Race Ideology Perpetuated

Media Representations of Newly Hired Football Coaches

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The purpose of the study was to examine the media coverage of newly hired NCAA Division I-FBS football coaches through the investigation of media releases (n = 191) related to their hires. Results indicate that (a) African Americans were under-represented in the hiring process, when compared to the proportion of African American athletes on the team; (b) African Americans were most likely to be hired to coach positions with a high concentration of African American athletes, while Whites were most likely to be hired as a coordinator; and (c) Whites were more likely than African Americans to be depicted as helping the team through their knowledge and experience, while African Americans were more likely than where Whites to help the team through their recruiting efforts and relationships with the players. Results suggest that the media perpetuate the dominant racial ideology in the US and are discussed accordingly.

The media (i.e., television, print, radio, Internet) have a substantial influence on people and the cultures in which they live. At one level, they inform people of current events and happenings in their world, thereby serving as a disseminator of information. By most accounts, however, the media's reach is much more substantial than that of a distributor of facts and figures; rather, they also shape what people think about (McCombs & Shaw, 1972) and how they think about it. That is, the media help mold people's understanding of the self and their identity formation (Johnson, Richmond & Kivel, 2008), and at a broader level, they serve to shape, produce, and reproduce dominant attitudes and values concerning cultural events

(Birrell & McDonald, 2000; Messner, 1988; Wenner, 1998). Consider, for instance, Kane's (1988) comments, in suggesting that "the mass media have become one of the most powerful institutional forces for shaping values and attitudes in modern culture" (pp. 88–89). Or, as Buffington has argued, the "media never simply report on athletes or events in the sports world; they actively interpret them for audiences by the way they select, frame, and describe" (2005, p. 33).

These dynamics have also been observed in the sport context, where the media create, shape, and reinforce popular ideologies concerning sport participation. This is particularly the case when it comes to the intersection of race and sport. African American sport participants are seen as having natural athletic abilities (Wonsek, 1992) and are more likely to be described in terms of their athletic abilities than are Whites (Woodward, 2004). Whites, on the other hand, are cast as harder workers who have to overcome obstacles to achieve their athletic success (Wonsek, 1992), superior leaders (Jackson, 1989), team-first participants (Davis & Harris, 1998), and are more likely than African Americans to be described in terms of their mental capabilities (Woodward, 2004). Furthermore, African Americans are more likely than are Whites to be referred to by their first names, a practice that undercuts the respect they are due and trivializes their accomplishments (Bruce, 2004; Davis & Harris, 1998; Denham, Billings & Halone, 2002). Indeed, whereas the media of old might have used blatant language to reinforce racist ideas (see Mead, 1985), more contemporary depictions are more nuanced and subtle (Buffington, 2005).

Collectively, these studies suggest two key points. First, sport is a highly racialized and stratified space in the United States (see also King, Leonard & Kusz, 2007). Second, and related to the first point, the media have helped to create and sustain what Coakley (2009) refers to as the dominant racial ideology in US sports—that is, *a web of ideas and beliefs that people use to give meaning to skin color and evaluate people in terms of racial classifica-*

tions" (pp. 277–278, emphasis original; see also Bruce, 2004). This ideology privileges Whiteness, including Whites' appearance, actions, and experiences, and casts anything other than White as abnormal, strange, or immoral, thereby creating White privilege (McIntosh, 1990). At the macro level, this racial ideology has been used as a justification for (a) colonization and work to "civilize" persons of color; (b) legal decisions promoting the concept of separate but equal (*Plessy v. Ferguson*, 163 U.S. 537, 1896); and (c) racist policies concerning voting rights, schooling, and citizenship (Coakley, 2009; Nobles, 2000), among others.

