

Trash Talk or Smack Talk: The Language of Competitive Sport

Marcis Fennell
Florida A&M University

Abstract: This paper challenges the Eurocentric interpretation of the intentionality of the use of trash talk in competitive sport. The power bloc established within sport enables the formation of a moral community amongst athletes within competitive sport. An anthropological exploration of the Black vernacular tradition of trash talk, from the Middle Passage to modern American sport, supports the use of trash talk as a mechanism used to ethically vet and form relationships within moral communities of competitive sport. The proposed conceptual framework advances philosophical scholarship on the sociology and ethics of sport by creating a line of literature that explores moral communities in sport from the perspective of the athlete. Framing trash talk as smack talk reveals the intentionality of the aggressive interactions as an ethical construct established by the athletes within the capitalistic environment of competitive sport. An understanding of athlete discourse will empower diversity, equity, and inclusion officers, administrators, and coaches in producing and regulating ethical environments for athletes in American sport.

Keywords: sport, ethics, psychology, trash talk, sportsmanship

Shocked the World

On February 9, 1992, the University of Michigan men's basketball head coach unknowingly changed the cosmetic and sociological make-up of sport in America. During this game, Coach Steve Fisher elected to start five true freshmen. This strategic move was the first in the history of the National Collegiate Athletic Association (2020) competition (University of Michigan Athletics, 2017). Now known as the Michigan Fab Five, Chris Webber, Juwan Howard, Jalen Rose, Jimmy Jackson, and Ray Jackson played a major role in the social, educational, and regulatory development of sport. This impact not only changed the appearance of sport and how people view the participants, but it influenced how sport is played and regulated (Films, 2011).

Leading the Michigan Wolverines to two consecutive national championship games in their first two seasons, the five young Black student athletes infused the NCAA basketball world with their style, which included aggression, trash talk, and celebrations. Often accompanied with aggressive body behavior, the Fab Five initiated trash talk during competition that involved constant verbal chatter amongst themselves, towards their opponents, and their fans. In contrast to the decorum and rigid formality of the NCAA Final Four championships where players were neatly groomed and passively expressive (NCAA, 2020), the antics of the Fab Five were perceived as blatantly disrespectful to the morals and history of sport, i.e., respect, honesty, and beneficence. Such observations, perceived through the cultural perspective of White America, were analyzed in a regulatory manner. Disregarding the philosophical approach of play that strategically and aesthetically enhanced the play of the University of Michigan's men's basketball team, critics

misinterpreted the aggressive words and gestures. This misinterpretation birthed the coining of the term *trash talk*.

It has now been nearly 30 years since the Fab Five shocked the NCAA and the American sport community. However, upon observation of modern sport culture, the occurrences of extracurricular verbal and physical interaction between teammates and opponents appear to be more prevalent during competition. Yet, prior research on trash talk within competition fails to ethically assess the intentionality of the trash talk used in competitive sport. To assess intentionality, one must consider the moral agents of the moral community in which trash talk is present. To consider the moral agents of the moral community, one must consider the sociocultural background of the members of the moral community.

Furthermore, it appears as though athletes in the revenue-generating sports of basketball and football have formed their own moral community in which the interpretation and application of the moral and civic values used to monitor behavior during competition differ from the norm. Based on the vernacular tradition of trash talk, the purpose of this theoretical paper is to present anthropological evidence through a sociocultural interpretation of the intentionality of trash talk. Such evidence supports the proposal of using the term *smack talk* as the antithesis to the interpretation of *trash talk*. As the language of moral communities of competitive sport, smack talk has a positive influence on the environment and individuals within the community. Modern sport has established itself as an influencer on larger societal constructs throughout American history. Insight from this paper will expose the moral impacts of the competitive environment, therefore strengthening the importance of studying the sociomoral aspects of sport.

