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The NFL: The Cultural Stage for a Shifting American Landscape

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THE NFL: THE CULTURAL STAGE FOR A SHIFTING AMERICAN LANDSCAPE

by

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B.A., Millsaps College, 2013

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The NFL: The Cultural Stage for a Shifting American Landscape

Thesis directed by Professor Stewart Hoover

The National Football League is more than just the most popular sports league in America. Dominant American discourses that surround American patriotism and popular culture have a parallel in the NFL. This parallel is due to the fact that football is a game uniquely rooted and structured like war. Additionally, many products of the American neo-liberal era are flourishing on the NFL stage. These products include: corporatism, commercialization, consumer culture, and aggressive competition. The violent nature of the game invites notions of militarism and war that fit seamlessly with the game's identity. Militarism, being a symbol that protects the nation, fits perfectly with an American civil religion that is largely devoted to Reagan's ideal redemptive America. The NFL, through active and skillful branding, has meshed its identity with foundational aspects of American identity. Now the NFL has to navigate through the popular and traditional logics that are ingrained in American society while maintaining their business.

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

In 2015, 114.4 million viewers in the United States watched the Super Bowl. That mark topped last year's record-breaking Super Bowl viewership of 111 million viewers. There is a devout following of the National Football League (NFL) in the United States. Football has received the highest and most consistent ratings on television since the 1980s (Crepeau, 2013). Football, especially NFL football, is not only the most popular sport in America, but it also has deep reaching ties to the fabric of American society and culture. These ties are due in large part to the league's partnership with television as well as other media outlets. The league's bond with media provides an opportunity for popular culture and dominant narratives to be perpetuated via ads and the event itself. Another main reason football and the NFL mesh well with American society and culture is due to the violent nature of the game itself. Football is a simulation of war where physical domination and territorial invasion are the winning strategies. The nature of the game combined with our warring patriarchal society and the collective memory of past war victories help legitimize the NFL contest.

With these social ingredients the game can network itself into an alliance with popular American ideals and traditions, notions of civil religion, popular culture, and general logics of entertainment and mediation. The NFL now exists as an extension of American culture and the societal landscape. The league has been aware of this fact since the Pete Rozelle era (1960-1989) and has made numerous

changes to the game—like speeding it up, and implementing technology—in order to appease the general American appetite. The NFL is second to none in the way it has implemented progressive changes in order to enhance its league, which I will discuss later, and that is—in large part—just good business. Meeting social demands is an important aspect of business. This mannerism is what Max Weber (1946) called a business's 'ideological halo,' and the NFL has used it well enough to get itself atop of the sports entertainment world. However, the league has reached new ground that extend even deeper than mere dominance in entertainment.

The league is beginning to dominate cultural currency in America. The NFL produces national heroes in the form of talented male athletes. The NFL is a stage that presidents try to appear on to reach the public. The NFL establishes the notions of merit and masculinity, as well as femininity. Players and even sports broadcasters are held at such high regards equivalent to role models for citizens. The NFL is conceived as, and purports itself to be, a model for America. But, in 2014 the NFL faltered in dealing with two large social issues in America. The first is Michael Sam—the first openly gay football player entering the draft—and the second, in which the league made a severe mistake—its understanding of the social importance of domestic violence—and that almost cost the league everything.

The NFL is the richest league in the world (HBR, 2005). Now that it is atop the sporting world, both socially and economically, NFL owners are focused on balancing the relationship between the league's profits and its public image. During the recent scandals that placed the NFL front-and-center in the American media landscape, the NFL provided key insights into its bureaucratic structure around

media, and raised awareness of how deeply Americans are affected by those bureaucratic processes and by the sport, as a symbolic spectacle. Further, the NFL found itself in a vulnerable position after negative cries from the American public reached an all-time high (Valkenburg & Natta, 2014). The public outcry forced the NFL to change some fundamental aspects of its player management rules, reevaluate the public's authority, and the cries propelled several face-saving operations (Valkenburg & Natta, 2014). Now, the league—through its own actions and surrounding social circumstance—exists in a dialectical relationship with dominant American society. The league has relocated itself in a dominant part of society in which it has the power to substantiate and perpetuate ideals and values, but also has to answer to cultural authority. The National Football League's public image hangs in the balance of the existing and fluctuating discourses circulated in the very same American society with which it has amalgamated its identity.

Since its initiation as an American sports league, the NFL has aimed to place itself into the "hearts of major cities all across America" (Crepeau, 2014). This was a strategy to increase its popularity and revenue. The league succeeded in its attempt. However, there are now two major aspects of American society that have developed since the early stages of the league; the biggest of these social and environmental factors is the presence of media, more specifically, social media, broadcast television, and ESPN. Similar to Durkheim's interpretation of the inevitable desecularization of French society, the other factor is the desecularization of the US, which has led to a civil religion with broad-reaching connotations that has allowed for the re-appropriation and veneration of many arbitrary things (Santiago, 2009).

Football and the NFL are examples of those things.

The NFL operates within several major discourses in America. I will discuss two. The first one is American civil religion. Civil religion discourse fuels America's constant state of war against 'evil.' The binarification of 'good vs. evil' sets the stage for a violent game that uses war strategies, language, and rules: American football. David Chidester (2005) and Elanie Scarry (1987) both approach the issue of war as existing for the sake of preserving the ideals of a nation. Chidester builds a case study of Ronald Reagan's "sacrificial America," in which he accredits Reagan for establishing a strong civil religion that holds an "ideal" America as something worth dying for. Scarry's philosophical approach positions the pretext of fighting for one's nation as a cause worth dying and killing for. Scarry explores the nature of war and discovers two key points that serve my argument: 1) War is a contest of injuring, and the act of injuring makes it a "self-enforcing" contest; 2) she notes the phenomena of the contradiction present in modern civilized nations being at war is overlooked when placed in the discourse of national pride. Fighting for "one's nation," Scarry says, is at once a constructing and deconstructing act in the form of "killing and dying," or, acting uncivilized (122-124). That is to say, it is fine to act like an uncivilized "brute" as long it is for a larger supposed self-evident goodness like one's nation. Being brutal in football links indirectly to battling for America—Reagan's cause. What it does do directly, is it simplifies the setting, which allows the often-patriotic and redemptive discourse of war to align with the game. In 1959 the cover of TIME featured New York Giants star Sam Huff, with the heading, "A Man's Game." Crepeau (2014) marks this as a key moment and signal of the rise of NFL

football. “You play as rough and vicious as you can,’ said Huff, because if ‘you hit a guy, you hurt him instead of him hurting you.’ ...When played cleanly, ‘football is a game of awesome violence’” (Crepeau 2014). By coupling war and football, one essentially couples football with nationalism—and other discourses surrounding war. This posits football as a justifying aspect in the discourse that denotes American righteousness. War, and the ideals that war purports to defend, are heavily exemplified in NFL football, thus making football a significant role player in America’s identity. I am going to use Chidester and Scarry to demonstrate the warring discourse surrounding America. This discourse has spawned a redemptive and sacrificial civil religion, and NFL football fits seamlessly within it. Also, I hope to demonstrate that watching football positions the viewer to participate in a national festival of celebrating and defending an “ideal” America that is worth sacrifice.

The second discourse consists of a variety of dominant narratives within American popular culture that are circulated via the media. My focus here will be television, since NFL games are the most watched TV broadcasts in the country—especially the Super Bowl. Closely tied with my thoughts on media and culture, large structures in America such as corporations and their implications for society will be considered. Consequences of corporations like marketing and commodities are celebrated throughout the NFL broadcast, and that helps illustrate how the sport perpetuates America’s dominant narratives in popular culture. Media culture is an important location for cultural meaning and shifts in cultural meaning in the modern American society: “The manufacture of symbolic systems organized for public consumption is an economic, as well as a cultural enterprise. Therefore,

documenting the transition to vicarious management necessarily involves explaining how restructuring within the sports media marketplace, especially the emergence of new media, 'provides an economic base for the making and selling of personhood'" (Oates, 2009, p. 33). Cultural capital takes on a monetary form, but more than that, cultural understandings like masculinity become commodified. An example that I will demonstrate is how the NFL's Super Bowl TV broadcast evokes and relies on a male driven culture, or, what Mulvey (1975) calls the "male gaze" in order to project itself and its sponsors in a consumable fashion.

Sports and media analysts point to television as the reason for the NFL's success, and the numbers back that up. Darren Rovell from ESPN.com writes that, "Television is what is most important to the league, at least as far as revenue is concerned. Taking into account the \$102.5 million each team received from its national TV deal last year [2011], the presentation of games on television more than doubles the revenue of ticket sales." Rovell also talked to Barry Frank, executive vice president of IMG Media. Frank, "might have negotiated more sports television deals than anyone in broadcast history; the game is tailor-made for TV." Frank stated:

If a group of intelligent, knowledgeable sports fans sat down with an empty table and said, 'Let's create a sport for television, the best sport there could ever be,' we would create football," he said. "Football is a perfect television sport. It gives you time between plays to replay, it gives you commentary, it allows close-ups.

Football, now being a television-sport, is bound in many ways by the dominant narratives and the market logic of television. I will conduct a brief analysis of the Super Bowl production in 2008. I will look at the production of the broadcast and

use a lens similar to Laura Mulvey's (1975) "male gaze" methodology, which consisted of deconstructing a video production up to the very scenes and cuts, and then, constructing them back using enabling dominant discourses as the context from which to extract meaning. However, the Super Bowl narrative is not just male-driven, it also perpetuates war, American idealism, and popular culture.

There are some overlaps in the discourses of war, civil religion and mainstream popular culture. I will focus on overlaps that are found almost exclusively in NFL football telecasts. I am speaking of instances where the Army takes out large ads in the Super Bowl followed by Budweiser ads honoring soldiers because Budweiser knows that the military is being celebrated in this event. The Super Bowl audience is the perfect marketing opportunity for marketers to forge a combined image of brands and country for their product. Areas of contention—where the overlaps do not match—will be my key reference points for my analysis. These overlaps consist of instances where the NFL failed to play to the public and cultural stage. The instance that I will use as a foundation for my argument consists of the Ray Rice domestic violence incident.

The public domain—institutions, commercials, shows, and news media—is where feedback plays out. The league and its media investors hope and wait for the civilian's voice to approve or at least not disapprove their product. I analyze why the NFL does what it does, what messages it chooses to send, and I want to see how it conceives of itself in the public sphere. Whether or not society is receptive to the league's messages is another question that has much to do with the current dominant narratives being circulated in the public arena. The fact that NFL games

and the Super Bowl are by far the most watched programs on TV is telling that the league has a good product. But, what are the key aspects of their product that attract so many? Further, what role does the league's public image now have in the overall value of its product? The fact of the matter is that the American culture is not static, and the NFL was recently caught being behind the times of a dominant idea concerning domestic violence. The issue of Ray Rice and domestic violence came closer to ending the league than anything had ever before; I aim to find out why.

Literature Review

“Religious symbols, myths, and rituals are resources for merging the first person singular into a first person plural, for transforming any particular “I” into a collective “Us” (Wenner, 2015, p. 24).

David Chidester's “Authentic Fakes”

Chidester's (2005) working definition of religion consists of religion being a generic term for, “ways of being a human person in a human place...Accordingly...[religion] is the activity of being human in relation to superhuman transcendence and sacred inclusion” (vii-viii). So, for Chidester, religion humanizes and dehumanizes; includes and excludes. Chidester's naming of “authentic” religions over “fake” religions does not extend past a mere historical distinction. On his premise for his argument about authentic fakes, his concept of religion's role and adaptability allows me to comprehend what ingredients are needed to create and sustain a religion.

Althusser's phrase of humans being “always-already subjects” consists of a good gateway into understanding Chidester's “authentic” and “fake” religions. The idea of American popular culture creating religions, and that alone is what makes

them “fake,” seems to devalue the intervention of media and popular culture to all religions and to all cultures throughout history. However, Chidester’s point is actually an inverse detail. By showing how the creation of new religions via media and popular culture happens today, Chidester is uncovering and mapping the formula needed to do so, which, I think he would agree, is a very similar formula to the one used for the much older “authentic” religions. Chidester is simply making a distinction between authentic and fake to make his point easier to digest, and not to legitimize one religion over another.

Mapping how a religion can seemingly spring from popular culture requires me to look at the mediation of popular culture. The line of thinking that Wenner (2015) uses to justify his interest in advertisement’s role in society is helpful for understanding the extensive power of media in shaping society: “As Gerbner was fond of saying, those people who tell most of the stories most of the time control a culture. Certainly, in today’s increasingly ‘hypercommodified’ world, advertising tells most of the stories” (37). Social theory, especially in the way I am using it, has to generalize at some point. So, I have to consider the power of popular culture, not just as popular culture, but as culture: ergo, as a part of our human discourse. This wider space of existence—like a simulacrum—will help me think about why and how Ray Rice’s punch ended his career and changed the NFL forever, and, transversely, why and how that punch affected people in-and-outside of NFL fandom. The NFL has a strong place in American culture, not just popular American culture; if the NFL shakes, society feels the tremble.

Chidester also makes a point that religion exists with a certain,

“place...[that]...includes...[and] excludes.” Again, using the NFL, I understand that some of the most advanced architecture and construction the world has ever seen defines the stadiums in which the games are played. However, NFL’s true place, its true home, is in media. In today’s American society, as the NFL proves, media is ubiquitous and inescapable. Today, the media is more powerful than ever. McCombs and Shaw’s (1972) point that, “The mass media becomes the only contact many have with politics,” rings true for a sport the size of football, as well. Both fans and members of the NFL inhabit a common space in media: the NFL, in its commodification, and fans, in their consumption. The constant circulation of signs and symbols is a common practice for the NFL’s media.

Chidester's (2005) case study on Ronald Reagan’s civil sacrificial religion qualifies Reagan as a symbol operating within a specific simulacrum that circulates and resurrects the ideals from the “golden age of 1950s America.” Chidester’s case study on Reagan as a symbol provides a helpful link from, “Always-already subjects”—to—“preferred readings”—to—the resulting simulacrum that can resurrect and perpetuate a worldview in religious rhetoric and rituals. Together, I can identify the discourse in which the NFL has and continues to operate in. Specifically, Chidester finds that Ronald Reagan established an American sacrificial religion, and that religion helped him justify and operate within his particular pro-free-market worldview with large public support: “The religious worldviews of Reagan and [Jim] Jones were both embedded in the political economy of the cold war 1950s. For both, religion was aligned with a particular economic system, but each constructed his world view on different sides of the geopolitical line that

divided capitalism from communism...” (p. 106). Chidester (2005) also states that Reagan was an “idol of consumption, a figure suited to a postmodern society of simulation, a simulacrum in a political economy based on the circulation of signs” (p. 107).

There are solid comparisons between Reagan’s sacrificial religion and the NFL’s explicit pro-America ideology. The NFL is also an idol of consumption, and, in addition, the league embodies many of the qualities of Reagan’s redemptive civil religion. The league exists as a symbol within a very similar simulacrum that Chidester places Reagan, meaning they both project a similar worldview. That worldview consists of a combination of free enterprise, God (in Reagan’s case it was Christianity and in the NFL’s case it is the civic body of America), and there is the militaristic force that defends those world-views. When comparing what Reagan was to America to what the NFL is, the NFL is continuing the idea of the “sacrificial American”—the American civic body Reagan championed.

The NFL is without a doubt the nation’s strongest proponent for the military and the freedom the military protects. The NFL stands to support the fight against the enemy that Reagan rallied the nation against. Who is that enemy? Chidester claims that the Reagan’s enemy is anyone who is not “us.” Chidester (2005) writes of Reagan’s ability to manipulate people’s worldview, “Dying for America, in Reagan’s terms, also marks classifications of persons: spiritual and material, human and animal” (100). One’s own ability to define oneself as human is contingent upon their willingness to die for America. Reagan made it very clear that it was only America and her ideals and values that can grant personhood, thus creating a very specific

American religion.

Today, the clearest link between Reagan's enemy and the NFL's enemy is the US's 'war on terror.' The NFL has fervently backed the 'war on terror', especially since the emotional 2002 half-time show honoring the victims of 9/11¹. Chidester notes that the definition of terrorist is very wide in Reagan's civil religion as it encompasses all but a select few—diehard Americans. Chidester notes, "More than simply a truism of modern political violence—one person's freedom fighter is another's terrorist—Reagan's ideology of redemptive sacrifice was a strategic device for manipulating elements of his worldview" (100). It is obvious that the NFL tries to embody this idea with all of the soldiers on display and the military jets and canons at almost every game, but the league's own willingness to carry Reagan's torch is not the only element enabling it.

The second major discourse, which I would like to qualify now before returning to my point on America's civil religion, is the discourse surrounding war. The discourses surrounding war and the war-like nature of football make the sport the perfect platform for it. Then I will come back to Reagan's American sacrificial civil religion in an attempt to show how football is the combination of both.

