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Analysis

The portrayal of renowned figures in today's media is a multifaceted occurrence that offers a unique window into the comprehensive societal and cultural narratives that define our time. This analysis will focus on the media's depictions of Coach Prime, LeBron James, and Serena Williams, analyzing how these depictions and narratives are constructed and to show what they reveal about the convergence of race, gender, sports, and society. This analysis will combine discourse analysis with qualitative content analysis to further examine the contextual and textual elements of media representations of these figures. Through a meticulous examination of diverse media sources, the research that is presented in this analysis will offer a unique contribution to the field of Communications Studies. The complex interplay between societal perceptions, representation, and the role of the media molding both will be revealed.

In order to move any further, it is necessary to break down the concept of media and what I mean when I talk about the media's portrayals. When I refer to the media, I am not referring to one sole entity that covers everything. I am referring to the social actors, social media platforms, and channels that basically compose the whole of the term "media". In this analysis, we will cover three specific examples of how the media has portrayed Serena Williams, LeBron James, and Deion Sanders. By examining the interactions that occurred with these figures and the way

the media reacted/portrayed each of them, we will then begin to gain an understanding of how these narratives can shape someone's identity.

As we take a closer look at each of the interactions, it is pivotal that we understand what is happening. I will provide brief summaries of the incidents that occurred between each of the individuals. During the U.S. Open Final in 2018, Serena Williams was hit with a series of contentious penalties that provoked widespread public debate and media coverage. It all started when Serena was penalized for "receiving" coaching signals from the stands. The umpire would follow up with another point penalty, calling for racket abuse against Williams, after she slammed her racket on the ground. All this led up to Williams receiving a point deduction for verbal abuse after calling the umpire a "thief" and a "liar" (Williams). This specific interaction was captured across multiple media platforms, from social media discussion groups to live broadcasts, with each of the representations portraying a different mix of criticism and support for Williams. In the case for LeBron James, James was scrutinized for voicing his opinions on social justice issues. James has been an outspoken advocate for racial injustice and political matters. His outspokenness is exactly what led to a news anchor telling him to "shut up and dribble" (Ingraham), further confining his concerns and voice to those of just an athlete's "role". The remarks made by the anchor became a symbol of activism for athletes against racial injustice happening right in their backyards. The coverage of this certain altercation varied, with some outlets framing James as overstepping his boundaries as an athlete, while others illustrated him as a hero for using his platform to fight racial injustice. The interaction between Coach Prime and Coach Norvell, became a focal point for sport and media coverage. Norvell had this to say in regards to Coach Prime, "When I talk to grown-ups, I take my hat and my glasses off.' That's

what my mother taught me” (Norvell). Coach Prime responded the following day while on the Buffs Primetime Radio Show stating, “I’m not going to get in front of you and change who I am just because you’re here. I don’t do that. I’m consistent with who I am” (Sanders). Then he said: “I’m a grown man, you telling me what I’m supposed to wear, what I’m not supposed to wear. Please” (Sanders). This interaction accentuated themes of racial undertones in sports leadership and respectability politics. The incident was covered extensively from sports broadcasts to social media forums, with a vast variety of takes on the magnitude of their exchange.

Let’s go ahead and take an in-depth look at some of the reactions that materialized after the incidents took place. We’ll go ahead and start with the Serena Williams incident in the 2018 U.S. Open Final. On one side of the spectrum, there’s criticism that Williams was displaying inadequate on-court behavior, and many took this viewpoint as overshadowing Osaka’s significant win. There were many people on Twitter (X) arguing that the focus of the media should’ve been on Osaka becoming the first Japanese player to win a major tennis title, rather than Williams’ arguments. The following remarks will be from Twitter users who thought Williams’ actions overshadowed the whole tournament, and these tweets all occurred on Sep. 9, 2018. Natalie Jacobs stated, “A shame a woman “fighting for women” has overshadowed what should have been a triumphant moment for another woman [#UsOpenFinal](#)” (Jacobs). Rebecca Powell stated, “A shame that the spotlight remains on [@serenawilliams](#) behaviour & not the superior performance of [@Naomi_Osaka](#) Let's celebrate her win not Serena's loss [#USOpen](#)” (Powell). Camellia actually scrutinized Williams for putting the loss on sexism. Camellia Alexan stated, “Serena Williams lost. Blaming it on sexism shows she's weak. She's doing a disservice to all women by making us look like victims. We are not victims” (Alexan). A whole lot of these

