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A Black and White Game: Racial Stereotypes in Baseball

Patrick Ferrucci
University of Colorado

Edson C. Tandoc Jr.
Nanyang Technological University

Chad Painter
University of Dayton, cpainter1@udayton.edu

Glenn Leshner
University of Missouri

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Abstract

The current study experimentally tested stereotypes and credibility of messages associated with athletes. Participants were asked to rate photos of black and white baseball players based on stereotypes identified in previous literature. They were then given an anonymous paragraph from a newspaper that featured either a stereotype consistent or inconsistent message and asked to rate the author's credibility. Black players were rated significantly higher in physical strength and natural ability, which is consistent with previous literature. However, inconsistent with previous literature, white players were not rated significantly higher in intelligence and leadership. Despite these results, when measuring credibility, this study found white-consistent stereotypes to be credible, whereas black-consistent ones were not. These results are interpreted in light of Devine's model of stereotype processing and in-group, out-group bias.

Disciplines

African American Studies | Communication | Gender, Race, Sexuality, and Ethnicity in Communication | Sports Studies

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ABSTRACT:

The current study experimentally tested stereotypes and credibility of messages associated with athletes. Participants were asked to rate photos of Black and White baseball players based on stereotypes identified in previous literature. They were then given an anonymous paragraph from a newspaper that featured either a stereotype consistent or inconsistent message and asked to rate the author's credibility. Black players were rated significantly higher in physical strength and natural ability, which is consistent with previous literature. However, White players were not rated significantly higher in intelligence and leadership. Yet, White-consistent stereotypes were found to be credible, while Black-consistent were not. These results are interpreted in light of Devine's model of stereotype processing and in-group, out-group bias.

KEYWORDS:

RACE
STEREOTYPES
BASEBALL
ETHNICITY
EXPERIMENT
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Introduction

On April 15, 1947, Jackie Robinson made his Major League debut for The Brooklyn Dodgers at Ebbets Field. He became the first Black ballplayer to play in Major League Baseball. At the time, baseball was by far the most popular sport among Blacks living in America (Ribowsky, 1995). Baseball played an integral role in African-American culture during the mid-20th century (Rader, 1992). However, in recent years, Blacks are less represented in professional baseball. During the 2011 season, only 8.5 percent of all Major League Baseball players were Black; that's down from 10 percent in 2010 and more than 17 percent in 1997, the 50th anniversary of Robinson crossing the color barrier (Foster, 2011).

Numerous studies have shown that Blacks are now far more likely to play and be encouraged to play basketball rather than baseball (Boyd, 1997; Harris, 1994; Philipp, 1999). Major League Baseball itself has started many initiatives in inner cities to encourage more African-American youths to choose baseball, but so far those efforts have yet to show any of the desired results (Foster, 2011). The mainstream media, Major League Baseball and scholars have examined why Black athletes no longer choose baseball as much.

Researchers that have examined why African-American youths choose basketball and football over baseball found that the reasons include economic factors, societal pressure and messages from the mass media (Boyd, 1997; Harris, 1994; Ogden & Rose, 2005; Philipp, 1999). Studies of the mass media have shown that sports journalists and broadcasters treat races differently, using different kinds of stereotypical descriptors

depending on the race (Billings, 2004; Denham, Billings, & Halone, 2002; S. Eastman & Billings, 2001).

Stereotypes concerning the difference between White and Black athletes first received notice in the 1800s (Stone, Sjomeling, Lynch, & Darley, 1999). Coaches, biologists, doctors, social scientists and sportswriters all played a part in explaining how the Black athlete and the White athlete utilized differing skill sets (Wiggins, 1997b). Still today, debates persist about whether the Black athlete is superior based on nature versus nurture (e.g., Billings, 2004; Boyd, 1997; S. Eastman & Billings, 2001; George, 1992; Jones & Hochner, 1973; Kane, 1971; McCarthy & Jones, 1997; Stone, Perry, & Darley, 1997; Wiggins, 1997b; Worthy & Markle, 1970). Through a series of content analyses, researchers have examined how Black athletes have been portrayed differently than White athletes in the mass media (e.g., Angelini & Billings, 2010; Biagi & Kern-Foxworth, 1997; Billings, 2003, 2004; Billings & Eastman, 2002, 2003; Billings, Halone, & Denham, 2002; Denham et al., 2002; S. Eastman & Billings, 2001; S. T. Eastman & Billings, 1999; Halone & Billings, 2010). The scholars found that announcers and journalists frequently describe Black athletes differently than they do White athletes. For example, intelligence is typically mentioned when describing a White athlete, while physical strength is a characteristic that tends to be used when describing Black athletes. Journalists and broadcasters do not typically make value judgments with these descriptions. For example, while a White athlete may be described as intelligent, a Black athlete will not be described as unintelligent. Intelligence will just be discussed in the context of a White athlete. This is a way to subtly stereotype athletes.