Football and the Discourses around War

Butterworth (2008) points out that the Super Bowl yields "the most concise iteration yet of sport culture's rhetorical endorsement of the 'war on terror'" (p. 318). He talks specifically about Fox's 2008 production of the Super Bowl, which included the presentation of the "Declaration." Butterworth (2008) writes, "Fox's

¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zqtkik7nTik>

production exploits patriotism and militarism in ways that justify the mission on the ‘war on terror’ and undermine the democratic values for which the war purportedly is being waged” (p. 319). The Super Bowl’s presentation of war is exploitive in that patriotism and militarism becomes a mask for the war, hence leaving pro-Americans little to no option other than to support the troops—and the war. This is a clear connection to how Reagan’s ideology of redemptive sacrifice manipulated people to share his worldview. However, militarism and the patriotic/nationalist showings that are a part of the NFL may not be completely out of place. Sports have always played a significant role in civilizations, and the act of competing does not belong only to games. Modern American football is without a doubt, a game of war, and its popularity sheds light on America’s obsession with war has and can be transferred to an obsession with football. That drive and obsession with war and competition is the other discourse, or, the “regimes of truth” that make football a substitute for war.

There is a strong connection between competition in a game of football, and the act of war. Elaine Scarry (1987), in her assessment of pain and the human body, also breaks down the discourse behind, and structure of war—war’s very nature. She defines war as being a contest: “The conflation may occur as a flat assertion of equality—war is a game, games are war—or, more often as the importing of the attribute of one into the other’s sphere” (83). Similar to a game of chess or a tennis game, war is a contest, and like all contests, requires a winner and a loser. War is a contest in the same way a game of chess or tennis is a contest. In the case of war, she says, “injuring the most” is how to win the contest (84). She asks, what is the

difference between war and an arbitrary game of tennis or a singing contest. She posits whether we could have national competitions that are not war in order to settle or establish points of contention. Then, of course, she concludes that contests such as those, non-injuring contests are not “self-enforcing” contests. Thus the result of a large singing competition (one of her examples) will not compel the losing side (nation) to retract their argument or plans that are in contention. She claims that these types of contests would mostly likely provide more inspiration for war. However, “war...and the act of injuring,” Scarry claims, “does not have the, power of its own enforcement” (104). Rarely, if ever, has the outcome of a war left an opponent completely incapable of contest or of injury or of fighting. So how does war enforce its own outcome? Scarry claims, “The outcome of war endures long beyond the temporal moment and is translated into the disposition of issues because it is believed to and hence allowed to carry the power of its own enforcement” (108). The key is, according to Scarry, that people believe that war has the power of its own enforcement. The violent nature of war is its legitimization.

Like most every nation, America was founded on war, and the US has been practicing war incessantly since rising to a superpower. Reagan’s war on all that is not “us” is what Scarry would call an aspect of war that is “morale,” and this aspect carries over, even to peacetime, because injury is not necessary. Policing smaller countries aside, America is mostly in a fight with the world’s opposing “morale.” For Scarry (1987), “morale” is often translated into an activity “separate from injuring” (106). Scarry writes, “Because morale has connotations of the human spirit, the capacity to live beyond the body, the capacity to dwell in the realm of symbols and

substitutes...[for] physical events of survival (106). War is an ongoing process for the United States, whether it is ideological or an economic cold war. But, the “morale argument,” she claims, is often the source of contention for these wars. Of the “morale argument,” Scarry writes, “it is at least as often associated with world-building as with world-destroying, with creating as with killing, and thus can be taken to reside in...benign activities” (106-107). The activity, however, cannot be carried out in any such fashion. It must be a collective effort that shares the spirit of the society that it represents. NFL football, by emulating war in many ways, provides the outlet for what Scarry describes as the “morale argument?” She states:

The abbreviated contest does not displace or provide a substitute for the injuries...it instead substitutes for the single element that was thought to necessitate and hence justify the injuring...[the contest] is like a small jewel placed down in the midst of a three-year massacre and relied on to perform the very work for the sake of which its own activity had been originally rejected (107).

The NFL games constitute the “jewel” that inspires belief and morale that compels people to respect the outcome of America’s war. The Super Bowl is a celebration and enforcement of America’s morale. What’s more, football evokes the morale argument and provides the violence. This setting qualifies the statement repeated over and over again at NFL stadiums and on television broadcasts, which goes something like: “We honor the soldiers who sacrifice their lives so that we can enjoy our football.” Once one thinks about this statement, one is tempted to ask if soldiers are actually willing to die so that you and I can watch guys run around chasing each other. Of course not; football is a manifestation of America, and it is the morale of America—what NFL football encapsulates—that the soldiers are willing to die for.

History of the Game and NFL

The National Football League started in 1922 as a small, unpopular sports league. The league benefited immensely with the introduction of television that next decade. The first national NFL broadcast was the Chicago Bears and Detroit Lions game on Thanksgiving Day, 1934. The intention of the league owners was made clear by the date that they chose. They knew then, as they know now, that the key to prospering as a sports league is to tie in civic pride with their sport. Sports and the civic body, religion, as well as sports and politics, have a history that dates to ancient Greek civilization.

It is hard to imagine the game of American football any other way than it is now, but due to its hybridity as a sport and its violent beginnings, the game underwent numerous significant changes, and still continues to do so. According to Harvard Business Review (2005), the United States began to play a form of football that featured a combination of rugby and soccer in the late 1800s. Rutgers, Princeton, Columbia, and Yale formed the Intercollegiate Football Association in 1873. Harvard preferred to play a game more like rugby instead of soccer:

Eventually, Harvard convinced Yale to play by Harvard rules in 1875. Touchdowns counted for 1 point, a successful conversion kick for 4 points, and a field goal was worth 5 points. The game became increasingly popular but wide variations in the rules caused confusion. Finally, the first rules of American Football were written at the Massasoit convention, the forerunner of the NCAA, in 1876 (HBR, Wells and Haglock, 2005).

Then shortly after, a player from Yale, Walter Camp, made many of the most significant changes in the history of the sport. Wells and Haglock (2005) found that, "In 1880, Camp suggested one side should be given undisputed possession of the ball, and the line of scrimmage was introduced," as well as more points for

touchdowns and less for field goals. “However,” they continue, “The game was brutal, and physical force dominated over skill and strategy. In the 1905 season, 18 players died and 159 were seriously injured. Camp made more changes to help the game gear towards a more strategic and skillful contest instead of one with such brutality. Camp started a trend that is iconic of football, which is a change to the game. No other game has changed and is as open to change as football. In this case, the game began moving away from European-style soccer and towards a unique American contest.

The game took off in the college realm much faster than in the pros. Football programs grew every year and eventually became one of the most profitable assets of their universities. The playing field was set for the real money to be made for football as a professional game. William (Pudge) Heffelfinger was the first player to be paid for playing football when he received \$500 to play with the Allegheny Athletic Association against the Pittsburgh Athletic Club in 1892 (HBR, 2005). In 1920, Jim Thorpe was appointed president to the American Professional Football Association (APFA). That league failed after one season. In 1921, the league was reorganized with 22 teams, and in 1922 it was renamed to the National Football League (NFL). Joe Carr was president from 1921 until his death in 1939, a timespan in which several changes, formations, and consolidations occurred including the NFL draft. In 1941, Elmer Layden became the first Commissioner of the NFL. The Bert Bell and then Pete Rozelle era followed after that. Many other football leagues challenged the NFL starting in 1946, but they all ended up failing or joining the NFL. The last of these challengers—which failed—was the USFL in 1986. In 1999, the

league reached its current state of 32 teams across the country. My attempt will be to show how volatile the league has been since its inception. The sport is relatively new in the world of sports, thus its deliberate actions to form or mesh with society in order to gain traction, is traceable. The commodified and media saturated NFL of today is largely the product of Pete Rozelle, so I will touch on his leadership and refer to his era as the foundation for today's league.

The league could be considered what Weber (1946) referred to as, "A private economy bureaucracy" (197). Money is the motivation of most of the changes that the league makes. The society has changed since the gladiator days and the Dark Ages, so the game could not remain so brutal. Like any good product, the game needed integrity. Rules and regulations to promote fairness helped make it more entertaining as well as legitimize the sport. Thus, the bureaucratic structure of the NFL began with a goal to make an honorable product that people could respect. However, one advantage the league had over other sports was the violent nature of the game, which provided needed "outlets" and entertainment for blue-collared workers in industrial cities like Pittsburgh and Philadelphia (Crepeau, pg. 5, 2013). Now the league has fully tapped into the glorified hard work and grassroots narrative that is thought to be the beginnings of this nation, which has helped propel football into a state of mania:

Football has been popular in the United States for more than 100 years, but now expands beyond popular into mania. High school team's fly coast-to-coast for televised games. College coaches use private jets and helicopters to woo 17-year-olds. Three national high school all-star games air on ESPN, NBC and NFL network, sponsored by DR me, the Marines and Under Armor. Dozens of local and regional prep All-Star games have been established; with even youth leagues staging 'all-star' games. (Easterbrook, 205, 2014)

The NFL has succeeded in taking a uniquely American sport and turning it into a ritualized American spectacle. So much so has the NFL succeed in roping in American civil loyalty to its game, that the National Football League has now transformed into a cultural stage, where significant political, personal, cultural, and national events and changes are played out. And, due to its ubiquitous presence in civic life (all levels of education and inescapable marketing), the league has now reached a point where many citizens of this country are consumed by the sport and its leagues, and thus have a powerful hand in shaping the very structures of the leagues and game.

Cultural Stage: Scandals and Semiotics

In an ideal world for the NFL, the league could control all the messages and connotations it sends, and how these messages and connotations are interpreted, but recent controversies in the league have revealed another, much sharper, edge to the sword of semiotics. If you are not convinced of the level of sacrality the NFL has now ascended to, then look at what happens when the NFL or proponents of the NFL act in a way contrary to the accordance of traditional or trending social and civil norms. I was, at first, taken by surprise at the vast amount of media coverage Michael Sam, the first openly gay player drafted into the league, was receiving. Watching the NFL taking on the responsibility to accept Sam was like watching America change into a slightly more pro-gay country.

But, the prime case study for this is the Ray Rice scandal, in which he punched his then fiancé, now wife. The incident was caught on video that showed Rice dragging his unconscious fiancé out of the elevator. Rodger Goodell, the

Commissioner, sat down with both of them and received their statements. Goodell then proceeded to give Rice a two-game suspension in accordance to league policy. Yet, that policy seemed to be looking out for the interest of the game, which, it seems, would benefit the league as a whole. The league's mistake during this process was leaving out a major part of the equation: the public. This instance was not unusual for the NFL. An "Outside the Lines" report shows that the NFL's domestic abuse policy—and variations crafted by the NFL over the past 20 years:

Did not yield a suspension after a domestic violence conviction until 2000, according to data compiled from court records and media reports. And out of 48 players considered guilty of domestic violence under the league policy between 2000 through 2014, the league suspended players for one game or not at all in 88 percent of the cases. Twenty-seven players -- or 56 percent -- received no suspension, and 15 others were forced to sit out one game.

The second video that was released showed the actual punch, and it quickly "filled people's social media feeds." OTL reports that the public reaction was, "Swift and devastating. Immediately, questions were raised anew about the appropriateness of Goodell's two-game suspension and the league's handling of scores of other domestic violence cases." Later that day, the Ravens terminated Rice's contract, and the NFL announced that Rice was suspended indefinitely an hour after Rice was cut from the Ravens. The week following the Rice re-suspension, Adrian Peterson, the star running back for the Minnesota Vikings, was charged with child abuse. Peterson was immediately suspended for an indefinite amount of time.

There are still appeals and cases to be made for both incidents, and Rice has since won his appeal. That being said much has happened, and there is plenty of evidence to analyze that gives us insight into how much people are concerned with the league.

As we know, Goodell has been accused of being overreaching with player discipline as the “judge, jury and executioner,” yet with the initial two-game suspension of Rice, he was excoriated for being too soft. The real problem is the lack of clarity and consistency of punishment without adherence to precedent. Judge Jones’ words feed into the “they’re making it up as they go along” mentality now in vogue about NFL discipline. No arbiter wants to be called out as “arbitrary.” (MMQB—Peter King)

The most important thing to note is that the league was not aware of people’s concerns surrounding the incidents. The league has no strict policy guidelines unless they are in place to protect monetary interest. The league is capable of predicting economic fluctuations. The issues of personal conduct are very difficult for the league to deal with due to the changing standards of social conduct in society at large. The NFL is by no means an unorganized entity, it has impressive means of operating, but society is a tricky landscape to identify. The league’s surprise at the public outrage caused them to make irrational decisions—irrational in bureaucratic terms. The initial two-game suspension of Rice—despite video footage that showed him dragging his unconscious fiancée out of an elevator—was consistent with an NFL policy that for years has handed out much harsher punishments for substance abuse and performance-enhancing drugs than for physical violence against women. (OTL)

As the ESPN article points out, the rational decision was to suspend Rice for two games. That was league policy and has been for 20 years. According to league policy, a drug violation is grounds for a 3-4 game suspension. Let’s consider the time frame in which these policies were implemented so that they make sense for the NFL. Drug violations directly affect the fairness of the game, which, in turn, directs the integrity and legitimization of the sport and league. This is a strategic rule that

was adapted in the early pre-popular stages of the league. The domestic violence punishment did not even exist until 1995, and even then, it was not so strictly enforced. From then to now, the NFL has grown in popularity, but more importantly, it has expanded its media presence. ESPN, the 24/7 sports network is largely accountable for that. Sensitivity and awareness of women's rights has not stopped growing since it started. These are all contributing factors, but the sole reason that the NFL received so much flack and continues to do so is that it did not respond to the situation like the nation it represents expected them to. The Commissioner in this sense is like the president of the United States. The only difference is that the NFL did not directly give any formal speeches promising a fair and progressive stance for the equality and well being of all American citizens like a president would do. Instead, the league took on that identity by crisscrossing connotations of fundamental American ideals and displaying them in the public domain.

The Business of the NFL: The Balancing of Business and Personal

Weber (1946) delineates what a bureaucracy does and how it works, but he also acknowledges that there has to be an adept awareness of the societal conditions in which the structure stands. Although most of Weber's work on bureaucracy focuses on the processes, his acknowledgements of the relation bureaucracies' share with society are important for this paper. When a private economy bureaucracy needs a leader, that leader is expected to have a vast comprehension of the culture and society in which the organization is operating. When referring to the relationship a leader has with his or her organization, Weber (1946) states:

"Modern loyalty is devoted to impersonal and functional purposes. Behind the

functional purposes, of course, 'ideas of culture-values' usually stand. These are ersatz for the earthly or supra-mundane personal master: ideas such as 'state,' 'church,' 'party,' or 'enterprise' are thought of being realized in a community; they provide an ideological halo for the master" (Weber, 199). The NFL, more than any other private bureaucracy in America, uses the "ideas of culture-values" in combination with its product. The NFL logo is in the shape of a star-filled shield with a football and "NFL" stamped across it in a bold white font. The face of the business is a symbol for protection, either for its product or its country, or both. Several businesses and sports leagues in America have used the prevailing notion of American exceptionalism to distinguish their brand or product, but only the NFL has such a powerful influence in almost every major city in the country, a game of war, and a ubiquitous media presence. The league uses the power of sport and the fanaticism that comes with sport to set itself apart from other businesses, but that entails that the league is open and appealing to various points of view. Crepeau (2014), points out that at one point, 'Rush Limbaugh was interested in buying a minority share in the St. Louis Rams, Goodell was quoted as saying that "divisive comments are not what the N.F.L. is all about.' The commissioner referred specifically to Limbaugh's racist comments about Eagles quarterback Donovan McNabb, which Goodell characterized as 'polarizing'" (3414). The NFL understands that it plays a role in social issues. Racism is still a no-fly zone that no large structure wants to deal with.

Not only has the league succeeded in its union with cultural ideas and values, but it also attracts fans from its biggest assets: its star players. There is nothing like

a hometown sporting hero, but when you have popular media's power to perpetuate certain narratives combined with media's presence in the NFL, those heroes can become national heroes. However, these unique human assets of this private business are where the NFL begins to go against traditional bureaucratic processes and blur the line between what is business and what is personal. This presents a challenge because it necessarily involves the league's business with public and social norms. Weber (1946) suggests that a bureaucracy needs to "segregate official activity as something distinct from the where of private life" (197). To the NFL's credit, its human assets, or players, are not completely normal people anymore, like you and I might be considered. They now serve a role, or play a part, if you will. Crepeau (2014) discovered a journalist's comments that help define the NFL athlete's role: "Mary Riddell, The Observer's superb columnist, once noted that sports heroes reflect and amplify "the fixations" of their society. It is who they are and what they do. It is also what sports cultures do. Both offer a distorted or exaggerated version of social reality and social values, and this happens whether one sees positive or negative images emanating from sport." A reality of the sport that is often misconceived is the frightening level of objectification each athlete is subjected to ever since they can run.

