

The Construction of Deion Sanders's Identity Through Well Off Media



By: James Robinson

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of the requirements of the Degree of Bachelor of Arts

I hereby recognize and pledge to fulfill my responsibilities, as defined in the Honor Code,
and to maintain the integrity of both myself and the College as a whole.

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Introduction

As a college athlete who grew up playing sports my entire life, I have often been involved in team environments. Through these experiences, I have come to understand what it means to be a leader and teammate and to be a part of something that is bigger than your own self. Through the years of primarily playing baseball and currently at the college level, these team environments have helped me create and shape my current identity. Baseball and sports have helped to teach me, and many other people worldwide, about discipline, success, failure, and confidence. However, being this close and involved in sports has shown me how teammates, coaches, fans, and the media talk about athletes and coaches. Since transitioning from high school to college sports, I have experienced how media has a real and increasing impact on sports and the individuals involved. Because of this change, I have become interested in the ways that athletes and coaches are talked about by the media and what impact that has on their identity. Which helped lead me to this project.

Aside from my initial interest, my goal for this project was to find a topic area within sports that sparked my interest. I really wanted to find someone or something that already had my attention that I could learn more about and expand on and eventually turn into a project. One day, I was scrolling through YouTube shorts, and I came across a video of Deion Sanders, who is a National Football League (NFL) Hall of Famer and current head football coach at the University of Colorado. Although I was already familiar with Deion Sanders, I connected with him as an athlete because I admire his unique approach, show of character, and the way he conducts himself on and off the field. The way that he has conducted himself over the years has always struck me due to his personality, energy, and athletic success. His flashy personality is entertaining and engaging, and he can be over the top with voicing his opinions, but at the same time, to me, there is a seriousness about his commitment to the things he feels are right and respectable. I see him as a cultural figure, and I thought he would be just the right person to learn more about and expand on.

When doing more research into Well Off Media, I noticed that the YouTube channel Deion Sanders runs with his son Deion Sanders Jr., and the channel highlights his everyday endeavors as a football coach. The videos posted on the channel caught my interest due to the fact that the way that Deion Sanders tells his story to the world has a different and unique approach. The content posted felt real and different and gave me, the viewer, a new experience of

sports media. It felt like I was getting a special access look into Deion's world. Through my education as a communication student, I could see the ways in which these videos were telling Sanders' story in order to build upon both a football program and his personal story and legacy. At this point, I wanted to know more about Sanders and Well Off Media and understand them better.

As I continued watching more of their videos, I began to think about how Well Off Media used its platform to construct Sanders' identity. I noticed the videos were presented in a way that told a story, not just general sports information like traditional, modern sports media. I saw a new type of sports media that was nothing like what I had seen or experienced before. It was a type of media in which the star, Coach Sanders, was creating an image that he wanted the world to see. The stories pulled me in, and I was interested in learning and hearing more, but I realized the reality was that the engaging and entertaining feel of behind-the-scenes videos was not as real as they seemed, as Sanders had complete control over the image and information being presented. This idea blew my mind, and I started to discover that there is more than just football going on; it is more about the stories, who is telling them, and what part of the story they want to share.

At this point, I knew that this would be the perfect idea for my senior project. This idea tied into my personal experiences and interests as an athlete, as well as my academic interests in communication and identity, and ultimately informed my decision to pursue this topic. I have always believed that sports are more than just wins and losses and that they can reveal aspects of leadership, culture, and character. I have experienced firsthand the impact of sports and the lessons learned that have nothing to do with the game, and I believe that has impacted who I am as a person. I noticed a similar theme in Well-Off Media videos, and I wanted to look at how Deion Sanders, through the use of Well-Off Media, can use digital media to share the aspects he chooses with an audience.

Throughout the paper, you can expect to understand how Well Off Media constructs Deion Sanders' identity as a football coach through the use of digital media. Focusing on how the videos are produced and what impact that has on shaping public perceptions of Sanders as a leader, mentor, and brand. I will look at ideas of personal storytelling, sports culture, and communication strategy to understand how identity is constructed in the digital age.

The structure of this paper will provide general information on Deion Sanders' athletic and coaching career, followed by a literature review and theory section on surrounding scholarship and theorists. The primary theorists I will use are Stuart Hall's Representation Theory and Robert Entman's Framing Theory. After that, I will move into an analysis of Well Off Media and specific videos, looking at how language, recurring messages, and visuals construct Sanders's image using Hall and Entman's theories. Each section will build on one another, connecting all of the observations to larger ideas about athlete branding, leadership, and media construction. In all, this paper will help me to explore and understand a personal interest and question I had, which is understanding how digital media can construct identity. In this case, understanding how Well Off Media constructs Deion Sanders's identity as a football coach.

Background and Context

Deion Sanders, also known as "Prime Time" and "Neon Deion," is a well-known personality and figure in the United States professional sports industry. He is widely recognized for his extensive sports career at the collegiate and professional levels, as well as his career as a collegiate head coach and media personality. The sports icon was born in August 1967 in Fort Myers, Florida, to Connie and Mims Sanders (Momodu). While a multi-sport athlete in high school, Deion began to get noticed on a higher level, first as a defensive back and punt returner on Florida State University's football team in the fall of 1985. During his time at Florida State, Deion set individual Florida State football records, achieved first-team NCAA consensus All-American status twice in his career, and received the Jim Thorpe Award in 1988 (FrankDNole). At the end of his successful college football career, Sanders was selected by the Atlanta Falcons with the fifth overall pick in the 1988 NFL draft. In 1995, Florida State recognized his accomplishments with the honor of retiring his number 2 Seminole jersey.

