

Reading Tim Tebow: Conservative Politics and White Power in the Tea Party Era

Matthew Hawzen

A thesis submitted to the Graduate Program in Kinesiology & Health Studies in  
conformity with the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts

Queen's University

Kingston, Ontario, Canada

Final Submission December, 2013

\*\*\*Copyright © Matthew Hawzen, 2013

## Abstract

In 2011, National Football League (NFL) quarterback Tim Tebow gripped America when the Denver Broncos reeled off a series of thrilling wins in an unlikely playoff run. Surrounding this stretch of Bronco wins was a media frenzy popularly known as “Tebow Mania”. The media explosion around Tebow can be attributed to his perplexing character and the political, cultural and social circumstances in 2011. This thesis is a critical media discourse analysis of Tebow’s sport star identity. I analyze the ways in which Tebow was described during the heights of his popularity during the 2011 NFL season. I argue that Tebow’s sport star identity naturalized ideologies of rightwing conservatism, (rightwing) conservative Christian fundamentalism and white masculinity into “common sense” notions of social life. To accomplish this, I follow cultural studies methodologies that trace Tebow’s rise to prominence within the context of The Tea Party Movement. I outline two dominant narratives that emerged during Tebow Mania to fabricate an American Dream, underdog story. While the first narrative of polarization criticizes and contemplates Tebow’s muscular Christianity, the counter-narrative repackages the polarization of Tebow by celebrating his white racial identity and conservative American values.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<i>Chapter 1 Introduction</i> .....	1
<i>Chapter 2 Theory and Method</i> .....	6
<i>Theorizing Tebow</i> .....	6
<i>Method: Critical Discourse Analysis</i> .....	14
<i>Chapter 3 Literature Review: Whiteness in Sport and Sport Stars</i> .....	18
<i>Whiteness in Sport</i> .....	20
<i>White Male Sport Stars in the Media</i> .....	24
<i>Muscular Christian Sport Stars?</i> .....	30
<i>Chapter 4 Contextualizing Tebow: Muscular Christianity in the Tea Party Era</i> .....	32
<i>Muscular Christianity and Rightwing Fusionism</i> .....	33
<i>The Christian Right: Morality Politics in the Culture Wars</i> .....	40
<i>The Tea Party Movement: Libertarian Means to Meet Social Conservative Ends</i> .....	45
<i>Chapter 5 Empirical Evidence: Discursive Construction of Tim Tebow</i> .....	52
<i>Tebow Before Tebow Mania</i> .....	53
<i>The Polarization of Tebow’s Muscular Christianity</i> .....	57
<i>Chapter 6 Repackaging Tebow’s Sport Star Identity</i> .....	66
<i>Tebow’s Hegemonic Masculinity: Discourses of Capitalist Production</i> .....	66
<i>Tebow as a Quintessential Leader: Soft-Boiled Masculinity on a Hard-Boiled Body</i> .....	73
<i>Tebow’s Whiteness: the Cultural Politics of Morality</i> .....	78
<i>Chapter 7 Concluding Remarks: Tebow’s Sport Star Identity in the Tea Party Era</i> .....	89
<i>References</i> .....	95

## Chapter 1 Introduction

In 2011, National Football League (NFL) quarterback Tim Tebow gripped America when the Denver Broncos reeled off a series of thrilling wins in an unlikely playoff run. Surrounding this stretch of Bronco wins was a media frenzy popularly known as “Tebow Mania”. Tebow Mania began in October when he guided the Broncos to a come-from-behind victory with two touchdown passes in the final 3 minutes against the Miami Dolphins (Associated Press 2011). Tebow Mania climaxed in mid-December when Tebow was matched up against Tom Brady and the New England Patriots on national television. In between, Tebow Mania was a hyper-mediated, four-month long cultural phenomena that produced Tebow as *the* (inter)national icon of the day. If you were an NFL fan in 2011, you were consuming Tebow. If you were not an NFL fan, it was likely that you still knew of Tebow. News networks, sports talk radio, talk show television, *Entertainment and Sports Programming Network (ESPN)* and *Saturday Night Live (SNL)* were talking about Tebow. It was ubiquitous in (North) American popular culture. Tebow Mania was about profit. It was sustained by Tebow’s ability to consistently attract television audiences. Tebow Mania was polarized. There was popular debate over whether or not Tebow was a good NFL quarterback and religion’s place in sport. Tebow Mania was about the media trying to “understand” Tebow’s followers as they were typecast based on whether or not they rooted for him. At its core, Tebow Mania was an ironic name coined by the media in reference to itself, to understand, and justify, the amount of time it dedicated to Tebow.

The media explosion around Tebow can be attributed to his perplexing character and the political, cultural and social circumstances in 2011. Tebow is an evangelical Christian with an unorthodox throwing motion for a quarterback. When he led the Broncos to victory it was often described as a miracle. He was a football star who was simultaneously an object of praise, criticism, respect, contempt, reverence or farce depending on who was talking and what aspect of Tebow they were talking about. He was discussed on a multitude of platforms that cross-cut sport, news, politics, feminism, religion, satire, and business. Media coverage of Tebow was complex and often contradictory. This is perhaps reflected in public opinion of Tebow, which was said to be “polarized” along religious lines.

In concert with the canonical texts of Susan Birrell and Mary G. McDonald (2000) and David L. Andrews and Steven J. Jackson (2001), this thesis is a critical evaluation of Tebow’s sport star identity. Given the cultural significance of Tebow, I contend that Tebow’s sport star identity is an important site of contestation for rightwing conservatism and structures of dominance around power lines of class, race and gender. My research is guided by the following sociological queries:

1. What are the conditions of possibility for the emergence of Tebow’s sport star identity?
2. What are the ideological effects of Tebow’s sport star identity?

To provide answers, I trace Tebow’s rise into the public mind as a student-athlete at the University of Florida (UF) to the eruption of press coverage during the 2011 NFL season. Committed to a socio-cultural analysis of sport stars, I emphasize the broader cultural and political landscape in the United States on which the rise of

Tebow was made meaningful. I argue that Tebow's sport star identity contributed to naturalized ideologies of rightwing conservatism, (rightwing) conservative Christian fundamentalism and white masculinity into "common sense" notions of social life. Overall, I am constructing a counter-discourse to popular narratives of Tebow that seeks to complicate and disrupt these common sense notions. By contextualizing and reconstructing emergent narratives, with the help of critical scholarship across multiple disciplines, my goal is to unmask the "ideological atrocities lurking below the surface" (Birrell and McDonald 2000:7) of Tebow's sport star identity.

In *Chapter 2 Theory and Method* I describe the theoretical lenses used to read and evaluate Tebow. I begin this chapter with an explanation of the "cultural text." Then, following Marxist theory, I move into a discussion of ideology by examining its meanings and how power is sustained through ideas and discourse. I then outline my multilayered methodological approach, and my understandings of culture, sport stars and identity. To conclude the theoretical discussion, I return briefly to the cultural text to show how it naturalizes ideology. The last section of this chapter is dedicated to outlining the research method of critical discourse analysis. Here I describe how I collected data and reveal the primary material for my discourse analysis.

In *Chapter 3 Literature Review*, I locate Tebow within two bodies of sport literature. Foremost, the critical study of sport stars. My focus is on the rise and sociological importance of this type of study. I then locate Tebow within the vast body of literature known as whiteness studies. I highlight the goals of this type of

research and two ways in which whiteness is mobilized through sport. Next, I review specific studies of sport stars to show the sociohistorical context through which Tebow's sport star identity emerges. Specifically, I focus on the discursive construction of white male athletes to show how they are handled by the media. In conclusion, I argue that Tebow's sport star identity adds depth to this ongoing conversation of sport stars based on his "new" muscular Christianity.

In *Chapter 4 Contextualizing Tebow: Muscular Christianity in the Tea Party Era*, I contextualize Tebow within a sociocultural history of muscular Christianity that coincides with vast shifts in rightwing conservatism. To do so, I describe the rise of muscular Christianity as analyzed by William J. Baker (2007) and trace historical developments of rightwing conservatism from fusion-era politics to The Tea Party Movement. Overall, I am describing an intertwined history of sport, muscular Christianity and rightwing conservatism to show how these histories represent the conditions of possibility for the rise of Tebow's sport star identity.

In *Chapter 5 Empirical Evidence: Discursive Construction of Tim Tebow*, I analyze Tebow's mediated representation to understand how he was discursively constructed. This chapter is dedicated to understanding Tebow's privileged personal history and the polarization of his sport star identity. I borrow from religious studies to argue that Tebow was polarizing and provoked criticism because he disrupted isolationist views of the NFL, assumed truth-claims of religious exclusivism, and promoted rightwing conservative Christian fundamentalism. I also describe how the polarization of Tebow came to represent an adverse situation facing Tebow.

*Chapter 6 Repackaging Tebow's Sport Star Identity* is focused on how the adversity of polarization and criticism fostered a counter-narrative that repackaged Tebow's sport star identity in reflection of an American Dream story. I borrow from gender and critical whiteness studies to show how Tebow's success in Denver was reduced to intangible characteristics that made him a successful capitalist producer, quintessential leader and a "good" person. In so doing, I argue that these discourses were built upon conservative ideologies of race and gender.

In *Chapter 7 Concluding Remarks: Tebow's Sport Star Identity in the Tea Party Era*, I return briefly to the contextualization of Tebow to show how the overall story of (narrative, counter-narrative) polarization and repackaging of Tebow's sport star identity reinforces neoliberal ideology of the Tea Party Movement. I highlight the ways in which individualism undergirds Tebow's muscular Christianity. I bring this thesis to a close by outlining Tebow's movements to different NFL teams, and some of the stories that have emerged about Tebow since this project began.



## Chapter 2 Theory and Method

This chapter discusses the theoretical lenses used to evaluate “the various levels of power and privilege that were working for, on, in, and through” (King-White:181) Tebow’s sport star identity. I ask, what are the ways in which I can go about studying a cultural phenomena such as Tebow? In what follows, I center the theoretical discussion around my object of study, Tebow, as a cultural text. I then outline a Marxist theory of ideology as the intersection of belief systems and the maintenance of power. Then I describe my qualitative, multilayered, interdisciplinary methodology that enables connections of context to the emergence of Tebow’s sport star identity to be drawn. I bring the theoretical discussion to a close by describing how a cultural text “fits” within ideological critique. Lastly, I discuss the method of critical discourse analysis where I describe my data collection, primary sources and how I went about my interpretations.

### *Theorizing Tebow*

I understand Tebow as a cultural text that was produced by media conglomerates and “cultural intermediaries” (Bourdieu 1984). Cultural intermediaries are social beings working in the (media) culture industry who represent sport stars. As Ryan King-White (2010) notes, this constituency, “largely comprised of white men, has long been criticized for their nationalist, racist, sexist, and classist depictions of (sport) celebrities and spectacles” (181). Acting as middle men and women between sport star and consumer, cultural intermediaries are embedded in power structures. As such, sport stars as cultural texts reflect the

power structures from which they were produced. Raymond Williams (1977) argues that the forms and conventions of cultural texts are “inalienable elements of a social material process” (133). Cultural texts are the byproducts of social beings and the reproductive mechanisms of ideologies of class, race, gender, religion, nationality, etc. I recognize cultural texts to be contested in meaning. Other readings of Tebow’s sport star identity are surely possible. However, I argue here, a critical discourse analysis committed to cultural studies inspired methodologies will provide a thorough interpretation of Tebow’s sport star identity.

John B. Thompson (1984) states, “to study ideology is to study the ways in which meaning (or signification) serves to sustain relations of domination” (as cited in Eagleton 2006:5). Ideology is in reference to the intersection of belief systems and the maintenance of power. The purpose of studying ideology is to critique the ways in which power is solidified and naturalized in appearance, through ideas and discourses.

Following Marxist theory (Eagleton 2006; Thompson 1984; Williams 1977), I argue there are five components to ideology. First, ideology is “the general material process of production of ideas, beliefs and values in social life” (28). This first aspect of ideology “turns on ideas and beliefs (whether true or false) which symbolize the conditions and life-experiences of a specific, socially significant group or class” (29). The social determinations of thought rise out of one’s class, race, gender, and sexuality. Simply put, a social agent’s world-view manifests out of their material, personal background.

Second, ideology is part of the *promotion* and *legitimation* of the (social) capital pertaining to certain social groups. “Ideology here can be seen as a discursive field in which self-promoting social powers conflict and collide over questions central to the reproduction of social power as a whole” (29). This feature of ideology hinges on “rhetorical rather than on a veridical kind of speech” (29). In other words, for ideology to be affective it simultaneously constructs and relies on powerful, common sense ideas and discourses that resonate with the body politic.

