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Racism in contemporary American institutions: a critical, color-blind discourse analysis of sport

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Racism in contemporary American institutions:

A critical, color-blind discourse analysis of sport

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DEDICATION

This research is dedicated to

those who have faced injustice in sports

and have persevered through such trying times.

It is also dedicated to

those who are accepting of others,

regardless of their class, gender, sexual orientation and race,

as well as those who have adopted an antiracist mentality.

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NOMENCLATURE AND DEFINITIONS

Nomenclature

CRT: Critical Race Theory

NHL: National Hockey League

NBA: National Basketball Association

NFL: National Football League

NCAA: National Collegiate Athletic Association

Definitions

Culture: Is all that in human society which is socially rather than biologically transmitted, thus culture is a general term for the symbolic and learned aspects of human society (Marshall & Scott, 2009) (Scott & Marshall, 2009).

Ethnicity: A cultural heritage that people use to identify a particular population (Coakley, 2015, p. 226).

Ideology: A set of beliefs, convictions or ideas which both binds a particular group of people together and determines the actions they take (Buchanan, 2010)

Race: The biological, physiological, or genetic classification of humans according to distinctive features of physical appearance such as skin color, shape of face, hair color, body morphology. Race is generally used in a binary fashion to identify both a superior race and an inferior race (Buchanan, 2010).

Racial Ideology: Interrelated ideas and beliefs that are widely used to classify human beings into categories assumed to be biological and related to attributes such as intelligence, temperament, and physical abilities (Marshall & Scott, 2009).

Racism: the unequal treatment of a population group purely because of its possession of physical or other characteristics socially defined as denoting a particular race. Racism is the deterministic belief-system which sustains racialism, linking these characteristics with negatively valued social, psychological, or physical traits (Marshall & Scott, 2009).

Social Constructions: Parts of the social world that are created by people as they interact with one another under particular social, political, and economic conditions (Coakley, 2015, p. 8).

Social Structure: The established patterns of relationships and social arrangements that take shape as people live, work, and play with each other (Coakley, 2015, p. 5).

Society: A relatively self-sufficient collection of people whom maintain a way of life in a particular territory. (Coakley, 2015, p. 5).

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ABSTRACT

This research examines the prevalence of the "new" or contemporary form of racism that exists in post-Civil Rights American society. Since the 1960s, racial ideologies and racism have shifted from "traditional" or overt to a "new" form that is covert and dialectical in nature. This study explores the ways in which the "new" form of racism manifests in discussions about sports and race in an internet environment that is very public yet seemingly private for commenters because of the ability to make comments anonymously. A thematic analysis of 545 comments in relation to two race-related sports articles that appeared on ESPN.com was performed using a critical race theory perspective and Bonilla-Silva's color-blind framework. The discussions surrounding these race-related incidents and subsequent articles included the racialized frames of (a) abstract liberalism, (b) naturalization, (c) cultural racism, and (d) minimization of racism as means of explaining racial injustice and maintaining the racial hierarchy in modern society. This analysis revealed that not all individuals conform to the predominant ideology of racism in sports and society, these individuals are known as racial progressives. The findings revealed that racism is cultural, socially constructed and present within contemporary society and sports even though individuals and groups would like to believe otherwise. Moreover, the results indicated that sports and the internet are important domains to examine how racism is continually endorsed and reproduced in contemporary American society.

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

Traditional racism is the term attributed to the racial ideology that was predominant prior to the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960's, where racism in the United States could easily be identified through the overt racial resentment and discrimination towards Blacks and people of color (Zamudio & Rios, 2006). This overt or explicit racism was reflected in institutions by the imposed political and public policies associated with Jim Crow such as segregation of schools and neighborhoods as well as the openly acceptable public discourses and displays of hatred that surrounded Blacks and their rising position in society (Bonilla-Silva & Forman, 2000). Racism in contemporary America, however, is a difficult concept for individuals to identify, understand, and accept, especially because of the inherent nature of racism to manifest itself differently over time (Myers & Williamson, 2001). While it is uncommon today to see individuals or groups publicly expressing their hatred or animosity towards people of color, racism continues to exist, albeit in a predominantly novel form, that continues to maintain White privilege, while at the same time negating the existence of racism in contemporary society all together. This form of racism is referred to as "new" or "contemporary" racism in that it functions in a covert and less extreme manner as compared to traditional racism imposed during the pre-Civil Rights era (Myers & Williamson, 2001; Zamudio & Rios, 2006;).

In recent years, sociologists and critical race scholars have focused their research on this "new" form of discrimination to reveal that racism in contemporary America is systematic and practices have become deeply embedded in institutions like schools, churches, and politics over time (Myers & Williamson, 2001). Color-blind racism is the term

used by researchers, specifically Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, to describe the "new" racial ideology that Whites use in post-Civil Rights America (Bonilla-Silva, 2006). The ideal of color-blindness, or not seeing color (race), is the universal justification that Whites use for racial inequality in contemporary society (Bonilla-Silva & Forman, 2000; Bonilla-Silva & Embrick, 2001). Color-blind racism is said to be fixed in the ideology that race should not be taken into account because if people or institutions do not acknowledge race, then they cannot act in a racially biased manner (Apfelbaum, Norton, & Sommers, 2012). Moreover, studies have focused on the underlying nature of contemporary racism, pointing out that racism today is dialectical and racist structure is made legitimate by racist belief, which normalizes the differential treatment of people of color (Myers & Williamson, 2001).

Sports have also become a focal point for researchers to address the nature and existence of racism in a color-blind society. Sport is considered to be one of the most important social institutions in contemporary American society and is deeply tied to other institutions, such as education, religion, and politics (Primm, DuBois, & Regoli, 2007). The perceptions of sport are consistent with existing American ideals, which contest the existence of racism, even though sports have been considered to reflect the racial hierarchy of societies (Frey & Eitzen, 1991; Lapchick, 1986; Sanderson, 2010). There is also little doubt amongst critical race scholars and sports sociologists about sport being one of the most powerful and important institutions in the production, legitimization and potential contestation of contemporary racial constructions (Hartmann, 2003; Leonard, 2004; Hartmann, 2012).

Discourse and imagery analysis of professional and intercollegiate sports have become a popular method for identifying and attributing meaning to racism in contemporary America where public, overt racial talk and actions are widely condemned. Researchers have

examined the public, racially charged commentary and images surrounding individual, Black athletes such as Kobe Bryant (Leonard, 2004; Leonard & King, 2011), Barry Bonds (Alexander, 2009), Serena and Venus Williams (Douglas, 2012), and Ray Emery (Lorenz & Murray, 2014). Moreover, researchers have focused on the overall commentary and portrayals of Black athletes in several professional and intercollegiate sports. These studies have included: the National Basketball Association (NBA) (Bruce, 2004; Leonard, 2004; Leonard & King, 2011; Primm et al., 2007), the National Football League (NFL) (Primm et al., 2007), and European football (Cleland, 2014; Cleland & Cashmore, 2013). In addition, National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) men's Division I Basketball (Bruce, 2004; Love & Hughey, 2015; Rada & Wulfemeyer, 2003) and NCAA men's Division I Football (Rada & Wulfemeyer, 2003; Sanderson, 2010) have become important settings for scientific examination and analysis.

Aside from Lorenz and Murray's (2014) examination of the parallel policing of Blackness in the National Basketball Association and National Hockey League (NHL), minimal attention has been focused on comparing and analyzing commentary concerning racism in sports with differing racial compositions. For instance, many studies focus on Black athletes in sports that are primarily composed of Black athletes such as the NBA and NFL and little attention has been concentrated on Black athletes in sports that are primarily composed of White athletes such as the NHL, Major League Baseball and the Professional Golfers Association. Moreover, a number of studies have focused their analysis on public television, newspaper, and announcer commentary to expose racial biases and stereotypes (Alexander, 2009; Bruce, 2004; Douglas, 2012; Leonard & King, 2011; Lorenz & Murray, 2014; Rada & Wulfemeyer, 2003). While these studies provide important insights into the

workings of public racial discourses, they are limited in providing insights into the racial conversations and justifications that occur in environments that are believed to provide privacy and anonymity (Love & Hughey, 2015; Myers & Williamson, 2001; Sanderson, 2010). Moreover, academics have begun pointing out the issues with the reliability of survey findings about White racial attitudes and actions along with the inconsistent and contradictory survey responses that are provided by research participants as compared to participant interview responses (Bonilla-Silva & Forman, 2000; Myers & Williamson, 2001). As Bonilla-Silva states "survey questions still restrict the free flow of ideas and unnecessarily constrain the range of possible answers for respondents." (Bonilla-Silva, 2006, p. 11) By examining conversations behind closed doors and in settings that provide security, researchers have revealed a great deal of race talk among everyday people (Myers & Williamson, 2001)

One environment that has been overlooked as an area for issues of race in contemporary America and sport is the internet (Love & Hughey, 2015; Sanderson, 2010). The internet is described as a place where a myriad of ideals concerning race related issues can exist covertly but most often times overtly (Rauch & Schanz, 2013). The internet has also been considered to provide researchers with more honest, unbiased, edited responses from respondents because of the assumed privacy and anonymity associated with cyberspace (Cleland, 2014).

Employing a critical race perspective in conjunction with Eduardo Bonilla-Silva's (2006) color-blind framework to examine internet discourse surrounding incidents of overt racist acts directed towards Black athletes in the NHL and NFL will provide a better understanding of how the "new" form of racism disseminates in a contemporary, color-blind

institution, where consumers and participants alike consider race to be inconsequential. Analyzing the extent of racial discourse surrounding overt racialized incidents in the NHL and NFL will demonstrate if the racial composition of leagues have an effect on consumer commentary. Moreover, examining consumer discourse in an internet setting will provide responses that are more elaborate and candid as compared to survey research where respondents are prompted and given the chance to alleviate their feelings and replies (Bonilla-Silva & Forman, 2000). In other words, "surveys on racial attitudes have become like multiple-choice exams in which respondents work hard to choose the ''right'' answers," which has been the case in past studies (Bonilla-Silva, 2006, p. 11).

While there is a predominant ideology about racism no longer existing and infecting the beliefs of people and the social structures of society (Bonilla-Silva, 2006), this study aims to reveal that racism still does exist and it can be found in conversations concerning professional Black athletes in the institution of sport when examined through a critical lens and color-blind framework. This investigation specifically asks: (1) To what extent is racism prevalent in online discussions surrounding overt race related incidents in professional sports? (2) Does the racial composition of athletes in a professional sport have an influence on the amount of racially oriented comments by consumers? (3) How are the frames of color-blind racism used within comments to justify racial injustice and ideals in contemporary society? and (4) Will the overall conversations surrounding Black individual athletes be mostly racist or racially progressive in nature?

In addition, the purpose of this examination is not to test critical race theory (CRT) nor is it an attempt to chastise individuals who have unconsciously adopted the color-blind ideology. Rather, the intent is to advance empirical analysis of Bonilla-Silva's (2006) color-

blind framework and to provide information that provokes critical thinking and discussions about racism in contemporary America that can help in the advancement of antiracist attitudes, which can be employed to contest and overcome the false consciousness that has consumed society.

CHAPTER 2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK/LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter discusses the theoretical lens and ideological framework that informs this study as well as the complexities and interconnections of sport, race and society. The first section, explains the theoretical perspective and specific tenets of CRT that inform this study. The second section provides a general discussion of the "new" ideology of racism in contemporary society, color-bind racism and its associated consequences along with a group of individuals who are labeled "White racial progressives." In the third section, the predominant ideology of sport and the scholarly critique of sport are explored to reveal the paradoxical understanding of athletics in modern-day society. The final section discusses the expected outcomes and assumptions of this qualitative content analysis, which are informed by previous research, the application of critical race principles and the four frames of color-blind racism.

Critical Race Theory – Theoretical Lens

The shifting dynamics and ideals about race and racism in "post-race" America make it difficult to understand, recognize, and discuss how racial beliefs and narratives continue to perpetuate in contemporary society (Myers & Williamson, 2001). However, critical race theory offers a theoretical perspective that can be used to identify and examine how contemporary racial discourse and actions operate in American culture and American institutions such as education, politics, and sport (Bimber Jr. , 2014).

CRT emerged in the 1970's when the advances made during the Civil Rights era of the 1960's had stalled and, in essence, reverted, due to the subtler, covert forms of racisms which were gaining popularity (Delgado & Stefanic, 2012). Because of this change in

racialized actions, new strategies and theories were required to contest the new concealed

forms of racism that were gaining predominance in society (Delgado & Stefanic, 2012).

Delgado & Stefanic (2012) state that "unlike traditional civil rights, which embraces

incrementalism and step-by-step progress, critical race theory questions the very foundations

of the liberal order, including equality theory, legal reasoning, enlightenment rationalism,

and neutral principles of constitutional law" (p. 4). While critical race theory provides several

principles regarding racial matters and societal injustice, not all of these tenets will be used

for the purposes of this study.

One tenet of critical race theory is the notion of intersectionality and anti-

essentialism. This means that no individual has a single identity; rather everyone regardless

of their race has a myriad of identities and adherences, which constitute them as a diverse

whole, rather than a singular entity (Delgado & Stefanic, 2012). While an individual may be

Black, White, Hispanic, or Asian, these identity markers represent a mere portion of the

totality of an individual. For instance, a Black man or woman could also be a Republican or

Democrat, a Christian or atheist, an athlete or a consumer and so on.

Another precept of critical race theory is that people of color have a recognized

proficiency in speaking about race and racism because of their unique histories and

experiences dealing with subjugation in America as opposed to Whites; therefore, these

marginalized groups should be given a voice to be heard and learned from (Delgado &

Stefanic, 2012; Hylton, 2010). It might seem logical to assume that the experiences of Blacks

could be deducted from observation or other means. However, the reality remains that it is

impossible to understand another individual's or group's perspective on reality unless that

reality is presented from the unique experiences of the individual or group under examination

(Borland & Bruening, 2010). Although the aforementioned tenets are of extreme importance for researchers and critical race theorists, the purposes of this exploration necessitated the need for employing the following three tenets, in particular.

The first critical race principle that informed this study is the idea that racism, rather than being uncommon, is ordinary and affects the experiences of people of color in American society (Delgado & Stefanic, 2012). Critical race theory contends that racism and racial ideologies are present and permanent in society, challenging the predominant belief about race related issues and discrimination being infrequent (Hylton, 2010). Critical race advocates do not question if we live in a racist society; rather, supporters of CRT contend that we do live in a racist society and something should be done about this (Hylton, 2010). With this in mind, CRT scholars have maintained that racism is not stagnant, nor is it reflected by isolated incidents; rather, racism is normalized and widespread in all American institutions (Bimber Jr. , 2014).

