

AN INTERSECTIONAL AND DIALECTICAL ANALYSIS AND CRITIQUE OF NBA  
COMMISSIONER ADAM SILVER AND NFL COMMISSIONER ROGER GOODELL'S  
AMBIVALENT DISCOURSES IN THE NEW RACISM

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## ABSTRACT

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In 2014, the leadership performances of National Basketball Association (NBA) Commissioner Adam Silver and National Football League (NFL) Commissioner Roger Goodell (both men who occupy White positionality), in response to two critical moments in their respective leagues, offered insight into prevailing racial and gender ideologies between United States (U.S.) professional men's sport, and ultimately, U.S. society. In the NFL, a domestic abuse incident between NFL star Ray Rice and his then-fiancé Janay Palmer, two individuals who do not occupy whiteness, and in the NBA, racist comments made by then-owner of the Los Angeles Clippers Donald Sterling, a man who occupies whiteness, required responses and disciplinary action from the commissioners. Utilizing critical rhetorical analysis as a method of textual analysis (McKerrow, 1989), this dissertation examines and critiques Commissioners Silver and Goodell's rhetorical performances as leaders in response to these incidents as well as the surrounding global news and sports media reactions to their decisions. Informed by concepts within critical whiteness studies (e.g., Nakayama & Krizek, 1995), intersectionality (e.g., Crenshaw, 1989; 1991), Black Feminist Thought (BFT) (e.g., Collins 1991; 2004; Griffin, 2012b; hooks, 2004), hegemonic masculinity (e.g., Trujillo, 1991), and dialogism (Bakhtin, 1981; Baxter, 2011), this dissertation examines the intersection of whiteness and hegemonic masculinity within the commissioners' performances to explore how whiteness functions dialectically and intersectionally to secure its persuasive power as a strategic rhetoric. The analyses within the two case studies revealed two distinct dialectics: (1) rhetorics of postracism vs. critical rhetorics, and (2) rhetorics of honor vs. rhetorics of shame. Overall, this project

extends understanding of how the rhetorics of whiteness work dialectically and intersect with the rhetorics of masculinity within the NBA and NFL via the rhetorical performance of those in leadership to maintain and protect White masculinity as central, thereby marginalizing racial and gender “Others” within the NBA and NFL. The dissertation closes with a call for future scholarship within the emerging study of communication and sport to function as scholarship of resistance and to examine race and gender intersectionally.

Human progress is neither automatic nor inevitable. Even a superficial look at history reveals that no social advance rolls in on the wheels of inevitability. Every step toward the goal of justice requires sacrifice, suffering, and struggle; the tireless exertions and passionate concern of dedicated individuals. Without persistent effort, time itself becomes an ally of the insurgent and primitive forces of irrational emotionalism and social destruction. This is no time for apathy or complacency. This is a time for vigorous and positive action.

– Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. (1958, p. 197)

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## CHAPTER I: ESTABLISHING THE RHETORICAL ASPECTS OF U.S. MEN'S PROFESSIONAL SPORT

In 2014, two incidents within the National Basketball Association (NBA) and the National Football League (NFL) offered insight into prevailing racial and gender ideologies between United States (U.S.) professional men's sport, and ultimately, U.S. society as a whole. On April 25, 2014 *TMZ* (an entertainment news website) released a tape containing racist comments by Donald Sterling, a man<sup>1</sup> who occupies whiteness<sup>2</sup>, and the majority owner of the NBA's Los Angeles Clippers (*TMZ*, 2014). By April 29, 2014, NBA Commissioner Adam Silver, also a man who occupies whiteness, fined Sterling 2.5 million dollars and banned him for

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout this dissertation, I utilize the terms "man," "men," "woman," and "women" to refer to individuals who present as man or woman. I utilize the terms "male" and "female" when referring to the human body's differentiation in biological sex. I also use the identifiers "male" or "female" when these terms are used within a direct quotation, even though these specific labels may not accurately reflect the referenced individual(s) preferred gender identification(s).

<sup>2</sup> To identify individuals who contribute to and/or benefit from whiteness's cultural space, I describe individuals throughout this dissertation as those who "occupy White positionality" and "occupy whiteness" or a variation of these terms rather than describing individuals as "White" (Nakayama & Krizek, 1995). In such instances, I have chosen to capitalize "White," (which is consistent with American Psychological Association (APA) formatting requirements) but not "whiteness" to identify "White" as a racial identification and to call attention to its significance. Only in instances when either of these terms is capitalized or lowercased, or when the phrase "White man" or a similar identifying phrase is utilized by an author that I am quoting, do I not follow these rules. When describing individuals who both occupy whiteness and hegemonic masculinity, I refer to them as occupying "White hegemonic masculinity," "White masculinity," and "White patriarchy" or a variation of these terms. Likewise, when describing individuals who identify as Black or who occupy Black positionality, I have chosen to use the label "Black," a name that individuals who occupy Black positionality have historically claimed for themselves. I have chosen this label rather than "African American," because such label indicates African heritage or ethnicity, which may not be accurate for all individuals who occupy Black positionality, as they could have a different ethnic identity or heritage. Similar to my explanation of individuals who occupy White positionality, I also refer to individuals who identify as Black as individuals who "occupy Black positionality" or a variation of this phrase. In such instances, I have chosen to capitalize "Black," and I only use "black" when providing a direct quote from an author. Additionally, I use the phrase "people of color" and individuals who "do not occupy White positionality" or a variation of these phrases to describe all individuals who do not identify as White or occupy whiteness's cultural space.

life from any affiliation with the NBA, including his majority ownership of the Clippers (Zillgitt, 2014a). Immediately following Sterling's lifetime ban from the NBA, Silver received praise and recognition from current and former NBA players and coaches, media, and fans for his leadership and firm stance against racism (Cacciola, Jones, & Futterman, 2014). Armour (2014a) stated in a *USA Today* online article, "...Silver is the new American hero. His lifetime ban of Donald Sterling and impassioned defense of common decency earned him praise from players, owners and fans, as well as everyday folks who just wanted to see the right thing done and were thrilled someone had the courage to do it" (para. 2). By August 12, 2014 Steve Ballmer, the former CEO of Microsoft, bought the Clippers, and the episode faded from news media coverage (Felt, 2014). Donald Sterling's comments, Commissioner Silver's response, and the overall support from NBA players, fans, and the media brought forth a discussion of racism in the U.S. and the NBA among basketball fans and many non-NBA followers.

In that same year, on February 15, 2014, only a few months before the Donald Sterling incident, NFL and Baltimore Ravens star running back, Ray Rice, and his then-fiancé, Janay Palmer<sup>3</sup>, two individuals who do not occupy White positionality, were released from jail on assault charges after the two had gotten into a fight at the Revel Casino in Atlantic City. Four days later, on February 19<sup>th</sup>, a video was released to the public that showed Rice dragging Palmer's unconscious body from the elevator. In a subsequent disciplinary meeting with the NFL on June 24<sup>th</sup>, Rice gave his account of what happened inside the elevator. By July 24<sup>th</sup>, following Rice's court order to complete probation and attend anger management classes, Rice was given a two-game suspension by Commissioner Goodell as the League's punishment for the charges,

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<sup>3</sup> I refer to Janay Rice as Janay Palmer throughout the analysis, as this was her name at the time of the abuse. Janay Palmer and Ray Rice were married on March 28, 2014. Janay then changed her name from Palmer to Rice and now goes by Janay Rice.

citing Rice's account of the incident as legitimacy for his suspension. Following the suspension, Goodell and the NFL received harsh criticism for the minimal punishment of a two-game suspension, prompting a press conference by Goodell on August 28<sup>th</sup>. At the press conference, Goodell stated that he did not get it right when he handed Rice the two-game punishment. On that same day, he also sent a letter to NFL team owners with a memorandum for their organizations that provided an updated personal policy for those charged with domestic abuse or sexual assault as well as several action items that the NFL will engage in (*USA Today Sports*, 2014). Only days later, on September 8<sup>th</sup>, *TMZ* released a second video that showed Rice punching and knocking out Palmer inside of the elevator, followed by him dragging her unconscious body out of the elevator, which had been shown in the first video. That same day, Rice was released from the Baltimore Ravens and suspended indefinitely by the NFL. This again prompted a press conference by Commissioner Goodell on September 19, 2014 in which he again stated that he "...got it wrong in the handling of the Ray Rice matter" (Goodell, 2014, para. 2). By November 2014, Rice had filed and won an appeal against the NFL, citing that his original account to the NFL of the abuse did not conflict with what was shown in the second video (Bien, 2014; Van Natta & Van Valkenberg, 2014). After winning the appeal, he was allowed to return to play in the NFL (but has yet to have a team sign him), and similar to the Donald Sterling incident in the NBA, it faded from the media (Hanzus, 2014). This particular seven-month long debacle, and an event that occurred simultaneously involving the suspension of NFL star Adrian Peterson, also a man who does not occupy whiteness, due to accusations of child abuse, sparked media discussions about the NFL and its stance (or lack thereof) against domestic violence. Considering that Commissioner Goodell did not give Rice an indefinite



suspension until the second surveillance video was released to the public, media and fans questioned the NFL and Commissioner Goodell's true standing as the all-American sport.

In light of these incidents within the NFL and NBA, I have conducted two rhetorical case studies utilizing rhetorical criticism as a method of textual analysis focusing on Commissioners Silver and Goodell's rhetorical performances as leaders who occupy whiteness of two major sports franchises. Whiteness is a positionality of racial power and privilege that is made both central and invisible in society through strategic rhetorics (Frankenberg, 1993; Nakayama & Krizek, 1995). My overarching goal is to examine the intersection of whiteness and hegemonic masculinity to explore how whiteness functions dialectically to secure its persuasive power as a strategic rhetoric. More specifically, I seek to investigate how whiteness utilizes dialectics (i.e., contradictory or opposing discourses) to maneuver through and around challenges to its cultural space. This examination sheds light onto how whiteness exists and thrives as many things at once. It also provides understanding of how dialectical tensions within whiteness function to preserve and perpetuate "postracism" (Ono, 2011), the new racism (Collins, 1991, 2004), and color-blind ideology (Bonilla-Silva, 2014). By focusing on two rhetorical case studies within men's professional sport in the U.S., my analysis provides insight into how sport as a cultural site is both a reflection of and an influence upon racial ideologies beyond the boundaries of sport. I seek to extend understanding of how the rhetorics of whiteness intersect with the rhetorics of masculinity within the NBA and NFL via the rhetorical performance of those in leadership to secure White masculinity as central.

In this first chapter, I first offer a discussion of critical whiteness studies by highlighting core concepts and influential research within this field. I then discuss important findings within critical studies focused on the NBA and NFL and argue that there is a need for a project such as

this one to further interrogate the ambivalences of whiteness as performed by Commissioners Silver and Goodell. Second, I discuss rhetorical criticism as a method as well as my analytical procedures, including my processes for selecting texts that were analyzed. I then offer my critical frameworks, or concepts within and related to critical whiteness studies, intersectionality, hegemonic masculinity, and the dialogic approach, which functioned as tools for identifying and analyzing the strategic rhetorical performance of whiteness and masculinity expressed by Commissioners Silver and Goodell. Out of this rhetorical critique of press conferences, public statements, and international news and sports media, I later argue, surfaced the strategic rhetorical performance of whiteness, which is characterized by its intersection with hegemonic masculinity as well as competing discourses that contribute to color-blind ideology, the rhetorics of postracism, and the rhetorics of the new racism.

### **Whiteness**

Ruth Frankenberg (1993) uses the term “whiteness” to describe a location from which many individuals, both men and women, experience racial privilege and structural advantage. Whiteness, then, is seated at the top of the new racism’s hierarchy, with those who do not occupy White positionality situated below it. Whiteness refers to a set of locations that are historically, socially, politically, and culturally produced, and are intrinsically linked to unfolding relations of domination (Frankenberg, 1993). It is a set of cultural practices that are usually unidentified and unnamed, meaning, individuals often do not perceive or acknowledge these practices (Nakayama & Krizek, 1995).

Studies that have examined whiteness have utilized four distinct methodological approaches (Warren & Heuman, 2007): a rhetorical perspective (e.g., Lacy & Ono, 2011; Marty, 1999; Nakayama & Krizek, 1995), an empirical perspective (e.g., Martin, Krizek, Nakayama, &

Bradford, 1999; Martin, Trego, & Nakayama, 2010), a pedagogical perspective (e.g., Cooks, 2010; Cooks & Lebesco, 2006; Warren, 2013; Zingsheim & Goltz, 2011), and a performative perspective (e.g., Cooks & Simpson, 2007; Warren, 2003; Zingsheim & Goltz, 2011). Often the pedagogical and performative perspectives overlap (e.g., Cooks, 2010; Cooks & Simpson, 2007; Warren, 2003; Zingsheim & Goltz, 2011). Additionally, qualitative methods (e.g., Jackson, 1999; Jackson & Heckman, 2002), auto-ethnographic (e.g., González, Cantu, & González, 2007; Herakova, Dijana, Sibii, & Cooks, 2015; Orbe, Groscurth, Jeffries, & Prater, 2007), postcolonial and poststructuralist (e.g., Shome, 1999), and television, film, and cultural criticism (e.g., Chidester, 2008; Cramer, 2016; Cranmar & Harris, 2015; Griffin, 2015; Projansky & Ono, 1999; Watts, 2006) have been utilized to identify and interrogate whiteness.

While numerous methodological perspectives have framed the examination of whiteness, a critical cultural approach is most suitable for calling out whiteness's centrality, and thereby revealing its hidden power in society at a macro-level. The theoretical and methodological contributions of the examination of whiteness from a critical perspective can be attributed to its theoretical foundations in feminist studies, a discipline that interrogates systems of power with the goal of social justice and equality for women and other marginalized individuals (Hesse-Biber, 2014). Significant projects that have named whiteness through a critical lens include Nakayama and Krizek's (1995) analysis in the *Quarterly Journal of Speech* entitled, "Whiteness: A Strategic Rhetoric." Nakayama and Krizek (1995) argue that whiteness is a strategic discourse, that is, whiteness constructs and utilizes a discursive space of pre-existing privilege and power. Their essay explores six strategic ways in which whiteness operates in everyday communication practices. One of the six strategies that they identify is that individuals who occupy whiteness often associate White positionality with power. For instance, they found that the participants of

their study, which included students who identified as White, utilized words like “majority” or “dominant” to describe whiteness. This strategy, along with the other six strategies, functions to protect whiteness’s discursive power. Through this study, the authors illuminate whiteness as a dominant, invisible force that is situated as normal and central within communicative practices. Nakayama and Krizek’s (1995) conception of whiteness as a communicative concept led to several publications in the 1990s among communication scholars that explored whiteness through a critical cultural lens, including an influential text edited by Nakayama and Martin (1999), *Whiteness: The Social Construction of Identity*. Most common among critical whiteness studies within communication is the examination of whiteness within pedagogy and within media.

### **Pedagogy**

*Performing Purity: Whiteness, Pedagogy, and the Reconstitution of Power* by the late John Warren (2003) provides a substantial influence on the development of whiteness studies within the study of communication, and specifically within the study of communication and education. Warren (2003) offers critical understanding of the performance of whiteness by students within the classroom and argues for a more complex way of seeing whiteness and the body. He suggests a move towards the “constitutive body of whiteness,” arguing that whiteness is a reiterative performance or an identity that is maintained and naturalized through everyday communication. More specifically, he claims that the reproduction of whiteness as purity is the outcome of the performative process (Warren, 2003). More recently, *Whiteness, Pedagogy, Performance*, a book edited by Leda Cooks and Jennifer Simpson (2007), examines whiteness in pedagogical practices. The authors write with a social justice agenda and focus on analyzing cultural practices of whiteness and racial identities as performative and situated within various

historical contexts, thus drawing attention to the significance of whiteness within unique historical, social, and pedagogical settings. Influenced by works such as these, countless publications have identified and examined whiteness within pedagogy (e.g., Cooks, 2010; Cooks & Lebesco, 2006; Warren, 2003, 2013), as well as whiteness's intersection with other subject identities within the classroom (e.g., Zingsheim & Goltz, 2011).

## **Media**

Lacy and Ono's (2011) *Critical Rhetorics of Race* includes a compilation of news media, television, and film criticisms focused on naming and interrogating whiteness within media texts through a critical cultural lens. Similarly, an abundance of critical cultural analyses of media texts focus on naming and analyzing whiteness within film and television (e.g., Cramer, 2016; Cranmar & Harris, 2015; Dubrofsky & Ryalls, 2014; Griffin, 2015; Watts, 2006). For instance, Chidester's (2008) rhetorical analysis and critique examines how whiteness functions through the strategic absence of people of color within the show *Friends*. Chidester claims that *Friends* portrayed a circle of friendship among a cast of men and women who occupy whiteness that could not be infiltrated by a person of color, such as two of Ross's (a main character) girlfriends who did not occupy White positionality. Furthermore, even though the show was set in New York City, a very racially diverse city, people of color were sparingly portrayed on the show as supporting or visiting roles or even as people in the background. Similarly, Projansky and Ono's (1999) analysis of *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* examines the absence of racial discourse within interracial interactions of the main characters as a strategic color-blind rhetoric functioning to elide the significance of racial identification in life experiences for both individuals who do and do not occupy whiteness. Studies such as these are key examples from the abundance of critical cultural analyses of texts naming and examining whiteness.

It is evident that whiteness studies has fulfilled its significant potential to move communication studies towards racial justice practices that dismantle White power and simultaneously move voices and experiences of people of color out of the margins. While these studies have offered profound insight into whiteness through media analysis and the critical exploration of pedagogy, another cultural space that has potential to reveal the strategic practices of whiteness is within professional sport. In the following section, a discussion of how the study of communication and sport has furthered critical cultural studies, as well as how there is a need for further study of whiteness within communication and sport is presented. Furthermore, an explanation of how my two rhetorical case studies can extend understanding of whiteness as a strategic rhetoric is discussed.

### **Critical Whiteness Studies, Communication, and Sport**

Critical analyses of sport as a cultural domain have provided insight into how sport's rhetorical power has transcended the boundaries of sporting arenas, courts, and fields to infiltrate society. Griffin and Calafell (2011) argue that sport is a pedagogical space that "...is instructive of how racial hierarchies in the United States reflect larger systems of domination" (p. 117). The analysis of race and racism in sport has contributed greatly to the understanding of how historical racial inequities are enacted within and through professional sport organizations. Therefore, the critique of professional sport offers insight into how professional leagues, such as the NBA and NFL, function as sites of struggle over the meaning of race, which have profound influence on racial ideologies beyond the boundaries of professional sports (Griffin & Calafell, 2011). However, there is still significant potential in the analysis of whiteness, specifically within the NBA and NFL, to contribute to critical whiteness studies, communication, and communication and sport specifically.

## **The National Basketball Association (NBA)**

The NBA has gained significant popularity and market power at both local and global levels, as exemplified by its 31,107,392 Facebook followers (NBA, 2017a) and its 24.1 million Twitter followers (NBA, 2017b). Current NBA star LeBron James (three-time NBA Champion and four-time NBA MVP) alone has 34.1 million Twitter followers (Lebron James, 2017), and combined, television networks *TNT*, *ESPN*, *ABC*, and *NBATV* garnered over 7.7 million NBA viewers in 2016 (Cohen, 2016). Due to the NBA's extreme popularity worldwide, the discourses within and surrounding the NBA are not limited to the sports world, but extend into other arenas of society and influence both a local and international understanding and perspectives of the intersections of race, gender, wealth, poverty, nationality, and power (Flores, Ashcraft, & Marafiotte, 2013; Lavelle, 2015; Park, 2015; Shor & Galily, 2012). The NBA, more so than any other U.S. professional sport, has the persuasive power to influence racial understanding beyond the U.S. (Griffin, 2012a; Shor & Galily, 2012).

The NBA has approximately 450 players, and the majority of the players self-identify as Black<sup>4</sup> (74.4%). Additionally, 1.8% identify as Latino, only two players (0.3%) identify as Asian, and 23.3% identify as White. While players predominantly identify as Black, they play for teams that are under the ownership and administration of predominantly men who occupy whiteness, with only two majority owners of color in the Association: Michael Jordan, a man who occupies Black positionality, majority owner of the Charlotte Hornets, and Vivek Ranadive, a man who identifies as Indian, majority owner of the Sacramento Kings. Additionally, there are only two women owners, both who occupy White positionality: Karen Gail Miller is the majority

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<sup>4</sup> The authors of this specific study, Lapchick and Guiao (2015), use the specific terms "Black," "Latino," "White," and "Asian." Therefore, I have used their exact language choice here to report their findings.

owner of the Utah Jazz and Jeannie Buss is the controlling owner of the Los Angeles Lakers (Lapchick & Guiao, 2015). In the Association office, 40.9% of professional staff positions are held by women and 35.4% are held by people of color. As for head coaches, 0% of head coaches are women and 33.3% are men of color. One assistant coach is a woman, and 40.8% of assistant coaches are people of color. For administrative positions, 7% of CEO/presidents are people of color (numbers are not provided for women), 20.3% of vice president positions at the team level are women and 15.4% are people of color, and 36.1% of team professional administration positions are held by women and 26.4% are held by people of color. For medical personnel, 3.5% of team physicians are women and 21.4% are people of color. Additionally, 0% of head athletic trainers are women and 33.3% are men of color. For media positions, 3.2% of broadcasters are women and 31.1% are people of color (Lapchick & Guiao, 2015). In sum, men who occupy White positionality far outweigh women and people of color in decision-making positions in the NBA. Therefore, a critique of the NBA's racial and gender imbalance offers understanding of society's struggle over the meaning of race (Griffin & Calafell, 2011) and its intersection with gender. For this reason, in recent years, the NBA has been examined through a critical cultural lens due to this racial hierarchy and several incidents that have called attention to its "Blackface" which is dominated by White masculine ideology (Griffin & Phillips, 2014).

Within the NBA, critical studies have focused on the different and complex ways in which Black masculinity has been rhetorically constructed (Dickerson, 2016; Lavelle, 2010) and then commodified and consumed by stakeholders who occupy whiteness (i.e., media, fans, and ownership) (De B'éri & Hogarth, 2009; Flores, Ashcraft, & Marafiotte, 2013; Griffin, 2012a; Griffin & Phillips, 2014; Mocarski & Billings, 2014). Additionally, critics have analyzed how Black masculinity has been controlled and policed through specific league policies, ownership,



and disciplinary actions guided by whiteness and hegemonic masculinity (Colás, 2016; Cunningham, 2009; Flores, Ashcraft, & Marafiotte, 2013; Griffin, 2012a; Griffin & Calafell, 2011; Griffin & Phillips, 2014). Studies focusing on whiteness in the NBA have found that the process by which athletes who occupy Black masculinity are commodified and consumed by management, media, and fan bases that occupy whiteness, and the process by which whiteness functions to control and police athletes who occupy Black positionality through strategic policies and disciplinary actions of the NBA, work together simultaneously, and most often invisibly, to secure whiteness' centrality and power.

Griffin and Phillips (2014) argue that when NBA super star LeBron James chose to serve his own interests and play for the Miami Heat rather than the Cleveland Cavaliers in 2010, the resulting hostile reaction from the media, fan base, and management to "The Decision" was a contemporary example of cybercolonization. This is because fans and sports media who occupy whiteness utilized discourses within online spaces, which are generally considered part of a digitized democracy, to discipline and attempt to control James, an athlete who occupies Black positionality (Gajjala, Rybas, & Zhang, 2010). Additionally, Flores, Ashcraft, and Marafiotte (2013) analyzed the performance of White masculinity in comparison to the performance of Black masculinity in the NBA and found that White masculinity is situated by the media as civilized, while Black masculinity is situated as uncivilized (or primitive), thus furthering the centrality of White masculinity in the NBA. In a different study, De B'éri and Hogarth (2009) examined the implications of the discourse surrounding "Malice of the Palace," an incident that involved a fight between Indiana Pacers players, including NBA Champion Ron Artest, and Detroit Pistons players, that flooded into the stands and involved fans. De B'éri and Hogarth (2009) found that athletes who occupy Black positionality were positioned by the media, NBA

ownership, and fans through a White gaze. De B'éri and Hogarth (2009) argue that “By examining the Ron Artest brawl and subsequent conversations related to this, it becomes clear that the NBA’s spectatorship is marked by the possessive gaze of White fans, which colonizes the Black bodies of NBA players” (p. 104). Furthermore, Griffin (2012) and Griffin and Calafell (2011) provide significant understanding of the processes in which whiteness within the NBA has policed, disciplined, controlled, and even punished athletes who occupy Black positionality through specific NBA policies and disciplinary actions that operate covertly in the name of color-blindness and under the guise of interest convergence. Interest convergence is a concept within critical race studies that explains that progress for individuals who do not occupy whiteness is often only accomplished when it serves the interest of whiteness (Bell, 2004). In Griffin and Calafell’s (2011) analysis, they focused on the former NBA Commissioner David Stern’s (who served as commissioner from 1984 to 2014) rhetorical performance of whiteness and paternalism via the 2006 NBA Dress Code and his punishments given to players involved in the previously mentioned 2004 “Malice at the Palace.” Specifically, through these incidents, Stern elided the perspectives and experiences of players who occupy Black positionality by banning clothes related to hip-hop culture (i.e., chains, throwback jerseys, boots) and by delivering harsh punishments to players involved in the fight between players and fans at the Palace of Auburn Hills without acknowledging the players’ standpoints (Griffin & Calafell, 2011). Griffin (2012) also explored Commissioner Stern’s White hegemonic masculinity and paternalism in enforcing the NBA age limit. Griffin argues that Stern’s 2006 enforcement of nineteen as the minimum age of players allowed to play in the NBA exemplified Stern’s paternalistic control of Black masculinity, similar to a slave owner, whereas in sports dominated by players who occupy White positionality, such as soccer, tennis, and golf, there is no age

minimum. These studies as a whole argue that through these different events, Stern embodied White patriarchal control within a hypermasculine space of sport that praises strength and dominance.

While the exploration of whiteness and its intersection with masculinity within the NBA has been examined in relation to the rhetorical performance of former Commissioner David Stern as well as noteworthy events such as “Malice at the Palace,” the implementation of the NBA Dress Code, and “The Decision” by LeBron James, among other events in the 1990s and early 2000s, there is room to examine contemporary issues of whiteness and its intersection with hegemonic masculinity through specific leadership decisions enforced by current NBA Commissioner Adam Silver. Lavelle (2015) examined the *TNT* game commentary from the April 29, 2014 Clippers/Warriors game that followed the press conference delivered by Commissioner Silver in response to Donald Sterling’s comments, as well as reactions of current and former NBA players that appeared in news coverage on April 29, 2014. While Lavelle’s (2015) analysis provides insight into the NBA’s role in the new racism, Lavelle (2015) suggests that the rhetorical performance of Commissioner Silver via his press conference deserves a separate analysis. This project seeks to address that void. As a member of former Commissioner David Stern’s staff, Commissioner Silver’s role in past decisions regarding “Malice at the Palace” and the NBA Dress Code function to influence his contemporary leadership approaches and provide understanding of how whiteness is perpetuated through time. Because the strategies of whiteness morph and change throughout history to secure its centralization, the examination of new leadership as well as that leadership’s response to racialized events provide insight into the ways in which whiteness evolves and works to secure its power. Therefore, my analysis of leadership decisions made by Commissioner Silver aims to provide substantial contributions to whiteness

studies as well as communication and sport. To complement an analysis of Commissioner Silver as the leader of the most athletically elite, popular, and profitable professional basketball league globally, my examination of the NFL, the most profitable and popular football league in the world, can provide extensive insight into the professional sport world. For this reason, the second rhetorical case study for this dissertation focuses on examining whiteness and masculinity within the NFL.

### **The National Football League (NFL)**

The NFL is arguably the most popular professional men's sports league within the U.S. In 2015, the Super Bowl, which has become a de facto U.S. holiday, drew in 112.8 million viewers, making it the fourth year in a row that over 100 million viewers tuned in for the NFL's championship game. The 2014 Super Bowl audience was over double that of the Academy Awards (45.3 million), the 2014 Winter Olympics (33.5 million), and the Grammy Awards (30.5 million) (Sandomir, 2015). Currently, the NFL has 21.1 million Twitter followers (NFL, 2017a) and its Facebook page has 15,732,017 likes (NFL, 2017b). In an effort to grow an already expansive audience, the NFL recently partnered with companies like Yahoo, *CBS*, and Verizon to allow for online streaming via digital devices to reach a growing international and millennial audience in Eastern Europe, Germany, Japan, Australia, Brazil and China. Additionally, as of September 2015, the NFL moved onto Youtube, Twitter, and Facebook to offer additional NFL content beyond the already available replays and podcasts through NFL websites and apps. Audiences now are able to access shows like "The Rich Eisen Show" and "Fantasy Live" and clips from the various teams (Castillo, 2015). Clearly, the NFL's U.S. and international appeal and influence is profound, and is only growing, thus expanding the influence of the NFL's rhetorical power to mold racial and gender ideologies.

The NFL currently is composed of 32 teams, each with 53 players on its squad, plus an eight-player practice squad. This means that there is a total of 1,696 players in the NFL, not including players on the practice squad and players who come to training camps but do not make the squad (Irwin, 2014). The League is composed of predominantly non-White players with 68.7% of players identifying as African American<sup>5</sup>, 0.7% as Latino, 1.1% as Asian/Pacific Islander, 0.9% as “other,” and 28.6% as White. Overall, the League, similar to the NBA, is dominated by men who occupy whiteness within ownership and administrative positions. The NFL has only one majority owner of color, Shahid Khan, a Pakistani-born American man and the majority shareholder of the Jacksonville Jaguars. The League also has two woman majority owners, Virginia McCaskey of the Chicago Bears and Martha Ford of the Detroit Lions, both who occupy White positionality. Kim Peluga, who also occupies White positionality, is the co-majority owner of the Buffalo Bills with her husband Terrence Peluga. Additionally, only 30.3% of the League office positions are held by women and 28% by people of color. As for coaches, 0% of head coaches are women and 18.7% are men of color (6 of 32 positions), and 0% of assistant coaches are women<sup>6</sup> and 37.9% are men of color. Additionally, 22.9% of team vice presidents are women and 13.7% are people of color. There is only one (3%) person of color in the position of CEO/President and no (0%) women. As for senior administration positions,

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<sup>5</sup> The authors of this reported study, Lapchick and Robinson (2015) specifically use the terms “African American,” “White,” “Latino,” “Asian/Pacific Islander,” and “other.” Therefore, because I am reporting the findings of their study, I have chosen to use their exact language.

<sup>6</sup> Jen Welter, the first woman to hold an assistant-coach position in the NFL, was part of the Arizona Cardinal’s coaching staff for the 2015 training camp and pre-season training. Because she was employed only temporarily in the pre-season, she was not considered as a full-time assistant coach. Welter was let go before the regular season (Bieler, 2015). Additionally, in January 2016, Kathryn Smith was hired as the special teams quality control coach for the Buffalo Bills, making her the first full-time assistant coach in the history of the NFL (Klausner, 2016). She was hired after this report was assembled.

22.2% of positions are held by women and 19.4% by people of color. Furthermore, 32.2% of professional administration positions (i.e., assistant directors, controllers, video coordinators, equipment managers, coordinators, supervisors, and managers) are held by women and 19.4% by people of color. As for medical personnel, 2.7% of team physicians are women and 14.6% are people of color, and 0% of head trainers are women and 41.3% are people of color. The officials in the NFL are 0.8% women and 30.3% are people of color (Lapchick & Robinson, 2015).

Similar to the NBA, the NFL's decision-making is dominated by men who occupy White positionality, as they predominantly occupy ownership and administrative positions. Therefore, my critique of the NFL's contribution to sport and society's racial and gender hierarchy offers an opportunity to identify the deliberate workings of whiteness and its strategic intersection with masculinity as a rhetorical strategy that secures this hierarchy.

Race and racism have been topics of exploration within the NFL from an interdisciplinary perspective; however, there is a need for more critical analyses of the NFL's rhetorical influence particularly as it relates to whiteness and leadership performances. For instance, Cunningham (2009) examined Black athletic defiance to policies that seek to enforce an anti-hip-hop culture in both the NFL and NBA. Additionally, Grano (2014) examined the strategic rhetoric of NFL star Michael Vick and the NFL in crafting public forgiveness after his prison term for dog fighting and animal abuse. Among the more popular topics covered include covert racism and whiteness within the NFL draft. For example, Dufur and Feinberg (2009) qualitatively examined covert racism that potential NFL athletes experienced during the NFL tryouts (the "combine" evaluation process) over a ten-year period. Likewise, Oates and Durham (2004) and Oates (2007) critically examined media discourses of the athletic male body during the NFL draft. Several studies have also responded to racist comments made by Rush Limbaugh

about quarterbacks who occupy Black masculinity. These projects have examined how quarterbacks who occupy Black positionality are frequently described with words and phrases within media texts that emphasize physical dominance and lack of mental dexterity; meanwhile, quarterbacks who occupy White positionality are primarily described as less physically skilled, more mentally prepared for the game, and less likely to make mental errors (Buffington, 2005; Hartmann, 2007; Mercurio & Filak, 2010; Niven, 2005; Rada, 1996).

It is clear that several studies have examined constructions of Black masculinity within the NFL through analyses of media representations, as well as covert strategies of racism and whiteness in the NFL draft. These contributions provide understanding of the ways media and sport converge to dominate commonsense ideologies about race and masculinity. However, there is room to examine whiteness's intersection with masculinity through the rhetorical performance of NFL leadership. More specifically, Commissioner Goodell's leadership decision-making and overall rhetorical performance provides substantial understanding of how the creation and enforcement of NFL policies and Goodell's public responses to incidents, such as the one involving Ray Rice, work to perpetuate dominant racial and gender ideologies in intersectional ways. This project seeks to provide such insight. By pairing analyses of both Commissioners Silver and Goodell, I seek to provide an extensive examination of how whiteness's centrality has strategically functioned to secure itself, and thus perpetuate the marginalization of individuals who do not occupy White positionality or White masculinity, within two of the most popular U.S. professional men's sports.

In total, similar to De B'éri and Hogarth (2009), Flores, Ashcraft, and Marafiotte (2013), Griffin (2012), Griffin and Calafell (2011), and Griffin and Phillips (2014), I seek to make new contributions to accounts of how racial and gender inequality is enforced and reinforced through

the rhetorical performance of commissioners in professional sports, and specifically in the NBA and NFL, thus securing White masculinity's power. Unique to these studies, I aim to examine the influence of leadership via commissioners of both the NBA and the NFL, rather than just the NBA. By extending analysis to the NFL, a deeper understanding of how racialized and gendered power is constructed, as well as how whiteness is centralized within U.S. professional sports can begin to unfold. Within this dissertation, I specifically examine the rhetorical performance of NBA Commissioner Silver and NFL Commissioner Goodell through their responses to incidents involving players and team owners requiring disciplinary action. In the following section, the methods for the rhetorical analysis and critique as well as the critical frames that will inform the analysis and critique are described.

### **Methods**

Rhetorical criticism is a humanistic methodology that has a history of over two millennia (Black, 1965; Campbell & Jamison, 1975; Foss, 2009). Rhetorical criticism has been defined in different ways throughout time. Aristotle (1954), who focuses on rhetoric as persuasion through speech making, delivery, and interpretation, identifies rhetoric as “the faculty of observing in any given case the available means of persuasion” (p. 3). More recently, Edwin Black (1965) moves beyond focusing on rhetoric as persuasion through oratory. He identifies rhetorical criticism as “... a discipline that, through the investigation and appraisal of the activities and products of men, seeks as its end the understanding of man himself” (p. 9). The focal point of rhetorical criticism, according to Black (1965) “...is usually taken to be discourse that aims to influence men” (p. 17). I take rhetorical criticism to be the examination of texts in any of their numerous forms with the purpose of identifying and interrogating the text's communicative process as well



as current or potential outcomes of the text's rhetorical power on all individuals (not just men, as Black indicates).

The goal of rhetorical criticism is to understand the complex matters of human communication. Engaging in rhetorical criticism consists of describing, interpreting, and evaluating rhetorical texts or artifacts. To begin this process, the first step entails describing the artifact or text at hand. As a humanistic process, the scholar's viewpoint with its sprawling assumptions as to what is imperative and non-imperative about available texts, plays a significant role in determining what text(s) she/he selects to examine, as well as what characteristics of the text are noteworthy (Borgmann, 1975). Examples of artifacts that can be examined include a speech, press conference, film, television, social movement, website, newspaper, political campaign, advertisement, or any other kind of text or activity in which human communication plays a role (Foss, 2009; Medhurst, 2014). Secondly, the critic interprets the text. Medhurst (2014) explains this process of interpretation by stating:

The critic first discovers the issue or question that lies at the heart of the text under investigation and then, having experienced that ah-ha moment, formulates a propositional argument that highlights the significance of the rhetorical action within the text.

Everything else flows from this pivotal moment when the critic formulates a significant argument and then uses that formulation to interrogate the rest of the text. (p. 132)

This leads to the final stage in which the critic evaluates the text for its influence on its intended audience given the artifact's goals. The distinction of the critic in comparison to scientists is their move beyond description or understanding of the text to forming an evaluation or judgment (Black, 1965). This evaluative process is what distinguishes rhetorical criticism as a method. Black (1965) explains, "...criticism, like other humanistic studies, seeks to understand

men by studying men's acts and creations. If the critic has a motive beyond understanding- and he usually does- that motive is to enhance the quality of human life" (p. 9). Therefore, rhetorical analysis is motivated not by neutrality or objectivity, but rather, the aim of making a judgment. The critic's perspective influences this evaluative process. What evidence the critic seeks out to support their conclusions about the rhetorical process of the artifact as well as its influence or potential influence, and what interpretations will be concluded about the artifact stem from the critic's subjective perspective and critical framework (Borgmann, 1975). I will describe the critical frameworks that I used to evaluate my chosen artifacts in the literature review. Before I explain my frameworks, however, the procedures for my rhetorical analysis and critique as well as my chosen texts are described in the following section.

### **Critical Procedures**

Similar to Cisneros (2014) and Wanzer-Serrano (2015), this dissertation utilizes rhetorical case studies to examine critical moments that offer insight into racial and gender relations in the U.S. Within this dissertation, I examine two rhetorical case studies within the NBA and NFL. The defining goals of these analyses include: (1) to understand how whiteness functions dialectically to secure its invisibility and centrality; and (2) to understand how whiteness intersects with hegemonic masculinity to secure a racial and gender hierarchy within the NBA and NFL. The first rhetorical case study focuses on the examination of the rhetorical performance of NBA Commissioner Silver in response to the racist comments made by the now former L.A. Clippers majority owner Donald Sterling in 2014. The second rhetorical case study focuses on NFL Commissioner Goodell's rhetorical performance in response to the 2014 video released to the public that showed NFL star Ray Rice in a physical domestic dispute with his then-fiancé Janay Palmer. The two rhetorical case studies represent moments in which whiteness

is maintained and centralized. Though my primary focus is on the perpetuation of whiteness in the NBA and NFL through the discourses of Commissioners Silver and Goodell, this dissertation also advances a broader critical approach to the study of whiteness rhetorics. My analysis seeks to advance current critical approaches to examining whiteness by offering an explication of *how* whiteness rhetorics work to strategically secure whiteness's centrality and power. This moves analysis beyond only naming whiteness rhetorics to examining the *process* of whiteness rhetorics.

The methodological process for the critical analyses of these rhetorical case studies draws from common procedures utilized for generative criticism and ideology criticism (Cloud, 2014; Foss, 2009). While I draw from common steps within these procedures, my rhetorical criticism follows the lead of Black (1965) and McKerrow (2014) who suggest utilizing a critical approach that allows for "openness" to the artifact. This is in contrast to a formulaic approach, which can limit the critic's ability to go beyond the steps of the given formula. Black (2014) explains:

In the end, there are no formulae, no prescriptions, for criticism. The methods of rhetorical criticism need to be objective to the extent that, in any given critique, they could be explicated and warranted. But it is important that critical techniques also be subjective to the extent that they are not mechanistic, not autonomous, not disengaged from the critics who use them. (p. 5)

Therefore, the description of my procedures below seeks to offer an explication of my analytical findings. As explained in the following section, my critique draws from common analytical procedures utilized in ideology criticism and generative criticism (Cloud, 2014; Foss, 2009) and follows the outlined procedures loosely to obtain the closest and most in-depth analysis of the texts possible.

**Ideology criticism and generative criticism.** Ideology criticism looks beyond the surface and structure of an artifact to identify and examine the underlying values and beliefs that the artifact communicates. Ideology is a broad concept that can be defined as a system that rationalizes or justifies the way society is structured and emboldens members of society to go along with its priorities (Cloud, 2014). Masculine ideology, for instance, is perpetuated through discourses that value and favor the dominance of men over women and children, physical power, and independence (Trujillo, 1991). Dana Cloud (2014) argues that ideology criticism challenges who controls the circulation of ideas and who benefits from those ideas. Cloud argues that when the critic recognizes how rhetoric perpetuates or challenges power relations, this method should not be called *ideological criticism*, as it is commonly referred to, but instead should be called *ideology criticism* or *ideology critique*. This is because all rhetoric itself is inherently ideological, and therefore, all criticism is ideological criticism. As a project situated within ideology criticism, this dissertation seeks to expose power and raise consciousness. As such, it goes beyond description of the situations, strategies, and value systems of the texts. I follow the lead of Cloud (2014) and am directed at interrogating "...how systems of power are expressed and justified in speech acts, at who is left out of the system, and at how speeches and other texts can be misleading, distorted, or oppressive of others" (p. 24). For this project, I define power as the ability to exert control over institutions, states, politics, culture, one's future, and/or public good (Cloud, 2014).

