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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to (a) explore how information on accessible seating and parking was presented on college athletic department websites, and (b) identify what language was being used on college athletic department websites to communicate to people with disabilities. A content analysis was conducted with 67 NCAA Bowl Championship Series college athletic department websites. Results indicated that no more than 56.7% of schools used person-first language in reference to accessible seating and parking. Less than 36% of schools used person-first language in accessible parking headings or text, revealing a discrepancy in seating and parking language. The difference indicates that athletic department personnel are not familiar with the preferences of most people with disabilities. Athletic department personnel should ensure they are using person-first language to avoid offending a segment of their stakeholders and to foster relationships with a brand-loyal group of potential season ticket holders.

 Keywords: *college athletics; disability; NCAA; stakeholders; website*

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Introduction

People with disabilities who desire to attend college athletic events in the United States frequently are left to seek accessible seating and parking information from official college athletic department websites, which is often more cumbersome to locate than the general seating and parking information. Athletic stadiums must provide accessible parking and seating in accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA.gov, n.d.a), and stadiums must provide the same information for accessibility features as nonaccessibility features (ADA.gov, n.d.b). Athletic departments have concurred that their websites are the primary tool for publishing seating and parking information for people with disabilities (Pate, Bemiller, & Hardin, 2010). Websites are the best medium for this type of communication because they allow organizations to control their message while also communicating directly with their stakeholders in an unfiltered manner (Cooper & Cooper, 2009; Hur, Ko, & Claussen, 2011; Kriemadis, Terzoudis, & Kartakoullis, 2010; Lombardo, 2007). Put simply, athletic departments can publish information online for fans to seek. However, this freedom to publish begs the question: How are athletic departments speaking to their stakeholders?

The Internet's "accessibility, interactivity, speed, and multimedia content" make it the "ideal" medium (Real, 2006, p. 171) and fans are actively seeking sport information online (Hutchins & Rowe, 2012). Such declaration is merited considering that 52% of adult Internet users seek information pertaining to sport (Pew Internet and American Life Project, 2011). The drawback to college athletic department websites, however, is that while they are a destination of choice for obtaining sport information, they are often congested and make finding information difficult when it is cluttered in different locations within each website (Ruihley, Pate, & Hardin, 2012). It is of great importance that athletic departments not only streamline the access to information in general, but practice effective communication with their stakeholders to maintain and enhance those

relationships. More specifically, athletic departments should be aware of how they communicate with minority stakeholders through word choice.

Universities often cite a commitment to diversity in all areas of higher education, identifying it within mission statements, policies, and administration statements (Chang, Milem, & Antonio, 2011). Such a commitment to diversity should also be reflected in how the universities communicate with the public. It should be an ethical obligation for a university to consider the appropriate word choices when speaking to a minority population, and it often is just that with regard to the traditional ideal of minority audiences (e.g., with regard to race, ethnicity, and gender). Considering that athletics are often considered the front porch of universities that welcomes the general public, the manner in which the university communicates to the public is then subject to further critique. This study examined how athletic departments communicate information to stakeholders with regard to services for people with disabilities.

Disability Population

People with disabilities comprise approximately 19% of the population in the United States (United States Census Bureau, 2010). "People with disabilities" would rank first in the minority representation of U.S. citizens if it were considered a racial or ethnic category by the United States Census Bureau, placing it ahead of "Persons of Hispanic or Latino origin" (16.3%) and "Black persons" (12.6%; United States Census Bureau, 2012). The fact that the population of people with disabilities ranks as a major minority population in the United States is reason to consider this group integral as stakeholders. People with disabilities are particularly important with regard to athletics due to their high risk for social isolation, which occurs when people struggle to socially connect with other individuals (Cacioppo & Patrick, 2008; Warner & Kelley-Moore, 2010). For example, inaccessible physical and social environments such as parking and seating prevent people with disabilities from being able to integrate and connect with others at sporting events, thereby resulting in isolation.

Social isolation is when people struggle to establish intimate social relationships with others, which results in reinforced loneliness (Cacioppo & Patrick, 2008; Warner & Kelley-Moore, 2010). People with disabilities face social isolation when physical, personal, social, and systemic barriers prevent inclusion within society. Paramio, Campos, and Buraimo (2012) argue that sport fan accessibility should be a global priority to avoid isolation of fans with disabilities. Previous work has focused on legislative issues to ensure accessibility (Paramio-Salcines & Kitchin, 2013). More specifically to physical barriers, Nguyen and Menzies (2010) analyzed stakeholder perceptions of events and disability access was identified to be one visible quality identified by volunteers. Unfortunately, a dearth of research that explores the experiences of spectators with disabilities has set forth a scholarly call for greater research on inclusiveness and for events to promote inclusiveness and

accessibility for people with disabilities (Darcy, 2012). This research is focused on the systematic barriers that may lead to isolation, which can be easier to remove than physical barriers. Systemic barriers (e.g., language choice) are further evidence of isolation and continue to be deeply rooted in everyday interaction while often going unnoticed. Athletic departments can work to remove systematic barriers by enhancing the way in which they communicate with their stakeholders with disabilities.