This racial ideology has had a substantial impact on sports, the way people interpret them, and their attitudes toward athletes. The ideology places Whites in positions of power and privilege, as persons who have superior intellect, and on high moral grounding. Conversely, African Americans and other persons of color are depicted as individuals with innate and "natural" athletic ability but who also lack the mental capabilities to excel in the classroom or in "thinking" positions (e.g., pitcher or catcher in baseball; see Sack, Singh & Thiel, 2005). Note that these are the same images depicted in the media, as previously outlined. Further, this racial ideology is widely held by people in the U.S., thereby shaping their attitudes and beliefs about Whites and African Americans in the academic and athletic contexts (Sailes, 1993; 2000). As one example, after his football team's loss to Texas Christian University (TCU), Air Force coach Fisher DeBerry attributed the defeat to the fact that TCU had more African Americans on the team. This was an important fact, at least to DeBerry, because African Americans "can run very, very fast" (as cited in Cunningham, 2007, p. 105). As a result of their "natural ability," DeBerry planned on recruiting more African Americans to his team in the future.

Not only does the racial ideology shape people's perceptions and attributions of others, but it also influences decisions athletes make. Johnson, Richmond & Kivel (2008), for instance, reported how a young White athlete's sport choices were shaped

by the media's reproduction of the dominant racial ideology (i.e., the movie *White Men Can't Jump*) and his personal observation that others racially similar to him were unlikely to play basketball and more likely to surf. Given these influences, the athlete chose to pursue surfing rather than basketball. In a somewhat similar vein, Stone, Lynch, Sjomeling and Darley (1999) found that sport performance among Whites and African Americans was reliably influenced by how the contest was framed: African Americans performed poorly when the assessment was one of "sports intelligence" while Whites performed poorly when the activity was one that assessed "natural athletic ability" (see also Steele, 1997). These findings suggest that the racial ideology influences the sport choices people make and can also impact how they perform in those sport events.

Current Study

Collectively, this review suggests that (a) the media serve a critical role in shaping people's values, attitudes, and beliefs, including dominant racial ideology, (b) the dominant racial ideology places Whites as the standard and in a position of privilege and power over persons of color, and (c) this racial ideology shapes how people interpret sport events and the decisions sport participants make. Interestingly, these relationships have been observed among sport teams and current athletes, but investigations of the media's framing of the intersection of race and coaching and administration is missing. This is not because the media do not address coaching and administration, nor is it because the dominant racial ideology is not played out in this context. Consider the evidence presented below.

Among administrators, African Americans are under-represented, relative to their proportion in the U.S. population, at the highest levels of athletics administration (DeHass, 2007). The exception is in areas where they have high interactions with African American athletes, such as in support services (for possible

explanations, see McDowell & Cunningham, 2008). Though African Americans constitute a majority of the athletes in university revenue-generating sports (men's and women's basketball and football), they constitute but a fraction of the assistant and head coaches of those sports (DeHass, 2007, 2008). When African American coaches are on staffs, they are more likely to be in peripheral rather than central coaching positions (e.g., wide receiver coach versus offensive coordinator; Anderson, 1993), and their primary contributions to the team are oftentimes perceived to be in relating to African American players rather than crafting the game plan (Brown, 2002).

These data suggest that the dominant racial ideology observed among athletic participants is also reinforced in coaching and administrative levels (see also Coakley, 2009). Yet, as previously noted, examination of how the media frames these differences has not received due attention. This is an unfortunate omission, as limiting investigations of the media's portrayal of the race-sport intersection to only athletes and athletic teams tells but a portion of the story. The purpose of this study, therefore, was to examine the way the media framed race in the context of newly hired football coaches. Specifically, we were guided by two research questions:

RQ$_1$:   What are the roles for which African American and White football coaches are hired?

RQ$_2$:   How do the media frame the contributions the newly hired African American and White coaches are expected to make to the team?

