

ENGL 4384: Senior Seminar
Student Anthology

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WE'RE NUMBER ONE!:

Power, Contest, and the Ethics of Winning

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Introduction

OUR SENIOR SEMINAR this semester, entitled “We’re Number One!: Power, Contest, and the Ethics of Winning,” took a critical, materialist look at the omnipresent phenomenon of sports in America. Culturally, this Wide World of Sports (as the ABC program that ran for nearly four decades dubbed it) wields such power today precisely because it has been so thoroughly naturalized within our everyday lives. It’s hard to imagine a significant season or holiday or annual tradition in America that has not been intimately co-joined with an accompanying sporting event. Thanksgiving is known for turkey and football. The NBA plays from morning until night on Christmas Day. New Years Day is reserved for college football. And the Fourth of July, America’s day, is inseparable from baseball, America’s Pastime. We even dedicate one whole day a week, Sundays, to the holiest of holy, the NFL (although that “sacred” day is spreading, as the NFL has laid increasingly powerful claims on Monday nights, Thursday nights, and the occasional Saturday afternoon, too). Sports are on our TVs in our homes and on the TVs in our restaurants. We watch movies that recreate historical sporting events and movies that fictionalize sports heroes so powerfully that they become almost as mythological as our real-life idols (one could almost imagine a non-sports fan mistaking Rocky Balboa for an actual heavyweight champion, for example). If we actually stop and look at ourselves, sports are *everywhere*, a ubiquitous backdrop to our lives that has no cultural rival.

But, when you really think about it, why do we care if our team wins or loses? Is it because of some innate, human love of competition? Or an innocent need for shared social bonds? Or a sensual desire for the aesthetic pleasures found in athletic grace and physical excellence? Perhaps ... But what if, as Noam Chomsky suggests, the real reason we cheer is because sport “offers people something to pay attention to that’s of no importance, that keeps them from worrying about things that matter to their lives.” From *The Great Gatsby* to *The Big Lebowski*, representations of sports permeate our cultural landscape. But what is all this rooting and cheering and winning and losing actually doing to us? What political issues are lurking behind the foam fingers, the fight songs, and the fourteen-point spreads?

Within this anthology are four different approaches to these critical questions.

Our anthology begins with Nia Washington's critique of the white gaze in the feel-good football film *The Blind Side*. Ms. Washington argues that the film has more to do with celebrating the nobility of the white character played by Sandra Bullock than with portraying Michael Oher – the film's real hero – in a realistic way. Next, Kristen Leonard takes up *Creed*, the most recent chapter in the storied *Rocky* franchise, and examines how this seemingly formulaic rehashing of the boxing film motif actually re-imagines lingering cultural stereotypes in positive ways. In her essay "The Power to Hide the Truth," Ti-Ray DeGrate reads the NFL's real-life concussion problem through the lens of the film *Concussion*, a dramatization that Ms. DeGrate argues sidesteps the darker realities of concussions in favor of a "Hollywood" face that obfuscates the truth. Finally, Katherine Trial reads to the 2012 film *Silver Linings Playbook* as being much more than the "romantic dramedy" it looks like on the surface, finding a meditation on gender inequality and female empowerment lurking beneath the surface.

All of these selections, interestingly, focus on representations of sports in the medium of film. For if sports are our great American pastime, cinema is our art-consuming medium of choice. The coming together of these two uniquely powerful American cultural spectacles – sports and film – creates a tremendous rhetorical force, a force that reverberates powerfully in the essays that follow.

Dr. Kevin Casper



The White Gaze in *The Blind Side*: Tackling White America's Blind Side

BY NIA WASHINGTON

“UP UNTIL NOW the play has been defined by what the quarterback sees, it’s about to be defined by what he doesn’t.” So says Sandra Bullock in the role as Leigh-Anne Touhy, John Lee Hancock’s *The Blind Side* appears to be the typical American Dream, the rags-to-riches kind of story, the one America loves to hear (Hancock). Michael Oher, a homeless black kid from the projects, is welcomed in the lives of the Touhy’s, a wealthy Southern family; they eventually legally adopt Michael. This is the typical “feel good” story we love to tell ourselves; however, this film reveals a more complicated truth. Although *The Blind Side* initially creates a “feel good” heartwarming emotion internally, the film’s white gaze praises the white experience while denying the realities of race in modern day society. This film reinforces white exceptionalism by portraying Michael Oher’s life in small moments of triviality yet acknowledging the success of the Touhy family for rescuing him from his terrible upbringing. Although this is a film made by white people for white people, it was also made to blind America’s awareness of racism by falsifying the celebration of racial uplift; thus encouraging America to put on its blinders and celebrate this film’s racial undertones rather than critique it. In reality *The Blind Side* celebrates white America’s blind side towards racial history through the white gaze theory.

The white gaze is looking at the world through the eyes of whites. Although the white gaze in *The Blind Side* creates a comforting, self-serving feeling for white people the film actually reveals a dishonest and racist world. George Yancy's article "Walking While Black in the 'White Gaze'" states that "the white gaze is also hegemonic, historically grounded in material relations of white power: it was deemed disrespectful for a black person to violate the white gaze by looking directly into the eyes of someone white" (Yancy 7). This is exactly what *The Blind Side* does. Generally, in the white gaze most of the characters in the film are white or performing as white. In the film Michael is standing at the entrance of Wingate Christian School and the children that are passing by are all white. When Michael is practicing with his teammates they are all white, and much of the film Michael sticks out like a sore thumb as he is seen interacting with the Touhy family. The only moments of blackness viewers see are when Michael visits his hometown and within these moments there are an abundance of blacks but are portrayed in a negative light; Michael's "friends" are seen hanging out on the steps of their apartment building with guns and bandanas tied around their heads giving viewers the impression of a thug-like lifestyle. The white gaze theory sees nothing wrong with putting the label "thug" on a group of men who are merely hanging out. The portrayal of Michael's neighborhood is another way on which white gaze exposes racial history. The film also presents a screenshot of the apartment complex where Michael grew up. The apartments are molded, the windows are covered with bedsheets, and the playground has been marked by graffiti. This representation exposes what white America wants to think of blacks. Where are the neighborhoods with nice homes and cars, the neighborhoods with racial diversity throughout, where are the black people who are educated and successful; the white gaze keeps whites from understanding the full range of what it means to be black.

Within the white gaze race is seen as irrelevant and ancient news. When Leigh-Anne's cousin Bobby calls Michael a "colored boy" after seeing him on the family's annual Christmas card the camera shoots to Michael's face as he turns around with a look of disbelief but the shot is quickly moved to Collins and Sean who are laughing at the racial remark (Hancock). Although the shot is brief, Michael's face expresses the desire for The Touhy family to defend him and react to the comment. Nothing happens, no one seems to care. This should be a moment full of anger to the ignorance of a racist comment against their "son." This was the perfect opportunity for The Touhy family to understand

the negative feedback they could receive for raising a black son or this could be Michael's opportunity to speak out against racism and express his feelings about being brought into a world full of "white floors, white walls, and a lot white people" (Hancock). Race is again overlooked as The Touhy family attempts to convince Michael to go to their alma mater, Ole Miss, a school historically known for its racial prejudice. Alan Blinder's article "Racist Episodes Continue to Stir Ole Miss Campus" talks about the past and present racial issues at Ole Miss. In 1962 Ole Miss, located in the deep south of Mississippi, James Meredith was the first black student to attend the university which caused a major uproar because people did not want a black student coming in and disrupting their white world. In an effort to calm the racism the university built a bronze statue to honor his legacy; administrators call this a "symbol of progress." However, after the statue was built two men placed a noose around James Meredith's statue leaving behind the Confederate flag. This act of ignorance displayed the lack of "progress" that Ole Miss made in attempting to weed out racism. In the film, The Touhy family never mentions anything about racism at the school instead they encourage him to go into an environment where people like him are historically not wanted. *The Blind Side* does a good job of leaving out those raw details of racism at Ole Miss which reinforce the blindness of the white gaze. Throughout this film the white gaze performs its obligations by turning a blind eye to moments of racism and replacing them with moments of white exceptionalism.

Michael's physical appearance upholds the stereotype of black athlete's portrayal in sports media. Before even looking at Michael's physical appearance, Coach Cotton is hesitant to accept Michael into Wingate Christian School, a school built on wealth and whiteness. Coach Cotton's face shows a sense of disbelief and sarcasm because he knows that a kid from the projects could never make it, economically and socially, in a school full of wealthy white kids. The coach continues to make up excuses as to why Michael will not be able to attend that "white" school stating, "I'm not involved with admissions" and "It's in the middle of the semester" completely shutting the idea down in an effort to protect his prestigious, white community (Hancock). However, when Coach Cotton turns, with widen eyes, and sees Michael's size he also sees opportunity. Coach Cotton knows that he could use Michael's size to his advantage. Often times in sports media black athletes are perceived as more physically enhanced than white players while white players are seen as intelligent and mentally enhanced. In his article "The Puzzling

Game of Jimmy ‘The Greek,’” Lloyd Cohen recalls Jimmy’s comment on why he believes black athletes are far better than white athletes. Jimmy Synder was a twelve year American sports commentator on CBS and in 1988 Jimmy was fired from the network for his racist remarks about black athletes in sports. Jimmy says, “Blacks were bred to be better than whites because slave owners during the Civil war bred his big black to his big black woman so that he could have a big black kid...that’s where it all started. The black man was bred to have big thighs which gave him a genetic advantage in athletics” (Cohen, 44). Martin Kane’s article “Black is Best” takes this concept a step further by taking a scientific look at why black players are more physically enabled than white players. He believes that “Black athletes have a shorter trunk, slender pelvis, longer arms, longer legs, more dense bones, more muscle in upper arms/legs, and blacks fat distribution differs from whites”(Kane, 74). He even mentions several doctors who research this phenomena such as Dr. JM Tanner who measured 137 track and field athletes, Dr. Albert Damon of Harvard University who studied 529 soldiers, and Dr. Edward E. Hunt Jr of Penn State University who studied how bone formation differ from white players in comparison to black players. Nowhere in the either article does it mention the pure intelligence of black players it only focuses on their physical build. *The Blind Side* reinforces this idea as Michael’s size is highlighted repeatedly throughout the film. In the very beginning of the film Leigh-Anne Touhy gives a voice-over about the position of the left tackle, while giving the basic facts she describes the build of an athlete who would play this position. She states, “the ideal left tackle is big... wide in the butt, massive in the thighs...he has long arms, giant hands, and feet quick as a hiccup”, this underlines the attitudes of people like Mark Kane who only saw the physicality of black athletes (Hancock). Also during this scene the film shows different clips of left tackle and they are all black but the film mentions nothing about how left tackle might just be knowledgeable of their position, which makes them a good player, rather the film only highlights the physical build of black players. *The Blind Side’s* ceaselessly highlight of Michael’s size reinforces the portrayal of black players on media in relation to their physicality. The film uncovers the hidden truths of the white gaze in sports.

