

**PROVOCATIVE AND UNPROVEN: The unsubstantiated Colin Kaepernick “most disliked player” headline.**

*A senior writer at a well-known sports media outlet published a poll claiming: “Colin Kaepernick most disliked player in league.” The research claim was unsubstantiated and misleading. Other sports media outlets repeated it anyway.*

Joy Marie Sever, Ph.D. July 7 2017

**On August 14, 20, and 26, 2016 San Francisco 49er QB Colin Kaepernick remained seated during the national anthem to protest social injustice against African Americans and other minorities in the United States. On September 1, he adjusted his protest by taking a knee during the anthem.**

**Results of five national public opinion polls on Colin Kaepernick and his protest were published in September. All five polls reported differences in opinions based on respondents’ race.** Headlines for four of the five polls reflected those differences. The fifth, written by Darren Rovell at ESPN citing data from E-Poll Market Research, stated: **“Poll: Niners QB Colin Kaepernick most disliked player in league.”**

**There were two problems with Rovell’s bold headline.** First, it identified Kaepernick as the “most disliked player” *in the league*, but compared his likeability rating to *only 20% of the players in the National Football League*. Second, the headline was true for *White Americans only*. Neither problem was evident in Rovell’s poll headline, but both were obvious in his full poll release. Moreover, contrary to the professional standard of disclosing research methods to substantiate a publicly released research claim, Rovell did not provide any details about how the E-Poll Market Research Poll was conducted.

**Had Rovell’s headline been ignored there would be no need to say more about it. But it wasn’t ignored.** Other well-known sports media outlets repeated it. Ignored were more rigorous polls with far more substance about the public’s opinion of Kaepernick and his protest. A few media outlets openly rejected Rovell’s headline, they too received little attention. Ultimately, Rovell’s unsubstantiated research claim dominated. Many months later, it continues to be reported.

**PROVOCATIVE AND UNPROVEN** looks at five public opinion polls about Colin Kaepernick, the media’s response to those polls, the public opinion polling process, and the efforts underway to increase adherence to transparency standards and the disclosure of research methods for publicly released research. As for substandard polls, professional research associations are appealing to the media to do their due diligence before reporting such polls.

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## COLIN Kaepernick ENTERS THE NATIONAL SPOTLIGHT

### August 2016: Kaepernick talks to the media about his decision to sit during the anthem

I am not going to stand up to show pride in a flag for a country that oppresses Black people and people of color. To me, this is bigger than football and it would be selfish on my part to look the other way. There are bodies in the street and people getting paid leave and getting away with murder (Aug 26).<sup>1</sup>

This country stands for freedom, liberty and justice for all. And it's not happening for all right now. ... If we have these real conversations that are uncomfortable for a lot of people ...there's a better understanding of where both sides are coming from. If we can reach a common ground...we can really affect change and make sure everyone is treated equally and has the same freedom. I'm going to speak the truth when I'm asked about it. This isn't for looks. This isn't for publicity ... This is for people that don't have the voice. ... When you have the knowledge ... you can make an educated decision on what you really feel and what you really stand for (Aug 28).<sup>2</sup>

### September 1: Kaepernick adjusts his protest

Prior to the preseason game between the 49ers and the San Diego Chargers, Colin Kaepernick, Eric Reid (another 49er), and Nate Boyer (free agent, and former U.S. Army Green Beret) had a 90-minute meeting in the lobby of the San Diego Westin Hotel. In "From a seat to a knee: How Colin Kaepernick and Nate Boyer are trying to effect change,"<sup>3</sup> (Sep 6), ESPN Staff Writer Nick Wagoner provided the background on Kaepernick's shift from sitting away from his teammates during the national anthem, to taking a knee while standing alongside them. Reid was first to suggest the shift to Kaepernick. Boyer agreed, and told Kaepernick that taking a knee is a gesture of respect:

It's a good step, and it shows progress on your part and sensitivity and that you care about other people, and how this affects them, their reaction. It's still definitely a symbol. People take a knee to pray. In the military, we take a knee all the time. It's one of the things we do. When we're exhausted on patrol, they say take a knee and face out. So we take a knee like that. We'll take a knee as the classic symbol of respect in front of a brother's gravesite, a soldier on a knee.

In the interest of bringing people on both sides of the debate into the discussion, Boyer went on to say:

You've got myself, you've got [former Marine Sgt. Johnny] Joey [Jones], you've got Colin, you've got Eric [Reid] and countless other people on both sides of the spectrum that I'm sure would be interested in continuing discussions and trying to involve as many people from both parties as we could and find something, whether it's some sort of change in policy or at least bridging these gaps in communication. Maybe what Colin is doing, as off-putting as it may be to a lot of people, maybe it's exactly what we needed to happen to move forward.