To perform ideology criticism, the critic often approaches the selected text with a critical frame (Black, 1965). It is often understood among rhetorical critics that while multiple ideologies are present in society, some ideologies are privileged over others by society in general, and ideologies that present oppositional or alternative perspectives are sometimes

repressed, silenced, or marginalized. The result is a dominant worldview or the development of hegemonic ideology in certain domains (Foss, 2009). Ideology criticism is concerned with identifying and interrogating hegemonic ideologies (e.g., Lacy & Ono, 2011).

Hegemony is, according to Dill and Zambrana (2013), "...the cultural ideologies, images, and representations that support or justify policies and practices in the structural and disciplinary domains" (p. 183). This constitutes a kind of social control, a means of symbolic oppression and coercion, or a form of domination by more powerful groups over the ideologies of those with less power. When an ideology becomes hegemonic in a culture, certain interests or groups are advanced, centralized, or served more than others in a way that appears normal (Foss, 2009). When an ideology becomes hegemonic, it develops the power to direct and explain the world for others. It also invites people to understand the world in certain ways and not in others. For instance, hegemonic masculinity directs people to value masculine ideals and perceive them as normal and natural, such as masculine dominance and power, over feminine values, such as inclusivity or distribution of power (Trujillo, 1991). When a dominant ideology is hegemonic, it controls what people see as natural or normal in a way that often goes unnoticed (Foss, 2009; Gibson & Heyse, 2010). "Normal discourse" then maintains the dominant ideology and suppresses challenges to its power and centrality. Foss (2009) explains:

To maintain a position of dominance, a hegemonic ideology must be renewed, reinforced, and defended continually through the use of rhetorical strategies and practices. Resistance to the dominant ideology is muted or contained, and its impact thus is limited by a variety of sophisticated rhetorical strategies. (p. 210)

These strategies often incorporate the resistance to alternative perspectives in the dominant discourse in a way that the challenge will not contradict and may even support the

dominant ideology. Because hegemonic ideologies use rhetorical strategies to maintain or perpetuate power, ideology criticism aims to not only ask *what* the message says as well as *how* the rhetor strategizes to overcome obstacles to achieve their goals, but also *why*, that is, whose interests are served and for what purpose (Cloud, 2014).

In addition to ideology criticism, I also draw from the procedures of generative criticism. Generative criticism is a specific method of rhetorical criticism that allows the critic to generate an explanatory schema (i.e., a theory) based on the major components of the artifact that emerge from analysis (Foss, 2009). This method guides the critic in a process that develops an explanation of the entire artifact through the development of a theory that accounts for each of the artifacts major elements. This is in contrast to relying on applying a conventional theory or concept that may only partially explain the artifact. Additionally, generative criticism functions to make contributions to communication theory by identifying and formulating new insights and explanations of the rhetorical process (Foss, 2009).

I have chosen to analyze my two selected rhetorical case studies through an amalgamation of common procedures for ideology and generative criticism because while this criticism is first and foremost concerned with critiquing ideology, I also aim to engage in theory development, which the procedures for ideology criticism do not aim to do. The procedures for generative criticism, however, allow for critic to develop a theory to explain *how* the rhetorical strategies of the artifact function to perpetuate certain ideologies. I am concerned with not only identifying underlying ideologies (i.e., whiteness and hegemonic masculinity) and explaining how artifacts communicate those ideologies, but also with identifying and explicating how these ideologies work through these artifacts to maintain and/or perpetuate their power (i.e., through

dialectics and intersections). Given this understanding of generative and ideology criticism, I engaged in the following procedures to rhetorically analyze the case studies.

***Identify the artifact.*** For the first rhetorical case study, I primarily examined the rhetorical performance of NBA Commissioner Silver and his response to the racist comments made by the now former L.A. Clippers majority owner Donald Sterling. For this rhetorical case study, I analyzed the press conference, as both a video and transcripts, delivered by Commissioner Silver on April 29, 2014 (*USA Today*, 2014a). Furthermore, readily available public statements made by Commissioner Silver as well as current and former players, coaches, and owners, and media and fan responses after his public press conference were analyzed. I specifically focused on statements made in national and global news and magazine articles between the dates of the press conference on April 29, 2014 and the sale of the L.A. Clippers on August 12, 2014. These texts were selected through an academic search engine, LexisNexis, by utilizing the specific terms “Adam Silver” or “Commissioner Silver” and “Donald Sterling.” I chose these key words because I am specifically interested in responses to Commissioner Silver’s disciplinary action towards Donald Sterling. For my search, I filtered for articles only published in print form and/or in online form in “Major World Publications.” Example publications included: *The Washington Post*, *The Nation (Thailand)*, *The Telegraph (United Kingdom)*, *Daily News (New York)*, *The New York Times*, *USA Today*, and *AlJazeera*. I chose to focus on national and international texts because the NBA is a professional basketball league with global reach (Shor & Galily, 2012), and I am interested in how Commissioner Silver’s rhetoric influences both a national (U.S.) and global ideology about race in the U.S. Additionally, I focused on news that is available both in online and in print form, as most

individuals attain their news through a variety of news mediums, including both print and digital sources (*Americanpress Institute*, 2014).

My LexisNexis search generated 399 articles. A total of 90 duplicate articles, irrelevant articles, and articles less than 200 words were discarded. The final total included 309 articles. I then completed a second search through another academic search engine, MasterFILE Premiere, for articles specifically published in online or print form in popular media including major sports media. Example media included *Sports Illustrated* and *Ebony*. In MasterFILE Premiere, I used the search terms “Adam Silver” or “Commissioner Silver” and “Donald Sterling” and the date range of April 29, 2014 through August 12, 2014. My search generated 36 articles. Articles less than 200 words as well as duplicates were discarded, resulting in a total of 35 articles. By searching articles specifically within sports media, I was able to obtain responses from within the sports world, which have influence on readership that extends beyond the boundaries of sport.

In addition to media texts, my analysis also included the most recent racial and gender report on the NBA produced by The University of Central Florida College of Business Administration: The Institute for Ethics and Diversity in Sport (TIDES). The report is titled, “The 2015 Racial and Gender Report Card: National Basketball Association” and provided understanding of the racial and gender hiring trends within the NBA, as well as a summary of its diversity and inclusion initiatives implemented by the Association since Commissioner Silver took office in 2014 (Lapchick & Guiao, 2015). This document is necessary, as it offered examples of how women and people of color are centralized and/or marginalized within the organization.

For the second case study, I examined the rhetorical performance of NFL Commissioner Goodell in response to the public release of a surveillance video showing NFL star Ray Rice



punching his then-fiancé and dragging her unconscious body out of an elevator. For this analysis, I examined the press conference, in both video and transcripts, delivered by Commissioner Goodell on September 19, 2014 in response to the media release of the video (*Fox 5 Atlanta*, 2014; Goodell, 2014). Commissioner Goodell's new domestic violence policy that he delivered to team owners via a letter on August 28<sup>th</sup> also served as an important text for analysis (*USA Today Sports*, 2014). Additionally, I analyzed the NFL's updated personal policy that was released to the public on December 10, 2014, which was influenced by his letter from August 28<sup>th</sup> (NFL Enterprises, 2014a). I also analyzed a press conference in which Commissioner Goodell announced the release of the revised policy, and introduced the members of the newly created league Conduct Committee, and NFL owners endorsed the revised policy (NFL Enterprises, 2014b). These texts were an important artifact for analysis because they are part of the larger conversation about domestic abuse, which have ideological underpinnings for analysis. I also focused on readily available public statements made by Commissioner Goodell as well as current and former players, coaches, owners, and media personalities in response to Commissioner Goodell's handling of the incident. The responses were limited to those made between the date of the press conference (September 19, 2014) and Ray Rice's appeal to overturn the NFL's indefinite suspension (November 1, 2014).

I specifically analyzed the statements made in online international news articles and magazines obtained through a LexisNexis search. For my search, I used the key terms "Goodell" and "Ray Rice" and "NFL." I chose these terms because I am interested in specific responses to Commissioner Goodell's disciplinary action taken towards Rice. My LexisNexis search generated 232 articles. Those that were less than 200 words as well as any duplicates were discarded, resulting in a final total of 175 articles. I then completed a second search through

MasterFILE Premiere, just as I did for the first case study, for articles specifically published in online or print form in popular media including major sports media. I used the search terms “Goodell” and “Ray Rice” and “NFL” and I limited the articles to those between September 19, 2014 to November 1, 2014. Articles less than 200 words as well as duplicates were discarded, resulting in a total of 40 articles. By searching articles specifically within sports media, again, I was able to obtain media responses from within the sports world, which have influence on readership that extends beyond sport’s cultural space.

Additionally, similar to the NBA analysis, “The 2015 Racial and Gender Report Card: National Football League” produced by the previously mentioned TIDES was also analyzed to identify racial and gender hiring practices as well as diversity and inclusion initiatives implemented by the League and Commissioner Goodell (Lapchick & Robinson, 2015). Similar to the NBA report, this report offered examples of how women and people of color are centralized and/or marginalized within the NFL. Once all of these texts were gathered, I began the analysis of the texts.

***Analyze the artifact.*** To analyze the case studies, I engaged in the following procedures: (1) identify the presented elements of the artifact; (2) identify the suggested elements of the artifact; (3) identify or develop an ideological theory about the suggested elements; and (4) identify the functions served by the ideology (Foss, 2009).

The first step of the analysis involves coding for presented elements. In criticism, coding means that the critic notices and interprets major features of the artifact, which are known as presented elements. Presented elements are anything that can point to the artifacts’ ideology. This can include major arguments, types of evidence, images, terms, or metaphors. Within this first stage of coding, the critic focuses on two features of the presented elements within the

artifact: intensity and frequency of noticeable features. Intensity involves identifying specific elements of the artifact that seem strikingly important or significant, that is, they stand out for some reason. Frequency entails pinpointing patterns in the artifact, or those that are repeated or appear regularly. The critic codes for frequency and intensity several times, as each examination will surface more information about the artifact's major elements, as well as how the elements interrelate and/or contradict each other (Foss, 2009).

The next part of the coding process is for the critic to interpret the major features that emerged from the initial coding process. Here, the critic attends to the presented elements, those that are obvious and were identified in the initial coding process. The critic then identifies the suggested elements- the implicit elements that the presented elements provoke. Within this process, the critic identifies what the presented elements symbolize or reference in an implicit way. By identifying the suggested elements, the critic develops the basis for which the ideology will be identified (Foss, 2009).

***Identify or develop an ideological theory.*** Once the presented elements (i.e., initial codes) have been interpreted for their suggested elements, the critic then groups together the similar suggested elements into groups or themes. By developing clusters of suggested elements, the critic engages in developing the ideological framework that is implicit within the artifact (Foss, 2009). During this process, the critic either develops a theory of the artifact or locates a theory that they believe to be appropriate. If the critic chooses to apply an existing theory to the artifact, then upon its application, the critic observes the ways in which the theory either fits or does not fit the artifact, possibly finds an alternative theory to replace or supplement the one with which she/he began, and continues to apply the theory to the artifact until she/he finds the best explanation for how the communication functions (Medhurst, 2014). If the critic is not able to

find an applicable existing theory, they will choose either to extend a pre-existing theory or develop their own theory or explanatory schema to explain the artifact (Foss, 2009).

By developing their own theory or explanatory schema, the critic builds a structure for organizing their insights about the artifact in a comprehensible and insightful way. It allows for the critic to connect all or most of the major features that emerged from analyzing the artifact. Through the articulation of an explanatory schema, the critic can identify and explain the patterns and relationships encountered within the artifact. The theory, then, will be about the concepts or constructs, such as the themes, developed within the analysis and it will explain how these constructs or concepts relate to one another to explain what is happening within the artifact. This explanatory schema will serve as the structure of how the essay is presented.

***Identify the functions served by the ideology.*** After the ideology has been identified and/or articulated through an explanatory schema, the critic then applies the concepts or constructs of the theory to the artifact to explain how the artifact rhetorically communicates. This involves identifying the process of how the artifact encourages its audience to think, behave, or believe. Specifically, for this project, I am interested in how and why the artifact rhetorically perpetuates certain ideologies. To engage in such analysis, Foss (2009) suggests that the critic should consider the following questions:

Does it encourage the audience to accept a particular position on a social issue? Does it present a view of a condition that is naïve, misguided, or inappropriate for some reason? How does the ideology encourage audience members to construct themselves? Does the ideology present something as natural and normal in the artifact that audiences do not question a particular perspective? Does it represent a marginalized perspective that it invites the audience to consider? (p. 220)

To develop arguments in response to these questions, the critic should aim to reach the standards for evaluation of rhetorical criticism as described by Foss (2009). In the following section, the standards by which sound rhetorical criticism should be judged, and those which I have aimed to reach within this dissertation project, are described.

### **Standards for the Evaluation of Rhetorical Criticism**

Rhetorical criticism is an artistic form of analysis rather than a scientific one. Foss (2009) argues that in rhetorical criticism, the critic is required to bring a variety of creative skills to the methodological process, such as writing in an engaging way, assisting the reader in envisioning and experiencing the artifact in the same way as the critic, conveying the critic's interest in and perhaps passion for the artifact, persuading the readers to interpret the artifact's contribution to rhetorical theory in the same way as the critic, and offering a compelling call to the reader to understanding some aspect of the world in a novel way. Because of its creative and artistic nature, rhetorical criticism is judged by different standards than social scientific methods, such as in quantitative research. Borgmann (1975) explains, "...a powerful explanatory structure is what makes a work of scholarship live on through time" (p. 170). He continues:

Structure implies an organic form of interrelationships among the salient features which provides so apt a fit of the observable record or the sources that the reader of the criticism is both persuaded and pleased by the scholar's new way of looking at the material. The structure leads to an understanding of the subject under study. (p. 170)

Therefore, rather than judgments like reliability and validity as used in the social sciences, criticism is judged by its structure. To evaluate the critic's structure, three important criteria should be examined: (1) justification, (2) reasonable inference, and (3) coherence (Foss,

2009). These standards for evaluation are based on two primary assumptions about rhetorical criticism as a method.

The first assumption for the critic is that objective reality does not exist. Rather, reality is constituted through rhetoric, making reality a symbolic creation, not a reality that can be proven. The second assumption is that a critic can only know an artifact through their personal and subjective interpretation of it. The critic does not aim to engage in objectivity and impartiality because these are considered impossible tasks. Rather, the critic brings particular values and knowledges to the critical process that are reflected in how they interpret, analyze, and write about the artifact (Black, 1965; Borgmann, 1975; Foss, 2009). As a result of these two main assumptions, the critic's task is to offer one perspective of an artifact or one possible interpretation of it. Finding the true, correct, or right interpretation of an artifact is not the critic's goal, nor is it assumed to be achievable (Foss, 2009). Based on these assumptions, this dissertation will aim to reach three major standards.

### **Justification**

The first criterion is justification. This involves providing evidence or reasons in support of the claims the critic makes in the essay of the findings. Basically, all of the judgments critics apply to arguments should apply to judgments about the quality of a critical essay. Therefore, evidence from the artifact itself is provided to support the claims that I make. The evidence constitutes the grounds of the critic's arguments. The evidence is provided through quotations from the press conference, for instance. Overall, justification answers the questions, "Where are we going?" and "What do we have to go on here?" (Foss, 2009).

**Reasonable Inference**

The second criterion judges if the critic delivers a reasonable inference. The critic must prove that they have made a reasonable inference by showing the process of how they moved from the information about the artifact to the claims they make. This process shows the reader how the claims that the critic makes reasonably can be inferred from the artifact. Supporting a reasonable inference answers the question, “How do we justify the move from these grounds to the claim?” (Foss, 2009).

**Coherence**

The third criterion for judging rhetorical criticism is coherence. The order, arrangement, and presentation of the criticism should be congruent and consistent as to allow for the scholar’s interpretation of events to be understood. Congruence means that the findings do not contradict one another and are internally consistent. It also involves all of the major dimensions of the artifact in the theory presented in the findings. Nothing major about the artifact should be left out or unable to be explained. Coherence also means that the critic offers parallel constructs and labels for the findings of the analysis. Therefore, the terms that the critic uses in their findings should be parallel in their level of abstraction and language. The critic’s findings should be equally concrete or abstract, equally specific or general, and the findings’ wording should match one another in length, tone, and kind of vocabulary (Foss, 2009). To reach these findings, a rhetorical analysis is influenced by specific critical frames. In the following section, the critical frames that informed my analysis are described.

### **Critical Frames**

This project is informed by concepts within critical whiteness studies (Nakayama & Krizek, 1995), intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989, 1991), Black Feminist Thought (BFT) (Collins 1991, 2004; Griffin, 2012b; hooks, 2004), hegemonic masculinity (Trujillo, 1991), and dialogism (Bakhtin, 1981; Baxter, 2011). Each of these concepts provides a significant and unique contribution to the analyses and simultaneously function to critically interrogate how rhetorics of whiteness and masculinity both intersect and compete to perpetuate racialized and gendered power. As such, the analyses seek to reveal how rhetorics of whiteness and hegemonic masculinity function to perpetuate the marginalization and silencing of individuals who do not occupy their cultural space of privilege within professional men's sport. Additionally, this project is informed by dialogism, a method of analyses that aims to identify and examine the interplay between competing discourses in their quest to obtain and/or maintain a centralized voice in society (Baxter, 2011).

### **Naming Whiteness: A Critical Project**

This project is first and foremost informed by critical whiteness studies. Whiteness scholars draw upon critical or post-structural frameworks to interrogate White racial identities in discourse that reproduce White privilege and power, while simultaneously masking its existence as invisible, thus contributing to postracism (Lacy & Ono, 2011; Ono, 2011). As a project situated within critical whiteness studies, it seeks to contribute to critical intercultural communication, intercultural rhetoric, and critical rhetoric as it attempts to reveal and examine how structures of power and macro conditions historically and rhetorically create and reinforce racial inequality in the present day (Lacy & Ono, 2011; Nakayama & Halualani, 2013). Intercultural rhetoric is a project within rhetorical studies that examines diverse cultural



assumptions and understandings revealed when people act rhetorically (Shuter, 1999). To understand the rhetorical power and possibilities of White positionality, this paper follows the lead of Nakayama and Krizek (1995) who suggest that the first critical task is to identify (or name) whiteness by mapping its space. Therefore, I seek to contribute to McKerrow's (1989) *critical rhetoric* by critically examining racial power structures and common sense understandings of race through rhetorical performances of whiteness. Critical rhetorics methodologies and perspectives highlight the challenges of specific cultural environments and adapt to postmodern conditions (Lacy & Ono, 2011; McKerrow, 1989). Similar to critical race perspectives that have risen out of critical legal studies (Crenshaw, 1989, 1991; Delgado, 2000), projects situated within critical rhetoric theorize race and racism and seek to reveal and decipher power, knowledge, and truth claims (McKerrow, 1989). Therefore, the interrogation of whiteness is an essential component of critical rhetoric.

**Whiteness.** For this project, I conceptualize whiteness as strategic rhetoric that functions to secure White positionality as central, natural, normal, and invisible (Nakayama & Krizek, 1995). Nakayama and Krizek (1995) explain:

By viewing whiteness as a rhetorical construction, we avoid searching for any essential nature to whiteness. Instead, the critic seeks an understanding of the ways that this rhetorical construction makes itself visible and invisible, eluding analysis yet exerting influence over everyday life. (p. 293)

Through an exploration of whiteness as a construction, whiteness can be interrogated as a distinct identity among individuals who occupy White positionality who see themselves as White, even though they may identify with different ethnic groups (Martin, Krizek, Nakayama, & Bradford, 1999). Therefore, I draw from works that have explored whiteness as a rhetorical

and social construction. Specifically, Ruth Frankenberg's (1993) *White Women, Race Matters: The Social Construction of Whiteness*, Michael Lacy and Kent Ono's (2011) *Critical Rhetorics of Race*, and Thomas Nakayama and Judith Martin's (1999) *Whiteness: The Communication of Social Identity* inform this analysis. Furthermore, rather than understanding whiteness as an essence, or looking for the essence of whiteness, as a rhetorical construction, I follow critics who have examined whiteness as created, performed, and perpetuated through specific rhetorical strategies, such as Bonilla-Silva's (2014) examination of color-blind ideology and Leonard's (2004) analysis of color-blind rhetoric within sport, and Ono's (2011) critique of the rhetorics of postracism.

Additionally, similar to practices in colonialism and postcolonialism studies, this project is informed by works that have recognized that whiteness has been constructed uniquely across geographic locations, both within and outside of the U.S., and throughout historical periods (Shome, 1999). According to Shome (1999) the recognition that both history and location influence how whiteness's power operates encourages a nonessentialist and historically specific understanding of whiteness. Drawing from critical race theory (CRT) scholars Derrick Bell (2004) and Richard Delgado (2000) and historians Ira Katznelson (2005), Michael Keevak (2011), David Leverenz (2012), David Roediger (1991), and Mark Smith (2011), a historical analysis of how race and whiteness have been constructed through specific public policies, discourses, and social practices within the U.S. to influence historical oppression of people of color, and now contemporary whiteness's role in the new racism is provided. By examining how whiteness is rhetorically and socially created across time and space, I seek to contribute further understanding of how racial power is strategically constructed and how it can morph and shift to maintain its position as central and at the top of the new racism's hierarchy throughout time and

space. This process of identifying and critiquing whiteness as a rhetorical construction within specific historical and geographic contexts is known as *naming whiteness*.

***Naming whiteness.*** Naming whiteness involves identifying and revealing the ways in which it makes itself invisible, hides itself from analysis, and yet still exerts influence over everyday life (Nakayama & Krizek, 1995). Whiteness scholars generally agree that whiteness is situated at the center of society and is protected by strategic rhetorics that work to ensure that it stays at the center and at the top of the racial hierarchy (Nakayama & Krizek, 1995). For instance, Lacy and Haspel (2011) interrogated how rhetorics of whiteness within news media positioned victims of New Orleans' 2005 Hurricane Katrina who occupy Black positionality as apocalyptic looters who were irrational, immature, and dangerous criminals and rapists, thus perpetuating a racial hierarchy with whiteness seated at the top and individuals who do not occupy whiteness seated at the bottom. As Lacy and Haspel's study exemplifies, the central location of whiteness results in the "otherness" or moving people of color to the margins. To identify the way in which whiteness functions to marginalize, my analysis is informed by Patricia Hill Collins' *Black Feminist Thought* (1991) and *Black Sexual Politics* (2004). Collins provides significant perspective on how whiteness is perpetuated through enculturation, construction, centralization, and normalization of the White experience. Similar to Projansky and Ono (1999), Collins argues that whiteness's power to marginalize people of color and to represent people of color as different and therefore inferior to those situated within whiteness is part of whiteness's strategic rhetoric to self-protect and ensure whiteness's centrality.

The identification and deconstruction of whiteness as a normalized, universal location, according to Moon (1999) is (or should be) concerned with identifying discursive communicative practices and their consequences (regardless of intentions) and their connections

to and implications within the larger system of domination. Naming whiteness, therefore, involves attending to the centrality and invisibility of whiteness from a critical perspective. Nakayama and Krizek (1995) state that "...by naming whiteness, we displace its centrality and reveal its invisible position" (p. 89-90). By naming whiteness, I seek to engage in recognizing and unearthing how whiteness historically has molded, and continues to mold, the lived experiences and identities of individuals who occupy whiteness and those who do not in an invisible way- a way that is often unrecognized by individuals who occupy White positionality. In doing so, following the lead of Frankenberg (1993), I seek to displace whiteness from its "unmarked, unnamed status," or its central location for the purpose of dismantling whiteness's power. My hope is that through naming whiteness, a project like this can contribute to moving whiteness out of its centralized, normalized, and powerful position, and thus create space for marginalized voices to influence society in a more powerful way than currently allowed within the structures of the new racism. Part of naming whiteness involves a recognition and interrogation of how whiteness intersects with other subject identities. For this project, this will be achieved through utilizing an intersectional approach to analysis.

### **Intersectionality**

Developed in BFT by scholars including Patricia Hill Collins, Kimberlé Crenshaw, and bell hooks, intersectionality is a concept describing the multiple, rather than singular, forms of oppression that women who occupy Black positionality and other women of color experience due to intersections of race, gender, socioeconomic status, nationality, and other subject identity locations (Crenshaw, 1989, 1991). Intersectionality is an analytical strategy that utilizes a systematic approach to understand human life and behavior, as it is rooted in the experiences and struggles of marginalized peoples. It provides a way to contest existing ways of looking at these

structures of inequality by focusing on the experiences of marginalized individuals, by complicating identity, and by unveiling power in interconnected structures of inequality (Dill & Zambrana, 2013). From this perspective, the separate aspects of social life cannot be differentiated into discrete and pure components for the purpose of understanding the lived experience and marginalization of individuals. Rather, these subject identities are intricately associated, creating a complex web of lived experiences characterized by multiple and simultaneous oppressions and privileges, rather than one lived experience that can be characterized unitarily.

Drawing from BFT's concept of intersectionality, intersectional approaches to academic research have slowly been adopted by different academic disciplines to examine identity and oppression in more complex ways (Griffin & Museus, 2011). Such approaches focus on how identity locations, like race and gender, intersect to inform how oppression is enacted and experienced in a more complex way, rather than a monolithic way. An intersectional approach to studying intercultural communication has become more popular within the functionalist, interpretivist, and most notably, the critical paradigms (Boylorn & Orbe, 2014; González, & Chen, 2016; Lengel & Martin, 2013; Orbe, Groscurth, Jeffries, & Prater, 2007; Orbe, 2011). This project utilizes an intersectional approach as a critical frame for analysis. As such, this project is concerned with how individuals are multiply marginalized via intersectionality through the intersection of whiteness and hegemonic masculinity. By incorporating an intersectional approach to this project, a more holistic and complex understanding of the intricacies that influence how power is reproduced uniquely between cultures and individuals can be provided. For this project, I specifically seek to examine how whiteness intersects with hegemonic

masculinity to examine how whiteness marginalizes and oppresses individuals occupying intersecting marginalized identities.

### **Hegemonic Masculinity**

Nicholas Trujillo (1991) argues that no other realm of culture has influenced ideologies about masculinity more than sport. Hegemonic masculinity refers to the cultural idealized form of toughness and competitiveness and the subordination and marginalization of the feminine and women (Connell, 1990; Trujillo, 1991). Trujillo (1991) conducted a groundbreaking case study of hegemonic masculinity to identify its power within sport. He identified how masculinity is promoted among professional men's sport and society in general. Drawing from the larger body of literature on masculinity, Trujillo (1991) identified five components of hegemonic masculinity, which were then revealed in his analysis. Trujillo (1991) examined how media representations of Major League Baseball (MLB) star Nolan Ryan reinforced these five standards of hegemonic masculinity through an analysis of articles that applauded Ryan for his adamant style and toughness. Trujillo found that Ryan was seen as a masculine athlete that average (men) baseball fans could appreciate and look up to because his actions and identity fit the expected standards for hegemonic masculinity. These five criteria include the following.

First, hegemonic masculinity is characterized by physical force and control, meaning, masculinity is “naturally” superior through its physical power over femininity. Second, masculinity is characterized as hegemonic when it is defined through occupational achievement, such as through the division of labor into categories of “men's work” and “women's work.” Third, masculinity is hegemonic through patriarchy, or the placement of men as dominant over their wives and children through expectations, such as “breadwinners” and “father figures,” whereas women are positioned as “housewives” and “sexual objects.” Fourth, masculinity is

hegemonic as symbolized in the daring, frontiersmanship of past men and the contemporary outdoorsman. Fifth, masculinity is hegemonic through heterosexuality, as it is not socially acceptable for men to be “sissy” in appearance or mannerisms (Trujillo, 1991).

Similar to Trujillo (1991), I use the concept of hegemonic masculinity to inform the rhetorical analysis and critique of Commissioners Silver and Goodell in chorus with a critical examination of whiteness. This intersection of masculinity and whiteness allows for a more holistic and critical understanding of how these two powerful subject identities work together to secure their gendered and racialized power. In addition to whiteness, intersectionality, and masculinity, this critical process also draws from the framework of dialogism, and more specifically, dialectics, to identify and examine the contradictory discourses that help to secure whiteness and masculinity’s power within men’s professional sport including the NBA and NFL.

### **Dialogism**

Nakayama and Krizek (1995) explain that whiteness as a strategic rhetoric is fundamentally dialectical:

In the assemblage of whiteness, we find that these contradictions are an important element in the construction of whiteness, as it is through these contradictions that whiteness is able to maneuver through and around challenges to its space. This dynamic element of whiteness is a crucial aspect of the persuasive power of this strategic rhetoric. It garners its representational power through its ability to be many things at once, to be universal and particular, to be a source of identity and difference...Our point here is not that there are contradictions within this discursive assemblage. Rather, our principal thesis is that these contradictions are central to the dynamic lines of power that resecure

the strategic, not tactical, space of whiteness, making it all the more necessary to map whiteness. (p. 102-103)

Therefore, this study seeks to engage in the examination, identification, and explanation of whiteness' deliberate use of contradictory discourses (dialectics) as a strategy for securing its centrality and invisibility, and thus its racial power. Similar to Martin and Nakayama's (1999, 2013) dialectical approach to intercultural communication, I aim to understand the simultaneous presence of discourses that are seemingly tension-filled and opposite, but also interdependent. This is accomplished through a utilization of the dialogic approach (Bakhtin, 1981; Baxter, 2011). The dialogic approach, conceptualized by Russian theorist Mikhail Bakhtin (1981) and further developed by Leslie Baxter (2011), offers a heuristic approach to understand how meaning is created through the interplay of dialectics, that is, competing and contradictory discourses. Therefore, for this project, dialectics and dialogism inform my analysis of how whiteness operates to secure its position of power through tensions of competing rhetorics. Drawing from the work of Bakhtin, Baxter (2011) explains that the dialogic approach focuses on a specific dialectical power struggle between discourses for an influential voice called the centripetal-centrifugal struggle. The centripetal-centrifugal struggle offers a potentially insightful framework for analyzing racial power struggles.

**Centripetal-centrifugal struggle.** According to Baxter (2011), focusing on Bakhtin's concept of centripetal-centrifugal struggle for participation, power is conceived as a relation between discourses. All discourses are not equal in their quest for participation, therefore, there is a power struggle among discourses. The dialogic approach examines how this struggle creates meaning. Some discourses move toward centralization or the center (the centripetal). The center is considered normative, typical, and natural, and thus it works as a baseline from which all



others are compared and situated as deviant. In contrast, some discourses are marginalized, or moved away from the center (centrifugal). These discourses are situated as off-center, non-normative, unnatural, and somehow deviant. The centripetal is therefore situated as privileged relative to the centrifugal, and therein lies its power. This focus on centralization and marginalization offers an insightful framework for analyzing race and masculinity as centralized discourses (the centripetal) that result in the marginalization of non-White, non-masculine voices (the centrifugal).

Dialogism has widely informed analyses among communication research utilizing numerous research methods. However, there is potential for the dialogic approach to inform critical studies. The dialogic approach has been used as a framework in rhetoric (e.g., Murphy, 2001), performance studies (e.g., Strine, 2004) mass media (e.g., Martin & Renegar, 2007), health communication (e.g., Thatcher, 2006), and organizational communication (e.g., Barge & Little, 2002). Most notably, dialogism has been utilized in relational communication by Baxter and Montgomery (1996) to develop the extensively applied Relational Dialectics Theory (RDT). The core premise of RDT is that meaning in the moment is not simply the result of isolated, unitary discourses, but rather, it is the result of the interaction between opposing discourses. RDT is a theory of relational meaning making, as it is interested in how relationships and identities are constructed through language use (Baxter, 2011).

While the dialectical aspect of dialogism has informed numerous projects within communication, mostly within relational communication, it has potential to inform analysis of racial power struggles, and namely, whiteness, thus contributing to critical whiteness and intercultural studies. Furthermore, it has potential to examine the intersections of masculinity and whiteness in their play for power. An example of how dialectics can inform understanding of

whiteness is captured by Dreama Moon (1999), who discusses whiteness in dialectical terms. Moon (1999) identifies two contradictory elements of whiteness experienced by women who occupy White positionality within their enculturation into whiteness: whiteness-evasion and White solipsism. This dialectic of whiteness-evasion vs. White solipsism captures White enculturation as both the embracement and denial of whiteness (Moon, 1999). For instance, Moon found that the women in her study used a passive voice when discussing racism. This allowed the women to recognize historical events of racial oppression such as slavery, and thus demonstrate their empathy for others, while repressing any connection to these events. Discursive strategies such as using a passive voice allowed for the participants to maintain White racial loyalty and solidarity and to silence opposition. Through an analysis informed by a lens that examines rhetoric for its competing and contradictory systems of meaning, as shown by Moon (1999) and Nakayama and Krizek (1995), the complex, contradictory, and fluid nature of whiteness can be further explored and understood.

### **Primary Questions and Overview of Dissertation Chapters**

The general questions guiding this study are: (1) How does whiteness utilize contradictory discourses to secure its position as central and invisible within the NBA and NFL?; and (2) How do the rhetorics of whiteness intersect with the rhetorics of hegemonic masculinity to perpetuate a racial and gender hierarchy within the NBA and NFL? More specifically, this dissertation addresses the following:

1. What discourses (both consistent through time and contradictory with each other) do the rhetorics of whiteness utilize to secure its central and invisible cultural space in the NBA and NFL?

2. How do the rhetorical performances of Commissioners Silver and Goodell centralize and/or marginalize individuals who do not occupy locations of whiteness and/or masculinity?
3. How do the rhetorics of whiteness within the NBA and NFL contribute to the new racism (Collins, 1991, 2004), or a post-Civil Rights era racism that operates covertly at structural levels?
4. How do the rhetorics of whiteness within the NBA and NFL preserve and perpetuate a racial ideology that creates a strategic societal forgetting of historical racial oppression, also known as “postracism” (Ono, 2011)?
5. How do the rhetorics of whiteness within the NBA and NFL function to perpetuate color-blind ideology (Bonilla-Silva, 2014), the conception that racial identifications and designations are not influential factors in peoples’ lived experiences or chances to succeed professionally, economically, socially, or otherwise?

These questions guided my research on whiteness and masculinity within the NBA and NFL. Naming whiteness and calling out its central and invisible location within professional sport is an important contribution to communication and cultural studies. Naming whiteness’s presence and its practices in historical and contemporary contexts as well as geographic, transnational locations such as sport allows for communication scholars to contribute to moving towards the practices of racial justice, which is a central component of critical studies (Cooks & Simpson, 2007; Nakayama & Halualani, 2013). Moving towards racial justice involves a comprehension of the material realities associated with race, including not only stereotypes, but also the situation of the new racism- the widespread inequalities among housing, education, economics, criminal justice, healthcare, and employment, among other facets of individuals’

lives that have developed historically, usually through U.S. laws, policies, and specific economic, wartime, and education efforts (Bell, 2004; Bonilla-Silva, 2014; Cooks & Simpson, 2007; Katznelson, 2005; Wilson, 2010). Therefore, by considering and examining the rhetorical layers and the sense-making processes associated with whiteness, the denial of racism at these systematic levels, as well as the denial of race's role in individuals' everyday lived experiences can be dismantled (Cooks & Simpson, 2007). As a critical project, this dissertation seeks to meet these aims through informing, dismantling, and advocating. The structure of the dissertation is as follows.

The second chapter offers an explanation of current conceptualizations of whiteness as well as my suggested approach to further name and interrogate whiteness rhetorics within U.S. men's professional sport. This includes the utilization of dialogism (Bakhtin, 1981) and intercultural dialectics (Martin & Nakayama, 1999, 2013) as well as intersectionality and an intersectional approach (Collins, 1991, 2004; Crenshaw, 1989, 1991) to identify how whiteness functions through contradictory discourses as well as how it intersects with hegemonic masculinity to maintain its societal power. First, this chapter draws from the rhetorics of postracism (Ono, 2011), the new racism (Collins, 2004), BFT (Collins, 1991; hooks, 2004), and color-blind ideology (Bonilla-Silva, 2014) to explain current understandings of whiteness. Second, this chapter explains intersectionality and intersectional approaches to critical intercultural communication and whiteness studies as a critical framework for my case studies. Following this, the foundations of the dialogic approach are discussed, drawing from Bakhtin (1981) and Baxter (2011), as well as the dialectical approach to intercultural communication, drawing from Martin and Nakayama (1999, 2013). Lastly, I explain how a dialogic and intersectional approach can inform critical whiteness studies.

The third chapter consists of the previously outlined case study involving the rhetorical criticism of the NBA Commissioner Silver. The fourth chapter then contains the previously discussed rhetorical criticism of NFL Commissioner Goodell. These case studies are situated within critical whiteness studies and critical intercultural communication (Lacy & Ono, 2011; Nakayama & Halualani, 2013), intercultural rhetoric (Shuter, 1999), and critical rhetoric (McKerrow, 1989). The aim of each of these case studies is to examine my research questions with the overarching goals of identifying how whiteness utilizes contradictory discourses to perpetuate its centrality and invisibility, as well as how the rhetorics of whiteness and the rhetorics of hegemonic masculinity intersect to perpetuate a racial and gender hierarchy within men's professional sport, and specifically, within the NBA and NFL. Through a critical dialogic analysis of whiteness within the rhetorical case studies, I seek to identify and examine any dialectics (contradictory discourses) that work to secure whiteness's centrality and invisibility.

The fifth and final chapter offers a discussion of the current state and future projections of critical whiteness studies and its contribution to communication studies and particularly the emerging area of inquiry, communication and sport. This is informed by my two rhetorical case studies within this dissertation, including any insightful theoretical developments or findings that emerged from the rhetorical analyses. Drawing from intersectionality, an emerging approach to critical analyses, as well as dialogism, a new approach to whiteness studies, I hope to offer new perspectives and frameworks for future studies that seek to engage in a similar critique of whiteness.

### **An Initial Reflection**

As a project grounded in critical theories, the necessity for a transparent reflexivity is essential on my part as a researcher to conduct and present research that is trustworthy. For this reason, I find it necessary to disclose that I am a cisgender woman who occupies White positionality, and one who has personally experienced the culture and power structures of men's professional sport internationally for four years as the spouse of a U.S. American pro basketball player in Europe. My subject identities, including my racial and gender identities, among others, as well as my lived experiences with sport, race, and gender in the U.S. and abroad inform my scholarly perspective. As a critical scholar, I believe this to be inescapable, and I do not wish it to be. I connect deeply with the harmful influence of gender ideologies and societal structures that guide and pervade the lived experiences, choices, and options available to women in general, women who have an interest in or connection to sport, and specifically working-class women who occupy White positionality. However, I do not claim to know what it means to be a woman or man of color of any socioeconomic status who experiences oppressive ideologies and structures, and arguably ideologies and structures that are far more harmful than those experienced by women who occupy White positionality. Therefore, I do not claim objectivity, but rather, I agree with Linda Alcoff (2014) who states, "...a speaker's location (which I take here to refer to their social location or social identity) has an epistemically significant impact on that speaker's claims ..." (p. 485). Consequently, my multiple identity locations and lived experiences cannot be separated from my analysis and critique found within this dissertation.

As a project in critical intercultural communication, critical whiteness studies, and critical rhetoric, I aim to contribute to critical scholarship that strives for social justice through the identification and critique of societal power structures that marginalize and oppress racial and

gender “Others.” With this objective, I make no claims to speak as a race or gender “neutral” individual, nor do I claim to speak from the perspective of a woman or man of color. Instead, for this project, I have made a precise effort to heed the advice of Alcoff (2014) and speak with scholar advocates and scholars of color dedicated to this particular cause. Namely, I draw greatly from scholarship developed by Black feminists and specifically those identified as Black Feminist Thought (BFT) (e.g., Collins, 1991, 1998, 2004; Crenshaw, 1989, 1991; Griffin, 2012a, 2012b, 2013, 2015; Griffin & Calafell, 2011; Griffin & Phillips, 2014; hooks, 1989, 2004; Owens Patton, 2004a, 2004b; Phillips & Griffin, 2014, 2015). By drawing from this often underrepresented and underappreciated scholarly perspective and applying it to my rhetorical case studies, I have made every attempt to merge my voice with their voices and speak with rather than for individuals who do not occupy White positionality in an effort to move towards social justice practices. I realize, however, that by attempting to speak with, which also entails speaking about, individuals who do not occupy whiteness, I am inherently speaking for them (Alcoff, 2014). I also realize that as an individual who occupies White positionality (i.e., race privilege), claiming to adequately speak for any oppressed or marginalized group, racially or otherwise, can serve to further silence, oppress, and marginalize those same groups that I am seeking to advocate for and further perpetuate whiteness’s centrality, invisibility, and overall power. However, Alcoff (2014) suggests, “One cannot simply look at the location of the speaker or her credentials to speak, nor can one look merely at the propositional content of the speech; one must also look at *where* the speech goes and what it *does* there [emphasis added]” (p. 492). It is my sincere hope that the content of my dissertation has succeeded in speaking with men and women of color, and not just for them, even though I understand fully that in many ways, research is always speaking for in some way. May this dissertation truly be a work that has

merged my voice with voices of people of color, and namely, women of color, as well as victims and survivors of domestic abuse. I hope to reach this aim even as the perspectives of scholars of color are reproduced and applied through my own racially privileged perspective. And most importantly, I sincerely desire that this project will go, as Alcoff implies, and do so something meaningful. Namely, may this project challenge, and therefore work towards dismantling, hegemonic racial and gender ideologies in men's professional sport that so strategically support current oppressive power hierarchies.