In addition to football, Deion was an overall athlete who earned recognition and accomplishments in multiple sports. Sanders was drafted by the Kansas City Royals baseball organization out of high school, but he decided to attend Florida State instead (Flanagan). While a student-athlete at Florida State, Sanders also competed in the 100-meter and 200-meter dash races on the track team and also played as an outfielder on the baseball team. While Sanders did not get the same level of recognition in baseball as he did in football, he excelled as an outfielder.

After competing on the nationally ranked Florida State baseball team, Sanders was drafted to the New York Yankees in the 30th round of the 1988 MLB draft (Flannagan).

In his NFL career from 1989 to 2005, Deion Sanders was an eight-time Pro Bowl selection and a first-team All-Pro selection nine times (Bergman). During his 14-year professional football career, Sanders played for the Atlanta Falcons, San Francisco 49ers, Dallas Cowboys, Washington Redskins, and the Baltimore Ravens (Pro Football Hall Of Fame). He won two Super Bowls in his career, once with the San Francisco 49ers in 1994 and once with the Dallas Cowboys in 1996. By the time he retired, Sanders was second in all-time career interception yardage and interceptions returned for a touchdown and was inducted into the NFL Hall of Fame in 2011 (Osterhouse). In addition, Sanders played nine seasons of MLB baseball from 1989 to 2001, all of which were partial seasons since he played in the NFL at the same time (The 3 Best NFL & MLB Players). Sanders compiled a career .273 batting average, and is the only athlete in history to play in the MLB World Series and NFL Super Bowl in the same year in 1992.

Deion Sanders had a successful career on the football and baseball fields while also attracting attention off the field, ultimately building his persona as "Prime." He received this name for his entertaining and attention-getting actions off the field; for instance, he was once driven to a Florida State football game in a stretch limo and got out wearing a tuxedo (There May Never Be Another Athlete). Sanders was known for his flashy custom outfits and built friendships with celebrities with flamboyant personalities like MC Hammer and Mr. T, who would go with Sanders to the Atlanta Falcons practices. Deion started to make over-the-top comments that got attention and showed he was very confident, even considering himself to be of a god-like status, by once saying that "God covered two-thirds of the Earth with water, and I cover the rest" (Sanders). Prime appeared in multiple commercials for California Almonds, KFC, and Aflac, all presenting him as flashy and bold (Two-Way Player). Once Sanders' time as a professional athlete was over, he moved to sports commentary, working at CBS, the NFL Network, and Barstool Sports (Deion Sanders Leaves NFL Network).

After being the focus of the camera on and off the field, Deion pivoted to his current career as a head football coach. In 2012, Deion started his coaching career at the prep and high school level, coaching his two sons once they got older, Shedeur and Shilo Sanders. After his sons graduated from high school, Prime moved to Jackson State University in 2020, where he continued coaching his sons. The Jackson State football program was not very successful prior to

Sanders' arrival, and the facilities and field were rundown and needed improvement. In three seasons, Deion's team posted a school record of eleven wins in a season, won the SWAC title, went to several bowl games, and received the Eddie Robinson Award for the top coach in FCS football. Deion Sanders famously convinced the eventual Heisman Trophy Winner, Travis Hunter, to change from attending Florida State to committing to Jackson State.

While Sanders had multiple schools pursuing him to coach for them, he chose to move to the University of Colorado in Boulder (Plati) next. His sons followed him there, along with many high-level recruits. Sanders brought in NFL-grade coaches and former NFL stars to assist him. In his second season as the head coach, Colorado won ten games, and celebrities and rap artists watched on the sidelines (Atkinson). Now known as "Coach Prime," Sanders wore cowboy hats, spoke like an NFL general manager, negotiated Name, Image, and Likeness (NIL) deals, and drove flashy cars like a Lamborghini through Boulder, Colorado. Games started selling out, and Bowl Committees recognized that the attention Deion was bringing to Colorado had a lot of value. According to Steve Hurlbert, the Director of Athletics Strategic Communications and Spokesperson at Colorado State, Sanders generates 90.6 million dollars of revenue for the University of Colorado, the surrounding Boulder community, and his extensive business interests and corporate partners (Dorisca). Beyond this business, athletic, and financial accomplishments, Deion Sanders also built an alternate identity for Coach Prime. Building on "Prime Time," which was his flashy and bold character during his playing days that stood out and helped build his public image, he became a well-known character as a coach. Because of his very unique and extensive career as an athlete, media personality, and coach, the media and public couldn't get enough of Sanders' story and the large personality he continues to present.

Well Off Media is a YouTube channel and digital media company founded in 2018 by Deion Sanders Jr., the son of the football Hall of Famer and current football coach at the University of Colorado. The channel has uploaded approximately 1.5k videos and has gained 539k subscribers since the creation of the channel in 2018 (Well Off Media). The channel produces content related to Deion Sanders' daily life, especially focusing on an inside look at his life as the head football coach at Colorado. Content posted to the account includes vlogs, "behind-the-scenes" footage, and documentary-style storylines that center on Sanders' life, leadership, and his impact on his players, staff, and team. Jackson State University and the University of Colorado are the two football programs that have been included in and documented

by the channel. Besides Coach Sanders, the players and coaching staff that are part of the programs are included in the content posted. It is typical to see personal stories being shared, and Well Off Media often focuses on long-term growth in players and how they are impacted by the leadership of Coach Sanders. The channel showcases the overall culture and mindset of the team and shows the player and coach perspective inside a college football atmosphere. There is a large focus on developing character and qualities that Sanders values, and stories focus on how Sanders impacts this, mentors players, and holds them accountable. Additionally, we see aspects of lifestyle, some of which seem a little over the top but are also a reflection of new changes in college football as a result of NIL money and branding in the content regarding the colleges' football program, coaches, and players.

