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## Textual Analysis: Hard Knocks

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TEXTUAL ANALYSIS: HARD KNOCKS

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Master's Project

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Bowling Green State University

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## Abstract

This study uses textual analysis to examine how masculinity is conveyed through HBO's docu-series *Hard Knocks*. NFL players featured on HBO's docu-series *Hard Knocks* are examined to see examples of masculine behavior in the NFL. NFL football is characterized by competitiveness, strength, violence and aggression and *Hard Knocks* showcases it in a raw form. This study observes the framework and context of the gender order, masculinity, hegemonic masculinity, war-football comparisons, men's relationship with sport, the physical body in the NFL, and NFL's current issues. The specific scenes give rare glimpses of training camp in the NFL. The scenes showcase relationships between players and coaches, players and fellow teammates, a team with its opposing competition and outsiders. The scenes were transcribed, analyzed and critiqued through textual analysis to find themes about masculinity that relate to the previous research. Using textual analysis allowed me to make my best guess as to the meanings and understanding of the scenes. I found instances of males using violence/force and competition to establish their dominance. There were examples of comradery and fatherhood through teammate and coach exchanges. The information found in this critical analysis can be used as the basis for effecting social change. The benefits of the findings can also help lead to a better understanding of the masculinity of NFL football players.

Adviser: Dr. Spencer

Second Reader: Dr. Cho

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## Introduction

Every August marks an anxious and exciting time. As the summer draws to an end it marks the beginning of a journey that will last into early February- the NFL season. If you turn on any sports network you'll see nonstop coverage of NFL training camp. Players arrive to their respective teams, General Managers make final adjustments to the roster and coaches prepare to make a run at the playoffs and Super Bowl. Aside from the coverage of NFL training camp from the likes of ESPN and NFL Network, there is one annual show that gives viewers one of the most in-depth looks at NFL training camp HBO's *Hard Knocks*. The five week documentary series follows one team a year through their entire training camp season as well as their preseason games. The show is unique in its coverage of NFL training camp because of the way it is covered by NFL Films and HBO.

As a fan of football, I want to see what goes on behind closed doors, I want to see how players conduct themselves away from the field and facility. What is so striking and entertaining is everything outside of the actual game of football that goes on in *Hard Knocks*. The relationships and the interactions of coaches with the players, the competition between players on the team and the overall day-to-day activities of the team away from the field. If you are seeking to see something similar to an actual NFL game, this is not the show for you. On the other hand, if you are searching to get an in-depth look at what life in an NFL training camp is like, *Hard Knocks* has delivered it in the rawest form since 2001. *Hard Knocks* delivers by showcasing the daily operations of NFL training camp, players, coaches, and management during practices, workouts, meetings, and beyond the field of play (Vogan, 2011).

Through all of the seasons of the show, which have featured the Ravens, Cowboys, Jaguars, Chiefs, Bengals, Jets, Dolphins, Falcons and Texans, one thing that has remained

consistent is the high-level of competitiveness and intensity of each and every team. With the same competitiveness and intensity also comes fights and brawls breaking out routinely at practice, egos being put on display in the locker room and away from the field, outrageous personalities which come together to showcase masculinity of individuals on each team. In the most recent season which aired this past August the Houston Texans were the featured team in what was a season of *Hard Knocks* filled with storylines and adversity that had high levels of the previously mentioned antics (Hanzus, 2015; Tavers, 2015).

The sport of football is something that has intrigued me much longer than the advent of *Hard Knocks*. I was drawn to the sport by the way the game was played: with hard hits, magnificent catches, and great feats of strength and power. Basketball was my first love, while I did play other sports, my passion was for basketball. Entering High School at Cardinal Mooney, a school with a rich history in football, (they won 8 Ohio State Championships) coaches and classmates gave me a great deal of encouragement to play football. My natural characteristics could best be described as relatively gentle, kind and caring, but while playing any sport I became the complete opposite. No matter what it was, when I engaged in sports I felt that I could become a different version of my normal self. I could be less caring and more dominant in what I was trying to accomplish, and football took that to a new level. I used more aggression to elevate my level of play. I would do whatever it took to win. Although I was a tough young competitor who enjoyed weightlifting and competing very hard, in my first two years of playing, the emphasis was always on toughening up so I'd be ready to play at the varsity level when my time came. My coaches would always put me up against bigger, stronger, better and older teammates in practice which allowed me to grow and develop at a quick pace. The biggest barrier I had to overcome was understanding that my natural instinct was not necessarily what would benefit me

most. As I took on this new approach I saw the benefits and earned a starting spot on the offensive line as the left tackle.

My first start at left tackle came as a junior in High School during an August scrimmage, when my offensive line coach pulled me aside and said, “Listen Eric, you’re a good kid and nice guy, but today you need to change that. You need to flip a switch and get nasty.” Different coaches had often said things like this to me before games. Once I began to ‘get it’ as August camp drew to an end, I became a much more effective player. I knew I had gotten nasty on one specific day. It was our second to last practice leading up to our first game of the season.

During the entire practice, our scout team defensive end kept lining up offside which made it extremely difficult for me to block him. After getting yelled at a few times, I decided I would handle the situation myself. When I went to block the player on the next play, he was already close to my body because of where he lined up so I pressed him with my long arms to get separation and then threw my elbow into his helmet to knock him down. I realized I could be violent, enforce my physical will on others, hurt people’s feelings, make opponents feel that I was superior to them and because it was on the field of play, it was acceptable.

This way of behaving on the football field was contrary to how my parents raised me, but I did not care because having the approval of my teammates and coaches was all that mattered to me. The problem with that particular incident was that it left my elbow gashed. My mother had to take me to the ER where it was stitched up. Another sign of how the toughness of football had finally become engrained in me was that the doctor told me I couldn’t play with stitches in my arm two days later on Friday night. To this day I think it’s the maddest I’ve ever been at a particular moment. I totally flipped out over his diagnosis much to the dismay of my mother. I told both of them there was not a chance that I was not playing. Eventually we got a second

doctor involved who cleared me to play with the help of my coaches and team medical personnel. The situation was behind me and I could begin my career. This new behavior, attitude and way of thinking was rewarded further through increased attention from my coaches, classmates, parents, and fans.

As my junior year progressed, I received 20-30 letters and calls from college coaches, recruiting visit invitations. I was viewed as being “raw” because I only started playing football my freshman year of High School and was coming from a basketball background. I can’t say for certain, but I believe my coaches would also tell college coaches that I was still coming along in becoming a full-fledged aggressive/nasty football player. This also helped my recruitment because I was not a finished product, I could be molded further into what they wanted. I did have my struggles dealing with the thought that I wasn’t good enough. I wanted to get the attention I had seen given to older teammates when it came to college recruiting from schools in the Big Ten, ACC, MAC, or Big East. I knew that I had to constantly get stronger, faster and “nastier.” I decided to retire from basketball much to the delight of the football coaches because I needed the winter to train solely for football and while I did throw shotput and discus for the track team all four years of High School, I was still primarily focused on football.

All of the focus and attention to football while giving up basketball eventually ate away at me. I still remember the feeling of the August day mid-way through two-a-days of my senior year. I was burned out on football. I woke up every morning at 6am before practice and felt emotionless, I was totally disconnected from everything for which I had been working. I made it through 8-10 days of two practices a day with no real feelings of passion, just doing what I was told and trying to get the job done. I don’t like using the word quit, so I prefer to think that I ran out of gas instead. All of the coaches on our staff reached out to me individually to try and coax

me away from my decision. One even pointed out that another teammate and I were on the cover of a high school recruiting website. Their words and pleadings could not reach me. I was burned out on football. My parents guided me through the decision while attempting to remain very neutral. I used up all my fuel for football at the time and didn't think I could last the remainder of the year. So I ultimately made the decision to stop playing football. Our team would go on to be undefeated and win the state championship that year. The decision to not play that year still haunts me. For the next two years I would think about it daily.

When I stopped playing football my senior year, I continued to train and lift because I enjoyed that. While still training hard, I kept asking myself to find the answer to what happened to me on that August day. Why did I lose all of my drive for football? Why did I give up on something for which I had so much passion? I was filled with regret and needed to discover how to overcome whatever was lacking at that moment when I had stepped away from football. A year and a half after giving up football, I had become twice as strong as I was when I was playing football. I had developed the physical and mental toughness to get through anything and found myself needing a way to use this built up strength, ability, athleticism and aggression. I wasn't sure I was ready to get back into football just like that because any interest from major programs had subsided. Instead, I opted to walk on to the track team at Youngstown State University.

This new strength and tenacity enabled me to have a very successful track career, but it was fueled by everything I had learned from football. I felt that I could always be stronger and do more to become even better. My mindset had officially gotten to where my former football coaches wanted it to be when I was in High School. I wanted to be the strongest, toughest, version of myself, while still remaining a nice young man. I had learned how to flip a switch on

and off between being a nice and kind young man and being a dominant, violent, aggressive athlete through all of my work in the weight room.

Football taught me what it meant to be truly tough. When you play, you have to be prepared 100% for it physically and mentally. At the time I was playing high school football, I was only 75% physically ready and 10% mentally ready to endure it, so I learned how to get myself there. Learning this not only benefited me when I earned all-conference and won a conference championship ring in track at YSU, but it has helped me in all aspects of life. Being aggressive, not worrying about harm and taking chances can lead to great success in life and in football those all come into play. Right now my goal is to work in college football because I feel that I am able to do so much because of what I learned though football and what I have to offer it. The time away from it helped me “refuel my gas tank.”

Developing high levels of toughness also comes with a sense of being the ultimate man. When I walked away from football, I felt like I was less of a man because of that. Any man that can withstand the physical, mental and emotional pain that comes with football is someone I would view as being masculine and someone after whom I can model myself. I grew up looking up to football players instead of super heroes because they were real. Professional football players are big, strong and tough individuals who are put under enormous pressure and stress to succeed at their job. Anytime a player does something spectacular, they are even referred to as being super human. When I've been fortunate to meet professional football players I always noticed how much bigger they seemed in person, they had a presence about them. Not just a physical presence, but a “football” presence. Next to members of the military, they represent what I think it means to be the most masculine man. The two can be compared on a number of levels when it comes to the demand and dangers of the career. That is not to say that if you don't

play football or are not in the Armed Forces, that you are not masculine, rather that a guaranteed sign of masculinity would be if you've gone through or are currently going through obstacles that have shaped you into being someone who is built up physically, mentally sharp, and emotionally prepared to deal with life's hardships.

Life's struggles and adversities are rarely shown in their rawest form. When it comes to the NFL and *Hard Knocks* I go back to how I felt about never doing enough in high school and always striving to be better. These athletes are competing at the professional level and they are invested in their job and livelihood. I can also see how many people can take exception and offense to these same actions. Seeing such actions and behavior like fighting a teammate or instigating conflict with a younger player shifted my thinking. I began to step back from the show as just a viewer looking for entertainment and started to bring up questions about what I was seeing and what others were seeing in the same show. Is this behavior masculine? Are these players epitomizing the idea of masculinity? Is it ok to like this kind of behavior? Is this what it means to be tough? Is this what it means to be a man? I decided to make these questions the focus of my research for my Master's project.

The purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between masculinity and U.S. football in the 21<sup>st</sup> century culture. This study was conducted using textual analysis (McKee, 2001; White & Gillet, 1994) to analyze key moments and scenes from *Hard Knocks* in order to convey how masculinity is constructed and understood in the NFL. In the review of literature, the concept of hegemonic masculinity and the gender order will be discussed, how war and football were brought together through the Gulf War, men's relationship with sport in general, orthodox masculinity, body composition and issues within the NFL.

### Review of Literature

The review of literature begins with an explanation of what masculinity is by examining different perspectives. Then it delves into the gender order and the different types of masculinity that exist. Additionally, I examine the historical background of football and *Hard Knocks* upon which the study is based. The relationship between the Gulf War, football and the media's coverage of both is examined. There is an exploration of the NFL draft process which includes dehumanization and putting pressure on the physical makeup of players entering the NFL. In addition, I explore some of the current issues, problems and questions facing the NFL. Finally, I explain textual analysis and how it is used to examine HBO's docu-series *Hard Knocks*. The review of literature will provide insight into what masculinity is, what it entails while the football background and processes will help reveal how masculinity is constructed within the NFL.

#### *What is masculinity?*

What is masculinity? Better yet, what does it mean to be a man? These may sound like fairly short and simple questions to answer, but in reality they are very deep and have a multitude of answers. Masculinity, itself, is not something men are born with, according to Connell and Messerschmidt (2005):

Masculinity is not a fixed entity embedded in the body or personality traits of individuals. Masculinities are configurations of practice that are accomplished in social action and, therefore, can differ according to the gender relations in a particular social setting (p. 836).

Simply put, your masculinity can change and evolve based on the social setting you are in.

The answer to the question of whether masculinity is good or bad is one that comes under debate as Kenneth Clatterbaugh (1990) explained, "Masculinity is, after all, a social issue and its

desirability or undesirability is very much a political one” (p. 2). While masculinity can be considered the social reality for men, the reality itself is something that is ever changing and up for debate (Clatterbaugh, 1990).

There are three components to understanding masculinity: the masculine gender role, the stereotype of masculinity, and the gender ideal. The gender role is what men are as Clatterbaugh (1990) explains that it is, “a set of behaviors, attitudes and conditions that are generally found in men of an identifiable group” (p. 3). The distinguishing part of Clatterbaugh’s definition is that everything is identified by a particular group. With *Hard Knocks* the behavior, attitudes and conditions that define masculinity are all associated with an NFL team being the group. Clatterbaugh (1990) elaborates further, stating “if men in this group tend to behave aggressively, aggressiveness is a part of their masculine gender role” (p. 3).

The stereotype of masculinity is the general belief of what the gender role is. If people believe that all NFL players drive expensive sports cars that would be part of a stereotype on the masculine gender role of NFL players. The stereotype is distinct from the gender role in that the gender role is an actual identifiable group’s practices and behaviors whereas the stereotype is the assumed thought of what behaviors accompany a group.

The gender ideal is defined as, “a widespread notion as to what the gender role for men should be” (Clatterbaugh, 1990, p. 3). Clatterbaugh uses the example of judging men’s age and status in life as a marker of when they should be getting married. The ideal is similar to the stereotype in that they both have historical roots of the ideas that reflect a specific group.

There are six major perspectives for which Clatterbaugh shares their specific views on masculinity. They are: conservative, profeminists, the men’s right, spiritual, socialist, and group-specific perspectives. For the sake of this study, conservative, profeminist and socialist will be

outlined. The perspectives share the specific qualities that they believe should accompany masculinity. Conservatives believe, “It is perfectly natural for men to be the providers for women; it is natural for men to be politically and socially dominant. Masculine behaviors and attitudes are manifestations of male nature” (Clatterbaugh, 1990, p. 9). Furthermore, moral conservatives believe, “masculinity is created by society in order to override men’s natural antisocial tendency” (Clatterbaugh, 1990, p. 9). Biological conservatives believe that masculinity is generally made up of men’s natural tendency (Clatterbaugh). Profeminists, on the other hand, argue against the idea that masculinity is morally necessary or biologically rooted. Radical profeminists believe that masculinity is a product of misogyny compounded with violence pitted against women (Clatterbaugh, 1990).

Liberal feminists have the most even-keeled viewpoint on masculinity and femininity. They believe that both masculinity and femininity act as rules imposed on men and women in which you are, “encouraged by a system of rewards, punishments and social stereotypes and ideals” (Clatterbaugh, 1990, p. 9). The liberal feminists have strong thoughts on how this affects self-realization:

Both men and women are prevented from self-realization by these restrictive roles. The best way for men to combat sexism is to break through their own limitations and to become fully human, just as women have had to struggle to overcome the limitations of femininity (Clatterbaugh, 1990, p. 10).

The NFL in particular is filled with players that come from many different economic situations. For those coming from harsh impoverished backgrounds, they had to follow the liberal profeminist theory in breaking through the barriers that may prevent them from the success of the NFL.

The socialist perspective is based solely on economic class structure. Clatterbaugh (1990) explains that , “under patriarchal capitalism, masculinity is determined by who does what work, who controls the labor of others, and who controls the products of that labor” (p. 11). It is dependent on what class you come from. This makes the NFL structure extremely unique in the fact that the strong majority of owners and head coaches are white, while the favorable majority of players are black. The identification of the gender ideal of masculinity and the stereotype of masculinity help to establish the study moving forward into the gender order.

### *The gender order*

The concept of the gender order was introduced by Connell (1987) as a way to grasp relationships of power between males and females. Connell (1987) said that over time a pattern of power acceptance between sexes and how femininity and masculinity are defined individually were known as the “Gender Order.” The crux of hegemonic masculinity finds itself based in the males seeking to hold power over women and with that Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) say also leads to some unsavory behavior:

Because the concept of hegemonic masculinity is based on practice that permits men’s collective dominance over women to continue, it is not surprising that in some contexts, hegemonic masculinity actually does refer to men’s engaging in toxic practices—including physical violence—that stabilize gender dominance in a particular setting. However, violence and other noxious practices are not always the defining characteristics, since hegemony has numerous configurations.

There is no way to say whether a behavior is negative or positive that accompanies hegemonic masculinity, since some of the most popular traits, “do include such “positive” actions as

bringing home a wage, sustaining a sexual relationship, and being a father” (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 832).

Donaldson (1993) provides contradiction to Connell and Messerschmidt’s belief that fatherhood is a positive aspect of hegemonic masculinity, by explaining that the idea of fatherhood is viewed differently by men:

Most men have an exceptionally impoverished idea about what fatherhood involves, and indeed, active parenting doesn't even enter into the idea of manhood at all. Notions of fathering that are acceptable to men concern the exercise of impartial discipline, from an emotional distance and removed from favoritism and partiality. (p. 650).

Thus, men’s idea of fatherhood doesn’t incorporate the necessary functions of parenting that would exist in all households or align with the ideas that a female would have towards raising a child.

Masculinity and femininity can have different responsibilities as they relate to the raising of children:

In hegemonic masculinity, fathers do not have the capacity or the skill or the need to care for children, especially for babies and infants, while the relationship between female parents and young children is seen as crucial. Nurturant and care-giving behavior is simply not manly. Children, in turn, tend to have more abstract and impersonal relations with their fathers (Donaldson, p. 650).

A man’s view on fatherhood is something that can be accepted or rejected depending on the value one places on being a father. Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) feel that it is a choice whether or not to accept:

Men can adopt hegemonic masculinity when it is desirable; but the same men can distance themselves strategically from hegemonic masculinity at other moments.

Consequently, “masculinity” represents not a certain type of man but, rather, a way that men position themselves through discursive practices (p. 841).

Thus, being a father who is there to provide for his children by making a living in the NFL can also play a pivotal role in raising his children by dedicating time to being at home or reject the role by playing father at a distance. Some players may choose not to have children because of the demands of their job. Others like Antonio Cromartie, who was featured with the New York Jets in the 2010 season of *Hard Knocks* naming all of his children, take a much different approach to fatherhood. Cromartie pays \$336,000 yearly to support all of his children. “Besides the two children he already has with (his wife) Terricka, Cromartie, 31, has eight kids with seven other women across the country” (Douglas, 2016, para. 2). Cromartie’s wife is also expecting twins currently. Choosing to father that many children with so many different women cannot lead to ideal fatherhood, but in order to afford such high child support Cromartie made around seven million dollars last year (Douglas, 2016).

### *Hegemonic masculinity*

Describing hegemonic masculinity is not something that can be defined specifically or remain constant. As Clatterbaugh pointed out, depending on the identifiable group to which you belong, the idea of how to be masculine can differ. As Donaldson (1993) explains, “Hegemony involves persuasion of the greater part of the population, particularly through the media, and the organization of social institutions in ways that appear ‘natural’ ‘ordinary’ ‘normal’” (p. 645). Hegemonic masculinity’s core is based in an underlying theme of men’s sets of behaviors to assure their dominance and power over women (Connell & Messerschmidt). Hegemony, “is

about the winning and holding of power and the formation (and destruction) of social groups in that process” (Donaldson, 1993, p. 645). While hegemonic masculinity was not practiced identically, Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) said about hegemonic masculinity that, “It embodied the currently most honored way of being a man, it required all other men to position themselves in relation to it, and it ideologically legitimated the global subordination of women to men” (p. 832).

The importance of hegemonic masculinity was much more critical in the past when there were ruling classes that dominated and controlled cities, states and countries; it has since evolved over time (Donaldson). From past experience playing football I understood that adopting a violent personality to play the sport was not necessarily required, but could be useful to a player. According to Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) hegemony “could be supported by force; it meant ascendancy achieved through culture, institutions, and persuasion” (p. 832).

Hegemonic masculinity has had changes to its’ identity and definition throughout time as the world and different cultures have been established. As Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) state, “From the mid-1980s to the early 2000s, the concept of hegemonic masculinity thus passed from a conceptual model with a fairly narrow empirical base to a widely used framework for research and debate about men and masculinities” (p. 835). Hegemonic masculinity has been employed over time to examine the behavior of children in school, how teachers can connect with students, why and who commits certain crimes, what crimes are committed and how media is received by certain audiences to determine particular behavior and motivations of specific groups of males (Connell & Messerschmidt).

How men take up hegemonic masculinity is all in their own decision making and how they choose to behave within their social group. As Donaldson (1993) discusses, “hegemonic

masculinity can be analyzed, distanced from, appropriated, negated, challenged, reproduced, separated from, renounced, given up, chosen, constructed with difficulty, confirmed, imposed, departed from, and modernized” (p. 646). A rookie entering into the NFL can understand the different personalities of his teammates through their action on and off the field and can adopt ones that he may feel are beneficial to him sustaining an NFL career.

