12-2010

We're Not Thugs and Rappers: An Examination of African American Male Athletes' Perceptions of the Media

Keia Janese Bragg
University of Tennessee - Knoxville, kbragg2@utk.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://trace.tennessee.edu/utk_gradthes

Part of the Behavioral Disciplines and Activities Commons, Behavior and Behavior Mechanisms Commons, Cognition and Perception Commons, Educational Psychology Commons, Inequality and Stratification Commons, Race and Ethnicity Commons, Social Psychology Commons, Social Psychology and Interaction Commons, and the Sports Sciences Commons

Recommended Citation

To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a thesis written by Keia Janese Bragg entitled "We're Not Thugs and Rappers: An Examination of African American Male Athletes' Perceptions of the Media." I have examined the final electronic copy of this thesis for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science, with a major in Recreation and Sport Management.

Robin L. Hardin, Major Professor

We have read this thesis and recommend its acceptance:

Sylvia A. Trendafilova, Steven N. Waller

Accepted for the Council:
Carolyn R. Hodges

Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School

(Original signatures are on file with official student records.)

To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a thesis written by Keia Janese Bragg entitled "We're Not Thugs or Rappers: An Examination of African American Male Athletes' Perceptions of the Media." I have examined the final electronic copy of this thesis for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science, with a major in Recreation and Sport Management.

<u>Robin L. Hardin, Major Professor</u>

We have read this thesis and recommend its acceptance:

<u>Sylvia A. Trendafilova</u>

<u>Steven N. Waller</u>

Accepted for the Council:

<u>Carolyn R. Hodges</u>
Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School

(Original signatures are on file with official student records).

We're Not Thugs or Rappers: An Examination of African American Male Athletes' Perceptions of the Media

A Thesis
Presented for
The Master's of Science Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Keia Janese Bragg
December 2010

Abstract

Manipulation of stories and events expose issues of false representation and stereotyping within the mainstream media. This research examined the media's role in shaping the behaviors and experiences of African American male athletes while using Critical Race Theory as the framework in conducting the research. A focus group consisting of six former African American male student-athletes was conducted. A semi-structured interview schedule was used in order to allow for open discussion. The Constant Comparison Method was instrumental in thematizing the data while QDA Miner software was used to analyze the data. Four themes emerged from the focus group: the media's negative perceptions, feelings about the media, positive influence of the media, and behavior changes. The former athletes felt that the media represent them in a negative way. The findings proved that the media do have an impact on African American male athletes and that they do feel pressured to conform a certain way because of the media. The participants felt inspired not to conform to the images of other African American male athletes in the media, but to prove the media wrong in terms of what it means to be an African American male athlete. Future research should explore the media's impact on younger generations of African American male athletes as well as African American female athletes to compare whether similarities exists between the groups.

Key Words: *Media, African American, Image, Conform, Experiences, Critical Race Theory*

Table of Contents

Chapter 1 Introduction

The media have become a large part of culture in 21st century America. They play a role in "shaping social norms and values as well as altering individuals' own identities" (Withycombe, 2009, p. 4). The role that the media play in shaping the attitudes and beliefs of athletes as well as society has been of great importance to many scholars (Whisenant & Pedersen, 2004). These scholars feel as though the media's "words and images have a major impact on societal processes and institutions…the influence of the media is projected not only by what is being said, but also what is not being reported through the absence of coverage" (Whisenant & Pedersen, 2004, p. 55). Much of the images of minorities by the media contribute to the public's opinion about racial policies as well (Fujioka, 2005). It is important to understand that America is a "representation-driven society" and that "Americans have allowed themselves to live via stereotypes" (Withycombe, 2009, p. 4).

From a racial perspective, African American men "have been reduced to mere caricatures of their true selves' (Withycombe, 2009, p. 4). Fujioka (2005) confirms that "negative minority images have been prevalent in the mainstream media" (p. 451). As a result, the negative portrayals of African Americans have led many white viewers of sports to perceive African Americans in a more negative context (Fujioka, 2005). This fact is important because if white viewers have a negative perception of this group, it can influence many decisions that they make in regard to African Americans, such as hiring practices and also cause them to place stereotypes on this group. The concept of hegemony can be applied to the media's role in portraying African American male athletes. The mainstream media and sport "are the most prominent and hegemonic institutions and cultural practices in society" (Whisenant & Pedersen, 2004).The

concept of ethnic identity (Fujioka, 2005) and hegemonic theory (Whisenant & Pedersen, 2004) should be also discussed to illustrate the media's role in portraying African American male athletes. Ethnic identity and hegemonic theory will be discussed in detail in the literature review. Fujioka (2005) mentions how ethnic identities can be formed through the mainstream media, and how this is a representation of the social structures within each ethnic group. Both theories relate to how an individual's identity is shaped by whatever group that they may identify with. Fujioka (2005) refers to the concept of self-categorization when she explains ethnic identities. Whisenant and Pedersen (2004) go further to suggest that these groups are then subordinated and forced to accept the norms of the dominant group in society.

When players in general commit an act of indecency, the media amplify the situation and direct negative attention towards these players, which can ruin the athlete's reputation. Certain portrayals of African American male athletes can also lead to stereotypes. Negative attention can prove detrimental to the athlete's performance and hinder them from focusing clearly on competing (Ott & Puymbroeck, 2010). Media distractions can result in "increased anger, confusion, fatigue, and tension" that affect athletic performance (Ott & Puymbroeck, 2010). Preserving the African American image in the media is important because "for African Americans, mainstream media as well as the Black-oriented (ethnic) media serve as one of the influential sources of information about in-group through which African American concepts and identity are developed and negotiated" (Fujioka, 2005, p. 22). The media generally do not promote an African American male athlete who is a positive role model to his children or a faithful husband to his wife, and who also gives back to his community or has never been to jail.

The media direct so much attention on the negative actions of athletes, that often the positive qualities are overlooked. The media also sometimes fail to recognize that being an athlete is only one aspect of African American male players. The African American NBA superstar Grant Hill, for example can also be known for his collection of African American art (Molloseau, 2006). It is interesting to know that,

> although Hill is known for his gentlemanly manner, even temper, and team play, he also hopes to be known for his willingness to stimulate other African American athletes to do things that are outside the box (Calvo, 2004, p. E1)….He has argued, I'm sure they have interests that don't fit within the stereotypical athlete, but maybe this will give them confidence to show that side (Molloseau, 2006, pp. 123-124).

Barry Bonds has also supported a number of community service projects, but the media do not report on that aspect. His community service projects include the Alameda-Contra Costa County Blood Bank, the National Marrow Donor Program and Adopt a Special Kid Foundation (O'toole, 2003).Tiger Woods would be another example. Although he has been a direct target of the media, he has put millions of dollars into the Tiger Woods Foundation, which provides grants and scholarships to help empower young adults (Fish, 2010).

Significance of the Study

It is important to understand how African American male athletes feel when they read headlines in a newspaper, see images in a magazine or on television that attempt to convey the identity of an African American male athlete because this will provide a better understanding as to whether the media has a negative or positive influence on these athletes. What these athletes

see in the media may paint a picture in their head of what they should be or who they are. It is important that these athletes' identities be based on their own experiences and interactions and not on stereotypes painted by the media. It is evident that "racism and its intersections with other forms of subordination shape the experiences of people of color very differently than whites" (Yosso, 2005, p. 72). A better understanding of the psychological impact that the media have on these male athletes would provide answers to questions that pertain to the sport in which they participate, and also their behavior (Ott & Puymbroeck, 2010). One concern is whether the media have a false perception of what it means to be an African American male athlete. This leads to the question of what the African American male identity really is, and whether there is more to being an African American male athlete than what the media portray. Akom (2008) suggests that other areas should be explored, such as how the mainstream media affects African American athletes. This research will utilize Akom's (2008) counsel as a guide to exploring this issue further in regards to the African American male athlete.

This research can be applied to broaden the perspective of the sport manager in regard to the stereotypical African American male athlete. Acknowledgement of this issue is the first step sports communication professionals could take to overcome faulty images of these athletes. Sport managers and agents are highly involved in the endorsement of athletes. Most companies that sponsor athletes seek those who have a good reputation because "for some companies, it's a tremendous investment, and when it goes bad, it is not only the loss of investment, it's a black eye for the company" (Belson & Sandomir, 2010, p. 1). Many companies have even sought out insurance policies to protect their brand in the event that an athlete suffers public humiliation that

would ruin their image (Belson & Sandomir, 2010). Endorsements result in more money for the athlete and for the sport agent. Tiger Woods had approximately $4.6 billion in endorsements with Nike, American Express, Asahi, General Mills, Golf Digest, and Rolex (Keating, 2000). Before Kobe Bryant was arrested for sexual assault, he had signed a $45 million deal with Nike ("Kobe Bryant Resumes Endorsement Career," 2005). Michael Vick had an endorsement portfolio of $7 million a year before he was arrested for dog fighting charges (Briggs, 2007). These same athletes lost a great amount of endorsements with the media's continued use of negativity to portray their situations. Sport managers must be aware of this when managing African American male athletes. They should focus more on the positive attributes of these athletes, which will lead the athlete as well as the sport manager to become more successful. It is evident that there is an image problem for African American male athletes. The problem stems from the media "which chooses to point its cameras at the most ridiculous among us rather than the most productive" (Watkins, 2009, p. 3). Examples would be how the media focused heavily on the cases of Kobe Bryant, Michael Vick, and Tiger Woods. The mainstream media brought much attention to these cases through television reports and articles about these athletes. A lot of research has been conducted using content analysis that illustrates the different portrayals of African Americans in the media such as that of Yosso (2002), Buffington and Fraley (2008), and Billings (2003). Minimal research has been conducted on how African American male athletes feel about these images that are presented in the mainstream media. This study will serve to address this and add to the body of knowledge concerning this topic.

Purpose of the Study

  This research will utilize concepts from Critical Race Theory as a framework for this study and discuss how the theory can be applied to analyze the experiences of African American male athletes. The researcher seeks to determine how African American male athletes feel about the media. The researcher will also investigate whether the portrayal of African American male athletes in the media pressures them to conform to media images. The researcher has chosen to use the term African American throughout this research to represent "persons of African descent who reside in the United States…Americans whose are considered to have African heritage (biologically or socio-culturally)" (Withycombe, 2009, p. 9). This term will also be used to represent American black male athletes as well. These two terms are often synonymous and could be used interchangeably, however, this researcher will only use the term African American male when referring to athletes in this research.

Chapter 2 Review of Literature

History and Evolution of Critical Race Theory

Critical Race Theory has been a "growing movement in the law, instigated by young writers" (Withycombe, 2009, p. 95). Since its introduction in the 1970s, CRT maintains its core structure (Ladson-Billings, 2005). The real issue at hand over the years has been how "everyone, regardless of his/her declared racial ethnic identity is positioned in relation to whiteness (Ladson-Billings, 2005, p. 3). In the late 1980s, CRT evolved from the criticisms of the Critical Legal Studies (CLS) Movement (Yosso, 2005). Many scholars questioned the traditional ways of the oppressive legal system, suggesting that strategies be put in place in order to bring about change (Yosso, 2005). During this time, there was a need for a more critical approach to analyzing oppression and subordination. Civil Rights laws had been structured only around the oppressions of one group of people, and the impact of these laws was beginning to depreciate.

Such conditions inspired the foundations of Critical Race Theory, which was heavily influenced by the scholarship of W.E.B. Dubois (Rucker, 2003). Dubois was perhaps one of the most influential scholars and activists of the 1900s. Most of Dubois' work centered on the notion of white supremacy and the problem of African American double-consciousness (Rucker, 2003, p. 37). Dubois stated that double consciousness was "a sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity" (Rucker, 2003, p. 37). Dubois sought out to "make it possible for a man to be both Negro and American" (Rucker, 2003, p. 37). Through his accomplishments and writings, Dubois helped found the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People

(NAACP), in which he was the editor for the association's official magazine (Rucker, 2003). Dubois' greatest contribution was that he

> effectively created a model for the community-control black nationalism that black power advocates of the mid to late 1960's would passionately argue for…Dubois's concept of self-segregation became the basis for a revolutionary Pan-Africanist tradition that would be espoused later" (Rucker, 2003, p. 38).

