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## Experience of Media and Race in the National Football League: An Existential Phenomological Study

Jocelyn Alexis Fisher

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THE EXPERIENCE OF MEDIA AND RACE IN THE NATIONAL FOOTBALL  
LEAGUE – AN EXISTENTIAL PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY.

by

JOCELYN A. FISHER

(Under the Direction of Daniel R. Czech)

ABSTRACT

Over 70% percent of the current National Football League (NFL) population is of African-American descent (Lapchick, 2007). Moreover, there is a disparity between sport analyst with 74% of the radio and television announcers being White, and 12% being Black (Lapchick 2006). Thus, the purpose was to examine African-American NFL players on their experiences of media interaction from a phenomenological perspective and veteran NFL reporters' experiences of interacting with African-American NFL players. This study consisted of one open-ended question for each population. Data was transcribed and analyzed, and themes were identified. Themes for the NFL players consisted of a) how media coverage affects the player, b) perceptions of media personnel, c) Black quarterbacks. Identified themes for the veteran sport reporters consisted of a) how the media covers the NFL, b) interrelationships between the media and African-American NFL players, c) pressures of being a media professional, d) playing quarterback in the NFL.

INDEX WORDS: Sport Psychology, Media, Black NFL Players, Existential Phenomenology, Qualitative Inquiry

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B.S., Howard University, 2003

A Thesis Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of Georgia Southern University in Partial  
Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

MASTER OF SCIENCE

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## DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my Georgia Southern University Sport Psychology family. Without all the support, dedication, and encouragement everyone has provided me, this project would never have been finished. Thank you.

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## INTRODUCTION

Human diversity is a constant phenomenon in our world. Our eyes tell us that people look different; however, it is today's society, with its skin-color based racial beliefs, that tells us that people have distinct characteristics from one another. Although race distinguishes one person from another in terms of being biologically separate from other populations, social norms create stereotypes that differentiate certain aspects of life (Beck & Bosshart, 2003). Over time, we have learned to give meanings to individuals based on physical characteristics; however, even positive stereotypes can have negative effects.

The majority of current National Football League (NFL) players are African-American, making up approximately seventy percent of all players (Lapchick, Ekiyor, & Ruiz, 2007). How African-American athletes are viewed by society is often contingent on the media coverage they receive. In their survey of research on sports and race, Davis and Harris assert that "the association between athletics and African-American success is not surprising, given that sports is just about the only type of mainstream (non-fictional) media coverage in which one can see images of many successful African-Americans" (1998, p. 166).

It can be inferred that as soon as a Black athlete reaches success, we as a society want to look into their genetic make-up as an explanation. Although not the basis of many stereotypes, the sports media can provoke many generalizations about the Black athlete. Sport is most often observed through a sports media filter which is overwhelmingly made up of White men (Lapchick, Ekiyor, & Ruiz, 2007). These filtered images include the popular perception that the Black athlete has natural physical abilities

which can be seen when the media make such comments as “natural or raw talent”, while the White athlete is more intellectually advanced than Blacks and can often be seen in more of the “thinking” positions (Stone, Darley, & Perry, 1997). More specifically, Black athletes are frequently stereotyped as being self-centered, arrogant, and selfish, but with innate athletic abilities, where as White athletes are seen as being hard workers and team players, as well as possessing leadership roles (Price, 1997). Research also indicates genetic differences between cultures. Evidence suggest that Black men possess longer arms and can run at a faster speed than other racial groups, making them superior in the more popular sports today (Johnson, Hallinan, Westerfield, 1999).

Furthermore, Coakley (2007) suggests that physical prowess, particularly in sports such as football and basketball, has become a distinguishing characteristic of African-American athletes. These thoughts about athletic ascendancy are closely related to being unintelligent. It has to be known to the public that success in sport can be due to a number of different factors such as emotional and cognitive, in addition to physical contributions (Coakley, 2007). If this is the case, then why does society often focus on skin color as a basis to describe, stereotype, or give praise to athletic ability?

Virtually all members of today’s society view the media on a regular basis. Theoretically, the media is expected to present an accurate and precise account of what is going on in our community and the world; however, often what we want to hear, clouds our assessment of the reality of what actually happened (Coakley, 2007). According to Whannel (2002), the media can feed off one another and audience readings of representations in one type of media are already created and structured by interpretations in other media outlets. No matter how honest a reporter’s or journalist’s intentions may

be, they are obligated to give the public what is needed in order to keep their attention and better the ratings. The producers of many media outlets often direct our attention from “selected items of information to selected experiences, people, images, and ideas” and those producers are consistent when dealing with the sports media (Coakley, 2007, p. 368). Coakley (2007) further asserts media prose and telecasts are many times edited by those who control it such as producers, writers, commentators, and other media professionals. These individuals provide information in the form of entertainment, “but their decisions are based on their interest in five things: (1) making profits, (2) shaping values, (3) providing public service, (4) building their own reputations, and (5) expressing themselves in technical or artistic form” (Coakley, 2007, p. 368).

Media coverage largely implies that there is a correlation between race and ability that affect’s athletic performance (Wenner, 1998). Consequently, it can be inferred that Black athletes are portrayed in a distorted way by sports media. Moreover, “subliminal and unintentional stereotyping still occurs in sports coverage and can consequently affect public perception” (Zackal, 2006, p. 2). But the media, public, and many athletes have to take into account that racial stereotypes of athletes include negative beliefs about both Blacks and Whites (Stone, Darley, & Perry, 1997). Many athletes are the targets of the media’s scrutiny; however, it is a question of whether the media is responsible for a large amount of misrepresentation of those athletes when stereotypical attitudes are promoted. It is thought that the sports media may portray African-American athletes in a negative manner; however, some ask whether or not it is the athlete that actually puts themselves in bad situations that entices the media to focus on those stories.

According to the 2006 Racial and Gender Report Card for the NFL, 74% of the radio and television announcers are White, and 13% are Black (Lapchick, Ekiyor, & Ruiz, 2007). Although there is a decrease in the number of White radio and television announcers from 2003 (94%), there is still a disparity between White and Black analysts (Lapchick, Brenden, & Wright, 2006). A panel was held at Morehouse College in May 2007 that focused on the disproportionate number of African-American athletes and the number of African-American sports journalists. Long time sport journalist Ron Thomas asserts that “many believe that increasing the number of Black sports writers, particularly those covering sports like football and basketball where Blacks athletes are in the majority, will help increase the understanding of those players and more positively affect how they are depicted” (Seymour, 2007). Washington Wizards center Etan Thomas feels as though the media focuses too often on the negative aspects of Black athletes rather than the positive aspects. In contrast, Atlanta Falcons tight end Alge Crumpler takes into account that many athletes get too comfortable and puts themselves in situations that will attract negativity (Seymour, 2007).

Although sports can be very objective, the sports media still has a need to relay information to the public what the audience has the most interest in, just like any other form of entertainment (Zackal, 2006). Coakley (2007) suggest that sport news coverage is similar to any other news coverage as it involves drama and violence where you are adding an element of analysis and commentary, which instead of just presenting dry facts, offers perspective and entertainment into the events more efficiently than other competing media outlets. Viewers of the sport news may not understand the notion that the images and stories we see and hear have been edited to enhance the dramatics and

accentuate racial ideologies and logics in our society (Coakley, 2007). However, the public has to recognize that these stories are not representative of what generally happens in the sports community, but merely an aspect of some matter that athletes may possibly face (Coakley, 2007). The media is not necessarily to blame for racial concerns in athletics; they just cover the sports that African-American's dominate. However, the images the media sends out are how individuals base their opinions of athletes. The media is often looked at to define athletic ability; unfortunately this is hard because even the best sports journalist can be biased.

Previous research (Billings, 2003; Billings, 2004; Eastman & Billings, 2001; Rada & Wulfemeyer, 2005) has analyzed media coverage of sports, finding racial differences in the depiction of Black and White athletes. Billings discussed the former media theory arguing that media outlets may not always tell viewers what to think, but can persuade viewers how to think (2004). The media can be bias and frame a story into what they are attempting to portray, whether positive or negative. As cited by Billings (2004), Gitlin (1980) contends that the three main purposes of the media are to “(a) determine who or what is shown (selection), (b) determine how much who or what gets shown (emphasis), and (c) determine who or what does not get shown (exclusion)”. Rada and Wulfemeyer contend that announcers take attention away from an athlete's on field accomplishments – an area where the player has more control over what takes place – and redirects that attention to other facets of that athlete's personal life and character (2005). A study was conducted to analyze how portrayals of Tiger Woods, within the realm of professional golf, differed from other white golfers. The researchers assert that whenever Woods was playing well, the media would praise him with comments about his

hard work and experience, stereotypical of a White athlete. In contrast, when Woods was not in a winning position, he was portrayed stereotypically fitting a Black athlete with comments that exploit his lack of composure and concentration (Billings, 2004).

In addition to the media theory, scholars have looked at the self-categorization theory to explain why there are discrepancies in the way the media depicts athletes. The self-categorization theory believes that social categorization influences people's perceptions of others and the formation of self-identity (Boehling, 2007). For example, when viewing a commentary on a televised football game, Black viewers would hear observations about their own ethnic group (i.e., Black quarterbacks in football) contrasted with discussions about White quarterbacks – a group in which they do not self-identify with, “and the result being that self-identity is defined by both what they are (Black) and what they are not (White)” (Billings, 2004). With this knowledge, self-identity with one's own ethnic group may show implications for analyst and commentators as they may use different descriptors and show unknown racial biases when speaking about an athlete of a different ethnicity. The same can be said for the viewers as they may make different assumptions about the portrayals due to their perceived “in-group” status with their own ethnicity (Billings, 2004).

There has been significant quantitative research conducted that examines race, media, and sport (Billings, 2004; Bruce, 2004; Coakley, 2007; Eastman & Billings, 2001; Lapchick, Ekiyor, & Ruiz, 2007; Rada & Wulfemeyer, 2005); however, little research has been found that examines this phenomenon from the holistic approach that seeks an understanding of an athlete's personal experiences. Additionally, little qualitative work had been found that specifically examines the individual experiences of NFL players, and

the media, which suggest a need for further investigation. By examining their experiences through a qualitative perspective, the researchers anticipated the advantageous contributions that emerged for numerous related fields associated with African-American athletes, the media, and sport psychology.

The current study attempted to expand upon the existing research of the experiences of race with the media by utilizing a phenomenological investigation. Because phenomenology seeks to gain an enhanced understanding of unique experiences, African-American athlete's and media personnel's perspectives can be better understood by using this methodological approach.

Choosing the appropriate methodology for research is extremely crucial, as with the theoretical framework. The humanistic model is used as a framework to describe and understand phenomenology. This model gives us a better understanding of the perspective of the athlete through their lived experience within their own environment (Hill, 2001). If we wish to gain the actual lived experience of the athlete, the human and the world cannot be examined separately (Hill, 2001). To do this, thick rich descriptions of experiences are gathered from the perspective of the participant, through discussions, observations, or interviews (Patton, 2002). "The existential phenomenological researcher, then, is concerned with description, experience, and intentionality; and these must be considered as the researcher seeks the structural essence of some event as experienced by some person" (Czech, Wrisberg, and Fisher, 2004, p.53). Therefore, existential phenomenology will be used in this current study to have a better understanding of what it's like to experience the media in sport, and to portray African-American athletes from a media perspective.

## PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

According to the 2006 Racial and Gender Report Card of the Associated Press Sports Editors, coverage of athletes is neither accurate or fair, and very rarely do the opinions of those players being covered emphasize their satisfaction or dissatisfaction of the media (Lapchick, Brenden, and Wright, 2006). Consequently, what appears to be lacking in the current sport psychology literature is a systematic examination of the African-American athlete's "lived" experiences of the media, as well as the "lived" experiences of the media portraying African-American athletes. Thus, the present study was designed to examine this phenomenon by obtaining it from the first-person perspective of African-American athletes, and the media themselves. The researchers of this study examined this relationship from an existential phenomenological perspective through conversations with the athlete, and veteran media professional. This was done by means of interviews that elicited the honest feelings and opinions of those African-American athletes, and media professionals regarding to their experiences with the media. This accomplished by allowing the athlete and media professional to speak openly and candidly, and by understanding the views of those individuals without judgment or pre-determined beliefs.

## METHODOLOGY

### *The Researcher as an Instrument*

For existential phenomenological research, the researcher plays the primary role as the instrument in the study. Thus, it is critical to include an understanding of my personal experience as it relates to the phenomenon of the relationship between media and elite athletes (Czech et al, 2004). A description below will consist of my past experiences and growing interest concerning this topic.

Currently, I am a first year graduate student studying sport psychology at Georgia Southern University. All my life, I have been involved in sports, from playing youth soccer to the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Division I level. Moreover, as an African-American woman, I have always had a love and interest in cultural studies. For that reason, my passion for learning how certain aspects of life can affect my culture is only natural. During my athletic career, I have been fortunate enough to have pleasant experiences with the media. For example, I have received positive feedback from reporters and newspapers in regards to my athletic ability, however, that has not been the same experience for others. In talking and consulting with other African-American athletes on the elite level, I have taken notice of similar patterns of concern, stress, and annoyance towards the sports media. Therefore, due to my personal experiences and the experiences of others in regards to the phenomenon of the relationship between the media and elite athletes, I wanted to further examine this topic in a more systematic manner.

### *Bias Exploration and Bracketing Interview*

The experiences of different people are “bracketed, analyzed, and compared to identify the essences of the phenomenon” (Patton, 2002). The bracketing of the researcher biases is done before and during data collection, and is an attempt to depict the study participant's reality. Of initial importance is the notion that the researcher is the data collection instrument through his/her own interaction with study participants.

After a topic is chosen and prior to the interview of study participants, a bracketing interview is performed to enable the researcher to talk about presuppositions concerning the phenomenon, and to become sensitized to any potential for imposing the researcher's own views on co-participants. From this, the investigator experiences the interviewing process and obtains a thematic description of his/her current comprehension of his/her experiences of the phenomenon of interest (Henderson, 1992).

Before initiating the present study, a bracketing interview and a pilot interview were conducted. The bracketing interview consisted of a fellow graduate student, knowledgeable in the area of qualitative research, who interviewed me, in a similar way that the study participants would be interviewed, on my experiences of race and the media in sport. Because of my personal experience as an African-American athlete, the bracketing interview helped to make clear my own experiences on race and media relations in sport.

Several themes emerged from my interview. The first theme explained a preference towards one's own race when dealing with sport and the media. Growing up, I played soccer; what was known to many in my area as a “White” sport. Not until I began playing collegiate soccer did I see other faces like my own due to the fact I played on an

all African-American women's soccer team. At this time, I realized I connected with, and enjoyed playing with other Black females, as well as interact with an all-Black media outlet in our school's newspaper.

The second theme to emerge described my feelings on the inconsistencies in the way different races are portrayed in the media. I felt as though there are more negative portrayals of African-American athletes, than their White counterparts.

A third theme to emerge was viewing the media as just another form of entertainment that chooses how they want to portray people, not only athletes. As an audience member, I enjoy watching and reading about drama in today's societies, and believe I am a part of the norm. I understand the realm of sports is like any other business, and media outlets must sell in order to keep their business successful

The final theme explained that the media can be helpful in certain instances in order to gain positive exposure. The bracketing interview allowed me to become aware of the biases that may have occurred during the interview process that otherwise might have gone unnoticed.

### *Pilot Study*

Due to the fact that little to no qualitative research has been found examining the relationship of the media and the lived experiences of African-American NFL athletes, I conducted a pilot study to better understand qualitative research, as well as test my research question. I interviewed one African-American NFL player on their experiences with the media. The same interview method that was used for my pilot study will be used for the current study as well. The interview was audio taped and transcribed. After

conducting the pilot study, the participant was asked for suggestions on how to improve the interview process.

Some of the major themes that emerged from the pilot participant were:

- The media can be more helpful and positive than negative.
- The media needs to be more respectful towards athletes and remember they are people also
- The local media can be more degrading than the national media; however, the local media analyzes the game more in depth.
- The media can add extra pressure to an already stressful event (game) and bring down an athlete's self-esteem if portrayed negatively.
- The media consist of predominately White reporters, and the NFL contains predominately Black players.
- The "White media" wants to see the White athlete succeed; therefore, it will hype those White players more than the Black players.

### *Participants*

The participants within this study consisted of six African-American NFL players, with at least three years experience, and six veteran sport reporters with at least five years experience. While a sample of five athletes and six sport reporters may not be powerful enough for traditional research, according to Patton (2002), rules for sample size do not exist within qualitative inquiry. The decision on the size of the sample depends on several of the following factors: "a) what the researcher wants to know; b) the purpose of the study; c) what is at stake; d) what will be useful; e) what will have credibility, and f) what can be done with available time and resources" (Patton, 2002, p. 244).

Purposeful sampling was employed due to the fact that the subjects were picked largely through personal contacts. Furthermore, purposeful sampling provided the researcher with honest descriptions of the experiences the African-American athlete as well as media professional. In addition, snowball sampling occurred because we sampled people who knew people who knew they would be good examples to use in the study (Patton, 2002).

### *Procedure*

Participation was completely voluntary throughout this study. Interviews were held in a quiet, private location to ensure confidentiality, or over the phone. Participants in this study were informed that: (a) the interviews are digitally recorded for accuracy and precision, (b) they can refuse to be interviewed or end participation at anytime, (c) they can ask questions at any time, (d) no incentive will be provided for their participation, (e) the interviews will be transcribed and reviewed by me and other researchers to find appropriate themes, and (f) copies of the transcription will be provided for them to review.

The African-American NFL participants were prompted with the following open-ended question: “When you think about a specific time being portrayed by the media, what comes to mind?” Additionally, the veteran sport reporters were prompted with the following open-ended question: “When you think about a specific time portraying an African-American NFL player, what comes to mind?”

