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## EFFECTS OF TRASH TALK ON HIGH SCHOOL ATHLETES

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### ABSTRACT

Trash talk is a captivating, complex part of sports that is often overlooked. The purpose of this paper was to explore how trash talk affects high school athletes. 63 male and female high school athletes completed a survey containing both quantitative and qualitative questions examining how often they trash talked, how often they were the target of trash talk, how large of a role their peers played in teaching them how to trash talk, how often trash talk affected them in a negative way, how early they started using trash talk, and their purpose for using trash talk. Results revealed that high school athletes trash talk often, and they use it with a specific purpose (hinder their opponent's performance/improve their own performance). They start using it from an early age (pre-adolescence), and they learn it primarily thanks to their teammates, parents, coaches, and professionals. Furthermore, trash talk experiences differ between gender, age, and sport played. Males, older athletes, and contact sport athletes have more experience trash talking than females, younger athletes, and non-contact sport athletes, respectively. Trash talk affects high school athletes in a negative way both on and off the field. Thus, trash talk has reached a level of normative acceptance and has both immediate and long-lasting negative effects on high school athletes, and it may harm their mental health. Competition in sport is now more than merely physical; trash talk enhances the mental component of sports beyond what it is thus far.



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## Introduction

Trash talk has many different definitions. Jeremy Yip defined it as “boastful remarks about the self or insulting remarks about an opponent delivered by a competitor typically before or during a competition,” (Yip, 126) whilst Ben Commy defined it as “a deliberate form of verbal communication utilized by individuals for both affirmative personal reasons (i.e., motivation, fun), and disruptive motives toward opponents (i.e., distraction, intimidation)” (Commy, 1002). During this research, anything that falls into either of those definitions will be considered as trash talk. Regardless, trash talk is an especially important but often overlooked aspect in sports. A simple insult or taunt can completely throw off an opponent, causing them to lose their concentration or their cool, resulting in a negative impact on performance. This was perfectly illustrated by the 2006 World Cup Final, where Zidane, a player for the French national team, headbutted an Italian opponent after they made a remark on his sister, causing him to earn a red card and sit out the rest of the match. That match ended up being the last of his career. This is one of many examples of trash talk being used to offset an opponent, and trash talk is highly controversial and often talked about. However, although psychologists and social scientists have previously researched trash talk, they have never focused on trash talk in high school athletes; they have only focused on college athletes and professionals. It is important to conduct research on trash talk because trash talk is widely used in sports, and it not only has a major influence on the playing experience of athletes, but also on the viewing experience of spectators. Furthermore, trash talk may be considered as an unfair advantage, and especially since so many high school athletes constantly use trash talk whilst playing sports, it is important to consider its effects on society and on their development, as well as the influence trash talk has outside the field on matters such as mental health and self-confidence. High school athletes are still growing and developing, and their experiences with trash talk can impact future generations and how trash talk evolves.

## Literature Review

### *Acceptance in Sports*

Trash talk is both widely used and accepted in sports. It is common in esports, face-to-face sports, among fans, and it is considered as an inherent part of sports. According to Jeremy Yip, “trash-talking is a common form of competitive incivility in the workplace” (Yip, 140), and Kevin Kniffin states that, “across domains, trash-talking is a part of communications between rivals” (Kniffin, 366). Furthermore, the average college athlete has been targeted with trash talk by opposing players and fans in one out of every three games (Rainey, 16), which demonstrates how trash talk is a major part of sports. However, not only is trash talk prominent in sports, but it is also accepted as a part of it and has reached normative acceptance (Rainey, 25). According to Jesse Fox, “trash talk where players insult other’s ability is generally accepted or excused, even by targeted players who reported negative emotions” (Fox, 4068). Even though the intentions of using trash talk may be different between people, trash talk is an inevitable form of communication that comes up within competitive settings. This is not only limited to traditional sports, trickling down to other forms of competition such as esports. An

example of this is within the esports community of CS:GO, where trash talk is predominantly accepted and even considered as a distinct part of the sport (Irwin, 17). Trash talk is thus not only widely used but also accepted in esports, just as much as it is in real sports. The level of acceptance and normality of trash talk in high school athletes will be researched in this paper.

