

Sport-War Cartoon Art

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Abstract

In this paper, we explore the extent to which political cartoons and comic strips (as mediated public and political visual art, the *ninth art* (cf., *Groensteen, 2007[1999]*)) subvert/confirm institutional values of so-called Western democracies during times of war. Our concern—as sociologists of sport—is with the ways dominant sporting sensibilities are (re)presented in cartoon art, and how sport itself is conflated with patriotic ideologies of war as a vehicle for propaganda. In particular, we interrogate how competitive-sporting ideals are aligned with war and conflict, and mobilised by cartoons during periods of Western-asserted conflict. We are intrigued by how some cartoon illustrations have the visual power to misplace, simplify, and essentialise—via sporting analogy—the intense and complex emotions surrounding war. Our aim is to examine how the visual within popular culture is used to dis-connect and dis-engage a public with the realities of war and human conflict.

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Introduction: Sport/War Preserves

The connection between popular cultural representations and personal and societal issues has a rich tradition: such written texts portraying narrative (cf., Denzin, 2008; Richardson, 2013), narrative about art (cf., Denzin, 2011), and poetics (cf., Faulkner, 2009; Pelias, 2011) have discussed both specific issues and identities, and the ways these representations have disseminated "information," "knowledges," and "understandings" differentially. But visual methodology, as Harper (2005) reminds us, is both representative and constitutive of cultural formations: thus, the use of the visual for cultural studies has been intended primarily 'to advance theories of the self, society, existence itself, and/or symbolism' (p. 748) while also, in some form, utilizing inductive visual representations 'to study specific questions and issues in sociology, anthropology, communications, and the like' (p. 748). Apperception through the visual sense(s) has become a hegemonic conceit, at least since the middle ages (cf., Howes, 2005).

The medium of created artwork, more specifically political and comic strip cartooning, utilises the visual and the written simultaneously:

What defines narrative in a comic strip is that picture and text work together to tell *one* story. Once we focus on the nature of comics as narrative, we will cease to be tempted to think that their unity is any less natural than that of paintings or novels. (Carrier, 2000: 74)

Though there are significant differences between the political cartoon and cartoon strips, we conflate these two forms of creative arts as objects of study based on the themes of sport and war. The world of comics exists for its own

sake, and it is properly studied regarding the 'realms of the semantic and the aesthetic' (Groenstein, 2007[1999]: 2). Comics, by their own logics, contain such systems that may inform societal views of war and conflict.

In this paper, we discuss perceptions of and attitudes toward war, nation-state hostile actions, and conflict within cartoon art that is linked to sport and/or sporting practices. There is a paucity of political cartoons focusing specifically on sport and war (for reasons elucidated later)—not cartoons on war, or cartoons on sport: cartoons on war seen through a sport lens.

We utilised a convenience sample—based on English-language comics, with logics that a majority of English-speaking audiences would understand, and with the stipulations that they include both sport- and war- or terror- or conflict-related content. This latter stipulation sharply cut down on possibilities, and the idea of a "convenience" sample is only realistic in that, while we exhaustively scoured the Internet for searches with these terms, we cannot be certain that we have exhausted the possibilities.

The political cartoons we discuss either advance or decry aggression, assertiveness, and overt hostility between individuals and/or nation-states. That is to say, the cartoonist makes a statement about war and/or hostile actions using sport metaphors in "his" art.¹

The issue of the sport-war political and comic strips and any public support or rejection of war or war-like actions is much more complex and nuanced than simply being correlational or causal. The purpose of this examination is not to draw causal lines between complex societal factors. Instead, it is to delineate mediated sport-war cartoon art as a popular culture formation that reflects attitudinal arcs of public response to the normalization of

war and conflict, and to unpack some of the ways that cartoonists align the written with the powerful visual metaphor. The mediated image becomes powerful as a trope when it is exposed to massified, popular culture.

We look at cartoon art to better understand current (western) societal attitudes toward war and conflict. We utilize a case study approach (cf. Becker, 2014), with political cartoons—drawn "cartoons," from the Internet, and comic strips more broadly—providing most of our exemplars. As well, we are engaging with the premise that politicised cartoons have the potential to provide a simple, concise and effective use of sport as a visual metaphor for war. These cartoons effectively compete for notice in a world rife with war and terrorism imagery (e.g., Lamb & Long, 2014).

The unexamined power of the exactly-resonant visual/verbal cartoon moves masses in ways that cognitive logics often cannot (cf., Harvey, 1996; Lamb, 2007). We examine the co-existence of cartoon art using sport in support or rejection of nation-states' actions towards other nation states or groups, be they tolerant or belligerent, interventionist or "nation-building," defensive or offensive. We argue that visual culture may be constitutive of larger cultural, mediated, and political formations (e.g., acceptance, tolerance, or rejection of war, bellicose actions, and conflict situations). The parameters of acceptance of and/or resonance with a single cartoon by a public gives us, by inference, an indication of what tolerance a given society may hold for such constructs as bullying, violence, terror, conflict, and war.

Through satire, the political cartoonist is meant to counter the dominant, to shake up comfortable worldviews (Lamb, 2007). Yet the workings of hegemonic power can and do manage to evade real change – and praxis:

... the subaltern functions of social hegemony and political government [include] ... the "spontaneous" consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group; this consent is "historically" caused by the prestige (and consequent confidence) which the dominant group enjoys because of its position and function in the world of production. (Gramsci, 1989: 12)

As such, the political cartoonist simply works within a system where, by only slightly disrupting (dominant) sensibilities, the cartoon ultimately serves to reinforce the power of the dominant, to momentarily satisfy objections so that easing back into the "normal" feels comfortable.

