

SKILL IN BLACK AND WHITE:  
A CONTENT ANALYSIS OF THE 2001-2002 NFL SEASON

by

DANIEL TAYLOR BUFFINGTON

(Under the Direction of Reuben May)

ABSTRACT

Ideas of racial distinction arose as part of a massive anthropological program to order the “races” from superior to inferior. While some of these myths have been debunked, many remain salient today, often times in unobtrusive manifestations. One arena in which these myths have taken on notable prominence is sport. Despite being described as one of “America’s most integrated work place” for players (Racial and Gender Report Card, 1998) media portrayals of sport remain immersed in collective impressions of race (Davis and Harris, 1998). Using a mixed method content analysis, I examined the language used by sportscasters to describe professional football players with special attention to how black and white quarterbacks are differentiated. In brief, my results show that the familiar “black-brawn/white-brains” (D. Z. Jackson, 1989) distinction still exists, albeit in a diminished, more nuanced form. Furthermore, this examination indicates that similar analyses must take into account stacking and demography.

INDEX WORDS: History of Race, Collective Impressions of Race, Social Construction of Race, Race and Media, Race and Sport, Intersection of Race and Gender, Agenda Setting Theory of Media, Sociology of Sport

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## DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to all those who have fought, struggled, and died in the effort to combat inequality locally, nationally, and globally. Peace be upon you Jane.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Behind any individual's work lays the effort of many standing behind them. Although there are too many people to acknowledge here, do not think that I have forgotten any of your efforts. Specifically, I would like to thank the many teachers who have sparked me out of my laziness, especially Flora Clancy, Ken Cunningham, Dawn Stracener, and Catherine Ramirez. Thanks must also be given to all those who have helped in the intellectual and physical construction of this thesis: Beth, Liz, Todd, Micki, Woody Beck, Tom Beamish, and Reuben May. Thanks to my parents, especially my mother, for standing by me and encouraging my intellectual development. Mom, I hope I've made you proud. Special thanks must also be given to Chris Rodgers, who, more than anyone, helped me to develop a critical assessment of the world. Without all of you this project would have been unimaginable.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

A central crux of modern sport revolves around the tension between the American ideal of equality (Sawhill, 1999) and the differing interpretations of sports' ability to bring such ideas to fruition. While some interpretations present a rosy picture of racial utopia (Tygiel, 1984), other examinations reveal stereotypes that perpetuate a popular belief in genetic inequality (Davis, 1990; Hoberman, 1997). Using a mixed method content analysis, I examined one aspect of the latter: how the language used by football commentators differentiates and hierarchically arranges athletes by race. In brief, my results show that the "black-brawn/white-brains" (D. Z. Jackson, 1989) distinction still exists, albeit in a diminished, more nuanced form. While announcers draw upon real actions on the field, the events that are selected and how they are emphasized, interpreted, and presented reveals the frame through which announcers decode the sports world and hence suggests something about how collective impressions of race are constructed.

The issue is not that the media tells us what to think, but rather that it helps to set the agenda of what becomes a part of public discourse (McCombs and Shaw, 1972). In a *de facto* segregated society, sports commentary serves a "default function" (Tuchman, 1978, Beamish, 1995), relaying information about groups that might not otherwise be available (May, 2001). During televised sports, discourse implies biologically constructed categories of race that are inherently unequal. These assumed differences divert attention from socio-political and historical factors in the construction of such ideas, and thus emphasize genetics as the prime explanation for black success on the field, and white success off it. In sum, stratification becomes explained as part of a "natural order" that perpetuates the racial status quo (Davis, 1990), while emphasizing human differences rather than similarities.

## CHAPTER 2

### STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Many examinations of the most popular sports in America today (baseball, football, and basketball) have made note of the numerical and statistical domination by black athletes. While only 12.3% of the total US population is African American (2000 US Census), black athletes represent 78% of the players in the NBA, and 67% of the players in the NFL (2001 Racial and Gender Report Card). This discrepancy increases when considering starters and “stars” in football and basketball. For example, the 2003 NBA All-Star game contained five white players, only one of whom was American born (Brad Miller). Eighteen of the twenty-six players named “All-pro” by the Associated Press were black, and all of the white players named appeared in traditionally “stacked positions” (2001 Racial and Gender Report Card; Leonard, 1998).

Considering that desegregation of professional sports only began in the late 1940’s, some have interpreted the current situation as an example of integration from which the rest of society could discover lessons (Tygiel, 1984). Indeed, the Racial and Gender Report Card<sup>1</sup> (1998) went so far as to call sport “America’s most integrated work place” for players. The same document, however, goes on to point out that *de facto* segregation still exists off the playing field. Little improvement has been seen in the coaching and front office ranks, the television booth, and, perhaps most importantly, the skyboxes of the owners.

In addressing these issues forty years after Jackie Robinson broke the barrier for black players, Al Campanis, then Dodgers vice president for player personnel, supplied some of the most controversial public statements on the subject to this day. He stated that African-American’s

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<sup>1</sup> The Racial and Gender Report Card is a summary of gender and racial hiring practices for both players and personnel in the major, American professional and collegiate sports. The report, which has become an industry standard, is compiled by Northeastern University’s Center of the Study of Sport in Society ([www.sportinsociety.org](http://www.sportinsociety.org)) directed by Richard Lapchick.

lack of off field success in sports had nothing to with prejudice. Rather, blacks simply lacked the “necessities,” “desire,” and “background” to run organizations such as banks and sports franchises. He went on to describe former black teammates as “outstanding athletes,” “God-gifted,” and “fleet of foot.” Within the space of a few minutes, Campanis had not only ended his front office career, but also publicly articulated the “semiconscious values” of many in the sports industry and outside it (Hoose, 1989). His statements implied that blacks, as a “race,” were genetically endowed with innate physical skills, yet lacked the mental qualities necessary to lead on or off the field. All the success following Robinson’s triumph could be undermined by a still prevalent stereotype and form of segregation: the separation of black brawn and white brains.

Players of a by-gone, segregated era are not the only annotators expressing such typification. Academics, such as the authors of the controversial best seller *The Bell Curve* (Murray and Herrnstein, 1994a, 1994b), enthusiastically endorsed the dominance of black athletes, while simultaneously placing African-Americans lowest on their highly controversial mental aptitude scale. In 1989, NBC ran a special broadcast, “Black Athletes: Fact or Fiction,” in which flawed methodology credited performance differences to genetic criteria (Mathisen and Mathisen, 1991). Popular sports magazines advertise training regimens that claim to build “fast twitch muscle fibers” despite no scientific evidence that such physiology actually affects athletic performance (Hoberman, 1997). These pseudo-scientific “theories” have more to do with a preoccupation with racial hierarchies than they are attempts to explain performance (Davis, 1990).

Such “scientized” accounts have now incorporated themselves into the popular mindset. Half of the respondents from a poll conducted in the US agreed with the statement, “blacks have more natural athletic ability” (Myers, 1991). In the 2000 version of the General Social Survey, 45% of all respondents believed African Americans lacked the will and motivation to pull themselves out of poverty. It is important when recalling the successes of black athletes to understand how these victories are framed. Accomplishments of black athletes are now

acknowledged, but in such a way that genetic inheritance is credited for achievement and categories of race become fixed, immutable biological realities. In turn, these “realities” may limit opportunities for African Americans off the field and in the labor market in general.

This paper seeks answer the following questions through an analysis of sports commentary. Are black and white athletes presented in different ways on television? Given the history of racial stereotypes, are black athletes more likely to be credited with physical skill than white athletes? Are white athletes more likely to be credited with mental skill than black athletes? In order to answer these questions, some discussion of the history of race and sport is required.

## CHAPTER 3

### RACE AND SPORT IN THE UNITED STATES

#### A Brief History

During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, European writers used “race”<sup>2</sup> as a means of ordering and ranking the various peoples of the world. At the time, the widespread development of mental and physical aptitude tests were part of a massive anthropological program to order the “races” from superior to inferior (Shipman, 1994; Hoberman, 1997; American Anthropological Association, 1998). Within this mechanistic and hierarchical system, Europeans thought of themselves as physically and mentally superior to those whom they conquered. Influential writers, such as Darwin (1981), used colonialism as empirical evidence stating “civilized men [have] been found, wherever compared, to be physically stronger than savages” [pp. 170-1].

European thinkers did not wholly reject the athletic aptitude of non-whites. The paternalism of the “noble savage” always contained an amount of respect for the outdoor skills of “primitive” peoples, but such physicality cannot be seen as purely athletic, but rather “quasi” or “proto-athletic” (Hoberman, 1997). Europeans at the time believed that such physicality could never be controlled enough to conform to the disciplined skills required by modern sport.

Within this context, one can better understand the folklore in late 19<sup>th</sup> century America that asserted black’s physical inferiority (Tucker, 1994). Even writers such as W.E.B. Dubois called for increased physical education in black schools. However, at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Jack Johnson became the first black heavyweight champion. In a rigorously stratified society, one of the few occupations where whites and blacks competed on a somewhat level playing field became an arena of historical significance. The spectacle of Jack Johnson and Joe Louis routinely

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<sup>2</sup> At this time, “race” was often used where more modern terminology would refer to nationality, ethnicity, or cultural group.

beating white opponents proved a symbolic victory in an era of lynching, physical intimidation, and overt racism (Hoberman, 1997).

The beginning of desegregation in professional American sports began with Jackie Robinson's entrance into baseball in 1947. At the time, Jimmy Powers of the New York Daily News predicted that he would fail because "the Negro players simply don't have the brains or the skill."<sup>3</sup> Such comments were still caught up in the myth of white mental and physical superiority, indicating the "black-brawn/white-brain" distinction (D.Z. Jackson, 1989) had not fully developed at that time. The belief in white physical superiority took significant symbolic blows through the success of Robinson and a number of other prominent black athletes, while the Civil Rights movement officially ended overt racism at both the collegiate and professional levels. By the 1970's there were prominent black athletes in the three big American sports.

Numerically, black's success overcame the myth of white athletic superiority, but this did not stop the emergence of a new hierarchy. Black athletic success became explained through "race linked genetic differences" (Davis, 1990) harkening back to the Colonial obsession with racial taxonomy. These explanations include myths such as natural black hardiness developed during slavery; differences in bone density, skin thickness, and relaxation; as well as quick reaction nervous systems and muscle fibers (Hoberman, 1997). Each of these theories has been debunked or placed in serious doubt by more rigorous scientific studies (Ama, et al, 1990; Saltin, 1995a, 1995b), yet the cultural resonance persists.

To date, there is no widely accepted theory that claims a genetic link between race and "human capabilities or behavior"(American Anthropological Association, 1998), including athletics (Hoberman, 1997). Part of the problem comes from the complexity of heritability and expression. For example, to produce skin pigmentation, every child inherits multiple sets of genes, and these do not work on the simple dominate-recessive scheme of Mendel (Shipman, 1994). Add environmental and socio-political factors to this complex picture, and the certainty of

a genetically linked expression of so complex and culturally biased a measure as “athletic skill” quickly fades.

Furthermore, social scientists have been quick to question studies that employ race as a biological construct and that emphasize differences among human populations rather than the high degree of similarity (Edwards, 1971; Shipman, 1994). Academics from as wide ranging fields as biology (Gould, 1981), anthropology (Shipman, 1994; American Anthropological Association, 1998), and sociology (Ferrante and Brown, Jr., 1998) instead explain race as a social construction. Analysis of DNA shows that the so-called race categories have more within-group difference than between group difference (Gould, 1981; American Anthropological Association, 1998). “The idea of ‘race’ has always carried more meanings than mere physical differences; indeed, physical variations in the human species have no meaning except the social ones that humans put on them” (American Anthropological Association, 1998). In short, these hierarchical social meanings, begun by European colonists as they conquered the world, have become the inherited racial folklore of today.