Communicating to Stakeholders with Disabilities

A stakeholder is anyone with a vested interest in the organization or "any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of a corporation's purpose" (Freeman, Harrison, & Wicks, 2007, p. 6). It is important for athletic departments to identify their stakeholders, particularly those individuals buying tickets to athletic events. Stakeholders are critical to an organization's success if satisfied over time; therefore, satisfying stakeholders becomes a necessary focus of the organization (Freeman et al., 2007). To satisfy stakeholders, organizations must serve stakeholders equally, communicate and engage with all stakeholders, and maintain efforts to improve the service of stakeholders (Freeman et al., 2007).

Freeman et al. (2007) set forth a framework for successful stakeholder management. Ten guiding principles were outlined when managing stakeholders. Five of those principles were applied in Ruihley et al.'s (2012) research on athletic department website communication and are applicable to this research as well. Those principles are (1) Everything serves stakeholders; (2) Act with purpose that fulfills commitment to stakeholders; (3) Intensive communication and dialogue is needed with all stakeholders; (4) Stakeholders consist of real people with names, faces, and children; and (5) Consistently monitor and redesign processes to make them better serve the stakeholders (Freeman et al., 2007, p. 52). The remaining principles are beyond the scope of this research due to their emphasis on time, governance, satisfying multiple stakeholders simultaneously, marketing, and multiple levels of stakeholders. These aforementioned principles that do apply to this research stress the importance of communication between an organization and its stakeholders. Freeman et al. (2007) emphasized engaging stakeholders and evaluating the best ways to serve them.

Displaying a commitment to stakeholders through website language is not specific to disability or even accessibility. For example, major-market hospital websites strive to communicate with Spanish-speaking stakeholders of varying demographics through language options on the site, such as the ability to toggle between English and Spanish (Gallant, Irizarry, Boone, & Ruiz-Gordon, 2010). Online advertising has shown to be more appealing when speaking the preferred language (Flores, Chen, & Ross, 2014). Sport websites have targeted their accessibility as well. The National Hockey League's official website offers eight translation options in English, French, Russian, Finnish, Swedish, Czech, Slovak, and German through menu items in the top-left corner of its home page (NHL.com,

n.d.). MLB.com (n.d.) offers translation options of Major League Baseball's official website in five languages of English, Japanese, Spanish, Korean, and Taiwanese Mandarin using options in the top-left of the home page. NFL.com (n.d.) is English and offers a Spanish translation option, en Espanol, in the top-right of its home page, while NBA.com (n.d.) is English and also offers a Spanish translation at the bottom of the home page entitled Ene-be-a. Yet when accessibility has been explored, results have not been promising. For example, Loiacono, Romano, and McCoy (2009) found that just 30% of *Fortune* 100 websites could be described as accessible. Olalere and Lazar (2011) examined 100 U.S. government websites and only four home pages were free of accessibility violations when using human evaluations, and eight home pages were free of accessibility violations when using automated evaluation systems. Ironically, U.S. government websites are required to be accessible, and the U.S. Department of Justice is expected to revise ADA regulations for Internet accommodations (Shaw & Vu, 2013). While these studies focused on accessible technology, the language used on a website can reinforce an inability to serve stakeholders. In other words, language choices are an easy first step toward inclusion and satisfying patrons.

This study examined how athletic departments serve stakeholders with disabilities by providing information to them appropriately, a key component in the satisfaction of patrons. Therefore, it is essential to explore the communication between athletic departments and minority stakeholders such as individuals with disabilities.

Person-First Language Preference

It is essential to understand the preferences of people with disabilities with regards to language and word use before analyzing the communication of services for people with disabilities between athletic departments and stakeholders. More specific, it is important to know what word choices athletic departments are making when publishing information regarding accessible seating and parking, which is educational information for people with disabilities prior to arriving at an event.

The movement in much of North America, particularly the United States, has resulted in a person-first language standard, which is placing the person before the disability in word order because it helps people understand disability in a social context (Lynch, Thuli, & Groombridge, 1994; Titchkosky, 2001). Most people with disabilities in North America prefer person-first language (Lynch et al., 1994; Titchkosky, 2001). For example, under the person-first language approach, it is more appropriate to say "person with a disability" rather than "disabled person" because the word order is indicative of prioritization (e.g., the person is more important than the disability label). This concept can be applied to items as well. For example, the University of Kansas Research and Training Center on Independent Living (hereafter University of Kansas, n.d.) *Guidelines for Reporting and Writing about People with Disabilities* suggests even so much as avoiding the

term "handicapped parking" and using "accessible parking." Conversely, disabling language, also known as identity-first language, is "a way of referring to a disabled person that emphasizes the disability as an identity," and is often preferred among people with autism and people with visual and hearing impairments (Identity-First Language, n.d., para. 2). Scholars have argued that person-first language assumes that having a disability positions someone as less of a person and simply using person-first language can be cumbersome in everyday discourse (Collier, 2011a, b, c). Yet, the prevailing belief across North America is that disabling language "perpetuates myths and stereotypes about persons with disabilities" and "uses a demeaning or outdated word or phrase in reference to persons with disabilities" (Patterson & Witten, 1987, p. 245). Those preferences, however, do not translate into consistent use due to a lack of awareness of such different preferences.

