

**Brains versus Brawn:
An Analysis of Stereotyping
and
Racial Bias in National Football League Broadcasts**

**Pat Viklund
Boston College
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Abstract

This study analyzed prior research on racism and sports media as well as examined television broadcasts of 5 National Football League games. The intent of the study was to investigate the possibility of announcers conveying racial bias and stereotyping players during games. The study analyzed the difference in frequency of physical and cognitive/personal descriptors used by commentators in describing black and white players. It also explored the naming patterns of announcers. No racial bias was found in naming patterns. The overall findings, however, suggest that black players tend to be stereotyped as naturally gifted athletes, while white players receive more praise for their intellect, work ethic, and personal life.

Introduction

Sports have been a large part of television since the very earliest days of TV production. In fact, the first live TV report was broadcast by the BBC on June 21, 1937 from a tennis match at Wimbledon (Beck & Bosshart, 2003). Clearly, television and athletics have a long history together. This history has been and continues to be characterized by a symbiotic relationship in which television and sport both help each other grow and continue to assist each other in maintaining popularity and making money (Coakley, 1990). Recently however, the coverage of sports on TV has been changing. Channels such as Fox Sports Net, ESPN, Eurosport and DSF provide audiences with a non-stop flow of athletic contests and information (Beck & Bosshart, 2003). A sports fan can watch live games, classic games, highlights, sports talk shows such as *Pardon the Interruption*, and even sports game shows such as *Stump the Schwab*, at nearly anytime of the day.

The importance of the relationship between television and sports cannot be underestimated in the lives of viewers: “With the meteoric rise of televised sporting

events during the last two decades, viewing sports programs has decidedly become a national pastime” (Bierman, 1990, p. 413). Televised sports, particularly major events such as the Super Bowl and FIFA World Cup, attract some of the highest ratings and largest audiences (Coakley, 1990). It is clear that audiences truly enjoy watching sports on TV since they do so in such large numbers. Research has also shown that a major factor in viewer enjoyment is broadcast commentary (Eitzen & Sage, 1993). According to Eitzen and Sage, “sportscasters serve not only to fill the in the lack of knowledge about the sport but also to add histrionics to the human drama of athletic events” (1993, p. 293). The role of commentators in sports broadcasts may be important to the overall experience and messages that viewers receive from televised sport. Announcers during a broadcast do not merely call the action exactly as it plays out in a game, they also “fill time in broadcasts with humor, frank analysis, and anecdotes about players, coaches, owners and their families” (Rada, 1996, p. 232). In performing these duties during a fast-paced athletic broadcast, announcers may bring up comments having to do with subconscious beliefs, images, attitudes, and values (Rada, 1996). These comments may reflect on athletes or coaches in a biased manner even if the commentator does not intend them to do so.

It would seem that sports announcers cannot be completely objective, as they are human, but television productions of athletic events, on the whole, tend to not reflect objective reality. According to Eitzen and Sage, “They actually construct the events through the sports they select to cover, their priority of focus, and the narrative themes they pursue” (1993, p. 287). Audiences receive this selective, and possibly biased,

depiction of athletics in large amounts due, in part, to the many networks that televise sporting events (Beck & Bosshart, 2003). According to Coakley (1990), these “selective versions” of sports are presented in terms of “general values”:

These values are most often consistent with the ideas and perceptions of those who control the media. Therefore, media coverage of sport most often serves to re-create and strengthen the values held by people in positions of power and responsibility in a society. (Coakley, 1990, p. 288)

Thus, the ideas and values of the dominant majority are reflected in sports broadcasts (Coakley, 1990). A problem may arise if these values and ideas, as projected through sport, belittle or in any way dehumanize a minority or group not in a position of power. Race is an area in which biased ideas or values may be projected by sports broadcasts, their announcers, and those who own the sports media. Such a distorted view may serve to “shape [audiences’] own perception of sport and the sport experience” as well as reinforce mainstream, stereotypical beliefs (Coakley, 1990, p. 288). This study will analyze the ways in which racial bias may be presented in various National Football League broadcasts.

Background of the Problem

According to a Harris Poll conducted in February of 2008, Professional football is America's most popular sport, with 30 percent of Americans who follow one or more sport claiming the NFL to be their favorite (Harris Interactive, 2008). This is compared to only 15 percent of fans stating that baseball was their favorite, and just 12 percent and 10 percent for college football and auto racing respectively, with all other sports having percentages in single digits (Harris Interactive, 2008). The same poll also showed that football's popularity has had the largest growth of any sport since 1985, with growth of 6 percent (Harris Interactive, 2008). Also, according to a USA Today article, 222 million Americans, almost three-quarters of the country's population, watched professional football in 2006 (Lopresti, 2007). Thus, the potential biases and distortions that are presented in football broadcasts are viewed and possibly internalized by more Americans than for any other sport. Football has also been praised by sportswriters for its excellent marketing strategies resulting in its continued economic and popular growth. The NFL's popularity makes it extremely valuable for analysis since it is a staple of American culture. Football is truly an American sport that is a large part of this country's culture and society.

Because football could be considered a dominating force in our culture, it is important to understand how its values and ideals are promoted, as well as to look at the ways groups of people are portrayed through televised broadcasts and perceived by audiences. Sporting events are places in society where Americans feel that blacks have

achieved relatively equal or superior success in comparison to whites. According to Madison and Landers, “It is often maintained that professional sport, music, and entertainment, more than other occupations, have been areas in which minority groups could have equal opportunity with whites” (1976, p. 151). Also, as Dufur explains, “Since Jackie Robinson broke baseball’s color barrier in 1947, black athletes’ participation in many major professional and Olympic sports has increased sharply” (1996, p. 345). It seems that sports have become a place of equality for blacks as well as providing an avenue for success outside of more traditional professions. In 1991, black players made up 75 percent of pro basketball players, 60 percent of pro football players, and 17 percent of major league baseball players, while African-Americans were only 12 percent of the general population (Eitzen & Sage, 1993).

With numbers like these, it appears that blacks, in fact, dominate athletics. In proportion to the general population they are extremely well represented in sports, and account for many of the superstars that are seen on television. In the National Basketball Association, black stars such as Kobe Bryant, LeBron James, and Kevin Garnett are some of the most recognizable faces. In the NFL LaDainian Tomlinson, Adrian Peterson, and Randy Moss are just a few of the extremely popular black players. This has led many people to believe that sports are a sacred place in society in which racism does not exist and black players are dominant (Eitzen & Sage, 1993).

It is true that black athletes have made great strides in the past fifty years or so. They have become prominent figures in major American sports. According to *Ebony* magazine, as quoted in Billings (2004):

Ten years ago, the number of black quarterbacks in the National Football League could be counted on your left hand. Nowadays, you need the left hand, right hand and the hands of a few friends to count the Black quarterbacks on NFL rosters. (Roquemore, as cited in Billings, p. 201)

The belief that sports are sacred and now free of racism, however, may underlie biases and discrimination that are masked by statistical data about blacks in sports: “Rather than being free from racism, sport as a microcosm of the larger society reflects the same racial problems as society” (Eitzen & Sage, 1993, p. 323).