It is out this misunderstanding of race as a biological, rather than a constructed category, that many of the stereotypes of whites arose as well. Intelligence tests to order the “races” appeared contemporaneously with physical tests. When intelligence testing began in America under Henry Goddard, it was already under the ideological sway of eugenics (Shipman, 1994). After being used as a tool for the Immigration Act of 1924, these tests were administered in the military. The “results” showed lower IQ’s for blacks than whites and beliefs based on these tests had seeped into school textbooks by the 1920’s (Seldon, 1999). The popularity of *The Bell Curve* (Murray and Herrnstein, 1994a) attests to this idea’s continuing salience today. Such theories assume that human beings are inherently genetically unequal, and thus stratification becomes explained by biological, rather than socio-political and environmental factors (Gould, 1995; Hasian, Jr., 1996)

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<sup>3</sup> Quote taken from Hoose, 1989

Impressions of white athletic performance are exemplified in references to “white man’s disease” (Hoose, 1989) and made popular in films like *White Men Can’t Jump* (1992). This presentation of white athletes as disadvantaged physically, in comparison to their black counterparts, is tempered with a positive emphasis on mental skills such as intelligence, hustle, desire, hard work, and leadership. Black athletes are portrayed as mentally disadvantaged compared to their white counterparts (Davis and Harris, 1998), thus completing the dichotomous relationship.

The breadth of such “semiconscious values” (Hoose, 1989) are accurately captured in the following comment on athletic stereotypes by former black basketball player, Isaiah Thomas:

When [Larry] Bird makes a great play it’s due to his thinking and work habits. It’s all planned out for him. It’s not the case for blacks. All we do is run and jump. We never practice or give thought to how we play. It’s like I came dribbling out of my mother’s womb. (Berkow, 1987)

In sum, beliefs surrounding the athletic and mental abilities of both whites and blacks are part of a “discursive network” about race, biology, and stratification (O’Donnell, 1994). They are derived from a massive anthropological program to order the “races” from superior to inferior that began in the 1700’s and currently continues in pseudo-scientific accounts. While such stereotypes might have changed over time, the thread that holds such discourse together is the necessity to classify the so-called races into hierarchies and to explain any differences at the biological level. The naturalization of biological differences has been interpreted as racist (Davis, 1990) because of its focus on differences rather than similarities and its presentation of racial categories as unambiguous biological truths. Such explanations tend to devalue human agency (such as the efforts of individual athletes) and the socio-political forces that structure occupational opportunities (Davis, 1990). Such stereotypes also turn sport into a public spectacle that mirrors and justifies current power relations. The sight of white men owning and directing the labor of people of color also naturalizes the current national and international division of labor



and power. In sum, sport is a politicized landscape that is shaped by, reflects, and justifies particular manifestations of race and power.

### Stacking

Such beliefs have had real structural effects on the opportunities for both black and white athletes as seen in stacking, or positional segregation. Stacking is the “practice of assigning positions based on race logic and stereotypes” (Dufur, 1997). Within sports that have a “well-defined social structure” (Leonard, 1998), positions that are central tend to have more interaction with teammates/opponents, more decisions to make, and more control over the outcome of the game. A number of studies of multiple sports have found that white athletes are disproportionately “stacked” at central positions (Lavoie and Leonard 1994; Schneider and Eitzen, 1986; Lewis, 1995; Eitzen and Furst, 1989; Maguire 1988). Numerous hypotheses, ranging from the social to the psychological, have attempted to explain this pattern (Leonard, 1998). The social explanations tend to concentrate on the perceptions of management and coaches, who assign players to specific positions based on the skills required by that position and the characteristics deemed to be predominant in a particular group. The more social psychological theories concentrate on the individual athlete, assuming that individuals make career decisions about which position to play based on perceived likelihood of success via childhood role models.

In thinking about football, specific positions require particular skills that may affect which athletes are chosen to fill them. Wide receiver, running back, and defensive back all require speed, while offensive and defensive lines requires strength. Quarterback, offensive center, and middle linebacker have been considered football’s central positions because of their active role as play callers. Thus in football, as in many other sports, white athletes have traditionally been found at central positions that emphasize decision making, while black athletes have traditionally been found in the margins, in more reactive positions requiring physical skills such as speed and running ability.

An examination of the most current data shows that stacking continues to persist in the NFL. White athletes have numerically dominated the position of quarterback and, to a lesser degree, offensive center for quite some time. In 1983, 99% of quarterbacks and 97% of centers in the NFL were white (2001 Racial and Gender Report Card). By 1998, only moderate changes had occurred with 91% (quarterback) and 83% (offensive center) of the positions filled by white athletes (2001 Racial and Gender Report Card). Conversely, running back (87%), wide receiver (92%), cornerback (99%), and safety (91%) are positions numerically dominated by black athletes (2001 Racial and Gender Report Card). It should be noted that in the last few years professional opportunities for black quarterbacks have risen considerably,<sup>4</sup> suggesting a possibility of changing or fading typifications. This paper will specifically focus on the way black and white quarterbacks are framed.

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<sup>4</sup> The 2001 Racial and Gender Report Card reports that for the 1999 season 18% of quarterbacks were black, while for the 2000 season 21% were black. Thus, these figures show tremendous increase compared to the previous years for which data is available.

## CHAPTER 4

### LITERATURE REVIEW

Harry Edwards' (1969) suggestion that the sports media failed to recognize the accomplishments of African American athletes created a proliferation of mass media studies regarding sport and race. One of the earliest studies of this type came from Rainville and McCormick (1977), who found that announcers built "positive reputations" for white football players and "negative reputations" for black football players. It is interesting to note that the project became formulated through one of the researcher's experience with mediated images of sport. Rainville, who was blind and naïve to football, found that he could typically identify the race of a player from auditory information only, even with the player's names dubbed out. This observation led to the empirical design focusing on racial differences in language used by sportscasters, and their relation to ideas regarding physical and mental skill (f6, pg. 21).

Later studies of primarily male athletes (well summarized by Davis and Harris, 1998) began to find a clear pattern of racial distinction. Black male athletes were often portrayed as "naturally" gifted with "innate" physical skills such as speed, power, and jumping ability. Typification of athletic prowess was tempered with doubts of black intelligence, commitment, discipline, and leadership. Conversely, white athletes were often portrayed as athletically average, yet with enough mental skill (determination, work ethic, intelligence, leadership) to overcome such obstacles. Thus, this "black-brawn/white-brain" distinction (Messner, Duncan, and Jensen, 1993, D. Z. Jackson, 1989) builds upon the same racial mythology as popular psuedo-scientific accounts, such as *The Bell Curve* and the 1989 NBC broadcast "Black Athletes: Fact or Fiction."

The high-water mark for studies of this type appeared in the late 80's and early-90's when D.Z. Jackson wrote a number of articles (1989a, 1989b, 1990a, 1990b, 1990c) based on a

study sponsored by the Boston Globe. These articles became widely discussed in the world of sports and outside it (Messner, Duncan, and Jensen, 1993). A number of research findings in the mid-90's reported a reduction in the aforementioned stereotypes of African American male athletes (Messner, Duncan, and Jensen, 1993, Sabo et al., 1996, Denham, Billings, and Halone, 2002). Sabo et al. (1996) indicated that these improvements showed responsiveness on the part of the sports media to popular criticisms. Messner, Duncan and Jensen (1993) noted that the commentary they analyzed appeared forced, or as an afterthought, suggesting that media was reacting to internal and external critiques. Contemporaneously, Arthur Ashe reported the introduction of "sensitivity training" for sports commentators to overcome this linguistic dichotomization (Sabo et al, 1996, Messner and Sabo, 1994). Regardless, the need for sportscasters to undergo training in order to overcome the tendency to linguistically separate black and white achievement implies the strength of racial myths in decoding the sports world.

Davis and Harris (1998) urge their readers to view this new evidence with caution since the "bulk of research findings show evidence of racism in sports coverage." These new results do not completely dismiss the "black-brawn/white-brain" distinction, but rather show that the prominence (at least as it has been measured) has decreased compared to earlier research. A decrease of overt racism, however, may be replaced by more covert forms (Davis and Harris, 1998). This project analyzed both the manifest and latent content of sports commentary in order to address the possibility that racial distinctions have moved more towards the unobtrusive pole.

#### Hierarchy of Naming

Differences in race may not only appear as differences in skill assignment. Studies of gender, language, and sport have often found a hierarchy of naming by gender (Messner, Duncan, and Jensen, 1993, Koivula, 1999). Hierarchy of naming refers to the tendency for announcers to refer to dominant groups by last names or full names, while referring to dominated groups by first names. Formally referencing dominant groups, and subordinate groups, informally, has been interpreted as infantilizing the latter and thus "reflect[ing] and (re)construct[ing] inequality"

(Messner, Duncan, and Jensen, 1993). An alternative interpretation, however, might be that referencing by first names only implies a degree of familiarity with the athlete. Thus, star players might be called by their first name because of their “intimate” relationship with the viewing audience through both playing sports and advertising products.

In analyzing 1989 coverage of the NCAA Final Four, Messner et. Al. (1993) found that hierarchy of naming had a gendered and racial aspect. While hierarchy of naming occurred more often in the women’s games, all references to players first names in the men’s Final Four were directed at men of color. Furthermore, prominent white players such as Danny Ferry and Andrew Gaze were never referred to by first name only. Thus, the interpretation regarding power structures appears to be correct for the data available.

#### Default Function of the Media

Studies of collective memory have shown the pervasive effect media plays in the formation of popular beliefs (Best and Horiuchi, 1985; Chambliss, 1994; Beamish, Molotch, and Flacks, 1995; May, 2001). Emphasis from the mass media can make very isolated events (such as hostility towards GI’s by Vietnam-era protestors or razor blades in apples) appear as widespread “beliefs.” Over time, such events take on characteristics of urban legends, with the “remembered” nature of such events more closely mirroring mass media accounts than empirically verified instances (Beamish et al, 1995).

The widespread impact of media on popular discourse has been explained through the “default function of the media” (Tuchman, 1978, Beamish, 1995). Despite increased connection through globalization, most people rely on media to inform them of the “outside world.” Individuals who do not come into direct contact with places, people, and/or events become dependent on less direct sources of information. In modernity, mass media helps to fulfill this need by providing (necessarily) selected information about such distant environments. These mediated selections, however, help to set the agenda of what becomes a part of public discussion

(McCombs and Shaw, 1972).<sup>5</sup> For example, previous research has shown that media routines help construct popular discourse around urban legends (Best and Horiuchi, 1985), crime (Chambliss, 1994), social movements (Beamish, et. al, 1995), and race talk (May, 2001). Even when individual agents regard the specific details of media accounts with suspicion, such stories frame what is at issue.

In thinking about race in America, we must take into account the continued presence of *de facto* segregation. While the Civil Rights Amendments alleviated some of the most overt forms of racism, neighborhoods, cities, and towns across America remain segregated (Massey and Denton, 1993). When whites and blacks do interact, their relationships rarely fit the requirements of contact theory (Allport 1954; Cook, 1988), which calls for extended, non-hierarchical interaction with equality in mind. This lack of interaction means that one of the main ways blacks and whites learn about each other is through the media. In a study of African Americans, May (2001) found that lack of intimate familiarity with “white life” is supplemented by mediated images. Studies of whites show a similar pattern of reliance on media to construct “blackness” (Anderson, 1990, Duneier, 1992). This is problematic, in that the lack of familiarity makes it difficult for viewers to unpack the “real” from the “fantasy.” Furthermore, studies of media have continued to show that African Americans are portrayed in a negative light (Duneier, 1992; Grover and Soothill, 1996). May (2001) found that discussions surrounding such images (always framed within individual and collective impressions of race) tended to increase the salience of racially dichotomous discourse. This paper will argue that televised sport reflects and perpetuates many of the racial mythologies about “whiteness” and “blackness” by both drawing from and legitimating collective impressions of race.