The Blind Side presents an animalistic view of Michael, emphasizing the film’s focus on Michael’s physicality. Throughout the film, Michael’s physicality defines him, not who he is as person or his experiences. When Leigh-Anne takes Michael to the Big and Tall store the store clerk says that Michael is “bigger and taller,” when S.J. is eating lunch

with Michael he says that Michael looks like a “giant bumble bee,” and Coach Cotton refers to him as “Tarzan” and “a big marshmallow.” One of the most offensive remarks happens when Leigh-Anne’s pretentious country club friend refers to Michael as “King Kong” when discussing The Touhy family’s Christmas card, talking to Leigh-Anne she states “you look so tiny next to him, like Jessica Lang and King Kong” (Hancock). Michael is essentially being compared to a big, angry ape, and history proves the long history of negative references black people received as they are often compared to monkeys. In the article “Comparing Black People to Monkeys Has a Long, Dark Simian History,” Wulf D. Hund and Charles W. Mills explore the history of blacks comparison to monkeys, finding that this idea did not start as a black to monkey comparison but rather a human to monkey comparison. Comparing a human to a monkey has always carried negative stigma; the Fathers of the Church compared pagans to monkeys while in the Middle Ages, and Christians recognized monkeys as devilish figures and representations of lustful and sinful behavior (Wulf, Mills 5). The black to monkey comparison arose in 1933 during the production of “King Kong.” During the production of the film a rape trial was underway. The trial involved nine young black boys, called The Scottsboro Boys, who were accused of raping two white women. There were images in the newspaper to represent what The Scottsboro Boys were accused of doing: the image showed “a monstrous black ape figure baring its teeth and dragging off a helpless white girl (Wulf, Mills 5). This image caused “white public to be conditioned by dehumanizing violence of animal comparison,” this is evident in the film when Leigh-Anne’s friend is concerned about Collins, Leigh-Anne’s white daughter, living in the home with a “large black boy” (Wulf, Mills 8). Her friends’ negative reflection of Michael’s size shows one fragment of what white America’s blind side is being protected from: black men who could harm their helpless white women.

The Touhy family also see Michael’s size as opportunity for glory and an opportunity to show off their prized possession. They are under the assumption that his size will guarantee his success as a football player at Wingate and eventually Ole Miss. Leigh-Anne notices that Michael begins to receive college recruit calls and jumps at the opportunity to improve his chances. However, this is all deceit. It is not until she realizes her golden opportunity does she began to really invest in Michael’s education and she hires a tutor for Michael, Miss Sue. However Miss Sue is just another piece in the “Get Michael to Ole Miss” puzzle because when viewers are first introduced to Miss Sue the camera zooms in slightly on

her Ole Miss coffee cup and she is also wearing blue, red, and white: the colors of Ole Miss. Like Leigh-Anne, Miss Sue wants Michael to attend Ole Miss so Leigh-Anne informs her that Michael is in line for a football scholarship. In this moment Michael's size begins to limit him even more and he is no longer just their adopted black son, but the ticket to the Touhy family's glory. If Michael attends Ole Miss they can take credit for his success which creates the feel good, heartwarming feeling the white gaze produces. Although this film wants America to believe that Michael's size was a way for him to escape his past and become a successful football player, what the film really does is portray his size as a way for the white people to be worshiped.

Another way this film misrepresents Michael as an animal is through its erroneous gesture towards the children's book "Ferdinand the Bull." This is story about a bull who grew up only wanting to sit under a shady tree and smell the flowers while the rest of the young bulls were fighting with one another by butting their heads together. Eventually, Ferdinand grows into an enormous black bull who is chosen by five men to go to a bullfight in Madrid because they think he will fight rough. However when it is time for Ferdinand to fight, his only focus is smelling the bouquet of flowers that a woman had thrown at him. Eventually the five men realize that Ferdinand does not want to fight so they take him back to his home where he can sit under the shady tree and smell flowers all day. After Michael's first football practice Coach Cotton says to the Touhy's "most kids from bad situations can't wait to be violent and that comes out on the field. But this kid doesn't want to hit anyone" then Leigh-Anne refers to Michael as "Ferdinand the Bull" (Hancock). However, Michael is nothing like Ferdinand. Ferdinand's mother was content and understanding that Ferdinand did want to fight, but Leigh-Anne is persistent in her efforts to get Michael to "fight" or play football. After seeing Michael have multiple struggles with football Leigh-Anne takes it upon herself to ensure that Michael plays well by going onto the field during a football practice and explaining to Michael the duties of his position. Leigh-Anne never gives Michael the opportunity to choose football because she chose it for him. Ferdinand was also taken back to his home and never pursued bullfighting again, but Michael went on to play college and the NFL. When Ferdinand sits in the arena and smells the flower no one seems to be bothered by it, but imagine if Michael sat down in the middle of football field. Would this be the same story? Would this story even make the box office? If Michael sat down in the middle of the field and was taken back to his home this would

no longer be a story that praises the “white savior” nor would Michael be of any use to the Touhy family. No one wants to hear a story where the big black guy turns into a softy. Comparing Michael to Ferdinand is another way the film connects Michael to animalistic characteristics.

The Blind Side is a modern day plantation story as it emphasizes several characteristics of slavery. The film shows little about Michael’s life before the Touhy family therefore allowing the family to create their own version of Michael’s past. However, when the past is shown it is in quick flashbacks that last for a total of seconds carefully crafted to not overshadow the Touhy family’s life. The film exposes Michael’s success as a direct relation to the help of the Touhy family, before they came along Michael is portrayed as a “nobody”. Often times in the film Michael is seen alone and unnoticed until the heroic Touhy family saved the day. During slavery slaves were given no voice, they could not speak for themselves, especially in court, their stories were left untold much like Michael’s story is left untold in *The Blind Side*. This film silences Michael Oher by showing his life in minor flashbacks of his childhood. During these flashbacks the lighting is in shades of gray, blue, and black thus creating an unsettling feeling of sadness for viewers. Also, the flashbacks never connect but are rather seen in quick, moments. As viewers we never get the full story of what really happened because only shows Michael for few seconds. We never see what happened to Michael after he was taken away from his mom and for all we know he might have had a very positive upbringing. However, the film does not show the happy moments of Michael’s childhood only the moments that would make us feel bad for the black kid with the druggie mom. In Mark Reinhardt’s article “Who Speaks for Margaret Garner?” focuses on the silence of slaves, particularly the Margaret Garner story. “By law and custom, the slaveholding South advanced the principle that the slave could only be known through his master, denying slaves the right and means of speaking for themselves” Michael is only known through the Touhy family in the film (Reinhardt, 83). In one of the opening scenes Michael is walking alone in his neighborhood; his face shows a feeling of loneliness and hopelessness yet the same face occurs later in the film when he walking, alone again, from the gym. When Michael is picked up by the Touhy family, he then becomes “known” to Wingate students, football players, and later to college recruiters. The film depicts Michael as an unknown object before the Touhy family made him a subject reinforcing the idea that slaves were only known through their masters. “Fugitives who had eluded capture in the North were ex-slaves, experientially, but still slaves

by law; they could speak out against the system they had left behind but doing so increased the risks of discovery or forced return”, this was yet another way whites were able to silence blacks (Reinhardt, 70).

Although these fugitives were free from slavery they feared speaking about their past because they might be returned to it much like the film shows Michael timid to talk about his past as he fears he will have to go back those horrific conditions. *The Blind Side* only displays Michael past in internal flashbacks, not once does Michael come out and say that he lived a life with a druggie mother who he had to care for. There are moments where clues of a rough past are actually spoken; when Leigh-Anne creates a room for Michael he says, “I’ve never had one of these before...” Leigh-Anne assumes he is talking about his own room but instead he says “a bed” (Hancock, *The Blind Side*). Other times his past is an internal memory he does not share with others. Not allowing Michael to speak about his past openly reinforces this idea of Michael as a silenced slave. The major focus of Reinhardt’s article is the story of Margaret Garner, a slave woman who was a part of one the most notorious fugitive slave cases in American history. Michael Oher and Margaret Garner are similar as both of their voices were silenced. In 1856 Garner fled Kentucky with her husband and children, after successfully crossing they were found by slave owners. Before being captured Garner killed her daughter with a butcher knife and attempted to kill her other daughter because she did not want them to be returned to a life of slavery. Hamilton County Grand Jury charged Garner with murder and the United States Commissioner had them released from jail and returned to their owner but Ohio governor, Salmon P. Chase demanded the Garners return to Ohio so they could stand trial. When re-telling this story people end up “speaking for Margaret Garner, putting words into her mouth, and claiming access to her inner life” (Reinhardt). This is similar to Michael’s story. This film is trying to tell Michael’s story without Michael’s voice by reducing his past to a couple of minutes. These flashbacks are images of Michael being ripped away from his home and his mother reaching out to him then leaving in a car, this is all the film gives us. The rest of Michael’s adolescent years are left untold. These moments also lack dialogue, therefore the film presents images left to the audience interpretation or how the white gaze would construe or misconstrue them.

