

“In Order to Form a More Perfect Man: Hegemonic Masculinity In American
Professional Football.”

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Abstract

If asked to name the quintessential expression of American culture most observers would name the Super Bowl. The annual spectacle held to crown the champions National Football League (NFL) expresses and celebrates American cultural values in many ways: from the ultra patriotic pre-game ceremonies to the much anticipated million dollar advertisements and the celebration of the players themselves. In addition to being the epitome of physicality, professional football players represent an American ideal of masculinity.

Using R.W. Connell's landmark theory of hegemonic masculinity this paper explores the development and manifestation of the ideal of American masculinity in professional football using a case study of two contrasting teams, the Dallas Cowboys and the Pittsburgh Steelers.

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Introduction

Every fall Americans of all ages eagerly gather around to celebrate the return of professional football. The game is as quintessentially American as apple pie or Budweiser beer. For American men specifically, the game is much more than just an All-American leisure activity. Professional football is an idealized representation of American masculinity. The men who play are representations in the ultimate form of masculinity, an example for men watching to aspire to and emulate.

This idealized representation of masculinity is what influential sociologist R.W. Connell refers to as hegemonic masculinity, a gender identity that is dominant over all others and is celebration as the paramount representation of gender.¹ This dominance over all other gender identities means that hegemonic masculinity is neither simple nor stagnant. Rather it is always in flux, evolving to remain dominant despite societal changes.

In professional football the evolution of, and dramatic change in representations of hegemonic masculinity is well illustrated by the contrasting masculinities of the Pittsburgh Steelers and the Dallas Cowboys. The two teams represent the public persona of different cities that they call home and the fans they entertain. The Steelers played into the gritty, hard-working reputation of the city of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. They achieved their greatest popular and competitive successes in the 1970s when, as female gender roles progressed in the wake of the second wave feminist movement, American men returned to a masculinity defined

¹ R.W. Connell. Masculinities. (Berkeley, UC Press, 1995.)

by raw physicality and aggression.² The Steelers, a defensive heavy and aggressive team, captured the nation's mood perfectly. In contrast, the Cowboys played into the glamour and nouveau riche attitude of the city of Dallas, Texas. The Cowboys had their greatest successes in the 1990s, when, as gender identities settled, masculinity was redefined. It was no longer defined by the raw physical differences of the sexes but became more nuanced and fluid. The flash and wealth of the Cowboys was perfectly suited to this moment in time.

Despite the dramatic differences between the two teams' representations of masculinity both are examples of hegemonic masculinity and its constant evolution. Though it is always changing in response to cultural development hegemonic masculinity in the context of American professional football retains three primary characteristics. Successful and respected football players are, or represent, being Caucasian, middle to upper class, and heterosexual.

Though well more than half of the league is 'non-white' these men are still largely absent from positions of power – the quarterback, coach and ownership. Certainly there are 'non-white' men who occupy these positions of power. However, these men seem to be the exception rather than the rule. This indicates that characteristics racially associated with Caucasians are valued above those of other races. Thus, a 'non-white' man can embrace certain perceived Caucasian

² Feminism is commonly divided into three primary waves. The first refers to the suffragette movement of the mid-nineteenth and early-twentieth century where women fought for the right to vote. The second wave refers to the women's liberation movement of the mid-twentieth century where women campaigned for the right to work outside the home and to have their sexuality recognized and respected. The third wave of feminism acknowledges the interplay between gender, race and socio-economic class and began in the 1980s. [Estelle B. Freedman, The Essential Feminist Reader. (New York: Modern Library, 2007)]

characteristics and achieve success. This is not to say that perceived Caucasian characteristics are superior to other racially associated characteristics, but rather to suggest that in the context of American professional football the Caucasian racial identity is more consistently rewarded than any other racial identity.

The characteristics of a middle to upper class socioeconomic status are also highly rewarded in professional football. Though some players often earn upwards of a million dollars, well above the national average and television coverage makes accessing the NFL available to Americans of nearly every socioeconomic class representations of middle to upper class status are still celebrated.³ The game originated in a distinctly classed setting and still values representations of class. This is evident in the lifestyle that is required to have the luxury to play football – disposable income and spare time most fundamentally.

Finally, representations of heterosexuality are highly valued, and rewarded in the NFL. In fact, these representations are so highly valued that all depictions of homosexuality are suppressed. Only three men have openly acknowledged their homosexuality in the history of the NFL and all did so only after retirement. All three recall in their memoirs that overt expressions of heterosexuality were rewarded in the homosocial environment of the football team.⁴

³ Largely because of differing collective bargaining environments professional athletes in some other sports earn higher average salaries than those of NFL players. More significant, however, is the contrasting cultural image – particularly the image of masculinity – of athletes in the NBA or MLB. Economic and broadly comparative cultural analysis would make for some very interesting research but is beyond the scope of this paper

⁴ David Kopay and Perry Deane Young, The David Kopay Story: The Coming Out Story That Made Football History. (New York: Advocate Books, 2001); Roy Simmons et al., Out of Bounds: Coming Out of Sexual Abuse, Addiction, and My Life of Lies in

These three primary characteristics are celebrated as part of the hegemonic masculine identity. They speak to core American values. Football players are held to a high standard of gender identity. The game they play is synonymous with the nation itself.

The Model Citizens of the 'City Upon The Hill'⁵

In the days leading up to the 2011 Super Bowl, much was made of Pittsburgh Steelers quarterback Ben Roethlisberger and his supposed 'road to redemption.' The two-time Super Bowl champion had been thrice accused of sexual assault, though no charges were ever formally filed.⁶ As Roethlisberger readied himself for a third Super Bowl, critics and supporters, alike, heatedly debated whether a third championship ring would effectively redeem the player for his controversial behavior off the gridiron.⁷ While Roethlisberger's public persona represents just one, albeit extreme, version of masculinity both created and sustained by

the NFL Closet. (New York: Carroll and Graf Publishers, 2006); Esera Tuaolo and John Rosengreen, Alone in the Trenches: My Life as a Gay Man in the NFL. (New York: Sourcebooks, Inc, 2007); Roy Simmons's memoir was not available for purchase because it has been taken out of print. As a result the author used only the memoirs of Esera Tuaolo and David Kopay for the foundation of this paper.

⁵ Since Massachusetts Bay Colony Governor John Winthrop first used the phrase in 1630 to describe the vision of his Puritan settlement, Americans have used the utopian image and ideal of the nation which they expect serve as an example to all others. [John Winthrop, A Modell of Christian Charity, (Boston, 1630)].

⁶ "Ben Roethlisberger Beats Third Rape Charge." *Political*. April 12 2010 [http://www.politicalnews.com/roethlisberger-3rd-rape/]

⁷ Mike Wise, "Ben Roethlisberger's redemption on the field doesn't mean he's a changed person off it." *Washington Post*. January 29 2011. [http://www.washingtonpost.com/wpdyn/content/article/2011/01/29/AR2011012904241.html]; Drew Juber, "Roethlisberger's road to redemption." *CNN.com*, January 29 2011 [http://articles.cnn.com/20110121/us/steelers.roethlisberger.redemption_1_ben-roethlisberger-terry-bradshaw-clutch-quarterbacks?s=PM:US]; LZ Granderson, "Ben Roethlisberger's redemption." *ESPN.com*, January 23 2011. [http://sports.espn.go.com/espn/commentary/news/story?id=6045429]

professional football, the media storm surrounding his personal indiscretions raise some interesting questions for scholars of American sport and culture. Most fundamentally, why are Americans so concerned with the conduct of players *off* the field?

This is quite simply, because football is more than a just a game. American football is a cultural phenomenon; it attracts far more than just devoted fans of the sport. For instance, the Super Bowl is much more than just a championship game. It is an opportunity to celebrate American culture.⁸ It attracts more viewers than any other U.S. television event; approximately 111 million people watched Super Bowl XLV.⁹ Winning players become national celebrities over night, appearing on numerous talk shows and news programs.¹⁰ The most recent NFL Champions, the Green Bay Packers, have made numerous appearances at events that were unrelated to football, and the players have become household names, known to those who do not regularly follow the world of sport. The key here is *why*. Why do Americans get so absorbed with football, and more specifically the men who play?

This paper will argue that Americans are concerned with conduct of football players off the field because football is much more than just a game. It is a salient cultural symbol. The men who play the game at the professional, and thus most highly visible, level embody a perfected or idealized form of masculinity. Football, as

⁸ St. John, Allen. The Billion Dollar Game: Behind The Scenes of The Greatest Day in American Sport – Super Bowl Sunday. (New York: Doubleday, 2009), 65.

⁹ Ben Klayman. "Super Bowl Packs In Record U.S. TV Viewer Total." *Reuters*. February 7 2011. [<http://www.reuters.com/article/2011/02/07/us-superbowl-ratings-idUSTRE7163GS20110207>]

¹⁰ "Clay Matthews will present Grammy Award." *AOL Sporting News*. February 11 2011.] <http://aol.sportingnews.com/nfl/story/2011-02-10/clay-matthews-will-present-grammy-award>]

a game unique to America, developed along with the country itself. As a result, the game values many of the same key things that Americans, as a nation, hold close.

Football involves, and highly values, intense physicality. This is reminiscent of the men most valued and respected in American history. Like the colonials who built the 'City Upon A Hill,' the homesteaders who brought the nation westward, or the soldiers who fought to protect it, football players make a living with their bodies. The intense physical demands of the game made it a popular, and most importantly a societally acceptable, game. It was of critical importance that any leisure activity be perceived as productive. Football was a game that did more than just entertain those who played and watched. It helped to keep men strong, fit and physically active.

Today, football remains a productive activity. NFL football players are representations of idealized American masculinity, held up as an example of for other men. This hegemonic masculinity is always in flux, evolving along with the gender roles to remain in a leadership position. As a representation of American hegemonic masculinity NFL football plays an important role in the development, sustainment and promotion of the gender order.

An American Phenomenon: A History of Professional Football

Significantly, football first developed at the collegiate level.¹¹ The first ever recorded game was played between New Jersey rivals Rutgers and Princeton Universities in 1869.¹² Modern fans would hardly recognize the game played that

¹¹ Ronald A. Smith. Sports and Freedom: The Rise of Big-Time College Athletics. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988.)

¹² Ibid.

day as American football. It was both extremely violent and unorganized. The match would have looked much more like rugby, with a seemingly chaotic scrum rather than a well-organized line of scrimmage. What is more, the forward pass, a hallmark of the modern professional game, was not legalized until 1909.¹³ While the first game was hardly recognizable as American football, it remains an important historical mark, both for the time period in which it was played and the two teams that competed.

Firstly, the historic Rutgers/Princeton game was played in the late nineteenth century, a time when masculinity was in deep crisis. The emergence of the industrial revolution shifted working conditions for the majority of society, as the most of men were working in an industrial or manufacturing setting rather than an agrarian or farm setting. Labor in factories became more mechanized and less physically demanding. This dramatic change in work environment led many Americans, including President Teddy Roosevelt, to believe that American men were becoming 'soft,' losing the vigor and physicality and that historically been the strength of the country. Football, a game that heavily emphasized physicality, fitness and strength, was a welcome addition to the social milieu. The game was particularly welcome on college campuses, whose young men sought fun, camaraderie and to distinguish themselves from others.