The importance of television today can hardly be debated. Research estimates that young children, on average, spend more time watching television than they spend in school (Anderson and Taylor, 2001). Sport has become one of the dominant genres on television, with Gorman and

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<sup>5</sup> See also “Agenda-setting research: where has it been, where is it going?” (Rogers and Dearing, 1994)

Calhoun (1994) estimating that over 8,000 sporting events are televised each year. Sport takes on an especially prominent role in the American landscape by dominating weekends and even primetime weekday broadcasts in the case of special events (NCAA Men's National Championship, NBA Finals, Olympics), or the classic Monday Night Football. Furthermore, sports forms one of the major subjects of informal workplace culture, especially for men, by providing a common theme around which conversations are constructed. All these point out the prominent position media holds generally, and specifically as a catalyst for American impressions of race.

## CHAPTER 5

### SAMPLE AND METHODS

I transcribed and coded commentary from NFL football games televised regionally in the Atlanta area for weeks three through seventeen of the 2001-2 season. Sunday broadcasts on both CBS and FOX, Monday nights on ABC, and special holiday broadcasts were taped generating a total sample of 41 games. Sunday broadcasts typically overlapped, so that one game was chosen at random. Thus, of the total sample, 15 games were broadcast on ABC, 13 games on CBS, and 13 games on FOX. Because CBS and FOX were televising regional and nationally syndicated games concurrently, the samples from these stations included a number of announcing teams [Appendix A], as opposed to the one announcing team employed at ABC. Still, the FOX sample included eight games by Pat Summerall and John Madden, while the CBS sample included seven games by Greg Gumball and Phil Simms. Greg Gumball and Curt McNafee (of FOX) were the only black announcers appearing in the sample, and McNafee appeared in only one game. A comparison of linguistic references by black announcers and white announcers will be commented on periodically.

One randomly chosen quarter from each of the games was transcribed into a word document, and then analyzed using a mixed-method content analysis. Stability was established by recoding just under a quarter (24.4%) of the total sample. There was 90.8% agreement regarding content selected as physical and mental skill between the two codings, with a range of 82.6% to 100% agreement. Reproducibility (intercoder reliability) was established by using another, untrained coder for just over 10% of the transcriptions. These codings showed 78.1% agreement regarding skill assignment, with a range of 70% to 81.3% agreement.

First, commentary was coded for hierarchy of naming using the “search” feature to find first and last names of athletes. References to players not on the two teams playing were not



included in this portion. Due to this paper's assumption that race is a socially constructed category, skin color was used as the primary method of determining race. Pictures of almost all the athletes appearing in this sample were publicly accessible on the Internet via each team's home page. Where pictures were not available or skin color was largely ambiguous, no category was assigned. The researcher also listened for information regarding the players' background provided by the announcers. For example, Olindo Mare, originally coded as black based on skin color, was later identified as Hispanic due to the announcer's reference to this player having grown up in the Dominican Republic.

Secondarily, commentary was coded for linguistic references to either athletic or mental skill. A codebook [see Appendix B], based on the "black-brawn/white-brains" distinction, was constructed using words, phrases, and linguistic references found to be prominent in previous studies of a similar nature (Davis and Harris, 1998; Dufur, 1997; Hoberman, 1997; Hoose, 1989; Jackson, 1989; Messner, Duncan, and Jensen, 1993; O'Donnell, 1994; Rainville and McCormick, 1977; Wonsek 1992). While the two main categories (physical and mental skill) resembled the brawn-brain distinction, these categories were further subdivided into specific types of skill.

Based on the aforementioned literature, speed, size, strength, and the ability to run were closely associated as positive skills for black athletes. The ability to throw and catch the football, skills most closely associated with specific positions, was added in order to examine the "skill positions." The literature also suggested leadership, emotion, intelligence, and work ethic as skills for which white athletes were positively associated. Tactical knowledge was appended to these mental skills based on early tests of categories. Before coding began, each subcategory was expanded upon to include some field specific jargon. During the process of transcribing and coding, comments by announcers clued this researcher into previously uncategorized jargon. For example, Dan Fouts stated that "possession receiver" is another way of saying that a wideout is not very fast. John Madden, as well as Craig James, revealed that the phrase "holding your water" refers to a quarterback who bravely stays in the pocket despite a heavy, potentially damaging

rush. Thus, the final categories were constructed using both a deductive and inductive approach, as suggested by Strauss (1987), Altheide (1987), and Berg (2001). Furthermore, “other” categories for both physical and mental skill were used to assess data that were clearly physical or mental, but for which there were no existing categories. After the conclusion of the coding process, two new categories (athlete and concentration) emerged. Each reference to skill also included race of athlete, position of athlete, and race of announcer.

Critiquing the more “traditional,” strictly quantitative style of content analysis (Berelson, 1966)<sup>6</sup>, Altheide (1987) and Berg (2001) encourage the collection of both numeric-type data and the narrative type of data found in qualitative studies. Although quantitative data derived from content analysis provides information about the frequency and magnitude of patterns, it tends to promote inflexible categories of data collection (Altheide, 1987), loss of context (Altheide, 1987; Berg 2001), and over-emphasis on manifest content to the detriment of latent content (Berg, 2001). Building upon these critiques, I recorded quantifiable linguistic patterns regarding hierarchy of naming and skill assignment into simple frequency distributions [see Tables 3-5] in order to assess overarching patterns. These patterns were colored with qualitative examples to provide context and a means of discussing latent meanings within the data.

As suggested by Altheide (1987) and Berg (2001), the construction of categories used in this project’s codebook (see discussion above) involved interaction between the researcher and the data. In short, data analysis began with a distinction suggested in the literature from which new categories emerged during the data collection process. In this way, the project was not consumed by the rigidity of previously constructed categories, or the haphazard nature of idiosyncratic decisions to which some textual analyses can succumb.

Furthermore, a qualitative assessment of the data was used to avoid homographs or mistaken meaning involving phrases. This distinction can be seen as extremely important to this

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<sup>6</sup> Also see Silverman’s (1993) rejection of content analysis as a type of qualitative data analysis “because it is a quantitative method.”

project when considering the following two phrases: “quick thinking” versus “quick running.” Thus, any words or phrases from the project’s codebook found in the transcripts were examined within the context in order to ensure proper coding.

Additionally, not all meaning is quantifiable into the codebook. While manifest content such as speed was rather easily recognized, latent meanings that otherwise would have been absent were discovered through a qualitative assessment of the data. For example, the following commentary, regarding a white quarterback for the San Francisco 49ers, reveals precisely this problem:

[Miller] You gotta love Garcia’s court (sic) awareness, don’t you Danno? He really has all the nuances of a field leader; knows exactly how much time he has to get it out of bounds.

[Fouts] Yeah, if you put a 16 on the back of that jersey he could confuse some people.

Note that while both court awareness and field leader are phrases identified in this project’s codebook, the comment by Dan Fouts, referencing Joe Montana (a retired white quarterback of legendary mental skill) adds power to Miller’s comments, while not using any of the language contained in the codebook (nor any real catch phrase to quantify). Thus, wherever possible, qualitative examples of both deviant cases and those matching the quantitative data are called upon to enrich the analysis.

## CHAPTER 6

### FINDINGS

Upon examining this data, the results show that black and white athletes tend to be framed along familiar lines. In terms of hierarchy of naming, black athletes received more than twice as many first name references as white athletes. Furthermore, as anticipated from the literature, black athletes received more positive qualifiers for physical skills such as speed, running ability, strength, size, athleticism, and the ability to catch the ball. Mentally, blacks received more positive comments regarding determination, as well as ability to read and understand the game tactically. Conversely, white athletes received more positive comments in categories such as the ability to throw the football, intellect, leadership, and emotional control. These differences became highlighted at the position of quarterback. Examination of these results also revealed that the numerical prominence of black athletes (especially as starters) and the strong association between particular positions and skills, partially, but not completely, explained black-white difference in terms of hierarchy of naming and skill assignment.

In the following, I direct attention to the differences and similarities by which announcers discuss black and white athletes, and where it is appropriate, to differences between black and white announcers. I begin with a discussion of hierarchy of naming and follow with a general discussion of physical skill assignment. Subsequent to this, I discuss the general findings regarding mental skill. I finish with an in-depth analysis of quarterbacks as a means of discussing the general frames through which collective impressions of “blackness” and “whiteness” are presented. Following the empirical results, I discuss the implication of these findings regarding a sociological understanding of race, media, sport, and stratification.

### Hierarchy of Naming

Announcers used first name references for black athletes nearly 2.5 times (207 to 86) as frequently as for white athletes [Table 1]. Thus, as found with gender, the socially dominated group is more likely to receive “informal” treatment (Messner, et. al, 1993). Citing this variation, one must acknowledge the fact that black athletes make up the majority of players in the NFL. In order to account for this numerical discrepancy, I looked at the percentage of first name references within the total number of times a player’s name was mentioned (first, last, or both). Results showed that black athletes were slightly more likely to be referred to by their first name only than white athletes (4.1% to 3.3%). Thus, the exclusive use by race found by Messner, et al (1993) was not present in this sample.

Hierarchy of naming was further broken down into announcing teams in order to assess any idiosyncratic effects of individual announcers [Table 2]. Among the three nationally broadcast announcing teams, there was a considerable variation, although not necessarily by race. ABC’s Monday Night Football, hosted that season Al Michaels, Dan Fouts, and Dennis Miller, used first name references more often than the national FOX (Pat Summerall and John Madden) or CBS team (Greg Gumbell and Phil Simms). This increase, however, occurred for both white and black athletes (and even included references to players of other ethnicities, the only time this occurred in this sample). While some of the announcing teams with few quarters in the sample showed some tendency for increased hierarchy of naming, not enough data were available to make an assessment. Black announcers did not seem to deviate greatly in terms of hierarchy of naming from their white counterparts, although Greg Gumbell (black) did address more players by their first name than did partner Phil Simms (white).

As stated above, Messner et. al. interpreted hierarchy of naming as an implication of power relations, although familiarity with a “star” athlete could be another interpretation. The latter suggestion was not founded in the data examined. While it was extremely rare that a fringe player would be cited by their first name, by no means were stars solely, or most prevalently,

singled out on a first name basis. For example, the St. Louis Rams' offense contains a number of stars (Kurt Warner [W, QB]<sup>7</sup>, Marshall Faulk [B, RB], and Tory Holt [B, WR]), yet Faulk and Holt received more references to their first name. Furthermore, Garrison Hearst [B, RB], playing for the 49ers with such stars as Jeff Garcia [W, QB] and Terrell Owens [B, WR], was cited a number of times by his first name.

The qualitative examination showed that references to first name occurred in close proximity to each other. When an announcer began to call Garrison Hearst by his first name only, the other announcer(s) seemed to follow this cue. Then, following interruptions of the game such as commercials, spectacular plays, or turnovers, the pattern ceased. This finding is especially interesting considering reports of "sensitivity training" for announcers (Sabo et al, 1996, Messner and Sabo, 1994). One might speculate that an announcer who "slips up" from the constructed routine could induce similar behavior in other announcer(s). It is unfortunate that interaction between the announcers and the production team is unavailable for examination of possible direct negative sanctioning.