Scholars such as Derrick Bell and Alan Freeman specifically, agreed that the progress that had been made with the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s was deteriorating, and therefore, sought to confront this issue (Thomas, 2005). As Bell and Freeman began to pull away from CLS, they implemented parts of Dubois' research to form what is now called Critical Race Theory (Yosso, 2005). Bell and Freeman "attempted to inject the cultural viewpoints of people of color, derived from a common history of oppression, into their efforts to reconstruct a society crumbling under the burden of racial hegemony" (Casanas, Coello, & Rocco, 2004, p. 2). In its initial stages, Critical Race theorists focused heavily on improving the slow progress of the post Civil Rights era (Yosso, 2005). It focused mainly on the binary issues of black versus white, but failed to include many other minorities that might have been oppressed as well (Yosso, 2005). Certain groups were being silenced on the basis of their gender, class, or ethnicity, and not solely in terms of black and white (Yosso, 2005). Although African Americans had an immense history of racism and oppression, they were not the only group in the United States that had been oppressed. This view was generally referred to as the black/white binary, which is "the conception that race in America consists, either exclusively or primarily, of only two constituent

racial groups, the black and the white" (Price, 2010, p.152).

Throughout the years however, "the CRT family tree has expanded to incorporate the racialized experiences of women, Latinas/os, Native Americans, and Asian Americans" (Yosso, 2005, p. 72). Its more current research suggests that although CRT is "seeded in legal tradition, it has rapidly spread to the fields of education, political science, ethnic studies, and American studies" (Withycombe, 2009, p. 95). Although CRT is grounded in legal theory, this research will explore other disciplines to examine the social, psychological, and even physical impact that the media has on African American male athletes. Currently, there are two schools of CRT research led by scholars Richard Delgado, Kimberle Crenshaw, Angela Harris, Charles Lawrence, Mari Matsuda and Patricia Williams (Withycombe, 2009). The two schools of CRT are the real world group and discourse analysts (Withycombe, 2009). The real world group focuses on issues dealing with human rights, poverty and the criminal justice system (Withycombe, 2009). Discourse analysts look at "the system of ideas by which our society constructs and understands race and racism…emphasize issues such as identity…and are likely to examine the role of ideas, thoughts, and unconscious discrimination" (Withycombe, 2009, p. 99). This research will fall under the school of discourse analysts, due to its examination of the African American male athlete identity. Even today, Critical Race theorists believe that there are "multiple ways in which African Americans, Native Americans, Asian/Pacific Islanders, Chicanas/os, and Latinas/os continue to experience, respond to, and resist racism and other forms of oppression" (Yosso, 2005, p. 4).

Implications of Critical Race Theory

Critical Race Theory provides an approach to examine interactions among people on a daily basis and utilizes these interactions to help improve the way minorities are portrayed and treated. Singer (2009) points out three facets of CRT: First, that race and racism have become a normal part of American Society. Second, narratives should be used to place emphasis on the experiences of people of color. Lastly, that those individuals with decision-making power make decisions based on his or her own self-interests and not for the common good of oppressed groups. Critical Race Theory emphasizes the importance of storytelling for improving the status quo (Singer, 2009). Storytelling allows minorities an opportunity to speak out about situations in which they have been exploited, stereotyped and mistreated. The theory reveals the "unseen largely invisible collection of patterns and habits that make up patriarchy and other types of domination" (Withycombe, 2009, p. 96). One must realize that CRT is different from other theories because "unlike most other theoretical frameworks focusing on discrimination, CRT is unique in that it requires an activist approach to understanding and changing society" (Withycombe, 2009, p. 98). CRT is also "committed to social justice and offers a liberatory or transformative response to racial, gender and class oppression" (Yosso, 2005, p. 74). The theory examines racism in a historical and contemporary context (Yosso, 2005). In this present study, CRT will be used to examine the shared experiences of African American male athletes to uncover any oppression or discrimination in the mainstream media that might have otherwise been veiled.

Validity of Critical Race Theory

Perhaps one of the most important traits of Critical Race Theory is its dynamic nature that allows one to explore experiences of minorities across many disciplines. Critical Race Theory was selected for this research because of its ability to analyze African American athletes through open dialogue that will provoke them to share the experiences they have had with the media. CRT is compatible with this study because it focuses on the fact that racism is engrained within the American culture (Singer, 2009). If this is true, one must examine the role that racism plays in the mainstream media. If those who represent the mainstream media agree with the above statement, it is equally important to understand what steps have been taken to improve racism that exists in the media. Critical Race Theory's second point is that narratives should be told in order for others to have a better understanding of the experiences of people of color (Singer, 2009). The researcher will focus mainly on this point in conducting research. The last point that those who have decision-making power only make decisions based on their own self-interest and not the interests of oppressed groups relates to the media's portrayal of African American male athletes (Singer, 2009). It is possible that the media portrays the African American male athlete in a negative way due to its own self interest to increase its customer base. Those in the media who already have a negative perception of these athletes may feel they are right and be unwilling to change. Lastly, CRT will allow the researcher to explore new themes that may emerge as a result from discussion with the African American male athletes.

Critical Race Theory in Sport

Singer (2009) uses Critical Race Theory to examine the commitment of predominantly

white institutions of higher education to the educational interests of African American male athletes. His research focuses on the unfavorable circumstances in the education of black intercollegiate athletes. Singer (2009) suggests that black male athletes are exploited by these institutions and uses CRT to analyze the impact that this has on black athletes. CRT in this study is used in the context of education. The purpose was to provide black male athletes with a voice "so that they too could reflect on the issues of institutional integrity in college sport…and analyze their perceptions of barriers to institutional integrity in college sport" (Singer, 2009, p. 106).

Singer (2009) notes that the small sample size was one limitation to the study, however, it allowed him to be able to focus on a more intimate conversation with the student athletes. A small sample size will also be used for conducting research in this study. The reason being is because the researcher wishes to gain more in-depth, valuable information from conversations with the athletes. A focus group was first conducted followed by individual interviews (Singer, 2009). One of the major themes that were discovered from Singer's study was that African American athletes felt as though racism played various roles in their experience and that they felt a strong need for more African American role models in the athletic department. This finding links to the present research by suggesting that there is a lack of role models for African American athletes, thus adding another component to this research. If there is a lack of role models in the African American community, one is led to question whether the mainstream media could play a role in portraying more positive role models for African American male athletes. One could also make the assumption based on Singer's (2009) study, that if there were

perhaps more role models for African American male athletes, it could improve the experiences that these athletes have in relation to racism in the mainstream media.

Akom's (2008) research explores the mental life of African Americans and the burden of acting white while also examining the factors that affect the daily experiences and behaviors of African Americans. In his study, Akom uses Critical Race Theory to focus specifically on how black identity has historically been defined through the lens of white supremacy (Akom, 2008). Because this research uses CRT as a guide for conducting research, the researcher feels this article is appropriate in that it addresses African American identity in terms of white supremacy. In relation to the present study, white supremacy in the mainstream media can have a direct or indirect impact on and African American male athlete's identity. Akom's conclusions reference the work of W.E. B. DuBois in stating that blacks have developed survival strategies, such as acting white to overcome supremacy (Akom, 2008). He also states that "mass-mediated images, and state practices that maintain white privilege force racialized and gender performance from Black people/people of color" (Akom, 2008, p. 5). Akom suggests that future research should examine black identity in other areas; therefore, this study will use Critical Race Theory to also look at how stereotypes in the media influence the identity of African American male athletes.

In Lawrence's (2005) research, she "investigates African American athletes' experiences of race with regard to specific incidents during their athletic careers" (pp. 99-100). She sought to understand what events affected the performance and behaviors of these athletes. The analysis resulted in five themes: being hurt, outrage and shock, team togetherness, being empowered, and differences (Lawrence, 2005). In regard to being hurt, the athletes expressed that they were hurt

because of stereotypes that had been placed on them that resulted in them receiving unfair treatment while participating in sports. Also, participants expressed the concern that there are not enough images of prestigious black athletes who are administrators and successful (Lawrence, 2005). Most of these stereotypes can relate back to the images set in the media. In Lawrence's research, the conclusion is drawn that outside influences such as this can affect the performance and behavior of African American athletes. Ott and Puymbroeck (2010) confirm this by pointing out that negative media attention is detrimental to an athlete's performance, causing increased anger, fatigue, and tension. Fujioka (2005) also confirms that images in the mainstream media influence the development of African American identity. Lawrence also agrees with the notions of Critical Race Theory that "race is vitally significant and racism is found in all sectors of society….a culture of racism is deeply ingrained in sport" (Lawrence, 2005, p. 109).

Yosso (2002) argues that there is a need "to get real about how racism, as well as gender and class-based oppression, in the United States is perpetuated in the form of entertainment media" (p. 52). This work emphasizes that the media often portray people of color as failures in society, whereas their white counterparts are portrayed as successful individuals. In Yosso's study, the purpose of CRT was to challenge racism and racial stereotypes. There was a common theme that images presented on television were negative and that the media did not display positive role models for minority groups (Yosso, 2002). Also, the students agreed that repeated negative images teach the minority that they are inferior to whites. The students, therefore, were encouraged to take action and prove the media wrong by acting contrary to the ways in which the media present them (Yosso, 2002). One student explained that "the images make her feel bad,

yet they also push her to achieve her goals" (Yosso, 2002, p. 56). This is an interesting statement. Perhaps the media can have the same impact on African American male athletes. Maybe these athletes feel the need to prove the media wrong in order to improve the African American male identity in the mainstream media. This is worth exploring further and will be incorporated into the analysis of this study. **Sport**

Media and African American Athletes

Buffington and Fraley (2008) researched the media's impact on its audience members. They examined racialized commentaries of sports reporters to determine the audience's perceptions on race as a result of these commentaries (Buffington & Fraley, 2008). Buffington and Fraley indicated that "A well-developed literature on men's sports indicates that Black and White athletes are often presented in a diametrically opposed manner, creating a "black brawn vs. white brains" (Buffington & Fraley, 2008, p. 293). This statement represents another problem of stereotyping that the media use to portray black male athletes. Buffington and Fraley (2008) point out that minimal research has been done on the sports media's impact on race perceptions of its audience members and emphasizes the need for more research on this topic. The analysis proved that most respondents justified their answers on the basis of "physical abilities--not the mental skills--of the athletes selected" (Buffington & Fraley, 2008, p. 299). Results also indicated that black athletes were chosen to be better athletes simply because of their race and physical attributes, thus proving the "brain vs. brawn" (Buffington & Fraley, 2008, p. 293) concept that was previously referenced.

Fujioka (2005) studied black media images and the influence these images have on

African American identity, and how this impacts them in terms of the perception of Affirmative Action. According to Fujioka, "In general, minority members are more frequent media users than Whites… they are more likely to consider the content of the media as real…and they are more critical audiences when evaluating how the media present in-group members" (Fujioka, 2005, p. 450). She also notes that in general, negative media images of African Americans are perceived negatively by white viewers (Fujioka, 2005). Fujioka (2005) also points out that most of the media today are white. This illustrates another vital aspect of this study; that there is a need for more minorities in the mainstream media. This would allow for a true representation of these minorities. Fujioka's (2005) study found that the more negatively the black viewers perceived media images, the more they considered these images to be less accurate. Also, it proved that the more negative the media's portrayal of African Americans was, the more negative others' perceptions on blacks would be (Fujioka, 2005). What is interesting here is that this article is suggesting that media images do lead others to have a negative perception of African Americans. From this, it can be assumed that there is a negative relationship between the media and African American identity. This article proves that African Americans believe that the media does not have a clear perception of African American identity.

