

TRANSFORMING THE IMAGE OF BLACK MASCULINITY IN THE NBA:
A RHETORICAL ANALYSIS OF THE NBA CARES PROGRAM

BY

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Abstract

This thesis examines the NBA Cares Week 2013 video as a rhetorical artifact that represents the transformation of the narrative of black masculinity in the NBA. I argue that the images in the NBA Cares Week 2013 video supplant the probability and fidelity of the narrative of black masculinity as presented in the Malice in the Palace brawl between the Detroit Pistons and the Indiana Pacers in 2004. The brawl violated the social contract between fans and players, necessitating the league to find a way to reestablish organizational legitimacy and redefine and preserve the brand of the NBA. Using Walter Fisher's narrative paradigm as a framework, I detail the NBA's shift to social responsibility as a productive strategy to recreate the league's narrative of black masculinity.

Chapter 1: Introduction

The Superbowl, arguably the most prominent and sensationalized platform in professional sports, provides fans the opportunity to watch the two most dominant teams of the National Football League compete for the season's top honor. While the quality of either of the team's quarterbacks or the strength of the teams' respective defensive lines are usually at the center of the analysis leading up to the big game, the actions and statements made by Seattle Seahawks cornerback Richard Sherman after making a game changing interception in 2014 are what amassed much of the attention. Sherman, who is known to be outspoken and highly competitive, made the "choking" gesture after picking off a ball meant for opposing receiver Michael Crabtree. This play changed the momentum of the game and ultimately led to a Seahawks victory, followed by a spirited interview with commentator Erin Andrews. In the postgame coverage, Sherman made very candid comments about the inadequacies of his opponents, and boasted of his stature as the best at his position. He was directly conveying an image of pride, superiority, and dominance on a worldwide stage.

The initial coverage of Sherman's statements spurred a firestorm of commentary from writers and fans that ranged from celebratory to scrutinizing, as social judgment was being passed on whether his behavior was on point for that highly emotional moment or a step too far. By some, Sherman was stereotyped and vilified as a "thug," which was mostly attributed to the fact that he is a black man who was born and raised in Compton, California, an area of Los Angeles County widely known for its gang violence and crime rate (Kurtzleben, 2011). Despite attending Stanford University, earning an above-average

GPA, and graduating with a degree in communication, Sherman became a polarizing individual.

His personality on and off the field gave game observers pause because his words and actions were deployed in a way that posed a threat to the game's palatability. Sherman responded to his critics by apologizing for his actions, but more significantly, presented the parallels between the seemingly radioactive "thug" rhetoric attached to his actions and other associated pejoratives like the "n-word" (Wilson, 2014) that are often attached to black male athletes who exude the characteristics of a ghettocentric logic. Ghettocentrism is defined by Andrews and Silk (2013) as a mobilization of stereotypical signifiers of the urban African American experience and associated aesthetics (including socio-spatial location, family history and constitution, and preferences for particular cultural practices, forms of attire, music, hair style, and modes of verbal and nonverbal communication).

Given the highly publicized debates about black masculinity and sports that followed his comments, Sherman's observation is one that is not only proven to be accurate across other major sports, but begs the question of how the organization that employs the player is to expected to respond to instances of ghettocentric black masculinity. My analysis examines the way that the NBA as an organization has responded to similar confrontations with black masculinity. It also seeks to identify in what ways the NBA embraces ghettocentric behavior and in what ways it seeks to neutralize it through the rhetorical strategy of narration. Thus, I argue that the images in the NBA Cares program's 2013 NBA Cares Week video supplant the probability and fidelity of the normative narrative of black masculinity.

Historical Context

In the National Basketball Association's 67-year rise as one of America's most widely patronized professional sports leagues, it has become recognized as an organization known for its rich racial and cultural diversity. Since 1950, when the league saw its first black players in Chuck Cooper and Nat "Sweetwater" Clifton (NBA.com, 2013), there has been consistent divergence from the significantly white origins of professional basketball. Before the Basketball Association of America and the National Basketball League merged in 1949 to create the NBA, both leagues thrived for decades as white-only organizations, as did the other prominent American professional sports of the time, football and baseball (Clark Science Center, 2013). Over time however, the growing racial diversity of the NBA necessitated a way to manage the way black men represented the league. Subsequently, as the number of black players in the league continues to grow significantly, rhetorical methods of image reconstruction are deployed by the NBA to confront the presence and representation of black masculinity. The intent of this study is to identify how images of black masculinity have come to exist and are shaped to be congruent with the standards of legitimacy for the NBA.

Contrary to the dominant norm of white masculinity that saturated the NBA from patrons to participants at its genesis, the league has expanded into a multi-billion dollar organization that specializes in presenting a palatable form of black masculinity for public consumption (Boyd, 2003). This league, which has been regarded as "the industry leader among men's sports for racial and gender hiring practices from the player up to the executive level" (Lapchick, 2012, p. 2) has become a beacon for other professional sports organizations to emulate. This status, however, has encouraged the need to restructure

the communicated image of black masculinity, a result of its current association with hip-hop culture and the elements of hyper-masculine, ghettocentric, and deviant expressions and behaviors (Leonard, 2006; Andrews & Silk 2010). This notion is particularly true because 76.3 % of NBA players are black, a significant majority of professional players, compared to 67% of the players in the NFL and only 8.8% of the players in the MLB (Lapchick, 2012). When manifestations of aggressive and ghettocentric expressions and behaviors emerge and threaten the livelihood of the NBA, the organization has an interest in responding to them in a way that communicates mastery in grappling with and smoothing racial issues.

As normative representations of black masculinity begin to take shape and suggest a negative dominant ghettocentric narrative of the black male participating in the sport, players hold the power of the league's perception in their hands. Because the league has initiatives and programs that extend around the globe that reach countless audiences and cultures, there is a vested interest in maintaining a racially competent climate and effectively responding to image crises (Dowling & Pfeffer, 1975). That racial competence can be appraised by evaluating a historic NBA event and aftermath that is typically situated in the context of race: the Malice in the Palace brawl between the Detroit Pistons and the Indiana Pacers and the subsequent establishment of three rhetorical strategies to redeem the image of black masculinity. The brawl, which acts as the exigence, justified organizational policies including of an increase in the minimum age requirement, a dress code enforcement, and mandatory community service. This thesis describes the method of counter-narration that the NBA, as a socially responsible, and profit seeking organization, has used to confront and represent black masculinity

with a method of community service through the NBA Cares Program. I evaluate the counter-narration of black masculinity by analyzing the 2013 NBA Cares Week video produced by the NBA.

To investigate the methods deployed by the NBA to respond to highly racialized issues within the league, it is important to identify some of the players and situations that shape the approaches and outcomes of these issues. Though the most recent confrontations with black masculinity have occurred before the backdrop of hip-hop culture (Ebanda de B'be'ri & Hogarth, 2009), the NBA has been mediating the image of black players since their emergence in the league. The 1970's and 1980's ushered in the panicked notion that the professional basketball was becoming "too black" and thus might be seen as too deviate, irresponsible, or lazy to adequately reflect the upstanding image of the organization (Cady, 1979). NBA Commissioner David Stern spoke to league efforts to grapple with racial image crises, saying, "It was our conviction that if everything else went right, race would not be an abiding issue to NBA fans, at least as long as it was handled correctly" (Maharaj, 1999, p. 228). Stern's desire to "handle" the issue of race "correctly" demonstrates an ethic of intentionality in creating and maintaining an organizational atmosphere of racial legitimacy however, what it means to convey racial legitimacy has unfolded in a variety of ways.

The most prominently successful approach I have identified to reconciling the image of black masculinity has been to view the history of black masculinity in the NBA as a story that has been shared with fans of the game. Over time the NBA has attempted to re-narrate the image of black masculinity and convey an image of black men who represent the standards and values of the league and of broader society. The NBA was

compelled by the need to be perceived as organizationally legitimate, to present a more socially conscious and responsible product to its fans and has done so by recasting positive visual representations of its athletes.

As systems, societies, and cultural studies have looked more deeply into the concept of masculinity they have discovered that is often more recognizable than it is definable. Because of its subjective applications, there is no way to collapse its variety of interpretations into a universal definition (Peterson, 2003), however the concept of hegemonic masculinity has been developed in the context of sports (Fitzclarence & Hickey, 2001). Appropriately, the culture that the sport is played in largely influences hegemonic masculinity, and Nicholas Trujillo offers its five components: (1) physical force and control, (2) occupational achievement, (3) familial patriarchy, (4) frontiersmanship, and (5) heterosexuality” (p. 291). This definition coupled with a racial analysis that discusses the way black players are encountered in the NBA provides an interesting lens to interpret the corporate, cultural, and social implications of black masculinity and the league.

To date, “Malice in the Palace,” a brawl that broke out at the Palace of Auburn Hills during an Indiana Pacers and the Detroit Pistons game in 2004, has been one the most intense confrontations fans and officials have experienced with black masculinity in the NBA. The incident, which originally involved players shoving in an intense game, eventually escalated to include violence against on-looking fans after a cup was thrown at players from the stands. Calls for the docility and taming of black masculinity resounded from entities of many levels and led to a search for the appropriate organizational response. Closely analogous to the Watts Riots of Los Angeles (1965), in which the

imminence of tensions boiling over was realized without much notice, the fight unfolded as the breaking point of years' worth of frustration. The aftermath of the incident necessitated an introspective organizational evaluation by the NBA that prompted the league to find ways to develop a brand of professional basketball to which the audience could relate. Beyond the facts of the fight, the unwritten social contract between the NBA and its patrons had been grossly violated (Grano, 2007). As a result, the NBA found itself searching for ways to both sustain its fanship and to extend representations of marketable black masculinity to spaces outside of the game itself.

