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**BLACK OR WHITE:
A CONTENT ANALYSIS OF
NEWSPAPER COVERAGE DEALING WITH
NBA PLAYERS & RACE**

**Thesis submitted to
The Graduate College of
Marshall University**

**In Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts in Journalism**

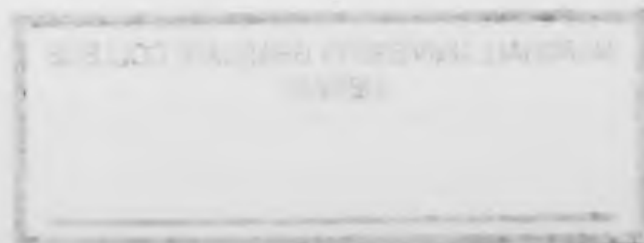
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*To Pa Jack, Grandpa, Papa, and Vivi,
the people who wanted me to strive to be the best that I could be,
no matter what I did or where I went in life.
Let this be just a small measure of how thankful I am
that I had each of you in my life.*

*“What more can I say
I wouldn’t be here today
If the old school didn’t pave the way.”
--Vincent Brown*

"What John Edgar Wideman calls "our country's love/hate affair with the black body" can be seen nowhere more clearly than in the National Basketball Association, which is a photo negative of American race relations: strong, young black men have some of the power, much of the money, and all of the fun."

--David Shields

"Owners think we're blacks who should be happy with what we got. I'm not saying it's all about race, but it plays a factor."

--Alonzo Mourning

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ABSTRACT

A content analysis of *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* was conducted to determine if there were differences in the coverage devoted to African-American and Caucasian players in the National Basketball Association from July 1, 1999, through June 30, 2000.

The study examined 96 randomly chosen articles, 48 from each publication, to determine trends with regard to coverage of each race.

While the hypotheses predicted African-American players would receive more negative coverage than their Caucasian counterparts, the results showed that Caucasian players actually receive slightly more negative coverage.

The results also showed *The New York Times* is more positive toward both races than is *The Washington Times*.

The researcher believes that although this study is valid, others need to be conducted to gain a fuller understanding of the topic.

Chapter One Introduction

THE PROBLEM

One of the most newsworthy sporting events of the 20th century occurred April 15, 1947. Racial integration stepped to the forefront in sports when Jackie Robinson debuted for the Brooklyn Dodgers. Racial integration in sports was tried through boxing in the 1920s, but it came with little fanfare or success. Once Robinson broke the color barrier, he “became the cultural paradigm for racial integration” (Early, 51-59).

Many research studies have examined the effect(s) media coverage has on athletes. Historically speaking, the bigger the athlete or event, the more coverage received. “Some sports stories receive far more coverage than others, especially when they involve major sports or newsworthy events” (Real, 31-43).

This statement could apply to Randy Moss, Mike Tyson, Lawrence Phillips, and Darryl Strawberry, gifted athletes who have had news-making troubles. Another thing these athletes have in common is their race; they are African-Americans.

Journalists are not generally held in very high regard. This is especially true about sports journalists. The public believes there is minimal effort by sportswriters to do their job in an ethical manner (Wulfenmeyer, 57-67).

The above concern does not hold true only for the adult public. Much has been written about the media’s depiction of blacks and the impact on black youth (Johnson, 328-341).

Ethical or not, most sports journalists in our country are Caucasian according to the Rev. Jesse Jackson (Wulfer, 1996). At a sports symposium, Jackson's group, the

Rainbow Commission for Fairness in Athletics, said that of 1,600 daily newspapers, only 10 have a black sports columnist, while the NBA is 80 percent black, the NFL is 67 percent black, and Major League Baseball is 37 percent black or Latino.

In a December speech to the Penn National Commission on Society, Culture and Community, Richard Lapchick (3), director of The Center for the Study of Sport in Society at Northeastern University, agreed with Jackson that there are very few black sportswriters and that newspaper editors are predominantly white.

Still, after all of the supposed media and public scrutiny of blacks in sports, the major sports leagues in this country are not doing so poorly. In the 1997 Racial Report Card issued by Northeastern University's Center for the Study of Sport in Society, the National Basketball Association (NBA), National Football League (NFL) and Major League Baseball (MLB) received an A+, A+, and A, respectively (Atkin, 14). Ross Atkin, a staff writer for The Christian Science Monitor, said the grades were determined by how the players relate to the makeup of society at large. Items such as players' treatment of teammates and coaches during games, community service, and media accessibility were involved in the grading process.

In his book, A Hard Road to Glory, tennis legend Arthur Ashe (1993) says black athletes have been more successful than any other group in any other endeavor in American life and that the black athlete did it despite social indifferences that would have dampened the spirit of most people.

Some athletes receive an overwhelming amount of positive publicity. Such is the case with world champion boxer George Foreman, who in recent years has had a

dramatic upsurge in popularity. David Engen (59-62) in an article in the *Southern Communication Journal* argues Foreman presents himself as a sort of “ignorant, fun-loving buffoon.”

Contrary to what has occurred to Foreman, many athletes have the unfortunate experience of feeling the heat of the media being cast against them, especially when issues of race come into play. Are major newspapers such as *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* responsible for this perceived problem in our society? Is it correct to say that these publications are biased in their coverage of the National Basketball Association based on the players' race?

ISSUES CONCERNING AFRICAN-AMERICANS

At the 1999 National Association of Black Journalists (NABJ) Convention, the topic of African-Americans in sports was on the program. The specific topic was coverage of minority athletes (Childs, 10). One issue discussed was the coverage of Latrell Sprewell, at the time of the Golden State Warriors, following his choking of his coach, P.J. Carlesimo in December 1997. The discussion centered on the fact that even though Sprewell attacked Carlesimo twice, the media coverage was clearly imbalanced, (Childs, 10). Because the altercation was a major occurrence at the time, it can be concluded that the “imbalance” of coverage took place right after the incident.

Nelson George (38-41), author and writer for The Village Voice, stated although Sprewell was suspended for a league-record 68 games and fined \$6.4 million, there was

no sense Sprewell would be getting the benefit of the doubt in the New York newspapers anytime soon after he arrived to play for the Knicks due to a trade.

The other controversy at the convention was a May 4, 1998 *Sports Illustrated* article (56-62) that profiled NBA players who have fathered children out of wedlock. The vast majority of these players are black. The author of the piece, Larry Munson, said, "I don't feel that we as reporters acted with any bias in our hearts or our minds." Munson also stated the magazine received 1,000 letters criticizing the article, 15 percent of which concerned the cover, a picture of Khalid Minor, son of Boston Celtics player Greg Minor (see Appendix A for a copy of the picture). The title said, "Where's Daddy?" with the two-year-old holding a basketball. Munson said that many letters accused *Sports Illustrated* of targeting the subject because it would be viewed as negative toward blacks.

Prior to Sprewell's outburst, Sarah Banet-Weiser theorized that many of the fantasies and fears of white audiences about black men were being played out. Banet-Weiser said superstars such as Michael Jordan and Shaquille O'Neal were being objectified to a white audience, while this same audience was lamenting the deterioration of the game because of "thugs" such as Chris Webber and Allen Iverson (403-420).