## CHAPTER II: AN INTERSECTIONAL AND DIALECTICAL APPROACH TO NAMING THE STRATEGIC RHETORICS OF WHITENESS

The consensus in critical literature is that criticism is a humanistic research process involving the description, interpretation, and evaluation of rhetorical texts or artifacts with the ultimate goal of understanding the intricate and complex phenomena of human communication. The critical process necessitates the application of critical frames, or concepts, theories, and ideas, to the chosen artifact with the purpose of identifying and evaluating the artifact's communicative influence and potential influence (Borgmann, 1975; Foss, 2009). This second chapter offers an explanation of the critical frames that inform my analysis of two significant moments involving Commissioner Silver and the NBA (Chapter Three) and Commissioner Goodell and the NFL (Chapter Four) that offer insight into and critique of U.S. racial and gender relations. It specifically includes an explanation of current conceptualizations of whiteness and their place within the new racism as well as a summary and rationale for further understanding and theorizing whiteness within men's professional sport using a dialectical and intersectional approach. I specifically draw from concepts associated with critical whiteness studies (e.g., Nakayama & Krizek, 1995; Nakayama & Martin, 1999; Warren, 2003), dialogism (Bakhtin, 1981), and intercultural dialectics (Martin & Nakayama, 1999, 2013) as critical frames for identifying and understanding contradictory discourses that function to secure whiteness's invisibility and centrality within the NBA and NFL. This chapter is divided into two primary sections. First, I provide a foundational understanding of whiteness and its conceptualizations as a strategic rhetoric by identifying and explaining its theoretical influences as well as specific concepts within critical race approaches that have guided critical whiteness studies in its revelation and examination of whiteness's rhetorical power. I specifically discuss what it means

to “name whiteness” and offer concepts including the new racism, White privilege, rhetorics of postracism, and color-blind rhetorics as foundational concepts and critical frames for the rhetorical analysis and critique of whiteness. Additionally, I provide a discussion of the significance of hegemonic masculinity and its strategic intersections with whiteness, and I discuss the ways in which whiteness multiply marginalizes through intersectionality. In the second half of this chapter, I summarize the foundations and fundamentals of a dialectical approach, drawing from Bakhtin’s dialogic approach (1981), as well as the dialectic perspective of intercultural communication, as conceptualized by Martin and Nakayama (1999, 2013). Lastly, I offer an elucidation of how an intersection of these theoretical perspectives, a dialectical and intersectional approach and critical whiteness studies, has potential to contribute further understanding and theorization of how whiteness works strategically to secure its racial power through the use of intersections as well as contradictory and competing discourses within two U.S. men’s professional sport leagues, the National Basketball Association (NBA) and the National Football League (NFL). First, I begin with an explanation of whiteness.

### **Whiteness**

Whiteness is a strategic rhetoric that secures a positionality of White racial privilege and perpetuates White domination (Nakayama & Krizek, 1995; Frankenberg, 1993; Moon, 1999).

King and Springwood (2001) define whiteness as:

...simultaneously a practice, a social space, a subjectivity, a spectacle, an erasure, an epistemology, a strategy, an historical formation, a technology, and a tactic. Of course, it is not monolithic, but in all of its manifestations, it is unified through privilege and the power to name, to represent, and to create opportunity and deny access. (p. 160)

The rhetorical performance of whiteness, and consequently, the perpetuation of White ideals, is often difficult to pinpoint because as a strategic rhetoric, whiteness "...affects the everyday fabric of our lives but resists, sometimes violently, any extensive characterization that would allow for mapping its contours" (Nakayama & Krizek, 1995, p. 291). This resistance manifests in rhetorical strategies that situate White positionality and White ideals as normative, universal, central, invisible, and therefore, hegemonic. As a hegemonic force, attitudes, values, beliefs, and behaviors stemming from White positionality are often positioned as the standard, the ideal, and common sense among society (Giroux, 1997). Because of whiteness's strategic rhetorics that work to maintain its power in a way that is perceived as common sense, critical projects, such as this one, are necessary to map its cultural space and strategies with the aim of illuminating and dismantling its societal power that favors White domination (Lacy & Ono, 2011).

The study of whiteness within the field of communication was propelled into motion with a groundbreaking essay by Thomas K. Nakayama and Robert L. Krizek (1995) in the *Quarterly Journal of Speech* entitled, "Whiteness: A Strategic Rhetoric." Within this essay, Nakayama and Krizek (1995) argue that whiteness is a strategic discourse that constructs a discursive space occupying pre-existing privilege and power. The essay explores six strategic ways in which whiteness operates in everyday communication practices. It illuminates whiteness as a dominant, invisible force that is situated as normal and central within Western communicative practices. Nakayama and Krizek's (1995) conception of whiteness as a communicative concept influenced the development of several publications in the 1990s among communication scholars that explored whiteness from a variety of methodological perspectives. Two influential books, *Whiteness: The Communication of Social Identity* edited by Thomas K. Nakayama and Judith

Martin (1999), as well as *Performing Purity: Whiteness, Pedagogy, and the Reconstitution of Power* by the late John Warren (2003) substantially influenced the development of whiteness studies within the field of communication (and also greatly influenced this dissertation).

*Whiteness, Pedagogy, Performance*, a book edited by Leda Cooks and Jennifer Simpson (2007), is one recent product of these influences providing an updated examination of whiteness as a performance within K-12 and higher education. Influenced by works such as these, numerous publications have identified and studied whiteness from a variety of methodological perspectives, ranging from critical to social scientific, within the field of communication.

Prior to Nakayama and Krizek's work, White feminist Ruth Frankenberg's (1993) *White Women, Race Matters: The Social Construction of Whiteness* is credited as one of the founding publications in critical whiteness studies. While it increased the scholarly attention given to the concept of whiteness and influenced Nakayama and Krizek's previously mentioned essay, the concept of whiteness and its invisible power, however, were exposed in vernacular traditions by people of color long before Frankenberg's essay. Scholars like Toni Morrison, W.E.B. DuBois, James Baldwin, Audre Lorde, bell hooks, and Patricia Hill Collins, all people of color, wrote about issues of White racial power years before Frankenberg. For instance, Patricia Hill Collins (1991) and bell hooks (2004) have long argued that feminist scholarship, which stems from White positionality, has not acknowledged or understood the distinct lived experiences of women of color, but instead has centralized and essentialized White positionality, resulting in further marginalization of Black feminist scholarship, and ultimately, women who occupy Black positionality. Black feminist scholarship alone, while today still disconcertingly under-acknowledged, may not have operated under the title of critical whiteness studies at the time of its development, but it certainly engaged in the identification and critique of whiteness. For this

reason, Black feminist scholarship in particular was and continues to be a foundational element in the development of critical whiteness studies and serves as an essential and insightful critical frame for this specific dissertation. Not until Frankenberg (1993), a woman occupying whiteness, utilized her racially privileged positionality to shed light on whiteness as a racial construction, did whiteness studies increase in popularity in the 1990s and become a topic of analysis in several humanities-based disciplines, including communication and critical intercultural communication. Work by scholars such as hooks, Collins, and Frankenberg influenced an interdisciplinary focus on whiteness beyond feminist scholarship. Sociologists Eduardo Bonilla-Silva (2014) and Joe Feagin (2001, 2014) and historian David Roediger (1991, 2005), for instance, offer a profound interdisciplinary influence on how whiteness is understood, its historical construction, its contemporary power within the racial structures of society, its intersections with other identity markers, and its influence on how discrimination is expressed and experienced.

As these and many other scholars argue, whiteness's presence and influence initially appears elusive, but its disguise as a normative racial performance and positionality is what fuels its rhetorical power (Ono, 2011). Whiteness functions at an ideological level in a way that is hegemonic and normative, that is, it is defended vigorously as natural, correct, and inevitable. Because of this, identifying, critiquing, and revealing the ways in which the rhetorics of whiteness function and maintain whiteness's power, including how it is preserved as invisible and centralized, which also entails how it is defended, requires a critical mapping. This critical mapping allows for critics to identify whiteness's strategies to maintain its cultural power to marginalize individuals who do not occupy its space in a way that seems natural and normal to those who occupy whiteness, and sometimes even to those who do not. This process of

identifying and critiquing whiteness rhetorics and whiteness's specific strategies within particular historical and geographic contexts is known as *naming whiteness*.

### **Naming Whiteness**

Naming whiteness involves calling out whiteness's centralized and invisible presence and its practices in historical and contemporary contexts as well as geographic, transnational locations (Nakayama & Krizek, 1995). To "call out" is the critical act of unearthing, identifying, evaluating, and interpreting symbolic communication that is often disguised, thereby revealing its rhetorical function and influence. The aim of naming whiteness is to contribute to moving towards the practices of racial justice, which is a central component of critical studies (Cooks & Simpson, 2007; Nakayama & Halualani, 2013). Moving towards racial justice includes an understanding and a challenging of the material realities associated with race, comprising not only of stereotypes, but also the condition of contemporary racism- the widespread racial inequalities in housing, education, economics, the criminal justice system, healthcare, and employment, among other facets of individuals' lives. These inequities have developed historically, usually through U.S. laws, policies, and specific economic, wartime, and education efforts (Bell, 2004; Bonilla-Silva, 2014; Cooks & Simpson, 2007; Katznelson, 2005; Wilson, 2010) and are justified through strategic rhetorics that maintain hegemonic ideologies (Collins, 2004; Dill & Zambrana, 2013). For individuals like myself who identify as White, naming whiteness should not foster silence or paralyzing guilt, but rather, should spark a sense of outrage at historical racial oppression and a longing for racial justice now and in the future (Giroux, 1997). Therefore, by considering and examining the rhetorical layers and the sense-making processes associated with whiteness, the denial of contemporary racism at systemic levels, as well as the denial of race's role in individuals' everyday lived experiences, can be challenged

and dismantled with the aim of striving for racial justice (Cooks & Simpson, 2007; Cramer, 2016). This process of naming and examining whiteness, however, is as welcome in 2017, especially by individuals who occupy whiteness, as it was in the 1990s, when whiteness studies began to take root. This is because the denial of whiteness, and therefore, the discrediting of individuals who call out White space, White domination, and White privilege, is part of whiteness's strategy in maintaining its centralized position. Communication scholar Ronald Jackson made the following statement in 1999, which still applies today:

The racial climate in America does not facilitate a simple reading of white space. It awakens emotions and issues which conjure frustration, guilt, pain, hostility, antipathy, and discord. To address whiteness as an 'absent center' or privileged space is to invite defensive discourse and retaliatory feedback which repudiates the implied accusation. Though this may be the challenge of embarking on this terrain, it is important for the advancement of human communication research to chart and interrogate the discursive territory of whiteness from multiple conceptual and methodological approaches. (p. 51)

Naming whiteness, therefore, is a complex, trying, and commonly unwelcomed task, as are many critical projects involving race. However, if social justice is to be realized, naming whiteness is a crucial and worthy project that is not just a contribution to such efforts, but I argue, is imperative and foundationally urgent for understanding and dismantling whiteness as a normative racial power that has perpetuated what Patricia Hill Collins calls *new racism* (or *the new racism*) (Collins, 1991, 2004). In the following section, drawing from some of the previously mentioned scholars, I explain how the strategies of whiteness to maintain itself as normative are key to perpetuating the system of the new racism.

## **The New Racism**

New racism, also known as systemic racism, post-Civil Rights era (during the years of about 1954-1965) racism, post-Jim Crow (during the years of about 1877-1965) racism, or covert racism, and sometimes referred to as the new racism, is a concept developed and examined by Black feminist Patricia Hill Collins and later examined by sociologist Eduardo Bonilla-Silva. Collins explains that the conditions, structures, and ideology of the new racism contributes to the unequal distribution of power and resources according to racial identifications and designations within U.S. society in a way that appears natural and normal (Collins, 2004). Best understood as a socio-political ideology, the new racism organizes the composition of race relations and racial disparities (Bonilla-Silva, 2014). Bonilla-Silva (2014) describes the new racism in the U.S. as “...a network of social relations at social, political, economic, and ideological levels that shapes the life chances of the various races” (p. 26). Domination of one racial group’s ideals, usually those guided by whiteness, over “Other” racial groups’ ideals, is a key component of the new racism. This domination is a social problem, a problem of thought and practice that destroys human lives, human cultures, and human possibility, necessitating radical treatment locally and globally (Karenga, 1999). To sustain such domination, the new racism, according to Collins (2004), relies on media constructions, including sports media, as this dissertation also proposes, to produce (and commercialize) the consent that makes racial structures favoring White positionality appear inevitable, natural, normal, and right.

As part of the new racism, White domination has changed from more explicit practices from the Jim Crow period, such as legalized racial segregation of public spaces and schools, to more sophisticated and covert rhetorics and practices. Ideologies that maintain the new racism that are manufactured within cultural spaces like media and sport influence and construct the



societal acceptance of policies and practices at the political level, including color-blind policies that ignore racial disparities and perpetuate the system of the new racism. These systemic ideologies and practices are arguably equally as effective in maintaining the racial order as Jim Crow ideologies and policies that did so explicitly (Bonilla-Silva, 2014; Collins, 2004; Katznelson, 2005). Scholars who specifically examine covert legal practices, which are influenced by these racial ideologies that contribute to the perpetuation of White domination, often use critical race theory (CRT) as an approach. Scholars including Derrick Bell (CRT founder), Richard Delgado, Jean Stefancic, and Kimberlé Crenshaw argue that the domination of whiteness over “Other” racial groups is maintained through social control and public policy (Bell, 2004; Bonilla-Silva, 2014; Crenshaw, 1991; Delgado, 2000; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). As part of the new racism, these scholars argue that legal and political practices and policies favor individuals who occupy whiteness over any other designation considered to be non-White, namely individuals who occupy Black, Latinx, Asian, Middle Eastern, and Native American positionality, to name a few, through the invisibility of whiteness and *White privilege*.

### **White Privilege**

Critical approaches to whiteness studies have called attention to the concept of White privilege, prompting further investigation of how individuals who occupy White positionality are born with “unearned” social advantages (McIntosh, 1992). These unearned privileges are obtained through historical practices within systems such as U.S. educational, real estate, and criminal justice systems that have favored White positionality and disadvantaged individuals who occupy non-White positionalities (Golash-Boza, 2015). Essentially, White privilege is obtained, not earned, through historical White domination. For instance, the generational inheritance of wealth has disproportionately benefited individuals who occupy whiteness due to

discriminatory practices, beginning with the genocide of Native Americans and the enslavement of African Americans, for example, which limited the amount of education, pay, or real estate that individuals who do not occupy White positionality could obtain over a lifetime, and therefore, pass on to future generations of their family (Golash-Boza, 2015). Thus, the average financial legacy for individuals who occupy White positionality was ten times that of individuals who occupy Black positionality in 2001 (Bonilla-Silva, 2014; Oliver & Shapiro, 2006). Furthermore, in 2001, individuals who occupy Black positionality owned only three percent of U.S. assets even though they comprised 13 percent of the population (Bonilla-Silva, 2014). Meanwhile, in 2009, individuals who occupy White positionality on average had a household net worth of \$113,149, individuals who occupy Black positionality had a household net worth of \$5,677, and Hispanic households had a net worth of \$6,325 (Kochhar, Fry, & Taylor, 2011). In that same year, one-third of people who occupy Black and Latinx positionalities had zero or negative wealth (Kochhar, Fry & Taylor, 2011). Additionally, men who occupy Black positionality are seven times more likely than men who occupy White positionality to go to prison within their lifetime (Feagin, 2001). In total, various measures have identified that individuals who occupy Latinx, Black, and Native American positionality are faring worse socially and economically than individuals who occupy White positionality in the U.S. (Golash-Boza, 2015; McCartney, Bishaw, & Fontenot, 2013).

Peggy McIntosh's (1992) groundbreaking essay, "White Privilege and Male Privilege: A Personal Account of Coming to See Correspondence Through Work in Women's Studies," brought significant attention to privileges that individuals who occupy whiteness experience by listing specific privileges that she can count on cashing in at any point in time due to her White positionality. McIntosh (1992), focusing on the social privileges associated with whiteness,

explains that the term “privilege” subsumes both negative and positive connotations, but inherently this characteristic is desirable. The term “privilege” contributes to the egocentric characteristic of whiteness, in which individuals who occupy White positionality assume all who occupy whiteness are normal, and therefore desirable, and all who do not are abnormal, and therefore undesirable, a foundational element to the perpetuation of the new racism (McIntosh, 1992). Specific studies within whiteness studies have examined White privilege as a fluid location, rather than a static or reserved space, which allows for those who occupy it to change throughout time and geographic location. For instance, Luconi (2011) and Roediger (2005) examined how Jewish-, Italian-, and Polish-American immigrants have moved to occupy whiteness, but in the past were marginalized as non-White. Furthermore, researchers have examined how some Black, Latinx, and Middle Eastern individuals are able to “pass” as White, while some Asian Americans are considered “honorary Whites” (Valdez Young, 2009). Regardless of the historical time period or geographic location in the U.S., the positionality of whiteness has provided significant social, political, educational, health-related, and economic privileges to those who are encultured into its space and who perform it. The ability to “pass” as White, or to change racial locations to partake in its power, supports the argument that whiteness is a social or rhetorical construction.

### **Whiteness as a Social Construction**

Nakayama and Krizek (1995) explain, “There is no ‘true essence’ to ‘whiteness’; there are only historically contingent constructions of that social location” (p. 293). Therefore, those who examine whiteness have done so with the understanding that whiteness is a rhetorical and social construction (Haney Lopez, 2000; Mahoney, 1997; Nakayama & Krizek, 1995; Shome, 1999). As a construction, whiteness is a distinct identity among individuals who occupy its space

and who see themselves as “White,” even though they may identify with different ethnic groups (Martin, Krizek, Nakayama, & Bradford, 1999). Additionally, I argue, that as a strategic rhetoric, whiteness can be performed, and therefore perpetuated, by individuals who identify ethnically and/or racially as non-White. Therefore, rather than understanding whiteness as an essence, or looking for the essence of whiteness, as a rhetorical construction, whiteness is created, performed, and perpetuated through strategic rhetorics that maintain its position at the top of the racial hierarchy and legitimize the placing of individuals who do not occupy White positionality below those who occupy whiteness. Additionally, similar to practices in colonialism and postcolonialism studies, whiteness studies scholars have recognized that whiteness has been constructed uniquely across geographic locations, both within and outside of the U.S., and throughout historical periods with the aim of protecting its power and ensuring that racial “Others” are denied power in a way that seems natural and inevitable (Keevak, 2011; Leverenz, 2012; Roediger, 1991, 2005; Shome, 1999). By examining how whiteness is rhetorically and socially created across time and space, whiteness studies scholars have contributed to understanding how White racial power is strategically constructed and how it can morph and shift to maintain its position as central and at the top of the new racism’s hierarchy. Among the various rhetorical strategies that scholars have identified, for the purposes of this project I have identified two significant contemporary rhetorical strategies that contribute to the perpetuation of whiteness: (1) the *rhetorics of postracism*, and (2) *color-blind rhetorics*. While postracial and postracism strategies are further examined in the next chapter, I aim to provide a brief discussion of how rhetorics of postracism and color-blind rhetorics have worked as two influential and often overlapping strategies to perpetuate whiteness’s power.

**Rhetorics of postracism.** Postracial strategies, or what Kent Ono (2011) calls the rhetorics of postracism, operate as progressive discourses that lead individuals to believe that the U.S. is a “postracial” and “postracism” society. In other words, postracism is an ideology that views racism as a thing of the past, a problem that was eradicated by the Civil Rights Movement. Rhetorics of postracism can be found in discussions of the election of the U.S.’s first president who occupies Black (or bi-racial) positionality, Barack Obama, in 2008 (Bonilla-Silva, 2014; Orbe, 2011). News discourses claimed that because a man who occupies Black (or bi-racial) positionality was elected, a person of any racial identity could be elected, and therefore, racism does not exist. Media discourses, such as those in *The Help* (Griffin, 2015), *Mad Men* (Ono, 2013), and *Grey’s Anatomy* (Cramer, 2016), also utilize rhetorics of postracism to perpetuate postracial ideologies. Specifically, shows such as these invite audiences to accept U.S. society as racially progressive and postracial by eliding systemic inequalities among racial groups through a variety of rhetorical strategies that situate racial inequality as non-existent. In the next chapter, I argue that NBA Commissioner Silver utilized the rhetorics of postracism to elide structural inequities in the NBA, thereby reinstating the status quo of White power in the NBA. As such, these rhetorics of postracism work to influence postracial ideologies, which ultimately influences public policies, workplace policies, and educational policies, among others, that maintain the status quo, that is, the system of the new racism that favors whiteness and marginalizes individuals who do not occupy White positionality. In addition to the rhetorics of postracism, color-blind rhetorics also work covertly to maintain whiteness’s power within the system of the new racism.

**Color-blind rhetorics.** The rhetorics of postracism often intersect with color-blind rhetorics to maintain racial order in a way that appears to be natural. Bonilla-Silva (2014) argues that color-blind ideology, or what he calls, *color-blind racism*, has four central frames that individuals who occupy whiteness utilize rhetorically to justify, perpetuate, and maintain White domination: (1) *abstract liberalism*, (2) *naturalization*, (3) *cultural racism*, and (4) *minimization of racism*. First and foremost, abstract liberalism frames race-related issues in the language of liberalism, that is, “equal opportunity,” “choice,” and “individualism” to allow for individuals who occupy whiteness to appear moral and reasonable in opposing all practices that aim to eradicate racial inequality. For instance, utilizing the Civil Rights Movement language of “equal opportunity” allows for individuals to oppose affirmative-action policies because they supposedly represent the privileged or special treatment of certain groups. These kinds of claims necessitate ignoring that people of color are severely underrepresented in top-tier jobs and universities (Bonilla-Silva, 2014). Therefore, abstract liberalism utilizes rhetorics of a meritocracy, that is, discourses that argue success is achieved by individual efforts, working hard, and advancing one’s self. A meritocracy is based on the idea that individuals’ “...character, merit, and self-help are the basis on which people make their place in society” (Giroux, 1997, p. 300). Meritocratic ideals, however, ignore historical and structural forces, such as the complexities of generational poverty, which prevent or hinder advancement, regardless of one’s work-ethic, and place the blame for inequities within the individual. Second, naturalization is a frame that allows for individuals who occupy whiteness to “explain away” racism as a naturally occurring phenomenon. Rhetorics such as what Collins calls “controlling images” of people of color work to provide the justification of racial oppression in a way that seems natural and normal (Collins, 1991, 2004). Giroux (1997) explains:

Central to the formative influence of the media is a representational politics of race in which the portrayal of black people abstracts them from their real histories while reinforcing familiar stereotypes ranging from lazy and shiftless to the menacing and dangerous. (p. 295)

For instance, media images of women who occupy Black positionality as mammies, matriarchs, jezebels, and welfare queens contribute to racial and gender ideologies about women who occupy Black positionality that justify their oppression as a natural or biologically inevitable (Collins, 2004; Giroux, 1997; Griffin, 2012b). A further analysis of naturalization and Collins's controlling images are provided in my rhetorical case study of NFL Commissioner Goodell in the fourth chapter. Third, cultural racism is a frame within color-blind ideology that relies on cultural justifications, rather than biological explanations, to defend racist ideologies. Phrases such as "Latinxs do not value education" or "Black women have too many children" imply a *cultural* inferiority of any racial group that does not identify as White due to cultural values and practices, and ultimately cultural insuperiority. Fourth and lastly, minimization of racism is a frame within color-blind ideology that suggests that "it's better now than it was in the past." It utilizes a progressive rhetoric, such as postracial and postracism rhetorics, to suggest that anyone who claims racism is "playing the race card" and being "hypersensitive," because in reality, racism has been eradicated and racists are rare (because, remember, the U.S. had a president who occupied Black (or bi-racial) positionality). The minimization of racism is perpetuated by color-blind practices in which individuals are encouraged to "not see race" and "only see people for who they are," which ultimately functions to obviate the influence of race on individual's lived experiences and life chances, as previously discussed (Bonilla-Silva, 2014).

In sum, whiteness utilizes specific rhetorical strategies, such as the rhetorics of postracism and color-blind rhetorics, to perpetuate its invisibility and centrality. Therefore, this project aims to examine the following questions: (1) How do the rhetorics of whiteness within the NBA and NFL preserve and perpetuate a racial ideology that creates a strategic societal forgetting of historical racial oppression, also known as “postracism” (Ono, 2011)? And (2) How do the rhetorics of whiteness within the NBA and NFL function to perpetuate a color-blind ideology (Bonilla-Silva, 2014), the contention that racial identifications and designations are not influential factors in peoples’ lived experiences or chances to succeed professionally, economically, socially, or otherwise? Additionally, whiteness, and ultimately the racial hierarchy in the U.S., function ideologically through race’s complicated intersection with numerous subject identities. Specifically, I argue that race, including both White and non-White positionalities, can rarely be understood without identifying and understanding the ways in which race intersects with other subject identities, both privileged and marginalized, especially that of femininity and masculinity. This notion of subject intersections is explained through the concept of *intersectionality*.

### **Intersectionality and an Intersectional Approach**

Intersectionality as a theory, approach, method, and paradigm traces its roots to Kimberlé Crenshaw’s (1989, 1991) conception of intersectionality as the multiple oppressions that women of color, and specifically Black women, experience in the legal system due to the complex relationship between race, socioeconomic status, and gender. Originally conceptualized by Crenshaw with the image of roads intersecting, intersectionality, now a growing approach within feminist studies, seeks to examine and understand how women who occupy multiple marginalized identities experience racial and gender oppression uniquely compared to women



who occupy White positionality and men of color (Berger & Guidroz, 2009; Brah & Phoenix, 2004; Dhamoon, 2011; Essed, 1991). “Intersectionality,” “intersectional approaches,” and “intersections” have been understood and explained both together and independently as research concepts, a theory, a method, and as a research paradigm by scholars and critics mostly associated with BFT and CRT, which are two worldviews that have strongly influenced critical whiteness studies and critical intercultural communication (Berger & Guidroz, 2009; Collins, 2004; hooks, 2004; Dill & Zambrana, 2013; Lykke, 2010; Okolosie, 2014). Intersectionality and the intersectional approach, however, have variations in their aims due to intersectionality’s origin within BFT.

Unique to intersectionality, the intersectional approach has most recently been expanded within the study of intercultural communication and feminist studies beyond the experiences of women who occupy Black positionality to analyses focused on how individuals can be multiply marginalized, multiply privileged, and/or both privileged and marginalized (Dubrofsky & Ryalls, 2014; Henderson & Tickamyer, 2009; Sherwood, 2009; Zingsheim & Goltz, 2011). Because of the focus on privileged identities, the intersectional approach moves in a different direction than intersectionality, which is specifically concerned with multiple marginalizations of women of color. Dill and Zambrana (2013) explain that the intersectional approach is an innovative and emerging field of study that provides a critical analytical lens to examine intersections of race, class, gender, ability, ethnicity, age, and sexuality disparities, which as many intercultural scholars argue, makes it fitting for examination within critical intercultural communication across paradigms.

I argue that an intersectional approach is also imperative for critical rhetorical examinations of whiteness within professional sport, as it allows for an understanding of how

whiteness intersects with other dominant identities, like hegemonic masculinity, to maintain both a racial and gender hierarchy. Additionally, it allows for a deeper understanding of how intersectionality, or the multiple oppressions experienced by women of color, is perpetuated through whiteness's intersections with hegemonic masculinity. However, recent examinations of gender inequities, race, or whiteness within sport have rarely utilized such approach to understand racial and gender power and oppression within sport. To provide a more complex understanding of racial and gendered power and oppression, as the following case studies detail, an intersectional approach guides my analysis of the ways in which whiteness intersects with hegemonic masculinity to maintain White masculine power and marginalize racial and gendered "Others." Therefore, in the following section, I provide a brief explanation of hegemonic masculinity.

### **Hegemonic Masculinity**

Connell (1990) explains that hegemonic masculinity is the culturally romanticized form of masculine identity that is related to toughness, competitiveness, the subordination of women, and the marginalization of gay men. This idealized form of masculinity becomes hegemonic when it is accepted as common sense and a desired norm within society (Hanke, 1990). In Trujillo's (1991) analysis of Major League Baseball star Nolan Ryan, he identified five dominant rhetorical characteristics of hegemonic masculinity: physical force and control, occupational achievement, familial patriarchy, frontiersmanship, and heterosexuality. These qualities together define what it means to be masculine in U.S. society and are the rhetorical components of the patriarchal script, often valued and performed in men's professional sport by athletes, coaches, team administration, and sports media. In total, hegemonic masculinity has shaped the culture,

gender order, and gender performances in U.S. men's professional sports, including the NFL and NBA.

As previously stated, however, subject identities, like gender performances, cannot be understood as monolithic identities that live in a vacuum. Rather, they always intersect with other identities such as race, nationality, and ethnicity. In the same way that feminist scholarship historically has failed to acknowledge the unique lived experiences of women of color (Collins, 1991, 2004), hegemonic masculinity studies have often failed to consider the unique ways in which men of color are marginalized and subordinated to White masculine ideals, specifically within men's professional sport. Certainly, there have important critical studies that examine and give voice to Black masculinity, as I have detailed in the first chapter. However, overwhelmingly, studies focusing on hegemonic masculinity have often generalized masculinity (e.g., Fielding-Lloyd & Mean, 2015; Lamb & Hillman, 2015) and hegemonic masculinity (e.g., Messner, 2013; Rodriguez, 2016; Sandersen, Weathers, Snedaker, & Gramlich, 2016; Smith, 2016a) to *all* men, rather than understanding the distinct ways in which whiteness intersects with hegemonic masculinity to perpetuate White masculine domination. For this reason, this project explores how whiteness intersects with hegemonic masculinity in the performance of Commissioners Silver and Goodell, as well as how masculinity and femininity intersect with Black positionality in the instance of Ray Rice and Janay Palmer to influence racial and gender ideologies that sustain whiteness within and beyond U.S. men's professional sport. Specifically, I seek to answer the question: How do the rhetorics of whiteness intersect with the rhetorics of hegemonic masculinity to perpetuate a racial and gender hierarchy within the NBA and NFL? In total, the rhetorical case studies in the following chapters examine whiteness's rhetorical power through an intersectional lens. Additionally, I argue that whiteness not only functions

*intersectionally*, but also *dialectically*. The following section details the dialectic perspective as a guiding critical frame for this project's analysis.

### **A Dialectic Perspective**

The rhetorics of whiteness utilize contradictory discourses at individual, relational, organizational, and ideological levels to secure its centrality and invisibility (Moon, 1999; Nakayama & Krizek, 1995). Nakayama and Krizek (1995) explain that whiteness as a strategic rhetoric is fundamentally dialectical because through the use of contradictions, whiteness is able to move “through and around” challenges to its space (p. 102). Whiteness develops much of its power in its ability to be “many things at once” and to be universal and yet particular (p. 103). For those who occupy its space, it functions covertly as a source of identification as well as a source of differentiation from “Others.” Through these contradictions, whiteness can reify its space of racial power (Nakayama & Krizek, 1995). While whiteness scholars generally agree that whiteness is tension-filled and contradictory, this project seeks to examine *how* whiteness functions dialectically to maintain its racial power. I aim to identify the ways in which whiteness utilizes strategic rhetorics that allow it to simultaneously be many things, to be both unifying and differentiating, and to be both universal and particular. More pointedly, I aim to identify the contradictory discourses that secure whiteness as centralized and invisible by examining two specific rhetorical case studies within men's professional sport. To that aim, my project seeks to answer questions such as, how do the contradictory discourses utilized by the NBA and NFL Commissioners, as well as sports media, function together as strategic rhetorics of whiteness? And, how do these contradictory discourses strategically interact and compete with one another to construct whiteness as natural, normative, and invisible (especially to those who occupy its space) within the NFL and NBA, U.S. men's professional sport, and ultimately, U.S. society in

general? To explore these questions, my project is guided by an approach focused on the interplay of contradictory discourses, the dialectical approach, which traces its roots to Mikhail Bakhtin's conceptualization of *dialogism*.

## **Dialogism**

Dialogism, a term utilized by translator Michael Holquist (Bakhtin, 1981) to describe Russian theorist Mikhail Bakhtin's conceptualization of dialogue and the dialogic approach, traces its philosophical lineage in Lao Tzu, a philosopher from ancient China, who envisions the essence of reality as a dynamic process of *motion* and *change* influenced by the interaction of *opposing forces*. This essence of ceaseless motion is captured in the Chinese notions of yin and yang, which represent two poles of Taoist reality. The yin is associated with darkness, earth, the intuitive mind, stillness, rest, and femininity. Yang is associated with light, creativity, Heaven, rationality, action, motion, and male. Yin and yang have a dynamic, rotational motion which is in constant interplay (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996).

Influenced by the Chinese philosophy of interacting opposites, according to Bakhtin (Bakhtin, 1981), *dialogue* is a process in which unity and difference among and between *voices*, in some format, are at play, both with and against one another. He uses the words *voice* and *utterance* interchangeably, which essentially mean the worldview, point of view, value, or ideology constituted in the word (Bakhtin, 1981). Baxter refers to this as *discourse* (2011). In an explanation of Bakhtin's conceptualization of dialogue and the dialogic approach, Baxter (2011) explains, "Put simply, dialogue is counterpoint among multiple competing discourses, or systems of meaning" (p. 32). Bakhtin (1981) explains:

The word, directed toward its object, enters a dialogically agitated and tension-filled environment of alien words, value judgments and accents, weaves in and out of complex interrelationships, merges with some, recoils from others, intersects with yet a third group: and all this may crucially shape discourse... (p. 276)

Bakhtin further argues that dialogue is “simultaneous differentiation from yet fusion with another” (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996, p. 24). Therefore, tensions between unification and difference are at play in all parts of social life. He specifically theorizes that these tensions are evident in the construction of self, in individual relationships to societal systems or structures, and in individuals’ social interactions and experiences.

Within his writings on the dialogic approach, Bakhtin argues that every utterance of a speaking subject is a point in which *centripetal* and *centrifugal* forces are at work. The centripetal includes voices which are often centered and privileged, while centrifugal voices are those which are often disenfranchised and marginalized or decentralized. Bakhtin explains that the process of centralization and decentralization, of unification and dis-unification, meet and compete in the utterance. He also posits that an analysis of utterances allows for exposing the contradiction-ridden, tension-filled unity of two opposing tendencies in discourse (Bakhtin, 1981). As tension-filled, Bakhtin’s conceptualization of discourse, then, is committed to a dialectic perspective (Baxter, 2011).

Bakhtin applied his dialectic perspective to two dialogic genres, including the novel and medieval carnival. Within his analysis of the novel, he discussed “double-voiced discourses,” that is, a plurality of consciousnesses in which the reader is engaged. Therefore, in contrast to a monologic voice, that is, a single-voiced position, when something is dialogic, there are multiple voices, and therefore, multiple perspectives, worldviews, ideologies, and consciousnesses

interacting in the process of meaning-making. In Bakhtin's analysis of the medieval carnivalistic life, that is, diverse festivities and rituals associated with a carnival, Bakhtin argues that the carnivalesque is a moment where the centripetal (centralized) and centrifugal (de-centralized) forces are at play. He argues that eccentricity, a form of the centrifugal, rules the carnival event. This analysis of the carnivalesque is Bakhtin's closest dealing with power relations at the analytical level. So while Bakhtin's centrifugal and centripetal struggle recognizes power inequities, he did not examine systematically whether or how the centrifugal voice can become centripetal or how the centripetal maintains its centralized location and the centrifugal's marginalized location (Bakhtin, 1981; Baxter, 2011). This examination of *how* has been explored at the relational level through Baxter and Montgomery's (1996) and Baxter's (2011) explication of RDT and in intercultural interactions through Martin and Nakayama's (1999, 2013) IC Dialectics. However, there is room to apply this conceptualization to the rhetorical and ideological struggle. This project is aimed at filling that void.

Drawing from this dialectical element of dialogism, Baxter and Montgomery (1996) developed RDT which eventually influenced the development of IC Dialectics (Martin & Nakayama, 1999, 2013). RDT utilizes a dialectical approach to communication revolving around "...the notions of contradiction, change, praxis, and totality" (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996, p. 6). This influence is obvious in Martin and Nakayama's (1999) development of IC Dialectics and their intent to find a transparadigmatic method to living with inherent contradictions among research paradigms as well as their identification of six dialectics that occur within intercultural relationships and interactions.

## A Dialectical Approach to Intercultural Communication

Baxter and Montgomery (1996) developed two types of dialectics that function in interpersonal relationships: internal and external. These include autonomy-connection, novelty-predictability, and openness-closedness (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996). Even though these dialectics have predominantly been utilized to examine and explain the contradictory needs present in relational communication, such as in family and romantic relationships (Baxter, 2011), this approach influenced the examination of contradictory pulls present in face-to-face intercultural communication and relationships, as Martin and Nakayama (1999) argue.

The dialectical approach to intercultural communication offers a perspective to capture the complex, contradictory, shifting, and competing nature of intercultural communication (Martin & Nakayama, 1999, 2013). The dialectical approach to intercultural communication functions as a new, heuristic approach with profound possibilities. Via Martin and Nakayama's (1999) essay "Thinking Dialectically About Culture and Communication" in *Communication Theory*, a dialectical approach to intercultural communication was conceived. In the essay, the authors offer two unique, yet related, theorizations. First, they explore four strategies for constructive interparadigmatic discussions for intercultural communication, one of which includes their newly proposed dialectic perspective. Second, the authors theorized six dialectics experienced within intercultural interactions, which they term Intercultural (IC) Dialectics. While Martin and Nakayama's discussion of research as dialectical is significant, for the purpose of this study, I have chosen to focus on Martin and Nakayama's development of IC Dialectics, those which are experienced within intercultural interactions and relationships. The six dialectics that Martin and Nakayama (1999) theorize include: *cultural-individual*, *personal/social-contextual*,



*differences-similarities*, *static-dynamic*, *present-future/history-past*, and *privilege-disadvantage* dialectics.

The first dialectic, *culture-individual*, focuses on how some human behavior is individual, while some behavior reflects community or cultural influences. A dialectical approach highlights that intercultural interaction is characterized by both. The *personal-contextual* dialectic emphasizes that there are some aspects of communication that remain relatively constant over many contexts. There are also aspects that are contextual or situational. This means that people communicate in precise ways in precise contexts, and messages are interpreted in particular ways. The dialectical approach focuses on the interplay between both the personal and contextual forces on communication. The *differences-similarities* dialectic attends to the importance of both likenesses and variances between cultures. There has been a tendency to over-emphasize cultural differences in traditional intercultural communication. This has resulted in false dichotomies and rigid expectations. The dialectical approach emphasizes that difference and similarity can coexist in intercultural communication interactions. The *static-dynamic* dialectic highlights the mutable and constantly changing nature of culture and cultural practices. It also focuses on individuals' tendency to examine these things as constant, and to examine the forces that are constant in culture and cultural practices. This dialectic focuses on the tension between the static and dynamic elements of culture. The *present-future/history-past* dialectic focuses on how functionalist and interpretive scholarship investigating culture and communication have ignored historical forces. Meanwhile, other scholars, most notably critical scholars, have added history as a variable in understanding contemporary intercultural interactions. A dialectic perspective suggests that scholars need to balance both an understanding of the past and the present. Finally, the *privilege-disadvantage* dialectic focuses on the privileges

and disadvantages that individuals experience in the form of political or social position, for instance. While critical scholars have focused on these issues, traditional intercultural communication research mostly ignores issues of privilege and disadvantage. The dialectical approach emphasizes that individuals may be simultaneously privileged and disadvantaged, or privileged in some contexts and disadvantaged in others. The dialectical approach focuses on the interplay between privilege and disadvantage.