NBA Cares

The NBA Cares Program, the league's social responsibility initiative, consists of a five-part approach to confront public issues including education, environmental protection, health and wellness, youth mentorship, and family development. Introduced on October 15, 2005, the 30 NBA teams and hundreds of league players committed to donating \$100 million to charity, providing 1,000,000 hours of hands-on service to the community, and creating 250 places where kids and families can live, learn or play over a five-year span. Since its inception, the efforts have resulted in \$230 million toward charitable, engaged in more than 2.8 million hours of hands-on service, and built more than 860 places for community use ("NBA Cares," 2014). While each team has individual community goals and causes based on the particular needs of their communities, all of NBA's endeavors fall within one or more of the following major programs: Coaches for Kids, NBA/WNBA FIT, NBA Green, Basketball without Borders, and Kia Community Assist. Some of their regular community programming includes

youth basketball clinics, holiday toy and food giveaways, and regular events with America troops.

The leagues newfound commitment to social responsibility is also accompanied by a rigorous public relations campaign that displays images of the players engaged in local and global community efforts around the world. Consisting of an assortment of short 30-second to one-minute public service spots that air multiple times during televised games, a well-developed league webpage with links to the efforts of individual teams, and a YouTube channel with over 150 videos, fans or sponsors are able, at any time, to be introduced to images of their favorite players or franchise organizations performing acts of service. In the videos, players are often depicted in intimate interactions with fans, smiling, laughing, or in the case of teaching at some of the annual youth clinics held across the league, focusing intently on the task at hand. Usually players are not only seen engaging in community service, but give their feedback on the experience, as well. While teams or individuals are individually recognized for their role in the effort, they all portrayed as representative of the mission of the entire NBA.

In addition to participating in charitable acts that meet the community needs of any average major city, the NBA Cares program has taken noteworthy action in the face of natural disaster and tragedy. Most recently events like the deadly typhoon in the Philippines (2014), the earthquake in China (2014), Hurricane Sandy in New Jersey and New York (2013), and tornado in Moore, Oklahoma (2013) have become opportunities for the NBA to lead efforts to bring those communities back together after such calamity (“NBA Cares,” 2014). While sizeable donations of various amounts are traditionally raised and donated to the cause by the league, the efforts usually include players, coaches,

and staff of the NBA participating in the action of the actual rebuilding process. The images of these efforts are often edited into photo and video compilations and added onto the platforms where the rest of the NBA Cares images are found, illustrating the NBA's commitment to support its communities, especially in times of tragedy and chaos.

My artifact, the NBA Cares Week 2013 video, a video of the year's outreach opportunities in review, portrays an assortment of players and teams working in various capacities to reach out to valuable people in their local communities. The one minute-42 second video, found on the YouTube channel of the NBA Cares (2013 NBA Cares Week, 2012) details the summer efforts of the league before the start of the 2012-2013 season. Stars from the Brooklyn Nets, the Washington Wizards, the Indiana Pacers, the Detroit Pistons, and the Los Angeles Lakers, respectively, are seen visiting patients at a local NY hospital, serving U.S. Veteran's at a luncheon in the nation's capital, donating food to hungry children in Indianapolis, recognizing members of the Detroit Fire Department, and mentoring children at a community center in L.A. Tied together in five short segments, it begins with an unidentified voice briefly narrates the mission and goal of the service week but is quickly replaced by the narrations of elite players: Deron Williams, Bradley Beal, Roy Hibbert, Greg Monroe, and Dwight Howard.

Emerging less than one year after the Malice in the Palace altercation, the timeliness of the NBA Cares Program worked to keep the tattered image of the NBA intact. The relationship between the league and its fans would remain fragile without acts of good faith made by the NBA collectively and players individually, presenting the ideal opportunity for the organization to reconcile its image after such a significant event. Developing and producing visual images of the players serving their communities

function as an effective counter narrative to the images of aggression and physicality that saturate coverage of the league, otherwise. By breaking up the action of the game with feel-good juxtaposing images, the NBA is able to reclaim control over the representation of its overall brand of basketball.

Theoretical Framework

In creating a counter narrative of black masculinity, the NBA was charged with the task of presenting players who aligned themselves with the social values held closely to the NBA. Demonstrating social responsibility is an important component of the NBA's quest for racial legitimation primarily because it allows a service-centered portrayal of players to transcend the urban, ghettocentric, hip-hop associations connected to black participants, making the NBA's images more palatable to a diverse range of viewers. The "good black man/bad black man" binary becomes a narrative misnomer attached to players as they generate attention through the media and unfavorable coverage. As NBA commentary demonstrates, there is a distinct power given to sportswriters and sportscasters to interpret race relations within the NBA and to frame and interpret behavior instantly to an enormous audience (Levelle, 2010; Hoberman, 1997). The NBA has combatted these characterizations by matching them with more acceptable and desirable images. Currently, images of social responsibility via acts of charity have become prominent representations of the black athletes in the NBA.

Community service has become a unique element of the NBA's credibility as a legitimate organization because it enables the league to exist in a constant state of response to exhibitions of unfavorable representations of black masculinity. The NBA

Cares program functions as a permanent counter narrative to incidents like Malice in the Palace because it allows patrons to "re-invest" in a story of positive black masculinity, regardless of isolated instances within the organization that challenge that image.

Because the programming and, more importantly, the way the content from this programming is presented to consumers, shows the league's most prominent players in roles of service and community building, the program functions as a built-in mechanism to mediate and reconfigure negative images. To demonstrate this notion, I analyze the 2013 NBA Cares Week video produced by the NBA, which displays many of the league's most recognizable players performing various acts of charity in their respective communities. The video is significant because it represents the rhetorical apparatus by which the league both presents black men as unthreatening and demonstrates corporate and social responsibility, achieving the necessary balance to achieve organizational legitimacy.

The purpose of this thesis is to analyze the ways the NBA uses the NBA Cares program to present a counter-narrative to dominant representations of black masculinity by placing a strategic focus on the social values of the NBA's community service initiatives. I argue that the images and rhetoric used in the 2013 NBA Cares Week video supplant the narrative probability and fidelity of normative images of black masculinity in the NBA. In the video, players are portrayed in less intense and aggressive environments like youth centers and banquet halls, serving and acknowledging others instead of being served and acknowledged, themselves. These images are a stark contrast from the hyper masculine, dominant and self-consumed representations that otherwise saturate league images.

Walter Fisher's narrative paradigm provides a theoretical framework to interpret the NBA's approach to reshaping the narrative around the images of black masculinity that pervade the league. Fisher argues the test of a narrative's normative rationality is based on perceptions of probability and fidelity, offering an explanation of the way the NBA uses these standards to improve the quality of the story it presents to its patrons (Fisher, 1984). Incidents like the Malice in the Palace brawl or even more normalized aggressive aspects of the game like dunking have placed a value on the standard of dominance, presenting an interesting binary to a sport equally known for its elements of finesse. The addition of aggression and assertions of power has supplemented the NBA's style manual, creating the justification for an alternative narrative to accompany and affect the inherent violence attached to the game. By drawing distinctions between the juxtaposition of black players behaving aggressively and black players doing various acts of charity in their communities, I present the binary in which the NBA's racial narrative exists.

In order to interpret the approaches the NBA has taken to achieve and communicate racial legitimacy, it is important to discuss the current ways black masculinity is presented and typified in popular culture. While the NBA has thrived on and praises itself for the diversity in the league, represented by both American and international black players, the league is most easily connected to negative portrayals of black masculinity that often pervade more positive characterizations (Andrews & Silk, 2010). Recently, scholars have sought deeper understanding of the convergence of black masculinity and professional basketball. Todd Boyd argues that basketball is "a stage where many of the social and cultural concerns relevant to issues of race and class in

America are performed,” enabling it to create and maintain many of the dominant narratives of identity that the consuming public believes to be true (2003, p. 7). The NBA, as a largely significant platform for black men to achieve and express themselves through sport, has become a preeminent space for racial and cultural definition. In the last three decades, the newer generations of NBA players have exuded a close identification with hip hop culture, but according to Boyd, this identification is situated in the context of performing for a mainly white audience and in a subordinated position to white team owners and league executives. Because black masculinity unfolds on a platform that is subject to be viewed through a “white prism,” he speaks to the way black masculinity has become something to be grappled with:

Perceptions about Black culture tend to override what the culture might have to say about itself. The mainstream often pigeonholes Black culture, forcing the culture to accommodate whatever perceptions might already be in place as opposed to allowing it to exist on its own terms and give off its own representation. (Boyd, 2003, p. 14)

In Boyd’s analysis, black masculinity is enacted in a way that is confronted and managed by the NBA. I agree with Boyd’s conclusion that players ultimately live out their identities on a stage to be interpreted and consumed by a patronizing audience. The thesis will explore the ways that a particular type of story plays out on the NBA’s grand stage and forms a narrative that the league buffers to line up more closely with its brand of black masculinity

The notion of black culture being filtered through a white prism is a common conceptualization of the process that black masculinity goes through to exist within the landscape of the NBA. Jeffery Lane suggest the league engages in a form of social gerrymandering that allows the NBA to profit from the association it has with black masculinity and hip-hop culture while simultaneously walking a fine line so that the league does not intimidate, alienate, or disidentify with white fans (2007). Lane argues that the NBA touts black masculinity with one hand and constricts it with the other:

The NBA is clearly guilty of having it both ways: it chastises players for looking or acting “too street” while it manipulates and sells their street-bred swagger for all it’s worth and cashes in on the celebration of its players and iconography in mainstream hip-hop. (Lane, 2007, xv)

He explores the downside of the colloquial idea that the league is “having its cake and eating it too” by looking to the Malice in the Palace brawl. As a result of this event, the league goes to great lengths to temper the aggressive and hyper-masculine hip-hop aesthetic with a more sanitized image of black men. I look to examine the way the NBA ameliorates these images by analyzing the more positive images of socially responsible black men in the 2013 NBA Cares Week video.

