

THE MEDIA CONSTRUCTION OF SIMON WHITFIELD:  
PRODUCING A CANADIAN OLYMPIC CHAMPION

by

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## **Abstract**

This thesis analyzes the media coverage and marketing of the Canadian Olympic athlete Simon Whitfield. Whitfield, a 25 year-old from Kingston Ontario, won the first ever gold medal in the Olympic men's triathlon at the 2000 Sydney Games. The victory propelled him to the status of Canadian celebrity and afforded him increased commercial opportunities including corporate sponsorships and product endorsements.

This research combined two methodologies: 1) a textual analysis of Canadian media coverage of Whitfield and a keyword search of the coverage, and 2) interviews with five Canadian sports journalists that covered Whitfield and four marketing representatives from companies that sponsored Whitfield or employed him as a product endorser. Whitfield was also interviewed to provide an athlete's perspective on the media production and marketing processes.

The results revealed thematic consistencies in the Canadian media coverage of Whitfield, particularly with respect to Canadian national identity, the value of an Olympic gold medal and Whitfield's status as a Canadian hero. These results support previous research that found recurring themes of athletic heroism and myths of Canadian nationalism in the production of Canadian sports media (MacNeill, 1996, Gruneau, 1989).

Interviews with journalists confirmed the observed elements of the Whitfield story – his Canadian identity, gold medal victory, heroic performance, as well as other features (genuine personality, athletic good looks) – that made him newsworthy. Covering these attributes of Whitfield helped newsmakers to produce news that was attractive to audiences, and maintained circulation, viewership, and ad ratings, strengthening the media "audience commodity" (Sparks, 1992).

Interviews with marketers revealed that Whitfield was commercially attractive because the meanings associated with his media image could be attached to brands through the endorsement and sponsorship process in order to improve brand equity, the value that consumers attribute to a brand of product or service (Keller, 1993). The results support a model of celebrity product endorsement based on the transfer of meanings from the endorser to the product and subsequently, to the consumer (McCracken, 1989).

Overall, the results suggest intertextual linkages between media production and marketing as they relate to celebrity athletes in Canada. Whitfield's positive media image was understood to impact his marketability and contributed to a "vortex of publicity" (Wernick, 1991) by linking stages along the promotional chain.

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## Chapter I - Introduction

This thesis examines the media coverage and marketing of a Canadian athlete: Simon Whitfield. Whitfield, a 25 year-old from Kingston, ON won the first ever gold medal in the Olympic triathlon at the 2000 Summer Games in Sydney, Australia. The victory propelled Whitfield, a relative unknown prior to the event, on a rapid ascent to the status of celebrity athlete, product endorser and Canadian Olympic hero. A crucial element of his ascension was the positive press and television coverage he received in the Canadian commercial media. Celebratory stories about Whitfield's victory contributed to the construction of his positive media image and helped to create sponsorship and endorsement opportunities.

These stories tended to emphasize three themes: Whitfield's victory, his identity as a Canadian national hero, and his commercial rewards for winning the gold medal. These themes were oftentimes interwoven in the accounts of his win and linked his achievements with prominent myths about sport and national life. I use the term myth in the sense of deep, cultural understandings that resonate emotionally with social groups (Miracle & Rees, 1994; Rowe, McKay & Miller, 1998; MacNeill, 1996; Gruneau & Whitson, 1993). According to Rowe et al.:

"Myths are not total delusions or utter falsehoods, but partial truths that accentuate particular versions of reality and marginalize or omit others in a manner appealing to deep-seated emotions" (Rowe et al., 1998, p. 121).



Two myths especially prevalent with respect to Whitfield were the myths of sporting nationalism wherein sport is seen to create national pride and unity, and the myth of victory as the prime goal of sport participation.

The mythological construction of Whitfield as a Canadian icon and national hero provides a useful opportunity to explore the connection of sport and nationalism in Canada and the role that commercial media play in this construction. Nationalism remains closely tied to sport despite the blurred definition of the nation state in the face of globalization (Rowe et al., 1998; Blain, Boyle, & O'Donnell, 1993). Mediated sports events serve to create and legitimize the political norms of citizenship (Rowe et al., 1998), yet the creation of nationalist mythologies can be problematic in that it narrows the accepted definition of citizenship in the nation state and serves to reinforce hegemonic social relations:

“The media sporting nation is shown to be deeply gendered, tending to obscure and legitimize not only hegemonic gender divisions, but also those that apply to social class, to indigenous people and to non-Anglo/Celtic migrants” (Rowe et al., 1998, p.120).

To accept the notion of a singular Canadian culture serves to depoliticize the contestability of culture in Canada in terms of class, gender, race/ethnicity, and other sources of social inequality (Jackson, 1994).

The canonization of athletes like Whitfield due to their success in the sports arena also potentially serves to legitimize the principle that winning is necessary to make participation in sport meaningful. It normalizes a narrow definition of success that leaves little room in sport for personal achievement or for constructing a healthy and active lifestyle. Further, the focus on winning has a

potential impact on the epidemic of cheating in high performance sport. Scholars have explored the relationship between cheating, in particular the use of performance enhancing drugs, and the social and cultural pressure to win (Burstyn, 1990; Begley and Brant, 1999). Burstyn (1990, p. 46) cites Kidd's explanation of the play/win relationship, and the carding system for Canadian athletes, where athletes receive a stipend based on their world ranking:

"How many Canadians are in the top eight in the world in any field? Imagine making the salaries of Canadian lawyers or judges dependent on that criterion. But that's what we do to our athletes. We tell them, unless you win, you don't eat" (Burstyn, 1990, p. 46).

The media's celebration of Whitfield's gold medal as a symbol of sporting excellence reinforces a nearly impossible standard for others to follow and tacitly supports a system that too often uses unethical means to achieve victory. By exploring the social construction of sports celebrity and sports media in Canada and the resulting marketing opportunities that this construction affords, this research will contribute to a better understanding of how media coverage is constructed and the manner in which media narratives influence the culture of sport in Canada as well as the culture of Canada.

This study is informed by an understanding of the central position of the mass media in contemporary society. The emergence of a media culture in which images are constructed by media producers and subsequently consumed and interpreted by audiences on a mass scale has meant that media have come to play a central role in daily life, influencing beliefs and social practices. While the full extent of media 'effects' is often debated, the understanding that the mass

media saturates and influences everyday life in contemporary culture is widely held (Kellner, 1995; O'Sullivan, Dutton, & Rayner, 1998).

Researchers in media studies and cultural studies have theorized the important role of the media in the process by which individuals construct their identities (Kellner, 1995; Grossberg, Wartella, & Whitney, 1998). The mass media provide audiences with many of the cultural materials and reference points from which they construct their perceptions of the social world, including their sense of class, race, ethnicity, nationality, and gender. This means media are implicated in how people produce a sense of themselves and of others, of both their personal and social identities (Grossberg et. al, 1998). Therefore, a clear understanding of the media, and how it is constructed, is important for understanding and engaging the social and cultural implications of media consumption.

The research reported in this thesis has two components: 1) An examination of the media processes that led to the construction of Whitfield as a hero and a celebrity and 2) an exploration of how this coverage was employed by corporate sponsors to help configure Whitfield as a celebrity endorser of their products.

This study recognizes the production/consumption relationship and the important role that audiences play in interpreting texts, but is concerned with issues of media construction, not interpretation. The impetus for this study was the privileged themes used in the media construction of Simon Whitfield and their relationship to the marketing of his media image. The research focuses on how

sports media texts are socially constructed and the professional and commercial processes involved in this construction.

Several key questions are addressed: How was Simon Whitfield portrayed in the Canadian media after his gold medal victory in Sydney? How was his image constructed through the media? Why was his image created in this particular way? What elements of the Simon Whitfield story were considered newsworthy by the Canadian press and why? What personal and professional decisions made by journalists affected the resulting coverage? How did Whitfield's construction in the popular press affect his marketability and ability to attract sponsorship? Did marketers and sponsors draw on Whitfield's media image in their business decisions?

The thesis is organized into five chapters. Following this introduction, I provide a review of literature in Chapter 2, outlining prior research. In Chapter 3, I explain the research methodology used in this study. I present the results of the thesis in Chapter 4, and in Chapter 5, I discuss the social and cultural implications of the results and relate the findings to relevant theory.

## Chapter II - Literature Review

The literature review is organized into four parts. In the first part, I explain my theoretical approach to this study informed by five concepts from media and cultural studies. Second, I discuss theory and research that explores the relationship between mass media, spectator sports and celebrity athletes. Third, I discuss theory and research that examine sports marketing and celebrity product endorsements. Finally, I situate the study within these literatures.

The definition of media production used in this chapter is deliberately broad, but primarily refers to the selective *reporting* of news in the popular press as opposed to the *creation* of entertainment or spectacle. This is meant to reflect my research focus on the choices made by journalists in shaping sports coverage, the impact of this coverage in terms of marketing and sponsorship, and the cultural implications of these processes.

### 2.1 Theoretical approach

The process of creating news is not a natural one where actual events are directly reported to audiences (Berger & Luckman, 1967). Rather media production is a social process, actively negotiated by media practitioners and often based on personal and professional codes of newsworthiness, good coverage, objectivity, and balance (Gruneau, 1989; Lowes, 1999). This means that gender, race and class-related perspectives and political economic influences that underlie social relations and social processes in broader society are often reflected in the production of the media. As Gruneau (1989) notes, the

processes of meaning production in the media are not different in kind from those of life generally. Meaning is made by people.

"The meanings that human beings give to events are never naturally contained within the events themselves. [That is to say] real life does not contain or propose its own integral, single, and intrinsic meaning, which is then neutrally transmitted to us through language or other systems of communication. On the contrary, meaning is a social production..." (Gruneau, 1989, p.151, drawing on Hall, 1982, p.67).

In recognition of the social process of sports media production, research is needed to examine the processes by which sports media coverage is produced and the reasons that it is produced in particular ways. It is on this basis that the study of the social processes underlying the various productions of Simon Whitfield as a specific case is a useful contribution to the current understanding of the relationship between media and sport celebrity. This research contributes to what Andrews and Jackson (2001, p. 9) refer to as a "...call to critical interpretive arms" to use specific cases as a means to identify broader conditions of power, position, and social understanding.

"We advocate focusing on a particular incident or celebrity as the site for exploring the complex interrelated and fluid character of power relations as they are constituted along the axes of ability, class, gender, and nationality. Each cultural incident offers a unique site for understanding specific articulations of power... Thus these analyses traverse the boundaries between lived experience, knowledge production, and political practices" (McDonald & Birrell, 1999, p.284; c.f., Andrews & Jackson, 2001).

Gruneau (1989) and Andrews and Jackson (2001) represent a tradition of research that has examined the construction of sporting spectacles, including sports events and celebrity athletes, and the social, political and economic implications of these cultural forms. An important part of this literature, and the focus of my research, is the manner in which these spectacles are reported by the mass media. The commercial mass media are primarily in the business of

developing audiences that can be sold to advertisers to create profit (Hackett & Gruneau, 2000; Lowes, 1999; Rowe, 1999; Sparks, 1992; Jhally, 1984). By covering events in ways that produce insightful, informative, and/or entertaining news, the media work to construct consistent audience segments that attract advertisers wishing to target the segments. It is mainly through this process of creating and selling audiences to advertisers that commercial media organizations make money. As well, the effects of globalization and convergence among media corporations mean that an increasingly smaller number of media practitioners are responsible for an increasingly larger proportion of the flow of mediated information (Bogart, 1993). With this in mind, scholars have called for a critical analysis of how the business of the media affects the media's social role as political watchdogs and information filters as well as the media's ability to provide a forum for social debate while reflecting the diversity of competing viewpoints (Hackett and Gruneau, 2000). In this sense, critical analysis of commercial mass media is crucial in order to understand more clearly the implications of an industry that is increasingly focused on audience construction and profit-maximization. As Hackett and Gruneau (2000, p. 67) suggest:

"Widespread concerns about the consumerist and business orientations of the commercial media in North American go back decades. In the past 15 years, though, the accelerating processes of concentration, profit maximization, multimedia ownership, and the formation of conglomerates has arguably reinforced – and may well have deepened – the corporate media's structural biases and blind spots."

It is within this cultural frame of the contemporary media that issues of media coverage are important. Hackett and Gruneau (2000) argue that a critical analysis of media production should go beyond the recognition of the mass media as simply cultural filters, and examine the processes, structures, and

interests that affect the final coverage, because the media provide a means for individuals to acquire and debate the information and cultural capital required for active and meaningful citizenship. Despite the central role of broadcast media in this process print media in general, and newspapers in particular, are still important vehicles for newsgathering, producing, and disseminating, a point noted by Hackett and Gruneau (2000).

“(Newspapers) are still immensely important vehicles for democratic communication. At present, no other mass medium offers the same combined possibilities for accessibility, in-depth analysis, potential diversity of viewpoints, and sustained reflection on important political and economic issues. That is why we can’t ignore them or take them for granted.” (Hackett and Gruneau, 2000, p.12)

Media coverage in its condition as a manufactured product is related to the way that media producers interpret, organize and make sense of the world. In this sense, the mass media are tied to ideology. Lull (1995, p. 6) defines ideology as:

“organized thought – complements of values, orientations, and predispositions forming ideational perspectives expressed through technologically mediated and interpersonal communication.”

I use ideology in the tradition of Marxist critiques of mass media production, where selected ways of thinking – dominant ideologies – are reinforced by those people in the society that hold political and economic power, a power that stems from such people’s ability to publicly express their preferred systems of ideas (Lull, 1995; Berger 1998). In this framework, the mass media can be considered a tool used by the politically and economically powerful to express, through the social construction of media texts, values that are consistent with the dominant ideology of the culture (Lull, 1995). In turn, media values and perspectives come



to influence culture more generally. In other words, the Marxist tradition suggests that individuals within the media culture do not formulate their ideas or construct their identities independent of influence from the mass media, and that knowledge, like the production of media texts, is the result of a series of social processes (Berger, 1998). In this sense, the manner in which media are produced, and the resulting texts that audiences consume, can potentially influence social reality.

Closely linked to ideology is Gramsci's (1971) concept of hegemony, which describes power and domination existing in a combination of force and consent (Jhally, 1989). Hegemony is a subtle framing of ideological power in that it is not an overt attempt to stimulate thought or action, but rather repositions opposing definitions of reality within the standards laid out by the ruling class (Lull, 1995). Jhally (1989, p. 74) paraphrasing Gramsci, describes the process of hegemony as "one of negotiation, compromise, and struggle in which the ruling class, or more precisely, the ruling bloc, gives concessions in one area so that it may receive them in another." Similar to ideology, hegemony is important for the study of media production because it theorizes the ability of the media to legitimize and normalize social structures, as well as provides a conceptual basis from which to analyze how individuals working in the media end up negotiating their own points of view and social understandings. A critical analysis of media texts and media production, such as the coverage of Whitfield, can yield insight into the legitimization of hegemonic social relations in Canadian sport.

In this research, issues of ideology and hegemony are examined through an exploration of various aspects of commercially produced media including the role of marketing and advertising, and of media self-promotion in media production. Commercial media are linked with marketing and advertising as part of a promotional chain (Wernick, 1991). This chain links these different types of media in an intertextual matrix wherein media contents and advertising become nearly indistinguishable (Wernick, 1991). Wernick (1991) dubbed this chain the "Vortex of publicity."

Intertextuality refers to the conscious or unconscious use of material from previous texts to create new texts (Berger, 1998). The result is a reflexive notion of the mass media where each mediated text is developed on the basis of previous texts, and aids in the development of subsequent texts in an ongoing process. This intertextual framework of media applies not just to the creation of texts but to the creation and maintenance of ideology and hegemony:

"Television may be the most obvious conveyer of dominant ideology, but all mass media including less recognized forms such as postage stamps, store windows, automobile bumper stickers, tee-shirts, even museums and restaurant menus, carry messages that serve the interests of some and not others" (Lull, 1995, p.9).

The concept of intertextuality is complimented by articulation, Hall's (1985) notion that media texts, and their influence on identity and social practices, are 'relatively anchored' (McKay, 1995) within complex social and historical relations. In other words, the meaning or signification of texts is grounded in and linked to (articulated with) a particular set of historical conditions that are expressed within these meanings and that help to sustain these meanings by supporting some interpretations over others. Hall (1985, p. 193) argued that ideology is "precisely

this work of fixing meaning through establishing, by selection, a chain of equivalences.” In the case of Whitfield, articulation suggests that the Whitfield texts, and the struggle to create meaning and identity through these texts, is rooted in an association with previous media production and the dominant ideology of the Canadian sport culture.

The final theoretical concept that is important to address is that of the mediated spectacle. French situationist Guy Debord (1994) argued that through cultural hegemony, society had transformed into a consumer and media-driven “society of the spectacle” where individuals consume a culture created by others rather than producing their own (Best & Kellner, 1997). As Belanger (2000, p. 381) explains, Debord’s spectacle refers to “...the highly mediated image-based nature of contemporary life [where the] complexity and contradictions of life become unified behind the veil of appearance.” While Debord’s position problematically dismisses human agency by failing to acknowledge individuals’ abilities to critically analyze and interpret the media that they consume, he effectively tied the creation, and increasing impact, of the spectacle to the ideology of capitalist accumulation.

## **2.2 Mediated sport and sporting celebrity**

In the context of sport, the relationship between sport and the commercial media is increasingly interdependent (Rowe, 2000; Lowes, 1999). As Rowe suggests (2000, p. 346) “...the media are central to the conduct and destiny of contemporary sport – and sport is crucial to the present health and future of the media.” Jhally (1984) emphasized this interdependence when he identified the

media and sport as an inter-related industrial complex, or what he called the 'sport/media complex.'

Jhally's (1984) framework was underpinned by the notion of mediated sport as a spectacle of accumulation. Jhally framed the creation of sports media spectacles as a way not just of creating advertising time, but also of delivering particular audiences (primarily male) to sponsors. The owners and producers of sports media work to create content that conforms to the dominant social code of sport in which men feature as the major producers and consumers of sports because this is profitable and maximizes capital accumulation. According to Jhally, this economic importance of television audiences within the sports/media complex is reflected in the willingness of producers and managers to change the rules, times and/or locations of sports events in order to increase television viewership and meet increased profit demands.

Rowe (1999), in particular, drew on and ultimately reformulated Jhally's framework into the 'media sports cultural complex' highlighting the primacy of cultural symbols in sport and the two-way relationship between the sports media and the larger culture in which it resides. For Rowe (2000), the manner in which the media have reshaped sport fundamentally alters, and ultimately undermines, a critical understanding of sport as a free-standing cultural institution.

"If it is accepted that mass media and sport can no longer be seen as separate socio-cultural entities, it may also be accepted that the media have reshaped sport to the extent that they have inadvertently undermined its economic, social and cultural integrity" (Rowe, 2000, 347).

Rather than simply lamenting the ever-closer relationship between media and sport, however, Rowe (2000) advocated monitoring and regulating the ways

in which increased media control of sport might damage its integrity. He also called for a critical analysis of the ways in which sport mythologies are employed in media coverage through metaphor and as ideology.

These types of analyses have served as departure points for critical research into sports media, including studies focused on sports media content and messages about celebrity athletes (Andrews and Jackson, 2001; Vande Berg, 1998; Andrews, 1996; McDonald, 1996). Most sports media studies have been narrative and text based, however some have also examined audiences and the manner in which they make sense of the sports media texts that they consume (Wilson and Sparks, 1996, 1999). One of the least researched areas is that of sports media *production*, specifically how professional and personal practices of media and marketing practitioners affect the creation of media narratives and texts.

In the area of sports media production, three studies have been seminal for this thesis, and are briefly introduced here. MacNeill (1996), Gruneau (1989), and Sparks (1992), have argued for an empirical understanding of the social, political, economic, and regulatory factors that shape the creation of sports spectacles and the media coverage of these events.

MacNeill (1996) conducted an ethnography of CTV network coverage of the men's hockey tournament at the 1988 Calgary Olympic Winter Games. Her methodology, similar to the one used in this study, used two kinds of evidence. First, she conducted a systematic analysis of research on Olympic sport, media and corporate sponsors – what she calls the “Olympic-media-advertising nexus”

(p. 105) – and evaluated their interaction and relationship and how these relate to the traditional construction of meanings within Olympic sports media coverage. Second, she worked behind the scenes at the 1988 Olympics with members of the CTV domestic hockey crew and, through participant observations and interviews with the crew, was able to catalogue a multitude of factors including in-crew and intercrew relations, work routines, decision-making, and struggles and negotiations over production practices and representational codes. Her results raised several key points. She described the manner in which ice hockey was televised as dependent on a process of social interactions among the CTV production crew and suggested that the CTV staff employed historical perceptions and understandings of hockey and its cultural relevance that helped to shape their coverage and televised storylines. MacNeill argued that CTV's hockey coverage was part of a larger process in which one particular group of Canadians remade their culture and positioned it as the dominant culture, and similarly, in which cultural significance was accorded to certain dominant discourses during the production process. Most notably, MacNeill (p. 104) identified “national heroes, competitive individualism in team sports, notions of rugged athletic masculinity, myths of nationhood, and the consumer hegemony of North American society” as prevalent in CTV's coverage. MacNeill employed Jhally's notion of the spectacle of accumulation to argue that these meanings were incorporated into the televised production of the Olympic hockey tournament to aid CTV's efforts in building a traditionally male audience that they could sell to sponsors. She also introduced the culturally legitimating function of

sporting spectacles in terms of reproducing established meanings and cultural forms particularly as a by-product of choices made by broadcasters. In this way, CTV's hockey coverage both reproduced historical understandings of Canadian hockey and reflected these meanings in their broadcasts.

Gruneau (1989) conducted a similarly groundbreaking study of sport media production in his examination of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation's (CBC) television coverage of a World Cup downhill skiing event in Whistler, BC. He too performed a preliminary analysis of the political economy of the Canadian sports/media complex and combined these results with ethnographic research into the creation of a commercially attractive skiing spectacle. Gruneau found that while some messages in the CBC's coverage had an "open-ended character," some accounts of the event were accorded more significance than others. This was considered to be the result of the routine acceptance among CBC staff of the "...making of good television" and not the result of political maneuvering as some had suggested previously (p.152).

Gruneau examined the elective affinity – 'the way in which particular beliefs and material interests seek each other out' (p. 143) – that developed between athletes, event organizers, sponsors, and the television production staff. He found that the various groups involved in the production of the event held a common sense of purpose and that choices made by members of the production team reflected the affinity that they shared with other stakeholders. Gruneau argued that the elective affinity among these stakeholders and the defining characteristics of "good television" resulted in coverage that supported an

understanding of contemporary sport as open and meritocratic, and as designed to further the careers of individuals and create investment. According to Gruneau, these types of television sports programs play an indirect role in normalizing a dominant social definition of sport that is consistent with that of a capitalist consumer culture.

Gruneau added that the polysemic nature of media images, where audiences interpret the texts that they consume, means that television producers work diligently and deliberately to “position viewers in particular ways and gain credibility for their (the producers’) own viewpoints” (p.152). In this way, Gruneau’s and MacNeill’s findings both support the argument that the mediated sports spectacle aides in capital accumulation and cultural legitimation.

Sparks (1992) investigated the political economy of commercial television production by examining the role of the state and the role of market conditions in the creation of The Sports Network (TSN), a Canadian cable sports network licensed in the early 1980’s. Similar to MacNeill and Gruneau, Sparks explored the context of the production process, in this case focusing on the regulatory function of the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC), and then used this context to discuss the implications of TSN’s overtly masculine marketing formula. He also examined TSN’s initial business plan and examined the manner in which TSN maneuvered through the political, economic, and regulatory boundaries in establishing their network.