Still, there is some evidence of discrimination. Sociologists have noted that blacks tend to play positions where attributes such as strength, size, speed, aggressiveness, and "instinct" are important, but they are underrepresented at those playing positions that require thinking, leadership and are the most crucial for outcome control (Eitzen, 1999).

Black players are often reported by the media in a tone of polite confusion (Banet-Weiser, 403-420). She says that according to many white journalists, black athletes often "play the race card" by accusing journalists of racism.

Walter Williams (9), a nationally syndicated columnist, contends that because blacks, who make up 13 percent of the population, comprise 80 percent of basketball players, that maybe the National Basketball Association is racist. He defends his claim by noting that, besides Caucasians, there are no players of other races in the league.

Although this study is intended to focus on the coverage of African-Americans, it became obvious to the researcher that there were other races of athletes receiving biased coverage. A study of Japanese athletes involved Major League Baseball pitchers Hideo Nomo and Hideki Irabu (Mayeda, 2003). The research intended to focus on how newspapers and magazines treated the pitchers upon their arrival in this country to play baseball, Nomo in 1995, Irabu in 1997.

The results showed that, unlike his Japanese predecessors who played in this country, Nomo garnered positive media attention wherever he went, en route to winning the National League Rookie of the Year award in 1995.

Irabu, on the other hand, got off to a bad start. The media were initially attracted to him because of his incessant demands to play for the New York Yankees and then accepting a four-year contract that was going to pay him \$12.8 million. After suffering through a miserable first season in New York, Irabu was called "a \$12.8 million disaster" (Smith, B7).

SCOPE OF THE STUDY

While researching this topic, the researcher found many studies associated with the positive, negative, and neutral coverage of minorities in the media that were both interesting and informative. However, the reasoning behind this study is to view the most current attitudes concerning this topic. Many prior studies served their purpose by examining attitudes of the time. The researcher believes that by viewing current trends in media coverage of minorities, the public can get a better feel for what the perceptions are of minorities going into the new millennium.

Sometimes the athletes bring negativity upon themselves. At the Unity '94 conference, sponsored by the National Association of Black Journalists, professional basketball player Carlos Rogers, an African-American, talked about how many athletes keep their distance from journalists, no matter what color their skin may be (Fitzgerald, 127).

"To me, a sportswriter is a sportswriter and that's all there is to it. You don't know he is anything but a writer; you don't even look at his face."

Money may also be part of this equation. Players used to think that by talking to the press, management may consider giving them pay raises. Now, in an era of oversized salaries, players don't concern themselves with this aspect (Sokolove, 19-24).

The notion that minorities are shortchanged when it comes to media coverage may be an accurate one, but upon further review minorities do not always get mistreated when it comes to their coverage in the media.

This study will look at the coverage minorities receive in the mass media today. In our society, it is not uncommon to see minorities being downgraded by the media, but at the same time, there are many positive commentaries written about these same minorities.

This topic was chosen for two main reasons. First, the results will provide more information about how minority athletes are covered by the media. Second, previous studies should be replicated to see if their conclusions still hold.

RESEARCH PURPOSE

The purpose is to explore how Caucasian and African-American players in the National Basketball Association are presented by the media to the public—either in a positive, negative or neutral light.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following research questions were posed:

RQ1: Is there a difference in tone between *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* concerning the coverage of Caucasian and African-American players in the NBA?

RQ2: Do African-Americans receive more negative coverage than Caucasians in *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*?

RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

H1: Caucasian players will receive more positive than negative or neutral coverage in *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*.

H2: African-American players will receive more negative than neutral and positive coverage in *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*.

H3: African-Americans will receive more negative coverage than Caucasians.

ASSUMPTIONS AND LIMITATIONS

One assumption of this study was that inferences about minorities playing in the National Basketball Association could be made by analyzing the content within newspapers.

Related to the above assumption was that newspaper coverage would have an observable tone and so the coders would be able to differentiate among positive, negative and neutral stories.

It can be presumed that because some African-Americans who played in the National Basketball Association during the timeframe of the study encountered trouble on and off the court, their coverage may be viewed as more negative than positive.

This study was limited to African-Americans and Caucasian players in the league. This is because there aren't any players with different ethnicities than the ones mentioned above.

The study was limited to newspapers because they were the most readily available source of news, although television and radio may have covered this topic during the time period that was critiqued.

No study can be all-inclusive. Hence, the information resulting from this research is intended to provide **some** indication of whether a player's race determines whether he is cast in a positive, negative or neutral light by the print media.

DESCRIPTION OF PROCEDURE

A content analysis of newspaper articles is the best and most accurate way to determine whether minority players in the National Basketball Association are being treated fairly.

Many definitions of content analysis exist (Wimmer and Dominick, 1997). Walizer and Wienir define it as any systematic procedure devised to examine the content of recorded information (1978). Krippendorff defines it as a research technique for making replicable and valid references from data to their context (1980). Perhaps the most basic definition of what a content analysis is came from Kerlinger, who defined it as a method of studying and analyzing communication in a systematic, objective, and quantitative manner for the purpose of measuring variables (1986).

SELECTIVE PERCEPTION THEORY

Selective perception is the mental or psychological recasting of a message so that its meaning is in line with a person's beliefs and attitudes (Baran and Davis, (a) 141-

144). A more simple and succinct definition is “the process of screening out information that does not interest us and retaining information that does” (Wells, Burnett and Moriarty, 1995).

Joseph Klapper (1960) is often given credit for coming up with this theory, saying, “by and large, people tend to expose themselves to those mass communications that are in accord with their existing attitudes and interests.” He wrote people, either consciously or unconsciously, avoid communications of opposite feeling.

To show how selective perception works, Klapper offered a study done by two psychologists, G.W. Allport and L. J. Postman (61-81) as an example. They showed a group of people a picture of a Caucasian male and an African-American male fighting aboard a train. The Caucasian male had a razor, while the African-American male was unarmed. Those who viewed the picture were then asked to describe it to another person, who, in turn, passed it on. In most cases, the razor eventually ended up in the black man’s hands. (See Appendix B for a copy of the picture)

Hastorf and Cantril reported an example of how this theory works in the sports world in 1954. They interviewed Princeton and Dartmouth college students who had recently been shown a film of a football game that had taken place between the two schools. Reports of the game pointed out that there had been rough play by both sides but that Dartmouth had contributed more to this than Princeton. The students who watched the film were asked to say how many fouls each team committed. On average, Dartmouth students attributed roughly as many fouls to each team (4.3 to their own team and 4.4 to

Princeton) while the Princeton students, on average, attributed far more fouls to their opponent's team than to their own (9.8 compared to 4.2) (Hastorf and Cantril, 129-134).

AGENDA-SETTING THEORY

Agenda-setting theory postulates the idea that media do not tell us what to think, but rather what to think about (Baran and Davis, (b) 231-236). Within this framework is the idea of gatekeeping, the process by which editors and writers are able to delineate what material is sent out to the public. Gatekeeping is an important process because editors have a major impact on many aspects of our society, including sports, just by including or not including certain pieces of information in their publications.

Propaganda theorist Walter Lippmann's original ideas about the theory were refined by Bernard Cohen, who wrote, "It (agenda-setting theory) may not be successful much of the time in telling people what to think about" (13).