The responsibility of the NBA not only to confront the issue of race, but also to do so in a way that presents the product it provides to consumers in a positive light informs the need for organizational legitimacy. John Dowling and Jeffrey Pfeffer provide a conceptual framework for the analysis of organizational legitimacy and the process of legitimation through which organizations act to increase their perceived public suitability

(1975). They reason that organizations are perceived as legitimate when there is an established congruence between the social values associated with the organization and behavior that is acceptable to the larger social system within which the organization exists. The NBA, as a \$12 billion dollar operation (Badenhausen, 2012), takes conscious steps to ensure that the fans and corporate sponsors who generate its revenue identify enough with the brand to continuously invest in it.

The Malice in the Palace brawl is a unique instance to evaluate the way the NBA has sought legitimacy primarily because it has been the organization's most prominent threat to legitimacy in throughout its recent existence. Because the aftermath of the incident resulted in a significant loss of support and revenue (Martin, 2013), the NBA needed to respond in a way that repaired its tattered image and realigned the organization with the social values of the viewing public. In my work, I connect Dowling and Pfeffer's analysis with the emergence of the NBA Cares program as the assertion of organizational legitimacy. The service-oriented focus of the NBA Cares program becomes an effective way to bolster the morals and values with which the league wants the public to connect.

Daniel Grano furthers the examination of organizational legitimacy by analyzing the mediated discourse following the Malice in the Palace brawl (2007). By focusing on media coverage of the brawl that suggests how ritualized social contracts are negotiated in ways that normalize and disguise political inequities, Grano argues that the incident struck up a necessary discussion about contractual morality. Because an organization establishes an implicit agreement with its patrons, a serious incident like the Malice in the Palace creates strain and tension on the terms of that relationship. The culture of basketball is one that is hyper-masculine and aggressive internally however, the platform

of the brawl expanded that aggression from the court to the stands with fans. Grano's argument exhibits the dynamics of the relationship organizations have with an audience they depend on to exist. Ultimately, beyond the facts of the fight, an unwritten contract was broken. I work to isolate the rhetorical method of counter narration that creates the possibility to mend this violation of the social contract. I reason that in the breaching of the contract the opportunity for the NBA Cares program emerges as the ground zero of reimagining of black masculinity.

Specifically in terms of sports organizations that have a propensity for players to act violently, Joel Michael Ugolini investigates the responsibility that organizations like the NFL have to account for the behavior of their players (2007). Ugolini's work focuses on the recent history of NFL players' legal and behavioral missteps and the level of conscious determination that an organization has to make in deciding its involvement in a player's personal issues. He furthers his argument by determining that those organizations that take an active, not passive, approach to confronting the behavior of players have a superior strategy to sustaining a successful relationship between players, the organization, and the public. Players are as much representatives of themselves as they are of their respective sports organizations, complicating the lines where one begins and other ends. He also discusses the extent to which the league is liable for continuing to endorse players with records of past violent behavior. While Ugolini's argument is tailored more toward serious legal offenses like the O. J. Simpson trial (1995) and the Michael Vick conviction (2007), I to explore the way that the NBA confronts instances of violent behavior that occur within the organization. *The Malice in the Palace*, for example, put the Indiana Pacers organization in a particularly negative light with

professional basketball fans and commentators; however it has come to represent the league's standard in social and community care in the 2013 NBA Cares Week video. I argue that over time, the NBA engages in a counter narration of the black masculinity that the two fighting teams had exhibited, portraying its players as much less aggressive, violent, and hyper masculine.

The world is a set of stories from which people choose from in order to exist in a process of continual recreation thus, Fisher contends that people either accept or reject a story based on the judgments that they make about it. To make these judgments, people apply the test of normative rationality. Whereas Fisher believes that normative rationality is based significantly on probability and fidelity, I argue that the images in the NBA Cares program's 2013 NBA Cares Week video supplant the probability and fidelity of the normative narrative of black masculinity. The Malice in the Palace offered the public images of black men that not only threatened the physical safety of players but threatened the security of on-looking fans. The images and rhetoric attached to the NBA Cares program are strategically situated with the images of black masculinity that are displayed in the NBA to rearticulate the story of black masculinity as one that is invested in social responsibility. By displaying images that prop up the social values of the patronizing public, the NBA is able to establish legitimacy on a perpetual basis, with a built-in public relations mechanism that demonstrates a less aggressive, violent, and hostile black man.

From the historical and theoretical context and framework I have established, I proceed in the next chapter with an investigation of the Malice in the Palace brawl as the exigence that obliged a rhetorical response from the NBA to confront the persisting negative narrative of black masculinity. I support this argument by analyzing the incident

through Grano's interpretation of the social contract. In chapter three, I unpack Fisher's narrative paradigm to explain the transforming narrative of black masculinity by framing black masculinity before, during, and after the Malice in the Palace. This process will complicate the assumptions substantiated by particular elements of the narrative paradigm. Chapter four applies a rhetorical analysis of the recreated narrative of black masculinity via the NBA Cares program, specifically examining the representations in the 2013 NBA Cares Week video. Lastly, chapter five will offer concluding thoughts on this project as well as implications of the analysis on future investigations into black masculinity.

Chapter 2: The State and Story of Black Masculinity in Professional Basketball

As the number of black men rises to significantly populate the NBA, so does the number of instances where black masculinity becomes an issue inherent to the game. In a post-civil rights America, the black athlete has been constructed as a site of pleasure, dominance, fantasy, and surveillance by Euro-American idioms such as discipline, deviance, and desire (King & Springwood, 2001). Much attention has been drawn to the countercultural practices and behaviors of black players. The ghetto-centric aesthetic that accompanied players like Allen Iverson works to perfectly demonstrate the contradictory impulses of “Blackophilia” and “Blackophobia” that the decision makers of the league were tasked to balance as they sought the most effective and strategic ways to make representations of Blackness marketable and palatable to the consuming audience (Andrews & Silk, p. 1672). Iverson, whose historic career unfolded before a backdrop of controversy regarding his tattoos, clothing, attitude, and issues off the court, is symbolic of the type of images of black masculinity the league often struggles to negotiate. Thabiti Lewis reasons that, in comparison to players like Michael Jordan who represented the “good black man” by being tattoo-free, clean-shaven, and found professional business attire during games on the bench, Iverson projects a more “gangsta” image that automatically juxtaposes him as the “bad black man” (2008).

The Malice in the Palace

The good man/bad man motif forces black players into a binaried existence that tends to acknowledge them for fitting neatly into one category or the other based on the

way they perform black masculinity. For black players, as those acts become too urban, counter normative, or aggressive, they are deemed problematic and incongruent with the league's broader image. The Malice in the Palace, also commonly known as the "Basketbrawl," was a violent incident between the Indiana Pacers and the Detroit Pistons that functioned as the NBA's most direct confrontation with the negative implications of black masculinity. The Malice in the Palace, named after The Palace of Auburn Hills in Auburn Hills, Michigan, began as a result of a hard foul by Indiana Pacer Ron Artest on Detroit Piston Ben Wallace during a layup attempt in the final 45 seconds of a game that was essentially over with the Pacers in the lead, 97-82. Subsequently, Wallace responded with a two-hand shove, setting the stage for chaos to quickly arise.

This particular match up, taking place in November of the 2004-2005 campaign, was a highly sensationalized game for the beginning of the season because of the teams' last meetings at the Eastern Conference Championships a year before, where the Pistons won four games to two in the best of seven series. Winning four of the seven would have landed the Pacers in the final to face the Los Angeles Lakers. A chippy competition dominated by defense from the beginning, the intense game would decisively unfold in favor of the Pistons, who had a 13-point lead in the last four minutes of the fourth quarter. The altercation between Artest and Wallace caused players from both teams to engage one another, each defending his respective teammates, leaving Artest to slip out of the commotion and lay down across the scorer's table as the arguments ensued. While Artest's version of events suggest he laid across the table to calm down and remove himself from the situation, Piston's CEO Tom Wilson stated "Artest's action took away physical barriers, such as tables and benches, that normally separate fans and players,"

thus provoking and escalating the altercation (Abrams, 2012). Artest's "provocative" behavior was the lynchpin of events that were to follow.

As players from both teams surrounded Wallace at midcourt, some to calm him and others to exacerbate the commotion, Artest remained at the announcer's table, away from the core of the drama. As he lay there, spectator John Green threw a beverage in Artest's direction, hitting him in the chest and triggering in him an enraged response. Artest took off into the stands to confront the person who he assumed threw the drink, only to grab the wrong person. In an attempt to hold Artest back, a man in the stands suffered five fractured vertebrae and a cut on his head. Stephen Jackson, a fellow Pacer, joined Artest in the stands and began to throw punches in response to those throwing objects and threatening his teammate (ESPN.com, 2004). As more players from both teams ended up in the stands and fans spilled over onto the court, two fans are able to confront Artest, resulting in one being hit and the other being knocked to the floor as the Pacer delivered a powerful blow. Soon after, Jermaine O'Neal, another Pacer, stormed into that fight, landing a punch on one of the fans that was luckily dulled when O'Neal slipped on liquid on the floor. The three lone police officers in the arena intervened to control the scene as players, fans, coaches, referees, and other league personnel were all dispersed from the court and the game was called in favor of the Pistons.