Professional athletes, especially NFL players, undergo an intense fragmentation process of their physicality that is constantly scrutinized. So, the NFL—along with middle schools, high schools, and universities—has greatly succeeded in objectifying its players to an extreme with surprisingly little resistance, thus rendering them less than human, or heavily objectified at best.

Oates (2009) states, "The discourse of vicarious management brings extraordinary focus and deliberateness to a long-standing tendency to convert elite athletes into commodities, framing them as assets and construction mechanisms for audiences to manipulate them" (39). Oates' Foucauldian take on the commodification of NFL athletes is spot on, especially when it comes to the NFL draft. These players' every physical asset is tallied and reassessed every year beginning during childhood. Players' personal choices are amplified as they grow into celebrities and they have ramifications for the league. Weber (1946) states that, "In principle, the executive office is separated from the household, business from private correspondence...The more consistently the modern type of business management has been carried through, the more are these separations the case" (197). This separation can quickly get ambiguous when referring to exactly how much the league can control its players' conduct outside of the game, and the media make personal matters for top players a much more public affair.

Bureaucracy and Cultural Authority

When asked by CBS News during the Rice scandal whether he believed his job was on the line, Goodell said:

"No. I'm used to criticism. I'm used to that. Every day, I have to earn my stripes. Every day, I have to, to do a better job. And that's my responsibility to the game, to the NFL and to what I see as society. People expect a lot from the NFL. We accept that. We embrace that. That's our opportunity to make a difference, not just in the NFL but in society in general. We have that ability. We have that influence. And we have to do that. And every day, that's what we're going to strive to do" (CBS).

The scandals suggest that the NFL was not aware of the extent of its immersion in American culture until the controversies that occurred in 2014. This statement is

more of a statement to itself as well as one for the public. The league has ascended to a sacred place in American society and have now realized their position as well as accepted the responsibility. As popular and as profitable as the league is, that in-and-of itself is not enough to include it as a part of the dominant social fabric. Apple is a much more profitable and popular product, but a national outrage will not ensue should one of its employees strike his or her partner. It is near impossible to imagine that a national debate would occur if one of Apple's employees admitted he or she were gay. The difference between the two organizations is not simply that one is a popular sport, and the other is a popular consumer product. There are plenty of popular sports that do not have the same national pull as the NFL.

My awareness of the league's powerful influence began with the heavy national media coverage of Michael Sam's drafting into the league as the first openly homosexual NFL player. This was a landmark case, not just for the league, but for the whole country. The subtle, but growing awkwardness with the Redskins' name and logo, seemed to be an affordable controversy for the NFL. But, the tension around the Redskins occurred before the Ray Rice domestic abuse scandal. What really set the crisis in motion was the mishandling by the commissioner, which caused an outcry so loud that the league found itself frantically trying to realize what the big deal was. The pressures on the society and public policies outside of the league were pressuring the league as well. Once the league figured it out, it had to act in a way that pleased not the players, commissioner, or even the league owners, but the American public. I am conducting a genealogy of the NFL; therefore, I am not looking to provide a cause for the public scandals, rather, I'd like to

delineate the processes and factors that made the events and actions taken by the league a reason for scandals. For this, I believe it is imperative to note the league's close identification with American exceptionalism, or, America the good, or, Reagan's reference to a "golden-age" America. Thus, the significance of what the league does is profound due to its habitual embroidery with dominant American myths and the nationalistic American identity.

Now, the NFL is on its heels as it tries to remedy any other controversies that could jeopardize their statues and business. A testament to its new approach is the Adrian Peterson case. Peterson, an undisputed top-three running back in the league, and second most endorsed athlete in the league, was recently suspended for at least a year after pleading guilty to a child abuse misdemeanor. I believe the league will soon obligate Redskins owner, Daniel Snyder, to change the name of his team, as well. The league has to work on a face-saving operation in order to maintain its important statues in America. The league must turn to the media in order to right the ship, but media introduces another set of logics that the NFL must deal with.

The Media and the League

Richard Johnson's "Circuit of Culture"

Wenner (1989) notes the similarities between Richard Johnson's (1986-87) "circuit of culture" model and Stuart Hall's "encoding/decoding" model. While both originate from Marx's 'circuit of capital,' Johnson's phrase was designed for thinking of cultural products in general, while Hall's is only applied to media forms. Johnson's conception allows more flexibility in categorizing football's place in American culture. Wenner delineates Johnson's model:

There are four moments of the process: (1) a focus on the production of cultural products, (2) a focus on the texts that are produced, (3) a focus on how these texts are read by ordinary people, and (4) a focus on 'lived cultures' and 'social relations' that relate to the 'uses' made of the readings of texts, as well as being material that new forms of cultural production can draw upon (Wenner, 1989, p. 78).

Stuart Hall (1975) and Richard Johnson (1986-87) provide the theoretical background for my conception of the relationship that NFL and television share and how they fit within American society. My goal is to do what Johnson proposed needs to be done to successfully understand a social form, and that entails understanding them in terms of "use values" and "outcomes." Wenner (1989), in his own exploration of sports and society, cites Johnson's formula for understanding a social form: "They can best be answered once we have traced a social form right through the circuit of its transformations and some attempt to place it within the whole context of relations of hegemony within the society" (p. 91). Sports, more specifically NFL football, are the social forms that I will be tracing in this analysis.

It all started with a \$9,000 investment, the purchase of a "transponder" by a father and son who had never seen one, and the suicide of a famous playboy. (Miller & Shales, p. 1)

In their opening statement (above) Miller and Shales reference the following: economics, technology, culture, a corporate institution—respectively. *Those Guys Have All The Fun* (2011), is a historical account of ESPN. It is a book written by two journalists that consists of a series of interviews from the people that were involved with ESPN's conception and its rise to power. The ones responsible for the success of ESPN almost always attribute it to "dumb luck" and the writers of the book also build upon this tone of randomness while piecing the interviews together. However, using Foucault's approach to understanding history allows me to deconstruct some

of these incidents of “dumb luck.” Of his method of genealogy, Foucault states, “...to follow the complex course of descent is to maintain passing events in their proper dispersion’ it is to identify the accidents, the minute deviations—or conversely, the complete reversals—the errors, the false appraisals, and the faulty calculations that gave birth to those things that continue to exist and have value for us...truth or being does not lie at the root of what we know and what we are, but the extremity of accidents (Foucault, 1964). Further specializing this approach, Richard Johnson’s (1987) “circuit of culture” helps narrow my discourse analysis of how the NFL has risen to its social prominence. One can infer that ESPN’s rise to dominance followed what it was afforded by the society and the culture surrounding that period in the United States.

Kath Woodward (2012) looks at how the world exists within sports and how sports exist within the world. She makes a crucial connection between sports and culture: “Although sport is usually classified under the umbrella of culture, a consideration of global sport and globalization of sport makes it evident that sport is intensively political and embedded in economic systems as well as generating its own power mechanisms and social and economic processes” (Woodward, 33). Culture cannot account for the rise of ESPN and football alone. Culture is a great point of reference, but there is another level, an economic level that needs analyzing as well.

“Getty’s (Getty Oil) investment of \$15 million in May of 1979: Step Number Two in ESPN’s rise to world dominance.” (Miller & Shales, p. 25) Is it fitting that a corporation like Getty Oil is what brought us ESPN? Another important fact is that

Anheuser-Busch gave ESPN their first large ad contract. What's more is that sports have been commodified because they are a revenue-based product, and entertainment product. I will follow the trajectory that began in the Reagan era. In addition to Reagan's sacrificial civil religion, he also had a large hand in creating the modern fragmented society—post-industrial, working class turned into service class. Then enter the advertisers, which leads to the commodification of fans and players alike. Then I will briefly explore the logic surrounding cable TV, which allowed the advertisers to reach their targeted audiences. Lastly, the culmination of all of them in what proved to be the perfect cultural product to team up with this social and economic product: NFL football. Football is a game, not an institution, but NFL football pervades several intuitions—education included.

The Production of Cultural Products

The early intersection of TV and sports

NBC director Harry Coyle reminisced in 1988, "What some people forget is that television got off the ground because of sports. Today, maybe, sports need television to survive, but it was just the opposite when it first started" (Neal-Lunsford, p. 59, 1992).

In the 1920s sports began to establish themselves as an important part of US society. Baseball was the most popular sport, and the MLB was the most prestigious and largely followed professional sports league at the time. College basketball, and professional boxing were immensely popular as well. Football was mostly played in colleges at the time, but was not considered a respectable game, and was not thought of as a viable career option. Professional football became official in 1920, but the organization was so small that they couldn't compete with other careers. To really put it into perspective, Robert Griffin III, a Heisman winner, entered the NFL

and received a \$21.1 million contract with a \$13.8 million signing bonus. This is a considerable amount more than a history teacher would make, but this was not always the case:

Three of the first five Heisman Trophy winners in 1935-39 chose business careers over joining the NFL. The two who did choose to play pro football, Larry Kelly and Davey O'Brien, had just one-and two-year careers, respectively. Kelly retired to teach history...(Coenen, 2005, p. 96).

These circumstances made the rise of professional football a slow and tumultuous process (Coenen, 2005). Football had a long way to go before the thought of choosing a teaching position over an NFL contract seemed bizarre.

Things began improving for football and sports in general with the inception of television in the 1930s. Television was broadcasting in a similar large network-based set up as radio. TV began producing talk shows, game shows, and series, but they were not persuading people to go out and purchase TVs. Top executives needed to tap into a cultural product people were already willing to watch: sports (Neal-Lunsford, 1992).

Boxing and wrestling proved themselves to be a hot-ticket item because they took place in such confined spaces, which was easy for the cameras to capture. The same was true for college basketball (there was no pro league until 1946). Sports owned prime-time slots all the way until the 1950s: "From 1946 to 1950, it was sport which held the upper hand in its relationship with television as the networks relied heavily on sport to fill out their prime-time schedules in those first few years" (Neal-Lunsford, 1992, p. 57). TV sales began to increase dramatically: "In 1948 television set sales jumped from 14,000 to 172,000" (Neal-Lunsford, 1992, p. 65). But, that dominance was short lived as television networks came began to develop

popular programming. Sports began to lose its appeal to producers and the public. Lunsford writes, “No longer did television need sports to sell sets, as it did just a few years ago...highly popular shows as Texaco Star Theater and Philco TV Playhouse, had arrived on the scene” (p. 69). Lunsford goes on to reveal that market research at the time “indicated that women controlled family viewing choices as well as consumer spending” (p. 70). This research made women advertiser’s target, so shows needed to cater to their preferences. Sports were out of the spot light.

During this time period, professional football and its handlers were working hard to make their product a viable game and form of entertainment (Coenen, 2005). Pro football went through several changes from the late ‘30s-late ‘40s in an attempt to distinguish their product from college and semi-professional football. Also, they made several changes to the rules of the game in order to make it a higher scoring game and a more entertaining one (Coenen). Exposure on television could only help the sport. Baseball, on the other hand, had dominance over the sporting arena, and they were guarding that cautiously by strictly limiting their exposure on TV, but they knew that they should eventually try to capitalize on this new medium.

Baseball was weary of giving their TV audience a good view of the game in fear of losing revenue at the gate. In 1948, baseball commissioner, Ford Frick, famously said, “The view a fan gets at home should not be any better than that of the fan in the worst seat of the ball park” (Neal-Lunsford, 1992, 67). Also, TV shows were getting better, and people were getting used to the fact that they could see the human element on display—other people—by watching TV. TV sets were beginning

to sell automatically in the '50s, and the battle in the industry was now turned to capitalizing on advertising.

Cable TV: A Product of a Fragmented Society

Television was rapidly turning into America's dominant cultural form of entertainment after the '50s. The 1950's were the first decade that radio no longer ruled broadcasting. NBC led the charge by establishing the first network-programming schedule in 1948. Then, "network television began to spread westward via coaxial cable," and "in 1951 the link reached the west coast. In a short time television had gained a firm hold on the nation's conscience" (Neal-Lunsford, p. 58). Television producers and advertisers alike were figuring out what worked, and for what audience. Sports were thought to be quite a pain at that time for producers because of the big-three broadcast format of television. Show length and programming needed to be precise and sports were often not reliable (Neal-Lunsford 1992). But, at this point in time, television consisted mostly of ABC, CBS, and NBC, and this 'big-three' network system eventually proved to not be diverse enough to keep up with the changing social tides that would take place in the next decade.

Meanwhile, the most beneficiary function of society for the NFL at that time was that it provided an opportunity for civic pride during the post-WWII era. Supporting your local NFL team became a good place to show your pride for your city and country: "Rallying around NFL franchises gave many people a common sense of community and civic pride" (Coenen, 167). Even though there was civic pride in supporting a professional football team, the owners were too controlling of

their product during the 50s—only allowing 13 franchises—and they were only getting limited exposure in comparison to prime time TV shows. As the '50s ended, the tables had turned in the sports-TV relationship. Sports needed to find an outlet that would make them even more desirable, and the NFL “would have to wait a decade, and the arrival of television-minded NFL commissioner Pete Rozelle, before it made an impact on network television” (Neal-Lunsford, p. 73).

The technologies of the times began to catch up with the broadcast TV during the late '70s. That being said, it was not the inventions of satellites and cable TV that put the pressure on network TV. Rather, it was technologies such as the Nielsen box and other tools used for market research that had industry eager to expand (Morse, p. 48).

Social, political, economic, institutional, and industrial forces around the nation were being affected by the deindustrialization occurring in the States around that time period. Outsourcing most production jobs played a major role in turning American workers into the larger service industry that is prevalent today. Barker (2012) writes, “This sectorial reorganization leads to a reduction in regional and urban concentration, together with a rise in flexible forms of work organization and a decline in national bargaining procedures” (153). With this stratification of the people happening, the 'Big 3' TV networks made less sense to advertisers trying to re-conceptualize the audience during this period. Political forces and persuasions followed the economic and social forces, per usual, thus leading America into the Reagan era; a time of social fragmentation and government deregulation.

No longer producers, the large American working class began to shift or turn into consumers. Barker (2012) notes, “This consumption-centeredness of the working class becomes the medium and instrument of their fragmentation as they are internally stratified through ‘taste’ preferences” (154). I’ve referring to TV, radio, and sport as cultural products, and because of sport’s association with the entertainment industry and television, they are rendered commodities as well. Well, during this era in American history, people get added to this list as they solidify themselves as cultural, commodified products via their “taste preferences”. Advertisers, being aware of this stratified society and market, needed a way to capitalize on it.

Cable telecommunications provided the way, “And yet, during the 1980s many national advertisers were hesitant to dive into the new electronic media that many of them were heralding as the newest way to reach this divided society” (Turow, 1997, p. 49). RCA manager, Al Parinello, explains the difficulty involved in selling the new electronic media during this time:

In 1978, I was one of two people hired by RCA to penetrate the cable-television marketplace and basically convince new emerging networks that satellite distribution of their televisions product—as opposed to terrestrial distribution—was the wave of the future. RCA had launched a satellite called SATCOM 1, but no one understood that this thing was real, that it actually existed. Think about it: you couldn’t see it, you couldn’t touch it, and there was no way to demonstrate that it really was up there 23, 300 miles above the equator. So it was a concept to sale. Al Parinello, RCA Manager (Miller & Shales, p. 6).

Parinello eventually sold a \$35,000 transponder to the creators of ESPN, but advertisers were still not ready to risk their practice on something new; they just knew that they were falling out of love with the old: “Much of their interest in Turner’s

channels in the late '70s and early '80s had less to do with general enthusiasm over the cable medium's potential for marketers than with specific complaints about the broadcast networks" (Turow, 1997, p. 49). As I mentioned before, the Nielsen box was leading them to believe that the Big 3 were "forfeiting their audiences," and it was true for the most part as "Nielsen reports indicated that the Big 3 had lost five rating points-5 percent of total national TV households—in prime time between 1976 and 1981. In fact, in highly cabled cities such as Tulsa, network prime time shares were dipping as low as 56 percent in 1983" (Turow, 1997, p. 49).

Cable channels proved to be the perfect outlet for football and other sports as well. ESPN was going to prove that in the early '80s. The trajectory of cable networks and channels that led to the 24/7 sports channel is as follows:

In 1978, there were just over 14 million homes receiving cable—less than 20 percent of all TV households. HBO had gone on the air in 1975 but offered limited programming and signed off at midnight. A year later, Ted Turner uplinked his then-piddling Atlanta UHF outlet to a satellite, thereby creating the country's first 'SuperStation,' but one that showed more Braves games than original programming. The next year, televangelist Pat Robertson launched his 700Club on satellite, and in 1978, despite that fact that HBO reached only about 1.5 million homes, Viacom fired up its slow-blooming imitation, Showtime (Miller & Shales, 4-5).

