
Constructing the Digitalized Sporting Body: Black and White Masculinity in NBA/NHL Internet Memes

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Abstract

In this article, I examine the ways sport fans construct and circulate discourses of race and masculinity in cyberspace. I do this through an examination of a set of Internet memes that juxtapose the bodies of National Hockey League players with National Basketball Association players in one single image. I argue these memes celebrate White masculinity, while at the same time constructing African American athletes as individualistic, selfish, and unwilling to sacrifice their bodies for the greater good of the team. More so, I argue that these memes construct a form of racial ideology that is representative of White backlash politics.

Keywords

race, Internet memes, masculinity, communication, hockey

On March 10, 2014, Dallas Stars forward Rich Peverley collapsed on the bench during a game from a heart complication. In the aftermath, both the Dallas Stars and Columbus Blue Jackets agreed to postpone the hockey game based on the emotional stress of watching a player collapse on the bench. In the following days, reports circulated that Peverley asked to reenter the game after he regained consciousness (see Arthur, 2014; O'Brien, 2014). This purported act led to a series of memes that pitted

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Figure 1. Richard Peverley Meme 1.

the toughness of Richard Peverley against other professional athletes most notably, LeBron James (see Figures 1 and 2).

Two days after Peverley collapsed, Barry Petchesky, a writer for the website *Deadspin*, wrote an article responding to these memes. Petchesky (2014) uses these memes and others like them to make the argument that the marginalization of hockey among the major sports in the United States has perpetuated a sense of insecurity within hockey fans. Petchesky argues these images are meant to address the insecurity of hockey fans by attempting to legitimize their sport as superior to basketball, football, and baseball via notions of hypermasculinity.

While I agree with Petchesky's (2014) reading, I want to take this argument further and discuss the ways these images construct more specific forms of White masculinity and Black masculinity in 2014. In this article, I interrogate the previously mentioned Peverley Internet memes and a series of memes that Photoshop a player from the National Hockey League (NHL) and the National Basketball Association (NBA) into one image. I argue these memes celebrate White masculinity, while at the same time constructing African American athletes as individualistic, selfish, and unwilling to sacrifice their bodies for the greater good of the team. More so, I argue that these memes construct a form of racial ideology that is representative of White backlash politics.

Internet memes are visual texts such as still images, videos, or animated GIFs that are intertextual. These texts are created and circulated by everyday citizens in order to construct and communicate understandings of the social world (Huntington, 2013). Thus, memes can be thought of as a form of participatory media culture. More specifically, in relation to sport, social media (blogs, twitter, memes,



Figure 2. Richard Peverley/Lebron James meme.

and YouTube) has allowed fans to have an influence on how sport media is constructed and presented (Sanderson & Kassing, 2011). The examination of the memes in this article traces the construction of racial ideology within sport fan culture to gather an understanding of one way sport fans are constructing and sharing discourses of race, masculinity, and sport.

These memes use the bodies of Black and White male athletes to produce and reproduce ideologies of race and gender, and examining the ways these bodies are represented gives insight into how individuals are interpolated into racialized, gendered, and classed identities (Carrington, 2001). What is unique about these memes is their ability to make commentary about race without any overt references to race. Therefore, I situate these memes within a framework that Eduardo Bonilla-Silva (2010) refers to as “color-blind racism.” This form of ideology “explains contemporary racial inequality as the result of non-racial dynamics” (p. 2). Thus, it is not the long histories of racial discrimination or contemporary racist practices that place racial minorities at the margins of our society, but racialized beliefs—Latino/Latina’s are lazy, or African Americans do not value education instead that are used as explanations for existing inequity. This type of ideology of course works to obscure the structural and cultural racism that still exists, and this form of thinking is central to the understanding of the memes in question.

Color-Blind Racism

Eduardo Bonilla-Silva (2010) argues, “the central component of any dominant racial ideology is its frames or set paths for interpreting information” (p. 26). Color-blind racism relies on the fundamental belief that race no longer shapes an individual’s experience or life chances. Any racial inequality that still exists between different groups is explained away through cultural differences such as the belief that Black people are prone to violence, prefer to live on welfare as opposed to working, or don’t want to take responsibility for their own actions (Ferber, 2007). Therefore, this ideology places the onus on the individual to work through any barriers they may face, as systematic racism is not seen as a constraint. Yet racism is perpetuated through this process, as racial inequity is divorced from history, and the reluctance to acknowledge that racism still exists pushes the systematic inequities racial minorities face to the margins of society (Bonilla-Silva, 2010). This type of rhetoric also makes it increasingly difficult to have conversations about race.

This form of thinking about race has roots in 1960’s America, where many Whites believed that after the legislation put in place by the civil rights movement the only way to eradicate racism would be to adopt color-blind politics (Brown et al., 2003). In other words, within the context of the post-civil rights movement, the way to end racism is by not acknowledging race. Yet, what this rhetoric fails to address is that policies such as universal health care, access to educational funding, or job creation that do not address how structural inequities put racial minorities at different starting points than their White counterparts, negates the impact of universal legislation (Wise, 2010). The space of sport is a central place where this type of ideology is reproduced.

