

# Race, Ethnicity and the Sport Media

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# Race, Ethnicity and the Sport Media

**Huidskleur, etniciteit en de sportmedia**  
(met een samenvatting in het Nederlands)

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## Chapter 1

### Introduction

I think it has something to do with the way their [Black athletes'] bodies are constructed....Their muscles are different, that is why they are better in sport. They have faster muscles...They are naturally better in sports such as sprinting; their bodies are built that way.

(Black Surinamese Dutch, male student about the international successes of Black males and females in sprint, cited in: Van Sterkenburg & Knoppers, 2004, p. 307).

Moroccan technical qualities and Dutch tactical understanding: a golden combination

(Mohammed Sinouh, brother of professional Moroccan Dutch soccer player Khalid Sinouh, about Dutch male soccer players of Moroccan origin. Cited by sport journalist Van Driel in daily newspaper *De Volkskrant* (sport section), 31 August 2006.

The quotations above illustrate the tendency of people to categorize athletes into a number of discrete racial or ethnic categories and to link these categories implicitly or explicitly to certain characteristics or qualities; 'Black people have fast muscles and excel in sprinting', 'Dutch soccer players of Moroccan origin combine Dutch tactical skills with Moroccan technical skills'. I have chosen to begin this research project with these quotations since they will return in the following chapters and reflect a recurring theme that runs through this book: Meanings given to racial and ethnic categories such as 'Black', 'Dutch' or 'Moroccan' in relation to sport. I deliberately use the terms 'race' and 'ethnicity' together here since it reflects my approach towards race and ethnicity throughout this research project as densely interrelated and conflated social constructs. I will return in more detail to my approach towards race and ethnicity later in this chapter. Brubaker, Loveman & Stamatov (2004) argue that racial and ethnic categories and the meanings given to these categories are tools used by individuals in contemporary western society to distinguish among people. These categories seem to work largely automatically and influence people's perceptions without their own awareness. The quotations above illustrate that sport media consumers as well as the sport media themselves are no exception: they also use or refer to racial/ethnic categories when discussing athletes, often on a daily basis, and relate these categories to certain qualities. Such daily reconstructions of race and ethnicity strengthen the significance of racial/ethnic

categorizations in processes of differentiation among people in modern western societies (Brubaker et al., 2004).

The role of the sport media in reinforcing racial/ethnic categories and boundaries is often overlooked or downplayed however, by sport commentators themselves (Bruce, 2004), by the general public and even in much of the academic writing about race and ethnicity. This also applies to the Dutch context where sport on television is usually trivialized as an innocent popular pastime in everyday talk. As a result, the complicity of the sport media in transmitting ideas about race and ethnicity receives relatively little critical reflection. I address this neglect in this research project. In contrast to a view on mediasport as a-political and innocent pastime, I argue that mediasport makes important contributions to people's beliefs and opinions about race and ethnicity. Sport programs are among the best watched programs on Dutch television (Stichting Kijk Onderzoek, 2010) and show and discuss players of a great variety of racial/ethnic backgrounds. Due to its multi-ethnic character and popularity, mediasport reinforces, shapes and challenges values and attitudes people hold about race and ethnicity. Sport coverage may even be more influential than coverage of 'hard news' in influencing viewers' ideas about racial and ethnic groups because in the sport context media users may exhibit relatively little critical reflection and, thus, more passively consume the ideas presented to them (Malcolm, Bairner & Curry, 2010). The sport media can therefore be considered as having a key role in transmitting popular ideas about race and ethnicity, 'a role arguably more powerful than any other social institution' as Carrington (2011, p. 86) argued. This particularly applies to sport coverage *on television* that is characterized by the simultaneous occurrence of verbal commentary and visual images. The visual character of television makes it possible for viewers to immediately identify race/skin colour of athletes when they appear on the screen. Even when sport commentators do not explicitly refer to the racial background of athletes, the visual information presented to the viewers can still make implicit connections for them between commentary statements and race of athletes. This interplay between commentary and visual imagery makes sport coverage on television an extremely powerful site for the articulation and reproduction of racialized meanings and beliefs. Sport commentators are essential in this process since they give meaning to the television images, they *anchor* the images through their verbal messages (e.g. Desmarais & Bruce, 2010; Meân & Halone, 2010). These messages always contain implicit assumptions and knowledge –sometimes elaborate knowledge – about how people of a certain racial or ethnic category characteristically behave (see also Medin, 1989). In this research project I will reflect on and

discuss the often taken-for-granted assumptions that are implicated in the use of racial/ethnic meanings and categorizations by sport commentators and sport media users.

In addition to this focus on the sport media and sport media consumers, I will explore and discuss the racial/ethnic categories and meanings used in sport media research and in a Dutch sport policy program. The racial/ethnic categorizations that researchers and policy makers use should be explored and discussed since they also help structure the ways in which people think about race and ethnicity. Specifically, I will show how sport research and sport policies that are explicitly dedicated to challenging and subverting racial/ethnic stereotypes and inequalities may use language that reifies rather than challenges these inequalities. My focus on racial/ethnic categories used in a Dutch sport policy program is additionally relevant since it gives me the opportunity to reflect critically on the dominant and uniquely Dutch racial/ethnic *allochtoon-autochtoon* categorization. This categorization was created by Dutch governing bodies relatively recently, at the end of the 1980s (Essed & Nimako, 2006) and is dominant today both in Dutch policy discourse<sup>ii</sup> and in Dutch popular and media discourses surrounding race and ethnicity. It shows both the *constructed* character of racial and ethnic categories and the structuring role policy making can have on the categories people and the mainstream media use. I use the Dutch sport policy program *Meedoen allochtone jeugd door sport* [Participation allochthonous youth through sport]<sup>iii</sup> as a case study to discuss the wider relations of power that are implicated in the use of this *allochtoon-autochtoon* categorization and the societal racial/ethnic hierarchies this categorization creates and stabilizes.

Such a relationship between the use of racial/ethnic categories in the context of sport policy and wider relations of power in (Dutch) society at large points to a recurring aspect of the various chapters of this research project: The interplay between discourses and categorizations as they are articulated in sports related cultural practices on the one hand, whether it is sports commentary, audience receptions of sport media content, sport policy or sports research, and general society on the other. The research project is, therefore, situated in a critical research tradition that explores how racialized power relations in wider society are played out in sports related cultural practices and how sports related cultural practices in turn have the potential to influence racialized power relations in wider society. As such, the relationship between the sport media, sport policy and sport research on the one hand and wider society on the other can be considered as mutually reciprocal. Exploring articulations of race and ethnicity in a variety of sport related cultural practices has added value since these

various practices all play a role in shaping individual understandings of race and ethnicity. It enables me to not only advance the debate on the use of race and ethnicity in and through the sport media which constitutes the major focus of this research project but also on the use of race and ethnicity in the discursive platforms of sport policy and sport research.

### **Aim and research questions**

The overall research question of this research project is: What racial and ethnic categorizations and discourses are implicitly and explicitly (re)constructed and used in and through the sport media, in sport policy and in sport research and how do these categorizations and discourses help to constitute and are constituted by broader relations of power? The following four related subquestions will be answered in detail in each of the next chapters. First, how do European Dutch and Surinamese Dutch media users give meaning to race/ethnicity and gender in professional sport practice and performance, to what extent do their meanings overlap with each other and with dominant sport media discourses, and how do their meanings constitute and are constituted by wider relations of power (chapter 2)? Second, what racial/ethnic categorizations are used in policy documents that describe the Dutch nationwide sport policy initiative *Meedoen allochtone jeugd door sport* [Participation allochthonous youth through sport], what racial/ethnic categorizations are used in international critical sport research and how are both categorization practices informed by and constitutive of wider racial/ethnic relations of power and racial/ethnic hierarchies (chapter 3)? Third, how have sport media researchers who used the method of content analysis to explore racial and ethnic biases in large volumes of sports commentary defined race and ethnicity, what are the implications of their definitions for wider racial/ethnic relations of power and what suggestions can be made to improve existing methods of content analysis of large volumes of sports commentary (chapter 4)? Fourth, how do Dutch soccer commentators on television construct racial/ethnic difference through their descriptions of soccer players and how do these constructions reinforce or challenge dominant discourses surrounding race and ethnicity and racial/ethnic hierarchies in Dutch society at large (chapter 5)?

### **Social and academic relevance**

The social and academic relevance of this research project is threefold. First, I focus on the (re)constructions of racial/ethnic difference in and through men's soccer commentary on Dutch television. Soccer commentators play a fundamental role in helping to (re)construct racialized/ethnicized beliefs about human difference through their verbal

representations of sporting bodies of diverse ethnic origins to mass audiences. A considerable amount of research (e.g. Billings, 2004; McCarthy, Jones & Potrac, 2003; Rada & Wulfemeyer, 2005) has focused on verbal representations of race and ethnicity in the US and UK sport media showing that commentators use racial/ethnic stereotypes. These stereotypes associate Black male and female athletes with natural athletic, animal-like physical capabilities while White athletes and in particular White male athletes remain more invisible in the media coverage or are more often associated with mental and intellectual qualities. As I will discuss later in this chapter, this use of stereotypes serves to reinforce unequal racial/ethnic relations of power in society at large. Very little is known, however, about language in *Dutch* televised sport in relation to race and ethnicity. This is surprising considering the popularity and multi-ethnic character of Dutch televised soccer that potentially makes it a key site for contributing to meanings the Dutch hold about race/ethnicity. This research project addresses the often neglected role of Dutch televised soccer in transmitting ideas about race/ethnicity that help to shape and reinforce (but also challenge) racial/ethnic boundaries and hierarchies in society at large. Second, the research project empirically addresses understandings of *media users* of various ethnic origins in relation to race and ethnicity in sport. Buffington & Fraley (2008) have argued that researchers have all too often speculated that sport media content has significant influence on how viewers see the world. However, the presence of research on sport media content is matched by an absence of research of audience receptions and understandings. It is, therefore, important to investigate discourses used by sport media users of various ethnic origins and explore to what extent their discourses are congruent with sport media content and with each other. Such an investigation provides researchers with a better understanding of the structuring role of sport media messages in framing ideas that individuals hold about race and ethnicity. Third, this research project reflects critically on the use of racial and ethnic categories in sport media *research* that aims to unravel racial/ethnic stereotypes and in a *sport policy* program that uses sport as a tool to improve interethnic relations. Even though the racial and ethnic categories that are implicitly or explicitly used in sport media research or sport policy documents often seem self evident, they are *constructed and discursive* ways to classify the Self and Others (Long & Spracklen, 2011a). In this project, I interrogate how these discursive classification processes and the implicit knowledge they (re)produce help construct and structure hierarchical racialized/ethnicized relations of power in general society, usually without the actors involved being aware of it. I propose a shift in focus in sport policy initiatives and suggest an alternative

methodology of conducting content analysis of race and ethnicity in sports commentary that helps policy makers as well as researchers refrain from unintentionally reinforcing racial/ethnic inequalities. In so doing, I answer Morning's (2009) call for scholarship 'that is explicitly dedicated to the description and analysis of our varied understandings of race and which aims to develop suitable methodological tools and theoretical propositions to structure and implement such inquiry' (p. 1172).

### **Set up of this chapter**

In the remainder of this Introduction, I first outline in some detail the theoretical tenets of the theoretical framework of the *cultural studies perspective* that has informed my analyses and my approach towards key concepts of this research project. I also discuss useful insights from *social cognition theory* that supplemented my cultural studies approach. After discussing the theoretical framework I elaborate on the basic themes that run through the various chapters that will follow. I give a summarized overview of the academic literature on the topic of sport media representations followed by an overview of existing research into audience receptions of race and ethnicity in the sport media. In my overview of literature, I pay specific attention to studies that conducted content analysis of large volumes of sports commentary since that method is also the focus of some of the chapters in this book. I then move to a more conceptual meta-level introducing some urgent issues in relation to the use of racial/ethnic *categories* in sport research and in Dutch sport policy. I sketch out some of the tensions that many scholars struggle with between the popular and essentialist use of racial and ethnic categories in everyday discourse and the scholarly understandings of race and ethnicity as fluid and discursive social constructs. Although both categorization practices pose their own problems, I introduce a way to synthesize them. In addition, I show how categorization practices used in the nationwide Dutch sport policy program *Meedoen allochtone jeugd door sport* [Participation allochthonous youth through sport] are situated in hierarchical racialized relations of power. Although I touch upon all these various elements in this Introduction, I return to them in greater depth in the various chapters that follow. The Introduction ends with an overview of the various chapters of this book.

### **Theoretical framework: A cultural studies perspective**

My writing in this project is primarily situated within the theoretical framework of a cultural studies perspective. As the cultural studies perspective combines insights from a variety of disciplines such as sociology, media studies, postcolonial studies and gender studies, it is

important to first define the foundational concepts of the cultural studies perspective that I drew on in this research project. The boundaries of my engagement with cultural studies are primarily based on three propositions of the cultural studies perspective that are widely regarded as its basic principles 1) an approach towards popular culture as *a site of struggle over meaning*, 2) a focus on *contextuality* and 3) a focus on *power relations* (Andrews, 2002; Grossberg, 2006; Hall, 1995; 1997). I will now discuss these three tenets of the cultural studies project in relation to the foci of my research project: (re)constructions of race and ethnicity among sport media users, in sports commentary, sport research and sport policy documents.

### **Struggle over meaning**

The cultural studies perspective considers practices such as sports commentary, audience receptions of sport media content, sport policy making and sport media research as practices where an ongoing *struggle over meaning* takes place. Cultural studies scholars like Hall (1997) speak in this regard also of *discourses* that are continuously reconstructed and struggled over. Since discourse is a complex concept that is used in many different disciplines, my use of discourse in this research project deserves some further explanation here. In very general terms, discourse can be seen as everything people talk and write about. Physical things and practices that exist in the material world gain *meaning* within discourse (Hall, 1997). This does not mean that physical things cannot exist outside or pre-date discourse, but it is discourse and not the things themselves that give meaning to the material reality, that produce knowledge. My use of discourse is mainly informed by Hall's definition as 'ways of referring to or constructing knowledge about a particular topic of practice: a cluster (or formation) of ideas, images and practices, which provide ways of talking about a particular topic or practice [...] (Hall, 1997, p. 6)<sup>iv</sup>. According to Hall, discourses, for instance about race/ethnicity, not only 'prefer' certain ways of talking or writing about these concepts but also exclude other ways of talking and writing about them. Discourses thereby help to (re)construct and (re)produce dominant meanings given to race and ethnicity. Discourse in this definition is not only a linguistic concept but is about language *and* about practice (Fairclough, 1995; Hall, 1997). Discourses produce meanings and these meanings are applied to everyday practice. They structure everyday practice, influence conduct and, thus, shape 'lived culture'. This understanding of discourse resembles that used by media scholar Macdonald (2003) who refers to discourse as 'a system of communicative practices that are integrally related to wider social and cultural practices, and that help to construct specific ways of thinking' (p.

1). According to Macdonald these ‘ways of thinking’ are open for contest and debate. She thereby conceptualizes discourse as historical *processes* of struggles over meaning rather than as a fixed position. The never ending struggle over discourses implies that discourses are never fixed or stabilized but can only be understood, captured and located in a specific historical and cultural context and as a result of relations of power (Andrews, 2002). Not surprisingly, *context* and *power relations* are therefore key terms within a cultural studies perspective.

### **Context**

A focus on *context* can be seen as one of the definitional cores of the cultural studies approach (Andrews, 2002; Grossberg, 2006). As Andrews (2002) has argued, discourses are always *constituted by* as well as *constitutive of* the cultural specificities of the broader societal context in which they are situated. It is, thus, impossible to understand discourse such as that about race and ethnicity without attending to the wider social and cultural context in which a discourse is situated. One of the main tasks of cultural studies scholars is, therefore, to reconstruct the social and historical context that produced the discourse under study and through which it becomes understandable. Context thereby refers not only to a specific time or place but more generally to the accumulation of historically produced relationships and circumstances that characterize that time and place (Grossberg, 2006). Together these relationships and circumstances determine the uniqueness of the historical moment or the *conjuncture* in question (Andrews, 2002). This focus on the contextuality of hegemonic discourses surrounding race and ethnicity implies that I will frequently reflect on and discuss the historical and cultural specificities of the use of race and ethnicity, in particular in relation to the Dutch context that serves as a reference point in most of the chapters that follow. The popular Dutch discourse surrounding race and ethnicity can be considered illustrative of the contextual character of race and ethnicity. Its unique terminology shows the context-specific character of race and ethnicity.

One of the most dominant racial/ethnic categorization used in everyday Dutch discourse is the earlier mentioned dichotomous categorization that distinguishes between the social groups of *allochtonen* and *autochtonen*. Governmental definitions of *allochtoon* and *autochtoon* prescribe that any individual with at least one parent who was born abroad is coined *allochtoon* and any individual whose parents were both born in the Netherlands is coined *autochtoon*. Everyday discourse can differ from such governmental discourse however. In everyday, popular Dutch discourse, the term *allochtoon* generally refers to non-White minority ethnic groups who experience a relatively low social economic status

regardless of birthplace of parents (Captain & Ghorashi, 2001). The white Dutch majority ethnic group is coined *autochtoon* (European Dutch) and occupy a privileged social group position in Dutch society. Since the dominant group of White European Dutch is usually not considered an ethnic group in popular Dutch discourse, the White European Dutch often function as the ethnically invisible norm against which the other minority ethnic groups are measured.

Apart from this very broad *allochtoon-autochtoon* categorization, the Dutch also often use another ethnic categorization that distinguishes between the largest ‘*ethnic minority groups*’ in the Netherlands. These are defined as ‘Turkish’, ‘Surinamese’, ‘Moroccan’ and ‘Antillean’<sup>v</sup>. The groups labeled as Surinamese and Antillean have come to the Netherlands as a result of the Dutch colonial past; The groups labeled as Moroccan and Turkish primarily came to the Netherlands as labor migrants during the 1960s. During the last decade, ethnic difference has been increasingly conflated with religious difference in Dutch everyday and mainstream media discourse. Moroccan and Turkish minority ethnic groups in particular have increasingly been referred to as Muslims and are situated within a negative discourse that equals Muslim and especially Muslim men with problems, criminality and terrorism (Essed & Nimako, 2006). I will return to the Dutch context in more detail in all the chapters that follow with a detailed synthesis in the concluding chapter of this research project.

#### *Race and ethnicity as conflated constructs*

Similar to cultural studies scholars like Hall (2000) and Gunaratnam (2003) I will treat race and ethnicity in this project as conflated social constructs. This is not due to a failure to realize that analytical distinctions can be drawn between race and ethnicity as some scholars have done (e.g. Jackson & Garner, 1998; Smith, 2002; Wagg, Wheaton, Brick and Caudwell, 2009). They associate race with meanings given to biological characteristics such as skin colour while ethnicity is defined in terms of differences grounded in cultural or religious features. However, such analytical distinctions do not seem particularly helpful in capturing everyday signifying practices in relation to race and ethnicity such as those used in the sport media, among sport media audiences and in sport policy documents. Hall (2000) and Brubaker et al. (2004) argued that in popular discourse about race and ethnicity biologically and culturally informed arguments as well as religiously informed arguments are often combined. Ethnic groups are, for instance, often characterized as distinct from each other in racial terms, in other words as being physically or biologically different. For example, people who have been stigmatized on

cultural or religious grounds such as the social groups of Asians or Muslims in many western societies have often *also* been characterized as biologically or physically different in significant ways. Modood, Berthoud & Nazroo (2002, p. 422) spoke in this regard of the ‘racialization of Muslims’.

The idea that physical appearance can be a marker of ethnicity is also evident in the Dutch context, for instance in the *allochtoon-autochtoon* distinction. Even though these technically sounding terms were invented by the Dutch government as *ethnic* categories that apparently circumvent any racial connotations or sensitivities, in everyday Dutch discourse skin colour has actually become an important marker to distinguish between the social group of *allochtonen* and *autochtonen* as I have explained in the previous section (see also Wekker & Lutz, 2001). Just like ethnic difference has been racialized throughout history, ‘racial’ characteristics like skin colour have also been associated with ethnic/cultural difference. A dark skin colour, for instance, has historically been associated with being closer to Nature but it has been associated at the same time with *cultural* inferiority (Hall, 2000). Hall (2000) therefore argued that racial exclusion based on biological characteristics and ethnic exclusion based on cultural characteristics should not be distinguished from each other but should be considered as racism’s two registers. According to Hall (2000), this conflation of race and ethnicity in everyday discourse is characteristic of contemporary western societies.

### **Power relations**

The third central tenet of the cultural studies approach is *power relations*. The use of a cultural studies approach typically requires scholars to connect discourses about race and ethnicity in a specific domain such as the sport media with wider relations of power in society at large. Relations of power determine which discourses surrounding race and ethnicity become dominant in society and considered as normative and ‘true knowledge’ and which do not (Foucault, 1981). It is usually the most dominant group in society who has the most resources to construct and determine the hegemonic discourse with respect to race and ethnicity (Elling & Luijt, 2009). Nederveen Pieterse (1995) has contended in this respect that hegemonic discourses are the result of the political relationship between social groups and the effort by the most powerful racial/ethnic group to legitimate its hegemonic position. When the established hierarchy is challenged by non-dominant social groups, the dominant group will use and highlight stereotypes about minority groups to keep them in their place and confirm the status quo. The dominant social group, thus, uses stereotypes as a discursive strategy to stabilize

existing racial/ethnic hierarchies (Carrington, 2001). This is often not a conscious process since the dominant group may reinforce its dominant status position and the status quo without knowing it (Hall, 1995). This reflects the power of hegemonic discourse to inform people's thoughts and practices, often without their own awareness.

Power relations are, however, never stable and always transformed and challenged. As a result, hegemonic discourses surrounding social group relations such as race and ethnicity are also always contested. Not only minority ethnic groups whose social position is not served by the hegemonic discourse challenge hegemonic discourses but also members of the dominant racial/ethnic group themselves. As Hall (1995) argued, it would be too simplistic to think of all people who are usually labeled White as belonging to a 'unified and racist ruling class' (p. 20) or, for that matter, of all people who are usually labeled as belonging to a minority ethnic group as by definition not complicit with racialized discourses (see also Long & Spracklen, 2011a). Such a conception lacks credibility since it does not fit social reality (Hall, 1995). In other words, White soccer commentators, audience members and policy makers who are positioned in a privileged social position in Dutch society on the basis of their skin colour may tend to draw on hegemonic discourses surrounding race and ethnicity since it serves to legitimate their privileged social group position, but may not necessarily always do so. In other words, there is no *guaranteed* correspondence between their racial/ethnic position and the discourses they draw upon since there is always the possibility of individual difference and agency influenced by the individual range of access to alternative discourses that circulate throughout society. This also points to the distinction that race scholars have made between *White people* as a socially constructed racial category that is internally differentiated and *whiteness* as a *process* consisting of discourses and cultural practices that sustain White dominance, normativity and structural advantage (Frankenberg, 2004; Hylton, 2009; 2010; Wekker, 2002). Put differently, even though White people share a 'racially conditioned perspective on the world' (Hartigan, 2010, p. 87), there is always the possibility for White individuals to negotiate or resist this racially conditioned perspective. At the same time, White people often remain unaware of this 'racially conditioned perspective' that is usually constructed as normative, remains invisible and is rarely discussed by Whites in White dominated societies. This points to one of the defining characteristics of White privilege that White people experience in White dominated societies; they usually do not have to think about themselves in racial/ethnic terms (Hartigan, 2010). Whiteness and White privilege become visible in the current research project when White sport

commentators, sport media consumers, sport policy makers or sport researchers are engaged in meaning making practices that link differences in skin colour of athletes to different stereotypical qualities and characteristics. Consequently, performances of White athletes or athletes of the majority ethnic group remain racially unmarked and are valued more highly than those of non-White minority ethnic athletes. I will return to such processes of racialization in more detail later in this chapter and throughout the entire research project.

### *White Skin, White Research?*

The same complexity with regard to the relationship between whiteness and White people applies to White researchers who produce work on race and ethnicity. Most of the research in relation to race/ethnicity and sport has been conducted by White academics (see also Burdsey, 2010). This includes myself as a White male researcher writing about race and ethnicity. Although their own racial/ethnic background may mean that researchers tend to draw on and reproduce the hegemonic discourse surrounding race and reinforce dominant White-situated categories in and through their research, this influence is never total or definitive. Frankenberg (2004) argued that the opportunities for White researchers to write or act in ways that are *not* almost automatically congruent with dominant discourse depend on their critical reflexiveness. Frankenberg used the term critical reflexiveness to argue that ‘the [racial/ethnic] positionedness of the researcher must be examined and accounted for’ (p. 106). Obviously, the capacity to be self-reflexive varies from individual to individual and is facilitated by sites such as education, critical scholarly literature and interactions and experiences with members from minority ethnic groups (Essed, 1994; Hylton, 2009). For me, my university education and in particular the critical academic literature that continues to inform my research work has encouraged me to rethink my privileged social positioning as a White male in a White male dominated society and the *preferred* hegemonic discourses and categories that I may tend to reproduce in everyday life as well as in and through my research. Such reflexive thinking extended the diversity of non-hegemonic discourses that I can draw upon<sup>vi</sup>. This self-reflexiveness about myself as a (re)producer of discourse has hopefully resulted in research that tries to make explicit (instead of leaves unmarked) my own and other researchers’ assumptions about race and ethnicity. I have attempted to make such assumptions visible by critically interrogating well-established, commonly used White-situated conceptualizations of race and ethnicity in existing research practice, both of myself and of other researchers.

The use of a cultural studies perspective has helped me in this endeavour since a cultural studies perspective attends to the racial/ethnic positionedness of individuals and how that may influence the discourses they tend to draw on to make sense of their social world. In so doing, the cultural studies perspective does not leave the ‘racialness’ of White people undisturbed. But even though my use of a cultural studies perspective has been of essential assistance in guiding my research design and analysis of findings, as every theory it produces only partial knowledge since it represents one out of multiple theoretical stances towards or perspectives on the world (Denzin, 2010; Macdonald, Kirk, Metzler, Nilges, Schempp & Wright, 2002). Most importantly, as I argue in more detail in chapters 3 and 4, its conceptualization of race and ethnicity poses some theoretical and methodological problems when it comes to reckoning with everyday essentialism and popular racial/ethnic categorization practices. For that reason I found it particularly helpful to supplement my use of a cultural studies perspective as the primary theoretical lens with insights from social cognition theory. In the following and last paragraph of this theoretical section, I will sketch out how social cognition theory has informed my research and my approach towards the complex concepts of race and ethnicity.

### **Social cognition theory**

Whereas a cultural studies perspective views racial and ethnic categories as discursive social constructs whose meanings change across time and place, social cognition theory emphasizes that individuals themselves often use race and ethnicity as timeless and universal concepts in the world consisting of fixed categories. As Baumann (1999) and Brubaker et al. (2004) argued, people usually see race and ethnicity as something one ‘has’, as a fixed and homogeneous entity in the world rather than a social construct that one constructs and reconstructs from a particular perspective. People link the racial/ethnic categories they use to certain traits and qualities that each category is assumed to characteristically possess. According to social cognition theory, these racial/ethnic classification processes are the product of limited cognitive space individuals have and their necessity to deal with a rich and increasingly ethnically diverse social environment (Wetherell & Potter, 1992). The perception of others, therefore, has to be organized in a set of simplified racial/ethnic categories (Wetherell & Potter, 1992). The significance of social cognition theory for my research project is that it emphasizes the importance of essentialist, shared popular racial/ethnic categories in the practice of everyday talk, policy making, media broadcasting, audience receptions, and even in some of the constructivist academic writing about

race and ethnicity. A social cognition perspective requires scholars who study race and ethnicity to attend to the popular, essentialist notions of race that many individuals use to order the social world around them. These populist categories shape the realities and the discourses of the people that scholars are interested in and want to understand (Baumann, 1999). Sport commentators, media users, sport policy makers and researchers are probably no exception in this regard. They may also stabilize race and ethnicity and use fixed categories when they give meaning to or classify people of various racial/ethnic origins. Specifically, I acknowledge that popular societal categorizations of race and ethnicity require scholarly attention even if such essentialist, popular notions of race and ethnicity are not congruent with the social constructionist stance towards race/ethnicity as a time and place specific *floating signifier* (Andrews, 1996). In the next section I will discuss how *sport commentators* have been documented to reconstruct and reinforce but sometimes also have challenged such essentialist notions of racial/ethnic difference in and through their commentary practices.

### **Racialization processes in sports commentary**

Most people working in the western sport media are White males who belong to the dominant racial/ethnic group in the societies they work in (e.g. Carrington, 2011; Claringbould, Knoppers & Elling, 2004). Previous studies, that were primarily conducted in the US and UK, have shown that an implicit hierarchy of racial and ethnic groups is often articulated within the White-situated sports commentary (e.g. McCarthy et al., 2003; Rada & Wulfemeyer, 2005)<sup>vii</sup>. Müller, Van Zoonen & De Roode (2007) referred to this as processes of *racialization* used by sport commentators. Racialization/ethnicization refers here to unobtrusive, routine and subconscious everyday practices of racial/ethnic categorizing and stereotyping that may normalize everyday racism. More specifically, White sport commentators in these studies tended to draw on hegemonic discourses surrounding race/ethnicity that construct and reinforce a mind-body dualism in which they represent Black athletes explicitly as 'naturally' physically superior to White athletes and implicitly as mentally unstable (Carrington, 2001; Morning, 2009; Rada & Wulfemeyer, 2005). White athletes, on the other hand, are not as explicitly described in terms of their extraordinary physicality within the hegemonic discourse. They thereby can become the invisible norm against which racial/ethnic difference can be measured and against which Blacks can be constructed as not human or as super-human (whereas Whites are 'just human') (Carrington, 2002). *If* White athletes are explicitly described, they are relatively often associated with mental skills such as tactical capabilities

and a good work ethic (Rada & Wulfemeyer, 2005). Scholars such as Sabo & Jansen (1998) have spoken of 'enlightened racism' in this regard. Black success is framed as achievable and acceptable in activities that require physical or bodily qualities such as sport but not in other social domains that require intellectual skills such as academics, business or politics. From a cultural studies perspective, the use of this discourse surrounding race/ethnicity by White male commentators is not surprising given the fact that it serves the privileged social position of White males in society at large. Since White male dominance in western societies is usually situated in a hierarchy in which mental qualities are valued above physical/bodily qualities, this sport media discourse reinforces a societal status quo that supports the privileged social position of White people compared to Black people. These racialized representations may take gender specific forms as well. Black male athletes are often represented as naturally strong and athletic and as having uncontrollable physical and sexual impulses (Carrington, 2001; Leonard, 2004). Black female athletes are also represented as strong but they are additionally described in terms of the stereotypes that are characteristic of the dominant discourse surrounding gender such as being heterosexually attractive, emotionally unstable and being dependent on men (e.g. Christopherson, Janning & McConnell, 2002; Elling & Luitj, 2009).

Since there is always a degree of individual freedom in making sense of events, there is contradictory evidence as well. Individual agency of commentators allows for the use of discourses that oppose or negotiate dominant ones. For example, Sabo, Jansen, Tate, Duncan & Leggett (1996) found no difference in the representation of Black and White athletes by the predominantly White commentators during the US television coverage of international athletic events. In other words, these commentators did not draw on the hegemonic discourse that associates Black people with natural athleticism and White athletes with cognitive capabilities. In addition, North American scholars Billings (2004) and Byrd & Utsler (2007) studied media representations of Black and White quarterbacks in American Football and concluded that North American sport journalists increasingly try to avoid prejudicial treatment of minority racial and ethnic groups and have become more sensitive to racial issues. This finding reflects Hall's (1995) assertion that it is unrealistic to see the White controlled media as only transmitting hegemonic, racially biased meanings but that they should also be seen as a place where hegemonic meanings and discourses can be challenged and subverted.

However, *consistent and systematic* counter-narratives in the sport media that contradict the Black Brawn-White Brain stereotype are still lacking, in particular in contexts outside the US. This lack points to the

continued urgency for those concerned with racialized sport media reporting to continue to do critical empirical research of uncritical sport media reporting (see also Hylton, 2009). Such research may help to make White sport commentators more conscious of their commentary practices and their possible implicit use of racial/ethnic stereotypes.

#### *Findings for the Dutch context*

The few scholars that have examined Dutch sports commentary generally confirmed the overall findings from North American and British studies (Knoppers & Elling, 1999; Hermes, 2005). They showed that Dutch sport commentators used racialized language along the lines of a White Brain-Black Brawn distinction that is similar to that of their British and North American colleagues. Results from those studies need to be further explored, however. Hermes (2005) focused on the representations of only two players of one minority ethnic group. Knoppers & Elling (1999) used a limited US based definition of race in terms of Black, White and Other while the Dutch generally do not use such a definition of race/ethnicity. More studies are, therefore, needed that focus on Dutch sport media language using racial/ethnic categorizations that are characteristic for the (re)construction of racial/ethnic difference in everyday Dutch discourse. Such research is especially relevant since the small number of audience reception studies that have been conducted worldwide provide some justification for the concerns expressed by researchers and other people about racial/ethnic stereotyping in the sport media.

#### **Audience receptions of race/ethnicity in the sport media**

While verbal representations of race and ethnicity in the sport media have received relatively much academic attention from scholars outside the Netherlands during the last two decades, the audience *receptions* of such media content has been under-researched, both nationally and internationally. This is surprising considering the widespread agreement among media scholars that media texts acquire meaning in the complexity of interactions between those texts and their readers/viewers (Buffington & Fraley, 2008; Hall, 1997). This research has yielded diverse results. For example, Buffington & Fraley (2008) found support for racial stereotyping among both Black and White media users in the US along the lines of the Black Brawn vs. White Brain distinction. They concluded that ‘the similarity of audience understandings documented here [i.e. in their reception study] to media representations documented elsewhere lends credence to those concerned about racial stereotyping in the sports media. [...]’ (p. 306). The results of other audience reception studies (Knoppers & Elling, 2001a; McCarthy et al., 2003) suggest the matter is complex.

The researchers concluded that the meanings given to race and ethnicity by media sport consumers are not necessarily congruent with dominant race logic in the media. Audience discourses also depend on prior knowledge and experiences that individuals bring to the viewing experience (Belton, 2000; Buffington & Fraley, 2008) and on the social location of viewers such as their ethnic background and gender. McCarthy et al. (2003), for instance, examined audience receptions by White and Black viewers of British Premier League soccer and found that whereas perceptions of White recipients of the media were congruent with the dominant discourse surrounding race in the British soccer media, Black viewers received White commentators' remarks differently. They held the media responsible for the dominance of the hegemonic British discourse surrounding race and sporting success that highlights the Black 'natural athletic' stereotype. Knoppers & Elling (2001a) who studied audience receptions in the Dutch context also found that young White media-users were more likely to draw on biologically informed discourses about sporting success in relation to performances of Black athletes than young Black media users. Hermes (2005) additionally concluded that the discourses that Dutch male viewers draw upon in their reception of soccer coverage depend on the type of soccer that is being watched. Whereas male viewers discussed international soccer players in terms of their technical qualities with hardly a link to discourses about race or ethnicity, matches of the Dutch national team invoked strong nationalist feelings resulting in racialized types of talk in which the White European Dutch players were implicitly or explicitly considered to be more 'Dutch' than the non-White players who played for the Dutch national team.

