WOMEN WATCHING FOOTBALL: THE TELEVISUAL GAZE AND FEMALE SPECTATORSHIP

A Thesis
submitted to the Faculty of the
Graduate School of Arts and Sciences
of Georgetown University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree of
Master of Arts
in Communication, Culture and Technology

By

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Washington, DC
April 12, 2007
Television has changed the way the game of football is played, but it has also changed how spectators are affected by and affect football images. This project examines two televised football texts—the AFC-NFC Pro Bowl and the NFL Scouting Combine—in order to better understand the relationship between television spectators and the persistent display of the male football body. Ever since the wedding of television and football, the sport has become a spectacle and the male football body has been created as an object to be looked at and analyzed, though ostensibly only by men.

This project, then, also investigates the role of the female football spectator—how she is constructed by the discourse that surrounds female football spectators as different from and often subordinate to the male football spectator. I argue, through an examination of several female-authored football texts, that women are systematically “othered” as football spectators, both by the institution of football itself and by these female-authored texts. Female football spectators occupy a different space from male football spectators (as is evidenced by the female-authored
football texts): that of an outsider. The discourse that surrounds football consistently positions women as less knowledgeable, less interested viewers who come to view the game for ulterior motives. While this is in some ways detrimental, it allows women to watch football from a space that they themselves can define as pleasurable.

In other words, women have been intentionally left out of football, both by the institution itself and by way of these female-authored texts. Therefore, the female position in football spectatorship is always uninvited—this feeling of looking in on a private world gives the female spectator pleasure in that she imagines she is seeing something forbidden. In this case, the pleasure for female football spectators arises from the chance of participating in a way that threatens the culturally specified role of the football participant as male. Women are not allowed access to the football apparatus; therefore, their pleasure comes from being able to look at the already-objectified male body while being told they are not allowed to do so. Female football spectator’s pleasure comes from viewing the spectacle of football while simultaneously occupying the position of the outsider.

KEYWORDS: Football, Female Spectatorship, Masculinity, Television
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to dedicate this thesis to Adam Denny and to my family, Karen, Howard, Kathryn and Jacob. I can never thank you enough for your unwavering support and inspiration. I love you all very much.

I would like to thank to Professor Matthew Tinkcom, Professor Diana Owen and Professor Michael Coventry for your academic guidance and encouragement.

Finally, I would like to thank a few very special people who have made this whole process more bearable. Barbara, your craziness kept me sane. Thank you! Don, thank you for being genuinely interested in my work. This was both comforting and inspiring. Vanna, thank you for forcing me to rethink things, but to ultimately have enough confidence in my own ideas to move forward. And finally, Stacie, thank you for talking things over with me whenever I needed to. Your quiet presence was a constant in my life that I will miss a lot.
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Preface

I am a female football spectator. This seemingly simple statement has added an air of complexity to this project unforeseen to me until its later stages. While this project has gone through several iterations, ultimately, in hindsight, I look at it as a way for me to examine my own role as a female football spectator who is also a feminist emerged in cultural studies. Prior to working through ideas about pleasurable spaces for female football spectators, I was unable to reconcile these two identities because I had not critically examined what it meant for me to find watching football pleasurable.

I do not explicitly place my own experiences as a female football spectator in this thesis, but I do feel that these experiences inspired and helped to ground parts of my argument. I was able to better navigate the primary football texts because of my experience and football knowledge. Furthermore I, as a specifically female spectator, was also able relate to the women who are participating in football through female-authored football texts. However, I found a disconnect between my own experiences and those I examine as representative of the female football spectator experience. Where, I wondered, are the texts that address my voice as an experienced, knowledgable football spectator? My research turned up no popular culture texts that
address female football spectators in a manner that I can related to as pervasive as the ones I examine here that address female football spectators as uninformed and uninterested. The answer is perhaps fodder for another study, but I feel it necessary to say here that the texts that I examine in this thesis construct a specific female football spectator. Not all women who engage in football through spectatorship experience the game in this way. While the particular version of the female football spectator I lay out in this thesis is not wholly representative, that it is not wholly representative in fact helps us to better understand what kind of people are licensed to talk about texts, especially football texts, and what they are allowed to say about these texts.
Chapter 1. INTRODUCTION

Football is a violent sport in which male bodies are surveilled and controlled, ostensibly in an effort to uphold the Lombardian ethic: “winning isn’t everything, it’s the only thing.” To meet this goal, football players commit their bodies to the game, a commitment that inevitably leads to loss of control over one’s own body and pain. The bodies that are produced are best described as superhuman. To be big, fast or strong isn’t enough: football players are the biggest, the fastest and the strongest; they lift the heaviest weights, run the fastest 40-yard dashes and hit each other the hardest. And the bodies that complete these feats are walking reminders of what it means to be the best. This thesis will explore how we can define the kind of masculinity the male football player embodies as well as how this kind of masculinity informs the “currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy…” (Connell 77).

In football, bodily performance is measured and labeled on a regular basis. Players are consistently confronted with their “numbers”: height, weight, statistics, scores, etc. These numbers are as much a part of the display as the images of the body themselves. Because the institutional organization of football has constituted success through bodily performance, the image of the football body has become pervasive in American culture as an icon of ideal male body image. The male football body is
displayed in specific ways, most notably through television. Television and professional football have been inextricably linked since the first game was televised in the 1930s—football now depends on the television spectator (The 1930s and the First Televised Game 1-3). While only a few hundred thousand fans watch games from stadium seats each week, millions tune in to watch professional football games on television. The thesis will explore how introduction of the spectator into the football apparatus changed how the game is played, now that audiences are watching not only from the stands, but from their living rooms as well. The project will also look at how the spectator is informed by the images s/he sees. In order to do these things, I will examine two examples of this interdependent relationship between the mediated image and the spectator: the AFC-NFC Pro Bowl and the NFL Scouting Combine.

The term “spectator” can be used several ways in a discussion of sport. Spectator can refer to people who watch games in the stadium, from the stands. It can also refer to fans who watch games on television. Both of these uses are colloquial; the word spectator in these cases is easily interchangeable with the word “fan”. Admittedly, the televised football text is markedly different from the football text that is provided to the audience watching from stadium seats and from act of playing football. This thesis only takes up the former text. Therefore, in this project, I use spectator as it is used in feminist film theory, as this area of study informs much of my
research. In feminist film theory, the spectator is constructed by his/her relationship to the screen image. In her essay “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” Laura Mulvey asserts,

…the extreme contrast between the darkness in the auditorium (which also isolates the spectators from one another) and the brilliance of the shifting patterns of light and shade on the screen helps to promote the illusion of voyeuristic separation. Although the film is really being shown, is there to be seen, conditions of screening and narrative conventions give the spectator an illusion of looking in on a private world (Kaplan 37).

In my own analysis of the football spectator, I will apply these ideas from feminist film theory by looking for evidence of both pleasurable looking (scopophilia) and voyeuristic separation from the televised football text.

After defining the interdependent relationship between the football spectator and the televised football text, I will turn my attention to the gendered football spectator. While professional football excludes women from playing the game and coaching, it is important to look at the ways are women allowed to participate in this male-centered sport and how women assert their desire to participate in the game, even if they cannot participate at the most basic level. Demographic information about televised football spectatorship provides clues about the evolutionary role of the spectator, especially in terms of gender. The 2007 Super Bowl attracted over 90 million television viewers; women comprised about 40% of that audience (NFL’s
Female Fan Base Grows). That an ever-increasing number football spectators are women may simply illustrate that women are willing to comply with a system that inherently oppresses them. One way to think about this is to look at female-authored football texts. Several women have written books about the rules and history of football, addressed specifically at female audiences. This project analyzes these texts in order to see how women are positioned (and are positioning themselves) in the football discourse. These texts act in conjunction with televised football texts to construct the female football fan. They may be ancillary to the primary televised text, but they are important and telling.

Women are football spectators, and it is important to look at how and why they participate. However, it is also necessary to consider what possible benefits women can gain from participating in football through spectatorship. Here again, feminist film theory will provide an ideal analytical tool. Feminist film theorists have set the groundwork for looking at spectatorial roles, as well as screen images. While these film theories are not usually applicable to television, televised sport is unlike other television shows. The melodrama and spectacle inherent in televised football—from the heightened sense of emotion associated with wins and losses to the manipulation images through instant replay and slow motion—will provide an ideal space to look anew at gendered spectator positions and screen images.
Feminist film theory finds that, in narrative cinema, women are the bearer of meaning, the object of the male gaze. Women are looked at and objectified by men in the audience and on the screen alike. In football, however, the gender relation of spectator to screen image is somewhat inverted. As mentioned above, the male football body is constantly on display; the advent of televised football helped to objectify the male football body by allowing its image to be seen by millions of spectators. Additionally, women are systematically denied primary roles in football, which means that they are also denied filling the role of object. In football, then, women’s subject position has shifted from spectacle (they are consistently objectified in other media, like film) to spectator. This thesis will explore the ways that this move from spectacle to spectator might be uncomfortable and jarring for women and how women might navigate this discomfort. More so, this project sets out to determine if there are any possible pleasures to be derived from participating in the violent, misogynistic, and heteronormative institution of football that has long fought to keep them invisible. It may be a man’s game, but women certainly are watching, and this act is the central issue of this thesis.
A REVIEW RELEVANT LITERATURE TO AN EXAMINATION OF FEMALE SPECTATORSHIP OF FOOTBALL

In order to examine the issues I have raised above, I will begin with a review of relevant literature. The following theories enhance my own argument by laying the theoretical groundwork and acting as points of departure for my own arguments. This study will argue that entrenched gender practices, like football, can become sites of resistance and redefinition. My research will be built upon several fields of study: masculinities studies, sports sociology, media studies and feminist film theory. These fields cover issues of the construction of masculinity, the male body, sports spectatorship, televised sports, and the objectification of women by the male gaze in narrative cinema. This study will use these theories to discuss the televisual gaze and spaces for pleasurable female spectatorship in American football.

MASCULINITIES STUDIES

In the 1970s, feminists proposed a sharp distinction between sex and gender in order to refute what sociobiologists had labeled as natural differences between men and women. According to R.W. Connell, “Sex was the biological fact, the difference between the male and the female human animal. Gender was the social fact, the difference between masculine and feminine roles, or men’s and women’s personalities”
Feminists declared optimistically that with this breakthrough, biology could no longer be used to justify the subordination of women. By making new social choices about gender, the oppressive gender arrangement could be eliminated. The “two-realms model” did not go unscrutinized for long, however. It has eroded steadily since the 1970s, because, according to Connell, “The idea of gender as culturally chosen difference (‘sex roles’) was unable to explain why one side of the difference, the masculine, was consistently more highly valued” (452).

Therefore, in pursuit of what Connell calls ‘gender justice’ feminism revised its tactic and began to put “men and masculinities in a critical spotlight, in the process centering on the practices of men in ways many men would prefer it not to, not least because there may well be costs to them as a result” (Whitehead and Barrett 3). Feminist theorists began to realize, and therefore wanted to reveal to men and women alike that, “…the historical centrality of ‘malestream’ writing, philosophy and political practice has served to make men invisible, particularly to themselves” (4). In response to this revelation, feminist-inspired writings on men and masculinities has emerged as an area of enquiry over the last three decades.

Like feminisms, masculinities studies have evolved as more scholars enter the field and began critiquing long-standing theories. First-wave masculinities studies was “concerned with the problematics of male role performance and the cost to men of
attempting to strictly adhere to dominant expectations of masculine ideology” (Whitehead and Barrett 15). Sex role theory had tied men and women to strict sets of gender expectations; Robert Brannon, for example, identified four elements of the male role: “No Sissy Stuff”: differentiation from women; “The Big Wheel”: status and achievement; “Sturdy Oak”: inexpressiveness and independence; and “Give ’Em Hell”: adventurousness and aggression (6). First-wave masculinities studies focused on the detriment of following socially constructed sex roles and gender expectations.

Second-wave masculinities studies (exemplified by the work of Tim Carrigan, R.W. Connell and John Lee) “introduced the concept of ‘hegemonic masculinity and in so doing firmly placed masculinity as a political, multiple, contested, yet powerful concept” (15). This wave of masculinities studies purported that men had concretized themselves in the role of the masculine subject. Despite a capacity to change or at least a capacity to forge an awareness of one’s position, many men actively choose to oppose the gender revolution due to a recognition that it would do little to benefit them. “Such men often remain locked in juvenile and crude display of masculinity…that can only be sustained and reaffirmed through fraternal groupings, often misogynistic male bonding rituals, rejection of intimacy and an avid denial of the ‘Other’—be it women, femininity, or gay sexuality” (10). Connell defines this as hegemonic masculinity, an essential concept of second-wave masculinities studies.
Antonio Gramsci’s analysis of class relations bore the concept of hegemony—which “refers to the cultural dynamic by which a group claims and sustains a leading position in social life”—that Connell uses to discuss the culturally exalted form of masculinity (77). According to Connell:

Hegemonic masculinity can be defined as the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women (Connell 38-9).

Because there is an association between the cultural ideal of masculinity and institutional power working to perpetuate this ideal, hegemonic masculinity, as articulated by Second-wave masculinities, reigns as the currently accepted masculine strategy.

Connell’s definition, however, reveals that conditions for the defense of patriarchy are always changing, and therefore hegemonic masculinity is unstable. “Hegemony, then, does not mean total control. It is not automatic, and may be disrupted—or even disrupt itself. (Connell 37). According to Connell, “masculinities are, in a word, historical” (245). Modern gender order began to shape in and around the North Atlantic between 1450 and 1650. As Connell traces the history of masculinities he highlights four developments that “seem particularly important for the making of these configurations of social practice that we now call ‘masculinity”’: cultural changes that produced new understandings of sexuality, the creation of overseas
empires, the growth of cities and their designation as centers of commercial capitalism and the onset of large-scale European civil war (246). “…the fundamental point is that masculinities are not only shaped by the process of imperial expansion, they are active in that process and help to shape it (245).

The historical nature of the current strategy of masculinity calls into question its authority. According to Stephen Whitehead and Frank Barrett, “…cracks and fissures…belie the complications and contradictions embedded in the masculine project” (Barrett and Whitehead 19). Masculine identity is the effect of performance. It is the claim to authority, more than any other definitive features, that marks hegemonic masculinity and keeps the cracks and fissures suppressed.

Third-wave masculinities studies is “primarily influenced by feminist post-structuralism and theories of post-modernity. Here the emphasis is on how men’s sense of identity is validated through dominant discursive practices of self, and how this identity work connects with (gender) power and resistance” (15). The theories of power and discourse developed by Michel Foucault are particularly relevant to this wave of masculinities studies, as are considerations of male embodiment and its role in sustaining and being controlled by the masculine project.

From Third-wave masculinities came the idea that masculine characteristics are inextricably tied to the male body is not a new one. The body has either been thought
to produce gender difference, to act as a neutral landscape onto which society imprints its gender-specific symbolism or to be half of a social-biological tandem that works to produce gender difference. In *Masculinities*, Connell asks how the male body has been related to social ideas about masculinity, stating that neither biology nor social influence—nor a combination of the two—can lead us to a full understanding of the relationship between the male body and masculinity. Connell sees bodies as both “objects and agents of practice,” operating within structures that both appropriate and define the body. That is, the body is an inexorable part of the construction of masculinity, but the way it fits into that construction is always shifting; there is no fixed relationship between the body and the production of masculinity, but some kind of relationship between the two always exists. “The body…is inescapable in the construction of masculinity; but what is inescapable is not fixed. The bodily process, entering into the social process, becomes part of history (both personal and collective) and a possible object of politics” (Connell 56).

Thus, masculinity is linked to progress as perpetuated by the body, the image of which helps to form the patriarchal ideal. To uphold this ideal, the male body should be penetrating, controlling, directive, effective and strong. “Patriarchal ideology takes the male body, or rather the fantasied version of the male body, as its metaphoric basis, as the metaphor for its generating and structuring principle (Flannigan-Saint-Aubin
This bodily ideal may give the outward appearance of power, but it also is being shaped by power outside itself. The institution of sports stands as evidence of this, and sports theorists—influenced heavily by feminist and masculinities scholars—readily apply theories of power and control to the role of the athlete.

**BODIES, VIOLENCE AND FOOTBALL**

Inquiries about sport and how the bodies that participate in them are both objects and agents of hegemonic masculinity can shed light on how the structure that purports to be defined by strength and power is actually tenuous. “The study of sport provides fertile ground for bringing classic sociological and feminist questions about agency/constraint, nature/culture, body/mind, and the institutional/symbolic realms into conversation” (Dworkin and Messner 348). Sports play a major role in American society. From the large percentage of sports participants to the even larger percentage of sports spectators, sport tends to have an effect on the lives of many Americans. “Clearly the national preoccupation with the multibillion-dollar industry of sport takes up enormous cultural, ideological, and institutional space; it is also integral to the constitution of gendered, racialized, and sexualized identities and bodies (Dworkin and Messner 347).
Because they are integral to the construction of masculinity, sports sell masculinity to men. “Sport, as a cultural and commercial production, constructs and markets gender; besides making money, making gender may be sport’s chief function” (Dworkin and Messner 342). Since the categories of gender and sex are not simple ones (there are an endless number of possibilities in both category), it is important that there are specific representations of what hegemonic masculinity looks like. Sport and images it provides is an important source of examples of hegemonic masculinity. Without a constant reminder of what it means to fulfill the definition of masculinity, the structure would crumble under its own weight. (Connell 453). Despite the fact that very few people actually become elite athletes, it is sometimes hard to see why millions of people strive to reach that goal. Messner asks, “Are they simply pushed, socialized, or even duped into putting so much emphasis on athletic success?” (197). The answer seems to be that sports are an important organizing institution for the embodiment of dominant masculinity (Messner and Sabo 96). Myra Marx Ferree, Judith Lorber and Beth B. Hess argue in the introduction to Revisioning Gender that men’s sports reproduce race, class and gender relations of power due to their glorification of the male body as powerful, sexual and violent. “In sports, the superior reign over the inferior—men are more powerful than women, white men more so than men of color” (xxx).
In her essay “When is a Body Not a Body? When It’s a Building” Marcia Inn discusses the role of the body and the gym in bodybuilding. In doing so, she also solidifies the connection between the male body and ideas about masculinity. Inn argues that the male athlete is charged with performing hegemonic masculinity (194). For her, the engorged muscular physiques of male athletes are meant to be seen as representative of exactly what it is to be masculine (194). The “repetition, ritual, provocation and performativity” that is part of bodybuilding (and I would argue, football) “prevents thinking about what one is doing to a degree that may prevent doing it” (192). In other words, performing masculinity with one’s body both perpetuates ideas about hegemonic masculinity and prevents one from realizing he is doing so.

