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# **Free Speech and Political Correctness in the talk radio world: Can a public sphere be achieved?**

**Michele Margolis,**  
MSc in Politics and Communication

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# **Free Speech and Political Correctness in the talk radio world: Can a public sphere be achieved?**

Michele Margolis

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## **ABSTRACT**

This paper investigates the informal limits placed on public discourse and how these limits effect the potential for a public sphere on the radio. In order to explore these issues, a case study of the cancellation of "Imus in the Morning" on account of Don Imus calling the Rutgers women's basketball team "nappy-headed hos" is used. Employing both content analysis and discourse analysis, the key goal of this paper is to understand how the fervor surrounding Imus's comments and his subsequent firing were portrayed within American newspapers. From the reporting, the research also sought potential reasons why Imus was fired over these comments, whereas he and others received no punishment for a slew of other similarly offensive remarks. That the attacks were made towards young athletes and students who were deemed inappropriate targets is the first potential reason with a second possibility being the simple fact that in this instance, advertisers opted to pull their sponsorship, whereas in the past they did not. A final posited reason regarding an increased concern about intolerance and the way women are treated in society is borne out of the content analysis but is not subsequently corroborated by the discourse analysis. The second research objective is to assess the existence of a public sphere on the radio, in this case a modified public sphericule based on Mouffe (1999) and Gitlin's (1998) models. The discourse analysis revealed that newspapers present talk radio as a passionate sphere, but one that excludes minority groups, specifically women on account of the hateful language used. The authors also argue, however, that silencing Imus on account of his words is not a proper response either. These inherently contradictory beliefs expressed through the texts demonstrate the paradox that America currently faces; there is increased support for inclusive and politically correct language while the country still holds fast to its tradition of free speech for all.

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## 1. Introduction

*Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.*

-First Amendment to the United States Constitution

"Don Imus in the Morning" was one of the most popular morning talk radio programs in the country: it was broadcast on 70 radio channels, simulcasted by the National Broadcasting Company (NBC) television, and reached more than 3 million listeners and viewers daily. Part of his unique appeal is that Imus did not fit neatly into a specific type of talk radio. "Shock jocks" barrage their listeners with "sexually explicit references, cultural and ethnic attacks, off-color listener telephone calls, and sexually based interviews and antics" (Hilliard & Keith, 1999, p. 75). Don Imus, at times, exemplifies this genre with a long list of offensive comments including calling the African American journalist Gwen Ifill "the cleaning lady" and referring to Palestinians as "stinking animals." Imus's show, however, is also heavily based upon serious talk and includes discussion of both national and international politics. Bill Clinton's appearance on the show in 1992 and Imus's subsequent endorsement of the former governor is what some believe enabled Clinton to win the New York state primary (Douglas, 2002, p. 496). Since Clinton's initial appearance, scores of political and media elites have shared the microphone with Imus including former and current president candidates: Mayor Rudy Giuliani, Senator John McCain, Senator John Kerry, Senator Barak Obama, Senator Joseph Lieberman, and Senator Chris Dodd, who even opted to announce his formal candidacy on Imus's program.

On the morning of April 4<sup>th</sup>, 2007 Don Imus and his colleagues were discussing the National Collegiate Basketball Association (NCAA) women's championship which had taken place the previous night between the University of Tennessee Wolverines and the Rutgers University Scarlet Nights. The following exchange took place between Imus and his executive producer Bernard McGuirk:

Imus: *"That's some rough girls from Rutgers. Man, they got tattoos . . ."*

McGuirk: *"Some hard-core hos."*

Imus: *"That's some nappy-headed hos there, I'm going to tell you that."*

It is this brief back-and-forth that ignited a two-week media frenzy that ultimately cost Imus his job. While the Columbia Broadcasting System (CBS) and NBC initially suspended Imus's show for two weeks this punishment was changed and it was decided on April 11<sup>th</sup> that NBC and CBS would cancel "Imus in the Morning" permanently.

It is against this backdrop that the research lies. For someone who is familiar with Imus's history, the initial question that comes to mind is, why did he get fired on account of this specific comment? Over the past three decades Imus has said caustic and arguably more offensive comments, and has done so without causing a media uproar nor a country-wide debate. In this case though, it was deemed that his comments warranted the show's cancelation, and this research will seek to understand why this is. What line did Imus cross and what does this tell us about what types of speech are considered to be in ill taste, but tolerable, and what types are thought to be inexcusable?

A second question that emerges deals with the ongoing academic debate of the existence of a public sphere, in particular, on the radio. Imus's show presented the opportunity for in-depth political discussion to take place, which is why politicians like Senator Dodd chose to be on the program: "[Imus] gives you enough time to talk, not a 30-second sound bite, a chance to explain your views" (Wallsten, 2007, p. A23). Even with Imus's flaws, does talk radio present a new medium for discourse to take place freely and openly? After exploring the relevant literature surrounding the public sphere, free speech, and talk radio, a research design employing both content and discourse analysis will look at newspapers during the two week period after the comment was made in hopes of gaining a better understanding both of what happened in this specific case as well as broader implications regarding acceptable speech and talk radio.

## Literature Review

### Free Speech and the Public Sphere

The public sphere has become an institutionalized starting point for all discussions relating to public discourse. The normative model illustrated by Jürgen Habermas is set in post-industrial Western Europe beginning in 1700 and describes the existence of a public sphere; a place separate from both the market and state which encourages all voices to opine in rational discussion (Habermas, 1989, pp. 24, 35). A key emphasis is placed on the ideal that all are equals at the discussion table, as ideas are judged on their merit, rather than to whom the ideas belong (Habermas, 1989, p. 38; Kellner, 2001, p. 4). While this egalitarian portrayal of history was criticized as women, ethnic minorities, and non-property owning men were excluded from debate (Fraser, 1990, p. 60), the United States with its overwhelming emphasis on the value of free speech, provides a potential setting for the public sphere to thrive. J.S. Mill, the oft-cited theorist on the subject of free speech, bases his argument not on people's right to express whatever they choose, but on the right of listeners to hear all that is said on a subject (Mill, 1859, p. 229). Truth is rarely found within a single claim, rather is it through competing ideas and "many sided-ness" (O'Rourke, 2001, p. 80) that parts of truth can come together (Mill, 1859, p. 252). Furthermore, it is unfair in a supposedly open society to impose a collective decision on someone who has not been able to contribute to the discussion, regardless of how offensive the majority believes the ideas to be (Dworkin, 2000, p. 385). These ideals surrounding free speech are internalized through the words, "Congress shall make no law...abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press." While enshrined in the First Amendment of the Constitution since 1791, it was not until the Second World War that these words gained the currency it carries today (Fiss, 1996a, p. 9).

Beginning with *Stromberg v. California* in 1931 where the Supreme Court overturned the conviction of Yetta Stromberg for her Communist activities citing the First Amendment as the basis for the ruling, the courts have slowly molded a standard committed "to the principle that debate on public issues be uninhibited, robust, and wide-open" (Walker, 1994, p. 101). The promotion of unhindered political discussion has been upheld almost exclusively to protect even the rights of American Nazis to demonstrate in a predominantly Jewish suburb<sup>1</sup> and white teenagers to burn a cross on an African American

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<sup>1</sup> The Nazi demonstration case (also known as the Skokie case) was ruled on by the 7<sup>th</sup> Circuit Court of Appeals in 1978. As the Supreme Court refused to hear the appeal, the lower court's opinion stood. While the court did

family's front lawn.<sup>2</sup> America's dedication to the freedom of speech stands in stark contrast to other democracies and is epitomized by America's refusal to sign the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights Treaty on account of Article 20, which requires states to prohibit speech that incites certain forms of hatred (Lee, 1990, p. 39).

While present-day America does provide the forum for all to speak freely, the modern realm of debate is not comprised of a single group of individuals speaking disinterestedly. In today's virtual and segmented society, it becomes increasingly difficult to promote the unitary public sphere Habermas suggests. Instead, Gitlin (1998) poses the idea of "sphericules" as technology allows individuals to, "move their concerns into public life with a vigor and intensity of unprecedented proportions" (Gitlin, 1998, p. 171). The ability for people to further personal interests makes it increasingly unlikely for a sustainable single public sphere to exist. In addition, while one might presume that Habermas supports Mill's defense of free expression, he in fact, argues that Mill's toleration of the diverse and eccentric diminishes the ability for rational decisions to be made based on the greater common good (Habermas, 1989, p. 133). Mill embraces the nonconformists and encourages diversity of opinion as, "dogmatic residues could indeed be suppressed but not reduced to the common denominator of reason" (*ibid*, p. 135). Stemming from Mill's desire to find truth from many, including sometimes irrational, places and Gitlin's claim that sphericules enable individuals to promote specific interests, Chantal Mouffe's (1999) agonistic public sphere becomes an appropriate alternative concept. Mouffe criticizes Habermas's requirement of a rational and disinterested debate, as passions and personal values should not be separate from the political realm (Mouffe, 1999, p. 752). The focus should instead be on making power compatible with democratic values by encouraging these private views to be brought into the public sphere (*ibid*, p. 755). The encouragement of publicizing private thoughts coupled with the American protection of speech create the potential for many public spheres to be created. While all forms of speech are legally tolerated, however, there are now informal limits on speech.

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admit that the Nazi symbols represented genocide, they were not considered to be "fighting words" set out in *Chaplinsky v. State of New Hampshire*, 315 U.S. 568 (1942), which is the standard used for limiting free speech.

<sup>2</sup> *R. A. V. v. City of St. Paul*, 505 U.S. 377 (1992) overturned Minnesota's Bias-Motivated Crime Ordinance on the grounds of the First Amendment. While the perpetrators could be charged for various acts including trespassing and arson, they could not be arrested or convicted based on the fact that their acts were bigoted or inciteful.

Political Correctness as a limit on free speech

The political correctness (PC) movement stemmed from the stream of liberation movements beginning in the 1960s including civil rights, feminism, and gay liberation (Spencer, 1994, p. 559). While the movement heavily emphasizes academic equality, including the expansion of the literary canon (Dunant, 1994, p. ix), the argument most relevant to this research is the debate surrounding both formal (through laws) and informal (through social norms) speech codes. The complexity of the issue on a moral as well as constitutional level has created a wide fissure where we see, "For the first time in American history, the same people who are calling for an extension of rights are also calling for an abridgement of speech" (Hitchens, 1994, pp. 137-138).

While recognizing the importance of free speech, many see hate-speech regulation as a necessary step in ridding society of discrimination (Altman, 1993, p. 302). Racist terms, according to this view, do not merely express hatred, but also proclaim the inferiority of the target-group and can cause feelings of anxiety, fear, and isolation within the addressee (Gerber, 2004, p. 28; Matsuda, Lawrence, Delgado, & Crenshaw, 1993, p. 36). The resultant psychological effect known as the "silencing dynamic" has a significant consequence for public discourse:

*It is asserted that hate speech tends to diminish the victims' sense of worth, thus impeding their full participation in many of the activities of civil society, including public debate. Even when these victims speak, their words lack authority...It impairs their credibility and makes them feel as though they have nothing to contribute to public discussion (Fiss, 1996b, p. 90).*

This view purports that when hate speech is included within discourse it becomes no longer egalitarian as targeted groups lost their status as full participants in the discussion.

The response to these claims assert that speech codes serve as an illegitimate control of individual expression. From a constitutional standpoint, the negative "Congress shall make *no* law..." presents a clear and unequivocal response to creating a law that could limit speech, even if deemed offensive, in any way (Gerber, 2004, p. 28). While defenders of the First Amendment do not deny that hate speech is wrong and potentially painful, they instead are concerned with the precedent that free speech restrictions might set. It might seem easy to refuse the right of free speech to those who abuse it, but this act nonetheless

weakens the underlying principle (Dworkin, 2000, p. 383). The “slippery slope” effect created by limiting free speech, even if the speech appears to be worthless, slowly whittles away at what is trumpeted as a universal right within American society.

Whenever the 1<sup>st</sup> Amendment of free speech has clashed with the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment guaranteeing equality to all, the court has consistently ruled on the side of granting freedom of expression. This, however, does not mean that political correctness and informal speech codes have not had an impact. PC-advocates claim that America is a complex and diverse society of interlocking religious, ethnic, and racial groups which requires understanding and respect in order to achieve inclusion and tolerance (Spencer, 1994, p. 548; Wolff, 1969, p. 22). PC-opponents believe that adhering strictly to the tenants of political correctness will give rise to a new form of “Liberal McCarthyism” (Dickstein, 1994, p. 43), where common sense is denied and people are fearful of expressing themselves truthfully (Dunant, 1994, p. viii). Whether political correctness has widened social debate by including and accepting more participants or has narrowed it through self-censorship and social conformity, both camps agree that how minority groups are addressed and the scope of appropriate discourse has changed during the past two decades (Ayim, 1998, p. 454; Loury, 1994, p. 132). Though the lines delineating what is acceptable and what is not are often unclear, as we have seen with Don Imus, these lines most certainly exist: “Careers are now made and unmade on the basis of PC criteria” (Kramer, 1994, p. 72).

#### Talk radio, free speech and the public sphere

Talk radio exploded in the 1980s, scholars argue, for a variety of reasons. Until 1987, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) enforced the “Fairness Doctrine” which ensured that air time was made available for “balanced presentation of all responsible viewpoints on particular issues” (Hilliard & Keith, 2003, p. 15). During the deregulation era of Reagan, however, the FCC announced that the Doctrine would no longer be enforced and while Congress overwhelmingly passed a law that would reinstate the statute, the President vetoed the measure and the override fell short (Douglas, 2002, p. 491; Hilliard & Keith, 2003, p. 16). From this opening, certain media flourished, most notably talk radio. In the single decade following the repeal of the Fairness Doctrine, the number of talk radio stations quadrupled, which represents a new talk radio show every four and a half days (Goldberg, 1998, p. 214). To date, there are approximately 4,000 talk radio shows, with the format of a news and talk combination being the single most popular on the air (Center for American

Progress and Free Press, 2007, p. 3). This transformation spawned a new academic debate regarding the effect talk radio has on public discourse.