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.nfl.com/news/story/0ap3000000691077/article/colin-kaepernick-explains-why-he-sat-during-national-anthem>

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.espn.com/blog/san-francisco-49ers/post/\\_id/18957/transcript-of-colin-kaepernicks-comments-about-sitting-during-national-anthem](http://www.espn.com/blog/san-francisco-49ers/post/_id/18957/transcript-of-colin-kaepernicks-comments-about-sitting-during-national-anthem)

<sup>3</sup> [http://www.espn.com/blog/san-francisco-49ers/post/\\_id/19253/from-a-seat-to-a-knee-how-colin-kaepernick-and-nate-boyer-are-trying-to-affect-change](http://www.espn.com/blog/san-francisco-49ers/post/_id/19253/from-a-seat-to-a-knee-how-colin-kaepernick-and-nate-boyer-are-trying-to-affect-change)

## September 5 and 28: President Barack Obama speaks publicly about Kaepernick's protest.

You've heard me talk in the past about the need for us to have an active citizenry. Sometimes that's messy and controversial and gets people angry and frustrated. But I'd rather have young people that are engaged in the argument and trying to think through how they can be part of our democratic process than people just sitting on the sidelines not participating at all. My suspicion is that over time he's going to refine how he thinks about it. Maybe some of his critics will start seeing that he had a point about concerns about justice and equality. That's how we move forward.<sup>4</sup>

I want Mr. Kaepernick and others who are on a knee, I want them to listen to the pain that they may cause someone who, for example, had a spouse or a child who was killed in combat. But I also want people to think about the pain that he may be expressing about somebody who has lost a loved one that they think was unfairly shot.<sup>5</sup>

### **Kaepernick's protest attracted national attention. Many observers boldly expressed their opinions – some by kneeling in solidarity, others with death threats toward Kaepernick.**

Kaepernick's protest launched nationwide debates on social injustice, police conduct, a professional athlete's right to protest, the method of protest, the meaning of the national anthem, and the impact of Kaepernick's protest on NFL viewership (the NFL leads all sports leagues in annual revenue).

In late September, an **HBO Real Sports/Marist Poll**<sup>6</sup> provided insight into the public's opinion of a professional athlete or team protesting an issue by not standing for the national anthem. According to Keith Strudler, Director of the Marist College Center for Sports Communications, their results "show a remarkable divide between how minorities and Whites view the reverence of political displays such as Colin Kaepernick's recent protest." Overall, 50% of Americans said not standing during the national anthem was "disrespectful to the freedoms the anthem represents," and 46% said it "demonstrates the freedoms the anthem represents." When looked at by race, however, 57% of Whites said it was disrespectful, while 68% of Blacks and 64% of Latinos said it demonstrates the freedoms.

TIME Magazine's Oct 3 issue featured Kaepernick on the cover, taking a knee."<sup>7</sup> Senior writer Sean Gregory wrote about the support Kaepernick received from athletes at all levels: college, high school, the peewee ranks; and from multiple sports: volleyball, baseball, soccer, and a school band in Oakland, CA, that knelt during its performance of the anthem. Gregory also described the backlash. Some military veterans labeled Kaepernick's supporters unpatriotic, police unions threatened to withhold security at NFL games, and young protesters were threatened with lynching. Kaepernick received death threats.

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/nationworld/ct-obama-colin-kaepernick-20160905-story.html>

<sup>5</sup> <http://time.com/4512595/president-obama-colin-kaepernick-town-hall/>

<sup>6</sup> <http://maristpoll.marist.edu/927-protesting-the-national-anthem-disrespectful-or-an-expression-of-freedom/>

<sup>7</sup> <http://time.com/magazine/us/4503993/october-3rd-2016-vol-188-no-13-u-s/>

## FIVE PUBLIC OPINION POLLS ON COLIN KAEPERNICK AND HIS PROTEST

Given the attention to Colin Kaepernick's protest, researchers soon began measuring public opinion of him. At least five polls surveyed the U.S. general public during the first three weeks of September. All five polls revealed differences based on race, based on one or more of the following four findings: Blacks more likely to express positive opinions; Whites more likely to express negative opinions; Blacks more likely than Whites to support Kaepernick; and Whites more likely than Blacks to oppose him. Poll editors described the differences as: "deeply divided," "split sharply," "vary drastically," "stark" and "strong." Three of the five polls also reported differences based on age.

### Poll 1: "Significant racial divide over Kaepernick protest"<sup>8</sup>

By Peter Moore at YouGov | Published Sep 6 | data collected Aug 31 – Sep 1 by YouGov | N = 997

Q7: Colin Kaepernick said, "I am not going to stand up to show pride in a flag for a country that oppresses Black people and people of color ..." Do you approve or disapprove of Colin Kaepernick's decision to protest racism by remaining seated during the playing of the national anthem? Response options: Approve strongly, Approve somewhat, Disapprove somewhat, Disapprove strongly, or Not sure?

On Sep 6, YouGov reported a significant difference in approval of Kaepernick based on respondents' race. Although more Americans, overall, disapproved (57%) of Kaepernick's actions vs. approved (32%), this finding was true for White Americans only (69% disapproved, 23% approved). Among Black Americans, only 19 percent disapproved of Kaepernick's actions; the majority (72%) approved.

YouGov's results also revealed that Americans under 30 years of age were more likely to approve of Kaepernick's decision (50%) than disapprove (39%), with disapproval increasing with each age group.

### Poll 2: "Most Americans Disagree with Kaepernick, but respect his right to protest"<sup>9</sup>

By Amy Tennery at Reuters New York | Published Sep 14 | data collected Sep 6 – 12 by Ipsos | N = 2,093

Q: Extent to which you agree or disagree with the statement ...I support the stance Colin Kaepernick is taking and his decision not to stand during the national anthem.

