

The Quarterbacks of the NFL Draft: A Study into the Media Coverage of the 2012 & 2020 First  
Round Quarterbacks

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## **Abstract**

This study seeks to identify, understand, and compare the themes created, by the print media, utilized to ascribe identity to college quarterbacks as they are entering the NFL Draft. The study will compare the four first-round quarterbacks from the 2020 NFL Draft and four first-round quarterbacks from the 2012 NFL Draft; which because of its historic nature of being the first draft to include a white and Black quarterback of drafted number one and two, respectively, is used as a baseline. The study uses framing theory and previous research to understand the themes present in the media coverage of these quarterbacks from the 2020 NFL Draft and the 2012 NFL Draft.

A total of 112 newspaper articles from the Newsbank database were analyzed using qualitative research methods to compare the differences in frames that exist due to the racial background of each quarterback. Additionally, the difference in narratives and expressed frames, depicted by the print media over an eight-year time span were compared and examined using framing theory. The findings reveal that in both 2012 and 2020 there was racial framing utilized, in the sports media, when describing college quarterbacks and these racial frames functioned as a reflection of the existing racial views within society. The findings also displayed a clear difference between the frames present in 2012 and 2020. This difference, however, did not point toward a lessening of racial framing, but rather to a shift in the formation of the themes utilized, by the sports media, to create the racial frames.

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## General Audience Abstract

This study examines the sports media and its coverage of eight college quarterbacks as they enter the NFL Draft. The study utilizes the four quarterbacks drafted in both the 2012 and 2020 NFL Draft in order to understand the racial themes that are present throughout 112 newspaper articles. The unique history of the 2012 NFL Draft which featured a white and Black quarterback drafted one and two, respectively, serves as a baseline for the comparison of racially driven themes used by the media. Racially driven themes are used throughout sports media to produce narratives about sports topics for the public's consumption. This study seeks to understand the presence of racial themes throughout the sports media's coverage of college quarterbacks as well as the difference in these themes during the eight-year gap between 2012 and 2020. Previous research has shown the sports media to create narratives about athletes that attempt to mirror society. The changing racial landscape present in today's society serves as a backdrop to understand how the sports media alters its narrative choices in order to mimic society.

The findings reveal a presence of racially driven themes throughout the 112 articles for both the 2012 and 2020 NFL Drafts and display a clear difference between the formation and utilization of the themes used to create these narratives within the eight-year gap. Although the findings communicate a clear shift in the racial themes, they do not demonstrate a less racially driven form of theme development.

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## Introduction

The sports media has been shown to create narratives that interest sports viewers (Lewis & Weaver, 2015). Many of the themes are ‘classic’ media, or journalistic themes or myths (Lule, 2001), while others are unique to sports (Messner, Dunbar, & Hunt, 2000). Other themes that emerge in sports coverage include those based on the race of an athlete (Rada, 1996). It is important to understand the complex use of these themes in creating sports-related narratives. This study will examine the themes present in the media coverage of eight top collegiate quarterbacks entering both the 2020 and 2012 NFL Drafts.

The months leading up to an NFL Draft can be the most national media coverage a college player has ever received. According to Pettigano (2009), “I find that the lead-up to the NFL Draft is one of the most ridiculous displays of sensationalist sports media coverage you’ll find anywhere in the world.” Which makes an NFL draft the ideal vehicle for this study and an examination into the racial narratives used to frame each college quarterback as they enter the NFL Draft. An examination into the frames used by the media will allow for an in-depth interpretation of the changes in themes over an eight-year period, 2012-2020. By examining the 2012 and 2020 NFL Drafts, this research can be extrapolated to include similar and future cases as well as be a guide to the examination of media coverage in other sports, which adds to the existing research in media framing regarding race and sports. Using the NFL Draft as a platform, this thematic analysis creates a broader knowledge into the understanding of how themes are used in the media to create narratives designed to pique the viewing public’s interests in the months leading up to the NFL Draft.

The purpose of this study is to identify the differences in frames used by media in the coverage of racially diverse collegiate quarterbacks over an eight-year span, 2012-2020. Guided

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by framing theory and previous research, this study analyzed 112 news articles located in the Newsbank database to determine which themes are used in the framing of these individual narratives. This research examines how news print media's coverage and utilization of both traditional media and sports themes aid in the creation of narratives used to personify the eight individual quarterbacks. Framing theory is a sensitizing framework for the thematic analysis in an effort to discover the themes utilized throughout the months leading up to each draft with regards to the top collegiate quarterbacks.

Previous research will aid in the examination of prominent themes that run throughout the media-created narratives (Lewis & Weaver, 2015; Lule, 2001; Lumpkin & Williams, 1991; Messner et al., 2000; Rada, 1996). Billings and Hundley's research (2009) provides an understanding that there is congruence between the thematic analysis of non-white raced quarterbacks and the traditional, stereotypical frames used to frame Black quarterbacks within the media. This understanding allows for the study to expound upon existing research by delving into the intricacies of media created frames of differently raced quarterbacks. The study also utilized the four phases of theme development set forth by (Vaismoradi, Jones, Turunen & Snelgrove, 2015). The coupling of these principles combined with the uniqueness of the individual quarterbacks, and the understanding of acceptable comparison within races aids in furthering the thematic research of the sports media's use of framing regarding collegiate quarterbacks and race, and can provide a framework for future research.

### **Literature Review**

#### **Frames and Frameworks**

In communication research, framing is described as the production of content, (Tuchman, 1978) that molds public ideology (Gitlin, 1980). "Frames are the principles of selection,

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emphasis, and presentation composed of tacit theories about what exists, what happens, and what matters” (Saleem, 2007, p. 132). Frames help to shape an individual’s views and behaviors during social interactions. The term ‘frame,’ originally proposed in the field of ecology, refers to a conceptualization of understanding that allows animals to make sense of their interactions with others (Bateson, 1956). For example, frames allow a dog to distinguish whether it should fight or play with another dog. Goffman (1974) later expanded on this idea by setting the theoretical framework into the field of social sciences. The term ‘primary framework’ is used to describe the interpretations humans make about the surrounding characteristics of an interaction (Goffman, 1974). According to Goffman (1974), frames are a collection of perspectives and concepts created in order to arrange experiences and shape an individual’s actions. “... a primary framework is one that is seen as rendering what would otherwise be a meaningless aspect of the scene into something that is meaningful,” (Goffman, 1974, p. 21).

A frame or framework describes an individual’s understanding of what occurs within and around a social interaction and is distinguished by the portrayal of events within stories (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989; Saleem, 2007). A frame is a “central organizing idea or story line that provides meaning” (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989, p. 143). In media, these frames are carefully devised and crafted in order to bind with conceptional, theoretical, and fundamental tendencies in the viewer’s mind. Media builds these frames by highlighting and crafting distinct experiences or ideas using “certain key words, stock phrases, stereotyped images, sources of information, and sentences that provide thematically reinforcing clusters of facts and judgements” (Entman, 1993, p. 52). These media frames act as the pylons for which information is interpreted and organized within the individual’s mind (Reber & Berger, 2005) and therefore influence opinions by transferring strategic information to the public and the individual (Entman,

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1993). Therefore, media frames link messages found within news media to such intellectual elements as feelings, thoughts, goals, and motivations within the viewer (Iyanger, 1987; Price, Tewksbury & Powers, 1997).

By creating and using frames the media seeks to influence viewers by connecting with familiar cognitive elements within the brain allowing for certain feelings, emotions, and motivations to be triggered and therefore, enticing desired reactions within the viewer. “The cognitive elements that are activated from media coverage of an event are more likely to influence viewer interpretations, evaluations, and judgements with respect to that event” (Schenck-Hamlin, Proctor & Rumsey, 2000, p. 56-57). According to Iyengar (1994), the effect of these frames on the viewer, also known as ‘framing effect,’ occurs when the frame interacts with these cognitive elements within the viewer, activating particular elements, desired outcomes, over other such outcomes within the viewer’s mind. A viewer is more likely to be influenced by the media if a cognitive element has been activated within the memory (Krosnick & Schuman, 1988). Viewers reach conclusions and/or desired outcomes due to emotional and cognitive responses that have been evoked by the frames constructed by the media in the formation of a news story (Nerb, Spada, & Lay, 2001). Creating these frames allows for the media to elicit emotion and may strongly affect the viewer’s behavior. Research has shown that behavioral intentions, attitudes, and actual behavior is strongly correlated (Armitage & Conner, 2001). “A person’s attitude is a function of his salient beliefs at a given point in time” (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975, p. 222). Therefore, theoretically, attitudes can be formulated by exposing an individual to a chosen stimulus, frame, at a chosen time.

The theory of reasoned action proposes that a person’s intentions influence a person’s behavior (Albarracin, Fishbein, Johnson, & Muellerleile, 2001) and in most studies that intention



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is propelled more by attitude than by norms of society (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993), which posits that a person's actions are heavily influenced by their attitudes. Kim and Hunter (1993) also found that there is a correlation between attitude and behavior. "Our results showed a strong overall attitude-behavior relationship when methodological artifacts were eliminated... the higher the attitudinal relevance, the stronger the relationship between attitude and behavior" (Kim & Hunter, 1993, p. 101). Considering that the creation of frames in the media aims to change or reinforce the public's attitudes toward a certain story, issue, or idea, it is intuitive that the change or reinforcement of those attitudes may lead to a behavioral change as well. The intermingled ideas that attitude is abstract, is a function of time, and can be formatted to coincide, through direct transfer, with positive stimulus, or frames, suggests that through the media's framing of an event individual attitudes can be altered. The link between media frames and attitude change or reinforcement can, therefore, be furthered to that of behavioral change and, in the case of sports media, can be used to retain and gain new viewership. The specific frames created by the media when producing a news story, tap into the viewer's cognitive processes, allowing media to manipulate the emotions of a viewer in order to trigger certain stereotyped attitudes that can lead to the desired behavior. Framing is a process that allows for individuals to develop an understanding of an interaction or to change their conceptualization of a situation. The evolution of frameworks into the social sciences has allowed for the introduction of multiple theories describing frames and human interaction, one of which is framing theory.

### **Framing theory**

Framing theory posits that "the media cannot tell the public what to think but provides the public with what to think about" (Jones, Cantrell, & Lindsey, 2019, p. 1). The overarching theme of framing theory is that an issue can be seen through multiple perspectives and can be

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understood in a variety of different ways. The frame or ‘lens’ that individuals use to view each issue can be molded and adapted to produce a desired behavioral outcome.

Framing theory is particularly present within the media. Framing theory acknowledges that there are many ways to distribute information and how it is presented and displayed, within the context of the media, affects the public’s understanding and conception of that information and how that information is ultimately implemented (Terkildsen & Schnell, 1997). The media focuses on certain events and omits others in order to form a desired meaning. A focus on certain aspects in a media message influence people to also focus on those same aspects (Druckman, 2001).

Billings (2004) argues that there are three functions of framing theory “(a) selection (determining who or what is shown), (b) emphasis (determining how much who or what gets shown), (c) exclusion (determining who or what does not get shown)” (p. 203). “To frame is to select some aspects of perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the items described” (Entman, 1993, p. 52). According to Entman (1993), framing allows for individual features of a story to be emphasized to include particular messaging and other aspects to be deemphasized or even omitted in order to portray a desired message. The fundamental idea behind deemphasizing or omitting information is that it limits the public’s knowledge and options and denies them the opportunity to ingest all sides of a story (Entman, 1993). Entman (1993) also shows that framing can be used to divert attention from certain aspects of media stories, which can have the same influence on the public as emphasizing certain strategic aspects. Therefore, “the framing and presentation of events and news in the mass media can systematically affect how the recipients of the news come to

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understand those events” (Scheufele, 1999, p. 107). The simple omission of events and perspectives disqualifies the viewing public from making a fully informed decision and in turn, guiding their actions.

Tuchman (1978) posits media actively set the frames that the readers will use to interpret public issues. The particular framing of such messaging influences the way those messages are ingested and understood by the public (Entman, 2007; Tuchman, 1978). Framing effect, a phenomenon described as changes made to a narrative or presentation of an idea, issue, or event produces a change in opinion or attitude toward a certain idea, issue, or event. These changes are usually small and can create a large change in opinion (Chong & Druckman, 2007). This occurs through the framing of stories in the media that surround particular events. These frames typically “emphasize exculpatory or inculpatory information” (Seate, Harwood, & Blecha, 2010, p. 344) in an attempt to influence the public. A person’s frame in their own thoughts has a substantial impact on their overall opinion. Political candidates utilize this knowledge to impassion voters and change attitudes to be in line with that of the politician. Highlighting certain parts of a candidate’s platform and minimizing others aids in setting frames that will be in line with a voter’s already existing values (Jacoby, 2000). Similarly, sports media use an increasingly growing social media to create a narrative focus on an athlete’s personal life and attributes to craft frames designed to change the public opinions of sports events, (Lewis & Weaver, 2015). A more contemporary definition of framing, as compared to Goffman (1974), extends framing to the media:

“to frame a communicating text or message is to promote certain facets of a ‘perceived reality’ and make them more salient in such a way that endorses a specific problem definition, casual interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or a

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treatment recommendation” (Entman, 1993, p. 51).

In the field of television sports broadcasting, framing theory combines narratives with visual images to produce effects that intend to frame the broadcasts to align with certain themes prevalent in the sports world. “Sports journalists can and do employ various frames that emphasize specific content in their stories” (Lewis & Weaver, 2015, p. 219). The mix of narratives and visuals can be a powerful combination when it comes to framing certain issues. The potential of visuals in framing theory was recognized by Goffman (1974) when discussing advertising and gender framing. The use of framing by journalists and broadcasters allows audiences to process great deals of information quickly by ‘pre-sorting’ that information into frames easily recognizable by the audience (Gitlin, 1980). This allows audiences to create views about and understand information that, without, the use of frames could be overwhelming.