It is important to note that in the late nineteenth century a college education was reserved for only the upper echelons of society. The first football teams represented Universities, like Rutgers and Princeton that were considered to be

¹³ Ibid.

amongst the best in America. As the game matured on college campuses throughout the northeast Yale coach Walter Camp, often known as the 'Father of American Football,' played a critical role in shaping football as it is known and played today. Camp first played for Yale between 1876 and 1882 and coached the team between 1888 and 1892. Camp's Yale team was dominant under his leadership, winning multiple national championships. Beyond his contributions to the game as a coach it was Camp's contributions as a member of the rules committee that made the biggest impact. Camp was amongst the loudest voices on the rules committee throughout his career. Though he left Yale in 1892 for a brief coaching stint at Stanford University he returned to Connecticut in 1896 to work with his family's local New Haven business. Camp remained actively involved with the football team at Yale and wrote frequently for regional publications on the subject of collegiate football. In his capacity as an influential member of the rules committee, Camp is credited with developing several significant parts of the game including: the snap-back from center, system of downs, points system, and offensive arrangement – seven man offensive line up front, with a four man backfield. While his contributions to the game of football are most certainly significant, his influence on the American perception of exercise is also worth noting. Camp vehemently argued that football was a good form of exercise, but it was far from the only one available to American men. He actively promoted calisthenics and was involved in the development of daily exercise routines that were adopted by both the Army and Navy.¹⁴

¹⁴ Ronald A. Smith. Sports and Freedom: The Rise of Big-Time College Athletics. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988.); Harford W.H. Powel Walter Camp, The

It is particularly significant that the game developed first at the college level. Since men who attended college were elites and bound to be the future leaders of their country football became an important proving and training ground. Football was a game that would instill 'American' values in the nation's next generation of leadership. Despite overwhelming changes in the world around them, American men would remain as strong, determined, and committed as the men who had come before them.

Football originated in a position of leadership, teaching the future leaders of America to retain a physical and aggressive masculinity. Today, it remains in a leadership position. As a key representation of hegemonic masculinity in America NFL football is an important leader in the development and evolution of gender roles.

Football, in its early stages, demanded a player who was strong, determined and physically tough. Without the protection of modern pads or helmets, severe injuries were commonplace. Broken bones, severe concussions, significant lacerations, and torn ligaments were so common that President Teddy Roosevelt was concerned with the level of violence in the game. He, like many other politicians of his era, suggested that the game needed to be regulated. Too many young men with promising futures ahead of them were suffering catastrophic injuries.

Roosevelt's own son Ted had suffered a broken nose while playing at Harvard. The U.S. President gathered the presidents of the nation's five major colleges; Harvard, Yale, Princeton, Army (West Point) and Navy (Annapolis) in 1906 to discuss the

Father of American Football: An Authorized Biography. (Freeport, N.Y.: Books for Libraries Press, 1970.)

possibility of regulating intercollegiate athletics. The result of the meetings was the establishment of the Intercollegiate Athletic Association of the United States (IAAUS). The IAAUS eventually became the NCAA in 1910 and went on to encompass nearly every university in the United States to regulate all sports played.¹⁵

The early game required a player to be able to play through injury and without the benefit of protective clothing. Even without the helmet and pads that are considered to be absolutely necessary now, players were hitting and tackling extremely hard. Battling through pain and the risk of further injury required a player to be committed and determined – characteristics that were highly valued and encouraged in college-aged men. Football provided an opportunity for young men to learn the skills and characteristics of American masculinity to combat dramatic changes to the working world caused by the industrial revolution.

As the game expanded at the end of nineteenth century, it spread beyond college campuses. The first professional teams were associated with industrial mills. Players were laborers, who worked in an industrial setting during the day and played on behalf of the mill on evenings and weekends. Mills invested in forming a team to ensure that, despite changes in the working world, men would remain active and physically fit. Based on this assumption, it was in the best interest of mills and factories to provide a constructive outlet for laborers to release stress and physically tensions. Mills and factories formed small leagues to provide competition for teams. Industrial centers in the mid-west were hotbeds of this early form of

¹⁵ Jack Falla. NCAA The Voice of College Sports: A Diamond Anniversary History. (Missions, KS: NCAA, 1981)

professional football in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Several NFL teams originated in this era, including the most recent winner of the Lombardi trophy, the Green Bay Packers. The name 'Packers' is a nickname derived from the original vocation of the first players: meatpackers.¹⁶ The deep connections to labor were not coincidental.

Professional football grew slowly throughout the first half of the twentieth century. What is now known as the NFL was first formed as the American Professional Football Association (APFA) by sixteen eager men in a Canton, Ohio automobile showroom in the summer of 1920. Legendary Olympian, star athlete, and player coach of the Canton Bull Dogs Jim Thorpe served as the league's first president, though for only a year. The APFA struggled through its first two years. Thirty-five individual teams folded during this time, threatening to bring the league – and the idea of professional football – down with them. The league was re-named the NFL in 1922, though it was hardly national in scope. The league was kept purposely small after the catastrophic quick expansion of the APFA. A select few business-minded men emerged as the leaders of professional football and were integral to the league's success; Chicago Bears owner George Halas, one of the few survivors of the APFA, was joined in 1921 by Earl 'Curly' Lambeau and the Green Bay Packers. Book-keeper Tim Mara's New York Giants joined in 1925. Seven years later, in 1932, Southern gentlemen George Preston Marshall and the Washington Redskins joined the NFL. Chicago businessman Charlie Bidwell bought the Chicago Cardinals in 1933, though he remained a Bears fan throughout his life. Finally, the

¹⁶ John Nichols. The History of the Green Bay Packers. (Minnesota: Creative Education, 2005.)

repeal of Pennsylvania's blue laws, a vestige of the state's Quaker history, permitted leisure and gaming on Sundays allowing Art Rooney's Pittsburgh Steelers and Bert Bell's Philadelphia Eagles to join the league. These seven men, often referred to as the Fathers of the modern NFL, were the heart and soul of professional football in the 1930s and 1940s. Their love of both the game, and the revenue it generate, allowed the league to survive through its tumultuous early years.¹⁷ Key to its success was the limited size and geographic scope. With no teams west of Chicago or south of Washington the NFL was hardly national but growth was coming shortly.

In the first decades of the league, finances were extremely tight. Teams were confined to the Midwest and Northeast where interest was highest and to ensure that teams could afford to travel for away games. Even in Chicago, where football was considered popular enough to sustain two teams, a sold-out stadium was a rarity. Even Curly Lambeau had difficulty filling seats for Packer's games. Players earned only a paltry sum meaning that most had to take second or third jobs to support family.¹⁸ Games were covered on the radio, though few listened especially if a baseball game could be found somewhere on the airwaves. In the early twentieth century professional football was a working class game, second to the more elite class college football. Professional football players were like mercenaries, without loyalties, fighting for payment. Real football was played at the college level by young gentlemen, not by grown men in front drunken, frenzied working class crowds. NFL

¹⁷ Michael MacCambridge, America's Game: The Epic Story of How Pro Football Captured A Nation. (New York: Random House, 2004): 7-8.

¹⁸ Ibid.

football was for men who did not go to college, and thus had no college team to cheer for.

Beloved University of Illinois halfback Harold Edward 'Red' Grange helped to change that perception when he joined the NFL in 1925. Grange had wowed crowds in Illinois with his speed, skill and precision. After a legendary game against the University of Michigan in 1924 where he earned 402 yards and six scores, Grange was nicknamed the 'Gallop Ghost' by a Chicago sports writer. Nobody respected Grange's talent more than George Halas, owner and coach of the NFL's Chicago Bears. More than his outstanding talent, Halas also recognized Grange's value to the league. The day after his last college game, Grange signed a contract with Halas's Chicago Bears for \$100,000. In an era where most players had to take second or third jobs to support a family Grange's contract garnered an overwhelming amount of media attention. Moreover, as the first well-known college player to cross over into the professional league, Grange added an air of legitimacy to the fledging NFL.¹⁹ With the addition of Red Grange, the NFL was no longer a league for men without college allegiances, but rather it was becoming a place where college greats could continue to shine. College football fans could go to an NFL game and watch their favorite players and former rivals play again. In this respect, professional football drove social connections deeper into society.

As the reputation of professional football began to slowly change with the addition of respected and admired college players, the NFL grew in popularity.

Professional football was no longer a game just for working class men; rather it was

¹⁹ John M. Carroll. Red Grange and the Rise of Modern Football. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999): 25-43.

becoming a respected career choice for gifted college athletes. However, in the world of professional sports NFL football remained a distant second to major league baseball. Though it had yet to achieve the overwhelming and iconic success that it enjoys today professional football had risen to an important and influential position in American popular culture. With this new found respect professional football began to take on the leadership position that the college game had long enjoyed. Professional football players were now admired athletes and representations of hegemonic masculinity.

The NFL exploded in popularity during the 1950s and the 1960s when, once again, American men faced a crisis in masculinity. Following the Second World War and the Korean War, men returned home to sedentary office-based working environments. The suburbs expanded rapidly, and the nuclear family employed the economic gender binary – men working in the public sphere for wages, women laboring in the private sphere – which divided all aspects of American life. Like the nineteenth century industrialists before them, Americans were again growing concerned that men were becoming ‘soft’ and losing the physicality that had been the hallmark of American society. These fears were further underscored by growing Cold War tensions. It was in this anxious and fearful environment that professional football grew and the modern NFL came to be.

Many sport historians date the beginning of the modern NFL with the ‘Greatest Game Ever Played,’ the 1958 NFL championship game. The match between the Baltimore Colts and the New York Giants went into sudden death

overtime and was broadcast nationally on both radio and television by NBC.²⁰ Even with Colts' star quarterback Johnny Unitas and Giants' star halfback and wide receiver Frank Gifford appearing the championship game, Yankee Stadium was not sold out that day. Yet, the excitement of the game, and most importantly the sudden death overtime, garnered thousands of television viewers rather unexpectedly. Years of painfully low attendance and fiscal uncertainty were brought to an end by the popularity of the 1958 championship. Often, perhaps too often, the 'Greatest Game Ever Played' is heralded as single-handedly creating the modern NFL and beginning football's ascent to the pinnacle of American sport. Certainly the game had a lasting and significant impact on the NFL. However, more than just the excitement of one game contributed to the NFL's remarkable rise. The league had been slowly, but steadily, building a reputation as an exciting, entertaining and respectable form of football. By 1959 some men believed that, despite often fledgling ticket sales, professional football was becoming so popular that the nation would be able to sustain two professional leagues.

The rival American Football League (AFL), founded in 1959, was not the first upstart league to challenge the NFL's monopoly on professional football.²¹ Several leagues popped up in the first half of the twentieth century though they were all quick to fold, often after less than one season. The All-America Football Conference (AAFC) challenged the NFL successfully for four seasons between 1946 and 1949.

²⁰ Craig R. Coenen, From Sandlots to the Super Bowl: The National Football League, 1920-1967. (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2005.)

²¹ Craig R. Coenen, From Sandlots to the Super Bowl: The National Football League, 1920-1967. (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2005.)

While the AAFC was able to thrive for longer than most rival leagues, it too eventually succumbed to financial pressures in 1949. Only three teams survived and were folded into the NFL including four-time AAFC champions the Cleveland Browns, the San Francisco 49ers and the short-lived Baltimore Colts. The AAFC Colts played in the NFL for only one season before folding in 1950. The Colts were added as an expansion team to the NFL in 1953 where they remained for thirty years before a controversial midnight move to Indianapolis.²² Like the AAFC, the AFL was able to sustain competition against the NFL for a short period.