To answer these research questions, we analyzed content from media releases posted on the official athletic department website. This form of media was chosen for several reasons. First, according to Pedersen, Miloch and Laucella (2007), media releases contain material aimed at providing the public with "significant news" and "key information" (p. 270). As such, the

most important messages about the newly hired coach—such as his qualifications and the contributions he will make to the program—are included in the release. Second, the media release represents the official information presented by the athletic department; thus, it can provide information both about the athletic department as a whole and sports information directors (the persons who craft the messages), in particular. Therefore, in line with Kane and Buysse's (2005) explanation of media guides, media releases "are consciously constructed products that enable an institution to present its athletic department and sports programs to a broad array of stakeholders" (p. 219). Third, and related to this point, the media releases are accessed by outside news agencies, such as the Associated Press, and online visitors to the athletic department's website, thereby demonstrating the many people who read this material. Finally, examination of the cultural depictions present in media releases allows for a broader examination than more traditional media, such as magazines (e.g., Woodward, 2004) or television programs (e.g., Denham, Billings & Halone, 2002).

Method

Data Collection

In seeking to limit potentially confounding factors, we restricted our context to NCAA Division I-FBS football coaching staff. Football provides an ideal context because of the highly racialized and stratified nature of that setting relative to others (Cunningham, Bruening & Straub, 2006). To illustrate, only 8 coaches of color (or 6.67% of all head coaches) led FBS programs during the 2008 season, thereby warranting a failing score in the *2008 Racial and Gender Report Card*. In addition, we limited the analysis to only FBS schools so budgetary concerns that might be present at smaller schools would not confound the results.

Finally, to reduce possible history effects, we limited the data collection to a single year.

Official athletic department websites of all 119 NCAA Division I-FBS programs were searched for media releases regarding the addition of any new assistant football coaches to the coaching staff. To be included in the study, media releases had to have been posted to the official athletic department website between the date of said team's final 2007 regular season game and February 29th, 2008. The latter date was chosen because spring football drills typically begin in March, and new hires would have most likely taken place before that time. Data collection resulted in 191 media releases.

Procedure

Once the media release was accessed, two data files were created. The first contained the demographic information for the coach, including his race, the position for which he was hired, and time spent in the coaching profession. On a separate file, the content of the media release was copied and pasted. The second file did not contain any demographic information for the coach, and no pictures were included. In this way, the coders were not aware of the demographic information while completing the coding process. Once both processes were complete, the data were merged into a single file.

With respect to the specific coding process, the two authors independently conducted a content analysis of each media release and highlighted any word or phrase relevant to the attributes of the newly hired coach. Words and/or phrases had to have been quoted by the head coach or a member of the hiring committee. Media releases void of any quotes concerning coaching attributes or expectations were excluded from the study, thereby reducing the dataset to 155 releases. After conducting the analysis, we met with one another to discuss any potential differences and ultimately arrived at a single theme for each data point.

Analysis

The first research question focused on the roles for which White and African American football coaches were hired. A chi-square analysis was conducted to determine if there were a relationship between the race of the coaches and the roles to which they were hired. The second research question focused on the expectations for White and African American coaches regarding the contributions they will make to the football team and coaching staff. The contributions were first coded onto themes. We then considered whether or not the theme occurred in the press release. A chi-square analysis was conducted to determine if there were any racial differences in the expectations of the newly hired coaches' contributions, such that we compared the occurrence of themes based on the race of the coach.

Results and Discussion

Overview

Our data indicate that 191 coaches (120 Whites 62.8%; 68 African Americans, 35.6%; 3 persons listed as "Other", 1.6%) were hired to NCAA Division I-FBS staffs following the 2007 season. Analysis of the different frequencies indicates that, on any given staff, a White coach was 76% more likely to fill an assistant coaching position than was an African American.

We can also statistically compare the proportions of African American and White coaches hired to a set standard (Bruning & Kintz, 1997), and we offer two options here. From one perspective, the proportion of coaches hired should mirror that of the US population, a standard that Lapchick (2009) has used in his *Racial and Gender Report Cards*. The U.S. Census Bureau (www.census .gov) data indicate that Whites represented 64% of the population in 2008, while African Americans represented 14%, and we can therefore use these figures as comparison points. From this standpoint, Whites are hired at rates similar to their proportion

in the U.S. population ($z =$-.34, n.s.), while African Americans at higher rates ($z = 8.64$, $p < .05$). One could conclude from these data that, if anything, African Americans are over-represented, relative to what chance would predict, as new hires.

