



Racial Representations of Women's and Men's Intercollegiate Basketball Coverage on ESPN.com

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ABSTRACT

Prior research has shown that racial ideologies exist within traditional media (i.e., newspaper, media guides, television). Through these different channels, Black athletes are often praised for their physical attributes while Whites athletes are credited for their cognitive abilities (McCarthy, Jones, & Potrac, 2003). This phenomenon of athletic superiority and intellectual inferiority of Black athletes has been coined as "race logic" (Coakley, 2007; Hodge, Burden, Robinson, & Harrison, 2006). Race logic is well documented in different forms of media but no research has explored the phenomenon via the internet. The purpose of this study was to benchmark media coverage of women's and men's intercollegiate basketball on the internet. The research question guiding this study examines whether or not race logic is challenged or perpetuated in online photograph representations on ESPN.com's women's and men's collegiate basketball websites. Feature photographs ($n=336$) for the 2006-2007 National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) basketball season were collected on ESPN.com and quantitative content analysis was employed. Results indicated when athlete(s) were pictured homogenously (only black or only white), Black athlete(s) were five times more likely to be portrayed in photographs compared to White athletes, regardless of sex.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

To examine sport media racial representations of feature photographs of NCAA Division-I women's and men's basketball players on ESPN.com

METHODOLOGY

Population of the Study: Feature photographs on women's ($n=168$) and men's ($n=168$) college basketball web pages within ESPN.com were collected between 10am and 11am daily during the 2006-07 NCAA intercollegiate basketball season.

The 2005-06 student-athlete race/ethnicity percentages for Division I men's and women's basketball were as follows: Black males (58.9%), white males (29.9%), and other males (11.2%); Black females (44.6%), white females (44.3%), and other females (11.1%).

Procedure: The sport of basketball and the content source, ESPN.com, were purposively chosen for analysis in this study. Quantitative content analysis was used in this study. First, each photograph was coded for the publication date. Second, each feature photograph was coded as "female" or "male". Third, each photograph was coded by race as (1) White, (2) Black, (3) combination of White and Black, or (4) other. Only feature photographs of athletes were included and coded.

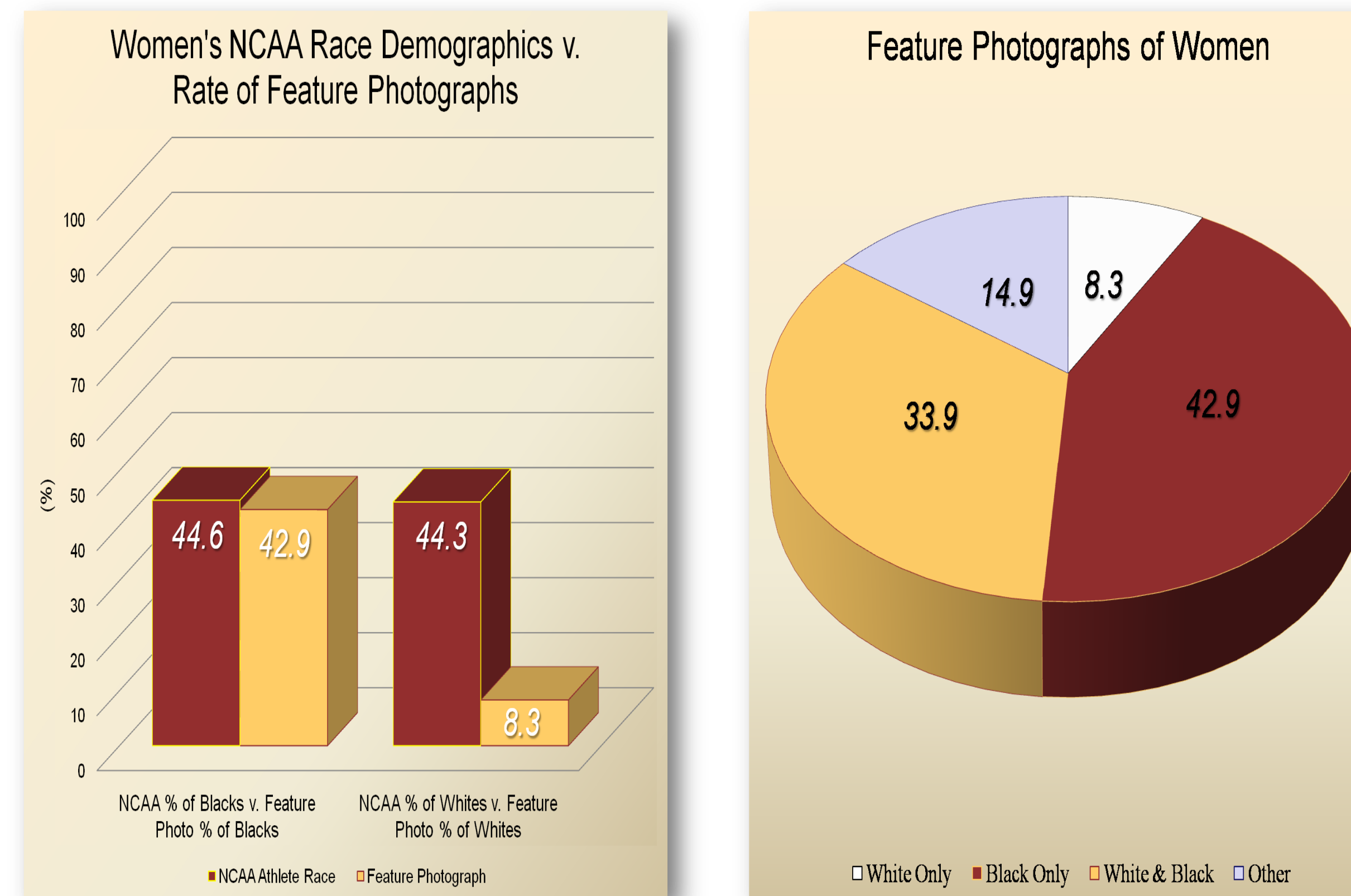
Data Analysis: The primary and secondary researchers independently coded the first 25 percent of women's and men's feature photographs by race. Thereafter, both researchers compared their codes and an appropriate level of intercoder reliability ($\alpha = .85$) was achieved.