### *Factors Influencing Trash Talk*

Trash talk experiences depend on many factors, such as one's age, gender, background, and past behaviors, but the reasons for trash talking are always similar. First, gender is one of the biggest factors influencing trash talk. Males begin to use trash talk at a younger age than females, and they report higher frequencies of both using and being targeted by trash talk (Granito, 26). This is confirmed in a paper by Dylan Palacio, where it was found that "men trash-talk significantly more than women" (Palacio, 364). Furthermore, the sport being played also has an impact on trash talk: "basketball players reported targeting their opponents with trash talk significantly more often than did swimmers and golfers" (Granito, 28). This is because swimming and golf are seen as more eloquent and educated sports, and because the opponents are closer to each other in basketball. Indeed, "there is more trash-talking in contact sports than noncontact sports" (Kniffin, 364). Basketball is a contact sport, whilst swimming and golf are not, which increases the amount of opportunity to trash talk. Moreover, the level of competition also matters, with trash talk being more prominent among higher competition (Rainey, 26). This is because the higher the level, the more important the result will be, and thus players will be incentivized to trash talk more to gain any advantage they can. In fact, trash talk is generally always used to gain a competitive advantage, with athletes reporting that they "trash talk to motivate themselves, to psych out and intimidate opponents, and to impair their opponents' performance, suggesting that the ultimate motivation for trash talk is to gain a competitive advantage" (Rainey, 24). Moreover, if an athlete has previously used trash talk, they are more likely to use it again (Kitchings, 33). The factors influencing trash talk in high school athletes will also be researched in this paper.

### *Impact on Performance*

Trash talk also has a negative impact on performance. Trash can throw players off their game, causing them to lose concentration, primarily by being a source of auditory distraction, which in turn increases cognitive distraction (McDermott, 50). This is because, unlike other auditory distractions, trash talk has a negative connotation to it, and thus holds emotional value: "humans are generally able to filter out sound that has no cognitive or emotional value to them, but as noted earlier, the purpose of trash talk is to engage a competitor's mind in psychological stress by manipulating the threat of failure" (McDermott, 50). Competitors cannot filter trash talk out unlike other forms of distraction because of its emotional value, which makes it such an effective source of distraction. Trash talk induces anger (Ring, 13), and this anger influences performance by "indirectly distracting attention away from the task" (Ring, 17). Thus, trash talk harms performance and focus well because it is a source of distraction that induces anger, which consequently "directs attention away from the task and on to the provoker" (Ring, 16-17).

The impact of trash talk on performance in high school athletes will equally be researched in this paper.

### *Ethics*

However, it is important to consider the ethics of trash talking. On one hand, trash talk is legitimate when it helps to achieve goals or overcome difficulties, which consequently elevates physical or strategic performance (Johnson, 46). If trash talk helps an individual in their performance, it should be considered as a legitimate part of play. However, trash talk should not distract from the fun of play, be used as a tool to distract an opponent to gain a competitive advantage, or harm the opponent (Duncan, 195). Duncan states that “for [trash talk] to be a genuine part of play it should be spontaneous, creative, light-hearted and fun.” However, Nicolas Dixon disagrees with both papers previously mentioned, arguing that trash talking deliberately insults and disrespects opponents (Dixon, 95), and elaborates in a different paper in which he claims that trash talk degrades and humiliates its victims, treating them in a worthless and dismissive manner (Dixon, 211). Moreover, he argues that trash talk is unconnected to skill or strategy, and that instead, trash talk takes away from the skills that sports are designed to test (Dixon, 95). Thus, trash talk is not connected to skill and simply disrespects opponents and takes away from the competition. He concludes by saying that “we cannot immunize trash talking from the moral condemnation that we direct at verbal insults in other contexts” (Dixon, 95). Trash talk should be considered just as illegitimate in sports as other verbal insults, and it should be condemned and not a part of play. Thus, the ethics of trash talking in sports are unclear.