The cartooning we focus on in this article is grounded in the twin preserves of war and sport, and in negotiating the dynamical relationships between the audience responses of *status quo* or of progressive social justice movements.

Logics of sport-war cartoon art

Our analysis is framed by utilizing the theoretical underpinnings of Antonio Gramsci (1989[1971]), Raymond Williams (1974; 1977), and, to a lesser degree, Pierre Bourdieu (1986). Gramsci drives a Marxist discussion of what Laclau and Mouffe (1985) see as an essentialist stance toward structures. Conversely, as Marxist thought is brought forward, through Gramsci, Williams and Bourdieu, the interplay of culture (somewhat opposed to 'the economic sphere' (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985: 85)), agents, and structure creates a new space for the concept of subject-based hegemony. Thus, Laclau and Mouffe (1985), interpreting Gramsci—and others—argue for a 'subject [position, which] is penetrated by the same ambiguous, incomplete and polysemical character which overdetermination assigns to every discursive identity' (p. 121). Simply put,

then, readers of cartoons may assume—within and between subject positions—fluid (or "ambiguous") positionalities and standpoints. Even Williams (1974) argues for an interplay between 'technological determinism . . . [and] symptomatic technology' (p. 13), resulting in an active subject position with 'intention' (p. 14). In our view, the interplay between cultural knowledge, capital, literacies, competence and consumption of cartoons is most decidedly not deterministic, essentialist, or functionalist—we remain aspirational that comics can have some impact upon their readers. As such, examining cartoons—political and strip—provides visual material of the everyday, popularist representations of war and conflict, which are historically and culturally contingent.

In the next sections of this paper, we examine the arts and crafts of cartooning, look at historical exemplars of cartoons that contain a metaphorical linkage between sport and war, and then hone in on some sport-war themed cartoons during the so-called "War on Terror."

We first ground the work in a discussion of political cartoons and their use in mediated popular culture as a form of the visual that might *reflect* and only slightly *challenge* societal trends and attitudes. In this section, we operationalize such terms as "comic strips" and "political cartoons." We also foreground our arguments within some of the scholarly literature about cartoons and their machinations, and literature about the so-called "soft struggles" that popular culture may elicit, produce, and make visible for its audiences. It is important to remember that, as there are relatively few examples of sport-war themed political cartoons, we expand our discussion to exemplars from comic strips. As

such, this paper reflects a preliminary discussion of the conflation of sport and war themes within cartoon art.

Second, we offer some exemplars of historical cartoons that reflect, reinforce, or push public attitudes towards war or bellicose states. These exemplars provide contextual comparisons to the contemporary political cartoons we investigate in the final section. Are there substantive differences between how the public viewed war (and sport) in the 19th Century, for example, and how a 21st Century global public views war (and sport)? As well, are there also substantive differences between the cultural capitals of contemporary audiences (cf., Bourdieu, 1986)?

Third, we look at political cartoons within the past fifteen years of "A [global] War on Terror." These cartoons exemplify (mostly) English-speaking, western nations' takes on the "new" nature of conflict (e.g., that conflict between organizations and nation-states, or the proclaimed "war on [abstractions]"), and our original pool of possible cartoons drew from the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, and New Zealand.

We conclude by speculating on the expansion and eclectics of what might be strictly termed "war" cartoons to a look at "terrorism," "conflict," and the rhetorics of perpetual war. We reiterate that this paper is meant to spark further research into popular cultural forms of visual research within media, peace, and war studies. Photography, videography, and multimedia approaches (cf., Pink, 2007) are certainly dominant forms of how contemporary society "sees" its visual, but there remain residual forms, such as newsprint, where readers engage visually and emotionally in a range of ways. All of these popular

cultural formations can influence citizens' attitudes toward—and acceptance of—the normalisation of war.

Drawing the frame(s)

The intent, techniques, presentation, and reception of comic strips and political cartoons vary. However, we posit that their creation and reception may overlap in terms of when and how they "discuss" war and sport (cf., Harvey, 1996). With that said, the comic strip requires slightly different textual reception techniques than the political cartoon. Comic strips are a series of panels (also known as "cels" or frames) juxtaposed sequentially, usually relying on temporal movement. This linearity *generally* demands a sequential reading, and much of the information needed for literacy and understanding is provided within the strip itself (cf., Carrier, 2000).

In contrast, the political cartoon is typically one larger frame that usually requires greater knowledge outside of the world of the cartoon itself. This knowledge and cultural capital may be of current events, both somber and humorous; it may be of societal relationships, or intricate, historically-laden positionings within a larger culture: the knowledge may be tacit or explicit. The knowledge required may also include, in the case of sport-war metaphors, knowledge of both sport codes and bellicose events throughout the world. Political cartoons usually appear on or near an editorial/opinion section of the paper, which adds to their potential embedded *gravitas*. Political cartoons, by their nature, can be very fragile: out of their own context, they may appear offensive, wrong-headed, or simply passé. The reader of a political cartoon, to

more deeply understand it, must be sufficiently versed in the logics of the world outside (cf., Bostdorff, 1987).

Audiences of cartoons with a political sensibility generally consume both political and strip cartoons (El Refaie, 2009). Their reception, engagement with, and subsequent support of either strips or political cartoons is integrated into a complex system of visual representation and consumption that can go beyond the "realities" of the world and suggest other possibilities. Readers have to have both visual and written literacy—forms of cultural capital—for both types of cartoons, but they require more cultural literacy for political cartoons than for comic strips (Carrier, 2000; Eisner, 2005[1985]).