This paper examines whether participants have been affected by the stereotypical descriptions that previous studies show exist of Black and White players. It will employ the stereotypes that other scholars have found inherent in the broadcasting and reporting of sporting events and see if participants will link certain labels and descriptions with White or Black athletes. It will also study whether participants find media messages with stereotype consistent and stereotype inconsistent descriptors credible.

Literature Review

While the days of announcers and journalists describing the differences between athletes using various forms of overt racism seem to be over, the different manners in which races are depicted in the mass media suggest that subtle racism still exists (Essed, 1991). Entman (1993) argues that the media, through its coverage of events or people, can call attention to certain characteristics while obscuring other portions of reality. By doing this, he contends, the media influence dominant interpretations.

Previous literature suggests that athletes of certain races tend to be described in similar ways. Readers of a sports section might not notice that Black players are rarely described as having high levels of intelligence. The observation itself might seem trivial, but the effects of stereotypes can be just as powerful, if not more powerful, than those of overt racism (Essed, 1991). Recent studies have shown that stereotypes in sports can not only impact how the general public perceives athletes, but that “it is possible that knowledge of the positive and negative stereotypes about Black and White athletes could have an impact on an athlete’s performance in a sports event” (Stone et al., 1999, p. 1215).

This review of the literature will examine what previous studies have found concerning race and sports. It will then discuss how people process stereotypes when primed, and how people tend to stereotype others. Finally, it will examine how people determine what journalism they consider credible.

Race and Sports

Rowe (2007) argued that the sports media strongly influences how people view athletes. He also suggested that scholars and mainstream pundits have been very critical of the job the news media has done, but the sports media have somehow evaded the same amount of criticism despite worse performance. Rowe (2007) concluded that race is one area that the sports media has been examined.

Numerous studies have examined how race is approached in the context of sports. The vast majority of this research suggests that Blacks and Whites are described differently. One difference in how athletes are described that researchers have consistently found is that the sports media tend to describe White versus Black athletes in the context of brawn versus brains descriptors (e.g., Billings, 2003; Billings, 2004; Denham et al., 2002; S. Eastman & Billings, 2001; Halone & Billings, 2010; Rada & Wulfemeyer, 2005; Rainville, Roberts, & Sweet, 1978). Studies argue that while it may seem rather complimentary to say a White athlete is intelligent or that a Black athlete is very strong, bias reveals itself when we think about this through the prism of race (Rada & Wulfemeyer, 2005).

Rainville, Roberts, and Sweet (1978) first examined whether audiences could detect “covert” racial biases in sports journalism. They found that more than half of participants, presented with anonymous transcripts of televised NFL games, correctly

guessed which players were White and which were Black based on the announcers' descriptions. In an experiment that presented participants with paragraphs from newspaper or online stories pertaining to baseball that featured seven descriptors commonly stereotyped (intelligence, leadership, personality, work ethic, physical strength, natural ability, and background), researchers found significance with six descriptors – all but natural ability were significant and authors argued only a methodological error kept natural ability from significance (Ferrucci, Herrera, Douglas, & Buford, 2011). Participants were asked to identify the race of the athlete while reading paragraphs that contained stereotypical messages. For example, all participants read a paragraph from a newspaper story about an unidentified baseball player with high levels of intelligence. More than 78% of participants identified that player as White. Wiggins (1997a, 1997b) examined the history of the Black athlete through a series of case studies. He compared White and Black athletes at certain periods of time to see if race plays a role in athletic superiority. He concluded that while there is no evidence that race and athletic superiority are linked, this has not stopped the mass media, throughout history, from publishing information to the contrary.