### Physical Skills

Black players received 560 comments referring to physical skill compared to only 285 for whites over the course of the 41 quarters examined [Table 3]. For blacks, 82.1% of these were positive, while 17.9% were negative. For whites, 72.6% were positive, and 27.4% negative. Consequently, there was a slight tendency to give more positive treatment to blacks, and more negative treatment to whites, regarding physical skill. The subdivision of skill revealed that speed, running ability, strength, size, and athleticism were more commonly assigned to black players [Table 4]. The ability to throw the football (a skill exclusively used for quarterbacks) was the sole physical skill more often assigned to whites. The effects of stacking are discussed independently for each skill.

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<sup>7</sup> For convenience, players are presented by their race followed by their position. Thus [W, WR] indicates a white wide receiver, while [B, QB] indicates a black quarterback.

## *Speed*

Although black athletes were more than three times as likely to be called fast, quick, or speedy, there were few references to white athletes as slow [Table 4]. However, the degree of variation became more exaggerated with closer examination. References to speed included two types: one for individual references (“Schroeder showed some good speed on that one”), and one for group references (“Pittsburgh’s defensive line is extremely quick”). Individually, blacks received more than five times as many references to speed as white players. The majority of the references to speed assigned to white players came in the form of groups. Thus, few white players were singled out as fast. The majority of the groups interpreted as fast (9 of 13) contained more black players. Thus, many of the references to whites as fast could have been in passing references without specific intent.

While players at virtually every position were credited with speed, the vast majority occurred at positions in which blacks held a numerical advantage (wide receiver, running back, linebacker, and defensive back). Hence, stacking played an influential role in this particular skill assignment. Still, a qualitative examination revealed differential treatment among those athletes labeled as fast. For example, ABC announcer Dennis Miller expressed surprise that Bill Schroeder [W, WR] displayed speed. Miller stated, “Boy, Schroeder has some jets there I didn’t now he had there ... pretty quick.” While Miller does not deny a white player with obvious speed his due, such “positive” commentary is not purely positive. This comment depicts the surprise, and implied doubt, that Schroeder was fast, despite his background in track and field.

Furthermore, white players credited with speed or quickness were rarely qualified by adjectives accentuating this skill. Inversely, announcers described the speed of black players as “world-class,” “impressive,” “blazing,” “exceptional,” and “too fast.” The speed of a white players was preceded by an adjective in only four instances, and these were all of the much more ordinary “good” and “great” variety. Therefore, while announcers did not avoid crediting white

players with speed, the description of this skill differed in terms of emphasis, with black speed presented as exceptional and spectacular.

### *Running*

Quickness also conveyed the ability to run, cut, and make successful fakes, with black athletes receiving nearly five times more positive comments than white athletes [Table 4]. Moreover, in only one instance did announcers negatively sanction a black player, compared to four such instances for white players. Although wide receivers and tight ends received comments within this category, the majority of references were to running backs and quarterbacks. Only one white running back, Mike Alstott of Tampa Bay, made a significant appearance in this sample, assuring more opportunities for blacks. For quarterbacks, more than half of the positive comments were directed at blacks not whites (see discussion of quarterbacks below).

Qualitative examples reveal the tendency for announcers to emphasize black mobility, while overlooking the same skill in whites. For example, despite the fact that Jay Fiedler [QB, W] was cited numerous times in this sample for his mobility, his replacement by black back up Ray Lucas was attributed to the latter's ability to run:

[Gumbell] Phil, let's go back to that drive when Dave Wandstat inserted Ray Lucas in at quarterback, and then he connects with Chambers on a pass that you said ... well, hey, Jay Fiedler could have just as easily thrown that, but how about the potential to run that Lucas brought to game?

[Simms] Well, its' everything now. Jay Fiedler is a good runner too, Greg, but now just to go back to that. You're the Jets defense, Lucas hands it off, now you know he can run the option, the quarterback sneak, and he'll throw it deep down the field. You're just guessing ... like us.

Despite the fact Fiedler is an excellent runner himself, and that Lucas completed a tough pass on the play, announcers interpreted the difference as mobility, an explanation repeated by Steve Tasker regarding the same players later in the season.



### *Hands*

The vast majority of comments regarding the ability to catch the ball were directed at wide receivers, and to a lesser degree, tight ends, running backs, and defensive backs. The numerical dominance of black athletes at these positions quite possibly led to the discrepancy regarding this particular skill assignment (Table 4). Black athletes not only received many more comments of this variety, but also were more likely to be positively credited. A slight majority of the comments directed at whites were negative.

### *Strength*

The racial differentiation regarding strength was much clearer, with black players unanimously portrayed as strong and powerful [Table 4]. Only two negative comments regarding strength appeared in this sample; both were directed at white players. The relative lack of references to “weakness” suggests a strong association between power and strength in American football and hegemonic conceptions of masculinity (Lorber, 1994). While many comments of this type were directed at offensive and defensive lineman, every position (minus kicker and punter) received comments of this variety, suggesting that this skill was less associated with a particular position.

### *Size*

Similarly, size was a skill assigned to most positions, indicating a minimal effect for stacking. Still, black athletes were often portrayed as large, with this emphasis at times bordering on mythical proportions. Furthermore, black bodies were verbally dissected with some regularity. While it is obvious that players in general (and especially lineman) are at the upper end of the size distribution for humans, this distinction applies to both black and white athletes in the NFL. Standing next to each other, it would be hard to distinguish a size difference between Tony Siragusa [W, DL] (6’03”, 340) and Gilbert Brown [B, DL] (6’02”, 339), yet qualitative examples show differential treatment by race.

For example, Gilbert Brown received eight individual references to his large size. Besides being described as “big” and “bulbous,” many of the comments revolved around his “trouble” the previous year with keeping his weight down. Take the following selection from ABC:

[Michaels] You know the story with him, he was up to almost 400 lbs., and he couldn't play. They wouldn't sign him last year. He had to get his life back in order, get his weight down. He's playing at about 335 now. And back 20-25 plays a game.

[Fouts] Yeah you don't have to draw as big a circle this year for Gilbert, down to 335 or whatever – if you can get down to something like that ...

[Miller] ... I just like the fact that Gilbert Brown is able to utter the sentence “I'm down to 335.”

This portrayal of a “remodeled version” of Gilbert Brown was mirrored, not only in comments from CBS and FOX, but also in comments about fellow African-American lineman Ted Washington (6'05", 330). In a broadcast on CBS, both Greg Gumbell and Phil Simms jokingly expressed fear at commenting on Washington's weight in public for fear of reprisal. The portrayal of Siragusa slipped into humor on only one occasion, when Miller commented, “Siragusa took on two men. It looked like he was wearing ‘em like water wings.” Siragusa was specified for his size on only one other occasion (although the entire Baltimore defensive line was emphasized for size on two other occasions), and that incident involved the bland “big.”

Commentators tended to dissect black athletes' bodies verbally. Body dissection (the objectification of body parts in advertisements) has primarily been commented on by Jean Kilbourne in the *Killing Us Softly* series (1979, 1987, 2000). More recently, Dufur (1997) showed body dissection to be common in advertisements involving black athletes. Comments of this type emphasized distinct portions of the body and typically portrayed them as larger than life. For example, Baldinger commented to his fellow announcer, “You see the size of those legs Curt?” Similarly, Madden stated, “[Keith Hamilton] has to have about three or four guys to hold that right arm.” In total, 13 comments of this type occurred and all were directed at black athletes.

### *Athleticism*

Within this sample, black players received more individual references to athleticism; however, this type of description was not exclusively used for black athletes, as reported by D.Z. Jackson (1989). Overall, black players were called athletic 24 times compared to 14 times for their white counterparts. Like speed, athleticism was assigned to both individuals and groups of players. Black players received 15 individual comments compared to only one for a white player (Rich Gannon). Furthermore, Brad Johnson [W, QB] received the only negative comment regarding athleticism. Of the five total groups who received athletic comments, two were majority black, two were majority white, and one equally split. Thus, like speed, it is unclear how many of the group references were directed at white players, or were assigned in passing reference. Individually, however, black players were clearly more likely to be presented as athletic.

### Mental Skill

Black players received 178 comments regarding mental skill compared to 135 comments for whites (Table 3). For blacks, 67.4% of the comments were positive, and 32.6% were negative. For whites, 71.1% of the comments were positive, and 28.9% negative. The subdivision of skill revealed that whites were more often cited as intelligent, emotionally in control, leaders than blacks [Table 5]. Determination, and especially the ability to play hurt, was more evenly assigned, while black athletes were more often credited with tactical awareness. The effects of stacking are discussed independently for each skill.

### *Intellect*

Overall, white athletes received slightly more positive comments, and slightly fewer negative comments than did black athletes (Table 5). While intelligence was assigned to various positions on the field, many of these comments were directed at quarterbacks. The distinction for black and white players at this position seemed accentuated (see pp 33-43). Still, announcers commonly criticized white players for their decisions and credited black players as smart. For

example, Cam Cleeland [W TE] made an “inexcusable mistake,” while rookie Dominique Rhodes [B, RB] was praised for his intense study of the playbook.

Mistakes by whites could be qualified with other information. In one instance, we are told Adam Archuleta’s [W, DB] “big hits” come at the price of the occasional mistake, while in another Glenn Parker’s [W, OL] “inexcusable mistake” is presented as an anomaly. John Madden interprets Jason Sehorn’s [W, DB] penalty as an intentional play, ultimately benefiting his team:

Yep, that was Jason Sehorn right down here in front of us. Again, after 5 yards you can’t touch him. See it was a little stop and go. He got fooled ... you know but that was still a pretty good play by Sehorn, because Isaac Bruce [B, WR] had him beat deep. He went for that thing, and that’s what we call a double move, and he went for that hook. It was going to be a hook and go. Jason Sehorn really started to bite on that hook, and then Isaac Bruce goes, so he just held ‘em, and all they had was a pass interference penalty.

Conversely, only one black player in this sample had a mistake qualified.

### *Emotion*

Commentators portrayed white athletes as more in control of their emotions than their black counterparts [Table 5]. They received more comments (33 to 29), and 63.6% of these were positive. Conversely, only 48.3% of the comments directed at black athletes were positive regarding emotion. Considering that emotional control was assigned to both quarterback and wide receiver, this distinction appears despite the effects of stacking.

Qualitative examples showed announcers interpreting similar instances of emotional outbursts differently. In a game televised on FOX, Bill Maas presented Keith Brooking [W, LB] as playful in his emotional display, stating, “Boy, Brooking was pissed right here ... he starts pounding his fist on the ground [finishing with a slight chuckle].” In another game, Adalius Thomas [B, DL] was said to have “lost his mind” and “gone mad,” while Randy Moss’ celebration after a big gain led to Dennis Miller pleading for the wide receiver to “be cool.”

### *Concentration*

Perhaps this lack of emotional control led to the interpreted lapses in black's concentration. This mental skill did not appear tied to any position, however, 33.3% of the comments directed at blacks were positive, while 66.7% were negative [Table 5]. For whites, 60% of these comments were positive, while 40% were negative.

### *Tactics*

Tactical awareness was one of only two mental categories in which black players received more positive comments than their white counterparts. Wide receivers received the majority of these comments; thus, stacking played a prominent role. For blacks, 83.3% of the comments were positive, while 16.7% were negative [Table 5]. Of the very few comments directed at whites, 66.7% were positive, and 33.3% were negative.

### *Determination*

More than any other category, comments about determination were directed at all field positions. While more comments were directed at black athletes, 83.7% of these were positive and 16.3% were negative. For whites, 90.6% of these were positive, while only 9.4% were negative. Still, qualitative examples of commentary regarding hard work, effort, and determination included many positive observations about black players.

