Trent Crimm, The Independent: The Image of the Journalist in *Ted Lasso*

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Introduction

With its eponymous character as the heart of the show, *Ted Lasso* has been an early success for the Apple TV+ streaming platform. Jason Sudeikis plays Ted Lasso, coach of AFC Richmond, a football club based in England. Lasso had some success coaching an American college football team in his home state of Kansas, but he is met with immediate ridicule as soon as he accepts the position to coach a soccer or international football team, an entirely different sport from Lasso’s expertise. The criticism comes from everyone, including the crowded pressroom. One reporter leading the charge is Trent Crimm of *The Independent*, who does not hesitate to point out Lasso’s deficiencies. However, over time, most characters on the show come to understand and support Lasso, while others have the opposite trajectory. In this paper, I will explore these shifts to understand how Crimm transforms in his role as a journalist, and through the analysis of the themes identified, I will examine the image of the journalist as reflected in Crimm’s character arc.

To understand Crimm, we must first understand Lasso, a character born out of a collaboration between Jason Sudeikis, Brendan Hunt, and Joe Kelly during their time in the comedy troupe Boom Chicago (Hailu, 2021). A rougher version of the character appeared in a four-minute NBC Sports television advertisement in 2013. The show *Ted Lasso* was greenlit
several years later, and it premiered in August 2020 (Fienberg, 2020). Some of the commentary Lasso uses in the 2013 advertisement spot does not transfer to the television show, specifically the slurs used to denigrate women (e.g., in reference to the cut of a player’s shorts, Lasso taunts, “Can I get those in the women’s section!?”) (NBCSportsNetwork, 2013). However, the pressroom examples from the commercial did make their way into the pilot episode of the *Ted Lasso* show, such as the mistakes Lasso makes in discussing international football (e.g., Lasso says, “We’re gonna play hard for all four quarters” in reference to American football. To which a reporter amends, “two halves.”) (NBCSportsNetwork, 2013). The scene in the pressroom of the *Ted Lasso* series set the stage for the introduction of Crimm, but some of that content preexisted the series by seven years in the television spot from 2013. Despite the mistakes Lasso makes, he still moves forward without any visible qualms.

To further illustrate Lasso’s radical optimism and acceptance, a scene in the second episode of season one encapsulates his perspective well: “You know what the happiest animal on earth is?” Lasso asks player Sam Obisanya after Obisanya was put down by his teammates for failing to score a goal during practice. Lasso’s question confuses Obisanya, who shakes his head in response to the question. “It’s a goldfish,” Lasso continues, “You know why?” Perplexed, Obisanya says, “No.” Lasso immediately replies, “Got a ten second memory. Be a goldfish, Sam” (Hunt, Sudeikis, & Braff, 2020). The goldfish metaphor is an excellent way to describe Lasso’s approach to everything—he chooses to have a ten second memory to give people the benefit of the doubt. If a person behaves poorly, Lasso chooses not to hold their past transgressions against them. Every interaction can be a blank slate. This narrative fidelity, as Fisher (1989) described it, remains consistent throughout the series.
As the series was further developed, the creators develop a character that embodies the opposite of Lasso, to create a dual dynamic of engagement. James Lance is cast to play Crimm, and he meets those criteria fully. Crimm comes off as intellectual and sophisticated, even as he blurts out a profane judgmental proclamation upon meeting Lasso. The dynamic between Lasso and Crimm places Crimm as the straight man (Jeffries, 2017). Crimm rarely wavers in the face of Lasso’s antics. As we will see in the themes and results of this paper, Crimm’s straight man demeanor transforms into an alliance that questions journalistic integrity. As Ehrlich & Saltzman (2015) posited, this kind of shift can be problematic with respect to framing the work of journalists. In a similar example to the Lasso and Crimm dynamic, “Cal McAffrey in State of Play engages in questionable conduct driven by a wrenching conflict of interest. He has been close friends with the congressman, and he simultaneously tries to protect and expose his friend” (Ehrlich & Saltzman, 2015, p. 46). Like Crimm, McAffrey attempts to do his job as a journalist, but ultimately, the practices were flawed. This moral question is raised in the final scene of season two, but whether Crimm faces true accountability for his actions is left for the viewers to decide. There simply is not enough time left in the last episode of season two to account for these repercussions.