Generally, scholarly work about how cartoons "work" resolves into discussions of the relationships between the signs and symbols inherent in the semiotics of comics. There is scholarly work contextualizing comic strips whose "language," in the sense of a "text," has been conveyed, according to Eisner, in 'a series of repetitive images and recognizable symbols' (2005[1985]: 8). There has been a longer pattern of scholarly work looking at the political cartoon, whose 'overtly political purpose [is] achieved primarily through satire and irony' (Todd, 2012: 37), in, generally, a single "panel."²

However, at the audience level, borrowing from Lorenz (1995), Hallett and Hallett state that 'a (political) cartoon has the ability to influence a reader as well as reflect some internal part of the reader' (2012: 60). In such a way, qualitative researchers have found political cartoons to uncover 'shared ideologies and culture of a particular readership' (ibid.). As vehicles of subtle coercion, cartoons may reflect and [re]produce attitudes, opinions, or worldview about a topic, such as war.

The process of consuming a political cartoon is subtle. Marín-Arrese (2008) discusses salience, incongruity, and resolution of the incongruity in political cartoons. Essentially, the reader of a cartoon, who is confronted with seemingly-incompatible metaphorical objects, registers the most salient relationship between the objects. However, that is frustrated by the incongruence of the initial reading, and a secondary—or alternative—reading emerges, which is humorous, ironic, or somehow pedagogical.³

Within this resolution-of-dissonance frame, of course, many intertextual aspects abound in order for a reader of the political cartoon to understand any ironies. For example, s/he typically must be quite culturally literate. Note, as one obvious counter-example, Yonatan Frimer's maze cartoon (see: Yonatan Frimer, "The Afghanistan Handoff" <http://fineartamerica.com/featured/the-afghanistan-handoff-by-yonatan-frimer-yonatan-frimer.html>). This work uses images of American football, the lingering US-lead incursion into Afghanistan, and the "facts" of General Petraeus' giving up command of allied forces to General McChrystal as basic assumed knowledges in the reader.

Though the image and the linguistics may provide a relatively powerful initial, affective impact, upon closer examination, the metaphorical relation between its "factual" components breaks down. The "facts," as portrayed by the artist, do not proceed logically, at least to a USA-football-literate audience: when McChrystal was dismissed by President Obama, Petraeus replaced him. Petraeus took over command from McChrystal, not the other way around. Coincident with this chronology, the reader (and apparently, artist) also needs to understand a basic "fact" about American football: the "football"—Afghanistan—being

handed off intends to imply a shared team effort, a sense of male camaraderie, and a loss of Petraeus' power (which makes the cartoon temporally illogical).⁴

The initial effects of cartoons are often mostly transitory, emotional, and affective, and many consumers of them do not deeply analyse their logics. One point that can be taken from Frimer's misrepresented sport-war cartoon, however, may be that understanding and context can matter. In order for a political cartoon to be cognitively effective (as the metaphor works or fails, as it resonates with the thoughtful reader), the artist and the reader have to share common understandings of societal trends, attitudes, and context. In the case of Frimer's, knowledge about how American football "works," the metaphor for transference of power simply does not align with knowledge about current events in Afghanistan. It is true that Petraeus was now the "quarterback," the "field general," the "one in charge." But by handing off the football to McChrystal, Petraeus—illogically—has given up his own agency. We can see how the delicate metaphorical "fit" breaks down if one of the elements is not an *exact* fit, or if the audience does not understand the context.

We argue that Frimer's main purpose was not to depict an accurate rendering of American football, or even the succession of generals by the United States in Afghanistan. We propose that the artist's primary intention was to support the war effort by using a sport-as-patriotism-conflated metaphor, which advanced a rhetoric of sport (being an uncontested "good" thing) supporting the war in Afghanistan. The conflation of sport with war (or with patriotism, or nationalism) is a rather old trope, often used by politicians to garner support from fence-sitters during election cycles (cf., the previously-mentioned BIRG). This cartoon works in much the same way as political leaders, who

‘assume . . . that if they support the things that people value and enjoy, they can increase their legitimacy. . .’ (Coakley, Hallinen, & McDonald, 2011, p. 424). It is a bandwagon sport-war cartoon.

To recap, political cartoons and comic strips probably share more similarities than differences. These include a rich visual imaginative engagement with readers, and requirements for a culturally "literate" readership and varying degrees of cultural competence. There are obvious general differences, as well. Among these are the perceived salience of political cartoons to everyday life; the perceived *gravitas*—and accompanying reflexive nature—of political versus comic strips; and the relative ephemerality of comic strips.

However, in regard to cultural capital, three points need to be reinforced. One, understandings and experiential resonances of readers may dissipate over time. That is to say, the details and nuances of biting satire may be lost on contemporary readers. Two, geographical differences may mitigate cultural capital of readers. Three, even within a so-called homogeneous culture, capital may vary quite widely. Levels of education, knowledge of current affairs or popular culture, tribal affiliations, gender, age—all of the so-called socio-economic variants may influence how a specific comic is read.

Historical exemplars

The importance of cultural literacy within political cartoons can be illustrated by looking at historical examples. We are not examining the historical production of cartoons; rather, we see these popular cultural artifacts (political cartoons) as ways of measuring how publics may have viewed war

historically. For example, do 21st Century political/editorial cartoons offer a qualitatively different set of constraints and freedoms to viewing, audiencing, and consuming cartoons than in the past? Might they, for example, have devolved so that political/editorial cartoonists have become targets for totalitarian expressions of governments, where 'intimidation and closing of newspapers far and wide' serves to dampen lively and open discussion, so that contemporary cartoonists 'found themselves in their weakest state. . . since the late nineteenth century' (Lamb & Long, 2014: 95)?