A practice known as racial or media stacking is one way that covert or unintentional racism is perpetuated even today, when sports seem to be equal and just (Billings, 2004; Eitzen & Sage, 1993). Media stacking is the communicative process in which athletes are placed disproportionately in certain positions based on stereotypes and underrepresented in other positions (Billings, 2004; Eitzen & Sage, 1993). Black athletes are usually placed into peripheral positions without a leadership role. When the media, particularly television, present black athletes in such stereotyped positions they can and frequently are seen as “inconsistent performers, unreliable, and effective only in instructive, reflex-oriented positions (e.g., running back)” (Murrell & Curtis, 1994, p. 225). This is seen in football, especially in the quarterback position, which has typically been dominated by whites (Billings, 2004; Eitzen & Sage, 1993; Murrell & Curtis, 1994). As mentioned earlier there are black quarterbacks in the NFL; these athletes, however, are still rarely placed in the starting position, the leading spot on a football team. The sports media may present images and provide commentary that strengthen a racist

positioning of black athletes. It is a problem of bias that may go unnoticed because of its apparent subtlety and inconspicuous nature.

Although racism found in football may seem likely to be relatively covert or unintentional because of the stacking process, there has been at least one instance of overt racism that demonstrated how intense the problem of racial bias can become. This incident occurred in 2003 when conservative radio talk show host Rush Limbaugh, in a segment on ESPN, made controversial comments about black NFL quarterback Donovan McNabb. During ESPN's *Sunday NFL Countdown* Limbaugh blurted out:

Sorry to say this, I don't think he's been that good from the get-go...What we have here is a little social concern in the NFL. The media has been very desirous that black quarterback can do well – black coaches and black quarterbacks doing well...There's a little hope invested in McNabb, and he got credit for the performance of his team that he didn't deserve.

The defense [has] carried this team. (Hartmann, 2007, p. 46)

These remarks were made on national television to fans watching ESPN across the country.

Limbaugh's comments seem to denigrate the hard work, intelligence, motivation, and skill of Donovan McNabb. They also seem to portray him as being merely a product of outside factors and attribute his success to things which have nothing to do with him. As prior research has demonstrated, racial bias is a frequent occurrence in football on TV, if not overtly expressed. Another problem is that Limbaugh's explanation of the media favoring black athletes has not been supported. Niven (2005) found that black athletes are

rarely featured in many types of sports media and that there is “no body of evidence showing media bias in favor of African American athletes” (p. 688). The Limbaugh and McNabb incident in 2003 may illustrate how racism is still found in football media, despite the large number of black athletes who play the game.

Research Question

This research investigated how various broadcasts of National Football League games portrayed athletes in order to understand whether or not television transmits racially biased images of athletic figures.

Rationale

Racism in sports and in the televised media’s portrayal of sports is a major problem that should be better understood. Even if racial bias in NFL broadcasts is covert or unintentional it may still be harmful and inappropriate. McCombs and Shaw (1972) explain that the media perform an agenda setting function, which can demonstrate how racial bias may be displayed. Agenda-setting may be defined as the mass media, including television, not necessarily telling people what to think, but instead being “stunningly successful at telling people what to think about” (McCombs & Shaw, 1972, p. 177). The media’s power is “in its ability to define and shape the discussion of public events” (Billings & Angelini, 2007, p. 96). In terms of NFL broadcasts Billings explains that:

Within the realm of sports, the theoretical underpinnings of agenda-setting implies that sportscasters will not explicitly tell a viewer that a black quarterback is inferior; instead, sportscasters will use different types of comments that leave a viewer wondering if that black quarterback is inherently different from others. (2004, p. 203)

This is an important distinction. According to Denham, the media “often tell us what to think about when the issues at hand do not otherwise intrude into our lives” (1997, p. 4). Thus, the media might bring to light certain aspects of black and white athletes, whether accurate or not, which we may not have tended to think about. Viewers also may see images and hear commentary repeatedly as football games are broadcast. The high frequency of exposure to such visuals and commentary may significantly affect the way that viewers construct and perceive the world around them (Buffington & Fraley, 2008). The agenda-setting function of television sets the table for the way people perceive things by cueing viewers as to what they should think about. This may be especially true with NFL broadcasts because games are only televised on CBS, NBC, FOX, ESPN, and NFL Network, giving the audience little choice in the source from which they receive their entertainment and information.

Understanding the racial bias that may be present in NFL broadcasts is made even more important by the tremendous popularity of the sport. It is America’s favorite sport to watch on television with 30 percent of American sports fans claiming it as their preferred sport (Harris Interactive, 2008). According to Rada, more than half of the all-time top-rated twenty shows have been Super Bowl broadcasts (1996, p. 233). The extent

of football coverage and viewing make audiences especially susceptible to hearing, seeing, and potentially internalizing the racial bias that may be portrayed. Because most pro football games are shown on major networks and prominent cable channels, they are more able to “affect the world view of the American people” (Rada, 1996, p. 233).

Therefore, it is important to understand the ways in which television may broadcast a biased view of football players. The extent of football’s influence combined with the fact that the media set an agenda make this study important.

Review of the Literature

There has been much research done concerning the media portrayals of black and white athletes in various sports (Billings & Angelini, 2007; Bruce, 2004; Dufur, 1997; Eastman & Billings, 2001; Rada & Wulfemeyer, 2005; Wonsek, 1992). The methods and results of these studies have varied slightly, but they have consistently demonstrated that racism exists in sports media. The nature of this racism and its perpetuation by the sports media, as demonstrated through this prior research, is important to understand for analyzing NFL broadcasts.

One study that found evidence of a racial bias in sports broadcasting was done by Billings and Angelini (2007). They analyzed 70 hours of NBC's coverage of the 2004 Olympics in their attempt to find ethnic biases, as well as biases in regard to gender and nationality, in sports telecasts (Billings & Angelini, 2007). Billings and Angelini (2007) used a type of 12 category coding system developed by Billings (2007) in an earlier study, which consisted of looking for commentary about characteristics such as concentration, strength-based athletic ability, talent, or experience. Through these methods they found that "more than two-thirds of the athlete mentions were white athletes, and that fourteen of the twenty most frequently mentioned athletes were white" (Billings & Angelini, 2007, p. 95). This under-representation of non-white athletes favors athletes in the "majority" group and does not do justice to the athletic accomplishments of other sports figures (Billings & Angelini, 2007).