The AFL was founded in 1959 by a group of men who had repeatedly been denied the opportunity to own and operate an NFL franchise. The group of men, led by Dallas businessman Lamar Hunt, had all been interested in buying the struggling Chicago Cardinals in the late 1950s. Bud Adams, Bob Hawsam, Max Winter, and Lamar Hunt had all made offers to purchase the failing franchise but were denied by the NFL's executive. Undiscouraged, the men separately offered to purchase the rights to expansion teams. However, then NFL commissioner and former Philadelphia Eagles owner Bert Bell felt that the league could not sustain more than twelve teams. Since the early disastrous days of 1920-1922 the NFL's leaders had been wary of adding more teams. The early failures had made the league cautious and NFL ownership was a closely-guarded and select group. Lamar Hunt had been attempting to purchase an NFL team for several years and was frustrated by the league's leadership. He encouraged other men who had been denied by the league to

²² John M. Carroll. Red Grange and the Rise of Modern Football. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999): 13-15.

join him in an upstart rival league. Adams, Hawsam and Winter all agreed and with several other businessmen, formed the AFL in 1959.²³

The AFL began play in the 1960 season and, despite being the upstart challenger, played with the benefit of a great deal of the era's best college players. The AFL college draft attracted nearly half of the year's biggest college stars.²⁴ The AFL also worked to attract big personalities. The new league's owners, more adventurous than their NFL counterparts were looking to attract a new, younger crowd to their games. One AFL owner who took this vision to a new level was Sonny Werblin a former Music Corporation of America (MCA) talent agent. For Werblin, AFL football was not about old-school rivalries (the year old league simply lacked them) or keeping hometown crowds happy and in the stands. Rather, it was about "...building a show...football has become one of the great entertainment mediums in the United States." He believed that a team was nothing without a marquee player to draw in fans from around the country. Just as a movie, a football team needed a star. Werblin, thinking well beyond his time, understood that television would be the future of football and that a team needed something to attract fans from well beyond the hometown. Werblin purchased the AFL's failed New York Titans for \$1 million in 1963. His first order of business was changing the name from Titans, which he considered to be pitiful mimicry of New York's NFL franchise The Giants, to the Jets, a name he considered to be fitting of the flash and thrill of football in the 1960s. Secondly, Werblin found his marquee star, a young Pittsburgh native with the

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ John M. Carroll. Red Grange and the Rise of Modern Football. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999)

bigger-than-life personality to invigorate the game. Quarterback 'Broadway' Joe Namath quickly sold-out Shea Stadium, where the Jets played, and packed living rooms from coast to coast. New, younger fans loved to watch Namath play, as did the game's core audience who respected the QB for his grit and determination even if they disliked his conduct off the field.²⁵

The two leagues bitterly fought for a share of America's football fans through the early 1960s. Each spent millions of dollars trying to wipe the other off the map. The rivalry between the two did more for professional football than either league ever imagined; "...the feuding leagues unwittingly accelerated the growth of the sport as a whole."²⁶ The AFL's fresh new approach to professional football, symbolized by the celebrity of Joe Namath, proved to be enormously successful. Unlike previous upstart leagues that preceded them, the AFL was able to sustain itself against the entrenched NFL.

Initially the NFL had a distinct media advantage over the AFL; former players and league leadership were writers, reporters, commentators and buyers for the country's biggest media outlets. However, despite this media advantage the AFL not only survived but, thrived. The fresh look and feel of the young AFL garnered fans, and, most importantly, television viewers. Quickly, AFL administrators learned that directly competing directly with the NFL in limited size markets would prove to be too much. AFL founder Lamar Hunt moved his Dallas Texans to Kansas City after

²⁵ Shawn Coyne and Chad Millman. The Ones Who Hit the Hardest: The Steelers, The Cowboys, the '70s and the Fight for America's Soul. (New York: Gotham Books, 2010): 55.

²⁶ Michael MacCambridge, America's Game: The Epic Story of How Pro Football Captured A Nation. (New York: Random House, 2004): xvii.

only one season of direct competition with the NFL's Cowboys. The AFL's Los Angeles franchise became the San Francisco 49ers to avoid direct competition with the already established NFL Los Angeles Rams. Only the newly renamed New York Jets remained in an already established NFL market. The two leagues engaged in massive bidding wars for top college prospects. Competition for college players was fierce. However, an implied agreement was reached between the two rivals; one league would respect the contracts of the other, and not attempt to 'poach' players. This gentleman's agreement was broken in 1966 when the NFL's New York Giants signed a kicker already under contract to the AFL's Buffalo Bills. The resulting hostile and unpredictable environment was too much for the leadership of the NFL to handle; merger talks were initiated later that year. Talks were long and drawn out, both leagues unwilling to compromise but pressuring the other to do so. In January 1967, the first AFL-NFL championship game was played, an annual tradition that would soon be renamed the Super Bowl. A common college draft was also established, eliminating the hostile competition for top prospects that had preceded it. After years of talks between the two leagues, a merger agreement was finally reached in 1970. However, the agreement required approval by Congress to assure that it was not in violation of antitrust law. Eventually, the 89th Congress approved the merger with the help and encouragement of Louisiana representative Hale Boggs and Louisiana Senator Russell Long. Shortly after the merger, the New Orleans Saints were announced as the freshly merged league's newest expansion

team.²⁷ Though the merger was in clear violation of anti-trust laws, Congress was willing to turn a blind eye, as long as their constituents could cheer for a local team.

Critical to the success of both leagues in the 1960s was the increased television coverage of football. The game of football was well-suited to the medium of television. A single camera at mid-field was able to capture the game well in the early days. The drama of the game was perfect for a television audience; each new play was an opportunity for big success or failure. The game play was on a large scale – dramatic throws from the quarterback, tackles or runs – each measurable in yardage across the screen. As the game grew in popularity, so did the complexity of coverage with multiple cameras at multiple positions on the field. Television commentators exaggerated the narrative and drama of the game by filling lulls or stops in play with anecdotes about the teams, players or coaches. Football was most certainly a game perfect for television coverage, but the NFL also masterfully exploited the opportunity. As author Michael MacCambridge writes: “...the medium alone cannot explain the rise of the message.”²⁸

Professional football was steadily gaining in popularity throughout the 1960s. However, “...pro football was still far behind baseball in the matter of myth, nostalgia and lore.” Commissioner Pete Rozelle wanted to create ‘myth, nostalgia and lore’ around the game of football. To do this he hired Ed Sabol, a filmmaker, to document the highs and lows of professional football and present the game to the American people with all the drama and excitement that professional baseball

²⁷ Michael MacCambridge, America’s Game: The Epic Story of How Pro Football Captured A Nation. (New York: Random House, 2004).

²⁸ Michael MacCambridge, America’s Game: The Epic Story of How Pro Football Captured A Nation. (New York: Random House, 2004): xv.

already enjoyed. Sabol premiered 'This is Pro Football,' a documentary-styled film on the world of NFL football in 1967. The film was shot with dramatic cinematography, "...close-in football action, made more vivid by the sounds of contact, and interspersed with close-ups of men sweating, bleeding, resting exhausted on the sideline."²⁹ Sabol established a dramatic and signature style with 'This is Pro Football' that resonated with fans and, most importantly, with commissioner Rozelle. Sabol was given the responsibility of documenting each game, putting together team highlight films and filming the Super Bowl. The new department, NFL Films, was a first in sports, an in-house film crew given unprecedented and sole access to a professional league. Sabol, and later his son Steve, created a signature look and feel for NFL Films; close shots in a fast-paced, back-and-forth style effectively captured the confusion and excitement of an NFL game. Sabol was able to give viewers a look at what it would be like to be on the line of scrimmage for the big, game-winning play. NFL Films' coverage of Super Bowl III and IV cemented the importance of the signature Sabol style. The unique cinematography made its mark on the world of sport film and television coverage and even influenced mainstream filmmaking.³⁰

With the AFL-NFL merger professional football completed its ascent to the top of American sport. Players were now household names, critiqued in the media for their attitudes and behaviors on and off the field. With the help of unprecedented television coverage and the 'myth, nostalgia, and lore' purposely crafted by Pete

²⁹ Ibid,282.

³⁰ Michael MacCambridge, America's Game: The Epic Story of How Pro Football Captured A Nation. (New York: Random House, 2004): 285.

Rozelle and NFL Films professional football became firmly entrenched as an American cultural icon. As highly visible and well regarded men NFL players had become representations of hegemonic masculinity – examples for American men to aspire to and emulate.

Literature Review

Football holds a particularly special place in American culture. The game is synonymous with the nation itself. However, despite football's iconic position in American culture few academics have examined the sport. This is most certainly not to say that there is a scarcity of football literature. Rather, as one of the most successful and popular professional sports in the United States, football generates an incredible volume of literature. Unfortunately for the scholar, almost all of this work is descriptive or celebratory; a large portion of it is biography or autobiography, and nearly exclusively hagiography.

It is important for the careful scholar to consider each piece of football literature with a critical eye. For instance, the bulk of football literature is composed of player biographies and autobiographies, the reminiscing and reflections of sports journalists, and the work of quick publishing presses commemorating Super Bowl wins, player records or team anniversaries. Nevertheless these works can provide a valuable insight into the world of professional football. In the instance of player autobiographies they provide first-hand accounts of the player experience. The work of former sport journalists, or quick publishing presses, provides a look at the fan experience; what fans of the game are interested in reading and seeing. In this sense, this type of football literature can be examined as part of the cultural work of

the game. Meaning, that they should be examined as a product of the game rather than as an outside source. These works are often written contemporaneously to the events or period in question providing a direct look at the topic. While this, often unique perspective, is certainly valuable it is important to consider the inherent bias that accompanies a contemporary examination. Possible biases include the intent of work (to commemorate a championship winning team or a similar landmark) the topic (a specific player, team or game), the time period (bearing in mind the state of the league, pre or post merger, and what style of play and team dominated) and, of course, the author (a former player, coach, journalist or fan, with any team allegiances or additional background.)

Furthermore, it is important, particularly for gender interested scholars, to consider the gendered perspectives of the authors. Like most professional football players, authors of popular football literature often embody the characteristics of hegemonic masculinity; heterosexual, Caucasian and middle to upper class. Moreover, a great deal of popular football literature is intended for a hegemonic masculine audience; celebrating these characteristics in their portrayal of players and team. Popular football literature is a product and contributor to the hegemonic masculine identity of the game rather than an outsider.

Examining popular football literature was certainly useful and enriching to the overall research process. However, it was not, alone, sufficient to fully understand the creation, sustenance and promotion of hegemonic masculinity. The analysis of primary historical materials including newspaper clippings and team promotional materials was immensely helpful in reaching a better understanding of

the hegemonic masculine identities of the Pittsburgh Steelers and Dallas Cowboys. To access these materials the author travelled to the Pro Football Hall of Fame in Canton, Ohio. The Hall of Fame (HOF) maintains a research archive containing news clippings on each of the NFL's thirty-two teams dating from their founding to the present day. With the aid of a staff researcher, the author accessed the news clippings of both the Steelers and Cowboys between the years of 1960 and 1990.

In addition to maintaining and actively collecting a research collection on each team the HOF also maintains the actual hall of fame and accompanying museum for fans to enjoy. Like the bulk of football literature the HOF is intended primarily to be an attraction for NFL fans rather than a serious scholarly archive. The museum tour provides a brief history of the league, but leaves out a great deal of detail. The bulk of the museum's physical space is dedicated to memorabilia, both historical and contemporary, from the league's teams. Again, like popular football literature the HOF should be considered a contributor to, and product of the hegemonic masculinity of NFL football.