The second tenet of critical race theory that is considered is the idea that race is socially constructed and is the product of social ideologies and relations (Delgado & Stefanic, 2012). Society frequently ignores the fact that race is not a biological identifier; rather race is a social construct that is formed and maintained through irrational categorization, stereotypes, and ideologies that are deeply rooted in the social and historical constructs of culture (Adair & Rowe, 2010; Peller, 1990). Moreover, CRT acknowledges the differential racialization of people of color by dominant society during different eras, which are used to exploit these groups for the needs and material gains required by the dominant White group (Aleinkoff, 1991).

Lastly, CRT asserts that the dominant power relationship of Whiteness over Blackness serves important psychological and material purposes for the dominant group. (Delgado & Stefanic, 2012). Critical race theorists have challenged the dominant and inescapable entitlements of color-blindness, meritocracy, and neutrality (Bimper Jr, 2014; Matsuda, Lawrence, Delgado, & Crenshaw, 1993). Furthermore, CRT asserts that the problem with racism is not racism itself, rather the problem with racism is the power that it maintains and reserves for dominant racial groups in society (Bonilla-Silva, 2006).

Consequently, when engaging CRT as a theoretical lens I begin with the notion that contemporary culture and societal institutions, like sports, are vehemently racist in orientation. Additionally, I argue that racism is different today than it was in the past and has taken on a much lighter, covert façade compared with the widely acceptable overt discrimination associated with pre Civil-Rights and concepts like color-blindness. Furthermore, meritocracy and neutrality have served to perpetuate this new form of racism in an effort to maintain White privilege while at the same time negating racial injustice. As a matter of fact, I postulate that color-blindness has become a powerful form of racism itself, and is the predominant form of racism employed by Whites in contemporary society. To expose this new form of racism and how it operates, particularly in sports, I apply Bonilla' Silva's (2006) four frames of color-blind racism, which aids in revealing the dialectical nature and context of racism in present society in addition to the continual struggle for power between racially dominant and racially subjugated groups.

Color-blind Racism in Contemporary America – Ideological Frames

Racial ideologies, as defined by Bonilla Silva are, "the broad racial frameworks, or 'grids', that racial groups use to make sense of the world, to decide what is right or wrong,

true or false, important or unimportant" (Bonilla-Silva, Lewis, & Embrick, 2004, p. 556).

Additionally, for ideologies to be substantive, they must produce narratives that clarify the

world in ways that make sense to the people who use an ideologies central frames (Bonilla-

Silva, Lewis, & Embrick, 2004). For Bonilla-Silva (2004), "these stories are then the

conveyor belts that transport the new racial frames" (Bonilla-Silva, Lewis, & Embrick, 2004,

p. 560) and beliefs. Moreover, it is important to note that ideologies are not created

instantaneously; rather ideologies are culturally learned and reinforced by historical and

societal interactions (Bonilla-Silva, 2006).

In North America, there has been a restructuring of ideologies about race and the

ways in which racism is employed and demonstrated in everyday life. Color-blind racism is

the term used specifically by Eduardo Bonilla-Silva (2006), to describe the "new" racial

ideology that Whites use in post-Civil Rights America (Bonilla-Silva, 2006). The ideal of

color-blindness, or not seeing color (race), is the widespread rationalization that Whites use

for racial inequality in contemporary society (Bonilla-Silva & Forman, 2000; Bonilla-Silva &

Embrick, 2001). Racial color-blindness is a diversity ideology that attempts to ignore

differences in race when making decisions, forming impressions, and enacting behaviors

(Apfelbaum, Norton, & Sommers, 2012). The color-blind ideology allows Whites to believe

that segregation and discrimination are old-fashioned, and that society is inclusive and

accepting of all races, which conceals White privilege and negates issues and discussions

concerning racial injustice (Gallagher, 2003). Color-blindness contends that the best way to

achieve equality among racially divided groups is to downplay group differences and treat all

people as unique individuals (Rattan & Ambady, 2013). Peery (2013) states, "the assumption

underlying a color-blind approach is that as long as people do not 'see' categories such as

race, they cannot discriminate on the basis of them" (Peery, 2011, p. 473). This is not to say that the color-blind ideology completely ignores the color of one's skin, rather color-blindness does acknowledges race, however, the purpose of adopting a color-blind ideology is to minimize the effect of the social racial hierarchy and privileges that are afforded to Whiteness which have been embedded within culture (Gallagher, 2003).

Also, highly successful Blacks and people of color exist as public examples to reinforce the color-blind way of thinking in that achievements of these individuals indicate that all individuals within a certain racial group have equal opportunities and life chances (Gallagher, 2003). However, as Apfelbaum et al. (2012) states, "when race is made salient, many Whites shift from viewing color-blindness as a distributive principle (i.e., everyone should have equal outcomes) to viewing it as a procedural principle (i.e., everyone should receive equal treatment, regardless of existing race-based inequalities)" (Apfelbaum et al., 2012, p. 207).

The negative and incomplete beliefs about people and groups of color are reinforced by employing the color-blind ideology. According to CRT and color-blindness the predominate ideal among most White Americans is that racial inequalities no longer exist and that they have personally overcome their own racial apprehensions, therefore, racism has been politically addressed and is a thing of the past (Gallagher, 2003). Believing that American society is color-blind fosters the belief that America has overcome racial animosities and that upward mobility can be achieved because socioeconomic and historical barriers no longer exist for Blacks and people of color (Bonilla-Silva, 2006). By viewing society as "race-neutral," past historical practices and events can be undermined and believed to no longer affect contemporary racial injustice (Gallagher, 2003). Therefore, from this

perspective, not only are Whites motivated by material rewards to maintain racial attitudes, the activities and inactivity of institutions also serve to reinforce the new color-blind racism (Zamudio & Rios, 2006). The color-blind perspective normalizes racial inequality because it creates the appearance that Whites are no better off than people of color (Bonilla-Silva, 2006) and that openly discussing racial issues is not needed in a society where racism and discrimination have been eradicated (Gallagher, 2003).

In his 2006 book, *Racism without Racists: Color-Blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in the United States*, Eduardo Bonilla-Silva illuminated "an interpretive matrix from where to extract arguments to explain a host of racial issues" (p. 47) in contemporary society. This interpretive matrix consists of four frames; abstract liberalism, naturalization, cultural racism, and minimization of racism. According to Bonilla-Silva (2006), the frame of abstract liberalism is described as relying on ideals, "associated with political liberalism (e.g., ''equal opportunity,'' the idea that force should not be used to achieve social policy) and economic liberalism (e.g., choice, individualism) in an abstract manner to explain racial matters" (p. 28). The frame of naturalization is categorized as permitting Whites to rationalize and dismiss racial occurrences because it suggests that they are natural or biological manifestations of groups and society (Bonilla-Silva, 2006). The frame of cultural racism employs culturally based arguments to explain the inadequate status of Blacks and people of color in society (Bonilla-Silva, 2006). Lastly, the minimization of racism frame relies on arguments that propose that "discrimination is no longer a central factor affecting minorities' life chances (''It's better now than in the past'' or ''There is discrimination, but there are plenty of jobs out there'')" (Bonilla-Silva, 2006, p. 28). Even though the four frames of color-blind racism possess specific differences, this approach does

not mean that they are exclusive of one another, rather these frames are often mixed and used in combination because "informal expressions of ideology are a constructive effort, a process of building arguments in situ" (Bonilla-Silva, 2006, p. 30).

Despite the widespread practice and predominance of color-blind racism in contemporary American society, there are individuals and groups who challenge and attempt to deconstruct the social racial hierarchy (Bonilla-Silva, 2006). Bonilla-Silva (2006) labels these individuals as "White racial progressives" in that they recognize racial discrimination and segregation as a problem, "therefore today, as yesterday, a portion of the White population is not singing the tune of color-blindness" (Bonilla-Silva, 2006, p. 132). While these White progressive individuals stray from the predominant societal ideology, many of their views are still influenced by color-blind racism and its entrenchment in contemporary culture and societal institutions (Bonilla-Silva, 2006).

Contemporary American Society and Sport

Predominant ideology of sport

> *"I'm so sick of this "racism" crap it's unbelievable...seriously, focus on the game, not on a few idiots. It's the playoffs for God's' sakes."* h287

Sports in contemporary, post-Civil Rights American culture are predominantly regarded by participants and consumers alike to be utopian in that they are viewed as institutions that promote progressive ideals about racial equality while at the same time negating the existence of racial inequality, discrimination, and race all together (Carrington, 2012). Reasons for this situation include, but are not limited to, the extreme popularity of sports participation and consumption from the local to global level (Primm et al., 2007). The ways in which sport emphasis virtues of fair play, meritocracy, and competition, which

"seems to parallel and model liberal democratic visions of social justice and cross-cultural understanding" (Hartmann, 2012, p. 1008). Thus, sports are viewed as an avenue of equal opportunity that lead the way towards civil rights, human rights, and racial justice (Hartmann, 2012). The unmatched success and distinction that people of color have achieved in the sporting world, where they were once excluded from participation because of institutionalized discrimination, now participate at rates that exceed their representation in the general population (Rada & Wulfemeyer, 2003). This increase in participation and athletic excellence conceals the socioeconomic and institutional barriers that Blacks and people of color have encountered for generations, which further perpetuates the ideal of social and class mobility (Dubrow & Adams, 2010). Sport is also considered to be one of the most important social institutions in American society and is deeply tied to other institutions, such as education, religion, and politics (Primm et al., 2007). Despite sport being an important site for racial contestations and meanings, scholars scarcely mention sport when discussing race and racism (Carrington, 2012).

Speaking at the Laureus World Sports Awards in 2000, which honors outstanding individuals from the world of sports along with the greatest sporting accomplishments throughout the year, Nelson Mandela captured the predominant ideology of sport in today's contemporary American culture when he stated:

> Sport has the power to change the world. It has the power to inspire. It has the power to unite people in a way that little else does. It speaks to youth in a language they understand. Sport can create hope, where once there was only despair. It is more powerful than governments in breaking down racial barriers. It laughs in the face of all types of discrimination. (Mandela, 2000)

For Mandela and many others, this ideology about sports holds true because he, like the majority of people, is under the assumption that sport has the ability to overcome the systematic racism that has been deeply embedded within all institutions by the global and cultural ideologies and meanings of race (Myers & Williamson, 2001). The dominant position about sports is one in which racism has been eradicated and color-blind racism as policy and procedure perpetuate (Cleland, 2014).

Scholarly critique of sport

Researchers, specifically sports and race sociologists, disagree with the predominant ideology of athletics and have been critical of sport, emphasizing that certain forms of racism and discrimination continue to exist (Hartmann, 2012). It has been argued that sport produces stereotypes, prejudices, and myths about groups and people of color, which have contributed to both discrimination against and an underrepresentation of people of color within certain sports (Jarvie & Reid, 1997). Sports are also viewed as vehicles for displays of prowess, masculinity and forms of identity, many of which are racist in orientation (Jarvie & Reid, 1997).

The popular image of Black professional athletes rising from the "ghetto" to fame and fortune is misleading not only for academics but also for the public as well (Dubrow & Adams, 2010). Building on the theoretical assertion that "the intersection of race, class and family contextualizes the opportunity structure for entry into professional athletic careers" (p.44) Dubrow & Adams (2010) used newspapers from 1994-2004 to code for race, class, and family structure (Dubrow & Adams, 2010). Their examination found that the majority of NBA players come from relatively advantaged social origins and Black players who do come

from disadvantaged origins have a less likely chance of making it to the NBA as compared to advantaged Blacks and Whites (Dubrow & Adams, 2010).

Post-racial discourses have also had an influence on Black student-athlete experiences and their perceptions of issues concerning race and racism. Using Bonilla-Silva's framework (2006), Bimber Jr. (2014) displayed that abstract liberalism was engaged through discussions about equal opportunity, individualism and choice or lack thereof. In addition, naturalization, cultural racism and minimization were used to undermine the significance of race and racism in sport (Bimber Jr., 2014).

Likewise, announcers continue to paint a picture wherein African American athletes are portrayed as physical specimens using their God-given, natural ability, whereas White athletes are hardworking and intellectually endowed (Bruce, 2004). Announcers also construct racialized images and descriptions of players. Through their negative descriptions, announcers portray African American athletes as being at odds with society (Rada & Wulfemeyer, 2003). Through televised coverage of men's NCAA Division I football and basketball, Rada & Wulfemeyer (2003) revealed that of all the negative comments made by announcers in their study (49 out of 486), 92% of them were directed towards Black players (Rada & Wulfemeyer, 2003). They also found that 93% of the comments that pertained to physical attributes were made about Blacks, which accounted for 57% of all comments made about Black players, as compared to 19% of the total comments made about White players (Rada & Wulfemeyer, 2003).

The normalization of name choice (first name for Blacks and last name for Whites) by NBA and NCAA Division I basketball announcers has also been explored by scholars. Relying on interviews from 7 color commentators and 4 play-by-play announcers (10 White,

1 Black) from across the United States, Bruce (2010) revealed that personal experiences influenced naming choices and announcers normalized name choice based on player color even though awareness at the individual and institutional level of race have increased (Bruce, 2004). Additionally, "the 'playful' use of first names becomes part of an 'othering' process which emphasizes names that do not fit the normalized (white) culture – names that are carried more often by African American players" (Bruce, 2004, p. 875).

Researchers have also started to focus on representations of single professional athletes in mainstream media. Leonard (2004) employed Bonilla-Silva's color-blind framework to examine how its frames operated in discussions about race in general society and, specifically surrounding Kobe Bryant's 2003 rape trial and the subsequent ongoing destructive imagery and conversations that were produced (Leonard, 2004; Leonard & King, 2011). Alexander (2009) explored the racialized framing of Barry Bond's during his 2007 race for Major League Baseball's all-time home run record, illuminating how many sportswriters and fans were "reluctant to at least acknowledge the possibility that race played a role in how" (p.86) Barry Bonds was unfairly treated, framed, and perceived in mainstream media (Alexander, 2009). Douglas (2012), examined the racialization, surveillance, and racial discourse surrounding tennis phenomes Venus and Serena Williams, demonstrating how two Black women in a predominantly White space does not "automatically signal the achievement of racial equality and the end of racism" (p. 140) in contemporary society (Douglas, 2012). Rather, the Williams sisters' existence exemplified how "White racial hegemony is continuously— and very publicly—struggle[d] on and over" (Douglas, 2012; Hartmann, 2002, p. 411).