On Sep 14, Reuters/Ipsos also reported that support for Kaepernick was "split sharply along racial lines." Overall, 61 percent disagreed with the stance Colin Kaepernick was taking. Looked at by race – 70 percent of White Americans disagreed with Kaepernick's position, compared to only 40 percent among "racial minorities." Racial minorities included Black Americans, but specific results for Blacks were not provided (see footnote below).<sup>10</sup>

<sup>8</sup> <https://today.yougov.com/news/2016/09/06/significant-racial-divide-kaepernick-protest/>

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-nfl-anthem-poll-idUSKCN11K2ID>

<sup>10</sup> The Reuters/Ipsos poll provided results for two race categories: White and "racial minorities." Based on the YouGov results published on Sep 6 (Poll 1), support for Kaepernick among Black Americans (72%) is significantly more positive vs. "Other" races (41%, see poll 1). When Reuters/Ipsos combined non-White races into one group, they merged higher support among Blacks with lower support among other non-White races. Specific results for Blacks were not provided.

### **Poll 3: “Yahoo poll: Half of Americans oppose Kaepernick's protest”<sup>11</sup>**

By Jay Busbee at Yahoo Sports | Published Sep 19 | data collected Sep 13 – 14 by YouGov | N = 1,128

On Sep 19, Yahoo Sports/YouGov also reported demographic differences in the opinion of Kaepernick. The “survey indicates that Americans remain deeply divided” and that “supporters vary drastically by demographics” with “...stark differences in perception of the protest among racial and age lines.”

Specifically, their results revealed that Americans, overall, were more likely to oppose (47%) vs. support (32%) Kaepernick’s protest (21% neutral/declined). By race, Black Americans (63%) expressed significantly more support for Kaepernick than did White Americans (24%). Consistent with YouGov (Sep 6), Hispanic support fell between the two races (39%).

Also consistent with YouGov (Sep 6), Yahoo Sports/YouGov (Sep 19) reported stronger support for Kaepernick among younger Americans. Specifically, respondents under 34 years of age were more likely to support (39%) rather than oppose (30%) Kaepernick. Opposition increased with each successive age group, reaching 65 percent among those over the age of 55.

### **Poll 4: “Americans Show Disapproval of Kaepernick's Actions But Support His Right To Protest”<sup>12</sup>**

By Rick Gentile at Seton Hall Sports Poll | Published Sep 22 | data collected Sep 19-21 by The Sharkey Institute | N = 875

Q: How do you feel about the fact that Colin Kaepernick kneels down on the sideline instead of standing during the playing of the anthem? Do you approve, disapprove or have no opinion?

On Sep 22, Seton Hall Sports /The Sharkey Institute became the fourth poll to report demographic differences in opinions of Colin Kaepernick. “Overall 47% disapprove of Kaepernick’s actions, with 27% approving (22% had no opinion). However African Americans were just the opposite, approving of his actions by more than 2 to 1.”

Consistent with YouGov (Sep 6) and Yahoo Sports/YouGov (Sep 19), the Seton Hall Sports/Sharkey poll reported “a strong effect” by age with disapproval rising markedly from 25% among those 18-19 years old, to 44% among those 30-44 years, to 53% among those 45-60, and to 60% among those over 60.

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<sup>11</sup> <http://sports.yahoo.com/news/yahoo-poll-half-of-americans-oppose-kaepernicks-protest-154103124.html>

<sup>12</sup> <https://blogs.shu.edu/sportspoll/2016/09/22/americans-show-disapproval-of-kaepernicks-actions-but-support-his-right-to-protest/>

## **Poll 5: “Poll: Niners QB Colin Kaepernick most disliked player in league”<sup>13</sup>**

By Darren Rovell at ESPN | Published Sep 22 | research conducted by E-Poll Market Research (dates not provided) | N = 1,100

Also on Sep 22, ESPN’s Darren Rovell (based on research conducted by E-Poll Market Research) released poll results on the likeability of Colin Kaepernick. In Rovell’s words: “Kaepernick was ‘disliked a lot’ by 29 percent of those polled.” Rovell also noted, “Among African-Americans, Kaepernick has never been more popular ... 42 percent of African-Americans now say they like the 49ers quarterback ‘a lot,’ while only 2 percent dislike him ‘a lot.’ ... Two years ago, only 7 percent of Caucasians said they disliked Kaepernick ‘a lot.’ Last week, that number had jumped to 37 percent.”

### **There were two problems with Rovell’s “most disliked player in league” headline.**

The first problem (apparent from Rovell’s own poll release) is that E-Poll Market did not have, and/or did not use, the necessary data to back up the “most disliked player *in league*” research claim. The second problem, the research claim was misleading in that it was true for White respondents only, not Black.

### **Problem #1: The comparison needed to prove the “most disliked in league” claim was not made.**

Rovell’s headline stated that Kaepernick was the “most disliked player *in [the] league*,” which implies that of all the players in the NFL, Kaepernick was the most disliked. That is a bold research claim, and a measurable one. For the claim, as stated, to *be true* – E-Poll Market Research would have needed to compare Kaepernick’s likability rating to the likeability ratings for all players in the NFL. Was that comparison made? Based on Rovell’s poll release, no. Did Rovell have the required research results to publish his bold headline? Apparently not.