Third, ideology involves the *unifying* of social formations in ways convenient for itself. This does not necessarily mean the imposition of beliefs or ideas onto others, but rather, “securing the *complicity* of subordinated classes and groups” (30 italics mine). This differs slightly from ideology in the first sense (ideology as “common beliefs and ideas symbolic of life conditions of classes and groups”). Here ideology is viewed as the unseen, symbolic fabric that holds together divergent and subordinate groups and classes. What I mean by this third aspect is that ideology creates the ideas and language that social agents draw upon to comprehend their experience as shared amongst different social groups, through time and space.

The fourth component is not epistemologically neutral like the preceding elements. This one focuses on the way ideology is involved in signifying ideas and beliefs which are specifically *distorted* to legitimate class and group interests of the powerful members of society. Eagleton (2006) notes, “it is hard to know what to call a politically oppositional discourse which promotes and seeks to legitimate the interests of a subordinate group or class by such devices as the ‘naturalizing’, universalizing and cloaking of its real interests” (30). This means that attributing the

fourth sense of ideology to a subjugated class or group is mistaken because it is unlikely that subordinated classes would be able to “cloak” their interests in something else to “get ahead” of powerful groups. Put differently, because the power of ideology cannot be legitimated by subjugated groups, its common sense renderings are inextricably connected to the legitimation of interests for dominant members of society.

Fifth, stemming from the fourth component, ideology retains deceptive beliefs, “but regards such beliefs as arising not from the interests of a dominant class but from the material structure of society as a whole” (Eagleton 2006:30). The clearest example here is Marx’s theory of commodity fetishism.

Since studying ideology is dedicated to undermining systems of power, Michael D. Giardina’s (2005) argument highlights the importance of studying sport stars: Sporting “celebrity is perhaps unrivaled within commercial media for both its drawing power and influence on a mass audience” (as cited in King-White 2010:180). Critical investigation of sport stars requires scholars to draw connections from complex social, political and economic networks to the emergence of (sport star) identities (King 2006). As such, I take advantage of the flexibility of critical sport studies by using a multilayered, qualitative methodology to “read” and evaluate Tebow. David L. Andrews, Daniel S. Mason, and Michael L. Silk (2005) argue:

Sport provides the site for critical interrogation through a variety of theories or “lenses”, a space that has been characterized by a broad spectrum of research approaches, interdisciplinarity, flexibility, and... a methodological

contingency that can allow the researcher to employ the tools suitable for critical interrogation of the particular sporting phenomena under investigation (1).

However disparate my methods may be, they are congruous in the belief that social structures and historical contexts shape meanings associated with sport stars (Andrews 2001; Andrews and Jackson 2001; Birrell and McDonald 2000).

Specifically, I draw from techniques that help me navigate the Tebow phenomena from the landscape of American *culture* to the emergence of his sport star identity.

Drawing upon Stuart Hall (1986), I understand *culture* as “the actual, grounded terrain of practices, representations, languages and customs of any specific historical society [as well as] the contradictory forms of ‘common sense’ that have taken root in and helped to shape popular life” (as cited in Nelson, Triechler and Grossberg 1992:5). Tebow, as a cultural text, is a contextually bound site of contestation where common sense meanings are produced and negotiated. To understand the impact of cultural and political contexts on the formation of sport star identity I turn to Samantha King’s (2005) idea of “methodological contingency”.

Methodological contingency informs my understandings of how particular identities emerge within a complex network of economic, social and political contexts. This type of critical contextual analysis requires the “reconstruction, or fabrication, of the social, political, economic, and cultural articulations and linkages that produce cultural phenomenon, which show how, in turn, the phenomenon (re)shapes the formation of which it is a part” (27). The sociopolitical context of the 2011 National Football League (NFL), for instance, represents, what King refers to

as, “the conditions of *possibility* for the appearance” of Tebow’s sport star identity (King 2005:26).

Ultimately, this approach will locate Tebow within the Tea Party era of American politics and culture to show how Tebow matters for the perpetuation of uneven forces of neoliberalism and white masculinity. In reconstructing the context to Tebow linkages, I draw from necessary sources that stretch across gender studies, feminism, religious studies and critical race theory. Of equal importance, this approach dictates that the primary source material of my critical discourse analysis are produced by, and productive of, their broader contexts. To understand how sport stars specifically relate to the production of “common sense” notions of social life, I turn to the text of Andrews and Jackson (2001), *Sport Stars: The Cultural Politics of Sporting Celebrity* where the authors theorize the relationships between culture, sport stars and individual experience.

The authors contend that sport stars are contextually bound public entities or “emblematic individuals” responsible for structuring meaning and crystallizing ideologies. In reflection of American political economy and ideology, sport stars share a dual role as both product and processes as an “embodiment of the twinned discourses of late modernity: neo-liberal democracy and consumer capitalism (1). ... Within the dominant, symbolically propelled, regime of capital accumulation underpinning the late capitalist economy” (4). Put simply, sport stars are both a commodity form produced by the media and a public pedagogy through which capitalism and neoliberal Western democracy are reproduced (Giardina 2005). Relative to individual experience, sport stars act as vehicles for “negotiated

embodiments of the social categories in which people are placed and through which they have to make sense of their lives” (Andrews and Jackson 2001:18). In other words, when “read” by a viewing individual, the racial, gender, sexual, national, religious, etc. meanings inscribed on sport stars are internalized and inform world-views and subjectivities of that individual.

To understand Tebow’s sport star *identity*, I turn to cultural studies theories of identity that take into account the contextual, relational and constructivist aspects of identity formation. Critical scholars of sport and human movement, Timothy J.L. Chandler and Tara Magdalinski (2002) argue that the collective categories of identification and embodiment are more a relational process of marking difference and boundaries than self-prescription:

Social identities do not exist in isolation and require a carefully defined ‘Other’ against which a group may juxtapose its ideologies behaviors and rituals... identities are more a process of marking difference than of representing a homogeneous unity; and of course, differentiating between groups requires the creation of boundaries to symbolize inclusion and exclusion (6).

Thus, identity is not a fixed or inherent ideology of the self or other. Rather, identity is to be understood and revealed as a cultural relationship embedded in power structures (Chandler and Magdalinski 2002). Moreover, my understanding of identity rejects biologically determined notions of identity that are popular in understanding athlete identities (McDonald and Troglia 2010). In addition,

borrowing from feminist theory (Crenshaw, 1991), I understand the power/oppression of identity to be intersectional.

Birrell and McDonald (2000) outline an intersectional methodology to study discourses of sport stars. The authors criticize the limits of popular discourse and call attention to the *multiple* ways in which power operates. Mediated “stories are always presented within frames, and these frames guide and limit public understandings of events and personalities” (6). Popular discourses inadequately represent the complexity of people and events. Power lines of race, class, gender and sexuality do not exist in isolation as they often appear in popular media. Singular identity formations are not mutually exclusive social categories of power and oppression. Rather, power lines are always defined relationally; and singular power lines cannot be understood, embodied or experienced in isolation (Birrell and McDonald 2000).

I began this chapter by describing the cultural text as a manifest form of material social processes. I outlined a theory of ideology to understand the intersection of belief systems and the maintenance of power. I have outlined my multilayered approach to reading Tebow as a cultural text located in a network of contexts and embedded in identity politics. To conclude, I return briefly to a discussion of the cultural text. My goal is to show that cultural texts are important in the production and transformation of common sense notions of social life into powerful ideologies through processes of naturalization.

Simply, cultural texts help ideologies “make sense” in the social and cultural world. They help render ideology natural and common in appearance. Indeed, in



order to be powerful, ideologies must translate common sense ideas into social practice; link the practical with the theoretical (Eagleton 2006). Ideologies must make sense in the day to day routines and logics of social beings to carry substance. Ideologies can make sense when they seem natural and “fit” into a world-view or experience. Naturalization enables this situation as reality and ideology become mutually self-confirming. “Social reality is redefined by the ideology to become coextensive with itself, in a way which occludes the truth that the reality in fact generated the ideology” (Eagleton 2006:58). More specifically, the naturalization of ideology entails the significations and processes (Tebow’s sport star identity) that create self-evident, common sense, ahistorical, and apolitical belief systems of the social. Furthermore, the naturalization of ideology is closely linked with “universalizing” and “dehistoricizing” the common sense understandings of the social, which freezes history and *reifies* social life (Eagleton 2006:59).

Tebow’s sport star identity, as a cultural text, is part of a process of naturalization. Rightwing conservatism, (rightwing) Christian fundamentalism, whiteness and masculinity appear natural, apolitical and ahistorical when Tebow is described by mainstream media. Thus, reading Tebow using the critical approach outlined above shines light on the power and naturalization of ideology. My goal is to unravel this natural appearance of ideological power that surrounds Tebow’s sport star identity.

#### *Method: Critical Discourse Analysis*

To understand Tebow’s mediated identity, I searched across the media spectrum. I wanted to “know” how Tebow was discussed and described to “the

American reading/watching public” (King-White 2010:182). A *Factiva* academic search of “Tim Tebow” between October 1, 2011 and January 15, 2012 limited to “major US newspapers and magazines” yielded 116 publications. I limited my search within this date range to understand how Tebow was described during the height of his public attention, Tebow Mania. I also focused on U.S. mainstream sources as these sources were more likely to reach a wider reading/viewing audience than local publications. This meant incorporating “major” local papers such as the *LA TIMES* and *New York Times*. I coupled this search with extensive exploration of news and sports websites *Denverpost.com*, *USAtoday.com*, *Latimes.com*, and *NYtimes.com*, *Huffingtonpost.com*, *ESPN.com*, *Yahoosports.com*, *Grantland.com*, *Foxnews.com*, *CBSsports.com* and *Profootballtalk.com*. To supplement the scope of my searches, I initiated a daily “google alert” for web productions that contained the term “Tim Tebow”.

My search parameters allowed me to stockpile sources as they were produced daily on the Internet. Additionally, I critically analyzed the documentary *Tebow on a Mission* (Friedman 2012), Tebow’s autobiography *Through My Eyes* (Tebow and Whitaker 2011), and images of Tebow in *Vogue magazine* (Leibovitz 2012). Overall, the sources I utilized in my critical discourse analysis are from the *USA Today* (three articles); *ESPN* (17 articles, four from *ESPN* affiliate *Grantland.com*); *The Associated Press* (two articles); *The Los Angeles Times* (three articles), *The New York Times* (four articles), *The Denver Post* (seven articles); *The Boston Globe* (one article). I used eleven website publications: *Vogue* (one article), *Salon* (one article), *The Hill* (one article), *Sports Illustrated* (one article), *Fox Sports*

(one article), *Think Progress* (one article), *The Daily Beast* (one article), *MarketWatch* (one article), *Truthout* (one article), *Forbes* (four articles), and *Bloomberg*. Six blogs: *Profootballtalk* (five articles), *Collegefootballtalk* (one article), *ABC News* (one article), *The Huffington Post* (two articles), and *Yahoo News* (one article). Two videos: *Youtube* (one video) and *Tebow on a Mission* (one documentary).

I turn now toward my understanding of critical discourse analysis (CDA) that unmask the ideological operations of Tebow's sport star identity. To select and analyze mainstream sources, I focused on "key and emergent" themes (Andrews 2000; Birrell and McDonald 2000; Giardina 2005; King-White 2010). By key and emergent themes, I mean the popular forms of language that repeatedly described Tebow's football skills, religiosity and characteristics through conservative ideologies of the body and politics. These forms were repetitive, accentuated and obvious in the economy of discourse constituting Tebow's sport star representation. According to Pirkko Markula and Michael L. Silk's (2011) description of CDA this meant making value judgements and authoritative decisions as to which combination of materials "yield the most fruitful perspective on relations between semiosis and non-semiotic elements (as cited in Fairclough 2005:84). CDA entails critically examining the ideological workings of texts. The intent of CDA is to make explicit how dominance works through texts. This means outlining "the intersection of language use and social and political structure, particularly how language use, or discourse, functions ideologically to contribute to the creation and reproduction of unequal power relations" (Markula and Silk 2011:119). This also means evaluating

and contextualizing the various meanings provided by cultural intermediaries about sport stars. Cultural intermediaries are particularly important considering capitalist production/accumulation underpins the discursive construction of Tebow's sport star identity. Tebow was used for and by media corporations for capital gains. Cultural intermediaries always play a direct role in the fabrication and consumption of America's sport stars.