Despite the insights these studies produced about the complexity of audience receptions of sport media content, academic knowledge about the reception of sport media content by media users and about the discourses audience members draw upon remains largely speculative due to the small number of studies. It is, therefore, important to further examine the extent to which audience members of various ethnic origins actually receive and interpret media messages. This is particularly valuable in relation to young viewers since the popular media may provide them with discourses out of which they make sense of their own and others' racial/ethnic identities (Azzarito & Harrison, 2008).

### **Contextualization of categories in research**

As the foregoing indicates, empirical research into sport media representations and receptions in the Dutch context requires contextualized definitions of race and ethnicity. Even though this may sound self evident, this is a more difficult task for researchers than may

appear at first glance. The empirical studies discussed in this Introduction often have defined race and ethnicity in terms of Black and White, perhaps because most of them used a North American and British context as their reference point. In the current project, I discuss some of the problems connected with such use of a binary categorization. In particular, I discuss how predefining race and ethnicity in binary terms such as Black and White may *de-contextualize* and limit both the research questions scholars pose and the findings they produce. This requires me to reflect critically on my own use of racial/ethnic categorizations. In addition, I discuss the more fundamental question whether researchers who study race and ethnicity should work with racial/ethnic categories. Although most scholars nowadays subscribe to an approach towards race and ethnicity as contextual and layered social constructs whose meanings and articulations are time and place specific, paradoxically these same scholars stabilize race or ethnicity into homogeneous, unitary categories in their empirical practice at the same time. In so doing, they impose a stable and homogenizing order on an unstable and increasingly heterogeneous multi-ethnic reality (McCall, 2005). I explicate how this paradox can be traced back to a fundamental tension that researchers experience between scholarly understandings of race and ethnicity on the one hand and popular and governmental usages of race and ethnicity that scholars want to capture through their research on the other. This tension poses a typical challenge to *all* scholars working with the complex concepts of race and ethnicity and in particular to those scholars who conduct content analysis of race and ethnicity in large volumes of (sports) commentary. Since content analysis of large volumes of commentary requires the analysis of a vast amount of data, scholars who conduct this type of analysis may prefer to structure their data along the lines of one predefined fixed categorization. This may facilitate the management of their data (Gunaratnam, 2003). However, the use of such a fixed categorization may also result in a reification of a stabilized, ontological status of race and ethnicity that these same scholars reject *in theory* (Nayak, 2006). In order to negotiate this paradox of working with but also against racial/ethnic categories, I propose an alternative methodological approach towards the empirical analysis of race and ethnicity on the basis of large volumes of data in chapters 3 and 4.

### **Race and ethnicity in Dutch sport policy documents**

Since racial and ethnic categories and assumptions not only frame research questions but also policy issues, I additionally reflect on the use of racial/ethnic categorizations in policy documents that describe the nationwide Dutch sport policy initiative *Meedoen allochtone jeugd door*

*sport* [Participation allochthonous youth through sport]. As I argued earlier, a reflection on the use of race/ethnicity in this program gives me the opportunity to discuss the uniquely Dutch *allochtoon – autochtoon* categorization that is often used in both Dutch policy and Dutch popular discourse and that structures the ways many Dutch people think about and define race and ethnicity. So whereas my critical reflection on categorization practices in content analysis of sports commentary problematizes the use of racial/ethnic categories in international research, my analysis of the policy program *Meedoen allochtone jeugd door sport* gives important insights in the in- and exclusionary mechanisms inherent in the Dutch governmental and popular use of race and ethnicity. This focus on Dutch everyday and policy discourse also reflects my call throughout this research project to researchers to attend to and explore the articulations of race and ethnicity in the specific context that they study, in my case the Dutch context. In addition to this, a critical reflection on the use of race and ethnicity in the policy program *Meedoen allochtone jeugd door sport* has merit since such a reflection may nuance and challenge the often taken for granted myth about sport as a social equalizer in the Netherlands. Dutch policy initiatives such as *Meedoen allochtone jeugd door sport* often consider sport primarily as an integrative tool that brings together various ethnic groups and enhances racial/ethnic equality in society at large (Van Sterkenburg, 2010). This sport-as-a-progressive social force discourse (Hartmann, 2000) masks, however, the patterns of racial/ethnic exclusion that these programs also tend to reinforce through their use and definitions of race/ethnicity. In particular, I show how the essentialist use of the *allochtoon-autochtoon* categorization in the policy documents that describe the program *Meedoen allochtone jeugd door sport* revolves around hierarchical notions of race/ethnicity that privileges one racial/ethnic group above the other. Such a critical reflection on (sport) policy's ideological underpinnings and how they sustain White privilege in society at large are very rare in the Dutch context (Essed & Nimako, 2006). I offer suggestions for those engaged in shaping policy agendas to become more reflexive of their use of categorizations. My suggestions may equip sport governing bodies and sport policy makers with useful tools to challenge racialized/ethnicized assumptions that may underlie sport policy initiatives.

### **About this book**

The chapters that follow were originally written as peer reviewed papers or chapters for publication in journals or books. Although each of these chapters can be read as a separate piece with its own narrative, the order of the chapters is not random but reflects the development of my

conceptual approach towards the constructs of race and ethnicity. In addition, the chapters all revolve around the connection they make between discourses and categorizations as they are articulated in sports related cultural practices and wider society. Consequently I continuously place results in a broader societal perspective. This introductory chapter is followed by chapter 2 entitled ‘Dominant discourses about race/ethnicity and gender in sport practice and performance’. In that chapter I present and discuss the dominant discourses used by male and female White European Dutch and Black Surinamese Dutch media users to explain White and Black sporting success and Black and White overrepresentation or underrepresentation in certain sports. I explore the extent to which the audience discourses of both social groups are congruent with hegemonic sport media discourses as they have been documented in the literature. In addition, I discuss to what extent the discourses of both racial/ethnic groups overlap with each other and how their discourses relate to relations of power in wider Dutch society. I also discuss some of the study’s shortcomings, in particular the use of race and ethnicity as a Black-White variable in the interviews I did. Even though such a Black-White definition was congruent with the use of race and ethnicity in similar studies at the time, I point out how it may have de-contextualized some of my research findings. This concern with practices of racial/ethnic categorization in research constitutes the departure point for chapters 3 and 4 that focus on the use of racial/ethnic categories in sport research and sport policy. More specifically, in chapter 3 titled ‘Thinking ‘race’ and ethnicity in (Dutch) sport policy and –research’ I discuss dominant racial and ethnic categories which work in research as well as in a Dutch sport policy program to validate and normalize racial/ethnic classification practices and hierarchies in society at large. This conceptual debate on categorizations is continued in the chapter 4 entitled ‘Race, ethnicity, and content analysis of the sport media: a critical reflection’. In this chapter I critically look at the definitions of race and ethnicity used in content analyses of race and ethnicity in large volumes of sports commentary, to 1) explore the dominant categorization practices in this type of studies, 2) discuss the consequences of these categorization practices for broader racialized relations of power, and 3) develop an alternative approach of content analysis of large volumes of sports commentary that defines race and ethnicity in alternative, more contextualized ways. In chapter 5, I use the alternative approach that I propose in chapter 4 to explore how Dutch soccer commentators on television (re)construct racial/ethnic difference in and through their commentary practices. Results from my content analysis are discussed and embedded in a historical and internationally comparative perspective. In the concluding chapter of this research project

I synthesize and connect the main findings from all of the preceding chapters.



## **Chapter 2**

### **Dominant Discourses about Race/Ethnicity and Gender in Sport Practice and Performance<sup>viii</sup>**

Jacco van Sterkenburg & Annelies Knoppers (2004)  
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#### **Abstract**

Although it is generally assumed that the (sport) media play an important role in the meanings readers/viewers give to gender and race/ethnicity, relatively little is known about the way 'the public' deals with hegemonic (media) representations about race/ethnicity and gender. The purpose of the present study is to describe the dominant discourses concerning race/ethnicity and gender and sport performance used by White and Black Dutch students. We explore the extent to which their discourses overlap with each other and with dominant media discourses. The results are placed and discussed in a broader societal context.

Keywords: discourse; sport media; race/ethnicity; gender

'Immigrant women have difficulty finding a job' is the heading of an article in the Dutch newspaper *Metro* (Latijnhouwers, 2002). According to Latijnhouwers, Dutch employers rarely consider Dutch women of Moroccan, Surinamese, and Antillean descent as prospective and/or competent employees. Consequently these women have many problems finding and holding a job. Essed (1991), a scholar in the area of Dutch ethnic and racial relations, argues that this is often due to differentiation between and stereotyping of people based on ethnicity/race and gender<sup>ix</sup>. Race/ethnicity and gender and other social group relations are used in western societies to give meanings to experience and to categorize others (Dines & Humez, 1995). Dominant meanings given to gender and race/ethnicity help support a social-economic hierarchy in which being perceived as White and Anglo Saxon are generally rated more positively than being Black and non-Anglo Saxon; similarly being a man is assigned greater value than being a woman (Acker, 1990; Knoppers & Elling, 1999). This discourse of White and male superiority often dominates the labor market, as the beginning of this article indicated. It is also evident when members of minority ethnic groups are associated with a lack of education and as having inherent character flaws (Van Dijk, 1993). This discursive practice reveals itself in the apparent over-representation of White males in 'high-status' occupations, such as business managers, members of Parliament or college faculty, and of Black men and women in 'low-status' occupations, such as hotel maids, postal clerks and nursing aides ('Stop de angst,' 2002). Parliamentary debates and media accounts in which minority ethnic groups are often stereotyped as criminals, illegal and deviant people, support and reinforce such hierarchies and the discourses about them (Van Dijk, 1993).

These stereotypes may have a special function when used by dominant groups. Nederveen Pieterse (1995) argues that dominant groups often stereotype nondominant groups because they are afraid of losing power and privileges. He contends that:

It is also a matter of the anxiety that comes with power and privilege. Existing differences and inequalities are magnified for fear they will diminish. Stereotypes are reconstructed and reasserted precisely when existing hierarchies are being challenged and inequalities are or may be lessening (p. 26).

This may not be a conscious process. White men may reproduce and strengthen the status quo without knowing it (Hall, 1995). Their

dominance is often constructed as natural and self-evident. Various institutions including the media play a role in creating and reinforcing these constructions.

### **Sport media**

The sport media are primarily a White male dominated institution (Claringbould et al., 2004; Coakley, 2004; Knoppers & Elling, 2004; Sabo et al., 1996) that often support the dominant (social-economic) position of many middle to upper class White men. The capability of the sport media to repeatedly reach many different people at the same time, gives them a great deal of power in confirming and reconstructing images that are congruent with hegemonic discourses about social group relations (Hargreaves, 1986). In this study we explore, in an indirect manner, the extent to which different racial/ethnic groups embrace hegemonic discourses of the sport media. We use Fairclough's (1995) definition of discourse as the 'constructions or significations of some domain of social practice from a particular perspective' (p. 94). In the context of the present research, discourse refers to the meanings and significance given to race/ethnicity and gender in sport by those interviewed.

The popularity of the sport media in the Netherlands is illustrated by the statistic that in 2001 a little more than 50% of the 60 most popular Dutch television programs consisted of sport broadcasts (Nederlandse Omroep Stichting/Kijk en Luister Onderzoek, 2002). The sport media however, are not a site where only dominant discourses regarding race/ethnicity and gender are created, confirmed and reinforced (Hall, 1995). Nondominant social groups, such as minority ethnic groups and women, may resist using hegemonic discourses in which they are generally subjugated as a group and instead create alternate discourses (Van Dijk, 1993; Duncan & Brummet, 1993; Knoppers & Elling, 2001a). Since White (middle class heterosexual) men as a group tend to have the most economic power in western society, their discourses often predominate. Yet these discourses are constantly challenged by alternate discourses. Consumers of the sport media tend to have multiple discourses available to them to make sense of their (media) experiences. In other words, the sport media are a 'site of struggle' which different social groups use to create and sustain discourses about social relations of power.

### **Hegemonic discourses of the sport media about social relations**

Most studies of dominant sport media discourses about gender consist of content analyses that compare the amount and type of coverage given to men and women's sports (for a summary of this research see Duncan &

Messner, 1998; Kinkema & Harris, 1998). No matter which country and event are studied, the results consistently show that women's sports are relatively under-represented in the sport media and are framed as less exciting and less newsworthy than are men's sports. Male athletes tend to be predominantly represented as strong, active and independent, while female athletes are also often represented as strong, but simultaneously as mentally unsure of themselves and as dependent on men. In addition, the greater amount of coverage given to men's sports by the media conveys the greater societal importance attached to men's sport. This gender media discourse confirms and reinforces a status quo in western societies, in which stereotypical qualities associated with males in general are rated more positively than stereotypical female qualities. It sustains the notion that most men and women conform to gender stereotypes and strengthens a hierarchy in which men in general tend to occupy a more valued position than women (Hall, 1996).

Race and ethnicity relations also play a role in sport media discourse although that role is often more subtle since sport is not formally structured along racial/ethnic lines as it is by gender. Many researchers who have looked at dominant sport media discourses about race have also used content analyses (Knoppers & Elling, 1999; McCarthy & Jones, 1997; McCarthy, Jones & Potrac, 2003; Murrell & Curtis, 1994). They found that Black athletes tend to be represented more often as 'natural' athletes with great physical power than are White athletes. White athletes, on the other hand, tend to be described more often in terms of intellect, perseverance and hard work than Black athletes are (Davis & Harris, 1998; McCarthy & Jones, 1997; Murrell & Curtis, 1994). Thus the media often (re)produce an image that associates being Black with being 'naturally' suited to perform well in sport and of being White as being congruent with the ability to perform mental tasks. This representation of Black and White athletes seems to reinforce a dominant societal status quo, in which Black athletes are more often associated with natural physical strength and White athletes with intellectual capacities. Since (White male) dominance in western societies is usually based on a hierarchy in which mental qualities are valued above physical qualities, this discourse primarily supports the privileged social position of many White men. This is not surprising since sports journalists, editors and owners of the media in general are White males (Claringbould et al., 2004; Coakley, 2004; Knoppers & Elling, 2001a; 2004; Sabo et al., 1996). To maintain their dominant social group position they may (often subconsciously) use the sport media to convey their stereotypical images (McCarthy & Jones, 1997).

Hegemony is however never total and must be constantly won (Hall, 1997). This can be illustrated by the findings of several studies that contradict the aforementioned findings. Christopherson et al. (2002) conducted a content analysis of the coverage of the 1999 Women's World Cup and found that women soccer players were presented with a 'hint of masculinity' in a positive way; however they were simultaneously presented as heterosexually physically attractive. Analyses of television commentary of sport events show that Black athletes are not always described less frequently in mental terms than their White counterparts are (McCarthy et al. 2003; Sabo et al., 1996). Yet these studies also show that Black athletes tend to receive more positive physical attributions than their White counterparts do. Thus although the emphasis in television representations on mental differences with respect to race may have changed, still the stereotypical images of Black athletes as naturally gifted continue to be perpetuated. Similarly, women athletes may now be represented as rough and tough as long as they are also shown as being heterosexually attractive. Media discourses therefore are contradictory and fluid in which slippages of meaning are always possible (McDonald & Birrell, 1999). Media discourses may however inform perceptions of how race and gender are constructed by media users. Little is known about the extent to which dominant and alternate media discourses are received and internalized by those who use the sport media.

### **Receiving sport media discourse**

Although the (sport) media are widely acknowledged as an important source of information that can structure people's experiences (Ford, 1997; Hansen & Hansen, 1988; Hargreaves, 1986; Lee, 1992), relatively little is known about the way media users read media representations of race/ethnicity and gender. According to Morley (1983) and Fiske (1995) reading is a process of negotiation between media users and the texts that they read/view. The meanings a text has for individuals are dependent on the discourses they have at their disposal (Richardson, 1998). The social context of media users, which includes the social group(s) with which they mainly identify, determines to a large extent the way they read the texts<sup>x</sup>. Kellner (1995) supports this idea and argues that 'all texts are subject to multiple readings depending on the perspectives and subject positions of the reader. Members of distinct genders, classes, races, nations, regions, sexual orientations and political ideologies often read texts differently' (p. 11-12). De Boer & Brennecke (1995) speak in this context of a 'preferred reading' by the dominant social group as opposed to possible 'oppositional readings' by members of a nondominant social group.

De Boer & Brennecke (1995) and Van Dijk (1993) contend that in the Netherlands a dominant group, consisting of White men, tend to read the media in a way the media propose or prefer. This is not surprising since, as we indicated earlier, dominant media discourses are mainly created by White (middle to upper class) men. These preferred readings therefore almost automatically fit the perspectives of many White male media-users. Nondominant social groups on the other hand, such as minority ethnic groups or women, may reject the hegemonic discourse and create oppositional and/or negotiated readings more frequently than their (White) male counterparts. Oppositional readings involve interpreting the media in an opposite way than the preferred way while negotiated reading requires focusing on other aspects of the images and coverage (Fiske, 1987). McCarthy et al. (2003), in a study of the reactions of Black and White students to televised commentary of sport, found that Black men consciously rejected dominant media representations. These students resisted the hegemonic discourse or White commentary when discussing Black athletes and their attributes. McCarthy et al. (2003) interpreted this resistance as a way for Black students 'of challenging the logic and efficiency of racism they face daily at a symbolic and very real level' (p. 230). Therefore they created an oppositional discourse. Duncan & Brummet (1993), in a study of reactions of various groups to a televised football game, found that a group of women dissociated themselves from the hegemonic discourse of the sport media. They did this by making ironic and sarcastic remarks about the presented images and the commentary. They interpreted the commentary and the images in a way that did not fit the hegemonic (male) discourse. Duncan & Brummett (1993) concluded that group members can find aspects of the text to 'construct for themselves positions of empowerment, even in opposition to the preferred readings encouraged by those texts' (Duncan & Brummett, 1993, p. 59)<sup>xi.3</sup>

The processes by which various social groups give meaning to gender and race/ethnicity in sport are obviously complex. The extent to which members of ethnic groups reject, negotiate or may be complicit in maintaining hegemonic discourses has received relative little attention from researchers. Exceptions are the studies of media users by McCarthy et al. (2003) and Knoppers & Elling (2001a). They found that immigrants who took part in their studies tended to use oppositional/negotiated readings about race/ethnicity in sport more frequently than their non-immigrant counterparts. Knoppers & Elling (2001a) however grouped various minority ethnic groups in the Netherlands into one single research group that they labeled immigrant students. Their discourses were compared with those of nonimmigrant students. McCarthy et al. (2003)

were primarily interested in the opinions of British students about dominant sport media discourses with respect to race and did not explore the discourses these students themselves used regarding race/ethnicity and gender. In contrast, the current study explicitly looks at discourses of members of a majority ethnic/racial group (White European Dutch) and of a minority racial/ethnic group (Black Surinam Dutch).

The sources of individual discourses are however difficult to trace. Although comments from media users may reflect dominant sport media discourses, there is no way to prove that the media are the sole source of their perceptions. We assume that individuals are informed by discourses from all social institutions that are part of their social context. Individual discourses may be constructed and negotiated from those discourses and/or be in opposition to them. We furthermore assume that an estimation of the role of the media in strengthening or contesting specific discourses can be obtained by comparing individual discourses with those of the media and by asking individuals about the sources of their discourses. This may be especially applicable to the sport situation in the Netherlands where most of the information about top athletes is obtained through the media (Elling, 2002).

### **Purpose of the study/Research questions and methodology**

The purpose of the present exploratory study was to describe the dominant discourses concerning race/ethnicity and gender and sport performance used by White European Dutch and Black Surinam Dutch students in the Netherlands<sup>xii</sup>. In addition, we explored the extent to which their discourses overlap with hegemonic sport media discourses. Members of these two groups were chosen for inclusion in the present study because most of the Black athletes who appear regularly in the Dutch sport media are from Surinam descent while the White players tend to be European Dutch<sup>xiii</sup>.

The political sensitivity of the topic and the voluntary involvement of the students made it difficult to find participants. Since we wanted the number of respondents from each racial/ethnic group to be similar, the size of the White European Dutch group was limited to that of the Black Surinam Dutch group. The respondents were recruited primarily with use of the *snowball-method* (Baarda, De Goede & Teunissen, 1996). Potential respondents were phoned to ask if they would be willing to take part in the study. Respondents were asked whether they knew men or women students of either group who would be willing to participate in the research. They were told that the interviews would be recorded on tape and were assured of confidentiality and anonymity. The students were not financially rewarded for their participation. Eleven Black Surinam Dutch

and twelve White European Dutch students who studied at one of five different Dutch universities participated in the study. None of them competed competitively in sport. Ten of the respondents were women, thirteen were men. The average age of both groups was 22 years. On the average, the Black respondents had lived in the Netherlands for 10.5 years. Semi-structured interviews were used to gather the data. On the average each interview lasted about 45 minutes. The interviews were structured around two topics: 1) the participants' own involvement in sport, and 2) explanations for gender and ethnic differences in sport participation. Appendix A gives an overview of the sample questions that were used with respect to each topic.

The first step in the analysis of the interview data consisted of a search for emerging themes. Some of the themes were in line with expectations derived from literature study while others were not. The research questions were used as a guideline for the data analysis although they were adjusted when new themes emerged. This is typical of a process called *open coding* (Glaser, 1978). Interviews were then divided into fragments that were labeled identically if they were similar in content. The labels became the titles of the various discourses. Fragments were specified 'White' or 'Black', to indicate whether it originated with a White European Dutch or Black Surinam Dutch respondent. We not only looked for fragments that could be labeled similarly but looked for contradictory evidence as well. Subsequently the process of *axial coding* took place (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Fragments that were classified under the same label (discourse) were put together to judge the extent to which the discourse represented its label or to indicate that a new separate discourse should be labeled for several of the fragments. When we completed the process of axial coding, we compared the various discourses with each other. The dominant discourses the respondents used are explained in the following paragraphs.

## **Results**

In this section we identify the dominant discourses used by these White and Black men and women students to explain perceived differences in sport participation and performance on the basis of race/ethnicity and gender. We labeled the most common discourse used by the participants in this study a 'natural physicality discourse'.

### **A natural physicality discourse**

*Race* - Both Black and White respondents used this discourse to attribute the relative over-representation of Black athletes in certain sports/events (sprinting events and basketball) to differences in bodily

explosive power. According to these students, Black people are generally physically stronger than White people in activities like sprints that call for quick explosive movements. The explanation of some Black and White (male) students best illustrates this discourse. A male Black student explains:

I think it has something to do with the way their [Black athletes] bodies are constructed. Their muscles are different, that is why they are better in sport. They have faster muscles. They are naturally better in sports such as sprinting; their bodies are built that way.

Similarly, another Black student argued that Blacks are over-represented in sprinting events and basketball ‘because their [Black athletes] bones are heavier, their bodies are more athletic. Yes it is race. It starts at birth.’ A White male student echoed: ‘Black people have a different body build than White people. More athletic, stronger which manifests itself in some sports...that Black athletes sometimes have more power.’ Similarly, Black athletes are assumed to perform better than White athletes in basketball because they are ‘tall(er).’ A few White male and female respondents contended that Black people are stronger because they had to rely on their muscular strength for a long period of time such as during slavery.

Only rarely was something said that explicitly refuted this natural physicality discourse. One Black male participant said that excellent performances by Black athletes in sprints ‘doesn’t have anything to do with size or anything’. This comment was however an exception. The respondents argued that this difference in racial/ethnic representation in sport would change in the future. They forecast that differences in performance would disappear because the distinction Black/White will have changed. A Black female student wonders ‘if there’ll be a difference in ten years... There will be many racially mixed people then.’ Others made similar statements but mentioned different time spans with the most extreme answer being 500 years. Several White students argued that the perceived difference in natural physical power between Black and White athletes would disappear in the future because physical power will have no function in western society anymore. A White female student explains:

The [physical] difference between Black and White athletes will disappear. We now live in the same society. Blacks are no longer...they don’t all live in warm countries anymore, yes some still do.... The Black people we are talking about now live in

western worlds, in western society. And their bodies will adapt. They will sit behind desks at the office as well, and they will also become less skilled physically.

The over-representation of White athletes in certain sports such as weight lifting and tennis was seldom explained by a reference to natural physical power. A Black female student explained that there are more White than Black long distance runners because 'you need to have a lot of endurance for the long distances; in the shorter distances you need to use your muscles more'. Another Black female student explains the relative preponderance of White long distance runners by arguing that 'anyone can do longer distances because you do not use all your energy immediately.'

*Gender* - A natural physicality discourse was also the dominant discourse used by the respondents to justify the formal structuring of sports based on gender. Black and White participants contended that since men are by nature physically stronger than women it would be unfair to let men and women compete against each other. They argued that the formal gendering of the structuring of sport is justified. The comments by a White female student best typify the arguments that were made:

Throughout history, women have always been physically weaker than men. If you let them [men and women] compete against each other in a sprint, it's just unfair, because as a woman you have very little chance to win.

Comments that used a different gender perspective were rare. The following remark by a Black female respondent was an exception: 'A female sprinter is often a bit lighter. Suppose she is lighter and she has a lot of muscles too. Then she might be faster than the male sprinter, who has to carry weight.'

*Intersections* - The respondents agreed with the formal structuring of sport based on gender. They were against a formal structuring of sport based on ethnicity/race however, because physical differences between White and Black athletes were considered to be too small to justify such a structure. For example, a White male student argued: 'There is really a physical difference between men and women. That's very obvious. That's not the case with Black and White men.' The strength of the gender and natural physicality discourse was evident in reply to a question about who would win in a sprint: a top Black female athlete or a top White male athlete. Almost all participants argued that a White male athlete would

win; a few were unsure. None of the respondents assumed that a Black female athlete would win. The perceived physical advantage of being a man (instead of being a woman) seemed to count more than the perceived physical advantage of being Black (instead of being White).

### **Mental discourses**

Although a natural physicality discourse was the dominant discourse used by the participants in this study, they also mentioned mental differences to explain differential rates of sport participation across gender and race. The use of mental discourses sometimes varied by race/ethnicity of the participants.

*Race* - Although most White respondents emphasized that they did not believe in the existence of natural mental differences between Black and White people, several of them gave examples that contradicted their own beliefs. For example, a White male student responded to the results of stacking research in soccer by saying that White soccer players tend to be found more often in central positions on the field because 'they have more organizational capabilities' than Black players. Another White male student argued that the relative preponderance of Black boxers was due to the lack of thinking required to box well; someone else has to do the thinking for the boxer.

You shouldn't think too much in boxing. You just shouldn't want to think too much. Everyone has their own qualities. A Black person has boxing skills, but someone else should do the thinking. It doesn't necessarily have to be a White person. But I think that if you're very busy with this sport someone else should do the thinking.

The natural physical and mental discourses were intertwined in the argument that short and powerful sport/events require a different attitude than long distance/endurance events. Sprint events are assumed to acquire natural physical power while long distance events are assumed to require a specific type of mental attitude. A Black female student explains that 'Black people are better mentally suited to short explosive sport [events] than are White people. [...] White people are better suited for sports that require endurance such as long distance running.'

White students did not only use a natural mentality discourse; some talked about the mental attitudes and capacities needed to acquire skills (an acquired mentality discourse). They stated that in general more Blacks than Whites excel in sport because sport is 'the only way out' for

Blacks. Therefore they are more ambitious in sport than White athletes. Interestingly when White students used this discourse they did so primarily in relationship to African Americans. As one of the White students said:

But don't you think that it's because those Afro-Americans come from the ghetto...the only way out is sport. You can see a great difference between Black basketball players and White basketball players. Because Black basketball players are throwing and doing lay-ups eight hours a day, and well...a White person won't do that so often, because he's doing all right anyway.'

Similarly White participants stated that excelling in sport is the only possible way for [African- American] Black youth to go to college/get a scholarship. As a White male student argued:

Excelling at sports is very important at American high schools. You can go to college if you excel at sports. If you're talented you'll train a lot. So if you're good at basketball, you'll play basketball frequently so that you can go to college. Or running, or playing soccer. So perhaps it makes sense that many Black boys may not be able to afford college, but can go there by excelling at sports.

White students used, thus, both a natural and an acquired mentality discourse. Black students primarily used a discourse that stressed the mental attitude needed to acquire various skills. In contrast to the White students, the Black students attributed both 'insight' and 'education' to Black athletes. A typical response was 'making sharp passes in basketball requires developing an intelligence... But a different sort of intelligence than used for studying.' Some used the fact that most NBA players had attended college as proof that Black athletes are intelligent. One Black male student added, however, that the university results of Black students probably 'are rigged a bit'. Two Black students were an exception and used the same natural mentality discourse as did some of the White students; A Black female student argued that White soccer players 'may have more organizational talent' than Black soccer players and a Black male student explained that White players are found in central positions, because they 'create the plays and keep tabs on what is going on'.

The over-representation of Whites in weight lifting was also attributed to acquired mental factors such as (lack of) self-confidence. Both Black and White students used this explanation. A Black male

student argued, for example, that Whites dominate weight lifting because White people want to show they are just as strong/good as Black athletes.

White athletes have an attitude 'I'm here, I'm strong'. It has to do with recognition and with making themselves known. To show 'we are just as strong as you'. Black athletes have no need to demonstrate their physical power in this way.

*Gender* - Most of the participants did not use a discourse about mentality to explain gendered sport. Two female Black students were an exception and used a natural mentality discourse with respect to gender. One felt that having separate women's and men's sports is good because men and women think differently. She could not explain what she meant with 'differently':

Boys just play differently. They also think differently, you can see it at the Olympics too. It's just different. I think the way they play originates from the way they think about it. So.... I don't know. I really don't know.

Another Black female student argued that men are by nature more passionate/ambitious in sports than women. As we indicated these remarks were an exception. None of the other respondents mentioned mental differences between male and female athletes as an explanation for differential participation rates in top sport by women and men.

### **The cultural tradition discourse**

*Race* - Many respondents also referred to 'culture' or 'tradition', to explain White or Black over-representation in certain sports. According to some participants, certain sports were originally/ historically part of 'Black' or 'White culture'. For example, a Black female participant used the following reasoning to explain why tennis is a 'White sport' and sprinting is a 'Black event':

Because tennis is of course an elitist sport that used to be practiced and is invented by White people. And I think that's still noticeable. And running was always practiced in cultures and countries where Black people originally come from.

One Black male respondent challenged this cultural discourse by arguing that 'you hear people say "Black people do not ski" but I went skiing one

time and it was a fantastic experience. If I had the opportunity, I would go again and I am not such a bad skier.’

The cultural discourse was also used by White and Black students to explain White over-representation in wrestling, weight lifting and (field) hockey, and Black over-representation in basketball. A Black female participant, for example, stated that many White people can be seen in field hockey, because it’s a ‘tradition’ for White people to play hockey. A White male participant said that whether a sport is practiced by White or Black athletes ‘depends on the country a sport originally comes from’.

*Gender* - ‘Tradition’ was also used by many respondents as part of their cultural discourse to justify the existing separation in sports between male and female athletes. They argued that a gender separation is good because it has always been that way. Yet at the same time many respondents argued that men and women could play certain sports together. They generally named sports that are practiced by both genders in Dutch society such as korfbal, tennis, volleyball. A few students mentioned sports predominantly practiced by men in the Netherlands. A Black female participant said soccer ‘should actually be mixed’. One White female participant argued that basketball could be played by men and women together while a White male participant felt that men and women could compete together in car racing.

*Intersections* - The cultural tradition argument was also used to explain why sport should remain formally structured by gender and not by race/ethnicity. In contrast to the acceptance of the separation in sports based on gender, the participants did not justify a Black-White structure in sports. They said it would mean turning back the clock, and turning back to the time of apartheid.

### **The economic discourse**

*Race* - At times participants in this study referred to economic differences between White and Black people to explain Black or White over-representation in certain professional sports. Both Black and White respondents equated Black people with poverty and White people with wealth. The students stated that Black athletes perform better in baseball, basketball and sprints than White athletes because participating in these sports/events is relatively inexpensive. Those sports are especially practiced by Black people because they are poor. As one Black female student argued:

Basketball really is a sport in which many Blacks are seen. I think a reason for that could be that in general Black people all over the world are quite poor. And those are sports that have little costs concerning the outfit or the material.

A White male respondent said: 'you don't need anything [to run in sprints], it doesn't cost anything, I mean to run. And historically Black people are in a disadvantaged position. They have less money.'

Similarly White over-representation in sport was explained by the argument that White people are richer than Black people. A White female student said that 'tennis is a fancy sport. [...] You must have a pass and that's very expensive, and it is historically for the rich people. That's why many White people practice it, I think.' Several Black and White students added that the economic state of Black people is in a state of flux. They observed that the number of Black tennis players and golfers has grown the past few years, and will grow in the future, because of improved financial possibilities for Black people. Statements in which financial prosperity was associated with Blacks were however rare. As we have shown in the previous section, this assumed economic difference was seen as a motivating force for Black athletes.

*Gender* - An economic discourse was not used to explain differential rates of participation across gender. Neither was gender associated with wealth/poverty or other economic factors.

## **Discussion**

### **Hegemonic media discourse**

In this section we explore the extent to which the discourses used by these White and Black students about perceived race/ethnicity and gender differences in sport performance, overlap with hegemonic sport media discourses. The results show that the students, regardless of race/ethnicity and gender, primarily used a natural physicality discourse to explain the great number of Black athletes in certain events and sports. In contrast, over-representation of White athletes in other sports was seldom explained with a natural physicality discourse but with mental, cultural and economic discourses. Similarly, the natural physicality discourse was also the dominant discourse used by White and Black respondents to justify the existing separation in sport between male and female athletes. Men are assumed to be naturally stronger. This use of a natural physicality discourse with respect to both race and gender corresponds with dominant race and gender logic in sport media discourses (Coakley, 2004). As we showed earlier in this paper, male athletes are represented as innately stronger and faster than women; Black (male) athletes are

assumed to be born possessing excellent physical qualities more often than White athletes are.

A natural mentality discourse, used by a few of the White students, also overlaps with a dominant sport media discourse about race. These students tended to talk more positively about the mental capabilities of White athletes than of Black athletes. This corresponds with a hegemonic media discourse that often associates White athletes more positively with mental capabilities than Black athletes (Davis & Harris, 1998; McCarthy & Jones, 1997; Murrell & Curtis, 1994; Simons, 2003). Most White respondents stated, however, that they did not believe in innate mental differences between Black and White athletes. There are fewer parallels between the hegemonic media discourse and the varied uses of mental discourses by the Black Surinam Dutch respondents. Sometimes the Black students used a natural mentality discourse in a hegemonic way as well, by saying for example that White soccer players may have more organizational capacities than Black soccer players. However, they also used it in an alternative/oppositional way such as associating Black soccer players with 'insight/education'. We will return to these alternative discourses in the following section.

A mental discourse was only occasionally used with respect to gender. This is surprising since media research shows that men are represented as more knowledgeable about sport than women are (see for example, Knoppers & Elling, 2001a; 2004; Kinkema & Harris, 1998; Claringbould et al., 2004). Possibly the natural physical discourse about gender was seen as the most explanatory.