### ***Gap in the Literature***

Although general research has been done on trash talk, no research about trash talk has been done on high school athletes. Thus, my gap is high school athletes, and the question guiding this research is “How does trash talk affect high school athletes?” All research papers have been done on college athletes or other populations, all above high school age. Thus, a research paper on high school athletes is necessary to examine, explore, and assess trash talk in those populations. According to Vincent Granito, “surveys of high school and younger athletes will be necessary to assess trash talk in those populations” (Granito, 31). Furthermore, research that “examines whether trash-talking about distantly related topics such as physical appearance also exists at different levels of sport such as high school would be helpful” (Kniffin, 363). Therefore, this research paper will attempt to explore how trash talk affects high school athletes.

### ***Hypotheses and Rationale***

*First Hypothesis:* Overall trash talk usage in high school athletes will be on the lower side, and trash talk will only affect them on the field, not off the field.

*Second hypothesis:* Boys will report trash talking more, being the recipient of more trash talk, trash talking and being the target of trash talk from a younger age, and that trash talk affects them less both on and off the field compared to girls.

*Third and fourth hypotheses:* Same hypotheses as the second hypothesis, except replacing males with older athletes and contact sport athletes, and females with younger athletes and non-contact sport athletes for the third and fourth hypotheses, respectively.

*Rationale for Hypotheses:* The rationale for these hypotheses is that these are the findings of previous papers examining trash talk in college athletes, such as Vincent Granito's paper, Dylan Palacio's paper, and Jesse Fox's paper. Therefore, it makes sense that the findings in this paper, which examines high school athletes, should be like those found in previous papers examining college athletes.

## Methodology

A mix of quantitative and qualitative research will be used for this paper. This is called "mixed research," which according to Shorten and Smith, is a research method where "researchers collect and analyze both quantitative and qualitative data within the same study" (Shorten, 2). This type of research will be beneficial because it will help us "gain a better understanding of connections or contradictions between qualitative and quantitative data" (Shorten, 2-3). However, quantitative research will be the research method guiding this paper, with only one single question in the survey being qualitative, all other questions being quantitative. Quantitative data will be useful because according to Kim Astroth, "quantitative research is a method used to answer questions about or explain a phenomenon of interest by collecting and analyzing objective numerical data, as opposed to subjective narrative data contained in a qualitative study" (Astroth, 283). Therefore, quantitative research will allow us to better understand trash talk by using numerical data. Furthermore, quantitative data was proven to be effective in papers by Kevin M. Kniffin, Dylan Palacio, William Kitchings, and Vincent Granito and David Rainey, where they sent a survey to college athletes about their trash talk experiences to learn how trash talk affects them. However, through qualitative data, we will also be able to qualify the point of view of people who have experienced trash talk happening live themselves rather than solely relying on numbers, and qualitative data was equally proven to be effective in papers by William Kitchings and Vincent Granito. As stated by Shagufta Bhangu, "qualitative research techniques provide a lens for learning about non quantifiable phenomena such as people's experiences" (Banghu, 39). To collect the data, a survey was sent out to high school athletes in Los Angeles using a Google Forms link. All survey questions were based on the paper by Vincent Granito and David Rainey, with minor adjustments to focus the survey on high school athletes. These participants were asked to send the survey to any other high school athletes they knew, and the survey was also sent out to high school coaches so they could give the survey to their players. This survey had a sample size of 63 participants, and these participants played a variety of sports (soccer, basketball, volleyball, tennis, fencing, dance, martial arts), and ranged from younger athletes (freshmen and sophomores,  $n = 26$ ) to older athletes (juniors and seniors,  $n = 37$ ), with about half boys ( $n = 31$ ) and half girls ( $n = 32$ ). No incentives were given for completing this survey, and participants could simply exit the survey at any moment if they wished to do so. All data collected was completely anonymous.