Rovell’s poll release states “Kaepernick was “disliked a lot” by 29 percent of those polled, *more than any of the more than 350 players asked about in the survey.*” The National Football League has 32 teams and each team can have up to 53 players, which means the league has approximately 1,700 players. E-Poll Market Research did not compare Kaepernick to the nearly 1,700 players *in the league* – but to the “more than 350 players,” which is only 20% of the league.” Moreover, who were the “more than 350 players” on which the “most disliked player” claim was made (only four players were named – Winston, Suh, Brady, and Roethlisberger), and *why* these “more than 350 players” and not others? Were they randomly selected from all 1,700 players in the league? Did they have something in common that made them a fair comparison to Kaepernick? Rovell’s poll release did not say.

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<sup>13</sup> [http://www.espn.com/nfl/story/\\_/id/17604958/san-francisco-49ers-qb-colin-kaepernick-most-disliked-player-nfl-according-poll-e-poll-marketing-research](http://www.espn.com/nfl/story/_/id/17604958/san-francisco-49ers-qb-colin-kaepernick-most-disliked-player-nfl-according-poll-e-poll-marketing-research)

E-Poll Market Research may have had a valid reason to compare Kaepernick to the only “more than 350 players” – but if so, say so. But even if they had a valid explanation for the “more than 350,” it would still not substantiate the headline because 20% of the players in the league, is not “the league.”

This problem with Rovell’s bold research claim was not evident in his headline – but it was in his full poll release. Readers with knowledge of the number of NFL teams and number of players per team should have immediately noticed that the claim was based on a small subset of players, not the entire league.

**Problem #2: The “most disliked player” research claim applies to White Americans only, not Black.**

National polls of the U.S. general population typically include samples of at least 1,000 people (usually adults, 18+ years of age). If a sample is representative of the total population, results from the 1,000 can be projected (or generalized) to the total population (approximately 248 million adults).

A sample is representative of the US population if it represents key demographic segments *according to their actual proportions in the total population*. Representativeness is often attained with high quality sampling of respondents and/or by weighting key demographic groups to reflect their true proportions. Probability sampling and nonprobability sampling are also relevant (see footnote<sup>14</sup>).

Key demographics typically include: gender, age, education, race, ethnicity (Hispanic/Latino origin), and region. Guidelines for weighting demographic segments are provided by U.S. Census Bureau surveys such as the American Community Survey (ACS) and the Current Population Survey (CPS). Using gender as a demographic example, Females and Males each represent approximately 50 percent of the general population.<sup>15</sup> In a representative sample of 1,000 respondents, approximately 500 of those respondents will be Female and approximately 500 will be Male. Therefore, when comparisons are based on gender, Females and Males contribute equally to the overall results. *Race is different.*

According to 2015 estimates, 77 percent of the US population identify as White (62% White/non-Hispanic, 15% White/Hispanic), 13 percent as Black/African American, 6 percent as Asian, and 4 percent as American Indian, Alaskan Native, Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, and/or Two or More Races.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> For a discussion of probability samples (where every person has an equal probability of being selected to participate in the survey), non-probability samples (i.e., pre-recruited panels, online interviews), and margin of error, see: NYT What’s the Matter With Polling? Cliff Zukin June 20 2015, and The Savvy Person’s Guide to Reading the Latest Polls, Nate Cohn, Oct 12 2016.

<sup>15</sup> According to 2015 Census figures: Females = 50.8 percent of the US population, and Males = 49.2 percent.

<sup>16</sup> The Census currently measures Race and Ethnicity with two separate questions. Overall, 18 percent of the U.S. population identifies as Hispanic or Latino (15% also identify as White; 3% do not). Pollsters vary in how results for Whites are reported: some include all Whites, including those identifying as Hispanic; other pollsters create two categories: Whites/non-Hispanic, and a separate category for all Hispanics.

When responses from all survey respondents are combined and weighted to reflect the US population, the results will reflect opinions of Whites, Blacks, and Hispanics/Latinos based on their proportions in the overall population – and which, if the sample used by E-Poll Market Research was representative, is what their 29 percent (overall) “dislike a lot” result reflects. But the analysis does not end there. After looking at all survey respondents combined, the typical next step is to look at demographic differences. If significant differences are found, they’re reported. If those differences are relevant to the topic of the poll, more likely than not those results will be mentioned in the headline. E-Poll Market Research poll results showed that Kaepernick was “disliked a lot” among 37% of White Americans vs. only 2% among Black Americans. The difference was significant, race was the key variable, and race is at the center of Kaepernick’s protest. Rovell noted the race difference – but not in his headline.

All five Kaepernick polls published in September reported differences in public opinion based on race, but only YouGov mentioned “racial divide” in its headline. The headlines for three of the five polls lead with disagreement, opposition, and disapproval of Kaepernick (two also mentioned Kaepernick’s right to protest). In the fifth poll, Rovell identified Kaepernick as the league’s “most disliked player.”