A Black quarterback played in and won a Super Bowl for the first time in 1988, when Doug Williams and the Washington Redskins defeated the Denver Broncos. Just a year later, members of the national press had begun to notice that Black and White quarterbacks were still being described differently (Jackson, 1989). The subtle racism used to describe Black quarterbacks has been a topic of conversation for years (Billings, 2004; Jackson, 1989; Mercurio & Filak, 2010; Murrell & Curtis, 1994). In a study that examined the differences in how Black and White football quarterbacks were described,

Billings (2004) found that when Black quarterbacks succeeded, it was more likely attributed to superior athletic skill and, in turn, when White quarterbacks failed, it was attributed to a lack of athletic skill. However, Billings did not find support for many of the categories and this “should indicate progress” (p. 208). Finding that in the majority of categories Black and White quarterbacks were not described differently is the opposite of what Murrell and Curtis (1994) discovered. In their study of how Black and White quarterbacks were described in five prominent sports magazines, they found that Blacks tended to be praised for characterizations they could not control (i.e., natural ability), while Whites were praised for controllable characteristics (i.e., hard work). Mercurio and Filak (2010) studied how Black and White quarterbacks were described prior to the NFL draft over a 10-year period. Their findings were consistent with Murrell and Curtis (1994).

Because so many of these studies that examined racial differences in sports have employed content analysis, Van Sterkenburg, Knoppers and De Leeuw (2010) took a cultural studies approach to analyzing each of the previous studies. They came to the conclusion that the researchers using content analysis found that Black and White athletes are described differently, but they have not suggested there are any connections between these findings and the audience. Further studies should examine “how categories used (implicitly) in sports commentary are congruent with the understandings that sports media audiences have of race” (Van Sterkenburg et al., 2010, p. 833). An experiment utilizing these descriptors, such as this current study, could answer some of the questions Van Sterkenburg and colleagues had posed.

Eastman and Billings (2001) used previous literature to come up with a taxonomy of descriptors that tend to be used more often or less often depending on race. Those 15 categories of descriptors included physicality, intelligence, effort, motivation, speed, physical power, mental power, positive consonance, negative consonance, leadership, versatility, team orientation, personality, looks, and background. For White athletes, intelligence and leadership ability are stereotype consistent; for Black athletes, these descriptors are stereotype inconsistent. For Black athletes, high levels of physical strength and natural ability are stereotype consistent. For White athletes, these descriptors are stereotype inconsistent (e.g., Billings, 2003, 2004; Billings & Eastman, 2002, 2003; Billings et al., 2002; Birrell, 1989; S. Eastman & Billings, 2001; Eastman & Billings, 1999; McCarthy & Jones, 1997; Sage, 1990; Whannel, 1992a, 1992b; Wonse, 1992). Thus, we test the following hypotheses:

H1. Black players will be rated higher than White players based on:

- a. Physical strength
- b. Natural ability

H2. White players will be rated higher than Black players based on:

- a. Leadership skills
- b. Intelligence

Priming

Priming theory suggests that when individuals receive information, they will use the most easily retrievable or accessible information already existing in their cognitive networks to make sense of the new material (Abraham & Appiah, 2006). If applied to racial stereotypes, priming suggests when a person is exposed to media messages

containing racial cues, they will rely on the racial stereotypes that are most accessible to process the information (Dalisay & Tan, 2009).

Devine (1989) made the argument that racial stereotyping is a function of both automatic and controlled processes. She showed the discrepancy between personal beliefs and cultural stereotypes. Devine's model of stereotyping contains two distinct stages. The first stage, activation, occurs unconsciously. What she argued is that because stereotypes have often been activated in the past, they automatically activate when presented with a member of the stereotyped group. Devine concluded that no matter the manner in which a person acts, everyone has knowledge concerning different stereotyped social groups such as Asians or African-Americans. It's this knowledge that is activated in the first stage of the model. The second stage suggests that after activation, an application stage occurs, and this is a voluntary process. During this stage, a person may choose to disregard the stereotype that has been activated. If the stereotype is accepted, though, or if the person does not think about whether it should be applied, then the person will be more likely to use the stereotype as a guide to interpret the stereotyped person they have encountered. Bodenhausen, Macrae and Sherman (1999) explain that while stereotypes are activated automatically, people differ in their ability and motivation to inhibit stereotypical thinking.