The main goals of Well Off Media are to produce content that promotes Sanders' current identity as a football coach, leader, and mentor and the success of whatever football program he is coaching. While they are controlling the content and, therefore, the information that impacts personal branding and perception of the program, Coach Sanders and Well Off Media have been successful in that presentation. The branding and messaging have helped to build a stronger program that recruits better football players. Having an inside access view of Coach Sanders and the Colorado football program has helped to gain a larger fan base for both Sanders and his program while generating larger revenue for the program and players.

Originally, the Well Off Media YouTube channel gained popularity in 2020 when Deion Sanders became the head football coach of Jackson State University and then again in 2022 when he began coaching at Colorado, as showcased by its content. During this time period, Well Off Media grew into a major media outlet that showcased Coach Sanders and the Colorado football program. Since 2018, Sanders Jr. has used Well Off Media to document the coaching journey of his father, providing an inside look that traditional sports media had never seen before.

The way that Well Off Media is used and how it relates to Deion Sanders as a football coach is somewhat straightforward yet unique at the same time. In particular, Well Off Media uses a digital platform to tell the story of Coach Sanders, displaying who he is as a football coach while giving a "behind-the-scenes" perspective of how Sanders conducts himself. Sanders is one of the most popular faces in sports media today, separating himself from other coaches and programs around the country on and off the field. The following paragraphs will consider and

review the notable scholarly works about identity, image, and representation as they pertain to athletes' and coaches' portrayal in sports news, specifically Black athletes and coaches. By understanding how Deion Sanders' image has shifted throughout the years from his time as an athlete to his time as a coach, we can begin to answer the question of how Well Off Media constructs Deion Sanders' identity as a football coach.

Literature Review

Media Representations of Black Athletes

Similar to the concept above, Douglas Hartman, Alex Manning, and Kyle Green (2022) analyze how the media represents Black athletes who participate in racial justice activism. In their peer-reviewed journal article, "The Performance and Reception of Race-Based Athletic Activism: Toward a Critical, Dramaturgical Theory of Sport," they argue that Black athletes get caught up in media narratives that praise their physical talent but condemn them when they go outside their expected role as an athlete. The authors give the example of Colin Kaepernick, a former National Football League (NFL) quarterback, who kneeled for the national anthem as a protest against police brutality which then created nationwide media backlash. He was previously praised for his athletic achievements but the media quickly shifted and portrayed him as unpatriotic once he stepped outside the role of athlete and used his athletic platform for political expression. The authors make the claim that this specific reaction by the media is due to established racial ideologies that attempt to shut down and limit Black athletes who pursue political issues and punish them if they do. The journal article's framework discusses how sports media is an example where protest, performance, and race come together, showing how the media tries to destroy Black athletes when they take on roles outside of being athletes.

The journal article "Political Activism, Radical Identity and the Commercial Endorsement of Athletes" by Cunningham and Regan (2012) looks at how public activism by Black athletes intersects with media narratives and shows racial biases in representation of these athletes. Using two controlled experimental studies of hypothetical athlete endorsement scenarios, they came to the conclusion that Black athletes who participate in political activism and have strong racial identities are often perceived negatively and this impacts evaluation of them as product endorsers. This perception impacts Black athlete's marketability and the media narratives surrounding them. The study suggests the idea that commercial and media industries

choose "safe" portrayals of Black athletes that are neutral and silent on social issues. The findings from their study add to a larger understanding of how Black athletes who speak out are at risk of being viewed as controversial, which limits the range of voices and identities allowed in mainstream sports media. Their journal and study highlights how media representation is not just shaped by what Black athletes do, but also by how audiences respond when Black athletes challenge racial and political norms.

The Portrayal of Black Coaches in Sports Media

In the article "Race Ideology Perpetuated: Media Representations of Newly Hired Football Coaches," Cunningham and Bopp (2010) look at the ways racial stereotypes exist in the media portrayal of NCAA Division 1-FBS. Through the content analysis of several newspaper articles announcing the hiring of head football coaches, the authors discovered a difference in how Black and White head football coaches were described by the media. When it came to describing Black head coaches, terms associated with leadership qualities were used, like "motivational" and "players coach," while white coaches were framed as "intellectual" or "strategic." These patterns of racially based representation reflect deep socially constructed beliefs that value intellect in White individuals while presenting Black individuals through emotional and relational traits. The authors argue that this bias contributes to the issue of underrepresentation of Black coaches by reinforcing perceptions that these individuals lack the expertise or strategic thinking needed for success. The article adds to the literature regarding racial media framing, showing and explaining how even positive depictions of Black coaches can limit their perceived qualifications, shaping how audiences and decision-makers look at leadership potential.