Journalists are held to a higher standard and for good reason. Similar to journalistic integrity, Ödmark (2021) identified several ethical values for comedians, and by extension, comedically situated television shows like Ted Lasso. Truth-telling was identified first in a list of traits such programs should have, specifically “the idea of presenting reliable data and not engag[ing] in deception” (Ödmark, 2021, p. 222). In shows like Ted Lasso, which have the tendency to be both comedic and dramatic, what viewers take in can be “a refracted version of reality,” but it “should not be consciously misleading” (Ödmark, 2021, p. 222). As we will later
see, Crimm acknowledges his affront to journalistic practices and takes the heat for such actions. Whether this is enough to make up for Crimm’s actions is still not addressed in the few minutes after the reveal at the end of season two. However, I am engaging in this work to understand how Crimm arrives at this place and how we can interpret the image of the journalist that Crimm is projecting.

**Methodology**

To better understand Crimm’s image of the journalist, I used content analysis to examine the first two seasons of *Ted Lasso*. At the time of this writing, a third season has not yet been released. Using the available content from the Apple TV+ platform, I watched and rewatched all episodes featuring Crimm or discussions about Crimm, even when he is not present in a scene. Some of Crimm’s actions and journalistic commentary are told via other characters, so those scenes have also been included for analysis.

The data were manually coded to identify commonalities and narrative threads. The narrative threads are important, because they confirmed whether the coding matched its intent (Fisher, 1989). After the data were coded, I rewatched the episodes again to confirm their validity and overall reflection of Crimm as a journalist. Some segments have also been transcribed to highlight their importance to these themes. The themes indicate a shift in Crimm, beginning with a strict adherence to journalistic integrity (and even the integrity of football, as we will see in his first scene) toward a focus on friendship.

**Themes and Results**

After coding and organizing the data, three themes emerged based on Crimm’s interactions with Lasso. These themes include (1) incredulity, (2) transition, and (3) flipped
alignances. To understand how I arrived at these themes, I will present each one using Fisher’s (1989) narrative form to match the viewer’s experience of the television show.

**Theme 1: Incredulity**

On his first day at AFC Richmond, Lasso is given a tour by Rebecca Welton, the new owner of the club. Shortly thereafter, Lasso is thrust into the press room where dozens of reporters are seen waiting and clamoring for his attention. Lasso then admits that he knows nothing about international football or soccer. He then fumbles his description of the sport by describing game play as four quarters, which constitutes American football. After one of the reporters corrects the game play as two halves, Lasso’s blunders continue by omitting the possibility of a tie as a game outcome. The scene jump cuts to several responses of people showing displeasure at Lasso’s lack of knowledge. Leslie Higgins, the Director of Football Operations, decides to cut their losses and limits the press conference to one last reporter. Lasso calls on a person in the middle of the second row. Lasso says, “I like your glasses.” The journalist Lasso called on thanks him. It is at this point where we hear an introduction repeated throughout this journalist’s ten appearances in the first two seasons of the show: “Trent Crimm, *The Independent.*”

“I just want to make sure I heard this right,” begins Crimm, “You’re an American who has never set foot in England, whose athletic success has only come at the amateur level—a second tier one at that—and is now being charged with the leadership of a premier league football club despite clearly possessing very little knowledge of the game” (Sudeikis, et al., 2020). With a smile never leaving his face, Lasso replies, “You got a question in there, Trent?” Appearing perplexed, Crimm responds, “Yeah. Is this a fucking joke?” The scene then cuts to fans at a bar watching the press conference and then players of AFC Richmond in the locker
room showing their support for Crimm’s comments. An unnamed reporter asks if Lasso can name any footballers. Lasso mentions Renaldo, and then stumbles in describing David Beckham, while the press room descends into chaos. The team owner, Rebecca Welton, then steps in and admonishes the press for their behavior, calling them a “salty bunch” (Sudeikis, et al., 2020). Welton points out the fact that the room is fuller than it has been in a long time. Her speech calms down the fray, and she asserts that the “Ted Lasso way” will solve their consistent state of “mediocrity” (Sudeikis, et al., 2020).