Communicating Disability in Athletics

Hall's (1976, 2000) concept of high- and low-context culture contributed to the theoretical structure of this study as it related to language. High-context culture is when individuals are familiar with experiences beyond their own. Low-context culture is when individuals are not familiar with experiences beyond their own. Specifically, Hall's work stated that communication was impacted by cultural differences based off the contextual characteristics of diverse groups. Würtz (2005) employed Hall's concept of high- and low-context culture in her analysis of websites as a medium of communication. The use of animation, depiction of values, representation of individualism, and other variables were distinctly different among high-context and low-context cultures. These findings further illustrated that not only do cultural differences impact interpretations and perceptions, but so does the medium through which it was delivered (Würtz, 2005). In this study's example, the communication gap between the two cultures of people with disabilities and people without disabilities is exposed through language choices. This integration was also substantial in applying Hall's concept to this study's use of language in college athletic websites.

The consistent result in high- and low-context culture studies have found diversity in low-context cultures necessitates explicit communication because of varying levels of familiarity with certain topics (Kim, Pan, & Park, 1998; Würtz, 2005). Explicit communication in low-context cultures, however, does not necessarily mean accurate or appropriate. The value of the message directed by the sender in low-context cultures is the unambiguous nature of the communication. The objective is to present an overall message and focus less on a single word or phrase (Hall, 1959). In the scenario presented in this study, an accepted practice of misusing the terms "handicapped" or "disabled" was seemingly part of the culture due to a lack of knowledge. However, as primary stakeholders, people with disabilities may view this oversight as a disconnection to the university or, worse, a lack of caring.

Such disconnection was displayed by McCoy and DeCecco (2011) when less than 25% of college students were found to use person-first language when describing a person with a disability, whereas more than 70% of students used non-person-first language, or disabling language. Examples of disabling language in the context of this study, consistent with the movement across much of North America, are "handicapped people," "special parking for disabled people," and "wheelchair seating." It should be noted that disabling language may refer to word order (e.g., disabled people) or specific terminology (e.g., handicapped). This study focused on the use of person-first language in all instances of describing people (e.g., person with a disability) and things (e.g., accessible parking rather than handicapped parking).

An example of how athletic departments use their websites to reach stakeholders with disabilities is through offering information on accessible seating and parking. Using disabling language in these sections of the websites is potentially offensive to the group of stakeholders. This misstep in language use occurs frequently in conversation, and outdated signage continues to use the term "handicapped" in reference to seating and parking at venues (e.g., handicapped seating and disabled parking). Yet, it is not the seats or parking spaces that have disabilities, as that language may indicate. Therefore, the terminology should reflect what is actually intended with signage or word use (e.g., parking for people with disabilities). Terms such as "disabled parking" or "handicapped seating" misrepresent disability and reinforce that the author of the words (e.g., athletic department personnel, in this case) has a "misunderstanding of the disability experience" (Haller, Dorries, & Rahn, 2006, p. 71). Furthermore, the simple use of improper terms may resonate negatively with the population in North America. The misunderstanding is seen when authors of content display assumptions that "disabled," "handicapped," or even "special" are appropriate terms, or that all people using accessible seating and parking also use wheelchairs and are limited in mobility. Misunderstandings such as these are at the heart of this study.

Athletic departments often consider it a priority to speak the proper language to high-end stakeholders such as donors due to the potential returns the donors can provide (e.g., financial donations). Similarly, athletic departments are charged by U.S. law to ensure equal opportunity with regard to gender, and would likely not purposely ostracize racial or ethnic minorities publically, and especially in a published document. Use of improper language toward a minority group can be derogatory, offensive, and discriminatory. Therefore, this study was aimed at exploring the published language use toward people with disabilities.

Purpose Statement

Given that athletic departments use their official websites to communicate with stakeholders and that people with disabilities comprise a significant role among stakeholders, this study aimed to explore how athletic departments communicate

to stakeholders with disabilities. The purpose of this study was two-fold: (a) to explore how information on accessible seating and parking was presented on college athletic department websites, and (b) identify what language was used on college athletic department websites to communicate to people with disabilities.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this examination of how information on accessible seating and parking was presented to stakeholders via athletic department websites:

RQ1:   How is information on accessible seating presented on athletic department websites?

RQ2:   How is information on accessible parking presented on athletic department websites?

Methodology

A content analysis was utilized to gather the information relevant to the research questions. Content analysis is a procedure grounded in being systematic, objective, and can be quantitative when applied to examining communication content (Kassarjian, 1977; Krippendorff, 2013). Krippendorff (2004) argued that content analysis allows researchers the ability to gain insight, increase understanding, and acquire meaningful practical information about a phenomenon. This type of data collection has also been used "as a microscope that brings communication messages into focus" (McMillan, 2000, p. 80). Content analysis has previously been utilized in sport-based research examining the Internet. Content areas include Australian Professional Basketball homepages (Carlson, Rosenberger III, & Muthaly, 2003), Internet coverage of March Madness (Kian, Mondello, & Vincent, 2009), MLB team websites (Brown, 1998), NCAA athletic department websites (Ruihley et al., 2012), and Twitter® use (Hambrick, Simmons, Greenhalgh, & Greenwell, 2010; Sheffer & Schultz, 2010).