The researchers wanted this question to allow the participants to get across their honest feelings and opinions of their personal experiences with the media and African-American NFL athletes respectively. As expressed by Patton (2002), this open-ended

approach ensures that the participants can speak openly and candidly, without judgment or predetermined beliefs from the interviewer. Follow-up or probing interview questions were then asked for further clarifications of the athletes, and media professionals, experiences with the media (Patton, 2002). To effectively foster more information from the participants, the interviewer must convey the concept that failure to understand a thought or feeling is the fault of the interviewer (Patton, 2002). The following probing questions were utilized in a natural manner:

“You said \_\_\_\_; will you please elaborate on that experience?”

“I want to make sure I understand correctly, will you please give me another example of that feeling?”

#### *Data Analysis*

The phenomenological approaches that were used for analyzing the data are modified from Czech et al. (2004) and Patton (2002) as listed below:

1. Approaching the interviews
  - Transcribing the interview*
  - Obtaining a grasp of the interview*
2. Focusing the data
  - Bracketing the data*
3. Phenomenological reduction
  - Eliminating irrelevant, repetitive, or overlapping data*
  - Verifying the elimination of the data*
4. Releasing meanings
  - Forming categories*
  - Identifying the themes*
  - Describing the themes*

### Approaching the Interview

Transcribing. All interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim to create a text. A professional transcriptionist and I prepared the transcripts. The participants were provided the opportunity to review the digital recording; once the transcripts were prepared, the participants were able to request a copy of the transcripts. Other than the participants, the professional transcriptionist, and myself, no one else will have access to the digital recordings. The audiotapes, transcripts, and informed consent forms are kept in a locked file drawer.

Patton (2002) emphasizes the importance of obtaining a verbatim transcript otherwise, the data may be distorted. Therefore, the transcripts were checked for errors and inconsistencies by listening to the digital recording while reading the transcript.

Obtaining a Grasp of the Interview. Checking for inconsistencies also serves the purpose of obtaining what Kruger (1979) calls a holistic grasp of data (Czech et al, 2004). This approach assisted the researcher in retaining a sense of wholeness of the data even though some parts of the data that was eliminated in later phases (Czech et al, 2004). Becoming accustomed to the various protocols allowed me to extricate the structure of the participant's experience.

### Focusing the Data

Bracketing the data. The researcher must put aside any preconceptions and any other person notions which may interfere with an open reading of the text. With this, the data was analyzed directly to the phenomena in question (Patton, 2002). Patton (2002) points out that "the researcher 'brackets out' the world and presupposition to identify the data in pure form, uncontaminated by extraneous intrusion." Once this was completed,

the researchers were able to treat the data with equal value and the text was examined with all elements and perspectives having equal weight (Patton, 2002).

### Phenomenological Reduction

Eliminating irrelevant, repetitive, or overlapping data. At times, conversations involved some information that was not essential or relevant to the experience and understanding of the phenomena being studied (Patton, 2002). This involved decreasing clutter (eliminating parts of the conversation that was not necessary for understanding the text), managing punctuation (condensing sentences as long as the meaning was not distorted), eliminating repetition, de-emphasizing the interviewer, and enhancing readability of the text (Czech et al, 2004).

Verifying the elimination of the data. The goal of this step was to have the participants verify that the edited version of the interview is correct and still has the thoughts and words that they wanted to express. The summaries of the text were read and modified by the participant. This step ensured a truthful experience of the phenomena. Once the editing was completed, the transcripts still remained a rich source of information and was easily read and placed into meaningful groups.

### Releasing meanings

Forming categories. The data was placed into meaningful clusters based on the similar themes that emerged (Patton, 2002). Both the research team and I placed the phrases that were similar into clusters. We then compared the clusters and categories were formed.

Identifying the themes. Once the categories were formed, themes were created. The themes were identified across interviews each theme was found in the individual

process. Next, these themes were analyzed over and over again until a consistent representation of each category was present and there were distinct differences between each separate category.

Describing the themes. Patton (2002) gives recommendations when presenting the results of qualitative data: a) focusing and balancing and b) description and interpretation. Due to the large amount of data collected, the interview text was focused and balanced, meaning that some of it was omitted in order to focus on the experience of race and the media in sport. Patton (2002) also points out that when dealing with qualitative inquiry, a thick, rich description of the experience is essential. Therefore, the data in the current study was presented in a clear and descriptive manner that captured the essence of the participant's experiences.

#### *Reliability*

For qualitative research, reliability is based on the assumption that the data can be replicated or repeated (Patton, 2002). Furthermore, for qualitative data to be considered reliable, the participants must be trustworthy (Patton, 2002). Therefore, if the description of the athletes experience with the media can be shown as true, it is considered reliable. Because the participants in this study were able to verify their own transcribed interviews, we can assume a truthful experience of the phenomenon was provided.

#### *Validity*

As cited in Czech et al. (2004), if the reader is able to follow the experiences described, then the conclusions should be accepted as valid. Furthermore, triangulation was used for validity because it offers the perspectives of others on the data and the conclusions that are going to be drawn from the data (Patton, 2002). Triangulation is the

application and combination of several research methodologies in the study of the same phenomenon. This was accomplished by gathering the data and performing member checks, which allowed the participant to read the transcripts for clarity and to ensure the rich descriptions of their experiences were found. Likewise, clarification of researcher bias was addressed by performing a bracketing interview. In addition, journaling and observations of media outlets was utilized as forms of triangulation.

## RESULTS

Using the methodology described in the previous chapter, the interviews of the athletes and veteran sport reporters were conducted, transcribed, and placed into themes and subthemes. This allowed the structure of the experience of media and race in the National Football League to be determined. The themes from the African-American NFL player were illustrated. Later on in this section, the results from the veteran sport reporters will be revealed. In addition, this section contains quotes from the participants to illustrate the structure of media and race in the NFL as it surfaced from their descriptions.

### *African-American NFL Player Results*

The participants were five male African-American NFL players with at least three years experience. Table 1 provides a brief description of the African-American NFL participants.

**Table 1.**

### *Description of NFL Participants*

#	Gender	Race	Position	Code Name
1.	Male	African-American	Tight-End	Ted
2.	Male	African-American	Tight-End	Boogie
3.	Male	African-American	Linebacker	Sanchez
4.	Male	African-American	Cornerback	Thomas
5.	Male	African-American	Safety	Bobby

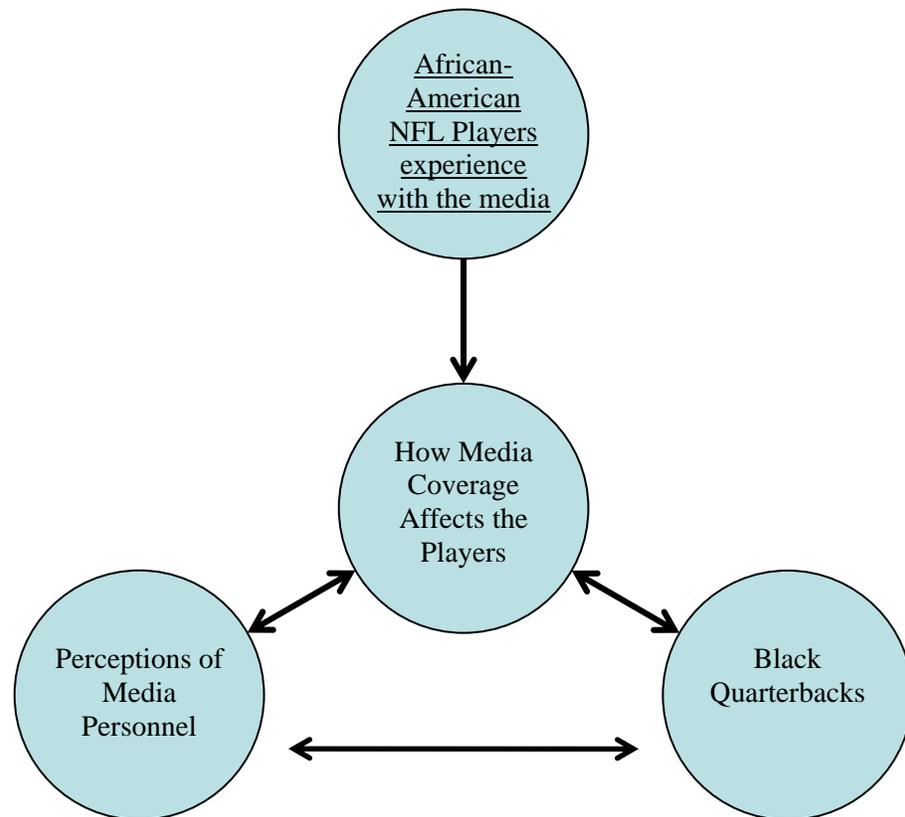
The intention of this study was to describe the thematic structure of the experience of race and media in sport in the NFL from a phenomenological perspective. Upon examining the eleven transcripts both individually and comparatively, the following three themes were revealed to describe the structure of race and the media from the African-American NFL player's perspective: (1) how media coverage affects the NFL players – the perspective of media coverage from the athletes' point of view, (2) perceptions of media personnel - the specific perceptions the players have about the media personnel whom they've dealt with, and (3) Black quarterbacks – the pressure this position faces in the NFL from the athlete's perception. These three themes form the structure of the media experience for these African-American NFL Players.

Each of these themes was consisted of one or more subthemes. For the theme of how media coverage affects the NFL players, the subthemes consisted of (a) positive or helpful, (b) how the media can be negative, (c) interrelationships with the media, and (d) coping. Finally, for the theme of perceptions of media personnel, the subthemes were (a) the “white media” and (b) personnel who never played the sport before.

A representation illustrating these themes, the subsequent subthemes, and their interrelationships is provided in Figure 1 and Table 2. The three part interrelated experience of race and the media correlated to how media coverage affects the NFL players, perceptions of media personnel, and race in the NFL reveals the importance of understanding the relationship between the media and African-American NFL Players. The model provides the themes in a more uniform and definite method than the interviews, where the conversation moved back and forth between all three themes. From utilizing the media to gain positive exposure, to understanding the obligatory relationship

with the media by team rules and individual contracts, to dealing with individuals who analyze a sport they have never played before, to understanding the racial make-up of NFL players, all parts of the model effected how the African-American NFL player feels towards the media in this study.

**Figure 1.** Themes Describing the African-American NFL Player's Experience of Race and the Media in the NFL.



**Table 2.**

*Description of Themes and Subthemes – African-American NFL Players*

<b>THEMES</b>	<b>SUBTHEMES</b>
How media coverage affects the NFL Player	Positive/Helpful How the media can be negative Interrelationships with the media Coping
Perceptions of media professionals	“White Media” Individuals whom never played the sport
Black Quarterbacks	

*Theme #1: How Media Coverage Affects the African-American NFL Player*

The first theme that emerged from the data describes how all types of media coverage affect the participants of this study. The athletes described the affects of the media as being helpful at times, although the negativity of the coverage can also affect them. The players often mentioned that although the media can be hurtful at times, you really do need them during their athletic career. The athletes’ description of the media coverage was a consistent theme heard throughout most of the interviews.

Positive/Helpful. In regards to media coverage being positive or helpful, most athletes expressed that they utilize the media to gain more positive exposure in regards to fan recognition, or speaking about subjects they find most important. The following

quotes portray the positive effect of media coverage as it pertains to the African-American NFL Players. The players described the need for the media to help gain fan recognition and attention for selection in the Pro-Bowl, the NFL's all-star game played at the end of every season where fellow players, coaches, and fans vote for the individuals to make the team:

“Let’s say Pro Bowl...Pro Bowl is like an all-star game for the best guys, but a lot of it’s about votes. So the guy for the fan, he’s only gonna know the players he hears on TV everyday. You know? Like I said, if that guy was not getting all that publicity, maybe he had better stats than the guy that went to the Pro Bowl, but he didn’t get no a vote from the fans cause nobody knows who he is.” (Participant “Ted”)

“You need em [the media] because they dictate, in a sick way, how people see you. They portray you. In some instances, they can dictate whether or not you make the Pro Bowl. They dictate how your contract is. They dictate how much money you make.” (Participant “Thomas”)

Other participants discussed how they utilize the media in order to be portrayed how they personally want to be and speak about subjects they find important.

“Like I said, you need em because, basically, you tell the media what you want people to know. That you use them to get your voice and your opinion out there.” (Participant “Thomas”)

“I really think it’s a situation where, it’s a necessary evil. You know, it’s something that’s always going to be there as far as that job is concerned. It’s something that in my situation, and a lot of guys that I play with, we use it to our advantage. You know...we get our message out there where we are doing something in the community, what we want them to portray.” (Participant “Sanchez”)

One participant illustrated how the media allows him the opportunity to speak more about his faith, which is the most important aspect of his life.

“I mean, the way I see it, had it not been for God and for where I stand in a spiritual basis, I wouldn’t be where I am. And so every opportunity I get to portray that in the media, I want them to know that that’s going to come out of my mouth. I want them to understand that if they do an interview with me, that’s going to be something that I’m going to allow them to understand. I think it’s

been helpful to in a way, because of some of the things that they've written. It's put my faith out there, and people have been able to see that side of me."  
(Participant "Bobby")

In summary, the participants in this study utilized the media to help gain positive exposure when it came to post-season success as well as portraying subjects personally important to the participants themselves.

How the media can be negative. This subtheme emerged from many of the athletes' descriptions on how media coverage can be offensive, harsh criticisms that are at times disrespectful, false, propagandistic because reports can be skewed down to "sound-bites", stereotypical, biases in coverage, and lack of trust in the media. One of the participants added that he believes the media needs to be more respectful at times when covering the NFL athletes:

"I wish the media would just be a little bit more respectful and be a bit more open-minded to the fact that you're dealing with people. Yes we got helmets on and people idolize us but, you know, at the end of the day, these dudes got families. And you talk bad about a person, like that wife, she hears that, you know. That kid or that daughter or that son, they go to school, 'Your dad sucks.' You know what I'm saying."  
(Participant "Ted")

Another participant pointed out that one of the first things they think of when dealing with the media is the negativity they portray when there are other things they could be talking about:

"I think specifically about the negativity that they always portray dealing with athletes and dealing with some of the things that occur during the season and off-season where there is probably twice as much or three times as much positive things occurring, but yet aren't explored in the media, so they don't get as much attention...the bad things, they're going to show the bad things. They're going to be leading off the news and they're going to say, 'Alright, tune in, we're going to show you an NFL player that got in trouble today.' And that's going to be the whole segway to what else is going in to their media." (Participant "Sanchez")

Another aspect of the media some of the participants associated with negativity is when some portrayals of the African-American NFL players are false or untrue:

“There may say things about players or teammates of mine even other players on other teams, are just untrue, you know...I can't tell you, I can't even count how many times I've read an article or seen a story that I know for a hundred percent is false, is wrong, is not accurate.” (Participant “Ted”)

And if you're not available the way the NFL tells you is part of your job description and you have to be available, then you know. I mean, you're labeled in a way and portrayed in a way that may not be the truth. (Participant “Bobby”)

A participant described his frustrations on the false portrayals of African-American NFL player, Sean Taylor, who was shot and killed during the 2007-2008 season.

“Something I was a little frustrated about was at the onset of the death of Sean Taylor. And I had a hard time watching everything they portrayed of his persona and I think more so when he had first been shot. You know, before he had even passed away. Instead of focusing on the fact that this man had been shot wrongfully and everything he had endured at that point, they took it upon themselves to make it look as though he had lived a lifestyle that he had this coming. And basically everything that he had done or the life that he had lived up to that point.... they neglected to even pay attention to the fact that he had changed tremendously...and so for them to make it out like that was the person that he was, I just really had a hard time sitting back watching that. And I think it took away from the attention of what had really happened. And the injustice in what had happened.