In the story of ESPN and football's rise to dominance each moment was necessary for the next but did not determine its form. The next section is focused on the texts that were produced as ESPN took the lead on mediating football. But first we will look at the example they followed from ABC's Monday Night Football. All of this is to show the process of how football when mediated became a 'text' of its own, a text that was distinguishable from its non-mediated form. However, in the path of

their rise, as ESPN and football come to full strength, football and its mediated form become less and less discernible.

Mulvey's Male Gaze

Certain approved narratives exist throughout all television production. Laura Mulvey (1975) argues that essentially all popular film narratives are viewed through a male perspective or a perspective that compliments males. Since my argument is that the NFL operates within an overarching American civil religion and war, it is important to see how these notions get presented in a televised NFL event. Although Reagan does not exclusively single out men as the defenders of American liberty, the violence of war is usually thought to be a male endeavor. While maleness is not a key focal point for my analysis, dominant society is, and for Mulvey, dominant society is essentially male. She goes into a deep analysis of films in order to delineate examples of the male gaze. Through psychoanalysis, she finds that the fantasy perspective of the dominant male-driven society permeates through all phases of film production. Mulvey (1975) writes, "the fascination of film is reinforced by pre-existing patterns of fascination already at work within the individual subject and the social formations that have moulded him" (p. 57). She blames the subconscious of a patriarchal society for the structuring of film form. Her use of psychoanalysis is necessary for she is trying to show male oriented sexual tendencies prevalent in film.

Another key point to Mulvey's (1975) study is how film perpetuates narcissism. Narcissism is accomplished by showing flattering people in a positive light, and also by anthropomorphizing objects in a particularly flattering manner.

The effect this has on the viewer is that it forms their ego, which is an essential part of one's identity. The viewer then becomes obsessed with flattering human bodies through such constant positive exposure. Constructing the viewer's identity is the same goal behind the over-saturation of the American symbolism in the Super Bowl. This produces the same effect that the redemptive sacrificial religion achieves. For Reagan, in order to qualify to be an actual human and not an "animal" one must be willing to sacrifice themselves for the nation.

Here, one can now see the relationship between "preferred meaning," and how it is limited through the male gaze theory. Similar to how Mulvey's male gaze denotes that film provides a very selective scope for the viewer, which is that of an idealized (objectified) woman, the American gaze limits the perspective of the viewer to that of the dominant American culture. Through American TV broadcasts such as the Super Bowl, the producers create a 'preferred meaning' by showing an idealized representation of the dominant American society. Therefore, I will be showing how the production elements limit the viewer's agency in the 2008 Super Bowl (Super Bowl XLII) broadcast.

Stuart Hall and Althusser

Although it is tempting to delve into Althusser's notion of people being "always-already subjects," Hall's rationale that accounts for historical and deliberate attempts to alter hegemonic meanings and identities is more applicable for my thesis. Hall provides a complicated site of struggle when he addresses changing connotations to the word "black" when he states, "As social movements develop a struggle around a particular program, meanings which appear to have been fixed in

place forever begin to lose their meanings. In short, the meaning of the concept has shifted as a result of the struggle around the chains of connotations..." (111). This line of thought helps explain how the NFL's name and identity has to flourish in conjunction with fundamental American ideals. However, the connotations of culture do shift, and it is the leagues goal to maintain pace. The use of media, especially the league's Super Bowl broadcasts, provide key insights into how the NFL uses nationalist symbols and narratives to align their identities with that of the American identity.

The Super Bowl, Civil Religion, and Football's Sacrality

"Although civil religion, as Bellah defined it, still operates in America, these national religious impulses have thoroughly diffused through popular culture. As a result, Americans assimilate their civil religion less through the constitutional arms of the U.S. government—the executive, legislative, or judicial branches—than through the productions of film, television, radio, and other media of popular culture" (Chidester, 2005, 6).

Chidester points out that Robert Bellah's approach to civil religion is more formal approach. Civil religion in this form can be understood as representing two-forms. These forms, as presented by Gerald Parsons (2002) can be conceived as either, "prophetic" and "liberal," or "priestly" and "conservative" (Parsons, p. 3). The latter, "Is inclined to celebrate and affirm the belief that America has a divinely appointed role in the world, and is more likely to uphold 'traditional' moral values, and appeals to a generally uncritical acceptance of the correctness and goodness of American values and their influence in the world" (Parsons, p. 4). This, of course, is the conception; similar to one understood by Bellah that is projected in the mediation of the Super Bowl and NFL marketing. Robert Bellah (1967) offers a strong case for a

definition of dominant American culture. In addition to concept of popular and civic religion, he offers a top-down kind of method for unpacking American practices and traditions to show that a deeper potency is at play, which is useful in understanding how the NFL was able to tap into it.

Bellah addresses JFK's first speech as president, in which JFK explicitly states that America has an obligation to carry out God's will on earth, and that liberty is something worth fighting and dying for (Bellah 1967). This is a very similar message to the one the NFL purports in every game and telecast when it salutes and honors the troops. Not to mention that Bill O'Reilly interviewed President Obama during the pre-game show of the 2014 Super Bowl, which was later followed by a reading of the Declaration of Independence, which was shot at the sight of various historic cities, and recited by various NFL players and affiliates as well as political leaders. What is the NFL trying to communicate here? My argument will be that the league is making explicit statements calling for an ideal "golden age" American ideology similar to the one Ronald Reagan habitually operated in during his era, which, like Reagan, emulates a religious-like implementation.

Super Bowl Case Studies

Durkheim saw the French Revolution as a critical historical moment when modernity's new sacred forms appeared. As never before, society's ability to proclaim itself God, or create other gods was revealed, and 'that time...things purely laical in nature were transformed...into sacred things: the Fatherland, Liberty and Reason...All at once we have seen society and its ideas directly converted, with no transformation whatsoever, into objects of true veneration' (Santiago, 2009).

For America, these now venerated things consist of freedom and free-market, and, because of the NFL's brilliant assimilation to these ideals and its immersion into the

social capital market in which it circulates, 'Football' is arriving into the category of "objects of true veneration." This veneration is on full display during America's football holiday: the Super Bowl.

Joseph Price (1984) recounts the close relationship that sports and politics shared in ancient Greek and Roman cultures. He refers to ancient traditions as religious festivals, and compares them to the modern-day Super Bowl. Price notes:

Professional football games are not quite so obviously religious in character. Yet there is a remarkable sense in which the Super Bowl functions as a major religious festival for American culture, for the event signals a convergence of sports, politics and myth. Like festivals in ancient societies, which made no distinctions regarding the religious, political and sporting character of certain events, the Super Bowl succeeds in reuniting these now disparate dimensions of social life (p. 190).

Price makes the connection between the society and the Super Bowl. Basically, Price links the fundamental basics of a nationalist American civil religion to the Super Bowl. Michael Butterworth (2008) helps link these "festivals" directly to Bellah's notion of American civil religion and Reagan's notion of American sovereignty to the NFL rituals. He writes, "It is reasonable to assert that the championship game of American professional football contributes to the affirmation of what Bellah (1967) famously calls a "civil religion" (p. 318). In fact, I argue the genetic makeup of Reagan's redemption-based American civil religion has been reappropriated to the creed of the NFL. They are identical from the very makeup of the war-like game, the corporatism, the commodification and commercialization of heroes and products, and to the idealization of traditional American ideals. Hundreds of millions of people see the American creed unfold before them during the NFL season and Super Bowl, and they soak it up. Mapping up that process is how I plan to show that the NFL

works as the active force in perpetuating and reinforcing American civil religion ideals.

Dirt Theory: "Matter out of place"

A 2010 Nielson survey revealed that 51% of Super Bowl viewers tuned in for the traditionally over-the-top commercials (Alcacer & Furey, 2012)

Wenner (2015) notes the progression and development of dirt theory from Mary Douglas (1966) to Edmund Leach (1976). Dirt derives its power by bringing, "meaning and [it] creates change as it crosses boundaries. By importing old logics to new stories, dirt employs 'cultural borrowing' to bring familiar understandings, impose restraints and pollute meaning" (27). Wenner then applies dirt theory to sports by citing sport-referential narratives in the media. Wenner notes:

Indeed when we note 'sport's appeal' or claim that sport provides a special setting for marketing products, we recognize the power of sport's dirt. Of course, in analyzing sport-referential narratives, we need to assess communicative dirt stemming from much more than sport. Dirty meanings that are ported from old to new settings to manufacture strategic connections can be diverse. Depending on the focus of study, 'out of place' meanings about gender, race, family, class, community and consumption (amongst others) may be concerns of the narrative" (27).

Dirt theory, and especially it's framing of 'cultural borrowing,' is a perfect way to simplify the theoretical process in which I will try to explain why the NFL scandals and Super Bowls are important to American society. In Wenner's (2015) assessment of how dirt operates in the Super Bowl he goes straight to the ads. His premise is that: "As Gerbner was fond of saying, those people who tell most of the stories most of the time control a culture. Certainly, in today's increasingly 'hypercommodified' world, advertising tells most of the stories" (37). He proves his point of the depth that ads reach in our society by breaking down ads in recent

Super Bowls that reference and reiterate narratives from older ads in earlier Super Bowls. Thus, the ads operate off of their own ad culture, which Wenner convincingly argues, is the same as our own. Now the question is why the Super Bowl, or, “AdBowl” (as Wenner calls it). It is practically the biggest event our culture and nation has: “The magnitude of ‘Super Bowl Sunday’ celebrations has seemingly put the day’s activities on par with those marking Christmas, Thanksgiving and New Year’s Day. The day’s ‘communal rituals’ have made it ‘the busiest pizza day of the year,’ and it trails only Thanksgiving in overall food consumption.” Wenner (1984, 2015) has also done extensive work about how important sports are to society. What I wish to do with his work is to extend the notions of “dirt” and cultural borrowing beyond the ads and into the NFL’s overall status as an American frontier and cultural stage.

The NFL is a brand that exists primarily on television, which, similar to a television ad attempts to connote a message and uses referential narratives to do so. Wenner argues that the Super Bowl provides the perfect stage for “dirtied” ads, and that is because the NFL has been using Douglas’s (1966) method of ‘cultural borrowing’ for quite some time now. The NFL is actively importing social logics and trends into its business structure and public ethos, which was made apparent during the 2014 scandals. Advertisers and news media alike are aware that most common tropes are relatable on the NFL stage, and that is because the league operates within America’s dominant discourses. Dirt theory helps me conceptually navigate through the league’s discourse. I am not going to delve into the exercise the Wenner did with ads; more so, I want to find out why the NFL stage is the best

platform to “tell the stories” that “control a culture.” More specifically, this theory will help me link the myths and dominate narratives of American cultural to the scandals that have shed light on the NFL’s importance to American society.

Methods

Prior to the gala opening, the networks, both sports and news, presented their video tributes to the man and his monument. This may have been the most genuinely American moment in the history of the NFL’s pretentious claims as national symbol (Crepeau, 2014).

Dallas Cowboys owner, Jerry Jones, constructed the world’s largest stadium for his team, which is also considered “America’s team.” What is interesting about Crepeau’s claim is that he picks this moment over the flag-waving, militaristic games to be the “most genuinely American moment” in the NFL. What aspects of the stadium’s opening make it so? First, note the vast media coverage of both the corporate billionaire and his monument. The discourses of the American dream of wealth and prosperity that drive millions of Americas to work is celebrated by this display. Second, the stadium is a new shiny object to play in. Consumerism is the economic backbone of America because big fancy new toys help people identify their success. Finally, the competitive American landscape worships the biggest and most expensive. The 1.15 billion dollar project features a retractable roof with doors, 180 foot wide by 120 foot high. They are the largest in the world. Foucault traces accidents and maps out surrounding discourses to understand the meaning behind a structure or significant event. He adapted Nietzsche’s genealogy, and put his own emphasis on dominant systems of control. Foucault states: “Genealogy does not[...] map the destiny of a people...Genealogy seeks to establish the various

systems of subjugation; not the anticipatory power of meaning, but the hazardous play of domination.” For this thesis, I will be conducting a genealogy of how the NFL gradually evolved and stumbled into becoming the prominent stage for the practice of American civil religion, as well as becoming the telling measure for social and cultural change in America. Thus, my thesis will be an examination of how the NFL has been discursively constituted up to the present day. The league was subjugated many times on its way to the top, and the ones in charge of the league were smart enough to align their image with dominant structures as much as possible. I will begin with the NFL’s social scandal—with an emphasis of the ones that occurred in 2014—and work my way backwards.

So, true to Foucauldian form, I will trace the various structures and dominate discourses the NFL existed in during its short history, and how the league ultimately (recently) acted on slightly outdated cultural awareness. The league officials made a big mistake, and that led to its scandal-filled 2014. The first step will be to establish the NFL’s place and legitimacy within American society. NFL proceedings have transcended into large-scale American public rituals. I will examine the various ways that the NFL has stumbled historically and continues to struggle to maintain its public image, and how part of that image has transformed with the times. I will also be investigating the discourse around mass media coverage of the league—particularly news media, ESPN shows and articles, and other sports coverage. The main historical periods of analysis will be the period when sports and television enabled themselves to rise to a massive force in society, as well as other significant moments in the league’s growth.

The genealogy approach is useful to look at things that are harder to trace such as, masculinity, patriotism, and what is special about a large football stadium. I am going to combine many different social and cultural theories as well as primary sources like sports media coverage. A few business reviews will be useful in showing the leagues economic power and status. I will use the theories of Stuart Hall, and Richard Johnson to delineate what is meant by cultural authority. In order to understand the NFL's bureaucracy, I will turn to Weber and to Harvard Business case studies. To understand media's role and usage, I will turn to Laura Mulvey, Hall, again, as well as the work of McCombs and Shaw on agenda setting. Roland Barthes' and Oates' work on myths will guide my exploration of the symbolic nature of sports and athletes within certain cultures. To understand the league's rituals and sacrality of its brand, I will look at David Chidester (2005) and Robert Bellah (1967).

I want to first establish the sacrality and prominence of the NFL in America. Then, I wish to explore the relation the league has with its money-motivated bureaucratic processes and American society at large. How does the NFL struggle to control its public image and how does that image affect its business? Early observations indicate that due to the NFL's massive significance in American culture and omnipresence in the media, its public image is vital to its business model. Much like the scandals that have recently plagued the Catholic Church, scandals and public demand have caused significant changes to the NFL, and I believe that the league has tapped into a powerful notion of an American civil religion, and that, among other related things, has allowed the NFL to become a prominent and symbolic structure in America.

Analysis

The Mediation of Football

“The cultural and ideological role of sport in advanced capitalism (especially in the United States) is impossible to understand without locating the centrality of commodity relations to the framework of which it is a part” (Wenner, 1989, p. 79).

Sports are a part of the social fabric in almost every nation in the world. In the US, football is the undisputed king as far as popularity, TV ratings, value, merchandise and ticket sales go. Media, especially television has fully integrated itself into the NFL (and college football), and in that process, it has drastically altered TV itself, the National Football League, the athletes, the fans, and even the rules of the game. In this project, I aim to explore the “extent [to which] these historical transformations constitute a qualitatively new stage for the domain of professional sports” (Wenner, 1989, p. 80), and how that new stage fits within American society. Sports should not be thought of as separate from society and culture, especially with the way sports are mediated today. For professional football, one would need to look no further than the Super Bowl game to see how fans, politics, institutions, religions, and economics are all constitutive of the sport. In addition to the Super Bowl, one could also look at how ESPN, a cable network dedicated exclusively to sports, rose to world dominance and continues to grow as a prevalent voice in American society. My focus in this segment of my paper is to explore the league’s connection to the discourses surrounding television and ESPN.

In this exploration, I look at the foundational social forces and interactions that have created and continue to sustain the type of relationship football shares

with TV today. The historical period in sports/media history that has provided the environment that bred these occurrences is from the late 1970s-early 1990s. The end of this time period marked a significant difference from the initial interaction between these two giant social and cultural forces, and it is constitutive of the standards that are still prevalent today. In order to do this, I will trace the rise of the largest sport mediator today, ESPN, which began in the late 70s and came into dominance in the late '80s-early '90s, and explain how football along with American society helped its rise.

This may seem obvious, but the role of media has essentially been to bring sports to the larger public. Now, more than before, media, especially TV, transmits the “knowledge about sport through making particular sporting practices and connections visible and audible” (Woodward, 2012, p. 75).

