



Who is to blame?

An examination of American sports
journalists' Lance Armstrong Hero narrative
and post-doping confession paradigm repair

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“The country has a right to at least one [hero]. Armstrong embodies all the attributes, his dominance in the sport of cycling, his successful battle against testicular cancer, the work of his foundation.”

– Buzz Bissinger, *The Daily Beast* column

Jan. 14, 2013

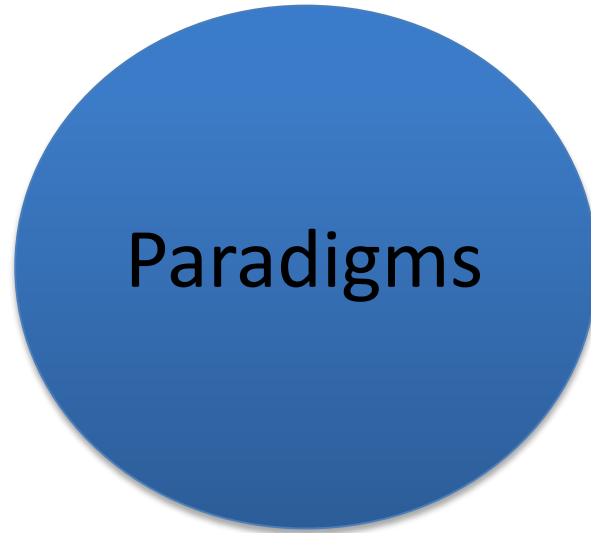
“[Defending Armstrong was] the worst piece of opinion I have ever written.”



– Buzz Bissinger, *The Daily Beast*

Industry-wide **paradigm repair**:

- How American sports journalists engaged in paradigm repair
- In their previous Armstrong coverage, did they employ a **hero narrative** – then question this element of sports journalism's paradigm when they engaged in **paradigm repair**?



Systems that
shape how
people think, act
(Kuhn, 1962)

Learned through
socialization

Create boundaries for
members of a collective
to learn profession's
"rules" (Berkowitz,
2000)



Paradigm repair



Demonstrating that
written and
unwritten rules *are*
dependable, but ...

Paradigm
produced atypical
results (E.g., Helen
Thomas)

because of a
particular event or
person, the
paradigm's rules
were violated



Helen Thomas

Long-time White House press corps member

Hindman and Thomas (2013)

Journalists' columns fell into four categories:

- Suggestions that her career should end
- that her remarks were caused by senility
- that her remarks were racist and privately held for a long time
- and that there is a blurred line between acceptable and unacceptable speech



The Hero Myth

Stems from “Gee Whiz”
school of sports writing

Elements:

1. Humble beginning(s)
2. Adversity
3. Athlete triumphs (or dies trying)



Sports journalists need to look past athletes' vices in order to construct this myth.

Current Research

Using hero narrative *is* part of American sports journalists' paradigm

Sports journalists' use of the hero narrative historically distinguished it from news counterparts

Did sports journalists question their use of the hero narrative's place in their profession's paradigm while reacting to Armstrong's confession?



Columns that included “Lance Armstrong” in the text published from Oct. 9, 2012, to Jan. 31, 2013, in a major U.S. newspapers and magazines

- 54 columns from 32 sports journalists.

Search of the 32 authors found in above sample was done, of *all* the stories they had written about Armstrong from Jan. 1, 1999, to Dec. 31, 2010.

- 109 articles

Hero myth was present in about 40% of the sample's stories, but from nearly 70% of the sports journalists.

Past research suggests journalists will isolate the journalist who erred, sports journalists painted Armstrong as the rogue and scapegoat

- *Could perpetuating Armstrong's narrative have been avoided? Could similar situations could be avoided in the future?*