In addition, the majority of the participants were bothered by propagandistic ways of the coverage because the media sometimes skews portrayals and stories to give the audience what they most want to see, hear, or read:

“Our society just preys upon it. The media and even Hollywood. We love to see drama. We love to hear about people going through things. I don't know what it is. I don't think we were born that way. But I guess society kind of molds us to be and we love this, to hear about and see it. Our eyes stay glued to it. And as long as we do, they're going to keep reporting it.” (Participant “Thomas”)

The following quote illustrates a propagandistic story of when African-American quarterback Donovan McNabb was interviewed on HBO's Real Sports with Bryant Gumble:

“He had done the interview prior to the time when they showed it. But they [the media] just chose the day after he [Donovan McNabb] stunk it up in a game to show the interview. I mean, it was the same thing when 9/11 occurred and the media was showing people in Iraq cheering. They weren’t cheering at that date exactly. They were cheering and it might have been a New Year celebration. The media has a way of pinpointing things and putting things right after each other as if they happen simultaneously and in fact, they don’t.” (Participant “Sanchez”)

One of the participants told a story of when the media skewed something he said in regards to returning following an injury:

“I had a situation this year where I was injured and one of the guys [media] asked me how did I feel, and did I feel like I would be ready to play the upcoming week. I told him that I was definitely in pain and it was something that I needed to get evaluated and we would see as the week went on. But based on how I felt that day, I thought that I would be ready to play by Sunday. Well, he wrote the article in such a way that made it sound like I’m fine. I’ll be ready to play Sunday. So I got in trouble for it. Because they basically came to me in the medical staff and they were just like, ‘what are you doing telling him that you going to be ready to play when we don’t even know if you’re going to be ready to play. And now the coaches are approaching us saying, well is he ready or is he not?’ And, you now, it’s just a whole bunch of mess. So, after that, I’m just like, look, I ain’t telling you nothing.” (Participant “Bobby”)

Another aspect of negativity the NFL participants expressed was the use of stereotypes involved in the media’s coverage of them:

“If you are a black athlete, they’re looking to uphold those stereotypes. You get caught driving drunk, or you got back payment on child support, or you got a gun charge, or whatever. I mean, that’s how they stereotype black males in society anyway...and just the portrayal’s a little slanted. And it’s like they almost want to uphold the stereotypes that black athletes already have...if we’re known for being cocky and spending our money, and not responsible, and got baby mommas everywhere. The media’s going, every once in a while, they’ve got to through a story out there, to let you know yes, this is still happening. Just to solidify the stereotypes.” (Participant “Thomas”)

“I think, first of all the media, I think they put the black athlete in a box. You know...they say, this is how the guys are, they like to dance in the end zone. They like to wear their uniform different, you know what I’m saying? They like to wear jewelry, and this is how most of them act, and this is what you can expect, when we all know this is not true.” (Participant “Ted”)

One of the major issues the athletes conveyed was the biases that can be seen in media coverage of African-American NFL players:

“You kind of see the media kind of blow stuff out of proportion sometimes. Specifically relating to figures in professional sports. And specifically nowadays on black athletes. And I don’t know if it’s meant to be done. Or maybe there’s just more black athletes out there. But you see a little, you see the media tend to like to stay on the negative topics a lot longer than positive ones. And that’s one main thing that’s rampant nowadays. For example, they got on the quarterback for who he was dating. But they get on the receiver because supposedly he’s sleeping in meetings. He’s not doing this. He’s trying to commit suicide. You know, it’s totally different things that are reported. You know what I’m saying? The way it’s reported. It’s totally different. Everybody’s going to get criticized. But you can criticize somebody constructively or negatively. Or you can criticize them in a positive way. It seems like one kind of player gets criticized negatively while the other gets criticized and it’ll still be kind of positive.” (Participant “Thomas”)

“I would definitely say that if there’s a white player and a black player going up against each other and they’re both good, the white dude is going to get more hype. He’s gonna get more publicity. I’ll DEFINITELY say that.” (Participant “Ted”)

“When you have majority white people critiquing you, there’s already things in their head where they have...its already stapled in their head like, Chad Johnson, he might do a dance in the end zone whatever, but you know, he dropped like 3 balls that game...let me fire off on him like that. You know, let me exploit that, even though he scored 2 touchdowns, you know, I’m tired of the dancing and shucking and jiving, let me, let me focus on the 3 drops. You know...Peyton Manning has a bad game, It’s rare that you hear the media say, “Well Peyton, he’s just playing horrible.” It’s the other players around him that need to step up.” (Participant “Ted”)

“When a black athlete or white athlete are stopped for a DUI, the black athlete is definitely going to be going through the mud. But with the white athlete, someone is going to be make a convenient excuse for him like, “well, it was 0.8, or 0.9 [blood alcohol level], he’s a straight up and down guy”. It’s just a different shade on the situation.” (Participant “Sanchez”)

“I’m going to tell you one that really, really surprised me, and the media has its chosen goldenboys, Tom Brady being one of them. Tom Brady is a father out of wedlock. Same thing with Matt Leinart...but these are two goldenboys, big time quarterbacks, and nobody really struck the moral chord, if you will and said, ‘this is wrong or they should know better’.” (Participant “Boogie”)

Lack of trust was another issue the NFL players vocalized when speaking about the media's coverage of them:

“Trust in the media. I don't think there is any.” (Participant “Thomas”)

“I've had a couple of instances, where they've kind of twisted some of the things I've said. And that really irritates me, and so to say that I completely trust them is hard to say...and that's why I think that I can't be open and honest and talk about how I really feel because I'm afraid of the way they're going to portray something. I mean, you have to watch every single word you say. And they'll pry, they'll try to get you.” (Participant “Bobby”)

These athletes believe one of the reasons Black NFL players are often portrayed negatively in the media is due to the fact that Blacks dominate the sport as described in the following quotes:

“Man, the matter of fact is that there's a whole lot more black players. And so, normally when you see someone portrayed in a negative light, it's usually an African-American player.” (Participant “Bobby”)

“It just seems that obviously we dominate in my mind, sports. If you look at the total number of African-Americans. Men in sports period. All three, or not even African-Americans. Black. It could be black Latino. Could be whatever. You see that we're portrayed, or the negative things that we do are amplified in my mind over those of our Caucasian counterparts.” (Participant “Boogie”)

“Because first of all the NFL is predominantly black so when they see white people blowing up, they have to promote black people cause we're the best players out there.” (Participant “Ted”)

In summary, the participants in this study view the media as being a negative entity in the realm of professional football.

Interrelationships with the media. This subtheme emerged from many of the athletes descriptions on their obligatory relationship by contracts and team rules to interact with the media; however, the participants expressed if you do not speak to the media when they want you to, they are prone to portray the athletes in a more negative light:

“Now, the team I played for it was mandatory. We had to sign balls. You have to talk to the media. You have to...this is a thing that you’re obligated to do while you’re on this team. And obviously, they never put a gun to your head, but these are the things that you’re expected to do. So, when you don’t talk, this is why sometimes you’ll hear the media, ‘Oh, so and so didn’t talk this week’. And they’ll start writing bad stuff about you.” (Participant “Thomas”)

“You know, you get a stigma if you’re not friendly with the media, and if you’re not the most outgoing guy, you’re not fan friendly. I mean, bottom line, is NFL players get paid a lot of money, but that doesn’t make them have to be friendly. You could say it’s a moral obligation, but they’re still people...so the media expects, and there’s, contractual obligations that make professional athletes have to do a certain number of media, or make themselves available. But how you going to be mad with somebody when it may not be in their personality? It may not be in they nature? They may have had personal things. And 9 times out of 10 that’s what it is. Personal, introspective, identity, personality traits that make them the way they are. Or situations that have happened in the past that have soured them on the media, or opening themselves up to people that they don’t know. And too many times, that’s seen as a negative, and you know, you just get tired of it. You get tired of it.” (Participant “Boogie”)

“I mean, really when you come into the NFL, they tell you that, every year we have a media presentation and they tell you that this is a part of your job description and that you have to deal with the media. And I really think that if the media is not treating you fairly, then you shouldn’t have to deal with them...I’ve seen that everybody that didn’t want to deal with the media or were not as apt to be available to them, then they [media] had some negatives to say about them. They feel like, obviously you have something to hide. Or they just label you a weirdo. Somebody that’s antisocial or, but I mean the truth of the matter is, everybody is not real vibrant, no born to talk, not feeling comfortable talking, and that’s the sad matter of the fact.” (Participant “Bobby”)

To sum up, the participants of the study articulated that they understand a “mandatory” relationship with the media is necessary due to contract and team rules, but do not agree with the notion that if a player does not speak to the media, they are going to portray that athlete in a negative way.

Coping. Many of the athletes in this study spoke about the emotional effects of media coverage on themselves, as well as the public when other’s watch or read media reports. Interestingly, the athletes voiced their concerns on other players who seem to put

themselves into certain situations that allow for the media to portray African-American athletes negatively:

“I mean, ignorance should no longer be an excuse and that’s in anything in life. You can’t go and say “I didn’t know that if I got in trouble, the media was going to do that to me.” I mean, it’s been reoccurring, it’s things that have always been out there, so you should be cognizant of that and act accordingly. You know, don’t use ignorance as a case, like ‘I didn’t know that’.” (Participant “Sanchez”)

“Me personally, what I do is I try to do one thing that is going to present myself and my school and my family and my team and whatever else in a positive light so they don’t have anything to say about me. And then, I also try to encourage those around me to not do things that are going to bring negative publicity to them.” (Participant “Boogie”)

The following quotes offer descriptions on the athletes’ experiences of when they read or watch media coverage on themselves:

“I was told a long time ago not to really read and pay attention to the stuff because it can really mess you up. So, I’m one of the knuckle heads that can’t stay away from reading stuff I’m always on the computer and stuff. So I accidentally come across a lot of stuff. And it bothers me, sometimes it challenges you. And other times it just destroys you. So really the media can literally make or break you. And I think if you’re not tough skinned or you’re not somebody that’s willing to be able to shake it off and just move on, it’ll tear you apart. So I try not to pay attention to it. I try not to read the papers every day.” (Participant “Bobby”)

“Well, everybody knows when they messed up. You don’t need somebody telling you that you messed up. So when I, go home, if I had a bad game, I’m not watching TV if I know I’ve had a bad game. I don’t need the next the extra beatings.” (Participant “Ted”)

Another participant expressed his concerns on the general public reading or hearing negative portrayals of African-American athletes:

“And another thing is the public or the general population. We’re so brainwashed to just believe everything that you read and hear on the news. I mean, how many times do we make judgments on people based on how something is reported? So I think it’s a two way street. It’s the media presenting it, and then it’s the population just drinking it like it’s Kool-Aid.” (Participant “Boogie”)

In summary, the athletes spoke about the emotional affects of the media when it comes to actually reading coverage on themselves and others. The majority of the NFL

players reiterated the fact that they purposely do not put themselves in certain situations in which the media can find a way to depict their actions negatively.

*Theme #2: Perceptions of Media Personnel*

The second theme to emerge from the examination of the transcripts was the African-American NFL players' impressions towards the make-up of media personnel.

The "White Media". The majority of the players spoke about the percentage of White reporters to the percentage of Black players. The mass of the media is made up of White men, reporting on a sport that is predominantly Black. Some of the concerns of the African-American NFL players on that ratio are described in the following quote:

“When you think about the media, who do you think about? Do you think about, or when you think about people who portray the media, you think about white male, probably 35-45 years old, right? So that’s about 90% of the people who is covering the NFL, probably 70% African-American league is covered by 90% of white male who is 45. It’s the people who are reporting the news. If you can identify with the player in some light, which most of them are white males writing on white guys, if you can identify that you grew up, that you ate pasta for dinner and played with Mary Sue and, these are the things that you did and all of the things that you’re accustomed to, that’s just the situation. You know, they can’t stand there and ‘I grew up and I lived with my 10 brothers and sisters in a two-bedroom house with just my mother raising us and my sister couldn’t go to school.’ They can’t fathom that so they have no idea what that would do to someone’s psyche.” (Participant “Sanchez”)

One participant believes the “White media” will give more positive publicity to a White player which is illustrated in the following quote:

“Because the white media loves... Hands down. Certain positions like Peyton Manning or you got players like that. Brian Urlacher, you know he’s a linebacker, he’s one of the best at his positions. OK, that’s no doubt, you know that’s undeniable. But if it’s neck and neck, that white player is going to get way more love because the white media wants that white hero. You know what I mean. They’re always looking for that. Brett Favre, if you ask the players, he ain’t been playing great, you know what I’m saying? He’s lost games for the team. But, the white media doesn’t put him down in the media, you know. The white media doesn’t put him down. They’ll say, ‘Oh Brett had a bad game today, but he’ll bounce back.’ I mean it’s just obvious.” (Participant “Ted”)

Another interesting aspect in the make-up of media personnel are the NFL players get bothered when media coverage is coming from some individuals who have never played the sport before:

“The other thing that really is annoying, and media figures that have never done what you’re done and they’re trying to report on it. These guys in the locker room, men and women. They’ve never stepped foot on a football field in their life. How are you going to tell me, this that and the other how I’m playing. Who’s good and who’s not. You’ve never stepped foot on a football field. You’ve never grew up in poverty, or in the hood. You don’t know what it’s like, so why are you voicing your opinion so strongly on something you know nothing about?” (Participant “Thomas”)

“My biggest gripe is that most of these dudes who are writing about a sport that I’m a professional and they haven’t even played it...I’m in the locker room and I see all these reporters coming in and let’s say after practice there’s about 50 reporters. These dudes are the most out of shape. You can tell they never picked up a football before except to throw it in the back yard. Never played organized football. But they’re the ones critiquing you. So I think it’s a lot of BS.” (Participant “Ted”)

In synopsis, the participants in this study experience media personnel that they feel they cannot relate to with the “White media” and individuals that never played professional football before.

### *Theme #3: Black Quarterbacks*

The final major theme for the experience of race and the media from the African-American NFL player’s perspective details what they perceive the pressures to be associated with Black quarterbacks. A major issue the athletes spoke about how Black quarterbacks may have it “harder” than their White counterparts. The participants explained that Black quarterbacks are often stereotyped and through history have found it harder to be accepted at the quarterback position:

“But they had racial breakdowns by positions. One of the positions that’s on the field that’s predominately white is quarterback. They’re the leader of the team, and this that and the other. So, the black quarterbacks...they’re running

quarterbacks. They can't throw. Their mechanics are whatever. You know what I'm saying, and definitely. In that position. The odds are stacked against you. You come into the college as a black quarterback. They're looking to put you at receiver, corner, everything else. And that's just the nature of the beast.”  
(Participant “Thomas”)

“Look how long it took Warren Moon to get to the National Football League. He spent I don't know how many years in the CFL and had to light the CFL up before teams would give him a chance. White quarterbacks were just automatically in, and not so much as much now. But definitely back in the day, in the late 80s or mid 80s, 70s, 80s, and early 90s. Black quarterbacks, you really had to be that much more physically gifted and dominant than everybody else. You know, just to get opportunity. It took Doug Williams.”  
(Participant “Boogie”)

In summary, the NFL athlete participants in this study had the opportunity to illustrate their experience of race and the media in the NFL. Some participants spoke about their mandatory relationship with the media, while others spoke about the negative portrayals they feel the media often gives African-American NFL players. When the initial question was asked, “when you think of a specific time being portrayed by the media, what comes to mind?” all the participants' initial response was something negative. In addition, all the participants agree the media shows negative biases when covering African-American NFL players. One participant actually relived his personal experience of confronting a media professional who was making negative and untrue comments by taking the researcher through the step-by-step process of dealing with someone in that situation.

In addition, many of the athletes spoke about of specific experiences of utilizing the media in order to gain positive exposure. Most of the participants stated numerous situations in which they can speak to the media about positive situations that are important in their everyday life in hopes the public will hear about them. One participant explained that anytime he speaks to the media, he is going to mention the importance of

his faith, and expressed his excitement when the public is able to see that: “And I can’t even say how many people I’ve met in the street and have come up to me and said, man I’m a Christian too. And I know that’s just coming from things they read. And that’s kind of cool too.” Importantly, each participant had an interest in describing their experiences with the media and expressed an appreciation for this study being conducted. This shows that the African-American NFL athlete participants enjoyed being able to discuss their experience of race and the media in the NFL and can clearly be seen as an advantage for phenomenological research.

### *Veteran Sport Reporter Results*

In addition to the African-American NFL players, another structure was formed to describe the experience of race and the media in the NFL from the veteran sport reporter's perspective. Table 1 provides a brief description of the participants. The participants were six male veteran sport reporters, with at least five years experience. Three of the veteran sport reporter participants were of Caucasian descent, while the other three were of African-American descent.

**Table 3.**

*Description of Veteran Sport Reporter Participants.*

<b>Participant #</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Race</b>
1	Male	African-American
2	Male	African-American
3	Male	African-American
4	Male	Caucasian
5	Male	Caucasian
6	Male	Caucasian

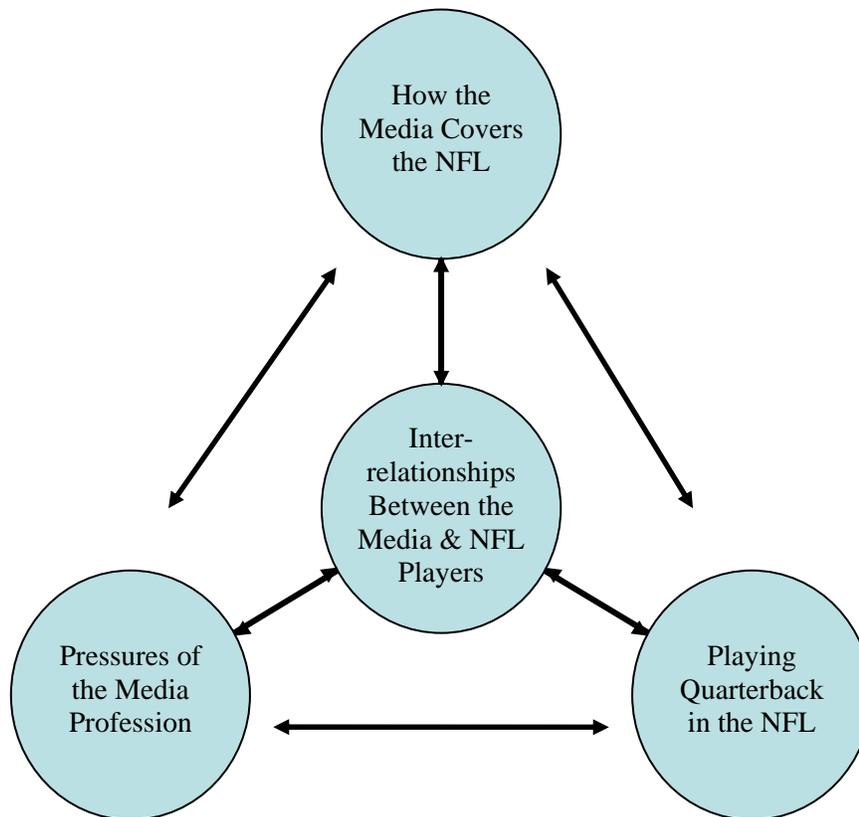
The analysis of the veteran sport reporters' interviews exposed four major themes: (1) how the media covers the NFL- the perspective of media coverage from the veteran sport reporters' points of view, (2) interrelationships between the media and the NFL players- media professional's relationships with the African-American NFL players, (3) the pressures of being a media professional, and (4) playing quarterback in the NFL.

These four themes create the structure of the experience of race and the media for these veteran sport reporters.

