ELEVATING ALL-STARS TO SUPERSTARS: AN EXAMINATION OF

THE FRAMING PRACTICES OF ESPN

by

Christopher Andrew Volker

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of the University of Delaware in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Communication

Summer 2014

UMI Number: 1567831

UMI

Dissertation Publishing

UMI 1567831

ProQuest®

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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ABSTRACT

The idea of celebrity in sport is a familiar conception within our current media landscape. Professional athletes have always maintained a level of celebrity status due to the popularity of sports within the American culture. Much research in the area of communication and sport seeks to tackle themes of race, gender, and in-game coverage portrayal. However, little examines what sports highlights and sports news programs offer towards continuing or challenging ingrained stereotypes, and how such coverage elevates (or diminishes) the celebrity status of these athletes. This study seeks to expand upon this current mass and sports communication research.

Using theoretical perspectives of celebrity attribution, framing, and sports framing methodologies, the current study is a content analysis of the main network of ESPN in the summer of 2013. Results indicate specific athletes garner much of the descriptive coverage spoken by ESPN employees. In addition, women athletes remain under-represented and misrepresented through the spoken descriptive phrases. Finally, results indicate significant differences emerge in the ways specific athletes are described based on athletic and intellectual ability. It is through these types of representation where one may see a clear elevation of celebrity status.

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

The Entertainment and Sports Programming Network (ESPN) is synonymous

with sports culture. As a business, it is estimated ESPN has a net worth over 40 billion

dollars, and accounts for 57% of the Disney Corporation's total revenue (Badenhausen,

2012). Former Disney CEO, Michael Eisner, stated, "To this day, the Walt Disney

Company would not exist without ESPN. The protection of Mickey Mouse is ESPN."

(via Miller, Eder, & Sandomir, 2013, p. 5). By examining the profits and viewing

numbers of ESPN, it is evident the prominence the network has within American culture.

But, the business of ESPN does not solely lie within the news it presents or its function to

provide sporting coverage. Instead, the *brand* of ESPN is its most valuable asset. As

ESPN continues to dominate sports broadcasting and, more importantly, shape sports

culture, academic research must strive to understand its framing practices and content.

Considerable academic research examines sports broadcasting practices generally

(see Angelini, MacArthur, & Billings, 2012; Angelini & Billings, 2010a; Billings, 2007)

and that of ESPN in particular (see Adams & Tuggle, 2004; Tuggle, 1997; Turner, 2013).

It should come as no surprise that ESPN remains a topic of discussion among sports

communication scholars as it continues to rank within the top-10 in Nielsen ratings for

cable networks (Kondolojy, 2014). In addition to cable networks, ESPN websites and

mobile applications are necessities for scoring updates and up-to-the-minute sports news

for the most devoted fans. Therefore, it is not merely enough to examine ESPN's presence within the sports culture; instead, one must examine the messages in broadcasts.

Using the main network of ESPN as the basis for this examination, the current project seeks to evaluate framing practices (Entman, 2007; Gitlin, 1980;Goffman, 1974), expand the current usage of sports framing methodology beyond the realm of in-game competition and Olympic broadcasting (see Billings & Eastman, 2003) and examine the celebrity status attribution (Hellmueller & Aeschbacher, 2010; Rojeck, 2001) of athletes on the network. In other words, the researcher seeks to understand how, through the processes of selection, emphasis, and exclusion (Gitlin, 1980), framing practices of ESPN serve to boost, damage, or moderate an athlete's celebrity status. Celebrity status is an important concept within our culture as it may be argued that there are levels to which an individual has both achieved one's status and been attributed such stardom.

Previous examinations of ESPN show that certain athletes garner significant coverage from the network (Burns, 2013), whether one agrees it is warranted or not. This is not to say that ESPN does not engage in the practice of non-biased journalism, especially when covering more traditional "harder" news stories. Instead, previous "news-events" (e.g., LeBron James' *The Decision*, "Tebowmania") and critiques of the network (see McBride, 2011, 2012; Ohlmeyer, 2010) provided the impetus to examine potential favoritism exhibited by the network.

This examination into framing and celebrity attribution does not question the ethical commitments of the network, nor does it intend to devalue the athletic talents of those athletes present on ESPN. Instead, as Wanta (2012) notes, the way in which

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athletes are described may have a profound effect on the ways in which sports fans view these athletes. With this in mind, one must first understand the content of the media message, before examining potential audience effects. As such, the goal of this project is to understand how athletes are framed through language spoken by ESPN employees. These devices allow one to observe: (1) how celebrity status of an athlete is attributed beyond that which is achieved, (2) how gender is represented amongst male and female athletes, (3) how athletes are described based on their athletic and intellectual talent, and (4) how athletes are framed in terms of contributing to a team or individual's victory or defeat.

1.1   Celebrity Creation

Celebrities are social constructs that are granted status through the society and culture to which they belong (Seifert, 2010 via Hellmueller & Aeschbacher, 2010). In this sense, a celebrity is not created merely through one's personal perseverance and devotion. Instead, celebrities are cultural fabrications aided by the media and its subsequent presentations (Rojeck, 2001). Within the current literature, researchers distinguish between three types of celebrities: *attributed celebrities*, *ascribed celebrities*, and *achieved celebrities* (Rojeck, 2001). An *attributed celebrity* is one who is a product of media manufacturing through one's constant portrayal or depiction within the mass media (Rojeck, 2001). For example, reality stars Nicole "Snooki" Polizzi from *Jersey Shore* or Alana "Honey Boo Boo" Thompson from *Toddlers and Tiaras* have not accomplished a rare feat to earn their fame. An *ascribed celebrity*, on the other hand, is one who is created due to biological descent (Hellmueller & Aeschbacher, 2010). These

celebrities include members of the British Royal Family or children of famous politicians or actors. In these cases, the celebrity status is ascribed to them based on the actions of their parents or family lineage. Finally, an *achieved celebrity* is one due to an individual's possession of a rare talent or skill, such as actors, musicians, or athletes (Hellmueller & Aeschbacher, 2010). However, as noted by Rojeck (2001), an "achieved celebrity is not exclusively a matter of special talent or skill. In some cases it is largely the result of the concentrated representation of an individual as noteworthy or exceptional by cultural intermediaries" (p.18). Thus, while these athletes may be seen as those who have achieved their celebrity status, their stardom may also be attributed because of their continual presence within the media (Hellmueller & Aeschbacher, 2010; Rojeck, 2001).

The creation, or celebrification, of an ordinary citizen into a celebrity is not a new task. Many "ordinary people" have been discovered, uprooted from the life they once knew and placed within celebrity culture (Turner, 2006). However, the creation of a celebrity may not only be applied to those who were previously unknown. Visibility granted through media outlets enables celebrities to bolster, uphold, or damage their stardom due to constant access and exposure to their interactions (Hellmueller & Aeschbacher, 2010). For example, Justin Bieber first rose to fame as a teenage musician and YouTube sensation with a devoted following of adolescents. Recently, however, his celebrity status was damaged through altercations with the paparazzi and inappropriate comments viewed as uncharacteristic of the once innocent teen star. Therefore, as the media industry is able to manufacture celebrities, it is also able to destroy them and create their replacement (Turner, 2006). As a result, a celebrity cannot be thought of one whose

status is stagnant or guaranteed. Instead, celebrity status may be viewed as a fluid process, capable of changing based on the circumstances. Even though audiences clamor for the current reality star or superstar athlete, new stars are generated because the media can invent and re-brand their own celebrity creations (Turner, 2006). To this degree, the creation of a celebrity serves a business function for media conglomerates; the need to create celebrities, or superstar athletes, is a necessity to continue to entice audiences and produce profits.

The media benefits from celebrity creation as it continues to drive ratings. For example, the television special, *The Decision,* allowed millions of viewers to see how the specific LeBron James narrative would unfold.13 million viewers tuned in to watch this hour-long special despite critiques of it being a fabricated news-event (Ohlmeyer, 2010). Beyond this special programming, celebrity creation may help drive the overall ratings of the network. ESPN remains among the top 10 cable networks for primetime viewership, behind networks such as TBS and USA Network (Kondolojy, 2014). It may be argued that individuals are not simply tuning in for sporting news, but instead choosing to watch because of the vivid storylines and personalization of the players (Fortunato, 2001).

Despite the economic benefits of the fabrication of celebrities, it remains important to look at celebrity portrayals in terms of media effects; one must strive to understand how framing of superstar athletes affect both the perceptions and actions of the viewing audience. As noted by Chia and Poo (2009), adolescents who received more content regarding their celebrity idols reported higher levels of "intimacy" with such celebrities. Through their media consumption, adolescents created parasocial

relationships with those celebrities with whom they have never met (Chia & Poo, 2009).

If one were to extend such principles towards the coverage of superstar athletes, one may recognize how coverage may affect fan affinity or, potential dislike of specific athletes. If devoted fans are engrossed in the framing and narratives told through sports broadcasting, particularly that of ESPN, they may also form opinions or devotions similar to those portrayed through the media.

As this study may not make conclusions or test audience responses to celebrification, these concepts serve as a foundation to analyze how celebrity messages are framed through the media. If the study finds framing practices that serve to elevate the *attributed* status of superstar athletes, one may further explore if these practices have an effect on the perceptions or actions of the audience. It remains crucial to understand both the process of celebrification and the framing practices of the mass media. Through first understanding the content, one can conduct future research examining potential audience response to the celebrification process and may continue to examine constant media practices.

1.2   Framing

Based in the fields of psychology and sociology, framing is the theoretical perspective centered on an assumption that audiences' perceptions of an issue are affected by the way it is characterized within a news story (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007). Building on the work of Goffman (1974), framing theorizes that individuals make sense of their everyday lives through the formation of "schemata of interpretation," or frames, as a way to organize and identify their experiences (p. 21). Expanded beyond

Goffman's (1974) original interpretation, framing perspectives have often been applied to mass media studies and news production (Pan & Kosicki, 1993). Primarily associated with political candidates, legislation, and policy formation (D'Angelo & Kuypers, 2010), framing assembles a narrative through a purposive selection of highlights and information to promote a particular interpretation by the audience (Entman, 2007). Whether a narrative is crafted portraying an athlete as a hero (Hoebeke, Deprez, & Raeymaeckers, 2011), or depicts an individual as embodying the American Dream (Burns, 2009), frames provide a central idea by which audiences may organize and interpret these news events (Pan & Kosicki, 1993).

Framing is an actively selective process through the emphasis of certain issues while minimizing or excluding others (Lecheler & de Vreese, 2010). In other words, framing is an organizing concept that allows the audience to create meaning through the presentation of the material (Gamson & Modigliani, 1987). When such framing practices are employed, those who are favored by the presentation, or slant, appear to have a higher position of power (Entman, 2007).

Gitlin (1980) proposes framing employs three processes: selection, emphasis, and exclusion. It is through the persistence and conventions of these methods that one begins to see the true power of framing. Unlike the potential effects of priming and agenda-setting theories, framing serves as an important concept as it does not merely look at what topics were covered, but how such topics were presented (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007). Thus, the current study does not view framing as an unintentional byproduct of journalistic norms and conventions. Instead, consistent with the views of Kendall (2005),

the current study views framing as an intentional measure to help spread an individual ideology, or, in this case, the views and opinions of ESPN gatekeepers.

