory and better understand industry. Five common approaches, mentioned earlier in this report, are systems (including excellence theory and relationship management), rhetoric, social construction, critical, and integrated marketing communications (IMC). The research question in this study was developed to learn how sport industry executives approach public relations, particularly NCAA Division I athletics directors. Understanding was the focus of this study, which allowed the ADs to discuss public relations from their own point of view.

While the findings of the study reflect their perspectives, they also tie into the work of prior scholarship, which, though unintentional on the part of participants, helps to put their words into a theoretical context. Based on the connection between the participants' words, the researcher's analysis and relevant scholarship, the best way to describe how ADs in this study understand public relations is *integrated impression management*.

An integrated approach to public relations.

The results of the current study show that public relations is not a separate, distinct entity to the ADs interviewed; rather it is part and parcel of all entities of an athletics department that emphasize image, message and action/interaction with publics. For the participants, public relations encompasses management and technical functions of media relations, community involvement, fundraising, management, and marketing. It is ultimately intended to further department goals. Some of these goals are relational, such as building rapport with editors/writers, being a positive community partner, getting along with faculty and university administration, explaining difficult decisions to concerned publics, or recruiting student athletes. Other goals are practical/functional, such as providing information to the media, providing information to publics about events, and planning promotions and special occasions.

These ideas appear to resonate most closely to an IMC approach to public relations. ADs in this study emphasized the communication aspects of public relations in their comments, but also associated public relations with all types of planning activities (e.g., crisis, fundraising, event planning, and marketing). While scholars continue to debate the facets of an academic definition of IMC (e.g., Cornelisson & Lock, 2000; Hutton, 1996; Kliatchko, 2008; Schultz, 2005; Kerr, Schultz, Patti & Kim, 2008; Kitchen, et al., 2008), IMC scholars concur that public relations works in tandem with the communication strengths of advertising and marketing in the

process of implementing and managing an organization's strategic development (e.g., Brody, 1994; Griffin & Pasadeos, 1998; Kerr, et al., 2008; Kitchen, et al., 2008; Kliatchko, 2008). Public relations in an IMC approach supports relational *and* practical/functional goals, and works with other departments towards common goals and objectives (e.g., Brody, 1994; Hutton, 1996).

The participants' integrated meaning of public relations was also reflected by their focus on what public relations *is*, as opposed to what it *is not*. This led to a comprehensive, multi-faceted, and inter-related meaning of public relations, characterized by inclusivity of scope and function. For example, the ADs in this study associated public relations with branding and corporate sponsorship—traditional domains of marketing and advertising—as much as they did with media relations and fundraising—traditionally in the public relations "camp."

Similarly, the IMC approach does not take great pains to differentiate public relations' roles, values and priorities from those of marketing and advertising (e.g., David, 2004). Rather, its focus is the success of an overarching business strategy, and how public relations, marketing and advertising contribute and are stakeholders in organizational success.

For example, Stuart and Kerr (1999) found that public relations practitioners who embraced an IMC approach recognized that corporate identity is a manifestation of visual and message elements, which should be implemented and understood by all aspects of an organization. In his study of the relationship between marketing and public relations, Hutton (1996) claimed that scholars' definitions of marketing are moving closer to those of public relations, with their emphases on relationships with stakeholders, and managing dialogue with publics. He also dismissed claims by some public relations scholars that, among other things, marketing is not concerned with the resolution of conflict and disputes. Hartley and Pickton (1999) suggested that long-held terms of industry segmentation hinder understanding and

successful implementation of IMC, and that they should be replaced with more comprehensive ones, such as Non-Personal Communications (NPCs) and Personal Communications (PCs).

Different types of publics and a variety of ways to reach them were important aspects of the participants' understanding of public relations. For example, participants described "external" publics as fans, university students, local community members, sponsors, donors, alumni, prospective student athletes and media (among a few others). But their discussions of public relations outreach to these publics included marketing and advertising campaigns, media relations, social media development, community service, special events, promotions, recruiting visits, logo consistency and charity involvement.

The ADs' integration of media and non-media outlets, strategies and tactics suggests a view of publics consistent with the IMC approach. Kitchen and Li (2005) describe today's marketplace as customer-oriented and consumer-controlled, and that an IMC approach reaches, communicates and responds to those publics' needs. Schultz, et al. (1993) suggest that publics are demassified and increasingly segmented, thanks in large part to changes in communication technology. They, along with other IMC scholars, indicate that these publics are best reached through multiple channels by an optimal combination of marketing, public relations and advertising (e.g., Griffin & Pasadeos, 1998; Hartley & Pickton, 1999; Kitchen & Li, 2005; Schultz, et al., 1993).

However, as stated earlier, the participants' understanding of public relations only begins with integration. Impression management, as the second part of the offered term, can also be more fully explained through its relationship to prior scholarship, beginning with the work of Erving Goffman.

An impression management approach to public relations.