Sport is believed to be a space of meritocracy, where athletes who rise to stardom are thought to do so based solely on their own talent and dedication (Andrews & Jackson, 2001). The belief that sport is a space of meritocracy is then used to perpetuate the idea that race does not impact opportunity. In both sport and general society, the disavowal of racism not only works to obscure the existence of systematic racial inequality, but this ideology also helps to maintain the power of whiteness.

Whiteness is a reference to the social constructed nature of White identity, and the study of whiteness interrogates how understandings of whiteness shape societal norms and social institutions (Doane, 2003). Since the formation of the United States, society has been structured to privilege the White male body. Joe Feagin’s (2010, p. 3) uses the term “the white racial frame” to refer to the manner in which our social world is interpreted through the perspective of White bodies. In other words, understanding of whiteness structures our cultural norms, but also demonstrates how social institutions are stratified to privilege White bodies. In this manner, whiteness can be understood to function as an invisible social norm. Thus, a central component of studies that examine how whiteness is constructed seek to expose how whiteness operates as the dominant lens of interpretation by making it visible

through analysis (Giroux, 1997; King, 2005; Long & Hylton, 2010; McDonald, 2005). Yet, color-blind ideology helps to perpetuate the White racial frame through a refusal to engage with issues of race.

Color-blind ideology and racism are not unique to the United States. Stacy Lorenz and Rod Murray (2014) in their discussion of the NBA dress code and Canadian hockey player Ray Emery argue that while both the United States and Canada have different histories regarding race, both countries adhere to aspects of color-blind ideology that denies the existence of racism (also see Abdel-Shehid, 2005; Joseph, Darnell, & Nakamura, 2012; Lorenz & Murray, 2011, 2014). Thus, similar to Lorenz and Murray, this project deals with color-blind ideology and its effects in both the United States and Canada in the material and digital world.

Race and the Digital Age

In the early days of the Internet, many marketers of Internet services constructed cyberspace as a utopian form of communication where gender, age, and race did not matter (Nakamura, 2008). In other words, the Internet was marketed as a space uninfluenced by the outside world where you were free to be whoever you wanted. However, that optimism is misplaced. Scholars have examined the role of race in the creation of online forums (Byrne 2008; McPherson, 2000), access to the Internet (Nakamura, 2002), the algorithms of Google search engines (Noble, 2013), and the use of social media for antiracist work (Senft & Noble, 2013). Despite scholarship that has demonstrated the importance of race in cyberspace, it remains an underdeveloped area in Internet scholarship.

One of the challenges to examining issues of racial identity in cyberspace is the way participatory media such as blogs, discussion forums, and social media work to obscure “the racialized protocols that circumscribe our online interactions” (Sharma, 2013, p. 47). In other words, the ability for users to create their own content and identity helps to obscure the ways racial identity matters in cyberspace. More so, race matters within the space of the Internet, because race matters in the material world (Nakamura, 2008). In other words, the Internet is not a space that is uninfluenced by the material social world. Participatory media culture is a product of what Henry Jenkins (2006) has called “convergence culture” or “the flow of content across multiple media platforms” (p. 2). Moreover, new media such as Internet memes provide consumers an opportunity to create content as opposed to simply consuming it (Jenkins, 2006). The ability for traditional media consumers to not only consume mediated projects but also create their own has the potential to reproduce, transform, or resist dominant discourses.

The participatory culture of social media has had a profound impact on sport media and fandom. Traditionally, sport fans have not had the ability to influence how sport media is constructed and presented (Sanderson & Kassing, 2011). However, social media has significantly altered how fans engage with sport media. NHL fans can still access news through traditional outlets such as a newspaper or

magazine, but they can also stream games and access news through their cell phones, laptops, social media, and video game systems.

In a 2009 special edition of the *Sociology of Sport Journal*, David Leonard argued that sport scholars were behind in examining new media (blogs, video games, and social networking), while new media scholars were ignoring global sporting culture. In that issue and beyond sport, scholars have addressed how social media is changing sport through fan construction of sporting blogs (Dart, 2009; MacKay & Dallaire, 2013), Twitter (Norman, 2012; Sanderson, 2011; Smith, 2011), and as an avenue to connect to other fans through sport fan groups (Norman, 2014). Despite the growing literature, the specific area of Internet memes, and even more so, the connections between social media and understandings of race still need to be developed.

What makes memes unique to other forms of participatory media is that their livelihood relies on their circulation and recirculation by a range of producers and consumers. Evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins originally created the term meme in 1976 to refer to small cultural units such as fashion, songs, and forms of language that spread from person to person by copying or imitation (Shifman, 2014, p. 9). An Internet meme follows the same logic, as Limor Shifman (2013) describes Internet memes as user-created content that is intertextual, edited, and circulated numerous times among different users via social media.

Although memes usually require some inside knowledge in order to decode them, the actual creation of a meme is quite simple. There are websites that will guide you through the process, like memegenerator.net. Additionally, having access to the photo editing software Adobe Photoshop gives an individual all the tools needed to create a meme. Once a meme is created, the structure of the Internet allows the possible quick and widespread circulation of these images through social network sites (Facebook and Twitter) and e-mail.