Theory

Trash Talk

The term trash talk has been used for verbal taunts that players direct at their opponents during contests, often accompanied by displays of physical intimidation (Phillip, 1995). Considered intentional psychological intimidation, trash talking is as common as putting on a game uniform, though outlawed by most amateur sport ruling bodies (Lumpkin et al., 1994). Trash talking exists in youth sports, school sports, collegiate sports, and professional leagues. Women practice it, children practice it, and fans practice it. Trash talk is defined as “boastful comments about the self or insulting comments about an opponent that are delivered by a competitor typically before or during a competition” (Yip et al., 2018, p. 125). Additionally, trash talk is categorized as incivility expressed in a competitive context in which two or more parties are vying for resources, recognition, or status (Yip et al., 2018). Incivility is rude behavior characterized by displays of disrespect and disregard for others (Porath & Erez, 2009). Incivility violates social norms for mutual respect and has been associated with a number of negative interpersonal consequences (Martinko et al., 2013).

According to observations, trash talk is intended to deride an opponent’s skill in many fashions: to emphasize the opponent’s weakness, e.g., “Your sorry ass can’t stop me!,” some in a misogynist manner, e.g., “Used you like a bitch!,” often in an aggressive manner, e.g., “J in your eye” (making a jump shot directly over your opponent), claiming turf, e.g., “My ball!,” while

others are simply mildly humorous put-downs, e.g., “Call 911, there’s been a robbery” (after making a steal in basketball) (Eveslage & Delaney, 1998). These verbal interactions are executed in a short period of time. Critics of trash talk believe that using trash talk as a competitive skill exemplifies a pernicious “winning-at-all-costs” mentality (Dixon, 2008; p. 91). Though there appears not to be any distinct forms of trash talk that have been dictated, there seem to be two common interpretations used by the individuals enforcing sportsmanship regulations: de-competition and the simple distraction.

De-competition

According to Eurocentric scholars, these two interpretations translate trash talk as intentional behavior that negatively influences the purity of sport. The first interpretation of trash talk violates the respect aspect of sport, also known as *de-competition*. De-competition refers to the intent to “strive against” your opponent, shifting the goal of sport from excellence to conquering opponents (Shields & Bredemeier, 2009; 2011; Shields & Funk, 2011). Those who develop and enforce sportsmanship rules believe trash talk decreases the quality of competition by distracting and frustrating the opponent with verbal jeers, convoluting the ultimate goal of excellence (Shields & Funk, 2011). Trash-talking is often characterized by the intent to harm an opponent and involves taunts that criticize an opponent’s identity, group membership, competence, and/or performance. This sort of interaction benefits the trash talker, as it disables their competitor’s desire to achieve the psychological focus needed to compete at an elite level. This approach may result in de-competition.

The Simple Distraction

The second interpretation believes the verbal jeers attempt to force the opponent into striving to defeat the trash talker, rather than competing with themselves within the sport in order to achieve the greatest performance (Shields & Bredemeier, 2009). Therefore, this approach taints competition, as true competition is between two or more competitors seeking to achieve their greatest performance individually and/or as a team (Shields & Bredemeier, 2011). This sort of trash talk is interpreted as personal attacks upon an individual, such disrespect that is intolerable in civilian interactions. Critics of trash talk approach their moral evaluations by considering the constitutive rules of sport in the English standard of signification.

Morality of Trash Talk

Human beings develop moral callouses around our hearts like we do on our hands. Similar to the commentary surrounding trash talk, such callouses come with sociomoral symptoms such as: “everyone else is doing it” rationalization and if no harm is done or no rule is caught broken, it is okay (Kretchmar, 1994). Moral callouses produce problems distinguishing rules as well as difficulty in understanding the difference between strategy and moral trickery (Lumpkin et al., 1994). Philosophically, the callousness allegedly caused by trash talk is an example of how situational ethics is applied to sport. Situational ethics suggests that every ethical and moral decision is made on the spot, with no consistency between acts (Lumpkin et al., 1994). In this case, critics believe that the money and fame which accompanies winning in modern American sport causes athletes in competitive sport to disregard their moral values. Within the moral analysis of

trash talk, one must consider the intent of the action. However, the intent is often misinterpreted between members of different moral communities within modern American society. This misinterpretation of trash talk is displayed by the governing of competitive sport in America.