In *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959), Goffman walks the reader through the concept of symbolic interactionism: the idea that everything we do is intended to give a certain impression to a specific audience. The management of impressions is the essence of public relations to the participants interviewed for this study.

"Impression management" is not a new concept within public relations scholarship. In an article deconstructing the concept of image in public relations, J. Grunig (1993) calls impression management "one of the best developed theoretical approaches to the production of images" (p. 128), and discussed its roots in Goffman's works. Johansson (2007) specifically used Goffman's (1959) approach to impression management—along with framing, footing and face—to address the study of interpersonal relationships with internal and external publics. Sallot (2002) tested whether perceived motives of self-interest could explain the "poor reputation sometimes attributed to public relations" (p. 150). Her results showed the perceived motives did have a main effect, and that public relations' reputation suffered when subjects saw practitioners as "acting with overt, intentional behaviors for self-gain" as opposed to those not appearing to be managing impressions (p. 150).

Other scholars have researched impression management in the context of crisis. Allen and Caillouet (1994) developed a typology of impression management strategies by studying the external discourse of an organization in crisis. A subsequent study by the same researchers compared impression management strategies of the employees of an organization in crisis to those within the organization's official public statements (Caillouet & Allen, 1996). Coombs (1995) used the impression management strategies from Allen and Caillouet's 1994 study to help

ground five crisis response strategies, which has been used subsequently by other public relations scholars (e.g., Vlad, Sallot & Reber, 2006).

Some public relations scholars hold open contempt for the term "image." According to J. Grunig (1993), these scholars (including himself at times) have associated image with something that seems to be, but is not. In other words, image can imply inauthenticity.

However, J. Grunig (1993) also acknowledged the dominance of image in the vocabulary of practitioners in his own studies and those of his peers, which provides justification for addressing the concept in research. For example, L. Grunig (1993) critically analyzed scholarly and professional literature to study organizational image and symbolic leadership. She also used a case study of focus group research to address the role of public relations in "exploring, defining, and communicating image" (p. 95), and found that a counseling or managerial role of public relations helps an organization to "*be*, rather than *seeming to be*" (emphasis in original) (p. 95).

The ADs interviewed for the current study lend credence to this acknowledgement, as image is a critical part of their understanding of public relations. Participants referred to the image of an athletics department as a "front porch." This term has also been used by other university officials in reference to the ability of athletics to be a "powerful marketing tool," which can generate free publicity for institutions (Drape & Thomas, 2010).

The front porch, according to the ADs, is the image that an athletics department cultivates for presentation to its publics. This corresponds with Goffman's (1959) concept of performance regions, especially the "front region" that is meant to give a specific impression (p. 123). Similar to the way Goffman describes the front regions of homes, businesses and theater stages, participants noted the importance of keeping the front porch clean and well maintained.

Publics were described by participants in much the same way that Goffman describes "audiences" (1959, p. 17). Audiences, like publics, can be internal or external groups, and have expectations of image that are congruent with their relative standpoints to people or organizations.

Similar to the IMC approach, Goffman's "audience segregation" (1959, p. 49) is also relevant to participants' treatment of publics. The ADs in this study not only described publics in terms of being internal and external, but also as friends and non-friends, fans, writers and editors, colleagues, faculty, university administrators, neighbors, and local community members, among other things.

While participants made it clear that they do not desire to present images that are contradictory, they acknowledged that there are aspects of their departments that are more important to show to some publics than others. For instance, a fan base or board of trustees might have little interest in an AD's or coach's role on a city planning committee, but it might improve his or her image with members of the local community if they were to see such involvement. An athletics department's website will likely show sport-related accomplishments, while a report to the university board will show fiscal responsibility and academic achievement.

Integrated impression management: Putting it all together.

Message and image are not the same thing, yet participants indicated that it is difficult to have one without the other. The "message" that participants assigned to their understanding of public relations resonates with the way Goffman defines "performance." According to Goffman, performance is "all the activity of a given participant on a given occasion which serves to influence in any way the other participants," (1959, p. 15). For the ADs in this study, message is the planned communication—typically verbal—of specific values, arguments, ideas and

information to publics, all of which are intended to be believed, adopted and/or acted upon

by those publics. Mission statements are messages. Policies are messages. Responses to inquiries

and controversies are messages. Dissemination or clarification of facts and stories are messages.

Action/interaction, then, can be defined as the *combined* performances of individuals (or

organizations of individuals) and audiences as they navigate front and back regions. Several

participants noted that not all publics are content to view the front porch or hear the performance.

What some publics desire most is access: to power, to individuals, to recognition and attention.

This access requires *interaction* in closer contexts, which means that the organization or

individual wishing to remain in control must *act* to create an appropriate front region (image)

and prepare for the right performance (message) for the given situation, in order to guide the

audience (public) toward a favorable response.