Billings (2003) analyzed the different portrayals of Tiger Woods in the media as a black man and as a white man. Billings describes how many people argue that Woods' biggest contribution to golf is that he is a black man who dominates a primarily white sport. Woods, however, "does not identify himself as being black, instead, he has been derided for claiming to be ''Cablinasian…a mixture of his Caucasian, Black, Indian, and Asian backgrounds" (Billings,

2003, p. 30). Despite the fact that Woods does not identify as being fully black, Billings describes how the media still portray him as a black golfer based on his appearance (Billings, 2003). The purpose of his study was to explore how the media depicts Tiger Woods in comparison to white golfers, what stereotypes of black athletes have the media used to characterize Woods and also what impact it had on minorities who watched the golfer on television. The analysis resulted in 82.1% of comments about Tiger Woods pertaining to athletic skill. In comparison to white golfers, Woods was portrayed as more likely to have a lack of concentration and lack of composure and emotional control, thus representing a significant difference between Tiger Woods and other golfers. Lastly, the research proved that when Woods is winning, comments about him fit the traditional white athlete stereotype, which is based on more cognitive and leadership abilities, however, when he is losing, the comments tended to reflect traditional African American male athlete stereotypes, referenced in chapter one, which are based on physical and biological attributes (Billings, 2003). Obviously, there is more to an African American male athlete than his athletic ability, but this review of literature proves that the media has failed to display this adequately. Younger generations of African American male athletes may look up to Tiger Woods and feel as though they have to be exactly like Woods in the way that the media portrays him. If Woods has only been portrayed by his physical attributes that is all that children will see and therefore, they will feel as though they need to focus on their physical appearance alone. Fujioka's (2005) study is a great example of this, stating that African Americans "are more likely to consider the content of the media as real" (Fujioka, 2005, p. 450). This statement alone presents the issue that African Americans are susceptible to the media and

this research will discover whether this susceptibility is what has led many African American male athletes, such as Tiger Woods, Kobe Bryant, or Michael Vick to public humiliation.

Hegemonic Theory and Ethnic Identity

Hegemonic theory was developed by Gramsci in 1971, and is "the condition in which certain groups within a society wield authority over other groups…where certain groups---those without or limited power—allow hegemony to survive by accepting as normal reality or commonsense, their subordination" (Whisenant & Pedersen, 2004, p. 55). If hegemony is in fact present in society, this leads one to consider which group African American male athletes have been placed in by the mainstream media: the subordinate group or the dominant group. If these athletes have been placed into the subordinate category, it is of interest to know how these athletes respond to such subordination. If certain groups are forced to accept their subordination as reality, it is worth exploring what steps should be taken to improve the status quo.

The concept of ethnic identity (Fujioka, 2005) can also be discussed to illustrate the media's role in portraying African American male athletes. Ethnic identity is referred to as "a group-based identity formed and developed through a variety of social processes, including both personal experiences and mediated experiences" (Fujioka, 2005, p. 451). The foundations of ethnic identity come from recollections of the past as well as the expectations of others (Tarimo, 2010). Ethnic identities can be formed through the mainstream media, which represents "where each ethnic group stands in a social structure" (Fujioka, 2005). Ethnic identity can also be tied to social identity and self-categorization theories (Fujioka, 2005). These theories suggest that one's positive social identity is based upon a particular group to which a person belongs and that

constant interactions within this group will continue to shape positive social identity (Fujioka, 2005). Self-categorization means that "people perceive themselves as members of the in-group rather than as unique individuals, which leads people to perceive in-group similarity, yet feel more distance from out-group members" (Fujioka, 2005, p. 452). This presents a problem. If African American male athletes develop their identity through self-categorization, then the media images they see may become an in-group to which these athletes will identify with. Ethnic identity, as well as self-categorization, provides members of an ethnic group with security in which they feel a sense of belonging (Tarimo, 2010).Within this research, "the challenge is not how to overcome ethnic identities, but how to integrate them into social relationships" (Tarimo, 2010, p. 300), which is the media in this case.
Stereotypes

Like Grant Hill, other African American male athletes may identify with things other than sports. Those athletes who play football or basketball may also enjoy working with technology or even landscaping. The media only dims the public's perception of these athletes by placing them in a box that is concealed by stereotypes. Stereotypes can be defined as "overgeneralizations of group characteristics which are used to describe and evaluate people of those groups" (Hughes & Baldwin, 2002, p. 41). Stereotypes are a necessary part of human life (Hughes & Baldwin, 2002). The role of stereotypes is to "help us attain rewards (utilitarian function), defend our self-esteem (ego-defensive function), express important parts of how we think and see ourselves (value-expressive function), and organize the world around us" (Hughes & Baldwin, 2002, p. 41). Despite the fact that stereotypes may be necessary, they are negative in that they are biased, they allow people and groups to be placed in boxes, and they create

unrealistic expectations which lead to prejudices and discrimination (Hughes & Baldwin, 2002).

An example of such negative stereotypes would be that of an earlier study which found that

whites most commonly stereotyped African Americans as "argumentative, emotional,

straightforward, critical, sensitive, ostentatious, defiant, hostile, open, responsive, and

intelligent"(Hughes & Baldwin, 2002). Although some stereotypes have changed throughout the

years, they still remain negative in nature (Hughes & Baldwin, 2002). Many believe "such

notions about black identity to be problematic because they fail to account for and honor the

diversity that exists within black communities" (Eppehimer, 2006, p. 3). It has also been

suggested that some "racially stereotypical comments by a coach, sport journalist, sport leader,

or athlete" could be linked to racism (Fasting & Massao, 2010, p. 149). The media come into

play with this because "as popular images and stereotypes of various minority groups shift over

time, so do the meanings of racism" (Fasting & Massao, 2010, p. 148). Scholars believe that

mediated communication is a major factor that influences the formation of many stereotypes

(Hughes & Baldwin, 2002). Research has suggested that African American men and women "are

frequently portrayed on television in stereotypic roles such as criminal, matriarch, or welfare

mother…conversely, negative news reports about ethnic crime have been found to lead to a

perception of ethnic minorities as threatening" (Hughes & Baldwin, 2002, p. 42). Many

stereotypes that have been placed on African American male athletes are associated with existing

stereotypes in society (Muwakkil, 2002). Other stereotypes have stemmed from the notion that

African Americans are "associated with bestial behavior" which makes African Americans

"better for athletic activities that require quick bursts of speed and explosive animalistic actions"

(Muwakkil, 2002, p. 1). Buffington and Fraley (2008) point out the "black brawn vs. white brains" stereotype that suggests African Americans are widely known for their athletic talent, whereas white athletes are more known for their intelligence. African American male athletes have also been stereotyped as being "violent and felonious, irrespective of educational or financial status" ("The Gun-Toting Black Athletes Affect All Black Males," 2010, p. 1). Akom (2008) suggests that African American identity has historically been defined through the lens of white supremacy and that blacks have developed survival strategies, such as acting white to overcome supremacy due to the presence of such stereotypes. Research has found that all people can list the same stereotypes for a particular group, but that people are also able to replace "stereotypical thoughts with non-prejudice ones" (Hughes & Baldwin, 2002, p. 42). If this is true, it is possible that stereotypes within the media may be overcome if people choose to act upon non-prejudice thoughts, rather than to believe that every stereotype that they see or hear is true.

Examples

Kobe Bryant

Kobe Bryant is one example of how the media portray African American male athletes. The Los Angeles Lakers' basketball star was accused of sexually assaulting a 20-year-old woman in 2003; however, Bryant claimed the sex was consensual (Reid, 2004). After the woman told the police that she had been raped, she and Bryant both underwent physical examinations to find evidence as to whether the woman's statement was true (Benedict, 2004). The examination proved that Bryant had been with the woman, but also that the woman had been with another man as well the same night (Benedict, 2004). The case was dismissed after the woman failed to

testify in court (Reid, 2004). Although the case was dismissed, the plaintiff still filed a civil suit against Bryant, claiming that her rights had been violated (Reid, 2004). Since the case, Bryant has been scrutinized by the media who feel that "Kobe has always had a very good reputation in everything he has done. However, Bryant's reputation as a product endorser has been tarnished and could take years to repair" (Nance, 2004, p. 1). This case brought much adversity for Bryant. The negative attention from the media brought comments that referred to Bryant as "cocky and egotistical" (Carter, 2010, p.1). Other comments suggest that

> black men feel they are trading up when they bed or get a white woman in to their lives-even if it means replacing a Halle Berry with a Roseanne Barr…for the vague hope that something better is out there- even if they end up leaving Mrs. Kobe Bryants in the process (Schneider, 2003, p.1).

The media also claim that "Kobe's outrage is really genuine, considering his obvious respect for the institution of marriage. …Kobe is a piece of garbage" (Freelove, 2004, p. 1). After his arrest, it was estimated that Bryant lost approximately $4 to $6 million in endorsements, as well as his contracts with McDonald's and Nutella ("Kobe Bryant Resumes Endorsement Career," 2005). If Bryant would have been convicted of sexual assault, he could have faced life in prison and his $136 million contract would have been terminated (Reid, 2004). Because "America is a representation-driven society," (Withycombe, 2009, p. 4), what is seen on television or in the newspaper can be perceived to be real. In this particular case, the media played a role in bringing tremendous amounts of media attention to Bryant, which has destroyed his image (Nance, 2004). It was concluded that the case "had the makings of one of the most high-profile celebrity trials

since that of O.J. Simpson" (Reid, 2004, p. A01).

Tiger Woods

Another example of the media's portrayal of African American male athletes is professional golfer, Tiger Woods. Since Woods began his professional golf career in 1996, television rights for the PGA Tour have increased tremendously (Billings, 2003). His performance in golf has set him above and beyond many other golfers, placing him in first place in career earnings on the PGA Tour ("PGA Tour," 2010). Some argue that Woods' largest contribution to golf "is the impact of having a black golfer dominate a sport that is almost exclusively white" (Billings, 2003, p. 4). Although Woods identifies as multi racial, the media have portrayed him as an African American simply by the way he looks (Billings, 2003). In 2009, Woods admitted to infidelity (Brennan, 2010). A great deal of media attention was directed toward Woods during this time as well as speculations that Woods had "numerous extramarital affairs" ("Tiger Woods Statement: Admits Affairs, Taking Indefinite Break from Professional Golf," 2009, p. 1). The golfer had been married for five years and has two children ("Tiger Woods Statement: Admits Affairs, Taking Indefinite Break from Professional Golf," 2009). After making a public statement admitting to having several affairs, Woods concluded that he would be taking an indefinite leave of absence from golf in order to take time to work on himself and his marriage. He asked the media to leave his family alone, and that he was the only one to blame ("Tiger Woods Statement: Admits Affairs, Taking Indefinite Break from Professional Golf," 2009). Several comments have been made since this incident suggesting that Woods' infidelity was directly related to his ethnicity, declaring that "Tiger Woods is behaving

like a black athlete now" (Watkins, 2009, p. 1). Woods has gone from being the No. 1 golfer in the world to one whose image has taken a beating by the media ("PGA Tour," 2010). Others have also stated that "his status as a role model for children has come into question" (Miller, 2009, p. 1). Since the incident, Woods lost several of his endorsement deals, including Gatorade, AT&T and Accenture, as well as being "de-emphasized" in the marketing plans of Gillette and Tag Heuer ("Tiger Woods Loses Gatorade Endorsement," 2010). Gatorade felt that there was "no longer a role for Tiger" in their marketing efforts while Gillette stated that they "did not need a distraction of using him in their marketing" ("Tiger Woods Loses Gatorade Endorsement," 2010).