In *Power at Play: Sports and the Problem of Masculinity*, Michael A. Messner attempts to analyze this relationship between the “development of masculine identities and the structure of sport as a social institution” (8). He points to the elevation of the “male-body-as-superior” as one of the key elements in maintaining men’s power over women, one of the fundamental components of hegemonic masculinity (15). Messner cites sociologist Eric Dunning in arguing “historical and cross-cultural evidence shows that the balance of power tips more strongly in favor of men when violence and fighting are endemic parts of social life” (15). With the coming of Industrialization, the
use of violence as a means of control was curtailed, and thus the balance of power
shifted away from men. Thus, combat sports, like football, were instituted in order that
men might have a space to indoctrinate society with masculine ideals (Messner 15). “A
culturally dominant conception of masculinity was being forged and legitimated within
and through sport. The social Darwinist belief that a natural hierarchy emerges out of
competitive, meritocratic system…provided ideological support for the existing class
and gender privilege…” (Messner 19). Therefore, for Messner, football provides an
ideal illustration for already-entrenched ideas about masculinity.

Both on a personal-existential level for athletes and on a symbolic-ideological level for
spectators and fans, sports have become one of the ‘last bastions’ of traditional male ideas
of success, of male power and superiority over—and separation from—the perceived
‘feminization’ of society. It is likely that the rise of football as ‘America’s number-one
game’ is largely the result of the comforting clarity it provides between the polarities of
traditional male power, strength, and violence and the contemporary fears of social
feminization (Messner 196).

As noted above, however, despite its outward appearance of strength and
dominance, hegemonic masculinity is actually a fragile system based on the flow of
history. With that in mind, many theorists have started to look for the cracks and the
system, often to show how women and marginalized men can contest their oppression.
This concept has been vital to the study of sports and gender (Messner 315).
Masculinity may be power, but theorists are starting to see that “…the very heart of the
gender regime of men’s sport is contested and wrought with contradiction and
paradox” (Messner 315). Through the study of the body, health and violence, these paradoxes are beginning to be revealed and the once unquestioned bastion of masculinity as illustrated by sport is beginning to be examined.

Football is both the most popular televised sport in America and one of the most fertile grounds for studying the ways in which hegemonic masculinity is fraught with contradiction. Football players are often seen as embodying masculine traits, like strength, virility, health and control. In *Reading Football*, Michael Oriard defines the relationship between football and the fundamental definition of male identity in the United States. “For those who played, football became one arena for validating their masculinity; for those who watched…football generated dramatic narratives in which competing ideas about manliness were a major theme” (191). Oriard argues that football not only functions as a rite of passage for many American males, but that it also generates ideas about what constitutes masculinity for the sport’s audience (200). For him, the “version of manliness” that is represented in football rests on physical power and necessary violence. That is, the male football body acts as a tool to reinvigorate the definition of masculinity that rests on vigor and brutality (191).

Football, then, can be seen as a ritual that produces heralded masculinity. The football ritual consists of five things: it is a social theater with an all-male, intergenerational cast, coaches control their players and insist on conformity, it unfolds
in sex-segregated contexts and if women are present, they are subservient (lockers rooms, etc.), football is hierarchically structured (coaches/players, stars/scrubs), and the football ritual is defined by pain (Sabo and Messner 117). Football, one of the most violent of all sports, pits large, powerful and violent male bodies against one another. These perpetual contests of winners vs. losers “serve as public symbols of exemplary masculinity, with whom all men can identify as men, as separate and superior to women (Dworkin and Messner 343).

In *Power at Play: Sports and the Problem of Masculinity*, Messner illuminates the ritual of football by arguing that the football player tends to see his body as an instrument (62). “The ultimate extension of instrumental rationality is the alienation from one’s own body—the tendency to treat one’s body as a tool, a machine to be utilized…in the pursuit of particular ends” (62). Messner’s main contention is that pain, which is experienced by almost every athlete, is often ignored in order that he may perform, achieve and win (62). In football specifically, the aggressive use of the body is a reflection of the socialization one has to go through in order to legitimize such violence. This legitimization “reveals the affinity between developing masculine identities and the structure and values of the institution of sport” (68). The male body, then, is socialized towards violence in order to both achieve and win in sports and to legitimate the socially constructed ideas about masculinity.
That the reigning type of masculinity is perpetuated by football is complicated by the fact that, despite football’s wide-ranging appeal, very few men will actually play the sport professionally. Those who do get to live the dream of so many aspiring athletes often pay a hefty price. “…although athletic masculinity symbolizes an image of physical health and sexual virility, athletes commonly develop alienated relationships with their bodies, learning to relate to them like machines, tools, or even weapons to be ‘used up’ to get the job done” (Dworkin and Messner 343). All professional football players will suffer injury in their career, often permanent, and many will live out their lives with poor health. Most can expect not to reach the average life expectancy for American men; the average professional football player who has played in the league for at least five years can expect to only reach the age of 56 (Messner, *Power* 71).

Violence in football, then, is endemic. It is assumed to be a natural part of the game, and those that do not adhere to the idea that sitting out due to injury is detrimental to the athlete and the team, are admonished. Here, one of the biggest fissures in hegemonic masculinity becomes visible. According to Connell, “Violence is part of a system of domination, but is at the same time a measure of its imperfection. A thoroughly legitimate hierarchy would have less need to intimidate” (Connell 44). Masculinity must always prove itself because it is always in doubt. Violence,
aggression, and extreme competitiveness—three things needed to be a successful football player—are also signs of compulsory masculinity (Kimmel 237). The internalized values of masculinity in conjunction with the insecure nature of the sports world cause the athlete to become replete with doubt about his ability to live up to expectations (Messner 199).

**POWER AND SURVEILLANCE**

There is, then, a tension between cultural ideas about masculinity and the real embodied experiences of men. The male body is encoded with socially relevant meanings, and as a result, his experiences do not always necessarily coincide with these definitions. In “The Tall and Short of It: Male Sports Bodies” Don Ihde argues that masculine embodiment is socially entrenched (Tuana 233). “This social embeddedness is very long-lasting, historical, and is expressed similarly across radically different social contexts” (233). Ihde goes on to argue that in male socialization the role of the body, its size and ability to perform certain tasks (presumably athletic tasks) are vital (235). If one’s performance “comes up short” in terms of the socially imbedded definitions, then a man’s sense of who he is, as defined by his body, is called into question (236). The disciplinary gaze that enforces this definition of what a masculine body is supposed to be able to achieve is a “gaze which
simultaneously objectifies and enacts control over the selectively passive bodies” (239). In other words, the male body is always acted upon and forced to comply with the socially embedded definitions of manhood as illustrated by football. “Conformity takes a hold of an athlete, in part, because he or she is visible” (Shogan 37). The disciplinary practices enforced in football inform the transformation of the male football body into something that is admired and emulated.

Michel Foucault’s analysis of the role of the body in relation to discipline in institutions like schools and the military is helpful for this study of the control and discipline experienced by the male football body. In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault discusses time control and enclosed spaces, among other techniques, and theorizes, “discipline increases the forces of the body and diminishes these same forces” (138). That is, what the body gains in utility it loses through obedience to a higher power. Foucault’s influence with respect to sports studies has recently been considered by scholars as a way to make sports relevant to cultural studies. The body that becomes strong and skillful is simultaneously manipulated and trained to obey (136). While Foucault uses institutions like the military and schools to illustrate his theories about discipline, sports scholars apply similar theories to the discipline enforced in sports in general and football specifically.
In addition Foucault’s ideas about discipline, his theories about surveillance from *Discipline and Punish* are also relevant to this discussion. Whether in games or practice, the body of the football player is constantly put on display, which aids in the ability for it to be controlled. The body is constantly linked with statistics regarding height, weight, speed and strength—it is understood not as a body working in tandem with a mind, but only in terms of information and data. If one fails to fulfill each technical category so laid out by the powers that be, then he fails to be seen as entirely masculine. Therefore, just as Foucault theorized of Bentham’s panopticon, surveillance by coaches and trainers and fans does not need to be constant; rather, the threat that someone could be watching is enough to induce the football player to control his own actions. Bodies are habituated to self-monitoring because there is an everyday anxiety about how to perform one’s gender.

In “Hegemonic Masculinity on the Mound” Nick Trujillo argues that the male body is critiqued, revealed and exposed even further through televised sports. Commentators and spectators alike often comment directly on the physical aspects of the male sports body. In this way, the male athlete serves as a “safe sex symbol” to be discussed by heterosexual male spectators without endangering how society perceives their masculinity. In his discussion of pitcher Nolan Ryan, Trujillo states that Ryan, who illustrates perfectly hegemonic masculinity, (white, upper-class, heterosexual,
etc.) is an ideal conduit for those wishing to perpetuate hegemonic masculinity (32). His body is put up on a pedestal (the mound), watched, critiqued and thus controlled in a way that allows socially constructed ideas about masculinity to persist.

Toby Miller offers further specificity about discipline and control of the male sports body. In *Sportsex* he argues that “bodies are both subjects and objects, active phenomena that are also acted upon…” (16). That is, athletes may be able to create their bodies through sport, but they are creating them in circumstances where social definitions about masculinity are already embedded. Miller argues that male football bodies are indeed acted upon both by other participants and by spectators. “Sports have always licensed men to watch and dissect other men’s bodies in fetishistic detail, [it is] a legitimate space for men to gaze on the male form” (40). Additionally, Miller argues that in sports, the male body is scrutinized and that men have become dependent on the gaze that is directed towards them (40). For Miller, the sports body is an “icon of difference”; that is, it stands in to illustrate the social definitions of masculinity when no other body can.

The physical control of specifically the male football body has at its roots the notion that football is a source of definitions of masculinity in American culture (Falk 10). In *Football and American Identity* Gerhard Falk argues that football teaches men to accept physical pain in order to be seen as powerful (Falk 11). “Evidently, the
infliction of pain on others is therefore also seen as an important male attribute…” (Falk 11-12). Football, therefore, preserves both the physical and cultural values of masculinity (Falk 99). It is an “aggressive, risky, domineering, all-male display” that allows those who participate in it and watch it to identify with “power, control and dominance” (Falk 98).

In *The Meaning of Sports*, Mandelbaum argues that football players are like workers in a factory who must perform their jobs in precise sequence so that the team, which functions like a machine, can operate properly. Failure for any individual body to do his part results in disaster (120). Additionally, time in football, as in the factory, is governed rigidly. “The game, like much of industrial life, proceeds under externally imposed deadlines” (120). That is, time in football is never to be wasted and the player or group of players who breaks this rule suffers a penalty. Mandelbaum goes on to compare football to another social institution that rests on the principle of bodily control: war (127). The violent physical encounters between players require that each football body be prepared physically to meet the challenge. Such preparation often requires adherence to a strict regimen of bodily control (diet, exercise, etc.). More often than not, this regimen is not only controlled by the player himself, but by the army of trainers and coaches who are “in charge” of the player’s body.
These coaches and trainers not only teach their players the basics of football, they are responsible for making their players adhere to strict training regimens that control everything from sleeping and eating habits, to dating and sexual habits. “Coaches are likely to be a good deal older than the youthful champions, and to a considerable extent their successes as coaches depend more on their skill as ideologists—persuading their charges to stick to the training regime and psyching them up for big events—than on their technical knowledge” (Sabo and Messner 92).

Additionally, football players are subject to “a highly authoritarian system of control that taught them to conform to… ‘the pain principle’” (Messner 316). They are taught to ignore their own pain and treat their bodies like weapons or instruments to be used to get the job done. They are taught to shake it off and to never let anyone see them not being masculine enough. Eventually, it has become ‘natural’ to play hurt with the help of painkillers (or not) and completely unacceptable to sit out of a game due to injury. “Scholars view the mantra of ‘no pain, no gain’ as paradigmatic of the health costs paid by boys and men who were socialized to narrow, instrumental goal orientation through sport” (Messner 317).

Therefore, it is clear that not only is sport reliant on the physical ability of bodies, it is also dependent on the control of said bodies through regular surveillance. Whether they are being watched by trainers, coaches or fans, athletes are constantly
under surveillance. In sports, as well as other societal institutions, control and surveillance are necessary elements for the continuation and success of the institution. As a result, it is not the individual who controls his body, but rather those in charge of the discipline and surveillance. In other words, a football player’s body is not his own. Through constant supervision and forced discipline, the male football body, which outwardly exudes strength and toughness, is molded and used to serve the interests of hegemonic masculinity.

**Television and Football: The Perfect Match**

It is not the simple act of looking that has created male football bodies as the object of commodification and admiration. The image of the football body, dressed in the muscle-emphasizing uniform would not be as pervasive in American culture as an icon of ideal body form if it were not presented as a mediated image. Charlotte Jirousek, in her essay “Superstars, Superheroes and the Male Body Image: The Visual Implications of Football Uniforms,” argues, “[t]he steady rise in the popularity of football was concurrent with the increasing augmentation of the player’s body. The protective gear under his uniform ultimately created an irresistible image of male power which has in turn affected standards of male strength and beauty” (4). The steady rise in football’s popularity was due to its ever-increasing presence on the
televisions of people across America. “Corporate capitalism and masculinism became twinned, mutually supporting pillars of the sport-media complex” (Burstyn 104). Thus, the “image and mythology” of football have consistently been upheld by “the ubiquitous force of television,” allowing the commodification of exemplary masculinities as illustrated by sports stars to strengthen the grip of hegemonic masculinity on a global level (Jirousek 4, Connell 241).

However, televised football is not simply a mirror held up to reflect the image of the “real” game. It is not live football’s double, and one does not precede the other. Thus, fans’ notion of what football is and of the images it produces, because they are mediated through television, are not informed by the game itself (as it occurs in the stadium). Richard Giulianotti’s essay, “The Fate of Hyperreality: Jean Baudrillard and the Sociology of Sport” illuminates the connection between hyperreality and televised football even further. Giulianotti’s discussion of Baudrillard’s theories reveals that “[t]he hyperreal is the world as simulacrum, in the sense that it is both simulated and ‘realer than real,’ characterized by the obscene attention to excessive detail” (233).

The “excessive detail” that Giulianotti brings to light as definitive of the hyperreal is best illustrated by the close-ups, varied camera angles and instant replays of televised football games. “Televised sports provides superfluous streams of useless information transmitted in pornographic detail: the multiple camera angles…the
seamless and confusing blend of live and recorded events” (Giulianotti 234-5).

However, the artifice of the football broadcast is often concealed. As Murray Pomerance argues in his discussion of sport’s relation to the cinema, the manipulation of the football image through close-ups, replays and varied camera angles is thought of merely as “technical achievements of media producers…” (312), rather than as the “obscene attention to detail” that places televised football within the realm of the hyperreal and mediates the images that fans see. Phil Patton clarifies this idea by arguing, “Television taught its viewers about the game, showing them the large strategies and small dramas of pro football. The only thing it did not show was just how much the medium had massaged the game into its own shape” (Patton 5).

According to Patton, instant replay “immediately began conditioning viewers that they had a second chance at things. It put the game on the table for dissection” (67). In putting the game on the table for dissection, it also put the football player’s body on display for dissection by the fan. Instant replay—along with reverse angles and close-ups—turned the game into something it never was in the stadium: a text that can be read over and over again from a unique vantage point. “The replay is an unusual and privileged way to see the game. It is not the way that coaches or players or officials see it” (Patton 70). Devices like instant replay made televised football into a
spectacle. Football players were no longer being watched only by coaches, trainers, and attendees; their images was now being beamed into homes across the country.

**SPORTS SPECTATORSHIP**

“What is truly chilling is that there are a lot of smart people interested in sports. That just gives you no hope at all for the human race.”

—Fran Lebowitz

The look, or gaze, of the fan watching football on television is one of the most neglected areas of sports studies. As Garry Crawford points out in his book *Consuming Sport*, only about four percent of all sport sociology and psychology focuses on sports fans. Regarding gender, some sociological research has shown that more men watch sports than women, and that when women do watch sports, they prefer aesthetic sports such as gymnastics or figure skating (Wann, et. al. 9, 47). Similar studies show that when women do watch sports that typically fall into the domain of male viewers, they often do so to be able to spend time with men (46). Men, according to these studies, are watching sports to derive excitement, arousal, a sense of self-worth and for the sport’s artistic nature. Even when a sport is typically defined as violent, male viewers tend to describe them as aesthetically pleasing (46).
Just like the control exerted by coaches and trainers, discussed earlier, the spectacle and performance inherent in televised football is a vital component of social control (Crawford 26). Media studies have sometimes seen viewers and fans as social dupes who are simply products of what they consume. Similarly, feminist studies see sports fandom as equally enforcing of hegemonic masculinity as the institutions themselves. In fact, some recent studies on fandom have shown that fans and spectators area actually shaping their objects of consumption through things like weblogs, fan sites and radio call-in programs (Crawford 38).

One of the least explored of all areas, even within in the little-explored area of sports spectatorship, is female sports spectatorship, and most notably, women watching men’s sports. This is a vital missing piece to understanding and sport and hegemonic masculinity because, as Margaret Morse points out in her essay, “Sport on Television: Replay and Display,” “The discourse of sport is like no other in our culture insofar as its object is the male body…At the center of this discourse is an image of fascination, the perfect machine of a body-in-motion choreographed with others as a vision of grace and power” (Kaplan 44). How does the notion of a female gaze relate to the idea of male bodily perfection through control and surveillance? Two bodies of work are applicable to this questions: one is fan sociology, which has shown that women often
have a disconnected relationship to sport spectatorship and the other is feminist film theory, which has theorized about the male gaze in narrative cinema.

Regarding sports sociology and the study of women as sports spectators, Varda Burstyn elucidates the statistics on women’s sports spectatorship mentioned above. “…large numbers of women relate to the core men’s sports—up to 30 per cent of television audiences for certain events such as the NFL Superbowl (sic) are women. Some women enjoy identifying with the male athletes; others enjoy the masculine spectacle and sexual display. Still others watch or support participation in these sports in order to be with the men (lovers, husbands, brothers, sons, fathers) to who they are affiliated” (153). However, while statistics are helpful in understanding sports spectatorship, the sometimes-superficial analysis that has thus far accompanied these statistics is problematic for a feminist analysis of female sports spectators.