In season 1 episode 3, an episode actually called “Trent Crimm: The Independent,” a photo of Lasso comforting Keely Jones, the girlfriend of a star player Jamie Tartt, will be released via The Sun. Rebecca Welton, having planted the story, decides to shut it down. As a compromise, Welton asks Lasso to have an exclusive interview with Crimm. On the morning of the interview, Crimm comes to watch AFC Richmond practice, and he learns that one of the maintenance personnel from the club, Nathan Shelley, contributed a play that the team was practicing.

Later in the interview, Crimm asks Lasso about a reported team party that happened after AFC Richmond’s loss to Crystal Palace. “I never concerned myself with wins or losses,” Lasso says matter-of-factly (Becker & Marshall, 2020). Shortly thereafter, Lasso invites Crimm to join him and one of his assistant coaches and best friend, Coach Beard, for their visit at an elementary school. Crimm is incredulous, and he says this visit was not a coincidence. Lasso responds with his signature cheer, saying that it truly was a coincidence. At the visit, Lasso introduces the captain of AFC Richmond, Roy Kent. Kent gives a few profanity-laced comments, which strangely endears the children to Kent. After playing a few football moves with kids, and Lasso sustaining a bloody nose in the process, Crimm witnesses Kent chewing out Lasso. Kent accuses
Lasso of playing mind games by giving him *A Wrinkle in Time*. When Kent asks what the book means, Crimm steps forward and gives a synopsis, “It’s a lovely novel. It’s the story of a young girl’s struggle with the burden of leadership as she journeys through space.” Lasso agrees with the description. Kent asks, “Am I supposed to be the little girl?” Lasso responds, “I’d like you to be” (Becker & Marshall, 2020). Kent chews them both out and walks away.

Crimm and Lasso go to dinner at a family restaurant, and Lasso orders the waiter to make it as though they were preparing the meal for their family. The food was spicier than Lasso bargained for, which impacted the rest of the interview. Crimm considered the meal a reflection of Lasso’s recklessness and ignorance. The piece written by Crimm was titled, “Wayward Ted.”

The scene in this episode shows Higgins reading the article to Welton. In it, Crimm writes, “Whatever you think of Ted Lasso as a football coach, I assure you the truth is harder to swallow. And swallow you must, because Ted is out there in the community either bravely or stupidly facing the music. That’s for you to decide. And yes, he is in over his head, insisting twice that he didn’t care if Richmond won or lost. But, if the Lasso way is wrong, it’s hard to imagine being right. In a business that celebrates ego, Ted reigns his in. His coaching style is subtle, and he never hits you over the head, slowly growing so you can no longer ignore his presence. Whether that means allowing followers to become leaders, or a show of respect, eating food so spicy that it is sure to reap massive havoc on his intestines. And though I believe Ted Lasso will fail here, and Richmond will suffer the embarrassment of relegation, I won’t gloat when it happens, because I cannot help but root for him” (Becker & Marshall, 2020). Welton curses at the end, because her plan to destroy Richmond as revenge to her cheating former spouse, Rupert Mannion, is failing. Mannion’s favorite team is AFC Richmond.
Theme 2: Transition

Over the rest of season one and the onset of season two, AFC Richmond experiences a lot of changes. As the episodes move forward, AFC Richmond improves their performance and gains more acclaim, despite being demoted from the Premier League. Welton eventually comes around to Lasso, and she becomes one of his closest friends. Even when Lasso learns the truth about the circumstances around his hiring—Welton wanting the team to play badly so her ex-husband suffers—but that did not even phase Lasso. Their friendship becomes one of the hallmarks of the show, and Welton commits to supporting the team as they improve. This shift is important because Lasso starts to suffer from mental health issues over season two. Sport psychologist Dr. Sharon Fieldstone is brought in to support the team and staff with therapy sessions, and she supports Lasso as he struggles to address the main source of his panic attacks. The team also experiences changes with star Roy Kent retiring and other members become standouts, such as Sam Obisanya. Keeley Jones, a former model and girlfriend of Roy Kent, becomes a public relations coordinator for AFC Richmond, and her PR career starts to take off. Nate Shelley moves from kit man to assistant coach, and his propulsion forward is notable in a short period of time. In a pep talk while shopping with Shelley, Jones tells him how similar the two of them are, and that sometimes “we have to go for it” (Garron & Delaney, 2021). Shelley then impulsively kisses Jones, but Jones does not kiss back. Shelley apologizes. “It’s okay,” Jones says, “It happens to the best of us” (Garron & Delaney, 2021). Shelley returns to the dressing room and spits at his own reflection.