Relationship management literature—which generally falls under the systems approach

to public relations, but also appears in some IMC contexts—adds depth to this Goffman-esque

definition of action/interaction. Ledingham (2003) summarized the relationship management

perspective as a balance of the interests of organizations and publics through the management of

organization-public relationships. The outcome of effective (ideal) relationship management is

mutual understanding and benefit, resulting in gains for both organizations and publics (e.g.,

Bruning, et al., 2004; Ledingham, 2003). Participants indicated that establishing and maintaining

relationships with publics is a major part of the action/interaction of public relations. They also

said that there is much to be gained on the part of their athletics departments in terms of

goodwill, better media coverage, increased attendance, ticket sales and smoother day-to-day and

event operations when relationships with publics are positive.

Publics also experience desirable outcomes from these positive relationships, according to the ADs, such as access to high-profile persons, inside information, and enjoyable events. This coincides with relationship management researchers' definition of mutual benefits as "maintaining equilibrium between organizational and public interests" (Bruning, et al., 2004, p. 436).

Integrated impression management is not only participants' understanding of public relations on a macro (department-wide) level; it is also their understanding of public relations at an individual level. The individuals whom participants associated with integrated impression management were themselves, their basketball coaches, and managers of internal offices with a high degree of interaction with external publics.

Integrated impression management and participant ADs.

Integration of impression management into participants' jobs ranged from passive (public relations is *someone else's* job) to interactive (public relations is *our* job) to active (public relations is *my* job). The passive end of the spectrum is best exemplified by P8, who indicated that public relations was *only* the responsibility of sports information, marketing and fundraising. Conversely, *his* job was to lead the department in achieving two goals: graduating student athletes and winning championships. Moreover, the public relations responsibilities of sports information, marketing, and fundraising that P8 described were reactive and task-oriented (e.g., answering media requests, selling sponsorships, asking donors for money), as opposed to proactive and management-oriented (e.g., making decisions, issues monitoring, crisis planning).

Some participants expressed a slightly more interactive relationship with public relations. These ADs viewed public relations as primarily the responsibility of those most closely involved with taking care of tasks related to external publics, but that all employees (including

themselves) had impression management responsibilities. Still others elevated public

relations to a less task-oriented, and more consistent and valued part of their management teams.

And while no participants viewed public relations as *solely* their responsibility, a few

emphasized the importance of their roles in public relations management, from setting the tone to

representing their departments to communicating decisions with publics.

These responses aid in understanding how ADs see themselves in light of their

understanding of public relations, and resonate with the concepts from Goffman mentioned

earlier. However, this passive-interactive-active orientation of ADs towards impression

management also corresponds to the range of public relations functions in the literature,

particularly among those who favor systems approaches. J. Grunig and L. Grunig have been

especially prolific in explicating the technical to management range of public relations functions,

and in promoting strategic management as the preferred function within organizations. J. Grunig

(2000) described the management function as one of the key forms of public relations; he and L.

Grunig (2000) stated that involvement of public relations in strategic management was the best

predictor of excellent public relations in the organizations they studied. They contrasted this

management function with one that is technical and composed of a set of communication tactics

(J. Grunig & L. Grunig, 2000). These tactics include messaging, publicity and media relations (J.

Grunig, 2006).

Along these lines, scholars such as Dozier and Broom (1995) discuss the roles of

individuals within the range of technical to management functions of public relations. For those

performing roles of the technical function, public relations is task-oriented (e.g., sending press

releases) with little input or influence on management decisions. According to J. Grunig and L.

Grunig (1991), these individuals are the writers, editors and publication designers of an

organization. Those performing management roles make organizational decisions, plan and evaluate public relations programs (which are executed by those in technical roles), and are either consultants to or members of executive staff (J. Grunig & L. Grunig, 1991).

Scholars indicate that an organization's leadership determines the function of public relations, along with the role of its public relations practitioners (e.g., Aldoory & Toth, 2004; Howard, 1995; Petersen & Martin, 1996). In other words, an organization whose leadership sees public relations as a management function will assign practitioners more power and influence, and perhaps executive status. This is similar to participants who fall along the interactive to active range of integration of public relations: the more actively an AD is integrated in public relations management, the higher the status of public relations (and anyone associated with public relations) within the athletics department.

Conversely, an organization whose leadership sees public relations as a technical function will assign public relations practitioners more tasks, and few, if any, opportunities for counsel and influence (e.g., Dozier & Broom, 1995). This is similar to participants who fall along the interactive to passive range of integration of public relations: the more passively an AD is integrated in public relations management, the less the status of public relations (and anyone associated with public relations) within the athletics department.

Knowing how an organization's leadership approaches public relations aids understanding these technical-to-management or passive-interactive-active ranges. For the current study's participants—who represent the leadership of their organizations—public relations is understood as integrated impression management. Whether they are passively, interactively or actively integrated in impression management for their organization provides a sense of how public relations relates to their own jobs, as well as its place in their departments

overall. However, participants also discussed their understanding of public relations in the context of expectations they have for another group within their departments: men's and women's basketball coaches.

Integrated impression management and basketball coaches.

Most ADs viewed public relations as an integral part of basketball coaches' jobs, but again, varied in their approach to *how* it should be integrated into their coaches' jobs. For example, while most ADs advocated a relational approach to dealing with media (again, with the exception of one participant), they were split as to how involved coaches should be in promoting their teams.