Lorenz and Murray's (2014), comparative study examined the popular media narratives surrounding the implementation of the NBA's dress code and the behavior of NHL goaltender Ray Emery throughout the 2005-2006 basketball and hockey seasons (Lorenz & Murray, 2014). Their analysis revealed the parallel, racialized constructions of Black athletes as "menacing, criminal, and dangerously different" in coverage of both sports (Lorenz & Murray, 2014, p. 25). Even though the racial compositions of the NBA and NHL differ dramatically, "the various forms, expressions, and effects of racism are similar in these two sports, as well as in Canada and the United States more generally." (Lorenz & Murray, 2014, p. 27)

The expanse of the internet and online usage has granted researchers the opportunity to discover "new and promising avenues for academic inquiry in the field of sport communication" (Clavio, 2008, p. 434). Clavio's (2008) analysis of online college message board demographics showed that 87.7% of users were male, 90.8% were White, 77.4% were aged thirty or older and 76.0% had at least an undergraduate degree (Clavio, 2008). Sanderson (2010) took advantage of this approach in exploring racism in sport, specifically in NCAA Division I football. Rather than examining public media resources such as television commentary, newspaper and magazine articles where racist ideals can be consciously censored, Sanderson (2010) performed a thematic analysis of 1,254 postings to an ESPN.com fan discussion forum to explore how computer mediated communications where used by fans when allegations of racism were raised by former NBA standout and Auburn University alumnus Charles Barkley (Sanderson, 2010, p. 315). Barkley publicly criticized Auburn for the University's decision to hire a White, head football coach over a highly qualified Black candidate. Barkley's condemnations were reported by several major

news outlets, which prompted fans to take to the internet to respond to his allegations (Sanderson, 2010). Sanderson's (2010) analysis demonstrated that "much of the discussion in the forum collectively served to (re)produce ideological positions that (a) claim racism as nonexistent, (b) blame the victims of racism for their underrepresentation, and (c) suggests any lingering racism is against Whites (e.g., Whites are victims of reverse discrimination)" (Sanderson, 2010, p. 315). Forum participants also "sought out the Internet to defend and protect the identity of college football by contending that the domain of sport is a haven free of racial strife" (Sanderson, 2010, p. 315). The internet and social media applications have afforded researchers new opportunities to investigate racism and racial ideals in an environment that provides anonymity and security for commenters to proclaim their racialized views, which would otherwise be restricted in mainstream, public mass media (Cleland, 2014).

Despite the decrease in overt racism and the increase in scholarly work and consciousness concerning racial ideologies and differences, universal and historically grounded racial ideologies perpetuate through indirect actions and "sports commentary about black athletic superiority and white intellectual superiority, and differential patterns of naming that support existing racial hierarchies" (Bruce, 2004, p. 861). Racism in sports and contemporary society persists and is either disregarded or suppressed to give the impression of it not existing (Cleland & Chasmore, 2013). "Sport is essentially *unnatural*, given that it is organized, enacted, and reproduced through language and other communicative practices in ways that echo and maintain particular cultural forms and their ideological underpinnings" (Mean & Halone, 2010, p. 244). In this sense, sport as an institution and the ideologies surrounding sport parallel and intersect with the ideologies that are prevalent in

contemporary society in that they are socially constructed and perpetuated (Delgado &

Stefanic, 2012) rather than naturally occurring phenomena, which is the predominant belief

held by both participant and consumers of sport.

Hypotheses

Even though researchers have acknowledged the existence and perpetuation of racism

in American society and its embedment within institutions such as sports, the predominant

public ideology about racism contrasts significantly with the scholarly critique (Myers &

Williamson, 2001). So much so, that individuals and groups negate race and racism in

contemporary society all together. This ideological denial nullifies the need for discussions

that could be beneficial in addressing racial injustice and discrimination that could be

developed to bring about greater societal equality and change (Gallagher, 2003).

Critical race theory posits that racism, rather than being infrequent, is commonplace,

ongoing and permanent in American society (Delgado & Jean Stefanic, 2012, Hylton, 2010).

Moreover, CRT acknowledges that we live in a racist society and racism is normalized and

pervasive in all American institutions rather than being reflected by isolated incidents and

singular individuals (Bimper Jr., 2014). If racism is present between both sets of online

consumer commentary, then comparisons can be made between the NHL and NFL, which

will aid in demonstrating the dialectical nature of racism and the intersectionality of sport,

race and society. Furthermore, the presence of racial discourse will contest the predominant

cultural ideology of sport, thus giving the scholarly critique additional legitimacy and

credibility. Based on the first tenet of critical race theory discussed earlier which suggests

that racism is common and normalized in institutions (Hylton, 2010), I posit the following

hypothesis:

H_1: Color-blind racial discourse will be present in both sets of consumer commentary regardless of the sport and its racial composition.

Even though the racial compositions of the NHL and NFL are significantly different, this divergence does not mean that the racial composition of commenters will be significantly different. Clavio's (2008) research on online college sports message board demographics demonstrated that 87.7% of users were male and 90.8% were White (Clavio, 2008). With this in mind it can be conceived that even though NFL commenters see more people of color on the playing surface as compared to NHL commenters it does not necessarily make them anymore accepting or liberally progressive (Lorenz & Murray, 2014). Furthermore, the racial demographics of NFL and NHL consumers are similar in that 78% of NFL fans and 85% of NHL fans are White (Eby, 2013). According to the color-blind ideology and the second tenet of CRT, race and racism are socially constructed and deeply embedded within culture and all societal institutions (Myers & Williamson, 2001) which suggests that racism will be present in all sporting entities as well. In this manner, I posit that:

H_2: The total prevalence and use of color-blind racial discourse will be similar among the NFL and NHL related article commentary.

Based on the tenet of CRT, which suggests that racism is widespread and normal in all societal institutions (Bimber Jr. , 2014), in addition to the precept that color-blindness, meritocracy and neutrality serve important psychological and material purposes for Whites (Bimper Jr, 2014; Matsuda, Lawrence, Delgado, & Crenshaw, 1993). From this perspective, therefore, one would expect that comments will contain more color-blind racial discourse as compared to acknowledgment of racism and inequality, thereby lending support to the argument that sports are in fact highly racialized "contested terrains" (Hartmann, 2000) that

need to be critically examined and exposed. Based upon this perspective, I pose hypothesis 3:

> H₃: Overall consumer commentary will contain more racialized sentiment and color-blind discourse than acknowledgment and condemnation of racism in contemporary sport and society.

If hypotheses 1, 2 and 3 are supported by content analysis then the employment of the four frames of color-blind racism by online commenters can be examined, measured and compared between the NHL and NFL. The color-blind frame of abstract liberalism enables Whites to proclaim that all people regardless of their race should be treated as individuals and held accountable for their own opportunities, achievements and shortcomings (Bonilla-Silva, 2006). This belief ignores the fact that people of color are severely underrepresented in society and particular areas such as higher education and high paying jobs (Bonilla-Silva, 2006). At the same time, abstract liberalism uses those who have achieved success as examples for how anyone can overcome their economic and social status regardless of their race and the cultural impediments that have been historically imposed (Gallagher, 2003). For Bonilla-Silva (2006), abstract liberalism is the most important of the four frames because it "constitutes the foundation of the new racial ideology" (p. 26). Moreover, in his 2001 discourse analysis, Bonilla-Silva demonstrated that 96% of White respondents relied on abstract liberalism to substantiate racial inequality in contemporary society (Bonilla-Silva & Embrick, 2001). Furthermore, the frame of abstract liberalism coincides with the tenet of CRT, which proposes that, dominant power relationships and denial of racial hierarchies serve both material and psychological purposes for Whites (Delgado & Stefanic, 2012). Therefore, based on the tenets of CRT and the importance of abstract liberalism as it

constitutes Bonilla-Silva's (2006) color-blind ideology it is expected that abstract liberalism will be the most used frame amongst the sets of NHL and NFL consumer commentary data.

H$_4$: Abstract liberalism will be the most frequently used color-blind frame within comments to explain and justify racial issues and inequality surrounding each athlete and sport-related incidents.

The next frame that will be analyzed is naturalization, which is employed to make arguments that justify the position of Blacks and people of color in society by framing their outcomes as "natural" or biologically driven rather than politically and socially influenced (Bonilla-Silva, 2006). Naturalization relies on stereotypical arguments and generalizations that are specific to the race of individuals or groups to explain their choices and standings in society. Bonilla-Silva's (2006) examination of color-blind racial framing revealed that naturalization was the least utilized frame by White respondents in explaining race related issues and racialized outcomes concerning Blacks (Bonilla-Silva & Embrick, 2001). Moreover, the frame of naturalization corresponds with the tenet of CRT, which illuminates the idea of racism being ordinary or natural rather than uncommon, which affects the experiences of Blacks and people of color in society. (Delgado & Stefanic, 2012). While the results of Hypothesis 5 will be used to confirm the notion of naturalization being the least employed color-blind frame among both the NHL and NFL related online consumer commentary these results will also demonstrate the precept of CRT which acknowledges racism as socially constructed, normalized and widespread in all American institutions (Bimber Jr. , 2014).

H$_5$: The frame of naturalization will be the least utilized frame among article commentary.

The frame of cultural racism, like naturalization, is used to make arguments that justify the position of Blacks and people of color in society based on their race. However, cultural racism relies on cultural arguments specific to the race of individuals and groups to explain their choices and standing in society (Bonilla-Silva, 2006). 88% of White research participants in Bonilla-Silva' 2001 study used the frame of cultural racism in explaining and justifying race related issues (Bonilla-Silva & Embrick, 2001). Moreover, CRT illuminates and aligns with the frame of cultural racism in that CRT posits that we do live in a racist society and race is socially constructed by social ideologies and historical race relations (Delgado & Stefanic, 2012). Based on CRT and the frame of cultural racism which broadly stereotypes and attributes meaning to all individuals within a particular racial culture, it is expected that the frame of cultural racism will be highly employed in this online commentary investigation to explain any perceived 'deficiencies' associated with the individual Black athletes in the NHL and NFL. Rather than constructing arguments based on individual characteristics, it is anticipated that cultural stereotypes and arguments will be used to explain the racialized treatment that individual Black athletes receive.

H_6: The frame of cultural racism will be highly employed between both sets of article commentary (more than naturalization but less than abstract liberalism).

Lastly, the color-blind frame of minimization of racism suggests that discrimination no longer affects the life chances of Blacks in contemporary society. In previous research, 84% of White interview respondents relied on minimization of racism to contest the occurrences and negative effects of discrimination towards Blacks and people of color in contemporary society (Bonilla-Silva & Embrick, 2001). Furthermore, CRT disagrees with the ideal of racism being minimal and ascertains that racism is common and ordinary within

American society and all institutions, which are socially constructed by a culture where

racism and racist ideologies are present and permanent (Hylton, 2010). Employing the tenet

of CRT which acknowledges racism as a common phenomenon in society will help in

demonstrating how the frame of minimization of racism is used within online comments to

diminish the extent of racism in contemporary society and sports.

H_7: Minimization of racism will be the third most used color-blind frame and

employed in high amounts (similar to cultural racism).

Because of the high representation and composition of Blacks within the National

Football League, it is expected that comments will be more likely to minimize the effects of

racism in relation to the achievements of these individuals. In contrast, the National Hockey

League is composed primarily of White players, making the limited number of Black

athletes appear as exceptional. However, these athletes also serve as an example of how the

barriers to entry in sport have been lifted, allowing people of all races to achieve

professional athletic success regardless of their socioeconomic status and the sport that they

choose to pursue. This racialized temperance may grant article commenters the opportunity

to agree that discrimination is better than it once was, racism is archaic and the treatment

that people of color and Blacks receive is not the fault of all people in society but the

responsibility of a few ignorant individuals (Bonilla-Silva, 2006). Furthermore, CRT

illuminates the ideal about racism being prevalent in society and sport, which conflicts with

the predominant ideology of race being inconsequential in athletics. In addition, CRT

postulates that race is socially constructed through irrational categorization and stereotypes

(Adair & Rowe, 2010) therefore; the amount of minimization of racism in the NHL and

NFL is expected to be determined by the specific cultural ideologies and racial similarities

between consumers and participants relevant to the compositional presence of Black athletes in each sport.

H_8: The minimization of racism frame will be more prevalent in NFL/Sherman related comments as compared to NHL/Subban article related comments.

H_{8a}: The minimization of race frame will be more prevalent in NHL/Subban related comments as compared to NFL/Sherman article related comments.

CHAPTER 3. METHODS

Researcher's Relationship to Study

For the past 20 years, the sport of ice hockey has consumed my life and, at times, has taken precedence over several other important facets such as education and family. Ice hockey has also granted me several unique opportunities, one of which was playing hockey in British Columbia, Canada, for four years, which led to me being recruited by several universities and, ultimately, becoming the first person in my family to earn a degree from an institution of higher education. Upon completing my undergraduate coursework, I was hired as a full-time coach on my alma mater's men's hockey staff. Moreover, my employment was contingent upon me being enrolled in full-time Master's coursework. Being an interdisciplinary graduate student has afforded me the ability to be critical of sport, rather than purely optimistic and unconscious of sport and its underlying sociological functions.

During the past two years, I have contemplated several of the issues that I have noticed in the sport of ice hockey, such as the underrepresentation of people of color, violence, homophobia, and sexism. I have also reflected on my own experiences within the sport of hockey and the incidents of overt racism that I had to endure, at times being the only player on my team and often times the only player in the league who was not White. Laughing along with my White teammates about racial jokes and stereotypes became the norm. It was always easier to conform and downplay the extent of societal racial animosities rather than speak out and confront my "friends" (it is very difficult to believe that teammates can be racist because of the time and common goals shared with them). While racial jokes lingered in the dressing room, there were often times where racism spilled over onto the

playing surface. While I do not remember the countless incidents of opponents insulting my

skill set, or ability, I do specifically remember the times when I heard monkey noises

(oooohh oooohhh aaaaahhh ahhhhh!) on the ice and from opponent's benches. I remember

the time I was called a monkey, and told that I wasn't really Black because Blacks don't like

cold weather sports. I also remember the times being called a nigger, and being asked, "what,

you've never been called that before?" These highlight only a few of the incidents where

overt racism influenced my hockey experiences but also reminded me that the sport I love is

filled with racial animosity and discrimination, just like society, even though I would prefer

to think otherwise.