Framing theory suggests how individuals should interpret those views. Framing theory has never been more utilized than in today’s media outlets. The use of framing theory covers issues involving politics, public relations, school shootings, education, advertising, and sports. Framing allows for the media to extend their biased points of view onto readers, watchers, listeners and consumers. The use of framing has become increasingly noticeable in sports, with programs like ESPN’s *Outside the Lines* and websites like Bill Simmons’ now-defunct *Grantland* (Hambrick, Simmons, Greenhalgh, & Greenwell, 2010).

### **Strategic Framing**

The use of strategic framing, the “strategic selection of concepts such as issues and actors (agenda) and their evaluation,” (Schultz, et al., 2012, p. 100) as well as “their mutual associations (frames)”, (Schultz, et al., 2012, p. 100) allows media to purposely select issues and associations to develop frames that are “consistent with the ideals and contemporary themes of

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civic life,” (Zald, 1996, p. 309). Hallahan (1999) describes strategic framing in public relations as crucial in the definition of social issues. “Social problems and disputes can be explained in alternative terms by different parties who vie for the preferred definition of a problem or situation to prevail” (Hallahan, 1999, p. 210). The organization of ideas and actions by the public is influenced by the frames put forth by the media or organization. Ihlen and Nitz (2008) propose that framing influences an individual’s judgements and actions. Strategic framing in the media is used for many of the same reasons. Media framing allows the media to influence their public’s attitudes and behaviors by allowing them access to only particular, strategically planned aspects of a certain idea or issue.

Strategic framing allows for information to be more streamlined; it becomes more impactful or memorable (Entman, 1993). The media use strategic framing to create lasting impressions on publics when defining issues and changing certain behaviors involved with these issues. “The entire study of mass communication is based on the premise that the media have significant effects” (McQuail, 1987, p. 327). As described by McQuail (1987), these effects are the evolution of framing theory making its way into the media and mass communication as a whole. According to McQuail (1987), these media effects have both a strong and limited effect on the public. The desired effect of framing theory in the media is to influence the public’s beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors. This effect would be considered a strong media effect, and media would have succeeded in strategically framing images of reality in a powerful and patterned way that serves to influence the public.

### **Framing in Sports**

In sports, framing theory and the more streamlined approach of strategic framing allow sports media outlets to formulate stories that will provide the viewing public with a point of view

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in order to shape their attitudes when it comes to athletes, teams, and organizations. Sports media television has uplifted the sporting industry to mainstream societal importance (Gaustad, 2000). This promotion of sports through television and commentary affects how the viewing public perceives televised sports (Comisky, Bryant, & Zillman, 1977). Through framing theory, media outlets can help to shape attitudes and therefore change behaviors. The media can impart and mold particular thoughts and beliefs through framing theory (Tuchman, 1978) as well as control the conversation that ensues simply by choosing ‘what’ to cover and ‘how’ to cover each event. Television producers use framing theory to create and manipulate the sports viewers’ preferences depending on the amount of time and content a particular event receives, which Messner & Duncan & Wachs (1996) argue creates a behavioral social construction for sports viewing.

Sports media outlets produce stories that involve sports teams and athletes and must identify reported information. How athletes are portrayed in the media stems from the actions and decisions producers, sportswriters, and editors of the specific sports programs make. The sports media has become a vital force in creating narratives that suit the public’s interest by associating athletes and sporting events to societal norms that are familiar to viewers. According to Sullivan (1991), sports commentators, in addition to reporting an event, also use a blend of factual, critical, and social elements to dramatize the sporting event. These decisions include the features, athletic or personal, and the style in which that narrative will be delivered to the audiences (Lewis & Weaver, 2015). According to Price et al. (1997), these frames can influence how athletes and teams are understood and evaluated by the public. Media commentary has become a way for the public to understand sporting events through both present day and historical comparisons that are created and molded by the sports commentators who are reporting the event. “Media are no longer just a witness to sports events, facilitating our access to them,

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but have become the most powerful judging platform for sports competitions, serving as a guide for their interpretation and evaluation” (Dumitriu, 2013, p. 65).

One example of how framing in the sports media can uplift a college quarterback into the public eye by the prevalence and framing of a story is the rise of Doug Flutie in 1984. Flutie, a Boston College quarterback and Heisman Trophy winner, was thrust into the public view when he and his team defeated the Miami (Florida) Hurricanes, who were the top-ranked, and defending College Football National Champions, in a November 23, 1984 matchup via a last-second ‘Hail Mary’ pass, dubbed the “Miracle in Miami.” The media portrayed Flutie as an all-American quarterback at an underdog university defeating college football’s ‘bad guys’ (Mahoney, 2019). This example extends further back to include the framing of the often-criticized Miami football team for not following the rules and being characterized by the media as ‘bullies’ and ‘thugs,’ a term attributed to violent individuals and/or criminals. According to Lewis and Weaver (2015), when a player gains more and more coverage through the media, he/she is judged by not only their on-field accomplishments but also by their off-field lives, which are reported on by the media.

The print media is a major outlet that determines what parts of the quarterback’s lives are to be reported to the public. These narratives are created to improve the appeal of a sports story to accomplish goals such as enhancing the audience share, profit, or even status of the print media outlet, itself. Media aims to appeal to a broad number of readers, not just those readers who seek information for a specific sport or athlete. There is a need in sports media to create personas for athletes, to provide a personality, a narrative, to entertain fans. Sports media bring athletes and sporting events to the forefront for fans and allows for greater visibility and therefore scrutiny by readers. The sports media creates both public visibility and the framing of

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these sporting events (Dumitriu, 2013). Fans desire to embrace athletes and their personalities, which are often constructed using recognized human qualities and stereotypes (Izod, 1996).

To keep and maintain readership, sports print media consistently construct and frame stories about athletes and teams that pique reader interest. Sports and the media are “engaged in a complicit, mutually dependent commercial relationship” (Nicholson, 2015, p. 208) where narratives are created and displayed, through the framing of athletes and events, to entice sports readers to define the sports coverage with the perspective that is portrayed by that same media. These narratives are constructed in a way that may or may not tell the entire story of an individual or team and tend to frame each in a way that keeps audiences interested and engaged. One way of accomplishing this kind of engagement is the creation of narratives where certain themes emerge. These themes are prevalent throughout media, including journalism and sports.

### **Themes in Media & Sports**

When discussing framing theory, themes play a prevalent role. There are common themes that run throughout narratives. For example, in journalism, Lule (2001) identifies seven recurring myths, or themes, that have guided narratives throughout human history and claims that these themes are adapted and shifted in order to resonate in current cultures. Lule (2001) identifies ‘The Victim,’ ‘The Scapegoat,’ ‘The Hero,’ ‘The Good Mother,’ ‘The Trickster,’ ‘The Other World,’ and ‘The Flood’ as master myths within journalism and the news (pp. 19-25). These myths are “primordial stories that have guided human storytelling for ages. And they guide the news stories of today” (Lule, 2001, p. 22). Other common themes that occur in journalism, such as conflict or tragedy can be connected into one of these seven myths. According to Bartholome, Lecheler, and De Vreese (2015), conflict is a major theme used in framing. Conflict framing is also one of the most common forms used in political communication across times and cultures



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(De Vreese, Claes, Jochen, & Semetko, 2001). Framing theory depends on narrative themes that can span across cultures, socio and economic groups, racial groups, and age groups to disseminate a message that can be deciphered by many to change attitudes and behaviors.

The sports media is no different in its attempt to frame both athletes, coaches, and teams in certain ways that will both entertain and enthrall audiences. Messner et al. (2000) identified ten recurrent themes throughout sports broadcasting that they have dubbed the ‘Televised Sports Manhood Formula’ (p. 380). The Manhood Formula is described as a “master ideological narrative that is well suited to discipline boys’ bodies, minds, and consumption choices in ways that construct a masculinity that is consistent with the entrenched interests of the sports/media/commercial complex” (Messner et al., 2000, p. 380). These ten themes are observed again and again when analyzing the frames that sports media send out to the public, especially when targeting 8-17-year-old boys. The ten recurrent themes produced by Messner et al. (2000) were ‘white males are the voices of authority,’ ‘sports is a man’s world,’ ‘men are foregrounded in commercials,’ ‘women are sexy props or prizes for men’s successful sport performances or consumption choices,’ ‘whites are foregrounded in commercials,’ ‘aggressive players get the prize,’ ‘nice guys finish last,’ ‘boys will be (violent) boys,’ ‘give up your body for the team,’ ‘sports is war,’ and ‘show some guts.’ These themes are used in the framing of sports television to ensure lasting viewership and to change or reinforce beliefs and attitudes toward products that are endorsed and sold through the use of sports media.

Major themes that encompass the Televised Sports Manhood Formula are prevalent in ESPN’s *Sportscenter* coverage of the major sports, including football, basketball, baseball, and extreme sports and continue to run through the advertisements that accompany these sports (Messner et al., 2000). Sociologists involved in the sports genre tend to agree that the most

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common involvement that fans have with sports is through watching sports on television (Loy, McPherson, & Kenyon, 1978). The viewing public watches the contests and learn about heroes, favorites, and underdogs. These themes run through the mediated sports cycle and form a basis for a shared sports culture in America (Wenner, 1989). Mediated sports mirror some of the same values that are important in American society. Edwards (1973) has pinpointed some of these values and characteristics that develop in sports as character, competition, mental and physical fitness, discipline, nationalism, and religiosity. These values serve to frame the way sports is portrayed in the media. The visual medium of television allows for these values to be played out before the viewer's eyes and provides a more visceral platform for the development of these 'American' values wherein the existence of dominant meanings depicting race aid in creating "a social-economic hierarchy in which being perceived as white and Anglo-Saxon are generally rated more positively than that of being Black and non-Anglo-Saxon" (Van Sterkenburg & Knoppers, 2004, p. 301).

It is clear that the use of dominant themes plays a crucial role in the framing of sports media (Van Sterkenburg & Knoppers, 2004). A study conducted by Gantz (1981) examined the 'gratifications' received by sports fans through the mediated sports genre. Using a sample of students, Gantz (1981) explored the motives of sports fans in viewing football on television and found the strongest of motivations was the development of the theme, 'the thrill of victory' (p. 263). The theme, itself, created a curiosity about who would prevail, and viewers experienced better moods and felt better when their favorite teams and players performed well and won. Gantz (1981) also linked the viewing of sports to affective feelings such as excitement, happiness, anger, and nervousness. Although the study was that of an exploratory nature, viewers reported strong affective feelings throughout the act of watching the games and two-thirds of

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viewers talked with friends leading up to and following the game. Media also thrives on creating themes of human interest in the broadcasting of sport. Two themes that arise in sports broadcasts are those of the ‘underdog’ and ‘favorite.’ Sports media is greatly aware that the competition of sport is a primary reason for fans to tune into games, and

“One of the fundamental characteristics of sport in western society is that it is a competitive activity... This characteristic creates an uncertainty in game situations regarding the outcome, and this unpredictability is important in creating the tension and excitement for the participants and spectators”  
(Frazier & Snyder, 1991, p. 380).

The process of creating the rules that help to maintain an ‘even playing field’ and thus, tension is known as ‘tension-balance’ (Kew, 1990). However, it is impossible to maintain this tension-balance for all sporting games all the time. Some individuals or teams will compete at a competitive disadvantage due to undermanned teams, less skill level, and unequal ability. This provides for a team or individual to be less likely to achieve victory and to be dubbed an underdog (Frazier & Snyder, 1991). This underdog theme runs through sports media and creates a narrative that draws in fans. “As suggested by the original use of the term underdog (comes from a 19<sup>th</sup> century song titled, “The Under-Dog in the Fight”) spectators and fans, at least in American society, are thought to be predisposed to root for the underdog” (Frazier & Snyder, 1991, p. 381). The theme of underdog then, sets the stage for the theme of the ‘favorite,’ the more skilled and able team that is predicted to prevail. These two prevalent themes add to the narratives that are created by the sports media.

Looking back at journalistic myths, another theme emerges in the media coverage of American sport, which is ‘The Hero,’ as suggested by Lule (2001). The creation of both a sports

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hero and corresponding villain is a theme that resonates throughout sports. This narrative can be, most famously, seen in the stories of both Muhammad Ali and O.J. Simpson. Ali, a heavyweight boxer throughout the 1960's and 70s, was dubbed a hero for both his in ring skill and his out of ring charisma. Ali, a converted Muslim, was first criticized for his political views against the Vietnam War. Grano (2009) discussed three major themes that were particular to Ali during this time, racism, The Vietnam War, and his conversion to Islam. Ali would later be raised to the status of idol and hero due to a combination of his boxing ability and his exceptional use of dialogue throughout his career during radio and television interviews. This is no more prominent than a photograph taken by *Esquire* magazine in April of 1968, called 'The Passion of Muhammad Ali, depicting Ali as a contemporary icon of St. Sebastian, the patron saint of athletes (Howells, 2011).

Simpson, a Heisman Trophy-winning running back at the University of Southern California, and later a Hall of Famer for the NFL's Buffalo Bills, was treated as a hero during his career and well after when he transitioned into starring in movies. However, after he was alleged to have murdered his ex-wife, he transitioned into a villain in the minds of the public. Moore and Moore (1997) describe this as a 'demonization' that transformed a cultural hero to a murdering husband in a "post-modern fall from grace" (p. 305). This transition was aided, by the journalistic media and sports media, who were also covering the case and trial. Journalists and prosecutors pointed to major themes of a cycle of violence and control were major themes that journalists and prosecutors pointed to throughout the trial (Cotterill, 2001). The theme of hero and villain is prevalent and necessary in sports broadcasting. It creates a narrative that enthralls viewers and cuts into the rooted human need to see who will prevail in the end. Due to the scope and depth of the frames examined in this study that are associated with race and identity the

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following section will discuss the prevailing themes that previous research has identified in each of these areas. The use of the collection of these themes in the framing of sports only adds to the effect that framing theory has on viewing publics.