### **Other discourses**

#### *An 'acquired mentality discourse' and hard work theme*

Another discourse that was used by the respondents with respect to race/ethnicity but that does not correspond with a dominant sport media discourse was a mental discourse used by both Black and White students which emphasized the mental attitude needed to acquire athletic skills. White students attributed the success of Black athletes to hard work and ambition. Although such a discourse has been rarely identified in sport media research, there is some research that confirms the importance of this discourse in the Netherlands. Knoppers & Elling (2001a) in a study of immigrant and nonimmigrant youth and Dutch sport, found that a similar discourse was a frequently used by immigrant media users to explain differential sports participation across race/ethnicity.

The use of the 'hard work' theme to explain the over-representation of Black athletes in certain sports may be part of a negotiated reading, that is, a negotiation between race/ethnicity discourses

and the meanings given to sport in general by the sport media. An emphasis on hard work is a major part of the success theme that is part of another sport media discourse. Coakley (2004) has identified this as a major theme in sport images and messages conveyed by the American sport media. Relatively little is known about the extent to which the Dutch sport media stress themes of success. The over-representation of White athletes in sports such as tennis and weight lifting was not, however, explained by hard work or intelligence, possibly because the respondents who used this discourse indicated that Whites had other choices if they did not succeed. Still, since the most popular sport hero of Black and White Dutch youth is Michael Jordan (Elling, 2002), it is well possible that Dutch youth consume American sport media directly or indirectly and that therefore their discourses are also informed by North American discourses. As we said earlier, at times the participants in the current study referred specifically to African American athletes and not to Black athletes who live in the Netherlands. We return to this point later in the paper.

This use of a discourse that emphasizes hard work and ambition can be interpreted as White resistance to a hegemonic (physical) discourse that stereotypes immigrants in a negative way. Yet their point of reference seemed to be primarily African American athletes, not Surinam Dutch soccer players and sprinters. Also, although an acquired mentality discourse was used, it was not the dominant discourse used by the White respondents to explain racial/ethnic differences in sport participation. They (and the Black respondents) primarily used a natural physicality discourse. Possibly the predominant use of a physicality discourse by the Black respondents can be attributed to the fact that they are members of a minority ethnic group that watches more Dutch television than other minority ethnic groups in the Netherlands (Schothorst, Verzijden & Doeven, 1999). Other large minority ethnic groups in the Netherlands like those of Turkish and Moroccan origin, often watch (non-Western) channels that originate in their country of origin (Schothorst et al., 1999). Seventy-five percent of the Surinam Dutch watch Dutch channels almost daily, compared to 36% of the Moroccan Dutch and 31% of the Turkish Dutch. Research has shown that the Dutch sport media tend to use a natural physicality discourse more often when referring to Black athletes (regardless of country of origin) than to White athletes (Knoppers & Elling, 1999). This television viewing may facilitate an adoption of the hegemonic (western) media discourse by the Surinam Dutch students participating in our study. Moreover, the regular appearance of professional male soccer players of Surinam descent in the Dutch sport media may contribute to the use of this media discourse by both Black and

White students. The usage of the natural physicality discourse by Black students may in part reflect the hypothesis Coakley (2004) has used to explain the athletic achievements of Black male athletes in the US context. He argues that the interactions among: 1) a long history in which a natural physicality discourse was used to refer to Blacks, 2) a history of discrimination and segregation that limited Black people's access to mainstream occupations, and 3) the existence of opportunities for Black people to excel in a few sports, may explain the outstanding achievements of Black athletes; Black young people may feel they are naturally and culturally destined to excel in a few sports. Further research needs to be done to explore racial/ethnic differences in describing Black athletes as hard working and ambitious.

#### *A cultural tradition and economic discourse*

Coakley's hypothesis also partly reflects the use of cultural and economic discourses to explain Black over-representation in certain sports (Coakley, 2004). In this study the cultural and economic discourses were also used to explain why Whites might not work hard to achieve success in sport or not choose certain sports. This finding has not been found in similar available studies. In part these discourses may have been elicited by the interviewer who asked specifically about White over- and under-representation. Possibly in other studies about racial media representations in the media the emphasis may have been focused on explaining Black over-representation only (see for example McCarthy & Jones, 1997; McCarthy et al., 2003). This may elicit discourses about Black people but not White people. Further research, therefore, should focus on both groups.

A cultural tradition discourse was also used to explain gendered sport. This, however, was always in the context of the natural physicality discourse. In other words, the gendered structure of sport was justified because it has always/traditionally accommodated perceived physical differences between men and women.

#### **Contradictions**

Hall (1995) argues that the dynamic nature of discourses results in contradictions. It is not surprising then that our results contained contradictions as well, in spite of similarities between hegemonic sport media discourses and the dominant discourses of the respondents. One interesting contradiction concerns the structuring of sport with respect to gender and race/ethnicity. Acker (1990) has argued that discourses create structures. Our results seem to indicate that (non-)existing structures can also be a source for discourses. The natural physicality discourse was the

primary and most frequently used discourse to explain gender differences in sport participation. The existing gender separation in sports was justified by the respondents, because of a perceived natural physical difference between men and women. A similar separation in sports between Black and White athletes was not justified, although respondents often used explanations based on the assumption of a natural racial/ethnic Black-White physical difference as well. Although it was the primary discourse used to explain racially differentiated sport participation rates, other discourses were used as well. The formal structuring of professional sports in the Netherlands along the lines of gender but not along the lines of race/ethnicity seemed to be used by the respondents as the starting point for their opinions: The official, existing separate gender structure was justified while the possibility of a (currently nonexistent) formal racial/ethnic division was not. The respondents seemed to be searching for reasons to argue why the existing structure should not be changed. Possibly then if professional sports in the Netherlands were officially structured along the lines of race/ethnicity and not along the lines of gender, the opinion of respondents might have been different. In other words, not only hegemonic media discourses and ethnic identification but also the current structure of (professional) sport may have influenced their discourses.

### **Possible influences on discourses**

Other factors, besides the sport media and sport structure, may also have influenced the creation of discourses by the participants in this study. The references to African Americans, for example, may reflect interactions between globalization of the media and sport and localization of meanings given to social group relations. In the US, the concept of race is often used in a categorical way while it is rarely used in that manner in Dutch populist discourses. Instead, an ethnicity paradigm informs dominant Dutch discourses about race/ethnicity. Essed (1994) explains that the association that Whites make between Black and inferiority dates back to colonial times. She argues that this association with colonizing tends to create discomfort among White Dutch people; to avoid that discomfort, they have constructed a dominant discourse based on ethnicity. It is therefore customary in the Netherlands to speak about ethnicity and not race. Ethnic groups are usually not described as hyphenated Dutch people but as Surinamese, Moroccan and Turkish. Consequently it seems they have no history in the Netherlands; there is relatively very little discourse about race and instead discussions about the (lack of) integration of immigrant ethnic groups (Essed, 1991; 1994). In addition, perhaps the use of words in interviews such as *race and Black/White* by the researchers

may have placed the focus on American instead of Dutch athletes. Surinam Dutch students may not see themselves or be coded as Black the way African Americans do. Similarly, White European Dutch students may not see themselves as White and Surinam Dutch athletes as Black, since they are not presented in terms of race but in terms of ethnicity in dominant discourses. Possibly then the use of the words *Black* and *race* in the sport setting and in conjunction with the current study may be associated with the US since local Dutch interpretations and discourses about skin colour tend to be framed only in terms of ethnicity. The globalization of the (sport) media may have had relatively little effect on local/national discursive practices in this respect.

This influence is different with respect to gender relations. Western societal discourses about gender and the body tend to be framed similarly at the local and global level (see for example the essays about gendered local and global practices in Hartmann-Tews & Pfister, 2003). As we argued earlier, this in part may be due to the structure of sport. Yet local contradictions to the dominant media discourse about gender also exist. Local and national practices also provide platforms for alternate meanings. Programs and schools often present pupils with meanings pertaining to gender and race/ethnicity that differ from hegemonic media images (Buisman, 1995). Dutch governmental programs and educational institutions stimulate and emphasize noncompetitive and mixed gender competition in volleyball, basketball and soccer in physical education. Thus, such practices and programs contest both the formal professional structure of sport and the dominant media discourse. When the participants in the current study were asked to mention sports in which they thought men and women could compete/play together they mentioned korfbal, volleyball, and tennis. Korfbal is a popular Dutch sport which men and women play together. Tennis and volleyball are sports in which an almost equal number of male and female athletes participate (NOC\* NSF, 2003). Korfbal is rarely shown on television while men's and women's volleyball and tennis are always shown as gender separate sports with the exception of mixed doubles in tennis. At the school, the noncompetitive and recreational level however, volleyball and tennis are often played as mixed gender sports. Yet personal knowledge about korfbal, volleyball and tennis seemed to have had little influence on dominant discourses of the respondents. The natural physicality discourse predominated. The results indicate that it is therefore difficult to tease out the extent to which the national and global sport media, professional and recreational sport programs and structures, (ethnic) group identification, and personal experiences separately

influence the discourses of these students about physicality and gender and race/ethnicity.

The similarity between the hegemonic sport media discourse as described in the literature and that used by the respondents seems to support the idea of the media as a site that informs hegemonic discourses. Yet both Black and White students involved in this study seem to be engaged in negotiated reading as well, creating for example a more heterogeneous discourse about mentality. In contrast, women and men participants in this study tended to be complicit with the preferred reading of the sport media about gender although other local alternative discursive practices exist. The structure of sport seems to have played a role in the creation of discourses as well. The ways in which media discourses are read and used by media users may therefore be informed by other societal discourses and personal practices and vice versa to create slippages of meanings. Our results suggest that personal experiences, ethnic identification and structure of sport as well as media discourses play a role in influencing personal discourses; the extent to which this occurred varied across discourse and race/ethnicity.

The results of this study also show how concepts that are used and types of questions that are asked by interviewers may influence the manner in which explanatory discourses are constructed. A research focus on both Black and White over/under representation in certain sports may increase the likelihood that participants in such studies use a greater variety of discourses than when the focus is on Black over-representation in certain sports. This study also raises questions about the use of a racial paradigm to conduct a study in a context in which use of an ethnicity paradigm predominates although race is implicit in dominant everyday Dutch definitions of who is defined as 'minority ethnic' and who is not. Our use of the words 'Black' and 'race' in the interviews may have led participants to talk about the North American instead of the Dutch context. The current study is, however, exploratory in nature. Further research that examines contextual factors is needed before any definite conclusions can be made about ways the sport media are read by its users.

## **Appendix A: List of topics and sample questions introduced during the course of the interviews**

### *Own sport involvement*

*Sample questions:* Do you participate in sport? Do you ever watch sports on television?

### *Gender and racial/ethnic comparisons/explanations*

#### *Black-dominated sports/events such as sprinting events and basketball*

*Sample questions:* At the Olympics in Atlanta in 1996 seven out of eight athletes in the men and women sprint finals were Black. What do you think is the reason for the large number of Black athletes in the sprint finals? (sometimes this question was posed in the reverse order: respondents were then asked why one out of eight athletes in the men or women sprint finals was White). In sprinting events shown on television, Black athletes win more often than Whites and seem to be relatively over-represented. Do you think that therefore there also should be a competition structured along the lines of race/ethnicity, so that White athletes will compete against each other and Black athletes will compete against each other?

#### *White-dominated sports such as weight lifting and tennis*

*Sample questions:* What do you think is the reason that so many White and so few Black athletes are seen in Olympic weight lifting events? Why are mainly White athletes seen in top tennis? Do you think there will be more Black tennis players in the future?

#### *Mixed sport/national sport such as soccer*

*Sample questions:* In a study by Maguire (1991) the field positions of Black and White players in the English soccer competition in the season 1989/1990 were investigated. Black players often occupied non-central positions (fullbacks, 'wide'/support midfield players and forwards); White players on the other hand appeared to occupy about as often non-central positions as central positions (goalkeeper, center back, central midfield player, central 'striker'). Why do you think Black players were mainly found in the positions at the sides of the field? Why do you think White players were relatively often found in the central positions on the field?

#### *Other sports*

*Sample questions:* Do you think other sports than sprinting events should be structured along the lines of race/ethnicity? What do you think of the

present separation in most sports between male and female athletes? Do you think there are sports in which separate men's and women's sports are not necessary? Are there sports in which males and females could compete together?



### **Chapter 3**

## **Thinking Race and Ethnicity in (Dutch) Sports Policy and Research**

Jacco van Sterkenburg (2011)

Long, J. & Spracklen, K., *Sport and Challenges to Racism*, 2011, p. 19-34, Palgrave Macmillan, reproduced with permission of Palgrave Macmillan

#### **Abstract**

The chapter will be about how race and ethnicity are considered social constructs in scholarly discourses about sport, but are often treated as essentialist categories in popular and policy discourses about sport with consequences for racial and ethnic inequalities in society at large. A cultural studies perspective, along with social cognition theory, provides the theoretical framework within which to highlight the centrality of classification and categorization in the popular use of the concepts of race and ethnicity and emphasize the constructive character of race and ethnicity in scholarly discourse. I will review dominant racial and ethnic categories which work in sport research as well as popular and policy discourses about sport to construct and normalize racial/ethnic hierarchies. New ways of using race and ethnicity in sports policy and –research will be suggested that are more open to the temporal and situational character of race and ethnicity.

Keywords: race/ethnicity; categorizations; sport policy; sport research; cultural studies

## Introduction

As authors like Brubaker et al. (2004) argued, the social constructions of race and ethnicity are significant structuring dimensions in contemporary western societies and important ways of categorizing the Self and others. Ideas about racial and ethnic groups and the multicultural society are not just influenced by institutions such as education, family and paid labor, but also by sport. Due to its popularity and the visibility it gives to various ethnicities, (televised) sport -and soccer in particular as one of the most popular sports worldwide- has become an important factor in the expression of racial and ethnic meanings and categorizations. This is evident in a recent article in the national Dutch quality newspaper *De Volkskrant* that states that 'the line-up of the Dutch [soccer] team under 17 at Euro 2008 reads like an exotic menu' (Dibi & Jungmann, 2008, p. 12). According to the writers of the piece, the Dutch national soccer team will increasingly become multi-ethnic and multi-racial. Another newspaper article adds 'that a new phenomenon presents itself already; the former asylum seeker as professional soccer player, [...] [such as] Youssouf Hersi from Ethiopia, Collins John from Liberia and Haris Medunjanin from Bosnia' (Vissers, 2005, p. 40). These quotations illustrate the multiplicity and range of ethnic groups that are represented in Dutch professional soccer. And this multi-ethnicity is not restricted to soccer or the Dutch context: it is illustrative of professional as well as amateur sports worldwide (Poli & Ravenel, 2008; Coakley, 2007).

Two schools of thought can be roughly distinguished in the (Dutch) debate about the social functions of sport for the multicultural society: one more popular and common sense, the other more scholarly and critical (Hartmann, 2000). The popular and commonsense discourse about sport generally emphasizes and takes for granted the beneficial effect of sport on racial and ethnic relations. Politicians and the mainstream media in the Netherlands generally seem to support this positive perspective towards the social function of sport (Van Sterkenburg, 2010; Verweel, 2010). They argue that sport, with its appeal to a variety of ethnic groups, can make a fundamental contribution to interethnic interaction and dialogue and to processes of social bonding and integration in multicultural societies (see also Verweel, 2007). This sport-as-a-progressive-racial/ethnic-force discourse (Hartmann, 2000) is evident in Dutch national policy programs that often use sport as a social panacea, to solve perceived problems of, for instance, obesity among young people or to face perceived challenges arising from the integration of minority ethnic youth (Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport, 2005).

In contrast to this perspective stands the recognition, by many Dutch as well as international critical scholars of sport, that sport also

harbours racialized (as well as homophobic, sexist or sectarian) ideologies. They emphasize that racism, homophobia and sectarianism are persistent aspects of sport and that (mediated) sport confirms and reinforces, and at times challenges, racial or ethnic stereotypes as well as more institutionalized forms of racism (e.g. Boyle & Haynes, 2000; Müller, Van Zoonen & De Roode, 2008). These scholars see the sports arena primarily as a site of struggle in which different dimensions of ethnic bonding and ethnic exclusion are performed, experienced and demonstrated (Elling & Van Sterkenburg, 2008).

In this chapter, the purpose is not so much to elaborate in detail on perspectives on both sport and race/ethnicity. Previous studies already extensively discussed the role of sport as a potential catalyst for racial and ethnic relations and generally concluded that sport should be considered a 'contested racial terrain' (Hartmann, 2000, p. 245) and that 'it is too simplistic to say that sport improves "race relations", just as it is to say that sport can only reproduce racist ideologies' (Carrington & McDonald, 2001, p. 2). However, the specific racial/ethnic *categorizations* that these two views towards sport generate and (re)produce have received relatively little scholarly attention until now. As several authors have discussed, racial and ethnic categorizations are essential in structuring the very ways in which people think about and give meaning to race and ethnicity (Hall, 1995). Racial and ethnic categorizations permit individuals to go beyond immediately given information, to make inferences and interpret the world according to these established categories (Brubaker et al., 2004). They give people a definition of what race or ethnicity *is* (Hall, 1995).

This chapter critically interrogates the common sense and often taken for granted use of racial/ethnic categorizations in Dutch sports policy and everyday discourse about race and ethnicity. I will juxtapose these categorization practices with the racial/ethnic categorizations used in critical scholarly studies (Dutch as well as international) on race and ethnicity in sport and the sport media. These studies are usually informed by a constructionist approach towards race and ethnicity. I will argue that both categorization practices pose their own problems. Suggestions will be made about how to synthesize the two perspectives. Such an effort seems relevant to sensitize researchers as well as (Dutch) policy makers in the field of race and ethnicity, helping them to conceptualize race and ethnicity in more reflexive and contextual ways.

### **My theoretical lens**

A cultural studies approach provides the theoretical lens through which I approach sports, the sport media and race and ethnicity. A cultural studies perspective sees sport and the media as aspects of popular culture through

which people formulate and put into action ideas about race and ethnicity. In other words, sport, sport governing bodies as well as the sport media can be considered as sites that provide people with *discourses* about race and ethnicity. Stuart Hall, a leading proponent of cultural studies, defines discourse as 'ways of referring to or constructing knowledge about a particular topic' (1997, p. 6). While discourse 'rules in' and prefers certain ways of talking about a topic, it also by definition rules out, limits and restricts other ways of talking about that topic. In that sense discourse constructs the topic, defines and produces it (Hall, 1997). Both race and ethnicity can be considered social phenomena that are constructed and reconstructed in and through discourses. Central in the understanding of race and ethnicity from a cultural studies perspective is their reflection of existing power relations. Discourses about race and ethnicity in sport and sport media, as in other domains, reflect inequalities of power in which powerful groups in society have more power to label, categorize and define the less powerful (Feagin & Vera, 1995).

Although some critical examinations of race and ethnicity have revealed their distinctive conceptual character by associating race with social meanings given to biology and inherited differences, and ethnicity with cultural differences (Jackson & Garner, 1998), others argue that these constructs also overlap and are often conflated in western societies (e.g. Brubaker et al., 2004; Eriksen, 2002; Rath, 1991). The conflated character is evident when ethnic groups are described in racial terms, for instance when all people from the African diasporas, variegated in ethnic terms, are aggregated and lumped together into the racial category of 'Blacks' (Omi & Winant, 1986), or when all (West) Europeans are labelled 'White' despite ethnic differences among them. In this chapter, I will also refer to the constructs of race and ethnicity as conflated constructs.

### **The Dutch context**

Apart from being theoretically informed by a cultural studies perspective, my view upon race and ethnicity in sport is also influenced by being a (White, male) Dutch scholar. The Dutch situation with regard to discourses about race and ethnicity is unique in several aspects and therefore deserves some explanation. Philemona Essed (2004), a scholar in the area of Dutch ethnic and racial relations, has noted the specificity of the Dutch context, stating that the discourse about race and ethnicity in the Netherlands is framed in terms of minority ethnic groups and their lack of integration. As in other European countries like France or Finland (Silverman & Yuval-Davis, 1999; Rastas 2005) the race category 'Black' and the Black-White dichotomy to define race, commonly used in US and UK discourses about race, is generally rejected in popular Dutch

discourse. According to the Dutch Central Office for Statistics, the four largest minority ethnic groups in the Netherlands are defined as ‘Turkish’, ‘Moroccan’, ‘Surinam’ and ‘Dutch Antillean’ (CBS, 2009). These ethnic groups comprise around seven per cent of the total Dutch population according to government statistics (CBS, 2009). The Surinamese and Antillean minority ethnic groups are linked to the Dutch colonial past while the Turkish and Moroccan groups are linked to economic labor migration during the 1950s and 1960s. In addition to this discourse about *minority ethnic groups*, the Dutch everyday and policy discourse about race/ethnicity focuses on the binary categorization of *allochtonen* and *autochtonen*. The term *autochtoon* could be loosely translated as indigenous and *allochtoon* as foreigner. But since these terms are contextualized in the Dutch discourse about race and ethnicity, a precise translation into English is not possible (Van Sterkenburg, Knoppers & De Leeuw, 2010). The official Dutch governmental policies classify an individual as *allochtoon* if one parent was born out of the Netherlands and as *autochtoon* if both parents were born in the Netherlands. In everyday discourse, however, these ethnic categories are also highly racialized because skin colour has become an important marker of both categories. All non-western minority ethnic groups of colour are usually classified as *allochtoon* in everyday discourse while White European Dutch people are called *autochtoon*. I shall reflect on this categorization further on in the chapter.

In the following, I will discuss the sport-as-a-progressive-racial/ethnic-force discourse and the more critical, scholarly discourse with regard to how they both perceive the social function of (Dutch) sports for racial and ethnic relations. In particular, I will focus on the racial/ethnic *categorizations* these two discourses (re)produce (or challenge). After having discussed these categorization practices, I will try to bring the two perspectives together. Some guidelines will be suggested for the use of race and ethnicity in future sports policy and research that is more sensitive and open to the contextual character of race and ethnicity and to the power relations involved in the constructions and definitions of race and ethnicity.

### **Dutch sports policy discourse and racial/ethnic categorizations**

The dominant policy discourse about race/ethnicity and sport in the Netherlands has been largely concerned with how sports can be beneficial for interethnic relations through interethnic contact and how sports can contribute to the integration of minority ethnic groups. This discourse was demonstrated, for instance, when the former Dutch Minister of Integration Rita Verdonk argued that participating in sport brings people closer to one

another and that ethnic mingling in sport contributes to integration (in: Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport, 2006a). Included in this policy discourse about sport is the use of specific racial and ethnic categorizations that define the target groups of sport policies or locate problematic groups that these policies address. The racial/ethnic categorizations (often implicitly) represent certain discourses about race and ethnicity and specific hierarchies that reach many people simultaneously, often through the media. The question of relevance then becomes which racial and ethnic categories and discourses about race and ethnicity are dominant and preferred in this sport-as-a-positive-racial/ethnic-force discourse, and which are marginalized, and how this connects to relations of power in society at large.

As discussed earlier, the discourses about race/ethnicity in the Netherlands mainly centre around two categorizations; one that distinguishes between the largest minority ethnic groups in the Netherlands and one that distinguishes between the categories of *autochtonen* (indigenous) and *allochtonen* (foreigner). In the next sections, I will discuss how the widespread and often unreflexive use of the *allochtoon/autochtoon* categorization in particular, in recent Dutch sport policy documents, can result in one-sided governmental sports policies that are very much situated in an assimilationist framework towards racial/ethnic relations and the multi-ethnic society.

### **The policy initiative *Meedoen allochtone jeugd door sport***

The Dutch nationwide sport policy initiative *Meedoen allochtone jeugd door sport* [Participation of allochthonous youth through sport] in which more than 500 Dutch sport clubs participate, was initiated by the Dutch government in 2006. The programme is financially funded by the Dutch Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sports for the period 2006-2010 and aims to increase the numbers of minority ethnic youth (4-23 years) who are members of a sport club (Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sports, 2005; 2006b; c). The programme explicitly uses sport as a tool for achieving social goals, in particular to improve the integration of minority racial/ethnic groups in Dutch society. The following quote, referring to the programme, is a concrete manifestation of this:

[...] In the programme ['Meedoen allochtone jeugd door sport'] the characteristic aspects of sports will be used for pedagogical and integration purposes towards the allochthonous youth. This will take place through creating fields of encounters between autochthonous and allochthonous youth in sport [...]  
(Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sports, 2006b, p. 3, own contribution between brackets)

As this quote demonstrates, the Dutch programme reproduces the dominant *allochtoon/autochtoon* binary. Although it briefly addresses sport participation of autochthonous youth and the role of White autochthonous sport clubs in the integration of minority ethnic youth (Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sports, 2006c), the programme is especially directed towards the allochthonous youth (2006b; 2006c). This dominant focus on allochthonous youth is evident when the document continues by saying that the programme aims to 'convey norms and values' to allochthonous youth and 'teach [them] how to deal with rules' (Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sports, 2006b, p. 4). These quotes are situated in a sport-as-a-positive-racial/ethnic-force-discourse that is characterized by the idea that the assimilation of allochthonous youth into the mainstream of Dutch values is a positive contribution that can be made by sport. The focus on the category of allochthonous youth in the policy programme and the perceived need to teach them Dutch norms and values through sport reflects the wider Dutch discourse about race and ethnicity that emphasizes the need for the social group of *allochtonen* to assimilate to dominant Dutch norms and values. In other words, sport is used here to bring the cultural norms and values of *allochtonen* closer to those of *autochtonen* while rendering the social group of (White) *autochtonen* normative. An instrumentalist discourse of this type thus reduces the Dutch population to discrete racial/ethnic groups – *allochtonen* and *autochtonen* - that implicitly continue to be hierarchically positioned according to what Carrington & McDonald (2001) called 'the ascribed proximity to the normative structure of White [autochthonous] collective identity' (p. 59, own contribution between brackets to relate to the Dutch context). In doing so, the discourse implicitly denies the *allochtone*/non-White individual the right to be different and assesses him/her exclusively with regard to his/her degree of assimilation to the dominant (Dutch) cultural norms and values. In other words, the *allochtoon/autochtoon* categorization used in sport policy documents like *Meedoen allochtone jeugd door sport* is situated in a discourse that privileges one racial/ethnic group (*autochtonen*) above the other (*allochtonen*).

This mainstream Dutch sports policy discourse surrounding race and ethnicity is consistent with Hall's (1991) statement that the majority ethnic group finds itself in an ideal subject position with respect to ethnicity in many socio-cultural practices, including sport. Although majority and minority ethnic Dutch citizens increasingly interact in their neighborhood, at work or in leisure time, the majority ethnic group in general has more discursive power to stipulate the dominant discourses and categorizations about ethnicity (Elling & Van Sterkenburg, 2008). This also applies to the area of Dutch sports policy: the vast majority of sports policy makers belong to the majority ethnic group that can be defined as White and *autochtoon* in everyday discourse. Their discursive power (re)produces the *allochtoon-autochtoon* dichotomy in Dutch sports policies and society at large. This dichotomy causes those labeled as *autochtonen* (and White) generally to be 'inside, included and powerful', as the 'we', the 'answer' and, most notably, to be unspoken (Dyer, 2001; Wekker, 1998). The categories of *allochtonen* or minority ethnic groups (generally non-White) on the other hand are often stereotyped as the Other and are often (unconsciously) represented as less intelligent, deviant, uncivilized, and the source of the problem (Wekker, 1998). This discourse thus constructs a racial/ethnic hierarchy that represents the socially constructed group of *allochtonen* as culturally less developed vis-à-vis the socially constructed group of *autochtonen*. This may not be a conscious process; White/autochthonous people may reproduce and strengthen the status quo without knowing it (Hall, 1995).

### **Cultural racism**

The dominance of a White *autochtoon* (sports policy) discourse that strengthens and revolves around this hierarchical relationship between *autochtonen* and *allochtonen* determines the kind of integration that it will finally produce. Such a discourse reveals what several authors have labeled the operation of 'cultural racism' (Carrington & McDonald, 2001). Cultural racism constructs insider and outsider groups on the basis of cultural assimilation to Dutch mainstream (White, autochthonous) norms and cultural values. It is signified by and conflated with biological and religious markers of difference, evident from the fact that it is, in particular, non-western minority ethnic groups of *colour* or 'Muslims' who are labeled *allochtoon* in contemporary everyday Dutch discourse. This dominant way of 'thinking' race and ethnicity in terms of homogeneous and fixed entities, marginalizes alternative engagements with race and ethnicity in sports policy or society at large. It does not address cultural differences within or similarities between the broadly defined categories of *allochtonen* and *autochtonen* (Gunaratnam, 2003;

Wekker, 1998). It also runs the risk of ignoring the fact that race and ethnicity and racial and ethnic identities are always co-constituted by other axes of power like gender, age or social class (Wekker, 1998). In addition, it does not generate a critical reflection on the imagined homogeneous group of (White) autochthonous people and its privileged position in the Dutch mainstream discourse about race/ethnicity.

To summarize, the (re)production of the *autochtoon-allochtoon* categorization scheme in the Dutch sport-as-a-positive-racial/ethnic-force discourse is not ideologically neutral, but socially produced, and situated in a certain hegemonic (White) autochthonous discourse that privileges White *autochtonen* above non-White *allochtonen*. The autochthonous White perspective that historically produced this dichotomy in the first place remains invisible and, as a result, it becomes difficult to reveal the normativeness of ‘autochthoanness’/whiteness in Dutch policies and society. What is at stake here from a cultural studies perspective, is the disappearance of the *constructedness* of the ethnic categorizations of *allochtonen* and *autochtonen* into the taken-for-granted world of common sense (Hall, 1995; 1997). If existing discourses about ethnicity and ethnic categorizations – or other social group relations – are increasingly being naturalized through their repeated and seemingly self evident use in (sport) policies, they are likewise increasingly placed beyond the reach of change and political intervention. Such an unreflexive (sports) policy can then only direct itself towards that what it *does* know, that what *is* visible and what ‘*should be civilized*’: the *allochtone* Other.

### **The scholarly, constructionist discourse**

Constructionist scholarly writings on race and ethnicity have extensively criticized such normalized hierarchical accounts of racial/ethnic categories as pure and fixed entities (see for example, Hall, 1997) and have emphasized that race and ethnicity are social constructs that are context specific and dependent on power relations. It is not surprising that Dutch scholars using a constructionist approach are critical of the Dutch governmental use of race/ethnicity as a seemingly fixed characteristic that can be pinned down along the lines of the hierarchical dichotomy between *allochtonen* and *autochtonen* (Wekker, 1998). Dutch as well as international critical scholars emphasize the temporal and situational character of race and ethnicity by pointing, amongst other factors, to the historically shifting boundaries that determine who is included in a certain racial category and who is not. Race scholars Omi & Winant (1986) and Nederveen Pieterse (1995), for instance, demonstrated that populations nowadays defined as White in the US and UK such as South European and Irish immigrants, have been defined as distinct ‘races’ in the past<sup>xiv</sup>.

Captain & Ghorashi (2001) illustrated the historical flexibility of who is labeled as *allochtoon* and *autochtoon* in the Dutch context by describing the shifting position of Dutch immigrants originating from the former East Indian colony (*Indische Nederlanders*).

These immigrants of Dutch and Indonesian origins came to the Netherlands in the 1950s. In order to limit their immigration into the Netherlands, the government divided this variegated group into two subgroups; those who were perceived as oriented towards the Netherlands ('Western-oriented *Indische Nederlanders*') and those with Indonesian roots ('Eastern-oriented *Indische Nederlanders*') (Schuster, 1999, p. 311). The first group mainly included White Dutch individuals who had lived in the Dutch East Indian colony only temporarily while the second group consisted of people of mixed Indonesian and Dutch origin most of whom had never seen the Netherlands (Schuster, 1999). The group constructed as Eastern-oriented *Indische Nederlanders* were then discouraged to immigrate to the Netherlands because of their perceived genetic inability to assimilate (Captain & Ghorashi, 2001). One decade later however, the same government radically changed its view and considered the whole group of *Indische Nederlanders* as successfully assimilated in Dutch society. While they were, thus, (in part) defined as the Other upon their arrival in the Netherlands, they became socially invisible one decade later and are now even praised for their successful assimilation into Dutch society (Captain & Ghorashi, 2001)<sup>xv</sup>. When the label *allochtoon* became dominant in Dutch policy discourse in the 1990s (Captain & Ghorashi, 2001), this minority ethnic group managed to escape the label non-western *allochtoon* altogether.

The emphasis in contemporary sociological work on the temporality and situatedness of (meanings given to) race and ethnicity has also resulted in a growing body of literature that examines and reflects on the construction of whiteness as a privileged and normative category (e.g. Dyer, 1997; Garner, 2006). Sport has proved to be a useful sociological site for examining whiteness, White privilege and racial/ethnic hierarchies (for example, Long & Hylton, 2002). In the Dutch context, scholars like Elling (2007) have reflected on the problems that White, autochthonous athletes have to see their own (White) 'autochtonness'. The shift in attention towards the dominant ethnic/racial Self instead of the marginalized ethnic/racial Other can be considered an important contribution to the sometimes pathologizing almost exclusive attention paid to the (Black or *allochtone*) Other in sport sociological research and policy documents.

But despite the significant contributions that constructionist scholarly writings have made to examining White privilege and to the

deconstruction of common sense discourses about race and ethnicity, their use of racial/ethnic categorizations also poses some theoretical and methodological problems. In the remainder of this section I will make this problematic more explicit by discussing the kinds of racial/ethnic categorizations that some constructionist scholarly writings on sport have produced in and through their studies.

### **Social constructionism and racial/ethnic categorizations**

The major problem that social constructionist writers face when it comes to the use and definitions of race and ethnicity is how to reckon with everyday essentialism and popular racial/ethnic categorizations (Brubaker et al., 2004; Nayak, 2006). Social constructionist writers generally reject the use of stabilized and essentialist categories, but they also tend to reify them in their studies. Gunaratnam and Nayak illustrated this ambiguity by stating that social constructionist writers on the one hand emphasize that there are no 'distinct races with biologically inherent characteristics or culturally immutable ethnicities' (Nayak, 2006, p. 411), but at the same time 'freeze, tame and objectify race and ethnicity into unitary categories that can be easily understood and managed' (Gunaratnam, 2003, p. 33). Brubaker et al. (2004, p. 45) agreed and argued that

Despite the constructivist stance that has come to prevail in sophisticated studies of ethnicity, [...] much ostensibly constructivist academic writing about ethnicity remains informed by 'groupism': by the tendency to take discrete, sharply differentiated, internally homogeneous, and externally bounded groups as basic constituents of social life, chief protagonists of social conflicts and fundamental units of social analysis. Ethnic groups, races and nations continue to be treated as things-in-the-world, as real, substantial entities [...]