Moreover, each of these themes contained subthemes. For the theme of how the media covers the NFL, the subthemes included (a) the evolution of the media, (b) how media portrayals are done, (c) misperceptions of media portrayals, (d) racial biases in coverage, and (e) stereotypes. For the theme of interrelationships between the media and the NFL players, the subthemes consist of (a) perceptions of the African-American NFL players' dealings with the media, (b) the media's relationships with the African-American NFL player, and (c) the athlete's role in the media portrayals.

A representation illustrating these themes, subthemes, and their interrelationships is provided in Figure 2 and Table 3. The illustration provides the themes in a more uniform and distinct manner than the interviews, where the conversation moved back and forth between the four themes.

**Figure 2.** Themes Describing the Veteran Sport Reporters' Experience of Race and the Media in the NFL.



**Table 4.***Description of Themes and Subthemes – Veteran Sport Reporters*

<b>THEMES</b>	<b>SUBTHEMES</b>
How the Media Covers the NFL	Evolution of the media How portrayals are done Misperceptions of media portrayals Racial biases in coverage Stereotypes
Interrelationships between the Media and NFL Player	Perceptions of athlete's dealings with media Media's relationship with NFL players Athlete's role in media coverage
Pressures of the Media Profession	
Playing Quarterback in the NFL	

*Theme #1: How the Media Covers the NFL*

The first theme that emerged from the analysis of the transcripts describes media coverage from the veteran sport reporter's perspective. The participants often mentioned that they do not see race when portraying African-American NFL players, but look more at whether or not the athlete did well on the field. The majority of the sport reporters

described their experiences of covering the NFL, thus making it a consistent theme throughout the interviews.

Evolution of the media. In regards to evolution of the media, most of the sport reporters described difference between present day media versus in the past. Some of the participants mentioned the differences in how race is portrayed between the younger generation and the older individuals in the media in the following quotes:

“It [race] shouldn’t be looked upon any differently. But for a lot of, unfortunately, old school people in the media profession, whether it be print journalism or what have you, who don’t see that light at the end of the tunnel. They don’t see how it’s really supposed to be portrayed.” (Participant #1)

“And I think you have a divide between older media members and younger media members. I’m a younger media...And when you have the older guys who have been doing this for 30, 40 years. 30, 40 years ago, race played a major role in the locker room...I’m not speaking for all older media members, because I know some that are not like this, but I think the older media members certainly do see race more than the younger media members.” (Participant #4)

In addition, many of the participants discussed how the media has changed over the years and how they deal differently with athletes today:

“When I first started covering the [TEAM], many many moons ago. There were actually four papers in [CITY]. You didn’t need that many media, because you only had a couple TV stations, and they would show up. And they would get a tape and had to get it back. Now of course they have the satellite, I guess microwave technology... So that has changed the dynamic of how we deal with athletes much more than the culture part of it...and also quite frankly with the technology, and the cell phones and cameras. You’re out there, and you know, you’re out there, and someone sees you talking to someone. It could just be a friend, or a pretty girl like there, and somebody’s out there, this guy’s messing...so now they’re [the athletes] naturally guarded. Especially in this day and age...see, that’s the whole dynamic with the media and the player has changed.” (Participant #5)

“There was a group interview, and back then, you know. Now, the Super Bowl has kind of gotten out of control where you have, oh man, 4,000 reporters covering the event. I should say 4,000 people who were issued media passes. And the reason I’m saying that is not all 4,000 of the people are reporters, legitimate papers. Probably 2/3 of them aren’t. But nowadays, you get a lot of weird

questions. And I'm making this point to say it was different 20 years ago when Doug Williams did what he did against Denver. And that makes what I'm going to say next important. So the majority of the people that were there were legitimate media. So in the early days, it always was perplexing I think with a lot of reporters on how to deal with black athletes in general, and certainly NFL players... And you've got to remember that nothing had changed."  
(Participant #2)

In synopsis, the participants in this investigation identified the change in the media through out the years of the NFL in relation to how race is seen and portrayed.

How portrayals are done. This subtheme emerged from many sport reporters' descriptions on the importance of "getting the story". Some of the participants spoke about the competition the papers experience, thus needing to "juice up" some of the stories in order to sell papers or gain ratings:

"Now, as a whole with the media particularly newspapers right now. Newspapers are in a real bad problem now. They are in bad shape. Because people are not reading newspapers anymore. So newspapers are dying. They're having all kinds of problems. So, you have people trying to, and newspapers trying to find ways to attract readers. So whether people admit it or not, people are going to have a tendency to probably try to juice things up more than they should and try to get attention. Look at me, look at me. Read me, read me. Watch me, watch me."  
(Participant # 2)

"I think sometimes the media goes out of its way to try to make a story out of things. And I think that's wrong." (Participant #4)

"Some of them might be doing things in order to sell papers in order to just have something to talk about. Sometimes that will generate some negative comments, or sometimes that will generate more coverage toward one person than the other."  
(Participant #1)

"And we put these athletes on a pedestal. Because we can't be them, and we love our heroes. We love our entertainment. We love all this stuff. So, the media knows that, and the media goes after it. Good, bad, indifferent." (Participant #3)

Another participant explained that although he will be fair in his interviews with African-American NFL players, sometimes the television network he works for will change the story to show the audience something else:

“I try to be fair. And when I try to be fair, I like doing my one on one interviews where the person can be free. And talk and the problem that I have is sometimes when I do interviews like that, as a media professional, I’ll start off as one way, but then when it filters up through my chain of command, what actually makes the air is totally different. So, it’s a constant battle of you as an individual and your morals and scruples, and then your news director or general manager saying, no. I just want this part where he says this.” (Participant #3)

In addition, one participant expressed how he covers African-American NFL players by “getting the story” and moving on:

“Get the story. Get reaction from the person. And just keep moving on. Not, lead and write about it all the time, or lead my newscast with it all the time. Unless it’s a major, major, major story. Something like that. That’s national. And then you have to dig a little deeper. But for the other stuff, just hit it, hit it, and move on. We live in tough times as it is in this world. Why dwell on the negative? I mean, I’m not avoiding the issues. I would never shirk the issues, but I don’t like to belabor the point when it’s negative to make it a downer. I just keep moving.” (Participant #1)

In summary, although some of the veteran sport reporters feel the media “sensationalizes” stories for entertainment purposes in order to sell papers and ratings, the majority of the media professionals stated they just like to “get the story” and not dwell on the negative aspects of the athletes.

Misperceptions of media portrayals. All the veteran sport reporters in this study expressed that when they portray African-American NFL players, “it’s not always about race”, and they personally fairly portray the athletes. This notion can be seen in the following quotes:

“I don’t show favoritism to black, white, Puerto Rican, Hawaiian. Because there are so many athletes in our country from so many different nations, and so many different ethnic backgrounds. I like talking about the sport in general and what they need to do to better themselves, and what they’re getting out of the sport. I don’t look at color. I think that’s the wrong thing to do.” (Participant #1)

“We’ve got to give the media a little bit more credit. In this day and age, people always throw up the race card, and I hate that. Because it’s not always about race.” (Participant #3)

“Basically, I portray them by any performance stats, when you cover professional sports, it’s all about performance.” (Participant #5)

“I never approached the game in racial terms. I never saw the game in that way. I never wrote the game that way. So I don’t think I was ever confronted with a player who suggested I was harder on him or unfair to him because he was black as opposed to white. Because I just don’t see the world that way. And it’s certainly never ever entered into my reporting or my writing.” (Participant #6)

One participant described the equal coverage he sees with today’s media coverage of NFL players:

“But every now and then when I turn on ESPN or pick up the paper, I’m seeing what I think is equal coverage.” (Participant #1)

To sum up, all the veteran sport reporters find importance in gaining ratings and audience members, but are fair in their personal coverage of not only African-American NFL players, but all athletes in general.

Racial Biases in coverage. Many of the veteran sport reporters acknowledged there are discrepancies in the amount of negative coverage African-American NFL players receive, as seen in the following quotes:

“But in general, there’s no way you can deny that black athletes aren’t treated differently.” (Participant #2)

“Um, you know. I think part of it is the fact that it’s always going to be unfair. And you know, we could take our pity party. But it was always unfair. It’s always been unfair. That doesn’t mean it’s not unconquerable. But it’s always been unfair. Us, as blacks, we always are going to have to be one step above just to be even.” (Participant #3)

“I think that when it comes to looking at the black athlete compared to the white athlete in football for instance, I think there’s an unfair portrayal.” (Participant #4)

One of the Caucasian sport reporters described how he may find it harder to understand that there are racial biases in the coverage of African-American NFL players because he is not African-American himself:

“[NAME] is an African-American who played for the Broncos. Played in the league for a while. And he and I had a discussion. We get along extremely well. We’ve done this TV show for six or seven years. But sometimes he says to me that he make me see things through his eyes. And I say, you know, I never thought of that. But I know the players do and black players do.” (Participant #6)

Another reporter spoke about the exploits of African-American NFL players although some of their White counterparts have done some of the same negative things:

“Look at the exploits of Pacman Jones, Tank Johnson, Chris Henry. The trouble maker, Michael Vick, the trouble makers of the NFL. While Jared Allen, who’s a white defensive end for the Kansas City Chiefs, has had his problems with DUIs. You know? I mean, he is not exactly a model guy off the field. But yet when people talk about the trouble makers in the NFL, very rarely do you hear about a commentator or a reporter ever say Jared Allen. Now, I always say Jared Allen because I’m going to group him in with anybody. Either you’re a trouble maker or you’re not, regardless of race. But I think when you, you know, you read the media. I mean, how often have you heard Jared Allen’s name mentioned... he’s not as high profile in terms of what he has done, making it rain at strip clubs or drug offenses, and things like that, but Jared Allen is not a good guy, and he deserves to be portrayed in the same light as any other NFL player regardless of race who has gotten in trouble and brought shame to the league.” (Participant #4)

Many of the participants explained why they feel more African-American NFL players are seen in the media than other races in the same sport. Some believe the difference in excessive amount of coverage of African-American athletes is due the media being majority White and the NFL being predominately Black as seen in the following quotes:

“Overwhelmingly, clearly, 95, 98<sup>th</sup> percentile, of journalists from major newspapers are white. So they’re, they have, they have a different way of dealing with black athletes. It just is, and the thing too that needs to be pointed out is, sports is just a microcosm of society. Just because you have a white person covering sports that is heavily black oriented, that doesn’t necessarily translate that the reporter is going to be enlightened. More so than the bulk of white folk.” (Participant #2)

“So the fact of the matter is there is more percentage of African-Americans in every sport except hockey. So because there’s a bigger percentage, more and more of the news is going to be about black athletes. If three fourths of your team

is black, and a third of that gets in trouble, they're going to be black.” (Participant #3)

“I just, I think that, overall black players get a lot of respect today. Because, you look at the face of the NFL right now. You look at the [underarm] of commercials. 90% of the athletes portrayed are black.” (Participant #4)

In summary, the sport reporter participants in this study recognize that there are racial biases in today's coverage of African-American NFL players. Many of the participants feel as though they do not adhere to those biases when personally interacting with the NFL players.

Stereotypes. The final subtheme within this theme explained how many of the veteran sport reporters discussed the racial stereotypes in the media coverage African-American NFL players receive. One participant gives an example of different stereotypes that can be seen in commentating in the following quote:

“But he'll say things to me like if Donovan McNabb goes back to pass and instead of passing, he runs for 15 yards, people will say, that was a great athletic play. Or, boy, is that an athletic player. Whereas if Jeff Garcia does the same thing, people will say, what a gritty competitor. You know? Or what a heady play. Nobody was open, so he made the smart play. If McNabb does it, it's an athletic play. If Jeff Garcia does it, it's the smart play.” (Participant #6)

These two participants discussed the stereotypes Black quarterbacks face in the NFL:

“Everybody thinks the white quarterback comes from a tight knit family with a mother, father, the Peyton Manning's of the world. Every white quarterback is Peyton Manning in terms of upbringing. A very gifted, lucky upbringing, with money, blah blah blah. The black quarterback comes from a little school, in a little town, and this and that. Single mother, blah blah blah. And I think that unfortunately has, is how people sometimes look at it. And that's why I think a black quarterback does actually have to work a bit harder to gain the respect, I think of the public.” (Participant #4)

“Which is this idea of the African-American quarterback as an athlete not a better quarterback. When he runs, is he the stereotype, he's an athlete more than he was a quarterback... Randall Cunningham was a great athlete, but he wasn't a great

quarterback. And you have all this great athletic ability, but he wasn't a quarterback in the sense that Elway was a quarterback. The African-American player has all this more athletic ability." (Participant #6)

In summary, the veteran sport reporters in this investigation found the use of stereotypes to be prevalent in the media when portraying African-American NFL players, as well as stereotypes they may have in their own personal thoughts on these NFL athletes.

*Theme #2: Interrelationships Between the Media and the NFL Players*

This theme emerged from the veteran sport reporters' descriptions of the relationships between the media and the African-American NFL players they portray. The participants discussed the perceptions of the athlete's dealings with and treatment of media professionals. In addition, the sport reporter's spoke about their professional relationship with the athletes and what they find is the best way to interact with the African-American NFL players. Another subtheme that surfaced was the athletes own role in the story by putting themselves in negative situations.

Perceptions of athletes' dealings with the media. Many of the sport reporter participants spoke about the athletes relationships with the media. Some reporters explained that when athletes do not embrace the media, they are often portrayed in a negative way which is outlined in the following quote about a prominent African-American NFL Player:

"Art Monk being left out of the Hall of Fame inductions for 8 years or some odd years, was a crime. It was a crime. It was something that people here would just so, up in arms about. And the reason, and a lot of reason that we feel or a lot of people feel that it took so long for Art to get into the Hall of Fame, is because Art was not really one to embrace the media. And not in a bad or, he just did his job. Which is a foreign concept to a lot of professional athletes now. But he did his job. And because he wasn't flashy, and he wasn't in the press, whatever. He just did his job, caught passes, and ended up being the record holder at the time. All

these other flamboyant receivers came after him, and they got into the hall of fame. The media can really, really run with bad press, and it could end up having a bad boy image, you could end up being good. You could end up being, sensationalized.” (Participant #3)

This sport reporter spoke about an African-American NFL player that utilized the media in order to speak about how important his faith is:

“I covered Reggie White during his whole career in Philadelphia. And Reggie took his fame and used it for the purposes of his faith. And he knew that everybody knew he was, and he was the best player on the team. He was one of the best players in the league. And so after every game, he knew [someone was going to want to come up and talk to him], and he was wherever he went in the city people knew who he was. And Reggie just took that as that was his forum to give his testimony about how he wanted to live his life and act out his faith. So he took all that same scrutiny and turned it into something positive.” (Participant #6)

One African-American participant spoke about a story when he first started covering teams in the NFL and how the African-American NFL players would favor the Black reporters:

“And I remember an incident specifically. When I first started covering the [TEAM] for the San Francisco Examiner in 1980, the first day of training camp, Gene Upshaw, who’s now the head of the player’s association, he was a right guard for that team. And Art Shell, who became the first African-American head coach in the NFL, he played left tackle for that team. After practice, and they started walking to me on the sidelines. I’m the only black person around that’s not playing. And I was a little nervous, like what are they coming up to me for? And Art Shell put out his hand. He introduced himself. He introduced Gene Upshaw. He said “look, you ever need anything, let us know. We’re here to help you”. And that was very striking. Well, those days are gone.” (Participant #2)

In summary, many of the veteran sport reporters described their experiences and perceptions of the African-American NFL players’ interactions with the media. The reporters spoke about instances where the athletes don’t embrace the media, which in turns allows the media to create their own thoughts and feelings towards those African-American NFL players.

The media's relationships with the African-American NFL players. The majority of the sport reporters discussed the importance of a professional relationship with the African-American NFL, although the type of relationship each sport reporter spoke about is different. One of the participants considers the best and most ethical relationship for a sport reporter to have with the athlete should be kept strictly professional:

“And there's one thing too that's got to be distinguished. There are some people in our business who go too far. And there are famous black journalists who have tried to become buddy, buddy with these athletes. Which is journalistically unethical. It's a professional relationship. Because I'm paid to do a job. I'm not paid to be friend with these guys. Because if you try to be friends with these guys, you can't do your job. Because sometimes you've got to write some tough things about them. I point that out to say that unfortunately, and again I'm just calling a spade a spade. We have a lot of so-called black journalists who cross the line and become pals with these guys, and cover up for these guys. And so that's a whole different story there.” (Participant #2)

In contrast, other sport reporters believe being friends with African-American NFL players allows for a better professional relationship:

“I would say that being 29 years old, and being regularly in the locker room of the Philadelphia Eagles, I probably get along better with, on average, the black players... But I think when, on a personal level, I think that the, when I'm in the locker room, I get along better with the black players. There's more to talk about. I think there's more personality, there, frankly...and I think on a level outside the locker room, of continued relationships, I would say I have numbers wise better relationships with black players, and feel more comfortable than I do at times the white player.” (Participant #4)

“I think it's a great equalizer too, because when you deal with them especially as a beat guy on an everyday basis, you get to know these people as people. And that's really what it's all about. When you get to know people, that's when all sorts of barriers break down, and you see.” (Participant #5)

In summary, the participants in this study find the importance of the professional relationship with the African-American NFL players, but have varying opinions on how far the relationship should go on a personal level.