Moral Community

The *moral community* is characterized by social integration, extensive and intimate attachments, and moral integration. Evidence of such integration is presented through socialized ethics. In all contexts, socialized ethics are a set of shared beliefs about morality and behavior. Additionally, they are established within the moral community. In modern usage, any small group with these qualities, such as a religious sect or military unit, may be termed a moral community (Marshall, 2020). Sport presents opportunities for cultural resistance, confronting the social values that are promoted as worthy of being maintained (Carrington, 2009; Coakley, 2015; Gruneau, 1983). Considering competitive sport as a moral community, examination of the sociocultural background of Black vernacular tradition is imperative because it has been used as a tool for cultural resistance throughout history.

For the revenue sports of football and basketball, African American athletes are increasingly sought after and represented. Considering racial demographics of participants in collegiate and professional revenue-generating sports, 81.1% of National Basketball Association players were People of Color, 73% of Women's National Basketball Association players were African American, 63.3 percent of National Football League players were African American, 41.9% of collegiate women's basketball students were African American, and 53.2% and 54.4% of collegiate men's basketball and football student athletes were African American respectively (Lapchick et al., 2020). African Americans represent more than half of the population of basketball and football participants on the collegiate and professional levels of competitive sport.

Individuals participating in the revenue-generating sports, i.e., men's basketball and football, use trash talk as a moral gauge between participants as well as a motivational tool between competitors across all sociocultural backgrounds (Fennell, 2018). Participants of all genders who participate in sanctioned high school varsity level sport and above are members of the same moral community of sport (Fennell, 2018). Furthermore, as a moral community, the behavior within competitive sport directly correlates with the history of moral agents of its participants. Moral agents directly affect the sociocultural influence of all individuals. The contribution of behavior to our moral character is but a recognition that what we do should be done in the manner befitting our history as moral agents (Hauerwas, 1981). The recognition and performance of duty are made possible because humans are inherently virtuous. Like any skill, virtues must be learned and coordinated in an individual's life, just as a master craftsman has learned to blend the many skills necessary for the exercise of any complex craft (Hauerwas, 1981). The ability to express oneself, verbally and nonverbally, has become a skill crafted to control and influence any environment in which there is social pressure to perform.

To support the mantra "sport builds character," these skills give the individual the ability to respond creatively to the always unanticipated difficulties in any craft in a manner that technique can never provide. Our capacity to be virtuous depends on the existence of communities that have been formed by narratives to the character of reality (Hauerwas, 1981). Trash talk has become

virtuous within the moral community of sport. The ability to be able to express confidence while confirming confidence through performance and the ability to remain calm through adversity in such a dynamic environment is a prerequisite to elite-level sport in America. Such behavior does parallel reality for the Black experience in America.

With the integration of Black athletes in major American sport, members of the elite social class have become more exposed to Black culture. The commercialization of competitive sport and integration of technology has enhanced the impact of Black culture on American society. Reaching members of White America who reside in the upper-class urban areas and/or rural areas, Black vernacular tradition presides throughout sport, music, and art. The use and interpretation of trash talk are highly influenced by one's exposure to the Black vernacular tradition. Contrary to the increase in expressive behavior, socialized ethics in competitive sport do not consider the cultural background and influence of the athlete. Therefore, sportsmanship rules, i.e., the socialized ethics expressed in regulatory rules, unethically limit the experience and performance of the athlete. Perhaps such conflict exposes potential moral communities within the moral community of sport, separating coaches and administrators who govern sport from the athletes.

The Social Power Bloc

The recruitment of the Black athlete has ignited the discussion about the commercialization of the capitalist-athletic complex (St. Louis, 2009) and the commodification of young men and women (Byers & Hammer, 1995; Coakley, 2015; Eitzen, 2000; Sage, 1998; Zimbalist, 1999; 2006). The desire for institutional prestige and financial gain propels athletic programs to compete within a high stakes market, often focusing more on athletic performance than on student development (Comeaux & Harrison, 2011; Van Rheen et al., 2011). Eighty-three point one percent of NCAA Division I athletic directors, 70% of NCAA Division I conference commissioners, and 85.3%, 86.2%, and 89.6% of all head coaching positions in Divisions I, II, and III men's sports respectively are Caucasian (Lapchick et al., 2020). Administrators, coaches, and governing officials are tasked with fairly establishing and governing all regulations that impact the athlete experience.