What has great impact on what kind of hegemonic masculinity a man chooses to adopt is who is influencing such behavior and the conduct they display, Donaldson (1993) identifies those who have the greatest influence and representation of hegemonic masculinity, “the most influential agents are considered to be: priests, journalists, advertisers, politicians, film makers, actors, novelists, musicians, activists, academics, coaches, and sportsmen” (p. 646). For new players in the NFL, veteran players who have been in the league for some time would seem to embody what kind of characteristics are required to last. Still, these individuals’ actions and behaviors, while influential, do not necessarily mirror the generally accepted practices or moral codes of most males outside of football. Much of the behavior that is most gravitated towards is the kind of behavior that is heroic, powerful, unattainable, fictional, nonrealistic, and nearly impossible to replicate (Donaldson). Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) suggest that it is clear, “that many men who hold great social power do not embody an ideal masculinity” (p. 838). Men can become misguided by what they see as dominant and what they assume leads to the notion of power.

What gains power in society may not be behavior that embodies all that is good, Donaldson (1993) points out that:

The public face of hegemonic masculinity, the argument goes, is not necessarily even what powerful men are, but is what sustains their power, and is what large numbers of

men are motivated to support because it benefits them. What most men support is not necessarily what they are (p. 646).

Accepting that hegemonic masculinity can be part reality and part of an allusion can help to gain a clearer picture for what it entails. Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) sum it as:

Hegemonic masculinities can be constructed that do not correspond closely to the lives of any actual men. They provide models of relations with women and solutions to problems of gender relations. To the extent they do this, they contribute to hegemony in the society-wide gender order as a whole (p. 838).

Understanding that there is a separation between playing football for a living and normalizing life away from the game is something that fans and viewers of *Hard Knocks* must learn to define on their own. Adopting the behaviors and practices of an NFL player may not fit with the norms of society as whole or the social group to which one belongs.

### *Orthodox masculinity*

Following Connell's (1987) theory about the gender order, and in particular, hegemonic masculinity, Adams, Anderson and McCormack (2010) forward the notion of a similar masculinity that is based more inclusively upon sport and is known as orthodox masculinity. The two main attributes of orthodox masculinity are, "that one be heterosexual and hypermasculine" (Adams, et al., 2010, p. 280). Adams, et al. (2010) draw upon authors Messner (1988), Pronger (1990), Kelly and Waddington (2006), and Parker (1996) when they assert that:

Men compete for hegemonic dominance by showing overt physical prowess, using sexism and femphobia to distance themselves from association with femininity, deploying homophobia to distance themselves from homosexuality and committing

physical violence against themselves and others, all in order to raise their masculine capital among peers (p. 280).

Adams, et al. (2010) also discuss how sport can act as a vehicle to promote thoughts and ideas that are unfavorable to women and homosexuals, citing Dunning (1999) when they pronounce that, “Sport has traditionally served as a vessel for the generational transmission of homophobic, misogynistic, and femphobic attitudes, where boys and men are socialized to exhibit toughness, violence, and aggression” (p. 285). Adams, et al. observed both coaches and players of a semi-professional soccer team, to see how they behaved in sporting and nonsporting environments. The findings of Adams, et al. (2010) suggest that coaches and players police masculinity among members of the team:

We suggest that the coaches on this football team perpetuate this orthodox ethos of sport through the use of what we call masculinity establishing discourse. Putting this discourse into action functions to (re)establish football as a masculine sport, and through a process of regulating, disciplining, and policing, it (re)defines the perimeters of the (toxic) behaviors and attitudes that constitute (orthodox) masculinity (p. 286).

The coaches dictate what the masculinity of the team should be and do so through constantly regulating and policing of it. In *Hard Knocks* there are glimpses into team meetings where words like “culture” are often used to convey the attitudes and behaviors that will be expected of the players on the team by the coaching staff and other members of the team staff. The study by Adams, et al. shows that forms of masculinity are not just formulated by players amongst themselves, but actually influenced by the actions and language of the coach as well.

Where there is some disjunction between soccer and American football is in that women’s football is not as prevalent as women’s soccer, both at the collegiate and professional

level. Adams, et al. (2010) explain how soccer is unique because it is played by both males and females; as a result the soccer coach's language seems to constantly disparage that:

There are numerous, often overlapping, forms of masculinity establishing discourse. One form is to situate football as a sport specifically for men, despite the fact that women play the same game, by the same rules. Highlighting this usage, in the locker room at halftime, one of the coaches shouted to his athletes, "This is a man's game!" He added, "If you haven't got the balls for it, there's a women's team you can play on." The athletes listened to this tirade submissively, with their heads hung low. (p. 286).

NFL football does not have a comparable women's league, therefore comments made in relation to women are more likely to reflect a misogynistic view as a whole. While it is one thing to use this language in the heat of competition, Adams, et al. (2010) say it was common language elsewhere as well:

Although this "man's game" narrative is frequently employed by coaches to chastise athletes, it is also used in less intense emotional moments. For example, the coaches often watched a Premier League football match (the elite professional league in England) with their players on the TV in the team's club-house before their own game. One time, a fellow patron (not a member of the team) commented that the referee missed an "obvious foul." The coach challenged him, saying, "It's a man's game, mate. There's going to be some contact." Even in informal moments like this, football was presented as a physical and aggressive masculine endeavor. (p. 286).

Developing a hypermasculine tone within a team as well as carrying it away from the pitch reinforced the coaches' stern belief on what he believed to be the masculinity appropriate for playing soccer.

Using the opposite sex to motivate players was one tactic employed by the coaches, but they did not stop there; there were their practices of motivation. Adams, et al. (2010) noted that the coaches even took it a step further than relating the game to male and female behavior:

Not only did the coaches establish football as a “man’s game,” they also suggested the men who play it have to be so masculine that they are “warriors.” Ostensibly, this is done to “motivate” players to be successful on the field. The coaches, for example, frequently asserted that football players must maintain what the head coach called “a warrior attitude” (p. 286).

In American football there is an assumed level of toughness one must understand when playing, but similar to the soccer coaches, toughness and strength are constantly reinforced by coaches. Words like warrior, savage, beast, and monster, are often used to define a player who shows a great deal of toughness.

Adams, et al. (2010) further explain the mentality of the “warrior attitude” when quoting the head coach in the first team meeting:

There are two things we judge players by. The first is your playing ability, and the second is whether you’re a warrior or not. We need players who are willing to spill blood and die for this team. If we go into battle and you are not willing to die, then we’ll get you off [the field] quickly (p. 286).

The manner in which the coaches speak and carry themselves is eye-opening because soccer unlike American Football is not a game where there is necessarily the guarantee of physical battles and collisions, but the language and intensity of the coaches noted by the authors (Adams, et al., 2010) would say otherwise about soccer:

The establishing of players as warriors was not, however, a one-time opening diatribe of team expectations. Both the head and the two assistant coaches regularly shouted instructions to players that were heavily saturated with references to bodily sacrifice and violent physical acts. (p. 286).

The level of violence involved in the game appeared to emanate at the request of the coaches themselves. Adams, et al. (2010) noted the specific/vulgar commands of the coaches:

“Slit their fuckin’ throats!” a coach screamed in attempt to influence the players to keep up the physical pressure on their opponents. And, after what he considered to be a poor practice session, an assistant coach said, “We want to see more players coming off the pitch [field] with blood on their shirts.” Coaches also frequently encouraged their players to tackle so aggressively that the opposition “will know that they’ve been in a battle” (p. 286).

The commands of the coaches are seemingly nonsensical with respect to the game of soccer where such behavior can lead to a player being dismissed from the match.

Furthering the intensity of the language there was also homophobic, misogynistic and sexual language in the coaches’ directions as described by Adams, et al. (2010):

A coach said, “If this was a war, you’d put a bullet in the cunt’s head. But it’s not, its football [soccer], so stick a boot in on him next time.” Another coach yelled to his players, “Go out there and dominate them. Bend them over and fuckin’ rape them!” In frustration, a coach shouted, “When you get the opportunity you’ve got to take your chances. Don’t fuck it up. Don’t be a fucking poof!” Another yelled, “You go out there and finish them off! You’ve got to cut their balls off!”(p. 287).

By using such harsh and vulgar language and giving orders with threats to manhood, the coaches established the masculinity of the team and continuously managed and reinforced it through orders and demands.

Adams, et al. (2010) referred to this as masculinity challenging discourse:

Masculinity challenging discourse served as a mechanism for gender and player performance regulation, when coaches felt that their players had not attained the appropriate form of masculinity established for them. Thus, it was used as a disciplinary strategy over the players. It should not, however, be misunderstood as discourse used to resist or challenge the hegemonic (orthodox) form of masculinity. (p. 287).

Whether semi-professional soccer or professional football, the head coach's influence is paramount to a player because he dictates whether you play or not as well as whether you remain on the team.

While a coach's language and guidance can be very influential, players are able to keep this to the sport and leave it when they are away from the sport. While having the influence of coaches constantly instructing very aggressive and offensive behavior while involved in the team sport Adams, et al. (2010) observed that this did not automatically translate to the same behavior and conduct away from the field of play:

The athletes on this team model some aspects of hegemonic (orthodox) masculinity when in sport but distance themselves from it outside of sport. Of course, we cannot empirically validate whether or not there may be leakage of gendered discourses from the field into all areas of these athletes' lives. However, observations of the other areas of their lives, to which the primary author was privy, suggests that there is little leakage. Explicating this, outside of sport these men were observed to be socially inclusive of gay

men, they typically avoided violence and aggression, and they avoided the discourses associated with both of these (p. 295).

This demonstrates the ability of the athletes to separate themselves from the nature of the sport and their lives away from it. When there are issues of violence and arrests in the NFL many point to the violence involved in the game itself. What the study about the soccer team demonstrates is that players are able to separate the uglier side of their game from their everyday life.

### *The NFL*

The beginning of professional football started in the 1920s as it was competing for attention against collegiate football. A meeting was held in Canton, Ohio at Ralph Hay's car dealership where those who met wanted to create a professional football league (Klein, 2014). A month later a deal was made to create a league with eleven teams in the Midwest. At that meeting were "representatives from 11 professional football clubs sprinkled across Ohio, Illinois, Indiana and New York: Akron Pros, Canton Bulldogs, Cleveland Indians, Dayton Triangles, Decatur Staleys, Hammond Pros, Massillon Tigers, Muncie Flyers, Racine Cardinals, Rochester Jeffersons and Rock Island Independents" (Klein, 2014, para. 4). The league became known as the American Professional Football Association (APFA).

The first president of the APFA was a current player in Jim Thorpe. Klein (2014) explains that even though Thorpe was nearing the end of his playing career, his body of work was so tremendous that he was appointed president, "the 32-year-old Thorpe, the Canton Bulldogs star who although past his prime was still touted by newspapers such as the *Milwaukee Journal* as the 'world's greatest athlete'" (para. 5).

The first ever professional football game was played September 26, 1920 (Klein, 2014). While the length and width of the field were the same then as they are now, the original teams

made their own schedules which included playing against college football teams (Klein). Games were not highly attended and there were no playoffs or championship game; the league determined a champion by voting (Klein). Today, winning championship teams receive lavish rings and bonus checks worth thousands of dollars, at the dawn of football, the gifts as Klein (2014) points out were not as glorious, “The victors received a silver loving cup donated by sporting goods company Brunswick-Balke-Collender. While players were not given diamond-encrusted rings, they did receive golden fobs in the shape of a football inscribed with the words ‘World Champions’” (para. 9).