#### **MEDIA RESPONSE TO POLLS DISPROPORTIONATELY FAVORED THE “MOST DISLIKED PLAYER” HEADLINE**

A Google search after Rovell’s Sep 22 poll release using the words *Kaepernick* and *poll*, revealed the popularity of his “most disliked player” headline among sports media outlets, especially mainstream outlets. Many repeated the headline as written (or close to it), including: **USA Today** (Sep 22) “Colin Kaepernick most disliked player in the NFL;”<sup>17</sup> **Fox News Insider** (Sep 23) “POLL: Colin Kaepernick Is the NFL’s Most Disliked Player;”<sup>18</sup> **Sports Illustrated/SI Kids** (Sep 22) “Poll: 49ers QB Colin Kaepernick most disliked player in NFL;”<sup>19</sup> **Breitbart** (Sep 22) “Poll: Colin Kaepernick Most Disliked Player in the NFL;”<sup>20</sup> **ABC** (Sep 21) (same corporate media family as ESPN), republished the ESPN “most disliked” headline and the article as written by ESPN’s Rovell<sup>21</sup>; and **New York Daily News** (Sept 23) “Colin Kaepernick voted the most disliked player in the NFL, lands on cover of TIME Magazine.”<sup>22</sup>

Other media outlets repeated Rovell’s headline (some made it even more provocative) – *but removed the results showing support for Kaepernick among Black Americans that appeared in Rovell’s release.*

Examples include: **NBC Sports’ ProFootballTalk** (Sep 23) “Poll finds Colin Kaepernick is America’s most

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<sup>17</sup> <http://www.usatoday.com/story/sports/nfl/2016/09/22/colin-kaepernick-poll-disliked/90831148/>

<sup>18</sup> <http://insider.foxnews.com/2016/09/23/poll-colin-kaepernick-nfls-most-hated-player>

<sup>19</sup> <http://www.si.com/nfl/2016/09/22/san-francisco-49ers-colin-kaepernick-most-disliked-player>

<sup>20</sup> <http://www.breitbart.com/sports/2016/09/22/poll-colin-kaepernick-hated-player-nfl/>

<sup>21</sup> <http://abcnews.go.com/Sports/poll-niners-qb-colin-kaepernick-disliked-player-league/story?id=42263215>

<sup>22</sup> <http://www.nydailynews.com/sports/football/most-disliked-kaepernick-lands-time-cover-article-1.2802082>



disliked NFL player;”<sup>23</sup> **CBS Sports** (Sep 22, referencing the ESPN poll and Seton Hall Sports Poll) “POLL: Almost half of Americans disagree with Colin Kaepernick's method of protest: Kaepernick is a very divisive human being right now;”<sup>24</sup> and **NESN** (Sep 22) “Colin Kaepernick NFL’s Most ‘Disliked’ Player, Poll Reveals; Reason is Obvious.”<sup>25</sup>

**The media outlets that republished the “Kaepernick most disliked player in league” headline did so within a day or two of its original publication.** Rovell’s headline quickly dominated sports news. Many outlets included phrases like “poll finds” and “poll reveals,” implying that the claim was substantiated. As the repetitions of Rovell’s headline increased, readers may have also concluded that “many polls” had been conducted and found the same result – a conclusion made more likely given the lack of media attention to other polls with more balanced headlines.

**It’s not clear whether the media that republished Rovell’s headline noticed that it was misleading. But other media outlets did – so they rewrote the headline adding the highly relevant race difference.**

On Sep 21, Stu Rosenberg at the **Sacramento Bee** contrasted Rovell’s headline with the increasing visible support for Kaepernick: “Poll says Kaepernick NFL’s most disliked player ...but the feeling isn’t universal: Many are now coming forward to show their support for 49ers quarterback.”<sup>26</sup>

**Atlanta Black Star’s** Kiersten Willis (Sep 22) also revised Rovell’s headline by changing “Poll: Niners QB Colin Kaepernick most disliked player in league” to “Poll Says Colin Kaepernick Is NFL’s Most Disliked Player, But Black Fans Like Him Even More.”<sup>27</sup>

Michael Rosen at **Fusion Media Network** (Sep 22) said this about Rovell’s headline and the similar headlines that followed: “...not really the case ...The headlines are *technically* true, but if you were to pry apart the data even a little bit, you’ll see what the actual truth is here: *White people don’t like Colin Kaepernick.*” Rosen titled his article: “Poll reveals growing dislike of Colin Kaepernick among White people.”<sup>28</sup>

Ultimately, skepticism about Rovell’s research claim was overshadowed by the many that accepted it.

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<sup>23</sup> <http://profootballtalk.nbcsports.com/2016/09/23/poll-finds-colin-kaepernick-is-americas-most-disliked-nfl-player/>

<sup>24</sup> <http://www.cbssports.com/nfl/news/poll-almost-half-of-americans-disagree-with-colin-kaepernicks-method-of-protest/>

<sup>25</sup> <http://nesn.com/2016/09/colin-kaepernick-nfls-most-disliked-player-poll-reveals-reason-is-obvious/>

<sup>26</sup> <http://www.sacbee.com/sports/nfl/san-francisco-49ers/article103340087.html>

<sup>27</sup> <http://atlabblackstar.com/2016/09/22/poll-says-colin-kaepernick-nfls-disliked-player-Black-fans-like-even/>

<sup>28</sup> <http://fusion.net/story/350147/kaepernick-disliked-by-white-people/>

## DISCLOSURE OF RESEARCH METHODS IS A PROFESSIONAL RESEARCH INDUSTRY STANDARD

The American Association for Public Opinion Research (AAPOR) has a Code of Professional Ethics and Practices (“the Code”) “to support sound and ethical practice in the conduct of public opinion and survey research and promote informed and appropriate use of research results.”<sup>29</sup> AAPOR’s Best Practices for Survey Research (Item 12) states: **Disclose all relevant methods of the survey to permit evaluation and replication.**

Good professional practice imposes an obligation upon all survey and public opinion researchers to include, in any report of research results, or to make available when that report is released, certain minimal essential information about how the research was conducted to ensure that consumers of survey results have an adequate basis for judging the reliability and validity of the results reported.