Furthermore, the primary research materials accessed at the HOF, newspaper clippings and team promotional materials, are also contributors to, and a product of, the hegemonic masculine identity of professional football. Newspaper clippings featuring stories on both teams from the period between 1960 and 1990 were all attributed to male authors fitting the hegemonic masculine parameter of American professional football; white, middle-upper class and heterosexual. What is more, these materials were intended for a similar audience – addressing issues of masculinity both directly and indirectly. For instance, *TRUE*, *Esquire* and *GQ*

magazines all published articles dealing with the types of players and fans the Steelers and the Cowboys fielded and attracted.³¹ Team rosters, intended for coaching staff and team administration, included facts on each player's marital status, education and personal habits both positive and negative.

These materials indicate that well beyond their performance on the field, coaches and administrators were concerned with the conduct of players *off* the field. A player was not a good fit for the team simply because he played well. Rather, these types of materials indicate that a player needed to be well suited to the team's persona in addition to being a talented football player. This speaks to the notion that a team actively pursued and created a team image. While these images may be different, even radically so as is the case with the glamorous Dallas Cowboys and the gritty Pittsburgh Steelers, they all prescribe to the same concept of hegemonic masculinity. In the case of American professional football, hegemonic masculinity is three primary things; Caucasian, middle to upper class and heterosexual. The primary research materials accessed at the HOF support this idea.

Newspaper articles dealt more subtly with issues of masculinity. Articles often critiqued or praised the style of play that each team favored and the men who succeeded or failed at it. Masculinity, or the personality of the players was rarely discussed openly. However, players were critiqued or praised individually for their efforts on the field. The characteristics that each city favored – Dallas, a strong and bold offensive player, Pittsburgh a resolute defensive player – reflected the character of the city itself. Though not outright, the cultivated image of the team and

³¹ Esquire Magazine, September 1972; TRUE Magazine, September 1964.

of the individual players, proved to be important to sport journalists. Despite the stark differences in the images that the two teams cultivated the core characteristics of American hegemonic masculinity remain.

Though limited, the academic work produced on professional football proved to be extremely valuable in the research process. However, this work was not without significant flaws. Perhaps the most prolific scholarly author on football is Oregon State's Michael Oriard. Like many football authors Oriard offers a perspective colored by his own experiences with the game. A former Kansas City Chief, Oriard's brief professional career was ended by labor disputes in the 1970s. His work is both thoroughly researched and engaging, offering a detailed and thoughtful analysis on a variety of topics – from the college game to the cultural significance of the NFL in America. As both a former player and an academic Oriard lends a unique and important voice to the discourse on football. However, it is important to note the personally engaged perspective.

The nature of the topic means that most work, scholarly or popular, has a level of personal bias. NFL football is America's most popular professional sport and a cultural icon. It is difficult for any scholar to approach the topic with true objectivity. Many authors, as is the case with Michael Oriard, have played the game themselves and bring, along with astute analysis, a wealth of personal experiences. Others, like this author, have not played the game personally but have encountered the game as an American cultural touchstone. The two are vastly different perspectives, both valid, but with different biases. With such varying perspectives

offered it is important to always consider any author's personal experiences with the game.

More than just personal perspective football literature also differs widely in focus. Two primary forms of academic work on football exist. Firstly, there is a great deal of work on the unprecedented success of the NFL business model. Through the use of lucrative television contracts, local-black outs, relatively low player compensation and, most importantly, revenue sharing; the NFL has become America's most profitable professional sport.³²

The scholarship that examines the business side of the league offers an interesting and important focus. These types of analysis often include an in-depth history of the league's business strategy. However, like a great deal of football literature, business oriented books appear to be the side projects of serious business journalists or scholars. Wall Street Journal reporter Mark Yost is an example of this. His *Tailgating, Sacks, Salary Caps: How the NFL Became the Most Successful Sports League in History* is a statistically-rich analysis of the NFL's ascent to the top of the sport business world. In the past, Yost has written for the professional and academic business community in his capacity as columnist for the Wall Street Journal.³³

Frank P. Jozsa's *Football Fortunes: The Business Organization and the Strategy of the NFL* is another example of a business-oriented analysis written as a side, or

³² Local 'black-outs' refers to a technique used by a number of professional sports leagues, though it was particularly successful in the early years of the NFL, where a local area is 'blacked-out' of television coverage if a game is not sold out. Before television contracts were extremely lucrative in favor of the league local black-outs were an extremely common and successful tool.

³³ Yost, Mark. Tailgating, Sacks, and Salary Caps: How The NFL Became the Most Successful Sports League in History. (Chicago: Kaplan Publishing, 2006)

interest project. Jozsa has built an academic career based upon his work on the business of Major League Baseball (MLB). He offers up an interesting contrast between the NFL and America's pastime.³⁴ In order to best explain the overwhelming success of the NFL Jozsa considers American culture – how and why has the country fallen in love with the game, and thus supported it financially. His analysis provides an interesting bridge between the cultural and financial aspects of the NFL. It is important to consider both sides of football, given that they are interconnected so deeply. The game would not be as successful as it is at the professional level if the game was not well suited to the nuances of American culture. This interplay between business and culture is one that is especially important to consider with the NFL.

Author Allen St. John offers a targeted look at this relationship in his 2009 book *The Billion Dollar Game: Behind The Scene of the Greatest Day in American Sport – Super Bowl Sunday*. St. John, a journalist who has written extensively on the business of American popular culture, examines how the Super Bowl has captured the hearts, and most importantly, the wallets of Americans.³⁵ Like St. John, Michael MacCambridge's *America's Game: The Epic Story of How Pro Football Captured A Nation* explores the connection between culture and the business of the NFL. MacCambridge approaches the topic from a cultural perspective, asking the question: how did the Super Bowl 'capture a nation' and thus become an unprecedented business success. Previously, MacCambridge has written for

³⁴ Jozsa Jr., Frank P. Football Fortunes: The Business Organization and Strategy of the NFL. (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland & Company, Inc, 2010)

³⁵ St. John, Allen The Billion Dollar Game: Behind The Scenes of The Greatest Day in American Sport – Super Bowl Sunday. (New York: Doubleday, 2009.)

ESPN.com and Sports Illustrated giving a sport and culture oriented perspective to the business story of the NFL and the Super Bowl in particular.³⁶

David Harris's *The League: The Rise and Decline of the NFL* is another book that provides a link between the cultural and business aspects of professional football. As a former political activist, and journalist who has written for *Rolling Stone Magazine* and the *New York Times Magazine*, Harris provides an interesting insight into the cultural grasp that football holds on America. Harris's past work has focused on culture – exploring the history of war protests, recounting his personal experiences as an imprisoned protestor – *The League* is his first foray into the world of sports. As a cultural commentator, David Harris's work provides another useful bridge between the world of business and culture in American football.

All of these books take different approaches to answering a similar question: how has NFL taken hold of America and become the most profitable professional sport in the country? Though all the books take different approaches they all have similar authors, men who have backgrounds in business or cultural commentary who have taken an interest in the NFL and examined the league through their familiar lenses. Each brings a slightly different set of experiences and expertise to their work. Yet, like authors of popular football materials, each author is male. Though they may not personally fit the criteria of hegemonic masculinity they write of the game and of the league as a part of the hegemonic masculine ideal. The gender identity created, sustained and promoted by the game is taken for granted, assumed

³⁶ MacCambridge, Michael. *America's Game: The Epic Story of How Pro Football Captured A Nation*. (New York: Random House, 2004.)

as a part of the game. None of the authors examine the gender identity of professional football and its relationship to the business of the league. There is most certainly a connection to be made between the two – how a game, and its corresponding masculinity, is successfully sold to American men. However, this topic is not discussed by any of the authors mentioned above.

The business aspect of the game is certainly worth exploration. However, it is not the only aspect of the game that has received a great deal of attention. Specific teams and time periods have intrigued authors as well. ESPN magazine editor Chad Millman, who co-authored the book *The Ones Who Hit Hardest: The Steelers, The Cowboys, the '70s and the Fight for America's Soul*, is a prime example of this type of football literature.³⁷ Millman, along with co-author Shawn Coyne, wrote about his hometown team, the Pittsburgh Steelers, and the decade that he grew to love football, the 1970s. Writing about a hometown team and a beloved decade can produce an interesting, nuanced and engaging piece of work. However, it can also produce an unbalanced evaluation, even a hagiography. Unfortunately this is the case with *The Ones Who Hit the Hardest*. To the detriment of his work Millman has chosen to examine his hometown team. While the history of the team and the city of Pittsburgh is exhaustive, and even includes an in depth history of the union movement in the steel industry, the aim of the book, to explore the 'the fight for America's soul' as the subtitle suggests, is obscured. Millman gets lost in a description of trivial details and a glorifying history of the region that is never fully

³⁷ Shawn Coyne and Chad Millman. *The Ones Who Hit the Hardest: The Steelers, The Cowboys, the '70s and the Fight for America's Soul*. (New York: Gotham Books, 2010.)

connected to the team. Moreover, the comparison of the Dallas Cowboys and the Pittsburgh Steelers is not sufficiently explored. Rather, the book is compiled of short and disconnected snap shots on the histories of both teams. A discussion of how the two teams relate to each other, the time period in question and the 'fight for America's soul' is lacking. The problem of Millman's book is a common one in football literature. Authors with a prior emotional connection to the topic have the potential to write with the enthusiasm of a fan rather than the detachment of scholar or journalist. While this enthusiasm can make the work uniquely engaging it also has the potential to distract from the serious aim of the book. As fans of the game, authors like Millman are very much a part of the hegemonic masculine identity that professional football creates, sustains and promotes.

Though there is a limited amount of academic work on football there is a great deal of excellent scholarship available on the world of sport in general that proved to be invaluable in the research process. The field of sport academia includes a wide array of disciplines including sociology, history, gender studies, education and psychology to name just a few. Exploring the relationship between gender and sport has proven to be invaluable. There are a great number of authors, from a wide array of disciplines, who have written about sport topics.

One such an example is David Coad, a professor of English at the Université de Valenciennes in France, who suggests that the hyper-masculine environment of a sports team allows for a degree of sexual fluidity. Players are able to adopt traditionally female traits, most notably an increase in concern over personal grooming and appearance, because they have the hyper-masculinity of sport to rely

upon. Furthermore, Coad argues that the increased sexualization of professional athletes in the second half of the twentieth century is a combination of both sexual fluidity and the growing acceptance of, and appeal to, female sexuality – a previously unrecognized market for professional sports.³⁸

Allen Guttman is another example of the interdisciplinary examination of sports. A professor of English and American Studies at Amherst College has written extensively on the relationship between sexuality and sport. His book *The Erotic in Sports* is considered to be a landmark in the fields of both American Studies and sport history.³⁹ Sport sociologists have also explored the relationship between homosexuality and sport.

In the case of American football heterosexuality is integral to the hegemonic masculine identity. Given this parameter, the literature on sport and homosexuality has proved to be invaluable in exploring and understanding the hegemonic masculine ideal in the NFL. Sociologist Brian Pronger's influential book *The Arena of Masculinity: Sports, Homosexuality, and the Meaning of Sex* explore the homoerotic aspects of sport through the lens of Foucaultian theory.⁴⁰ Furthermore, cultural critic Varda Burysn also discusses the connections between homosexuality and the hyper-masculine environment of sport in her well-known book *The Rites of Men:*

³⁸ David Coad. *The Metrosexual: Gender, Sexuality, and Sport*. (Albany: SUNY Press, 2008): 96.

³⁹ Allen Guttman. *The Erotic in Sports*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996.)