Though the study will not look at audience effects, the potential consequences of news-framing practices may have cumulative effects on audiences. Studies reveal framing techniques can have a lingering effect, on those exposed to such content (Druckman & Nelson, 2003; Lecheler & de Vreese, 2011; Tewksbury, Jones, Peske, Raymond, & Vig, 2000). For example, Druckman and Nelson (2003) concluded framing effects are relatively short-lasting, dissipating ten days after the initial frame exposure and remaining conditional on other factors including interpersonal conversations and previous knowledge. More recently, a study conducted by Lecheler and de Vreese (2011) found participants had lingering effects of the selected content up to two weeks after exposure. Whether the framing effects last ten days (Druckman & Nelson, 2003) or three weeks (Tewksbury et al., 2000), the audience remains susceptible to the messages and viewpoints of media broadcasts and portrayals. To this end, framing practices of the mass media could have cumulative effects on heavy television viewing individuals, as they may constantly be exposed to such purposeful messages.

Though recent studies sought to expand the horizons of this theoretical perspective, framing theory remains grounded within the field of political communication. In particular, framing perspectives and analyses are often used to evaluate audience interpretation of policy debates and political candidates, with studies concluding that cable news networks, such as FOX News and MSNBC, have the power to influence the opinion of their viewing audience (Feldman, Maibach, Roser-Renouf, &

Leiserowitz, 2012). However, news frames may be seen within a broader perspective as they may be viewed as storytelling devices that can be applied to any number of issues (Brewer & Gross, 2010). The same basic tenets, mainly the assemblage of a narrative to promote a particular interpretation (Entman, 2007), apply beyond political boundaries previously constructed by scholars.

It is important that one not oversimplify the power of framing, reducing it merely to the overall presentation of a message. Instead, at its core, framing involves the cognitive process of encoding, interpreting, and retrieving media messages (Pan & Kosicki, 1993, p. 57). Framing gives greater understanding to not only *how* a message is presented but possible motivations, or *why* such messages are chosen and depicted to a certain audience. Similar to that of political campaigning, effective framing via broadcast television produces winners and losers, benefiting those who can control the message and understand the audience.

1.3   Sports Framing

Wanta (2012) states the framing perspective has strong implications for sports communication research. He claims, "the attributes linked to athletes influence the ways in which sports fans view these athletes" (Wanta, 2012, p. 82). From reinforcing gender differences to perpetuating racial stereotypes, sports broadcasting serves as a way to shape the understandings of athletes within our culture. However, to move toward understanding potential audience effects, one must first analyze the content and messages present within current sports broadcasting practices. In addition, it may also serve

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researchers to examine possible motivations (e.g., profit models, ratings) of these framing practices.

Much of the recent sports broadcasting framing research focuses on gender portrayals within Olympic and specific sports announcing (Angelini & Billings, 2010a; Billings, Angelini, & Eastman 2008a; Billings, Brown, Crout, McKenna, Rice, Timanus, & Ziegler, 2008b; Billings et al.; 2005), race portrayals (Angelini & Billings, 2010b; Billings, 2003; Billings, 2004; Billings et al., 2008a; Billings et al., 2008b; Mercurio & Filak, 2010), and broadcasting strategies of the NBA (Fortunato, 2001). As evident through academic research, the use of framing within the genre of sports is not new to the field of communication. Instead, the results indicate practices that begin to divide the sports world. Therefore, such sports framing methodologies can be applied to sports analysis and highlights beyond that of in-game competition.

Moving forward, when one is referring to the attributed status of athletes, the researcher will now refer to them as 'superstar' athletes. Within the study, the superstar athlete is one who is awarded celebrity status through one's portrayal within ESPN programming. Operationally and conceptually, one may see the difference between what the researcher means between all-star and superstar. While an all-star athlete may be defined as one who achieves such a status through their actions on the field, a superstar athlete represents the elevated status (i.e., attributed celebrity status) one receives as a result of their constant media presence. The responsibility to become an all-star, in this case, lies within the athlete's talent and ability; the pressure to become a superstar lies in the creative abilities of mass media.

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In addition, the researcher does not believe these are two dichotomous or mutually exclusive categories. Instead, these classifications recognize how specific coverage and emphasis through the media may elevate the status of those receiving praise. To view such categories along a continuum may be a more accurate representation when discussing superstar and all-star athletes. In this regard, it remains the argument that one cannot merely achieve superstar status without the attributive influences of the media system.

RQ$_1$: How does the portrayal of superstar athletes through the framing practices of ESPN help boost or damage the celebrity status of athletes?

Central to RQ$_1$ are the framing functions described by Gitlin (1980) of selection, exclusion, and emphasis. In other words, who, or what, is being presented and emphasized within these sports broadcasts? Burns (2013), after observing the content of ESPN for a year, noted LeBron James was mentioned 1,930 times within ESPN's *SportsCenter*. The next highest mentioned athlete, Kobe Bryant, was mentioned 1,345 times, yet no tennis players, racecar drivers, or, most notably, female athletes made the list of the "12 Most Mentioned Athletes" (Burns, 2013). Through these results, one may conclude that ESPN contributes to the attributed celebrity status, albeit positive or negative, of these athletes through mere clock time, if nothing else were to be examined.

H$_1$: There will be a statistically significant difference in the amount of coverage given to specific athletes.

Through the media's framing practices, athletes may be attributed their celebrity status beyond the level to which they have already achieved (Rojeck, 2001). The media's

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constant portrayals enables athletes to be constantly lauded or criticized for their achieved

athletic success. At the same time these athletes are given coverage as a way to fit into

the current media narratives and storylines. For example, Fortunato (2001) notes the goal

of the sports reporter is to personalize the player and create a humanizing storyline

extending beyond the court and jersey number. Serazio (2010) agrees, claiming the media

was responsible for the recovery metaphor surrounding the 2006 New Orleans Saints'

surprise season, in which the team made it to the playoffs after Hurricane Katrina

destroyed much of the Louisiana city.

As sports journalists engage in reporting that resembles devoted fans rather than

non-biased observers (Serazio, 2010), research must examine how the current sports

media seek to report the "news" and highlights of the day. For if these biases exist,

whether racial or gendered, prejudices may permeate into future generations, allowing a

continued culture of stereotyping and poor journalistic standards (Eastman & Billings,

2001; Mercurio & Filak, 2010). Consequently, if a reporter is truly considered a sports

journalist, it should be acceptable that they are held to the same journalistic integrity as

other reporters in the field.

1.3.1   Gender Sports Framing

There is considerable research on the portrayal of women athletes in sporting

events, such as the Olympics (see Angelini, MacArthur, Billings, 2012; Billings, 2007;

Billings & Angelini, 2007; Billings et al., 2010a), the NCAA College Basketball

Tournament (see Billings et al., 2002; Eastman & Billings, 2001), and within sports

specific broadcasts (see Billings et al., 2008a; Billings et al., 2005). While most studies

conclude that clear gender differences exist, recent research states gender disparities within sports commentary "should be classified as gender *differences* rather than *stereotypes*" (Angelini et al., 2012, p. 274). In other words, while a gendered structure within language exists, it may not be as predictable as previously conceived by sports communication scholars. Though Eastman and Billings (2001), when observing 66 college basketball games, found that the athlete's gender altered the gender-based language, overtly gendered language should not be used as a way to describe the framing phenomena within sports broadcasting.

Yet, despite recent findings that suggest the support of gendered *difference* instead of *stereotypes* (see Angelini et al., 2012), previous research continually supports a gendered sports world, both in terms of description and on screen presence. When observing the 2006 Torino Olympics, Billings et al. (2008b) observed clear biases in the way men and women were portrayed in regards to *attributes of success/failure* and *personality and physicality*. While men were viewed as more likely to succeed due to their composure and intelligence, women were said to have succeeded because of their courage (Billings et al., 2008b). This was further perpetuated through women's failures attributed to their lack of athletic skill, while men's failures were due to a lack commitment (Billings et al., 2008b).

These conclusions are consistent with other studies regarding Olympic framing. For example, Angelini and Billings (2010) found similar results in the 2008 Beijing Olympic broadcasts, finding significant gender biases in the descriptions of male and female athletes ($p < .05$). Whether such studies reveal men are portrayed as succeeding

because they are more courageous (Billings & Angelini, 2007; Eastman & Billings, 1999), or more recent studies finding women described based on their emotions (Angelini et al., 2012), language continues to divide the sporting world, resorting back to ingrained gendered practices.

Beyond observing the practices in Olympic broadcasts, gender differences in athletic descriptors were also found in golf and basketball broadcasts. When observing the 2000 men and women's NCAA College Basketball Tournaments, Billings, Halone, and Denham (2002) found female athletes were described primarily by where they came from, their personality, and what they looked like. Male athletes, on the other hand, were primarily described on their athletic ability (Billings et al., 2002). In addition, a content analysis of golf tournaments/matches announcing revealed men were seen as more extroverted or introverted and described by their emotions (Billings et al., 2005). Yet, announcers reinforced gender stereotypes because successful female golfers were seen as "luckier" than male golfers while unsuccessful female golfers were said to lack athletic ability (Billings et al., 2005).

However, it may only be pertinent to examine gender biased portrayals if women are actually depicted within sports broadcasts. For Example Tuggle (1997) found that only 5% of the coverage on ESPN's *SportsCenter* and CNN's *Sports Tonight* was devoted to women. Adams and Tuggle (2004) later found that stories devoted to women reduced to 2% on ESPN's *SportsCenter,* with 778 stories about men and 16 about women. In addition, Burns (2013) noted that no female athletes appeared in the "Top 12

Most Mentioned Athletes," further supporting claims that women remain underrepresented or absent on the sports network.

H_2: *Women athletes will continue to be under represented within the broadcasts of ESPN.*

1.3.2   Race in Sports Framing

Framing perspectives have also been applied to racial stereotypes. Often, Black athletes are portrayed as naturally gifted while White athletes are portrayed as intelligent, using their mental abilities to excel on the sports field (McCarthy & Jones, 1997; Mercurio & Filak, 2010; Rada, 1996). Rada (1996) found White athletes were portrayed as "thinking men," while Black athletes were portrayed as just athletes (p. 237). Such an assertion is further supported in a more recent study examining the portrayal of Black and White quarterback prospects. Mercurio and Filak (2010) observed Black quarterbacks were portrayed 424 times (43.9%) as having positive athletic traits as compared to 192 (19.9%) times they exhibited sports intelligence, a statistically significant difference. On the other hand, White quarterback prospects were described 1,309 times (34.5%) as having athletic skills and 991 (32.9%) as exhibiting sports intelligence. Similar to the findings of Rada (1996), Mercurio and Filak (2010) conclude underlying racial portrayals still exist in current media practices, despite conceptions of growing equality with regard to spoken descriptive coverage.

