

The Creation of a Superstar: Study into the Relationship
Between the Media's Role & Fan's Perceptions in Creating
Superstars Athletes

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Abstract

This study takes a closer look into the creation of sports superstars as seen through the sports media. The rise to superstardom is categorized by an increase in media coverage for an athlete which includes an influx of differing themed narratives. This study seeks to identify and understand the themes that are used to frame two unique case studies that portray the meteoric rise of an athlete into superstardom. The study uses framing theory and previous research to attempt to identify and understand the themes present in ESPN's Sportscenter's coverage of this rise to sports superstardom. Alabama Crimson Tide quarterback, Tua Tagovailoa and former Duke Blue Devil basketball star, Zion Williamson, serve as unique case studies of sports superstardom and are examined in order to pinpoint the themes used by the media in the creation of narratives involving sports superstardom. The units of analysis for this study consist of clips for each case study that are taken from YouTube, containing Sportscenter's coverage surrounding both Tagovailoa and Williamson. Focus groups will then be gathered in order to discuss these themes and provide a deeper and richer understanding of the identified themes as well as an opportunity to identify new, emergent themes that may have been overlooked. The two case studies were chosen using previous research in theme development and uniqueness of narrative characteristics, which will aid in the identification of differing themes that run through Sportscenter's coverage of their rise to superstardom.

Keywords: superstardom, thematic analysis, focus groups, framing theory

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Introduction

Superstardom is not a new phenomenon in sports, however with the extending number of media outlets for sports fans, athletes are more visible to fans than ever before. An athlete's on field performance as well as his/her personal life, business ventures, and political views are easily accessible to fans throughout the world. Aided by the immense amount of sports media found in television, radio, and sports websites, athletes are crossing over from players to celebrities and from sports figures to pop culture personalities. In order to determine the media's role in this transformation, this research project utilizes framing theory to examine the portrayal of athletes throughout these media outlets.

A qualitative thematic analysis was utilized to identify emergent sports, superstar themes in the narratives that are present in coverage by ESPN's *Sportscenter* for two specific case studies. The first case study examined is that of Tua Tagovailoa, the Alabama Crimson Tide's quarterback, who brought the Crimson Tide back from a second half deficit in the January 8th, 2018 BCS national championship game, played against the Georgia Bulldogs. *Sportscenter's* coverage of his career and rise to superstardom after that game is the focus of the first case study. The second case study spotlights Zion Williamson, a Duke University basketball player that rose to prominence during the 2018-19 college basketball season. A deeper examination into the factors and themes present in *Sportscenter's* coverage of Williamson's career is the subject of the second case study. In addition to a thematic analysis of ESPN's *Sportscenter's* coverage of these case studies, focus groups were assembled in order to better understand the importance and

effect of these themes on audiences. By utilizing focus groups as a secondary method for data collection, insights that may be overlooked with a single thematic analysis may emerge through the interactive, 'group effect' present in focus groups. The data collected will provide a better understanding as to why athletes become superstars in the eyes of fans. The data will also be helpful to advertisers who are looking for the next big, superstar athlete to endorse their products. By gaining insight into the media's role in the creation of sports superstardom, advertisers will have a better chance to forecast the next superstar, in order to maximize his/her superstardom. Media chooses, or frames, athletes to boost and expand its own viewership and a better understanding of sports fan's perceptions of these frames is valuable in producing favorable attitudes toward the athlete and, in turn, the products he/she may endorse.

Framing Theory

In communication, framing refers to the collection of experiences, ideologies, and stereotypes individuals use to interpret the world around them. Frames help to shape an individual's views and behaviors during social interactions. The term 'frame,' originally proposed in the field of ecology, refers to a conceptualization of understanding that allows for animals to make sense of their interactions with others (Bateson, 1955). For example, frames allow a dog to distinguish whether it should fight or play with another dog. Goffman (1974) later expanded on this idea by setting the theoretical framework into the field of social sciences. The term 'primary framework' is used to describe the interpretations humans make about the surrounding characteristics of an interaction (Goffman, 1974). According to Goffman (1974), frames are a collection of perspectives and concepts that are created in order to arrange experiences and shape an individual's actions. "... a primary framework is one that is seen as rendering what would

otherwise be a meaningless aspect of the scene into something that is meaningful” (Goffman, 1974, p. 21).