Barry Bonds

Barry Bonds is an African American baseball star who has become famous due to his accumulation of records for homeruns as well as being an outstanding defensive player (Blumert, 2001). The baseball superstar comes from a family of baseball stars, including his father, Bobby Bonds (Blumert, 2001). What is interesting is that while Bonds has never been arrested for any serious crimes, the media still have a negative perception of him (Blumert, 2001). He has been referred to by the press as overpaid, selfish and greedy (O'toole, 2003). His response to this was "I think we've let people get too close to us, and everybody seems to focus on the flaws, the negativism, instead of just enjoying the game" (O'toole, 2003, p. 138). Bonds has claimed that he is not fond of the media because he feels they are manipulative and cannot handle his honesty, and therefore, he avoids encounters with the media (Blumert, 2001). In 2003, Bonds was brought to trial with allegations of using steroids from a series of tests that had been taken since 2000

(Elias, 2009). Bonds, however denied that he had any knowledge that what his trainer had given him was steroids (Elias, 2009). In 2009, he tested positive again for steroids, and there was evidence that Bonds knowingly allowed his trainer to give him steroid injections (Elias, 2009). When questioned about the steroids scandal, Bonds responded to the media by saying, "All of you guys have lied…I'm an adult and I take responsibility for what I do, but I'm not going to allow you guys to ruin my joy" ("Slugger sidesteps questions; Chastises media," 2005). Despite the media's criticism, Bonds had a successful career. Bonds had 703 homeruns compared to Babe Ruth's 714 career homeruns by 2005, ("Slugger sidesteps questions; Chastises media," 2005). During this time, Bonds felt that most of the criticism was due to the fact that he was approaching Ruth's record. Bonds stated that "because Babe Ruth is one of the greatest baseball players ever, and Babe Ruth ain't black either...Blacks we go through a little more…I'm not a racist though, but I live in a real world. I'm fine with that" ("Slugger sidesteps questions; Chastises media," 2005, p. 1). Most of the negative attention about Bonds breaking Babe Ruth's record stemmed from the steroid scandal, which has caused many to question whether Bonds actually broke the record on his own, or with the help of performance enhancing drugs. Now, some have referred to Bonds as a "steroid junkie" (Gibson, 2006, p. 1). Others have stated that

> There is not an active player in MLB who brings more discredit to the game of baseball than Barry Bonds. The steroids bother me and I think from what I have read Bonds is guilty of using them. He has been so caught up in his own achievements that he cheated and when he was confronted about it he lied….we deserve better treatment than what we get out of players like Bonds and THAT is why I cannot stand him (Smith, 2010, p.1)

Despite the circumstances, he has not allowed the media to get to him. Because the media already dislike Bonds, the steroid scandal has only heightened the animosity that the mainstream media have for Bonds. They now not only criticize him for being "overpaid, selfish, and greedy" (O'toole, 2003, p. 138), but also portray him as a liar and cheater. The time that it will take to repair his image could be indefinite because of such criticisms.

Michael Vick

Perhaps one of the most unusual cases of an African American male athlete would be that of Michael Vick. The former quarterback for the Atlanta Falcons was the "figurehead for the Falcons and, as a dual-threat quarterback, was one of the NFL's most dynamic stars from 2001 to 2006" ("Vick, Eagles agree to 2-year deal," 2009, p. 1). He was the No. 1 draft pick in 2001 as well as the highest paid professional football player (Mortensen, Paolantonio, & Pasquarelli, 2009). In 2007, Vick was charged with financing and operating a dog fighting ring, based in Virginia on property that Vick owned (Maske, 2007). The indictment concluded that Vick was "highly involved in the operation…paid off bets when his dogs lost… he also was involved in the executions of dogs that did not perform well" (Maske, 2007, p. 1). Vick reportedly told officials that he was not aware of any dog fighting on the property; but, he was eventually sentenced to 23 months in prison for dog fighting and lying about his involvement in the dog fighting ("Apologetic Vick gets 23-month sentence on Dogfighting Charges," 2007). The Falcons' response to Vick's conviction was that "one of our players -- and therefore the Falcons -- is being presented to the public in a negative way, and we apologize to our fans and the community for that" (Maske, 2007, p. 1). He was suspended from the NFL without pay, and lost

all of his endorsements ("Apologetic Vick gets 23-month sentence on Dogfighting Charges," 2007). In the face of losing endorsements and being suspended from the NFL, Vick also had to confront his family and fans who had lost faith in him ("Apologetic Vick gets 23-month sentence on Dogfighting Charges," 2007). Vick also endured financial hardships that caused him to go bankrupt ("Vick, Eagles agree to 2-year deal," 2009) It was estimated that he has lost nearly $142 million in endorsements, NFL salary, and bonuses ("Apologetic Vick gets 23-month sentence on Dogfighting Charges," 2007). Sport fans have expressed their dislike for Vick, by making comments such as, "you can take the boy out of the ghetto, but you can't take the ghetto out of the boy...Mike would tell you he is keeping it real…Shame to see that athletic ability wasted on a moron" ("Do others hate Vick as much as I do?", 2006, p. 1). Others feel the reason for such actions were because "he doesnt know the difference between right and wrong and he thinks livin the thug life is a good thing....since when is thuggery associated with anything good?" ("Do others hate Vick as much as I do?", 2006, p. 1). Clearly Vick's image has been stained since this incident. After the incident, there were 26 football clubs that rejected the idea of bringing on Michael Vick, however, he has now returned to the NFL to play for the Philadelphia Eagles (Mortensen, et al., 2009). The media now characterize him as a "disgraced quarterback" (Mortensen, et al., 2009, p. 1). He has expressed his sincere apologies for being involved in dog fighting, and is working to repair his image for a better future in the NFL, as well as for being a role model to younger generations ("Apologetic Vick gets 23-month sentence on Dogfighting Charges," 2007).

Research Questions

The literature and theoretical framework examined in the previous sections present research that explored issues concerning the media's impact on race in sport and also studies that applied Critical Race Theory in examining race in sport. The application of CRT in these studies has allowed researchers to gain insights on the experiences of African American male athletes. It has also helped to provide researchers with an understanding of how the media and race has affected the lives of many black athletes. Two research questions will be used to guide this study:

RQ1: How do African American male athletes feel about the media?

RQ2: Do African American male athletes feel pressured to conform to the media's portrayal of other African American male athletes?

Chapter 3 Methodology

Data Collection

Convenience sampling was used to form the focus groups used in this study. According to Berg and Latin (2008), a convenience sample is, "subjects possessing the necessary trait or traits are readily available" (p. 80). This sampling technique was chosen because the researcher had access to this particular group of athletes. Participants were former African American male student-athletes. The sample was comprised of six participants.

An application to the Institutional Review Board was submitted prior to research. Before conducting any research, all participants were asked to sign a confidentiality agreement along with an informed consent to protect the privacy of each participant. The respondents were given instructions and the encouraged to share their experiences and opinions in response to the questions posed. All conversation has been kept confidential, and information pertaining to the athletes' identity has been kept only by the researcher and locked in the researcher's office.

The purpose of a focus group is to identify any needs or concerns, provide feedback, identify strengths and weaknesses in a policy, and provide a basis for quantitative research (Seymour, 2004). Two advantages of focus groups are that they: (1) they provide the researcher with a two-way flow of information where the researcher and participants are able to listen and share with one another; and (2) improve planning and serve as a means for evaluating programs (Seymour, 2004). The researcher chose to conduct a focus group specifically because of its ability to "elicit opinions, attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions from individuals to gain insights and information about a specific topic" (Seymour, 2004, p. 6). This is the very nature of the study

because the researcher wanted to gain a better understanding of the experiences of African

American male athletes therefore, a focus group was the best method to capture these

experiences effectively.

The focus group consisted of six African American males who were athletes from

universities in the Southeast. The focus group was administered on a day that was convenient to

all participants, and took place in a controlled setting on a university campus. The location of the

focus group was enclosed and all doors were secured in order to protect the privacy of all

participants. The session was audio recorded in order to transcribe the data and lasted

approximately one hour. The researcher used an interview schedule of 15 semi-structured, pre-

determined questions that was posed to participants to guide the flow of discussion. The athletes

had an opportunity to elaborate on questions and responses from others based upon their

previous experiences. The focus group was semi-structured in order to allow for open discussion.

Questions were developed around the two research questions. After the focus group, the data was

sent to an independent transcriber. The transcriber was asked to sign a confidentiality agreement

Data Analysis

The data from the focus group were coded using Qualitative Data Analysis (QDAMiner)

software. This software allows for ease of coding and categorizing. QDA Miner software is

especially effective at coding large amounts of data as well. The Constant Comparison Method

was used to aid in coding the data. The Constant Comparison Method is used to "group answers

to common questions [and] analyze different perspectives on central issues. The method has four

distinct stages: comparing incidents applicable to each category, integrating categories and their

properties, delimiting the theory, and writing the theory" (Coleman, Dye, Rosenberg, & Schatz, 2000, p. 1). Themes in the data reflect the two research questions in this study. RQ1: How do African American male athletes feel about the media? RQ2: Do African American male athletes feel pressured to conform to the media's portrayal of other African American male athletes?

Operational Definitions

Media: "individuals who publicly report or make public statements relative to an

athlete's performance…newspaper reporters, paparazzi, television newscasters, or

fans and critics who publicize their critiques of athletic performance through the

use of public forums and blogs" (Ott & Puymbroeck, 2010, p. 1).

African American: "A contemporary label for persons of African descent who reside

in the United States or for Americans whose are considered to have African heritage

(biologically or socio-culturally)" (Withycombe, 2009, p. 9).

*Image: "*The basic tenant of being "critical of the notion of an integral, originary and unified

identity"(Withycombe, 2009, p. 11).

*Conform: "*The individuals' wish to meet the expectations of others, to avoid sanctions or

even punishment for deviance, or to create a sense of belonging" (Imhoff & Erb,

2009, p. 309).

Experiences: A mediating factor in the relationship between protective/risk factors

(such as gender, race, socioeconomic background) and important social outcomes

(such as graduation, upward social mobility, and psychological well-being)… the

ecological context that student athletes encounter during their stay on campus

(Sellers, Kuperminc, & Alphonse Damas, 1997, p. 701).

Chapter 4 Results

Table 1, which is located in Appendix A, provides each participant by their pseudonym, age, division, conference, and athletic profile. The focus group lasted 76 minutes and generated 16 pages of transcribed data. After coding and analyzing the data utilizing the Constant Comparison Method, the following four themes were found: 1. Media's Negative Perceptions, 2. Feelings about the Media, 3. Positive Influences of the Media, and 4.Behavior Changes. Each theme was developed based on the participants' responses. Recurring similarities in the answers to each question allowed the researcher to categorize the responses into suitable themes. Also, during the focus group the researcher noted how the participants responded to each question. The researcher would consider whether a question caused the participants to become angry or excited, or whether they displayed any emotion at all. The four themes developed from this study specifically, were topics in which the participants displayed the most emotion due to the fact that they used expressive gestures and were often anxious to answer the particular questions pertaining to the themes presented. Coding was also driven by key findings in the literature of Yosso (2002), Fujioka (2005), and Akom (2008), as well as others, that were similar to the themes found in this study. Each of the four themes will be discussed.

Media's Negative Perceptions

The athletes defined media as being biased, judgmental, and opinionated. This stemmed from the fact that they believed that most of what they see or hear from the media does not accurately represent an African American male athlete. The participants felt strongly that the media do not have a correct perception of what it means to be an African American male athlete

Participant A stated that "the media kinda gets involved and they don't see the full insight of things or seeking the truth of things, but things that you know will basically not be positive, but negative." The participants felt that the media hype up stories in order to sell newspapers, magazines, or boost ratings. Participant F stated,

> The Reggie Bush incident with the Heisman Trophy, he played and did well…He talked with his spiritual leader, his pastor, and decided to give it back cause he wanted it to go away so he could take care of business. Made a good decision. The media portrayed it as he's admitting his guilt.

Participant D made the comment that "the media got to realize that we as African Americans are humans."

The respondents also suggested that the media create images and comments that characterize African American male athletes as failures in society, incapable of leadership abilities and as troublemakers. The participants felt as though African Americans get criticized and judged even when they do the right thing. Participant F confirmed this by stating, "If the African American athlete does the right thing, we still get hammered!" Participant B felt as though

> The way that they portray the black male athlete is as someone who has low character because of whatever circumstance he may have came from or something like that. And so when they tear down a person like Randy Moss or Michael Vick, then what it does to the public opinion of those caliber of players is they look at those two people and say ok this is how all black athletes are. And so now this is what we expect from all black athletes.

When discussing stereotypes in the media, the participants had much to say in this regard. The participants first felt that the media put African American male athletes on pedestals, and

expect them to excel in every sport that they participate in. Participant C stated,

> It kinda makes me feel that the African American male athlete is not supposed to be
> human. Not supposed to be a person. They are supposed to be trained machines to
> compete and when you make a human mistake it's like oh my gosh what is that guy
> doing.

Participant E agreed that "you know you this world class or high school greatest athlete…and they don't see that you're just as vulnerable as everybody else."

The participants felt that the media even influence the position that African American male athletes play by portraying them as impatient and unable to make good decisions. They felt the media influence causes them to be placed in positions that required little cognitive abilities, but more physical skill. Participant B stated, "You look at the predominantly black positions on the football field for instance. And it's not a lot of thinking involved in these positions. It's more of a reaction type position that they play." Participants felt that because of these media-generated perceptions of African American male athletes that coaches as well as fans will feel that these athletes shouldn't hold positions such as quarterback or other administrative and leadership positions. Participant F confirmed this by stating,

> As an African American male, when you play quarterback they say we don't stay in the
> pocket. You know, we're not patient. And usually if he's the leader of the team and you
> have the receivers that are dropping the ball or whatever they'll say it's because he's an
> athlete, he's not good in that position.