Famed researchers Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw (180-181) showed both the strengths and weaknesses of the agenda-setting theory. On one hand, it showed the important relationship between media reports and the public's ranking of public issues. On the other hand, the theory has primarily been applied to political news and campaigns.

In later research, McCombs and Shaw (1977) stated that, "increased salience of a topic or issue in the mass media influences (causes) a salience of that topic or issue among the public."

Chapter Two

Review of Literature

The review of literature on this particular subject clearly shows that coverage of minorities appears in both positive and negative aspects. Coverage of African-American and Caucasian players in the National Basketball Association via the print media is a minute part of the larger picture of media representations of athletes in general. Instances where professional football and basketball players are arrested for serious offenses have affected the way the media portray athletes.

The intent of this study is to show how two samples of the sports media cover players in the National Basketball Association. Hence, the review of literature will show examples of how minorities are covered.

AN HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The media do not only have an impact upon African-American sports stars today. Athletes from yesteryear were also impacted by what the media had to say.

The issue of race and media extends more than 50 years ago to when Jackie Robinson was signed to a professional baseball contract in 1945. Black sportswriters emphasized the importance of the story, providing the social and historical ramifications, while white sportswriters did not (Simons, 62). An analysis of press reaction to Robinson's signing suggested that white sportswriters did not comprehend the severity and extent of prejudice and racism in America.

ABILITIES OF AFRICAN-AMERICAN AND CAUCASIAN ATHLETES

The abilities of all athletes have been studied over the course of time but some studies have broken down just how each race of athlete is perceived by the public and by the media.

A study by Audrey J. Murrell and Edward M. Curtis (224-233) examined the impact of race on attributions of a player's performance by doing a content analysis of 273 passages from five magazines that analyzed six National Football League quarterbacks (three White and three Black) to a content analysis. The study showed the performance of the black quarterbacks, as discussed by the print media, was because of natural ability. This type of natural ability is consistent with the view of the black player as a reflex-oriented, genetically bred athlete (Allsopp, 1990).

M. Cunningham (107-108) concluded that the popular perception in sports holds that black athletes are genetically equipped to participate in active sports such as basketball, baseball and football but not in other sports such as gymnastics and swimming.

PUBLIC PERCEPTION OF ATHLETES

R. Rainville and E. McCormick (20-26) reasoned that the race of an athlete influences the media's commentaries about athletes. Rainville, a blind psychologist, used to listen to broadcasts of athletic events and could identify the race of a player even

though race was never mentioned. The findings of the actual study were that whites were described as receiving play-related praise and having positive cognitive attributes. Conversely, the black athletes were said to have had negative attributes and a non-professional record (e.g., problems with police).

Researchers David McCarthy and Robyn L. Jones (216-220) conducted a study to investigate whether the language used by television commentators during the coverage of English soccer games differed according to the race of a player. It was shown through this study, done over a two-week period of the 1995-96 regular season, that black players were depicted more positively than negatively. At the same time, instances of covert stereotyping were discovered in the way that black players were described. This particular finding supports Gary Whannel's (1992) assertion, which states, "while sport offers a fund of positive images of talented black athletes succeeding, it also serves to reproduce elements of stereotypical attitudes."

A study by L.R. Davis concluded that the belief that blacks are inherently better athletes could trap them into certain occupational molds and limit their economic mobility (179-187).

Similar findings reported by Lawrence A. Wenner (227-231) also concluded that because the media focus on black men as athletes, the public doesn't see them as anything else. He went on to say that the story of black men who matter in America is being told in the sports pages more than ever. Furthermore, the sports media may be taking the leadership role in making assessments about African-Americans in public life

because the public puts an undue burden on sports journalists, a disproportionately white group, to comment on the character of most publicly visible blacks in American life.

G.A. Marshall (1994) summed up past, present, and maybe future feelings toward the issues of blacks in sports as a whole: skin color remains a strong determinate of stereotyping and prejudice and that until this changes, blacks will be looked down upon not only on the field but also when it comes to hiring practices in the front offices of major sports franchises as well.

Richard Lapchick (14) asserts that the media and the public look for patterns to evolve when it comes to athletes, especially black athletes. D.S. Eitzen and G.H. Sage (1999) seem to concur with Wenner in saying that the public holds stereotypes and even coaches believe blacks have more physical ability and less mental ability and may be better suited in certain “non-central” positions.

PHOTOGRAPHS

Imbalances in sports coverage also come in the form of photographs.

In an analysis of photographs concerning minorities, 250,000 photos in four newspapers between 1937 and 1990 were examined to determine the representation of African-Americans (Lester, 71). Over this period of time their exposure increased, but only stereotypically. The author was referring to more exposure for athletes, entertainers, criminals, and other traditional depictions of African-Americans.

A 1996 study investigating the use of photos to ascertain the belief that certain attributes contribute to success in basketball showed that the “stereotyping theory” was

supported through the results (Johnson, Hallinan, and Westerfield, 45-53). This theory states that success for a black athlete was the result of innate athletic abilities such as natural jumping ability, natural quickness, and athletic speed. Success for a white athlete was measured in terms of characteristics such as access to better coaching and hard work.

From the Jackie Robinson era to the present, African-American athletes have been perceived as individuals who have succeeded because of their natural abilities. The studies also show that skin color goes a long way in determining stereotypes and prejudices. This study will attempt to show if these attitudes are still visible today in the NBA.

Chapter Three

Methodology

TIMEFRAME FOR THE STUDY

The time from July 1, 1999, to June 30, 2000, was used for the analysis. The reasons for using a full year rather than one playing season (November-June) were:

1. The NBA free agency period starts July 1. This is the time during the off-season when many players sign contracts, both with current teams and new teams, so articles can be found concerning different players and teams.
2. Besides free agency, many trades are made during this period. Hence, coverage of these trades may be made available in the sports sections of each of the publications.

DESIGN OF STUDY

This study examined the newspaper coverage devoted to the National Basketball Association over the course of one calendar year. A content analysis of feature stories and columns was conducted to determine how players in the National Basketball Association are presented in the print media, namely in a positive, negative, or neutral tone, according to the color of their skin.

Game stories were originally chosen to be part of this study because the researcher thought the races of the players would be mentioned frequently enough so that an analysis could be done. But after initially researching the matter, it was determined that a player's race was rarely mentioned and so the topic of game stories was eliminated from the study.

Samples from the sports sections of *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* were analyzed. These publications were selected because they are considered "national" newspapers, meaning they do not cover just one specific team located in a certain area as many newspapers do. Rather, each one covers many teams in the league and hence more information on NBA players is available.

USA Today was initially chosen to be a part of this study but the researcher could not retrieve an adequate number of articles from original copies, photocopies, or microfilm at numerous local libraries (and two others in New York City).

Another reason for choosing these newspapers is they contained stories from wire services on a frequent basis. The researcher thought this would allow for more variety (concerning teams and players) in the stories that appeared in the newspapers because both locally written and wire stories were analyzed. *Note: The Associated Press does not produce columns.*

As Stempel (1989) pointed out, purposive sampling can be useful, as a researcher might learn more about newspaper coverage by examining a small sample of carefully selected newspapers than by studying a random sample of 100 newspapers (Wimmer and Dominick, 1997).