For example, Aeneus Williams [B, DB] was singled out, amongst a hard working St. Louis defense, as giving a particularly strong effort, especially in practice:

[Madden] [T]his defensive line of the Rams work harder in practice than any defensive line I've ever seen. Every one of them runs to the ball. And the other guy who works harder is Aeneus Williams. I mean he's just like the defensive lineman. He runs to the ball on every play in practice full speed.

Similarly, Curtis Martin's [B, DB] success during the season was credited to his voluntary, off-season workout program.

The greater distinction qualitatively occurred in negative references to effort. Only two white athletes (Jeff George [W, QB] and Rich Gannon [W, QB]) were singled out as “indifferent” and playing “half-hearted,” respectively. Conversely, the inability of Bubba Franks [B, TE] to catch the ball became a moment for Dan Dierdorf to reflect on effort:

Well, if its not in the end zone Bubba doesn't want any part of catching the football ... a really easy touchdown as Brett [W, QB] drops it right on his palms. But in the open field Bubba, I guess, uninterested.

Announcers universally assigned praise for continuing to play when hurt. Players of all positions and races were often credited as tough, gutsy, competitors, willing to endure pain for the team. One announcer was particularly fond of Marvin Harrison [B, WR]:

[Dierdorf] Dick, I cant tell you how much I admire a guy like Marvin Harrison for coming back and playing in this football game. You've got a legitimate NFL superstar, a guy who, lets face it, whose team is out of the playoffs. It would be easy to say, “hey you know what? I'll meet you at the airport and head back to Indianapolis.” That, he, only a true competitor, hurt, comes back into a game like this when a season is lost.

In a similar manner, Dave Krieg praised Chad Cota [W, DB] for a making a tackle while hurt:

Watch Cota come up in here. He's got the nose, we talked about, broken, but right here he shows he has a nose for the football. He sticks his nose right in there. And there you see Chad Cota with his nose in there, stopping the Falcons on fourth and one.

Only once did descriptions of this type suggest racial differentiation. In describing nagging injuries to Eddie George and Steve McNair, Dennis Miller told viewers that to get them out of the game “you got to hit them with a board.”

### *Leadership*

In general, the ability to lead one's team was credited to white players, although black players were not completely excluded from this type of commentary. White athletes were called leaders a total of eight times and were always referred to in a positive light [Table 5]. Black athletes received positive commentary regarding leadership six times, including comments such as "team guy" and "good in the locker room." Black athletes received the only negative comments regarding leadership, although all three of these instances were directed at the same player, Randy Moss.

In the final Monday night game of the season, Al Michaels, Dan Fouts, and Dennis Miller took the time to reflect on the Vikings disappointing season and the future that lies ahead. Of particular concern was the retirement of veteran Chris Carter [B, WR], and the effect this would have on the oft-criticized Randy Moss [B, WR]:

[Michaels] You know another thing we haven't touched on tonight too much is the Randy Moss situation in relation to his relationship with Chris Carter, which has been well known through the years. But with Chris going where will the father/confessor come from?

[Miller] Yeah, well you know Carter has done a great job of mentoring, but at some point the next stage in a young man's evolution is to become the man. So I know he's only 24, but he's a veteran and at some point he's got to get out from under the aegis of Chris Carter.

Here the veteran, Carter, is credited for his leadership and mentoring, while simultaneously doubting the relatively young Moss' abilities. In contrast, announcers called young Tim Couch [W, QB] a "franchise quarterback ... that the team and everybody believes in."

Changing the tone of the discussion from critical to humorous the announcers state:

[Miller] Al, what about Randy Moss as a player-coach?

[Laughs from all 3]

[Michaels] What about it [sounding shocked]?

[Miller] Just a thought. He would be able to handle Moss.

[Fouts] ... you hope he would be able to, but maybe not ...

[Michaels] Denny, how about Rasheed Wallace as a player coach?

[Laughs all around]

Here the link between perceived lack of leadership and self-control leads directly to doubts about future coaching ability. If Moss cannot, according to the announcers, inspire his teammates or evoke self-control, how could one imagine him on the sidelines?

However, Michaels' final comment, a comparison to black basketball player Rasheed Wallace, serves as an entry point into a larger "discursive network" (O'Donnell, 1994) regarding race and perceived skills and inadequacies. Both Randy Moss and Rasheed Wallace become metonymic symbols allowing announcers to simultaneously comment upon athletic performance and larger societal issues. In this way, Moss and Wallace represent the white power structures' disapproval of a particular stereotype regarding culture: specifically, black youthful culture equals hip-hop, or, more generally, race equals culture. The ease with which Michaels' comments were understood by his co-announcers (as evidenced in the laughter), as well as the interchangeability of Moss and Wallace, clue us into the shared meaning of "blackness" and "whiteness" filtered through collective impressions of race. Such cognitive shortcuts allow players to be easily categorized and assimilated without considering the idiosyncrasies of action, or the ambiguity of interpretation. Placing Moss within this stereotype Michaels states:

Yeah, like so many guys that come in, get rich in a hurry, have a lot of success, you're right, then all of the sudden you wake up one day and you say, "you know, I should have been a little different."

Using a cultural frame, Michaels passes universal judgment on behavior and provides little hope for an exit. Moss' failure in the future is assumed to be predestined.

Moss' future was also commented on by former black running back Eric Dickerson:



Well I think Randy Moss is the most talented football player that I've ever seen. I don't think he has the mentality to be a great football player yet, like Jerry Rice [B, WR]. Now the mentality comes from your heart. It comes from within. That's what makes a great football player. I really believe that after Randy Moss' career is over with, if he does not change his attitude, I really believe he will really regret a lot of things that have really happened in his career.

Here Dickerson expresses many facets of the stereotypes examined in this paper. Moss is talented but lacks the proper mentality, an internalized skill. Dickerson does not paint a rosy picture for Moss's future; at least he casts doubt that the trajectory is inevitably negative, giving some agency to Moss himself. Considering the differing presentations of old and young black players, it is interesting to note that during his playing career, Dickerson was presented in a similar manner to Moss. However, the collective memory of Dickerson's career now focuses more on his tremendous on-field accomplishments, allowing him to be contemporarily viewed as an inside expert, rather than a former troubled star.

### Quarterbacks

Some of the greatest distinctions between black and white athletes occurred when discussing players at the position at quarterback, due in part to the still limited role for black quarterbacks. Eleven black quarterbacks made 19 appearances in the 41 quarters viewed compared to 68 appearances for their 22 white counterparts. Unsurprisingly then, white quarterbacks received five times as many positive comments regarding the ability to throw the football compared to blacks [Table 4]. However, 70.4% of these comments were positive for black quarterbacks, compared to 68.1% positive comments for white quarterbacks. Still, the qualitative assessment revealed many themes tied into collective impression of race.

While announcers credited white quarterbacks with good running skills on numerous occasions, presentations tended to portray black quarterbacks as "mobile" and white quarterbacks as "pocket passers." This treatment was not exclusive. For example, Al Michaels stated, "That's

something Brunell [W, QB] has been doing since he came here back in '95: running for first downs," while Jeff Garcia [W, QB] "display[ed] the skills of a fearless runner." However, every black quarterback who appeared more than twice in this sample was credited for running ability, athleticism, or mobility (and often a combination). The following provide a range of presentations:

[Michaels, ABC] ... as McNabb [B, QB] escapes. That's what he does so well.

[Madden, FOX] That's what I said earlier. Dante Culpepper [B, QB] is their best QB, but he's also their best running back.

[Michaels, ABC] McNair [B, QB] nimbly stepping away ... and Stevie can give as well as take.

[Tasker, CBS] And that's why Ray Lucas [B, QB] is in the game. I mean he has a knack for being a good quarterback sneaker. He's a physical runner, and he's just a bigger guy [comparing him to Jay Fiedler [W, QB], see above].

[Fouts, ABC] Staying alive on the outside, McNair [B, QB] has such ability to know exactly when the defense is closing in. He hops out of more tackles. Watch the instincts here as he gets way from Darrell Russell with a little hop there...

[Michaels, ABC] One of the keys for the Jets defense today, or the Pittsburgh offense, as you watch this game: the Jets are worried about Kordell [Stewart] [B, QB] running.

[Miller, ABC] Now Danno, Aaron Brookes [B, QB] hung in that pocket about as long as you would expect any quarterback with his natural running skills. Is it a good thing to have the kid hold in there that long? [My emphasis]

This tendency to label black quarterbacks as mobile athletes, rather than pocket passers, was even addressed in a pre-game special about Philadelphia Eagles quarterback, Donovan McNabb. James Brown opens this piece by discussing McNabb's apparent evolution and increased comfort at throwing the football. Sideline reporter Pam Oliver tells us that Donovan McNabb has been labeled a "new breed of quarterback" and "the running quarterback," which we

are later informed is a stereotype placed on many black quarterbacks. Oliver goes on to state that McNabb has not yet fully comprehended the West Coast offense and that opposing coaches specifically design their defenses to force McNabb to throw and prevent him from running. Furthermore, Oliver reports that the quarterback does not want to improve upon his running stats from the previous year for fear of perpetuating this stereotype. McNabb points to the danger of such a typification when he states, “when you sort of label someone as ‘a running quarterback’ that sort of takes away from the other things he’s capable of doing.” It is interesting that the opening of the piece, accompanied by hip-hop, showed a number of scenes with McNabb running the ball and celebrating, and only two scenes of him throwing the ball while standing in the pocket. One clip of McNabb “dunking” the football over the goal post is repeated later during the special. While the surface theme of the piece is directed at informing viewers of a stereotype, the visual and auditory accompaniment emphasizes McNabb’s athleticism, not his throwing skills.

The distinction between the two types of quarterbacks was made explicitly clear in a game between Baltimore and Tampa Bay. Here, Aaron Brookes [B, QB] (who was not even a participant in the game) was compared, but primarily contrasted, with white quarterback Elvis Grbac:

[Fouts, ABC] Yeah, he got a couple of sacks last week in New Orleans against a very mobile quarterback in Aaron Brooks. Grbac more of a sitting target back there in the pocket.

While commentary accentuated the running skills of black quarterbacks, white quarterbacks were lauded for their passing skills, as shown in the following examples:

[Dierdorf, CBS] And [Kurt Warner; W, QB] does what he does better than any other quarterback in this league: hitting his players, his receivers, in stride.

[Miller, ABC] No one is really close to Warner [W, QB] as far as leading receivers and putting the ball exactly where it is. But if there is a guy in this league, its Brad Johnson [W, QB]. Perfectly thrown pass into the flat.

[Fouts, ABC] [Jeff George, W, QB] does his one thing. He's got a great arm, relies on it.

[Fouts, ABC] [E]ach can throw about as hard as any two quarterbacks in the league.

[Referring to Favre and George]

[Buck, FOX] It used to be Elway in this league you wanted on the field trying to win a game in the 4<sup>th</sup> quarter. [Referring to Brett Favre]

[Dierdorf, CBS] Out of the shotgun, Brett Favre in command, very comfortable running it from the shotgun ...

[Baldinger, FOX] [W]hen Chandler [W, QB] gets protection, he gets time, and the running game gets going, he is as effective a passer as there is in this league.

[Miller, ABC] Well, I always thought Montana was the most accurate passer I, or anybody else, had seen, but Warner [W, QB] is right there. I think he picks the shoulder pad that he wants to put it on. He's that accurate.