Participants also varied in their approach to coaches' involvement with university publics. Some were quick to tout their basketball coaches close ties with faculty and students. Others mentioned the occasional speaking engagement or gesture of appreciation. Still others said that their university culture permitted little interaction between the two groups, if any.

The coach – university relationship has been investigated by scholars to some extent, through the concept of "branding," which participants associated with public relations. Robinson and Miller (2003) looked at the role of former Texas Tech University's men's basketball coach Bob Knight in building the institution's basketball and athletics brand. Bruening and Lee (2007) examined Tyrone Willingham's impact on the brand equity of the University of Notre Dame during his tenure as its head football coach.

Judson, et al. (2006) investigated the communication of the "university brand" to college coaches. According to the authors, college coaches regularly have an opportunity to communicate their university's brand to outside audiences, but are often overlooked regarding involvement in their universities' academic cultures (p. 97).

For participants in the current study whose coaches have little interaction with university publics, this viewpoint seems especially salient. Judson, et al. (2006) found that coaches from major programs feel stronger about brand communication efforts from their universities than those from minor programs, as well as a better understanding of their institutions' brand values, and how to incorporate those values into their work and lives. Considering that all participants in the current study were from major athletics programs, this finding is particularly interesting.

Most ADs said that community relationships are needed for coaches' public relations success, and several favored an inclusive, extemporaneous approach (coaches develop their own relationships and interests, spontaneous gestures, engagement with university publics). However, some advocated a limited, structured approach (prioritized, scheduled public involvement of coaches typically tied to marketing, distance from university publics).

The contrast between these two approaches resonates with another aspect of public relations systems theory. According to Creedon (1993), systems theory purports that organizations are open or closed systems. Open systems actively engage in exchanges with their environment, while closed systems do not respond or adapt to changes in their environment (Creedon, 1993). J. Grunig's and L. Grunig's development of excellence theory is from the systems line of thought. According to their research results, "excellent" organizations are characterized by two-way symmetrical communication and an open systems orientation (J. Grunig, 1992; J. Grunig & L. Grunig, 2000).

An open-systems, two-way symmetrical orientation seems congruent to the inclusive, extemporaneous public relations approach that some participants advocate for their basketball coaches. ADs whose coaches take this approach are described as accessible, conversational, and

involved in promoting their programs from the ground up. By contrast, a closed-systems, one-way (or two-way) asymmetrical orientation matches up with the limited, structured public relations approach that some of the other participants advocate for their basketball coaches— though it should be noted that only one AD interviewed endorsed this approach to its most extreme extent.

Implications for Research and Industry

The understanding of public relations that has emerged from participants' words in this study can be viewed from different standpoints. In some ways, this understanding reflects a sociological model of impression management that integrates image, message and action/interaction with publics. In other ways, the understanding reflects systems models of relationship management and excellence theories. Taken together, the results of this study speak to issues in need of further examination and discussion by academicians as well as intercollegiate sport leaders (including coaches). They suggest theoretical and practical considerations, solutions and questions, all of which have implications for research and industry.

   Implications for research.

The integrated nature of how participants in this study understand public relations highlights other important challenges in public relations research. One challenge is the need to distinguish public relations from other communication fields in order to mature as a discipline. A second challenge is to understand public relations as a big-picture, management perspective that exists in relationship with advertising and marketing, instead of a set of detailed, technical functions—or counsel independent of other organizational aspects (e.g., Hutton, 1996).

Industry leaders (e.g., Budd, 1995; Edelman, 1996) have addressed these challenges, as well as academic leaders (e.g., J. Grunig & L. Grunig, 1998; Hutton, 1996; Lauzen, 1991). Budd

(1995) warned that by replacing "public relations" with "communication" in industry department names and titles, practitioners are in danger of losing their management status and counseling role within their organizations. "Communications is the last act in the process of public relations—a process that should appropriately begin with policy and decision-making," he wrote (Budd, 1995, p. 178). Edelman (1996) concurred, noting that while communication is an "important facet" of public relations, it involves a narrow range of "technical proficiency," not management of relationships with an organization's many publics (p. 35).

Similarly, J. Grunig and L. Grunig (1998) argued that companies benefit from public relations and marketing functions that are separate, but work together in a matrix with advertising. They used data to show that "public relations is most excellent when it is strategic and when marketing does not dominate public relations," (p. 141). Lauzen (1991) studied the relationship between public relations and marketing, and found that the more similar the domains and the more resource dependence there is between public relations and marketing departments, the more likely the more powerful department (usually marketing) will take over the less powerful department (usually public relations). Hutton (1996) also recognized tensions regarding integration of marketing and public relations, and suggested that the underlying issue is to determine what is the appropriate relationship between the two.