The days of the week when these stories were produced had no effect on the outcome of the study because the NBA plays each day of the week throughout the season. Also, a feature story or column can appear in a newspaper at any time. This sample will attempt to show how each newspaper covers professional basketball and whether each is

more likely to cover players with a positive, negative, or neutral tone, depending on their race.

Before being sent to the coders, the articles were labeled by the researcher. The researcher recorded the source of the article (identified as wire story, staff writer/reporter, or syndicated writer) and the race of the player(s) (African-American or Caucasian) involved in the articles prior to the codes receiving them.

Because the researcher has an in-depth knowledge of the players mentioned in the articles (whereas the coders may not), the researcher labeled the articles as focusing on either African-American or Caucasian players.

UNITS

The units of analysis for this study are the articles in their entirety, along with headlines and any photographs, graphics, or illustrations that were evident. Headlines and photographs were included to help the coders better comprehend whether the articles are positive, neutral, or negative.

CATEGORIES

The independent variable in this study was the newspapers selected for review (*The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*). The dependent variable is how NBA

players are portrayed with respect to their race. An independent variable is an object or event that is manipulated by the researcher and that is predicted to have an effect on another object or event. The dependent variable is an object or event that may be affected by the researcher's manipulation of another object or event (Williams, 1979).

Positive, negative and neutral were the categories for coders to place the articles into. Coders determined tone after reading each article.

If an article had both negative and positive words, it was left to the coder to make a judgment. If negative and positive words were nearly equal in number, the article was coded as neutral.

If an article was deemed negative, it must have had few or no positive words. If an article was deemed positive, then it must have had few or no negative words (see Appendix C for a further explanation).

SAMPLING METHOD

The articles selected for coding were found on microfilm and from the original hard copies that were later made into photocopies.

To answer the research questions with a manageable amount of data, a purposive sample of 96 articles from the two newspapers was chosen (48 samples multiplied by two newspapers for a total sample of 96).

Four samples from each month were taken systematically beginning with the *n*th week in July 1999. The *n* value was determined by randomly drawing a whole number

between one and four. The number chosen indicated which week in July the initial sample was collected. The sample for the following month was determined by taking week $n+1$; the sample for the next month was determined by taking week $n+2$, until the n value reached four. When the fourth week was reached, the next sample automatically began with the first complete week of the following month (Swiergosz, 1998).

The second sample in each month was taken from the following week. For example, the second sample from July 1999 was taken from week $n+1$, the second sample for August 1999 was taken from week $n+2$, etc.

The third sample in each month was taken from the next week. For example, the third sample from July 1999 was taken from week $n+2$, the third sample from August 1999 was taken from week $n+3$, etc.

The fourth sample in each month was obtained by using the same formula as was used in getting the first three samples in the month.

In order to get an equally divided sample between the genres and publications, the researcher chose one article from each newspaper and genre once every four weeks. For example, a feature story from *The New York Times* was chosen from week n , while a column from *The New York Times* was chosen from week $n+1$, followed by another feature story from *The Washington Post* from week $n+2$, and a column from *The Washington Post* was chosen from week $n+3$. This process was repeated until the total of 48 articles from each genre was selected.

This process was also designed to achieve an equal balance between the number of articles devoted to each race. Of the 48 articles selected from each publication, 24

were feature stories and the 24 were columns. From each genre, 12 articles were about African-American players and 12 were about Caucasian players (see Table 4-6).

Not all articles were strictly about a player(s) of one race as some articles had small or casual mentions about another player(s) of the other race. A February 7, 2000 article from *The New York Times* about Karl Malone, an African-American player, also mentioned John Stockton, a Caucasian player.

“Although Malone is one of the best players of this era, the fact is plain and simple that without Stockton he is not even close to being a lock for Springfield” (Wise, D1).

CODING

Coders were provided with coding sheets (see appendix D) and instructions (see appendix E) with operational definitions. Items including tone of the article and the newspaper from which the article was selected were included on the sheets. The coding instructions told the coders how to analyze the articles they were given. The instructions were written to answer questions coders may have had about how to classify the tone of the articles.

Three coders read each article carefully and after doing so, determined whether he/she believed the article was positive, negative, or neutral. Coders received photocopied pages from the samples.

The task of the coders was to read the articles and headlines, and to examine any accompanying photos to determine the overall tone.

If two of the coders thought the overall tone was one way, but the third coder differed, then the sample was counted in the direction of the majority. If each of the coders rated the sample differently, then the researcher made the final determination.

Because the researcher thought it was important to use coders who had similar sports knowledge and background, the three to be used for this study were not experts or professionals in the field, nor were they complete novices. Rather, they were people who had a moderate understanding of professional basketball.

Coders selected included a full-time college student, an advertising executive, and a retiree.

TREATMENT OF DATA

After all data were coded, results were entered into a statistical analysis program, the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS).

Because all of the data was nominal, chi-square analysis was performed to determine any significant differences in category results, and differences among the newspapers. The chi-square study indicated whether frequency differences occurred on the basis of chance, comparing observed frequencies with expected frequencies (Wimmer and Dominick, 1997).

In addition, percentage frequencies and distributions were calculated to test the hypotheses.

Chapter Four Results of the Study

ARTICLES CODED

Ninety-six articles were coded for this study from the two newspapers. *The New York Times* yielded 48 articles (50 percent) while *The Washington Post* yielded the other 48 articles (50 percent). While the number of articles was exactly the same for each newspaper, the findings were different when it came to issues concerning race, the sources of the articles, and the overall tone of the articles in each newspaper.

INTERCODER RELIABILITY

Intercoder reliability is established as the percentage in which two out of the three coders agreed on categorization or “neutral” status of an article (Wiggins, 1993).

Two out of three coders reached agreement on 93 out of 96 articles (96.9 percent) regarding tone. The researcher arbitrated the remaining three disagreements. When applying the Holsti Formula (Wimmer and Dominick, 1997) intercoder reliability was determined at 96.8 percent for judgment of tone.

Intercoder reliability for articles obtained from *The New York Times* was 93.8 percent and for articles from *The Washington Post* 100 percent. The overall intercoder reliability was 96.9 percent for the 96 articles involved in the study (see Table 4-1).

Table 4-1 Intercoder Reliability of Tone/Percentage of Articles

Newspaper	% of coder agreement	% of articles
New York Times	93.8	50
Washington Post	100.0	50
Mean of both newspapers	96.9	-----
Total % of articles	-----	100

**TO NE OF ARTICLES BY NEWSPAPER
(African-American and Caucasian combined)**

The New York Times produced 48 articles for this study. Twenty were judged as positive (41.7 percent), 12 were deemed to be negative (25.0 percent) and the remaining 16 were thought to be neutral (33.3 percent). Of the 48 articles generated by *The Washington Post*, 16 were judged to be positive (33.3 percent), 13 were judged to be negative (27.1 percent) and 19 were judged to be neutral (39.6 percent) (see Table 4-2).