Beginning at a time when television news and broadsheet publications were cutting staff and reducing story length, talk radio provided a new means to discuss the state of society electronically (Douglas, 2002, p. 487). In stark contrast to Habermas's apocalyptic claim of refeudalization and the decline of the public sphere on account of mass media (Habermas, 1989, p. 211), many claim that this new two-way communication medium will enhance, not destroy, the public sphere. The extreme radio-optimists believe the interactivity of talk radio will allow for an "electronic town hall" (Toffler & Toffler, 1994, p. 103) and will "become a public extension of the private sphere of casual conversation" (Ilie, 2001, p. 215). Others, while accepting the inherent limitations of the medium and do not claim it to be transformative, do believe that the medium has given a voice to those previously silenced:

*Talk radio has become a window on the world for millions. Talk radio...can be a remarkably democratic medium. The lines are open to all: few callers are screened; non-discrimination is the policy. There is no color line, no political test, no registration, no qualification, and no charge for access (Levin, 1987, p. 16).*

All scholars, and anyone who has listened to talk radio for that matter, will agree that talk radio rarely meets Habermas's standards of a rational debate leading to consensus. While accepting this limit, talk shows do allow for politics and society to be discussed, often heatedly, but in a way which does promote participation and deliberation (Lunt & Stenner, 2005, p. 61). Whereas Habermas has been criticized because his egalitarian public sphere was exclusionary, talk radio shows are easily accessible to all, with the potential result being an agonistic public sphericule.

Critiques of talk radio's discursive influence often relate to the tensions between populism and commercial interests as well as exclusion in the form of masculine hegemony. One cannot assume that talk shows are a public sphere untainted by capitalism (Shattuc, 1997, p. 92). Talk radio, like other entertainment media, is reliant on advertising dollars which often forces pluralist ideals to be sacrificed at the altar of the commercial agenda. In line with the Propaganda Model, advertisers serve as a filter which limits and shapes what the medium transmits (Herman & Chomsky, 2002, p. 16) and serve as a restriction on free

speech by affecting what topics are discussed on the air (Sunstein, 1993, p. 64). This criticism gives credence to Habermas's previously dismissed argument of refeudalization, as external influences are, in fact, able to shape discussion and restrict speech.

Secondly, while talk radio is meant to be egalitarian in nature, it is criticized as being exclusionary to women, minorities, and homosexuals. The argument rests on the "crisis of masculinity" thesis which states that men, since the series of liberation movements, have become confused about their roles and identities (Darnell & Wilson, 2006, pp. 444-445). Beginning in the late 1960s and through the 1980s, these changes challenged a man's position within society, and while the "white, middle-aged male" certainly still retains much power, they arguably feel increasingly helpless (Kimmel & Kaufman, 1994, p. 262). Put into the perspective of talk radio, Douglas (2002) argues that the medium has taken on a central role in attempting to restore masculine prerogatives and are, "challenging and overthrowing, if possible, the most revolutionary of social movements, feminism. The men's movement of the 1980s found its outlet – and that was talk radio" (p. 485). The dominance of men within the medium is exemplified by the fact that over 80 percent of talk radio hosts are men, and the listeners overwhelmingly tend to be white, middle-class, heterosexual men between 24-55 years of age who generally vote Republican (Goldberg, 1998, p. 214; Hutchby, 1996, p. 1). Previous research has found that listeners and callers do use talk radio as a means of seeking refuge from the world of minority movements (Douglas, 2002, p. 485; Nylund, 2004, p. 139). Talk radio has undoubtedly created a new outlet for speech, but the type of speech and its subsequent effects are debateable.

## **Conceptual Framework**

By using the "Don Imus in the Morning" talk radio show as a case study, this research attempts to see what types of discourse are acceptable on the airwaves and how the discourse either aids or hinders the potential for a public sphere to exist. The amalgamation of the public sphere and political correctness frameworks is unique as the concept of the public sphere is largely European in origin and emphasis, whereas the political correctness debate has grown out of North American literature.

This concern with open public discussion is intrinsically linked to the public sphere. While Habermas's normative model is riddled with criticisms, the underlying basis that all are free to debate sets an important precedent for society to strive towards. Pragmatically,

however, the genre and structure of talk radio leave two irreconcilable criticisms to be addressed. Firstly, the fact that talk radio reaches a niche audience precludes the possibility for a single public sphere to exist on the radio. Distinct groups inherently cluster based on similar interests, with the result being competing and fragmented groups (Fraser, 1990, p. 66; Gitlin, 1998, p. 173). While a sphericule precludes a unitary public sphere, these smaller realms are still open to all for participation. Also, the passionate arguments commonly found on talk radio shows inevitably go against Habermasian requirements for a public sphere, but according to some, like Mouffe (1999), this departure from rationality is beneficial. Therefore, this research will be looking for the existence of a modified public sphere, one which is smaller and allows for passionate discussion, but still encourages participation from all on a wide variety of social and political subjects.

In looking for the existence of a modern day public sphere, it is first imperative to know what is and what is not allowed to be said in a discussion. While legally, the United States is unique in its guarding of free speech, I am interested in exploring the more informal ways in which free speech has been curbed. The April 4<sup>th</sup> incident was not the first time either Imus or a plethora of other racy radio hosts made a comment thought by many to be offensive and degrading. As Imus lost his job for referring to the Rutgers basketball team as “nappy-headed hos,” however, he apparently stepped over the boundary that separates off-color humor with demoralizing and racist speech. By using the ongoing political correctness debate as a theoretical underpinning, this research will look to establish potential reasons for why Imus lost his job and define where the line that he crossed currently resides. From these findings, the research can show what speech society has deemed intolerable.

## **Objectives**

From this theoretical framework, the overarching objective of the research is to learn how the Don Imus incident – specifically him calling the Rutgers women’s basketball team “nappy-headed hos” and his subsequent firing – was portrayed in the newspapers. Using content analysis and discourse analysis, key themes will emerge and offer reasons as to why, in this instance, Imus lost his job. By understanding how the newspapers presented the saga and positing possible reasons for why Imus was fired, the research can also provide more general insight into how society perceives different types of speech.

The second key objective is to look at talk radio and assess the presence of a public sphere on the airwaves. While the term “public sphere” will not appear in an average newspaper article, the research will instead look for other signs of inclusion and exclusion in order to judge radio’s egalitarian nature. I will also look to see how issues such as political correctness, censorship, and freedom of speech are presented, as these issues surrounding discourse are intrinsically linked to the public sphere. This second set of objectives is more nuanced and may not yield definitive results, however, an analysis will still prove important as newspaper texts represent “ongoing processes such as the redefinition of social relationships” (Fairclough, 1995a, p. 209). As this clash between political correctness and free speech is still in a nascent stage of development, the research can show how this feud is currently faring.

## Research Design and Methodology

In order to operationalize the research objectives, a combination of content analysis and discourse analysis will be employed. Content analysis provides an overview of how the newspapers covered the situation by identifying general themes. There are several reasons why content analysis is an appropriate fit. Firstly, content analysis allows for a large sample population to be analyzed. Through the systematic nature of the coding sheet and definitions, a researcher is able to look at many texts and establish trends and anomalies that are not possible when focusing solely on a few articles, as discourse analysis does (Krippendorff, 2004, p. 42).

A second feature of content analysis is especially important given the research question at hand:

*Compared to techniques like interviews, [content analysis] yields unobtrusive measures in which neither the sender nor the receiver of the message is aware that it is being analyzed. There is therefore little danger that the act of measurement itself will act as a force for change that confounds the data (Weber, 1990, p. 10).*

The discreet nature of content analysis provides a crucial advantage, as the texts concern themselves with the sensitive, and often controversial, topics of racism, sexism, as well as individual liberties and their potential limits. Finally, because a major critique of discourse analysis is that it is a more subjective methodology (Gill, 2000, p. 181), content analysis will provide an orderly and replicable examination of the media texts (Bauer & Gaskell, 2000, p. 148; Rife, Lacy, & Fico, 1998, p. 20).

Content analysis is not without criticisms, most notable of which is its superficial analysis of the texts. Researchers, for example, can only look at manifest content and cannot hone in on details that may either be present or conspicuously absent (Bauer & Gaskell, 2000, p. 149). Also, through the formal structure of a coding sheet, the language used in the articles is threatened, as concepts may be taken out of context or views altered (Flick, Kardorff, & Steinke, 2005, p. 193). Finally, there is the potential for a perspective difference where a discrepancy might arise between how an academically oriented and trained coder perceives an article as compared to an average newspaper reader (Weber, 1990, p. 17). While minimized through a strong coding design, inherent limitations of the methodology should be noted.

I will also be using discourse analysis as a complement to content analysis. While there are many definitions of discourse, its meaning and subsequent importance is aptly put that, "discourse is language above the sentence or above the clause" (Stubbs, 1983, p. 1). While content analysis provides the broad generalizations that allow for an overall understanding, discourse analysis will add to the textual examination:

*Closer attention to texts sometimes helps to give a firmer grounding to the conclusions arrived at without it, sometimes suggests how they might be elaborated or modified, and occasionally suggests that they might be misguided* (Fairclough, 1995a, p. 188).

Built upon the argument that language is used to *do* things and that it helps create and change meanings (Taylor, 2001, p. 6), discourse analysis is a fitting technique in order to see how language is used to reference issues, such as race and gender, that arise from the research question. How these concepts are addressed within the media texts provide insight into the larger, functional questions of discourse analysis which concerns itself with power relations and the creation of representations and identities (Fairclough, 1995b, p. 24). As race and gender are often addressed indirectly or implicitly, a discourse analysis will unearth the nuances and contextual meanings that content analysis cannot provide. Finally, Fairclough (1995a) explains that discourse analysis can serve as a "barometer of social processes, movements and diversity" (p. 209) and that texts can provide evidence of social change. As the research looks specifically at an instance where a person's voice is silenced due to the nature of his words, but had been allowed and encouraged to make similar comments in the past, an in-depth analytical approach to see if and how societal values are changing is suitable.

As mentioned previously, the most commonly cited critique is the subjectivity of discourse analysis. While there are guidelines and frameworks that can be imitated, discourse analysis provides a single person's interpretation of the data and the results are difficult to replicate or validate (Wood & Kroger, 2000, p. 165). Also, while I have selected articles that, in my opinion, best represent the themes that emerge from the content analysis, the resultant findings from the discourse analysis reflect only the five articles which I analyzed, and cannot represent a larger population (Le, 2006, p. 53). These limitations, however, still allow for a deeper and richer understanding of the text than from content analysis alone.

### Sampling data for content analysis

My first decision regarding my sample was the decision to look at newspaper coverage specifically. While television news also covered the incident, a study from ADT Research found that, "Cable news networks appeal to...highly ideological so-called news junkies whose daily entertainment derives from the overheated debates of the political class" (Farhi, April 2003). In contrast, newspapers in the United States appear less ideologically aligned and do not face the same 30-second sound-byte constraints that television news broadcasts have internalized (University of Michigan, n.d.). Therefore, in order to gain a broader and more inclusive sense of the issues surrounding the topic at hand, I opted to analyze newspapers.

Secondly, I decided to look at the top five American newspapers with regards to circulation as the research question pertains to how the issue was covered in general (Audit Bureau of Circulations, 2007). While one cannot assume these newspapers are representative of all American newspapers, they do represent the widest breadth that five newspapers can provide. I opted to exclude the *Wall Street Journal* due to its narrow financial focus, which left me with the five newspapers of: *USA Today*, *New York Times*, *Los Angeles Times*, *Chicago Tribune*, and *The Washington Post*.

Don Imus made his comment regarding the Rutgers basketball team on April 4, 2007 and was fired one week later on April 11, 2007. I decided to have my sampling timeline start on April 4<sup>th</sup> and end one week after Imus was fired, on April 18<sup>th</sup>. This endpoint was decided by the fact that after this date the fervor surrounding Don Imus had subsided and his name was used only in passing as opposed to being the primary or secondary focus of the articles. After clearing out duplicates and non-related articles, there was a total of 155 articles in which the name "Don Imus" appears using the Lexis-Nexis search engine. Due to the prior constraints set in place which limited the number of articles, there was no sampling procedure done and instead the entire population was coded.

### Design of Content Analysis Coding Sheet

After the coding sheet was piloted (Appendix A) a final draft was created which used 23 variables (Appendix B). The variables were chosen as they addressed the key issues, both academic and laymen, surrounding the Imus debate and would be able to provide a holistic representation of how the incident was portrayed. When doing the statistical analysis, however, I opted to disregard the articles which were categorized as "letters to the

editor.” Due to the large number of letters published and their short length which only addressed a single point, they skew the data by minimizing the appearance of elements that are prevalent within the other articles. Therefore the statistical analysis will only look at the 110 articles which are coded as news, feature articles, and editorials.

I trained an additional coder who then coded 15 articles. The Inter-Coder Reliability was 89.4%, with the formula for used calculation being:  $r = (\text{agree}) / (\text{agree} + \text{disagree})$  (Holsti, 1969, p. 140).