Devine's model has been empirically tested in numerous studies (e.g., Brown Givens & Monahan, 2005; Dijksteruis & van Knippenberg, 1996; Dovidio & Kawakami, 1997; Spencer, Fein, Wolfe, Fong, & Dunn, 1998; Wittenbrink, Judd, & Park, 1997). Brown, Givens, and Monahan (2005) used Devine's model to measure how participants responded to non-stereotypical and stereotypical film clips of African-American women

described as either “mammies” or “jezebels.” They found that participants reacted to the mediated film images with responses consistent with a stereotype, whether the film scene depicted that stereotype or not. This result showed that participants were aware of common stereotypes of African-American women and that those stereotypes were activated automatically. Dijksteruis & van Knippenberg (1996), in a series of three experiments, compared reactions from participants primed for stereotypes and ones that were not. They found the participants primed with stereotypical images reacted according to Devine’s model. Dovidio and Kawakami (1997) showed digitally produced photos of White and Black men and women. The researchers then timed reactions when each photo was preceded by positive or negative traits. Participants responded more quickly when the preceding words fit a stereotype. Thus, this study, the first utilizing the sports media, also follows Devine’s model.

In-group-out-group Biases

Linville and Fischer (1993) note that people tend to stereotype based on in-groups and out-groups. These groups can be created based on age, gender, race or some other variable. They found that people perceive out-groups to be more homogenous and more stereotypic than in-groups in terms of individual characteristics (Linville & Fischer, 1993). The goal of in-groups is usually to preserve solidarity and justify the exploitation of out-groups (Brewer, 1979). This results in in-group bias. Several factors such as similarity, shared fate and interdependence can make someone aware of being part of a group and determine the degree of in-group bias; explicit competition also heightens the distinction between an in-group and an out-group (Brewer, 1979). A group of scholars also offered the similar concept of intergroup bias. Hewstone, Rubin and Willis (2002)

defined intergroup bias as the systematic tendency to assess one's own group (the in-group) or its members more favorably than a nonmembership group (the out-group) or its members. Intergroup bias provides members with self-esteem (Hewstone et al., 2002).

Perceiving out-groups to be homogenous and in-groups more heterogeneous allows people in the in-group to think of themselves as a "we," while considering the out-group a "them" (Leshner, 2006). In terms of stereotypes, this could mean that participants are much more likely to apply stereotypes to people in the out-group because, to the participant, this group is homogenous.

Media Credibility

The media are chief agents in the propagation of stereotypes (Billings, 2004; Boyd, 1997; Harris, 1994; Ogden & Rose, 2005; Philipp, 1999). Thus, it is also important to look at how credibility varies when media disseminate messages that are consistent or inconsistent with stereotypes that media users hold. The popularity and proliferation of biased and partisan news through cable television and the Internet has made it easier for people to consume information similar to their disposition (Stroud, 2010; Tsfaty & Cappella, 2005). Indeed, people choose news media products based on their political predispositions (Stroud, 2008). Those who consume news that fits their worldview consider this type of news more credible (P. Meyer, 1988, 2002).

Media credibility has been explicated as a function of three dimensions: source, medium and message (Hu & Sundar, 2010; Johnson & Kaye, 2004; Kioussis, 2001; H. K. Meyer, Marchionni, & Thorson, 2010). Gaziano and McGrath's (1986) credibility scale is among the earliest and most used credibility scales. They used 12 items that focused on believability and community concern that they argued loaded on just one factor (Gaziano

& McGrath, 1986). In replicating Gaziano and McGrath's (1986) survey, Meyer (1988) found that credibility could be broken down into two dimensions of believability and community concern.

In a study that examined whether participants with a preexisting opinion on a subject would find something that confirmed their opinion more credible, researchers found that message recipients felt a need to bolster support for a position they favored (Sternthal, Dholakia, & Leavitt, 1978). If a message featured a position a participant agreed with, it was deemed more credible. Gunther (1992) identified media credibility as a relational variable. Using print and broadcast stories about social groups, Gunther (1992) found that participants' own group identification was the strongest predictor of whether they labeled a story credible or not. In this current study, we argue that another manifestation of stereotypes will be the perception of a source. For example, readers will perceive a source more credible when the source provides a message consistent with the stereotypes readers subscribe to than when the message is not. However, research is unclear on whether this relationship holds true for stereotypes for both Black and White players. Thus, we pose the following research questions:

RQ1. How will readers perceive the credibility of a source based on whether or not the description is consistent with stereotypes?

RQ2. Is there an interaction between stereotype consistency and race of athlete in terms of source credibility?

Study Design

This is a 2 (race of athlete: black or white) X 2 (stereotype: consistent or inconsistent) X 4 (message repetition) mixed experimental design, where race is a

between-subjects factor while stereotype consistency and message repetitions are within-subjects factors.