One of the more popular sporting memes is based on the phenomenon of “Tebowing” (see Figure 3). This meme mimics a well-known posture of former NFL quarterback Tim Tebow getting down on one knee and placing one’s elbow on their knee and fist on the forehead (Sutera, 2013). This meme is based on a photograph of Tebow dropping to one knee after a comeback victory against the Miami Dolphins in the 2011 season.

A real estate agent named Jared Kleinstein was the first to appropriate this image by taking a photo of friends Tebowing outside a bar in New York City. He then posted the image to Facebook and the popularity of the image led him to create a Tumblr site devoted to the image, named Tebowing.com (Sutera, 2013). This website allows users to post images of themselves copying the Tebow pose in a wide variety of different locations. Kleinstein’s original image obtained more than 175,000 views within 2 days of the construction of Tebowing.com (Sutera, 2013). In the Tebowing craze, the meme is based on an existing photo. The images I examine in this essay rely on combining images and written text to make social commentary.

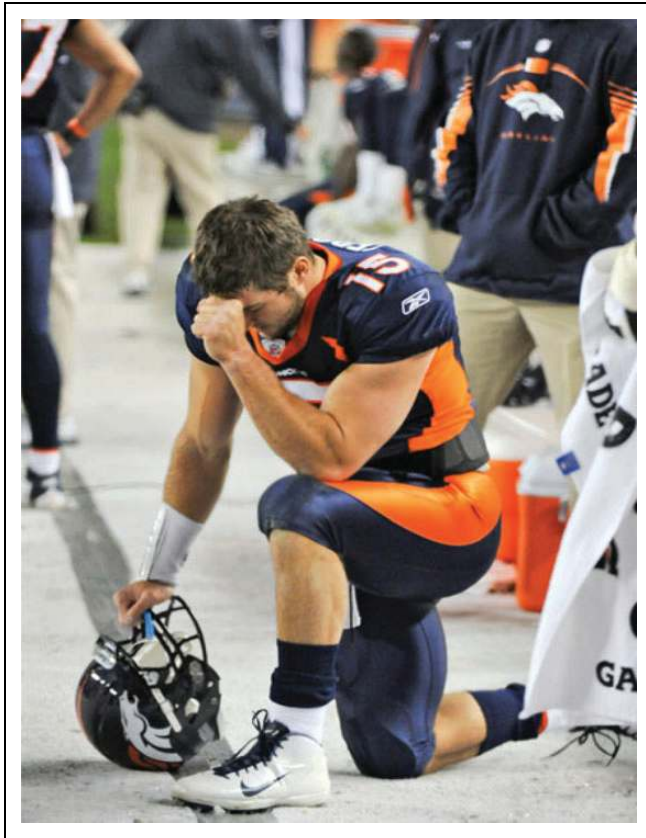


Figure 3. Tebowing Retrieved from <http://blogs.denverpost.com/videogames/2012/05/23/tebowing-included-ea-sports-madden-nfl-13/3603/tim-tebow-tebowing>.

Method

To find memes for this project, I searched Google images, knowyourmeme.com, and memebase.com. I used knowyourmeme.com and memebase.com, as they are two of the largest websites attempting to compile a database of the large amount of Internet memes (Börzsei, 2013). Additionally, I used Google images, as it is a search tool that allows one to search the web for various images. I searched each website with key words such as LeBron James, the NHL, the NBA, Richard Peverley, NHL vs. NBA, and P. K. Subban. Overall, I found 23 different memes. Twenty of these memes either compared the NBA to the NHL or featured racialized discourse of Montral Canadiens player, P. K. Subban.

Although these images are limited, I argue that the intent of memes to be circulated and reproduced (Bauckhage, 2011) makes this small number of images a



Figure 4. Richard Peverley Meme 2.

significant cultural artifact to examine. More so, in all of the memes that compared NBA players to NHL players none of the NBA players used to make this juxtaposition were White. In fact, all of the players used to make this comparison were African American. Additionally, no Black NHL players were used to make comparisons to injured White NBA players, which I believe points to the racial significance of the aforementioned memes. I do not believe these memes are representative of all sport fans. However, the very selective use of NBA and NHL players and the text that is used within these memes provides an important space to see how some fans are constructing and circulating discourses of race and gender.

In my analysis, I pay specific attention to what Patrick Davison (2012) calls the ideal of a meme, or the “concept or idea conveyed” (p. 123). I draw on critical race and sport studies scholarship to interrogate how these memes construct understandings of race and masculinity within sport. The focus on both race and gender allows for a more complex understanding of how these forms of power work together not in isolation (Birrell & McDonald, 2000). The analysis of these memes thus focuses on how race and gender inform each other and how these narratives are connected to understandings of color-blind racism.

Whiteness, Morality, and the NHL

I begin with the Internet memes that compare the toughness of Richard Peverley to LeBron James (see Figure 1) and to the entire NBA (see Figure 4). These two memes make explicit commentary about the supposed superior toughness found in hockey players. However, these memes also make subtle interpretations of race as well.