As these results support the notion of seemingly overt, stereotypical portrayals, such depictions have also been recently challenged. Billings (2004) notes while stereotypes and inequality exist in descriptions of the athletic ability of White and Black

quarterbacks, there has been progress in media coverage. When examining the 2008 Beijing Olympics, Angelini and Billings (2010a) observed sportscasters rarely used overt discriminatory language to describe athletes. Instead, the covert language (i.e., differences in descriptive language) utilized by the broadcasters helped shape perceptions of the viewers (Angelini & Billings, 2010a). In addition, Angelini and Billings (2010b) conclude, "implications for social identity are equally complex, as one can argue differences persist, but not in overarching, predictable ways" (p. 8). Though racial undertones may drive portrayals within these announcing practices, the results suggest that racial depictions no longer follow the stereotypical patterns isolated in past studies (Angelini & Billings, 2010b). An examination of the 2008 Summer Olympics found that race no longer followed predictable patterns or themes (Angelini & Billings, 2010b). For example, Black athletes received more comments about their experience than White athletes (Angelini & Billings, 2010b). In addition, Asian athletes trumped Black athletes in regards to strength superiority, hence challenging previously held notions regarding race depictions (Angelini & Billings, 2010b).

This conclusion may be further supported through the portrayal of professional golfer Tiger Woods. Billings (2003), for example, concludes that Woods is only portrayed as Black when he is losing, with descriptors matching more stereotypical Black portrayals. Furthermore, racial themes and patterns are further complicated in the portrayal of Asian-American teen golfer, Michelle Wie (Billings et al., 2008a) who was depicted similar to male golfers because announcers made fewer comments about her

gender, ethnicity, or age (Billings et al., 2008a). Thus, using Woods and Wie as examples of athletes who broke previous stereotypes:

H_{3a}: *Athletes with the most mentions will be lauded for their athletic abilities*

H_{3b}: *Athletes with the most mentions will be lauded for their intellectual abilities*

As stereotypes continue to occupy our sports broadcasting media, one cannot apply overarching themes as a way to describe what is actually occurring. Instead, subtle nuances may begin to dictate how athletes of the same race may be portrayed based on their status within the sporting world. This may be especially true when observing superstar athletes.

1.4   Superstar Analysis Framing

Little research has been conducted to view the framing of individual athletes within sports media. Studies by Billings (2003) and Billings et al. (2008a) represent how superstar athletes Tiger Woods and Michelle Wie broke the mold of traditional stereotypical portrayals. In addition to these analyses, Trujillo (1991) illustrates how Hall of Fame pitcher Nolan Ryan was framed to represent the quintessential image of masculinity.

However, most studies regarding athlete portrayal are qualitative analyses, using no statistical methods to quantify the findings or assertions. For example, Butterworth (2013) described the media portrayal of Tim Tebow as fitting into the narrative of a tragic hero. Additionally, Burns (2009) noted how coverage of athletes through media outlets places them within the American Dream myth through the overcoming of obstacles, working from the bottom up, and making sacrifices. These studies have provided a

foundation to observe potential techniques of sports media, yet one must take the

analyses a step further and provide quantifiable data to truly examine framing practices.

Therefore, two additional RQs were generated to examine how athletes are portrayed in

regards to competition results:

> *RQ₂: How will athletes with the most mentions be portrayed in regards to*
>
> *contributing or failing to contribute to the victory or defeat in a team*
>
> *competition?*
>
> *RQ₃: How will the athletes with the most mentions be portrayed in terms of*
>
> *success or failure within an individual competition?*

The author found no current research to support the above research questions.

However, through understanding how an athlete is portrayed within sports highlights as

to contributing to the outcome of a competition, one may be able to suggest further

implications and research regarding the framing practices and the elevation of celebrity

status. As there is little quantitative research regarding individual portrayals of athletes,

these research questions should spark interest in seeking to understand if there is an

increase in praise or scrutiny of such athletes. Utilizing conclusions of the current

research and previous knowledge regarding sports highlights and analysis, the researcher

believes there is added pressure on superstar athletes in relation their performance within

team or individual competitions.

Chapter 2

METHOD

2.1   Sample

The study focused on the athlete descriptors (n= 22,712) and athlete mentions (n= 24,059) on ESPN in a one-week composite sample from June 10 to August 8, 2013. To construct the composite sample, each day was broken up into 8 three-hour time blocks (e.g., 12:00- 3:00am, 3:00am- 6:00am) totaling 392 possible recording parameters. Using individual, non-repeating random number generation sequences for each day of the week, each day randomly comprised one of each of the eight individual time blocks, thus creating a full 24 hours of content. In total, 168 hours of content was collected (see Appendix A).

The study focused on mentions and portrayals within programs that were considered "non in-competition" sporting events. Broadcasts that were considered competition broadcasts (e.g., The NBA Finals), pre-game broadcasts (e.g., *NASCAR Countdown*), or post-game analysis (e.g., Wimbledon analysis) were omitted from analysis.

2.2   Coders and Coder Training

Coders of the ESPN programs were the author and an additional graduate student from the Department of Communication at an East Coast University. The primary author

coded 100% of the sample, while the additional coder coded a randomly selected 20% of the sample. Each coder was trained through the coding of one randomly selected hour of content from the original sample. The training also consisted of discussions and explanations of the recording instrument, as well as meetings with a faculty advisor to discuss refinement of the recording instrument and proper coding application. Through such discussions and refinement, training lasted approximately two weeks.

2.3   Intercoder Reliability

Each variable was tested for intercoder reliability through the use of Cohen's kappa (Cohen, 1960). It is important to note that the reliability of the variables is not as strong as it should be. Disparity among the coded descriptors was very low, yielding reliability scores ranging from .12 to .26. Such low reliability scores may be due to the significant variation in the number of descriptors coded; the primary coder coded 5,299 descriptive phrases with the second coder having a percent agreement of 16.3%. However, when examining the descriptors the two coders had in common (n=866), Cohen's kappa results ranged from .79 to 1.00. Thus, the reported kappa scores are adjusted to reflect the reliability between those descriptors that were coded in common.

Potential reasons for the overall low reliability measures will further be discussed within the limitations and directions for future research. Therefore, discretion should be used when interpreting the results and tables. The author does not believe, however, that the lack of reliability invalidates the results presented in later sections, though one acknowledges the weakening of the results and their implications.

2.4   Recording Instrument

There was one primary unit of analysis in the recording instrument: the athlete

(see Appendix B). Each athlete was coded for mentions (n= 24,059) within the individual

broadcast and was subsequently coded for the individual descriptors (n= 22,712). Only

those descriptors, comments, or mentions utilized by ESPN employees were coded in the

analysis. Employees included *SportsCenter* or other studio anchors (e.g., Neil Everett,

Karl Ravech), on-site reporters and "insiders" (e.g., Bob Holtzman, Adam Schefter), and

former coaches and athletes who are now employed by the network (e.g., Barry Melrose,

Tim Hasselbeck). Those comments made by in-competition color-commentators, play-

by-play announcers, or reporters, yet utilized within the broadcasts as highlights,

flashbacks, or montages, were omitted from analysis.

2.5   Variables

An athlete mention was recorded every time an athlete's name was spoken within

the broadcasts. These mentions include any formation of their first or last name (e.g.,

LeBron James, LeBron, or James) or any accepted nickname used in reference to an

athlete (e.g., A-Rod, King Felix, R.G. 3). The use of pronouns (e.g., he, the slugger,

World's number 1) were not coded as mentions, though, if applicable, may have been

coded for descriptors. Mentions that were utilized within in-game competition or by

unidentified reporters were not coded. Furthermore, previous segments used from prior

airings of ESPN programming were also omitted from the mention analysis.

The following categories were used to code athlete descriptors: program

characteristics, athlete demographics and affiliation, story theme and portrayal, attributes

of success and failure/personality and physicality characteristics, and team/individual

competition outcome. Each program was coded for the month (June, July, August), day,

and year (2013) of its original airdate. In addition, each program was coded for its *time of*

broadcast (12:00am- 3:00am, 3:00am- 6:00am, 6:00am- 9:00am, 9:00am- 12:00pm,

12:00pm- 3:00pm, 3:00pm- 6:00pm, 6:00pm- 9:00pm, 9:00pm- 12:00am), *program title*,

and *program format*. Within the current study, *program format* examined the structure

and prevailing theme of the show. *Program format* was coded as sports highlight/news,

debate, sports specific, breaking news, documentary/extended portrayals, or other.

    The athlete demographics and affiliation category examined the individual

characteristics and sports affiliations of the described athlete. *Athlete gender* (κ = 1.00),

which sought to understand the gender identity and breakdown of described athletes, was

coded as male, female, or unknown. *Athlete race* (κ = .98) was coded on the aesthetic of

the athlete and sought to examine which races were primarily represented within the

network. *Athlete race* was coded as White, Black, Asian, Latino/ Hispanic, or cannot

code. *Sport affiliation* (κ = .98) coded the sport in which the athlete is most commonly

portrayed and associated with. For example, if Tony Romo played in a pro/ am golf

event, he would be coded for his football affiliation, not as a golfer. *Sport affiliation* was

coded as cannot code/no sport affiliation, baseball, basketball, football, hockey, golf,

tennis, racecar driving, motocross/ X-games events, soccer, track and field, and other.

    The story theme and portrayal category sought to understand the circumstances in

which descriptive phrases were used, and the overall presentation of the individual

athletes. *Presentation format* (κ = .95) identified the manner in which the ESPN

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employee described the athlete. *Presentation format* was coded as highlights, debate, analysis, sports related news story, non-sports related news story, interview, extended montage or portrayal, event promotion, or other. Furthermore, *story theme* (κ = .96) addressed the topics in which the athlete was most mentioned and described within the ESPN broadcasts. *Story theme* was coded as athletic talent/ability, trade talk/signing with team, retirement, on the field misconduct/suspension/fines due to sports related misconduct, salary discussion, injury and sports rehabilitation, philanthropy/charity, crime and illegality, off the field misconduct, death/bereavement, victimization, and other.

Athlete/theme representation (κ = .96) examined if the athlete was portrayed in an overly positive or negative way and was coded as positive, negative, or neutral. *Athlete/theme representation* was coded based on the overall portrayal of the athlete, with coders utilizing the descriptors, tone, and story theme to determine the possibility of positive or negative representation.