These six dialectics are not exhaustive, nor are they mutually exclusive. Rather, they represent the dynamic, complex nature of intercultural communication in which multiple and simultaneous dialectics are in constant occurrence within intercultural relationships and communicative interactions (Martin & Nakayama, 1999, 2013). In total, the dialectical approach to intercultural communication seeks to explore and understand the many relational aspects of cultures and can be powerful in understanding how gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, age, religion, and other cultural forces can help define and change cultures. This specific approach serves critical intercultural communication well, as it can expose power dynamics and hierarchies. Martin and Nakayama (2015) explain:

Individuals are not equal in their power relations in that some social realities are created in the interests of some, over other social realities that might benefit others. Rather than the emphasis on the individual that runs through much of the constructivist work, the dialectical approach connects individual agency with larger, structural constraints into dialectical relationships. (p. 19)

This focus on power is essential to the examination of dialectics. According to Bakhtin's centripetal and centrifugal struggle, dialogue is constituted in the dialectical, or contradictory, interplay between two opposing forces. Bakhtin (1981) explains, "Every utterance [voice,

ideology, or worldview] participates in the ‘unitary language’ (in its centripetal forces and tendencies) and at the same time partakes of social and historical heteroglossia (the centrifugal, stratifying forces)” (p. 272). Xu (2013) argues that Bakhtin’s dialogic approach has a fitting place in the critical examination of intercultural communication. Xu (2013) explains, “...the essence of intercultural communication lies neither in one particular culture nor in the other culture, but in the dialogue or ‘between’ of them. It acknowledges the unique value of the competing discourses of different cultures” (p. 390). Pairing the dialogic approach with an analytical approach that focuses on examining and critiquing power within grand narratives, or a critical approach, results in what Xu (2013) calls a critical dialogic approach. In utilizing the critical dialogic approach, Xu (2013) explains:

The intellectual’s role is to make these invisible mechanisms [of power] appear and contribute to the transformation of a system of power. Dialogic research, through the methods of deconstruction and resistance readings, seeks to open up the indeterminacy that power structures have closed off, and recover the voice and value of the discourses that have been suppressed and devalued in the dominant system. (p. 388)

Xu (2013) goes on to state, “...in the field of intercultural communication, the dialogic approach has not yet been explicitly discussed and applied, although critical intercultural communication is consistent with this approach” (Xu, 2013, p. 383). However, “...the combination of the two approaches [critical and dialogic] yields especially illuminating research findings in the study of intercultural communication” (Xu, 2013, p. 389). The critical dialogic approach has specific potential within the analysis of organizational contexts, a landscape that critical intercultural scholarship has little examined. Critical dialogic research can examine how identity and otherness have been constructed, enacted, and enforced by management and often

the dominant Western management practices, and how the creation of identity and representation of cultural differences have become a creation or result of colonialism, neocolonialism, and hegemony in the corporate context (Xu, 2013). Therefore, the critical dialogic approach can be utilized to explore how certain voices or ideologies, and the intersections of certain voices or ideologies, are institutionally and culturally centered or marginalized in the decision-making process in major corporations (Xu, 2013, p. 393). For instance, Deetz and Simpson's (2004) case study of a public university's "build community" dialogic processes found that organizational members and leaders required an awareness of "the otherness of the other" as well as the development of organizational policies and practices that held organizational leaders responsible for organizational life in order to de-center dominant voices and ideologies and make room for those that are marginalized.

For this project, a dialectical approach guided by principles of Xu's (2013) critical dialogic approach, offers a perspective for the analysis of major sport (and societal) organizations like the NFL and NBA. This approach specifically provides a framework for the identification and critique of how centripetal forces, like whiteness and hegemonic masculinity, and centrifugal forces, like Black femininity, Black masculinity, and femininity in general, are constructed and advanced or marginalized by the NBA and NFL's organizational leaders and the surrounding sports media, and how these competing discourses interact to reinforce whiteness and hegemonic masculinity's rhetorical power.

### **A Dialectical Approach to Whiteness**

In my efforts to examine the NFL and NBA dialectically, I draw from and aim to contribute to Martin and Nakayama's (1999) dialectical approach, which has potential that has yet to be realized in the examination of critical intercultural communication, critical rhetoric, and

critical whiteness studies (Martinez, 2006). This potential is found in their call for more work on dialectical approaches to culture and communication. A dialectical approach is not a method nor is it driven by any methodological rules; rather, it is a perspective (Martin & Nakayama, 2013). The dialectical approach to intercultural communication understands intercultural communication at both the relational and systemic levels as tension-filled, contradictory, complex, dynamic, and fluid (Martin & Nakayama, 1999). Martin and Nakayama (2015) argue, "...dialectics reveal the complexities of culture, as well as the various interests at work in driving cultural hierarchies" (p. 19). Given that whiteness works to seat itself at the top of U.S. society's racial hierarchy, and that it often intersects with hegemonic masculinity (as I explain the next two chapters) to maintain both a racial and gender hierarchy that favors White masculinity, a dialectical approach is fitting for an analysis which seeks to name, and therefore reveal the complexities and ambivalences, of whiteness. Whiteness studies is a foundational element for the understanding of critical intercultural communication (Nakayama & Halualani, 2013), and therefore, the extension of Martin and Nakayama's dialectical approach to intercultural communication is fitting for the analysis of whiteness.

Baxter (2011) states that "...theories are not static things; to stay alive, a theory must continue to develop and evolve" (p. 1). In response to Martin and Nakayama's (2013) call for further scholarship that examines intercultural dialectical tensions, as I have just stated, I believe there is great potential to extend critical intercultural communication by examining the dialectical nature of whiteness to provide insight into how whiteness's racial power is reproduced and strategically centralized and normalized. Because whiteness is "a strategic rhetoric" (Nakayama & Krizek, 1995), the reproduction of whiteness's racial centrality, normalization, and overall power, and therefore, its power to perpetuate the new racism, is found

within rhetoric (discourse), such as the previously described rhetorics of postracism and color-blind rhetorics. In addition to whiteness's intersections with numerous subject identities, both privileged and marginalized, I posit that the strategically fluid and complex nature of whiteness is found within opposing, contradictory discourses, which function to secure whiteness's centrality, and thus the marginalization of voices that do not occupy whiteness, particularly in the NBA and NFL. This approach to the examination of whiteness brings to light elements of whiteness that are too often confusing, hidden, or set aside. For critical intercultural communication scholarship, critical whiteness studies scholarship (which are often one and the same), and examinations of communication and sport, new understandings of whiteness's rhetorical power and its strategies can be found in applications and explorations of both Bakhtin's, and subsequently, Martin and Nakayama's, dialectical approach.

### CHAPTER III: NBA COMMISSIONER ADAM SILVER'S AMBIVALENT DISCOURSE IN THE NEW RACISM

On April 29, 2014, the National Basketball Association (NBA) Commissioner Adam Silver, a man who occupies whiteness, delivered a press conference in which he fined the then-owner of the Los Angeles (L.A.) Clippers (an NBA team), Donald Sterling, 2.5 million dollars and banned him for life from any affiliation with the NBA, including his majority ownership of the Clippers (Zillgitt, 2014b). This press conference took place in response to the public release four days earlier of a recorded conversation between Sterling, a man who also occupies whiteness, and his girlfriend/mistress V. Stiviano, a woman who occupies a non-White positionality, in which Sterling made racist comments about individuals who occupy Black positionality, including Irving (Magic) Johnson (five-time NBA Champion, three-time NBA MVP, and highly regarded as one of the greatest NBA players of all time) (*TMZ*, 2014). In this chapter, I provide a rhetorical analysis and critique of Commissioner Silver's press conference and the international news and sports media responses that surrounded it. My aim for this analysis is two-fold. First, I seek to offer an explanation of how these responses function as a strategic rhetoric to secure whiteness as centralized and invisible through the use of dialectics, or contradictory discourses. Second, I aim to examine how the rhetorics of whiteness intersect with the rhetorics of hegemonic masculinity to maintain and perpetuate a racial and gender hierarchy within the NBA. My analysis is guided by the following questions: what discourses (both consistent through time and contradictory with each other) do the rhetorics of whiteness utilize to secure its central and invisible cultural space in the NBA?; how does the rhetorical performance of Commissioner Silver centralize and marginalize individuals who do not occupy locations of whiteness and/or masculinity?; how do the rhetorics of whiteness within NBA contribute to the

new racism (Collins, 1991, 2004), or a post-Civil Rights era racism that operates covertly at structural levels?; how do the rhetorics of whiteness within the NBA preserve and perpetuate a racial ideology that creates a strategic societal forgetting of historical racial oppression, also known as postracism (Ono, 2011)?; and how do the rhetorics of whiteness within the NBA function to perpetuate color-blind ideology (Bonilla-Silva, 2014), the conception that racial identifications and designations are not influential factors in peoples' lived experiences or chances to succeed professionally, economically, socially, or otherwise?

As this chapter discusses, guided by these questions, my analysis and critique revealed that Commissioner Silver's press conference and the global news and sports media's response to it utilized two dialectics, *rhetorics of postracism vs. critical rhetorics* and *rhetorics of shame vs. rhetorics of honor*, to secure whiteness and masculinity as centralized and invisible discourses. Considering the NBA's global impact, the decisions of Commissioner Silver and the international news and sports media's response to his decisions have profound implications for racial and gender ideologies beyond the boundaries of professional basketball and the U.S. To begin, I provide a summary of Commissioner Silver's press conference.

### **Commissioner Adam Silver's Press Conference**

Speaking on behalf of the NBA, Commissioner Silver delivered his response and reaction to Donald Sterling at a press conference on April 29, 2014, four days after the public release of the audio recording containing Sterling's racist comments. The entirety of the press conference, including the question and answer session, lasted approximately 21 minutes. The brevity of the press conference was a result of Commissioner Silver's undeviating and succinct delivery of the punishment and his responses to media questions.



At the press conference, Commissioner Silver began by stating that the NBA completed an investigation upon the release of the audio recording. He stated that the investigation was complete, and it determined that the voice heard on the recording was in fact Sterling's. Commissioner Silver then expressed his remorse and anger, and apologized to "pioneers of the game" by stating:

The views expressed by Mr. Sterling are deeply offensive and harmful; that they came from an NBA owner only heightens the damage and my personal outrage. Sentiments of this kind are contrary to the principles of inclusion and respect that form the foundation of our diverse, multicultural and multiethnic league. I am personally distraught that the views expressed by Mr. Sterling came from within an institution that has historically taken such a leadership role in matters of race relations and caused current and former players, coaches, fans and partners of the NBA to question their very association with the league. To them, and pioneers of the game like Earl Lloyd, Chuck Cooper, Sweetwater Clifton, the great Bill Russell, and particularly Magic Johnson, I apologize. (*USA Today*, 2014b, para. 4-7)

Commissioner Silver then banned Sterling for life from any association with the NBA and fined him 2.5 million dollars. He indicated that the funds would be donated to organizations dedicated to "anti-discrimination and tolerance efforts" that would be "jointly" determined by the NBA and the player's union (*USA Today*, 2014b, para. 9). He then stated, "I will urge the Board of Governors to exercise its authority to force a sale of the team and will do everything in my power to ensure that that happens" (para. 10). The Commissioner then closed by reiterating his disgust and thanked the players, the L.A. Clippers coach Doc Rivers, the players' union president (and NBA All-Star) Chris Paul, and the players' union representative then-Mayor Johnson for

their “support and understanding” (para. 10). He ended by stating, “We stand together in condemning Mr. Sterling's views. They simply have no place in the NBA” (para. 11).

Upon the completion of Commissioner Silver’s prepared statements, he fielded several questions from the media. In his responses, he spoke briefly and succinctly. The first questions pertained to the forced sale of the Clippers. For example, one question included, “From polling the owners that you've spoken to, what support do you think you have to force Mr. Sterling to sell the team?” (*USA Today*, 2014b, para. 14). Commissioner Silver responded, “I didn't poll the owners. I spoke to several owners, and I have their full support” (para. 15). Other questions concerned the process that Commissioner Silver went through to make his decision about banning and fining Sterling. For example, one media representative asked, “What was the process to coming to this decision over the last couple days, and when did you decide that this was the appropriate action to take?” (para. 22). Commissioner Silver responded by stating:

I ultimately decided this morning that this was the appropriate action, and the process beginning Saturday morning when this tape was first released was to appoint an investigator. It was David Anders from the Wachtell Lipton firm. He conducted a series of interviews, some by phone, some in person. He concluded his investigation late last night. (para. 26)

The questions that followed concerned Sterling’s personal reaction to the ban, Commissioner Silver’s message for the Clippers, their fans, and their sponsors, Commissioner Silver’s message behind the punishment, Commissioner Silver and the NBA’s consideration of Sterling’s past behaviors in their decision-making, the bylaws within the NBA constitution that allowed for Commissioner Silver to exercise the ban, potential ownership by individuals who occupy Black positionality, the situation’s influence upon future rules for NBA ownership, the

financial impact of the loss of sponsors on the NBA, the Sterling family's future association with the NBA, and Sterling's history with former NBA All-Star and coach Elgin Baylor. One of the final questions called to attention Commissioner Silver's Jewish identity and any loyalties he could have to Sterling:

Media Representative: ...In terms of Donald Sterling self-identifying as Jewish and you doing the same, as well, I'm wondering whether there was a specific kind of pain associated with that for you and if you felt a certain responsibility within the Jewish community to be responding to this in this way? (para. 64)

Commissioner Silver: I think my response was as a human being, and I used the word distraught before. I spoke on Saturday morning directly to Chris Paul, to Doc Rivers, and it wasn't even anger at that point. I mean, there was a certain somberness, and frankly, I felt sort of most strongly and personally for that team. While this affects every player and anyone associated with the NBA family, for those players and those coaches to go out and do what they need to do and play at the highest level in the world and have them hanging over this I think caused me to have a certain sadness I would say about the entire situation. I think this is regardless of anyone's religion, ethnicity, nationality. I think this is incredibly hurtful. (para. 65)

The closing question asked, "If you don't get the three quarter vote that you need, is it possible that Donald Sterling could still be an absentee owner profiting from this team even though physically he's banned from doing anything with it?" (para. 70). Commissioner Silver responded, "I fully expect to get the support I need from the other NBA owners to remove him" (para. 71).

Following the lifetime ban and 2.5 million dollar fine given to Sterling, Commissioner Silver was named by *Sports Illustrated* in 2014 as the Executive of the Year and was ranked by *SportsBusiness Journal* as number one on their list of the 50 Most Influential People in Sports Business. In 2015, he was honored as one of *TIME Magazine's* 100 Most Influential People. He also earned Sports Executive of the Year honors at the 2015 Sports Business Awards, and was named to *Fortune's* 2015 list of the World's 50 Greatest Leaders (NBA Media Ventures, LLC, 2016). The recognition, honor, and praise that Commissioner Silver received for his decisions as a leader of the NBA point our attention to the profound impact that he has as commissioner and the far-reaching influence of NBA and men's professional sport on understandings of race.

The following section focuses on my analysis of this press conference, as well as reactions to the press conference from international news and sports media, current and former players, coaches, owners, and fans. As previously described, I specifically analyzed statements made in major national and global news and magazine outlets between the dates of the press conference on April 29, 2014 and the sale of the L.A. Clippers on August 12, 2014. Additionally, I examined the "The 2015 Racial and Gender Report Card: National Basketball Association" produced by the previously mentioned TIDES to identify racial and gender hiring practices as well as diversity and inclusion initiatives implemented by the Association and Commissioner Silver (Lapchick & Guiao, 2015). In the following, the two dialectics that emerged from my analysis, *rhetorics of postracism vs. critical rhetorics* and *rhetorics of shame vs. rhetorics of honor*, are explained.

### **Rhetorics of Postracism vs. Critical Rhetorics**

The consistent interplay between contradictory discourses that either situate the NBA as “progressive,” postracial, and postracism or call out the NBA for its racial hierarchy that favors White positionality serve to situate whiteness as centralized, invisible, and untouched. I conceptualize this dialectic as the *rhetorics of postracism vs. critical rhetorics*. This dialectic exemplifies an antagonistic struggle, that is, a struggle between two ideological positions or systems of meaning constructed and perpetuated through discourse (Baxter, 2011). In the following section, I provide an identification of these contradictory discourses and their intersection with hegemonic masculinity.

#### **Rhetorics of Postracism**

The NBA has long been praised as a leader in “racial progress” and “racial diversity.” The University of Central Florida College of Business Administration’s Institute for Ethics and Diversity in Sport (TIDES) designated the NBA with an “A+” in racial hiring practices within their “Racial and Gender Report Card” in 2015 (Lapchick & Guiao, 2015) as well as 2009 (Lapchick, Hanson, & Johnson, 2009), 2011 (Lapchick et al., 2011), 2012 (Lapchick, Lecky, & Trigg, 2012), 2013 (Lapchick, Hippert, Rivera, & Robinson, 2013), and 2014 (Lapchick, Donovan, Loomer, & Martinez, 2014). The NBA also received an “A” in 2008 (Lapchick, Elkins, & Mathew, 2008) and 2010 (Lapchick, Kaiser, Russell, & Welch, 2010). Following Commissioner Silver’s press conference in response to Sterling’s racist comments, Richard Lapchick, founder and director of TIDES stated:

...the NBA, among all of the [U.S. men’s professional sports] leagues, is more in tune with moving in the right direction in terms of diversity and inclusion than all of the other [U.S.] leagues. And that’s been the case for a long time. (Lee, 2014, para. 3)

Similar to Richard Lapchick and TIDES' consistent praise of the NBA as a leader in racial diversity within men's U.S. professional sport, Commissioner Silver's press conference, as well as global news and sports media's coverage of his press conference, rhetorically situated the NBA as a "progressive" organization with a fearless leader guiding the NBA towards progress in race relations and diversity (Cacciola & Witz, 2014; Egan, 2014; Smith, 2014; *The Nation (Thailand)*, 2014a). For instance, Cacciola & Witz (2014) stated:

The N.B.A. has been one of the more progressive sports leagues in regards to race. It has long been the league with the most black players (76 percent as of 2013), and was the first with more than a handful of black head coaches. (para. 11)

Designated as a leader, some international news and sports media called upon two other influential men's professional sports organizations, the NFL and the Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA), to follow Commissioner Silver and the NBA's example in addressing (or removing) racism or racists from within their respective leagues (Bell, 2014a; Brown, 2014). The rhetoric of "progress" and "inclusion" constructed the NBA as a space that is both postracial and postracism.

Postracial discourses imply that racial designations and/or identifications no longer influence individuals' lived experiences or life chances (Orbe, 2011). Therefore, one's success, whether socially, educationally, financially, politically, or professionally, is claimed to not be hindered by structural inequalities or barriers, but rather, is supposedly determined by one's work-ethic. In a postracial society, the myth of a meritocracy, in which one's success is determined by their work-ethic, dominates common sense understanding of race and racial disparities (Bonilla-Silva, 2014; Orbe, 2011; Ono, 2011). A postracial society is inherently postracism. Rhetorics of postracism, according to Ono (2011), function as a "discourse of

distraction” (Ono, 2011, p. 227) from the realities of racism’s historical presence and influence, as well as contemporary racism’s existence and power. Ono (2011) explains:

Postracism is the perfect elixir to help society forget about the icky historical abomination known as racism. It is one part cultural condition and one part political strategy, a creative solution to help free the mind of racism once and for all. (Ono, 2011, p. 227)

The rhetorics of the postracial and postracism have, for instance, surrounded the overwhelming athletic and corporate (retail sales and advertisement endorsement) success of Michael Jordan (current owner of the Charlotte Hornets who is regarded as the NBA’s best player of all time) and pro-golfer Tiger Woods (14-time Major Champion and one of the most successful U.S. professional golfers of all time), two athletes who self-identify as non-White. During the rise of their popularity and success, media discourses emphasized that their success was due to hard work and discipline (i.e., a meritocracy), rather than an innate, natural ability that is often wrongfully ascribed to athletes who occupy Black positionality for their success. Nike’s slogan for each in the 1990s, “Be like Mike” and “I am Tiger Woods,” elided any structural barriers that people of color, such as these two athletes, may encounter in achieving economic success and implied that anyone of any color, with hard work and discipline, could become successful and even an athletic superstar (Houck, 2006). More recently, the rhetorics of postracism have framed the presidency of Barack Obama, the U.S.’s first president who occupies Black (or biracial) positionality. Obama’s election illustrated one of the major functions of postracial and postracism discourses, which is to minimize the reality of racism. While the election of Obama did not move society into the “post,” for media, Obama’s election cannot be disassociated with postracial and postracism times. Many claimed that if a man who occupies

Black (or biracial) positionality could be elected president, then anyone can. Anything is considered possible in a postracial and postracism society, regardless of color (Ono, 2011). As part of the construction of the NBA as both postracial and postracism, Commissioner Silver and media responses functioned to construct the NBA as a site of inclusion.

**Racial inclusion as postracism.** Contemporary racial discourses, such as that of Commissioner Silver and the international news and sports media coverage of his press conference, may appear at first glance to be unique to racist discourses prior to the Civil Rights Movement, and because they take an antiracist stance, their participation in postracism may initially be elusive (Ono, 2011). However, the abstract and intangible nature of these rhetorics are part of postracism's strategy. This is first exemplified within Commissioner Silver's press conference and the media reactions surrounding it in which the rhetorics of postracism functioned to minimize the presence of racism within the NBA and society in general. Ono (2011) explains:

Postracism strategically draws attention away from existing racism. By suggesting racism no longer exists and has been solved, postracial discourse functions as a discourse of distraction, filling up blogspace, airwaves, and screens with visions and messages of progress, hence keeping legitimate information about contemporary and historical racism at bay. (p. 227)

The NBA's postracial and postracism position of "inclusion" and "progress" was first communicated during the press conference through Commissioner Silver's reference to his partnership with coach Doc Rivers, then-Mayor of Sacramento Kevin Johnson (and former NBA All-Star), who served as the NBA players' union representative during the Sterling incident, and



the players' union president Christ Paul, all who do not occupy whiteness. Commissioner Silver stated:

This has been a painful moment for all members of the NBA family. I appreciate the support and understanding of our players during this process, and I am particularly grateful for the leadership shown by Coach Doc Rivers, Union President Chris Paul and Mayor Kevin Johnson of Sacramento, who has been acting as the players' representative in this matter. We stand together in condemning Mr. Sterling's views. They simply have no place in the NBA. (*USA Today*, 2014b, para. 10-11)

By offering an image of a coalition consisting of himself and the players, Commissioner Silver drew attention away from his power and authority as man who occupies whiteness, and thus his role within a racialized and gendered society and his complex performance of whiteness. Commissioner Silver, a Jewish man, replaced David Stern, also a Jewish man who occupies whiteness, as NBA commissioner following Stern's retirement on February 1, 2014. Prior to his position as commissioner, Commissioner Silver worked alongside Stern for 20 years and was intimately involved in the NBA's business during its time of growth in the early nineties (Cacciola, Jones, & Futterman, 2014). He held five different influential positions within the NBA while working alongside Stern. He worked as Deputy Commissioner and Chief Operating Officer from July 1, 2006 to January 31, 2014 where he was involved in franchise sales, stadium development, labor negotiations, and television deals (Cacciola, Jones, & Futterman, 2014). Prior to this, he held the position as President and COO of NBA Entertainment for more than eight years. He also served as Senior VP & COO of NBA Entertainment, NBA Chief of Staff, and Special Assistant to the Commissioner (NBA Media Ventures, LLC, 2016).

Through Commissioner Silver's rhetorical performance, he situated himself as "progressive" by distinguishing himself from the previous commissioner, David Stern, who often utilized paternalistic rhetoric to maintain control of players (and specifically players who do not occupy whiteness) and the Association (Griffin & Calafell, 2011). Paternalistic rhetoric situates the speaker as a father-like, authoritative figure with masculine control over children or child-like beings (Griffin & Calafell, 2011). Stern's rhetoric concerning the 2004 "Malice at the Palace," an incident that involved a game-time fight between the Detroit Pistons fans, Indiana Pacers players, and Detroit Pistons players, including NBA stars Ron Artest and Stephen Jackson, situated himself as the White, masculine, paternalistic leader who distributed harsh punishments to the non-White, misbehaving players. Through these punishments, Stern completely dismissed the perspective of players who occupy Black positionality and overlooked their knowledge and experience of what it means to be men who occupy Black positionality in both the NBA and the U.S. This contributed to Stern's rhetorical strategy to keep whiteness and hegemonic masculinity centralized in the NBA and Black masculinity in the margins. The Commissioner's perspective, which reigned from a location of whiteness, was the only perspective communicated through Stern's rhetoric, not the players' perspectives (Griffin & Calafell, 2011). Because Commissioner Silver worked so closely with David Stern at this time, it is inevitable that he had a role in this decision-making, thus contributing also to White hegemonic masculinity, and consequently racial disparities, in the NBA.

However, when Commissioner Silver, as the new commissioner, was faced with a similar situation in which action needed to be taken towards a team owner for his discriminatory comments directed at players who occupy Black positionality, Commissioner Silver aimed to act differently. He attempted to communicate a partnership rather than speak for the players as a

father-figure. In this way, he appeared to remove himself from the racial and masculine center and bring the players' perspectives as men who occupy Black positionality from the margins and into focus. His references to a partnership as well as his reference to the NBA as diverse and as a leading organization in race relations offered a foundation for players, coaches, owners, and media to build upon in reinforcing the NBA's image as postracial and Commissioner Silver's image as a progressive leader of the NBA for other sports organizations to follow. This is exemplified when Commissioner Silver stated, "I am personally distraught that the views expressed by Mr. Sterling came from within an institution that has historically taken such a leadership role in matters of race relations..." and again when he stated, "Sentiments of this kind are contrary to the principals of inclusion and respect that form the foundation of our diverse, multicultural, and multiethnic league" (*USA Today*, 2014b, para. 6). He was embraced by current and former NBA players, including Kyle Lowry, a man who occupies Black positionality, who stated his feelings of support in response to Silver's punishment to Sterling, "It's a fraternity. We all support each other" (quoted in Smith, p. S5). He, as well as the NBA, was then embraced by common media reactions, such as Smith's (2014), who stated, "In the closed-knit world of the NBA, which is the most inclusive pro sports organization when it comes to minorities in positions of authority up and down the power structure, opposition to Sterling's views was universal" (p. S5). Working jointly with language and performances that established the NBA and Commissioner Silver as racially inclusive, rhetorics of masculinity and whiteness also intersected to construct White masculinity as a protector of the NBA's inclusive postracism and postracial space.

**White masculinity as the protector of postracism.** In addition to Commissioner Silver's rhetoric, which was repeatedly reproduced in global news and sports media coverage of the press conference, the mass circulation of responses by current and former NBA (man) players and coaches who do not occupy White positionality contributed to the rhetoric of racial progress. Subsequently, a mythological narrative of the "warrior," the embodiment of hegemonic masculinity, emerged and intersected with the rhetorics of postracism to frame Commissioner Silver as the great White warrior and hero, protecting racial progress and the postracial. This rhetoric resembled that of paternalistic rhetoric utilized by Stern, as it situated Commissioner Silver as a father-like protector. The distinction between Commissioners Silver and Stern, however, is that players and media interpreted this performance as wholesome and good for the league and its players, rather than controlling and demeaning to the players.

Ono (2011) argues that the rhetorics of postracism work "...strategically to displace and deny racism, resituate whiteness as progressive and heroic, and recycle and repurpose stereotypes of people of color" (p. 227). The collective discourse of players, such as LeBron James, Kyle Lowry (NBA player), Michael Jordan, and Magic Johnson, as well as Coach Doc Rivers (former NBA player, NBA Champion coach, and current head coach and president of basketball operations for the L.A. Clippers) reached this aim by situating White masculinity (namely, Commissioner Silver) as the hero of the offended players who occupy Black positionality by securing the future of the postracial and postracism NBA. This was achieved when players and coaches attributed Commissioner Silver and his performance with masculine qualities associated specifically with mythologies surrounding "warriors," which embody hegemonic masculinity. Additionally, the discourses situated players who do not occupy whiteness as non-threatening and inclusive, contrary to popular stereotypes of athletes who

occupy Black positionality as selfish, lacking discipline, arrogant, criminal, and disrespectful (Grainger, Newman, & Andrews, 2006). This positive portrayal of athletes who occupy Black positionality, or postracial and postracism discourses, worked to mask whiteness's presence within the overall discourse. Therefore, the strategic invisibility of the rhetorics of whiteness resided in that they came from individuals who do not occupy White positionality, thus contributing to the illusion of the postracial. While it may not have been the individual intent of each rhetor to reach this aim, it is through mass reproduction and circulation of these discourses that this outcome is reached. Because of this, practices and ideologies of mainstream White America were perpetuated through the player responses and media coverage of Commissioner Silver's press conference.

Through a mythic narrative of athletes as "warriors," sports media constructs masculinity as unproblematic and normative, and therefore, sets athletes up for admiration of an ideal to which men are often expected to strive (Berg & Harthcock, 2012). The narratives of warriors and heroes often follow the shape of mythic stories that highlight certain masculine qualities as both idealized and realistic. These qualities include competitiveness, courage, bravery, commitment, strength, toughness, power, aggression, and the capability to stand up to pressure (Whannel, 1992). When Steve Nash, two-time NBA MVP and man who occupies White positionality, praised Commissioner Silver for his "...quick, unequivocal and concise decision made today on behalf of everyone involved in this situation" (quoted in Smith, 2014, p. S5), audiences were invited to understand Commissioner Silver as a strong and determined protector of the people. The use of masculine rhetoric to praise Commissioner Silver is consistent with the professional sport context, which perpetually uses masculine rhetoric to describe those within the sports industry (Berg & Harthcock, 2012; Burstyn, 1999; Butterworth, 2007; Trujillo, 1991). Through

my analysis, I found that Commissioner Silver was framed as a warrior, and specifically, as a protector of the good of humanity.

Heroes are constructed as “instinctive protectors,” defending those who are legitimately powerless or incapable of protecting themselves (Mark & Pearson, 2001, p. 107). These qualities of the “protector” were found in tweets such as that of Dwyane Wade (three-time NBA Champion), who stated, “Commissioner Silver...STRONG...way to take charge and protect our great league” (*Daily News (New York)*, 2014, p. 75). Additionally, LeBron James tweeted, “Commissioner Silver thank you for protecting our beautiful and powerful league!! Great leader!! #BiggerThanBasketball #StriveForGreatness” (Dillon, Burke, & McShane, 2014, p.6).

Reactions surrounding Commissioner Silver’s delivery of a 2.5 million dollar fine and life-time ban from the NBA to Sterling praised Commissioner Silver, the not-so-apparent representation of White masculinity, and positioned him as a super hero of sorts. As a hero, he used his powers (whiteness and masculinity) to protect the players who occupy Black positionality, who through their “tamed” responses to Sterling appear to be helpless, and stomp out any one and anything, including Donald Sterling and racism, which aimed to stand in the way of goodness and decency in the NBA and beyond. In this way, he was situated as a protector of the postracial and all who inhabit it, White, Black, or any other racial identification. Problematically, this situated players who occupy Black positionality as helpless, child-like individuals in need of a protector. Warrior mythology suggests that warriors and heroes seek to benefit the community that they protect and bring a reward to that community upon successful completion of the trials laid out before them (Campbell, 1968). Commissioner Silver was positioned as the protector of “goodness” in widely circulated statements such as the previously mentioned tweets by LeBron James and Dwyane Wade, as well as that of current NBA coach,

former president of the National Basketball Player's Association (NBPA), and five-time NBA Champion Derrick Fisher (who does not occupy whiteness) who stated that Commissioner Silver "...did the right thing today" (*USA Today*, 2014a, p.5C). Responses from other non-White athletes were also reproduced, such as that of Marcellus Wiley, an *ESPN* broadcaster and former NFL player, who praised Commissioner Silver for "...showing true leadership, boldness, & intolerance..." (*USA Today*, 2014a, p. 5C).

The imagery of a warrior was furthered through metaphorical language that framed Commissioner Silver as a weapon and created an image of him using a weapon to combat against racism and racists. One headline in an Australian newspaper, *The Courier Mail (Australia)* (2014), proclaimed the Commissioner as the "Silver bullet" (p. 63). A *USA Today* article also stated that Commissioner Silver used his "...biggest weapon" when referring to the maximum fine and life-time ban (Zillgitt, 2014a, p. 1C). Smith (2014, p. S5) stated that Commissioner Silver "...hammered Los Angeles Clippers owner Donald Sterling with unprecedented penalties." Furthermore, Jones (2014) in the *Tampa Bay Times* stated that Commissioner Silver "...swung his sword mightily and quickly, ridding the league of a despicable human being" (p. 1C). The imagery of Commissioner Silver using weapons or being a weapon to remove Sterling from the league embodied the masculine ideal of a warrior who uses weapons or physical force to defeat the enemy (Leverenz, 1994).

As a protective warrior, Commissioner Silver also received praise for the masculine ideal of decisiveness. Hero mythology contends that heroes pride themselves on discipline, focus, and the ability to make tough choices with the aim of making the world a better place (Mark & Pearson, 2001). According to Berg and Harthcock (2012), "...the Warrior, is one who achieves great heights of physical competence and adheres to hegemonically masculine qualities such as

rational thinking and decisiveness, while still remaining humble and selfless” (p. 145). This was found in comments, such as those from New York Knicks (of the NBA) owner James Dolan who stated that he applauded Commissioner Silver for “...acting quickly and decisively” (Sandoval & McShane, 2014, p. 4) and Steve Nash’s previously mentioned comment in which he praised Commissioner Silver for his “quick, unequivocal, and concise decision” (quoted in Smith, 2014, p. S5). Another Australian newspaper praised Commissioner Silver for “...acting swiftly and with exceptional conviction to overnight turn what had been a black eye for basketball into a shining beacon of what all right-thinking people should stand for” (*The Advertiser (Australia)*, 2014, p. 71).

Cumulatively, Commissioner Silver’s rhetorical performance combined with player, coach, and international news and sports media responses situated whiteness as progressive, and White masculinity as the warrior-like protector of what is good and right in humanity- a postracial and postracism society. The discourse, then, framed the NBA as a racially progressive organization, representative of racial diversity and inclusion, a postracial and postracism place where there is “no room for racism” (*USA Today*, 2014a, para. 11). These discourses maintained one of the aims of postracism, which is to minimize and distract from the effects of racism’s historical legacy, thus securing a mental habitus of “preracial consciousness,” thereby situating whiteness as invisible and unquestioned (Ono, 2011, p. 227). These discourses, however, did not go uncontested. Rather, they were contradicted by media responses that called out the NBA for its prior mishandling of Donald Sterling’s racist history as well as the NBA’s current racial hierarchy. Therefore, the following discourses represent the other side of the *rhetorics of postracism vs. critical rhetorics* dialectic.



## Critical Rhetorics

While the discourse within and surrounding Commissioner Silver's punishment delivered to Sterling represented Silver and the NBA as postracial and postracism, there were simultaneous discourses within Silver's press conference as well as the media coverage that contradicted these rhetorics. Rather, competing discourses took on a critical nature and questioned the power dynamics, racial hierarchy, and racial inequality within the NBA. These discourses aimed to confront the rhetorics of postracism, which as critical cultural scholars know all too well, is a difficult, but worthy task. The difficulty lies within the power of postracial and postracism ideology, which aims to remove the presence and legacy of historical oppression experienced by people of color from the White consciousness. Ono (2011) explains:

Processes of forgetting go beyond single instances of denying racism and its effects. Denial is a transhistorical and psychological phenomenon, usually manifested in processes of sublimation, transference, or repression, and is therefore, constitutive of oppression, itself. (p. 228)

Therefore, the critical rhetorics that contradict the rhetorics of postracism, were confronting a very powerful ideology that has been strategically constructed throughout time. In this specific incident, the acknowledgement of racial disparities within the NBA, which were then further interrogated by various media sources, began during Commissioner Silver's press conference:

We're always open to ownership from people of all races, nationalities, ethnicities. As you know we have an African American primary owner in the league right now.

Shaquille O'Neal just became a small owner of the Sacramento Kings. David Robinson is an owner of the San Antonio Spurs. Vivek Ranadive, a person of color born in Mumbai,

India, just became the primary owner of the Sacramento Kings. So I believe we have a very diverse league, but I'd always like to see it become more diverse. (*USA Today*, 2014b, para. 36)

His brief acknowledgement of the need for more diversity, however, did not necessarily indicate that he would take action to increase it. His acknowledgement, however, is notable. This mention of the need for more racially diverse ownership was taken a few steps further by numerous media that questioned not only the racial make-up of those in team ownership positions, but also the decisions made by those in those positions. Some headlines read, "Sterling slain, race remains" (Siegel, 2014, p. 31) and "Now let's fight racism that spawned Sterling" (Arthur, 2014, p. S5). Media coverage such as these brought attention to the NBA, its 34 other majority owners, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), and the former Commissioner David Stern's decision to overlook Sterling's prior documented racist behaviors.

**Critiquing administrative decisions.** Numerous media reports aimed to critique the complete obviating of Sterling's racist history by various individuals and organizations. Sterling's history of racial discrimination includes a 2006 lawsuit by the U.S. Department of Justice against Sterling for housing discrimination (Board, 2014). Allegedly, Sterling had stated, "Black tenants smell and attract vermin" (Abdul-Jabbar, 2014, para. 4). In 2009, he reportedly paid 2.73 million dollars in a Justice Department suit alleging that he had discriminated against individuals renting homes from him, including individuals who occupy Black and Hispanic positionality and families with children. In that same year, a Clippers general manager, former L.A. Lakers star and NBA former coach and All-Star Elgin Baylor, sued Sterling for employment discrimination based on race and age. He stated that Sterling had a plantation-style

mentality (Abdul-Jabbar, 2014; Fenno, 2014). These past behaviors were brought up during the question and answer session of Commissioner Silver's press conference:

Media: Just to be clear, you said when specific evidence was brought to the league you did act. In past cases, has Donald Sterling ever been fined or suspended for racial or offensive remarks, and if not, why not? (*USA Today*, 2014b, para. 44)

Commissioner Silver: He's never been suspended or fined by the league because while there have been well documented rumors and cases filed, he was sued and the plaintiff lost the lawsuit. That was Elgin Baylor. There was a case brought by the Department of Justice in which ultimately Donald Sterling settled and there was no finding of guilt, and those are the only cases that have been brought to our attention. When those two litigations were brought, they were followed closely by the league office. (para. 45)

Media: Just a follow to that, one of the greatest players of all time, Elgin Baylor, accused Donald Sterling of running a plantation style [*sic*] franchise. Did that not concern you, and why was that not investigated? Despite the fact he lost the case, he has a prominent standing in the league and he said some very serious things. (para. 46)

Commissioner Silver: It concerned us greatly. We followed the litigation closely, and ultimately Elgin Baylor did not prevail in that litigation. (para. 47)

Sterling's past behavior also left many associated with the NBA, such as civil rights activist and NBA legend Kareem Abdul-Jabbar (six-time NBA Champion, six-time NBA MVP, two-time NBA Finals MVP, and highly regarded as one of the greatest players ever in the NBA), questioning why the NBA and former Commissioner David Stern (with Silver on his staff) did not take action towards Sterling for these actions, but only chose to fine and remove him when he made racially charged comments about individuals who occupy Black positionality within the

NBA. In an op-ed piece for *Time*, after listing Sterling's prior behavior, Abdul-Jabbar (2014) stated:

What bothers me about this whole Donald Sterling affair isn't just his racism. I'm bothered that everyone acts as if it's a huge surprise. Now there's all this dramatic and very public rending of clothing about whether they should keep their expensive Clippers season tickets. Really? All this other stuff I listed above has been going on for years and this ridiculous conversation with his girlfriend is what puts you over the edge? *That's* (his emphasis) the smoking gun? (Abdul-Jabbar, 2014, para. 8)

**Critiquing administration's racial hierarchy.** The NBA was not the only organization to overlook Sterling's past behavior. As some media outlets noted, the NAACP, an advocacy organization dedicated to ensuring the political, economic, social, and educational equality of all U.S. citizens as well as the eradication of racial prejudice and discrimination (NAACP, 2015), was scheduled to present a Lifetime Achievement Award to Sterling for his history of donating to minority charities and giving free basketball tickets to inner-city children. The NAACP had honored Sterling several times in the past, regardless of his lawsuit, but the latest award, scheduled to be given only weeks after the transcripts were released, was revoked (*The Gazette (Montreal)*, 2014).

Media reaction also called attention to the racial hierarchy within the NBA ownership (Arthur, 2014; Jones, 2014; Siegel, 2014). Specifically, media did not shy away from acknowledging that the ownership in the NBA is a specific elite club that is afforded predominantly only to White elites, with the exception of Michael Jordan of the Charlotte Hornets and Vivak Ranodive of the Sacramento Kings. In a *Washington Post* article, Todd Boyd, a professor of race and popular culture at Southern Cal is quoted saying:

It's one thing to say, 'We need more black owners.' But where are they going to come from? The ownership issue is a bigger issue. This is not the NBA's fault that black people were denied the opportunity to advance economically. That's not their fault at all. That speaks to the nature of the country we live in. . . . But there is nothing prohibiting teams in the NBA from hiring people in positions of authority across the board. You don't need to accumulate wealth to be an NBA general manager or president of a club or operate in other capacities in the league. (Lee, 2014, para. 15)

Here, Boyd called attention to two important issues. First, historically, individuals who occupy Black positionality, and people of color in general, have been denied the opportunity to advance economically, which brings to light that racism, which favors White positionality, is both historically systemic and systematic. Secondly, Boyd pointed out that the NBA cannot use this rationale to justify its failure to hire or move people of color up the ranks into leadership positions such as general managers, presidents, or administrative positions. This systematic and systemic issue of White elitism that Boyd pointed to is what numerous media sources associated with the culture of the NBA that allowed for prior Commissioner Stern as well as the 34 other owners to overlook Sterling's racist history. To exemplify this discourse, Arthur (2014), in the *Toronto Star* stated:

We should all laugh at Donald Sterling, cackle at this sad plantation billionaire, exile him to the status of repugnant laughingstock. But we should pay attention to what he got away with, more than anything. In a just league, and a just world, it would have doomed him long ago. (p. S5)

While the rhetorics of postracism, including that of Commissioner Silver, NBA players and coaches, TIDES, and media, have aimed to mask the presence of a racial hierarchy or any

kind of history of racism within the NBA, they have not operated without challenge.