In its “**Principles of Professional Responsibility in Our Dealings with People**” AAPOR states:

We will inform those for whom we conduct publicly released research studies about AAPOR’s Standards for Disclosure in Section III of the Code, and provide information on what should be disclosed in their releases (I.C.2).

We will disclose to the public the methods and procedures used to obtain our own publicly disseminated research results in accordance with Section III of the Code (I.D.1).

The **National Council on Public Polls (NCPP)** has a similar set of standards for survey research organizations “to insure that consumers of survey results that enter the public domain have an adequate basis for judging the reliability and validity of the results reported.”<sup>30</sup>

Professional standards are also important to **poll aggregators** HuffPost Pollster and Nate Silver’s FiveThirtyEight.

**HuffPost Pollster** requires that the polls it includes meet all of the minimal disclosure requirements of the NCPP. “We have always excluded polls that fail to disclose survey dates, sample size, and sponsorship; however, going forward, and consistent with these policies, we may also choose in our editorial discretion to exclude polls or pollsters that do not provide sufficient methodological information for us or our readers to determine their quality.”<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> <http://www.aapor.org/Standards-Ethics/AAPOR-Code-of-Ethics.aspx> (revised in 2015).

<sup>30</sup> <http://www.ncpp.org>

<sup>31</sup> <http://elections.huffingtonpost.com/pollster/faq>

**FiveThirtyEight** rates pollsters on a number of variables including affiliation with standards organizations – being a member of the NCPP, a signatory to AAPOR’s Transparency Initiative, or a contributor to the Roper Center for Public Opinion Research data archive.”<sup>32</sup>

**AAPOR’s Standards for Disclosure** includes 11 survey-related items to be disclosed at the time of publication, and 9 additional items to be made available “within 30 days of any request for such materials” (III.A.1-20). **The Survey Disclosure Checklist**,<sup>33</sup> a shorter version of the full 20-item list, contains 12 “minimum disclosure” elements. Using this Checklist to compare the five Kaepernick polls, the YouGov (Sep 6) poll stands out as the only poll to disclose all 12 items. Providing the fewest disclosure items was ESPN/E-Poll Market Research (Sep 22) – only two items were disclosed: the name of the organization that conducted the study, and the total sample size. Key disclosure items such as sample sources, question wording, and unweighted subgroup sample sizes, were not provided.

## **EFFORTS ARE UNDERWAY TO INCREASE RESEARCH AND REPORTING TRANSPARENCY**

Using information from polls, which are not conducted with scientific rigor in effect sets a new – lower – standard for the types of information that other news outlets may now seek to report.<sup>34</sup>

Michael Link, Ph.D. (former President of APPOR), 2014

Properly conducted opinion polls use statistical methods to provide the public, politicians and the media with objective measure of people’s attitudes and intentions, allowing the voice of the general public to be heard.

AAPOR, ESOMAR, WAPOR, May 10, 2016

We also believe that it is important that journalists check which polls they should be more cautious about reporting.

Finn Raben, Director General of ESOMAR, on behalf of the ESOMAR Council (2016)

It’s a time to double down on being unbiased and being careful and being dispassionate good journalists. ... It’s not enough that people know we are a trustworthy news organization, we should also show them what we do. ... The more ethical the behavior is, the more we earn the right to be trusted.<sup>35</sup>

Stephen J. Adler, president and editor-in-chief of the news agency Reuters

<sup>32</sup> <https://projects.fivethirtyeight.com/pollster-ratings/>

<sup>33</sup> <http://www.aapor.org/Standards-Ethics/AAPOR-Code-of-Ethics/Survey-Disclosure-Checklist.aspx>

<sup>34</sup> <http://www.aapor.org/Publications-Media/Public-Statements/AAPOR-Response-to-New-York-Times-CBS-News-poll.aspx>

<sup>35</sup> <http://www.thedrum.com/opinion/2017/01/12/reuters-global-chief-calls-greater-transparency-news-reporting-methods>

**AAPOR** launched its **Transparency Initiative (TI)** in 2014 with the goal of “an open science of survey research” and the recognition of organizations that “pledge to practice transparency in their reporting of survey-based findings.”<sup>36</sup>

According to AAPOR’s TI Terms and Conditions for Transparency Certification,<sup>37</sup> survey organizations are eligible to join the TI, as are “subunits of larger organizations that produce surveys and/or commission, sponsor or report them publicly.” Certification indicates that the organization complies with TI Standards, including the disclosure standards for public released surveys.

In May 2016, research associations, **AAPOR, ESOMAR, and WAPOR**, launched the “first-ever **international online training tool for journalists** to help improve media reporting about polls and survey results around the world.”<sup>38</sup> The training tool is for journalists, media students, bloggers, voters, and anyone interested in knowing how polls are conducted. The online course will “help journalists understand and interpret opinion polls to ensure their reports are as objective as possible and identify what they need to know about a study so they can more critically assess poll quality.”