### Sampling Data for Discourse Analysis

Due to the more in-depth focus of discourse analysis, a smaller number of articles were chosen to be analyzed. While there is a framework for sampling, it is less formalized than content analysis, with the focus instead on making the sample, “relevant to or representative of the phenomenon of interest” (Wood & Kroger, 2000, p. 78). Making up over 25% of the total articles coded, I opted to do a more in-depth analysis of editorials which are,

*...argumentative and aim to persuade by explaining. This is achieved by relating new facts to already known ones, but appearing 'objective' and well-informed by presenting others' positions and by positioning the author's voice in the targeted community (Le, 2006, p. 214).*

Editorials, while still adhering to the facts of the incident, provide a more critical and opinionated viewpoint which can provide more information on both the discussion surrounding the incident and the overarching themes that were paired with the saga. From the editorials, I chose one article from each of the five newspapers, with the criteria that it must have at least five of the 19 variables present set out in the content analysis coding sheet.<sup>3</sup> The resulting articles are: “Rutgers women stand tall in class” by Christine Brennan in *USA Today*, “Trash talk radio” by Gewn Ifill in the *New York Times*, “Imus is not alone” by Constance Rice in the *Los Angeles Times*, “Big stories, big talk, little understanding” by Dawn Turner Trice in the *Chicago Tribune* and “A needed conversation” by Sally Jenkins in *The Washington Post*.

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<sup>3</sup> There are 23 variables in total, but the variables including newspaper title, date article was written, type of article, and overall frame of the article were omitted due to an inability to categorize based upon them.

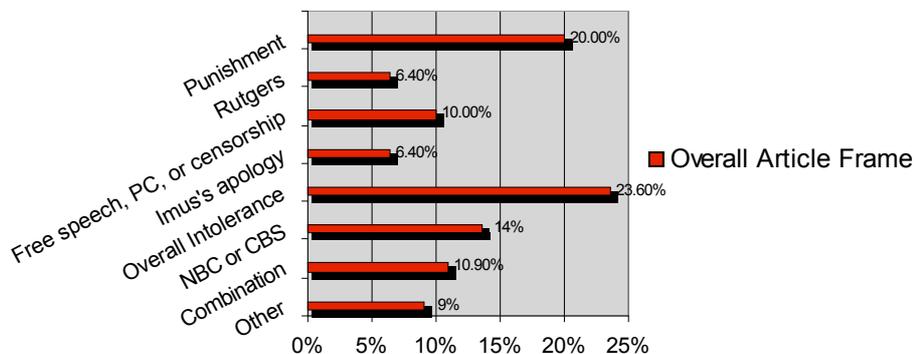
## Results and Interpretation

### Content Analysis

The following is a summary of the main findings from the content analysis. Some of the variables coded for are not addressed because upon analysis they did not relate to the research questions previously set out.<sup>4</sup> Also, cross tabulation tables and chi squared results comparing the newspaper analyzed with the other coded variables found that none of the combinations produced a statistically significant result.<sup>5</sup> This finding shows that the five newspapers analyzed are similar to one another with regards to reporting style, article focus, and the emphasis or de-emphasis of particular elements within the texts. Preliminary findings will be reported here, with a more in-depth interpretation taking place in conjunction with the discourse analysis.

### Overarching portrayal

Eight variables were used to gain an understanding of the overall representation of the articles. Firstly, the question asking how the situation regarding Don Imus was framed found that a plurality of texts were about overall intolerance within American society (23.6%) which was then followed by the possible or actual punishment for Imus (20%).



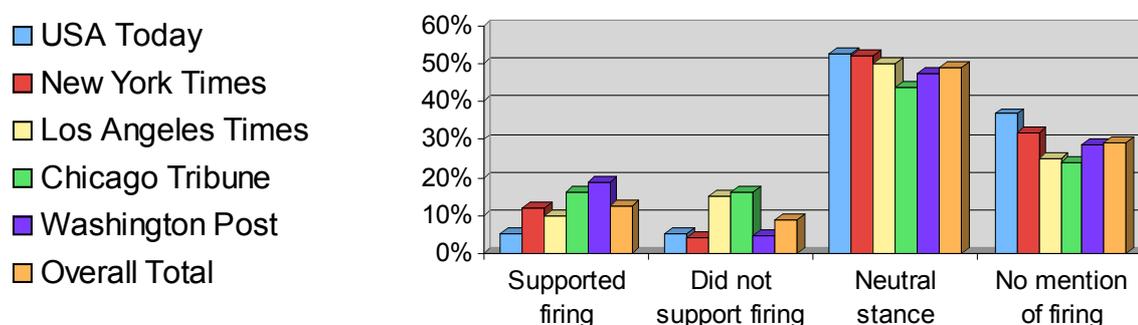
The first result illustrates the emphasis on the tangential issue of contemporary social problems, creating an opportunity for a broader debate to take place. The difference in article framing may be related to the type of article (news, feature, editorial) the text was, but a crosstabulation between framing and type of article did not meet the minimum cell requirements, so a definitive answer cannot be given. Secondly, the content and speaker of

<sup>4</sup> See appendix D for distribution of the variables not mentioned in the analysis.

<sup>5</sup> See appendix E cross tabulation results of newspaper analyzed and all other coded variables.

the first quote serve as another type of framing as the author gives a direct voice to a third party (Strohm, 1999, p. 64). Whereas only 6.4% of the articles had the Rutgers women's basketball team as the overall focus, 15.5% of the articles used a comment from one of the players or Coach Vivian Stringer as the first quote of the article.<sup>6</sup> This number is only exceeded by quotes from NBC or CBS. From this we see that while official information is highly valued, the quotes from the Rutgers team, which have more of an emotive rather than factual appeal, were employed regularly and served to personalize the situation, even when the team was not the article focus.

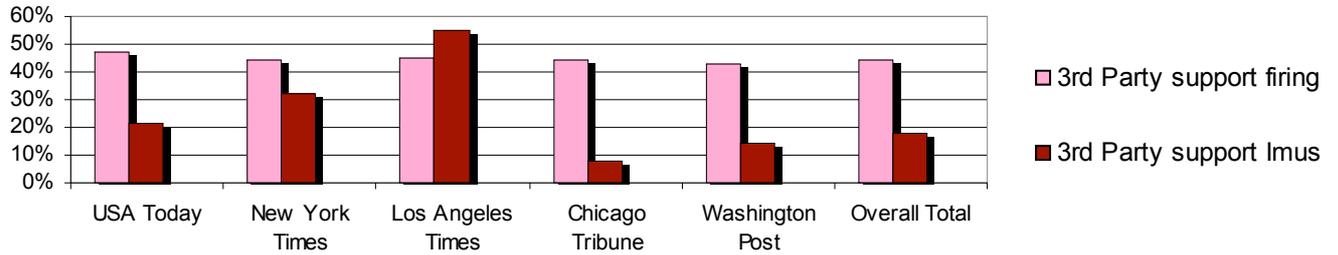
### Authors' Support and Opposition to Imus



I also looked at whether or not the author explicitly supported the idea of Imus losing his job over his comment. 29.1% of all articles, which is 57% of all articles that mention firing anywhere in the article, take an explicitly neutral stance. A crosstabulation reveals a significant relationship between the type of article and the authors' support of Imus's firing at alpha equals 0.001 level. Only a single "news" article and 7 "feature" articles take explicit stances on Imus's firing while approximately 22 in each category take a neutral stance. This stands in stark contrast to the 16 editorials which do take a stance and the mere 7 which do not. These results follow the assumption that news pieces are meant to be unbiased while editorials are supposed to inject personal opinions (Le, 2006, p. 214), but upon closer examination the presentation of the situation is not as neutral as the statistics suggest.

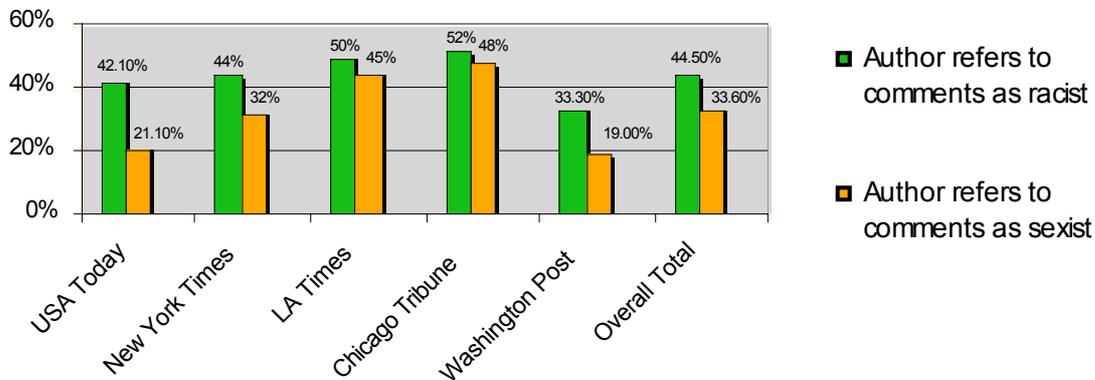
<sup>6</sup> See appendix F for the distribution of content and speaker of first quotes.

### 3rd Party Support and Opposition to Imus



While 44.5% of all articles have a third party calling for Imus’s firing, only 18.2% of the articles have a third party accepting his apology, saying that Imus should not lose his job or that he/she would be a guest or continue listening to the show. While the New York Times offers the least disparity, a cross tabulation of all the articles shows that the variables are statistically independent indicating that the authors were not consistently reporting on both Imus’s opponents and supporters equally.

### Author referring to comments as racist and sexist

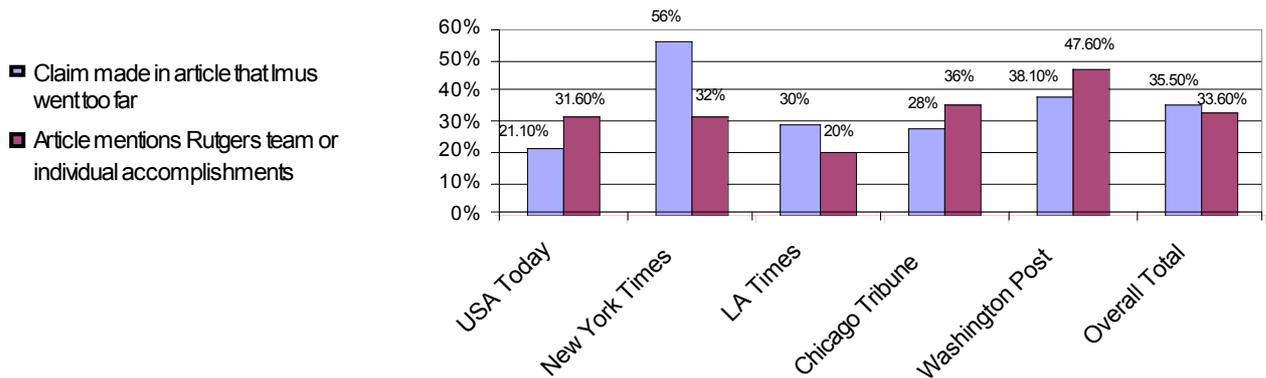


Similarly, the descriptive results show that 44.5% of the articles explicitly referred to Imus’s comments as racist and 33.6% as sexist. A further chi squared test once again reveals that there is not a statistical relationship between the type of article analyzed and whether the author refers to Imus’s remarks as racist or sexist. Therefore, the loaded language cannot be attributed to the fact that it was used solely within the context of an editorial. From this broad base of general reporting style, the results below show more specific themes which emerged from the content analysis.

The Rutgers women’s basketball team was an unacceptable target for such a comment

Similarly to the result found regarding the Rutgers team contributing many “first quotes” within the texts, 33.6% of articles mention the players with regards to their individual or team circumstances and accomplishments. Also, 34.5% of the articles mention that Imus chose unfair targets or went too far in this instance. While Imus’s history of inappropriate humor is well-established, this situation was represented as different, as the targets were considered to be “out-of-bounds.” 53.63% of the total texts contained one or both variables which serve to clarify why Imus’s remark was inappropriate.<sup>7</sup> The personalization of the victims and the creation of an overall feeling that the Rutgers team did not deserve this treatment act as one possible reason for why, in this instance, Imus’s comments were deemed unacceptable.

How the Rutgers team was portrayed

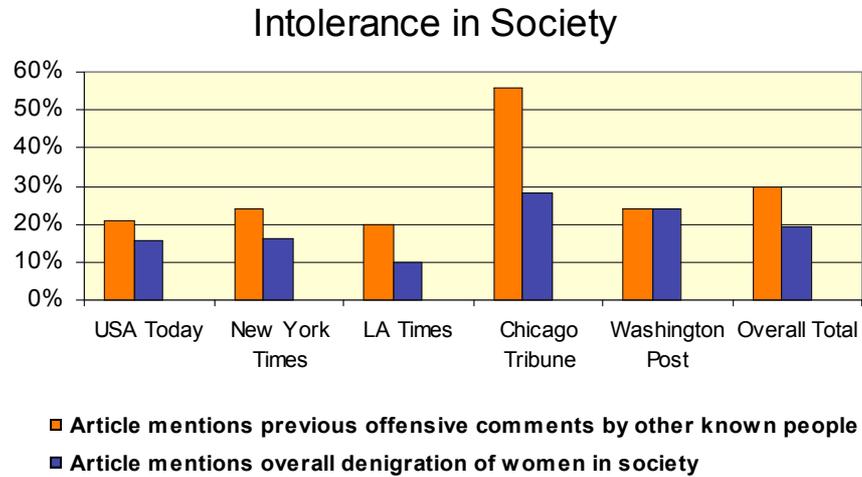


Denigration of women within society

30% of the texts repeat examples of other “known personalities” making similarly inappropriate comments and just under 20% mention specifically the overall denigration of women, in any form, within today’s society. Though a smaller trend, these variables represent the broadening of the discussion surrounding Imus by taking the focus off specifically what Imus said and placing it on the larger picture of intolerance occurring in society, which is in line with the finding of the overall article framing. The growing concern

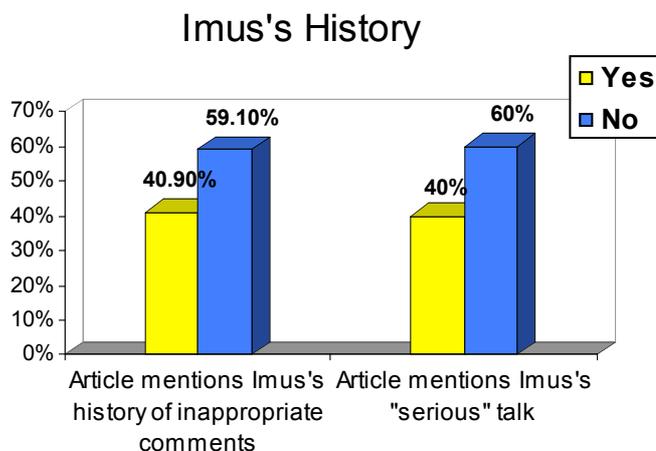
<sup>7</sup> If both variables were present, it was not counted twice.

and discussion surrounding the treatment of women and minorities may be indicative of changing social values and serves as a second potential reason for why Imus was fired.