[James, CBS] [B]ut, so far, I have not seen Van Pelt [W, QB] prove that he is a consistent thrower, accurate thrower, when he's outside the pocket. Sitting inside the pocket, no question about it, but when he rolls outside I don't see it.

Despite the acknowledgement of a series of strong, accurate throws by black quarterbacks and impressive runs by white quarterbacks, when framing players as to their most salient skill, announcers tend to fall back into the fabric provided by collective impressions of race. Such skill assignment takes on characteristics of a master status, overriding other accomplishments on the field.

It could be argued that race may not be the only factor creating this separation between "pocket passers" and "mobile" quarterbacks. Age may also affect the on-field occurrences described by announcers. The average age of the black quarterbacks labeled "mobile" above was 26.7 years old, with an average of just under four years of NFL experience. The average age of the white quarterbacks highlighted for pocket passing was 32.4 years old, with an average of just

under nine years of NFL experience. Thus, the age, as well as wear and tear on the body that occurs in such a physically demanding sport, may influence the likelihood of individual players to subject themselves to further physical abuse. Furthermore, the age of a quarterback may influence the type of offense and plays utilized by a coaching staff. Mobility at quarterback may in fact be more related to age than to race.

The effect of stacking makes it difficult to assess the validity of this argument. Because of the lack of opportunities for black quarterbacks in the past, the NFL currently contains very few older black quarterbacks. For example, no black quarterbacks over the age of 29 appeared in this sample, while the majority of white quarterbacks were over 30. Although this age discrepancy leaves little room for direct comparison of how announcers frame older black and white quarterbacks within this sample, sports writers still emphasize the running skills of former black quarterback Randall Cunningham as what “separated him from the pack” (Noonan, 2003). A comparison of young black and white quarterbacks shows that age alone does not seem to influence perceptions of mobility. For example, Dan Dierdorf stated that Tim Couch [W, QB], age 24 at the time, is, “not known as a real nifty guy in the open field,” while Phil Simms encouraged Brian Griese [W, QB], age 26 at the time, to not stay in the pocket so much. In fact, the four white quarterbacks credited with running skills in this sample (Rich Gannon, Jeff Garcia, Mark Brunell, and Jay Fiedler) were all over 30 during the 2001-2002 season. A more accurate assessment of the effect of age can occur as the current crop of young black quarterbacks age.

White quarterbacks were also singled out as competitors. This competitive spirit often allowed these players to overcome their perceived lack of physical skill, as shown in the following comments about Brad Johnson [W, QB] and Brett Favre [W, QB]:

[Summerall, FOX] [Brad Johnson] is not widely renowned as a runner.

[Madden] Well, and he's not. But you know we were talking about Brett Favre running when you have to compete, and that's what ... [a]t some point, to make a play, to win a

game, you have to do this. You don't want to get hit, you don't want to get hurt, you want to slide and all those things, but a competitor will make these kinds of plays. A competitive spirit also allowed Rich Gannon [W, QB] to continue to play hard despite a concussion he suffered in the first half:

[Fouts, ABC] [W]hat a gutty effort right here by Rich Gannon.

[Miller] Even when he's on impulse power his instinct tells him to stay up instead of sliding.

[Michaels] Ohh! And look at that; by 2 inches it's a 1<sup>st</sup> down.

[Fouts] That's being a competitor. Fierce!

While black quarterbacks who ran were credited with running skills, smashing into opponents without sliding did not produce the same sentiments regarding competitive spirit. Rather, these were framed as displays of power. When Steve McNair [B, QB] ran over and knocked Dwayne Starks [B, DB] unconscious, he was called a "wall." No black quarterbacks (and fewer black players in general) were called competitors.

Black and white quarterbacks were also distinguished by their ability to deal with the emotions surrounding the game. While white players were often portrayed as relaxed, black players were often portrayed as being overcome by emotions. Thus, announcers presented Brett Favre [W, QB] as so relaxed he forgot to put on his chinstrap, and Tim Couch [W, QB] as calm, despite charging defensive lineman. When emotions began escalating, white quarterbacks were still portrayed in a positive manner:

[Madden, FOX] Look at Brad Johnson [W, QB] – he's fired up!

...

[Madden, FOX] And Brett Favre [W, QB] is fired up now. He's going around head butting linebackers and stuff. But I don't think Brett Favre has been fired up until now, and I don't know if you want to fire Brett Favre up.

[Summerall] I don't think so.

While white quarterbacks were as emotionally charged by the game setting as other players, their unique ability lies in the channeling and conversion of emotion into the positively framed “fired up”. Being “fired up” brings the player up to another level, where players like Brett Favre are at their very best. Thus, white quarterbacks are interpreted as thriving through their ability to control and manipulate feelings to their advantage.

Black quarterbacks (and players in general, see pp. 28-9) were much more likely to be portrayed as being overcome by emotions. Only once did an announcer tell a white quarterback (Brett Favre in a different game) that he needed to “relax.” Even after a good play, a black player could be sanctioned for failing to keep control:

[Fouts, ABC] Every time [Steve McNair, B, QB] goes back he's got to pretend he's Houdini just to get out of the pass rush. He escaped that time, and then was so hyped up about it he overthrew.

...

[Fouts, ABC] What an escape from Kenny Holmes and Cornelius Griffin. McNabb [B, QB] is huge: 6'2" 226 pounds, probably a little bigger than that, and strong. Watch Griffin here as he fights through the offensive line. He's got a clear shot at McNabb. Look at the strength to pull away. But this is where he's got to relax a little bit. Once he knows he's free of the defensive line he's got to set himself up and make a good throw.

For white quarterbacks, increased emotion becomes funneled into elevated skill, while for black quarterbacks, it becomes the path to unnecessary mistakes.

White mistakes were acknowledged regularly, but often found themselves qualified by the surrounding situation. After throwing an interception, the announcer stated, “Wienke [W, QB] is a rookie and makes mistakes, but I think they should have run the football and not had that kind of mistake from him. They put him in a bad position there.” Attempting to explain an incompleteness, Dave Krieg states:

The other side of that is if you're Chris Chandler [W, QB], you're the quarterback, and you are sitting back and you are getting dogged and blitzed and put on your back. You don't feel like you are going to have as much time, sometimes when you do have time. And that was an indication there, were Chris got rid of the ball a little bit quicker, but he had more time than he thought. But what happened is you keep getting hit, you keep getting hit, and you're thinking, man, they are going to come and get me and hit me again this time. So maybe you get rid of it quicker.

Very similar plays could be interpreted differently for white and black quarterbacks, as evidenced in the treatment of Rich Gannon [W, QB] and Aaron Brookes [B, QB]. First, Greg Gumbell and Phil Simms of CBS describe a replay in which the play clock expired before the Raiders could snap the ball, causing a penalty:

[Simms] Well, that's a mistake. That's a big mistake because the play was going to be there if it would have counted.

[Gumbell] Clock strikes zero and the ball is not snapped.

[Simms] Oh yeah, not even close.

[Gumbell] Even in slow motion it wasn't close.

[Simms] Rich Gannon though was trying to read the coverage. Had a lot of motion to his right. Sometimes you are going to lose contact with the play clock.

Gannon's mistake, framed as caused by the motion of the defense, differs considerably from the description of a similar play in a New Orleans Saints game:

[Fouts, ABC] One word for that: inexcusable. Playing at home, no crowd noise to bother you, players late getting in, personnel perhaps a little confused, and Aaron Brookes not keeping his eye on the play clock which is right in front of him, right in between the goal posts. He is perhaps 40 yards from the play clock.

Despite the tardiness of players entering the game, the difficulty in distributing the play, and getting players lined up into the right spots, Aaron Brookes was interpreted as not having been



aware of the play clock. Gannon's mistake was diminished by the extenuating circumstances, while Brookes was held individually responsible.

Black players were not always highlighted for mistakes. Steve McNair was credited with a "heads up play" and Dante Culpepper was "savvy," but the overall pattern pointed to white quarterbacks as superior in terms of intellect. Announcers labeled Brett Favre as a "good decision maker," Brad Johnson as "sharp," and Peyton Manning as "smart." However, some white quarterbacks go beyond wits to a complete understanding of offenses, as if they were a coach on the field:

[Criqui, CBS] Tim Ruddy [W, OL], the Dolphins standout center, told us at practice yesterday one reason Fiedler [W, QB] is so effective is he's been in different offenses as a pro and he knows everything about every one of them. And he's always confident of making a big play.

Trevor Matich frames Chris Chandler [W, QB] in a similar manner, going so far as to portray him as a "certified genius." As with pocket passer, mastery of the playbook becomes a skill foremost associated with white quarterbacks:

But one of the great things that Chandler brings to the offense is the guy is brilliant. He's an actual certified genius, and he knows every single nuance of this offense as a reaction. He doesn't have to think about it. [My emphasis]

...

Chandler has a photographic memory. I mean he gets a game plan with 80 plays for this week's defensive schemes on Wednesday morning, and by practice at 2 o'clock he's got it down. He knows what formations need to be run at them. He knows what the nuances are going to be and all of the sudden he's out there coaching the rest of the team in practice as to how to run it. Michael Vick [B, QB] came out after his

sophomore season at Virginia Tech.<sup>8</sup> This is all very complex to him. He's not ready to do that at this scale yet. It's not his fault. It's a matter of time.

At this point in the game, Chris Chandler had nearly fainted from sickness and Falcon's coach Dan Reeves had flirted with inserting then rookie Michael Vick before reinserting Chandler. In total, Matich and Bolerjack spent over six minutes of airtime spanning one commercial interspersing game description with explanation of the coach's decision. This commentary is framed within the dichotomy of Chandler's "certified genius" and Vick's lack of understanding:

[Matich, CBS] They've got to really simplify the offense for Vick because it is incredibly complex ...

... and Chandler is back in. It is a very complicated offense, and they don't want to simplify it this early in the 2<sup>nd</sup> half ...

... [i]ts super complex for the quarterback because the quarterback has to know what every single person does and tell them what to do, and then execute it against whatever defensive variation comes up ... the quarterback needs to know it all. That's why Michael Vick isn't ready for it yet.

Vick is not condemned to misunderstanding offenses. His grasp of football knowledge will come with time. But we are never told that the offense is simplified for backup rookie Mike McMahon [W, QB].

In much the same way, Kordell Stewart's [Q, QB] improved play during the season became explained through coaching and a simplified offense. Thus like the evolutionary path set up by Trevor Matich for Michael Vick, in order for Kordell Stewart to become legitimized he must spend years in the league under the direction of (usually white) coaches:

[Simms, CBS] Herman Edwards said it best. He goes, "the coaches in Pittsburgh have done a good job of teaching Kordell Stewart how to manage his team in this offense."

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<sup>8</sup> Michael Vick actually entered the NFL Draft after his red shirt sophomore season (i.e. his third year in college)

...

[Miller] You've got to admire Kordell's game management. He's certainly upped it over the last year.

[Fouts] You know he's having fun again. You talk about how Mike Malarkey has brought a system that's like back to the future. They are doing things that they used to do when Ron ????? [Reference to prior coach] and Champ Gaily were here. They're moving him around. He's having more fun. He's getting along with people.

Compare Chandler's active participation in a complicated offense to the passive reaction of Kordell Stewart in an offense simplified for him and his black wide receiving corp:

[Gumbell, CBS] We have heard over and over how things have been simplified for Kordell Stewart, making his decision making process easier.

[Simms] Well, that's what it is Greg. Its really been simplifying the Pittsburgh offense for the wide receivers and you are seeing more production from those wide receivers because they are just going down and running routes. And Kordell is just making the throw. They are not thinking, there is just reacting, just do it and that's why they've been so efficient so far this year.