Violating the Social Contract

The aftermath of the Basketbrawl brought criticism of the event from both within and outside of the league that significantly shaped public perceptions about black players in the NBA. Though most reviews of the incident place blame on both the players and

fans involved, there were very strongly expressed scrutiny and disapproval of the behavior carried out by the players. In a brief statement released by NBA Commissioner Stern on November 20, 2004, a day after the brawl, the entire event was decried as a poor reflection of the league:

The events at last night's game were shocking, repulsive and inexcusable -- a humiliation for everyone associated with the NBA. This demonstrates why our players must not enter the stands whatever the provocation or poisonous behavior of people attending the games. Our investigation is ongoing and I expect it to be completed by tomorrow evening. The NBA has taken the following actions, effective immediately: 1. Indiana players Ron Artest, Stephen Jackson and Jermaine O'Neal are suspended indefinitely, the length to be determined upon completion of the investigation. 2. Detroit player Ben Wallace is suspended indefinitely, the length to be determined upon completion of the investigation 3. Review of rules and procedures relating to altercations and security have [*sic*] been undertaken so that fans can continue to attend our games unthreatened by events such as the ones that occurred last night. (Stern, 2004)

After deliberating on the behavior of the players involved, the league penalized nine players with suspensions that totaled 146 games and over \$11 million dollars in salary lost by players. In addition to penalties from the NBA, five players were criminally charged with assault and sentenced to probation and community service. The punishments handed down were the harshest in the history of the league and were alleged to have been imposed to deter such egregious and aggressive behavior in the highest level

of professional basketball, especially as it was so largely dominated by the presence of black, masculine, ghettocentric men.

Black masculinity as a threat to the organizational efficacy of the NBA has been constructed in a multiplicity of ways. In the context of Stern, who was commissioner from 1984 to 2014, racial issues surrounding the integrity, appropriateness, and general marketability of black players were always an impending concern. When Stern took over in 1984, the league's image was in trouble. In his words, "sponsors were flocking out of the NBA because it was perceived as a bunch of high-salaried, drug-sniffing Black guys" (quoted in Maharaj, 1999, p. 231; Hughes, 2004). Because the emergence of black players in the league is perpetually emphasized by the rags-to-riches stories of disadvantaged black players gaining incredible wealth through athletic achievement while overcoming the dangers of poverty and violence, the racialized aspects of black masculinity in the NBA can go overlooked. The metanarratives created by this stereotypical understanding of black men allow people to ignore the racial issues that pervade the sport and its method of branding and image management. Thus, when instances like the Malice in the Palace happen, the black masculine behavior that threatens the sustainability of the NBA is mediated by white commissioners, executives, and managers that need to salvage their product.

After the brawl, the media played a significant role in negatively impacting the image of black masculinity in the league and the overall brand of the NBA. At the end of Stern's 30 years as NBA commissioner, he reflected in an interview on the most difficult event for him to manage during his tenure. His response highlights the Tim Donaghy [an NBA referee] gambling scandal, Magic Johnson announcing his HIV- positive diagnosis,

Ron Artest going into the stands after fans (Malice in the Palace), Latrell Sprewell strangling his coach, and Gilbert Arenas' gun-in-the-locker-room incident as significant moments of duress, but when he is asked about the toughest, he points to the brawl specifically because of the covertly racist disposition of the media:

"Each one kept my *[sic]* up in its own way," Stern said. "But the brawl that happened between the Pistons and the Pacers provided much of the media in the course of that weekend to use the words 'thugs' and 'punks' with respect to all of our players which to me is freighted with respect to what they're really saying and brought up visions of the way the media treated us a decade or more earlier." "As in being racist?" "Mildly, yeah," Stern said." (quoted in Young, 2013)

Though Stern stated earlier in his career that he hoped race would not be an abiding issue (Maharaj, 1999), the media were able to create a collective understanding of how an entire race of players were identified and represented.

It is important to note that while there was some, the detailed coverage of the brawl tended to look disproportionately at the player's behavior for going out into the stands, and less at the acts of aggression and instigation by fans. The fans most notably linked back to the incident's escalation are John Green (threw the cup that hit Artest), Charlie Haddad and Alvin Shackleford (both in altercations with Artest and O'Neal), Bryant Jackson (threw a chair), David Wallace (punched another fan), William Paulson, and John Ackerman (both for fighting). While all received restrictions and bans from the league and in some cases, criminal charges, what was less discussed in the barrage of "thugs," "punks," and "idiots" was the amount of previous criminal convictions many of

the fans had prior to the game's attendance. Green alone had charges including counterfeiting, carrying a concealed weapon, felony assault, and three drunken driving convictions, and he was on court-ordered probation from a DUI conviction at the time of the brawl (The Smoking Gun, 2004). Though his past crimes were easily discernible through any basic search, what was not made nearly as clear was whether or not his race and culture played a significant role in his action. The players were not necessarily afforded that same dignity, though most, if not all of them, had no serious criminal history.

The racial undertones become amplified once connected to the general criticism of sports journalist from across the country in the days following the incident. While some minced words by discussing the incident in terms of acts of "idiocy" and the "punks" involved with the brawl, others took the issue of race head on. Sports Illustrated journalist, Jack McCallum, commented:

Few connected to the NBA wanted to touch whether racism was kindling for the firestorm last Friday, but it was inescapable that black Indiana players were duking it out with mostly white Detroit ticket holders. That image will not sit well with those white fans who see some African-American players—lavishly paid, richly tattooed and supremely confident—as the embodiment of all that is wrong with sports. (McCallum, 2004)

In his statement, McCallum not only attaches the brawl to the implications it has on class and race in the league, but he also makes a significant link between the way the brawl impacts the social contract between the NBA and the fans and consumers it depends on to

make it a viable and legitimate organization. Similar notions from a columnist from the Denver Post suggest that the “violation of the social contract implied between fans and athletes...proves that a tendency to behave like an idiot is no bar to attaining a comfortable level of affluence. These were not cheap punks going after one another. These were expensive punks" (Grano, p. 455; Brown, 2004). From the identification of this failure emerged a pronounced justification for the prejudice of black players. By failing to behave in a way that disrupted stereotypical racialized expectations, selfish, pampered, and wealthy NBA players had placed themselves outside the official community and were unfit partners in the social contract (Grano, p. 456).

The Malice in the Palace operates as the exigence that materialized as a violation of the social contract by which the league was forced to confront what Stern openly worked to maintain as a covert and non-impending threat to its organizational legitimacy. The way that the NBA responded to the brawl and the criticisms of it would be crucial in re-establishing a brand of professional basketball that people would continue to support and patronize, especially after the chaos that ensued. Dowling and Pfeffer suggest that in order to be deemed legitimate, the NBA would be charged with the task of adapting its output, goals, and methods of operation to conform to prevailing definitions of legitimacy (p. 127). In light of the violation of the social contract between players and fans, the approach the NBA would take to reconcile that relationship would set the precedent for years to come. Furthermore, marketers know that brand perceptions translate into actions and practices related to the brand and, by sociological extension, we can assume that everywhere there are brand perceptions there will also be some set of practices informed by those perceptions (Hughes, p. 165). Because the league was so decidedly black, this

fact meant finding a way to decouple the problematic associations and expectations of black players and to reintroduce images of black masculinity in which fans would feel comfortable investing.

Chapter 3: After the Malice-Narrative Recreation

The marketability of black masculinity in the NBA is central to the direction of much of league's attempts to offer its product as valuable and legitimate to a patronizing public. Particularly after the Malice in the Palace, there was an imminent need for the league to develop a rhetorical strategy to facilitate the image reconstruction of the predominant face of the game: black men. In response, I contend that the NBA Cares Program, and specifically the 2013 NBA Cares Week video functions a specific rhetorical apparatus that functions to reconstruct the dominant narratives of black masculinity within the league. Because the arrival of black men in the league, dating back to the 1950's, has been accompanied by racist presuppositions that automatically "otherize" the identity and integrity of these players, incidents like the brawl magnify the disparaging perceptions of aggression and violence attached to the behaviors of black players. This otherization not only recognizes black players for being different, but seeks to demonize them for those differences.

Fisher's Narrative Paradigm

These disparaging perceptions negatively impact the NBA's credibility to consumers, necessitating an examination of the way organizations like the NBA engage and, furthermore, change perceptions of their products to reestablish legitimacy. To answer this question, I am inclined to evaluate 1) the perceptual image of black masculinity in the league over time 2) the Malice in the Palace as a significant confrontation between the white owned-and-operated NBA and players' black masculinity, and 3) the rhetorical strategies used by the NBA to reintroduce a less

damaging, more consumer-friendly perception of black masculinity. Walter Fisher's narrative paradigm as a theoretical foundation for analysis is a useful lens because it supports the notion that, similar to interpersonal interactions between individuals, organizations have the ability to convey a story to its audience and connect with them through that story. Fisher defines the narrative paradigm similarly to the rational paradigm as one way to tell the story of how persons reason together in certain settings (Fisher, 1987). In a setting like the NBA that is patronized by a diverse audience, mobilized by black players, and managed by white executives, the narrative paradigm acts as a unique lens to evaluate the way that these various perspectives interact with one another to create a common perceptual narrative of black masculinity. The idea of a perceptual narrative suggests that fans and patrons make decisions about the images and representations of black masculinity based on the way they are constructed by influences like the league white-dominant culture and the media.

A narrative, in this context, acts as a perceptual understanding of the way black masculinity has been grappled with in the league as the type of player has changed. Fisher explains the presuppositions that structure the narrative paradigm: 1) people are essentially story-tellers that engage in symbolic actions--words and/or deeds--that have sequence and meaning for those who live, create, or interpret them; 2) the paradigmatic mode of decision-making and communication is "good reasons" which vary situationally; 3) good reason is ruled by matters of history, biography, culture, and character; 4) narrative probability and narrative fidelity determines the rationality of a story, and 5) the world is a set of ever-changing stories that are chosen among to create a particular social reality (Fisher, 1987, p. 7-8). These presuppositions situate narrative as a paradigm that

crosses time and culture to communicate a metacode that posits a shared reality. The cultural convergence of hip hop culture within the NBA and mainstream America creates the conditions for a series of instances that work together to create a universalized perception of players that comprised the majority of the league.