The tendency to use stabilized, essentialist categories to define race or ethnicity seems particularly evident in some of the more quantitatively oriented studies that subscribe to a social constructionist approach. In a meta-analysis on quantitatively oriented media studies that examined racial and ethnic representations in the sport media (discussed in detail in the following chapter), we found that many North-American and British researchers subscribed to a social constructionist approach on the one hand but used a definition of race or ethnicity in terms of Black and White *a-priori* on the other. These studies generally froze and classified race and ethnicity into the seemingly fixed and stable categories of Black and White (Van Sterkenburg et al., 2010). Even in West European contexts

like the Dutch, social constructionist researchers have used a similar predefined Black-White conceptualization of race (Knoppers & Elling, 1999). This is remarkable, since the Dutch popular discourse, as explained earlier in this chapter, focuses more on the broad *allochtoon/autochtoon* dichotomy or a diversity of minority ethnic groups. The use of a Black-White dichotomy to define race or ethnicity in Dutch scholarly studies may obscure relevant ethnic distinctions that go beyond what can be captured by the Black-White mapping. The end result of such scholarly routines is that they might reproduce universalist forms of essentialism, stereotyping and racialized power relations instead of unraveling and deconstructing mechanisms of racial or ethnic inequality in sport or the sport media in the specific context under study.

Researchers who subscribe to a social constructionist approach towards race and ethnicity thus need to move away from *predefining* racial/ethnic categorizations as if they were universally applicable and a-historical. Such predefining categorization practices still guide the questions some social constructionist scholars pose and the knowledge they produce. In particular, studies that work with large volumes of data and that are characterized by the process of classifying and categorizing these data along racial/ethnic lines, should remain open for the temporality and situatedness of racial and ethnic categorizations and use categories that are relevant in the context under study (Van Sterkenburg et al., 2010). In the next section, I will attempt to provide some theoretical and methodological guidelines for ‘thinking’ race/ethnicity and using racial/ethnic categories in scholarly research that does justice to the tension that exists between aiming to approach race and ethnicity as socially constituted and contextual constructs on the one hand, while also acknowledging the need to examine large volumes of data and the logic to use everyday essentialist categories on the other. Apart from suggesting guidelines for future (sports) research, I also aim to demonstrate how these insights can result in a more sophisticated usage of the concepts of race and ethnicity in sports policy and help policy makers escape blinkered thinking.

### **Bringing the perspectives together**

As I argued in the previous section, an essentialist common sense approach towards race/ethnicity that defines the concept in seemingly stable and naturalized hierarchical categories like Black and White or *allochtoon* and *autochtoon* has generally been rejected within the scholarly social constructionist paradigm. It gives the impression of biological or cultural determination, while racial or ethnic groups do not in fact have any biological or cultural essence but are socially constructed

and change over time and place (Miles, 1989). However, social constructionist writers regularly do use a notion of race/ethnicity that ‘freezes’ the concept into seemingly stable and naturalized categories (Nayak, 2006), in particular when they have to manage and classify large volumes of data. In contrast to scholarly discourses, an essentialist approach towards race and ethnicity is much more commonplace and accepted in everyday and policy discourses about race and ethnicity. Brubaker et al. (2004) and Baumann (1999) argued that an approach towards race/ethnicity that emphasizes its essentialist and categorical character is very popular in everyday conversations, political rhetoric and the (sport) media, for the majority racial/ethnic group as well as minority racial/ethnic groups. Because so many laypeople embrace a view of race/ethnicity that more or less *essentializes* others and the self into seemingly fixed racial/ethnic categories, Baumann (1999) argued that it cannot be simply discarded (Baumann, 1999); After all, ‘it shapes the realities that we [as sociologists] need to understand’ (Baumann (1999 pp. 90 -91, own contribution between brackets).

For this reason, I would argue that scholars should not treat both approaches –the essentialist, categorical approach and the scholarly, constructionist approach - as opposites and mutually exclusive, with the one as false and the other as true. Instead, I would suggest to consider them as complementary rather than oppositional (Baumann, 1999). We can do this by acknowledging that both approaches are largely directed towards different questions. The categorical approach works with discrete categories that are actually used to define race/ethnicity in daily practice. The constructionist approach, which is supported by most scholars within the social and human sciences, emphasizes how these categories are at the same time contextual, fluid and constructed. Connecting the two perspectives requires attending to everyday essentialist, popular, categorical definitions of race and ethnicity as well as to structures of power and structural inequalities that are related to how these racial and ethnic categories *have come into being*, are continuously (re)constructed, played out and change over time and place (Carrington, 1998; Malik, 1996). It also requires attending to how these popular and essentialist categorizations are themselves the structuring principles of social life in contemporary multi-ethnic societies and, consequently, the vectors of existing relations of power. As argued earlier in the paper, the naturalization of racial/ethnic categories (implicitly) relates to very specific racial/ethnic hierarchies.

To make my argument more precise I will refer here to the writings of theorists Baumann (1999) and Brubaker et al. (2004)<sup>xvi</sup> who mainly approach race and ethnicity as social cognitive categories<sup>xvii</sup>.

Social cognition theory attributes popular societal categorizations of race and ethnicity to mental classification practices that are used by many to understand the world (Van Sterkenburg et al., 2010). Although these authors argue that we should avoid ‘analytical groupism’, that is, the tendency to treat racial and ethnic groups as *predefined* entities, they argue that we should take into account the importance of ‘groupism’ and categories in the practice of everyday thought, talk, policy analysis, media broadcasting, and even some of the constructivist academic writing about race and ethnicity (Baumann, 1999; Brubaker et al., 2004). They highlight the centrality of categorization in the popular use of the concepts of race and ethnicity, while emphasizing at the same time its constructive character. Without ignoring the shared content of a racial or ethnic group, their perspective claims that this shared content has no *a priori* existence or stability (see also Eriksen, 2002). It is the product of people’s ways of categorizing themselves and others, in order to create boundaries between them and construct racial/ethnic hierarchies. In other words, it is the people’s *beliefs* about racial or ethnic differences that create the categories. It is not important whether race and ethnicity ‘in reality’ are relevant categorizing variables here, if they are believed to be relevant, this belief is real in its consequences (Woodward, 2004).

Race and ethnicity should, therefore, be understood in terms of categories, but these categories should *not* be considered and used as pre-defined and already fixed entities that can be *a-priori* operationalized - as many Dutch politicians, as well as some social constructionist researchers studying race and ethnicity, still do. In other words, although the binary racial/ ethnic classification *allochtonen/autochtonen* is commonplace and dominant in Dutch society, is rooted in cognitive processes, and even institutions like the state routinely categorize people as members of the *allochtone* or *autochtone* group, the very process of this categorizing is a *practice* that originates from a specific (White, autochthonous) racial/ethnic standpoint; an inventive/constructive act which is shaped by human minds (Baumann, 1999).

Precisely because racial and ethnic categories are socially constructed and can change across cultural and historical boundaries, I argue that researchers as well as politicians should be more reflexive of their use of racial and ethnic categorizations. This implies, amongst others, an emphasis on and reflection of *power relations* and *racial/ethnic perspectives* from which these categorizations emerge. Categorizing practices always relate to wider power structures and racialized/ethnicized histories in society at large (Leonard, 2004). In addition, they are always expressed through voices that are racially/ethnically positioned (Wekker, 1998). Therefore, the point is not so much, as Fernandes (1997) argued, to

‘deny the importance –both material and discursive – of [racial/ethnic] categories, but to focus on the process by which they are produced, experienced, reproduced and resisted in everyday life’ (quoted in McCall, 2005,p.1783).

In Dutch sport policy, this means that policy makers should avoid attempting to almost exclusively represent the *allochtone* Other in their governmental documents that describe policy initiatives. Instead they should also reflect on their own ethnic positioning and acknowledge the *autochtone* Self as the subject for policy analysis and governmental address. This means, for instance, that policy makers should critically expand on the role that predominantly *autochtone* (White) sport clubs play in the participation and integration of minority ethnic youth. Although this notion is touched upon in documents that describe the Dutch sport policy programme *Meedoen allochtone jeugd door sport*, these documents generally address the social group of *allochtonen*. Addressing the *autochtone* Self in policy documents and programmes also means a shift in focus on to more institutionalised forms of racism in sport organizations<sup>xviii</sup>. Minority ethnic groups are still significantly underrepresented in boardrooms and other managerial positions within many sport clubs and organizations as well as sport governing bodies. This situation is not unique for the Netherlands, but applies to other European countries as well (Burdsey 2007; Long & Hylton, 2002; Van Sterkenburg & Rijnen, 2005). As a consequence, the unwritten, informal rules and norms in most sport organisations usually fit most closely the preferences, norms and interpretation frames of the (White) majority racial/ethnic group. The rules of the majority ethnic group have thus become and continue to be the ‘norm’ for the organisation of sport. Governmental programmes can address this phenomenon more explicitly and stimulate a critical (self) reflection on the unequal racialized/ethnicized distribution of power in sport clubs and sporting bodies. As Gloria Wekker (1998), a scholar in the area of Dutch racial and ethnic relations, already argued, the presence and mere existence of the *allochtone* Other is always relational and refers to the presence of the (normative and normalized) *autochtone* Self. A more balanced policy discourse would overcome the invisibility of the White *autochtone* Self that implicitly functions as the norm. It might open up the possibility to discuss White, autochthonous privilege and normativity in many sports policy programmes. It would also render more explicit the constructed hierarchical racialized/ethnicized character of contemporary, apparently value-free and objective sport policy discourses.

With regard to critical scholarly research, I would urge Dutch as well as international sport scholars to problematize in every new study the

categorizations that they use and to ‘ground’ these categorizations in empirical research that is contextualized in time and place, instead of predefining them on the basis of past research that is often located in the US or (to a lesser extent) the UK. Studies that tend to use predefined racial/ethnic categories in their research design could benefit from methods used in ethnographic case-study oriented approaches to sport. Those studies tend to locate the analysis of race and ethnicity at the micro level of sport into the larger framework of racialized/ethnicized power relations and discourses in the society at large that is being studied (Van Sterkenburg et al., 2010). Scholars such as Jackson (1998), Spencer (2001) and Jamieson (1998), for instance, deconstructed media representations surrounding sport celebrities and demonstrated that racial and ethnic meanings and categorizations used by the sport media are dependent on the convergence of temporal and situational societal factors as well as on the varied ethnic standpoints from which these meanings and categorizations are constructed<sup>xix</sup>. Quantitatively oriented studies that are characterized by the use of categories should also continuously reflect on this convergence of temporal and situational factors and ethnic standpoints that help to shape racial/ethnic categorizations used at the micro level of sport or sport media. This implies that researchers explore throughout their analysis the various racial/ethnic categorizations that might be relevant in the specific context under study to differentiate among people, instead of predefining *one* racial/ethnic categorization based on previous studies and routinely apply that categorization without reflection throughout the analytical process. In Dutch everyday discourse, for instance, several racial/ethnic categorizations are often used parallel to each other. These various popular categorizations should be explored throughout the analysis, along with possible alternative categorizations that appear to be relevant for the specific context or situation under study. This exploration and analytical use of a variety of categories throughout the analysis gives the researcher the opportunity to gain better insight into the diversity and different levels of racial/ethnic categories that are used to give meaning to and construct difference in the context under study. In addition, it urges the researcher to reflect on the question which categories are actually preferred and dominant in that context, and which are marginalized, and how that might relate to power relations in society at large<sup>xx</sup>. For a further elaboration on the possible use of such a contextual analysis in sport media research that uses racial/ethnic categories, see Van Sterkenburg et al. (2010) and the next chapters of this book.

## **Conclusion**

In summary, then, I have drawn from a cultural studies perspective as well

as insights from social cognition theory to critique the use of racial and ethnic categorizations in Dutch sports policy and everyday discourse as well as in some (quantitatively oriented) constructionist scholarly writing. I urge those using racial/ethnic categorizations in sports research or sports policy to reflect on their use of categorizations and be open to the power relations and racialized/ethnicized standpoints from which these categorizations emerge. Situating racial/ethnic categorizations in the power dynamics of the time will result in more balanced (Dutch) sport policies. Such policies will not almost exclusively focus on the non-White *allochtone* Other, but also reflect on the dominance and normativeness of the White *autochtone* Self in sports policy and on the differences within and similarities between the categories of *allochtonen* and *autochtonen*. Although critical scholarly research in the area of sport and race/ethnicity have increasingly paid attention to White normativeness and the privilege of being White in a White culture, some of this research can at the same time be criticized for naturalizing the status quo and confirming existing (US-oriented) racial/ethnic hierarchies through their tendency to *predefine* race or ethnicity and, it seems routinely, follow categorizations used in previous studies. It is vital that race and ethnicity are problematized in every new study and that the use of categorizations is ‘grounded’ in the context under study, in order to avoid routinely reifying racial and ethnic categories (see also Van Sterkenburg et al., 2010).



## **Chapter 4**

### **Race, Ethnicity and Content Analysis of the Sport Media: A Critical Reflection**

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#### **Abstract**

In this paper we draw on a cultural studies perspective to reflect critically on the racial and ethnic categorizations that are used by those who employ content analysis to study sports commentary and to demonstrate how such categories naturalize racial thought and erase ethnic distinctions. We use examples of content analyses of the sport media to illustrate the dominant categorization practices used in many studies. We draw on perspectives from cultural studies and social cognition theory and on methods based on grounded theory to suggest a method of conducting verbal content analysis that is sensitive to the contextual character of constructions of race and ethnicity.

Keywords: sport media, race, ethnicity, content analysis, categorizations, cultural studies

Opinions about and attitudes towards the constructs of race and ethnicity in contemporary western society are not only influenced by institutions such as those of academics, politics, education, family, or paid labour, but also by the media. Popular forms of media culture, varying from news broadcasts and talk shows to soap operas and music videos, can be highly influential in structuring ideas about race and ethnicity. Entman contended that the media 'call attention to some aspects of reality while obscuring other elements' (1993, p. 55). The media create dominant interpretations of reality that appeal to a desired or anticipated audience. According to Hall (1995; 1997), the media are not only a powerful source of dominant ideas about race and ethnicity, but should also be considered as sites of constantly shifting meanings and struggles over meaning. This is evident in the way that the media on the one hand celebrate successful African Americans like Oprah Winfrey and Michael Jordan, while also confirming and reinforcing racist stereotypes. According to Jessica Rhodes, a scholar in ethnic studies and mass communication, racist stereotypes have been embedded in the US mass media since the 18th century, whether it be 'the benign and happy slave figure', 'the black brute who rapes white women' or the 'promiscuous black woman' (1995, pp. 36-7). This stereotypical and one-dimensional framing of racial and ethnic groups by the media is not confined to the US context. Ter Wal, d'Haenens & Koeman, in an analysis of the representation of ethnicity in European Union (EU) and Dutch domestic news, found that negative societal constructions of minority ethnic groups were maintained by media generalizations, 'for example, [...] through explicit associations of ethnicity [minority ethnic groups] with predominantly negative news contexts' such as 'crime and deviance' (2005, pp. 937; 948, own contribution between brackets).

Due to their popularity, the *sport* media are also assumed to play an important role in the expression of meanings given to race and ethnicity (Bruce, 2004). Sport media scholars such as Boyle & Haynes (2000) and Rowe (2003) have argued that the amount of television coverage given to professional male sport in particular has increased on a global scale during the past decades. The social power of televised sport is evident in the popularity of male sport stars like Tiger Woods or Thierry Henry that may serve as role models and a source of empowerment for many young Black media users. However, critical scholars such as Davis & Harris (1998) have suggested that the sport media also portray minority racial and ethnic groups in stereotypical ways, thereby reinforcing and confirming racial and ethnic inequalities in society at large. Bruce (2004) suggested that sport commentators who work under high pressure and on a live stage may often unconsciously draw on widely circulating racial ideologies as they have little time to think about their reactions to what

occurs on the playing field. The societal consequences of this stereotyping are often ignored in public discourse about the sport media, since televised sport programs and discussions are generally not recognized as having broader societal implications.

Central to the ways in which the sport media construct and represent ideas about racial and ethnic groups, are the categorizing practices they (may) use. The (sport) media have the potential to render certain racial and ethnic categorizations more salient than others, thereby shaping or reifying the racial and ethnic categories that people use to structure and order the world around them (Hall, 1995). An article in a national Dutch newspaper, for instance, referred to the ‘wave of Turkish and, especially, Moroccan blood in Dutch professional soccer that follows the Surinamese influx of soccer players in the eighties and nineties’ (Vissers, 2005, p. 40). Such a quotation illustrates the range of ethnic categories that are represented in and named by the Dutch sport media. Although this quotation refers to the Dutch context, this multi-ethnicity is not unique but common to professional men’s sport teams worldwide (Coakley, 2007; Poli & Ravenel, 2008).

In order to capture the representations of race and ethnicity in the sport media, scholars often also use racial and ethnic categorizations in their analyses. These categorizations guide their research questions and their findings (see also van Sterkenburg et al., 2010). Yet the nature of the racial and ethnic categories employed by scholars who study the sport media has received relatively little attention. In this paper, we address this neglect by critically interrogating the racial and ethnic categorizations used by scholars who study the sport media. We draw on a cultural studies perspective to argue that such categorization practices may naturalize a form of racial thought and subsequently we discuss possible alternatives to existing categorization practices.

### **Theoretical framework**

A cultural studies approach considers sport and media as aspects of culture through which people formulate and put into action ideas about skin colour and cultural heritage that are then carried over into the rest of society. Stuart Hall (1995), a leading proponent of cultural studies, spoke in this context of *discourses* that are constructed by the media. He defined discourse as ‘ways of referring to or constructing knowledge about a particular topic’ (1997, p. 6). Discourse produces certain ways of talking about a topic and excludes or restricts other ways of talking about that topic. In that sense discourse *constructs* the topic, defines and produces it (Hall, 1997). A cultural studies perspective assumes that both race and ethnicity are social phenomena that are constructed and reconstructed in

and through discourses. These discourses reflect inequalities of power in which powerful groups in society have more power to label, categorize and define the less powerful ones (Feagin & Vera, 1995). Dyer (1997) argued that the White majority ethnic group tends to label the (Black) Other, but not themselves. He contended that minority racial or ethnic groups are categorized and kept in their place through the ways they are stereotypically represented. This is evident, for instance, when Black people are characterized as lazy, incompetent and dangerous, while the race or ethnicity of White people seen as lazy or incompetent often goes unmarked. Whites are not seen as raced and function as the norm (Dyer, 1997; Feagin & Vera, 1995). We continue this argument further on in the paper.

### **Analyzing race and ethnicity in the sport media: content analysis**

Because media coverage given to sport reaches so many people at the same time and provides readily accessible ideas about race and ethnicity, research has been conducted to explore the content of the ideas that it presents. In order to capture the meanings given to race and ethnicity in media sport, researchers have typically subjected large volumes of sports commentary to verbal content analysis. Sport media researchers using such verbal content analyses for the study of race and ethnicity have investigated how, if at all, sports commentary differs across race and ethnicity of athletes. One of the first available sport media studies using this method was conducted by Rainville & McCormick in 1977, who hypothesized that the race of the players influenced US sport media commentary. Their results indicated that football commentators gave White players more play-related praise and represented them in a more positive light than Black players.

The classic study by Rainville & McCormick (1977) has been extended and replicated by other researchers using content analyses that focused on racial or ethnic biases in large volumes of sports commentary. The results of these studies have shown that although overt and easily-recognizable racist messages have largely disappeared from sport broadcasts, more covert ethnic and racial biases still occur. The most common stereotypes embedded in such broadcasts are those of the naturally-gifted, strong, Black male athlete and the intelligent and hard-working, White male athlete (e.g. Eastman & Billings, 2001; Rada & Wulfemeyer, 2005; also see Davis & Harris, 1998 for a summary of this research)<sup>xxi</sup>. Such stereotypes are not racially or ethnically neutral since people attach inferior and superior values to them (Long, Carrington & Spracklen, 1997). The positive media messages describing Black men as

extremely talented in sports cannot, for example, be considered only as adoration of the Black Other (Leonard, 2004). They construct a mind-body dualism, in which Black male athletes are explicitly associated with superb bodies and implicitly with unstable minds (Carrington, 2001; Fleming, 2001). A national Dutch newspaper, for instance, referred to the African players of professional soccer club Roda JC as being 'playful, unpredictable, quick, physically strong, technically competent, though tactically weak' (Dekker, 2007, p. 11). Such media representations of Black athletes are consistent with the more general perception in amateur and professional sports that Black athletes are 'naturally' athletic while White athletes are equipped with decision making skills (Long et al., 1997; Maguire, 1988; 1991). Since intellectual qualities are generally valued above physical qualities in western societies, this discourse mainly serves the status quo that privileges White people over Black people.

Although content analyses of large volumes of sports commentary have made significant contributions to scholarly understandings of racial and ethnic biases in sport media coverage, relatively little is known about how race and ethnicity are defined in these studies. Rainville & McCormick (1977) used dichotomous Black-White categories to define the race of athletes. Given the huge amount of scholarly work in the area of race relations that has framed race as a social construct rather than a fixed categorization, we wonder if such understandings have been incorporated in content analyses that study the sport media. Because sports commentary is assumed to play an important role in confirming (or challenging) dominant meanings given to race and ethnicity, it is relevant to critically reflect on definitions and categorizations of race and ethnicity in analyses that try to capture sport media discourses. These definitions and categorizations structure such analyses and influence research questions and findings.

The purpose of this paper is, therefore, threefold. First, we explore whether the Black-White categorization to operationalize race that was used by Rainville & McCormick in 1977 still dominates verbal content analyses of large volumes of commentary. Second, we use a cultural studies approach to consider the extent to which this method of verbal content analysis, with its emphasis on categorization, is a valid methodology to study social constructions of race and ethnicity. Third, we draw on a cultural studies perspective, social cognitive theory and methods based on grounded theory to suggest an alternative approach of conducting content analysis of large volumes of sports commentary. We used insights from ethnographically informed studies that focus on the social constructions of race and ethnicity in sport practice and performance to develop our alternative analytical framework. These

studies have been published in interdisciplinary journals like *Leisure Studies* or sociology of sport journals (e.g. Carrington, 1998; Long et al., 1997; Maguire, 1988; K. Woodward, 2004). Although we realize that a critique of equating race with Black and White is not new (e.g. Birrell, 1989), this critique has rarely been developed further nor has it been implemented in content analyses that examine how athletes of various racial or ethnic origins are represented in (large volumes of) sports commentary.

### **Contextualization and conflation of race and ethnicity**

Eriksen (2002) points out that scholars often distinguish between the concepts of race and ethnicity by associating race with social meanings given to biology and inherited differences and ethnicity with cultural differences. Yet both constructs also overlap and have conflated meanings. For example, the Dutch government uses a binary categorization based on the categories of 'allochtonen' and 'autochtonen'. The term 'autochtoon' could be loosely translated as indigenous and 'allochtoon' as foreigner. But since these terms are contextualized in the Dutch discourse about race and ethnicity, a precise translation into English is not possible. Dutch governmental policies classify an individual as 'allochtoon' if one parent was born outside of the Netherlands and as 'autochtoon' if both parents were born in the Netherlands (CBS, 2008). The popular and formal discourse about race and ethnicity in the Netherlands seems therefore to be framed in terms of minority ethnic groups and not in terms of the racial Black-White dichotomy commonly used in North American and British popular and scholarly discourse. Philemona Essed (2004) and Jan Rath (1991), scholars in the area of Dutch ethnic and racial relations, have argued however that these categories of 'allochtonen' and 'autochtonen' are also racialized because skin colour has become an important marker to define both categories in everyday discourse. In popular Dutch discourse, the term 'allochtonen' refers to an umbrella category of various non-western minority ethnic groups of colour. The White Dutch majority ethnic group is seen as 'autochtoon'. These Dutch constructions show how race and ethnicity are context specific constructs and often conflated since ethnic categorizations are implicitly defined in terms of racial characteristics like skin colour. Those who study race and ethnicity with the use of content analysis should, therefore, be sensitive to how these constructs are articulated in the specific context under study. In the following we explore how, if at all, context specificity is taken into account in content analyses that study representations of athletes of various racial and ethnic origins.

## **Inventory of content analyses**

In order to explore the extent to which Black-White categorizations such as that used by Rainville & McCormick (1977) dominate methodology in content analyses that study race and ethnicity in sports commentary, we investigated scholarly empirical articles that used verbal content analysis to study depictions of race and ethnicity in the sport media. We defined content analysis as a method through which researchers examine large volumes of sports commentary by coding the adjectival descriptors used by the commentators to describe individual athletes of various racial or ethnic origins. One of the strengths of content analysis and an important reason for our exploration and discussion of this method in this paper is that it compares representations of athletes of various racial or ethnic groups, including White athletes. We assume that everyone is ethnically and racially positioned and an inclusion of representations of White athletes provides researchers with the opportunity to explicitly investigate the privileges of being White in a White culture. In addition, because the results of content analyses are based on large volumes of sports commentary, possible racial/ethnic biases that may demonstrate White privilege cannot be easily dismissed as just anecdotal evidence. We, thus, excluded studies that focused on the racial discourses that surround Black sport media icons like the (ex) basketball stars Kobe Bryant and Michael Jordan or the Williams sisters in tennis (Andrews, 1996; Leonard, 2004; Spencer, 2004) or that focus on one racial or ethnic group in particular (Daddario & Wigley, 2007) because they did not include representations of White sport stars<sup>xxii</sup>. We do, however, acknowledge the significance of these studies for demonstrating the dynamics involved in sport media constructions of race and ethnicity and will draw on their insights to propose an alternative analytical framework for conducting content analysis in the last sections of this paper. In addition, since the focus of our research was on the dominant forms of content analyses that have been conducted of sport media coverage, we included only reports of verbal content analyses and excluded the few studies such as that of Hardin, Dodd, Chance & Walsdorf (2004) that only looked at visual representation.

We used various sources to find articles that applied the method of content analysis to study race and ethnicity. First, we searched for articles on Google Scholar using the terms race, ethnicity, sport, media and content analysis. The available sources that we found included journals in the field of media studies, race and ethnicity and sport sociology<sup>xxiii</sup>. Subsequently, we conducted a supplementary search to find content analyses that might not have been identified by Google Scholar. We included in our analysis the three main sociology of sport journals –

the *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, the *Journal of Sport and Social Issues* and the *Sociology of Sport Journal* - and the interdisciplinary journals *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, *Leisure Studies* and *Media, Culture & Society*. These latter three occasionally publish on topics concerned with media and sport. This supplementary search was restricted to studies published during the last decade (1995-2007). During that time span, the relationship between sport and the media intensified and became increasingly important (Boyle & Haynes, 2000; Rowe, 2003). In addition, international migration of professional athletes increasingly brought together people from a great variety of racial and ethnic backgrounds in various professional sports (Coakley, 2007; Poli & Ravenel, 2008). Hence, one would expect that scholars have begun to use a variety of racial and ethnic categorizations instead of the traditional Black-White mapping to classify the athletes under study. We examined the ethnic and racial categorizations used in these content analyses to classify the athletes under study.

The purpose of this phase of the study was to gain insight in popular methods of conducting verbal content analysis of race and ethnicity in large volumes of sports commentary and not necessarily to provide an inventory of all that has been published in this area. When saturation was reached in how race and ethnicity were conceptualized in the articles that we found, we assumed that our results adequately reflect the dominant methods of racial and ethnic classification in verbal content analyses conducted on this subject. Because the focus in this paper is on the categorizing practices in content analysis, we refer to these content analyses as 'categorical content analyses' in the remainder of this article. The results of this search are presented and discussed below.

### **Race/ethnicity categorizations used in categorical verbal content analysis**

Thirteen articles used categorical verbal content analysis to examine racial and ethnic biases in large volumes of sports commentary (see Appendix A). Ten of the articles analyzed television coverage, three dealt with the print media. Nine of the articles focused exclusively on male athletes. Furthermore, eleven of the thirteen articles focused on the US context while two articles analyzed British soccer commentary.

Our analysis reveals that these scholars used racial and ethnic categorizations in similar ways. They often coded the race or ethnicity of athletes in terms of Black and White a priori. Several researchers defined the race or ethnicity of the athletes in diverse and conflated ways in their *methods* section. However, they primarily used the racial Black-White dichotomy when describing the results of their content analysis. Eastman

& Billings (2001), for instance, analyzed 1999 college basketball broadcasts and operationalized the race of the athletes as Black, White, Latin, Asian, and other/don't know in their methods section. Yet, they almost exclusively referred to Black and White athletes in their results section. They grouped together the Asian and Latin players (as well as the tiny fraction of players categorized as 'other/don't know') into the umbrella category 'Black'. Racial/ethnic mappings that are more diverse were the exception in the selected studies. Byrd and Utsler (2007), Niven (2005) and Rada & Wulfemeyer (2005) did not use the category 'Black', but used a dichotomous categorization by classifying the athletes as White or African American. Sabo et al. (1996) were the only researchers in our sample who did not employ dichotomous race/ethnicity categorizations when presenting their research findings. They based their categorization on that used and defined in the US Census and therefore classified the athletes under study as Black, White, Asian, and Latino Hispanic when describing their results.

Those conducting these studies often acknowledged the limitations in using the crudely defined race categories of Black and White in their studies. McCarthy et al. (2003), for example, stated that 'the debate around the usefulness of the term Black to collectively constitute a heterogeneous population means that the coding for race continues to constitute a methodological problem. Merely labeling people as 'Black' or 'White' can justifiably be considered inaccurate and heavy-handed' (McCarthy et al., 2003, p. 221). Denham et al. argued that one clear limitation of their study is 'the use of the crudely defined categories of White, Black and Other when coding for the race of a given athlete. Further research would ideally be able to construct more exact definitions of each athlete's race' (2002, pp. 329-30).

Although these researchers acknowledged the reductionist character of their Black- White classification scheme, they also gave several reasons to legitimize their conceptualization. Most argued that they followed previous work on racial and ethnic biases in sport media coverage. Denham et al. (2002), for instance, explained that their choice is consistent with previous studies and with stereotypes that were actually based on this dualistic construction of race/ethnicity. Others argued in a footnote that they used the terms White and Black for the sake of brevity (Bruce, 2004; Eastman & Billings, 2001). In contrast, Billings (2004), who studied media representations of quarterbacks in American football, justified the use of dichotomous racial categorizations because the athletes under study consisted only of Blacks and Whites. No other racial groups were represented. McCarthy et al. (2003), who studied the UK context, legitimized their labeling of the athletes as Black and White by arguing

that British race relations are predominantly based on generalized differences between the categorizations British and Black.

### **Examining Black-White categorizations from a cultural studies perspective**

Notwithstanding the critical self-reflections and arguments used by those who have employed categorical content analysis, we argue that the continued a priori operationalization of race and ethnicity raises both theoretical and methodological questions. Those who authored these studies often constructed race or ethnicity as a fixed binary by creating racial and ethnic categories prior to analyzing the data. In other words, they created self-defined categories a priori. We argue that the use of these a priori categorizations are problematic. In the first place, unambiguous 'natural' racial and ethnic categories do not exist, but are constructed by people and influenced by power relations and historical contexts. The consolidation of slavery in areas colonized by Europeans gave rise to an understanding of race that resulted in the construction of racial identities for both African slaves and Europeans; African slaves became 'Black', Europeans became 'White' (Omi & Winant, 1986). Since Whites generally thought of themselves as more advanced, civilized and moral than the colonized Blacks (Miles, 1989), this Black-White mapping has historically framed a racialized discourse that privileges and legitimizes White colonial power. Over time, these ideas were institutionalized in the form of a complex, biologically informed ideology about skin colour, intellectual capacities and physical skills that connected Black people with brawn and White people with brains (Davis, 1990).

Although contemporary sociologists agree about the scientific invalidity and problematic biological status of race (Miles, 1989), these biological views of 'natural' differences between Black and White people continue to be reflected in 21st century studies about race and ethnicity. For example, Entine (2000) used the overrepresentation of Black athletes in certain sports as evidence that Blacks are more 'naturally' suited for sport and athletic performance than are Whites. Similarly, although Hoberman (1997) labelled the widespread belief in Black physical superiority as 'racial folklore' and 'racial myths' (1997, pp. 5; 138), he also argued that 'there remains the hope that western science will eventually be able to explain the physiological secrets of the Black body.' (1997, p. 140). Such arguments have received critical scrutiny from sport sociologists, amongst other for providing the 'fuel for the racist fires of others' (Shropshire & Smith, 1998, p. 106). St. Louis (2004, p. 35) referred to this as the 'scientific turn' towards race that is characterized by scholarly questions of racial Black-White differences based on notions of

genetic differences. He argued that such scholarly discourses help to move racial common sense hypotheses to that of acceptable scientific knowledge.

According to Davis (1990) and McDonald (2005), this predominant use of race and ethnicity as normalized, stable Black-White categories that are innately different from each other continues to naturalize the historically and culturally institutionalized discourse about skin colour, intellectual capacity and physical skill. The traditional Black-White categorization that is still very dominant in categorical verbal content analyses of the sport media (Appendix A) is, thus, not ideologically neutral but socially produced and situated in a hegemonic, White ideology that privileges White people above Black people. Hall (1995) argued that such a naturalization of the Black-White categorization implies the neglect of race and ethnicity as existing in and through discourses and the disappearance of ideology and discourse into the taken-for-granted world of common sense; when researchers routinely *predefine* race or ethnicity as a singular, fixed Black-White categorization, they likewise (re)produce and naturalize a form of racist knowledge.

Although much contemporary scholarly work reflects a shift from such a biologically informed understanding of race towards recognition of race and ethnicity as social constructs, this shift did not dismantle the societal hierarchy connected with racial and ethnic categorizations. It rather resulted in a shift towards cultural racism that locates social problems in absolute cultural differences between Black and White people (Malik, 1996; Carrington & McDonald, 2001). Dyer (1997) stated that the discursive power to define race and ethnicity still causes Whites to be the privileged category that can render their own race or ethnicity normative while representing Blacks as the Other, the 'peripheral' and the source of the problem.

Another problematic aspect of the a priori use of the Black-White categorization in categorical content analyses is that it obscures ethnic distinctions within the categories of 'Blacks' and 'Whites' and virtually excludes a wide range of people who can be considered neither White nor Black, like Asians, Native Americans, Latino(a)s, and Jews (Dyer, 1997). Such a Black-White categorization creates a scholarly discourse that naturalizes and essentializes racial/ethnic categories as bipolar, fixed and unambiguous 'given' realities (Andrews, 1996; Davis, 1990). Yet, despite its analytical deficiencies, this US-based operationalization of race and ethnicity continues to be used in categorical content analyses of media sport in other countries. In West-European contexts like the Dutch where the popular discourse focuses on minority ethnic groups rather than on a racial Black-White dichotomy, researchers have also used a predefined

Black-White conceptualization of race that may obscure relevant ethnic distinctions that go beyond what can be captured by the Black-White mapping. Knoppers & Elling (1999), for instance, classified athletes as Black, White or other in their study of representations of gender and ethnicity in Dutch sport media coverage and thereby may have erased relevant ethnic distinctions.