The athletes' role in the media coverage. The majority of the veteran sport reporters explained it is up to the African-American NFL player to be responsible for their personal actions. If the athletes keep themselves out of bad situations, certain media coverage will not arise. This notion is illustrated in the following quotes:

“In the last couple years...the African-American community, have just been pounded with so many black athletes who are just, I call them knuckle heads. My grandparents used to say all the time, nothing good happens after midnight. And 9 times out of 10, these guys, when they get in trouble, they get shot up or get a, it's after midnight, and it's always outside a club, or coming from a club, or in a club, or something like that. It's some sort of. So that's, that is not helping matters, in other words.” (Participant #2)

“You know, get more involved in the community. Let people write about that. I try to make it a point to write about what our athletes are doing in the community...So it depends on what they get involved in. You've just got to be in the right place at the right time. Cause if you're in the wrong place at the wrong time, people are going to talk about it no matter what color you are. But I can see where some of the athletes might think some of the media is racist. Only because of what the athletes have gotten themselves involved in and then it gets blown out of proportion.” (Participant #1)

“So I don't think that the media is purposely portraying blacks. It's just that we [African-Americans] got to do our part. And when we don't do our part and we do dumb stuff, obviously, we're opening ourselves up for banter and conversation and town meetings and what not. But I think it's half the media, and it's half the athletes. Their own actions, that's causing this. Because if you're clean, like Marvin Harrison, like an Art Monk, like a Darrell Green, there's other black athletes that go through the sport and go through a time and nothing's said about them. And they're fine. Troy Vincent of the NFLPA.” (Participant #3)

One participant reiterated the fact that when these athletes become part of the NFL, they have to be cognizant to the fact they are now public figures:

“If you're going to play in the league, if you're going to play on that stage, and you're going to reap the benefits of that kind of thing, the celebrity, the money, all the things that come with it, then you have to take the other things that come with it. Which is the world's going to be looking over your shoulder 24/7. And you make a mistake, and all of a sudden, it's on the front page of the paper, that's the other part of it. And you have to live with that. The minute you put on an NFL uniform, you're putting that on with it. What happens next is really up to you.

You can either take it and turn it into something real negative, or you can turn it into something real positive...your life has become a public record.”  
(Participant #6)

In summary, it is thought by the veteran sport reporters that if the African-American NFL players keep themselves out of certain situations that draw negative attention, they will not receive negative attention in reference to their off the field actions.

*Theme #3: Pressures of the Media Profession*

The third major theme that emerged from the transcripts of the interviews was dealing with the difficulties of being a media professional. The following quote describes how information is filtered through a “chain of command” and not all portrayals are how the veteran sport reporter planned it to be:

“I’ll start off as one way, but then when it filters up through my chain of command, what actually makes the air is totally different. So, it’s a constant battle of you as an individual and your morals and scruples, and then your news director or general manager saying, no. I just want this part where he says this. So, it is hard for us at times.” (Participant #3)

This participant spoke about personal trials he’s had to deal with as a prominent media figure:

“It became this nasty thing, like, from the whites, you’re a racist. You hate white people. And from the blacks, you’re an Uncle Tom. That’s why you’re doing this. It became very personal. I’ve gotten people just like with this Michael Vick thing. I was in a Red Lobster in August, and 2 black guys came up and wanted to challenge me to a fight. Wanted me to come out to the parking lot. And one of the waitresses said one of the guys had a gun. I called 9-1-1. So I’m dealing with that all the time.” (Participant #2)

“I came up with a divorce rate of 94%. It’s a terrible job for relationships. Because I always tell people the best thing about my job is every day is different, you meet a lot of people, and you travel a lot. That’s the best thing. The worst thing is, every day is different, you meet a lot of people, and you travel a lot. And it’s a killer. So there’s a lot of pressure on you, just from the traveling the fact that you work awkward hours. You’re out of sync with everybody in society. Friends and relatives and that sort of thing. And then you get to my level where you’re a columnist and you’re giving an opinion. Anytime people give an opinion anyway,

that's going to cause conflict. Whether you're right or not. You probably know that yourself. So when you're writing a profile opinion and then you're on TV and what have you, then you're going to really generate a lot of flack."  
(Participant #2)

One of the participants detailed a situation in which an African-American woman gained respect in the professional media field where Black women are seen in minimal numbers.

"We talked about the influential media members who are black. I mean, you could throw Pam Oliver in there. Look at Pam Oliver, and the way she handled that whole Donovan McNabb situation. I mean, here is a black woman reporter. It's hard to be a woman reporter in football and be respected. And here she is, and just being so strong, and really going at it with a black football player. Think about it. I mean, that to me was ground breaking... And the respect that she got, I think, even from fans. And again, it's hard enough being a woman reporter. But, you know, I mean, she, the credibility is there. And I think people don't look at Pam Oliver anymore as being a black woman. They just look at her as being legitimately a reporter." (Participant #4)

To sum up, the sport reporters find the life as a media professional to be difficult at times when it comes to respect from athletes, fans, and other media professionals as well.

#### *Theme #4: Playing Quarterback in the NFL*

Every veteran sport reporter participant spoke about the pressures associated with being a quarterback in the NFL, especially an African-American one. Many of the participants spoke about prominent African-American quarterback Doug Williams and the strides and had to take in order to gain the respect of other players, fans, coaches, and the media:

"I remember covering the Super Bowl in, I want to say 1988, and the Washington Redskins were playing the Denver Broncos. And what made that so significant, it was the first Super Bowl that a black quarterback started. It was Doug Williams. And Doug Williams just had a record day against the Denver Broncos that day. Now what made that significant was the quarterback for the Denver Broncos was John Elway, who was sort of like the great white hope. So now you've got this,

the first black quarterback in the history of the Super Bowl against the great white hope, John Elway. And the Denver Broncos were heavily favored in that Super Bowl. Not only did they lose, the Broncos, but they were destroyed by a black quarterback. And that was a huge moment. Because prior to that, there was always this, sort of thing in the air that black could not play quarterback. So now you've got a guy who's not only playing quarterback, but starting quarterback in the Super Bowl, and destroying the other team. That was a real huge moment. That's one of the first things I think about when it comes to black African-American players in the NFL. That a reporter asked Doug Williams how long had he been a black quarterback? And that's sort of a famous line. And Doug Williams just kind of brushed it off by saying he had been black all of his life." (Participant #2)

Many participants spoke about the difficulties African-American quarterbacks experienced in the earlier years of the NFL when dealing with the stereotypes Black athletes had to face as outlined by the following participant:

"There was a time in the 50s and the 60s where if you were an African-American quarterback in college, that you didn't have a chance to play in the NFL or even really compete in the NFL. I mean, if you were an African-American in college, even a good one, you kind of had two choices really. You could either go to the NFL and change positions, try to make your running back or receiver or defensive back. Or, if you wanted, if you were really insistent on being a quarterback, you kind of had to go to Canada to play in the Canadian football league... Because in the Canadian football league, it's a different game. It's a bigger field. It's three downs instead of four. And it lends itself to a more wide open scrambling kind of game. Which people at that time thought the African-American quarterback was more capable of playing. So a lot of players at that time chose to go to Canada. And those that came to the NFL were generally told, okay, you're now a defensive back. Or you're now a receiver. They didn't really get a chance to compete." (Participant #6)

One participant expressed that not only do African-American quarterbacks get scrutinized by the media, but quarterbacks in general:

"Eli Manning is persecuted. He's persecuted beyond belief. And he's won a Super Bowl. Now he's won a Super Bowl, and people like the great Eli Manning. It's so fickle. But it's New York. That's what they do. They're cynical. That's what they do." (Participant #3)

In summary, the veteran sport reporter participants in this study had the opportunity to describe their experience of race and the media in the NFL. Some

participants explained their perceptions of media coverage of African-American NFL players in reference to it either being fair to all races, to noticing the biases and stereotypes in the coverage of Black NFL players. Other participants spoke about the importance of their personal relationships with specific African-American NFL players. When the initial question was asked, “when you think of a specific time portraying an African-American NFL player, what comes to mind?” many of the participants’ initial response was about the first Black quarterback to play in the Superbowl. Other participants said they do not look at race as a factor in their portrayals, so the first thing they thought about when the question was asked had to do with athletic ability.

In addition, many of the athletes spoke about of specific experiences of how difficult it can be to be a media professional. Two participants mentioned how important their faith is in helping them get past many trials they face as media professionals. One participant went on to say, “in order for me to get through the stuff I deal with, I definitely have to have the spiritual tie. Otherwise, I’d go nuts.” Importantly, each participant had an interest in describing their experiences as media professionals portraying African-American NFL players and expressed an appreciation for this study being conducted. This shows that the veteran sport reporter participants enjoyed being able to discuss their experience of race and the media in the NFL and can clearly be seen as an advantage for phenomenological research.

## DISCUSSION

The current study explored the experiences of race and the media in the NFL from an existential phenomenological approach. The transcribed interviews were analyzed to expose a thematic structure about the experience of media representation. This allowed for a successful description of the experiences of the African-American NFL players, as well as the veteran sport reporters. Structural descriptions were utilized to show similar patterns from the participant's interviews, which resulted in several major themes.

The purpose of this chapter is to explain the major themes of this study with previous research in the field of race, media, and sport. Because this study examines both the African-American NFL players' experiences, as well as the veteran sport reporters' perspective, many common themes emerged from the participants' transcripts. Each section begins with a brief description of the current theme for both sets of participants; then continues with an examination of related research. The researchers wanted to compare and contrast the results for the African-American NFL players and veteran sport reporters; therefore, cross-themes are outlined throughout this discussion. The cross themes were grouped together so detailed comparisons of those themes and subthemes could be provided throughout this section where appropriate. In some instances, one participant group's major themes may have related to the other group's subtheme, so those will be explained in detail. Lastly, those themes that did not relate to another will be detailed exclusively. Additionally, the sections are followed by conclusions and suggestions for future research.

*How Media Coverage Affects the African-American NFL Player (NFL Theme) and How the Media Covers the NFL (Media Theme)*

According to Coakley (2007), the media provides three main parts: information about events and people, happenings in the world, and entertainment. The media has a large impact on the success of professional sports in part by the popularity it gains by the large attention mass media provides as well as the large amount of money the media puts into sports (Eitzen, 1993). One consequence of the media is its affect on perceptions. The theme of media coverage affecting the African-American NFL player was a common occurrence throughout the participant interviews of both the NFL players and veteran sport reporters. A common subtheme for both the athletes and media professional included “positive” feelings towards the media.

The NFL and sport reporter participants of this study detailed aspects of how the media is a positive entity to the realm of professional football. Both set of participants spoke about African-American NFL players being able to utilize the media in order to gain positive exposure and portrayals, and not all aspects of the media are negative. One athlete detailed his experience of utilizing the media to express his passion for Christianity and how his religion is the one most important facet of his life (Participant “Bobby”). Another athlete (“Thomas”) stated “You hate ‘em, but you need ‘em”, in reference to the need for positive media coverage.

One of the veteran sport reporters (Media Participant 5) believes the athletes need the media as much as the media needs them. These statements support Coakley’s thesis that suggest sports and the media have a two-way relationship (Coakley, 2007). Research indicates much notice has been given to the media’s influence on sport, but less attention

has been given to the media being influenced by sport, although they do have a reciprocal relationship where “each has influenced the other, and each has grown to depend on the other for its popularity and commercial success” (p. 371). Without media coverage, the popularity and revenue-generating potential of the NFL would be greatly limited, thus causing player salaries to be decreased and less of a need for coverage of games (Coakley, 2007).

Coakley (2007) explains that the NFL currently brings in about 60 percent of its revenue from television contracts. With this, “(a) schedules and starting times for many sport events have been altered to fit the programming needs of television, (b) halftime periods in certain sports have been shortened so that television audiences will be more likely to stay tuned to events, (c) prearranged schedules of time outs have been added to football to make time for commercials” (p. 372).

Similarly, when discussing race, media, and sport, it is important to look at the evolution of race, the media, and professional football, a subtheme that emerged from the transcripts of the veteran sport reporters. The majority of the sport reporter participants see a positive change in the racial ideologies the media has promoted through out the years of the NFL. According to Coakley (2007), before the 1950s, most whites in America avoided playing with Black athletes, forcing those Black athletes to start their own leagues in baseball and football. Veteran sport reporter (Media Participant 6) relived an experience that relates to this notion of racial evolution in the NFL:

“I remember walking into [TEAM] training camp and just seeing like all the black players at two tables by themselves. And I was in the dining room the whole summer at training camp, and just like one day, I was sitting there looking around the room, and it was a double take. But I had been there for like four weeks, and one day, I’m looking around, looking around, looking around, and they’re all just sitting in this corner by themselves. And nobody said they had to... but I don’t

think they felt part of the whole. You don't see that now. But back then, they were a distinct minority. And I think the culture of the game was certainly a more white one. And I think the black players at the time did feel like outsiders... But over the course of 27 years, I saw the population sort of shift. And I saw the culture of the game kind of change. And now you don't see any of that...I mean, it was real different then. I mean, I can honestly say it was real different then. But now it's not."

When speaking about the evolution of destructive race relations in the media, one sport reporter (Media Participant 2) stated:

"I think the only thing to say is I don't think this is a situation that's ever going to change. I think it's just something that's just inherent. Because of, I mean specifically, and again, one of the key things I would say, the point I was making earlier, sports is a microcosm of society. And you can see everything, every thought process, every good thing and every bad thing about society through sports."

This notion is supported by research that emphasizes theories which show sport as a microcosm of society because it mimics society's "racial hierarchies" (Buffington, 2005). Research in the area of race relations evolving in the NFL and sports media is limited and needs to be further investigated.

The subtheme of "negative" emerged from the NFL player transcripts. In comparison, the veteran sport reporters described subthemes that were consistent with those of the African-American NFL players when speaking about negative aspects of media coverage: (a) misperceptions of media portrayals, (b) how media portrayals are done, (c) racial biases in coverage, and (d) stereotypes, thus an extensive comparison is necessary to better understand both experiences of the populations.

One athlete stated that he "specifically thinks about the negativity that they [media] always portray dealing with athletes and dealing with some of the things that occur during the season and off-season where there is probably twice as much or three times as much positive things occurring, but yet aren't explored in the media"

(Participant “Sanchez”). One participant even said he believes “the media is racist” (Participant “Ted”).

It can be argued that a combination of a predominantly Black sport with a predominantly White professional field in the media, an environment that promotes racialized representations is inevitable (Rada & Wulfemeyer, 2005). In the same way, research suggests that media coverage mostly entails a correlation between race and ability that affect’s athletic performance (Wenner, 1998). Previous research has analyzed media coverage of sports finding racial differences in the portrayals of Black athletes in the form of racial stereotypes (Wenner, 1998; Billings, 2003; Billings, 2004; Eastman & Billings, 2001; Price, 1997; Rada, 1996; Rada & Wulfemeyer, 2005; Stone, Darley, & Perry, 1997). One of the most common stereotypes of African-American athletes is that they possess natural athletic ability where as the White athlete is thought to be smarter. This stereotype can be seen in one of the veteran sport reporter’s statements:

“You look at the skilled positions. Running back, wide receiver, tight end, and positions cornerback, like that, that predominately African-Americans, those are positions that you have to be extremely athletic to play. It’s one thing to be an offensive lineman, where, you know, you’re a big fat guy. And your job is to make sure nobody gets by you to touch your quarterback. When it comes to actual athletic ability, those are the skilled positions.” (Media Participant 4)

According to Stone, Perry, and Darley (1997), because African-Americans dominate the widely televised and popular sports (basketball, football, track and field), the established, but often unspoken stereotypes of African-American athletic ascendancy have filtered into American society. One NFL participants suggested that media portrayals are slanted because the media is “almost trying to uphold the stereotypes that black athletes already have” (Participant “Thomas”). The previous illustrations indicate stereotypes are prevalent in the media, and the athletes are aware of those racial

stereotypes and perceive them to be negative. Although many of the NFL participants would like the media to be a “little bit more respectful and be a bit more um open-minded” (Participant “Ted”) when dealing with African-American NFL players, one of the veteran sport reporters has contrasting thoughts on the notion of respect:

“So I think black players are actually, as a whole, are respected more because there’s a perception, they’re just better. As horrible as that sounds, there’s just a perception that they’re better. Because of the athletic ability we talked about to start the interview.” (Media Participant 4)

Furthermore, many African-American athletes are thought to be portrayed as “brutish, buffoonish, comical, criminal, ignorant, lazy, and oversexed” (Rada & Wulfemeyer, 2005). This was illustrated by a story told by veteran sport reporter Media Participant 6 when recalling portrayals of African-American NFL players:

“When I see some of the magazine advertising campaigns for certain sporting apparel, or drinks...it’s a guy who’s sort of scowling at you as opposed to smiling. But there’s a certain edginess to it that maybe suggests that... It was a menacing sort of look. Which, maybe he’s trying to make a statement that he’s a really tough player. But I’ve seen Howie Long does that, when he was a tough player, but [he doesn’t do that]. He’s sort of smiling at the camera. I think commercially, I don’t know if it’s the players’ idea or if it’s the endorsers’. Okay, now give me your mean look. But it does, in some cases, it does seem to go in that direction.”

An athlete participant makes a similar statement in reference to the media’s portrayal of Black athletes in that “they would like us to be seen as barbaric and as non approachable as possible” (Participant “Sanchez”). Another negative stereotypical belief the media asserts, is that African-American athletes don’t work as hard as their White counterparts (Stone, Perry, & Darley, 1997). At the same time, many African-American NFL players are portrayed as growing up in the “hood” and coming from single parent homes. If that notion is the case, these athletes are coming from poverty and having to work extremely hard in order to be considered not only for professional sports, but for

collegiate acceptance as well. Unfortunately, little research has been found that looks at the differences in how individuals are raised and what some like to call, “the middle class white man’s syndrome”, but it important to better understand why these athletes are viewed negatively in terms of work ethic, when they may have worked twice as hard to get into professional sports.

A similar stereotype was illustrated by an African-American NFL player, but he believes it’s the media’s portrayals that are causing these negative stereotypes to be promoted:

“We’re known for being cocky and spending our money, and not responsible, and got baby mommas everywhere. The media’s going, every once in a while, they’ve got to throw a story out there, to let you know yes, this is still happening. Just to make people solidify the stereotypes.”