### **Racial Identity in Sports**

It has been said that sports are an escape from society, and that sports can cut across political, cultural, racial, and economic divides. Although poetic and embracing to the public, this view of sports is not necessarily the full vision of sports in America. Eitzen (2000) describes sports as a microcosm of society, in that “individual attitudes, values, and beliefs, in the broader society become an integral part of sporting practices” (Davis, 2007, pp. 291-292). This is no more apparent than when it comes to the concept of race in sports. Race has played a major role in sports throughout history. From the integration of the modern era of Major League Baseball (MLB) when Jackie Robinson broke the color barrier in 1947 with the Brooklyn Dodgers, to the 1968 Olympics in Mexico City, where Tommie Smith and John Carlos each raised a fist on the medal stand as the American anthem played, in order to support human rights and racial mistreatment during a time of civil unrest in the United States, up to today’s sports leagues allowing players to don their jerseys and helmets with social justice phrases and statements, it is clear that sports are a vehicle for social justice in America and that race is more a construct of sports than it ever has been. With the prevalence of race in sports as a backdrop, this study dives into the media coverage given to quarterbacks in the months leading up to the NFL Draft, specifically focusing on the 2012 and 2020 drafts. The historic nature of the 2012 NFL Draft with respect to its racial makeup, the first two selections being both a white and Black quarterback, respectively, serves as a starting point to pinpoint the racial themes utilized to create relevant themes for the media’s draft coverage. The similarities of the 2020 NFL Draft enable a

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meaningful comparison to examine and understand the differences in the media's draft coverage and the creation of racial themes regarding quarterbacks and race.

In recent years, with the emergence of the Black Lives Matter movement, a grassroots movement that aims to shed light onto social justice and the “political misconduct” of the American government (Rickford, 2016), a spotlight has been shone onto the way, not only black, but also white athletes are portrayed in the media. #BlackLivesMatter was founded in 2013 during the aftermath of the murder of Trayvon Martin, a 17-year-old African American teenager from Sanford, Florida. Martin was shot and killed by George Zimmerman, a neighborhood watch group member, who was later acquitted of murder charges. According to the Black Lives Matter (2020) website, their mission:

“is to eradicate white supremacy and build local power to intervene in violence inflicted on Black communities by the state and vigilantes. By combating and countering acts of violence, creating space for Black imagination and innovation, and centering Black joy, we are winning immediate improvements in our lives” (blacklivesmatter.com).

The emergence of Black Lives Matter and its mission has been evident in the landscape of sports, with NBA players wearing T-shirts, Premier league players kneeling on the soccer pitch pre-game, in protest against racial mistreatment, and NFL players, including quarterbacks, also taking a knee, during the national anthem, in an effort to protest the mistreatment of African Americans by the police. This study examines the changes in media coverage of racially diverse quarterbacks compared to their white counterparts amid the social climate of our country and the emergence of the Black Lives Matter movement in today's society. In the past the masculine representation of black athletes in America has been tied heavily to sports and athletics. “African

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American males will continue to be channeled in three venues with little resistance from mainstream institutions: athlete, entertainer, and criminal” (Harrison, 2000, p.38). By examining the coverage afforded to college quarterbacks entering the NFL Draft, a better understanding of the media’s views into race in sports can be discovered.

The quarterback position in the NFL has been almost completely dominated by white athletes. Historically, Black quarterbacks were “blocked from playing quarterback in the NFL” (Reid & Mcmanus, n.d.). It has only been in the last two decades that black quarterbacks have been accepted into the position. In 1953, Willie T. Thrower became the NFL’s first African American quarterback, (Billings, 2004). In 1998, Doug Williams, of the then, Washington Redskins was named the first black quarterback, Super Bowl MVP. In 2001, Michael Vick became the first African American quarterback drafted overall number one into the NFL. Until 1978, there were no black quarterbacks drafted in the first round of an NFL Draft. Since then, 22 African American quarterbacks have been drafted in the first round of the NFL Draft, with five being drafted number one overall, including Michael Vick in 2001 (Guilbault, 2020). This influx of African American quarterbacks into the NFL has changed the way the media portrays the quarterback position. In 2003, Rush Limbaugh, a conservative talk show host and employee of ESPN, proclaimed that the media was biased toward Donovan McNabb, the Philadelphia Eagles’ African American quarterback. Limbaugh praised McNabb with, “credit for the performance of his team that he really didn’t deserve because the media have been very desirous that a Black quarterback do well,” (ESPN.com, 2003).

This study examines the media’s portrayals of quarterbacks of different races as they enter the NFL Draft. The 2020 draft featured Tua Tagovailoa, a Hawaiian born Samoan quarterback. Previous research has identified narrative themes surrounding Samoan athletes

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(Saluga, 2018). These prevalent themes include culture-based [Polynesian] values, family, and a warrior theme that, according to Saluga (2018), is prominent in these narratives. A former Hawaiian born quarterback, Marcus Mariota, has been characterized as “quiet and good hearted down to earth” (Rohan, 2014). The emerging themes that formed around Mariota were his family ties, intelligence, and his kindness, “almost too nice to lead a football team” (Uthman, 2014). Research shows non-white athletes and are continually compared to white athletes using Black and white themes. Billings and Hundley (2010) state that these portrayals and distinctions “often result in an amalgamation of disparate ethnicities into overarching categories defined solely by one’s skin color” (p. 7). Billings and Hundley (2009) cite Vijay Singh, a golfer from the island of Fiji, Tiger Woods, a golfer of mixed race (Asian and African American), and Tony Parker, a French-born NBA basketball player, to expound on their point. This study builds upon previous research by investigating the media frames present when referring to quarterbacks of differing races and providing for the comparison of these differing raced quarterbacks through the lens of the Black/white comparison. A lens of comparison that has been prevalent since the 1800’s, and the perceived differences between Black and white athletes were published by not only sportswriters, but by coaches, biologists, doctors, and social scientists (Wiggins, 1989). This distinction aids the current study in moving the research forward in an attempt to understand the future of media framing in sports.

Research into the bias of network television shows that within the media, African American athletes are portrayed “inaccurately and stereotypically,” (Rada, 1996, p. 231). The study showed that white players are attributed with high-level cognitive abilities, while athletic ability is highlighted when describing the black athlete (Rada, 1996). Research shows that black athletes are not proportionately credited for their accomplishments by the media and that



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coverage of black athletes is not proportional to their participation in sports (Lumpkin & Williams, 1991). Race is rarely tackled adeptly in the media; it is tip-toed around and alluded to. “Race in sports has become something to talk around, something to divert, and, sometimes, something to encode” (Billings, 2012, p. 200). Billings (2012) posits that although, possibly more enlightened than in the time of Rush Limbaugh, race is a common factor in collegiate sports and the disparaging media coverage of black athletes has become more subtle but still displays the characteristics of the past. For example, “black athletes as intellectually inferior and white athletes a born leaders and hard workers” (p. 212). The construct of race within the NFL and especially the quarterback position is as salient now as ever. With the shift to many more racially diverse quarterbacks being drafted in the first round of the NFL, a look into the media’s coverage of a diverse racial make-up of college quarterbacks is merited and necessary in order to examine how the media coverage has changed throughout the decade.

Another aspect of race in sports is the creation of identity through the construction of frames and the development of stereotypical themes. This is especially prominent among athletes (Ferrucci & Tandoc, 2018). Previous research has shown that sports media use race, (Billings, 2003), gender (Billings & Hundley, 2010), and nationalism (Bairner, 2001) as frames to create themes that stereotype athletes. One pervasive racial stereotype that emerges is that white quarterbacks are intelligent and that Black quarterbacks are athletic (Rada, 1996). These media stereotypes aid in building a lasting impression, identity, with both the sports-viewing public as well as with executives of NFL teams (Gill & Brajer, 2012).

This study examines the identities of quarterbacks that are created, based on race, by the media in its coverage of the months leading into two NFL Draft. The study of communication theories involving the media “is ‘Ground Zero’ for understanding the complex messages that

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mediasport imparts” (Billings & Hundley, 2010, p. 3). A close examination of the themes that emerge during the coverage leading up to the NFL Draft will help determine the importance of media created stereotypes and distinguish the frames that are used to accomplish the creation of these themes. Past research has proven that race is prevalent in the creation of themes and is often the aspect of framing that permeates most to users of sports media (Entine, 2000).

### **2012 NFL Draft**

The first NFL Draft was held in 1936 in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. It was the completion of an idea set forth by Bert Bell, the then owner of the Philadelphia Eagles. In 1935, Bell proposed an idea that the NFL should begin selecting players from college football to enter the NFL as a player for the team that selected them. Before then, players were paid to play for the team that could negotiate a deal with each senior college football player, ensuring that the rich teams would continue to become rich as the poor teams became poorer (Welky, 2012). The proposal also called for the NFL team with the worst record to draft first, followed by the second worst record, and so on. The NFL Draft, as it was dubbed in 1937, was a huge success and has continued every year since. The 2012 NFL draft was held April 26-28 in New York, New York and featured four quarterbacks drafted in the first round, including both the first and second overall picks. The fact that the first two quarterbacks selected in the 2012 draft are of different races makes it an ideal case study to examine the media’s coverage of college quarterbacks entering the NFL Draft.

Andrew Luck, a two-time, first-team All-American, white quarterback at Stanford was the first overall selection of the 2012 NFL Draft by the Indianapolis Colts. Luck was a Maxwell Award, Johnny Unitas Golden Arm Award, and Walter Camp Award winner in 2011 and came into the draft as the odds-on favorite to be the first overall pick. Luck, the son of Kathy and

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Oliver Luck, a former college and NFL quarterback for the West Virginia Mountaineers and the Houston Oilers, respectively, was born on September 12, 1989, in Washington D.C. The family relocated to Texas, where he became a co-valedictorian at Stratford High School as well as a four-star quarterback recruit (Rivals.com). Luck became the starting quarterback at Stanford in 2009, after a redshirt season under then-coach Jim Harbaugh. This made Luck the first freshman to start at quarterback for Stanford since 1996 (FitzGerald, 2009). Coming into the 2012 NFL Draft, Luck was touted as “the best quarterback prospect since John Elway” (Gower, 2018, para. 3).

Robert Griffin III, a 2011 consensus All-American Black quarterback at Baylor was the second overall player and second quarterback taken in the 2012 NFL Draft by the Washington Redskins (now the Washington Football team). Griffin was the *Sporting News* Player of the Year, Davey O’Brien Award, and Manning Award winner in 2011. Griffin, the son of Jacqueline and Robert Griffin Jr., both of whom were U.S. Army sergeants, was born on February 12, 1990 in Okinawa, Japan. Griffin attended Copperas Cove High School where, as class president, he played football, basketball and ran track. Griffin was ranked as the fourth-best dual-threat quarterback (Rivals.com). Griffin earned Big 12 Freshman of the Year in 2008 as quarterback for the Baylor Bears. The draft experts ranked Griffin as the number two player in the country. “No player in college football or in the 2012 NFL Draft class has the ability to take over a game like Griffin” (Miller, 2011, para. 40).

Ryan Tannehill, a two-time, All-Big 12 Honorable Mention winner, white quarterback at Texas A&M was the eighth overall pick and third quarterback selected in the 2012 NFL Draft by the Miami Dolphins. Tannehill passed for 5,450 yards and 42 touchdowns in 2011 as the starting quarterback for the Texas A&M Aggies. Tannehill the son of Cheryl and Tim Tannehill

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on July 27, 1988 in Lubbock, Texas. Tannehill attended Big Spring High School where he played football and basketball and ran track. Tannehill graduated high school as a three-star recruit (Rivals.com). Once reaching Texas A&M, he played wide receiver during his first two years and then became the starting quarterback halfway through the 2010 season. Although Tannehill was drafted with the eight overall pick many experts disagreed, “Tannehill does many things well, but he doesn’t do any one thing perfect and is more a product of the system and routes around him than anything else” (Miller, 2011, para. 22).

Brandon Weeden, a first-team, All Big 12, white, quarterback was the 22<sup>nd</sup> player and fourth quarterback taken in the 2012 NFL Draft by the Cleveland Browns. Weeden finished his college career at Oklahoma State as the owner of several quarterback records, including passing yards in a season (4,727) and completion percentage for a season (72.3). Weeden the son of Sharie and Robbie Weeden was born on October 14, 1983 in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. Weeden was both an all-state football and baseball player at Edmond Santa Fe High School. In 2002, Weeden was drafted into Major League baseball by the New York Yankees and did not enroll into Oklahoma State until 2007. In 2010, Weeden became the starting quarterback for the Oklahoma State Cowboys and in his senior season led the Cowboys to the BCS Tostitos Fiesta Bowl. Weeden’s mix of talent and experience made him one of the most intriguing prospects to enter the draft. “There are questions about him, such as how he will handle pressure in the pocket” (Dumonjic, 2012, para. 41).

The first-round quarterbacks of the 2012 NFL Draft provide a baseline for the media coverage of college quarterbacks entering the NFL Draft. A look into the media’s narratives and frames when covering these four quarterbacks provides a background and framework to understand how the media’s coverage has changed with regards to race and quarterbacks before

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an NFL Draft. The fact that quarterbacks of differing races were selected number one and two overall sets the 2012 draft apart from other such NFL Drafts and creates an ideal case study for an examination into the media's coverage of race in sports.