The Transforming Narrative of Black Masculinity

Professional basketball's categorical association with hip hop culture, as a result of its saturation with young, urban, black men, has situated it in the crux of the dominant narrative of ghettocentrism. This perceptual narrative of black players took shape during the "image crisis" of the 1970's as a product of the racial pathologizing of them as habitually deviant, irresponsible, selfish, and lazy by an increasingly reactionary media (Cady, 1979). With the media's ability to shape public opinion, which implicates organizational strategies like sponsorship, advertising, and marketing, the presence of black men has had a unique impact on the cultural and commercial value of the league:

Many advertisers saw the NBA as a drug-infested, too-black league with dwarfish Nielsen ratings. Major corporations wanted no part of this game. Magic Johnson or James Worthy might sign a low five-figure sneaker deal, but that was it. Sponsors felt the NBA and its black stars had little value in pitching colas and cornflakes to Middle America. (Kiersh, 1992, p. 28)

The subsequent narrative reimagining and commercial resuscitation of the NBA came about through strategic interventions into the manner in which NBA players were represented to the American public (Andrews & Silk, 2010). The league has ultimately

worked diligently to weave particular acceptable notions of black masculinity into the fabric of the NBA brand.

Over time, the pathology of a “too-black” league has evolved into a more targeted connotation with an ultra-urbanized hip-hop culture that is commonly represented by symbols--both words and or/deeds--that are stereotypical signifiers of the African American experience (Andrews & Silk, 2010). The commodification of that experience for financial gain means the NBA has had to walk a fine line between demonizing some aspects of black masculinity while lucratively capitalizing on others. Because the NBA is marketed and managed with a “specific, if often tacit, goal of making Black men safe for (White) consumers in the interest of profit” (Hughes, p. 164), the quest for a lucrative payday season-to-season is a primary concern. Historically, Perry contends, “The love of black culture with the simultaneous suspicion and punishment of black bodies is not unusual” (2005, p. 28). Therefore, the ability to simultaneously accept and/or reject particular aspects of black masculinity allows the NBA to craft and re-craft a representative narrative of the black men in the league.

Former NBA superstar Allen Iverson represents a generation of players that significantly contributed to the antagonistic relationships between the NBA and black masculinity that developed in the 1990’s and 2000’s. Marketing Iverson’s image required finding ways to give even his most urban characteristic crossover appeal (Brown, 2005). For him and players like him, this appeal was crucial for consumers of the NBA brand because the overall narrative of black masculinity was in flux from the generation of race-neutral. All-American stars like Michael Jordan, Magic Johnson, and David Robinson had a more universal appeal, to an emergent era of players that represents a

new aesthetic and has redefined how the game is played (p. 66). In keeping up with the evolving representations of black masculinity, the league's approach to diversity management has been focused on offering a palatable brand and product to its most profitable demographic, the white middle class, an audience that does not readily identify with the urban lifestyle or experiences of players like Iverson (Hughes, 2004; Brown, 2004).

As the NBA organization remains a primary circulator of images of African American men for mass audiences, the incentive to make these images rhetorically malleable is substantial. Though selective, the league's embrace of hip hop culture has allowed it to culturally and corporately capitalize on representatives of urban communities that display counter-cultural hip hop aesthetics while still meeting the standards and demands to have a professional career in the NBA. This flexibility has resulted in the hegemonic practice of the NBA policing young black males who defy dominant expectations with baggy shorts, trash talking, "bling-bling," and hyper-masculinity (Leonard, 2006), as demonstrated by the dress code enforced by the league in 2005. The NBA policy states, "Players are required to wear Business Casual attire whenever they are engaged in team or league business" and continues by listing bans on articles of clothing that are particular to hip hop culture (sneakers, work boots, sleeveless shirts, shorts, chains, pendants, medallions, headgear of any kind, etc.), an inventory which clearly the taste targets young, black players.

To no avail, players like Iverson, Marcus Camby, and Stephen Jackson argued that the policy was unfair and "racist toward young black males" (Rovell, 2005, p. 1; Stein, 2005). It is also important to note that the dress code changes went into effect in

the season following the Malice in the Palace, situating it amidst an adverse climate for black masculinity in the league and as part of a process of sanitization. The dress code operates not only as an instance that contributes to the formation of the narrative of black masculinity in the NBA, but also a material attempt by the league to manipulate that narrative. Consequently, the dress code is representative of the NBA's ability to communicate a situational understanding to the fans about the league's standards on black masculinity justified through Fisher's concept of "good reasons."

While the notion of evaluating "good reasons" seems to arbitrarily rest within Fisher's theoretical interpretation of human connection, he directs focused attention to reason and values as the two major criteria. For the purposes of analyzing the reason and value, I want to identify the metric of reason and value used to frame the NBA's approach to black masculinity and, in this instance, specifically the dress code. The attempt to "correct" the perceptual narrative of black masculinity through initiatives like the dress code can be viewed as a strategic move to buffer the image of black players, within reason. In interviews about the enforcement of the dress code changes, Commissioner Stern adamantly defends the new policy by denying the notion that it is being implemented to police black players or meet corporate interest, but rather it is a collective organizational move to increase uniformity. He also justifies the reasonability of the changes by pointing to the standard practice of credible businesses to enforce some iteration of a dress code, debunking the conception that the NBA was making an unusual or unreasonable demand (Wise, 2005). Modifications to the aesthetic of the black players can arguably be seen as an attempt by the NBA to maintain the profitability of black

masculinity by controlling the elements of ghettocentric, hip hop culture that may negatively influence the public's perception of the league.

Isolating the role of the values criterion also contributes to the shaping of the perceptual narrative of black masculinity in the league because it works to identify what elements of the narrative are being either forefronted or altered as good reason for fans to validate and connect with the shared narrative. While the NBA and Commissioner Stern at no point list a set of NBA values that directly or indirectly implicates black masculinity, Elliot Wilson, editor-and-chief of hip hop magazine lifestyle magazine XXL criticizes deterrence policies like the dress code that target the hip hop influence in the NBA: "It sort of allows the men in charge to think that they have reclaimed the NBA's value system -- and they now have a league that reflects their taste and what they believe in" (quoted in Wise). Because the vast majority of the "men in charge" are white and the players impacted the most by the dress code are largely black, Wilson's statement could be interpreted as an observation of the standard of white, dominant culture that serves as the foundation of the league's organizational and marketing goals. Maintaining that foundation is essential to providing fans and sponsors with the product they are willing to accept.

Policing People, Rejecting Culture

The infamous Malice in the Palace brawl made a very significant contribution to the narrative perception of black masculinity in the NBA. As the game began to unfold more normally before the backdrop of hip-hop culture, the incident urged the league to take a closer look at the risk associated with commodifying the negative experiences

associated with ghetto-centric black masculinity. Hip-hop music, largely charged with aggressive and violent messages and connotations, is predominantly performed by and aestheticized through the lived experiences of young, urban black men roughly between the ages of 16-34 (Wood, 2012, p. 105). Similarly, the vast majority of NBA players currently consist of black men who range in age from 18-39, presenting a clear overlap in the image of individuals from this particular demographic (Leonard, 2006). This overlap, in turn, provided those who witnessed the brawl with a correlative lens to interpret the actions of the black men involved, in addition to implicating other black men in the league. The impact of an altercation of such magnitude on an international stage was readily apparent. Not only did it portray violence between black men but also toward white patrons with a powerful impact on the perceptual narrative of black masculinity.

Amidst an atmosphere that perpetually negotiates the racial coexistence of the dominant (white) and counter culture (black/hip hop), the Pistons-Pacers brawl animates the largest concerns within the spectator-athlete relationship; the negative outcomes of the black body's interaction with the white gaze (Ebanda de B'be'ri & Hogarth, 2009). Historically and beginning at slavery, the black male body has been reduced to an object to be commodified for its capabilities, placing it on display for the purpose of white fulfillment (King, 2004, p. 24). Though players are now paid to entertain white audiences, the logic behind the white fulfillment still abides, as demonstrated by the incident. During the altercation, a cup of liquid was haphazardly tossed in the direction of the court from the stands, resulting in the cup and the beer inside it, hitting an isolated Ron Artest. This action not only escalated the brawl, but expanded its scope from player-to-player to

player-to-fan, as three white male spectators were attacked by Artest and players Stephen Jackson and Jermaine O'Neal.

Similarly to slave rebellions, the brawl seemingly illustrated the outcome of the black male body lashing out as a result of that gaze and subsequent provocation. John Edgar Wideman describes this type of relationship as a contemporary slavery, in which black men have been "caged" within this notion of black masculinity. These long-standing representations of black masculinity and physicality are built on the animalistic representations of the black male body that have long been the site of white fascination, consumption, and fear (Guzzio, 2005, pp. 223-224). By painting the perception that the same black players who were captivating and enjoyable to watch in the game of basketball were also uncontrollable and unruly, the brawl tapped into a historical element of the narrative of black masculinity. Based on Fisher's interpretation of narrative paradigm, matters of history actively indicate the way people connect to the stories they are being told.

The image and brand of black masculinity in the NBA were in such a declining state that the league would be compelled to reconcile this issue after the Malice in the Palace. That task was made more difficult by coverage of the event by journalists and commentators. The accounts and analysis of the brawl operate to further shape the narrative of black masculinity by contributing inferences about the incident that present the story from additional perspectives. More simply, in telling a story about the way black masculinity functioned in the context of the Malice in the Palace, the journalistic narrative contributions thickened the plot. Writers were able to probe the racial issues unfolding for black men within the controversy by discussing the brawl under the guise

of hip hop culture. They did this through headlines reading “Hip-Hop Hoops Feeding Negative Stereotypes” (Powell, 2004), “Hip-Hop Culture Contributes to NBA’s Bad Rap” (Wilbon, 2004), and “NBA’s Problems Are Cultural, Not Racial” (Celizic, 2004; Leonard, 2006). These headlines, even with no intention of being overtly, or even subtly, racist can support an ideology of racism as they may unknowingly maintain the racist hegemonic framework of the society in which they were represented (Ebanda de B’be’ri & Hogarth, p. 93). In keeping with Fisher’s conceptualization of what factors shape a narrative, the criticism and decrying of the hip-hop culture though its association with black players in the league illustrates the idea that narratives are molded and manipulated based on matters of culture, or in this instance, cultural rejection.