This study utilized a five-step approach set forth by Krippendorf (2013). The five-step approach involved the following areas: (Step 1) formulating research focus and developing research questions; (Step 2) selecting a sample; (Step 3) defining coding categories for examination; (Step 4) training coders, coding content, and checking reliability; and (Step 5) analyzing and interpreting data (Krippendorff, 2013; McMillan, 2000). The following portions of this methodology section provide information on Steps 2-4 (e.g., sample, coding, procedure, and reliability).

Sample

The sample for this research consisted of websites of university athletic departments. The sample was restricted to colleges and universities within the National Collegiate Athletic Association's (NCAA) Bowl Championship Series

(BCS) classification competing in football as of 2011. All schools within each of the six BCS conferences were included in the sample; a total of 67 athletic department websites were coded. The sample included the following conferences: Atlantic Coast Conference (12 schools), Big East (nine schools), Big Ten (12 schools), Big 12 (10 schools), Pacific 12 (12 schools), and Southeastern Conference (12 schools). Only the male athletic department websites were coded when a department had separate websites for men and women due to the study's parameters on BCS universities and their affiliation with football. Data were collected May 2011 through July 2011.

Coding and Procedure

Two of the three authors of this research were responsible for coding. Searching entire websites can be an overwhelming task when they contain large amounts of information. Due to the sheer volume of information, each coder was assigned a specific set of websites to code. To sort through the information on athletic department websites, the coding parameters for this research were broken into two categories: parking language and seating language. The coding process started by visiting the homepage, and then, specifically, the football parking and seating sections for each university's athletic department. Once on the appropriate page, coders searched for coding factors. A Microsoft Excel file was created for each conference, with tabs for each school. Coders noted the following for each school in regard for seating and parking: (1) whether heading terminology matched text terminology, (2) examples of the terminology, (3) actual words used in the entirety of the heading, and (4) actual words used in entirety of the text. The actual words used were then placed in a word processing document for quantitative content analysis where specific terms were counted for the number of times they appeared (Berger, 2011). The terms counted were "accessible," "ADA," "disabled," and "handicap."

The University of Kansas (n.d.) *Guidelines for Reporting and Writing about People with Disabilities* was used as the basis for identifying words that were counted in the analysis. The guidelines offer a list of words to use and words to avoid. For example, the guidelines state to use "people with disabilities" rather than "the disabled" and to use "accessible parking" rather than "handicapped parking" (University of Kansas, n.d.). Universities that used the suggested person-first language were categorized as "Person-First Language." Examples of person-first language were terms such as "accessible" and "people with disabilities" (University of Kansas, n.d.). Universities that did not use the suggested person-first language were categorized as "Disabling Language." Examples of disabling language were terms such as "handicap" and "disabled" (University of Kansas, n.d.). Universities that used general language in the accessible parking and seating sections (e.g., they only referred to it as parking or seating) were categorized as "Generic Language." Universities that did not have information on accessible parking or seating were

categorized as "NA" for not applicable. The coding process for discovering content on one athletic department website and completing the Excel form for each university required approximately 20 minutes.

Reliability

Valid coding relies greatly on data and instrument reliability (Krippendorff, 2013; Milne & Adler, 1999). With that, one major concern in content analysis is coding subjectivity (Frost & Wilmshurst, 2000; Schreier, 2012). As mentioned, two of the three authors of this research were responsible for coding and were assigned a specific set of websites to code. With the simple nature of coding by seeking out specific words, the coding authors trained by working on several examples together to assure understanding of the coding charge. To assure reliability, a percent agreement or coefficient of agreement (Lombard, Snyder-Duch, & Bracken, 2002; Schreier, 2012) was examined between the two coders. To complete this, (1) a random conference was selected, (2) each author coded the websites within that conference, (3) findings were compared, and (4) percent agreement was computed. The following equation represents coefficient of agreement: the total number of correct coding matches divided by the number of coding decisions. The coefficient of agreement between the two coders was 0.85. This is an acceptable range for exploratory research (Krippendorff, 2004; Lombard et al., 2002), especially when the coding landscape is so large and inconsistent (Ruihley et al., 2012). The coding authors worked side-by-side on coding. When confusion arose and clarification was needed, discussions took place.