Adding to the conversation about the portrayal of Black coaches in sports media, the article "An Analysis of Racial Tasking and Other Sport Management Theories Through the Lived Experiences of Black College Football Coaches" by Bopp and Turick (2024) gives insight into how systemic biases, including media portrayals, influence the experiences of Black coaches. "Racial tasking," a concept talked about in the article, is when Black coaches are stereotypically assigned to roles involving motivation, discipline, or recruiting Black athletes. These assigned roles are positions shaped by assumptions about cultural familiarity rather than coaching strategy. Reinforcing media narratives that frame Black coaches as emotional leaders

instead of strategic thinkers. After interviews with Black National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) football coaches, the study shows how these lived experiences are a part of the larger pattern of sports media coverage, where Black coaches are not given credit for full credit for their contributions. Through the interviews of these football coaches, the article is able to show how media narratives limit the ability of Black coaches to advance. Building on top of the conversation about racial representation in sports shows that portrayals in media are not just reflections of bias but shape professional opportunities and perceptions of leadership potential.

Athlete-Controlled Media and Identity Construction

The article "Playing in the New Media Game or Riding the Virtual Bench: Confirming and Disconfirming Membership in the Community of Sport" by Kassing and Sanderson (2015) looks at the relationship between athletes and their audiences and how social media has redefined this relationship. The authors explain how social media platforms, such as Twitter, now known as X, and Instagram, give athletes the ability to speak directly to fans, bypassing traditional sports media and offering athletes more control over how their identities are shaped and understood. This self-managed media presence gives athletes the ability to present a more authentic version of themselves, highlighting personal values and responding to controversies, aspects that often get filtered or misrepresented by mainstream media. The authors also look at both sides of this shift while understanding that self-managed media gives these individuals the power to construct their own narratives and expose them to public scrutiny within these digital spaces.

Additionally, the article "Performing Athletic Identity on Twitter: Differences in Status and Gender" by Vera Varis (2017) looks into how athletes use Twitter, now known as X, to construct and perform their identities, focusing on variations across professional and gender status. Revealing the idea that professional athletes emphasize their athletic identity by sharing content on these platforms that is related to athletic achievements, competing, and training. In contrast, amateur athletes tend to display a multifaceted identity, using aspects of their personal lives alongside their athletic lives. The article also highlights how gender differences, especially female athletes, often balance the portrayal of their athletic life with content that connects with traditional femininity norms to navigate social expectations and media pushback. This idea shows how social media can be used as a platform for athletes to have control over their personal personas, allowing the ability to challenge or follow narratives in sports media.

Social Media's Role in Athlete Branding

In the book, "Sport Beyond Television: The Internet, Digital Media and the Rise of Networked Media Sport," Hutchins and Rowe (2012) look at how digital media has reshaped sports communication and athlete visibility. The authors pose the idea that social media platforms like Twitter, known as X, Instagram, and YouTube, have given athletes the ability to construct their own public personalities and interact with fans, moving away from traditional media outlets. This change has made social media an important tool for modern athletic branding. The book goes on to talk about the challenges and opportunities that have come due to this change; while athletes now have more control over their personal image, they must understand how to deal with pressures when it comes to renaming authentic, marketable, and engaged. It also highlights the tight line between overbranding and understanding, which could potentially give control back to traditional media. The authors give an understanding of how social media gives athletes power while also complicating the ways athletes manage their identity through social media.

The article "Branding in the Age of Social Media" by Douglas Holt (2016) looks into and critiques traditional branding strategies in the digital age, focusing on the emergence of "crowd culture," which are online communities that drive cultural innovation. Holt goes on to argue that "crowd cultures have had an impact on the effectiveness of conventional branded content, as consumers now connect with content that relates to their own ideologies and community values. Presenting the idea that personal branding efforts on social media must connect with the values of these "crowd cultures" to maintain engagement and authenticity. Encouraging individuals to participate in cultural movements and conversations that matter to their audiences.

Theory

Representation Theory - Stuart Hall

In the book, "Representation: Cultural Representation and Signifying Practices" (1997), Stuart Hall writes about a theoretical framework for understanding how meaning is produced and created through representation. Hall defines representation as the process by which members of a culture use symbols, images, and language to produce and create meaning. Defining representation as a central process through which meaning is actively being constructed and distributed, not a secondary act that reflects meaning.

Hall introduces the constructionist approach to representation, which believes and argues that meaning is not always inherent in images or objects themselves. Rather, meaning comes

from the systems of signs and language that individuals use to view and comment on the world. In this approach, representation is built and depends on shared cultural codes that define how signs are understood within a particular setting. The constructionist approach moves away from earlier reflective or intentional theories of meaning and rather focuses on how meaning is culturally and socially created.

Hall discusses the concept of semiotics which is the study of how meaning is created through signs and symbols. He explains that signs are made up of two elements which are the signifier, which is the physical form of a sign (word or image) and the signified, which is the idea that the sign represents. The relationship between signifier and signified is not automatic but determined by what the culture believes it should mean. This means that signs can change in meaning across all different types of historical and cultural contexts.

As well, Hall talks about the role of discourse and how it shapes meaning. Discourse is a group of statements that provide a language for having a conversation about specific topics. These items are structured to provide knowledge, control behavior, and shape perceptions. Through discourse, representation has become a point where meaning, power, and knowledge intersect. Institutions such as media, education, and law use the discourse to define what is correct or normal.

Ideology is an important part of Hall's theory and in this case means having a shared set of values, ideas, and beliefs. Representations often hold meanings that uphold strong social norms and beliefs. Through exposure these meanings can become normalized and presented as common knowledge, even though they represent and reflect particular perspectives.

Hall touches on stereotyping as a specific representational practice. The concept of stereotyping reduces people to a set of easy, fixed characteristics and amplifies differences between groups. The concept works through the idea of binary oppositions, for example, "good vs. bad", playing an important role in the maintenance of social hierarchies. By labeling certain groups as "other", stereotyping sustains exclusion and power imbalances.