The variable of *attributes of success/failure* and *personality and physicality* (κ = .81) is comprised of the taxonomy first created and utilized by Billings and Eastman (2003). Within the current study, this taxonomy was used to examine how ESPN employees described the portrayed athlete and how such descriptors may contribute to an overall positive or negative portrayal of said athlete. To code for *attributes of success/failure* and *personality and physicality*, each word for word adjectival or adverbial phrase (see Angelini, MacArthur, & Billings, 2012) was recorded and coded by the individual coders. As noted by Billings and Eastman (2003) and further elaborated in

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more recent sports communication methodology (see Angelini, et al., 2012) the taxonomy is comprised of 16 categories that encompass the various descriptors spoken by sports journalists and analysts. The descriptive categories are as follows: concentration (e.g., "that took incredible concentration"), strength based athletic skill (e.g., "the strongest man on earth"), talent or ability based athletic skill (e.g., "he has immense talent"), composure (e.g., "seems to be un-phased"), commitment (e.g., "seems to have rededicated himself"), courage (e.g., "amazing courage"), experience (e.g., "3-time MVP"), athletic consonance (e.g., "you got lucky tonight"), intelligence (e.g., "a very smart player"), extroverted/outgoingness (e.g., "he's exuberant"), modesty/ introverted (e.g., "he was humbled"), emotional (e.g., "overcome with emotion"), attractiveness (e.g., "he's good looking"), size/parts of body (e.g., "275 pounds, he's a big man"), background (e.g., "hailing from the same hometown as Sydney Crosby"), and other.

The differences among *attributes of success/failure* and *personality and physicality* were analyzed by chi-square to determine if there were significant differences between groups through using the percentage of overall comments as its expected frequencies (see Billings & Eastman, 2003). For example, because 95 percent of all comments regarding attributes of success were about male athletes (N = 13,578), it should be expected that approximately the same proportion of comments about skill, courage, concentration, and the other categories should be about male athletes. As Billings and Eastman (2003) note, it is through using this expectancy that one can truly establish more meaningful and significant deviations of these attributes among the athlete portrayals.

Attribute classification (κ = .79) was only used to classify those attributes that pertained to attributes of success or failure (i.e., concentration through intelligence). These were coded as cannot code, positively portrayed, negatively portrayed, or neutral portrayal. When descriptors for *personality and physicality* were utilized, "cannot code" was added to the coding scheme.

Finally, the team/individual competition category outcome was coded through the following variables: *team/individual victory or defeat* and *team/individual victory or defeat association*. *Team/individual victory or defeat* (κ = .86) examined if the athlete won, lost, or tied within their respective competition. If the team's outcome was not announced, or if there was no outcome associated due to the story theme, the variable was coded as "cannot code." Otherwise, *victory or defeat* was coded as won, lost, or tied.

Team/individual association (κ = .81) examined if the athlete was portrayed as responsible or instrumental in the team's outcome. This was coded based on any analysis or direct phrases that would suggest that an individual athlete was responsible for the specific results of the contest. However, mere strong or weak performances were not always framed to a specific association. Additionally, if no outcome was announced, or if there was no outcome associated with the story theme, the variable was coded as "cannot code." *Team/individual victory or defeat association* was coded as cannot code, associated with victory, not associated with victory, associated with loss, not associated with loss, associated with tie, not associated with tie.

Chapter 3

RESULTS

This section will present the results of a content analysis of a composite week of programming from the main network of ESPN from the summer of 2013. Results should be viewed with caution due to low reliability scores.

3.1   Athlete Mentions

The current project evaluated the attributed celebrity status of athletes and potential gender and racial differences among descriptors of athleticism and personality/physicality. A total of 22,715 descriptors were coded and analyzed. Additionally, 2,065 different athletes were portrayed during the current the sample.

H_1 predicted specific athletes would receive significantly more coverage than other athletes in the sample. In terms of athlete name mentions, a frequency distribution found that 10 athletes accounted for 16.3% (n = 3,917) of the 24,059 comments containing an athlete's name (see Table 3.1). Individual chi-square goodness-of-fit analyses were conducted for each of the top 10 athletes to examine potential significant differences. These chi-square goodness-of-fit analyses found significant differences in the number of mentions for LeBron James (n = 754) (χ^2(9, N = 3,917) = 337.01, $p < .001$), Aaron Hernandez (n = 688) (χ^2(9, N = 3,917) = 225.59, $p < .001$), and Yasiel Puig (n = 482) (χ^2(9, N = 3,917) = 21.17, $p < .001$).

Table 3.1 Top 10 Mentioned Athletes (without Descriptors)

Athlete Name	Sport	Number of Mentions	Percent of Total Mentions in Sample (N = 24,059)
LeBron James[a]	Basketball	754	3.1
Aaron Hernandez[b]	Football	688	2.9
Yasiel Puig[c]	Baseball	482	2.0
Alex Rodriguez	Baseball	370	1.5
Tiger Woods	Golf	335	1.4
Dwight Howard	Basketball	333	1.4
Riley Cooper	Football	267	1.1
Miguel Cabrera	Baseball	262	1.1
Chris Davis	Baseball	253	1.1
Derek Jeter	Baseball	173	0.7
Total		3,917	16.3

[a]$\chi^2(9, N = 3,917) = 337.01, p < .001$; [b]$\chi^2(9, N = 3,917) = 225.59, p < .001$; [c]$\chi^2(9, N = 3,917) = 21.17, p < .001$

Moreover, a frequency distribution revealed ten athletes received 19.73% (n = 4,483) of the total mentions with descriptors (N = 22,715). Table 3.2 shows the number and overall percentage of these athlete descriptors. A chi-square goodness-of-fit analysis was completed for each athlete within the *Top Ten Mentioned Athletes with Descriptors* to determine potential significant differences. Individual chi-square goodness-of-fit analyses revealed significant differences in the number of descriptors with mentions regarding LeBron James (n = 869) ($\chi^2(9, N = 4,483) = 395.63, p < .001$) Yasiel Puig (n = 680) ($\chi^2(9, N = 4,483) = 120.14, p < .001$), and Tiger Woods (n = 623) ($\chi^2(9, N = 4,483) = 395.63, p < .001$). Thus, H1 is partially supported as only three athletes garnered statistically significant differences in coverage.

Table 3.2 Top 10 Mentioned Athletes with Descriptors

Athlete Name	Sport	Number of Descriptors	Percent of Total Descriptors in Sample (N= 22,715)
LeBron James[a]	Basketball	869	3.8
Yasiel Puig[b]	Baseball	680	3.0
Tiger Woods[c]	Golf	623	2.7
Aaron Hernandez	Football	471	2.1
Chris Davis	Baseball	463	2.0
Phil Mickelson	Golf	333	1.5
Alex Rodriguez	Baseball	320	1.4
Miguel Cabrera	Baseball	282	1.2
Derek Jeter	Baseball	231	1.0
Inbee Park	Golf	211	0.9
Total		4,483	19.73

[a]$\chi^2(9, N = 4,483) = 395.63, p < .001$; [b]$\chi^2(9, N = 4,483) = 120.14, p < .001$; [c]$\chi^2(9, N = 4,483) = 395.63, p < .001$

3.2 Athlete Gender Representation

H$_2$ predicted women athletes would be under-represented in the broadcasts of ESPN. Using Adams and Tuggle's (2004) data, which found women were under-represented 98:2 on ESPN's *SportsCenter* as the expected value, a chi-square analysis was calculated to determine if a significant difference was present.

Table 3.3 Athlete Descriptors by Gender

Gender	Descriptor Total	Observed Percent
Male	21,703	95
Female	1,014	5
Total	22,715	100

$\chi^2 = 4.59, df = 1, p < .05$

A frequency distribution indicated of those mentions with descriptors, 95% (n = 21,703) of them were about male athletes and 5% (n = 1,014) were about female athletes, as shown in Table 3.3. Additionally, a chi-square analysis determined this distribution was significant ($\chi^2 = 4.59$, $df = 1$, $p < .05$), supporting the notion that women remain under-represented within ESPN broadcasting.

Significant differences in gender were also found when examining descriptors of success and failure among all athletes present in the sample. Table 3.4 shows male athletes were more likely to be depicted as successful due to their athletic strength ($\chi^2 = 5.83$, $df = 1$, $p < .025$), experience ($\chi^2 = 15.65$, $df = 1$, $p < .001$), and intelligence ($\chi^2 = 4.58$, $df = 1$, $p < .05$) than female athletes. In terms of failure, male athletes were viewed as more likely to fail due to lack of experience ($\chi^2 = 6.15$, $df = 1$, $p < .025$).

Table 3.4 Descriptive Analysis of Success/ Failure by Gender

| | Gender | | | | | | | |
| | Success | | | | Failure | | | |
	Men	(%)	Women	(%)	Men	(%)	Women	(%)	Total
Concentration	4	0.0	0	0.0	6	0.2	1	0.6	11
Athletic Strength	213[a]	2.0	3[a]	0.5	3	0.1	0	0.0	219
Athletic Skill	9624	89.8	492	89.8	2554	89.1	139	86.8	12,809
Composure	72	0.7	4	0.7	42	1.5	2	1.3	120
Commitment	261	2.4	7	1.3	32	1.1	2	1.3	302
Courage	21	0.2	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	21
Experience	350[b]	3.3	36[b]	6.6	162[d]	5.7	16[d]	10	564
Intelligence	124[c]	1.2	1[c]	0.2	21	0.7	0	0.0	146
Consonance	43	0.4	5	0.9	46	1.7	0	0.0	94
Total	10,712		548		2,866		160		14,286

[a]$\chi^2 = 5.83$, $df = 1$, $p < .025$; [b]$\chi^2 = 15.65$, $df = 1$, $p < .001$; [c]$\chi^2 = 4.58$, $df = 1$, $p < .05$, [d]$\chi^2 = 6.15$, $df = 1$, $p < .025$

(%) represents the column percent of the selected group

Three significant differences were also found when examining attributes of personality and physicality. Table 3.5 shows that male athletes were viewed as more modest ($\chi^2 = 4.01$, $df = 1$, $p < .05$), emotional ($\chi^2 = 11.39$, $df = 1$, $p < .001$), and were described more according to their size and parts of their body ($\chi^2 = 9.49$, $df = 1$, $p < .005$).

Table 3.5 Descriptive Analysis of Personality and Physicality by Gender

	Gender				
	Men	(%)	Women	(%)	Total
Outgoing/ Extroverted	36	2.3	3	3.2	39
Modest/ Introverted	97[a]	6.3	1[a]	1.1	98
Emotional	110[b]	7.1	16[b]	17	126
Attractiveness	25	1.6	1	1.1	26
Size/ Parts of Body	219[c]	14.1	2[c]	2.1	221
Background	1063	68.6	71	75.5	1,134
Total	1550		94		1,644

[a]$\chi^2 = 4.01$, $df = 1$, $p < .05$; [b]$\chi^2 = 11.39$, $df = 1$, $p < .001$; [c]$\chi^2 = 9.49$, $df = 1$, $p < .005$
(%) represents column percent of selected group

Though a gender gap is present (see Table 3.3), H_2 may only be partially supported as many of the descriptors of success/failure and personality and physicality did not yield significant differences.

3.3   Athlete Athletic Ability

H_{3a} predicted the athletes with the most mentions would be lauded for their athletic ability. The variable of athletic ability was comprised of those descriptors regarding athletic strength and athletic skill. As shown in Table 3.6, 13,085 descriptive

phrases were used to describe athletic ability, with 2,323 used to describe the top 10

athletes within the sample. These 2,323 descriptors accounted for 17.8% of the

descriptors used to describe athletic ability and 10.2% of our overall sample.