Perhaps commentators disenchanted by the cost of hip-hop’s intrusion into the league, where fans “like pro game, not the players” (Whitlock, 2004) because of its “image problem” (Elmore, 2004) and its “punks and thugs” (Kindred, 2004) called for an organizational overhaul of black masculinity (Leonard, 2006). This overhaul would mandate a much closer negotiation of how players were allowed to represent the game. What makes the media’s role in shaping the narrative of black masculinity so interesting is the lack of vested interest journalist and commentators have in the overall perception of they write about. Writers typically have nothing to lose or gain based on the reception of the stories they produce. The communicative connection created through the narrative paradigm necessitates a sender and receiver of a narrative in order to evaluate its rationality, coherence, and overall communicative capacity, yet the media work as an external source of influence over the public’s acceptance of such a narrative. Though the creation, formation, and function of the narrative of black masculinity primarily takes

place between the NBA organization and fans and sponsors of the league, the media's cultural criticism of hip hop's contribution to the brawl lends additional context to the cultivation of that narrative.

As demonstrated by the media's calls for the NBA to respond to the recent surge in problematic representations of black masculinity, the league quickly assumed responsibility for developing more effective and productive tactics to confront the issue. With the exigence of the Malice in the Palace and the evolving narrative of black masculinity both within and around the incident, the league was encouraged to implement efforts to confront the negative attention, associations, and expectations of its black players. The initial material attempt to do this was through the implementation of the dress code in the 2005-06 season, immediately after the brawl. This form of brand renovation serves as a visual buffer between the black athletes and the hip hop culture with which they are so easily analogized, reintroducing players to fans and sponsors in a more culture-neutral business casual aesthetic.

While this strategy was welcomed by some observers as a productive measure in deterring the negative associations of the NBA with hip hop, it would generate major backlash from a number of players, league administrators, commentators, and fans for its gerrymandering and cherry picking of ghettocentric culture. Many argued that the specifics of the policy overtly problematize the lifestyles and identities of black players. Of the regulations, Iverson said, "They're targeting my generation -- the hip-hop generation... You can put a murderer in a suit and he's still a murderer" (Wise, 2005, p. 1). Iverson's statement suggests that the narrative interpretation of black masculinity in the league is incomplete if it is solely based on assumptions about how players decide to

express it. Further, Dallas Mavericks owner Mark Cuban, who dresses in t-shirts, jeans, and sneakers regularly while watching his team courtside, explains of the flawed policy, “Some in the NBA want things to work purely in a way they are comfortable with rather than understanding players, communicating with them and understanding how the players can bring added value by dressing to fit the customer, rather than dressing to fit senior management.” Cuban continued to explain the connection between the marketability of black masculinity and the dress code declaring, “If NBA TV ratings were higher, this never would have come up” (Wise, 2005, p. 1). Cuban’s statement acknowledges the generational, and subsequently, racial divisions among players, NBA management, and the fans and the way these factors are intimately connected to a perceptual narrative of the black players.

Although the dress code worked to refine the image of black masculinity, the accusations of the targeting and policing of black players worked to delegitimize the organization’s efforts to change public perception. Accusations of enacting blatantly racist policies as an organization would actively reinforce both the idea that the league itself was racist and that the association NBA’s ghettocentric with black masculinity was one the league was willing to refuse. In the context of narrativity, the NBA communicated contradictory messages about the coexistence of its brand and the players that influence it. The NBA essentially communicated a negative, and therefore objectionable, narrative of black masculinity to the dominant culture it attempted to reengage. While nothing about the dress code policy was amended as a result of the criticism, the NBA did not stop at that structural change in handling the brawl. The summer after the incident, collective bargaining meeting sessions resulted in an

agreement between the National Basketball Players Association and the league. In these sessions players agreed to two more mandated community appearances per season and a directive to sign autographs for fans after leaving the court during warm-ups (Wise, 2004). The strategy for formulating a more positive narrative of black masculinity seemingly went from initial efforts at positioning the league as the primary intermediary of the image of black players, to relying on the players to convey that message themselves, ultimately resulting in the NBA Cares program (Lombardo, 2014).

Challenging Narrative Probability

In the months following the Basketbrawl, the NBA rapidly unveiled its multi-faceted approach to the image construction of its black male players, including an intensely enforced dress code, a renovated minimum age policy that mandated all players go to college for at least one year before entering the NBA draft (Leonard, 2006), and the establishment of the league's new global community outreach initiative: the NBA Cares (McGowan & Mahon, 2009). Endeavoring to alter the brand of black masculinity through the NBA Cares program is a strategically unique and effective rhetorical strategy for the league, primarily because it releases back to the players the agency to cultivate the narrative of black masculinity themselves. Although the league's expectation for participation in community service is mandatory, it also requires the voluntary cooperation, commitment, time, and resources of the players to serve its purpose. Notwithstanding the racist trepidations regarding black masculinity in the league or the incidents that magnify them, the NBA Cares program represents a redemptive approach to narrative recreation that provides a nuanced understanding of how a narrative can be successfully redeployed. Fisher contends that people are presented with various

narratives from which they must choose in order to thrive within the process of human connection and communication. In the case of the NBA, the strategy chosen is inconsistent with Fisher's interpretation of a "continual process of recreation." Rather than depending on the logic of narrative probability and fidelity of black masculinity that had been expected to explain the thoughts, habits, and behaviors of black NBA players, the program enables fans and sponsors to connect with more palatable representations of black masculinity that challenge what spectators might have earlier expected from men in the league.

The conventional concept of narrative probability, what constitutes a coherent story, is rejected by the NBA as a meaningful contribution to the process of narrative recreation because the existing probable representations of black masculinity are the ones the league worked diligently to defy. Through the NBA Cares narrative, the stereotypical images of overpaid, selfish, individualistic, deviant black men behaving violently have been replaced by, if not at the very least juxtaposed with, images of humble, selfless, unified, community-oriented black men, contributing a more complex and complete look at the lives and responsibilities of athletes in the NBA. Photos and videos of players passing out turkeys at Thanksgiving and reading to students during a book drive are inconsistent with the allegedly ghettocentric behavior that was displayed in the Malice in the Palace brawl and the hip hop culture that allegedly informed it. This inconsistency however, becomes ironically beneficial to the league because it is predicated on the acceptance of sponsors and fans buying into an unfamiliar narrative of black masculinity. Among the many frames of black masculinity that exist, the campaign makes the audacious move to offer

the public a product with which it is unacquainted and then forced it to choose the best one with which identify.

Challenging Narrative Fidelity

Contingently, the notion of narrative fidelity, or whether a story “rings true” in one’s life is perpetually challenged by the way the community service efforts are portrayed to the public. Unlike the NFL, which partners with the eternal charity organization, United Way, and MLB, which engages more small scale and individual team endeavors, the NBA was the first major American sports league to develop its own community service initiative (McGowan & Mahon, p. 7). As opposed to a decentralized extension of the league’s overall purpose and mission, service became an integral cornerstone of the NBA. Additionally, the high level of frequency with which the public was made aware of the NBA Cares program and its service forces an interruption of the conventional and troubling representations of black masculinity that might ring true to fans. The placement of NBA Cares ads at the end of commercial breaks and at halftime allows the images of caring and socially responsible black men to act as an immediate buffer to images of hyper-masculinity, aggression, or violence that are inherently part of the game broadcast. The elaborately designed website and YouTube page that meticulously document the service work of the players allow for fans to actively recreate the narrative of black masculinity by seeking out more representations of the league’s black men doing positive and productive things in the community. Narrative recreation, in this context, occurs because the NBA is able to nullify what rings true about black masculinity by consistently supplanting potentially negative images with positive ones.

In the years since the brawl, the emergence of the NBA Cares program has altered the larger narrative of black masculinity in a few significant ways. First, the global reach of the NBA's service initiative has expanded the league's definition of "team." In the past, fans overwhelmingly viewed players in the league as "less as role models and more thuggish than athletes in competitive leagues" (McGowan & Mahon, p. 17) Now fans seeing images of players like Russell Westbrook and Carmelo Anthony leading disaster relief efforts in their respective cities that illustrate their reaching out to connect further than simply on the court and with people other than those they share a jersey with (Devine, 2013; Begley, 2012). The concept of corporate social responsibility reflects a "business's commitment to contribution to sustainable economic development, working with employees, their families, the local community, and society at large to improve the quality of life" (Allouche, 2006, p. 3), ultimately facilitating the idea that team should represent more than just the franchise one plays for. By fostering connections in the communities of the people where the players live, work, and serve, even if only temporarily, the NBA is able to reframe what is typically an inaccessible, multi-million dollar industry, and embed it into the attitude and morals of the host city.

Next, the images of players positively engaging with fans at service events work to restore the social contract that was broken as a result of the Pacers-Pistons brawl. In efforts to reconcile the broken agreement, the NBA Cares program operates in a way that communicates an organizational commitment from the league to fans that makes avoiding incidents like the brawl a conscious part of the NBA's product. It also reestablishes and reflects the players' commitment to honor the social agreement. Images of Jermaine O'Neal aiming a monstrous punch toward white fans during the brawl are

forever frozen in time, able to be recalled easily by searches on Google and YouTube. However, the also easily accessible photos and videos of players meeting and greeting white fans through the NBA Cares program create the conditions for all to believe that the social contract has been reinstated. Additionally, the athletes becoming more accessible to fans also demonstrates a reestablishment of the social contract. Building personal relationships with the people who make up the communities players play in offers a more personal connection to multi-million dollar athletes who these fans would likely not meet another way.