The starting point for much of feminist film theory is the gaze. Feminist film theory arose as a challenger to psychoanalytic film theory because the latter lacked gender neutrality. “…Psychoanalytic film theory posits the cinema as a fantasmatic production which mobilizes primary processes in the circulation of desire. The cinematic apparatus constructs its spectator and then structures the screen relationship along psychoanalytic modalities of fantasy, the scopic drive, fetishism, narcissism and identification. Conventionally, it is the woman’s image, existing to be looked at (and to
be desired) that is offered to the male spectator-consumer who possesses the gaze” (174). Thus, psychoanalytic film theory establishes the male spectator’s desire as being constantly reinforced by film form. Feminist film theory was developed to question this seemingly unmovable position of the male that leaves no room for the female spectator and always cements woman into the role of the desired object. Subsequently, feminist film theory has worked to appropriate psychoanalytic film theory in order to interpret the ways that the cinema is forever enforcing the rules of patriarchy as well as to reveal how pleasure works to keep re-tying woman into her role as object (174).

The primary work that established the psychoanalytic framework for feminist film theory was Laura Mulvey’s essay “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” (Stam 174). “Mulvey’s argument is basically this: spectatorship in the cinema is organized along gender lines, creating an active (male) spectator in control of a passive (female) screen-object” (174). Mulvey argues that the ultimate challenge of feminist film theory is to figure out how to pull woman from her role as bearer of meaning, controlled by the male gaze, while still bound up in the language of patriarchy. She sets out to use a piece of the patriarchal language, psychoanalytic theory, as a weapon to show how film form has been structured around patriarchy (Mulvey 35). “Woman then stands in the patriarchal culture as a signifier for the male other, bound by symbolic order in which man can live out his fantasies and obsessions through linguistic
command by imposing them on the silent image woman still tied to her place as bearer, no maker, of meaning” (35).

What does Mulvey mean by this? The woman, according to Mulvey, who relies heavily on the theories of Jacques Lacan, symbolizes the castration threat due to her lack of a penis. Her only role is to raise her (assumedly male) child into the realm of the symbolic, at which point her role as a meaning-maker is over. Thus, the patriarchal order is established. From that point forward, man is forever maker of meaning and woman is forever bearer of meaning—a conduit for all male fantasies and obsessions (35). “The paradox of phallocentrism in all its manifestations is that it depends on the image of the castrated women to give order and meaning to its world” (34). Thus, woman always embodies a “to-be-looked-at-ness” quality because her image is coded and is offered to the male spectator, who is the beholder of the gaze (40).

For Mulvey, spectatorship is also organized along gender lines. Gender roles are delineated as the active male spectator and passive female screen-object (37). These are the ideas that Mulvey’s argument about visual pleasure is based on. “There are circumstances in which looking itself is a source of pleasure, just as, in the reverse formation, there is pleasure in being looked at” (37). Mulvey argues that cinema is appealing to spectators along two lines: 1) scopophilia in which the subject derives
pleasure from looking at passive object, and 2) narcissism, “in which the sense of the self is reconfirmed in the unity of the screen image. Both scopophilia and narcissism can be tied back to the earliest stages of the development of the human psyche based on the Lacanian mirror stage during which one enters the symbolic order by forming the idea of ‘I’ or on the erotic gaze that is based on the primal scene (38). Mulvey argues that these principles of pleasure in cinema are only available to the male because the world has ordered the hierarchy to maintain the male as active and the female as passive. “The determining male gaze projects its fantasy onto the female figure, which is styled accordingly” (39).

Feminist film theory also addresses the question, as E. Ann Kaplan does in her essay “Is the Gaze Male?”: if woman is in the dominant position, is she in the masculine position? (128) Kaplan notes that women are allowed to take on the role of the bearer of the gaze. However, when woman does so and the man is set up as the sex object, “she nearly always loses her traditionally feminine characteristics in so doing—not those of attractiveness, but rather of kindness, humaneness and motherliness. She is now cold, driving, ambitious, manipulating, just like the men whose position she has usurped” (129). Thus film alters the established positions of active male and passive female, but is not able to shatter them completely and create something else. When
woman steps into the masculine role and man steps into the passive role, the whole structure is inverted, yet remains in tact (129).

Miriam Hansen provides more insight into the role of the female spectator in her essay, “Pleasure, Ambivalence, Identification: Valentino and Female Spectatorship.” For Hansen, Rudolph Valentino’s films were the first to be explicitly addressed to female spectators, so they deserve historical as well as theoretical consideration. Classical American cinema has always entailed what Mulvey calls the ‘masculinization’ of the spectator, because it operates within a hierarchical system of sexual difference (Hansen 228). Valentino’s films were different because they recognized female experience and fantasies, even if only for commercial exploitation (227). Through an analysis of Valentino’s films and the women who watched them, Hansen raises questions about female spectatorship that have often been ignored by feminist film theory. While other feminist film theorists are weary of enthusiasm regarding a possible female spectator position, Hansen still raises such questions as:

If a man is made to occupy the place of erotic object, how does this affect the organization of vision? If the desiring look is aligned with the position of a female viewer, does this open up a space for female subjectivity and, by the same token, an alternative conception of visual pleasure? (Hansen 231).

Questions like these may be applied more readily to a thus-far uncontested field of study, like female sports spectatorship, and more specifically, female football
spectatorship. Indeed, “The mythic national male subject—outside the reaches of
capital, embodying both nature and history, an elemental agent of progress—is
revealed to be very much an object, made so by desiring gazes…” (78). Chapter 2,
entitled “The Uninvited Look of the Female Spectator” problematizes the idea of the
male subject and female object by applying feminist film theory to female football
spectatorship. The aim of this chapter is to better understand the subject position of the
woman who watches football, and to strive towards being able to label this position as
pleasurable.

Chapter 3, entitled “Cracks in the Hegemony: Violence and Visual Display in
the NFL” examines two football texts—the AFC-NFC Pro Bowl and the NFL Scouting
combine—in order to define the television football spectator and to discover how
football has been shaped by them. As theorists in the realm of masculinities and body
studies have argued, the male football body is perpetually shaped and controlled by
surveillance of coaches, trainers and fans in an effort to make the body comply with
the tenants of hegemonic masculinity. However, ever since the wedding of television
and football, the sport has become a spectacle and the male football body has been
created as an object to be looked at and analyzed, though ostensibly only by men,
whose looks may be desirous, though not dangerously so. According to Morse, “every
look of ‘man at his exhibitionist like’ is transformed into a scientific inquiry into the
limits of human performance” (Kaplan 45). Men, like coaches and trainers, who have traditionally surveilled male football players critique technique, speed, strength, size and scores. Football before television was not a spectacle, but a numbers game. However, the advent of televised football may have caused an unintended shift in the “sexual division of labor in looking” as women, who have always been marginalized in football, are beginning to take a more active role in spectatorship (Kaplan 58). Finally, Chapter 4, entitled “Women and the NFL: Silence and Subordination” examines this active spectator role by looking at secondary football texts, namely female-authored football guidebooks written for a female audience, in order to better understand how the female football spectator is defined by this discourse and to discover ways that this definition, often viewed as demeaning, can be used as a tool for gendered resistance and redefinition in the inherently exclusionary institution of football.
Chapter 2. The Uninvited Look: Female Spectatorship in Football

“...to those of you who are women this will not apply—you are yourselves the problem...”
—Sigmund Freud²

Cracks in hegemonic masculinity, as demonstrated by the perpetuation of violence and visual display in football, provide spaces for redefinition of entrenched gender systems, like football. The violence and visual display inherent in football makes it a latent example of the fallibility of the type of masculinity football perpetuates. Therefore, while football reproduces hegemonic masculinity, it is also a space for divergence, a place for contradiction to male domination. The control of the male football body shows that hegemony rests on one basic principle: people are willing to give in to some powers in order to have others. The male football body is controlled, has violence done unto it and is watched perpetually. It gives in to the power of the coaches and fans in order to have the power that comes with strength and physical success afforded to them.

An important feature of hegemonic masculinity is the exclusion of women, sometimes to the extent of misogyny. Football has long been the realm of men, from players and coaches to owners and fans, America’s favorite game has had few
openings for women participants. However, recent demographic shifts have changed the institution. Currently, no women have every played or coached in the NFL, but more and more women are beginning to participate in football through spectatorship. Nearly forty percent of the audience who tuned in to the 2007 Super Bowl was comprised of women (*NFL’s Female Fan Base Grows*). A game that has long been seen as a masculine pastime is now watched by a large percentage of American women. In fact, the NFL welcomes women fans—even if their willingness to be inclusive is solely based on their bottom line. Indeed the NFL has started to design and sell jerseys and other team paraphernalia made specifically for women. According to a 2006 article in *USA Today*, “Women consumers are snapping up NFLLicensed pastel jerseys, pink caps and other gear designed in the styles, sizes and colors they want.” In 2005, women’s NFL gear generated about fifteen percent of the NFL’s $3.4 billion in total merchandise sales, up from just three percent in 2004 (Chandler).

That there are so many women football fans engaging in the game through consumerism is a note-worthy recent demographic shift. Women fans are asserting their “right” to be fans by forcing the NFL to gear merchandise to them, but are also often relying on display through clothing to assert their fandom. Equally, the line of NFL clothing just for women illustrates the idea that women football spectators and men football spectators are different. Theories of femininity and theories of the image
“assigns to the woman a special place in…representation while denying her access to that system” (Doane 420). Again, though women are allowed and often encouraged to participate in football, they are always told that their ability to watch is not equal to men football spectators.

The discourse that surrounds the recent shift in women football fandom is telling in this respect. Through football seminars geared towards women like Football 101 to books written by women for women fans, like *The Girlfriends Guide to Football*, women fans are told that even though they are watching the game, they do not actually understand it. With the help of the seminars and books, all described as “easy” and “fun,” women are told they will be able to understand the game and thus enjoy it more. Women are also told that because football is a complicated game, they do not have to understand or care about every football detail, but that they should focus on things that peak their interest, like players’ personal lives. Additionally, women are told that learning about football is a good way to spend time with their male family members (who are all ostensibly watching football and are knowledgeable about it, without the aid of books and seminars). Just the ability to “be in the conversation” about sports, women are told, should motivate them to learn to watch and enjoy football. According to the discourse, women do not really know anything about football even though they may be watching it and, ultimately, they are not expected to
learn anything tangible, even when confronted with the information. Football is still the realm of men, and therefore women who are allowed to participate in football through spectatorship are always relegated to the periphery.

In these popular cultural texts, women self-report that they tend to have a somewhat distanced relationship with sports spectatorship. If they see themselves as more engaged sports spectators they self-report that they like to identify with the strength and success of the male athletes, that they enjoy the sexual display, or that they use sports to spend time with male family members. Each football book and weblog geared toward women analyzed in Chapter 4 found women saying similar things about their role as women football spectators.

Is what these women are articulating a true representation of their subject position? Have they articulated all of the potential sites of pleasure in football viewing? Are being able to spend time with male family members, not having to be the “chip and beer lady,” or using your football know-how to get dates or promotions the only possible pleasurable positions for female football viewers? If this were the case, it would seem a sad proposition to entice any women to become informed football viewers. These positions all purport to break gender barriers based on who knows what about football and why they enjoy the sport, but in fact perpetuate them by telling women, “Go ahead, watch football. But men who watch football and women who
watch football are still two very different groups.” Like cheerleaders and women sideline reporters before them, women football fans are only allowed to watch the game from an outside position.

Women are consistently addressed by men and other women as unknowledgeable and somewhat uninterested (in the nuances of the game, at least) viewers who have come late to the game and thus have fallen insurmountably behind. So why do so many women still watch football, with their numbers increasing each season? To begin to answer this question it is necessary to look more closely at how football as an institution and the texts surrounding football determine spectator positions for men and women, as well as how these positions can be deemed either pleasurable and empowering or unpleasant and prohibitive.

Pleasure and Football Spectatorship

One source of pleasurable viewing in football comes from identification with the bodily performance of the athlete; spectatorship is the vicarious enjoyment of sport (Morse 45). Football is a structure within which desire is satisfied through extension of self: the ball is an extension of the quarterbacks arm, the turf an extension of the running back’s legs and the uniforms extensions of all the players’ entire bodies. Football is about the most extreme possibilities of the male body, an extremity reached
through these extensions. The same sort of pleasure through extension of the body is true for football viewers as well. By identifying with the players, by sharing in their triumphs and tribulations, football viewers extend their own bodies by assuming the bodies of the players.

There is another layer of pleasure for the fans that players do not have: fans who watch televised football enjoy a position of privileged viewing. In football, television viewers get to see the game or event in a way that coaches and players never do. With instant replay, reverse camera angles, close-ups and slow motion, football for television viewers is a different text than it is for people watching from the stadium, from the sidelines or from the field itself. This privileged way to look is in itself pleasurable—being able to see something others cannot or seeing the same thing from multiple points of view gives the televisions viewer empowerment derived from pleasure through visual display and spectacle. Fetishism is the pleasure of fascination directed toward a spectacle, and this is another site of pleasure available for viewers of football. The ability to be fascinated with the spectacle of football is increased by instant replay, slow motion, player statistics constantly on the screen, and “add-on” televised football events. These forms of pleasurable viewing, however, are available to spectators across gender lines. Therefore, the questions remains: Are women
football viewers allowed a pleasurable viewing position, only to have to share that position with men football viewers?

Feminist film theorists like Laura Mulvey and E. Ann Kaplan discuss ways of looking in trying to determine pleasurable spaces (or lack thereof) for women viewers in narrative cinema. In the words of Mulvey, fetishistic scopophilia “builds up the physical beauty of the object, transforming it into something satisfying in itself. With voyeurism, on the other hand, the pleasure in looking comes through ascertaining guilt” (42). In discussing the possible pleasures of cinema, Mulvey states “Although the film is really being shown, is there to be seen, conditions of screening and narrative conventions give the spectator an illusion of looking in on a private world” (Kaplan 37-8). This feeling of looking in on a private world gives the spectator pleasure in that they imagine they are seeing something forbidden; their look is uninvited.

Because football is often seen as a univocal text with a homogeneous and passive audience, it is easy to look at spectatorship as non-gendered, to see the spectator as already written into the meaning of the text. However, the text does indeed have more than one meaning and spectators can determine meaning of the text (the increase in women viewers has created a whole new “Football for Females” discourse). Unfortunately, even though their mere presence is changing the text of football, women are often encouraged to adopt a self-effacing subject position. They
are convinced that their interest in football is only peaked by the sexual display of men performing athletic feats in skin-tight uniforms or by the prospect of spending time with male family members. Additionally, women are often denied access to information about the game. Information targeted towards women is often presented in a manner of self-condemnation. Pink covers and qualifying terms like “girlfriend’s” and “female fans” call attention to the fact that these are not “real” (read: men’s) guides to football, but sub-par, superficial guides to only certain, pre-determined aspects of football.

If these spaces are not empowering to women because they encourage them to take a self-effacing position, does that mean that there are no empowering spaces for women football viewers to occupy, except the positions in which they share or take on a male spectatorial role? Certainly, an important part of empowerment is pleasure, so in light of the heretofore detrimental positions women have held in football, it is necessary to look for ways in which women who watch football can experience pleasure through their spectatorial position. In her book *Desire to Desire: The Woman’s Films of the 1940s*, Mary Anne Doane works with the notion that the spectator should not be read as a stable position, but as a process, that is, spectatorship. Doane argues that this redefinition allows for agency for the spectator: women are
position themselves in relation to the discourse of these popular texts, rather than having their position solely determined by the text.

Men have intentionally left women out of football in an attempt to uphold hegemonic masculinity (if it is important that these men (coaches, players, fans) are strong, athletic, tough, violent, it is definitive of their empowered position that they are not women) but by doing so they have created a separate viewing space for women. If women’s role in football is always that of an outsider, then, it is necessary to look at how she can navigate this position on the periphery to create a site for possible pleasurable viewing. Women are told they cannot look—at least not in the same way men do. Therefore, the female position in football viewing is always uninvited—this feeling of looking in on a private world gives the spectator pleasure in that they imagine they are seeing something forbidden. In this case, the voyeuristic pleasure for women football spectators arises from the chance of participating in a way that threatens the culturally specified roles of football participant and football viewer.

This kind of voyeuristic pleasure is not usually associated with non-cinematic forms, like television. Voyeurism requires isolation, as in the darkened theater of cinema; television is often viewed in a social space. The darkened theater of cinema allows the spectator to be isolated from other spectators and permits him/her to see the contrast between his/her own position and the screen. Additionally, narrative cinema
employs a shot-reverse-shot technique, which “eliminate[s] intrusive camera presence and prevent[s] a distancing awareness in the audience” (Mulvey 47). Television does not employ these techniques. However, like the cinema, televised football allows its spectators to look in on secret world by letting them see things from a variety of angles, again in replay and in slow motion—things that are not available to the stadium spectators. In fact, the kind of pleasurable identification present in football spectatorship requires that “the spectator overlooks the distance between the screen and armchair” in order to identify with the image, rather than, like in cinema, revel in the distance between his or her own position and the screen. Voyeurism requires the latter, but pleasurable viewing of televised football rests on the former.

The discourse surrounding women watching football tells us that their viewing is different; therefore, their viewing pleasure is derived from the spectacle in different ways. As the football texts created by women for women show us, women are often not perceived as knowledgeable fans capable of sharing spectatorial positions with men viewers. They are told their pleasure is derived solely from looking at the eroticized male football body and that their knowledge of football is superficial at best. Women assert that they gain pleasure from football viewing by eroticizing the male football body. While this often reads as a superficial attraction to the game and usually others women as football viewers, it actually contributes to the voyeuristic pleasure that
women football viewers can experience. Sexually motivated looks are always voyeuristic because they go against cultural norms. Many women claim that they are only watching for the tight pants, yet sexually explicit looking is never openly encouraged, though it is clearly always possible in football.