Table 3.6 Attributes of Athletic Ability

Athlete	Athletic Ability		
	Athletic Strength	Athletic Skill	Total
LeBron James	2	467	469[a]
Yasiel Puig	0	349	349[b]
Tiger Woods	2	387	389[c]
Aaron Hernandez	0	51	51
Chris Davis	26	349	375[d]
Phil Mickelson	0	185	185
Alex Rodriguez	0	58	58
Miguel Cabrera	0	200	200
Derek Jeter	1	87	88
Inbee Park	0	159	159
Others	188	10,574	10,762
Total	219	12,866	13,085

[a]$\chi^2(9, N = 2,323) = 242.11, p < .001$; [b]$\chi^2(9, N = 2,323) = 58, p < .001$; [c]$\chi^2(9, N = 2,323) = 106.25, p < .001$; [d]$\chi^2(9, N = 2,323) = 88.14, p < .001$

Individual chi-square goodness-of-fit analyses were used to determine significant

differences of athletic skill attribution among the *Top 10 Mentioned Athletes with*

Descriptors. These chi-square goodness-of-fit analyses revealed significant differences in

the athletic descriptions of LeBron James (n = 469) ($\chi^2(9, N = 2,323) = 242.11, p < .001$),

Yasiel Puig (n = 349) ($\chi^2(9, N = 2,323) = 58, p < .001$), Tiger Woods (n = 389) ($\chi^2(9, N$

$= 2,323) = 106.25, p < .001$), and Chris Davis (n = 375) ($\chi^2(9, N = 2,323) = 88.14, p <$

$.001$). However, H$_{3a}$ may only be partially supported, as six of the top 10 athletes yielded

non-significant chi-square values, with three of the top ten athletes receiving under 100

descriptors regarding one's athletic ability.

3.4   Athlete Intellectual Ability

H_{3b} predicted the athletes with the most mentions would be lauded for their

intellectual ability. The variable of intellectual ability was comprised of those descriptors

regarding concentration, composure, and intelligence. As shown in Table 3.7, descriptors

of athletic intelligence accounted for 1.2% (n = 282) of the total descriptors.

Comparatively, only .2% (n = 52) of these intellectual descriptors were used to describe

Top 10 Mentioned Athletes with Descriptors.

Table 3.7 Attributes of Athletic Intelligence

Athlete	Athletic Intelligence			
	Concentration	Composure	Intelligence	Total
LeBron James	0	8	6	14
Yasiel Puig	0	1	0	1
Tiger Woods	1	8	4	13
Aaron Hernandez	0	0	0	0
Chris Davis	0	4	1	5
Phil Mickelson	2	9	6	17[a]
Alex Rodriguez	0	0	2	2
Miguel Cabrera	0	0	0	0
Derek Jeter	0	0	0	0
Inbee Park	0	0	0	0
Others	12	90	128	230
Total	15	120	147	282

[a]$\chi^2(9, N= 282) = 28.8, p < .001$

When evaluating the *Top 10 Mentioned Athletes with Descriptors*, individual chi-square goodness-of-fit analyses were used to determine significant differences among intellectual descriptors. A chi-square goodness-of-fit analysis determined a significant difference in intellectual descriptors pertaining to Phil Mickelson (n= 17) (χ^2(9, N = 282) = 28.8, *p* < .001). While this leaves much to investigate within the discussion section, H_{3b} remains largely unsupported as the majority of categories yielded insignificant results.

3.5   Athlete Association with Team Success/Failure

Table 3.8 Athlete Association with Team Victory or Loss

Athlete	Team Victory/ Loss Association				
	Associated with Victory	Not Associated with Victory	Associated with Loss	Not Associated with Loss	Total
LeBron James	17	156	0	186	359
Yasiel Puig	50	133	0	105	288
Aaron Hernandez	0	0	0	0	0
Chris Davis	3	149	0	88	240
Alex Rodriguez	0	0	0	1	1
Miguel Cabrera	0	26	0	113	139
Derek Jeter	24	53	0	3	80
Total	94	517	0	496	1,107

RQ$_2$ examined how the athletes with the most mentions were framed in regards to contributing to their team's outcome. Table 3.8 shows that of the 1,201 total descriptors that associated athletes with victory, 94 descriptors, or 7.8%, were used to describe the *Top 10 Mentioned Athletes with Descriptors* associated with a team victory (i.e., LeBron

James, Yasiel Puig, Aaron Hernandez, Chris Davis, Alex Rodriguez, Miguel Cabrera, and Derek Jeter). In addition, of the 109 descriptors used to associate athletes with team losses, no descriptors were used to associate these athletes with the team's loss.

3.6   Athlete Association with Individual Victory or Loss

RQ$_3$ examined how athletes with the most mentions were portrayed in terms of success or failure within individual competitions. As shown in Table 3.9, of the 1,201 total descriptors associating athletes with a victory, 64 descriptors, or 5.3%, were used to describe those Top 10 athletes who participate in individual competitions (i.e., Tiger Woods, Phil Mickelson, and Inbee Park), all of which are golfers on the PGA or LPGA Tours. In regards to failure, none of these athletes were associated with responsibility for a loss within their individual competition.

Table 3.9 Athlete Association with Individual Victory or Loss

	Individual Victory/Loss Association				
Athlete	Associated with Victory	Not Associated with Victory	Associated with Loss	Not Associated with Loss	Total
Tiger Woods	25	1	0	0	26
Phil Mickelson	15	0	0	0	15
Inbee Park	24	0	0	0	24
Total	64	1	0	0	65

3.7   Athlete Race Representation

Though no specific hypotheses were made regarding race and descriptors of *success/failure* and *personality and physicality*, post-hoc analyses were conducted to see

if there were any significant differences amongst descriptors and athlete race. As illustrated in Table 3.10, a chi-square analysis indicated significant differences in attributes of success among four categories. White athletes were viewed as more likely to have succeeded based on athletic strength ($\chi^2 = 9.88$, $df = 4$, $p < .05$), athletic skill ($\chi^2 = 13.25$, $df = 4$, $p < .025$), and experience ($\chi^2 = 16.79$, $df = 4$, $p < .005$); Black athletes were viewed to have succeeded due to their commitment ($\chi^2 = 71.75$ $df = 4$, $p < .001$).

Table 3.10 Descriptive Analysis of Success by Race

	Race					
	Success					
	White	Black	Asian	Latino	Other	Total
Concentration	2	2	0	0	0	4
Athletic Strength	123[a]	48[a]	1[a]	42[a]	2[a]	216
Athletic Skill	5038[b]	2938[b]	281[b]	1758[b]	100[b]	10,115
Composure	47	16	0	13	0	76
Commitment	110[c]	138[c]	3[c]	16[c]	1[c]	268
Courage	8	8	0	5	0	21
Experience	216[d]	124[d]	9[d]	36[d]	1[d]	386
Intelligence	54	47	1	21	2	125
Consonance	25	8	2	13	0	48
Total	5,623	3329	297	1,904	106	11,259

[a]$\chi^2 = 9.88$, $df = 4$, $p < .05$; [b]$\chi^2 = 13.25$, $df = 4$, $p < .025$; [c]$\chi^2 = 71.75$ $df = 4$, $p < .001$; [d]$\chi^2 = 16.79$, $df = 4$, $p < .005$

When observing failure, a chi-square analysis revealed significant differences in two categories: athletic skill and consonance. As shown in Table 3.11, White athletes were portrayed to have failed because they lacked skill ($\chi^2 = 17.49$, $df = 4$, $p < .005$). In

addition, White athletes were portrayed to have failed due to bad luck, or from being

unlucky ($\chi^2 = 24.03$, $df = 4$, $p < .001$).

Table 3.11 Descriptive Analysis of Failure by Race

	Race					
	Failure					
	White	Black	Asian	Latino	Other	Total
Concentration	5	1	0	1	0	7
Athletic Strength	3	0	0	0	0	3
Athletic Skill	1457[a]	748[a]	60[a]	417[a]	9[a]	2,691
Composure	19	18	2	5	0	44
Commitment	15	12	0	7	0	34
Courage	0	0	0	0	0	0
Experience	103	44	2	29	0	178
Intelligence	8	11	0	2	0	21
Consonance	40[b]	4[b]	0[b]	2[b]	0[b]	46
Total	1,650	838	64	463	9	3,024

[a]$\chi^2 = 17.49$, $df = 4$, $p < .005$; [b]$\chi^2 = 24.03$, $df = 4$, $p < .001$

Finally, when observing attributes of *personality* and *physicality*, a chi-square

analysis showed significant differences among five categories, and is illustrated in Table

3.12. While Black athletes were portrayed based on their outgoingness and extroversion

($\chi^2 = 16.82$, $df = 4$, $p < .005$), White athletes were portrayed as more emotional ($\chi^2 =$

19.80, $df = 4$, $p < .001$). Additionally, Black athletes were portrayed based on their

modesty ($\chi^2 = 15.29$, $df = 4$, $p < .005$) and received more descriptors regarding the size

and parts of the body ($\chi^2 = 21.04$, $df = 4$, $p < .001$). Finally, White athletes received more

descriptors regarding their background ($\chi^2 = 24.68$, $df = 4$, $p < .001$) than the other races present in the sample.

Table 3.12 Descriptive Analysis of Personality and Physicality by Race

	Race					
	White	Black	Asian	Latino	Other	Total
Outgoing/ Extroverted	7^a	24^a	0^a	8^a	0^a	39
Modest/ Introverted	40^b	45^b	0^b	13^b	0^b	98
Emotional	88^c	25^c	0^c	13^c	0^c	126
Attractiveness	13	12	0	1	0	26
Size/ Parts of Body	84^d	89^d	3^d	41^d	4^d	221
Background	570^e	387^e	17^e	158^e	2^e	1134
Total	802	582	20	234	6	1644

$^a\chi^2 = 16.82$, $df = 4$, $p < .005$; $^b\chi^2 = 15.29$, $df = 4$, $p < .005$; $^c\chi^2 = 19.80$, $df = 4$, $p < .001$; $^d\chi^2 = 21.04$, $df = 4$, $p < .001$; $^e\chi^2 = 24.68$, $df = 4$, $p < .001$

Chapter 4

DISCUSSION

4.1   Summary

This study was a content analysis examining the celebrity status and athlete descriptive representation of athletes on the main network of ESPN. Exploring gender representation, attributes of success and failure, attributions of personality and physicality, athletic and intellectual skill, and contributions to victory or defeat, the study examined a composite week of programming during the summer of 2013. Framing (Gitlin, 1980; Goffman, 1974) and celebrity attribution (Hellmueller & Aeschbacher, 2010; Rojeck, 2001) theories were used as the theoretical foundations for this project. Additionally, sports framing methodologies (Billings & Eastman, 2003) were used to code for *attributes of success/failure* and *personality and physicality* within the recording instrument.