Sparks’ study has important implications for a case study of Simon Whitfield. Particularly relevant is the concept of the audience commodity, a term



that describes how the television industry stratifies audiences based on their viewing choices and social and psychological characteristics, then assigns them monetary values and sells these audience groups to sponsors and advertisers in commodity form.

Sparks argued that TSN's commitment to (re)producing a traditionally gendered, predominantly male audience commodity stemmed from uncertainty as to how to create a successful new sports network, and that in the face of uncertainty, TSN resorted to a proven market formula. Thus, the network's audience commodity necessarily resulted in production practices that aided in the continued reproduction of this commodity.

Beyond these three key studies, there is also an abundance of textual analysis research that expands current understandings of the way that spectacles of legitimation and accumulation are presented in sport media. For example, in Messner, Dunbar, & Hunt's (2000) textual analysis of televised sports events most often watched by boys, ten recurrent and dominant themes concerning gender, race, aggression, violence, militarism, and commercialism were identified. Through the analysis of these themes, Messner et al. developed the Televised Sports Manhood Formula, a group of dominant masculine meanings that aid in aligning the social and consumer habits of boys and young men with the interests of the commercial sports media. Messner et al. described the Televised Sports Manhood Formula as:

"[a] master ideological narrative that is well suited to discipline boys' bodies, minds, and consumption choices in ways that construct a masculinity that is consistent with the entrenched interests of the sports/media/commercial complex" (Messner et al., 2000, p. 380).

Messner et al. suggested that the Televised Sports Manhood Formula serves to create portrayals of gender norms that are commercially viable as well as to influence consumption patterns among young male audiences. The Televised Sports Manhood Formula is consistent with the spectacle frameworks in that it encompasses the dual roles of accumulation – packaging audiences of young males that can be sold to advertisers interested in such target markets – and of legitimation – the normalization of masculine values and behaviours.

Messner et al. also made an important link between the construction and positioning of sports media, in this case televisual media, with dominant cultural norms. This link is relevant to the Whitfield case in that it helps to combine a critical analysis of sports media production with an understanding of the manner in which these constructions potentially influence consumer culture and consumption choices.

Similar studies have used Michael Jordan as a case example for critical analysis of sports media coverage as well as sport marketing and celebrity advertising. Andrews (1996) analyzed portrayals of Jordan in both the popular press and marketing and advertising, focusing on representations of race in order to identify and interpret dominant racial discourses in the complex social and political climate of the United States in the mid 1990's. Andrews argued that Jordan's image was constructed and manipulated in an attempt to transcend racial stereotypes and appeal to a broader audience. In this sense, Jordan was presented as a non-stereotypical black man, which according to Andrews, also made Jordan a non-threatening black whose "racial transcendence" fit within the

dominant (White) ideology of American culture. Andrews suggested that the creation and celebration of Jordan's mediated persona as an example of popular culture is characterized by ideologies of race that "...are publicized and authorized in support of the multiple inclusions and exclusions that delineate the post-Reaganite American imaginary" (p.125).

Similar to Andrews (1996), McDonald (1996) suggested that Jordan's image within a variety of celebrity endorsements was carefully positioned to make him as de-politicized as possible and consistent with the renewed focus on the nuclear family, traditional American family values and Conservative politics in the United States. In her analysis, McDonald deconstructed a series of advertisements featuring Jordan, in particular an advertisement for Hanes underwear, where Jordan is presented as a devoted, sensitive father figure, in contrast to typically hypersexualized images of White celebrities in underwear ads. This construction, McDonald argued, emphasized the notion of Jordan's body as 'safely erotic' (p. 355) in order to downplay fears of black sexuality. Similar meanings are included in a Jordan endorsement of Ball Park Franks which, according to McDonald, can be read as further emphasis on the traditional family and backlash against the progress of women and other political minorities. An important implication of McDonald's analysis is the continued relationship between accumulation (the profitability of Jordan's endorsements) and legitimation (the reinforcement of conservative and potentially hegemonic ideologies of race and family disseminated through popular media and advertising).

Kellner (1996) argued that Michael Jordan's success as a celebrity product endorser represents an intertextual relationship between media production, the construction of sport spectacles and spectacular personalities, and their promotion and marketing through the process of advertising. Kellner suggested that:

“...Michael Jordan represents a highly successful marketing phenomenon and calls attention to the construction of the media spectacle by corporations, public relations, and the techniques of advertising. Just as Jordan marketed Nike, Wheaties, and other products, so did these corporations help produce the Jordan image and spectacle” (1996, p. 461).

In this sense, the creation of Jordan's image and associated cultural meanings through media production and coverage was incorporated and perpetuated by his role in marketing and endorsing consumer products, a series of activities that all took place within the same promotional chain.

Finally, several recent studies have examined gender in sports media texts and explored the resulting social implications of various gender representations. For example, Goodman, Duke, and Sutherland (2002) used a combination of semiological and content analysis to examine the gendered portrayals of male and female athletes in U.S. advertising aired during the Sydney Olympics. Grounded in a Jungian understanding of archetypal heroism, their study found that both male and female athletes were portrayed in a variety of advertisements as Warriors, an extension of the athlete-as-hero construction. At the same time, Goodman et al. found evidence of gender stereotyping, namely that heroic female athletes were sometimes sexualized, whereas males were not and that male hero athletes were celebrated as conquerors who vanquished their

opponents, whereas females were more often portrayed as gracious and graceful victors.

Schell and Rodriguez's (2001) textual analysis of CBS' coverage of the 1996 Paralympics found that media representation of Paralympian Hope Lewellen undermined the possibilities of Lewellen subverting stereotypical understandings of gender and disability by portraying her in ableist ways. Wright and Clarke's (1999) analysis of media production of Australian Women's Rugby Union suggested that overt and tacit discourses in media production tended to reinforce heterosexual beliefs about femininity and sport and contribute to the invisibility of sporting experiences of lesbians. Finally, Kennedy's (2001) textual analysis of televised coverage of women's tennis concluded that the gendered nature of female sports coverage resulted in physically active femininity being characterized by perpetual adolescence, as an activity to be relinquished in womanhood, and subject to dominant ideals of heterosexuality. When combined with an understanding of the media's influence in identity construction (Grossberg et al., 1998) and the construction of dominant ideology (Lull, 1995), these studies are seen to account for some of the various ways in which sports media texts reflect or potentially (re)produce hegemonic social relations.

The analysis of Jordan discussed above also draws on a body of literature that examines sports celebrity, its constructions and politics, as a site where the mass media play an important role. The implications of the celebrity culture are widespread. Contemporary notions of celebrity represent the 'twinning discourses of late modernity: neo-liberal democracy and consumer capitalism' (Marshall,

1997, p. 1; c.f.; Andrews & Jackson, 2001). More importantly, through the pervasiveness of the mediated experience, celebrities have real effects on the manner in which people negotiate the experiences of their lives despite the fact that we most likely never truly know them (Andrews & Jackson, 2001). Ultimately, “the celebrity is a person who is known for his (sic) well-knownness” (Boorstin, 1992, p. 57).

With regard to sports celebrities, Vande Berg (1998), Tudor (1997), and Lines (2001) have provided textual analyses of athletic heroes and the ways in which they are framed in the mass media as celebrities. Vande Berg traced the origin of the word hero to the Greek word *heroes* referring to a person duly noted for exceptional courage, outstanding accomplishments, or superior qualities. In this sense, the hero is an archetype, and heroes across cultures share common traits and characteristics (Campbell, 1968). At the same time, Vande Berg problematized the definition and distinction of heroism by suggesting that the qualities of a hero or heroic actions are not consistent, and that contemporary heroes perform acts of much less significance than traditional or mythological ones. To define contemporary heroism, Vande Berg, citing Boorstin (1978), classified the hero as a human being who has shown greatness in an achievement that has stood the test of time.

In response to the ambiguities of contemporary heroism, Vande Berg emphasized the role of celebration and media coverage as crucial in constructing a hero and then separated sporting heroes into five categories: the traditional, the modern, the antihero, the hero as commodity, and the postmodern. In her

analysis of each category, represented by a different celebrity athlete, she acknowledged the role of the media in representing, and reinforcing, dominant cultural themes. Vande Berg concluded that "...the mass media serve as the primary vehicles through which we learn of the extraordinary accomplishments, courage, and deeds of cultural heroes and the faults and ignominious deeds of villains and fools" (p. 152).

Tudor (1997) differentiated athletes as heroes, stars, and/or celebrities, three overlapping yet distinct categories that are useful for analyzing the manner in which the mass media attaches images and values to athletes. Tudor's athlete as hero is understood through archetypal notions of heroism, often grounded in mythology, and characterized by the hero's fabulous victory which is shared with others. The athlete as star is characterized by the combination of an outstanding athletic performance and accompanying media attention. The athlete as celebrity comes with the negative connotation of lacking actual athletic achievement and relying almost exclusively on the media for his/her celebrity image. Through this framework, Tudor examined the dominant cultural discourses of three athletes, Ryne Sandberg, Jim McMahon, and Michael Jordan, treating them each as media texts. Her analysis suggested that the mediated images of all three athletes were based, in part, on hegemonic discourses of race, gender, and social class. Clearly, this analysis has implications for the legitimating role of sports media production.

Lines (2001) analyzed the celebrity athlete phenomenon as it relates to youth and critically examined how media coverage is implicated in the positioning

of sports heroes as contemporary role models. She argued that the media coverage focus on scandals and sensationalism creates tension about the characteristics of the ideal sports hero. She also suggested that representations of heroic athletes are often gendered, wherein celebrity male athletes are more often presented as worthy models for youth. Lines (2001) also pointed out that the polysemic nature of sports media texts means that the manner in which the media and the public produce and understand sports celebrities and heroes does not necessarily reflect the interpretations of sports fans.

There have also been studies that focused on Canadian celebrity athletes. Jackson (1994, 1998, 2001) examined the ways in which media coverage of Canadian athletic heroes has been influenced by, and contributed to, a crisis of Canadian national identity. Jackson's (1994) research into the media discourses surrounding the trading of hockey star Wayne Gretzky to the Los Angeles Kings focused on the media's role in highlighting political, economic, and cultural factors that fit the discourse of crisis. His analysis (1998) of discredited Canadian Olympic sprinter Ben Johnson examined how Johnson's racial identity was repositioned within the media after he tested positive for a banned substance. By changing Johnson from a Canadian to a Jamaican-Canadian, Jackson argued that the mass media contributed to a crisis of Canadian national identity and attempted to distance Johnson as a national symbol of sporting excellence.

Wong and Trumper (2002) built on Jackson's work by comparing and contrasting Gretzky and Chilean futbol star Ivan Zamorano, an analysis that they situated within contemporary notions of globalization, transnationality, and



deterritorialization. They argued that the representations of Gretzky and Zamorano as national symbols in Canada and Chile respectively, are 'ambiguous, paradoxical, and contradictory' (p. 168) given that these two celebrity athletes possess transnational citizenships enabled by the conditions of increasingly globalized economics.

### **2.3 Celebrity Endorsement and Consumer Engineering**

The use of celebrity product endorsers as a means of supporting brand imagery is a common practice in contemporary marketing and corporate communications (Erdogan, 1999). Research has examined the theoretical and practical aspects of the celebrity endorsement process and a variety of theories and models have been proposed to help account for the effects of celebrity endorsers. McCracken's (1989) 'meaning transfer model' is one of these. McCracken posits that the celebrity comes to the endorsement process with an already (at least partially) developed identity and framework of cultural meanings. McCracken defines the celebrity endorser as "...any individual who enjoys public recognition and who uses this recognition on behalf of a consumer good by appearing with it in an advertisement" (P.310).

McCracken intended his model to overcome shortcomings he had found in two prominent prior models of the celebrity endorsement process. These two models are the source credibility model and the source attractiveness model. The source credibility model (Hovland & Weiss, 1951, Hovland, Janis & Kelley, 1953) has its roots in social psychology and holds that a message's effectiveness is reliant on perceptions of expertise and trust in the source. Expertise is the ability

of the source (celebrity endorser) to make valid claims and trustworthiness is the willingness, or likelihood, of the source to make claims that are true. The second model is McGuire's (1985) source attractiveness model that posits that the effectiveness of a message is dependent on familiarity, likability, and/or similarity of the product endorser. Familiarity is knowledge of the source, likability is affection for the source, and similarity is a perceived resemblance between the source of the message and its receiver. While acknowledging the fact that both of these models have been confirmed empirically, McCracken argued that the models are insufficient in explaining or accounting for the complexity of the celebrity endorsement process.

For example, in the source models, as long as the criteria for credibility and attractiveness are met, any celebrity should be effective in endorsing any product. According to McCracken, these models place too much emphasis on the celebrity and do not account for endorsements that fail as a result of a 'mismatch' between product and endorser. They emphasize conditions under which consumers might identify with an endorser, but cannot account for the reasons why, which suggests that the models are incomplete. Ultimately, McCracken argued, "the source models tell us about *degrees* of attractiveness and credibility when what we need to know about is *kinds* of attractiveness and credibility" (p.312).

Other models have also been developed in the celebrity endorsement literature. According to the match-up hypothesis (Kamins, 1990, Kahle & Homer, 1985), an endorsement is more effective when there is a 'fit' between the

endorser and the product (Till & Busler, 2000). This approach is based on social adaptation theory and suggests that, for example, an attractive celebrity may serve as an effective endorser for a product that is attractiveness related (Brooks & Harris, 1998). The match-up hypothesis has also been examined from the perspective of attribution theory, suggesting that consumers infer the causes of behaviour of the celebrity endorser (Folkes, 1988; c.f. Brooks & Harris, 1998). Thus, in the case of a successful athlete endorsing athletic equipment, for example, consumers may infer that the endorser would only choose to endorse equipment that would cause him/her to perform at a high level. Overall, however, further empirical support for the theory of endorser/product match-up is required (Till & Busler, 2000).

Of all of these theoretical contributions, the one with the most to offer to the study of athletes like Simon Whitfield is McCracken's (1989) meaning transfer model, based on a "conventional path" of movement of cultural meaning. According to McCracken (1989, p. 313) "meaning begins as something resident in the culturally constituted world," influenced by the prevailing culture, then follows a path of transfer to consumer goods and in turn to the life of the consumer. It is through this meaning transfer process that consumers acquire goods that not only serve their needs, but also provide the "bundles of meaning" with which to build a cultural and social identity (McCracken, 1989, p. 314).

From this understanding of cultural meaning movement, McCracken developed a model that applies specifically to the endorsement process. According to this model, meanings are attached to the celebrity through previous

events and performances, and it these meanings that the celebrity brings to the endorsement process. These meanings are then transferred to the product through an (effective) endorsement, and subsequently claimed or acquired by the consumer in the development of social identity.

#### Meaning Transfer – Consumer engineering and brand equity

To understand and apply McCracken's model – based on meaning transfer through culture – requires an understanding of the ways that meaning is constituted *within* culture. Thus, an understanding of the celebrity endorser relates to the influence of style and image. Within the advertising and marketing industries, the notion of self-expressive style and its influence on consumer purchasing is accepted and implemented into marketing practices (Brooks & Harris, 1998). Marketing activities are designed to package and sell cultural “images and illusions” by moving them from the celebrity (athlete) endorser to the product so that the images desired by the consumer can be claimed through purchasing (Brooks & Harris, 1998, p. 37). This process of consumer engineering (Sheldon & Arens, 1932) has been practiced throughout the history of modern marketing (Ewen, 1988) but is best exemplified in the consumer culture by Holmes' (1863) landmark concept of the separation of form and function. With its roots in architecture, this conception of structural meaning suggests that products, like buildings, can be designed and produced not only to serve a practical purpose but also to create and distribute meanings to individuals or consumers. In a consumer culture, products are vehicles of cultural meanings.

In addition to consumer engineering, an important concept for this discussion is that of brand equity. Brand equity, a combination of brand awareness and brand image, is the value that the consumer inherently attributes to a consumer brand (Keller, 1993, Brooks & Harris, 1998). Brand equity is based on meanings and images interpreted and retained in memory by the consumer. The implications for the process of celebrity product endorsement and meaning movement are profound. By successfully positioning the athlete in an effective endorsement, meanings associated with the celebrity transfer to the product or brand. These meanings can be claimed by consumers purchasing the product, and this contributes to customer-based brand equity for the endorsed brand. This process is partly a matter of image transfer. The consumer builds an awareness and image of the brand that incorporates the meanings transferred through the endorsement, and these meanings in turn transfer to the consumer through the purchase and use of the product. McCracken's model is not only effective in conceptualizing a successful endorsement in terms of increasing product sales, but also in terms of building brand equity over time.

#### **2.4 Whitfield: The next step**

This study is designed to contribute to understandings of a) sports media production and sports marketing as social, political and economic processes and b) the cultural meanings that underlie and are incorporated into these processes. Informed by the notion of spectacle, this research focuses on the choices made by reporters in covering sporting events, the meanings that journalists incorporate into their coverage, and subsequently, the ways in which marketers

use these meanings in branding and promoting products. Little research has examined the process by which athletic events are covered and reported *and* the ways in which this coverage is used in marketing. In exploring these two realms simultaneously, this study traces cultural codes of sport through a process of selection, promotion, and incorporation. It is important to note that while studies that inform this research have examined the *production* of the sporting spectacle, often through the medium of television (MacNeill, 1996, Gruneau, 1989), this research explores how media organizations, primarily print, continue the process of creating a sustained spectacle through interpretation and *coverage* of sporting events and personalities.

As demonstrated, research on media production has often examined sporting events and not individual athletes. Media and marketing practices and social meanings of achievement, nationalism, and commercialism are potentially unique in the construction of single athletes versus entire events. Studies that have focused on individual athletes have mostly examined professional athletes, such as Michael Jordan and Wayne Gretzky, and the manner in which they are portrayed in mass media (McDonald, 1996, Kellner 1996, Andrews, 1996, Jackson, 1994, 1998, 2001). This work has tended to concentrate on the athletes' public profile, their commercialization through marketing and endorsements, and the social and cultural implications of these conditions in terms of the media's portrayal of their race, gender, and social class. However, Olympic athletes such as Whitfield, still considered amateur in sports like triathlon because of the lack of a professional league or circuit in which to

compete, have not been examined in terms of media production<sup>1</sup>. Thus, the unique values attached to the Olympic Games and the ideals of amateur competition have not been critically examined in the context of sports media production. This study provides an opportunity to learn more about the ways in which Olympic athletes are portrayed in commercial mass media and the potential implications of media production practices for sports culture and the broader Canadian culture as well.

The majority of prior research in this area has been text-based with authors interpreting the meaning and impacts of media portrayals of particular athletes or coverage of events. This methodology overlooks the key role played by journalists, editors, broadcasters, producers, marketers and agents in determining the newsworthiness of elements of sporting spectacles, as Gruneau (1989) explains:

“...this ‘textual’ perspective has tended to downplay analysis of the political and economic limits and pressures that operate as context for television sports production, and it has all but ignored the analysis of the actual technical and professional practices – the labor process – involved in producing sports for television. In the absence of detailed case studies in these areas, assessments of relationships between television sports ‘texts’ and their ‘contexts’ of production have been speculative at best” (p.135).

To gain a better understanding of the social and commercial values underlying media coverage of Canadian Olympic athletes, it is necessary to engage those whose values, decisions, and practices are most influential: media and marketing practitioners. In the following methods section, I describe how interviews with

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<sup>1</sup> Jackson’s (1998) examination of the media production of Canadian Olympic sprinter Ben Johnson is one of the few studies to examine Canadian Olympic athletes. However, this work focuses primarily on issues of racial representation and less on the issues relevant to this proposal: nationalism, elitism, and commercialism.

journalists and marketers were utilized as a means of addressing some of these shortcomings.

Finally, nearly 15 years after the key studies in this area were done (MacNeill's research took place during the 1988 Calgary Olympic Games, Gruneau's took place at a World Cup downhill ski race in 1986, Sparks' interviews were conducted at TSN in 1988), it is unclear to what extent similar processes are still at work in Canadian sports media production and how these practices are similar or different in the case of a single athlete like Whitfield. This prior research made an important contribution to understanding sports media production and the social process of creating sports spectacle through mass media, but new research is needed.



## **Chapter III - Methodology**

This chapter summarizes the research methods used in this study. The research had two components: 1) an analysis of the media coverage of Simon Whitfield and 2) interviews with journalists and marketers. This combination of research methods was used previously in the study of Canadian sports media production by MacNeill (1996) and Gruneau (1989). The textual analysis, comprised of an interpretive reading of news articles about Whitfield and a keyword search of the Canadian NewsDisc database, was designed as a preliminary step to the interviews, in order to identify the manner in which the Canadian press covered Whitfield's gold-medal performance. The primary focus of the research was the interview component, intended to build on the textual data by providing insight into the personal, professional and ideological factors that influenced the final media and marketing coverage of Whitfield. For both steps in the research process, a description and rationale is provided and strengths and weaknesses are discussed.

### **3.1 Textual Analysis of Media coverage of Simon Whitfield**

The goal of the textual analysis was to identify and document thematic consistencies that emerged in the Whitfield coverage. Attaining this goal required a compatible combination of qualitative and quantitative strategies. I chose a methodology informed by both semiology (for the interpretive reading) and content analysis (for the keyword search). This combination of research strategies has been used in the critical study of advertisements (Leiss, Kline, &

Jhally, 1986, Goodman, Duke, and Sutherland 2002), in order to conduct research that is rigorous and systematic as well as sensitive to multiple meanings.

Semiology (or semiotics) developed from linguistics as a means of understanding and analyzing the processes through which cultural meanings are constructed (Leiss et al., 1986). Essentially, any meaningful object, event, or practice can be studied using a semiological approach (Leiss et al., 1986). The essential unit of meaning construction in semiology is signs, and semiology may be understood as the “science of signs,” wherein researchers examine how arrangements of signifiers come to specify particular meanings to particular groups of people. Context and interaction of signifiers are important in the semiological approach where:

“...relationships among the parts of a message or communication system [are critical, for] it is only through the interaction of component parts that meaning is formed.” (Leiss et al., 1986, p. 150)

When conducting semiological analyses, a sign may be thought of as a combination of two component parts: “the signifier” (the vehicle of the meaning) and “the signified” (the meaning itself) (Leiss et al., 1986).

A semiological approach is useful in this research as a means of interpreting and analyzing the cultural meanings that are signified in the media coverage of Whitfield. However, there are several weaknesses to the semiological approach that should be considered. First, semiology relies almost exclusively on the skills of the interpreter. In this way, a less skilled or experienced analyst may produce results that are superficial, inconsistent, or unreliable. Second, because a semiological analysis can only be applied to

specific texts and instances in which they have been examined, it does not lend itself to results that are generalizable to the larger population. Therefore, according to Leiss et al. (1986, p.165), "What insights may be extracted from (semiology) must remain impressionistic." Third, semiology is often plagued by unequal access to all texts within a large sample or to different types of texts. For example, a semiologist may choose texts that support previously constructed arguments, as opposed to exploring a random sample (Leiss et al., 1986). To account for these weaknesses in semiology, this thesis research also employed a keyword search informed by the method of content analysis.