Kusz (2007) argues that post-9/11 media discourses about sport figures were able to express and garner support for a form of White cultural nationalism without explicitly discussing race. More so, Kusz argues that mediated framing of White male athletes such as Pat Tillman as embodiments of average everyday citizens and lacking economic privilege, produced a discourse that re-centered White masculinity without seeming to be discussing race at all.

The previous memes are able to achieve the same goals through a focus on traditional sporting ethos. For example, the valorization of physicality and toughness has long been a cultural component of men's hockey (Allain, 2008; Gee, 2009; Gruneau & Whitson, 1993; Robidoux, 2001, 2012; Theberge, 2000). Additionally, the sacrifice of one's body for the good of the team has been a central cultural understanding of male sport in general. As Mike Messner (2002) argues, male bodies that play through the pain are performing a celebrated form of masculinity, while male bodies that refuse to put their bodies on the line risk alienating their teammates and being labeled feminine or homosexual.

The previously mentioned memes thus suggest a failure of NBA players, and specifically LeBron James, to live up to the masculine code of sport. While the culture and institution of sport has routinely discriminated against girls and women in order to secure sport both culturally and structurally as a place for men's bodies (Birrell & Theberge, 1994), the space of sport has also played a role in the making and remaking of understandings of racial difference (Carrington, 2010). Given that these memes use the sport of basketball, a sport that has a strong symbolic association with blackness (Leonard, 2006), to make their point these images specifically suggest the failure of the Black male body to live up to traditional sporting norms.

This message takes on greater prominence given the history of construction of Black male bodies as having a natural inclination to athletics (see Andrews, 1996; Cahn, 1994; Carrington, 2010), and criminality (Leonard, 2006). The belief that African Americans are natural athletes is just a part of a larger history of reducing Black men and women to their bodies. For example, the construction of Black men as unintelligent, strong, violent, and hypersexual was used as justification for the physical labor of slavery, while the construction of African American women as primitive and hypersexual was used to justify the rape of these women by White men (Collins, 2005). Thus, these beliefs about the Black body have been used to justify racial oppression.

However, these images convey the message that the Black bodies of LeBron James and the rest of the NBA have failed in their ability to be physically productive. This is a significant point, as historically successful Black male athletic bodies such as boxer Jack Johnson have consistently posed a threat to White hegemonic masculinity (Carrington, 2001). Within these memes, the failure of Black bodies such as LeBron James allow for the centering of White masculinity.

Not only do these images construct White male hockey players as more masculine they also position White hockey players as self-less. Kyle Kusz (2007) argues

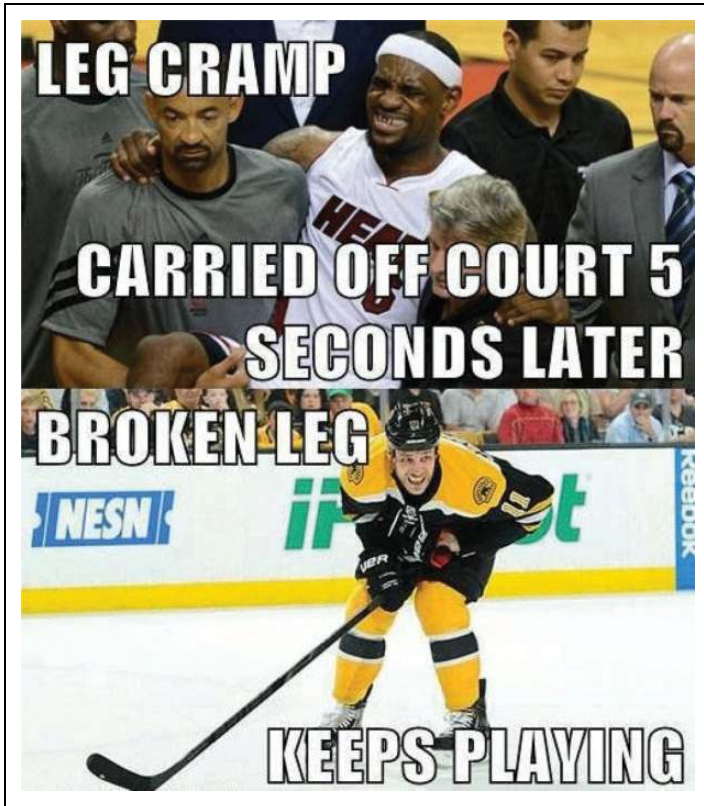


Figure 5. LeBron James/National Hockey League (NHL) Meme 1.

that in order for White male athletes such as Pat Tillman to be understood as moral and unselfish, they have to be constantly juxtaposed with constructions of the selfish, attention-seeking Black male athlete. Through these images, the physicality of James's body is disavowed, while his selfishness is reimagined. James's muscle cramp is dismissed as trivial compared to the heart failure of Peverley, and James's action is coded as selfish while Peverley is willing to put his body on the line for his teammates. Therefore, not only does this construction of the two athletes allow for Peverley to be understood as performing a valorized form of masculinity (Messner, 2002), but it also reinforces the notion that Black athletes like James care only about themselves, hence his unwillingness to stay out on the court despite what is constructed as a minor injury. This understanding is also reinforced through the following two memes (see Figures 5 and 6).