Since most political cartoons engage with some sort of life event—an event, or series of events, of which the reader is expected to be knowledgeable—when one looks at historical examples without the historical, cultural knowledge of the events, the satirical, metaphorical, and ironic aspects may often be lost.

Decontextualised, these events lose their immediacy. This "order of translation" exists more at the semiotic level than the linguistic level: the intertextuality of text and image in many of these political cartoons is dependent upon 'a semiotic system, making use of . . . fertilized entities of meaning and points of reference. . .' (Tzankova & Schiphorst, 2012: 119). We have inferred that a temporal element exists as well—political cartoons often do not translate well over time.

In a fascinating study of sixty years of 18th-19th Century political cartoons from the United States, Cohen (2012) spends two paragraphs contextualizing and explaining David Claypoole Johnston's cartoon "A Foot Race" circa 1824 (see:<https://static01.nyt.com/images/2016/04/10/books/review/10Ellis/10Ellis-master675.jpg>) The cartoon, in its time, was a biting statement about the crowding of four candidates into the Presidential elections. In the context of its

own time, this cartoon required no discussion: in fact, to discuss why it worked would have undercut its effectiveness. Johnston drew it in terms of a foot race between the candidates: the metaphor of a sporting contest engaged the "common man." (Foot races were popular physical feats at the time and a way to win money). The temporal distance from 1824 to present day dulls the ability of readers to apprehend what is going on visually: we do not even know some of the caricatured politicians! Thus is it up to a historian to flesh out the meaning of what was, at the time, a snappy visual. All the 'dialogue balloons' (Buhle, 2005: 24), mostly of the bettors' comments, make this a very busy cartoon. The point is that even with the "busy" verbal aids, the decontextualized satirical and ironic elements are basically lost.

There are significant world events, such as the US involvement in Vietnam, that are relatively fresh in people's memories, and yet even the nuanced wit of specific cartoons from the Vietnam era has dulled. We can look at exemplars of the political cartoons of the 1960-70s in terms of their hybridized takes on sport and war. For example, political cartoonist Karl Hubenthal depicted the United States as a gigantic baseball pitcher ("US Power" see: http://www.bobstaake.com/karl/images/cartoon_guerilla.gif) effectively stifled by the North Vietnamese – who are depicted as the catcher ("Guerrilla tactics"). Titling his cartoon "Reduced strike zone," he appears to express frustration at the unevenness of the "game" being played by both teams. But the meaning is ambiguous, much like the Vietnam intervention. A 1960s-knowledgeable "reader" of this cartoon would have to know about American baseball—including the charges of unethical tactics by reducing the strike

zone—and about the North Vietnamese use of guerrilla tactics to attempt to even the playing field—which many 21st Century readers may not know.⁵

A second example, begun during the Vietnam Conflict, Garry Trudeau's *Doonesbury* strip series, an amalgam of the political/editorial cartoon and the comic strip, [re]produced the national emerging horror at the endless nihilism of the Vietnam war. It also reflected a growing bellicose, xenophobic, and, ironically, tired United States culture. B.D, one of the main characters, '... has been a college football star, Vietnam soldier, third-string pro quarterback, highway-patrol officer, Gulf War reservist, football coach, and lastly, reactivated reservist for the war in Iraq' (Lule, 2007: 77).

Occasionally, Trudeau's social commentary pushed editors to either "edit" it out of the paper altogether (that is, ban it: cf., Trudeau, 2007, p. 91; Lamb, 2004) or to resign it to the editorial page, marking it, in substance, as a "strip political" cartoon. The fact that *Doonesbury* is a comic strip means that

... recurring characters, whom an audience is familiar with, provide a much different opportunity to comment on the war and its effect than single-panel editorial cartoons. (Mello, 2007: 79)

From the 1970s, *Doonesbury* has been a cartoon "comic-strip" whose social commentary was manifest. Its creator's interpretation of the Vietnam, first Iraq, and second Iraq wars became a running social commentary in the United States regarding US involvement in increasingly-frequent, if not highly violent, bellicose actions such as Lebanon, Grenada, and Panama during the Reagan-era 1980s (cf., Zinn, 2005).

Newton (2007) suggests that Trudeau uses the four-panel comic strip in such a way as to tell a 'long-form story with the short-form punch of a comic strip' (p. 83):

The grace of minimal visual detail and carefully chosen words invites a fusion of heart and mind, a synthesis of simultaneous recognition, enlightenment, and empathy, of affirmed truth, a deep recognition of knowing beyond logical argument, facts, or statistics. (p. 84)

Indeed, *Doonesbury* as a whole worked to overtly politicize the comic strip form, creating an ideological new incongruity that directly challenged the dominant pro-war rhetorics (cf., Holsti, 2011; Barker & Sabin, 2012).

Though B. D.'s "football metaphors" and analogies run throughout the length of the *Doonesbury* series, we have chosen but one exemplar of this form (see: <http://wellesley.edu/Polisci/wj/Vietimages/Cartoons/cartoons.htm>). In this comic-strip, run on 9 December 1970, Trudeau exploits the varying rhetorics of the Vietnam involvement: the so-called "domino effect," where, without intervention, Communism would topple country after country in Southeast Asia, the "total victory" referred to is a reference to Nixon's "Operation Total Victory" which sent troops into Cambodia. The layers of meaning, subtly referencing a lack of full commitment to the war effort by celebrating a familiar sport metaphor "you need eleven men on the field," would later be echoed in many pro-war hawks, both in the administration and in the public, saying that the military had been hampered. Ironically, Trudeau's own irony had morphed into pro-war rationale.