### **Chapter 3 Literature Review: Whiteness in Sport and Sport Stars**

This literature review is dedicated to putting my Tebow analysis into conversation with existing bodies of scholarship. I locate my analysis within two overlapping bodies of literature. Foremost, the critical study of sport stars. This body of literature has inspired the basis of this study, the theoretical approaches and the sociohistorical contexts through which Tebow's identity emerges. I trace the rise of this type of research and review specific studies in this area. Secondly, I locate my analysis of Tebow's sport star identity within the larger body of work known as whiteness studies. I would be remiss to not consider this project within the body of scholarship that seeks to unveil the "hidden" operations of white power. I then review specific scholarship dedicated to the study of individual, contemporary sport stars. In particular, I highlight critical analyses focused on white male athletes to show how Tebow's muscular Christianity in the Tea Party era adds to this ongoing discussion.

The study of sport stars is relatively new, having come to prominence in sociology of sport during the late 1990s. Sport celebrityhood is not a new phenomena, however. The celebration of high-profile individuals in sport was introduced in early civilizations that were exploring the limits and boundaries of organized physical activity (Andrews and Jackson 2001). The rise of the hyper-individualization and mediation of sport stars specific to the last four decades though, is due in part to broader shifts in political economy and the proliferation of televisual media. Specifically, neoliberalism has extended the accumulation of

capital by expanding the the ways in which sport stars are branded, marketed and commodified (Andrews and Jackson 2001).

Sport stars are used to sell diverse ranges of products (including themselves for agents, teams, cities and leagues), tickets, and media ratings (Andrews 2001). Coupled with ideals of rugged individualism and conservative, nationalist discourses that were popularized during the Reagan/Clinton/Bush eras, neoliberalism has fostered a situation where sport stars can rise to prominence in popular culture for at least three reasons. First, the justification for and means by which an individual turns into a sport celebrity is often reduced to personal qualities such as work ethic, innate talent, dedication, leadership abilities, determination, etc. Second, sport is widely viewed as a meritocratic institution. Thus, stardom is perceived as the natural corollary to exceptional athletic performance because the beneficiary “earned” it. Thirdly, “there is a perception that spectators/viewers are confronted with ‘real’ individuals participating in unpredictable contests” (Andrews and Jackson 2001:8). Contemporary sporting culture presents audiences with seemingly authentic, unscripted competition and “real” individuals. With capitalist profits at stake, media corporations, teams, leagues and agents have played a role in the rise, popularity and commodification of sport stars. Sport stars are carefully crafted to “leverage” brands and sell commodities. This means that sport star identities are handled according to these capitalist logics.

## *Whiteness in Sport*

The goal of critically studying a sport star is to name, locate and understand how various forms of power are working on and through the high-profile, public entity. This cannot be accomplished without understanding how power (race, class, gender and nationality) has been theorized and studied on past sport star identities. As such, I turn to whiteness studies so my project can become part of the broader, sociohistorical process of naming and unveiling the white racial identity.

Sociology of sport scholars (Butryn and Walton 2006; Giardina and Newman 2010; Hartmann 2007; Kusz 2007a, 2007b; McDonald 2005; McDonald and Toggia 2010) have turned to studying whiteness. Whiteness is the invisible racial identity category closely linked with white economic privilege (McDonald 2010). Whiteness takes on many forms and operates in many ways. Whiteness scholar George Lipsitz (1998) argues, “whiteness is everywhere in U.S. culture but it is very hard to see” (1). It has remained the unspoken and unrecognized racial identity category of normative American culture. Categories *race* and *ethnicity* have historically been associated with black or non-white, and “often considered frameworks only for understanding the sporting experiences of Others” (Butryn and Walton 2006:5). It has proven socially unjust to only consider racialized Others as having, being, embodying or possessing “race”. Richard Dyer (1997) argues, “as long as race is something only applied to non-White peoples, as long as White people are not racially seen and named, they/we function as a human norm. Other people raced, we are just human” (1). Only when critical scholars point to the ways in which

whiteness operates does it become visible. Thus, the goal of studying whiteness is to apply “race” to white people.

I locate Tebow’s sport star identity within this body of whiteness literature. I seek to understand how whiteness is operating on and through Tebow. This requires reviewing past analyses of sporting whiteness. I begin by outlining an analysis of how whiteness operates in the National Basketball Association’s (NBA) dress code policy, and then I review Hartmann’s (2007) analysis of color-blind ideology in the NFL.

Mary G. McDonald and Jessica Togli (2010) contextualize and unpack the racialized introduction of the NBA dress code. The authors view the dress code policy as a “public pedagogy” that “teaches” viewers/readers particular knowledges about race. They argue that the dress code policy that requires NBA players to wear business casual attire on game days or when engaging in team or league business is embedded in the racialized codes and logics of late capitalism, and moral behavior, structural hierarchy, and middle-class sensibilities of white corporate culture. The authors show how the dress code policy was a form of surveillance for black masculinity and hip-hop culture in the NBA. In addition, while the NBA suppressed “an authentic” black hip-hop culture through surveillance, the basketball organization was marketing and profiting from “white washed”, repackaged, superficial, highly commodified forms of hip-hop culture that naturalized racial/racist binaries. This study shows how the logics of whiteness operate in policy and corporate culture. I will show later how this study informs my analysis of Tebow as he performs white corporate culture. Whiteness asserted through the



NBA dress policy is distinctively different from how whiteness is reproduced through color-blind individualism in the NFL though.

Douglas Hartmann (2007) analyzes an incident between rightwing conservative talk show host Rush Limbaugh and black NFL quarterback Donovan McNabb. The case study shows how color-blind individualism asserts White power through sport. Color-blindness is an ideology that has shaped race relations in the United States. Color-blindness is a popular view of “racial justice” that is associated with conservatism. The tenets of color-blind ideology state that race does not inhibit or help one’s chances at (economic) success (Hartmann 2003). Color-blindness shields people from viewing, or caring about, existing racial injustices rooted in structural inequality as the ideology makes “it seem as if the existing racial status quo and White supremacy itself is acceptable” (49). To show the operations of color-blindness, Hartmann analyzes this statement offered by Limbaugh about McNabb:

Sorry to say this, I don’t think he’s been that good from the get-go... What we have here is a little social concern in the NFL. The media has been very desirous that a Black quarterback can do well - Black coaches and Black quarterback doing well... There’s a little hope invested in McNabb, and he got credit for the performance of his team he didn’t deserve. The defense [has] carried this team (46).

Limbaugh was forced to resign from his post and the network was forced to issue an apology after many viewed the comments as racist. Limbaugh was publicly demonized for the racist remarks. However, Hartmann urges readers to first think about Limbaugh’s position as a rightwing conservative pundit to understand how

color-blind ideology has become a common view of race. It is too simple and problematic to demonize him for the racist comments. When someone makes racist comments publicly in sport, mainstream media is quick to black mark the perpetrator. The perpetrator then usually issues some form of apology to reassure the public that they are not racists (e.g. Sergio Garcia and Terry Bradshaw). This type of apology individualizes and tends to expunge the guilty party. This allows the media to move its attention elsewhere without a critical dialogue about racism taking place because the comments get framed as a “slip-up” or the individual gets cast as a “bad apple” in a non-racist culture.

Hartmann takes the time to think about, before demonizing, Limbaugh’s conservative world-view though. This shines light on how whiteness articulates in the Limbaugh-McNabb case, aside from being overtly racist. According to Hartmann, Limbaugh believed he was in the right. In his mind, he had done nothing wrong. Limbaugh actually believed that critics who brought up “race” were “the problem” and the racists. “Limbaugh believed his remarks about what he perceived to be the media’s overly sympathetic assessment of McNabb were not only defensible but in fact virtuous – because they emanated from colorblind, individualistic values” (48).

Hartmann’s work is influential on my study because of how The Tea Party Movement forwards color blind ideology and individualism. Tebow’s personal beliefs not only align with the rightwing conservative ideas of Limbaugh, but also, as Tebow overcomes his own physical obstacles and media criticisms, he becomes a veritable lesson in how race does not matter for sporting, and by extension, economic success – Tebow’s circumstances were “difficult” too. The media handling

of white male sport stars often follows this model of “overcoming” that erases whiteness and white privilege from their narratives. White men overcoming the odds is a main focus of the second part of my literature review.

### *White Male Sport Stars in the Media*

Much has been written on the “whitening, transculturalizing [sic], reracializing, and normalization” of black and minority U.S. sport stars such as O.J. Simpson, Michael Jordan, Dennis Rodman, Venus Williams and Nancy Lopez (King-White:181). These studies show how *difference* is constructed and strategically represented to convey/sell “exceptional” minorities to a white male majority in the United States (King-White 2010). The cultural meanings of white male sport stars are defined in relation to the meanings attributed to the bodies highlighted above. Thus, while I align Tebow’s sport star identity with Nolan Ryan (Trujillo, 2000), Andre Agassi (Kusz, 2001), and Lance Armstrong (Kusz, 2007) below, I am also positioning Tebow in relation to critical understandings of black and minority sport stars. I exclude analyses of non-American sport stars such as David Beckham (Whannel 2001, in Andrews and Jackson 2001) and Wayne Gretzky (Jackson 2001, in Andrews and Jackson 2001) from this literature review. I narrow my focus to American-born sport stars to understand how “real” Americans are treated in U.S. mainstream media. To situate this project and draw conclusions on my own empirical material, I borrow insights from the following analyses.

Nolan Ryan is arguably the greatest pitcher in the history of Major League Baseball (MLB). Ryan’s MLB career spanned 27 years (1966 – 1993) as he set records for no-hitters, strikeouts and victories. In *Hegemonic Masculinity on the*

*Mound*, Nick Trujillo (2000) argues that “the media have functioned hegemonically by personifying Ryan as an archetypal male athletic hero” (14). The author explores the ways in which Ryan reproduced hegemonic masculinity through the embodiment of male athleticism, discourses of capitalist production, family patriarchy, American Western frontiersman, and heterosexuality. Capitalist production and family patriarchy are important features of Tebow’s sport star identity. Although dynamics and discourses of American capitalism have shifted since Ryan’s sport star identity (late 1980s and early 1990s), producing as a good capitalist remains laudable. This is made evident by how mainstream media celebrated Tebow’s ability to sell out stadiums, stimulate ticket sales and drive media ratings. In addition, I draw from Trujillo’s exploration of Ryan as family patriarch. Tebow’s sport star identity is inextricably linked with his born-again, evangelical Christian values as a leader of muscular Christianity and patriarchal male leadership. Interestingly, one of Tebow’s most celebrated characteristics is his leadership ability, which, I argue, naturalizes patriarchal leadership in family, business and government institutions. How Ryan and Tebow were constructed as great leaders perpetuates common sense notions that (white) men are naturally fit for leadership roles.

Another white male athlete who was considered to be the best at his sport was professional tennis player, Andre Agassi. Agassi was an eight-time Grand Slam champion and 1996 U.S. Olympic gold-medalist. In *Andre Agassi and Generation X: Reading White Masculinity in 1990's America*, Kyle Kusz (2001) critically examines Agassi’s sport star identity to unmask the “hidden” white masculinity in Agassi’s

American Dream and Coming of Age mediated story. Early in Agassi's career he was constructed as a delinquent. He was subject to the "Generation X" narrative, which, according to Kusz (2001), was "the derogatory early 1990's narrative used to personify the perceived crisis of white, American, masculine youth" (11). Later in Agassi's career, this narrative was re-positioned to represent an adverse situation. Kusz argues that Agassi's sporting success resulted in positive representation, and, thus, a re-imagination and reproduction of white masculinity as Agassi *overcame* his delinquent former-self vis-à-vis the traditional American Dream and Coming of Age narratives.

A key feature to Agassi's story is how one narrative is positioned in multiple ways to represent a sport star. For example, Agassi was constructed as a delinquent early in his career and this narrative, later in his career, buttressed his white masculinity by representing an adverse situation which he overcame. Similarly, one narrative of Tebow's sport star identity is polarization. Tebow is considered polarizing because of his brand of muscular Christianity and unorthodox throwing mechanics. This tends to draw criticism from mainstream media and causes angst for "everyday fans" (Feezell 2013). Thus, the polarization of Tebow, an economy of negatively charged discourses that questioned and scrutinized, represented an adverse situation for which to overcome. So while Tebow was being criticized in 2011, his concurrent success in Denver repositioned or repackaged the polarization narrative to "fit" Tebow's sport star identity into the traditional American Dream and underdog story lines.