I believe these memes represent a form of White backlash politics. The notion of White backlash politics has consistently been linked to the cultural climate of the 1980s and 1990s. Anxiety about job security due to global outsourcing, affirmative



Figure 6. Lebron James/National Hockey League (NHL) Meme 2.

action programs, and the States' role in protecting minority rights, all created a misconception that Whites would soon be the minority (Doane, 2003). This perceived crisis created what could be thought of as a White revolt. One of the ways this revolt was manifested was through popular culture.

For example, Kusz (2001) argues that *Sports Illustrated's* "Whatever happened to the white athlete?" article constructs a narrative of the disappearance of the White male athlete that helps generate anxiety "about the supposed declining position of white males within American society and culture" (p. 406). While these perceived threats are often linked to the overrepresentation of African Americans in basketball, football, and track and field, the majority of American sports participants remain mostly White (Harrison, 2013; Kusz, 2001). Even though White men and women make up the majority of sport participants in the United States, the popularity of basketball and football is important to note. The Harris Poll has been asking adults over 18 their favorite sport since 1985, and in 2014, the poll found that the sport of hockey still lagged behind both the NBA and the National Football League (NFL), and Major League Baseball (MLB; Rovell, 2014). Given that both the NBA and NFL have an overrepresentation of African American men, this poll would suggest that the Black male sporting body is at the center of the national sport imaginary.



Figure 7. National Basketball Association (NBA)/National Hockey League (NHL) Meme 1.

These memes allow White male hockey players to take over this central position through ridiculing the masculinity and apparent lack of dedication to the team of the Black male athlete. The focus on masculinity and commitment to a team allows for the communication of racial ideology without mentioning race, which is a key component of how racial discourse functions within the color-blind era (Bonilla-Silva, 2010). The nature of Internet memes allows users to promote stereotypical understandings of the Black male athlete through images and text that do not appear to be racially charged. In particular, the negative connotations of the selfish Black male athlete are again symbolically conjured by focusing on the dedication of the White male hockey players to their team despite their more serious injury (also see Figures 7–12).

The use of LeBron James as the central figure in these memes is a critical component in the larger symbolic connotations of these images. James is not only arguably the best player in the league, but he may also be the most well known. It is

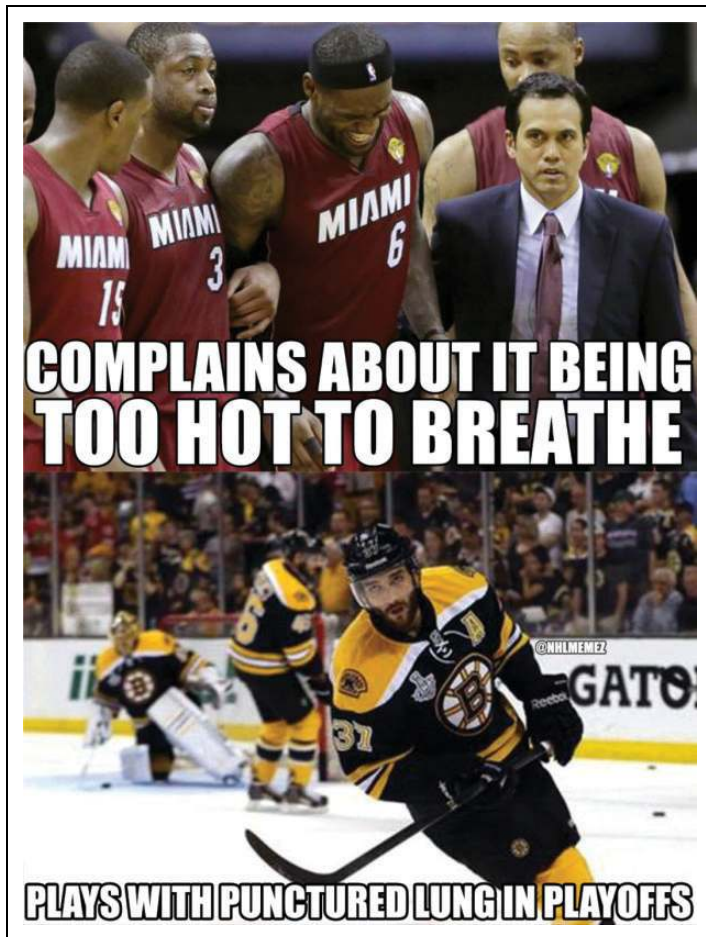


Figure 8. LeBron James/National Hockey League (NHL) Meme 3.

because of his position as one of the best players in the league and his widespread familiarity that he is able to stand in for the NBA and the blackness of the league. Moreover, since July 8, 2010, when James decided to conduct a live broadcast to announce that he was going to sign with the Miami Heat via free agency, he has become a villain. The public announcement of him leaving his hometown Cleveland Cavaliers has led to characterizations of James as selfish, a traitor, and arrogant (Hawkins, Cooper, & Baker, 2014). Although James's recent return to his hometown Cleveland Cavaliers has most likely softened this negative construction, I still contend that his widespread notoriety allows him to stand in for the NBA; thus, his selfishness stands in for the league's selfishness. This narrative is emphasized in the following meme (see Figure 13).