## ***Survey Questions***

The survey had fifteen questions, all based on a paper by Vincent Granito and David Rainey (with minor modifications for high school athletes), and it began by asking participants to identify their grade, gender, and primary sport. Next, participants were asked, to the best of their memory, the age in which they had first been the target of trash talk and the age in which they first directed trash talk at others whilst playing sports. Participants then rated on a Likert type scale ranging from 1-7 (1 = never to 7 = always) how often they have: 1) been the target of trash talk by opposing players, coaches, and fans, 2) targeted opposing players, coaches, and fans with trash talk, 3) heard their teammates or coaches engage in trash talk, 4) had trash talk have a negative effect on their performance, 5) used trash talk to psych themselves up, intimidate their opponent, or hinder the performance of their opponent 6) engaged in trash talk by “getting ugly” (swearing/calling names/belittling the opponent), 7) how large a role parents, siblings, coaches, teammates, opponents, professional athletes, and fans played in teaching them how to use trash talk. As for the qualitative part of the survey, participants would be presented with a box in which they could freely type, where they were asked to identify their primary purpose of using trash talk. Afterwards, back into a quantitative method, participants answered either “yes” or “no” to if trash talk has ever affected them outside of sports, and they then selected any specific game circumstances that influenced their likelihood of engaging in trash talk (such as if they were playing an important rival).

## ***Collection and Analysis of Data***

This research method is easily replicable, since it is no more than a simple survey, and these questions were all asked with the purpose of identifying how often high school athletes use trash talk, how it affects them both on and off the field, and if there are any differences in the use of trash talk in between diverse groups (such as different sports, genders, or grades). For the quantitative data, the mean was calculated for all the data collected, and this data was then tabulated, comparing the different results to each other through gender, sports, and grade, as well as overall results. The mean of the data was collected because it was the simplest and most efficient way of comparing the data to each other, to effectively examine the role of different circumstances influencing the use and perception of trash talk. Means and averages were also not only used in a paper by Vincent Granito and David Rainey, but also in a paper by Kevin M. Kniffin and Dylan Palacio, which are the two papers on which the survey is based on, further justifying the effectiveness of using means to analyze the data. Furthermore, procedures such as MANOVAs, ANOVAs, and analyses conducted using SPSS, were too difficult to execute due to the limited resources, time, and knowledge available. As for the qualitative data, a thematic analysis of the data obtained through the qualitative question was performed. A thematic analysis is “a method for identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns (themes) within data” (Braun and Clarke, 79). In this case, a thematic analysis was useful to elaborate on the intentions behind the use of trash talk, allowing a deeper understanding of the use of trash talk beyond only numbers. The answers to the question were analyzed and codified and were then sorted into six categories (excluding those who had never used trash talk) (Punch, 169).



## Results

### Overall Results

Before examining trash talk differences between gender, age, and type of sport played, the data was analyzed for the entire sample, all of which are listed in Table 1.

### *Trash Talk Usage and Effects of Trash Talk*

**Table 1**

*Overall Results in High School Athletes: Means, (Standard Deviations)*

Item	High school athletes
Age first targeted by trash talk	9.57 (2.79)
Age first using trash talk	10.26 (2.91)
Frequency of being the target of trash talk (1-7)	4.76 (1.84)
Frequency of opposing other players with trash talk (1-7)	3.97 (2.21)
Frequency of teammates engaging in trash talk (1-7)	5.16 (1.79)
Frequency of negative impacts of trash talk (1-7)	4.03 (2.02)
Frequency of trash talk with a competitive purpose (1-7)	4.35 (2.14)
Frequency of “ugly” trash talk engagement (1-7)	1.95 (1.4)
Role of surrounding people (1-5)	3.57 (1.2)
Trash talk has affected me outside of sports	61.9% (n = 39)
Trash talk has never affected me outside of sports	38.1% (n = 24)



## ***Reasons for Using Trash Talk***

**Table 2**

*Reasons for Using Trash Talk: Definition of Themes and their Frequency Mentioned*

