The ethics of trash-talking in sports

This chapter is preprint version of a chapter forthcoming in The Oxford Handbook of Sports Ethics, Thomas Søbirk Petersen, Sebastian Holmen, Jesper Ryberg (eds). New York, Oxford University Press

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Abstract Trash-talking holds a contested place in sport, sometimes celebrated for its entertainment value yet often condemned for undermining respect and sportsmanship. This chapter examines trash-talking through the lens of the ethics of influence, situating it between impermissible conduct such as cheating and unproblematic expression such as playful banter. The chapter first clarifies what counts as trash talk and gives examples of its diverse forms. Then it evaluates its moral status. Existing views are critically assessed. The chapter advances an alternative account that frames trash-talking as a form of manipulation, morally troubling insofar as it is simply indifferent to the revealing of reasons. This perspective reveals the practice as ethically troubling and illustrative of the moral tensions at the heart of competitive sport.

Keywords trash-talking; sportsmanship; ethics of sport; manipulation; respect; fairness; influence; competitive integrity

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1 Introduction[1]

Trash-talking occupies a curious place in the moral landscape of sport. It is part of the spectacle: from Muhammad Ali's creative provocations to Conor McGregor's headline-grabbing bravado,

athletes have long used verbal attacks both to unsettle opponents and to entertain audiences. In this sense, trash-talking seems to heighten the intensity of the competition, arguably adding to its appeal.

Yet many also regard trash talk with suspicion. Critics claim that it undermines respect, violates ideals of sportsmanship, and diminishes the moral value of sports. Trash talk can quickly turn from playful banter into insult, humiliation, or abuse, which raises questions about its acceptable limits.

There is thus a divide between defenders and detractors of trash-talking. But what makes it ethically interesting is that both sides seem to track something morally significant. Trash-talking is not clearly assimilated to impermissible conduct like cheating, nor is it comfortably classed with unproblematic expression. Instead, it occupies a liminal space: an ethically ambivalent practice that, in some cases, seems to call for toleration if not admiration, while in others it seems to rightfully invite reproach.[2]

This chapter examines trash-talking as an ethical phenomenon in sport. My aim is not only to map the conceptual and normative terrain, but also to develop a new perspective. I suggest that we understand trash-talking through the lens of the ethics of influence—the study of influence types like manipulation, deception, coercion, and persuasion. Through this lens, the central question is not whether trash-talking offends or breaches norms of sportsmanship, but rather: what kind of influence is it, and why, if at all, is that influence ethically troubling?

To get there, we proceed in four stages. In Section 2, I begin with illustrative examples that highlight the diversity of practices grouped under the label "trash-talking." This introductory section sets the stage for the two central inquiries of the chapter. The first concerns the concept of trash-talking, in Section 3. What makes an utterance in sport count as trash-talking? The answer is not a matter of stipulation but depends on the explanatory perspective we adopt. I suggest that looking at trash talk as a form of manipulation helps us see a unifying

factor and yet still recognize its diversity. The second inquiry concerns the ethics of trash-talking, in Section 5. When, and why, is it morally problematic? I survey prominent views and then develop an alternative account, again rooted in understanding the wrongness of trash talk via an understanding of the wrongness of manipulation.

Throughout, the chapter aims to be both descriptive and evaluative. While I offer a survey of influential positions, I also advance an opinionated argument for reorienting our ethical analysis of trash-talking. The result, I hope, is a richer and more illuminating account of a practice that sits at the intersection of play, performance, and provocation.

Before delving into the discussion, it is helpful to situate the topic of trash-talking within broader debates in the ethics of sport. In my view, and as I hope to show throughout this chapter, trash-talking can be a very fruitful lens through which to approach various other topics that stand central in the ethics of sport. For example, ethicists of sport often emphasise themes of respect (Dixon 2007), gamesmanship (Howe 2004), competitive integrity (Simon 2004), and the limits of spectator or non-athlete influence (Morris 2012), all of which can be looked at through the lens of trash-talking. These domains show how trash-talking interacts with several ethical values without determining its nature.

2 Examples of trash talk

Trash talk is a diverse phenomenon. Here are ten prominent and illustrative examples, sampled from the sports of boxing, soccer, American football, cricket, basketball, and tennis:

> **Boxing I** During the build-up to Muhammad Ali's clash with reigning boxing heavyweight champion of the world, Sonny Liston, Ali relentlessly taunted Liston during their press conferences and in interviews. At one time, he said: "*"Sonny Liston is too ugly to be the world champ. The world champ should be pretty like me!"*

Boxing II During a later fight with George Foreman, Ali went to the ropes and had Foreman exhaust himself by spurring him on to hit his guard. "*That all you got, George?"* he repeatedly said.

Soccer/Football During the 2006 World Cup Final, Italian player Matteo Matterazi insulted Zidane's sister. Accounts vary on what Matterazi said exactly, but it was enough to enrage Zidane so much that he headbutted Matterazi and got sent off court with a red card.

Soccer/Football II Suarez repeatedly used a racist slur against his opponent Evra during a match. He later received a ban.

Soccer/Football III During the 2011 season, and a number of important matches between Real Madrid and FC Barcelona, Real Madrid manager José Mourinho repeatedly taunted and verbally provoked Barcelona players and staff, specifically their manager Pep Guardiola, including shouting insults from the touchline, sarcastically clapping decisions, and calling Barcelona's style a "theatre" (Lowe 27-4-2011)**.**

Basketball I At the 1986 NBA three-point contest, basketball player Larry Bird walked into the locker room, looked around at the other competitors, and said, *"I want all of you to know I'm winning this thing. I'm just looking around to see who's finishing second."* Then he won the contest.

Basketball II NBA player Kevin Garnett allegedly wished Tim Duncan, playing for the opposing team, a "*Happy Mother's Day*," knowing that Duncan's mothed had passed away years earlier.

Basketball III Before practice with his team, NBA player Michael Jordan is recorded in the locker room talking to his team-mate Scott Burrell: "*Try not to be dogfood tonight, dawg! For one time, come out ready to play!"*

American Football The National Football League teams Denver Broncos were playing the New England Patriots in 1996. During the game, Broncos player Shannon Sharpe, who was 'mic'd up', i.e. had a microphone attached so TV viewers could hear what he was saying, went to the sideline, picked-up a phone, pretending to call the President of the United States: "*President, we need the National Guard. Send the National Guard! 'Cause we are killing the Patriots!"*

Tennis After an opponent double-faulted (a frustrating mistake that professional players rather rarely make), player Nick Kyrigos muttered loudly *"So good, man. So good!"*

Cricket In the lead-up to the 1976 series against the West Indies, England player Tony Greig said "*You must remember that the West Indians, these guys, if they get on top are magnificent cricketers. But if they're down, they grovel, and I intend […] to make them grovel."* The sinister connotation of the word "grovel" used in talking about West Indian people, many of whom had slave ancestry, was not lost on the listeners, and there was a public outcry.