Content analysis is designed to break down a group of texts into fields of representation and then interpret the results (Leiss et al., 1986). Thus, while semiology is concerned with the interpretations of signs and meanings, content analysis seeks to reliably describe texts by restricting the unit of measurement to surface content. The main strength of content analysis is its ability to objectively detect patterns of similarity and difference across a sample group (Leiss et al., 1986). However, content analysis has weaknesses as well. The primary criticism of content analysis is that it fails to accurately analyze the meanings of texts, concentrating instead on isolated issues of occurrence or repeatability (Leiss et al., 1986). Content analysis says little, if anything, about the signification of a text, nor can it make any reasonable inference about the manner in which audiences might interpret the meanings imbedded therein.

Given the strengths and weaknesses of semiology and content analysis, combining the two is a reasonable way to employ the strengths of both in order to

“...be rigorous and systematic while also being sensitive to the multiple levels of meaning and the multiple codes that [texts] employ (Leiss, et al., 1986, p. 175).”

The textual analysis used in this study drew on both techniques but modified them in order to create a method of data collection and analysis that fit the research goal, namely establishing context from which to develop an interview protocol and conduct interviews with journalists and marketers. With this understanding, I designed an interpretive content analysis that combined a reading and a keyword search.

### Textual Reading

The first step in the textual analysis was an interpretive reading of Canadian media coverage of Whitfield. The reading served two specific purposes: 1) to identify any thematic consistencies in the media coverage of Whitfield and 2) to interpret, and where appropriate, deconstruct, the social and cultural meanings imbedded in this coverage. The reading was conducted by scanning newspaper articles published in ten major Canadian daily newspapers, (Calgary Herald, Edmonton Journal, Edmonton Sun, Montreal Gazette, National Post, Ottawa Citizen, Vancouver Province, Vancouver Sun, Victoria Times-Colonist, Winnipeg Sun) each of which covered the Sydney Olympics and Whitfield's gold medal victory. The reading included materials published between September 1<sup>st</sup> and November 30<sup>th</sup>, 2000, which covered the Sydney Olympics, held September 16<sup>th</sup> to October 1<sup>st</sup>, 2000.

Scanning the articles, and interpreting the meanings ascribed to Whitfield through press coverage, allowed for similar types of coverage to be grouped

together according to how the journalists constructed the "Whitfield story." This process enabled me to identify major themes that emerged in his coverage and to identify how these themes were constructed semiologically. To supplement the initial reading, I performed three subsequent scans using the Canadian NewsDisc database and the microfiche stores of Canadian newspapers in the University of British Columbia library. This was meant to provide depth to the analysis and further specify the most prevalent themes.

In the tradition of responsible textual analyses, the analysis in this study was envisioned as a means of establishing a critical lens through which to examine the Whitfield case as well as to develop a basis from which to discuss Whitfield with media and marketing practitioners. When conducted in a sensitive manner, textual and production-based research is relevant and justified in that it sheds light on issues of cultural and social representations and provides a basis from which to draw inferences of interpretation:

"Responsible textual studies do not assert with absolute certainty how particular texts are interpreted. But they do suggest the kinds of interpretations that may take place, based on the available evidence, and likely interpretations of a particular text. Ultimately these interpretations must be judged on the basis of the persuasiveness and logic of the researcher's discussion" (Duncan 1990, p. 27).

### Keyword Search

The initial reading was not designed to objectively analyze the number of articles that comprised each theme but rather to focus on the meanings that were produced. Recognizing the need to support my interpretive analysis with more rigorous, standardized, and self-reflexive accounts (Leiss et al., 1986), I also conducted a structured keyword search using the Canadian NewsDisc Database

and Olympic coverage from CBC television in order to document the distribution of themes within the Whitfield coverage. The keyword search was intended to analyze how the thematic consistencies identified in the reading were distributed among a large sample of articles.

The search documented the prevalence of keywords that represented themes identified in the interpretive analysis while also remaining open to emergent themes. To maintain a manageable sample size, searches were limited to five newspapers (Edmonton Journal, National Post, Vancouver Province, Vancouver Sun, Victoria Times-Colonist) that represented national, local, and regional papers (as determined by circulation rates) and also represented distinct geographic areas of Canada, including Whitfield's hometown of Victoria. These newspapers were also selected because they employed the journalists targeted for interviews in Phase 2. The keyword search was limited to stories published by the five newspapers between September 1<sup>st</sup> and October 1<sup>st</sup>, 2000, a time period that covered the two weeks before, and the two weeks during the Sydney Olympics. I decided it was unnecessary to include the two weeks of coverage after the Olympics because the men's triathlon took place on Day Two of the Olympic Games which meant that the majority of the coverage that Whitfield received was covered in the sample frame. CBC television coverage of September 16, 2000, the day of Whitfield's victory in the Olympic men's triathlon, was also recorded and analyzed for content that directly related to Whitfield. This encompassed 12.5 hours of televised coverage, and included a preview of the

men's triathlon, a biography of Whitfield and the race itself. It represented most of the focused coverage afforded Whitfield by CBC.

This research was facilitated by having access to the CBC television coverage of the 2000 Sydney Olympics (recorded in the Leisure and Sport Management audio/video lab at the University of British Columbia between September 16<sup>th</sup> and October 1<sup>st</sup>, 2000), the Canadian NewsDisc database through the University of British Columbia library website, and Canadian newspaper microfiche archives in the University of British Columbia library.

### **3.2 Interviews with Media and Marketing Practitioners**

The primary method used in this part of the thesis research was semi-structured interviewing with media and marketing practitioners. The interviews were designed to build on the textual analysis by providing insight into the processes that directly influenced the media coverage and marketing of Simon Whitfield. Interview methodology fits within the phenomenological approach to social research, which focuses on understanding social interactions from the perspective of social actors (Bogdan and Taylor, 1975). Phenomenological research is less focused on facts or causes of social reality, and more on describing social structures from the perspective of the subject (Bogdan and Taylor, 1975). There are several approaches from which the interviewer can approach the interviewee (Hollway and Jefferson, 2000), three of which are discussed here. In the traditional approach, the success of the interview is seen to be primarily a matter of good investigative technique on the part of the interviewer (Hollway and Jefferson, 2000). For example, follow-up questions that

build on previous answers are crucial for extracting as much information from the interviewee as possible. In the narrative approach, the interviewer's role is to be a good listener, and the interviewee is seen as a storyteller (Hollway and Jefferson, 2000). This technique often employs open-ended questions that allow for emergent and in some cases, unexpected results. The clinical case-study approach, most often used in psychoanalysis, requires a large degree of reflexivity with the onus on the interviewer to interpret the results of the interview while accounting for issues of objectivity and bias (Hollway and Jefferson, 2000).

For this study, I designed an interview protocol based on semi-structured interviews that combined elements of the traditional, narrative, and clinical approaches. Using the results of the textual analysis, in particular the thematic consistencies in the meanings ascribed to Whitfield's gold medal victory, I developed a protocol to use as a template for conducting interviews (see Appendix 1). The interview protocol was designed so that key themes and topics were addressed in the questions asked of all interviewees. At the same time, all questions were open-ended to allow interviewees' responses to influence the direction of the protocol. Follow-up and probing questions were used whenever appropriate. Notions of reflexivity from the clinical approach were also employed to promote objectivity and minimize bias wherever possible. For example, questions were designed to be of neutral tone and every attempt was made to avoid any leading questions. No proprietary information was requested. Ultimately, the interview protocol focused on the media and marketing



construction of Simon Whitfield, but also remained open to important and revealing points introduced by interview subjects.

In addition to issues of objectivity and interviewer biases, interview methodology can be compromised by the difficulty in establishing an interviewer-interviewee relationship and knowing whether or not subjects' responses are truthful (Bogdan and Taylor, 1975). In this case questions that related to business strategies had the potential to threaten the interview relationship or result in misleading or untruthful responses. Therefore, in addition to not requesting any proprietary information, all interview participants retained the right to refuse to answer any questions at their discretion.

#### Interview Sample

Prior to recruiting interview participants, I applied to the Office of Research Services at the University of British Columbia for Behavioural Ethics approval. Approval was granted on February 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2002 (See Appendix 2).

The process of identifying potential interviewees for this project began on February 17<sup>th</sup>, 2002 through email correspondence with a representative of International Management Group (IMG), the firm that represents Simon Whitfield. Through this initial correspondence, a list of five companies with marketing-based relationships with Whitfield was obtained. In April, 2002 a list of journalists who had covered Whitfield was compiled from the bylines of the articles used in the textual analysis. Formal interview recruitment began on May 2, 2002. Fourteen packages were mailed, including a letter of recruitment and an informed consent form, to ten journalists and four sponsoring/marketing companies.

Telephone calls and e-mail messages were used as follow-ups to complete the recruitment process and determine journalists' willingness to participate. In the case of marketers, the follow-up correspondence was also used to identify the manager with direct knowledge of and experience with the Whitfield account. Five journalists and four marketing/sales representatives agreed to interviews for the research project. The other five journalists who were contacted did either not feel qualified to speak knowledgeably about the Whitfield case (one), were not available during the study's timeframe (two), or did not respond to repeated recruitment correspondence (two). A recruitment package was also sent to Simon Whitfield's coach on September 5<sup>th</sup>, 2002, and contact information for Whitfield was obtained through subsequent correspondence. Whitfield himself was recruited for an interview via telephone on September 12<sup>th</sup>, 2002 and Whitfield agreed to a telephone interview.

I conducted all interviews personally. Given the researcher's geographic location (Vancouver) and the various locations across Canada of sports reporters and marketers involved with Simon Whitfield, face-to-face interviews were not always feasible. In these four cases, telephone interviews were substituted.

## Chapter IV - Results

This chapter is organized into two parts, the textual analysis, including the reading and the keyword search, and the interviews with journalists and marketers. In each part, I explore recurring themes .

### 4.1 Textual Analysis

#### Reading the Texts

The reading component of the study was conducted between November 15<sup>th</sup> and December 17<sup>th</sup>, 2001. Sixty articles from ten major Canadian newspapers (Calgary Herald, Edmonton Journal, Edmonton Sun, Montreal Gazette, National Post, Ottawa Citizen, Vancouver Province, Vancouver Sun, Victoria Times-Colonist, Winnipeg Sun) were printed out electronically and then reviewed four times each. Through these readings, I identified three major themes that recurred in the media coverage of Whitfield. First, media coverage of Whitfield tended to focus on his status as an Olympic champion, valued because of his victorious achievement and gold medal victory. Second, Whitfield was referred to in the Canadian press as a national hero valued because of his contribution in constructing a positive Canadian identity. Third, Whitfield was portrayed as a commercial success, valued and celebrated because of his ability to transform his status into sponsorship money and product endorsements.

Table 4.1 illustrates how I operationalized the development of the three themes. Row #1 identifies the theme. Row #2 describes the major characteristics of the theme and the way that the theme aligned with media portrayals of

Whitfield. Row #3 provides a list of descriptors or keywords that represent the theme and were used to describe Whitfield in media coverage. (These keywords were used again in the keyword search.)

**Table 4.1 – Explanation of Themes in Coverage of Simon Whitfield**

<b>1. Themes in the coverage of Simon Whitfield:</b>	<b>#1 <i>Champion</i></b>	<b>#2 <i>Canadian Olympic Hero</i></b>	<b>#3 <i>Commercial Success</i></b>
<b>2. Characterized as:</b>	<p>One who claims a victory through sheer determination and effort.  A victor, despite being an underdog.  A refusal to accept anything but victory.</p>	<p>One who has shown greatness in an achievement that has stood the test of time (Boorstin, 1978; c.f. Vande Berg, 1998)  One who claims a fabulous victory which he shares with his fellow man, based on archetypal notions of heroism, often grounded in mythology (Campbell, 1968; c.f. Tudor, 1997)</p>	<p>One able to parlay athletic success into commercial opportunities, specifically sponsorships and product endorsements.</p>
<b>3. Descriptors of Whitfield or keywords:</b>	Champion, Gold, Gold Medal, Driven, Victory, Win, Underdog, Come from behind	Hero, Nation, Canada, Maple Leaf, Role Model, Inspired	Commercial, Marketing, Sponsor, Endorse

It is important to note that these three themes were not intended to be exhaustive or mutually exclusive. It is reasonable to suggest that other investigators may have derived different themes by reading the same coverage. However, the three themes do provide important and informative context from which to further develop understandings of the media portrayals of Whitfield. I use excerpts from newspaper coverage to provide evidence of the manner in which Simon Whitfield was portrayed in the Canadian media. It is important to note that these excerpts are examples of sports writing, a particular genre within the popular press. These samples possess unique elements of the sports writing style; they are colourful,

theatrical, bombastic and verbose and often employ clichés and even stereotypes. This is important context when describing the manner in which Whitfield's victory was interpreted and reported in the Canadian press. The three themes are examined in more detail below with examples provided from exemplary newspaper articles.

### Champion

From the outset (September 17<sup>th</sup>, 2002) newspaper stories about Whitfield focused on the fact that he had won the gold medal. The fact that Whitfield received significant media attention for winning a gold medal is not surprising since this is the norm for media coverage of Olympic athletes, but his coverage demonstrated a flair and hyperbole that from the start had heroic and nationalistic pretensions.

"Simon Whitfield...had done it the Canadian way, coming from way back, finding a reserve nobody thought was possible, running his way into contention in the grueling men's triathlon event. And when there was a chance to win – not just win a medal but win the gold – Whitfield managed what the other contenders could not. He found a way. First pushing his way into third place, then second, then that mad desperate dash to the finish line." – Steve Simmons, Winnipeg Sun, 09/17/00

The Canadian media praised Whitfield for his personal drive to victory, assuming in its coverage of his achievement that he had been motivated, primarily, by the goal of winning the race.

"If there's one thing Canadians admire about sports figures, it's grit. Silken Laumann won our hearts by courageously rowing to a bronze medal in 1992 despite a grisly injury to her leg just weeks before the big event. This year, Canadian gold medal triathlete Simon Whitfield captured national respect by fighting from the back of the pack to a triumphant finish – driven by a pure hunger for victory." – Liane Faulder, Edmonton Journal, 09/26/00

The focus on Whitfield's victory took other forms within the Canadian media. As well as being valued for his victory, Whitfield was positioned as a

valuable athlete relative to other Canadian Olympians who had failed to medal. For example, in the same article as that cited above, Faulder chastised other members of the Canadian Olympic team, specifically track stars Bruny Surin and Donovan Bailey, for not adequately performing despite an injury and an illness, respectively. A popular discourse thus emerged within the Canadian media that examined how poorly Bailey and Surin had performed, and how particularly disconcerting their performances were relative to the outstanding performance turned in by Whitfield. In this context, Whitfield's win was positioned as a benchmark for Canadian performances in Sydney and allowed for the vilification of other Canadian athletes who did not win medals.

"The Games aren't over but the verdict is in. We are having a very disappointing Olympics. Congratulations to Simon Whitfield on a heroic achievement in the men's triathlon and to the men's basketball team on an amazing showing, but they are clearly the exceptions. The rule is underachievement." – Tom Barrett, Edmonton Journal, 09/26/00

### National hero

The positioning of Whitfield as a victor and standard-bearer for other Canadian Olympians allowed for a smooth transition to a second theme in the construction of his media image. Coverage emphasized Whitfield's value to Canadian culture, identity, and pride and positioned his gold medal as a symbol of Canadian expertise, competence on the international stage, and an enviable amateur sport system able to produce Olympic champions. This adulation of Whitfield took different forms. It was clearly tied to his victory, as seen in the previous section, but it was also linked to his physical attributes and persona. For

example, the following statement appeared in an article in the National Post under the headline “Our Hero Heard the Cry of a Nation”:

“He is a wiry sprite of extraordinary grace. His curls are the very gold of that podium in the sun of Sydney Harbour he kissed, then stepped upon to accept his medal and his flowers, into which he sobbed and pressed his collapsing face as his anthem played, his flag rose, and his oversized heart filled to bursting.” — Christie Blatchford, National Post, 09/18/00

This excerpt demonstrates the rhetoric of nationalistic heroism involved in the coverage of Whitfield, yet the focus was almost non-sport related. While Whitfield was valued for winning the gold medal, the coverage afforded his victory was validated by this particular author because he fit the image of the ‘golden boy,’ suggesting that his sprite-like qualities, gracefulness, and golden curls are the marks of a champion. The article continued by linking his heroic character to his genuine victory:

“He is funny and profound. He is madly extroverted and wickedly self-deprecating, which is to mean complicated. He is intelligent and creative, with such enormous intuition that his quiet, thoughtful father, Geoff, says of him, ‘He responds to things I don’t even hear.’ One of those things the champion heard was the cry of a nation hungry for victory.” — Blatchford (con’t.)

The link seen in this article between Whitfield’s success and his Canadian identity continued in various forms in other articles. The relationship between the athletic success of Olympians like Whitfield and the state of Canadian national identity was a privileged theme in Canadian media. Canadian coverage of the Olympics assumed that Canadian athletes serve as ambassadors of Canada and represent the positive moral values that characterize Canadian social identity. It also assumed that, in the case of sport, this representation is best served by athletes who win.

"Our Canadian sport system, and the Olympics, in particular, symbolize what we believe in our hearts, as a nation. We believe in fair and honest competition, and excellence. One cannot help but be inspired by the gold-medal performances of Canadians Simon Whitfield, Daniel Igali, Daniel Nestor, and Sebastien Lareau. The tears and emotion of Whitfield and Igali, the implacable restraint of Nestor and Lareau, speak to the dichotomy of our country." – John Mills, Calgary Herald, 11/25/00

Thus, an association was established within the media discourses of Whitfield and other gold medal winners between the act of winning and the attributes of an heroic figure. There was also evidence to suggest that Whitfield's accomplishment was perceived as that of a role model for youth and that Whitfield could inspire positive changes in Canadian society and within the Canadian sport delivery system:

"After watching Canada win gold in the triathlon, children are dreaming of being the next Simon Whitfield. And why not? Olympic athletes have to start somewhere, so go ahead and encourage your child to be the next Olympic champion." – Jill Barker, Montreal Gazette, 09/26/00

"A strong, physically fit nation can't exist without hero-like athletes to inspire the rest of us, say athletic specialists. 'Investing in successful positive role-models, like (Gold-winning triathlete) Simon Whitfield, makes a lot of sense,' says Terry McKinty, a program director at the Canadian Association for Health, Physical Education, Recreation, and Dance." – Kelly Cryderman, Ottawa Citizen, 09/21/00

### Commercial success

The first two themes demonstrate how Whitfield's athletic success was positioned with respect to the cultural values of winning and national pride. The third theme is related to these, but demonstrates how the media positioned Whitfield as valuable to commerce and consumer culture as well as to national culture.

Coverage that focused on the commercial outcomes of Whitfield's newfound fame and status emerged two to three weeks after his victory. For



example, several Sports section articles reported on Whitfield's commercial progress and his contracts to endorse consumer products such as Cheerios breakfast cereal.

"Simon Whitfield, who won gold in the first ever Olympic men's triathlon, has signed a sponsorship deal with General Mills, which currently sponsors Olympic gold medallist Daniel Igali. 'General Mills is delighted to have Simon join the Cheerios team,' says Christi Strauss, president of General Mills Canada. As part of the multi-year sponsorship deal, Cheerios will design a commemorative Whitfield cereal box. The Kingston, Ont., native won gold with a time of 1:48:24:02." – Sports section, National Post, 10/03/00

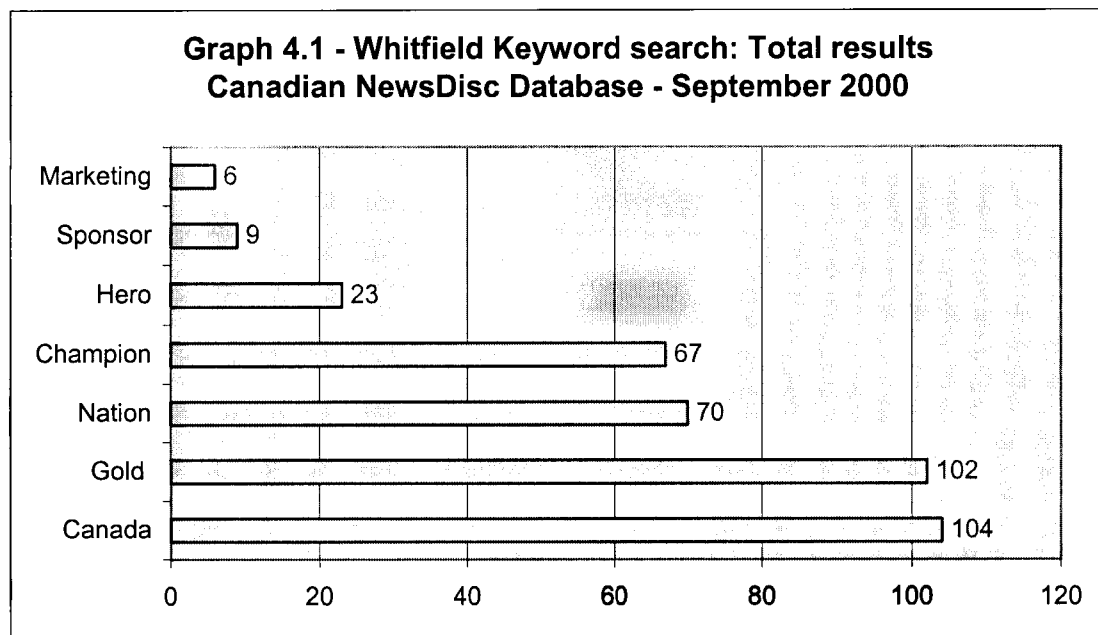
Further, Whitfield's signing a contract with a sports management company was also deemed newsworthy and helped to legitimate his status as a commercial success.

"Whitfield...had some inkling of what's in store because two days before the Games ended, he signed on with Capital Sports Ventures, a sports management company based in Austin, Tex., that also represents American cyclist Lance Armstrong. 'It's fair to say he's in high demand,' said Capital's Bill Stapleton, who said Whitfield's face will appear on the side of a breakfast cereal box next spring. Whitfield was already under contract to Nike." – Donna Spencer, Canadian Press, National Post, 10/02/00

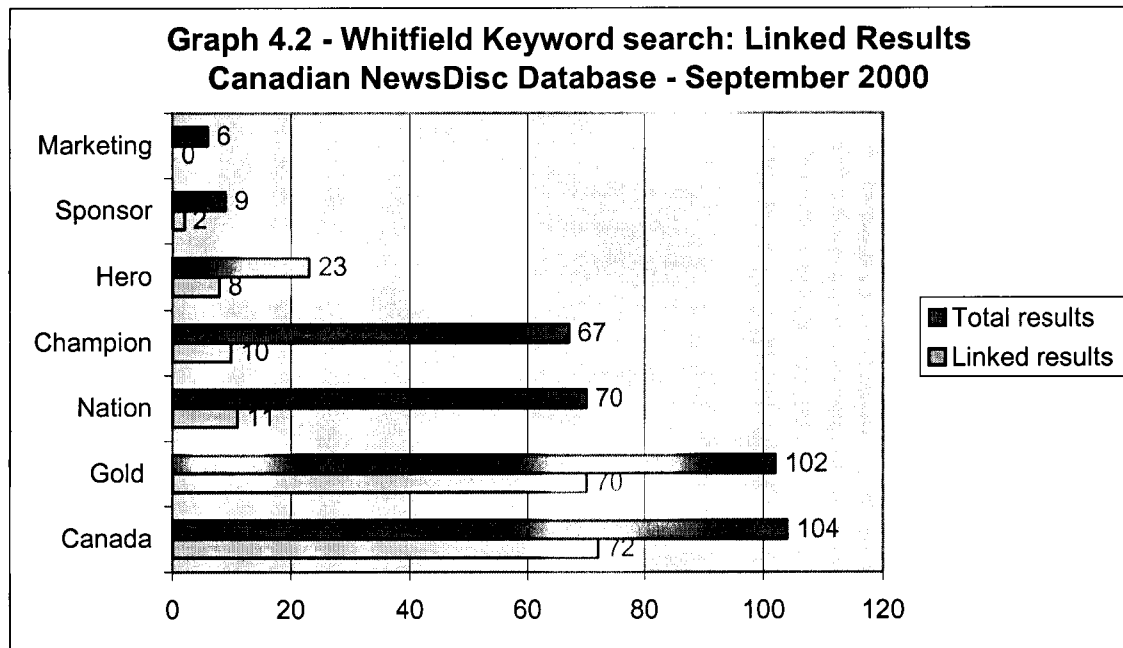
### Keyword Search

The keyword search was conducted between September 15<sup>th</sup> and October 15<sup>th</sup>, 2002 in order to explore the validity of the textual readings by determining the prevalence and distribution of themes within Canadian media coverage of Whitfield. A basic search for the term "Whitfield" in the Canadian NewsDisc database revealed 118 total articles that made reference to him within the five newspapers in the sample (Edmonton Journal, National Post, Vancouver Province, Vancouver Sun, Victoria Times-Colonist) between September 1<sup>st</sup> and October 1<sup>st</sup>, 2000.