Later in the penultimate episode of season two, Lasso comes home after a final dinner with Dr. Fieldstone, who will be leaving the next morning. Lasso receives a text message from Crimm. The message says, “Hello, Ted. This is Trent Crimm. The Independent. This will be in
the print edition tomorrow morning” (Garron & Delaney, 2021). A link then appears with the headline, “Coach Lasso suffered panic attack during FA Cup match says anonymous source” (Garron & Delaney, 2021). Lasso’s smile morphs into confusion as he clicks on the link. Beneath the headline, Crimm’s name is included as the author. Crimm continues with more text messages: “As a journalist, I had to write that. But as someone who respects you… My source was Nate” (Garron & Delaney, 2021). As Lasso processes Shelley’s betrayal, Crimm sends another message, “Would you like to comment?” Lasso finally responds by saying, “No comment” (Garron & Delaney, 2021). As the scene fades out, “Karma Police” by Radiohead begins to play, chanting “This is what you’ll get” (Radiohead, 1997).

In the season two finale, Lasso receives text messages of support now that the article has been released. Lasso walks into Welton’s office, where she is joined by Jones and Higgins. All three greet Lasso as he walks in, and Jones adds, “I’m so sorry about the article, Ted.” Lasso responds, “Oh, that’s okay, Keeley. You know what they say, ‘No such thing as bad publicity,’ right? Although, I think they might have been wrong about that one, which is a bummer, because they were spot on about the whole beer before liquor thing” (Sudeikis, Kelly, & Lowney, 2021). Lasso leans over to offer Welton his daily offering of biscuits. “Here you go,” he says. “Thank you, Ted,” Welton says as she accepts the pink box, “and you know you have our full support.” Lasso expresses his appreciation. Jones laments, “I still wish I could have done something before that dick Trent Crimm posted the article.” Lasso shakes his head and says, “Aw, come on, Trent’s a good guy. He’s just doing a gig.” “Well, don’t worry,” Welton replies, “I’m going to speak directly to the owner of the paper to see who this anonymous source was.” “Aw, come on,” Lasso says with full knowledge that the culprit was Shelley, “No need. The fact is
everything they said was true. And unlike Lieutenant Kaffee,¹ I actually can handle the truth.” Higgins replies with a reverent, “Mm, hmm.” “Well then,” offers Jones, “My advice is no press until after the match” (Sudeikis, Kelly, & Lowney, 2021). Welton agrees and then bites into a particularly salty biscuit. Lasso then admits that he might have mixed up the salt and sugar, which reflects Lasso’s difficulty with handling the situation, despite the smile on his face.

Later, Shelley walks into the office looking for Kent. When he cannot find him, Shelley asks Coach Beard where Kent might be. Beard replies matter-of-factly, “No. You seen this?” In reference, Beard raises a copy of Crimm’s article about Lasso’s panic attack. Shelley stumbles over his words until he finally settles with, “Yes, it’s awful.” “Yeah,” Beard replies, “It was awful.” The tension of the exchange indicates that Beard figured out that Shelley was the source, and “It was awful” was in reference to Shelley’s actions. “Yeah,” Shelley says quickly and leaves the room.

As the team gets ready to practice, Lasso makes an announcement: “Hey fellas, before we get started here, I want to talk to y’all about the article you saw in the paper this morning.” Lasso then makes a few quips about how they read it on their phones rather than the physical newspaper, and then he gets back on track. “The point is,” Lasso continues, “y’all found out about it from somewhere when you should have found out about it from me first. I chose not to tell y’all, and that was dumb. You know, fellas, we make a lot of choices in our lives every single day” (Sudeikis, Kelly, & Lowney, 2021). As Lasso digresses into a comment about the choices he has made, the camera focuses on Shelley with a guilty look on his face. In reference to not telling the team about his mental health issues, Lasso says, “That was a bad choice, but I can’t be wasting time wishing for a do-over on all that. That ain’t how choices work, no sir.”