⁴⁰ Brian Pronger. *The Arena of Masculinity: Sports, Homosexuality, and the Meaning of Sex*. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990)

Manhood, Politics, and the Culture of Sport.⁴¹ More recently, sociologist Eric Anderson has written about the topic. Anderson, much like David Coad, argues that participation in sport allows gay men to participate in the hegemonic masculine identity despite their sexuality.⁴²

The relationship between gender and sport has also been thoroughly explored by many scholars. University of Southern California sociologist Michael Messner has written several books on the topic. In *Power at Play: Sports and the Problem of Masculinity* Messner argues the homosocial environment of the sports team reinforces conservative gender roles.⁴³ Moreover, the world of sport is a 'contested terrain' where gender roles are being constructed and reinforced.⁴⁴ In his latest effort, Messner contends that the rise of organized sports, in the mid-twentieth century coincides with a crisis in masculinity. Traditional male power was receding, or so it seemed, in the face of the second wave feminist movement. Sport was used as a conservative tool to reinforce the dominance of masculinity and traditional gender roles.⁴⁵ Garry Whannel, a professor of media cultures, reiterates this notion in his book *Media Sport Stars: Masculinities and Moralities*. He continues with the notion that sport is a conservative social force. He contends that sports stars are held to a higher standard of morality because of their participation in this

⁴¹ Varda Burstyn. *The Rites of Men: Manhood, Politics, and the Culture of Sport*. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999.)

⁴² Eric Anderson. "Openly Gay Athletes: Contesting Hegemonic Masculinity in a Homophobic Environment." *Gender and Society*, Vol. 16, No.6 (Dec.,2002): 860.

⁴³ Michael A. Messner. *Power at Play: Sports and the Problem of Masculinity*. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992)

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Michael A. Messner. *Out of Play: Critical Essays on Gender and Sport*. (Albany: SUNY Press, 2007.): 92.

conservative social force.⁴⁶ The notion of sport as conservative, particularly in the arena of gender role formation and prescription, has been extremely influential in this project.

Messner's and Whannel's work has been especially influential in developing the parameters of hegemonic masculinity in the context of American professional football. Also influential and guiding in this project was the work of respected Australian sociologist and masculinity scholar R.W. Connell. The theory of hegemonic masculinity has become a well-known, and heavily debated, theory in the field of masculinity and gender studies. First articulated in the landmark 1995 book *Masculinities*, Connell asserts that there is a dominant, or prescribed, form of masculinity that occupies a position of power in society. Her understanding of hegemony is based upon Gramscian or cultural hegemony. Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci theorized cultural hegemony during his time as a political prisoner.⁴⁷ He suggested that one social class dominates all others and that the ideals of this ruling class become the accepted norm. These norms are perceived by society to benefit all in society while in actuality they serve only to benefit the already established ruling class.⁴⁸ Connell's hegemonic masculinity theory is based upon an understanding of the feminist theory of patriarchy. Those who embody the characteristics of hegemonic masculinity are members of what Gramsci referred to as the ruling social

⁴⁶ Garry Whannel, *Media Sport Stars: Masculinities and Moralities*. (London: Routledge, 2002): 7.

⁴⁷ Joseph A. Buttigieg. "Reading Gramsci Now." in *Perspectives on Gramsci: Politics, Culture and Social Theory*. Joseph Francese ed. (New York: Routledge, 2009.): 20-32.

⁴⁸ Benedetto Fontana. "Power and Democracy: Gramsci and Hegemony in America." in *Perspectives on Gramsci: Politics, Culture and Social Theory*. Joseph Francese ed. (New York: Routledge, 2009.)

class, or what feminist theory has termed the patriarchy.⁴⁹ Hegemonic masculinity is based upon dominance, both of men who do not embody hegemonic ideals and of women. Thus, hegemonic masculinity is oppressive to both men and women in many ways. Because of this, Connell's theory has been, and continues to be, heavily debated by both feminist and masculinity scholars.

Connell's theory of hegemonic masculinity is particularly applicable to the NFL. As an American cultural touchstone professional football creates, sustains and promotes a unique form of masculinity. This particular gender identity is dominating, over other forms of masculinity and women. The prominence of the NFL and the masculinity of the men who play speak to the notion that the NFL is an example of and a reproducing force for hegemonic masculinity in America.

NFL Football: American Hegemonic Masculinity Defined

This paper will argue that, in the context of American culture, professional football is a powerful site for the creation, reproduction and promotion of hegemonic masculinity. American professional football is a cultural phenomenon and the men who play are held to a high standard of idealized masculinity. They are the model citizens of the 'city upon a hill,' the epitome of American masculinity. The media interest, even obsession, with the conduct of NFL players both on and off the field suggests that they are much more than just professional athletes. Rather, they are cultural icons – expected to be the best that the country has to offer, a beacon for all Americans to follow, admire and emulate. Certainly professional athletes of all sports, or public figures more broadly, experience a great deal of media scrutiny. It

⁴⁹ R.W. Connell. Masculinities. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995.)

is the unique association between America and football that makes the NFL a primary site of hegemonic masculinity creation, reproduction and promotion.

NFL football is synonymous with America itself. While other professional sports, notably baseball, which is described as the national pastime, are deeply associated with the nation and its values – including masculinity – football represents the ideal. The game was designed to teach boys to be men, to be part of a well-rounded education. It is intensely and aggressively physical unlike any other game. Football, especially to the men who watch and play, is much more than a pastime. It is a chance to develop and prove masculinity.

In the case of American football, hegemonic masculinity is defined by three primary characteristics: Caucasian, middle to upper class, and heterosexual. Hegemonic masculinity is based upon an understanding of Gramscian or cultural hegemony. This means that one social group dominates all others and advocates for all other social groups to emulate the dominant, often at the expense of lower groups. Moreover, cultural hegemony is not absolute – an individual can be powerful yet not prescribe to the notions of the dominant group or vice versa.⁵⁰

Furthermore, hegemonic masculinity is not static, nor consistent anywhere and everywhere. Rather, it is, at any given time or place, the form of masculinity that occupies the hegemonic, or dominant, position – this position being, of course, always contestable.⁵¹ The contrast between the gritty, working class Pittsburgh

⁵⁰ Joseph A. Buttigieg, “Reading Gramsci Now.” in Perspectives on Gramsci: Politics, Culture and Social Theory. Joseph Francese ed. (New York: Routledge, 2009.)

⁵¹ Connell, R.W. Masculinities. (Berkeley, UC Press, 1995.) 76-77.

Steelers and the glamorous and flashy Dallas Cowboys illustrates this contest quite well.

Despite the early racial integration of the professional game and the numerical predominance of 'non-white' players currently in the league the leadership of the NFL remains staunchly and overwhelming Caucasian. Because the leadership of the league remains racially defined hegemonic masculinity is also so defined.

The NFL's early beginnings were racially integrated; in fact the league's first commissioner was American-Indian Jim Thorpe, from 1920-1921. Fritz Pollard, an African-American was famously one of the first player-coaches in the fledging mid-western league.⁵² However, this early era of racial integration and harmony lasted only a short while. Just prior to the 1927 season all of the league's African-American players were summarily dismissed. The league began a slow reintegration process in 1946 that was finally completed in 1961.⁵³ Competition with the AFL, beginning in 1959, also encouraged and accelerated racial integration. The competition between the two leagues, and the AFL's practice of recruiting players from historically black colleges, meant that it was necessary for the NFL to also begin actively recruiting players from these traditionally overlooked colleges. African-

⁵² John M. Carroll, "Fritz Pollard and Integration in Early Professional Football." in Race and Sport: The Struggle for Equality on and off the field. Charles K. Ross ed. (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2004): 3-25.

⁵³ Charles K. Ross, Outside the Line: African Americans and the Integration of the National Football League. (New York: New York University Press, 1999): 143. It is not a coincidence that this happened contemporaneously with the integration of Major League Baseball and the Armed Services. The league completed integration when the Washington Redskins were forced by the Kennedy administration or forfeit their right to play in DC Stadium.

American players offered a competitive player at an even more competitive wage – African-American players were often willing to accept a lower wage than their white counterparts.⁵⁴

Since the league became fully integrated in the 1960s racial diversity has become an accepted part of professional football. Currently, ‘non-white’ players represent approximately two thirds of the league.⁵⁵ Despite this majority the leadership of the league remains overwhelming white. To demonstrate this problem three leadership positions have been isolated: the quarterback who leads the players on the field, the coach who leads the team on the sidelines and provides a bridge between players and the organization and the owner who leads the club and provides a bridge between the team and the league. Of thirty-two starting quarterbacks from the 2010-2011 season only eight, or twenty-five percent, were ‘non-white.’⁵⁶ Of the thirty-two head coaches from this past season only six, or nineteen percent, were ‘non-white.’⁵⁷ And finally, there are no ‘non-white’ owners

⁵⁴ Ibid,119.

⁵⁵ Wharton Sports Business Initiative Player Survey as cited in William C. Rhoden, “NFL Players Evaluate Their Coaches.” New York Times, October 25 2008. ‘non-white’ refers, by and large, to African American players though there is a growing demographic of Hispanic and Pacific Islanders playing in the league.

⁵⁶ NFL.com; player profiles from source. Assessment of racial identity by author. This figure includes Dallas Cowboys quarterback Tony Romo (Romo did not play this season due to injury but was a fixture on the sidelines and continued to participate in the leadership role of his position. He is also still a well-known player and has maintained his role a marquee player for the Dallas Cowboys.) and Mark Sanchez of the New York Jets, both of whom are players of Hispanic heritage. Furthermore, for the purposes of this figure ‘starting quarter back’ has been defined as a player who started more the half of the regular season’s sixteen games.

⁵⁷ NFL.com; coachprofiles from source. Assessment of racial identity by author. This figure includes the thirty-two coaches from the 2010-2011 season.

or significant stakeholders in any of the league's thirty-two teams.⁵⁸ Despite the fact that 'non-white' players are now the expected majority of the league they are still disturbingly absent from positions of leadership in the league. These positions of leadership are those that Americans look up to, aspire to and those that receive the highest status, and of course, receive the corresponding highest pay checks.

This suggests that race is an integral component of hegemonic masculinity. 'Non-white' men in the NFL are unable to succeed at the highest level despite their majority in the league.⁵⁹ All of this is most certainly not to say that 'non-white' players are not admired, or respected in the NFL, but rather that these players are the exception rather than the rule. What is more, 'non-white' players who are most admired in the league often defy racial stereotypes and rely more heavily on other characteristics of hegemonic masculinity.

Also integral to the ideal of hegemonic masculinity is socioeconomic class. The game initially developed at the college level in the late nineteenth century. The men who attended college at this time were of the most privileged classes – able to afford tuition and, more importantly, time away from valuable labor. Early football powerhouses included elite private colleges like Harvard, Yale and Princeton. The game was considered to be an important component of an elite education and was strictly reserved for the men of the highest socio-economic status.

As the game evolved in early twentieth century, it spread to the mid-west where industrial mills and factories adopted the game to keep workers strong,

⁵⁸ NFL.com; Most teams are not owned by just one person. However, there are no teams with a 'non-white' individual who has a significant, or majority, stake in the team's ownership.

⁵⁹ R.W. Connell. Masculinities. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995.)

motivated and fit. Football was played for leisure – both for the men who play and those who came out to watch. The men who played were certainly not middle-upper class, but rather they were working or laboring class. However, the ideal that the game, and the factory or mill, encouraged was distinctly upper to middle class. The game required leisure time – a hallmark of higher social classes. As the game spread from elite colleges to the industrial mill-sponsored clubs that became the NFL it was used as a way to celebrate core American values across class lines. Upper class men encouraged the working class to play football as a way to teach, and encourage, their understanding of what it meant to be an American man. Today, with professional football as the most popular spectator sport, it continues to cross class boundaries and celebrate American values.