From a different perspective, however, several authors have argued that student-athletes represent the best pool of potential coaches, and therefore, the proportion of coaches should be compared to their representation as athletes (Cunningham & Sagas, 2005; Cunningham et al., 2006; Everhart & Chelladurai, 1998). This argument seems appropriate because of the specialized experiences, knowledge, and expertise required for a collegiate coach. Thus, coaching is not truly open to all persons; rather, persons who have previously played are most likely to coach (see Cunningham & Sagas, 2002, for statistical support). According to DeHass (2007), Whites represented 46.3% of the NCAA Division I-FBS football players during the 2006–07 season, while African Americans represented 46.4%. These rates have remained relatively stable across the past decade. In drawing from these proportions, we see the proportion of Whites hired to coaching staffs is significantly higher than this proportion ($z = 4.58$, $p < .05$), while African Americans are hired at rates significantly less than this proportion ($z =$-3.00, $p < .05$). Conclusions drawn from these data are starkly different than those drawn from the other perspective; in this case, Whites are over-represented and African Americans under-represented as new hires. Given the conceptual support for using athletes as a point of comparison (Cunningham & Sagas, 2005; Cunningham et al., 2006; Everhart & Chelladurai, 1998), the latter conclusion appears more tenable.

Coaching Positions

The first research question was concerned with the potential racial differences based on the position for which the coach was hired. Given that this research question focused on Whites and African Americans, we deleted the data for the coaches ($n = 3$)

	AFRICAN AMERICAN		WHITE	
Position	N	%	N	%
Coordinator	14	20.6	52	43.3
Coaching HCAA	30	44.1	24	20.0
Coaching LCAA	24	35.3	44	36.7

Notes: HCAA = High concentration of African Americans.
LCAA = Low concentration of African Americans.

outside of these racial profiles for the subsequent analyses. Following the racial ideology (Coakley, 2009) and occupational segregation (Evans, 1997; McDowell & Cunningham, 2007) literature, the dominant racial ideology would be perpetuated in coaching if African Americans were hired to coach positions where there is a predominance of African American athletes. Further, they would be unlikely to hold positions of power, such as offensive or defensive coordinator. In line with this perspective, we classified the many positions for which a coach could be hired into three categories: coordinator (i.e., offensive or defensive coordinator), coaching a high concentration of African Americans (HCAA; i..e, running back, wide receiver, and defensive back), and coaching a low concentration of African Americans (LCAA; i.e., quarterback, offensive and defensive line, linebackers, and special teams). For similar approaches, see Anderson (1993).

The racial breakdown of positions for which the coaches were hired is presented in Table 1, and chi-square analysis indicated that the differences in proportions were significant, χ^2 (2, $N = 188$) = 15.21, $p < .001$, Cramer's $V = .28$. Consistent with other occupational segregation literature in the sport context (Anderson, 1993; Evans, 1997; McDowell & Cunningham, 2007), our data indicate that Whites were most likely to be hired to be a coordinator, while African Americans were most likely to be hired to

coach an HCAA position. In both of these cases, the racial differences were more than double (43.3% vs. 20.6%, and 44.1% vs. 20.0%, for coordinators and HCAA positions, respectively).