Other studies of sports and the media have, however, uncovered less disparity in the frequency of comments about black and white players. Eastman and Billings (2001) analyzed 66 college basketball games using almost the same coding scheme as Billings and Angelini (2007). They found that TV announcers commented with about the same frequency on black players, but reinforced societal stereotypes, such as attributing speed to black athletes (Eastman & Billings, 2001). Such stereotyping may be just as dangerous as under-representing black athletes, since it gives audiences a one-dimensional view of these athletes. According to Eastman and Billings, racial biases that are “repeated hundreds, even thousands, of times by different announcers in similar ways provide a conceptual frame for the sports experience, and that mental frame has particular importance because fans often apply it to non-athletic situations” (2001, p. 183).

Rada and Wulfemeyer (2005) also found that black athletes are often depicted and viewed as being successful only in terms of their athletic ability which can, in turn, lead to the continuation of racial stereotypes. They studied college football and basketball games on television, coding for depictions of players as athletes, and players as off-field persons (Rada and Wulfemeyer, 2005). The researchers found that black athletes are viewed as merely physical specimens and were mentioned much more negatively when being described as people, as opposed to players (Rada and Wulfemeyer, 2005). They found a difference between the views of *player-as-athlete* and *player-as-person*. They also noted that commentators create a negative image of black athletes when talking about them as people (Rada & Wulfemeyer, 2005). The way that black athletes are stereotyped in the media by being “portrayed as physical specimens using their God-

given, natural ability whereas white athletes are hard working and intellectually endowed” undermines the progress that black athletes have made in athletics (Rada & Wulfemeyer, 2005, p. 80).

A study done by Wonsek (1992) had similar results. She analyzed twelve NCAA basketball games during the National Tournament in March in an attempt to describe the image of black athletes that is portrayed in the media and to determine if this image is perpetuating racial stereotypes (Wonsek, 1992). This article discussed the importance of media, particularly television, in displaying a glorified image of black players as merely star athletes, as well as the influence this has on young black audiences (Wonsek, 1992). Young black males, according to Wonsek, see sports as the only opportunity for success and achievement largely because of the common stereotypical image of the black superstar as a naturally gifted athlete who became rich, famous, and popular. However, in reality, their chances of becoming professionals are very slim, as only one in every 12,000 high school athletes reaches the pros (Wonsek, 1992). After her thorough analysis of college basketball games on television, Wonsek states in her conclusion:

Additionally, it has been suggested that college basketball broadcasts may also serve to reinforce rather than negate stereotypes of black males. These athletic contests are a part of the white American cultural ideology which perpetuates itself by demeaning and stereotyping blacks via media images. (1992, p. 460)

This study shows that racial stereotyping in sports television may be an even more dangerous negative force because of the influence that they have on black youth and their goals for the future.

Bruce (2004) found evidence of racial bias in sports television that focused specifically on the commentators and their actions in sporting events. Bruce (2004) interviewed 11 male basketball commentators and also did a content analysis of 41 college basketball and professional basketball games. The author looked for commentator patterns in naming players, by either first name only, last name only, both names, or nicknames and also analyzed the descriptions of players used throughout the broadcasts (Bruce, 2004). Overall, the study found that white athletes were referred to more by their last names, which is considered most respectful, while black athletes were called more by their first names, widely believed to be the least respectful form of naming (Bruce, 2004). Part of this is likely due to the fact that the white announcers found the black athletes' first names to be exotic and strange, thus they used them more and possibly inadvertently created a boundary for what is "normal" in white culture (Bruce, 2004). The interviews with commentators enabled Bruce to determine that:

If the sports media systematically reinforce racist ideologies – as they appear to do – it is not because media workers are active racists. It is through the sets of practices and discourses by which knowledge is constructed in the media, not the personal inclinations of media workers, that racist ideologies continue to be recreated. (2004, p. 863)

The study claims that live sports broadcasts produce fast-paced and high pressure situations for commentators. Consequently, they frequently resort to using common racial ideologies and stereotypes that are present in the dominant white culture of America (Bruce, 2004). This study specifically of commentators' naming and descriptive practices provides important insight into various dimensions of sports television.

A study done by Dufur (1996) did not explicitly examine racial bias in sports broadcasts, but found similar stereotypes in advertisements using black athletes. Dufur (1996) looked at ads in *Sports Illustrated* for examples of stereotypical images of athletes, such as blacks being successful because of innate physical traits (strength and speed) or whites being successful because of acquired or intellectual traits (work ethic or leadership). These stereotypes, which also seem to be prevalent in sports broadcasts, were found to be reinforced even more intensely in advertising (Dufur, 1996). Black athletes were portrayed as succeeding due to their natural physical athleticism, while white athletes were portrayed in terms of their hard work, intelligence, and leadership (Dufur, 1996). Also, "black athletes are more likely to be portrayed as angry, violent or hypersexual" according to Dufur (1996, p. 345). This study shows how the stereotypes of black athletes that seem to be widespread in sports broadcasts may be even more influential as they permeate into other areas of the media such as advertising. This may provide audiences, particularly black youth, with even more exposure to the racism and stereotyping of black athletes (Dufur, 1996).

The previous studies analyzed and found some form of racial bias in the sports media. One study (Billings & Angelini, 2007) found a discrepancy in the number of times

that black athletes were mentioned compared to white athletes during the Olympics. However, most studies did not uncover racial bias as a matter of frequency counts. Rather, the majority of studies (Bruce, 2004; Dufur, 1997; Eastman & Billings, 2001; Rada & Wulfemeyer, 2005; Wonsek, 1992) found racism within the sports media to be in the manner that black athletes were represented. These athletes were found to be named in less respectful ways (Bruce, 2004). They were also portrayed primarily in terms of stereotypes of their natural athletic and physical abilities as opposed to working hard and using their intelligence (Dufur, 1996; Eastman & Billings, 2001; Rada & Wulfemeyer, 2005; Wonsek, 1992). These stereotypes projected by the media seem to reinforce the racism present in the dominant white culture of America (Wonsek, 1992).

Other studies have specifically examined the sport of football and are relevant to this study (Billings, 2004; Byrd, 2005; Murrell & Curtis, 1994; Rada, 1996; Rainville & McCormick, 1977). The findings of these studies are similar to the research done on other sports and support the idea of racial bias being present in media depictions of athletes, specifically football players (Billings, 2004; Byrd, 2005; Murrell & Curtis, 1994; Rada, 1996; Rainville & McCormick, 1977). The main theme throughout this research suggests that white players' positive reputation is reinforced through the media, while black players are generally demeaned and stereotyped as pure athletes without significant cognitive abilities (Billings, 2004; Byrd, 2005; Murrell & Curtis, 1994; Rada, 1996; Rainville & McCormick, 1977).

