

APOLOGIA IN COACHES' POST-GAME RHETORIC:
"LISTEN, IT'S NEVER AS BAD AS YOU THINK..."

By

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1: LITERATURE REVIEW	1
AMERICAN FOOTBALL AND SOCIETY.....	1
APOLOGIA.....	2
<i>Ware and Linkugel.....</i>	2
<i>Ryan.....</i>	5
<i>Benoit.....</i>	7
SPORT APOLOGIA.....	10
<i>Course Discourse as Apologia.....</i>	12
<i>Llewellyn’s “Coachtalk”</i>	12
<i>Sports Apologia Research Expanded.....</i>	14
RESHAPING AMERICAN IDEALS?... ..	16
SPORTS AND CULTURE.....	17
RESEARCH QUESTIONS.....	18
CHAPTER 2: METHOD.....	21
OVERVIEW... ..	21
DATA COLLECTION.....	23
DATA ANALYSIS.....	25
CHAPTER 3: RESULTS.....	31
PRIMARY THEMES.....	31
SUBCATEGORIES OF “COACHTALK” THEMES.....	32
<i>Deference.....</i>	32
<i>Justification.....</i>	34
<i>Redefinition.....</i>	35
<i>Suffering.....</i>	37
<i>Themes Expressed During Press Conferences.....</i>	39
<i>Redefining Victory.....</i>	41
<i>Viewer Statistics.....</i>	41
<i>Coach Continuity?.....</i>	42

CHAPTER 4: DISCUSSION.....	45
INTRODUCTION.....	45
IMPLICATIONS FOR LLEWELLYN’S “COACHTALK” THEORY.....	45
CONTINUING KRUSE’S SPORTS APOLOGIA RESEARCH.....	48
IMPLICATIONS FOR PRIOR APOLOGIA THEORIES.....	50
SPORTS APOLOGIA FURTHERED.....	52
<i>Playoffs vs. Regular Season.....</i>	<i>53</i>
<i>Absence of Variables.....</i>	<i>54</i>
<i>Lack of Extremes Explained.....</i>	<i>55</i>
SPORTS APOLOGIA AS UNIQUE FIELD OF STUDY.....	56
FUTURE CODING SCHEMES AND ADDITIONAL RESEARCH AREAS....	57
REFERENCES.....	61
APPENDIX A: DATA COLLECTION – COACH TRANSCRIPTS....	69
APPENDIX B: CODING CATEGORIES.....	72
APPENDIX C: “WINNING” QUOTES.....	73
APPENDIX D: 2009 LOSING STREAKS.....	75

ILLUSTRATIONS

TABLES

Table 1: Developed coding scheme.....	29
Table 2: Additional justification subcategory examples	35
Table 3: Redefinition subcategory examples	36
Table 4: Additional suffering subcategory examples.....	38
Table 5: Examples of differing ongoing apologia.....	44
Table 6: Subcategories most often utilized	51

FIGURES

Figure 1: Frequency of primary “coachtalk” theme.....	32
Figure 2: A comparison of team and individual subcategories.....	49

ABSTRACT

Sports apologia is a unique type of self-defense discourse, which is particularly made salient following a public team loss. Although previous studies have outlined the necessity of studying sports apologia, few have endeavored to longitudinally investigate head coach rhetoric (Kruse, 1981; Llewellyn, 2003). The current study sought to determine the distinct place of sports apologia in terms of established theories and pioneering conjectures. The study begins by considering how sports apologia relates to established communication theories and then continues to determine why and how sports apologia serves as a discrete field.

Through examining transcripts of losing coaches' post-game press conferences reproduced online at <NFL.com>, progress was made into outlining sports apologia's position in society. Llewellyn's "coachtalk" theory (2003) served as the foundation for a coding system that analyzed 45 transcripts' overarching themes and underlying trends. Unexpectedly, the balanced nature of three of Llewellyn's losing coach rhetorical themes -- justification, redefinition and suffering -- emerged during this content analysis, while the fourth theme, deference, appeared significantly fewer times. Furthermore, differences materialized based on regular season matchups vs. playoff season contests, the phase of the season and individual coach preferences. This study reinforces that coach discourse reflects American societal values based on dissemination of material and reported public interest.

CHAPTER 1: LITERATURE REVIEW

The National Football League (NFL), a professional American football organization comprised of 32 teams, has millions of followers worldwide and the numbers continue to grow. In 2009, 39 million viewers watched the NFL Draft, up 2.5 million viewers from the previous season (“Record 39 million,” 2009). In fact, the official NFL Twitter page boasts more than 1.38 million followers with thousands joining each week (“NFL,” 2009). Additionally, with games being played and promoted abroad, the demographics of NFL fans are changing and becoming more diverse.

Throughout this revolution, the NFL coaches, although their tenure may be ephemeral at times, serve as more than figureheads. Fans listen to what the coaches say about a loss, personnel changes, controversies and victories. American society in particular reflects this coach discourse in many ways. Canadian author and journalist Malcolm Gladwell asserts: “One of the strange things about the American obsession with football – as opposed to the sports obsessions carried by most cultures around the world – is the particular status granted to the coach” (2000, p. 1).

The way sports dialogue impacts society will be examined because much can be gleaned by studying the communication aspects. One largely understudied area is coach discourse following a contest. With the increasing number of absorbed sports fans worldwide, how do coaches construct sports realities through their explanation of a loss?

Apologia

The English word “apology” is taken from the term *apologia*, which dates back to ancient Greece (Ryan, 1982). It stems from the Greek verb for defense, or *apologeomia*. *Apologeomia* encompasses a multitude of defenses including to: “defend oneself, speak

in answer to, defend oneself against, [and] defend what has been done” (Liddell & Scott, 1968, pp. 207-8). While its roots are well established, the term was historically understudied. It was not until a study by B. L. Ware and Wil Linkugel that the concept of apologia was made salient to the field of communication (1973).

Ware and Linkugel

In their influential article, Ware and Linkugel (1973) sought to identify the recurrent themes of “the speech of self-defense” (p. 273). Few concrete efforts had been made to look at the recurrent form of self-defense discourse to that date (Benoit, 1995). Ware and Linkugel recognized the rhetorical variability under which apologies are warranted yet also postulated there were certain commonalities. They sought to examine the generic tactics --as well as the subgenres-- the “*combinations* of factors,” of the warranted discourse (Bitzer, 1968; 1973, p. 274).

Noting the work of psychologist Robert F. Abelson (1959), Ware and Linkugel recognized the need to extend the research in the classification system of self-defense texts further. Building on Abelson’s work, Ware and Linkugel identified four factors of apologia: (1) denial, (2) bolstering, (3) differentiation, and (4) transcendence.

Even prior to Ware and Linkugel’s seminal article, denial commonly was thought of as coinciding with public apologies. As described by Ware and Linkugel, a denial is a “disavowal by the speaker of any participation in, relationship to, or positive sentiment toward whatever it is that repels the audience” (p. 276). Denial is the first of Ware and Linkugel’s factors because of its prevalence in apologetic discourse, although it was argued by some not to be the most effective factor (Abelson, 1959). It is “reformative” because it does not seek to have the audience reinterpret the situation in any way (p. 276).

Instead it calls the event itself into question or the ramifications of the archaic construction event, and only the relationship of the event to the speaker is altered (Linville, 2002). However, the category of denial also entails the idea of *intent*. Through the example of Marcus Garvey, Ware and Linkugel show that if the rhetor is considered a “tragic figure,” and unjustly harmed as a passive actor in the situation, the judgment of the public oftentimes is much less harsh (p. 276). This is an important concept which will be revisited later in this coach study.

The second factor is bolstering. In a bolstering instance, the rhetor attempts to align him- or herself with a valued sentiment, fact, object or even perhaps a relationship, all without attempting to change the audience perception of the event. Identification is central to this factor, as the individual’s involvement and allegiance is questioned. When a rhetor successfully utilizes bolstering, the audience members are reminded of a positive association and identify the speaker with that concept or item (Ware & Linkugel, 1973). The negative event is not attempted to be manipulated in any way, therefore making it reformative, however, the person’s association with something positive, identified by the general public, constitutes bolstering. Ware and Linkugel identify how the Kennedys used a bolstering attempt to align the nation with the family during the drowning incident of Mary Jo Kopechne. Senator Edward Kennedy used the prestige of the Kennedy family name to have the general public consider the concept of an “American family” dealing with an extremely unfortunate circumstance (Ware & Linkugel, 1973).

While denial and bolstering are deemed reformative, the third and fourth factors are transformative in nature (Ware & Linkugel, 1973). The third factor is differentiation, which encompasses “those strategies which serve the purpose of separating some fact,

sentiment, object, or relationship from some larger context within which the audience presently views the attribute” (p. 278). In order for differentiation to be accomplished, the audience has to reinterpret its initial response to the incident as well as the association the speaker had with it.

Ware and Linkugel summarize differentiation as “any strategy which is cognitively *divisive* and concomitantly transformative” (p. 278). Ware and Linkugel harken back to the “Chappaquiddick” speech by Senator Edward Kennedy. They argue he employed differentiation by his discourse to suggest this behavior was an aberration from his normal persona. He attempted to show that the “larger context” was his overarching personality and solid character (p. 276). Kennedy’s examined discourse partially outlined the way he acted immediately following Ms. Kopechne’s drowning. Ware and Linkugel argued that Kennedy attempted to compensate for his initial aberration from the night before by going to the police the next morning and pleading guilty due to a claim of moral obligation.

Transcendence is the fourth factor of self-defense as outlined by Ware and Linkugel. It is nearly the opposite of differentiation as it entails “any strategy which cognitively joins some fact, sentiment, object, or relationship with some larger context within which the audience does not presently view the attribute” (p. 280). This means, in order to achieve rhetorical transcendence, one must seek to transform the audience’s perception of the negative event into a more “abstract, general view” (p. 280). As Ware and Linkugel state, “those strategies which involve a change in cognitive *identification* and in *meaning* factor together as transcendence” (p. 280). Transcendence moves away from that particular at-hand situation to a larger, more abstract perception of the rhetor’s

character or surrounding circumstance. Ware and Linkugel aptly used the example of Eugene V. Debs in 1918, when it was more advantageous for Debs to make the focus of the court case about freedom of speech instead of the particular alleged inflammatory speech on trial.

These four factors are not mutually exclusive and admittedly were “necessarily ambiguous” as each situation is different and rhetors employ different strategies (p. 281). Ware and Linkugel go on to discuss the four subgenres that are present in apologetic discourse: absolution, vindication, explanation and justification. As succinctly paraphrased by Linville (2002, p. 13), each posture combines the general characteristics of two basic factors: (1) Absolutive: denial and differentiation, (2) Vindicative: denial and transcendence, (3) Explanative: bolstering and differentiation, and (4) Justificative: bolstering and transcendence.

Ware and Linkugel recognized that additional research would be done into what they identify as a “rough grouping of speeches” and “merely working subcategorizations of apologetic discourses,” therefore, more attention will be paid to later subcategories (p. 275). These four postures and aforementioned factors laid the framework for apologia research for decades, despite never actually using the term *apologia* in the article. However, it was not long before another scholar continued this investigation into the concept of apologia.

Ryan

Ware and Linkugel’s work sparked numerous articles, including one by Noreen Kruse that propelled the study of sport apologia following her work in the 1970s and 1980s. While her work in sport apologia is addressed in greater detail in subsequent

sections, she must be mentioned now because one of her 1981 articles prompted Halford Ross Ryan to construct his 1982 landmark article, “‘Kategoria’ and ‘Apologia’: On their rhetorical criticism as a speech set” (Kruse, 1981b). Ryan utilizes Kruse’s initial complaint of the brevity of work and discussion of apologia as a beginning point for his article. In his piece, Ryan argues for apologia scholars to consider an entire stream of events. Too often, earlier researchers would address the rhetorical defense, *apologia*, or the attack, *kategoria*, without considering the larger implications of the entire discourse. Ryan contends that the “critic cannot have a complete understanding of accusation or apology without treating them both” (p. 254). He is the first scholar to link the term *apologia* to this genre of discourse.