Michael’s past is misinterpreted in the film which allows the Touhy family’s “rescue” of him to be that much more glorified. There is one moment in *The Blind Side* when viewers come in contact with some of Michael’s past, his mother. However, this film erases Michael’s maternal

identity and substitutes it with a newer, whiter, better version by setting his biological mother and adoptive mother as binaries, at one point literally placing them side by side on a couch. *The Blind Side* attempts to rescue Michael from this own mother. The film shows Michael's biological mother apartment as completely dysfunctional: there are unmade mattresses on the floor, half-drunken wine bottles on the table, and cigarettes and cigars in ashtrays. The space is very small and cramped, the lighting is dimmed due to only two lightbulbs in the kitchen, there is one small window, the couches are stained, and the walls are molded; creating a depressed and worn-down atmosphere. However, Leigh-Anne Touhy's mega mansion is in complete order: there are big, tall windows which illuminate the home, the couches are fluffy and well-kept, and a spacious living area. When Michael's biological mother and Leigh-Anne Touhy sit next to one another on the couch viewers a physical difference between them. His biological mother is dressed in a raggedy robe, her hair is mess, and her posture is slouched. Whereas Leigh-Anne is perfectly manicured: her hair is flawlessly straight, her clothes are fashionable and ironed, her face is clean and fresh, and her nails are manicured. Creating this binary allows Michael's mother to be seen as cracked-out, dysfunctional mess while Leigh-Anne is the perfect Barbie who has her life in order. The film does not show Michael's mother journey to drugs making Leigh-Anne's "white savior" role that much more appealing.

Everyone speaks for Margaret and try to tell her story much like characters in the film are constantly attempting to speak for Michael. In a particular scene when Leigh-Anne is having lunch with her country club folk she says to her friends, "You have no idea what that boy has been through" and well quite frankly she does not either (Hancock). In this scene she uses one part of Michael's life, the one she witnessed three times when visiting Michael's old neighborhood in the projects, to define his whole past. This notion is repeated when Coach Cotton says, "Most kids from violent situations cannot wait to be violent", again whites are "putting words into" Michael's story assuming his whole life was full of violence. The film only portrays Michael's past as negative, there may have been moments in his life where he was happy but the film does not show that because that story would be a failure, it would not create the "feel good" emotion. We do not want to tell the story of the black kid who was happy with his "hood-rat" conditions because then whites could not come in and be the heroic figure. *The Blind Side* attempts to rewrite Michael's past forcing Michael's voice fade into background

noise, while the white gaze of his past is point on full display with all its loud misrepresented voice.

“Courage is a hard thing to figure. You can have courage based on a dumb idea or mistake, but you’re not supposed to question adults, or your coach or your teacher, because they make the rules” (Hancock, *The Blind Side*). John Lee Hancock’s *The Blind Side* using the white gaze theory to blind America’s hypocritical celebration of racial uplift. This film portrays a biased opinion on what it means to be black by means of showing the black community in a negative light, ignores moments of racism by blinding viewers with moments that praise the Touhy family’s rescue of Michael, comparing Michael to an animal by calling him names like King Kong and Ferdinand the Bull, limiting Michael’s past to quick flashbacks full of sadness, and erasing Michael’s biological mother and replaces her with a whiter, better version. Although this film does create a “feel good” emotion that connects to viewers it also shows the reality of racial injustice. This is film that completely overlooks the life of the main character, Michael Oher yet praises the Touhy family for playing their role as the “white savior” and rescuing him. This is the “rags to riches” story America loves to hear, but we need to open our eyes and see the complex truth behind this story we tell ourselves over and over again. Are we only telling ourselves this story to make America feel better about racism?

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Knocking out Stereotypes: Re-imagining Race, Social Class, Family, and Disability in Ryan Coogler's *Creed*

BY KRISTEN LEONARD

THE GREAT ROCKY BALBOA once said, “In the boxing ring of life, it’s not how hard you can hit, but rather how many times you can get hit and keep moving forward.” This is the message that the Ryan Coogler’s 2015 film *Creed* seeks to emphasize as it follows Apollo Creed’s son, Adonis ‘Donnie’ Johnson, on his journey to pursue a career in boxing and prove that he is “not a mistake.” What is interesting about this film, besides it being a spin-off of the legendary Rocky series, is the fact that it challenges cultural stereotypes that we normally associate with race, social class, and family. When the audience first meets Donnie, he is in a juvenile detention center, and we assume his story will be like any other “rags to riches” story – where the main character suffers at the hands of his race, social class, etc. However, to the audience’s surprise, the film forces us out of that stereotypical mentality into a more progressive outlook. *Creed*, then, transforms cinematic expectations regarding race, social class, and family in its effort to reject cultural stereotypes and prejudices.

Creed rejects the absent mother-father stereotype in order to show that not all African American males are negatively influenced by parental neglect. The film first shows the audience a stereotypical image of Donnie that influences us to make negative assumptions about who he is. The opening scene begins in the main hallway of the detention center. The

double doors open up, and in walks two security guards followed by a group of young boys walking in a single file line. Someone calls “Code Red” over the intercom and suddenly another security guard comes dashing through the hallway and down stairs to the cafeteria, where he finds Donnie fighting with another boy (*Creed*). Seeing Donnie’s violent behavior and later learning that both of his parents are absent, we assume that he will live a violent life because society has been conditioned to think this way about black males, particularly those who lack parental guidance. In Joseph P. Ryan’s article “African American Males in Foster Care and the Risk of Delinquency: The Value of Social Bonds and Permanence,” he argues, “Victims of [...] neglect are more likely relative to children in the general population to engage in delinquency” and that “the risk of delinquency is particularly high for African American males, adolescents, and children in substitute care settings” (115). Even though the statistic proves that the risk of delinquency is high for black males who experience neglect, this is not the reality for every black male. Knowing that, however, does not stop the audience from stereotyping Donnie and associating him with the statistic. For a second, the audience forgets that neither statistics nor stereotypes are true for everyone. After the opening scene, the film quickly transitions to when Donnie is older. The camera shows Donnie warming up for his practice boxing match. Seconds later, Donnie walks through the crowded boxing arena, steps into the ring, and proceeds to fight his opponent. A couple minutes later, the scene switches again, and Donnie is sitting at his office desk (*Creed*). Before this scene, the audience likely assumes that Donnie’s life as an adult is just as reckless and violent as it was when he was child, but the film strips us away from that mindset when Donnie is shown working at the securities firm. Donnie’s success as a business man proves just how oversimplified stereotypes are, and it reminds us that there are black males who are capable of making a stable life for themselves without the help of their biological parents.

The film also challenges the stereotype that says African American males only exude positive roles in sports as a way to acknowledge other existing roles that black males are successful in. Often times, we rarely see African Americans being represented as successful business men in the media. Sports are the only area where we constantly see black males thriving. In Jay Coakley’s book *Sports in Society: Issues and Controversies*, he writes, “...facts are distorted in media content that presents disproportionately more images of black athletes than blacks in other positive roles. If young African Americans use media images as a basis

for making choices and envisioning their future, there will be less progress toward achieving racial equality in the United States” (290). These disproportionate images in the media are likely the reason why “rags to riches” films that feature black males are typically sports-related. We have been conditioned to believe that sports are the only way for black males to escape issues such as, poverty, violence, and adversity. *Creed*, on the other hand, is a film that honors black males in areas other than sports. When the film makes a quick transition from Donnie’s experiences at the detention center to him preparing for his practice boxing match years later as an adult (*Creed*, 6:40), the audience automatically assumes that *Creed* will be another “rags to riches” story in which Donnie goes from a struggling kid to a boxing champion as a way to overcome his childhood struggles. However, by showing the audience that boxing is, at first, just a hobby and that Donnie is in fact a business man in the beginning, the film seeks to eliminate any stereotypes that claim black males are only capable of being sports players. When Donnie is inside the securities firm sitting at his desk, he appears to be in deep thought by the serious look on his face. Donnie gets up from his desk and walks to his boss’s office. Once there, he walks in and takes a seat. After taking a deep breath, he then hands his boss a rejection letter that says he will not take the position (*Creed*). Donnie’s role at the securities firm proves that African American males are and can be successful in more than one area, despite the media’s misrepresentation. *Creed*, then, rejects the notion that black males are limited to athletics by showing that these men are capable of receiving roles outside of sports.

Creed is also shown rejecting cultural stereotypes that deal with social class when Donnie gives up his position at the securities firm to be a boxer, which indicates that sports are sometimes a personal pursuit rather than a financial one. The audience questions why Donnie would rather box instead of work at the securities firm. Traditional ideology tends to associate boxing with the lower class. Coakley’s states, “Chris Dundee [...] said, “Any man with a good trade isn’t about to get himself knocked on his butt to make a dollar” [...] What he meant was that middle- and upper-class boys and men have no reason to play a sport that destroys brain cells, that boxers always come from the lowest and most economically desperate income groups in society...” (278). Years ago society believed that people of the lower class were the only ones desperate enough to risk their lives for money. While that may have been true in some cases, *Creed* seeks to show that it is not true in all cases. For Donnie, it is obviously not about the money because he already has wealth;

it is about proving to the world that he is “not a mistake.” When Balboa asks Donnie why he wants to pick a fight with life, Donnie responds, “I’ve been fighting my whole life,” and when Balboa says he should have stopped the fight with Apollo, Donnie says, “Maybe he wanted to go out like a fighter. Maybe you did exactly what he wanted” (*Creed*). Donnie has been fighting the fact that he grew up without his biological parents, so he feels compelled to go out like a fighter as well. Boxing becomes a way for Donnie to come to terms with his own identity. He wants to prove that parentless black children can be just as successful and that not all of them grow up to become delinquents, even though statistics suggest there is a high possibility it could happen. Essentially, the movie challenges our expectations of social class by suggesting that people are sometimes more concerned with doing what makes them feel like a winner instead of trying to please society or maintain a particular status.