Figure 9. National Basketball Association (NBA)/National Hockey League (NHL) Meme 2.

The image again positions LeBron James as self-centered and arrogant, while positioning U.S. Olympic representative TJ Oshie (member of the NHL's St. Louis Blues) as the selfless athlete by refusing the label of hero. While the image of LeBron James could stand in for any post-game interview the image of TJ Oshie is recognizable as the immediate aftermath of his four-goal performance in a shoot-out that catapulted the United States to victory over Russia, in the opening game of the 2014 Winter Olympics. The specific context of the image of Oshie is important, because of the significance of his achievement, while the inability to pinpoint the specific Eastern Conference Final game of the James interview is also very important, because the failure to tie James's statements to any specific moment helps to reinforce this characterization as part of James' regular personality.



Figure 10. National Basketball Association (NBA)/National Hockey League (NHL) Meme 3.

On the other hand, the supposed refusal of Oshie to accept that label of hero at the very moment when he is constructed as a national hero through the mediated press heightens his apparent selflessness. This same idea can be seen in Figure 14. Again, this meme contrasts a speech made by LeBron James with hockey player Jonathan Towes. Through this image, LeBron James becomes the stand in for individualism, while the White hockey player comes to represent the moral aspects of sport.

The previous images used individual players to make subtle commentary about race and masculinity between the NBA and NHL. The following image directly addresses perceived differences between the two leagues (see Figure 15). The meme above constructs Black athletes as overpaid benchwarmers with a questionable work ethic. It is worth noting that the fourth line on any NHL team is the least talented, and the amount of ice time these individuals get varies from night to night. Additionally, it is very common in basketball for players to come in and out of the game, while at times spending numerous minutes on the bench. Still, what this meme does is devalue the Black basketball player, while constructing White hockey players as harder working and thus more deserving of financial compensation. Thus, these memes use



Figure 11. National Basketball Association (NBA)/National Hockey League (NHL) Meme 4.

nonracial rhetoric to normalize White masculinity by demeaning the Black male sporting body.

The Case of P. K. Subban

I turn now to a discussion of one of the NHL's top Black players P. K. Subban, because his story parallels the arguments in the previous section, while highlighting how Black masculinity is negotiated within the space of the NHL. Subban is a defenseman who was drafted by the Montreal Canadiens 43rd overall in the 2007 NHL Entry Draft. He grew up in Toronto, Ontario, Canada, and was raised by his mother and father, both of Caribbean descent (Montserrat, Jamaica). In 2012, P. K. Subban became the first Black player to win the James Norris Memorial Trophy (given to the leagues' best defensemen as voted on by the hockey writers association), and he was named to the 2014 Canadian Olympic team. Despite these accomplishments Subban is continuously positioned as both an insider and outsider within the sport of hockey.



Figure 12. National Basketball Association (NBA)/National Hockey League (NHL) Meme 5.

For example, in game one of the Montreal Canadiens versus Boston Bruins 2014 playoff series, after P. K. Subban had scored the game-winning goal for the Canadiens, he was the subject of about 17,000 tweets featuring the *n*-word following this goal (Gorman, 2014). This led to Bruins President Cam Neely releasing the following statement “The racist, classless views expressed by an ignorant group of individuals following Thursday’s game via digital media are in no way a reflection of anyone associated with the Bruins organization” (Wilbur, 2014). Additionally, many “nonracist” Bruins fans took to twitter to condemn other Bruins fans for their remarks and to distance the bigots from the larger Bruins fan base (Dujay, 2014). The one thing that ties all these responses together is the attempt to distance the Bruins organization from these racist remarks and to emphasize that these comments were an isolated incident brought forth by a small segment of bigoted fans.

However, this is not the first time Subban has experienced instances of racism in the NHL. In 2012, Florida Panthers forward Krys Barch was suspended after asking Subban if he slipped on a banana peel during a game (Allen, 2012). Barch insisted his comment had no racial connotations. In 2010, Darren Pang was discussing P. K. Subban, who was then in his rookie year. During this Total Sports Network



Figure 13. LeBron James/National Hockey League (NHL) Meme 4.



Figure 14. LeBron James/National Hockey League (NHL) Meme 5.