### **2020 NFL Draft**

The 2020 NFL Draft was held April 23-25 and was held online due to the Covid-19 regulations put in place by the NFL. The draft featured four quarterbacks drafted in the first round, including both the first and fifth overall picks. The fact that the first two quarterbacks selected in the 2020 NFL Draft are of different races makes it an ideal comparison to the 2012 NFL Draft and an exemplary case study to examine the evolution of the media's coverage of racial frames and narratives involving college quarterbacks entering the NFL Draft due to the fact that the first two quarterbacks drafted were of differing races, white and Samoan.

Joe Burrow, a 2019, unanimous, first-team All-American, white quarterback at Louisiana State University (LSU) was the first overall selection of the 2020 NFL Draft by the Cincinnati Bengals. Burrow earned the 2019 Heisman Trophy award as well as the Maxwell Award, Johnny Unitas Golden Arm Award, and Walter Camp Award winner in 2019 and entered the draft as the overwhelming favorite to be the first overall pick. Burrow, the son of Robin and Jim Burrow, a former college assistant coach and defensive coordinator, was born on December 10, 1996 in Ames, Iowa. Burrow attended Athens High School in The Plains, Ohio, where he was an All-American basketball player. Burrow earned the "Mr. Football" award for the state of Ohio in 2014 and subsequently the high school renamed its football stadium after Burrow. Burrow, a four-star quarterback recruit (Rivals.com) committed to the Ohio State Buckeyes in 2014 and later transferred to LSU in 2018 where he became the starting quarterback in 2018. Burrow went on to lead the LSU Tigers to the National Championship in 2020 and broke multiple passing

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records including the FBS touchdown record with 60 passing touchdowns. “Burrow is the best quarterback in the 2020 NFL Draft class and one of the best quarterback prospects in the last decade,” (Miller, 2020, para. 17).

Tuanigamanuolepola ‘Tua’ Tagovailoa, a 2018 All-American, Samoan quarterback for the Alabama Crimson Tide football team located in Tuscaloosa, Alabama, was selected as the second quarterback taken and the fifth overall pick in the 2020 NFL Draft by the Miami Dolphins. In 2018, Tagovailoa earned the Maxwell Award, Walter Camp Award, and was named First-team All-SEC. The son of Samoan parents, Diane and Galu Tagovailoa, Tagovailoa was born on March 2, 1998, in Hawaii. Tagovailoa attended Saint Louis High School in Honolulu, Hawaii where he became a four-star recruit (Rivals.com) and the top-ranked prospect in the state. In 2017, Tagovailoa committed to play for the Alabama Crimson Tide where, as a freshman, he was the back-up quarterback to then starter Jalen Hurts. Tagovailoa, was brought off the bench during the 2018 BCS national championship game in the fourth quarter as Alabama trailed the Georgia Bulldogs. Tagovailoa rallied the Crimson Tide to the national title and became the starting Alabama quarterback until a hip injury in November, 2019. “If healthy, he [Tua Tagovailoa] could easily become the best quarterback of the year’s class” (Miller, 2020, para. 16).

Justin Herbert, a 2017 Academic All-American, white quarterback from the University of Oregon was the sixth overall all pick and third quarterback selected in the 2020 NFL Draft by the Los Angeles Chargers. Herbert won the 2018 William V. Campbell Trophy, the “Academic Heisman” and earned the 2020 Rose Bowl Most Valuable Player. Herbert, the son of Holly and Mark Herbert, a former college football player, who coached Herbert for many years, was born on March 10, 1998 in Eugene, Oregon. Herbert attended Sheldon High School, where he played

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football, basketball, and baseball and was named First Team All-State. Herbert committed to Oregon, a school located in his hometown of Eugene, Oregon in 2015, where he became the first true freshman since 1983 to start at quarterback for the Ducks. Herbert's senior season, 2019, the Ducks went 12-2 and earned a bid to the Rose Bowl where Herbert capped off the season with a Rose Bowl victory where he earned the Offensive MVP award. Despite his talent and success at Oregon, Herbert had some mixed expert reviews when entering the NFL Draft, "... but he [Herbert] must learn to trust his traits more and be an aggressive thrower. Herbert has rare size and athleticism, but he hasn't used that ability to date" (Miller, 2020, para. 16).

Jordan Love, a second-team, All-MWC, Black quarterback from Utah State University, was the 26<sup>th</sup> player and fourth quarterback taken in the 2020 NFL Draft by the Green Bay Packers. Love, the son of Anna and Orbin Love, both, one-time police officers, was born on November 2, 1998 in Bakersfield, California. Love's father, Orbin, committed suicide in 2013. Love attended Liberty High School where he was not named the starting quarterback until his senior year. Love finished the season passing for 2,148 yards and 24 touchdowns as well as rushing for 806 yards, adding eight rushing touchdowns. Love committed to play for the Utah State Aggies in 2016, where he redshirted and then became the starting quarterback for the last six games of the 2017 season. Love earned the MVP of the 2018 New Mexico Bowl. After his junior year, Love declared for the NFL Draft in 2020 to a mix of reviews from the experts. "The Utah State product is a boom-or-bust QB in every sense of the phrase—but that won't necessarily stop a franchise from taking him in the top 10" (Mays, 2020, para. 15).

### **Research Questions and Hypotheses**

The study of the 2020 NFL Draft will help determine what changes the media has made regarding the framing of race in sports. Due to the atmosphere of the United States in 2020, with

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the threat of Covid-19 and a heightened awareness of social justice issues, including the Black Lives Matter movement, the 2020 NFL Draft, the first one held completely online, provides an ideal opportunity to examine the changes in narratives and frames used by the media to portray college quarterbacks as they enter the NFL Draft. A comparison to the media coverage of the 2012 NFL Draft, a historic draft used as a baseline, allows this study to be a meaningful analysis into how the frames of race in sports, especially rising NFL quarterbacks, have changed over the last decade. Media coverage of athletes has increased to groundbreaking levels over the last decade (Lewis & Weaver, 2015).

This study utilized the NFL Draft as a platform to examine the frames that surround college quarterbacks entering the NFL. Research has shown (Saluga, 2018; Rada, 1996) the existence of racially contrasting frames in sports media. An analysis of the NFL Draft will add to the current research by pinpointing and comparing the media coverage of first-round college quarterbacks. Using the 2020 NFL Draft, and the inclusion of Tua Tagovialoa, a Samoan quarterback, as a similar but unique contrast to the 2012 NFL Draft an examination into the frames used by the sports media can be studied in order to determine the evolution of sports framing in the media. The existence of a development and transformation in sports framing will lead to an expansion and extension into the study of framing within the entire field of sports media. This study is driven by these research questions:

RQ 1: How does sports media use racial framing to discuss first-round quarterbacks entering the NFL Draft?

RQ 2: How have the frames changed between the 2012 NFL Draft and the 2020 NFL Draft?



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H 1: The sports media uses a mixture of traditional sports themes and racial frames to create narratives for college quarterbacks entering the NFL Draft.

H 2: The sports media used less racially driven themes in the lead-in to the 2020 NFL Draft than were used for the 2012 NFL Draft.

### **Method**

The purpose of this study is to identify the frames that are present in the media's coverage of the eight first-round quarterbacks from two separate NFL Drafts, 2012 and 2020. Framing theory is the basis to determine the frames that are present in each draft, or case study. Additionally, this study seeks to discover the changes in those media frames between the two case studies, considering the changing scope of social justice and sports within this eight-year period. Each draft possesses separate and unique qualities that make them important and relevant in a qualitative thematic analysis. The previous research showed that both selected NFL Drafts, individually, possess characteristics that could be exploited by sports media in order to create separate and distinct narratives.

This study uses a qualitative case study approach which according to (Braun & Clarke, 2006) constitutes a method of searching for "certain themes or patterns across an (entire) data set," (p. 81) and "more or less overlap with thematic analysis" (p. 81). Case studies are often used to describe phenomenon on a small scale and then the results can be extrapolated to fit into a larger context (Thomas, 2011). The use of case studies is a descriptive account of a certain event or happening that can be analyzed to inform about a larger similar context and become an anchor point of knowledge within a larger academic discussion (Ragin & Becker, 1992). Case studies may offer insights into particular phenomenon that cannot be broached by other research methods or strategies (Rowley, 2002). The strength of a case study that it is able to investigate an

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event or issue in its own context. Case studies are particularly adept in providing answers to the ‘how’ and ‘why’ questions concerning a particular issue and can be utilized for descriptive, exploratory, and explanatory studies (Schell, 1992). Case studies are used as a research design that allows for theory and logic to be connected to the data and conclusions of a study (Luck, Jackson, & Usher, 2006). Case studies also allow for speculation as to a theory from the data collected from a specific unit of analysis.

### **Data Collection**

The news articles for the two case studies (2012 and 2020 NFL Drafts) were selected using Newsbank, a database that archives media to be used as reference materials. Newsbank contains editions of over a thousand nationwide newspapers (Aull, & Brown, 2013). Articles were selected that fit into the date ranges that lead up to each case study: January 9, 2012, through April 26, 2012, which encompassed the time from the NCAA National Championship and the end of the 2012 college football season to the first day of the 2012 NFL Draft. The second case study, the 2020 NFL Draft, provided a similar date range. January 13, 2020 through April 23, 2020 also encompassed the days between the last day of the college football season and the first day of the 2020 NFL Draft. The specific date ranges were chosen because the college football season had ended and national news coverage of quarterbacks entering the draft shifts from game coverage to draft coverage.

The selection of these dates and the Newsbank database allows for a full, in-depth picture of the media’s pre-draft coverage of each quarterback. This selection also encompasses national coverage as well as local coverage of each quarterback which allowed for a cross-section of frames and themes throughout the media. The selected Newsbank articles will feature Andrew Luck, Robert Griffin III, Ryan Tannehill, and Brandon Weeden from the 2012 NFL Draft and

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Joe Burrow, Tua Tagovailoa, Justin Herbert, and Jordan Love from the 2020 NFL Draft. All 112 articles from Newsbank that covered the eight first round selected quarterbacks, four from the 2012 NFL Draft and four from the 2020 NFL Draft were selected using two search terms. The name of each quarterback along with the term “NFL Draft” was searched within the headlines to determine the 112 articles that were to be studied and examined. A list and breakdown of the number of articles for each quarterback can be found in the article table (Appendix B).

The uniqueness of the 2012 NFL Draft, with quarterbacks of different races being taken with the first two picks of the draft, serves as a baseline to identify themes that ran through the media’s coverage of the individual quarterbacks selected in the draft. The 2020 NFL Draft, due to its similarities, the first and fifth picks were quarterbacks of differing races, and contemporary setting provides an ideal comparison to explore the differences in themes provided by the media in regard to race over an eight-year period.

### **Data Analysis**

Thematic analysis aids a researcher in drawing out and identifying themes that run through the narratives created in media. (Nowell, Norris, White, & Moules, 2017). Braun and Clarke (2006) argue that in qualitative research, thematic analysis as a method, is fundamental. These themes may stand alone or be layered upon subthemes or subdivisions of the same theme. In a qualitative thematic analysis these factors must be considered to produce meaningful results and to ensure the data can fit into the larger academic discussion (Aronson, 1994; Lopez & Willis, 2004). Once themes are identified throughout a narrative, it is essential in thematic analyses, to group these themes into categories that are then used to interpret the data in relation to the research question(s) being posed. The process of determining exact themes in narratives is

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determined by the researcher's aim and experience. Vaismoradi, et al. (2015) proposed the four phases of theme development that will be used in this study:

1. Initialization: the reading and highlighting of units of analysis along with the coding and searching for "abstractions in participants' accounts" (p. 103)
2. Construction: the classification, comparison, labeling, translating, defining and description of relevant data
3. Rectification: immersion and distancing from the data, and relating themes to previous research and established knowledge
4. Finalization: developing the story line, or answer to the research question(s)

These phases allow the thematic analysis process to be transparent and systemic. Although qualitative research is flexible in its ability to gain and decipher data, having a clear understanding of the method to be used will help to ensure the accuracy of both the data collection and analyzation of this qualitative thematic analysis.

A thematic analysis looks to extract themes, using content analysis (Vaismoradi & Snelgrove, 2019) from certain media; this study uses 112 newspaper articles found in the Newsbank database. Theory and previous research acts as a roadmap, a guide, to help extract and draw out these themes from media created narratives (Ryan & Bernard, 2003). This study uses framing theory as the guide to follow in order to identify themes within the case studies selected.

The unit of analysis in this study is the 112 national newspaper articles that are contained within the Newsbank database that feature the eight first round quarterbacks of the 2012 and 2020 NFL Drafts. A thematic analysis of each article was conducted in order to compare the frames used by the media in regard to first round quarterbacks. The case studies were selected due to both the similarities and differences in the possible themes they may contain according to

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the previous research (Lule, 2001: Bartholome et al., 2015: Messner et al., 2000: Frazier & Snyder, 1991: Saluga, 2018).

The selected articles were analyzed using both deductive and inductive analysis to ensure that all relevant frames and themes can be identified. A deductive approach was utilized to identify themes that mirror those of the previous research (Ardevol-Abreu, 2015). A deductive approach considers the frames previously identified and defined by other researchers and similar studies (Ardevol-Abreu, 2015). Understanding the existing frames and identifying them in the selected articles is a critical step in determining the changes that have occurred in the eight-year time frame of this study. An inductive approach to thematic analysis allows for themes to emerge and are greatly linked to the data being viewed (Patton, 1990). Therefore, an inductive approach to analysis provides for a rich and detailed description of the data being observed.