Ryan makes several other important assertions in this essay regarding the then-fledgling field of apologia. First, he argues that the accusation is the initial point of image creation. Ryan states:

The speaker is motivated to give birth to an image, the speech of accusation, because he perceives an exigence which he would seek to modify through accusatory discourse. Apology can be conceived as “purification, concerned with correcting an image.” The image, affirmed by the accusation, then becomes for the apologist the exigence to which he would respond by seeking to modify that image through apologetic discourse. (p. 255)

Additionally, Ryan argues that the discourse of apologia demonstrates certain central themes. He makes an important division when classifying these themes. There are differences between attacks on a person’s character versus an attack on a policy, as first

suggested by Kruse (1981b). Ryan revisits Ware and Linkugel's (1973) postures -- absolute, vindictive, explanative and justificative -- finding them to be indicative of attacks on policy. He finds character assassinations to be entrenched in "ethical materials" (p. 256). With these attacks, the apologist is "motivated to deny, to mitigate, or to purify the resultant image, and the rhetorical response to that motivation is a speech in apology" (p. 256). Ryan continued to examine apologia after setting forth these four themes. His 1988 collection of essays, *Oratorical encounters: Selected studies and sources of twentieth-century political accusations and apologies*, clarified apologia for the readers and laid forth a framework for the continued study of apologia in the field of communication.

Ware, Linkugel, Kruse and Ryan were not the only scholars to consider the nature of self-defense rhetoric during the 20th century.¹ Several other investigations into image restoration surfaced at approximately the same time as the apologia texts, including Kenneth Burke's (1970) concept of "purification" and L.W. Rosenfield's (1968) general classification system gleaned from political speeches by Truman and Nixon. William Benoit (1995) recognized these disparate theories lacked one cohesive element despite their similar attempts to classify self-defense and he sought to remedy this by his theory of image restoration strategies.

Benoit

Benoit is perhaps the most well-known, present-day apologia scholar, in part due to his book *Accounts, excuses, and apologies: A theory of restoration strategies* (1995) and copious scholarly research over decades. In this work, Benoit further develops the

¹ Very early studies included two of the first rhetorical looks at self-defense in Barnet Baskerville's (1952) discussion of Nixon's "Checkers" speech and James H. Jackson's (1956) examination of Clarence Darrow's discourse.

classifications and forms that apologia takes. His conclusions expand the field and shed light on additional and alternate categories building on the original theories by Ware, Linkugel, Kruse and Ryan. Benoit succeeds in showing how prevalent apologia is in society.

Benoit outlined reasons such as a world of limited resources, uncontrollable circumstances, human nature, and conflicting sets of priorities, to demonstrate the ubiquitous and necessary nature of apologia. Along with Ware and Linkugel's work, the Burkean "purification" texts (1970) and Rosenfield's (1968) work -- a look at recycled arguments and the claim that the facts are lumped in the middle third of self-defense speeches -- also were considered by Benoit (Benoit, 1995). After concluding these texts could be integrated, he lays out a theory of image restoration based on two assumptions: (1) communication is a goal-directed activity, and (2) maintaining a favorable reputation is a central goal of communication. His assumptions, dating back to Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, provide a basis for his systematic look at texts.

Benoit's typology of image restoration strategies (1995) isolates five overarching strategies used to restore one's image. Each strategy entails certain tactics unique to the overarching category. Benoit's five strategies were: denial, evading responsibility, reducing offensiveness, corrective action, and mortification (1995; 2001). He posited a total of 12 tactics across these categories. Four tactics are of particular interest to the study of head coach apologia, all of which are defined as tactics of reducing offensiveness (2001). First is *bolstering*, which simply means to stress one's good or positive traits. *Minimizing* is another tactic of reducing offensiveness and is characterized by displaying the act as not serious. A similar tactic is *differentiating* between the act and

a more serious one. Finally, *transcending* treats the act one is defending as part of a larger event with more important considerations (Benoit 1995; 2001; Linvill, 2002). While other scholars had introduced some of these ideas in the communication realm prior to 1995, Benoit laid out one of the first inclusive frameworks for studying apologia by integrating copious amounts of previous research.

Ware and Linkugel's work thrust the apologia discussion into the political realm, corporate world and religious discussion, while even prompting a few examinations into the sports industry and apologia. Scholars from many different divisions of communication began analyzing this speech of self-defense in greater detail. Political apologia became a popular field of study once the parameters of apologia were set, and the bulk of research was done in this sector (Benoit, 1995; Benoit & Lindsey, 1987; Downey, 1993). President Nixon's speeches and post-Watergate discourses were heavily analyzed (Wilson, 1976; Blair, 1984; Benoit, 1995; Linvill, 2002). Bill Clinton, former president of the United States, provided rich texts for political apologia scholars with his public declarations amidst accusations of his extramarital affairs. Kramer and Olson (2002) embrace Ryan's concept of considering both the apologia and the kategoria (1982). They posit that Clinton's self-defense communication was ongoing and he was forced to react to the continually developing situation. His apologia strategies had to differ and adjust accordingly (2002). In the midst of all this, apologia in sport was essentially ignored by mainstream communication scholars.

Sport Apologia

Communication researchers concur that the sport apologia foundation was set in 1981 when Noreen Kruse published an article aptly entitled, “Apologia in Team Sport.” She was the first communication scholar to look at sports personalities and their use of apologetic discourse. Kruse made a strong case for the “rhetoric of sport” to be considered a field of study, eventually prompting surge of research (p. 283).

First, she discussed the identification that fans have with their respective sports teams and figures and the way it constitutes a type of “secular religion” (p. 283). It is quite remarkable what many of these fans invest in these team associations. Kruse discusses how fans align themselves with the team’s fate despite its “internally exhausting” tendencies, far exceeding the fascination with sport as mere recreation and a way to escape, as some scholars claim (p. 272).

Kruse also has much to offer on the topic of the “general ethic of team sport” (p. 273). In Kruse’s investigation readers are reminded how the ideal athlete is a team member, both on, off and after retiring from, the playing field. An ethical team, according to Kruse, is one where the group is indicative of the commonly-expressed idiom: the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. This means that each individual’s importance is less than that of the collective team goals. Also, effort should always be paramount as an ethical standard, despite the score. However, the all-pervading ethic of team sport as understood by American society comes down to one thing. “Because winning is vitally important, the concept of outscoring opponents controls all of the sport world's ethical precepts,” Kruse argues (p. 283).

In “Apologia in Team Sport,” Kruse states, “The apologetic responses of sport figures do not differ strategically from the character defenses offered by those in the sociopolitical world” (p. 280). She extends previous research by showing that “[s]port figures' attempts to identify themselves directly with particular attitudes about the game are integral parts of their discourses” (p. 281). She finds these alignment attempts are brief and somewhat vague, prompted by two factors: the public is usually well versed on the rhetorical situation and oftentimes “concrete actions” can show more to the public than pure sentiment (p. 281).

In summation, Kruse makes a number of key assertions in her article. First, she defends the argument that sport apologia does not greatly differ from that of other apologia relevant to everyday society. Additionally she cites how crucial winning is to sports apologia. If a team is winning, fewer answers have to be given to the public and to the integral members of the unit. However, apologia is not sufficient for these familial fans if the team is losing. They seek concrete actions in order to reach their team’s ultimate goal – winning.

Kruse’s research serves as a starting point for examining sport apologia. One substantial contribution of her work was the outlining of multiple areas that scholars had yet to consider in the sports industry, such as additional investigations into coach apologia. She insists, “[a]n institution that has such a pervasive effect upon the lives of so many should not be ignored, especially when that effect is produced, in part, by rhetorical means” (p. 280).

Coach Discourse as Apologia

Kruse explains that fans often view themselves as a type of extended family of a sports team and will often utilize the collective “we” in reference to these teams. Coupled with society’s emphasis on winning, these fans demand to know why their team is losing and what can be done about it. Head coaches must consider this in their post-game press conferences and defend their position as the leader of this team that just suffered a setback. Coaches must apologize in a way that takes into account the surrounding circumstances, or ongoing *kategoria*, and use their rhetoric in an appropriate way. As John Llewellyn states, “both winning and losing coaches are expected to account for themselves and the contest’s outcome,” and the way that NFL coaches do this after a loss is apologia (2003, p. 2). This distinct type of apologia reflects society in a unique way (Llewellyn, 2003).

Llewellyn’s “Coachtalk”

One scholar who advanced the study of coach apologia was John T. Llewellyn, who extended some of Kruse’s ideas. In an innovative study, he examines the genre of men’s collegiate basketball head coaches and the way their comments were disseminated by newspaper columnists after men’s NCAA basketball tournament final contests for a 26-year span. This particular article is informative to this project because Llewellyn moves into an examination of head coaches not just after a win, but also in explaining losses.

Stressing the importance of head coach discourse, Llewellyn states:

The talk of coaches is rhetorical action that delineates social norms concerning sport, competition and the coaching profession. This

“coachtalk” helps to create the meanings that enthusiasts take from sports activities. Examination of the common message patterns produced by experienced coaches will offer insight into culturally prescribed themes in the drama of sport. (p. 3)

In his research, Llewellyn identified four common themes of discourses for winning and losing coaches. The victorious side demonstrated elevation, humility, value reinforcement, and suffering, while the defeated coach spoke in terms of deference, justification, redefinition, and suffering. Llewellyn found that the discourse of winning and losing coaches maintain a social system where parties know their role.

The four themes of losing coach discourse serve as the framework for the study of NFL head coaches’ post-game press conferences. These, as well as components of Benoit’s (1995) overarching themes of image restoration and Ware and Linkugel’s groundbreaking self-defense study (1973), were used to analyze post-game press conferences in the NFL. In his “coachtalk” article, Llewellyn (2003) proposes these categories after analyzing years of losing coach discourse so these four organically-developed categories prove more apt and warrant a more in-depth look.

First, *deference* is the method that coaches and teams go about “respectfully acknowledging the winner” (p. 11). This is when losing coaches praise the victors and note their positives. Next is *justification*. “Losing coaches are called on to justify tactics in not-so-subtle challenges to their judgment,” Llewellyn states (p. 11). Similar instances seem to abound in post-game press conferences but scholars need to look more closely in order to posit whether this is the most-often utilized theme of coach apologia to follow a defeat. Additionally, *redefinition* is commonly used. This is the case when a coach seeks

to find a “positive value” despite the loss. They are seeking to find a win within the loss. Finally, *suffering* is commonly voiced. As Llewellyn summarizes: “[d]iscussions of suffering by losing coaches are so frequent and intense that this talk must be the rhetorical equivalent of donning sackcloth and ashes” (p. 13). These four themes are not mutually exclusive and coaches can – and seemingly often do – employ more than one of these in answering questions following a defeat.

Llewellyn’s contributions to the field of sport apoloia will be revisited in a later section but one key idea reinforces the need for examining coach communication. Llewellyn summarizes, “the coach will be the primary architect of the luster and meaning of the fans’ sense of belonging as well as the lightning rod for fan dissatisfaction” (p. 5). When examined, sports apoloia primarily had investigated individual athlete’s statements, yet Kruse asserts that “sport—and especially team sport—has both social and psychological significance” to citizens (p. 270).

Sports Apoloia Research Expanded

Before Kruse’s key 1981 article looking at team sports, there were other studies that began to delve into self-defense rhetoric by individual athletes. The pioneering study was Nelson’s (1984) research of Billy Jean King’s extramarital gay relationship. After it was discovered that King had an affair with a female former secretary, multiple parties came forward and gave examples of non-denial apoloia, including King, her husband, and friends (Nelson, 1984). Nelson argued that the involved parties utilized differing strategies of apoloia throughout the unveiling of the indiscretion. He also posited that the general public was receptive because the varying strategies were not contradictory throughout the course of the event (Nelson, 1984; Benoit, 1995).

In addition to Nelson, Benoit and Hanczor (1994) looked at a female athlete's alleged misdeed in their examination of skater Tonya Harding after an attack on colleague Nancy Kerrigan. This study, based on Harding's defense on the CBS news show *Eye-to-Eye with Connie Chung*, illustrated how bolstering, denial and even an attack on the accuser indeed can be used as apologia attempts (Benoit & Hanczor, 1994; Linvill, 2002).