In 1922 Joe Carr, owner of the Columbus Panhandles, became the new president of the league which was rebranded to the National Football League (Klein). While Carr began to make changes to improve the game, college football remained more popular. Klein says that the addition of Red Grange to the league is what really began to turn the tide in 1925 to where we are now over ninety years later.

#### *War, football and media*

Understanding the aggressive nature surrounding football is something that can be linked to the parallels of verbiage between sport and war. Football and battle have had a relationship with words and terminology crossing over into both which started to make their way into viewers’ living rooms during the Gulf War (Jansen & Sabo, 1994). Ira Berkow (1991) wrote in the *New York Times*, “With its military argot that includes ‘blitzes’ and ‘bombs’ and ‘ground and air attacks’ football has sometimes been referred to as the moral equivalent of war”(para. 14).

Certain words are familiar to both worlds as Jansen and Sabo (1994) point out:

The language of football has always drawn heavily on military (and sexualized military) argot: attack, blitz, bombs, ground and air assaults, offense, defense, penetrations, flanks,

conflicts, and battles for territory are standard terms in sports casters' vocabularies. When the game/conflict is over, coaches/generals publicly glory in their victories, lament their defeats, and mourn their casualties (p. 3).

The correspondence between football and war also plays a role in the construction of hegemonic masculinity.

Jansen and Sabo (1994) explain how the tropes that are used in both play a role in establishing hegemonic masculinity, "We maintain that sport/war tropes are crucial rhetorical resources for mobilizing the patriarchal values that construct, mediate, maintain, and, when necessary, reform or repair hegemonic forms of masculinity and femininity" (p. 1). The link between football and battle and its portrayal by the media is something that only heightens the hegemonic masculinity of both. Jansen and Sabo felt that the combination of war and sports verbiage and how it was covered by the media made the impact more widespread, since "the prominence of sport/war-based rhetorical devices in mass-mediated discourse during the Persian Gulf War resonated with values in the larger society that legitimate the practices of the military, sport, and media" (pp.1-2).

The relationship between sport and war show the magnitude to which both are viewed. The level of violence that results from both highlights the fortitude required to partake. Jansen and Sabo called upon McKay and Rowe's (1987) critical paradigm of sports and media coverage to give light to how the media can act as an agent to shape hegemonic masculinity, as they explained, since the; "media operate in some way to reproduce and legitimate relations of domination in patriarchal capitalist societies" (p.259). Males of all ages are empowered to have their own personal beliefs on football, but turning on the television and hearing the same terminology used to describe war and battle certainly raised the magnitude of the sport. *Hard*

*Knocks* uses many of the same words to help set the stage for what is endured in an NFL training camp.

While hegemonic masculinity refers largely to men's dominance over women, "it also allows elite males to extend their influence and control over lesser status males" (Jansen & Sabo, p. 7). Jansen and Sabo tied this together through a male-dominant framework to explain the interworking of the war and sports' narrative on males:

Within this framework, we were able to identify three propositions that help explain how sport/war tropes fit into current formations of the U.S. gender order: (a) the "language games" of sport and war share and are generated by the rules of a common categorical "deep structure"; (b) this deep structure is homologous with as well as an artifact of the sex/gender system of American society; and (c) this structure preserves and amplifies male dominance in several important theaters for public performance and myth making in American society including politics, sports, and the military (p. 8).

By using this theory, Jansen and Sabo came to the conclusion that, "the extravagant mixing of metaphors surrounding the Persian Gulf War not only reasserted the presence of American political power on the world stage, but also celebrated and conspicuously displayed elite male power at home" (p. 8). A show like *Hard Knocks* magnifies the sounds and images that reflect the trials and tribulations of life in the NFL. While some scenes bring out the spirit and toughness of a player, others showcase the physical and mental hardships they must endure in pursuit of a career in the NFL.

Football can be viewed as an outlet for men to demonstrate their power and violence, which is similar to war in many ways. Jansen and Sabo draw on feminist theories of various

scholars (Connell 1989; Hall 1988; Kidd 1987; Messner 1988; Walker 1985; Whitson 1990) when discussing the function of sports and war:

Some critical feminist scholars maintain that sport has functioned primarily as a homosocial institution through which hegemonic masculinity has been constituted, particularly in the recent historical periods when men's superiority has been challenged by organized feminist activity. That is, they suggest that sport operates, in part, as an institutionalized mechanism for venting, galvanizing, and cultivating resistance to gender-based forms of social equality (p. 9).

Furthermore Jansen & Sabo cite Edwards (1990) in noting, "there is a 'massive institutional and popular commitment to thinking of war as an essential test of manhood and [like football] a quintessentially masculine activity'" (p. 9).

What connect war and football besides the language similarities is what both of them involve: danger and violence. According to Jansen and Sabo (1994), "The primary appeals of the game itself are the physical daring and danger that it involves as well as its ritualized violence that plays at the edge of, and sometimes breaks into, real violence" (p. 10). A large portion of *Hard Knocks* focusses on the tension that builds within the team from practice to practice. On multiple occasions tensions spill over and it results in an all-out brawl between players. While these fights are not necessarily promoted by members of the coaching staff, players are informed that they should not shy away from it or be timid about it.

### *Men and sport*

There are multiple reasons why men value participation in sports. Football is a sport that requires one to buy in and commit to being focused and dedicated to the physical and mental requirements (being in physical shape, understanding the playbook, etc.). Many males choose to

play sports for the camaraderie, the self-discipline they teach and the lessons that can come from active participation. Over time, discoveries have been made about some of the different motivations of males for participation in sport. Adams, et al. (2010) sought to find, “whether the benefits associated with sporting participation are the result of something intrinsic to team sports, or whether they simply reflect the broader hegemonic dominance of some men (who excel in sport) over marginalized others” (p. 279). Over time as women’s roles and power grew, men needed an alternative way to express their power and try to assert their dominance over the opposite sex (Adams, et al.). NFL football is unique in that there isn’t a popular women’s college equivalent or an equivalent professional league opposite of it.

### *Hard Knocks*

HBO premiered *Hard Knocks* in 2001 with the first year featuring the Baltimore Ravens coming off of their Super Bowl victory the year before. The show which HBO (2016) touts as, “The first sports-based reality series - and one of the fastest-turnaround programs on TV” (para. 2) is a five week look at training camp in the NFL. Teams featured on the twelve time Emmy Award and 121 Sports Emmy Award winning show include: Dallas Cowboys in 2002; It later resumed in 2007 with the Kansas City Chiefs, subsequently spotlighting the Cowboys (2008), Cincinnati Bengals (2009), New York Jets (2010), Miami Dolphins (2012), Bengals (2013), Atlanta Falcons (2014) and Houston Texans (2015) (HBO, 2016).

The show is predicated on the access given to viewers as Sarah Spain (2013) from *espnW* stated, “‘Hard Knocks’ gives football fans a closer look at the players and coaches they watch on Sundays and a rare peek inside the locker rooms, practice fields, hotels and training rooms that these guys call home” (para.4). Vogan (2011) describes how HBO and NFL films create such a unique program, “NFL Films creates these moving experiences by putting to use a distinct set of

aesthetic conventions that have become commonplace in sports film and television, such as slow-motion cinematography, baritone voiceover narration, montage editing, and orchestral scores” (p. 292).

The show focuses on the aspects of NFL training camp that even fans in attendance at practice do not get to see. Rather, the show delivers on and off the field action, “Hard Knocks purports to offer unprecedented access into the daily operations of NFL training camps, following players, coaches, and management during practices, workouts, meetings, and even after hours” (Vogan, 2011, p. 292). To add to the coverage, Hard Knocks conducts interviews with players, coaches and other members of the team’s staff to discuss the training camp process as well as the outlook on the season ahead (Vogan).

Along with the entertainment value of getting an inside look at training camp, the product of training camp practices alone which Della Femina (2016) describes as, “the intense, chaotic and spirited environment that surrounds professional football teams” (para. 1) provides enough shock value to attract viewers. NFL films also helps to dramatize and add to the footage by their own trademark production skills. As Vogan (2011) documents:

The program dramatizes its coverage of the league’s day-to-day operations through employing NFL Films’ signature stylistic practices. For example, interview footage of a player who discusses how hard he will need to work to make the team might be followed by a montage sequence of his training backed by a driving musical score (p. 293).

Particular story lines are fixated on through the five episodes which include new additions to the featured team, players returning from injury and players dealing with off-of-the field dilemmas. One story line that is consistent with every season of Hard Knocks is the struggle for players to make the final 53-man roster. As Vogan (2011) explains, “The program most explicitly

dramatizes the reality it documents through the attention it gives to the rookies, veterans, and journeymen players who are struggling to make the squad” (p. 293).

The season featuring the Houston Texans, “registered the second-highest viewership level for the show since 2002. Houston, which went on to win the AFC South championship, averaged 4.4 million viewers per episode, a 20% increase from 2014” (HBO, 2016, para. 10).

The show has received great praise as well. HBO highlights what the *Washington Post* said:

Turning football players into people is what HBO's *Hard Knocks* series does so well. The massive scope, meticulous editing and time-hopping special effects that highlight a production under massive time constraints are all impressive, but it's the film crew's access to NFL players that makes the program special (para. 13).

Perhaps this helps to explain why *Hard Knocks* has been so appealing to fans of football.

#### *The NFL body*

What's obvious right from the start when watching *Hard Knocks* is that these players do not resemble the average male in his 20s and 30s. They are individuals with large frames and physical builds with large, defined muscles. A component of hegemonic masculinity that is not behavior related is body image. Oates and Durham's (2004) article “The mismeasure of masculinity: The male body, ‘race’ and power in the enumerative discourses of the NFL Draft” focused on the evaluation process of college prospects by NFL teams. While the article's focus was rooted more so in the enumeration and dehumanization of the athletes and how some compare the draft evaluation process to slave trade, the authors touched on body image and the ideal image for an athletic body. The idea of an aesthetic body was first identified by artwork of ancient Greek gods:

Athletes were presented in art as muscular, graceful, powerful and heroic. That Greek gods were represented as the ultimate achievement of the athletic ideal suggests the value placed on male physical development. These muscular gods also signal a visual trope that continues to this day: the hyper-developed male body as the embodiment of physical and cultural power (Oates & Durham, 2004, p. 301).

Throughout history, beyond ancient Greek culture, bodies have been studied by different cultures and groups as a manner of evaluation, distinction and a catalyst to hegemonic masculinity.

The study of physical features as a tool of measurement has been around decades. Oates and Durham reference the works of Gould (1981), Appadurai (1996), and Banet-Weiser (1999) in stating:

The pseudo-science of craniometry was developed to reify the myth of biological racial inferiority; colonial administrations used the census and other bureaucratic forms of enumeration as regimes of discipline whereby they could exert authority over subjugated peoples and feminist theorists have noted that the emphasis on the physical dimensions of the female body serves to contain and constrain women's social roles. Thus, the measurement of the body has been shown to be a function of ideology: a tactic by which hegemonic power may be sustained (p. 302).