The addition of a theme table (Appendix A) is included to exemplify the process used in order to extract the themes utilized by the sports media. The table allows the reader to understand the origins and connections made by the researcher to produce each relevant theme. The table includes all themes that are grouped together using the approach set forth by Vaismoradi et al. (2015) in order to fully grasp the themes that emerge from the 112 newspaper articles and the created narratives. Framing theory, coupled with the four phases of theme development introduced by Vaismoradi et al. (2015), will be utilized to identify the themes that are present in each of the case studies. Frames will be identified and cataloged for future consideration and analysis. The use of case studies to conduct research calls for generalizations that are drawn from the data collected. In order for these specific generalizations to be relevant there must be a presence of both reliability and validity, which, along with the specific data garnered from the case study, should be compared and analyzed along with previous research associated with the

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given phenomenon. The use of framing theory along with the four phases of theme development set forth by Vaismoradi et al. (2015) allow for a unique extension of the previous research. The addition of utilizing the sports media's coverage of college quarterbacks entering both the 2012 and 2020 NFL Drafts aids in continuing the development of the previous research.

### Findings

The intention of this study was to determine the themes that emerged within the sports print media to determine if the sports media utilizes racial framing in its discussion of college quarterbacks entering the NFL Draft and if so, how that has changed over time. Upon the examination and thematic analysis of 112 newspaper articles from NewsBank, six themes emerged demonstrating that racial framing does exist within the sports media's coverage. The themes identified included future performance justification, attribute and talent characterization, appearance and cultural reputation, positions of influence and power, compatibility with the status quo, and language and connotation usage. In addition, there were several subthemes that emerged in the data as well. These will be explored and discussed in greater detail. These six themes combine to provide both detail and insight into RQ1 by shaping the strategy in which racial framing plays a role in the discussion of first-round quarterbacks within the sports media.

#### **RQ 1: Themes**

**Future performance justification.** The theme of future performance justification embodies the tendency of the sports media to make pre-empted claims, about how a quarterback will ultimately perform in his NFL career and offering the reasons why the quarterback may or may not be successful. This theme was present in just under 23.2% of the 112 articles, with thirteen of the articles containing the theme more than once. When discussing college athletes and their futures as professional quarterbacks, the sports media uses speculation and conjecture to provide

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the public with an assessment of the abilities and potential of the athlete. The editorials and speculation of the sports media when discussing the likelihood of their success or failure as a quarterback in the NFL combine to create future performance justification as a theme throughout this data set. The theme includes discussions about an athlete's future legitimacy, expectations, and legacy as a professional quarterback. Future performance justification also includes the sports media's speculation and rationalization for an athlete's projected failures in the NFL. Often times, these rationalizations were in the form of excuses for white athletes and criticism for the Black athlete. Overall, the future performance justification theme was utilized, in the data, to exact blame on a Black quarterback's talents and attributes while, in contrast, excuse the future performance of white quarterbacks with factors that were out of the athlete's control. Although, there were mentions of white quarterbacks having a lack of talent, arm strength, and speed the overwhelming majority of the theme being utilized was to pre-emptily exonerate a white quarterback from sub-par performances in the future.

The future performance justification theme was portrayed when describing Ryan Tannehill, in the run-up to the 2012 NFL draft. *The News Herald* (Ohio) published, in 2012, a quote from Tom Heckert, the then Indianapolis Colts general manager, that read "Obviously when you look at quarterbacks you like to watch all his throws in college, and his are a lot less. That's just the way it is and it's not his fault." In contrast, when describing the future performance of Robert Griffin III, the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram* (Texas) wrote that the most important task that faces Griffin will be his ability to convince NFL scouts that his skills "can translate to the next level." Similar to *The News Herald's* (Ohio) description of Tannehill, *The Advocate* (Louisiana), when describing Joe Burrow, in 2020, also justified a future unsuccessful career by introducing outside factors as reasons. *The Advocate* stated "If Joe Burrow did fall in

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the draft, it could be due in part to a lack of opportunity to show off his craft in workouts for teams at the top of the draft.”

The theme also was brought into articles with the addition of quotes from other sports media. For example, in a 2020 *Washington Times* (Washington D.C.) article, Mike Miller of Bleacher Report, an online sports media outlet, was quoted as saying, “It’s not all injuries, one team source explained that they have knocked Tua [Taglovailoa] for an all-world supporting cast that often saved him when plays broke down.” This example aligns Taglovailoa, a Samoan born quarterback with the Black athletes as per the previous literature by ascribing the same kinds of criticism afforded to Black athletes to Taglovailoa, including talent criticisms.

**Attribute and Talent Characterization.** This theme represents the propensity of sports media to compartmentalize athletes with regard to their attributes and talents. The idea that Black athletes are praised for their athletic ability and white athletes are shown to possess intellectual and leadership skills (Billings, 2012) emerged throughout the analysis of this data. When narrowing down themes that existed in the data, all mentions of physical abilities, such as hand size, speed, arm strength, etc., were considered talent characterizations, whereas all mentions of intelligence, test scores, grade point average, leadership skills, etc., were characterized as attributes. The theme of attribute and talent characterization was present in 71.4% of the 112 articles included in the data. The sports media, in most cases, highlighted the athletic ability of Black quarterbacks when utilizing the attribute and talent characterization theme. This was highlighted in the current research by the data showing that the sports media often mentioned running ability, speed, and competition in other sports when describing talents attributed to Black athletes.



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In a 2012 article, the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram* (Texas) reported not only the passing statistics for Robert Griffin III (RGIII), a Black quarterback, but also introduced his rushing statistics. The same article dubbed Griffin as a “dual-threat quarterback.” Another 2012 article from the *Idaho State Journal* (Idaho) states, “the exciting dual-threat quarterback knew in his gut it was time to move on to the next level,” when describing Griffin’s decision to turn professional. In a third, 2012, article in *The Tampa Bay Times* (Florida), when discussing Griffin and his possible position as the Washington Redskins draft pick, the media explains how Mike Shanahan, the head coach, has an “expertise with mobile quarterbacks” and also quoted John Gruden, an ESPN analyst saying,

“And what Mike [Shanahan] did in San Francisco with Steve Young, another mobile quarterback, those were as good as offensive tapes I’ve ever seen. So, I think when you get Robert Griffin, one of the most explosive quarterbacks to ever play the position, in a Mike Shanahan system, the possibilities are very exciting.”

The inclusion of these quotes and analysis perpetuates the use of this theme in extending the talent attribute to the Black quarterback. In contrast, PR Newswire, also in 2012, when discussing Andrew Luck’s statistics, did not mention his rushing statistics instead focused on his throwing ability. In a second article, written by *The Sports Network*, Luck was commended for his intellectual and leadership abilities, “Exceptional intelligence and throwing accuracy,” “Commanding and athletic leader,” and “Exceptional recognition of defensive themes.” The previous examples highlight the sports media and their tendencies to focus on certain attribute and talents of individual quarterbacks. The following examples spotlight the sports media’s propensity to compare quarterbacks to other athletes with the use of the attribute and talent

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characterization theme. For instance, in a 2020 article, the *Chicago Sun-Times* (Illinois) compared Jordan Love, a Black quarterback, to the current Chicago Bears, white, quarterback, Mitch Trubisky. The article assesses the talents of Love to be lacking to that of Trubisky, even though the Bears general manager, Ryan Pace admits that Trubisky has been experiencing a “total regression.” In still another article comparing Love to Cole McDonald, a contemporary white quarterback prospect, *The Honolulu Star Advertiser* (Hawaii) utilizes the attribute and talent characterization theme in a way that spotlights Love’s lack of running ability when stating, “But Jordan Love can’t run like this guy can run.” The mention of Love’s lack of running ability, when not mentioning this about white quarterbacks, only bolsters the poignancy of the attribute and talent characterization theme found within the data.

The attribute and talent characterization theme, utilized throughout the data set, shows the difference in descriptions of Black and white quarterbacks by the sports media. The media highlights the intelligence and leadership qualities of white quarterbacks while promoting the talents and tangible assets of Black athletes. Black athletes were commonly attributed with assets such as speed and strength, whereas their white counterparts were touted for their intangible abilities, such as reading defenses, and understanding game situations.

**Appearance and Cultural Reputation.** Similar to the two themes discussed above the findings in this study show that, although, less prominent within the data, the appearance and cultural reputation theme is utilized by the sports media when describing college quarterbacks entering the NFL Draft. This theme refers to the amount of copy describing the appearance, clothing, and overall popularity of an athlete with regards to popular culture. There is some overlap here when it comes to appearance with the previous theme and the utilization of attributes, however,

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appearance, in this theme refers to the athlete's hairstyle, clothing, and jewelry rather than his physical measurements. Findings show the sports media employed the appearance and cultural reputation theme in 16% of the 112 articles, mostly referring to Black quarterbacks.

For instance, a 2012 article from *The News & Messenger* (Virginia), Joseph White commented, "There was no mistaking Robert Griffin III at the NFL Draft. His ends of his dreadlocks settled onto a baby blue jacket. His checkered-patterned shirt was offset and a purplish tie with horizontal stripes." White went on to describe Griffin's sock choice as well. This is in stark comparison to the words used to describe Ryan Tannehill on the same day. David Neal of the *Miami Herald* (Florida) described Tannehill as "the smart young man working toward being an orthopedic surgeon... Tannehill projected the giddy optimism, appropriately, of a recent college graduate hitting the labor market with a job in place." There were no references to his clothes or physical characteristics. The one reference to a white quarterback with regards to his wardrobe and clothing occurred when *The Advocate* (Louisiana), in a 2020 article, explained how a necklace was gifted to Burrow by a Baton Rouge based rapper, Boosie Badazz. The Advocate stated,

"The homage to Athens County, his [Burrow] hometown, was front and center thanks to the '740' area code t-shirt he wore from Nike. His nod to Baton Rouge, however, was a little more subtle – a diamond-encrusted No. 9 chain necklace sitting on his chest just above the outline of the state of Ohio on his shirt."

Although the appearance and cultural reputation theme was not the most popular theme within the data it was apparent that it was more prominent in the discussion of Black quarterbacks. The fact that it was only utilized once when referring to white quarterbacks, aids in

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the importance of its inclusion as a theme and demonstrates the sports media's priorities when it comes to framing college quarterbacks.

**Positions of Influence and Power.** This theme represents the sports media's acknowledgement and ability to portray white quarterbacks as influential and powerful athletes within the NFL while portraying Black athletes as powerless and under control of the NFL. It was found that the positions of influence and power theme, although, extremely prevalent throughout the data, is more apparent when discussing the first two quarterbacks drafted, rather than the two later drafted quarterbacks, both in 2012 and 2020. The positions of influence and power theme was found to occur in 30.4% of the 112 articles, with 87% of those occurrences occurring when describing Luck, Griffin III, Burrow, and Tagovailoa, the first two quarterbacks drafted in 2012 and 2020, respectively.

The findings show that the sports media utilizes the positions of influence and power theme in order to portray athletes in a way that parallels the overarching societal views of race. For example, *The Alexander City Outlook* (Alabama), in a 2020 article, suggested that Joe Burrow, a white quarterback, "force his way to another team other than the Bengals." Suggesting that the power and influence lies with Burrow himself and not with the NFL team. This is in sharp contrast to the way in which Tua Tagovailoa, a Hawaiian born, Samoan quarterback was discussed in *The New York Post* (New York), also in 2020. *The New York Post* clearly placed the power of Tagovailoa's future with the New York Giants, who held the fourth pick of the NFL Draft, by predicting that the Giants would trade their draft pick, which could be used on Tagovailoa to any team that would be willing to match their cost for the pick. In this same article, *The New York Post* also mentioned Burrow and his ability to "insist he will not play for Cincinnati [Bengals]." Another such example that utilizes this theme in order to portray the

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perceived power of white quarterbacks is evident in a 2020 article from the *Dayton Daily News* (Ohio), where again Burrow was discussed, “Patrick [Dan] and his staff have been among those building the narrative Burrow could consider following in the footsteps of Eli Manning, who was traded to the Giants [New York] after making it known he did not want to play for the Chargers [San Diego], who had the No. 1 pick in 2004.” Dan Patrick is the host of a *The Dan Patrick Show* a sports media show on NBC. The position of influence and power theme is not only evident in the preceding statement in regards to Burrow, but also portrays Eli Manning, another white college quarterback entering the NFL Draft, with the same narrative. The comparison to Manning in the 2004 NFL Draft displays the prominence and importance that this theme carries as far back as 2004.

The data set shows that the sports media’s use of the positions of influence and power theme played a role in the description of both white and Black athletes. The utilization of this theme place in importance on the leverage that an athlete was garnered throughout the pre-draft time period by NFL teams. While white quarterbacks were attributed with the leverage needed to force a team into a trade or to somehow determine with which team they would ultimately play for, Black quarterbacks were portrayed as pawns within the NFL draft and were not afforded such leverage through their portrayals within the media.

**Compatibility with the Status Quo.** The emergence of the compatibility with the status quo theme is evident in the sports media’s propensity to interpret the ability of athletes to conform to societal roles, including specific roles that are prevalent in the NFL, especially for quarterbacks. This theme focuses on the characteristics of the soon-to-be drafted quarterbacks and their perceived capacity to conform to the expected norms of the position of quarterback. According

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to Murrell and Curtis (1994) the quarterback is regarded as an extension of the head coach on the field and requires leadership, responsibility, decision-making, and cognitive expertise. The position also requires consistency and reliability. The findings show that the theme of compatibility with the status quo occurred in 40.2% of the 112 articles. Considering that the status quo of a quarterback is made-up of several factors including but not limited to talent, intelligence, leadership abilities, pedigree, and overall franchise quarterback attributes, the utilization of the compatibility with the status quo theme was found to be the third highest utilization of any of the six themes present within the data set.