Results

Research Question 1: Seating

In the examination of headings for accessible seating, results indicated 56.7% of the sampled schools (38 of 67 schools) used person-first language while disabling language was used 31.3% of the time (21 of 67 schools). Other results indicated 7.5% (5 of 67 schools) of schools did not have any headings or information on accessible seating and 4.5% (3 of 67 schools) used generic language (e.g., Seating, General Seating, and Public Seating). Shifting to the language used in text describing the seating options, 46.3% (31 of 67 schools) of schools used person-first language, while 43.3% (29 of 67 schools) did not. The term "accessible" was used 165 times in seating sections, more than any other term. Conversely, "disabled" appeared 94 times, and "ADA" appeared 93 times. "Handicap" or a form of the word (e.g., "handicapped") was used 44 times. Results indicated 10.4% (7 of 67 schools) of schools did not have any headings or information on accessible seating. Seating heading language matched language used in the text 38.8% (26 of 67 schools) of the time. See Figure 1 for side-by-side comparison.
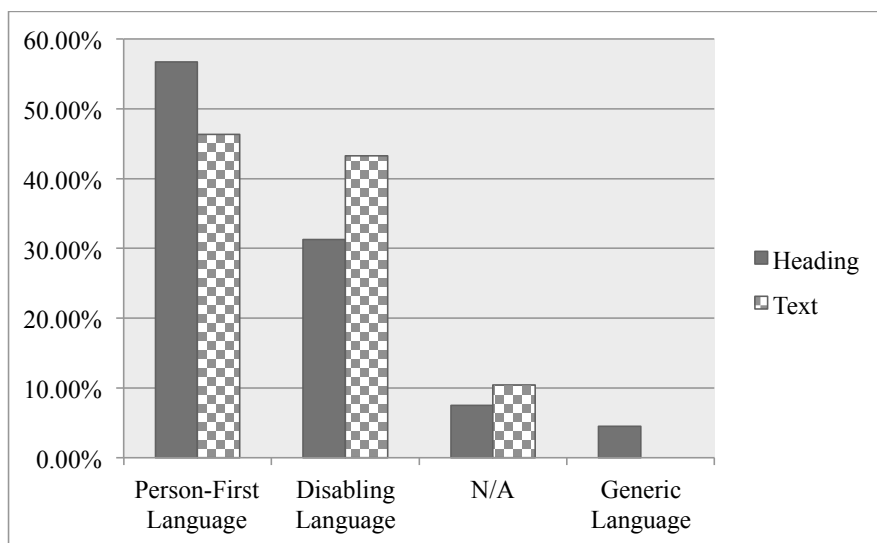
Figure 1. Comparison of Person-First Language Use in Seating Headings and Text

Research Question 2: Parking

The analysis of headings for accessible parking produced results indicating 34.3% of sampled schools (23 of 67 schools) used person-first language while disabling language was used 40.3% of the time (27 of 67 schools). Other results indicated 25.4% (17 of 67 schools) of schools used generic language (e.g., Parking, General Parking, and Public Parking). Language used in text describing parking options utilized person-first language in 35.8% (24 of 67 schools) of sampled schools, while 62.7% (42 of 67 schools) did not use person-first language. The percentages are supported qualitatively as "handicap" or a form of the word appeared 164 times. "Disabled" appeared 159 times in the text, and "ADA" appeared 126 times in the text. In contrast, the person-first word "accessible" appeared 100 times. Other results indicated one school not having headings or information on accessible parking. Results indicated parking heading language matched language used in the text 44.8% (30 of 67 schools) of the time. See Figure 2 for side-by-side comparison.

Discussion

The need for exploring the language used on athletic department websites is merited because universities claim commitments toward diversity through their mission statements (Chang et al., 2011) and yet their front porches (e.g., athletic departments) are not using language preferred by a large minority group. Additionally, people with disabilities are among the primary stakeholders of college athletic departments and critical to their success and survival (Clarkson,
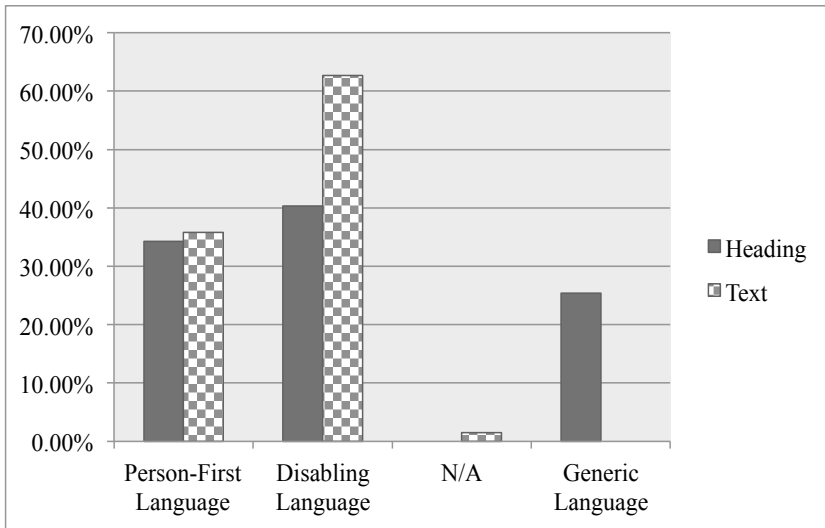
Figure 2. Comparison of Person-First Language Use in Parking Headings and Text

1995; Freeman et al., 2007; Madsen & Ulhoi, 2001). In fact, to satisfy those primary stakeholders, Freeman et al. (2007) suggested that everything an organization does should serve stakeholders and impact stakeholders equally, organizations should communicate and engage with their stakeholders, and organizations should maintain continuous efforts to improve the service of stakeholders. This study reveals that major college athletic departments are not, in fact, fulfilling their university mission statements or serving stakeholders equally. They are not promoting diversity because they, in many cases, use derogatory language toward people with disabilities and they are not communicating and engaging with some stakeholders appropriately. They are not maintaining a continuous effort, albeit as simple as updating their website language, to improve the service of stakeholders and fulfill the commitment to serve those stakeholders. In applying stakeholder theory to this study and the recommendations of satisfying stakeholders by Freeman et al. (2007), this study identifies one example of how organizations may not be satisfying a portion of their stakeholders.