As a result, regulations in modern American society often support the societal divide between the *haves* and the *have-nots*. The *haves* and *have-nots* are not objective social categories like the bourgeoisie and the proletariat or Blacks and Whites. They are mobile categories, formed to fit the conditions of their use and their user (Fiske, 1993). Thus, in sports contexts, Black athletes are the *have-nots*: laborers without power and without regulatory control over their cultural-specific brand (Andrews, 1996). It is important to note that categories of such concept are strategically and tactically formed and dissolved according to the perceived exigencies of the issue involved and their situating conditions by those in power (Fiske, 1993).

A product of conflict between the *haves* and *have-nots*, in this case, members of the rules committees and African American athletes, is the formulation of social power blocs. The concept of social power blocs can help in understanding the subsequent political and power-related nature of decisions by people in certain social roles. Gramsci (as cited by Hall, 1986) hypothesized the bloc as the welding of different components for a specific purpose. In the case of American

collegiate and professional sport, many argue the sole purpose is to capitalize on the athletic talents of the athletes.

Access to the power bloc is solely determined by the membership within the elite class of that society. In the sport context, the elite class consists of upper administration, rules committees, coaches, media members, and oftentimes fans. The power bloc is a disposition and exercise of power to which certain social formations, defined by class, race, gender, and ethnicity, have privileged access and which they can easily turn to their own economic and political interests (Fiske, 1993). Therefore, the power bloc does not oppose certain actions or behaviors unless it negatively affects their economic status.

Perhaps this is the reason why celebrations by athletes, on all levels, are recorded and used to promote commercialized competitive events, yet are policed by sportsmanship rules. The most recent enforcement of the NFL's Rule 12, Section 3, Article 1, prohibiting insulting language, taunting acts, and excessive celebrations presents evidence of the unethical power bloc. Under the same sportsmanship principles, the NCAA Football Rules committee established sportsmanship rules prohibiting celebratory actions in response to the competitive dominance of the predominantly Black University of Miami football program in the late 1980s. The notorious Miami Rule, Rule 9-2-1 was the result of the knee-jerk reaction of the NCAA (Mell, 1991; National Collegiate Athletic Association, 2020). The controversial legacy of the Michigan Fab Five is another casualty of such a power bloc. The result of such governance within the play of sport may result in in-play penalties and/or disqualification. Beyond play, such interpretations can interrupt the performance and well-being of the athlete penalized, as well as others within the competition.

The organizational framework in competitive sport benefits from the behavior they seek to influence, which is a form of imperialized power. Administrators and coaches garnish the scarce benefits in stature and compensation, while the athletes receive basic benefits in access to education and/or the privilege of playing the sport. The athletes use a localizing power whose main tactical purpose is not to expand terrain. Rather, it is to strengthen control over the immediate conditions of everyday life, which is the space the have-nots live, work, and move within (Fiske, 1993). Within the context of competitive sport, trash talk is a mechanism to exercise such localized power. Considering the intentionality of the use of trash talk, the researcher of the current study will now use the term *smack talk* in reference to the Eurocentric term of trash talk.

Athlete Exploitation

Considering the sociocultural dynamics of elite competitive sport in America, the exploitation within commercialized sport exudes a dark cloud over sport. Revenue-generating sports provide the conditions for the greatest likelihood of athletic exploitation, which may be understood as economic, educational, and social (Van Rheen, 2012). Social exploitation considers social reproductive labor. Social reproduction is the mental, manual, and emotional labor required to reproduce the commodity labor-power (Laslett & Brenner, 1989). In spectator sport, social reproductive labor is central to capitalist reproduction, underlines the significance of athletic labor to the broader political economy in which it is situated, and exposes the experience of the athletic laborer (Kalman-Lamb, 2019). Consistent with the cultural concept of signification, smack talk serves as a mechanism that combats such oppression while supporting others within the moral

community indirectly. To further understand discourse as a tool for signification, it will be helpful to historically trace the evolution of the vernacular tradition that became smack talk.