A frame or framework describes an individual’s understanding of what occurs within and around a social interaction. A frame is a “central organizing idea or story line that provides meaning,” (Gamson & Modigliani, 1987, p. 143). Framing is a process that allows for individuals to develop an understanding of an interaction or to change their conceptualization of a situation. The evolution of frameworks into the social sciences has allowed for the introduction of multiple theories describing frames and human interaction, one of which is framing theory.

Framing theory was introduced by Erving Goffman (1974), and posed that frames are a collection of perspectives and concepts that are created in order to arrange experiences and shape an individual’s actions. Goffman (1974) also presented that individuals interpret the world around them through a primary framework. Framing is particularly present within the media. The media focuses on certain events and omits others in order to form a desired meaning. The simple omission of events and perspectives disqualifies the viewing public from making a fully informed decision and in turn, guiding their actions. Framing effect, a phenomenon described as changes made to a narrative or presentation of an idea, issue, or event produce a change in opinion or attitude toward the certain idea, issue, or event. These changes are often small and can create an often large change in opinion (Chong, Druckman, 2007). A person’s frame in their own thoughts has a substantial impact on their overall opinion. Political candidates utilize this knowledge to impassion voters and change attitudes to be in line with that of the politician. Highlighting certain parts of a candidate’s platform and minimizing others aids in setting frames that will be in line with a voter’s already existing values (Jacoby, 2000). Emtman (1993) proposes a more modern definition of framing:

to frame a communicating text or message is to promote certain facets of a 'perceived reality' and make them more salient in such a way that endorses a specific problem definition, casual interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or a treatment recommendation (p. 51).

Framing theory is often coupled with agenda setting theory when it comes to analyzing media. Agenda setting theory, posits that the media selectively produce and deliver stories to the public. Media uses agenda setting theory to create which views are shown to the public. "Agenda setting serves as the first function of framing as it defines the problems worthy of attention" (Entman, 1993, p. 165). Framing theory then, is suggesting how individuals should interpret those views. Framing theory has never been more utilized then in today's media outlets. The use of framing theory covers issues involving politics, school shootings, education, advertising, and sports. Framing allows for the media to extend their biased points of view onto readers, watchers, listeners and consumers. In the case of sports, agenda setting and framing theory allows for sports media outlets to formulate stories that will provide the consumer with a point of view in order to shape their attitudes when it comes to athletes. Framing theory, in the field of television sports broadcasting, couples narratives with visual images to produce effects that intend to frame the broadcasts to align with certain themes that are prevalent in the sports world. "Sports journalists can and do employ various frames that emphasize specific content in their stories," (Lewis & Weaver, 2013, p. 219). The mix of narratives and visuals can be a powerful combination when it comes to framing certain issues. The potential of visuals, in framing theory, was recognized by Goffman (1979) when discussing advertising and gender framing. Framing theory, then, aids in media outlets creating narratives that can convert an athlete to that of superstar status. This use of strategic framing allows for journalists, politicians,

and broadcasters to use themes in narratives in order to frame certain ideals, issues, or individuals in a way that is congruent with the values of their audiences.

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

Strategic framing allows for information to be more streamlined, it becomes more impactful or memorable (Entman, 1993). The media use strategic framing to create lasting impressions on publics when it comes to defining issues and changing certain behaviors involved with these issues. “The entire study of mass communication is based on the premise that the media have significant effects,” (McQuail, 1994, p. 327). These effects as described by McQuail (1994) are the evolution of framing theory making its way into the media and mass communication as a whole. According to McQuail (1994), these media effects have both a strong and limited effect on the public. The desired effect of framing theory in the media is to influence the beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors of the public. This effect would be considered a strong media effect and media would have succeeded in strategically framing images of reality in a powerful and patterned way that serve to influence the public.