#### Advertisers pulling their spots from the Imus show

19.1% of all the newspaper articles mention the specific fact that key “Imus in the Morning” sponsors opted to stop running advertisements on the show on account of his April 4<sup>th</sup> comments. Approximately 12 advertisers, including large-name companies such as Proctor and Gamble, General Motors, Staples, and American Express all decided to discontinue advertising on the morning show (“Don Imus show loses more advertisers,” 11 April 2007). The number of articles highlighting this detail is not particularly relevant, but instead the newspapers are providing an important fact that gives insight into the overall situation. As, “talk radio derives its lifeblood from advertising dollars” (Boggs & Dirmann, 1999, p. 79), this fact is a potentially crucial element in determining why both NBC and CBS chose to end their syndication of Imus’s show. While one cannot claim that the decision to fire Imus was based either directly or indirectly on account of the sponsors’ pull-out, it does present itself as a unique variable which is important both to understanding why Imus was fired as well as the ability for a public sphere to exist on the radio.

Public sphere on the radio

From the content analysis we see Imus's inconsistent nature come to life. While 40.9% of articles mention Imus's history of inappropriate comments or specifically cite a previous example of his questionable humor, 40% of the articles also make reference to Imus's "serious" side or mentions the distinguished list of politicians, journalists, authors, and activists who have appeared on his show. If adhering to Fiss's "silencing dynamic", Imus's string of hateful language would curb the speech of the minority groups targeted which taints the public sphere (Fiss, 1996b, p. 90), whereas Imus's penchant for in-depth discussion illustrates the potential benefits of the medium. With both the distinct advantages and disadvantages discussed, content analysis does not provide a single picture of how talk radio effects public debate. Also, within the academic community, the issues such as political correctness, the First Amendment, and censorship are all tied to and impact the existence and perception of the public sphere. Although the findings are based on low sample sizes, we do see the beginnings of the paradox that American currently faces, as the articles are both supportive of political correctness and opposed to censorship. While these beliefs are in inherent conflict with one another, they are simultaneously promoted by the texts, thereby creating a muddled picture of public discourse and its future prospects. The lack of findings may be partially attributed to the fact that the content analysis was looking for specific words as opposed to broad themes or definitions which encompass these ideas. Discourse analysis will allow us to see if these issues are addressed more implicitly.

| <b>What is overall tone towards concept of censorship?</b>                          | <b>Percent</b> |
|---|----------------|
| Positive  | 1.8%           |
| Negative  | 5.5%           |
| Neutral   | .9%            |
| Censorship not explicitly mentioned   | 91.9%          |
| <b>What is overall tone towards concept of political correctness?</b>               | <b>Percent</b> |
| Positive  | 4.5%           |
| Negative  | 0%             |
| Neutral   | .9%            |
| Political Correctness not explicitly mentioned                                      | 94.5%          |
| <b>What is overall tone towards concepts of free speech or the First Amendment?</b> | <b>Percent</b> |
| Free speech needs certain limits in place   | 5.5%           |
| First Amendment is of the utmost importance and must be protected                   | 6.4%           |
| Neutral   | .9%            |
| Neither concepts are explicitly mentioned   | 87.3%          |

### Discourse Analysis

Using the content analysis findings as a foundation, the discourse analysis will look more closely at the key themes that emerged and see if, upon closer examination, discourse analysis bolsters, minimizes, or even contradicts the generalized content analysis findings.

#### The Rutgers women's basketball team was an unacceptable target for such a comment

The Rutgers women's basketball team was indeed portrayed as victims deserving of sympathy making Imus's comments appear that much more unforgivable. Jenkins refers to the team as "kids" and the captain, Essence Carson, as having a "blameless face and voice" (paragraph 10, 3), while Ifill says the team is made up of a "bunch of teenagers" who are merely just "girls" (paragraph 3, 4). The picture created is that of a group of defenseless children who are not in a position to shield themselves from the ills directed at them. Ifill provides the example of Don Imus's racial joke aimed at her to illustrate that the Rutgers team is not a fair target: "I am a big girl. I have a voice" (Paragraph 12). This stands in contrast to her description of the Rutgers team: "They are not old enough, or established enough" (paragraph 13). This deictic use, whereby Ifill distinguishes herself (I) from the team (they) defines the line which Imus's humor crossed (Young, 1988, p. 29).

Similarly, the notion that “athletes are not fair targets” (Rice, paragraph 3) and Imus instead needs to “pick on people [his] own size” (Ifill, paragraph 16) reiterates the idea that some people within society deserve protection, like children, and others deserve respect, like students and athletes. In this instance, the Rutgers team qualifies as both. Furthermore, by using the agent-patient distinction which separates people into those making choices and those who merely suffer the external consequences, Imus was portrayed as the agent and the Rutgers team as the patient (Wood & Kroger, 2000, p. 101). Imus “branded” the Rutgers team (Ifill, paragraph 4) and by doing so he “disabused them” and “hardened their hearts” (Jenkins, paragraph 10). Ifill’s use of the term “branded” also serves as an important example of intertextuality, which looks at the way texts transform and are embedded in other texts (Fairclough, 1995b, p. 75). Branded means, “to be marked with a branding iron to show ownership” (branded, n.d.). While this word is often only used in modern day to describe cattle, its meaning reverberates back to a time when white men owned blacks and these slaves were not seen as individuals, but property.

Finally, the Rutgers women confronted the “most withering media firestorms any athlete, male or female, pro or amateur will ever have to face” (Brennan, paragraph 3) and experienced the “biggest moment of their lives” turn into the “biggest disappointment” (Ifill, paragraph 13). The adoption of extreme case formulations, which occurs when an evaluative dimension is taken to its extreme limits, creates a strong emotional appeal that neither the public or Imus’s syndicators could ignore (Potter & Wetherell, 1992, p. 47).

#### Denigration of women within society

All five of the editorial pieces employ some sort of staging, which refers to the linear organization of a piece which allows some items and events to gain more prominence within a text (Brown & Yule, 1983, p. 134). In the *Washington Post* and *USA Today*, the story of the Rutgers team is eclipsed by the problems facing college level women’s sports in general as “female ballplayers still fight enormous prejudice” (Jenkins, paragraph 11) including, “On every college campus...a male athlete or coach...has made fun of a female athlete in the last week or two” (Brennan, paragraph 11). The incident was also subordinated by staging the Rutgers situation as a foundation for the more overarching issue of the treatment of women, and black women in particular. Ifill’s concluding remarks transcend the specific issue at hand and instead focus on the fact that society needs to, “learn to applaud and encourage the young people who have to work harder to just achieve balance on an unequal playing field” (paragraph 16). Instead of focusing solely on the Rutgers incident and describing the racist

and sexist comment of one man, Ifill opened up the discussion and readily asserts that today's society is not color-blind. *The Chicago Tribune* and *Los Angeles Times*, however, present the situation of women as one that must first be corrected from inside the black community.

Both articles use the case of popular misogynistic rap lyrics as an example of the larger, ongoing problem within the black community. Trice bases her argument on a quote from the rapper Snoop Dogg who claims that black rappers can refer to women "in the 'hood" as "hos" but a white middle-aged man has no right to speak that way about African American women who have "made it to the next level in education and sports" (paragraphs 3, 4). Once again, this idea that the Rutgers team did not deserve what they received comes to the surface of the argument. In this case, however, Trice criticizes the hypocrisy of the situation and faults national black leaders for not speaking out against rappers' depictions of women, "with the same vehemence that was directed toward Imus" (paragraph 10). Rice furthers the claim by arguing that Imus's comments only, "mimic those of the original gurus of black female denigration: black men with no class" (paragraph 6). Another example of intertextuality, the word "guru" is a spiritual and intellectual leader within the Hindu and Buddhist faiths (guru, n.d.), but it is used here to mean the opposite; to be a teacher of superiority and hate. Rice then makes her final argument that all those decrying female denigration, "can begin to examine our own glass mansions" (paragraph 13). A variation of the modern-day adage, "Those who live in glass houses shouldn't throw stones", Rice's deitic "our" points to the hypocrisy between how white men and black men are allowed to treat women.

#### Public sphere on the radio

"Imus in the Morning's" history of sexist and racist comments, which "advertisers and sponsors gleefully supported" (Trice, paragraph 7) has created an atmosphere where: "Listeners expect racist and sexist banter" and the show even has someone specifically designated to do "nigger jokes" (Rice, paragraph 2). The end result is that Ifill does, "not know any black journalists who will [appear on Imus's show]" (Paragraph 14). Furthermore, the talk radio world is described by Brennan as a place, "where it's often open season on women" (paragraph 11). As open season refers to game hunting, this example of intertextuality illustrates the author's views of talk radio; it is not merely a place where inappropriate comments are occasionally made, but a world that encourages men to choose a target, take aim, and shoot, in this case, at women.

Though none of the texts analyzed mention the First Amendment or political correctness, how Imus's firing would affect public discourse is addressed. Jenkins makes the oft-cited argument of free speech advocates: "Clearly, as a society we've made the uneasy decision that censorship is more dangerous than sensitivity" (paragraph 9). We see the author use a presupposition, in this case assuming that the readers agree with the fact that there should be minimal censorship in our society (Brown & Yule, 1983, p. 30). As we know from the literature, this is not an agree-upon decision, but Jenkins assumes this to make her point that, "you don't cure prejudice by curbing speech" (paragraph 9) while Rice claims that, "it's healthier to have what people of all races really think out in the open rather than hounded into the shadows" (paragraph 11). From this basis, you can see both Jenkins and Rice do believe in the First Amendment's protection of free speech and opposition to censorship, even if the speech is harmful to individuals and groups. The fact that Rice specifically says it's "healthier," as opposed to simple "healthy," means that if emotions of disdain remain unexpressed, they do not disappear but instead fester, while an open dialogue allows for real progress to be made. This commitment to free speech, however, does not mean that these authors condone the language used. These two articles once again illustrate the American paradox of free speech as the comments are referred to as "unpardonable garbage" (Jenkins, paragraph 8) and "racist" (Rice, paragraph 3) by both authors but they still believe society has more to lose if Imus is fired. We also see the two authors clarify Imus's current societal status as a "racist". Through examples of his "champion[ing] Harold E. Ford...and bitterly decry[ing] the slow government response to Katrina," Jenkins claims that is difficult to call Imus an "out-and-out-racist" (paragraph 8) while Rice concluded that, "Imus is not a malevolent racist. He is a good-natured racist," who has "some of the best political interviews on the air" (paragraph 9). The authors mitigate Imus's charge of being a "full racist" by creating different degrees of racism, into which Imus apparently falls into a more innocuous category. These distinct depictions of both Imus and talk radio present differing views regarding Imus's role within the public debate.

### Interpretation

While Don Imus could never face legal action on account of his words, the fact that he was fired for calling the Rutgers women's basketball team "nappy-headed hos" demonstrates that there are limits on what is allowed to be said on a more informal basis. Firstly, the number of articles focusing on overall American intolerance and the personalization of the Rutgers team creates a story focus that extends beyond the simple

fact that Imus said an offensive comment. While racist terms subordinate their targets and “put them in their places” (Altman, 1993, p. 310) regardless of individual social status, Imus did not receive backlash for his previous comments directed at either groups of people or public figures. The dual presentation of the Rutgers team as students and athletes coupled with their inexperience in the public spotlight, however, creates a unique situation where these girls were considered to be off-limits to an Imus insult. Secondly, from the content analysis we see an overwhelming furthering of the PC-agenda. Most notably, the authors’ use of “racist” and “sexist” to describe Imus and his comment creates a new limit on what can and cannot be said. As their diction makes the presupposed claim that the words “nappy-headed hos” are unacceptable, in essence an “implicit convention of restraint on public expression” (Loury, 1994, p. 132) was created. While the tangible implications are undeniable, whether this limit promotes or hinders speech is an unanswerable question that exemplifies the ongoing academic debate regarding political correctness. Although the overall framing and general content appears to be concerned with societal inclusion and furthering the tenets of the political correctness, a closer look illuminates the contradictions that exist within the texts and illustrates the inconsistencies that the interlocking ideas of political correctness, free speech, and the public sphere currently pose.