¹ A reference to Tom Cruise’s character, Daniel Kaffee, in *A Few Good Men.*
After making another obscure reference about letting someone borrow his Chicago Bulls starter jacket and never getting it back, Lasso continues: “Every choice is a chance, fellas, and I didn’t give myself a chance to build further trust with y’all” (Sudeikis, Kelly, & Lowney, 2021). Lasso asks for their forgiveness, and the players echo sentiments of support. The players then pledge to find out who the anonymous source was and threatened to harm the person. Lasso cuts them off and insist that the players do not find the “rat.” Instead, Lasso insists that the team focuses on their next match and diverts their attention to practicing Shelley’s latest play.

Later, Lasso and Beard are having dinner, and Beard asks, “So, you gonna say anything?” Lasso replies, “Well, I mean, eventually, yeah. You may have noticed through the years that I can be quite loquacious.” “No,” Beard says pointedly, “To Nate. The anonymous source.” Lasso grunts and asks, “Why, what makes you think it was Nate?” Beard looks intensely at Lasso, and Lasso indirectly admits that he knew. “You gotta let ‘em come to you,” Lasso says. Beard replies, “That’s not going to happen. Some people need a little push.” “Well,” Lasso explains, “I ain’t pushing nobody” (Sudeikis, Kelly, & Lowney, 2021). Lasso says it will not help Shelley, but Beard adds that it might help Lasso.

**Theme 3: Flipped Alliances**

A series of realizations hit before the final game of the season. Welton finds out that her ex-husband, Rupert Mannion, bought rival team West Ham United FC, which explains why he gave her his shares of AFC Richmond recently after Welton’s father died. Later, Shelley and Lasso talk just after the team heads to the field. “You made me feel like I was the most important person in the world,” Shelley says, “and then you abandoned me” (Sudeikis, Kelly, & Lowney, 2021). Shelley describes how hard he worked to make Lasso notice him, and Shelley says he wanted Lasso to “like me again, but the more I did, the less you cared.” Believing that Lasso
calling Shelley’s play “Nate’s False Nine” set him up for failure—with emphasis on “false”—Shelley considered himself the fall man. As Lasso steps in to apologize and clear up the misunderstanding, Shelley curses at him and leaves.

AFC Richmond struggles early in the game, but “Nate’s False Nine” succeeds and promotes AFC Richmond to the Premier League. Shelley leaves looking agitated as the game concludes. Lasso walks back to his office amid screams of joy from the triumphant team. On his desk, Lasso finds his handwritten “Believe” sign ripped in half. A look of disappointment is clear on Lasso’s face. Later, Lasso is back in the pressroom trying to respond to reporters talking over each other. Lasso finally gets their attention, and he starts by addressing the article written by Crimm. However, Crimm is not in the audience of reporters, which is a first, and Lasso is clearly thrown by Crimm’s absence. “I want to share with y’all the truth about my recent struggles with anxiety and my overall concern with how we discuss and deal with mental health in athletics” (Sudeikis, Kelly, & Lowney, 2021). The scene cuts, but the viewer is left to assume that Lasso shared everything related to his mental health that viewers already witnessed throughout the season.

As Lasso leaves for the day, Crimm is waiting for him in the parking lot. They exchange some banter, and then Lasso asks why Crimm was not at the press conference. “Because I am no longer a reporter,” Crimm answers, “I was fired when they found out I revealed an anonymous source.” “Oh snap,” Lasso says, “I didn’t say anything, I promise.” “No, I know, Ted” Crimm responds, “I did.” They exchange a few more words, and then Lasso asks, “You know what this makes you now, right?” Crimm nods, “Trent Crimm, Independent” (Sudeikis, Kelly, & Lowney, 2021). Notably, Crimm leaves off the article “the” in his former affiliation, marking his own independence from The Independent. Lasso laughs, and Crimm admits his father made the same
joke. As they start to head out, Crimm offers Lasso a ride, but Lasso declines in favor of walking. Lasso is already gone when Crimm approaches his car. As Crimm tries to open his door, it appears he locked his keys inside, and Crimm mutters to himself just as the scene fades out.