viewpoints suggest that Serena's actions were almost tantrum-like, and took away from Osaka's achievement and celebration. Some of the comments under Alexan's post are disgusting, scrutinizing Williams in ways she's been scrutinized her whole career. One user had this to say, "I agree- Serena definitely did women and equality a great disservice by playing the sexist card- women are not the pathetic creatures she portrayed today in her disgraceful unsportsmanlike manner. How can you expect equal prize money when you behave like that?" (X User). Another commenter posted, "Uhh since Serena s a guy, pretty weak argument" (X User). Serena has faced racism and sexism her whole career. Critiques of Williams' behavior have touched on the issue of whether her response to the penalties was justifiable or if it just demonstrated a lack of control of her own emotions in such a high stakes moment.

Luckily, on the other side of the spectrum, there is strong support for Williams and her fight against sexism that occurred after the incident. There were both men and women defending Serena's actions, and even a tennis legend, Billie Jean King. Billie Jean King had this to say in regards to the incident, "When a woman is emotional, she's "hysterical" and she's penalized for it. When a man does the same, he's "outspoken" & and there are no repercussions. Thank you, [@serenawilliams](#), for calling out this double standard. More voices are needed to do the same" (King). This comment received over 213,000 likes, showing the immense amount of support that is behind this certain narrative. King highlights the double standards that occur in the sport of tennis, showing how expressions of emotion are penalized differently for women when they are compared to men. James Blek, former tennis player, had this to say in support of Williams, "I will admit I have said worse and not gotten penalized. And I've also been given a "soft warning" by the ump where they tell you to knock it off or I will have to give you a violation.

He should have at least given her that courtesy. Sad to mar a well played final that way” (Blake). This is one of the many examples that goes to show the disparity between calls that women get in comparison to their male-counterparts. Serena should’ve received a warning of some sort before having a whole point deducted from her. She didn’t use vulgar language or get physical in any way with the umpire. Men can be as “outspoken” as they want, but as soon as a woman does it, she’s labeled as “hysterical”. Adam Grant, a twitter user stated, “When a man argues with an umpire, it’s passion. When a woman does it, it’s a meltdown. When a black woman does it, it’s a penalty. [#DoubleStandards #USOpen #Serena](#)” (Grant). Grant makes it clear that there is a discrepancy in the officiating in regards to women, and more to those of women in color in the sport of tennis. There needs to be a change in rules that addresses these differences, specifically on the need for fair and equal treatment for all athletes, regardless of gender or race. Williams has been a trailblazer for the sport of tennis, solidifying herself as a symbol of resiliency and having a large impact far beyond that of just tennis. Her voice for equality continues to be heard around the world, despite the negative narratives the media attaches to her name.

Next, we will delve into the reactions and ways the media portrayed NBA star LeBron James after the “shut up and dribble incident”. In response to James’ political comments, Laura Ingraham directed James to stick to his area of expertise and stay out of politics by telling James to “shut up and dribble”. There was a significant amount of debate and discourse all across various media outlets, with some seeing her comments as racially motivated, while others critiqued the involvement of celebrities in any political conversations. You can bet that LeBron James, and fellow NBA players did not take lightly to Ingraham’s comments. They refused to be silenced when it came to voicing their opinions on social issues. James responded by posting