The broad phrasing of content analysis painted the picture that it might be a growing concern about the denigration of women that caused the media, networks, and society to react against Imus. Upon closer examination through discourse analysis, however, the results are quite mixed. Ifill’s appeal for society to change its speech towards minorities falls in line with the political correctness argument that a change in speech is a necessary precursor to a change in attitudes (Hentoff, 1992, p. 56). The newspaper articles, however, do not only focus on how the white majority should treat minorities, but focuses on what the African American community must do for itself. The outrage stemming from Imus’s comment compared to the acceptance of degrading hip-hop lyrics is highlighted in the discourse analysis, an aspect of the political correctness debate that is conspicuously absent in the academic literature. In this instance the discourse analysis provided a clarification on the content analysis, showing that not all the findings from the content analysis argue the same point. From the combination, we can see that while there is a concern regarding the growth of intolerant speech, the question of to whom politically correct speech applies presents itself without a clear answer. Secondly, by looking at the content and discourse analyses together we see the complexity created by today’s society which values both freedom of speech and political correctness. An overwhelming number of authors refer to

Imus's comments as racist and sexist, but these same authors do not necessarily advocate for his firing, and in the discourse analysis we see Rice and Jenkins actively defend Imus's job. While in the academic literature clear stances relating to political correctness and free speech are presented, we see through the texts that, in practice, opinions relating to these two subjects often result in conflicting beliefs.

Furthermore, the research shows that an agonistic public sphere on talk radio can never truly exist, while simultaneously preserving the merits of talk radio. It was previously set out that talk radio would never meet Habermasian standards, but could instead be a modified agonistic sphericule (Gitlin, 1998; Mouffe, 1999). According to the discourse analysis, women and minorities are often excluded from the public sphere of talk radio, as they are not treated as equal participants in the discussion. Instead of talk radio providing open access to debate, the newspaper texts clearly bring to life the notion of masculine hegemony, as men are portrayed as using the airwaves to demean and degrade those seen as potential threats to their superiority (Darnell & Wilson, 2006, p. 444; Douglas, 2002, p. 485). We also see how intrinsically difficult it is to claim the existence of a public sphere when someone is fired for his/her speech. Without people being able to speak freely there are concerns that the breadth and quality of debate will be restricted and that "truth" will never be found (Dunant, 1994, p. vii). Also, the fact that advertisers pulled their support, regardless of whether or not this influenced the networks' decision to cancel the show, furthers Habermas's refeudalization hypothesis. As advertising imposes both direct and indirect controls on the program content, a public sphere can never exist (Sunstein, 1993, p. 63). The medium in itself and its need for advertising poses an inherent and inevitable constraint on all talk radio.

Although a public sphere cannot be attained, Imus's "serious" tone, which is represented within the texts, reveal that the virtues of an electronic forum for discussion have not been disregarded either. We do see, even with Imus's obvious flaws, that the authors still see the benefit of talk radio. Imus's ability to reach such a large audience coupled with his political segments with American elites provide an opportunity for listeners to both learn and contribute. The authors' decision to call attention to Imus's contribution to discussion via the airwaves illustrates that even in the wake of this frenzy, many defend the potential as well as actual merits embodied by talk radio.

## **Conclusion**

America's unique legacy of free speech protection coupled with the increasingly popular talk radio provides, in theory, a setting in which a public sphere, a concept often deemed unachievable, could potentially thrive. We see in practice, however, that contradictory elements go into the creation of a public sphere which inevitably stifle discussion. From looking at the case study of Don Imus's firing, we see that there are numerous reasons for why Imus might have been fired for his comment, all of which serve to further the PC agenda which looks to limit hurtful speech in order to promote equality within society. We also find both by limiting Imus's speech and allowing him to continue as a radio host produce the similar result of a diminished public sphere. This can be attributed in part to our concept of a public sphere, which was built on Mouffe's claim that passions should be present within public discussion. While talk radio is often heated and will never meet Habermas's standards of rational discussion, by encouraging the inclusion of passions the presence of bigotry and hate appears inevitable. The result is a paradox where people are inherently excluded: either the speaker of hurtful words or the targets of the speech – both of whom must be included for a true agonistic public sphere to exist. We also see the formation of a second paradox through the texts where both the First Amendment and political correctness are held with esteem and talk radio is both admonished and defended. While the former presents an academic challenge to the notion of the public sphere, the latter reflects the complex actuality of the situation and the contradictory views presented in the media.

While this paper presents interesting findings by looking specifically at how the newspapers reported on Don Imus and the key issues surrounding his statement, we cannot say for certain what the audience effects are. Further analysis into how these newspapers impacted the readers, either through interviews or before and after opinion polls, would take the research one step further and present a new set of results relating to the impact level of newspaper framing. A second interesting way to continue research in this field is to do a cross-example comparison with different actors who made other similarly offensive comments in order to see how these situations were portrayed within the media. By looking at multiple examples with different circumstances, media coverage, and outcomes, it might be possible to create an even more specific definition of exactly what types of speech society is willing to tolerate and what it will not. Lastly, a way to improve the current design would be to modify and add questions relating to free speech and political correctness. Though the

problem experienced in this research is, in part, a byproduct of content analysis, it can be minimized by making the questions more inclusive.

This project just touches on the surface of the interrelated topics of free speech and political correctness. Since political correctness's inception in the 1980s, it has quickly become a known concept in both the academic and everyday realms and is an evolving idea that continues to change and be shaped by the society in which it exists. As speech is the most basic and concrete way we have to express ourselves, looking deeper into how political correctness has changed our speech is an increasingly imperative dimension needed to understand public discourse as a whole.

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Appendix A  
Don Imus Content Analysis Pilot

Newspaper \_\_\_\_\_

Headline:

Word Count of article: \_\_\_\_\_

1. Title of Newspaper
  1. USA Today
  2. New York Times
  3. Los Angeles Times
  4. Washington Post
  5. Chicago Tribune
  
2. When was the article written?
  1. Between April 4 – April 11
  2. Between April 11 – April 18
  
3. Type of article?
  1. News
  2. Feature article (sports, arts and entertainment)
  3. Editorial
  4. Letter to the editor
  9. Other
  
4. Within the article, how is the issue regarding Don Imus's comments framed?
  1. The possible or actual punishment for Don Imus
  2. The Rutgers team members
  3. Free speech, political correctness, censorship
  4. Don Imus's apology
  5. Overall intolerance of any kind within American society
  6. The business or financial aspect of Imus's show or syndication
  7. A combination of 1-6
  8. Don't Know
  9. Other
  
5. Does the author support Imus being fired (or advocate it before it occurred?)
  1. Yes
  2. No
  3. Takes a neutral stance
  4. There is no mention of firing anywhere within the article
  8. Don't Know
  9. Other
  
6. Does a third party advocate for or support Imus's dismissal anywhere within article?
  1. Yes
  2. No
  8. Don't know

7. Does a third party accept Imus's apology, claim that firing is too harsh a punishment, or say he/she would be a guest or continue watching the show? (If yes to one or more, mark yes, if no to all, mark no)

1. Yes
2. No
8. Don't know

8. Who is the first third party quoted within the article?

1. Imus's original comment from April 4<sup>th</sup>
2. An apology made by Imus
3. A person calling for Imus to be fired/A person supporting the decision for Imus to be fired
4. A person saying that an apology is enough/A person who does not believe that Imus should be fired
5. A member of the Rutgers women's basketball team or their coach
6. A spokesperson, statement or comment from NBC or CBS radio
8. Don't know
9. Other

9. Does the article mention any of Rutgers players' individual accomplishments or circumstances?

1. Yes
2. No
8. Don't know

10. Does the article mention any previous offensive comments made by Imus regarding race, religion, sexuality or other minority groups?

1. Yes
2. No
8. Don't know

11. Does the article mention any previous offensive comments made by other famous/known/political figures regarding race, religion, sexuality or other minority groups?

1. Yes
2. No
8. Don't know

12. What is the overall tone towards the concept of censorship?

1. Positive
2. Negative
3. Censorship is not explicitly mentioned within the article
8. Don't know
9. Other

13. What is overall tone towards the concept of political correctness?

1. Positive
2. Negative
3. Political correctness is not mentioned explicitly in the article
8. Don't know
9. Other

14. What is the overall tone towards the concepts of free speech or the First Amendment?
  1. Free speech needs certain limits or boundaries in place for protection of citizens
  2. The First Amendment is of the utmost importance and must be protected
  3. Neither the concepts of free speech or the First Amendment are mentioned explicitly in the article
  8. Don't know
  9. Other
  
15. Does the author use the term "nappy-headed ho" anywhere in the article?
  1. Yes
  2. No
  
16. Does the author mention that advertisers pulled support from Imus's show?
  1. Yes
  2. No
  
17. Does the author claim that Imus "went too far"?
  1. Yes
  2. No

Appendix B

Don Imus Content Analysis Final

Newspaper

Headline:

---

Word Count of article: \_\_\_\_\_

1. Title of Newspaper
  1. USA Today
  2. New York Times
  3. Los Angeles Times
  4. Washington Post
  5. Chicago Tribune
  
2. When was the article written?
  1. Between April 4 – April 11 (before Imus was fired)
  2. Between April 11 – April 18
  
3. Type of article?
  5. News
  6. Feature article (sports, arts and entertainment)
  7. Editorial
  8. Letter to the editor
  9. Other
  
4. Within the article, how is the issue regarding Don Imus's comments framed?
  9. The possible or actual punishment for Don Imus
  10. The Rutgers team members
  11. Free speech, political correctness, censorship
  12. Don Imus's apology
  13. Overall intolerance of any kind within American society
  14. Overarching media of NBC or CBS: The business aspect, syndication, show structure, focus on stations' response
  15. Combination of 1-6
  16. Don't Know
  9. Other
  
5. Does the author support Imus being fired (or advocate it before it occurred?)
  5. Yes
  6. No
  7. Takes a neutral stance, Does not give explicit opinion through "own words"
  8. There is no mention of firing anywhere within the article
  8. Don't Know
  9. Other
  
6. Does a third party advocate for or support Imus's dismissal anywhere within article?
  3. Yes
  4. No
  8. Don't know

7. Does a third party accept Imus's apology, claim that firing is too harsh a punishment, or say he/she would be a guest or continue watching the show? (If yes to one or more, mark yes, if no to all, mark no)

- 3. Yes
- 4. No
- 8. Don't know

8. What was the content of the first quote in the article? (excluding the original comment from April 4<sup>th</sup>)

- 7. An apology made by Imus
- 8. A person calling for Imus to be fired/A person supporting the decision for Imus to be fired
- 9. A person saying that an apology is enough/A person who does not believe that Imus should be fired
- 10. A comment from a member of the Rutgers women's basketball team or their coach regarding feelings of hurt/pain
- 11. A comment from a member of team or coach regarding personal/team accomplishments or individuality
- 12. A comment from a member of team or coach regarding overall intolerance
- 13. A comment distancing the distancing NBC or CBS from Imus
- 10. A comment from NBC or CBS regarding Imus's punishment
- 11. A comment from NBC or CBS claiming they will monitor Imus/his career is contingent on changing his behavior
- 12. Was no quote in the article
- 13. Rutgers team or coach other
- 14. NBC or CBS other
- 15. A comment giving a professional/external opinion regarding the situation (could include a non-political personality)
- 10. Don't know
- 11. Other

9. Who says the first quote in the article? (excluding the original comment from April 4<sup>th</sup>)

- 1. Don Imus
- 2. Civil rights leader or spokesperson of a civil rights organization
- 3. Elected politician or person currently running for elected office
- 4. A Rutgers team member or coach
- 5. Spokesperson or comment from NBC or CBS
- 6. Was no quote in the article
- 7. Other known, but non-political, personality
- 10. "Professional" (includes academics, political operatives, etc – speaking from experience on subject)
- 8. Don't know
- 9. Other

10. Does the article mention any of Rutgers team or individual accomplishments or circumstances?

- 3. Yes
- 4. No
- 8. Don't know

11. Does the article mention any previous offensive comments made by Imus regarding race, religion, sexuality or other minority groups or the fact that he has a history of making inappropriate comments?

- 3. Yes
- 4. No
- 8. Don't know

12. Does the article mention any previous offensive comments made by other famous/known/political figures regarding race, religion, sexuality or other minority groups or another person's history of making inappropriate comments?

- 3. Yes
- 4. No
- 9. Don't know

13. What is the overall tone towards the concept of censorship?

- 4. Positive
- 5. Negative
- 6. Neutral
- 7. Censorship is not explicitly mentioned within the article
- 10. Don't know
- 11. Other

14. What is overall tone towards the concept of political correctness?

- 4. Positive
- 5. Negative
- 6. Neutral
- 7. Political correctness is not mentioned explicitly in the article
- 8. Don't know
- 9. Other

15. What is the overall tone towards the concepts of free speech or the First Amendment?

- 4. Free speech needs certain limits or boundaries in place for protection of citizens
- 5. The First Amendment is of the utmost importance and must be protected
- 6. Neutral
- 7. Neither the concepts of free speech or the First Amendment are mentioned explicitly in the article
- 10. Don't know
- 11. Other

16. Does the author specifically refer to Don Imus or his comment as racist?

- Yes
- No

17. Does the author specifically refer to Don Imus or his comment as sexist?

- Yes
- No

18. Is the overall denigration of women in society mentioned anywhere within the article?

- Yes
- No

19. Does the author repeat Don Imus's comment of "nappy-headed ho" anywhere within the article?

Yes

No

20. Does the author employ another derogatory slur (regarding any minority group) anywhere within the article?

Yes

No

21. Is the claim that Imus went too far, chose the wrong targets, or crossed the line mentioned anywhere within the article?

Yes

No

22. Is the fact that advertisers pulled their spots from the Imus show mentioned anywhere within the article?

Yes

No

23. Is the fact that Imus also has "serious" talk on his show mentioned anywhere within the article or does it name (specifically or in general) his past political and literary guests?