### **Should the method of categorical content analysis still be used?**

A cultural studies perspective assumes that race and ethnicity are not stable and fixed but temporal and heterogeneous constructs with contextually specific meanings and categories. This suggests that the method of categorical content analysis, that is characterized by the classification of a large amount of data into fixed categories, should rarely be used. Several critical textual analyses of the sport media have utilized a constructionist, anti-essentialist stance towards race and ethnicity with the use of sophisticated, ethnographically informed media analyses that go beyond the Black-White dichotomy (e.g. Andrews, 1996; Jackson, 1998; Leonard, 2004; Spencer, 2001). These authors deconstructed media representations surrounding sport celebrities showing how racial and ethnic meanings and categorizations are *floating signifiers* that are not universal and fixed but dependent on the convergence of temporal and situational factors as well as on the varied ethnic standpoints from which they are constructed (Jamieson, 1998). These studies focused on the media representations of individual sport icons and the discourses that surround them; They did not, however, analyze the representations of athletes of various racial/ethnic origins in large volumes of sport coverage as has been done in categorical content analyses that are the focus of this paper.

Popular and scholarly discourses may differ however. The anthropologist Baumann (1999) has argued that essentialist ideas about race and ethnicity rejected by scholars can still be highly persuasive in popular discourse. Categorical definitions of race and ethnicity are very popular in everyday conversations, political rhetoric, and the (sport) media and used by both the majority racial/ethnic group and minority racial/ethnic groups (see also Miles, 1989; Skinner, 2007). Although the populist approach embraces a view of race and ethnicity that more or less essentializes others and the self into seemingly fixed racial/ethnic categories, it cannot be ignored by scholars since 'it shapes the realities that we need to understand' (Baumann, 1999, pp. 90-1).

For this reason, we argue that scholars should not treat the 'categorical', populist approach to race and ethnicity as false and the 'constructionist' perspective as true but bring the two perspectives together. This requires attending to everyday essentialist, populist,

categorical definitions of race and ethnicity and to structures of power and structural inequalities that are related to how these racial and ethnic categories are constructed, are played out and change over time and place (Carrington, 1998; Maguire, 1988; 1991).

Several scholars in the area of social cognition theory support this argument. Social cognition theory attributes popular societal categorizations of race and ethnicity to mental classification practices that are used by many to understand the world (Baumann, 1999, Brubaker et al., 1994). Baumann and Brubaker et al. argued that although scholars should avoid 'analytical groupism', i.e. the tendency to treat racial and ethnic groups as predefined entities, they should take into account the importance of categories in the practice of everyday talk, policy analysis and media broadcasting. They contended that individuals use these popular classifications to categorize themselves and others, to create boundaries between them. In other words, while racial and ethnic classification is commonplace in society, is rooted in cognitive processes, and even institutions like the state routinely categorize others as members of a particular racial or ethnic group (Brubaker et al., 2004), the very process of this categorizing is a *practice*; an inventive/constructive act which is shaped by human minds (Baumann, 1999). The groups thus created do not exist independently of the categorization and classification processes; they are epistemological, discursive and constructed entities instead of ontological ones (Brubaker et al., 1994). Specifically, this means that societal categorizations of race and ethnicity and the processes through which they are (re)produced still require scholarly attention. Such research reflects popular but not necessarily scholarly notions of race and ethnicity. We contend that the definition of these constructs should not be based on past research, but should reflect the context in which the study takes place. The question then is how such research can be conducted without reifying categories that have already been used in other studies.

### **A proposal for an alternative analytical framework**

In the remainder of this article we propose an alternative analytical framework for the study of possible racial and ethnic biases contained in large volumes of sports commentary. J. Woodward (2004) argued that racial ideologies continue to be used in contemporary western societies to place people in racial categories. Commentators are no exception. They also place the athletes, often unconsciously and implicitly, in racial or ethnic categories while interpreting their actions on the field. We suggest therefore that scholars begin with a focus on the commentary itself instead of starting with a predefined Black-White dichotomy. Sport commentators may not only construct and confirm, but may also challenge, existing

racial and ethnic categorizations and hierarchies. We assume that commentators differentiate between athletes in various ways. Some athletes, for example, may be represented as physically competent, others as born leaders or as particularly disciplined (e.g. Farred, 2004; McCarthy et al., 2003). While commentators may seldom mention the racial or ethnic background of the athletes outright (Jamieson, 1998; Sabo et al., 1996), they may emphasize certain traits that (often implicitly) relate to the racial or ethnic background of the athletes that they describe. In this way, unquestioned assumptions about race and ethnicity are embedded in sports commentary (Hardin et al., 2004). In addition, these assumptions may often create and reinforce (but can also challenge) existing popular racialized/ethnicized boundaries (Carrington, 2001; Dyer, 1997). This implies that racial and ethnic categorizations used in content analyses should be operationalized on the basis of the utterances of commentators rather than being established a priori.

Although we advocate an operationalization of race and ethnicity on the basis of the commentary, we realize that a great tension exists between, on the one hand, taking the commentary itself as the starting point to explore relevant racial and ethnic categorizations and, on the other hand, the systematic examination of large volumes of commentary. Put differently, researchers face the challenge to infer from a large corpus of commentary the racial/ethnic categorical assumptions that commentators predominantly use to make sense of what happens on the sporting field. Therefore we suggest that researchers, in their search for the racial/ethnic categorizations that underlie the sport media discourse, should be informed by the *social context* from which these racial/ethnic categorizations emerge. After all, sports commentary does not take place in a vacuum, but commentators use preconceived meanings, assumptions and categories that are part of the cultural and historical racialized/ethnicized context they work and live in at a certain moment in time (Leonard, 2004).

Sport commentators in the mainstream media often 'speak through' widely circulating dominant racialized/ethnicized discourses or 'public stories' that are temporally, situationally and historically specific (Hall, 1995; K. Woodward, 2004). It is these discourses that create the racial and ethnic categorizations used in sports commentary in the first place and make them look 'natural' and 'real'. In addition, sport media representations are also important sites themselves for the creation and construction of racial/ethnic meanings and categorizations (Carrington, 2001). Because the vast majority of sport commentators working in the mainstream (western) media are White males (e.g. Claringbould et al. 2004; Coakley & Pike, 2009), the discourses that they use are often

positioned in a White, male subject position. Situating the commentary of the sport media in its historical and political context should enable scholars to increase their understanding of how White (male) privilege shapes the construction of racial and ethnic categorizations and meanings (Jamieson, 1998). Ironically, White sport commentators themselves often tend to deny that they participate in the construction of the discourse about race and ethnicity (Spencer, 2004). Instead they tend to use 'sincere fictions' (Feagin & Vera, 1995), that is, they often have internalized an image of themselves as being objective, race-neutral professionals. Because the racial and ethnic categorical assumptions employed by sport commentators are the result of power relations and White privilege, the challenge is to locate the (search for) racial and ethnic categorizations on the micro-level of everyday sports commentary in the larger framework of racialized/ethnicized power relations in the particular society being studied. In other words, the complex interaction between racialized/ethnicized discourses and power relations in society at large and specific sports commentary practices needs to be interrogated critically if scholars want to understand how sport commentators construct and confirm categorizations that refer to dominant notions of race and ethnicity.

### **Possible use of categorical content analysis**

We suggest that this analytical framework could be applied to empirical data with the use of methodological insights gleaned from a grounded theory approach (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Such a methodology requires an open coding process to explore and generate themes that recur in the text. In our proposed framework this coding would be applied to the descriptions of athletes by commentators or journalists. Contrary to traditional categorical content analysis of racial and ethnic biases in media sport described earlier in this paper we suggest a two-step method. The first step requires a mapping of descriptors that commentators use to describe the athletes. In the course of this analytical process, many descriptors can be discovered within the large data set of commentary (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). This contrasts with conventional categorical content analyses where the focus is not so much on the discovery of themes in the commentary, but rather on verification of racial and ethnic biases found in previous research.

The second step in this method consists of exploring how the themes in the commentary relate to the racial or ethnic background of the athletes using populist categories that are relevant within the context under study. A content analysis in the Dutch context, for instance, might include commonly used ethnic categorizations that are part of popular

Dutch discourse. Because these categorizations are temporally and situationally specific and dependent on the power dynamics of the time, researchers should reflect on their categorization choices and be sensitive to their contextual character. These categorizations provide the initial categorizations to code the athletes under study. They are not fixed however but should be complemented by categories that emerge from the data and be changed when new racial or ethnic categories seem relevant. In other words, although provisional categories initially guide the study, other racial and ethnic categories that appear relevant in the commentary should be allowed to emerge throughout the study (see also Altheide, 1987). We emphasize the contextualization of such analyses. This implies that when scholars conduct such analyses on media in contemporary western societies, they need also be sensitive to a current tendency towards the 'ethnification' of Islam (Eriksen, 2002). The Dutch media scholar Hermes (2005) has argued that religion captures the popular imagination of the moment more so than race or ethnicity. Television commentators may, therefore, also use religion as an important structuring concept to distinguish between players. A pilot study of the commentary could therefore be used to explore if the racial and ethnic categorizations applied by the researcher actually highlight differences among constructions of the (qualities of the) athletes that reveal a certain racial or ethnic pattern in the commentary. These categorizations can then be considered to reflect the (often implicit) racial or ethnic categorical assumptions of the commentators in the context under study.

In a two-step analysis as described above, the researcher reflects on the commentary as well as on the specific context under study to 'create' and define the racial and ethnic categories. The resulting racial and ethnic categorizations are empirically grounded in the data and in the contextualized discourses about race and ethnicity and not imposed upon the data by predefined racial and ethnic categories. This contextualization and 'groundedness' of racial and ethnic categorizations reflect the situational and temporal character of the social constructs of race and ethnicity in contemporary multi-racial/ethnic societies. In addition, the explicit focus on the relationship between racial/ethnic categorizations used by the commentators and the discourses about race and ethnicity in society at large that produced them, prevents researchers from routinely using a Black-White dichotomy that may not necessarily fit the data.

In summary then, we have drawn from both a cultural studies perspective and a social cognition approach to critique racial and ethnic categorizations in existing analyses of the sport media and to propose an alternative way of conducting verbal categorical content analysis. We urge those who conduct content analysis to reflect on their use of

categorizations and be open to the contextual and temporal manifestations of constructions of race and ethnicity and the specific power relations in society from which they emerge. Since previous studies have found a link between dominant sport media representations and audience receptions (Van Sterkenburg & Knoppers, 2004), we also recommend further study into how categories used (implicitly) in sports commentary are congruent with the understandings that sport media audiences have of race and ethnicity. Such studies could further reveal how the sport media serve as a site that informs, reflects and possibly challenges societal discourses about race and ethnicity.

**Appendix A: Racial and Ethnic Categorizations in Verbal Categorical Content Analyses**

**Table 1**

<b>Authors</b>	<b>Country of study</b>	<b>Object of study</b>	<b>Construct used (race/ethnicity)</b>	<b>Race/ethnicity categorizations used in results section<sup>xxiv</sup></b>
Rainville & McCormick (1977)	USA	Television coverage of football games	Race	Black and White
Murrell & Curtis (1994)	USA	Print media coverage of quarterbacks in football games	Race	Black and White
Sabo et al. (1996)	USA	Television coverage of seven international athletic events	Race and ethnicity	Black, White, Asian, Latino Hispanic
McCarthy & Jones (1997)	UK	Television coverage of domestic English soccer games (1995-1996 season)	Race	Black and White
Eastman & Billings (2001)	USA	Television coverage of college basketball games	Race	Black and White
Billings & Eastman (2002)	USA	Television coverage of the Summer Olympics	Ethnicity	Black and White
Denham, Billings & Halone (2002)	USA	Television coverage of collegiate basketball	Race	Black and White

McCarthy et al. (2003)	UK	Television coverage of English soccer games (1997-1998)	Race	Black and White
Billings (2004)	USA	Television coverage of football games	Ethnicity	Black and White
Bruce (2004) <sup>xxv</sup>	USA	Television coverage of basketball games	Race	Black/African American and White
Niven (2005)	USA	Print media coverage 2002 NFL season	Race	African American and White
Rada & Wulfemeyer (2005)	USA	Television coverage of intercollegiate football and basketball games	Race	African American and White
Byrd & Utsler (2007)	USA	Print media coverage of quarterbacks in football games	Race	African American and White



## **Chapter 5**

### **Constructing Racial/Ethnic Difference In and Through Dutch Televised Soccer Commentary**

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#### **Abstract**

The purpose of this study was to expand on current research about ways in which race and ethnicity are socially constructed through popular media culture. In this paper we explore to what extent broadcast commentary of televised soccer in the Netherlands reproduces and challenges hegemonic discourses about race/ethnicity and is congruent with findings of similar research in other contexts. We used a layered approach towards race/ethnicity instead of the frequently used Black/White dichotomy in research on sports commentary. Our findings suggest that current Dutch soccer commentary displays a number of dominant racialized/ethnicized themes that at times resonate with colonial discourses, are in part congruent with racialized/ethnicized sport media representations found in other contexts and also challenge popular Dutch discourses about ethnicity. We place these findings in a broader historical and internationally comparative perspective.

Keywords: race/ethnicity; soccer commentary; sport media; discourse; stereotypes; cultural studies

In 2007, an article in a national Dutch newspaper with the title *Suriprofs in Oranje* [Suriprofs in Orange] stated that ‘a new generation of young players of Surinamese descent’ has presented itself in ‘the already multiracial soccer team of *Young Orange*<sup>xvii</sup>’, during the last European Championships Soccer under 21 (Dekker & Oudshoorn, 2007, p. 1). One year earlier, another Dutch quality newspaper pointed out that ‘the number of Dutch soccer players of Moroccan descent has doubled during the last five years.’ The newspaper then quoted professional player Sinouh who explained that their combination of Moroccan technical and Dutch tactical skills makes them ideal soccer players (Van Driel, 2006). These quotations illustrate the great and increasing variety of racial and ethnic backgrounds that is visible in Dutch professional male soccer. The quotations also show that sports journalists use a variety of racial/ethnic categorizations in their writings and ascribe certain qualities to these categorizations, for example players of Moroccan descent who combine ‘Moroccan technical’ and ‘Dutch tactical skills’. This suggests that the sport media contribute to popular ideas about race and ethnicity. According to scholars such as Carrington (2001/2002), the role that the sport media play in the representations of racial and ethnic groups has increased significantly in many countries worldwide during the last decades.

Although the sport media often celebrate the athletic performances of sport stars, critical sport media scholars have shown that mass mediated sport at times also portrays minority racial or ethnic athletes in stereotypical ways, thereby reinforcing and confirming centuries-old racial/ethnic stereotypes and hierarchies (e.g. Bruce, 2004; Hylton, 2009). Sport media scholar Bruce (2004) has suggested that sport commentators on television in particular tend to draw on racial/ethnic stereotypes when they describe performances of the athletes. Because they often work under high pressure, they may routinely and often unconsciously draw on and (re)produce widely circulating racialized/ethnicized discourses and categorizations in their construction of meaningful narratives for the television viewer. Sport media scholars who have examined racial/ethnic representations in televised sports commentary generally have focused on the US and (to a lesser extent) the UK context and found that sport commentators emphasized the physicality of the Black male athlete (e.g. Billings & Eastman, 2002; McCarthy et al., 2003). This emphasis on physicality may strengthen popular beliefs that construct Black people as naturally talented in sport. Such media representations of Black athletes are congruent with the more general perception in populist western thought as well as in amateur and professional sports that Black people are ‘naturally’ more athletic than

White people (Maguire, 1991; Morning, 2009). White athletes, on the other hand, have tended to be represented more often in terms of intellect, perseverance and hard work than Black athletes are (Billings & Eastman, 2002; McCarthy & Jones, 1997). These messages tend to suggest and (re)produce a mind-body dualism in which Black athletes are explicitly associated with superb bodies and implicitly with poor cognitive skills and unstable minds (Carrington, 2001/2002).

Such content analyses of large volumes of sports commentary have, therefore, contributed significantly to understandings of racial/ethnic biases in sport media coverage. Nevertheless, they also raise some important theoretical and methodological problems. Most importantly, the prevailing categorizations scholars have used to define race and ethnicity in these studies may restrict their analytical power. A survey of content analyses that examined large volumes of sports commentary showed that these studies tended to predefine race/ethnicity in dichotomous categories, usually a Black-White categorization (Van Sterkenburg et al., 2010). The use of such a dichotomous categorization in research may, however, not apply to other contexts than the US or UK. In addition, such a dichotomous mapping of race may obscure relevant and more nuanced racial/ethnic distinctions that go beyond what can be captured in a Black-White mapping. Although this critique of equating race with 'Black' and 'White' is not new in itself (e.g. Birrell, 1989), this critique has not been implemented in content analyses that examined how athletes of various racial/ethnic origins are represented in and through large volumes of sports commentary (Van Sterkenburg et al., 2010). In addition, many researchers who examined large volumes of sports commentary used a predefined taxonomy to identify the dominant themes in the commentary (e.g. McCarthy et al., 2003; Denham et al., 2002). We argue, however, that dominant themes in sports commentary should not be abstracted from a predefined taxonomy but discovered in every new study since they are (re)constructed in relation to the specific temporal and local context in which the commentary is located (see also Van Sterkenburg et al., 2010).

For these reasons, the purpose of our study was to further investigate racialized/ethnicized sport media discourses in large volumes of sports commentary but to do that in a more nuanced and contextualized way than previous studies have done. First of all, we approach race/ethnicity in our study as a complexly layered and contextualized social construct and not as a predefined dichotomous variable. Second, we apply insights from grounded theory to *discover* the themes that were present in the commentary about the players instead of drawing on a predefined taxonomy. These two extensions of earlier scholarship may

help to further develop scholarly understandings of racial/ethnic stereotyping in and through the sport media.

### **Theoretical framework**

Following a cultural studies perspective, we consider sport and the media as part of popular culture and sites where discourses about race and ethnicity are continuously (re)constructed. Stuart Hall (1997, p. 6), one of the leading scholars in the field of cultural studies, defines discourse as 'ways of referring to or constructing knowledge about a particular topic'. Discourses about race and ethnicity not only 'prefer' certain ways of talking or writing about a topic like race/ethnicity but also exclude other ways of talking and writing about it. Discourses thereby construct race/ethnicity, define and produce it. Although several scholars have differentiated between race and ethnicity by associating race with biological differences based on phenotypical characteristics like skin colour and associating ethnicity with cultural differences (e.g. Jackson & Garner, 1998; Smith, 2002), we argue that the constructs are at the same time often interrelated and conflated in everyday discourse (Brubaker et al., 2004; Essed & Trienekens, 2008; Hall, 2000). Hall (2000) has argued that the 'biological referent is never wholly absent from discourses of ethnicity' (p. 223) and vice versa. This conflation is evident in the Dutch context, for instance, where having a 'non-White' skin colour has become an important marker to be perceived as belonging to a minority ethnic group in everyday Dutch discourse and to be considered culturally different in absolute terms than the (White) majority ethnic group (Costera Meijer & De Bruin, 2003).

As several scholars have shown, sport commentators help to construct and reinforce dominant meanings given to race/ethnicity (e.g. Denham et al., 2002; McCarthy et al., 2003). Sport commentators tend to incorporate hegemonic cultural assumptions and discourses about race/ethnicity in their commentary that are played out in narratives and seemingly trivial statements about athletes (Hardin, Kuehn, Jones, Genovese, Balaji, 2009). But within the seemingly innocent sports commentary and analyses an implicit hierarchy of racial/ethnic categories or groups might be articulated. Müller et al. (2007) have argued that sport commentators engage in processes of racialization or *ethnization*. Racialization/ethnization refers here to unobtrusive, routine, subconscious and everyday practices of racial/ethnic categorizing and stereotyping through which everyday racism can become normalized.

A cultural studies perspective suggests that the stereotypes and categories used in such processes of racialization/ethnization reflect inequalities of power in which powerful groups in society have most

power to categorize, position and ‘define’ the less powerful (Hall, 1996). However, the specific dynamics and discursive consequences of these power relations are never stable but always temporally and locally situated (Andrews, 2002; Jackson, 1998). This means that the study of representations of race/ethnicity in sports commentary should always locate the search for racial/ethnic meanings and categorizations in the larger framework of power relations and in the social and historical context under study from which the representations emerged (Van Sterkenburg et al., 2010).<sup>xxvii</sup>

### **The Dutch context**

In this study, we were particularly interested in racial/ethnic categories and racialized/ethnicized meanings used in Dutch soccer commentary. The usage of race and ethnicity in popular Dutch discourse can be considered illustrative of the complexly layered and contextualized use of race and ethnicity in everyday discourse in many other western societies. Dutch scholars Costera Meijer & De Bruin (2003) and Essed & Trienekens (2008) have argued that Dutch people prefer to speak of ‘ethnicity’ instead of ‘race’ to avoid being perceived as racist. This preference has led Essed (1991) to argue that racism often takes the form of ‘ethnicism’ in the Dutch context while in reality discrimination based on skin colour has not disappeared at all (Captain & Ghorashi, 2001). The tendency to speak of ethnic and cultural distinctions between a variety of social groups in everyday or political discourse instead of (only) referring to ‘race’ or to biologically informed Black-White differences has also been documented for other western multi-ethnic societies like Belgium, Finland, or Germany but also the US and the UK (e.g. Alexander, 2002; Bonilla-Silva, 2004; Carrington & McDonald, 2001; Rastas, 2005; Schuster 1999).

The everyday discourse about race/ethnicity in the Netherlands is framed, first of all, in terms of the uniquely Dutch categories of *allochtonen* and *autochtonen*. The term *autochtoon* can be loosely translated as indigenous and *allochtoon* as foreigner. But since these terms are contextualized in the Dutch discourse about race and ethnicity, a precise translation into English is difficult. In everyday Dutch discourse, the term *allochtonen* is usually applied collectively to name the groups defined as the four largest (non-White) minority ethnic groups in the Netherlands in governmental and everyday discourse: the ‘Turkish’, ‘Surinamese’, ‘Moroccan’ and ‘Antillean’ ethnic groups. Many individuals belonging to these ethnic groups were born in the Netherlands and have Dutch citizenship (Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek, 2010).

The (White) Dutch majority ethnic group, on the other hand, is usually labeled *autochtoon*.

In addition to the broad *allochtoon-autochtoon* categorization, Dutch discourses about race/ethnicity are also framed in terms of a more nuanced and layered categorization that distinguishes between (instead of groups together) the largest ethnic groups in the Netherlands: the Dutch majority ethnic group and the previously mentioned four largest minority ethnic groups. The presence of the Surinamese and Antillean minority ethnic groups reflects the Dutch colonial past and the process of decolonization<sup>xxviii</sup>. The Turkish and Moroccan immigrants came to the Netherlands as economic labor migrants during the 1960s and 1970s.

Both the *allochtoon-autochtoon* categorization and the classification that distinguishes among the largest ethnic groups revolve around hierarchical positions of power and are situated in a dominant and White, 'autochthonous' perspective. The social group of (White) men and women categorized as *autochtonen* in everyday discourse occupies a privileged position while young (non-White) individuals categorized as *allochtoon* are often represented as the outsider (Wekker, 1998). Young (non-White) males who are categorized as 'Moroccans' in particular are relatively frequently associated with criminality. In addition, the perceived lack of cultural integration of immigrants of Moroccan and Turkish descent is often framed as a religious issue. These ethnic groups are often placed together under the umbrella label of 'Muslims' and are frequently represented as culturally deviant and a threat to the 'Dutch way of life' (D'Haenens & Bink, 2007; Essed & Trienekens, 2008). Such conflation of race/ethnicity and religion has also been documented for other European countries such as the UK and Sweden (Alexander, 2002; Larsson, 2006). The race and ethnicity scholars Brah (1996) and Eriksen (2002) spoke in this regard of the ethnification/racialization of Islam. The everyday Dutch categories reflect the conflation of race/ethnicity with social dimensions such as religion, nationality and geography (see also Essed & Trienekens, 2008).

### **Racial/ethnic diversity in Dutch professional soccer**

Dutch professional soccer is also characterized by racial/ethnic diversity. By the mid 1990s, Dutch players with a minority ethnic background accounted for about 15% of the total amount of professional soccer players in the Netherlands and that percentage has remained more or less stable since then (Janssens, 2005; Van Bottenburg & Janssens, 2004). The majority of these players has Dutch citizenship and grew up in the Netherlands. The players labeled as 'Surinamese' in everyday Dutch discourse have especially shaped Dutch soccer history to an important

extent due to their numerical presence in club teams as well as the Dutch national team (Tan, 2000). Also the number of professional players of Moroccan origin increased from 0% in 1990 to 5% in 2003/2004 (Van Bottenburg, 2004). The number of foreign players in Dutch professional soccer that do not have Dutch citizenship has also increased considerably during the last fifteen years, from 13% in the 1995/1996 season to 36% in the 2008/2009 season (Hack, 2008). This increase was mainly due to the Bosman legislation that scrapped the 'nationality clause' in professional football (Janssens, 2005). The increased multi-ethnic character of Dutch professional soccer during the last decades combined with its continued popularity among many Dutch people confirms the role of Dutch televised soccer as a platform that helps to (re)construct everyday meanings given to race/ethnicity in the Netherlands. The popularity of men's televised soccer in the Netherlands is evident, amongst others, from the fact that soccer broadcasts are usually among the five best watched programs on Dutch television every week (Stichting Kijk Onderzoek, 2009).

## **Method**

### *Sample*

In order to explore constructions and representations of race/ethnicity in Dutch televised soccer, we analyzed commentary in broadcasts from the television program *RTL Voetbal* [RTL Soccer]. This program was by far the most popular weekly Dutch sports program and one of the most popular weekly programs during the period in which we collected our data (September – December 2007). The program was broadcast every Sunday night between 19.00 and 20.30 and contained highlights of the nine matches played during that weekend. It attracted between 2 million and 2.6 million viewers on a weekly basis (Stichting Kijk Onderzoek, 2007), which is about 15% of the Dutch population. A detailed analysis of ten broadcasts comprising 2440 commentator comments indicated that the data were thematically saturated. Thematic saturation means here that there was consistency in the themes and racial/ethnic patterns we discovered in the commentary. In other words, the commentators used certain themes and racial/ethnic categorizations systematically throughout the broadcasts to construct racial/ethnic difference among (groups of) players. This indicated that the evidence started repeating itself and that it could be expected that no new themes or relevant data would emerge from further analysis of the commentary (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

The strength of content analysis of large volumes of sports commentary is that the numbers it brings to the surface can be extremely revealing and cannot be easily dismissed as 'just anecdotic evidence' (Bruce, 2004; Van Sterkenburg et al., 2010). In addition, content analyses

of large volumes of commentary typically include representations of White athletes and, thus, acknowledge that we are all racially/ethnically positioned (Hall, 1996; Wekker, 2002).

#### *The commentators*

The verbal descriptors used by play-by-play commentators, the presenter and the expert analyst in the studio were included in our analysis. Each match in a program was covered by a different play-by-play commentator and introduced by the presenter of the program or a 'voice over'. An expert analyst conducted the post-match evaluations based on questions asked by the presenter. Since our focus was on the discourses contained in the commentary as a whole, we did not engage in a comparative analysis of the individual commentators. The soccer commentators and expert analyst were all of European Dutch origin. The presenter of the program was of Surinamese origin but he was primarily engaged in announcing the matches and only seldom described the players. The commentary under analysis that referred to the (qualities of) players can, thus, be considered primarily as originating from a White (male) European Dutch perspective.

#### *Discovering themes*

The analytical software program Atlas.ti was used to analyze the commentary. We applied a method that we have described earlier as 'qualitative verbal categorical content analysis' (see Van Sterkenburg et al., 2010). The first step in the analysis consisted of a search for descriptors that were present in the commentary and that referred to individual players. We grouped together the codes that referred to the same phenomenon into more encompassing conceptual themes. Since previous content analyses demonstrated that sports commentary includes positive and negative descriptions of players that relate to the constructions of racial/ethnic difference (e.g. McCarthy et al., 2003; Rada & Wulfemeyer, 2005), we also coded whether the commentary statements represented the player in a positive or negative light. We used definitions of 'positive' and 'negative' where statements that presented a favorable impression of a player were coded as positive and statements that criticized an aspect of a player or presented the player in a negative light were coded as negative (Rada & Wulfemeyer, 2005). A numerical count of the commentator comments determined the prominence of various themes (Mayring, 2000). Although we present some of the data numerically in terms of percentages in our results section to show differential treatment of (groups of) players by the commentators, our analysis was primarily qualitative. Specifically, we focused on those themes that emerged as dominant and the racial/ethnic patterns that were

associated with them and that were used *systematically* throughout the broadcasts rather than on the verification of statistical significance in all the differences we found. We continuously compared our findings with (inter)national literature on the topic to see to what extent our results confirmed or differed from previous research. In order to ensure accuracy of interpretation of ambiguous comments, we analyzed the commentary statements together with the visual television images to which they referred. We discussed areas of uncertainty until agreement was reached.

After grouping together the codes that referred to the same phenomenon, we were left with four 'umbrella themes': 1) Cognitive/psychological skills of players, 2) Physical skills of players, 3) Technical skills of players, and 4) General evaluation of players. The first theme, the cognitive/psychological theme, included commentary about players their a) intelligence or intelligent play, b) game mentality (e.g. motivation, team orientation), c) self control/cool headedness and d) concentration. Examples of comments that fell under this theme were 'remains very calm when confronted with the keeper' (coded positive) and 'not creative' (coded negative). The second theme, the physicality theme, contained descriptors of physical strength and speed of players. Positive commentary that referred to physical skills of players included, for instance, 'very quick'. A negative example included 'not in a good physical condition'. The third theme consisted of comments about technical skills of players that pointed to a specific action of the player on the field such as 'A perfect save' (positive) and 'clumsy defense' (negative). The fourth theme consisted of specific evaluative comments such as 'one of the most valuable players for his team' (positive) or 'not very talented' (negative). The vast majority of comments (52%) were classified as 'technical skills'. The physicality theme contained the fewest comments (n=171) while the cognitive/psychological skills theme and the evaluative comments comprised respectively 483 (20%) and 469 (19%) comments.

### *Racial/ethnic patterns*

After identifying the dominant themes in the commentary, we examined the data for differential racial/ethnic patterns to locate those themes that were used by the commentators to construct racial/ethnic difference among the players. Media scholars like Bruce (2004) and Hall (1995) have argued that sport commentators and people more generally often 'speak through' the racial/ethnic ideologies and categorizations that dominate everyday discourse in the society they work and live in. In other words, even though sport commentators may not refer to race/ethnicity explicitly in their commentary, many taken-for-granted assumptions that

reflect dominant racialized/ethnicized discourses and categorizations that circulate in society at large are embedded in sports commentary (Bruce, 2004). This means that we used the two popular ethnic classification practices used in Dutch everyday discourse to classify the data, the *allochtoon- autochtoon* categorization and a categorization based on the largest racial/ethnic groups in the Netherlands ('Dutch', 'Turkish', 'Surinamese', 'Moroccan' and 'Antillean'). We also used additional racial/ethnic categorizations based on categories that were used in previous Dutch sport media studies to code the commentary (Knoppers & Elling, 1999; Hermes, 2005; Luijt & Elling, 2007) and our own knowledge as Dutch scholars of everyday categorization practices in the Netherlands. The additional categorizations were based on 1) religious affiliation, in particular the 'ethnification of Islam' resulting in the categories of 'Muslim' and 'non-Muslim'<sup>xxix</sup>, 2) country of origin, resulting in categories such as 'Brazilian', 'Belgian', 'Dutch', 3) wider geographical area of origin using labels that are common in Dutch everyday discourse (e.g. 'Caribbean', 'Latin American', 'West European'), 4) skin colour, resulting in the categories of 'White' and 'Black'<sup>xxx</sup> and 5) a broader *allochtoon - autochtoon* categorization with a more inclusive definition of the social group of *allochtonen*. Included in this broader definition of *allochtonen* were players of East European and South European descent and non-White players who are labelled as 'African', 'Latin American', 'Asian', 'North African/Middle Eastern' and 'Caribbean' in everyday Dutch discourse. We also explored what commentators said about each individual player. This allowed us to explore if and how differential racial/ethnic patterns in the commentary reflected descriptions of individual players. The content analysis, thus, used various layers with sometimes overlapping racial/ethnic categorizations instead of a predefined dichotomous racial/ethnic categorization to classify the data.

In racially/ethnically categorizing the players we used information retrieved from the internet about their racial/ethnic background. We reflected critically on whether the racial/ethnic labels we used could be assumed to reflect dominant everyday categorization processes. The racial/ethnic categorizations that we used were all provisional and were used to *guide* the analysis. New racial/ethnic categorizations were allowed to emerge throughout the analysis if they seemed relevant in the soccer commentary under study, for instance if commentators repeatedly used certain racial/ethnic 'labels' in their commentary other than the ones we described above. However, this appeared not to be the case.

## **Results**

The technical skills theme was the dominant theme in the commentary (52% of all the comments). As such it was an important theme for the commentators to construct a narrative about the players. Our data show however that the commentators did not use this technical skills theme to construct racial/ethnic difference among (groups of) players in a systematic way. In our further presentation of the results we focus on those themes that the commentators did use to racially/ethnically differentiate among (groups of) players throughout the broadcasts. To conclude this results section we will attend to the emphasis that commentators placed on individual players during the post match analyses.

### **Theme of physicality**

Our results reveal that commentators used a physicality theme to construct racial/ethnic difference among (groups of) players. Specifically, the soccer commentators described players that we had classified as ‘Surinamese’ more frequently in terms of physical/bodily qualities throughout the broadcasts we analyzed than we expected on the basis of their share in the overall commentary across the four main themes. Whereas 22% of all the commentator comments across the four main themes we identified in the commentary referred to players that we classified as ‘Surinamese’, almost half (46%) of all the comments about *physicality* of players pertained to ‘Surinamese’ players. Frequent references were made, for instance, to the physical strength or the size of players, for example ‘Denneboom, with that strong body’, or ‘Zijler is a small man [...], therefore this is not a goal’. Commentators also made frequent references to the *speed* of the players of Surinamese origin, for example ‘the fast Eljerio Elia is his substitute’. The trend seems opposite with respect to players that we had classified as (White) ‘Dutch’; Whereas 61% of all the commentator comments (across the four main themes) referred to players we had classified as (White) ‘Dutch’, this percentage dropped to 43% in relation to comments that specifically referred to the physicality of these players.

### **Theme of cognitive/psychological characteristics**

The soccer commentators also used a psychological/cognitive theme to racially/ethnically differentiate between players. In general, the references to the cognitive/psychological qualities of players tended to be positive. However, the majority of references to the psychological/cognitive qualities of the players we classified as ‘Latin American’ were *negative* in character (62%). Argentinean-born goal keeper Romero was described, for instance, as someone who did not follow the most important tactical

rule in goal keeping: “Rule number one is: never come out of your goal if a defender of your own team is with the forward of the opposite team. Well, Romero unfortunately did that twice during the match.” Closer analysis in which we looked at country of origin of players revealed that the frequent negative comments about the cognitive/psychological characteristics of players that we classified as ‘Latin American’ mainly applied to Argentinean and Uruguayan but not to Brazilian players. More specifically even, the majority of these remarks referred to two players: the twenty year old Argentinean goalkeeper Romero (see for example the quote above) and the twenty year old Uruguayan forward Suarez. A commentator explained, for instance, that Suarez is ‘an individual player’ who ‘plays for his own individual success’. Such descriptions point to the perceived lack of game mentality or team orientation of this Uruguayan-born player who was frequently associated with being self centered and not having the game mentality of a team player. This singling out of individual players was a regular pattern in the commentary.