Scholars and practitioners have struggled for years to address these challenges, especially as globalization (e.g., Curtin & Gaither, 2005; Fuse, et al., 2010), new technology (e.g., Diga & Kelleher, 2009; Sallot, et al., 2004; Schultz & Patti, 2009; Waters, Tindall & Morton, 2010) and changes in educational offerings (e.g., Caywood & Ewing, 1991; diStaso, Stacks, & Botan, 2009; Griffin & Pasadeos, 1998) shape the academic landscape of public relations (e.g., Gower, 2006; Robinson, 2006). The current study suggests some approaches to these challenges.

Approaches to public relations research challenges.

One approach is for researchers to hone in on public relations' big-picture concepts and functions, such as those mentioned by participants (i.e., image, message, action/interaction), or others, such as ethics and reputation. This approach would place less emphasis on specifying definitions and terminology, and instead turn the spotlight on learning, communicating and modeling how public relations works in industry. Focusing on the larger realities of public relations might also help scholars to better understand and explain some of the disconnections between public relations research and practice.

Some scholars have taken steps in this direction. For example, Gilpin (2010) studied how online and social media channels are affecting the public relations function of organizational image construction. Moffitt (1994) developed a new public relations model to aid theoretical understanding of the process by which publics form and receive images of organizations. Sallot (2002) examined the reputation of the field of public relations itself. Hutton, Goodman, Alexander and Genest (2001) studied the impact of reputation management as a driving force in corporate public relations within *Fortune* 500 companies. Fuse, et al. (2010) compared and contrasted Western and non-Western values of public relations practice through a case study to show how ethical philosophies affect public relations responses.

Another approach is to focus on how public relations is integrated with other disciplines and/or professions, in research and practice. Instead of assuming a defensive posture of bemoaning, discounting or ignoring the impact of other fields on public relations, scholars might seek to better understand the realities, relevance and relationships between these fields and public relations. As with the previous approach, this approach might help to bridge gaps between scholarship and industry. It might also provide a more accurate picture of how public relations is

evolving professionally and theoretically, and open the door to more critical questioning of its dominant theoretical perspectives.

Some scholars have advocated this type of approach, such as Cottone (1993) with the "new science of chaos" (p. 167), Everett (1993) with management and organizational theory, Gower (2006) with management literature and postmodern philosophy, Sharpe (2000) with ethics and rhetorical theory, and Sriramesh, J. Grunig, and Dozier (1996) with organizational culture and communication.

Other scholars have pursued this approach by examining the concept of integrated marketing communications (IMC). Public relations has been studied as a part of IMC (e.g., Robinson, 2006), and in terms of its relationship with IMC (e.g., Griffin & Pasadeos, 1998; Kitchen & Li, 2005). It has also been studied in contrast to an IMC perspective (e.g., Brody, 1994).

Addressing research approaches within an intercollegiate athletics context.

There are several ways that scholars can apply these approaches to study public relations in an intercollegiate athletics context. For example, using the first approach, researchers could explore how intercollegiate athletics departments use public relations to create desired images among publics. They could also examine how messages are developed to foster relationships with their stakeholders, build confidence in executive decisions, and recover from potentially damaging situations (such as NCAA investigations).

Using the second approach, scholars could examine the relationship between public relations and marketing within intercollegiate athletics departments. They could also explore how intercollegiate athletics departments are using social media to accomplish public relations goals—or the role of public relations in responding to social media-related issues. Organizational

and public relations research could also be used together to learn how public relations leadership is understood within intercollegiate athletics departments.

Additional future research considerations.

The current study suggests other research ideas involving public relations and intercollegiate athletics beyond the recommended approaches to future studies. For example, while this research addresses intercollegiate athletics directors' understanding of public relations, a future study could use the concept of meaning to take it to another level of analysis. To understand the meaning of public relations to these ADs, further research of the ADs' institutional contexts; the history of public relations, athletics directors and basketball coaches within intercollegiate athletics; and the evolution of ADs' and basketball coaches' public relations roles would need to be discussed and evaluated in conjunction with the study's findings. A study of the meaning of public relations to these intercollegiate athletics directors would shed light on the construction of public relations within the social world of NCAA Division I athletics departments with major basketball programs.

Intercollegiate basketball coaches' understanding of public relations could be explored as well. Their understanding might be different than ADs': overall, and regarding their own jobs and those of athletics directors. Therefore, using similar methodology to the current study, scholars could explore basketball coaches' understanding of public relations. Findings could be compared to those of the current study, which might indicate whether ADs and their basketball coaches are on the same page regarding public relations; or whether there are disconnections in understanding and expectations that need resolution.

The gender aspects of this study could be further explored as well. The ADs in this study were all males, so it might be useful to interview female ADs to see if their understanding of

public relations differs from their male peers. This would be a challenging study to conduct, as there are only two NCAA Division I athletics departments with major basketball programs led by females at this writing. If a study were to examine male and female executive associate ADs, the greater degree of gender parity at this level would allow for such a comparison (DeHass, 2007). Executive associate athletics directors' understanding of public relations could also be compared to those of the ADs in the current study, which might indicate whether there is internal consistency of understanding within athletics administration.