All these examples have been described as examples of trash talk – by other players, by sports pundits, in media commentaries. All, or at least most of them, are also readily recognizable as trash talk. None of them clearly *fails* to be an example of trash talk.

But note that they vary widely. Some, but not all of them, happen during the game. Several instances occur before or after the actual match, like at a press conference. Some examples are about the opponent's performance in the game, but not all are, and some are

indeed just nasty, and the words uttered have nothing to do with the game itself, or the opponent's performance at the game, like Garret's alleged remark to Duncan, or Ali's comment on Liston's appearance. It is not even the case that all are directed to the opponent player – as exemplified by Jordan's comment to Burrell. Many are probably intended to undermine the opponent's performance, directed at them, but there is at least a question as to whether that is also true of Jordan's comment, or Sharpe's humoristic remark, which was heard by the spectators rather than the opponents.

So, these examples are as varied as they are bound together by the idea or impression that they are examples of trash talk.[3] From an ethical perspective, we now face a choice. We can address these examples piecemeal and ask about the ethics of specific instances. Or is there some hope that trash-talking is a useful category of ethical analysis on a more general, unified level.

I will later, in sections 3 and 4, give an idea of this in more detail. I think that we can say something about this category in general and leave open that there are more specific assessments of specific *types* of trash-talking, like trash-talking that is also pernicious and racist, that needs to be complemented.

3 What is trash-talking?

There have been several important philosophical attempts to characterize trash-talking as a specific form of influence (see especially Kershnar 2015; Kershnar 2018; Dixon 2018; Dixon 2008; Summers 2007; Dixon 2007; Duncan 2019).[4] This section will review the most prominent attempts and discuss the advantages and disadvantages, and we will discuss the two most influential answers to the conceptual question, due to Dixon (2007) and Kershnar (2015; 2018), respectively.

I will break new ground regarding the conceptual question in two ways. First, I will introduce a taxonomy of trash-talking that distinguishes different types, only one of which is the person-to-opponent trash talk that has been the focus of the debate so far.

Second, I argue that the current debate about the nature of trash-talking falls short in an important aspect. It fails to notice that trash-talking is often, if not always, an instance of the influence type manipulation.[5] I will explore the merits and downsides of this perspective, too, before providing a summary of the findings and open questions regarding the conceptual question about the nature of trash-talking.

Looking ahead, one overarching finding of this section and the next is that there has been much less debate about the conceptual question of what trash-talking is (this section), compared to the intense debate about its moral status, which we cover in section 5. However, both debates are closely linked. Recognizing the diversity of trash-talking, for which I argue in this section, means not only that the existing accounts of what trash-talking is are limited, but also that the resulting answers about the wrongness of trash-talking fall short.

3.1 Existing philosophical accounts of the nature of trash-talking

In this section, I will discuss the two central accounts of trash-talking in the recent debate about the ethics of sport. By exploring their strengths and weaknesses, we will then arrive at several facets of trash-talking that have been neglected by these accounts. That lays the ground for a broader taxonomy of trash-talking in section 4.3.

3.1.1 Trash-talking as a way to gain a competitive advantage

Dixon (2007) characterizes trash-talking as "verbal insults and intimidation, designed to gain a competitive advantage" in the context of athletic performance (Dixon 2007, 97). This definition captures a common and influential conception of trash-talking—as a strategic extension of the contest itself, directed at opponents with the aim of undermining their focus or confidence. On this view, trash-talking functions as a form of psychological competition,

complementary to the physical dimensions of sport. A similar perspective is found in Summers' (2007) discussion of sledging, which he describes as serving the same purpose: securing a competitive edge through verbal provocation. He writes that it is a "comment or series of comments, generally negative, taunting, or aggressive in tone, made by one or more competitors in the hope that said comment will affect the mental state of another competitor" (Summers 2007, 75).

This view of trash talk can accommodate examples like the of Kyrgios trying to destabilize his opponent, Suarez's racial slur, or Ali's taunting and teasing of Foreman during the fight.

Moreover, the performance-oriented view is supported by a recurring feature of post-game interactions. Athletes often resume cordial relations once the contest ends, and remarks made during play are retrospectively framed as "part of the game." Such cases suggest that trash-talking, at least in these instances, targets the opponent in their role as a player rather than as a person, and that its rationale is confined to the competitive domain. This observation lends some plausibility to the narrow, game-bound conception put forward by Dixon (2007) and others.

3.1.2 Trash-talking as intentional insult by offense

Kershnar (2015) offers another precise and influential account of trash-talking. According to his definition, A trash talks B if and only if A intentionally insults B during competition, where to insult is to attempt to offend. [6]

This definition succeeds in capturing many paradigmatic cases. For example, Bill Bradley's remark to Patrick Ewing—"I saw your SATs. You're a dumbass. Didn't they give you 400 points just for signing your name?"—is a clear instance of trash-talking, satisfying both the intention and offense criteria. Similarly, Ali's teasing of Foreman and Materazzi's insult to Zidane's sister are clearly recognized as trash talk. Thus, Kershnar's account gets some

key examples right. Kershnar's account is further strengthened by allowing that the insult may lie in the pragmatic rather than the semantic content of what is said. A seemingly benign utterance like "You are nice" can function as an insult when, contextually, its pragmatic force communicates contempt or condescension. This is a strength of Kershnar's account, and for some forms of trash talk, it works very well.

3.2 Problems for existing philosophical accounts of the nature of trash-talking

However, both Summers' and Kershnar's accounts of trash-talking are limited. At best, they are accounts of specific types or sub-classes of trash-talking, but neither view satisfactorily accounts for all types of trash-talking. So, neither view captures trash talk in all its interesting diversity.

Summers' account assumes that (1) all instances of trash talk are directed toward performance-related goals, and (2) that they consistently address the opponent qua player. Clearly, both assumptions are restrictions that mean that Summers' account captures only some forms of trash talk, but not all. As Kershnar (2015) rightly points out that some utterances qualify as trash-talking despite having no clear relation to competitive strategy; instead, they may aim simply to offend or harm the recipient as a person. For example, Ali's insult of Liston's appearance is not obviously related toward a performance-related goal – and yet it is a *bona fide* example of trash talk.[7]

Kershnar's account is wider in some respects, encompassing the Ali example, but it is limited in others. It relies on three key assumptions: (1) that trash-talking must be intentional, (2) it must involve an insult (understood as an attempt to offend), and (3) it must occur during competition. Each of these assumptions can be challenged.