       Over two decades ago Pierre Bourdieu asserted:

> …on the one hand, those who know the most about sport tend not to have the
> inclination or ability to realize its broader social connections and significance
> (athletes, coaches, etc.). While, on the other hand, those who have the
> requisite skills to understand the broader social dimensions tend to ignore or
> dismiss sport as a phenomenon worthy of social scientific investigation of
> serious political consideration. (Hartmann, 2003, pp. 454-455)

       Before attending university and pursuing a Master's degree, I lacked the inclination

and ability to realize the societal connections and significance of sport, but knew a great

amount about sport. As I conclude my Masters work, I feel as though I have acquired the

requisite skills to understand the broader social dimensions of sport as well as the ability to

accept sport as phenomena worthy of scientific investigation. In other words, as a

multicultural individual, I was oblivious to color-blind racism because I too was emerged

within a culture that acted in a completely color-blind manner. My personal reflections and

the knowledge I've gained have led me to consider the relationship between sport and race,

as Douglas Hartmann (2000) does, in that sports are: (a) more complicated and contradictory

than we often think; (b) exist within the ideological structure of a culture that is very racialized; and (c) because of sport's prominence in American culture and sport's own unique racial characteristics, have meaning and consequences that can reproduce or transform racial formations broadly conceived. "This is the essence of what it means to think about sport as contested racial terrain" (Hartmann, 2000, p. 245)

Study Setting

Although overt, public displays of racism are minimal compared to what they were in the pre-Civil Rights era, this does not mean that individuals and groups completely refrain from expressing their prejudice views and xenophobia's in public spaces and particularly in anonymous, online settings. Two incidents involving overt racism towards individual athletes in the NFL and NHL are described next, which have ultimately provided the opportunity to examine how overt racist acts directed towards professional Blacks athletes are perceived and discussed by online sports consumers.

On January 19th, 2014 Richard Sherman, a Black cornerback for the Seattle Seahawks, deflected a touchdown pass intended for Michael Crabtree, a Black wide receiver for the San Francisco 49ers during the 2014 NFL, National Football Conference (NFC) championship game, which ultimately granted the Seahawks a birth to Super Bowl XLVIII. Following Sherman's game winning play and the win, he was interviewed (in the heat of the moment) by Fox Sports reporter Erin Andrews, where he belittled Michael Crabtree about his performance. Sherman later took responsibility and apologized for his remarks, citing that his relationship with Crabtree off the field was turbulent and that added to his behavior during the post-game interview. While no racist incidents occurred on the field of play, this did not keep users of the online social media site Twitter from publicly expressing their racial

animosity towards Richard Sherman. While the extent of the racially oriented tweets (comments) is unknown, many of these tweets along with the commenter's profile information were published online by media outlets in an effort to both expose the extreme racist nature of the comments in addition to publicly shaming individual commenters. A selection of these tweets are provided in Table 1 to give a better understanding of the explicitly racialized sentiment that was expressed about and directed towards Richard Sherman.

A similar incident occurred on May 1st, 2014 involving NHL all-star P.K. Subban, a Black defenseman for the Montreal Canadians, when he scored a game winning, double-overtime goal, giving his respective team a one-game advantage over the Boston Bruins in their best of seven Stanley Cup playoffs series. While Subban was not featured in an interview like Sherman following his game winning performance, and no racist incident occurred on the playing surface, Twitter again exploded and some users expressed their racial animosities towards Subban, who represents the marginal 5% of players who are Black in the National Hockey League (Associated Press, 2014). Some of the racially oriented tweets directed towards P.K. Subban were also published online by news and social media sites which are provided in Table 1 to illuminate the extreme racial resentment of commenters.

In both occurrences, the overtly racist Twitter comments captured the attention of local and national media sources, resulting in the publications of several news stories online that featured interviews with both players. On January 27th and May 4th, 2014, ESPN.com published articles featuring interviews with Richard Sherman and P.K. Subban concerning the racist incidents that occurred through the social media site Twitter.

Table 1. Examples of racist tweets

Athlete/Incident	Examples of Tweets Directed Towards Each Athlete
<u>Richard Sherman</u> **National Football League** **January 19th, 2014**	• *"Richard Sherman just proved you can take the nigger out of the hood but you can't take the nigger out of the nigger."* • *"I hate Richard Sherman man. I don't care where he went to school. He's a fucking nigger."* • *"Richard Sherman is a classless hoodrat piece of shit. Fucking Nigger."* • *"I'm sorry, Richard Sherman is such a fucking nigger. You're an absolute disgrace."* • *"Sherman is the definition of a nigger."* • *"I take that back…Sherman should get lynched* • *"Sherman is still a nigger.. And my cotton still isn't picked."* • *"Sherman's a true nigger especially after that interview."* • *"Richard Sherman = cocky nigger."* • *"Thanks Sherman for providing my children an example of being a nigger."* (Binder, 2014)

Athlete/Incident	Examples of Tweets Directed Towards Each Athlete
<u>P.K. Subban</u> **National Hockey League** **May 1st, 2014**	• *"That stupid nigger doesn't belong in hockey #whitesonly."* • *"FUCK YOU NIGGER SUBBAN YOU BELONG IN A FUCKING HOLE NOT AN ICE RINK."* • *"PK Subban = FUCKING NIGGER."* • *"Fuck PK Subban. Fucking nigger. Wish he got sold."* • *"Subban is the definition of a nigger."* • *"Someone needs to smack PK subban across his big nigger lips. #scumbag."* • *SUBBAN IS A FUCKING PORCH MONKEY* • *"Fuck that stupid monkey #subban."* • *"Fuck you subban you fucking lucky ass nigger!"* • *"Once again, Subban stop being a nigger."* (CBS Detroit, 2014)

Sherman, who is a Stanford graduate, condemned Twitter users for their racist tweets in his interview and expressed how racism is still a problem in the United States and its institutions. In contrast, P.K. Subban dismissed the racist tweets directed towards him, ascribing them to a few ignorant individuals rather than the fan base of the NHL and city of Boston. Accompanying these articles was a section for discussions where readers could comment about the stories and openly voice their reactions and opinions.

The similarity between the cases involving Richard Sherman and P.K. Subban are noticeable in that both athletes demonstrated success in sport and then became the recipients of overt racial aggressions. Both athletes responded publicly about the incidents, albeit in differing manners with dissimilar understandings of the complexity of race in society and sport. The responses that these athletes gave were then published by ESPN.com, where they were commented on and discussed by individuals who accessed the stories through ESPN's home website or their social media news feed. While, the interview responses and articles are of importance, the comments posted about these articles were the focus of this critical content analysis and study. One limitation concerning the incidents described above involving P.K. Subban and Richard Sherman was how each individual athlete reacted to the overt racism that was directed towards them, which could have an effect on how commenters discuss and employ color-blind racism or racial progressiveness in an online setting.

These overtly racist events allowed for an opportunity to observe and account for how color-blind racism manifests itself in online commentary that concerns incidents where Black athletes achieved sporting success and, in doing so, became the targets of disparagement and traditional racism. Moreover, it was important to examine sporting entities with differing

participant racial demographics to reveal the tenet of CRT, which suggests that racism is

present, permanent and widespread in all contemporary social institutions (Hylton, 2010)

In addition, both of these events provided an opportunity to compare two sports with

extremely different racial compositions to ascertain if dissimilarities exist in how the

thematic elements of color-blindness are expressed in the discourses surrounding a sport that

is predominantly composed of White athletes as compared to a sport that is predominantly

comprised of Black participants.

Data Collection and Procedure

Due to the nature of overt racial incidents rarely occurring in public spaces and

professional athletics, it was important to first search for and locate such occurrences. A

primary search on Google using phrases, such as: "racism in professional sports," "racial

incidents involving sport," "racism surrounding athletes," and "recent racist incidents in

sport," revealed that several racial incidents had occurred in the world of sports during 2014

involving fans, owners, and players alike across all professional sporting entities such as the

NFL, NHL, NBA, and European Football. Because previous research has focused largely on

professional sport leagues such as the NBA and NFL, which are primarily composed of

Black athletes, I found it important to locate an incident involving a Black player in a

predominantly White sport for comparative purposes.

Currently the NHL contrasts significantly with the NBA and NFL in player racial

composition. This differential composition, along with my knowledge of and experiences in

the sport of ice hockey, made it seem like a perfect entity for analysis. My search continued

by reviewing incidents of unconcealed racism in the NHL with the hope of being able to pair

such an incident with that of the NFL or NBA. When an article was found on a website

concerning a Black player in the NHL, that same news site was then explored for a similar incident that involved a Black athlete in the NFL or NBA. Two such sites included news stories pertaining to incidents of racism concerning Black athletes form the differing leagues (NHL and NFL); the Huffington Post and ESPN. Because the purpose of the study was to critically investigate discourse, it was of utmost importance that the news site provided a discussion section that allowed for consumer commentary, which both websites did. However, ESPN.com provided a greater amount of consumer commentary for both articles compared to the Huffington Post site, which ultimately would allow for greater content analysis. Moreover, the overt racist incidents and subsequent articles published by ESPN, which were discussed earlier in the "study setting" section, were selected for inquiry because ESPN is the dominant site for online sports consumption and has been used by scholars as a point of examination in past research studies (Sanderson, 2010; Lemke, 2008).

At the time of data collection (prior to analysis), ESPN's message board sections indicated that there were 954 comments in total for both leagues and incidents. Consumer comments on the NHL/Subban related article totaled 488 spanning from May 3rd, through May, 10th, 2014 and the NFL/Sherman article received a total 466 comments from January 26th through January, 31st 2014. To ensure the accuracy of the quantity of comments that were posted a preliminary manual count of all comments was then performed which revealed that, from the original 488 comments on the NHL/Subban article, a total of 429 remained and, for the NFL/Sherman article of the original 466, 381 remained for analysis. Reasons for the discrepancy in count may either be attributed to individuals deleting posts and/or ESPN editing content that was too vulgar or obscene for public display; either way, the reason for this divergence is uncertain.

Having established the exact number of available comments made it was possible to begin coding the comments related to each article. Since racial ideologies are socially constructed racism should not be viewed as an individualistic perpetuation (Bonilla-Silva, 2006). Moreover, because racism is deeply embedded in all institutions and its boundary crossing nature, it seemed appropriate to treat the commentary as a reflection of larger society rather than a single event (Sanderson, 2010). For these reasons each online comment served as a unit of analysis rather than the commenters themselves (Moss-Racusin, Molenda, & Cramer, 2015; Sanderson, 2010). Subsequently it was important to retain the discourse in its original context rather than making the commentary ambiguous and difficult to follow, therefore each remaining comment was given a code (e.g., h001 – h429 for hockey and f001-f381 for football) relevant to where the comment joined the conversation (Cleland, 2014). In addition, coding in this manner provided anonymity and protection because any information that could be connected to the identities of the individual commenters such as screen names and locations was removed. Because of the similarity between the articles and the manageable number of available postings, all comments were considered and used for analysis rather than applying a sampling strategy. Furthermore, a sampling strategy was not employed because the purpose of this examination was not to generalize findings to broader society, rather the purpose was to further empirical analysis of Bonilla-Silva's (2006) color-blind framework and to reveal how racism continues to exist in contemporary society.

After a tally of comments was established, an initial reading of both discussion sections was conducted to remove postings that were either irrelevant to the topic (e.g. "I hate the city of Boston and their fans") or meaningless to the conversation (e.g. "The Seahawks are the best team in the league") ($n = 265$). This preliminary analysis resulted in a

total of (n = 230) P.K. Subban-related comments and (n = 315) Richard Sherman-related comments for a total of (n = 545). Participation in both message board discussions ranged from individuals making 1 comment (n = 341) to 12 comments (n = 1). Table 2 illustrates the participation frequencies in both sets of commentary data.

Table 2. Participant frequencies in responding to ESPN.com articles

Number of Comments	NFL/Sherman	NHL/Subban	Number of People	Number of Comments
1	208	133	341	341
2	12	24	36	72
3	6	7	13	39
4	6	2	8	32
5	2	2	4	20
6	2	0	2	12
7	1	0	1	7
8	0	0	0	0
9	0	0	0	0
10	0	1	1	10
11	0	0	0	0
12	1	0	1	12
Total	238	169	407	545

During this preliminary reading, an attempt was also made to code comments for the sex of the commenter based upon the screen names of commenters associated with their user account merely for comparative purposes with past research that examined online sport's message board demographics and to garner an idea for which gender was most involved in the message board discussions. This procedure yielded 205 male, 17 female, and 8 unknown comments on the NHL/Subban article and 272 male, 12 female and 31 unknown gender comments for the NFL/Sherman article. While these demographics closely coincided with other studies that have investigated racism and sport online (Clavio, 2008), these demographics were inconsequential for the objective of this analysis because racial ideologies are socially constructed and there is no way to know if the names used for profiles were the actual names of commenters. Additionally, the race of commenters was not coded for because of the uncertainty associated with race and the way in which individuals self-identify with a particular race. Moreover, profile images are unreliable in making a racial determination and the struggle against color-blind racism is not only against color-blind Whites but also against "the many color-blind Blacks" (Bonilla-Silva & Forman, 2000) and people of color.

Application of Color-blind Frames

Having created the population, these remaining comments were subjected to a critical, thematic analysis utilizing Bonilla-Silva's (2006) four frames of color-blind racism, which are; abstract liberalism, naturalization, cultural racism; and minimization of racism (Bonilla-Silva, 2006, pp. 25-52). When a comment provided one or more color-blind theme, which was the case in several incidences, the theme(s) was recorded and given a score of "1" for presence and a score of "0" for non-presence of theme(s) (0 = no, 1 = yes) (Love &

Hughey, 2015). No theme was recorded more than once in a single comment. The

NHL/Subban and NFL/Sherman related articles provided ($n = 195$ and $n = 248$) comments,

respectfully. From this point, it was pertinent to examine the prevalence of each theme within

each article so that general comparisons between leagues, players and online commentators

could be made. Moreover the total comments between the two articles that contained color-

blind theme(s) (81% $n = 443$) was similar which could be indicative of how consumers

comment on articles reporting on racism in sports, however, such an assumption and

examination is not the intent of this study nor is the population large enough to make to

generalizations to larger society.

Table 3 provides the function and meaning of each color-blind frame along with

examples from Bonilla-Silva's (2006) analysis in addition to comments that were deducted

from this analysis that contain color-blind ideologies so that a better understanding could be

attained for the types of comments that comprise the individual frames of color-blind racism.

However, it is important to note the major difference that exists between Bonilla-Silva's

examples as compared with the ones employed within this analysis. In Bonilla-Silva's

examination, data was collected from respondents who were in an interview setting where

they were asked specific questions regarding race and racism in society, which were used to

guide respondent's rational and reactions. Whereas this examination focused on responses

that were provoked 'naturally' by racialized incidents and subsequent news articles in an

anonymous setting where beliefs could flow freely without incitement. One limitation with

collecting data in this manner is that many respondents deviate from the topic of racism and

do not provide in-depth reasoning for their ideologies, which can limit the richness of

analysis.