Using the NewsDisc database, the term 'Whitfield' was coupled with keywords from the textual reading (See Graph 4.1), and searches were conducted using the resulting term combinations. Each search yielded a count of articles that included both terms ('Whitfield' plus the keyword) at least once each, anywhere within the entire text of the article. These results are outlined in Graph 4.1.

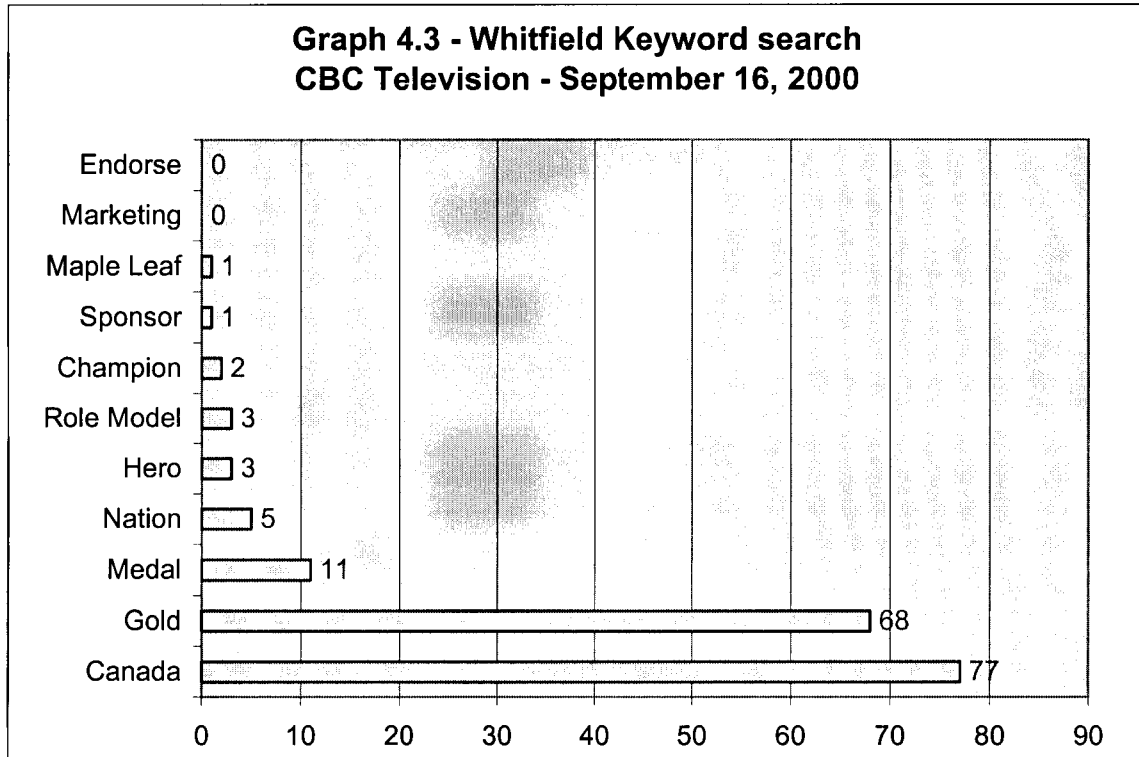


The initial search results were found wanting, however, because there was no way to account for whether or not the two search terms (e.g. 'Whitfield' & 'Champion') were directly linked in the article and the results did not exclude the possibility that the two terms appeared in a non-related fashion. A second search was conducted within each of the initial term combination results and each article was reviewed to identify whether or not there was a direct relationship between 'Whitfield' and the respective keyword. This second analysis resulted in a more accurate list of articles (See Graph 4.2).

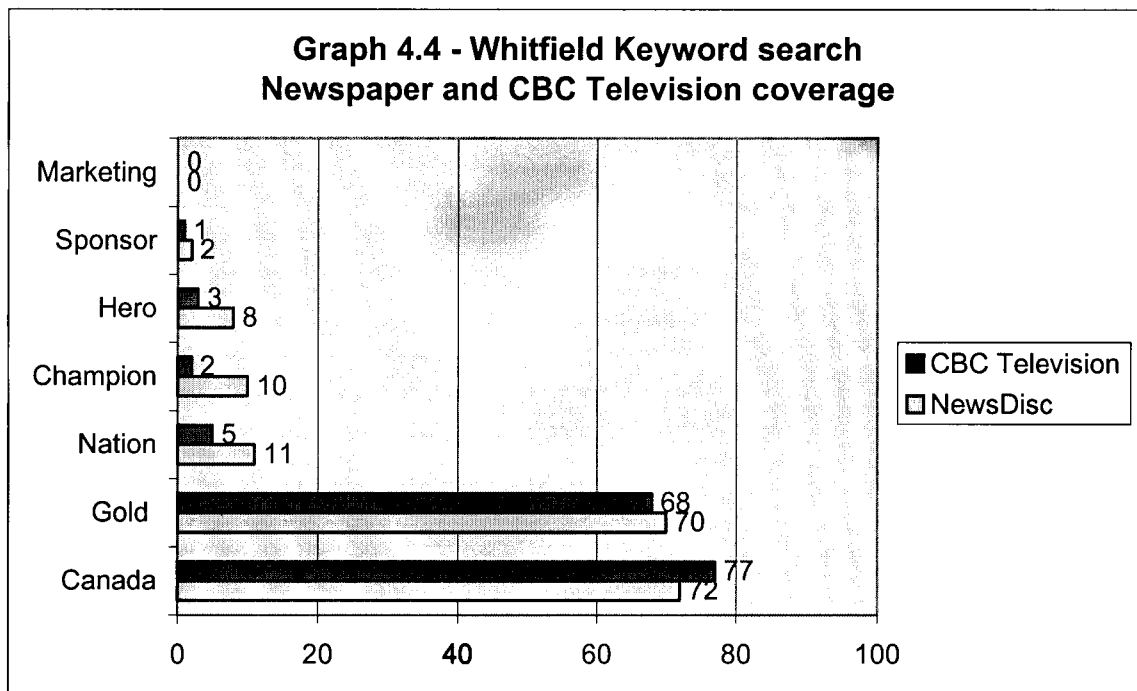


It is important to note, as well, that during the scanning process for linked keyword references within each article, care was taken to recognize any new or emergent themes. If themes did emerge, new keywords representative of the themes were coupled with 'Whitfield' to form a new search term combination and subjected to the process described above.

CBC television coverage of Whitfield from September 17<sup>th</sup>, 2000 (the day of the Olympic men's triathlon) was also analyzed using the same key terms employed in the Canadian NewsDisc database analysis. Within the television coverage, the number of references to each key term was recorded provided it directly related to Whitfield. Emergent themes and representative keywords were also accounted for. A list of references to Whitfield and accompanying keywords was constructed for CBC television coverage, using the same method as for newspaper coverage (See Graph 4.3).



Finally, a comparison of newspaper and television coverage was prepared that listed the number of linked references in both newspaper and television coverage (See Graph 4.4).



The results of the Whitfield keyword search suggest that Whitfield's gold medal and his Canadian identity were the most prevalent descriptors within both Canadian television and newspaper coverage of his Olympic win. The results are significant in that the gold medal and Whitfield's Canadian-ness were used in media coverage exponentially more often than the next most frequent keyword identified in the textual analysis, nation, which itself related to his Canadian identity. The representations of Whitfield took different forms but primarily the gold medal and his Canadian identity became shorthand used to identify Whitfield in media coverage. After his victory in the Olympic triathlon, for example, Whitfield was often referred to as "Canada's gold medallist."

Since the keywords were developed to represent the three themes, the results suggest that proportionally television coverage of Whitfield demonstrated

similar themes as newspaper coverage. In both instances Whitfield's identity as a Canadian athlete who won the gold medal were more frequently cited than other possible themes or representations, including his commercial success.

The results also indicate that the representation of Whitfield as an Olympic hero and the focus on his commercial success as a product endorser, were not as prevalent in media coverage of Whitfield as originally anticipated. As described in the textual reading, coverage of Whitfield did, in some cases, position his accomplishment as heroic and some coverage focused on his commercial success, but not nearly as consistently as expected.

#### **4.2 Interviews**

The final sample consisted of Whitfield, five journalists from four major Canadian daily newspapers and four marketing/sales representatives from four (out of a possible five) companies that had relationships with Whitfield. Of the journalists interviewed, three were male and two were female. All four of the marketers interviewed were male. Tables 4.2 and 4.3 describe the interview participants and their professional affiliations.

The interviews took place between May 9, 2002, and October 16, 2002, and ranged in duration from 30 to 90 minutes. Five of the interviews were conducted face-to-face, three of these in Vancouver, British Columbia, and one each in Burnaby, B.C., and Victoria, B.C. These interviews took place at the participant's office or home (three) or at a neutral location such as a coffee shop (two). Four interviews were conducted over the phone because of the geographic locations of participants across Canada. Three of these participants were

marketing representatives based at their company's head offices in Toronto or Montreal. The other was a journalist from a national newspaper also based in Toronto. The final interview, with Whitfield, was conducted via telephone because Whitfield was training in Switzerland at the time. All interviews, both face-to-face and by telephone, were audio taped and then transcribed into a MS Word computer file. Data analysis software was not used. I analyzed all the interview data by repeatedly reading interview transcripts and grouping similar responses together into themes.

**Table 4.2 – Summary of Journalist Interviews**

	<b>Regular Beat</b>	<b>Newspaper Type (Weekly Circulation, 2001)</b>	<b>Covered Whitfield in Sydney?</b>	<b>Gender</b>
<b>Journalist #1 (J-1)</b>	Sports	Local (523,804)	No	Male
<b>Journalist #2 (J-2)</b>	High School/University Sports	Regional (1,006,882)	No	Male
<b>Journalist #3 (J-3)</b>	Olympic/Amateur Sports	Regional (1,204,718)	Yes	Female
<b>Journalist #4 (J-4)</b>	News	Regional (1,204,718)	No	Male
<b>Journalist #5 (J-5)</b>	News/Sports	National (2,057,353)	Yes	Female

**Table 4.3 – Summary of Marketer Interviews**

	<b>Product Category</b>	<b>Company's Relationship with Whitfield</b>	<b>Gender</b>
<b>Marketing Representative #1 (M-1)</b>	Sports Nutrition	Product Endorsement & Sponsorship	Male
<b>Marketing Representative #2 (M-2)</b>	Food Products	Product Endorsement	Male
<b>Marketing Representative #3 (M-3)</b>	Bicycles	Sponsorship	Male
<b>Marketing Representative #4 (M-4)</b>	Fitness apparel	Sponsorship	Male

Generally, the Canadian media coverage of Simon Whitfield's Olympic gold medal, and the manner in which this coverage contributed to constructing a positive media image of Whitfield, was influenced by the professional, political, and personal decisions made by journalists covering the Whitfield story. Likewise, Whitfield's relative success as an endorser of consumer products was due in part to the professional and strategic decisions made by marketing representatives from the companies associated with him. When asked to comment on the construction of Whitfield's image in the Canadian press, and the resulting impact on his marketability, journalists and marketers responded with a complex and varied range of perspectives that overlapped in some areas and differed noticeably in others. In many cases, journalists spoke knowledgeably about the marketing function with respect to celebrity athlete endorsement, and marketers showed an equally clear understanding of sports media production. However, perspectives on the factors that influenced the Whitfield case often differed between the two groups. With regard to particular issues – such as Whitfield's genuine personality and media savvy – there appeared to be a near consensus among all respondents (journalists, marketers and Whitfield). Nevertheless, the overall pattern of responses was complex and varied across participants and the results were not homogeneous.

It is also important to note that the complexity and subjective nature of the questions raised in the interviews resulted in responses that often overlapped and inter-wove with other important issues and topics raised during the interview



process. Throughout this chapter, themes are sometimes revisited as they relate to various issues. This is an indication of the depth of the data collected through interviews with journalists and marketers, as well as a reflection of the complexity of factors that influenced Whitfield's coverage and subsequent sponsorship contracts.

I have organized this section using the key themes found in the textual analysis. I explore the social, political, professional and ideological issues identified by the journalists and marketers, and examine, from the interviewees' perspectives, how these factors contributed to the construction of Simon Whitfield's media image and the use of his image in marketing and endorsing consumer products. As well, Whitfield's own perspectives are integrated into the analysis to provide a more complete picture of the media construction and marketability of celebrity athletes.

#### Simon Whitfield: A Canadian Olympic Hero

The results of the textual analysis showed that, in some instances, Simon Whitfield was described by newspaper and television journalists as a Canadian Olympic hero. This coverage was anchored in a perception of Whitfield as having exhibited heroic characteristics during his gold medal performance, characteristics that separated him from other Canadians and other Olympic athletes and made his accomplishments particularly notable and worthy of celebration.

Despite the keyword search results that downplayed the consistency of the Whitfield-as-hero theme, all five journalists interviewed acknowledged that

Whitfield had been portrayed as a Canadian hero, and that his accomplishments had been positioned as heroic within the Canadian media coverage. Both journalists and marketers also generally agreed that this portrayal had impacted his marketability to some degree. When asked to comment on why Whitfield's image had been constructed this way, journalists and marketers produced a variety of perspectives. The interview results demonstrate that the following factors contributed to the mediated construction of Whitfield as a Canadian Olympic hero.

First, the fact that Whitfield won the gold medal despite his underdog status prior to the Olympics, was cited by three of the five journalists as an heroic characteristic. Whitfield was not favoured to win a gold medal in the triathlon and even during the early portions of the event, when he languished near the back of the main group of competitors, his chances at victory appeared minimal. His unexpected dash to victory in the race's latter stages, and the come-from-behind manner in which he claimed the victory, gave his story an heroic quality that journalists could easily identify and, in turn, employ in their coverage of the event. In other words, according to journalists, the Whitfield story was heightened and made more dramatic because he was not expected to win a medal at the Sydney Olympics, let alone come away with the gold.

"(He was portrayed) as a hero, again, because I think he was an underdog. And (Canadians) seem to really relish this underdog status and the fact that Simon came through a little bit unheralded or unexpected - although he was having a very good season and getting better all the time - the fact that he came through when it really, really counted I think Canadians really liked that because we are underdogs." (J-3, Female, Regional paper)

The manner in which Whitfield captured the gold medal was also portrayed as heroic because it was accompanied by a pervasive sense that his image was fresh and untainted by overexposure or scandal. Journalists suggested that the surprising manner in which he captured the gold became a platform from which Whitfield burst on to the scene and dramatically entered into the collective consciousness of Canadian sports media and fans. Four of the five journalists said that if Whitfield had been expected to win, or had received significant media attention prior to winning the gold medal, the coverage of the story would most likely have differed and media consumers' understanding of Whitfield as representative of a genuine Canadian hero would most likely have been altered. When combined with the perception of him as a genuine, friendly, and approachable individual, in opposition to the stereotypical spoiled, surly, and overpaid contemporary (professional) athlete, Whitfield's underdog status resulted in a mediated canonization and a sense that his accomplishment was heroic and worthy of celebration within Canadian sport.

"I think for everybody, (the key) was the surprise of it. Just the total shock of it, that nobody expected him to win, and I think the whole fresh-face thing. He was a total fresh face. And nobody had ever heard of him before. So instead of always talking about Donovan Bailey, Bruny Surin, that same old soap opera, people get tired of it, y'know the high-strung amateur athlete, the prima donnas, and here was a guy nobody had ever heard of. And he was an appealing personality, I think that really appealed to a lot of people, he was the all-Canadian boy. So he has his personality, he was fresh faced, and nobody had ever heard of him before." (J-1, Male, Local paper)

The journalists cited other factors that also contributed to Whitfield's heroic image. One reporter suggested that the dedication and exhaustive effort put forth by Olympic athletes towards their training and the sacrifices made in the name of

sporting success made, in her opinion, all Canadian Olympic athletes worthy of heroic treatment.

"Well, I'm pre-disposed to think of all Olympians as heroes, frankly, because (Sydney) was my eighth...Olympic Games going back to 1976 and every time I go I fall completely in love with all of them all over again. Although, I'm not as married to the notion that they ought to win all the time as some people might be. (But) I just like the breed. They tend to be the best of young Canada in my view. They're disciplined, and ambitious and they're glorious to look at." (J-5, Female, National paper)

This particular journalist positioned Whitfield, as well other Canadian Olympic athletes, as heroes in the manner of role models, and associated Whitfield and other Olympic athletes with broadly held characteristics of sporting excellence, namely hard work, perseverance, and merit-based accomplishment.

This notion of Whitfield's heroic status being grounded in his accomplishment and athletic performance was one held by several journalists who covered his story. In effect, his accomplishment was viewed as heroic in part because he had engaged in a demanding physical activity, confronted a tremendous challenge and had overcome that challenge to claim a victory. In this sense Whitfield's victory separated him, in the eyes of journalists, from other Canadian celebrities, such as popular musicians and celebrity actors, who could not attain heroic status because of a lack of a physical accomplishment. The physicality of claiming the gold medal was important in the media's perception and celebration of Whitfield as the Canadian hero.

"...you never hear Nelly Furtado or Diana Krall referred to as heroes. We wouldn't say 'Canadian hero Diana Krall.' But we say it about Whitfield. So in that sense, it's kind of like a sporting term. Because he's done something physically, he brought great pride to (his) country so you're a hero. That's the way that I think the media meant it and the way that people generally took it. I think that the physical aspect comes into it because he'd actually run and beat guys to do this, he defeated the entire world to get to the top of the podium so

that's an heroic thing. I think that people use the term hero more often in sports than they would in entertainment or culture." (J-1, Male, Local paper)

Underlying the journalists' perspectives of Whitfield as a Canadian hero was a general consensus that this construction was in response to a perceived eagerness among Canadian sports fans, both dedicated and casual, to embrace a national athletic hero. In this way, portraying Whitfield's victory as heroic was a means of delivering an attractive, positive story to media audiences. For journalists, the hero theme used in the construction of Whitfield was understood as a way to create a story and an image that appealed to a mass Canadian audience, a means, in effect, of delivering popular news.

"Why was (Whitfield) newsworthy? People were interested. Canadians love a hero. I hate to put it that way. I hate that whole convention, actually. But Canadians like to honour someone, especially at the time of the Olympics where the country is actually thirsting for some common patriotic symbol. So he was one and that's why I went (to cover him)." (J-4, Male, Regional paper)

"Everybody wants a hero. We all go to the movies to cheer for Spiderman, we don't go to cheer for the Green Goblin. We do. I mean, we love the Green Goblin but everybody wants to be the hero. Everybody wants their 15 minutes of fame, and (Whitfield was) lovable because he's totally regular." (J-2, Male, Regional paper)

The hero construction was also seen as important or significant in opposition to the sometimes overwhelmingly negative news items that often appear to dominate media coverage.

"The thing about newspapers too - and I don't think at least for someone at my level that it's a conscious thing - but good news keeps people happy and sells papers and all those other things. And these aren't things that I think of but I know newspaper editors think of that. Y'know newspaper editors look at the front page and go 'Damn, another pileup on the Coquihalla, more trouble with the Canadian Alliance...Jean Chretien is off at the mouth again, there was almost a nuclear war...OH WOW, there's a hero!' And you want to kind of mix it up on the front page of a newspaper so that's part of it. So I don't doubt that played into (the Whitfield case). 'Finally! Good news!' We're not all bad, we do like printing good news. Sometimes we blow it out of proportion. I don't know that Whitfield was blown out of proportion. I don't think that he was, but I haven't done an analysis." (J-4, Male, Regional paper)

Finally, within the overlapping and disparate views regarding the celebration of Whitfield, one generally accepted perspective emerged, a sense among both journalists and marketers that the hero image was strongly tied to Whitfield's Canadian identity. His heroism was positioned as an extension of his image as the 'good Canadian kid,' and linked to his perceived willingness to accept the burden of Canadian nationalism.

"I think it's just an expression of national pride that we don't get to express a lot of times so (the result is to) turn him into a hero...When you say hero, I think it mean's someone who's done something well for Canada, he was a Canadian hero, someone we should congratulate, not (necessarily) look up to, but a 'well-done' thing." (J-1, Male, Local paper)

"I think through sports, in terms of the Olympic type stuff, we see (sport) as being a role for (Canadians), right? Canada's good because well, we won the gold medal in hockey. Simon Whitfield won the gold medal and (therefore) he's a great Canadian, because he won the gold medal. I mean, that's all we know: 'He won the gold medal, he must be good...'"(J-2, Male, Regional paper)

Whitfield's heroic status was described by journalists as due, in part, to his ability to embrace and effectively convey the stance of a proud Canadian champion. This resulted in a strong sense among media that Whitfield's victory was worth celebrating and his accomplishment heroic since it was an achievement on behalf of Canada and Canadians.

"As I recall of Whitfield, he was kind of the typical Canadian hero, at least he fit into the cliché of the typical Canadian hero: soft-spoken, intelligent, young, good-looking guy. Middle-class (or) upper middle-class. I don't know his background but he kind of gave that...he just fit into so many kind of Canadian stereotypes or clichés. He was a nice guy or at least that's what everybody had heard, and everyone had seen him interviewed." (J-4, Male, Regional paper)

Paradoxically, while all five journalists and three of the four marketers recognized and acknowledged the media construction of Whitfield's gold medal

victory as heroic, and commented knowledgeably on the factors that influenced this coverage, two of the journalists and one marketer also expressed personal discomfort with the concept of Whitfield, or other athletes, as heroic or representative of Canadian heroes. Thus, with respect to the hero theme, there were dissenting voices amongst both groups of interviewees, in the sense of questioning whether or not the construction of Whitfield as a hero based exclusively on his sporting performance was justified or even positive.

"Well, I think everyone used (the hero) in their coverage. (But) I don't even know what that means in that context. To me a hero is someone rushing into a burning building and taking someone out but Canadian hero, in this context, I think it's just an expression of national pride coming out. He's a hero. I mean you can't compare it to a guy going off to war and dying like those four people. I think it's just an expression of national pride that we don't get to express a lot of times..."(J-1, Male, Local paper)

Beyond personal discomfort, another journalist also questioned his professional participation in the construction of Whitfield as a hero. For this reporter, discomfort was represented through a problematic sense of compliance in the media production process.