Also along the lines of gender, researching men's and women's teams' coaches separately, then comparing findings from each group might reveal whether coaches of men's teams understand public relations differently than coaches of women's teams. While there are no NCAA Division I men's basketball teams coached by women, a growing number of NCAA Division I women's basketball teams are coached by men (Associated Press, "Few females coaching," 2008; Longman, 2002; Rhode & Walker, 2008). Therefore, basketball coaches' understanding of public relations could also be explored among women's coaches from the perspective of gender.

Participants in the current study understand public relations as integration of several elements, which are typically represented by different offices within their athletics departments. These departments include public relations, sports information, marketing and promotions and fundraising. Therefore, it might be beneficial to learn whether those who oversee these offices have a similarly integrated understanding of public relations. As with the executive associate athletics directors and ADs study mentioned previously, the findings might indicate consistency or conflict, and might also speak to how public relations functions are evolving within intercollegiate athletics departments.

Implications for industry.

The findings of this study offer considerations for NCAA Division I ADs, men's and women's basketball coaches, and athletics administrators who oversee offices consistently identified by participants as associated with public relations. These offices include communication and public relations, sports information/media relations, marketing and promotions, broadcast properties and sponsorship sales, and fundraising. In addition, the findings of this study speak to members of the sport media industry, particularly Internet publications and talk radio.

New public relations management positions.

ADs should be aware that public relations is manifesting itself in new positions in management. These new positions include public relations directors, communications directors, internal operations directors and external operations directors. They should educate themselves on the benefits of each of these positions, and be open to restructuring to include any that might be helpful and appropriate for their departments. ADs would be wise to heed McLuhan's prophetic words, and not persist in doing "today's job with yesterday's tools—with yesterday's concepts" (McLuhan & Fiore, 1967).

While ADs in this study espoused an integrated perspective of public relations, it should be noted that an integrated perspective does not mean everyone does the same thing—nor should they. Each institution has its own culture, issues and challenges; each AD brings something different to the table based on his or her experiences. The same goes for coaches and other employees. Therefore, communication is important in order for ADs and their associates to have a clear understanding about public relations roles and responsibilities. Different understandings of public relations, if not communicated clearly at the outset, might lead to confusion about

expectations down the road. It is especially important to talk with basketball coaches about how they are to integrate public relations in their jobs.

Evaluation practices.

In the current study, ADs discussed evaluation as one of the challenges related to public relations that they encounter. The "evaluation" they referred to was typically event-related (e.g., fan experiences) or issue-related (e.g., response to a negative situation). For some participants, evaluation was informal, and conducted through staff meetings, personal observations and conversations, and noting complaints following an event. For others, evaluation was more formal, and conducted primarily through surveys distributed by the ticket or marketing departments. A few participants mentioned consulting with experts from on or off-campus for guidance.

Best practiced as an intentional and focused step, evaluation should always be part of the process of accomplishing goals. Regardless of an AD's understanding of public relations, evaluation will help him or her to determine whether that is an area of success, weakness, or a little of both. For example, a thorough evaluation of crisis management might help an athletics department to prevent similar problems.

In addition, helpful lessons learned in evaluation should be recorded and communicated to department associates. Occasional sharing of results and conclusions with external associates—such as industry colleagues or professors—might help improve the industry's reputation overall by assisting those in similar positions with knowledge they need.

New media.

Although participants acknowledged the benefits of new media to the promotion of their programs, they emphasized it as a public relations challenge as well. A greater understanding of

and comfort level with new media will help ADs in media relations. New media should be monitored consistently. First, it should be monitored for rumors that might need to be addressed. ADs in this study were clear that rumors on the Web do not deserve equal treatment; some have potential to cause immediate damage and others pose little threat for the time being.

New media should also be monitored for developing technology that will help ADs and coaches. Web sites, Facebook and Twitter were once-upon-a-time innovative ways to reach out to publics, and are still developing. Meanwhile, new technology is always on the rise, and keeping up with it will keep athletics departments and programs from playing catch-up in the future. ADs should not excuse themselves from cultivating a comfort level with technological changes that could have dramatic effects on the well-being and structure of their organizations.

However, new ways of communicating typically means new rules as well, from the NCAA, conferences and individual institutions. Keeping up with new media policies will help to keep ADs and their employees out of trouble. It might also aid in helping ADs to develop a consistent philosophy regarding new media adoption and response, which will aid in decision-making.

Basketball coaches and public relations.

Intercollegiate basketball coaches should clarify their understandings of public relations with their ADs: If he or she wants their coaches to be involved in "PR," coaches need to know what that entails. In addition, basketball coaches should be honest about their comfort levels with various aspects of whatever their ADs define as "public relations." They should work together to find common ground that will be mutually beneficial.

Along those lines, the directors of the various "public relations" departments should be brought into those discussions. They need clear understandings of and input into determining an

appropriate balance of involvement. This will help everyone to avoid confusion and frustration, especially regarding roles and responsibilities.