It is interesting to note that Trudeau himself has differentiated between his own political stance and his recognition of the individuals who enact war. His views have been summarized by Newton (2007: 84): 'Cartoons... abstract and represent a personal war within and a public war of the real versus the political.' This echo of C. Wright Mills' sense of the personal and the political (cf., 1959) is imbedded in Trudeau's own statement that '... longtime readers of the

strip know that while I . . . bitterly opposed the Vietnam War, the strip has never been particularly antimilitary' (2007: 87). In other words, he supported those individuals caught up in the government's policies (private woes, public issues), which he decried.

These few select historical examples demonstrate how timely and temporally-sensitive political cartoons may be. That is, they are dependent upon not only knowledge of the situation but also on a deeper, experientially-based understanding of the situation (which, unfortunately, can never be *exactly* duplicated by historians, artists, novelists, or politicians). The immediacy of the cartoon reflects unique experience—a "you had to be there" sense.

The War(s) on Terror: 2001-'Endless'

When the World Trade Center Twin Towers in New York City were levelled in September 2001 (cf., Baudrillard, 2002; Denzin, 2002; Giroux, 2002; Richardson, 2002), this act of aggression provided an opportunity for then-President George W. Bush to declare, rather disingenuously, a "war on terror."⁶ In fact, this single event mobilized western indignation and anger—often misguided and misdirected—sometimes even against fellow victims of the violence (cf., Bratich, 2002; Kellner, 2002a). The visual "facts" of the destruction of the towers, the countless deaths, and the visible righteous indignation of citizens, however, played repeatedly on American, British, and other English-speaking news media. The event produced a rhetoric that seesawed between 'confused, angry, depressed, full of grief, not knowing how to act' kinds of responses (Denzin, 2002: 5) and calls for action and retribution.

Of course, the disproportionate media response—including the typical cartoonist responses of this event being an "untouchable" resulting in pre-verbal, hushed responses—worked as a reinforcer to the impression that the violence itself was more terrible than violence in any one of a number of places across the globe, before or since. The macro message from western media was that North Americans suffered more than any other group of people due to the September 11 tragedy. The Op-Ed sections of national and local newspapers drew responses, and the visuals for those opinions and editorials often played out in political cartoons. But, in keeping with the untouchability factor, there were no sport-war cartoons.

The event of 9-11 was not cause for a general political cartoon with its accompanying senses of satire, irony, or humor: this event became a "taboo" topic, not exploited for humour or irony—or by sport metaphors, which tend toward the light or the comfortably distant.⁷ The nature of the perceived social insult seems to have provided, at least for a time in the mainstream press, a strong gatekeeping function (cf., Lamb, 2007).

In fact, Lamb (2004) discusses this very phenomenon, related to the September 11 Twin Towers' destruction:

Social policy pundit Stephen Hess. . . said that the September 11 tragedy left Americans, including editorial cartoonists, shaken, and he described the cartoons in the weeks following the attacks as "very dull." . . . [Cartoonist] Mike Luckovich agreed. "After September 11, you just couldn't use humor," Luckovich said. "The tragedy was so enormous, you couldn't be funny. . . ." (p. 5)

Linking together lighter topics (such as sport) with the 9-11 event was even more unthinkable.

The rhetoric surrounding 9-11 became its own space for cartoons of hushed regard, cartoons that reinforced bringing people together, or that solemnly revered the heroes of the horrific day. Luckovich's cartoon, "We've reached the top," (Mike Luckovich, Atlanta Journal-Constitution, 13 September 2001)⁸ depicted six uniformed first responders, haloes above each head, at the gates of heaven. As Rees (2005) points out, political cartoonists '... couldn't seem to make jokes about that particular element of the War on Terrorism' (p. 32).

Thus, in the years since the Twin Towers' destruction, popular culture references—like metaphorical references to sport—simply were not used by political cartoonists for their cartoons regarding "9-11". Linking sport and the horrific, unimaginable nature of the World Trade Center towers' collapse was, itself, unimaginable. The cartoons, when they were used, were at different times dense, serious, nostalgic, patriotic, nationalistic, angry, and reverential; but most "cartoons" were based in safe realities or pathos. Thus, most cartoonists made no individual statement: they worked to reinforce the *status quo*, collective safety, and a paradoxical national "hush"—a non-critical "coming together"—about the actual events of 9-11.

Cartoonists—and, interestingly, comedians—regarded 9-11 as off limits, and, to a large extent, still do.⁹ The incessant visual repetition of, for example, the World Trade Center towers being impacted by airplanes, is akin to a visual "shouting" that amplifies the (perceived) horror and sacred nature of the subject to those directly affected (cf., Baudrillard, 2002). The video-ification of events like this leads to a disproportionate sense of fear, vulnerability, and angst—

cartoons became a vehicle for people to begin to try to affectively deal with what had happened.

The use of nostalgia, reverie, or the religious or spiritual, for cartoons is reserved for the sublime, the indescribable, the ineffable. Clearly, most political cartoonists were staggered by the destruction of 9-11. Responses ranged from sublime horror that any group could hate North Americans to the shocking realisation that others (e.g, the plane hijackers who drove the planes into the buildings) might disagree with their moral worldview, from the privileged sudden understanding that all human beings are vulnerable in the world to the knowledge that their governments' actions could result in counter-actions by others.

In the United States, there was a virtual shut-down of all ranges of discourse, even cartooned visual discourse, in the mainstream media, regarding the antecedents, meanings and resultant effects of 9-11. This response was framed as the nation coming together in its grief. Complex thinking, consideration of the others' point of view, empathic efforts: all seem to disappear in favor of simplistic, binary and bifurcated thinking. 'You're either with us or against us in the fight against terror', intoned President Bush ('Bush says', 2001; 'You're either with', 2001). Indeed, many references since have pointed to this unified national response to the 9-11 attacks (cf., Denzin, 2002; Giroux, 2002; Clough, 2002; Rocha, 2004; Conley, 2010). Counter-hegemonic voices were effectively silenced—and nowhere more prominently than in the mainstream press.