"Media, we manufacture heroes. Or we're a really important part in the process. We do make people into heroes sometimes. I don't think I've ever done that personally, I don't think I'd want to. But there's no question that the press do that...we're a part of the machinery and that's the way it goes." (J-2, Male, Regional paper)

For the journalists who expressed personal and professional discomfort with the construction of Whitfield's heroic image based solely on his gold medal victory, their response was to include and highlight other images and meanings in their stories about Whitfield, in an attempt to create a more complete (positive) image. Thus, other positive Whitfield traits – personality, speaking ability, patriotic

embrace, sincerity – were also included in the media coverage, and done so in an attempt to create, in these journalists' view, a more complete heroic form.

Generally, marketers seemed less willing or able to try and explain or account for the construction of Whitfield's heroic image and, similar to the journalists previously described, expressed personal reservations in acknowledging the canonization of Whitfield as a positive social convention.

"If you spend some time with him or you see what he's involved in often it's to do with children and kids and positives so we liked him more in that sense, maybe not so much as a hero because of what he did on the sporting field - I'm a little reticent about the word 'hero' in sports - but just like what he was as a person and that kind of thing. So I think, yes a sense of pride as someone who speaks well and is obviously educated and you're proud to have that kind of athlete representing Canada. Not so much the hero but more pride in 'aren't we lucky to have an athlete like that...performing well for Canada and then speaking (for our company)?" (M-1, Male, Sports nutrition)

However, three of the four marketers were clear that Whitfield's heroic image was important and in the end, potentially culturally influential, in that it contributed to a mix of positive meanings that, when attached to Whitfield, made him a successful product endorser. For these marketers, the hero image was a factor in successfully marketing Whitfield and using associations with him to increase the equity of their brands.

"I think that his image being very clean and very youthful and exuberant, and the things I described already were key in making him compatible with what our brands represent. But I think the way that he was portrayed as somewhat of a hero, and somewhat of a hard-worker (who displayed) perseverance, and all those types of things, once again directly related to what we were trying to communicate with our association with him. So, I think that the way that (the media) portrayed him in those fashions was very applicable to what was important to us." (M-2, Male, Food products)

For his part, Whitfield expressed some discomfort with the hero construction and downplayed its importance. He suggested that the heroic portrayals of his accomplishment constituted a rare form of media attention



particularly for an amateur athlete and that he understood that this type of coverage was temporally limited.

"The Canadian hero...I don't know, I've said it quite a few times, that I had 15 minutes of fame and I've used 14 minutes and 30 seconds of it. So...to be portrayed that way for the brief amount of time that the media seemed to focus on amateur athletics was an interesting experience. But...it's not something you train for or you're ready for. You just kind of roll along with it." (Simon Whitfield)

### Whitfield's Canadian Identity

Results of the textual reading and keyword search indicated that Whitfield's representation was strongly tied to his Canadian heritage and subsequently, his identity as a Canadian became an important theme in the construction of his mediated image. Interviews with journalists and marketers provided a variety of responses and viewpoints as to the elements that made up Whitfield's Canadian identity, the importance of his Canadian-ness within the media coverage, and the role that his national ties played in terms of reporting and marketing strategies. Clearly, though, journalists and marketers involved with Whitfield perceived a strong connection between his media image, his status as a gold medal winner and his Canadian identity. Interview results revealed several key factors that framed the representations of Whitfield's Canadian-ness and the manner in which his national identity was incorporated into newspaper stories and marketing strategies.

First, all five journalists shared the view that Whitfield's accomplishment was important in that it resonated with the average Canadian, particularly in response to a perceived Canadian inferiority complex in relation to the United States. In this sense, Whitfield was positioned by journalists as a representation

or an affirmation of Canadian success, one to be shared and celebrated within the collective national psyche. According to journalists, Whitfield's gold medal victory as a Canadian created a sense of confidence within the country as to Canada's ability to compete and succeed internationally, and also contributed towards forging an identity of separation from the U.S.

"I think more than Americans, Canadians really get into the Olympics, and we saw that again in Sydney, there's a real sense of pride. Because it's one of the few times when we can say we're not American, right? We can have an accomplishment where people say, 'Oh, it's Canada' as opposed to being lumped into a North American glob that most people think of." (J-1, Male, Local paper)

"Yeah, again here's a guy who really came through. Canada's this underdog nation, we see ourselves as this little brother to the States, 'Geez, we're just poor little Canada.' Here's this little guy winning some event we really don't know that much about. I'm willing to bet that if you surveyed (Canadian) people about what he did, as far as distances and times and things like that, no one would really know, but here we are (celebrating his accomplishment)." (J-2, Male, Regional paper)

Whitfield was seen by journalists to have touched a collective sense of Canadian pride, heightening the importance of his accomplishment, and increasing the newsworthiness of his story. This perceived sense of national pride then was incorporated by journalists into their coverage of Whitfield's gold medal.

In a similar vein, journalists commented on the manner in which Whitfield won the men's triathlon as being quintessentially Canadian. For one journalist in particular, the come-from-behind victory, combined with his understated and polite demeanor, and his graciousness in accepting the gold all contributed to the image of Whitfield as a Canadian icon, a representation of the key elements of Canadian culture.

"But y'know, it was so neat because it was so Canadian in a way. He wasn't expected to win, everyone's looking at these other guys and he comes along and does it sort of out of the blue. And he was so thrilled, his whole mannerism was

just so...there wasn't any of that bombastic jingoist kind of stuff. It was a real genuine thrill that he had done this, and I think we were also saying 'Oh, he's so Canadian, isn't that great?'" (J-3, Female, Regional paper)

Whitfield's national identity was tied to his personality and described as particularly symbolic and resonant in contrast to the perceived arrogance, and sometimes ungracious behaviour of American athletes.

"I think we were all struck by that, not more low key, but the more humble Canadian aspect of his victory and his demeanour. As opposed to that - oh boy I'm going to get in trouble here - he wasn't American, OK? 'Yeah, we won, we kicked butt!', he wasn't like that at all. And it was really satisfying to see it come through like that." (J-3, Female, Regional paper)

A different journalist viewed the construction of Whitfield's national identity as not only a source of Canadian pride but also as a potential tool to create unity among Canadians and provide a platform from which to celebrate Canadian accomplishments.

"I think that's part of the good thing about sports; it can really bring people together. How often are we disappointed to be Canadian or not proud to be Canadian? How often do we look at the States and they're waving the flag and stuff like that and we go, 'Geez that's wrong, we're not like that'. But hockey wins and people are driving down the streets waving their flags, it's something that you and I and her (sic) can rally around. Simon Whitfield is our guy. He won the medal." (J-2, Male, Regional paper)

Thus, Whitfield's accomplishment was generally viewed by journalists as an important opportunity to celebrate in opposition to the stereotypical Canadian propensity to understate and inadequately revel in the Canadian experience. In this sense, the media coverage of Whitfield's accomplishment included a focus on his Canadian identity as a response to, and reflection of, perceived issues of divisiveness and self-doubt within a collective Canadian identity.

With respect to Canadian identity, responses from four of the five journalists included a general sense of Whitfield as a Canadian role model, one

to be emulated as representative of the positive elements of young Canadians. Similar to the hero construct, journalists focused the Whitfield story on his Canadian identity, and then used that identity to model his accomplishments as representative of a new, successful generation of Canadians. Journalists saw Whitfield not only as a representative of Canadian identity, but perhaps more importantly, as a *positive* example of Canadian identity, a national identity that should be celebrated within the construction of his mediated image.

Journalists also described the attention paid to Whitfield's Canadian identity, from a professional standpoint, as a necessary and interesting part of the story. One journalist downplayed the notion that Whitfield's Canadian-ness was sensationalized in order to construct a more dramatic story, but stated that, in her opinion, Whitfield's national identity and pride emerged as a story angle that she chose to include in the coverage of the event.

"(Whitfield's gold medal victory) was an emotional moment. There are very few times when I hear the national anthem in the course of my life. I mean, one of them would be at a hockey game and the other would be at an Olympic Games, if I'm lucky. And I find it thrilling and I find it part of the story, absolutely. I don't think I was trying to exaggerate his Canadian-ness...but I think also that he struck me as a pretty good Canadian kid." (J-5, Female, National paper)

For his part, Whitfield downplayed the focus on his national identity, in a similar fashion to the heroic accolades tied to his media image. Whitfield suggested that his comments in the media about his ties to Canada, particularly with regard to his Australian identity<sup>2</sup>, had been significantly spun, and even sensationalized, through media coverage.

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<sup>2</sup> Whitfield's father is Australian and Simon Whitfield spent significant time in Australia as a boy. Therefore, he had the opportunity to compete for Australia internationally but chose to race as a Canadian. This became a significant factor in media coverage of Whitfield's Canadian identity.

"No, you know, actually, I think the media took it as a patriotic thing, (but) I didn't plan it to come across as a patriotic thing. I was just asked my opinion on 'Well, what do you think, you have an Australian passport, you could race for Australia, why do you race for Canada?' So I answered the question quite honestly. 'Well, I love Canada. I love where I live in Canada, I'd never live anywhere else. It just suits me. Home is where the heart is.' Which is true. So I just answered the question, (the media) took the skin off it (in the way) that they perceived (my response) and I got cast, well portrayed, as very patriotic. And I am, but I didn't intentionally go about thinking 'Well shoot, I want to come across as being patriotic.' I just answered the question and it went from there." (Simon Whitfield)

In Whitfield's opinion, the focus on his Canadian identity, especially in opposition to his Australian ties, was connected by journalists to his being a Canadian nationalist in ways that he did not anticipate based on his interview responses.

There was a similar perception of Whitfield's Canadian identity among marketers and sponsors, although this group did not speak as directly to the image of Whitfield as a quintessential Canadian or positive national role model. Two of the four marketers considered Whitfield's Canadian identity to be, like the hero, one of several factors that contributed to the clearly positive media coverage that Whitfield received after winning the gold medal. His Canadian identity was also, for the majority of marketers, another important element in the larger mix of meanings that influenced his image and commercial value. Whitfield's Canadian identity was, to varying degrees, a cultural code that marketers recognized as strengthening positive associations and brand equity.

"The media coverage was very good obviously, they loved Simon, I think Canadian media always loves a winner in Canada. We don't have them as a dime a dozen and the ones that we do have I think are ambassadors for our country. They have been in the past (and) will be in the future." (M-3, Male, Bicycle)

Interviews with marketers also revealed that Whitfield's Canadian identity was integrated into marketing strategies in a variety of ways depending on the

specific goals and marketing programs of the company. For example, one company developed a relationship with Whitfield as a continuation of previous marketing relationships with Canadian Olympic athletes and the Canadian Olympic Association. These relationships had been used to develop brand equity by linking healthy and active images of Canadian athletes to the company's products. In this instance, Whitfield's national identity and its construction and reinforcement through the media, fit in well with the marketing strategy already in place.

"Yeah, I think that (our brand's Canadian identity) was in existence already just because, as I mentioned earlier, (Whitfield) was part of an Olympic program (that) we already (had in place)...so that heritage of Canadiana, and the pride, has already been seen through our entire Olympic program and with other athletes and as a generic with the program before Simon because we ran the same type of program in '98 as well as in 2002. So I don't think the Canadiana around him specifically (was crucial), I think he reflected, he actually more fit into our piece of, as I mentioned, the pride of being Olympic." (M-2, Male, Food products)

This contrasted sharply with another sponsoring company – a much smaller company – that had no prior Olympic connection and no prior marketing strategy based on Canadian identity in which to incorporate Whitfield. In this instance, the positioning of Whitfield as a patriotic icon was effective because it was seen as a way to attach new and positive images to a relatively young brand.

Generally, then, the focus on Whitfield's Canadian identity within the Canadian mass media was viewed by journalists as a means by which to connect with Canadian media consumers and as a means of making the Whitfield story more appealing to the mass Canadian media audience. For marketers, on the other hand, Whitfield's Canadian identity was a recognizable

element of the positive media coverage that he received but just one part of the larger mix of meanings that made Whitfield an attractive endorser or sponsee.

### The Olympic Gold Medallist

When combining the results of the textual analysis with those of the interviews, Simon Whitfield's gold medal victory heavily influenced the coverage he received in the Canadian media and became a primary theme in the construction of his media image. All five journalists and all four marketers interviewed recognized that the gold medal had influenced his media image and marketability to some degree. Within this general consensus, journalists expressed a variety of perspectives regarding the degree to which the gold medal influenced the coverage of Whitfield and marketers offered different views with regard to the importance of the gold medal in developing and implementing their strategies. However, overall, the gold medal was deemed to be a significant advantage in the marketing of Whitfield's media image.

For journalists, the gold medal elevated Whitfield to a status and image that would have been otherwise unattainable within Canadian sports media. According to all five journalists, Whitfield was transformed from a relatively unknown amateur athlete to a major amateur sports personality due in the largest part to winning the gold medal.

"...it was a genuinely great performance. I mean, Canadians win so few gold medals, I mean when you look overall at the Olympics, we do win medals and gold medals but it's not like the States where it's almost expected especially in the Summer Olympics. So I think any gold medal propels you to a certain status because it is a fairly rare occurrence especially at a Summer Olympics. It wouldn't have been as good a story (without the gold medal). Fourth is always the worst position to come because it might have been his best finish and certainly satisfying for him, but it's not a medal." (J-3, Female, Regional paper)

"I think it (the gold medal) was huge. I think that if he didn't win, if it was a fourth place, or a silver medal...(he might have) got a little bit of press, but (not) any of the big sponsorship deals. Everybody wants to be attached to a winner, be it fans, be it anybody. Everybody remembers first place." (J-2, Male, Regional paper)

There was a consensus among the journalists interviewed that the quality of the Whitfield story – the hook, the drama, the perceived audience interest – was significantly heightened by the gold medal achievement. In fact, immediately following the men's triathlon, the Whitfield story took precedence over all others for Canadian journalists working in Sydney. Two journalists related anecdotes of having to quickly adjust their assignment schedules at the Sydney Olympics from their original beat in order to focus on Whitfield, due to a professional understanding that covering Whitfield became a priority once he had won the gold medal.

All five journalists also agreed that at least part of the emphasis on Whitfield's gold medal performance stemmed from the fact that it was the first Canadian medal of any kind at the Sydney Games and therefore carried greater significance. Journalists suggested that Whitfield's victory invoked a sense of relief among a variety of stakeholders – athletes, fans, journalists, Canadian Olympic staff – and eased the burden of recent disappointments, particularly the previous day in the women's triathlon when Canadian medal hopefuls Carol Montgomery and Sharon Donnelly crashed during the bike stage and did not finish. This sense of relief only heightened the importance of covering Whitfield for Canadians sports journalists.

"There was that kind of tremendous, as I remember it, sigh of relief...because you know, I'm not a patriotic guy (but) even then you kind of look and newspapers are



totaling all the countries that got gold medals. Canada - Zero 'Oh we really suck!' So when he won, everyone kind of said 'Thank God! We're not as bad as we like to think we are.'" (J-4, Male, Regional paper)

" (Whitfield's gold medal) was huge because it came early on in the games, it really set the tone for a great games." (J-3, Female, Regional paper)

The significance of Whitfield's gold medal within Canadian press coverage remained high according to journalists due in part to the fact that Canadian athletes won only two more gold medals in Sydney, one in men's double's tennis and the other in men's wrestling. As well, Whitfield was eventually selected as Canada's flag bearer during the closing ceremonies of the games, and remained a focal point of the Canadian Olympic team. Thus, all journalists agreed that media interest in the Whitfield story was steady throughout the games because no other Canadian athlete seriously challenged his position as the premier Canadian victor of the 2000 Summer Olympics<sup>3</sup>. The scarcity of gold medals made Whitfield's more valuable and journalists reflected this in their coverage.

The scarcity of gold medals and its influence on the importance of Whitfield's victory also related to other issues in his media construction. All five journalists felt that Canadian media and sports fans had been waiting to celebrate a gold medal and therefore turned their collective attention to Whitfield after the men's triathlon. This related once again to the perception among Canadian media of a national inferiority complex and the positioning of Whitfield as an affirmation of Canadian success. It also illustrated once again, that Whitfield's media image benefited from the timing of his event – early in the

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<sup>3</sup> One journalist suggested that a possible challenge to Whitfield's status as the premier Canadian athlete of the Sydney Games was gold-medal winning wrestler Daniel Igali. However, the media impact of Igali's event was diminished somewhat by the fact that his event took place at the end of the Olympics.

games – as well as the previous failure of other Canadian athletes to win gold medals.

“So it was a great relief as well for Canadians who care about these things. ‘Thank god, we finally won something.’ And it couldn’t have happened to a better guy; that was the sentiment that was out there.” (J-4, Male, Regional paper)

“Oh yeah, definitely. I think that any Canadian gold medal is huge in Canada. I mean, we only won three in Sydney, so any gold medal is important.” (J-1, Male, Local paper)

“We don’t win many medals in Canada so they stand out, y’know?” (J-5, Female, National paper)

At the same time, one journalist was uncomfortable with the implication that the importance of the gold medal was a media construction, one designed to serve a particular agenda. This reporter was clear that in her opinion the emphasis or importance placed on Whitfield’s gold medal was not simply a product of media ideology. Rather, she felt that winning medals is important to athletes, fans, and sponsors, as well as journalists and editors, and therefore Whitfield’s gold medal became an important topic in sports reporting that targeted a Canadian audience.

“Sure, I mean it’s always important when someone wins gold because it’s so hard to win. I mean...it’s a heartbeat that separates the first from the fourth so if somebody manages to do it, then I mean it’s worthy of celebration for them. And I don’t think it’s some media creation that gold medals are important, they’re very important to the athletes too.” (J-5, Female, National paper)

Interestingly, the same journalist also suggested that researching and producing a story focusing on a gold medal winner such as Whitfield made for relatively straight-forward sports reporting because of the inherent story lines and dramatic angles that could be identified and elaborated on. In fact, according to this journalist, the gold medal-winner and the tragic non-finisher (such as the aforementioned Montgomery) make for the easiest stories for reporters and the

most accessible way to meet deadlines in what is invariably a high-stress environment for sports reporters.

"As a reporter it's nice to have a clear-cut ending and there's nothing as clear cut as either a gold medal or somebody that falls off their bike. You know what I mean? It makes the job easier, I'm afraid, for us if you don't have to search for good quotes. You know, second and third are wonderful finishes, they're wonderful medals, I'm not diminishing them, but the Olympics is also a pressure cooker for writers, we're running around trying to figure out the best story and find out who won and...sometimes the easiest quote is the one we're drawn to, and you find that with the gold medal." (J-5, Female, National paper)

In this sense, Whitfield's gold medal separated him from other athletes in the eyes of some journalists and his media coverage benefited from this separation. When given the opportunity, reporters were more likely to be drawn to a gold medal story in order to produce copy on a short deadline.

For all five journalists, there was also a connection between Whitfield's gold medal and his Canadian identity, the theme previously explored. The gold medal was significant in the sense that it was perceived as an accomplishment completed by Whitfield but done so on behalf of all of Canada. Whitfield's accomplishment was newsworthy because of the perception that he had claimed victory for the entire nation. Clearly, this contributed to the narrative of heroism and also increased the importance of covering his story for Canadian audiences.

Not surprisingly, the journalists interviewed shared a general sense that the Whitfield story would have been significantly different if he had won a silver medal as opposed to gold. If Whitfield had failed to win a medal at all, the coverage afforded him would have been minimal in the eyes of the journalists covering his victory.

"Well, I think there were a lot of people that finished fourth in the Olympics, Canadian athletes. I can't name one of them. If you don't rank...I mean, when

you rank you get a lot more attention. That's the way it is. It's sad, but that's the way it goes. So, if he had have won bronze, it probably wouldn't have been as big a deal." (J-4, Male, Regional paper)

"Even if he'd won a silver (medal) people would have known about him but he wouldn't be 'Simon Whitfield the personality.' He'd just be the silver medal winner, 'Oh, good on him.' People would know about him but he wouldn't be the major amateur sport personality that he is. And if he hadn't won a medal at all, nobody would even know about him other than the fact that he was an Olympian. People in the triathlon circles would know but beyond that nobody would put him on a (cereal) box. That's interesting, it's that gold medal combined with his personality that made it all possible for him." (J-1, Male, Local paper)

As for marketers and sponsors involved with Whitfield, there was a similar sense of the importance placed on the gold medal performance. The gold was important first and foremost because of the positive press that it afforded Whitfield and, in turn, the positive press that his sponsoring companies received. This was clearly most important for those companies that had relationships with Whitfield prior to his gold-medal victory in Sydney. For those companies, especially those whose products are designed for athletic use, the gold medal served as proof or affirmation of the quality of the product(s). This relationship between the gold medal and product performance was incorporated into the strategic branding of the product to take advantage of the positive media coverage and the associations between the brand and the gold medal performance.

"Yeah I think (the Whitfield relationship) probably would (have been different without the gold medal). You do need some performance right? You do want to excite the consumer...and there's no question there's a different response from the consumer...people like to meet a gold medallist and there's an excitement in that there's something about achieving for a brief period of time, being on top of the world within your chosen field that (gets) people excited. And that's not to say that they don't get excited about other medallists or other performers but it is different. I mean, I'm sure you've experienced that, it's just human nature, right? So of course him winning the gold medal energized us as a company to create this program and so we might have used Simon or other athletes differently if he had come back and won the silver or the bronze or just performed really well, you might still use him as a spokesperson but maybe not branded it like we have or (maybe) positioned it differently." (M-1, Male, Sports nutrition)

Ultimately, all four marketers were uncomfortable with a causal branding strategy – Simon Whitfield uses this product and he won the gold medal; if the consumer uses the product, the consumer will achieve the same results – or marketers considered such a strategy ineffectual. However, marketing representatives did see clear benefit in the heightened awareness of Whitfield and the potential associations with their products as a result of the gold medal.

There were varying viewpoints, however, among the companies associated with Whitfield, as to how important the gold medal was to their overall marketing strategy. For some companies that were already involved with Whitfield, his unexpected victory provided a unique opportunity to re-develop marketing strategies based on their previous relationship. The gold medal became a catalyst in the creation and implementation of several Whitfield-based sponsorship relations and promotional campaigns.

“So, he went to the Olympics...and won. We fell off our chairs. All of a sudden, we had to seize the opportunity. And from there, we couldn't contact him for three weeks, he was in big demand, and so once he came back he called us and he says 'I won.' And I was pretty much in a state of elation. And I said 'You know Simon...we're happy to support you and we'll be happy to support you in the future so if you would consider remaining with us, we would gladly draw up a contract that makes you one of our very, very few fully-sponsored athletes.'” (M-3, Male, Bicycle)

“I think what we did is recognize an opportunity in that when we were talking about him after his result we were recognizing that he and his coach had really developed a program using our product. So...we contacted his coach and we were wishing him congratulations and we were talking to him in a celebratory way about his achievement and then we started to recognize 'I wonder if we could incorporate his program in a way of helping educate our consumer and also tap into the good will (associated with) what he's done?'” (M-1, Male, Sports nutrition)

However, for other sponsoring companies, the gold medal won by Whitfield was not the most important element in selecting him for a marketing relationship. Rather, other elements of his mediated image were deemed to be more important in creating a positive and productive fit between Whitfield and the brand. In other words, Whitfield's media persona, with particular personal traits, took precedent over the gold medal in establishing a strategic link between the brand and Whitfield. In this sense, some sponsors perceived Whitfield's gold medal as a bonus in that it afforded Whitfield more significant media coverage and increased his exposure in turn increasing an understanding of the images associated with the sponsoring brand.