An additional aspect that emerged from the thoughts of the athletes and the sport reporter participants on stereotyping included the phenomena of stacking. The stacking phenomenon can be defined as athletes being assigned to certain positions in team sports based on stereotypical characteristics such as race related athletic ability (Coakley, 2007; Johnson et al., 1999). Within professional football, the quarterback is typically a position held by whites, while wide-receiver and running back are ones held by blacks due to the athletic ability those two positions entail. One sport reporter discussed his knowledge on the stacking phenomenon in the NFL:

“They call it the up the middle thing. Where the four spots on the football field, that are considered thinking man’s positions...and it’s right up the middle. Quarterback, center, middle linebacker, and free safety. Those are sort of the four thinking man’s positions. And for years, you didn’t have any black people in those positions.” (Media Participant 2)

A proposed hypothesis suggested that instead of black youth being channeled into certain positions by coaches, they merely modeled their athletic heroes, and consequently played similar positions in their own athletic careers (Eastman & Billings, 2001).

The subtheme of racial biases in media coverage (NFL & Media subtheme) indicates there is a discrepancy in the portrayals of Black NFL players as also seen throughout analysis of the transcripts of the African-American NFL players and veteran sport reporters alike. One player commented that “you see the media kind of blow stuff out of proportion sometimes...and specifically nowadays on black athletes” (participant “Thomas”). Another player felt as though “there’s no equality in their [media] reporting” (participant “Boogie”). Past research has found racial biases in media coverage across a range of sports ranging from professional to intercollegiate athletes in the United States (Rada and Wulfemeyer, 2005). Results from a study conducted on racial descriptors in television coverage of intercollegiate sports explained that when sport announcers described African-American athletes, the majority of the comments were negative about a player’s off-field intelligence, character, and personal life. In contrast, the White players received only positive comments in regards to the previously stated categories (Rada and Wulfemeyer, 2005). The same study asserts that sport announcers often take attention away from the player’s on-field achievements (a area where the player has more control over what happens), and averts attention to other aspects of that player’s personal life and character. The researchers found that “through this transformation from the player-as-athlete to player-as-person, the announcers are also able to shift the commentary – and thus the portrayal – from positive to negative” (Rada and Wulfemeyer, 2005).

In contrast, an athlete believes some media portrayals are “even-sided of who’s doing well and who’s not, whether black or white, in how they are portrayed in the media. If you are stinking up the joint, then the media is going to let you know about it, and if you’re doing good, they’re going to sing your praises” (Participant “Sanchez”). Qualitative analysis of media studies of race and culture show that “race, ethnicity, or nation do not appear to determine the types of stories that producers and commentators used to portray athletes” (Bernstein & Blain, 2002).

All the sport reporters stressed the importance of “getting the story”. Gaining an audience, ratings, and a competitive environment are vital to the success of any media form. Previous research on media studies supports the notion on “getting the story” because “the media may have a need to give the audience selected information in order to provide a sense of entertainment” (Coakley, 2007, p. 368). With this knowledge, many of the sport reporter participants discussed that some stories may be skewed due to the fact things need to be “juice up in order to gain attention” (Media Participant 2). A number of veteran sport reporters and NFL participants spoke about the media’s negative portrayals of deceased African-American NFL player, Sean Taylor. One veteran sport reporter, Media Participant 3, described how he feels the media attempted to “skew” the public’s perception of this Sean Taylor to believe he was killed due to his “thuggish way” by not telling the whole reality of the events leading up to his death:

“When he was shot and killed, there was articles, even by famed black newspaper writers saying that they’re not surprised about what went down because that’s the life that this guy was. He was a thug or whatever, or trying to get away from thuggery. And it ended up that this guy was trying to protect his family. He had lent his place out to his sister, his half sister for a party. They invited some people. The people cased the joint and knew that Sean Taylor was away in Washington playing football. Didn’t know that he was home, rehabbing, checking in on his family. And boom...he gets shot, he’s killed, and basically he was killed trying to

protect his family. So the media jumped to conclusions, and even during the funeral, one of their speakers said, I hope that the media has been given a dose of humble pie.”

Thus, two theories can be referenced pertaining to the media and sports: media and framing theories. The media theory suggest that there are three aspects essential to the success of media outlets: (a) determine who or what is shown, (b) determine how much who or what gets shown, and (c) determine who or what does not get shown” (Billings, 2004). Additionally, the framing theory is the process of selectively influencing an individual’s perception and influencing the choices the choices they make.

Media outlets not only select the athletic event that is going to be covered, but also decides on what pictures, impressions, and commentary will be given to the public (Coakley, 2007, p. 369). Whannel (2002) says when the media creates the images the public will eventually view, “they [media] play an important role in constructing the overall frameworks that we in media audiences use to define and explain sport in our lives” (p. 369). What has to be remembered by athletes, the media, and the public is that we are not forced to read, watch, or listen to things that are presented to us in the media and that media outlets are just another form of entertainment attempting to gain ratings. One veteran sport reporter (Media Participant 3) expressed the public’s need for entertainment by saying the media “sensationalizes” stories and for that reason, “the media is not one for pumping up the good”. Another veteran sport reporter described his thoughts why the media often sensationalizes stories:

“Because it’s a story. When the media, you know, when you have TV, 24/7 365, with say ESPN. It’s day and night sports. Sometimes it’s kind of thin in terms of what to talk about. So if you can make a story out of nothing, then, what the heck? You’ve just bought yourself a week of programming. And we all do that. I do a sports talk show 4 hours a day. And it’s a long time. And some days there’s nothing to talk about. You just kind of have to bring something up and hope it

sticks. And if there's something that's somewhat juicy, or semi juicy, hey. Go with it. I think when it comes to something like the racial topics in football, it's always a heating point. There's always something there. But I think the national media at times does try to make something out of nothing. Because if they're interviewing a black player, they'll bring race into it, just to see the reaction. Because they know that a player can either say, there's nothing there. If there's something there, you just bought yourself programming. Okay. Why do you perceive race? Is it something in your past, growing up, and bam there's a story. The rest of the media picks it up. It's a national thing now." (Media Participant 4)

In comparison, one of the NFL player participants understand society's need for drama and entertainment, but would like for the media to display positive aspects of NFL athletes which as much force and power as the negative portrayals:

"PAO is among others, it's called Professional Athlete Outreach. And it's Christian athletes in the National Football League get together. I know they have a conference every year. And it's a four day conference. It's family driven. And it's about teaching athletes, or helping professional athletes and their families grow in Christ, and grow in the family with religion. But you don't hear, you don't see anybody covering that event." (Participant "Boogie")

Although the sport reporters and NFL participants agree that the media is imbalanced in their portrayals of African-American NFL players, all the veteran sport reporters reiterated that they do not personally see race as a factor in their portrayals of NFL players. One veteran sport reporter participant explained that in his portrayals of NFL athletes, "I don't show favoritism to black, white, Puerto Rican, Hawaiian..." (Media Participant 1). While many of the African-American athletes mentioned they feel race is a big factor in the negative portrayals of Black NFL players, a sport reporter participant mentioned that he feels that "football media has done the best making race a non issue as a whole" (Media Participant 4). While speaking about the misconceptions of media portrayals, another veteran sport reporter stated: "I never really thought in terms of whether a player was black or white. When I sat down to interview a guy, it was for a

specific reason. It had something to do with his role on the team, the way he had played, where he was drafted, what his, where he fit into the plans” (Media Participant 6).

What research appears to be lacking is the knowledge of how these African-American NFL players are coping with the media’s negative portrayals of them. Cox (2002) asserts that any behavior that assists an individual in dealing with a stressful situation is considered to be a coping behavior. Coping for these participants included not reading or watching media coverage, whether good or bad, because it can really have an effect on someone’s psyche. Ott & Van Puymbroeck (2005) explained why African-American NFL player, Ricky Williams, has faced so many struggles such as a drug addiction: “the constant pressure of the media drove Williams to quit the sport he loved.” One NFL player participant observed that some guys “definitely let the media affect them” whether on or off the field (Participant “Sanchez”).

It is important for the public, the media, and the NFL players to understand that many athletes are placing themselves into unfavorable situations resulting in the negative representations of their persona. Consequently, little research has been found that examines an athlete’s response to dealing with negative media portrayals.

Another aspect of coping from the athletes’ perspective was the notion of the large amount of African-American NFL players placing themselves in unfavorable situations resulting in negative presentations of their persona. The coping phenomena of African-American NFL players also emerged in the transcripts of the veteran sport reporters; therefore, coping is a cross-theme that can be seen from different perceptions in this study.

The majority of the participants in this investigation are consistent in that a large amount of African-American NFL players are viewed more in the media partaking in negative situations than their White counterparts. One NFL player (Participant “Boogie”) stated: “I try to encourage those around me to not do things that are going to bring negative publicity to them...as long as you have people that are doing negative things that are against the law or bringing negative publicity to themselves, or negative attention, you going to have the white media doing what they do.” One of the sport reporters compared his profession to that of the NFL players. Because he is a well known figure, he knows he cannot do certain things that may have a bad outlook on his character:

“I’m a big time sports columnist...I’m on ESPN all the time. I do local television. You know what, whether I like it or not, there are certain things I can’t do...or say. And if I don’t like it, you know what I need to do? I need to go wash dishes, or shovel snow or something.” (Media Participant 2)

Another reporter mentioned that Black and White athletes alike will receive scrutiny if both are involved in reckless situations:

“And sometimes, whether it’s a black player or white player can bring negative news upon themselves, depending on what they’re doing. I mean, look at Roger Clemens. Making negative news on him. And then you got the Vick case and other things. It depends on what that individual is involved in.” (Media Participant 1)

Little research on the coping of African-American athletes has been found to support this theme.

*Interrelationships Between the Media and the NFL Players (Media Theme & NFL Subtheme)*

Many of the participants in this investigation discussed the professional relationships between the NFL players and media professionals. An interesting notion is

the question: Could sports and the media thrive without one another? Like many other things in today's culture the media is a social construct that is controlled by people who create and organize ideas in order to relay thoughts and stories to the public. Without the reciprocal relationship between the NFL and the media, people would probably give less priority to sports, thus a decline in the revenue for both the media and the NFL could occur.

Many of the NFL player participants spoke about the mandatory relationship or “contractual obligations that make professional athletes have to deal with a certain number of media, or make themselves available” (Participant “Boogie”). However, it was stated by both the NFL and sport reporter participants that if you are not friendly with the media, or talk to them when they need you, a negative stigma will be placed on that athlete. Participant “Bobby” illustrated this concept in the following quote: “I think the fact that he [Sean Taylor] had closed himself down from the media made him more of a bad guy in their eyes.” In his book entitled “Inside the sports pages: Work Routines, Professional Ideologies and the Manufacture of Sports News”, Mark Douglas Lowes (1999) detailed certain transgressions, like Sean Taylor not speaking to the media and in return receiving a negative stigma which lead to confrontations between the reporters and athletes. In addition, reporters are being barred from locker rooms and many athletes are refusing to speak to the media (Lowes, 1999).

Many of the veteran sport reporter and NFL participants explained the importance of a positive personal relationship with one another. Some of the athletes described wanting the media professionals to treat them with respect, while many sport reporters agreed that having a friendly relationship with the African-American NFL players is best

in order to get the stories they need. One veteran sport reporter (Media Participant 3) feels as though when “you can gain the trust, and you can gain the respect of athletes”, you can be a better media professional for that. Dissimilarly, one sport reporter feels as though a friendship with the African-American NFL player is “journalistically unethical” (Media Participant 2). He believed you cannot truly get the essence of a story if you are “buddy buddy” with an athlete, because some reporters “become pals with these guys, and cover up for these guys” instead of relaying the needed information. Research needs to address the thin line many reporters walk between maintaining positive relationships with sources and upholding journalistic standards (Lowes, 1999).

*Perceptions of Media Personnel (NFL Theme)*

The theme of perceptions of media personnel was prevalent throughout the transcripts of the African-American NFL players when speaking about the “White Media”. In addition, the NFL players expressed their dislike for analyst and reporters whom never played the sport of organized football before. According to the Racial Report Card of the NFL (2007), 74% of radio and television announcers are White, while only 12% are Black, outlining the disproportion between White and Black media professionals (Lapchick & Kushner, 2006). With this knowledge of discrepancy, some sport journalists stress the need for increasing the number of Black media professionals in sports like football where Black athletes dominate; this will help increase positive depictions and understandings of these athletes” (Seymour, 2007). One African-American NFL player pointed out:

“When you think about the media, who do you think about? Do you think about, or when you think about people who portray the media, you think about white male, probably 35-45 years old, right? So that’s about 90% of the people who is

covering the NFL, probably 70% African-American league is covered by 90% of white male who is 45.” (Participant “Sanchez”)

Due to the disproportionate number of White media professionals, many of the NFL player participants feel as though the sport reporters cannot connect with many of the African-American NFL players. Participant “Sanchez” spoke of this specifically:

“If you can identify with the player in some light, which most of them are white males writing on white guys, if you can identify that you grew up, that you ate pasta for dinner and played with Mary Sue and, these are the things that you did and all of the things that you’re accustomed to, that’s just the situation. You know, they can’t stand there and say ‘I grew up and I lived with my 10 brothers and sisters in a two-bedroom house with just my mother raising us and my sister couldn’t go to school.’ They can’t fathom that so they have no idea what that would do to someone’s psyche.”

One sport reporter participant made a statement in relation to the previous notion:

“I always say this, I’m a middle aged white guy who grew up in suburban [STATE]... So I in no way would ever try to tell anybody that I have any grasp at all of the African-American experience. That would be stupid. I don’t.” (Media Participant 5)

More qualitative research in this area would be beneficial in better understanding how one’s background effects their perceptions of African-American athletes. One way to reduce this uneven number of Black and White reporters is to hire more media professionals from different minority groups.

In the same way as the “White Media”, many athlete participants mentioned they are displeased with the number of media professionals analyzing them although those individuals never played the sport of organized professional football before. Participant “Thomas” supports this concept with the following statement:

“The other thing that really is annoying, and media figures that have never done what you’re done and they’re trying to report on it. These guys in the locker room, men and women. They’ve never stepped foot on a football field in their life.”

Likewise, Participant “Ted” feels the same way as illustrated in the following quote:

“These dudes are the most out of shape. You can tell they never picked up a football before except to throw it in the back yard. Never played organized football. But they’re the ones critiquing you.”

Due to the lack of specific information regarding these subthemes, this may be an area of further investigation specific to this population of athletes. At the same time, a lot of research does not acknowledge the extent to which media professionals are themselves football fans and thus willingly serve the promotional interest of the NFL teams they cover.

*Pressures of the Media Profession (Media Theme)*

Another theme occurred when some of the veteran sport reporter participants spoke about the difficulties they face in the field of sports media which creates a question as to whether the profession of sports media is helpful or harmful to the individuals’ experience of dealing with African-American NFL players. From high divorce rates, to angry football fans, to angry players, to disrespectful peer, the everyday trials the veteran sport reporter faces can be stressful to ones mentality. Media Participant 5 recalled some reasons why he finds the media profession to be difficult at times:

“Sometimes, I’ll get 20 emails from people who love it and I’ll get 20 emails from people that think I’m an idiot and send me an angry email. I’ll email them back and say, first of all, don’t call me an idiot. You disagree. I hate it. It’s like you’re giving people a change to just call names and that kinds of stuff. That’s one of the many things I hate”

In addition, research suggests when dealing with live coverage of sporting events, announcers are placed in a high-speed and stressful environments. Having athletics events “unfold before them at a breakneck pace puts announcers under enormous pressure to generate commentary to fill the time and keep the program moving” (Rada &

Wulfemeyer, 2005). Such enormous pressure can cause the announcer to say stereotypical beliefs about African-American athletes that may have been more controlled in a less stressful setting.

Again, further research in this area would be beneficial in order to identify if these reported frustrations are specific to veteran sport reporters or all media professionals. Furthermore, additional qualitative investigations would be beneficial to continue understanding the reported coping and handling of the everyday situations that accompany the experience of being an African-American NFL and media professional. *Black Quarterbacks (NFL theme) and Playing Quarterback in the NFL (Media Theme)*

The final subtheme to emerge from all participants in this investigation pertained to the cultural significance and importance of the emergence of the Black quarterback, thus a comparison of both perspectives is crucial to this study. Both the NFL and veteran sport reporters agree that the quarterback position receives most of the scrutiny in the NFL, thus making the Black Quarterback a common theme amongst both sets of participants. Until recent years, the quarterback may have been one of the most racial stereotypes positions in the NFL. Although the NFL is predominately Black, the quarterback position is still that that is dominated by White athletes. If a Black quarterback wanted to play professional, he had to make a crucial decision about the path of his career: “he could switch positions, usually to wide receiver or a defensive secondary role, bolt to the Canadian Football League to play quarterback, or face the long odds of becoming a Black quarterback in the NFL” (Roquemore, 2001, p. 38). Black NFL quarterback, Steve McNair was quoted to say, “The climate is better in the last 10 years than what it has been because we’ve had some great guys like Randall Cunningham

and Doug Williams who paved the way for young guys like myself and other guys who have just started in the league” (Roquemore, 2001, p.38).

McNair’s quote is consistent with those of the participants in this investigation. Throughout the majority of the interviews, many of the participants spoke about Warren Moon’s racial barrier breaking feat of being the first Black quarterback to play in the Superbowl. Interestingly, when the veteran sport reporters described their impressions on the Black quarterback, it was of a more positive nature, while the African-American NFL players discussed the negative stereotypes and scrutiny that accompanies this position as portrayed by NFL player participant “Sanchez”:

“But what he said about blacks being treated unfairly, especially at that position is, I mean you just look up the history of the NFL quarterback, and between Doug Williams, who was the first guy who was a quarterback and your Randal Cunninghams, guys who could scramble, and all the other black quarterbacks, I mean, it has always been that all they do is scramble, and run with their legs and none of them are pure passers.”