Contribution to the Staff

With our second research question, we asked how the media framed the contributions the newly hired African American and White coaches were to make to the team. The content analysis of the media release revealed ten themes: *coaching ability* (i.e., the technical expertise the coach brought to the team); *coaching experience* (i.e., the years of experience in the coaching ranks); *playing experience* (i.e., the degree to which the coach's experience playing collegiate or professional football would contribute to the team); *recruiting* (i.e., the coach's skills in attracting athletes); *relate* (i.e., the degree to which the coach could relate to the players on the team); *fit* (i.e., the degree to which the coach "fit in" with the other members of the coaching staff); *personal* (i.e., the unique personal characteristics of the coach, such as his integrity); *network-head coach* (i.e., the previous connections and affiliation the coach had with the head coach); *network-experience* (i.e., the previous connections and affiliation the coach had with influential others in the coaching industry); and *network-alum* (i.e., the previous experiences the coach had with the particular university, most oftentimes as a player). A coach's media release could conceivably contain any or all of these themes. We used chi-square analysis to examine racial differences in the degree to which the theme appeared in the media release.

In Table 2, we provide a summary of the occurrences of the given themes in a media release. Results from the chi-square analyses indicated significant differences for *coaching ability*, χ^2 (1, $N = 188$) = 6.08, $p < .05$, Cramer's $V = .18$, *coaching experience*, χ^2 (1, $N = 188$) = 5.07, $p < .05$, Cramer's $V = .16$, *recruiting*, χ^2 (1, $N = 188$) = 3.20, $p = .07$, Cramer's $V = .14$, and *relate*, χ^2 (1, $N = 188$) = 4.52, $p < .05$, Cramer's $V = .16$. No differences were observed for

TABLE 2: **Racial differences in the coach's contributions to the staff**

Theme	AFRICAN AMERICAN		WHITE	
	N	%	N	%
Coaching ability				
Not mentioned	14	22.6	6	6.3
Mentioned	48	77.4	89	93.7
Coaching experience				
Not mentioned	25	40.3	16	16.8
Mentioned	37	59.7	79	83.2
Playing experience				
Not mentioned	50	80.6	78	82.1
Mentioned	12	19.4	17	17.9
Recruiting				
Not mentioned	33	53.2	64	67.4
Mentioned	29	46.8	31	32.6
Relate				
Not mentioned	49	79.0	86	90.5
Mentioned	13	21.0	9	9.5
Fit				
Not mentioned	52	83.9	75	78.9
Mentioned	10	16.1	20	21.1
Personal				
Not mentioned	42	67.7	56	58.9
Mentioned	20	32.3	39	41.1
Network-head coach				
Not mentioned	49	79.0	69	72.6
Mentioned	13	21.0	26	27.4
Network-experience				
Not mentioned	50	80.6	77	81.1
Mentioned	12	19.4	18	18.9
Network-alum				
Not mentioned	50	80.6	77	81.1
Mentioned	12	19.4	18	18.9

the other themes, and a layered chi-square analysis demonstrated that the occurrence of the themes was not moderated by the position coached.

Analysis of the specific differences indicate that *coaching ability* and *coaching experience* were more likely to appear in White coaches' media releases than they were in the releases for African American coaches. Examination of the themes indicates that both *coaching ability* and *coaching experience* were collectively linked to what organizational psychologists refer to as human capital, or the knowledge, skills, abilities, and work-related experiences one possesses (Becker, 1993; Nordhaug, 1993). These forms of codified and tacit knowledge are important because they are very difficult to imitate and are closely linked with various indicators of career success, including promotions (Hitt, Bierman, Shimizu & Kochhar, 2001; Sagas & Cunningham, 2004). Note the reinforcement of the dominant racial ideology in the media release: Whites were more likely than African Americans to be cast as having excellent coaching skills and unique experiences. And, it is these human capital investments that, according to the media release, would allow the White coaches to contribute to the team's success. For African Americans, such attributions were oftentimes absent: 20.6% of the releases did not mention their coaching ability while 42.2% did not mention their coaching experience.