Framing in Sports

In the case of sports, framing theory and strategic framing allows for sports media outlets to formulate stories that will provide the viewing public with a point of view in order to shape their attitudes when it comes to athletes, teams, and organizations. Through framing theory, media outlets can help to shape attitudes and therefore change behaviors. Sports media outlets produce stories that involve sports teams and athletes and have to identify the information that is reported. The way in which athletes are portrayed in the media stems from the actions and decisions producers, sportswriters, and editors of the specific sports programs make. These decisions include the features, athletic or personal, and the style in which that narrative will be delivered to the audiences (Lewis & Weaver, 2013, p. 221). According to Price, Tewksbury, & Powers (1997) these frames can influence the way that athletes and teams are understood and evaluated in the public.

One example of how framing in the sports media can uplift a player or team into the public eye by the prevalence and framing of a story is the rise of Doug Flutie in 1984. Flutie, a Boston College quarterback and Heisman Trophy winner, was thrust into the public view when he and his team defeated, then #1 ranked Miami (Florida), in a matchup, November 23rd, 1984 via a last second 'Hail Mary' pass, dubbed the "Miracle in Miami". The media portrayed Flutie as an all-American quarterback at an underdog university defeating the 'bad guys' of college football. This example extends further back to include the framing of the often-criticized Miami football team for not following the rules and being characterized by the media as 'bullies' and 'thugs.' According to Lewis & Weaver (2013) when a player gains more and more coverage, through the media, he/she is judged by not only they're on the field accomplishments but also by their off field lives, which are reported on by the media.

The media determine what parts of their lives that are to be reported. These narratives are created to improve the appeal of a sports television broadcast to accomplish goals such as enhancing the audience share, profit, or even status of the telecast. Media aims to appeal to a broad number of viewers, not just those viewers that tune in for a specific sport or athlete. There is a need in sports broadcasting to create personas for athletes, to provide a personality, a narrative, to entertain fans. Fans have a desire to embrace athletes and their personalities, which are often constructed using recognized human qualities and stereotypes (Izod, 1996). To keep and maintain viewership sports media consistently constructs and frames stories about athletes and teams that peak the interests of viewers. These narratives are constructed in a way that may or may not tell the entire story of an individual or team and tend to frame each in a way that keeps audiences interested and engaged. One way of accomplishing this kind of engagement is the creation of narratives where certain themes emerge. These themes are prevalent throughout media, including journalism and sports.

Themes in Media & Sports

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

Lecheler, & De Vreese (2015) conflict is a major theme that is used in framing. Conflict framing is also some of the most often used in political communication across times and culture (De Vreese, Claes, Jochen, & Semetko, 2001). Framing theory is dependent on narratives themes that can span across cultures, socio and economic groups, racial groups, and age groups in order to disseminate a message that can be deciphered by many in order to change attitudes and behaviors.

The sports media is no different in their attempt to frame both athletes, and teams in certain lights that will both entertain and enthrall audiences. Messner, Dunbar, & Hunt (2000) identified 10 recurrent themes throughout sports broadcasting that they have dubbed the 'Televised Sports Manhood Formula.' (p. 380). The Manhood Formula is described as a "master ideological narrative that is well suited to discipline boys' bodies, minds, and consumption choices in ways that constructs a masculinity that is consistent with the entrenched interests of the sports/media/commercial complex," (Messner et al., 2000, p. 380). These 10 themes are observed again and again when analyzing the frames that sports media send out to the public, especially when targeting 8-17 year-old boys. The 10 recurrent themes produced by Messner et al. (2001) were 'white males are the voices of authority,' 'sports is a man's world,' 'men are foregrounded in commercials,' 'women are sexy props or prizes for men's successful sport performances or consumption choices,' 'whites are foregrounded in commercials,' 'aggressive players get the prize; nice guys finish last,' 'boys will be (violent) boys,' 'give up your body for the team,' 'sports is war,' and 'show some guts.' These themes are used in the framing of sports television to ensure lasting viewership and to change or reinforce beliefs and attitudes toward products that are endorsed and sold through the use of sports media. Major themes that encompass the Televised Sports Manhood Formula a prevalent in ESPN's *Sportscenter* coverage

