

APPLYING AN ADVERTISING CREATIVITY MODEL TO THE NFL'S BLACK QUARTERBACKS AND POSTMODERN SPORT MARKETING PRACTICES

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The purpose of this paper is to examine the Black quarterback's emergence in the National Football League as a modern superstar and celebrity endorser in light of the theoretical framework of advertising creativity proposed by Smith and Yang (2004). These authors suggested that creativity existed around the concepts of divergence and relevance, while proposing further examination of the theory in five primary areas: advertising as a communication process, management process, societal process, group process, and personal process. This paper will apply historical investigations; discussions of images, perceptions, and racial discourses; and modern sport marketing practices to the five prongs of the creativity framework to present an exploratory analysis of divergence and relevance related to the Black NFL quarterback's postmodern status as the new sport marketing icon and discuss him in terms of divergence and relevance for each of the model's prongs. This work fills a gap in the sport marketing discipline and addresses a call for future research described by Douvis and Douvis (2000) by connecting theories of social sciences and epistemology of consumer sciences to sport marketing research through application of theoretical concepts and models from broader areas of psychology and consumer behavior to the evolving cognate of sport advertising.

INTRODUCTION

Though general hypotheses indicate that sport provides greater opportunities for minorities' upward mobility, when examined from a global perspective, opinions concerning sport's reproduction of social circumstances of the larger society differ. Some theorists opine that sport becomes a microcosm of society to which it remains inextricably linked (Eitzen 1983; Smith and Seff 1989; Lapchick 2001), while other theorists contend that sport does not mirror society and its larger social issues due to its entertainment value and exists as an ahistorical, apolitical, and asocial entity (Brooks and Althouse 2000).

Ads: Do They Reflect or Shape Society?

Much as the role of sport in society is debated, the role of advertising in society has also been

debated around the mirroring/modeling debate (Kilbourne 2004). The mirror perspective suggests that advertising merely reflects the values already found in society, while the modeling perspective suggests that advertising molds society into the desired image of industrial society (Holbrook 1987; Pollay 1986).

Consequently, according to Burton (2002), marketers must consider marketing as a powerful, seductive agency of social control that places consumption at the middle of individual awareness and identity. Selling images of particular groups that reflect distorted images can be harmful and alienate the targeted consumers that marketers wished to attract in the first place.

Marketing and the National Football League

Regardless of its perceived connection to larger societal elements, the sport industry has reached a strategic inflection point in addressing race, ethnicity, and diversity amid

evolutions in games, athletes, marketplaces, and consumers. One sport property at this crossroads is the National Football League (NFL), which has seen a rise in both numbers and prominence of Black quarterbacks. As a result, the Black quarterback has emerged to defy race logic and may necessitate reformulation of the quarterback position, social stereotypes, scientific literature, and the entire NFL structure, not to mention changes in sport marketing practices for NFL properties and brands affiliated with the league's properties and players.

Creativity in Advertising: Divergence + Relevance

In 2004, Smith and Yang examined the concept of creativity in advertising by reviewing literature in psychology, marketing, and advertising. From this base, they developed a model that defined a creative ad as one possessing both divergence and relevance to consumer processing and response factors. Further, they postulated a general theory of creativity that called for research in five primary areas: advertising as a communication process, management process, societal process, group process, and personal process.

The purpose of this paper is to examine the Black quarterback in the NFL in the context of creativity as defined by Smith and Yang (2004), characterized by the phenomena of divergence and relevance in postmodern sport marketing practices. This paper will apply historical investigations; discussions of images, perceptions, and racial discourses; and modern sport marketing practices to the five prongs of the framework for an exploratory analysis of divergence and relevance as related to the Black NFL quarterback's postmodern status as the new creative sport marketing icon.

CHRONOLOGY & HISTORY

The quarterback position has always been a central figure in the sport of American football and has consistently exercised the functions of leader and major role player in offensive

functions of the sport (Carroll 1999). Throughout much of the 20th century, Blacks were often relegated to other positions as professionals, where an unwritten Jim Crow policy persisted within the ranks of leadership in the NFL. Over time, Blacks transitioned into commonly observed, expected roles as quarterbacks, but such has become the case only recently (Carroll 1999).

On the cover of its November/December 2002 official magazine publication *NFL Insider*, the National Football League (NFL) emblazoned its cover with a dramatized photo of Atlanta Falcons quarterback Michael Vick and the caption: "Vick Be Nimble: The NFL's New Prototype QB." The headline for the accompanying cover story inside the magazine read: "Great Expectations: Lightning-Quick Michael Vick is Poised to Redefine the Quarterback Position" (Barber 2002).

In 2005, five Black quarterbacks started regularly among the 32 NFL teams, and another 10 populated the rosters as backups (NFL Players Page 2005). Until starter Byron Leftwich suffered a season-ending injury, all three quarterbacks listed on the Jacksonville Jaguars' depth chart were black, believed to be a first in league history (NFL Players Page 2005). This surge of Black quarterbacks into the sport's primary, defining playing position, once thought impossible in recent sport lore, clearly indicates change in philosophical agendas of NFL management (Entine 2001) and presents new horizons in the sport marketing industry.

THE ROLES OF IMAGES IN ADVERTISING

At the heart of the discussion of transformation and Black NFL quarterbacks, in terms of either cause or effect, lies the necessity of examining the pertinence of the roles of images projected by advertising as promotional components of marketing plans and how those images are translated, consumed, and internalized by consumers as parts of their social and cultural identities.

