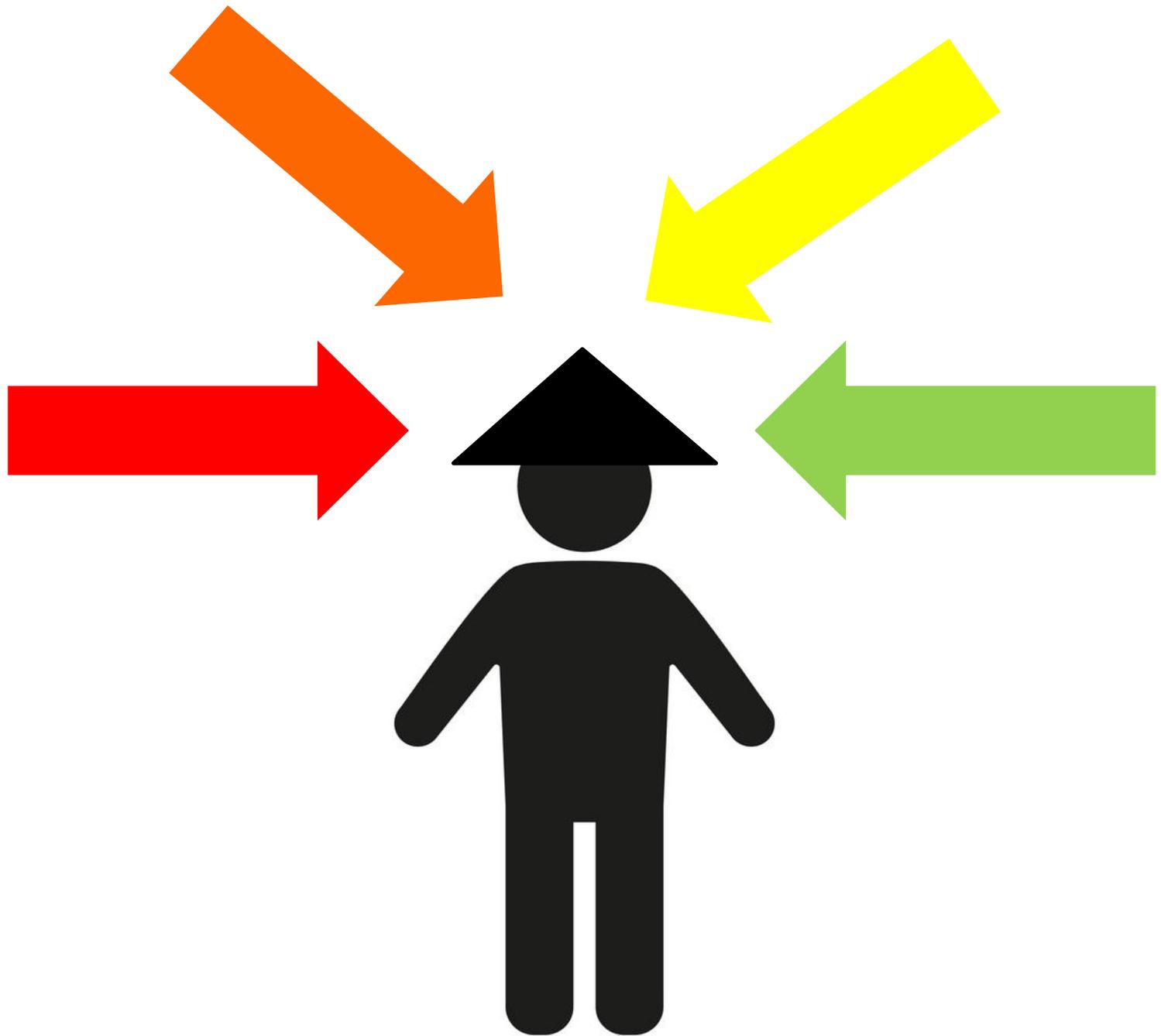




# Lance Armstrong's hero narrative and PEDs discourse in American TV broadcasts

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# “Myths” in U.S. sports media

- Journalists present people, events through lens of seven common myths (e.g., hero, villain, victim)
- Constructed narratives, reflect humankind’s values and vices
  - Help organize media messages
  - Can oversimplify people and events

# The Hero Myth: Elements



1. Humble beginning(s)
2. Adversity
3. Athlete triumphs (or dies trying)



Journalists need to **look past athletes' vices** to construct and to maintain this myth.

This is **in conflict** with American journalism's traditional responsibilities

# Earlier study: *Hero Narrative*

- A hero narrative present in 44 of the 109 American print and online articles (40.4% of sample)
  - 15 of the 22 sports journalists (68.2%)
- Adjectives like “hero,” “**virtual saint**,” “the best ever,” “**godlike**,” “saintly,” “supergenes,” “America’s greatest untarnished sports icon,” “aberration,” “greatest cyclist in history,” “different from competitors, most mere mortals,” and “product of a miracle,” among others

# However...

American sports journalists **did not** examine reporting techniques, routines, and culture

Instead:

- Armstrong's [poor] character
- How **"we" as fans** are disappointed in sports figures, cheating
- If good Armstrong did outweighs bad



# This study

- The final sample consisted of 201 news segments, aired between July 3, 1999, and July 25, 2010, on U.S. TV networks
- Reports ranged from 10 seconds to 6 minutes, 20 seconds in length.

Network	Frequency	Percent of Sample
ABC	60	29.9%
FNC	51	25.4%
CNN	37	18.4%
CBS	32	15.9%
NBC	21	10.4%

- **Reporters** *described* Armstrong in ways that embodied the hero myth in 56 reports, or about 28% of the sample
  - No statistically significant difference between networks and reporters' descriptions
- **Sources** and **Armstrong** himself
  - 12 reports (6% of sample) and 8 reports (4%) respectively

## Visual portrayals

- **105 segments** (52.5%) displayed hero myth
- Only **five** instances where a segment had hero myth, and **did not also** show him in a yellow jersey or wearing a yellow Livestrong bracelet,  $X^2(1, N = 198) = 52.813, p < .001$ .



## Visual portrayals

- Varied significantly **between networks**
- Effect of **airing date** on hero portrayal was significant,  $F(68,132) = 2.17, p < .001$



Cancer/hero myth

1999

2010

Drug accusations

- Using a **hero narrative** is a “normal” part of the American sports journalism
  - Many sports journalists were fans before they were journalists
  - It isn’t clear if sports journalists are consciously aware of their creation, perpetuation.
  - Type of imagery changed as myth changed