On the other hand, the media releases were more likely to emphasize the African American's *recruiting ability* and capacity to *relate* to the players than they were to emphasize those qualities for White coaches. It should be noted, though, that differences in the recruiting ability were only marginally significant ($p = .07$). Again, the media releases served to reproduce the prevalent racial ideology. African Americans were depicted, more often than were Whites, as contributing to the team's success by how well they would relate to the players and how they would help in recruiting. To be sure, both of these functions are important; however, that they are more likely to appear in African Ameri-

can's releases than in White's reinforces a common perception among African American coaches—that they are hired to help in recruiting and to "monitor" the African American athletes on the team (Brown, 2002).

It should be noted that no media releases specifically mentioned that the African Americans coaches would relate well to *only* the African American athletes on the team. But, the implicit suggestion is there. After all, African Americans constitute the plurality of the athletes on the team (DeHass, 2007) and the relationship the coaches would have with the players was noted more than twice as often in the media releases for African Americans relative to Whites. In this way, the media have re-crafted the ways African American coaches are depicted: as monitors or baby-sitters for the African American athletes on the team. This trivialization of their efforts and contributions to the team's success further diminishes the stature of these coaches and serves to reinforce the common racial ideology.

Summary and Conclusions

Kane and Buysse (2005) suggested that "media coverage of sport offers fertile ground for any investigation that explores images, symbols, and myths related to power" (p. 216). Indeed, as research related to the intersection of race and sport attests, the images and social constructions of athletes and athletic events in the media oftentimes serve to reinforce the prevalent racial ideology in America—that of Whiteness as the norm, of Whites as natural leaders, team players, and highly intelligent, and of African Americans as "natural athletes" but persons who lack mental fortitude (Buffington, 2005; Davis & Harris, 1998; Denham, Billings & Halone, 2002; Jackson, 1989; Sailes, 2000; Wonsek, 1992; Woodward, 2004). Unfortunately, attention paid to these dynamics in the coaching and administrative side of sport had gone largely unexplored. The purpose of our study, therefore, was to examine the media coverage of newly hired NCAA Divi-

sion I-FBS football coaches, and thereby provide an investigation into the images of African American and White coaches that the media produced.

There are three primary findings from our study: (a) African Americans continue to face access discrimination in the hiring process, as the proportion of African American coaches hired is significantly less than the proportion of African American athletes; (b) when they are hired, African Americans are most likely to coach positions with a high concentration of African American athletes, and they are least likely to be hired to a coordinator position; and (c) the racial ideology dominant in the U.S. is perpetuated through the media releases, as Whites are praised for their human capital (i.e., their coaching abilities and experience) while African Americans are thought to contribute to the team by helping recruit and monitor athletes on the team (most of whom are African Americans). Collectively, these findings suggest that Whites continue to be over-represented as coaches, especially in power positions (i.e., coordinator), and are depicted in ways that reproduce and reinforce their social power in the sport context. The results also support Kellner's (1995) notion that the media help craft and shape our worldviews while also demonstrating who has power and who does not.

The nature of these findings suggests that training and educational efforts are needed for sports information directors. The need for such training efforts is particularly heightened when considering the vast scope of the stories and images constructed through the media releases. The efficacy of such educational endeavors, particularly when they are idiosyncratically designed, has been demonstrated both in the general athletics context (Cunningham & Singer, 2009) and in efforts to influence language used (Parks & Roberton, 2002). Parks and Roberton's findings are especially germane here, as they found that training efforts resulted in meaningful differences in people's attitudes toward inclusive language. Similar techniques could be employed in the current context.

Of course, we are not so naïve as to think that diversity training for sports information directors would automatically result in greater opportunities for African American coaches. Numerous researchers, such as Hawkins (2001), Smith (2007), and Sailes (2000), have eloquently highlighted the deep-seated issues of racism and discrimination within major college athletics, and these institutionally constructed practices and norms are unlikely to be significantly altered by more thoughtfully-written media releases. Clearly, structural and ideological changes are required. What we do suggest, however, is that some change is better than the status quo. Collectively, little changes, such as press releases that do not perpetuate the dominant racial ideology—can amount to meaningful transformation.

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