Intercollegiate basketball coaches need to invest time in media training, especially early in their careers. As one participant indicated, poor media relations can "stick" with a person for a long time, which is reputation damage almost no coach can afford. Internal sources, such as ADs or communications directors, are options for coaches wishing to improve their skills. External sources such as consultants can also be helpful, though they are expensive and might not be as familiar with a program's needs and culture as an internal source.

ADs and administrators are not the only ones who should be concerned about crisis management. Basketball coaches should have crisis communication plans. Plans for their teams and staff can be developed internally, but must be communicated to executive staff. They have to mesh with plans of the department and university, otherwise there is potential for chaos at the worst possible time.

Basketball coaches need to understand their communities. First, basketball coaches should know their institution's academic culture. This requires learning their AD's idea of what is appropriate regarding building relationships with faculty, and university administrators and personnel. For example, some participants indicated that developing relationships with faculty and administrators was encouraged; for others, coaches should maintain a professional distance in order to avoid the appearance of inappropriate influence.

Second, basketball coaches should understand their city and regional cultures. This includes meeting elected officials, volunteering for charitable causes, attending cultural events, and visiting schools and clubs. Just as important, they should know about any issues that have

come between their programs/athletics department/university and their local community, and consider what their roles might be in improving relationships.

Women's basketball coaches and public relations.

This study reveals implications for women's basketball coaches, specifically. First, they should find out whether expectations regarding public relations are different between men's and women's programs, how and why. This is especially important when considering a position at an institution. Second, women's basketball coaches need to consider whether different expectations are helpful, fair and appropriately balanced with coaching duties.

Third, women's basketball coaches who are expected to take an active role in promoting their programs and reaching out to media need to get a baseline of public perception of the program to help develop goals and objectives. To determine where you want to go, you have to know where you are, and that will help set realistic and reachable expectations.

Fourth, there is no need to re-invent the wheel: Women's basketball coaches should find out how coaches with similar levels of prominence and success accomplish similar public relations goals. Garnering media attention, building relationships with university administrators, and gaining student support are examples of public relations goals that have many means to their ends. However, if a program is barely making the NCAA tournament, coaches would be better off to consult a program that is one step up, rather than multi-time national champions. Doing so will help coaches and ADs to avoid frustration and conduct more helpful evaluations.

Finally, those who wish to have coaching careers should learn as much as possible about media relations, fundraising, marketing/promotions and public speaking. As several participants indicated, women's basketball coaches need to be prepared to take a very active role in

promoting their programs and their sport, but they need skills and confidence to play that role well.

Other athletics administrators and public relations.

Participants' remarks indicated that athletics administrators in charge of marketing, fundraising, media relations and communications/public relations might also find themselves in need of clarification regarding the expectations associated with an AD's understanding of public relations. These administrators should communicate with ADs, coaches and each other about how to manage the integration of their departments. Their greatest concern should be finding ways to better communicate with one another.

ADs with an integrated understanding of public relations will expect administrators of the units mentioned previously to be on the same page. Therefore, administrators in these departments should develop cohesive, open relationships with each other, and encourage their employees to do the same. This will enable them to work as a unit, and avoid territorialism.

Regarding their relationships with basketball coaches, these administrators should make sure they (and their employees) understand what is appropriate to ask of coaches, and what is appropriate for coaches to ask of *them*. ADs need to understand conclusions from such discussions, and they can make decisions if there is disagreement.

It was clear from the interviews in this study that these ADs are interested in the positive and negative uses and repercussions of new technology, internally and externally. Administrators whose departments are heavily involved in technological development or response to new media should take time to educate their ADs, coaches and colleagues about what they are doing and why. They should also take the lead in environmental scanning and issues monitoring, and share what they find with ADs, executive staff, coaches and colleagues on a regular basis.

In the process of scanning the environment and monitoring issues for potential problems, athletics administrators and coaches should work together to develop department-wide crisis communications plans. While several participants in the current study emphasized that it is impossible to prepare for every possible situation, most acknowledged that communication is the basis of any crisis response. Therefore, having a consistent and updated communications plan is essential regardless of the situation.

Sport media and intercollegiate athletics.

ADs in this study had much to say about sport media. While acknowledging the benefits of new technology and the important role that radio, TV and Internet media play for intercollegiate athletics, they spent much more time discussing their challenges and frustration with sport media. Almost all of them recounted a negative experience with sport media, such as betraying a trust, broadcasting incorrect and unconfirmed information, neglecting "due diligence" in story research, and hounding ADs and SIDs for responses to chat room-generated rumors.

The ADs' shared experiences imply considerations for sport media, particularly Internet publications and sports talk radio. These are the two types of media that ADs cited most often as being more concerned about being the first to break a story than being accurate and fair. Journalists should understand that whenever they choose to publish a story without checking for accuracy or getting perspectives from both sides, they run the risk of damaging their relationships with ADs, coaches and SIDs. This can have all kinds of negative, long-term consequences: ADs can refuse future interviews, coaches can discourage their players from speaking to certain media members, and SIDs can blacklist them from some media events.