Most people with disabilities in North America prefer person-first language (Lynch et al., 1994; Titchkosky, 2001), but athletic department websites are failing to address those preferences. Among the potential reasons for failing to adhere to the preferences of people with disabilities with regard to language choice is a cultural difference (Hall, 1976, 2000). The findings from this study support findings from Kim et al. (1998) that a low-context culture requires greater education for successful communication among cultural differences. As previously stated, the communication gap between the two cultures of people with disabilities and

people without disabilities is exposed through language choices. Applying the high- and low-context culture concept to this study, athletic department websites are not using person-first language simply because the individuals providing content on the websites are not knowledgeable of the disability culture and its preferences. One reason organizations fail to satisfy stakeholders is simply because the organizations and their personnel do not proactively seek to understand those stakeholders and their preferences.

One of the guiding principles to stakeholder management is to consistently monitor and redesign the processes set in place to better serve stakeholders. The results of this study suggest that college athletic department personnel should engage in a monitoring phase of the language used to communicate to people with disabilities, which therefore would initiate the redesign phase of person-first language within the actual websites. College athletic department websites offer a mix of inconsistent language, oftentimes using multiple words to avoid overuse of particular words, a journalism strategy that may very well be consistent with the educational and professional backgrounds of individuals providing the website content. However, in this case, consistency would have been better than a thesaurus of words relating to disability.

When websites use person-first language, it is mostly used in text and headings for seating rather than parking (see Figure 3). One explanation for the discrepancy between language choice for seating and parking is because parking problems/questions for event-goers typically are handled with signage whereas on-site seating problems/questions are often handled face-to-face. Again, the high- and low-culture context concept applies in that athletic department personnel and event management staff members likely have greater cultural knowledge of
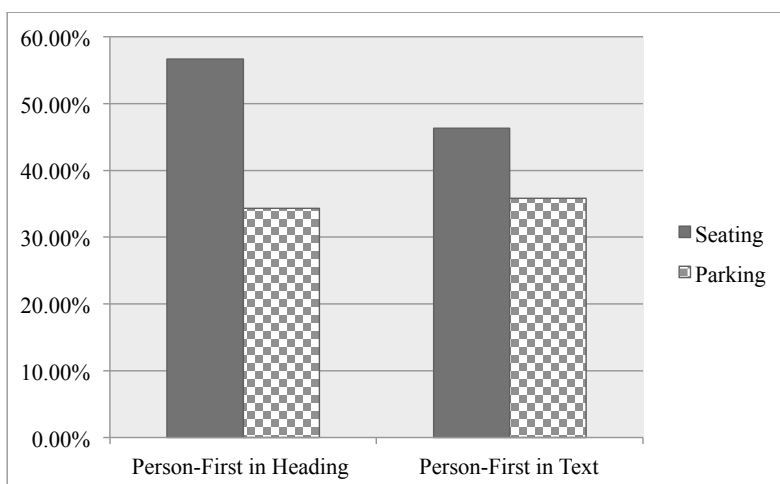

Figure 3. Comparison of Person-First Language Use in Seating and Parking

disability due to exposure and answering accessible seating questions face-to-face with patrons within the athletic event. The website language choices, therefore, reflect the customer service experiences an athletic department may face regarding services for people with disabilities.

Language use in headings and text is also inconsistent. The assumption was that if the heading used certain language or terms, then the text would likely match. Using mismatched words and terms comes across as lazy or as a way to cut corners in attempt to be politically correct. Another possible explanation for mismatching words is to avoid redundancy in the text, yet the athletic department personnel fail to understand the meanings behind the words they use. For example, one school used the term "accessible" in its seating heading but then only referred to the seating options as "wheelchair seating." Yet, not all accessible seating is conducive to wheelchair access and not all patrons seeking those seats may use a wheelchair.

A final characteristic that should be noted regarding accessible seating and parking information is that some websites use generic language in their headings. For example, information about accessible seating may simply be listed under a heading "Seating" or "Getting to Your Seats." The use of generic language may be viewed two ways. Generic language can be viewed negatively in that it corroborates the difficulties of locating information on accessibility. Yet, generic language can be viewed positively in that it offers a hint of integration for people with disabilities. This issue merits further study regarding how people with disabilities may view integrated information and information that is highlighted by a heading.

Practical Implications

The issue of importance from this study is an inconsistent use of language with regard to services for people with disabilities. Discrepancies and inconsistencies of language may seem like a debate of semantics to those whom the words do not affect, and it has been argued that person-first language should not compromise the rules of grammar (Collier, 2011a, b, c). However, in this study's setting of the United States, person-first language is preferred yet athletic department personnel fail to connect with the disability culture to understand those details. These misguided messages that include improper or inconsistent language risk reinforcing social isolation of people with disabilities due to the athletic department taking little time to connect or understand those individuals (Cacioppo & Patrick, 2008; Warner & Kelley-Moore, 2010). While a disregard for preferences may not be intentional, it is important to identify and examine such instances that reveal a lack of preparation and knowledge within athletic departments particularly when messages may be perceived as offensive.

