**"CONVICTED RAPIST" VS. "SERVED HIS TIME":
ANALYSING THE FRAMING OF CHED EVANS' ATTEMPTS TO RETURN TO
FOOTBALL**

All authors:
Ann Pegoraro (corresp), Evan Frederick, Lauren Burch

Synopsis:
This study examines bottom-up and networked framing in a sport environment, specifically analysing the differences in framing regarding the social issues brought to light as convicted rapist Ched Evans attempted to return to football.

Abstract:
In April 2012, Ched Evans a professional football player with Sheffield United was convicted of rape and sentenced to five years in prison. In October 2014, Evans was released after serving half of his sentence, vowing to clear his name and return to professional football (Hebert, 2015). In November 2014, Evans' former club Sheffield announced that he would be training with the team, sparking immediate outrage from fans on social media while traditional media also leapt to cover the emerging story and debate. The story continued to unfold over several days with club patrons removing their support. Olympian Jessica Ennis-Hill asked that her name be removed from the stands at Sheffield should the club sign Evans, while a debate raged on through social media. By November 30, Sheffield rescinded the offer to Evans indicating that he would no longer train with the club. Evans did not stop in his attempts to return to football and in early 2015, after secret talks, Oldham announced that it would sign Evans. As with the previous attempted return, media and fans erupt in a debate over whether Evans, as a convicted rapist, should be allowed to play football again. The purpose of this study is to examine bottom-up and networked framing in a sport environment, specifically analysing the differences in framing regarding the social issues brought to light as Ched Evans attempted to return to football.

In traditional media, empirical studies on news framing have found frames to influence audience attitudes on various issues. Recently, Nisbet (2010) has indicated the need for increased examination of bottom-up framing on social media, which involves framing by consistent producers of content, as the

conventions of online media enable individuals to employ these practices. Framing of issues from a bottom-up perspective has been found to provide increased awareness and dispersion regarding social issues (Hamdy & Gomaa, 2012). In addition, Meraz and Papcharissi (2013) found that over time certain frames rise to prominence through crowdsourcing practices, and are reframed to remain relevant in the minds of the audience, a processed they referred to as networked framing.

The concepts of bottom-up framing and networked framing have been utilized extensively in political communication research but many scholars have argued that sport mirrors the society in which it operates (i.e. Eitzen, 2001) and as such, sport fans, media and society in general often engage with sport as it dramatizes social issues. Therefore, sport also provides an excellent setting in which to study the framing societal issues. This study utilized the methodological process of Hamdy and Gomaa (2012), to examine both traditional news media framing from a top-down perspective, as well as social media framing from a bottom-up perspective to determine if differences exist in the type of frames produced over the two different time periods in an effort to investigate the ability of social media to increase awareness of social issues.

A content analysis methodology was employed, using both November 13, 2014 and January 3, 2015 as dates for traditional news and social media dialogue. To capture the volatility of news cycles, two purposive, consecutive day timeframes from November 10 to 22, 2014 and January 2 to 10, 2015 were selected. Data collection and preliminary analysis was performed using the software tools Sysomos and Leximancer. Sysomos is a textual analysis platform that enables users to construct real-time or historical datasets comprised from blogs, Twitter, social networks, message boards, and traditional news articles through keyword searches. Employing the term "Ched Evans" in Sysomos, and filtering search criteria based upon the timeframes specified yielded 88,321 tweets, 6,763 news stories, 10,119 forum posts, and 2,599 blog posts for a total dataset of 107,802. This dataset was then imported into Leximancer, a textual analysis software that conducts conceptual (i.e., thematic) and relational (i.e., semantic) analysis on content.

Preliminary data analysis revealed fans constructing debates on social media such as Convicted Rapist vs Served His Time, similar themes were found in forum and blog posts while traditional media tended to frame the story more around his guilt. Additionally, analysis of the full dataset will be completed prior to the 2015 EASM Conference. Theoretical implications regarding bottom-up framing and audience sentiments pertaining the social issue of rape as they play out in the sport world, as well as practical implications for sport organizations in relation to messaging and sport consumer perceptions will be discussed.

References:
Eitzen, S.D. (2001). Sport as Microcosm of Society in Sport in Contemporary Society, Sixth Edition, Worth Publishers, pp. 1-9.
Hamdy, N., & Gomaa, E.H. (2012). Framing the Egyptian uprising in Arabic language newspapers and social media. The Journal of Comnmication, 62, 195-211.

Hebert, (8, January 2015). Ched Evans: Why the footballer's move to Oldham collapsed. Retrieved from http://www.independent.co.uk/sport/football/news-and-comment/ched-evans-accepts-he-will-have-to-clear-his-name-before-playing-again-9966521.html

Meraz, S., & Papacharissi, Z. (2013). Networked gatekeeping and networked framing on #Egypt. The International Journal of Press/Politics, 18(2), 138-166.

Nisbet, M. (2010). Knowledge into action: Framing the debates over climate change and poverty. In Paul D'Angelo & Jim Kuypers (Eds.), Doing frame analysis: Empirical and theoretical perspectives (pp. 43-83). New York, NY: Routledge.