The next few scenes follow Jones and Kent as Jones leaves to start her new PR firm, and later, Obisanya reveals his plans to open a Nigerian restaurant. Then, the screen fades to black again, and rejoins two months later at the field of West Ham United FC. The team is running drills, and a figure with his back to viewers comes into view. Mannion comes into the shot and whispers into the person’s ear and pats his shoulder. The figure turns around, and the person is revealed to be Shelley, who approaches the camera with a smirk on his face. Viewers are led to believe that Shelley is now the head coach of West Ham United FC. “Yankee and the Brave” by Run the Jewels (2020) plays in the background as the scene fades to black. With that, season two concludes.

Discussion

As the three themes illustrate, Crimm faces a personal dilemma in his final story as a journalist, and he chooses Lasso over his purportedly strong adherence to journalistic integrity. The source of his information in the story about Lasso’s panic attack presents a different ethical quandary for Crimm. He writes the story anyway like any good journalist would. However, he also tells Lasso the source like any good journalist would not. The personal ethical dilemma outweighs Crimm’s journalistic dilemma, so he chooses Lasso over his career. To Crimm’s credit, he tells The Independent management that he revealed his source, which appropriately leads to his firing. The show does not go much further beyond this reveal to account for any additional ramifications to his former publisher. Would their overall integrity come into question
after one of its most prominent journalists outed a source? Potentially. Had this happened in the real world, the ramifications would be swift not just for Crimm, but also anyone or any entity who had associations with him. Although one could say Crimm locking his keys in his car after the exchange with Lasso reflects some fallout that viewers could observe, it could also be a narrative approach to indicate what is to come for Crimm and his associates (Fisher, 1989).

Overall, Crimm’s dedication to the truth, which can be seen early on in his first exposé on Lasso, remains intact for the most part. Crimm’s decision to reveal his source and tell the truth about that revelation to his employer is a double-edged sword. He is honest to Lasso, the subject of his final journalistic piece, but he is also honest to his employer, *The Independent*. This duality complicates Ödmark’s (2021) ethical trait of truth-telling, because Crimm breaks journalistic code while mostly maintaining his honesty throughout. The only deception that could be seen here is Crimm’s disloyalty to Shelley as his source. Crimm uses Shelley’s information to write a story, but Crimm’s lack of protection of Shelley’s identity from Lasso reflects one unaddressed narrative thread. Perhaps the writers could explore this more in season three.

In terms of a journalistic code, keeping sources’ identities secret from the public would not be a lie or deception, because it promotes future truth-telling by those sources and protects them from blowback after coming forward. In fact, this expectation of journalists is the foundation of all the work they do, especially when there could be consequences for the source. However, Crimm is no longer concerned with his longevity in the field, so he takes honesty to the furthest limit. Now that Crimm knows Lasso as well as he does, he considers Shelley’s breach of Lasso’s personal confidentiality to be far more egregious than his own actions of outing Shelley to Lasso. As we can see in the themes that emerged from this research, Lasso has shown himself to have a limited capacity to judge others, such as the goldfish metaphor
discussed earlier. This is a choice Lasso makes in all situations, and this one seems to be no exception.

There is still much to be learned from the *Ted Lasso* series, such as the future of Crimm and how Lasso ultimately responds to Shelly’s new role as head coach of West Ham United FC. More scholarship needs to be done on this series when the next season comes out, which could reportedly be its last (Echebiri, 2022). More content analysis studies focusing on different characters could yield additional data on the series as a whole. Ultimately, this study concludes with a complicated view of Crimm’s truth-telling (Ödmark, 2021). Journalistic practice is uncomplicated when it comes to protecting sources, so Crimm’s reflection of journalism overall is neither an accurate nor an aspirational one. When it comes to narrative intrigue, Crimm was dramatic and heart-felt in his actions. Crimm is on his own journey, like the girl from a *Wrinkle in Time*, a reference Crimm certainly enjoyed far more than Kent.
References


Run the Jewels. (2020). Yankee and the brave (episode 4) [Song]. On RTJ4. Jewel Runners; BMG.