In the modern context, football as an activity remains more accessible to boys from advantaged backgrounds. While fans of all socioeconomic classes can watch the NFL on television, playing the game requires a good deal of equipment and time. Certainly, schools and youth associations will provide equipment and coaching. However, for a school or association to have the funds to provide such equipment significant financial contributions are necessary. In the case of American public schools, where funding is largely dependent on district property taxes and thus property values, having the financial ability to provide students with equipment means that the school is located in a district with reasonable property values. Furthermore, football requires a great deal of space to both play and practice. This means that inner city schools, in areas where land is at a premium, are less able to provide students with space to practice and play football.

The idealized football player is also a representation of heterosexuality. In the history of the NFL there have only be three openly gay players. All three men waited until they had retired to make their sexuality known. Furthermore, all three men felt the identity of a football player could not be reconciled with their sexuality. All three explored this problem in memoirs.⁶⁰

David Kopay made history in early 1976 when, after a decade long career, he became the first NFL player to openly identify as gay. Though he feared the reaction from the football community Kopay recalls feeling a sense of responsibility to reveal his sexuality in order to challenge the assumptions of both gay men and football players. He recalls in his memoir:

When I looked at what people told me were homosexuals, I thought I'd be sick to my stomach. None of the guys I know are like that. The people I was told were homosexuals – I didn't want those people being a part of my life.⁶¹

David Kopay and Esera Tuaolo describe the strict heterosexual definition of masculinity in the football environments they experienced. Tuaolo likens the environment of a football team to a fraternity, where acceptance by other males can make or break a career. He recalls the social anxiety that all players felt when they first entered the locker room of a new team. Critical to the much coveted social

⁶⁰ David Kopay and Perry Deane Young, The David Kopay Story: The Coming Out Story That Made Football History. (New York: Advocate Books, 2001); Roy Simmons et al., Out of Bounds: Coming Out of Sexual Abuse, Addiction, and My Life of Lies in the NFL Closet. (New York: Carroll and Graf Publishers, 2006); Esera Tuaolo and John Rosengreen, Alone in the Trenches: My Life as a Gay Man in the NFL. (New York: Sourcebooks, Inc, 2007); Roy Simmons's memoir was not available for purchase because it has been taken out of print. As a result the author used only the memoirs of Esera Tuaolo and David Kopay for the foundation of this section.

⁶¹ David Kopay, The David Kopay Story: An Extraordinary Self-Revelation. (New York: Arbor House, 1977): 18.

acceptance was the overt expression of heterosexuality.⁶² Both Kopay and Tuaolo speak of the assumption and expectation of heterosexuality in the hegemonic masculine identity embodied by professional football players. Both men actively hid their sexuality during their time in the NFL. They both feared rejection from teammates, coaches and fans.

Kopay and Tuaolo describe struggling to understand their own sexuality. Tuaolo specifically recalls struggling to reconcile his attraction to other men and love, and success at, football. Both men vividly describe feeling that the two identities were mutually exclusive, one simply could not co-exist with the other.

The experiences of both Kopay and Tuaolo, and their decision to keep their homosexuality hidden until retiring, speak to the importance of heterosexuality in the hegemonic masculine identity. Both men struggled to reconcile their careers with their sexuality. The idea of the homosexual in football is almost unimaginable to all those involved with the sport: players, coaches, managers and fans. In reaction to David Kopay's 1976 announcement former Philadelphia Eagles coach Mike McCormack said: "I don't know first-hand of any homosexuality and I don't know where it would fit in."⁶³ Furthermore, both Tuaolo and Kopay were involved in sexual relationships with women throughout their professional football career. They did so primarily because women were easily accessed with the privilege of the team and the status of a professional football player. Actively engaging in visible

⁶² Esera Tuaolo, Alone in the Trenches, (Chicago: Sourcebooks Inc, 2007).

⁶³ David Kopay, The David Kopay Story: An Extraordinary Self-Revelation. (New York: Arbor House, 1977): 16.

heterosexual relationships helped to cement the masculine identity of the football player that both Kopay and Tuaolo felt the pressure to embody.

The assumption of heterosexuality runs deep in the culture of football. Both David Kopay and Esera Tuaolo speak to this in their memoirs. Tuaolo was able to hide his long-term partner for many years by referring to him as his best-friend and business partner. Kopay describes being caught in sexually suggestive situations with men throughout his career in the NFL. Despite numerous allusions to their true sexual identities neither Kopay's nor Tuaolo's heterosexuality was ever questioned. Both men were able to hide their sexuality from close friends and family because their profession was so closely associated with heterosexuality. Even behavior that, in other situations, would have been considered homoerotic or outright homosexual was dismissed on the basis of their profession as football players. Tuaolo himself recalls questioning his sexuality after learning that he enjoyed football and was talented and skilled as a defensive lineman.⁶⁴ The idea that a man could both play football and be homosexual was seemingly unthinkable even to Kopay and Tuaolo as they came to their private conclusions about their sexuality.

Hegemonic Masculinity: Always Contestable in Time and Place

NFL football players are an idealized representation of masculinity in America. Three overarching characteristics define hegemonic masculinity in professional football: Caucasian, middle to upper class and heterosexual. While

⁶⁴ Esera Tuaolo, *Alone in the Trenches*, (Chicago: Sourcebooks Inc, 2007).

these three characteristics are an integral part of the hegemonic masculine identity they do not always manifest themselves in the same ways.

Critical to hegemonic masculinity is its dominance over all other forms of gender identity – both male and female. Thus, it is necessary for hegemonic masculinity to evolve in response to social changes, particularly those that affect gender relations. For example, the aggressive, physical, labor defined masculinity of the 1970s Pittsburgh Steelers is a response to the significant change brought on by the second wave feminist movement. As women gained more freedom to work outside the home and have a recognized and respected sexuality, men struggled to find new ways to define their masculinity. The struggle brought a return to what sociologist Michael Messner refers to as “hard-essentialism,” a form of gender identity based upon physical gender differences.⁶⁵ Thus, the Steelers celebrated raw physicality and aggression in both their style of play and in their public image.

In contrast, the Dallas Cowboys of the 1990s celebrated radically different values. Women’s gender roles settled after the transformations of the second and third wave feminist movements and in response, men’s gender roles began to move away from “hard essentialism.” Masculinity became more fluid and malleable. Thus, the Cowboys celebrated glamour and wealth rather than strictly physical characteristics.

As the contrast between the Cowboys and the Steelers illustrates, hegemonic masculinity is always contestable in both time and place. The two teams represent

⁶⁵ Michael Messner, Keynote Address, International Symposium Speaks the Unspoken, Ottawa ON June 6 2011.

the images of the two very different cities that they call home, the fans they attract and the eras where they found their greatest successes.

For instance, the Steelers are often remembered as the team of the 1970s when the 'Steel Curtain' dominated winning four Super Bowls.⁶⁶ The Cowboys are recognized as the team of the 1990s when the bigger than life personalities of Emmitt Smith, Michael Irvin and coach Jimmy Johnson led the league, winning three Super Bowls.⁶⁷ Both teams were respected and successful. However, the two embodied markedly different forms of masculinity. Both subscribe to the three principle tenants of hegemonic masculinity yet manifest them in a radically different way.

'BIG D STYLE': THE GLAMOUR OF THE DALLAS COWBOYS



The Dallas Cowboys were the first modern-era expansion team, joining the league in 1960.⁶⁸ Texas based businessmen Clint Murchison and Bedford Wynne Jr. bought the rights to own and operate an NFL team in Texas for just \$600,000 each.⁶⁹ The city of Dallas had heavily lobbied for many years

for an NFL team. However, Washington Redskins owner George Preston Marshall was particularly reticent about awarding a team to the Texas city. He believed that

⁶⁶ The Steelers appeared in, and won, four Super Bowls in the 1970s; Super Bowl IX in 1974, Super Bowl X in 1975, Super Bowl XIII in 1978 and Super Bowl XIV in 1979.

⁶⁷ The Cowboys appeared in, and won, three Super Bowls in the 1990s; Super Bowl XXVII in 1992, Super Bowl XXVIII in 1993 and Super Bowl XXX in 1995.

⁶⁸ Craig R. Coenen, From Sandlots to the Super Bowl: The National Football League, 1920-1967. (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2005.): 17.

⁶⁹ Frank P. Jozsa Jr., Football Fortunes: The Business Organization and Strategy of the NFL. (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland & Company, Inc, 2010): 25.

the Redskins, who had recently moved from Boston, were the 'team of Dixie,' representing the entire South. Marshall had a good deal of influence within the league as a long time owner and representative of the NFL.⁷⁰ Because of the league's reluctance to award Dallas a team the Cowboys were not formed until after the 1960 season's college draft. Thus, the team was haphazardly put together with players who had not been drafted by either the NFL's other teams or the newly formed AFL.⁷¹ As a result, the Cowboys lost all twelve games of the 1960 season, along with a great deal of money for the new owners.⁷² But the 1960 season would be the last time that the Dallas Cowboys would lose money. In fact, in just a few short years the franchise would prove itself to be one of the most successful expansion clubs in any professional sport. The city of Dallas, and the entire country, eventually fell in love with the iconic five point blue star and the bigger than life personalities of the Dallas Cowboys.

From the beginning the Cowboys had a unique style that appealed to fans in the 'Big D,' a city known for its opulence, modernity and entrepreneurial spirit. In 1960 Dallas was a city with something to prove – a city with new money, young citizens and a hunger for a prestigious national reputation. Shortly after establishing itself the organization struggled to find a name appropriate to the style they wanted to cultivate and the city they called home. Known first as the Dallas Steers, then the

⁷⁰ David Harris. The League: The Rise of Decline of the NFL. (Toronto: Bantam Books, 1986).

⁷¹ Craig R. Coenen, From Sandlots to the Super Bowl: The National Football League, 1920-1967. (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2005.): 212-3.

⁷² Ibid, 200.

Dallas Rangers the name Cowboys was finally arrived at in March 1960.⁷³ The name perfectly captured the image the team sought: the rebellious, brash and bold masculinity of the Wild West.⁷⁴ Though, given the persona later cultivated by the team and fans perhaps the 'Dallas Businessmen' would have been a more appropriate name.⁷⁵ The new team, despite a lackluster record, helped the city build civic pride, providing a common goal to rally around.⁷⁶ Despite their early challenges on the field, "Texans [couldn't] peel off bills fast enough to fight their way into the Cotton Bowl to cheer..."⁷⁷ The Cowboys appealed to the attitude of the city they called home, and fans came out in droves to support a team they identified with.

A few big personalities helped the team establish its glamorous and over the top persona from the very beginning. Original President and General Manager Tex Schramm was a loud, brash and bold businessman with a name to match.⁷⁸

Schramm was keenly aware that the young team needed to be branded, to create a recognizable image that could be sold not just to Dallasites, but to football fans

⁷³ Craig R. Coenen, From Sandlots to the Super Bowl: The National Football League, 1920-1967. (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2005.): 212-3.

⁷⁴ Dallas is unique city, a nexus between the mythic Wild West and the modern metropolis, a place where oil tycoons wear business suits and cowboy hats. The name 'Cowboys' speaks to the power of the Wild West, though it has faded into a thoroughly modern and bustling metropolis.

⁷⁵ Lukas, Anthony J. "Wanta Buy Two Seats for the Cowboys? Struck oil lately?" *Esquire*. September 9 1972.