Rainville and McCormick's (1977) research sparked much interest in the question of race portrayal in the sports media. They attempted to measure covert prejudice in

broadcasts of nationally televised NFL games. Rainville, a blind psychologist, noticed that he could identify the race of players through the broadcast commentary without race ever being explicitly mentioned (Murrell & Curtis, 1994; Rainville & McCormick, 1977). This led the researchers to study 12 professional football game broadcast transcripts for descriptions or attributions hinting at a racial bias. They paired black and white athletes with similar statistics to compare announcer comments about different races (Rainville & McCormick, 1977). Rainville and McCormick found that announcers “are building a positive reputation for white players and a comparatively negative reputation for black players” (1977, p.24). White players were depicted as “causal agents” who do things for themselves, while black players were portrayed as “externally moved objects” (Rainville & McCormick, 1977). Thus, white athletes were described by announcers as active participants physically and cognitively, whereas black athletes were represented as having negative non-professional records and playing passive roles in the game. This type of commentary boosts white players’ prestige while portraying black players as peripheral athletes. This study is some of the first research to identify and explain the football media’s racial bias in favor of white players.

Another study done by Rada (1996) expanded on the idea of racial bias in football broadcasts. Rada’s study analyzed games from each major network during the 1992 NFL season using a Biased Coverage Index (BCI) to “characterize descriptive comments of players by announcers” (1996, p.234). The study found that both black and white players received much positive commentary, but there was a difference in the type of comments. Black athletes “were much more likely than whites to receive comments relating to

physical characteristics, whereas whites were much more likely than African Americans to receive comments relating to cognitive characteristics” (Rada, 1996, p. 236). This study provides more support for the idea that black athletes are stereotyped as naturally gifted physical specimens, and brings this idea into the realm of football. Rada’s (1996) research makes it clear that football players are not immune to this bias. Professional football broadcasts may be reinforcing stereotypes of a racist white culture.

Billings (2004) further investigated portrayals of race in televised football games. His study, however, looked specifically at the position of quarterback, a position traditionally dominated by whites (Billings, 2004). Billings (2004) hypothesized that black and white quarterbacks would be described differently by the commentators, much like other positions in football and athletes in other sports. The study analyzed 54 NFL and college football games with coders noting the ethnicity of both the quarterback and the announcer while also noting the descriptors used for that quarterback (Billings, 2004). Overall, the research found that “white quarterbacks had less comments about their successes based on athletic skill, whereas blacks were more likely to fail if they were not superior in regard to innate athletic ability” (Billings, 2004, p. 208). Thus, the stereotype of the black player as a naturally gifted athletic machine is reinforced. Billings (2004), however, notes that despite this stereotype remaining in football broadcasts, his study provides evidence that there have been improvements. He claims that “The study found no other major differences attributable to the ethnicity of the athlete and/or sportscaster” (Billings, 2004, p. 209). Billings (2004) proposes that this demonstrates the progress

being made over the past few years in terms of how white and black athletes are portrayed in the media.

Murrell and Curtis (1994) conducted a study that also looked at black and white quarterback portrayals. Their research, however, analyzed print media. They examined articles about three black and three white quarterbacks from five different magazines during the period of 1990 to 1992 (Murrell & Curtis, 1994). The study investigated the print media's descriptors of black and white quarterbacks. Murrell and Curtis found some of the same stereotypes and racial bias present in magazine coverage of football:

Performance by a black quarterback was described by the print media as being due to internal, stable, and uncontrollable causes. This is akin to attributing the cause of performance to factors such as being a natural athlete or having natural ability. (1994, p. 230)

This finding resonates with many other studies concerning commentary on black athletes. Performance by white quarterbacks in this study was described as being due to “internal, unstable, and controllable factors”, which essentially means hard work (Murrell & Curtis, 1994, p. 224). The common stereotypes found in television broadcasts of football and other sports seem to be present in other media outlets as well, possibly making them even more harmful because of their saturation.

The literature about race and sports coverage seems to show a clear trend towards a racially biased portrayal of athletes. Some studies (Billings & Angelini, 2007; Bruce, 2004; Dufur, 1997; Eastman & Billings, 2001; Rada & Wulfemeyer, 2005; Wonsek, 1992) found evidence of black athletes across various sports being depicted by the media

as stereotypically athletic, but unintelligent. Other studies (Billings, 2004; Byrd, 2005; Murrell & Curtis, 1994; Rada, 1996; Rainville & McCormick, 1977) looked more closely at the sport of football and produced very similar findings. They uncovered a trend of stereotyping in football broadcasts and coverage. Still, other past research (Billings, 2004) was more optimistic and found that racist commentary in football has improved recently. Hopefully, the current study can contribute to this body of prior research and provide further information on the relationship between race and sports broadcasting.

Methodology

This research study examined televised broadcasts of National Football League games from the first half of the season. The collection of games used was a convenience sample recorded at Boston College. The sample was based on games airing on the local cable system. The sample was made up of 15 hours of coverage spanning five games on each of the television networks which currently air NFL contests. These networks were NBC, CBS, FOX, and ESPN. There were two games recorded from CBS, one game from ESPN, one game from FOX, and one game from NBC. The time slots for the games were 1:00 PM, 4:00 PM and 8:00 PM on Sundays and 8:30 PM on Mondays. It was important to include all of the networks and time-time slots where NFL games currently air so that there would be a variety of announcers, teams, and wide-ranging coverage in the data. Each game was recorded in full and eventually coded according to the system devised. The games being analyzed were: Jets vs. Raiders on CBS, Seahawks vs. Buccaneers on NBC, Vikings vs. Saints on ESPN, Cowboys vs. Cardinals on FOX, and Bengals vs. Jets on CBS.

Football was chosen as the object of study because of its popularity and prevalence in American culture. Americans claimed the NFL to be their favorite sport to watch on television with 30 percent designating it as their preferred sport (Harris Interactive, 2008). It is the most heavily watched professional sport in America with more than half of the all-time top-rated twenty shows being Super Bowl Broadcasts (Rada, 1996). According to Rada, “unlike baseball and basketball games, most

professional football games are televised nationally on one of three major networks and cable services and so are more able to affect the world view of the American people” (Rada, 1996, p. 233). Thus, football is an extremely important part of American culture and its broadcasts may have wide reaching influence. The methods in this study were designed to see if NFL broadcasts portray a racial bias that could possibly become a part of this influence.

This study analyzed potential racial bias using secondary research, as well as primary research. The analysis of prior research was done by searching scholarly communications journals. These journals included *The Howard Journal of Communications*, *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly*, *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media*, and *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*. Secondary research was also conducted using sociology journals, such as *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*, *Sociology of Sport Journal*, *Sociological Inquiry*, and *Sociological Focus*. In addition to researching published journal articles, this study used sociology of sport books and text books, such as *Sport in Society* by Jay J. Coakley and *Sociology of North American Sport* by D. Stanley Eitzen and George H. Sage. This portion of the study qualitatively analyzed previous findings and conclusions about sports, race, and the media.