**Table 4-2 Tone of Coded Stories by Newspaper
(African-American and Caucasian combined)**

Newspaper	Data	Tone			Total
		Positive	Negative	Neutral	
New York Times	Frequency of Stories	20	12	16	48
	% of stories	41.7	25.0	33.3	100.0
Washington Post	Frequency of Stories	16	13	19	48
	% of stories	33.3	27.1	39.6	100.0

A two-by-three Chi-Square analysis indexing *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* with the tone of the articles did not yield statistically significant results with a chi-square value of 3.125. Statistical significance can be defined as “the high probability that a relationship or finding based on a random sample is not the result of sampling error but reflects the characteristics of the population from which the sample was drawn” (Black, 356).

The conclusion is that the variation in tone between the two publications is due to chance and that the differences are not significant and hence, the null hypothesis is accepted. The null hypothesis states that there will not be any statistically significant difference and that the observed distribution of the sample across the categories does not differ from the expected (Black, 356). It is expected that any differences or changes or relationships found will be merely due to chance (see Table 4-3).

Table 4-3 Chi-Square Analysis of *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* with Tone

<i>New York Times</i>	Tone			
Frequency	Positive	Negative	Neutral	Row Total
	20	12	16	48

<i>Washington Post</i>				
Frequency	Positive	Negative	Neutral	Row Total
	16	13	19	48
Total	36	25	35	96

Degrees of Freedom = 2; Chi-Square Value = 3.125 (n/s); $p > .05$

CLASSIFICATION OF ARTICLES BY NEWSPAPER

As was mentioned in chapter three, the sample was divided equally between feature stories and columns from each of the newspapers. Hence, *The New York Times*

produced 24 feature stories and 24 columns and, accordingly, *The Washington Post* produced 24 feature stories and 24 columns.

SOURCE OF ARTICLES BY NEWSPAPER

The source of the coded news articles could be attributed to any one of the following: wire story, staff writer/reporter, or syndicated columnist. *The New York Times* had one wire story (2.1 percent), 39 articles contributed by a staff writer/reporter (81.3 percent), and eight articles from a syndicated columnist (16.6 percent).

The Washington Post contained six wire stories (12.5 percent), 28 articles from a staff writer/reporter (58.3 percent), and 14 articles from a syndicated columnist (29.2 percent) (see Table 4-4).

Table 4-4 Frequency and Percentage of Sources Attributed

Newspaper	Data	Wire story	Reporter/writer	Syndicated columnist	totals
New York Times	Frequency of Stories	1	39	8	48
	% of stories	2.1	81.3	16.6	100.0
Washington Post	Frequency of Stories	6	28	14	48
	% of stories	12.5	58.3	29.2	100.0

A two-by-three Chi-Square analysis indexing *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* with the source of the articles yielded statistically significant results at the .001 level of probability with a chi-square value of 62.875. This means that there is a

nearly 100 percent chance that there is a connection between the two publications and the sources of the articles involved in the study.

In this case, the null hypothesis is rejected (see Table 4-5).

Table 4-5 Chi-Square analysis of *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* with source

<i>New York Times</i>		Source		
	Wire Story	Staff Reporter/Writer	Syndicated Columnist	Row Total
Frequency	1	39	8	48

<i>Washington Post</i>				
	Wire Story	Staff Reporter/Writer	Syndicated Columnist	Row Total
Frequency	6	28	14	48
Total	7	67	22	96

Degrees of Freedom = 2; Chi-Square value = 62.875; $p < .001$

RACIAL MAKEUP OF SUBJECTS OF ARTICLES

To make this study fair and valid, the number of articles involving each race was split equally with 48 devoted to African-Americans and the other 48 devoted to Caucasians. Of these articles, half of them were feature stories and the other half were columns. Half of each genre (feature story and column) came from *The New York Times* and half from *The Washington Post* (see Table 4-6 and page 21).

Table 4-6 Frequency of Stories by Genre, Race, and Publication

Newspaper	Race	Feature stories	Columns	Total
New York Times	African-American	12	12	24
	Caucasian	12	12	24
Washington Post	African-American	12	12	24
	Caucasian	12	12	24
Totals		48	48	96

Another important factor to measure was the tone of coded stories by newspaper as compared with each race. Of the 24 articles coded in *The New York Times* that were about African-Americans, 37.5 percent were judged as positive, 20.8 percent were deemed to be negative, and the remaining 41.7 percent were neutral. In *The Washington Post*, seven of the articles were positive (29.2 percent), another 25.0 percent were said to be negative, and 45.8 percent were judged to be neutral (see Chart 4-1 and Table 4-7).

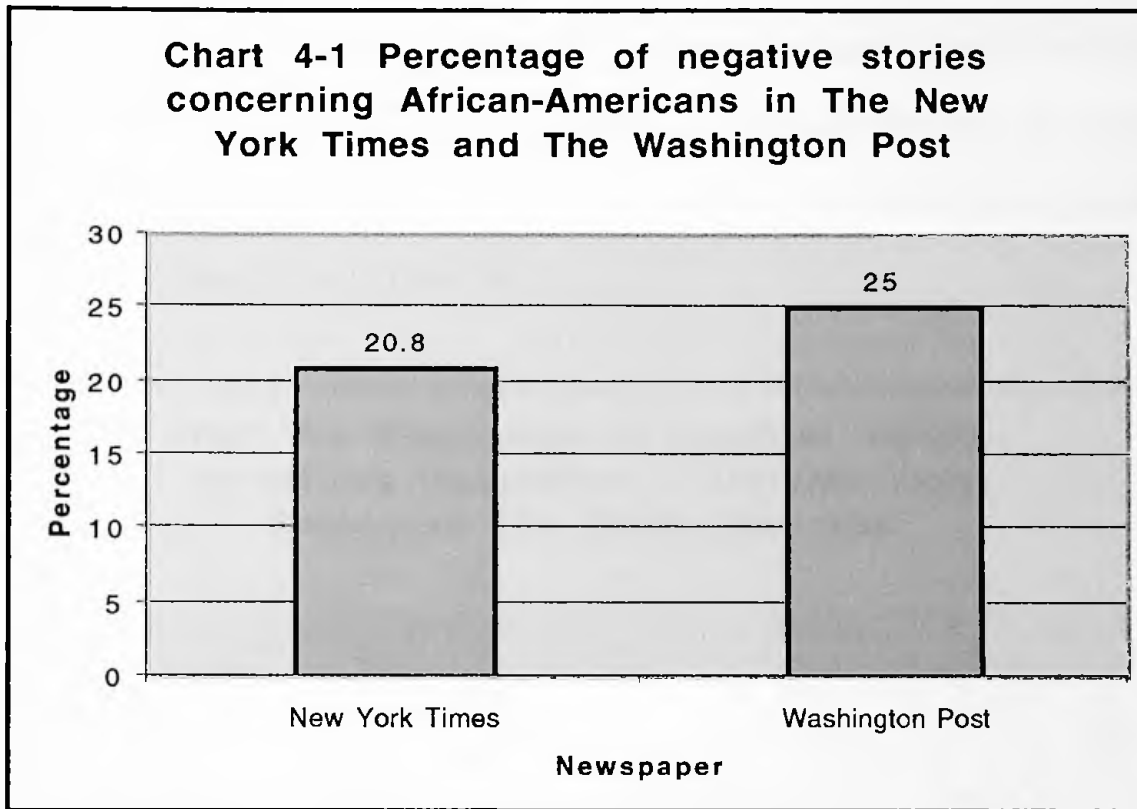


Table 4-7 Tone of Coded Stories about African-American Players by Newspaper

Newspaper	Data	Tone			Total
		Positive	Negative	Neutral	
New York Times	Frequency of stories	9	5	10	24
	% of stories	37.5	20.8	41.7	100.0
Washington Post	Frequency of stories	7	6	11	24
	% of stories	29.2	25.0	45.8	100.0

Of the 24 articles that appeared in *The New York Times* that were about Caucasians, 45.8 percent were positive, 29.1 percent were negative and the remaining one-quarter (25.0 percent) were deemed neutral. In *The Washington Post*, 37.5 percent were positive, 29.1 percent were negative, and one-third (33.3 percent) were judged to be neutral (see Chart 4-2 and Table 4-8).