Though these are insightful examples of how white male sport stars are handled by mainstream media, it is Kyle Kusz's (2007b) critical reading of Lance Armstrong that most closely resembles Tebow's story (before Armstrong's performance enhancing drug [PED] scandal). Armstrong, a professional cyclist, was best known for surviving cancer to go on to win the Tour de France a record seven straight times. His cancer survivorship coupled with record-setting success made for an extraordinary and culturally motivating story of determination, heart and perseverance. Armstrong was the "ultimate contemporary symbol of hope, inspiration, and the limitless potential of the human will and spirit to the American audiences" (139). To Kusz (2007b), Armstrong was another white male positioned as "truly disadvantaged" just to be repositioned as inspirational, having heart, and great work ethic in a cloaked reassertion of white male supremacy.

Similar to Tebow, the national attention on Armstrong was spread wide across media platforms. Armstrong was given extensive coverage on *ESPN*. He made appearances on *Good Morning America*, *Discovery Channel* and *Outdoor Life Network*. He wrote two *New York Times* best-selling books *It's Not About the Bike* and *Every Second Counts*. Armstrong quickly became "one of the most popular athletic endorsers" for top selling corporations such as *Nike*, *Bristol-Meyers Squibb* and *Wheaties*. During 2005, the yellow *Nike* "LIVESTRONG" bracelet was a popular American fad and symbolic piece of rubber that represented Armstrong and others' survival of cancer (Kusz 2007b:138). Wide spread media attention, corporate endorsements and commodified representation of survivorship are important

indicators of cultural significance. Armstrong's mass appeal with the American public can also be seen in how politicians rallied around his sport star identity.

Both Republicans and Democrats used the symbolic representation of Lance Armstrong. North Carolinian House of Representative Sue Myrick highlights how easy Armstrong's story resonated with America. "Lance Armstrong's courageous spirit is an inspiration to all Americans. By building upon his exceptional athletic accomplishments to lead the fight against cancer, he is one of the first *true American heroes* of the 21<sup>st</sup> century" (138). In 2001, after Armstrong's third Tour de France victory, President George W. Bush described Armstrong "as a true champ, a great American... a story of character and... class, and an extraordinary human being" (138). And Democratic Presidential Candidate John Kerry pondered whether or not Armstrong "had the tools" to enter politics, as a Democrat (Kusz 2007b).

Although Armstrong's story differs from Tebow's based on cancer survivorship, the "ubiquitous feel" and politicization is what matches the two. Tebow was a sport star who received a media "mania". Tebow Mania was not limited to local sports talk radio by any means. Rather, Tebow Mania, riding the wave of the NFL's immense popularity, cast a wide net over (North) American popular culture to project a feeling that everyone knew of "the Tebow thing". Further, how Tebow's sport star identity has been appropriated by politicians is indicative of his relevance with the American public. During Tebow Mania, politicians used Tebow as a symbolic representation of good character, hard work and how to succeed in the face of adversity. Also, in 2010, Tebow (in)famously represented the rightwing Christian fundamentalist group Focus on the Family. I

draw from Kusz's critical interpretation of Lance Armstrong mainly to understand the meanings of ubiquitous media attention around white male athletes in the perpetuation of white power.

Each of these studies has demonstrated the privileged ways in which white male sport stars are sometimes handled in U.S. mainstream media. They show how white male privilege is intertwined with and buttressed by powerful, traditional American narratives (the American Dream and underdog stories). The measure of these mythical sport stories are defined/celebrated in relation to human shortcomings or (un)likelihood of achieving sporting success. These studies show how white males have overcome "adverse" situations such as old age, white male victimhood, drug addiction or illness through hard work and mental fortitude. This group of white male sport stars thus represent the "fairness" of U.S. sociopolitical structures (King-White 2010). On the one hand, they represent the inimitable prospects of hard work and "good" moral values. On the other hand, they implicitly downplay the effects of racism, homophobia, classism and misogyny facing minority, women, black and/or migrant sport stars such as Danny Almonte (King-White 2010), Venus Williams (Douglas 2002) and Nancy Lopez (Jamieson 2000) to name a few. In addition, each study positions white male moral values and ethics in relation to those of "unacceptable" black and minority athletes who are often implicated in racialized criminality and illegal immigration. Overall, this body of scholarship shows how white male athletes serve to reproduce uneven relations of class, race and gender. These sport stars have been celebrated because their whiteness and



masculinity represent “true” or conservative American values of hard work, individualism, God and freedom.

### *Muscular Christian Sport Stars?*

While there is substantial literature on both media representation of sport stars and the sport-religion nexus (Baker 2007; Higgs 1995; Hoffman 1992; Krattenmaker 2010; Magdalinski and Chandler 2002), very few have focused on the mediated portrayal of muscular Christian sport stars. William J. Baker (2007), Tom Krattenmaker (2010) and Tony Ladd and James A. Mathiesen (1999) focus on sociohistorical and religious developments of muscular Christianity. The authors describe how developments in American ideology have been influenced by histories of muscular Christianity; how sport team owners utilize their sport stadiums as spaces for religious promotion; and how contemporary sport stars promote Christianity through sport. However, not considered are the ways in which these muscular Christian sport stars are handled in the media. Specifically not considered is how muscular Christianity is intersected by race, class and gender. While my focus is not on the shifting relationship of sport and religion per se, I did not find any research that follows the sport star identity model to include muscular Christianity. This project aims to add depth to the discussion on discursive constructions of sport stars by adding Tebow’s brand of muscular Christianity. My plan is to situate Tebow within a sociohistorical perspective of muscular Christianity to describe how his mediated representation as a white male intersects with his muscular Christian identity. To do so, I must contextualize Tebow within a history of muscular

Christianity, and the complex network of social, political and economic contexts, that materialized his sport star identity.

## Chapter 4 Contextualizing Tebow: Muscular Christianity in the Tea Party Era

In *After Neoliberalism?* Stuart Hall, Doreen Massey and Michael Rustin (2013) “analyze the present” disjunctural moment of neoliberalism that is defined by effects of the 2008 financial crisis and has produced unprecedented, global inequalities of income, health and life chances. The authors maintain “the [neoliberal] economic model that has underpinned the social and political settlement of the last three decades is unraveling, but the broader political and social consensus apparently remains in place” (3). Strikingly, “the financial crisis has been used by many Western governments as a means of further entrenching the neoliberal model” (4). Since 2008, the United States economy and its people have been held hostage by austerity measures, the Sequestrian, an explosion of (student, health care, and credit card) debt and a contentiously inept Congress. Instead of turning to *different* understandings of the socioeconomic and political to make change, economic freedom, individualism and social conservatism continue to haunt the national political discourse, bringing us back into the trenches of the neoliberal model.

In this chapter I contextualize Tebow within a history of muscular Christianity and rightwing conservatism to show how Tebow’s sport star identity emerged and reinforced the neoliberal model. I offer a modest overview of muscular Christianity borrowed from Baker (2007) to argue that shifting meanings of muscular Christianity during the mid-twentieth century coincided with and strengthened important changes on the conservative Right; namely, “fusionism” as the blending of idealized Western liberal individualism and rightwing Christian fundamentalism. As such, I describe muscular Christianity from its “original”

meanings, and the sociopolitical developments of rightwing conservatism. I then outline how the Christian Right and Tea Party Movement have emerged as rightwing social movements to shape not only political discourse in contemporary America, but also, Tebow's sport star identity. This will shine light on how Tebow's sport star identity materialized in the midst of the divisiveness and polarization of American Tea Party politics in 2011. I conclude by highlighting how Tebow has contextually shifted the meanings of muscular Christianity in an NFL era of racialized criminality, discourses of greed and concussion issues.

### *Muscular Christianity and Rightwing Fusionism*

The rise of muscular Christianity took place in the mid-nineteenth-century in Britain and the United States. According to William J. Baker (2007), early muscular Christianity was the promotion of sport and physical activity for a religious cleansing of the body and soul. There was believed to be an interplay between being fit and being a morally good person. Muscular Christianity originated in the beliefs that "physical exercise and competitive games made for better digestion, lungs, and muscles, and that a stronger body would fortify the human spirit against the beguiling allurements of big-city life" (3) and would "render men and women more prayerful, more charitable, and more virtuous" (38). Moreover, the concept was coined during a time when males were seen as better suited for physical activity than females. The contextually bound notion was formed around male exclusivity in organized sport and masculine ideals of fit bodies. "Round shoulders and narrow chests were states of criminality... It is truly a man's moral duty to have a good

digestion, and sweet breath, and strong arms, and stalwart legs, and an erect bearing” (Baker 2007:37). Meanwhile, religious overtones of muscular Christianity tended to overshadow its (Western) liberal, individualist undertones.<sup>1</sup> The promotion of sport and physical activity for a healthy body and soul meant that it is up to individuals to embrace Christianity to care for their bodies and moral values. Illness, disability and sinful acts were seen as the result of one’s lack of, or kinship’s lack of, muscular Christianity.

The meanings of muscular Christianity have shifted quite a bit since its inception in the United States. Muscular Christianity is now more reflective of “a reaction against the feminization of American middle-class culture” (Baker:45), and an attempt to dispel the image of a “weak and timid Jesus who could attract only women and effeminate men” (46). Institutions such as the *Young Men’s Christian Association*, *Youth for Christ Organization*, *Fellowship of Christian Athletes*, *Athletes in Action*, college football and commercial sport have knotted muscular Christianity and hyper-masculine sport. Contemporary muscular Christianity looks less like the promotion of health and active bodies for good morals as much as it looks like a promotion of Christian fundamentalism, manliness and commercial sport.

The meanings of muscular Christianity saw critical shifts throughout early twentieth century America. Intolerant sects of Christianity began promoting dogmatic fundamentalist beliefs in sport. This was a defense mechanism to the “intruder” religious groups such as such as Jews, Mormons, Catholics and moderate

---

<sup>1</sup> Muscular Christianity was a uncontested formation, especially in regards to Western liberal ideals. Baker (2007) alludes to competing ideologies of muscular Christianity to include socialist muscular Christianity.

Protestants who were beginning to embrace the ideas about physical activity, sport, religion and moral values during the early 1900s. In response, extreme rightwing evangelical Christians resisted their inclusions in the sport-religion nexus by turning to biblical inerrancy and redefining muscular Christianity to their benefit.

“Fundamentalist beliefs in biblical inerrancy, a decisive spiritual rebirth, and the urgency of winning converts before the imminent return of Christ produced a defensive posture” (Baker:193) that purposefully excluded competing religious groups from entering the sporting arena. By the 1970s hyper-conservative evangelical Christianity was promoting (professional and college) sport for religion, or religion through sport. This was coined “Sportianity” by *Sports Illustrated*.

Sportianity was “an energetic, theologically conservative movement that used sport as a means of witnessing for Christ” (193). The Sportianity movement retained traditional meanings of muscular Christianity while interweaving sport and religion with American patriotism. Baker (2007) argues:

This proselytizing mode of behavior derives from a religious revival that seized the United States in the wake of World War II... It first thrived in the Cold War era of the 1950s, when Americans added sport to religious faith and patriotism to create an idealized American “way of life” as an antidote to “godless Communism” (193).

Sportianity helped foster an idealized American “way of life” in reaction to “godless Communism” which held broader sociopolitical implications on the Right during this time. I will come back to Sportianity and how it allowed contemporary muscular Christians to emerge in professional sport. For now, I address developments of the

Right that are important conditions for the emergence of Tebow's sport star identity.

The middle of the twentieth century was an important period of time for the Right. The Right was making concerted efforts to mend fractures and secure political power through fusionism. Muscular Christianity played a role because of its theologically inspired promotion of (rightwing) liberalism. I outline below processes of fusionism that are at the root of normalized privatization, deregulation, and corporatism; powerful discourses of free enterprise, individualism, and self-reliance in contemporary sociopolitical rationality in the United States (Brown 2007; Harvey 2005). The marriage between rightwing conservatism and Christian fundamentalism are important political and cultural linkages of Tebow's sport star identity. How can a religious figure be influential of seemingly non-religious political endeavors? To understand Tebow's position in the rightwing religio-political nexus, I turn to the historical development of fusionism.

Fusionism was both a belief system and long-term historical project. It was the history of a fractious Right attempting to overcome contradictions in philosophical ideas to unify religious sects, political coalitions and conservative social movements. Fusionism represented a practical alliance between libertarians and social conservatives, and the cohesion of their ideologies. Indeed, political analysts credit "the maturity of intellectuals who were willing to hold in mind two seemingly contradictory ideas, libertarianism and [moral] traditionalism" (Diamond 1995:31) for the Right's enduring influence and power.