In the film, Mary Anne, who plays Apollo Creed’s widow, discards the “mad black woman” trope that audiences typically witness in Hollywood films in order to depict black women in a more positive light. The audience expects the film to portray Mary Anne as this mad black woman who is angry at the world for her husband’s infidelity. We are forced to think this way due to the media’s portrayal of black women who experience a type of social conflict. In the article “But She’s Not Black,” Philip Kretsedemas states, “A common theme of these recent stereotypes is that of the angry black woman. [...] In the current era, [...] it is increasingly being used as a standard template for portraying all black women, regardless of social class, skin tone or body type” (150). This standard template of the “mad black woman” has become so common that filmmakers make it difficult for society to classify black women as anything other than that. As a result, the audience is shocked when characters like Mary Anne, who certainly has a viable reason to feel angry toward her situation, is the complete opposite. Mary Anne does not let her husband’s infidelity keep her from doing what she feels is morally right, which is taking Donnie into her care and providing him with a stable home. Mary Anne’s role, then, serves to teach the audience that there are black women who, despite the challenges they face, learn to deal with their issues without being negative and bitter. When Mary Anne visits Donnie at the detention center and asks him to explain his reason for fighting, he responds, “Nigga said something about my ma so I beat his ass.” She then responds, “I’m sorry about your mother. I know what it’s like to lose someone [...] Adonis, I would like it very much if you would come and stay with me” (*Creed*). To the audience’s

surprise, Mary Anne is extremely patient and understanding toward Donnie, and we do not expect that considering he is the product of her husband's affair. By having Mary Anne play the opposite role of a "mad black woman," the film is rejecting the stereotype and bringing attention to the fact that not all black women are the same.

Creed transforms the way we think about family through Donnie's relationship with Rocky Balboa, his white "Unc," in order to encourage the acceptance of interracial relationships. The idea of blacks and whites being closely related has fostered a lot of controversy and stereotypes over the years, making it seem impossible to establish a healthy relationship with someone of a different race. In Jon K. Mill's article "A Note on Family Acceptance Involving Interracial Friendships and Romantic Relationships," he discusses the results of a study done to show how people view interracial friendships and relationships. Mill states, "The finding that Blacks indicated a greater tendency to accept friendships with people of different races than did Whites was not surprising. As a minority, Blacks are forced to interact and associate with a dominant White society..." (351). It is true in most cases that blacks are more accepting of whites than whites are of them. Blacks are often left no choice but to interact with whites, but this film flips it by depicting how a white person might grow to be more accepting of blacks. When Donnie goes to Balboa's restaurant to ask him for a few boxing drills, he says, "Hey, Unc! Unc! How you doing?" Balboa responds, "Did you call me Unc?" Donnie replies, "Yeah, it was either that or O.G." Balboa then says, "Unc is good." (*Creed*). Donnie referring to Balboa as "Unc" reifies the idea that blacks are usually comfortable interacting with whites on a personal level, but the fact that Balboa does not reject Donnie's openness proves that whites can sometime be just as accepting of blacks as blacks are of them. It also shows that it is possible for blacks and whites to get along and understand each other on a deeper level, which society sometimes takes for granted or fail to acknowledge. Donnie and Balboa's acceptance of each other soon rubs off on the other characters, allowing them to be more open-minded and accepting as well. When Balboa visits Delphi Boxing Academy, the gym that Donnie practices at, he is seen chatting with Pete and Leo Sporino. Donnie walks in and yells, "Ay, Unc!" Pete asks Balboa, "Is he talking to you?" Balboa responds, "Yeah, I think so." Then Pete goes to say, "How you know Hollywood?" Rocky says, "We met at the restaurant." Pete finishes by saying, "Okay, Rock. Okay" (*Creed*). Though Donnie and Balboa's connection may seem odd, at first, the characters in the film are not overly concerned.

They simply accept it for what it is. When Donnie is preparing to move out of his apartment complex to move in with Balboa, he tells Bianca, his love interest in the film, “I didn’t get a chance to tell you, but I’m gonna be living with my uncle for a while, training for the next fight.” Bianca responds, “That’s your uncle? He’s white.” Balboa says, “Yeah, a long time.” Bianca then laughs (*Creed*). Seeing how comfortable Donnie and Balboa are with each other and being that they literally become like family, the characters in the film are willing to look past color and accept Rocky and Balboa’s relationship in the same way that they accept each other. Even though it is different from what we are used to, given our country’s consistent hatred toward black and white integration, the fact still remains that there are white and black people who are capable of having relationships with each other without race being factor in the matter. It also shows that society can move past racial indifference and stereotypes if people become more open-minded and tolerant of others. Essentially, *Creed* challenges negative perceptions about interracial relationships in its effort to re-imagine family in a way that enables blacks and whites to accept each other on a more personal level.

In the film, Donnie works hard to pursue his dream of boxing and to define his name in society. His determination to “fight” for his name challenges traditional ideology that says blacks are useless and less than human. Creed’s journey to prove his name also returns the audience to those moments in history when African Americans had to fight for citizenship because they were considered inferior and inadequate to whites. According to Nathan Irvin’s book *Black Odyssey: The Afro-American Ordeal in Slavery*, “Logic would have it one way or the other: either these black people were human and could not be property, or they were property and something less than human. Many would want to resolve the dilemma, assuming blacks to be less than human. [...] They were not persons in any sense the law need recognize” (118-119). Due to the fact that African Americans have been ostracized and degraded by society for so long, it is natural for them to believe that it is their duty to work harder than everyone else and to prove that they are capable of being successful. Although slavery is a thing of the past, racial justice is still something African Americans struggle with. While it is true that Donnie does not have to work as hard as most African Americans, considering he has money and already earned his name in some respect, being that he is Apollo’s son, he still feels obligated to prove that he is not a mistake. In a conversation between Donnie and Balboa about the Sporinos, Balboa states, “They know you’re a Creed?” Donnie responds,

“I don’t go by that. I’m trying to make it own my own. Name’s Johnson” (*Creed*). Donnie already has his path laid out for him, and though he wants to follow in his father’s footsteps, he does not want to do so with a name that he did not earn himself. It is vital to consider why Donnie feels the need to earn his name when he is already financially privileged. In Elizabeth Warren’s speech “It Comes to Us to Continue the Fight,” she argues, “Economic justice is not—and has never been—sufficient to ensure racial justice. Owning a home won’t stop someone from burning a cross on the front lawn. Admission to a school won’t prevent a beating on the sidewalk outside” (348). So, while being wealthy is not at all a bad thing, it will not guarantee African Americans their rightful place in society. For Donnie, that is only one part of the fight; the other part is making his identity mean something to the world around him. Through Donnie’s character, the film seeks to send the message that African Americans are capable of earning their names and proving that they, just like Donnie, are not a mistake.

Creed makes a political statement in its effort to prove that black lives do matter when Donnie is arrested in the film. This is the film’s way of emphasizing just how important it is for our country to put an end to the racial violence and discrimination. Recently in the past couple of years, there has been an ongoing issue of police brutality within the African American culture. Though this issue is becoming more and more apparent all over the United States, cases regarding Oscar Grant, Trayvon Martin, Mike Brown, Eric Garner, and Sandra Bland, just to name a few, are constantly overlooked by whites, and even some blacks, as being minor or unimportant because “all lives matter,” not just black lives. However, what people often fail to realize is that, while all lives do matter, black lives are the ones constantly being threatened. What *Creed* seeks to point out, though, is how essential it is for our society to recognize this brutality as a serious issue that has recently affected African Americans the most. Donnie walks into Johnny Brenda’s Bar to see Bianca’s performance. As he is walking into the building, a group of men notice that he is Apollo’s son, so they speak to him. Donnie nods his head and keeps walking. He chats with Bianca for a few seconds when the one of the guys asks him for a picture. Donnie walks over to him, and someone snaps their picture. When the guy refers to Donnie as “Lil Baby Creed,” it offends him. Seconds later, when the guy makes a disrespectful comment about Apollo, Donnie punches him in the face. A group of security guards rush over and grab Donnie, and they push him up against the wall to keep him from moving. The next scene shows Donnie sitting inside a jail cell (*Creed*).

This scene is probably the most powerful scenes in this film because it allows the audience a chance to witness a reality completely different from the one we know in real life. The audience is able to empathize with Donnie because we understand his plight; however, we recognize that, unlike Donnie, black males often endure consequences far more severe. In Gordon Marino's essay "All Lives Matter VS Black Lives Matter," he argues, "Prayerfully intoning "all lives matter" is an oblique way of muting the hard truths of Katrina, Ferguson, Waller County Texas, Baltimore, Cleveland, and Charleston. It's a way of dismissing the special burdens that African Americans have endured in the biased, harrowing machine of American justice" (6). It is true that all lives matter, but this film spotlights a race of people that have been targeted over and over again for years. While we are happy that Donnie only gets arrested, the audience realizes that this film is a powerful reminder of the changes that we need to establish in our real lives. *Creed* essentially forces the audience to face the truth about police brutality and racial inequality while spotlighting the "Black Lives Matter" movement.