Although the goal of this study was to identify the usage and occurances of color-blind frames, it was also important to code for comments that both aknowledged racism and condemed society, rather than individual racists perpetrators. Comments that recognized the existence of racism and racial injustice not only will reveal the overal sentiment within the commentary data, but will also illuminate how individuals and groups can overcome the color-blind ideology and be critical of contemporary society and American social intitutions.

Ethical Considerations and Trustworthiness

Although no human participants were involved in this study, the human subjects research training course, which is required by Iowa State University's Internal Review Board was completed to ensure the ethical treatment of participants had any been involved. Furthermore, any and all information associated with a commenter's online user profile was removed before applying the coding instrument and not included in the analysis. This guaranteed user anonymity and privacy because none of the information that was provided or kept for examination could be traced back to an individual commenter.

Table 3. Four frames of color-blind racism

Color-blind Frame	Meaning/Function	Bonilla-Silva Example	Commenter Examples
Abstract Liberalism	"Involves using ideas associated with political liberalism (e.g., ''equal opportunity,'' the idea that force should not be used to achieve social policy) and economic liberalism (e.g., choice, individualism) in an abstract manner to explain racial matters" (Bonilla-Silva, 2006, p. 28).	*"I don't think that they should be provided with unique opportunities. I think that they should have the same opportunities as everyone else. You know, it's up to them to meet the standards and whatever that's required for entrance into universities or whatever. I don't think that just because they're a minority that they should, you know, not meet the requirements, you know." – (p.31)*	*"Great example of everything that's wrong with this country, zero accountability or responsibility. Say whatever you want and then somehow spin it to where you are the victim, or everyone else has the problem. Don't want to work? No problem, we got you. Can't afford health care but you can afford an iPhone? No problem, we got you." – f348*
Naturalization	"Allows whites to explain away racial phenomena by suggesting they are natural occurrences" (Bonilla-Silva, 2006, p. 28).	*"You know, people group together for lots of different reasons: social, religious. Just as animals in the wild, you know. Elephants group together, cheetahs group together. You bus a cheetah into an elephant herd because they should mix? You can't force that [laughs]." – (p.38)*	*"Sorry but stereotypes are still true to this day. Who's been doing all the gang rapes of women on college campuses across America? Vandy, Missouri... etc... Here's a hint....it's the same "culture" that teaches its cool 2 run trains on women. This is why over 20 of em raped a 11 yr. old Hispanic girl in Texas. Little brains, even less morals." – f254*
Cultural Racism	"Relies on culturally based arguments such as ''Mexicans do not put much emphasis on education'' or ''blacks have too many babies'' to explain the standing of minorities in society" (Bonilla-Silva, 2006, p. 28).	*"The majority of 'em just don't strive to do anything, to make themselves better. Again, I've seen that all the way through. ''I do this today, I'm fine, I'm happy with it, I don't need anything better.'' Never, never, never striving or giving extra to, to make themselves better." – (p.42)*	*"You can take the man out of the city but you can't take the city out of the man." – f171* *"Thank you P.K. I guess hockey players are just much more intelligent and much less ignorant than NBA players." – h284*
Minimization of Racism	"Suggests discrimination is no longer a central factor affecting minorities' life chances" (Bonilla-Silva, 2006, p. 29).	*"I think if people act responsible they will not be discriminated against. People who are acting irresponsible, in other words, demanding things, ah, ''I need this'' or ''You did this because of my skin color'' yeah, then they will be discriminated against. People who are intelligent present themselves in a manner that is appropriate for the situation and will not be discriminated against.to." – (p.47)*	*"Ignorance is when racism is only reported when its white people doing it, apparently it doesn't matter how much racism white people, Asians and Mexicans get from others. There is not an Al Sharpton or Jesse Jackson for other races." – h135* *We're half way through 2014, and you people still can't get past racism. Why? Because the powers that be, don't want you to. The sooner you realize that, the better off you'll be." – h420*

CHAPTER 4. FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

The findings of this qualitative content analysis revealed the presence of the color-blind ideology associated with a seemingly utopian, contemporary American institution. This section presents commenter data in relation to Bonilla-Silva's (2006) four frames of color-blind racism in an attempt to display how the "new" form of racism perpetuates and remains prevalent in discussions involving race and sport in an apparently anonymous environment. Moreover, this section compares the thematic color-blind outcomes associated with both of the individual articles as they relate to their respective sport. In addition, a summation of all commentary data points from both articles are provided to shed light on the usage of the color-blind racial ideology and its four frames, as they pertain to internet discussions regarding race and sport. According to Bonilla-Silva:

> These frames are central to the views of Whites, young and old and serve them as an interpretive matrix from where to extract arguments to explain a host of racial issues. More significantly, together these frames form an impregnable yet elastic wall that barricades Whites from the United States' racial reality. (Bonilla-Silva, 2006, p. 47)

Overall, a total of 545 comments were coded: 230 statements came from the NHL/Subban article and 315 came from the NFL/Sherman article. Of the 545 comments that were coded, 443 (81%) contained color-blind racial frames, 195 (36%) of which came from the NHL/Subban related article and 248 (45%) from the NFL/Sherman article. In total 102 (19%) comments contained ideals of racial progressiveness and acknowledgment of racism. 35 (7%) of these progressive comments were deducted from the NHL/Subban article and 67 (12%) were identified in the NFL/Sherman article commentary. A summary of these findings are provided in Table 4.

Table 4. Total color-blind frames and racial progressiveness by sport (*N*=545)

Frames	NFL		NHL		Total	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Color-blind	248	45	195	36	443	81
Racial progressiveness	67	12	35	7	102	19

Hypothesis 1 stated that color-blind racial discourse would be present in both sets of consumer commentary regardless of the sport and its racial composition. The findings support Hypothesis 1 in that both sets of consumer commentary revealed color-blind racial discourse. Of the total 545 comments coded, 81% contained frames of color-blind racism, 195 of which came from the NHL/Subban related article and 248 from the NFL/Sherman article.

Hypothesis 2 stated that the total prevalence and use of color-blind racial discourse would be similar among the NFL and NHL related article commentary. Hypothesis 2 was supported. Of the 230 comments coded in the NHL/Subban related article, 85% (*n* = 195*)* contained color-blind frames and of the 315 NFL/Sherman related comments, 79% (*n* = 248) contained color-blind ideologies. These anticipated findings aided in testing and supporting Hypothesis 3.

Hypothesis 3 specified that the overall consumer commentary would contain more racialized sentiment and color-blind discourse than acknowledgment and condemnation of racism in contemporary sport and society. Hypothesis 3 was supported. Of the 545 comments that were valid for coding, 81% (*n* = 443) contained color-blind discourse which was significantly greater than the 19% (*n* = 102) of comments that contained ideals associated

with racial progressiveness and acknowledgment of racism in society and the institution of sport. Table 5 provides a detailed breakdown of the color-blind frames and instances of racial progressiveness that existed in each set of consumer commentary that were deducted from critical, thematic color-blind content analysis.

Table 5. Deployment of color-blind frames and racial progressiveness by sport

Frames	NFL		NHL		Total	
	$N = 315$		$N = 230$		$N = 545$	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Abstract liberalism	7	2	4	2	11	2
Naturalization	6	2	5	2	11	2
Cultural racism	64	20	31	13	95	17
Minimization of racism	171	54	155	67	326	61
Total color-blind	248	79	195	85	443	81
Racial progressiveness	67	21	35	15	102	19

$X^2 = 10.2$, $df = 4$, $p = .037$

Abstract Liberalism

A central frame of color-blind racism is abstract liberalism, which Bonilla-Silva (2006) describes as "…the use of ideas associated with political and economic liberalism in an abstract manner to explain racial matters" (p. 28). According to critical race theory and the colorblind ideology abstract liberalism is employed by Whites to justify ideals such as equal opportunity and individualism in an attempt to appear concerned about racial inequalities while at the same time ignoring the greater complexities of the post-Civil Rights era racial environment (Bonilla-Silva, 2006).

Content analysis of both sets of data revealed the presence of abstract liberalism, though it was minimal. In total 2% ($n = 4$) of the color-blind comments employed in the NHL/Subban article and 2% ($n = 7$) of color-blind comments found in the NFL/Sherman data set employed abstract liberalism. Between both sets of consumer commentary the frame of abstract liberalism comprised 2% ($n =11$) of the total color-blind ideology usage found in article comments. Furthermore, abstract liberalism was never used singularly within a comment, rather it was always paired with another theme to provide evidence or justification for a statements reasoning. These findings did not support Hypothesis 4, which stated that abstract liberalism would be the most frequently used color-blind frame to explain and justify racial issues and inequality surrounding each athlete and sport related incident.

While Hypothesis 4 was not supported, abstract liberalism was still considered to be an important frame for further exploration in regard to how it was employed within commentary when reacting to incidents of racism in sports. Individualism and expressions of equal opportunity were used in comments to convey racial animosities and beliefs about race relationships in contemporary society and social institutions. The importance of this frame is evident in that it is used for issues ranging from affirmative action and interracial relationships to residential segregation and societal privileges (Bonilla-Silva, 2006). One comment stated:

> *This is all so crazy! This should have never become a Black and White issue. Blacks can have their own T.V. shows, their own magazines, their own clothing lines, and many others I cannot even think of. Let us have a White Entertainment Television and there would be rioting in the streets. Now that is a double standard.* – f039

In this example, the comment expressed and emphasized the predominant myth about Blacks being afforded several advantages and opportunities compared to Whites in society while at

the same time negating the fact of the overwhelming privileges and power afforded to

Whites. Moreover, this comment expressed resentment for the achievements of Blacks while

ignoring the social, political and economic barriers that have influenced the life opportunities

and outcomes of Blacks throughout American history and modern times. This comment

contends that it is a *"double standard"* for Blacks to be allowed to have exclusively Black

entities such as Black Entertainment Television (BET). However, the fact that BET is owned

by media conglomerate Viacom is ignored, whose brand portfolio consists of 4 media

networks and 18 related brands which includes: Country Music Television (CMT), Comedy

Central, MTV, Spike, Nickelodeon, VH1, and TVland, among others, none of which are

solely dedicated to peoples of color other than BET (Blacks), CENTRIC (Blacks &

multicultural individuals), and Tr3s (Latinos & bicultural individuals) (Viacom Brands,

2015). The popular mythology about the unfair advantages afforded to people of color

serves to perpetuate popular stereotypes while at the same time denying white privilege

(Zamudio & Rios, 2006).

   Another comment provided several abstract examples in an effort to deny the unequal

treatment of Blacks while at the same time promoting liberally progressive ideals of

individualism, egalitarianism and equal opportunity:

> *Boston/Massachusetts tends to be one of the most progressive, non-racist*
> *regions in the U.S.: (1) Voted in and currently has a Black Governor (Deval*
> *Patrick). (2) First (and only state) to establish UNIVERSAL health care. (3) Became*
> *the 6th jurisdiction in the WORLD to legalize same-sex marriage. (4) First Black*
> *player ever (Willie O'Ree) played for the Boston Bruins. (5) The Boston Celtics' very*
> *first icon was none other than Bill Russell. (6)The most beloved player to ever play*
> *for the Red Sox over the past 30 years is easily David Ortiz. (7) Some of the greatest*
> *Patriots ever were black. (8) The Kennedys, the greatest political party ever, were*
> *from Massachusetts and heavily supported racial integration. (9) First NBA team to*
> *ever draft a black player (Chuck Cooper, 1950). – h202*

This comment, like the aforementioned example, ignores the historical and contemporary discrimination that effects the social and economic status of Blacks in society. Although this comment provided several examples of racial reformism and equality, it undermines the fact that Blacks are severely underrepresented in several aspects of society such as high paying jobs, universities, and select sports (Bonilla-Silva, 2006). Furthermore, this example relies on the social "success" of a limited number of Black athletes (Willie O'ree, Ortiz, Russel, Cooper) and the contributions of a few White racial progressives (the Kennedys) to support the argument of Massachusetts tending *"to be one of the most progressive, non-racist regions in the U.S."* By generalizing incidents of racial progress in an abstractly liberal manner to a single region and a few individuals, the magnitude of racial inequality that was endured (and still is) and overcome so that these achievements could be attained by Blacks becomes greatly ignored and taken for granted. Furthermore, believing that a few racially progressive moments constitute an ideology of universal racial tolerance conflicts with CRT and denies the need for further inquiry and discussions that could be used to promote greater racial fairness and social improvement.

Another comment employed abstract liberalism in response to a previous comment that condemned racism by declaring:

> *All you're doing is following the popular belief that anything making fun of a person that is black is racist. Finding humor in a person who is black is not racist. Finding humor in someone because they are Black is racist. Keep sitting there, flowing with popular belief and supporting your ignorant use of terms with nonsense. Remember, if everyone always went with the popular belief, slavery wouldn't have ever been abolished.* – h026

This comment attempted to describe the actions that institutes racism and what does not, but no significantly grounded evidence is provided to support the argument other than abstractly

stating, *"if everyone always went with the popular belief, slavery wouldn't have ever been abolished."* In this case, the popular belief refers to racism still being prevalent in contemporary society and by believing that racism still exists only perpetuates racism further which contends with the predominant ideology of sports and society provided in previous sections. This comment's reliance on the abolishment of slavery ignores the fact that the abolishment of slavery was not an initial objective of the Civil War; rather the goal was to preserve the United States as a nation. The abolishment of slavery came later due to military necessity (History.com Staff, 2009). By enacting the Emancipation Proclamation, the Union was able to deprive the Confederacy of the majority of its labor force (slaves), which in turn allowed the Union to increase its military strength by enlisting roughly 186,000 Black soldiers (History.com Staff, 2009). Although 4 million Blacks were freed from slavery with the Union's victory, slavery has still continued to influence American history and the life chances of Blacks through the Civil Rights movement of the 1960's and into modern-day society where Blacks are still discriminated against and socially restricted by the color of their skin and color-blind racism (Bonilla-Silva, 2006).

Naturalization

Another frame of color-blind racism is naturalization, "…which allows Whites (and Blacks) to explain away racial phenomena by suggesting they are natural occurrences" (Bonilla-Silva, 2006, p. 28). Naturalization allows race related issues and discrepancies to be viewed as normal and biologically driven rather than sociologically constructed as CRT suggests, which reinforces the belief of racism being non-existent and or normal phenomena in society (Sanderson, 2010; Bonilla-Silva, 2006).