The 1950s and 1960s were especially important for fusionism because an anti-communist ethos permeated the Cold War United States. There was a general fear of communism that was influenced by the rise of the National Socialist Party, perceptions of World War II, McCarthyism, and a potential “communist” victory in the Cold War (Diamond 1995). Meanwhile, the Right was facing a U.S. populace that largely supported the welfare state, and big government intervention of the New Deal (Diamond 1995). Nevertheless, rightwing conservatives saw this form of governance as creeping socialism. Despite the success of government leadership in the economy, rightwing conservatives were opposed because big government represented too much central control, and put America on a socialist/communist trajectory. And “godless communism” was antithetical to securing the liberties of free enterprise, which, in turn, threatened any promise of a traditional moral order.

According to political historian Sara Diamond (1995), by the early 1950’s, anticommunism had become the *raison d’être* of U.S. foreign and domestic policies. “Anticommunism was the tenet everyone on the Right could agree on” (37). Hence, “economic libertarians could see that the threat of socialism required a response more profound than mere fiscal policy or theory (37). Rightwing moral traditionalists “could see that cherished institutions and moral persuasion alone could not stem the tide toward socialism” (31). Anti-communism represented the sociopolitical and cultural backdrop on which rightwing libertarians and rightwing social conservatives reconciled their contradicting world-views and politics.

The problem of fusionism was, and remains today, the problem of philosophical contradiction. While the groups’ ideas do overlap, on the one hand,



libertarianism is more known for the promotion of a culture rooted in freedom of expression, private property, individual liberty, tradition and market fundamentalism. It is believed that these ideals can only be reached in a free market society bereft of government intervention and violence. And on the other hand, moral traditionalism shares a reverence for the past, but in the endurance of a social and moral order based in conservative Christian doctrine, racial, gender and sexuality hierarchies. Moral traditionalism supports church and state institutions as the enforcers of such an order (Diamond 1995; Harvey 2005).

The role of the state is the most obvious contradiction facing the fusionist movement. Libertarians seek a stateless society, denounce Marx's theses on labor exploitation in vouching for free-market capitalism, and see government oppression as the most insidious form of violence threatening a free society. This is demonstrated in the way libertarian populism harps on "man versus state" historical narratives (Diamond:29). In contrast, rightwing moral traditionalists and social conservatives see the state as a necessary apparatus for the preservation of a morally sound body politic. The legacy of fusionism was in its ability to offer unifying discourses that reconciled the state's role. Fusionism argued that the state should protect the precepts of individual liberty and traditional morality in three main realms: the economy, the nation-state in a global context (military and diplomatic), and the cultural politics of behavior and social norms (Diamond 1995).

Rightwing conservative intellectual Frank Meyer (Diamond 1995) theoretically fused the moral values of rightwing social conservatives with the

prospects of a “clean” capitalism offered by rightwing libertarians.<sup>2</sup> Meyer proposed that there was a “dialectical synthesis” between moral traditionalism and libertarianism. “Both implicitly accept, to a large degree, the ends of the other...[because]... without a basis in moral values, personal freedom is meaningless; and without freedom of choice, society’s pursuit of virtue and order would lead to “totalitarian authority”” (31). This theoretical and historical cohesion resulted in profound, rightward shifts in American political power and discourse. Critical scholars argue that fusionism has given a cultural reception to neoliberal sociopolitical rationalities (Brown 2002) as it opened up constructive dialogue between contradicting rightwing conservatives/conservatism:

Disparate conservative ideologues could “work together” to revive *traditional* norms of social conservatism, reestablish a free enterprise economy, refocus fundamentalist moral imperatives in the national dialogue, grossly expand military spending and endeavor, and eradicate many of the “liberal” social welfare initiatives introduced during the New Deal and implemented throughout the civil rights era (Giardina and Newman 2010:57).

The contradictions on the right have not been mended through dialogue alone though. Rather, I would argue that the ways in which rightwing libertarianism and rightwing social conservatism have manifested in social movements has been more impactful in influencing rightwing power, political discourse and sociopolitical

---

<sup>2</sup> Frank Meyer was editor of the conservative publication the *National Review*, which served as the host for many of the intellectual discourses pertaining to fusionism. He is also credited with coining the term “fusionism.”

rationalities than mere theory. How conservative social movements have taken up fusionism ideals to complement each other and promote rightwing power is sociologically important for a critical reading of Tebow's sport star identity. Tebow is contextually bound to the discourses of *The Tea Party Movement* and *the Christian Right*. I now focus on the developments and cultural politics of these rightwing social movements. I outline how fusionism has manifested "on the ground" to give rise and meaning to Tebow's sport star identity.

### *The Christian Right: Morality Politics in the Culture Wars*

The Christian Right is a grassroots and federal-level rightwing "social movement that attempts to mobilize Christians groups that had traditionally avoided politics into conservative political action... by convincing them that political involvement was a God-given responsibility" (Larson and Wilcox 2006:6-7).<sup>3</sup> The Christian Right has long been known for its radically conservative politics and attempts at cultural reform (culture wars) through the promotion of rightwing Christian fundamentalism. The movement is motivated by the decaying of a "true" American culture and values. The movement virulently attacks left liberalism, abortion rights, homosexuality, homosexual marriage rights, single-parent homes, and the welfare state whilst normalizing discourses on traditional gender roles, white privilege, homophobia, patriarchy, racism, and market fundamentalism. The Christian Right uses "televangelism" and rightwing conservative politicians to

---

<sup>3</sup> "The New Christian Right" as a title is contested and often rejected by its leaders, for they believe it depicts a narrow movement. "Some prefer the term "religious Right," which would encompass all "people of faith," including conservative Jews and possibly Muslims" (Larson & Wilcox, p. 6).

disseminate “the most radical conservative ideas into the public mind by constant repetition... guaranteeing a radical conservative future for America” (Lakoff 2012:NP).<sup>4</sup>

The Christian Right is responsible largely for the rise of neoconservatives in the U.S. government. Neoconservatives are typically associated with the state-fashioned American empire building project, government spending, and “union busting.” (Giardina and Newman 2011). According to David Harvey (2005), neoconservatives have reshaped governmental practices in two respects. First, through big government they emphasize a “concern for order as an answer to the chaos of individual interests” (82). Secondly, an overweening Christian fundamentalist morality is promoted as the “necessary social glue to keep the body politic secure in the face of external and internal dangers” (82). Neoconservatives, media icons, televangelists and rightwing Christian fundamentalist organizations have fashioned morality politics as a “discursive regime” (Foucault 1980) to implement these ideas and unify diverse rightwing constituencies.

Morality politics are the creation and reframing of independent social issues such as abortion, homosexuality, pornography and family values into moral issues. Morality politics demonize, dehistoricize, isolate, and reduce complex social “problems” to the moral codes of individuals (Erzen 2006; Kintz and Lesage 1998). American studies scholar Axel Shafer (2011) argues:

---

<sup>4</sup> George Lakoff (2012) describes the Right’s “Santorum Strategy”. A strategy to pound the public with radically conservative discourse in an effort for long term cultural impression.

By attributing social wrongs to the sinful nature of man, it shifted the locus of social transformation away from structural evils and back toward individual conversion. In fact, prior to the 1970's abortion, homosexuality, and similar issues per se had had remarkably little resonance within the wider evangelical fold. Rather than being dictated by strict religious teachings, these campaigns, therefore, grew out of the conservatives' search for a unifying issue that combined moral orthodoxy with extensive political and social action (122).

This discursive regime has had at least a threefold impact: First, morality politics helped subsume major left leaning evangelical sects. Left and Right evangelicals agreed on moral codes of gender, race, and sexuality based in moral traditionalism. The sides disagreed, however, on the capitalist free market. The evangelical Left was skeptical of free-market capitalism because of the socioeconomic ills it befell impoverished populations. The Left supported social programs, structures and aid for the poor in response to capitalism's exploits (Shafer 2011). In response, the much more persuasive evangelical Right vouched for a religiously inspired form of fusionism, and by the mid 1970s there was an axiomatic "defense of idealized market capitalism as a biblically based system" (Shafer:116). In line with Meyer's dialectical synthesis, the Christian Right recognized "that capitalism needed to be tied to an awareness of sin, but saw the pursuit of self-interest as a means toward a positive social end as long as it was wedded to a religiously inspired code of self-discipline, honesty, fairness, and charity" (116). Rightwing conservative Christianity offered a persuasive model for self-governance

and self-reliance within a free market society that effectively engulfed the Left evangelical impetus for social action.

Second, morality politics victim-blame individuals for deviant behavior and impoverished circumstances, as seen in, what Douglas Hartmann and Eric Tranby (2008) call the “evangelical race problem”. White evangelicals often use “principled conservatism” (342) to reconcile and explain racial differences in economic disparities. In other words, many white evangelicals adhere stringently to individualist, anti-black sentiments and conservative ideals as “part of a broader racial-cultural schema that structures and undergirds how evangelicals understand both the general problem of race and economic inequality between the races” (Hartmann and Tranby:342). This form of individualism is blind to the structural inequalities of race while also providing ways of thinking that allow its adherents to justify, rationalize, and legitimate the racial status quo. This view blames black populations for their own impoverishment by alluding to stereotypical notions of laziness and welfare complacency.

Third, morality politics provide an interlocking, “umbrella” language that unifies diverse conservatives over an agenda that appeals to many (non-religious) white voters (Kintz and Lesage 1998; Kintz 1998; Larson and Wilcox 2006). “Family values”, for instance, show the Christian Right’s appeal to whiteness, heteronormativity and patriarchy. The Christian Right packaged its brand as a pro-family institution. It (re)invented mythical ideas of the nuclear family in reflection of God’s image according to traditional and hierarchical gender roles. This resonates with many white, heterosexual, middle class, family-oriented Americans. The pro-

family discourse also positioned the Christian Right against “anti-family” detractors (i.e. “those” racial minorities, supporters of feminism, socialism, gay rights, pro-choice, etc.). The Christian Right normalized cultural understandings of family values of anti-gay, anti-abortion and anti-communist, which, in turn, produced sociocultural binaries that defined “good” and “bad” citizens in relation to nuclear families and single parent households, heterosexuals and homosexuals, social conservatives and cultural liberals, hard workers and welfare recipients.

The 2008 election of President Obama and his liberal social initiatives for gay marriage rights, racial diversity, and big government has reinvigorated the Christian Right’s cultural battle. Most noticeable has been the Christian Right’s stance against homosexuality. The group understands homosexuality as “religious sin, sexual addiction, gender deficit, and psychological disorder” (Erzen:16), and believes the “problem” of homosexuality can be “cured” through being born-again. The battle against homosexuality is not so much waged by politicians in fear of losing votes as it is waged by supportive rightwing institutions such as Focus on the Family. These types of religiopolitical institutions have been known to adopt queer theory notions of sexuality-change to promote “a wider anti-gay agenda cloaked in the rhetoric of choice, change, and compassion” (Erzen:18). The constituents of such institutions use ex-gay participants’ testimonies as living proof that homosexuality is merely a choice or a developmental disorder. Through the strategically curated language of sexuality change, the Christian Right moralizes and naturalizes the nuclear family, anti-abortion, heterosexuality, and traditional gender roles (Erzen 2006). Overall, the Christian Right has polarized American politics based on archaic, socially

conservative radicalism. How Christian fundamentalist-inspired social conservatism has operated with the free market and anti-government agenda of The Tea Party Movement is my next focus in understanding the meanings of Tebow's sport star identity. The two socio-political-religious movements are concrete, material histories that clamor for the ideals of fusionism and also represent the conditions of possibility for the emergence of Tebow.

*The Tea Party Movement: Libertarian Means to Meet Social Conservative Ends*

The Tea Party Movement is a highly mediated rightwing, conservative, and self-identified grass-roots social movement that began following the inauguration of Barack Obama in 2008. The grass-roots origins of the Tea Party Movement are highly contested as the movement was said to be financed by wealthy individuals such as the billionaire Koch brothers. The Tea Party Movement was energized by a particular strain of libertarian thought grounded in strict constitutionalism characterized most notably by Republican Congressman Ron Paul, and the conservative think-tanks the *Cato Institute*, *Rockford Institute* and *Ludwig Von Mises Institute*.<sup>5</sup> Tea Partiers regularly assembled in "protest of what they perceived to be too much government involvement in their everyday lives" (Giardina and

---

<sup>5</sup> "This latest surge of American populism is financed by some extremely wealthy men, including a couple of oil billionaires named David and Charles Koch, who favor cutting taxes for the super-rich and abolishing government subsidies for the poor, such as Social Security and President Obama's health-care plan. This agenda might seem selfish, though understandable from the point of view of an oil billionaire. But who are all those people wildly cheering for the billionaire's dream... They are almost uniformly white, largely middle-aged and above, and for the most part far from wealthy" (Giardina and Newman:51).