All in all, *Creed* teaches its audience about the importance of possessing an open-mind and open heart by pointing out how stereotypes limit our views and perceptions and keep us from moving forward in what is supposed to be a post-racial society. The film allows us to take a closer look at people and their circumstances before prejudging them and assuming we know who they are and where they will end up. Donnie's transition from a childhood filled with neglect and violence to an adult pursuing his professional career in boxing makes us realize that anything is possible, even in the rarest cases. This film re-imagines a life where people are open and accepting of others and a life where stereotypes and negative perceptions are no longer a factor.

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The Power to Hide the Truth: *Concussion*, *the NFL's Disclaimer*

BY TI'RAY DEGRATE

THE FILM *CONCUSSION* at first glance appears to be a collision between medical and scientific researchers against the NFL corporation that serves to expose the NFL for their role and contribution to retired NFL player's deaths; however, the film omits specific details about the actual victims who the movie is supposed to represent and be about. The film starts out in a direction that seems to demonstrate medical researchers like Bennet Omalu intentionally colliding with the NFL in order to expose the corporation for playing part in risking players lives for capital gain. On the contrary, the film instead reveals how the NFL uses their power to continually hide the truth about the risks of lethal injuries from playing football from the public. By focusing more on the battle between Omalu and the collision with the NFL, *Concussion* demonstrates how the NFL used similar tactics to tobacco companies in order to hide the truth that comes along with engaging or using their product so that the corporations will continue producing massive capital.

In the film *Concussion* directed by Peter Landesman, the conflict between a medical neurotic examiner and the NFL is exposed when former NFL players' cause of death point to brain injuries caused on the field while playing the professional sport of football. Bennet Omalu is the neuropathologist who performs the autopsy of Mike Webster and

discovers a lethal brain disease called chronic traumatic encephalopathy (CTE). According to Omalu, this disease “triggers a cascading series of neurological events which unleashes killer proteins upon the brain” (Landesman). With these findings, Omalu concludes that playing football puts not only professional athletes at risk for a traumatic brain injury like CTE, but high school and college players as well. Athletes who’ve dedicated their whole lives to football, like Mike Webster, have developed an eighteen year career of professionally using the head as a weapon in football, putting their brains at risk in every game and in every practice.

In the film, Landesman displays collisions that signify or represent larger American conflicts dealing with American culture and class. These collisions also reveal the conflict between religion and science in many ways through the film’s character beliefs. Omalu is an African native who practices Christian faith while residing in the United States as an immigrant. The significance of Omalu’s faith and religion is that it allows Omalu to analyze the corpses he performs autopsies through a form of communication. Omalu emphasizes how “the dead are my patients,” which demonstrates the initiative to treat the dead with the same respect as if they were living patients. Omalu’s occupation shows the collision between the living and the dead in American society. Unless a person is a median and believes in being able to communicate with both the living and the dead, most Americans aren’t into communicating with the dead and see it as a weird unfamiliar abjection that doesn’t sit well deep inside the self of an individual. According to Julia Kristev, the abjection “refers to the human reaction to the collapsing of meaning as the self becomes aware of the difference between self and other or subject and object” (2). We see through Danny, one of Omalu’s co-workers, exemplify this abject in that he does not understand the communication Omalu has with the dead. Danny sees a corpse as a dead body as an entity that needs to be left in peace. Underneath, as Danny becomes aware of himself in correlation to the dead bodies, an unexplainable horror arrives; the acknowledgement as well as the border between the living and the dead. This is demonstrated in early scenes in the film where Danny sees Omalu talking to his dead patients before he performs their autopsy. “Tell me what happened to you?” Omalu questions his patients. Danny looks at Omalu in disgust. Omalu tries to explain that “If I know how they lived, then I can find out how they died”. This method allows Omalu to get to know his patients in ways no other living person can or did when the patient was alive.

Concussion also reveals the collision between the self through its short display of Mike Webster's life before he died. After retiring from the NFL, Webster is afraid to sleep due to the possibility of not waking up. He drinks cleaning products as a way to stay awake in his pickup truck which he lives in homelessly. The collision between Mike Webster and himself are all in his head. He isn't the man everyone once knew him to be as the greatest center that ever played for the Steelers. Instead, his brain tells him he's something else. Something that either needs to destroy or needs to be destroyed. As Mike yells to the Steelers team doctor he says "You've got to help me! I'm dying in here!" (Landesman). While yelling in the doctor's office, Mike continually points to his head as he exclaims "You have to fix this". The problem with Mike is that his brain no longer allows him to recognize himself as him. Unfortunately, no one was able to diagnose or understand what was going on inside of Mike Webster until after he died. Mike Webster's condition reveals a lot about Americans in that society acts as our brain. Many American Individuals battle between themselves daily about who they actually are, who they want to be, and who society is telling them who they are. Which one do you listen to and how do you know if the conscious you listened to is yours? Mike Webster's condition also demonstrates the collision between being sane and insane.

While working on Webster's case, Danny informs Omalu on how big a deal it is that this Pittsburgh hero is dead. "When this town was out of jobs, that man gave us hope" (Landesman). The fact that Omalu isn't aware of who Webster is before his death makes Danny feel as though Omalu is unworthy to perform his autopsy. Treating Webster's body as if it is a famous, valuable, collectible item, Danny pushes Omalu not to cut open Webster's body and to just leave the dead man be. The difference between Omalu and Danny are that Danny like many Americans are horrified of a lot of issues that are placed in front of us, and instead of correcting those issues, or asking the right questions that will assist in correcting the problem, Danny chooses to look the other way and leave the issue where and as it is. He is so heavily wrapped up in the flight mode of fight or flight that he encourages others to choose flight as well. On the other hand, Omalu is a fighter. He chooses to analyze the issue in order to find the best solution possibly for that specific issue. Instead of being scared of what the outcome maybe, Omalu choose to collide with the problem and take it on first hand.

The director of *Concussion* also makes clear the collisions that take place in football. While Omalu continues analyzing Webster's brain, he

finds the same proteins that are found in retired boxers brains. He begins to study the game of football as the film displays Omalu in his living room watching ESPN. On ESPN is a countdown of the weeks hardest in-game hits. The commentators show no remorse, but instead show more excitement and awe the harder the hits get as the countdown goes down. Immediately after this scene, Omalu visits a team practice where the coach is aggressively demanding that the players “find any teammate and make collision. You be physical and you be violent” he urges as he directs them through practice drills (Landesman). Following this scene, the film displays Omalu watching videos of player vs player collisions in football. The significance of this is that these players in the video vary from little league recreational football, to high school, college and professional football players, all playing with the same style and goal; stop the player with the ball by all means necessary. The audience watches as players aggressively collide with one another while their coaches yell from the side “Hit Em! Drive! Drive!” (Landesman). The compulsive and repetitive acts of collision in the game of football comes with consequences with which Mike Webster and other former NFL players died from. The significance of this is that the film shows through long term player injuries that collision without a solution or from of balance can take you out of the game, not just football, but the game of life as well.

After hearing about the reports on CTE and its relationship to the game of football the NFL responds by requesting Omalu to “retract his findings” (53:38). This request reveals the anxiety and denial that NFL has about Omalu’s research on deceased retired NFL players. While Omalu’s boss is informing him about the NFL’s request, his boss makes him aware of the situation he is now in. “Bennet Omalu is going to war with a corporation that has 20 million people craving their product on a weekly basis” (57:42). This moment reveals the main conflict displayed throughout the film; collision. Bennet Omalu collides with the NFL by making them, the NFL Corporation, “terrified” of Omalu’s research. Omalu cannot comprehend why the NFL is so threatened by him when his use of his research is only to make people aware of the lethal risks that come along with playing football. From the NFL’s stand point, they are looking at what effects this problem Omalu has caused them will have on their corporation. Will they lose fans or future NFL participants due to “moms and dads who will make decisions about whether or not their kids will play football” (Vrentas). If this was the case, the NFL could lose one of the most valuable aspects of their company which is annual revenue that accumulates from all the sales the NFL makes from stadium sales

to team paraphernalia. In a Frontline interview, Omalu makes a point that the fact that the NFL requires players to wear protective equipment means that they are aware that players would be “exposed to repeated trauma” (Omalu). What the NFL reveals about Americans is that by tackling one situation for example, success or the American Dream, we open up the cycle for future collisions or conflict that repeatedly contributes to end you or your success. This film illustrates how Americans want the best doctors, and people from all over the world to do research and help America be better, but we stonewall and critique them when they do. It shows that instead of fixing problems Americans choose to put a bandage on the problem to cover up the wound, similar to team medics giving the ok for injured players to continue to play.

A problem this film poses is how Americans glorify and beautify collision not only in football but in life as well. The harder the hit on the field, the more hype the crowds get in the stands. Similar to getting vengeance in war, Americans have been programmed and are still being programmed to attack, fight, and prevent the “other” from scoring due to a fumble on your part, or getting ahead due to your mistakes. This film reveals that because many Americans believe in the American dream, odds are many are going to go out and achieve it. Of course when everyone is going after different versions of the same dream there will be many collisions and conflicts.