of the major sports, including football, basketball, baseball, and extreme sports and continue to run through the advertisements that accompany these sports (Messner et al., 2001). Sociologists involved in the sports genre tend to agree that the most common involvement that fans have with sports is through watching sports on television (Loy, McPherson, & Kenyon, 1978). This viewing public watch the contests and learn about heroes, favorites, and underdogs. These themes run through the mediated sports cycle and form a basis for a shared sports culture In America (Wenner, 1989). Mediated sports mirror some of the same values that are important in American society. Edwards (1973) has pinpointed some of these values, characteristics, that develop in sports as character, competition, mental and physical fitness, discipline, nationalism, and religiosity. These values serve to frame the way sports is portrayed in the media, television especially. The visual medium of television allows for these values to be played out before the eyes of the viewers and provides a more visceral platform for the development of these 'American' values.

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

following the game. Media also thrives to create themes of human interest in the broadcasting of sport. Two themes that arise in sports broadcasts are those of the ‘underdog’ and ‘favorite.’ Sports media is greatly aware that the competition of sport is a primary reason for fans to tune into games. “One of the fundamental characteristics of sport in western society is that it is a competitive activity... This characteristic creates an uncertainty in game situations regarding the outcome, and this unpredictability is important in creating the tension and excitement for the participants and spectators” (Frazier & Snyder, 1991, p. 380).

The process of creating the rules that help to maintain an ‘even playing field’ and thus, tension is known as ‘tension-balance’ (Kew, 1990). However, it is impossible to maintain this tension-balance for all sporting games all the time. Some individuals or teams will compete at a competitive disadvantage due to undermanned teams, less skill level, and unequal ability. This provides for a team or individual to be less likely to achieve victory and to be dubbed an underdog (Frazier & Snyder, 1991). This underdog theme runs through sports media and creates a narrative that draws in fans. “As suggested by the original use of the term underdog (comes from a 19th century song titled, “The Under-Dog in the Fight”) spectators and fans, at least in American society, are thought to be predisposed to root for the underdog” (Frazier & Snyder, 1991: 381). The theme of underdog then, sets the stage for the theme of the ‘favorite,’ the more skilled and able team that is predicted to prevail. These two prevalent themes add to the narratives that are created by the sports media. Looking back at journalistic myths, another theme emerges in the media coverage of American sport, that is ‘The Hero,’ as suggested by Lule (2001). The creation of both a sports hero and corresponding villain is a theme that resonates throughout sports. This narrative can be, most famously, seen in the stories of both Muhammad Ali and O.J. Simpson. Ali, a heavyweight boxer throughout the 1960’s and 70’s

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

Simpson, a Heisman Trophy winning running back at the University of Southern California and later a Hall of Famer for the NFL's Buffalo Bills, was treated as a hero during his career and well after when he transitioned into starring in movies. However, after he was alleged to have murdered his ex-wife, transitioned into a villain in the minds of the public. Moore & Moore (1997) describe this as a 'demonization' that transformed a cultural hero to a murdering husband in a "post-modern fall from grace" (p. 305). This transition was aided, by not only the journalistic media but also the sports media, who were also covering the case and trial. Themes of a cycle of violence and control were major themes that journalists and prosecutors pointed to throughout the trial (Cotterill, 2001). The theme of hero and villain is prevalent and necessary in sports broadcasting, it creates a narrative that enthralls viewers and cuts into the rooted human need to see who will prevail in the end. The use of these themes in the framing of sports only adds to the effect that framing theory has on viewing publics. Framing theory attempts to change attitudes, which in turn is shown to alter behavior.