Procedure

Undergraduate students were recruited from a large Midwestern university to participate in the online experiment in exchange for course credit. We eliminated incomplete responses, which left the study with 201 participants almost evenly split in the two athlete race conditions ($n_1 = 100$, $n_2 = 101$). The participants were randomly assigned to one of two conditions based on the month they were born. They were directed to the corresponding URLs for the assigned condition where they first encountered a standard consent form and a set of instructions on how to proceed. During the experiment, they saw eight photos, rated each with a series of questions, read a description for each photo (four stereotype consistent and four stereotype inconsistent), and then rated the credibility of the writer of each description. They finally answered a set of demographic questions before they were thanked and debriefed.

Stimulus Materials

The photos used in this study were selected from a collection of photos of minor league baseball players to reduce the likelihood that participants would be familiar with the people shown in the photos. The photos used came from the online press office of the Durham Bulls, a minor league baseball team. The descriptions were adapted from real sports articles and were edited to fit each condition, with the consideration that descriptions across all conditions were uniform in length. For our design, we used 16 photos (8 Blacks and 8 Whites). We used 8 descriptions for our four descriptors each with stereotype consistent and inconsistent versions.

Dependent Variables

Descriptors. The participants rated each player on a 5-point scale, with 5 being high and 1 being low on the trait, based on four descriptors we adopted from the literature on stereotypes of athletes. The four descriptors were physical strength, natural ability, leadership, and intelligence. The literature indicates that Black players are often stereotyped as high in physical strength and natural ability, while White players are stereotyped as high in leadership and intelligence.

Source Credibility. The participants rated the writer of each descriptor based on five items using a 5-point Likert scale (5 as strongly agree; 1 as strongly disagree). The five items described the writer as can be trusted, accurate, unfair (reversed), tells the whole story and biased (reversed). These items were adapted from previous studies on media credibility (Gaziano & McGrath, 1986; Hu & Sundar, 2010; H. K. Meyer et al., 2010; P. Meyer, 1988). The Cronbach's alpha across all conditions was an acceptable 0.66.

Independent Variables

Race of athlete. This was manipulated by exposing participants to photos of athletes. Because race of the player was a between-subjects factor, participants assigned to one condition saw eight photos of only Black athletes while those in the other condition saw eight photos of only White athletes. The players were assigned fictitious names based on a list of most common names in the United States reported by 2010 United States Census.

Stereotype consistency. We exposed participants to descriptions of players that varied in terms of being consistent or inconsistent with racial stereotypes. For instance, a

Black-consistent description would describe a Black athlete as high in physical ability while a Black-inconsistent description would describe a Black athlete as high in intelligence. Consequently, a Black-consistent description becomes a White-inconsistent description in the White condition (e.g. White player described as high in physical ability) and vice versa.

Covariates

Athlete attractiveness. This was measured using questions from previous studies that looked at the effects of attractiveness. A recent example found low cognitive capacity or distracted voters evaluated attractive political candidates more favorably than unattractive candidates (Hart, Ottati, & Krumdick, 2011). Controlling for other factors, physically attractive politicians in Israel also tended to attract more TV news coverage than their unattractive counterparts (Tsfati, Elfassi, & Waismel-Manor, 2010). Physical attractiveness also affects simple judgments. An experiment involving bartenders found they were less likely to demand proof of legal age for alcohol purchase from attractive customers than from less attractive customers (McCall, 1997). In the current study, we measured physical attractiveness using three attractiveness items that previous studies had used (e.g. 1990). The respondents rated in a 5-point scale how attractive, ugly (reverse coded), and classy the players looked. The description classy had to be dropped in the final analysis to improve reliability. The two items are correlated, $r(201) = .425, p < .01$.

Sports media use. We asked the respondents to rate in a 5-point scale how often they: watch sports news on television news programs, read sports sections in newspapers, read about sports online, listen to sports radio, read sports magazines, and watch cable

sports networks (for example: ESPN, Fox Sports). The scale constructed from these statements was reliable; Cronbach's alpha was 0.94.

Sample.

The average age was 19.25 ($SD = 1.13$). Most of the respondents were females (70.1%) and identified themselves as Caucasians (80.7%). Most of them do not use sports media heavily as the average sports media use, a scale using six items, was 2.71 out of a maximum rating of 5.

Results

Initial analysis revealed that males ($M = 3.52$, $SD = .135$) consume a significantly higher amount of sports media than females ($M = 2.37$, $SD = .088$), $F(1, 199) = 50.79$, $p < .01$. Thus, in testing our hypotheses, we decided to control not only for attractiveness and sports media use but also for gender.