In the book *League of Denial* by Mark Fainaru-Wada and Steve Fainaru it is revealed how the NFL worked to keep the dangers of playing professional football as a secret and a risk players would not be informed about before signing contracts with this billion dollar corporation. The authors show how at first the NFL never mentioned anything about dangers and risks that come along with playing the game, other than broken bones, sprains, and mild injuries that are expected to heal within a matter of weeks at the most. With the common injuries noted and expected, the NFL downplayed critical conditions like concussions that have long term effects and eventually begin to wear down the brain and body. Similarly to drafting players into the Military, the NFL sell themselves to prospective players in the same way the military convinces recruits to “serve their country”. Both of these organizations mention nothing about the long term effects of trauma and disease that comes along with joining, but instead, mention how much money they’ll pay you or the fame and recognition you’ll receive. *Concussion* director Landesman depicts this in the film shortly after Omalu publishes his research on CTE and its relation to the death of many former NFL play-

ers. Omalu receives a phone call by an anonymous person who claims to be “a neurologist who’s worked around football for years and is very familiar with the NFL’s concussion research”. The scene of this phone call is shown immediately after we see NFL staff reading Omalu’s work in a medical journal. The anonymous caller goes on to tell Omalu that the NFL has already concluded “that football players do not get brain damage and that Webster is a random case” (Landesman). What’s significant about this is that in the previous scene at the NFL headquarters, the staff seem a bit frantic about Omalu’s article and are quick to see if it’s anything that “they need to be concerned about”. This conversation between NFL staff Christopher Jones and Dr. Elliot Pellman is short, concise and reveals that the NFL may be a little threatened by Omalu’s claims. As Dr. Pellman reads reviews the CTE research, Chris Jones phones him about the situation that has occurred. Pellman responds by informing Chris that he is already on it and degrades Omalu’s research by saying “he’s a coroner in Pittsburgh, he looks like a nobody, but let me get to it”(Landesman). We can assume that in the very next scene Omalu’s anonymous caller is possibly Pellman himself or someone he hired to try to scare off Omalu. Before hanging up with Omalu the caller persists with the subtle attack by saying “You’re an uneducated quack and your career is over” ending the call and also warning Omalu about the potential war he’s starting with a powerful corporation.

Both *Concussion* and *League of Denial* depict how the NFL uses its power and capitals to attack autonomous researchers like Omalu to diminish their own inconsistent and faulty research. In the next scene after the phone call the audience learns that the NFL owns neuroscience which proves that this corporation has power in science that is related to their sport. This also raises suspicions as to why the NFL would need to own neuroscience. It gives the NFL the ability to not ask, but tell or threaten Omalu and his employers to retract the research on CTE and say that Omalu “made it all up” (Landesman). In this moment in the film we start to see the NFL use its power to keep the truth about the dangers of playing football quiet. In *League of Denial*, authors not only question the NFL’s sacredness and positive purposes endorsed by the NFL, but they also suspect that the “NFL denying that players experienced concussions and that concussions caused brain damage (CTE) parallels with cigarette companies’ denials that smoking caused cancer” (Fainaru). As shown in the film the NFL discretely objectifies the research that proves that players are dying from playing the repetitive violently aggressive sport.

In Peter Benson's *Tobacco Capitalism* a similar reaction takes place once scientist reveal that smoking tobacco can ultimately lead to lung cancer. Like the NFL being terrified of the amount of money being lost due to the truth of harm and death being associated with their product, the tobacco industry responded similarly "with various strategies, including redoubling marketing campaigns to legitimize the smoking habit and secretly funding pseudoscience to foment public debate and doubts about the basic facts of tobacco toxicity" (Benson). This correlates to the scene in the film when the audience becomes aware that the NFL owns neuroscience; both companies exert their power to dismiss allegations and to also change the science to be in their favor so that their companies can continue to selling their products to the public. Benson adds historical perspective when he notes that by the 1960s "the tobacco industry begin to become a problem" before this period "tobacco was glamorized on the silver screen and even recommended to patients by doctors" (Benson). Due to U.S. Surgeon General's report in 1964 the public was made aware of the scientific and medical unanimity about smoking and its relation to health.

Furthermore, Stuart L. Esrock's *Talking Tobacco* also reveals how like the NFL, the tobacco industry denied research that concluded the company and their product was responsible for people dying from lung cancer due to smoking. "Tobacco companies have engaged in a largely repetitive strategy of fallacious arguments designed to obscure scientific evidence demonstrating the dangers of cigarette smoking" (Esrock). The NFL use some of the same strategies to deride the scientific argument that Omalu publishes about the dangers of playing football. This similarity between the NFL and the tobacco industry demonstrates how power allows for the opportunity for corporate organizations to create tactics that refute the evidence against them in order to resist the health regulations. Also as seen in *Concussion* NFL degrades Dr. Omalu and his research by not only insulting him, but saying that his research on CTE is fraud and not credible. The tobacco industries does this likewise by portraying evidence of the risks of smoking tobacco as "junk science" (Esrock 82). Both corporations use their power to deny scientific research and attacking the researchers by creating their own false research to go against the truth. As stated in *Concussion* by Omalu's boss, "These people don't want to save the world!" The only intent of companies like the NFL or Tobacco companies is to accumulate as much wealth as possible off the public using and engaging with their products. Exposing the fact that potential lethal harm is a risk that comes along

with playing football or smoking tobacco will only make the public hesitant to use these companies products, which in the end cause the corporations to lose money. Despite the medical and scientific research, these billion dollar industries aren't interested in how many people die from the product, but how much capital they gain from it instead, only to later use that capital to buy a part of science like in the NFL's case or to use the capital sponsor other companies related to health in order to attempt to separate or distance themselves from the problem.

Although the film *Concussion* reveals how the NFL is similar to tobacco companies, the film does not depict what it was intended to. Instead of displaying how playing football long term is not only dangerous, but potentially lethal, they do this minimally by excluding scenes that show and really let us get to know the CTE victims that died. When the audience is first introduced to Mike Webster, it isn't the most inviting. The film depicts Webster as a deadbeat homeless ex-football player who's lost his way in life. The film shows news media where they discuss rumors that were already suspected before his death. The sports news anchor describes Webster as being "suicidal, dangerous, and delusional," which is the same way the NFL views Omalu as a threat, dangerous and delusional (Landesman). With every victim that died due to brain CTE, the movie only displays the characters with the symptoms for a brief moment. None of the scenes that display the ex-football players last longer than two to three minutes, which keeps the already curious and suspicious audience from connecting, relating, or knowing the character(s) the movie seemed to be about in the beginning. By restricting the audience from these scenes, the film *Concussion* distances the audience from these victims, in the same way the NFL chose to.

By reading the synopsis or watching a preview of the film *Concussion*, the film looks as if it is about exposing the NFL for keeping the whole truth about concussions from the public. Instead of treating these ex-football players who made the NFL millions like victim, they leave no room to pity the ex-players. Every reaction towards their cry for help is negative and the scene lasts less than five minutes. The scene where retired NFL player Andre Waters begs his former teammate Dave Duerson for help depicts how the NFL looks at the victims of CTE. In this scene Andre Waters is already experiencing symptoms of the CTE disease and appears to be a little insane. He tells Dave Duerson that "me and you were the same. We were bangers, hitmen," as he tries to get his former teammate to relate to him (Landesman). Duerson's response isn't sentimental or understanding at all. Instead what we see is him pulling

away from Waters, and when Waters gets close to make Duerson listen and understand that he is ill, Duerson insults him and tells him to “stop eating everything, and to see a doctor if his head hurts” (Landesman). Instead of trying to sympathize and be there for a teammate who was more like family than a friend on the field, Duerson yells at Waters telling him to “Get his shit together!” he also looks down on Waters and sighs “You used to be a warrior”. (Landesman). This scene demonstrates how even when these men were begging for help, they were ignored and looked at as if they had given up on life. What makes this scene ironic however, is that later on Duerson also becomes a victim of CTE and later commits suicide as well.

As shown earlier, similar to the Tobacco companies, the NFL denied the scientific truth that proved playing football was potentially lethal. In the early scene where Omalu gets the anonymous caller, the caller says that Webster is just one case. However, after Andre Waters commits suicide and several others do the same, Omalu also finds the same disease in their brain that was found in Webster’s, proving that Webster was not the only CTE victim. As Omalu looks over Andre Waters’ and Justin Strzelczyk’s, diseased brains with Dr. Julian Bates, who was the Steelers former team doctor, Dr. Bates winces and sort of blames himself for playing a part in the death of these players. “I just kept sending them back out there,” he says as he shakes his head in despair. When asked why he explains that his job as an NFL team doctor is to do “whatever it takes to keep them in the game, to keep the whole thing going” (Landesman). He gives a long list of medications they would give the players before sending the “mildly injured” players back into the violent collision based game. Bates justifies this risky and lethal strategy by comparing football to racing cars. “It’s tires and oil. Just mechanics tryin to keep the cars on the race track.” He later says it’s all just “business” illustrating how the NFL isn’t as concerned about the safety of their players as they should be. This scene demonstrates the risks that the NFL staff were taking on players in order to not only make sure they won games, but made more money while doing it. This correlates back to the tobacco companies disregarding the health risks in order to increase their capital.

In the following scene, Omalu meets with Dr. Maroon, former president of the Congress of Neurological Surgeons. Representing the NFL, he starts the meeting off by showing the audience that even after the scientific research proves that playing football is potentially lethal, the NFL is still in denial about football playing a part in these former NFL player’s deaths. “Your conclusions totally misrepresent the facts,” Maroon

argues as he dismisses Webster, Long, and Waters being killed by football as ludicrous. When Omalu proposes to do a study on former and current NFL players to solve and potentially find a cure for the disease and suggests that the NFL work with him in doing so, Maroon asks “Who do you think you’re talking to?” this again reveals how the NFL use their authoritative power to shut down scientists like Omalu who they view as a threat to their capital gain. The significance of this scene highlights how the NFL continuously denied the research findings and omitted this information from the public for their own imperial benefits.