With the overlying theme of hegemonic masculinity being an unwavering need for men's dominance over women, it is no surprise that having a muscular body would play a major role in furthering this idea. Even more, in the NFL, it could result in one's dominance over an opponent. When discussing the body and how it is related to hegemonic masculinity, Oates and Durham (2004) use Connell's definition that, "Hegemonic masculinity' is defined as 'the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of patriarchy,

which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women” (p. 303).

In football where there are routinely accepted practices of violence upon which the game is based, hegemonic masculinity is on full display. Oates and Durham (2004) support this thought by referencing Tim Curry (1990) who wrote that, “contemporary professional American football players currently epitomize the ideal of hegemonic masculinity.” In addition, Jackson Katz (1995) deems a football player as a, “a signifier of violent masculinity” (p. 304). The term “combat sport” was introduced by Messner to classify football and as Oates and Durham quote Messner (1988), football is, “a game in which high levels of aggression, violence and injury exist not as accidents or violations, but as intended, even desired parts of the game” (p. 304). Oates and Durham (2004) add that “Football’s violence serves as a symbolic assertion of power, and a warning to groups who would challenge that power on other fields, such as a political one” (p. 304). Having shown such violence while playing football could act as a signifier to others that a person was able to take and give out hard hits.

In terms of hegemonic masculinity, the example of O.J. Simpson prior to his arrest is used to show how an athlete, in O.J.’s case: African-American, can become idealistic to a mainstream audience. O.J. demonstrated superior physical ability and toughness while playing on the football field, but had a sense of humor and an all-around good guy feel to him as an actor and regular member of society. Men could relate to his lifestyle away from the field and be awed by his talent on the field (Oates & Durham, 2004).

The article by Oates and Durham (2004) delves into the NFL Draft and how, “the Draft discursively empties the male athletic body of its subjectivity, making it a commodity to be bought, sold or traded” (p. 310). The process of the NFL Combine is explained at length and it

begins with the authors describing how lengthy and dehumanizing it can be. Oates and Durham (2004) clarify how players lose their sense of humanity and become a commodity as soon as the combine begins:

It takes four full days for trainers, doctors, scouts and coaches from the NFL's thirty-two teams to encode the nearly 400 prospects with a series of numbers. The process is startling for its invasiveness, comprehensiveness and studied dehumanization. The potential draftees are assigned a numbered, grey uniform, and have the same number written on their hand.

The process of dehumanizing the players continues as players lose their names and are now evaluated as Oates and Durham (2004) illuminate:

Players are not called by name, but summoned by their numbers. Each team has personnel on hand to record this information that they then use, together with data collected from their own private tryouts involving potential draftees, to assess each player's physical potential (p. 310).

Worse yet, the examination of the player's bodies are then quantified in order to rank them Oates and Durham (2004) explain:

The investigation at the Combine quantifies the dimensions and health of the athletic bodies and the bodies' athletic abilities. These numbers are then used to create a numerical measurement of relative talent. Each player has his height, weight and hand-size measured and his body fat percentage estimated. After this information is acquired and recorded, each player undergoes a series of questions and tests designed to determine his health (p. 310).

The total process is even referred to as a cattle call because of the way the players are viewed and examined.

The bodies of the NFL hopefuls are picked, prodded and tested further through drills (40-yard dash, bench press, cone drills, vertical leap and position-specific individual drills) as well as mental cognitive test (Wonderlic Personnel Test). It is that what cannot be tested at the combine that rears its ugly head, most recently with the domestic violence cases of Ray Rice and Greg Hardy and back at the time Oates and Durham's (2004) article was written:

The wild card in this quasi-scientific assessment is the element of character. Recent public relations disasters- such as Ray Carruth's conviction on charges of murdering his pregnant wife and linebacker Ray Lewis's conviction on charges of obstructing justice in a Florida murder investigation- have led teams to entertain questions about a player's integrity. In the image industry that is the NFL, this is undoubtedly a well-placed concern, but it provides a problem for teams specifically because of the difficulty they have in assigning a numerical measurement to the quality (p. 312).

### *NFL issues and questions*

The NFL is in the midst of many controversies over the last few years including: head injuries, homophobia and an overall image issue. Michelangelo Signorile (2014), editor-at-large of *Huffington Post Gay Voices*, offered his opinion of two components of football specifically in his piece *Misogyny and Homophobia in the NFL: Is America's Crisis of Masculinity Playing Out in Its Favorite Sport?:*

Let's be honest: Professional football, perhaps more than any other male team sport, is based on misogyny and homophobia, built on it from the ground up. Entire generations of American men have been raised on the idea that if they don't participate in male team

sports, they're maybe a little faggy, and football, as surely the most aggressive of male team sports, is the Holy Grail if you want to prove you're not. (para. 4)

Signorile (2014) brings up the language used towards players similar to Adams, et al.:

Entire generations have grown up -- and, in many cases, still grow up -- with it being routine for high-school and college football coaches to demean the players during training by calling them "girls" or "ladies" if they don't perform well, or even going further with "pussies" and "pansies." And what are these terms really all about? The idea that women are less than men, and that being less than a real man, and being a like a woman, is being like a homo, which is the worst thing you can possibly be (para. 4).

The use of the language is common place which doesn't reflect the principles of respect young males should be taught as they grow up.

Dr. Elizabeth Meyer (2014) reveals her thoughts on the NFL and the "masculine ideal" Clatterbaugh referred to, "the NFL represents our culture's masculine 'ideal': it seeks out, develops and highly pays big, strong, tough, aggressive, and muscular men. The problem is that it ignores the flip side of the coin of such extreme 'masculinity'" (para. 2). From the point of entering the NFL the attributes mentioned above are only made stronger through the NFL which helps explain some of the problems away from the field of play. Meyer (2014) notes, "When these qualities are nurtured, coached, selected, and rewarded it isn't hard to understand why these players have problems with physical violence, aggression, and intimate relationships off the field" (para. 3). The reason this is becoming such a problem is how it coincides with what society views as acceptable behavior. Meyer discusses the treatment of sexual assault on campuses in relation to the NFL's handling of the Ray Rice incident in which he was seen on camera striking his then fiancé. The strong and tough football player can be viewed as a model of

masculinity to those that follow the NFL and acts, whether good or bad, help shape even further the idea of masculinity in this day and age. Meyer (2014) explains how both sexual assault and domestic violence shape our culture at large:

How does domestic violence in the NFL and sexual assault on college campuses affect us all? They are all outgrowths of the American masculine ideal gone to the extreme. We cannot hope to raise children who will value gender equity, who will not resort to violence, and who will seek affirmative consent as long as the messages they get from popular culture, professional sports, and the news media continue to celebrate and valorize a very narrow and harmful form of masculinity (para.5).

When the wrong masculine idea becomes accepted it can lead to illegal behavior being viewed more in a “boys will be boys” light.

What becomes one of the biggest concerns is how children and young kids view these highly publicized incidents and what can be done to help separate what is good and bad behavior to model yourself after. She poses three ways to approach these negative situations with your children. Similar to the show *Hard Knocks*, it is a way to interpret what you see on the screen and how it reflects the generally accepted behavior of society as a whole. Meyer (2014) offers her three ways for approaching this with children in mind specifically, first:

Start with a question: “Have you heard about this NFL thing? What have your friends had to say about it?” or “Did you see the video everyone is talking about? How did it make you feel?” Open-ended questions allow your child to start with what they know and how they feel. Let them lead the way from there to show you what they understand and how the media coverage may be influencing how they and their peers are making sense of this story (para. 7).

Secondly, Meyer (2014) suggests opening up a conversation about society's message of masculinity and romance:

Use it as an opening to talk about our culture's notions of masculinity and romantic relationships: "The media has been nonstop on these NFL scandals. What message does the NFL send if these 'heroes' are allowed to keep playing until public pressure forces a different response? Do you think this affects how boys see their dating relationships? How do you think it makes girls feel?" (para. 8).

Finally, Meyer (2014) proposes watching games with your children to filter the message of the media and what you would like your children to know:

Watch a football game with them and discuss the coverage and commentary around the players and the league over the next few weeks. Use it as an opportunity to get your message in along with the mass media's perspectives. "Do you agree with what they just said?" "Why do you think they show ads like that during football games? What message does that send about the NFL audience?" "Do you think professional athletes are role models? What happens when they behave badly?" (para. 9).

Although these questions may be focused towards youthful viewers of the NFL, fans of all ages can ask themselves these same questions when viewing the game and specifically negative events that come out of it.

### *Textual Analysis*

When watching *Hard Knocks*, the viewers are interpreting the show-which can be referred to as a text. Viewers can have varying opinions and interpretations of what they see in the show. This is part of the process that is textual analysis. McKee (2001) defines textual analysis as, "a methodology: a way of gathering and analyzing information in academic

research” (p. 140). The beauty of textual analysis is that there is not a singular precise way of interpreting the material. McKee (2001) continues, “There are large numbers of possible interpretations, some of which will be more likely than others in particular circumstances” (p.140).

There is a process that McKee outlines as steps to conducting textual analysis. Step one is selecting the topic in which you are interested in studying further and developing a research question. The second step is making your research question more narrowly focused. Steps three, four, and five overlap each other in that they involve listing out relevant texts, researching and finding texts and gathering together texts. Step six involves watching the texts as much as possible looking for different elements in each one. Step seven is to watch similar programs to see how they compare and contrast to your study. Step eight follows step seven closely as it involves what McKee directs:

get as much sense as you can of the wider ‘semiosphere’ (the ‘world of meaning’) as you can (read newspapers, magazines, watch as much television, listen to as much music as you can) to get some sense of how these texts might fit into the wider context (p. 149).

The final action, step nine, is to refer back to the texts and make conclusions based on the texts and the literature you have discovered.

With the following subjects outlined, the textual analysis will be focused on locating examples of such behaviors and tendencies shown throughout scenes in *Hard Knocks*. The examples will be outlined and discussed as to how they relate to the subjects covered in the review of literature.

### Method

This study employs textual analysis. As McKee (2001) defined it, “textual analysis is a methodology: a way of gathering and analyzing information in academic research” (p. 140). I used textual analysis to examine four scenes from *Hard Knocks* in order to see how masculinity is conveyed through access to the NFL. I used textual analysis in order to make an, “educated guess at some of the most likely interpretations that might be made of that text” (McKee, 2001, p. 140). Meaning can be conveyed through a text in multiple ways. For example when breaking news happens, there are multiple ways in which it is covered and many angles given to the news. While the headlines and titles of the stories may be all different and unique in their own right, they are still covering the same story (McKee).

The basis for using textual analysis is a method to develop a new mean of viewing the scenes and cultural practices of *Hard Knocks* to encourage a new way of thinking about the subject matter (McKee). With *Hard Knocks* and any other text (i.e., program, magazine, book) there isn't a precise or singular way of interpreting it, but through textual analysis I am able to pick out themes through which this study is based. McKee (2001) further explains how to interpret a “text” in regard to textual analysis:

This assumption is inherent in the very word ‘text’. As soon as we describe a program, magazine or book as a ‘text’, we are implying a certain approach to it, and a certain way of making sense of it, including the fact that we do not think it has a single correct interpretation. We know from audience research that every television program, film or magazine article can be interpreted in many different ways by viewers (p. 140).