More recently, however, the abstraction "War on Terror", as it has continued to be named for years, has become relatively fair game for political

cartoonists, and so we see more sport-related cartoon art in the ironic and satirical displays of political cartoons. Examples of these more commonplace or staunch renderings of political cartoons include discourses surrounding the London 2012 Olympics and the Boston Marathon bombing in 2013. These may play on solidified cultural stereotypes and reflect the cartoonist's own political positionings, or they may demonstrate a general ennui about the endlessness of continual and normalized conflict.

It is important to remember that cartoons rarely confront the dominant; if they reflect a non-dominant stance, they usually do it glancingly, by planting a seed of doubt in the reader. Their effects are also their process: they are meant to entertain while piquing. The courage of the individual cartoonist—and the way they confront "commonsense" stereotypes—often is what is reflected in their renderings. But their stealth is a *modus operandi*: they need to somehow hook the reader first, often with the reader's own assumptions and values. For example, in the cartoon "London Olympic bowling" by Terry Wise¹⁰ the stereotypically-Semitic character—perhaps conflated with an imagined image of a member of an Al Qaeda terrorist cell—is shown releasing/bowling a crude bomb/bowling ball. This cartoon promotes and reinforces xenophobia and racism in the way it caricatures the ethnicity of the "terrorist"—his beard, sandals, the stereotypical shape of his nose. As with Hubenthal's baseball cartoon referencing "Guerrilla tactics," the "other" of "London Olympic bowling" is illustrated via—literally—under-handed and atypical tactics of warfare.

Further ridicule of "the enemy," and the threat of "terrorism" at London 2012, is achieved in a form of emasculation. In the UK, bowling is not considered a mainstream competitive sport. Instead, bowling is an activity

associated with older members of communities, people who are typically viewed as non-athletic, weak, with diminishing potency. Again, this plays into a simplistic gender binary that equates virility with aggressive action, and weakness with 'not playing fair'.

After the Boston Marathon bombing in 2013, cartoonist John Cole depicted a trim "Uncle Sam"¹¹ figure—itsself a cartoon-based icon representative of dominant United States ideologies—running on a hamster wheel of "Terrorism," whose treads endlessly repeated the word "Threat" ("The terror marathon," John Cole, 22 April 2013, http://billingsgazette.com/april-cartoon-terrorism/image_62c4dcf1-4184-51e9-866c-e9e2b1fb86a7.html). As a commentary on the endlessness of Bush's declared "war on terror," and a recognition of any *real* threats of terror, it solidifies a point of growing concern in the United States and the rest of the world: while continual war is unsustainable, vigilance is continual.

Contextualizing the motif of running and the endlessness of this type of war is the fact of the Boston Marathon bombing, which took place only a week before. Twelve years after 9-11, the shock of this attack was mitigated by it not being the first attack on North American soil in recent memory. Cole seemingly has no answers, but, in 2013, chose to engage readers in a thoughtful questioning of western geo-political tactics, and, possibly, some of the consequences of those tactics.

Like many political cartoons, the image and words pose questions to their audience and ask for reader engagement. As cartoonist Peter Kuper writes, '...I have concluded the best way to get people's attention on life and death issues is to use humor' (2005: 28). "Cartoons" are, *de facto*—because of the caricatured

nature of them—seen as humorous, despite their often-sombre subject matter. The integration of irony, satire, and current events can provide humorous and thoughtful ways for readers to engage with, confront, oppose, or support the abstractions and, perhaps, particulars, of war.

Expanding the frame

Clearly there exists a variety of ways that cartoons in print or Internet media have "worked" visually, to reflect, shape, or discuss a nation-state's policies regarding war. In this paper, we have discussed the use of a sport-war metaphor, finding that historically, the relationship of war to sport in political cartoons especially, has acted as a mitigating force to the harsh realities of actual war. In some cases, the cartoon has been created to humorously—or "softly"—enervate readers' imaginations about the possible outcomes of violent conflict; in other cases, political cartoons have ironically taken a stance either for or against a proposed war; some cartoons have simply been drawn nostalgically and poignantly to take or reflect a nation's pulse.¹² Most of the cartoons we have discussed are meant to elicit emotions and clarify values. The emotions elicited might include, for example, humour, outrage, pathos, patriotism, or distress. Values clarifications may mean that readers come away from the mediated consumption of a cartoon reinforced, confused, or conflicted about their previously-held beliefs about war, or a certain war.

Whether cartoonists, as citizens within their own countries, respond to perceived 'national crises' with sardonic wit, biting satire, or as 'government propagandists' (Lamb, 2004: 102) largely depends upon the context. However, after a perceived crisis, cartoonists typically return to what they do best: Joel

Pett (Lexington (KY) Herald-Leader cartoonist), in response to George W. Bush's admonition to 'go about their lives as usual' said: 'He wanted us to return to what we do. . . and what I do is attack Bush' (cited in Lamb, 2004: 5).

We found Garry Trudeau's *Doonesbury* strip particularly enlightening in our discussion of sport-war metaphors: when audiences "get to know," for example, B. D. in *Doonesbury*, they empathize with him. He is humanised.