The frame of naturalization was present in both sets of article consumer commentary; however, like abstract liberalism, this presence was negligible and was only used in conjunction with another frame of color-blind racism. Of the total comments related to the P.K. Subban article, there were $n = 5$ (2%) instances of naturalization which was similar to the results deducted from the Richard Sherman data set ($n = 6$, 2%). In total, naturalization, like abstract liberalism, was the least utilized frame and constituted 2% ($n = 11$) of the total color-blind discourse that was deducted from thematic content analysis. These findings supported Hypothesis 5, which suggested that the frame of naturalization would be the least utilized frame amongst both sets of article commentary. Although comments utilized the frame of naturalization sparingly these occurrences provided important insights into how this frame is employed in response to evidence and accusations of racism in sport and society. One comment indicated:

> *Yes the word Thug has racial underlying...But remember who pushes the Thug mentality the Thug image? It's the rap world "THUG LIFE". So yes, the word thug is used more for young black men than other races but that is because Black America labels its youth through pop culture as thug. This by no means tries to say there is not racism in America there is and it goes both ways. The main reason people reacted poorly to Richard Sherman was because he came off as classless. Not because of races. If u want to use race go look at the college football player who was shot running towards police asking for help after a car accident. That was a race issue."* – f304

This comment used naturalization in combination with other frames of color-blind racism to express the standing and stereotypical perception of Blacks in contemporary society. While all of the frames within this comment will be exposed, the frame of naturalization will be discussed in greater depth. To begin this comment uses naturalization to make the labeling of Blacks as *"Thugs"* seem natural for society when they argue; *"Yes the word Thug has racial underlying...But remember who pushes the Thug mentality the Thug image? It's the rap*

world "THUG LIFE". So yes, the word thug is used more for young Black men than other races but that is because Black America labels its youth through pop culture as thug." This comment makes the labeling of all *"young Black men"* as *"thugs"* seem natural because *"the rap world "THUG LIFE""* (Blacks) and Black culture provoke and foster the *"Thug mentality"* and *"Thug image."* This reasoning moderates and allows events and actions that could be considered racially motivated (Richard Sherman being labeled a thug and receiving racist tweets) to seem normal or naturally occurring. By adopting this frame, users become further disillusioned about the myth and extent in which events in the social world "naturally" occur which intensely differs from the principles of CRT. This comment also attempts to acknowledge the existence of racism today but at the same time minimizes the magnitude of racism by stating that, *"This by no means tries to say there is not racism in America there is."* This statement implies that racism is present in society; however, it also believes that racism *"goes both ways"* essentially meaning that Blacks are just as racist as Whites, which ignores the extreme racial inequality that Blacks have faced throughout American history and the discrimination that they still face in contemporary society. Furthermore, this comment suggests there could be no other reason for how people reacted to Richard Sherman other than *"he came off as classless"* and not because of his race, even though extremely overt racist tweets and comments were directed towards Sherman. This argument, along with contending that racism goes both ways, minimizes the amount and effects of racism directed towards people of color in society. This comment further minimizes racism by attempting to describe what constitutes racism, *"If u want to use race go look at the college football player who was shot running towards police asking for help after a car accident. That was a race issue."* Ascribing racism to only macro-level

occurrences negates the many micro-aggressions of racism faced by Blacks in their everyday lives and clashes with CRT, which posits that racism is deeply rooted in culture and all societal institutions and affects the lives of Blacks and people and color. According to CRT naturalization also denies the fact that race, racism, and institutions in America are socially constructed and grant Whites several privileges that are not afforded to Blacks and people of color, such as educational opportunities, high paying jobs, and increased athletic training for professional sports achievements. The frame of naturalization creates an extreme misconception about Blacks and their position in society by contending that Blacks naturally choose to be labeled as *"thugs,"* live in ghettoized neighborhoods, attend primarily Black schools and group only with others of their same race (Bonilla-Silva, 2006).

Cultural Racism

A third frame of color-blind racism is cultural racism, which "…relies on culturally based arguments to explain the standing of minorities in society" (Bonilla-Silva, 2006, p. 28). Rather than naturalizing or making biological arguments about groups, cultural explanations are made for the standing and choices of Blacks and people of color in society (Bonilla-Silva, 2006).

Hypothesis 6 stated that the frame of cultural racism would be highly used among both sets of article commentary (more than naturalization but less than abstract liberalism). Hypothesis 6 was not supported by the findings. Although cultural racism was not employed in the amount anticipated in Hypothesis 6, it was the second most prevalent theme in both commentary data sets. Moreover, the frame of cultural racism was employed more often than naturalization, which was expected, and abstract liberalism, which was not expected. Content analysis revealed that cultural racism was present in 13% ($n = 31$) of the comments

concerning P.K. Subban and 20% ($n = 64$) of the comments pertaining to Richard Sherman. Overall cultural racism constituted 17% of all online consumer commentary and was used $n = 95$ times in an effort to rationalize discrimination and racial inequality in contemporary American society.

One comment employed the frame of cultural racism by expressing: *"You can take the man out of the city but you can't take the city out of the man." –* f171. In this example the comment essentially concludes that *"the man"* (Blacks) can overcome *"the city"* (impoverished areas) but they cannot overcome the cultural aspects that are inherently associated with disadvantaged city life, such as poverty, crime, and drug usage. Rather than relying on biological arguments for the standing of Blacks in society, this comment asserts that Black culture is deficient and creates deficient individuals who cannot overcome their cultural influences even when achieving great success. Furthermore, this comment ignores the notion of intersectionality and anti-essentialism in that Richard Sherman is not only an NFL star but also a philanthropist who became the first individual in over 20 years to qualify for both athletic and academic merits to attend Stanford University where he graduated with a 3.9 GPA in Communications (Friz Martin Management, 2015).

Another comment expressed the same sentiment towards Richard Sherman, however, in a greatly overt manner: *"Really we're going to make this jerk out to be a good guy? All this proves is even when a black guy makes it through Harvard he still acts like, well, a n*****" –* f150. This comment is critical of Sherman's accusations of racism that were publicly directed towards him by declaring, "we're going to make this jerk out to be a good guy?" Moreover, like the example previously discussed, this comment believes and expresses that Blacks, regardless of their social achievements are still culturally deficient and less than

Whites by referring to Richard Sherman as *"a n*****."* This commenter also attempts to diminish or minimize their racist position by stating *"acts like"* rather than outright saying "is", *"well, a n*****."*

Additionally one comment on the NHL/Subban article proclaimed: *"Wait! Why isn't the NHL using this act of racism to promote their playoffs! Oh wait that's the NBA... My bad."* – h099. This comment reveals the belief that the NBA (Blacks) uses racist acts directed towards them as a resource of promotion, which basically means that Black culture attempts to profit off of inequality and racism by using it as an excuse to "…hide the central reason(s) why they are behind Whites in society" (Bonilla-Silva, 2006, p. 41). Essentially this comment is stating that Black culture is fundamentally lazy, rather than working for their achievements, and Blacks depend on rare occurrences of racism to accomplish their goals. Furthermore, by asking *"Why isn't the NHL using this act of racism to promote their playoffs"* is counterintuitive because of the racial composition of the NHL and privileges afforded to Whites in both the NBA (owners) and NHL (owners and players).

Lastly, one comment used the frame of cultural racism in combination with the frame of minimization of race when stating:

> *How is the word "thug" racist? I've referred to more punk white kids as thugs than black kids. More of this playing victim trash coming from left-wingers. Sherman isn't a thug. He is just a loudmouth who doesn't think before he speaks. He is skilled, but he should just shut up like LeBron learned to do. When he does that, he will deserve respect as an individual and not just a skilled athlete. – f147*

This comment begins by questioning the term "thug" by arguing how the term is personally used in referring to individuals, *"I've referred to more punk white kids as thugs than black kids."* By doing this the comment is able to minimize the effects of racism and the

connotation associated with the word *"thug"* as it was directed towards Richard Sherman and how it is reserved for Black culture as indicated by earlier examples. Additionally, this comment blames the victim (blacks) for their racialized treatment by exclaiming, *"More of this playing victim trash coming from left-wingers."* This part of the comment is of great importance because not only does the comment code Blacks as *"left-wingers"* rather than just saying Blacks, but a cultural statement is also made about Blacks playing the victim card, which is an important component of the cultural racism frame, when racism or other isms surface and are contested by sufferers. Moreover, this comment attempts to cover up the racial resentment towards Richard Sherman by claiming, *"Sherman isn't a thug. He is just a loudmouth who doesn't think before he speaks."* This concealment essentially says that Sherman may not be a thug but he is still infected by the 'negatives' associated with Black culture even though he overcame the many socioeconomic barriers ascribed to Blacks in society.

While this may not appear to be the strongest of evidence of cultural racism initially, the point is made stronger when the commenter states, *"He is skilled, but he should just shut up like LeBron learned to do. When he does that, he will deserve respect as an individual and not just a skilled athlete."* What this comment is actually saying is that Richard Sherman should learn to rid himself of his cultural deficiencies (speaking out against racism, and speaking in general) and comply with the expectations of White society. For this commenter it is not okay for a Black individual to be outspoken in social or athletic settings. Furthermore, this comment's comparison to another Black athlete (LeBron James) solidifies the argument and stance. This is because there are plenty of outspoken White athletes that could have been chosen as an example for contrast, however, it was a conscious decision to

choose another Black athlete for comparison purposes, which, implies that the issue of speaking out is not just Richard Sherman's problem but also an overall problem within Black culture. In addition, this comment concludes that for a Black man to gain respect they must not speak out and do things the right (White) way if they are to overcome their associated cultural stereotypes.

Minimization of Racism

The last ideological frame of color-blind racism is minimization of racism, which suggests: "…discrimination is no longer a central factor affecting minorities' life chances" (Bonilla-Silva, 2006, p. 29). According to the color-blind ideology and CRT minimization of racism allows Whites to accept the fact that racism exists while at the same time it allows them to downplay the role of race and the extent of racial injustice in society (Bonilla-Silva, 2006).

The minimization of racism frame was the most predominantly used color-blind ideology within both sets of online consumer commentary. Between the NHL/Subban and NFL/Sherman articles, minimization of racism was present in 61% of all comments analyzed and appeared a total of $n = 326$ times. These findings did not support Hypothesis 7, which speculated that the frame of minimization of racism would be the third most used color-blind frame, and employed in high amounts (similar to cultural racism). However, the minimization of racism frame was actually the most prevalent frame used amongst both sets of consumer commentary and was employed in greater amounts than the other three color-blind frames combined.

Hypothesis 8 stated that minimization of racism would be more prevalent in NFL/Sherman related comments as compared to NHL/Subban article related comments.

Hypothesis 8 was not supported. Of the 315 comments examined in the NFL/ Sherman article, minimization of racism comprised 54% of all comments and was present in $n = 171$ observations.

Hypothesis 8a stated that the frame of minimization of racism would be more prevalent in NHL/Subban related comments as compared to NFL/Sherman article related comments. Hypothesis 8a was supported. The NHL/Subban article contained $n = 155$ comments that utilized the frame of minimization of racism. While the total usage of minimization of racism was smaller in quantity for the NHL/Subban article compared to the NFL/Sherman article, of the 230 comments in the NHL/Subban commentary that were examined, 67% of these employed minimization of racism.

Several comments employed the minimization of racism frame to downplay the extent and effects of racism in contemporary society and sport contesting CRT, which contends that racism is prevelant and deeply rooted in all societal institutions (Myers & Williamson, 2001). One comment relied on the minimization of racism frame by stating:

> *I have played 18 years of hockey, I have played with multiple black players, I have never heard any teammate or fan make any sort of racial slur. The bottoms line is racism isn't dead, BUT we have come light years from where we were as a nation. The day racism dies is the day evil dies and that's not going to happen anytime soon. We cannot allow 1 or 2 scumbags to label us as racist! They are just sick people who need help!* – h402

This example begins by illustrating what Bonilla-Silva (2006) calls a "discursive buffer" (p.57) when the commenter explains, *"I have played 18 years of hockey, I have played with multiple black players, I have never heard any teammate or fan make any sort of racial slur."* Discursive buffers are used before or after an individual states something that could be interpreted as racist. Using personal evidence of experience with Blacks and hockey fans

(who are predominantly White), this comment is able to minimize the notion of CRT which acknowledges racism as prevalent, socially constructed, and institutionalized in American culture. While this comment acknowledges that *"racism isn't dead,"* it minimizes the micro-aggressions and covert racism that Blacks still face by asserting *"we have come light years from where we were as a nation,"* which disagrees with the significance of race being a significant factor in explaining the inclusive standing of Blacks and their treatment in society.

Furthermore, this example states, *"The day racism dies is the day evil dies and that's not going to happen anytime soon."* Rather than attributing racism to society, this comment characterizes racism as something that is innately unworldly and not something that can be controlled by individuals and groups, even though race and racism are socially constructed according to CRT and perpetuated by color-blind racial discourse. In addition, this comment employs the common tactical maneuver of blaming Blacks for making situations racist that should not be when asserting, *"We cannot allow 1 or 2 scumbags to label us as racist! They are just sick people who need help!"* Initially this comment argued that racism in ice hockey is negligible and virtually nonexistent, however, in this instance out right offense is taken to victims, the one or two *"scumbags"* (Blacks) that point out racism being an issue in sport and society. Overall, this comment discursively attempts to minimize racism while at the same time maintaining power and perpetuating White society's negative racial views.

Another comment employed minimization of racism in combination with cultural racism to support the interpretation of events:

> *Over sensitivity? Not understanding multiple viewpoints? Here's one for you.*
> *There is a VICTIMS mentality that exists in the black communities. Point the*
> *finger at anyone or anything to blame for their circumstances. That's just*
> *what Richard Sherman did. Blame somebody else. Take responsibility and*
> *then do something about it. Quit blaming others. Sherman has done well for*

himself. I applaud him. Instead of blaming others do something about it. –
f199

This comment begins by maintaining, *"There is a VICTIMS mentality that exists in the Black communities. Point the finger at anyone or anything to blame for their circumstances. That's just what Richard Sherman did. Blame somebody else."* This is a prime example of how a Black individual (the victim) pointing out racism becomes an issue for Whites who believe that racism is no longer as big of an issue as it was in the past. Moreover, this comment associates the *"victims mentality"* with the entire Black community (cultural racism), even when racism is overtly evident. Rather than showing any kind of empathy for Blacks, this comment feels that Blacks should *"take responsibility"* for their position in society and then *"do something about it."* This stance ignores the societal limitations of Blacks in overcoming their situation in the racial and social hierarchy, which are perpetuated by predominant racial ideologies and the need to maintain power (Delgado & Stefanic, 2012). Lastly, in an attempt to save face, this example complements Sherman for doing *"well for himself,"* but still feels that *"instead of blaming others"* for the racial slurs that Sherman received, he should *"do something about it."* What is ironic about this is the fact that Richard Sherman spoke out about racism, however, in doing so, he was criticized and it was conceived that rather than racism being the fault of broader social powers it became the fault of Richard Sherman, the victim.