Everything that can be read or seen can be interpreted differently depending on the reader or viewer of the text.

My analysis of *Hard Knocks* is not to prove something is right or wrong about the show, but rather look for a common thread of masculinity. Using McKee's step nine, I searched out examples of hegemonic masculinity and representations of masculinity that fit with the literature in defining hegemonic masculinity based on the past. The approach to such analysis must be understood prior to the actual research (McKee's step two of textual analysis) of the show as McKee (2001) explains:

When you are analyzing a newspaper story about Indigenous Australians, for example, or a film about women or gay men, it is often tempting to interpret the text as being 'inaccurate' - stereotyped or negative in some way, or not showing reality. However, when you are doing textual analysis in Media Studies, you must never do this (p. 142).

My interpretations of what I find in the show are formulated by the literature and discussion, but with the knowledge and research of hegemonic masculinity and all of the themes it encompasses, I hope to bring about some of the "reality" that resonates in the literature that is in a reality television show.

Getting a better understanding of the show and the NFL in relation to masculinity is the objective and as McKee (2001) explains:

Because there is no simple, single, correct interpretation of reality, it becomes very important to understand how media texts might be used in order to make sense of the world we live in. We cannot simply collect facts about our society – statistics, for example – and then say that we understand our society and culture, because these facts and statistics are just more texts. If we want to understand the world we live in, then we have to understand how people are making sense of that world (p. 144).

Understanding and having the knowledge of football from both playing it and following it will help me further explain what I interpret from the scenes.

### *Procedure*

My procedure follows McKee's (2001) nine step guide to textual analysis. Step one of choosing a topic to research (McKee) was easy because of my high interest in NFL football. Step two of focusing in on a research question (McKee) was influenced by White and Gillett's (1994) study: *Reading the Muscular Body: A Critical Decoding of Advertisements in Flex Magazine*. White and Gillett's (1994) analysis focused on, "the visual and narrative representation of the muscular male body and bodywork practices in advertisements promoting bodybuilding technologies" (p. 18). As it relates to this study, White and Gillett (1994) focused on:

The images of the muscular body found in bodybuilding advertisements encourage masculine self-transformation through bodywork. Moreover, the taken-for-granted representation of the muscular body as natural and desirable is rooted in an ideology of gender difference, championing dominant meanings of masculinity through a literal embodiment of patriarchal power. (p. 18)

The aggressive behavior and actions of the players in my study can be seen as desirable and off-putting depending on the viewer, much like the advertisements in White and Gillett's study.

My review of literature satisfied steps three, four and five of gathering and organizing texts (McKee). In this study, I will watch episodes of *Hard Knocks* from the 2015 year which featured the Houston Texans following step six of McKee's (2001) guide to textual analysis. McKee's (2001) step seven and eight consist of watching other shows and gaining a "wider 'semiosphere' (the 'world of meaning')" (p. 149) which, in relation to this study, involved my

viewing of other sports (basketball, hockey, and baseball) as well as staying current with news, both sports and socially-related.

Because football players are seen to be some of the most important agents of masculinity (Donaldson, 1993), their actions will depict relatively accurate examples of what a large majority of males view as an accepted norm in the United States. Based upon the Review of Literature, using step nine in McKee's (2001) guide, I want to examine how masculinity is conveyed through NFL players in *Hard Knocks*, based upon the following themes: hegemonic masculinity (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Donaldson, 1993; Jansen & Sabo, 1994; McKay & Rowe, 1987.; Messner, 1988; Oates & Durham, 2004), male dominance (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005), gender order, behavioral motivation, hegemonic dominance, homophobia, misogyny, violence (Connell, 1987, 1989), "warrior attitude" and coach's encouragement of such behavior (Adams, et al., 2010). I am looking to add some context to the actions or behaviors based on what the research indicates. "This context (that is, a series of intertexts, related texts) is what ties down the interpretations of a text" (McKee, 2001, p. 145). Context as it relates to the NFL's current state of affairs is focused around the violence of the game, the off-the field conduct of its players and the ideas of homophobia and misogynistic behavior (Meyer, 2014). While the series is a quick/short glimpse into NFL training camp, just from the footage alone, there are many examples and displays of hegemonic masculinity that can be unveiled and questioned further. While *Hard Knocks* is meant to give the viewer an inside look at what life is like in NFL training camp (Vogan, 2011), no study has ever looked at the response to the show in regard to masculinity.

## Findings

*Jadeveon Clowney Returns to Practice*

In the first clip, the focus is on the return of former #1 overall draft pick Jadeveon Clowney. The scene begins with a shot of a banner in the locker room that reads “What are you going to do to help us win today?” This shows a motto that the team comes first and that winning is utmost important. Adams, et al. (2010) findings support the idea that a team tries to form and establish masculinity discourse. The motto may represent the team’s hegemonic masculinity in comparison to Connell and Messerschmidt’s (2005) definition that it, “embodied the currently most honored way of being a man, it required all other men to position themselves in relation to it” (p. 832). What is the answer to that question for someone who has been injured? Does that mean that Clowney was unable to help the team win while he was recovering from injury? Or was the surgery, recovery and even rehab part of the process that got him back to the point where he can contribute more substantively? Clowney’s motivation to return could be embedded in the culture that the team has created. Being that the sign is hanging in the locker room and not the training area, playing the game appears to be the only way to help the Texans win.

Clowney is then shown lacing up his spikes, putting on his jersey and grabbing his helmet from his locker. The music accompanying this scene is very dark and ominous. This is fitting for the previously discussed “warrior attitude” that Adams, et al. (2010) spoke of. In that scenario, there were only two things the coaches needed to know about their players: their ability to play and whether they had a warrior attitude (p. 286). Hallmarks of the warrior attitude included, “players who are willing to spill blood and die for this team” (Adams, et al., 2010, p. 286). The camera then follows Clowney as he walks from the locker room to the practice field. As he

walks, voices are heard asking, “You good?” (De La Garza, 2015). Clowney’s response to all questions is, “Yeah I’m good” (De La Garza) as he proceeds to the field.

Clowney is then seen walking up some stairs that lead to the outdoor practice field. Breathing slightly heavy as he walks up the steps he exclaims, “It’s been a long time man. It just feels funny as hell being back out here” (De La Garza). The narrator’s voice is then heard for the first time announcing, “For the first time in 10 months Jadeveon Clowney and his surgically repaired knee will practice with his teammates” (De La Garza). This gives insight into the severity of the injury and how long it has kept him out. Clowney is now on the field where he is heard saying, “I better put my helmet it on” (De La Garza) realizing it is now time to begin playing football again. Clowney shows an understanding of the protocol of being on the field; like a gladiator in the coliseum, the player must don his shield to enter the practice. It is at this point that Houston Texans linebacker’s coach Mike Vrabel approaches Clowney. “Do you know how that buckles?” (De La Garza) is the first thing Vrabel says to him in reference to Clowney’s helmet. Clowney is heard chuckling as he assures Vrabel he’s good. Even as Vrabel teases Clowney, he does it with a smile on his face during this particular practice. This contrasts to Adams, et al.’s (2010) theory of Orthodox Masculinity that suggests coaches promote hyper-masculine and heterosexual behavior (p. 280). I’d be more shocked to hear Clowney say anything other than “I’m good” to anyone asking him how he feels. There’s a level of reassurance that he is conveying to anyone asking him how he is. Obviously Clowney knows how to buckle a helmet, but Vrabel is surely alluding to how long it has been since he has put one on. It can be viewed as a slight jab at Clowney. He then playfully responds, “don’t try me like that” (De La Garza) as he pats Vrabel on the back. Vrabel turns around with a big grin on his face and shakes Clowney’s hand.

Vrabel is then shown working 1-on-1 with Clowney going through a number of drills. During these drills, Vrabel is full of compliments of Clowney. Vrabel has him doing some drills that involve the coach physically combating him with pads on his hands and forearms. At one point Vrabel jabs him in the chest and says, “Sell that” and then repeats the action again even harder saying, “sell that” (De La Garza). The coach is definitely trying to hammer the point across by physically demonstrating it on Clowney. Vrabel is a former player and Super Bowl champion, his ability to play the same position has surely helped him become an NFL coach. Clowney responds by doing the exact action back to Vrabel who exclaims, “Jesus” (De La Garza) under his breathe. The subtle punching action to Vrabel’s chest clearly knocks him off balance which is a demonstration of Clowney’s strength and is reason for Vrabel’s response. Vrabel’s response can be interpreted one of two ways. He could be shocked by the force Clowney has or he could be exclaiming excitement over what he may have in this player with Clowney’s ability. This small example of force shows the strength of the player. Although it has been ten months since Clowney last played, a simple punching motion delivers a blow of that magnitude. Vrabel continues to make a point to Clowney of how he can extend his long arms to give himself an advantage. Vrabel is shown with Clowney’s hand on the top of his chest as he directs Clowney, “then turn your shoulders square. Now turn. See you just made yourself longer. Now it’s shit, is he going to run me over? Or...” Clowney interrupts, “Or move out the way” (De La Garza). Vrabel appears pleased with Clowney’s showing and his understanding of the concept he is trying to convey to him.

The scene shifts to Clowney conversing with a fellow teammate who extends a handshake to him as he appears pleased to see him. The teammate asks, “You good?” to which Clowney with no hesitation responds, “yea I’m good” (De La Garza). Although it is a minuscule

gesture, it does show comradery amongst teammates to check on one another. The teammate then follows up with, “how was it today?” to which Clowney responds, “It was alright. It was straight. I’m rusty as hell though. I haven’t been out here in about a year. My knee feel good though” (De La Garza). Clowney shows some honesty in admitting that he is a little rusty from time off but for the first time in the clip acknowledges his knee injury and affirms that it feels good.

The scene ends with Vrabel giving Clowney some words of advice. “And remember, it’s a process ok? You got a schedule, you got all this stuff and it’s a process. It’s good to have you out here.” To which Clowney responds, “yea it’s good to be out here” (De La Garza). Vrabel has won three Super Bowls with the New England Patriots so he knows the process involved in becoming great. The fact that he is clearly taking his time to help guide Clowney back into action without much impatience is a good sign for the player and the team. From a motto that reeks of “do whatever it takes” to a coach insisting on patience, the scene reveals how a player like Clowney can have a lot of weight on his shoulders.

### *Brian Cushing calls out Alfred Blue*

The first image of this scene is linebacker Brian Cushing lined up at his position with a slight bend in his knees, arms to his side like a tiger getting ready to pounce. With this image is the voice of a coach who utters out, “let’s compete. Let’s go” (NFL, 2015). Cushing is then seen running aggressively forward where he is met by Alfred Blue, a running back for the Texans. There is sweat glistening on both players indicating that they’ve been practicing for some time at this point in the Houston heat. The Texans are working on a pass blocking drill in which the running backs block the linebackers. Alfred Blue is #28 and Brian Cushing is #56. In their first collision, the two become tangled up as the whistle blows. After the whistle blows, Blue gives

Cushing a two arm shove. Cushing responds with, “Aye. Cut the sh\*t Blue” (NFL, 2015).

Cushing appears to take exception to the late shove because Blue did nothing wrong in the drill besides trying to stay in front of Cushing.