This can be seen in an article from 2020, in the *Las Vegas Review Journal* (Nevada), where Justin Herbert a white quarterback is praised for his character, intelligence, and experience. *The Dayton Daily News* (Ohio) highlighted a description of prospect Joe Burrow that portrayed him as “A super hard, blue-collar, gritty guy who was going to work his ass off.” The same article also mentioned his confidence and preparedness. These are all characteristics that fit into the status quo of a successful NFL quarterback. However, *The Plain Dealer* (Ohio), in a 2012 article, takes a differing look at the same ideal when it comes to Griffin. *The Plain Dealer* reports, in a statement from Todd McShay, a sports media analyst for ESPN, “The Heisman Trophy winner [Griffin] doesn’t have much to prove physically at the NFL Combine next week, but he must sell himself in interviews to the Browns [Cleveland] and Redskins [Washington].” Insinuating that Griffin has to prove that his leadership abilities, intelligence, interview skills, and overall compatibility with the ideals of a franchise quarterback are present.

The proclivity of the sports media to create narratives by using the compatibility of the status quo theme was evident within the data and portrayed white quarterbacks as fitting into societal norms when it comes to playing the quarterback position and portrayed Black

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quarterbacks as outside the status quo of the media's definition of a quarterback in the NFL. The overwhelming prevalence of this theme, although somewhat congruent with the previous them of attribute and talent characterization, reinforces the sports media's inclination of characterizing quarterbacks by utilizing the ideals of society within their formation of how their articles are structured.

**Language and Connotation Usage.** There is a propensity by the sports media to utilize word meanings and connotations that are familiar with the public in an attempt to portray athletes. The differences in words and the meanings of words used by the sports media to describe similar characteristics and actions when describing soon-to-be drafted quarterbacks construct the language and connotation usage theme. Even though the time of overt racism in the sports media has gone by the wayside, historical and societal beliefs about racism are still apparent (Andrews, 1996; Cottle, 2000; Lule, 1995). These beliefs reveal themselves in different ways including the language and connotation used by the sports media in situations where race is a factor. The theme of language and connotation usage is one that can be found in nearly every article, however, in an effort to ensure that the themes carried with it an importance and prominence, the meanings of words and their respective connotations were only utilized by the researcher when they were significant to the article and quarterback themselves. Otherwise, there would be no end to the examples that could be found throughout the data set. Using this structure for the theme of language and connotation, the theme was found to be present in 63.4% of the 112 articles. In deciphering the theme of language and connotation usage it was found that when describing quarterbacks entering the NFL Draft, the language and connotations utilized by the sports media was consistent with previous research in regards to the race of the quarterback. In other words,

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the words, along with the connotations, portrayed within the data depicted stereotypical implications for both white and Black athletes. Traits and characteristics were attributed to athletes using words, meanings, and connotations that fit into the public's view

The above research mentions that Griffin was described as a “dual-threat quarterback” and a “mobile quarterback.” The connotation being clear that Griffin is athletic and is being described using stereotypical language and connotation that excludes the public from inferring the presence of intelligence or leadership skills. A clear case of this theme is exemplified when article data from Tua Tagovailoa and Justin Herbert are compared. Both quarterbacks are described as unknown quantities as draft picks in the respective articles, however Tagovailoa is labeled “a gamble” in a *Times Daily* (Alabama) article whereas Herbert is labeled “intriguing” in an article published by *The Bulletin* (Oregon). The language and the connotation of that language are in clear display when labeling the white and Black quarterbacks. Another example of the utilization of this theme is written in a 2012 article in *The Times-Picayune* (Louisiana), describing Griffin as “selfish and entitled.” In contrast a 2012 article published in *The Plain Dealer*, Luck was described as making “few mistakes and works constantly to improve.” In this same article Luck also is described as a “once-in-a-generation talent.” The language used to describe these two quarterbacks is remarkably different even though, the quarterbacks ended up being drafted No. 1 and No. 2 in the 2012 draft, Luck one pick before Griffin. It is also clear that the connotation used when describing each quarterback is also contrasting.

The contrasting language and connotation usage is, at times, difficult to pinpoint when analyzing articles and difficult to pinpoint specific examples, however the theme is prevalent when comparing full articles. For example, the same article as in the above example, from *The Times-Picayune* (Louisiana) describes Griffin as a former track athlete and a quarterback that



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will have to rely heavily on his attitude and leadership abilities, which are seen as positives. In other words, the journalist feels the need to point out these attributes in Griffin as positives where in the previous article they are looked at as a given with Luck. This is a clear example of the language and connotation theme being utilized by the sports media.

### **Hypothesis 1**

The inclusion of these six themes shows a distinct pattern, within the sports media, of creating narratives congruent with the previous research when defining both sports and racial themes. The findings revealed themes displaying the characteristics of both traditional sports themes as well as racial themes. The emergence of these themes and their utilization by the sports media, to create narratives describing college quarterbacks, act as catalysts to the framing process and therefore, confirm H1.

### **RQ2: Changes in Frames**

In regards to RQ2, although all six themes were found to be present in both the 2012 and 2020 articles, themes one, two, and three (future performance justification, attribute and talent characterization, and appearance and cultural reputation) were more prominent and show greater frequency and intensity in articles written about the 2012 NFL Draft and themes four, five, and six (positions of influence and power, compatibility with the status quo, and language and connotation usage) became more prominent and show greater frequency and intensity within the 2020 NFL Draft articles. The reduction of the prominence of themes one (future performance justification) and three (appearance and cultural reputation) between the 2012 articles and the 2020 articles was extremely evident almost becoming non-existent in 2020. The theme of attribute and talent characterization was found to be contained in both data sets, 2012 and 2020. In the 2020 data set, there were more instances of Black and non-white quarterbacks being

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framed as athletic, fast, and elusive, prompting the emergence of speed and talent qualification as subthemes. The utilization of these subthemes not only added frequency to the attribute and talent characterization theme but also increased the intensity of the theme. The emergence of these subthemes and their inclusion into an already existing theme is a notable distinction when comparing the two data sets. Collectively, this demonstrates that there was, in fact, a difference in theme utilization between the 2012 and 2020 NFL Draft.

The findings, within the data set, displayed a clear difference in the themes present between 2012 and 2020, with one of the most notable differences, being the emergence of subthemes, as stated above. Another difference being the intensity and frequency in which each theme was utilized in 2012 as opposed to 2020. The differences were displayed when comparing the themes present in the articles leading up to the 2012 NFL Draft and those articles leading up to the 2020 NFL Draft. Both the frequency and intensity of themes differed between the two data sets. It is clear that all six frames were present in both data sets, however, the 2012 NFL Draft contained more instances of future performance justification, attribute and talent characterization, and appearance and cultural reputation themes and were recorded at a higher intensity per article.

A 2012 article in the *Kansas City Star* (Missouri) illustrates this point by introducing several subthemes regarding Brandon Weeden, and the quarterback's future performance. Past athletic performance is an emergent subtheme highlighted by attributing the quarterback's lack of arm strength to his years playing professional baseball. In this same article the subtheme of age vs. experience also was introduced. The article portrays Weeden as being older than his draft class and use this as an excuse to downplay his potential success in the NFL. In 2012, in an article from *The Houston Chronicle* (Texas), Andrew Luck was described as both a Stanford

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graduate and a product of a football family on the account of his father having played the position of quarterback and also being an athletic director. This prompted the subthemes of intelligence and pedigree. These subthemes were far more frequent in 2012 as compared to their 2020 counterparts which aided in an increase in the intensity of the theme as a whole.

The data also revealed, in 2020, position of influence and power, compatibility with the status quo, and language and connotation usage themes increased in both frequency and intensity. This was apparent throughout the 62 articles from 2020. Although both Luck (2012) and Burrow (2020) were pre-empted No. 1 picks, it was clear that journalists used the theme of position of influence and power far more to describe Burrow than Luck. This theme was also more prevalent in the description of Tagovailoa (2020) than that of Griffin (2012). This was evident in the frequency and intensity of mentions in each article, rather than the total number of articles that contained the theme.

The data sets show a clear shift in the use of the six themes, utilized by the sports media between 2012 and 2020. These changes and variations are highlighted by distinctions within the themes which include a differentiation in subtheme usage as well as a change in the frequency and intensity of the individual themes within each article. Although the sports media uses the six themes in both data sets (2012 and 2020), the way in which they are constructed and utilized shifted within the eight-year gap. Subthemes which aided in the construction of each theme were not only found to vary in both frequency and intensity between the data sets but also new subthemes emerged or disappeared, depending on the year, which aided in creating a shift in the way the themes were both arranged and utilized by the sports media. This deployment of subthemes and the way in which they are utilized, within the data, allows for the sports media to design and shape separate and different narratives when discussing future NFL quarterbacks.

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### **Hypothesis 2**

The shift in the construction of these six themes, along with the changes in frequency and intensity of the subthemes reveal a change in the utilization of framing between 2012 and 2020. However, H2 cannot be confirmed. Although the themes changed and differed in both frequency and intensity, the researcher does not conclude these differences to be less racially driven as forms of framing in 2020 as opposed to 2012. The research only points to a shift of both sports and racially driven framing in the 2020 data set but does not support the idea that this shift is more or less racially driven as a form of framing college quarterbacks to the public.

### **Discussion**

The aim of this research was to identify and analyze the themes present within the sports media's discussion with regard to college quarterbacks entering the NFL Draft in both the 2012 and 2020 NFL drafts. The study also sought to determine any differences and changes to the themes that occurred within the eight-year gap between 2012 and 2020. In other words, the research sought to understand how the sports media changed or differed with their use of themes in order to create narratives for the public. Framing theory posits that the frames created by the sports media are dependent on the themes utilized in order to create the narratives for the public (Van Sterkenbug & Knoppers, 2004). This study identified six themes that are utilized by the sports media when describing college quarterbacks entering the NFL Draft. These themes are utilized by the sports media in order to create narratives that interest the public, and these themes are consistent with previous research. Although consistent and comparable with the previous research, there are notable nuances between the findings and the previous research. Research shows that the sports media create narratives to interest viewers and readers (Lewis & Weaver,

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2015). Framing theory informs the idea that a change in themes may also act as a shift in the narratives that are created (Van Sterkenburg & Knoppers, 2004).

H1 predicted, that a mixture of traditional sports themes as well as racial themes would be used by the sports media to describe college quarterbacks entering into the NFL. A mixture of these themes was found to be utilized, by the sports media, to create narratives conforming with societal views of sports and race. In addition, the public's view on the quarterback position was utilized in the creation of these themes in order to frame college athletes. It was also found that the themes utilized in narrative creation shifted from the 2012 draft to the 2020 draft. The shift was evident with the emergence of new subthemes as well as the intensity and frequency of their use by the media. H2 predicted the sports media would use less racially driven themes in 2020 due to changes in the views of society. Although a shift took place in regards to how the sports media formulated and utilized themes, that shift was not found to be less racially driven. The nuances that made up these shifts strategically aided in creating narratives to mirror the current racial landscape.

### **Strategic Framing**

The media utilizes strategic framing as a way to streamline information and create narratives that resonate with the public (Entman, 1993). Themes are selected purposely in order to create narratives that are consistent with the public's views on the world (Zald, 1996).

Strategic framing allows the media to set up situations and to create alternatives so as to compel the audience to support the media's position (Riker, 1996). This manipulation of the "rhetorical dimension" (Wedeking, 2010, p. 619) extends framing theory and creates an opportunity for the sports media to mold the public's opinion and is the goal of strategic framing. This study found that the sports media tends to portray any future bad performances by white quarterbacks with

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factors that are not under the player's control. For example, the lack of repetition, age, and repercussion on practice time due to Covid-19 were all found within the data. In contrast, when assessing the future performance of Black quarterbacks, it was found that attributes such as arm strength, pocket presence, and defensive recognition are factors in their future performance. This helps to create and further along the narrative that white athletes are not responsible for their future bad performances when their Black counterparts only have their own talents and failures to blame for their lack of performance. In this case, the sports media utilizes strategic framing in order to sway the public to support the media's long-standing perception of race and how it effects the quarterback position in the NFL. The presented media stereotypes about athletes, "an athlete's race, whether white or Black, will significantly affect how media professionals will describe him or her" (Lewis, Bell, Billings, & Brown., 2020, p. 342) buoy the notion that media framing can shape the way in which the public will view the performance of an athlete. With the understanding that societal, racial stereotypes are used in the sports media (Rada, 1996; Lumpkin & Williams, 1991; Billings, 2012) in order to create frames for the public, the notion that the media's justification for the future performances of quarterbacks would align with the racial and cultural ideals set forth in the previous literature helps to explain the connection between sports, culture, and expectation (Eitzen, 2001) and extends the notion of strategic framing into the NFL Draft.

The collective findings of this study demonstrate that future performance justification differs greatly depending on the race of each quarterback. The differences present between white and Black quarterbacks are consistent with contemporary views of race in the larger sense. For instance, the findings show a strong inclination for the sports media to excuse white quarterbacks for any future bad performance by blaming outside factors such as age, lack of practice time, and

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lack of experience. These attributes work together in creating a narrative about white quarterbacks that represents them as being fit for the job at hand and can only fail because of forces beyond their control therefore the choice of a white person can be justified to the public if they do fail. This narrative, when added to preexisting societal views, helps further along the idea that whites have enough talent to succeed at any job whether it be quarterback, head coach, or ownership. In the NFL, although 69% of players are non-white, only 35% of head coaches are non-white (Reimer, 2021). As for ownership in the NFL, there are only two non-white owners, Kim Pegula, a South Korean and Shahid Rafiq Khan, a Pakistani-American and Pegula is a co-owner (Henson, 2020).