"The fact that he won a gold medal was a bonus because winning a gold medal, he received a lot more attention especially on the press side, versus a silver or bronze. And because of the importance of that event being won for the first time in the Olympics created a little bit of a top spin of press and I think the association that way benefited us more than it would have if he hadn't won, but that wasn't a criteria for selection." (M-2, Male, Food products)

"Within the running community, it's a pretty tight community and triathlon's the same way, there's a large number of people who participate in that sport and I'm sure they were all very aware of him prior to that. And those are the types of people that are obviously interested in the different types of product that we have, especially the performance oriented stuff...obviously we don't have a lot of Olympic gold medallists in Canada, particularly in the Summer sports, (so) if you can have (a relationship with) one, all the better. But the relationship would exist, it existed before (he won the gold medal)." (M-4, Male, Fitness apparel)

Generally, marketers shared the opinion held by journalists that the scarcity of gold medals helped elevate Whitfield to a status in the eyes of Canadians that was otherwise unattainable. In fact, one marketer described Whitfield the gold medallist as a Canadian ambassador and clearly stated that Whitfield's lofty public image had, as far as the company was concerned, made Whitfield an individual worth associating the company's product with.

For his part, Whitfield dismissed the linear relationship between his gold medal and his marketability, suggesting that such a causal interpretation did not reflect his experiences. In Whitfield's opinion, he had not become instantly marketable as many in the public and even the media had assumed. As important as the gold medal was to marketers and sponsors, Whitfield described his marketing and sponsorship relationships as being primarily and significantly grounded in the personal and professional relationships that he had cultivated with sponsoring company's representatives.

"There's this ridiculous perception that when you win an Olympic gold medal you instantly become financially successful (but) you also get a thousand different promises made to you in business. I can't tell you how many millions of dollars I've made (based) on spoken word and even on signed contracts that I never ended up seeing. It's just the way it works so you learn...through experience or you just learn through these situations happening over and over again that the people that follow through with their word and follow through with their ideas...are the people that you really stay around. And so I've been able to do that with (a particular sponsor) who, y'know, I learned a lot from our relationship...beyond just being a company that I'm associated with, I like working with them and doing the typical sponsorship arrangement, (and) I've been able to learn a lot about how (the company) works as a business and learn about how (the company) builds their products, and had a lot of input into how they build some of their products. I've really enjoyed that. I think that was one of the (reasons that) there was never any question that I would (stay with the company) because beyond the business side of it, I've just really enjoyed the relationship as well. I've had some somewhat negative experiences with the business side too, though, and it's been definitely an interesting learning experience." (Simon Whitfield)

Overall, therefore, the gold medal was viewed by journalists as one of the most important factors that influenced their coverage of Whitfield. Marketers, on the other hand, differed in their perspectives, depending on their strategy, about the importance of the gold medal in their branding and sponsorship relationships with Whitfield.

### Media image and marketability

A focus of this study was to explore the relationship between Whitfield's media image and his marketability. All five journalists demonstrated, to varying degrees, an understanding of the marketing function and specific marketing strategies particularly with respect to Whitfield as well as other athletes they covered. Journalists also generally held strong opinions about the marketing of Whitfield and other Canadian amateur athletes and were often willing to speculate as to why athletes such as Whitfield became marketing successes.

"...obviously looks, personality, and appeal have everything to do with (marketability). Especially when marketing amateur athletes because that's what you're selling. Pros are different, because you can market a little bit of an aggressive edge, you can't market that in an amateur athlete, nobody likes that. The other thing is gold, you've got to have gold. That's got to be your platform. If you don't have gold...I mean who wants bronze medals coming home from your supermarket (on a cereal box)? It's ok, but it's not really...it's got to be gold." (J-1, Male, Local paper)

Journalists demonstrated first-hand knowledge of how marketing and public relations had influenced their access to information and ultimately contributed to what they wrote about Whitfield. For example, two journalists recalled a press conference featuring the gold medallist upon his return from the Olympics where a sponsor's public relations' representatives assumed roles as mediators between the press and Whitfield in order to better control the flow of information that would contribute to his portrayal in the media. Journalists understood the role being played by the marketers and public relations staff in this example and also acknowledged that it had affected the construction of the Whitfield story.

"I think if (the positive portrayal of Whitfield's victory) was a common theme, one of the reasons for that is the format of how things happened. He came back (and)



we had half an hour to basically watch a pre-packaged press conference. (The sponsoring company) is going to love this, right, because basically what they did worked. You don't have time to spend more time with Whitfield and to do a story looking at who he is. You kind of run with what you know about him and if that's confirmed in the press conference (then): 'Fine. OK.' You go with it." (J-4, Male, Regional paper)

The press conference was recognized by these journalists as an attempt to strategically utilize press coverage to increase Whitfield's media profile and presumably aid in Whitfield's ability to successfully endorse the sponsor's product. The journalists were aware of this public relations strategy but were willing to engage in the public relations process because of their own need to gain access to Whitfield and produce a story. In this way, Whitfield became a focal point for both sponsors and journalists in a symbiotic relationship.

"It's probably a bit of a symbiotic relationship because the exposure that the athlete gets in the media increases his or her marketability, absolutely, and in turn the marketers will use the media to make their athlete more marketable. Again, some athletes you have to phone up their agent to get an interview or you phone up the sponsors. The sponsors will organize a media event so that you can have access to the athlete. It is symbiotic, we kind of need each other. They need us for the exposure, sometimes we need them for the access." (J-3, Female, Regional paper)

However, not all journalists were comfortable or willing to embrace the role of sponsors and marketers in the creation of Whitfield's media image. Two journalists expressed serious reservations about perceived compliance in the marketing of Simon Whitfield. They pointed out that the story assignment was most important and that they would have been more comfortable without the presence of corporate sponsors or public relations. One journalist in particular described free gifts he had received from a Whitfield sponsor as an insult. In fact, the same journalist referred to public relations staff as 'flaks,' and was clear that

he would prefer if public relations or corporate staffers were absent from the newswriting process.

"Oh, I wouldn't say that I embrace it. I wish that that weren't a factor at all. It's something that you're aware of...as soon as you get P.R. people involved. For the most part, we really don't like them and we wish they would just go away because they do alter the story and control the story and that's something that if you're a good journalist, you're aware of. So you're always aware of what's happening and what the pitch is going to be." (J-4, Male, Regional paper)

However, this journalist also conceded that the need to collect information about Whitfield at the press conference made dealing with gatekeepers, in this case public relations staff, necessary.

While journalists' reactions to the role of public relations in the construction of the Whitfield story differed, there was similar disparity in journalists' attitudes towards their own role in the media/marketing relationship. For example, two journalists openly embraced their ability to create a positive media image for Whitfield, one that they recognized as being useful for him in terms of sponsorship and endorsement opportunities. The opportunity to build a positive image for Whitfield was described by these journalists as a positive outcome of covering amateur sport, a way to contribute to a perceived lack of funding for amateur athletes in Canada. These journalists acknowledged that Whitfield would have few opportunities to take advantage of his broad and intensely positive media image around the gold medal, and therefore, they were comfortable in accepting their role in creating a marketable image on his behalf.

"I liaised a little bit with (a Whitfield sponsor) on a marketing program and also this program that they have with the Winter Olympics and they made sure that we could talk to some of the athletes. So again, it's we need them and they need us. And in some ways you don't mind. I don't mind because I know that with a lot of these athletes, this is their one kick at the can to make some bucks and you don't mind doing it. It's part of the game, isn't it?" (J-3, Female, Regional paper)

Further, these reporters felt comfortable with creating an image that would benefit Whitfield in terms of marketing and sponsorship because of their strong relationship with him and his personal appeal. In this sense, journalists perceived a need for Whitfield to take advantage of his positive image and position in the media spotlight and were willing, within reason, to contribute to enhancing Whitfield's marketability through positive media coverage. This was not seen to be at the expense of journalistic integrity or objective reporting because of the genuine fondness that reporters had for Whitfield, and because of his ability to help sports writers' produce good copy by delivering articulate, thoughtful quotes.

"...quite honestly, I write, basically, pretty shameless propaganda for Canadian athletes when I'm covering an Olympic Games because I'm someone who thinks that they deserve the attention...I have no idea if it has helped (Whitfield) but I would hope it has because he's all the things that I've said he is: bright, dedicated, attractive, smart. So if what I have written about him has helped him reap some financial benefit, great! I mean don't misunderstand me. I don't think that my job is to do promotions for these guys, but invariably that's what happens because I like them so much and I admire them so much." (J-5, Female, National paper)

Ultimately, journalists described a reciprocal relationship whereby Whitfield helped journalists create good copy and journalists aided Whitfield in creating a positive media image.

Not surprisingly, however, journalists that expressed discomfort about the role of public relations and marketing within the media production process also expressed discomfort with directly contributing to Whitfield's role as a product endorser.

"Yeah, that's something that's in the back of your mind, well it was in the back of my mind anyways. I can't remember who put on the (press conference) whether it was the Canadian Olympic Committee or who it was but (a Whitfield sponsor) was a big part of it. And whatever, that's how Whitfield makes his money and he has a right to do that. But, your hackles are always up because you're wondering,

are we being used here? And we are. And at the same time we use them, not me personally, but my newspaper uses them to sell newspapers, TV stations use them to get people to watch broadcasts, that's the tradeoff. That's the lowest common denominator of the business. But there's no question that they need us, that's why they send us press releases.

The thing that I don't like to do is...if Whitfield came out and said "I (use this product) everyday, and it makes me healthy and strong!" I wouldn't put that in my story, not to save anybody's life, right? Because you're aware of that and you're not here to do free advertising for (the sponsoring company). You're here to write a story." (J-4, Male, Regional paper)

"(Is my story influenced) in terms of making someone marketable? No. No, I think that you're trying to tell the truth as much as anything. That's the big goal. And sometimes it sucks. Because you get to know people (and then may have to write negative copy about them). I don't think you're trying to screw anybody or promote anyone you don't think deserves promotion, I think you're trying to tell the truth. (But) sometimes you cloud the truth." (J-2, Male, Regional paper)

As for marketers, they spoke knowledgeably about the role of the press within the marketing function. Marketers' responses suggested that the construction of Whitfield's media image in the Canadian press was an important factor in his success as an endorser of their product. The manner in which Whitfield won the gold, his genuine appeal, his youth, exuberance, hard work and commitment, and the timing of his victory, were all cited as positive meanings associated with him and meanings that were aided, at least in part, by the coverage within the Canadian press.

"(The media coverage) was extremely important. There's no question that not only was he winning but he was winning in a way that was nothing but positive, right? The style of his performance was terrific, and there's nothing like being first, right?" (M-1, Male, Sports nutrition)

I haven't seen every piece of...whether it was TV or radio or interviews, I haven't had the chance to review and see every little thing so it would be kind of unfair for me to state how they referred to him. But the things that I saw were positive in that he was this energetic, young, exciting person who through hard work achieved his goal." (M-2, Male, Food products)

Again, marketers were most attracted to the mix of positive meanings associated with Whitfield, because it was these meanings that they hoped to attach to their products and/or brands through the sponsorship or endorsement

process. However, while marketers' unanimously recognized the media coverage of Whitfield's gold medal as a positive, they varied in their opinions as to how this coverage had influenced their marketing strategies.

"I don't know...that's a difficult question, because you can't really measure (the impact of media coverage) in a sense. I mean, he's the number one triathlete in the world, and he won the Olympic gold medal so he's the best at what he does. If we're going to be involved in triathlon or running sports then it would be important for us to be involved or associated with athletes of that calibre. So, while it's important that he gets media coverage not only for us but for himself, I wouldn't say that...it's not something that we sit here and measure and it doesn't make or break our association with him. Y'know there are things that we use top athletes for outside of media, that's only a part of what we do. Y'know, we could integrate events around the athlete, they can do talks to our sales staff, we can bring them into a world championships where we have hospitality set up and use them in that environment, and put them into product design. So all of our top athletes have basically touched in those areas at some point so it's kind of like the more global picture as opposed to 'Hey, he won the Olympics, he's getting tons of media coverage.' I mean obviously, that's nice but we have relationships with athletes that aren't getting that much coverage that are important to us as well." (M-4, Male, Fitness apparel)

Similar to the impact of Whitfield's Olympic gold medal victory, these marketers downplayed the impact of Whitfield's media coverage and image on why he was worthy of sponsorship or product endorsement. In most cases, marketers were clear that they viewed heightened media coverage of Whitfield as a bonus in that it highlighted the elements of Whitfield that they worked to incorporate into a strategic fit with their company's brand. Even while they conceded the benefits of Whitfield's media coverage, they also appeared to want to distance their strategic marketing decisions from the influence of the Canadian media alone. Marketers recognized the impact of the positive media coverage but did not cite media coverage as the dominant factor in their marketing campaigns.

Overall, then, an interesting relationship emerged where journalists viewed their work as potentially contributing to the marketing success enjoyed by Simon Whitfield and, with some notable exceptions, expressed a general comfort level with having aided him in his business successes. Marketers, on the other hand, acknowledged that media image was an important factor in building the positive meaning mix that accompanied Whitfield but seemed reluctant to credit the media constructed image of Whitfield as the defining characteristic in their marketing decisions.

#### Branding Simon Whitfield

After the Sydney Olympics, a nutrition sponsor of Whitfield's re-created a product line that he had used during his training and incorporated his name and likeness into the brand logo and as part of its labeling. This strategy was designed and implemented in an effort to capitalize on the company's relationship with a gold medal winner who was enjoying positive media attention. A food product sponsor used an image of Whitfield on their packaging to try and increase the profile and positive associations of the product and the brand at points of purchase. A bicycle sponsor re-designed their website to include images and provide a story line describing Whitfield's victory using their product, again as a means of publicizing their association with an Olympic gold medallist. This, according to the company, was part of a grassroots supply chain approach that was undertaken to ensure that important stakeholders such as suppliers and retailers were aware of and understood their relationship with Whitfield, a

relationship that they hoped would eventually be transferred to the consumer by word of mouth.

The common thread underlying all of these different strategies was a desire on the part of marketers and their companies to create a strong link between their brand and the positive meanings associated with the public image of Simon Whitfield. In other words, the link between Whitfield and a particular brand – or in some cases, the specific branding of Whitfield – was seen by marketers to be a mechanism whereby they could raise the profile of their brand and, more importantly, associate the meanings of their brand with the positive meanings associated with Whitfield.

“We’re looking for a spokesperson that everyday athletes, weekend warriors, young people, women, can feel comfortable with and that association wouldn’t feel threatening. We want people to say they’ve heard of Simon Whitfield, they’ve seen him, they’ve heard him interviewed and they would feel comfortable using a line of sports nutrition products that he would endorse.” (M-1, Male, Sports nutrition)

“The fact that he was, y’know, he was on top of the world, he won an inaugural event, there were a lot of those types of things that were very strong for him. But I think in general the things that we look for that he possessed was - once again I want to repeat this because it’s very important - the energy, the enthusiasm and the strategic fit to our brand and what our brands represent is consistent with the personal traits that he possesses.” (M-2, Male, Food products)

“And it’s just a perfect fit as (industry members) continue the whole conversation on our (company). (They say:) ‘This is exactly how Simon is. They’re like this as a company, he’s like that as an athlete, together they won a gold medal.’ And we’re going to make (a product) for you as well that’s really personalized the same way that (we) personalized it for him. And no other companies can do that currently.” (M-3, Male, Bicycle)

“I mean, we see ourselves as the number 1 company in the world (in our product area). I think across many of the athletic realms that we are involved in through sports marketing, we’ve pretty much borne that out. And so we like to have relationships with athletes that have similar focuses and similar personas. Obviously, we were one of the first companies to get on board, we saw a promise in him, and he’s become the number 1 triathlete in the world and really that’s what our whole relationship’s about. We work for him, he works for us. It works well, he continues to perform, and he has value because he helps legitimate or bring authenticity to our product.” (M-4, Male, Fitness apparel)

These perspectives suggest that the manner in which meanings associated with Whitfield were recognized and subsequently employed by companies in marketing strategies was related, at least in part, to the Whitfield image created through media coverage. Companies were interested in establishing marketing relationships with Whitfield because of the positive profile that he enjoyed and the meanings attached to his personality through media coverage. And in some cases, the mix of meanings that companies wished to transfer to their brand through an association with Simon Whitfield was closely aligned with his personality and the manner in which he was portrayed within the Canadian media. As mentioned above, marketers differed in their opinions regarding the importance or influence of Canadian media coverage of Whitfield in strengthening his position as a product endorser and in turn strengthening their brand. However, what is clear is that a relationship existed between the meanings injected into the construction of Whitfield's media image and the meanings that marketers wished to tap into by associating their products and brands with him.

As mentioned above, marketers also varied in their assessments of the success of their marketing strategies involving Whitfield. Interview responses varied from enthusiastic affirmation of Whitfield's role in improving brand equity to a much more guarded optimism as to whether the association with Whitfield had paid off in terms of the strength of the brand. This reluctance to label the Whitfield marketing strategy as successful was based on marketers' self-described difficulty in accurately measuring the results of marketing strategies



using celebrity endorsers. In one particular case, the interviewee believed that, based on circumstantial evidence, Whitfield had helped to heighten the brand profile and strengthen the brand's equity but clearly noted the difficulty in empirically assessing the impact of the Whitfield marketing strategy on the strength of the brand. Still, it is noteworthy that none of the marketers interviewed expressed a clear dissatisfaction with the Whitfield relationship or the use of Whitfield in their marketing strategies. It should also be noted that marketing professionals in an interview situation might be unwilling to admit the failure of a marketing strategy in an attempt to avoid the potential embarrassment accompanying such an admission. Generally, though, marketers clearly articulated the Whitfield/brand relationship as successful.

"Yes. I mean, we have marketed the hell out of it, we've used his image, we've talked in a very up front way and in a very hidden way that we are associated with him and it's worked. Everyone knows, that 'You're the guys, you got Simon as an athlete.' Everybody knows it, across Canada. All our dealers know it across the United States." (M-3, Male, Bicycle)

"Oh yeah, no question, no question (it was successful). And like I said, we have a ways to go in terms of marketing and marketing with Simon. We know there's lots of other product mix out there that we can really market quite easily and quickly and get superior sales results. (But) Simon definitely expanded our (product) area and definitely helped in distribution, definitely helped in sales and (helped improve) the consumer's understanding of how to use the (Whitfield branded) program, and now it's a little bit up to us again to continue to market him and the brand." (M-1, Male, Sports nutrition)

"(The success of the marketing strategy) is extremely difficult to measure. I don't think you can ever...we have very sophisticated measuring tools of volume and performance of our brands and that is one that is extremely hard to capture. I would say that the association to him and what traits he brings have created more awareness of those brands but I wouldn't...like I say, it's not something that we could actually define and say...not just with Simon specifically, but with anything it's hard to say whether it help or hurt outside of knowledgeable commentary from people involved in the project and the industry." (M-2, Male, Food products)

### Whitfield: Sincere, yet Savvy

Underlying many of the elements that journalists and marketers identified as important in the media and marketing success of Simon Whitfield was Whitfield's ability to engage with the press and deal with public attention in a thoughtful, poised, and articulate manner. Both journalists and marketers described Whitfield's media savvy as directly related to what they viewed as his sincere and genuine personality, traits that not only separated him from other athletes, but also increased his audience appeal, his rapport with the press, and ultimately, his marketability.

For journalists, Whitfield's sincerity and comfort with the media were defining features of his personality and increased, in some cases, their interest in the Whitfield story. In other words, journalists covered the Whitfield story with particular attention because of his attractive personality and his media rapport.

"...he contributed to his own media image. Just the personality that he has come through in the media. I don't think the media went out to create him as an all-Canadian boy, I think he created that image himself. He actually is a really nice guy so that comes through. Often that doesn't come through, I mean if a guy's flat. But he has a very expressive personality - and without being cocky - and I think that really comes through that he's expressive, he's happy, and he portrays well. He projects well without that sense of cockiness about him. I think the media picked up on that." (J-1, Male, Local paper)

Whitfield's ability to deliver a strong quote and his confidence in speaking to media and in front of large groups made him a favourite target of journalists and was cited as an important reason as to why he received significant coverage. For example, one journalist commented on the enviable dilemma of having too much information and having to choose from a multitude of possible angles after interviewing Whitfield. This, according to veteran journalists, was in sharp

contrast to the average athlete, particularly amateur or Olympic athlete, who often lacks confidence and/or experience dealing with sports media which invariably results in a much more difficult assignment for journalists.

"And again, I think that made the story almost easier, because there was so much there. I remember...saying, 'You know, you could approach this from so many angles.' You know, he was the underdog or he was the kid that made good after being a bit of a jerk, the whole Australian angle, and forging the friendships and coming back there to win the big medal at the opera house. There were just so many angles with Simon that it was a bit of a banquet in terms of story angles and story ideas." (J-3, Female, Regional paper)

Similarly, all five journalists described Whitfield's sincerity in contrast to many successful contemporary sports figures. For example, journalists listed professional athletes or amateur athletes who have experienced previous athletic success as often jaded by the media process or so over-practiced as to make their responses stale and cliched. According to these journalists, Whitfield displayed neither of these tendencies, in large part because he was receiving significant media attention for the first time. Whitfield demonstrated a natural affinity for speaking to the press that made covering him relatively easy and enjoyable.

"He was unpracticed. He was a pretty good example of someone who hadn't had much media attention outside of the triathlon world except when the Olympics approached. And (if he had received prior media attention) it was just a 'Hey, let's meet our Olympians' kind of thing. But he wasn't like a track star, hockey player, basketball player, or a skier who'd been interviewed to death. The comments were un-rehearsed and spontaneous and, like I said, he also spoke in complete sentences, which was a treat." (J-5, Female, National paper)

"But a lot of that too is people used to dealing with the media (and) people still being interested in the whole process. Because if you've been asked the same question 15,000 times and I come to you and ask it again, you may not come up with a real snappy quote. You may just bite something off...But this Whitfield guy, that may have been the first time he was ever interviewed was in Sydney and I think that's part of it too is that a guy like that hasn't had a chance to be jaded by it." (J-2, Male, Regional paper)

Ultimately, journalists suggested that the Whitfield story was influenced to some degree on a personal level. Since reporters were attracted to Whitfield's personality and his confident, articulate, liaisons with the press, the coverage afforded Whitfield was subsequently positive.

"I mean I haven't seen him since (the Olympics) but I can see his smiling face in front of me as though it was yesterday. I mean, he left a big impression on me, not what I wrote about him, but he the person. I remember that." (J-5, Female, National paper)

Clearly, Whitfield was perceived by journalists as unpracticed and fresh because, for the most part, he was. In his own words, Whitfield's relationship with the media and his ability to conduct himself in a natural and sincere manner were the result of being thrust into the spotlight after his victory in Sydney.

"It's been a learning experience dealing with the media in general because it's something that you're not necessarily taught, you kind of learn through trial and error or through...I think the media actually, or the public kind of watched me grow up media-wise. Grow more with my understanding of how it worked and how there's never really the off the record comment. They watched me learn how that worked so I came by it pretty honestly." (Simon Whitfield)

At the same time, Whitfield described his strategies in positively handling the media attention paid to him and revealed, at least in part, why he had been so clearly perceived by journalists as well as marketers as genuine despite the pressure of the media spotlight.

"I had a pretty naïve approach to (dealing with the media), but then I've just learned to pretty much say anything that I thought and as much as people give you (that) advice, it's true, you just be yourself. So I kind of learned that...the funniest thing people have told me is 'Man, you're actually still a nice guy! Y'know, you're a nice guy.' And I'm like, 'Are you kidding? I think I was like this before! I think I was an alright guy before.' So why would I change?" (Simon Whitfield)

Interestingly, Whitfield also acknowledged that the more practiced he became in interview situations and dealings with the media, the more polished and refined

became his responses. Thus, despite his description of his approach to media coverage as “naïve,” he also recognized the need to practice his media skills.