Yes

No

Appendix C

Don Imus Content Analysis

Coding Definitions

- Definitions and clarifications of the coding frame are meant to reduce ambiguity for coders.
- Not every question has follow-up definitions, only the ones with follow-up questions are below. The original questions and answer options are written in non-bold while additional definitions and clarifications are written in **bold**

4. Within the article, how is the issue regarding Don Imus's comments framed?

17. The possible or actual punishment for Don Imus – **Whether or not Imus will/won't/should/shouldn't be fired as the focus. Can take place both before and after he is suspended and fired**

18. The Rutgers team members – **This can deal with any aspect of the Rutgers team including, but not limited to: their expressed feelings, press conferences, or personal circumstances and history. The Rutgers team can be mentioned and even quoted within the article and still not have it be the overall focus of the piece.**

19. Free speech, political correctness, censorship –**If the piece takes the Rutgers incident as a jumping off point to discuss one of these issues in more depth.**

20. Don Imus's apology – **Any of his multiple apologies between April 4<sup>th</sup> and April 18<sup>th</sup>**

21. Overall intolerance of any kind within American society – **Can relate to any type of intolerance, not just towards African American women.**

22. Overarching media of NBC or CBS: The business aspect, syndication, show structure, focus on stations' response

23. Combination of 1-6 – **Only if there is not a single theme that emerges as most prominent.**

24. Don't Know

25. Other

5. Does the author support Imus being fired (or advocate it before it occurred?) **The author can either explicitly say he/she wants Imus fired (before the fact), is happy that**

**Imus was fired (after the fact), or comment that his possible/actual firing is a good thing for talk radio/society/etc.**

- 9. Yes
- 10. No
- 11. Takes a neutral stance, Does not give explicit opinion through "own words"
- 12. There is no mention of firing anywhere within the article
- 8. Don't Know
- 9. Other

7. Does a third party accept Imus's apology, claim that firing is too harsh a punishment, or say he/she would be a guest or continue watching the show? (If yes to one or more, mark yes, if no to all, mark no) **This can be any example of a third party showing support for Imus, with the above being the most common examples, but not an exhaustive list of signs of support.**

- 5. Yes
- 6. No
- 8. Don't know

**The difference between questions 8 and 9 below is to differentiate between *who* said the first quote and *what* the first quote said. Therefore, it is possible for a "professional" to say that Imus should be fired (aka answer #10 in question 9 does not have to correspond with answer # 15 in question 8).**

8. What was the content of the first quote in the article? (excluding the original comment from April 4<sup>th</sup>)

- 14. An apology made by Imus
- 15. A person calling for Imus to be fired/A person supporting the decision for Imus to be fired
- 16. A person saying that an apology is enough/A person who does not believe that Imus should be fired
- 17. A comment from a member of the Rutgers women's basketball team or their coach regarding feelings of hurt/pain
- 18. A comment from a member of team or coach regarding personal/team accomplishments or individuality

19. A comment from a member of team or coach regarding overall intolerance
20. A comment distancing the distancing NBC or CBS from Imus
13. A comment from NBC or CBS regarding Imus's punishment
14. A comment from NBC or CBS claiming they will monitor Imus/his career is contingent on changing his behavior
15. Was no quote in the article

13. Rutgers team or coach other

14. NBC or CBS other

15. A comment giving a professional/external opinion regarding the situation (could include a non-

political personality) – **In this case it is the person giving his/her opinion**

**regarding the situation**

**as a whole (it's affect on people, society, predicting what will result from the incident, etc)**

**If he/she gives an opinion as to what *should* happen to Imus, then their *content* of the quote would be either answers 2 or 3, even though they are still coded as a profession as question 9.**

12. Don't know

13. Other

9. Who says the first quote in the article? (excluding the original comment from April 4<sup>th</sup>)

1. Don Imus

2. Civil rights leader or spokesperson of a civil rights organization

3. Elected politician or person currently running for elected office

4. A Rutgers team member or coach

5. Spokesperson or comment from NBC or CBS

6. Was no quote in the article

7. Other known, but non-political, personality

10. "Professional" (includes academics, political operatives, etc – speaking from experience on subject)

8. Don't know

9. Other

**For both 11 and 12, this can be the author saying that Imus or another person has a history of comments or can explicitly give an example of a previous comment. The comment can be about any group of individuals, not simply the ones listed specifically below.**

11. Does the article mention any previous offensive comments made by Imus regarding race, religion, sexuality or other minority groups or the fact that he has a history of making inappropriate comments?

- 5. Yes
- 6. No
- 8. Don't know

12. Does the article mention any previous offensive comments made by other famous/known/political figures regarding race, religion, sexuality or other minority groups or another person's history of making inappropriate comments?

- 5. Yes
- 6. No
- 10. Don't know

**For questions 13, 14, and 15 – the attributes, or a derivation of it, must appear explicitly within the texts. For example, for censorship: censor, censoring, or censored must appear in order to answer question 13.**

13. What is the overall tone towards the concept of censorship?

- 8. Positive: **Censorship is, at times, necessary. Can say that censorship has its limits or downfalls, but in some instances it is needed.**
- 9. Negative: **Censorship is not acceptable under any circumstances.**
- 10. Neutral
- 11. Censorship is not explicitly mentioned within the article
- 12. Don't know
- 13. Other

14. What is overall tone towards the concept of political correctness?

8. Positive: **Political correctness is a necessary thing in our society, it is a way of inclusion, it is an important part of how we treat others, helps garner respect, etc.**
  9. Negative: **Political correctness does not help minorities, it stifles speech, it limits free thought and expression, has gone too far, hurts more than it helps, etc.**
  10. Neutral
  11. Political correctness is not mentioned explicitly in the article
  8. Don't know
  9. Other
15. What is the overall tone towards the concepts of free speech or the First Amendment?
8. Free speech needs certain limits or boundaries in place for protection of citizens: **Can have positive undertones, but mentions that at times it is acceptable to limit free speech or the First Amendment is not all encompassing.**
  9. The First Amendment is of the utmost importance and must be protected
  10. Neutral
  11. Neither the concepts of free speech or the First Amendment are mentioned explicitly in the article
  12. Don't know
  13. Other
18. Is the overall denigration women in society mentioned anywhere within the article? **This can refer to any mention of women being treated poorly, including but not limited to, an example of another person saying something derogatory towards women, mentioning the discrimination women face in sports, in the work place, education, etc.**
- Yes
- No
21. Is the claim that Imus went too far, chose the wrong targets, or crossed the line mentioned anywhere within the article? **This variable is concerned with anything regarding a boundary, limit, or line that Imus might have crossed, regardless of whether or not the author defines what/where the line is.**

Yes

No

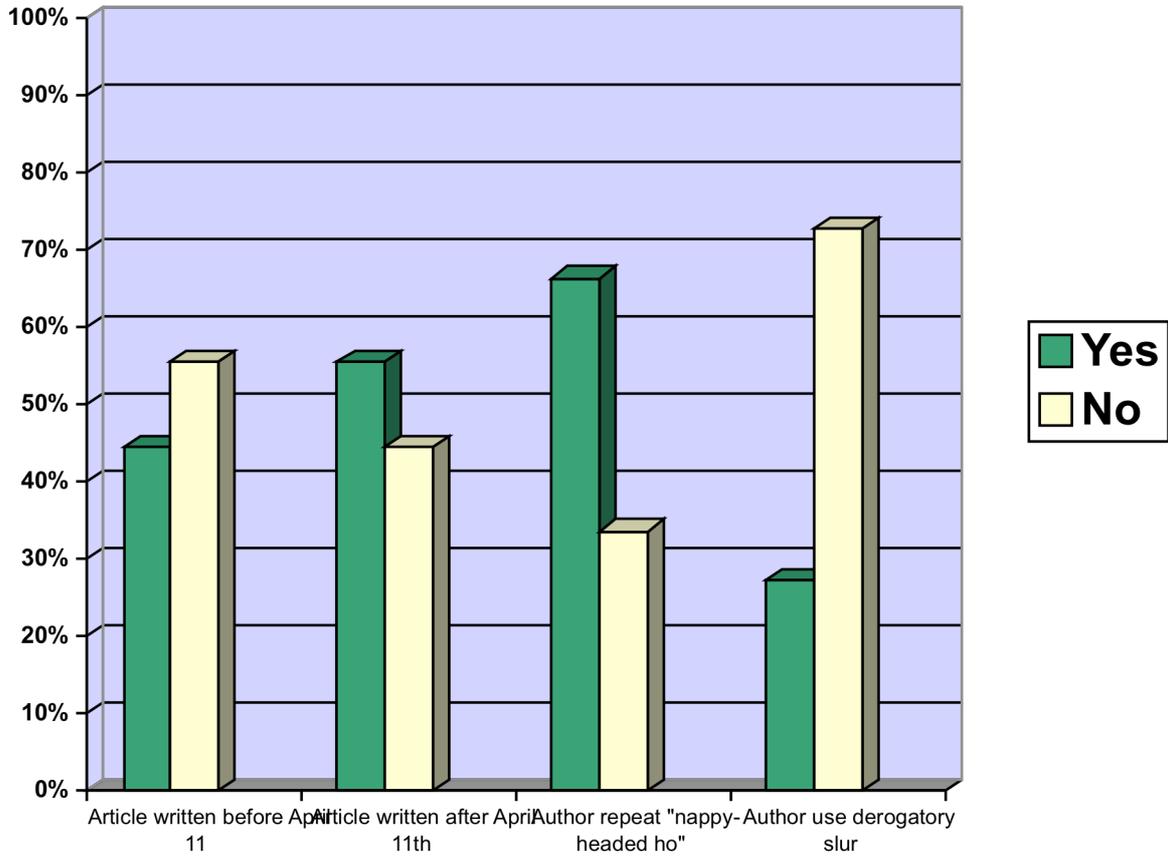
23. Is the fact that Imus also has "serious" talk on his show mentioned anywhere within the article or does it name (specifically or in general) his past political and literary guests? **Can mention a past example of when he discussed serious matters, had a political/literary guest on his show, or simply say that Imus does have a history of serious discussion on his show.**

Yes

No

Appendix D

Frequency graph for uncharted variables



Appendix E:

**Cross tabulation for Newspaper Analyzed**

|  | <b>Chi squared values</b> | <b>2-sided asymmetry significance</b> |
|--|---------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Article Frame                            | 39.564                    | .072                                  |
| Author support firing                    | 6.402                     | .894                                  |
| 3 <sup>rd</sup> party support firing     | .093                      | .999                                  |
| 3 <sup>rd</sup> support Imus             | 5.407                     | .248                                  |
| Content first quote                      | 34.976                    | .966                                  |
| Speaker first quote                      | 26.236                    | .753                                  |
| Rutgers individual accomplishments       | 3.634                     | .458                                  |
| Imus previous inappropriate comments     | 4.509                     | .342                                  |
| Others' previous inappropriate comments  | 10.536                    | .032                                  |
| Censorship                               | 13.926                    | .305                                  |
| Political Correctness                    | 3.490                     | .900                                  |
| First Amendment                          | 18.974                    | .089                                  |
| Comments called racist                   | 1.921                     | .750                                  |
| Comments called sexist                   | 6.848                     | .144                                  |
| Denigration of women                     | 2.946                     | .567                                  |
| Nappy headed ho                          | 4.022                     | .403                                  |
| Author use derogatory slur               | 3.956                     | .292                                  |
| Imus crossed the line                    | 7.265                     | .123                                  |
| Advertisers pulled spots                 | .917                      | .922                                  |
| Shock jock and political talk tendencies | 2.128                     | .712                                  |

Appendix F: Content and speaker of first quote

What was the content of the first quote in the article?

|   | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|---|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid An apology made by Imus   | 10        | 9.1     | 9.1           | 9.1                |
| A person calling for Imus to be fired or supporting the decision for Imus to be fired                                 | 6         | 5.5     | 5.5           | 14.5               |
| A person saying an apology is enough or a person who does not believe that Imus should be fired                       | 5         | 4.5     | 4.5           | 19.1               |
| A comment from a member of the Rutger's women's team regarding feelings of hurt or pain                               | 8         | 7.3     | 7.3           | 26.4               |
| A comment from a member of the Rutger's women's team regarding personal or team accomplishments or individuality      | 4         | 3.6     | 3.6           | 30.0               |
| A comment from a member of the Rutger's women's team regarding overall intolerance                                    | 3         | 2.7     | 2.7           | 32.7               |
| A comment from NBC or CBS distancing the company from Imus  | 2         | 1.8     | 1.8           | 34.5               |
| Other   | 8         | 7.3     | 7.3           | 41.8               |
| A comment from NBC or CBS regarding Imus's punishment   | 11        | 10.0    | 10.0          | 51.8               |
| A comment from NBC or CBS claiming they will monitor the situation or that Imus's job depends on a change in behavior | 5         | 4.5     | 4.5           | 56.4               |
| Was no quote in the article   | 23        | 20.9    | 20.9          | 77.3               |
| A comment from a member of the Rutger's women's team - other  | 3         | 2.7     | 2.7           | 80.0               |
| A comment from NBC or CBS - other   | 2         | 1.8     | 1.8           | 81.8               |
| A comment giving a professional or external opinion regarding the situation   | 20        | 18.2    | 18.2          | 100.0              |
| Total   | 110       | 100.0   | 100.0         |                    |

Appendix F: Continued

Who says the first quote in the article?