In *Doonesbury*, B. D. loses his leg in 2004 Iraq.¹³ This resulted in great dismay and angst from the *Doonesbury* readership. The comic is immediate and visceral: B. D. is helmeted (as he always was), prone in a medi-vac helicopter, with medics working on him. His blood pressure is 90/60; he has sweat trickling off his face; "let me do my job, man," one of the medics shouts. In the final panel, one of the medics says "Not your time, bro." Finally, B. D., for the very first time without a helmet (Vietnam, football, Iraq), is shown with his left leg amputated above the knee, clearly in shock. Trudeau is asking readers to feel conflicted, and to see the human being within the pro-war rhetoric.

Since readers of *Doonesbury* mostly derive from the United States of America, their attitudes toward war and conflict arguably may affect their governments' policy. Unfortunately, it seems, cartoons and sport alike are often dismissed as popular culture, as unimportant in motivating people's values. This paradox—that the subject matter is biting social commentary at the same time that it is ephemeral and easily-dismissed—can undercut the impacts cartoons may have on policy makers. Their logics are not often taken seriously, but with *Doonesbury*, male readers (particularly USA veterans) could identify with many of the daily dissonances that the characters experienced.

Though we examine gender issues more specifically in war-sport cartoons in a subsequent paper, it is noteworthy that both sport and war are highly masculinized institutions—and that cartooning is an almost-exclusively-male endeavour. The linkages between these three institutions are clearly influenced by gender, stereotypical gender performances, and—particularly in the case of war—its tragic consequences, which often impact disproportionately on non-combatants (cf., Ormhaug, Meier, & Hernes, 2009; Roy, 1997; 2004).

Finally: Eclectic logics

Political cartoons are usually intended to make a point, not simply to amuse; they are historically contextualized: that is, visual and language/image and words work together to influence the reader. Political cartoons also use satire and irony as devices. This increases their dependence upon the cultural competence of their readers. Notably, Garry Trudeau in *Doonesbury* uses many of the same devices and values of political cartoons. *Doonesbury*, through the years, has become historically contextualized, in real time: readers from the 1960s would have understood the nuances of the characters' involvement during the Vietnam War. However, the comic strip is not intended to be timeless; *Doonesbury* works in the present time, much like political cartoons. Though the lines are often quite subtle, *Doonesbury* worked/works through its reliance on satire and irony to engage and resonate with readers well beyond their consumption of the strip.

For a political cartoon, the shared cultural capital of readers and artist may create an interactive effect, through the visual, between cartoonist and audience. Savvy readers will know contexts and nuances that the cartoonist depends upon

to make the work timely and hard-hitting. But, concomitantly, both visual and written meanings can become distorted and washed out over time. As Garry Trudeau makes the point, 'comics were once an enormously influential part of the cultural conversation, but now it's streaming video that's a leading edge. . . . the field obviously isn't as robust as it was when I was starting out' (in Kahn, 2014: ¶ 2).

In using a comic strip form in present time, Trudeau has co-opted some of the hard-hitting values of political cartoons while also gaining an empathetic, engaged audience that follows his strip as if its recurring characters (e.g., B.D., Mike Doonesbury, Boopsie, Zonker Harris, Mark Slackmeyer) are seemingly real people. Clearly this continual engagement with the comic strip provides a very different motif for conveying current events to readers, and it is an effective tool for sharing lived experiences, attitudes, and values about nations' involvement in conflicts and wars. Arguably, Trudeau's Vietnam War—accompanied by the anti-war effort and other ubiquitous popular culture, like Heller's *Catch 22* (published in 1961)—nudged anti-war sentiment towards a critical mass.

We also found that the sport-war metaphor has been used by political cartoonists to poke fun at individuals who "do not measure up," reinforcing a stereotypical macho view of sporting culture that comingles with a similar attitude within armed forces, conflict, and war. As well, some topics can become temporally 'taboo' in the mainstream. For instance, 9/11 events remain objects of reverence in the USA, and are not easy targets of mainstream cartoonists. As the 'War on Terror' has become normalised within UK and USA societies, gentle reproofs and slight digs are the more typical (see Knight, "TV Carnage,"

http://media.cagle.com/218/2013/04/16/130381_125.gif)

The Knight (16 April, 2013) cartoon, by making the statement: 'FACT: NETWORK & CABLE TV HAVE SHOWN MORE CARNAGE FROM TWO SPORTING EVENTS OVER THE PAST COUPLE OF WEEKS THAN FROM OVER A DECADE OF WAR COVERAGE IN THE MID-EAST', criticizes televisual reportage, including the visualization of violence, reflexively turning back on mass media and popular culture itself.

Paradoxically, the very ephemerality of political cartoons (with very few exceptions, where their images may have entered, as iconic structures, into the larger massified popular culture) assigns them to a status where the problem *feels* assuaged. By reading—and noting—the deft political cartoon, somehow the reader is "let off the hook" (Johnson, 2005).

So which is it? Are political cartoonists (and their media outlets) agents for (gradual) change, or have they become a part of a smoothly functioning system, acting as pressure relievers, as cathartic devices of a functional system? The answer is not as clear as the question may imply: it depends on one's epistemological standpoint. Viewed on a case-by-case basis, cartoonists' work may enlighten and shape readers. Seen through a functionalist theoretical lens that attempts to identify determinant, causal relationships within larger structures of society, cartoons *may* serve to perpetuate and reinforce the status quo. Viewed through a more critical lens, cartoons may become a vehicle for change, for individual or group insights, and for identification of social problems, including war and conflict.

In this way, some cartoonists carry on a tradition of anti-hegemonic writing. They may resist the dominant, using satire and humour to make their points as we have shown in some of our examples. But, they often travel a lonely

road—supported by editors in an increasingly-homogeneous field, and their positionality may be thoughtfully compared with that of the morally-conflicted 'embedded journalist' in war zones (cf., Pfau, et al., 2004; Inghilleri, 2010). They live in at least two worlds: the reality of corporate, neoliberal-driven, for-profit news and the world of their own consciences. It is this omnipresent political context which makes complex the critical analysis of sport-war cartoon art. In this paper, we have illustrated particular cultural intricacies and formations through a focus on the sport-war metaphor.