Participant B also stated that,

It's almost like there's already one strike against them in the sense of well he already has

a chance of making a bonehead play or a bonehead decision whether it be on or off the

field. And then so that carries onto the field. And so when something bad goes wrong,

well this is a prime example of why they need to be playing receiver, punt return, or

something like that.

Another stereotype that the former athletes discussed was that African American male

athletes are portrayed as money hungry, and that they all want to be like thugs, rappers, or drug

dealers. They believed a lot of this stereotype stems from the belief that a lot of successful

African American male athletes come from the ghetto. Participant F suggested that

A lot of your black athletes come from poverty areas…and they start to give these kids,

show these kids a hundred thousand dollars. And then some of these kids probably

didn't see a hundred dollars in cash…and how they portray the black athlete as just

money hungry and all he's thinking about is money…It shows a lot that African

American males are either athletes, rappers, or some type of drug dealing actor.

Participant E also stated,

If you come in with tattoos on you oh it's a different ballgame. But you haven't

changed because you put tattoos on. You haven't changed because you put an earring in

your ear or earring in your nose or the clothes you wear you still the same person. But

they take that as… a rap artist or thug.

Feelings about the Media

A majority of the participants in the focus group felt as though the media focus heavily

on the performance, success, and failure of African American male athletes. Participants pointed out that most of the top performers in high profile sports are African American and therefore, this is what they believe causes the media to focus so much attention on those athletes. Participant B stated that

> I think because the black male athlete you know no matter what sport is usually at the top. As far as talent, as far as ability, so as a result he stands out. I think you know we do a lot of things to bring it on ourselves and that's why the media continues to go towards the black male athlete…But it could become one of those deals to where it almost looks like the black male athlete is being picked on.

Participant B stated that "the way they focus on the black athlete it causes a lot of drama." The participants also felt that African American male athletes usually excel in sports and are in the public eye. Because of this, they felt that when they do something wrong it catches the media's attention immediately to focus on the negative aspects of the athletes. Participant C recalled how he was involved in some trouble during his athletic career, and the same media who once treated him as a hero, was there to report on the negative. He stated that

> You know I got myself into some trouble and along those same lines the media was right there. Because I was in that position of the athlete that was already on the paper and in the news for doing well. And then when this comes, the media is even bigger to put the bad out there. And I think if it wasn't for the media then that situation wouldn't have been blow out of proportion as it was.

Participant E agreed with this statement by stating that,

As good as they made me feel, I will never forget the article when they put my name in it

like I was a failure because I didn't come here I guess and save you know the

secondary…But the thing is, I don't remember them saying nothing about anybody else.

You know, because they see the black athlete oh and he's supposed to come in and do

this and do that.

Participant A felt that, "negative things are going to be said about Tiger Woods. Negative things

are going to be said about Vince Young. But whereas some of the white players, you don't see

that as much." In terms of how the media portray these athletes, Participant A stated that "It just

seems like at times that the black male character is under attack to where it's going to be broken

down."

Another point that was made was how the media try to compare African American male

athletes to white athletes. The participants suggested that the media use white athletes as the

standard and any deviation from this is wrong. Participant F stated,

They tell us to play this and want to show us to be like this other player because they try

to model us after another non-African American player. And want us to act like him,

whereas we probably didn't have that same setting because we are just recruited into a

situation of play ball. And we don't have that figure that we can relate to.

Participant E agreed with this statement by saying,

They try to get you to model yourself after somebody, you think you've got

something…I can build my program and I can go out and get 30 of these guys,

African American guys to act like this, we got a chance to win.

Participants also suggested that such modeling is used to help the African American male athlete's media exposure because he now can be seen in relation to white athletes. The athletes in the present study agreed that such modeling came from the fact that the traditional athletic system was designed for white athletes before African Americans were allowed to participate in sports. The athletes also suggested that Americans were used to seeing white men playing sports and when African Americans began playing, if they acted differently than white athletes, they were going against the norm. Participant B stated,

> You know, looking at why the media had the perception why they try to compare black athletes to other athletes, you know if you look when sports started you know there was no black male athlete. And so they already had this preconceived notion of how an athlete should be.

> Most of the participants felt that there is racism within the mainstream media. They felt

that in some way, there will always be racism within the media. Participant C stated,

> I think there will always be some type of racism. Now, 2010, it's not as overt as it was 20 or 30 years ago. But me personally, I think I would rather somebody just come to my face and say hey I don't like you as to try to mask it to be something else when it really just comes back around that that's what it is, just blatant racism.

Participant E claimed,

> The racist thing I think is there. How can you be a successful media person if you let someone tell you African American jokes….and I think the media is very vicious in the sense of if they get something….they go for the goal.

According to their experiences, many felt that the media do not like African American male athletes, and therefore, write and post negative things about them. One main point that Participant D made is that "prejudice is not always seen, it's felt." The group suggested that although not everyone recognizes racism in the media, those who have experienced it, know it firsthand.

When providing reasons for why they thought the media act the way they do, the group suggested that all media content is predominantly money-driven. The participants believed that the media are always evolving; going from one story to the next in order to make gains on whatever is popular at that particular time. Participant A said "they have to sell papers or do commercials on TV and things so sometimes it can get to be a negative thing. Just to be sure the people are watching or buying the papers or magazines." The participants compared the media to coaches by saying that it is "kinda like the coach's job is to win. The media's job, the way that they win is by finding whatever controversy is out there and exploiting it and making people want to tune into it."

Positive Influences of the Media

Although the respondents felt that the media mostly portray them in a negative way, they also felt that there were a few positive aspects of the media. It was agreed upon by most of the athletes that the media helped to shape their image when they first came to college as an athlete. They claimed that the media gave them name exposure and recognition when they performed well, which helped to advance their athletic careers. Participant D stated that "the media kind of helped me because it was a challenge. It was a challenge by me being at the place I participated

in my career was the only African American on my position." They also suggested that the athletes can use the media to their advantage if they know how the media works. Participant C stated,

> When you're doing well you know the very first game in my college career, first football season I scored with like nine seconds left. It put us up to win the ballgame. And at that time I was a sophomore at school and new to a city and no one knew my name. But the very next day everyone did.

Participant E stated, "The media did a wonderful thing when I went off to school. They put in the paper he's the new kid on the block." Although most athletes agreed that the media gave them recognition as they transitioned into college sport, they all agreed that the media can be either positive or negative, and that there is no in between.

Behavior Changes

The group of former athletes expressed that they were motivated to prove the media wrong in terms of what it means to be an African American male athlete and an African American male in general. Participant D stated that

> I was raised by a single parent, but I knew I had goals set. I knew where I wanted to be….If you got that drive you're not going to let anyone or anything come between what you've got to do…but it strived me to prove them wrong. That hey I'm a go getter.

The participants also indicated that they look to other African American male athletes in the media who have handled negativity well. They emphasized how certain athletes have still displayed good character and continued to be a positive role model regardless of what the media

have said. Participant F stated,

> Donovan McNabb. He's one of the best quarterbacks at this time than in the past time in
>
> the NFL and since he first came from college to the pros he experienced a lot of diversity.
>
> He was booed on his draft day. He's won more championships than other Caucasian
>
> quarterbacks…I have a great respect for McNabb…He keeps his character, he holds his
>
> composure. Never lashes back…no matter how bad the media or other races came
>
> against.

The group believed that the media has effected what they say, do, where they go, and what they

wear in a positive way. They do not want to be seen as the stereotypical thug athlete, so they take

precautions before going out to avoid drawing any negative attention to themselves. Participant E

claimed that "You have to watch what you say. You basically have to walk a straight line." Some

felt that there is pressure placed on them to be perfect because of how the media feeds upon

anything negative that they do. Participant B stated,

> When I was an athlete I said to myself, Ok you've got to watch you know things that I
>
> say things that I do. But at the same time I know the spotlight is even brighter on me so I
>
> really got to watch what I say and do. So it would affect me when I was in school almost
>
> to the point where I didn't even want to go out to night clubs and bars and that type stuff
>
> just because of the chance of you know someone saying something…you know you wake
>
> up in the morning and you're like, ok if I put on these baggy jeans then they are already
>
> looking at me certain ways, so let me just pass by these and put on khakis instead…it
>
> makes you think about stuff like that…because they are already expecting a certain image

or certain stereotype about you…you want to break down those walls and a lot of times it stays on your mind.

Participant F concluded,

I'm going to be a model citizen and I'm going to be somebody that another African American man comes to and looks up to. Yes I'm a collegiate athlete but I'm a collegiate athlete going after a major to become a citizen in my community. And I'm not going to be portrayed in the image that the media says you know that a black man can just be a good athlete that's going to probably topple over to some type of entertainment or whatever. But I can be a businessman. I can run a business. I can open up something that's conducive to the environment. I can give back to our environment.

Chapter 5 Discussion

In regards to the first research question, the findings of this research show that African American male athletes feel that the media portray them in a negative way. They feel the media use stereotypes that portray African American male athletes as sport heroes, but also like thugs and rappers who are money-hungry and lacking cognitive abilities that will result in leadership positions. They also feel that the media has an incorrect perception of what it means to be an African American male athlete. The media use white male athletes as a standard in sports, and this causes the African American male athlete to be criticized and judged against the white standard continuously, which therefore caused the participants to believe that racism does exist within the mainstream media. Because they felt that the media are biased, judgmental, and opinionated, they believed that not everything that is represented is always accurate, and therefore, these athletes should be cautious about what they allow themselves to be exposed to when watching television, reading a magazine, or browsing the internet. The participants felt that the media are driven by what sells and therefore, do not always act in the best interest of the African American male athlete. This researcher agrees that the media sometimes fail to realize that African American male athletes are still human, and that they make mistakes just as any other person does.

These findings are similar to Fujioka's (2005) study that found that the more negatively African American viewers' perceived media images, the more they considered these images to be less accurate. Fujioka's study confirms that the media do not have an accurate perception of African American identity and that there is also a negative relationship between the media and

African American identity. Yosso's (2002) research also confirms that the media use

predominantly negative television images of African Americans that represented them as failures

in society. What this means is that the media uses whatever images that will sell, and do not take

into account what is actually true regarding the African American male athlete. Ott and

Puymbroeck's (2010) study also found that the negativity of the media can also cause the athlete

to have increased anger, fatigue, and tension, thus affecting their image. Fujioka (2005) also

confirms that most negative content about African Americans causes white viewers to view this

population more negatively. In conclusion of this finding, the participants believed that the

media directly and indirectly tear down the image of the African American male athlete. Such

images in the media lead others to have a false perception of who these athletes are. These

findings also suggest that the media have an effect on how others perceive African American

male athletes. Instead of viewers seeing these athletes as role models or positive examples, they

see them in a negative light, and then make generalizations about the entire population of African

American male athletes. Lawrence (2005) points out that most stereotypes come from images

displayed in the media. Buffington and Fraley's (2008) research also concludes that the media

has created a "black brawn vs. white brains" mentality in which African American athletes are

represented based on their physical abilities, and portray them as naturally born athletes just

because of their race. This sends a message to the African American male community that all

they can do is be an athlete and that they lack the intelligence or abilities to do anything else but

be an athlete. This also puts pressure on these athletes to be the best in their sport; otherwise,

they will be criticized by the media and its viewers. Muwakkil's (2002) research supports this

study's findings by concluding that African Americans have been "associated with bestial behavior" which makes them appear to be "better for athletic activities that require quick bursts of speed and explosive animalistic actions" (p. 1). Billings' (2003) also supports the conclusion that the media often depict African Americans as only being capable of performing physical and skilled tasks and lacking concentration, composure and emotional control. If coaches for example, agree with how the media portray these athletes, this can hinder the advancement of African American males holding positions in which they have to make decisions for the team or where they are leaders of the team. Hughes and Baldwin (2002) agree with this finding and concluded that African American men and women "are frequently portrayed on television in stereotypic roles such as criminal, matriarch, or welfare mother…conversely, negative news reports about ethnic crime have been found to lead to a perception of ethnic minorities as threatening" (p. 42). The above comments suggests that the media often portray African American male athletes to be threatening because of their outter appearance. Again, this statement ties in with the above finding that the media use white athletes as a standard to compare African American male athletes. If these athletes do not look the same as a white athlete, they are then labeled a thug, rapper, or drug dealer simply for being different. According to the participants, this is a very misguided belief and leaves no room for the African American male athlete to form his own identity. Yosso's (2002) findings also complement this research by confirming that negative media images teach minorities that they are inferior to whites. She also concludes that racism does exist in the mainstream media in the United States. Lawrence's (2005) study also concludes that African Americans were hurt by the unfair treatment in sports

that was a direct result of mediated stereotypes of African Americans. Singer's (2009) research also points out that African Americans felt racism played a role in their experiences as athletes. Akom's (2008) research also piggybacks this study by analyzing the African American's burden of acting white. Akom (2008) found that mediated messages influence African Americans to act white in order to fit in with the status quo.