Therefore, women football viewers are “othered” and isolated by these texts. Because they are told not to watch or are told that how they watch is wrong (or at least different from how men watch), women football viewers are forced to watch from the periphery. Television viewing, usually perceived as a social act, becomes a clandestine act for the woman football viewer because she is disallowed the act of participating with the rest of the (male) group. “The rigid distinction between either desire or identification, so characteristic of psychoanalytic film theory, fails to address the construction of desires which involve a specific interplay of both processes” (Stacey 464). Female football spectators, therefore, occupy a position that is unique—they both share a space with male football viewers from which they derive scopophilic pleasure and occupy the position of “other,” which affords them voyeuristic pleasure.

Another way to look at the position of female football spectators is to explore how male football spectators are addressed by the discourse of football. According to Margaret Morse, sport is seen as a domain for men only. “Despite the inroad of women as active participants into some spectator sports…and into all sports as spectators…,
sport remains a masculine preserve, a place of ‘autonomous masculinity’” (Kaplan 44). Men are playing, displaying “the perfect machine of a body-in-motion choreographed with others as a vision of grace and power” and other men are watching (44). Therefore, sports are the only situation in which the male body is the legitimate object of the male gaze. Because of this, sports are integral in the perpetuation of hegemonic masculinity. Males gazing at what is perceived to be the perfect image of maleness is necessary to construct and replenish cultural ideas of masculinity. “The masculine can partly look at itself, speculate about itself, represent itself and describe itself for what it is…” (Irigaray qtd. in Doane 425). The scientificity of football (scores, statistics, etc.) defines the objectification of the male body by other men appropriate.

There seems to be a gap in the justification for this gaze, however. There are deep-seeded cultural inhibitions against objectifying the male body, yet the institution of football upholds this objectification. To look at another is a privilege, an instrument of power and possibly a tool of mastery and degradation (Morse 45). Men can be the bearer of the look, but are never supposed to be subjected to the gaze of another. In the words of Mulvey only women, not men, can “connote to-be-looked-at-ness” (40). “In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female” (39). Morse underscores Mulvey’s comments, but also points to the contradictions about objectification apparent in sports. “In a culture where
the female image is proliferated and exchanged among and between both sexes, national spectator sports are the place where the male body image is central, if disavowed” (45).

How then, in a culture that sanctions pleasurable looking at the female form, but prohibits such a gaze to be directed at the male form, is the gaze inherent in spectator sports like football licensed and deemed harmless? Football, as mentioned previously, rests on an intricate web of numbers: scores, statistics, speed and strength are all measured and the information is disseminated to all who watch. Therefore, “every look of ‘man at his exhibitionist like’ is transformed into a scientific inquiry into the limits of human performance” (Morse 45). Because football is based on performance measured quantitatively, the male gaze on the male form is rendered harmless. The male football body, which is looked at and displayed, is not coded for visual and erotic impact, but for visual and scientific impact. Thus, due to this scientificity, the gaze, in other instances seen a tool of degradation, is in fact interpreted as a tool for nurturing and displaying hegemonic masculinity. Yet, television has changed the function of sport in social imagery. It has elevated the importance of the male body by putting it on display to help define and perpetuate hegemonic masculinity. Televised sport is all about displaying the body. Football is a fabricated world—instant replay, slow motion, repetition of plays and varying camera
angles alter time and space—yet it is received as documentary because it is a live event with an unknown outcome. Though the football world may be contrived, it is contrived to a specific ends: to illustrate what it means to fit the masculine mold, who fits that mold and who does not. For those who do not fit the mold, the football apparatus serves to other, to push to the periphery.

There must, then, be a sense of displeasure associated with the male spectator position. While it might be pleasurable initially men to engage in narcissistic scopophilia—looking at the male football body and identifying with it—perhaps there is a sense of inadequacy as well, a sense of not being able to live up to the purported male body ideal, and gauge of success (physical dominance through violence). If women are addressed as not being able to participate as football viewers the same way men do, perhaps part of the pleasure is derived from the fact that they do not have to participate in this unpleasant and threatening association with the male football body. This, then, opens a space for pleasurable female spectatorship in that there is an inherent gap between the image and the (female) spectator. In football, the female spectator maintains the attribute of distances necessary for an adequate and pleasurable reading of the image. This is the relation of the female gaze to the phantasm of male perfection. According to Morse, “The outside status of the female gaze has one significant advantage when it comes to analysis and critique of the imaginary of sport:
it is not included in the same specular reflections in which the male identity is enclosed” (59).

The pleasures described above are aided by texts that address women as outsiders, but they may still cause women to take on a role that outwardly seems empowering and pleasurable, but is in fact disempowering and unpleasant. This is the trap of a multi-voiced text. According to Kaplan, much of our culture rests on “clearly demarcated sex differences, called masculine and feminine” (129). The differences revolve on the gaze apparatus and dominance-submission patterns. When a woman steps out of her role as the powerless, dominated object and into, through representation, the masculine position, the man must then step into her position to keep the whole system intact (129). This role reversal occurs in football, with the male body being dominated and objectified and the female viewer being the voyeuristic spectator fetishizing the male body. However, to maintain the whole system—the football apparatus and hegemonic masculinity—both the male object and the female subject perform, in taking on the role traditionally held by the other, perform an exaggerated form of masculinity and femininity, respectively. In the case of the male football player, he devotes all of time and physical and mental efforts to being “the best”: the fastest, the strongest, the winningest.
Likewise, the female who takes on the position typically defined as masculine (that of the spectator) exaggerates her femininity. Authors of books and weblogs make certain that their readers know that it is not important to understand the game, so long as you enjoy watching it. For the female audience, this pleasure, they are told, is derived from hosting good football parties, knowing the human interest stories behind the game, and deciding who the best looking players are and memorizing their names so that conversation about football with other fans is easier. The authors themselves exaggerate their own femininity further by using qualifying words like “female” and “girlfriend” when referring to the fans they are writing for. They also often include pictures of themselves on the covers of their books and the home pages of their weblogs to assert their femininity, while one author (Robinson Peete) swathes the cover of her book with pink lettering and even wears a pink jersey. However, the overriding way that women who talk about football assert their femininity is by overtly sexualizing their gaze. According to Doane, “The masquerade, in flaunting femininity, holds it at a distance. Womanliness is a mask which can be worn or removed. The masquerade’s resistance to patriarchal positioning would therefore lie in its denial of the production of femininity as closeness, as presence-to-itself, as, precisely, imagistic” (427). Women often qualify their statements about their interest in football and the pleasure they derive from viewing football by declaring that may understand football
and enjoy the game itself, but that they also derive pleasure from looking at handsome, athletic men move across the football field in tight pants. Their gaze is not one of control, nor is it demeaning; rather, the female gaze in football is one that is prohibited; therefore, the pleasure comes from uninvited viewing.

The next chapters construct the female football spectator, first by analyzing primary football texts and secondly by analyzing secondary, female-authored football texts. The former analysis works towards an understanding of the way football constructs and is constructed by the television spectator, while the latter analysis defines the female football spectator as “other.” The two analyses combined—the relationship of the female gaze to the phantasm of male perfection—help to define a pleasurable space from which women can participate in football through spectatorship.
The ability for an athlete to direct his or her body to perform athletic feats is the basis of all sports. Whoever can run faster, hit harder and move quicker is verifiably the superior athlete; in other words, sport, as consumed by the television spectator, is all about the body. American football, as presented by the National Football League, is reliant on a specific type of body with specific physical abilities. To have a “male football body”—one that is strong, quick and capable of engaging in violent acts—means, for most, constant, supervised training. Therefore, not only is football reliant on the physical ability of specific male bodies, it is also dependent on the control of said bodies through regular surveillance. Whether they are being watched by trainers, coaches or fans, football players are constantly under surveillance and on display so that they remain aware of the consequences of not controlling their own bodies in a specific way. The surveillance of the male football body helps it to outwardly exude strength and toughness. However, it also puts the body on display so that it becomes, through television, a text to be dissected over and over again. Every dropped pass and missed tackle is seen multiple times from a variety of angles; each pound over playing weight and percentage of body fat is revealed to as many people as possible. The male football body’s flaws, however, are not its own; they also belong to hegemonic
masculinity. As noted in the introduction, hegemonic masculinity is the reigning type of masculinity in the United States, defined by strength, aggression, and power over any one who does not embody this type of masculinity. Thus football as an institution perpetually displayed both disseminates hegemonic masculinity and reveals that the hegemony is dangerously flawed.

Ultimately, any part of the football season, from the preseason to the Super Bowl, is illustrative of the violence and control perpetuated by the institution of football. Each game pits body against body in a violent display of the kind of masculinity so heavily touted in American society. Football both helps define and is defined by idealized definitions of masculinity. The football season also reminds us of the amount of discipline it takes to live out that definition. The game is not simply played over a few hours on a Sunday afternoon, it is won or lost during Wednesday’s practice or Monday’s weight lifting session. Hegemonic masculinity purports that men should be big, strong, violent and tough, and in football, it is expected that players will constantly work at being bigger, stronger, more violent and tougher in order to succeed. The discipline it takes to achieve this is disguised as self-discipline, but in actuality there is an intricate system of coaches, trainers, owners, teams doctors and fans acting as the driving force behind the extreme work ethic of the average professional football player. Players often report that their lives are not their own:
coaches ensure that they come to practice on time, trainers ensure that they lift the requisite amount of weight, doctors ensure that they abide by the correct diet and owners ensure that they do all of these things for all of these people in order to get paid. The ultimate controllers, then, are the fans, because they are the ones paying for the tickets and the merchandise and affixing their eyes to the television sets, thus ensuring that the perpetual money-making machine that is professional football sustains itself. If it were not for spectators watching them constantly from the stands or on television, the football player would not be compelled to subject himself to the rigors of constant physical and mental control.

Thus, it is not the simple act of looking that has created male football bodies as the object of commodification and admiration. The steady rise in football’s popularity was due to its ever-increasing presence on the televisions of people across America. The first professional football game was televised on October 22, 1939. According to the Pro Football Hall of Fame, “Five hundred-or-so fortunate New Yorkers who owned television sets witnessed the game in the comfort of their own homes…” (Pro Football History). In stark contrast, the 2007 Super Bowl was seen by over 93 million Americans—sixty three percent of all households tuned in. Football is now the most-watched sport in the United States, with nearly one third of the populace naming it as their favorite sport to watch (Chandler). Thus, “image and mythology” of football have
consistently been upheld by “the ubiquitous force of television” (Jirousek 4). 

Televised football, then, is not simply a mirror held up to reflect the image of the “real” game. It is not live football’s double, and one does not precede the other. Signs of the real, to paraphrase Jean Baudrillard, have been substituted for the real itself in modern American society (166). Thus, fans’ notion of what football is and of the images it produces, because they are mediated through television, are not informed by the game itself (as it occurs in the stadium).

The excessive detail that is definitive of the hyperreal is best illustrated by the close-ups, varied camera angles and instant-replays of televised football games. “Televised sports provides superfluous streams of useless information transmitted in pornographic detail: the multiple camera angles…the seamless and confusing blend of live and recorded events (Giulianotti 234-5). However, the artifice of the football broadcast is often concealed. As Murray Pomerance argues in his discussion of sport’s relation to the cinema, the manipulation of the football image through close-ups, replays and varied camera angles is thought of merely as “technical achievements of media producers…” (312), rather than as the “obscene attention to detail” that places televised football within the realm of the hyperreal and mediates the images that fans see. Phil Patton clarifies this idea by arguing, “Television taught its viewers about the game, showing them the large strategies and small dramas of pro football. The only
thing it did not show was just how much the medium had massaged the game into its own shape” (Patton 5). In putting the game on the table for dissection, it also put the football player’s body on display for dissection by the fan (Patton 67). Instant replay—along with reverse angles and close-ups—turned the game into something it never was in the stadium: a text that can be read over and over again from a unique vantage point.

Thus, football is an act, a display, the ultimate spectacle. It rests on a definition of masculinity that is not tangible and it must constantly remake itself on full display. This is evidenced by the violence and display perpetuated by every game of the season. However, a few games stand out as particularly violent and spectacular. The Super Bowl is the game that is most cultural theorists look to when “reading” football. It is by far the most-watched game of the season and takes up the most television airtime, newspaper space and water cooler talk than any other sports event. While the Super Bowl does stand as an important text for analyzing violence and spectacle in professional football, I will not attend to it here. Instead, I will look at the two events that bookend the professional season: the AFC-NFC Pro Bowl and the NFL Combine, held annually in February and April, respectively. The goal of my analysis is to determine how television has shaped the way the game of football is played, as well as how the television spectator is shaped by this new football text.
THE PRO BOWL: A REAL (SPECTACULAR) FOOTBALL GAME

The NFL played its first All Star game in 1939, at the end of the 1938 season. Over the subsequent decades, the game evolved to reflect the growth of America’s two professional football leagues, the American Football League (AFL) and the National Football League (NFL). After the AFL-NFL merger in 1970, the name of the game was officially changed to the AFC-NFC Pro Bowl and since 1971 the game has been played between All-Stars from the American and National Football Conferences. Currently, coaches, players, and fans vote for the players they want to play in the Pro Bowl, with each group’s ballots counting for one third of the vote. This is a relatively new process; prior to 1995 only coaches and players voted for Pro Bowl selections (Pro Bowl).

While NFL players are for the most part honored to be selected to the Pro Bowl and generally fulfill their commitment to play in the game (unless they were injured during the regular season), popular opinion holds that the game is usually “softer” than a regular season NFL game and that the players tend to play at “half-speed.” Unlike All-Star games in other professional leagues like Major League Baseball and the National Basketball Association—both played mid-season, the former with post-season ramifications—the outcome of the Pro Bowl does not have regular season implications, yet, and perhaps because of this difference, its implications regarding masculinity and
the spectacle of sport are more far reaching than in the two other aforementioned professional sports.

At the beginning of the 2007 Pro Bowl, CBS commentator Greg Gumble reminded television viewers of this when he said, “There is really nothing on the line today.” Gumble’s remarks serve as a reminder that the game tends to be viewed as a media spectacle and a fun get-together for players who are normally pitted against one another in violent contests in which it seems like everything is on the line. The idea that the game is not hard-hitting may not be completely true, however. As commentators and ex-NFL stars Dan Dierdorf and Phil Simms explained before the 2007 Pro Bowl, “football is not a game to be played at half-speed.” In other words, the very nature of the game dictates violence, hard hitting and competitiveness. The game that followed these remarks provided two examples of what Dierdorf and Simms were trying to explain. In the 2007 Pro Bowl Washington Redskins safety Sean Taylor laid a crushing blow on Buffalo Bills punter Brian Moorman during an attempted fake punt and New Orleans Saints quarterback Drew Brees dislocated his left elbow.

So, whether or not the Pro Bowl is played “soft”, it is still football. On the surface, it does not look that different from a normal professional football game. The camera loves the quarterback, hard hits and mistakes are shown again and again in excessive detail, and the tight, front-on angle shot of the offensive line is still the most
common, as we would see in a regular season game. Midway through the second quarter of the 2007 Pro Bowl, Quarterback Mark Bulger moved outside of the pocket and was attempting to throw on the run when the ball slipped from his hand. The incident, ruled a fumble, could have had greater ramifications, but because Bulger quickly fell on the ball, the play simple went for no gain. The television crew, however, decided to replay the mishap over and over again, in slow motion, so that the audience at home knew exactly the anatomy of the misfortune, despite the fact that the play was relatively meaningless.

All the while, the commentators were reminding television viewers how the Pro Bowl is unlike the regular season. For instance, during the regular season teams wipe each football before it is used in play to get rid of the slick residue on the ball’s surface. During the Pro Bowl, the two squads do not do this because each play does not carry as much weight as during the regular season. Thus, the plays matter enough for them to be shown over and over again in pornographic detail to the television audience, but they do not matter enough for the teams to wipe down the game balls in order to avoid fumbles like Bulger’s. All of the rule and habit changes in the Pro Bowl seem to make the game less technically sounds, but more visually interesting, and thus more appropriate for television. Despite the fact that it does not have regular season implications, the Pro Bowl is a successful television endeavor watched by millions of
people because audiences are drawn to the possibility of seeing a spectacular
touchdown, a costly fumble, or a violent tackle. Audiences like to watch events that
they are not supposed to see; the big hits and the fumbles bring an otherwise
inconsequential game back to football relevance.

Because it is a game for the sake of a game, there is something inherently
flashy about the Pro Bowl; it is a self-referential spectacle perpetuated by the ubiquity
of television. Television adds layers of meaning to the average football game with
instant replays, slow motion and reverse camera angles. Yet there are even more
technological visual and audio gimmicks in the Pro Bowl. For instance, the camera
roams the field at the level of the players, allowing television viewers to go inside the
huddle with the offensive squad and hear the calls that the quarterback makes. The
viewer is also able to hear the calls that the coaches deliver from the sidelines to the
speaker in the quarterback’s helmet, a privilege not afforded to spectators during the
rest of the season when games “count.” These gimmicks are a way to attract more
viewers to a self-proclaimed meaningless game, but they also reveal the
constructedness of the football apparatus. Each and every moment of a supposedly
spontaneous event is contrived and the devices used by television to bring the game
into the viewer’s home openly advertise this.
In fact, in the Pro Bowl the gimmicks spill outside of the game itself. The Pro Bowl Skills challenge takes the “game” out of the game of football and instead pits players against players in skills challenges—drills that showcase what they do best whether that be throwing, running or kicking. The Skills Challenge, a two hour televised event that airs on the eve of the Pro-Bowl, began in 2005. Additionally, highlights of the Skills Challenge are replayed during halftime of the Pro-Bowl game. The Challenge is touted by the NFL as a way for the best players and biggest stars to showcase their skills and the improvements they have made over the last season.

The competition is split up into several different position-specific events: Best Kicker, which pits the best kickers from the AFC and NFC against one another to see who has the strongest, most accurate leg; the Strongest Man competition, which requires competitors to bench press 225 pounds as many times as possible; On the Mark, a challenge which tests quarterbacks accuracy and arm strength; Best Hands, a test of which wide receiver can catch the most balls; Fastest Man, a contest which usually pits running backs, wide receivers and return men in a foot race to see who sprints the fastest; and finally, an Open Field Obstacle Course, which sets the purported best overall athletes against one another in a challenge that requires them to run fast, be strong, and throw accurately. The final challenge, the Alumni Air It Out competition, pits former NFL players against one another in a game of flag football in
an effort to prove that despite injury, weight gain and retirement, they are still highly skilled football players.