The first two sets of hypotheses asked whether or not respondents would rate Black and White athletes consistent with the stereotypes. For these hypotheses, we ran a multivariate analysis of covariance (MANCOVA). H1 predicted that respondents would rate Black athletes higher than White athletes in terms of a) physical strength and b) natural ability. Both H1a and H1b were supported. The respondents rated Black athletes ($\bar{x} = 3.59$, $SD = .043$) higher than White athletes ($\bar{x} = 3.34$, $SD = .043$) on physical strength, $F(1, 196) = 16.443$, $p < .01$. The respondents also rated Black athletes ($\bar{x} = 3.55$, $SD = .041$) higher than White athletes ($\bar{x} = 3.32$, $SD = .041$) on natural ability, $F(1, 196) = 11.21$, $p < .01$.

H2 predicted that White athletes would be rated higher than Black athletes based on a) leadership and b) intelligence. These were not supported. There were no differences

in how the respondents rated Black and White players based on intelligence ($F(1, 196) = .623, p > .05$) and leadership ($F(1, 196) = .588, p > .05$). The results are summarized in Table 1.

RQ1 asked about the effect of stereotype consistency, or describing players based on stereotypes, on a source's credibility. Thus, we looked at ratings of source credibility when the description is a) White consistent (high in both intelligence and leadership and low in both physical strength and natural ability) and when it is b) Black consistent (low in both intelligence and leadership and high in both physical strength and natural ability). We found a significant difference in ratings of credibility between White-consistent and Black-consistent descriptions, $F(1, 193) = 8.422, p < .01$. The respondents found the source more credible when describing players based on White stereotypes than when describing players based on Black stereotypes (see Figure 1).

RQ2 asked about how the race of the players will affect the differences in source credibility due to stereotype consistency. Specifically, we expected that the differences in ratings of source credibility will be different when the descriptions are White-consistent from when they are Black-consistent. Indeed, the interaction between the race of the player and the consistency of stereotype present in the description approached significance, $F(1, 193) = 3.302, \alpha = .07$. The repeated measures ANOVA to test the differences in source credibility ratings between consistent and inconsistent descriptions in the White condition found that descriptions consistent with White stereotypes were rated higher ($\bar{x} = 3.174, SD = .031$) than inconsistent descriptions (and hence Black consistent; $\bar{x} = 3.048, SD = .032$), $F(1, 100) = 8.422, \alpha < .01$. In contrast, we did not find this pattern when we ran the test only with the respondents in the Black condition; there

were no significant differences in source credibility ratings whether the descriptions were Black consistent or not, $F(1, 99) = 3.302, \alpha = .07$.

Discussion

Previous research suggests that a form of subtle racism exists in sports journalism. Scholars found that announcers and journalists frequently describe Black athletes differently than they do White athletes. Athletes are described in a stereotypical manner. In this study, respondents rated Black players higher than White players for descriptors depicting physical strength and natural ability. This result conforms to previous research, which suggested that Black players are usually stereotyped as high in physical strength and natural ability. However, the hypothesis that White players would be rated higher than Black players in terms of leadership skills and intelligence was not supported here. This finding runs counter to previous literature.

This inconsistency with the literature might have occurred for two reasons. First, the respondents largely did not describe themselves as heavy users of sports media. This could be due to the fact that participants were 70.1% female who reported lower levels of sports media use than did males. Rowe (2007) argued that the sports media strongly influences how people view athletes. However, non-heavy consumers of sports media might not have been exposed to stereotypical messages from sports announcers and reporters at a level high enough to bias their opinions of Black and White athletes. Second, the respondents, who were largely White, might have ascribed to stereotypes about Black athletes (who are more different from themselves), but might not have ascribed to stereotypes about White athletes (who are more similar to themselves). Because people tend to stereotype the other, the predominantly White sample was likely

to stereotype Black athletes. This is consistent with the concepts of in-groups and out-groups (Brewer, 1979; Linville & Fischer, 1993). Our predominantly White sample is the in-group and therefore did not activate stereotypes about themselves. Instead, they perceived the out-group, in this case Blacks, to be more homogenous and thus stereotypical.

When the participants were exposed to descriptions consistent and inconsistent to stereotypes and asked to rate the credibility of the descriptions' writers, they rated the authors of the stereotype-consistent descriptions as more credible. What was more interesting was the interaction we found between stereotype consistency and race of the player: The positive relationship between stereotype consistency and credibility was significant among White-players. This, at face value, runs counter to the earlier findings. Our participants displayed tendencies to stereotype Black athletes but not White athletes, but they rated authors who stereotyped Whites as more credible.