The coding scheme was solidified and the remaining of women's and men's photographs were coded. Descriptive statistics were run on SPSS for the following variables: 1) Quantity and percent of the total photographs of athlete(s) for men's basketball, 2) Quantity and percent of the total photographs portrayed athletes of athlete(s) for women's basketball, 3) Quantity and percent of the men's basketball photographs that portrayed White athlete(s) only, Black athlete(s) only, or combination of White and Black athletes, 4) Quantity and percent of the women's basketball photographs that portrayed White athlete(s) only, Black athlete(s) only, or combination of White and Black athletes.

A quantitative content analysis was employed to examine feature photographs situated in prominent positions "above the scroll" on women's and men's basketball web pages within ESPN.com.

RESULTS

Table 1.

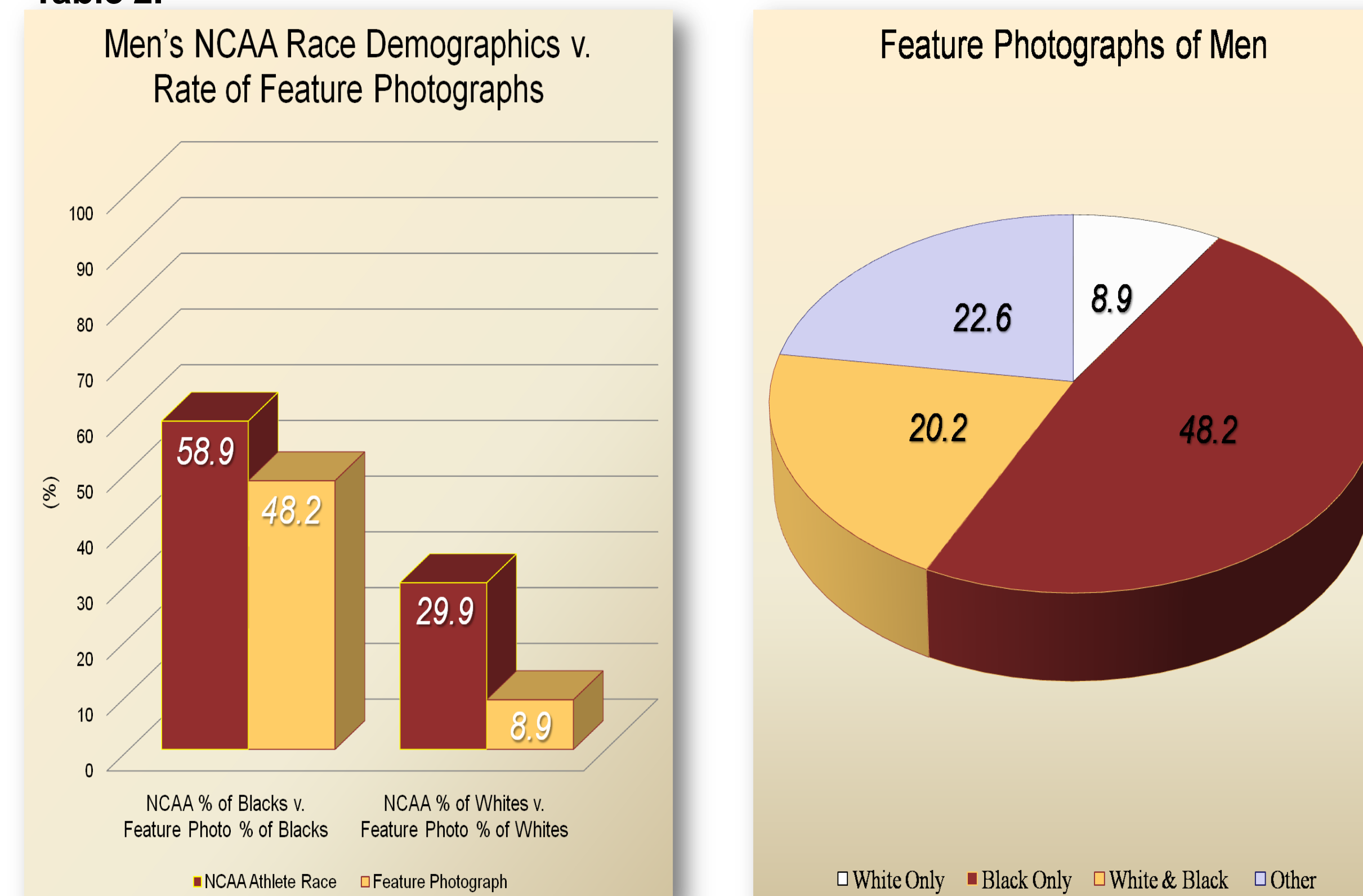


(Source: <http://sports.espn.go.com/ncaa/tourney/06/news/story?id=2377424>)



(Source: http://sports.espn.go.com/nba/columns/story?columnist=oneil_dana&id=3481053)

Table 2.



In comparing the racial demographics of NCAA Division-I women's and men's basketball players to the racial composition of online feature photographic representations on ESPN.com., four important findings emerged. First, a sizable quantity of photographs portrayed both Black and White athletes. Second, when photographs portrayed only Black females or Black males, Black athlete(s) were proportionally representative in comparison to the demographic make-up within the NCAA. Third, when photographs portrayed only White female(s) or White male(s), White athlete(s) were under represented in comparison to the demographic make-up within the NCAA. Lastly, when pictured homogenously (only Black or only White), Black athlete(s) were five times more likely to be portrayed in photographs compared to White athletes, regardless of sex.

DISCUSSION

Over or under representation of races in sport may provide misleading ideas about sport participation and may contribute to Whites avoiding sports in which Blacks have excelled and vice versa (Coakley, 2007).