Contradictory discourses, or critical rhetorics, such as those furthered by Kareem Abdul-Jabbar and various media sources, have aimed to bring public attention to the racial hierarchy that favors White elitism in the U.S., as well as how this hierarchy has historically influenced strategic decision-making within professional sport in situations such as Donald Sterling's racist past to favor White elitism. Through an analysis of the interplay between the rhetorics of postracism and critical rhetorics, I argue that this dialectic has strategically functioned to perpetuate and situate whiteness as unmoved from its centralized and invisible location of power.

### **Rhetorics of Shame vs. Rhetorics of Honor**

A second theme among competing discourses, *shame vs. honor*, functioned within the rhetoric of Commissioner Silver, the NBA community, and the media's coverage of Commissioner Silver's press conference. While the dialectic of rhetorics of postracism vs. critical rhetorics exemplified an antagonistic struggle, a struggle between ideologies, this dialectic represents a nonantagonistic struggle. According to Baxter (2011), within a nonantagonistic struggle, multiple discourses can be identified within a single source. Bakhtin (1981) argues that dialogic relationships exist within a single utterance, and even inside an individual word. Therefore, a single rhetorical performance can in itself represent a dialectical struggle. Through my analysis, I found that the competing and contradictory rhetorics of honor and shame were woven throughout the Sterling debacle.

The rhetorical performance of the now former L.A. Clippers owner Donald Sterling, which was widely reproduced and circulated within global media, communicated Sterling's aim to establish his own honor by shaming the Black community. Through explicit racial shaming, he sought to situate himself at the top of society's racial and gender hierarchy. Concurrently,

Commissioner Silver, NBA players, coaches, owners, fans, and media, also utilized rhetorics of shame and humiliation to distance Sterling from the NBA for his racist sentiments, as racist sentiments are not acceptable in a supposed postracial and color-blind society. Through shaming Sterling, the NBA sought to reclaim its honor as a leader in racial progress, which had been temporarily tarnished by Sterling. Sterling's racist performance had called attention to a racial hierarchy in the NBA, which problematically called out whiteness's systematic centrality in the NBA. As a result, within Commissioner Silver's press conference and the surrounding media coverage, rhetorics of shame and honor were utilized concurrently and competitively. These discourses functioned covertly to negotiate "proper" whiteness, or the socially acceptable way to invisibly maintain a racial hierarchy. The quest for honor via shaming is not only historically a White rhetorical strategy, but also a masculine one. For this reason, the intersection between whiteness and masculinity worked in concert to secure a racial and gender hierarchy. Simultaneously, this consistent reproduction of the interplay between discourses of shame and honor functioned to situate whiteness, the leading racial power, as invisible, centralized, and uncontested within the NBA.

### **Shame and Honor**

While the U.S. has often been portrayed as "postracial" due to the first election of a president who occupies Black (or biracial) positionality, rhetorics of shame and honor have functioned simultaneously within U.S. society to covertly secure the positionality of whiteness as centralized and powerful. This, for instance, was found in various political and media discourses that portrayed the White House, and thus the U.S., as racially contaminated due to the election of Barack Obama. Criticisms of Obama's "intrusive" agenda, claims of him being Muslim, and questions and subsequent investigations into his U.S. citizenship led to cries to "take our country

back” or “restore honor” (Leverenz, 2012). Donald Trump’s vie for the White House in 2015-2016 even used the slogan “Make America Great Again” (Donald J. Trump for President, 2015). This slogan was the backdrop of his popularity in Republican polls while he characterized Mexican and Latinx immigrants as rapists, called for 12 million illegal immigrants to be deported, and argued that a wall should be built along the U.S. and Mexican border. He also called for the U.S. to ban Muslims from entering the U.S., whether refugees or visitors (Bump, 2015; Miller, 2015). Trump’s vie for presidency, and eventual win, fed into and then fed off of the fears of White racial contamination and whiteness’s sense of its boundaries and superiorities. These rhetorical strategies of shaming racial and/or ideological “Others” in order to protect and restore the honor of whiteness are reflective of past events in U.S. history, such as, but certainly not limited to, slavery’s long history (1619-1865) in the Antebellum south, segregation, Japanese internment camps, and the “red scare” during McCarthyism. Such shaming in the name of honor has resulted in the maintenance of a racial order that favors White positionality. Practices of shaming and honor claiming extend beyond the boundaries of politics and have continued throughout U.S. history into contemporary society. Namely, the quest to rebuild or maintain honor and through shaming tactics functioned strategically within Commissioner Silver and Donald Sterling’s rhetorical performances in 2014. As a metaphoric battleground, the quest to shame and thereby obtain, maintain, or restore honor within professional sports reflect and reinforce intersections of racial and masculine ideologies that necessitate dominance of one group over another in the name of respect, honor, and doing the right thing. In the instance of the NBA, this racial and masculine power struggle was played out through the rhetorics of shame competing with rhetorics of honor.



**Racial shaming: The restoration of racial honor.** When the then-L.A. Clippers majority owner Donald Sterling was thrust into the media spotlight because an audio recording of him stating to his girlfriend, V. Stiviano, a woman who occupies non-White positionality, that he did not want her to bring individuals who occupy Black positionality to Clippers basketball games, pieces of the recording were repeatedly played on air waves and reprinted in online and print news sources (*TMZ*, 2014). Through my analysis, I found several clips were consistently reproduced, including the following clip in which Donald Sterling shamed NBA players who occupy Black positionality:

I support them [players who occupy Black positionality] and give them food, and clothes, and cars, and houses. Who gives it to them? Does someone else give it to them? Do I know that I have—Who makes the game? Do I make the game, or do they make the game? Is there 30 owners, that created the league?. (Wagner, 2014, para. 7)

Sterling's statements, such as this one, implied that he perceived himself as an owner of NBA players who occupy Black positionality who is kind enough to "give them food, and clothes, and cars, and houses" (para. 7). He saw himself as a person of power, a man who occupies whiteness, similar to a slave owner from the Antebellum south, who shared his wealth with the "lowly" men who occupy Black positionality, similar to slaves without honor or respect, who have not in fact earned their wealth through their talents, intelligence, and hard work, but instead, have received it through charity. Additionally, comparable to a slave owner, Sterling aimed to benefit from the physical performance of the men who occupy Black positionality that he viewed as lowly. This performance exemplifies Sterling's quest to establish honor through racial shaming.

This form of racial shaming is reminiscent of Antebellum slavery in the U.S., a time when individuals who occupied whiteness used racial shaming, humiliation, and fear to make individuals who occupied Black positionality feel like outsiders who were tolerated only for their labor. This degrading continued for generations, reaffirming the so-called honor of their whiteness and righteousness of their mastery over individuals who occupied Black positionality (Leverenz, 2012). Therefore, individuals who occupy whiteness who shame individuals who occupy Black positionality, as well as any person of color, do so to reconsolidate their (White) power rather than to actually make people of color feel ashamed (Leverenz, 2012). This was also revealed in Sterling's interview with *CNN*'s Anderson Cooper following the audio recordings' release to the public in which he shamed Magic Johnson for having AIDS and also shamed the Black community for not helping one another the way Jewish people help each other (Estrada & Shoichet, 2014). Therefore, Sterling's intent may have not been so much to harm the NBA players who occupy Black positionality or men who occupy Black positionality in general as it was to reassert his own power and honor as a man who occupies whiteness through the use of shame. It is not possible, however, to assert power in this manner without causing harm.

In addition to Sterling's racial shaming of men who occupy Black positionality and the Black community, Sterling's relationship with V. Stiviano added a notable element to Sterling's rhetorical performance of whiteness through shaming. This time it occurred through shaming a woman of color. V. Stiviano was Sterling's mistress, although she only claimed that he was a father-like figure and lover, who leaked the recorded telephone conversation that included Sterling's racist comments to the pop media outlet *TMZ*. Both Stiviano and Sterling received negative media criticisms following the release of the phone conversation, as Stiviano is a 32-year-old woman who identifies herself as Black and Mexican, while Sterling is an 80-year-old

man reigning from White positionality (Yan, 2014). Their relationship was portrayed as inappropriate because of their age difference as well as the fact that Sterling is married. Beyond this, Stiviano's racial identification was clearly problematic considering Sterling's racist comments towards the Black community, a group with whom she identifies. While V. Stiviano denied an extramarital affair with Sterling, they often appeared very close in public, and he lavished her with expensive gifts, such as a Ferrari and a duplex.

Similar to Sterling's racist comments about men who occupy Black positionality and the Black community, through this relationship, again, Sterling was positioned as a slave owner-type of individual seeking honor through the domination and shame of the racial "Other." During U.S. plantation slavery, White masculine privilege meant that men who occupied White positionality had the freedom to do as they pleased with darker-skinned women (i.e., their women slaves), regardless of either's marital status. White masculine privilege, then, extended beyond control over men who occupied Black positionality as laborers, to control over all women as sexual beings. Men who occupied White positionality utilized their "natural superiority" to justify the engagement in unabashed extramarital affairs and sexual relations with women of color (Leverenz, 2012). Sterling's extramarital affair with Stiviano, the much younger and darker woman, resembled these relationships all too much.

Following Sterling's lifetime ban from the NBA and his 2.5 million dollar fine, he engaged in numerous strategies to restore his honor, none of which succeeded. First, he challenged the NBA's forced sale of the Clippers by filing a one-billion-dollar lawsuit against the NBA for breach of contract and for violating anti-trust laws by using what he claims was an illegal recording to oust him. He stated that he felt "...the leadership of the NBA is incompetent, inexperienced and angry. It is clear that they took this opportunity to settle the personal

grievances they have harboured against me for years" (Tadeo, 2014, para. 3). Sterling also hired private investigators to "dig up dirt" on the NBA by looking at past lawsuits filed against the NBA by women and racial minorities (Red, 2014a). Regardless of Sterling's attempts to restore his honor by maintaining his position as the majority owner of the Clippers, the team was sold by the Sterling Family Trust to Steve Ballmer, the former CEO of Microsoft, for two-billion-dollars in mid-August 2014.

After Sterling's failed attempts to regain his honor by challenging the forced sale of the Clippers through suing the NBA, and even hiring a private detective to find information about the NBA that could humiliate the NBA in the same way he had been shamed, Sterling attempted to restore his honor through demeaning and embarrassing his mistress, V. Stiviano. Leverenz (2012) states that "A targeted man can continue to belong, temporarily abashed, if he accepts the shame. A transgressive woman is more likely to face humiliation or be sacrificed to preserve male honor" (p. 8). Following the sale of the Clippers to Steve Ballmer, Stiviano lost a lawsuit filed against her by Shelly Sterling (the Sterling Family) and was forced to move out of her 1.8-million-dollar duplex given to her by Donald Sterling and return 800,000 dollars worth of gifts lavished on her by him. Pictures of Stiviano circulated through pop media of her moving her belongings out of her duplex into a graffiti-covered truck and then driving off in an old, average looking car, a stark contrast from her Ferrari that she had to return to the Sterlings (*USA Today*, 2015). The loss of the lawsuit and the subsequent public embarrassment of Stiviano situated her as a woman of color who allegedly utilized her sexuality to prey upon an old man who occupies White positionality for financial gain. Through her shame, she was, according to Leverenz (2012), sacrificed for the sake of White masculine honor. She was rendered powerless and humiliated, and constructed as a shameful sexual object, while Sterling regained his power over

her and reinforced his Whiteness and masculinity. Therefore, while Sterling was not able to restore his honor by denigrating the NBA and keeping his majority ownership of L.A. Clippers, his family was able to publicly humiliate the woman of color that they viewed as the cause of his shame. The logic here communicated that if his honor could not be repaired by shaming the NBA, it at least could be achieved by shaming his mistress. Yet again, just as the incident began, Donald Sterling attempted to position himself at the top of the racial and gender hierarchy through the deprecation of racial “Others.”

**Racist shaming: The restoration of postracial honor.** In Sterling’s quest to establish his honor through racially shaming athletes who occupy Black positionality and the Black community, he simultaneously dishonored the NBA, necessitating the NBA and its supporters to rhetorically retaliate and re-construct their own honor. Discourses such as that of Magic Johnson exemplified this shame that the NBA was ascribed with. He stated, “LA Clippers owner Donald Sterling’s comments about African Americans are a black eye for the NBA” (Hart, 2014, para. 13). Additionally, Zillgitt (2014c) in a *USA Today* article stated that Sterling’s comments stood to “...damage the league’s reputation” (p. 4C). This dishonor was placed upon the NBA because as a supposed leader in race relations and diversity, Sterling’s racist comments violated postracial and color-blind ideology. As such, his comments revealed the existence, and arguably the prevalence, of White domination within the NBA. This caused a very problematic public relations crisis for the NBA’s so-called progressive image.

While racial shaming has historically taken place between individuals who occupy White and Black positionality, a new form of racial shaming was practiced between Sterling, Commissioner Silver, and the NBA community. Rather than inter-racial shaming, a method of intra-racial shaming emerged, in which individuals either equivocally supporting and/or

occupying whiteness shamed a co-inhabitant of whiteness for violating postracial norms.

Leverenz (2012) argues, “When honor protects whiteness, whiteness becomes dishonorable” (p. 81). Therefore, the NBA had to distance itself from those who represent White domination, such as Donald Sterling, to reestablish its honor. To repair this embarrassment, and thus restore the NBA’s honor, the use of discourses that not only shame, but also humiliate, were also utilized by Commissioner Silver, current and former players, owners, coaches, fans, and media. In an honor-shame society like the U.S., Commissioner Silver was situated as the hero, while Sterling was situated as the villain. According to Leverenz (2012), “The message of shaming is ‘Honor is everything and you have to get it back.’ The message of humiliation is ‘You no longer belong because you’ve *contaminated* [emphasis added] everything we stand for’” (p. 8-9). Therefore, the use of humiliation by those associated with the NBA was a step beyond shaming, as it positioned insiders, like Donald Sterling, as ostracized outsiders once he deserved such humiliation (Leverenz, 2012).

The responses of players and media situated Sterling as a “contamination” to the “pure” NBA. Kevin Johnson stated, “When one rotten apple does something, or if you see cancer, you’ve got to cut it out really quickly, and Commissioner Silver did that in real time. We’re so proud and thankful for him” (Dillon, Burke, & McShane, 2014, p. 6). Phrases of “disgust” and “rotten” worked to situate Sterling as a shameful being, a form of cancer or contamination, not worthy of NBA ownership, and thus, deserving of banishment from the NBA, which apparently, without Sterling, is pure and clean of racism.

Numerous media and players also stated that there simply is “no room” in the NBA or society for individuals like Sterling. As such, he was framed by NBA players and media as the “ostracized outsider.” For instance, Michael Jordan stated:

As an owner, I'm obviously disgusted that a fellow team owner could hold such sickening and offensive views. As a former player, I'm completely outraged. *There is no room in the NBA- or anywhere else- for that kind of racism* [emphasis added] and hatred that Mr. Sterling allegedly expressed.... (Lawrence, 2014, p. 46)

Similarly, Smith (2014) stated in *The Toronto Star*, "It was a crisis that struck at the very heart of the NBA, a rogue owner spouting racist views that ran counter to the league's inclusive nature and threatened to cripple the sport at its very core" (p. S5). LeBron James also tweeted, "There is no room for Donald Sterling in our league" (Feldman, 2014, para. 4). By implying that there is "no room" in the "inclusive" NBA for detestable or "rogue" individuals like Sterling, the media and individuals associated with the NBA rhetorically constructed Sterling as an ostracized outsider, and someone who no longer deserves citizenship within the inclusive NBA (i.e., progress) or within a postracism, postracial, color-blind era.

Eduardo Bonilla-Silva (2014) states in his appropriately titled book *Racism without Racists* that today in the post-Civil Rights era, individuals who occupy White positionality commonly believe that racism has been eradicated; therefore, racists, such as Donald Sterling, are rare. This is because individuals in contemporary society are socialized to believe that they should be color-blind (i.e., not see race). Within this framework, racists, who are clearly not color-blind, are outdated remnants of the past. For this reason, when the media identifies one racist, that individual is put on display, mocked, and detested. This was evident in incidents involving celebrities like celebrity chef Paula Deen, a woman in her sixties who occupies whiteness, who in 2013 was the target of a lawsuit for making racist comments about individuals who occupy Black positionality in the presence of her employees. Her racist comments and admittance of using the "N-word" in a subsequent deposition resulted in a major erosion of her

celebrity image. The incident also resulted in numerous companies ending their publishing deals and endorsement contracts with her, including the *Food Network*, Smithfield Foods, Walmart, and Caesars Entertainment, among others, in an effort to distance themselves from her racist image (*Huffpost Celebrity*, 2013). Similar to the Paula Deen debacle, Commissioner Silver confirmed that contemporary society is a time in which racists are falsely seen as both rare and detestable. His punishment to Donald Sterling- a lifetime ban from any association with the NBA, a forced sale of the Clippers, and a 2.5 million dollar fine (i.e., the maximum fine allowed by the NBA constitution), communicated this.

To restore the honor of the NBA, in addition to shaming and humiliating Sterling, the media encouraged and then praised the NBA, and specifically Commissioner Silver, for swift action in removing Sterling. Portrayed as a warrior, this swift action aided in restoring Commissioner Silver's warrior-like honor as the protector of the NBA and racial progress in the U.S. Some headlines read, "League simply has to get rid of him" (Lupica, 2014a, p. 4) and "Bounce Sterling Now" (NLVL, 2014a, p. 24). Commissioner Silver's delivery of Sterling's punishment took place only four days after the tapes were released, thus exemplifying this swift and harsh action necessary to repair the NBA's image. Upon Commissioner Silver's delivery of the maximum fine allowed by the NBA constitution and banishment of Sterling from the league, the honor of the league was restored rhetorically. This symbolic restoration was found on the L.A. Clipper's homepage immediately following Commissioner Silver's press conference, which simply stated, "Now the healing process begins" (Dillon, Burke, & McShane, 2014, p.6). One Australian newspaper stated, "It [Sterling's recorded conversation] rightly caused worldwide outrage, NBA Commissioner Silver acting swiftly and with exceptional conviction to overnight turn what had been a black eye for basketball into a shining beacon of what all right-thinking



people should stand for” (*The Advertiser (Australia)*, 2014, p. 71). Simply put, Commissioner Silver, the proclaimed hero and protector of the so-called pure, clean, and progressive NBA, supposedly restored the NBA’s honor by removing the shameful and contaminating racist, and thus racism, from its postracial and postracism space.

### Summary

NBA Commissioner Silver’s press conference in response to the racist statements made by then-owner of the L.A. Clippers, Donald Sterling, and the subsequent reactions from international news and sports media, fans, and current and former NBA players, coaches, and owners, provide significant insight into how the strategic rhetorics of whiteness and whiteness’s intersection with hegemonic masculinity work to maintain a racial and gender hierarchy in U.S. society. Through a critical and dialectical analysis, the identification and examination of contradictory and competing discourses within both the press conference and international news and sports media responses offer a new way to understand how the tension and interplay between competing discourses works as a rhetorical strategy to both mask and maintain whiteness’s racial power and its intersections with other subject identities such as hegemonic masculinity. This chapter identified two dialectics, *rhetorics of postracism vs. critical rhetorics* and *rhetorics of shame vs. rhetorics of honor*. In the following chapter, I analyze NFL Commissioner Goodell’s response to NFL star Ray Rice’s domestic violence charges in 2014, as well as the subsequent media, player, coach, and fan responses to the press conference. Following this rhetorical analysis and critique, an examination of how the tension and interplay between dialectics within these two case studies work as contemporary rhetorical strategies of whiteness to perpetuate power hierarchies within an era of the new racism is provided.

## CHAPTER IV: NFL COMMISSIONER ROGER GOODELL'S AMBIVALENT DISCOURSE IN THE NEW RACISM

On February 15, 2014, Baltimore Ravens star running back, Ray Rice, and his then-fiancé (and now wife), Janay Palmer (now Janay Rice), two individuals who do not occupy whiteness, were released from jail on assault charges due to a domestic dispute at the Revel Casino in Atlantic City. On February 19<sup>th</sup>, a video was released to the public by *TMZ* that showed the domestic abuse incident from February 15<sup>th</sup>. It included video footage of Rice dragging Palmer's unconscious body from the hotel elevator. In a subsequent disciplinary meeting with the NFL on June 24<sup>th</sup>, Rice accounted for his actions in the elevator. On July 24<sup>th</sup>, following Rice's court order to attend anger management classes and serve probation, NFL Commissioner Goodell issued Rice a two-game suspension. Upon receiving harsh criticism from global news and sports media and women's organizations throughout the U.S. for this very minimal punishment, on August 28<sup>th</sup> Commissioner Goodell stated in a press conference that he did not handle the situation correctly (Bien, 2014). He also issued a letter to the NFL team owners in which he communicated six action items that the NFL would implement to address domestic violence and sexual assault both within the NFL and the general public (*USA Today Sports*, 2014). One of the six action items included updating the domestic violence and sexual assault policies for all NFL personnel convicted of committing sexual assault or domestic abuse. However, instead of resolving the issue, Commissioner Goodell experienced a second news and sports media backlash after *TMZ* released a second longer video of the incident in the elevator. In the longer video, Rice is shown punching and knocking unconscious Palmer in the hotel elevator. On the same day that the second video was made public (on September 8<sup>th</sup>), the Baltimore Ravens fired Rice, and Commissioner Goodell extended the two-game suspension to an

indefinite suspension (Bien, 2014). Numerous global news and sports media and women's organizations again immediately criticized Commissioner Goodell and the NFL, often calling for Commissioner Goodell's resignation, for not taking the domestic abuse incident seriously until the second video was released to the public showing the actual abuse (Associated Press, 2014). This again prompted a press conference by Commissioner Goodell on September 19<sup>th</sup>, eleven days after the release of the second video, in which he again stated that he "...got it wrong in the handling of the Ray Rice matter" (Goodell, 2014, para. 2) and offered an explanation of steps the NFL would take to move forward with the League policies concerning domestic abuse and sexual assault and its role in preventing domestic abuse and sexual assault in the general public. By November 28<sup>th</sup>, Rice had filed and won an appeal against the NFL, citing that his original account to the NFL of the abuse did not conflict with what was shown in the second video (Bien, 2014; Van Natta & Van Valkenberg, 2014). He was reinstated by the NFL as a free agent, but as of 2017, he has yet to be signed by an NFL team.

My goal for this study, like that of the previous chapter, is two-fold. First, I aim to examine how Commissioner Goodell's responses to the Ray Rice incident functioned as a strategic rhetoric to secure whiteness as centralized and invisible through the use of dialectics, or contradictory discourses. Second, I aim to examine how the rhetorics of whiteness intersect with the rhetorics of hegemonic masculinity to uphold a racial and gender hierarchy within the NFL. In this chapter, I provide a critical rhetorical analysis of Commissioner Goodell's rhetorical performance regarding this incident, specifically focusing on his press conference and surrounding global news and sports media discourses. This analysis, similar to the previous chapter, is guided by the following research questions: (1) what discourses do the rhetorics of whiteness utilize to secure its central and invisible cultural space in the NFL?; (2) how does

Commissioner Goodell's rhetorical performance centralize and marginalize individuals who do not occupy locations of whiteness and/or masculinity?; (3) how do the rhetorics of whiteness within NFL contribute to the new racism (Collins, 1991, 2004), or a post-Civil Rights era racism that operates covertly at structural levels?; (4) how do the rhetorics of whiteness within the NFL preserve and perpetuate a racial ideology that creates a strategic societal forgetting of historical racial oppression, also known as postracism (Ono, 2011)?; and (5) how do the rhetorics of whiteness within the NFL function to perpetuate color-blind ideology (Bonilla-Silva, 2014), the conception that racial identifications and designations are not influential factors in peoples' lived experiences or chances to succeed professionally, economically, socially, or otherwise?

To examine these questions, several important texts offer insight into how the Ray Rice incident contributed to current racial and gender ideologies within the NFL. As previously mentioned, the texts I have chosen to examine include Commissioner Goodell's letter to the NFL on August 28, 2014, Commissioner Goodell's press conference on September 19, 2014, and international news and sports media responses to Commissioner Goodell's press conference between September 19, 2014 and Rice's filed appeal to be reinstated by the NFL on November 1, 2014. Additional texts for analysis include: the revised Personal Conduct Policy (released on December 10, 2014) for NFL players and all NFL employees and a press conference held on December 10, 2014 by Commissioner Goodell and the NFL owners to announce the revised policy and the new Conduct Committee. Further, I examined the "The 2015 Racial and Gender Report Card: National Football League" produced by the previously mentioned TIDES to identify racial and gender hiring practices as well as diversity and inclusion initiatives implemented by the League and Commissioner Goodell (Lapchick & Robinson, 2015). In the

following sections, two of the foundational texts for this analysis, Commissioner Goodell's letter to NFL clubs on August 28<sup>th</sup> and his press conference on September 19<sup>th</sup> are summarized.

### **Commissioner Roger Goodell's Letter to NFL Clubs**

Commissioner Goodell's letter issued to NFL clubs on August 28, 2014 began by stating his commitment to ensuring that the NFL is held in the "highest regards" (*USA Today Sports*, 2014, para. 1) by its fans, players, business partners, and public authorities. He stated, "My commitment has always been to do what is right and to protect the integrity of the game, both now and long into the future" (para. 1). He then stated that as a leader, the NFL will engage with experts to develop policies, practices, and an overall culture that respects women "both within and outside of the workplace" (para. 4). Following this, Commissioner Goodell stated that he has reviewed the Personal Conduct Policy and met with a wide range of experts, including women on staff with the NFL, to identify a number of steps to improve the NFL's position and policies on domestic violence and sexual assault. Commissioner Goodell stated, "These steps are based on a clear, simple principle: domestic violence and sexual assault are wrong. They are illegal. They have no place in the NFL and are unacceptable in any way, under any circumstances" (para. 8). He then outlined six actions that the NFL will take to "reinforce" and "enhance" their policies.

First, Commissioner Goodell stated that the NFL will continue to work with "leading experts" (para. 9) to expand the League's education on domestic violence and sexual assault for all NFL personnel. Second, the NFL's club Player Engagement Directors, Human Resource Executives, and other appropriate team personnel will engage in comprehensive training to help them "understand and identify risk factors associated with domestic violence and sexual assault" (para. 10). Third, Commissioner Goodell promised to ensure that the NFL LifeLine and NFL

Total Wellness Program are staffed with personnel trained to provide prompt and confidential assistance to anyone at risk of domestic violence and sexual assault. Furthermore, the Player Engagement Directors and Human Resource Executives will meet with team spouses and significant others to make them aware of resources available to them and their family members.

Fourth, Commissioner Goodell stated that the NFL will expand its educational components to colleges, high schools, and youth football programs. The NFL will "...create and promote programs that develop the character of the young men who play, coach, or manage our game, emphasizing respect for women and appropriate ways to solve conflicts" (para. 12). Fifth, Commissioner Goodell promised that in the "coming months" (para. 13), the NFL will seek to work with external organizations and utilize partnerships with current and former players, coaches, and families who have been affected and are willing to speak out on issues of domestic violence and sexual assault. Sixth and finally, Commissioner Goodell promised to update the personnel policies for individuals who are charged with domestic violence or sexual assault.

Commissioner Goodell then requested that each club distribute the "Memorandum to All NFL Personnel," which he included with the letter, to every player under contract and ensure that all head coaches review the information in the notice with their staff and players. Finally, Commissioner Goodell directed the clubs to share this letter and the memorandum with all members of their organization. The "Memorandum to All NFL Personnel" concisely summarized the six action items outlined in the letter and reiterated the NFL's condemnation of domestic violence and sexual assault.

### **Commissioner Roger Goodell's Press Conferences**

On September 19, 2014, Commissioner Goodell spoke on behalf of the NFL and presented a prepared statement at a press conference in which he addressed the NFL's handling of the Ray Rice incident and the NFL's future directions related to player conduct policies. The press conference occurred eleven days after the release of the second surveillance video, which showed Ray Rice striking unconscious Janay Palmer inside a hotel elevator and then dragging her body out of the elevator. The subsequent press conference on September 19<sup>th</sup> lasted about 43 minutes. Commissioner Goodell's prepared statements alone lasted just under 11 minutes, and the question and answer session of the press conference lasted about 32 minutes. At the press conference, Commissioner Goodell began by stating:

At our best, the NFL sets an example that makes a positive difference. Unfortunately, over the past several weeks, we have seen all too much of the NFL doing wrong. That starts with me. I said this before, back on August 28, and I say it again now. I got it wrong in the handling of the Ray Rice matter. And I'm sorry for that. I got it wrong on a number of levels, from the process that I led, to the decision that I reached. But now I will get it right and do whatever is necessary to accomplish that. (para. 1-3)

Commissioner Goodell then organized his remarks around four main points. First, he stated that he had asked former FBI Director Robert Mueller to conduct an independent investigation to answer questions raised about the process that he and the NFL went through in reviewing Ray Rice's case. He then promised "...that any shortcomings he finds with how we dealt with the situation will lead to swift action" (para. 4).

Second, Commissioner Goodell stated that the domestic abuse incidents demonstrate that the NFL can help to "create change" (para. 4) not just in the NFL, but in society, regarding

domestic abuse and sexual assault. As he stated in his letter to NFL owners on August 28<sup>th</sup>, he promised that the entire NFL would receive “comprehensive information and resources and support systems for victims<sup>7</sup> on domestic abuse and sexual assault” (para. 5). He then promised to do a comprehensive evaluation and improve all the NFL’s current programs.

Third, Commissioner Goodell stated that the NFL had entered a long-term partnership with the National Domestic Violence Hotline and the National Sexual Violence Resource Center. Fourth, Commissioner Goodell clarified that the NFL strongly condemned domestic violence and will punish unacceptable behavior including “...child abuse, sexual assault, irresponsible ownership or handling of firearms, the illegal use of alcohol or drugs” (para. 10). He added, “I’m here now because our rules, policies and procedures on personal conduct failed to ensure that this high standard is met” (para. 12). He followed this by stating that the NFL will “...bring together our players and their union representatives, coaches, owners, and outside experts who can help us set the right standards and identify the right procedures” (para. 14). Commissioner Goodell then assured that the NFL will make changes to their personal policy and have these changes completed by the next Super Bowl (January 2015). He closed by maintaining that most of the players, coaches, and staff in the League are doing “tremendous things in their communities” (para. 21). He also asked that everyone that is part of the NFL to join him in making a positive and important change as they move forward.

Following his prepared statements, he fielded a variety of questions from the press. These questions varied in nature. The first question from Peter Alexander of *ABC News* asked, “If any

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<sup>7</sup> Commissioner Goodell refers to women who have been victimized and who have survived domestic abuse as “victims.” I have chosen to refer to these same women as both “victims” and “survivors” interchangeably, as they have been victimized by an abuser(s) and have also survived such abuse, marking them as both victims and survivors.



of these victims had been someone you love, would you be satisfied with the way the league has handled this crisis, and what would you say to them?” (para. 25). In response, Commissioner Goodell repeated that he was “...not satisfied with the way we handled it from the get-go” (para. 24) and restated “...I made a mistake...” followed by a promise to make changes to their disciplinary policies and “...do better going forward” (para. 24). He answered similar questions that were premised on his identity as a father or as a caring human being, and with each response, he reiterated that he and the NFL made a “mistake” and that the policies for discipline were outdated and inadequate, and needed to be updated to the appropriate standards with the help of experts.

Media representatives also questioned Commissioner Goodell about the future of his role as commissioner. Specifically, reporters asked Commissioner Goodell if he intended to resign, and he responded no. Commissioner Goodell also answered several questions about the surveillance tape of Ray Rice knocking out Janay Palmer. Reporters specifically asked why the NFL did not obtain a copy of the video tape from the hotel, or why *TMZ* could obtain a copy with one phone call, but the NFL, which has a very large legal team, could not. Commissioner Goodell was not able to provide a clear answer to that question. Commissioner Goodell also answered questions about what Ray Rice told him happened in the elevator, stating that what Rice told him was inconsistent with what was in the video and that he could not go into very much detail because the National Football League Players Association (NFLPA) had appealed Rice’s suspension.

Commissioner Goodell fielded a few questions about women’s roles in the decision-making process for disciplining Ray Rice. Aaron Kotursky from *ABC* asked Commissioner Goodell if he anticipated any personnel changes and how can he bring “meaningful change” and

“credible change” within the “culture” and “attitude” of the NFL (para. 105)? Commissioner Goodell stated that the NFL announced several personnel changes in the previous week so that they can bring the “right voices to the table” (para. 106). He then answered a follow-up question by stating:

...we didn’t have the right voices at the table. We need to get better expertise. Some of you know, we announced earlier this week that Lisa Friebl is joining us as a former chief of sex crimes in downtown New York. I think she’s going to be able to provide a very valuable perspective... (para.110)

Toward the end of the press conference, Commissioner Goodell responded to a question about the absence of women who occupy Black positionality among the group of women that he hired to consult the NFL on sexual assault and domestic violence. He simply denied that women who occupy Black positionality were excluded. He then closed by stating, “...so, we understand the need for diversity. It’s important for us, and we will always look to be able to do whatever we can to improve it. All right [*sic*]. Thank you. We’re good” (para. 147-148).

The following section provides an analysis of Commissioner Goodell’s press conference and the supporting texts previously described. From my analysis, one distinct dialectic emerged: *rhetorics of shame vs. rhetorics of honor*. Through an identification and analysis of this dialectic, I examine the ways in which whiteness and hegemonic masculinity intersect strategically to perpetuate a racial and gender order that favors White hegemonic masculinity at the expense of Black femininity, Black masculinity, femininity in general, and survivors of domestic abuse and sexual assault.

### **Rhetorics of Shame vs. Rhetorics of Honor**

International news and sports media responses to the debacle that I analyzed revealed a dialectical relationship between rhetorics of shame and honor. When considering the international news and sports media, an antagonistic struggle, that is, a struggle between two opposing discourses, shame and honor, were performed by two sources, Commissioner Goodell and the global news and sports media (rather than within a single source, word, or utterance) (Bakhtin, 1981; Baxter, 2011). The global news and sports media, which is predominantly controlled by whiteness and hegemonic masculine ideals (Hill, 1997; Lacy & Ono, 2011), responded to Commissioner Goodell's rhetorical performance by aiming to shame him for mishandling the Ray Rice incident by stripping him of Trujillo's (1991) elements of hegemonic masculinity. The apparent goal of the global news and sports media, through this shaming, was to honor women and victims of domestic abuse and sexual assault, which the news and sports media claimed, Commissioner Goodell had not done (e.g., Bondy, 2014; Lupica, 2014b; NLVL, 2014b; Reissman, 2014; Rhoden, 2014; *The Nation (Thailand)*, 2014b). Through a closer reading and analysis, however, I found that to shame Commissioner Goodell, the media actually utilized discourses that shamed femininity and survivors of domestic abuse, resulting in further marginalization and ostracization of women and victims of domestic abuse and sexual assault. Overall, the interplay between the rhetorics of shame and the rhetorics of honor were present *between* and *within* the rhetorical performance of Commissioner Goodell and the international news and sports media, resulting in the restoration of the interlocking powers of whiteness and hegemonic masculinity as dominant in both the NFL and society.

Additionally, my analysis of Commissioner Goodell's explanations as well as the language used and the policy goals described, revealed a tension between the rhetorics of shame

and the rhetorics of honor throughout the Ray Rice debacle. Similar to the Commissioner Silver and Donald Sterling incident, this dialectic functioned in the form of a nonantagonistic struggle between discourses. This specific form of struggle involves multiple discourses stemming from one individual source; therefore, a dialectical relationship exists within a single utterance and/or word (Bakhtin, 1981; Baxter, 2011). As I argue below, I found that Commissioner Goodell sought to assert his White patriarchal power, and therefore, his honor, by performing rhetorics of whiteness and hegemonic masculinity (Trujillo, 1991). Throughout this process of asserting and restoring his honor, White racial power was evident when he ostracized Black femininity and expressed domination over Black masculinity, thereby shaming both. Rhetorically, Commissioner Goodell was able to locate the blame for domestic violence away from White masculinity and place it upon the body occupying Black masculinity.

### **Shaming to Reclaim Honor: Commissioner Goodell's Performance of White Hegemonic Masculine Ideals**

Commissioner Goodell's dialectical performance of shame and honor was exemplified in his language utilized throughout the Ray Rice and Janay Palmer domestic abuse incident. Owens Patton (2004b) explains, "The enactment of agency with regard to language choice and action become a subjective choice- to maintain the status quo or use language that produces actions that challenge the current hegemonic order" (p. 186). Commissioner Goodell's rhetorical enactment via language and action following the domestic abuse incident between Rice and Palmer maintained the current racial and gendered order of both the NFL and society in general and invited others to embrace his leadership, thereby embracing the hegemonic order that he maintains. Specifically, Commissioner Goodell offered a salient intersectional performance of whiteness and hegemonic masculine ideals in an effort to recover fan and media faith in his role

as an honorable leader of the NFL. Trujillo's (1991) conceptualization of hegemonic masculinity interprets how masculine leadership is expected to be enacted (Gibson & Heyse, 2010). The social value of masculinity within a leader elevates masculinity to a perceived honorable trait. The amalgamation of masculinity with whiteness, the "natural" and therefore perceived superior racial standpoint, positioned Commissioner Goodell as rhetorically reinstating his place at the top of both the gender and racial hierarchy. Therefore, Commissioner Goodell's discursive moves to reclaim his honor through the intersectional performance of whiteness and hegemonic masculinity fits the societal expectation for his role as the leader of one of the most powerful sports institutions in the world.

The need for Commissioner Goodell to reinstate his authority and regain the support of the NFL community (thereby reclaiming his honor) was initially established in his letter to team owners on August 28, 2014, in which Commissioner Goodell stated:

I take responsibility both for the decision [the two-game suspension of Rice] and for ensuring that our actions in the future properly reflect our values. I didn't get it right. Simply put, we have to do better. And we will. (*USA Today*, 2014, para. 2).

Later, on September 19<sup>th</sup>, at the press conference, he stated:

I said this before, back on August 28, and I say it again now. I got it wrong in the handling of the Ray Rice matter. And I'm sorry for that. I got it wrong on a number of levels, from the process that I led, to the decision that I reached. (Goodell, 2014, para. 2)

His following responses, namely, the letter on August 28<sup>th</sup>, his press conference on September 19<sup>th</sup>, the revised Personal Conduct Policy completed on December 10<sup>th</sup>, and the press conference in which Commissioner Goodell introduced the revised policy on December 10<sup>th</sup>, all functioned as rhetorical performances of whiteness and hegemonic masculinity to reclaim White

masculine honor, which had been diminished because of his mishandling of the Rice incident. In the following, I assert that Commissioner Goodell's rhetorical enactment of whiteness and hegemonic masculinity performs Trujillo's (1991) conceptualization of hegemonic masculine ideals, including the elements of occupational achievement, frontiermanship, familial patriarchy, heteronormativity, and domination. Through the analysis of these elements, I critique the ways in which White masculinity deflects blame from itself on to Black masculinity and inscribes racial otherness onto people that occupy Black positionality, as well as how it inscribes gender otherness on all women.

**Occupational achievement.** Sport is a site in which achievement and success are definers of masculinity (Fiske, 1987). Given sport's, and particularly men's professional sport's, profound ideological influence, men's professional sport embodies the societal standard for what work and professional success within a capitalistic society should look like. Trujillo (1991) explains, "...there is in sport an overemphasis on success as occupational achievement, defined (and quantified) in terms of team victories and individual records" (p. 295). This measure for success extends beyond individual athletes to team ownership and management as well. Knoppers and Anthonissen (2005) argue that corporate management and professional sport utilize similar discourses, which are reflective of Western hegemonic masculine ideals perpetuated in men's professional sport, to perform White managerial masculinities. Therefore, while Commissioner Goodell is not a professional athlete whose professional success is measured by team victories or individual records, his corporate work within the professional sports context is measured similarly by the NFL's financial success and his individual records of success. Arguably, his achievement, as viewed by society, is exemplified by his annual salary, which in 2014, was 34.1 million dollars (Kimes, 2016).

Commissioner Goodell began his career with the NFL in 1982 as an intern at the NFL offices in New York. In 1983 he worked for the New York Jets (NFL team) in the public relations and administration offices. One year later, in 1984, he returned to the NFL offices as a public relations assistant. By 1987 he was appointed assistant to Lamar Hunt, the president of the American Football Conference (AFC), by then-NFL Commissioner Pete Rozelle. Three years later, in 1990, he served then-NFL Commissioner Paul Tagliabue as director of international development and club administration, vice president of operations, vice president of business development, senior vice president of league and football development, executive vice president of business and football development, and executive vice president of business, properties and club services. In December 2001, eleven years later, Commissioner Goodell was promoted as the NFL executive vice president and chief operating officer by then- NFL Commissioner Paul Tagliabue. In this position, he was responsible for serving as president of NFL Ventures, Inc. This involved supervising the NFL's business units, including media properties, consumer products, international marketing and sales, special events, strategic planning, and stadium development. He also directed the NFL's football operations and officiating departments. On August 8, 2006, Commissioner Goodell was selected by then-NFL Commissioner Tagliabue to serve as the NFL commissioner (*ESPN*, 2006).