Language athletic departments use on their websites may seem trivial to some, but it can be critical to the population it describes. Improper or offensive language (e.g., disabling language) reinforces stereotypes about people with disabilities (Patterson & Witten, 1987). Reinforcement of those stereotypes steers

perceptions of people with disabilities as being unable or insufficient, which in turn reduces those individuals' desire to participate in social activities (Bramston, Bruggerman, & Pretty, 2002; Coleman, 1971; Louis Harris and Associates, 1986; Rimmer, Rowland, & Yamaki, 2007). An athletic department that socially isolates a demographic such as people with disabilities is overlooking a brand-loyal donor base that may be seeking to attend games or simply communicate with the athletic department. Furthermore, those athletic departments are failing to culturally connect with people with disabilities because they are not educating themselves on the preferences of that demographic. Using the preferred language can send the message that an athletic department has gone beyond the bare minimum and taken the time to research and understand a segment of its stakeholders.

Delimitations and Limitations

A delimitation of this study was its sample and means by which data were collected. The sample was comprised solely of athletic department websites of the 67 universities with BCS classification. Only websites of universities that field football teams were part of this study and researchers only sought information pertaining to accessible seating and parking at football games. Therefore, accessible seating and parking information for other sporting events or from non-BCS universities was not included in this study, and no logistical information for women's athletic events was included.

Another delimitation to this study was that researchers coded by following guidelines suggested by the *Guidelines for Reporting and Writing about People with Disabilities*, published by the University of Kansas (n.d.). These guidelines suggest a person-first language approach that adheres to language describing people and objects. The authors recognize that some advocates of person-first language argue that it only applies to people, and that there are a number of arguments against using person-first language altogether. In fact, terms such as "disabled people" are preferred throughout the United Kingdom so as not to belittle the social realization of disability. Yet, this study focused on the labeling of disability in regards to people, seating, and parking.

Additionally, this study was limited by the fact that websites are not static, and therefore, content discovered during data collection may no longer exist in the same format at the time of discovery. To preserve the content from a methodological standpoint, however, the content at the time of discovery was saved to a word processing file.

Finally, the accuracy coefficient of 0.85 was acceptable for exploratory research, but not nearly as high as the researchers anticipated. This was first viewed as a significant limitation, but the researchers surmised the finding was extremely telling in regards to the purpose of this examination. It can be argued that the differentiation is an effect of athletic department websites not uniformly presenting requisite information and that cluttered websites, such as those examined in this sample, are not user-friendly.

Conclusion

The theoretical and practical application of this study highlight an issue that has lacked uniformity in execution, much less explication in overall discourse. This study speaks to the tenor of the topic in that amending common practices should become a priority for institutions that seek to accommodate any number of fans or simply adhere to their published mission statements in promoting diversity. Using any and all language comes off as lazy and desperate to find the right word to describe accessible seating and parking, hoping something may be correct. Using the wrong language risks socially isolating a minority demographic and potentially offending certain individuals within that segment of stakeholders. On a university campus with faculty who research areas of disability, communications, and sport, and with a department on campus focused solely on serving people with disabilities (e.g., disability services office), it is inexcusable to ignore these preferences because the resources are at the athletic department personnel's fingertips.

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Displaying Disability

A Content Analysis of Person-First Language on NCAA Bowl Championship Series College Athletic Department Websites

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I. Research Problem

The purpose of this study was (a) to explore how information on accessible seating and parking was presented on college athletic department websites, and (b) to identify what language was used on college athletic department websites to communicate to people with disabilities.

Most people with disabilities, particularly in the United States, prefer person-first language where the person is emphasized rather than the disability label (e.g., "person with a disability" rather than "disabled person"). This study aimed to determine if Bowl Championship Series (BCS) university athletic departments adhered to those preferences by using person-first language on their websites in sections that contained accessible seating and parking information for athletic events.

This article would be useful for intercollegiate athletic department personnel working in athletic communications, tickets, and development—the three departments universities primarily task with governing game-day parking and seating. More specifically, this article would be useful for personnel responsible for providing content for athletic department websites.

II. Issues

People with disabilities comprise approximately 19% of the population in the United States, and most prefer person-first language, which is placing emphasis on the person rather than the disability label. For example, it is better to say "person with a disability" than to say "disabled person." Furthermore, terms such as "accessible parking" offer a more positive perception because it focuses on access. Conversely, terms such as "handicapped parking" are frowned upon within the disability community because those words come with a negative perception, highlighting the difference from other parking and emphasizing disability. Put simply, person-first language word order is indicative of prioritization (e.g., the person is more important than the disability label). Those preferences by people with disabilities, however, do not translate into consistent use among the general population or

even among organizations that offer services to people with disabilities. Less than 25% of college students use person-first language when describing a person with a disability, whereas more than 70% of students used non-person-first language, or disabling language. Examples of disabling language in the context of this study, consistent with the movement across much of North America, are "handicapped people," "special parking for disabled people," and "wheelchair seating."

It is essential to understand the preferences of people with disabilities with regards to language and word use, particularly for college athletic department personnel who may be providing a service (e.g., seating and parking) to stakeholders with disabilities. It other words, it is important to speak the appropriate and preferred language to those individuals. Using disabling language in seating and parking sections of athletic department websites is potentially offensive. This misstep in language use occurs frequently in conversation, and outdated signage continues to use the term "handicapped" in reference to seating and parking at venues. An accepted practice of misusing the terms "handicapped" or "disabled" reveals a lack of knowledge of the preferences of people with disabilities. However, as primary stakeholders, people with disabilities may view this oversight as a disconnection to the university or, worse, a lack of caring.