Newman:50). According to critical sport scholars Michael D. Giardina and Joshua I. Newman (2010), the Tea Party Movement is guided by traditions of social conservatism, visions of “simpler” past-times, antiquated institutions and symbols of the U.S. South, individualism and free-market economics. The movement’s goal was to resurrect the ideals of freedom that Obama’s “socialist” government was supposedly destroying.

Moreover, scholars (Lundskow 2012; Giardina and Newman 2010; Zeskind 2011) have argued that the Tea Party Movement is an American populist social movement that mobilized around the collective racial identity of whiteness in response to the late economic atrocities brought by the “financialization of everything” (Harvey 2005:33). The financial crisis of 2008 left many formerly middle class individuals homeless, unemployed, underemployed, and dispossessed. This was made worse by the continuum of accelerating capital flows from small business to big business. The concentration of capital has reached the hands of very few upper class individuals and corporations, thereby, turning many middle class owners into working class laborers (Lunskow 2012; Zeskind 2011). The transfer of wealth and ownership had many Tea Partiers disillusioned by the prospects of freedom, individualism and neoliberal policy as they were no longer its beneficiaries.

While The Tea Party Movement mobilized against Obama’s big government and the foundering economic promises of neoliberalism, its constituents are “overwhelmingly” white men. Members are drawn to the anti-Obama, anti-federal government, pro market agenda who come together to represent a white racial

collectivity (Giardina and Newman 2010; Lundskow 2012; Zeskind 2011).<sup>6</sup>

Moreover, Giardina and Newman (2010) argue that supporters of the movement – rightwing public intellectuals, conservative media icons and Tea Partiers – who clamored against big government to secure individual freedom were using the language of white victimhood to reinforce color-blind racism and white male-centric ideologies:

Cloaked in the words of economic populism (government ‘stealing’ taxpayer money, government as ‘gangsters’) and hyperreligious fundamentalism (if not outright biblical literalism), what [Glenn] Beck, [Ron and Rand] Paul, [Joe] Miller, and their cohort are perpetuating and profiting from is a form of white victimhood in the United States that is made meaningful against the backdrop of economic hardship, a dwindling racial majority, and the growing acceptance of the under-30 crowd of gay rights, abortion rights, and multicultural or ethnic identities (52).<sup>7</sup>

Though The Tea Party social movement only resonated with a small population of U.S. voters, it had enough cultural force in the media and political force in Congress to obstruct political compromise. Patently, the Tea Party Movement forged an “agonistic” and “destructive” position against the “un-American” President Obama and Democratic Party initiatives. The movement’s supporters were principled, unwavering, radical and combative in virulently opposing Obama’s healthcare plan

---

<sup>6</sup> Tea Party members were more likely to be evangelical Christians and Republican voters than the general population (Zeskind 2011).

<sup>7</sup> Glenn Beck is a rightwing media personality and intellectual. Ron and Rand Paul, and Joe Miller are rightwing conservative politicians who have publicly voiced their support of the Tea Party Movement.

and federal budget cuts because Obama's proposals apparently infringed on individual freedom. In August of 2011, Tea Party members of Congress were key players in the debt ceiling crisis political standoff that held the American people and economy hostage. The Tea Partiers' unwillingness to compromise on the allocation of federal budget cuts during the debt ceiling crisis created a political standoff which signaled the beginning of an inept era of congressional politics.<sup>8</sup> The political showdown that could have resulted in the U.S. defaulting on its national debt was highly mediated, evoked a fear of the unknown – what actually happens if the U.S. defaults on its debt? – and democratic compromise was stymied by The Tea Party Movement's market fundamentalist ideals, if not blatant support for those already wielding economic influence.

Together, the Christian Right and The Tea Party Movement have re-entrenched ideologies of economic freedom, individualism and social conservatism. They are disparate sociopolitical movements that, from contradicting perspectives, call for mythical, conservative, traditional forms of social behavior and free market fundamentals. In other words, to echo Hall, Massey and Rustin (2013), these movements are efforts to maintain the broader political and social consensus of neoliberal ideology. They are discursive processes in the naturalization of rightwing Christian fundamentalist and libertarian ideals that intersect (fusionism) with the cultural politics of whiteness, racism, patriarchy and heteronormativity in contemporary U.S. society. The Tea Party Movement is an especially important and

---

<sup>8</sup> President Obama was willing to make federal budget cuts to traditionally Democratic Party initiatives such as Social Security and put an end to the Bush Tax Cuts. The Tea Party rightwing was not willing to add taxes for any group of people.

culturally defining moment in the U.S. as it provokes critical questions about President Obama's ability to lead the American people, the sociopolitical trajectory of American government, and whether or not federal government power is (un)just during times of economic hardship.

In reflection of these dominant discourses in American political culture, Tebow's sport star identity had emerged during the 2011 NFL season. Tebow's was distinct from his predecessors because it resembled the cultural residues of the Christian Right's social conservatism and The Tea Party Movement's individualism. Tebow's muscular Christianity was easily appropriable by both of these contradicting standpoints. The sheer impact of the Tea Party politics on American conservatism pointed to the ways in which Tebow's muscular Christianity was not so much defined by his religious beliefs as it was by how he carried those beliefs, promoted them and continued to be unwavering when faced with direct criticisms. I return to this notion in subsequent chapters. Also, Tebow's new muscular Christianity was constituted by his self-identified and media substantiated status as a role model in the NFL. His understandings of being a role model were based upon, and promoted, born-again Christianity (Tebow and Whitaker, 2010). His goal was to improve American culture by using the "NFL stage" as an ideological vehicle, and he drew upon his personal experiences as an athlete, a quarterback, and a born-again Christian to achieve this end.

While preceding muscular Christians in the age of Sportianity used the hyper-mediated NFL stage to promote God during the 1980s, 90s and 2000s, they did not attract the same type of polarizing media attention. Muscular Christians

(NFL) such as Kurt Warner, Ray Lewis, Shaun Alexander and Reggie White were great athletes. They accomplished more than Tebow did on the field (some will be inducted into the Professional Football Hall of Fame), they promoted God like Tebow, and also possessed charisma and marketability, like Tebow (Karettenmaker 2010). They did not, however, conjure a national, polarized media frenzy, like Tebow. No other muscular Christian was at the fore of commercial sporting culture during 2011. So Tebow's sport star identity, largely constituted by muscular Christianity, offers an important lens through which to understand contested cultural meaning of sport stars in the Tea Party era.

I argue Tebow's sport star identity differentiated from these muscular Christians as he was much more privileged by mainstream media. On the one hand, Tebow's identity reflected the political uncertainty and polarization defining this conjuncture. But on the other hand, Tebow's hyper-mediated 2011 season coincided with a particular moment when the sanctity of the NFL (brand) "shield" had been sullied by racialized "character issues" (King 2006), "greedy" (owners) billionaires and (players) millionaires threatening the 2011 season with a labor lockout, and the emergence of existential concerns about concussions and long-term brain trauma in football. Hence, the discursive construction of Tebow's sport star identity draws more so on the common sense, "positive" affirmation that Tebow offers (such as capitalist production, quintessential leadership, and status as moral exemplar), and less on the criticizing polarization of his muscular Christianity. That said, understanding how Tebow's form of muscular Christianity caused polarization is vital to understanding how Tebow reinforces conservative ideologies of class, race

and gender, which is the focus in the following chapter.

In sum, I have detailed the context out of which Tebow's sport star identity emerged. Sociohistorical contexts of muscular Christianity, rightwing fusionism, the Christian Right, the Tea Party Movement, and the uncertainty of the 2011NFL season make up the network of social, political and economic conditions of possibility for the emergence of Tebow's sport star identity. In what follows, I critically analyze the discursive construction of Tebow, how he was described to the American public. This entails outlining my empirical material to show how Tebow's sport star identity naturalizes ideologies of rightwing conservatism, Christian fundamentalist moral values, capitalism, and white masculinity into "common sense" notions of social life.

## **Chapter 5 Empirical Evidence: Discursive Construction of Tim Tebow**

In this chapter I outline the discursive construction of Tebow's sport star identity. The main focus here is how Tebow was described to the American reading/viewing public during the height of his mediated attention, Tebow Mania. I also draw upon meaningful discourses of Tebow from outside this time frame. Utilizing diverse scholarship from sport studies, sport history, feminism, gender studies, and critical race theory, I reconstruct Tebow's mediated story. I navigate from his privileged childhood upbringing, to discourses of polarization, to how Tebow's sport star identity came to represent idealized capitalist production, quintessential leadership and a moral role model for the American people. There are two dominant narratives surrounding Tebow during this time. The first describes Tebow as a polarizing or controversial figure. Here the mainstream media views Tebow's outspoken religiosity as a threat to behavioral and cultural norms of the NFL. The fact of Tebow's new muscular Christianity both draws and alienates, unifies and polarizes. This narrative describes the various ways in which Tebow was considered polarizing, how he may have caused angst and discomfort amongst everyday fans and mainstream media. I reconstruct this narrative to argue that Tebow was presented as a polarizing contemporary muscular Christian who disrupted isolationist views of the NFL, was criticized for religious exclusivism, and that his NFL "platform" for moral and religious promotion was dogmatic. Overall, Tebow established new boundaries and precedents around the meanings of muscular Christianity in the Tea Party era.

The subsequent, counter-narrative, repackaged the polarization of Tebow to

fit into an American Dream or underdog story. In so doing, mainstream media constructed Tebow as a white male role model to serve as an active moral agent for the American public. The polarization and controversy of Tebow's muscular Christianity created an adverse situation which Tebow overcame through Denver's success in 2011. Consequentially, the language of the American Dream and underdog stories underpinned this repackaged version of the polarized Tebow. Representation of Tebow's sport star identity shifted to serve as an affirmation that hard work, rightwing Christian moral values, and self-determination are unrivaled conservative American values. I argue that Tebow's white racialization and masculinity undergird these rightwing conservative values. Before outlining the dominant narratives of Tebow Mania, I trace Tebow's background to show how his middle-class, white, privileged background presented an opportunity for professional success in the United States in the first place.

### *Tebow Before Tebow Mania*

Tebow's story is not atypical of other privileged white males aspiring to be a professional athlete. Tebow grew up in a middle-class family on a large farm in Jacksonville, Florida where there was no shortage of property and space for physical activity. "There was plenty of room to take batting practice without losing a ball in a neighbor's yard or worrying about a nearby window" (Tebow and Whitaker 2011:14). Like many privileged white boys, from a young age, Tebow had support from his family, neighbors and close relatives to participate in what were thought of as character and health developing physical activities, sports. Before getting involved



in organized sport, Tebow and his siblings enjoyed less-structured “play” such as obstacle course racing, push-up, pull-up and sit-up competitions, and wrestling in the backyard.

Tebow grew up in a born-again Christian family, and he accepted Jesus into his heart at the age of six. He was born-again to devote his life on earth to Jesus Christ. This meant daily prayer rituals, homeschooling, Bible readings and muscular Christianity were ways of life for Tebow as an adolescent. This lifestyle advanced Tebow’s drive to excel in sports. His passion for muscular Christianity developed into an emotionally charged, ultra-competitive spirit that dovetailed with the requirements to succeed in today’s major sporting institutions (basketball, baseball, football and hockey). Tebow developed into an exceptional athlete because his enjoyment of competition and winning at all costs meant he had to push his body to its physical limits. Tebow believed in the American maxim that “*hard work beats talent when talent doesn’t work hard*” (33, italics original). Before his father allowed him to lift weights as a young teenager, Tebow developed his own strict, daily physical fitness routines where he did four hundred push-ups and sit-ups every day (33). On top of that, Tebow was a laborer on his parents’ farm. Daily farm labor developed Tebow into a “country strong” man. The arduous lifting, tiring movements, and self-discipline married to subsistent farm labor seemed “natural” and “better” for the body than “artificial” weight lifting, anyways. Once old enough though, Tebow began lifting weights. He did bench presses, squats, deadlifts, etc. He tirelessly engaged in physical fitness activities because his goal was to be the absolute best at whatever it was he was doing, to win at all costs, and some day, be a

professional football player.