The primary research portion of the study used two methodologies. The first was based on Bruce’s (2004) study in which the author coded for naming patterns of basketball players by race. Bruce (2004) noted whether players were called by their first name, last name, both names, or nicknames and also indicated the race of the player. This

study used similar methods, although they were simplified slightly so that one coder could record data for each game. A table including the race of the player (black or white) on one axis and the name used in describing a player (first, last, both, or nickname) on the other axis was created. Race was recorded based on a visual assessment of the player being named. Every time a player's name was used a frequency count was made in the corresponding box. For example, if Earnest Graham, a black running back for the Tampa Bay Buccaneers, was described on one play with "Graham runs it up the middle", it would be noted in the box representing a black player and last name used. Notes were also taken to identify any special examples, such as the repeated reference to one player by his first name or to comment about the ways in which names were typically used. This data was analyzed quantitatively using frequency counts. The notes on specific examples, however, were useful in looking qualitatively at naming patterns in NFL broadcasts.

The second portion of this study examined the possible stereotyping and racial bias found in general commentary during NFL broadcasts. This section was based on the findings of prior studies (Billings, 2004; Eastman & Billings, 2001; Murrell & Curtis, 1994; Rada, 1996; Rada & Wulfemeyer, 2005; Rainville & McCormick, 1977) which make the argument that black players receive comments stereotypically praising their athletic skill and natural ability while white players are more likely to receive comments praising cognitive and personal attributes such as hard work and intelligence. These studies all analyzed various aspects of commentary in sports broadcasting and discovered that the major issue at stake in terms of racial bias is the type of comments that black or white players receive and the potential implications of these comments for society. This

study used these prior conclusions to focus the analysis on where bias is thought to actually exist.

Remarks made by network-employed individuals were again analyzed for this portion of the study. Network-employed individuals included play-by-play announcers such as Al Michaels, color commentators such as John Madden or Cris Collinsworth, and on-field reporters, such as Suzy Kolber. Another table was created for this part of the study that recorded race (black or white) on one axis and the type of description of the comment on the other. The type of comment was divided into either positive or negative physical descriptors and positive or negative cognitive/personal descriptors. In prior studies, physical and cognitive descriptors have been the area with the most significant differences in results in terms of comments about black and white players. A frequency count was recorded in the appropriate box for race each time an announcer made a remark about a player's physical attributes or cognitive and personal attributes. These frequency counts allowed the researcher to see how many times certain descriptors were used for each race and thus analyze whether a racial bias still exists in NFL broadcast commentary.

Notes were also taken to document examples of each different descriptor. The codes to identify types of comments were simple. The first note was whether it was positive (+) or negative (-), the second was whether the comment referred to a physical attribute (P) or a cognitive/personal attribute (C), and the final piece was whether the player was black (B) or white (W). These codes were used in conjunction with notes describing the various comments in order to create examples of the actual remarks made.

These were useful in accompanying the quantitative data from frequency counts and tables. Remarks that were classified as physical comments included, “He’s a gifted athlete”, “He’s got great foot speed”, or “He really just lacks arm strength”. Examples of remarks that were classified as cognitive or personal included, “He’s one of the hardest workers out there”, “He just loves to compete”, or “He worked his way out of the harsh streets of his hometown”. This primary research was combined with the secondary research to obtain a complete qualitative and quantitative analysis of racial bias in NFL broadcasts.

Findings

The findings of this study showed a trend in terms of the stereotyping of black players based on announcers' comments, but did not indicate any major differences in terms of the naming of black and white players. The frequency counts and percentages found in this study were relatively consistent with prior research on the topic and also with studies on other sports. They displayed a tendency for announcers to describe black players with physical descriptions praising their natural athletic ability, while often describing white players as having stronger cognitive and personal attributes. Whether or not this bias was intentional may still be unclear, but the trend definitely exists.

The overall findings that were most striking in this study were in the analysis of general commentary by network employees during NFL broadcasts. Looking broadly at the data there were many more positive comments in both the physical and cognitive descriptor categories than there were negative comments. Positive comments from announcers made up 82 % of all comments (314 out of 383 comments). Black and white players were mostly discussed in a positive light for either their physical abilities or the cognitive abilities and life stories. Racial bias was found in the types of comments that players tended to receive. Positive physical descriptors were used to describe black athletes 160 times, while these positive physical descriptors were only used 63 times for white players. Negative physical descriptions were much closer in frequency for white and black players, as black players received 17 negative physical comments while white players received 16. The lower frequency of negative physical comments and the

similarity between comments about black and white players did not appear to be perpetuating the stereotype of black players as gifted athletes. One example of the positive physical comments made about black players during the broadcasts was “He really has some nifty footwork and can really provide a spark for his team” (*NBC Sunday Night Football*, 2008). This comment was made during a game between the Seattle Seahawks and Tampa Bay Buccaneers. In another example from a game on FOX, a commentator described DeMarcus Ware (a black player) as “such a great athlete” (*NFL on FOX*, 2008). This was not qualified with any explanation and seemed to be an assumption of natural physical prowess on the part of a black man. Other examples of the plethora of stereotypical comments about black players’ physical abilities included “the speed and explosion of Darren McFadden” (*NFL on CBS*, 2008), “Reggie Bush was too fast for himself, his electricity really changed this game” (*Monday Night Football on ESPN*, 2008), and New York Jets running back Leon Washington described as “that rare combination of size and speed” (*NFL on CBS*, 2008). Comments such as these were typical throughout all of the broadcasts and were most frequently used when describing black players.

White players received some positive physical comments, but they were not nearly as numerous as the physical comments about black players. White players received a total of 63 positive physical comments compared to the 160 for black athletes. Many of these positive physical comments actually were about New York Jets quarterback Brett Favre. He was described as “a real Superman, an iron man” and also as “one tough son of a gun” during the Jets’ game against the Raiders (*NFL on CBS*, 2008).

His passes were also frequently described in these positive physical terms as “rifles” to the end-zone or “bullets” (*NFL on CBS*, 2008). These implied the immense strength and accuracy of Favre’s throwing arm. Other white players also received positive physical comments, such as New Orleans Saints quarterback Drew Brees being described as “a great deep ball thrower” (*Monday Night Football on ESPN*, 2008). Most of these comments, however, were about quarterbacks, such as Favre or Brees. This trend will be analyzed further in the discussion section.

Negative comments of both a physical and cognitive nature were rare, with only 18% (69 out of a total 383) of all comments being negative; however there were some examples of negative physical comments for both black and white athletes. There were only 33 negative physical comments for black and white players combined. An example of such a comment about a white player was seen in the comments about Arizona Cardinals quarterback Kurt Warner. One announcer said “apparently the fumbling problems that have plagued Warner in the past have returned” (*NFL on FOX*, 2008). Comments such as these were relatively rare however. An example of a negative physical comment made about a black athlete was the description of running back Leon Washington’s running play. The commentator said “he is lucky that his teammates saved that terrible play for him” (*NFL on CBS*, 2008). This was an indication of Washington’s lack of physical skill in making the play. This type of comment was not seen as frequently as positive comments however, as only 33 physical comments were negative compared to 223 positive physical comments.

