

Realigning Opinion with Original Argument in a Mass Media Era

Mackenzie Langley

University of Denver

4 March 2019

On August 14, 2016, as the national anthem blasted through the speakers of a stadium, one player remained as the rest of the stadium stood with their hands over their hearts, and their eyes on the American flag waving up high. The seated player was Colin Kaepernick, the quarterback for the 49ers professional football team. As could have been expected, controversy over Kaepernick's actions and inquiry into his motives immediately erupted. With this controversial action broadcasted nationally, the popular media and credited news sources picked up the story, framed it to their liking, and distributed it to the American Public. These reports were often cloaked in personal agendas, filled with simplified messages, and highlighted extreme polarized ideologies. This conglomerate of swayed opinions has buried the greater meaning for Kaepernick's actions and displays obvious issues in current debate practices.

In order to set the record straight and in an effort to contain the framing decisions of the media, Kaepernick informed the NFL media about his actions and his goals. He said:

"I am not going to stand up to show pride in a flag for a country that oppresses black people and people of color...To me, this is bigger than football and it would be selfish on my part to look the other way. There are bodies in the street and people getting paid leave and getting away with murder."

<http://www.nfl.com/news/story/0ap3000000691077/article/colin-kaepernick-explains-why-he-sat-during-national-anthem>

This quote set the stage: Kaepernick's choice to remain seated was deliberate and it was his way of conducting a peaceful protest. This quote outlines Kaepernick's motives, goals, and decisions clearly from Kaepernick himself. While reading about this controversy, it is important to keep this quote in mind. Regardless of what any other author says or argues, it is imperative to center back around to this quote.

In considering this controversy, I have done thorough research into over ten articles about Colin Kaepernick that were published after he began his protests during the national anthem.

These articles vary in focus points ranging from the protest itself, the controversial Nike campaign that was unveiled in the fall of 2019, Kaepernick's credibility, and the debate about whether or not politics belong in football. These discussions, opinions, and editorials are included in articles ranging from Fox News, NBC News, Forbes, MSN, The Guardian, The Atlantic, BuzzFeed, Occupy Democrats, and the BBC. My sample of sources displays a range of perspectives, each encompassing various motives, goals, and persuasive devices. As a result, I have gained a well-rounded understanding of the ongoing debate. Based on the evidence, these articles highlight an ethical problem in debate and persuasion practices

For those of you who are opposed to Kaepernick you may feel that his method of protest is disrespectful. You may believe that refusing to stand during the national anthem shows disrespect for the flag and the members of the armed forces. Engrained in many of us may be the idea that the national anthem is an act of patriotism that is meant to unite all Americans. So it may follow that Kaepernick's actions feel divisive in the face of unity. If this is your position, I understand the troubles you may have with Kaepernick's choices. But I urge you to not end the conversation there.

Just as it is patriotic to respect the flag, it is also patriotic to speak up for injustices. The motives behind Kaepernick's actions are important here as they are in all controversies. It appears in the wildfire media age motives are too quickly assumed. Once assumptions are tacked on, strategic framing by the media polarizes the complexity of the various factors at play in controversies and they immediately are portrayed as an all or nothing, zero-sum game. The reality is, the Kaepernick protest is complex. The media has strategically simplified Kaepernick's motives, and used unethical persuasion techniques to control the public discourse. Kaepernick did not remain seated to disrespect veterans, and he did not remain seated because he is against

American Ideals. This I know, not as an assumption that aligns with my agenda, but because of the words spoken by Kaepernick himself. In an interview Kaepernick gave when he evolved his sitting protest to a kneeling position, (a decision made to show respect for veterans) he said:

"Once again, I'm not anti-American. I love America. I love people. That's why I'm doing this. I want to help make America better. I think having these conversations helps everybody have a better understanding of where everybody is coming from."

<https://www.military.com/undertheradar/2016/09/kaepernick-meets-veteran-nate-boyer-kneels-anthem>

Attaining American ideals is not a one-time goal to be met, but a continuous standard to be challenged and improved. Considering American ideals in this way opens up the conversation beyond an all or nothing agenda.

Motives are used to define what drives an actor to action. This doesn't mean that an actor is for or against the inherent opposite. In Kaepernick's protests, he has been motivated to action by the unjust deaths of people of color at the hands of the police. Some media took this motive to portray Kaepernick as a person who does not value the wrongful deaths of police men on duty. This unethical persuasion technique skews the position of Kaepenick's motives. The result? The creation of an all or nothing position taking platform. This is a false dichotomy. By this I mean it possible to view both the 37 police officer deaths ([source](#)) and the 1,146 deaths of people of color ([source](#)) from 2016 as unjust. Murder is wrong. All deaths matter. All people have value. The media's decision to skew motives and frame casualties to match agendas is unethical.

Kaepernick's protest was quickly picked up by the media, framed, and polarized. Understanding the misrepresentation in this controversy can be as simple as separating the facts of the protest from the emotions added by the media. This separation can be done by any reader who uses a critical eye. Then the question becomes, so what? Although this piece centers around one controversy in isolation, the medias persuasion techniques outlined, are behaviors that extend into most every news coverage. With the changing media and 24/7 news culture unethical

persuasion techniques have become infiltrated into every controversy from front page news to opinion pieces. By reading critically, separating known facts from emotions, and differentiating actors' choices from other people's assumptions, readers begin to hold the media accountable. A consumer that is critical is a consumer who will not easily fall victim to unethical persuasion practices. A media that is held accountable is a media that will not be able to take advantage of their consumers. In short: continue to be critical of the polarization of the news, and continue hold the media accountable.