The Impact of Images in Advertising

In the broadest sense, according to Stern, Sinkhan and Jaju (2001), the word *image* is derived from the Greek term *ikon* that refers to the verbal creation of an almost invisible representation of something in the mind's eye. Essentially, an image transforms physical stimuli created by real-world and/or media representation into mental pictures. This makes deriving a precise, universal meaning of the term image is inherently difficult because it incorporates at least four binaries: words/pictures, text/mind, world/mind, and structure/process (Stern et al. 2001).

As it pertains to marketing, *image* is an overall, gestalt impression or perception located in stakeholders' minds that is the outcome of a transaction in which signals are emitted by a marketing unit and are received and organized into a mental perception of the sending unit by a receptor (Stern et al. 2001).

In the field of marketing, the powerful concept of image becomes critical across several facets of the marketing mix. Image power springs from the human need to simplify buying decisions by creating symbolic representations to embody a network of salient meanings (Hite and Bellizzi 1985; Lindquist 1975). These representations serve as decision guidelines in situations of uncertainty, which are characteristic of an environment driven by rapid technological change. Accordingly, as marketing shifts from tangible to intangible offerings like services and e-commerce, the functions of images in marketing accumulate added importance as consumers' decisions become based less on an entity's physical attributes and functional benefits and more on its symbolic associations, expressiveness (Swan and Combs 1976), psychosocial aspects (Liechty and Churchill 1979), and intangible attributes (Hirschman 1980).

The focus of empirical research seeking to definitively characterize the concept of image varies depending on the aspect of the image being studied (Stern et al. 2001). It can refer to

a real-world sending entity like a firm, product/brand, or store; a psychological entity such as a pattern of beliefs and feelings in a consumer's mind stimulated by associations with the real-world entity; or advertising/public relations messages. In effect, the term refers to three different domains of reality: the external world, or tangible, physical entities; the mind of the consumer, where mental pictures are created; and the textual intermediary between them, embodied by verbal and pictorial representations in media.

Generic definitions of *brand image* treat the term as a broad abstraction, emphasizing both consumer perceptions and divergence between perception and reality. Symbolic definitions of brand image refer to a set of objects, actions, words, pictures, and/or complex human behaviors that serve as stand-ins for other ideas or feelings (Levy 1958). Meaning and message definitions focus on the underlying meaning that consumers ascribe to a product. Personification definitions treat brand images in terms of human characteristics in which a brand is described as if it were a human being (Dobni and Sinkhan 1990). Cognitive/psychological definitions emphasize the link between extrinsic attributes of a real-world brand and image as a mental construct developed by the consumer. Consumer identity is fluid, not fixed, in a constant state of flux because consumers create self-images within the moment (Firat, Dholakia and Venkatesh 1995).

Images, Ethnicity, and Social Construct

As might be expected, several perspectives exist concerning the linkages between advertising images, ethnicity, culture, and identity formation. Social and cultural identities are affected by one's social surroundings and the kind of product being purchased (Zmud 1992). Taylor and Guttman (1992) argue that identity is partially shaped by recognition or misrecognition of others; a person or group can suffer certain damage and distortion if society reflects a demeaning image of it, which can be viewed as a form of oppression. Furthermore, according to Burton

(2002), ethnic categories such as African-American and Hispanic are social and political construct categories that reinforce the idea of internal sameness, have little empirical meaning beyond the most stereotypical ways, and do little to boost understanding of complex empirical realities of populations, collectively described by Stanfield and Dennis (1993) as the “fallacy of homogeneity” (p. 19). Because of this fallacy, status distinctions such as class, gender, and ethnoregionalism have been marginalized (Burton 2002).

With specific applications to marketing, Bouchet (1995) described ethnicity as a bricolage used to create an a la carte lifestyle. Consumer culture-swapping frustrates marketers’ attempts to target consumers strictly by demographic variables or product usage, since goods are assigned different meanings as consumers move between identities (Burton 2002). Because of this culture-swapping, positivist attempts to understand consumer behavior as attached to a wide range of products and services becomes difficult (Oswald 1999), especially since different groups form different images (Stern et al. 2001).

FRAMEWORK APPLICATIONS

Smith and Yang (2004) scrutinize the theory of creativity in advertising by examining the concept of creativity in advertisements along two primary determinants: something must be new, imaginative, different, or unique—commonly referred to as *divergence*—and the divergent thing must solve a problem or have some type of *relevance*. Their theory revolves around the basic premise proposed by Amabile (1996): a product or response will be judged to be creative to the extent that it is a novel and appropriate, useful, correct, or valuable response to the task at hand. Of the two factors, divergence emerges as the primary element of creativity around which the factor of relevance must be shaped, as supported by Tellis (1998), who defined creativity as productive divergence, and Guilford (1950, 1956). Seven of Guilford’s (1950, 1956) factors of creativity

were related to divergence: sensitivity to problems, fluency (number of ideas), novelty, flexibility, synthesis, redefinition/reorganization, and complexity, while only one factor was related to relevance: evaluation/shaping.

In connection to the broader social perspective of marketing, the concepts of divergence and relevance are uniquely determined by social context or recognition (Getzels and Csikszentmihalyi 1975; MacKinnon 1962) and will demonstrate a significant interaction effect on ad notice, motivation to process ad, depth of ad processing, and consumer responses (Smith and Yang 2004).