While Chandler and Fiedler become coaches on the field, understanding the nuances of complicated offenses like military strategists, Kordell Stewart and his wide receivers passively move through a system provided for them in a digestible format. Chandler thinks; Stewart reacts.

The most telling indication that the white quarterback is synonymous with intelligence comes in a play describing a penalty on a former quarterback turned wide receiver, Drew Bennett [W, WR].

[Fouts] He got behind Eric Allen [B, DB], forced Allen to run him over, and still almost made the catch. Great effort by Bennett. Stop! When he stopped right there that guarantees that Allen will run him over and that guarantees the penalty flag.

[Miller] Yeah, there comes that moment in each pattern where the deep receiver either has to make the decision to stop and get plowed or push off like Randy Moss. It's right at that nanosecond where the decision is made.

[Michaels] So in a way it's the rookie wide out in ... to some measure outfoxing the 14-year veteran.

[Fouts] Ahh, but that rookie wide out is a former foxy quarterback at UCLA.

On a play in which intention was, at least to this researcher, highly questionable, Fouts assures us that Bennett premeditated just such an occurrence. Furthermore, his ability to plan such a "foxy" action is directly related to the fact that he is a former quarterback. The fact that he is a rookie does not appear to be a hindrance to Bennett's learning curve. His intelligence comes "naturally," and therefore does not require a maturation process like his black counterparts.

## CHAPTER 7

### DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The quantitative analysis of this sample indicated that announcers more often assigned many of the skills traditionally associated with impressions of black athleticism (speed, running ability, strength, and athleticism) to black athletes. Similarly, announcers often allocated many of the skills traditionally associated with impressions of white intelligence (intellect, emotional control, and leadership) to white athletes. Examination of these subcategories revealed that the dual effect of demography and stacking partially, but not completely, explained black-white differentiation, at least numerically. First, the prominent number of black players in the NFL increased the number of comments directed towards black athletes, thus affecting both hierarchy of naming and skill assignment. However, the number of white quarterbacks, the position most likely to receive comments, tempered this effect slightly.

Second, the skills commonly associated with particular positions, combined with positional segregation, influenced the likelihood of particular skill assignment by race. Presentations associated skill such as speed and tactical knowledge, as well as the ability to run, throw, and catch the football with specific positions, making these categories the most affected by stacking. Size, strength, leadership, intellect, and emotion were partially (but not exclusively) assigned to specific positions. Commentators assigned determination and concentration across most field positions, freeing these skills from some of the effects of stacking.

Still, these cautionary restrictions do not completely dismiss the patterns found in this sample. While the dual effects of demography and stacking certainly have their respective influences, they are constant across the course of a full season, whatever their magnitude. Although black athletes received more comments regarding physical skill, the decreased gap in black-white difference when comparing positive and negative physical qualifiers (Table 3)

suggests a tendency to credit black players physically, while critiquing white athleticism, despite the effects of stacking. Similarly, the quantitative tendency to more often assign intellect, leadership, and emotional control to white players, despite demography and stacking, suggests a tendency to credit impressions of white intellect, while ignoring or critiquing impressions of black intelligence.

Furthermore, demographics and positional segregation are themselves products of collective impressions of race. They are outcomes of the same myths regarding black athleticism and white intelligence through which announcers decode and report upon the sports world. Thus, linguistic descriptions of actions on the field are a product of collective impressions of race at both a structural-historical (demographics and stacking) and ideal (frames through which announcers view race) level. To explain away some of the quantitative differences in how black and white athletes are presented through demography and stacking does not so much diminish the role of “race,” as point towards its far-reaching influence within the sports world.

Still, very few overt references to “semiconscious values” (Hoose, 1989) expressing a connection between race, genetics, and athletic performance appeared in this sample. Many of the narratives involved more subtle distinctions, such as the white quarterback as “pocket passer” and “certified genius,” in contrast to the black quarterback as “mobile runner” and slow learner. Although announcers credited white athletes with speed, these presentations framed such events as surprising or ordinary, compared to the spectacular presentation of speed for black athletes. Furthermore, commentators interpreted mistakes by white players as caused by extenuating circumstances, while often holding black athletes to blame individually.

Only once was a black player labeled as “natural” (Aaron Brookes, see above), and athlete was not exclusively used for black players as found previously (D.Z. Jackson, 1993). The qualitative examination revealed, however, that announcers utilized the idea that genetics determine athletic success. While praising veteran Bruce Matthews [W, OL], Baldinger stated:

There are a couple of guys who have been in a lot of Pro Bowls: Hopkins and Matthews. And Matthews in his 19<sup>th</sup> year, I don't know, his brother Clay Matthews played for 19 years. Some pretty good genetics there. Got 6 kids, heck, have another 6 pass those genes on.

While the latest theories of inheritance point to the complex interaction between genetics, environment, and socio-political factors regarding phenotypic expression, announcers utilized a simplistic view, bordering on biological determinism. Such presentations presented the link between genetics and performance as unproblematic, and thus served as cognitive shortcuts limiting discussion of race as a socially constructed category.

These cognitive shortcuts also appeared when comparing players, so that most announcers identified current, young players with older or retired players of the same race. For example, announcers said rookie Travis Brown [W, QB] “looks like Jim Kelly [W, QB],” while big hitting Adam Archuleta [W, DB] is said to be “the next John Lynch [W, DB]” rather than the next Ronnie Lott [B, DB]. Similarly, announcers compared Vinny Sutherland [W, WR] to Tim Dwight [W, WR], not Antonio Freeman [B, WR]. Comparisons crossed the color threshold on only two occasions. In one, Miller compared Jeff Garcia's [W, QB] spin move to “Pearl” Monroe's (a cross sport comparison to a black basketball player). The other compared young black safety Donovan Darius first to Robert Griffith [B, DB], and only secondarily to John Lynch [W, DB]. Fouts stated, “Darius, who ... the Packers compare him to Robert Griffith, of the Vikings, and a few of them have said he even comes up and hits like John Lynch, of the Buccaneers.” Thus, even when athletes play in the same position as, and retain skills similar to players of another race, announcers hesitated to compare them across the racial threshold. This lack of comparison may point to announcers' internalization of collective impressions of race that maintain a belief in immutable biological categories and their corresponding, distinct phenotypic expressions.

Race is not the only belief that affects reporting on the sports world. Gender also played a role for some skills. One of the few categories that showed similar treatment for both black and white athletes involved descriptions of dedication, determination, and effort, especially regarding playing when hurt. Furthermore, strength showed a degree of uniformity in application. The relation of these skills to conceptions of hegemonic masculinity point to the effect of gender partially dampening race.

Both professionally and culturally, American style football is dominated not only by men, but also by actions relating to hegemonic masculinity (Lorber, 1994; Connell, 1987, 2001). Many modern sports (football in particular) and the images of them broadcast by media tend to glorify strength, power, and violence (Hargreaves, 1986). This violence does not have to be misogynistic, but, as pointed out by Connell (2001), can be directed at men's own bodies. One of Connell's (2001) key informants partially expressed his masculinity through routine abuse of body through drug use. The consistent, positive presentation of taking the body to extremes, coupled with the negative sanctions for those who avoided contact, indicate an area where gender may override certain impressions of race.

Occasionally media hinted that certain presentations of athletes drew upon stereotypes and cognitive shortcuts, as shown in the piece on Donovan McNabb. Two further examples of this type begin to unpack the complex process of reporting on the sports. While announcers draw upon real actions on the field, which events are selected and how they are emphasized, interpreted, and presented reveals the frame through which announcers decode the sports world. In a continuation of the discussion of Randy Moss (see pp. 31-33) Dennis Miller stated:

[Miller] You know what's upsetting about Moss [B, WR], Al, is he upsets our belief systems because when you look at that play-by-play chart with Rice [B, WR] he is a great player. I don't care how hard he's tried. He's an amazing player.

[Michaels] Sure [while not sounding very reassuring] ...



Here Miller clearly points to the distinction between perceptions and presentations of Moss's career and the empirical data of performance. In a graphic shown earlier in the quarter, comparing Moss and Jerry Rice after 63 professional games, their stats, even by Michaels' admission, "stacked up quite similarly." Yet, many announcers throughout the season questioned Moss' determination and effort despite the fact that his statistics were on par with one of the greatest wide receivers in the history of the NFL.<sup>9</sup>

Sportscasters do not make up such discourse out of thin air. Earlier in the season, Moss had made a widely discussed comment, "I play when I want to play" (Robinson, 2001). However, both Miller's comments above and Madden's commentary below admit to the role of interpretation when attempting to place meaning on actions. In this sequence, defensive lineman Jim Flanagan [W] made an open field tackle, only to come into contact with the referee when he began to celebrate.

Let's watch it here, Pat. We'll watch it on the clicker. Here's Flanagan. He goes to ... now if Randy Moss did that, that would be a \$40,000 fine. He hits it, and knocks his hat sideways.

It is possible that one of the ways announcers navigate between an individual athlete and collective impressions of race is by use of a metonym. Research on European sportive stereotypes shows that in international competitions, individual athletes and teams represent their nation, which is presented "as a single sentient being" (O'Donnell, 1994; Blain, Boyle and O'Donnell, 1993).<sup>10</sup> Here an individual player could come to stand in for or represent a racial category, which, like "a single sentient being," is assumed to be biologically distinct and composed of genetically linked skills and inadequacies. These assumed skills and inadequacies, like racial categories themselves, are ranked in ways that perpetuate current hierarchies. Thus, sport

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<sup>9</sup> It might also be added that Rice played on a better team (San Francisco 49ers), with a quarterback (Joe Montana) renowned as one of the best, in an offense that emphasized passing.

<sup>10</sup> Also see Wallerstein's (1991) discussion of the connection between identity, ethnicity, race, and nationality in the modern world.

“mythologizes the collective fitness for work” (O’Donnell, 1994), with the sight of white men owning and directing the labor of people of color naturalizing the current national and international division of labor and power.

Research on sports in far different contexts, such as indigenous American games (Cox, 1967), current American sports (Hoberman, 1997), and international soccer, as well as the Olympics (O’Donnell, 1994), has theorized a connection between sports, intergroup rivalry, and hierarchical arrangements. O’Donnell (1994) states that dominant groups use sportive stereotypes to “act out their preferred myths through self- and other-stereotypes, and celebrate those qualities which, in their own eyes, make them more modern, more advanced, in short superior [emphasis in original].” Furthermore, sports’ competitive nature ties it into impressions of Social Darwinist thought, the very same ideas that placed an evolutionary order on purported racial categories. Watched before a televised audience of millions, the spectacle of interracial competition becomes “Darwinian theatre ... stand[ing] out as a unique reenactment of evolutionary struggle,” (Hoberman, 1997) with victories by individual athletes metonymically representing victories for an entire race.

The *de facto* segregation of blacks and whites in America influences the salience of these narratives for their audiences. With little inter-racial, egalitarian communication, many Americans depend on media (especially sport) as a site for information on groups with whom they do not come into contact (Beamish, et. al, 1995; May, 2001). Media does not tell us what to think, but rather helps to set the agenda of what becomes a part of public discourse (McCombs and Shaw, 1972). When such discourse assumes biologically constructed categories of race (with assumed skills and inadequacies) ranked hierarchically, current manifestations of power and stratification (both within sport and outside it) are explained as products of genetics. Socio-political factors, the history of ideas, and the agency of individual athletes go unnoticed or unacknowledged, creating the impression that the stratification we see before us is largely “natural,” devoid of other influences. In short, although the history of sport contains a number of

symbolic and economic achievements for blacks in America, the framing of such successes maintain many of the hierarchical myths of racial difference as active, but nuanced narratives in public discourse on race.