In their second encounter, Blue keeps Cushing in front of him, thus winning the drill. As Blue is blocking Cushing you can hear a coach or player yell out, “There you go Blue” (NFL, 2015) offering up some words of encouragement for the young player going up against a veteran in Cushing. Cushing is then shown taking a knee noticeably agitated. He is sweating profusely and has a bandage dangling off of his left elbow. You can sense the rage and anger in Cushing. He lets out a sigh and sprays water out of his mouth. As he does this you can see the muscles in his arms tighten up displaying the massive physique Cushing has. He then exclaims, “f\*\*k” (NFL, 2015) and tosses his helmet back on.

The scene continues. “Come on Blue, one more” (NFL, 2015) is heard coming from Cushing as Blue is shown also taking a knee looking exhausted and worn out; sweat dripping from his face. Cushing is showing hegemony as Donaldson described it, “the winning and holding of power and the formation (and destruction) of social groups in that process” (p.645). Blue is Cushing’s teammate, but today he is an enemy. Although Blue got the best of him, he refuses to let that be the lasting image of the day. Someone in the distance yells out, “Blue, Blue, you’re being called out. Let’s go Blue, you’re being called out. Let’s Go! Act like you want some, let’s go” (NFL, 2015). The quote “act like you want some” really sticks out because it represents an attitude of “you better want to beat someone to prove yourself.” Understanding that this is a competitive attitude that should be exhibited in professional sports, but in this scenario it appears to be a calling out of manhood. The war/battle like mentality concept that Jansen and Sabo (1994) spoke of is present. You better rise to the occasion, you better be willing

to take on the tough/aggressive teammate, and you better prove you are a man. The motto “What are you going to do to help us win today?” seems fittingly appropriate. Blue is shown walking hesitantly back to the drill as he re-buckles his helmet which indicates he may have taken it off assuming his bout with Cushing was over for the day. His reluctant body language seems to show that he was really wishing it was.

Cushing proceeds to drive himself right through Blue without much resistance and finishes the drill by throwing him to the ground. Blue is left face down on the grass looking defeated. As Cushing walks away he exclaims with two fingers in the air, “That’s two sacks. Him and the quarterback” (NFL, 2015) referring to the fact that he knocked down Blue and the padded dummy used to simulate a quarterback for the drill. Another offensive teammate of Blue approaches him and consoles him by saying, “Aye. That boy strong man” (NFL, 2015). Blue has a discouraged smile on his face as the teammate tries to bring him up. Although the words seem encouraging, the message is one of a need to develop the strength to take on Cushing. This strength is referenced physically by the teammate but in this instance may be the mental fortitude to keep challenging the veteran player and follow through.

The following clip is a slow-motion replay of Cushing enforcing his will on Blue in the drill for the second time which showcases the force of Cushing even more. The slow-motion clip is followed by another replay of the drill in real-time speed. As the clips play, Cushing is heard telling a teammate, “I said ‘Blue, block me one more time’. I forklifted his ass right into the bag and he fell right on top of the bag” (NFL, 2015). Cushing is clearly proud of his assertion of his dominance in this particular situation. He was offended by Blue’s initial late shove, disgusted with Blue beating him and victorious in his final showcase of power.

The clip ends with Cushing talking to a teammate, “I said don’t ever push me after like that. First off, you’re not going to block me. Second of all, you don’t want to fight me. Third of all. I’m the man” (NFL, 2015). Cushing has thus asserted his dominance and physical strength. The threat of violence is also added to his appraisal of the situation. The fact that physical violence is presented shows an absolute demand for Cushing to settle his score one way or another. There’s a vengeance quality to his words.

#### *Texans Redskins Brawl Breaks Out During Practice*

This scene starts with the camera focused on a rain soaked football covered in some grass with the golden NFL logo showing. It is very clear that it is pouring rain as you can see and even hear it. A Texans player is shown with rain dripping off of his helmet. As a viewer it is depicted as a miserable day to be outside. A Texans coach is then heard announcing, “Next period, it’s 1-on-1s with them” (De La Garza, 2015) referring to the Washington Redskins who the Texans are having practice with in Richmond, Virginia. The next two shots are of Texans players engaging in blocking Redskins players. The same coach’s voice is then heard saying, “Let’s start this thing off right. Let’s start this off with good tempo. Let’s go get em” (De La Garza, 2015). It is important to focus a point of hegemonic masculinity that Jansen and Sabo (1994) touched on, “it also allows elite males to extend their influence and control over lesser status males” (p. 7).

These players are clearly out to prove who the lesser male is on this day.

The Texans running backs coach, Charles London is then shown instructing the players that it is good to be practicing in the inclement weather because they will have to play in it during the year. Coach London finishes by saying, “Let’s get ready to compete, ok?” (De La Garza, 2015). The next clips are of Texans and Redskins players pushing and shoving. The players needed to be separated by teammates and coaches. There is a clear tension between the

two teams and neither seems to be backing down from conflict. As the clips of skirmishes are being shown, Texans head coach Bill O'Brien is heard explaining to someone, "So this is the last day you know. Last year we went against Denver and guys were pissed off at each other. They started chirping. It wasn't bad, it just got broken up quick" (De La Garza, 2015). The focus of the pushing matches focuses in on a group of Texans players and Washington Redskins wide receiver Pierre Garcon. A Texans player is heard shouting, "F\*\*k wrong with y'all?" (De La Garza, 2015). Garcon retorts back with, "I do whatever the f\*\*k I wanna do, f\*\*k boy. I do whatever the f\*\*k I wanna do, f\*\*k boy" (De La Garza, 2015) as more Redskins teammates come to his aid. It is unclear on what exactly started the shouting match but Garcon has undoubtedly inserted himself right in the middle of it by challenging the Texans best player J.J. Watt.

The camera then focuses on the sideline to defensive end J.J. Watt and linebacker Brian Cushing having a conversation. Brian Cushing: "How about Garcon coming at you?" (De La Garza, 2015). Watt responds with, "You're maybe 112 pounds, you may want to stay the f\*\*k back from the defensive line" (De La Garza, 2015) referring to the size difference of the wide receiver and himself. Reverting back to the battle between Cushing and Blue, physical violence appears to be present when the weight differential of the player is being thrown into the conversation. Because of their positions, Watt and Garcon would never be in contact with each other on the field unless they were physically fighting one another. Cushing continues on with a noticeably disgusted look on his face, "We got into it every year in Indy. He's always talking" referring to a previous history with Garcon when Garcon played for the Indianapolis Colts.

The next clip is of the Redskins running a play. A Redskins player catches a pass and begins running down the sideline until he is hit below the knee by a Texans player. The music

goes from calm to more erratic. Instantly, a brawl breaks out between the teams. Players converge on the fight from all angles. O'Brien is heard shouting, "Ay, ay, ay! Get out of there! Ay, ay, ay! Get out of there! Houston, get on the side. Houston get on that sideline!" (De La Garza, 2015). Garcon is seen grabbing onto a Texans' player's facemask and pulling it towards himself with a total of eleven players involved in trying to break the two apart. There are players fighting without helmets on and some that aren't even in their pads and uniform. At one point there is a Redskins player jostling with a Texans player and the Texans player attempts to body slam him to the ground. The violence is not football related at all, but rather looks like a wrestling match. There is a montage sequence that shows 9 separate fights and skirmishes in a matter of seconds.

The final clip shows a Texans player talking with teammates, "I said yesterday you tried to run a man over, what do you expect him to do?" (De La Garza, 2015) referencing a Redskins player. This sheds light on a Redskins player doing something out-of-line in the previous day's practice and reason for Texans players to seek out revenge. The player pauses for a moment visibly upset and a fellow teammate he is talking to declares, "Let's get the f\*\*k out of Richmond" (De La Garza, 2015). The screen then goes completely black.

#### *Hard Knocks: Carli Lloyd vs. Vince Wilfork*

The clip begins with US women's soccer player Carli Lloyd walking into a large huddle of Texans players. In the middle of the grind of training camp it is very note-worthy that a female athlete was selected to speak to the team to help inspire them. As she walks forward, players respectfully make way for her and Coach O'Brien is heard addressing the team, "Alright guys, we got a really special guest here today. She's a world champion women's soccer player. Carli Lloyd" (NFL, 2015). In relation to hegemonic masculinity it is worthy to note the respect the

players show because at its root hegemonic masculinity involves men's power over women (Connell and Messerschmidt). The players clap as her name is announced standing alongside O'Brien. The players are showing a mutual respect for Lloyd. It would be interesting to see how they reacted to a female speaker if it was not a championship athlete. While sports often times seems to create divide with men and women athletes, in this situation it seems to have brought them together. O'Brien shakes her hand as she exclaims, "You guys are a lot bigger in person" (NFL, 2015). This is yet another example of the physical presence of the players being marveled at. This specific clip does not show her actually addressing the team, but she is shown in the airing of the show speaking to the team about winning the World Cup.

The scene shifts as O'Brien says, "Since you're here, how about a little competition for ya? How about Vince, Mr. Wilfork? How about a little kicking competition? Are you loose Vince?" (NFL, 2015). The camera is then directed at Wilfork weighing over 325 pounds, who casually responds, "Man I'm always loose" (NFL, 2015) much to the excitement of his coach, teammates and Lloyd who is seen smiling joyfully. The selection of Wilfork is one of interest. Due to Wilfork's build and size, he would not be most people's choice as the best competitor for Lloyd. Perhaps this is a way of cushioning the blow if she were to win because of how out of place it is for a lineman to kick. The other thought is that it may be a way of showcasing the athletic ability of an NFL player of his size to still have the ability to kick field goals. Lloyd asks Wilfork if he's going to go first to which he responds, "Ladies first" (NFL, 2015). It's worth pointing out that Wilfork is genuine in his response to Lloyd.

Lloyd lines up the first field goal and easily knocks it through the goal post in the practice facility as the team claps and ooos and awwss. Wilfork has a big grin on his face as Lloyd has made it look very easy with her soccer background and kicking ability. Teammates begin to

clamor and shout out “Let’s go Vince!” (NFL, 2015). Wilfork lines up the field goal as teammates and O’Brien are shown pointing and laughing hysterically at the sight of the large player. Wilfork drills the football through the uprights much to the delight of his teammates and coaches who roar for him as it goes through. O’Brien pumps his fist emphatically before another slow-motion view of his kick is replayed. Perhaps this excitement comes from beating a female in her specialty. The final shot is of Lloyd smiling and laughing as it appears she has enjoyed the experience.

### Discussion

NFL players are in a unique situation because part of their job requires engaging in physical violence that would be considered toxic in everyday behavior. Many players are able to showcase their ability to partake in behaviors that allow them to not be defined solely by the violence of the game.

Clatterbaugh’s socialist perspective on masculinity is also very intriguing in relation to the NFL. In short, masculinity in the socialist perspective was the result of who did what work, who controls the work of others, and who controls the final product of the labor. In the NFL, from the players, to the coaches, up to the owners, everyone is getting paid handsomely in comparison to the average American salary. There are still scenarios that present themselves because an owner’s wealth supersedes that of the coaches and players and the best players on each team make substantially more than the coaches directing them.