To conclude, Landesman’s *Concussion* appeared to be a film that exposes the NFL’s hiding of the concussion problem. While the film does that slightly, its main focus was not the CTE victims or what their battle with the brain disease after football was like. The film focuses more on Omalu’s love life and provides more scenes of him and his fiancé than it does allowing the audience to analyze the lifestyle and tribulations the CTE victims experienced before and after football. Similarly to tobacco companies finally taking action by including disclaimers on the packages of their products that serve to warn the public of potential harm, the film *Concussion* seems to serve as the NFL’s own disclaimer to football fans. Instead of exposing the NFL for knowingly contributing to the potential death of football players, the film never gets to a solution. The film lacks detail on the victims of the lethal brain disease and portrays the victims in a negative light that makes it appear that the men deserved the lifestyle they received after playing football. *Concussion* also fails to demonstrate the NFL’s acceptance and affirmation to the concussion problem, but uses the film itself to do that for the NFL. Instead, the audience is forced to analyze the film by becoming aware of what the film chose not to show. This revealed how the NFL Corporation parallels to tobacco industries in prior decades. Both of these corporations continue to sell their products and gain an excessive amount of capital from it. Like Omalu’s boss stated in the film, these people are not out to save the world. *Concussion* discloses how these companies are interested only in their own selfish imperial desires and with a corporation as big as the NFL, power exerts the capability to omit the truth and manipulate the public to still use and engage in its product even after the truth is out.

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The Playbook for Sissies: Gender Equality in American Sports in *Silver Linings Playbook*

BY KATHERINE TRIAL

WHEN I WAS 10 years old I remember my mother putting me on a co-ed softball team. I never enjoyed it much, and I remember often getting distracted by other things like butterflies and dandelions while in the outfield. Softball was something that did not intrigue me very much as a young girl. Then one day while I was dozing off in the outfield, I saw the ball flying straight towards me. I became so ecstatic, and it seemed as if the ball was going in slow motion and I had my glove in the perfect position to catch it. Then all of a sudden another boy on my team runs towards me and knocks me down trying to retrieve the ball as well. Neither of us caught the ball and we both ended up on the ground while the other team started running the bases. I had a chance to make a big move, an opportunity to get excited about softball, but this boy ruined it for me. Like many other girls in the sports society, I had to fight for my relevance in sports.

Silver Linings Playbook is an American film that includes running, gambling, football, dance, sorrow, and a general belief that “Once you get in the right frame of mind [...] anything’s possible” (Russell 00:02). This sports film was written and directed by David O. Russell in 2012. Russell characterizes attitudes towards femininity in sports in America through the characters in this film, Tiffany, Pat, and Dolores. Dolores

(Jacki Weaver) plays the typical Italian-American housewife and mother to Pat Solatano (Bradley Cooper) and only wants the best for her family but ends up only standing on the sidelines while the men in her family make the difficult plays throughout the film. Meanwhile Tiffany (Jennifer Lawrence), a widow who is coping with the death of her husband and the loss of her job, contradicts the standard gender roles by participating in running, gambling, dancing, and the analysis of football. Tiffany also goes against gender inequality in sports by rejecting what America's ideal image of a woman should be. Pat defies the gender standard in sports by participating in a sport that is usually intended for women: dance. These characters demonstrate to the American audiences in the twenty-first century how women are managing to fight for relevancy in sports while the society of sports is still dominated by men. Tiffany and Pat's defiance of the male-dominated sport's world inspires the female audience and their relations to sports in their own lives, and challenges gender inequality within the sports culture.

Silver Linings' Playbook exemplifies how sports are still dominated by men in America today by presenting that women are not intended to participate in sports. Delores exemplifies how men ignore her role with her absence in sports but Tiffany goes against this idea by fighting for her relevance in sports in the film. In the one scene of the film (Russell 01:22), Pat Solatano goes out with his brother and a group of his friends to an Eagles football tailgate and the majority of the people in the parking lot are males. Also, a bus pulls in to the tailgate and everybody that comes out of it is a man. This scene does not depict the mother at all and shows Tiffany impatiently waiting on Pat at home. The director makes a point that in the Solatano family that the women should stay at home while the men go to the sports games. The family does not even consider inviting any of the women to the football game, which can lead to the assumptions that the women would not enjoy the football game at all, or that they just do not belong in a sports setting. Tiffany proves them wrong in a later scene when she spits out multiple facts and scores about several Eagles games (Russell 01:28). *Silver Linings Playbook* shows that women are stereotyped by their gender in the sports world and Learn supports this idea when she presents a poll of "the percentage of students who say sports is a big part of who they are" in which only thirty-four percent of girls agreed and sixty-one percent of boys agreed (Learn 44). The idea that women have to live up to this ideal that society has created for them, to be woman that does not think about sports but is associated with other ideals like being a wife or mother, has been

imbedded in American's minds. The poll proves that even when people are young, they are taught to stereotype women to be less involved in sports. Continuously females are discriminated in sports equality in America. Females are not even considered when sports are mentioned. Men in the fandom of football are more dominant than women in this film as well as in American sports society and the director proves with Tiffany that women do not have to keep falling into the same historical stereotype and can be more involved with sports.

Russell makes a point in the film that women and sports do not go together, and Dolores and Tiffany defy this idea, and their defiance help the audience to envision better gender equality in sports. When Pat Sr. suggests Tiffany should not be hanging out with Pat because she brings bad luck to the sports games; "When you started spending time with her, it all fell apart," the film shows the push of more gender equality in sports between men and women when Tiffany responds to Pat Senior that she has actually brought good luck to the Eagles juju (Russell 34:50). Pat's father was trying to keep Tiffany outside of the sports conflict, but she proves to be a good contributor and rejects the negative stereotype that has been created of women. Pat Senior tries to keep Tiffany out of the sports society just like America pushes women out of the gender equality in sports. Tiffany seems to know more facts about football than any of the men in the room, yet none of the men invited her or any other women to the game. All of the men are proving to stereotype women in the sport's society, assuming that they are uninterested or just do not belong in the sport's scene and Tiffany rejects this stereotype by proving she has the knowledge of sports. Once again, the men want to keep the women on the outside of the sidelines, but Tiffany proves to Pat Sr. that the women belong there because they bring good luck to the sports games and that she has more knowledge of the games than the men. The women in the film cannot enjoy the sports games without proving to the men their knowledge of the game. Tingle provides that the gender inequality in sports needs improvement when he states that "While progress has been made in providing sport opportunities for women, women are still significantly under-represented in its management and research affirms the suggestion that men continue to dominate the field" (Tingle 8). The men in this film continue to be domineering when it comes to all the decision-making associated with sports in the film and continuously ignore the women. Throughout the whole discussion of the sports parlay bet between Randy and Patrizio, Dolores does not say a word the whole time. When she does speak up

saying, “Patrizio, don’t! It’s toxic” she is completely ignored and the father takes the bet anyways regardless of the huge risk that comes with the bet (Russell 31:25). Dolores is depicted as the stereotypical woman in this scene because the men do not even see her when they start talking about sports, obviously assuming she does not have a valid opinion on the subject. Her role as a mother and housewife devalues her stance as a valid person in the sports role, and the men assume she does not have any knowledge in the field of sports. Dolores is ignored for her input on sports while Tiffany’s voice is heard. Dolores’ role in the film depicts how Americans have historically viewed women as a mother and housewife figure that should not be involved in sports while Tiffany dares to change that historical view. Tiffany is defying the female standard in sports while Dolores continues to stand in the background of the men, and the audience can take from the film that the view of women in sports needs to change.

Even though Dolores does not take a major role in the decision-making in sports or the major plays in the film because of her womanly role in the movie, she still remains an important character and without her the family would fall apart. The film’s lack of focus on Dolores reveals society’s view towards women in sports and the director reveals to the audience that society’s view should be modified. Entertainment Weekly describes Mrs. Solatano as: “the hovering, snack-preparing wife and mother of troubled young men,” which could be generalized as the typical Italian-American housewife (Varby 62). She does not take part in any sports, although she still cheers behind her husband during the Eagles games. The men in her family are constantly relying on her as the matriarch to keep the family stable whenever it starts to fall apart. The men in Dolores’ life are constantly falling apart and she is always there to keep her family together and stable. Pat Sr. shows characteristics of obsessive-compulsive disorder and Pat Jr. is diagnosed as bipolar. Both of the men in the house experience multiple emotional outbursts and Dolores is always there to calm them both down, and keep the family together, much like the coach does to a sports team. One of the first impressions that Russell gives the audience of Dolores Solatano is Danny’s reminiscence of Pat’s stories, in which he tells her “Pat told me all about you, how God made you rich in character, and you’re the mighty oak that holds the household together” (Russell 00:02). Even though Dolores does not have a huge interest in sports in this film, her character is still significant and even though women are not significant in sports in America, they play a huge role in society. One academic journal digresses on how

women are usually ignored: “Despite the ubiquitous presence of mothers in sports contexts, mothers’ voices are often absent in the sport literature” (Leberman 474). The audience pays less attention to her role in the film because she is not put into the sports, but without her, the family would not be held together. The film makes a point of not putting a large focus on the mother because that is how American society views the mother in sports. Elizabeth Cady Stanton contends with her anger felt towards the ideal image of a woman in America the first women’s rights convention when she describes “The general discontent I felt with woman’s portion as wife, mother, housekeeper, physician, and spiritual guide, the chaotic condition into which everything fell without her constant supervision” (Zirin 11). This convention took place in 1840 and the ideology that a woman must take on the role of mother and housewife is still relevant in a 2012 film, *Silver Linings Playbook*, and suggests that these mother figures should not participate in sports because they have duties to concentrate on the family. Stanton also reveals in her speech that without the mother all the people around her would not be successful. American society does not pay attention to the mother in sports texts because she is a woman, and this film shows through Dolores that the audience should start paying attention to the woman, because without her, there would not be a sports story. Even though Dolores is not a major player in the sports in the film, her role as a housewife and mother shows that women’s importance in sports is valid, and without the women, the team might fall apart. *Silver Linings Playbook* exhibits the idea that women who are standing on the sidelines and not making the major moves are just as viable as the men in the game.