|   | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|---|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid Don Imus  | 10        | 9.1     | 9.1           | 9.1                |
| Civil rights leader or spokesperson of a civil rights organization                                  | 3         | 2.7     | 2.7           | 11.8               |
| Elected politician or person currently running for elected office                                   | 3         | 2.7     | 2.7           | 14.5               |
| A Rutgers's women's team member or coach  | 17        | 15.5    | 15.5          | 30.0               |
| A spokesperson or comment from CBS or NBC   | 21        | 19.1    | 19.1          | 49.1               |
| Was no quote  | 23        | 20.9    | 20.9          | 70.0               |
| Other known, but non-political, personality   | 14        | 12.7    | 12.7          | 82.7               |
| Other   | 3         | 2.7     | 2.7           | 85.5               |
| "Professional" - including academics, political operatives, authors on relevant subject matter, etc | 16        | 14.5    | 14.5          | 100.0              |
| Total   | 110       | 100.0   | 100.0         |                    |

Appendix G: List of Chi Square Values Reported

| <b>Variable 1</b>  | <b>Variable 2</b>   | <b>X<sup>2</sup> Value</b> | <b>Probability of significance</b> | <b>Significant at alpha 0.05 level?</b> |
|--|---|----------------------------|------------------------------------|---|
| Type of Article  | Does the author support Imus being fired (or advocate it before it occurred?)   | 39.317                     | 0.001                              | Yes                                     |
| Does a third party advocate for or accept Imus's dismissal anywhere within the article?          | Does a third party accept Imus's apology, claim that firing is too harsh a punishment, or say that he/she would be a guest or continue watching the show? | 9.762                      | 0.008                              | No                                      |
| Type of Article  | Does the author specifically refer to Don Imus or his comments as racist?   | 9.519                      | 0.009                              | No                                      |
| Type of Article  | Does the author specifically refer to Don Imus or his comments as sexist?   | 7.527                      | 0.023                              | No                                      |
| Does the article mention any of the Rutgers team or individual accomplishments or circumstances? | Is the claim that Imus went too far, chose the targets, or crossed the line mentioned within the article?   | 4.241                      | 0.039                              | No                                      |

Appendix H

Discourse Analysis Articles

**USA Today**

April 11, 2007 Wednesday  
Rutgers women stand tall in class  
BYLINE: Christine Brennan  
LENGTH: 701 words

- 1 Most women can't dunk, so how do we explain what happened Tuesday to Don Imus at Rutgers?
- 2 How do we explain how 10 college women, none of them particularly well-known nor even remotely as recognizable as the now-radioactively infamous "I-Man," completely outclassed and outsmarted a man who has spent nearly 40 years in the public eye?
- 3 How do we explain what these women did for themselves, for their team, for their school, for their sport and for the nation's perception of female athletes in the face of one of the most withering media firestorms any athlete, male or female, pro or amateur, will ever have to face?
- 4 As the Rutgers Scarlet Knights stepped to the microphone at their nationally televised news conference, one by one, to introduce themselves, say a polite hello or answer a question -- in complete, comprehensible sentences, we might add, hardly typical jockspeak -- Don Imus looked worse by the minute, didn't he?
- 5 Just how out of touch is this man, to say the disgusting things he said about this group of young women, of all people -- the young women we as a nation saw and were so impressed with on our TV screens all day?
- 6 "These young ladies who sit before you are valedictorians of their classes, future doctors, musical prodigies and, yes, even Girl Scouts," Rutgers Coach C. Vivian Stringer said at the news conference, and she wasn't kidding. One of them, team captain Essence Carson, is a music major who plays four instruments, which would be a news flash to Imus, who last week called Carson and her nine teammates "nappy-headed hos."
- 7 "These young ladies are the best the nation has to offer," Stringer said, "and we are so very fortunate to have them here at Rutgers. They are ladies of class and distinction; they are articulate, they are brilliant. They are God's representatives in every sense of the word."
- 8 If Imus doesn't lose his job over his reprehensible comments, he should be fired for being so clueless that he apparently has no idea what kind of women we as a nation are producing through competitive sports.
- 9 "They are 18-, 19-, 20-year-old women who came here to get an education and reach their gifts for all to see," Stringer said. "These are young women little girls look up to. ... There is a bigger issue here, more than the basketball team. It's all women athletes, it's all women."

10 When an issue like this explodes in our culture, the first outrage usually is racial, the second, gender-related. And so it is in this case. First came Al Sharpton and Jesse Jackson, weighing in loudly, metaphorically shutting down the factory. Then came the women's voices, not quite so full of force. Their reaction appeared more muted because the mainstream sports media rarely pay as much attention to women's issues as they do to African-American issues, at least in part because equality in women's sports has been a national topic only since the passage of Title IX in June 1972.

11 In the Imus case, the racial component has helped give voice to the gender issue: The fact that the nation's No.2 basketball team has been treated with such utter disregard by a national media powerhouse. Imus thrives in a male-dominated, trash-talking world, where it's often open season on women. While Imus uttered repulsive words that others certainly would not use, let's not kid ourselves. On every college campus, there's a male athlete or coach who under his breath has made fun of a female athlete in the last week or two, guaranteed.

12 So how important was that appearance by the Rutgers team on all those cable channels during the day, then leading the network news at night?

13 "They spoke with such dignity, as the decent, respectable, upstanding student-athletes they are," said Women's Sports Foundation President Aimee Mullins. "They showed the ability to be bigger than their attacker. That was so uplifting."

14 There are steppingstones that link the short history of women's sports after Title IX. There's Billie Jean King, the U.S. women stars of the Olympics, the 1999 U.S. World Cup soccer team, the Williams sisters -- and now this. A group of 10 female athletes, standing tall and proud, as the nation turns its head to look.

15 A slam-dunk? On second thought, it was even better than that.

**New York Times**

April 10, 2007 Tuesday

Trash Talk Radio

BYLINE: By Gwen Ifill

LENGTH: 708 words

1 LET'S say a word about the girls. The young women with the musical names. Kia and Epiphanny and Matee and Essence. Katie and Dee Dee and Rashidat and Myia and Brittany and Heather.

2 The Scarlet Knights of Rutgers University had an improbable season, dropping four of their first seven games, yet ending up in the N.C.A.A. women's basketball championship game. None of them were seniors. Five were freshmen.

3 In the end, they were stopped only by Tennessee's Lady Vols, who clinched their seventh national championship by ending Rutgers' Cinderella run last week, 59-46. That's the kind of story we love, right? A bunch of teenagers from Newark, Cincinnati, Brooklyn and, yes, Ogden, Utah, defying expectations. It's what explodes so many March Madness office pools.

4 But not, apparently, for the girls. For all their grit, hard work and courage, the Rutgers girls got branded "nappy-headed ho's" -- a shockingly concise sexual and racial insult, tossed out in a volley of male camaraderie by a group of amused, middle-aged white men. The "joke" -- as delivered and later recanted -- by the radio and television personality Don Imus failed one big test: it was not funny.

5 The serial apologies of Mr. Imus, who was suspended yesterday by both NBC News and CBS Radio for his remarks, have failed another test. The sincerity seems forced and suspect because he's done some version of this several times before.

6 I know, because he apparently did it to me.

7 I was covering the White House for this newspaper in 1993, when Mr. Imus's producer began calling to invite me on his radio program. I didn't return his calls. I had my hands plenty full covering Bill Clinton.

8 Soon enough, the phone calls stopped. Then quizzical colleagues began asking me why Don Imus seemed to have a problem with me. I had no idea what they were talking about because I never listened to the program.

9 It was not until five years later, when Mr. Imus and I were both working under the NBC News umbrella -- his show was being simulcast on MSNBC; I was a Capitol Hill correspondent for the network -- that I discovered why people were asking those questions. It took Lars-Erik Nelson, a columnist for The New York Daily News, to finally explain what no one else had wanted to repeat.

10 "Isn't The Times wonderful," Mr. Nelson quoted Mr. Imus as saying on the radio. "It lets the cleaning lady cover the White House."

11 I was taken aback but not outraged. I'd certainly been called worse and indeed jumped at the chance to use the old insult to explain to my NBC bosses why I did not want to appear on the Imus show.

- 12 I haven't talked about this much. I'm a big girl. I have a platform. I have a voice. I've been working in journalism long enough that there is little danger that a radio D.J.'s juvenile slap will define or scar me. Yesterday, he began telling people he never actually called me a cleaning lady. Whatever. This is not about me.
- 13 It is about the Rutgers Scarlet Knights. That game had to be the biggest moment of their lives, and the outcome the biggest disappointment. They are not old enough, or established enough, to have built up the sort of carapace many women I know -- black women in particular -- develop to guard themselves against casual insult.
- 14 Why do my journalistic colleagues appear on Mr. Imus's program? That's for them to defend, and others to argue about. I certainly don't know any black journalists who will. To his credit, Mr. Imus told the Rev. Al Sharpton yesterday he realizes that, this time, he went way too far.
- 15 Yes, he did. Every time a young black girl shyly approaches me for an autograph or writes or calls or stops me on the street to ask how she can become a journalist, I feel an enormous responsibility. It's more than simply being a role model. I know I have to be a voice for them as well.
- 16 So here's what this voice has to say for people who cannot grasp the notion of picking on people their own size: This country will only flourish once we consistently learn to applaud and encourage the young people who have to work harder just to achieve balance on the unequal playing field.
- 17 Let's see if we can manage to build them up and reward them, rather than opting for the cheapest, easiest, most despicable shots.

**Los Angeles Times**

April 11, 2007 Wednesday

Imus is not alone; If he has to go, so do a lot of others making millions by denigrating black women.

BYLINE: Constance L. Rice

LENGTH: 619 words

1 'THAT'S SOME nappy-headed hos." When white radio shock jock Don Imus dropped this little gem about the Rutgers women's basketball team onto the airwaves, he couldn't possibly have imagined that it would trigger a two-week suspension of his top-rated radio gig, the "Imus in the Morning Show."

2 On the Imus insult meter, "nappy-headed hos" wouldn't rate above a 3. It doesn't even come close to one of his meaner riffs. Regular listeners of the show expect racist and sexist banter. As Imus explained to Mike Wallace on "60 Minutes" in 1998, his show has someone specially assigned to do "nigger jokes." But rest assured, the Imus crew has plenty of kike, wetback, mick, spick, dago, Jap, Chink, redneck and unprintable Catholic priest jokes too. Not to mention the rabid homophobia and occasional Islamophobia.

3 The Rev. Al Sharpton, the NAACP, NOW -- the whole civil and women's rights establishment -- are up in arms, and they should be. Imus' remarks were racist, offensive and, given that these athletes are not fair targets, out of bounds. There is no excuse for what he said.

4 But there's also no basis for firing him or ending his show. Firing Imus for racist riffs would be like firing Liberace for flamboyance. It's what he does.

5 More to the point, Imus should only be fired when the black artists who make millions of dollars rapping about black bitches and hos lose \o7their\7 recording contracts. Black leaders should denounce Imus and boycott him and call for his head only after they do the same for the misogynist artists with whom they have shared stages, magazine covers and awards shows.

6 The truth is, Imus' remarks mimic those of the original gurus of black female denigration: black men with no class. He is only repeating what he's heard and being honest about the way many men -- of all races -- judge women.

7 Just as black comedians who make mean jokes about Asians and Latinos don't see themselves as racists, I'm sure that Imus doesn't see himself as a racist either. He reveres blues artists such as B.B. King and Ray Charles. He praises American icons such as Jackie Robinson and Martin Luther King Jr. He clearly likes former Tennessee Rep. Harold Ford and has interviewed Sharpton a few times. He treated Lani Guinier with uncharacteristic respect during her guest appearance to discuss her latest book.

8 His sympathy for the Katrina victims came through. And after the James Byrd dragging-lynching in Texas in 1998, Imus did not joke. In serious tones that couldn't hide his sorrow or disgust, he quietly remarked that it was unwise for black people to ever trust whites.

9 After listening to him for 10 years, I've concluded that Imus is not a malevolent racist. He is a good-natured racist. And the streak of decency running down his self-centered, mean persona is sometimes pretty wide.

10 Imus and company are jocular misanthropes who say what a lot of folk only dare to think. That's why many tune in: to eavesdrop on a seventh-grade white boys' locker room -- and

to hear some of the best political interviews on the air. More often than not, the humor works, but it is universally offensive and sometimes goes too far, as it did in this case.

- 11 It is what it is. If his show has to go, there are hard-hitting black and Latino acts on cable that will be put in the cross hairs next. In the end, it's healthier to have what people of all races really think out in the open rather than hounded into the shadows.
- 12 After Imus sincerely apologizes to the women on the Rutgers team and listens to the well-deserved criticism, he should go back to doing what he does best -- tearing down the powerful.
- 13 And then the rest of us concerned about black female denigration can begin to examine our own glass mansions.

**Chicago Tribune**

April 16, 2007 Monday

'Big' stories, big talk, little understanding

BYLINE: Dawn Turner Trice

LENGTH: 713 words

1 There's a phrase I hear a lot lately on a certain morning television news show: "Everybody's talking about. . . ." What follows is often something juicy and gossipy and salacious and filled with drama and intrigue. It's so tasty that if you had escaped talking about "it," you might be inclined to do so after the newscast.

2 The story last week that didn't need the "everybody's talking about . . ." teaser was regarding Don Imus and the fallout from him calling the women of the Rutgers University basketball team "nappy-headed hos."

3 One of my favorite moments came when rap bad boy Snoop Dogg chimed in, explaining that while he and fellow rappers are justified in calling some African-American women "hos," there was no justification for a middle-age white man doing so.

4 Snoop, who (it pains me to say) is African-American and the king of misogynistic rap, told MTV: "[Rappers] are not talking about no collegiate basketball girls who have made it to the next level in education and sports. We're talking about hos that's in the 'hood that ain't doing [expletive], that's trying to get a [expletive] for his money. These are two separate things."