Other recent sports individuals' apologia investigations include studies by McDorman (2003), Sierlecki (2007), Brazeal (2008) and Meyer (2007). McDorman (2003) looked at baseball legend Pete Rose's apologia and how it differed in content and reception over the years in part due to situational and audience changes. His primary argument was that the way that American culture has fragmented over the past several decades makes it easier for sports apologia to be successful in the eyes of the public. In Sierleck's (2007) piece, she examines the types of apologia utilized by National Basketball Association great Kobe Bryant during a rape allegation made by a Colorado woman. Additionally, Brazeal examined NFL wide receiver Terrell Owens and agent Drew Rosenhaus' public relations appeals in the course of Owens' career (2008). Brazeal found that Owens and Rosenhaus failed to exemplify the American ideal of a "team player" which, in part, caused his public relations appeals to fail, reinforcing Kruse's concept of team ethics (1981; 1981b).

Most pertinent to this proposed study, Meyer (2007) investigated NFL quarterback Michael Vick's immediate apologia following the breaking of the dog fighting-ring story. He uses Benoit's (1995) image repair typology to investigate Vick's video apology of August 27, 2007. In his argument, Meyer outlines how understudied the

field of sport apologia has been, despite the recent onslaught of public apologies by sports figures. His findings coincide with Ryan's 1982 evaluation and argue that "expanding apologia and image repair theories is to regard apologia and kategoria as an ongoing process" (p. 26).

Reshaping American Ideals?

With a society that often buys into a phrase frequently and incorrectly credited to Vince Lombardi, "Winning isn't everything; it's the only thing," what happens to the losers (Riegel, 2010)?² This is an area that has not been considered at great length by communication scholars. Llewellyn and Vande Berg and Trujillo's (1989) work are exceptions. Vande Berg and Trujillo's (1989) article, "The Rhetoric of Winning and Losing: The American Dream and America's Team," examines sports journalism related to a 28-year era of Dallas Cowboys coverage. Vande Berg and Trujillo consider how sportswriters emphasize success and frame it for reinforcement and shaping American culture. They found that the actual sense of winning extended far beyond the Cowboys' win-loss record and displayed societal values. Vande Berg and Trujillo break this 28-year period into four phases of Cowboys' history based on record and organizational shifts. The first two phases, the first one with an abysmal record and the second phase with a better overall record and a time of growth for the team, were described:

In the first phase, the process-oriented "human" value of success dominated the writing. Losses were defined as moral victories and wins as progress toward self-actualization, not scoreboard dominance. By the end of the second phase, however, "winning is the only thing" had begun to

² The actual Lombardi quote has been reported as, "The effort, the desire, the will to win is everything" (Mastro & Shevalla, 1996, p. 1).

displace “winning is playing with courage and grace” as the dominant formulation of success. (p. 221)

This study focused on sports journalism but still offered some insight into apologia in a losing coach’s discourse in defeat, such as “overemphasis on winning does restrict interpretation of the success or failure of a franchise” (p. 222). Kruse reiterates, “In actuality, how one plays the game is only nominally significant, and means are considered less important than the end of winning, which too often leads to a society that discounts the losing team and its members” (p. 274). Llewellyn further argues this in his 2003 article:

Winning is a prominent concern in American life. Ironically, this preoccupation may go unnoticed precisely because we attend almost exclusively to winners; others are only furniture in the victorious scene. Therefore, it is important to thoroughly examine losing as well although not commonly considered. (p. 141)

All of this points toward a continued study of losing coach rhetoric.

Sports and Culture

A series of studies have demonstrated a positive relationship between sports and American cultural values such as achievement (Kruse, 1981; Vande Berg & Trujillo, 1989). Kruse stresses that winning seems to trump all other constraints for teams (1981). Vande Berg and Trujillo restate the same point, “the dominant value emphasized in American sport is success” (p. 204).

With a wave of new media infiltrating and impacting how the public receives the news, original sports journalism has to evolve to account for this. Broadcast and print

media are basically responsible for what the general public will see and remember (Lapchick, 1985). Vande Berg & Trujillo describe sports journalism as the “primary vehicle” for which the winning narrative continues to dominate American culture and the fascination with sport (p. 205). The media play a pivotal role in the way people look at winning in sports and society, which furthers the argument for continuing to analyze technological trends such as online video and viewer totals. Vande Berg and Trujillo (1989) add:

When sportscasters characterize individuals and teams in sports as successful and unsuccessful, they define, interpret, and evaluate notions of success and failure not only for sports fans but for the larger American society as well. (p. 205)

In summation, a myriad of questions are still unanswered by scholars when considering apologia in team sport. The vast majority of readily-available information on this topic is based on individual sports figures, in particular, highly successful or unsuccessful persons. This begs the question: What happens on a weekly basis with coaches who have just lost a game? How do obligatory apologia to fans and the public reinforce the coach’s position and American ideals? This study addresses common themes of losing coach discourse, as well as look at how coaches utilize apologia to defend their position, as well as the team’s stance.

Research Questions

Despite the social fascination with sport, it remains understudied in the field of communication. The implications of narratives dealing with successes in the NFL and how these narratives impact secular American society are presently unknown. The lack of

understanding of coach-generated narratives leads this study to address multiple research questions about NFL coaches' discourse with the general public immediately following a regular-season loss and posits one primary hypothesis:

H1: The themes discussed by NFL head coaches following a loss will differ when analyzed in terms of recognized apologia theories and themes.

The first discourse characteristic to be determined is what are coaches saying after a loss? Football will be the examined sport as it is deemed "America's choice" by many and has been voted America's favorite sport the last 43 years (Curtis, p. 1). Several lenses through which to analyze coach discourse have been presented and will be examined in the first research question:

RQ1a: What themes do NFL coaches express during post-game press conferences after a loss?

RQ1b: Do Llewellyn's (2003) four themes of losing coach discourse account for the themes in NFL post-game press conferences? Which of Llewellyn's four characteristics is most prominent: deference, justification, redefinition or suffering?

RQ1c: How does the discourse compare to Benoit's typology of image restoration (1995)?

Secondly, this research considers how winning is defined through the losing coach's speech. This study considers the redefinition of the loss, as described by Llewellyn, and the reduction of offensiveness, as outlined by Benoit, for an investigation of the way American culture is shaped by the discourse on achievement (Vande Berg & Trujillo, 1989; Benoit, 1995, Llewellyn, 2003). If winning is indeed the ultimate goal and

societal pressures are regulating the way coaches account for each loss, one would expect similar narratives and themes evident in the press conferences. The audience that views these post-game press conferences on the Internet may be more prone to watch press conferences that reinforce their own stance within the “extended family” or the clips may garner a greater audience when they seemingly differ from expectations (Kruse, 1981).

RQ2a: How do losing coaches define victory in losing game press conferences?

RQ2b: Which press conferences are viewed most often by viewers?

Finally, a look at the coaches themselves will be conducted in order to begin to account for individual differences and a multitude of rhetorical situations, as well as to look at the possibility that teams stress dissimilar themes (Bitzer, 1968; Kruse, 1981b; Meyer, 2007).

RQ3a: Does coach rhetoric following a loss depend primarily on the game situation or the coach? Is it a combination of factors?

RQ3b: Do coaches continue discursive themes from week to week and are explanations similar week-to-week?

CHAPTER 2: METHOD

Overview

This chapter defines the methods used to answer the proposed research questions. This study examined losing coach rhetoric from the 2009 National Football League season, where coaches are mandated to provide post-game press conferences. Thousands of viewers watch the post-game press conferences with an even larger audience seeing snippets of these press conference clips that pervade sports shows throughout a workweek during the NFL season. In order to gain an understanding of this study, the overall NFL season will be discussed first, followed by an overview of each game's obligatory post-game press conference set-up.

In the NFL, all 32 teams compete in 16 regular season games with one bye week beginning when the official season kicks off in September. Upon the conclusion of the NFL's regular 17 weeks of action, each team's overall record and regular season performance determine if the team's season ends after 16 games or if the team has an opportunity to vie for a Super Bowl victory in the NFL's championship game after advancing through the playoffs.

The 32 NFL teams are evenly divided into the American Football Conference (AFC) and National Football Conference (NFC) with four divisions in each conference. All eight division winners of the regular season advance to the single-elimination playoffs, in addition to two "wild card" teams from each conference based on win-loss record (and additional factors if two or more wild card contenders boast identical season records), for a total of 12 teams advancing to the playoffs. In the Wild Card Round, the two wild card teams from each conference face off against the third- and fourth-ranked

teams in the conference, respectively (*i.e.* No.6 at No. 3, No. 5 at No.4). The top two teams get a first round bye in each conference. The second round of playoffs, the Divisional Round, is hosted by the higher-rated seed, and each remaining team competes. After this round of games, there will only be four remaining teams to participate in the Conference Championships. The winner of the AFC and the winner of the NFC games contend in the Super Bowl for the title of World Champions.

During any matchup between two teams each head coach is responsible for “holding a news conference after every game” (“2007 Revisions,” p. 1). The locker room will be opened to the media following the game as determined by the squad’s public relations department and mandated by the league office. Each player in the locker room at the time the doors are opened may be addressed by the media, unless otherwise indicated. For some prominent players and for each coach, the team provides a backdrop, whether visiting or away, for members of the organization to stand in front of while conducting a press conference. The coach addresses the media after having an opportunity to speak with his team shortly following the contest. With ample distance separating opponents’ locker rooms in an NFL stadium, both head coaches often speak to the media at the same time. The number of visiting and home media members and news outlets also allows for some flexibility, as media outlets can cover simultaneous broadcasts and interview schedules.

Numerous news outlets tape, transcribe and/or broadcast the head coach’s postgame press conference. Many provide a live feed as part of the outlet’s coverage of the team while others may edit the press conference down to a few sound bites. The league’s official Web site, *NFL.com*, is a blend of both styles. The NFL releases a post-

game press conference video for each team in nearly every contest. The video usually ranges from one to six minutes and features the head coach and oftentimes several key athletes. This official video can be viewed by any user with access to the Internet, and the viewer is not required to register on the site unless commenting or recommending the video (“Scores,” 2009).

As established, each NFL coach is obligated to address the media after a regular season game, no matter the circumstances surrounding the game (“2007 Revisions,” 2007). These press conferences usually open with a brief statement regarding the game’s outcome and current standing of the team. Following the opening statement, media members in attendance ask questions directly to the coach, who handles them in real-time. The press conferences vary in length depending on a number of factors including the number of media in attendance, the number of questions, the coach’s personality and current disposition, and the monitoring of the team’s Sports Information Director (a public relations professional).

Data Collection

During the 2009-2010 season, each coach’s press conference was posted on the NFL’s official Web site, NFL.com, in multiple areas to increase accessibility. The video from each press conference usually was posted the day of the event and edited down to quotes solely by the head coach and one additional individual athlete – often the starting quarterback - depending on the discretion of the producer. The number of viewers and comments are automatically tabulated and listed on the page with the updated counts.

In order to access coach rhetoric, post-game press conferences from throughout the season were examined. The study was longitudinal across the 2009 season to test for

trends. The regular season lasted 17 weeks and the number of games slightly varied per week, contingent on the number of teams with bye weeks. For example, during Week 1, no teams had an off week. However, six teams had a bye during Week 6. As discussed in a following section, the press conference data was randomly selected and an accurate copy of the press conference text was obtained or created and confirmed for accuracy.

Matchups from each week were selected using a random number generator available at *Random.org* and accessed on March 4, 2010. A list of random numbers was generated, ranging from numbers 1 through 16 representing each game if all 32 teams were in action during one particular week. Each of the numbers represented a matchup on the NFL.com “Scores” page for each week. To determine which press conferences would be analyzed, the generated numbers served as indicators of which matchup and losing head coach rhetoric to analyze, selecting two games for each week.³ The quotes provided by the head coach were then transcribed. Also, to determine whether the regular season press conference themes differed from the playoff themes, all of the head coaches of the teams that lost in the playoffs, in addition to the randomly selected regular season games, were considered. For the entire list of press conferences analyzed, please see Appendix A.

Several issues arose during data collection but were resolved prior to data analysis. First, transcripts of the press conference were not always readily available. When copies were posted online, the accuracy of the quotes varied depending on the organization that was transcribing and posting the quotes. It became apparent that teams’ public relations staffs differ greatly in the precision of the reproduction of post-game press conferences. Many organizations do not always write down and report word-for-word what the coach

³ For example, the first number that was generated by Random.org was “8.” The eighth game listed on the “Scores” webpage for Week 1 on NFL.com, reading left to right, was a Minnesota Vikings’ 34-20 victory over the Cleveland Browns.

said. Also, the quotes provided were not always the quotes utilized in the NFL.com film. To combat the issue of availability, the coach's words from each press conference not searchable online were transcribed by the researcher. After transcribing the entire clip verbatim from the NFL.com video, the press conference clip was then listened to at real speed while the coder read along with the recently-notated transcript to ensure accuracy. In a similar process, when copies of the press conference were available online, each document was amended until the transcript fully matched the clip word-for-word. This procedure was repeated for all 45 transcripts ($n=34$, regular season; $n=11$, playoffs).