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Definition</b>	<b>Frequency of Appearance</b>
Hinder the opponent's performance	Participants used trash talk with the intention of hindering their opponent's performance by pestering them, getting in their head, distracting them, or messing with them.	39 times 54%
Psych themselves up	Participants used trash talk to increase their own confidence and improve their own performance. They used trash talk to psych themselves up into believing in their own capabilities.	10 times 14%
Release anger	Participants used trash talk to express and release anger over the score of the game, a referee call, being substituted, or getting fouled.	6 times 8.3%
Revenge	Participants used trash talk in retaliation for getting trash talked themselves.	6 times 8.3%
No reason/ never used trash talk	Participants either had no specific reason to use trash talk or had never used trash talk before.	6 times 8.3%
Friendly competition and fun	Participants used trash talk to make the game more fun and interesting, and to include drama in the game.	5 times 7%

## ***Exploring the Role of Gender, Age, and Sport Played***

To ascertain if trash talk experiences varied between different genders, ages, and sports played, the mean result of each survey question was calculated and compared to one another, as explained in the methodology.

### *Examining the role of gender*

These results were based on 63 participants (31 boys and 32 girls). Eleven key dissimilarities were uncovered, and these are tabulated in Table 3. Throughout, a pattern arises

from these findings, with trash talk having a greater presence among boys, and boys clearly having more experience in trash talk than girls.

**Table 3**  
*Gender Differences: Means, (Standard Deviations)*

Item	Gender	
	Boys	Girls
Age first targeted by trash talk	8.68 (1.21)	10.44 (2.85)
Age first using trash talk	9.3 (2.87)	11.23 (2.67)
Frequency of being the target of trash talk (1-7)	5.26 (1.81)	4.28 (1.76)
Frequency of opposing other players with trash talk (1-7)	4.71 (2.07)	3.25 (2.14)
Frequency of teammates engaging in trash talk (1-7)	5.77 (1.26)	4.56 (2.03)
Frequency of negative impacts of trash talk (1-7)	3.9 (2.02)	4.16 (2.03)
Frequency of trash talk with a competitive purpose (1-7)	5.16 (1.85)	3.56 (2.14)
Frequency of “ugly” trash talk engagement (1-7)	2.58 (2.85)	1.34 (0.6)
Role of surrounding people (1-5)	3.9 (1.19)	3.25 (1.14)
Trash talk has affected me outside of sports (1-7)	38.1% (n = 12)	84.4% (n = 27)
Trash talk has never affected me outside of sports (1-7)	61.9% (n = 19)	15.6% (n = 5)

*Examining the role of age*

These results were based on 37 upper-class athletes (juniors and seniors) and 26 underclass athletes (first-year students and sophomores). Eleven distinctions were uncovered, all of which are tabulated in Table 4. Once more, a pattern emerges from these findings, suggesting upper-class athletes also have more experience in trash talk than under-class athletes.

**Table 4**  
*Age Differences: Means, (Standard Deviations)*

Item	Grade	
	9 <sup>th</sup> and 10 <sup>th</sup>	11 <sup>th</sup> and 12 <sup>th</sup>
Age first targeted by trash talk	9.46 (2.5)	9.65 (3.01)
Age first using trash talk	10.42 (2.66)	10.14 (3.12)
Frequency of being the target of trash talk (1-7)	4.69 (1.95)	4.81 (1.78)
Frequency of opposing other players with trash talk (1-7)	3.58 (5.05)	4.24 (2.18)
Frequency of teammates engaging in trash talk (1-7)	5 (1.85)	5.27 (1.76)
Frequency of negative impacts of trash talk (1-7)	4.42 (1.86)	3.76 (2.1)
Frequency of trash talk with a competitive purpose (1-7)	3.96 (2.11)	4.62 (2.15)
Frequency of “ugly” trash talk engagement (1-7)	1.54 (0.9)	2.24 (1.61)
Role of surrounding people (1-5)	3.5 (1.21)	3.62 (1.21)
Trash talk has affected me outside of sports (1-7)	69.2% (n = 18)	56.8% (n = 21)

Trash talk has never affected me outside of sports (1-7)	30.8% (n = 8)	43.2% (n = 16)
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*Examining the role of sports*

These results were based on 45 athletes that played a contact sport (soccer, basketball, fencing, and martial arts) and 18 athletes that played a non-contact sport (volleyball, tennis, dance, and swimming). Eleven notable dissimilarities were discovered, all of which are tabulated in Table 5. One last time, a pattern emanates from these results, suggesting trash talk has a greater presence in contact sports.