Due to the fact that there is a majority of Blacks in professional basketball (Lapchick, Elkins, & Mathew, 2008), the ideas developed about race, physical abilities, and chances of success have a direct effect on youth, and how, and in which sports athletes choose to participate (Coakley, 2007).

Hypothetically, if a White high school female basketball player reads about women's college basketball on ESPN.com, she would likely see photographs of Black player(s) a majority of the time. This may lead her to assume the majority of women college players are Black and perhaps she can not or should not play. This belief may in part be influenced by the over representation of Black players and the under representation of White players in online feature photographs—which convey what is valued and normative. In reality, the NCAA demographics are comprised of nearly half Blacks and half Whites for female basketball players.

In this study race logic is both challenged and reproduced by online media feature photographs within NCAA Division-I basketball. Race logic is challenged because a large percent of the photographs feature both Black and White athletes together. Race logic is reproduced because when athlete(s) are featured homogenously White athletes are drastically under represented.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS & APPLICATION

In future studies, researchers could consider analyzing headline articles and captions that accompany feature photographs.

Investigation of online sport media representations of White and Black coaches in Division-I intercollegiate basketball is also warranted.

Although viewers, operators, and advertisers have ranked ESPN #1 for 8 consecutive years (ESPN Corporate, 2008), researchers could also reproduce this study on alternative websites such as Foxsports.com and yahoo.com which are quickly approaching the same amount of traffic ESPN receives.

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