### **Individuality**

Apart from the specific racialized/ethnicized themes we identified in the commentary, a more general defining characteristic of the commentary was the extensive evaluation of individual players in the studio by the ‘expert’ during the post-match evaluations. In other words, the commentators emphasized the individual qualities of players instead of teamwork in the team sport soccer during the coverage. The following quotation that discusses the qualities of the Spanish player Gabri during a post match evaluation shows this tendency to highlight individual players and their qualities.

Presenter: An easy victory for Ajax. Where lies the strength of the team?

Expert: Well [...] their midfield was very strong today since Maduro and Gabri played very well. And Gabri really presented himself as the player who is about to take over Jaap Stam's leading role in the team. This was particularly evident when the plays were set up to score the first goal. Look, Gabri fights to put himself back here, that shows his strength of character. But he then also has the technique and subtlety to serve his team well. [...] Here we see Ogararu [Gabri's teammate] being defeated. Gabri then sprints for about 80 metres and recaptures the ball. And that is a constantly recurring image, I even think that one of the reasons for Ajax' relapse in the second half of the match was the fact that Gabri had to withdraw from the match with an injury [...]

(Post-match evaluation of Ajax – Vitesse, 25 November 2007)

## **Discussion**

In the remainder of this article we explore possible explanations and interpretations for our findings. We first place the theme of physicality and of cognitive/psychological characteristics that the commentators used to racially/ethnically differentiate among players in a broader historical and internationally comparative perspective. After that, we further discuss the emphasis commentators placed on individual players and their qualities. We conclude this section with discussing how the soccer commentary not only confirmed but also challenged dominant societal discourses surrounding race and ethnicity.

### **Theme of physicality**

Our results showed that the Dutch soccer commentators differentiated among groups of players along racial/ethnic lines by their frequent references to the physicality of players that we classified as 'Surinamese'. The use of the 'physicality theme' is possibly drawn from a broader physicality discourse that can be traced back to the time of slavery and Dutch colonialism. Oostindie (1995), a scholar in the field of Dutch postcolonial relations, has argued that Dutch involvement in slave trade and plantation economies set into motion a set of mostly negative representations of African slaves working at Surinamese plantations. Stereotypes that circulated in both proslavery and antislavery writings at the time associated the slaves with savagery, animality, physical strength and energy, laziness, and sexual lasciviousness (see also Wekker, 2002). Schuster (1999) has shown how residues of these colonial stereotypes

reappeared in representations of Surinamese people in Dutch governmental post-war discourses during the 1960s and 70s. Males classified as 'Surinamese' in everyday Dutch discourse were 'reduced to their body' (Schuster, 1999, p. 234), especially their sexual prowess. The relatively strong emphasis the soccer commentators in our study placed on the physicality of soccer players that we classified as 'Surinamese' and the relatively little emphasis they placed on the physicality of 'European Dutch' players may therefore be a continuation of such (post) colonial constructions.

Although this finding may seem to confirm those of North American and British scholars who found a predominant use of the physicality theme when commentators referred to Black athletes, our results show that the matter is more complex. Their skin colour would place the players we classified as 'Surinamese' in the category 'Black' in studies that used a Black-White dichotomy of race. Our analysis, however, also indicates that such a physicality discourse did not apply to *all* (categories of) players in Dutch soccer commentary who would fall under the category 'Black' in a racialized dichotomy. The group of players we classified as 'African' were not differentiated on the basis of their physicality by the commentators even though they would fall under the category 'Black' in the cited studies. A possible explanation is that the Netherlands did not have a centuries-long colonial relationship with any African country represented in the data as it did with Surinam. Nederveen Pieterse (1995) has contended that stereotypes are the result of the political relationship between social groups and the effort by the powerful group to legitimate its (past or present) ruling. The frequent use of the physicality theme by commentators to describe the soccer players we classified as 'Surinamese' may therefore have its origin in the nature of the historical relationship between the Netherlands and Surinam. Such constructions of colonial powers of the colonized may have been used to legitimate colonial ruling over Surinam. Vestiges of those centuries-old stereotypes may be embedded in contemporary Dutch soccer commentary. More research should be done, however, to explore these ideas more in depth. Such research should also pay attention to the complicating fact that many colonized slaves working at Surinamese plantations during the time of Dutch colonialism were of African origin and can be considered ancestors of many of the present-day 'Surinamese' football players in Dutch professional football. The African origin of these players is generally not referred to in Dutch popular discourse since these players are usually labelled 'Surinamese'. Possibly their African heritage is ignored or forgotten and instead the Surinamese heritage plays a more central role in Dutch popular discourse and/or in the ways commentators

frame players of Surinamese origin. Our results however also require other research that explores the representations of the Dutch Antilles in Dutch sport coverage since the Dutch Antilles also share a colonial history with the Netherlands marked by slavery and colonial exploitation. However, the commentators did not draw on a physicality discourse in relation to (the relatively few) players we classified as ‘Antillean’ as they did for the players with a Surinamese background. Possibly, despite their existence as a Dutch colony, the Dutch Antilles remained relatively invisible from the Dutch public imagination throughout history (Oostindie, 1995). Only very few Dutch writings about the Dutch Antilles have been produced that date from the time of slavery. This contrasts sharply with the quantity of literature about Surinam during colonialism (Oostindie, 1995). As slave holders in the Antilles had relatively little contact with the Netherlands (Oostindie, 1995), stereotypes about the ‘Antilles’ and its population might not have reached the European Dutch population in the Netherlands to the extent that stereotypes about Surinam and Surinamese people have.

### **Theme of cognitive/psychological characteristics**

Besides the physicality theme, our results showed that the Dutch soccer commentators constructed racial/ethnic difference among players on the basis of cognitive/psychological characteristics. In our results section we contrasted the predominantly negative tone in relation to the cognitive/psychological characteristics of Latin American players with the predominantly positive, complimentary representations of other groups in the commentary. In addition, we indicated that these frequent negative comments in relation to Latin American players mainly referred to two players, Suarez and Romero. Although such ascribed characteristics seem to pertain to individual players and could be dismissed as an example of idiosyncratic comments, the negative treatment of these players is not exceptional when placed in an international comparative perspective. Authors such as Feres Jr (2009), Morin (2010) and Román (2000) concluded that the social group of Latin Americans in the US context has been associated throughout history with traits like hot temperedness, irrationality, emotional instability and criminality in everyday as well as media and academic discourses. In relation to the US sport media, Latin American athletes have often been represented as ‘selfish’ and ‘hot tempered’ and were, thus, assumed to be lacking in team orientation and cool headedness (Juffer, 2002, p. 353). Due to globalization of the media it is well possible that such racialized/ethnicized media representations surrounding Latin Americans have informed Dutch media representations including those of Dutch soccer commentators. Therefore, the compound

effect of such ascribed individual characteristics in Dutch sports commentary can very well have a high impact on established stereotypes and public perception about this racial/ethnic group (see also Hylton, 2009).

However, those scholars who included the category of 'Latin American' athletes or a roughly similar label such as 'Latino-Hispanic' athletes (Sabo et al., 1996) in their examination of large volumes of sports commentary did not systematically explore their results using 'nationality categories' such as 'Argentinean', 'Uruguayan' or 'Brazilian'. The few scholars that categorized by nationality focused specifically on media representations of Argentinean (Blain, Boyle & O'Donnell, 1993) or Brazilian soccer players (Billings & Tambosi, 2004). The findings of these studies were largely congruent with our results. In addition, they also found that Brazilian soccer players sometimes managed to escape the media stereotypes that are often associated with Latin American athletes. Possibly, the many successes the Brazilian soccer teams have experienced on the world stage throughout history have resulted in a dominant, globally shared perception of Brazilian soccer players as strong on every aspect of the game including the psychological/cognitive aspect.

Overall, our findings suggest that current Dutch soccer commentary displays a number of racialized/ethnicized themes that sometimes resonate with colonial discourses and are (partially) congruent with racialized/ethnicized sport media representations found in other contexts like the US and UK. A cultural studies perspective suggests that the repeated use of the physicality theme and the cognitive/psychological theme to racially/ethnically differentiate among certain groups of players may help to *naturalize* the constructed character of these racialized/ethnicized themes. If such themes become naturalized, the power relations and hierarchies that are implicated in the use of these themes to (re)construct racial/ethnic differentiation may become invisible and remain unquestioned. This may help to reinforce and naturalize the broader racialized/ethnicized discourses that these themes draw upon. For instance, it may reinforce already taken for granted assumptions circulating in Dutch society that Surinamese people have brawn rather than brain and that Latin Americans are hot tempered. Such naturalization of racial/ethnic difference may be reinforced by the emphasis sport commentators placed on individual players and individual qualities in their commentary.

### **Individuality**

The emphasis commentators placed on individual players and their performances and statistics is congruent with previous studies that

examined large volumes of sports commentary and that showed that sports commentators tended to highlight individualism rather than teamwork (Hylton, 2009; Niven, 2005). This focus on individual qualities may give commentators themselves as well as their audiences the impression that sport commentators are purely ‘objective’ reporters who base their commentary exclusively on individual sporting qualities of players irrespective of players their racial/ethnic background. Knoppers & Elling (2004) showed, for instance, that ‘objectivity’ was a frequently mentioned word that Dutch sport journalists used when asked to reflect on their criteria for paying attention to a sport event. Bruce (2004) showed that US basketball commentators tended to believe that they themselves – as ‘objective’ reporters- do not participate in the construction of (hegemonic) discourses about race and ethnicity. She also found that the commentary practices of these commentators were racially/ethnically biased. This focus on perceived objectivity and individuality of players in sports commentary may allow sport commentators to marginalize the existence of or deny responsibility for racialized/ethnicized patterns in sport reporting. The emphasis on individual qualities can then result in a manifestation of *colour blind racism* in and through sport reporting. Colour blind racism operates through the ‘denial of the structural character of racism’ and the perception of discrimination as ‘sporadic and declining in significance’ (Bonilla-Silva and Forman, 2000, p. 70). When sports commentary is perceived as exclusively based on objective judgment of individual sporting qualities that are considered responsible for team results, sport commentators may implicitly help to reinforce the dominant notion in society at large that racism or ethnicism in sports reporting does not occur or is a thing of the past. In reality however, numerous studies have shown that racial/ethnic discrimination has not disappeared in sports commentary but has been replaced by more covert, subtle racialized/ethnicized discourses that commentators draw upon (e.g. Bruce, 2004; Hylton, 2009).

### **Contradictions**

Hall (1995; 1997) argued that the media are not only a powerful site for the (re)production of dominant ideas about race and ethnicity, but also a site of struggle over meaning where dominant everyday discourses or categorization practices can be challenged. This was also evident in our study since two dominant classificatory schemes in contemporary Dutch popular discourse to differentiate between people, the *allochtoon-autochtoon* and ‘Muslim’–‘non-Muslim’ dichotomies, appeared not to be used systematically by the soccer commentators to differentiate between players on any of the dominant themes we identified in the commentary.

In addition, players we classified as ‘Moroccan’ were *not* described differently than the other players. This contrasts sharply with the hegemonic representation of (young) people labeled as ‘Moroccan’ in contemporary Dutch everyday discourse and the mainstream media where the ultimate position of the Other is reserved for this social group.

Such findings suggest that soccer coverage may challenge as well as reproduce racial/ethnic constructions that are present in other realms of Dutch social life. Possibly, notions of deviance like criminal behavior or cultural maladjustment that are often used in the (re)construction of the social groups of *allochtonen*, ‘Muslims’ or ‘Moroccans’ in popular Dutch discourse played a marginalized role in the soccer broadcasts we analyzed. The emphasis was instead on the *sporting* qualities of the players, most notably the technical skills of players. This technical skills theme played a major role in the commentators’ verbal portrayal of *all* groups of players, a finding that is congruent with previous studies that examined Dutch soccer commentary (Knoppers & Elling, 1999; 2001b).

### **Concluding remarks**

We conclude that current Dutch soccer commentary is a place where hegemonic, historically informed and globalized discourses about racial/ethnic groups are reconstructed, confirmed and naturalized but also a site where existing racial/ethnic categorizations and hierarchies are challenged. In other words, although the soccer commentators drew on and reinforced widely circulating, centuries-old and internationally shared discourses, their representations also appeared to be important sites for challenging hegemonic racial/ethnic meanings and categorizations.

We recommend further research be conducted into how sport media audiences differentiate among athletes and whether the racial/ethnic categories they use to give meaning to race and ethnicity are congruent with those used (implicitly) in sports commentary. Visual images also need to be analyzed as well as the content of the numerous talk shows about sport. These may also be places where dominant discourses may be confirmed, reinforced, naturalized and challenged. The (growth in) media attention to women soccer in several European countries including the Netherlands may also provide a fertile field of further study (Culture, Media and Sport Committee, 2006; Schots, 2010; Women’s Professional Soccer, 2009). Such analyses could provide further insight into the gendered nature of the dominant themes that emerged in this study and in the intersections of gendered and racialized/ethnicized meanings in sports commentary.

## **Chapter 6**

### **Discussion**

‘There is no such thing as race’, Nayak (2006, p. 411) proclaimed at the beginning of his article titled *After race: Ethnography, race and post-race theory*. I agree that race as a biologically determined variable based on physiological characteristics such as skin colour is a ‘fabulous fiction’ (p. 411). I also fully embrace Nayak’s statement that the same applies to a notion of ‘culturally immutable ethnicities’ (p. 411). Still, race and ethnicity are central concepts in this research project that shows the complexities and paradoxes involved in working with these concepts; While I reject the existence of race and ethnicity as entities in the world that are rooted in fixed and absolute cultural or biological divisions among people, I used race and ethnicity as central concepts in my research. Similarly, various race scholars such as Troyna (1995), Gunaratnam (2003) and Flintoff & Webb (2009) have referred to research on race and ethnicity as ‘tricky’ and ‘messy’ business. I explored, reflected on and negotiated this challenging and tricky character of (research into) race and ethnicity using a perspective on race and ethnicity that acknowledges their social power as conflated *social constructs* used by many to classify people. Drawing on the work of race scholars such as Brubaker et al. (2004), Gunaratnam (2003), Hall (2000) and Hylton (2009), I have argued that the analytical boundaries that can be drawn between the concepts of race and ethnicity are often disrupted in popular sport media and policy discourses. More specifically, I have argued that biological markers of difference such as skin colour that are usually associated with race are often implicitly present in culturally informed discourses usually associated with ethnicity and vice versa. This reflects Hall’s (2000) and Gunaratnam’s (2003) point that processes of cultural and biological differentiation articulated through the categories of ethnicity and race should not be seen as separate, distinct processes but rather as ‘racism’s two registers’ and as conflated processes (Hall, 2000, p. 223). My approach to race/ethnicity furthermore emphasizes its invented, contextual and layered character and dense interrelatedness with other logics of differentiation such as those based on nationality, geography and religion, in particular Islam. Before further discussing these interrelations in relation to the Dutch context, I first focus on the research question that I posed in the introductory chapter.

#### **Research questions revisited**

The preceding chapters have provided detailed answers to the overall research question that I posed in the introductory chapter and that was

formulated as follows: *What racial and ethnic categorizations and discourses are implicitly and explicitly (re)constructed and used in and through the sport media, in sport policy and in sport research and how do these categorizations and discourses help to constitute and how are they constituted by wider relations of power?* In this section, I answer to this overall research question by first turning to the findings from my empirically framed studies (chapters 2 and 5) followed by a presentation of findings from the more theoretically framed chapters 3 and 4. The audience reception study (chapter 2) indicated that Surinamese Dutch and European Dutch students drew on the same but also on varying discourses to make sense of the media constructions of race and ethnicity and gender. Specifically, my results showed that male and female students of both ethnic groups primarily drew on a ‘natural’ physicality discourse to give meaning to the overrepresentation of Black athletes in certain sports such as sprint. A natural physicality discourse was also predominantly used in relation to gender. Men were assumed to be naturally stronger than women. This use of a natural physicality discourse corresponds with dominant sport media discourses surrounding race/ethnicity and gender. There were fewer parallels between the Surinamese Dutch and European Dutch students in relation to some of the other discourses they used, most notably the natural mentality discourse. Although most of the students of both groups rejected the idea of natural difference between White and Black athletes in relation to mental, cognitive capacities, some of the White European Dutch students *did* argue that White athletes were superior to Black athletes in terms of their cognitive and organizational skills. The use of such a mentality discourse corresponds with hegemonic media discourses surrounding race that have been documented in North American and British scholarly literature. Although a few Surinamese Dutch students also used a natural mentality discourse in this way, others used a natural mentality discourse in an oppositional way by explicitly associating Black athletes with intelligence and education. Besides physicality and mentality discourses, the students used as ‘cultural tradition’ and an ‘economic’ discourse to explain White and Black overrepresentation in sports. In sum, my reception study showed that dominant discourses used by media users to give meaning to race/ethnicity and gender correspond with hegemonic sport media discourses and reflect existing and well established racial/ethnic stereotypes. It supports the idea of the media as a site that informs hegemonic discourses individuals draw upon. However, I also found that personal sport experiences, ethnic background and the formal structuring of professional sport additionally inform the discourses that individual media users use. For instance, while respondents justified the existing

gender separation in most professional sports by a reference to the perceived physical superiority of men over women, they did not justify a possible and currently non-existing racial division in sport even though they also considered Black athletes physically superior to White athletes. The existing structure of sport along the lines of gender and not race seemed to be used by the respondents as the starting point for their opinions about separation in sport and thus seemed to be a source for the discourses they drew upon. I concluded chapter 2 with a critical, reflexive note about the definition of race/ethnicity I had used throughout the study. In particular, I argued that my conceptualization of race and ethnicity in the interviews as a Black-White variable may have led both the European Dutch and the Surinamese Dutch students to draw on the North American discourse surrounding race that revolves around a Black-White dichotomy instead of on the Dutch discourse. For instance, my questions about overrepresentation of Black or White athletes in certain sports sometimes elicited references to African American athletes and not to Black Dutch athletes. My use of the Black-White terminology may, in other words, have de-contextualized some of my findings. In the other empirical study of this research project, the content analysis of Dutch soccer commentary (chapter 5), I therefore conceptualized race/ethnicity of the soccer players in a more contextualized way attending to layered definitions of race/ethnicity used in everyday Dutch discourse. My content analysis showed that Dutch soccer commentators on television reinforced but sometimes also challenged hegemonic constructions of race/ethnicity that circulate throughout Dutch society. Specifically, I found that commentators constructed the groups of players I labeled 'Surinamese' and 'Latin American' as racially/ethnically different from the other (groups of) players. I discussed how such reconstructions of difference can be traced back to centuries-old colonial discourses in relation to Surinamese-ethnic soccer players and internationally shared, globalized discourses in relation to Latin American soccer players. At the same time, my research findings showed that even though the White commentators drew on hegemonic discourses surrounding race and ethnicity that strengthen their social group position as Whites, commentators' (re)constructions of racial/ethnic difference were not always congruent with such hegemonic discourses. Most notably, sport commentators in my content analysis did not (re)construct and reinforce the *allochtoon-autochtoon* and Muslim-non-Muslim binaries that are used as important exclusionary categorizations in Dutch everyday discourse.

Whereas the focus in the audience reception study and content analysis presented in chapters two and five was on empirical research, chapters 3 and 4 were more theoretically and methodologically framed. In

their focus on racial/ethnic categorizations practices, they were a logical follow up on chapter 2 that ended with a reflexive note on the importance of contextualization of racial and ethnic categorizations in research. At the same time, chapters 3 and 4 provided me with the theoretical and methodological substance for the content analysis of soccer commentary presented in chapter 5. In chapter 3, I reflected critically on the use of the dominant and uniquely Dutch *allochtoon-autochtoon* categorization in policy documents that describe the nationwide sport policy initiative *Meedoen allochtone jeugd door sport* [Participation allochthonous youth through sport]. My analysis of the documents showed how this program is situated in an assimilationist discourse that revolves around the hierarchical use of the typically Dutch *allochtoon-autochtoon* categorization. More specifically, I showed how the focus in the program documents is turned outward, towards the social category of allochthonous youth, instead of inward, towards practices and responsibilities of sport clubs and institutes that are generally informed by the rules and norms of the social category of the autochthonous, majority ethnic group. In doing so, the program documents implicitly leave hegemonic sport practices and policies invisible and unchallenged while they problematize allochthonous youth. This is problematic from a cultural studies perspective since it leaves the relations of power that structure the implicit calls of this program towards minority ethnic youth to assimilate to hegemonic codes of behavior unaddressed. This means that such sport policy documents tend to reproduce and perpetuate, instead of challenge, the racialized/ethnicized status quo and White, autochthonous privilege in society at large. I suggested alternative ways of using race and ethnicity in sport policy programs and documents, in particular an acknowledgment of and critical reflection on the often invisible normativity of White 'autochthoeness'. In addition to that, I discussed how sport *researchers* who work with the concepts of race and ethnicity can use a social constructionist approach towards race/ethnicity while at the same time attending to essentialist notions of race and ethnicity that are used in (sport) policy or everyday discourse. In particular, I emphasized the need to problematize race and ethnicity in every new study and ground the use of categories in the context under study instead of predefining them on the basis of past research. In chapter 4, I continued with this critical reflection on dominant racial/ethnic categorizations but now in relation to international *sport media research*, in particular existing content analyses of large volumes of televised sports commentary. My inventory of racial/ethnic classification practices in these studies showed that scholars conducting content analysis of large volumes of sports commentary primarily used a Black-White definition of

race/ethnicity and should be critical as to how far the racial/ethnic categorizations they use are still meaningful in increasingly ethnically/racially heterogeneous societies in which their research is situated. In addition, I argued that this Black-White categorization is problematic since it *predefines* and essentializes race and ethnicity in a way that has historically framed a White situated racialized discourse that legitimized White colonial powers during the time of colonialism. In other words, these critical sport media studies can themselves be criticized for naturalizing a historically informed racialized status quo through their tendency to *predefine* race and ethnicity into a single fixed categorization (Long & Spracklen, 2011b). I suggested an alternative approach to explore racial/ethnic representations in sports commentary that takes into account the layered, contextual and power laden character of racial and ethnic categories in daily discourse. I implemented this alternative approach in my content analysis in chapter 5.

### **Theoretical framework**

Throughout the various chapters I used a critical cultural studies perspective combined with insights from social cognition theory (see chapter 1 for a detailed description of my theoretical framework). Central in a cultural studies perspective is an emphasis on power relations and on the contextual, dynamic and historically contingent character of discourses surrounding race and ethnicity and racial/ethnic categorizations. Therefore, I explored and discussed the historical and cultural specificities of the racial/ethnic meanings and categorizations and attended to the contextualized power relations from which these meanings and categories emerged. I combined this focus on contextuality and power that characterizes a cultural studies perspective with insights from social cognition theory that argues that the use of categories such as racial/ethnic categories is a fundamental human process that all human beings are involved in to make sense of the social world and events around them (Baumann, 1999; Brubaker et al., 2004). As I have shown throughout the preceding chapters, sport commentators, sport media audiences and sport policy makers are no exception in this regard; they also engage in racial/ethnic differentiation but often do so in an implicit way through the qualities and characteristics they ascribe to people.

### **Purpose and structure of this chapter**

In this concluding chapter of the project, I aim to bring together and synthesize the main insights articulated in the previous chapters. I do not intend to rehearse all the complexities, ambiguities and contradictions that characterized the articulations of race and ethnicity that I discussed in the

preceding chapters. My goal is rather to highlight and elaborate on those issues that I think have been central to my thinking. The overall research questions formulated in the Introduction (chapter 1) thereby guide the direction. Although I have answered the research questions in a summarized way in the previous section I will connect and discuss the insights they produced in more detail in the remainder of this chapter.

The chapter is divided into three parts. I start with a discussion of the use of race/ethnicity in Dutch popular discourse. I synthesize the main insights described in the preceding chapters and additionally place the Dutch use of race and ethnicity in an internationally comparative perspective. This discussion of Dutch popular discourses surrounding race and ethnicity is relevant for the second part of this chapter in which I discuss how the dominant everyday Dutch constructions of race/ethnicity are articulated in and through the specific domains that I explored in chapters 2, 3 and 5: audience receptions of sport media content, Dutch sport policy and Dutch soccer commentary. In the third part of this chapter, I will reflect on how *research* on race/ethnicity can be considered a discursive practice (Gunaratnam, 2003) that helps to *produce* racial/ethnic categorizations and meanings. A reflection on the use of categories in research requires a broad elaboration on the difficulties researchers examining race/ethnicity face in translating theoretical notions about the contextuality and constructedness of racial/ethnic categorizations into empirical practice. I will zoom in on the added value that the alternative methodological approach that I developed in chapter 4 can offer in this regard, in particular in relation to the study of representations of race and ethnicity in large volumes of sports commentary.

### **Popular Dutch discourses surrounding race/ethnicity**

Synthesizing and elaborating on the sections on the Dutch context in the preceding chapters, the Dutch everyday use of race/ethnicity can be characterized by its complexly layered character and by ‘cultural racism’, ‘ethnification of Islam’ and ‘colour-blind racism’. I discuss these key terms and related processes of racial/ethnic differentiation in this section.

### **Cultural racism**

The everyday use of race/ethnicity in the Netherlands is mainly framed in terms of ethnicity and a variety of minority ethnic groups instead of an explicit race and a racial Black-White binary as is more common in the US or UK. Ethnicity in the Dutch context generally refers to perceived fixed cultural difference among social groups, something that Carrington & McDonald (2001) referred to as the perception that each group has its

'own incompatible lifestyle, customs and ways of seeing the world' (p. 1). Cultural difference is usually ascribed to *minority* ethnic groups only since the White *majority* ethnic group is generally not considered as a separate ethnic group and thus remains unmentioned and racially/ethnically unmarked in everyday Dutch discourse. This invisibility of the White majority ethnic group as a racial/ethnic category has been documented for other western countries as well. This invisibility renders the racial/ethnic category of the White majority ethnic group normative but hides this normativity from view leaving it unaddressed and unchallenged (Wekker, 2002). As Dyer (1997) argued: 'as long as race is something only applied to non-white peoples, as long as white people are not racially seen and named, they/we function as a human norm. Other people are raced, we are just people' (p. 1).

The construction of minority ethnic groups as inherently culturally different from the normative White majority ethnic group and from each other has resulted in forms of *cultural racism* in Dutch society. Cultural racism constructs insider and outsider groups on the basis of perceived cultural assimilation to the mainstream norms and values of the dominant racial/ethnic group in society (Carrington & McDonald, 2001). In the Netherlands, cultural racism primarily operates through the popular (re)construction of the majority ethnic group labelled 'autochtoon' or 'Dutch' as normative and of non-dominant ethnic groups usually referred to as 'allochtonen' or 'ethnic minorities' as different from this norm. The perceived difference from the norm is often grounded in cultural signifiers such as language, norms and values and dress. Minority ethnic groups are, for instance, relatively often criticized for poor language skills, for their lacking of identification with the Dutch nation and with Dutch norms and values and for the wearing of clothing that does not fit Dutch standards. In addition, minority ethnic groups are relatively frequently represented as unwilling or unable to integrate fully in Dutch society. There are of course contradictions to this pattern which shows the contradictory character of discourse. When White, autochthonous people are associated with poor language capacity or asocial behaviour, their race/ethnicity usually goes unremarked however. The resulting constructions of ethnic difference have increasingly become conflated with markers of difference that relate to religion, Islam in particular, as I will discuss in more detail in the following section.

### **Ethnification of Islam**

Cultural racism in the Dutch context has intensified during the last decade. Dutch society is now characterized by an increasingly restrictive policy towards the need for assimilation by minority ethnic groups (Essed &

Nimako, 2006; Scholten & Holzacker, 2009; Siebers, 2010). Developments relating to globalization and a social and political shift to the right have fuelled individual concerns of what constitutes national Dutch culture resulting in an increased identification by the majority ethnic group with a specific version of 'national' Dutch culture. Non-White Dutch inhabitants and especially young Dutch men of Moroccan origin are often represented in implicit or explicit ways as people with fixed cultural features that are incompatible with normative 'Dutch' culture and are disruptive of Dutch national unity. Islam in particular has become constructed as an obstacle to integration into Dutch society, something that was amplified by both global events such as that of 11 September 2001 and domestic developments such as the representation of Islam as culturally backward by Dutch politicians and opinion makers and the murder of (White) Dutch opinion maker Van Gogh by a Muslim man in 2004. Moroccan and Turkish minority ethnic groups have increasingly been referred to as Muslims in everyday Dutch and mainstream news media discourses and are often situated in a negative discourse that associates them primarily with perceived deviancy in their clothing such as the burka or headscarf, in their behaviour such as criminality if not terrorism, and in their attitudes on topics such as democracy or gender equality (D'Haenens & Bink, 2007; Essed & Nimako, 2006; Scholten & Holzacker, 2009). The (re)construction of Muslims as a homogeneous, threatening social group is not unique to the Netherlands but has been documented for other Western countries as well, for instance the UK, Australia and Sweden and, thus, seems to be part of a trend in western countries (Bloch & Dreher, 2010; Farooq & Parker, 2010; Larsson, 2006). The increased importance of Islam in the process of cultural/ethnic differentiation is referred to as the ethnification of Islam by scholars such as Brah (1996) and Eriksen (2002) (see also chapter 5).

### **Colour-blindness**

In this process of ethnic in- and exclusion in Dutch everyday discourse, meanings given to skin colour seem to be absent. The emphasis seems to be on fixed cultural difference instead of on biological difference between people based on their skin colour. This rhetorical emphasis on cultural difference circumvents an explicit linkage of ethnicity with race or biology that suggests socially unacceptable forms of 'racism' that the Dutch attempt to avoid (Essed & Trienekens, 2008). It suggests that Dutch society is a 'colour-blind' society where discrimination on the basis of skin colour does not occur. However, closer inspection of discursive practices surrounding ethnicity indicates that skin colour implicitly plays an important role in the (re)constructions of ethnic hierarchies and in

addressing certain cultural differences in Dutch popular discourse. This is illustrated, for instance, by the frequently used *allochtoon* - *autochtoon* dichotomy that captures the mix of popular racial thinking and ethnic/cultural terminology and hierarchy. As I have explained in the preceding chapters, in official Dutch governmental discourse the term *allochtoon* refers to any individual who has at least one parent who was born abroad while the term *autochtoon* refers to any individual whose parents were both born in the Netherlands. In popular Dutch discourse, however, the term *allochtoon* is often conflated with notions surrounding race and class and is generally used to refer to non-White individuals, often of lower social-economic class (see also Captain & Ghorashi, 2001; Essed & Trienekens, 2008; Wekker & Lutz, 2001).

Such conflation of racial and ethnic criteria in popular categorization practices occurs in other European and western multi-ethnic societies as well (e.g. Hall, 2000; Rastas, 2005). Even in the US where, in contrast to the Netherlands, the use of categories 'Black' and 'White' in the Census shows that skin colour is a more explicit racial categorizing principle than in Europe, 'race talk' or 'colour talk' is also increasingly combined with 'ethnic talk' (Morning, 2009). Morning, for instance, found that US students often combined biological arguments and cultural arguments when describing their understanding of race. More specifically, her interviewees equated race with ethnicity by speaking of fixed '*ethnic/cultural*' differences between the Black and White '*races*'. In addition, she concluded that the types of questions posed by the researcher determined whether students used biological or cultural arguments to talk about race. Whereas the students she interviewed frequently used biological arguments to explain the overrepresentation of Black athletes in the National Football League arguing that Blacks are naturally superior in such sports, this use of biological accounts of race occurred less frequently when the students had to define race in an open ended way without having to explain a specific sports related outcome. Students were then almost as likely to refer to cultural features as biological ones when defining race. This suggests that individual understandings of race and ethnicity are not stable across contexts but can vary depending on the specific context or situation that needs to be interpreted (Morning, 2009).

### **Complexity**

Capturing popular understandings of race/ethnicity in the Dutch context is also complicated by the fact that not only ideas about ethnicity, race, culture and religion/Islam are intertwined in popular racial/ethnic categorization practices but ideas that relate to geographical origin of

people as well. The internal differentiation within the social group of 'White people' in the Netherlands shows the use of geographical area of origin as a popular marker of racial/ethnic difference. In particular, White immigrants such as the recent Polish, Bulgarian, Romanian or ex-Yugoslavian immigrants who are hired as cheap laborers are often (re)constructed as racially/ethnically different from the White Dutch (Essed & Trienekens, 2008). This is not unique to the Netherlands. Gilroy (2006) argued in relation to the British context that even if they are White, the recently arrived immigrants from Eastern Europe 'can be held hostage by the logic of race through the non-negotiable specification that they are immigrants' (p2). The emphasis on the need for White East Europeans to assimilate to West European standards shows that access to privileges of whiteness is not equally distributed among all Whites (Hylton, 2009) but depends also on geographical origin and perceived cultural deviance based on that geographical origin. It also shows that (full) inclusion within the category of Whites can change across time and place. Whereas the social category of East Europeans do not have complete access to the structural advantages of being White in the Netherlands or the UK, they may have so in their home country where they constitute the dominant group.

### **Summary**

Summarizing we can, thus, conclude that hegemonic Dutch understandings of race/ethnicity are coded in a language that avoids explicit references to race/skin colour but that uses references to concepts such as ethnicity, culture, religion, nation and broader geographical origin to frame a hidden racialized/ethnicized narrative and racial/ethnic hierarchies. Muslims and young Dutch men of Moroccan origin in particular are often (re)constructed as belonging to exclusionary ethnic categories in contemporary Dutch society. As I have outlined in this section, these (re)constructions of racial/ethnic difference can be considered culturally specific for the Dutch context at some points, in particular in relation to the specific terminology that is used such as the *allochtoon-autochtoon* dichotomy, but they also show important similarities with the popular usages and connotations of race/ethnicity in other western countries and with representations in the sport media as I will discuss in the next section.

### **Race, ethnicity and sport on television**

As the media scholar Matheson (2005) argued, *the media* are among the institutions that continuously help to (re)produce, reinforce and reinvent but also challenge hegemonic racial/ethnic discourses and categorizations.

According to Macdonald (2003, p. 28) the media play an important role in forming 'frameworks for understanding' that many people construct in their heads to make sense of their social world. In helping to form these 'frames of understanding' 'the media call attention to some aspects of social reality' while obscuring others' (Entman, 1993, p. 55). Hall (1997) argued that media discourses surrounding race and ethnicity not only 'prefer' certain ways of talking about race and ethnicity or racial and ethnic groups but also exclude other ways of talking about them. The media thereby may structure the meanings people give to race and ethnicity when they classify their social world. And these cultural meanings are not only thoughts, they influence everyday conduct of individuals and consequently have real, practical and material effects (Hall, 1997).