In addition to the television gimmicks, the Pro Bowl is played slightly differently from a regular season or playoff game. These changes accentuate the spectacle. The league changes the rules somewhat on the premise that such changes will bring about high-scoring, exciting games and prevent the NFL’s stars from getting hurt (of course, major injuries are not unheard of). With the rule changes, defensive players do not have to work or think as hard and are barred from using formations that during the regular season would cause more turnovers and prevent offensive scoring.

The offense is not allowed to shift or use motion, a tactic that normally causes the defense to have to think on their feet. Intentional grounding, a penalty that would normally cause the loss of downs because of a quarterback’s mistake, is not called. On the defensive side of the ball, teams are only allowed to run a 4-3 defense, as opposed to a 3-4 defense, the latter of which allows for one more linebacker in the flat and subsequently fewer completed passes. There is no blitzing allowed in the Pro Bowl, as to protect the quarterback from injury, no bump and run coverage, to allow wide receivers to run their routes less inhibited. Finally, nickel and dime packages are not allowed—five and six defensive back, respectively—a rule that also allows wide receivers to get open more often and thus catch more passes. Additionally, referees are
not allowed to review controversial plays with instant replay, a boon to many teams during the regular season. All of these rule changes are not controlled with penalties; rather, a team that breaks one of them is simply accused of cheating, with no ramifications save a slightly tarnished Pro Bowl reputation and mild-mannered ribbing from the opposing team. Indeed, the adage that the game does not matter is revealing here. In a season of wins and losses, records and statistics, the Pro Bowl plays no role.

The signs all point to the idea that this is not a “real” game; the score does not matter, the statistics do not matter and some of the most basic rules of professional football are not adhered to. On top of that, things happen visually and audibly for the viewer at home that would not happen in a “real” game: we can follow the quarterback inside the huddle and while in there with him and we can hear his play calling. For viewers, then, the Pro Bowl is often thought of as a game that is not real, a game that does not mean anything in the ways that other games played during the regular and post-seasons (and even the pre-season) do. This game is merely the “finishing touch” on an exciting and meaningful season. On top of the statistical and outcome meaninglessness, the contention is that the game is played at half speed and that the hits are “soft.” However, from a player’s perspective, everything about the game is real. As alluded to by the color commentators during the 2007 Pro Bowl, football is not a game to be played at half speed. The players still wear their uniforms and
equipment—virtual armor consisting of helmets, shoulder pads, cleats, mouth guards—and because they have all the protection they do during other games, the hits can be just as hard and slow-motion and instant replay-invoking as ever. For many players, there is still a sense of pride tied to the Pro Bowl. For instance, the commentators noted that especially the offensive line views this game as real football because if they decide to play at half speed and a defensive lineman sacks the quarterback, they will be embarrassed (and potentially have allowed the quarterback to get hurt). Thus, there is an inherent willingness towards bodily violence and injury in football, even in a game whose outcome does not matter.

A hit on Buffalo Bills punter Brain Moorman near the end of the third quarter of the 2007 Pro Bowl illustrates the violence that is inherent in the Pro Bowl, simply because it is football. On fourth down, Moorman was lined up to boot the ball away, but when he received the snap he moved outside of the tackles and began to run up the sideline towards the first down marker. A few steps into his journey, Washington Redskins safety Sean Taylor flew through Moorman’s would-be blockers and in one fluid motion laid his shoulder into the punter and drove him to the ground. Moorman lay still for a moment, but then rose to his feet, unscathed. CBS replayed the hit several times and then after a commercial break replayed it again, but this time with the commentary of a Japanese television crew covering the game. The CBS commentators
reassured the television audience that this would indeed be the most replayed highlight of the game, pointing both to the fact that the Pro Bowl tends to be lackluster and that football viewers love to see players get “jacked up.”

It is sometimes assumed that professional football players willingly sustain injuries week after week in the pursuit of a win for the team without being aware of the long term effects on their bodies. Several football anecdotes serve to espouse this assumption. For instance, Ronnie Lott, a Hall of Fame safety, once had an injured finger that would not heal. Instead of having surgery, which would have forced him to miss a game, Lott decided to have the finger amputated. Similarly, as the quarterback for Marshall in 2002, Byron Leftwich (currently with the Jacksonville Jaguars) broke his leg during a contest against Akron. With his team trailing, Leftwich decided to return to the game despite the debilitating injury. For the rest of the contest, two of Marshall’s offensive linemen carried Leftwich between plays on several series as he rallied his team to a 17-point comeback.

There is evidence, however, that some players are aware of the excessively violent and injurious nature of their game. New York Giant’s running back Tiki Barber retired in 2007 after playing in the Pro-Bowl. During the game, Barber was interviewed by CBS commentator and ex-NFL player Shannon Sharpe on the sidelines. Sharpe mentioned that Barber has always been strong in his conviction to retire at the
end of the 2007 season, no matter what. Barber responded by saying that the game was starting to beat him up a little and that he was really seeing the wear and tear on his body. Even though Barber had played 10 years—much longer than the NFL average of three and a half years—he clearly was aware of the fact that he was putting his body through a lot of unnecessary abuse. Sharpe responded to Barber’s comments by saying, “It takes a rare, special man to walk away fro the game at the height of it.” Sharpe’s comments reveal that while Barber may we aware that success on the field does not always outweigh the negative impact on one’s body, he is going against standard practice in the NFL by putting the health of his body first and on-field success second.

As is evidenced by what happened to another player during the Pro Bowl—New Orleans Saints quarterback Drew Brees—it is often expected that injuries and pain will not quell a player’s desire to continue playing. Brees was felled after a hard hit from lineman Terrell Suggs, and as a result dislocated the elbow on his non-throwing arm. Brees was carted to the locker room for x-rays and did not attempt a heroic return to the game. However, the comments made by the booth crew after learning that Brees’ injury was not a more serious break, but merely a dislocation, reveal that injuries and pain are seen as part of the game. As they do not threaten the player’s ability to contribute to his team’s success, they are labeled trivial. The booth commentators expressed relief that the injury was only a dislocation without a fracture.
Dan Dierdorf explained that the elbow had simply popped back in place, and that everything would be fine. Brees would be unable to use his arm for only six to eight weeks. It is doubtful that the injury Brees sustained during the Pro Bowl will effect his ability to practice with his team during their first mini-camp in May or to play with his team come the 2007 season; if it did, news of the injury would be much more pervasive and the commentators would have been much less willing to define it as inconsequential.

The rule changes and television gimmicks reveal that the Pro Bowl is not significant in the way that other professional football games are significant, yet it is just as violent game. They also reveal that hegemonic masculinity, as illustrated by football, must put itself on display as often as possible in order to sustain itself. If the type of masculinity perpetuated by American football were perfect and true, then ostensibly the game would not be as violent and displayed as it is. Indeed, the season would end with a game that actually matters (at least in the football world), not the over-the-top, violence for the sake of violence “contest” that is the AFC-NFC Pro Bowl. The fragility of the entire system, its need to become ever more displayed and ever more violent, is illustrated absolutely by the inconsequential game that is the Pro Bowl.
Players in the NFL are faced with their “numbers” everyday. They, and anyone else interested, know exactly how many yards they have run or how many passes they have completed or how many tackles they have recorded in any single game, any season or over their entire career. They also know where they stand, numbers-wise, compared to every other NFLer who has ever played. In addition to these statistics, players are confronted daily with how much they weigh, how tall they are, how fast and strong they are and, at times, their body fat percentage. Rarely is a players name listed at the bottom of the television screen without being accompanied by his height, weight, position, and any other cumulative statistics that are relevant at the time (see passes completed, yards, run and tackles recorded). These numbers tend to blend into the text of the game; though they are extraneous pieces of information, they are usually seen as an integral part to immersing oneself in the game as a spectator. This is the information that the sincere fan craves, because football is nothing is not a game of numbers (yards gained, points scored, games won).

One place where the numbers are not about a specific game at all, but are instead part of what color commentator and ex-NFL coach John Madden calls one of the most important events in football, second only to the Super Bowl: The NFL Draft. Each year, the NFL’s 32 teams get together in mid-April and add to their rosters by
choosing from the nation’s best college players. The draft process, however, begins long before April each year with the NFL Combine in February. The NFL Combine is a six-day event, held annually at the RCA Dome in Indianapolis, Indiana. Every year, several hundred college juniors and seniors are invited by the NFL to come to Indianapolis to work out in front of coaches, trainers, scouts and doctors from each NFL team. The invitation is based on the cumulative opinion of coaches and scouts from around the NFL and means an opportunity for college players to show off their football skills, strength and size in hopes of being drafted by—and subsequently signing a lucrative contract with—an NFL team.

The NFL Combine started in 1982 as a way for teams to ascertain medical information about the top draft-eligible college football players. Today, the main purpose of the Combine is still gathering medical information, but it has also evolved into a six-day event that invites around 300 of college’s best players to perform drills, lift weights, run the 40 yard dash, take intelligence tests and conduct themselves in interviews with coaches from the league’s 32 teams. The invited players have been watched by team scouts since early in their college careers—game film has been poured over, injuries cataloged—and while they will be watched again at their upcoming NFL Pro Days (held at each university around the country), these 300 or so players come to Indianapolis to prove that they are worthy of being drafted. According
to Richard Whittingham, author of *The Meat Market: The Inside Story of the NFL Draft*, “They [the players] know that what comes of this three-day (*sic*) pageant may well determine if they’ll have a job in the business of playing football next year and, if they do, just how many numbers will be behind the $ on their salaries” (47-8).

Recently, the NFL Combine has become something else as well: a television event. In November of 2003, the NFL Network—a year-round television channel fully owned and operated by the NFL—was launched. According to the network:

> It [the network] is every football fans dream. Seven days a week, 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, a television network solely devoted to the most popular sport in America, professional football. NFL Network is a destination for all that happens around the league, on and off the field—during the season and throughout the offseason.

The NFL Network provides football fans with the opportunity to watch events they have not been able to see before. The network has 32 “Team Cams” at each team’s facility. In addition to board meetings and workouts, fans are able to watch one other event that has never been open to them in the past: the NFL Combine. In February of 2004, the NFL Network began exclusive coverage of the Combine, allowing fans to watch everything from weigh-ins and drills to in-depth examination from the network’s analysts for the first time. The NFL Network broadcasts a full 27 hours of NFL Combine coverage.  

If a fan is interested in watching the Combine, s/he does not have to miss a single drill or weight lifting session. By the end of the six-day Combine, it is possible
to know which running back ran the fastest 40 yard dash, which lineman lifted 225 pounds the most times, each players height, weight and body fat percentage, and even how each player conducts himself in front of the media. This information is not left for the coaches and trainers to decipher alone, as it once was, but is now in the realm of the media and fans as well. Football is no longer a game played for a few hours on Sundays in front a stadium crowd, but, for many, a year-round obsession fed by incessant mediated images of players and information about what they can do with their bodies.

The NFL Combine, like televised NFL games, perpetuates images of violent strong men competing against one another for the right to play the game successfully. These images help define hegemonic masculinity in American society. However, unlike the games, which attempt to mask greater societal intentions by putting forth the football adage, “Winning isn’t everything, it’s the only thing,” the Combine makes no such attempt. True, teams base some of their draft decisions on the information they obtain from the Combine, but as San Francisco 49ers Head Coach Mike Nolan explains, “We are not playing any football out there, it is just drills…getting on the field and running around in your shorts solidifies some things about guys athletically, but it’s just a piece of information” (NFL Network Feb. 25, 2007).
If the potential draftees are not playing football, what are they doing? At the Combine, players are first separated into groups based on position. Each group has a day devoted to on-field drills; the rest of their time at the camp is devoted to doing things off the field like interviews and medical examinations. While each group performs position-specific on-field drills (the wide receivers run, among other things, the “Gauntlet,” while offensive lineman run three-cone drills and the 20 yard shuttle), each of the over 300 players that work out at the Combine complete the same speed, strength and jumping tests. No matter their position, if they choose to work out at the Combine, players will run the 40-yard dash, bench press 225 pounds as many times as possible, perform a vertical jump and a standing long jump. The drills and tests are performed in the name of testing speed, strength, reaction, toughness, quickness and power, but the teams and analysts readily admit that certain tests just do not test the skills required for certain positions. For instance, offensive lineman—players who will never, except in extremely rare instances of strategic failure, need to run more than a few yards in a game—run the 40-yard dash. NFL Network commentator and former Kansas City Chiefs’ Coach Dick Vermeil explained that it is quickness in the first ten yards that coaches are looking for in these players, but that they run the full 40 yards anyway because teams “just want to know” that a player can run fast. Additionally, while successful quarterbacks need substantial arm strength, the type of strength tested
in a bench press does not translate into throwing strength. Yet, at the Combine, quarterbacks perform the bench press anyway. Additionally, when a player does exceptionally well in a drill that is not pertinent to his position, like Notre Dame quarterback Brady Quinn who bench-pressed 225 pounds 24 times (more than some lineman), comments and visual analyses from the network become ubiquitous.

That the drills are somewhat arbitrary is evidenced by the fact that many players spend their off-seasons being coached on how to perform the drills. If the drills correlated directly to football skills, ostensibly the players would not need to spend the off season practicing them, because they would have spent the entire season honing these skills in games and practices. According to the NFL Network, “You work on these drills from the day the season ends. You can work on your technique. You can practice the drill” (NFL Network Feb. 25 Broadcast). In fact, players can get professional training to prepare for the Combine. A company called The Cutting Edge specializes in the athletic performance enhancement and specifically trains football players for Combine drills. According to the company, “Not only do we prepare you for these specific tests, we specialize your program to maximize your individual needs. Six to twelve weeks at our Southern California training center can make the difference in draft selection and thousands of dollars” (NFL Combine/Pro Day Training). For players who have already played football for a decade or more and spent years training
their bodies to perform specific football skills, it seems excessive to spend months preparing for a one-day workout. On the one hand, teams are telling players that the drills are only a small piece of the information used to rank them in draft order, yet players are still inundated with conflicting information telling them that this could be one of the most important days in their football careers.

Despite the fact that, often, these drills and tests are not a reflection of actual football skill, the NFL Network still makes viewers feel as though the outcomes are imperative. The screen is consistently filled with information regarding the athletes’ performances. The network uses an on-screen graphics panel that highlights top results in test and conducts interviews with players after each drill. One analyst, Mike Mayock, also provides his “Top 5 Picks” for each position, lists that shift during the Combine to reflect how players are performing. When the graphics panel is not on the screen, NFL Network runs a ticker at the bottom of the screen listing 40-yard dash times and vertical jump scores. Viewers are inundated with information telling them who is the best at everything: the fastest running back, the highest jumping receiver, and the strongest lineman. By the end of the event, there should be no question as to who is number one in each position, based on the numbers. 10

Much like during NFL games (including the aforementioned Pro Bowl) the camera is everywhere at the Combine. The NFL uses its own cameras to record each
drill, each running of the 40-yard dash, each player weigh-in so that the league has a record of each player in attendance. Once the Combine is over, the 32 NFL teams each get a copy of the tape, which they add to the player’s profile and usually watch several times. In addition to the NFL cameras, the NFL Network has a number of cameras recording the event, including a “Cable Cam” which hovers above the field, moving from drill to drill to provide another perspective of the event. Like in NFL games, there is a constant mix of live and recorded materials; analysts look at certain drills any number of times, especially if a player has done exceptionally well or made a mistake. These images are also interspersed with images from past Combines, current NFL stars and the college players’ game film. The whole broadcast provides for a cacophonous display—it is hard to tell what drills are going on when (many things happen simultaneously). Not being able to construct a linear order of events is not necessary to understand what is going on at the Combine, however, because what matters is the result of each event. Who performed the best and worst in each event is always made known, whether those players performed first or last, or somewhere in between. This penchant towards non-linearity, then, shows us that the televised version of the Combine is pure spectacle.
THE MALE FOOTBALL BODY ON DISPLAY

Analysts are much more likely during the Combine to comment on what a player looks like and how he uses his body size and shape to perform the athletic feats required of him. In games, the plays themselves, players’ playmaking abilities (or lack there of) and the final outcome are much more likely to garner comments than are the size and shape of specific players (though this is not unheard of). During the Combine, however, rarely does a player escape scrutiny of his physical appearance, nor does he expect to escape it. Players who attend the Combine know they are going to be watched constantly.

The Combine begins with the requisite measuring of height, weight and body fat percentage. For this, the players wear only their underwear as they parade in front of a room full of team representatives and television cameras. No information is hidden at the weigh-in. For instance, Louisiana State University quarterback JeMarcus Russell came to the 2007 Combine just to get weighed and measured (like most quarterbacks, he opted out of the workouts in favor of working out only at his Pro Day). After the weigh-in, the NFL Network’s Charles Davis confronted him about his weight: “You came in here, you did get measured, you did get weighed, you weighed in at 265. Did you expect to weigh that? By our accounts, that is about five pounds more than your playing weight” (NFL Network Feb. 25 Broadcast). Clearly, players
are confronted regularly with their “numbers;” at the Combine, the NFL is watching all the time, and now so are the media and fans.

Often, interest lies not only in the numbers, but in aesthetics. How players look, how they move and how they carry their bodies are analyzed qualitatively both by coaches watching the Combine live and later by teams reviewing the tape. The analysts draw the viewers’ attention to the bodies in motion on the field in a way that goes beyond quantitative speed and strength. Comments like, “He looks like a track guy, he has that track build” seem benign, even laudatory, but in fact serve as another way to grade players. The “non-measurables” often influence teams’ decisions in the draft as much as (and sometimes more so) the quantitative skills.

NFL Network commentators often use metaphors and similes to talk about how the players are performing. Attributing qualities of inanimate objects to players is usually done in a admiring manner, but can also serve to undermine athletes’ work ethic, attributing the skills instead to natural ability. In this way, players are objectified. For instance, when different groups of players were performing on-field drills or running the 40-yard dash, the NFL Network’s commentators referred to several different players in the following ways:

- “He pulled a ham. Seems like be blew a tire right there.”
- “This kid’s got vines for arms!”
- “Where did that truck come from?!?”
“His motor was inconsistent in college. He had eight cylinders and ran on seven.”

“Jarvis Moss is smooth. He’s like butter.”

“This guy is a gazelle. Real smooth, just like a Rolls Royce.”

By referring to players as though they are objects, the commentators help to illustrate the “displayedness” of the male football body. The Combine provides one more venue where they male football can be both lauded for its super-humanness and critiqued for its shortcomings.