When we did SportsCenters before we got the NFL, there were always footage restrictions by the NFL on how much we could show. But once we got the NFL package, we could go as long as we wanted. We were showing three, four, five minutes of highlights! The conceit was, don't just show me Emmitt Smith's touchdown, show me the key block that sprang Emmitt's run as well. One game we had twelve straight completions; we showed all twelve. It was an opportunity to really take people inside the game, give them a sense of how a game unfolded. It was a revolutionary time [1987]” Bob Rauscher, ESPN Vice President of Production (Miller & Shales, 151).

However, the knowledge of the game does not reach the audience before it's influenced by this medium. Morse (1983) argues that television and technology manipulate sport to a cinema-like style. This transcendence of style connotes not only camera techniques to add intimacy, but also in the presentation of the narrative of the sport. Woodward (2012) writes, “Sport lends itself to spectacle and sensation; it is more than kicking, hitting or catching a ball, or running or jumping; it is about

success and failure, and hopes and aspirations” (p. 75). The same camera techniques used for the fragmentation and objectification of specific athletic play or athletic ability is used to present several cultural narratives as well. This observation of the camera’s role in perpetuating narratives will be analyzed using Laura Mulvey’s theory on the cinema. This insight is vital because football today, especially pro football, is completely dependent on television. It is a relationship that began in the ‘50s and then they became fully integrated in the ‘70s. I hope to explain the logic that allowed sport and media to get to this point of no return starting in the time period of the late ‘70s.

Many aspects—institutions, laws, technologies, and practices—in society and culture worked to bring this revolutionary time in sports and TV together. Further, these facets played an instrumental role in creating the version of NFL and NCAA football that we have today. There are major implications the relationship between football and television causes for the game and the medium itself. Beyond that, I will extend my scope to include major institutions in our society such as universities, the athletes themselves, fans, and demonstrate the overlapping ideals of the United States as a sovereign nation.

ESPN- The World Wide Leader In Sports

How did the concept of sports on one channel 24/7 for the same program come about? ESPN did revolutionize sports coverage, but they also benefitted from a one Roone Arledge (1931-2002), ABC’s sport producer in charge of Monday Night Football. Arledge inserted the human element into sports, which—the lack-there-of—is what, incidentally, forced sports out of prime time in the late ‘40s. He did so

by emphasizing the drama of victory and defeat with the camera shots and scene selections. What ESPN added on top of that technique is a full disclosure of the sports. They had no other programming to produce like ABC, so they had to thicken the television viewer's experience and knowledge of the games.

Modern day sporting events are spectacles. Woodward (2012) applies Bourdieu's (1986) notion of spectacle to dramatic human element found in sport: "Given the intensity of the experience in many sporting examples, the concept of sensation is a part of the two-way process in the liminal space between the movement on the field of play and responses of those who watch. These are elements in what transforms a game or a sporting event into a spectacle" (Woodward, p. 70). These elements that Woodward addresses are emphasized by TV's mediation of the spectacle.

Williams (1977) conducted a content analysis of three third-quarters from three different NFL games on network TV. He thought that the ideologies and logics of television would have a transforming effect on the game when mediated by TV. Williams writes about the total telecast when he asserts that the, "medium unity was further imposed upon the game event by pregame, halftime, and postgame program elements. These tended to enclose the game within a larger structure, incorporating news of other football games as well as news of other sports" (Williams, 1977, p. 136). To emphasize the further effects that television brings to sports Williams also concludes that the game coverage is "kaleidoscopic and visually dynamic. Although live play-action represented only 10 percent of the total telecast time, coverage throughout telecasts was energized by means of a kaleidoscopic,

dynamic mode of presentation” (Williams, 1977, p. 136). The combination of both of Williams’ findings, one regarding the narrative structure of the game within a larger context and (2) the kaleidoscopic means in which these stories were conveyed; consists of the combination that Roone Arledge used to put sports back in prime time. TV not only incorporates the larger sports narratives, but by imposing “pregame, halftime, and postgame program elements” the television and NFL incorporate dominant and sometimes hegemonic societal narratives into the games.

Cinema Style and Technology and The “Male Gaze”

Washington Senators owner, Clark Griffith, proclaimed this in 1948:

“Television doesn’t show you enough. You can’t follow the play. If it ever becomes good, I’ll throw it out” (Neal-Lunsford, p. 67). He was not too aware of the potential television had to enhance spectatorship of a sport not just visually, but intimately. Granted, that his sport was baseball, and it does not fit the television format as well as football, but what Roone Arledge did for ABC’s Monday Night Football revolutionized not just how people watched football, but how they felt and thought about.

Gunther and Carter, (1988) take people into a 1970’s telecast of the Cleveland Browns vs. the NY Jets, and contend that the most remarkable aspect of the show was its “intimacy” (p. 67). Arledge accomplishes this new dimension of football via his, “emphasis on close-ups and reaction shots” (p. 68). On his way to capturing “the shot” of Namath’s defeated pose, Gunter and Carter claim that Arledge:

Had been seeking exactly that kind of moment. Throughout the game he had been thinking about Namath, about how drama so naturally attached to him

as it did to other singular athletes in the mist of battle...The Namath shot distilled into one arresting image Arledge's contributions to sports television: the human dimension, the climax of the drama, the agony of defeat. (Gunther & Carter, 1988, p. 68)

Arledge received a lot of criticism from his boss and ABC's investors, but they stuck with their style until it became a hit. "ABC also pioneered prime-time sport on a regular basis with its highly successful Monday Night Football in 1970. MNF was predicated on the notion that prime-time success for sports depended upon making it an entertaining production first and foremost.

Note that these shots could not have been achieved a decade earlier in a sport like football. The technological advances in cameras and switchboards played a huge role in the transformation of this cultural product. ABC was the first network to "incorporate new technologies and techniques into its sports coverage, from instant replay to slow motion" (Wenner, 1987, p. 63). Wenner is of course referring to Arledge's work, but Margaret Morse (1983) is referring to more modern football telecasts, which we can relate too today when she notes the naturalize imagery of the game. Morse writes that, "The 'natural' mise-en-scene of football, with its clearly marked directionality and end-zones, its color-contrasting opponents and its field so neatly calibrated by ten-yard lines, seems tailor-made for continuity editing; so, as a transformation of the game experience, editing fades in importance. Long lenses and instant replay, however, lift football into another visual world, highly invested with desire and capital" (Morse, p. 49). The elements of desire that she mentions are tied up to not just victory, but a desirable form of masculinity that most male viewers try to project themselves as. She relates the link to how men picture themselves as

James Bond when they watch James Bond movies. Desirability is perpetuated by the technologies' ability to slow down the game and fully display the athlete's abilities:

The slowness, which we associate with dignity and grace, transforms a world of speed and violent impact into one of dance-like beauty...its transformed into a 'kaleidoscopic' other scene of shifting appearances or phantoms which has its analog as much in the field of desire as in the football field (Morse, 49).

She concludes that this type of telecast is "no different" than the Hollywood approach to a real or fictional event (Morse, 1983).

ESPN creators loved sports and wanted to show them all day every day for this very reason, but they knew they needed to bring even more than intimacy to the game. Television is a content medium, and ESPN need experts to analyze the games at a deeper level, journalist to investigate the structure of the sports, and hosts that could tell viewers not just what, but why things happen. When ESPN secured their first rights to the NFL in 1987, they were finally able to put content and character together. In essence, ESPN needed to add more depth to sports, and it paid off. ESPN was founded in 1979, and:

By October of 1983, ESPN could claim the title of America's largest cable network, its signal reaching 28.5 million homes. Ad revenue rose 60 percent to \$40 million...ESPN aired its first regular season NFL game on November 8, 1987. It attributed about 700,000 new subscribers to the NFL package...the Bristol upstarts had found their way into 45 million homes, becoming the first cable network to achieve 50 percent penetration in the U.S. television market (Miller & Shales, 150).

Super Stage

Similar to how Mulvey critiques film for "reinforcing pre-existing patterns of fascination," Sut Jhally (2012) writes about how sports dictate a similar message about a fantastic or idealized society:

Sports are an explicit celebration of the idealized structures of reality—a form of capitalist realism. They mediate a vital social dialectic, providing both an escape from the alienated conditions of everyday life and a socialization into these very same structures. (p. 51)

Now that we know that football, particularly the Super Bowl, is a heavily mediated spectacle, we can infer that the “vital social dialectic” is controlled or directed by the media. The media in this sense is not just offering a gateway, or opening the doors for an ideal American ideology, the media are perpetuating it. The Super Bowl functions within the discourse of American civil religion. Absolute control is the key to forcing something on people without them knowing they are being forced or controlled. In order for this control to be overlooked, it has to appear natural, or blend in. This is made possible by over-saturating the viewer with the same content. The outcome amounts to what Mulvey would call, narcissism. Narcissism helps grant absolute control, which is essential to absolute control. Jhally continues:

Sport fulfills the first and characteristically cultural function by mirroring the hegemony of the American success ideology; and...sport fulfills the second and characteristically expressive cultural function by providing a medium and a context for ecstatic experience in everyday life. (p. 79)

While Jhally refers to sports as the “medium” to express culture, one must realize that most major sports, especially the NFL, have an interdependent relationship with the media. Wenner (1989) points out that, “Sports have always been based on commercial relations...First, they sell tickets to fans...Second, professional sports sell the rights to broadcast events to the media” (p. 22). This applies quadruple to the Super Bowl. Sports broadcasts are commercial, and the only way to make money off commercial broadcast is by having commercials and sponsors.

In a short essay entitled, “Free at Last” Sut Jahlly (2012) writes:

Sponsorship is a double-edged sword. It buys corporations visibility and a place where it matters -- on the pitch and hopefully in the hearts of fans -- in the belief that the emotional meaning of the game or the team will be transferred to the sponsoring company (2).

Similar to how Mulvey criticizes film for transferring an objectified identity to women, the American corporate marketing strategies aim to do the same with fundamental American family or religious principles and personal identities. It is important to note the corporations are not just in play in the Super Bowl broadcast, but they fund the Super Bowl broadcast.

The potential for sales was made evident after Super Bowl VII in L.A. The New York Times noted, “[what] the perfect marriage of sports and commerce that the National Football League’s Championship game has become” (Crepeau, 2014). The distinction between sport and details of American reality (i.e. corporatism) is difficult to make because aspects of American lifestyle such as corporatism and consumerism have permeated through almost all aspects of American culture. Commodification even applies to religious culture. Lynn Schofield Clark (2007) delineates “religious lifestyle branding” as a consumer activity that helps legitimize one’s religious identity through purchases (Clark, p.14, 2007). With the emergence of mega churches one can see the principle of capitalism in play. Bigger churches means more people, more people means more money, more money means even bigger churches, and the cycle continues. The intricate relationship that religion has with the consumer market is important to understand in order to understand what the NFL represents. Clark points out that, “In the United States, Christianity has been a majority religion since the country’s beginnings, and as such it should not be too surprising to see an intersection between Christianity and the development of the

consumer market” (Clark, p.4, 2007). Reagan’s redemptive civil religion being the rhetoric that justifies his views on free-market capitalism is an example of what Clark points out. In the case of the NFL, American civil religion is further commodified and enlarged. The Super Bowl is a spectacle not unlike the religious spectacles produced by Christian mega churches. Crepeau (2014) plainly states that, “Over the past four decades, Super Sunday illustrates the ability of a sporting event to offer a distorted and exaggerated version of social reality and social values. The Super Bowl has done so on a grand, glorious, and obscene scale.” The reason is because these “distorted and exaggerated version[s] of reality” is the picture that the league, as a brand, and marketers constantly try to paint on this stage.

The very notion of American civil religion aims to satisfy the desire Americans have to be considered—what the dominant American culture would define as—‘good.’ In instances of rituals like the Super Bowl, the show is produced in a way to celebrate the “distorted” or “exaggerated” concept of America in order to gain favor among their audience. This is a ploy used by many influential leaders. Clark writes, “Such leaders have looked upon commercial goods, as well as publicity through the press or visual media, as useful means by which to promote their viewpoints and garner support for their claims to authoritative power (Clark, p. 4, 2007). The authority would then lead to more people wanting to literary buy in to that worldview. The NFL is full of such leaders, and for the league, corporatism does not just take advantage of the mass media coverage; it is part of the genetic make up of that which they are celebrating. Corporatism and commercialism are presented

as values of American civil religion, and they are what we are visually forced to accept when watching the Super Bowl.

Adding Chidester's perspective of people not wanting to be "fake" and Clark's view on how people purchase goods to counter fakeness to Mulvey's theory of narcissism we can see that the dominant readings portrayed in NFL broadcasts, especially the Super Bowl, also strongly influences how viewers see themselves, thus enabling the structuring of a preferred identity. American culture is very diverse, thus making it difficult to pinpoint a static American identity such as Clark did. Clark did understand the power of "cross-promotion." She understood that "no one, including a religious person, wants to be seen as 'fake'; thus, through the commercial marketplace, people can buy things that demonstrate their true faith and their unique authenticity as persons" (Clark, p.14, 2007). A person's purchase of authenticity can simultaneously authenticate a cross-promoted brand that has commodified whatever product. She uncovered a substantial amount of evidence by analyzing the purchases. However, the NFL is not a religion. American civil religion is pervasive throughout the league, but that is not as easy to pinpoint as Christianity. Since I'm doing a strictly textual analysis, I cannot assume a definitive American culture that partakes in NFL consumption. Instead, what could be helpful, would be to look at the dominant culture to see what is most available, accepted, and practiced in American culture. Barker (2012) wrote, "National identity is a form of identification with representations of shared experiences and history. These are told through stories, literature, popular culture and the media" (p. 260). Barker's definition serves as a blueprint for the events and contents in the Super Bowl

broadcast that aim to satisfy the spectator's desire for an idealized American identity. American's acceptance of these ideas, which can be shown through the massive popularity of the league, is enough to indicate that the league's cross-promotion of a traditional civil religion and the consumer marketplace is effective in garnering favor.

Joseph Price (1984) delineates two major characteristics in a "ritualistic festival" that form national identity: "Two dominant myths support the festivity and are perpetuated by it. One recalls the founding of the nation and the other projects the fantasies or hopes of the nation. Both myths indicate the American identity" (p.190). Price's formula for American identity fits right into Chidester's and Barker's definition. Price writes about the "Founding Father's role," and that would fall under Barker's claim for reassertion of "history." For Chidester, he would point to Reagan's constant reference to a past "golden age" in American history. Price writes about the "fantasies or hopes for the nation," and that would fall under what Barker called "stories" or narratives. American history and a fantasy of national identity lay the foundation for American civil religion.

The aforementioned elements that work towards establishing and defining identity are meticulously controlled in the broadcast of all televised games and especially the Super Bowls. Competition, masculinity, Christianity, corporatism, American exceptionalism, and American history—combined with an idealized American narrative—are strategically facilitated throughout this media spectacle. My methods reflect those used by Mulvey (1975) and Butterworth (2008) in that I

analyze not only what the content is, but also how—through camera work and production choices—the broadcast displays a contrived American identity.

Production Choices in Super Bowl XLII to Create Discourse: Mulvey and
Butterworth

I analyzed the 2008 Super Bowl XLII broadcast in order to see how the dominant narratives, and civil religious branding that I have discussed get produced. The parts of the Super Bowl I viewed are compilations of YouTube videos. I analyzed: the pregame rituals, the Declaration of Independence special; the Tom Petty half-time show; and two rankings of the top ten commercials.

Cutting and editing in film is about controlling time and space. In the section of her article entitled, “Woman as Image, Man as Bearer of the Look,” Mulvey (1967) uncovers how films reduce the woman characters to depthless images outside of the scope of time and space of the film, while syncing the male character to the narrative and action of the film. To accomplish this character positioning, certain cuts and edits have to be made. Mulvey recalls Marilyn Monroe’s initial appearance in *The River of No Return* and Lauren Bacall’s songs in *To Have and Have Not*. She analyzes how the filmmaker’s choice to fragment the woman character’s bodies with “conventional close-ups of legs or a face” clashes with the depth of the narrative, thus giving her character’s role “flatness, the quality of a cut-out or icon rather than verisimilitude to the screen” (p. 63).

In stark contrast, the male character “controls the film phantasy and also emerges as the representative of the power in a further sense: as the bearer of the look of the spectator” (Mulvey, 1967, p. 63). Mulvey accredits the viewer’s tendency

to identify with the male protagonist to the structuring of the film. Since the male is the centerpiece of the film (the action and narrative), he essentially controls the whole spectacle. Mulvey claims the viewers yearn to identify with that position of power:

As the spectator identifies with the male protagonist, he projects his look on to that of his like, his screen surrogate, so that the power of the male protagonist as he controls events coincides with the active power of the erotic look, both giving a satisfying sense of omnipotence (p. 63).