“#wewillnotshutupanddribble” to all of his platforms. This would eventually become a vociferation for athletes and people in positions of power and influence, asserting their rights to speak on matters outside of sports and their respective areas of expertise. James posted a picture of a sign stating, [“I AM MORE THAN AN ATHLETE”](#) to his Twitter and Instagram. The post gained over 1.4 million likes, and was the first official response from James. In one of the first press conferences after the incident, The Sporting News posted on twitter, “Thank you, whatever her name is. ... I appreciate her for giving me even more awareness, at the best weekend of the NBA.” LeBron James at All-Star media day responding back to the Fox News host who told him to "shut up and dribble.” (sportingnews). NBA Commissioner, Adam Silver, also commended his players on being resilient and speaking up on social issues. NBA TV posted on Twitter saying, “”Let me begin by saying I’m incredible proud of our players for using the platform they have.” Commissioner Adam Silver addresses recent “shut up and dribble” comments aimed at [@NBA](#) players. [#NBAAllStar](#)” (NBATV). Not only did the NBA Commissioner back his players, but millions of people around the world did as well. Tim, a Twitter user, replied with this comment when LeBron made his response to Ingraham, “People get scared when athletes start voicing their opinions because they are actually heard by millions. I think it’s great that they can be a voice for us” (Tmets1986). Tim shows that these athletes advocating for themselves and the people are exactly what they need to be heard. With athletes having immeasurable power and influence in the world, they are seen as leaders and beacons of hope to speak on social issues for the common civilian.

On the other side of the debate, many defended Ingraham’s comments. Scott Vaughn, a twitter user stated, “She is 100.%” (Palmettocock1). A bit after two years, Ingraham had

something else to say about a certain athlete, this time though, he was a white quarterback in the NFL, whose name is Drew Brees. In 2020, Drew Brees was interviewed by Yahoo Finance and he stated, “(he will) never agree with anybody disrespecting the flag” (Brees). This was in regards to the kneeling that players were doing in protest before NFL games in 2020. He received heat from some of his own teammates and even had LeBron James call him and Ingraham out. In a live broadcast, Laura Ingraham defended Brees and his comments. She had this to say, “He’s allowed to have his view about what kneeling and the flag means to him. I mean he’s a person. He has some worth, I would imagine... [This is beyond football though](#)” (Ingraham). Later on in that same broadcast on Fox News, her cohost said, “He’s a great Christian man” (Fox News). All in regards to people giving Brees backlash for his remarks about the National Anthem protests. This is a great example of racism and double standards right in our faces, on national television. LeBron responded quickly by stating, “If you still haven’t figured out why the protesting is going on. Why we’re acting as we are is because we are simply F-N tired of this treatment right here! Can we break it down for you any simpler than this right here?????. And to my people don’t worry I won’t stop until I see CHANGE???

#ShutUpAndDribbleThisPowerfulBlackManComingFullSteam” [\(LeBron\)](#). This certain Twitter post received over 497,000 likes. Hannah Storm, an ESPN Director, had this to say on LeBron’s tweet, “Her words are simply unacceptable and exactly what we must fight against. Thank you for being a consistently powerful voice and leader” (Storm). Another Twitter user stated, “This is completely incoherent. If anyone speaks baby here please translate for me” (BlayzeKarp). His comments were in response to the way LeBron typed his tweet. Raquel, another Twitter user, stated, “Lebron she definitely knows what she’s doing .. she doesn’t want you to use your

platform to spread awareness on issues that affect US!! But it's okay for Drew Brees to live blindly non his privilege" (Raquel). As we can see, the criticism of James also accentuated the broader issues of race and how certain athletes' voices on political activism is perceived in various ways based on race. Attitudes toward athlete activism is shaped by both race and ideology, and this can be seen in the comments and representation of figures in the media. Followers of Fox News and Laura Ingraham defended her actions, and were in disagreement with LeBron. What exactly does this indicate? This shows that the intersection of politics and sports can create strong feedback that is influenced by the viewers political ideologies and racial views. This incident is one of many that emphasizes the evolving role that minorities in positions of power and influence have in public discourse and the makeup of their participation in social and political debates. Figures like LeBron James, can use their platforms to start conversations on societal issues that broaden far beyond the realm of sports.