What many athletes have to remember is that racial stereotypes are made about both Blacks and Whites alike and that all athletes at the quarterback position get scrutinized in some form (Stone, Darley, & Perry, 1997). A veteran sport reporter participant provided an example of this:

“Eli Manning is persecuted. He’s persecuted beyond belief. And he’s won a Super Bowl. Now he’s won a Super Bowl, and people like the great Eli Manning. It’s so fickle. But it’s New York. That’s what they do. They’re cynical. That’s what they do.” (Media Participant 3)

Billings (2004) examined the depictions of White and Black quarterbacks in college and professional football broadcast commentary found that White quarterbacks had fewer comments about their success in relation to their athletic ability. In contrast, Black quarterbacks were “more likely to fail if they were not superior in regard to innate

athletic ability” (Billings, 2004). Thus, past research correlates with the notion that Black quarterbacks receive more scrutiny and negative portrayals in the NFL.

## CONCLUSIONS

Based on the results of this investigation, the following conclusions that can be drawn are that:

### *African-American NFL Players*

- NFL athletes in this investigation utilized the media to increase positive exposure of themselves.
- NFL athletes in this investigation find the media to be primarily negative in their portrayals of African-American NFL players
- NFL athletes in this investigation are aware of racial biases in the media coverage of African-American NFL players.
- NFL athletes in this investigation see racial stereotypes of the portrayals African-American NFL players.
- NFL athletes in this investigation adhere to the obligatory relationship they have with the media.
- NFL athletes in this investigation believe the media is primarily made up of White men who never played the sport of organized professional football.
- NFL athletes in this investigation understand the negative affects of placing themselves in unfavorable situations and as a result, receiving negative scrutiny in the media.
- NFL athletes in this investigation prefer not to pay attention to media portrayals of themselves.
- NFL athletes in this investigation believe the media can be propagandistic and their reports can be skewed in order to provide a sense of entertainment for the public.

*Veteran Sport Reporters*

- Veteran sport reporters in this investigation stressed the importance of “getting the story” when it comes to portraying athletes, and that not all portrayals have to do with race.
- Veteran sport reporters in this investigation do not see race as a factor in their own portrayals of African-American NFL players
- Veteran sport reporters in this investigation believe there are misconceptions to how the profession of mass media is viewed and do not find themselves to always deal with race when it comes to African-American NFL players.
- Veteran sport reporters in this investigation are aware of racial biases in the media coverage of African-American NFL players.
- Veteran sport reporters in this investigation see racial stereotypes of the portrayals African-American NFL players.
- Veteran sport reporters in this investigation understand the importance of a positive relationship with the African-American NFL players.
- Veteran sport reporters in this investigation believe the players are often placing themselves in negative situations, therefore resulting in bad media portrayals.
- Veteran sport reporters in this investigation find the pressure of being a media professional to be difficult at times.
- Veteran sport reporters in this investigation see a difference in media styles of the older generation of media professionals versus the younger generation.

### *Future Recommendations and Limitations*

This study is not without its limitations, and the following suggestions could possibly improve upon this study: the methodological approach taken in this study may have caused a limitation in regards to specific information provided by the participant. Furthermore, the researcher's interest in the subject may have fostered some probing questions to be leading towards specific topics. Thus, a structured approach (structured interviews) could have revealed different results; however, existential phenomenology was the aim of this current study. Furthermore, the inclusion of White NFL players may have improved this study in understanding the NFL athletes' experiences as a whole with the media.

Based on the results of this study, the following are recommendations for coaches, sport psychology consultants, and sport researchers:

- 1) Coaches should help their athletes learn how to have a successful relationship with the media.
- 2) Sport psychology consultants may help athletes enhance their performance and understanding of the media by utilizing this study for an awareness of other athletes' experiences with the media.
- 3) Future researchers need to examine the experience of athletes from other professional and collegiate sports to determine their experience of race and the media.
- 4) Future researchers need to examine the experience of athletes from other races and ethnicities to determine their experiences of race and the media.

- 5) Future researchers need to examine the experience of media professionals from other sports to determine their experiences of race and the media.
- 6) Future researchers need to examine the experience of media professionals from different races to determine their experiences of race and the media.

In addition, this information can also assist other professional and/or elite athletes.

Because all athletes deal with the media, having available information regarding how others explain the experience may be beneficial. Because the study centered on existential phenomenology, first-hand, lived experiences are presented which may foster a sense of preparation for what they may experience.

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APPENDIX A  
RESEARCH QUESTIONS, LIMITATIONS, DELIMITATIONS, ASSUMPTIONS,  
AND DEFINITIONS

### *Research Questions*

The primary research questions for this study are:

1. What are the African-American NFL player's personal experiences of being portrayed in the media?
2. What are the veteran sport reporter's personal experiences of portraying African-American NFL players?

### *Delimitations*

1. This study is delimited to African-American NFL players and veteran sport reporters, and the participants interviewed may not be a representative sample to generalize for all other African-American athletes and veteran sport reporters.
2. Interviews were conducted on five African-American NFL players, and six veteran sport reporters. Although this sample is small, it is not considered small for a phenomenological stand point.
3. NFL athletes have least three years experience.
4. Veteran sport reporters have at least five years experience.

### *Limitations*

As with every study, this investigation has some potential limitations:

1. All the NFL player subjects are of African-American ethnicity, thus no other racial differences were researched. This is due to the impression that there could be a different perception of the media due to different racial experiences.
2. The researcher of this study is African-American, and although the researcher kept an open-mind during the interview process, there is a possibility that a racial bias was present during the analysis of the data.

3. Participants were selected largely through personal contacts.

#### *Assumptions of the Study*

The following assumptions were made in reference to this study:

1. The personal experiences of the African-American athlete and the media professional are important in better understanding the “lived” experiences of both populations.
2. The phenomenological interview serves the purpose of exploring and gathering valid materials and stories to give us a deeper look at the population’s personal experiences.
3. Due to the nature of the humanistic approach, the subjects in this research were able to openly and honestly convey their own recounts, thoughts, and feelings of the media.
4. Participants accurately and honestly described the phenomenon in their own words during the interview.

#### *Definition of Key Terms*

The following definitions are utilized in the present study:

1. African-American – An ethnic group in the United States of America whose ancestors, usually in predominant part, were indigenous to Sub-Saharan and West Africa (wordiq.com, 2006). Can be used simultaneously with the term Black when describing an individual’s race/ethnicity.
2. Existential Phenomenology – A philosophy that that allows for an accurate interpretation of one’s own “lived” experience (Czech, et al., 2004). Understanding the human experience is directed by the question, “What is the structure, meaning,

- and essence of this lived experience for the people involved?” (Kerry & Armour, 2000).
3. Humanistic Framework – An emphasis on describing the perspective of an individual and how they experience the world in which they live (Hill, 2001).
  4. Media – A means of communication utilized to reach a large audience. Such means can include newspapers, magazines, books, radio, film, television, video games, photographs, and the internet.
  5. NFL Athlete – A male that participates in the largest professional American football league in the world, consisting of thirty-two teams from American cities.
  6. Phenomenology - A methodology of qualitative research that studies human experiences from in-depth recounts in the first-person point of view (Smith, 2003).
  7. Qualitative Interview – The researcher is used as an instrument for data collection and must attempt to conduct the research free of judgments, assumptions or bias towards the information described by the subject (Czech, et al., 2004).
  8. Research Team – Primary advisor and two graduate student peers, all with experience and knowledge in phenomenological research and data analysis procedures.
  9. Stereotype – A generalization about a person or group without regard for individual differences (Stone, Darley, & Perry, 1997, p. 292).
  10. Triangulation – Strategies for reducing systematic bias and distortion during data analysis (Patton, 2002).
  11. Veteran Sport Reporter – At least five years of experience in interviewing, analyzing, or reporting information of professional athletics.

APPENDIX B  
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The purpose of this study is to better understand the experiences of African-American NFL players and the media personnel who portray them. Qualitative inquiry in sport studies is gaining popularity as researchers have begun to examine athletes' experiences; however, within the sport studies literature, few studies have utilized an existential phenomenological approach when examining the race in the media.

The aim of qualitative research is to better understand people's experiences from their own perspective and words. There are many approaches to qualitative research, but the approach of this particular study will be that of existential phenomenology.

Existential phenomenology is a methodology that uses the tenants of both phenomenology and existentialism. Phenomenology is a methodology of qualitative research that studies human experiences from in-depth recounts of experiences in the first-person point of view (Smith, 2003). When discussing phenomenology, the researcher must use the foundational question: "what is the meaning, structure, and essence of the lived experience of this phenomenon for this person or group of people?" (Patton, 2002) The basis of this methodology will be from a humanistic perspective having an emphasis on the athletes' own perception of their experience. The humanistic approach is essential to this qualitative study because "the humanistic tenet reflected in qualitative studies is a concern with individual human experience in specific contexts" (Hill, 2001, p.118).

"Existential phenomenology initially emerged as a philosophy that sought to understand human existence in a manner as free as possible from cultural presuppositions" (Czech, Wrisberg, & Fisher, 2004, p.52). "Anything that is not related to the experience will be excluded, while anything related must be included" (Czech et

al., 2004, p.52). The existential phenomenological researcher wants to look at experiences from a perspective of the individual that is unbiased and free of societies' views and judgments; therefore, "in phenomenology the description is the means, experience is the matter, and structure is the goal" (Czech at al., 2004, p.53).

It is important to continuously make advancements towards understanding the athlete's feelings towards the media. As mentioned above, qualitative research, although rare in comparison to race related quantitative studies, provide the rich, thick descriptions needed to offer a different perspective of the actual experience of the African-American athlete. In order to fully understand the interaction between the media and the African-American athlete, it is important to allow those individuals the opportunity to speak first-hand in hopes that we will better understand the phenomenon of the African-American athlete's, as well as the media professional's experience.

In order to fully understand the reasoning behind the current study, it is essential that the history of race and media-related research be fully understood and discussed. As previously stated, the majority of research conducted has been quantitative. Moreover, qualitative research in sport studies has been recently employed, showing the importance of adding the essence of lived experiences to what traditional research has already revealed. The following information will highlight relevant work within race and media studies in order to gain an understanding from a historical, scientific, and sport perspective. It is important to first look at the stereotypes of race in sport, couple with the racial ideologies that follow close behind.

### *Stereotypes of Race in Sport*

The influence of race on athletic ability is an extremely delicate topic. It is without question that there are many racial perceptions in sports, but realizing how opinions and perceptions are created point to a common source: the media. The media can include newspapers, magazines, books, radio, film, television, video games, and internet (Coakley, 2007). Through out the history of television, African-Americans and their community have been underrepresented in television coverage, and when they have appeared, they were often stereotypically portrayed as “brutish, buffoonish, comical, criminal, ignorant, lazy, and oversexed” (Rada & Wulfemeyer, 2005).

Bruce (2004) asserts that although the days of overt racism seem to have disappeared from the media, racial differences still remain entrenched historically in societal beliefs. They reveal themselves, “more subtly in sports commentary about black athlete superiority and white intellectual superiority, and differential patterns of naming that support existing racial hierarchies” (Bruce, 2004). In their survey of research on sports and race, Davis and Harris (1998) assert that “the association between athletics and African-American success is not surprising, given that sports is just about the only type of mainstream (nonfiction) media coverage in which one can see images of many successful African-Americans”.

As previously discussed, stereotypes seen in today’s sports include the popular perception that the Black athlete has natural physical abilities, while the White athlete is smarter than Blacks (Stone et al., 1997). Although all athletes get intellectually stereotyped, African-American’s seem to receive the backlash more. This is illustrated in the book *Taboo* authored by Jon Entine (2000):

The stereotype of the dumb jock, often tinged with racism, is far more pervasive, at least in the United States. In the 1960s, after the sports establishment finally opened its doors to young Blacks, their immediate success triggered a reflexive backlash grounded in the lingering racist belief that Blacks were not “smart enough” to handle the demands of “thinking” positions in sports, most notably quarterbacking in football. Whether consciously or as the result of deep-seated prejudices, it was believed that Blacks could not cope in situations that place a premium on strategy.

In his article, Kyle Kusz (2001) stated the African-American athlete is said to be “more concerned with making money and achieving celebrity status than with winning championships and being a solid role model” (p. 405). Many of these notions are mostly based on assumed differences between Black and White athletes that may not have necessarily been convincingly confirmed with research.

Research on racial stereotypes is available because it is necessary to prevent generalizations of race that can lead to discrimination. Statistics show that Blacks are overrepresented in popular sports, such as professional football, but it is not fair to assume that characteristics in race cause differences in athletic ability. The Air Force’s long time football coach, Fisher DeBerry, became the center of controversy within the media over his remarks concerning the racial diversity of his team. In 2005, DeBerry was discussing a loss to Texas Christian University and was quoted to say, “It was very obvious to me the other day that the other team had a lot more African-American players than we did and they ran a lot faster than we did. It just seems to be that way. African-American kids can run very well. That doesn't mean that Caucasian kids and other descents can't run, but it's very obvious to me that they run extremely well” (Associate Press, 2005). In the same way, Howard Cosell sparked a national outrage in 1983 by a comment made about former National Football League wide receiver, Alvin Garrett,

during Monday Night Football, by saying “Look at the little monkey run!” (Ekstrom, 2005). Although Cosell’s intentions may have not been offensive, its stereotypes like those mentioned that promote racial discrimination in sports.

Another effect of racial stereotyping is substantiated through a process called stacking, which can be seen in sports such as football, baseball, basketball, and volleyball. Stacking is when an athlete is assigned to a certain position based on stereotypical rather than achieved characteristics (Johnson et al., 1999). Jay Coakley defined stacking as (as cited in Woodward, 2002), “players from a certain racial or ethnic group being either over – or – under-represented at certain positions in team sports” (p. 1). The stacking phenomena is an argument receiving attention in the NFL as to why there is such a small amount of African-American quarterbacks, and this could be a result of the stereotype that White athletes are intellectually better with a stronger work ethic, those athletes are seen most at the roles that involve more thinking (Stone, Perry, & Darley, 1997).

Table 5.

*Stacking in the NFL in 2006* (Lapchick, Ekiyor, & Ruiz, 2007).

<b>Position</b>	<b>% of Blacks</b>	<b>% of Whites</b>
<b>Offense</b>		
Running Back	88	10
Wide Receiver	91	9
Guard	42	53
Center	26	70
Tight End	43	54
Quarterback	16	82
<b>Defense</b>		
Corner	96	4
Safety	85	14
Defensive End	75	24
Linebacker	73	24

Another possible explanation for stacking could be that African-Americans choose the positions they want to be proficient in, based on role models they have seen through the media as children. If an African-American child decided to play football, and they do not see other African-American role models at certain positions, they may choose a different position to emulate a role model where more African-American faces are prevalent (Woodward, 2002, p. 2). McPherson pointed out (as cited in Woodward, 2002) that “role modeling, particularly as more and more African-American athletes are marketed through television, might in fact have an impact on what positions young athletes choose at the beginning of their football careers” (p. 2).

So why are the White athletes seen in the more “thinking” and leadership positions? It is thought that there is an underlying stereotype in the United States that African-Americans are not cut-out for the tasks that involve thinking (Woodward, 2002, p. 2). Although the “dumb-jock” – great athletically, but lacking intellectually – stereotype is applied to all athletes, it is seen more now to describe African-Americans (Woodward, 2002, p. 2). For so many years, Whites have maintained the “control positions” in sports (coaches, general managers, etc). Lapchick shows those percentages in his 2004 Racial and Gender Report Card for major sports in the United States. The statistics showed that Ninety-one percent of the head coaches in the NFL were White and only nine percent were African-American, and one hundred percent of the owners were White (p. 29). As a result, “African-Americans have been pushed into certain positions and away from other positions. Positions of leadership and dependability have been filled with White athletes, while African-American athletes are more likely to be found in positions of speed and power, with less of an explicit emphasis on cognitive qualities” (Woodward, 2002, p. 3).

#### *Racial Ideologies and Logic in Sport*

When discussing race in sport, it is important to examine the history of racial ideologies that follow stereotypes of athletes and how they are embedded in society’s thoughts, and how they have proven to be resistant to change (Bruce, 2004). Race logic and ideologies can be powerful, as it can shape what people see and how they interpret the world in Black and White. In 1977, Rainville and McCormick first found racial bias in television’s coverage of professional football. Their study noted that one of the authors, who was blind, was able to distinguish the race of a player just from the

commentator's description (Rada & Wulfemeyer, 2005), and with this knowledge, the importance of racial studies progressed allowing racial stereotypes to be exposed.

The tendency to explain an athlete's success by his skin color is firmly ingrained in society's racial ideologies. This ideology emphasized "racial difference and leads people to forget history and culture so that they can continue to attribute differences to biology" (Coakley, 2007, p. 253). Racial ideologies related to physical differentiation have also been prevalent in the media for some time now, and was responsible for the apparent non-innocuous comments made by former CBS sportscaster Jimmy "the Greek" Snyder, a former sport analysis for CBS. Snyder implied genetics as well as experimental factors were the explanation for the success of African-American athletes in certain sports in 1988. Snyder suggested that "African-Americans make good ball carriers in football because Blacks were 'bred' during slavery times to have big, strong thighs" (Coakley, 2007, p. 255). Is it fair, however, to not look at the fact that many female slaves were forced to have sex with their white owners implying that many Blacks have a white ancestor somewhere in their past. With this knowledge, how do these white genes configure into the biological explanation for Blacks in athletics? (Coakley, 2007, p. 256).