The commentators continue this objectification by attributing certain body shapes to certain abilities and positions. During the bench press, the commentators referred to a lineman as “one of those short-armed guys with a barrel chest. That’s why it looks like he is lifting a piece of balsa wood right now.” Often commentators feel that the most effective way to describe certain desirable skills is by dehumanizing the players who posses them. When the offensive lineman were running an on-field drill, the NFL Network’s Charles Davis said, “You want to see a guy whose feet work like a sewing machine. Just pitter-pat, that smooth, fluid motion.” By describing the player’s ability in terms of objects, instead of in terms of acquired bodily skill, the commentators are again reducing these multi-faceted players to the status of a simple
object. Again, this reinforces the idea that the Combine and other televised events rest on the display of bodies to perpetuate myths about definitions of masculinity.

Comments about specific body parts work to dehumanize the players; they become their body parts instead of a complex, unified whole person. For instance, one commentator noted, “It seems like they all have that common denominator: big, powerful thighs—not big calves—but certainly big thighs and that buttocks area. That is your position of power: your butt, your thighs and your hams.” While another noted, referring to player who could not catch, “He’s got hands like feet.” Some comments fetishize a certain type of male body, a practice that makes the Combine even more spectacular, even more overtly about the display of the male football body. When Arkansas cornerback Chris Houston was going through the requisite weigh-in (in his underwear) the NFL Network’s Jamie Dukes remarked, “Oh, gosh. Look at that body! Nothing short of sensational.”

Like the Pro Bowl, the outcome of especially the on-field drills of the NFL Combine have a minimal effect on the upcoming football season—team representatives often admit that the on-field drills and tests mean very little (teams are most interested in the results of the medical exams). Yet there is a sense of centrality that surrounds the somewhat arbitrary drills and tests. An anecdote about running back Adrian Peterson of Oklahoma, a top prospect and one of the best performers at the
Combine, illustrates this. Near the end of the running backs’ workout day, the NFL Network learned that Peterson’s brother had been shot and killed the night before, yet Peterson decided to participate in the Combine anyway. “He came out and got it done. That is mental toughness.” The analyst’s comments point to the fact that though much of what Peterson did at the Combine was relatively inconsequential (he was already a top prospect) it is viewed as admirable to work through adversity even when the outcome does not matter.

That the NFL Combine is televised makes it comparable to the Pro Bowl and other televised football events in that it illustrates the pervasiveness of images and information of violence and bodily performance. Both events work to make sure all who see them know how big, fast, strong and tough these men are, even though the images that perpetuate this are already pervasive in the league’s 16-game season, the playoffs and the Super Bowl. The football season spills out of what was once a neat block of time on the annual calendar—from September to January—and now has some kind of images and information to provide to football fans 365 days a year, 24 hours a day (incidentally, one of the NFL Network’s slogan is “Football.24.7”). Indeed, the owner of the Indianapolis Colts, Jim Irsay noted that the NFL Network’s coverage has had a major impact on the Combine. “It has become a major event. Any time there is
interest in our game it is a good thing. Back in the 1980s there were about three reporters at Combines; now there are 325.”

The mediated image of the strong, athletic, violent football player has become all the more prevalent with the broadcasting of the NFL Combine. It seems that nothing about football players is unknown. The media tells us that it is vital that we do know everything, despite the fact that the NFL has sustained itself for decades without televising the Combine. Perhaps we can see, then, that it is not about sustaining the money-making entity known as the NFL, but rather about perpetuating the definition of masculinity, typified by the men who play in the NFL. Hegemonic masculinity sustains itself by always putting some type of person on top, and by letting that type define who fits their definition and who does not. The NFL Combine lets us see who is “number one” by constantly confronting us with numbers and statistics. And numbers, we are told, do not lie. With quantitative information easily at hand, we can better judge who fits the mold and who does not, as well as continually set new standards for what it means to be the best, the most masculine.

The more venues there are to measure masculinity, the easier it is to perpetuate the myth. With a critical eye, however, we can see that more venues mean more uncertainty. Burdened with defining a fallible concept, football works overtime fill in the cracks inherent in hegemonic masculinity. Since the inception of the NFL, events
and coverage of those events have been added on a regular basis, including regular season games, bye-weeks to lengthen the season, extra play-off spots to lengthen the post season, and an extra week between the NFC and AFC Championship games, the Super Bowl and, of course, the Pro Bowl and the NFL Combine. Marketing dollars and demand from fans are motivating factors, but perpetuating images of football is even more vital to the maintenance of hegemonic masculinity. The more opportunities football has to beam these images into viewers’ homes, the more likely that hegemonic masculinity will be sustained.

Images of the male football body are pervasive. The preceding discussion looked at how and why these images are so ubiquitous, a ubiquity that demonstrates the bodily display inherent in the spectacle of televised football. The next step to understanding the football apparatus in terms of gender is looking at who is seeing these televised images and how they are being addressed, especially in terms of their gender. Chapter 4 will explore the ways in which female football fans are addressed and how women who watch football address each other. This exploration is an attempt to look for heretofore-unexplored pleasurable spectatorial positions for women, as well as to reveal the ways in which football constructs the informed and contented football spectator as male.
Chapter 4. WOMEN AND THE NFL: SILENCE AND SUBORDINATION

As football spectators, women are often addressed as ignorant girlfriends, wives, friends, daughters, sisters and mothers of all-knowing male viewers. The assumption is that at least some of these women may appear intent on learning more about the game and participating in viewing, but their true motivation is either to spend quality time with their male family members and friends, or to stare drop-jawed at 22 in-shape men who have been poured into skin tight spandex. In the face of stereotypes, women comprised forty percent of the 2007 Super Bowl audience, a number that has risen steadily over the past few years. Football may be a man’s game, but women certainly are watching. Are they simply enablers of male-domination, or women seeking to derive pleasure from looking at the spectacle of football and the displayed male football body? That there is high percentage of women watching a game that was once the domain of men only is worthy of exploration. Like the violence and display inherent in football discussed in the previous chapter, that there are women participating in football through spectatorship is evidence of inherent flaws in the hegemony and a possible site for redefinition of an entrenched gender practice.

Football genders its spectators by how it addresses them, but also by how it allows them to participate. In the NFL, women play only two roles: sideline reporters
and cheerleaders. Even when they are inside the institution of football, women are told that their position is always that of an outsider. Women sideline reporters are often known better for their good looks than their football know-how. In this way they are objectified and are disallowed the authority to participate in the discourse. Woman is allowed to speak only from a “radically external vantage”—the sidelines. The visual is privileged in western society as a way of obtaining knowledge. As Maggie Humm argues in *Feminism and Film*, “It is a commonplace of cultural theory that contemporary culture privileges ‘sight’ as a primary mechanism of knowledge and as a primary medium of communication” (39). Just as physical restraint was replaced by a “regime of observation” in Bentham’s panopticon, contemporary culture operates within the same kind of scopic regime. Thus, the gaze is a crucial instrument for control not only in narrative cinema, which operates like the panopticon, but for culture as a whole as well. In all of her actions, woman is under the control of the gaze; there is no need to physically restrain her because the gaze automatically restrains her to a position, which lacks authority. “The subjectivity assigned to femininity within patriarchal systems is inevitable bound up with the structure of the look and the localization of the eye as authority” (Doane and Mellencamp 7).

Sideline reporting is now commonplace in all NFL broadcasts, with mostly women performing that role. Sideline reporters comment on many aspects of the
game, ranging from player injuries to interviews with coaches to commentary on
players. Although there are male sideline reporters, it is more common in the NFL
today for women to hold that position. Women such as Suzy Kolber, Pam Oliver and
Sam Ryan have taken up the reigns as the preeminent sideline correspondents,
providing intelligent and constructive commentary to the broadcasts. While their
success can be seen as a positive model for women who may want to break the
proverbial glass ceiling in sports reporting, the exclusion of these women from the
play-by-play booth provokes a review of the social and psychological issues in play.
On the one hand, her role is one that is meant to impart a positive image for women,
yet the overarching goal of the production of the broadcast is meant to convey the
traditional values of patriarchy. Therefore, while the woman’s role as sideline reporter
appears to be positive at first glance, the underlying message is that woman is still
“other” and forced to live outside of the male narrative.

In her essay, “Disembodying the Female Voice,” Kaja Silverman affords us
another ideal analytical tool for examining women reporters on the sidelines of
professional football games. Silverman proposes that women are denied an active role
in the discourse. This is evident in the female sideline reporter’s exile from the booth;
she is not allowed to participate in the discourse that the play-by-play announcers take
part in. Conversely, by his participation in the discourse, the male announcer is
allowed to occupy a space of linguistic authority, thus confining the female sideline reporter to a safe place within the story. If this is the case, it is easy to understand much of the animosity voiced about the role of women in sideline reporting. During an interview on the Boomer Esiason Show in 2002, *60 Minutes* commentator Andy Rooney put his views this way:

> The only thing that really bugs me about television’s coverage is those damn women they have down on the sidelines who don’t know what the hell they’re talking about. I mean, I’m not a sexist person, but a woman has no business being down there trying to make some comment about a football game (The Boomer Esiason Show. MSG Network October 4, 2002)

The validity of Silverman’s argument is revealed in this quote as the female sideline reporter is referred to both positively—physical beauty—and negatively—lack of knowledge.

Silverman’s assertion is that the female voice is always matched with the female body translates into the male voice-over representing power and being transcendent. If the female sideline reporter is relegated to reporting only while she is on screen, as is often the case, logic follows that the male announcer in the booth is the holder of the power. In his position of power, a disembodied position, he becomes a symbolic father, a voice of authoritative knowledge who by way of his voice-over achieves invisibility and omniscience. The female sideline reporter, on the other hand,
becomes associated with unreliability. Thus, women are allowed to participate in the
isolation of football as cheerleaders and sideline reporters only to be undermined. 12

Similarly, the NFL puts forward the notion that women are welcome in football as spectators by creating workshops and websites created “just for women.” The short-lived “NFL for Her”—a website tied to NFL.com—provided its female readers with information about player’s wives, community events sponsored by the NFL (especially fundraisers for breast cancer research), and the “basics” of professional football, endearingly referred to as Football 101 (in other words, remedial football). There is no longer a website called NFL for her, but the subsequent site that the NFL specifically targets towards women includes a stripped-down version of the NFL rulebook, sections called “Football Basics” and “NFL for Beginners,” as well as cartoon illustrations of NFL referee’s official signals.

To welcome women into the ranks of loyal fans, the NFL developed “Football 101” yearly workshops held by teams around the country. Women are invited to attend Football 101 to spend a day learning about football, meeting players and coaches, and touring facilities. Most teams that hold such workshops use them as fundraisers for “women’s issues” like breast cancer research and awareness. The Green Bay Packers hold a Football 101 workshop annually and donate all money raised from tickets to the Packers Women’s Association. 13 The Packers describe the event as: “An interactive
and entertaining event geared for women to learn the basics of football...The day’s activities include a welcome reception, a general lecture about football, an equipment demonstration, a question-and-answer session with wives of Packers players, coaches and other personnel, an autograph session and drills with Packers players....” The event tends to be a light-hearted affair and provides attendees with only a few hours of actual football information. The rest of the time is devoted to autograph sessions and meetings with player’s wives. Rarely is the event hosted by the team’s big name stars; instead, the women are usually instructed by the likes of third-string quarterbacks and rookie defensive linemen, who are ostensibly feminized, subjugated men.

The Oakland Raiders also hold a Football 101 Workshop, similar to the one the Packer’s and other teams around the league hold. The Raiders invite women from all over the country and use the event to raise money for breast cancer research. Like the workshop held by the Packers, the Raider’s workshop tends to be a short affair, dedicated more to raising money than teaching women about football. During the 2006 Football 101 Workshop, Raiders Safeties Stuart Schweigert and Jarrod Cooper reportedly “stole the show” with an explanation of special teams. The safeties used video footage from previous Raiders games to perform a *comical account* of special teams formations and plays. The humorous and light nature of the fundamentals portion of the workshop suggests that women learning about football is not something
the NFL takes seriously. Women have systematically been denied access to learning about the game and the NFL’s attempt at education leaves much to be desired. In fact, purporting to teach women about the game and then teaching them instead about player’s wives and equipment in the name of raising money for breast cancer research seems to be a deliberate tactic to subordinate women. The organization seems to be saying, “Here, women, is what you asked for: information about the game—how it is played, who is playing it, and what exactly all those men running around on the field are doing” while at the same time being quite aware that they are teaching these wives, girlfriends, sisters and friends of “football men” very little. Women are encouraged to adopt a self-effacing position and are told over and over again that learning the “basics” is really where they need to start. Unfortunately, most of them are continually failing Football 101 due to an inherent lack of access to useful and pertinent information. Women are told that it is acceptable for them to see but not to watch. In other words, women are denied the role of spectator—a true and knowledgeable football fan—though they are allowed to see what is going on, what it must be like to participate fully, but they are only allowed to do so from the periphery. In this way, the NFL works to appease women fans who wish to take part in the game, but never goes as far as to allow full participation, even spectatorial participation.
Female Authored Football Texts

The NFL and the male-centered media outlets are not the only institutions working to subordinate women and deprive them access to tangible information. Women themselves are contributing to their own silencing and subordination. There are several books and weblogs written by female football fans to a female audience, though purportedly an audience that knows little or nothing about football.

Author and NFL consultant Betsy Berns writes a Weblog called “The Female Football Fan: Girl Talk About Football.” Berns also works as a consultant to the NFL for the development, design and implementation of its Football 101 workshop series for women. Berns states on her blog that growing up with three brothers helped her learn about and love football. Her brother’s would give her pop quizzes about football and if she passed, she could play in their flag football games. Even the knowledge Berns displayed did not give her uninhibited participation rights. Berns states: “Of course, hanging with the boys usually meant retrieving footballs from the bushes or running down the street whenever my oldest brother (who always played quarterback) accidentally threw the football too far…” (The Female Fan). Despite being allowed to participate only on a limited basis, Berns still credits growing up with boys for her being a knowledgeable football fan. Berns shares her football know-how with women out of a desire to educate women who she assumes are interested in the game, but
know nothing about it, presumably because they did not grow up with brothers who
made them memorize formations and statistics. “Well, I did some research and found
that not all “football widows” really hate football; some just didn’t understand the
game.”

Despite her aspiration to educate women about football, Berns’ relatively new
blog provides little information about the game of football—there are no entries about
the offensive and defensive formations she learned from her brothers as a young girl
and even the “Football 101” portion of the blog is woefully inadequate if the aim is to
teach women who ostensibly know very little about football anything about the
intricate game. Berns lists short descriptions of offensive players (excluding the
offensive line) and special team player in the Football 101 post. There are also
intermittent posts about referee’s signals, game recaps and the history of the football.
But overwhelmingly, the blog is devoted to recipes for football party food, information
on player’s personal lives—mostly revolving around who they are dating—and polls
that ask readers to choose who they think the most attractive players are.

Sunday Night’s Sexiest is a poll that Berns’ posts to her blog once a week. She
chooses three players from both of the teams playing in that week’s Sunday Night
Football game who she deems to be the most attractive. She then asks readers to vote
for their favorites. By referring explicitly to players’ (good) looks, Berns is attempting
to entice women to participate in football as spectators by narrativizing the game as melodrama. According to Berns’ site:

Some women watch the game because they like the strategy, some like the hard hits on the field, some like the drama on and off the field and some just simply like looking at the guys. Since my goal is to help more women become football fans, I’m launching a season-long “Sunday Night’s Sexiest” challenge. Each week I will nominate six of the best-looking players in the Sunday night game on NBC. At the end of the regular season, we’ll have playoffs, and as a byproduct, you will know at least as many players, if not more, than most of your obsessed football fanatic friends (The Female Football Fan).

Along with their votes, the readers of Berns blog post comments about the six players chosen each week. The comments mirror those made by commentators during the NFL Networks broadcast of the NFL Combine specifically about the male football body, yet the discourse surrounding the comments is much different. Some of the comments included on the blog in reference to Sunday Night’s Sexiest are:

Adam Archuleta is SO HOT!!!! WOOO I love being a Washingtonian! GO SKINS!!!!!!!
Posted by Stephanie

I vote for Ray Lewis - his love of the game is the sexiest - his determination, dedication and attitude, just really makes me wanna watch him - (on and off the field)
Posted by tracie

HAVE YOU SEEN TERREL OWENS BODY????
Posted by Trixie*

I have to admit I started watching football because of the gorgeous men, but I have grown to love the game. I am learning every Sunday and Monday about the rules of the sport. I still admire the eye candy…
Posted by Lola

…Everyone should be an Urlacher fan. Just imagine how he could rough you up….I think we've found our winner ;-) lol
Posted by Kara (The Female Football Fan)
There is an overt sense of pleasure derived from watching attractive football players for these women. On this blog—a space advertised as one where women can talk to other women about football—these women are exhibiting their ability to assert some kind of control in an institution in which they are otherwise undermined. The same posts, in contrast, display a kind of willingness to be controlled—both through masochism (“Just imagine how he could rough you up…”) and through relegation to the subject position of uninformed, passive viewer.

Berns recently appeared on the *Today Show* on NBC to talk about women and football in an interview with Ann Curry for a segment called “Today’s Woman: Football for Females”. For the segment, NBC reporter Lisa Daniels participated in a training camp for women held by the Pittsburgh Steelers. The camp, like 14 others around the league, invited area women to come to the Steeler’s facilities to learn how the Steelers train and practice through physical participation. Steeler’s coaches were on hand to direct the women through blocking and passing drills, and a few of the Steeler’s players came out to lend their football knowledge and skills to the one-day event. Like the workshops and weblog mentioned previously, it is the women’s own comments about the event and their participation that are revealing. Again, the language used by Daniels—as woman who is delivering football information about and to a female audience—and the training camp attendees—as participants in a woman-
centered, football oriented medium—displays a sense of pleasure derived both through looking and willing subordination. Daniels report masks itself as a celebration of women participating successfully in an institution that they are almost always denied access to, but in fact rests on the same trope as the male-centered media. For women, true participation in football comes through looks directed at men’s bodies and visual pleasure and not by emulating the actions and knowledge of male fans and players.

Daniels begins her report by stating:

There was a time when football and women had very little in common. But the days of the football widow are long gone. Nowadays, women are often the football experts. So enthusiastic, so fanatical about football, that in a recent poll women ranked NFL football their favorite spectator sport (Today Show).