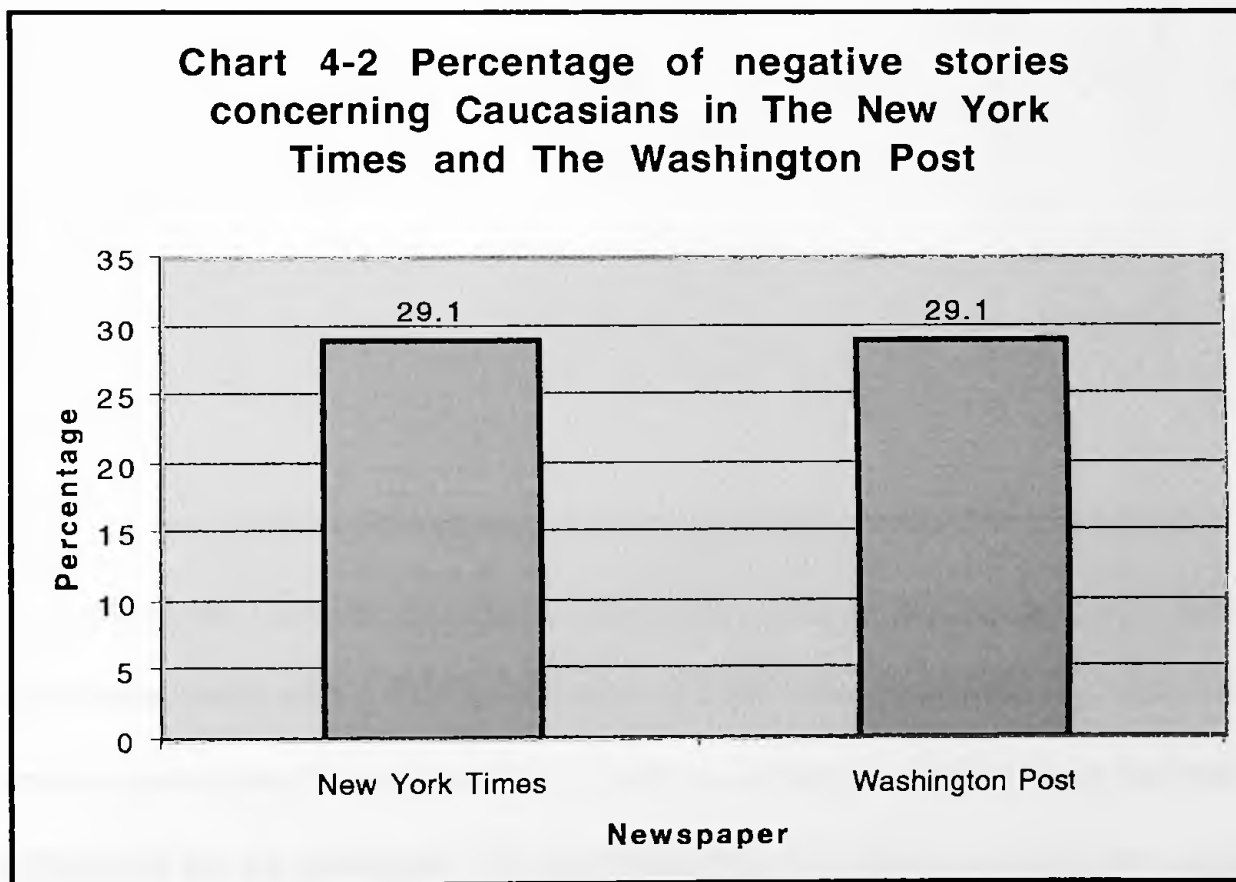


Table 4-8 Tone of Coded Stories about Caucasian Players By Newspaper

Newspaper	Data	Tone			Total
		Positive	Negative	Neutral	
New York Times	Frequency of stories	11	7	6	24
	% of stories	45.8	29.1	25.0	100.0
Washington Post	Frequency of stories	9	7	8	24
	% of stories	37.5	29.1	33.3	100.0

A two-by-three chi-square analysis indexing the tone of the coverage of Caucasians and *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* did not yield statistically significant results with a Chi-Square value of 2.000. This means that any variation in articles concerning Caucasians between both newspapers is due to chance and that the differences are not significant. The null hypothesis is therefore accepted (see Table 4-9).

Table 4-9 Chi-Square Analysis of Tone of Coverage of Caucasian Players by Newspaper

<i>New York Times</i>		Tone			
	Positive	Negative	Neutral	Row Total	
Frequency	11	7	6	24	
<i>Washington Post</i>					
Frequency	9	7	8	24	
Total	20	14	14	48	

Degrees of Freedom = 2: Chi-Square value = 2.000 (n/s); $p > .05$

A two-by-three chi-square analysis indexing African-Americans and *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* yielded results that were not statistically significant, as the Chi-square value was 3.500. As with the above chi-square analysis, any variation is merely due to chance and the differences are not significant and so the null hypothesis is once again accepted. (see Table 4-10).

Table 4-10 Chi-Square Analysis of Tone of Coverage of African-American Players by Newspaper

<i>New York Times</i>		Tone		
	Positive	Negative	Neutral	Row Total
Frequency	9	5	10	24

<i>Washington Post</i>		Tone		
	Positive	Negative	Neutral	Row Total
Frequency	7	6	11	24
Column	16	11	21	48

Degrees of Freedom = 2; Chi-Square Value = 3.500 (n/s); $p > .05$

Chapter Five

Discussion

Three hypotheses were drawn at the outset of the study with the intent of determining how both races of players in the NBA (Caucasian and African-American) are portrayed by *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*.

The researcher was able to conclude the following:

1. There are no statistical differences between the publications and their respective tones, and the coverage of either race and the publications.
2. There is a statistical difference between the publications and the source(s) of the articles. A majority of the stories involved in this study (70 percent) were written by staff writers/reporters.
3. The frequencies concerning the tone of the stories in each publication were similar (e.g. there were 13 negative stories in *The Washington Post* and *The New York Times* had 12).
4. There is a statistically significant difference between the publications and the source(s) of the articles.

HYPOTHESES

H1: Caucasian players will receive more positive than negative or neutral coverage in *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*.