Data Analysis

Rhetorical situations differed week-to-week for each coach, thus it was decided to independently analyze each clip. A content analysis was performed for each news conference, and a collective spreadsheet of the categorized data was organized. This spreadsheet encompassed data from all the units of analysis that outlined the game information, outcome, location, time of clip, time of entire footage and viewer count. Other categories included were: date of contest, overall season record and the distribution of press conference footage (*i.e.*, if coaches were the first representative to appear on the team's post-game press conference video clip). These demographics allowed for crosstab comparison of strategies and various game circumstances to help account for potential differences. First, the overall "coachtalk" theme was coded, followed by a more nuanced content analysis of each transcript (Llewellyn, 2003).

This study followed Klaus Krippendorff's (2004) agenda, beginning with the sampling of press conference data as outlined in the data collection portion.⁴ The unit of analysis for the primary theme was the transcript for each press conference. For the subcategory factors, the unit of analysis was each expressed idea. Once the transcripts were deemed completely accurate, each unit of measure was coded (see Appendix B for the coding scheme centered on Llewellyn's 2003 "coachtalk" theory). The sample ($n=45$) was then analyzed considering each primary factor and secondary factor. This reduced the data into manageable representations that allowed for inferences regarding coachtalk, therefore, answering the proposed research questions.

Once each transcript was completed and checked, the researcher coded the transcript for certain apologia themes. For the first question addressed in this study regarding what coaches say, a summative look was taken into what the losing coaches say and how they say it. The researcher began by watching the film while reading through the transcript provided. Then, the researcher indicated which of Llewellyn's four general categories of losing coach discourse was most prevalent throughout the transcript: deference, justification, redefinition or suffering (2003).

In order to test for coder reliability, a volunteer was given a brief description of each of Llewellyn's four losing coach apologia themes and then asked to code five random NFL post-game press conferences from Week 1. The primary researcher also coded this data and then the two data sets were compared. The overall primary codes were identical for the two coders. To ensure continued accuracy before coding the other

⁴ Krippendorff (2004) defines a content analysis as a "research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful matter) to the contexts of their use" (p. 18). In this work, he lists six primary components for a content analysis: sampling data, unitizing data, recording/coding data, reducing data to manageable representations, inferring from the data and context, and answering the research questions (2004; Muddiman, 2009).

90% of the data, the two coders discussed why they had selected each transcript and agreed to classify it into a specific category. Of the five units of test data, three were deemed as justification (Fox, 2009; Lewis, 2009; Schwartz, 2009), one as deference (Fisher, 2009), and the other transcript as suffering (Kubiak, 2009).

Using each press conference transcript and its content as data, a spreadsheet of coach rhetoric was developed. The four primary groups were based on Llewellyn's earlier research and combined elements of Benoit's image restoration theory (Benoit, 1995; 2001). Each of Llewellyn's four themes was found to encompass more specific themes when analyzing the sample data. To create a richer pool of data, more nuances were coded as part of the process. For example, the overarching theme of redefinition included additional subcategories such as "bolstering the team," "bolstering individuals," "minimizing the loss," and "demonstrating team resilience." Benoit's influence on this category is apparent (1995). He identified "bolster" and "minimize" as two of the tactics for the reducing offensiveness strategy, as Ware and Linkugel also had posited (1973; 1995; 2001). Furthermore, additional subcategories such as "moral victory" (Vande Berg & Trujillo, 1989) and "team importance trumps individual importance" (Kruse, 1981) were incorporated from prior apologia studies and included in the coding system.

The established coding system developed over several months. The first coding system, proposed on February 16, 2010, was performed on two measurable units, but looked at each question individually. After further analysis, it was determined to be a workable foundation but there were some areas that needed additional subcategories and a few areas needed to be pared down. The subcategories also needed clearer labels in order to make the study easily replicable. After several proposed coding systems were

fine-tuned, a more nuanced and encompassing coding system was selected on February 22, 2010. The greatest change from the first coding system was the unit of measure. It was determined that each idea spoken in the clips would be coded and analyzed for trends and themes in the study of NFL head coach rhetoric after a losing contest, not individual questions. This coding system would help to answer the first research question regarding reoccurring themes, Llewellyn's 2003 study and Benoit's impact in analyzing sports apologia (1995).

The second research question considers how a coach describes achievement and how, if so, he redefines success when confronting a loss. The overall themes for each press conference were identified and tested for significance to determine if "redefinition" was significantly prevalent. In terms of the volume of viewership, on April 2, 2010, the view count was recorded. The final game was played on February 7, 2010, so the 54-day time lapse allowed ample opportunities for aficionados of the sport and corresponding teams to view the video press conferences. The viewer numbers of each press conference begin to suggest what type of discourse is of interest to the viewers, building on the argument made by scholars such as Earl Smith (2009), Kruse (1981; 1981b) and Vande Berg and Trujillo (1989) that sport reflects society.

As Meyer (2007) and Ryan (1982) suggested, the idea of *kategoria* and *apologia* still needs be regarded as an ongoing process. One way to account for this process is to look at ongoing individual coach discourse, as posed by the third research question. Due to the analysis of the randomly selected matchups, several coaches had multiple transcripts examined. For example, Eric Mangini of the Cleveland Browns and Steve

Table 1: Developed coding scheme

<i>Primary "Coachtalk" Theme</i>	0	Deference
<i>Subcategories</i>	0	Opponent's Game-Day Performance
	1	Overall Skill Level (not limited to one contest)
	2	Strong Coaching/Decisions
	3	Opposing Team's Individual(s) Performance
	4	Storied Franchise
	5	Simple Congratulatory Offering
<i>Primary "Coachtalk" Theme</i>	1	Justification
<i>Subcategories</i>	10	Missed Opportunities/Execution
	11	Poorly Officiated
	12	Injury-Ridden
	13	No "Team" Cohesion
	14	Field/Weather Conditions
	15	Off-the-Field Distractions
	16	Evident Effort
	17	Exposed Mismatches
<i>Primary "Coachtalk" Theme</i>	2	Redefinition
<i>Subcategories</i>	20	Bolstering the Team
	21	Bolstering Individuals
	22	Minimizing the Loss (Transcendent Considerations)
	23	Team Importance Trumps Individual Importance
	24	Coach to Make Necessary Changes
	25	Moral Victory
	26	Improvement as a Team
	27	Individual Improvement
	28	Humbled, Wake-Up Call
	29	Team Resilience
<i>Primary "Coachtalk" Theme</i>	3	Suffering
<i>Subcategories</i>	30	Lack of Proverbial "Heart"
	31	Coach Stresses Disappointment
	32	Unsatisfied Team
	33	Team Errors
	34	Individual(s) Miscues
	35	Coach Mistakes
	36	Goal Not Achieved
	37	"I'm Sorry"

Spagnuolo of the St. Louis Rams had four analyzed transcripts in this study. The coaches who had multiple transcripts coded in this study were investigated to further examine the

possibility of ongoing coach discourse and specific game situations. This data was investigated to see if there was a correlation to the “progress” that Llewellyn refers to in his article on “coachtalk” (2003, p. 20).

The NFL has an undetermined effect on its spectators, as well as billions of dollars, so it certainly is time to consider the organizations’ head coaches’ impact on (and enactment of) American cultural understanding of success and accountability. The theories of apologia and image restoration discourse served as beneficial lenses with which to begin this exploration. The results of this study also raised further long-term questions to investigate.

CHAPTER 3: RESULTS

For apologetics and self-defense scholars, the need for additional research in this area is commonly expressed. This longitudinal study sought to continue researching an understudied population in order to examine key questions regarding coach apologetics. Through the theoretical lenses of apologetics and coachtalk, 45 National Football League post-game press conferences broadcast on the official league site, NFL.com, were analyzed (Llewellyn, 2003). The resulting data provided several inferences regarding how coaches defend the team and himself after a defeat on a national stage. First, the overall primary themes were analyzed, followed by the secondary categories of each primary theme. The final section of this chapter addresses each research question in detail.

Primary Themes

First, in order to test the hypothesis that the themes discussed by NFL head coaches following a loss will differ when analyzed in terms of posited apologetics theories, the primary themes of deference, justification, redefinition, and suffering were coded. The frequencies for each, including playoffs, were: deference, 4; justification, 13; suffering, 14; and redefinition, 14.

Separating the regular season from the playoffs, it appeared that deference was more likely to appear in the playoffs, while suffering was most often expressed as a primary theme during regular season post-game press conference transcripts.

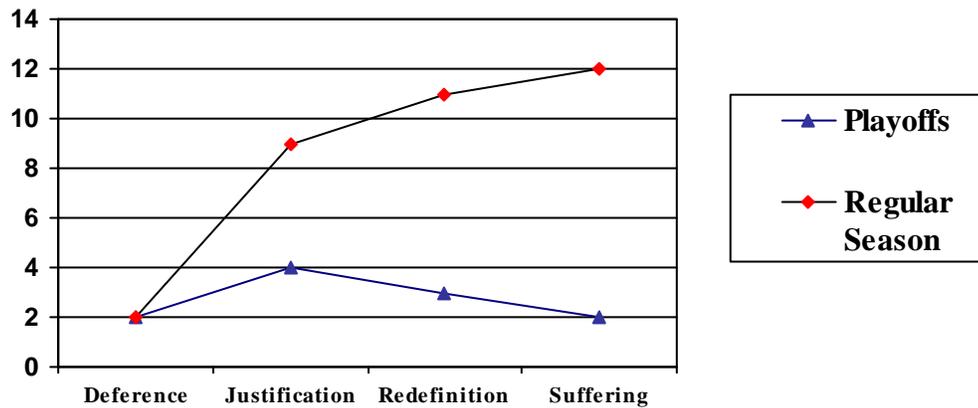


Figure 1. Frequency of primary “coachtalk” theme generated by press conference analyses ($n=45$).

Subcategories of “Coachtalk” Themes

Deference

In order to answer the first research question, the subcategories of each of the “coachtalk” themes were considered. While deference was examined as a primary theme in the coding process, it was also further divided into six subcomponents when assessing the entire video clip. The first subtype was identified as “Opponent’s Game-Day Performance.” This was coded when any mention of the opponent’s game-day performance was made by the losing head coach. For example, following Week 11’s New York Jets’ loss, head coach Rex Ryan deferred to New England, “They obviously did a great job and clearly they were a better team today” (Ryan, 2009, p. 1). Of the six secondary categories, it was the most prominently expressed sentiment with 71% ($n=32$) of the coaches praising the game-day play of opponents.

The second highest factor of deference expressed was “Overall Skill Level” for the opponents. It was reported any time a losing coach praised the winning team’s general ability, not solely limited to the game-day performance. For example, the

comment, “I mean Denver’s a good team,” by Dallas Cowboys’ head coach Wade Phillips in Week 4 was coded as an example of recognizing the overall skill level of the victor (2009, p. 1). This was used during slightly more than half of the instances at 51% ($n=23$).

“Opposing Individual(s) Performance” and “Strong Coaching/Coaching Decisions” were the next most often used categories. Coaches praised individual athletes 36% of the time ($n=16$), and the opposing coaches 24% ($n=11$). Opposing coaches would praise individuals, occasionally not mentioning them by name, for a variety of reasons, following the matchup. During Week 6, Tampa Bay Buccaneers’ head coach Raheem Morris spoke of a Carolina Panthers defensive team member: “Julius Peppers gave us a little bit of problems there off the edge at times. He made some dynamic plays,” (2009, pp. 1-2). Head coaches commended their peers in numerous ways, too. Spagnuolo of the St. Louis Rams praised the head coach of the Chicago Bears in Week 13. He commented, “...Lovie [Smith] does a heck of a job, so I credit them” (2009, p. 1).