Attitude and Behavior

Attitudes are abstractions. The construct of an attitude is not a single act or response it is an abstract ideal (Green, 1953). For instance, if an individual's attitude is less favorable toward a concept than another individual's, it is just to say that the first individual's actions and deeds are less favorable toward the concept. "A person's attitude is a function of his salient beliefs at a given point in time" (Fishbein, 1975, p. 222). Therefore, theoretically, attitudes can be formulated by exposing an individual to a chosen stimulus at a chosen time. The theory of reasoned action proposes that a person's intentions influence a person's behavior (Albarracín, Fishbein, Johnson, & Muellerleile, 2001) and in most studies that intention is propelled more by attitude than by the norms of society, (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993). In other words, a person's actions are heavily influenced by their attitudes. Kim & Hunter (1993) also found that there is a correlation between attitude and behavior. "Our results showed a strong overall attitude-behavior relationship when methodological artifacts were eliminated... the higher the attitudinal relevance, the stronger the relationship between attitude and behavior," (Kim & Hunter, 1993, p. 101). Considering that framing theory and media effects aim to change or reinforce the public's attitudes toward a certain issue, it is intuitive that the change or reinforcement of those attitudes may lead to a behavioral change as well. Classical conditioning principles of attitude formation suggest that "if a brand is repeatedly paired with a positively evaluated stimulus a 'direct transfer' of that evaluation to the brand might occur" (Olsen, 1975). The intermingled ideas that attitude is abstract, is a function of time, and can be formatted to coincide, through direct transfer, with a positive stimulus suggests that through positive media framing of a superstar athlete individual consumer attitudes can be altered. The link between framing theory and attitude change can, therefore, be furthered to that of behavioral change and in the case of sports

media can be used to retain or gain new viewership and to promote ideology that can be used for the promotion of certain products or entities. Therefore, the narratives that are created for individual and team success on television broadcasts are done so intentionally and strategically.

Superstardom

This study defines superstardom in sports as a combination of an athlete's on field performance with the perception of that athlete by fans and general publics. According to Cole (2005), superstars have common traits which include the commitment to excellence, high standards, unmatched work ethic and dedication. These traits describe an athlete's on field presence and athletic ability. To rise to the distinction of superstar the aspect of fan perception is required. "The televisual and back-page blitz that greets new sports talent is symptomatic of the media elevation of sporting achievement as part of a wider story, connecting the individual with society" (Boyle, 2009, p. 88). Public narratives are crucial in the development of sports superstars. To further the point of this study's definition of superstardom Whannel (1992) states "Stars are the bearers of the entertainment value of performance; as personalities they provide the individualisation and personalisation through which audiences are won and held; and as characters they are the bearers of the sporting narratives" (p. 122).

With the media being responsible for the narratives that are necessary to produce stardom within sports, an examination of the choices the media make is an integral step to deducing the fan's favorable or non-favorable attitude towards sports stars.

Athletic Sponsorship

Basketball isn't my job. For me, my job begins the moment I walk off the floor. It's everything that surrounds the actual playing of the games. My job is being a product endorser, an employee of the Chicago Bulls, trying to live up to the

expectations of others, dealing with the media. That's my job (Jordan, 1994, p. 43).

At times, even the superstars themselves see themselves as not just an athlete but an endorser of products. Athletic sponsorship is built on this premise. Along with the idea that favorable attitudes of athletes sell product. "The ability of sponsorship to connect to audiences who have become difficult to reach through traditional advertising methods, as well as the effectiveness of sponsorship as a marketing tool has been the driving force behind the remarkable growth of the sponsorship industry" (Bello, 2016, p. 1). Media allows for this connection and spans across states, countries, and continents, which allows for an almost universal dissemination of products and ideas. Athletes who have been shown through this same media can build a favorable attitude toward viewing publics and therefore help to form attitudes toward these products and ideas. Almost two-thirds of sponsorship spending goes toward sports and sports stars (International Events Group, 2015). A major reason for this spending is the popularity of sports throughout the world. Sports and sports stars have the ability "to attract a large and diverse audience, as well as the ability to stimulate high involvement in its audience" (Bello, 2015, p. 1).