**Table 5**  
*Sport Differences: Means, (Standard Deviations)*

Item	Sport	
	Contact Sport	Non-Contact Sport
Age first targeted by trash talk	9.2 (2.5)	10.5 (3.31)
Age first using trash talk	9.75 (2.72)	11.5 (3.07)
Frequency of being the target of trash talk (1 = never, 7 = always)	5.22 (1.76)	3.61 (1.54)
Frequency of opposing other players with trash talk (Likert type scale, 1-7)	4.58 (2.03)	2.44 (1.95)
Frequency of teammates engaging in trash talk (1-7)	5.6 (1.5)	4.06 (2.01)
Frequency of negative impacts of trash talk (1-7)	4.1 (2.03)	3.89 (2.03)
Frequency of trash talk with a competitive purpose (1-7)	4.8 (1.98)	3.22 (2.16)
Frequency of "ugly" trash talk engagement (1-7)	2.18 (1.54)	1.39 (0.7)

Role of surrounding people (1-5)	3.67 (1.17)	3.33 (1.28)
Trash talk has affected me outside of sports (1-7)	55.6% (n = 25)	77.8% (n = 14)
Trash talk has never affected me outside of sports (1-7)	44.4% (n = 20)	22.2% (n = 4)

## Discussion

The survey results suggest several things. First off, a considerable amount of trash talk is happening, with participants reporting being the target of trash talk often (4.76 on a scale of 1-7), and reporting trash talking sometimes (3.97 on a scale from 1-7). It starts from an early age as well, with the average participant having started trash talking before they were eleven years old, and first being trash talked from an even earlier age, before ten years old. The mean age of initially using trash talk was older than the mean age of first being the target of trash talk, and the reported frequency of trash talk usage was lower than the reported frequency of being targeted with trash talk. Therefore, high school athletes believe others trash talk more than they do. Thus, an explanation for the trash talk present may be that these high schoolers see themselves as victims of trash talk, and therefore justify their trash talking because they feel that they were the ones originally confronted with trash talk. Another explanation may be that peers, colleagues, and contemporaries play a huge part in teaching athletes how to trash talk in the first place (3.57 on a scale from 1-7), perhaps subconsciously, thereby increasing the likelihood of these athletes engaging in trash talk. This demonstrates that trash talk does not come from within the athlete, but instead, that they learned how to trash talk from elsewhere. Therefore, it is a process that is learned and internalized. This may also explain why it is present at such an early age, especially in a world where technology is readily available to all kids and teenagers. Young athletes can easily see professional athletes trash talking to each other and may decide to copy that behavior.

However, a trend that was immensely clear among all groups was that high school athletes almost never got “ugly” (using swear words, harsh insults) when trash talking (1.97 on a scale from 1-7 with a standard deviation of only 1.4). This may be because the level of competition of high school sports is not high enough to a degree that would incentivize more extreme trash talk, or simply because the athletes are still young, and are therefore not comfortable with degrading their opponent through harsher methods. Despite this, high school athletes do use trash talk with a purpose. The main reason for using trash talk, with a frequency of appearance of 54%, was to hinder their opponent’s performance, followed by to psych themselves up, with a frequency of appearance of 14%. They use trash talk as a strategy to gain a competitive advantage, whether that be by messing with or distracting the opponent, thereby hindering their performance, or by enhancing their own performance by increasing their confidence and belief in their own capabilities. Furthermore, an explanation for the high number of athletes using trash talk to hinder their opponent’s performance may be that they know its

effects firsthand. Trash talk often had a negative effect on the performance of athletes (4.07 on a scale from 1-7), and 61.9% of participants reported that trash talk had affected them outside of sports. Therefore, since they know how powerful trash talk can be, they try to use it to their advantage. Furthermore, these statistics show the immense influence and power that trash talk holds over athletes. Not only can trash talk throw them off their game, but it also affects them outside of sports. This brings up the question of the effects of trash talk on the mental health of athletes; it may have lasting effects on them, and it can be dangerous for these high school athletes, considering they are still mentally developing.