Finally, the two least coded categories were “Storied Franchise” and “Simple Congratulatory Offering.” Simple congratulatory offerings basically indicated well wishes for the opposing team without further explanation, which only occurred 11% ($n=5$) of the time. “Congratulations to the Texans,” is one example, offered by Jeff Fisher, head coach of the Tennessee Titans (2009, p. 1). Additionally, coaches rarely praised an organization’s historical prowess or storied traditions. However, comments such as Spagnuolo’s “Coming in here, and being they’re still the Chicago Bears...It was a challenge – a great challenge” in Week 13 appeared in 7% ($n=3$) of press conferences (2009, p. 1).

Justification

Justification had eight subcategories coded in the 45 press conferences. Regarding frequencies, the most interesting result was that “Missed Opportunities/Poor Execution” had a higher percentage than six other combined subcategories in the grouping. Seventy-three percent ($n=33$) of coaches justified the loss in part due to a lack of execution by their own teams during a potential momentum shift or throughout the contest. Oftentimes, these comments were aimed to indicate how close the outcome was to being the entirely different. A prime example of a commonly lamented justification happened during Week 9. Gary Kubiak, the head coach of the Houston Texans, asserted, “But we had our chances. I mean we had two chances to win the game there at the end” (2009, p. 1). Nearly three-quarters of all head coaches expressed a similar type of sentiment after a team loss, pointing toward reasons that might have cost them the win.

Six other categories, with the cumulative percentage frequency of use less than 47%, were rarely indicated. These were: “Injury-ridden Team” – 13% ($n=6$), “Exposed/Exploited Mismatches” – 11% ($n=5$), “Field/Weather Conditions” – 11% ($n=5$), “Lack of Team Cohesion” – 7% ($n=3$), “Off-the-Field Distractions” – 2% ($n=1$), and “Poorly Officiated” - 0% ($n=0$). The remaining category, justifying the loss by pointing out the “Evident Effort” but it just not being enough to get the win, fell in the middle with 42% ($n=19$) frequency. An example of each of these is contained in the below table.

Table 2: Additional justification subcategory examples

<i>Justification Subcategory</i>	<i>Week, Coach</i>	<i>Percentage</i>	<i>Example</i>
Evident Effort	9, Gary Kubiak	42%	“I mean, I’m proud of our team’s effort – tremendous effort on everybody’s part.”
Injury-Ridden	Divisional Playoffs, Ken Whisenhunt	13%	“Obviously, we had some injuries in the game today that affected how the game went.”
Field/Weather Conditions	3, Mike Smith	11%	“It’s the first time that we’ve played outside, [and] it’s our first road game of the season.”
Exposed Mismatches	6, Raheem Morris	11%	“We were in eight-man fronts and they ran the ball right at us.”
Lack of Team Cohesion	4, Wade Phillips	7%	“But we’ve got to keep our team together.”
Off-the-Field Distractions	NFC Champ. Game, Brad Childress	2%	“I don’t think anybody gave a chance to come down here and be able to play that way.”
Poorly Officiated	NA	0%	NA

Redefinition

The 10 subcategories of redefinition incorporated several aspects of Benoit’s typology of image restoration, as well as dominant situational themes (1995). In order of frequency, with the highest number of instances first, the items of redefinition used were: “Team Resilience” - 71% ($n=32$), “Bolstering the Team” - 67% ($n=30$), “Team Improvement” – 31% ($n=14$), “Coach to Make Necessary Change(s)”– 29% ($n=13$), “Bolstering Individuals” – 24% ($n=21$), “Team Importance Trumps Individual” ($n=6$) - 13%, “Minimizing the Loss Due to Transcendent Considerations” ($n=5$) -11%, “Wake-Up Call to Humbled Team” - 7% ($n=3$), “Individual Improvement” – 4% ($n=2$), and “Moral Victory” - 2% ($n=1$) (Ware and Linkugel, 1973; Kruse, 1981; Benoit, 1995).

Table 3: Redefinition subcategory examples

<i>Redefinition Subcategory</i>	<i>Week, Coach</i>	<i>Percentage</i>	<i>Example</i>
Team Resilience	14, Mike Smith	71%	"It's a resilient group."
Bolstering the Team	1, Eric Mangini	67%	"I think there were some positive things. There were some things that we did well in the first half..."
Team Improvement	17, Steve Spagnuolo	31%	"And hopefully, I know the guys will, I know the coaching staff will, I know the organization will, will learn from the adversity that we went through this year."
Coach to Make Necessary Change(s)	10, Tom Cable	29%	"I'm looking for the guy who gives the best chance to win and same with every position – who gives us the chance to win by making the plays that are there for us to make."
Bolstering Individuals	4, Eric Mangini	24%	"I didn't even mention Josh Cribbs and the day that he had. Talk about a guy that wills the return to happen..."
Team Importance Trumps Individuals	12, Raheem Morris	13%	"...the only thing that matters is the result. Nobody cares who the touchdown was caught on. Everybody just knows that it was a touchdown."
Minimizing the Loss (Transcendent Considerations)	3, Mike Smith	11%	"This is a long journey, this is a 16-week season, and this is our third game of this season."
Wake-Up Call to Humbled Team	5, Mike Singletary	7%	"As far as the setback is concerned, I wouldn't use the word setback, I would just say it will be a wakeup call for some of our guys."
Individual Improvement	11, Rex Ryan	4%	"And the only way to do it is really – well, you can visualize it all you want, watch tape and all that kind of stuff, carry a clipboard but – unless you get out on the field, you're not going to get any better."
Moral Victory	17, Steve Spagnuolo	2%	"...after three and a half quarters, it was toe-to-toe with a good football team."

The categories of team resilience and bolstering the team were very prevalent in coach rhetoric. This study is reinforcing the initial findings by Llewellyn (2003) and

others, who posited that coaches would try to find a win in the loss. During the regular season, the idea of team resilience ($n=27$) was reported 9% more often than bolstering the team ($n=24$). In the playoffs, however, bolstering the team ($n=6$) was slightly more prominent in playoff loss transcripts than the idea of team resilience ($n=5$).

Suffering

The highest frequency percentage of an individual factor across all four primary themes was suffering at 80% ($n=36$). This often-used factor was coded when a losing coach would indicate “Team Errors” led to suffering. The range of team errors indicated was vast. For example, Smith of the Chicago Bears articulated how every area of the team was at fault in the loss at Atlanta during Week 6: “Special teams, of course, we had a couple bad plays with it. Just like we’ve won in the past with all three phases kicking in, we definitely lost and everyone contributed to it” (2009, p. 1). During other instances, coaches would refer to the team as one component. “Our players have to take their share of it as well. We did not play very smart today, so that’s basically what I say,” Mike Singletary said of the San Francisco 49ers after a Week 5 loss to the Atlanta Falcons (2009, p. 1).

Relative to coaches pointing out overall team errors, somewhat regularly coaches actually would indicate “Individual Miscues” were to blame. However, this factor appeared in 37% ($n=17$) of the transcripts, fewer than half of the times the loss was attributed to team errors. At times the coaches would refer to the player(s) by name or by position (i.e. “our kicker”). The same coaches who sometimes broadly referred to the team did not always avoid using individual players’ names. In Week 15, Singletary said of his quarterback, “I think tonight, Alex [Smith], he played poorly” (2009, p. 1).

However, coaches did not limit their critique to the members of the organization on the field. Twenty-two percent ($n=10$) of transcripts placed some blame on the coaches. For instance, Kubiak of the Houston Texans lamented in Week 1, "What do I take away from this game? Boy, not much. Just other than the fact that I did a poor job with the football team this week..." (2009, p. 1).

Another commonly used factor was "Coach Expressing Disappointment." This happened in 60% ($n=27$) of all cases. This component of suffering indicated that coaches would say items such as, "Well, I'm disappointed where we are as a football team," somewhere during the course of the clip (Cable, 2009, p. 1). Other factors for suffering included: "Goal Not Achieved" - 27% ($n=12$), "Unsatisfied Team" - 22% ($n=10$), "Lack of Proverbial Heart" - 4% ($n=2$), and "I'm Sorry" - 0%.

Table 4: Additional suffering subcategory examples

<i>Additional Suffering Subcategories</i>	<i>Week, Coach</i>	<i>Percentage</i>	<i>Example</i>
Goal Not Achieved	11, Jim Mora	27%	"But another goal was to get pressure on Brett [Favre] and besides from those two sacks early, we really couldn't get to him and it was reflected in his success today - four touchdowns, 22-of-25."
Unsatisfied Team	19, Norv Turner	22%	"You'd like to be playing your best games in January in games like this. And certainly we weren't."
Lack of Proverbial Heart	15, Lovie Smith	4%	"The game looked like one team was playing for something and the other one really wasn't."
"I'm Sorry"	NA	0%	NA

Themes Expressed During Press Conferences

The first research question (1a) aimed to determine if common themes were expressed by NFL coaches during post-game press conferences following a loss. The results of this study outlined that coach discourse varies a great deal depending on game circumstances but it was clear that NFL coaches do express certain themes and the data directly connected with the findings of Llewellyn's "coachtalk" theory of losing coaches (2003). This finding helps to answer the second research question (2b). "Coachtalk" themes prevailed in NFL head coach rhetoric following a loss. However, the results for this study did not indicate one theme was more prominent than the others (justification, $n=13$; suffering, $n=14$; and redefinition, $n=14$). There was no significant difference between these factors. However, the data began to show trends of deference ($n=4$) serving as the least-utilized primary theme, principally during the regular season ($n=2$). Due to the variability, the data speaks to the idea that coach discourse is very contingent upon the game situations.

Finally, in the third part of the first research question (1c), Benoit's 1995 typology of image restoration was investigated from a sports apologia perspective. Based on the established coding scheme, it was evident that certain components of Benoit's typology were critical to understanding coach apologia. For instance, "bolstering" was used in the majority of press conference footage (including team bolstering and individual boosting). Additionally, Benoit's typology subcategories of "minimizing the loss" and "transcendent considerations" were important to the redefinition coding. Coaches would indicate the loss was not an ultimate failure because there were more important factors to consider. Furthermore, self-defense scholars Ware and Linkugel's (1973) factor of differentiation

was apparent in this present-day sports apologia study. Its idea of placing the indiscretion – in this case a sports event defeat – in a larger context, was utilized by multiple coaches as they minimized a loss due to transcendent considerations. This also directly ties back to Ware and Linkugel’s fourth factor of transcendence. So while Ware and Linkugel’s initial work was not necessarily intended to encompass sports, it undoubtedly entails certain aspects of sports apologia, especially when considering Benoit’s typology and multiple factors in congruence with the other. Even from the onset of apologia, Ware and Linkugel (1973) were aware of the need to consider factors as nonmutually exclusive entities because these ideas could overlap. Building off that concept, during coding development for this apologia study it was determined that transcendence and minimizing the loss were primarily interwoven in coach discourse. For example, Smith of the Atlanta Falcons incorporated both aspects into one answer at the press conference during Week 3: “This is a long journey, this is a 16-week season, and this is our third game of this season” (2009, p. 1). Therefore, one coding subcategory encompassed both categories.

The investigation into sports apologia continued to expand and fine-tune Ware and Linkugel’s “necessarily ambiguous” factors, as well as examine Benoit’s typology of image restoration in the sports industry (1973, p. 281; 1995). This was necessary because multiple, dissimilar themes could occur in remarks of just a few sentences. For example, Jim Mora (2009, p. 1) praised an individual opponent while explaining how his team did not achieve a set goal during Week 11: “But another goal was to get pressure on Brett [Favre] and besides from those two sacks early, we really couldn’t get to him and it was reflected in his success today – four touchdowns, 22-of-25.”

Redefining Victory

There are many ways coaches find a victory in a culture that stresses winning; however, winning itself remains prevalent in the discussion after games. As Singletary shared, “But we came here to win a football game, and that’s the bottom line” (2009, p. 1). Many of the transcripts expressed this sentiment (see Appendix C). A coach may feel a need to show the public and organization’s owners that he is aware that winning is the desired and necessary outcome if he is to maintain his position as a National Football League head coach for more than one season.

While coaches certainly note the importance of winning even if their team is not doing so, there are indeed ways in which losing coaches do strive to find a win in almost every loss (Llewellyn, 2003). Further analyzing the “redefinition” results from the data demonstrate how coaches redefine their losses. Forty-two of 45 coaches, or 93%, incorporated at least one of the factors of redefinition in his press conference. Following suffering (100%, $n=45$), redefinition was the most recorded category. This phenomenon will be discussed at greater length in subsequent sections.