First, the claim that trash-talking necessarily involves an attempt to offend appears too restrictive. Many utterances that qualify as trash-talking operate through sarcasm, passive aggression, or strategic ambiguity. Take tennis player Kyrgios' sarcastic remark (see section 2)

as an example. A player might also say, “That strategy was… bold. Not smart, but bold,” or, “Good for you, really trying today.” Such remarks may unsettle or destabilize the opponent without clearly intending to offend. If we broaden the notion of offense to accommodate such cases, the concept begins to lose traction, encompassing both overt insults and subtler forms of interaction that differ significantly in tone and effect.[8]

Second, not all trash-talking seems directed at the opponent as a player or aimed at diminishing performance. In some cases, the target’s existing doubts or vulnerabilities are exploited, not to offend, but to evoke hesitation or self-consciousness. The utterance “Look at you, weakling” may have identical surface form across contexts, yet its function may range from humiliation to subtle destabilization. A narrow focus on offense misses this diversity. Moreover, the examples of trash-talking team-mates (as in Jordan’s example), entertaining trash-talk (as in Sharpes’ fake-call to the president) suggest that an appropriate account of trash-talking must be wider.

Third, the assumption that trash-talking must occur during competition overlooks a range of clear counterexamples**,** some of which are already mentioned in the introductory section, such as Ali’s ridicule of Liston or Greig’s derogatory remarks. In general, press conferences, social media posts, and informal post-match interactions often feature statements universally recognized as trash-talking. Competition extends beyond the game, and certainly the advent of social media enables trash-talk that is clearly recognized as such even though it occurs outside the game.[9] So, a more plausible view allows that trash-talking is part of the broader frame of sport-related performance and associated aims like entertainment and commercialization, not confined to its in-game moments.[10]

Finally, not all trash-talking aims to harm, destabilize, or insult. In many cases, it is oriented toward entertainment, especially in commercially-driven sports contexts. Muhammad Ali famously used trash talk to generate public interest and promote events. The primary

audience is often the crowd, not the opponent, and the purpose is promotional rather than antagonistic.[11] In lower-level or recreational contexts, trash-talking may serve to amuse teammates, maintain camaraderie, or lighten the mood, in addition to the performance-related goals I already emphasized with the example of Jordan. Here, its social function resembles banter more than psychological harm.

In summary, Kershnar (2015)'s definition places intention, insult, and competitive context at the center of trash-talking. While this model accounts for many central cases, it excludes a significant range of phenomena that share the same linguistic surface but differ in target, function, and normative status. A broader framework is needed—one that captures not only performance-related and harmful forms of trash-talking but also those that are performative, humorous, or audience-directed. The next section proposes such a taxonomy.

3.3 Different forms of trash-talking

Evidently, there are different forms of trash-talking, some of which we reviewed in section 2 on examples of trash talk, and they seem to be so diverse that neither of the leading philosophical accounts of trash talk can accommodate all of them. At the same time, despite their diversity, all these examples are still recognizable *as* forms of trash talk, rather than examples of different phenomena altogether.[12]

In this section, I propose a framework for identifying important dimensions along which instances of trash-talking can vary. These dimensions can help clarify the phenomenon and guide future conceptual and normative assessments. At least six dimensions appear relevant, along which we can distinguish further criteria and thus segment different trash talk types:

Who is the speaker? (Speaker dimension)

- Player
- Non-Player

Except for Mourinho's non-player trash-talk, all the trash talk examples from section 2 involve players as the speaker- or influencer. Building on the Mourinho example, we can easily think about cases where non-players like coaches or spectators got involved in a way that did not make them a player, but what they did is recognizable as trash-talking.

Who is the target or recipient? (Target dimension)

- Another player
- A non-player

Many of the examples from section 2 involve another player in the target dimension. But not all of them do. Larry Bird taunts all his competitors as a group, rather than a specific individual. And Sharpe targets the audience, rather than another player.

When does it occur? (Temporal dimension)

- During competition
- Outside of competition

The pre-competition trash talk of Ali against Liston, for example, exemplifies one aspect of this dimension, while the in-play attempts at disruption by, for example, Kyrgios, exemplify the other dimension.

What is the content of the utterance? (Semantic and pragmatic dimension)?

- Game-related (e.g., tactics, performance)
- Non-game-related (e.g., intelligence, appearance, religion)

On this dimension, our two examples involving Ali already illustrate the two aspects of this dimension. His taunting of Liston was non-game related and targeted Liston's appearance ('ugly'), while Ali's comments to Foreman ('is that all you've got'?) clearly target game-related

aspects. Further examples of the former dimension are the actions of Materazzi, Suarez, Garnett, and Grei, while the cases involving Bird, Jordan, and Kyrgios exemplify the game-related dimension of trash-talk.

What is its function or aim? (Functional dimension)

- To impair athletic performance
- To cause other forms of harm
- To entertain (audience or target)

To illustrate these dimensions, we could classify the Ali-Foreman, Kyrgios, Materazzi, and Suarez exchange as aiming to impair athletic performance, Ali's remark to Liston, Garnett's to Duncan, and Greig to aim to cause harm, and Sharpe's and Bird's remark as aiming to entertain.

By what means is the function achieved? (Means dimension)

- Through offense or insult
- Through alternative means (e.g., sarcasm, ambiguity)

Finally, most of the examples from section 2 seem to work through direct offense and insult, while the Ali-Foreman, Kyrgios, and Sharp cases are more readily interpreted as involving alternative means like sarcasm.

Together, these variables generate a space of 75 theoretically possible types of trash-talk. This is surely too much and too little. Too much, because not all these theoretically possible forms will be (equally) interesting in practice; too little, because further dimensions might prove to be interesting or relevant to distinguish (e.g. specifying non-players in more detail, thus adding further dimensions there).

The following combinations of dimensions seem especially relevant, and they illustrate the usefulness of the above 6-dimension framework for distinguish types of trash talk. First, a quite restrictive, narrow account captures core cases of trash talk and it depicts those cases that much of the existing literature is focusing on. Consider the following form:

(1) In-competition, game-related, performance-oriented player trash talk: Player A trash talks B if A insults B during competition by making a game-related remark intended to undermine B's performance.