Here, Daniels is telling her audience (presumably female, as the report is filed for an ongoing series called “Today’s Woman”) that there has been a recent evolution in the way women engage with football, but not necessarily how football engages women. She points to the fact that “nowadays” women are knowledgeable about football and have a desire to participate (unlike in the recent past) and lists statistics about female viewership—numbers she delivers with a surprised tone with the expectation that the statistics on female spectatorship would be unforeseen by her audience as well. (Jackie Stacey and Mary Anne Doane)

Daniels’ commentary about her own lack of football knowledge continues throughout the report, but it is the comments of the women participants, just like in the
blogs, that reveal the most about the role of the female football fan. The first woman’s comments show that she clearly feels strongly about her role as a football fan and wants to prove that her commitment to the sport is not superficial. “I love football. I love every single second of it. I’ve loved it since the day I was born. I watch all the game. My husband refers to himself as a football widower” (Today Show). It is the woman’s last comment that her husband is a football widower—a riff on the stereotype of the football widow, a woman who loses her husband to football each year from September to February—shows that she feels her position as a committed female viewer is an anomalous one. There is no term to describe her subject position so she flips a terms used to describe men so that it applies to her. A woman trying to occupy the same position as men football viewers is only able to take on a male subject position—that of the longed-for partner of the football widow(er). Daniels herself continues this masculinizat on of the female fan position by applying the role to a larger group of women: “Several football widowers have been left behind by the women here.” To counter this masculinization, women football fans often overly assert their femininity. Perhaps moving out of the role of the object, even momentarily, is uncomfortable for women.

While the female fan is made to take on a masculine position through the use of the term “football widower” the woman’s physical participation in football drills is
lessened by the discourse that surrounds it, as exemplified by Daniels’ comments. For 24 hours they will live and breathe the sport learning from the sports off and on the field: rigorous training, with plenty of laughs” (Today Show). Again, she begins by describing the women’s commitment and desire to enter an institution that regularly forces them to the periphery, but ultimately diminishes their participation by noting a lack of serious commitment. While the women may be subjecting themselves to the same drills as professional male football players, they display an understanding that their participations is insignificant by laughing.

Finally, both Daniels’ and the women’s comments demonstrate the commonality of female participation only in terms of women relating to male family members. Daniels begins to refer to all of the women participating in the camp as “moms” and questions them about how their male family members will react to their football participation.

Daniels: “So do you think your sons are going to be impressed by your knowledge when you’re done with this?

Woman: “No, they no far more than I do, so they won’t be impressed. They’ll just be glad that I know a little bit more, that I don’t embarrass them” (Today Show).

This woman does not couch her participation in the camp in terms of personal desire to be knowledgeable or to participate physically in a game that usually bars her from doing so. She admits that her understanding is limited and her comments suggest that
she has embarrassed her well-informed male children by displaying this. Even direct participation in the sport has not allowed this woman to move out of her role as “football mom.”

Daniels’ final remarks return to the idea of visual pleasure derived from eroticizing the male football body in female football spectatorship. She admits that due to her lack of football skills, she, like the rest of the woman at the camp, will never make it in the NFL. She reveals, however, that she has become a football fan who is “drawn to the game’s excitement and one other thing…” (Today Show). Here, the segment cuts to a montage of images from behind of football players running, catching and blocking while “Move it Like That” (lyrics:“Can you move it like this (female voice), I can shake it like that (male voice)” plays. The “one more thing” for Daniels (and purportedly her female audience and the camp participants) is, in her own words, men in tights. This visually pleasing element is “one more reason,” according to Daniels, “for women to cheer on Sundays” (Today Show).

The Football for Females segment continues as Curry interviews Berns. That Curry interview Berns, a woman, and not a man shows that men do not address female football fans or speak on the topic; only women are allowed to. This seems to add an air of unimportance to the subject, since it is already assumed that women do not understand football, while men are the presumed experts.
During the interview, Berns explains to Curry that women should think about football as a drama similar to soap operas. The discussion that ensues demonstrates that women’s relationship to football is often carried out through a male family member. Women fans often relate stories about how male family members taught them about football. Women also often describe their relationship to male family members who watch football as a subservient one. When women do not actively participate as fans, they become once removed from the game by preparing and serving food to their male family members. Berns’ final remarks reveal her own assumption that football must be made “fun” and “easy” if women are going to be enticed to participate as fans. A game that is inherently “fun” and “easy” for men to understand and watch (because it is a game) must be made more fun and easier if women are to become even casual viewers.

Curry: Yeah, I think that is the thing that we don’t get. I mean often times we’re thinking ‘OK, football season is starting, good-bye husband, here’s your chips’ but really what you’re saying is that we’ve got to get with the program and understand the stories behind the actual game. So how do we do that, because often times it’s something—as you know you learned it from your brothers—that it’s something we learn from fathers, but that was years ago. So how do we catch up?

Berns: Well the point is to not be intimidated by it. If you don’t know all the stats, if you don’t know all the men on a 53-man roster it’s not important. It’s important to know the stories, it is important to get behind the players, understand the human-interest stories (Today Show).
As she does in her blog, Berns directs women’s attention away from what she characterizes as the difficult and tiresome duty of memorizing statistics, scores and player’s names and towards the soap opera behind the scenes, something that women are ostensibly much more interested in. Telling women viewers that it is acceptable not to be enticed to understand the game itself but instead to be more interested in “the stories” points to the fact that women sometimes do not want to participate in football as viewers, but that they feel obliged to do so in order to maintain or start a camaraderie with their male family members.

Berns is not the only woman addressing female football fans through female-authored texts. Another blog, The Football Monologues contains similar content to that of The Female Fan and addresses women with discourse similar to that of the Football 101 Workshops, Bern’s weblog, and her NBC interview. The author, known by her screen name “futbolgoddess”, claims that the blog is for “two kinds of women”: those who know nothing about football, but “have to hear about it” because the men in their lives talk about it incessantly and those who love football and are looking to talk about it with other women. The Female Fan hails a similar readership and couches the description in equally disheartening terms: high school girls wanting to know what’s happening at the weekend football game, college women wanting to hang out with the guys and talk about something timely, professional women who want to be able to
participate in water cooler conversation on Monday morning, women who are dating and need something interesting to talk about with their dates, moms with sports-playing kids, and grandmothers who want to be “hip” and understand the game their grandchildren are interested in. In both cases, the women who are meant to be the readers of the sites are addressed as mothers, wives, girlfriends, etc. who desperately want to relate to the men in their life. Unable and perhaps unwilling to learn about the games themselves, they are asked to turn to these blogs to help them bridge the gap between male and female football viewers.

Additionally, “futbolgoddess”, followed path to football fandom analogous to Berns’. She writes:

As a kid, my older brother would not let me go to football games with my dad unless I could name at least 10 players on the Eagles on the spot. And he would exclude Randall Cunningham or any popular player that was too obvious. If I hadn't learned the game I never would've survived (Football Monologues).

The site’s limited entries (the blog was started in late 2006) contain a higher percentage of references to actual football games than Berns’ site; references to players’ personal lives are in the minority. The remainder of the posts are about off-season coaching changes, player retirement and the Super Bowl. These posts, however, are failed emulations of ESPN’s Sports Center. There is no mention of team strategy or player statistics. There are a few “Diary Enters” (threads started by site members, rather than the author of the blog) dealing with game and player history (“Names you
"Should Know" is one of the few diary entries), but most posts are merely recaps of major events in the world of football. While an imitation of Sports Center may be appealing to some, there is no information provided on this site that could not be obtained from the mainstream sports media, and certainly neither this site, nor Berns’, provide the kind of information that someone who knows nothing about football needs in order to get acclimated to the game. This would not be a problem for a football weblog in general or even a football blog targeted towards women, but for the fact that both authors claim to occupy special positions as women with extensive football knowledge who are willing and able to share that information with other women. Therefore, both of these sites are part of a larger discourse that addresses female spectators as ill-informed and subordinate.

These sites, like the Football 101 workshops, appear to invite women to be football participants (if only as spectators) but then dispense inadequate and sometimes inaccurate information. Power in any social institution is based on knowledge, and an effective way to maintain power is to prevent others from having it. This refusal becomes even more problematic when women themselves are contending to be the teachers. Whether they have been provided with inadequate and inaccurate information themselves or are deliberately delivering sub-par counsel, Berns and “futbolgoddess”
are doing more to disseminate the stereotype that women just do not “get” football than to change the way the women football fans fit into the social institution of football.

Additionally, the women (and sometime men) who post on the site are contributing to a discourse that subordinates women football viewers into a position that assumes an inherent lack of knowledge and interest. As Walter Gantz and Lawrence A. Wenner have found in their studies of female football fans, women often claim to be football viewers so that they can spend more time with male family members (238). The women on this blog often site the ability to relate to their husbands and other family members as the driving force behind their quest for football knowledge. Posting that reflect this are:

…This is brilliant. I am also a football fan. I am the oldest of three and I used football as a way to get close to my dad. Now I love it…
Posted by Shellene

I’m a newlywed and really want to try to get into Sunday Night Football so my husband and I can spend that time together. I’ve had a hard time getting into it so I’m glad you’re doing this!
Posted by Tina

I need to learn everything about football so my husband and [I] have more things in common.
Posted by Dannielle

I appreciate all of your information b/c I don't know a thing about football. I am a mom and my son loves it—therefore, I need to learn!! Looking forward to reading more from you!!
Posted by Holly (The Female Fan). 16

Another overarching theme in the posts is that any knowledge these readers do have about football, they have learned from male family members. Rarely do these
women express personal interest in the game itself as the reason why they are football fans and viewers. Instead, they explain their experiences learning football from brothers and fathers as a way to reassert their femininity. If these posters claimed to have started watching football out of personal interest, they would move into a different spectatorial position. A woman who knows “too much” about the game is still viewed as an anomaly. Like the female athlete, there is something about her that is “not quite right” even if that means just being different from other women. Like female athletes, female football fans are often isolated. By tying their spectatorship back to male viewers, they maintain a safely feminine position. Several posts reflect this overt reference to male family members:

I have to (sic) older brothers that played High school football that’s (sic) how I learned about football I love football. I'm a Steeler's fan I watch it every weekend. GO STEELER'S
Posted by Barb Bickar

Growing up I never had a male figure or brother to teach me about football. When I married my sports loving husband, I soon found myself loving sports, especially football!...
Posted by Audra

As Duncan and Brummett also found in their survey, women often see watching a football game as an opportunity (or requirement) to perform several household duties. Many of the posters claim to watch games with their male family members, but often find themselves also doing other things, like preparing and serving food. The menus that Berns lists on her site are evidence that attending to the home and family members is often expected of female spectators, even as they are watching a game. The
comments made by the women themselves also reflect the notion that women take on multiple other roles while simultaneously trying to take on the role of football spectator.

…I started learning about football from my hubby when we met 7 years ago. At first I was the official beer-getting, wing-making, answer the phone and “tell ‘em I’m busy” hostess. Now wings are made before the game and you best get your own beer fool...I'm watching the game...
Posted by Hope

[T]his is so great. I am a mother of 3. A perfect chance for me to learn football and be able to participate when everyone is into [M]onday night football instead of just being responsible for the snacks.
Posted by Phyllis (The Female Fan)

Finally, women who do express interest in taking on the role of football viewer are often thought of as superficial viewers; that is, their interest in the game is thought to be based only on their interest in gazing at handsome, athletic men, rather than on an interest in the teams, and statistics and scores (assumed to be male interests), or even a combination of both. The women posters themselves reassert this discourse:

I LOVE football!!! This is great. Sundays you can find me in my robe, makin' eggs and watching football (sic)! And NO it's not cause of the boys in the tight pants...haha. It's the action! See....you only thought MEN watched football!!! =) This brings women and men together!!
Posted by Allison (The Female Fan)

Some women also express dismay at the prospect of having to ask questions of their husbands or other male family members, thus contributing to their own subordination as fans. The women either feel as though they will be belittled for not
already knowing the information or that their questions will be perceived as an annoyance. For instance, weblog posters note:

…I want my husband to relax and enjoy watching football but it isn't much fun when I keep asking questions. So my first question to you is how do you figure out when there is a 1st down? And are there rules about when should you kick for a field goal? Thanks for your help!
Posted by Mary

What a great idea, here's to all the female's who always wanted to know, but were afraid to ask. I love football!
Posted by Sheila

I bought the Female Fan guide (sic) because my husband was always made me feel foolish when I asked questions. Now I make him look like a fool (which he is).
Posted by Doris (The Female Fan)

Other texts written by women for women perpetuate the same discourse about female football viewers as the blogs. Before she started the Female Fan Blog, Berns wrote a book called The Female Fan Guide to Pro Football. Berns said that she was motivated to write the book by her belief “that more women would be football fans if they had an easy and fun way to learn about the game.” The book provides more of the “Football 101” information that Berns purports to include in her blog, and like the weblog, it is peppered with “Fun Facts” about players’ personal lives and has an entire chapter devoted to throwing a memorable football party (Helpful Hint: Place the crudités platter away from the TV—chomping on carrots and celery can be loud). The Female Fan Guide to Pro Football is a comprehensive look at the basics of
professional football, but the explanations are often couched in terms that negate the
effect of the information. Berns language is “easy and fun,” like she claims, but that is
precisely the problem. Women readers of her book are told that they will not
understand the things about football that seem to come easy to their husbands and
fathers unless those things are presented to them in the form of “Helpful Hints” and
“Fun Facts.”

For Berns, even the most basic information has to be interspersed with guides
to throwing good parties and personal information about NFL stars in order for her
readers to stay entertained and motivated. Additionally, some of the information Berns
provides is factually incorrect or rather obvious. In describing the football uniforms,
Berns tells her readers that players wear mouthpieces in order to prevent their teeth
from getting knocked out. In fact, the face masked is used to prevent facial injuries
such as getting ones teeth knocked out, while the mouthpiece is worn to prevent
concussions. In an anecdote about the most field goals ever kicked in a game, Berns
explains that had the Minnesota Vikings missed “even one” of their five field goals in a
23-21 decision over the Los Angeles Rams, they would have lost the game. This
anecdote comes after Berns has already explained that field goals are worth three
points each, yet she writes in a way that assumes her readers are unable to complete
this simple mathematical equation without her. Such inaccurate information and
remedial delivery shows that women who are fans are often unable to corroborate their information both out of fear of asking ignorant questions and based on the assumption that they as female football fans are an anomaly. Women who watch football often do not acknowledge the fact that other women also watch and understand the game. Berns’ sometimes-condescending tone and inaccurate information are detrimental to women’s continued participation in football as viewers.

Berns is not the only woman to write a book for and about female football fans. The Girlfriend’s Guide to Football and Get Your Own Damn Beer, I’m Watching the Game: A Woman’s Guide to Loving Pro Football were written by Teena Spencer and Holly Robinson Peete, respectively. Both women wrote their books with male co-authors; additionally, Robin-Peete’s husband, ex-NFL quarterback Rodney Peete, and his NFL teammates to contributed to the book.17 Spencer’s book is much more unapologetically about what she calls the “real” reason women watch football (men in tight pants) than either Berns’ or Robinson Peete’s, though Robin Peete unabashedly lists the Top Ten All-Time Great Football Butts at the end of chapter on “Standards of Excellence” in the NFL.

Both Girlfriend’s Guide and Get Your Own Damn Beer provide the same basic football information: positions, famous players, basic rules and equipment, and referees signals. Both books subscribe to the “make it easy and fun” method for getting
women to watch and enjoy football. Spencer tells readers that, “It’s all here: the teams, the history, the top players and the trivia, written with clarity and humor” (back cover) while Robinson Peete “is convinced that if women understood the game of football—if they were hard-wired to it like most men—they’d come to enjoy it as much as any guy” (4). The impetus for these two authors to write to female football fans is similar to that of the other texts examined thus far: in each case, women are addressed as potential fans with an inherent inability to understand football. Additionally, when they do learn through these fun and easy accounts, they take on a masculine position as a spectator (“enjoy it as much as any guy.”) If women are unable to move into this desired masculine position as spectators, they are relegated to the position of the unknowing female viewer, drawn to football as a way to spend quality time with their male family members or as a space in which they can unapologetically view male bodies (even if that means discounting the sincerity of their interest in the game itself).

Robinson Peete dedicates her book to “all the women who love football, want to love football, or just want to fake it better in an effort to find some harmony and bonding time with your man on the weekend…”, illustrating the idea that women often feel that in order to “relate” to their male family members, they must be proactive and learn about football. Similarly, Spencer notes that before she was a football fan, football would “steal” her “boys” (male friends) away from her. Because she wanted to
be more than the woman who served them beer, she set out to learn about the game (introduction). Her role as “one of the guys” was pleasing to her, and so she felt compelled to sustain that relationship by taking interest in something these men were interested in.

While both authors refer often to the attractiveness of football players (an attractiveness that dictates the amount of enjoyment they derive from the game) Spencer’s account of football is an attempt to convince her female readers that the only reason they are interested in learning anything about the game is that it will give them an opportunity to watch handsome, athletic men. Her chapters are littered with quips about “cute butts” and skintight pants. In her introduction, she proclaims not to know why men like football, but surely knows why she does:

The players wear skintight pants. They pat each other’s incredibly tight butts a lot. They run and jump and sweat. The quarterback usually has perfect teth and is able to smile through the pain as he limps off the field after making the game-winning pass. And the handsome players are stinkin’ filthy rich (9).

She goes on to tell women why they should love football: “We all know why we should, and do, enjoy football. It has something to do with those wonderful, tight, shiny buns bouncing across the field like spring fawns” (26). Robinson Peete lists her ten All-Time Great Football Butts, telling her readers, “This is a list where 10 just isn’t enough! Nice bottoms are an epidemic in the NFL.” She lists Kansas City Chiefs Tight
End Tony Gonzalez as the second best butt of all time, noting “he is one of the best tight ends in the league...he also happens to have one!” (169).

Finally, both authors try to convince their readers that women generally do not know as much about football as men, but they if they want to learn, they should not ask men “dumb” questions, especially during the game. This illustrates the fact that the discourse surrounding football fandom subordinates women viewers to men viewers, even if (or especially if) that language is being disseminated by other women, like Berns, Spencer and Robinson Peete.