Viewer Statistics

The second part of the research question (RQ2b) asked which type of press conferences were viewed most often. In order to determine this, on April 2, 2010, the number of views to date for each clip on NFL.com was recorded. This allowed more than six weeks for every film to be viewed by the general public with access to the Internet.

The overall average for the press conferences ($n=45$) was more than 9,000 views ($\bar{x} = 9,053$). The mean for the regular season views was 3,622 ($n=34$), while the average for the playoff contests was nearly three times higher ($\bar{x} = 22,216$, $n=11$). The lowest

viewer count during the regular season was during Week 6, when the Tampa Bay Buccaneers lost to the Carolina Panthers. For more than five months following the contest, merely 356 viewers watched Morris address the media as Tampa Bay fell to 0-6 on the season and Carolina went to 2-3 (including a bye week in Week 4). Alternatively, the fewest hits recorded during the playoffs was nearly 20 times the regular season low ($n=7,024$, Marvin Lewis - Wild Card). The highest viewer count, despite being accessible online the shortest duration of time, was following the Super Bowl loss. Indianapolis Colts' head coach Jim Caldwell's press conference attracted 37,049 hits on NFL.com. This press conference clip lasted 28 seconds, tied for the shortest of all the sampled clips (also Patriots' coach Bill Belichick's Wild Card loss).

Coach Continuity?

The third research question investigated coach rhetoric following a loss and the variability from week-to-week. The plan to study this had to be amended, as the initial plan was to look at coaches facing a 4-game losing streak. However, after an investigation into this, it was determined to be too large and out of the scope of this particular project due to its prevalence and commonality. During the 2009 NFL season, there were 21 four(+)-game losing streaks in the NFL as outlined in Appendix D.

For the duration of this study, 12 coaches were randomly selected to participate twice or more. Of the duplicate coaches, nine of the 12 repeated the same theme at least twice. For example, Philadelphia's head coach, Andy Reid, employed redefinition as the primary category both times his transcripts were analyzed (during Week 10 and the Wild Card Playoffs). Due to the variability of the primary themes in the sample, this seems to indicate that there is a trend for coaches to repeat the same theme, throughout a season

despite the situation. However, much more analysis needs to go into this area of research as both game situation and the particular coach seem to play a pivotal role.

During the study, there were two coaches, Mangini and Spagnuolo, whose press conferences were analyzed four times throughout the course of the season. Mangini utilized two primary themes. Three times - Weeks 1, 8 and 12 – justification was the primary theme, whereas during Week 4, he used redefinition. Although his primary themes were somewhat similar week-to-week, it was apparent his message was determined by game situations. For example, in Week 1, Mangini chastised his team's second-half performance. Then, in Week 4, despite starting the season winless, his tone was very upbeat and positive about his team. "I couldn't be prouder of how they played and they competed through five quarters.⁵ I thought [there were] some great individual efforts, as well as some great collective efforts," he said of his team, which would go on to get its first win of the season the next week (2009, p. 1). Similarly, Spagnuolo's press conferences centered around two primary themes – suffering (Weeks 3 and 14) and redefinition (Weeks 13 and 17). This continued to demonstrate that both game situations and individual coaches impact the overall theme.

Another interesting result regarded coaches' discourse at the onset of the season versus its conclusion. At the beginning of the season, several coaches strongly emphasized that last year's season had no bearing upon the current team. However, near the end of the season, coaches often stated that the concluding season would positively impact next year's organization (in terms of experience, resilience, etc.).

⁵ In Week 4, the Browns lost to the Cincinnati Bengals, 23-20, in overtime.

Table 5: Examples of differing ongoing apologia

<i>Week</i>	<i>Coach, Team</i>	<i>Example</i>
1	Eric Mangini, Cleveland Browns	“Last year has nothing to do with this year. Next year will have nothing to do with this year, either. What we control is right now.”
2	Jeff Fisher, Tennessee Titans	“Again, we’re all about trying to find a way to win the ballgame now. That’s what’s important. That was yesterday. There’s no carryover.”
17	Steve Spagnuolo, St. Louis Rams	“But after tonight, we will get back together as a team – a lot of things we’ve got to do... And we’ll think about next year. And hopefully, I know the guys will, I know the coaching staff will, I know the organization will, we’ll learn from the adversity that we went through this year.”
Div. Playoffs	John Harbaugh, Baltimore Ravens	“But we’re not good enough yet. We’ve got to find a way to make our team better, and that’s what we do in the offseason. We’re going to work on that. You do that by the guys that are getting better, you go out and take advantage of the draft and everything else, and you do the best job you can to become a better team next year.”
Div. Playoffs	Wade Phillips, Dallas Cowboys	“We know what it takes to get to this point and we’ve got to get to this point next year, maybe play at home, and take it from there. That’s going to be our goal next year.”

The results of this exploratory study continued to build on key sports apologia concepts and theories introduced by Kruse (1981) and Llewellyn (2003). The first chapter discussed the foundational apologia theories and burgeoning sports apologia conjectures. Then the study was outlined and described, followed by the results of the data. Now, the final section of this study will draw upon all three discussed areas and outline the implications of this research study.

CHAPTER 4: DISCUSSION

Introduction

This longitudinal study considered National Football League head coach rhetoric following the 2009-2010 regular season and playoff losses. This chapter analyzes implications through the theoretical apologia lenses adapted by Kruse (1981) and Llewellyn (2003). Their work provided the groundwork for focusing on losing coaches' themes and the public's reception. To situate the losing coaches' post-game press conferences as apologia several canons of apologia theory, including Ware and Linkugel's 1973 piece and Benoit's typology of image restoration (1995), are discussed. Additionally, this study extended sports apologia research. The themes that emerged and potential areas for future research in this sector conclude the chapter.

Implications for Llewellyn's "Coachtalk" Theory

Llewellyn's "coachtalk" theoretical framework was foundational as the primary coding scheme examined his four themes of losing coach public apologia: deference, justification, redefinition and suffering (2003). Utilizing Llewellyn's four losing themes as a basis, a coding scheme was established and tested for trends and similarities. The results were provided in the third chapter.

Llewellyn's overall themes were coded with the similarities proving to be a more noteworthy find than the differences. The four categories clearly defined by Llewellyn made replicating aspects of his 2003 study precise and consistent. After coding for the primary categories, three groupings of results -- justification, redefinition and suffering -- ended separated only by one number, indicating the close balance of the three themes throughout the season. This finding refutes the idea that coaches provide 'stock' press

conferences, at least in the sense that content varied without one constant theme emerging as dominant. The slight reshuffling of the distribution of press conferences when the playoffs commenced further illustrated this point.

However, the fact that deference was the least utilized primary theme provides insight into coach discourse. Coaches may not employ this tactic very often in order to continue building team morale throughout a season. If a coach were to defer too often during the regular season, the public may question why the head coach recognizes skill in other teams but cannot capitalize on his own organization's resources, jeopardizing the head coach's job.

An interesting trend arose when considering the regular season in contrast with the playoffs in terms of deference. Once playoffs commenced, coaches more often deferred to the winning team. This could occur for several reasons. First, the coach may be highlighting what really is a stellar opponent or opponent's game-day performance. During the regular season, the schedule may have worked out that the losing team had not frequently played teams of the caliber they faced throughout the playoffs. Additionally, deferring to the opponent may be a more positive way to conclude a season than a theme such as suffering (which decreased during playoff press conferences). The head coach knows this will be the final time of the football season when he will be addressing the media immediately following a game and wants to end on a more positive note for his organization to move forward. He also wants the general public, team's owners and general manager to feel secure with him as the head coach. By employing game-day deference, the coach does not detract from what his players and the entire organization were able to accomplish during the regular season and into the playoffs. In the NFL,

advancing to the playoffs is no small feat, and the coach may wish to continue emphasizing that point for team unity and preventing offseason turnover – of both staff and athletes.

The nuances of the coding system and the distribution of the categories supported Llewellyn’s argument for the four basic themes of deference, justification, redefinition and suffering. Every theme in the 45 gathered transcripts was able to be coded as one of the four primary factors.⁶ The variability of the secondary categories that emerged out of the transcripts illustrated how diverse coaches’ responses are to the media, contingent on game situation and individual rhetorical preference, despite the four distinguishable overarching themes that prevailed throughout the data. No two press conferences contained the same elements of the working subcategorizations presented by the coder in this study (Ware & Linkugel, 1973).

The data from this study supported Llewellyn’s “coachtalk” theory but offered some additional insights into supplementary nuances. Llewellyn stated, “[O]nly a winner can acknowledge the incredible pressure to win. In a loser, this behavior betokens a defective attitude” (2003, p. 14). As discussed and outlined in Appendix C, while many coaches do redefine the loss, the importance of winning remained salient in the losers’ immediate press conferences. In Week 12, Morris said, “It doesn’t matter what the call is, [doesn’t] matter what we do, the only thing that matters is the result” (2009, p. 1). Llewellyn does note the variability amongst coaches with exceptions to each case, but with the regularity of the utterances about the need and pressure to win, this phenomenon

⁶ With the exception of five instances of themes not expressed in the coding scheme - with the majority of these occurrences addressing a timing issue - each concept expressed in the 45 transcripts was coded as part of one or more subcategories.

appears to extend beyond purely exceptions. The overall coach discourse variability further reveals the balanced nature of press conferences

Continuing Kruse's Sports Apologia Research

Kruse's research incorporated many areas of sports communication research and propelled coach discourse into the study of communication (1981). This study continued to examine several of her key concepts. Kruse outlined the idiom that 'the whole is greater than its part' as part of team ethics and philosophy (1981). The "team importance trumps individual importance" subcategory of redefinition was a direct derivative of this concept. Coaches would only occasionally employ this type of sentiment during a post-game transcripts ($n=6$), which was an intriguing discovery. After review, one reason this overt comment may not have been expressed often during interviews was due to the general, inherent underlying assumption that reinforced that the team is more important than an individual member of it. The fact that the head coach is addressing the public as a representative for the team may imply that as well. In all 45 cases, the head coach began the press conference, with 10 press conferences only including quotes from the leader of the squad. In addition, the idea that the team considerations are more important than the individual ones is demonstrated by the frequency of coaches bolstering the team ($n=30$) versus bolstering individuals ($n=21$). It also is made salient by the data that determined coaches lament more over team errors ($n=36$) than personal miscues ($n=17$).

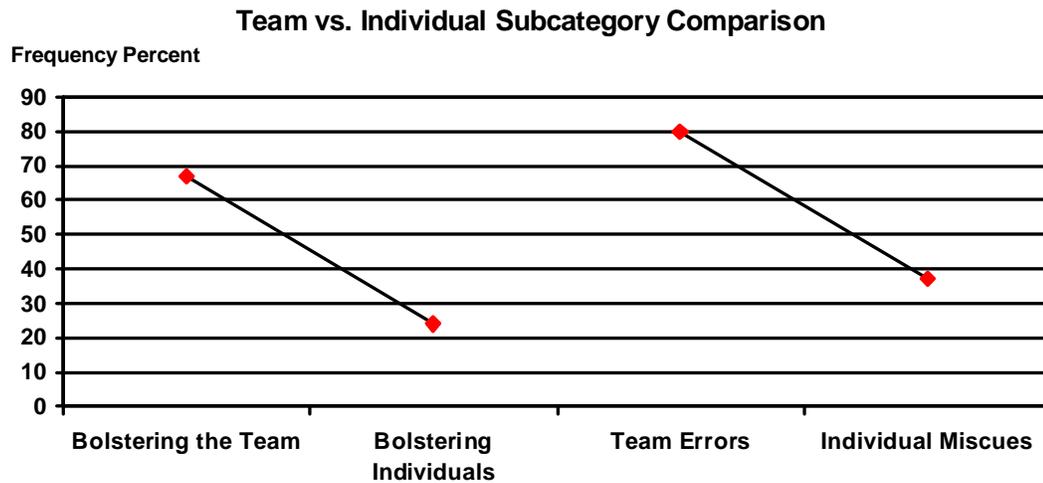


Figure 2: A comparison of team and individual subcategories coded in the 45 transcripts.