The game circumstance that increased the likelihood of engaging in trash talk the most was “the opponent is an important rival” (76.2%). This can be explained because of the level of competition and stakes behind the game. Trash talk increases with the level of competition (Granito, 27), and therefore, if the opponent is an important rival, the level of competition is automatically increased, because there are stakes behind the game, such as pride and leaderboard standings, which incentivizes both teams to play as well as possible. Thus, it makes sense that a noteworthy competitor would increase the probability of using trash talk, because athletes would want to use trash talk to gain a competitive advantage to win the game. The next highest circumstance was “your teammates do a lot of trash talking” (66.7%). This is because of the concept of social proof, which states that “people copy the actions of others in an attempt to emulate behavior in certain situations” (Cialdini, 116). If an athlete sees their teammates doing a great deal of trash talking, they are more probable to join in with them, rather than if they were alone; this comes back to the idea of athletes rationalizing their use of trash through others and demonstrates how teammates do take part in teaching athletes how to trash talk.

Hence, the first hypothesis is not supported. In reality, trash talk usage in high school athletes is on the higher side, and it affects the majority both on and off the field.

### *Gender, Age, and Sport Differences*

The data suggests that certain variables influence the use of trash talk. Regarding gender, boys reported trash talking more, being the recipient of more trash talk, trash talking and being the target of trash talk from a younger age, and that trash talk affected them less both on and off the field than girls did. Accordingly, the second hypothesis is supported. An explanation for this may be that males often feel like they need to trash talk more to seem manlier and scarier to their opponent, and to establish who the better player is because of gender norms and socialization. This also explains why they use it from a younger age, which, consequently, leads them to get used to it quicker. Because of this, it affects them less than it does for girls. Another explanation may be that female athletes are not as disposed to disclose their use in trash talk, or that males, either purposefully or subconsciously, over-report their trash talk to boast. Furthermore, females have simply not had as much competitive experience as males have and may still be catching up in terms of their trash talk. It is possible that both groups will trash talk the same amount in the future.

Older athletes reported trash talking more, being the recipient of more trash talk, trash talking and being the target of trash talk from a younger age, and that trash talk affected them less both on and off the field than younger athletes did. Thus, the third hypothesis is supported. An explanation for this is that older athletes have had more opportunities to trash talk, since they have been in high school for longer. Consequently, they have gotten more used to it and have

more experience trash talking compared to younger athletes, who are still learning how to trash talk. Furthermore, because of this experience, older athletes learn to deal with trash talk better than younger athletes do, and so trash talk affects them less. Furthermore, older athletes may also trash talk more because they feel older and superior, especially because of the height and growth differences.

CSA reported trash talking more, being the victim of more trash talk, trash talking and being the target of trash talk from a younger age, and that trash talk affected them less both on and off the field than NCSA did. Therefore, the fourth hypothesis is supported. An explanation is that since opponents are closer to each other in contact sports, there are naturally more opportunities to trash talk with each other. The proximity of contact sports may encourage trash talk, especially considering that trash talk sports tend to be rougher and more physical than non-contact sports, further creating opportunities for tension in between opponents, which may lead to more trash talk. This leads to these athletes using it at a younger age, getting used to it quicker, and thus it affects them less.

### ***Previous Research***

The results of this research are like results from previous research regarding trash talk conducted on college athletes (instead of high school athletes). These previous papers with comparable results were by Vincent Granito, Karen McDermott, Ben Conmy, and Dylan Palacio. The same results were found for gender and sports differences (and no research had been done on age differences). However, one difference between this research and previous research is that previous research, done on college athletes, had findings that indicated that trash talk did not affect college athletes in a negative way outside of sports, it only affected them whilst playing. In contrast, this paper has findings that suggest trash talk does, in fact, affect high school athletes in a negative way, both on and off the field. Thus, this paper suggests that talk has both immediate and long-lasting negative effects on high school athletes. Otherwise, all other results are similar, if not the same.