Smack Talk: Historical Knowledge of Expression

Historically, African Americans have been systematically oppressed and secluded within their own communities and harassed when outside of them (Majors & Billson, 1992). The systematic approach used to control Black America has often forced African Americans to outwardly express their awareness and concerns without directly addressing the oppressor. Such behavior can be culturally traced to the classic cultures of traditional West Africa during the formation of the New World. The Black Africans who survived the horrid Middle Passage from the west coast of Africa to the Americas, or New World, not only brought their physical capabilities to the New World, but also aspects of their cultures that were meaningful. Their music (a mnemonic device for Bantu and Kwa tonal languages), their myths, their expressive institutional structures, their metaphysical systems of order, and their forms of performance all survived the journey (Abrahams & Szwed, 1983). The Pan-African culture formed a unique mix of linguistic, institutional, metaphysical, and formal cultural structures. To adapt to the New World, the culture of Black America employed the stylistic verbal and non-verbal methods of communication to counteract the derogatory environment in which they were tasked to co-exist. Such a resilient, bold approach to facing opposition and presenting strength can be traced to the West African mythical figure Esu-Elegbara.

Esu-Elegbara and the Signifying Monkey

The variations on the African mythical figure, Esu-Elegbara, eloquently present an unbroken arc of metaphysical presupposition and a pattern of figuration shared through time and space among certain Black cultures in West Africa, South America, the Caribbean, and the United States (Gates Jr., 1988). Amongst the cultures in these countries in the New World, Esu-Elegbara presides over its liminal crossroads, which is a sensory threshold barely perceptible without access to the vernacular. It is important to note that the term *vernacular* is taken from the Latin *vernaculus* (“native”), taken in turn from the Latin *verna* (“slave born in his master’s house”) (Baker Jr., 1984). In modern American society, vernacular is often replaceable with *lingo*, frequently used in reference to one’s style of talk in conjunction with their modified use of linguistics, i.e., slang.

Despite the number of variations which conform Esu-Elegbara, each version of Esu is the sole messenger of the gods. Esu-Elegbara interprets the will of the gods and carries the desires of man to the gods. His is the guardian of the crossroads, master of style and of stylus, the phallic god of generation and fecundity, master of that elusive, mystical barrier that separates the divine world from the profane. Linguistically, Esu-Elegbara is the ultimate copula, connecting truth with understanding, the sacred with the profane, text with interpretation, the word that links a subject with its predicate. They connect the grammar of divination with its rhetorical structures (Gates Jr., 1988). In Yoruba mythology, Esu-Elegbara is said to limp as they walk due to their mediating function: their legs are of different lengths because they keep one anchored in the realm of the gods while the other rests in the human world. Perhaps this limp is where the urban street gesture of the *cool walk* or *cool pose* is derived.

Furthermore, the nature of this trickster figure can be characterized by many qualities that cannot be determined as predominant. A partial list of these qualities includes individuality, satire, parody, irony, magic, indeterminacy, open-endedness, ambiguity, sexuality, chance, uncertainty, disruption, reconciliation, betrayal and loyalty, closure and disclosure, and encasement and rupture (Pelton, 1980). Though Esu-Elegbara possesses all of these characteristics, they also possess a plethora of other qualities that present an idea of the complexity of the figure itself. Much of Esu-Elegbara's literature concerns the origin, nature, and function of interpretation and language use above that of ordinary language (Thompson, 1976). Esu-Elegbara is the Yoruba figure of the meta-level of formal language use, the ontological and epistemological status of figurative language, and its interpretation (Witte, 1984).

Signification

Throughout the journey through the Middle Passage, to the Oriente province, and ending at the United States, Esu-Elegbara was prominent. However, only the Signifyin(g) Monkey survived the journey from Cuba to the United States. Perhaps the racist designation of the Afro-American as a monkey primed the North American features of the Monkey, a derogatory slur used to describe Black Americans post-Middle Passage journey. The Signifyin(g) Monkey is the figure of the text of the Afro-American speaking subject whose manipulations of the figurative and the literal both wreak havoc upon and inscribe order for criticism. Such manipulation became a necessity as the social constructs of the New World intended to limit Black knowledge and expression. Such constructs preside over the competitive sport environment, creating power blocs that delineate moral communities and enable athletes to signify upon each other to build confidence and demarcate with the moral community. The very formation of the moral community amongst athletes manipulates the power of oppressors.