The *attributed* celebrity status of the athletes was coded based on the number of spoken mentions and descriptors found or heard in broadcasts. Gender representation was explored through comparisons of *attributes of success/failure* and *personality and physicality* and through an analysis exploring the percentage of descriptive coverage garnered to each gender. Athletic abilities of superstar athletes were determined through coding for athletic strength and skill; intellectual ability was examined through coding for concentration, composure, and intelligence. Finally, contributions to individual or team

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outcomes were examined through coding how athletes were portrayed as contributing to the competition.

Results indicate that athletes presented on the main network of ESPN may further be granted celebrity status beyond that of which they have achieved. Statistically significant chi-square results reveal LeBron James, Yasiel Puig, and Tiger Woods received much of ESPN's descriptive coverage and, thus, were further attributed celebrity status. In regards to gender representation, women continued to be under-represented within the main network coverage of ESPN, with a ratio of 95 descriptive comments about male athletes to every 5 descriptive comments about female athletes. Furthermore, there were gender differences present among how male and female athletes were described by ESPN employees, with significant differences among those comments regarding athletic strength, experience, intelligence, modesty/introverted, emotionality, and size/parts of the body.

Analyses of athletic ability revealed LeBron James, Yasiel Puig, Tiger Woods, and Chris Davis received statistically more comments regarding their athletic ability than other athletes present within the sample. However, only Phil Mickelson received statistically more comments regarding one's intellectual ability. There also remained no significant results of superstar athletes contributing to the overall outcome in team or individual competitions. Finally, post-hoc analyses revealed significant racial differences in descriptors regarding athletic strength, athletic skill, commitment, experience, outgoing/extroverted, modesty/introverted, emotionality, size/parts of the body, and background.

Though one must use discretion when interpreting these results, as reliability was not strong between two coders, the results indicate implications regarding celebrity status attribution and framing discrepancies among gender, race, and specific athletes. The present chapter will explore the findings and implications in greater detail and discuss potential limitations of the present study, as well as suggested directions for future research.

4.2   Findings and Implications

The following sections will present findings of *attributed* celebrity status, gender depictions, athletic and intellectual representations of superstar athletes, and contributions to team/individual victory and failure. Limitations and directions for future research will also be discussed.

4.2.1   Attributed Celebrity Status

RQ_1 examined if the framing practices of ESPN served to boost or damage the celebrity status of athletes. In addition, H_1 predicted specific athletes would receive significantly more descriptors than others on the network. When describing celebrity status, Rojeck (2001) states celebrities are "cultural fabrications" (p. 11). In other words, Rojeck (2001) argues celebrities rely on the media as a way to not only gain recognition, and that the media provides a way to maintain a continued presence within celebrity culture.

When observing the mentions with descriptive phrases, it is obvious ESPN continues to moderate, and seemingly boost, the celebrity statuses of LeBron James,

Yasiel Puig, and Tiger Woods beyond that they achieved through their performance. Statistically significant chi-square results unveiled a culture of continual coverage targeted at specific athletes far beyond the others seen on the network. Previous analyses of ESPN's *SportsCenter* in 2012 support the results finding LeBron James to be the network's most mentioned athlete and Tiger Woods within the Top 10 (Burns, 2013).

These results do not simply point towards the superior talent of these three individuals. As noted by Rojeck (2001), *achieved* celebrities have the ability to be an *attributed* celebrity based on their presence within the mass media. The results illustrate ESPN's ability to create sports celebrities within our culture. Through these mediated representations, sports fans see an exaggerated level of athletic superiority and may further perceive that certain athletes receive exaggerated levels of greatness within the sporting culture.

4.2.1.1 LeBron James

When looking at the specific athletes presented in the sample, the overall presence of LeBron James required further examination. Unlike Puig and Woods, whose athletic seasons continued well into the fall months, James' 2013 season concluded on June 20th. LeBron James' media presence throughout the summer of 2013 was upheld through ESPN's series, *LeBron in Chapters*, and through continual debates comparing James to Michael Jordan, an NBA Hall of Famer and five-time NBA-MVP. It is here where one may clearly identify the superstar status of LeBron James. While James was said to have performed well within the NBA Finals, such an MVP-performance may have begun to overshadow the accomplishments of other athletes. In line with assertions made by

Serazio (2010), one observes the ESPN employees not as non-biased journalists, but instead engaged sports fans. Discussions of James' talent and comparisons to hall of fame players elevates and exaggerates the superior talents of this all-star player to that of a sports superstar.

4.2.1.2 Business Implication

Regardless of the athlete or their apparent attributive celebrity qualities, it is clear that extended coverage of superstar athletes remain not necessarily a journalistic decision, but a business decision. As ESPN's senior coordinating producer, Michael Shiffman states, there are specific athletes who "move the needle" (via McBride, 2012); in other words, there are certain athletes who may drive higher ratings to the network. And though critiques have identified gender disparities (see Adams & Tuggle, 2004) and athlete-specific coverage (Burns, 2013), ESPN continues to rank within the top 10 cable networks and has a net worth of over 40 billion dollars (Badenhausen, 2012; Kondolojy, 2014). Thus, the implications of this study does not seek to change the business model of ESPN, nor should it seek to devalue the talents of superstar athletes. Instead, the implications show a sports culture that is built firmly on the talents these athletes provide. Through granting this elevated status, a glorified sporting culture is created. Therefore, the product of ESPN may not *have* to be non-biased sports coverage. Instead, the product of ESPN rests on the ability to associate its brand with superstar athletes as a way to further promote and build its brand identity.

4.2.2 Gender Representation

H$_2$ predicted women athletes would be under-represented within the broadcasts of ESPN. In line with previous analyses exploring gender representation on the network (see Adams & Tuggle, 2004; Burns, 2013; Tuggle, 1997), women were largely under-represented, receiving 5 percent of the descriptive mentions present in the sample. However, Inbee Park, a female golfer, was present within the *Top 10 Mentioned Athletes with Descriptors*, though there was not a statistically significant difference in the number of descriptors spoken about her.

Taken together, results regarding gender representation indicate few, if any, efforts by the network to boost the coverage of women's athletics. While Burns (2013) found no women within his top 12 most mentioned athletes, Inbee Park's appearance in the *Top 10 Mentioned Athletes with Descriptors* indicates some progress. Indeed, her presence among the top ten athletes may hint towards greater recognition of female athletes and their accomplishments. Due to her attempt to win four major championships in a calendar year, a feat accomplished by no other male or female golfer, there may be historical implications to her presence within the *Top 10 Mentioned Athletes with Descriptors*. Regardless, her presence may indicate hope towards more coverage seeking to identify momentous occasions within women's athletics.

Moreover, the overall percent of descriptive comments pertaining to women athletes may be higher than the 5 percent reported in our results because of the framework of our coding schemes. In the summer of 2013, ESPN aired documentaries entitled *Nine for IX*, highlighting the accomplishments of prominent figures in women's

athletics. Celebrating the 40th anniversary of Title IX, the documentaries addressed both athletic accomplishments and overall female sports milestones (i.e., the emergence of female sports reporters). However, these documentaries were often narrated by athletes, coaches, or presented through interviews of non-ESPN employees. As such, these documentaries were not coded because they did fit the parameters set in place by the researcher. The inclusion of these documentaries would increase the overall presence of women on the network in the summer of 2013. However, the addition of these programs might artificially boost female representation because it is unclear if this type of programming will continue on the network beyond the sample timeframe.

As Angelini (2008) notes, the world of televised sports typically serves as a way to reinforce ingrained stereotypical perceptions of gender. Though efforts have been made to close the gender gap on the network, it is clear ESPN remains a boys' club, reserved for those seeking testosterone driven, masculine messages. While there may be several reasons for this gender gap, one most likely remains: audience demography. According to an ESPN media guide, ESPN remains the most popular network among males 18-34, an achievement held since 1998, and 61% of all males use ESPN media within the average week (ESPN Media Guide, 2010). This content may, self-reportedly, be more interesting to the male dominated audience, though such material may not actually elicit physiological differences (Angelini, 2008). Therefore, the under-representation of women on the primary ESPN network may not be a mistake, but a targeted effort based on the wants and desires of its audience demographic.

4.2.3   Gender Descriptive Representation

To further test the representation of women athletes, analyses were conducted to observe potential differences among *attributes of success/failure* and *personality and physicality*. Previous sports communication research found that although overarching stereotypes and themes may not be present, more subtle, complex gender *difference*s do emerge through the language spoken by sports broadcasters (Angelini et al., 2012). Consistent with previous examinations of the Olympics and in-game sports competitions, ESPN's non-competition coverage (i.e., *SportsCenter, Pardon the Interruption, Baseball Tonight*) perpetuates gender differences through the descriptors spoken by its employees.

When examining *attributes of success/failure*, male athletes were portrayed as succeeding within sporting competitions based on their athletic strength, their experience, and their intelligence. Similarly, male athletes were also portrayed as failing due to their lack of experience. These differences in *attributes of success/failure*, hint towards great levels of disparity within the network. As evident through overwhelming positive descriptors regarding strength, experience, and intelligence, clear power dynamics are conveyed, reinforcing gender role schemas within our society.

Additionally, through the examination of *personality and physicality*, further differences are revealed within the descriptors of male and female athletes. Significant differences were observed when describing male athletes based on their modesty, their emotionality, and their size/parts of the body. Throughout the study, women were not described more than men in any category, which may be due to their low representation on the network. It is despite this low representation that there were not significant

differences within all categories of *success/failure* and *personality and physicality*. This non-significance may point towards a closing of the gender gap, in terms of descriptive representation, but not an elimination of such gap.

Taken together, women continue to not only be under-represented, but misrepresented. While men are described based on their strength and experience, women lack many meaningful descriptors to validate their presence within the athletic arena. Consistent with Angelini's (2008) argument regarding general sports coverage, ESPN, constructs a gendered world both through its gender representation and gender descriptions. While the network aired *Nine for* IX and a female athlete, Inbee Park, was present in the *Top 10 Mentioned Athletes with Descriptors*, ESPN presents a male dominated sports culture, which, in part, may be due to its audience demography (see ESPN Media Guide, 2010). Regardless of this information, measures should ultimately be present to create a sporting culture that fully recognizes the achievements and abilities of female athletes.

4.2.4   Athletic Ability

H_{3a} predicted athletes with the most mentions would be lauded for their athletic ability. This variable was comprised of those descriptors regarding athletic strength and athletic skill. Previous research shows racial undertones no longer follow predictable patterns (Angelini & Billings, 2010b). Using Tiger Woods and Michelle Wie as examples of superstar athletes who previously broke common stereotype conceptions (Billings, 2003; Billings et al., 2008), H_{3a} was constructed to observe how superstar athletes were

portrayed regarding their athletic talent; H_{3b} was constructed to observe one's intellectual talent, and will be discussed in a following section.

Four athletes were framed as having superior athletic ability within the summer of 2013: LeBron James, Yasiel Puig, Tiger Woods, and Chris Davis. Present within the top 5 mentioned athletes, all of the above were described primarily on their skill, while only Chris Davis received more than 20 comments regarding his strength. Conclusions regarding the presence of LeBron James have already been explored within previous sections. While James was not in season for most of the sample, it is clear there remain superstar status implications due to continual discussions of his talent after the conclusion of the basketball season. Conclusions regarding Yasiel Puig, Tiger Woods, and Chris Davis will be explored in the following sections.