As I discussed throughout the preceding chapters, the *sport* media can be considered one of the key sites in reflecting and reinforcing but also challenging hegemonic understandings of race and ethnicity. Due to its multi-ethnic character and popularity among a mass audience, men's soccer in particular plays an important role in societal meanings surrounding race and ethnicity<sup>xxxi</sup>. Although the sport media are not alone in (re)producing racialized/ethnicized discourses, 'their stories and narratives are particularly potent' (Bruce, 2004, p. 863). The social power of the sport media is illustrated, for instance, by the popularity of sport heroes of various ethnic origins that serve as role models for ethnically diverse youth audiences (Elling, 2002). The potential of sport media narratives in informing viewers' opinions and ideas is strengthened by the popular perception that sport journalists and commentators work in a value-free and objective journalistic manner (Knoppers & Elling, 2004). This popular perception particularly applies to *televised* sport coverage whose visual character reinforces viewers' impression that the televised event is brought to their living room in its natural, authentic and 'real' form. Due to the assumed naturalness of the presentation of sport on television and the perceived objectivity of sports commentary, the general public may assess the narratives created by sport commentators as credible sources of information.

A critical cultural studies perspective suggests, however, that a view on the sport media as reflecting reality in an objective and value-free way tends to obscure the dependency of media coverage on the entertainment value that is important to attract expected audiences (Boyle & Haynes, 2004; Hartmann, 2007; Van Zoonen, 1998). In the Dutch context, this dependence on entertainment values also applies to sports such as men's soccer on television that is watched by so many people. The fact that men's soccer on television pulls in so many viewers seems of

central importance to legitimate its continued screening, on commercial as well as public television. Bourdieu (2001) argued that a fixation on market share and audience ratings can even be considered a central characteristic of television resulting in the dramatization of events, an exaggeration of their importance and a continuous search for central figures and story lines in the stories that commentators tell (see for example, De Leeuw, 2003; Hermes, 2005 for the Dutch context). This dependence on and prioritization of entertainment values structures decisions about what events or what individual players should receive attention in soccer programs and what kinds of commentary, analyses and images should be used (Buscombe, 1975; Hartmann, 2007). Televised sport does not *reflect* reality, therefore, but instead those responsible for producing the coverage present *their preferred version of reality*.

### **Colour blind racism and whiteness**

The proclaimed and assumed objectivity of televised sport discourses also masks how sport coverage is often situated in a White perspective. The vast majority of commentators, journalists, program makers and editors in the Dutch sport media are White males. This is not unique to the Dutch context but applies to the sport media corps in western societies more generally (Carrington, 2011; Coakley & Pike, 2009). When they are faced with rapidly unfolding events and do not have the time to reflect on their word use, White commentators have drawn on hegemonic societal discourses surrounding race and ethnicity that are readily available to them and that may match White audience expectations<sup>xxxii</sup> (Hylton, 2009; Knoppers & Elling, 2001a). White sport commentators themselves often do not see their own complicity in reinforcing hegemonic, commonsensical meanings given to race/ethnicity (Hartmann, 2007). Instead, as Spencer (2004) explained, commentators tend to use *sincere fictions*: personal mythologies that serve to sustain an internalized image of themselves as being objective, race-neutral professionals. These sincere fictions allow commentators to use racially biased language, often unintentionally, whilst claiming to do the opposite (Carrington & McDonald, 2001). Bruce (2004) found, for instance, that although White US sport commentators acknowledged that racial stereotyping existed in US sports commentary, they also *all* believed that their own commentary was free of any racial/ethnic bias. Claringbould et al. (2004) found similar results in their study of Dutch sport commentators. Such verbal claims to race-neutrality point to the dynamic of colour blind racism that I discussed in the previous section of this chapter. Characteristic of colour blind racism is that White people tend to see themselves as individuals for whom race is no longer an issue. At the same time, they are however

complicit in naturalizing socially constructed racial/ethnic categories and discourses that actually perpetuate the status quo and White privilege in society (Bonilla-Silva & Forman, 2000).

The occurrence of colour blind racism in the sport media is additionally evident from the fact that the overwhelming overrepresentation of White males and the underrepresentation of minority ethnic groups within the sport media corps often remains unremarked by White people working in the sport media themselves (Carrington, 2011). It reveals, as Carrington argued, the 'deeply embedded normative whiteness of the sports/media complex' (2011, p. 94). One of the defining characteristics of this normative whiteness is the privilege of White people working in the sport media not to have to think much about and 'see' race or ethnicity in general and their own race/ethnicity in particular (Frankenberg, 2004; Hartigan, 2010). As a result, the overrepresentation of White people in positions of power within the sport media and the marginalized position of minority ethnic groups generally remains unnoticed, unspoken and, thus, unchallenged.

*Normative whiteness in another institutional context: sports policy*

Findings from the current research project suggest that such pervasiveness of normative whiteness is not unique to the media but applies to other institutional contexts as well, for example sport clubs or sports governing bodies where the underrepresentation of minority ethnic groups in positions of power seems to be common sense (Long & Hylton, 2002; Ouseley, 2011; Van Sterkenburg et al., 2005)<sup>xxxiii</sup>. As a consequence, the discourses and practices of the majority ethnic group have become, and continue to be, the often invisible 'norm' for the organization of sport (e.g. Elling, 2007; Verweel, 2010). This was evident from my analysis of policy documents that describe the large-scale Dutch sport policy project *Meedoen allochtone jeugd door sport* [Participation allochthonous youth through sport]. Even though intended to enhance interethnic contact and tolerance and even though generally considered successful in terms of attracting minority ethnic and majority youth towards sport clubs (Hoekman et al., 2011), policy documents that describe the program also help to normalize racial/ethnic categorizations that are situated in relations of power that privilege the dominant racial/ethnic group above non-dominant racial/ethnic groups. It is the uncritical use of the hierarchical and homogenizing *allochtoon-autochtoon* categorization in these policy documents that indicates the pervasiveness of normative whiteness in Dutch sport policy contexts. Or, to be more precise, it is the commonsensical and self-evident use of the *allochtoon-autochtoon* categorization that reveals how unquestioned and undisturbed practices of

racial/ethnic categorization that construct a racial hierarchy that confirms (the invisibility of) White privilege are sustained, even in apparently well meaning policy programs that aim to *decrease* racial/ethnic inequalities in and through sport. The unquestioned use of the *allochtoon-autochtoon* categorization in this national Dutch sport program, thus, gives important insights into how whiteness operates in institutional contexts: through a series of discursive strategies that the people who use them - who usually belong to the majority ethnic group but not necessarily so - seem hardly aware of themselves. These discursive strategies include the 'fixing' of difference so that the socially constructed non-White minority ethnic category is represented as a homogeneous group that is culturally or intellectually less developed than the White majority group while at the same time constructing the White majority ethnic group as normative and rendering the members of this group raceless.

In the studies that comprise the current research project I have attempted to reveal instead of leave unmarked such hierarchically based assumptions about race and ethnicity and open them up for discussion. In the next section, I will further elaborate on the patterns of racialized/ethnicized language in the sport media and among sport media audiences (chapters 2 and 5). The physicality theme in particular appeared important to both the White male soccer commentators and the male and female audience members of Surinamese and Dutch origin in their (re)constructions of racial/ethnic difference among players and athletes. The dominance of this theme in both the content analysis and the reception study suggests that it is deeply rooted in Dutch everyday discourse. In the following paragraphs of this section I will discuss the use of this physicality theme in detail and place it in a broader historical and internationally comparative perspective.

### **Dominance of a physicality theme**

My data showed that Dutch soccer commentators on television relatively often described the male soccer players of Surinamese descent in terms of their physical qualities or characteristics. I also found that Dutch media users of both Dutch and Surinamese origin primarily used a physicality discourse in order to explain overrepresentation of Black male and female athletes in sports such as sprint or basketball. There were, of course, contradictions to this pattern. White athletes were sometimes associated with natural physical strength and Black athletes with qualities such as work ethic and intellectual capacities. The overall tendency in the data, however, indicated an association of physicality with the soccer players I labeled 'Surinamese' in my content analysis and with 'Black' athletes in my reception study.

Morning (2009) and Carrington (2002) argued that an association of Black male athletes with 'natural' physical strength within the North-American context is likely the ideological legacy of discourses that circulated during the period of colonialism and slavery. The construction of 'Black people' versus 'White people' by the White European colonizers structured colonial relationships and led to a racialized hierarchy in which Black people were seen as inferior to White people (Morning, 2009; Omi & Winant, 1986). More precisely, an institutionalized biologically informed ideology about skin colour, intellectual capacities and physical skills that associated Black slaves with natural physicality and White European colonizers with civilization justified slavery and colonial ruling by Whites as necessary to 'civilize' Black bodies (see also Davis, 1990; McDonald, 2009). Carrington (2002) has argued that the emphasis on Black physicality remains deeply inscribed in contemporary Western culture thereby forwarding 'colonial discourses about the colonial 'Other' in the post/colonial present' (p. 3).

Several scholars have pointed out that this continued fascination for Black athletic physicality has a gender subtext as well. Ferber (2007) noted that Black females have historically been associated with a more passive physicality than Black males (see also Blaagaard, 2011). While Black females have always been represented as sexual objects who did not have the right to control their own body, Black males have generally been associated with a more aggressive, violent physicality and animal-like heterosexuality (Blaagaard, 2011; Carrington, 2001; Ferber, 2007). As Ferber (2007) noted, these stereotypical representations that are part of a hegemonic gender discourse also have influenced everyday practice and served to justify rapes of Black women and lynchings of Black males by Whites throughout US history. A commonality in these male and female Black representations is a reduction of the Black individual to his or her bodily characteristics or qualities.

### **Colonial legacy in the Dutch context**

A colonial ideology that associated a colonized population with 'natural' physical characteristics and closeness to nature has not only been documented in relation to the US context but also in relation to the colonial history of other western societies including that of the Netherlands. African slaves working at Dutch owned Surinamese plantations during the time of colonialism were associated with characteristics such as savagery, animality and physicality (Oostindie, 1995; Wekker, 2002). These associations represented Black people as biologically different from White people and served to legitimize slave labor. Similar as has occurred in the US, this physicality theme seems still

pervasive in contemporary Dutch sport media representations. Knoppers & Elling (1999) showed that the use of a Black natural athletic stereotype was a dominant feature in Dutch coverage of Black males during the 1996 Olympics while Black female athletes were marginalized in the coverage. Hermes (2005), who explored the media representations of two Dutch ex-professional soccer players of Surinamese origin Gullit and Kluivert, concluded that although these players were represented in different and sometimes even oppositional ways in the Dutch media, both were also stereotypically associated with their bodily qualities and sexuality and represented as emotional rather than rational. In my content analysis of Dutch soccer commentary, the physicality theme also emerged as an important theme for commentators to characterize the male soccer players of Surinamese descent. Furthermore, a natural physicality discourse was the dominant theme among the audience members in my reception study to explain Black male and female sport success. These findings seem to confirm that colonial discourses linger on in Dutch sport media representations and –receptions. They lend credence to the idea that Dutch sport coverage is also engaged –through their verbal representations of athletes- in the ongoing constitution of certain centuries-old Dutch discourses about race and racial/ethnic difference.

Furthermore, the associations that the male and female students in the audience reception study made between the category ‘Black’ and physicality indicates that their meanings may be additionally informed by globalized, US informed media discourses surrounding race that use a Black-White definition of race. This may also partly explain the emphasis Dutch soccer commentators placed on the physicality of players I labeled ‘Surinamese’ in my content analysis. Their skin colour would place these players in the category of ‘Black athletes’ in contexts that use a Black-White dichotomy of race. Due to globalization of the media and the frequent screening of North American movies, television series and videoclips worldwide, it is possible that an essentializing US informed discourse that constructs racial difference by reducing Black people to their bodies has informed Dutch sport media representations. At the same time however, this does not explain my finding that not *all* players in the Dutch soccer commentary who would be labeled ‘Black’ in the North American discourse about race were racially ‘othered’ by a reference to their physicality such as Black players of African or Antillean origin. As I explained in detail in chapter 5, possible explanations for these differences in representation should take into account local/national Dutch colonial histories. Slave owners at the Antilles had, for instance, relatively little contact with the Netherlands during the time of colonialism but were more interested in regional affairs (Oostindie, 1995). In addition, there was not

much literary activity from the part of Antillean slave owners compared to the vast amount of literature about colonial Suriname (Oostindie, 1995). Such local/national historical factors may explain why stereotypes about Suriname and 'Surinamese' slaves, for instance in relation to their physicality, have reached the European Dutch imagination while stereotypes about the Antilles and Antillean slaves have not. It suggests that globalized media discourses surrounding race have relatively limited effect on local/national discursive practices. Further research that explores possible interactions between local/national discourses and globalized discourses surrounding race and ethnicity may give more insight in the possible interrelationships between the global and the local/national.

**Another dominant theme in relation to Black male athletes:  
ghettocentric logic**

Besides revealing how Black athletes may be reduced to their physicality, North-American scholars have also discussed another recurring theme in the media portrayal of the Black male athlete. Andrews & Silk (2010) have captured this portrayal with the term 'ghettocentric logic'. They argue that various institutes like the North American media, sport associations like the NBA and the music and video industries together have constructed and commodified an urban, threatening and 'authentic' Black male identity in which the Black athlete is associated with criminality, hip hop music, violence and an obsession with material wealth (Andrews & Silk, 2010; McDonald & Togliola, 2010; Wilson, 1997 for the Canadian context). Processes of commodification and celebration of Black male urban subculture can also be observed in the Netherlands, for instance in video games and video clips presented on music channels such as MTV and in commercials that feature minority ethnic players in the Dutch street football game *Pannavoetbal* (Bundy, 2011). These videoclips and commercials show essentialized versions of Black North American hip hop culture in which Black or minority ethnic males are also often associated with hyper-masculine bodies, hip hop music and everyday physical violence and aggressiveness. It must be noted that Black athletes and artists themselves at times also seem complicit with these ghetto-centric stereotypes, to tap into racially informed anxieties that are implicitly tied to these stereotypes and/or to reveal the invented character of these stereotypes (e.g. Alturi, 2009; Carrington, 2001; Hall, 1997). However, I did not find explicit references to such a ghetto-centric logic in relation to Black male players in regular Dutch soccer commentary. In other words, Dutch soccer commentators did not describe Black soccer players in terms of criminality or sexuality and did not associate them with the urban ghetto-centric spaces of 'poverty, drugs and

crime-ridden streets' as US media do in relation to Black basketball players (Andrews & Silk, 2010, p. 1636). This finding suggests that despite the global spread of sports and music imagery and globalization of the media, local/national discursive practices in mainstream sport coverage can differ from each other in this respect.

### **Sport media as a progressive racial/ethnic force**

Notwithstanding the dominance of a physicality theme in the Dutch sport media that can be traced back to centuries old colonial stereotypes, it is misleading to see the White controlled sport media as only 'harnessed to a single, racist conception of the world' (Hall, 1995, p. 20). First of all, meanings given to race and ethnicity are not an inherent element of media texts themselves but should rather be considered as being produced in the very process of negotiation between media users and the texts that they read/view. This is congruent with a cultural studies perspective that argues that media discourses suggest a preferred reading to their audiences but that these preferred readings are also to a certain extent open for multiple interpretations depending on individual agency and the discourses that viewers have at their disposal to make sense of media messages (Carrington, 2001; Hall, 1997). This was illustrated by the finding from my reception study that some students, in particular those of Surinamese origin who were not positioned in the 'ideal' subject position vis-à-vis the hegemonic/preferred discourse in terms of ethnicity, were engaged in negotiated readings that did not overlap with hegemonic sport media discourses. For instance, some Black students explicitly opposed a 'natural' mentality discourse that was used by a few White and Black students and instead associated Black athletes also with education and intellectual capabilities.

Apart from that, the existence of alternative, non-hegemonic sport media portrayals of race and ethnicity was evident from my content analysis where I did *not* find any evidence that the television commentators constructed soccer players I classified as 'Muslim' or 'Moroccan' in a different way than the other players even though the categories of 'Muslims' and 'Moroccans' living in the Netherlands are often constructed as the racial/ethnic Other in popular Dutch discourse. A possible explanation for the absence of these otherwise popular (re)constructions of difference may be that perceived notions of deviance like cultural maladjustment, lack of democratic values or deviant clothing that are used in the process of Othering the social groups of Moroccans and Muslims in everyday Dutch and mainstream media discourse, do not play a role in the soccer-specific discourses that commentators draw on in *soccer* coverage. The emphasis in the soccer commentary that I examined

was instead on *play related, athletic* qualities of players, most notably the technical skills of players but also play related cognitive and physical qualities.

The absence in the data of otherwise popular racial/ethnic categorizations therefore suggests that (re)constructions of racial/ethnic difference that are used in general Dutch society to draw boundaries between social groups can differ from the racial/ethnic boundaries (re)constructed in Dutch televised soccer commentary. This context-specificity of (re)constructions of racial/ethnic difference reflects Morning's (2009) argument that people carry around a tool kit of race concepts and meanings from which to draw on. The content of the tool kit can vary from individual to individual and is based on a variety of discursive resources that individuals use including the media but also sites like education, work and family environment. The selection of particular concepts and meanings from that tool kit depends, amongst others, on the cultural practice to which they are applied (see also Swidler & Ardit, 1994). As Andrews (2002) argued, each cultural practice opens up specific reservoirs of categories, meanings and stereotypes that are 'fitting' and practically applicable to that cultural practice or context. In other words, (re)constructions of difference that people draw on in certain contexts or cultural practices, for instance soccer commentators in the cultural practice of soccer coverage, may differ to some extent from those used in other cultural practices, for instance in the context of regular news coverage or sport *policy* programs. The Dutch sport policy program *Meedoen allochtone jeugd door sport* [Participation allochthonous youth through sport], for example, reinforced other racial/ethnic categories and differentiations than the Dutch soccer commentary. While the sport policy initiative primarily reinforced the *allochtoon-autochtoon* dichotomy that is commonly used in Dutch policy practices and documents and reflects Dutch popular and governmental discourse, it did *not* (re)construct the 'Surinamese' category as a distinct ethnic group as did the soccer commentators in my content analysis. The soccer commentators tended to draw on soccer-specific discourses that easily open up the category of 'Surinamese players' since they have shaped Dutch soccer history to an important extent. It is precisely in this 'situationality' or 'context drivenness' (Morning, 2009, p. 1185) of racial/ethnic concepts and meanings that the emancipatory power of Dutch televised sport commentary lies. While soccer coverage may reinforce certain centuries-old colonial racial/ethnic stereotypes that are activated in the specific context of Dutch professional soccer where many players of Surinamese descent participate that can be linked to Dutch colonial heritage, soccer coverage may at the same time ignore and thereby challenge other

racial/ethnic categorizations and boundaries such as the *allochtoon-autochtoon* categorization. Since soccer on television is watched by so many people in the Netherlands, this power of soccer commentary to not use and thereby challenge certain, otherwise dominant, in- and exclusionary categorizations cannot be underestimated.

### **Summary**

My exploration of racialized/ethnicized theme(s) that were systematically used in both the content analysis and the reception study points to constructions of physicality as a key theme among both soccer commentators and media users to (re)construct racial/ethnic difference. More specifically, a physicality theme was used by Surinamese Dutch and European Dutch students to differentiate Black athletes from White athletes and by White Dutch soccer commentators to differentiate soccer players I labeled as Surinamese from the other soccer players. This use and dominance of a physicality theme can be considered the cultural continuation of local/national and globalized colonial discourses surrounding race but then in a more covert and implicit form. Such colonially informed discourses serve to reproduce racialized ways of seeing the world that reinforce the maintenance of White privilege. White commentators themselves often do not see their own complicity in the perpetuation of hegemonic discourses surrounding race/ethnicity but subscribe to what they perceive to be an objective, race neutral work attitude. This invisibility of their own complicity reveals the deeply embedded normativity and invisibility of whiteness in the Dutch sport media. Such normative whiteness is not restricted to the sport media but also applies to other contexts such as that of sport policy. The seemingly unreflexive use of the *allochtoon-autochtoon* categorization in the previously discussed sport policy documents that describe the program *Meedoen allochtone jeugd door sport* indicates how practices of racial/ethnic categorization that render White autochthousness normative and sustain White privilege can remain undisturbed and unchallenged in White situated Dutch sport policy.

Although my findings lend credence to those concerned about the racialized/ethnicized language in the sport media, my empirical research has also shown that the dynamic character of (sport) media discourses can result in contradictions and oppositional discourses that challenge the discourses and racial/ethnic inequalities in society at large. It shows that although White commentators tend to draw on hegemonic discourses that legitimize their privileged group position, there is also always a degree of individual and institutional agency that allows the sport media to draw on and reproduce alternative discourses that challenge the hegemonic

discourse. This finding suggests the contextuality of (re)constructions of racial/ethnic meanings and categorizations. Such contextuality implies that constructions of racial/ethnic difference that are dominant in society at large do not always play a role in, and are sometimes challenged by, the specific context of the sport media and vice versa.

### **Research as a discursive practice**

The contextual character of discourses surrounding race/ethnicity that I discussed in the previous section raises some methodological and theoretical problems for researchers who need to define race and ethnicity in their empirical research. A specific difficulty that I want to address in greater detail in this last section of the chapter concerns the problem of translating theoretical notions about race/ethnicity as an abstract social construct whose meanings and categorizations can change across time and place into an empirical research practice that is characterized by a stabilization of race and ethnicity into fixed categories. Such use of fixed categories is often considered necessary in empirical research in order to explore if certain racial/ethnic groups are treated differently or not in the media or in real life situations. Gunaratnam (2003) spoke in this regard of the treacherous bind of research focusing on race/ethnicity. This treacherous bind refers to the process of having to work *with* but also *against* racial/ethnic categorizations. Rastas (2005) formulated this ambiguity by stating that speaking or writing about racial/ethnic categories tends to reproduce racial reductionist thinking that researchers often want to resist because it freezes or crystallizes racial categories into universally fixed entities. But *not* using racial/ethnic categories in empirical research makes the uncovering of racial/ethnic biases or inequalities, for instance in and through sport commentary, extremely difficult.

Researchers who use a social constructionist perspective and wish to conduct content analysis of racial/ethnic representations in large volumes of (sports) commentary typically struggle with this treacherous bind. Generally, they realize that the racial/ethnic categorizations they use and stabilize in order to do empirical research are problematic since a social constructionist stance treats these concepts as fluid, context-specific social constructs (e.g. Denham et al., 2002; McCarthy et al., 2003). On the other hand, these same researchers use fixed, stabilized categories in order to manage and structure a vast amount of data to reveal the possible use of racial/ethnic biases in these data. As I explained throughout the various chapters in this research project, this has often resulted in a predefined use of an essentialist Black-White categorization to classify the athletes under study. Critical North-American and British race and ethnicity scholars

such as Hartigan (2010), Bonilla-Silva (2004) and Ghail (2001) have argued that even in countries like the US or the UK where it is quite commonplace to use these categories, such a predefined Black-White classification to define race is a reductionist simplification of the everyday use of race/ethnicity. Ghail (2001) argued also that the use of a Black-White categorization in research usually implies that researchers concentrate only on particular sections of selected White and Black social groups. As a result of that, experiences or representations of non-White ethnic groups such as those of the Vietnamese or Chinese minorities and of some White minority ethnic groups such as the Irish minority in Britain or East-Europeans throughout Europe may become marginalized.

Scholars conducting content analysis of race/ethnicity in large volumes of sports commentary may have, therefore, been complicit in discursively reproducing these reductionist Black and White collectivities through their a priori use of a Black-White definition of race. In other words, even though scholars who conducted content analyses of large volumes of sports commentary took on a social constructionist stance towards race/ethnicity, they simultaneously engaged in discursive work that reinforced essentialist Black-White conceptualizations of race that historically have served a racialized/ethnicized status quo that was based on notions of White supremacy and that privileges the social category of White people. I critically discussed such de-contextualization of research also in relation to the audience reception study (chapter 2). Although the Black-White definition of race/ethnicity that I used in my audience reception study was congruent with other international research on the sport media, the use of this binary definition might have resulted in a de-contextualization of research by placing the focus of the participants on the North American instead of on the Dutch context. Consequently, I defined race/ethnicity in a more nuanced and contextualized way in my content analysis of Dutch televised soccer commentary so that the resulting racial/ethnic categories were more congruent with the variety of categories predominantly used in popular Dutch discourse (chapter 5).

This notion of research on race/ethnicity as a discursive practice points to the need for researchers conducting content analysis of the media including sports commentary to be reflexive and critical in their use of categories. This is not to say that scholars should no longer use the Black-White categorization to define race or ethnicity but that they should explore all the various possible dominant logics of racial/ethnic differentiation that play a role in the specific context under study. This is similar to what I did in the content analysis of soccer commentary (chapter 5). In other words, I recommend that researchers begin with a contextualization of racial/ethnic difference as part of their empirical

analysis. This reflects Grossberg's (2006) argument that abstract concepts such as race or ethnicity only have analytical value if they are placed in and practically applied to a certain context. They must be connected, in other words, 'to the specifics of a concrete moment' (p. 7). Only then will it be possible to 'bring the conceptual together with the empirical' (p. 7). Such contextualization means that researchers in the Dutch context should attend to the multi-faceted and layered character of race/ethnicity in contemporary, hegemonic Dutch popular discourse that is characterized by confluences of skin colour, culture, nationality, geography and religion. Such a reconstruction of context is comparable with what I did in the first section of this chapter where I extensively discussed the dominant (re)constructions of racial/ethnic difference in popular Dutch discourse and in the various sections on the Dutch context in most of the chapters in this research project. These discussions of the Dutch context showed the unique and layered categories used in everyday, hegemonic Dutch discourse. They also suggested that the a priori use of conventional US based categorizations such as the broad Black-White categorization may have only limited analytical value for the Dutch context since they may obscure more nuanced ethnic distinctions used in everyday Dutch discourse such as the (re)construction of the ethnic category of 'Surinamese' as racially/ethnically different in soccer commentary. My reconstruction of the everyday Dutch use of race and ethnicity provided me with a well grounded overview of the layered racial/ethnic categorizations that are dominant in the Dutch context. These categorizations and the boundaries that they (re)construct in Dutch society at large could consequently all be explored for the specific cultural practice under study, in this case Dutch soccer commentary (chapter 5). Such a contextually informed approach towards race/ethnicity *temporarily* freezes the contextualized categorizations into fixed categories so that they are ready to be used in empirical research practice. The temporary freezing means that I use the contextualized categories on a provisional basis. These categories guide the analysis but can be changed when categories appear to be relevant in the specific cultural practice under study that differ from those used in hegemonic, everyday Dutch discourse. I recommend that researchers discuss the categories they use within the broader societal context and power relations from which they emerged in order to stay engaged with the discursive character of racial/ethnic articulations. In this way, researchers can remain reflexive of the constructive *process* through which essentialist categories are produced, contested and changed and simultaneously do not ignore the importance of fixed, stabilized categories in the structuring of everyday life. This process also requires a reflexiveness from the part of the researcher on his

or her racial/ethnic position and how that may influence the use of categories. In this way, research is developed that 'both recognizes and disrupts essentialism' (Gunaratnam, 2003, p. 34) and that successfully negotiates the treacherous bind.

This may sound very well in theory but as media scholar Belton (2000) argued 'the proof of the pudding is in the eating and the usefulness of any methodology can only be judged by what it enables the researcher to find out' (p. 634). The main question is, therefore, whether the alternative method of content analysis I developed and used has actually enabled me to find out more about the (re)construction of racial/ethnic difference in sports commentary than the conventional method of content analysis of large volumes of sports commentary would have done. Having implemented my alternative method in empirical practice I conclude my alternative method has analytical value. More specifically, analyzing the commentary along the lines of various contextual layers of racial/ethnic categories allowed me to search for and find (re)constructions of racial/ethnic difference in the soccer commentary *that might have been overlooked otherwise*. For instance, if I would have predefined race/ethnicity along the lines of the dominant Dutch *allochtoon-autochtoon* binary only, I would have concluded that these Dutch soccer commentators were *not* engaged in the (re)construction of racial/ethnic difference since commentators did not use this otherwise influential categorization to (re)construct racial/ethnic difference among soccer players. The use of several layers of racial/ethnic categorization allowed me to discover that the commentators *did* construct racial/ethnic difference but in a more nuanced way than could be found with the use of such a broad dichotomy. As I indicated earlier, I discovered that commentators constructed racial/ethnic difference by representing the groups of players I labeled Surinamese and Latin American as the racial/ethnic Other and did so in different ways (see also chapter 5).

I want to emphasize that researchers wishing to use this layered and contextually informed method should be flexible and open towards emerging and unexpected categories that may appear relevant for the (re)construction of racial/ethnic difference in the specific sport media context. These emerging categories may differ from those used in popular discourse. This flexibility and openness does justice to the two-sided character of mediasport. Mediasport is not only situated in and produced from a specific societal context but also 'actively engaged in the ongoing constitution of the conditions out of which they emerge' (Andrews, 2002, p. 115). In other words, the sport media not only reflect but also help to *reinforce and shape* racialized/ethnicized relations of power and the

racialized/ethnicized reality in which they are situated. This understanding of the sport media as (also) being an 'agent' of racial/ethnic meanings and categories acknowledges that the use of racial/ethnic categories and meanings in the sport media is not only structured by the broader cultural and historical context in which the sport media are embedded and the wider hegemonic discourses produced within this context but that the sport media may also draw on alternative discourses that challenge hegemonic discourses. This reflects a cultural studies perspective that emphasizes that various forms of cultural practice, whether it is sports commentary as discussed here, sports policy, sports research or audience receptions of media content, are not only reflective of broader hegemonic societal discourses but are also productive in reinforcing alternative discourses (Andrews, 2002).

### **Concluding remarks**

Although the use of racial/ethnic stereotypes or racialized/ethnicized discourses is the work of individuals, it is often not the product of individual intent or consciousness (Hall, 1995). Rather, as I have discussed earlier, sport commentators but also media users and policy makers often draw on and speak through societal everyday discourses that are readily available to them. These broader discourses provide them with the tools to make sense of the world around them. This implies that the focus of scholarly research should be on broader everyday discourses surrounding race and ethnicity that circulate in society at large and the power relations from which these discourses emerged rather than on individual intent. However, it is not an easy task to reveal everyday discourses surrounding race and ethnicity and open them up for critical discussion, especially since they are deeply engrained in everyday consciousness and often seem self evident, even to researchers who work with the constructs of race and ethnicity. Bourdieu (2001), however, argued that the task of critical scholarly research is to reveal that which is hidden or remains implicit. I have tried to reveal the everyday, commonsensical meanings given to the constructed categories of race and ethnicity in the sport media, in sports research, among sport media audiences and in sports policy documents. In particular, I have discussed and emphasized the *constructedness* and the *discursive character* of the commonsensical, often naturalized categories and arguments that are used to give meaning to race and ethnicity. Such critical interrogation of hidden and everyday manifestations of race and ethnicity remains necessary in order to challenge and subvert existing patterns of racial/ethnic stereotyping and categorization that are reproduced in and

through popular media, sport governing bodies and research reports and that may foster unequal racialized/ethnicized hierarchies.

Apart from taking a critical stance towards hegemonic discourses surrounding race and ethnicity and dominant ways of categorizing, I have also proposed alternative ways of engaging with race and ethnicity in sport media research and policy. One of my central foci thereby was the development and use of a method of content analysis of large volumes of sports commentary that will enable scholars to explore in more nuanced and contextualized ways how sport commentators (re)construct racial/ethnic difference. While I have discussed the added value of this alternative method in some detail in the previous section of this chapter, I use this concluding section to emphasize the added value of this type of content analysis in a more general sense and in comparison with more ethnographically oriented textual analyses of the sport media. This is important since content analysis of race/ethnicity in large volumes of data has been critiqued by many scholars including myself as reinforcing colonially informed, White situated constructions of racial difference and, thus, reproducing whiteness (see also Carrington, 2008). Given this critique, it is not surprising that sociology of sport scholars have used more case study oriented media analyses that go beyond the Black-White dichotomy to define race and that focus on the shifting media representations of *individual* sport celebrities such as Michael Jordan (Andrews, 1996), Ben Johnson (Jackson, 1998), Nancy Lopez (Jamieson, 1998) or Kobe Bryant (Leonard, 2004). As I explained in chapter 4, insights from these ethnographic studies proved to be very valuable for the development of my approach towards content analysis of large volumes of sports commentary. However, categorical content analysis of large volumes of sports commentary has two specific strengths of its own if used in contextualized ways as I suggested in this research project.

First, this method has great merit due to the *numbers and percentages* it generates. These numbers and percentages cannot be easily dismissed by practitioners in the field as just anecdotal evidence. This aspect of content analysis is especially important given the operation of colour blind racism in sports commentary (e.g. Bruce, 2004; Spencer, 2004). Commentators may, therefore, find it relatively easy to dismiss evidence from ethnographically informed research arguing that it only concerns idiosyncratic evidence that does not apply to commentary practices more generally or to their own commentary practices in particular. It is probably more difficult for commentators, however, to dismiss the numbers and percentages generated through the systematic analysis of vast amounts of sports reporting. The numbers and percentages categorical content analysis generates can have persuasive impact given

the privileged status given to quantitative evidence in contemporary western thought and among policy makers and mainstream media (Denzin, 2010; Holmes, Murray, Perron & Rail, 2006). In other words, even when content analysis of large volumes of data is carried out by using qualitative techniques as I did in my content analysis, the presentation of results in terms of numbers and percentages has the potential to influence policy making and public perception more so than do the results of case studies of individual athletes that are usually represented in a qualitative manner only.

Second, from a scholarly point of view, categorical content analysis of large volumes of sports commentary is valuable because this type of study typically compares media representations of the majority racial/ethnic group with those of minority racial/ethnic groups. This type of study, therefore, enables researchers to compare processes of racial/ethnic Othering with representations of the majority ethnic group. By acknowledging that everyone is racial/ethnically positioned these studies do not leave the race of White majority ethnic athletes unmarked and undisturbed. On the contrary, they make visible how White commentators speak about White athletes. In so doing, they challenge whiteness and White privilege that are characterized by the invisibility of the race of White people. This addressing of whiteness through empirical analysis contrasts with more ethnographically informed textual analyses of the media that usually focused on media discourses surrounding a *non-White* sport icon. Consequently, these case study oriented analyses could not compare how White sport commentators verbally represent athletes/players of a great variety of racial/ethnic origins including White athletes.

### **Recommendations for future research**

To conclude this research project, I want to suggest some avenues for future research. First of all, the main focus of this research project was on race and ethnicity that I often separated from other social dimensions for analytical reasons. I acknowledge, however, that these social constructs are just one part of a complex web of socially constructed relations of power that operate in and through mediasport. Race and ethnicity always intersect with other axes of power such as gender, social class, sexuality, religion or age (e.g. McDonald & Birrell, 1999; Wekker & Lutz, 2001). I have, therefore, touched on the gendered, classed and religiously informed character of discourses surrounding race/ethnicity in the sport media and in the Dutch context as well although in a limited manner. I recommend future research to further examine the complexity of these

interrelationships. In my view, two intersections deserve special attention in relation to research that focuses on race/ethnicity in the sport media.