The vernacular tradition inherited from the Signifyin(g) Monkey is termed *signification*. The highly structured rhetoric of the Signifyin(g) Monkey conforms to the demands of writing, particularly in the sense of a chain of signifiers open to (mis)interpretation (Gates Jr., 1988). The open-endedness of figurative language, rather than its single-minded closure, is adorned in Black vernacular tradition. The complexity of such language often conflicts with the linguistic functions of those who do not understand the concept of signification. Like all societies, conflict occurred due to misinterpretation, particularly between the Black linguistic sign "Signification" and the Standard English sign "Signification." Qualities within this conflict surface within the difference proposed between the intentionality of trash talk and smack talk.

The two versions of "Signification" have everything to do with each other and have few commonalities based on their origins. The Standard English word is a homonym of the Afro-American vernacular word. The concept of signification refers to three neologisms: *signification*, *signifier*, and *signified* (de Saussure, 1966). The Black vernacular tradition signifies upon the signified by displacing the received term's associated concept, creating a homonymic pun of the English community of speakers. Such displacement enables one to use common language intended to cause humor or rhetorical effect. The Afro-American culture's act of language Signifies upon both formal language use and its conventions. Traditional Black culture revises the received sign accounted for in the relation represented by the signified/signifier. At its most apparently denotative level, signification intends to critique the nature of the English meaning itself (Gates

Jr., 1988). This action is meant to challenge White America through a literal critique of the sign, the meaning of meaning (Gates Jr., *Figures in Black: Words, signs, and the "racial self"*, 1987). In the sport context, the athlete initiating smack talk signifies upon their opponent or teammate; the signified (opponent or teammate) then has the opportunity to establish the meaning of the signification by performing in a manner that opposes or confirms the signification presented by the signifier (smack talker).

Playing the Dozens

As American society transitioned from the New World to socially and economically segregated communities, signification presented itself within the urban game of the dozens. Depending on sociocultural aspects, *playing the dozens* can mean cursing someone out, insulting someone's mother or other relatives, or engaging in a duel of increasingly elaborate insults that might or might not include ancestors or female kin (Abrahams, 1976). For many Black Americans, playing the dozens are merely rhetorical jokes (Wald, 2012). Playing the dozens, like signification, requires an understanding of who is *putting someone in the dozens*, as well as who is *receiving the dozens*. The dozens could be a challenge to physical combat or a test of cool, in which the first player to throw a punch was regarded as having proved his lack of self-control. This lack of self-control often translated to one's ability to remain calm when entering a segregated community during such a juncture in American society (Wald, 2012).

The dozens served as a game that assisted in establishing social hierarchies within segregated communities. In a modern American society in which many did not feel comfortable being themselves, some chose to use the dozens to alleviate that pressure by covertly attacking oppression. Humor served as a coping mechanism as well as a cloak for confrontation. Additionally, the dozens served as practical experiences that influenced one's ability to uphold a calm demeanor in a hostile environment. This demeanor in Black America is referred to as the *cool pose*. The cool pose was first used to establish identity by Black males in racially segregated America. It entails behaviors, scripts, physical posturing, impression management, and carefully crafted performances (Majors & Billson, 1992). The cool pose delivered a single, yet critical message of pride, strength, and control. Within the posturing of the cool pose, creating the right image is a construct of acting in a theater that is dark (Majors & Billson, 1992). The dark refers to the social and economic oppression of Afro-Americans in the mid to late 20th century in America.

The dozens also served as a tool to build a racial bridge. Insult joking can ease racial tensions by providing a comic meeting ground, but it can also reinforce underlying stereotypes and divisions (Wald, 2012). Such effects can be revealed in the formation of the moral community of competitive sport. Misunderstandings can go in both directions; codes vary, overlap, and change according to time, place, and situation. Like jazz, rock 'n' roll, rap, and now sport, the dozens provided individuals of all backgrounds with opportunities to adopt Black styles and alter them through intentional ineptitude. Such ineptitude may be interpreted as offensive, as trash talk coiners and critics have expressed. This error in interpretation occurs when outsiders, individuals not within the moral community, attempt to interpret the behavior and language without being aware of the relationship. The nastiest of insults cloaked in warm affection are misinterpreted (Wald, 2012). Therefore, the intentionality of such insults must be considered within the interpretation.