Another comment employed minimization of racism and blamed the victim for the racist tweets that they received:

Sherman is "classless". Is it ok for me to say that? Is it racist? Don't care.
He's classless. He had an emotional outburst, which I get. Football is played
with great emotion. But instead of taking responsibility, he spins it into a

> *racial thing. Really people? Blame the "white man". Like I had anything to do with his "classless" outburst. Blame me. It's all my fault. Pathetic. – f197*

This example begins by criticizing Richard Sherman and labeling him as *"classless"* rather than using a derogatory term, which Bonilla-Silva (2006) refers to as "racism without racial epithets" (p. 55) because the ideology of color-blind racism leaves little room for Whites to label people of color with terms that could be considered racist (Bonilla-Silva, 2006). It could be argued that being labeled *"classless"* alone does not constitute racism, however, when this comment is examined further it becomes evident that this comment does possess racial animosities when it states, *"Is it ok for me to say that? Is it racist? Don't care. He's classless."*

Furthermore, an attempt is made to empathize with Sherman when the comment declares, *"He had an emotional outburst, which I get. Football is played with great emotion,"* which is actually an attempt to save face (buffer) and minimize racial attitudes. In addition, this comment blames the victim for the racial comments that were directed towards them when they exclaim, *"instead of taking responsibility, he spins it into a racial thing. Really people?"* Like the examples provided before, this comment believes that Blacks don't take responsibility for their standing in society. This confuses and undermines the responsibilities of Blacks and Black culture. Are Blacks not supposed to have sports related outbursts? Are Blacks not supposed to speak out against racism and racially charged actions of Whites? To conclude this comment attempts to argue that Blacks makes things racial that are in fact not when they express, *"Blame the "white man". Like I had anything to do with his "classless" outburst. Blame me. It's all my fault. Pathetic."* This statement not only blames Blacks for their treatment in society but also attempts to use Sherman's critique of the racial

status quo against him and the Black community as a whole, which negates racial inequality, minimizes racism, and preserves White privilege in doing so.

Racial Progressiveness

Bonilla-Silva (2006) explains that "most whites in the United States rely on the ideology of color-blind racism to articulate their views, present their ideas, and interpret interactions with people of color" (p. 131). The frames of color-blind racism and their usage aid Whites in normalizing racially motivated incidents, blaming Black's for their standing in the social hierarchy, minimizing the occurrences and effects of racism in contemporary culture, and, most importantly preserving, White power and privilege (Bonilla-Silva, 2006). However, this does not mean that all Whites subscribe to the frames and racial narratives associated with color-blind racism. In fact, several Whites have contributed a tremendous amount to racial equality in the United States, not only in the past, but also in modern times. Bonilla-Silva (2006) labels these individuals as "White racial progressives" (p. 131) in that these individuals recognize the significance of racial injustice and discrimination in American society. Thematic analysis revealed that of the 545 comments coded, 19% ($n = $ 102) of these observations contained ideals of racial progressiveness. In reference to Hypothesis 3, which was supported and discussed earlier, this section provides examples of how racial progressives contend color-blind racism and racial inequality in contemporary American society. One comment stated:

> *You better believe they see it (race) when Ortiz hits a jack... they'd still rather see it from Napoli or Pedroia. Boston sports fans are awful. Enjoy those recent bought and paid for NHL, NBA and MLB championships, just don't let the aftertaste of hypocrisy spoil them too much.*– h068

This comment realizes and accepts the salience of race in contemporary society by noting that *"Boston sports fans are awful"* in that, they see race when Ortiz (a Black Dominican baseball player for the Red Sox) hits a home run, but these same fans would rather see *"Napoli or Pedroia"* (White players for the Red Sox) hit that same home run. Additionally, this comment acknowledges the hypocrisy ascribed to sports fans in how their "support" for Black athletes like Ortiz is insincere and only exists when the accomplishments of these individuals contributes to the success of White consumer's prized sports franchises.

Another comment responded to racially insensitive remarks by stating:

No, I have a lifetime full of laughing at the way white people love it when a black man meekly responds to bigotry because it makes them so happy knowing that there will never be any kind of organized or significant response. What do you have?"– h241

This comment understands how White privilege operates and remains dominant in contemporary society in that there is a comprehension of the material awards afforded to Whites when a Black individual (P.K. Subban) downplays or *"meekly responds to bigotry"* directed towards them. Moderating the extent and occurrences of racism in sport and society not only negates the need for discussions and actions that could be engaged to bring about greater social equality but also allows Whites to believe that racism is not as big of an issue as it really is. In essence, this comment points out the color-blind frame of minimization of racism that is used in contemporary society to deny the effects and extent of racism perpetrated against Blacks and people of color. In addition, this comment acknowledges how Blacks can also minimize the effects and occurrences of racism in society and sports, which contributes to the predominant ideology of racism in society because it strengthens the myth

about race and racism being irrelevant to the life opportunities and outcomes of groups and individuals.

This next comment bluntly acknowledges that the United States and its citizens are not exempt from racism and racialized actions when responding to a previous comment: *"Dude I'm not from Montreal, not a Canadians fan, and not even from Canada. Americans are not as innocent as they appear especially Northeastern Americans."* – h247. While this comment may not completely understand the systemic nature of racism in contemporary society, it does attempt to dispel the predominant ideology of racism being nonexistent in American society and sport, which is a starting point for antiracist ideologies and actions.

Another comment addresses the problem of racism in sports as well by recognizing the existence of racism in society as well as how social media has become a platform for individuals to express their racial animosities towards Blacks in a seemingly, anonymous and private environment which is in fact very public:

> *Same thing happened to Aaron Ward for the Caps. Twitter gives a voice to racist idiots who normally hide under rocks and only come out when minorities are elected president or score playoff goals. Also Dude, let's not forget the Richard Sherman incident. He's a bad influence and a thug? No, you're all just racist.* – h273

What is interesting about this example is that the comment identifies how other Black professional hockey players such as Joel Ward (NHL athlete) have been the recipients of racially charged attacks in addition to Black athletes (Richard Sherman) in other professional sports being discriminated against by sports consumers. Likewise, this comment recognizes the racialized labeling of Richard Sherman and by providing examples of prejudice in other sports reveals how racism is embedded and transpires regularly in sports, which coincides with critical race theory and the scholarly critique of sport.

In addition, one racial progressive's response to a previous comment exclaims:

> *"Actually it is fair to point the finger, and it should be done. They may be passionate, but passion is no excuse for ignorance, bigotry, or racism. It's not just Bruins fans though, sadly."* – h372

For this comment directing the blame or *"point(ing) the finger"* at racists *"should be done"* because they feel that there *"is no excuse for ignorance, bigotry, or racism"* in society regardless of what might have provoked such actions. Moreover, this example acknowledges that racism does not occur in isolated incidents nor is racism reserved for select groups such as *"Bruins fans."* By conceding that discrimination and bigotry extends beyond singular individuals and groups this comment addresses the predominance and permanence of racism in contemporary American society, which aligns with principles of critical race theory.

To conclude, one racially progressive comment expressed how the media has aided in creating negative imagery of Black athletes, specifically Richard Sherman, by comparing Sherman's incident with that of Richie Incognito, a White NFL football player who was voted by his peers as the dirtiest player in the NFL in 2009 and who intensely harassed a fellow teammate in 2013 (Darlington, 2012):

> *We're not talking about twitter followers; we're talking about the media. The overwhelming conversation about Incognito was labeling him primarily a bully, and secondarily a racist. The overwhelming conversation in the media regarding Richard Sherman has been the word "thug." If you want to keep talking about twitter and Facebook comments, look no further than Sherman's mentions. The racism is not veiled with coded language there.* – h010

Not only does this comment express how the media creates negative racialized imagery of Black athletes, which coincides with past research, but it also illuminates the primary focus of this study, which is color-blind racism. This comment highlights the issue with color-blind

racism in that it is discursive and covert when stating, *"racism is not veiled with coded language there"* in reference to the overtly racialized Twitter comments directed towards Richard Sherman through social media. In closing, this comment acknowledges the differential treatment of Blacks in the media along with the principle of critical race theory, which concedes that racism is still present, prevalent, and permanently situated in contemporary American society, which contests' the predominant ideology of racism being infrequent (Hylton, 2010).

CHAPTER 5. SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

This study examined the "new" form of racial discrimination in contemporary American society and how the four frames of color-blind racism are employed within online consumer commentary in reaction to incidents of overt racism directed toward Black athletes in professional sports with differing racial demographics. The purpose was to further empirical research on Bonilla-Silva's (2006) color-blind framework using the perspective of critical race theory, which contests the predominant ideology of racism being nonexistent and inconsequential in contemporary society and the institution of sport. This investigation specifically examined: (1) To what extent is racism prevalent in online discussions surrounding overt-race related incidents in professional sports? (2) Does the racial composition of athletes in a professional sport have an influence on the amount of racially oriented comments by consumers? (3) How are the frames of color-blind racism used within comments to justify racial injustice and ideals in contemporary society? and (4) Will the overall conversations surrounding Black individual athletes be mostly racist or racially progressive in nature?

Engaging a critical race perspective and Bonilla-Silva's (2006) four frames of color-blind racism, a discursive analysis of 545 online consumer comments was performed in response to incidents of explicit racism directed towards professional Black athletes in the National Hockey League (P.K. Subban) and the National Football League (Richard Sherman). A series of hypotheses were produced based on tenets of critical race theory, the four frames of color-blind racism and the literature, which informed this exploration. The findings of this examination supported most of the hypotheses and provided some intriguing

insights and conclusions in addition to policies that could be used in sports and society to diminish racialized thinking and increase awareness about the effects of racism on the individual and societal level.

To begin, even though the predominant ideology about racism in contemporary society and sports maintains that racism is minimal and insignificant, this research found that racial beliefs and dialogue were overwhelmingly prevalent in online commentary surrounding incidents of overt racism directed towards professional Black athletes. Of the 545 comments that were coded, 81% contained color-blind ideologies, which was significantly greater than the 19% of comments that contained ideals associated with racial progressiveness and equality. In addition, the racial composition of athletes in the NHL and NFL did not affect the amount of racist commentary that was employed within online comments regarding each professional sports league. In the NHL/Subban article related commentary 85% of comments employed frames of color-blind racism whereas 79% of consumer comments on the NFL/Sherman article utilized frames of color-blind racism. The equivalence of racialized color-blind framing between the two sets of article commentary was consistent with CRT principles, which maintain that racism is not stagnant, nor is it reflected by isolated incidents; rather, racism is normalized, widespread and intensely engrained within all American institutions (Bimber Jr. , 2014).

One surprising outcome that contradicted the expectations of this analysis and previous research was that abstract liberalism which "constitutes the foundation of the new racial ideology" (Bonilla-Silva, 2006, p. 26) was the least utilized color-blind frame among commenters (2%). However, when considering the frame of abstract liberalism and its usage in explaining racial inequality in contemporary society, this outcome became more

understandable. Because abstract liberalism is associated with ideals of equal opportunity, affirmative action, and individual responsibility (Bonilla-Silva, 2006), the ability to employ this frame may become problematic when professional Black athletes are at the center of conversation. This is primarily because these Black individuals may seemingly appear to have overcome the social and economic barriers that are encountered by the majority of Blacks and people of color in society and institutions other than professional sport. In essence, the highly regarded achievements of Black professional athletes might negate the need for comments to justify racial treatment and inequality, which preserve White privilege and power relations. Likewise, it seems as though the status of professional Black athletes in society does not challenge the "assumed privileges" that are associated with political and socioeconomic equal opportunity legislation, because these individuals occupy high paying positions and notoriety which might have mitigated the need for comments to make abstractly liberal arguments that justify the racial status quo. However, while professional Black athletes seem to have overcome economically disadvantaged situations and serve as examples for how anyone can achieve success this does not mean that these individuals no longer face micro-aggressions and outright discrimination as was observed in both sets of article commentary.

Another intriguing finding was that the frame of cultural racism was employed in greater quantities than was hypothesized and was present in 17% of the comments that were coded through critical color-blind analysis. While it was speculated that cultural racism would be employed less than abstract liberalism, the results of content analysis proved otherwise. The frame of cultural racism was used within comments to explain the actions and "lifestyle" of Black culture in contemporary American society as well as the incurring

racialized treatment of the Black professional athletes who were at the center of conversation and subsequent analysis. Several comments relied on cultural racism not only to justify the racialized treatment of individual athletes but it was also used to characterize Blacks as culturally deficient, irrespective of the socioeconomic barriers that have been faced by Blacks throughout American history and that are still continually faced by Blacks in contemporary society. Moreover, the frame of cultural racism was employed to blame the victim(s) for the racist resentment that they encountered which aligns with the pliability of the color-blind ideology and how it is used to provide seemingly non-racialized views "without appearing irrational or rapidly racist" (Bonilla-Silva, 2006, p. 48). What is more is that cultural racism was used in a provocative manner in condemning the Black athletes, specifically Richard Sherman, for speaking out against racism in sport and society, which triggered severe backlash from comments. Condemning individuals and groups, Black or White for taking a stand against racism, allowed comments to diminish the need for discussions that could otherwise be used to bring about greater racial equality and societal change in contemporary America. In addition, it is important to remember how the problem with racism according to critical race theory and the color-blind ideology is a problem of power and social dynamics (Bonilla-Silva, 2006) therefore, when culturally based arguments are employed to justify the racial hierarchy power and privileges are preserved for the dominant group and diminished for Blacks and people of color.

A third illuminating outcome revealed that minimization of racism was the most used color-blind frame within online comments concerning racial incidents involving professional Black athletes P.K. Subban and Richard Sherman. This finding challenged the presumed hypothesis regarding the quantity of minimization of racism that would appear in online

consumer discourse, however, the vast application of minimization of racism proved to be of

great importance in developing an understanding of how the frames of color-blind racism are

employed in reaction to incidents of overt racism in professional sports. Consistent with the

predominant ideology of sports, which vehemently undermines and contests the presence of

racism in athletics (Carrington, 2012), the use of minimization of racism in 61% of the

comments analyzed seemed to be the most appropriate and easiest color-blind frame to use

when contesting claims of racism in the institution of sport. One reason for this could be that

sports are inherently regarded to promote ideals of equal opportunity, virtues of fair play,

meritocracy and racial justice in contemporary society (Hartmann, 2003). Moreover, sport

seems to be regarded as an environment that is believed to be unaffected by racial

hierarchies and struggles for power which conflicts with principles of CRT that acknowledge

the embedment and intersectionality of ideologies like racism with sport and sport with other

socially constructed institutions like education, religion and politics (Primm, DuBois, &

Regoli, 2007). Furthermore, the unsurpassed athletic achievements and presence of Blacks in

professional athletics since the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960's (Rada & Wulfemeyer,

2003), appears to continually serve as an example for how race and racism are

inconsequential concerning the ability for Blacks to achieve sporting and economic success.