First of all, more attention should be given to the intersection between race/ethnicity and gender, in particular the interrelationship between racialized/ethnicized sport media language and the gendered voice of the sport media. The sport media are still a very male dominated domain. This applies to the sport media worldwide including the Dutch sport media (Knoppers & Elling, 2004). Sport media discourses are, in other words, not only primarily produced by White people as I discussed extensively in this research project but also by males which may influence commentary practices. Research by Claringbould et al. (2004) among Dutch sport commentators showed that male journalists tend to hold a gender-neutral image of themselves but are at the same time less sensitive to gender biases in sports reporting than female journalists. Obviously, this may not apply to all males working in the sport media since the heterogeneity and diversity within the social category of men means that multiple discourses surrounding gender may be available to them. However, although I acknowledge that men working in the sport media can draw on various discourses, research evidence shows that male sport commentators relatively often use gender stereotypes in their commentary. Such gender biases include the description of female athletes as physically strong but emotionally and mentally unstable, passive and as dependent on a male coach (e.g. Christopherson et al., 2002; Luijt & Elling, 2007; Knoppers & Elling, 1999). Likewise, Elling & Luijt (2009) have argued that White, male western sport journalists/commentators tend to encode their messages about minority ethnic athletes in a hegemonic way reflecting commentators' hegemonic status position in society at large. It may well be that female reporters who often tend to be marginalized in sports journalism are not only more sensitive to gender issues in sport reporting but also to reporting about non-dominant social groups more generally including reporting about minority ethnic groups. It may also well be, however, that only commentators and journalists are hired that subscribe to hegemonic, White, masculine norms that dominate within the organizational/institutional context of the sport media (Van Zoonen, 1998). Knoppers & Elling (2004) concluded, for instance, that both male and female journalists tended to be complicit with a hegemonic form of masculinity that prevails in the sport media. This finding suggests that commentators and journalists may be selected and assessed with regard to the degree their opinions and commentary practices including those in relation to race/ethnicity and gender fit within the occupational, masculine subculture of sports journalism regardless of the commentators' racial or ethnic background and gender. However, the question how the

racialized/ethnicized discourses used in sport coverage are gendered has remained under-researched and requires further investigation.

A second intersection that deserves further attention is that between race/ethnicity and nationality and how they serve as markers of differentiation for male and female viewers during mega events such as the Olympics or World Cup soccer. During such international mega events involving national, instead of club, teams, race and ethnicity as markers of differentiation may be subordinated to an emphasis on shared national links. In other words, due to the emphasis on collective nationalist identifications and emotions preceding, during and after international contests, national identification may potentially obscure other markers of differentiation for the viewers and result temporarily in the inclusion of minority ethnic athletes in the collective imagination of 'the nation' (Rowe, 2010). Wensing & Bruce (2003) found that sport commentators tended to emphasize national belonging rather than racial/ethnic difference of athletes during television coverage of events where athletes represent the nation. In contrast, Hermes (2005) found that viewing of the Dutch national men's soccer team invoked both strong nationalist feelings and racialized types of talk among White, Dutch male viewers. Little is still known about how audiences of various ethnic origins receive sport media content and whether race and ethnicity as markers of differentiation are temporarily overridden by nationality as a marker of shared identification. More audience research is, therefore, necessary to gain a better understanding of the significance of international sport events on values and attitudes male and female media users of various racial/ethnic origins hold about race, ethnicity and nation.

Three last suggestions for future research relate to the fact that the potential of soccer on television as most popular mediaport in the Netherlands to help shape hegemonic discourses surrounding race/ethnicity is not restricted to soccer coverage as I explored it in this project. First, the discursive potential of soccer on television also applies to the numerous other soccer programs broadcasted on Dutch television. These include the weekly soccer talk shows that attract relatively large audiences such as *Studio Voetbal* or *Voetbal International*. These programs evaluate and magnify specific soccer related incidents of the preceding week through the eyes of White males who are perceived by the general public as experts: ex-players, coaches, sport journalists and editorial chiefs. Through their narratives, these experts help viewers to make sense of soccer related events and of specific players, coaches or managers. Just like regular soccer coverage, these programs may repeatedly provide their viewers with White situated discourses about race and ethnicity through the qualities and characteristics they ascribe to the

people they discuss. Considering this potential of soccer talk shows to (re)produce racialized/ethnicized discourses to relatively large audiences, I recommend further research be conducted into the content of this type of programs. A second route for future scholarship concerns the discursive significance of the so called new media for popular understandings of race/ethnicity and gender. Leonard (2009) argued that sport studies have largely ignored the impact of new media such as the Internet or sport video games on sporting cultures across the globe. At the same time, new media scholars have often ignored the prominence of new media technologies in the world of sport. There are exceptions (e.g. Boyle & Haynes, 2004; the thematic issue of the *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 2009), but the general trend shows that the relationship between new media and sport is still a relatively unexplored research area. I specifically recommend future scholarship dedicated to representations and articulations of race/ethnicity and gender in fan-generated weblogs, sport related websites and You Tube videos. Such research reflects the increasingly important role that fans and media users seem to play in the transmission of ideas and opinions surrounding sport including ideas about race/ethnicity and gender in sport. A third and last avenue for further research extends beyond mediated sports language used by commentators. Although commentators are powerful in providing meaning and anchoring the (interpretation of) television images for their viewers, much of what the game means is also expressed visually. Thus, future studies of constructions and meanings of visual imagery during sport broadcasts should complement further studies of commentary. Such research may give further insights into how mediasport supports and/or challenges dominant discourses surrounding social dimensions such as race/ethnicity, gender and nationality.

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## **Samenvatting in het Nederlands (summary in Dutch)**

### **Achtergrond en aanleiding vraagstelling**

Sportprogramma's op televisie zijn een belangrijke bron van betekenissen aan huidskleur en etniciteit. Zo behoren sportprogramma's elk jaar weer tot de populairste programma's op de Nederlandse televisie. Dit geldt met name voor voetbal op televisie. Te denken valt aan het WK voetbal, maar ook de wekelijkse uitzendingen van Studio Sport die miljoenen kijkers trekken. Tegelijk laat sport op televisie een diversiteit aan etnische groepen zien. Dit geldt voor voetbal, waar spelers uit alle windstreken actief zijn, maar ook andere sporten zoals atletiek, basketbal en in toenemende mate tennis en schaatsen laten sporters zien van verschillende etnische origine. Vandaar dat de Britse sportsocioloog Ben Carrington heeft gezegd dat van alle hedendaagse sociale instituties de sportmedia waarschijnlijk de grootste macht hebben om betekenissen aan huidskleur en etniciteit door te geven aan een groot publiek. Deze combinatie van etnische diversiteit en populariteit maakt onderzoek naar de manier waarop de sportmedia omgaan met etniciteit wetenschappelijk en maatschappelijk zeer relevant. In Nederland is hiernaar nog maar verrassend weinig onderzoek gedaan. De enkele onderzoeken die zijn gedaan hebben een belangrijke bijdrage geleverd aan de kennis op dit gebied, maar focusten vooral op representaties van gender in plaats van etniciteit of gebruikten een beperkte definitie van 'ras'/eticiteit. In het buitenland hebben onderzoekers meer aandacht gehad voor de manieren waarop de sportmedia omgaan met etniciteit. De meeste van deze onderzoeken zijn gedaan in de Verenigde Staten of Groot Brittannië en gebruikten een Zwart-Wit (Black-White) definitie van 'race'. Deze studies laten zien dat hoewel expliciet racistisch commentaar tegenwoordig vrijwel niet voorkomt, impliciete etnische/raciale stereotypen en patronen nog wel veelvuldig voorkomen in sportverslaggeving. Zo blijken Zwarte atleten relatief vaak te worden beschreven als atleten die van nature een grote fysieke kracht en/of snelheid hebben. Witte sportprestaties blijken daarentegen niet zo expliciet en breed te worden uitgemeten in termen van vermeende hyper-fysieke kracht, maar vaker te worden geduid in termen als intellect, tactische vaardigheden, trainingsarbeid of doorzettingsvermogen. Kritische sportsociologen Sabo & Jansen spreken in dit verband van 'enlightened racism': het succes van Zwarte mensen wordt gerepresenteerd als acceptabel en haalbaar in activiteiten die fysieke vaardigheden vereisen zoals sport, maar niet in andere domeinen als de wetenschap, politiek of het bedrijfsleven. Omdat mentale of intellectuele capaciteiten in westerse samenlevingen over het algemeen

belangrijker zijn om een sociaal-maatschappelijke positie te verwerven dan fysieke of sportieve vaardigheden, houdt een dergelijk discours de bestaande machtsverhoudingen in de maatschappij in stand. Daarin is de groep van Witte mannen over het algemeen nog steeds te vinden in de meeste invloedrijke posities.

Hoewel deze Amerikaanse en Britse onderzoeken in belangrijke mate hebben bijgedragen aan kennis over de rol van de sportmedia in betekenisgeving aan huidskleur en etniciteit, zijn ze niet direct toepasbaar op de Nederlandse situatie. Nederland kent een andere migratiegeschiedenis dan deze landen en geeft in het alledaagse discours op een andere manier betekenis aan etniciteit en huidskleur. Zo gebruiken Nederlanders over het algemeen niet het Zwart-Wit onderscheid om etniciteit te definiëren, maar hebben ze het over bijvoorbeeld ‘allochtonen’ en ‘autochtonen’ of over etnische minderheden zoals ‘Surinamers’, ‘Marokkanen’ of ‘Turken’. Dit maakt onderzoek noodzakelijk naar de Nederlandse in plaats van de Engelse of Amerikaanse context. Tegelijk is er nationaal *en* internationaal nog maar in geringe mate onderzoek gedaan naar hoe de media-representaties worden *ontvangen en geïnterpreteerd* door mediagebruikers van diverse origine. Naast kennis over sportmedia-representaties is het dus belangrijk meer te weten over de receptiekant van de sportmedia.

Het onderhavige onderzoeksproject heeft een begin gemaakt om deze wetenschappelijke leemtes voor de Nederlandse situatie op te vullen. Daarbij heb ik gebruik gemaakt van een kritisch cultural studies perspectief. Dit theoretisch perspectief heeft als uitgangspunt dat *discoursen* over sociale constructen zoals etniciteit of gender altijd contextgebonden zijn en een uitkomst van machtsrelaties in de maatschappij. Behalve het empirische onderzoek dat aan mijn resultaten ten grondslag ligt, heb ik eveneens kritisch gereflecteerd op bestaande methoden die eerdere onderzoekers hebben gebruikt. Op grond van deze kritische reflectie heb ik een alternatieve methodologie ontwikkeld, uitgewerkt *en* toegepast in mijn onderzoeksproject. Op die manier is geprobeerd niet alleen empirisch een bijdrage te leveren aan het wetenschappelijke kennisgebied, maar ook te interveniëren in het bestaande discours over etniciteit in sportmedia-onderzoek en bestaande methodieken te verbeteren. Tot slot heb ik een andere ‘platform’ dan de media kritisch bekeken dat betekenis verleent aan etniciteit, namelijk het Nederlands sportbeleid. Ik heb beleidsdocumenten die het nationale sportbeleidsprogramma *Meedoen allochtone jeugd door sport* (2006-2010) beschrijven, gebruikt als case study om te reflecteren op de constructie van etniciteit door de Nederlandse overheid in dit beleidsprogramma.

## **Vraagstelling**

Bovenstaande wetenschappelijke en maatschappelijke aangrijpingspunten hebben geleid tot de volgende overkoepelende vraagstelling:

Welke etnische en ‘raciale’ categorieën en discoursen over huidskleur en etniciteit worden impliciet en expliciet geconstrueerd in en door de sport media, in sportbeleid en in sportonderzoek en hoe dragen deze categorieën en discoursen bij aan machtsrelaties in de maatschappij?

De overkoepelende vraagstelling bestond uit de volgende deelvragen:

1. Hoe geven mediagebruikers van Nederlandse en Surinaamse afkomst betekenis aan huidskleur en etniciteit in sport, in welke mate komen de betekenissen van deze twee etnische groepen overeen met elkaar, en hoe bevestigen of ontcrachten deze betekenissen machtsrelaties in de maatschappij?
2. Welke etnische categorieën worden gebruikt in het Nederlandse sportbeleidsprogramma *Meedoen allochtone jeugd door sport*, welke etnische categorieën gebruiken (internationale) kritische sportonderzoekers om etniciteit te definiëren, en hoe dragen beide manieren van categoriseren bij aan machtsrelaties in de maatschappij?
3. Hoe hebben onderzoekers, die de methode van inhoudsanalyse hebben gebruikt om grote hoeveelheden sportcommentaar te onderzoeken, etniciteit en ‘ras’ gedefinieerd, wat zijn de implicaties van hun definities voor relaties van macht en hoe kunnen de bestaande methoden en definities worden verbeterd?
4. Construeren Nederlandse voetbalcommentatoren op televisie etnisch verschil in hun beschrijvingen van spelers, op welke manier doen ze dat en hoe bevestigen of ontcrachten deze constructies dominante discoursen over huidskleur en etniciteit in de Nederlandse maatschappij als geheel?

In het onderstaande zal ik weergeven welke methoden ik heb gebruikt om de vraagstelling te beantwoorden. Ik zal daarbij eerst de methoden bespreken die ik heb gebruikt om de empirisch georiënteerde deelvragen te beantwoorden (deelvragen 1 en 4 hierboven) gevolgd door de methoden die gebruikt zijn ter beantwoording van de meer theoretisch-methodologisch georiënteerde vragen (deelvragen 2 en 3).

## **Methoden**

Een diversiteit van methoden is gebruikt om de overkoepelende

vraagstelling te beantwoorden. In het receptieonderzoek (**deelvraag 1**) heb ik diepte-interviews gedaan met twaalf studenten van Nederlandse en elf studenten van Surinaamse afkomst. Het betrof semi-gestructureerde interviews van ongeveer 45 minuten die ingingen op betekenisgeving van de studenten aan over- of ondervertegenwoordiging van Zwarte en Witte sporters in bepaalde sporten. Data zijn geanalyseerd met behulp van inzichten uit de grounded theory benadering. Bewijs en tegenbewijs is naast elkaar gelegd om de dominante discoursen van beide etnische groepen over etniciteit in sport te achterhalen. In de analyse van het voetbalcommentaar (**deelvraag 4**) heb ik een inhoudsanalyse gedaan van voetbalcommentaar tijdens het wekelijkse voetbalprogramma RTL Voetbal tijdens het seizoen 2007/2008. RTL Voetbal was veruit het populairste Nederlandse sportprogramma ten tijde van mijn dataverzameling. Systematisch heb ik in kaart gebracht hoe commentatoren van dit programma spelers van verschillende etnische afkomst beschreven. Binnen de geanalyseerde programma's ben ik op zoek gegaan naar 1) dominante thema's in het commentaar en 2) etnische patronen binnen die thema's. Kenmerkend aan de methode die ik gebruik heb is dat ik etniciteit heb gedefinieerd als een gelaagd sociaal construct dat bestaat uit verschillende categorisering, variërend van de brede allochtoon-autochtoon categorisering tot een meer genuanceerde categorisering op grond van etniciteit of land van herkomst. Ik heb bij het construeren van de categorieën steeds het alledaagse Nederlandse discours over etniciteit als uitgangspunt genomen. De methode die ik heb gebruikt kwam tot stand na een meta-analyse van bestaande inhoudsanalyses (**deelvraag 3**). Deze inventarisatie maakte het mogelijk te reflecteren op bestaande methoden en een alternatieve methode te ontwikkelen die meer aandacht geeft aan contextualiteit en aan machtsrelaties die betekenissen aan etniciteit bepalen. *Contextualiteit* en *machtsrelaties* waren tevens sleutelwoorden binnen de discoursanalyse die ik verricht heb van beleidsdocumenten die het landelijke sportbeleidsprogramma *Meedoen allochtone jeugd door sport* beschrijven (**deelvraag 2**). Doel van deze discoursanalyse was om assumpties ten aanzien van etniciteit en sport boven tafel te krijgen die ten grondslag liggen aan dergelijke sportbeleidsprogramma's. Deze deconstructie van het sportbeleidsdiscours heeft geleid tot concrete suggesties voor sportbeleidsmakers en sportonderzoekers om te komen tot een evenwichtiger en gelijkwaardiger discours ten aanzien van etniciteit in zowel beleid als onderzoek.

In de volgende paragraaf zal ik de resultaten van de verschillende studies bespreken. Daarbij zal ik weer eerst de resultaten belichten van de empirisch georiënteerde receptie-studie en inhoudsanalyse (deelvraag 1 en

4) en erna van de theoretisch-methodologische reflecties op bestaand onderzoek en beleid (deelvraag 2 en 3).

## **Resultaten**

Resultaten uit mijn receptieonderzoek laten zien dat mediagebruikers van zowel Nederlandse als Surinaamse afkomst discoursen gebruikten die overeenkwamen met die van de sportmedia. Met name werd een *'natuurlijk' fysiek discours* door de respondenten gebruikt om betekenis te geven aan *Zwarte* sporters; Zwarte sporters werden met andere woorden 'van nature' sneller en fysiek sterker geacht dan Witte sporters. In relatie tot gender werd eenzelfde discours gebruikt, maar dan om aan te geven dat mannen van nature sneller en sterker zijn dan vrouwen. Tegelijk laten de resultaten zien dat mediagebruikers van diverse etnische komaf soms een verschillend interpretatiekader hanteren. Zo associeerden de mediagebruikers van Surinaamse afkomst Zwarte sporters soms met 'inzicht' en 'intellect' terwijl respondenten van Nederlandse afkomst dat nooit deden. Ik heb mijn receptie-onderzoek afgerond met een kritische kanttekening ten aanzien van mijn definitie van etniciteit in termen van Zwart en Wit. Deze definiëring heeft er mogelijk voor gezorgd dat mijn respondenten soms de Noord-Amerikaanse context als referentiekader gebruikten bij het beantwoorden van de vragen in plaats van de Nederlandse. Ik heb daarom meer aandacht besteed aan de contextualisering van etniciteit in mijn inhoudsanalyse. Resultaten van de inhoudsanalyse toonden dat Nederlandse voetbalcommentatoren spelers van Surinaamse en Latijns-Amerikaanse afkomst als 'anders' beschreven dan de overige spelers. Spelers van Surinaamse afkomst werden relatief vaak beschreven in fysieke termen, terwijl Latijns-Amerikaanse spelers vaker dan de andere spelers negatief werden beschreven in termen van hun cognitieve/psychologische kwaliteiten. Tegelijk laten mijn bevindingen zien dat de voetbalcommentatoren andere etnische onderscheiden *niet* gebruikten die in de rest van de maatschappij gangbaar zijn, zoals de allochtoon-autochtoon of moslim-niet-moslim categorisering.

In de meer theoretisch/methodologisch georiënteerde studies in dit onderzoeksproject heb ik kritisch gekeken naar het gebruik van etniciteit in sportonderzoek en - beleid. In mijn analyse van het Nederlandse sportbeleidsprogramma *Meedoen allochtone jeugd door sport* heb ik het gebruik van de allochtoon-autochtoon categorisering kritisch bevraagd. Mijn analyse laat zien dat de categorie van allochtonen wordt geproblematiseerd in de beleidsdocumenten die gaan over dit programma, terwijl de categorie van autochtonen grotendeels onzichtbaar blijft en tot onzichtbare norm wordt verheven. Sport wordt hierbij

impliciet gezien als een middel om de normen en waarden van ‘allochtonen’ dichter te brengen bij de normen en waarden van ‘autochtonen’. Ik laat zien hoe dit niet los kan worden gezien van het feit dat de meeste sportbeleidsmakers zelf tot de ‘Witte’/‘autochtone’ categorie behoren en dat dat hun interpretatiekader om etniciteit te definiëren mogelijk voor een belangrijk deel bepaalt. Hoewel kritische sportonderzoekers sceptisch staan tegenover een dergelijk beleidsdiscours, laat ik zien dat *ook* kritisch sportonderzoek bekritiseerd kan worden wegens het gebruik van essentialistische etnische categorieën die hiërarchisch gepositioneerd zijn ten opzichte van elkaar. Ik geef vervolgens uitgebreid aandacht aan een alternatieve methodologische benadering om etniciteit te definiëren. Ik zal hier verder op ingaan in de volgende, concluderende paragraaf van deze samenvatting.

### **Conclusie**

Concluderend kan gesteld worden dat Nederlandse sportmedia-discoursen niet op zichzelf staan, maar pas goed begrepen en geduid kunnen worden door de bredere historische en globale context in ogenschouw te nemen waarin zij gesitueerd zijn. Zo blijkt uit mijn studie dat voetbalcommentatoren spelers van Surinaamse afkomst beschreven op een manier die overeenkomsten vertoont met eeuwenoude koloniale stereotypen. Daarnaast passen de typering van Latijns-Amerikaanse spelers binnen een wereldwijd patroon van stereotypen over deze etnische groep. Tegelijk lijkt het voetbalcommentaar ook een plek te zijn waar betekenissen worden gecreëerd die *voetbalspecifiek* zijn en waar bepaalde etnische onderscheiden en ongelijkheden die dominant zijn in de rest van de maatschappij juist niet gebruikt worden, zoals het allochtoon-autochtoon onderscheid.

De vraag is vervolgens of dergelijke betekenisgeving de ideeën van *media-gebruikers* helpt te bepalen. Op grond van mijn receptieonderzoek kan deze vraag bevestigend beantwoord worden, hoewel tegelijk blijkt dat individuele discoursen mede bepaald worden door andere factoren zoals sportstructuur, persoonlijke sportervaring en etnische identificatie. De zorg van wetenschappers over het gebruik van raciale en/of etnische stereotypen in de sportmedia lijkt dus ten dele gegrond. Met name Witte mediagebruikers lijken het dominante discours en de dominante raciale/etnische stereotypen van de media over te nemen, terwijl mediagebruikers van een etnische minderheidsgroep soms een gevarieerde ‘lezing’ gebruiken door te putten uit alternatieve discoursen ten aanzien van etniciteit. Vanuit een cultural studies benadering is dit te begrijpen aangezien sportverslaggeving in Nederland vooral wordt geproduceerd door Witte mannen. Hun betekenisgeving sluit vaak het

gemakkelijkst aan bij de geprefereerde lezing van Witte media gebruikers, maar sluit over het algemeen minder gemakkelijk aan bij die van etnische minderheidsgroepen die eerder anders gepositioneerd zijn ten opzichte van het sportcommentaar.

In dit onderzoeksproject heb ik tevens aandacht gehad voor het gebruik van etniciteit in sportonderzoek en sportbeleid. Zowel sportonderzoek als - beleid in Nederland is vooral gesitueerd in een dominant (Wit/autochtoon) discours, wat kan leiden tot een sterke focus op de etnische Ander terwijl de etnische Zelf onzichtbaar blijft en tot norm wordt verheven. Ik doe in het onderzoeksproject enkele suggesties voor sportbeleidsmakers en –onderzoekers om te komen tot een gelijkwaardiger discours in sportbeleid en onderzoek. Kern is dat sportbeleidsmakers niet alleen de aandacht moeten richten op de etnische Ander die zich impliciet aan dient te passen aan de onzichtbare (Witte) norm, maar ook die onzichtbare (Witte, autochtone) norm kritisch moeten blijven bevragen. Ten tweede doe ik de suggestie aan kritische sportonderzoekers om hun vaak onuitgesproken assumpties ten aanzien van etniciteit continu te blijven bevragen en expliciet te maken. Concreet houdt het onder andere in dat het definiëren van etniciteit nooit vooraf/a priori plaatsvindt, zoals nog vaak gebeurt, maar dat de categorieën voortkomen uit de data, gesitueerd zijn in de context die bestudeerd wordt met aandacht voor machtsrelaties waaruit de categorieën voortkomen.



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Kristel, woorden schieten hier tekort. Je bent mijn lief, en veel meer dan dat. Jouw ervaring met de wetenschappelijke wereld en je suggesties hebben me vaak erg geholpen. Maar boven alles zijn je eerlijkheid, steun en vertrouwen me ongelooflijk dierbaar.



## **Curriculum Vitae**

Jacco van Sterkenburg was born in Assen, the Netherlands, on 27 May 1977. He graduated from the Marnix Gymnasium in Rotterdam in 1995 and studied Psychology at Utrecht University from 1995 to 2001, with a specialization in Cross-cultural Psychology. After having obtained his MA degree, he worked as a researcher (2002-2007) at the W.J.H. Mulier Institute – a Dutch centre for social science research in sport. During this period, he conducted research projects on a variety of topics ranging from racism in European football to the Dutch skateboarding subculture to processes of sports policy making. From 2006-2008, he was also affiliated as a lecturer to the Social Sciences department of Utrecht University. In 2007, he moved to the Humanities faculty (Research Institute for History and Culture) to start the work described in this thesis, under supervision of Prof. Dr. Sonja de Leeuw (Humanities faculty) and Prof. Dr. Annelies Knoppers (Utrecht School of Governance). From February to March 2009 and in November 2009, he conducted scholarly visits to Prof. Dr. Jonathan Long and Dr. Kevin Hylton, Carnegie Faculty of Sport and Education, Leeds Metropolitan University (Leeds) and to Dr. Eileen Kennedy, School of Human and Life Sciences, Roehampton University (London). As from March 2011 he is working as a researcher and lecturer at Utrecht University.



## Notes

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<sup>i</sup> Even though some chapters in this research project have been co-authored I will use I instead of We in this chapter for reasons of readability. The same applies to chapter six.

<sup>ii</sup> I will elaborate on my use and definition of the concept of ‘discourse’ in more detail later in this chapter.

<sup>iii</sup> This nationwide sport program that was financed by the Dutch Ministry of Health Welfare and Sport for the period 2006-2010 aimed to increase the participation of allochthonous youth in sport clubs and use sport as a tool to improve the integration of minority racial/ethnic youth in the Netherlands. During 2010, the name of the program changed into *Meedoen alle jeugd door sport* [Participation all youth through sport]. The new name indicated that the program was directed towards all youth who found themselves in a deprived socio-economic position and not necessarily only minority ethnic youth although minority ethnic youth often remained the main target group in practice (Hoekman, Elling, Van der Roest & Rens, 2011). The name *Meedoen allochtone jeugd door sport* was used, however, for most of the years the program was carried out and was also used in the policy documents that I analyzed. I will, therefore, use that name to refer to this policy initiative in this research project.

<sup>iv</sup> In the audience reception study (chapter 2), this definition is supplemented with Fairclough’s definition of discourse (1995, p. 94) as ‘constructions or significations of some domain of social practice from a particular perspective’ Discourse then refers to the meanings and significations given to race/ethnicity and gender in sport practice and performance from the perspectives of the two groups interviewed: European Dutch and Surinamese Dutch media users.

<sup>v</sup> Although governmental definitions such as those used by the Dutch Central Bureau for Statistics use the term ‘Dutch Antillean and Aruban’ to refer to this ethnic group, the generic term ‘Antillean’ better reflects how this social group is referred to in Dutch everyday discourse.

<sup>vi</sup> Besides education, the range of discourses individuals have at their disposal depends on a variety of contextual factors or *discursive resources* including family and work experiences, peer influences, media influence,

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exposure to political views etcetera. In addition, it depends on personal characteristics and subject positions such as race/ethnicity but also nationality, gender, age, social class or sexual orientation (Kellner, 1995).

<sup>vii</sup> I realize there is a whole body of whiteness literature that specifically focuses on the various ways whiteness as an unnamed and unmarked process that privileges White people is implicated in sport media representations (e.g. Cosgrove & Bruce, 2005; Walton & Butryn, 2006). Although I discuss whiteness at some places in this research project, the focus in this section is on literature that examined verbal sport media representations of players of various racial/ethnic origins, most notably Black and White athletes, and not on whiteness specifically.

<sup>viii</sup> For reasons of readability and congruency with the terminology used throughout the book, a few minor changes have been made to the original text such as changes in terminology and referencing. The content has remained unchanged. The same applies to some of the other chapters in this book.

<sup>ix</sup> The social construct of gender reflects here meanings associated with being male and female.

<sup>x</sup> Social context is not just confined to social group memberships but also includes other factors such as occupational and family experiences, peer influences, degree of exposure to various political discourses, and settings in which media coverages are consumed.

<sup>xi</sup> Duncan & Brummett (1993) situate empowerment in the context of the ways in which individuals relate to each other, mediated by the discourses that are available to them.

<sup>xii</sup> White students of Dutch descent will be referred to as European Dutch or White students, and Black students of Surinamese descent as Surinam Dutch or Black students.

<sup>xiii</sup> White European Dutch students were defined as students of whom both parents were born in the Netherlands; Black Surinam Dutch students were defined as students of whom at least one parent was born in Surinam. These definitions correspond with Dutch governmental definitions of ethnicity that are based on parental birth. Athletes of Surinamese descent tend to be most visible in men's soccer and athletics.

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<sup>xiv</sup> At the same time there are variations between cultures as to what ‘White’ means and includes; In the US, for instance, the socially constructed Hispanic population is often considered a non-White minority ethnic group (Yancey, 2003) whereas it is considered a White ethnic group in some British usages (O’Donnell, 2006).

<sup>xv</sup> Even though the Dutch government has praised *Indische Nederlanders* for their ‘silent assimilation’ into Dutch society (Captain & Ghorashi, 2001, p. 162), it remains very questionable whether the social group of *Indische Nederlanders* themselves have benefited economically or socially from this ‘successful assimilation’ into Dutch society (Captain & Ghorashi, 2001; Schuster, 1999).

<sup>xvi</sup> See also Van Sterkenburg et al. (2010) (chapter 4 in this book) for the use of the writings of Brubaker et al. (2004) and Baumann (1999) to reflect critically on the use of fixed Black-White categorizations in sport media (content) analyses

<sup>xvii</sup> See Brubaker et al. (2004) for a more elaborated discussion on the cognitive approach towards race/ethnicity, for example his preference for the concept of ‘schema’ above that of ‘category’.

<sup>xviii</sup> This shift in focus is most notable in countries like the UK where anti-racism initiatives in sport got off much earlier than on the European continent (Van Sterkenburg, Janssens & Rijnen, 2005).

<sup>xix</sup> Jackson (1998) critically studied the Canadian media representations of Ben Johnson, recognizing the importance of contextual factors in the shifting racial and national signifiers of Johnson’s identity. Spencer (2004) identified the convergence of various cultural factors in 1990s North-America to better understand the media representations of the Williams sisters in tennis. Jamieson (1998) demonstrated how US media texts from varied standpoints constructed the female Latina golf celebrity Nancy Lopez as a cultural marker of racialized, classed and gendered statuses in US society and sport (see also Van Sterkenburg et al., 2010).

<sup>xx</sup> Although previous researchers have legitimized their use of already established categories by arguing that they seek consistency with previous studies for the sake of comparison or measuring progress (Denham et al., 2002), I would argue that the use of contextualized categorizations still provides scholars with this opportunity. Even though the specific

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racial/ethnic categorizations and labels can change across time and place, these categorizations generally have in common that they originate from a process of Othering that constructs the dominant racial/ethnic group as the Self (that is often made normative) and the non-dominant ethnic groups as the Other. It becomes possible to compare the racial/ethnic categories defined as the Self with those defined as the Other across contexts, even though the specific markers or categories of difference might differ. In discussing empirical results of such a comparison, the researcher should point out which categories actually constitute the Self and the Other in the various contexts and which markers of difference (ethnic, racial, religious) are played out and emphasized in the respective dominant discourses.

<sup>xxi</sup> Although some studies have revealed that sport journalists try to avoid prejudicial treatment of minority racial and ethnic groups and have become more sensitive to racial issues (e.g. Billings, 2004; Byrd & Utsler, 2007), most verbal content analyses of media sport have documented the existence of racialized stereotyping of Black and White athletes.

<sup>xxii</sup> Even though these studies sometimes discuss whiteness, their focus is on the media representations of (individual) Black athletes or occasionally Latino(a)s or Asians.

<sup>xxiii</sup> More precisely, journals included the Howard Journal of Communications, the International Review for the Sociology of Sport, the Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media, the Journal of Communication, the Journal of Sports Media, Journalism Quarterly, the Journal of Black Studies, the Journal of Sport and Social Issues, Media, Culture & Society and the Sociology of Sport Journal.

<sup>xxiv</sup> Some of the researchers who conducted content analysis operationalized race or ethnicity in a more diverse way in the *methods* section than in the results section of their study. In this table, we focus on the dominant race and ethnicity categorizations that the researchers used in their results section, because these categorizations were most visible and crucial for the presentation and discussion of the empirical findings.

<sup>xxv</sup> Bruce (2004) examined whether basketball commentators used first or last names to refer to the athletes on the field and whether these naming patterns differed by the race of the athlete. We included this study in the sample because we argue that commentators' naming patterns can be

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considered adjectival descriptors in the commentary that may be racially or ethnically biased.

<sup>xxvi</sup> Young Orange is the popular name for the Dutch national men's soccer team for players younger than 21 years old.

<sup>xxvii</sup> Attention to relations of power also implies an acknowledgement of the notion that racialized/ethnicized discourses always intersect with other axes of power like gender and social class (Hall, 1996). Although our study focused on racialized/ethnicized discourses in (male) Dutch soccer commentary we realize that these discourses are at the same time classed, gendered and sexualized.

<sup>xxviii</sup> The social group originating from the former Dutch East Indian colony forms another large ethnic group in The Netherlands with a colonial background (Janssens, 2005). However, this social group escaped the label of non-western 'allochtoon' and 'non-western-immigrant' in policy discourse (see also Captain & Ghorashi, 2001; Schuster, 1999; Van Sterkenburg, 2010). As a result, they are generally not mentioned as one of the largest minority ethnic groups in Dutch populist discourse or governmental statistics such as that used by the Dutch Central Bureau for Statistics (Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek, 2010).

<sup>xxix</sup> I used a restricted definition of 'Muslim' that reflects dominant Dutch populist discourse and particularly refers to the increased grouping together of 'Moroccan' or 'Turkish' people under the label 'Muslims' (see also the section on the Dutch context).

<sup>xxx</sup> Although we realize that an (explicit) articulation of race/ethnicity in terms of Black and White is uncommon in everyday Dutch discourse we included this categorization in our analysis to explore the possibility that it was used by the Dutch soccer commentators in an implicit way to construct difference among players.

<sup>xxxi</sup> The focus of my research project is on hegemonic (re)constructions of race/ethnicity. I realize, however, that men's soccer coverage also transmits messages and images that have a gender and sexuality subtext prioritizing a hegemonic version of masculinity that reinforces heteronormativity (see also Elling & Janssens, 2009). Openly homosexual professional football players are, for instance, not visible and apparently non-existent.

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<sup>xxxii</sup> The use of explicit racial or gender stereotypes by sport commentators has occasionally even resulted in disciplinary sanctions from television networks themselves. A recent example comes from the UK where Sky Sports commentator Andy Gray was fired in January 2011 for remarks about a female assistant referee and to his female co-presenter that were considered sexist. A few years earlier, in 2004, former soccer manager Ron Atkinson resigned his job and lost his column in the English newspaper *the Guardian* after he referred to Black Chelsea player Marc Desailly as a ‘fucking lazy thick nigger’ (Carrington, 2011; Gibson, 2004). In the US, ESPN commentator Rush Limbaugh was forced to resign after a comment about the Black football player Donovan McNabb in 2003 that was considered racist (Hartmann, 2007).

<sup>xxxiii</sup> Although my focus here is on sport, the pervasiveness of normative whiteness has also been documented in other institutional contexts in the Netherlands such as the Dutch police force (Wekker & Lutz, 2001) and the Dutch tax administration (Siebers, 2009).