The utilization of the future performance justification theme allows sports media to create a narrative that white athletes will succeed at playing quarterback barring any outside forces and therefore, through the use of this strategic framing, perpetuates this same narrative into society as a whole. By employing the future justification theme, the sports media are presenting a racial frame that portrays to the public, in the event of future bad performances by soon-to-be drafted quarterbacks, that white athletes are not at fault, while portraying the Black athlete and his “skills” as being the reason for the future bad performance. The data points out that skills, such as speed, arm strength, and intelligence may be reasons for any future failure. Strategic framing determines that this narrative will then be employed into society and become impactful and memorable throughout society (Entman, 1993). Due to the sports media’s ability to create this narrative, the only excuse or justification of failure from a Black person in a job is personal and talent based. By preserving this viewpoint within society, the media are not allowing for Blacks to be justified for failures.

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Framing theory dictates that the narratives created by the use of future performance justification aid in setting the stage for future, similar narratives. Higgins (1996) states that accessibility of constructs, framing, heightens the more frequent the specific frame is available. With the high frequency of this theme available and presented in 2012 it is natural to conclude that the theme of future performance justification for white quarterbacks would be understood to the public as a representation of reality. Whereas in 2020 the frequency abated and therefore the likelihood of the public to be aware of this particular racial frame would be lessened or even non-existent. This is an important point in the narrative creation process that allows for the assumption that changes to narratives can help re-shape and mold the public's views. The importance of the utilization of this particular theme is that the sports media is setting the stage for future narratives when describing future performance when it comes to the race of an athlete. Set into a larger, sports media setting, the utilization of this racially biased theme can have long-lasting effects on the public when assessing the future performance of an athlete as their careers move forward. These long-lasting implications also reach into society as a whole and can therefore manifest in the public's mind when making decisions about hiring outside of sport.

### **Racial Stereotypes**

Racial stereotypes are common in society and can have harmful effects on both the target of the stereotype and for those that hold these stereotypical views (Wheeler, Jarvis, & Petty, 2000). Costs that include targets of stereotyping conforming to particular stereotypical views as well as societal discrimination (Chen & Bargh, 1997). Research has shown that sports is a microcosm of society and therefore the stereotypes held within the sports media are present and accepted throughout society (Eitzen, 2001). The sports media, in this case, provided the media frame that Black quarterbacks are coveted for their athletic ability rather than their intangible



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skill sets, which includes leadership and intelligence. The contrast of attribute and talent characterization of Black and white athletes is evident in its form within the current data and draws a congruency and parallels with previous research (Rada, 1996). This is a long-standing sports media frame that has been especially utilized by the sports media when describing the quarterback position due to the fact that the position has been filled, predominantly, by white athletes throughout the history of the NFL (Reid & Mcmanus, n.d.). This theme plays along known and researched stereotypes such as, the perceptions that Black athletes are powerful and athletic (Helmreich, 1982) and have natural physical abilities that are seen to be superior to that of white athletes (Coakley, 1998).

Research also depicts the white athlete to have a superior intellect and possess leadership skills that Black athletes are perceived not to possess (Coakley, 1998). Findings in this study suggest that these two common stereotypes are prevailing throughout the media and are what aid in the creation of the attribute and talent characterization theme. The utilization of this theme only serves to perpetuate societal stereotypes that place whites in leadership roles throughout society in such capacities as business, politics, and sports. The danger in using this racial theme in narrative construction, within the sports media, is that it preserves the prevailing stereotypes of society and does not allow for any modification to societal views. It is clear that the perpetuation of these stereotypes and the use of the attribute and talent characterization theme mirrors the stereotypes of society within the sporting realm and creates a narrative for sports publics that is easily understood. Pitts and Yost (2013) suggest that fans expect a quarterback to be white. This idea is clearly shown within the confines of this particular theme and is congruent with societal views of intelligence and leadership. The utilization of this theme allows the sports media to continue to create narratives that transmit the dominant racial views contained within are society.

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By extending the stereotypes which represent white quarterbacks as intelligent and capable of leadership and represent Black quarterbacks as athletic, fast, and strong into society, the sports media is only adding to the idea that whites are capable in fields that require intelligence and leadership whereas Blacks are coveted only in an athletic capacity.

Within the findings, the theme of attribute and talent characterization was shown to contain several nuances that build upon the previous research. These nuances include the addition of comparisons to other athletes when it comes to talent and attribute characterization. The data shows that both in 2012 and 2020, when characterizing attributes and talents, quarterbacks were compared to other quarterbacks of the same race. Rarely were quarterbacks compared to other quarterbacks of a different race and the times where this phenomenon was present was a Black quarterback being compared to a white quarterback unfavorably. Due to the use of this theme by sports media throughout history, it is easy to understand why quarterbacks of the same race would be compared. The utilization of the attribute and talent characterization theme allows the sports media to match up both attributes and talents that may have only been discussed, in the past, with athletes of the same race, therefore prolonging the stereotype, as was shown to be the case in the findings of this study.

The importance of these comparisons within the data is twofold when the created narrative is extended out of the sporting realm and into society. First, the process of comparing quarterbacks, in this case, to quarterbacks of the same race does not allow the public to see how whites will compare to Blacks and vice versa, only preserving the preexisting stereotypes that whites are capable of some careers and Blacks are capable of others. Secondly, framing theory posits that by pre-sorting certain ideas it is easier for the public to understand those ideas (Gitlin, 1980). By pre-sorting quarterbacks of the same race together and only comparing Black

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quarterbacks to white quarterbacks unfavorably, the public then understands that Blacks are inferior when it comes to careers that require intelligence and leadership skills.

Stereotyping was also present when discussing a quarterback's appearance and place within the culture. According to Reeder and Drake (1980), athletes garner attention from their clothing choices outside of their sport. Athletes "are often charismatic leaders whose personal charisma frequently extend to influence in clothing" (Roach & Eicher, 1973, p. 137). Reeder and Drake (1980) posit that Black athletes' choice of apparel aids in presenting a positive image to Black publics and that those clothing choices are often mimicked by admirers. The emergent of the appearance and cultural reputation theme was apparent more towards the Black quarterbacks. In addition to discussing clothing choices of Black athletes the sports media also noted the physical characteristics of the Black athletes, such as hairstyle. These kinds of mentions were absent from all but one article about white quarterbacks. Joe Burrow, and his wardrobe was featured in a 2020 article published by *The Advocate* (Louisiana). The fact that the clothing and physical information was included when describing Griffin and not Tannehill, Luck, Weeden, or Herbert suggests that the sports media are aware of a level of significance to this particular frame. Clothing, hairstyle, speech, and stance are parts of Black culture that are formulated, in sports, in order to assert manhood and self-esteem (Majors & Billson, 1992). Being an expression of Black, mainstream culture, the extenuation of these factors is often misunderstood by white society and are seen as "challenges to white definitions of sportsmanship" (Simons, 2003, p. 11).

A second stereotype exists that the characterization of athletes that involves the description of tattoos, gaudy jewelry, and dreadlocks can be seen, by the public, as that athlete being from the ghetto or inner-city (Pearlman, 2000). The suggestions that are evoked in the

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public from these descriptions can be discouraging toward these athletes when viewed or read from the perspective of someone from a differing race. Therefore, the implication from the use of the appearance and cultural reputation theme is that race matters when deciphering the meaning of the created narrative. This difference in interpretation only plays in to given stereotypes about clothing and culture within the reader's societal views and acts to prolong the stereotype. The importance of the utilization of this theme comes into play when its perpetuation is coupled with the long-standing cultural implications. The theme aids in the formulation of a narrative that the public understands as white athletes are sportsmen while Black athletes are preoccupied with appearance and cultural relevance, which blends into the ideal of society's view on what a quarterback in the NFL 'should' be. The added dimension of the race of the reader also suggest that the societal definition of a quarterback is not the same for everybody and extending that into society as a position of leadership and intelligence may not be as established within all races. However, the fact that the appearance and cultural reputation frame was only used once when referring to white quarterbacks (Burrow) it is also apparent that the sports media understand the impact this frame has within society and are broadening the societal stereotype through its sports narratives.

### **Power Structure**

According to Operatio and Fiske (1998) prejudice and power are major factors in creating racial oppression. Research has shown the connection between sports and the public and also the influence sports narratives can have throughout society. Sports is a mirror of society (Beck & Bosshart, 2003) and the sports media, often times, mirrors the values of society (Wenner, 1989). "Issues of power and inequality are central to contemporary sport" (Spaaij, Farquharson, & Marjoribanks, 2015). This study shows that the sports media utilizes this knowledge to portray

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athletes in a way that parallels the overarching societal views of race. The juxtaposition portrayed by the sports media in regards to the influence and power of the quarterbacks mirrors the NFL's current power structure, white quarterbacks make up four of the top five paid quarterbacks (Overthecap.com), and the perceived power structure of society. The sports media, by using the theme of positions of influence and power, are creating narratives that are designed to align with the public's interest by mimicking societal norms (Sullivan, 1991) and influence the public on how to view these athletes (Price et al, 1997) thus, how to understand race within society.

The collective findings bear out that white quarterbacks are described as having the power to choose their own landing spots in the NFL, whereas the Black quarterbacks are at the mercy of the NFL and the owners. In the case of Joe Burrow, not only were the sports media suggesting that he should be sure to go to the best situation for himself, other, veteran quarterbacks, already in the NFL and previous, retired quarterbacks, were quoted suggesting the same thing. However, when discussing Black quarterbacks, the data showed a proclivity for the sports media to highlight the cost, for the team, to maneuver in the draft in an effort to claim the quarterback. The positions of influences and power theme suggests a narrative that white athletes can and will determine the way in which the NFL Draft is conducted, whereas the Black athletes are simply to be drafted where the NFL determines. The implication being, white quarterbacks demand the power necessary to gain control over their own careers, whereas Black quarterbacks lack that same power and are controlled by the system, in this case the NFL. A broader view of the societal power structure tends to lean in this same direction. The power to choose the direction of a career path, political path, or educational path lies in the hands of white America and not in the hands of non-white people. The employment of the positions of influence and

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power theme, by the sports media, functions to preserve the existing power structure within society. It is also clear, within the finding of 2012 and 2020 that the positions of influence and power theme was more apparent in 2020 suggesting that the theme was not only more relevant in 2020 but also that a greater understanding, by the sports media, of its importance when creating narratives for the sporting public had been recognized. The increased frequency and intensity of the power theme in 2020 is points to a shift in the theme formulation by the media but does not suggest a less racially driven theme which H2 predicts.

It has been noted that the white power structure within sports is represented by sportscasters, who are predominantly white (Hoberman, 1997). Therefore, the opportunity for the sports media to frame societal issues and reach a large part of society provides them with an ability to assert this power (Staples & Jones, 1985). The importance of the utilization of the positions of influence and power theme is the fact that the narrative created by its use in sports articles coupled with its relevance and congruence with societal views aids in the public's understanding of the racial power structure, not only in the NFL but in sports and society as a whole. The creation of narratives utilizing this theme have consequences that outweigh that of just quarterbacks and sports. Framing theory allows for the narratives created by the sports media to not only impart and mold beliefs but also change attitudes (Tuchman, 1979). By utilizing this particular theme, to create the narrative of powerful and powerless in sports, sports media are mimicking society and producing stories that are accessible to the sporting public in an effort to elicit consistent thoughts with the publics already existing societal views allowing for the perpetuation of current racial representation not only in sports but also in society.

### **Framing Racial Identity**

In part, this study focuses on the shifts within the media as it parallels with the shifts in society. Amid today's social climate and the prominence of such groups as Black Lives Matter a greater emphasis has been placed on racial identity. The framing of racial identity plays a major role in how the public views race and sports media is at the forefront of the creation of these narratives. Due to the importance of the sports media in society, framing can aid in the formations of attitudes, including views on existing conditions; i.e., the status quo. The utilization of the compatibility with the status quo theme, throughout sports media, only grows in importance because of the prominence of today's existing racial climate. "Dominant group members are motivated to defend the status quo when threatened with change or when the legitimacy of their position is in doubt" (Kray, Howland, Russell, & Jackman, 2017, p. 100).

The research shows that the sports media mirror this motivation when utilizing the compatibility with the status quo theme. For instance, a Black athlete performing well at the quarterback position suggests the presence of characteristics such as, leadership, intelligence, defensive recognition, and awareness and happens to be inconsistent with the Black athlete stereotype suggested in the previous literature as well as the previously discussed frame of attribute and talent characterization. "This unexpected or inconsistent information is highly salient and activates the search for causal explanations" (Fiske, 1980). The practice of the sports media to attempt to preemptively, in this case, quell any incongruencies with the public's desire for reporting to match society is the basis for the compatibility with the status quo theme that is prevalent within the data collected in this study. Previous literature has shown that mediated sports mirror the ideas, attitudes and values of society (Eitzen, 2001) and this is done through framing theory. Framing theory projects that the narratives created by the sports media will

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influence publics (Entman, 1993) and therefore, through the use of themes, can create what the public interprets as the status quo. The quarterback position is seen as requiring leadership, work ethic, recognition, as well as talent. The findings show that while white quarterbacks received these accolades from the sports media, Black athletes were portrayed without these characteristics, instead the sports media reported on their athletic achievement both in football and other sports.

It is clear from the lack of status quo characteristics mentioned in articles about Black quarterbacks that the sports media are attempting to frame white and Black quarterbacks differently in an effort to maintain a consistency with public's ideals when it comes to the status quo and racial identity. The compatibility with the status quo theme aids to set the frames that are used by the public to interpret the issue (Tuchman, 1978). The findings showed that the theme of compatibility with the status quo overlapped with the attribute and talent characterization theme insofar as when mentioning the attributes and talents of quarterbacks, the racial differences pointed to white quarterbacks conforming with the status quo, whereas the Black quarterbacks did not. It was also apparent from the data that the compatibility with the status quo theme was more prevalent in the 2020 articles when compared to the 2012 articles. This points out the sports media's understanding as to what constitutes the status quo and racial identity. A view, that has been shaped by previous, similar themes. It also allows for the sports media to frame athletes in that light to the sporting public.