ESPN Sportscenter

ESPN is an acronym for Entertainment and Sports Programming Network. ESPN started out as a cable network channel dedicated to sports. ESPN was the first and only 24-hour sports cable channel when it began and has since blossomed into additional cable channels, radio, a magazine and to the internet, where it has its own website which includes stats, journalistic sports stories and podcasts. It is owned jointly by The Walt Disney Company (80%) and Hearst Communications (20%). ESPN started broadcasting September 7th, 1979 in Bristol, CT., which has remained its headquarters. *Sportscenter*, ESPN's daily and nightly sports recap show and is considered ESPN's flagship program. It began in 1979, and covers highlights of sporting events,

analyses of completed and upcoming games, live reports, interviews, and narrative segments in the form of feature stories of pertinent sporting events. *Sportscenter* was originally broadcast once during a 24-hour span, but is now aired 12 times daily. “*Sportscenter*, a resonant repository of contemporary life values ‘coolness’ above all else.” (Farred, 2000, p. 96). *Sportscenter*, being as cultural relevant as it is, with anchors appearing in popular movies, *The Longest Yard* (2005), *Grown Ups* (2010), and *Blended* (2014), and television series, *Brockmire* (2017), *#Millenials* (2016), and *The Gentlemen’s League* (2011), serves as an important, relative, and contemporary vehicle for this study’s thematic analysis of the sports successes to be examined.

Tua Tagovailoa

Tuanigamanuolepola ‘Tua’ Tagovailoa is a quarterback for the Alabama Crimson Tide football team located in Tuscaloosa, Alabama. Tagovailoa, a back-up quarterback who was brought in to the 2018 BCS national championship game in the fourth quarter while trailing in the game, rallied the Crimson Tide to the title and has been the starting quarterback until an injury to his hip in November, 2019. Tagovailoa has since appeared in the 2019 BCS championship and has been prominent on Sportscenter’s coverage of college football. Tagovailoa has been instrumental in the Alabama’s Crimson Tide’s frequent appearances in the top five of the BCS polls, since his introduction in 2018. Tagovailoa has been repeated mentioned as the possible number one pick in the upcoming NFL draft. Some fans are encouraging their favorite NFL teams to follow the motto ‘Tanking for Tua,’ a phrase introduced after Tagovailoa’s rise to stardom, which may see teams losing on purpose to achieve the first pick of the NFL draft. Themes that have been identified in previous research in narratives, that include Tagovailoa, are the themes of culture [Polynesian], family, and a warrior theme that according to Saluga (2018) was prominent in the narrative surrounding Tagovailoa. This study will seek to identify these

themes as well as other emergent themes through the use of ESPN's *Sportscenter* clips found on *YouTube*.

Zion Williamson

Zion Williamson is a forward for the New Orleans Pelicans of the National Basketball Association (NBA). Williamson was the first overall pick in the 2019 NBA draft after he decided to leave Duke University after his freshman year. Williamson was a freshman forward for the Duke University Blue Devils in the 2018-19 basketball season. Williamson led the Duke Blue Devils to the NCAA tournament where they would suffer a 68-67 loss to the Michigan State Spartans. Throughout the tournament, Williamson was touted as 'the next big thing.' Williamson began to outshine his own team, inspiring a Bleacher Report article titled "2019 NCAA Tournament is Clearly the Zion Williamson Show after 25-Point Outburst," (Miller, 2019). Williamson has been featured on Sportscenter ever since he stepped foot onto the court at Duke University for his freshman season. Williamson, who was also featured on ESPN, during his high school basketball career has been touted as the next LeBron James to enter the NBA. A closer look at Williamson's coverage and narrative on Sportscenter will examine the themes that are present in the narrative of Williamson's rise to sports superstardom. The two unique case studies will utilize framing theory to examine the questions of the role of sports themes in creating narratives that aim to create superstar athletes.

Research Questions:

RQ₁: How does ESPN's *Sportscenter* frame superstar athletes?

RQ₂: What are the audience's perceptions of current sports frames informing superstars?