⁷⁶ The Cowboys were particularly important to the city in the wake of President Kennedy's assassination in 1963. The team helped re-build civic pride and remind Americans that Dallas was more than just the site of Presidential tragedy but was a vibrant and bustling city.

⁷⁷ "How 'Dandy Don' and the Cowboys Hit the Top." *National Observer*. November 11 1968.

⁷⁸ Craig R. Coenen, From Sandlots to the Super Bowl: The National Football League, 1920-1967. (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2005.): 201.

around the country. Throughout his career with the Cowboys, Schramm was instrumental in the team's success as a business. Perhaps his most recognizable contribution to the team is the infamous Dallas Cowboy's cheerleading team. Original coach Tom Landry remembered Schramm's push to create the controversial cheerleading squad in his autobiography: "Tex saw the cheerleaders as just another part of the entertaining and glamorous Dallas Cowboys image that he, as a general manager, carefully built and fostered. A high profile of style, flair and maximum visibility."⁷⁹ The squad was the first in the NFL to garner national attention, primarily for their minimal uniforms and provocative dancing.⁸⁰ While other teams may have balked at the idea of being overshadowed by their own cheerleaders the Dallas Cowboys embraced the squad as another way to bring in fans, and most importantly, revenue.

Coach Tom Landry is another strong personality that was instrumental in the creation of the signature Cowboys brand. Not only did he coach a team that more often than not played well, he did not shy away from the media himself. He wore an iconic fedora and sport jacket for every game. The outfit started to attract national media attention in the late 1960s when the team made its first appearance at the Super Bowl in 1967.⁸¹ Moreover, Landry encouraged his players to develop larger than life personas both on and off the field. Original quarterback Don Meredith developed a reputation as a "stylish passer" and earned the nickname 'Dandy Don'

⁷⁹ Tom Landry and Gregg Lewis. Tom Landry: An Autobiography. (Walker and Company, 1990): 213.

⁸⁰ Mark Yost, Tailgating, Sacks, and Salary Caps: How The NFL Became the Most Successful Sports League in History. (Chicago: Kaplan Publishing, 2006): 223.

⁸¹ Ibid, 1.

from local sports writers.⁸² Dallas fans relished the characters of the Cowboys. Sportswriter Steve Perkins reflected the thoughts of the city when he titled a January 1966 piece “Who Needs A Unitas,” referring to the crew cut and straight forward play of Baltimore Colts all-star quarterback Johnny Unitas.⁸³ Dallasites took pride in players who were non-conformists, whose personality and game play were unexpected and unpredictable in the world of professional football.

The famous blue star and cheerleading squad are icons of professional football and more specifically the league’s glamour franchise. The well-cultivated mystique of the team attracted fans from well beyond the Dallas metropolitan area.⁸⁴ The Cowboys earned the much talked about nickname ‘America’s Team’ following the 1978 season when twelve of the team’s regular season games received national television coverage. NFL Films editor Bob Ryan struggled to come up with an appropriate name for the team’s 1978 highlight reel. Coach Landry eagerly pointed out the team’s record national interest and television coverage. He felt that, like the Montreal Canadiens of the NHL, or the Notre Dame Fighting Irish of NCAA football, the Dallas Cowboys were a team with national appeal. He personally suggested the moniker ‘America’s Team,’ that has since been a signature of the Cowboys franchise.⁸⁵

The team most certainly purposefully cultivated an image of glamour and modernity – but the team also embodied these ideals. For instance, the Cowboys

⁸² Steve Perkins. “Who Needs A Unitas.” *Dallas Times Herald*. January 10 1966.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ N. Jeremi Duru. *Advancing The Ball: Race, Reformation, and the Quest for Equal Coaching Opportunity in the NFL*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 17.

⁸⁵ Tom Landry and Gregg Lewis. *Tom Landry: An Autobiography*. (Walker and Company, 1990): 213.

pioneered computer based player recruitment and heavily publicized the system as mark of the club's modernity. In 1962 Services Bureau Cooperation, an IBM subsidiary, approached the club to sell computers for accounting purposes. Recognizing their potential for other uses General Manager Tex Schramm invested in the company and asked them to develop a computer based player recruitment program. Within few years, the Cowboys system was renowned to be one of the best in the league.⁸⁶ In the 1970s the Cowboys brought the computer based recruiting in-house, developing 'Optimum Systems Inc' as a subsidiary of the franchise.⁸⁷ The computer recruitment program contributed significantly to the success of the Cowboys in the late 1960s and early 1970s, but it also fit perfectly with the novelty of the team brand. Schramm was careful and purposeful to include the computer system in publicity literature on the team and was known to boast about its effectiveness to the media often and at length.

The allure of Texas Stadium, the Cowboys home from 1971 to 2009, also fit perfectly with the novelty of the team's brand.⁸⁸ The team played first in the Cotton Bowl, the Texas state fairgrounds site and traditional college bowl game of the same name. As the club struggled through the first few seasons the dilapidated stadium made a suitable home, but as the team improved and the fan base rapidly expanded then owner Clint Murchison and General Manager Tex Schramm began work on a new stadium more suitable to the success of the five point star. Despite significantly

⁸⁶ David Harris. The League: The Rise of Decline of the NFL. (Toronto: Bantam Books, 1986).

⁸⁷ AP, "Computers select players for Dallas." *Unknown Publication.* January 9, 1976.

⁸⁸ Frank P. Jozsa Jr., Football Fortunes: The Business Organization and Strategy of the NFL. (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland & Company, Inc, 2010):134.

higher ticket prices, and the abundance of private boxes (called Circle Suites), fans attended Cowboys games with the same fervor they had back at the Cotton Bowl.⁸⁹ The height of style, technology and sophistication for the time, Texas Stadium held 65, 675 fans and cost \$35 million dollars.⁹⁰ The new venue looked nothing like any other NFL stadium, something Cowboys fans considered with great pride.

Texas Stadium quickly became part of the Dallas Cowboys brand, a symbol of Texas sized luxury, wealth and pride. The stadium's atmosphere of glamour and opulence fit well with the form of masculinity that the Cowboy's brand sought to represent. This particular masculinity came with the expectation of the trappings of wealth. The wealthiest fans, most often local businessmen with clients to impress, watched the games from 'Circle Suites;' high-end private rooms decorated to each guest's preferences. A 1972 *Esquire* magazine article discussed the modern Texas Stadium and lamented the cost of attending of a Cowboys game; "The buyers, to be sure, are not quite the general public. Half are Dallas-based corporations...who will use the suites to entertain customers...The other half are largely the Texas super-rich..."⁹¹ Within just ten years of the team's arrival Cowboys games had become see and be seen social events for Dallas elite. As one Dallasite told *Esquire*: "Let's face it, on any given Sunday the stadium is Dallas's best country club. Everybody wears her newest frock or pants suit. It's a gas!"⁹² Some felt the club had taken the luxurious, nouveau riche image of the Cowboys too far. Even players, particularly African

⁸⁹ Ibid, 134.

⁹⁰ Ibid, 134.

⁹¹ Anthony J., Lukas. "Wanta Buy Two Seats for the Cowboys? Struck oil lately?" *Esquire*. September 9 1972.

⁹² Ibid.

Americans, bemoaned the lack of space for the ‘average Joe’ fan.⁹³ Others however, including General Manager Tex Schramm, were proud of having “...the highest average spectator income in the history of professional football.”⁹⁴ The glamour of Texas Stadium, where only the playing field open was open to the elements, and the glamour of the nouveau riche fans contributed greatly to the appeal of the team.⁹⁵ Even as the stadium aged, becoming one of the oldest in the league, it remained among the top five revenue producers.⁹⁶ Now, Texas Stadium has been replaced by Cowboys Stadium, a new and even more opulent home for the NFL’s glamour franchise.⁹⁷ The image of the Dallas Cowboys as a luxurious and glamorous team was only burgeoning with Texas Stadium. The sale of the team to the showy, and flamboyant Jerry Jones in 1989 firmly entrenched this image.

General Manager and President Tex Schramm had a friendly, trusted relationship with then NFL commissioner Pete Rozelle. In fact, Schramm was considered instrumental in the AFL-NFL merger. He, along with Rozelle, headed the talks between the two leagues beginning in 1963.⁹⁸ The relationship between the two was so well known that Schramm was known in the media as “Mr. Vice

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Frank P. Jozsa Jr., Football Fortunes: The Business Organization and Strategy of the NFL. (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland & Company, Inc, 2010)

⁹⁶ Mark Yost, Tailgating, Sacks, and Salary Caps: How The NFL Became the Most Successful Sports League in History. (Chicago: Kaplan Publishing, 2006):8.

⁹⁷ Cowboys Stadium played host to this year’s Super Bowl as one of the newest and most advanced stadiums in the league. (Lacayo, Richard. “Inside the Dallas Cowboys Stadium,” *Time Online*, September 21 2009. [<http://www.time.com/time/nation/article/0,8599,1924535,00.html>])

⁹⁸ Craig R. Coenen, From Sandlots to the Super Bowl: The National Football League, 1920-1967. (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2005.)223.

Commissioner.”⁹⁹ But a close, personal relationship with the league came at a price. The stability of the team was perceived by many fans as stagnation and viewership and game attendance dropped dramatically in the late 1970s. Owner Clint Murchison, plagued by financial burdens and an ailing family, was forced to put ‘America’s Team’ up for sale in 1979.¹⁰⁰ The club was sold to Texas banking executive H.R. ‘Bum’ Bright. The team initially flourished under Bright’s leadership, but the savings and loan crisis forced Bright to sell the team in 1989 to another Southern businessman, who would quickly become one of the most recognized names in the modern NFL: Jerry Jones.

Jones wasted no time in assuming complete control over the team. He quickly fired coach Tom Landry, who had been with the team since 1960.¹⁰¹ Shortly thereafter he dismissed long time General Manager and President Tex Scramm. In their places Jones appointed friends and former associates from the University of Arkansas, including former Razorbacks teammate and roommate Jimmy Johnson, and assumed a great deal of responsibility himself.¹⁰² Initially, Dallasites and NFL fans around the country were taken aback by Jones and his bold takeover of ‘America’s Team.’ As author Mark Yost says: “...his brash, Texas style may rub some people the wrong way, [but] its hard to argue with his success.”¹⁰³ Cowboys fans worried that the image they had worked so hard to cultivate, and took such pride in,

⁹⁹ David Harris, The League: The Rise of Decline of the NFL. (Toronto: Bantam Books, 1986).

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² David Magee, Playing to Win: Jerry Jones and the Dallas Cowboys, (New York: Triumph Books, 2008)

¹⁰³ Mark Yost, Tailgating, Sacks, and Salary Caps: How The NFL Became the Most Successful Sports League in History. (Chicago: Kaplan Publishing, 2006): 223.

would be lost when Jones took over. One journalist perfectly captured the mood: “...weep not for Landry. He’s an immortal. But the Cowboys Mystique isn’t.”¹⁰⁴ Not only the mystique was maintained the particular masculine image of the Cowboys, while evolving was maintained. This embodies the evolution and adaptation of hegemonic masculinity necessary to maintain its position of dominance.