In all, Stuart Hall's representation theory shows meaning as the outcome of cultural and language-based processes. Through systems of stereotyping, ideology, discourse, and signs, representation helps to define how individuals and ideas are understood in our society. Representation is a main way that power has an influence on how cultural meanings are created and understood.

Framing Theory - Robert Entman

In Robert Entman's journal article, "Framing: Toward Clarification of a Fractured Paradigm," he defines the concept of framing within communication studies as a process that involves choosing aspects of a perceived reality and making them more salient in a communication context. The idea is to promote a particular interpretation and influence how the audience evaluates and understands information. According to Hall, salience means the process of making facts and ideas more noticeable, memorable, and meaningful for the receivers of a message.

Throughout the article and as part of his theory, Entman defines four functions that framing performs in communication. These four primary functions include problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and treatment recommendation. Problem definition is the function that identifies what an issue is. Causal intervention is the function that assigns responsibility or causes for that specific issue. Moral evaluation is the function of when judgment is used and values are assessed. Lastly, treatment recommendation is the function that suggests courses of action and solutions. All of these functions tend to work together in political communication, new stories, and other forms of media to help guide how audiences interpret social issues and events.

Framing can work and operate at many stages of communication and can be used in the production of media messages, the way public and social content is presented, and how audiences interpret and respond to those specific messages. Entman explains how framing is not just present in what is included in a message but also in what is left out of a message. The exclusion of specific facts or perspectives can help shape and define meaning just as impactful as included content, allowing for frames to help guide public understanding without overall direction.

Although framing is used across many disciplines such as political science, sociology, and communication, he poses the idea that framing has been used incorrectly, vaguely, and inconsistently. Through the article, he tries to clarify the concept by creating a more clear and usable way to define framing theory, focusing on the idea that frames should be looked at through recognizable functions in media content.

Entman's framing theory works to provide a framework for looking at how media messages have an impact on public perceptions. Highlighting assigned responsibilities and

specific causes, making value judgments, and promoting solutions, frames guide not only what individuals think about but also how they tend to think about it. In all, framing is an important process that helps to shape public discourse and the construction of meaning in communication.

Analysis

In this section, I will analyze how Well Off Media constructs the identity of Deion Sanders through his role as a college football coach. By applying Stuart Hall's Representation Theory and Robert Entman's Framing Theory, this study analyzes the narrative strategies that are used to portray Deion Sanders as a culturally significant leader and a highly influential football coach. Using these theories, I will examine how Well Off Media creates and displays powerful and purposeful narratives in its video footage, interviews, and vlogs to shape the audience's perception of Deion Sanders and his identity.

Constructing Coach Prime's Identity Through Representation

The idea that meaning is not directly or simply reflected in media but is produced through language, symbols, and cultural codes is exactly what Stuart Hall's Representation Theory argues for. Well, Off Media follows this perspective by not just documenting Deion Sanders's life but also helping to construct his public identity through specific visuals, themes, and settings. On the Well Off Media YouTube channel, the video "I Am Black History - Coach Prime" is a great example of how Sanders is symbolically positioned as more than just a college football coach but more so as a cultural figure whose identity is rooted in leadership and Black history.

The video starts off with Coach Sanders seated in a barber shop, which is a setting that is deeply connected to the Black cultural tradition. The barbershop in Black culture has served as a long-lasting community setting where Black men have the opportunities to have conversations, debate ideas, share knowledge, and affirm each other's identities. Coach Sanders, being placed in this type of environment, helps Well Off Media draw on shared and common cultural meanings that stretch far beyond football and sports. According to Hall, representation works by connecting the signifier (visual image of Sanders in the barbershop) with the signified (cultural authority and mentorship). This connection helps to construct Sanders as an individual who belongs to and has the ability to speak for the Black community.

As well, when Sanders states, "I am Black history" in the video, it further demonstrates and reinforces this identity. This statement is not just personal to Sanders but more so symbolic.

Sanders's claims that he is a part of Black historical narratives put him in a position where he can be viewed as a cultural figure whose legacy is more than just his athletic and coaching achievements. Hall's theory helps to explain how this statement functions, showing how this is not just about Sanders's biography but about the meaning the audience should attach to him. Through the use of cultural codes, such as close-up shots and historically meaningful settings, Well Off Media is able to create a representation of Sanders that connects athletic leadership with racial and community significance.

Instead of strictly portraying Sanders as a typical college football coach who operates within the standard framework of college football, the video constructs him as a figure who expands and disrupts what a coach can represent, and his racial identity is a central focus. The visuals and verbal aspects in the video work to establish a symbolic representation that all connects together using personal style, historical pride, character and spiritual elements. By doing all of this, the video demonstrates Hall's argument that representation is not about reflecting reality but a cultural process through which identity is defined, and social meanings are established.

Framing Leadership and Legacy Through Narrative

As touched on earlier, based on Robert Entman's framing theory, the four key functions through which media can impact public understanding are problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and treatment recommendation. These four functions help to explain how messages shape meaning by focusing on specific aspects of a situation while minimizing others. In the video "We Can't Win Like That - Coach Prime," from Well Off Media's channel, these four functions are specifically used to portray Sanders not just as a football coach but as a leader who focuses on personal growth and moral discipline. The video frames Sanders's message to his team as more than just a post-practice speech but as a speech that teaches lessons about values and leadership.