Since the Super Bowl largely channels Bellah's American civil religion (Price, 1992) and Reagan's redemptive America, it also satisfies a sense of omnipotence, but for Americanism, rather than just patriarchy. While Bellah (1967) makes it apparent that American civil religion has been used for unifying the nation for peace and prosperity, he also points out, "American-Legion type of ideology that fuses God, country, and flag has been used to attack nonconformist and liberal ideas and groups of all kinds (Bellah, p. 9). The New Jerusalem and manifest destiny are ideals that were used to justify unjust treatment of the Indians (Bellah, 1967).

The technique to use highly stylized media production as a certain legitimization, is true for Mulvey (1975) in her dissection of film. Mulvey writes, "Power is backed by a certain legal right...True perversion is barely concealed under a shallow mask of ideological correctness—the man is on the right side of the law, the woman on the wrong" (p. 66). This perversion is made possible by the filmmaker's production choices. Mulvey continues, "Hitchcock's skillful use of identification process and liberal use of subjective camera from the point of view of the male protagonist draw the spectators deeply into his position, making them share his uneasy gaze...The audience is absorbed" (p. 66).

The Super Bowl positions its viewers in a similar way. Through excessive displays of patriotism and militarism (Butterworth 2008) combined with legitimization from God (Bellah 1967) (Chidester 2005), the identification process of the viewer is strictly limited to that of a pro-American perspective. In this study, I connect this with Bellah's negative view of American civil religion's role in ideals such as manifest destiny. Also, Butterworth uses the same line of thinking when he analyzes the production of the Super Bowl as a justification for the war on terror. He argues that the Super Bowl broadcast forces the audience to support the 'war on terror' if they enjoy any leisure activities like the Super Bowl, and just freedom itself.

Mulvey (1975) highlights Hollywood's knack for making films visually pleasing while they convey a patriarchal narrative. I relate to her work in the way I look at the camera's abilities to make the Super Bowl appear visually satisfying, and showing that ability in conjunction with a pro-America narrative. The Super Bowl, like all NFL broadcasts operate under a pro-American gaze that encompasses, but is not limited to, Mulvey's "male gaze."

For Fox's "Declaration of Independence" special, I expounded upon Michael Butterworth's (2008) analysis of the clip by implementing Mulvey's (1975) film deconstructing methods. These methods include focusing on camera angles, scene selection, and the narrative presented throughout the show. Any American reference or symbol is important. I will see not only what is being said, but also who is saying it. A large portion this analysis will be done on the Fox "Declaration of Independence" special. The point here is to show how these production decisions are deliberately creating the discourse for an American-centric world-view.

Butterworth (2008) points out “the production ran approximately 6.5 minutes and featured prominent current and former members of the NFL as ‘readers’ of the Declaration. It was heavy on patriotic symbolism, with multiple images of waving American flags and inspirational music providing the score” (p. 319). Butterworth focused his analysis on how the production framed the context of American ideals in order to justify the war on terror. He points out in the end of his article that “Regrettably, Fox’s ‘Declaration of Independence’ contained, rather than expanded, the possibilities for democratic citizenship in the United States” (p. 322). While, the Super Bowl does do this, I would like to point out that the “war on terror” is but a small piece of the puzzle that formulates the dominant American discourse. This special is one of the things that the American gaze accepts. I explore how the “Declaration” special is connected to other elements of the broadcast (the commercials and half-time show), which also exists within the American discourse.

Scene selections, shot selections, and narratives form a patriarchal ideology in film for Mulvey, and those same attributes create support of the “war on terror” for Butterworth. I want to use the same methodology to illustrate the perpetuation of an ideal America; an America similar to the one Reagan sought to resurrect with his redemptive rhetoric of a sacrificial American religion.

The Show Within the Show

For Super Bowl XLII, as it is for most Super Bowls, the broadcast was kicked off by a crew of sports analysts previewing the game. However, Super Bowl XLII featured an additional pregame special on the “Declaration of Independence.” The NFL and Fox made the production a very deliberate American event. The reading of

the “Declaration” was followed by the United States Marine’s presentation of the colors, and rising superstar, Jordan Sparks, singing the national anthem. Then, the game between the Giants and Patriots began. As it is the nature of the game, it featured many commercial breaks. These commercials are generally meant to be entertaining and cost about \$3.5 million just to air. The biggest break of them all was the half-time show, which featured Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers. After that, the New York Giants upset the New England Patriots and won the Super Bowl.

The NFL is heavily embedded with American symbolism, as one can tell from the NFL logo, which is an American flag (stars and stripes included) in the shape of a shield with the letters “NFL” pressed across it. The production of the Super Bowl is also the production of an American ritual. According to Ronald Grimes’s (2006) book *Rite Out of Place*, a ritual consists of certain criteria:

Ritual is, of course, repetitive. Its power is also cumulative, action building serially upon action, gathering emotional weight as it grows. Ritual is symbolic and employs various simple objects to evoke complex associations. It celebrates tradition and the status quo. It is oriented toward the past...it is nostalgic...Most comforting, ritual is predictable...It provides its audience with a respite from social anxiety, with a sense of belonging to a group that suffers the same conflicts and has homogenous goals (p. 8).

Based on Grimes’ logic, the words “ritual” and “Super Bowl” seem interchangeable. The game fits perfectly because the vast majority of people understand the Super Bowl through the perspective of the media, and that mediated production of the game is meticulous in its construction, content, presentation, and delivery.

Cross-Promotion

The increase in horizontal and vertical integration within these international media conglomerates goes a long way in explaining how it came to be in the interests of large corporations to approach the marketplace with not just media entertainment, but with tie-ins and products that reinforce an

association with a certain lifestyle and with cross-promotions that can cut across various media outlets and products (Clark, p. 25, 2007).

“Declaration of Independence” special: “We Are Americans”

This special is an example of how ‘dirtied’ the NFL has become with its brand and the nation’s identity. The scene opens up with a shot of Independence Hall.² Then, it cuts to Colin Powell and NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell walking side-by-side through Independence Hall. Similar to how Mulvey (1975) analyzed character positioning, this character positioning shows the unity between the NFL and the US government, more specifically, the US military. Powell begins to give the viewer a history lesson, “The Declaration of Independence is a remarkable document that defines our national character. It was in Philadelphia in 1776 when our Founding Fathers...” and he continues to provide Fox’s perspective of the context in which the document was created. Then, the show cuts to a scene where the viewer is shown Joe Gibbs (former coach for the Washington Redskins) and Donovan McNabb (quarterback for the Philadelphia Eagles) standing in front of the Washington Monument alongside 10 Army soldiers. Then the camera begins to pan out revealing more and more soldiers. The camera keeps revealing more soldiers until the readers have finished the first lines. This scene gave the soldiers an infinite presence. As the shot got wider and wider, the more Army men and women appeared. An important reading from Bellah’s (1967) dissection of president’s speeches is an unflinching

² As I was loading the “Declaration” special on YouTube, I had to watch a 20-second US Marines ad.

pronouncement of American military strength, which we see visually in this “Declaration” special.

It is important to note that there are no key female characters in the readings, which suggests that ideal American recollection is also situated within the male gaze. America is still largely a patriarchal society, and since 9/11 the nation has adhered to the ideals of American civil religion (which includes, but is not limited to, patriarchy). Therefore, American’s standard for pleasure is satisfied by a means of a more national reassurance and justification for our country and its people. “The Declaration of Independence” reading was chosen for the broadcast because it is precisely that, a justification for our country and the sporting event itself.

After the sequential military scenes, the show cuts to the next scene, which is Drew Brees (N.O. quarterback) standing amongst several students from George Washington Carver School in New Orleans. Brees reads out lines about equality as he stands on a football field surrounded by African American teens. After Brees, the mood slightly shifts as the viewer is brought back inside. There, Hinds Ward (Pittsburg Steelers star) is standing with the Pittsburg Youth Symphonic Orchestra in what appears to be a symphony hall reciting lines about the justification for the independence from the Crown. Again, the choice to read these words of legitimization for the country’s actions is followed by shots of the military. The next two scenes shift back to militarism with shots of the Air Force standing in front of fighter jets.

Then, another cut and pan occurs as we now see a CEO of a farming company standing among tractors reciting lines. It is important to note that the scenes that

show various locations across America using a technique called, tracking shots. This is to say that the camera never stops moving. The camera movement gives the sense of a head turning to view the full sight. This choice gives the impression of an uninterrupted view of America, as if there were no cuts or edits. Any hint of a break is at minute 2:55. But, it is actually a transition in which a waving American flag fades in and out. Continuous motion between scenes takes away any opportunity for the viewer to pause or break. In fact, there is no break throughout the entire 6.5-minute production.

After five minutes, the reading of the “Declaration” ends. The shot comes back to Powell and Goodell, and Powell continues his history lesson: “The king of Great Britain dictated an establishment of absolute tranny over the thirteen colonies. Our fate under his rule was evident; therefore our nation’s architects found declaring independence to be worth their lives...” and he and Goodell continue for a few seconds before the camera revisits all the previous sites and groups of people. They all exclaim, “We are home.” Finally, Powell concludes the segment by saying, “We are Americans.”

Why would this reading of the Declaration precede the NFL’s championship football game? Using Wenner’s (2015) work on dirt theory and ads within the Super Bowl we can see how the very essence of the league has been bound with identity of America. The NFL has created this bond. Understanding how ‘matter out of place’ can refer to dominant narratives in a society, we can see methods studied in dirt theory and the male gaze being executed by the league. In this special, America’s justification for its fight for freedom throughout history serves as the narrative.

Again, the discourse of American 'the good' vs. 'the bad' interpolates the nation's identity. The cinematic fusion between liberty—in the form of football, a leisure activity—and military—the force that secures that liberty—creates what Mulvey (1975) calls a, "shallow mask of ideological correctness," in order to give meaning to what is right and wrong.

Top Voted Ads

A another clear illustration of cultural borrowing and narrative framing exits within what millions of YouTube users voted as the top Super Bowl ads in 2008. American ideologies, such as gender roles, extend to each part of the broadcast, including the commercials. The top commercial was a Pepsi commercial featuring Justin Timberlake being sucked to a location by a woman in a bikini as she sucks in Pepsi from a straw. The character of the woman who is somehow pulling Timberlake in is very fragmented. All that is shown are her lips and breasts until the camera pans out to a full shot of her and her friends (all in bikinis) lying on lawn chairs. One can clearly see Mulvey's (1975) theory on female fragmentation as they are portrayed as "depthless" and unimportant to the narrative. Justin Timberlake, on the other hand, drives the narrative. He takes the journey, and the viewers are as confused as he is until it is revealed (to him and us) that by drinking Pepsi, you could win some tickets to see him perform live.

It is safe to assume that the viewers not only identified with the patriarchal narrative, but also found the portrayals of gender roles to be desirable because this commercial was voted number one in two viewer-based rankings. Due to the male driven narrative, viewers could only make sense of this commercial through the

gaze of the male protagonist. And, because the viewers responded positively to this commercial, which was shot for a male audience, the viewers were satisfied. Since a patriarchal society is a major part of the dominant American culture, the production of this commercial fits perfectly within the American gaze. Additionally, I found these same ideals embedded in the song choice of the featured artist: Tom Petty. He opens with a song called “American Girl.”

Half-time show

The hit songs of 2007³ according to Billboard’s Top 100 featured the following artists (in order from the top hit): Beyoncé, Rihanna, Jay-Z, Gwen Stefani, Akon, T-Pain, Yung Joc, and other popular mainstream artists. However, the halftime show featured Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers. Their first song, “American Girl,” was released in 1976, which is 32 years before Super Bowl XLII. Tom Petty’s “Greatest Hits” album was released in 1993 reviving the popularity and success he had during the ‘80s.

Tom Petty, a classic-rock artist, adds to the American narrative by operating within the male gaze. He was simply a safe choice for the producers who are trying to satisfy a largely white, male audience. The chorus to “American Girl” goes as follows, “Awe yea, awe right, take it easy baby, make it last all night. She was an American girl.” The content is an explicit reference to sex. As far as the camera work of the half time show, at minute 2:15 there is a cut to a very attractive young lady with brown hair dancing. She is the only singled out member of the audience

³ It makes more sense to look at the 2007 hits because the year 2008 was still young during the Super Bowl.

through out the whole first song; thus, she is the image of the American girl. Once again, America, strongly derived from Christianity, is a patriarchal society. The notion of objectifying women (American Girl) fits within the American gaze.

National Narrative

The Super Bowl, which is the pinnacle of the National Football League, features the game between the two best teams left after the playoffs. The football field, the “gridiron,” the battlefield, is a sacred ground; it does not matter whether the field is made of grass and dirt or artificial turf, it is the battle, which the sport represents, that really matters. Whoever wins this battle is the champion.

More so, the Super Bowl epitomizes America’s fight for liberty. As Fox Sports anchor, Menefee, stated during the broadcast, “they [the troops] fight so that we can enjoy our football.” Professional football is what America fights for, and the field on which it is played is the land of the free and home of the brave. The Super Bowl is the ultimate American expression of freedom, and that expression is often emotional. The word “sacrifice” is used often, but not lightly. All mentions of ones who fight for freedom not only honor the soldiers, but there acknowledgement in the NFL setting helps enhance the league’s own mission. Ahmed (2006) in here work on emotion notes that, “Within contemporary culture, emotions may even be represented as good or better than thought, but only insofar as they are re-presented as a form of intelligence, as ‘tools’ that can be used by subjects in the project of life and career enhancement” (3).

The American sporting exhibition serves as a defining reference to American culture and identity. Sports theorist Grant Jarvie (2009) writes, “The way one

chooses to think about sport will ultimately depend upon the values and political standpoint from which one views the human world” (p. 28). This rings especially true for the NFL seeing how it has repeatedly failed to extent itself into a global game. Despite other major American sports thriving outside of the US, the NFL, “continue[s] to have trouble attracting both a global roster...and international fan base despite systemized attempts at globalizing since 1991” (Alcacer & Furey, 2012). There is an irony present in the fact that American football is not a global game. Patriotism is often noted in global sporting competitions like the Olympics or the World Cup. American’s just play football among Americans, “Jerry Jones, owner of the Dallas Cowboys, was predicated on ‘my town against your town’ rivalries, which were best suited for home stadiums. In U.S. football, the emotional connection to homegrown and emotionally charged competition was reinforced by sporting events at the college level” (Alcacer & Furey, 2012). Much of what Jones said has to do with the grass-roots development of youth football and college football pride. However, that can be started within a different nation, much like hockey was. The real hindrance for the growth of U.S. football is way the NFL has cemented it to overt Americanism. The dominant American perspective is especially manifested in this American sport’s media productions.

The NFL and its media partners operate within a specific code. That code is derived from the American creed that Bellah (1967) identified as American civil religion. Laura Mulvey (1975) sets the stage for how cuts and edits create discourse within films. My goal was to combine the two theories at work here. Price (1992) already identified the Super Bowl as a “religious festival.” He points out the rituals

that constitute the Super Bowl. I used Grimes (2006) to illuminate how rituals and rites work towards constructing an identity. Mulvey once again, explains that the narrative drives the action and that the viewer will identify with that narrative. Football as a sport carries a narrative of patriarchy, violence, victory, and the declaration of a champion—all central to the American Gaze. The narratives at work in the Super Bowl production are not coincidental. The Super Bowl broadcast is an all-for-one and one-for-all show, in which the viewer is strategically placed within dominant narratives adhering to the proclamation of an ideal and victorious America.

Circuit of Culture: A focus on how these texts are read by ordinary people

Drawing off of Stuart Hall's "encoding/decoding" model of communication, one can see that in television, "the text will be 'structured in dominance' leading to a 'preferred meaning,' that is, the one to which the text guides us" (Barker, 2012, p. 341). The telecast of a football game is more meticulous in its structuring, and in leading its television audience to a "preferred meaning." In order to induce a reading of the text (telecast) for an audience, the text has to operate within their realms of knowledge concerning their societies' cultural, political, and economic constructions. A sports broadcast is highly effective in combining these elements into one show. Woodward (2012) writes, "Sport provides mechanisms for securing relationships, social inclusions and exclusions in a manner that other cultural practices cannot emulate...Sport provides positive connections between people and communities, but it can also reinstate racialised, ethnicised, class-based networks, and most notably those of hegemonic masculinity" (42). Networks like ESPN try to

keep all of this in mind when structuring show because advertising pays the bills. However, it has put the network in dicey situations as they struggle to retain their true journalistic and in-depth content approach that set them apart from any other sports show.