5 Indeed this is lunacy, and he really should stop talking.

6 But what I will pull from his comment is this enduring truth: A lot of people do make a distinction between those who deserve respect and those who don't and sort of get what they deserve. This is the case particularly where women, black women, are concerned. Of course, this is no revelation. But the Imus dust-up just returned it to the fore.

7 The controversy wasn't merely about what Imus said. Over the years he's made a lot of sexist, racist and otherwise disparaging comments, which, by the way, advertisers and sponsors gleefully supported. But this time, his words exploded in his face for myriad reasons, including that he (a white man) went off on a group of highly accomplished black female students and athletes. They are heroes and easily transformed into sympathetic figures.

8 But what about the women associated with the rap videos, about whom Snoop was speaking? To some, these women come across as far less sympathetic and less worthy of the chivalry on display by last week's protest leaders. Now that really stinks.

9 I can't help but wonder what would have happened if Imus had called the women who appear in the rap videos "nappy-headed hos," using the language of the rappers. Perhaps we would have witnessed the hue but not so much of the cry?

10 It's true that Rev. Jesse Jackson, who led several marches in Chicago on this subject, and feminist groups have at times spoken out against rap lyrics and some rappers' misogynistic depictions of women. But I don't recall them doing so with the same vehemence that was directed toward Imus.

11 How troubling because Imus' comments won't have much shelf-life. But the stuff that's pumped in the ear pods of young rap fans and the images that are floated across their television screens will be far more indelible.

- 12 The other big story that everybody was talking about last week was regarding the North Carolina attorney general who threw out the remaining charges against the former Duke University lacrosse players accused of sexually assaulting an exotic dancer.
- 13 When this story broke in March 2006, many of the news accounts went to great lengths to explain that although the victim was a stripper, she was also a student at a less prestigious college nearby.
- 14 Early on, I wondered if mentioning she was a student was an attempt to clean her up -- maybe make her more worthy or sympathetic.
- 15 In the end, the Duke story distilled down to race and class, the tale of privileged young white men who had sexually assaulted a black woman who was working hard to make ends meet. It was salacious. It was dramatic. But it lacked evidence of being true.
- 16 Many of these "everybody's talking about . . ." stories just begin to skim the surface before they fade into the next big thing everybody's talking about. When it comes to stories like the Imus controversy and even the Duke case, everybody talks and shouts a lot, but rarely is there much toward real understanding.

**Washington Post**

April 12, 2007 Thursday

A Needed Conversation

BYLINE: Sally Jenkins

LENGTH: 1024 words

- 1 I don't want Don Imus fired. Instead, I want him to buy season tickets to Rutgers women's basketball and sit in the front row wearing a sweat shirt with a big letter R on it at every home game.
- 2 It serves no purpose to call for Imus's job; that's mere harsh vengeance and we've had enough undue harshness. If you shut down Imus's show, silence him, the conversation ends there. What's needed in the Rutgers-Imus affair, and on the subjects of racism and sexism in general, is not silence but talk, lots of it, and what's needed in women's basketball is a promoter. I know just the guy for the job.
- 3 When Essence Carson took the microphone to speak for the Rutgers team, you saw Imus's problem and why it hasn't gone away. In comparison with that blameless face and voice, his slur seemed tangibly, specifically abhorrent, and you felt it all over again. How could any intelligent person conjure such verbiage as "nappy-headed hos" in the first place, much less apply it to such a nice kid? Carson and the Scarlet Knights didn't lecture, they didn't say that injustice is what happens when you treat someone as an abstraction, a stranger, an "other." Instead, they simply demonstrated the point by introducing themselves, one by one, and made clear that the central sin and fallacy in any -ism, whether racism or sexism, is that it fails to take into account the individual qualities of an Essence Carson.
- 4 As Heather Zurich said, "What hurts the most about this situation is that Mr. Imus knows not one of us personally."
- 5 It's only fitting, then, that Imus should have to get to know each and every player, learn the particulars of their characters and details of their lives, and one way to do that is to go to their games. Carson is a straight-A student, a classical pianist, a composed speaker and someone's child. "Before the student comes the daughter," she said. Point guard Matee Ajavon sat out for two months with a stress fracture and has a steel rod in her leg. Coach C. Vivian Stringer has surmounted a series of tragedies over her Hall of Fame career. Her daughter was crippled by spinal meningitis, and she was widowed early. "My heart has never been light in going to a Final Four," she said. "It took me personally 25 years to come to a championship game."
- 6 Asked in a radio interview yesterday if she thought Imus was a racist, Stringer pointedly replied that she would wait to meet him in person before deciding.
- 7 The Scarlet Knights have decided to meet Imus face to face. And personally, I believe it's the right thing to do. They aren't looking for a punishment that fits the crime, or to join a mob action, and they can reach their own conclusions without being stampeded by Jesse "Hymietown" Jackson into demanding Imus's resignation. They have a chance to get something more meaningful from him: a full-fledged conversion.
- 8 To their credit, the Rutgers players seem to feel that it's no more right to paint Imus with a broad brush than it was to paint them with one. Imus seems sincerely ashamed of mouthing such unpardonable garbage, and it's legitimately hard to categorize him as an out-and-out racist. While I don't particularly know him, I've been on his show, and I listened to him champion Harold E. Ford Jr. during his run for U.S. Senate in Tennessee, and bitterly decry the slow government response to Hurricane Katrina. He's a shock-satirist who takes verbal

baseball swings at pinata-size personalities for their pretensions, often as not powerful white people.

9 But regardless of what anyone thinks of Imus, you don't cure prejudice by curbing speech. Clearly, as a society we've made the uneasy decision that censorship is more dangerous than sensitivity, otherwise Ann Coulter and Rush Limbaugh wouldn't get work. Words are hurtful, but for the most part they're inactive. Censorship is an action. As columnist John Leo succinctly put it, "No insults means no free speech."

10 Just because words don't constitute acts, however, doesn't mean they're without effect, and that's where the Rutgers players have a chance to turn an evil incident into something beneficial. If nothing else, we've all learned that words aren't ephemeral, they hang around, in bits, texts and instant messages. Some things stay said. You can argue about whether Imus "scarred me for life," as Ajavon maintains, but he left a mark. The Rutgers kids assumed that the winner's circle was colorless and genderless, and Imus disabused them, abruptly, of that notion with one harsh sentence. He cost them that ideal. To a certain extent, he hardened their hearts, and he has to live with that.

11 It's not frivolous, then, to suggest that one way for Imus to make amends to the Scarlet Knights is to use his microphone to promote and defend a deserving sport. Female ballplayers still fight enormous prejudice: They deal with a daily drumbeat of small degrading remarks, false assumptions and acts of stubborn little meanness; their looks and skills are derided; and at some schools they even have to fight for time on the practice court. An example: Back in 1998, when Tennessee Coach Pat Summitt was being celebrated for her sixth national championship -- her sixth, mind you -- she returned to campus and in the hallway of her own arena, she ran into an aging male administrator, who went out of his way to insult her. He stared at her coolly. "Did you win?" he asked. It was his way of telling her it wasn't worth watching.

12 The truth is, the fallout from the Imus controversy is the most publicity the women's game ever has gotten. Some of the male sports columnists who weighed in this week annually neglect the women's Final Four, and most of them failed to witness a single game in which Rutgers played.

13 So how is the Rutgers team better served? By demanding Imus be fired, or by converting him into an ally and employing his powerful voice and platform? By silencing his microphone, or by engaging him in sustained and badly needed conversation about race and gender? By refusing his contrition, or by suggesting that he come and watch, close-up and firsthand, and get to know them and the game they love? Preferably, wearing a scarlet sweat shirt.

Appendix I: Discourse Analysis Findings

| Style of Author        | Casual Tone   | Use of quotes  | Use of rhetorical questions | Deixis  |
|------------------------|---|----------------|-----------------------------|---|
| <b>USA Today</b>       | -2 <sup>nd</sup> person plural<br>-news flash P. 6<br>-let's not kid ourselves P. 11          | P. 6, 7, 9, 14 | P. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 12, 15    | - 2 <sup>nd</sup> person plural throughout P. 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 11   |
| <b>New York Times</b>  | - I know, because he apparently did it to me P. 6<br>- Whatever P. 12                         | P. 10          | P. 14                       | - I'm a big girl. I have a platform. I have a voice. P. 12<br>- They are not old enough, or established enough P. 13            |
| <b>LA Times</b>        | - 2 <sup>nd</sup> person plural<br>- Dropped this little gem P. 1                             | None           | None                        | - I'm sure P. 7<br>- I've concluded P. 9<br>- Rest of us...can examine our own glass mansions P. 13                             |
| <b>Chicago Tribune</b> | - Everybody's talking about P. 1, 16<br>- Of course... P. 6<br>- ...which, by the way... P. 7 | P. 4           | P. 9                        | - I will pull from his comment... P. 6<br>- I can't help but wonder... P. 9<br>- But I don't recall them... P. 10               |
| <b>Washington Post</b> | - 2 <sup>nd</sup> person plural<br>- ...her sixth, mind you... P. 11                          | P. 4           | P. 13 (4)                   | - You don't cure prejudice by curbing speech P. 9<br>- We've made the uneasy decision that censorship is more dangerous... P. 9 |

| <b>Censorship and the public sphere</b> | <b>Censorship</b>  | <b>Exclusion in public sphere before firing</b>   | <b>Exclusion in public sphere on account of firing</b>   | <b>Alternative public sphere</b>   |
|---|--|---|--|--|
| <b>USA Today</b>                        | None   | - Imus thrives in a male-dominated trash-talking world, where it's often open season on women P. 11   | None   | None   |
| <b>New York Times</b>                   | None   | - I certainly don't know any black journalists who will [appear on Imus's show] P. 14   | None   | None   |
| <b>LA Times</b>                         | - It's healthier to have what people of all races really think out in the open rather than hounded in the shadows P.11 | Regular listeners of the show expect racist and sexist banter P. 2  | After Imus sincerely apologizes...he should go back to doing what he does best – tearing down the powerful P. 12<br><br>- It's healthier to have what people of all races really think out in the open rather than hounded in the shadows P.11 | None   |
| <b>Chicago Tribune</b>                  | None   | - Over the years he's made a lot of sexist, racist and otherwise disparaging remarks, which, by the way, advertisers and sponsors gleefully supported. P. 7 | None   | - When it comes to stories like Imus...everybody talks and shouts a lot, but rarely is there much toward real understanding. P. 16 |
| <b>Washington Post</b>                  | - As a society we've made the uneasy decision that censorship is more dangerous than sensitivity. P. 9                 | None  | - Can't cure prejudice by curbing speech P. 9  | -What's needed on the subject of racism and sexism, is not silence, but talk, lots of it P. 2                                      |

| <b>Diction</b>         | <b>Describing Imus's comments</b>   | <b>Describing Imus</b>   | <b>Describing Rutgers team</b>  | <b>Other slurs repeated</b>  | <b>Intertextuality</b>  |
|------------------------|---|--|---|--|---|
| <b>USA Today</b>       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Disgusting P. 5</li> <li>- Reprehensible P. 8</li> <li>- Repulsive P. 11</li> </ul>            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Radioactively infamous P. 1</li> <li>- Clueless P. 8</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- ...in complete, comprehensible sentences... P. 4</li> <li>- young women who impressed us P. 5</li> <li>- A stepping stone for women's sports P. 14</li> </ul>                                | None   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- news flash P. 6</li> <li>- open season P. 11</li> </ul>  |
| <b>New York Times</b>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Shocking concise insult P. 4</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Amused, middle-aged white men P. 4</li> <li>- D.J. P. 12</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Named each individually P. 1</li> <li>- Girls P. 1, 4</li> <li>- Teenagers P. 3</li> <li>- Grit, hard work and courage P. 4</li> <li>- Not old enough or established enough P. 13</li> </ul> | None   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- March Madness P. 3</li> <li>- Branded P. 4</li> </ul>  |
| <b>LA Times</b>        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- ...wouldn't rate above a 3... P. 2</li> <li>- Racist P. 3</li> <li>- Offensive P. 3</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- White radio shock jock P. 1</li> <li>- Good-natured racist P. 9</li> <li>- Jocular misanthrope P. 10</li> </ul> | None  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Kike,</li> <li>wetback,</li> <li>mick,</li> <li>spick,</li> <li>dago,</li> <li>Jap,</li> <li>Chink,</li> <li>redneck,</li> <li>nigger P. 2</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- ... firing Liberace for flamboyance P. 4</li> <li>- original gurus P. 6</li> <li>- Seventh-grade boys locker room P. 10</li> <li>- Our own glass mansions P. 13</li> </ul> |
| <b>Chicago Tribune</b> | None  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Middle-aged white man P. 3</li> <li>- He (a white man) P. 7</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Highly accomplished black female students and athletes P. 7</li> <li>- Heroes P. 7</li> <li>- Sympathetic figures P. 7</li> </ul>  | None   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Everybody's talking about P. 1, 16</li> <li>- Chivalry P. 8</li> <li>- I-pods and TV screens P. 11</li> <li>- Shelf-life P. 11</li> </ul>                                  |
| <b>Washington Post</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Abhorrent P. 2</li> <li>- Unpardonable garbage P. 8</li> </ul>                                 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Hard to categorize him as an out-and-out racist P. 8</li> <li>- Shock-satirist P. 8</li> </ul>                  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Blameless face and voice P. 3</li> <li>- Nice kid P. 3</li> <li>- Individual circumstances P. 5</li> <li>- Kids P. 10</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Hymie P. 7</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Rutgers-Imus affair P. 2</li> <li>-Jesse "Hymietown" Jackson P. 7</li> <li>-Bits, texts and instant messages P. 10</li> </ul>   |

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