Ethical Application of Smack Talk

To further understand the impact that smack talk has on competitive sport, this paper explores ethical applications of trash talk in sport. Sport ethics are greatly monitored within competition under the regulation of sportsmanship rules. Under these rules, smack talk has been demonized by sport governing bodies which, again, are largely populated by members unfamiliar with the Black vernacular tradition from which smack talk has evolved. Therefore, the socialized ethics of sport unfairly limit the experience of the athlete, as the formal ethics of sport are established by administrators who operate under the English standard of signification. The social vacuum created through sport exposes the world's inability to cope with socialization. In any moral community, socialization is highly important. In association with socialization, morality is the main criterion that justifies the actions we choose to perform. Morality may be divided into two sections: ethics and morality.

Ethics

Ethics considers theoretical social obligations while morality refers to a person's individual choice (Lumpkin et al., 1994). However, ethics does not consider the social dynamics of relationships within competitive sport. Oftentimes, the stronger the relationship, the more each participant seems to be encouraged and antagonized to increase the intensity of cruelty within the insults. Unfortunately, socialization may possess negative or positive characteristics, which depend upon the perspective of the participant and the viewer. In the case of modern American amateur sport, including the NCAA, the perspective of the athlete within the competitive environment is not regarded, as the negative characteristics of the socialization of student-athletes are considered within the ethics of the NCAA governance.

Morality

Due to such social dynamic, along with the pressure to perform, athletes have formed their own moral community. Theoretically, the conflict between the interpretation of trash talk and the interpretation of smack talk is based on the application of two ethical theories: idealism and relativism. The socialized ethics that govern the behavior of athletes during competition are based on idealism. Idealism establishes an inherent nature of right and wrong regardless of consequences, while realism considers consequences to have meaning (Frankena, 1973). Such socialized ethics also govern the behavior within sport and the athletes' personal lives. In regard to the perspectives of athletes, the intentional use and interpretation of trash talk and other behaviors that display self-expression are based on relativism. Relativism states that reality is not universal and that there is no absolute truth (Frankena, 1973). On a spectrum, these theories would represent polar opposite sides.

In the moral community of competitive sport, all critics of users of trash talk cannot lie on extreme ends of this spectrum due to the conglomerate sociocultural backgrounds and dynamic environment of competitive sport. In other words, one has to consider one's values as well as the situation when establishing rules, such as sportsmanship rules. Mixed deontology considers established theories when dealing with ethical situations: realism and idealism (Frankena, 1973). The decision-making process relies on the individual's moral values and the context of the

situation. Therefore, when establishing socialized ethics, sportsmanship, or constitutive rules, governing bodies should consider the social dynamics of the athletes. The consideration of the context and relationship in which one uses trash talk/smack talk must be considered by those who establish the ethics that govern behavior during competition.

In addition to the context in which one smack talks, governing bodies must also consider the true purpose of sport. Modern American sport has evolved from an activity to an art, a way of life. Kant's definition of beauty as a characterization of sport states that sport is purposiveness without purpose (Edgar, 2015). The purposiveness of sport outlines how participants should interact with each other. Though there are unofficial sets of ethics incorporated within sport, interpretation and application of such roles are determined within the moral communities of competitive sport.

The purpose in Kant's definition of "purposiveness without purpose" refers to the enjoyment of sport. Though sport often tracks success by the score displayed on the scoreboard, the score does not measure the level of enjoyment each competitor receives from the sport. The pre-lusory goals associated with sport have derived from the term *game*, which was derived from the term *play*. In simpler terms, sports are constructive activities that are infused with measurable competition that originated from the free-spirited activity of play (Suits, 1995). Play is simply and profitably an activity that is voluntarily pursued for predominantly intrinsic reasons (Morgan & Meier, 1995, p. 32). For the athletes who understand the pre-lusory goals of their respective sport, their intrinsic reasons for competing in sport empower them to experience all aspects of the tricky triad. As termed by Bernard Suits (1995), the *tricky triad* refers to the interactions of game, sport, and play. Furthermore, Suits proposed that game, sport, and play interact with each other equally (as cited by Morgan & Meier, 1995, p. 20). Metaphysically, the competitive athlete relies on the opponent's performance to achieve a pleasurable experience.