This study explored the type of language athletic department websites used in sections explaining accessible seating and parking information. Websites for 67 BCS universities were examined to determine if person-first language was being used. The goal of this examination was to determine if athletic departments were speaking the preferred language of people with disabilities.

III. Summary

Seating: More than half of BCS universities (56.7%) used person-first language in headings about accessible seating. However, less than half (46.3%) used person-first language in the subsequent text about accessible seating. The term "accessible" was used 165 times in seating sections, more than any other term, supporting the results that person-first was used more often than not. "Disabled" appeared 94 times, and "ADA" appeared 93 times. "Handicap" or a form of the word (e.g., "handicapped") was used 44 times. However, a concerning result was that seating heading language matched language used in the text just 38.8% (26 of 67 schools) of the time, revealing an inconsistency within text on the websites.

Parking: Parking language was much different as just 34.3% of universities used person-first language. Other results indicated 25.4% (17 of 67 schools) of schools used generic language (e.g., Parking, General Parking, and Public Parking). Language used in text describing parking options utilized person-first language in 35.8% (24 of 67 schools) of sampled schools, while 62.7% (42 of 67 schools) did not use person-first language. These results were supported by an examination of what words were used. "Handicap" or a form of the word appeared 164 times. "Disabled" appeared 159 times in the text, and "ADA" appeared 126 times in

the text. In contrast, the person-first word "accessible" appeared 100 times. The language used in parking headings matched language used in the text 44.8% (30 of 67 schools) of the time.

IV. Analysis

This study revealed that approximately half of BCS universities use person-first language on their websites when providing accessible seating information, and approximately one-third use person-first language when providing accessible parking information. The terms "handicapped parking" or "wheelchair seating" or "disabled seating and parking" are seen by most people with disabilities as derogatory and offensive. Yet, language such as this continues to be used frequently, and used in sections of athletic department websites (e.g., accessible seating and parking) that are designed to speak directly to people with disabilities. In fact, a previous study revealed that athletic department personnel said their websites are the primary avenues that provide spectators with information about accessible seating and parking, yet those websites are not speaking the preferred language of those very people seeking the information. The results of this study show that the very language being used in more than half of athletic department websites is considered offensive for most people with disabilities.

V. Discussion/Implications

This study offers implications for practice for athletic department personnel in general and those individuals specifically tasked with maintaining online content for services toward people with disabilities such as seating and parking. Those implications are centralized around one primary resolution: educate staff members on stakeholder preferences. Athletic department personnel must be educated on the preferences of their stakeholders, particularly those stakeholders with disabilities that may find particular language offensive or demeaning.

Educating staff members can be achieved through active and passive approaches. An active approach to educating staff members is to conduct biennial department-wide seminars led by experts or scholars in specific areas. This study's focus was on disability, and therefore a professor in disability studies or sport management with a disability concentration may be able to provide insight on proper terminology and treatment of people with disabilities. Additionally, practitioners such as local or on-campus services coordinators can offer significant insight into the community of people with disabilities and those individuals' concerns about accessible seating and parking. A seminar environment would, at minimum, expose staff members to information that may have otherwise never been considered, such as language preferences or seating and parking concerns. Hosting the seminar biennially would also avoid burnout of the issue while maintaining that new employees are educated and current topics are addressed.

A passive approach to educating staff members is resource distribution among the personnel. For example, the University of Kansas Research and Training

Center on Independent Living collected input from more than 100 national disability organizations to offer a published set of guidelines for print and online media professionals to follow. The full report can be found here, with an option to order brochures and posters to share: http://www.rtcil.org/products/RTCIL%20 publications/Media/Guidelines%20for%20Reporting%20and%20Writing%20 about%20People%20with%20Disabilities%207th%20Edition.pdf. The center prints basic guidelines in poster-size, which may be ordered by athletic departments to be displayed in prominent locations such as the website content editor's office location, the ticket office, or simply to be distributed to the staff in PDF via e-mail. Additionally, editorial guidelines addressing how media professionals should use language in reference to people with disabilities are produced by magazines such as *Ability Magazine* and organizations such as the International Paralympic Committee. These resources are simple ways in which athletic department personnel can enhance knowledge about population-specific preferences or even share with media professionals that cover the athletic departments.

This study identified inconsistency in word choice between accessible seating and parking as well as the language choices used in headings and text. Those inconsistencies in language send a message of laziness and lack of interest from athletic department personnel responsible for creating seating and parking content. While unwritten editorial guidelines may suggest authors avoid overusing the same words, creativity in online informative sections of an athletic department website addressing accessible seating and parking should be held to the minimum in lieu of using appropriate terminology no matter the repetition. Therefore, having a staff that is well educated on the preferences of the audience to which the information speaks would prevent such inconsistency. From a disability perspective, exhausting the options of disability language to explain accessible seating and parking is perceived as a desperation move to use the right wording. Furthermore, using the incorrect wording risks offending a segment of the population trying to be reached. Using the preferred language can send the message that an athletic department has gone beyond the bare minimum and taken the time to research and understand a segment of its stakeholders. Using any and all language comes off as lazy and desperate to find the right word to describe accessible seating and parking, hoping something may be correct. Using the wrong language risks socially isolating a minority demographic and potentially offending certain individuals within that segment of stakeholders. In this case, a knowledgeable editor's stroke would clean up inconsistent and inaccurate word choices.