We argue that this finding is consistent with the model of how people process stereotypes (Bodenhausen et al., 1999; Devine, 1989). The model involves two stages: activation and application. In our experiment, participants first just saw a photo of a player (one condition saw only Black players, one only White) and were asked to rate the player on the four descriptors (intelligence, leadership ability, physical strength, and natural ability). This part of the experiment only tested the activation part of the model. Because participants hold stereotypes of Black athletes, they rated Blacks higher in physical strength and natural ability. Since the participants were more than 80% White, most probably did not hold stereotypes about White players who are part of their in-group

and therefore White consistent stereotypes—leadership and intelligence—were not activated.

The second part of the experiment showed participants the photo of the same player this time accompanied by a paragraph featuring either a stereotype consistent or inconsistent descriptor. This part tests the application part of Devine's (1989) model. It is likely that in the Black condition, the first part of the experiment where they saw a photo of a Black player activated our predominantly White sample's stereotypes of the "other." So when they were confronted with a stereotype-consistent description, they were already aware of their tendency to stereotype and chose not to apply them, or even correct their earlier stereotypes, and not rate the author as credible. In contrast, the exposure to a White player's picture did not activate tendency to stereotype; it does not represent the "other." The only time participant activated was when they were confronted with a White-consistent stereotype in the descriptions. Hence, they rated the authors of White-consistent stereotypical descriptions as more credible.

Research on stereotypes in sports journalism began more than five decades ago (Philipp, 1999). Studies suggest that since the late 1970s, independent of the sport studied, the same stereotypes have existed in sports journalism, so much so that Eastman and Billings (2001) created a taxonomy of the stereotypes. Over this time, it's very possible that these stereotypes, especially the ones pertaining to Blacks, have become so dominant in the media and so ingrained among people that it is easily activated in them. Once activated, however, people become mindful about the stereotypes they hold and, possibly because of the continued discourse frowning on racial stereotypes, they strive not to act on, if not correct, them.

Though our study, possibly one of the few to have responded to the call of empirically testing the prevalence of stereotypes of athletes, found interesting and illuminating results, we have to be mindful of the limitations that should be considered when interpreting what we found. First, we use explicit measures to tap into our participants' stereotypes. Future research into the depiction of race in sports journalism should also utilize implicit measures to go beyond self-reports. Second, our sample had low levels of sports media use, and although we found that our participants embraced stereotypes of athletes consistent with the content analysis literature, it is possible that heavy sports media users will have higher levels of stereotypes. Sports journalism remains an underexplored area despite its almost mainstream popularity in the United States. We hope our humble contribution to the growing literature in sports journalism will spawn more discussions and more research.

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Table 1

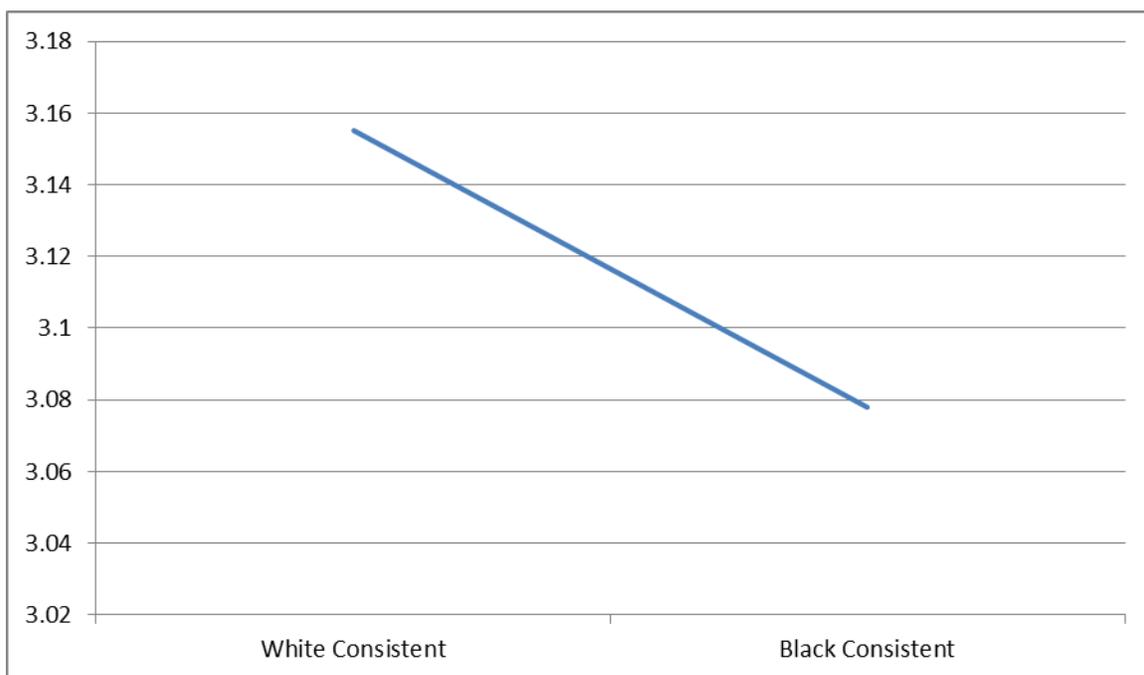
Differences in the Ratings of the Players