This form of trash talk is at the heart of the discussions by Dixon (2007) and Summers (2007), where trash-talking is framed as part of the competitive apparatus of sport. A slightly broader is the following, which captures well the type of trash talk that Kershnar (2015) is focusing on:

(2) In-competition, game-related, harm-oriented player trash talk: Player A trash talks B only if A insults B during competition by making a game-related remark intended to cause harm (not necessarily performance-related).

Both accounts, (1) and (2), focus on trash-talking that occurs between players and is directed toward the game itself. However, several examples of trash talk discussed throughout the chapter suggest that the scope of trash-talking extends beyond these forms, specifically because trash talk can occur outside the actual game, it may be directed at the audience, and its function might be to entertain rather than to undermine the opponent. The following captures these cases:

(3) Out-of-competition, game-related, entertainment-oriented player-to-audience trash talk: Player A trash talks B to entertain audience C if A makes a game-related comment about B outside competition with the aim of entertaining C.

Type (3) trash talk is exemplified in promotional events surrounding combat sports, like Ali's early attention-grabbing remarks about Liston, where athletes use trash talk to build hype and generate interest. Here, the function is primarily entertainment, and the primary audience is not the opponent but spectators or the media. A further variant involves intra-team dynamics:

(4) In-competition, game-related, entertainment-oriented player-to-player trash talk: Player A trash talks teammate B in-game with the aim of entertaining B or other teammates.

As suggested above, this form of trash talk may be more characteristic in recreational or lower-stakes sporting contexts, where psychological warfare is not the goal, and social bonding may be. Such utterances may still be recognized as trash-talking, despite lacking antagonistic intent or competitive utility. This is markedly different from trash-talking teammates to improve their performance, rather than to entertain or create. This would be captures as follows:

(5) In-competition, game-related, performance-oriented player-to-player trash talk: Player A trash talks teammate B in-game with the aim of affecting the performance of B or other teammates.

Finally, the framework also allows us to consider cases that stretch the boundaries of the concept. For instance:

Out-of-competition, non-player trash talk: Non-player A trash talks B if A makes a remark about B to entertain audience C.

This might apply to a coach joking during a press conference or a pundit mocking a player during a broadcast. While such utterances share features with trash-talking—public setting, mocking tone, strategic framing—they risk diluting the concept if included uncritically.

Without additional constraints, one risks classifying any entertainment-oriented critique as trash talk.

Accordingly, this framework raises an important conceptual question: are any of the six dimensions necessary for a practice to count as trash-talking? If not, then the category may lose its distinctive explanatory and normative force. For instance, if neither speaker identity, timing, target, nor function is necessary, then the term could cover innocuous jokes and stylized commentary alike. In the next section, I examine this question by considering which dimensions plausibly constitute minimal conditions for trash-talking.

The upshot will be that none of the six dimensions is individually necessary for trash-talking. What is necessary, I will argue in the next section, is that trash-talking is a form of *manipulative influence*, in the sense of being indifferent to the target's rational agency (Klenk 2022; Noggle 2025). That is, the six dimensions outlined in this section capture surface-level variation and trash-talking necessarily being an instance of manipulation supplies the unifying, underlying structural condition.

3.4 Trash-talking as manipulation

In this section, I consider whether trash-talking can be understood as a form of the social influence type *manipulation*.[13] The ethical literature on manipulation distinguishes between different views of manipulation (Klenk and Jongepier 2022). I will focus on just two views in this chapter, because both offer resources for conceptualizing trash-talking and assessing its moral status. Ultimately, however, I argue that one specific view, the indifference view, is better suited to account for *all* forms of trash-talk. Consequently, as already hinted at in the previous section, I will argue that being an instance of manipulation-as-indifference is a necessary, unifying feature across different types of trash-talking.

But before we go there, let us turn first to the widely accepted *mistake* view of manipulation. According to he mistake view due to Noggle (2020; 2025), manipulation consists

in intentionally inducing a mistake in the target's psychological states or processes by way of influencing them. The mistake might involve an epistemic error, such as a false belief, or a practical misjudgment, such as choosing an inferior course of action, or experiencing an inappropriate emotion. On this view, many paradigmatic cases of trash-talking qualify as manipulation. Consider again Ali, who is yelling "Is that all you got?" to his opponent Foreman, intending to provoke self-doubt and disrupt the opponent's concentration. This is a clear attempt to induce a performance-impairing misjudgment (perhaps Foreman did actually hurt Ali already). So, Ali's influence seems to aim to induce a mistake in his target Foreman, and thereby secure an advantage.

Interestingly, while the manipulation debate recognizes sophisticated forms of manipulation whereby the manipulator induces a mistake in *how* the target forms a mental state that is appropriate or correct (see Noggle 2025), the kind of manipulation that trash talk is will often be rather crude, and targeting mistakes in the outcome only. What a trash-talker wants is thus likely to make the opponent be *overly* cautious, form a *false* belief, an *inappropriate* desire or emotion, that somehow helps them win.[14]

So, framing trash-talking as a species of manipulation under the assumption of the mistake view has a significant advantage: it allows us to draw on an extensive and increasingly sophisticated body of philosophical work that identified ways to distinguish manipulative influence from other types of influence like persuasion and coercion. If trash-talking qualifies as manipulative under the mistake view, then its ethical status can be assessed using already familiar criteria that have been developed for the normative assessment of manipulation.[15]

One might object that this reclassification lacks precision. Not all forms of manipulation qualify as trash talk, and not all trash talk aims to induce mistakes. In response, one could argue that the contextual constraints of sport help delineate the relevant subcategory: trash talk,

understood as in-competition verbal manipulation by players, could be identified by its location and function within the game.

However, assessing trash talk as manipulation through the lens of the mistake view encounters difficulty when we consider broader forms of trash talk that we discussed in the previous section. As noted earlier, not all trash talk aims to produce performance errors. Promotional statements may be designed to entertain the public, build anticipation, or psychologically posture without inducing any identifiable mistake. Similarly, banter between teammates or light-hearted jabs may aim to amuse or build camaraderie, not to mislead or confuse. For instance, saying "Nice shot—almost went in!" after an obvious miss may be intended to elicit a laugh rather than to impair performance. Similarly, when trash talk is directed at one's team mates to try harder, as in the example of Jordan trash-talking Burrows, the intention is *not* to make them commit a mistake, but to make them better teammates (per Jordan's own account).[16]

It might be argued that these instances still involve mistakes of a different kind. Perhaps they aim to mislead the public about the speaker's confidence or to provoke false beliefs about the opponent's abilities. In the case of trash-talking one's team-mates, the intention might be to make them better *by* instilling over-confidence in them, a groundless, overly positive view of themselves. Yet this interpretation appears strained. In many such cases, there is no plausible target mistake; rather, the utterance is stylized, performative, or socially expressive. The mistake view thus seems to struggle to accommodate a significant range of trash-talking examples, such as the Larry Bird and Shannon Sharpe examples from section 2.