Knoppers and Anthonissen (2005) argue that the discourse of entrepreneurialism emphasizes the ability to be hardnosed, to be decisive, to be competitive, to focus on reaching targets, and to be efficient. This discourse of entrepreneurialism complements Trujillo's conceptualization of occupational achievement as an element of hegemonic masculinity, as it emphasizes the qualities perceived to be necessary or required for a masculine individual to obtain occupational advancement. For Commissioner Goodell, as commissioner of the NFL, his

victories and successes ultimately are determined by entrepreneurial-type of achievements- the revenue that he generates for the NFL through sponsors, ticket sales, merchandise sales, media contracts, and other miscellaneous sources of revenue. Additionally, his work ethic, competitiveness, decisiveness, and ability to achieve goals also define his legacy of success as a commissioner. Through my critical reading of Commissioner Goodell's press conference on September 19, 2014 (Goodell, 2014), I found that he rhetorically positioned himself utilizing a discourse of entrepreneurialism. For instance, he stated in the press conference on September 19<sup>th</sup>:

I'm focused on doing my job and doing the best to my ability. I understand when people are critical of your performance, but we have a lot of work to do. That's my focus. We've been busy in the last couple weeks. We have results to show for it. We've talked about some of them in my statement. (para. 42)

He also emphasized his ability to "deliver," engage in "action," and "work hard" to advocate against sexual assault and domestic violence.

And they want to see us make that difference, and that's up to us to *deliver* [emphasis added] on. So, they want to see us achieve that. They're not looking for talk. They want to see *action* [emphasis added]. And that's what we're looking for. And that's why we've been focused over the last couple weeks so hard on getting it right. Do the things we said we were going to do, and get it right. And do the *hard work* [emphasis added]. This is not a quick fix. This is something we've got to *work hard* [emphasis added] at. And we will. (para. 98)

In total, Commissioner Goodell's expressed need to engage in action and work hard were expressed decisively and confidently, communicating competitiveness and efficiency, allowing



for the NFL and Commissioner Goodell to exemplify the entrepreneurial and occupational achievement necessary for performing the masculine ideal.

**Familial patriarchy & heteronormativity.** In addition to occupational achievement, Commissioner Goodell's rhetorical performance of hegemonic masculinity included him symbolically constructing himself as a father-figure. Trujillo (1991) calls this element of hegemonic masculinity "familial patriarchy." This is characterized by individuals performing as "breadwinners," "family protectors," and "strong father figures." Collins (2004) explains, "Under patriarchal assumptions, maintaining a family (e.g., a wife and dependent children) and having material wealth (land and/or slaves) were essential to (White) masculinity" (p. 58). Collins (2004) also explains that during the Antebellum period, men and women who occupied White positionality were granted different rights. Men who occupied White positionality and who owned property performed a form of White masculinity that allowed for them to control their wives, children, and property, including men and women who were forced into slavery (and were inhumanely objectified as legal "property"). White masculinity, then, became defined in patriarchal terms, that is, men performed White masculinity as "masters" at home and in public activities of commerce and government.

Commissioner Goodell's performance of White familial patriarchy was most often exemplified when he related the NFL to a household and situated himself as the head, or father, of that household. Here, his White patriarchal control over the NFL and its employees, including players, was rhetorically perpetuated. In one instance, he even referred to the NFL's house as "his house," situating the NFL as a masculine organization: "The NFL has got to take care of *his* [emphasis added] house, as I said, and that's my focus is how do we do this better as the NFL" (para. 45). He repeated statements of this kind in the following examples: "We will get our house

in order first” (Goodell, 2014, para. 4); “There are things that we need to clean up in our house and make sure we get right” (para. 91); “But we better get our house in order first” (para. 46); “And what we said is, ‘We’re going to clean up our house, we’re going to get this straight, and we’re going to make a difference’” (para. 97).

This element of familial patriarchy often intersects with the masculine ideal of heteronormativity, that is, the father-figure is engaged in a relationship with a woman counterpart (Trujillo, 1991). Oats and Durham (2004) explain:

In western culture, hegemonic masculinity often takes the form of a white-supremacist, powerful, aggressive, sexist and heterosexist ideal that exists most comfortably at the level of myth, and serves to equate whiteness, heterosexuality, athleticism and (of course) males with power. (p. 303)

The performance of heteronormative, familial patriarchy was initially exemplified in Commissioner Goodell’s press conference when he referenced his wife and daughters:

But I think what we see so far is tragic. It’s hard to look at. I have two daughters who are 13. That’s very difficult to see. And I think what we have to do is allow those facts to proceed. But the important message think for all of us as parents is that our children are going to make mistakes. They need to learn how to take responsibility and be accountable for those mistakes and deal with those. (para. 39)

He also stated:

And that’s something that I and my wife, Jane, we—we work very hard on with our kids. When you make a mistake, be accountable for it. (para. 40)

In sum, Commissioner Goodell exemplified White patriarchal control and heteronormative standards for masculinity through his rhetorical performance during his press

conference on September 19, 2014. Namely, he constructed himself as the masculine head of the NFL household, as well as his personal household. In addition to his performance of familial control, he also exemplified Trujillo's (1991) conception of frontiersmanship.

**Frontiersmanship.** A man embodying frontiersmanship is the cowboy, a man occupying whiteness and representing working-class values (Trujillo, 1991). An important element of the cowboy imagery of frontiersmanship is rugged individualism. That is, masculine men make their own decisions and embrace simple worldviews in which there are clear distinctions between right and wrong or good and evil. In Commissioner Goodell's performance throughout the Ray Rice debacle, he situated himself as the authority on morality and values, often citing what he deemed "right" and "wrong."

The entire situation involving Ray Rice and Janay Palmer was laced with discourses of "right" and "wrong." Commissioner Goodell first addressed "right" and "wrong" in describing how the NFL handled the Ray Rice situation. In his press conference on September 19<sup>th</sup>, Commissioner Goodell (2014) stated, "Unfortunately, over the past several weeks, we have seen all too much of the NFL doing wrong" (Goodell, 2014, para. 1) and:

I said this before back, on August 28, and I say it again now. I got it *wrong* [emphasis added] in the handling of the Ray Rice matter. And I'm sorry for that. I got it *wrong* [emphasis added] on a number of levels..." (Goodell, 2014, para. 2).

He then stated, "But now I will get it *right* [emphasis added] and do whatever is necessary to accomplish that" (Goodell, 2014, para. 3).

Commissioner Goodell then went on to state that the NFL personal policies do not meet his standards, and therefore, will be updated. His indication that the policies need to be updated reflected his evaluation of what is fair and good, and therefore, he positioned himself as the

moral authority of what is fair and right. This was exemplified when he stated, “To get all this *right* [emphasis added], we will bring together our players and their union representatives, coaches, owners, and outside experts who can help us set the *right standards* [emphasis added] and identify the *right procedures* [emphasis added]” (Goodell, 2014 para. 14). He then said, “But I’m proud of the opportunity that we have to try to make a difference here and *do the right thing* [emphasis added]” (Goodell, 2014, para. 42). Additionally, he stated:

So we had to go back and fix our policy in the short term and say, this isn’t *sufficient* [emphasis added] discipline. We met with a variety of experts on this. We came to a conclusion that what the discipline would be, at least as a standard, with aggravating circumstances that could allow us some flexibility, and also that we would banish on a second offense. So, we took a very strong position, saying ‘*this is not acceptable*’ [emphasis added]. (Goodell, 2014, para. 72)

He then went on to state that his decisions and procedures for “getting it right” were an “obligation” of the NFL, indicating that the NFL is a societal moral authority on right and wrong ethics and practices. Furthermore, he promised that he would work to ensure that the integrity of the League would be maintained, demonstrating a work ethic necessary for the rugged individual who expressed working class work ethic. He indicated this authority and work ethic when he stated, “But also make sure we’re maintaining the integrity of the league in what we’re doing. We have an obligation there. And we’re prepared to do that. And we are going to do that” (Goodell, 2014, para. 50). He also stated, “And those are all difficult issues to ensure they have due process, anybody who's involved, but also make sure we're maintaining the integrity of the NFL” (Goodell, 2014, para. 102). His performance of work ethic was emphasized when he stated:

I've made it clear to sponsors directly that we are going to do better in this area. There are things that we need to clean up in our house and make sure we get right. And we will. And we will make a difference in this area. Now we have to deliver. (Goodell, 2014, para. 91)

In addition to Commissioner Goodell's performance of occupational achievement, patriarchal control and heteronormativity, and frontiermanship, he also embodied force and control, an additional element of Trujillo's conceptualization of hegemonic masculinity. Through my analysis, I specifically found that Commissioner Goodell's use of force and control was rhetorically perpetuated through the complex intersection of his White positionality and hegemonic masculine ideals. This manifested through two specific rhetorical strategies: (1) the maltreatment of Black femininity, and (2) the domination and control of Black masculinity.

**Force and control.** In an analysis of the ways in which masculinity has been socially constructed through time, Whitson (1990) explains, "...male 'norms' of mental and physical toughness are themselves historical constructs..." (p. 22). Even though hegemonic masculinity has shifted throughout time in U.S. culture to adapt to changing social, economic, and political conditions, the characteristic of physical force consistently appears as an expression of hegemonic masculinity for both individuals who occupy whiteness and those who do not. Physical force is often expressed as bodily domination and control over racialized and gendered "Others" (Gibson & Heyse, 2010). While domination over racial and gender "Others" can take place in the physical form, such as through slavery, human trafficking, prostitution, domestic violence, and sexual assault, among other forms, it also is expressed and justified through the domination and control of the body via strategic rhetorics (Calafell, 2015; Frankenberg, 2001; Meyers, 2004). One manifestation of this supposed rational supremacy and domination, is for

instance, through what Collins (1991) calls “controlling images” of Black masculinity and Black femininity. These controlling images, which are still prevalent today, stem from a time in which physical violence was utilized by slave owners who occupied White positionality to dominate, discipline, and control both men and women who occupied Black positionality during the period of chattel slavery (1619-1855) (Collins, 2004; hooks, 2004; Wright, 2014). The belief in deviant Black sexuality, for instance, sparked gender-specific controlling images for men who occupied Black positionality as potential rapists who “deserved” to be lynched. Women who occupied Black positionality were also subject to controlling images associated with sexuality. Specifically, women who occupied Black positionality were perceived by individuals, both men and women, who occupied White positionality to be morally loose and impossible to rape. Collins (1991) explains that from Jezebels, breeder women of slavery, and mammies, to the grinning Aunt Jemimas on pancake mix boxes, the interconnection of negative stereotypical images applied to women who occupy Black positionality has been essential to the justification of the domination and oppression of women who occupy Black positionality.

These gender-specific forms of sexualized control and violence were tools utilized by individuals who occupied whiteness for the economic exploitation and political subordination of individuals who occupied Black positionality in a time when slavery and racial segregation was legalized. Currently, this legacy of racialized domination and control is evident within the U.S.’s historically capitalistic society that depends on racial and gender ideologies that utilize objectification and commodification, and therefore control, of “Other” bodies, especially by individuals and organizations that occupy White positionality (Calafell, 2015; Collins, 1991, 2004; Griffin, 2012b; hooks, 2004; Phillips & Griffin, 2014). The prevalent commodification of women’s bodies, both those occupying whiteness and those who do not, as well as men’s bodies,

especially the athletic body occupying Black masculinity, is essential to the sports and media industries.

***The maltreatment and devaluation of women who occupy Black positionality.*** The objectification, and ultimately, the commodification of *all* women are evident within professional sport. This is found, for instance, in *ESPN Magazine*'s annual "Body Issue," which displays professional men and women athletes completely nude in poses that cover their private parts, and *Sports Illustrated*'s annual "Swimsuit Edition," which features women supermodels, and most recently, women athletes, in revealing swimsuits. In both of these issues, sexualized women's bodies, including popular women athletes, are displayed for adoration and consumption. While *ESPN Magazine*'s "Body Issue" appears to display women of numerous racial identifications, including women of color such as tennis professional Serena Williams and WNBA star Brittney Griner (*ESPN*, 2016), *Sports Illustrated* is more racially exclusive. In 2016, the *Sports Illustrated* "Swimsuit Edition" displayed three elite, blonde haired and blue eyed women athletes who occupy White positionality: MMA fighter Ronda Rousey was featured on the cover and Olympic skier Lindsey Vonn and tennis pro Caroline Wozniaki were displayed in body-painted swimsuits throughout the issue (*Sports Illustrated*, 2016). The objectification and commodification of women who occupy White positionality by *Sports Illustrated* represent the positioning of ideal beauty and sexuality as embodied by *only* women occupying whiteness. While the maltreatment of all women as pin-ups is disturbing and harmful, the ways in which women of color, and specifically, women who occupy Black positionality, are controlled, objectified, and marginalized throughout society in general, including sports and media, is unique due to complex and salient intersections of race, gender, and often socioeconomic status (Berger & Guidroz, 2009; Brah & Phoenix, 2004; Calafell, 2015; Collins, 1991; Crenshaw,

1991; Dhamoon, 2011; Essed, 1991; Goldman, Ford, Harris, & Howard, 2014; Griffin, 2012b, 2013; hooks, 2004; Isoke, 2013; Meyers, 2004). Owens Patton (2004a) explains that these “...complexities become apparent when we begin to recognize the infinite ways in which marginalizations become normalized and naturalized through communication and action” (p. 60).

Situated at the intersection of multiple marginalizations, including gender, race, and often, socioeconomic status, women who occupy Black positionality continue to be stereotyped, disparaged, and dehumanized in media discourses and representations (Collins, 1991; Griffin, 2013; Meyers, 2004), and even media discourses and representations that are produced by individuals occupying non-White positionalities such as Tyra Banks and Tyler Perry (Griffin, 2012b; Wright, 2014). As Griffin (2013) argues, when Desiree Washington, a woman who occupies Black positionality, was raped by boxing heavyweight champion Mike Tyson in the 1990s, as a woman survivor who occupies Black positionality, even a college educated woman who presumably occupies a positionality of class privilege, Washington was constructed by the media as deserving of gender violence and unworthy of protection (Griffin, 2013). The mistreatment and exploitation of Washington by the media was “...a micro example of the manifestation of racism and sexism at macro levels of society” (Griffin, 2013, p. 72). Compared to women who occupy White positionality, the maltreatment of women of color who are survivors of abuse rarely results in outcry from the general public, even when incidents involve celebrities and sports stars. Griffin (2013) further argues that public reprimand and criminal punishment that NFL star Michael Vick received for facilitating, funding, and promoting a dogfighting ring on his property and abusing and killing dogs that did not perform well, reflect the prevalent power of dominant ideologies that position women, and especially women who



occupy Black positionality, as inferior and deserving of abuse. Griffin (2013) argues, “In this instance, public reactions to Vick signal more cultural concern for dogs than women” (p. 75).

Commissioner Goodell and the NFL’s response to the domestic abuse that Janay Palmer experienced at the hands of NFL star Ray Rice rhetorically perpetuated the specific historical domination and ostracization that women of color, and namely, women who occupy Black positionality and survivors of domestic abuse who occupy Black feminine positionality, experience. Commissioner Goodell and the NFL’s control of women who occupy Black positionality was distinct from more explicitly recognized sexualizations, objectifications, and commodifications of the feminine body, such as those in *ESPN Magazine* and *Sports Illustrated*. Rather, his control was expressed by positioning the woman who occupies Black positionality as an object that White masculinity could compete for dominance over, thereby reflecting, and ultimately perpetuating, the power and control practiced during chattel slavery (Collins, 1991, 2004; hooks, 2004). During chattel slavery, women who occupied Black positionality were bodies through which men who occupied whiteness could express and reassert White patriarchal power by means of physical, mental, and emotional domination (Collins, 1991, 2004; Frankenberg, 2001; hooks, 2004). In this modern-day instance, Janay Palmer’s body was physically violated, and presumably, her emotional and mental state was damaged, by her now husband, and then-fiancé. She was then communicatively violated by the NFL and Commissioner Goodell. As I will argue below, this legacy of reasserting racial and gender power through the control of women who occupy Black positionality was evident in three central ways: (1) Commissioner Goodell’s slight punishment given to Rice for abusing Janay Palmer, (2) his delayed public response to the release of the second hotel surveillance video on September 8<sup>th</sup>

that showed Rice punching Janay Palmer, and (3) his exclusion of women who occupy Black positionality from NFL decision-making processes.

*Slight punishment.* This mistreatment of women, and women who occupy Black positionality more particularly, was perpetuated through Commissioner Goodell's slight punishment given to Rice for engaging in domestic abuse. This minimal punishment is the most recent example of the NFL's failure to address crimes against women in a serious way. In 1997, former Commissioner Paul Tagliabue, who remained in office from 1989-2006, implemented the NFL's Violent Crime Policy, which allowed for the NFL to punish players for violent crimes only when they had been charged with any crime of violence (Janusz, 2012). Under this policy, until 2000, players receiving a domestic violence conviction did not receive any form of suspension from the NFL. Between 2000 and 2014, of the 48 players considered guilty of domestic violence, players either received a one game suspension or nothing at all in 88% of the cases. Twenty-seven players (56%) received no suspension, and 15 others were forced to sit out one game (Fainaru-Waida & Fainaru, 2014). In instances when players did receive more than a one game suspension, their suspension rarely extended beyond three games. For instance, in 2004, when Tampa Bay Buccaneers running back Michael Pittman forcefully drove his Hummer into a car driven by his wife (which carried his two-year-old child and a babysitter), he was suspended by the NFL for three games (Janusz, 2012). Furthermore, in 2010, NFL star quarterback and Super Bowl Champion Brett Favre was only fined only \$50,000 for sexually harassing former New York Jets sideline reporter Jenn Sterger by texting sexually explicit photos of himself in 2008 when he played for the Jets (Norman, 2010).

Similarly, in the situation involving the abuse of Janay Palmer, Commissioner Goodell's initial two-game suspension given to Rice in July 2014, five months after the domestic abuse

incident took place, devalued her humanity. By giving Rice only a two-game punishment, Commissioner Goodell diminished the abuse that Palmer experience at the hands of Rice to a crime lesser than the “abuse” of marijuana. The crime that she was victim to, therefore, was situated as less significant than a minor drug charge. Her humanity was then constructed as less significant than a minor drug charge. For example, in May 2014, just two months before Commissioner Goodell delivered Rice his punishment, Commissioner Goodell handed NFL Cleveland Brown’s wide receiver Josh Gordon a season-long suspension for testing positive for marijuana use during the off-season (Bellware, 2014). The strict punishment given to players like Josh Gordon for abusing drugs and/or alcohol juxtaposed with the minor disciplinary action taken towards Ray Rice for physically abusing his fiancé rhetorically demeans women, especially women of color, by situating their bodies as value-less and unworthy of protection.

*No urgency.* Janay Palmer’s mistreatment and devaluation as a survivor of domestic abuse was compounded by Commissioner Goodell’s slow response to address the matter publicly after the second hotel surveillance video showing Rice punching Palmer and her falling unconscious in the elevator had been released by *TMZ* to the public. After the public release of the video on September 8<sup>th</sup>, Commissioner Goodell waited eleven days, until September 19<sup>th</sup>, to speak to the public about it. Any urgency to communicate his and/or the NFL’s disapproval of such treatment was absent. When the second video was released on September 8<sup>th</sup>, numerous media, including prominent *ESPN* commentator Bill Simmons, believed that the NFL had already viewed the video and had ignored it, even though Commissioner Goodell claimed during the September 19<sup>th</sup> press conference that NFL offices had not received or viewed it. Simmons was actually suspended by *ESPN* for three weeks after calling Commissioner Goodell a liar during his podcast for claiming that he had not seen the tape (Grautski, 2014). A similar lack of

urgency toward the situation was expressed by the majority owner of the Baltimore Ravens (the NFL team that Rice played for), Steve Bisciotti, a man who occupies whiteness. Several news outlets, including the *Daily News (New York)* (Thompson, Red, & O’Keefe, 2014), *USA Today* (Armour, 2014b; Bell, 2014b) and *The New York Times* (Macur, 2014) reproduced Bisciotti’s words. He stated, “There is no excuse for me to have not demanded that video, except I wasn’t concerned or interested enough to demand it” (Thompson, Red, & O’Keefe, 2014, p. 51). He went on to state that asking for the tape “Never crossed my mind” (p. 51). Armour (2014b), in response to Bisciotti’s comments, stated in a *USA Today* article, “The message? Domestic violence isn’t a real problem” (p. 1C). Not only was domestic violence obviated as a problem, the value of Janay Palmer as a woman, a woman who occupies Black positionality, and a victim of domestic violence was rhetorically negated. Her abuse simply was not a “concern” of Bisciotti, Commissioner Goodell, or the NFL.

*Exclusion.* In addition to Commissioner Goodell and Bisciotti’s obviation of Janay Palmer, and therefore, Black femininity, via an expressed lack of consideration or request for the surveillance video, or the urgency to respond to the content of the video, Commissioner Goodell also rendered women who occupy Black positionality insignificant by eliding the feminine perspective informed by Black positionality throughout his decision-making processes. Specifically, women who occupy Black positionality were not consulted or included as he came to conclusions regarding Rice’s suspension, the creation of the updated Personal Conduct Policy, and the planning of future strategies by the NFL to prevent domestic abuse and sexual assault both within the NFL and in U.S. society.

Oppressed groups, like women of color, often have experiences that develop a unique positionality among their members that allow for them to view things differently, or as Collins

(1991) explains, it helps women of color develop a unique “angle of vision.” Collins (1991) states:

Black women’s work and family experiences and grounding in traditional African-American culture suggest that African-American women as a group experience a world different from that of those who are not Black and female. Moreover, these concrete experiences can stimulate a distinctive Black feminist consciousness concerning that material reality. Being Black and female may expose African-American women to certain common experiences, which in turn may predispose us to a distinctive group consciousness... (p. 24-25)

Even though women who occupy Black positionality have expressed a unique feminist consciousness, or angle of vision, about the salient and intricate intersections of gender, race, and class, historically, women who occupy Black positionality have been excluded from feminist conversations that could influence decision-making within institutions (Griffin, 2012b; Owens Patton, 2004a, 2004b). This exclusion of the Black feminine perspective from organizations like the NFL has led to the advancement of elite White masculine ideals and interests, and the suppression of women who occupy Black positionality’s ideas (Collins, 1991).

During his press conference on September 19<sup>th</sup>, towards the end of the question and answer session, Jericka Duncan, a woman reporter of color, from *CBS News* directed Commissioner Goodell’s attention to this absence by asking:

Can I ask a quick question please? My hand’s been up for a while. It’s obvious when you look out on the field, a lot of these players, it’s a diverse crowd. A lot of the players that have been highlighted recently are African American. Can you justify not having an

African American as part of that group of women that you've hired to look into sexual assault and domestic violence?

Commissioner Goodell responded:

Well, that's not true. We have internal experts that have been working on this that are people of color, that are women and men. And they have been involved in this process from the beginning. In addition, as I said in my statement, that we will continually evaluate do we need other resources, do we need other individuals, do we need other organizations that can help us make...(para. 144)

Women who occupy Black positionality remain nearly absent from decision-making in the NFL. Commissioner Goodell repeatedly stated in both his letter to the teams and his press conference that he and the NFL would consult both "leading" and "outside" "experts" to update the Personal Conduct Policy to meet the "right standards" (Goodell, 2014; NFL Enterprises, 2014a). However, as Jericka Dunkan (Goodell, 2014) stated, women who occupy Black positionality were not considered among these "experts," as they were not invited into any of these decision-making processes regardless of Commissioner Goodell's claims that they were. Rather, in the development of the new Conduct Committee, the "experts," those who oversee future updates and revisions to the Personal Conduct Policy, consisted of predominantly men who occupy White positionality.

Therefore, the influence of Black feminine positionality was not only absent throughout the process of deciding upon the appropriate punishment for Rice, but it was also elided as significant by Commissioner Goodell in his appointment of a new Conduct Committee. On December 10, 2014, Commissioner Goodell presented a new NFL Personal Conduct Policy as well as the newly formed Conduct Committee at a press conference (NFL Enterprises, 2014b).

The revised Personal Conduct Policy gives the Commissioner the authority to assemble a Conduct Committee composed of NFL owners (not outside experts), who will review the policy at least annually and recommend appropriate changes “...including investigatory practices, disciplinary levels or procedures, or service components” (NFL Enterprises, 2014a, p. 8). At the press conference on December 10<sup>th</sup>, Commissioner Goodell introduced his newly appointed members of the Conduct Committee: Arizona Cardinals owner Michael Bidwill (committee chair), Atlanta Falcons owner Arthur Blank, Kansas City Chiefs owner Clark Hunt, Dee Haslam (wife of Cleveland Browns owner Jimmy Haslam), Dallas Cowboys Executive Vice President and chair of The NFL Foundation Charlotte Jones Anderson, Chicago Bears owner George McCaskey, Houston Texans owner Robert McNair, and two former NFL players that are part of NFL ownership including Warrick Dunn (Atlanta Falcons) and John Stallworth (Pittsburgh Steelers) (NFL Enterprises, 2014b). In total, the committee consisted of two women who occupy White positionality (one of whom is married to a NFL team owner), two men who occupy Black positionality (former NFL players with current partial ownership of a NFL team), and five majority owners who are men who occupy White positionality. There were no women of color appointed to the committee, thereby perpetuating the perceived insignificance of the Black feminine perspective.

Additionally, the racial and gender composition of those in decision-making positions within the NFL in 2014 displays a significant absence of not only the feminine perspective, but also the perspective of women who occupy Black positionality and women of color in general. According to TIDES’s 2015 “Racial and Gender Report Card,” there were no women, and therefore, no women of color, who were NFL CEO’s or presidents (Lapchick & Robinson, 2015). There were also no women, and therefore, no women of color, who were General

Managers/Directors of Player Personnel. Among the 13 women who were principal owners, or women who held significant ownership, none were women of color. Of the 31 women that served in vice president positions in the League office in 2014, three were African American<sup>8</sup>, one was Asian American, one was Latina, and 27 were identified as White. Of the 256 NFL Vice Presidents, 67 were women, and only five of those women were women of color. Only one, Qiava Martinez of the Oakland Raiders, was African American. While the TIDES report commends the NFL for increasing its hiring and/or promoting practices of women as well as its initiatives to promote diversity within the League offices, the report, like Commissioner Goodell, elides the League's failure to hire and /or promote women of color into decision-making positions.

Through Commissioner Goodell's and the NFL's failure to include women and more specifically, women of color, in not only disciplinary decisions, but also, future efforts to address and prevent domestic violence within the NFL and society in general, as well as help family members of NFL employees who are survivors of domestic violence or sexual assault, they have marked Black feminine positionality as invisible. This is evident, as Jericka Duncan pointed out, in the NFL's efforts to include women, but not women of color, within their newly formed committees to address domestic violence in the NFL. By selecting only women who occupy White positionality to speak on behalf of *all* women, the NFL has centered, privileged, and universalized whiteness. As Collins (1991) points out, feminist perspectives that claim to be collective or universally applicable to women as a group, those that claim a "sisterhood," are generally limited by a White, middle-class perspective. This creates, what bell hooks (1989) calls

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<sup>8</sup> The TIDES report uses the term African American, so I have used this same term when explaining the findings from their study.



a “narrative of shared victimization,” which is centered on the experience of women who occupy White positionality. The NFL is case in point. When whiteness is centralized, it is privileged, resulting in women of color being marked as racial “Others,” and therefore, further pushed into the margins. Their lived experiences, which are profoundly subject to multifaceted and significant intersections of race, gender, socioeconomic status, among other factors, are then obscured and rendered value-less (Calafell, 2015; hooks, 1989).

Suppressing, and thereby rendering insignificant, the knowledge created and shaped by any marginalized group, including women who occupy Black positionality, allows for dominant groups, such as those occupying White masculinity, to further their domination (Calafell, 2015; Collins, 1991; Griffin, 2012b; hooks, 2004; Owens Patton, 2004a, 2004b). This is because the apparent absence of an autonomous consciousness among the marginalized can be taken to mean that oppressed individuals, in this case, women who occupy Black positionality, willingly cooperate in their own victimization (Collins, 1991; Meyers, 2004). In this specific incident, Janay Palmer was strategically constructed by the Baltimore Ravens as willingly participating in her own abuse. This occurred when the Ravens staged a press conference at their practice facility for Palmer (who at this time went by the name Janay Rice because her and Ray Rice married on March 28, 2014) and Rice on May 23, 2014. At the press conference, Rice apologized for the situation that he and his wife were in, and Palmer, following a loose script that the Ravens provided for her, apologized for her role in the incident at the hotel (Bien, 2014). During the press conference, the Ravens tweeted, “Janay Rice says she deeply regrets the role that she played the night of the incident” (Hurley, 2014). After the tweet went out, fans and international news and sports media quickly responded with outrage towards the Ravens for placing the blame upon Palmer, prompting the Ravens to delete the tweet. The strategic act of the Ravens, a team

that is owned and managed by White masculinity, of crafting a message for Palmer that situated her as willingly claiming the blame for her own abuse represents organized efforts of White masculinity to eliminate and suppress Black feminine positionality and blame women for any physical or emotional oppression or abuse experienced. Collins (1991) explains the consequence of these kinds of efforts when she states, “Maintaining the invisibility of Black women and our ideas is critical in structuring patterned relations of race, gender, and class inequality that pervade the entire social structure” (p. 5). Through the obviation and/or masking of the Black feminine perspective and the centering of whiteness, the intersectional subordination of women who occupy Black positionality is perpetuated.

***Controlling Black masculinity.*** In addition to Commissioner Goodell and the NFL’s marginalization and shaming of Black femininity, Commissioner Goodell’s rhetorical performance also subordinated and shamed Black masculinity. I contend that Commissioner Goodell perpetuated controlling images of Black masculinity by expressing a need to regulate and punish athletes who occupy Black masculinity, similar to that expressed by former NBA Commissioner David Stern in his response to the fight between Indiana Pacers players, Detroit Pistons players, and Detroit Pistons fans at the Palace of Auburn Hills in 2004, the NBA Dress Code that was implemented in 2005, and the NBA age minimum of 19 that was applied in 2006 (Griffin & Calafell, 2011). I argue that this control and shaming was expressed through the revised Personal Conduct Policy, which functions as a material form of whiteness (Drzewiecka & Steyn, 2012), as it utilizes strategic rhetorics of whiteness, and namely, discourses of hegemonic civility (Owens Patton, 2004a) to maintain White hegemonic masculine power over Black masculinity and femininity in general.

The physical body, including those occupying and performing White masculinity and Black masculinity, is a crucial location from which the subjective lived experience is guided and informed. That is, the masculine body, of all racial identifications, is a text, a sign, a cultural construction, and a performance (Oates & Durham, 2004). Within men's professional sport, the performance of hegemonic masculinity is expressed through the domination not only of female bodies and femininity, but also through the domination of racialized masculinities and male bodies not within the territory of whiteness (Kidd, 1990; Park, 2015). While men who occupy Black positionality tend to dominate professional sports on the turf, such as in the NFL, men who occupy whiteness have historically dominated men who occupy Black positionality via athlete ownership and decision-making power (see Lapchick & Robinson, 2015). This form of masculine domination, I argue, was rhetorically perpetuated through the NFL's updated Personal Conduct Policy, which was released on December 10<sup>th</sup>, 2014 by Commissioner Goodell. The revised document materially secures and perpetuates whiteness, thereby allowing for individuals within decision-making positions (who are predominantly men) to continue to reap the economic and social benefits of White racial privilege and avoid the responsibilities of domestic abuse and sexual assault.

Commissioner Goodell's control was initially expressed in his promise to update the NFL Personal Conduct Policy to include stricter disciplinary action for what he deemed to be unacceptable behavior in the NFL. In Commissioner Goodell's letter to NFL owners and teams on August 28<sup>th</sup> (after the first hotel surveillance video was released, but not the second) he stated, "... we [the NFL] will increase the sanctions imposed on the NFL personnel who violate our policies" (*USA Today Sports*, 2014, para. 4). He also said, "Our goals are to prevent violence, impose appropriate discipline, provide professional support resources when appropriate, and

publicly embrace a leadership role on this issue” (para. 7). Commissioner Goodell then stated in his press conference on September 19<sup>th</sup> (after the second hotel surveillance video was released to the public), “...we [the NFL] strongly, strongly condemn and will *punish* [emphasis added] behavior that is totally unacceptable” (para. 10). He went on to state, “Domestic violence, including child abuse, sexual assault, irresponsible ownership or handling of firearms, the illegal use of alcohol or drugs, these activities must be condemned and stopped through education and *discipline* [emphasis added]” (para. 10). Commissioner Goodell repeated this message several times in the press conference- that the NFL will change the Personal Conduct Policy and enforce stricter disciplinary action for anyone who violates the new rules. He stated:

There will be changes to our personal conduct policy. I know this because we will make it happen. Nothing is off the table. Let me say it again. We will implement new conduct policies. They will have a set of clear and transparent rules for league and club personnel, owners and players. (Goodell, 2014, para. 17).

Commissioner Goodell kept this promise and released an updated Personal Conduct Policy on December 10, 2014. This revised policy followed a line of similar previous efforts by the NFL to address violence against women including former Commissioner Paul Tagliabue’s Violent Crime Policy in 1997 and Commissioner Goodell’s updated Personal Conduct Policy in 2007 (Fainaru-Wada & Fainaru, 2014; Janusz, 2012). By means of a press conference held by the NFL, Commissioner Goodell introduced the updated Personal Conduct Policy.

Commissioner Goodell (2014) accentuated the strictness of the revised policy by stating:

...NFL ownership has endorsed an enhanced policy that is significantly more robust, thorough, and formal... We now have a layered evaluation process to take into account a

diversity of expert views. This will better enable us to make appropriate decisions and ensure accountability for everyone involved in the process. (para. 4)

The revised policy laid out steps to be taken when an incident requires review by the NFL (NFL Enterprises, 2014b). New measures in the policy included: (1) additional NFL-funded counseling and services for victims, families, and violators; (2) a more extensive list of prohibited conduct; (3) revised independent investigative procedures; 4) revised specific criteria for paid leave for an individual formally charged with a crime of violence, including domestic violence, sexual assault and child abuse; (5) the inclusion of an expert group of outside advisors to review and evaluate potential violations and consult on other elements of the policy; (6) a baseline suspension of six games without pay was established for employees committing violations involving assault, battery, domestic violence, dating violence, child abuse, other forms of family violence, or sexual assault, with consideration given to possible mitigating or aggravating circumstances; (7) the creation of a league office executive position with a criminal justice background to issue initial discipline. The newly created position would be called the Special Counsel for Investigations of Conduct. They will oversee the NFL's investigatory procedures and determine discipline for violations of the Personal Conduct Policy. For players, this is consistent with past practice under the Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA) in which a member of the Commissioner's staff has generally issued discipline for off-field misconduct; and (8) a new appeals process pursuant to Article 46 (Commissioner Discipline) of the Collective Bargaining Agreement for all employees- the Commissioner may name a panel that consists of independent experts to participate in deciding an appeal.

The Commissioner's authority to punish is established and supported in the League's foundational documents, including the League's Constitution and Bylaws, the NFL's Uniform

Player Contract, and the CBA. Each of these documents authorize the Commissioner to take disciplinary action whenever a player's conduct is found to be harmful to the integrity of the game of football (Janusz, 2012). Janusz (2012) explains:

Because the NFL is a private entity and not a state actor, it is not required to offer the full constitutional due process protections required by the Fourteenth Amendment and, thus, can choose to grant or deny protections to the extent it deems necessary. (p. 114)

Commissioner Goodell's need for control and punishment, as just expressed, represents a historical legacy of fearing, disciplining, and controlling Black masculinity.

*Shaming Black masculinity.* Domination and control over bodies deemed outside the boundaries of whiteness by those who do not occupy whiteness has a long history in the U.S. (Collins, 2004; hooks, 2004; Katznelson, 2005; Leverenz, 2012; Rasmussen, Klinenberg, Nexica, & Wray, 2001; Roediger, 1991; Smith, 2011). In the Antebellum south, men who occupied Black positionality specifically were workers, bought and sold by slave owners who occupied White positionality without their personal consent to perform physical labor. For men who occupied Black positionality, this form of economic and racial oppression took a gender-specific form (Collins, 2004; hooks, 2004). Because men did manual labor, to justify the harsh conditions forced upon them, slave owners who occupied White positionality objectified the Black male body and socially constructed men who occupied Black positionality as big, strong, and unintelligent. Owners who occupied whiteness found men who occupied Black positionality to be more threatening than women, as they were considered by the dominant society (that occupied whiteness) to be naturally violent (Collins, 1991, 2004). Those within whiteness believed men who occupied Black positionality possessed a wildness, and therefore, needed to be controlled by harsh physical and mental discipline (i.e., abuse). Therefore, men occupying

White positionality created the controlling image of the Black buck- symbolic of a human animal that had achieved partial domestication through slavery, in contrast to Africans who “roamed wild” in their African homeland (Collins, 2004). This controlling image constructed a reality in which men and women within the boundaries of whiteness were accepted by the majority (who occupied whiteness) as intellectually superior to men who occupied Black positionality. Collins (2004) explains:

Taming the beast involved domesticating black men’s predilection for violence, placing their brute strength in service to productive manual labor, and directing their natural albeit deviant sexuality toward appropriate female partners. In this fashion, White elites reduced black men to their bodies, and identified their muscles and their penises as their most important sites. (p. 57)

In addition to this form of “taming” the Black buck, during Antebellum slavery, men occupying whiteness exemplified an obsession with preventing men who occupied Black positionality who were forced to work as slaves from revolting against their “owners” or “masters” and the dominant society controlled by whiteness. Therefore, men occupying whiteness practiced measures to suppress rebellions as forms of protection of their own racial and patriarchal power and control (Collins, 2004). This legacy of White patriarchal suppression and control has been extended to men’s professional sport, like the NFL. The NFL constitutes a contemporary version of historical practices that sees the bodies of men who occupy Black positionality as necessitating “taming” and “control” for practical use (Collins, 2004; hooks, 2004). Even though a small number of men who occupy Black positionality from the general population actually make it to the NFL, they have hyper-visibility within sports media (Grainger, Newman, & Andrews, 2006). Therefore, news stories surrounding both their on- and off-the field

performances “...operates as a morality play about American masculinity and race relations” (Collins, 2004, p. 153). This is most evident in the Ray Rice incident, among others that took place simultaneously in 2014, such as NFL stars Adrian Peterson’s child abuse charges and Greg Hardy’s domestic abuse arrest, which received a significant amount of news and sports media attention. Enck-Wanzer (2009) explains that when athletes who occupy Black positionality as well as men in general who occupy Black positionality are repeatedly cast in the media as naturally more aggressive than other racial identifications “...a particular kind of cultural knowledge about domestic violence is generated at the nexus of racism and sport as they are circumscribed onto the convenient villain of the black male athlete” (p. 3). This is demonstrated by Enck-Wanzer’s (2009) analysis of news coverage of athletes who occupy Black positionality accused of domestic violence between 1990 to 2005. Enck-Wanzer argues that athletes who occupy Black masculine positionality accused of domestic violence are represented in media as inherently violent due to their athletic background and their “natural” aggressiveness. These “morality plays” (Collins, 2004) about athletes who occupy Black masculine positionality are then paired with the constant enumeration and corporeal objectification of Black masculinity in men’s professional sport, as exemplified in fantasy leagues, in which predominantly players who occupy Black masculine positionality are bought and sold by fantasy league players who predominantly occupy whiteness, who function as imaginary team administration (Jhally, Earp, & Marracino, 2013; Oats & Durham, 2004). It is also exemplified in the NFL combine, the NFL Draft, and subsequent media coverage of the Draft. Oats and Durham (2004) explain:

The culture of elite football itself is a continuous process of objectification, of attempts to measure players in numbers. But the process becomes a media spectacle during the Draft process. Prior to the Senior Bowl (an annual post-season all-star game in January),



seventy-five of the best college senior football players in the United States will parade into a hotel banquet hall clad only in their underwear. From that moment, the process of measurement and re-measurement takes on a new seriousness. Over the next four months, NFL prospects will be measured, weighed, asked to run, jump, lift weights, take specially designed intelligence tests and quizzed about their injuries by professional teams. A majority of these players are African American; a majority of those who evaluate them are white. (p. 304)

This expressed control over athletes who occupy Black masculine positionality, as I have just argued, has been normalized within the culture of the NFL. This most recently was further cemented by the NFL as a result of the Ray Rice incident, in which Commissioner Goodell worked to preserve the “integrity” of the game and “protect the shield” through his rhetorical performances that essentially further shamed athletes who occupy Black masculine positionality through discipline and domination (NFL Enterprises, 2014a). Rhetorically, Commissioner Goodell perpetuated myths of “natural aggressiveness” and “innate violence” commonly associated with athletes who occupy Black positionality by expressing the need to discipline Black masculinity and maintain control of men who occupy Black positionality so that the NFL’s image for its audience that predominantly occupies whiteness could be repaired and maintained. This functioned to shift the responsibility for domestic violence from masculinity *in general* to athletes who occupy Black masculinity *more specifically*, consequentially removing the liability for domestic violence from White masculinity and placing it upon Black masculinity. This ultimately works to maintain wider investments in masculinity and whiteness as prominent intersectional systems of control, which perpetuates a larger racial and gender order that harms both women and men who occupy Black positionality (Enck-Wanzer, 2009). Commissioner

Goodell's control over Black masculinity was further established in the newly revised NFL Personal Conduct Policy.