In conclusion of this finding, the participants felt that the media can often provide African American male athletes with a sense of accomplishment and fame. It has the power to provide the athlete with recognition in the community that can cause fans to love and support the athlete. it was assumed that the media's main goal is to make money, and therefore, as much as a new athlete is hyped up for performing well, the media can tear down that same athlete when he is not performing up to specific media standards. In sum, the media may shed positive light on the African American male athlete temporarily, but only as a source to boost ratings and profits, and not because they are favored by the media.

In response to the second research question, African American male athletes do feel pressure from the media, but not to conform to media representations of other African American male athletes. The pressures that most of these athletes face, is the pressure to be a better person and to prove the media wrong. They want to prove that the media has a false perception of what it means to be an African American male athlete. Many of these athletes want to be an example to younger generations, and to be able to empower them to become something great regardless of the color of their skin and regardless of what picture the media paints of them. African American male athletes are not giving their attention to specific stereotypes, but on the behavior following

the negative media attention. Many of these athletes look to other positive African American role models in the media who have not let the media distract them from their main goal. They have allowed the media to positively impact their actions by changing how they dress, talk, act, and also where they go. The participants felt, however that trying to prove the media wrong places a lot of pressure on them to be perfect. In a way, these athletes are almost subconsciously influenced by the media because if they choose to dress, talk, or act differently as a result of the media, are they not feeding in to the white standard that has been placed on them? In this sense, is it could be a lose-lose situation. The athletes lose in a sense that they lose who they are while trying to not conform to stereotypes presented by the media. Similar reaction as were found in Yosso's (2002) study where participants were inspired to proved the media wrong by acting contrary to the ways in which the media portrayed them.

These athletes should not have to undergo so much pressure to conform that they lose themselves in the process. There should be a way for African American male athletes to express themselves freely without being categorized by the media. Just because a person is different in how they look, talk, or dress, they are not necessarily in the wrong. Obviously, when an athlete commits an act of indecency, he is in the wrong, but this shouldn't drive the media to pinpoint and stereotype one specific ethnic group. Athletes of all races have had something negative happen in their athletic career at some point, and therefore, it is not fair to direct negativity towards only one group.

In looking at the age comparisons of each participant, responses amongst participants A, D, and E tended to reflect more of their personal experiences as athletes, whereas responses from

participants B, C, and F reflected more of what they have seen on television or in the news about African American male athletes. This is interesting because the first group (A, D, and, E) were between 42 and 58, whereas B, C, and F were between 28 and 36. This could contribute to the fact that the older participants had more racialized experiences with the media during the time of post-segregation when African Americans were still fairly new to sports. If this is true, it raises an interesting question: Is racism in the media less prevalent today than it was in the 60s and 70s?

The four themes all seem to connect together. The media focus attention on African American male athletes because of their exceptional performance in sports. The performance of these athletes creates the stereotype that all African Americans are supposed to be incredible athletes and that they lack any cognitive abilities to become anything better. The belief that African Americans lack cognitive and decision making abilities stems from the stereotype that African American male athletes are failures in society. Portraying them as thugs, rappers, or drug dealers impacts the public's perception of whether these athletes can actually hold any leadership role worthy of making critical decisions for a team or sport organization. Labeling African American male athletes as thugs, rappers, or drug dealers then creates drama for the media to feed on in order to make more money. The drama created by the media then leads to a negative perception of these athletes. African American male athletes, therefore, are driven to challenge such stereotypes and prove to the media that they are better than what the media portray them.

Implications of Critical Race Theory in this Research

Critical Race Theory was used in this study as a basis for developing the research. The

first implication of CRT is that race and racism have become a normal part of American Society (Singer, 2009). The fact that all the participants had different athletic experiences demonstrates how the media can have a common impact on African Americans. Being an African American male athlete is enough to experience forms of racism within the mainstream media. All participants agreed that there is some form of racism in the mainstream media, and this confirms the first aspect of Critical Race Theory. The second implication of CRT is that narratives should be used to place emphasis on the experiences of people of color (Singer, 2009). Through the focus group, the former athletes were able to discuss current problems that they felt were prevalent with the media in regards to the African American male athlete. The athletes were able to elicit opinions and gain insight on this topic as well. The last implication of CRT is that those individuals with decision-making power make decisions based on his or her own self-interests and not for the common good of oppressed groups (Singer, 2009). This is especially true in the findings of this study. It was determined that the media portray images, good or bad, of African American male athletes, only for the purpose of selling magazines, newspapers, or boosting ratings. The people in the media have the power to manipulate stories in ways that will help them gain profits, regardless of what it does to the athlete's image.

Implications of Findings

This research is relevant in the fields of recreation, sport management and sport sociology. It is important to understand the experiences of African American male athletes in terms of racism, because "racism and its intersections with other forms of subordination shape the experiences of people of color very differently than whites" (Yosso, 2005, p. 72). Racism is

not always seen, but it is definitely felt. As a sport manager, one would need to know why an African American seems to excel at certain positions in football or basketball, but not in other leadership positions in order to help guide and counsel the athletes. It would be beneficial for a sport sociologist or psychologist who counsels African American male athletes to know why these athletes act, dress, or think the way that they do. This research also provides a deeper understanding for one who may not have much knowledge on what it means to be an African American male athlete, such as a person who works in the mainstream media. This research will also lead to a generation of ideas of how to improve the African American male athlete's image in the mainstream media. This research will above all, allow people to see that the media do have an impact on African American male athletes and that they do feel pressured to conform a certain way because of the media.   **Solutions**

to Media Stereotypes of African American Male Athletes

Several solutions can be posed to the problem of stereotypes of African American male athletes within the mainstream media. The researcher suggests that the first step towards solving this problem would be to have more African Americans and African American male athletes in the mainstream media. This would help to cut down on the bias and stereotyping that occurs. Who better to comment on the condition of these athletes than an African American? More African Americans in the media could impact the number of African Americans that are in head coaching and leadership positions in sports as a whole because there could be more positive perceptions of these athletes. If the public has a better perception of these athletes, it could then affect the way they perceive African Americans in leadership positions. A second solution would

be to have programming set aside for athletes coming into college that teaches them about media

exposure and what to expect and even how to interview with the press. If African American male

athletes have a better understanding of how the media can impact them, both positively and

negatively, this may cause them to be a little more cautious of what they do or say. A lot of

times, athletes are just thrown into college sports without any type of training or tools that will

help them in this regard. Coaches who recruit players are mainly focused on winning and not

developing the character of these athletes. The programs should be designed to teach the athletes

about morals and responsibility and how to handle money. Programs should also touch on

character development and self-esteem in order to teach the athletes to be confident in

themselves and not be influenced by negative representations of African American male athletes

in the media. Character development would teach them how to respond in certain situations to

where they are not being exploited by the media, thus causing stereotypes to arise. The

researcher also feels that it is the media's responsibility to become updated on exactly what is

going on and not hold athletes to standards of how an athlete should be that was set 20 or more

years ago. This means that the media person needs to truly try to understand the situation in order

to report it in full accuracy. The media professionals should have to undergo some type of

diversity sensitivity training before they are allowed to interview minority athletes or do reports

on these athletes. Reporters should not be allowed to just interview anybody. They should

develop a sense of rapport with the athlete first before just asking any question. This builds trust

and confidence from the athlete and media person. Another thing African Americans can do in

response to negativity in the media is to fight back with love and kindness. The athletes should

not seek to retaliate or get angry because this is what the media wants them to do. The media would generate a great story out of an African American male athlete getting upset and retaliating on the media. More focus groups should be conducted, such as the one in this study, to allow these athletes to elaborate on their experiences with the media and discuss ways in which to avoid such stereotypes in the media. It would also be beneficial for former athletes, such as the ones in this study, to mentor younger athletes on how to handle themselves in the media and what they can do to avoid negative media attention. **Future Research**

Each theme could be broken down into a more specific study to gain a better understanding of the psycho-social development of the African American male athlete in regards to the media. Questions arose in this study relating to whether the media impacts the upward mobility of African American male athletes in sports. Also, a more in depth look at the African American male athlete in the media in the 1960s versus the African American male athlete in the media after 1990 could be conducted to examine the differences in how the media has impacted these athletes. Future research could be done to determine the role that the media play in shaping the lives of the younger generation of African American male athletes. Younger generations might be more susceptible to what media stereotypes and images that they see because they are at a younger age and lack the experience the former athletes in this study had. Another study should examine individuals in the media's perceptions of these athletes and compare their responses to the responses in this study. It is important to understand where the media is coming from and that type of study would provide more insight and further confirm or disprove the

results of this study. Future focus groups could also be conducted with African American female athletes to compare with the responses of this study. These athletes may display the responses, however, the stereotypes, if any, may change. The researcher wishes to extend this research using current intercollegiate athletes to see if there is also any variation in responses.

Limitations

Several limitations exist and should be noted. Because of limited access to participants, member checking was not used before analyzing the data; however, the researcher reviewed the transcriptions several times before conducting analysis. Notes were also taken during the focus group to assist the researcher in coding the data. Also, although efforts were made to select athletes from diverse cultures and backgrounds, several athletes will be from the same region and may know one another. Their responses may be influenced by the responses of other participants whom they are familiar with. Another limitation was that all of the participants except one played football in college (See Appendix A). Their responses may only reflect the experiences from playing football and not the experiences of those who have played other sports. Another limitation is the sample size. The sample consisted of six participants, which is generally appropriate for a focus group. However, only one focus group was conducted and may not be appropriate for making generalizations for an entire population of African American male athletes. This is a good starting point and that most group members agreed and shared the same responses. Lastly, this study omit's young black male athletes under the age of 18, and therefore, generalizations cannot be made about the entire African American male population.

References

Akom, A. A. (2008). Black metropolis and mental life: Beyond the 'burden of acting white' toward a third wave of Critical Race studies. *Anthropology and Education Quarterly, 39*(3), 14. doi: 10.1111/j.1548-1492.2008.0020.x

Apologetic Vick gets 23-month sentence on Dogfighting Charges. (2007) Retrieved November 18, 2010, from http://sports.espn.go.com/nfl/news/story?id=3148549

Belson, K., & Sandomir, R. (2010, 2/1/2010). Insuring Endorsements Against Athletes' Scandals, *The New York Times*. Retrieved November 18, 2010,http://www.nytimes.com/2010/02/01/sports/01insurance.html?pagewanted=print

Benedict, J. (2004, September 6, 2004). The science of the brief encounter: Kobe Bryant's sexual-assault trial is sure to have its He-Said-She-Said moments. But the story told by blood stains, body fluids and other physical evidence may decide his fate. *Sports Illustrated, 101,* 2.

Berg, K. E., & Latin, R. W. (Eds.). (2008). *Essentials of research methods in health, physical education, exercise science and recreation* (3rd ed.). Baltimore, MD: Lippincott Williams & Wolters Kluwer Business.

Billings, A. C. (2003). Portraying Tiger Woods: Characterizations of a "black" athlete in a "white" sport. *The Howard Journal of Communications, 14*, 29-37. doi: 10.1080/10646170390180536

Blumert, B. S. (2001). Barry Bonds: The Baseball Superstar the Media Love to Hate. 5.

Brennan, C. (2010). Brennan Assesses Tiger Woods' Apology, U.S. Olympic Domination So Far. 1.