A more promising alternative to the mistake view of manipulation is thus the so-called indifference view of manipulation. According to this approach, defended by Klenk (2022; 2024), manipulation involves the attempt to influence the target in a way that is not explained in the right way by the aim to reveal reasons to the target. In short, we can gloss this as a

disregard for the target's rational capacities.[17] What unifies manipulative acts on this account is not the specific outcome they produce, but the speaker's motivational structure. Manipulative influence seeks to shape action without treating the target as a rational agent capable of deliberation. While this is an often-made claim about manipulation (cf. Noggle 2022), the indifference view offers a particular interpretation that is unlike the typical rendering of disregard to the target's rational agency: the underlying idea is that rational agents strive to do the right thing for the right reason. Consequently, influencing them should be sensitive to that aim. Manipulators, however, characteristically disregard that aim and *do not* strive to reveal reasons to their target (Klenk 2024); they simply want to effectively achieve a certain effect.

Understood this way, trash-talking fits well. Across a variety of contexts—whether the aim is to destabilize an opponent, entertain an audience, or engage in competitive posturing—trash-talking typically bypasses rational engagement. It does not aim to provide reasons for belief or action, nor does it appeal to shared standards of deliberation. Rather, it seeks to exert pressure, provoke reactions, or assert dominance through non-rational means. Even in its milder or humorous forms, trash-talking often functions by exploiting social cues, ambiguity, or status hierarchies, rather than engaging the listener as a co-equal deliberator.

On this view, the heterogeneity of trash-talking becomes a strength rather than a liability. What unites its various forms is not a shared intention to cause error, but a shared disregard for cooperative reasoning. Whether the goal is disruption, entertainment, or self-promotion, the method is characteristically manipulative—not in the sense of deception or coercion, but in the sense of influencing without the *aim* of offering reasons. The point here is subtle. While trash-talking of this kind might *end up* giving reasons to the target for behaving in a certain way (worse, in case of an opponent, or better, in case of trash-talking a team-mate), this is not the point in a characteristically manipulative interaction. Rather, when prudential reasons are offered, they are offered merely as a means for achieving the end. For example, when one nags

an opponent, one does give them a (prudential) reason for doing as one wants. When one trash-talks a team-mate, one gives a prudential reason to improve the game, for example, to make the harassment stop. But in these cases, giving reasons seems just a side effect of influencing the target effectively. That is what makes it manipulative, according to the indifference view of manipulation.[18]

This perspective, I suggest, offers a more unified and normatively illuminating account of trash-talking as a form of interpersonal influence in sport.

3.5 Summary

This section asked: What is trash-talking? Two influential definitions dominate the literature. Dixon and Summers treat it as a performance strategy to gain competitive advantage through provocation; Kershnar defines it as an intentional insult aimed at offending during competition. Both capture core cases but prove too narrow: they exclude utterances for entertainment, posturing, or camaraderie, and they restrict the practice to in-game contexts and specific harms, amongst other things.

To better capture the diversity of trash-talking, I then proposed six-dimensional taxonomy that focuses on speaker, target, timing, content, function, and means. To capture the unifying factor behind the different forms of trash talk captured by this framework, I then turned to manipulation as a unifying category. On the mistake view, trash-talking manipulates when it induces error in the opponent; but this neglects non-deceptive cases. The indifference view, by contrast, classifies trash-talking as manipulative whenever it disregards the aim to reveal reasons to the target of the influence. On this account, whether aimed at provocation, amusement, or performance, trash-talking is manipulative because and when it does not aim to reveal reasons to the target, but instead serves some other goal, such as entertainment, provocation, or performance.

4 When and why is trash-talking morally objectionable?

The conceptual investigation of trash-talking is for the most part motivated by a moral concern with its ethical status. As we have seen in the introduction, the tantalizing thing about trash-talking is that it is both welcomed and celebrated – and yet banned, problematized, and considered inappropriate.

Interestingly, all these stances on the morality of trash-talking might be true at the same time, if they apply to different (sub-)forms of trash-talking which, so far, have not been adequately distinguished in the literature.

In any case, we should like to know about what it is that makes trash-talking a moral problem, when it is. Outlining some answers to that question, and their respective advantages and disadvantages, is the goal of this section.

It might perhaps be surprising that I pry apart the *conceptual* question of what manipulation is and how we can understand trash-talking as a form of manipulation, which we addressed in the previous section, from the *normative* and *evaluative* questions on the moral status of manipulation and, consequently, trash-talking. However, it is now standard practice in the debate about the ethics of manipulation to distinguish the conceptual and the normative question (Noggle 2022). This should avoid the common confusion that anything manipulative must already be morally bad, which would collapse the two questions.

As before, I will start with briefly reviewing three influential accounts from the literature. Interestingly, and as suggested above, the moral question has so far received more attention than the conceptual question, so we will have more material to go through than above. After having reviewed the field, I suggest why each of those perspectives has – despite the advantages it brings - also problems. These problems then motivate the search for an alternative, and I will again turn to the ethics of influence for an answer. I will explore whether we can understand the ethics of trash talk on the basis of the ethics of manipulation.

Roughly, I suggest that trash-talking is wrong, when it is, for the same reason that manipulation is wrong, when it is. Naturally, there may be additional wrongs in trash-talking on top of the wrong of manipulation, such as harming the opponent.[19] But the genuine wrong of trash-talking is the same wrong as that of manipulation, or so I will argue.

4.1 Existing perspectives on the ethics of trash-talking

In this section, I will discuss three central accounts of the ethics of trash-talking. By exploring their strengths and weaknesses, we will then arrive at several facets of trash-talking that have been neglected in these accounts. That lays the ground a look at the wrongness of trash-talking through the manipulation perspective.

4.1.1 The skill perspective

One influential defense of trash-talking understands it as a test of competitive skill rather than merely a breach of sportsmanship (Summers 2007; Dixon 2008; Dixon 2007). The core of this perspective is that sport is not solely about physical excellence but also about psychological attributes integral to performance, especially at the professional level.