Divergence

Divergence means that advertisements must contain elements that are novel, different, or unusual in some way (Smith and Yang 2004). Divergence can be used in the execution elements of ads, including layout and design, celebrity spokespeople, unusual graphics, etc., and or the brand/informational elements of ads, such as clever copy, showing new uses for the product, unusual transformations of the product, etc. (Smith and Yang 2004). Ironically, Smith and Yang (2004) contend that brand managers are cautious and risk averse and thus typically prefer ads that are more familiar and comfortable—an “anti-divergence” attitude.

According to Smith and Yang (2004), ads with divergence will:

- receive significantly more notice than ads with low divergence.
- attract more attention and cause higher motivation and depth of message processing.
- produce higher motivation to process them in order to attain closure.
- cause significantly more motivation to process them when they correspond with the consumer’s divergent production system.
- cause the consumer to have significantly more favorable responses when they correspond with the consumer’s divergent production system.

- receive greater processing depth when containing strong brand-related divergent elements.
- resist wear-out significantly longer.
- serve as a peripheral cue in the persuasion process when contained in execution elements.
- motivate central processing of the brand message when contained in brand/message elements.
- produce significantly more favorable cognitive and affective responses.
- produce better consumer ad memory when contained in execution elements.
- produce better consumer brand memory when contained in brand/message elements.

As might be surmised from the above list, when properly executed, divergence can play a considerable role in consumer engagement. The pre-attentive, attention, and motivation effects of divergent execution elements will be significantly greater when consumer involvement is low than when consumer involvement is high (Smith and Yang 2004). Accordingly, in the early stages of an ad campaign, most of the ad's resources should be devoted to divergence to maximize the contrasting effects to gain greater attention and awareness. As campaign goals move to interest and comprehension, more of the ad's resources should be devoted to relevance (especially brand/message elements) and less to divergence (Smith and Yang 2004).

Relevance

Once a divergent idea is produced, it must be shaped in a manner to make it relevant, which is the second stage of creativity determined by the convergent production system in Guilford's (1956) model. To be relevant, the ad must be meaningful, appropriate, or valuable to the audience; hence, it can then be regarded as a stimulus property where some aspect of an advertisement is important, meaningful, or valuable to the customer (Smith and Yang 2004). Ads must also have ad-consumer relevance, which exists when the stimulus properties of the ad create a meaningful link to

the consumer; and a brand-consumer relevance, which occurs when an ad creates a meaningful link between the brand and the consumer (Smith and Yang 2004).

To properly underscore relevance in advertisements, non-brand cues must also be appropriate, including layout and design, non-brand photographs or graphics, color, music, etc. (Smith and Yang 2004). In the context of customer engagement, relevance can increase pre-attentive processing and attention, motivation to process, and depth of processing (Greenwald and Leavitt 1984; MacInnis and Jaworski 1989).

Smith and Yang's Theoretical Framework

Smith and Yang's (2004) five-pronged framework was proposed after their theoretical model development of key processing and response issues associated with ad divergence as a primary component of advertising creativity. Additionally, they proposed five broad conceptual domain areas labeled "processes" from which creativity in advertising could be considered: *communication, management, societal, group, and personal*. While these process category names could be considered a sufficient framework per se within which to examine Black NFL quarterbacks and postmodern sport marketing, Smith and Yang's (2004) definitions of the five processes require a deeper examination, yet they still provide a very applicable and functional framework that essentially representative of a cyclical marketing pattern.

First, the framework (Smith and Yang 2004) begins by discussing creativity in the communication process, which addresses advertising as a major form of communication between companies and customers, involving issues related to image, branding, and promotion, including persuasion, information processing, and consumer response. Second, the framework addresses creativity in the advertising management process as part of the promotional mix and relates it to the selection

of proper personnel who understand appropriate creative strategies, tactics, and goals necessary to plan effective advertising campaigns and formulate effective ads. Third, the framework approaches creativity as a societal process and the significant effects advertising has upon society and popular culture, including cross-cultural differences in processing creative ads. Fourth, the framework addresses creativity as a group process, including issues of majority/minority influence and personal/social identity. Finally, the framework concludes with creativity as a personal process, examining how advertising is processed by individual consumers and addressing issues of consumer growth, creativity, self-actualization, self-conceptualization, and the impact of these variables on ad effectiveness. Thus, the creative framework arrives cyclically again at its point of formation: as a major form of company-to-customer communication.

CREATIVITY IN THE COMMUNICATION PROCESS

Smith and Yang (2004) describe advertising as a major form of communication between companies and their customers. Accordingly, they identify key communication issues involved in advertising creativity such as persuasion, information processing, and consumer response, as well as such issues as using creativity to position the image of the company, introducing new products or brand extensions, and encouraging consumers to participate in promotional activities (among others). Obviously, the importance of the concepts of divergence and relevance clearly emerges for marketers when considering such communication-based issues in advertising.

Utilizing athletes as celebrity endorsers has long been a standard marketing practice. In fact, in 1995, U.S. companies paid more than \$1 billion to 2,000 athletes for endorsement deals, representing ten percent of the expenditures on corporate sponsorships as a specific promotion strategy (Van Hoecke, Van Hoecke, DeKnop and Taks 2002). Few segments of society offer such broad visibility

and unique opportunities for corporations to connect with consumers as athletes and sport platforms. Endorsements involve enlisting a high-profile individual to use his/her fame or position to assist a company in promoting or selling a product or to enhance the image of that product; often, this celebrity is an athlete (Irwin, Sutton and McCarthy 2002).