Several media outlets do make conscious attempts not to expose racial differences, because it undermines their professional credentials and ability to be neutral and unbiased (Bruce, 2004). Therefore, if the sport media continuously reinforce racist ideologies, it is not necessarily because they are trying to cause controversy and expose one racial group. It is "through the sets of practices and discourses by which knowledge is constructed in the media, not the personal inclinations of media workers, where racist ideologies continue to be recreated" (Bruce, 2004). In Bruce's research of "normal" in

televised sports, an interview with a commentator for the National Basketball Association (NBA) displays a sports broadcasting culture that attempts to be objective due to consciousness of racial ideologies. The commentator claims he “desired to remain true to the events on the court, and resist the feeling of being intimidated into not describing specific black players as ‘athletes; or white players as ‘smart’ indicated the power of dominant ideologies to normalize their positions and, in this case, contribute to a growing silence about the existence and influence of structural barriers linked to racial difference” (2004).

#### *Effects of the Media on Athletes*

Previous research does not look into the actual feelings and experiences of the African-American athlete’s interactions with the media; however, it is important to understand the effects the media has on these elite athletes. For commercial sports, such as professional football, the media is necessary for coverage and news to provide statistics, recounts and replays, and overall performance of teams and athletes (Coakley, 2007). Rush Limbaugh, a commentator and radio talk show host, made a statement in 2003 that Philadelphia Eagles African- American quarterback Donovan McNabb was overrated because the media wanted to see a Black quarterback succeed. Limbaugh was quoted to say, "I think what we've had here is a little social concern in the NFL. The media has been very desirous that a Black quarterback do well. There is a little hope invested in McNabb, and he got a lot of credit for the performance of this team that he didn't deserve. The defense carried this team." (“Limbaugh resigns from NFL show”, 2003). Racial comments of this nature create uproars that fuel the media, as well as the public, regardless of the effect on the athlete. Limbaugh’s comment created significant

controversy and many people in the sport's world started to see his comment as racist.

According to Tom Jackson, co-host of Sunday NFL countdown, on October 5, 2003

("Welcome to Rush Week", 2003),

I have seen replay after replay of Limbaugh's comments with my face attached, as well as that of my colleagues. Comments that made us very uncomfortable at the time, although the depth and the insensitive nature of which weren't fully felt until it seemed too late to reply. Rush Limbaugh is known for the divisive nature of his rhetoric. He creates controversy, and what he said Sunday is the same type of thing that he's said on radio for years. A player in this league who has a young son called me this week, and his son now wants to know if it's all right for Blacks to play quarterback. Rush Limbaugh's comments could not have been more hurtful. He was brought in to talk football, and he broke that trust.

But what was the affect on the Donovan McNabb, the athlete that surrounds this negative media scrutiny? McNabb expressed that the comment resulted in a negative feeling within him, "It's sad that you've got to go to skin color. I thought we were through with that whole deal. It's somewhat shocking to hear that on national TV from him. It's not something that I can sit here and say won't bother me" ("Welcome to Rush Week", 2003). Some may look at McNabb's athletic ability to have progressed that season, being that the Philadelphia Eagles made it to the National Football Conference (NFC) championship game that year. He may have been able to use the negative media attention as fuel to do better on the playing field; however, not all athletes are able to do the same. According to an editorial by David Swerdlick of collegiate and professional football player stand out, Ricky Williams, the "constant pressure of the media drove Williams to quit the sport he loved and suffer with a debilitating social anxiety disorder and extreme shyness" (Ott & Van Puymbroeck, 2006, p. 5). As much as Williams loved the sport, he just could not handle the media attention that came with being a great player.

As this underrepresented population of athletes continues to be examined, it is important to incessantly make advancements in the way we research. As mentioned, qualitative approaches to research provide rich, thick descriptions that provide deeper insight into the experiences of elite athletes and the media. Evidence suggests that the efficiency of an athlete's performance and ability to focus can be negatively affected by the media (Zackal, 2006, p. 9-10). It is important to sport studies to know the effects certain situations have on those athletes and to allow those with the first-hand knowledge speak about it. Only then will we better understand the phenomena of media and race in elite athletics.

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APPENDIX C  
INFORMED CONSENT



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## INFORMED CONSENT

You are being asked to participate in a study being conducted by Jocelyn A. Fisher and Advisor Dr. Daniel Czech from Georgia Southern University. I am currently a 2<sup>nd</sup> year graduate student working on my Masters in Kinesiology with a concentration in Sport Psychology. Dr. Czech is the Associate Professor in the Sport Psychology department. I am interested in studying the African American athlete's "lived" experiences of the media as well as the "lived" experiences of the media portraying African American athletes.

Thus, the purpose of this study is two fold. The first purpose is to examine African American NFL players on their experiences of media interaction from a phenomenological perspective. The secondary purpose is to examine veteran NFL reporters' experiences of interacting with African American NFL players from a phenomenological perspective.

Six to eight African American NFL players will be interviewed to understand the personal experience they have had when interacting with the media. In addition, six to eight veteran sport reporters will be interviewed to understand their "lived experiences" as well. Participation in this research will include the completion of a face to face or phone interview with the principal investigator. The interview will be transcribed verbatim and you will be given the opportunity to review the transcripts and make changes to your comments.

The information that you give in the study will be handled confidentially. Your information will be assigned a pseudonym or code name. The list connecting your name to this code will be kept in a locked file. When the study is completed and the data have been analyzed, this list will be destroyed. Your name will not be used in any report. The audio recordings will be stored in a locked file in the researcher's office. The digital recording files will be destroyed one year after the completion of the study. The researchers will be the only people with access to the recordings. The interview will take approximately 30 minutes.

There are no anticipated risks as well as no direct benefits to you for participating in this research study.

You have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. You may decline to answer certain questions. If you wish to withdraw from the study then tell the researcher who will immediately stop the interview. If you decide to withdraw after data has been collected then contact the researcher who will destroy the data collected. You will receive no payment for participating in the study.

Participants have the right to ask questions and have those questions answered. If you have questions about this study, please contact the researcher named above. To contact the Office of Research Services and Sponsored Programs for answers to questions about the rights of research participants please email [oversight@georgiasouthern.edu](mailto:oversight@georgiasouthern.edu) or call (912) 486-7758.

You must be 18 years of age or older to consent to participate in this research study. If you consent to participate in this research study and to the terms above, please sign your name and indicate the date below. Your participation in the study is completely voluntary. You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep for your records.

Title of Project: The Experience of Media and Race in the National Football League - An Existential Phenomenological Study.

Principal Investigator: Jocelyn A. Fisher, PO Box 8076 Statesboro GA 30460, 202-277-4887, [jocelyn\\_a\\_fisher@georgiasouthern.edu](mailto:jocelyn_a_fisher@georgiasouthern.edu) or [fishj28@aol.com](mailto:fishj28@aol.com)

Other Investigator(s): Dr. Dan Czech, PO Box 8076 Statesboro GA 30460, 912-681-5267, [drczech@georgiasouthern.edu](mailto:drczech@georgiasouthern.edu)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

I, the undersigned, verify that the above informed consent procedure has been followed.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Investigator Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

APPENDIX D  
REVIEWER CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT

**GEORGIA SOUTHERN UNIVERSITY**  
**DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND KINESIOLOGY**

**NON-DISCLOSURE AGREEMENT/CONFIDENTIALITY FORM**

I, \_\_\_\_\_ (print name) will be completing Jocelyn Fisher's transcriptions of her voice files for her thesis requirements.

I understand that as an active transcriptionist, I am expected to maintain the confidentiality of the persons I help to the best of my ability. I understand that I may have access to personal and private information in the course of my interactions. I agree to treat this information in the way that I would want personal information about myself treated.

I will treat all information about the files as confidential. I will not discuss the information provided with anyone other than Jocelyn Fisher. I will keep the identities of the study participants confidential to anyone outside of Jocelyn Fisher.

This issue of confidentiality has been discussed with me and I agree to the terms of this agreement.

Signed \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Approved \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

APPENDIX E  
DEPARTMENTAL IRB FORMS

Georgia Southern University Office of Research Services & Sponsored Programs	
<b>Institutional Review Board (IRB)</b>	
Phone: 912-681-5465	Veazey Hall 2021
Fax: 912-681-0719	P. O. Box 8005
Ovrsight@GeorgiaSouthern.edu	Statesboro, GA 30460-8005

**To:** Jocelyn A. Fisher  
130 Lanier Dr. Apt#115  
Statesboro, GA-30458

**Cc:** Dr. Dan Czech, Faculty Advisor  
P. O. Box-8076

**From:** Office of Research Services and Sponsored Programs  
Administrative Support Office for Research Oversight Committees  
(IACUC/IBC/IRB)

**Date:** December 10, 2007

**Subject:** Status of Research Study Modification Request

After a review of your Research Study Modification Request on research project numbered: "H07179" and titled "The Experience of the Media in the National Football League from an African-American Perspective-An Existential Phenomenological Study", your request for modification appears that (1) the research subjects are at minimal risk, (2) appropriate safeguards are planned, and (3) the research activities involve only procedures which are allowable.

*Therefore, as authorized in the Federal Policy for the Protection of Human Subjects, I am pleased to notify you that the Institutional Review Board has approved your modification request.*

The IRB approval is still in effect for one year from the date of your original application approval and will expire on March 26, 2008. If at the end of that time, there have been no further changes to the research protocol; you may request an extension of the approval period for an additional year. In the interim, please provide the IRB with any information concerning any significant adverse event, whether or not it is believed to be related to the study, within five working days of the event. In addition, another change or modification of the approved methodology becomes necessary; you must notify the IRB Coordinator prior to initiating any such changes or modifications. At that time, an amended application for IRB approval may be submitted. Upon completion of your data collection, you are required to complete a *Research Study Termination* form to notify the IRB Coordinator, so your file may be closed.

Sincerely,



N. Scott Pierce  
Director of Research Services and Sponsored Programs

**GEORGIA SOUTHERN UNIVERSITY INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD  
PROPOSAL NARRATIVE**

**For electronic submission: First complete the proposal narrative in entirety and “Save As” a word document to your computer or disk named “propnarr\_Year\_Month\_Date\_lastname, First initial.doc”. Then open and complete Cover page.**

*Please respond to the following as briefly as possible, but keep in mind that your responses will affect the actions of the Board. Clearly label your responses in sections that correspond to the specific information requested. You may insert your responses in each section on this page, leaving a space between the question and your answers. Narrative should not exceed 4 pages.*

The application should be submitted electronically or 2 duplicate copies sent to the Office of Research Services and Sponsored Programs, at P. O. Box 8005, Statesboro, GA 30460, and should contain, in this order: a signed cover page, the informed consent checklist page, the project proposal narrative, and the informed consent that you will use in your project. Additional information, such as copies of survey instruments, advertisements, or any instruments used to interact with participants should be attached at the end of the proposal clearly designated as an Appendix.

**Personnel.** Please list any individuals who will be participating in the research beyond the PI and advisor. Also please detail the experience, level of involvement in the process and the access to information that each may have.

Principal Investigator: Jocelyn A. Fisher  
2<sup>nd</sup> Year Graduate Student under Sport Psychology  
Involvement in all phases of the study

Co-Investigator: Dr. Daniel Czech  
Advisor under Sport Psychology  
Involvement in all phases of the study  
Experienced Qualitative Researcher

Research Team: Thesis committee and fellow graduate students: Matt Harpold, and Edward Hoffman (All members of the committee have completed the IRB Training)  
Involvement in helping with finding themes after interviews  
Fellow graduate students have some experience with the qualitative process

**Purpose.** 1. Briefly describe in one or two sentences the purpose of your research. 2. What questions are you trying to answer in this experiment? Please include your hypothesis in this section. The jurisdiction of the IRB requires that we ensure the appropriateness of research. It is unethical to put participants at risk without the possibility of sound scientific result. For this reason, you should be very clear on how participants and others will benefit from knowledge gained in this project. 3. What

current literature have you reviewed regarding this topic of research? How does it help you to frame the hypothesis and research you will be doing?

Over seventy percent of the current National Football League (NFL) population is of African American descent (Lapchick, Ekiyor, & Ruiz, 2007). Moreover, Zackal (2006) suggest that an uneven amount of African American athletes competing in elite sports account for most of the criticism in the national sports media (p. 9-10). Furthermore, there is a disparity between White and Black sport analyst with 74% of the radio and television announcers being White, and 12% being Black (Lapchick & Kushner, 2006). Unfortunately, very little research has been found which has examined the media's influence on those African American elite athletes as well as an understanding of media relations from the view of a veteran sport reporter. Consequently, what appears to be lacking in the current sport psychology literature is a systematic examination of the African American athlete's, as well as media professional's "lived" experiences. Thus, the purpose of this study is two fold. The first purpose is to examine African-American NFL players on their experiences of media interaction from a phenomenological perspective. The secondary purpose is to examine veteran NFL reporters' experiences of interacting with African American NFL players from a phenomenological perspective. The primary research questions for this study are: (a) what are the African American NFL player's personal experiences of media portrayals and (b) what are the veteran sport reporters' personal experiences of portraying African American NFL players? This study will consist of one open-ended question for each population, and with this question, the participants will be able to describe their honest feelings and opinions of their personal experiences.

As this underrepresented population of athletes continues to be examined, it is important to incessantly make advancements in the way we research. Evidence suggests that the efficiency of an athlete's performance and ability to focus can be negatively affected by the media (Zackal, 2006, p. 9-10). It is important to sport studies to know the effects certain situations have on those athletes and to allow those with the first-hand knowledge speak about it. Only then will we better understand the phenomena of media and race in elite athletics.

**Describe your subjects.** Give number of participants, approximate ages, gender requirements (if any).

Describe how they will be recruited, how data will be collected (i.e., will names or social security numbers be collected, or will there be any other identification process used that might jeopardize confidentiality?), and/or describe any inducement (payment, etc.) that will be used to recruit subjects. Please use this section to justify how limits and inclusions to the population are going to be used and how they might affect the result (in general).

Participants

Athletes: 6-8 African-American NFL players will be interviewed for the study

Media: 6-8 Veteran Sport Reporters will be interviewed for the study

Age: Approximately 23-70

Gender Requirements: Male

Recruitment: A purposeful sampling procedure will be used due to the fact that the subjects will be picked largely through personal contacts. Purposeful sampling seeks information rich cases, which can be studied in depth (Patton, 1990).

**Methodology (Procedures).** Enumerate specifically what will you be doing in this study, what kind of experimental manipulations you will use, what kinds of questions or recording of behavior you will use. If appropriate, attach a questionnaire to each submitted copy of this proposal. Describe in detail any physical procedures you may be performing.

Data Collection: The purpose of the data collection will be to collect in-depth descriptive information from the NFL players on their experience of interactions with the media, as well as the media's experience of interactions with African American NFL players. Participation in this study will be completely voluntary throughout this study. Interviews will be held in a quiet, private location to ensure confidentiality, or over the phone. Each interview should last approximately 30 minutes with one main interview question per population. African-American NFL participants will be prompted with the following open-ended question: "When you think about a specific time being portrayed by the media, what comes to mind?" Additionally, the veteran sport reporters will be prompted with the following open-ended question: "When you think about a specific time portraying an African American NFL player, what comes to mind?"

Real names and other identifying information will not be collected or used. There is a possibility that the identity of the participant will be visible through the reporting of their interview data. To address this issue numerous qualitative trustworthiness issues will be employed such as member checking, whereby each participant is given the opportunity to review the transcripts for accuracy and clarity. No inducements will be used in this study. As is standard for qualitative research, a small purposeful sample will be studied (statistical power and generalizability issues do not apply to qualitative research).

This study will employ Existential Phenomenology as the qualitative interview methodology. The principal investigator will be conducting all the interviews as well as a research team who will help in the data analysis process. Each member of the research team will sign a confidentiality form. For the interview process each of the participants will sign an informed consent explaining the process and for them to agree to participate in the study. The interviews will be audio recorded, transcribed verbatim and analyzed qualitatively using a content analysis procedure recommended by several experts in qualitative research (e.g., Flick, 2006; Patton, 2002). The interviews will take place over the phone or in person during a time that is best for the professional athletes and media professionals. Once all data is collected, an interpretive group will be used in order to form themes from the interviews. Each of the members will sign a confidentiality form in order to keep all information between the members involved in the research process.

**Research involving minors.** Describe how the details of your study will be communicated to parents/guardians. If part of an in-school study (elementary, middle, or high school), describe how permission will be obtained from school officials/teachers, and indicate whether the study will be a part of the normal curriculum/school process. Please provide both *parental consent* letters and *child assent* letters (or processes for children too young to read).

N/A

**Deception.** Describe the deception and how the subject will be debriefed. Briefly address the rationale for using deception. Be sure to review the *deception disclaimer* language required in the informed consent. **Note:** All research in which deception will be used is required to be reviewed by the full Board.

N/A

**Medical procedures.** Describe your procedures, including safeguards. If appropriate, briefly describe the necessity for employing a medical procedure in this study. Be sure to review the *medical disclaimer* language required in the informed consent.

N/A

**Risk.** Is there greater than minimal risk from physical, mental or social discomfort? Describe the risks and the steps taken to minimize them. Justify the risk undertaken by outlining any benefits that might result from the study, both on a participant and societal level. Even minor discomfort in answering questions on a survey may pose some risk to subjects. Carefully consider how the subjects will react and address ANY potential risks. Do not simply state that no risk exists, until you have carefully examined possible subject reactions.

Due to the nature of a humanistic approach, the subjects in this research will be able to openly and truthfully convey their own recounts, thoughts, and feelings of the media. By allowing the subjects to convey their own personal feelings, there may be some discomfort; however, I believe there are no inherent physical or mental risks in participating in this study.

**Cover page checklist.** Please provide additional information concerning these risk elements. If none, please state "none of the items listed on the cover page checklist apply." [Click here](#) to go to cover page for completion.