Hypothesis number one can be accepted as the data from Table 4-10 shows that *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* combined for more positive stories written about Caucasian players (20) than negative or neutral stories (14 apiece).

There was evidence in each publication that Caucasians were perceived in a positive tone. One of the better examples came from *The New York Times* in an article from January 13, 2000 entitled, "Williams Finally Finding His Way." It discussed how the often-maligned player is actually one of the more popular players in the league and because of this, is one of the top-sellers in the league (Wise, D6).

"Don't let his image fool you; Williams has worked hard at honing his craft and because of it has become one of the bright young stars to lead the NBA into the 21st century" (Wise, D6).

This statement and many others like it are part of the reason why Caucasian players in the NBA were perceived to be more positive than negative or neutral.

H2: African-American players will receive more negative than neutral and positive coverage in *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*.

Using a chi-square analysis (see Table 4-12), the results were not significant concerning the issue of African-Americans receiving more negative coverage than Caucasians in *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*.

Thus, the data do not support H2 that African-American players will receive more negative than positive or neutral coverage in *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* and so this hypothesis is rejected.

At the outset of the study, the researcher thought that because of the following two quotes, which appeared in *The New York Times*, African-American players would not be perceived in a positive tone.

“Often, Houston’s post-All-Star body language has resembled a loitering teen. He’s just hanging out, waiting for something to happen” (Roberts, D1).

“Even on the nights he has successfully turned back the clock, Ewing still gets questioned about his shot-happy tendencies (Broussard, D4).

On the contrary, negative coverage of African-American players was the least chosen category by the coders. Exactly one-third of the articles were judged to be positive. A March 31, 2000 article in *The New York Times* was just one example of how African-Americans are perceived in a positive light.

“In a game where every other starter began in a funk, Charlie Ward became a vital part of the Knicks’ support group (Roberts, D2).

H3: African-Americans will receive more negative coverage than Caucasians.

This hypothesis was also rejected, as 14 negative stories were written about Caucasians (see Table 4-9), whereas only 11 negative stories were written about African-Americans (see Table 4-10).

This was the hypothesis that supplied the most interesting findings to the study. In Chapter Two, it was discussed how African-American athletes have been perceived as not working very hard in their athletic endeavors and how they are naturally gifted. The chapter also talked about how Caucasian athletes were thought of as being hard-working and disciplined. The following excerpt from a *New York Times* article shows something a little bit different, as it puts a Caucasian athlete in a stereotypically unfamiliar position.

“Williams’s mix of poor play and surly behavior to the news media and fans has led to a backlash against him”” (Wise, D2).

While the researcher originally hypothesized that there would be more negative articles about African-American players, there were many that were positive in nature. The following, from *The Washington Post*, are two of the most positive commentaries concerning an African-American player.

“Instead of scoffing at input from his coaches and generally dismissing them, Abdur-Rahim continually works on his game. He signed a six-year, \$71 million dollar contract with Vancouver in January 1999 and is continuing to earn his money, having played in 260 of a possible 262 games since he entered the league (Herbert, D5).

“From the first day of camp, Francis has been a corporate dream. Everything he’s been asked to do, he does and then volunteers for more (Wilbon, D1).

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

RQ1: Is there a difference in tone between *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* concerning the coverage of Caucasian and African-American players in the NBA?

The tone of coverage in *The New York Times* is more positive toward both races than it is in *The Washington Post* (see Tables 4-9 and 4-10).

The data in tables 4-9 and 4-10 on pages 31 and 32 indicate a small difference in tone and race between each newspaper. Of the *New York Times* stories about Caucasian

players, 45.8 percent were found to be positive in tone, one-quarter (25.0 percent) were neutral and the remaining 29.2 percent were negative.

Thirty-seven and one-half percent of the articles found in *The Washington Post* were positive, one-third (33.3 percent) were found to be neutral and 29.2 percent were negative.

A chi-square analysis (see Tables 4-11 and 4-12) revealed results that were not statistically significant when looking at coverage of Caucasian players in both publications. (chi-square value of 2.000). The differences in the data between each newspaper were very small.

RQ2: Do African-Americans receive more negative coverage than do Caucasians in *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*?

By a slim margin, African-Americans receive more positive coverage than Caucasians in the two publications. In Table 4-9, we can see that one-quarter (25.0 percent) and 20.8 percent of the articles in *The Washington Post* and *The New York Times*, respectively, were negative toward African-Americans.

Table 4-10 shows that *The Washington Post* had 29.1 percent of its articles about Caucasian players deemed negative, as did *The New York Times*.

ADDITIONAL FINDINGS

Both publications had over half of their articles in this study written by a staff writer/reporter. *The New York Times* had 39 out of 48 articles (81.3 percent) come from a staff writer/reporter and *The Washington Post* had 28 out of 48 articles (58.3 percent) come from a staff writer/reporter. Only seven out of the 96 articles (7.3 percent) were wire stories and the remaining 22 (22.9 percent) were taken from a syndicated columnist.

When examining this statistic by publication, Table 4-5 on page 28 shows that *The Washington Post* produced more stories from outside sources than *The New York Times* (20-9). Although this, and the fact that there is a statistically significant difference between *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* and the source(s) of the articles, are apparent, the researcher believes that this finding has nothing to do with any of the research questions or hypotheses that were proposed at the outset of this study.

One other conclusion that can be made is that the low number of negative articles concerning both races (11 for African-Americans and 14 for Caucasians) is because of the high percentage of staff writers/reporters that produced articles for this study. The researcher believes this reflects the dependability that is placed upon these individuals and the standards to which the public holds them.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Besides the potential limitations that were brought up in chapter one, there were a few more that became evident by the end of the study.

This study originally attempted to examine three newspapers and ended up with two. Perhaps if more “national” newspapers were included in this study (e.g. Los Angeles Times, Chicago Tribune), the results of this study could be more comprehensive in determining how sportswriters/reporters are doing their job from the standpoint of covering all athletes equally, regardless of color.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The number of articles coded could be larger. While the researcher feels that 96 articles were enough to answer the research questions and hypotheses, by utilizing more of the sample population, the findings would be more definitive based upon the number of articles being coded.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Perhaps similar studies on the National Football League (NFL), National Hockey League (NHL), Major League Baseball (MLB), and Major League Soccer (MLS) may yield some clues as to the possible struggles that athletes of color are facing in some of the other major sports.

Another potential approach is to analyze television and radio news. The only problem with this may be whereas national newspapers can be found via microfilm and back issues, archived television and radio programming may be a bit more difficult to obtain.