Furthermore, considering the view counts, winning remains what sells in American society. Kruse and Llewellyn discussed how winning is the ultimate goal and supersedes all other considerations for team ethics (1981; 1981b; 2003). This synopsis seems valid based on the data collected and analyzed with this study. As reported, the lowest view count during this study was 356 at the time of collection. That post-game press conference was given by Morris of the winless Buccaneers, as the Panthers picked up their second win of the season. The most number of viewers was reported following the Colts' Super Bowl loss, with the number who accessed Caldwell's interview reaching 37,049 (more than 100 times greater than that of Morris' transcript). As a whole, playoffs averaged higher numbers than the regular season. This could be due to the fewer number of games and the increased promotion, but also correlated to the teams' winning patterns and overall success. Vande Berg and Trujillo (1989) posited that the winning narrative is prominent in American sport and that an excessive amount of attention is awarded to the victors. This summation, when coupled with the data results, answers the final portion of

the second research question. Coaches redefine losses into victories because that is what the target fan base seeks.

Additionally, the fewer views for the losses also relates to Kruse's (1981) discussion of sports as a secular religion to some members of the general public. People may consciously or subconsciously wish to avoid more emotionally taxing situations after a loss. Eventually, the number of losses and disheartening situations can lead fans to completely disregard a team, of which they once were an aficionado, and not voluntarily engage in further time investment with that organization. This would cause a fewer number of hits for struggling teams, while possibly reflecting more views for the winners as fans trade allegiances to a winning squad in order to be able to associate with the victors.

Implications for Prior Apologia Theories

Ware and Linkugel's signature piece discussed two factors, differentiation and transcendence, which were salient when reviewing the NFL coaches' transcripts (1973). Ware and Linkugel's (1973) factor of differentiation was apparent in the present-day sports apologia. The concept of placing the indiscretion -- in this case a loss -- in a larger context, was utilized by multiple coaches as they minimized a loss due to transcendent considerations. This also directly ties back to Ware and Linkugel's fourth factor of transcendence. So while Ware and Linkugel's initial work was not initially published particularly to encompass sports, it undoubtedly can account for certain aspects of sports apologia. However, certain factors, such as denial, are missing altogether from the losing coaches' post-game apologia, demonstrating Ware and Linkugel's initial theory (1973) is insufficient for the study of sports communication. The investigation into sports apologia

continued to expand and fine-tune Ware and Linkugel’s “necessarily ambiguous” factors as the researchers sought additional exploration of this area (p. 281).

One researcher who aptly responded to Kruse’s entreaty for more research into this murky territory was Benoit. In order to continue answering critics’ questions regarding sport apologia as a true form of self-defense apologia, the study investigated how Benoit’s typology of image restoration (1995) was practiced during post-game press conferences. The summative data showed that Benoit’s typology added a richness to the data, responding to the second part of the first research question. However, the information Llewellyn’s four themes covered could not have been reproduced by solely utilizing Benoit’s typology because sports apologia is unique (1995; 2003). Elements such as “bolstering the team,” “bolstering individuals,” and “minimizing the loss due to transcendent considerations” were direct concepts derived from Benoit’s typology that contributed to the understanding of coach transcripts. Not only was each of these apparent in significant portions of the data, but “bolstering the team” was recorded in more than two-thirds of the transcripts (67%), which ranked as the fifth-highest subcategory across all four themes.

Table 6: Subcategories most often utilized

<i>Subcategory</i>	<i>Primary Theme</i>	<i>Percent of Use</i>
Team Errors	Suffering	80%
Missed Opportunities/Poor Execution	Justification	73%
Game-Day Performance	Deference	71%
Team Resilience	Redefinition	71%
Bolstering the Team	Redefinition	67%

In summation, this study reinforced that Benoit’s typology of image restoration (1995) is an important research component for sports apologia studies, in addition to the

investigation of political apologia and organizational apologia. Benoit's typology provided supplementary insight into this study of sports apologia but would have had to be amended in order to truly encompass the entirety and variability of the data. Benoit's categories alone do not fully account for what goes on in sports apologia, particularly as corrective action and reducing offensiveness oftentimes intermingle in coach rhetoric.

Finally, Table 6 also attests to how coaches begin to redefine a victory even after a numbing loss. Team resilience is an area often touted by coaches when praising the team. While everyone, including fans, is negatively impacted by the loss, the coach already begins to publicly discuss specific plans for correcting this in the near future. Additionally, bolstering the team is prevalent in losing coaches' transcripts. However, while these two categories pervade the data, six other redefinition subcategories were reported in more than 1/10th of the data, including: bolstering individuals, minimizing the loss, team importance trumps individual importance, coach to make necessary change(s) and marking improvement as a team. The vast array of strategies and tactics that losing coaches employ to redefine a loss -- even when the loss was recorded just minutes earlier -- is quite remarkable. While the potential "occupational psychosis" (Burke, 1954, p. 38) of the coach profession impacts the need to address the wins in each loss, every coach demonstrates a unique strategy with his discourse immediately following a losing contest (Llewellyn, 2003). No two transcripts repeated the same combination of factors and secondary factors throughout the duration of the study.

Sports Apologia Furthered

Not only did this study reinforce prior sports apologia concepts, but the investigation into NFL post-game press conference rhetoric suggests several pioneering

inferences for the future of sports communication. First, the rhetoric of regular season contests compared to playoff matchups is examined.

Playoffs vs. Regular Season

Playoff losses and regular season losses are inherently different, and the disparity in apologetics between the two became salient with this data. As discussed, the primary theme of deference was utilized at a much higher rate during the playoffs. Only twice (6%) did deference emerge as the primary theme during the regular season transcripts. Alternatively, the two occurrences during the playoffs tripled (18%) the frequency that deference was utilized as the primary theme, comparing the different times of the season. The earlier sections outlined some of the underlying reasons why this may have been the case, such as ending the season on a positive note and truly deferring to a highly skilled opponent. Further investigation into the data yielded that the subcategories also varied when differentiating between the playoffs and regular season. For instance, the subcategory of a simple congratulatory offering appeared three times (27%) during the playoffs as opposed to twice (6%) during the 34 regular season transcriptions. This seems to indicate that head coaches see playoff victories as a unique accomplishment. It also speaks to the mutual respect that the head coaches of teams in the playoffs reflect for each other. Alternatively, the idea of a “storied franchise” never entered the playoff conversations of coaches; however, 9% ($n=3$) of losing head coaches in the regular season discussed the victorious teams’ storied history. Head coaches whose teams lose during the playoffs may principally be thinking of the present situation instead of considering the past. Both discrepancies indicate that head coaches during the playoffs deem the game as critically important and that is the salient item in the mind at the time

of the press conference.

Absence of Variables

The absence of certain themes posits additional conjectures about the apologia of head coaches following a loss. Coaches never expressed a simple, “I’m sorry,” in the transcripts, nor did coaches voice any complaints about officiating during a game. While losing head coaches do sometimes place blame on the coaching staff ($n=10$), including themselves, normally the acceptance of blame serves as a qualifier or is discussed in terms of a “transcendent consideration” (Benoit, 1995). Ryan (2009) of the New York Jets in Week 5 is a prime example of accepting blame, but doing so in a way that indicates this type of failure is rare and the ultimate goal of winning was still almost achieved:

I never had the defense prepared the way they should be. I’ll take full responsibility for that. I’ve never been involved in a game like that in my life. Our offense played tremendous, gave us every opportunity to win the game. (p. 1)

Singletary distributed the blame among the coaches and players during Week 5, “In a game like this I think our coaches, all of us, have to do a better job preparing our guys. Obviously, they were not prepared. Our players have to take their share of it as well,” (2009, p. 1).

When considering the data from this study, coaches hesitate to completely accept responsibility for a loss. This can be credited to several factors. First, the coach may not be, or at least personally feel, responsible for the loss. After all, the head coach has a full-time staff of position coaches surrounding him and contributing to the game plan and

execution, in addition to the athletes whose performance on the field determines the final score. Also, coaching changes are common in professional sports and the NFL coaches may subconsciously be trying to avoid direct blame for the loss and the anguish the fans felt because of it. This does not mean that coaches are overtly attempting to redirect blame for the loss. It just seems to point toward the fact that coaching is a profession, and head coaches are fulfilling a job responsibility by speaking in such terms at the press conferences and maintaining their job status quo. Head coaches seem to utilize the post-game press conferences as an opportunity to demonstrate their position as a leader of the organization and its members, as well as an effort to maintain this title, at the same time attempting to circuitously pacify the fans from around the globe that associate with the team and feel personal distress with each team loss. The fact that none of the 45 transcripts directed blame at the officials strengthens this argument for coaches viewing post-game press conferences as fulfilling a job responsibility. If a head coach were to blame the NFL officials for poor judgment, which does occasionally happen, the league office becomes involved and oftentimes the comments are followed by a hefty fine levied on the head coach who voiced dissent. By avoiding negative public discussions of the officiating, coaches respect their overseeing organization's rules, as any employee might do in every industry.

Lack of Extremes Explained

Numerous times coaches expressed that the season is comprised of many games and each of these games must be put into perspective. Even the head coach of the 2009 World Champion New Orleans Saints, Sean Payton, voiced this idea near the culmination of the season: "In our league, it's crisis or carnival, 'cause the stuff in the middle doesn't

sell” (2009, p. 1). Likewise, the secondary title of this work incorporates a quote from Andy Reid, head coach of the Philadelphia Eagles, which seconds this idea: “Listen, it’s never as bad as you think, it’s never as good as you think” (2009, p. 1). It appears that the head coaches use the press conferences to maintain a sense of normalcy amongst the organization and its fans, even at times when a string of losses threatens to unravel a team’s season and fan base.

Sports Apologia as Unique Field of Study

Is sports apologia different than other types of apologia? A major theme addressed in this study that underlies this entire investigation is how sports apologia serves as a distinct field of sports apologia, yet relates to established apologia theories. This relationship remains a discussion point even three decades after the publication of Kruse’s landmark sports apologia article (1981).

Previously, this study demonstrated how sports apologia developed out of apologia and self-defense theories. However, the results of this study began to indicate how sports apologia encapsulates components of these theories but the data of head coach post-game rhetoric cannot solely be addressed from an already-established apologia theory. Potential reasons for this include the argument that Kruse made regarding winning as serving as the ultimate salve to the audience which initially sought the apologia from a team or individual (Kruse, 1981). Apologia is needed when a team is losing but many doubts are eradicated and discontented voices are quieted when the team begins to win again. Furthermore, established apologia theories identified certain strategies such as denial to be common (Ware & Linkugel, 1973). Instead, in losing head

coaches' rhetoric, no denial narratives emerge. In sports, one cannot hide a win-loss record.

While the argument has been made as to why sports apoloia should be considered in its own area of study, this study extends this to posit another idea. Head coach rhetoric in professional sports serves as a discourse of its own. Due to the intricacies of its nature, constant public accountability and continually varying rhetorical situations, losing coach discourse materializes as its own division of apoloia.

Future Coding Schemes and Additional Research Areas

With the amount of information gathered from this study, numerous possibilities arise for future sports apoloia scholars. Furthermore, due to the nature of exploratory research, there are grounds to continue studying this type of rhetoric. Now, several of these possibilities are addressed.

In regards to this particular study, the amount of coding needed for each press conference yielded a relatively small sample size ($n=45$). Although many concepts were discussed and arguments made based on the data, it is important to continue researching the field of sports apoloia, in particular in regard to the public leader or head coach of an organization. Associated with the specific NFL transcripts, more research also could be undertaken to look at the other professional sports leagues to determine if the sport impacts coach conversations.

Another opportunity for supplementary research would be to undertake an extended longitudinal study of this same type. Initially in January 2010, the plan was -- in addition to analyzing the 45 press conferences -- to investigate coach discourse during losing streaks. However, after researching the number of NFL teams that faced one or

more four-game losing streaks during the 2009 season, it was concluded that this additional look into coach apologia should be conducted in a future study. During the 2009 season, there were 21 instances of teams facing four or more losses in a row (see Appendix D). To accommodate for all of these transcripts, the initial plan of study would have increased the sample size by more than double. The 107 total press conferences on NFL.com of teams with four or more consecutive losses could serve as another study in order to gain a more complete understanding of whether the coaches' themes changed over the period of the losing streak. Also advantageous to this field of research, another study could look at particular coaches over several seasons to test for trends. These opportunities for additional studies continue to point toward the necessity of prolonged scholarly research due to this field's understudied nature but prevalence to the national recreation industry.