Instead, journalists should seek to build trust with ADs, coaches and SIDs to ensure long-term, positive relationships with these important sources. They can do this in several ways: First, by prioritizing and researching rumors. ADs often expressed annoyance with media members calling their offices about every chat room or message board rumor; they do not have the time or energy to respond to these requests, and don't want to give rumors any credibility by acknowledging their existence. Journalists should conduct their own research, and decide which—if any—of the rumors they find are worth following up. Doing so will also help substantiate their reasons for calling an athletics representative, especially if they are asked to justify taking up that representative's time with their request for information.

Second, journalists should understand and honor "off the record" conversations. Those conversations are meant to help give journalists context and backstage understanding of various aspects of an athletics department. Journalists who wish to keep the trust of ADs, coaches and SIDs would be wise not to publish information given to them in confidence, whether under their names in professional publications or anonymously in blogs.

Third, journalists need to be aware that pursuing the quest to be first over the quest to be right can be costly: for their publications, the athletics departments they cover, their industry and themselves. Carelessly inaccurate stories—especially damaging ones—damage journalists' credibility, along with their publications and even the media industry. Running a correction will not mitigate the problem: Many readers, listeners and viewers will not see or hear the correction, and will continue to spread misinformation. Depending on the nature of the misinformation, the athletics department in question can suffer months or years of reputational damage, which can harm recruiting efforts and strain relationships internally and externally.

Therefore, journalists should proceed to do their job well, but take care not to get caught up in the "ready, shoot, aim" type of reporting that P3 described. It is clear from participants' remarks that journalists who value accuracy over speed will build better relationships with ADs and other athletics personnel, which in turn will lead to quality stories that will earn writers long-term respect.

Limitations

The findings and implications of this study must be considered in the context of its limitations. First, all interviews except for one were conducted by phone. This allowed the researcher to interview participants in a variety of geographical locations, and flexibility to work with ADs' schedules, which included accommodating last-minute time and date changes for conversations. The down side to this interview method is that the researcher did not get to see the realities of the ADs' workplaces in person, which might have added to her understanding of the ADs' life worlds (e.g., Gurwitsch, 1974; McCracken, 1988).

Second, due to participants' schedules, interview time was limited in some circumstances. While the researcher was still able to glean important information for the research question, ADs with limited time did not give as thorough of explanations or cover as many subjects as those with more time to elaborate on their thoughts.

Conclusion

This study's findings provide insight to inform research and practice. Through their own words, participants revealed a highly integrated understanding of public relations, which both emanates from and influences their and their basketball coaches' life worlds. An integrated understanding affects how ADs view responsibility for public relations within their departments.

It also influences the approach that ADs take towards involvement with the elements they assign to their understanding of public relations, whether relational or functional, active or passive.

This was apparent as the participants discussed their understanding of public relations in regards to their basketball coaches. Just as they did with responsibility for public relations, ADs also differed on how an integrated understanding of public relations should manifest itself in their basketball coaches' jobs. Some even made distinctions between coaches of men's basketball teams and coaches of women's basketball teams, largely based on a sense of a need of active involvement by women's basketball coaches to promote their teams, and the sport in general—and a contrasting lack of need of active involvement by men's basketball coaches due to the attention they already garner from fans and media.

While the findings of this study are not generalizable, they can be used to aid in understanding how public relations might be evolving within intercollegiate athletics. Considering the amount of media attention and rights deals, sponsorship and donation dollars, merchandise sales and legislative debate given to major NCAA Division I programs, it is clear that these institutions are an important part of the fabric of American society (e.g., Budig, 2007; Drape & Thomas, 2010; Hechinger, 2009; Kian, et al., 2009; Marrs, 1996; McAllister, 2010; McCormick & McCormick, 2008). They are also ripe for investigation by public relations scholars, especially as ADs and coaches wrestle with frayed university relations, academic inconsistencies, NCAA investigations, repercussions of new media, re-organization of conference affiliations, Title IX compliance and town-gown tensions (e.g., Associated Press, "WAC sues Nevada", 2010; Ferreri, 2010; Fortunato, 2008; Fowler, 2010; Kennedy, 2007; Staurowsky, 2005).

Learning how public relations is understood by those with power and influence in this industry is an important step toward dealing with the roots and ramifications of some major challenges facing intercollegiate athletics departments. For scholars, this presents an opportunity to test and develop theory, as well as to identify trends, changes and solutions for public relations in an industry with cultural power and influence. For public relations practitioners, the results of this study provide a glimpse into the realities and understandings of their field and function within the intercollegiate athletics context.

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Appendix

Appendix: Discussion Guide

Tell me about your athletics department.

Tell me about your men's and women's basketball programs.

Tell me about your men's and women's basketball coaches.

What does "public relations" mean to you?

Whose responsibility is public relations in your athletics department?

What do you consider to be public relations issues or challenges?

What does public relations mean to you in relation to your basketball coaches?

Vita

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