In the video, the problem definition is shown when Coach Sanders addresses his team after practice and identifies that the main issue with his team is not skill but a lack of discipline, accountability, and focus. The line "We cannot win like that. Ten something yards of penalty-we cannot win like that" helps to demonstrate that the team is underperforming and that is due to mental mistakes and fixable errors, instead of poor coaching efforts or overpowering opponents. The causal interpretation happens right after when Sanders tells his players that they are to blame

for their poor play. Sanders does not put the blame on his coaching staff but stresses that the burden has been placed on the players and that they need to fix their behavior. This instance sets a clear example and expectation that personal responsibility is central to their team's success.

Sanders engages in an act of moral evaluation when he shares a powerful childhood story with his team during their meeting. He starts the story off by sharing how he remembers being in a teammate's old pickup truck surrounded by his teammates, in which some of the individuals were passing around and smoking marijuana. Sanders was faced with peer pressure to smoke with his teammates, but he stood by his morals and removed himself from the situation. This moment is framed in the video as a turning point in Sanders's life and serves as an example of how he expects his players to handle decision-making. When Sanders states, "You've got to start standing for what you believe," the message is more than just football. It transitions into a lesson about self-discipline, character, and integrity. The video presents this moment as a lesson that is intended to build up his player's personal development on and off the football field.

When it comes to the treatment recommendation, it is clear and motivational: players must be fully committed, give full effort, and uphold moral standards both on and off the football field. Sanders pushes his team to commit to excellence when he says, "For four seconds at a time," pushing his players to be fully locked in on the current play. He also directly calls out players to "stand up for what you know is right," pushing them to not make excuses and hold firm to the values of discipline and accountability. Using moral appeals and storytelling, Sanders is able to turn regular team meetings and practices into opportunities to build lifetime habits and impact players.

Aside from direct commentary, the video's framing is reinforced visually, too. Most of the footage within the video is focused on Sanders's speeches to his team, with a few instances of moments focusing on players and other coaches. The video is dedicated to uninterrupted storytelling and tight, close camera angles that help to establish seriousness and sincerity throughout the video. There is no game footage; instead, the video focuses on highlighting Sanders as a moral authority whose leadership is much greater than their athletic performance.

Through Entman's framing theory, we can understand that the video "We Can't Win Like That - Coach Prime" is a carefully constructed message that checks off all of the four functions. Well Off Media frames Sanders as a coach whose influence is established in moral leadership

and life experiences. The narrative helps to add to Sanders's identity as "Coach Prime," showing him as someone who redefines success not just in football but in leadership and manhood.

Disturbing the Norm: Redefining the Black Head Coach

The Well Off Media video, "Coach Prime Cuts Everybody...Even Some Staff," gives a unique view into Deion Sanders's leadership environment and instead of showing him in formal meetings or at practice with his staff and team, the video shows Sanders reflecting, joking, and debating family dynamics, chains, cars, and content creation. Although the videos seem lighthearted and lifestyle-oriented, we are still able to understand and uncover how Sanders challenges traditional coaching norms. Using both Stuart Hall's Representation Theory and Robert Entman's Framing Theory, we can see how Sanders's family-focused, media-integrated, and expressive style pushes back against traditional expectations that are put upon Division One head football coaches, especially Black men in leadership roles.

Instead of being portrayed as a distant disciplinarian authority figure like many head football coaches are, Sanders is portrayed in a playful, familiar setting alongside his boys, barbers, and staff. In the video, we do not see any locker room speeches, team meetings, or active coaching of his players. Instead, Sanders's leadership is seen and expressed through constant presence, cultural connection, and emotional transparency. This picture reflects Hall's theory that identity is not fixed but more so constructed through symbols, settings, and language. In this video, Sanders is constructed as a leader who connects coaching with mentorship, fatherhood, and cultural pride.

Through Entman's framework, the narrative once again establishes and communicates all four framing functions. The problem definition is seen through jokes regarding decision-making, business, and performance, like the reference to Sanders "cutting everybody...even the barbers." The casual interpretation is built around a culture shift, where Sanders' family dialogue frames their work ethic and commitment to the media as necessary for achieving new standards. The moral evaluation is shown in their remarks that are critical of laziness, superficial decisions, and lack of discipline such as making bad financial decisions or missing video uploads, promoting self-responsibility and growth. The treatment recommendation is informal but is clear, which is to stay accountable, committed, and visible.

Not only what Sanders says but how and where he says it all is part of what disrupts traditional coaching norms. Settings like barbershops, constant camera rolling, real-time social media production, and regular jokes telling push away from the serious, media-trained performances that most head football coaches give to the media. Instead of speaking to the public through strictly press conferences, Sanders and his sons are able to speak directly to their audience and show combining media entertainment with leadership. Hall's theory helps us to understand how these daily videos produced by Well Off Media still function as representation, building a public identity using the professional and personal in a way that pushes and challenges institutional standards or authority and masculinity.

Well Off Media doesn't present Deion Sanders as a football coach who rose to the top by conforming; instead, the channel highlights his differences. Sanders builds culture by being rooted in cultural traditions, accessible, and emotionally expressive, using storytelling, settings, and material items. This type of leadership isn't always visible in mainstream sports media, which often categorizes coaches into standard roles. The ways in which the video centers Sanders's family, personality, and lifestyle reframe him as a cultural architect, not just a coach who breaks the rules but one who rewrites them.