4.2.4.1 Yasiel Puig

Yasiel Puig was a Dodgers' rookie sensation and was quick to provide a spark to the Dodger lineup. His brief presence, and the consequential turn around of the Dodgers' season, made it easy for ESPN employees to praise Puig for his tenacity, ruthless skill, and backyard baseball mentality. Despite all of this, Puig's selfish attitude and rude behavior towards fans and reporters remained hidden. Stories were broadcast downplaying his less than desirable demeanor and highlighted his natural baseball skill and ability.

His athletic ability not only boosted his celebrity status, but suggested bad behavior was tolerable due to his immediate effect on the Dodgers' team. Though talented, the presence of Puig points towards a way to elevate these athletes to a level of

superstar status while seemingly downplaying their off the field conduct. The "rebel"

mentality served as a way to highlight him challenging the established baseball system,

rather than suggesting a lack of maturity. Puig not only served as a spark for the Dodgers,

but also a spark for ESPN.

4.2.4.2 Tiger Woods

Tiger Woods has been a continual presence on ESPN and within golf broadcasts

since he emerged on the PGA Tour as a rookie in 1996. Previous analyses have examined

his stereotypical portrayal as a Black athlete in a "white sport" and his presence within

ESPN's *SportsCenter* (Billings, 2003; Burns, 2013). It should come as no surprise that

Woods received praise regarding his athletic ability. Though he has not won a major

since 2008, Woods is often praised for his shot making ability and overall talent to hit the

golf ball.

Most surprising, however, Woods was not described based on his intellectual

ability. Unlike Phil Mickelson, Woods was primarily described based on his athletic

ability. As golf is described as an intellectual game, significant comments about his

athletic ability may hint towards racial disparities in the descriptions of Woods and

Mickelson. These results corroborate previous findings which suggest Black athletes are

described based on their athletic ability, while White athletes are described based on their

intelligence (Mercurio & Filak, 2010; Rada, 1996). This is not to say that ESPN

employees consciously depicted Woods as unintelligible or that they are racially charged

in their descriptions. Instead, such a disparity points towards racial differences being

ingrained within our sporting culture, with attributes continually falling within previously

constructed racial conformities. As a result, racial cues are further perpetuated through our sports culture.

4.2.4.3 Chris Davis

Chris Davis emerged on the scene as the first baseman for the Baltimore Orioles who set his sights on the homerun record. Though he ultimately fell short, Davis was a topic of discussion among ESPN employees as challenging Miguel Cabrera for the Triple Crown race. His homerun record in the summer of 2013 was unquestioned and, thus, attributes of his athletic ability should be as well. Davis' ability was glorified on ESPN and his celebrity status was elevated as such. An athlete who started the season not even as an all-star, Davis emerged as a superstar athlete, who may become a staple within future ESPN broadcasts. Future analyses should examine if his presence remains constant within later broadcasts of ESPN or if his celebrity status will no longer be attributed after his *historic* homerun season.

4.2.5   Intellectual Ability

H_{3b} predicted the athletes with the most mentions would be lauded for their intellectual abilities. Intellectual ability was comprised of those descriptors pertaining to concentration, composure, and intelligence. Overall, athletes were not lauded for their intellectual ability, as these descriptors only accounted for 1.2% of the total descriptors in the sample. This lack of intellectual descriptors may be due to the prominence of highlights in the programs, particularly *SportsCenter*. While intellectual descriptors may be spoken sparingly by ESPN employees, these descriptors may not be conducive to show formats that rest upon quick highlights showcasing the talents of specific athletes.

Intellectual ability may be absent from descriptions as it requires more in-depth analysis of the athlete, observing the composure, concentration, and intelligence from an analytical standpoint, rather than spur of the moment highlight reporting. Thus, while individual differences may be examined, overarching themes regarding intelligence remain largely absent from the results.

4.2.5.1 Phil Mickelson

In the current study, Phil Mickelson was the only athlete within the *Top 10 Mentioned Athletes with Descriptors* who received significant descriptors regarding his intellectual ability. As golf may be considered an intellectual game, it is of no surprise that the most intellectually described athlete is a professional golfer. However, these descriptions may unveil greater implications within the descriptions of professional golfers. Though numerically sparse, the presence of intellectual ability as a way to describe Mickelson's success in the sport of golf may reveal clear racial differences between him and Tiger Woods. While Woods received 389 descriptors regarding athletic talent, Mickelson only received 185. And while Mickelson received 17 comments regarding his intellectual ability, Woods received 13, a minuscule difference by comparison.

Though the differences between the two golfers are not large, a significant difference in the number of descriptors regarding Woods' athletic ability and Mickelson's intellectual ability within the same sport reveal underlying racial differences. It is clear that while Woods was described based on his athletic ability on the golf course, Mickelson was further described based on the mental abilities of his golf game. Taken

together, these reveal an underlying narrative of racial differences within descriptions of White and Black golfers that should continue to be examined. For if these differences continue to emerge, one may further see the discrepancies present among those descriptors of talent and intellectual ability within the specific context of golf competitions.

4.2.6   Athlete Association with Success/ Failure

RQ_2 and RQ_3 examined how athletes with the most mentions were framed in terms of contributing to the competition outcome. As no current research addresses this topic, it is important to investigate how superstar athletes are framed towards contributing to the victory or loss of a competition. The current coding instrument included variables to investigate possible aspects of contribution, yet no results indicated the overwhelming presence of superstar athletes contributing or failing to contribute to the competition.

As this was a new way to identifying athletic portrayal within sports broadcasting, these results point towards continual refinement of coding instruments to identify if specific athletes are framed in terms of contributing or failing to contribute in athletic contests. This refinement will not only allow researchers to observe if any relationships or significant differences are present, but will also allow one to further investigate how superstar athletes are framed as being praised or scrutinized within sports media. As a result, further methodological considerations should be examined as a way to accurately assess the contributions of these athletes in such events.

4.2.7 Framing Implications

One of the central tenets of framing theory suggests that audiences' perceptions of an issue are affected by the way it is characterized in a news story (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007). Though one cannot make conclusions of potential audience effects, this study adds to our understanding of this theoretical perspective. Specifically, through the processes of selection, emphasis, and exclusion (Gitlin, 1980), it is clear that interpretations of athletes and news events surrounding sports may be framed to elicit a specific reaction from the viewing audience. For example, the framing of Dodgers' outfielder Yasiel Puig indicates a framing process that not only *selected* his appearance within ESPN broadcasts, but also *emphasized* his sporting ability and *excluded* his poor off the field behavior.

In line with conclusions made by Fortunato (2001), one is able to recognize framing practices that elevate players beyond their presence within the athletic arena. While athletes were primarily described based on their athletic ability, ESPN employees created superstar narratives, exaggerating athletic ability and creating a glorified sporting culture. Evident with the framing process of LeBron James, the constructed narrative of James' ability glorifies the ideas of a "savior" and "the greatest player of all time" status. Indeed, it is through such purposeful messages that one may hint towards the potential interpretations made by the audience. Though the present study may not make conclusions of the intentionality of such messages or potential audience effects, previous framing research suggests these framing methods are purposeful measures to ensure a

specific interpretation by the audience (Entman, 2007; Lecheler & de Vreese, 2010; Pan & Kosicki, 1993).

Thus, theoretically the present study and its results aid in one's understanding of framing, particularly within sports broadcasting practices, as it allows one to recognize the purposive selection of messages as a way to promote a certain understanding of the content. While more subtle framing practices exist within the framing of gender and race, seemingly overt framing methods of superstar athletes (i.e., perceptions of greatness within the sporting arena) seem to unveil the true intentions of the network. As a result, one may suggest that the framing practices of ESPN serve as a way to not only build the individual brands of athletes, but promote an overall brand of sporting excellence. In this regard, the results suggest the framing of superstar athletes and sports coverage serves to promote an idealized sporting culture, building upon the successes and talents of those in the arena.

4.3   Limitations & Directions for Future Research

There are several limitations in the current study. First, as the reliability is not as strong as it should be, the results must be viewed carefully. There are several possible reasons for these discrepancies. First, as the process involved a very methodical and tedious coding scheme to ensure the accuracy of mentions and descriptors, the coding process itself may have created different results between the two coders, particularly in terms of the number of descriptive phrases. More training would have helped eliminate differences in descriptor coding and clarified appropriate coding technique. As only one episode was used for training, the coders were unable to fully understand the different

techniques and possible phrases spoken within the whole sample of broadcasts. In addition, though the *attributes of success/failure* and *personality and physicality* taxonomy is fully applicable to our current study, it is not always evident when such devices are being used within highlights, news, analysis, and debate. Along with more extensive training, clearer rules of coding should be established to ensure the accuracy of multiple coders.

Though the results should be taken with caution, the researcher does not believe they are invalid and endorses the conclusions presented both within the results and the discussion sections. Strong reliability of the descriptors coded in common suggests individual coding variables were still coded accurately and should not be invalidated as a result. However, the author fully acknowledges that further training and coding clarification must be completed to ensure the validity of the results.

A second limitation of the current study is the form of the coding instrument. Though great lengths were taken to ensure the accuracy of the coding instrument, multiple story themes and broadcasting techniques made it difficult to provide a truly mutually exclusive and exhaustive coding instrument. Future studies should seek to create an instrument that fully encompasses the many different techniques and varying production aspects of ESPN programming. It is here where one may strengthen the conclusions and implications of future studies.

Third, as the methodology was a content analysis, the researcher may not adequately make conclusions regarding possible effects. Effects of ESPN programming and celebrity elevation on the audience may only be addressed through an effects study.

However, through understanding the content of ESPN, such a study may serve as a basis in which future research may be conducted. Future studies may also seek to observe framing techniques utilized within online and mobile applications of ESPN. Through observing prevailing themes and understanding athlete representation, studies may be conducted to observe potential audience effects of the framing of sports superstars.

Finally, the study may be limited as one cannot quantitatively show the attributive power of the mass media even through statistically significant data. While the author believes one has provided adequate theoretical foundations and conclusions, it is clear that the lack of 'testing' for celebrity status may weaken the overall results of the present study. Future research should try to include qualitative methods to further investigate and validate conclusions regarding attributed celebrity status. It may be through these qualitative methods where one explores possible narratives, myths, and portrayal similarities of different athletes present within sports broadcasting. This may also, methodologically and theoretically, provide greater implications of the study of sports communication and celebrity status attribution.

4.4   Conclusion

The current study examined the attributed celebrity status through the descriptive framing spoken by ESPN employees. In addition to celebrity status, gender representation, athletic ability, intellectual ability, and athlete contribution were examined to understand the network's overall framing capability. The current project contributes to mass communication and sports communication literature as it provides new avenues in

which to utilize current framing methodologies and explores a new conception of *superstar* within sports culture as a type of attributed celebrity status.

