



Race & Representation in Sports Media

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4 Key Concepts

2 Readings

Media Constructs Race

Sport, Media, & the
Construction of Race
By: Grainger,
Newman & Andrews

Stereotypes in Commentary

Color Coded
By: James A.
Rada and K.
Tim
Wulfemeyer

Player as Athlete vs Player as a Person

Color Coded
By: James A.
Rada and K.
Tim
Wulfemeyer

Myth of Natural Athleticism

Sport, Media, & the
Construction of Race
By: Grainger, Newman
& Andrews

1. Media Constructs Race

- In the reading the author explains how sports media helps shape how society understands race and identity.
- Sports media is one of the main places people see racial differences and stereotypes
- Media representations influence public attitudes and opinions

Media Constructs Racism

- Black athletes are often described in terms like “natural ability” “physical strength” or even “God-given talents”
 - This is often said to black athletes with the intention to be good but in reality is undercover racism. These saying has been turned into a pattern by telling this to black athletes.
- When a black athlete is being described in terms of strength, natural ability, and size. While white athletes are described as strategic and smart
 - This affects the public’s view by promoting this idea that black and white athletes have different athletic abilities

2. Stereotypes in Commentary

- Announcers sometimes describe athletes differently depending on race
- Black athletes are more likely to be described in terms of natural ability and strength
- White athletes are more likely to be described through the prism of intelligence and effort.

Real world: When a black athlete does something wrong it's in their nature and expected but when a white athlete does something wrong it's a good kid who experienced an unfortunate situation.

Stereotypes in Commentary

- Subtle word choices, whether good or bad, can reinforce any stereotypical narrative about players.
 - Athletes are seen mainly through racialized lenses, it is hard for them to be seen as an individual
 - This can affect the players mental health and views on themselves, which we seen with former LSU Football player Kyren Lacy
- With broadcasters and journalists creating these narratives on players this also shapes how their fans view these athletes

3. Player as Athlete vs Player as a Person

- People in general often forget that athletes are humans before anything else
- Creates unequal portrayals
- Example: Kyren Lacy
 - Even though this relates more to mental health it is still a perfect example of how the way the media portrays an athlete can deeply effect them.
 - This also relates back to the real world scenario



Player as Athlete VS. Players as a Person

- The media often cares more about a person's athletic performance rather than the person in general
- Only focusing on that makes the athlete feel pressured
 - Players start to work harder to perform better
 - They work so hard they forget about taking care of their mental health

4. Myth of Natural Athleticism

- Media suggests that black athletes succeed because of their natural talent instead of hard work. Raise your hand if you think this is true
- It takes a lot of hard work and dedication to become good enough to be drafted for any sport
 - It's not about your race but whether or not the athlete is willing to put in the time, effort, and grit.

Myth of Natural Athleticism

- Black athletes are often told their success comes from natural ability or a god-given talent, while white athletes are praised for working hard to get where they are
 - This undermines recognition of the hard work and effort black athletes put into their success
- When the media only focuses only on “natural talent” it overlooks the discipline that is required to make it to high levels
 - These players have worked hard their whole lives just to make it and be told all their hardwork is “God-given” or “natural”

College Football

40%

NFL

53.5%

Men's College
Basketball

44%

NBA

78.3%

Demographics of Black Student Athletes & The Pros

Women's College
Basketball

28%

WNBA

70.3%

College
Baseball

5%

MLB

6.2%

Comparing Whites and African Americans in the Media

Whites in Media

- ★ More praise related to intelligence, strategy, and work ethic
- ★ More positive characters descriptions
- ★ More positive personal interest stories

African Americans in Media

- ★ The vast majority of comments are about physical attributes
- ★ Nearly all negative comments related to on-field intellect
- ★ All negative comments related to off-field intellect, character, and personal interest stories

- ★ The study also found that announcers often attributed African American athletic success to natural or God-given ability, while White athletes' success was more often linked to effort and discipline.

Source That stands out to us

This piece is part of our special 6/27/20 episode "Sports, Racism And The Myth Of Meritocracy." Check out the full show [here](#). We all know what racism in sports sounds like, right? It sounds like the late Don Imus on his radio show back in 2007. But two sociologists recently published a study that looked at a decade's worth of March Madness broadcasts, and they found that sometimes racial bias sounds like this: *"That's a tough matchup for JJ Redick on the glass. Redick not known as a rebounder. Tasmin Mitchell much stronger; bigger and more athletic."* "I mean, of course, we can highlight some of these bigger comments that most people would consider to be racist," says [Dr. Rashawn Ray](#), who teaches sociology at the University of Maryland, College Park. "But instead, what we were highlighting, in many ways, is implicit bias and the subtle ways that race actually operates, when it comes to talking about some of these historical stereotypes, about what it means to be Black and physically superior and, at the same time, intellectually inferior, and, on the other hand, what it means to be lighter-skinned or white." Dr. Ray and his co-author Dr. Steven Foy, of the University of Texas, Rio Grande Valley, transcribed 52 men's college basketball broadcasts, including 11 championship games. They were looking at the ways broadcasters talk about players of different skin tones, and whether racial bias was at play. **"Skin tone and race, in a lot of ways, was the most significant factor determining how commentators talk about players."** "Are people talking about the size and height of darker skin tone players because they're actually larger?" Foy says. "Or are they talking about them in that way because of stereotypes about them being larger?" So they tracked all of the data about the actual size and skill of the players. "Points per game, rebounds per game, assists per game, fouls per game — we took into account all of those factors," Ray says. "And we still found that skin tone and race, in a lot of ways, was the most significant factor determining how commentators talk about players." <https://www.wbur.org/onlyagame/2020/06/26/racial-stereotypes-sports-broadcast-bias>

Al Campanis



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O4XUbENGaiY>

Current Events



**Angel Reese
vs. Caitlin Clark**



Patrick Mahomes

Discussion Questions

Do you think sports announcers influence how we see athletes and race?

Have you ever noticed announcers describing athletes differently based on race?

Should broadcasters be trained to avoid racial bias?

Does social media make representation better or worse?

If sports media shows Black athletes as naturally talented and White athletes as intelligent, what message does that send to young viewers?

Kahoot!

Interactive Game



**Sports media
influences how we
see athletes.**

**Representation
affects public
opinion.**

**Bias can be subtle
but powerful.**

**Understanding
media helps us
become better fans
and journalists.**

Conclusion

Outside Sources

<https://www.colorado.edu/today/2017/08/21/racial-stereotypes-influence-perception-nfl-quarterbacks>

<https://www.quantumrun.com/consulting/nfl-demographics/>

<https://www.mlb.com/news/mlb-diversity-shows-increase-in-black-players-on-opening-day-2025>

<https://www.ncaa.org/news/2025/2/1/media-center-celebrating-progress-black-representation-in-college-sports.aspx>

https://www.espn.com/wnba/story/_/id/35246462/wnba-receives-top-grades-racial-gender-hiring

['Crafty' Vs. 'Sneaky': How Racial Bias In Sports Broadcasting Hurts ...](#)

https://www.espn.com/espn/otl/story/_/id/7751398/how-al-campanis-controversial-racial-remarks-cost-career-highlighted-mlb-hiring-practices

**THANK
YOU!**