With his muscular corporeal body, attitude, work ethic, and family support, Tebow was bound for sporting success. The flexibility of homeschooling and his families disposable income presented a platter of organized sports from which to choose. Tebow gravitated toward football because of its physical nature. The special circumstances surrounding homeschooled high school athletes in Florida also meant Tebow was free to choose from a list of private schools where he wanted to play football. It was not long before Tebow became an All-State high school football quarterback. Tebow began drawing national attention as a young burgeoning athlete. His hyper-competitive spirit boiled over from his born-again Christianity made him a conspicuous young man in northern Florida. This attracted the attention of *ESPN Outside the Lines* (2009) which aired a documentary titled *Tim Tebow: The Chosen One*. The documentary highlighted his high school football career, exceptional work ethic, born-again Christianity and family life as a high school football player living in Jacksonville. By the time he was a junior in high school, Tebow was a top high school football recruit. Consequently, he received multiple scholarship offers from top U.S. academic institutions such as the University of Alabama, Louisiana State University, and the University of Florida. Once again, Tebow was able to choose from a list of schools where he wanted to further his education and football career. He chose the University of Florida (UF) (Tebow and Whitaker 2011).

Tebow had an amazing four-year college football career at UF. As the quarterback he helped his team win two Bowl Championship Series (BCS) National

championships. He was named the team captain three years in a row. He won the Heisman Trophy in 2007. He set multiple South Eastern Conference (SEC) records. He was on the Academic All-America team twice. And he was voted by his teammates as the team's most valuable player three times. Tebow was a national icon at UF. He personified the idealized student-athlete by excelling in academics and doing charity work with children. Meanwhile, he not only succeeded on the gridiron, but Tebow had, arguably, the greatest college football career ever. Tebow's only hindrance was his unorthodox throwing mechanics, which caused inaccurate throws sometimes. His throwing movements and arm action stirred controversy leading up to the 2010 NFL draft. The main question asked by pundits was: could Tebow's skill set that made him a successful college quarterback transition to the NFL? Despite the question around the physical shortcoming, Tebow was selected 25<sup>th</sup> overall by the Denver Broncos.

In 2011, Tebow's second season in the NFL, he saw his first significant playing time. After a disastrous one and three start (with Kyle Orton as the starting quarterback) head coach John Fox, looking for his savior, called upon Tebow to be the starting quarterback. Despite the unorthodox throwing motion and subpar statistical ratings, Tebow led Denver on an unimaginable playoff run. A run which featured the league's most inexplicable, come-from-behind, last second victories.<sup>9</sup> Tebow's first start in week four, he guided Denver to a come-from-behind victory with two touchdown passes in the final 3 minutes against Miami (Associated Press

---

<sup>9</sup> Week seven: overtime win vs. Miami; week 12: overtime win vs. San Diego; week 13: come-from-behind win vs. Minnesota; Week 14: overtime win vs. Chicago; Wild-Card Playoff game: overtime win vs. Pittsburgh

2011). This triggered a popular culture media phenomenon known as Tebow Mania. Tebow Mania climaxed in mid-December when Tebow faced Tom Brady and the New England Patriots on CBS's nationally televised game. Tebow Mania then came to a close after Tebow led his team to a triumphant playoff win over Pittsburgh only to be badly defeated by New England (a second time) the following week. In what follows, I outline the dominant mainstream narratives that constructed Tebow's sport star identity during Tebow Mania.

### *The Polarization of Tebow's Muscular Christianity*

This section attends to how mainstream media described Tebow as a polarizing and controversial figure for everyday fans and mainstream media. Tebow's brand of muscular Christianity used the NFL stage to promote a form of (rightwing) conservative Christianity (Feezell 2013), which fractured his popularity for a few reasons that I outline below. Tebow pushed his moral world-view when he spoke often and confidently about God, "...God's plan..." and being a role model for the youth. He repeated the phrases "thank God" and "God bless" during interviews, and he wore biblical symbols on his body during games. For instance, in reference to chapter 3, verse 16 of the Gospel of John from the Bible he wrote "John" under his right eye and "3:16" under his left eye. On top of that, Tebow genuflected to celebrate touchdowns, mentally prepare himself and thank his savior Jesus Christ. Mainstream media used the language of "polemical", "polarizing" and other epithets that denoted competing voices to describe the nature of Tebow's muscular Christianity.

In December 2011, *Grantland.com* published an article titled *The People Who*

*Hate Tim Tebow: On the Most (Curious, Complicated, Downright Strange) Polarizing Athlete of Our Age* that encapsulated the dichotomous views of Tebow (Klosterman 2011). In the article, sports and popular culture journalist Chuck Klosterman discusses why Tebow is polarizing to the American public. Klosterman argues, “on one pole, you have people who hate him because he's too much of an in-your-face good person... at the other pole, you have people who love him because he succeeds at his job while being uniquely unskilled at its traditional requirements” (Klosterman:NP). Furthermore, the *Denver Post* argues, you either “love him, hate him, or love him one week and dislike him the next” (Klis 2011). Greenberg (2011) of *ESPN Chicago* argues, Tebow was “an enigma to some, a hero to others.” In addition to the religious aspects of polarization, there was much popular football debate over Tebow’s role in Denver.

Tebow did not possess the aesthetically pleasing throwing motion of a Michael Vick (Philadelphia Eagles), the slender composure of a Tom Brady (New England Patriots), the quick-twitch arm action of an Aaron Rodgers (Green Bay Packers) or the overwhelming (“football IQ”) cognition of a Peyton Manning (Indianapolis Colts). Instead, Tebow carried an awkward, left-handed, elongated throwing motion on a thick and bulky frame, which did not fit the traditional quarterback mold. This caused pundits to question whether or not Tebow was the reason Denver was winning. Ian O’Connor (2011) argued that Tebow was a “god-awful” quarterback “for about nine-tenths” of the game until he made one or two key plays at the end to win. O’Connor was insinuating that this was hardly enough evidence to substantiate claims that Tebow was a good NFL quarterback. Tebow’s

statistical ratings supported O'Connor's doubts as well. In 11 games Tebow had a 46.5% completion rate, a 72.9 quarterback rating, and threw only 12 touchdowns – truly pedestrian stats at best and “god-awful” at worst. *ESPN* programs such as *First and 10*, *Around the Horn* and *Pardon the Interruption* echoed O'Connor's argument and featured contentious debate over whether or not Tebow was responsible for success in Denver.

To critically understand the meanings of Tebow's polarizing evangelical Christianity, I draw upon Randolph Feezell's (2013) multilayered analysis of Tebow. I argue that Tebow's muscular Christian sport star identity disrupted isolationist views of football, it presented “truth claims” of religious exclusivism, and his brand of religiosity was a part of the divisive American politics of 2011.

First, Feezell argues that Tebow's religiosity disrupts isolationist and traditional views of the NFL which caused a rift in his popularity. Through an isolationist perspective, Tebow problematically brings religion into professional football. An isolationist view of “sport” maintains that sport is separate from “real life”; sport is positioned as mere reflection of society, if not a safe haven from it. Hence, the popular notion that religion has no place in sport. “Football enthusiasts” were uncomfortable with how Tebow expressed “his religious beliefs before, during and after every game” (Bruni 2011). Football enthusiasts are isolationists who deride the type of “media circus” that was prompted by Tebow's religiosity and politics because these “things” do not belong in the NFL (Smith 2011a). Since Tebow's religiosity was seen as the catalyst of Tebow Mania, his evangelist identity was seen as undesirable to football enthusiasts. Moreover, isolationist views of the

NFL maintain that there are knowable, valuable “truths” defining what the NFL should look like, how it should be played and how it should be spectated. “According to this view, sport is about sport, nothing else, and everything should be done to promote the purity of its values and to exclude the ends for which sport is often used” (Feezell 2013:138), including the promotion of self, God and politics. Popular isolationist understandings of football describe the sport as the ultimate team sport. Thus, Tebow Mania was a media circus that deflected attention away from the team and onto Tebow in a selfish manner, which detracted from the team goal of winning.

Second, Feezell argues that Tebow’s evangelism presented “truth-claims” of religious exclusivism. This caused tension for people reading Tebow’s religiosity. The ways in which Tebow praised and thanked “God” were built on assumptions about which God he was describing, the nature of that God and the philosophy of religious belief more generally (Feezell 2013). These assumptions created boundaries of religious inclusion and exclusion based on group identity formation. Tom Krattenmaker (2012) in the *USA TODAY* wrote about how different viewing/reading audiences were simultaneously identified with and alienated from Tebow’s evangelism. Quite simply, if you shared Tebow’s religious beliefs you could identify with him or his group. If not, then you were an alien. Given the mass reach of the NFL, this impacted the identification of many religious groups. A projectable religious self and other formed around Tebow (Chandler and Magdalinski 2002). The power of Tebow’s religious beliefs/sect was displayed in the lack of criticisms toward religious exclusivism in mainstream media. Mainstream media did not offer critique of how Tebow was putting up identity boundaries. I found this to be

reflective of the comfortable relationship of conservative Christianity and mainstream sport media. In fact, the term “religion” became synonymous with Tebow’s conservative Christianity when pundits debated the place of “religion” in sport. Nevertheless, some challenges were posed against exclusivism such as “what if Tebow were Muslim, would America still love him?” (Abdul-Matin 2011; Cederstrom 2012). “Would a Jew or Muslim get similar treatment?” (Cherner 2011) And “there would be incredible blowback... if [Tebow] were promoting Mohammad and the Koran” (Cherner 2011). These critiques could hardly be considered mainstream though.

Lastly, Tebow explicitly stated his moral, religious and, by extension, political goals for his muscular Christianity. Tebow often spoke about the platform sports provide for “doing good” for others (Tebow and Whitaker 2011). “Doing good” for others meant a type of political intervention by Tebow’s moral world-view. Feezell (2013) argues that Tebow’s moral promotion/political interventions were dogmatic and contentious because of some of the built-in assumptions Tebow was making and the uncritical nature of the “platform”:

He witnesses and preaches to us in contexts in which philosophical or critical responses are either unavailable (for example, to persons in the popular media) or understood to be calloused and insensitive to a person’s cherished beliefs. Critical questions are required. How do you know? What are your reasons? What is your evidence, especially in light of a religiously ambiguous world? Why do you think that your status as a celebrated athlete permits or requires you to tell people what they should believe or how they should live



(152)?

Tebow's stage did not allow for the development of critical dialogue about the meanings of his muscular Christianity. And how Tebow used the NFL as his platform to promote God was also controversial and polarizing because his "brand of Christianity endorses a distinctively conservative (supposedly Biblical) moral worldview" (Feezell, p. 140). Tebow's moral and religious missions cross cut into American politics. Politicians and Parties were associated with Tebow, Tebow was associated with them to further fracture his public appeal.

Tebow Mania began at the heights of Tea Party contentiousness in 2011. Accordingly, mainstream media urged President Obama to act more like Tebow if he wanted to win Republican votes and fix America's problems (The Denver Post 2011). There were also three important examples of how Tebow was explicitly involved with the conservative Right. In January 2011 a Super Political Action Committee (PAC) ran an advertisement for Minnesota Congresswoman and Tea Party Caucus founder Michele Bachmann. Bachmann was, at the time, a presidential candidate. The commercial likened her Tebow:

What do Tim Tebow and Michele Bachmann have in common? Well, at first glance you may say "nothing". But look a little deeper. The establishment sports guys just love to hate Tim Tebow: he's not smart enough, his mechanics are no good, he's not accurate enough, still he just keeps winning. Maybe they're so invested in his failure because he makes them all feel guilty. He doesn't drink, smoke, cuss or even kick his opponents when they're on the ground, he has no baggage, and, oh yeah, he's a born-again Christian. Well,

the same could be said of Michele Bachmann: no baggage, Christian, and, like Tebow, she keeps fighting and she just keeps winning votes... still the establishment just loves to hate her no compromise, no flip-flop stand on the issues (Hartman 2012).

In December 2011, Texas state governor Rick Perry was participating in the GOP debates in Sioux City, Iowa when he also likened himself to Tebow:

There are a lot of folks that said Tim Tebow wasn't going to be a very good NFL quarterback. There are people that stood up and said, 'Well, he doesn't have the right throwing mechanisms, or he's not playing the game right,' and he won two national championships, and that looked pretty good. We were the national champions in job creation back in Texas. And so, am I ready for the next level? Let me tell you, I hope I am the Tim Tebow of the Iowa caucuses (Hartman 2012).