In another “Top Ten” list (actually, in this case, it is Top 20, Robinson Peete exhorts her readers not to ask certain “annoying” questions while “our men” are watching the game. These range from “You’ve already watched three quarters. Why can’t we spend the last one talking about us?” and “So does mean the trash is going to take itself out” (7) to “Okay, I get that a field goal is worth three points, but where is the three-point line?” and “Why do they need to keep running out those chains when they’ve got that yellow line running clear across the field?” (207). Similarly, Spencer lists questions about football women should not ask “unless you want to be tormented for the rest of your life by the condescending laughter of your football guy” (123).

Again, women are told by other women that they do not understand some foundational
information about football and that men are unwilling to provide them with this information.

In all of these texts, women football spectators are trying to claim pleasure through football spectatorship, but at the same time they are perpetuating the discourse that continues to other them in the institution of football. Through these texts, women assert that they gain pleasure through football spectatorship by being able to look at eroticized male football bodies, by being able to spend time with their male family members, or by learning about football by way of a melodramatic narrative about players’ personal lives. Despite the fact that discourse is often detrimental to women, it is still a marker that the discourse around football spectatorship is changing. It is also a sign that the dominance of the particular kind of masculinity evident in football is fragile and flawed. Though the cracks may be sometime undetectable, they may serve as a basis for exploring the possibility of other sites of pleasurable viewing for women football spectators, different from the ones they self-report in books and webblogs. The overriding theme of all of the football texts written specifically for women is that they are telling women that they are not supposed to be watching football, or at least not understanding football, the way male spectators do. Therefore, these texts can be seen as belittling women’s ability to learn and know, but they may also be seen as
empowering because they put women in a very specific subject position: that of an outsider.

Based on this text and the others I examined in my thesis, I argue that the discourse that surrounds the female football fan tells us that their viewing is different from men, that their pleasure is derived from the spectacle of football in a way that is markedly different, and generally subordinate, to that of male football spectators. My analysis of these texts also shows that women self-report watching football because others (namely male family members) are doing so. They also self-report watching football in order to “simply look at the guys” or to participate in the behind-the-scenes melodrama of football (i.e. human interest stories.) Finally, texts targeted towards a female audience often address women as ignorant football participants, even when those texts are authored by other women.
Chapter 5. CONCLUSION

Definitions of masculinity are constantly changing. Due to the association between the cultural ideal of masculinity and institutional power working to perpetuate this ideal, hegemonic masculinity reigns as the currently accepted masculine strategy. Football is one place where we can see this perpetuation and struggle to keep redefinitions of masculinity from taking over at work. American football has long been thought of as the preeminent illustration of hegemonic masculinity—the reigning type of masculinity in the United States that is defined by strength, aggression, success and power over women, as well as men who embody other masculinities. The perpetual territorial contest pits trained male body against trained male body in a violent display of physicality that consistently relegates women to the periphery. However, the violent, displayed, and commodified male football body is evidence that there are gaps in the hegemony. If the type of masculinity that defines American manhood were fixed, it would not need to perpetuate violence or constantly sell itself to American men and women by way of visual display. Indeed, hegemonic masculinity is not fixed; rather, it is quite dynamic—proof that entrenched gender practices can become sites of resistance and redefinition.

Television is a boon to football, but it also has begun to create a space for resistance and redefinition. Television has changed the way the game of football is
played, as is evidenced by the Pro Bowl and the NFL Combine, and it has also changed how spectators are affected by and affect football images. Television made the game of football into something it never was before: a text to be dissected over and over again. Not only is the game itself being dissected and analyzed, but those who participate in it—male football players—are displayed and scrutinized as well. On a basic level, we can understand the commodification of the male football body from a money-making standpoint. The NFL makes money from televising its games and from showing its players to television viewers as often as possible. However, we can also understand the visual display by noting that these men and their bodies help to define hegemonic masculinity.

If the male football body is not controlled and displayed, the fragility of the definition of American masculinity would become apparent. Their likeness is needed to perpetuate ideas about masculine perfection and success. Central to football discourse, according to Margaret Morse, “is an image of fascination, the perfect machine of a body-in-motion choreographed with others as a vision of grace and power” (Kaplan 44). Therefore, sport is the only discourse in culture where the object is the male body. While such objectification is not allowed in other spaces, football cushions its object by surrounding them with numbers (statistics, scores, etc.). This scientificity of football makes it acceptable for the male body to be objectified—
looked at, poured over—by other males. The masculine, in football, is allowed to look at itself.

But is the feminine spectator allowed to look at the masculine body too? Women are doing so in ever-increasing numbers, but are allowed to participate in football only in limited ways. Women are always relegated to the periphery in football. Whether they are cheerleaders, sideline reporters or wives of players or coaches, women are subjugated. In football, this makes perfect sense, since one of the defining features of hegemonic masculinity is to defend the preservation of patriarchy by maintaining a hierarchy which places men above women and football is an ideal representation of what it means to be hegemonically masculine.

Women who participate in football in these ways are visible members of a structure that is systematically marginalizing them. However, there is another, much larger group of women who are participating in football as football spectators. Women are joining the ranks of football fans in greater numbers than at any other point in the sports’ history, and the NFL encourages women to become fans by marketing directly through them. The league has created an entire line of team apparel created especially for women and runs yearly workshops around the country that encourage women to learn about the game and their local team. With the growing number of female football
spectators has come a new discourse that addresses them specifically; previous football discourse has always gendered the typical fan and spectator as male.

The discourse surrounding the female football fan often situates her as an uninformed viewer who watches football in a way that is distinctly different from the way that the male football fan watches. Female football fans are addressed as a homogeneous group whose interests are players’ personal lives, players’ bodies as sexual objects and the ability that football affords them to spend time with their male family members. While football has allowed women to participate through spectatorship, it immediately confines women viewers by defining them this way. In addition, women often address themselves using the same discourse. Several “Girlfriend’s Guides to Football” have been written by women for women readers; these books use the same categories to talk about female football spectators as the NFL does. Here again, the discourse that surrounds football, whether male or female-authored, constructs the informed and contented football fan as male.

That women discussing football are using the same homogenizing language to talk about the female football spectator could lead one to believe that these women are simply perpetuating the gender hierarchy inherent in hegemonic masculinity. Women like Betsy Berns and Holly Robinson Peete are willing to participate in their own subjugation for the right to be a part of the game. They consistently subordinate
themselves to men, and in doing so subordinate other women as well. But perhaps these women are not social dupes. They may be willing to give in to some powers to have others afforded to them.

By “othering” themselves, they have set up a spectatorial position that is separate and distinct from the male football spectatorial position. Additionally, by perpetuating a type of masculinity (illustrated by the display of the male football body) that requires women to remain on the periphery, football has inadvertently created a space for pleasurable female spectatorship that is inaccessible to male viewers. By taking a step back, we can see that the visual display of televised football allows for pleasurable viewership. Football spectators are afforded a space of privileged viewing; they get to see the game in a way—enhanced by mobile cameras, instant replay and slow motion—that coaches, players and fans in the stands never do. This privileged way of looking is in itself pleasurable as is the fetishism associated with the ability to be fascinated with the spectacle of football itself. However, this sort of pleasure is available across gender lines, so, in essence, women viewers are allowed a pleasurable viewing position, only to have to share it with men. But, women football viewers have another space available to them: that of outsider. The discourse that surrounds football, as mentioned above, consistently positions women as less knowledgeable, less interested viewers who come to view the game for ulterior motives. While this is some
ways in detrimental, it allows women to watch football from a space that they themselves can define as pleasurable. Women are not allowed access to the football apparatus; therefore, their pleasure is derived through voyeurism—being able to look at the already-objectified male body while being told they are not allowed to do so.

These conclusions came about of a project that evolved through the process. This project began as an inquiry into the role of the male football body. My initial questions dealt with the structure of football and how it shapes and is shaped by prevailing ideas of masculinity in America. I was particularly interested in the ways that the male football body outwardly appears strong and powerful, but is actually a somewhat passive entity, shaped by constant control and surveillance by outside groups like coaches and fans. These ideas lead me to masculinities studies and Foucauldian theories of power and surveillance, which in turn lead me to focus on one group that watches and controls: football spectators.

As a woman football spectator, I was not content to look at football as a structure that is only contributed to by males or one that only acts upon males. A simply statistic about women watching the Super Bowl sparked my interest in the way that football addresses women and led me to see that football is not a univocal text with a homogenous and passive audience. As a feminist, I was further discontented by the fact I and so many other women enjoy football—a misogynistic structure that
consistently pushes us to the periphery. I knew that if I wanted to reconcile these two seemingly disparate parts of my personality, I would need to look for ways that female participation in football could be labeled as pleasurable, instead of self-deprecating.

With that said, this project only began to look at questions about what it means to be a female football spectator. Further research into the topic could reach outside of football and into the greater sports world. Perhaps other professional sports construct the female spectator differently, in ways that could shed light on how we can understand an objectified male body being available for female spectatorship. Looking at other sports would also offer a way to construct spectatorship of men’s sport and its women’s counterpart. Professional football does not have a female equivalent (though there are a few professional women’s leagues, they often consist of only a few teams, require participants to pay for the right to play, and cater to only small stadium audiences). However, professional women’s basketball does exist; a study of spectatorship for the NBA and the WNBA side by side may shed additional light on gendered spectatorial positions in sports.

This project also did not deal explicitly with race, sexuality or class in sports, or in sports spectatorship. Sports consistently “other” women, but they also consistently “other” people according to race, sexuality and class. Further studies would concentrate on the importance of finding pleasurable, empowering spaces for people
who participate in sports, but are also systematically relegated to the periphery, or worse, made invisible.
APPENDIX I

GLOSSARY OF RELEVANT FOOTBALL TERMS

3-4 Defense - A basic defensive alignment with three down lineman and four linebackers.

4-3 Defense - A basic defensive alignment with four down lineman and three linebackers.

40 Yard Dash - A sprint covering 40 yards. Used to evaluate speed and acceleration for purposes of the NFL draft.

Audible - When the quarterback changes the play at the line of scrimmage.

Backfield - The area of the football field behind the line of scrimmage on the offensive side. This space is usually occupied by offensive backs, including the quarterback if the team is in shotgun formation. An “empty backfield” means that all offensive players are lined up on the line of scrimmage.
**Blitz**- A defensive strategy in which a linebacker or defensive back vacates his normal responsibilities in order to pressure the quarterback. The object of a blitz is to tackle the quarterback behind the line of scrimmage or force the quarterback to hurry his pass.

**Bod Pod**- The BOD POD is a complete system for measuring and tracking body fat and lean mass using patented air displacement technology (Bod Pod). Each player at the NFL Combine is required to have his body composition measured in the BOD POD.

**Bump and Run**- A technique used by defensive backs to slow down a receiver's ability to get off the line of scrimmage. The defender bumps the receiver at the start of the play and attempts to throw him off his route by keeping contact over the first five yards.

**Defensive Back**- A member of the defensive secondary. Defensive backs generally try to keep receivers from making catches. Safeties, cornerbacks, nickel backs, and dime backs are considered defensive backs.

**Dime**- A defensive formation in which there are six defensive backs.
**Draft** - A yearly process in which each of the NFL’s teams picks new team members from a pool of college players. The first draft pick is given to the team with the worst record from the previous season, the second pick to the team with the second worst record, and so on in order to sustain parity in the league. Teams may negotiate with one another to change the draft order.

**Flat** - The area of the field between the hash marks and the sideline near the line of scrimmage.

**Fumble** - When a player drops the football. Whoever picks the ball up retains possession.

**Gauntlet** - A drill at the NFL Combine in which receivers start in a standing position, turn around to catch a ball, turn back around to catch another, then race across the field as quarterbacks fire the ball in their direction. In all, there are seven catches to be made.
**“I” formation** - An offensive formation that includes a fullback and tailback lined up with the fullback directly in front of the tailback.

**Intentional Grounding** - Occurs when the quarterback, while he is still in the area between the tackles, purposely throws the ball out of bounds or into the ground to avoid taking a sack.

**Jacked Up** - A football euphemism for a particularly violent or debilitating hit.

**Line of Scrimmage** - an imaginary line that traverses the field from sideline to sideline. The opposing teams must remain on either side of this line until the play begins. The position of the line is based on where the ball was spotted at the end of the previous play.

**Motion** - When an offensive player begins to move laterally behind the line of scrimmage before the ball is snapped.

**Nickel** - A defensive formation in which there are five defensive backs.
**Playoffs (Post-Season)** - The NFL playoffs are a single-elimination tournament held at the end of the 16-game regular season. The winner of the tournament is crowned NFL Champion at the end of the final game: the Super Bowl. Six teams from each of the league’s two conferences qualify for the tournament based on regular season records.

**Pocket** - An area on the offensive side of the line of scrimmage that consists of the space between the two offensive tackles (the linemen on opposite ends of the offensive line). Offensive linemen try to prevent defensive players from entering this area so that the quarterback can “sit in the pocket” and try to complete a pass without getting sacked.

**Pre-Season** - NFL teams play four to five exhibition games each season before the regular season starts. Games are played from the end of July to the beginning of August. These games provide a chance for teams to prepare themselves for the regular season by essentially practicing against other teams. Score is kept and a preseason record is noted, but the record and individual statistics have no bearing on the regular season. The games are usually televised locally and fans can also buy tickets to see these games live.
**Regular Season** - The NFL currently plays a 16 game regular season schedule. Each of the NFL’s 32 teams plays 16 games between September and December of each year, eight games at home and eight on the road. A team’s win-loss record from these 16 games is used to determine if they are eligible for the play-offs or not. Additionally, individual statistics (yards, touchdowns, tackles, etc.) are based on play during the regular season.

**Sack** - When the defense tackles the quarterback behind the line of scrimmage.

**Shift** - The movement of one or more players to a different position in a formation before the football is snapped. Shifts are often used on both sides of the ball to create confusion for the opposition.

**Shotgun Formation** - In this formation, the quarterback receives the snap five to eight yards behind the center rather than directly from under center.

**Standing Long Jump** - A test that measures of how far a player can propel his body forward from a standing position by taking off and landing using both feet. All players at the NFL combine perform the standing long jump.
**Vertical Jump** - A measure of how high an individual can elevate off the ground from a standstill. Players at the NFL combine perform the vertical jump.
NOTES

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4 Though it is virtually impossible to decipher what play will be run, even after listening to the coach relay that information to his quarterback. If you do not know the “code” of a specific team, you can only gain a general understanding (run vs. pass, “I” formation vs. an empty backfield) of what you are about to see.

5 “Jacked Up” is a football euphemism for being hit or tackled in a particularly violent or debilitating way. ESPN (Entertainment and Sports Programming Network) airs a segment called “Jacked Up” during halftime of Monday Night Football games in which they replay the top five hits of the previous week’s games, with one stipulation: hits chosen for the segment are limited to those that did result in penalty or injury. Paul Zimmerman of Sports Illustrated once wrote,

   You ever watch that “Jacked Up!” thing before the Monday night game? Some poor guy gets leveled with a kill-shot, and the yahoos in the studio all yell, "Jacked Up!" I think I wrote this last year but I’ll repeat it, if you don’t mind. Those network commentators were born into the wrong era. They’d have been right at home in 17th or 18th Century England, enjoying a nice outing at a public hanging. And when the trap is released and the poor guy is hung, they’d all yell, “Jacked Up!” (Zimmerman 37).

6 Though the drafting process actually begins with scouts visiting teams to watch players as early as their sophomore year in the college, the NFL Combine is the first big event each season dealing with the draft.

7 Players at the NFL Combine are put through a gambit of medical tests. Besides height, weight and body fat percentage, players are required to have body parts they have injured in the past X-rayed. They are also required to have their knee strength, blood pressure, vision and hand span and arm length measured. Much of a player’s time at the combine is spent participating in medical exams (Whittingham 49-50).

8 The following is a breakdown of NFL Network’s 27 hours of coverage of the NFL Combine, according to the official NFL website: Press conferences—8 hours live (February 22-25, 2007), Player drills—12 hours live (February 24-27, 2007—Re-airs each day for an additional 12 hours), News and interviews on NFL Total Access—5 hours (February 22-26, 2007), Path to the Draft—1 hour (February 22-23, 2007), Wrap-up show—1 hour (February 28, 2007).

9 There are many NFL Combine training programs. In addition to The Cutting Edge, programs include: Pro Combine Training ("Turn scout's heads with your testing numbers, and improve your draft stock!")
To prepare for the 2007 Draft, the Cleveland Browns researched the top two quarterbacks taken in every draft since 1970. They found that of the 68 quarterbacks to enter the NFL through the draft, 28 were considered successful, while 40 were considered unsuccessful (NFL Network).

Many athletes strip to their underwear when performing speed and jumping drills like the 40-yard dash. Their undergarments are usually compression shorts—a sort of “second skin.” Compression shorts are form-fitting and very similar to boxer briefs. They are often made from a spandex-type material and help keep the muscles warm so as to prevent strains or pulls to the muscles. Perhaps athletes’ willingness to perform in this exposed state will change now that the Combine is televised. Historically, the Combine was not open to the view of anyone except (male) coaches. It could be safely assumed that no one was not supposed to be watching (i.e. women) was watching. That is no longer the case, though it may take time for the practice to change. This seems to be similar to women reports now being admitted to men’s locker rooms. This idea could be explored further in a different study.

Part of the previous discussion adapted from author’s previous work entitled, “Confining the Female Voice: Analyzing the Role of Women Sideline Reporters in the NFL with Feminist Film Theory.” Co-author, Stacie M. Hook.

Tickets for the Packer’s event are $65 each. The Packer’s Women’s Association is a group comprised mostly of player’s and coaches’ wives and girlfriends (Football 101, NFL Workshop for Women…).

The Tagline for The Football Monologues (perhaps a riff on the “Vagina Monologues”) is “An oasis of estrogen in the desert of testosterone.”

One post refers to the fact that one former Dallas Cowboy donated his kidney to one of his former teammates and another detailed the recent revelation that actress Bridget Moynahan and New England Patriot Tom Brady are pregnant.

Additional comments from the same thread include:

…What a fantastic idea to enable wives to connect with their football crazed husbands. Now I can actually speak his language! I looking forward to reading your column to keep on top of the game.
Posted by Christine

How exciting to be able to learn about football and be able to watch with my husband on Sunday night's
Posted by Michelle

NFL Hall of Fame Safety Ronnie Lott wrote the forward for Robinson Peete’s book.
WORKS CITED