Lastly, the individual efforts of players to develop their own benefits, charities, and organizations to engage the community contribute to the evolving perceptions on black masculinity in the NBA. Shifting public opinion away from the categorical assumption that black players in the league are no more than “overpaid thugs” who are solely concerned with self-interest has opened up the opportunity to participate in efforts that improve the quality of life for people outside of themselves, but to also set the tone for community services in the communities they come from. For example, Caron Butler, of the Dallas Mavericks returns home to Racine, Wisconsin to have an annual “Bike Brigade” that gives bikes to youth, hold a back-to-school supply drive, hosts charity basketball games, and conducts free basketball clinics. Though it may have begun as a mandatory contract addendum, the players’ dedication and initiative to serve under-served communities without the instruction or knowledge of the NBA exudes the type of leadership mentality the league comes to expect from its players. Butler says of his acts of service:

“I think there are other guys out there doing it,” Butler told PBT last week. “This is something I’ve been doing since day one, since I got into the league. I probably just had a camera crew out after four or five years of doing it... after a while people just started paying more attention to what I was doing and understand that what I did was from my heart and I was passionate about it. That wasn’t just a once a year thing, this was something I was committed to year in and year out....And I do believe there are other guys out there like that.” (Butler, 2010; quoted in Helin 2010)

As more players take advantage of the opportunity to positively contribute to the communities they come from and play in, the narrative of black masculinity will continue to become more and more appealing to fans and sponsors who lead both inside and outside of the game.

Chapter 4: The Recreated Narrative

The implications of the Malice in the Palace brawl on the relationship between players of the game and spectators were placed under a microscope by figures both within and outside the league. Though the media's criticisms of the players and incident were unsurprising due to the tendency of the news to sensationalize events, the criticism from within the NBA presented a very clear disapproval and disavowal of the players' behavior. Commissioner Stern went as far as to suggest that a "social contract" between fans and players had been broken, compelling the league to search for ways to reconcile the breaching of the agreement. Social contracts, which are rhetorically constructed and negotiated for the restoration of order around the value structures of particular communities, are frequently employed as a public call to order. They often play a primary role in shaping popular notions of agreement on diverse issues, offering the organization an opportunity to resituate the terms of agreement, should a violation of expectations occur (Grano, 2007).

To redeem the social contract in the NBA after the brawl, players needed to demonstrate a reinvestment in their contractual expectations: to be athlete-heroes who perform as the main characters in mythic sports rituals (Real, 1977). The action-filled images of enraged black men, fighting through attempts to restrain them as their stretched uniforms hung from aggressively positioned bodies, were broadly displayed as stark contrasts to the heroic figures they were expected to represent. These athlete-heroes, who through their game rituals become bigger than the game itself, are anticipated to engage in exploits that remind fans that there can always be a comeback, underdogs can overcome the odds, and social problems like racism and poverty are not associated with

the fan culture of the arena. It is hoped that athlete-heroes will embody "many nonathletic aspects—leadership, clean living, moral purity, hard work, religious piety, suffering, and so on," illustrating the characteristics of the players that the NBA would prefer to have in the spotlight of its image as an organization (Grano, p. 449). The overall goal is to provide the audience with identifiable traits that allow them to connect humanity of the players while still maintaining them a hero-like state.

The video campaigns attached to the NBA Cares program act as useful mediums to construct and present images that are congruent with the social contract expectations of the league. Specifically, in the NBA Cares Week 2013 video, many of the league's most recognizable players are seen engaging in various acts of charity in their communities and speaking about what it means to be civically involved in the places where they work and live. The videos have become strategically useful for the NBA to reestablish the favorable image of its players by presenting them in situations and settings that are less aggressive and hyper-masculine than those existing on the court. The "Basketbrawl" that unfolded in the Palace at Auburn Hills is illustrative of a time when the extreme level of aggressive and masculine behavior that was displayed, necessitated a countervailing institutional response.

Grano argues that two particular crises emerged in mediated reactions to the brawl: a crisis of sports heroism and a crisis of ritual order (2007, p. 453). He also highlights the race and class identity gap between fans and players as an overarching theme throughout responses to the brawl, examining the rhetoric writers and reporters used to discuss the significant confrontation with black masculinity. Words and phrases like "idiocy," "punks," "ill-equipped to handle fortune and fame," "thuggish," "individualistic," and

“flashy,” among other pejoratives, were used to describe the incident and the personalities attached to it, leaving the NBA to engage and counteract those descriptions. Using the video, I isolate five major moral values that function as rhetorical contrast to the description and respond to the crises of heroism and ritual order that disrupted the social contract.

Black Masculinity Controls the Narrative

The first value presented in the video is teamwork. The video begins with a voiceover that explains the purpose of the community outreach initiatives that various teams across the league performed in their respective cities before the start of the 2013-2014 seasons. The goals of the initiative were two-fold, both to “make an impact and to recognize that we are truly on the same team,” advancing a broadened interpretation of what it means to be a member of a team in the NBA. By inviting the members of their local communities to feel and physically be more close to players by doing activities in places outside of the arena, franchises work to minimize and dissipate the degrees of difference between players and fans. The New York Nets visited the Maimonides Medical Center in New York, New York, and are filmed visiting with and signing autographs for patients. The contrasting images of tall, black, men visiting much smaller, frailer, and less physically capable people convey the idea that the spirit of teamwork transcends the court and can be found in places like hospitals where having teams of people supporting a cause leaves a significant impact on fans. Hospital CEO Pam Brier describes the players as “big, strong, so kind, and lovely,” using language that directly contradicts the idea that the black males in the league are “thuggish” or “individualistic.”

Brier interestingly discusses their size and strength as positive attributes that are just as valuable as their soft and charming demeanors.

The value of patriotism is also explored in the video, as the Washington Wizard celebrated veterans at the “Salute to the Stars” luncheon held in Washington, D. C. Donning white collars and bowties, players serve members of the armed services food and drinks, signed autographs, and socialized with them, personally thanking them for their efforts. Guard Bradley Beal says of the experience, “I’ve never actually served before, and to actually see all of these soldiers here and how they represent us, it’s just a way of us showing our appreciation for them.” Further connecting to the idea that the NBA affirms a larger notion of “team,” the video allows a transition from a focus on NBA teams to attention to an all-inclusive American team. Emphasis on acknowledging the efforts of American troops allows for league to attach the widely transcendent American value of patriotism to values directly connected to the organization. In this segment, the players seem to be excited about the opportunity to acknowledge the soldiers, presenting an image of selflessness and humility that contradicts the idea that they are “punks” or “ill-equipped to handle fortune and fame.” Rather, they were able to demonstrate that they are equipped for that type of status and lifestyle by acknowledging the people who sacrifice their bodies for society’s freedom, much like the players sacrifice their bodies to entertain fans.

This “by association” presentation of the players actively engaged in service is one that is found throughout the video but is explicitly discussed by Beal and again by Indiana Pacers center Roy Hibbert. At the Lilly Boys and Girls Club in Indianapolis, the Pacers participate in a food giveaway to community children through an organization

called “Second Helpings,” a program dedicated to ensuring that hungry children have enough food to eat. “To be able to come back here and serve food and interact with the kids is great. It’s an all-around great effort,” says Hibbert just before he is seen bending down to introduce himself to two young boys. As the criticism of the brawl articulated, many commentators were concerned that the highly compensated, overly flashy black male players involved in the brawl lacked care and concern for young children in their communities who are starving due to poverty. Signifying the value of service by providing food is a uniquely potent act in countering the perceptions of black players in the league because it presents the image that players are mindful of issues that are larger than themselves. Contrary to the idea that black players are excessively “individualistic,” which is especially problematic in a sport where games cannot be won by one person, players are displayed tending to problems that exist in the community where they work and live, proving that they are involved with more than just themselves.

Extending the idea that players are deeply invested in the communities they live in, the video exhibits the Detroit Pistons spending the day with firepersons at the Detroit Fire Department Headquarters. Placing particular focus on unsung community leaders, center Greg Monroe discusses the significance of recognizing those who do jobs that are given too little attention. “We enjoy coming down here, spending time with the people that risk their lives for us,” Monroe explains as he presents a Piston’s jersey to firefighters, embroidered with the name “Game Changers” across the back. Players are portrayed laughing and joking with the emergency responders as they do things like play a beat on the sirens of the fire truck and ride the ladder. While some firefighters may play basketball as a hobby, it is less likely to see professional basketball players in the

environment of firefighters, making the imagery of players going into their arena an interesting display. While both firefighters and basketball players risk personal safety to meet the task of their occupations, the risk and danger associated with responding to emergency situations is exponentially more imminent than it would be to dive for a loose ball. The display shows the permeability of the league and its partnerships with community leaders. Acknowledging the fire fighters as “Game Changers” is also significant because it demonstrates the players’ willingness to redirect the spotlight to unsung heroes that tend to get minimal credit for the day-to-day efforts to keep the local community safe. Similar to the work done by soldiers, emergency fire responders risk their bodies and do so in a much more immediate capacity. Making those who support the team aware of the fire department’s efforts disrupts the normative expectation that the players would overlook the services provided in cities like Detroit every day.