Chuck Summers (2007) articulates this argument in two steps. First, he claims that professional sport is mainly about winning. And success in competitive sport is not only about athletic execution but also about psychological capacities such as focus, emotional control, and mental resilience. These, Summers argues, are just as integral to athletic excellence as strength or agility.

Second, trash-talking is defended as a way of testing these mental capacities. A provocation that unsettles or distracts an opponent serves to highlight the importance of psychological toughness. On this view, the ability to withstand trash-talking is not incidental but part of what it means to be a successful competitor. Trash-talking thus becomes a legitimate form of gamesmanship—a method of probing an opponent's mental readiness in much the same way as one tests their technical skill.

In this light, trash-talking is not simply an affront or insult; it is continuous with other non-physical pressures athletes regularly face, such as playing in hostile environments or against fierce rivals. Success in the face of such adversity is commonly celebrated as a hallmark of competitive excellence.

4.1.2 The disrespect perspective

A contrasting approach centers on the moral problem of treating others with respect. Dixon (2008; 2007) and others argue that trash-talking is morally problematic precisely because it offends, insults, or harms the opponent.

On this view, even if trash-talking is tactically effective in helping the player win, in line with the skill perspective, it is objectionable because it treats the opponent as a mere means to a competitive end. Its wrongness lies in the strategic intent of the communicative nature of the act: it seeks to degrade or destabilize without engaging the opponent as a rational and moral equal. This view echoes the Kantian constraint against instrumentalizing people.

Accordingly, the key normative claim here is that sport is not a moral vacuum. The rules and norms of sport may differ from those of ordinary life, but they are not exempt from broader ethical scrutiny. Verbal practices that demean or offend may remain wrong even if they are common, expected, or strategic within a game.

4.1.3 The ownership perspective

A third line of defense appeals to consent or community standards. The permissibility of trash-talking, on this view, is not grounded in objective features of the act but in the attitudes and agreements of those involved.

In its simplest form, this argument holds that if trash-talking is not widely perceived as insulting within the sporting community, and if it is broadly accepted as part of the culture, then it is not morally problematic.

A more sophisticated version is offered by Kershnar (2015), who frames trash-talking within a social contract framework. He argues that, in the absence of natural rights against being insulted, the permissibility of trash-talking depends on whether it is permitted by the rules that players voluntarily accept. On his view, "an instance of trash-talking is permissible if and only if the relevant sports organization's system of rules permits the expression" (Kershnar 2015, 306).

Kershnar's argument assumes that players consent to these rules either explicitly or tacitly by participating in the sport. This consent, in turn, sets the moral boundaries of permissible conduct. Where institutional rules prohibit trash-talking, it is impermissible; where they allow it, it is not wrong. The moral assessment is thus contingent on the framework adopted by the governing body of the sport and the acceptance of that framework by the athletes involved.

4.2 Problems with existing accounts of the ethics of trash-talking

There are helpful perspectives on aspects of the ethics of trash-talking. But they are also limited in important ways. One important problem is familiar from the previous section: the existing accounts apply to some but not all forms of trash-talking and thus the existing moral assessments do not reflect the full diversity that trash talk exhibits. All of these perspectives have been defended as *the* perspective on the ethics of trash-talking, but really they seem applicable only to some but not all of its forms.

Another concern is that the existing perspectives tie the ethical assessment of trash talk to assumptions about the ethics of sports in general that might be controversial. For example, the problem with the skill perspective is that it depends on highly contingent claims about what sport is designed to test, and what trash-talking is doing. Both are to some extent empirical questions. Moreover, insofar as they are empirical questions, their answers seem to be dynamic. What skill a sport is designed to test, and what aim trash-talk is used to pursue might change over time, by player, and perhaps even by sport. For example, is trash-talk used more to

entertain compared to a past where it was, let's suppose, used primarily to undermine an opponent's performance? If so, would its moral assessment, therefore, have to shift?

Third, the existing moral assessments seem to offer alternatives that are either too strict or too loose. A Kantian perspective in the spirit of Dixon's argument would morally condemn all forms of trash talk, which seems out of place when we consider trash talk that aims to entertain (e.g. amongst team-mates, or directed at the audience).[20] This thus seems too rigid. In contrast, a contractualist perspective in the spirit of Kershnar seems to give permission to all forms of trash talk provided that the 'owners' of the sport give permission, and players have given some (hypothetical) kind of consent to it. This seems out of place in the case of trash-talk that aims to harm the target using out-of-game content, e.g. by being racist.

Finally, even if all of the presented perspectives capture some aspect of the ethics of trash-talking, none of them seems to capture a morally salient feature shared across all cases of trash talk.

4.3 Wrongful trash-talking as wrongful manipulation

Framing trash-talking as a form of manipulation not only clarifies its conceptual structure, as we have seen in section 4, but also provides a promising route for moral evaluation, as I intend to show in this section. Like before, I will first focus on the mistake-view, before turning to the indifference view of manipulation as each perspective yields distinctive insights.

4.3.1 The mistake perspective

Although the mistake view does not best capture the nature of trash-talking as manipulation, it remains valuable for explaining its wrong-making features. Hence its reintroduction here: the conceptual analysis relies on the indifference account, while the normative analysis draws on insights from the mistake framework to illuminate how trash-talking can wrong others.[21]

According to the mistake view, trash-talking is problematic because it seeks to destabilize an opponent's judgment by inducing a mistake in their decision-making processes. For

example, by provoking doubt, overconfidence, or distraction. Indeed, this perspective seems amenable to the trash-talking discussion because, as Dixon (2018) notes, the standard defense of trash-talking as mere banter collapses under scrutiny: The reason trash-talking succeeds competitively is *precisely* that it causes offense and thereby undermines focus, all of which might be sensibly interpreted as 'inducing a mistake.' If it did not, it would not confer a competitive advantage. Thus, the view that trash-talking is "harmless" seems to be in tension with its strategic efficacy.

The manipulation framework allows us to diagnose this tension. Even if trash-talking is framed as playful or inconsequential, it functions by intentionally subverting the rational performance of the target. From the perspective of the mistake view, this undermining of judgment is morally dubious. After all, making a mistake is bad, and having a mistake induced by someone else may be even more lamentable (Noggle 2025).

Yet this is precisely where sport complicates matters. In the context of competition, we should not always treat the inducement of error as morally wrong. Bluffing in poker or feints in football are paradigmatic examples where leading an opponent to a false belief, and later inappropriate action, is not only accepted but expected.[22] Accordingly, the key question for the mistake view is not whether trash-talking intentionally induces mistakes (it often does), but whether inducing such mistakes is morally permissible in the context of sport.