Selective Framing and Narrative Control

The video "Coach Prime HATES EARRINGS! THE MAN IS BACK ON CAMPUS!" is a perfect example of how Well Off Media uses selective framing to strengthen Deion Sanders's leadership values and styles, especially in moments where the idea of team discipline is the focus. Once again, through Robert Entman's Framing Theory, the video shows how Well Off Media and their channel emphasize certain behaviors, bypass critiques, and position Sanders as a steady moral authority by controlling messaging focus and visual tone.

Throughout the video, Sanders returns to the team and talks to the group after a high-intensity early morning workout. Although most of the footage throughout the video focuses on aspects of football such as players training, pushing through drills, and interacting with teammates, the most important moment in the video comes when Coach Sanders calls out a player for wearing earrings that were covered with band-aids. Sanders interpreted the player's action of trying to cover up the earrings as an act of disrespect and warned the team: "Anybody else come out here like that again, I promise you, you'll be on the first thing smoking." This

moment becomes the most important part of the video, and Well Off Media uses Entman's core functions of framing to highlight the moment as a message about expectations, discipline, and identity.

The problem definition of this instance according to Entman's model, is the lack of team discipline which is symbolized by the earrings. Sanders uses this visible instance to address a bigger culture issue within his program which is a team that lacks self-control and attention to detail. The casual interpretation is the presence of rule-breaking behavior by players on the team, reflecting a deeper issue of ignoring team rules and standards.

The moral evaluation aspect happens through Sanders's delivery of the message to the team. Sanders does not just correct the player, he frames the behavior as selfish and disrespectful to the team, players, and staff. The act of hiding the earrings with band-aids becomes a way of doing things "your own way" in contradiction to what Sanders has established the team should be doing and the values he wants to see. Sanders compares discipline with love and accountability, using language like "discipline is the way it works" to position compliance not as control but as what needs to be done.

Lastly, the suggested remedy is both visual and verbal. Sanders tells the team that anyone who breaks the rules will be removed from the team and that is not an empty threat. The tone in which Sanders delivered the messages, combined with no-messing body language and silence that follows, reinforces the seriousness of his expectations. The camera pauses on players who are listening to Sanders' message, and the video closes with Sanders praising the coaching staff for work they have been doing.

Aside from what was shown, it is just as telling as what was not shown. Throughout the video, we do not see any moments where players debate or fight against what Sanders had to say to the team. This is a specific and controlled moment that shows Sanders at the center and the moment is edited to connect with the narrative of Coach Prime as a transformative and driven leader.

Entman's framing theory helps us understand how this message is more than a correction because it is an intentional constructed moment that helps to further establish Sanders as a leader, centered around ideas of structure, personal accountability, and consequences. Even the title of the video has aspects of cultural signaling that Sanders holds his team to high standards. The

video uses moments to reinforce larger themes: Coach Sanders is in full control of the culture, and Well Off Media highlights the lessons that support this image.

Identity Through Family and Mentorship

The video "Coach Prime Gives the Haters Something to Talk About" showcases Sander's identity as a mentor and a father by showing specific interactions with his sons. Throughout the video, there are moments of casual, funny family moments with reflective conversations about community impact, life values, and past experiences. Through these conversations and personal stories, Sanders's public identity is formed through the roles of a coach and father figure who blends legacy, leadership, and cultural values into his life every day. Using Hall's Representation Theory, we can come to understand how these moments verbally and visually construct Sanders as a leader rooted in faith and family. Entman's Framing Theory will help to explain how the video emphasizes values like generational impact, discipline, and sacrifice while pushing past controversy and critique in order to shape audience interpretation.

In the video, Sanders is sitting with his sons discussing everything from youth sports to family memories and personal life lessons. He recalls building multiple football fields in underserved communities, organizing summer camps with hundreds of children, and hiring teachers and parents to build a comprehensive mentorship program. This background isn't presented to brag but to construct an image of Sanders as someone who invests deeply in uplifting the community, which is consistent with Hall's idea that Media does not reflect reality but actively builds meaning. The video builds Sanders' identity around emotional storytelling, cultural commitment, and grassroots action, which contrasts him from the typical image of a transactional sports figure.

The video also begins the personal dynamic within the Sanders family, including jokes about money, discipline, parenting, and even "close calls" in life. These moments work symbolically as Sanders is represented as a protector, a teacher, and a man of strong principles, having characteristics that align with the cultural ideal of Black fatherhood that are often underrepresented in mainstream sports media. Through Hall's lens these symbolic elements reinforce Sanders as a cultural leader that presents both charisma and responsibility. Entman's framing theory considers how this story is intentionally told. The video selectively frames Sanders' life, work, and family values as evidence of his authenticity and long-term

commitment while also excluding any reference to controversy, negative issues or public backlash. For example, when Sanders talks about coaching the same kids for years or building a school out of necessity, the moral evaluation offered is clear without directly saying it. The message is that Sanders acts with intention and care, grounded in faith, service and character. He is not just a leader of a football program but is framed as the foundation of a family legacy and a positive, community-oriented movement.

This framing example suggests remedies to wider problems in sports, sports leadership, and youth development that could be furthered via social media. Instead of promoting quick success options or aggressive recruitment, Sanders believes in and is promoting generation investment, mentorship, and discipline as a path forward to positive reframing of these subjects. That message is seen in a media climate where athletic success is largely disconnected from family conversation, storytelling, and even humor. As presented in social media Sanders has become a live symbol of what leadership can look like when based on legacy, love, and shared experiences.