Russell depicts women’s irrelevancy in sports through the father-son bond created between Pat and his father and shows how Dolores is isolated from that bond with her son because she is a female. The film depicts the father-son bond held in sports when Pat Sr. tells his son “I think it would be wise if we spent father-son time, reading about the Eagles, talking about them” (Russell 01:14). Fathers and sons can create a relationship through sports but Dolores is left out of the bond because she is a woman, and it is harder for her to connect with him on that level because she is viewed as the outsider. American society views sports as gendered focused idea and because the son is raised in this society, he cannot have the same bond he has with his mother as he can with his father because of the way our society generalizes gender in sports. Research proves that men and women that are brought up in American society create an unequal stereotype in sports in relation to

parental figures: “studies that have found that when fathers are involved with their children’s sport experiences, it is typically in a technical or direct way, such as coaching the team [...] Mothers on the other hand were more likely to be involved with their child’s sport experience in a support role” (Graham 45). Dolores continuously is ignored and not focused on and there is a huge focus on the relationship between Pat and his father in the film, which has faults in the film. Patrizio digresses on his negligence to his son when he tells him “maybe I didn’t, spend enough time with you growing up” (Russell 01:15). Pat’s father seems to be too focused on the sports games, that he does not seem to give his son enough focus that he needs but the film is centered on their sports bond. The film focuses on this father-son relationship that is held between sports but it seems as if Dolores is more sensitive to her son’s needs than the father is. Consequently, the film should be focusing on the mother’s relationship to the son in sports because she spends more time and provides more care to her son, but the audience will be more intrigued by the father-son relationship because of the greater intrigue it holds on men in sports. The director makes a point in putting more of a focus in the film on the father and son relationship relative to sports to reveal the gender inequality in America. The lack of focus on Dolores is relevant because it reveals how American society is insufficient in the attention they give to females in sports.

Tiffany rejects the American male-dominated sports society by depicting the opposite of how an ideal typical female woman normally behaves in sports. She is dark and seductive and also a back-talking sarcastic person that demands the same respect from Pat that she gives to him. Tiffany defines the opposite of what an ideal woman should be when she yells at Pat “I’m just the crazy slut with a dead husband!” (Russell 00:49). Tiffany’s dark seductiveness is the opposite of what a girl in sports should represent which is a pure, cleaned up, motherly figure and Zirin describes this ideal woman in historical America: “Unless you could do housework and raise kids while wearing pearls, you are less than a woman” (119). Tiffany opposes the ideas of purity and motherhood because of her multiple sexual acts that she has taken a part of as a single woman. She also is dark and moody and dressed in black in the film and this opposes the pure aspect of a motherly woman. Women have to work harder than men to obtain relevance in the sports world because of their common linkage of being motherly and a wife figure. The image of a pure, white, and dainty female in sports is repetitive throughout American history and texts. In Fitzgerald’s text, *The Great*

Gatsby, Jordan, who is a professional golfer, is pictured as a small thin, womanly figure that is portrayed as high-class and pure and often pictured in white. Tiffany in *Silver Linings Playbook* is the exact opposite of this, being a beautiful, crazy, seductive widow that enjoys the freedom of expression through dance. Tiffany opposes the typical female that is white and pure because she is depicted in dark black attire throughout the film. Her representation of her sexuality through sports also changes the way society generalizes a woman's image in sports by suggesting that women in sports should have the freedom to express their sexuality and not have to be a motherly figure. The film is assisting in making women's relevance greater in sports by changing the stereotypes that have been created about women in sports throughout history and rejects that women in sports have to be pure and motherly.

Tiffany's participation in the sport of running in the film suggests defiance against the male dominated sports world by portraying a woman in a sport that is generally dominant of men. Throughout American history, women have always been set apart from the sports world but Tiffany is not. Pat even tells Tiffany "I like to run by myself," which signifies his undesirable feelings of having her join him in his sports (Russell 00:37). She continues to keep running with Pat and he spits on the ground. Tiffany then proceeds to spit on the ground as well. Tiffany's confidence in herself and her actions that may seem manly continue to break the gender difference in sports. Pat tries to push her away from joining him in the sport but she responds with a manly gesture to prove that she is fearless against the gender inequality. Her interest in running, which has not usually been a women dominated sport, causes a change in the ideology of male-dominated sports. Bubar gives light on America's historical views of women around fifty years ago when he states "Many people didn't think women were physically capable of running longer distances. Running a marathon was seen as 'unladylike' " (6). Tiffany breaks barriers in the gender equality by choosing the male-dominant sport of running and defying the image of an ideal woman. Tiffany is also making a statement in being physically active because most women do not consider sport a part of their daily lives in American society. Being physically active breaks the idea that a woman has to be pretty and clean, and pictures them dirty and sweaty. Tiffany tells Pat that "I was a big slut, but I'm not anymore. There's always gonna be a part of me that's sloppy and dirty, but I like that, with all the other parts of myself. Can you say that about yourself, fucker?" (Russell 00:38). Pat had called Tiffany a big slut because of how she represents herself in sports but what she is really doing is breaking

the stereotype of what women typically should be viewed as in America: clean and pure. The director proves through Tiffany that women can participate in any sport, no matter how dirty or unwomanly she may seem. Tiffany is also testing Pat, asking him if he can break that view of what is considered the norm of gender identity in American sports. Tiffany's participation in a male-dominant sport helps to eliminate the stereotype of what women should be in the sports society and helps to urge the audience that females can participate in any sport, and can be womanly in the sense of getting sweaty and dirty from a sport.

Tiffany defies the gender roles in sports by taking part in dance, a sport that is usually associated with women who go against the typical stereotype of an ideal woman. Tiffany expresses her defiance against gender roles in sports by expressing her sexuality in dance, when usually women are seen as pure and motherly. Tiffany explains to Pat how she can express herself better through dance when she tells him "I'm not that great of a dancer, but who cares? It's therapy and its fun" (Russell). Tiffany's attitude toward dance shows how she is opposing to the typical woman who is supposed to be modest and not participate in sports. The film depicts multiple scenes of Tiffany dancing in a very provocative and sexual way. She is also wearing dance outfits that can suggest her feminine sexuality as well. The film depicts her as a woman who does not care what anyone thinks about her, and this opposes the motherly pure figure that is usually envisioned in sports. The director chooses dance to prove that women can defy the image of purity that is so commonly associated with them in sports. Dancing has been viewed as a provocative sport in America that goes against the imagery of an ideal girl and Zirin describes a view of a dancer in American history: "he regards Jane [a flapper] as a perfectly example of wild youth—paint, cigarettes, cocktails, petting parties—ooh!" (Zirin 51). The description of a flapper or dancer in the twenties is much like Tiffany's character. She is bold, defiant, and also drinks beer in vodka in the film. The dance gives Tiffany a tempting seductiveness, which is not what is usually seen in a lady. "Sports for women [...] were typically tied to more than physical expression," which is true for Tiffany's character because she also displays herself sexually and emotionally (Zirin 29). She used dance to overcome her depression and also used it to her advantage as a way to spend more time with Pat. Tiffany's participation in the sport of dance suggests her opposition towards the ideal image of a woman in sports, as she rejects the typical innocence and expresses her emotion and sexuality through dance.

Silver Linings Playbook depicts how American history has created gender inequality in the sports society, and by putting a strong male character into a sport like dance that is typically associated for females, it goes against that inequality. In the beginning of the movie, Tiffany wants Pat to be her dance partner, because she cannot participate in a dance competition without a male dance partner, and she has missed the previous competition because her ex-husband does not want to do it. Men are fearful of entering into the dance world because it is typically associated with women and could possibly fear association with the sport because it may change how society will view their sexuality. Pat even responds to Tiffany, "Wait, I'm not gonna fucking dance with you, what are you talking about?" (Russell 00:58). Pat initially rejects the idea of being in a dance competition because it is not considered something manly. The sport of dance has typically been associated with females because of the delicateness and gracefulness that is associated with it, which shows much likeness to the ideal image of a woman. Partaking in the sport of dance tests the masculinity complex of men and urges them to not want to participate in the sport. Men do not want to be viewed with feminine or girly attributes associated with dance, so they would rather play a sport that is rough and dirty, much like when Pat chooses the Eagles tailgate over his dance practice he is supposed to have with Tiffany (Russell 122). This film goes against that idea also because of the use of Bradley Cooper as Pat's character. Bradley Cooper is a handsome, strong, muscular guy that usually would not be seen in a dance setting and the film verifies that the inequality in sports can be broken. By using a man that has such strong masculine features and portraying that anyone can be a dancer, the film rejects the inequality of gender in the sport of dance as well. Not only can society change the way women are viewed in sports but also men as well. The reversal of gender roles in the film tests the audience's stereotypes and views of gender within sports. The director's use of Pat's strong, masculine character in a more feminine sport like dance reverses the audience's idea of gender inequality in sports.

Silver Linings Playbook portrays that men dominate sports in American society in the twenty-first century, and women are continuously sitting on the benches of the sidelines. Russell expresses the gender inequality in sports in this film through the continuous push of women to stay out of sports. Tiffany, Pat, and Dolores all defy the unequal ideals in the sport's society by opposing the stereotypical views that Americans hold of gender equality in sports. The director provides the audience

with a depiction of gender inequality in the film while also giving the audience an optimistic view of what society can do to change these societal norms that have been repetitive throughout history. The confidence that Tiffany, Dolores, and Pat embrace while attempting to change the gender roles in sports gives confidence to the American society to help change the stereotypes that are contained within sports. The film gives the audience confidence to also defy these typical gender roles in sports and make a change to these views.

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