Despite public concerns, Jones expanded upon the Cowboys long history of success on and off the field. He worked to establish a greater distance between the team and the league, ending the close relationships that Schramm and Murchison has established before him. Jones believed, and continues to believe, that the Cowboys are the most successful and marketable team in the league. Jones is the only NFL owner who has fully retained the licensing for his team. The league’s thirty-one other teams entered into a joint merchandising agreement with the NFL, the Cowboys abstained from the deal. In fact, the team generated enough revenue from off field appearances and licensing agreements that the NFL revenue sharing agreement would have meant a loss for the team.¹⁰⁵ As Jones has controversially said: “The Cowboys are America. They are more than a football team.”¹⁰⁶

Jones is, in many ways, completely correct. The Cowboys are, and always have been, much more than a just one team. They represent a form of brash, bold and glamorous masculinity. Because of this unique persona, created and sustained purposefully by the team management, the Cowboys have an appeal well beyond

¹⁰⁴ Joe Gilmartin, “America’s Team runs out class.” *Phoenix Gazette*. February 28 1989.

¹⁰⁵ Mark Yost, Tailgating, Sacks, and Salary Caps: How The NFL Became the Most Successful Sports League in History. (Chicago: Kaplan Publishing, 2006): 127.

¹⁰⁶ Vito Stellino. “America’s Team or Laughingstock?” *Sporting News* March 6 1989.

Dallas. The iconic cheerleaders, the flashy stadium, the computer recruitment program and Jerry Jones are all part of a carefully cultivated image. The Cowboys create a culture of big fun, big luxury – all in an effort to attract the type of fan that is equally open to big spending.

The Cowboys are representative of a more modern form of masculinity – a man who is physically active and fit, but unafraid to enjoy the trappings of modern life. The Cowboys played for a different kind of man than any other professional football team before them. The unprecedented success of the team speaks to the power of this form of masculinity.¹⁰⁷ The Dallas Cowboys represent just one form of American masculinity created and sustained by the NFL, but like all forms of hegemonic masculinity, it always contestable in time and place. The Cowboys captured a moment in American history, a time of transition and change– the 1960s. Moreover, the team is a fitting representative of the city of Dallas – a modern and nouveau riche city looking to create a reputation for the best of American luxury and opulence. In sharp contrast are the gritty Pittsburgh Steelers, a fitting representative of the Great Depression era they were founded in and the city they call home.

¹⁰⁷ Mark Yost, Tailgating, Sacks, and Salary Caps: How The NFL Became the Most Successful Sports League in History. (Chicago: Kaplan Publishing, 2006): 2.

The 'STILLERS': THE GRIT OF THE PITTSBURGH STEELERS



Just as the Cowboys are representative of the cultural change of the 1960s and the modern, corporate city of Dallas the Pittsburgh Steelers are representative of the working-class, industrial city they call home and the Depression-era in which they were founded. The fans the team attracts are as gritty and hard working as the defensive-heavy players they watch on the field. The masculinity represented by the Pittsburgh Steelers is vastly different from that created and promoted by the Dallas Cowboys. But, interestingly, the two exist simultaneously in American professional football.

The Steelers, or the 'Stillers' as local fans pronounce the team name, are one of the NFL's best-known and most successful clubs. Owner Art Rooney bought the right to own and operate an NFL in Pittsburgh in 1933 with just one day's winnings from a nearby racetrack.¹⁰⁸ The Rooney family was well known and respected in the Pittsburgh coal mining community before purchasing the team.¹⁰⁹ Originally known as the Pittsburgh Pirates, the team debuted at a difficult time in American history, the Great Depression. The team was plagued with the double burden of poor results on the field and equally poor attendance. Few Pittsburghers had disposable income

¹⁰⁸ Craig R. Coenen. From Sandlots to the Super Bowl: The National Football League, 1920-1967. (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2005): 83.

¹⁰⁹ David Harris. The League: The Rise of Decline of the NFL. (Toronto: Bantam Books, 1986): 155.

to attend a game, and even fewer were willing to spend it on a consistently losing team.¹¹⁰ As a result of record low attendances, the Pirates/Steelers were forced to play many 'home-games' on the road, playing in cities and towns that were better able to sustain a fan base.¹¹¹ Without a steady attendance record the team lost money consistently in its early years.¹¹² Though the first seasons of Steelers football were extremely difficult, the 1930s would be the first and only decade during which the city of Pittsburgh did not wholeheartedly support the team.

The relationship between the Steelers and the city of Pittsburgh is firmly entrenched. In fact, the team is named after the city's most important industry – steel making. The iconic tri-color Steelers logo is actually the American Steel logo. The three asteroids, or stars, were originally said to represent the three different ways that steel helped make America great: "Steel lightens your work, brightens your leisure, and widens your world."¹¹³ Later, the three colors came to represent the three ingredients used in the steel-making process; yellow for coal, red for iron ore, and blue for scrap steel.¹¹⁴ To honor the team's seventy-fifth anniversary the Steelers introduced a mascot for the first time in 2008. 'Steely McBeam' was created to honor Pittsburgh's industrial roots, a part of the city's character that the team considered integral to its continued success.¹¹⁵ The relationship between the

¹¹⁰ Craig R. Coenen. From Sandlots to the Super Bowl: The National Football League, 1920-1967. (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2005): 137.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² David Harris. The League: The Rise of Decline of the NFL. (Toronto: Bantam Books, 1986): 156.

¹¹³ Ibid, 202.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Steve Rank, "Steely McBeam is Here." *Blogs.nfl.com*, February 6 2011. [<http://blogs.nfl.com/2011/02/06/steely-mcbeam-is-here/>]

Steelers and the steel industry goes far beyond the symbolism of the team logo and mascot. The working-class spirit of the city has breathed life into the team for decades, and in return the team has provided often much needed civic pride. The image of the Steelers and their fans is clearly masculine, and although it differs from that of the Cowboys it is consistent with the essential definition of hegemonic masculinity as an ideal. It expresses all three planks: Caucasian, middle to upper class and heterosexual.¹¹⁶

The Pittsburgh Steelers are perhaps best known their dominance of the 1970s. The NFL of the 1970s was synonymous with the Pittsburgh Steelers and their seven consecutive post-season appearances and a record breaking four Super Bowl wins. As *Sports Illustrated* writer Ray Blount Jr., wrote: “The Steelers of the ‘70s could become the most enshrined NFL team ever.”¹¹⁷ The success of the 1970s Steelers corresponded directly with the decline of Pittsburgh’s industrial lifeblood: the steel industry. The success of the football team provided much needed civic pride for a city in a harsh transitory period. Despite heavy layoffs and a steadily declining economy Pittsburghers still took pride in their city and their industry because their namesake football team was still dominating.

Like the working class fans that support them, the Pittsburgh Steelers have always appreciated their gritty, hard-working persona. It is no coincidence that the team rose to particular success and prominence when a hard knock four and three

¹¹⁶ Despite the industrial and working class imagery of the team, in reality the late twentieth unionized steel worker would have the income and the economic trappings of middle class status. Yet, the team continues to harp on its working class roots and reputation, maintain the perception of industrial toughness.

¹¹⁷ Ray Blount Jr., “Who Are These People, Anyway?” *Sports Illustrated*, August 1983. 32-37.

(four lineman and three linebackers) defense was popular.¹¹⁸ Certainly quarterback Terry Bradshaw was a huge part of the team's success on and off the field, but the team, and the city, took particular pride in their gritty defense. The style of play suited the character of the fans and the city itself.¹¹⁹ The type of masculinity that the team came to represent fit well with the masculinity of that fans that supported them.

The contrast between this image and that of the Cowboys lead one Pittsburgh newsman to comment: "None of them have dirt under their fingernails, they don't even know what dirt is."¹²⁰ The city of Pittsburgh took their working class, industrial history as a point of pride – reinforced by their successful football team. The player themselves emphasized the gritty masculinity that the fans appreciated: "The players were rugged and they could out drink almost anyone you could name."¹²¹ Even as the city grew and modernized the team remained firmly entrenched as "...a tough, mean and old fashioned professional football team..."¹²²

The team's well known ownership also supported this hard working persona. The Rooneys operated the team like a family business and stuck with the team and the city through the first harsh years of the franchise. Moreover, the Rooneys were a well-known Catholic family in the hard working coal mining community of the

¹¹⁸ O'Brien. "The Steel Model: Some of the Names Have Changed, But the Quality Remains." *Gameday* Vol.14, No.9, 1983. 11B-14B.

¹¹⁹ Ray Blount Jr., "Who Are These People, Anyway?" *Sports Illustrated*, August 1983. 32-37.

¹²⁰ John Crittenden, "Landry's Cowboys NFL's classiest, but also most resented." *Cleveland Plain Dealer*. January 10 1981.

¹²¹ Tex Maule, "Not A Perfect Friendship." *Sports Illustrated*, October 10, 1966.

¹²² *Ibid*.

1920s and 1930s.¹²³ The family was, and continues to be, loyal to the city of Pittsburgh and the working-class community that initially supported it. Today the city of Pittsburgh is a thriving and thoroughly modern town, but the Steelers continue to remind the city of its roots as a gritty, industrial town. Their continued commitment to this persona has helped attract fans from well outside the tri-state area. The Rooney family and the Pittsburgh Steelers were one of the first NFL teams to recognize the importance of national television contracts to reaching fans who could not make to a game in person.¹²⁴ Furthermore, the Steelers were one of the first NFL teams to provide pay-per-view content on the Internet, recognizing the revenue potential of fans who lived outside of the immediate area.¹²⁵

The Pittsburgh Steelers represent an old-fashioned, and traditional masculinity. The long-term success of the team speaks to the salience and relevance of this particular form of masculinity. The Steelers captured the masculinity of a specific time and place; the industrial decline of the 1970s in a steel-making city.

Conclusion

Just as the Steelers and the Cowboys captured the differing representations of masculinity from their respective cities, American football more broadly has captured the diversity of masculinity in the nation. All however, represent an idealized form of American masculinity. Given the cultural preeminence of the game this particular gender identity is an example of hegemonic masculinity, a form of

¹²³ David Harris, The League: The Rise of Decline of the NFL. (Toronto: Bantam Books, 1986): 155.

¹²⁴ Mark Yost, Tailgating, Sacks, and Salary Caps: How The NFL Became the Most Successful Sports League in History. (Chicago: Kaplan Publishing, 2006): 74.

¹²⁵ Ibid, 108-9.

masculinity that dominates all others. Hegemonic masculinity defines this dominance – both of other form of masculinity and of all forms of femininity. To maintain its position at the top of the gender order hegemonic masculinity must always be evolving and adapting in response to societal change. The contrast between the masculine representations of the Pittsburgh Steelers and the Dallas Cowboys illustrates this evolution and adaptation well.

The Dallas Cowboys brand of masculinity is the nexus of the frontier and urban wealth. Represented by franchise players from ‘Dandy’ Don Meredith to Troy Aikman and Tony Romo the Cowboys and their iconic five point star represent a more fluid more of masculinity, defined not only by raw physicality and aggression but rather by the modern trappings of wealth. In contrast, the Pittsburgh Steelers brand of masculinity is a reflection of the city’s industrial and laboring historical roots. With star players from linebackers Jack Ham and Jack Lambert to the unconventional quarterback Ben Roethlisberger, the Steelers represent a more traditionally defined masculinity. Raw physicality and aggression characterize the particular brand of Steeler masculinity.

Like most research projects this paper raises more questions than it answers. While the Steelers and Cowboys represent two particular forms of hegemonic masculinity it is likely that other NFL teams or franchises in other leagues represent their own unique forms. Do the Miami Dolphins represent a Latino form of masculinity? Do the Calgary Flames represent a Western Canadian form, and are there similarities with the Dallas Cowboys? Or more broadly, does the National Hockey League (NHL) represent a different form of masculinity, perhaps more

salient to Canadian men? In short, does sport help define masculinity in a regional or even national sense? These questions and many others could be the subject of further research and fall beyond the scope of this paper.

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