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¹ Males dominate in both producing and consuming political cartoon art in both English and non-English-speaking cultures (see Bernheim, 2008; Lent, 2010; Kian, Fink, & Hardin, 2011).

² In our discussion of contemporary cartoons, we speculate that the lack of exemplars may reflect a horror, exacerbated by a "shouting" of the visual, that is simply too sensitive to joke about. Sometimes, however, the political cartoon is meant to signify a "collective effervescence" (cf., Durkheim, 1976[1915])—of horror, sorrow, angst, or other dominant collectively-perceived feelings or attitudes. Examples might include cartoons that celebrate the ending of a drawn-out war, that simply state "RIP" to a beloved figure's passing, or that serve to effectively bring imagined communities (e.g., Agamben, 1993; Anderson, 1983) together over a significant event like 9-11, the UK 7/7 London bombings, or the Boston Marathon bombing. Though these types of cartoons re-instantiate the ideology that members of a nation or collective are all, in fundamental ways, alike, they also act to reinforce the sacred nature and taboo space that their topics may signify. They act as reinforcers of the taboo, and, in these collective cases, rarely advance understanding or any 'perspective by incongruity' (Bostdorff, 1987: 45). Their purpose is more sublime: to "express" the inexpressible.

³ In some ways, this reading is not unlike Festinger's (1985[1957]) concept of "cognitive dissonance," whereby initial difference is resolved by the agent.

⁴ A generous alternate "reading" of this cartoon might see the handoff as the beginning of a fumble, a loss of possession by the offensive team.

⁵ This so-called "unethical" tactic is ironic, especially to North Americans who remember that the American Revolution was in large part won by the use of guerrilla tactics. While British Redcoats stood in formation, the American insurgents hid behind trees, bushes and rocks, taking shots whenever they could.

⁶ We say "disingenuously" because, as many critics have pointed out, the declaration of war against an abstraction—in this case, "terror"—is illogical in the way "war" had been conceived prior to this moment. The declaration, however, worked to naturalise nationalism, patriotism, and created a logics of its own that allowed for counter-measures against any people that its instigators might want to name. Thus, based on this logic, Bush entered into a military action within Iraq—and against Saddam Hussein particularly—with a thinly-veiled excuse of seeking Weapons of Mass Destruction. This claim itself was also disingenuous, as has been demonstrated elsewhere (e.g., Kellner, 2002b; Rudd, 2004).

⁷ Though there have been a few newspaper content analyses of sport-related events or people (e.g., the 1996 Euro football championships (Maguire Poulton, & Possamai, 1999a, 1999b), the paucity of specifically sport-war cartoons, to our knowledge, has resulted in no content analyses thus far.

⁸ See: https://www.google.co.uk/search?sa=G&hl=en-GB&q=9+11+political+cartoons&tbm=isch&tbs=simg:CAQSlwEJZhBm2Bj6EHAaiwELEKjU2AQaBAGDCAoMCxCwjKcIGmIKYAgDEiitCIwD-Qn6Aa4llgP4CZIElAyTA8orhijiOcU2zz280c0ruD3jOcwrgjCiDhgn065-x1_1mnUDAFjw8NMxceUiC-QNOPHANhydMbyUm6_1Y8ygLMTtfm1x6zNuUgAwwLEI6u_1ggaCgoICAESBlyaq_1MM&ved=0ahUKEwjN4MP83pbOAhUsDcAKHQIMBREQwg4lGygA&biw=1366&bih=635

⁹ There are a few exceptions, at least in comedy. According to Sneed (2013): "Not every 9/11-themed joke landed however. Gilbert Gottfried bombed with his, given at a roast a few weeks after. 'I have a flight to California,' it went. 'I can't get a direct flight—they said they have to stop at the Empire State Building first.' It was met with crickets and a 'too soon.'" Thus, Gottfried demonstrates that some subject areas—actual deaths of people we valorize—are "taboo." They are only taboo, however, to the dominant or affected group—not to those subordinate group members who die at the hands of the dominant.

¹⁰ During the time taken to write this paper the "London Olympic Bowling" cartoon has disappeared from the Internet. We do not know why this is the case, but we are aware of the conditions that now face cartoonists post the Charlie Hebdo attack.

¹¹ "Uncle Sam" as an icon that "always referred primarily to the government of the United States rather than the nation as a whole" (Morgan, 1988, p. 33) has, in turns, reflected to the world a benevolent, welcoming spirit; a maligned collective, attacked by forces of evil (e.g., Pearl Harbor, 9-11); and, more recently, an invasive, corrosive, hegemonic, imperialist superpower. A possible

reason for this morphing of such an icon may be the overt and explicit merging of corporate and governmental interests in the recent history of the United States.

¹² War cartoons without sport themes, like those of Hans von Stengel and Karl Frederick Widemann in World War I and Bill Mauldin in World War II (cf., Lamb, 2007, pp. 723-724), reflect this trend.

¹³ See:

https://www.google.co.uk/imgres?imgurl=http://media.npr.org/assets/img/2010/10/25/bd-loses-leg_custom.jpg&imgrefurl=http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=130815184&h=316&w=1000&tbnid=QJio5THTu5FjPM&tbnh=126&tbnw=400&usq=_Tx_Jmk5Dm35674pt-earj-IJWhk=&hl=en-GB&docid=TviCYYx6U8wSLM