*Materializing whiteness through hegemonic civility.* Documents, such as the NFL Personal Conduct Policy, function to materialize whiteness, and more specifically, White hegemonic masculinity and hegemonic civility. Drzewiecka and Steyn (2012) explain that identity is not purely a discursive construct, as it is also shaped by and invested in material structures, such as Visas, birth certificates, or contracts. Cultural and racial meanings, therefore, are associated and materialized in cultural practices. Drzewiecka and Steyn (2012) conceptualize this process as the *materializing whiteness*, resulting in the materiality of whiteness (Drzewiecka & Steyn, 2012). This materialization of whiteness is exemplified in the revised policy, as the Commissioner (Goodell) is situated as the moral guide (which is also consistent with the frontiermanhood ideal of hegemonic masculinity) given the task of upholding civility. Owens Patton (2004a) conceptualizes the term *hegemonic civility* to describe a form of civility that is normalized and naturalized to maintain hegemonic order. Frankenberg (2001) explains that when individuals point out that something is "White," they are expressing that it is perceived to be "civilized," thereby equating whiteness with civility. Therefore, as part of whiteness's strategic rhetoric (Nakayama & Krizek, 1995), hegemonic civility is an expression of whiteness's historical power to interpret and enforce the perceived correct, appropriate, and civil behavior (Owens Patton, 2004a). Hegemonic civility, then, guides perceived appropriate speech, dress, talk, and even scent, for men and women who do not occupy whiteness (Smith, 2011). Owens Patton (2004a) explains that the problem with hegemonic civility is that it "...is used as a strategic means to resist and distance oneself from personal accountability for sexism and racism" (p. 65). In this case, hegemonic civility was expressed materially through the revised

Personal Conduct Policy allowing for Commissioner Goodell and the NFL to resist and distance themselves, and therefore White masculinity, from the responsibilities of gender violence.

Individuals in positions of power have the ability to construct their own racial identifications as well as others through materiality. That is, materials, like buildings or contracts, work together with symbolic constructs to create and direct racial meanings and sustain systems of inequality and domination (Drzewiecka & Steyn, 2012). In Drzewiecka and Steyn's (2012) analysis of how immigrants are racially incorporated into U.S. society, they state, "We find that while identities are constructed symbolically, their symbolism arises from, supports and constructs specific material conditions in ongoing articulations" (p. 2). In their study, they examined how immigrants adopt racial meanings that take full advantage of their material symbolic advantages. That is, individuals work to *construct* racial identities materially that *align* with specific racial identities, such as, but not always, whiteness, that can allow for the adoption of specific social and economic advantages, including materials, like Visas or birth certificates or even cars and homes. Furthermore, they contend that *material* structures sustain systems of inequality and domination. These structures are most often constructed by those in dominant positions, such as individuals occupying White masculinity. For instance, after Hurricane Katrina devastated New Orleans in 2005, 336 million dollars were spent on the reconstruction of the Super Dome, the home of the NFL team the New Orleans Saints, rather than on the reconstruction of thousands of homes of impoverished U.S. citizens occupying Black positionality that were ruined by the hurricane. The Federal Emergency Management Agency provided 156 million dollars of that total (ESPN, 2011). During the first game played in the newly reconstructed arena, which included a live televised tribute to the victims of the hurricane, the majority of the arena's seats were filled with individuals who occupy whiteness, while many

of the victims of the hurricane, mostly individuals who do not occupy whiteness, were still displaced and/or homeless and recovering from the hurricane. The reconstruction of the Super Dome symbolically and materially represented whiteness and the racial and income inequality in the U.S. The material repair of a professional football field expressed that the game of professional football, an institution directed by whiteness, was and is more significant than the livelihood and advancement of impoverished individuals who occupy Black positionality (Grano & Zagacki, 2011).

Therefore, while whiteness is symbolic and discursive, it is also realized materially. In this specific case of the NFL, policies and procedures stated in the revised Personal Conduct Policy, which serve as contracts between players, teams, team owners, and the Commissioner, function to establish whiteness as guiding and authoritative through discourses of hegemonic civility. The most recent updated Personal Conduct Policy operates materially to situate Commissioner Goodell as *the* authority of the NFL, and, the *ultimate* authority over correct behavior any decision-making regarding players, and more specifically, any disciplinary action taken towards players, the “actual and potential abusers,” for failing to maintain the “integrity” of the game. Through discourses of hegemonic civility, White masculinity is detached from any responsibility for domestic violence, and instead, is situated as the police of Black masculinity, the “natural” perpetrators of domestic violence.

The revised policy’s focus on maintaining correct and civil behavior disguises itself as protectionary measures for women, children, and society, when in reality, it is aimed at ensuring a “positive” image of the NFL for the purpose of maintaining financial revenue from fans and sponsors who predominantly occupy White positionality. This is most evident in the policies opening statements which state, “**Everyone** who is part of the league must refrain from ‘conduct

detrimental to the integrity of and public confidence in' the NFL" (NFL Enterprises, 2014a, p. 1) and "Conduct by anyone in the league that is illegal, violent, dangerous, or irresponsible puts innocent victims at risk, damages the *reputation* [emphasis added] of others in the game, and undercuts *public respect and support for the NFL* [emphasis added]" (p. 1).

In addition to securing the financial security, and ultimately, the societal power of the NFL, the newly revised document functions to maintain Commissioner Goodell's position of an authority figure with ultimate control over NFL personnel. These rhetorics of hegemonic civility are found within the policy, for instance, when it states, "This Personal Conduct Policy is issued pursuant to the Commissioner's authority under the Constitution and Bylaws to address and sanction conduct detrimental to the league and professional football" (NFL Enterprises, 2014a, p. 1). The following statements from the policy also exemplify the authority given to Commissioner Goodell to enforce his control over civility:

...if an investigation leads the Commissioner to believe that you may have violated this Policy by committing any of the conduct identified above, he may act where the circumstances and evidence warrant doing so. This decision will not reflect a finding of guilt or innocence and will not be guided by the same legal standards and considerations that would apply in a criminal trial. (NFL Enterprises, 2014a, p. 4)

In cases in which a violation relating to a crime of violence is suspected but further investigation is required, the Commissioner may determine to place a player or other employee on leave with pay on a limited and temporary basis to permit the league to conduct an investigation. Based on the results of this investigation, the player or

employee may be returned to duty, be placed on leave with pay for a longer period, or be subject to discipline. (p. 4)

In total, the NFL's updated Personal Conduct Policy, as well as Commissioner Goodell's rhetorical performance while introducing the revised policy and the new Conduct Committee, represent historical White patriarchal efforts to govern and discipline Black masculinity, which is perpetuated by controlling images of Black masculinity that stem from Antebellum attitudes, as inherently violent and dangerous to women, children, and society as a whole (Collins, 2004; hooks, 2004). As Enck-Wanzer (2009) explains, attributing the threats and dangers of domestic violence to men who occupy Black positionality's bodies, which historically has been "owned" and dominated by men occupying White positionality, works to relieve White masculinity of suspicion and guilt, and further perpetuate White masculine power. These controlling efforts are further expressed and justified materially through the strategic use of discourses of hegemonic civility found within the updated Personal Conduct Policy, allowing for whiteness and hegemonic masculinity to be solidified in the name of maintaining the "integrity" of the NFL and football in total. Owens Patton (2004a) explains, "Sexism and racism are interdependent because the bodies of women are marked in such a way that the White supremacist patriarchal hegemonic order is retained for the common good- in the name of hegemonic civility" (p. 73). This document, therefore, functions materially to distance White masculinity from responsibility for domestic violence, thereby placing the blame on so-called deviant and naturally violent athletes who occupy Black masculine positionality, which ultimately harms both women and men who occupy Black positionality in the name of "civility."

The rhetorical performances of Commissioner Goodell during the press conference as well as his related messages, did not go unchallenged by another institution occupied by White

positionality, the media (both popular news media and sports media), exemplifying the dialectical nature of whiteness. In the following, an analysis of international news and sports media responses to Commissioner Goodell's press conference between the dates of September 19, 2014 and November 1, 2014 is presented to identify and elucidate media's specific contribution to sport and society's racial and gender hierarchy that favors White masculinity.

### **Media Responses to Commissioner Goodell: Shaming the Feminine to Restore White Masculine Honor**

Commissioner Goodell's rhetorical performance and international news and sports media's subsequent responses specifically to his press conference on September 19th represent a dialectical struggle over White masculinity. As a result of my rhetorical analysis and critique of global news and sports media responses to Commissioner Goodell's press conference between September 19, 2014 and November 1, 2014 (as detailed in the first chapter), I found that despite Commissioner Goodell's rhetorical enactment of whiteness and hegemonic masculine ideals, including occupational achievement, frontiermanship, familial patriarchy, heteronormativity, and dominance, as previously explained, his masculinity was challenged by international news and sports media responses, which also embodied White hegemonic masculinity. Specifically, the news media sources that I analyzed, including major international news media articles and sports news media articles, aimed to strip him of these same masculine ideals, and consequently construct him as shamefully feminine, and even, a feminine victim of abuse who deserved such violent abuse. Furthermore, I found that a dialectical struggle manifested within international news and sports media responses, as while media claimed to seek to restore honor to women and survivors of domestic abuse and sexual assault, their strategies of insult contradicted these

messages, resulting in a competition between two competing discourses, shame and honor, over the value of the feminine.

Following Commissioner Goodell's press conference on September 19<sup>th</sup>, international news and sports media reported on and responded to Commissioner Goodell's performance with criticisms of his substantive and stylistic rhetorical choices. As this chapter has already established, Commissioner Goodell's aim to protect the financial security of the NFL by "protecting the shield" was evident to fans and players through his letter, press conference, and revised Personal Conduct Policy. His obvious financial aims did not go unnoticed by international news and sports media, and served as a focal point for immediate criticisms of his press conference. Specifically, global news and sports media criticized Commissioner Goodell for only aiming to "protect the shield" of the NFL, and therefore, safeguard its financial security, meanwhile, showing no genuine regard or remorse for women survivors of domestic abuse and sexual assault. Characterized by Myers (2014a) as "...the worst crisis the NFL has experienced" (para. 4), news and sports media offered criticisms of Commissioner Goodell's overall poor handling of the situation, which was perpetuated by his rhetorical performance at the press conference. In response to Commissioner Goodell's initial weak punishment given to Rice, followed by a slow and inadequate response to the release of the second surveillance video, Samuel (2014) claimed, "...the NFL has no true morals and ethics of its own" (p. 60). Additionally, Okeefe (2014) quoted Jenn Sterger, the woman who was previously sexually harassed by former NFL star quarterback and Super Bowl Champion Brett Favre, in a *New York Daily News* headline, "'The NFL and the owners don't care about individuals...The only thing they care about is money'" (p. 8). Sterger was then quoted within the article stating, "'The only reason the NFL is doing anything about these players now is because it may cost the league



sponsorship money. The sponsors don't want to be associated with people who beat women and children'" (p. 8). Samuel (2014) also stated in a *New York Daily News* article entitled, "It All Makes Cents to Roger," "Sports are supposed to be about ethics, about winning by playing by a set of rules. But the NFL brain trust plays by its own rules, rewriting them whenever needed" (p. 60). Raissman (2014) also stated, "You already know Goodell's, and the owner's, only priority is profit" (para. 6).

Through an analysis of international news and sports media coverage of Commissioner Goodell's conference, I argue that the media sought to critique and shame Commissioner Goodell's rhetorical performance in which he aimed to protect the NFL's financial security while ignoring the plight of feminine victims of domestic abuse and sexual assault. The global news and sports media's shame tactics manifested in rhetorically attempting to strip Commissioner Goodell of masculinity and by situating him as both shamefully feminine and a deserving feminine victim of domestic abuse. This was problematically attempted through the use of strategic, and often violent, rhetorics that I argue, did not result in the shame of Commissioner Goodell, but rather, the shame of survivors of domestic abuse and sexual assault.

First, numerous global news and sports media responses to Commissioner Goodell's press conference on September 19, 2014 metaphorically situated Commissioner Goodell as a victim of abuse or utilized language that constructed an image of Commissioner Goodell receiving abuse. This rhetorical strategy used the imagery of a victim, and inherently a feminine victim, as an insult, meanwhile, contradictorily claiming to condemn domestic violence and sexual assault. For instance, in the following example, Lupica (2014b) situated Commissioner Goodell as a feminine victim of abuse by stating:

But on a day that required strength, once and for all, from the NFL commissioner, Goodell looked weak. On a day that required that man to look big again, as big as he once was, like he was the biggest sports guy around, *he looked as beaten as one of the victims who brought him to this moment* [emphasis added]. (p. 4)

Additionally, headlines rhetorically created an image of Commissioner Goodell as a victim trying to protect himself, but ultimately, “getting sacked” or taking a beating. Phrases such as, “Goodell hid behind the shield...” (Reissman, 2014, p. 52) and “As commish plays defense, it’s quite offensive” (Bondy, 2014, p. 34) lead the audience to view Commissioner Goodell as a victim trying to hide or cower from a potential blow. Another article stated, “Goodell, once called the Sherriff, is now a man on the run” (Rhoden, 2014, p. 14). Additionally, Lupica (2014b) contributed to the imagery of Commissioner Goodell as someone attempting to hide or run from abuse when he claimed that Commissioner Goodell hid instead of addressing the public in response to the release of the second video with language such as “...after hiding for more than a week...” (Lupica, 2014b, p. 15).

Ultimately, global news and sports media constructions invite the audience to believe that even though Commissioner Goodell attempted to hide and run, he eventually fell victim to abuse. Myers’s (2014b) headline read, “Goodell taking the biggest hits” (p. 32). Thompson, O’Keefe, Red, & Vinton (2014) stated, “Roger faces KO punch...” (p. 40). In a *USA Today* article, Thomas (2014) wrote, “Scandals sack the NFL...” (p. 10A). Thomas (2014) then stated, “NFL gets a beating” (p. 10A). Another article stated:

Goodell spent 43 minutes talking and answering questions in front of a massive media throng Friday- his first public comments in nine days amid the *bruising* public relations

*hit the league has taken* [emphasis added] over its response to domestic-violence and child-abuse accusations against several of its players. (Red, 2014b, p. 32).

In many instances, if Commissioner Goodell was not already positioned as receiving abuse, many indicated that he was deserving of abuse. Lupica (2014b) wrote:

‘Our standards...must be clear, consistent and current,’ Goodell said at one point, and you wondered why in the hell they already weren’t in the most powerful and profitable league in this country, and why it took some grainy elevator video to *slap Goodell and his owners upside their own thick heads* [emphasis added]” (p. 4).

While appearing on the surface that the global news and sports media was defending Janay Palmer and all other survivors of domestic abuse and/or sexual assault by publicly highlighting what they saw as flaws in Commissioner Goodell’s leadership, in actuality, the media further marginalized her (and all other women), as lesser beings than those occupying White masculine positionality, including Commissioner Goodell, their supposed target. This took place through the international news and sports media strategically stripping hegemonic masculine ideals from Commissioner Goodell, thereby, attributing feminine qualities to Commissioner Goodell as a form of insult. In addition to shaming Commissioner Goodell by constructing him either as a victim or a potential victim, numerous news and sports media outlets also feminize Commissioner Goodell by positioning him and/or the NFL as physically weak, fragile, and ultimately, dominated, rather than strong, secure, and dominating, an essential component to hegemonic masculinity (Trujillo, 1991). For instance, an article read, “But who would have thought the rock-solid N.F.L. would be shaken to its foundation by two weeks of self-inflicted wounds?” (Rhoden, 2014, p. 14). Baker’s (2014) headline also constructed Commissioner Goodell as weak when it read, “Soft fist” (p. A11). Blows to his physicality also

constructed him as physically inept or clumsy. A newspaper from Thailand stated, “Yesterday’s slate of 14 games couldn’t come soon enough for a league under fire for its clumsy handling of incidents of violence by players against women and children” (*The Nation (Thailand)*, 2014b, para. 2). Another article headline read, “Commish set self up for big fall” (Lupica, 2014b, p. 4).

In addition to imagery of Commissioner Goodell and the NFL as both beaten and physically subordinate to masculine ideals, international news and sports media responses attempted to strip Commissioner Goodell of his leadership, an essential component of White patriarchal domination (Gibson & Heyse, 2010). Burke, Paddock, and Siemaszko (2014) quoted Tedy Bruschi, former New England Patriots player who stated, “We need someone to go up there and be a leader, and that wasn’t done” (p. 4). Commissioner Goodell was also criticized as having a “hollow pose” (NLVL, 2014b, p. 18) and being “...an empty suit delivering empty words...” (NLVL, 2014b, p. 18).

The result of these language choices was not just a seemingly brief embarrassment for Commissioner Goodell and the NFL, but more importantly and more harmfully, a continuation and maintenance of a gender order both within sport and media that situates White hegemonic masculine ideals as normative by constructing the feminine as shameful through insult. The power in these messages lies in that when read individually, they appear to be forms of media advocacy for women who are victims of abuse; however, through a critical analysis of these repeated messages, I was able to discover that collectively, they functioned in opposition to their individual aim. Commissioner Goodell and the NFL were not denigrated at all, but instead, reasserted their White masculine power at the cost of the human value of women and women victims of domestic abuse and sexual assault. By feminizing Commissioner Goodell and situating him as a feminine victim of domestic abuse, international news and sports media

shamed *actual* feminine victims of abuse, thereby contributing to the justification for abuse towards women and the shame and humility that many abused women experience. These rhetorical moves marked women of color and victims of domestic abuse and sexual violence as the problem or as deserving of their own abuse because they are “shameful,” rather than drawing attention to hegemonic masculinity itself as the problem or reason for abuse. Ultimately, these powerful media messages contribute to the ideological justification that allows for violence against women to become possible for some men in the U.S.

### Summary

NFL Commissioner Goodell’s rhetorical performance in response to the domestic abuse that Janay Palmer endured at the hands of NFL star running back Ray Rice, and the subsequent reactions from international news and sports media, provide significant insight into how the strategic rhetorics of whiteness and whiteness’s intersection with hegemonic masculinity work to maintain a racial and gender order in U.S. society that favors White masculine positionality at the expense of Black femininity and masculinity and femininity in general, as well as feminine victims of domestic abuse and sexual assault. Through a critical and dialectical analysis, the identification and examination of contradictory and competing discourses within Commissioner Goodell’s letter to the team owners, his press conferences, and the revised NFL Personal Conduct Policy, offer a novel way to understand how the interplay between competing and contradictory discourses work as a rhetorical strategy to conceal and uphold whiteness’s racial power and its intersection with hegemonic masculinity. Similar to the previous chapter that analyzed NBA Commissioner Silver’s reaction to the racist comments made by now former owner of the L.A. Clippers, Donald Sterling, this chapter identified the *rhetorics of shame* vs. *rhetorics of honor* as dialectical discourses that worked to maintain both White racial power and

hegemonic masculinity. In the final chapter, I offer an explanation of these strategic rhetorics by further discussing the dialectical characteristic of whiteness rhetorics and their implications for current racial and gender structures in the U.S. Additionally, I offer a discussion of future projections for critical whiteness studies and its contributions to communication studies and communication and sport.

## CHAPTER V: GENERAL CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR THE FUTURE OF COMMUNICATION AND SPORT

In 2014, the same year that the two previously analyzed rhetorical moments in the NBA (Chapter 3) and NFL (Chapter 4) occurred, issues of race and racism also resurfaced within U.S. news and sports media as imperative cultural issues due to the tragic deaths of multiple unarmed men who occupied Black positionality by police officers. First, 43-year-old Eric Garner was killed while a New York City police officer restrained him in a chokehold on July 17, 2014. Then, just over three weeks later, 18-year-old Michael Brown of Ferguson, Missouri was shot and killed by a police officer on August 9, 2014 (Berman, 2014; Gander, 2015). In response to these killings, the #BlackLivesMatter movement resurfaced from 2012 with a renewed vigor. #BlackLivesMatter was developed by Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullor, and Opal Tometi in response to the shooting death of 17-year-old Trayvon Martin by a neighborhood watchman, George Zimmerman, on February 26, 2012 to speak out against the anti-Black racism that permeates both society and Black movements (Garza, 2014). This hash tag soon became more than a social media phrase; it eventually developed into a forceful oppositional voice challenging racial inequities in the U.S. by directly calling attention to and confronting systemic racism that has resulted in police brutality and unfair policing strategies disproportionately affecting individuals occupying Black positionality. Months after the deaths of Michael Brown and Eric Garner, Tamir Rice, a 12-year-old boy, was also shot and killed in Cleveland by police officers for using a toy gun in a park on November 22, 2014 (Ly & Hanna, 2014). Less than a year later, Freddie Gray, 25, died from severe spinal injuries incurred during an arrest on April 19, 2015, seven days after being taken into police custody in Baltimore, Maryland (Stolberg & Bidgood, 2015).

The significance of these events on U.S. societal understandings of race and systemic racism cannot be undermined. As I proceed with a conclusion to this dissertation, I first address these unfortunate events and the similar events of 2016 that collided with the sporting world, working to further challenge, and further reveal particularly the NFL's, but also U.S. society in general's, understandings of race and racism. Following this discussion, I provide an argument for critical whiteness studies scholarship to function as a form of resistance to whiteness, followed by a summary of this dissertation's dialectical approach to understanding whiteness. I then proceed to unearth the ideological implications for the strategic maneuvers of whiteness due to my critical rhetorical analysis and critique of Commissioners Silver and Goodell. Finally, I offer an argument for the emerging field of communication and sport to embrace intersectional and critical approaches to the analysis of race, whiteness, and gender.

Nearly two years after the unfortunate deaths of numerous individuals who occupy Black positionality at the hands of police in 2014, as I write this dissertation, that emotion, fear, sadness, anger, and host of other responses that impelled the #BlackLivesMatter movement in 2014 resurfaced on July 6, 2016, when Alton Sterling, a 37-year-old man who occupies Black positionality, was shot and killed by two police officers in Baton Rouge, Louisiana (Balko, 2016). Public outcry then doubled down when on July 16, 2016, Philando Castile, a 32-year-old man who occupies Black positionality, was shot and killed by a police officer in Falcon Heights, Minnesota during a routine traffic stop and the incident was live streamed on Facebook by his fiancé (McLaughlin, 2016). Again, only two months later, two additional men who occupy Black positionality, Terence Crutcher and Keith Lamont Scott, were shot and killed by a police officers in Tulsa, Oklahoma, and Charlotte, North Carolina, respectively (Eversley, 2016; Karimi, Yan, & Almasy, 2016). During these three months, both peaceful and violent protests as well as



demonstrations and vigils took place around the nation, calling attention to unfair policing, police brutality, and systemic racism.

In addition to a societal outcry by individuals who occupy Black positionality and their allies, many NFL players chose to express a critical consciousness regarding these issues. On September 1, 2016, in a preseason game against the San Diego Chargers, NFL quarterback Colin Kaepernick, a man who occupies Black positionality, garnered national attention when he was photographed kneeling, rather than standing and facing the U.S. American flag, for the National Anthem (*New York Daily News*, 2016). Kaepernick explained his reason for kneeling by stating:

I'm going to continue to stand with the people that are being oppressed. To me, this is something that has to change. When there's significant change and I feel that flag represents what it's supposed to represent, and this country is representing people the way that it's supposed to, I'll stand.

He also stated:

This stand wasn't for me. This is because I'm seeing things happen to people that don't have a voice, people that don't have a platform to talk and have their voices heard, and effect change. So I'm in the position where I can do that and I'm going to do that for people that can't. (*New York Daily News*, para. 1, 2016).

Because of Kaepernick's symbolic and vocalized resistance, he influenced many other NFL players, which resulted in similar protests throughout the League for the next two weeks before it nearly disappeared from news coverage. Eric Reid, Marcus Peters, Martellus Bennett, Devin McCourty, Brandon Marshall, Jeremy Lane, and the entire Seattle Seahawks team, including Richard Sherman, were among those who expressed symbolic resistance to racial oppression and unfair policing tactics, whether by kneeling, raising a fist, or linking arms (*New*

*York Daily News*, 2016). The symbolic expressions of resistance by Kaepernick and those who followed his lead, however, were, and continue to be, met with opposition particularly by individuals and institutions employing discourses that maintain whiteness. NFL Commissioner Goodell, rather than address the lives that were lost due to police shootings, stated, "...I think it's important to have respect for our country, for our flag, for the people who make our country better; for law enforcement, and for our military who are out fighting for our freedoms and our ideals" (quoted in *USA Today Sports*, 2016, para. 5). He then stated:

I don't necessarily agree with what he is doing. We encourage our players to be respectful in that time and I like to think of it as a moment where we can unite as a country. And that's what we need more, and that's what I think football does - it unites our country. So I would like to see us focusing on our similarities and trying to bring people together.

(para. 6)

Condemnation of Kaepernick and his supporters came in different forms. Brandon Marshall, a man occupying Black positionality who plays for the Denver Broncos, chose to kneel during the National Anthem and lost two endorsement deals immediately afterward from Academy Federal Credit Union and CenturyLink (*New York Daily News*, 2016). Players like Marshall and Kaepernick, and those who chose to protest with them, also came under strong scrutiny by U.S. news and sports media and current and former NFL players, many of whom concurred with Commissioner Goodell that these players dishonored the flag and the military, and therefore were unpatriotic. Kaepernick was often told to be quiet and do what he is paid to do, namely, stop practicing a critical consciousness and play football. These messages were evident, for instance, in responses such as that of *ESPN* analyst and former quarterback Trent Dilfer:

This is a backup quarterback whose job is to be quiet and sit in the shadows and get the starter ready to play in Week 1. Yet he chose a time where all of a sudden, he became the center of attention. (Reimer, 2016, para. 5)

Similarly, *Fox Sport's* journalist and analyst Clay Travis criticized:

There is no systemic racism in our federal government. In fact, affirmative action is actually a governmental attempt to treat black people unequally—that is more favorably than other people—solely because of their race. If anything, the United States government's laws discriminate in favor of black people based on their skin color.

(Mathis-Lily, 2016, para. 8)

Similar to the findings of this dissertation work, these expressions rhetorically elided the actual reality of racial inequality in the U.S. and called for NFL players, fans, and society to focus on “similarities” and patriotism, thereby invoking postracial and color-blind logics. Such rhetorical strategies maintain the perceived insignificance or even nonexistence of power differentials due to racial positionalities and situate those who do acknowledge difference as antithetical to American cultural values of equality and hard work (Bonilla-Silva, 2014). Furthermore, like the previously analyzed rhetorical moments in the NBA and NFL, the application of shame tactics to maintain whiteness's honor were recycled to propagate the legacy of historical justifications for enslaving men who occupy Black positionality. Specifically, calls for Kaepernick to keep his mouth shut and play football inhumanely constructed him and those who protested with him as only physical bodies, animals really, who should not express a capacity to think or feel, just as slaves were inhumanely perceived by individuals who occupied White positionality in the Antebellum south (hooks, 2004; Majors & Billson, 1992).

Within two weeks of the initial protest, Kaepernick's and many other players' protests slowly disappeared from U.S. news and sports media coverage and debate (Eversley, 2016). Instead, focus was placed upon North Carolina Panthers quarterback, Cam Newton, a man who identifies as Black, and his responses to questions about the shootings and the ensuing riots in downtown Charlotte. Rather than supporting Kaepernick and practicing a critical consciousness by speaking against the systemic racism that leads to unfair policing and police brutality, Newton perpetuated color-blind ideology by referring to "Black-on-Black crime" and he even spoke in an incoherent way, similar to what many individuals who occupy whiteness do when asked to discuss race in an effort to appear color-blind (Bonilla-Silva, 2014). For instance, Newton (quoted in Newton, 2016) stated:

So you can't be a hypocrite and just say, 'Oh a white man or a white police officer killed a black man...' Now that's still messed up and I'm not sitting up here and saying that's OK. I am saying we have to have a clear eye vision on both sides and it starts with everyone holding each other accountable and policing yourselves. (para. 17)

The media attention that Newton received for his color-blind discourse, combined with the media absence of players like Kaepernick who practice a critical consciousness, nevertheless speaks rhetorically (Scott, 1993). Namely, the absence of discussion and debate concerning Kaepernick and other players' symbolic and vocalized protests, when the very thing they are protesting continued happening, renders any collective concern for the harms of systemic racism a non-concern. The placement of Newton's color-blind response, which aligned with Goodell's request to focus on "similarities" and not "differences," and to honor the military and police (but not individuals who have been killed by the police) allowed for Goodell's White hegemonic masculine authority to be sustained (*USA Today Sports*, 2016). Therefore, whiteness (and White

hegemonic masculinity), while challenged, continues to be maintained as normative and centralized, and the perspective of individuals who occupy Black man positionality, is further marginalized as abnormal and deviant.

This current issue exemplifies and furthers what I have argued within this dissertation. Namely, U.S. men's professional sport, as well as sport in general, is a cultural space that has the power, particularly through its leadership decisions, to construct, negotiate, and even challenge intersectionality and whiteness's role in maintaining the new racism. Furthermore, whiteness works both through intersections of identity and interests and social ambivalences to maintain its centrality and authority. The contradictions of whiteness mark the need for scholarly practices and works that name, interrogate, and offer resistance to whiteness as well as the way it multiply marginalizes individuals. Additionally, due to sport's ideological influence, especially as it relates to intersections of race and gender, a vigorous whiteness studies that critiques, challenges, and offers resistance to whiteness and its intersectional workings and oppressions specifically within the cultural domain of sport, as the events in 2014-2016 have shown, is essential for both critical whiteness studies and the evolving field of communication and sport as they grow in their scholarly influence.

### **Critical Whiteness Studies as a Form of Resistance**

Sport sociologist C. Richard King (2005) suggests that there are two forms of whiteness studies across disciplines: (1) a dominant version that is focused on identifying and deconstructing whiteness, which is institutionalized around great works of mostly individuals who occupy White positionality; and (2) a minor tradition of whiteness studies that focuses on "disidentification and opposition" (Munoz, 1999 cited in King, 2005). I concur with Black feminist Patricia Hill Collins (1991) who states that "understanding the dynamics of racism as a

system of power in a theoretical way sets the stage for developing pragmatic strategies for practicing resistance and catalyzing change” (p. 44). With the foundational understanding that whiteness rhetorics work to sustain and justify the ideological systems of racial power that Collins is referring to, and which she also calls the new racism, I have conducted this dissertation project as blend of King’s two distinct approaches to critical whiteness studies. It is both a project focused on the identification and examination of whiteness rhetorics (and one produced by a scholar who identifies as White), as well as a project of opposition and resistance to elite White patriarchal control, which dominates the racial and gender hierarchy of U.S. society and men’s professional sport. As such, I argue, that naming whiteness and examining the intersectional, complex, and contradictory processes through which it maintains its racial power is a form of opposition to its ideological intersectional domination. I have aimed to practice such resistance through the analysis of two case studies in U.S. men’s professional sport, and I have sought to provide a theoretical contribution to understandings of whiteness’s rhetorical, and therefore ideological, adaptability and maneuverability which work to maintain the system of the new racism. Ultimately, my hope is that this dissertation contributes to larger projects in BFT, critical rhetorical analysis, critical intercultural communication, and critical whiteness studies, which are effectively produced by people of various racial identifications and other subject positionalities. Further, I hope that the critique of whiteness as a critical rhetoric works as a strategy of opposition and resistance, and one that can catalyze future change, thereby contributing to these larger scholarly activism initiatives focused on racial and gender social justice particularly for men and women of color and feminine survivors of domestic abuse.

Drawing from literature, conceptualizations, and theories from critical whiteness studies, critical intercultural communication, critical rhetorical criticism, BFT, intersectionality, and

hegemonic masculinity, and informed by Mikhail Bakhtin's dialogism and dialectics (1981) and Judith Martin and Thomas Nakayama's (1999, 2013) dialectical approach to intercultural communication, this dissertation examined the ways in which whiteness rhetorics employ contradictory or dialectical discourses as well as how they interconnect with hegemonic masculinity to maintain their ambivalence, normativity, centrality, and invisibility in U.S. men's professional sport and U.S. society. Furthermore, this project illustrated how White masculinity oppresses through intersectionality. To reach this aim, this dissertation focused on two significant rhetorical moments in U.S. men's professional sport. The first case focused on NBA Commissioner Adam Silver's rhetorical performance in response to the now former L.A. Clippers owner Donald Sterling's publicly released racist comments made during a phone conversation with his mistress V. Stiviano. The second case examined NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell's rhetorical performance in response to NFL star Ray Rice's domestic abuse incident involving his then-fiancé Janay Palmer, which was also publicly released on hotel a surveillance video. My analyses of these two significant rhetorical moments examined each commissioner's rhetorical performances in response to these events, as well as the international news and sports media responses to the commissioners. As a result, two distinct dialectics emerged from my critical rhetorical analysis: *rhetorics of postracism* vs. *critical rhetorics* and *rhetorics of shame* vs. *rhetorics of honor*. To provide a further understanding of such dialectics, the following section examines these dialectics utilizing Bakhtin's (1981) dialogism.

### **A Dialectical Approach to Understanding Whiteness Rhetorics**

To understand the ways in which these contradictory discourses interworked, Mikhail Bakhtin's (1981) conceptualization of dialogism provides a heuristic and insightful perspective. Specifically, dialogism, or the dialogic perspective, allows for an examination of how power

resides in discourse, that is, the systems of meaning that construct and maintain social structures (Baxter, 2011). Bakhtin's centripetal-centrifugal relation between discourses theorizes how dominant and marginalized voices (discourses) interpenetrate to maintain and/or challenge dominant voices (Baxter, 2011). Bakhtin (1981) specifically conceptualizes the centripetal-centrifugal struggle to unearth the ways in which inequality in power and influence is present among discourses, as well as highlight how discourses are foundationally situated in an uneven playing field, but still challenge one another for influence. Because this framework promotes and allows for the critique of power, dialogism lends itself as an appropriate framework for critical rhetorical analysis, a methodological perspective distinctly concerned with critiquing and disassembling how power is constructed, preserved, and propagated through rhetoric (McKerrow, 1989). Furthermore, as I detailed in Chapter Two and as my two case studies have shown, the dialogic approach enriches understandings of critical intercultural communication scholarship through a critical dialogic approach, as Xu (2013) argues, particularly within Western organizational practices and discourses. Additionally, I have discovered through my analyses of these two critical moments in men's professional sport that dialogism also complements BFT's aim to "come to voice" and "come to power" (Collins, 1998, p. 44).

Through utilizing a critical and dialogic framework (i.e., critical dialogic approach), I was able to discover and understand the ways in which meaning making emerges from a struggle for voice by investigating the ways in which discourses refute one another in some way, or in other words, how they operate dialectically. Black feminist scholar bell hooks (1990) suggests that in order for individuals who occupy Black positionality to move from objectification to full human subjectivity, three interrelated components are required: breaking the silence about oppression, developing self-reflexive speech, and confronting or "talking back" to elite or dominant



discourses. Essentially, hooks, like Collins (1998) confirms that the need for voice is essential to move individuals, and arguably men *and* women who occupy Black positionality as well as other marginalized racial positionalities, from the margins and into a position of influence, a position recognized as fully human and valuable. This vie or fight for voice essentially is a collective struggle for self-definition and self-determination (Collins, 1998).

BFT has long discussed this contestation for voice (Collins, 1991, 1998; hooks, 1990). Relatedly, Bakhtin theorizes two distinct kinds of discourses, the centripetal and centrifugal, which he argues engage in a struggle for voice. The centripetal includes that which is moving towards the center or centralized. The centripetal is that of the privileged, and therefore, inhabits a normative position of power and influence. In the two rhetorical moments analyzed for this dissertation project, postracial rhetorics and those which worked to establish and restore White masculine honor to Commissioners Silver and Goodell represented this side of the dialectic. The centrifugal, in contrast, encompasses that which is pushed away or not allowed access to the center, and therefore is marginalized. The centrifugal is marked as deviant, abnormal, unnatural, odd, and nonnormative, and therefore, has less power and societal influence than the centripetal (Bakhtin, 1981). As a result of my analysis, those voices identified as the centrifugal include specifically critical rhetorics (in contrast to postracial rhetorics), as well as those that attempted to shame and/or challenge Commissioners Goodell and Silver and their respective league structures and policies that favor whiteness and marginalize those considered racial and gender “Others” as well as victims of domestic abuse and sexual assault. Within his conceptualization of the centripetal-centrifugal struggle, Bakhtin does not examine *how* it is that centrifugal voices become centripetal or vice versa (Baxter, 2011). Through this dissertation project, I aimed to examine the strategic operations of the dialogic process and further interrogate the “how.” As

this dissertation work has explained in Chapters Three and Four, my analyses revealed two distinct dialectics that work to maintain the ambivalence of whiteness rhetorics, the *rhetorics of postracism vs. critical rhetorics*, and the *rhetorics of shame vs. rhetorics of honor*. The workings of these dialectics, that is, how these contradictions interacted with one another to create meaning, including how whiteness rhetorics intersected with hegemonic masculinity, was established in Chapters Three and Four, and are summarized and further discussed in the following section.

### **Rhetorics of Postracism vs. Critical Rhetorics**

Within my analysis and critique of NBA Commissioner Silver's rhetorical response to the now former L.A. Clippers owner Donald Sterling's racist comments about individuals who occupy Black positionality and the global news and sports media's subsequent response to Commissioner Silver's press conference, I identified a dialectic of whiteness that I conceptualize as *rhetorics of postracism vs. critical rhetorics*. This dialectic manifested as an antagonistic struggle, that is, a struggle between two distinct ideological positions or systems of meaning produced and reproduced through discourse (Baxter, 2011). In the following, a summary of each side of this dialectical struggle is provided.

**Rhetorics of postracism.** Long praised as a leader of "racial progress" and "racial diversity," the NBA's so-called claims to a leadership position in such matters resurfaced during this incident, in which international news and sports media as well as NBA fans, owners, coaches, and current and former players, praised Commissioner Silver utilizing rhetorics of "progress" and "inclusion" to construct the NBA as a postracial space. These rhetorics of postracism built upon TIDES's 2015 grade of an "A+" designated to the NBA for its racial hiring practices and TIDES's founder and director, Richard Lapchick's, continuous praise of the NBA's

leadership for its diversity and inclusion efforts above all other professional sports leagues like the NFL, National Hockey League (NHL), or Major League Baseball (MLB) (Lee, 2014). These responses to NBA leadership, and specifically Commissioner Silver's leadership, worked together as rhetorics of postracism, that is, rhetorics that distract from racism and racial prejudice's historical legacy as well as its contemporary influence on the social, economic, education, and health (among other factors) conditions of U.S. society that favor whiteness above any racial identification deemed outside of whiteness's cultural space (Ono, 2011). Such discourses, which represent elite discourses, presented a view of social reality that elevated the ideas of those in power as normative and superior (Collins, 1998). In this specific case, this side of the dialectic functioned as the centripetal, or the privileged and centered discourse, and worked through two specific rhetorical strategies utilized by Commissioner Silver and international news and sports media: (1) racial inclusion as postracism and (2) White masculinity as the protector of postracism.

***Racial inclusion as postracism.*** Commissioner Silver's rhetorical performance and global news and sports media responses, which function as examples of contemporary racial discourse, initially appeared to be unique in their content because they took an antiracist and inclusive stance. However, under the agendas of diversity and inclusion, these rhetorics worked to obviate the racial (and gender) structures of the NBA. This included its ownership and administrative positions that are held by individuals who primarily occupy White masculine positionality, as well as previous policy initiatives, such as those by former Commissioner David Stern, that worked strategically to centralize whiteness and disenfranchise Black masculinity and hip-hop culture. Within my analysis and critique, I found that Commissioner Silver distinguished himself from former Commissioner Stern (see Griffin & Calafell, 2011) by presenting a

partnership between himself and players rather than speaking as a father-figure (like Stern), resulting in him attempting to remove himself from the racial and masculine center and bringing the players perspectives as men who occupy Black positionality to attention. His references to a partnership combined with his references to the NBA as a leading organization in race relations, allowed for news and sports media, as well as current and former players, coaches, owners, and fans, to respond in agreeance and build upon such statements with an embrace of the NBA as a so-called postracial/postracism space.

*White masculinity as the protector of postracism.* In addition to rhetorics that constructed the NBA as an “inclusive” and “diverse” organization and cultural space, rhetorics that constructed Commissioner Silver as the protector of postracism also worked to develop this centrifugal side of the dialectic. Specifically, the mass circulation within news and sports media of interview and Twitter responses by current and former NBA players and coaches such as Michael Jordan (current majority owner of the Charlotte Hornets), Magic Johnson, Doc Rivers, and Lebron James, all who do not occupy White positionality, worked to develop a mythological narrative of Commissioner Silver as embodying hegemonic masculine ideals associated with being a “hero,” “warrior,” and “protector” of postracism and all that is good and decent. While it may not have been their individual intent, through these collective responses, Commissioner Silver was rhetorically assembled as a masculine warrior through the attribution of masculine qualities to his character including courage, aggression, bravery, strength, commitment, power, and capability to stand up to pressure. Furthermore, my analysis also found that surrounding responses to his leadership performance rhetorically fashioned him as embodying and/or possessing weapons to combat racism in efforts to protect the NBA as a postracial and postracism space. These rhetorics situated Commissioner Silver as the “hero” and “protector” of

the “weak” and “childlike” NBA players from racism and racists like Donald Sterling, thereby drawing upon historical racial power structures and stereotypes dating back to Antebellum slavery in which individuals who occupied Black positionality were understood by individuals who occupied whiteness to be unintelligent, illiterate, and childlike beings in need of a master (hooks, 1990). These cultural and biological rationales for the supposed “natural inferiority” of Black masculinity work to support color-blind ideology, which relies on such narratives to maintain current racial systems as naturally occurring. Furthermore, hegemonic masculinity intersected with whiteness to present the illusion of postracism, and allowed for Commissioner Silver, and therefore White masculinity, to be maintained as the “rightful” protector of postracism. This was then solidified with numerous recognitions and honors awarded to Commissioner Silver for his handling of the Donald Sterling situation, including recognition as *Sports Illustrated*’s 2014 Executive of the Year and one of *TIME Magazine*’s 100 Most Influential People. He also received the Sports Executive of the Year honor at the 2015 Sports Business Awards and was named to *Fortune*’s 2015 list of the World’s 50 Greatest Leaders (NBA Media Ventures, LLC, 2016).