While use of celebrity athletes as pitchpersons for brands is a well analyzed and researched topic, as the growing popularity of sport, viewing contact opportunities, and the affinity syndrome of fan/athlete relationships have all further heightened the demand for sport celebrity endorsements (particularly the Black NFL quarterback as of late), arguments perpetrated by several researchers present conflicting perspectives on the relevance of athletes as spokespersons, particularly Black males. Often, the roots of these arguments revolve around the concept that Black athletes as celebrity endorsers, who are often used in arguably the most extremely creative manners in all of advertising, walk a fine line between being divergent in a relevant manner and being divergent in an objectionable manner.

Various practices of advertising, the media's primary source of income as well as a major form of company-to-consumer communication (Smith and Yang 2004), have been widely debated by numerous scholars (Andrews 1996; Hoberman 1997; Wilson 1997) regarding characterizations of minorities.

On one hand, images of Blacks in pro-social, positive commercial spokesperson roles that could be considered divergent yet relevant (and thus creative according to the Smith and Yang [2004] rubric) have received criticism (Wilson 1997). Labeled as portrayals of *enlightened racism*, critics highlight several perceived problems with such pro-social, positive advertising images, including "taming" Black athletes into non-threatening, racially neutral persona, allowing them to become "organizational men," or "a Black version of a White cultural model," to become more appealing and palatable to Whites (Wilson

1997, p. 181). Second, such images perpetuate the notion of enlightened racism by promoting “mythologized notions of individuals and meritocracy” which allow Whites to deny the existence of institutionalized racism in both sport and American society (Wilson 1997, p. 181). Third, the creation of Michael Jordan as a cultural icon of American virtue presents for critics a case study of the illusion of the non-existent open class structure, racial tolerance, economic mobility, and availability of the American dream for Blacks (Andrews 1996).

On the other hand, a common complaint voiced by critics concerns the commercial associations of Blacks with ghetto themes, elements, and images, which, in light of the Smith and Yang (2004) rubric, could be considered overly divergent and therefore irrelevant. Such an otherwise mild start as early Nike Air Jordan campaigns featuring Jordan amid the backdrop of a city playground in the mid-1980s (Andrews 1996) gave way to ghetto-themed commercials in the mid-1990s (Wilson 1997).

Hoberman’s (1997) assessment of these portrayals of Black male images could likely be best summarized by the application of the Smith and Yang (2004) creativity rubric, essentially that, in dealing with the Black male’s aggressive modern image and its threat to alienate the White, expendable-income population (i.e., high levels of divergence), corporations and leagues have sought to rationalize and counterbalance these displays of Black assertiveness (i.e., temper high levels of divergence with relevance). According to Hoberman (1997) with the cooperation of the sporting press, this counteractivity is done in a two-fold manner. First, the image of the Black male is domesticated through dissolving ethnic blackness into a sporting world that is exclusively and impeccably White by using such techniques as advertisements for fashionable clothing which picture him as well-groomed amid the sports of dynamic imperial males, including golf, tennis, rowing, sailing, and polo (Hoberman 1997), such as Charles Barkley in Right Guard deodorant commercials. Second, the Black man’s body is used to

accentuate vulnerability, either through publication of naked Black male torsos in primitive, deprived, National Geographic fashion, or as a comic celebration of the obese Black athlete, who is symbolically neutered the moment he becomes another pictorial device as a jolly fat man (Hoberman 1997), such as Coca-Cola ads featuring former Chicago Bears defensive lineman William “The Refrigerator” Perry.

Consequently, Hoberman (1997) says, such narrow similarities in typical modern thought processes between the images of Black, physically imposing males within the sporting context and those outside it have often caused the lines of demarcation between the Black athlete and the Black thug to blur. Because of the extraordinary requirements of the sporting realm, which require Black males to act out their aggressions as spectacular athletes, such threatening behavior causes them to become twins with the dangerous violent Black male (Hoberman 1997). Fueled by the media coverage/slant/glorification, Hoberman (1997) maintains that Black male style has become a product of the fusion of Black athletes, rappers, and criminals into a single menacing figure which is offensive to many Blacks as well as Whites.

Regardless of how extreme marketers may perceive the arguments of the aforementioned researchers to be, their works clearly indicate the applicability of Smith and Yang’s (2004) rubric to sport marketing practices, specifically that divergence must be carefully tempered with relevance to achieve creativity and thus be optimally positioned for successful advertising.

CREATIVITY IN THE MANAGEMENT PROCESS

Smith and Yang (2004) maintain that advertising as an element of the promotional mix must be carefully managed to maximize sales. To ensure greater creativity in advertising, Smith and Yang (2004) advocate the facilitation of creative processes through careful structuring of the organization, its plans,

and the selection of personnel who understand elements of creativity (divergence and relevance) and can effectively stimulate creative processes.

Media and Race

One topic of vigorous scholarly debate concerns racial representation in and throughout the American media (Dates and Barlow 1990; Montgomery 1989). Some experts attribute negative slants toward minorities to the abundance of White journalists within the media, particularly in sports journalism, providing what Wilson (1997) calls a misplaced charge for a disproportionately White group to critique the character of the world's most visible minorities. White television sportscasters' traditional verbal portrayals of "natural" Black athletes and "thinking" White athletes are also hypothesized to perpetuate racial stereotypes (Hoberman 1997, p. xv; Rainville and McCormick 1977).