Leadership is presented as the final major value of focus in the video. Dwight Howard, center for the Los Angeles Lakers, is seen addressing a group of young children and various adults at the ribbon cutting ceremony for the opening of the Lakers Center in L.A. The message he delivers to the crowd passionately urges the adults in the room to be more accountable and responsible for the children in their lives, saying, “I think it is important as parents and leaders, leading these kids on the right path, so they can grow up and be great themselves.” The largest and most consistent and overarching criticism of the players after the brawl was that they exhibited selfish, inconsiderate, and thuggish behavior. The utility of Howard isolating the consciousness and commitment it takes to lead children down the “right path” is largely important because it demonstrates that the players are more aware that both their professional and personal lives would be under a

microscope and that what they do reflects on more than just themselves. While it reads as an altruistic statement about the way people normally view the visibility and leadership of superstars, it can arguably be interpreted as a call to those who are in positions of leadership to work intentionally to invest time and attention in the leaders to come. By engaging in the mentorship efforts of the Lakers Center, Howard actively works to sustain the Los Angeles community for now and for the future.

The video, which is one of many that documents NBA Cares community programming, works effectively to push back against the pejorative descriptors used to describe the black athletes involved in the brawl. It is primarily effective because it offers images that, when juxtaposed to images from the Malice in the Palace, complicate the homogenization of all players as “flashy,” “individualistic,” “punks” who are too self-absorbed to be in the NBA, let alone represent the league’s values. This video is particularly useful in problematizing the claims of commentators because every player shown in the video is black. This fact allows the video to become a snapshot of black masculinity in the league because it portrays black players from across the league engaging in the community in a variety of ways. Because the video is a recap of the year in review, it helps to enhance the notion that the NBA is committed, year ‘round, to fulfill Grano’s interpretation of the athlete-hero. Reconciling the image of black masculinity in the NBA with the presence of the athlete-hero was especially crucial following such a significant blow to that perception after the brawl. This counterstatement was especially useful for the tarnished images of the teams directly involved in the altercation. Both the Indiana Pacers and the Detroit Pistons are featured as premier examples of the NBA’s

commitment to broadening and enhancing the way that fans and patrons see themselves on the league's team.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

This thesis has examined the NBA Cares Week 2013 video as a rhetorical artifact that represents the transformation of the narrative of black masculinity in the NBA. I argue that the images in the NBA Cares Week 2013 video supplant the probability and fidelity of the narrative of black masculinity by focusing on the Malice in the Palace brawl between the Detroit Pistons and the Indiana Pacer in 2004. The brawl violated the social contract between fans and players, necessitating the league find a way to reestablish organizational legitimacy, and contingently preserve the brand of the NBA. Using Walter Fisher's narrative paradigm, I have detailed the NBA's shift to demonstrations of social responsibility as a productive strategy to recreate the league's narrative of black masculinity. Further concluding thoughts will discuss the significance and further utility of the project, and its implications racial issues within the NBA organization.

This project offers a rhetorical investigation of organizational practices that utilize to strategies of narrative recreation as tool to reclaim organizational legitimacy after an image crisis. Because of historically damaging representations of black masculinity, many businesses find themselves seeking the most effective ways to represent and ultimately market black men. However, the NBA is substantially more equipped than the other major sports organizations (NFL, MLB) to confront incidents like the Malice in the Palace because of the way it has operationalized the NBA Cares campaign. First, the NBA has a more efficient method of narrative preservation and image control. As America's leading organization in racial diversity, black masculinity will inevitably be a fixture in the league. The physicality of the sport of basketball makes

instances of hyper-masculinity and aggression fundamentally inevitable, magnifying the presence of black masculinity. However, the airing and placement of NBA Cares public service commercials during games, as well as the easily accessible website and YouTube page, work as permanent counter-narrative that help mediate perceptually negative representations of black masculinity because they always already exist within the league marketing approach. These mediated images are what simultaneously guide organization and consumer interactions and re-center the league's identity on a commitment to service and having them readily available and accessible to fans and sponsors increases the opportunity for them to be introduced to more palatable images.

Additionally, because of everything from actual altercations between players to aggressive stylistic elements of the game like "posterizing" (aggressively dunking over) an opposing player, the league is in a constant state of negotiation about acceptable images of black masculinity, placing black masculinity perpetually under a microscope. However, The NBA has a more effective method of narrative preservation and image control because it allows for black players to have more control over the narrative that is constructed about them through acts of charity and social awareness. Though the NBA mandates charitable acts as a means to dull down the ghettocentric attributes of its black players, those acts allow players to 1) humanize themselves to people who only see them as big, black, affluent, superstars and 2) create and maintain their own community service initiatives that meet community needs that are the most important to them. Admittedly, this avenue of narrative control and recreation is constricting, giving black players a very narrow platform by which to take up agency over the way their actions and behaviors are perceived by fans and spectators. Consistent with Iverson's criticism of the enforced

dress code, the NBA's approach to the image crisis of black masculinity takes away the freedom of self-expression, (Rovel, 2005, p, 1.). The fate of the narrative of black masculinity then ultimately, left in the hand of dominant white gaze, which seeks to commodify the black body for its own gains.

This stripping of self-expression informs the larger implications of this project on further investigations of black masculinity and the performativity of the black body. Though my interrogations seems to suggest a productive rhetorical strategy for the NBA, it leaves to question in what ways the black body can engage in rhetorical strategies to disrupt the dominant white gaze that pervades sports, pop culture, politics, and society writ-large. The ubiquity of the white gaze's power over the black body assumes that there is little to no ability for the black body to escape it. Therefore this questions the possibility that if commodification through the white gaze is inevitable, there is a discussion to be had about the value of ghettocentric behavior (hip-hop culture, the Malice in the Palace brawl) in disrupting the white gaze and the benefit of doing so through a means of expressing one's self. In terms of this study, one would look to Iverson's counter-cultural identity and behavior as a more effective confrontation with the dominant narrative of the league. By maintaining fidelity to the normative narrative of black masculinity it suggest the benefits of forcing organizations to form around and conform to the identities and representations of black masculinity as they exist.

Though issues of race have been grappled with in some capacities within the NBA, it is still heavily prevalent in others. With black masculinity under constant surveillance, the league's approach to confronting its racial narratives across the league should be more closely called into question. Most recently, white L.A. Clippers owner,

Donald Sterling was allegedly privately recorded sharing his sentiments about black patrons coming to the Staples Center to support his team. In a conversation with his ex-girlfriend who is black and Latina, Sterling is heard lamenting her for sharing pictures with black people on her Instagram account:

It bothers me a lot that you want to broadcast that you're associating with black people. Do you have to?...You can sleep with [black people]. You can bring them in, you can do whatever you want. The little I ask you is not to promote it on that ... and not to bring them to my games...Don't put him [Magic Johnson] on an Instagram for the world to have to see so they have to call me. And don't bring him to my games. (Sterling, 2014; quoted in Golliver, 2014)

Peculiar, primarily because the head coach and all but two players are black on the Clippers' roster, the league is faced again with an exigence regarding race that requires a response. These statements function similarly to the Malice in the Palace brawl, contributing to the greater racial narrative of the league.

When black players were accused of behaving unacceptably in the eyes of the dominant white culture, the NBA mobilized swiftly with structural changes that were implemented so that player's actions and aesthetics could reflect the values of the league. In light of the controversial statements from Sterling, one must wonder if the same swift structural amendments will be made to create a more acceptable environment for black Clippers fans. The social contract violation between the league, as a business, and L.A. Clippers fans, both white and of color could spur backlash resulting in lost revenue from those willing to protest Sterling and sponsors who do not tolerate racist business practices

in association with their organization. Regardless of the way the issue unfolds or is resolved, instances like this pose larger questions about the responsibilities, expectations, and accountability of white individuals in positions of leadership, in the NBA and beyond. What, does this instance say about the state of the white-dominant narrative both within and outside of the league and what, if any, rhetorical strategies can be best deployed by NBA administrators to recreate the negative narrative of race attached to this organization?

Organizationally, the question above can be applied to any business looking to analyze or interpret the rhetorical strategies that help to create and maintain a positive narrative of their product and brand. This notion represents an interdisciplinary link between my inquiry and the overall study of organizational communication, marketing, public relations, black masculinity, and issues concerning identity within professional American sports. As companies look for more diverse intersectional approaches to socializing their brand to the public, it is important to look at the overlap of issues, theories, and instances like the infamous “Basketbrawl” that concern the way humans make, even the most basic connections. The establishment, cultivation, and maintenance of those connections will more likely than not, include an engagement through the method of narrative recreation.

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EDUCATION

Wake Forest University, Winston-Salem, NC

Master of Arts in Communication-Rhetoric **2012-2014**

Thesis: Transforming the Image of Black Masculinity: A Rhetorical Analysis of the NBA Cares Program

Emporia State University, Emporia, KS

Bachelors of Arts in Communication **2007-2012**

Area of Concentration: Public Relations

Lincoln College Preparatory Academy

**Earned college prep diploma with advanced placement
and International Baccalaureate courses** **2003-2004**

EMPLOYMENT

Wake Forest University

Graduate Assistant Debate Coach **2012-2014**

Wake Forest University

Graduate Teaching Assistant **2012-2014**

ECLI- Morgan State University

Debate Institute Instructor **2013**

CDI- Columbia University

Debate Institute Instructor **2012**

SDI- University of Missouri- Kansas City

Debate Institute Instructor **2012**

JDI- University of Kansas

Co-Dormitory Supervisor **2012**

RELATED EXPERIENCE

Emporia State University, Emporia KS

Varsity Debate **2007-2012**

Participated in the highest level of intercollegiate policy debate; ended career being recognized as one of the top speakers and teams in the country

Lincoln College Preparatory Academy
Varsity Debate 2004-2007
Competed in parliamentary, student congress, and policy
debate

AWARDS

Matt Grindy Graduate Student of the Year, CEDA D6 **2014**

Hearst Fellowship, Wake Forest University **2012-2014**

Brian Johnston Debater of the Year Award, CEDA **2012**

Various Top Individual/Team Awards **2007-2012**

MEMBERSHIPS

United Minority Media Association