Cognitive and personal comments showed a different trend from the physical comments. There were far more positive comments of this sort for white players than for black players. White athletes received 62 positive cognitive and personal descriptions, while black players only received 29. Black players received more negative cognitive and personal statements with 26, while white players only received 10 negative comments. This trend provides further evidence of a racial bias that stereotypes black players. White players were far more frequently described in terms of their hard work, leadership, or intellect than were black players. This seemed to show a lack of recognition of these qualities in black players and the assumption that black athletes are naturally gifted with physical strength, speed, and power because of their skin color. The frequency counts of the cognitive and personal comments indicated a trend of racial bias in NFL commentary, even if it is not intentional or overt.

Positive comments of the cognitive and personal nature were far more prevalent for white players than for black players. There were 62 such comments for white players, with a mere 29 for black athletes. One example of this type of description was a remark about Oakland Raiders running back Justin Fargas. A CBS announcer exclaimed, “He is such a great example for the younger Darren McFadden (a black Oakland running back). Fargas has really earned everything he’s gotten, truly a blue-collar example” (*NFL on CBS*, 2008). The white athlete’s hard work was praised in this example and he was even spoken about as a great role model. Another example of a positive cognitive description of a white athlete was one of the comments about Dallas Cowboys quarterback Tony Romo. He was described as “always excelling in these clutch situations” (*NFL on FOX*,

2008). The ability to excel when the game is on the line is considered a mental trait and Romo was celebrated for this ability. Another example of a white quarterback receiving praise for his positive mentality was Tampa Bay Buccaneers quarterback Jeff Garcia being described as “loving to compete and being a brutally honest human being” (*NBC Sunday Night Football*, 2008). These comments were representative of the overall data, where white players, especially quarterbacks, were described in primarily positive cognitive and personal terms.

Black players were described with far fewer positive cognitive comments and more negative remarks than white players. They had only 29 positive comments, compared to 62 for white athletes, and also were described negatively 26 times as opposed to 10 for white players. An example of one rare positive comment for a black athlete’s mental attributes or lifestyle was Dallas Cowboys wide receiver Terrell Owens being described as having to work extra hard each week to make an impact on the game (*NFL on FOX*, 2008). In this case his work ethic was praised over his athletic ability. Another example of this type of comment was one CBS announcer describing Leon Washington as “having a great work ethic and great effort” (*NFL on CBS*, 2008). Black players, however, received far more negative comments in this manner. For example, on ESPN, one of the announcers said, “that decision by the rookie is almost incomprehensible” as he described a play by a black running back (*Monday Night Football on ESPN*, 2008). The announcer in this case subtly attacked the player’s intellect and decision making. Another example of a negative cognitive/personal comment was a description of wide receiver Antonio Bryant’s past off-field antics. The

NBC announcer talked about his temper and an incident when he threw a towel in coach Bill Parcell's face (*NBC Sunday Night Football*, 2008). This was a negative personal story about a black player.

Based on the frequency counts the network that exhibited the most racial bias in the types of descriptors used for black and white players seemed to be either FOX or NBC. FOX had 45 positive physical comments for black players to only 10 for white players, and also had only 7 cognitive/personal statements for black players to 16 for whites. NBC had 30 positive physical comments for black players with 16 for white athletes, and only 4 positive cognitive/personal comments for black players to 16 for white players. These networks had the most drastic differences in these areas of commentary. Their positive commentary seemed to show a very clear trend in the stereotyping of black athletes as natural physical specimens without the cognitive and leadership aspects that white players possess. It is interesting to note that NBC also had a primetime spot for football coverage, hosting *Sunday Night Football* at 8 PM. Every network and every broadcast showed evidence of racial bias, but these networks showed especially large differences in the commentary on white and black players.

The portion of this study which looked at naming did not find a racial bias as significant as the analysis of general commentary found. The overall trend in naming seemed to be that announcers would use either the last name or both names for players regardless of whether they were black or white. Black players were called by their last names 135 times, both names 208 times, a nickname 7 times, and just their first name 18 times. White players were called by their last name 113 times, both names 84 times, a

nickname 0 times, and just their first name 3 times. Bruce's (2004) study claimed that racial bias is found in sports broadcasts when black players are called more by the first name and white players are called more by their last name. This is because, according to Bruce (2004), calling someone by their first name is widely considered the least respectful form of address. The findings of this study did not seem to support Bruce's research however. 93% of the names used when identifying black players were either the last name or both names and 98% of the names used for whites were either last or both names. Both of these percentages seemed to be high and represented the majority of the naming that took place in these broadcasts.

Black players were in fact called by their first names more frequently than white players, 18 to 3, but black players' names were used much more in general, 368 to 200. This slight difference in the frequency that announcers called black players by their first names may be exemplified by one CBS announcer repeatedly saying offensive lineman D'Brickshaw Ferguson's first name. He even remarked "I just like saying his name", as he continued to call Ferguson by his "exotic" first name (*NFL on CBS*, 2008). Bruce (2004) claimed that white announcers named players in this manner frequently, where they would say a black player's first name because it sounds different or exotic to them. Despite a small number of examples, such as this one with D'Brickshaw Ferguson, there was not a great difference in the way black or white players were called. Black players were referred to by their first name slightly more frequently; however both races were mostly named using either their last name or both names. Using either last name or both names seemed to be the most natural way for the announcers to name the athletes.

Overall, the frequency counts and qualitative examples of this study showed that NFL broadcasts may characterize black athletes as the stereotypical naturally gifted athlete. At the same time the results showed that NFL commentators seemed to be more likely to describe white players in terms of their intellect, work ethic, or personal life. In addition to these findings, the data seemed to show that there was no difference in the way that announcers used black and white players' names.

Discussion

The data generated in this study is congruent with prior studies on sports broadcasting. It indicates a clear racial bias in the way announcers comment on black and white players. This bias is revealed primarily in the stereotyping of black players as naturally gifted athletes lacking the intellect or work ethic of their white peers. The commentary of NFL announcers across all the networks reinforces this stereotype through the ways in which they describe black athletes vs. the way they describe white athletes. This racial bias may be very powerful especially because of the prominence and popularity of football in today's American society (Rada, 1996). This study provides further evidence of the continuing racial bias that seems to be entrenched deeply in sports media, and particularly in National Football League broadcasts.

The most telling part of this study is the apparent discrepancy between the type of descriptions that black players and white players receive from announcers. First of all, black players receive more comments in general than do white players (232 for black athletes to 151 for whites), so the problem is not a matter of lack of attention or praise for black players. The problem arises in the type of comments made about black players and the way in which these descriptions reinforce societal stereotypes or limit black players to certain roles. As is evident in the findings, black athletes received far more positive comments about their physical abilities (160 for blacks to 63 for whites), while their positive cognitive or personal attributes were described much less than their white counterparts (29 for blacks to 62 for whites). NFL broadcasts continue to stereotype black

players as merely athletes blessed with natural ability and largely without other redeeming qualities. Eastman and Billings (2001) also found that the sports media reinforce these societal stereotypes, such as assuming that black people are very fast or strong. Black athletes are typically portrayed positively as *player-as-athlete*, while the rest of his or her characteristics and personality (the *player-as-person*) are largely ignored or demeaned (Rada & Wulfemeyer, 2005). According to Wenner (1995), “This is troubling because the focus on the sports star role limits both blacks and whites in their thinking. Confronted by media to focus on black men as athletes, we miss out on seeing the diversity of everyday successes by African American men” (p.228). This kind of bias and stereotyping is seemingly repeated numerous times on all of the various networks that air football games.