A congruency with the attribute and talent theme as well as the position of power and influence theme aid in formulating a narrative that mimics the public's views and disallows for the influx of differences in interpretation. Differences that are moving more to the forefront in today's racial climate. The fact the findings indicate an increase in both frequency and intensity,



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in 2020, with the utilization of this theme bears this out and also highlights the need for sportswriters to preserve the status quo in order to frame the racial identity of athletes to society. The ideal of preserving the status quo, by the dominant group, in this case, sportswriters, mimics today's society as Black Lives Matter, among others, threatens the existing status quo and therefore the power of the dominant. H2 predicts that findings would indicate a less racially aggressive form of framing in 2020 due to the fact that by framing, the sports media, attempts to mimic societal views. Although the narratives created by the utilization of the compatibility of the status quo theme did mirror the public views, the theme was enhanced through its frequency and intensity in order to combat emerging societal views. In other words, the theme was utilized more racially than it had been in 2012 to combat the emerging views of society, which contradicts H2.

### **Ideology**

Ideology refers to the idea that “particular social ideas could be traced back to certain universal operations of the mind” (Eagleton, 2014, p. 1). In other words, ideology allows for the media to make certain correlations and associations within one's mind and can therefore be used to guide both thoughts and narratives. Ideology serves as a screen, or filter, to represent reality and this screen is manipulated by the media in order to create a certain narrative for the public (Eagleton, 1979). In the case of college quarterbacks, the sports media manipulates this screen, or filter, to create a congruency with existing ideology in order to shape the narrative of race and the quarterback position.

The literature acknowledges ‘white males are the voices of authority’ as a recurrent theme used throughout sports media (Messner et al., 2000). Because sportswriters are predominantly white males, the language used often embraces the societal hierarchies of the

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existing forms of racism (Bruce, 2004). The language and connotation used within the sports media is “peculiarly resistant to change and transformation” (Hall, 1981, p. 34). Hall (1981) goes so far as to state that racism is a polarizing ideology with deep roots in society and the distinctions between white and Black are a form of normalization in society. It is here where the theme of language and connotation emerges in the findings. The understanding of societal norms, language, and rhetoric allows the sports media to utilize ideology in an effort to guide the conversation and narratives presented about race and the quarterback position. The language and the connotation used is in clear display when labeling white and Black quarterbacks. This labeling can also suggest an approach, or strategy, when it comes to describing, or naming, quarterbacks. A strategy that illuminates from these voices of authority.

The significance of the language and connotation theme derives from the fact that racism is a historical ideology and this process of naming athletes can involve language and words where the “connotations and echoes which they carry reverberate back a very long way and continue to shape the ways whites see blacks today” (Hall, 1981, p. 42). Although these word choices and connotations are not overt in their racism they do hold, within them, suggestions of the past and representations that conjure up separate and distinct discourses when describing these athletes. The language and connotation usage theme found to exist in the findings is a clear message that society has not moved beyond the naming and labeling of racial characteristics when describing athletes. The language used in the sports media is often stereotypical and is used to trigger attitudes in the public. Due to the desire of fans to embrace athletes it is crucial for the sports media to present clear and relatable stereotypes when constructing narratives in order to highlight recognized qualities (Izod, 1996). These narratives not only pique the public’s interest

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but increase readership and viewership. Language and connotation are simple ways to elicit attitudes from the public.

The collective findings in this study displayed, in congruence with the previous research, a tendency for the connotation used, when describing Black quarterbacks, to portray them “inaccurately and stereotypically” (Rada, 1996, p.231). Therefore, preserving the societal views of the public rather than creating narratives that may lead to shaping new public views into the future. The ideology portrayed, with the utilization of the language and connotation usage theme, is that of white males and serves to create narratives to frame athletes in the view of these sportswriters. The importance of language, connotation, and labeling in framing these quarterbacks is that they set an ideology that penetrates society. Society understands and grasps sports commentary and carries those ideals into the world when it comes to business, politics, education, etc.

### **Racial Themes**

This study identified the sports and racial themes utilized by the sports media in attempt to create the narrative for the public in regard to college quarterbacks entering the NFL Draft. By utilizing framing theory, the themes identified in the research act as tools to ascribe identity to these soon-to-be drafted quarterbacks. In an attempt to understand the emergent themes, previous research was used as a back drop to provide context and meaning to the role these themes play within the fields of sports, society, race and in the overall parameters of framing theory. It was found that classic sports themes were mixed in with racial themes in the data sets researched. Denzin (1996) argues that racial framing used by the sports media is particularly powerful because the public understands racial representation through the narratives that sports media choose to provide. It is “only a slight exaggeration’ to suggest that sport, and particularly black-

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dominated professional sport, is ‘the most significant feature of the contemporary American racial order’ (Denzin, 1996, p. 319). The six emergent themes along with their corresponding subthemes point to the sports media’s vast knowledge of the public’s views on both sports and race. By utilizing a mixture of traditional sports themes with racial themes the sports media place a societal importance on the narratives they create and therefore, frame college quarterbacks in conjunction with that knowledge. The findings indicate racial framing is utilized within the sports media which depicts the quarterback position as a white athlete’s position. This racial framing also depicts Black athletes as lacking in the leadership skills and intelligence that is necessary for the quarterback position.

Framing, by the sports media, is marked by cliches, language choice, connotation, power, stereotypes and ideology. The ways in which sports and racial framing come together are shown within the data and suggest that both contemporary and historical racial themes exist among the articles examined. In addition to the six presented themes, many subthemes and subdivisions of themes were discovered by using the thematic analysis process set forth by (Vaismoradi et al, 2015) and were utilized to produce themes that fit into the larger academic discussion of racial framing in the sports media. Research has shown that frequency of a distributed message can predict and affect the judgement and direction thereof for the public (Higgins, 1996). This phenomenon occurs with both the attribute and talent characterization and the appearance and cultural reputation themes as well. The addition of subthemes displays the notion of how frequency and intensity can further the framing process when it comes to the public and its understanding of white quarterbacks with regard to intelligence and leadership.

As hypothesis two conveyed, the increases in themes four, five, and six (positions of influence and power, compatibility with the status quo, and language and connotation usage)

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show a shift in the sports media's usage of racial themes. The existence of all six themes in the findings of both 2012 and 2020 display the sports media's willingness to describe athletes with the use of both sports and racial themes. However, the increased frequency and intensity of certain themes coupled with the decreased frequency and intensity of others, and the emergent of subthemes, such as behavior threats, controllability, and influence in the 2020 data set, point towards a change in the framing used by the sports media within the eight-year time period.

Research has shown a congruence between sports and racial themes with the sports media (Billings & Hundley, 2009) and that combining these themes to create narratives aid in aligning the sports media's views with those of the public (Lewis & Weaver, 2015). The emergence of new themes acts as guide posts to understand how the sports media has changed and is continuing to change its narration construction to fit into the values, beliefs, and attitudes of society. The emergent themes perpetuate a narrative that Black athletes do not fit into the stereotypical mold for an NFL quarterback. Because the quarterback position elicits societal views of certain characteristics, leadership, work ethic, and intelligence, and is paralleled by views of other aspects of society, the societal view that is held about NFL quarterbacks can be expanded into other areas of society, including business, politics, education, and ownership. The need for research in this area is glaring and can allow for the restructuring of societal views. Due to the fact that sports are a microcosm of society (Eitzen, 2001) and are an integral part of how society views race, changes can be made, by the sports media, to aid in the shaping of the public view. This study helps to create a framework for future research within sports that can be expounded when researching other fields as well. Many of the emergent themes can be positioned in the fields of business and politics to further understand how media creates narratives based on race in order to influence the public.

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### **Non-white Athletes**

This study also begins to fill in a gap that previous research discussed within sports and race but without a variation that delves into quarterbacks and the NFL draft. Billings and Hundley (2010) stated that non-white athletes are often compared to white athletes using the same standards and themes as Black to white athlete comparisons. With the inclusion of Tua Tagovailoa, a Hawaiian born Samoan quarterback, in this research, the addition of a Samoan quarterback in the comparison can be added and expounded on for future research. The themes identified in this study complemented the previous research that showed the sports media's propensity to treat all races of non-white athletes with the same methods and frames that are used in regard to Black athletes. It can be said, however, this study, while extending previously known themes connected with a Hawaiian heritage, such as family and loyalty, to Tagovailoa, also instituted themes that described the athlete as intelligent and as a hard worker, although these themes are traditionally attributed to white athletes. These traditionally white themes were also complemented by a myriad of themes that are attributed to Black athletes, such as being athletic and being a gamble at the quarterback position. This shift in theme usage, to include traditionally white themes, and narrative formation throughout the sports media can be the basis for closer consideration in future research.

### **Limitations**

Although this study presented findings that were not only relevant to sports but also applicable to fields such as business, ownership, and politics, there were some limitations that acted as hindrances toward the study's goals. First, the inclusion of articles on in the Newsbank data base limited the amount and diversity of articles to analyze. While the parameters set forth above for the inclusion of articles created a comprehensive sample from Newsbank, there are

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other articles that fit these parameters not included within the database that could work to shed further light onto the goals of this study. Second, the current study focused on just the 2012 and 2020 NFL drafts and only the four first-round quarterbacks discussed in the above research. Although these drafts were chosen for their unique characteristics, other drafts and a deeper dive into the entire quarterback field of each draft could serve to create an emergence of separate themes as well as swell or deplete the importance of the themes discovered in this study.

### **Conclusion**

The method set forth by (Vaismoradi et al., 2015) aided in the formation and construction of six sports and racial themes that can be added to the research in an attempt to understand, more fully, the implications of racial framing within the sports media and how they affect society. Future research can build upon the framing used to describe racially diverse college quarterbacks to recognize commonalities and differences present in current research. Although the thematic analysis of this study highlighted many similarities with previous research, there was also found to be contemporary nuances that expand the previous research. These nuances include the addition of an aspect of comparison of attributes and talents to previous athletes. Several implications of framing theory have, in the past, been researched and discussed. This study begins to shed light on those implications in a contemporary light. By understanding the differences in the themes, between 2012 and 2020, researchers can begin to grasp the shifts that are being employed by the sports media in regards to framing racially diverse athletes. It is clear, from this study, that changes have occurred but the reasons for these shifts can still be researched.

In order for the sports media to strike a chord with its public the development of themes as well as the creation of narratives that reside with the public view is imperative. However,

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these themes do not necessarily need to follow the patterns of previous themes when it comes to sports and race. Themes can be adjusted and developed in order to not only mimic society but also to recreate certain societal views. This study aids in the interpretation of emerging themes within the sports media and allows for a better understanding of how the sports media can reproduce, negate, and create narratives that can aid in the construction of preferable narratives throughout society. Because sports have such an elevated platform, the understanding of sport related themes and their utilization has a pronounced effect on culture and society. Previous research has stated the themes prevalent in sports media may be systematic and, in turn, aid in reinforcing stereotypes (Bruce, 2004).

Due to the addition, in this study, of an eight-year-gap comparison, the previous research that suggests “it is through the sets and practices and discourses by which knowledge is constructed in the media, not the personal inclination of media workers, that racist ideologies continue to be recreated” (Bruce, 2004) can be confirmed or challenged. The implications for this study, when compared and examined with previous research, point to the fact that themes, as well as the frequency and intensity of these themes can change over time suggesting that discourses and narratives can also change. Coupled with the increase in Black athletes playing the quarterback position, Black quarterbacks being drafted at a higher rate and a renewed outlook on social justice there may be a change in both the created narratives and discourse that stray away from the practices of the past. Here in lies the importance for future research into theme development, narrative creation, and framing theory within the sports media.



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**Appendix A: Theme Table**

<b>Initial Themes</b>	<b>Secondary Themes</b>	<b>Final Themes (T) &amp; Subthemes (S)</b>
Heisman winner	Excuses for white QB's (pre-empted, talent excuses)	(T) Future performance justification
Improvement	Intelligence (white QB's)	(T) Attribute and talent characterization
Pre-empted no.1 pick	Athletic ability	(T) Appearance and cultural reputation
Compared to other quarterbacks	Clothing and appearance	(T) Positions of influence and power
Hometown	Maturity (leadership)	(T) Compatibility with the status quo
Marketing jackpot	Work ethic	(T) Language and connotation usage
Force to another team	Power of white QB's	(S) Past athletic performance
Show power	Injuries	(S) Franchise QB qualities
Leverage	Accomplishments (awards/stats)	(S) Age vs. Experience
Previous accomplishments	Needing to prove oneself (skepticism)	(S) Intelligence and Pedigree
Family life (parents & siblings)	Risky proposition (gamble, intriguing)	
Charity efforts	Comparison to other great QB's (mostly white)	
Athletic talent	Polarizing personalities	
Physical look (measurements)	Lack of decision for Black QB's as to where they are drafted	
Preparation	Unknowns	
Hard worker (work ethic)	Franchise QB's	
Franchise quarterback	Improvements (necessary)	
Intangibles		
Pocket passer		
Uncertainty		
Polarizing		
Speed		

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Risky player to draft		
Excuses for performance		
Accuracy and poise		
Underdog status		
Intelligence		
Emotional reactions		
Loyalty		
Clothing & jewelry		
Hairstyle		
Age		
Hometown pride		
Pedigree		
Injuries		
Explaining abilities and talent		
Overall value		

### Appendix B: Article Totals

Quarterback	Number of Articles (Newsbank)
Andrew Luck	29
Robert Griffin III	19
Ryan Tannehill	8
Brandon Weeden	6
2012 Total	62
Joe Burrow	24
Tua Tagovailoa	15
Justin Herbert	6
Jordan Love	5
2020 Total	50
Grand Total	112