As we take a closer look at the interactions between Coach Prime and Coach Norvell, it is key to understand that Norvell is a Black coach as well. It is rare to see Black coaches heading entire football programs, but it is even rarer to see them taking subtle jabs at each other's characters. The media representations for both coaches played into the impact on diversity and unity that Coach Prime has brought into the broader sports community. One Twitter user had this to say about what Coach Norvell directed at Coach Prime, "Crazy part is, people will come on here Sunday and pretend we made everything up and that he wasn't taking shots at Coach Prime. They are so jealous & threatened by Prime it's sad. He said nothing but nice things about this guy. Yet becuz dude is insecure all he can do is HATE!" (Reallytheitgirl). JZM7979 said, "Coach is right about Sanders. Deion is way too old to be dressing and acting like a 20-year-old kid"

(Jeremy). nother outlet frames Deion as being a reason that CU can take a step towards a more inclusive society. His sole presence can be a positive force for change. Delyce Collins, a writer for Westword, a Colorado newsletter, stated, “But this is football, a game, a tool being used by Deion Sanders to bring unity to a city that may have been behind the curve in diversity” (Collins). With Coach Prime’s influence to be different and express Blackness as he pleases, Collins hopes a new generation can look beyond racial divisions and look towards a future that has much more unity and diversity. Other reactions from the media portrayed Coach Norvell as the bad guy and framed what he said as wrong. Twitter users had this to say about Norvell’s comments, “Why do we as black men have to talk bad about other black men who are doing good things” (CliffordChatma1). Coach Prime is often scrutinized for the way he presents his Black masculinity in this white space. Others criticize him for the way he talks, the way he carries himself, and the way he dresses. Deion Sanders is going to continue doing what he does, just as he has since the time he was once a player. The way that Coach Prime displays his Black masculinity is important to those who look up to him. Sanders brings a certain “sizzle” to the space of coaching that has just not been seen before, especially at this high of a level (power 5 conference in the NCAAF).

Why exactly might it matter that Deion is displaying his Black masculinity in this way? It matters because at the end of the day, sports and coaching is all a business. A company can be scared or feel threatened when someone doesn’t conform to societal expectations, the “norm”, as some might say. Once a company or the media start to feel threatened, then the negative narratives and negative stereotypes start to emerge. In this certain instance, Coach Prime was seen as rude and that his mother failed to raise him correctly. Norvell stated, “When I talk to

grown-ups, I take my hat and my glasses off.' That's what my mother taught me" (Norvell). Norvell attacked Sanders for how "Black" he was acting, and took jabs at his mother all in a short statement. Because Coach Prime presented himself in such a different way compared to the other coaches, he was seen as less respectable. Through all this, Sanders has not changed, and he has continued to wear his hats and sunglasses. Further being an inspiration and a role model for other Black men in the sports world. Norvell is another example of someone trying to reinforce the idea that having an outspoken personality would further reinforce negative stereotypes about Black individuals. Deion Sanders has done a lot in his career in relation to impacting respectability politics and black masculinity. He has inspired others to be their true selves, no matter the circumstances. Navigating criticism and controversy can be a hard thing to do for most. But, when you've done it for multiple years of your life like Deion has, it is second nature at that point.

In analyzing the different media representations and public perceptions of Serena Williams, LeBron James, and Coach Prime, we are able to reveal a multiplex interplay of media framing, athlete identity, and societal discourse that goes far and above mere sports reporting. Observations from the media portrayals of these figures with differing identities and backgrounds help construct an extensive argument about the role of media in molding discourses and perceptions around identity. The patterns that have been uncovered through coding and interpretation reveal that there is bias in representation that the media provides. This bias misrepresents and marginalizes minority figures based on their gender, race, and activism. It is clear that minority figures such as athletes or coaches, are not only celebrated for their achievements and accomplishments but also critiqued and scrutinized for their personality and

activism. By combining these observations and patterns, there is a clear argument; the media serves as a front for the negotiation of societal values and identity. By dissecting and analyzing these three specific examples of public discourse and media coverage, this research has addressed gaps in understanding the interchange between media representations and identity. This analysis has challenged the existing assumptions that athlete portrayals are becoming less stereotyped and unbiased, showcasing a critique of issues that are still progressing in media representations today. The arguments and findings that emerge from the paper are designed to captivate a diversified audience that ranges from fields of racial discourse, Communication Studies, gender studies, and sports media analysts. By presenting a complex view of representation in media, scholars are invited to reassess their methods of studying media narratives and portrayals. By challenging scholars, this can allow them to go beyond their conventional research and consider the complexities of different experiences of minorities as they are influenced by converging societal factors.

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