In studying print media's attribution of the performances of Black and White quarterbacks, Murrell and Curtis (1994) measured attribution using *locus of performance* (internally/externally affected), *stability* (consistency/reliability of the cause), and *controllability* (intentional/accidental). Results indicated locus of performance did not differ by race, but significant differences were noted in stability and controllability attributions, indicating perceived lack of judgment and motivation in Black athletes among sportswriters, consistent with their allegedly perpetuated views of Black players as reflex-oriented, genetically bred athletes (Murrell and Curtis 1994).

Sport coverage by electronic and print media has grown considerably and, combined with the explosive growth of the sport landscape, has transformed the sports market into a multi-segment industry which competes with leisure organizations of every imaginable type for discretionary consumer spending. As a result of the plethora of sport leisure offerings created by the explosive growth of the sport landscape, consumers became more complex in their needs

as well as their demographic makeup (Douvis and Douvis 2000).

Marketing Implications

Ways in which athletes are framed by the media may have direct implications on companies' outlooks on potential brand essences of certain athlete. Sports figures hold extremely powerful images that can be transferred and imposed via the media to multiple outlets. These perceptions may have direct implications to notions of created superstars, which could lead to increased celebrity endorsement value.

While journalism and advertising are distinctive communication functions, they are also undeniably connected as such. According to Nichols, Moynahan, Hall and Taylor (2002), both print and electronic advertisements share at least a moderate connection to media content alongside which they appear and may even directly influence content selection.

The Shifting Landscape

Attention to underrepresented groups and efforts toward affirmative action to make the sport marketing and management landscape more inclusive and representative of society as a whole has never been greater in the sport industry (Blann and Armstrong 2003). As Smith and Yang (2004) indicated in their description of the importance of creativity in the management process, organizations must successfully hire, manage, and motivate creative personnel who understand and can develop creative activities and methods. In the sport industry and related industries, more organizations are hiring managers of color, both on the field (coaches) and off the field (front-office personnel and prominent journalists) and have affirmative action plans to perpetuate that process (Blann and Armstrong 2003).

This shift in the landscape of the sport industry (as discussed in greater detail in the subsequent "Creativity as a Group Process" section of this paper) might explain reasons for the increased relevance of the divergent Black quarterback in

the NFL, essentially that an increased number of Blacks in on-field and off-field management roles may have begun to offset entrenched journalistic slants by applying an understanding of how to make divergent entities relevant to target markets through creativity in advertising.

CREATIVITY AS A SOCIETAL PROCESS

Experts' opinions on the precise role of the mass media vary; some say that media simply reflect and describe events. Others argue that media actually shape public perception by selecting, defining, and labeling certain people and events as significant, while others go largely ignored (Murrell and Curtis 1994). Others allege that the media wields immeasurable influence as "the point at which power intersects with discourse in an attempt to normalize specific behavior patterns and the forms of authority associated with them" (Andrews 1996, p. 126). Concurrently, as a primary component of media, Smith and Yang (2004) opine that advertising has considerable effects on society. Some of the more important outcomes related to creativity include effects on popular culture, advertising as commercial art, and cross-cultural differences in processing creative ads.

Popular Culture and Cross-Cultural Image Constructs

According to Rose and Friedman (1997), as television has embedded itself into the fabric of modern life, its programs and their respective audiences are in a continuous process of dialogue. While the content of film/television constructs preferred positions for spectators, the meanings that viewers take from a cultural text will be constructed differently according to the historical, cultural, and institutional contexts within which those individual interpretations are made. Further, the production format of televised sports heavily influences the numbers of racial/ethnic images seen by the viewer population, may further reinforce the notion of the creation of stardom by the media and its various forms of exposure and coverage, and

may directly impact viewers' psychological and social perceptions of race and lead to the construction of powerful images (Rose and Freidman 1997).

Construction of Powerful Black Images

While little agreement exists on most racial issues, one such corroborated topic of empirical agreement involves the alleged perpetuation of racism through stereotyped images of the Black male. This perpetuation involves unstable, conflicting perceptions of positive and negative images of the Black male, also called "floating racial signifiers" or "floating images" (Andrews 1996, p. 126; Wilson 1997, p. 185). Dynamic, complex, and contradictory overlaps in identity between "good Blacks" and "bad Blacks" cause defining what "being Black" actually means to be difficult at best (Andrews 1996, p. 129). This floating phenomenon may even be seen within the portrayals of one individual's image, thereby further complicating the good Black/bad Black construct and serving to maintain racist ideologies through oscillating representations (Wilson 1997).

Regarding sport, several studies suggest that mass media portrayals of Blacks in sport indeed play influential roles in constructing images of Black athletes (Murrell and Curtis 1994; Wilson 1997), and that racial stereotyping of Black athletes in sports media is covert and systematic (Sabo et al. 1995; Shropshire 1996; Brooks and Althouse 2000). Such suggestions can easily be inferred to the sport of football, which has been specifically researched in at least two studies.

In an examination of the performance attributions of three White and three Black NFL quarterbacks, Murrell and Curtis (1994) analyzed print media passages about the quarterbacks and concluded that performances of the Black quarterbacks were often attributed to natural ability, while performances of the White quarterbacks were often credited to hard work. Also, in a similar analysis of radio broadcasts by Rainville and McCormick

(1977), White football players were praised more frequently than Black football players by radio broadcast announcers.