In early 2017, CASRO (Council of American Survey Research Organizations) merged with MRA (Marketing Research Association) creating the **Insights Association**.<sup>39</sup> The new entity’s priorities include attention to the industry’s image in the eyes of the media and public, adherence to its professional standards, and enforcing its best practices.

In a January 2017 interview with Ian Burrell at The Drum, Stephen J. Adler, president and editor-in-chief of the news agency **Reuters**, spoke about the connection between trust and transparency. Adler emphasized the need for careful, unbiased, factual, even-handed, transparent reporting. He also gave examples of how he plans to attain that transparency including: news gathering methods (how information is gathered, how they got the story); Q/A sessions where readers can ask journalists questions; providing more details on sourcing; and quickly admitting and fixing mistakes.

Burrell described Adler’s stance as refreshing when “so much of the media seems terrified that, unless it is provocative and sensational, its content will vanish unshared and ignored on the platforms of social media.”

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<sup>36</sup> [http://www.aapor.org/transparency\\_initiative.htm](http://www.aapor.org/transparency_initiative.htm)

<sup>37</sup> [https://www.aapor.org/AAPOR\\_Main/media/transparency-initiative/TI\\_Terms\\_and\\_Conditions\\_071015\\_Final.pdf](https://www.aapor.org/AAPOR_Main/media/transparency-initiative/TI_Terms_and_Conditions_071015_Final.pdf)

<sup>38</sup> <http://www.aapor.org/Publications-Media/Press-Releases/New-International-Online-Course-for-Journalists.aspx>

<sup>39</sup> <http://insights.marketingresearch.org>

## COLIN Kaepernick REMAINS IN THE SPOTLIGHT

### October 2016: Kaepernick Launches “Know Your Rights” Camps For Youth

On October 29, 2016, Shaun King at the NY Daily News wrote about his trip to Oakland for the launch of Kaepernick’s “I Know My Rights Camp” (“KING: Colin Kaepernick’s ‘I Know My Rights Camp’ cements his status as a cultural superhero in the Black community”). It was the eve of the launch when King met up with Kaepernick and saw him packing the backpacks with a few friends. Kaepernick explained:

I didn't just want to hire someone to come in and do this. We did all of this ourselves. We even opted out of corporate sponsors because we just wanted the freedom to say exactly what we thought the kids we've brought here today need to hear and learn. I told myself that if I was going to do this type of work that I was going to actually do it myself.<sup>40</sup>

Colin Kaepernick speaking to Shaun King

The Know Your Rights Camp is a free campaign for youth fully funded by Colin Kaepernick to raise awareness on higher education, self empowerment, and instruction to properly interact with law enforcement in various scenarios” (Kaepernick7.com website).

### November 2016: Kaepernick tells reporters “*I want to try to help create change.*”

In late November, Kaepernick spoke to reporters about systemic oppression and his goals to empower youth and organizations that empower other people. Backing up his words, Kaepernick also spoke about his \$1 million donation to those organizations and their communities, and the donation of the sales of his #7 jersey to communities in need (after his protest Kaepernick’s jersey became the NFL’s top-selling jersey).

Kaepernick told reporters he wasn’t surprised by the backlash to his protest. Inspired by the perseverance shown by Malcolm X, he said, “There’s always going to be backlash when you fight for different ideologies and different beliefs and different rights. That’s been proven throughout history. ...I knew that backlash was going to come when I initially took this stance. And I know it will continue...”<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> <http://www.nydailynews.com/news/national/king-kaepernick-camp-cements-status-Black-community-article-1.2850326>

<sup>41</sup> <http://www.chicagotribune.com/sports/football/bears/ct-bears-niners-colin-kaepernick-qa-spt-20161130-story.html>

## December 2016: Kaepernick receives the Len Eshmont Award

On Dec 30, 2016, Colin Kaepernick was awarded the prestigious Len Eshmont Award based on votes from his fellow teammates. The award recognizes the 49er that “best exemplifies the inspirational and courageous play of Len Eshmont, an original member of the 1946 49ers team, and a Navy veteran.

According to Dave Zirin at The Nation “the media tried to brand Kaepernick as ‘anti-military’ for his anthem protests ... Yet here are the players voting to give Kaepernick an award named after a World War II veteran. It shows they didn’t buy the hype. ... We need his voice.”<sup>42</sup> Zirin also spoke to Dr. Harry Edwards, a long-time 49ers advisor and sports sociologist. Regarding “the enduring and ever expanding disconnect between the media and sports locker room,” Dr. Edwards said:

What has been a persistent mainstream sports media “drumbeat” of insistence that Kaepernick was alienating his teammates and destroying team unity has been proven a fabrication and a demonstrable fiction. That Kaepernick’s locker room is majority Black is less a factor here than the fact that the sports media is falling farther and farther behind in terms of their capability and competence to “read” this generation of athletes—Black, White, and otherwise, professional, and collegiate.

The media were no more prepared to properly frame, chronicle, and communicate the dynamics and implications of the Kaepernick saga than they currently are regarding NFL-bound athletes exercising their prerogatives to bypass bowl games. And the fact that the sports media—and the sports establishment that it serves have not even begun to address the evident trajectory of the Kaepernick “movement”—and the growing support among athletes for its concerns—means that there are going to be some turbulent times in the upcoming Trump era as the pressure on athletes to stand up and speak out escalates.