Briggs, B. (2007). NFL Megastar Vick's Endorsements in Danger. Retrieved November 18, 2010, from http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/19834805/

Buffington, D., & Fraley, T. (2008). Skill in black and white: Negotiating media images of race in a sporting context. *Journal of Communication Inquiry, 32*(3), 292-310. doi: 10.1177/0196859908316330

Carter, J. (2010). Why so negative about Kobe's fifth ring? Retrieved November 18, 2010, from *http://bleacherreport.com/articles/409243-why-so-negative-about-kobes-fifth-ring*

Casanas, J. A., Coello, H. M., & Rocco, T. S. (2004). Understanding Critical Race Theory: An analysis of cultural differences in healthcare education. *Image*, 1-6.

Coleman, S. T., Dye, J. F., Rosenberg, B. A., & Schatz, I. M. (2000). Constant comparison method: A kaleidoscope of data. *The Qualitative Report, 4*, 1.

DiMeglio, S. (2010). Tiger Arrives at Masters; Next Step is to Face the Media. *USA Today*, 2.

Does anyone hate Vick as much as I do? (2006). Retrieved November 18, 2010, from. http://answers.yahoo.com/question/index?qid=20070511111415AAgfrCy.

Elias, P. (2009). Barry Bonds Steroid Evidence to be Unsealed by the Feds. *The Huffington Post*, 1.

Eppehimer, T. (2006). Victor Anderson's beyond ontological blackness and James Cone's black theology: A discussion. *Black Theology: An International Journal*, 87-106.

Fasting, K., & Massao, P. B. (2010). Race and Racism: Experiences of black Norwegian Athletes. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport, 45*(2), 17. doi: 10.1177/1012690210368233

Fish, M. (2010). Woods' Foundation carries on Mission. Retrieved November 18, 2010, from http://sports.espn.go.com/golf/news/story?id=4999660

Freelove, M. (2004). Kobe Bryant: King of the assholes. Retrieved November 18, 2010, from *http://blogcritics.org/sports/article/kobe-bryant-king-of-the-assholes/*

Fujioka, Y. (2005). Black media images as a perceived threat to African American ethnic identity: Coping responses, perceived public perception, and attitudes towards Affirmative Action. *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media, 49*(4), 450-467.

O'Kelly, M. (2010). The Gun-Toting Black Athletes Affect All Black Males. Retrieved November 18, 2010, from http://www.huffingtonpost.com/morris-w-okelly/gun-toting-black-athletes_b_427469.html

Gibson, J. (2006). Barry Bonds shouldn't be allowed to break Babe Ruth's total. *Foxnews.com* 5/10/2006 from http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,194883,00.html

Hughes, P. C., & Baldwin, J. R. (2002). Black, White, and Shades of Gray: Communication Predictors of 'Stereotypic Impressions'. *Southern Communication Journal, 68*(1), 17.

Imhoff, R., & Erb, H.-P. (2009). What Motivates Nonconformity? Uniqueness Seeking Blocks Majority Influence. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 35*(3), 13. doi: 10.1177/0146167208328166

Keating, P. (2000). Golf's $6 billion Man. Retrieved November 18, 2010, from
http://espn.go.com/otl/dollars/thursday.html

Kobe Bryant Resumes Endorsement Career. (2005). Retrieved November 18, 2010, from
http://www.usatoday.com/life/people/2005-07-10-kobe-bryant_x.htm

Ladson-Billings, G. (2005). The Evolving Role of Critical Race Theory in Educational
Scholarship. *Race, Ethnicity and Education, 8*(1), 5. doi: 10.1080/1361332052000341024

Lawrence, S. M. (2005). African American athletes' experiences of race in sport. *International
Review for the Sociology of Sport, 40*(1), 99-110. doi: 10.1177/1012690205052171

Maske, M. (2007). Falcon's Vick Indicted in Dogfighting Case, *Washington Post*. Retrieved
November 18, 2010, from http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-
dyn/content/article/2007/07/17/AR2007071701393.html

Milhouse, V. H. (2005). Women, Organizational Development, and the New Science of
Happiness. *Advancing Women in Leadership Online Journal, 19*.

Miller, V. (2009). Is Tiger Woods still a good role model for kids? Woods removed from role
models on the web. http://www.examiner.com/children-s-tv-in-philadelphia/is-tiger-
woods-still-a-good-role-model-for-kids-woods-removed-from-role-models-on-the-web

Molloseau, E. D. (2006). Grant Hill, post modern blackness, and art: A cultural critique. *Post
Modern Blackness and Art, 4*(2), 123-141.

Mortensen, C., Paolantonio, S., & Pasquarelli, L. (2009). Vick, Eagles Agree to Two-Year Deal.
Retrieved November 18, 2010, from
http://sports.espn.go.com/nfl/news/story?id=4397938

Muwakkil, S. (2002). Blacks, Sports and Lingering Racial Stereotypes, *Chicago Tribune*.
Retrieved November 18, 2010, from http://www.jonentine.com/reviews/chi_trib_04.htm

Nance, R. (2004). Bryant still faces obstacles. Retrieved November 18, 2010, from
http://www.usatoday.com

O'toole, A. (Ed.). (2003). *The best man plays: Major league baseball and the black athlete 1901-
2002*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company.

Ott, K., & Puymbroeck, V. (2010). Does the Media Impact Athletic Performance? *The Sport
Journal, 13*(2).

PGA Tour. (2010) Retrieved November 18, 2010, from
   http://www.pgatour.com/players/00/87/93/

Price, P. (2010). At the crossroads: Critical Race Theory and critical geographies of race.
   Progress in Human Geography, 34(2), 147-174.
Reid, T. R. (2004). Rape Case Against Bryant is Dropped. *The Washington Post*, A01.

Rucker, W. (2003). A negro nation within the nation: W.E.B. Dubios and the creation of a
   revolutionary pan-Africanist tradition, 1903-1947. *The Black Scholar, 32*(3-4), 37-46.

Schneider, D. (2003). Black men & white women: What up? Retrieved November 18, 2010,
   from http://www.cosmoetica.com/B111-DES65.htm

Sellers, R. M., Kuperminc, G. P., & Alphonse Damas, J. (1997). The College Life Experiences
   of African American Women Athletes. *American Journal of Community Psychology,
   25*(5), 22. doi: 10.1023/A:1024691002055

Seymour, A. (2004). *Focus Groups: An Important Tool for Strategic Planning*. Strategic
   Planning Toolkit Project. Washington D.C.

Singer, J. N. (2009). African American football athletes' perspectives on institutional integrity in
   college sport. *Research Quarterly for Exercise and Sport, 80*(1), 102-116.

Slugger sidesteps questions; Chastises media. (2005). Retrieved November 18, 2010, from
   http://sports.espn.go.com/mlb/news/story?id=1997445

Smith, S. (2010). Do the fans hate Barry Bonds as much as the media portrays? Retrieved
   November 18, 2010, from from http://www.helium.com/debates/76882-do-the-fans-hate-
   barry-bonds-as-much-as-the-media-portrays/side_by_side?page=12.

Tarimo, A. (2010). Politicization of ethnic identities: The case of contemporary Africa. *Journal
   of Asian and African Studies, 45*(3), 297-308.

Thomas, A. P. (2005). Derrick Bell. *The People v. Harvard Law*, 1-3.

Tiger Woods Loses Gatorade Endorsement. (2010). Retrieved November 18, 2010, from
   http://www.foxnews.com/us/2010/02/26/tiger-woods-loses-gatorade-endorsement/

Tiger Woods Statement: Admits Affairs, Taking Indefinite Break from Professional Golf.
   (2009). *The Huffington Post*, 1.

Vick, Eagles agree to 2-year deal. (2009). Retrieved November 18, 2010, from

http://sports.espn.go.com/nfl/news/story?id=4397938

Watkins, B. (2009). Tiger Woods behavior typical of black male athletes? *Black Voice*, 1-13.

Whisenant, W. A., & Pedersen, P. M. (2004). Analyzing Attitudes Regarding Quantity and Quality of Sports Page Coverage:Athletic Director Perceptions of Newspaper Coverage Given to Interscholastic Sports. [Journal]. *International Sports Journal*, 12.

Withycombe, J. L. (2009). *"Sometimes We are Smart and Athletic": A Qualitative Investigation of the social construction and pyschologial impact of media representations on African American intercollegiate female athletes.* Doctoral Disseration: University of Tennessee, Knoxville.

Yosso, T. J. (2002). Critical Race: Challenging deficit discourse about Chicanas/os. *Journal of Popular Film and Television, 30*(1), 52-62.

Yosso, T. J. (2005). Whose Culture has Capital? A Critical Race Theory Discussion of Community Cutltural Wealth. *Race, Ethnicity and Education, 8*(1), 23.

Appendix

Appendix A

Table 1: Focus Group Participants

Pseudonym	Age	Division	Conference	Athletic Profile
Participant A	58	I	Big East	Played offensive tackle in college. Assistant coach Division I and high school football from 1979-1990. Head football coach at small town high school in southeast from 1990-2001.
Participant B	28	II	Atlantic Sun	Played wide receiver from 2001-2004. Wide receiver coach and recruiter at Division II school from 2005-2006. Offensive Coordinator for high school football team from 2006-2008. Current head coach for high school football team.
Participant C	28	II	Big South	Played quarterback in college from 2001 to 2005.
Participant D	49	II	Atlantic Sun	Ran track from 1981 to 1985 and was inducted into the Hall of Fame for the university for track & field.
Participant E	42	I	SEC	Played offensive tackle and outside linebacker from 1986 to 1990. Current sprinter coach for track & field and assistant football coach for division 6A high school football team in the Southeast.
Participant F	36	II	South Atlantic	Running back in college from 1997 to 1998. Current strength and conditioning coach for high school football team in southeast.

Appendix B

List of Themes

1. **Media's Negative Perceptions**
   - **Incorrect perception of African American male athletes**
   - **Media do not seek the truth**
   - **Cause stereotypes**

2. **Feelings about the Media**
   - **Focus mainly on negative aspects**
   - **Destroy African American image**
   - **White as the standard**
   - **Racism in media**
   - **Money-driven**

3. **Positive Influences of the Media**
   - **Recognition/Celebrity status**
   - **Advancement of athletic career**
   - **Transition to college**

4. **Behavior Changes**
   - **Prove media wrong**
   - **Affects behaviors such as where they go, what they do, and what they wear**
   - **Positive role models**
   - **Pressure to be perfect**

Appendix C

IRB APPLICATION

All applicants are encouraged to read the Form B guidelines. If you have any questions as you develop your Form B, contact your Departmental Review Committee (DRC) or Research Compliance Services at the Office of Research.

FORM B

IRB # _____

Date Received in OR _____

THE UNIVERSITY OF TENNESSEE

Application for Review of Research Involving Human Subjects

I. IDENTIFICATION OF PROJECT

1. Principal Investigator Co-Principal Investigator:

Keia Bragg
2920 Legacy Pointe Way Apt. 328
Knoxville, Tn. 37921
(423) 736-3738
kbragg2@utk.edu

Faculty Advisor:
Dr. Robin Hardin
Exercise, Sport & Leisure Studies

Health, Physical Education, and Recreation Building
1914 Andy Holt Avenue
Knoxville, Tn. 37996-2710
(865) 974-1281
robh@utk.edu

Department:
Kinesiology, Recreation & Sport Studies

2. Project Classification: Thesis

3. Title of Project: We're Not Thugs or Rappers: An Examination of African
American Male Athletes' Perceptions of the Media

    4. Starting Date: Upon IRB approval

    5. Estimated Completion Date: January, 31, 2010

    6. External Funding *(if any):* N/A

    o **Grant/Contract Submission Deadline:** N/A

    o **Funding Agency:** N/A

    o **Sponsor ID Number** *(if known)***:** N/A

    o **UT Proposal Number** *(if known):* N/A

II. PROJECT OBJECTIVES
The primary objectives of this study are:

1. To determine how African American male collegiate athletes feel they are portrayed by
the media.
2. To determine whether African American male collegiate athletes feel pressured to
conform to the
 media's portrayal of other African American male athletes.

      Manipulation of stories and events expose issues of false representation and stereotyping
within the mainstream media. This research will examine the media's role in shaping the
behaviors and experiences of African American male athletes while using Critical Race Theory
as a model for conducting research. Critical Race Theory was developed to examine the
experiences of people of color through storytelling and allows minorities to speak out about

instances in which they have been exploited and oppressed (Coello, Casanas, & Rocco, 2004). Critical Race Theory was chosen specifically in this study to explore the experiences of African American male collegiate athletes with the media through a qualitative analysis.