**Critical Rhetorics.** While the discourses surrounding Commissioner Silver’s rhetorical performance in response to Donald Sterling’s racist comments worked to construct the NBA as a postracial and postracism space, with Commissioner Silver situated as its warrior-like and rightful protector, my analysis and critique revealed that Commissioner Silver’s rhetorical performance, as well as the news and sports media responses to it, contradicted claims of postracial/postracism, functioning as what I conceptualize as *critical rhetorics*. These oppositional rhetorical responses worked to provide a voice for people of color who have historically been excluded and/or have experienced racial discrimination within the NBA. These

rhetorics took on a critical form, meaning they questioned the institutionalized power relations, both racial and gendered, within the NBA, and therefore functioned as a centrifugal discourse, or a nonnormative response. Working against the rhetorics of postracism, this side of the dialectic was produced through Commissioner Silver's press conference, in which he recognized the need for more diversity within the NBA's leadership, as well as news and sports media responses, which worked to critique the NBA's administrative decision-making and its racial and gender hierarchy in administration. Specifically, by calling attention to the NBA's complete obviation of Donald Sterling's racist history associated with a 2006 lawsuit pursued by the U.S. Department of Justice against Sterling for housing discrimination, news and sports media sought to call attention to a history of administrative decisions within the NBA that favor White domination. Furthermore, these rhetorics worked to critique the NBA's administrative racial hierarchy that favors men who occupy White positionality by pointing out that Michael Jordan of the Charlotte Hornets and Vivak Ranodive of the Sacramento Kings are the only two owners of color among the majority owners of NBA teams. These news and sports media sources worked to point out that the absence of people of color in decision-making positions allows for policies and practices within the NBA that favor White positionality to continue, while obviating the perspectives of the player base who predominantly occupy Black masculine positionality. While these rhetorics provided legitimate proof and arguments for the NBA to take initiative in advancing people of color through the ranks into administrative positions, they were up against the centripetal, the privileged and powerful voices of not only whiteness, but also White masculinity, and therefore, remained ultimately marginalized and considered deviant.

### **Rhetorics of Shame vs. Rhetorics of Honor**

In addition to the rhetorics of postracism vs. critical rhetorics, my critical rhetorical analysis of Commissioner Adam Silver's rhetorical response to Donald Sterling's racist comments, revealed a second dialectic, which I conceptualize as *rhetorics of shame vs. rhetorics of honor*. This dialectic then emerged within my analysis and critique of NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell's handling of an incident involving a domestic dispute between NFL star running back Ray Rice and his then fiancé Janay Palmer, as well as the news and sports media's subsequent reactions to his rhetorical performance. While the dialectic of rhetorics of postracism vs. critical rhetorics exemplified an antagonistic struggle, a struggle between ideologies, this dialectic worked as a nonantagonistic struggle. As such, within this struggle, multiple discourses were identified within a single source. Bakhtin (1981) posits that a dialogic relationship can exist within a single utterance, and even within a single word. Therefore, a rhetorical performance itself can inhabit contradictions, or a dialectical struggle between two competing discourses.

This specific dialectic emerged as a struggle for racial and masculine honor through White hegemonic masculine shaming of racial and gender "Others" by perpetuating historical legacies of men who occupy Black positionality as a "Black buck" in need of discipline and control and/or further ostracizing women who occupy Black positionality's worth through obviating and/or altering their perspective. It also occurred through global news and sports media's rhetorical construction of racists (i.e., Donald Sterling) or abusers (i.e., Ray Rice) to disassociate the NBA from explicit racism and the NFL from domestic abuse, thereby placing the blame for each systemic cultural issue on someone else, but certainly not the League, its policies, or its leaders. The use of shame and honor tactics by Commissioners Goodell and Silver, Donald Sterling, and international news and sports media particularly reflected Bakhtin's

centripetal-centrifugal struggle, as White hegemonic masculinity fought against Black femininity, Black masculinity, and the voices of survivors of domestic abuse, and worked to maintain the dominance and centralization of not just whiteness, but White patriarchal control, and even constructed White masculinity as the rightful and good protector of whiteness standards, or hegemonic civility.

In the case of Commissioner Silver, he, as well as global news and sports media, current and former players, coaches, fans, and owners, sought to reclaim the postracial honor of the NBA by utilizing shame tactics that distanced Donald Sterling from the NBA for his racist sentiments, as these are not acceptable in a postracism, postracial, and color-blind space. Through shaming Sterling, the NBA sought to reclaim its honor as a leader of racial progress, which had temporarily been stained because Sterling's rhetorical performance called attention to the racial and gender hierarchy of the NBA. Sterling had brought shame to the NBA, and Commissioner Silver needed to somehow reclaim its honor. Therefore, Commissioner Silver's press conference and the surrounding media reactions utilized rhetorics of shame and honor to target Sterling, which I found, worked to covertly negotiate "proper" whiteness, or socially acceptable ways to invisibly maintain a racial hierarchy. My analysis and critique revealed that these discourses not only functioned dialectically, but that they intersected with hegemonic masculinity, resulting not only in the perpetuation of whiteness, but also hegemonic masculinity. My analysis and critique revealed two specific strategies within the rhetorics of shame vs. rhetorics of honor. First, Donald Sterling utilized shame tactics to shame racial "Others," including Black masculinity and femininity, including his mistress V. Stiviano, who identifies as Black and Mexican, to restore his own White masculine honor. This consequently brought shame upon the NBA, as it contradicted the ideals of color-blind ideology. Second, and concurrently,



Commissioner Silver, global news and sports media, and current and former players utilized rhetorics of shame and humiliation to distance Donald Sterling from the NBA by not engaging in *racial* shaming, but instead, by engaging in *racist* shaming by constructing Donald Sterling as a “contamination” to the “pure” NBA. This interplay between the rhetorics of shame and rhetorics of honor worked in the favor of color-blind ideology. In doing so, it reaffirmed the false belief that contemporary racism is maintained by racists, not institutional policies and practices, and that racists are rare remnants from the past. This works to affirm Bonilla-Silva’s (2014) claim that society lives within the illusion that we live in a time of racism without racists.

Within the case of NFL Commissioner Goodell, my analysis and critique revealed that Goodell’s rhetorical performance involving his explanations and language as well as the revised NFL Personal Conduct Policy, in combination with global news and sports media responses to his rhetorical performance, worked to assert Commissioner Goodell’s White patriarchal power, and therefore his honor, which had been tainted due to his initial reaction to Ray Rice’s domestic abuse incident. Similar to Commissioner Silver’s situation, the League and his reputation had been tarnished due to these incidents (in Goodell’s case, his initial response to Ray Rice’s domestic dispute with Janay Palmer) and it was the Commissioner’s role and objective to somehow restore both his and the League’s honor, which ultimately meant restoring his and the NFL’s White masculine honor. Commissioner Goodell’s restoration of honor was achieved through his intersectional performance of whiteness rhetorics and hegemonic masculine ideals, including occupational achievement, familial patriarchy and heteronormativity, frontierism, and force and control (Trujillo, 1991). Through his rhetorical performance, I argue, Black femininity was further ostracized and belittled. This occurred through his deliverance of a slight punishment to Ray Rice for abusing Janay Palmer, which ultimately labeled Janay Palmer, Black

femininity, and victims of domestic abuse, as valueless and unworthy of protection. Furthermore, his lack of urgency to address the incident of abuse publicly worked to obviate domestic abuse as a systemic cultural problem, as Janay Palmer and the abuse she endured were not situated as a relevant or urgent matters for the NFL to address. Similar to the Donald Sterling debacle, these rhetorical responses by Commissioner Goodell were reminiscent of the emotional, physical, psychological, and spiritual abuse that women and men who occupied Black positionality endured at the hands of individuals who occupied White positionality during chattel slavery. Therefore, these cultural and biological references to the supposed inferiority of individuals who occupy Black positionality yet again reaffirmed color-blind ideology, which relies on such false justifications to maintain the current racial hierarchy. Additionally, Commissioner Goodell and the NFL's exclusion of women who occupy Black positionality from decision-making positions in the NFL, including the decision-making process associated with the Ray Rice and Janay Palmer incident and the subsequent assemblage of a Conduct Committee to oversee decisions regarding player conduct and discipline, functioned to further disenfranchise Black femininity in the NFL and society. In addition to these rhetorical outcomes, Commissioner Goodell's rhetorical performance worked to perpetuate the historical control over Black masculinity, specifically through the revised Personal Conduct Policy, which functions as a material form of whiteness by using discourses of hegemonic civility to maintain White hegemonic masculine power over Black masculinity and femininity in general in the name of goodness and decency.

Commissioner Goodell's rhetorics of shame, which aimed to restore his White masculine honor, were also challenged by international news and sports media's responses to his handling of the Ray Rice and Janay Palmer incident on behalf of the NFL. While Commissioner Goodell's performance of White masculine ideals initially reestablished his position at the top of the racial

and gender hierarchy, news and sports media aimed to rhetorically strip Goodell of these masculine ideals as a way of shaming him for mishandling the situation. My analysis and critique revealed that the news and sports media discourse consequently discursively constructed him as shamefully feminine, and even a feminine victim of domestic abuse that deserved such abuse.

While the news and sports media utilized their medium to seek to restore honor to women and victims of domestic abuse by shaming Commissioner Goodell for his incompetence in handling the situation, their strategies of using feminine characteristics and situating him as a deserving victim of abuse as insult contradicted this aim and resulted in a struggle between shame and honor over the value of the feminine and victims of domestic abuse. So while the international news and sports media appeared to be advocating for women and victims of domestic abuse by calling out the flaws that they saw in Commissioner Goodell's leadership and decision-making, instead, by equating Commissioner Goodell with femininity and a victim of domestic abuse as an insult, they further marginalized Janay Palmer, as well as women in general and victims of domestic abuse, and even justified abuse through situating the feminine as shameful.

Consequently, women were constructed as lesser beings than those who occupy White masculinity, including Commissioner Goodell, their supposed target. Here, the centripetal, White masculinity, and its interplay with the centrifugal, Black femininity and femininity in general, engage in differentiation with one another, ultimately resulting in the maintenance of White masculinity as centralized, and femininity, including Black femininity as well as victims of domestic abuse, as further disenfranchised and devalued.

### **Ideological Implications for the Strategic Maneuvers of Whiteness**

Reflecting on my analysis and critique, whiteness's dialectical process and the interworking of whiteness and masculine ideals, particularly within men's professional sport, allows for the illumination and understanding of how sport and media pedagogically inform a public consciousness regarding race, gender, intersections of identity locations, as well as gendered violence. Therefore, in the following section, I discuss the ideological repercussions, regarding the rhetorical performances of Commissioners Goodell and Silver as leaders, and the international news and sports media responses to them. First, I discuss how Commissioner Goodell's performance pedagogically informs women who occupy Black positionality that their "rightful" place is within the margins and that feminine victims of abuse should remain silent, rather than vocalize or report any experience with domestic abuse or sexual assault. I then discuss how Commissioner Adam Silver's performance complicates understandings of racial progress, as his postracial performance conflicted with media criticisms, thereby, contributing to the ambivalence of whiteness and maintenance of the illusion of a color-blind and postracial NBA and society.

#### **Commissioner Roger Goodell and the Silencing of Women Who Occupy Black Positionality**

In the case of NFL Commissioner Goodell's rhetorical response to the abuse that Janay Palmer endured at the hands of Ray Rice, much can be extracted concerning the maneuvers and operations of whiteness rhetorics. In this case, by examining the rhetorical layers and sense making processes associated with the intersectional and dialectical performance of whiteness and hegemonic masculine ideals, the ways in which whiteness rhetorics and masculine ideals are calculated strategically to maintain White masculine dominance illuminates how White masculine supremacist ideologies are perpetuated rhetorically to maintain an illusion of racial

hierarchies as occurring “naturally” during the dialectical struggle for voice. This rhetorical process contrasts with historical biological myths associated with color-blind logics that maintain racial and gender oppression as a result of some “natural” inferiority characteristic of women, women who occupy Black positionality, and men who occupy Black positionality. Therefore, by deconstructing the process through which race and gender are rhetorically constructed, this dissertation supports and exemplifies Collins’s (1991) explanation of the historical narrative of “controlling images” of Black masculinity and femininity that have been used to justify emotional, physical, psychological, and spiritual damage done unto men and women who occupy Black positionality. Such rhetorical constructions continue to dominate media and sport representations of men and women, and subtly work to justify a hierarchy that favors White masculinity. These constructed myths were furthered by NFL Commissioner Goodell and subsequent global news and sport media responses, having significant ideological repercussions. As detailed in the following, this case functioned as a micro example of the macro sexist and racist enterprises that subject women who occupy Black positionality and victims of domestic abuse to further historical legacies of disenfranchisement (Griffin, 2013). Specifically, there are ideological ramifications for how women and men who occupy Black positionality and victims of domestic abuse were constructed by Commissioner Goodell and the news and sports media, which perpetuated whiteness’s obviolation of men and women who occupy Black positionality’s lived experiences, and whiteness’s use of “controlling images” of Black masculinity to maintain its power. To begin, the ways in which this rhetorical moment ideologically worked to encourage silence among feminine victims of domestic abuse who occupy Black positionality is explained.

The first ideological implication is that women who occupy Black positionality and specifically survivors of domestic abuse who occupy Black positionality are taught that

vocalizing their experience with domestic abuse, regardless of its physical, emotional, psychological, and spiritual toll on themselves, is insignificant to those in authority, and therefore, is pointless to report or vocalize. In total, women are taught that silence is the best response to domestic abuse. Similar to Crystal Mangum's (a woman survivor of rape who occupies Black positionality) media portrayal during the 2006 Duke Lacrosse Rape Case (Phillips & Griffin, 2015) and media constructions of Desiree Washington (a woman rape survivor who occupies Black positionality) during the 1991-1992 Mike Tyson rape trial (Griffin, 2013), my analysis and critique revealed that Commissioner Goodell and global news and sports media reactions to Janay Palmer's lived experience with domestic abuse speaks volumes about society's perceived insignificance of women who occupy Black positionality and feminine survivors of domestic abuse or sexual assault (especially those who occupy Black positionality). Together, these cases functioned as micro examples of the manifestation of racism and sexism at macro levels (Griffin, 2013), and such manifestation communicates the demand, on behalf of White hegemonic masculinity, for victims of domestic abuse to remain silent. While the means in which such outcome was achieved were unique in the cases of Mangum, Washington, and Palmer, ultimately, the delivery of the ideological message that silence is the required response from feminine victims of abuse or sexual assault, especially those who occupy Black positionality, is achieved.

The expressed desire for women victims of abuse, especially those who occupy Black positionality, to stay silent, is evident throughout Commissioner Goodell and the NFL's response to her abuse. While Janay Palmer may have been briefly present in news and sports media coverage, her voice and influence, as well as other women who occupy Black positionality and victims of domestic abuse, were monitored by the League, marked as invisible, and therefore,

further sidelined to advance a public narrative that protects the interests of the NFL and White masculinity. The near historical absence of women who occupy Black positionality within administrative positions in the NFL, as well as the near absence, and even alteration by the Baltimore Ravens, of Janay Palmer's individual voice (recall the press conference in which they provided her a script containing an apology for her role in the abuse) during Commissioner Goodell's decision-making process regarding Rice's punishment, exemplify such absence, silencing, and further subjugation that women who occupy Black positionality commonly experience. In sum, Janay Palmer was portrayed in the media as the woman that Ray Rice punched and knocked out in an elevator, and then who stood by her man and took the blame for causing the abuse to occur. She was represented as nothing more. Furthermore, the news and sports media's efforts to discipline Commissioner Goodell for his failure to competently address domestic abuse as a cultural systemic issue minimized the seriousness of the violence endured by Palmer, and even justified abuse endured by any woman, by situating the feminine body as shameful, contributing to a common trend in news media (Meyers, 2004). Ultimately, through such discourses, men's violence against women was maintained as a culturally supported act created through larger systems of power and oppression (Phillips, 2012). Ideologically, this works to inform women who occupy Black positionality and victims of domestic abuse that any abuse that they do experience and endure, and even one that is video recorded by a surveillance tape and released to the public, is of little concern to those in power. Therefore, feminine survivors of domestic abuse who occupy Black positionality are taught that it is meaningless or pointless to report experiencing abuse. Essentially, the message is to stay silent.

In addition to this ideological implication, I believe that women who occupy Black positionality and victims of domestic abuse also received a public education to remain silent

about any abuse that they experience, particularly if it is at the hands of men who occupy Black positionality, as a way to protect Black masculinity from White patriarchal control and discipline. In this case, the blame for domestic abuse as a cultural systemic issue was cast upon Black masculinity resulting in the subsequent expressed need by those occupying whiteness to control and discipline Black masculinity for the protection of the NFL and society in general. Within this process, White masculinity was situated as an honorable protector of society, and in opposition, Black masculinity was criminalized and marked with both blame and shame for domestic abuse. Such criminalization supports the wrongful maintenance of Black masculinity as deviant, unruly, animalistic, violent, and uncontrollable (Calafell, 2015; Grainger, Newman, & Andrews, 2006; hooks, 2004). This rhetorical moment, therefore, expressed the justification of revised and stricter disciplinary policies like the NFL Personal Conduct Policy. The continued emphasis placed upon the need for a revised and stricter policy by Commissioner Goodell and news and sports media confirmed this expectation that the NFL would “control” Black masculinity with “proper” disciplinary measures outlined in the revised Personal Conduct Policy. Ideologically, in addition to reinforcing long-held stereotypes about Black masculinity as violent and in need of discipline, this rhetorical moment instructs feminine victims of domestic abuse of all racial identifications that in order to mitigate such representations of Black masculinity, they should enact a form of protection. Specifically, to protect men who occupy Black positionality from further societal control and disenfranchisement by White dominated institutions like, but not limited to, the NFL, feminine victims of domestic abuse of all racial identifications are informed to remain silent yet again.

Given these ideological implications, which are both specifically related to silencing the voice of feminine victims of abuse, this specific rhetorical case study complements Phillips and



Griffin's (2015) analysis of how Crystal Mangum in the Duke case, was represented in public discourses during and after the case was resolved. Phillips and Griffin (2015) argue that public discourse positioned Mangum as a "vilified object," while simultaneously repressing her experiences and status as a speaking subject (p. 37). Furthermore, they argue that Mangum was both visible and hypervisible within public discourse, resembling the dialectic nature of whiteness rhetorics that this dissertation project aims to illuminate. The authors state, "Mainly, media depictions of Mangum undermined her humanity, dismissed the violence enacted against her, and, simultaneously, labored to secure the privileged status of the White middle-to-upper-class men accused of attacking her" (p. 40). As a result of such depictions, their analysis, as well as mine, draws attention to what Phillips and Griffin (2015) call "an overarching pattern of erasing women who occupy Black positionality as subjects in public discourse" and instead "...stage them as denigrated objects in accordance with dominant logics" (Phillips & Griffin, 2015, p. 37). Because the rhetorical moment involving Commissioner Goodell's rhetorical performance in response to the Ray Rice and Janay Palmer domestic abuse incident ignited a firestorm of global news and sports media coverage, the messages constructed by both Commissioner Goodell and the media about Black femininity, victims of domestic abuse, femininity in general, and even Black masculinity reinforced the societal acceptance and expectation of dehumanizing behavior towards racial and gender "Others." Furthermore, similar to the rhetorical construction of Desiree Washington during the Mike Tyson rape trial (Griffin, 2013) as well as Crystal Mangum during the Duke LaCrosse Rape Case (Phillips & Griffin, 2015), this rhetorical moment confirms Phillips and Griffin's (2015) finding that "Yet as women in general, and survivors in particular, watched and listened while the lacrosse team's dehumanizing behavior was largely ignored, trivialized, or excused, they learned how power

works in regard to men's violence against women" (p. 51). Namely, the pedagogical nature of public discourse surrounding Ray Rice and Janay Palmer, which were a result of the leadership performance of NFL Commissioner Goodell, teaches the fan base of the NFL, as well as society in general, that White patriarchal leaders and institutions rightfully have access to voice, a voice that has the power to dominate, discipline, and silence men and women who occupy Black positionality and victims of domestic abuse in the name of what is deemed civil by hegemonic White masculinity. If men who occupy Black positionality and feminine victims of domestic abuse (especially those who occupy Black positionality) had access to voice in this situation, an oppositional knowledge could have been expressed to self-define and ultimately self-determine future directions for moving men and women who occupy Black positionality out of the NFL's objectification and into positions of influence and value. Rather, elite voices, those of Commissioner Goodell and the global news and sports media, occupied the centripetal position and worked to serve their own White masculine interests by marking individuals who occupy Black positionality with shame and blame for their own oppression and/or any violence or abuse endured, resulting in the maintenance of silence surrounding domestic abuse particularly for feminine survivors of abuse who occupy Black positionality.

### **Commissioner Silver and the Ambivalence of Whiteness**

In the case of the NBA and Commissioner Silver's rhetorical response to the racist comments made by the now former owner of the L.A. Clippers, Donald Sterling, there are ideological ramifications for the ways in which Commissioner Silver and the global news and sports media responded to Sterling. Particularly, within this rhetorical moment, agendas and occupations that support color-blind ideology instructed NBA fans and U.S. society that the NBA, and ultimately, the U.S., is a postracial and postracism culture and one that is color-blind.

These messages of progress, in combination with challenges by critical rhetorics, contribute to the ambivalence of whiteness. Ambivalence often manifests itself within overlapping responses and contradictory discourses (King & Springwood, 2001). Such ambivalence of whiteness, in this rhetorical moment, obviates how the political economy of U.S. men's professional sport, through leadership performances and media narratives, serves the interests of whiteness by exploiting and constructing Black masculinity as inherently shameful and White masculinity as inherently honorable. Furthermore, postracial ideologies that claim racism, systemic or otherwise, was eradicated during the Civil Rights Movement, and that explicit racism is rare and only committed by racists like Donald Sterling, were preserved. As a result, the new racism was maintained.

Logics of color-blindness and postracism draw upon ideals like tolerance and multiculturalism to provide a false universal perspective grounded in the White masculine experience, which ultimately undermines differentials in access to power due to racial and gender identifications (Bonilla-Silva, 2014; Carillo Rowe, 2010). Such false universal perspectives persist only in situations in which men and women who occupy Black positionality, as well as other marginalized individuals, are excluded as agents of knowledge on their own behalf, or are controlled via tactics that silence or surveil the behavior and even the appearance those who are included (in this case, athletes who occupy Black masculine positionality) (Collins, 1998). As previously detailed in Chapter One of this dissertation, while about 74% of NBA players identify as Black, they are employed by 35 teams that are predominantly owned and operated by wealthy men who occupy White positionality, with the exception of the Charlotte Hornets and the Sacramento Kings, who have two owners of color, but still have administration that predominantly occupies White masculine positionality (Lapchick & Guiao,

2015). So while the face of the NBA is a racially diverse one, those who make decisions behind closed doors do not represent racial (or gender) diversity. Furthermore, the presence of men who occupy Black positionality in the NBA, while limited to player athletes, is strategically monitored, as Collins (1998) points out, which is a common practice in instances when racial minorities are present, rather than excluded.

This rhetorical moment involving Donald Sterling is an extension of the surveillance implemented with the previously mentioned NBA Dress Code, which was constructed and implemented in 2006 by former Commissioner David Stern. Griffin and Calafell's (2011) and Cunningham's (2009) rhetorical critiques of the policy argue that the Dress Code functions to monitor, control, and discipline Black masculinity. It reaches this aim by limiting the expression of hip-hop culture in an effort to "clean up" the "bad boy" and "thug" image of the NBA, and ultimately, enforce players to conform to elite whiteness standards for physical appearance. Therefore, while men who occupy Black positionality are present in the Association, but only as players and rarely in organizational decision-making positions; their bodies and behaviors are monitored by the Association with strict rules, like those of the NBA Dress Code. More specifically, the NBA Dress Code continues to function as a form of racial and gender surveillance that maintains the color-blind and postracial logics that Commissioner Silver's rhetorical performance perpetuated. As a form of surveillance, the NBA Dress Code, works in combination with Commissioner Silver's strategic rhetorics of postracism to implement control over Black masculinity and undermine the humanity of the Association's athletes who predominantly occupy Black positionality. Therefore, through Commissioner Silver's, as well as TIDES's, international news and sports media, current and former players, owners, and coaches' references to the league as racially diverse and a leader in race relations, the White masculine

perspective was universalized, in that it centered whiteness as normative and perpetuated the invisibility of whiteness strategies in the NBA. This occurred despite media criticisms of the league's history of obviating Donald Sterling's racist past, as well as the league's administration which is predominantly controlled by men who occupy whiteness. Instead, messages that supported the NBA as postracial and color-blind space persisted.

As this analysis has detailed, in the case of the NBA, individual voices, those of NBA players who occupy Black positionality like LeBron James and Dwyane Wade, who offered praise to Commissioner Silver for his punishment delivered to Donald Sterling, may have had their own individual intentions, but collectively with other player, coach, and fan responses, they maintained White hegemonic masculinity. Through their production and mass circulation within media texts, player responses worked collectively to sustain current racial ideologies, and therefore, the current racial hierarchy, by constructing Commissioner Silver as the "protector" and "warrior" of and for the postracial. Deceptively disguised within the voices of NBA players and coaches who occupy Black positionality, such responses functioned to maintain whiteness's ambivalence and covertly supported the White masculine voice in dominating the centripetal-centrifugal struggle. Such responses contributed to the silencing of anyone who talks back to narratives that promote whiteness as normative and universal. Namely, the ideological message is that if the players, who predominantly occupy Black masculine positionality, are not protesting or challenging the racial order of the NBA, then it must not need protest or challenge. Further silencing of any challenge or protest was maintained by Commissioner Silver's response to NBA players who sought to advocate for racial justice in 2014 during an NBA game after the death of Eric Garner by wearing shirts in place of their warmups that read, "I Can't Breathe." In response to their expression of resistance to systemic racism, Silver stated that he wished the players

would "...abide by our on-court attire rules" instead (Boren, 2014). Therefore, through surveilling and stifling player advocacy efforts that call attention to systemic racism, Commissioner Silver and the NBA strategically maintained the illusion that the NBA (and U.S. society) is a postracial space, a space where racism does not need to be identified or removed, because there is "no room for racism," or rather, it allegedly does not exist in the NBA.

Given the rhetorical power of the NBA and NFL in maintaining racial and gender ideologies, and therefore, a racial and gender order, that favors the intersection of whiteness and masculinity, and also one that multiply marginalizes historically disenfranchised individuals, professional sport is an important cultural location deserving of critical whiteness studies focus. For this reason, in the next section, I argue for a much needed juncture between critical whiteness studies and the emerging field of communication and sport, with a specific focus on intersectionality and intersections of whiteness with other subject identities, in maintaining White masculinity's racial and gendered power at the cost of racial and gendered "Others."

### **Locating Critical Whiteness Studies within Communication and Sport**

During the 2016 Rio Olympics, Gabby Douglas, a 20-year-old woman gymnast and Olympic gold medalist who occupies Black positionality, was scrutinized by U.S. and international news and sports media and fans on social media for failing to put her hand on her heart during the U.S. National Anthem. Douglas repeatedly has been subject of media and fan criticism for not styling her hair and/or face to people's liking, or cheering on her teammates in an "appropriate" way (Gray, 2016). Meanwhile, her U.S.A teammates from the men's swim team, Ryan Lochte (who is 32), Gunnar Bentz (who is 20), Jimmy Feigen (who is 26), and Jack Conger (who is 21), all men who occupy White positionality, drunkenly vandalized a Rio gas station bathroom and engaged in an altercation with a security guard. They then lied to media

and the public to cover up the incident by falsifying a story about being robbed at gunpoint and filed a false police report to Brazilian authorities. Rather than receiving any critique for their behavior, the 2016 Rio Spokesman, Mario Andrada, said that the public needs to “give these kids a break” because “sometimes you take actions that you later regret” (Gray, 2016, para. 5). A few months after the Olympics, Lochte was invited to participate on *ABC*’s “Dancing with the Stars,” solidifying his place as a sport and popular culture icon. The stark contrast between reactions to Douglas and reactions to the members of the men’s swim team, masculine Olympians who occupy White positionality, reveal the intersectional ways in which women of color are policed and scrutinized, while men who occupy White positionality are excused with “boys will be boys” rhetoric. As Gray (2016) points out, “Lochte is a straight, white man, who has long been beloved for his pretty face, doofy personality and charmingly slow demeanor during interviews. Douglas is a young, black woman who has battled racialized critiques of her appearance and attitude for years, despite winning three Olympic gold medals” (para. 8).

Incidents like these exemplify how sport has been and continues to be an important space in which individuals and institutions struggle over the significance and meaning of race (King & Springwood, 2001). Beyond meanings of race, however, incidents like these support the arguments in this dissertation and illustrate how whiteness works as a strategic rhetoric to perpetuate White dominance, as well as how it intersects with gender, and particularly masculinity, to degrade historically and multiply marginalized individuals, and specifically women who occupy Black positionality. Therefore, as the 2016 Rio Olympics have shown, racial and gender identification is not monolithic or complete, rendering a continued critical reading and examination of whiteness and its complicated intersections with gender within the terrain of sport. Furthermore, whiteness’s ability to, through intersectional performances, multiply

marginalize historically disenfranchised individuals, like women of color, are relevant in the study of communication and sport. More important than relevance, however, is the *necessity*, for the sake of racial and gender justice, to call out whiteness's cultural space and influence, and challenge its cultural power. Such worthy efforts, I argue, can be achieved through researching and interrogating communicative practices and performances within sport via critical whiteness studies scholarship that centralizes the voices of historically marginalized individuals, including women of color.

Important examinations of women and femininity within men and women's college and professional sport have interrogated how women are represented, sexualized, objectified, and disparaged (Bruce, 2013). However, recent studies, with few exceptions (e.g., Hodler & Lucas-Carr, 2015), have focused on a generalized and monolithic examination of women and femininity, rather than an intersectional one that considers elements of race, nationality, and socioeconomic status, among other identity locations, as mutually influential elements of gendered identity and oppression (Gee, 2015; Kane, LaVoi, & Fink, 2013; Smith, 2016a; Wolter, 2015). Particularly, examinations of women in sport are commonly grouped into one monolithic group, thereby universalizing White positionality to historically marginalized individuals. Problematically, this contributes to common feminist research practices that either group women of color with women who occupy White positionality or with men of color, but never as a distinct group who experience oppression due to a unique standpoint, one informed by intersections of race, gender, nationality, and often socioeconomic status, among other identity positionalities (Collins, 1991). Furthermore, in obviating the distinct standpoints of women of color, whiteness is maintained as normative, invisible, centralized, and therefore, preserved at the top of the racial hierarchy. Additionally, while many of these aforementioned projects take a



feminist approach and work as scholar activism for gender equality, the absence of studies utilizing BFT and intersectionality, or any other approach that calls attention to multiple marginalizations, as a guiding approach, marks an important opportunity and need within communication and sport. Particularly, communication and sport is confronted with an opening to welcome and nurture critical whiteness studies projects that identify and contest whiteness in sport and give voice to historically multiply marginalized populations (for examples, see Dickerson, 2016; Griffin & Calafell, 2011; Griffin & Phillips, 2014; Flores, Ashcraft & Marafiotte, 2013; Oates & Durham, 2004) .

In addition to a focus on women and femininities, examinations of men and masculinity continues to be a fruitful and insightful site for analysis in communication and sport (Messner, 2013). However, like communication and sport research focused on women and femininities, projects focused on men, masculinity (e.g., Fielding-Lloyd & Mean, 2015; Lamb & Hillman, 2015), and hegemonic masculinity (e.g., Messner, 2013; Rodriguez, 2016; Sandersen, Weathers, Snedaker, & Gramlich, 2016; Smith, 2016b), have utilized a monolithic lens, rather than an intersectional lens, resulting in the obviation of the significance of whiteness in understandings of masculinity. Unlike projects that examine Black masculinity or Asian masculinity, projects examining masculinity in general assume a White masculinity as a focal point of analysis when intersections of race are not explicitly addressed. Therefore, the umbrella concepts of “masculinity” and “hegemonic masculinity” are often whitewashed unless explicitly examined as Black masculinity or Asian masculinity, for instance. This results, just like projects focused on women and femininities, in scholarship that challenges the gender order, but maintains the normative, invisible, and centralized location of whiteness, and therefore, its place at the top of the racial hierarchy.

As this dissertation argues, racial and gender hierarchies within men's professional sport have been strategically and even vigorously defended and maintained by intersecting discourses of whiteness and hegemonic masculinity. This is also evident in communication and sport scholarship by the mere absence of scholarship that names whiteness particularly when gender inequities are examined. Therefore, scholarly activists, like myself, who aim to speak back to and dismantle racial and gender hierarchies by challenging common racialized and gendered representations and controlling practices of whiteness and/or hegemonic masculinity, must engage in more intersectional examinations. This will allow for communication scholarship to further unpack and develop a more complex understanding of how, due to intersections of identity locations, including (and especially) whiteness, certain masculinities and femininities are ostracized within sport to maintain a racial and gender order that favors White hegemonic masculinity in a way that is accepted as natural and normal. Essentially, grouping hegemonic masculinity into a uniform group encompasses all masculinities within whiteness's cultural space, thereby presenting specific challenges for understanding the salient role that whiteness and other identity locations play within expressions of masculine domination and/or oppression. In total, intersectional analyses of whiteness and its historical practices and strategies in maintaining its racial power within sport, as well as how it multiply marginalizes individuals outside its cultural space, is a necessary endeavor for the growing field of communication and sport.

The establishment of the Communication and Sport Division at the National Communication Association in 2014, as well as the founding of a quarterly peer-reviewed journal in 2013, *Communication & Sport*, affirms the growth of scholarly communication approaches to the analysis of sport. Such establishments reaffirm the communicative power of

sport as a cultural site by indicating the further need, and therefore opportunity, to examine sport from a communication perspective. Prior to such recent formal establishments, research concerning communication and sport, regardless of methodology, has had to find its place within communication journals not particularly dedicated to sport research and analysis (e.g., De B'éri & Hogarth, 2009; Griffin, 2012, 2013; Lavelle, 2010; Mercurio & Filak, 2010), or publish within journals related to the sociology of sport, kinesiology, or another related field (e.g., Buffington, 2005; Cunningham, 2009; Dufur & Feinberg, 2009; Leonard, 2004; Oates & Durham, 2004). Given these new outlets for research presentation and publication, sport scholarship specifically conducted from a communication perspective is further supported. Such support nurtures growth of the field as well as the development and advancement of mutually influential relationships with other fields that utilize a critical cultural approach to communication. These current and potential relationships, including those with many disciplines that numerous established and emergent sport scholars currently derive from, including intercultural communication, rhetorical criticism and theory, and critical whiteness studies, are ripe with possibilities.

With this reaffirmation of the significance of communication and sport scholarship, the relationship between critical whiteness studies and communication and sport is a necessity and an opportunity for this growing area of study. The examination of whiteness specifically within the terrain of sport has a history in several academic disciplines (see King, 2005), but has been slow to establish its influence within the recent progression and growth of the study of communication and sport (Wenner, 2013). Amidst the progress in the analysis of sport within the field of communication, insightful examinations of race and racism within sport have often occurred through the analysis of race (Colás, 2016; McGovern, 2016; Turner, 2014), celebrity and race (Andrews, 2013; Mocarski & Billings, 2014), Black masculinity (Mocarski & Billings,

2014), color-blind ideology (Dickerson, 2016), and racism (Lavelle, 2015), but particular attention to whiteness as a strategic rhetoric, as well as the role of intersectionality in White domination, is not common place. This is similar to other disciplines, like sociology of sport, which have, instead of examining whiteness specifically, have talked about race, racism, and racialization using terms like prejudice, exclusion, bias, stratification, oppression and dominance (King, 2005). These findings and analyses, however, while profoundly important for describing, and in the case of critical work, challenging, prejudice, exclusion, and racializations, do not always principally engage *whiteness* as a strategic rhetoric. Nor do they interrogate its intersections with other identity locations, and its role in maintaining White domination through the intersectional marginalizations of racial and gender “Others.” As a result, there remains an urgent, foundational need to address, challenge, and critique whiteness’s cultural space within sport.

### **Concluding Remarks**

Rhetorical criticism and theory are concerned with the concrete material effects (i.e., societal, political, economic) of symbolic action. The power of language and discourse, from this perspective, is not merely to reflect reality, but to frame, alter, and constitute reality. Rhetoric, therefore, is not passive, but is active in shaping society and the lived experiences of its individuals. Through the examination of language and discourse, this dissertation has aimed to name and challenge rhetorics representing the intersections of whiteness and hegemonic masculinity in an effort to challenge the reality that they so strategically construct. Throughout this critical process, the ways in which whiteness rhetorics work collaboratively with rhetorics of hegemonic masculinity to marginalize the voices of men and women who occupy Black positionality and victims of domestic abuse was revealed and challenged. While the two

rhetorical moments analyzed within this dissertation focus on U.S. men's professional sport, as I have aimed to argue, the ramifications for such workings of whiteness have societal implications for the maintenance of a system, that is, the new racism, which favors whiteness and hegemonic masculinity. When whiteness is named and de-centralized, marginalized voices can be heard and considered, thereby calling attention to historical strategies within sport that have silenced and oppressed individuals who do not occupy White masculine positionality. Without projects that challenge whiteness rhetorics and its strategic intersection with hegemonic masculinity, marginalized voices, particularly of people who do not occupy White positionality, which is not just limited to individuals who occupy Black positionality, are further disenfranchised within sport, allowing for whiteness to maintain its historical power. Moreover, the presence of critical whiteness studies scholarship further allows for marginalized academic voices to be vocalized, and therefore valued and influential. As Karenga (1999) points out, White domination is a social problem of *thought* and *practice*, which is sustained by whiteness rhetorics that justify ideologies of the new racism. As scholars, it is necessary to centralize the voices of those cheated, excluded, exploited, hurt, and denigrated, to allow for self-determination and self-definition of historically multiply marginalized individuals so that the material conditions and life chances of people of color can be improved. King (2005) argues for a sport studies marked by urgency and creativity that works to move individuals out of the margins within sport and makes a space for people of color to speak as equals. It is my sincere hope that this dissertation work has been marked by both urgency and creativity, but also, and most importantly, I hope that it has resisted and de-centered whiteness, thereby giving voice and value to those outside of its cultural space.

As I worked through this research process, I engaged in a continual practice of reflection regarding my own standpoint as a woman who occupies White positionality and its role within

the structures of the new racism, and certainly, its role within the larger purpose of this dissertation. My reflection embodied what Warren and Hytten (2004) explain as the experience of a “Critical Democrat.” Warren and Hytten describe that for individuals who occupy White positionality, working or enacting the position of a Critical Democrat means understanding and eventually challenging whiteness by balancing various tensions. They explain:

Critical Democrats must balance their own relationship with or investment in whiteness—that is, they must not obsess about their own actions, ending up with a worldview that begins and ends with them— while always keeping their own implication in the perpetuation of racism in play. (p. 330)

They go on to explain:

Critical Democrats balance their examinations of their own role in racism while simultaneously examining the roles of others. Additionally, Critical Democrats balance their own understandings of whiteness and racism while continuing to read and participate in conversations about the intricacies of racial constructions of power. (p. 331).

Completing this dissertation necessitated that I strove intensely for an intimate and complex empathy that bred understanding of the intricacies of intersectional oppression experienced by men and women who occupy Black positionality as well as femine survivors of domestic abuse. I struggled and endeavored to understand the silencing, objectification, and ostracization that women of color and feminine victims of abuse, as well as the control, commodification, and surveillance, among other marginalizing practices, that men who occupy Black positionality experience due to intersectionality. As I worked (and continue to work) through specific tensions, the push and pull between action and reflection as well as speaking out

and listening, I hope that I was able to, and will be able to continue to, create a balance between understanding my personal investments in whiteness and my engagement with the cultural texts and the literature that allows for research that functions as both a form of resistance and hope for those marginalized by whiteness and its complex intersection with hegemonic masculinity. By managing listening and speaking as well as reflecting and acting, Warren and Hytten (2004) argue that the imagination of societal possibilities and change is possible. This imagination of societal change, or the movement towards social justice, can, as this project has shown, be expressed through critical whiteness studies scholarship, which I will continue to pursue beyond this dissertation.

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