Related to the investigative nature of the study, this study marked the first time that the specific coding system was employed. While it is based on established apologia theories, the subcategories were derived from a small sample of press conferences randomly selected during Week 1 of the 2009 NFL season. Coinciding with that, the coding system could be streamlined moving forward with the categorical system. Several subcategories were not reported during the data collection, such as a head coach arguing an official penalty called during the game, and could be omitted from future transcripts.⁷ Additionally, some categories could encapsulate other similar categories. For example, the researcher coded team resilience and bolstering the team in the majority of press

⁷ However, this could be impacted by the source of the data. The press conferences were found on NFL.com, so it could be in the league's best interest not to disseminate press conferences of that nature.

conferences but the underlying vein of the two components is similar and could streamline the data.

This study analyzed the overall themes of NFL seasons, primarily in congruence with the playoffs. For future research, while one season of results certainly provides insight into coach apologia, an extended longitudinal study could be more useful in ascertaining whether one theme becomes prevalent in certain situations. For example, with the collected sample, the percentage of the suffering primary theme was distinctly higher during the regular season than the playoffs, while the primary theme of deference increased in frequency during the playoffs as opposed to the regular season. More data and additional analysis is needed to build a strong argument for exactly how and why these transcripts differ.

As evidenced by the survey of literature and this apologia study, there are still many questions to be answered about the rhetoric of sport, particularly in the fields of apologia and image restoration. However, these efforts, such as this study of NFL head coach post-game press conference apologia, will not be in vain. Llewellyn surmises that “rhetorical analysis of sport will continue to repay scholarly attention” (p. 20). There is a need for communication scholars to continue to address how sports are making an impact on the general public, as sports infiltrate many aspects of Americans’ lives. This study summarizes the uniqueness of sports apologia and the need for more research, while incorporating Llewellyn’s coding system of losing coaches. However, his “coachtalk” discussion addresses winning coaches as well. One area to continue this research would be to do an intensive study of several coaches throughout the course of the season in order to pinpoint the differences based on game situations and personal preferences. The

study of prolonged individual press conferences could showcase the primary differences between winning and losing press conferences during a season. This could continue to strengthen Llewellyn's argument for the both the losing coaches' themes and the winning coaches' themes of elevation, humility, value reinforcement and suffering (2003).

In conclusion, as Llewellyn asserts, "[T]he reality is that, win or lose, fans do not want dry statistics, they want a sense-making story" (2003, p. 2). This study of NFL head coach rhetoric sought to achieve the same goal, yet further research is needed to grasp a complete understanding of the "sense-making" aspect of post-game press conferences across the professional sports industry (Llewellyn, 2003). Each study on this topic is making strides toward a comprehensive understanding of sense-making coach rhetoric but all of the nuances and unique subtleties that head coaches are forced to utilize make one item clear. Coachtalk certainly remains in a category of its own.

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Appendix A: DATA COLLECTION - COACH TRANSCRIPTS

<i>Week</i>	<i>Week 1</i>	<i>Week 2</i>	<i>Week 3</i>	<i>Week 4</i>
<i>Date</i>	Sept. 13	Sept. 20	Sept. 27	Oct. 4
<i>Matchup</i>	Minnesota 34 Cleveland 20	New England 9 New York Jets 16	Atlanta 10 New England 26	Dallas 10 Denver 17
<i>Losing Coach</i>	LC Mangini	LC Belichick	LC Smith	LC Philips
	Sept. 13	Sept. 20	Sept. 27	Oct. 4
	New York Jets 24 Houston 7	Houston 34 Tennessee 31	Green Bay 36 St. Louis 17	Cincinnati 23 Cleveland 20
	LC Kubiak	LC Fisher	LC Spagnuolo	LC Mangini
<i>Week</i>	<i>Week 12</i>	<i>Week 13</i>	<i>Week 14</i>	<i>Week 15</i>
<i>Date</i>	Nov. 29	Dec. 6	Dec. 13	Dec. 20
<i>Matchup</i>	Cleveland 7 Cincinnati 16	St. Louis 9 Chicago 17	New Orleans 26 Atlanta 23	Chicago 7 Baltimore 31
<i>Losing Coach</i>	LC Mangini	LC Spagnuolo	LC Smith	LC Smith
	Nov. 29	Dec. 6	Dec. 13	Dec. 20
	Tampa Bay 17 Atlanta 20	Houston 18 Jacksonville 23	St. Louis 7 Tennessee 47	San Francisco 13 Philadelphia 27
	LC Morris	LC Kubiak	LC Spagnuolo	LC Singletary

Week 5

Oct. 12		
New York Jets	27	
Miami	31	
LC		Ryan

Week 6

Oct. 18		
Carolina	28	
Tampa Bay	21	
LC		Morris

Week 7

Oct. 25		
New England	35	
Tampa Bay	7	
LC		Morris

Week 8

Nov. 1		
San Francisc	14	
Indianapolis	18	
LC		Singletary

Oct. 11		
Atlanta	45	
San Francisco	10	
LC		Singletary

Oct. 18		
Chicago	14	
Atlanta	21	
LC		Smith

Oct. 25		
Chicago	10	
Cincinnati	45	
LC		Smith

Nov. 1		
Cleveland	6	
Chicago	30	
LC		Mangini

*In London

Week 16

Dec. 27		
Tampa Bay	20	
New Orleans	17	
LC		Payton

Week 17

Jan. 3		
Indianapolis	7	
Buffalo	30	
LC		Caldwell

Wild Card Playoffs

Jan. 9		
New York Jets	24	
Cincinnati	14	
LC		Lewis

Divisional Playoffs

Jan. 16		
Arizona	14	
New Orleans	45	
LC		Whisenhunt

Dec. 27		
Dallas	17	
Washington	0	
LC		Zorn

Jan. 3		
San Francisco	28	
St. Louis	6	
LC		Spagnuolo

Jan. 9		
Philadelphia	14	
Dallas	34	
LC		Reid

Jan. 16		
Baltimore	3	
Indianapolis	20	
LC		Harbaugh

Jan. 10		
Baltimore	33	
New England	14	
LC		Belichick

Jan. 17		
Dallas	3	
Minnesota	34	
LC		Phillips

Jan. 10		
Green Bay	45	
Arizona	51	
LC		McCarthy

Jan. 17		
New York Jets	17	
San Diego	14	
LC		Turner

Week 9

Nov. 9		
Pittsburgh	28	
Denver	10	
LC	McDaniels	

(MNF)

Nov. 8		
Houston	17	
Indianapolis	20	
LC	Kubiak	

Week 10

Nov. 15		
Kansas City	16	
Oakland	10	
LC	Cable	

Nov. 15		
Philadelphia	23	
San Diego	31	
LC	Reid	

Week 11

Nov. 22		
New York Jets	14	
New England	31	
LC	Ryan	

Nov. 22		
Seattle	9	
Minnesota	35	
LC	Mora	

Conference Championships

Jan. 24		
New York Jets	17	
Indianapolis	30	
LC	Ryan	

Super Bowl

Feb. 7		
New Orleans	31	
Indianapolis	17	
LC	Caldwell	

Jan. 24		
Minnesota	28	
New Orleans	31	
LC	Childress	

Appendix B: CODING CATEGORIES

Primary "Coachtalk" Theme	0	Deference
Subcategories	0	Opponent's Game-Day Performance
	1	Overall Skill Level (not limited to one contest)
	2	Strong Coaching/Decisions
	3	Opposing Team's Individual(s) Performance
	4	Storied Franchise
	5	Simple Congratulatory Offering
Primary "Coachtalk" Theme	1	Justification
Subcategories	10	Missed Opportunities/Execution
	11	Poorly Officiated
	12	Injury-Ridden
	13	No "Team" Cohesion
	14	Field/Weather Conditions
	15	Off-the-Field Distractions
	16	Evident Effort
	17	Exposed Mismatches
Primary "Coachtalk" Theme	2	Redefinition
Subcategories	20	Bolstering the Team
	21	Bolstering Individuals
	22	Minimizing the Loss (Transcendent Considerations)
	23	Team Importance Trumps Individual Importance
	24	Coach to Make Necessary Changes
	25	Moral Victory
	26	Improvement as a Team
	27	Individual Improvement
	28	Humbled, Wake-Up Call
	29	Team Resilience
Primary "Coachtalk" Theme	3	Suffering
Subcategories	30	Lack of Proverbial "Heart"
	31	Coach Stresses Disappointment
	32	Unsatisfied Team
	33	Team Errors
	34	Individual(s) Miscues
	35	Coach Mistakes
	36	Goal Not Achieved
	37	"I'm Sorry"

Appendix C: “WINNING” QUOTES

Week – Head Coach

2 – Jeff Fisher

“And all our focus is going to be winning the next ballgame...”

2 – Jeff Fisher

“Again, we’re all about trying to find a way to win the ballgame now. That’s what’s important.”

4 – Eric Mangini

“It’s just difficult to lose at any point. It’s always difficult to lose one like this where it went as long as it did, fought as hard as they did and came out on the minus side of the ledger.”

5 – Rex Ryan

“And I know it’s the fifth game of the year and we’re still in first place but it just didn’t feel like it right now.”

6 – Raheem Morris

“Not good enough, obviously, because we didn’t get the win.”

6 – Raheem Morris

“The right way to go about it is to prepare this week and go out and get your first win out there in London. It doesn’t really matter where it comes, you’re looking for your first win...”

8 – Mike Singletary

“But we came here to win a football game, and that’s the bottom line.”

10 – Tom Cable

“Ran the ball well offensively, did not throw it very well at all – not enough to win and that was the reason for the change at quarterback.”

12 – Raheem Morris

“It doesn’t matter what the call is, don’t matter what we do, the only thing that matters is the result.”

13 – Gary Kubiak

“We just have to figure a way to clean up the mistakes that’s keeping us from getting wins. That’s more of our main focus right now than anything else.”

16 – Jim Zorn

“It’s hard. It’s very hard, it’s devastating to be 0-6 and not win a division game. I don’t know if I can ever remember playing – maybe in my early career – but it’s been a long time, and it’s awful.”

16 – Sean Payton

“Obviously, it’s a loss so it’ll be a tough one for us...”

17 – Steve Spagnuolo

“But the bottom line is we lost the football game and the season’s over and we were hoping to finish on a high note and weren’t able to do that.”

19 – Ken Whisenhunt

“You’re ultimately short of your goal which is to win the Super Bowl.”

19 – Wade Phillips

“It’s like the elevator falling all the way from the top. It’s tough when it’s over. If you don’t win it all, you haven’t reached your goal, and we did not reach our goal that way...”

Appendix D: 2009 LOSING STREAKS

Team, Consecutive Losses, Dates (Includes Bye Weeks)

Atlanta Falcons, 4 - Nov. 8 - Nov. 29
Cleveland Browns, 7 - Oct. 18 - Dec. 6
Cleveland Browns, 4 - Sept. 13 - Oct. 4
Denver Broncos, 4 - Nov. 1 - Nov. 22
Denver Broncos, 4 - Dec. 13 - Jan. 3
Detroit Lions, 6 - Oct. 4 - Nov. 15
Detroit Lions, 6 - Nov. 6 - Jan. 3
Houston Texans, 4 - Nov. 8 - Dec. 6
Jacksonville Jaguars, 4 - Dec. 13 - Jan. 4
Kansas City Chiefs, 5 - Sept. 13 - Oct. 11
Kansas City Chiefs, 5 - Nov. 29 - Dec. 27
New York Giants, 4 - Oct. 18 - Nov. 8
Pittsburgh Steelers, 5 - Nov. 15 - Dec. 10
San Francisco 49ers, 5 - Oct. 11 - Nov. 8
Seattle Seahawks, 4 - Dec. 13 - Jan. 3
St. Louis Rams, 7 - Sept. 13 - Oct. 25
St. Louis Rams, 8 - Nov. 15 - Jan. 3
Tampa Bay Buccaneers, 7 - Sept. 13 - Oct. 25
Tampa Bay Buccaneers, 5 - Nov. 15 - Dec. 13
Tennessee Titans, 6 - Sept. 10 - Oct. 18
Washington Redskins, 4 - Oct. 11 - Nov. 8