The Interactivity of Creativity and Culture

While care must be taken in generating and applying results of general media content studies to marketing/advertising theory, the possibility and likelihood that similar patterns of representation may occur in the constructs and consumer interpretations of advertisements make the studies relevant for consideration. Their results become particularly salient when examining advertisement as a creative function of divergence and relevance, which, when considering results of the aforementioned studies, will likely vary from one market segment to another.

Generalizations of the studies' results that underscore the powerful influence that media wields over image construction, along with the consequential subjective individual interpretations of those constructs, could easily be inferred to the realm of advertising. Inferred results also emphasize the critical function of relevance in the Smith and Yang (2004) rubric, i.e., divergence may or may not necessarily be accepted as relevant by certain target segment populations. In terms of the NFL's Black quarterbacks, this principle can be clearly seen in a dearth of Black quarterback product spokesmen until very recently (e.g., Michael Vick, Donovan McNabb), despite their proven successes throughout the latter years of the 20th Century (e.g., Warren Moon, Randall Cunningham, and Doug Williams, who was named Most Valuable Player of Super Bowl XXII in 1988 but not asked to do the traditional post-game Disney World endorsement, which ordinarily is granted to the Super Bowl MVP).

CREATIVITY AS A GROUP PROCESS

In assessing creativity as a group process, Smith and Yang (2004) indicate that advertising creativity is typically the result of team-oriented collaboration. Specific issues pertinent to this collaboration include effects of

majority/minority influence and the role of personal/social identity. An assessment of sport sociology literature underscores the applicability of Smith and Yang's (2004) group process and creativity theories to the on-field management of the NFL's Black quarterbacks and may explain their historic virtual absence from mainstream sport marketing until very recent years.

Stacking

According to Entine (2001; 2003), past patterns of NFL coach and executive behavior indicate that the position of quarterback in the NFL has, until very recently, been very guarded by coaches and executives not willing to risk performance in such a critical position on players who did not fit preconceived perceptions of ones possessing characteristics necessary for proper positional execution.

One of the most documented and researched topics of sports sociology is the practice of *stacking*, or positional segregation of minorities in positions which require more manual dexterity and less leadership qualities and result in players from certain racial or ethnic group being either over- or underrepresented at certain positions in team sports (Coakley 1994). This phenomenon implies that minorities are assigned to play positions on the basis of their racial status instead of their achievements (Gonzalez 1994). Such a phenomenon often results in minorities being placed in positions removed from the cerebral hub of the game's interactivity, creativity, leadership, and strategy, relegating them to a supporting capacity instead of a dominant role and often creating competition among themselves for positions, thereby reducing the number of minorities on the roster (Gonzalez 1994). In the game of football, such cerebral positions might include quarterback, center, and inside linebacker (Coakley 1994).

Ramifications of Stacking

Smith and Seff (1989) maintain that stacking represents a situation of double jeopardy for

minorities. In terms of participation in sports, the end results of stacking are that minorities occupy positions that do not put them in direct contact with Whites, force them to follow the dictates of racial stereotyping, and alleviate them from having significant control over the outcome of the game defensively. Beyond these negative on-field ramifications, fewer off-field roles may subsequently be available for minorities after their playing careers are finished (Smith and Seff 1989).

According to Grusky (1963), an individual's position in an organization's formal structure contributes to cultivation of role skills which are vital for upward career mobility. Upon examination of 12 sport leadership recruitment studies, Gonzalez (1994) noted that all studies drew the same conclusion concerning stacking and its influence on managerial and coaching recruitment: i.e., "Grusky's hypothesis of high interactors being selected more often than low interactors for managerial positions appears to be confirmed" (Leonard, Ostrosky and Hutchendorf 1990, p. 299). Furthermore, Loy, Curtis, and Sage (1978) added that, in accounting for leadership recruitment between central and noncentral positions, the specific playing positions, not just the positional category, accounted for most of the differences observed.

According to Robbins and Coulter (2005) and Blann and Armstrong (2003), drawing upon diverse employees can be valuable to management decision-making because of fresh perspectives, flexibility, creativity, and unique solutions. As discussed previously in the "Creativity in Management" section of this paper, a shift in the landscape of the sport industry might explain reasons for the increased relevance of the divergent Black quarterback in the NFL. As numbers, prominence, influence, and accomplishments of Black quarterbacks and coaches in NFL ranks increase the presence of Blacks in on-field playing and management positions, so, too, might off-field management roles and presence increase, which would be indicative of the effects of minority influence on creativity specified by Smith and Yang

(2004). Theoretically, this enlarged influence increases organizational effectiveness (per Robbins and Coulter [2005] and Blann and Armstrong [2003]) in marketing efforts involving Black NFL quarterbacks by applying an understanding of how to make divergent entities relevant to target markets through creativity in advertising, which represents the role of personal/social identity identified by Smith and Yang (2004).

Image as it pertains to *advertising* versus image as it pertains to *positional development* continues to be a challenge in understanding the effective marketing of the Black NFL quarterback. Perhaps this could be construed as external imaging, which is what this paper primarily discussed, versus internal imaging, which is what scientific examinations of sport sociological phenomena like stacking, centrality, and marginality continue to address. Regarding the Black quarterback, the NFL must effectively deal with these concepts of image in both defining and visioning the broader value of the Black quarterback, particularly as the league, its teams, and its marketing partners take greater initiative in defining images for consumers (review blurb about 2002 NFL Insider cover and story featuring Michael Vick in the "Chronology and History" section, and see further discussion in "Management and Marketing Congruency" subsection of this paper).