The false assumption of race and racism not affecting the life opportunities and outcomes of

Blacks and people of color perpetuates the myth about racism being unimportant in modern

society and sports. In principle, it was made evident that popular ideals about racism in sports

today moderate the extent of racial injustice, which allows race to be regarded as

insignificant in addition to having no bearing on athletic competition even when covert

occurrences of racism are abundantly employed through discourse and made publicly significant through overt actions.

In summation, the results of this research demonstrated that online discourse surrounding overt racist incidents directed towards Black professional athletes was very prevalent, regardless of the racial composition of the professional sports league. In addition, the results reinforced tenets central to critical race theory in that:

1. Racism, rather than being uncommon, is ordinary and racial ideologies are present and permanently situated in society and all social institutions (Delgado & Stefanic, 2012).

2. Race is a societal construct, which is created and maintained through irrational categorization, stereotypes, and ideologies that are deeply rooted in the social and historical constructs of American culture (Adair & Rowe, 2010).

3. The dominant power relationship of Whiteness over Blackness serves important psychological and material rewards for the dominant group (Delgado & Stefanic, 2012).

Furthermore, the frames of color-blind racism where employed by commenters to:

1. Make abstract arguments which served to justify the unequal treatment of Blacks in society while at the same time dismissing the socioeconomic and political barriers that people of color face in contemporary American society (Bonilla-Silva, 2006).

2. Naturalize or make racial phenomena in society seem as though they are normal and biologically driven occurrences rather than social constructions, which reinforces the belief of racism being non-existent (Bonilla-Silva, 2006).

3. Explain the standing of Blacks in society by relying on stereotypical "deficiencies" and unsubstantiated culturally based arguments rather than acknowledging the influence that social ideologies have on the life opportunities and associated outcomes of Blacks and people of color (Bonilla-Silva, 2006).

4. Minimize the magnitude of racism and the negative effects on Blacks in society and the institution of sport (Bonilla-Silva, 2006) , which allowed individuals to blame the victims for speaking out against racism and negated the need for further discussions which could be used to challenge and change the predominant belief about racism in sports and society.

Limitations and Recommendations

Intercoder reliability refers to the extent in which two or more autonomous coders analyzing the same content agree with interpretations based on a pre-established coding instrument or system. This reliability measure is important because it aids in validating and objectifying interpretations from content analysis (Cho, 2008). Due to the limitations of personnel and funding, this project relied on a single coder and for this reason caution should be used when interpreting the results of a study that was unable to use more than one coder. Another limitation of this investigation involved the athletes and racialized incidents that were selected for examination, which constrained this exploration's ability to deviate from the popular Black and White binary that is frequently employed to examine race relations in contemporary American society where a plethora of racial identities exists. The Black-White dichotomy provides the majority of the ideals and themes that are associated with the prevailing dominant racial ideologies in modern America (Bonilla-Silva, 2006). However, this dualistic classification of race excludes the vast array of identities that constitute the

racial demographics of American society, which are dynamic and continually changing. I suggest here in accordance with many social scholars that more research needs to be conducted on individuals and groups outside of the Black-White multiplicity such as Hispanics, Asians, and Latinos as well as the subcategories that exist within each of these groups. Furthermore, as the racial demographics of a society change so do the power relationships. With these dynamics in mind it should be acknowledged that when conducting research that examines race relations, not only should the ideologies of dominant groups be examined but also the ideologies that are held by minority groups about other minority groups (i.e. Asian's ideals about Blacks, Blacks about Hispanics etc.). Expanding our understanding of interethnic dynamics as well as White and non-Black relations will aid in advancing our notion of how the color-blind ideology is employed and how it affects other racial groups in contemporary society.

An additional limitation concerned the data commentary compiled for this analysis, which was gathered by convenience rather than a representative sampling strategy. In addition, there was no way to know individual commenter's level of sports consumption (NHL or NFL), or how often they comment on sports related incidents concerning racism. Moreover, the inability to identify the race of individual commenters because of the ambiguity associated with online user profile information limited the application of the color-blind framework and restrained the capacity to generalize the findings to sports consumers and society at large. While the focus of this study was to increase empirical research on Bonilla Silva's color-blind framework and how it is employed towards Black athletes in professional sports future research should employ strategies that identify the specific race and consumption level of respondents. Increasing demographical information could potentially

lead to a better understanding of racial dynamics in contemporary society along with how the color-blind way of thinking operates and affects people in society. In relation to expanding how the color-blind ideology is employed regarding differing racial groups it is also recommended that the associated effects of the color-blind ideology on minority groups be explored more extensively. In accordance with critical race theory, which posits that, people of color have a recognized proficiency in speaking about race and racism because of their unique histories and experiences dealing with subjugation in America (Delgado & Stefanic, 2012). I suggest that rather than simply decoding racial ideologies in commentary which reveals the predominant beliefs of the dominant group , more emphasis be placed on how these ideologies affect the psychological and material outcomes of groups and people of color.

While comments employed the frames of color-blind racism extensively, this finding did not mean that all comments conformed and relied on these frames. Rather there was a select group of comments (19%) that acknowledged and recognized the significance and problem with racial injustice and discrimination in American society and attempted to challenge and deconstruct the racial hierarchy that has been created by social ideologies and color-blind discourse. Bonilla-Silva labels White individuals who challenge racism in society as "White racial progressives" in that these individuals contest racialized thinking and actions (Bonilla-Silva, 2006). However, because this analysis did not code for race and focused on the ideologies about racism and race within comments rather than individual commenters there was no way to know if White or Black commenters employed the color-blind or racially progressive comments. Moreover, because the color-blind way of thinking can be used by Blacks as well, as it was used by P.K. Subban to downplay the significance of the

racism that he received, which reinforced the idea of race and racism being insignificant it is proposed that a different terminology be used to categorize racial progressives. Because CRT maintains that racism is about power and preserving privileges it is proposed here that rather than using the term "White racial progressives" the term "racial power progressives" or simply "power progressives" be used to signify the individuals and groups who contest inequality and racial injustice. This terminology would further promote the issue with racism being about power and it would detract from the Black and White binary that is predominantly relied upon within American society where a plethora of racial identities and injustices exist. Moreover, racism is not the only socially constructed ill that manifests in contemporary sport and society, today like in the past there exist numerous isms and phobias that are used to maintain power among groups and individuals in contemporary society.

In reflecting on my own experiences and the predominant ideology of sports, it appears as though athletics in contemporary society have created a false consciousness of institutional and societal boundaries. When people consume or participate in sports, they do so for various reasons, one of which is for entertainment purposes. Sports for athletes and consumers alike serve as an entity that can be used to escape the realities of the social world. When an individual goes to a sporting event or watches it from the comfort of their home, they are allowed to temporarily cancel out everything else going on in their life and the social world. However, racism like any other form of discrimination is boundless and infects all social institutions because racism is socially constructed, perpetuated, and preserved by ideologies that are deeply embedded within the culture and history of societies. Believing that sports are blemish free from politics, economics, racism and other societal influences, negates the need to be critical of sport's innately utopian deceptiveness. This is not to say

that sports should be continually analyzed or criticized, but individuals and groups must realize the social significance of sports and the ideals that they produce about equality, racial hegemony and social justice. Moreover, participants and consumers alike must acknowledge the intersectionality of sports with other societal institutions and cultural ideals. For an individual, regardless of their race to believe that racism, sexism, homophobia and the like vanish when they enter an arena, step on a playing surface or tune into a sporting event from their home does nothing except contribute to the predominant ideology of sports and society, which continually normalizes and minimizes racial inequality (Carrington, 2012).

In agreement with Bonilla-Silva (2006), it is proposed that, rather than claiming to be nonracist, individuals, groups and institutions should work towards becoming antiracist. However, for this outcome to happen, an understanding must first be maintained which acknowledges that society and social institutions are highly racialized, contested terrains and that all participants in society are affected, negatively or positively, by the racial hierarchy. Becoming antiracist requires individuals and groups to take responsibility for their actions and involvement in racialized and other discriminatory enactments. While recognizing and condemning racist incidents might go against current societal norms, one of the only ways to achieve racial equality is to consciously disallow oneself from adopting the predominant ideology about racism and participating in racialized conversations. Furthermore, becoming antiracist requires continual action against racism, not just some of the time or when it is most convenient, but all of the time. Sometimes it will be difficult to take a stand and disagree with those closest to you, but you must remember that injustice for some is injustice for all and the fight for racial equality must be unrelenting and done wholeheartedly.

APPENDIX. EXAMPLES OF COLOR-BLIND RACISM

Abstract Liberalism:

- *"So...it's totally fine to "Blaze a trail" for kids to achieve those goals and get out of the poor intercity...so long as they make choking signs, taunt the other team and put down other youth ball players? "Everyone should be judged by their character" right? I am sure plenty of people tweeted and emailed some very racist slurs at this guy for what he did...because well it's a free country and there is no short supply of jerks allowed to speak in this world. The man is a tremendous football player and its enjoyable to watch him make great plays. But he acted like a moron and people are reacting to it...that's all. I have no doubt there are Racist people in this country but these people by no means are even close to representing the majority of population. So all the crap about America being a racist nation or Sherman has somehow reopened a dialogue for the country to get this off their chest an heal is nothing more than a ridiculous media narrative to keep beating this dead horse. A narrative that I will wipe my rear end with and you should to. We don't need a moral lecture by the degenerate gamblers that make up SPORTS NEWS thanks."* – f172*

- *"Didn't the Revolution end in 1830's, Mr. Caps Lock? The dominance of the North's economy beat the South! I know it's not politically correct to say But I think North America wouldn't be what we are today had the Indians beat the colonists!! The stronger civilization/process usually wins!!"* – f109*

- *"This is another example of the media pushing a racial narrative for ratings. It doesn't always have to be about race, the people that always make it about race, are the racists (irrational people) and the race baiters (manipulators seeking control). I've defended Sherman all week, and I will continue to defend him, because his behavior in that 30 sec clip, really wasn't that bad, and certainly doesn't make him a bad person considering his entire life story. Judge the individual, and escape this destructive group think BS that crapheads on both ends of the equation keep pushing on all of us."* – f182*

Naturalization:

- *"Rather than "reopening the dialogue on race", Richard Sherman has really only "perpetuated the stereotype" of the angry black male athlete. Black athletes everywhere literally cringed while watching his rant! Really poor writing, dude, when you could have taken this issue so much further, very disappointing!"* – f068*

- *"So he's not an arrogant classless guy. He's just black. OK, if that's the way you want it."* –f 231*

- *"Demographically, the Boston metro area is more than 10 to one "white" to "black." (Compare that to 3 to 1 in Chicago.) So yeah, most of the folks at Boston sporting events are gonna be white."* – h217*

- *"I lived in Boston for 1 year. N there are a lot of racist people there. Black people don't go to Celtics n red Sox games. It's all white Irish n Italian."* – h179*

Cultural Racism:

- *"Canadians think they are privileged. did anybody notice they have a lot of help from the refs. and Subban has a little Black rage thing going on. Maybe Subban hates whites !!! Canadian Refs want Canadians to win."* – h122

- *"You need to hang around a better class of 'black' people. love the Red Sox, Bruins, Patriots and had season tickets with the Celtics. Next time there is a Boston sport televised you might do better to look at the "minorities' in the stands before you speak again."* – h281

- *"Jeez, what is it about hockey players that they just "get it". No contemplation or threats of player, team or league boycotts resulting from racial tweets. Just focus for the task at hand. No sugar coating the fact racism exists EVERWHERE with all races, colors and creeds. No showcasing utilizing the stage for the sport's biggest event highlighting ignorance. Unlike baseball, football or basketball players, hockey players across the board have an appreciation for their sport and an inherent respect for the history of their sport."* – h359

- *"Thank you P.K. I guess hockey players are just much more intelligent and much less ignorant than NBA players."* – h384

- *"A swimming event lasts mere moments compared to the time of 1 game of basketball, much less an entire Olympic tournament. So you can't really compare the length of the rants by commentators. I don't think reasonable people really believe Sherman to be a thug, but the way he was getting in the "face" of the camera and screaming made him come off as a highly violent person, which is in fact what a thug is. If he wants to come off as otherwise, he should check his actions on screen."* – f033

- *"I agree that to pigeonhole one such area is problematic. The area in which I commented was the Richard Sherman issue. He has a platform now and is using it to promote the victims mentality. It would much better be served if he were to use it in a way to promote something positive. For instance if you don't want to be called a "thug" quit acting like one. But he chose to promote the victims mentality."* - f202

- *"So this columnist wants us to thank Sherman for re-enforcing the stereotype most people have of black athletes as rage filled, hateful, entitled, angry, classless, prima donnas? If a Stanford graduate can act in this manner, then what are people going to think about the next kid from Compton who isn't as "intelligent"?"*- f305

Minimization of Racism

- *"White people are called thugs every day in Hockey... I hate this guy for making it a racial issue. It's not about race... it's about being an a$$hole or its about bad sportsmanship. That's it. This is ridiculous."* – f040

- *"Now it's about race? Do all conversations end in race? Even during the heart of Civil Rights, force busing and desegregation, race riots, bomb threats; I find this generation more racially divided, and racially hyper-sensitive. It's getting as old a story at Middle East peace talks."* – f169

- *"Richard Sherman and the media need to stop transmuting this into a race thing. Put that card back in its deck. Sherman is a clown. After he gets exposed on Sunday and the Broncos crush the overrated Seahawks all this will soon be forgotten and he can worry about being the new T.O. next year."* – f219

- *"Can we quit playing the racist wheel of tragedy its getting really old now isn't there something else in the world going on better than this?"* – h289

- *"I've been a Bruins fan since the Orr/Esposito days, but I've never understood the animosity toward Subban. However, I doubt that it's race-based, at least in most cases. Subban's reaction showed a lot of class. If he ever wears the black-and-gold, I'll be among the first to cheer for him."*- h414

- *"We're half way through 2014, and you people still can't get past racism. Why? Because the powers that be, don't want you to. The sooner you realize that, the better off you'll be."* – h420

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