Kaepernick’s teammates were just positioning themselves on his side of this unavoidable struggle, on the right side of the issues and on the right side of history.

## January 2017 | Kaepernick holds Know Your Rights Camp in Harlem

Kaepernick began 2017 with a Know Your Rights Camp event at the Audubon Ballroom in New York City. The event included sessions on financial literacy, nutrition and physical fitness, and pursuing higher education. Youth also received DNA ancestry kits – something Kaepernick became more interested in after doing research on his own ancestry.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> <https://www.thenation.com/article/colin-kaepernicks-teammates-give-him-an-award-for-courage/>

<sup>43</sup> <http://www.ninersnation.com/2017/1/18/14302778/colin-kaepernick-know-your-rights-camp-harlem-dna-ancestry-kits-malcolm-x>

## March 2017 | Kaepernick becomes a free agent, announces decision to stand, holds Camp in Maine

According to ESPN's Adam Schefter, Kaepernick "no longer wants his method of protest to detract from the positive change he believes has been created." Kaepernick believed his message was affirmed based on the "widespread discussion on social inequality generated by his protest, and the support from athletes nationwide."<sup>44</sup> The response to Kaepernick's news was immediate – mostly in the form of backlash from sports media. New York Daily News' Shaun King responded to the backlash:

When I see this smear, calling him an opportunist, it immediately tells me that you've probably never done anything like what this man just did. Hell, few of us ever have. If subjecting yourself to national and international scorn, hate, and disdain from millions of people is opportunism, then I don't know what that word means. Several polls now call Kaepernick the "most hated man in the NFL." He is dissed and dogged and memed and harassed more than any player in the league. He has received death threats. His every move is tracked and followed and scrutinized.<sup>45</sup>

King mentioned "several polls" now calling Kaepernick the "most hated man in the NFL." Are these "several polls" actually one poll – namely Rovell's Sep 22 unsubstantiated poll – repeated by several other media outlets? Identifying the sources of the polls would answer that question.

Meanwhile, in late March, Kaepernick held another Know Your Rights Camp, this time in Maine. Working with him was Christopher Petrella of the Bates College Office of Equity and Diversity.<sup>46</sup> Kaepernick continues to finance these camps himself, and plans to expand across the country.

## April 2017: Colin Kaepernick named one of Time Magazine's 100 Most Influential People

Colin Kaepernick was alone in his early protests last year when he boldly and courageously confronted perceived inequalities in our social-justice system by refusing to stand for the national anthem. At times in our nation's history, we have been all too quick to judge and oppose our fellow Americans for exercising their First Amendment right to address things they believe unjust. Rather than besmirch their character, we must celebrate their act. For we cannot pioneer and invent if we are fearful of deviating from the norm, damaging our public perception or—most important—harming our own personal interests. I thank Colin for all he has contributed to the game of football as an outstanding player and trusted teammate. I also applaud Colin for the courage he has demonstrated in exercising his guaranteed right of free speech. His willingness to take a position at personal cost is now part of our American story. How lucky for us all and for our country to have among our citizens someone as remarkable as Colin Kaepernick.<sup>47</sup>

*Jim Harbaugh, Kaepernick's coach in the NFL, 2011-2014*

<sup>44</sup> [http://www.espn.com/nfl/story/\\_/id/18805744/colin-kaepernick-stand-national-anthem-next-season](http://www.espn.com/nfl/story/_/id/18805744/colin-kaepernick-stand-national-anthem-next-season)

<sup>45</sup> <http://www.nydailynews.com/news/national/king-criticizing-colin-kaepernick-no-sense-article-1.2988056>

<sup>46</sup> <http://bangordailynews.com/2017/03/21/politics/colin-kaepernick-thanks-know-your-rights-allies-in-maine/>

<sup>47</sup> <http://time.com/collection/2017-time-100/>

## June 2017: “Many polls” about Kaepernick remain in the news

On June 16<sup>th</sup> New York Times’ Ken Belson wrote about Colin Kaepernick’s continued free agent status.<sup>48</sup>

The political reality is this: The league consists of a largely conservative group of owners and, according to polls, a majority of fans who did not support Kaepernick’s actions. One poll suggested that some fans watched less football last season because of the anthem protest, which spread to a handful of other players, helping push down television ratings over all.

Belson did not identify any of the sources for those “polls,” or the source for the “one poll.”

## CLOSING COMMENTS

Colin Kaepernick’s protest attracted national attention and exposed a contentious divide in public opinion. People who read Rovell’s “Kaepernick most disliked player in league” headline, and there were many – *and especially if that’s all they read* – may have concluded that Kaepernick had very little, if any, support. If so, their conclusion would be wrong.

It is a substandard practice to publish bold, misleading, attention-getting headlines, propped up by using the word “poll,” without adhering to the professional standards the research industry puts forth to maintain the rigor, and the reputation, of public opinion polls.

But with or without professional standards, common sense would say any substandard practice in the publication of public opinion polls could not possibly be good for the general public seeking to be informed, the public policy decision makers seeking change, or the research and media professionals seeking to be trusted and respected. Common sense would be correct.

*To obtain a summary of AAPOR’s 11 Disclosure Checklist items for the five polls referenced in this paper, email: [joymarieever@gmail.com](mailto:joymarieever@gmail.com).*

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<sup>48</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/06/16/sports/football/colin-kaepernick-free-agency-nfl-nba.html>