Prior studies have considered this type of stereotyping to be “covert racism” on the part of the broadcasters and networks (Billings, 2004; Murrell & Curtis, 1994; Rada, 1996; Rainville & McCormick, 1977). By using the term covert racism, researchers seem to suggest that the announcers, or even the networks for which they work, are racist in their intent. By using the word “covert”, the researchers imply that announcers want to plant stereotypes and racial bias into their broadcast and into the minds of audiences. This intention may not actually exist for broadcasters or network executives. This study seems to suggest that the stereotypes that are reinforced and the biases that are conveyed may not be a conscious act on the part of the individuals or stations involved.

In fact, because the stereotypical portrayals of black athletes as pure, physical machines is a consistent theme put forward by announcers, it would seem that it is an

unintentional racial bias. All of the NFL games examined in this study exhibit similar patterns in the type of comments used in describing black and white athletes. So, barring some kind of conspiracy amongst television professionals, the racial bias must be unintended. Because such bias is unintended, however, does not make it acceptable. The consistency of stereotypical and sometimes potentially degrading portrayals of black athletes across NFL broadcasts is troubling. If the bias is intentional, it is a personal choice and can thus be easily fixed by removing this individual from the air. As an unintended and widespread trend, however, stereotyping during NFL broadcasts, as well as in the general sports media, may be a systemic problem deeply ingrained in the industry and society. This is problematic because it is much more difficult to identify. This study of NFL broadcasts provides one piece of evidence that indicates that the racism and stereotypes are internalized in America and in its media. Thus, they are reinforced through the media. The larger issue is how to fix these subtle and widespread media portrayals of black athletes.

A particular aspect of this study that must be mentioned is the impact that the position of quarterback may have on game commentary and its results. The quarterback is the primary leader of the team and is the central position in football. He is involved in almost every single play in each game. This means that much of the commentary about players is likely in reference to the quarterback. Quarterback is a position dominated by white players. Thus, most comments about white players are derived from references to the quarterback. In this study there were two black quarterbacks compared to seven white quarterbacks. Much of the positive attention that white players received about their

cognitive and personal attributes was directed towards quarterbacks because of their leadership position and central role in the game. Quarterbacks have the most decision making power on the field and essentially direct the game. As a result, they are probably likely to receive more comments about their cognitive or personal attributes. The large difference in the number of black and white quarterbacks may have an affect on the cognitive/personal descriptor data, particularly by inflating the number of positive cognitive/personal statements made about white athletes.

Black and white quarterbacks were also treated differently by announcers. This exemplifies the trend of stereotyping black players. Prior studies (Murrell & Curtis, 1994; Billings, 2004) specifically analyzed racial bias in commentary on quarterbacks. Both studies found that black quarterbacks were depicted as being more likely to succeed because of innate physical ability, while white quarterbacks were successful because of hard work and intellect (Murrell & Curtis, 1994; Billings, 2004). In this study there also seemed to be a difference in announcers' portrayal of black and white quarterbacks. In a game between the Jets and Raiders on CBS, for instance, the two quarterbacks seemed to be described very differently. The Jets' white quarterback Brett Favre was described as a knowledgeable, experienced player and "the natural leader of the team", while the Raiders' black quarterback, Jamarcus Russell, was described more frequently in terms of his "cannon of an arm" and also criticized for not having the presence of mind to correctly read the defense (*NFL on CBS*, 2008). In another game, the Buccaneers' white quarterback, Jeff Garcia, was described as "an emotional leader", "really understanding the game", and "playing as if he had a chip on his shoulder" (*NBC Sunday Night*

Football, 2008). Meanwhile, the Seahawks' black quarterback, Seneca Wallace, barely received any comments. Comments about the quarterback were consistent with the overall findings in this study. The frequency with which quarterbacks are described may have a large impact on the data of this study.

An important question to raise is that of the race of the announcers. In this study there was only one black announcer, Mike Tirico of ESPN's *Monday Night Football*. All of the others were white. This is interesting because the results show that ESPN was apparently one of the least biased networks in terms of stereotyping black players. The network had 30 positive physical comments and 9 positive cognitive/personal comments for black players. These results indicate that black players were still being portrayed as naturally gifted physical machines, but the frequency counts for ESPN show less bias than the other networks. For example, FOX had 45 positive physical comments with only 7 positive cognitive/personal comments for black players. This disparity was much greater and the stereotype was much more noticeable on FOX than on ESPN. A reason for this could be that ESPN had the only black commentator and the other games were announced by an all white crew. It may not mean that the white commentators were racist, but perhaps since they have likely lived their whole lives within white mainstream culture they are less aware of the stereotypes which they are unintentionally perpetuating. Perhaps Tirico is more cautious in the way he chooses to describe black players. However, this study can only make note of a possible trend, it would require more in depth research of announcers and race to come to a more definitive conclusion.

The second part of this study focused on naming patterns in NFL broadcasts. An earlier study done by Bruce (2004) found a racial hierarchy of naming in sports broadcasts. White players were more frequently called by their last names, which is considered most respectful, while black players were called by their first names, which is considered a less respectful form of address. As mentioned earlier, the results of this study did not support Bruce's (2004) findings. Black and white players were almost always called by only their last name or by both their first and last name. First names were used only 21 times throughout all 5 games and there did not appear to be a racial hierarchy of naming. A plausible explanation for the difference in results may be that Bruce analyzed basketball while this study analyzed football. In basketball, there are only five players from each team on the court at one time and the camera, press box, and stands are all much closer to the players. Basketball players also do not wear helmets and pads as do football players, so they are more exposed to viewing. This makes basketball a more intimate sport and quite possibly creates an atmosphere where fans and commentators feel personally close enough to the athletes to call them by their first names or by nicknames. In football, the players are more distant and may be more likely to be called by their last name. Using last or both names can provide a better way to differentiate between players when their pads, uniforms, and helmets make them look almost exactly the same on the field. This may be a reason why there was no data indicating a racial hierarchy of naming in this study.

The trend of announcers to stereotype the black athlete as merely a naturally gifted physical machine may also have implications for members of society who watch

football, particularly youths. According to Wonsek (1992), young black males see sports as the only opportunity for success and achievement largely because of this stereotype of the black superstar who became wealthy and famous. Black players are generally not depicted as anything other than natural athletes so young men may feel athletics are their only option. According to Bierman (1990), “Sports media creates mistaken illusions for impressionable black youths and produces a false sense of potential career success” (p. 413). This means that black youth may not pursue other avenues, like education, as enthusiastically. However, only one in every 12,000 high school athletes reaches the pros, so chances of becoming a superstar are much slimmer than they may seem on TV (Wonsek, 1992). Because this study shows that every network airing NFL games portrays black players in a stereotypical image, youth may be at an even greater risk for falling into this trap.