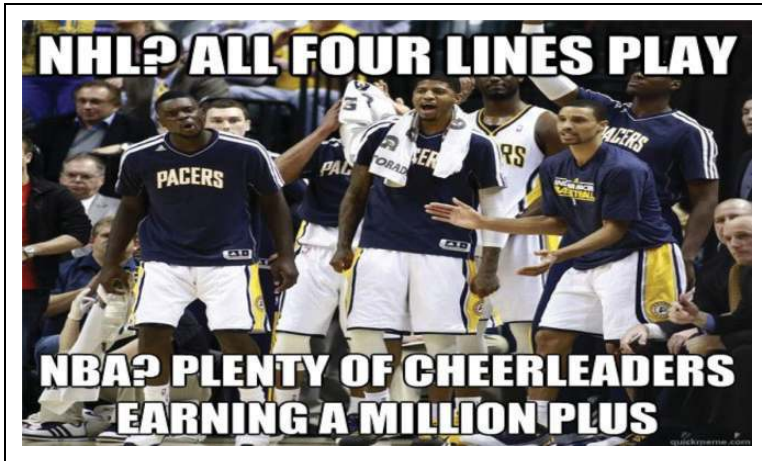


Figure 15. National Basketball Association (NBA)/National Hockey League (NHL) Meme 6.

Broadcast (TSN), Pang described Subban as outgoing and full of life, and stated that the more that persona continues to grow the more people want him to settle down. He went on to compare Subban to St. Louis Blues defenseman Alex Pietrangelo, who Pang argued, “does everything, on the ice, off the ice, the white way” (Couto, 2010). Darren Pang of course immediately apologized and characterized this statement as a slip of the tongue.

Even if all the previous incidents were to be viewed as rare occurrences, or unintentional racial remarks, there is no denying the power of the following memes (see Figures 16 to 20) featuring Subban, as the following images draw on explicit racial slurs and stereotypical understandings of Black bodies such as a love of fried chicken and the inability to swim.

Conclusion

All of these images require interrogation and contemplation. I share them to point to the necessity for more scholarship that interrogates the construction of race and masculinity within hockey. These memes of P. K. Subban also help to understand the significance of the memes that compare White hockey players to Black NBA players. While the memes that compare the NHL to the NBA work to re-center White masculinity within sport, they also symbolically imagine the sport of hockey as a space for White masculinity. The practice of culturally coding hockey as a space for White male bodies is not a phenomenon unique to memes.

For as Mary Louise Adams (2006) argues, “if hockey is life in Canada, then life in Canada remains decidedly masculine and white” (p. 71). Through an examination of Canadian media coverage of the women and men’s 2002 Olympic



Figure 16. P. K. Subban Meme 1.

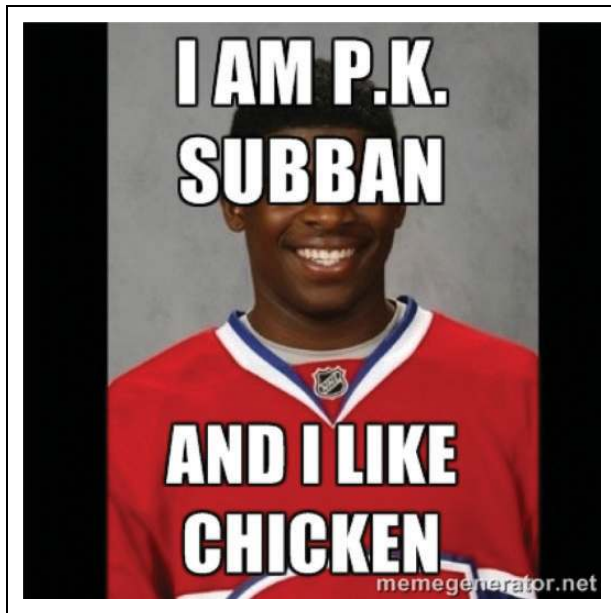


Figure 17. P. K. Subban Meme 2.

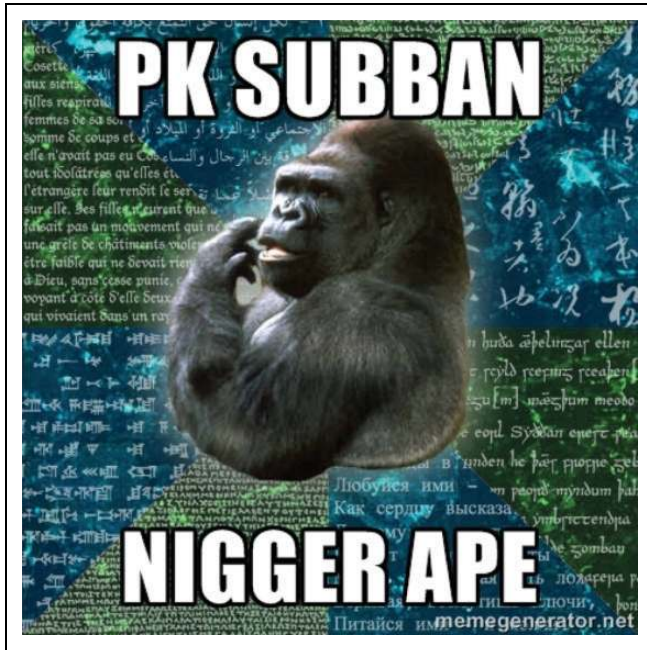


Figure 18. P. K. Subban Meme 3.