### **Limitations**

However, it is crucial to identify several limitations in this research. First off, the sample size of this survey was only sixty-three people. A survey with far more participants would certainly represent the effect of trash talk on high school athletes more accurately. Furthermore, there was not an equal representation of people in the survey. Although the number of boys (32) and girls (33) was close, there were far more participants who played a contact sport (45) than participants who played a non-contact sport (18), and only seven sports were represented. Moreover, there were more older athletes (37) than younger athletes (26), with most being 11th graders (20). In addition to this, the sample was demographically narrow; many of the participants came from the same high school and from the same sports teams in Los Angeles, so they might have naturally reported more similar answers than if they had come from many various high schools in Los Angeles. The limitations regarding sample sizes and representation are due to limited resources and time. Furthermore, procedures such as MANOVAs, ANOVAs, and analyses conducted using SPSS, were equally too difficult to execute due to the limited



resources, time, and knowledge available. Moreover, various limitations center on surveys requiring participants to self-report rather than direct observation. For example, participants may have had biases when answering the questions, such as males saying they trash talk more to appear manlier. Similarly, participants may have had an overestimation or an underestimated reality. They may have perceived events to have happened more, or less, than the amount they happened. The perception of the scale may also be different between participants. For example, what one participant believes is a rating of 5, another participant may think is a rating of 4 or 6. Finally, participants may simply not have fully understood a question or may not have fully concentrated on the survey whilst they were taking it, leading to inaccurate answers.

## **Conclusion**

Trash talk is an established practice within high school athletes with normative acceptance; high school athletes trash talk often and it is an accepted custom in high school sports. They do not get as harsh with it as do college athletes, but they do use it with a specific purpose (hinder their opponent's performance/improve their own performance). They start using it from an early age (pre-adolescence), and they learn it primarily thanks to their teammates, parents, coaches, and professionals. Furthermore, trash talk experiences differ between gender, age, and sport played. Trash talk affects high school athletes in a negative way (by harming their performance/making them lose confidence) both on and off the field. Thus, trash talk has both immediate and long-lasting negative effects on high school athletes.

## **Implications**

Trash talk is an established part of sports that will not go away any time soon. This research confirms the presence of trash talk within high school athletes, now in addition to college athletes. This presence has multiple implications; the first of which being that competition in sport is more than merely physical. Trash talk enhances the mental component of sports beyond what it is thus far. Previously, athletes had to deal with mental components such as pressure, anxiety, confidence, and mental toughness, but now, with the establishment of trash talk as an accepted practice, athletes must deal with being pestered by their opponents. Thus, athletes who obtain the ability to become numb to the effects of trash talk gain an immense advantage over those who do not. Furthermore, because trash talk is uncivil (Yip, 140), it may harm the mental health of athletes, specifically high school athletes, who have not finished developing yet. This brings up the question of the ethics of trash talk; how should it be dealt with? Should it be banned in all competitions? This would certainly be hard to regulate. Or perhaps it should only be banned within high school sports, which is the demographic it affects the most anyway.

## **Future Research**

Future research should have larger sample sizes with full representation in terms of demography, age, sports, and gender. Furthermore, observational studies and experiments



should be done to see how trash talk functions in real time, because there is only so much to learn with quantitative and qualitative data. Research on how trash talk affects adults and children would also be beneficial; they are the only groups in which trash talk has not yet been researched. More precisely, regarding adults, research should be done to see the difference in trash talk between professional athletes and recreational athletes. More in-depth research on trash talk within genders would also be useful. Moreover, research on the evolution of trash talk could be useful to understand trash talk better. Finally, research should be conducted on whether trash talk is harmful to mental health eventually, because based on this research, it is clear trash talk does affect high school athletes in a negative way, both on and off the field. More research on the ethics of trash talk would also be beneficial. Trash talk is a captivating, complex part of sports that warrants further research.



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