“The one thing that’s really interesting is when I talk to media a little bit...it’s like you become practiced at it. (If) you watch me a week into Commonwealth Games, talking to media, I’m much more articulate...I’m able to get across what I wanted to say, I answer the questions much better than the first couple of interviews. It’s not something that I thought of before but you need the practice, it’s just like training, you need the practice of it. You get back into being able to process ‘Well, what’s this question really about and how do I want to answer it?’ And, how do I give a truthful response that doesn’t necessarily...that still only tells the things that I want to. Y’know there’s certain things that I don’t want people to know, they’re not other people’s business. So, how do I do those things?” (Simon Whitfield)

Whitfield’s genuineness and the resulting positive media coverage transferred over to his success in marketing and sponsorship as well. Marketers cited Whitfield’s natural ease, the fact that he was articulate, energetic, and outgoing as reasons that they were interested in aligning their product and brand with him.

Clearly, Whitfield’s personality and confidence in public increased marketers’ confidence in dealing professionally with him.

“I think he was number one, a very well-spoken, energetic, enthusiastic individual. He created a very important point of history, I guess you could say, with solidifying the first ever gold medal at a triathlon in the Olympics. He represents, as I mentioned, our brands very well in consideration to the health aspect, and as I said already, the enthusiasm and energetic aspect.” (M-2, Male, Food products)

“Simon is very personable, he’s a very genuine person, and y’know, people see that when they interact with him. I think the media was probably portraying what they saw, (but) we saw (his sincere personality) before that. So that’s one of the things that we consider before we start these relationships (with athletes).” (M-4, Male, Fitness apparel)

Marketers’ confidence in Whitfield’s personality influenced their strategies in working with him. For example, the marketer from the sports nutrition company explained a marketing strategy that involved inviting customers and retailers to participate in recreational running and cycling events with Whitfield, providing an

opportunity for key stakeholders to learn from an Olympic gold medallist about the positive elements of the product and the brand. The marketer was clear that this type of strategy only works if the company has confidence that the celebrity product endorser can speak confidently and knowledgeably about the product and do so in an engaging and charismatic manner. In essence, companies were attracted to Whitfield as a product endorser because they felt confident entrusting the image and equity of their brand to him.

Marketers also described this confidence in terms of Whitfield's product knowledge and his ability as a company spokesman to speak knowledgeably and confidently about the products that he was endorsing. This was seen by marketers to be an important element of the marketing mix especially when combined with an understanding that Whitfield did in fact use the products that he was endorsing. Marketers commented on how the understanding of Whitfield as an actual user of the products being endorsed contributed to a heightened sense of genuineness in the marketing function that could potentially overcome consumers' skepticism of celebrity athlete product endorsement. Positioning Whitfield not only as a product spokesperson but also as a successful product user was seen by marketers to be a valuable strategy within their marketing mix.

"(Whitfield) was actually using our product before he made it big. So that's very appealing as someone that when he's interviewed about his sponsors or he's talking to other athletes or any of those kinds of things, he's talking knowledgeably about our product mix. The other thing is he recognized - as I said he came to us before we came to him, in a sense wanting to use our products - because he recognized the type of company we were and the position that we were looking for in the marketplace. So we respected his knowledge and how he was looking for safe, positive products that he could use." (M-1, Male, Sports nutrition)

Within this strategy, one marketing practitioner in particular pointed out the need to recognize the difference between Whitfield the gold medal winner and high performance athlete and the average consumer of their product who in most cases would be competing at a much different level. In this case, the marketing strategy tended to downplay Whitfield's gold medal achievement and instead positioned him as simply an active individual, performing the events that comprise a triathlon, and representing Whitfield as an example of an athlete who benefits from the product line. This strategy appeared to build on Whitfield's sincere and genuine personality as a way to bridge the gap between Whitfield's elite level of athletic performance and a recreational level in order to position the product as accessible and appropriate for the recreational athlete.

Finally, one marketer described the characteristics of Whitfield's personality as strategically attractive because of an understanding and appreciation of the contemporary consumer as media savvy – described in a manner similar to Whitfield – and able to recognize, interpret, and ultimately reject artificial or manipulated media coverage and marketing campaigns.

“People can detect artifice pretty quickly, especially younger people who have become so media savvy that it's easy for people to be almost jaded about athletes and athlete sponsorship. Anyways, that's our rationale (for working with Whitfield).” (M-1, Male, Sports nutrition)

Thus, marketers and journalists emphasized the importance of Whitfield's media savvy, his articulate speaking ability, and his interpersonal skills as attractive features. Marketers emphasized his product knowledge, sincerity and shared commitment and ideas as fundamental to their interest in him. It is reasonable to conclude that these factors influenced the extent to which Whitfield received

significant, positive media coverage and that he was able to utilize this coverage in terms of marketing and sponsorship.

### The 'new' sport of triathlon

When discussing the newsworthiness of Simon Whitfield and exploring the reasons that affected his media image and popularity after the Sydney Games, an emergent theme was the impact of the new sport of triathlon. Journalists and marketers described the impact of triathlon in several different contexts.

First, triathlon was described by three journalists as a high profile sport at the Sydney games, both in terms of local fan interest and media attention, as well as in terms of its historical importance. The historical importance stemmed from the fact that the Sydney Games marked triathlon's debut as an Olympic event with full medal status. This high interest and sense of history increased the importance that journalists' attached to Whitfield's victory and contributed, according to one particular journalist, to the dramatic elements, and newsworthy qualities, of the Whitfield story.

"I think it was (newsworthy), again because it was the first time that gold medals were going to be awarded (for triathlon) and I mean it being such a big sport for Australia, there was a lot of hype around it, which kind of heightened the importance. I mean, it wasn't like...some sports do draw more attention than others. I think triathlon has a pretty good profile throughout the world. I think its first introduction into the Olympics made it sort of a bigger thing." (J-3, Female, Regional paper)

Two other journalists commented on the perception of triathlon as an intense test of athletic fortitude and mental toughness, a notion that contributed to the perception and construction of Whitfield as a heroic figure who was able to overcome adversity and persevere on the way to victory. For one of these



reporters, this meaning was also linked to Whitfield's Canadian identity in that it reflected notions of Canadian culture.

"The event, first of all (was important), because his event is such a monumental test of endurance... I'm a person that has a tremendous admiration for the sport (of triathlon) and anyone that can do all those things and do them well." (J-5, Female, National paper)

"...it's not a finesse sport, triathlon, and we're not a finesse country. We're a 'Put the shoulder down and drive' and 'Go hard' kind of (country)." (J-2, Male, Regional paper)

For another reporter the sport of triathlon contributed to Whitfield's underdog status within Canada because the event did not hold the same level of importance for Canadian sports fans. This reporter again illustrated the adjustments that reporters made in covering Whitfield after he won, as well as suggested that Whitfield's victory had significantly affected the visibility of the sport in Canada.

"...generally, across Canada I don't think anyone really knew anything about (triathlon) and nobody still would if Simon Whitfield hadn't done what he did. I don't think anyone was expecting it to be a big hit sport for Canada going in, even the night before, nobody thought it would be the big story the next day because nobody had ever heard of Simon Whitfield. And in Australia it was big, 250,000 people lined the course. I think it has really raised the profile. You go anywhere in Canada, people know what triathlon is because of Simon Whitfield." (J-1, Male, Local paper)

As for marketers, two of the four interview respondents perceived a heightened sense of historical importance attached to Whitfield's gold medal because he was the first person ever to win an Olympic gold medal in men's triathlon. This importance made Whitfield a more marketable figure.

"So that appealed to us but also just having him win that first gold medal, and the first time they had the triathlon in the Olympics and then he wins Canada's first gold medal (was also appealing)." (M-1, Male, Sports nutrition)

### Whitfield's athletic good looks

An unanticipated result of the interviews was the frequency with which respondents, particularly journalists, cited Whitfield's physical appearance and athletic good looks as an important characteristic in the coverage afforded him and his resulting media image. Interestingly, journalists primarily spoke about Whitfield's physical attractiveness not as a defining characteristic in their own coverage of him but rather as a contributing factor to the generally positive image that Whitfield was able to cultivate in the press and parlay into marketing opportunities. Two journalists speculated that Whitfield's popularity among the Canadian public may have developed akin to that of a teen idol, particularly among young females, an image that was cultivated in some part by the media coverage that he received after winning the gold medal.

"Simon really epitomizes...I mean he's a young, good-looking guy and that never hurts. Y'know, I'm sure there is a young girl component (involved in his popularity). Y'know he's attractive, he's articulate, he has those aspects. Looks do count for something, being articulate does count for something. And, y'know Simon does have that package. There are a lot of athletes that maybe have that, but they're not at ease with the public, but Simon's got this little bit of a folksy way and I think that that has really helped him." (J-3, Female, Regional paper)

"I mean, he's a good looking guy, but he's not an overly good looking guy, he's a guy that guys could relate to but he's good looking enough that girls go: Hey, I could dig him. And mom's could see him as their daughter's boyfriend." (J-2, Male, Regional paper)

Conversely, marketers did not identify Whitfield's looks as a reason for involving their company, product or brand with him. Rather, his energy, youthfulness, speaking ability and genuine personality were identified more than his good looks. Yet, those most responsible for disseminating the information that contributed directly to Whitfield's media image, the journalists covering him, felt that his physical appearance played a role in the construction of his positive

media image. Therefore, it seems unlikely that the image of Simon Whitfield would have been as marketable and useful to sponsors, without the positive coverage attached to his perceived physical gifts.

#### The Whitfield story and the production of (good) news

In addition to the themes previously examined, interviews with journalists revealed some general insights into the nature of news production as it related to the Whitfield case. For example, journalists conveyed a general sense that the coverage afforded Whitfield, and the key themes prevalent in the coverage of his gold medal, was the result of newsmakers, including editors and journalists, publishing news that they perceived as attractive to audiences. In the case of Whitfield, this was done for several reasons.

First, two of the five journalists described a perception of sports fans and media audiences as craving the rise of a celebrity to whom they could attach symbolic meaning and derive pleasure. In this way, Whitfield was positioned as an opportunity for newsmakers to deliver upon audiences' wishes, namely an heroic figure with a strong Canadian identity who brought world-class recognition to his country.

One of the journalists that described the cravings of sports fans also cited editors' attention to the often oppressively negative stories that are placed on the front page of newspapers and as lead stories on television. Thus, Simon Whitfield became a story worthy of coverage due, in some part, to the opportunity it afforded newsmakers to lead with a positive piece, one that would stand in

contrast to predominantly negative stories and in turn, help increase audience satisfaction.

It is significant in this discussion to note that neither the textual analysis nor the interview results revealed anything substantial written about Whitfield that cast him in a negative light or appeared to tarnish his media image. Of the journalists that covered Whitfield, two groups emerged: those on a regular sports beat who had covered Whitfield extensively and knew him on a personal level, and those journalists who had been assigned to cover Whitfield after the Olympics for one or two stories. Of the former group, Whitfield's positive media image appeared to be influenced by his genuine-ness, his ability to speak well and the generally held notion of him as a personable, approachable individual. The resulting coverage was positive. Of the latter group, the resulting coverage was positive again not out of a personal connection or relationship with Whitfield but because of a lack of time and access to information regarding his character. In other words, journalists who were new to the Whitfield story suggested that if the only access to Whitfield was through press conferences, in some cases organized and mediated by public relations staff working for a corporate sponsor, then it hampered their ability to conduct independent research, or in-depth interviews, while still meeting their deadlines. Thus, several journalists conveyed a sense of capitulation, an understanding that they may not have accessed the true Whitfield but had little choice when needing to meet the requirements of the story and the newspaper.

"I mean, it was a really straight-ahead story. They don't get much more straight-ahead than that. When you don't know someone, when you don't have time to spend time with them, when you don't get them one-on-one, when you don't

have a background with them, it's really straight-ahead. I mean, it's just about the most straight-ahead assignment you can get...there was no hiding stuff, no having to cut important information for space, not that I remember anyway." (J-4, Male, Regional paper)

"It's a one off for me. (The editor says)'This is your assignment for the day, you go back and write your high school and university tomorrow but today we need you to come up with some story on Whitfield.' And some guys would go in and not even ask a question, they'd just stick their mic in the scrum, some guys would try and get a decent angle on it, a different angle, try and get something more than the standard CP: 'Simon Whitfield returned home today and he was really happy.'" (J-2, Male, Regional paper)

Consequently, journalists covering Whitfield for the first time also questioned whether any of their peers had researched deeper into the Whitfield story in an effort to find a more personal image, an image that perhaps would have resulted in different media coverage.

"I think it was a happy story. I don't think that anybody really - I'm not saying he was up to anything - but I don't think anybody looked real hard. Everybody was going in there to put a positive spin on it. He won the gold medal."

Interviewer: So you go in to put the positive spin on it because that makes it a better story?

"Because there's a feeling of that's what people want. 'Isn't it great?' Did anybody really bust their ass to see if there was anything in Whitfield's past? Did anybody do a whole lot of research and make a lot of phone calls, phone his High School teachers? No. It's a simple three hours, spend an hour and a half there, go home, spend an hour and a half writing. You're done for the day. That's the Whitfield story. That's a sad fact, but..."(J-2, Male, Regional paper)

In this sense, journalists suggested that there was a general understanding of the Whitfield story as an inherently positive one and that this understanding resulted in positive coverage of Whitfield.

Another element of the Whitfield story that was important in the construction of good news was Whitfield's local ties and connections with local communities. For newspapers in British Columbia, and particularly in Victoria where Whitfield lives and trains part of the year, the geographic and community

angle made coverage of his gold medal victory a priority. This attraction to the hometown angle was seen not so much as a means of constructing a positive media image but rather as a strategy of producing interesting news stories for a particular market. In fact the hometown angle was described by journalists as an institutional news tool, a standard element in the coverage of Canadian Olympians.

"For me it was, for (my paper), (the focus) was definitely the home-town angle. Born in Kingston, lived in Victoria. Y'know he was inducted into the BC Sports Hall of Fame last week which is really odd for a 27 year-old in the middle of his career, getting inducted with all of these really old guys but that's what an Olympic Gold medal will do for you." (J-1, Male, Local paper)

As well, a journalist from a British Columbia newspaper recounted how she altered her work schedule in an effort to find Whitfield and provide a uniquely local angle to the story of his gold medal victory. In her recount, the journalist made this decision in anticipation of the newspaper's requirement of a story with a local angle, one that differed from the standard copy being produced for the national newspaper chain. In other words, local news outlets wanted, and ultimately received, a different coverage of Whitfield because of his local ties.

"It was important because initially if Simon hadn't got a medal, (a colleague) would have covered it for the chain, but I knew (my paper) would want something from me being the British Columbia representative, they would want something different...so I knew at some point I was going to have to catch up with Simon and do a very separate story from what went out on the chain." (J-3, Female, Regional paper)

## Media Shelf Life

A final point to emerge from interviews with journalists and marketers regarding Simon Whitfield was a general consensus that Whitfield's positive media image, and in turn the value of associating his image with a brand or product, were, in varying degrees, subject to time constraints. In other words, journalists and marketers agreed that Whitfield had a peak in terms of media and marketing attractiveness, and, in turn, a shelf life with regard to newsworthiness and image. This perception of a time-limited mediated image appeared to affect the strategies employed both by the journalists in constructing their stories and the marketers in developing and implementing marketing plans involving Whitfield.

The perceived time limits placed on the impact of Whitfield's media image and marketability were directly linked to his gold medal accomplishment. All five journalists agreed that the gold medal victory in Sydney afforded Whitfield a public profile, but only within a certain timeframe and it was within this timeframe that Whitfield was most effective in parlaying his media coverage into marketing and business opportunities. Journalists anticipated a relatively short time period before Whitfield's public image would decline.

"So I think they have a shelf life, Olympians have a shelf life, and I think Simon's is (dependent on) if he wins again in Athens...your shelf life is through to the next Olympics. And I think that if he doesn't win gold in Athens, I think it's over for him as far as marketing possibilities. I think he'll be yesterday's news. And it'll be the next guy, the next thing." (J-1, Male, Local paper)

"The media is pretty fickle, they'll say 'What have you won lately, Simon?' You didn't win this World Cup or that World Cup, the World Championships were in Edmonton (Whitfield finished sixth). So fame is also quite fleeting in terms of the media as well and I think he has to sort of prove it again that he wasn't a one hit wonder." (J-3, Female, Regional paper)

For all journalists, this decline in Whitfield's media presence was nearly inevitable given the successes later enjoyed by other Canadian athletes – three journalists cited Canadian Olympic figure skaters Jamie Sale and David Pelletier as having taken Whitfield's place – as well as the need for journalists to stay current in their reporting.

"Oh yeah, (the shelf life is) not long. I think that people are looking for somebody new all of the time. Somebody new to buy into and you kind of get tired of (previous stories) after a while. All of a sudden Sale and Pelletier are the 'in' athletes right now. People want to know what they're doing, you're seeing all of those stories now, those little blurbs, whereas it used to be Whitfield, or it used to be Daniel Igali, or it used to be someone else. I mean the next one could be: 'who knows?' There's always a place for that great underdog story." (J-2, Male, Regional paper)

"I mean, you have to go with what's current. That's what news is, it's not what happened two years ago, it what's happened now or last week or whatever and you have to be aware of that. I mean, it's not very nice and I don't think it's easy for the athletes as well." (J-3, Female, Regional paper)

Journalists also suggested that for Whitfield to create more public attention in the future, he had to continue winning major triathlon events, particularly another Olympic gold medal. This was interesting given journalists' recognition and understanding that Whitfield's ability to win another gold medal was constrained by the fact that the Olympic Games are held once every four years. As well, according to one journalist, less high profile events such as the Commonwealth Games – at which Whitfield won the gold medal in the triathlon on August 4<sup>th</sup>, 2002 – do not afford athletes the same media attention. Thus, journalists suggested that Whitfield's media image would decline in non-Olympic years, before building in anticipation of his Olympic gold medal defense.

"I think you have a grace period after the Olympics, until the next Olympics, I really do. Because I don't think people remember World Champions, (even though) it's just as tough, the same competition, same people, in fact more,



because in the Olympics you have to cut back on the number of entrants, but at the World Championships you can have as many people as you want so all of the best are there in the world, not just a select best. So it's a tougher event to win. (But) I don't think the World Championships covers one tenth of the impact of an Olympic medal." (J-1, Male, Local paper)

In response to this generally held view of Whitfield's time constrained media image, one journalist suggested that Whitfield deserved intense and positive media coverage surrounding his Olympic Gold medal because the window of opportunity to receive recognition – and turn his media attention into business opportunities – would close quickly.

"You know, it's the Andy Warhol quote but for an Olympian it's usually true for most of them, they really do only get 15 minutes in the sun so unless they've been a complete asshole which is rare, I think they deserve the attention and they deserve a bit of adulation not for winning but for the work that they put into it for so long. I mean it breaks my heart when I think about it today, and not many of them are lucky enough to - or good enough to - win a gold." (J-5, Female, National paper)

Thus, journalists seemed to describe a type of self-fulfilling prophecy in which the media focused on Whitfield intensely and for a short period of time in anticipation of the decline of his public image. Clearly, however, this decline was directly impacted by the decisions made by journalists in terms of who and what to cover.

Generally, marketers shared the perception of the temporal nature of Whitfield's public profile. In two cases, this perception influenced marketers' strategies in terms of branding strategies with Whitfield.

"Even now, we have people who won't recognize Simon Whitfield or the brand because his profile is going down and that's why I said, when we branded (the product), it's (the product name), but it (also says) Simon Whitfield. We're always, on all of our (labels), saying 'Simon Whitfield, Canada's Olympic Gold Medallist, Triathlon.' So... rarely do we just say Simon Whitfield, it's always we have to help to create awareness about who he is. So that's a little bit of a challenge on our side." (M-1, Male, Sports nutrition)

"You know, a week after the Olympics, maybe 5 to 7 to 10 days after the Olympics are done, there is such low interest in the Canadian environment in the

Olympics. So reflecting upon that, it's difficult to keep that (public image) alive, however, (Whitfield) has gone out and won World Championships and other key competitions that has created that energy and has created that kind of newsworthy note within himself and to the general public of Canada. So that definitely has enhanced his marketability." (M-2, Male, Food products)

For marketers, the perception of Whitfield's shelf life necessitated marketing strategies that focussed on his accomplishments but were also implemented as soon as possible after the Olympic games. Marketers and sponsors held similar views of the difficulty of holding the public's attention and maintaining a high public profile surrounding athletes like Whitfield, however, they differed in their approach as compared to journalists. Whereas journalists commented on the need to find the next scoop in amateur sport, marketers had more invested in the Whitfield relationship and thus, focused more on Whitfield's achievements in subsequent events such as World Championships and the Commonwealth Games as evidence of the maintenance of his high profile and worthiness as a product endorser and sponsee. Ultimately, while marketers felt the need to work with Whitfield's positive image in a timely manner, in order to leverage the relationship to its maximum, every marketing representative interviewed described their relationship with Whitfield as long-term and ongoing.

"Yeah, so I think we'll have a good association with him for a long time and really that's what we're looking to do. That's why it's so important about the quality of the person because that's the association that we want. So we would definitely have a long-term investment with him.

I understand companies that want to just market him while someone's hot and then move on, there's something to be said for that too but that won't be our company. There's lots of areas where he'd be really great and useful to our company outside of just how he does at the latest event. That being said, he's doing fantastic and he's really recognized as one of the top triathletes now. We often talk to other triathletes, because we have a relationship with a number of them, and he's becoming one of those benchmark athletes." (M-1, Male, Sports nutrition)

With regard to the maintenance of his media image and marketability, marketers again expressed a confidence in their relationship with Whitfield based in large part on his personal traits – genuine, friendly, articulate, outgoing – qualities that enabled marketers to maintain a sense of confidence in future dealings with Whitfield. In other words, despite the unpredictability of victory in future athletic performances, all marketers were willing to commit to ongoing business relations with Whitfield in large part because of the attractive elements of his personality and the strong fit between his media image, his personality, and the identity of their brand.

As mentioned earlier, Whitfield shared the view that his image was temporally constrained and even suggested that he had exhausted the majority of his time in the media spotlight. At the same time, Whitfield also spoke of the anticipation of media coverage at the 2004 Olympics and was clear that, based on his experiences at the 2000 Olympic Games and the 2002 Commonwealth Games he did not anticipate enjoying the inevitable media crush that would accompany a successful defense of his Olympic gold.