By showing Sanders in conversation with his three sons, Well Off Media creates a public and personal identity based on both community credibility and personal vulnerability. The channel shows that his coaching success cannot be separated from the way he mentors, fathers, and gives back. This specific act of representation and narrative control connects with both frameworks. It tells a clear story that Deion is not just "Coach Prime"; he is a father and legacy leaver both on and off the football field.

Framing Respect and Discipline as Core Values

Deion Sanders highlights one of the fundamental principles of his program in the video "Coach Prime Made The Entire Team Wear Blank Jerseys Until They Earn A Number" by demonstrating discipline as a reward system. All team members receive blank jerseys until they demonstrate their value through practice performance or academic success and can then earn a jersey number. The rule about earning a jersey number represents team discipline and symbolizes Sanders' comprehensive project of identity development for his players.

Sanders' message goes along with Stuart Hall's Representation Theory to change players' perspectives about achievement and their self-esteem. In football culture low jersey numbers such as 1 or 2 have traditionally held symbolic significance of high value. Sanders creates team

member identities based on discipline and character because he grants special jersey numbers only after they demonstrate consistent performance.

You can use Robert Entman's Framing Theory to explain how Well Off Media presents Sanders as a transformational leader. The camera captures Sanders' authoritative presence and voice while showing players attentively listening and respectfully responding to his instructions. The film's editing flow decreases during important scenes like when he dismisses the concept of a player wearing number zero by saying "That means you're nothing" which serves to highlight the moment's importance. Sanders's presentation speaks to more than coaching the game and depicts him as a shaper of team culture and young men.

Sanders connects game performance with academic responsibility by stating that players with multiple failing grades will lose their practice opportunities and their team numbers. He tells them upfront, "You gonna get NFL or a degree. I want you to get both". This statement demonstrates his commitment to building identity through long-term accomplishments rather than immediate rewards and to his players as individuals.

The video presents interactions to demonstrate that Sanders prioritizes hard work over hype as a coach. The absence of numbers on the jersey symbolizes undeveloped potential, which players must earn through discipline and integrity to and proving their value.

Conclusion: Framing Sanders as a Cultural Icon

In all of the videos I analyzed, Well Off Media constructs Deion Sanders as more than just a football coach. Through a combination of everyday moments, motivational speeches, and behind-the-scenes access, Sanders is framed as a cultural icon who is looked at as a symbol of excellence, leadership, and moral authority. This identity is built not only through what he says, but also how the media platform frames his presence: as a mentor, entrepreneur, father figure, and changemaker.

Entman's Framing Theory lets us understand how Well Off Media selectively highlights specific attributes such as Sanders' discipline, charisma, and value-driven leadership to shape how viewers interpret him. These videos document football practices and team meetings but the message is to portray a larger-than-life image of Sanders and present him as someone who has a unique outlook and cultural vision. From discussing discipline, guiding players through

workouts, or sharing wisdom from his past, the framing intent is to elevate him to something iconic and influential.

Stuart Hall's Representation Theory helps explain how these videos challenge and expand traditional media portrayals of Black coaches. Instead of relying on reoccurring stereotypes, Well Off Media presents Sanders as a well rounded leader with intellectual, emotional, and cultural depth. He isn't just a coach shouting instructions or plays at his players, he's shown as a teacher, a visionary, and a mentor who is committed to shaping futures, not just football, but in life. Altogether, Well Off Media creates a new version of what it means to be a public figure in sports. By creating a consistent narrative through its media output, the channel turns Deion Sanders into a brand, which is centered in mentorship, transformation, and creating a legacy. This analysis shows how media platforms can serve as powerful tools for identity construction, and how Sanders is actively shaping his own representation as a cultural icon beyond the football field.

Conclusion

When I started my senior project months ago, my goal was to explore something personal and interesting that connected to my life as a college athlete and my academic interests in communication. Throughout this process, I found an interest in the conversation about how identity, culture, and media all intersect. Deion Sanders and the YouTube channel Well Off Media gave me the opportunity to explore how personal branding and storytelling operate together. As I watched and analyzed content on Well Off Media's YouTube channel through the lens of Representation Theory and Framing Theory, I came to the idea that Sanders' identity was not just being documented, but it was being constructed intentionally.

This project became meaningful to me due to how it combines my own experiences with the larger questions surrounding identity in sports. As a student-athlete, I have seen and experienced how discipline, leadership, and media presence can impact how someone is perceived by others. Representation on social media can help you get recruited, gain a following and lead to positive things, but it can also be very detrimental and derail your goals if it is negative. It is becoming a very important issue for student athletes. Sanders, through Well Off Media, creates his own perception and reshapes it the way he would like. Sanders has become more than just a football coach but is presented as a father figure, mentor, cultural symbol, and very successful brand. Each video posted on Well Off Media's channel adds to the narrative that

shows Sanders's values, leadership style, and the legacy that he is building, not just for himself but for his players, his team and his employer.

Throughout the project, I have learned that our current digital media today is not just about entertainment or visibility and that it also is about control and authorship. Athletes and coaches are no longer only reacting to how the media talks about them in the way it used to be a one way conversation. Today they are becoming the media. By analyzing how Well Off Media frames Sander's character and constructs meaning around his identity, I have had the opportunity to see how public figures deal with cultural expectations, disrupt and change stereotypes, and present in-depth versions of themselves that showcase the aspects they choose. This project reminded me of the idea that the stories that we tell and the ways in which we tell them matter. In the case of Deion Sanders and Well Off Media, those stories are as much about football as they are about legacy, transformation, and representations.

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