CREATIVITY AS A PERSONAL PROCESS

In discussing creativity as a personal process, Smith and Yang (2004) bring their argument to its most basic level by applying it to consumer processing, specifically that advertising creativity is processed by individual consumers and can have personal ramifications, including issues involving advertising as a source of consumer growth, consumer creativity, consumer self-actualization, consumer self-concept, and the impact of these individual difference variables on the effectiveness of creative ads.

Developing Self-Schema

In developing racial awareness and the notion of one's own race, Harrison (1995) maintains that individuals construct elaborate self-schema about their races which are used as frameworks of reference for evaluating preferences and abilities. This racial awareness has been documented as early as preschool ages in the specific forms of reactions about appearance; comments on skin color, hair texture, and facial features; cognitive development; and direct and indirect forms of interaction (Harrison 1995). While direct interactions may occur at such places as school or the neighborhood, indirect interactions include watching television and movies, thereby increasing the consequences of the images portrayed by the media (Harrison 1995).

In examining the development of self-schema in youths, Harrison (1995) combined findings of multiple studies to conclude that Black youths demonstrate racial awareness early in life. One link to such early cognizance may be the permeation of television in the Black household. Because of fewer resources, decreased mobility, and therefore fewer entertainment alternatives, television is often employed as an inexpensive babysitter or third parent in many Black households; through this overabundance of television exposure comes a powerful influence on Black youths as they observe race portrayals within the media (Harrison 1995).

Modeling from Images

The development of one's self-schema may be greatly influenced by both his/her personal expectations and those of others (Harrison 1995). Accordingly, image consumers, particularly youths, may overemphasize these media-projected elements within their own behavior, thus inadvertently perpetuating and internalizing racial stereotypes (Murrell and Curtis 1994). Due to youths' lack of experience in dealing with media images, they are more likely to internalize these images than most adults, and thus may internalize such notions as

natural athletic abilities of Black athletes as opposed to cerebral athletic proficiencies of White athletes.

The findings of Harrison (1995) uphold Smith and Yang's (2004) assertions about the personal ramifications of advertising creativity's procession by individual consumers, as these studies' findings directly examine consumers' growth, creativity, self-actualization, self-concept, and the impact of these individual variables on the effectiveness of creative material. All aforementioned consumer issues, coupled with the findings of Harrison (1995) and Murrell and Curtis (1994), become relevant to the postmodern marketing of Black NFL quarterbacks in a creative context that is both divergent and relevant. This contention of "creativity as a personal process" as part of a general theory of creativity proposed by Smith and Yang (2004, p. 47) becomes a critical juncture in otherwise cyclical patterns of sociocultural phenomena discussed throughout previous sections of this paper. It is a strategic inflection point where sport marketers can have direct influences on large portions of society through applications of relevance to divergence.

Lowe (1996) argues that the linkages between culture and identity formation are formed as much horizontally between communities as they are transmitted vertically from generation to generation. Ultimately, the Black NFL quarterback will become much more valuable as he has the ability though the innate divergence and creativity on the field to evoke passion, meaningfulness, and relevance off the field in product categories and services that will not only last for long periods of time, but will also allow a perpetual connection to generations.

DISCUSSIONS & IMPLICATIONS

This work fills a gap in the sport marketing discipline and a call for future research described by Douvis and Douvis (2000) by connecting the theories of social sciences and the epistemology of consumer sciences to sport marketing research through the application of

theoretical concepts and models from the broader areas of psychology and consumer behavior to the evolving epistemological area of sport advertising.

On-Field Development & Management

On the playing field, the Black NFL quarterback has emerged to earn his position through objective competition (Sullivan 2003). Entine (2001) cites comments by veteran NFL head coaches Tony Dungy and Dennis Green (both of whom are Black), who claimed that, until very recent years, a particular quarterback prototype perpetually existed in the NFL: a drop-back passer with a cannon-like arm who was relatively tall and could stay in the pocket, reading defenses and waiting until the proper split-second moment to pass the ball. Blacks like Doug Williams who fit that mold got a chance to compete at the position, while those who did not fit that mold did not get a chance (Entine 2001). In today's game, with elements of speed and strength so predominant among NFL defenses, running by modern NFL quarterbacks (particularly Black quarterbacks) is now included in offensive game plans with the specific intent (or at least the option) to advance the ball for positive yardage, score from anywhere on the field, or add dimensions of deception. According to Green (Entine, 2001), "...we all need athletic quarterbacks. Every coach is looking for mobility. It's just not a black-white thing anymore (p. 2)."

Off-Field Management & Marketing

According to Entine (2001), the evolved quarterback prototype is not the only reason why Blacks are receiving more opportunities to hold the quarterback position: "...African-Americans are getting more opportunities because the people making decisions in the NFL have changed, the way the media talks about Black quarterbacks has changed, and the position itself requires more athleticism. And, more than anything else, sports is a business. The bottom line is performance" (p. 2).

Such a surge of Black quarterbacks in the NFL appears to be progressing to previously unimagined levels and has simultaneously created new challenges for marketers. As the phenomenon of the Black NFL quarterback continues to develop athletically, socially, and traditionally, so, too, will marketing strategies. However, this phenomenon has only begun, and its dynamic progression is clearly visible when considering two ways in which Black NFL quarterbacks are marketed.