Proponents of the mistake view of manipulation might suggest that the wrong of manipulation is only *prima facie* and *pro tanto*, meaning, roughly, that manipulation appears wrong at first sight (*prima facie*) and unless further evidence is adduced that outweighs its wrongness (*pro tanto*). When trash-talk occurs in a sporting context where players have *consented* to trash-talk, then their consent might outweigh the wrongness inherent in trash talk, and certainly dissolve the initial impression that trash talk as manipulation is wrong.[23]

However, while this reply might go some way in explaining the wrongness of manipulative trash talk within a sporting context, it is not wholly sufficient. When a *pro tanto* wrong like manipulative trash talk is *outweighed* by other factors, such as the entertainment value of sports and the fact that players consented, this still means that there is a *remnant* of moral wrongness that does not get dissolved. That seems to be at odds with the common view that some actions that are deeply problematic outside sports, like tackling someone to the ground, are *completely benign* in some sports. There is not even a remnant of moral wrongness, given that the action takes place in a specific sport. The suggestion that *it would be better if players had not engaged in trash-talking (as a way to induce a mistake)* to justify the claim that trash-talking is *pro tanto* wrong would seem to imply that, in some sense, it would have been better if players would not play the game. This does not seem right.

Thus, it seems that the manipulation perspective suggests that a more nuanced analysis is required. Not all forms of trash-talking acts are equal. Some forms of trash-talking merely introduce competitive pressure, which is akin to legal deception within the rules of play. Others invoke personal, out-of-game references that offend or humiliate. These latter cases may be wrong not *only* because they induce mistakes per se, but because more so because they do so in a way that causes additional harm. On this reading, the wrongness of manipulation that lies in the manipulation itself is further compounded by the harm caused by trash-talking, which plausibly differs depending on the form of manipulation in question.

What the mistake perspective on manipulation gets us with regards to the moral evaluation of trash-talking is a *unified* basis for identifying the wrong of trash-talking. Trash-talking is *always* (pro tanto) morally wrong for it represents a willful attempt to induce a mistake in the target's psychological mechanisms. Mistakes are always (at least a bit) wrong. Therefore, manipulation is always (at least a bit) wrong, and so is trash-talking.

In contrast to the extant moral evaluations of trash-talking, the manipulation perspective offers a principled way to assess the moral issue with trash-talking, across its different and diverse forms, without relying on controversial assumptions about tacit agreement (ownership perspective), categorical wrongs (disrespect perspective), or legitimate goals in a game (skill perspective). This suggests that it is a fruitful perspective to further explore the ethics of trash-talking.

At the same time, there are also important questions, which pertain to the mistake account and thus to the ethics of trash-talking. The mistake account draws a connection between the moral wrongness of manipulation and the badness of mistakes. But while some connection between the evaluative and deontic must exist, it is unclear – without further argument – that an individual that realizes the badness of a mistake for their interlocutor (evaluative perspective) is thereby be bound to not induce a mistake in the other (deontic perspective). This might very well be a question of roles and expectations, which might be a useful direction of study concerning the ethics of trash-talking and the ethics of manipulation.

Moreover, there still seem to be some kinds of trash-talking, notably trash-talking aimed at the audience with the purpose to entertain, that do not readily seem to fall within the manipulation-as-mistake framework. Thus, a more expansive, complementary perspective of the mistake view would be needed.

4.3.2 The indifference perspective

The indifference view offers a complementary perspective. According to this account, manipulation is wrong if and because we have a duty to help others do the best thing for the right reasons. When we manipulate others, we merely treat them as someone to be acted upon rather than reasoned with. In most domains of life, this is a moral failure: we are expected to engage others as rational agents, helping them to act, feel, believe, and decide for good reasons. But in competitive sport, it stands to reason that this expectation is relaxed. Perhaps players are

not required to help their opponents do the right thing; they are not under a duty to reveal reasons or facilitate good judgment. In fact, many forms of strategic behavior in sport involve precisely the opposite than helping others act for good reasons, such as concealing one's intention, masking weakness, and exploiting doubt. Players are in a competition with each other, after all.

If this is correct, then trash-talking, understood as a form of influence that does not aim to supply reasons to the target,[24] may not be morally wrong qua manipulation. So long as it remains within the bounds of accepted competitive behavior, targeting game-related performance rather than personal dignity, it may be permissible. Thus, we get an explanation of why manipulation in the competition context is only *prima facie* wrong. Its wrongness can be completely dissolved by factors such as those constituted by the sporting context. This suggests that the moral permissibility of trash-talking is not grounded in whether it is manipulative per se, but in whether it causes unjustified harm or exceeds the normative bounds of the game.

A clear demarcation emerges. Trash-talking that causes an opponent to misjudge an in-game decision, without recourse to personal insult or irrelevant offense, may be manipulative but morally permissible in the context of sports. By contrast, trash-talking that targets an opponent's identity, dignity, or standing, especially outside the game context, reintroduces standard moral prohibitions. Such utterances may remain manipulative, but they are better classified as morally problematic for other reasons: they humiliate, harm, or disrespect.

This dual assessment is illuminating. The manipulation framework helps unify the diverse forms of trash-talking under a single analytical lens, while still allowing us to distinguish between permissible and impermissible cases. It also explains why trash-talking can be both permissible in some cases and yet, in other contexts, ethically troubling.[25]

4.4 Summary

This section turned from the conceptual to the moral question: when, and why, is trash-talking wrong? Three influential accounts were reviewed. The skill perspective treats trash-talking as a legitimate test of psychological resilience; the disrespect perspective regards it as objectionable for degrading opponents; and the ownership perspective grounds its permissibility in community standards or consent. Each view highlights an important dimension but also proves limited—either too narrow, too permissive, or too rigid to capture the full range of practices.

To address these shortcomings, I introduced the ethics of influence as an alternative framework. On the mistake view, trash-talking manipulates by inducing error in judgement or behavior; on the indifference view, it manipulates by disregarding rational agency in a particular way. Both perspectives reveal trash-talking as a form of influence that bypasses reason, while also clarifying why some instances are permissible and others troubling. The upshot is a more unified and tractable basis for moral evaluation: trash-talking is wrong, when it is, for the same reason manipulation is wrong, though additional harms may aggravate its moral status.