III. DESCRIPTION AND SOURCE OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

The participants will be current and former African American male student athletes. The research will consist of six to eight participants. The researcher chose to use current and former student athletes because both may have different views and experiences with the mainstream media that would be beneficial to this study. The researcher will also be able to compare the experiences of current and former student athletes to determine whether there are any differences or similarities in responses. Convenience sampling will be used to select research participants in this study.

A previous relationship may exist between the researcher and some of the former student athletes that will be invited to participate in the study. All former student athletes will be from universities in the Southeastern United States.

All current student athletes in this study will be recruited from the University of Tennessee. The researcher will work with an athletic department representative to identify focus group participants.

All invited participants will be 18 or older. No incentives will be offered for participation in this research.

IV. METHODS AND PROCEDURES

Participants will read and sign all informed consent documents (See Appendix A) prior to participating in a semi-structured focus group interview. The interview will be semi-structured in order to allow for open discussion that will enable the researcher to use open coding when analyzing the data. A semi-structured focus group format will also provide the researcher with more insight on the topics being discussed. The focus group will consist of six to eight current and former African American male student athletes. The focus group will be interviewed on a day convenient to all participants, and will take place in a controlled setting on a university campus. The interview is expected to last one to two hours with an occasional break as needed.

During the interview, the athletes will be encouraged to elaborate on each of their past experiences and opinions of the media. A series of 10 to 15 questions (See Appendix B) will be used to guide the interview. The questions will center on the two research questions of the study that focus specifically on the athletes' experiences with the mainstream media and whether they felt pressured to conform to certain images within the mainstream media.

V. SPECIFIC RISKS AND PROTECTION MEASURES

There are minimal risks to the participants in this study.

The researcher will take every precaution to protect the identity and responses of all participants. All conversation in the focus groups will be kept confidential. In order to protect the identity of the student athletes, each participant will be assigned a pseudonym that will be referenced in the transcript and subsequent documents. All information pertaining to the participants' identity will be locked in a secure place in the advisor's office at the University of Tennessee. Only the researcher and advisor will have access to information from the focus groups.

The focus group interview will be audio recorded and then transcribed. The interview will be facilitated by another individual with experience in leading focus groups. This person will be selected by a referral from the researcher's committee members. The facilitator will sign a Pledge of Confidentiality form (See Appendix D) before being allowed to conduct the interview. The researcher will take notes during the duration of the focus group. The researcher and the facilitator will take every precaution to keep all information pertaining to the focus group confidential. The data from the focus group will be sent to a paid transcriber to transcribe the data. The transcriber will sign a Pledge of Confidentiality agreement (See Appendix C) before transcribing any data. After the data have been collected and transcribed, they will be erased from the audio recorder. The data from the focus group will then be analyzed and coded to find patterns within the respondents' answers. The researcher will search for themes in the respondents' answers using the Constant Comparison Method (Coleman, Dye, Rosenberg, & Schatz, 2000).

Due to the fact that convenience sampling will be used, some of the athletes in the study may be familiar with one another. To protect the confidentiality of each participant's answers, each athlete will sign a confidentiality statement before they are allowed to participate in the research. The confidentiality statement will be included on the informed consent document.

Each participant will have the option to discontinue participation at any time for any reason, and this will also be stated in the informed consent. If the athlete chooses to no longer participate in the study, any answers or information provided by the athlete will be destroyed by the researcher. All of that participants' answers will be erased and not included in the transcribed data.

VI. BENEFITS

This study will contribute to the existing literature on the media's impact on African American male student athletes. It will help to provide the participants with a better understanding and appreciation for why they think and behave in certain ways. Participants will

be able to establish connections between the media and their own experiences, which could impact the way in which they see themselves.

VII. METHODS FOR OBTAINING "INFORMED CONSENT" FROM PARTICIPANTS

Each participant will read and sign a consent form (See Appendix A) to read and sign before participating in the focus group. The consent documents will be written clearly so that each participant is able to understand and can make a reasonable decision as to whether to participate. If a consent form is not signed, the participant will not be allowed to continue in the focus group. The researcher will also sign the consent form and make a copy for each participant. The consent forms will be kept by the principal investigator for at least three years and will be locked in the faculty advisor's office at the University of Tennessee.

VIII. QUALIFICATIONS OF THE INVESTIGATOR(S) TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

The principal investigator is a second year master's degree student in Recreation and Sport Management. The principal investigator has completed three hours of research, including Research Methods, and has experience conducting interviews on a qualitative basis.

Dr. Sylvia Trendafilova, a member of the thesis committee, will guide the methodological aspect of this research. Dr. Trendafilova primarily does qualitative research. The data for her dissertation were collected using semi-structured interviews and her two most recent published studies contained semi-structured interviews as the method of data collection.

IX. FACILITIES AND EQUIPMENT TO BE USED IN THE RESEARCH

The focus group interviews will take place in the Office of Minority Student Affairs conference room at the University of Tennessee. This location has been chosen because it is quiet and private. The equipment that will be used in this research includes an audio recorder for the duration of the focus group. The researcher will take notes on a Toshiba laptop using Microsoft Word 2007. The researcher will also use QDAMinor software to code the data and the researcher's Toshiba laptop will be used to store the data. A separate jump drive will also be used as a backup storage device for the data. The researcher will also utilize the university's statistical consulting center for assistance in coding the data.

X. RESPONSIBILITY OF THE PRINCIPAL/CO-PRINCIPAL

INVESTIGATOR(S)

By compliance with the policies established by the Institutional Review Board of The University of Tennessee the principal investigator(s) subscribe to the principles stated in "The Belmont Report" and standards of professional ethics in all research, development, and related activities involving human subjects under the auspices of The University of Tennessee. The principal investigator(s) further agree that:

1. **Approval will be obtained from the Institutional Review Board prior to instituting any change in this research project.**

2. **Development of any unexpected risks will be immediately reported to Research Compliance Services.**

3. **An annual review and progress report (Form R) will be completed and submitted when requested by the Institutional Review Board.**
4. **Signed informed consent documents will be kept for the duration of the project and for at least three years thereafter at a location approved by the Institutional Review Board.**

XI. SIGNATURES

ALL SIGNATURES MUST BE ORIGINAL. The Principal Investigator should keep the original copy of the Form B and submit a copy with original signatures for review. Type the name of each individual above the appropriate signature line. Add signature lines for all Co-Principal Investigators, collaborating and student investigators, faculty advisor(s), department head of the Principal Investigator, and the Chair of the Departmental Review Committee. The following information should be typed verbatim, with added categories where needed:

Principal Investigator: _____Keia Bragg_____

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Student Advisor (if any): _____Robin L. Hardin, Ph.D._____

Signature: _____ Date: _____
†
XII. DEPARTMENT REVIEW AND APPROVAL

The application described above has been reviewed by the IRB departmental review committee and has been approved. The DRC further recommends that this application be reviewed as:

[X] Expedited Review -- Category(s): __7_____

OR

[ ] Full IRB Review

Chair, DRC: _____

Signature: _____ **Date:** _____

Department Head:
_____DixieThompson_____

Signature: _____ **Date:** _____

Protocol sent to Research Compliance Services for final approval on (Date) :
_____

Approved:
Research Compliance Services
Office of Research
1534 White Avenue

Signature: _____ **Date:** _____
For additional information on Form B, contact the Office of Research Compliance Officer
or by phone at (865) 974-3466.

Appendix D

Informed Consent Statement

We're not Thugs or Rappers: An Examination of African American Male Athletes' Perceptions of the Media

Introduction

You are invited to participate in a research study. The purpose of this study is to determine:

1. How African American male collegiate athletes feel they are portrayed by the media.
2. Whether African American male collegiate athletes feel pressured to conform to the media's portrayal of other African American male athletes.

Information about Participants' Involvement in the Study

You will participate in a focus group consisting of six or seven current and former athletes to talk about your experiences with the mainstream media. The interview is expected to last one to two hours.

The interview will encourage open discussion. You will be encouraged to elaborate on each of your views and experiences with the media. A series of 10 to 15 pre-determined questions will be used to guide the interview. The interview will be audio recorded and transcribed.

Risks

There are minimal risks involved with participation in this study. Due to the fact that convenience sampling is being used, your may be familiar with other participants. This may comprise confidentiality. Additionally, the process of reflecting on past experiences may produce negative thoughts and emotions.

Benefits

This study may contribute to the existing literature on the media's impact on African American male student athletes. The interview experience may also help you better understand and appreciate why you think and behave in certain ways.

Confidentiality

All conversation in the focus groups should be kept confidential. In order to protect your identity, you will be assigned a code name that will be used to reference your comments. Other participants will be assigned as code name as well that will be used to reference their responses.

All information pertaining to your identity will be locked in a secure office at the University of Tennessee. Only the researcher and faculty advisor will have access to information from the focus groups. After the data from the focus group has been recorded and transcribed, it will be deleted from the audio recorder.

Emergency Medical Treatment

The University of Tennessee does not "automatically" reimburse research participants for medical claims or other compensation. If physical injury is suffered in the course of research, or for more information, you should notify **Brenda Lawson** in the University of Tennessee's Office of Research (865-974-7697).

Contact Information

If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, (or you experience adverse effects as a result of participating in this study,) you may contact the researcher, Keia Bragg at 1914 Andy Holt Ave. Room 335 Knoxville, TN. 37996 or call at 865-974-1281. If you have questions about your rights as a participant, you may contact the Office of Research Compliance Officer at (865) 974-3466.

Participation

Your participation in this study is voluntary; you may decline to participate without penalty. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw from the study at anytime without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you withdraw from the study before data collection is completed your data will be returned to you or destroyed.

CONSENT

I have read the above information. I have received a copy of this form. I agree to participate in this study and preserve the confidentiality of other participants I may know.

Participant's signature _____ Date _____

Investigator's signature _____ Date _____

Appendix E

Semi-Structured Focus Group Questions

1. What comes to mind when you think of the media? How would you define "media"?

2. Describe an experience in your athletic career, if any, in which the media has impacted your life? (good or bad)

3. How would you describe your current or previous relationship as an African American male student athlete with the media?

4. Do you feel the media has a correct or incorrect perception of what it means to be an African American male? Why or why not?

5. When you see or hear about athletes such as Tiger Woods, Kobe Bryant and Michael Vick, how does it make you feel?

6. Have you ever felt the need to change your behaviors or appearance in order to fit into the media's portrayal of African American male identity? Why or Why not?

7. Does the mainstream media to affect your everyday life? If so, how?

8. What type of media do you use most often and why?

9. In what ways do you feel the media depicts African American males versus African American male athletes? Is there a difference?

10. Do you feel that you have been stereotyped by the media in the past? If so, what stereotypes and were they correct or incorrect perceptions?

11. What is the most common stereotype (if any) that the media has of African American male athletes? Why do think that is?

12. How do you feel the media portrays you as an athlete? How do you feel the media portrays other African American male athletes?

13. How do you respond to what you hear or see in the media about African American male athletes? Does it affect your behaviors? Why or why not?

14. Do you feel that the African American male athlete identity has been shaped in

relation to "whiteness" by the mainstream media?

15. Do you feel that there is racism within the mainstream media and also a normal part of American society? Why or why not?

Appendix F

Pledge of Confidentiality

I understand that I will be reading transcriptions of a focus group interview for the study "We're Not Thugs or Rappers: An Examination of African American Male Athletes' Perceptions of the Media." I hereby agree not to share any information in these transcriptions with anyone except the investigator, Keia Bragg, the faculty advisor, or other members of the group. Any violation of this agreement would constitute a serious breach of ethical standards and I pledge not to do so.

Transcriber Signature   Date

_____   _____

Vita

Keia Janese Bragg was born in Morristown, Tennessee. She attended the University of Tennessee in Knoxville, Tennessee where she received her Bachelor of Science degree in Business Administration, Finance. After receiving her bachelor's degree, she worked for a year and a half as a financial counselor at 21st Mortgage Corporation in Knoxville, Tennessee. She then pursued a Master of Science degree in Recreation and Sport Management at the University of Tennessee in Knoxville.