“At the Commonwealth Games, I won, went through the start of this media role again and then just killed it, stopped it right away, went ‘Whoa, I can’t do this again, I don’t need this right now.’ I had that experience, it was a fun experience, following people around on a tight schedule doing interview after interview, it was fun but at the Commonwealth Games all I wanted to do was be alone, just sit down alone for an hour and say ‘Wow. Just set a goal at the beginning of the year, did a lot of hard work, came over and won. Fantastic.’ My goal is to go to Athens and to try and repeat as Olympic champion. I think, they say that the legends do that and I think ‘Ok, that’s cool, that’d be cool.’ But I want (my girlfriend) to be waiting with a car on the other side of the fence and I’ll just keep running. Jump the fence, get in the car, and drive off.” (Simon Whitfield)

## Chapter V - Discussion

Simon Whitfield's gold medal victory at the Sydney Olympics offers a useful case for examining how media production processes influence, and are influenced by, the marketability of celebrity athletes in Canada. This research built on prior works by MacNeill (1996), Gruneau (1989), and Sparks (1992) by exploring the complexity and fluidity of decisional processes involved in producing media representations of celebrity athletes. Journalists' understandings of the media production process and their interpretations of the important elements of the Whitfield story resulted in relatively consistent coverage based on themes of national identity and the value of a winning performance. Marketers, on the other hand, viewed an association with Whitfield as attractive because of the positive meanings that he brought to their brands and products. In this way, the Whitfield case revealed an interconnected cultural relationship between media image and marketability within the sports/media complex, highlighted by intertextual linkages between media representations and sponsorship and endorsements. Finally, sports journalists' and sports marketers' described their interactions with the Whitfield story as constrained by institutional, professional, and personal factors that they were forced to negotiate as they worked towards producing attractive stories or increasing the equity of their brand, respectively. This section discusses the cultural and theoretical implications of the study's results.

### Sports media production and the audience commodity

The textual reading, keyword search, and interviews with journalists revealed recurring themes in Whitfield's coverage that the journalists identified as important in developing their story lines. These privileged themes – the importance afforded Whitfield's gold medal, the national pride attached to his victory, the perception of his victory as an affirmation of Canadian success, and the repositioning of his image from an underdog to a hero – are similar in some ways to the dominant discourses – “national heroes, competitive individualism in team sports, notions of rugged athletic masculinity, myths of nationhood, and the consumer hegemony of North American society” – identified by MacNeill (1996, p.104) in her study of Canadian Olympic hockey coverage. According to the journalists interviewed in this study, covering Whitfield was worthwhile because of these elements, and integrating these themes into their coverage helped the journalists to create entertaining and popular news stories. These findings support previous sports media production studies that found some story lines selected and reported more frequently than others in the production process (MacNeill, 1996, Gruneau, 1989).

It is important to note that journalists described these dominant themes as related to, and sometimes dependant on, situational factors in the Whitfield story such as the timing of Whitfield's victory, the scarcity of Canadian gold medals in Sydney, the historical importance of winning the first-ever Olympic gold medal in triathlon, and the popularity of the sport in Australia. The thematic consistencies were described by reporters as part of a large collection of story angles from

which they were able or required to choose the themes that shaped their stories. Because these situational factors were specific to Whitfield only, the privileging of themes in the coverage of Whitfield does not necessarily suggest a dominant meaning mix that can be applied to other athletes in other contexts. The coverage of Whitfield was not based on predetermined, dominant news values as much as it reflected the important elements of his story as identified by the journalists assigned to cover him. In other words, there was not enough evidence in this research to suggest that the coverage of Whitfield was based on "[a] master ideological narrative" such as that identified with respect to sport and masculinity (Messner et al., 2000, p. 380). Rather, the thematic consistencies show that reporters, presented with many story angles and options from which to choose, tended to cover Whitfield in similar ways.

When speaking to the production process, journalists demonstrated a well-developed and often critically sensitive awareness for the manner in which their own professional and personal decisions had influenced media texts and in turn contributed to the construction of Whitfield's media persona. Further, journalists were able to clearly articulate why decisions had been made in particular ways and how these decisions had influenced the final product. Often, journalists grounded their perspectives on the Whitfield case within a broad (Canadian) social context, suggesting a sensitivity and awareness of their position within the larger national and cultural framework. Journalists were not simply compliant in the process of media construction, but rather active stakeholders in the identification and production of sports news.

Journalists also described their work on Whitfield as being influenced by more concrete, and often institutional factors, including the expectations and demands of their editors, the pressure to meet deadlines, and also issues to do with accessibility to interviews and information. For example, journalists shared a sense that tight deadlines, and a lack of one-on-one access to Whitfield, meant that their stories tended to be routine, and at times, even superficial. The institutional factors in media production not only influenced, but also constrained, journalists' work. Thus, journalists in the Whitfield case operated at a crossroads of professional and personal power. They conducted their work while being constrained by, but also actively negotiating and resisting, the professional, and ideological forces in the media production process.

Journalists also identified a commitment to audiences and reader satisfaction as an important factor in their decisions. The factors influencing media coverage of Whitfield were not viewed by journalists as highly political, buoyed by a particular social agenda, or anchored in dominant ideologies. Rather, the themes used to shape the Whitfield story were seen as attractive, and in some cases, requisite ingredients in producing truthful, entertaining, and timely sports coverage that informed audiences and reflected the interests and desires of media consumers. The implications of this commitment to audiences are twofold. First, the results support a theoretical and empirical conception of sports media production as heavily influenced by a routine acceptance among media producers of how to construct 'good television' (Gruneau, 1989, p.152), or, in this case, good newspaper coverage. With respect to Whitfield, journalists

indicated that their work was grounded in a commitment to audience satisfaction rather than influenced by political maneuvering or professional codes. Second, the relationship to audiences in the construction of the Whitfield story suggests that the media production process was influenced, at least in part, by the desire to produce a strong audience commodity, the market value assigned to audiences by the media industry in order to effectively sell commercial time or space to advertisers (Sparks, 1992). Journalists referred to organizational and institutional conditions – such as editorial direction and profit goals – that necessitated the production of news that was attractive to audiences. The results of this research suggest that the Whitfield story was newsworthy and received significant media attention because: 1) it possessed several dominant and recognizable news values that could be seamlessly incorporated into a news story and 2) the subsequent amalgamation of dominant meanings was perceived by journalists to be useful in reaching and attracting audiences, a key component of successful commercial media (Sparks, 1992).

The results also suggest that the media production process, both in terms of the meanings constructed around Whitfield and the context in which journalists conducted their work, existed within a hegemonic framework, Gramsci's (1971) conception of power existing in terms of both force and consent. Whitfield's gold medal, his construction as the all-Canadian boy, and his heroic image were afforded privileged status through the production process and became the standard of Whitfield coverage. There was room for divergent themes within this coverage but not to the extent that these divergent representations contradicted



the accepted means of understanding and representing Whitfield's media persona. As for journalists, they described their work in covering Whitfield as a constant and active negotiation influenced by personal, professional, and institutional forces. Meeting deadlines, pleasing editors, liaising with Whitfield's sponsors and public relations staff, and accessing information were all cited as forces that had to be negotiated. Thus, within a hegemonic framework, reporters were forced to constantly decide how far they were willing to consent or how actively to resist dominant forces, in order to complete their stories.

#### Intertextual linkages

Researching the Whitfield case in terms of media production, sponsorship and product endorsement was designed to explore possible linkages between media image and marketability as they relate to contemporary celebrity athletes in Canada. Evidenced by the professional and personal perspectives of both journalists and marketers, the results suggest that linkages do exist between media production and marketing, sponsorship, and corporate communications within the sports media and sports product industries.

Journalists and marketers demonstrated a clear understanding of each other's work, including goals, professional codes, and spheres of influence such as that of gatekeepers of information. In this sense, the journalists and marketers revealed an elective affinity as foreseen in Gruneau's (1989) research. This was demonstrated in part by an inclusive understanding of the sports media and promotional chain, from news reporting and image construction, to marketing and product endorsement, and by a shared recognition, understanding and

appreciation of the influence of media production on marketing and vice versa. Both groups recognized the reciprocal nature of their relationship and provided evidence of the manner in which their professions draw on each other. Specifically, journalists recognized the role played by marketers within the promotional chain and the ability of marketers to influence the media production process by staging press conferences, regulating access to athlete appearances, and influencing athletes' strategic decisions. Marketers recognized the role of journalists in influencing media images, meanings, and codes that were useful in the marketing process. The elective affinity between the two groups, based on common beliefs and interests (Gruneau, 1989), necessitated the development of a reciprocal relationship in order that journalists and marketers could reach their professional goals. While labeling these relationships as elective affinities differs slightly from Gruneau's (1989) original use of the term – which he used to describe the relationship between stakeholders working to produce a successful televised sports event – the term is relevant as a way to understand that knowledge of the entire sports promotional chain served as important professional and cultural capital in both the sports media and marketing industries.

The results suggest that the professional activities of journalists and marketers within the Whitfield case contributed to the creation, perpetuation, and maintenance of a 'vortex of publicity' (Wernick, 1991), where cultural images, meanings, and codes are created, disseminated, and eventually implemented in subsequent promotional activities. Within this framework, the branding of Simon

Whitfield would have differed had the media coverage, and its impact on his media persona, differed. Within the Whitfield publicity vortex, the cluster of meanings that made up Whitfield's media persona became the cultural ingredients for branding him and his image.

It is important to note that the interviews revealed different opinions regarding the extent to which Whitfield's media image affected his value, or more accurately, his image's value, as a product endorser. However, there was a consensus among interviewees that the positive media representations of Whitfield positively impacted his marketability. Thus, in the minds of journalists and marketers, meanings and codes attached to Whitfield remained influential, at least to some degree, at subsequent points along the mediated chain (Wernick, 1991).

There was also general consensus among marketers that the mix of meanings associated with Whitfield was the most important reason for linking his image to their product and brand. Marketers viewed associations with Whitfield as attractive because of the meanings that he brought to the relationship. For the most part, marketers were reluctant to completely acknowledge or credit media representations of Whitfield as the primary repository of the cultural codes that contributed to this meaning mix. However, based on the textual analysis and interview data, there was significant alignment between the codes present in the media coverage of Whitfield, and the meanings that marketers found attractive in terms of building brand equity through their relationships with Whitfield. Thus, the research results suggest an intertextual relationship whereby, to some degree,

Whitfield's positive mediated image was identified, interpreted, and incorporated into marketing strategies in an effort to build brand awareness and equity. In this way, the Whitfield case is further evidence that the commercial media and sport have developed a symbiotic, dependent relationship (Rowe, 2000) and also suggests that commercial media and sports marketing may be increasingly important to each other's success.

Clearly, the process of creating and maintaining this type of intertextual matrix was influenced and complicated by the ability and, in some cases, the insistence of both journalists and marketers to critically interpret the various stages in the media production and marketing process and accordingly adjust their involvement or their perceived compliance. Reporters and marketers both recognized the impact of their work on Whitfield's mediated image and marketability but engaged in this process in individual ways, in some cases embracing or justifying their involvement, in others outwardly rejecting their roles in the promotional vortex. In other words, no steadfast professional code was revealed as to how decisions are made when dealing with media image and its impact on the marketing function. Processes by which Whitfield's media image and marketability were created, organized, and employed were never linear or static but necessarily influenced or broken down by a series of complex decisions made by media and marketing practitioners.

The results suggest a link between McCracken's (1989) meaning-transfer model of the successful celebrity endorsement and the manner in which contemporary athlete celebrity endorsements are selected, constructed,

strategized, and implemented. Marketers who had relationships with Whitfield based on sponsorship or product endorsements were clear that the positive mix of meanings, images, and codes that had been attached to Whitfield was a primary reason for entering into a business arrangement with him and linking his image to their brand. In most cases, marketers perceived a strategic alignment between the meanings associated with Whitfield, and the meanings that they wished to associate to their product. In turn, and in accordance with McCracken's (1989) model, Whitfield was viewed as a cultural vehicle, a means by which to transfer meanings from the endorser to the product. Thus, marketers' perspectives on the Whitfield relationship were closely tied to, and appeared to support, McCracken's framework.

Marketers differed somewhat on the origin of the cultural codes through which they intended to build stronger brands, but media image was an important factor. Strategically, the primary use of the product endorsement was to effectively relate the meanings attached to Whitfield to the product and strengthen and improve brand equity. While it is problematic to speculate on the effectiveness of this process (see discussion of audiences below) it is clear from this research that marketers were most interested in associating with Whitfield because of the positive consumer perceptions that would be created by the relationship. Increased sales and market share, while clearly important to these companies, were secondary to the goal of increasing equity and awareness among consumers of the brand by associating it with Whitfield and his image.

### The Meaning(s) of Whitfield

As mentioned earlier, journalists assigned to the Whitfield story identified a plethora of factors that influenced the production of his media image and sometimes varied in their opinions as to the factors that most influenced the coverage of Whitfield's gold medal victory in the Canadian press. This variety made it difficult to identify a tight mix of cultural codes with which to describe Whitfield's media image. However, the results also suggest that, within the Whitfield case, particular themes were privileged, or afforded more significance, and this resulted in coverage that most likely held particular social meanings for media consumers. The results also show that this coverage was often consistent with the meanings and codes involved in Whitfield's role as an endorser of consumer products. Considering previous research examining the impact of mediated sports messages and advertisements among audiences (Wilson & Sparks, 1996, 1999), it is reasonable and important to discuss potential impacts of the portrayals of Whitfield.

First, journalists clearly positioned Whitfield's gold medal as a crucial element in their coverage, and as a fundamental factor in determining Whitfield's newsworthiness. When asked to speculate, journalists were clear that Whitfield would not have received similar coverage without a gold medal victory at the Sydney Olympics. In fact, several journalists pointed to non-medal winning Canadian athletes – athletes not afforded significant coverage – as examples of the most likely scenario faced by Whitfield had he not won the gold. To whatever extent media representations may be understood as socially legitimating (Jhally,

1984, MacNeill, 1996), this coverage may have served to reinforce social and cultural norms that place winning above participation within the value structure of the Canadian sport system and within the broader Canadian context. At the very least, the Whitfield case, and in turn the results of this research, should serve as a reinforcement to sport stakeholders as to the value placed on winning in Canadian media in terms of news selection and construction.

It should be noted that some journalists expressed discomfort with the social value placed on winning and its reflection in media production, and therefore the issue requires a measure of reflexivity in its analysis. Since journalists were clear that their coverage was guided by their desire to deliver entertaining and informative news to audiences, it is reasonable to suggest that the media coverage of Simon Whitfield was primarily a reflection of journalists' perceptions of audiences' interests. However, if media representations do, to varying degrees, legitimate cultural forms, the representations of Whitfield in Canadian media may have had some negative as well as positive social impacts, as seen for example in the emphasis on winning.

Second, Whitfield was interpreted and positioned as quintessentially Canadian, and in some instances, as a representation of the Canadian hero based on a number of factors, most notably his focus, desire and perseverance in the face of overwhelming odds, his overall fastidiousness, and his genuine, understated, and gracious manner in victory. It is reasonable to suggest that these portrayals tended to oversimplify the often contestable meanings of citizenship and national identity within the multicultural and oft-changing

Canadian cultural landscape (Rowe et al., 1998, Jackson, 1994). This was most evident in interview data where Whitfield was identified as the 'all-Canadian boy,' or as 'a good Canadian kid.' While nothing to the effect was overtly stated, there was an underlying sense that this particular recognition, understanding, and interpretation of Whitfield's image was influenced by a traditional conception of a 'Canadian' as one of European descent and one who demonstrates the White, middle class cultural and social affinities associated with Whitfield. Thus, the results suggest that the heroic portrayals of Whitfield, closely tied to his national identity, were perhaps based on stereotypical notions of Canadian race and ethnicity as White and Anglo-Saxon.

#### Professional negotiation within the Sport/Media Complex

With respect to Simon Whitfield, the chain of sports media production – the organization and execution of the sporting spectacle, the coverage of the event by mass media, and the marketing and corporatization of an athlete and his image – was linked by the professional and institutional understandings of key stakeholders and practitioners. As mentioned above, there was clearly an intertextual nature to the Whitfield case in that media organizations, marketing organizations, and sport organizations, relied on each others work to complete the media production chain in a manner that benefited all stakeholders. As noted, this demonstrates an elective affinity (Gruneau, 1989) between journalists and marketers within the sport/media complex (Jhally, 1984), and highlights the manner in which sport spectacle is created to aid in capital accumulation and



cultural legitimization. Initially, this appeared to be an over-arching force in the case of Simon Whitfield.

However, the results of the Whitfield case also suggest that the chain of sports media production is not institutionally or ideologically fixed. Rather, interviews with journalists and marketers revealed a large degree of professional interpretation, decision-making, and negotiation between perceived compliance and resistance, often based on personal values and experiences. Journalists displayed a critical sensitivity for their role in cultural production and indicated that they actively negotiate their contributions to the marketing of athletes and consumer products. Marketers also displayed a sensitivity towards perpetuating problematic aspects of culture and stressed the need for authenticity and sincerity in their marketing campaigns in order to build strong ties with their customers. It is reasonable to suggest that, particularly with respect to marketers, their motivations were driven by profit maximization, but the fact remains that they displayed an active and sensitive connection to their role in the sport/media complex. For all interview respondents, this negotiation was based on a combination of professional perceptions and responsibilities, coupled with personal values and experiences.

These results suggest the need for future case studies of other celebrated athletes as a means of better understanding how sports media messages are produced in the face of individual negotiations by practitioners within the sport/media complex.

### Viewing Simon Whitfield through a Marxist lens

This study primarily focused on the meanings that journalists included in their coverage of Simon Whitfield and the ways in which these meanings contributed to the marketability of Whitfield's image. In this sense, both the textual analysis and the interviews employed a micro-level approach to examining sports media production, in that they scrutinized the social and professional processes surrounding a single athlete. However, given the theoretical framework that shaped this study, informed by macro-theories of ideology, hegemony, and spectacle, it is important to situate the results of the study within this approach.

The thematic consistencies in the coverage of Whitfield – his Canadian identity, his value as an Olympic champion, and his transformation from underdog to hero – were reflective of journalists' understandings of how to create truthful, entertaining, and attractive newspaper coverage. As mentioned earlier, the goal of building a strong audience commodity and the formation of elective affinities played a role in constructing these thematic consistencies at the production level. However, it is also a reasonable conclusion that these recurring themes were acceptable and useful because they fell within the boundaries of meanings that reflected the dominant and accepted ideology or, "organized thoughts" (Lull, 1995, p. 6), of sports media production and broader culture. Journalists' coverage of Whitfield was constrained by institutional and organizational factors as well as personal and professional notions of what constitutes "good" news and entertainment. Ascribing accepted codes of

meaning to Whitfield's media image – codes that journalists understood to reflect a dominant Canadian identity and ideology – was a tool that reporters used to negotiate the challenges that they encountered in the production process. These codes are cultural and exhibit social and political values at a macro level.

The decisions made by journalists in their struggle to make meaning of the Whitfield story were also influenced by historical and social relations. Journalists' understandings, interpretations, and decisions regarding the meanings of Whitfield could be interpreted as consistent with the meanings historically attached to previous athletes and anchored in previous productions. In this way, journalists described the Whitfield story as "straight-forward" or could treat it as a "one-off" because they recognized and understood the historical and social significance of Whitfield based on previous athletic events and previous media productions as well as broader understandings of Canadian identity, society, and culture.

A balanced view is necessary here because the meanings that journalists ascribed to Whitfield were not invented editorially. These meanings were based on, and developed through, the reporting of actual events. However, a means of accounting for thematic consistencies, particularly in consideration of journalists' own descriptions of the production process, is to understand that making "good news" was most effective if it was based on meanings that fit within a dominant, historically located, ideology.

### Balancing Ideology with lived experience

Discussing ideology and hegemony as they relate to the case of Simon Whitfield is challenging because it requires balancing broad social theories on the one hand, and an understanding and respect for individuals' lived experiences on the other. Reconciling these two perspectives proved to be one of the major challenges of this thesis. While it was impossible to completely satisfy these two approaches simultaneously, I believe this study found an acceptable middle ground by highlighting the personal accounts of sports journalists, marketers, and an athlete and situating them within the social and cultural understandings inherent in macro-theories such as ideology, hegemony, and spectacle. In this way, this thesis used social theory to account for and explain the cultural interactions and implications of sports media and marketing production, but also provided important data, from the perspective of social actors, that informed these theoretical perspectives. Ultimately, the results make theoretical understandings more current, sensitive, and insightful.

### Remembering the audience

There is a tendency within an exploration of meanings, codes, and values in the media production process to overlook the importance and complexity of audiences in the consumption and interpretation of media texts. It is acknowledged that claims within this research framework as to the impact of media and marketing representations of Simon Whitfield upon Canadian audiences are speculative at best. It is reasonable to suggest however, that the construction and utilization of Whitfield's media image was based in large part on

dominant, and perhaps hegemonic, cultural values that were potentially legitimated through the media production and marketing processes.

### Limitations

This research was limited in two important ways. First, it was impossible to know with certainty that interviewee's responses were truthful and fully disclosing. It is reasonable that journalists and marketers responded to interview questions based on their perceptions of the interviewer's requirements or in ways that protected or enhanced their image or their company's image. Second, the ten interviews in this research represent only a small sample of the sports journalists and marketers involved in the Whitfield case, and an even smaller sample of sports journalists and marketers in Canada. This is important when considering the implications of the results in terms of Canadian sports media and marketing production and its impact on Canadian sport culture.

### Future Research

This study represents only the beginning of an exploration into the sports media/marketing relationship in Canada. Further evidence is needed to understand how media and marketing impact, and are impacted by sport culture. To do so, research should move beyond Olympic sports, and case studies of single athletes and examine other sectors of Canadian sport, including, but not limited to, amateur and recreational sports, professional sports, team sports, and emerging sports such as adventure racing and extreme sports. In fact, it is this last category, adventure racing and extreme sports, that represents the most exciting area for research in sports media and marketing, because of the

important role that commercial media, particularly television, and corporate sponsors have played in the development and distribution of these increasingly popular sports.

Further research is also needed in order to continue a critical analysis of the role that sports media and marketing play in creating and perpetuating traditional meanings and codes of sport in Canada and the way that these meanings contribute to hegemonic social and cultural relations. This research has informed notions of cultural hegemony and dominant ideologies in Canadian sport, but it is important that these findings be compared and contrasted with other results to create a more complete understanding of the social implications of sports media and marketing.

Finally, future research is necessary because the relationships and structures explored in the case of Simon Whitfield are not static. Rather, sports media and marketing production in Canada continues to evolve based on the actions of journalists and marketers. It is important that research continues to explore the implications of these social activities.

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## **Appendix 1 – Interview Protocol**

### **Media practitioners**

1. What elements of Simon Whitfield's race in Sydney did you consider newsworthy?
2. In your opinion, were these newsworthy elements demonstrated in the resulting coverage? Would you have liked to see the final coverage differ in any way?
3. How important was Whitfield's gold-medal achievement? Do you think that you would have covered Whitfield similarly or differently if he had won a silver medal?
4. Was Whitfield's Canadian-ness an important factor? Did it influence the decisions that you made with respect to covering his accomplishment?
5. Were there other elements of the Whitfield story that you considered newsworthy but may have not been reported? Why was this so?
6. Do you think that the media coverage afforded Simon Whitfield influenced his status as an endorser of consumer products? Why or why not?
7. In your view, has Whitfield remained newsworthy? Why or why not?
8. Do you anticipate further coverage of Simon Whitfield or will other individuals take his place?

### **Marketing practitioners**

1. What elements of Simon Whitfield's race did you consider marketable?
2. In your opinion, were these newsworthy marketable elements demonstrated in the resulting promotions involving Whitfield? Would you have liked to see the final coverage differ in any way?
3. How important was his gold-medal achievement? Do you think that you would have promoted or marketed Whitfield similarly or differently if he had won a silver medal?
4. Was Whitfield's Canadian-ness an important factor? Did it influence the decisions that you made with respect to associations with him?
5. Do you think that the media coverage afforded Simon Whitfield influenced his status as an endorser of consumer products? Why or why not?
6. In your view, has Whitfield remained a marketable figure? Why or why not?
7. Do you anticipate further marketing, promotions, or product endorsements involving Simon Whitfield or will other figures take his place?

## **Appendix 2 – UBC Behavioural Research Ethics Board – Certificate of Approval**