Marketing Through the Black NFL Quarterback

First, we presently observe marketing *through* the Black NFL quarterback, which utilizes the flashy nature of his physical skills to pitch the product. Such examples are product advertisements featuring Michael Vick, e.g., the EA Sports video game ads which highlight the user's computer-generated ability to reproduce Vick's capabilities electronically; the Gatorade ads featuring Vick perspiring profusely after a physically amazing but exhausting exhibition of his skills; and the Nike shoe ads featuring a science-fiction-like football game settings in which Vick must rely on his physical abilities to run a gauntlet of fantastic challenges. In these ads, Vick's personality is not featured with remotely the same emphasis as his motor skills, reverting to issues raised by Andrews (1996) and Wilson (1997).

Marketing of the Black NFL Quarterback

On the other hand, modern promotion of the Black NFL quarterback has also taken the form of marketing *of* the Black NFL quarterback, which features more of the pro-social personality of the player and downplays his physical abilities. One example includes the Campbell's Chunky Soup advertisements featuring Donovan McNabb, a Black NFL quarterback not known as much for his blazing speed or rifle arm as his cool demeanor, ability to both run and pass reasonably well, and his leadership ability. These ads feature McNabb and an actress portraying his mother circulating throughout a neighborhood, delivering

nutritious-looking soup meals to busy, hungry people. McNabb's football uniform is basically the only connection to the sport of football at all.

Unlike the conclusions of Tellis (1998) and Guilford (1950, 1956), relevance takes priority over divergence in the postmodern sport marketing field with regard to Black NFL quarterbacks because, per Smith and Yang (2004), marketing goals associated with them now parallel their on-field development by moving from attention/awareness aims to interest/comprehension aims.

The two distinct approaches of the marketing *through* the Black quarterback and marketing *of* the Black quarterback are direct reflections of the strategic crossroads at which the NFL and those companies desiring to market through its superstars stand and will be a critical area of future study in the field of sport marketing.

Management and Marketing Congruency

In light of an increasingly racially and ethnically diverse population of sport consumers, one of the greatest challenges sport marketers may face is ascertaining the manner in which socio-cultural and environmental market factors influence sport consumption (Hofacre and Burman 1992), since the individual sport consumer influences both the corporate and media entities that are helping to underwrite the sport (Gladden, Irwin and Sutton 2001). Keller (1993) proposes three keys to forming brand associations in the minds of consumers: *strength*, *favorability*, and *uniqueness*. Strong brands in the 21st Century will surpass other brands through achieving better understanding of consumers' needs, wants, and desires to create marketing programs that fulfill and surpass consumers' expectations (Keller 1993). Loyalty is formed in two ways: consumers' personal relationships with brands, and through construction of strong user communities around brands (Gladden, Irwin and Sutton 2001).

Accordingly, building better relationships with customers must become an integral component of the efforts of sport marketers (Gladden, Irwin and Sutton 2001). As evidenced by the modern marketing practices involving Black NFL quarterbacks, the NFL and marketers are apparently no longer content to passively allow independent, individual post-marketing construction of images to be created by consumers, then react accordingly. Instead, marketers have pre-defined the images for the consumer as extensions of values delineated by the NFL and/or marketers, who have used sport marketing to communicate to individuals what the images represent, both in cases of marketing *through* the Black quarterback and marketing *of* the Black quarterback.

In assessing the phenomenon of the Black quarterback in the NFL, notions of possibly redefined celebrity sport endorsers and concerns over sociocultural, diversity, and race issues emerge. Perceptions associated with the building of athletes as spokesperson commodities are intrinsically connected to the changing of socially constructed images directly related to race, and, without question, the evolution of the prototypical position of quarterback (the icon of virtually every football team and arguably the most iconic player position in all of sport) has impacted those constructs for both the public and marketers, who prize creativity in advertising, as explained by Smith and Yang (2004).

The Creative Icon

Because of the on-field management and off-field marketing practices surrounding him, the NFL's Black quarterback is arguably the epitome (or icon) of the Smith and Yang (2004) model of creativity in sport marketing as defined by divergence and relevance. The reason the Black NFL quarterback is the new icon is because he produces creativity as defined by divergence in a relevant context in both sport *management* and sport *marketing* contexts. In management of player personnel, the demand of the modern NFL game for the athletic talents possessed by the Black

quarterback has caused *divergence* (the triple-threat quarterback who can give, throw, or run the ball effectively on any given play, as opposed to the drop-back pocket passer) in the NFL quarterback prototype that is now *relevant* to the speed, pace, and strategy at which the modern game of professional football is played. In marketing, the Black NFL quarterback is *divergent* along the lines of ethnicity (he is not White) and *relevant* in that he possesses several highly evident characteristics that are stimulating to consumer audiences: he is highly recognizable, is very entertaining and exciting to watch, and, as such, evokes strong bursts of emotion.

Widely recognized as the leading sport property in the United States, the National Football League prioritizes maintaining its position on the cutting edge of sport management and marketing. Though operating from a position of strength, to stay No. 1, the NFL must find ways to inspire the next generation of NFL consumers. Through its management and marketing of the Black quarterback within the context of creativity as a product of divergence and relevance (Smith and Yang 2004), the NFL has set an iconic standard for postmodern sport marketing practices.

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