The four clips analyzed all have a common theme: competition. Jadeveon Clowney was in the process of getting back from injury in order for an opportunity to compete for the Texans once again. Brian Cushing and Alfred Blue were in the heat of competition with Cushing trying to prove that he was the overall winner of the drill. The Texans and Redskins were engaged in an

all-out battle because they were competing head-to-head against one another. Finally, Carli Lloyd was involved in competition to see if her kicking ability was as good if not better than that of Vince Wilfork.

Coach Vrabel's approach to mentoring Clowney back into playing again showcase some of the qualities of fatherhood that Connell and Messerschmidt's believed were some of the positives of hegemonic masculinity. He is shown playfully joking with Clowney, which can be seen as way of softening the labor of coming back from being away for so long. He is very diligent in his teaching of fundamentals and techniques while working individually with Clowney. Vrabel seemed to take Clowney under his wing in order to get the most potential out of the young player. He is patient and understanding of what is expected from Clowney and the understood pressure that Clowney is feeling in his return to football.

Clowney has been a player that many have questioned his desire to play football. After a stellar sophomore season at the University of South Carolina many questioned whether he should have sat out the following season to preserve his body for the NFL which he could enter following his junior year per NFL rules. In his junior year, he missed multiple games due to minor injuries and the question of his desire for the game grew stronger. He was still eventually drafted with the #1 overall pick by the Texans The fact that he is mostly given compliments on the field may be a sign that the coaches are trying to make sure he is not discouraged. Vrabel is a coach known for his intensity and vulgarity, but in the scene he appears to be much calmer in his handling of Clowney. There seems to be a high value placed on Clowney and the way he is treated is much different than other players shown in Hard Knocks. Clowney's previous history may have something to do with it or it could be a precautionary decision to try and get the potential out of the young player.

Clowney is the only player shown getting ready for practice and begs the question of where everyone else on the Texans is. Perhaps he was held back to get some final treatment from the medical staff prior to going to the practice field. The music playing in the background while Clowney gets ready and consequently begins to practice is very menacing. It is similar to that of the music played in the movie *Jaws*. The association of the player with the great white shark isn't too far-fetched of a comparison. Clowney circulated a highlight around the country for his devastating hit that knocked the helmet off of a University of Michigan running back in the Outback Bowl.

The questions by staff, players and coaches regarding Clowney's health do not come off as being deeply concerning ones. The repetition at which they are asked almost make them seem just a customary procedure for introducing an injured player back to practice. The one reassurance comes from Vrabel's words at the end. This is a good sign that they aren't pressuring him to rush back and re-injure himself, but affirming that they are certainly happier that he's now practicing once again.

In the Cushing-Blue incident, both players were jostling for a leg up on each other. Blue's initial shove of Cushing was a way to show he was not intimidated by the enforcer Cushing. Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) pointed out that hegemonic masculinity doesn't always mean violence is involved, but "it could be supported by force; it meant ascendancy achieved through culture, institutions, and persuasion" (p. 832). In this scene, force was definitely used in order to gain the upper hand in the situation. Cushing called out the player for another battle and later alluded to physical violence as a presented option as a way of settling the dispute.

Clatterbaugh (1990) discussed aggressive nature being part of a group members and how it can then become, “part of their masculine gender role” (p. 3). While Cushing is very aggressive and vicious, there is nothing shocking about his actions to Blue. If I were coaching for the Texans I would want more players to have the tenacity of Cushing over the more subdued responses of Blue.

This display of anger, strength, frustration and victory by Cushing is gladiator-esque. For Alfred Blue it is a moment to learn and to also grown to understand what to prepare himself for. Pushing someone late after the whistle blows isn't the most egregious action you could make on the football field, but doing it to a veteran like Cushing is something that he should've considered first. This clip demonstrates the ego and macho aspects of the NFL. Cushing will not settle with losing to Blue, especially after he was shoved past the whistle blowing. Cushing calls him out to settle his score. Blue had the opportunity to gain or lose respect in that situation. While there is respect in not backing down from the challenge, getting beat down in the matter overrides any leverage Blue had to gain in that drill. The voice letting Blue know he's being called out sounds like it may be that of a coach and this adds to the pressure Blue has to deal with. Blue loses the battle and just like a triumphant gladiator, Cushing let's those around him know that he is not to be challenged.

While Cushing is victorious and it appears that his hypermasculine behavior paid off for him, the literature by Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) does exclaim, “It is familiar that many men who hold great social power do not embody an ideal masculinity” (p. 838). So while Cushing is a veteran and leader on the Houston Texans, there are others on the team like J.J. Watt that have a greater public image. Watt is a better overall player than Cushing, but part of what makes him so marketable is his clean image on and off the field.

The Texans-Redskins conflict resembles and embodies the idea of how war and sports can cross over each other. Referring back to Jansen and Sabo's (1994) quote, "We maintain that sport/war tropes are crucial rhetorical resources for mobilizing the patriarchal values that construct, mediate, maintain, and, when necessary, reform or repair hegemonic forms of masculinity and femininity" (p. 1). There was a territorial and behavioral dispute at the epicenter of the Texans-Redskins practice. Neither team was willing to cooperate and back down from the other. While *Hard Knocks* is focused on football, the producers of the show would be remiss if they didn't focus in on the massive brawls that broke out. It shows the tension and violence that are ever present. At the drop of a hat, the practice erupts into a massive fight.

This is not the first time there's been a training camp melee between two teams. In fact, there is usually a weekly occurrence of a fight of some sort breaking out in training camp. "The primary appeals of the game itself are the physical daring and danger that it involves as well as its ritualized violence that plays at the edge of, and sometimes breaks into, real violence" (Jansen & Sabo, 1994, p. 10). We have to keep in mind that this is a game that is a job for the players involved.

The scene illustrates the anger, emotion, and built of frustration players can have towards opponents. While the joint practice helps to let players compete against someone other than their own teammates, the totality of training camp seems to have both sides on edge. Players on both sides clearly take exception to any disrespect and/or flagrant behavior shown to them. The cohesive bonds of the teams are clearly displayed by the sheer size of the melees. There are no single one-on-one brawls, although they may start off as one, teammates from both sides quickly come to the defense.

The media coverage of ESPN and the fact that *Hard Knocks* were both on hand to cover this practice make the outbreaks of violence a lot more telling on the media's presence. Jansen and Sabo called McKay and Rowe (1987) when they stated the, "media operate in some way to reproduce and legitimate relations of domination in patriarchal capitalist societies" (p.259). With both teams being aware of the coverage being given to them, it begs the question of whether less restraint was used when pushing turned to shoving.

This brawl scene also elicits my thoughts toward violent behavior and sports. I've heard phrases regarding channeling anger and rage to use it to your positive. Were the players in the fights competitive athletes who when provoked lash out? Or are they young men constantly looking for a fight that just so happened to make it to the NFL because of their aggressive nature? Even from my experience playing high school football, it is very much a game of getting the last word. Whether it is pushing and shoving after a play or refusing to let go of an opponent after the whistle blows. Perhaps this is part of the masculine ideal of the NFL.

The Carli Lloyd visit to practice and eventual competition with Vince Wilfork positions the ultra-competitive football team with a female athlete who for all intents and purposes is more accomplished. Some of male's motivation for engaging in sports comes from women's role in society growing over time and a need to showcase their ability (Adams, et al., 2010, p. 279). With the respect shown to Lloyd who represents the rising popularity of women's soccer in the USA with the winning of the World Cup, one must question if there was a need for respect to be paid, but also if an opportunity to show equality and dominance by the male athletes.

Liberal profeminists would enjoy this clip due to the lack of suppression of competitive nature of both the males and the female. Clatterbaugh shared liberal profeminists' belief that,

“both men and women are prevented from self-realization by these restrictive roles” (p. 10) referring to the stereotypes and ideals placed on both masculinity and femininity.

While the scene is a good indication of the Texans view on women in sports by bringing in a female athlete to offer words of encouragement, it is also interesting that a competition must be held. Although Lloyd appeared to be ready and willing to showcase her ability, it seemed in some way as an opportunity for the NFL players to diminish it in a way. Understanding that Lloyd would surely be able to out-school all of the players with a soccer ball, there seemed to be a sense of pleasure that the 325 pound lineman could kick a football just as well. With the Ray Rice and Greg Hardy incidents plaguing the league, the Texans are admirable in bringing in a female soccer player. It shows a respect for the women’s game and an acknowledgement of championship level athletes no matter what gender.

#### *Limitations*

One of the main limitations of this study is the limited access to the show content of *Hard Knocks*. I was able to use clips found on *YouTube* and the NFL’s website. This certainly limited the specific scenes to choose from and also left out certain aspects that lead up to the scenes as well as what was to follow. Having access to the full episodes would allow for more in-depth content to choose from as well as offer more material to use.

It would also benefit a study of this kind to gain perspective from the staff of NFL Films and HBO that were part of the filming and production of the show to gain information on how the scenes were positioned from the content they filmed. Similarly, if I had my druthers I would like to conduct a study like this with an ability to have players from the show give their explanation of the scenes analyzed.

## Conclusion

In this study I found instances of males using violence/force and competition to establish their dominance. There were examples of comradery and fatherhood through teammate and coach exchanges. I was able to see how players would react to having a female athlete address them and then subsequently compete against one of their own. There were instances of great control and patience while others seemed to verge on total recklessness.

### *Implications for practice and future research*

The information found in this critical analysis can be used as the basis for effecting social change. Masculinity and the behavior that defines what is masculine is going to be different on an NFL team than it would be on other male social groups. The identity of masculinity in the NFL, in general, is going to differ from that of the NBA, MLB, NHL and MLS. The importance of the study that I want to stress comes from the studies of Donaldson, Connell and Messerschmidt in regard to Clatterbaugh's masculine ideal. All three discussed how some of our leaders in society do not possess the best qualities of what it means to be the masculine ideal. This is important information to impressionable men and women who may view *Hard Knocks* and believe that it is what the ideal masculinity should be for men. It is important that we all fall into different groups and settings that shape our masculinity.

The benefits of the findings can also help lead to a better understanding of the masculinity of NFL football players. Not all athletes can be like the soccer players in Adams, et al.'s study who left the masculinity of their team at the field and acted accordingly in society away from the game. When the situation with Brian Cushing and Alfred Blue and The Texans and Redskins escalated, violence became an outlet. In some cases, the violence may lead to success on the football field. Away from the field when conflict arises the same kind of behavior

is not acceptable and in most cases it is against the law. This not to say that the individuals involved in the fighting at practice are more or less likely to engage in the same behavior in society. There is an importance on separating the masculinity in the locker room and around teammates and the masculinity of being a spouse, a father, a partner and a friend.

I believe there are good and bad men in the NFL. That is reflected by on and off the field behavior. There are men that may come off as extremely violent on the field, but are staples of their community and help many people who are less fortunate because of their football success. There are also those who struggle to make it in society because the behavior that may be accepted in the NFL is harmful in everyday life. The masculinity of an NFL team is very unique in that way. *Hard Knocks* gives us a sample to which we are all permitted to judge on our own accord. It is important to not mistake the masculinity displayed by NFL players for what is conventional in society.

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