Sports culture is dominated with live sports coverage and continual sports analysis and highlights. While sports communication scholars implemented an existing taxonomy within the broadcasts of the Olympic Games and competition coverage, very little research sought to isolate that coverage devoted to analyzing and reporting these sporting events. It is through implementing this existing taxonomy and the creation of new coding measures where one can understand how athletes are truly being portrayed within our sports culture and how this might aid to their overall celebrity status. For when we take such athletes out of the competition, researchers may investigate new avenues of their representation outside of its initial broadcast.

From observing the descriptors spoken to frame athletes, it is clear that one's celebrity status may be boosted from all-star to superstar within the main network of ESPN. Through a perpetual emphasis on the talent and athletic superiority of certain athletes, ESPN is not only able to moderate one's celebrity status, but elevate it beyond that achieved within competition. Primarily evident with the significant descriptors of LeBron James, Yasiel Puig, and Tiger Woods, ESPN contribute to their continual presence within our media environment and serves as a way to create an enduring sports legacy. As a result, each of these three athletes may be considered *superstars* as they are granted greater levels of stardom through overall descriptors regarding their talent, debates of their standing in sports history, and perceptions of legendary standing within sports culture; these achieved all-stars transcended to a level of attributed super-stardom.

Though women remain grossly under-represented on ESPN, it is clear that strides have been made in an attempt to close the gap. First, the *Nine for IX* documentaries gave more legitimacy to the achievements of women athletes, coaches, and journalists within the sporting culture, even if these programs were conditional to the summer of 2013. Even though these documentaries were relatively absent from the results due to the coding parameters set by the researcher, it was evident the network made efforts to boost the presence of female athletes, though not achieving equality. The presence of Inbee Park within the *Top 10 Mentioned Athletes with Descriptors* further legitimizes the accomplishments of women athletes within sporting culture. Due to her accomplishments, one can recognize a movement of women athletes who are validated through their presence in sports media. Thus, the under-representation should not be discouraging; it can serve as a level that can be improved upon.

Through exploring *attributes of success/failure* and *personality and physicality*, one sees continual differences in the way athletes are being portrayed. Though this is consistent with previous research, this current study isolated coverage that was not considered in-competition broadcasts. Differences in athletic and personality representation of gender and race go beyond sporting event coverage and move into the realms of highlight, analysis, and debate show formats. Through these differences, a gendered and racial sporting culture is created and perpetuated throughout the various programs on the network. Additionally, results pertaining to athletic skill and intelligence point towards the importance of a continual investigation of individual athletes and how such portrayals may contribute to their celebrity status. Results pertaining to athlete

contribution also reveal a greater need for researchers to quantitatively evaluate the framed contributions of athletes towards the outcome of a competition.

Theoretically, methodologically, and practically, the results have several implications. First, the theoretical implications reveal how the effectiveness of selection, emphasis, and exclusion may have a great impact on how a message is presented, and how such a message hopes to be received. For it is through this process of framing where one begins to understand the greater motivations for effectively framing a message for its audience. Additionally, the present research expands upon the concepts of *achieved* and *attributed* celebrity status. While it may be argued how much celebrity status a particular athlete has fully achieved, it is clear that the media provides an essential role in contributing to the overall celebrity status of individuals within our society. For without the media, celebrities would not exist. This study illustrates the validity of this argument through the presentation of professional athletes on ESPN.

Methodologically, the study expanded the use of a commonly accepted sports framing taxonomy (see Billings & Eastman, 2003). Though this taxonomy has been utilized in many in-game competitions, the current project expanded its usage to the realm of sports highlights, analyses, and debate. While this taxonomy was not, and should not, be the only coding measure utilized in these types of analyses, it helps to provide a more accurate understanding of sports broadcasting representation within our American culture. Furthermore, future coding instruments should be developed to more fully understand the content present within sports media. Through the creation of these instruments, researchers may fully understand the framing of specific teams, athletes,

sports, and story themes. This creation would allow researchers to explore the vast sports broadcasting culture and not be limited to demographic or individual athlete limitations.

Practically, the results of the present study hint towards a gendered world and the need for superstar athletes in our sports culture. From a gender perspective, women should be more visible in the main network of ESPN as a way to validate their rightful standing within the sporting community. Through this validation, it is the hope that one may tackle the hyper-masculine themes that saturate the ideas of sports culture and return to the values of competition, loyalty, and camaraderie. In regards to superstar athletes, such athletes are a necessity to the sporting culture due to the pure business perks they provide. From jersey and ticket sales to higher television ratings, it is clear that the superstar athlete is not merely a fabrication, but instead an integral part of the professional sports arena. As such, whether these athletes are unjustly given fame or have properly earned their stardom, this study illustrates that *superstars* provide the foundation in which sports media and sports culture are built.

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Appendix A

COMPOSITE SAMPLE SCHEDULE

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
12:00am-3:00am	July 29	July 9	June 19	June 27	July 5	July 13	July 14
3:00am-6:00am	July 1	July 9	June 26	June 20	June 14	June 22	June 30
6:00am-9:00am	July 8	June 25	June 12	July 11	July 5	June 22	June 16
9:00am-12:00pm	June 24	June 25	June 24	August 1	August 2	July 27	June 23
12:00pm-3:00pm	July 1	July 16	June 12	June 13	June 28	August 3	July 7
3:00pm-6:00pm	June 24	June 18	June 26	July 4	August 2	July 27	July 28
6:00pm-9:00pm	July 15	July 23	July 3	August 1	July 5	June 29	July 14
9:00pm -12:00pm	July 1	July 16	July 31	July 11	June 14	June 15	August 4

Appendix B

RECORDING INSTRUMENT: ATHLETE DESCRIPTIVE PHRASES

1. **CODER ID NUMBER**

2. **MONTH** _____ (JUNE (06), JULY (07), AUGUST (08))

3. **DAY** ____

4. **YEAR** 2013

5. **TIME OF BROADCAST**
   - 0- 12:00 AM- 3:00 AM
   - 1- 3:00 AM- 6:00 AM
   - 2- 6:00 AM- 9:00 AM
   - 3- 9:00 AM- 12:00 PM
   - 4- 12:00 PM – 3:00 PM
   - 5- 3:00 PM- 6:00 PM
   - 6- 6:00 PM- 9:00 PM
   - 7- 9:00 PM- 12:00 AM

6. **PROGRAM TITLE**
   - 0- SPORTSCENTER
   - 1- NFL PRIMETIME
   - 2- NFL LIVE
   - 3- AROUND THE HORN
   - 4- PARDON THE INTERRUPTION
   - 5- OUTSIDE THE LINES
   - 6- BASEBALL TONIGHT
   - 7- E:60
   - 8- NBA COUNTDOWN
   - 9- SUNDAY NFL COUNTDOWN
   - 10- SPORTS REPORTERS
   - 11- ESPN 30 FOR 30
   - 12- NINE FOR IX
   - 13- COLLEGE FOOTBALL LIVE
   - 14- OTHER _____

7. **PROGRAM FORMAT**
　　0- SPORTS HIGHLIGHTS/ NEWS
　　1- DEBATE
　　2- SPORTS SPECIFIC (i.e. Baseball, Football, etc…)
　　3- BREAKING NEWS
　　4- DOCUMENTARY/ EXTENDED PORTRAYALS
　　5- OTHER _____

8. **ATHLETE** _____

9. **ATHLETE GENDER**
　　0- MALE
　　1- FEMALE
　　2- UNKNOWN

10. **ATHLETE RACE (Code base on aesthetic)**
　　1- WHITE
　　2- BLACK
　　3- ASIAN
　　4- LATINO/ HISPANIC
　　5- CANNOT CODE

11. **SALARY (MAY NOT BE MENTIONED WITHIN THE PRESENTATION)**

　　_____

12. **SPORT**
　　0- CANNOT CODE/ NO SPORT AFFILIATION
　　1- BASEBALL
　　2- BASKETBALL
　　3- FOOTBALL
　　4- HOCKEY
　　5- GOLF
　　6- TENNIS
　　7- RACECAR DRIVING (NASCAR and INDY CAR)
　　8- MOTORCROSS/ X-GAMES EVENTS
　　9- SOCCER
　　10- TRACK AND FIELD
　　11- BOXING/ ULTIMATE FIGHTING
　　12- OTHER _____

13. **PRESENTATION FORMAT**
    0- HIGHLIGHTS
    1- DEBATE
    2- ANALYSIS
    3- NEWS STORY (SPORTS RELATED)
    4- NEWS STORY (OFF THE FIELD RELATED)
    5- INTERVIEW
    6- EXTENDED SEGMENT/ MONTAGE
    7- EVENT PROMOTION
    8- OTHER _____

14. **WORD FOR WORD DESCRIPTIVE PHRASE:**

15. **ATHLETE/ THEME REPRESENTATION**
    0- POSITIVE
    1- NEGATIVE
    2- NEUTRAL

16. **STORY THEME**
    0- CANNOT CODE
    1- ATHLETIC ABILITY/ TALENT
    2- TRADE/ TEAM SIGNING TALK
    3- RETIREMENT
    4- ON THE FIELD MISCONDUCT/ SUSPENSION/ FINE (sports related)
    5- SALARY DISCUSSION
    6- INJURY/ SPORTS REHABILITATION
    7- PHILANTHROPY/ CHARITY
    8- CRIME/ ILLEGALITY
    9- OFF THE FIELD MISCONDUCT (i.e. inappropriate comments, poor choices)
    10- DEATH/ BEREAVEMENT
    11- VICTIMIZATION (NON-FATAL)
    12- OTHER _____

17. **ATTRIBUTES OF SUCCESS/ FAILURE**

   0- CANNOT CODE
   1- CONCENTRATION
   2- STRENGTH BASED ATHLETIC SKILL
   3- TALENT OR ABILITY BASED ATHLETIC SKILL
   4- COMPOSURE
   5- COMMITMENT
   6- COURAGE
   7- EXPERIENCE
   8- ATHLETIC CONSONANCE
   9- INTELLIGENCE
   10- EXTROVERTED/ OUTGOINGNESS
   11- MODESTY/ INTROVERTED
   12- EMOTIONAL
   13- ATTRACTIVENESS
   14- SIZE/ PARTS OF BODY
   15- BACKGROUND
   16- OTHER _____

18. **ATTRIBUTE CLASSIFICATION (ONLY CODE IF PRESENT FOR ATTRIBUTES 1-9 ABOVE)**
   0- CANNOT CODE
   1- POSITIVELY PORTRAYED
   2- NEGATIVELY PORTRAYED
   3- NEUTRAL

19. **TEAM (INDIVIDUAL) VICTORY OR FAILURE**
   0- CANNOT CODE
   1- WON
   2- LOSS
   3- TIED

20. **TEAM VICTORY/ FAILURE ASSOCIATION**
   0- CANNOT CODE
   1- ASSOCIATED WITH VICTORY
   2- NOT ASSOCIATED WITH VICTORY
   3- ASSOCIATED WITH LOSS
   4- NOT ASSOCIATED WITH LOSS
   5- ASSOCIATED WITH TIE
   6- NOT ASSOCIATED WITH TIE