		Mean	SD	F
Physical Strength	White	3.338	.044	16.44*
	Black	3.588	.044	
Natural Ability	White	3.318	.041	11.21*
	Black	3.548	.041	
Leadership	White	3.225	.040	.588
	Black	3.267	.040	
Intelligence	White	3.119	.048	.623
	Black	3.163	.048	

Note. * $p < .001$; The means reported here have been controlled for the effects of respondents' gender, frequency of sports media use, and perceived attractiveness of the players.

Figure 1

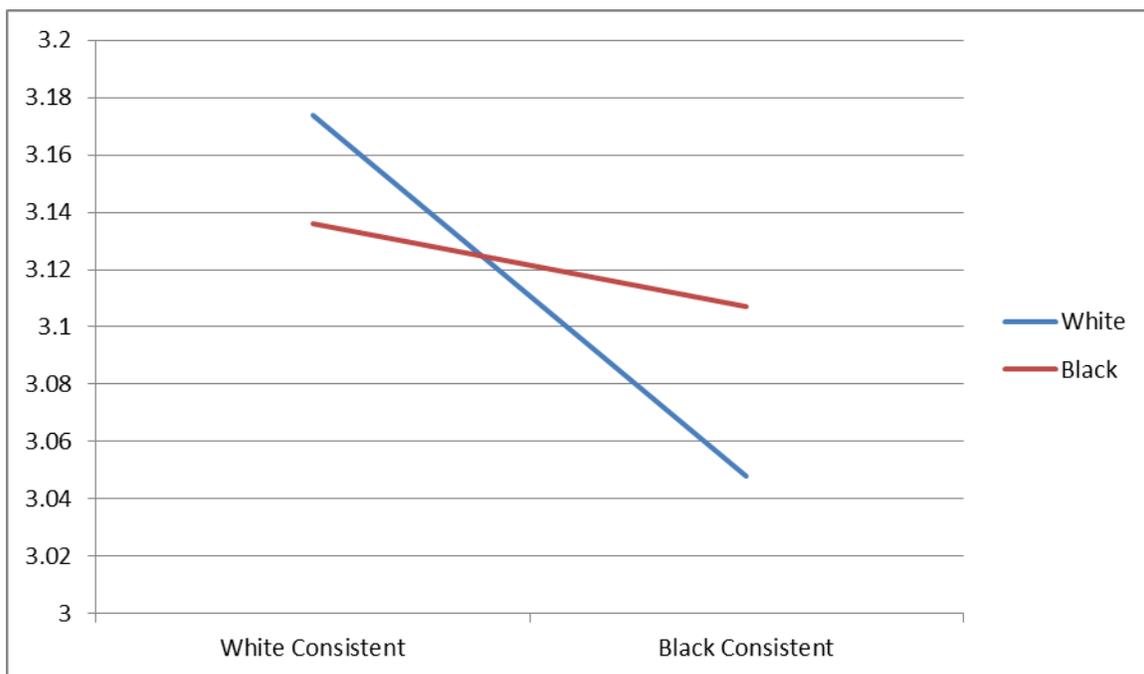
Differences in Source Credibility



Note. The source was rated as more credible when description of the player was consistent with White stereotypes than when it was consistent with Black stereotypes, $F(1, 193) = 8.422, p < .01$.

Figure 2

Interaction between Race and Stereotype Consistency



Note. The interaction between the race of the players and the consistency of the description in ratings of source credibility approaches significant, $F(1, 193) = 3.302, p = .07$. Though ratings of source credibility in the descriptions of Black players do not vary much, it does for White players. The credibility of the source improves when the description of White players are consistent the stereotypes.