The agenda setting function of the mass media is also relevant in this discussion. This study suggests that there is racial bias in comments about black athletes during NFL broadcasts and agenda setting may help to explain the impact that stereotyping may have on audiences. As mentioned earlier, agenda setting is the idea that the media, including television, tell people what to think about not necessarily what to think (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). In this case, the commentary in NFL broadcasts may subtly provide cues as to how viewers should think about differences between black and white athletes. Such commentary may also present these differences in a stereotypical and biased fashion, which may further influence the way in which audiences think about race in football and athletics. This may be especially influential in NFL broadcasts because they are only

aired on FOX, CBS, NBC, ESPN, and occasionally The NFL Network. Football audiences must watch televised games on one of these limited sources. As this study indicates, the stereotypical commentary common to all of the networks is nearly unavoidable. It is easy to see how the stereotype of the black athlete as a pure physical force without personality or intelligence can be allowed to persist in the media as well as in the collective thought of society.

This study provides support for the thesis that a racial bias exists in National Football League broadcasts. Black players appeared to be stereotyped according to traditional preconceptions as natural athletes without other redeeming qualities. In reflecting on the results and discussion, it is useful to analyze the study from a point of view that understands the stereotyping as unintentional rather than covert. This viewpoint does not assume that the announcers or networks are racist, but rather shows that this problem is still ingrained in the sports television industry.

Conclusion

The findings of this study indicate that despite recent improvements, a racial bias remains in NFL commentary. Black players are described primarily in terms of their physical characteristics, with less emphasis on their cognitive and personal characteristics than their white peers. This is an issue that is still present in broadcasts today. All networks airing NFL broadcasts seem to show a similar pattern in their commentary. This study has also provided evidence that the problem of a racial naming hierarchy is nearly nonexistent in NFL broadcasts. White and black players are called by the same names.

Obviously, like any research, this study has its limitations. Only five NFL games were recorded from the first half of one season. It is a relatively small and convenient sample which is probably not representative of every single NFL broadcast. This small sample size was chosen because only one researcher was coding games. A larger sample may have been able to provide more precise data and use a wider range of teams and games. More games also would have meant a more varied and diverse sample of announcers for analysis and allowed for a more extensive examination of the role of the commentator's race. It also would have been nice to have access to any NFL game that was aired during the year rather than the convenient sample of just the games on Boston College local cable. The study could have been more informative with an equal number of games from each network that showcased games aired in all parts of the country. However the limitation of having only one researcher hindered the ability to make use of all these different resources.

Despite the limitations, this study provided evidence to show the idea that unintentional racial bias is found in sports broadcasting. It also suggests future studies. It would be interesting to analyze commentary about coaches and race. Announcers frequently described, criticized, and praised the head coaches during broadcasts. Sometimes this type of talk made up a significant portion of the commentary. The NFL has only a handful of black coaches and it is important to understand if they are also depicted using harmful stereotypes. Another area of research could be to more thoroughly analyze the role of the race of the announcers. There was only one black announcer in this study. The data was not analyzed to see if there was a difference in his commentary compared to the white announcers' commentary. A useful study would be to determine if unintentional bias and stereotypical comments are made with the same frequency by black announcers as by white announcers. It would also be interesting to further compare the networks as well as the announcers for NFL broadcasts.

This study suggests that NFL announcers unfairly describe black players as merely stereotypical and naturally gifted athletes. It also suggests that white players receive more comments in praise of their intellect or work ethic than do black players. Hopefully this study will be a springboard for future research that might unveil the racial bias in sports broadcasting and in turn promote equality in media portrayals of black athletes.

Appendix

Table 1: Physical and Cognitive/Personal Descriptors: FOX, Dallas vs. Arizona

	Physical Descriptors		Cognitive/Personal Descriptors	
Race	Positive	Negative	Positive	Negative
Black Player	45	3	7	6
White Player	10	7	16	5

Table 2: Physical and Cognitive/Personal Descriptors: CBS, New York vs. Oakland

	Physical Descriptors		Cognitive/Personal Descriptors	
Race	Positive	Negative	Positive	Negative
Black Player	30	3	6	5
White Player	20	1	10	1

Table 3: Physical and Cognitive/Personal Descriptors: NBC, Seattle vs. Tampa Bay

	Physical Descriptors		Cognitive/Personal Descriptors	
Race	Positive	Negative	Positive	Negative
Black Player	30	7	4	7
White Player	16	4	16	1

Table 4: Physical and Cognitive/Personal Descriptors: ESPN, Minnesota vs. New Orleans

	Physical Descriptors		Cognitive/Personal Descriptors	
Race	Positive	Negative	Positive	Negative
Black Player	30	4	9	5
White Player	12	3	16	2

Table 5: Physical and Cognitive/Personal Descriptors: CBS, Cincinnati vs. New York

	Physical Descriptors		Cognitive/Personal Descriptors	
Race	Positive	Negative	Positive	Negative
Black Player	25	0	3	3
White Player	5	1	4	1

Table 6: Total Physical and Cognitive/Personal Descriptors in General Commentary

	Physical Descriptors		Cognitive/Personal Descriptors	
Race	Positive	Negative	Positive	Negative
Black Player	160	17	29	26
White Player	63	16	62	10

Table 7: Name Use in Broadcast Commentary by Race: FOX, Dallas vs. Arizona

Name Use	Black Player	White Player
First Name	0	1
Last Name	35	31
Both Names	63	25
Nick Name	3	0

Table 8: Name Use in Broadcast Commentary by Race: CBS, New York vs. Oakland

Name Use	Black Player	White Player
First Name	6	0
Last Name	28	26
Both Names	33	15
Nick Name	1	0

Table 9: Name Use in Broadcast Commentary by Race: NBC, Seattle vs. Tampa Bay

Name Use	Black Player	White Player
First Name	4	1
Last Name	38	18

Both Names	42	13
Nick Name	0	0

Table 10: Name Use in Broadcast Commentary by Race: ESPN, Minnesota vs. New Orleans

Name Use	Black Player	White Player
First Name	7	1
Last Name	18	24
Both Names	49	19
Nick Name	0	0

Table 11: Name Use in Broadcast Commentary by Race: CBS, Cincinnati vs. New York

Name Use	Black Player	White Player
First Name	1	0
Last Name	16	14
Both Names	21	12
Nick Name	3	0

Table 12: Total Name Use in Broadcast Commentary by Race

Name Use	Black Player	White Player
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First Name	18	3
Last Name	135	113
Both Names	208	84
Nick Name	7	0

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