Methodology

This study attempts to extend the research in the field of sports media and its role in the creation of superstars. Using framing theory, the study will attempt to gain insight into the themes portrayed by ESPN's Sportscenter when promoting an athlete to superstardom. The use of a focus group to reinforce and/or expand on these themes as ideals in the sports fans mind will aid to understand the perceptions gained by sports fans into the formation of superstars in sports. These two case studies possess separate unique qualities that make them important and relevant in a qualitative thematic analysis. The previous research showed that each, individually, possessed characteristics that could be exploited by sports media in order to create three separate and distinct narratives. Case studies often are used to describe phenomenon on a small scale and then the results can be extrapolated to fit into a larger context. The use of case studies is a descriptive account of a certain event or happening that can be analyzed to inform about a larger similar context and become an anchor point of knowledge within a larger academic discussion. Case studies may offer insights into particular phenomenon that cannot be broached by other research methods or strategies (Rowley, 2002). The strength of a case study that it is able to investigate an event or issue in its own context. Case studies are particularly adept in providing answers to the 'How' and 'Why' questions concerning a particular issue and can be utilized for descriptive, exploratory, and explanatory studies. Case studies are used as a research design that allows for theory and logic to be connected to the data and conclusions of a study. Case studies also allow for speculation as to a theory from the data collected from a specific unit of analysis.

In the case of this research, the unit of analysis will be *Sportscenter* clips, pulled from *YouTube* that contain broadcasts regarding two individual case studies. In this study a thematic analysis will be conducted using framing theory, previous research, and the phases set out by

(Vaismoradi, Jones, Turunen, & Snelgrove et al., 2015) to identify themes that run through Sportscenter's coverage of two specific case studies. The process of determining exact themes in narratives is determined by the researchers aim and experience. Vaismoradi, et al. (2015) propose four phases of theme development:

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

These phases will allow for the thematic analysis process to be transparent and systemic. An analysis of ESPN's *Sportscenter* media clips will be conducted. This study will utilize *Sportscenter* clips pulled from *YouTube* for each of the case studies. The case studies were selected due their differences in the possible themes they may contain according to the previous research (Lule, 2001; Bartholome et al., 2015; Messner et al., 2000; Frazier & Snyder, 1991; Saluga, 2018). These clips will surround the individual events associated with each case study. Each clip ranges from :30 seconds to five minutes. This qualitative methods study will also utilize four 90-minute focus groups consisting of eight American sports fans in order to gain insight into open-ended questions by taking advantage of the 'group effect' and allowing respondents to elaborate and expound on certain answers. A conference room with a round 10-person table will serve as the setting for the focus group. A list of questions will be constructed to help move along discussions for the purpose of gaining insight into the research question. In

order to obtain both male and female sports fans above the age of 18, that watch at least 3 hours of sports media per week, an extensive search will be conducted. An over recruitment of 15% will be attempted in order to combat any occasions where all respondents may be absentee. The focus group will be moderated by trained moderators so that the researcher can observe and collect data. The researcher, in order to collect 'rich' data will be able to see the respondents during the focus group to record nonverbals as well as verbals. Video and audio records will be produced, with the consent of the participants, for later data collection and confirmation of live, recorded data. The utilization of a post thematic analysis focus group will lead to a richer, deeper understanding of the themes and frames that are present in these two case studies. Data from this study will be analyzed by organizing the responses into categories in order to find patterns that may be unseen from listening and watching alone. Once categories are created for content analysis purposes, a qualitative thematic analysis will be conducted, using the visual and audio recordings, which will make meaning from direct quotes and nonverbals from the focus group. Once conclusions have been drawn, a comprehensive report will be constructed and disseminated to interested parties.

