

Media portrayal of race in sports reveals biases in corporate world

February 3 2012

The U.S. may have its first black president and the Fortune 500 its first black female chief executive, but African American CEOs account for a mere one percent of the chiefs of those 500 largest companies.

Andrew Carton, assistant professor of management and organization at Penn State Smeal College of Business, and Ashleigh Shelby Rosette of Duke University, suggest in the current issue of the [Academy of Management Journal](#) that what steers people's perceptions of African Americans are stereotypes about blacks' leadership failings, biases that may not even be conscious.

The researchers found evidence of this phenomenon in a source seemingly remote from the corporate world -- newspaper stories about college football quarterbacks.

Buried in those press reports is a consistent pattern of associating losses with failed leadership when quarterbacks are black but not when they are white, and associating victories with quarterbacks' native athletic ability when they are black but not when they are white.

"Evaluators adjust the way they use stereotypes according to performance outcomes," the researchers report. "Specifically, negative leader-based stereotypes will be applied after [a black quarterback's] performance failure and non-leader compensatory stereotypes (i.e., black leaders succeed because of marginal qualities that 'compensate' for negative qualities) will be applied after performance success."

This stereotyping, Carton and Rosette observe, "may provide an important missing link in our understanding of bias against black leaders and may serve as an important contributor to barriers that impede the advancement of black leaders in organizations."

The study owed its genesis in part to Carton's own experience as a member of his college's varsity football team.

"I became aware of certain [racial biases](#), and when I later enrolled as a graduate student at Duke, I mentioned my experience to Professor Rosette, whose research included bias in the workplace. Quarterbacks are a good focus for any research on leadership, because they have an executive role on the field that is unique in sports.

The researchers analyzed newspaper reports over the course of a season for 119 teams in the Football Championship Subdivision, the highest level of competition in college football. They randomly sampled one story a week from the leading newspaper of each school's locale, and coders unaware of the nature of the study were assigned to extract words or phrases that evaluated the quarterback and his performance -- for example, where reporters cited a quarterback for "intelligence" or for being "fleet-footed." Evaluative text was identified for 113 quarterbacks, 82 white and 31 black.

Analysis focused particularly on text that conveyed competence or incompetence and athleticism or its lack, the former two intimately related to leadership. Of special interest was how writers accounted for teams' success in view of this presumption of black incompetence and whether they accounted for success or failure differently depending on quarterbacks' race.

"Black quarterbacks were perceived to be significantly more incompetent than whites when their respective teams lost, but this

difference was not found when their respective teams won," the researchers said.

For example, black quarterbacks of defeated teams were more likely than defeated white quarterbacks to be tasked by reporters for making bad decisions under pressure.

To help rule out explanations other than bias for the difference in reporters' perceptions of incompetence, the researchers looked for intellectual or scholastic factors. Neither the academic ratings of the colleges quarterbacks attended nor their grade point averages from high school were significantly associated with these perceptions.

Carton and Rosette say that one way to combat corporate CEO biases is for companies to institute "perception-based reform." This might involve fostering one-on-one or small-group interactions that can serve to enhance people's awareness of each other as individuals and not stereotypes.

The researchers also suggest that black leaders themselves can make their colleagues and subordinates more aware of their qualifications and experience, and of biases caused by stereotyping.

Provided by Pennsylvania State University

Citation: Media portrayal of race in sports reveals biases in corporate world (2012, February 3) retrieved 26 April 2024 from

<https://phys.org/news/2012-02-media-portrayal-sports-reveals-biases.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.