Keith Olbermann, a host and favorite among almost all of those at ESPN, was the perfect voice for sport because he saw and understood sports within the discourse of a complex society. This insight made him seem like a “genius” and “the artist you can’t copy” (Miller & Shales, 393). However, his approach to the position was actually hindering the network’s exhilarating growth. John Walsh (Executive VP at ESPN) said this regarding Keith: “The Olbermann and Patrick SportsCenter was aimed at the highest level of intellectuals who loved sports, but I don’t think it was appealing to the average-IQ sports fan. I don’t think he had that much broad appeal. (Miller & Shales, 392). Based on the logics that have led ESPN to where it is now, its ability to “‘deliver the male’ is widely recognized by marketers, and the audience for vicarious management is even more appealing” (Oates, 36). The star athletes largely hated Olbermann because he always made fun of them by pointing out their flaws, which put a dent in the heroic image most advertisers depended for endorsements and viewers (Miller & Shales). As I pointed out earlier in this paper with Morse (1983), the desirability of these athletes and successful cross-promotion is what links the consumers to the products that the athletes endorse.

I think Richard Johnson (1987) was careful about using the phrase, “ordinary people” in his third step as opposed to all people. John Walsh certainly meant ordinary people—his biggest marketing base—when he said “average-IQ.” As Hall’s

“encoding/decoding” models indicates, popular texts have to be operating under the same operating systems of popular culture. This is why, “Hargreaves argues that media sports production personnel employ a set of ‘media sport new values’ constituted within the determining pressures and limits of a capitalist consumer culture. These production values tend to express dominate ideological tendencies in capitalist societies” (Wenner, p.135). Sport, especially sport media, is the ultimate symbol of our capitalist society; therefore it has to operate under its logics. And it has, that is why, “The processes of selection and representation involved in the production of sport for television have been viewed as manifestations of such (allegedly) ‘dominate values’ as hero worship, instrumental rationality, obedience to authority, possessive individualism, meritocracy, competitiveness, and patriarchal authority” (Wenner, p. 135). And, that is also why Keith Olbermann was let go. He saw the attempts of cross-promotion and questioned their role in sports. He was simply not obedient, and constantly questioned the ‘dominate values’ that the consumer market place used to make certain athletes national heroes.

The complexity that goes into successful major sport is multiplied when it is mediated by television. To conclude this segment, I wish to conclude as Williams (1977) did when the findings from his 3rd quarter content analyses indicated, “The televised version of the game has its own structures, its own unity, and provides points of reference and emphases which are unique to the medium event” (p. 139).

Lived Cultures

The ‘lived cultures’ that have resulted from the marriage of sport, specifically football, and TV are football fans, the athletes, the any institution that houses both.

In this case, the institution I will be looking at is American universities with division 1 NCAA football programs. To keep my point consistent I will show how the prominent forces in American society have not only allowed for these 'live cultures' to exist, but have been active participants in their creation.

Affect Theory

Ahmed (2006) looks through various texts that circulate throughout the public domain to scout out how certain narratives evoke emotion. She claims that the narrative operates by creating a binary of "others...who are not us," and the emotion then stems from, "who in not being us, endanger what is ours" (1). Reagan, in his rhetoric, for example, uses the emotions surrounding death and sacrifice to evoke a sense of pride for America. Anything other than the values and history surrounding his America is 'othered.' Thus, emotional fear results because the narrative works to 'other' individuals if they do not conform—it threatens people. Ahmed (2006) asks the question: "What do emotions do?" (4).

"As he [Descartes] argues, we do not love and hate because objects are good or bad, but rather because they seem 'beneficial' or 'harmful' (Descartes 1985; 350). Whether I perceive something as beneficial or harmful clearly depends upon how I am affected by something. This dependence opens up a gap in the determination of feeling: whether something is beneficial or harmful involves thought and evaluation, at the same time that it is 'felt' by the body. The process of attributing an object as being or not being beneficial or harmful, which may become translated into good or bad, clearly involves reading the contact we have with objects in a certain way (6)."

Advertisers have done their best to capitalize on the emotional male viewer whose very own perception of him is wrapped up in a longing to be like his favorite player. But what have the advertiser's dollars done to the players? Oates (2009) has done work on his analysis of fantasy football and "vicarious management." He finds

that athletes, now subjugated to view of the fans in addition to the owners and the league, are rendered to total commodification. Because the NFL is such a big business, "The disciplinary technologies developed by the NFL are productive--they seem to maximize return and minimize risk, thereby managing the risky, multimillion dollar proposition that is professional football" (Oates, p. 40). It is important to note that league's risks and returns are essentially referring to athletes, or people. In discussing how players are "subjugated to the view of authorities," Oates (2009) quotes Foucault: "these tactics are 'bent on generating forces, making them grow, and ordering them, not impeding them, making them submit, or destroying them'" (p. 40).

These tactics are supposed to do exactly what we have witnessed. Be it because of the money, the fame, the slow-motion camera, these players are larger than life. They are starring roles in a 24/7 blockbuster that is as much fiction as it is non-fiction. Oates continues to use Foucault to show that disciplinary elements that have now been complicated by the involvement of television are there to so that, "the workforce may be analyzed and individual units' so as to 'compare workers with one another, to classify them according to skills and speed'" (Oates, 2009, p. 42). One has to look no further than the spectacle that is the NFL draft to see this form of constant vigilance occurring.

Keeping in mind the logics in society that, in a sense, allow and create these dynamics it is well known here in America that free-market capitalism is intrinsically good, and racism is really bad. Ahemd (2006) claims that, "Whether something feels good or bad already involves a process of reading, in the very

attribution of significance. Contact involves the subject, as well as histories that come before the subject" (6). There is a level of interpretation and acceptance of America and its history. Oates writes about how TV and the NFL uses one to trump the other when he makes his point about integration, "Nevertheless, the fact of integration makes it possible to avoid disturbing implications of a discourse that phrase these athletes explicitly as commodities and celebrates the imagined "buying"" selling" of them" (Oates, 2009, p. 46).

Cultural Authority and Public Image

"We strongly, strongly, condemn and will punish behavior that is totally unacceptable" (Roger Goodell, 2014 Ray Rice press conference).

Above is one example of several statements given by NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell that does not actually say anything. Since his initiation in 2004, Goodell has been praised by owners and investors of the league, but criticized by the players. Like a good corporate executive, Goodell prioritizes money matters overall else. He keeps a short leash on his players in the name for protecting the NFL brand. Crepeau points out that one of Goodell's first actions as commissioner was to establish the point that improper behavior, "undermines the respect for our league by our fans, and lessens the confidence of our business" (Crepeau, 2014). Here Goodell understands that public image is important, and that is because the league is not just a business, but also a representative of the public.

"Sheriff Roger Goodell" is what many media sources have referred to Goodell as over the past years (Gee, 2014, Boston.com). He is notorious for being one that decides punishments based on his pulse of the gravity of a situation. One can infer

that his decision-making process includes some pondering of what the society would expect. Weber (1946) notes that the mark of any good leader of a bureaucracy must possess a convincing grasp on the environment's "norm of conduct" due to the social conditions all bureaucracies must face. This means that the margins for conduct are confined within the discourse they operate in. Weber would say, that for Goodell, "...the specifically modern and strictly 'objective' idea of 'reasons of state' is upheld as the supreme and ultimate building star of the official's behavior" (Weber, 220). Thus, the trick of good management is to make objective decision while existing within a subjected position. The problem for the league is now to understand its position within the American society, and how to balance that position with their business intentions.

NFL Scandals

In addition to Wenner's summary of television's effects on sports, I would like to add sport's effect on the discourse of television and mainstream society. As I pointed out earlier, TV got its jump-start from sports, and I think that sports still continue to ignite large issues in our society and news media today. Sports, as it did in the 1930s indicates where we are as a society. The first national scandal for the league was the infamous wardrobe malfunction, in which Janet Jackson's breast got exposed on live television. Janet Jackson's final act in her half-time performance at the 38th Super Bowl ignited passionate conversations that led to consequences for American media that are still current.

The game was broadcast live (no time delay) on CBS. The game was a promising match-up featuring the New England Patriots vs. the Carolina Panthers.

The NFL contracted CBS Sports and MTV to produce the half-time show, and it was evident that they had their sights set high. The all-star line up for the half-time show featured some of the top artists at the time: Jessica Simpson, Puff Daddy, Nelly, Kid Rock, Justin Timberlake, and the headlining performer; Janet Jackson. America Online (AOL) paid almost 10 million dollars to sponsor halftime, and it looked like it was going to be a success until literally the very last second of the show. Justin Timberlake and Janet Jackson were closing the show with the song, “Rock Your Body” and right after the final lyric sang by Justin, “I’m going to have you naked by the end of this song” he ripped off the part of Janet’s costume exposing her right breast, which had a star-shaped nipple ring. The camera cut away, but not before broadcasting Janet’s breast across the media world.

Janet and Justin’s “wardrobe malfunction” was the first media video to go viral. Stewart Hoover (2009) utilizes Hepp and Couldry’s notion of “thickening” as means to understand cultures and events. In the quest to discover how things produce meaning, one’s search must not focus on, “formally structured locations” but rather on, “ways, places and times that these exchanges become systematic in some sense” (Hoover, 2009, 287). This event marked the end of MTV’s collaboration with the NFL and the resurrection of a conservative area in national TV and cable networks. This infamous event was clearly a mediation of a, “shared social purpose and solidarity,” which called into attention a supposed decline in morality in American media. (Hoover, 2009).

Whether most thought it was insignificant or not, an old notion of American collectivity was revived. The nation reacted with 550,000 complaints to the FCC, half

a million dollars in fines, major media corporation's relationships being sabotaged, and a media frenzy. This response in the media sphere, I argue, validates "nipple-gate" as a significant event, not just for the NFL, but also in American media history. Senior writer at ESPN, Marin Cogan, writes of the incident, "If our children or our children's children ever dig up a time capsule from the beginning of the new millennium, they will find that in February 2004, America collectively lost its damn mind" (ESPN The Magazine, 2014). Cogan, whether intentional or not, establishes his statement with one of Reagan's old staples of civil religious rhetoric: "Most of Reagan's major political speeches began and ended with references to children. Reagan invoked American children—'our children and our children's children'—as the ultimate source of support for his public policy programs" (Chidester, 2005, p. 101). Cogan also alludes to America's collective mind, in which he is evoking what Chidester refers to as Reagan's notion of the American "sacrificial family." Chidester notes that the notion of collectivity was crucial to Reagan's discourse: "Research on biopolitics has suggested that patriotic rhetoric and sentiment, particularly the disposition toward self-sacrifice on behalf of a collectivity, might be sustained by socialized perceptions of kinships" (101). As Cogan points out, "Nipplegate" prompted the resurgence of a traditional discourse that rests on the sacrificial ideologies of Reagan. In trying to stay with the evolving trends of popular culture, the NFL's marketing team overstepped the boundaries set by the "golden age" (Chidester 2005) that the league embodies.

The outrage occurred because the incident desecrated a sacred American ritual. Following Hoover's (2009) thinking process about significant "media events"

opens up new avenues that need to be explored: “(1) the nature and constitution of media events, and (2) the contexts or frames in which these events are seen to have form, meaning and (perhaps) effect or function” (287). As “wardrobe malfunction” incident elevated in status, it simultaneously validated the significance of the Super Bowl, not just in its popularity, but also as a sacred occasion in the American calendar that was safe for American families to participate in. The significance of the Super Bowl is necessary to explore in order to explain how we know this event was important.

Neal and Lunsford (1992) point to a fragmented American society with distinct taste preferences as the main driver for cable television. However, the heavy symbolism in the NFL’s biggest game does not appeal to all popular discourses. As fragmented as the American television audience was in the 80s and is now, the collective memory of American society still recalls Reagan’s reference of a ‘golden age’ in American history, and the Super Bowl is that reminder. The big game was made aware of the sacred ritual that it was. The NFL is not the stage for anything edgy. Canadian ritual and media scholar, Ronald L. Grimes, has defined the media’s relation to ritual as being “two domains that are neither equated nor segregated but rather differentiated and conceived as sharing a common boundary” (Grimes 2006). Jackson’s breast clearly crossed the boundary: “The breast is on television for 9/16 of a second. The camera cuts wide. Fireworks explode from the stage. Cue the end of halftime. Cue the beginning of one of the worst cases of mass hysteria in America since the Salem witch trials” (Cogan, 2014). The binarification that results from America’s civil religion emphasizes the boundaries within the Super Bowl ritual, and

that polarization makes them more sacred.

Fast-forward 10 years to 2014, here, the league is in a similar situation to that of a decade ago. For this exploration, I will analyze the dialogue that resulted from this event to support my case that this was in fact a media event. I will explore the repercussions of the half-time show starting with the people who were offended, how media sources summarized what had just occurred, what actions were taken on a policy level, and finally, how new shared spaces were created by this scandal. All of these elements in, around, and after the controversy will hopefully explain how we can assert that Janet's infamous Super Bowl half-time blunder was indeed important to a large part of the American public.

Consider the recent case of Michael Sam, the first gay athlete in a major American sport; his reception was a powerful indicator as to where we stand as a society. If gay men can be accepted in the NFL then gay people can be accepted anywhere. That is a huge statement, and the NFL felt that responsibility. In this case, football, acted as a final frontier of acceptance. Another example is the recent forced resignation of Clippers owner Donald Sterling for racist remarks on a leaked audio recording. The instant public outcry and the NBA's swift and hard punishment shows that mass society is not ready to face or confront or discuss the issue of race. The NBA attempted to negate the issue before it could develop further. Oates (2009) discloses that the, "transformations that this study attempts to make visible are not, therefore, confined to some hermetically sealed sphere of entertainment" (p. 43). Compare sport's media's influence to mainstream news media's recent coverage of the Supreme Court declaring racism is over. That statement was released just one

week before the Sterling incident. Because sports and sports media are involved in so many layers of society, because they borrow meanings from most aspects of culture, and because they operate under their own logics as entrainment, they do more than represent society, they extend it.

ESPN is the most valuable asset that Disney owns. It comes in at \$50.8 billion, and ABC (also owned by Disney) is worth only 4% of ESPN (Forbes 2014). ESPN just signed a contract with The NFL for over \$15 billion for the broadcast rights. Texas University football program is the nation's highest valued at \$133 million. ESPN was worth \$9,000 in 1979, and Heisman trophy winners were opting not to play in the NFL in order to teach history in 1939. Each reason has something to do with another reason, and they all have something to do with the growth and transformation of football, and sports media.

Woodward (2012) notes that, "Financial and economic forces have always played a key role in sport" (p. 45). Then she also follows the logics of society when she confirms that, "Industrialization influenced the first professional sports leagues and post industrialization has been strongly implicated in the media sponsorship nexus through which mega leagues have developed in men's sport, especially in the twenty-first century" (p. 45).

To address the initial and final points made about culture, I would like to preface by noting that TV's powerful influence is due to that fact that you can see and hear other people through this medium. New media also allow people to do so, but television's presence is still greater. Because of the human element—the same element that put sports back in prime time—"Media sports texts in the age of media

convergence are highly valued 'for their flexibility and interconnectedness.' Sports media text can be recycled and deployed through various media" (Oates, 2009, p. 37). This is due to the fact that football is based on an ideal reality and displayed to connote a personal connection. The human link is what makes the spectacle so reusable. People like to watch a human achievement or amazing human ability over and over again. Television just mediates that desire, and in the process they enhance some aspects, and dilutes others. Those choices, of course, have to be made with the society, culture, politics, and economics in mind.

War

For Scarry (1985) war consists of two things: "First, it is a form of violence; it is a member of a class of occurrences whose activity is "injuring." Second, it is a "contest" (p. 63). Elaine Scarry makes a compelling argument that war is essentially a contest of injuring. Scarry states that war is a "self-reinforcing" contest not because it actually is in-and-of-itself—meaning that rarely is a nation completely annihilated—but due instead, to the fact that people respect the outcome of physical encounters—pain in general—more than anything else. She indicates that this is due to the fact that our identities are part physical, but largely social. Pain is the "opposite" of social for Scarry. Her research on war applies to the identity-building and destroy aspect of pain and war. National creeds are fervently exemplified during wars, and the American national creed is fervently exemplified during NFL games, especially the Super Bowl. Football accommodates warring habits very well. War is the greatest contest of all time. The champion of war means a victory for the champion's worldview. Victory of war is celebrated whenever possible, but it is best

commemorated during football, which is seemingly a reenactment of America's warring victories, no matter the teams; the nationalistic ideals celebrated in football are the true winners.

Chidester and Scarry Combined

The spirit of a collective morale benefits greatly from an ethos or worldview that civil religion can provide. In short, the NFL best channels America's strongest characteristics. Durkheim says of civil religion's link to nationalism: "One idea which enjoys precedence over all others and constitutes the aim par excellence of moral conduct, which is the body politic, or the motherland, but the motherland conceived of as the partial incarnation of the idea of humanity" (Durkheim, 1961, p. 87). For Ronald Reagan, what it means to be human is linked to whether or not you are willing to die defending American ideals (Chidester, 2005). This position assumes a threat, "Ronald Reagan also spoke of winning through sacrifice. America had won and would continue to win in the struggle for freedom, only because American sons and daughters would pay the highest price" (Chidester, 93, 2005). For Chidester, Christianity provided a good discourse for Reagan to justify his notion of redemptive sacrifice. This is a credit to the power of Christianity, and the worldview that was extracted largely from, and in conjunction with, Christian traditions. Thus, Christianity does have a presence in Reagan's religion, and the NFL's civil religion. However, my focus is on how the NFL's civil religion acts like its own entity. The league's rituals and rites will be my area of study. Obviously Christianity will be a part of what I find, as it was with Chidester and Reagan. Similar to how Christianity did for Reagan, Reagan's sacrificial religion provides the context for the NFL to

inhabit a significant space in the discourse of nationalism and war, as well as in the other dominant discourse found in American popular culture.