5 Conclusion

Trash-talking proves to be more than a marginal curiosity of sporting culture. It is a practice that illuminates central tensions in the ethics of sport: between competition and respect, performance and integrity, playfulness and harm. At its best, trash-talking showcases wit, creativity, and the psychological drama of high-level competition. At its worst, it slides into insult, humiliation, or abuse, revealing the darker sides of human interaction. Precisely this dual character makes it philosophically instructive.

Examining trash-talking through the lens of the ethics of influence shows how it straddles the line between legitimate gamesmanship and morally troubling manipulation. This approach

not only clarifies the conceptual and normative dimensions of trash-talking, but also suggests a more general lesson: applied ethics benefits from attention to practices that are playful, provocative, and culturally vivid. Trash-talking, in this light, is both fun and serious—an object of study that rewards by opening up broader reflections on agency, respect, and the conditions of human flourishing.

[1] Work on this chapter was supported by a Humboldt Fellowship for Experienced Researchers carried out at LMU Munich. Generative AI was used for stylistic and grammatical editing of this text.

[2] To clarify: trash-talking is not simultaneously to be admired and reproached. Rather, it seems as if different types of trash-talking merit different evaluations. The taxonomy developed in section 3.3 outlines dimensions that might account for appropriate admiration in some and reproach in other cases. Thanks to a reviewer for prompting me to clarify this point.

[3] It may often be difficult to distinguish between offenses that remain within the game, as it were, and those that don't. But there seems to be at least conceptually a line between speech that is *about* the target's sporting performance, aimed at sowing doubt in that sense, and speech that is about something else, and aimed to affect the target nonetheless.

[4] There are also important *empirical* investigations of trash-talking, many of which assess people's attitudes about trash-talking. These works also include operationalisations of what trash-talking is. I do not focus on them here, though I comparison between the philosophical works and the different empirical operationalisations would surely be valuable.

[5] Note that I suggest that trash talk is *often* an instance of manipulation, though there is an open question whether trash-talking is *always* manipulative, as opposed to, say, coercive. This will be a question that will occupy us in section 4.3. Moreover, it might be useful to already

note that whether trash-talking qualifies as manipulation does not depend on whether it communicates truthful information. For example, a tennis player might tell their opponent that they "suck at tennis" to get an easier win. That might be true, but it still seems like a case of trash-talking and, as I will show, a case of manipulation. Thanks to Sebastian John Holmen for suggesting the example and prompting me to clarify this point.

[6] Though that does not exclude that coaches, viewers etc. can also trash talk. It's simply that Kershnar (2015) does not offer an account of that.

[7] It would be a theoretical cost to any account of trash-talking to imply that the Boxing I example is not an example of trash talk. Of course, this does not mean that one cannot give an argument for why the benefits of restricting one's account of trash talk accordingly outweighs this cost. To clarify, the theoretical cost is primarily one of incompleteness: excluding Boxing I would make the account fail to cover intuitive central cases of trash-talking. An adequate conceptual analysis should capture the range of paradigmatic examples across sports; narrowing the category arbitrarily undermines the explanatory purpose of defining it. I thank an anonymous reviewer for prompting me to clarify this point.

[8] At this point, a fruitful line of inquiry would be to draw connections between the literature on insults to see whether the offence condition of Kershnar's account can be broadened sufficiently to accommodate further examples of trash talk without over-extending it. See (Daly 2018) for a start.

[9] Note that this does not suggest that trash-talking must take place within competition or *for* the competition. It might be directed at the audience to entertain, too.

[10] Kershnar might of course be offering a stipulative definition of trash-talking by players during competition. Or one might interpret competition to cover interactions at press-conferences, online, on the way back to the locker-room. But that does not seem prudent or helpful. Therefore, the competition condition better be dropped. In this vein, Proponents of

Kershnar's strict definition might reply that there is an important distinction between trash-talking and other concepts like taunting, boasting, intimidating, and being game.

[11] We could say that the aim is to attract interest, not necessarily to entertain. That depends on how involve an account of entertainment we want to use. For the purposes of this chapter, I believe it is sufficient to work with a broad, undefined notion of "entertainment" here.

[12] Note that the diversity of trash-talking also helps to explain why it is an ethically interesting phenomenon, as mentioned in the introduction. It appears that *some* forms of trash-talking are lauded and perhaps even appropriately so, while others are decried and, again, perhaps appropriately so. The philosophical accounts of trash-talking discussed above cannot readily account for this because they suggest that trash-talking is an ethically uniform phenomenon. So, they must suggest that appearances are misleading and all instances of trash-talking are problematic (*qua* being an instance of trash-talking) or that the relevant interactions do not really depict trash-talking. The taxonomy offered here can help account why there might be different forms of trash-talking that merit different forms of moral response *qua* being an instance of trash-talking.

[13] We can distinguish further *types* of influence like persuasion, coercion, and deception. There is no agreed-upon way of distinguishing these types, and it is not necessary to divide the space of influence along these dimensions, rather than amongst others that are more narrowly defined, like nudging, argumentation, etc.

[14] It is interesting to note that, as a form of manipulation, trash-talking has an interesting connection to gaslighting, whereby the speaker makes the target start to doubt their own abilities. Gaslighting has been studied mostly in the epistemic context. Some forms of trash-talking seem to have the same (intended) result, which becomes apparent with this lens.

[15] See, for instance, Klenk (2020)for an assessment of manipulation's impact on the target's well-being, Gorin (2022) domination-related harms, Gibert (2023) For a general assessment, and Noggle (2020; 2025) for the wrong of being tricked into making a mistake.

[16] Thanks to Sebastian John Holmen for suggesting this example.

[17] See also Baron (2003; 2014), (Gorin 2014), and (Tillson forthcoming)

[18] Thanks to Sebastian John Holmen for pressing me to clarify this point, and for suggesting helpful examples.

[19] It is worth noting that if manipulation is wrong only if it harms, then these perspectives are merged. Thanks to Sebastian John Holmen for the pointer.

[20] Come to think of it, why not also accept that competitors can trash talk one another to entertain themselves?

[21] Thanks to an anonymous referee for prompting me to clarify this point.

[22] Inappropriate in the sense of not being conducive to that player's success in the game.

[23] Thanks to Sebastian John Holmen for prompting me to clarify this point.

[24] But may do so, if that proves to be effective. See (Klenk 2022)

[25] At the same time, there is a way of accounting for the "bad feel" that trash talk may leave spectators with. Even though players may not have an obligation to reveal reasons to their opponents, it might be judged good form or a better state of affairs if they treat one another in this helpful manner. This may open a perspective to account for the moral *badness* of trash talk.

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