Considering the formation of a moral community amongst athletes, smack talk serves as a catalyst to the competitive environment. The purposiveness of smack talk is to establish oneself within the moral community by displaying a cool pose through vernacular in conjunction with athletic performance. This purposiveness occurs without purpose when smack talk utilizes humor in the manner displayed in the game of the dozens. Similar to the social and economic oppression of Afro-Americans in the late 20th century, the social dynamics of NCAA athletics present a power bloc that negatively affects the experience of the athletes who produce the profitable product.

Power in Expression

The Black experience in American society is stifled. Smack talk serves as the knowledge of expression for athletes in the moral community of competitive sport. A knowledge often struggles to repress, evade, or delegitimize other knowledges (Fiske, 1993). In the macro-social perspective, knowledge serves the cultural interests, materially and politically. The social formation that produces the knowledge is likely in direct proportion to the power of the interests behind the knowledge (Andrews, 1996). Power, then, produces a knowledge disguised as truth (Foucault, 1972). These truths struggle to repress, evade, or delegitimize other knowledges. Based on these truths, sportsmanship rules were established in sport intending to control the behavior of all players and coaches. However, all players possess their own knowledges that influence how

one behaves and communicates within competitive sport. These knowledges preclude their attitudes in their approach to the game.

Conclusion

Smack talk does not consider the characteristics of the individual competitor, but the variables of the ethos. The ethos within competitive sport permits various intensities and usages of smack talk. The word competition derives from the Latin verb *competere*, meaning “to meet, come together” (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). The conclusion of the exploration of Black vernacular and its role in Black anthropology presents trash talk, playing the dozens, and the concept of signification as a tool to build comradery in social groups within an exploitative environment. The intentionality of trash talk opposes the interpretation presented by White America. Interpretations from individuals who are not members of the athlete-only moral community cannot ethically assess the interaction. Ethical assessment of smack talk must consider the relationship between competitors within the moral community.

The demands placed upon the performances of the athletes resemble the pressures of Africans entering the New World, young Black Americans seeking to thrive in segregated America, and any other individual with conflicting identities in the social environment. In all circumstances, participants acquiesce to the environment in order to exist within the environment. In sport, athletes may understand such circumstances and know that there is a need to support each other in achieving their performance goals. Within the ethos of competitive sport, athletes use smack talk to intentionally motivate themselves as well as their opponents. Additionally, smack talk is used to signify upon their opponent to gauge competency within the sport, empowering their opponent to earn and show respect as competitors and individuals. The discourse within smack talk values honesty because the signified has the opportunity to create their own truth based on the signification of the signifier. Metaphysically, smack talk positively impacts one’s existential experience, as the athletes must work together to motivate and elevate their performance within the dynamic environment of competitive sport. The playful and humorous constructs of smack talk assists in alleviating the stress produced by the expectations of coaches, administrators, and spectators. In the same instance, smack talk presents a method for athletes to discretely uncover their self-expression while signifying upon their oppressors.

Furthermore, as sport represents a microcosm of American society (Coakley, 2015), the current research enables scholars and leaders to challenge and adapt the imperialistic values established within American society. Considering the established power blocs, assessment of ethical application of moral values within the moral communities of sport creates opportunities for cultural transformation within American society. Categories such as race and social class in American culture can be dismantled using the present displays of the community-building ability of Black discourse and its effects on cultural resistance. In conjunction with morality, the linguistic power of discourse serves as the catalyst for sociological unification. Retrospectively assessing the social impact of the Michigan Fab Five, the exact behavior that was criticized is now lauded and mimicked by all stakeholders in competitive sport; it morally and socially connects all participants. Administrators, coaches, and officials must strive to understand and gain access to the moral community in which athletes have metaphysically formed.

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