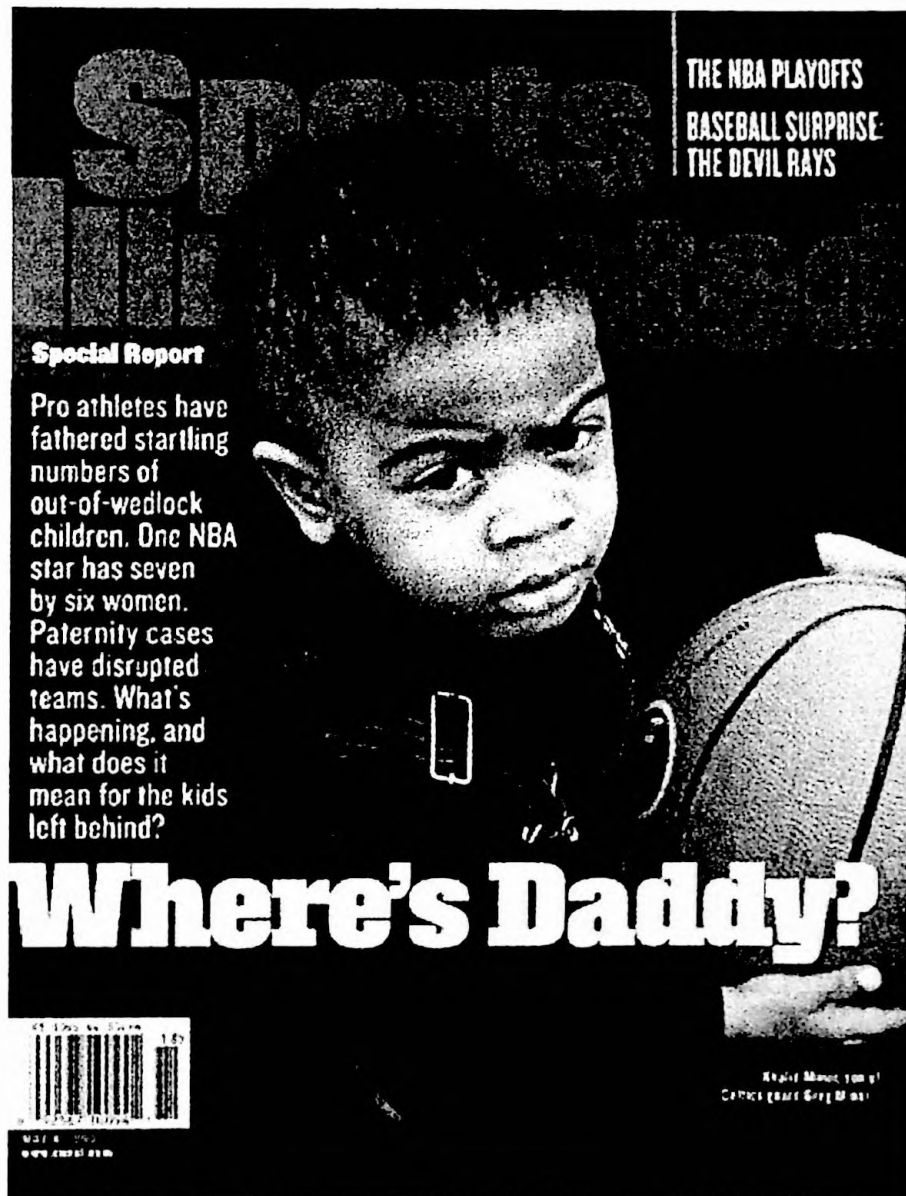
Perhaps the most important finding of this study was that *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* did not bias their coverage based upon a player's race. Knowing this, a study may be conducted on the same publications, examining other sections (news, entertainment, politics, business, etc.) to see if they are biased in their coverage of other newsworthy events.

CONCLUSIONS

Good journalism should always be fair in coverage, generally reporting the facts and providing enough information so that readers are able to form their own opinions and conclusions on the topics at hand. With this in mind, the researcher still came into this study thinking that both *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* would be biased toward minorities in their coverage of National Basketball Association players.

In the end though, only one out of three hypotheses turned out to be true. In the articles studied, Caucasian players actually received more negative publicity than the African-American players. *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* have continued to uphold the integrity of print journalism by not discussing factors such as African-Americans being better athletes because of innate abilities or Caucasians getting credit because of their hard work ethic.

Appendix A
Khalid Minor



*** Cover photo of Khalid Minor copied from Sports Illustrated, May 4, 1998, "Where's Daddy?" Story by Larry Munson.

Appendix B

Allport and Postman Selective Perception Experiment

Box 7b Allport and Postman Selective Perception Experiment

The Gordon Allport and Leo Postman experiment on selective perception that we discuss in these pages has become legend in mass communication theory circles. Here is the drawing that their subjects saw in 1945 (Reprinted by permission of the New York Academy of Sciences)



*** Copied from *Mass Communication Theory*. Written by Stanley J. Baran and Dennis K. Davis. Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1995.

Appendix C
Examples of Positive/Negative Words
(as defined by the author of this study)

- Before listing some examples of positive and negative words and phrases, it should be stated that this is merely a list compiled by the researcher and that these should not be the only words that can be considered positive and negative for the purposes of this study.

POSITIVE WORDS/PHRASES

won
earned
survived
gained

Player X came out on fire right from the opening tip.

Player Y played well when it mattered most.

He came out and played excellent defense.

In his first game as a rookie, Player E scored 25 points and grabbed 17 rebounds, as Team I defeated Team D 107-88.

Although July 4th had already come and gone, Player W set off some of his own personal fireworks last night, lighting up Team G for 16 points in just 23 minutes of play. And that was just the first half.

NEGATIVE WORDS/PHRASES

lackluster
dropped
beaten
lost
dismal
struggling

Player H has been stuck in a tailspin lately.

Player P had his worst game in recent memory.

It was apparent that Player T didn't have his head or his 6-foot-9, 255 pound frame in the game.

Each time down the floor, Player B had a quizzical expression on his face as if to say, "Am I in the Twilight Zone or am I in an NBA game?"

Player F shot just 2-for-17 from the field to go along with a paltry 1-for-7 from the free throw line, as Team O lost its ninth straight game.

Key Terms for Coders

Tone: (as defined by the author of this study)

Positive—An article that produces a favorable response to the athlete(s) or issue(s) being covered.

Negative—An article that produces an unfavorable response to the athlete(s) or issue(s) being covered.

Neutral—An article that produces neither a favorable nor unfavorable response to the athlete(s) or issue(s) being covered.

Type: (as defined by the Longman Dictionary of Mass Media & Communication and the author of this study)

Column— A more or less regular output of a columnist, a writer (often syndicated) who produces copy from a personal viewpoint or on particular subject areas.

Feature story—Stories, other than hard news, of interest to the public; coverage of an event or situation that stirs the emotions or imaginations of readers; designed primarily to entertain, but also to inform.

Game Story—Although these stories are important to the general public, many of these stories contain no mention of a player's race. Hence, this genre of story was eliminated from the study.

*** Connors, Tracy Daniel *Longman Dictionary of Mass Media & Communication*. Longman Press, New York & London, 1982.

Appendix D
Coding Sheet

- Please make sure all information is fully answered.

1. Coder #: ____

2. Newspaper:

____ Washington Post

____ New York Times

3. Article #: ____

4. Tone of article:

____ positive

____ negative

____ neutral

Appendix E

Coding Instructions

The following instructions are given as a guide to help you through the process of analyzing the articles.

1. Place your coder number in the space provided on the coding sheet.
2. Check off the newspaper from which the article is taken.
3. The article number will be labeled at the top of each article. Please write this number in the space provided on the coding sheet.
4. The tone of the article should be listed on the coding sheet once you are through with reading the article and the headline, as well as viewing any and all photographs, graphics, and other illustrations. For a further explanation, please read appendix C.

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