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## APPENDICES

## APPENDIX A – LIST OF ANNOUNCING TEAMS BY STATION

### TOTAL SAMPLE (41 GAMES)

#### ABC (15 games total)

Al Michaels, Dan Fouts, and Dennis Miller [15 games]

#### FOX (13 games total)

Pat Summerall and John Madden [8 games]

Curt McNefee (b)<sup>1</sup> and Brian Baldinger [1 game]

Joe Buck and Brian Baldinger [1 game]

Sam Rossen and Bill Maas [1 game]

Kenny Albert and Bill Maas [1 game]

Doug Bell and Dave Krieg [1Game]

#### CBS (13 games total)

Greg Gumbell (b) and Phil Simms [7 Games]

Kevin Harlan and Craig James [2 games]

Dick Enburg and Dan Dierdorf [2 games]

Don Criqui and Steve Tasker [1 game]

Brian Bolerjack and Trevor Matich [1 game]

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<sup>1</sup> (b) indicates black announcer; all other announcers were white

## APPENDIX B – PROJECT CODEBOOK: CATEGORIES OF SKILL

### **Physical Skill**

#### (A) Speed

Common references or similes - speed, quickness, acceleration, pace, velocity, rate (of speed) or being fast, rapid, or swift

Jargon (American football specific) - “turned on the jets”, “flew down the field”, “in a flash”, “like lightning”, “turned on the burners”, “outran the pack/ other players”... zip, whiz, “go like a bullet”, zoom, rocket, burn (almost any analogy to being like a rocket), “extra gear” “streaks” “burst”

#### (B) Running

Common references or similes - references to running with or without the ball not employing references to speed, being athletic, mobile, or using athleticism, mobility, movement, body control (esp. involving body fakes); scuttle, scamper, scurry, dash, or dart, feint,

Jargon (American football specific) - “moves”, “jukes”, “jerks”, “fakes” (as in body fakes), “running w/ or w/out the ball”, “avoiding tacklers”, “center of gravity”, “a great run”, “good run after the catch”, the ability to make tacklers/defenders miss, side-stepped

#### (C) Throwing ability (arm strength and/or accuracy)

Common references or similes - references to ability or inability to throw the ball powerfully and/or accurately; strong or good arm, arm strength, the ability to throw long and/or hard; poor arm, poor throw, weak pass, soft pass, technique, footwork

Jargon (American football specific) - “good/strong/great arm or throw”, “good/strong/great passer”, “the ability to throw downfield”, “a bullet” (in reference to passes), “a strike” (accuracy), “on the money”, “perfectly placed pass/throw” “thread the needle” “fires (a pass)” “hit him on the numbers” “overthrown”, “under thrown”, “misplaced pass”, “mistimed pass”

#### (D) Hands

Common references or similes - references to the ability or inability to catch a thrown pass, good/great/nice catch, good/great/nice hands, good/great/nice “grab”, negative references to catch, hands, or grab

Jargon (American football specific) - “he plucked that ball out of the air”, “he held on to the ball well”, “he did well to hold on”, “soft hands”, “a beautiful grab”, “possession receiver”, “bricks for hands”, “should have held on” “lassoed”

#### (E) Strength

Common references or similes - strength, power, being strong or powerful, overwhelming or overpowering (the opponent); weak or weakness, being overpowered, etc.

Jargon (American football specific) - “being cut”, “being ripped”, or other comments about body composition, “plowing/powering through” (other players), “running downhill”, “fighting for extra yardage” “fighting for tough yards”, “running hard” “hammering” “powerful run”

#### (F) Size

common references or similes - references to a players large or small body size, big, small, large, tiny, enormous, massive, etc.

Jargon (American football specific) - references to large animals or household appliances (like “refrigerator”)

(G) Other (used as a category to collect all other references for grounded treatment later)

common references or similes - jumping, leaping, extra long limbs, analogies to animals or animal characteristics, verbal body dissection (picking out particular parts of body to marvel at) athlete, athletic

Jargon (American football specific) - “like an ox”, “thoroughbreds”, “monkey” or “tough monkey”

(H) Athlete/Athletic (inductively constructed category)

common references and similes – athlete, athletic, athleticism, talent, potential

## **Mental Skill**

(A) Intellect

Common references or similes - intelligence, thinking, wit, quick thinking, improvisation, acumen, brain power, mental ability; being smart, sharp, bright, or clever, decision-making, awareness, mistakes, indecision

Jargon (American football specific) - “court/field awareness”, “court/field sense”, references to artistry or art-like aptitude, “head in the game” “a student of the game” “game management” getting fooled (by another player)

(B) Leadership

Common references or similes - leading/inspiring the team, being implicated as a major decision maker for the team, military references, references to respect from teammates, ability to motivate teammates, how other players are said to play when X is in the game

Jargon (American football specific) - “field general”, “team leader”, “MVP”, “leads by example”, “runs the show”, “runs the team”, “coach on the field”, “a second coach”, “strong character”, “game management”

(C) Tactical Knowledge

Common references or similes - Field or sport-specific knowledge, references to understanding or comprehending the proper roles a player should take; references to understanding or comprehending defenses/offenses

Jargon (American football specific) - for QB’s this will revolve around comments of reading defenses: “he did/ did not read the coverage”, “forcing passes”, “well executed plays”, “poor/good audible”; -- for WR/TE/RB this will revolve around the routes run ... i.e. are they appropriate routes or not “sharp route” “well run route”, “wrong route”, “broke off route”

(D) Emotional Control

Common references or similes– references to players having or lacking emotional control on the field; [positive] patience, cool, calm, in control, brave; [negative] jitters, nervous, overly emotional, tough, fearless [QB specific] “doesn’t see the rush” (i.e. brave)

Jargon (American football specific) - [negative] references to celebrations or taunts as being unnecessary, excessive, or uncalled for



(E) Dedication/Work Ethic

Common references or similes - dedication, work ethic, hard work, work rate, work effort, teamwork, self motivation, mental toughness; effort

Jargon (American football specific) many of these include references to how the player spent the off-season and/or how hard the player worked in training camp; did the player attend “voluntary” workouts in the spring (training camp)? [negative] references to the players interest in money over the team “competitor”, competitive spirit”, “workmanlike” “motor”

(F) Other (used as a category to collect all other references for grounded treatment later)

... access to better coaching, access to better facilities, coach’s son, concentration, instincts

(G) Concentration (Inductively Constructed)

Common references or similes – concentration or lack of it

TABLE 1. HIERARCHY OF NAMING FOR OVERALL SAMPLE

N = 41	First Name Only	First and Last Name, Or Last Name Only	Total
Black	207 (4.1%)	4814 (95.9%)	5021
White	86 (3.3%)	2517 (96.7%)	2603
Other	3 (3%)	2603 (97%)	101

TABLE 2. HIERARCHY OF NAMING FOR NATIONAL ANNOUNCING TEAMS

N = 41	First Name Only	First and Last Name, Or Last Name Only	Total
<b>Black</b>			
ABC n = 15	128 (6.1%)	1964 (93.9%)	2092
FOX n = 8	20 (2.1%)	947 (97.9%)	967
CBS n = 7	10 (1.4%)	716 (98.6%)	726
<b>White</b>			
ABC n = 15	45 (5%)	863 (95%)	908
FOX n = 8	8 (1.5%)	525 (98.5%)	533
CBS n = 7	1 (.3%)	392 (99.7%)	393
<b>Other</b>			
ABC n = 15	3 (7.1%)	39 (92.9%)	42
FOX n = 8	0	8	8
CBS n = 7	0	26	26

TABLE 3. OVERALL SKILL ASSIGNMENT

N = 41	Physical Skill	Mental Skill	Total
<b>Black</b>			
Positive	460 (82.1%)	120 (67.4%)	
Negative	100 (17.9%)	58 (32.6%)	
Total (black)	560	178	738
<b>White</b>			
Positive	207 (72.6%)	96 (71.1%)	
Negative	78 (27.4%)	39 (28.9%)	
Total (white)	285	135	420
<b>Other</b>			
Positive	3 (50%)	1 (100%)	
Negative	3 (50%)	0	
Total (other)	6	1	7
<b>Total (overall)</b>			
	851	314	1165

TABLE 4. PHYSICAL SKILL ASSIGNMENT

Type of Skill	N = 41	Physical Skill	
		Positive	Negative
<b>Speed</b>			
Black		160 (94.1%)	10 (5.9%)
White		49 (94.2%)	3 (5.8%)
<b>Run</b>			
Black		50 (98%)	1 (2%)
White		11 (73.3%)	4 (26.7%)
<b>Arm</b>			
Black		19 (70.4%)	8 (29.6%)
White		96 (68.1%)	45 (31.9%)
<b>Hands</b>			
Black		39 (52.7%)	35 (47.3%)
White		5 (41.7%)	7 (58.3%)
<b>Strength</b>			
Black		61 (100%)	0
White		17 (89.5%)	2 (10.5%)
<b>Size</b>			
Black		69 (65.1%)	37 (34.9%)
White		13 (54.2%)	11 (45.8%)
<b>Athlete</b>			
Black		24 (100%)	0
White		14 (93.3%)	1 (6.7%)

TABLE 5. MENTAL SKILL ASSIGNMENT

Type of Skill	N = 41	Mental Skill	
		Positive	Negative
<b>Intellect</b>			
Black		18 (46.2%)	21 (53.8%)
White		20 (53.8%)	18 (47.4%)
<b>Leadership</b>			
Black		6 (66.7%)	3 (33.3%)
White		8 (100%)	0
<b>Tactical</b>			
Black		25 (83.3%)	5 (16.7%)
White		4 (66.7%)	2 (33.3%)
<b>Emotion</b>			
Black		14 (48.3%)	15 (51.7%)
White		21 (63.6%)	12 (36.4%)
<b>Determination/Effort</b>			
Black		41 (83.7%)	8 (16.3%)
White		29 (90.6%)	3 (9.4%)
<b>Concentration</b>			
Black		3 (33.3%)	6 (66.7%)
White		3 (60%)	2 (40%)

and White: A Content Analysis of. College and Professional Football. Broadcast Commentary. White and Black athletes. Denham et al. (2002) conducted an analysis of the 2000 Men's and Women's Final Four, finding that Black players were still disproportionately praised for their athleticism and strength. The study only encompassed the first month of the football season was viewed as an enhancement to the validity of the study, as the frames sportscasters chose to implement for certain. players are shaped during this time and then likely reinforced throughout the remainder of. The 2002 NFL season was the 83rd regular season of the National Football League. Under scheduling formulas in use from 1978 to 2001, two teams in different divisions might never play each other for over fifteen seasons. [5] [1] Under the new scheduling formula, only two of a team's games each season are based on the previous season's record, down from four under the previous system. All teams play four interconference games. An analysis of win percentages in 2008 showed a statistical trend upwards for top teams since this change; the top team each year then averaged 14.2 wins, versus 13.4 previously. [6]. Old gold uniforms with black numbers and white trim. Brought back old gold pants. Denver Broncos " Added third alternative uniforms. Orange. All Rights Reserved. Skill in black and white: a content analysis of the 2001-2002 NFL season. by. Daniel Taylor Buffington. Major Professor: Committee: Reuben May. E.M. Beck Tom Beamish. Electronic Version Approved Are black and white athletes presented in different ways on television? Given the history of racial stereotypes, are black athletes more likely to be credited with physical skill than white athletes? Are white athletes more likely to be credited with mental skill than black athletes? In order to answer these questions, some discussion of the history of race and sport is required. 4. CHAPTER 3 RACE AND SPORT IN THE UNITED STATES A Brief History During the 19.