The NFL offers unique rites and rituals via popular culture and media that make it an individual force. In the US, the NFL's brand of football has transcended into an object of veneration, but, just as Chidester shows, so have other objects. The key with the NFL is that it formulates its image so that it too can share the cultural spaces of Coke, McDonalds, and such. The NFL has performed several evident actions to better mesh with the public domain. NFL games have actually "TV timeouts" built into its game structure. Not only that, the league's starry shield and name is always in the red, white, and blue. The true brilliance in executing these actions has been putting them in conversation with each other throughout its history. The league's bond with television necessitates a strong relationship with commercialism and consumerism. What is interesting here is how the NFL forms a relationship with free-market capitalism and America's overall "body politic" and Reagan's traditional "idea of humanity." American nationalism, as it pertains to Reagan's sacrificial civil religion, can be analyzed in the traditional fashion by observing the ritualistic qualities of the sport, the league, its spectacles, its fans, and the dominant discourses around them. The idea of free-market capitalism (consumerism, corporatism, commercialism) combined with Americanism represent what the league has come to be this day-in-age: a manifestation of American society's dominant values and popular culture. However, the NFL does not represent a fixed balance for the discourses within the public and corporate domain change. Thus, the NFL's ethos must shift along with the shifting landscape of

society. Remembering what Weber (1946) believed an “ideological halo” provided for a bureaucracy, one could infer that the bureaucratic domain of the NFL is quite susceptible to cultural authority.

Sports and War and Society

There’s little need in explaining that sports are important for populations. Sports consist of organized games, and games are just established means of competing. A way of thinking of sports, or what sports are is to think about its key elements: First, there is a game with parameters or rules which supposedly equal the playing field; second, its a competition—there must be a winner—; third, its a competition between people; and lastly, it must be witnessed. People like sports and sporting events; this fact dates back to the earliest forms of civilization. The original sports of wrestling, running and throwing offered a satisfaction for people. Moreover, engaging in a competitive sport provided a definitive and tangible means to answering a question: “what is better” (which is similar to ‘who is right?’)? The way sports help answer this question involves unpacking the idea of a “right” answer. One of, if not the most important, aspect of sports is that the games are visual, tangible displays, and people can watch the events unfold and take place as they happen. The fact that it is a live form of entertainment is an important. When asking which is better, any answer must carry with it, merit. Sports and merit go hand-and-hand because people can see all elements and all actions, which helps explain the result, or who won. Natural, relatable human ability, and the work that goes towards polishing one’s talent is a huge garner of human respect and

admiration in American society. Being a great athlete is regarded as such a high quality among people that it often is enough to allow one to break through any social or civil restraints that may be present in said society. Being the best in the field makes you among the best in life, thus heroes are made. Sports constitute an alternative form of live theater; where traits and techniques are matched against other traits and techniques—parameters are set—and then the ‘best’ one wins. However, despite all of that, sports also do not have the power of their own enforcement. Sports, like wars, do carry a very real affect for many people and entire nations.

So what makes the contest of American football similar to that of war? In football, the ball is considered “an extension of the player’s body;” if the ball touches the ground, the player loses his purpose. The language used in the rulebook of the NFL uses militaristic language and even refers to the times in the game in which the ball is “live” and “dead:”

RULE 7 Ball in Play, Dead Ball, Scrimmage Section 1 Ball in Play

Article 1: Live Ball. After the ball has been declared ready for play, it becomes a live ball when it is legally snapped or legally kicked (a free kick or fair catch kick). The ball remains dead if it is snapped or kicked before it is made ready for play.

Section 2 Dead Ball

Article 1: Dead Ball Declared. An official shall declare the ball dead and the down ended:

(a) when a runner is contacted by a defensive player and touches the ground with any part of his body other than his hands or feet. The ball is dead the instant the runner touches the ground. A runner touching the ground with his hands or feet while in the grasp of an opponent may continue to advance;

Each team will possess the ball throughout the game. Now, the language used to

delineate the processes of the game is war-like dialogue. When a player has the ball in his possession the ball is “live.” When that player is stopped or taken down to the ground the ball effectively dies. The offensive team gets four attempts or “downs” to try to advance the ball to ten yards at a time into the opponent’s end zone. In which case:

Section 3 New Series of Downs

Article 1: New Series for Team A.

A new series of four scrimmage downs is awarded to Team A when the following conditions exist:

(a) During a given series, the ball is declared dead in possession of Team A while at or beyond the line to gain; or

(b) Enforcement of a foul by Team B results in the placement of the ball at or beyond the line to gain,
or if the enforcement of a foul awards an automatic first down to Team A; or

(c) If there is a change of possession during the down, and Team A has possession at the end of the down; or

(d) The kicking team recovers a scrimmage kick anywhere in the field of play after it first has been touched beyond the line of scrimmage by the receivers. See 9-3-2-Item 1; or

(e) The kicking team legally recovers a free kick.

Article 2: New Series for Team B. A new series of four scrimmage downs is awarded to Team B when the following conditions exist:

(a) Team A fails to advance the ball to the line to gain during a series of downs; or

(b) There is a change of possession during the down, and Team B has possession at the end of the down, or has been awarded possession at the end of the down...

The language is very revealing of the game’s roots in war. The language is very specific; “awarded,” “enforcement,” “possession,” “recovers,” and “legally.” The entire section of the rulebook that refers to the game is very similar to these sections. NFL football is very much a metaphor for war.

Consider what sets both the contest of war and the game of football into motion. What is the thing that players sacrifice their all, not only to protect, but to force it into the opposition's territory? The actual football is that thing. In the context of comparing the contest of football to the contest of war, the ball represents the social, governmental, and cultural ideals—their right of possession. Once a team gets their ball into their opponent's end zone, they get closer to victory. By the end of the contest, the team that has infiltrated the other's defense and end zone the most—wins the contest. And, the only way to get into that end zone is to outperform the other men physically: whether it be outrunning them and catching the ball or by running through them. Interestingly, 'war' is not the first thing that comes to mind when thinking of football. It is mostly thought of as an un-related game and sport. The comparisons are obvious once you look intently at the game, but most people are not inclined to do so. One of the reasons for this could be what Alcacer & Furey (2012) pointed out about 51% of Super Bowl viewers tune in just for the commercials. Nevertheless, U.S. football has developed its own vocabulary to delineate the actions and objects of the game that work to disguise the overt act of injuring. The "habit of mind"—as Scarry calls it—required for war is manifested through the language used to describe the objective of injuring. The central activity of war "comes to be identified as 'disarming' rather than 'injuring'...sounding not merely 'protective' but nearly 'pacifist' in intention (67-68). Players, like soldiers in war, are simply doing their job. Although physical contact is as personal one can get with another person, physical contact within the context of war and football is supposedly not person (Scarry, 1987).

“For my country”

For Scarry, “The physical body itself” provides a compelling reality, which is one of the aspects that sets U.S. football apart from other sports. The idea of “for my country” can and does manifest in the physical body. That gives a soldier purpose (Scarry 1987). Initially I mentioned that NFL players and fans acted in the role of soldiers defending the ideals of the nation. “For my country” is an idea that comes into existence in the act of war (Scarry, 1987). Considering the warring nature of NFL football, and the overt simulation with an idealist American society, the NFL stage acts as a microcosm for war. The fact that the country can do football and display it in a grand arena adds to the physical presence of the game. Further, within football, the nation can perform nationalist rituals, which provides and reinforces the compelling reality of the US as ‘good’—a necessary function of civil religion and the discourses around war. The culmination of my analysis of football and war is to note the physicality of the game itself and the vast physical presentations of the games. These qualities allow NFL football to be the stage where an American can experience an idea version of America. Scarry writes about how personal authentication can be vicariously attained: “That is, instead of the familiar process of substantiation in which the observer certifies the existence of the thing [the value of defending the nation] by experiencing the thing in his own body (seeing it, touching it), the observer instead sees and touches the hurt body of another person (or animal) juxtaposed to the disembodied idea, and having sensorially experienced the reality of the first, believes he or she has experienced the reality of the second” (125). The fan or viewer sees the soldier who has sacrificed, sees the jets that fight,

and those visuals reaffirm the reality of the strength in America's civic body in the face of evil. This phenomenon explains how sacrifice works, and how physical violence becomes impersonal.

The Draft

Not to be confused with the military draft, the NFL draft is a more-or-less optional draft that occurs yearly. The top scouted college athletes are selected one at a time by NFL teams over the course of 7 rounds. Read Scarry's description of a soldier in war while keeping in mind an NFL prospect and eventual player:

The activity of war is, viewed within the framework of this opposition, the most unceasingly radical and rigorous form of work. The soldier's survival is at stake not in the real but diffuse way it is for the worker who out of his labor creates his own sustenance and will, if he stops, eventually starve; it is more immediately and acutely at stake; it is another soldier's direct object to kill him and his own work to be for the other a target yet to keep himself alive. The form of world alteration to which he devotes himself does not simply entail the possibility of injuring but is itself injuring, and it is this form of self-alteration to which his own body is at every moment subject (82-83).

Football players, more than in any other sport, are in constant physical contact with each other. It is a 'kill or be killed' game. What comes with the territory here? The NFL provides the highest level of football. Records are broken every year as the talent, size, and strength of the players' keep increasing. What is necessary, or what has become necessary in order to be able to play in the NFL? The answer is complete submersion into the game, much like how a soldier at war is submersed into his craft. Scarry continues her description of a soldier:

Although in all forms of work the worker mixes himself with and eventually becomes inseparable from the materials of his labor (an inseparability that has only its most immediate sign that residues which coat his body, the coal

beneath the skin of his arm, the scary of grain in his hair, the ink on his fingers), the boy in war is, to an extent found in almost no other form of work, inextricably bound up with the men and materials of his labor: he will learn to perceive himself as he will be perceived by others, as indistinguishable from the men of his unit, regiment, division, and above all national group (83).

With Scarry's take of a soldier's immersion into an indistinguishable individual who can now only be seen as a part of his national group, I want to consider the role of NFL players and fans again. I mentioned that the NFL had managed to bound football's identity to America's perceived identity in my earlier point about NFL's failure to globalize. Non-American football (soccer) is the most popular sport in the world. People have to say "American football" whenever referring to the NFL's sport. The term "football" is more likely to get lost in translation than the term "American." Do foreigners perceive an American football athlete more as a football player or as an American? American football teams and players do not compete against foreigners. Riots occur in international competitions for other sports, but not for football. NFL games are presented more as a celebration of the American product than a competition. Like Jerry Jones said, "its my town against your town" but both towns are American.

The final point that I want to make about NFL relationship with the military is how the NFL puts both football and the military in a consumable form. From a bureaucratic standpoint, Weber (1947) discusses how important a police presence is to a bureaucracy. "Both notable and bureaucratic administrations [understand that] the structure of state power has influenced the culture very strongly" (212). How the NFL is reinforcing their important status in society by using consumerism

and the military: 1st; consumerism: “To this extent increasing bureaucratization is a function of the increasing possession of goods used for consumption, and of an increasingly sophisticated technique of fashioning external life—a technique which corresponds to the opportunities provided by such wealth” (212). This point applies to how Clark sees material goods authenticate a person’s religious identity. Football viewers consume the American identity when watching NFL games. Their active participation in celebrations like the Super Bowl helps fashion their external identity into a more notable American one —2nd; military: “Among purely political factors, the increasing demand of a society, accustomed to absolute pacification, for order and protection (police) in all fields exerts an especially persevering influence in the direction of bureaucratization. A steady road leads from modifications of the blood feud, sacerdotally, or by means of arbitration, to the present position of the policeman as the ‘representative of God on earth’ (213).” ‘In God we trust,’ but if He messes up, we got our military. God, of course, plays an important role in legitimizing America, but American remains constantly flexing its military might. The NFL likes to appropriate this appearance of power to its own presence as a social force. The outcome is that the league is legitimized as a business as well, and the mediation of the NFL helps Americans consume both.

Conclusion

The NFL is constantly adapting and evolving because the commissioner and owners know how to please an audience. However, their audience has expanded to more than just football fans. The league has transcended into a state of significance where it represents a major portion of mainstream society and popular culture. The

NFL has tried to reach this state of significance since its inception as demonstrated through several key actions that I discussed in this paper. We need to think of the league and the Super Bowl as more than a platform to market ideas and projects, but as an active participant in the exchange of meaning that takes place in American society. The NFL seems to be the quintessential model for ads in the perspective of “dirt theory,” and it certainly applies to the Super Bowl, but the case of the NFL extends beyond ‘matter out of place.’ The seemingly external “matter” found in the NFL has become an intricate part of the league and the game thanks to the efforts of the NFL.

First, the NFL game fits well within an old and large pro-American discourse surrounding war. The attributes of football that make the NFL fit well with warring habits are as follows: the nature of the game itself; football is a violent game based on warring strategies; the rules of the game; and the language used to describe the game and its participants. The ‘nature’ of the game is not meant understood in essentialist terms. Football came out of rugby, which was created in a brutal time period of the world. But, the NFL has done as much as possible to secure the war-like elements of the game because those elements are often celebrated in America. Secondly, America is not only the proprietor of war, but also of free-market capitalism, which has propelled itself in large part due to the consumer market. Thus, consumerism—which spawns commercialization—is part of America’s identity along with war. And, the mediation of football—especially via the NFL—lends itself to commercialization better than any other mediated event in the country. The NFL was the first major sports league to see the potential in television

to spread its game. My research shows that for a time period, cable television depended on football in order to stay afloat. Questions of how the NFL is a legitimate source of pride or respect can be answered with Scarry's (1987) important point about how outcomes of war tend to be abided by:

“All that has been questioned is that the account of that outcome as happening through the power of enforcement principle, the explanation according to which the losers abide because they have no choice. It is not that they abide, but that they are compelled to abide, that is untrue. Furthermore, although the power of enforcement principle is not at work in the way that it is widely believed to be, the very fact that it is widely believed to be at work may be in the end the occurrence that lets it work. If populations, whether out of shared opinion, self-conscious judgment, or unselfreflecting impulse and intuition, assume this to be the case, it will be the case not because it had to be, but because it was believed it had to be” (108).

This argument presents a similar premise to Chidester's point about a religion being or being perceived as fake and authentic at the same time. Why do so many people watch NFL football? Football is an exciting and dramatic game. It is also a very popular game that adds points to people's cultural capital. It can also serve as an opportunity for patriotism. Being American is a quality that is celebrated throughout every NFL presentation. Commercials understand how lucrative the audience is, so they perform their best as well. The slow nature of the game makes it easy to present in an awe-inspiring cinematic form. Influential social and political figures are part of the events. Athletes are relatable heroes. It is a respected business where merit is rewarded. And, finally, it is a violent patriarchal game of war in a violent, patriarchal country. The fact of the matter is that the NFL is very popular, the most popular single event spectacle to ever be on American TV. However, none of these qualities were enough to convince me of the NFL's prominent place in American society. It is the scandals, the public's standards for

the league that legitimizes it. So, the NFL—through societies’ perception of the NFL—has the power of its own reinforcement.

The NFL’s must now be on its toes, with full realization of its place in U.S. culture. For this to happen more changes to the league’s bureaucratic structure need to occur. The culture of the league must catch up to the culture within which it is operating. Its “ideological halo” needs an update. Media, especially television, proved to be a perfect marriage for the league, and that union spawned an inextricable relationship between marketing and advertising, with whom the league shared tactics in assimilating its brand to freedom and other fundamental American ideals. These ideals, of course, are sacred to many Americans. The league conforms and helps perpetuate most of the dominant values in the country such as free-market capitalism, patriarchy, and militarism especially in the Super Bowl, but it was slow to notice the societies’ increasing awareness and disdain for domestic violence and violence against women. The result is the same as the rule changes to make the game less violent that took place in the early 1900s: the league changed to accommodate the standards in society. Except now, the difference is that the media expedites this process by making the league more transparent.

The NFL has always been aware that it lives on a two-way street, but it has not realized that the elevation of its status as a business has also elevated its status as an American symbol, and that the lanes on the street are narrowing. Now the league needs to start walking a finer line when it comes to their policies and incidents because they are now socially significant events.

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