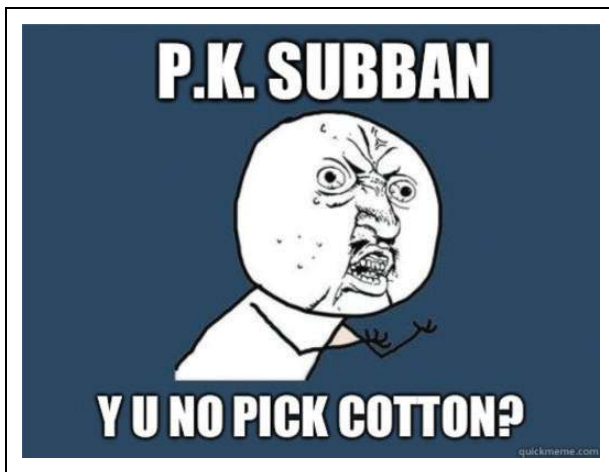


Figure 19. P. K. Subban Meme 4.



Figure 20. P. K. Subban Meme 5.

performance, access to ice time for females and males, and narratives of the game of shinny (pick-up hockey), Adams (2006) demonstrates the ways both symbolically and structurally the game privileges the White, male body. This is also done through the mythology of the birth of Canada (Clarke, 1997), the creation story of hockey (Gruneau & Whitson, 1993), the trophy cases of Canadian ice rinks (Robinson, 1998), and official histories of the game (Pitter, 2006).

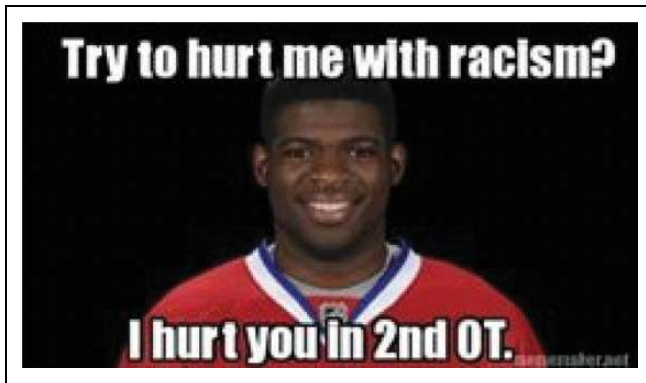


Figure 21. P. K. Subban Meme 6.

The erasure of women and people of color from the histories of hockey makes it seem that they don't play the game and makes it difficult to comprehend the racism and sexism that has been central to the sport. It also reinforces understandings of the game of hockey as White and masculine at both the cultural and institutional level. I believe the previous memes of P. K. Subban draw on such vile stereotypes of Black bodies demonstrate that he is a body that is out of place (for a discussion of this regarding Aboriginal Canadians, see Robidoux, 2012; Valentine, 2012). Through the images that ask Subban why he doesn't pick cotton, and the meme that suggests Subban should be thrown into the Pacific Ocean (because presumably he can't swim), it is implied that his body is in the wrong place and that it should be removed. Even more so, these are clear demonstrations of how race matters in both the sport of hockey and within North America in general.

David Leonard (2009) argues that a key area social media scholarship must address is the development of original mediated content by sports fans. In this article, I have detailed how Internet memes have produced and reproduced stereotypical understandings of White and Black male athletic bodies. By constructing the Black male basketball body as selfish and as failures of hegemonic masculinity, the White male athletic body is repositioned as morally superior. In addition, these memes construct the sporting space of the NHL as more honorable athletic league in comparison to the NBA.

Thus, the analysis of these memes not only reveals the fallacy of a post-racial society but also illustrates how some fans are constructing mediated images of Black and White athletes. While the memes throughout this essay have reinforced dominant narratives of racial identity, the dynamics of social media opens up a space for users to resist, or transgress dominant perceptions of race and gender. While the above memes depict P. K. Subban in a racist manner, there are also images that resist such messages (see Figures 21 and 22).

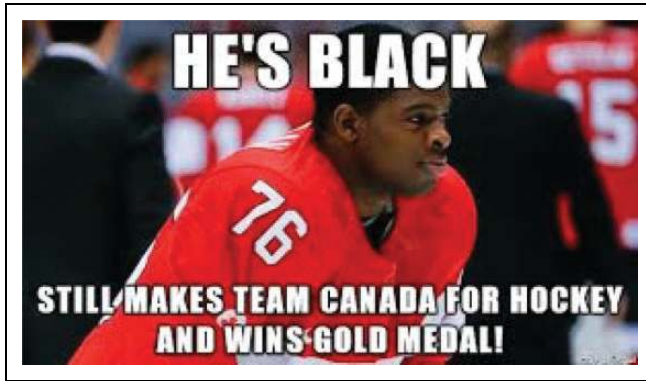


Figure 22. P. K. Subban Meme 7.

The previous images offer a very mild form of resistance, but they are important to point out and explore. Social media has indeed given sport fans the opportunity to shape and construct narratives about sport and its participants (Sanderson, 2011). It is critical to continue to examine social media, because of its ability to conform, transform, or resist dominant discourses. Social media also allows for new understandings of how ideas of race, gender, nation, and so on, are constructed and reconstructed within the digital world.

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