Discussion

This study seeks to find a better understanding of the making of a sports superstar. First, by using framing theory, to identify the themes used by ESPN's *Sportscenter* in creating the narratives that are depicted in order to personify an athlete as a superstar. Also, by utilizing focus groups, an examining of how, and an understanding of what, fans see as the qualities of a superstar and by what they perceive the media portrays in order to frame athletes as superstars. The expectation is that by understanding sports fan's insights into the media's portrayal of athletes, conclusions can be drawn as to the effect of media framing on attitude formation in the

public. This study hopes to find a correlation between the positive, superstar defined 'frames' of the media and the formation of attitudes toward that certain athlete. The limitations to this research lie with the ability to identify themes within *Sportscenter* clips that are taken from *YouTube*. Not all clips of the entire careers of either Tagovailoa or Williamson will be examined. Possible themes that occur during these unseen clips will not be realized in this study.

Conclusion

It is possible that classic media themes such as 'The Victim,' 'The Scapegoat,' or 'The Hero,' as put forth by Lule (2001) are found within the narratives of these case studies. Also, the classic sports themes such as 'sports is war,' and 'aggressive players get the prize,' may re-emerge as central themes in these narratives. Still other themes, 'culture,' 'family,' and 'the warrior,' Saluga (2018) may prove to be the overlying themes. Focus groups will also aid in the reinforcement of the identified themes and the possible addition of the identification of new and emergent superstar themes. The utilization of two separate case studies (Tua Tagovailoa and Zion Williamson), *Sportscenter* clips (taken from *YouTube*), framing theory, and the phases of theme formation set out by Vaismoradi et al. (2015) allows for an extension of the previous research to be realized. The identification of superstar related themes through thematic analysis and the confirmation and/or identification of emergent themes, through the use of a focus group can aid in the formation of narratives that will be useful in the media to maintain viewership. These findings will allow advertisers to take advantage of the emergence and confirmation of sports superstars within their marketing strategies in their attempts to connect with the public. Another significance of the research is the possible ability of advertisers to predict, from sports fan's insights into the media coverage of an athlete, as to when and how an athlete may crossover to superstardom.

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Superstar definition is - a star (as in sports or the movies) who is considered extremely talented, has great public appeal, and can usually command a high salary. How to use superstar in a sentence. The notion that superstars are protected by NBA refs is neither a new nor a particularly farfetched one. Jack McCallum. 2 : one that is very prominent or is a prime attraction From Wolfgang Puck to Alice Waters, America's leading chefs have become superstars. Marian Burros With that the judge sentenced the one time superstar investor to three years in prison for his role in the largest insider-trading scandal in history. Time Magazine Chardonnay is the superstar among white-wine grapes Barbara Ensrud. Other Words from superstar. relationship between MT and the characteristics of flow, MT maintained a unique significant. 7. direct effect on the flow dimensions of concentration on the task at hand and sense of control. and gain a richer understanding of the relationship between MT and dispositional flow, we. 24. 1. offer an important insight into the process of optimal performance in sport. In addition, 3. The tug of war between Phelps' swimming ambitions and his desire to be an everyday teenager illustrates the central challenge facing parents raising exceptionally talented young athletes. They must devote ample time and money to helping their kids achieve their full potential without pushing so hard it robs them of their childhood or leads to a breakdown. Sports history is littered with stories of young phenoms whose parents erred too far in either direction, from ex-USC quarterback Todd Marinovich, whose drug habit was an open rebellion against his father's draconian training regime, to former basketball prodigy Lenny Cooke, who was left to fend for himself at times during high school and squandered his considerable talent. Superstars on the Superstation was a televised professional wrestling event, presented by Jim Crockett Promotions, filmed in advance at the Omni in Atlanta, Georgia, airing on TBS on February 7, 1986. The event drew 10,000 fans to the Omni, while the broadcast had a Nielsen ratings of 3.2. The event also featured several celebrities. Singer Willie Nelson and Major League Baseball pitcher Gaylord Perry were interviewed during the broadcast. Superstar is a term used to refer to someone who has great popular appeal and is widely known, prominent, or successful in some field. Celebrities referred to as "superstars" may include individuals who work as actors, actresses, musicians, athletes, and other media-based professions. The origin of the term in the context of celebrity is uncertain, but a similar expression is attested in *The Cricketers of My Time*, a famous cricket book by John Nyren about the Hambledon Club. Writing in 1832, Nyren