In February 2010, Tebow was in a Super Bowl commercial for the global Christian Ministry, Focus on the Family, a powerful Christian fundamentalist organization (Larson and Wilcox 2006). The commercial was an anti-abortion message featuring Tebow and his mother Pamela. The commercial politicized Tebow's birth 24 years after he was born. In the commercial Pamela explained the dire circumstances of Tim's birth:<sup>10</sup>

I call him my miracle baby; he almost didn't make it into this world. I can remember so many times when I almost lost him. It was so hard. Well he's all

---

<sup>10</sup> CBS also rejected to air a commercial for mancrunch.com, a homosexual male dating site, during the Super Bowl.

grown up now and I still worry about his health. Ya know? With all our family's been through we have to be tough (PolitiClips1, Youtube, 2010). Details of Tebow's birth were starting to reach the public about four years earlier when *ESPN* aired a television segment during the 2007 Heisman Trophy Ceremony. Tebow recalls, "the story of my birth ended up generating a great deal of additional interest. It provided a platform...for a pro-life message, and now provides my mom with opportunities to speak to a variety of groups all over the country" (Tebow and Whitaker:159).

Tim Tebow and Nathan Whitaker (2011) detail his birth story in Tebow's autobiography *Through my Eyes*. In 1986 Tebow's parents, Pamela and Robert, were missionaries serving in the Philippines looking to spread their faith abroad when Pamela became pregnant with Timothy. As the pregnancy developed there was a great deal of "pain and bleeding". Doctors were convinced that without an abortion Pamela would lose her life. The doctors urged for an abortion. Tebow and Whitaker note that God "reached out" to Pamela and gave her an unexpected sense of "indescribable peace" about delivering her child as normal (4). Without the doctors knowing just how, the bleeding subsided, and she gave birth to whom the family called their "miracle baby" – Timothy Tebow.

The polarization of Tebow's muscular Christianity has given new meaning to muscular Christianity as a cultural phenomenon. Muscular Christian professional football athletes that preceded Tebow did not experience this type of divisive, polarizing attention. Following Feezell's insight, I outlined how polarization manifested on an aspect of Tebow's sport star identity. I showed how isolationist

views of the NFL, criticism of Tebow's religious exclusivism, and Tebow's religious alignment with rightwing conservative politics constructed him as a polarizing sport star. Overall, the polarization of Tebow's sport star identity fabricated an adverse circumstance for Tebow, which was a necessary component for this privileged white male to "fit" an American Dream fairytale. In the following chapter, I outline the counter-narrative that repackages Tebow's sport star identity into an idealized white male cultural figure.

## Chapter 6 Repackaging Tebow's Sport Star Identity

In the preceding chapter I showed how Tebow was described by mainstream media as a polarizing muscular Christian. The criticisms, negativity and discomfort constituting the representation of polarization fostered a situation where Tebow was a highly scrutinized quarterback. Despite the fact that Tebow was leading his team on a playoff run, there were still “doubters” and “non-believers” in the media who criticized his religiosity and throwing mechanics. In this section, I reconstruct polarization's counter-narrative to show how Tebow's sport star identity fit an American Dream narrative. American Dream stories are very popular in American sport, so this counter-narrative to polarization positioned Tebow as a culturally exalted white male who, through hard work, leadership, and good morals, prevailed against the critics. There are three main themes constituting this counter-narrative. The first theme describes how Tebow was praised as a capitalist producer. The second describes Tebow as a quintessential leader; and the third theme shows how Tebow was described as a moral exemplar. The purpose of this chapter is to argue that the prevailing counter-narrative described Tebow's sport star identity by relying on conservative ideologies of gender and race.

### *Tebow's Hegemonic Masculinity: Discourses of Capitalist Production*

This section is dedicated to understanding how Tebow's hegemonic masculinity was described in discourses of capitalist production and leadership. I draw upon gender and critical sport studies to understand how discourses of Tebow's capitalist production and quintessential leadership naturalized male power

in the United States.

According to R.W. Connell (1995) and Connell and James Messerschmidt (2005), hegemonic masculinity refers to “the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the legitimacy of patriarchy” (77), the subordination of women, and the subordination of nonhegemonic masculinities. Overall, the concept hegemonic masculinity describes power relations of gender hierarchies. It infers the historical aspects of masculinity as both accepted, taken for granted, dominant gender formation and the cultural dynamic by which a group claims and sustains a leading position in social life (Connell 1995:77; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005:846). At any given time, one form of masculinity rather than others is culturally exalted even though hegemonic masculinity is not always the most common embodiment for boys and men. And hegemony works through symbols of authority and exemplars of masculinity to which most do not live up (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005).

Nick Trujillo (2000) describes two features of hegemonic masculinity in American sporting culture as occupational achievement in an industrial capitalist society and familial patriarchy.<sup>11</sup> Trujillo argues, work itself can be defined along gender lines. “The division of labor is not exclusive of hegemony, as some work is considered men’s work or women’s work while some are more masculine than others” (Trujillo 2000:15). I describe how discourses of Tebow’s occupational

---

<sup>11</sup> While I do not discuss at length Tebow’s heterosexuality as part of this form of masculinity, I do want to note its existence within assumptions made in the discourses on leadership in the patriarchal nuclear family. Possibly, because Tebow was not married, nor did he have children, mainstream media did not explicitly talk about his patriarchal position as the head of a family.

achievement (re)produced a dominant form of masculinity when primary sources praised the capitalist production of “The Tim Tebow Economy” and the money value he provided big business. “Tim Tebow Economy” constructed Tebow as a successful capitalist producer, thereby, reproducing and celebrating a gendered division of labor.

Trujillo discusses the construction of “sport as work” (21) which defines Nolan Ryan as the epitome of a successful capitalist worker in baseball. He argues mass media represents sport as work through the Protestant work ethic and overemphasis on success as occupational achievement defined by (sporting) accolades. Tebow did not engender this type of representation as a successful capitalist worker though. Tebow’s occupational achievements were not limited to the on-field success or the sport as work nexus attributed to Nolan Ryan. Instead, Tebow’s occupational achievement was described in terms of his economic value to big business – corporations like the Denver Broncos, NFL, and ESPN – and his own branded-marketed body. Tebow as a successful capitalist producer differs from Ryan in that there was an implicit acceptance of sport, not as work per se, but instead as big business. How enormous quantitative figures – ratings, profits, sales, etc. – were talked about and constitutive of The Tim Tebow Economy, praiseworthy of Tebow, is evidence of the acceptance of sport as big business. If the normalization of sport as work is powerful for the reproduction of masculinity, then one should consider the normalization of sport as big business in similar vain as I discuss Tebow’s construction as a successful capitalist producer.

Since being drafted into the league, Tebow was a driving force for NFL

revenue. His autobiography, *Through My Eyes*, debuted on the New York Times best-seller list; Nike released 500 limited edition Tebow, blue and orange cross-trainer shoes that sold out online in 5 minutes; and Electronic Arts (EA) Sports featured Tebow on the cover of its annually released NCAA Football 11, which saw first month sales jump up 8% and sold 850,000 units at \$60 a piece. Tebow also set records in jersey sales, stimulated ticket sales and raised media profit.

In 2010 Tebow was selected after 24 other athletes but he managed to set a new record for jersey sales on draft weekend (Matuszewski 2010). Shortly thereafter, he led the league in jersey sales, and the following year, Tebow Mania, he was ranked as the second highest selling jersey in the league (Associated Press 2010).<sup>12</sup> Clearly, Tebow had a following which was willing and able to spend money on his merchandise. Interestingly, jersey sales paled in comparison to the amount of attention that was given Tebow's ability to fill empty stadiums.

NFL games were blacked out sixteen times in 2011. Cities that traditionally struggle to fill their seats such as Jacksonville, San Diego, Tampa Bay, Miami, Arizona and Cincinnati were often victims of blackouts. NFL and DIRECTV Blackout Policy states: "Sunday afternoon home team games will be blacked out (not aired on television) in a home team's television coverage territory if the game fails to sell out at least 72 hours before the game."<sup>13</sup> In Tebow's 11 weeks as the starting quarterback he encountered three away games that would have been considered

---

<sup>12</sup> The *Journal Sentinel* said Tebow was atop the list with the number one selling jersey.

<sup>13</sup> "This is to make sure that the team benefits from a stadium full of enthusiastic fans, to assure the entertainment value of a full stadium, and to protect home game attendance and local television coverage," according to DIRECTV's website.



strong candidates for blackout: week seven at Miami, week 12 at San Diego, and week 16 at Buffalo.<sup>14</sup>

For week seven, Denver was on the road (October 23) visiting a winless Miami Dolphins team. *NFL* reported in the days leading up, “as it turns out, Tebow will make his first start on that day, resulting in what could be as dramatic a game as anyone could expect from two teams with losing records” (Darlington 2011).

Tebow’s promotion (week four, October 2) three weeks earlier inspired sales of an additional 10,000 tickets (Associated Press 2011; Badenhausen 2011). Still, there were too many outstanding ticket purchases and the NFL and DIRECTV were prepared to issue a blackout in the Miami area. The Miami Dolphins responded by purchasing the remaining unsold tickets. Miami had been planning this moment since August when Tebow was supposed to be the starting quarterback. Miami was hosting members of the Florida Gators National Championship team for “Gator Day” at the stadium, Tebow included, and did not want to miss a chance to fully capitalize on the opportunity. The Miami Dolphins organization agreed to purchase their remaining tickets to avert the blackout (NFL 2011).<sup>15</sup> The San Diego Chargers were facing similar circumstances in Week 12 (November 27) when Denver was in town. Tebow saved the Chargers who were nearing the 72-hour blackout cutoff. “The local TV blackout was lifted on Thursday for when Tebow’s Broncos visit the San Diego Chargers on Sunday,” NFL (2011) reported. Tebow eliminated some of the blackout

---

<sup>14</sup> The Denver Broncos normally sell out their home games to avert blackouts.

<sup>15</sup> The Miami Dolphins used the week seven opportunity versus Tebow to “honor” Tebow and the Florida Gators on “Gator Day;” an interesting move by the opposing home team (Darlington 2011).

problems facing NFL cities by driving ticket sales. An extra effort to sell out home games is driven by the profitable relationships of the NFL, the team, the city, and media contracts. Corporate giants like News Corporation, Comcast Corporation, Walt Disney, and CBS corporation are the beneficiaries of sold out games.

Tebow's ability to spike television ratings certainly overshadowed his ability to stimulate ticket sales though. Tebow was pictured in the *LA Times* under a headline that read "NFL signs TV deals worth billions with Fox, NBC and CBS... Even Broncos quarterback Tim Tebow couldn't have pulled off this miracle finish". While Tebow was not responsible for signing the media deal, his picture centered in a report that explained the NFL's nine-year \$3.1 billion contract with media conglomerates is socially and economically significant (Badenhausen 2012).

Since Tebow was named the starting quarterback in October 2011, Denver's ratings went up 13% (Hiestand 2011). *Sports Illustrated* compared Tebow with LeBron James and Tiger Woods using the "N Score" criteria to determine who best "moves the needle" (Deitsch 2011). *USA Today* said, "Tebow might nudge the NFL's ratings this season passed last year's historic levels" (Heistand 2011). Tebow also provoked a (confusing) network battle in the NFL's primetime "flex scheduling" option over who would get the privilege to air the Tebow games:<sup>16 17</sup>

NBC and CBS sparred (December 9) this week over whether CBS' Dec. 18

New England Patriots-Broncos game would be flexed to NBC's prime time to replace the Baltimore Ravens-San Diego Chargers game... CBS, after losing

---

<sup>16</sup> Flex scheduling policies retrieved from <http://www.nfl.com/flexible-schedules>

<sup>17</sup> ESPN dedicated a full hour to Tebow on an episode of "SportsCenter" in January. For over 30 years "SportsCenter" has been dedicated to delivering sports news and highlights across hockey, basketball, football, baseball, etc. (Barry, 2012).

the Broncos on Sunday as Fox was compensated for losing a flexed game to NBC, must be Tebow's No. 1 fan. After the Chicago Bears-Broncos game airs Sunday (4:05 p.m. ET) in 42% of the USA as the lead regionalized game, CBS has the remaining Denver games and all of its playoff games (if there are any) before NBC's Super Bowl. If Tebow gets that far, NBC's peacock might be redesigned to assume the Tebowing position (Hiestand 2011).

Tebow-induced television ratings peaked in mid-December and early-January 2011. CBS broadcast the (December 18) Week 15 Denver versus New England game that was hyped as the "Tebow versus Brady" game in 79% of American homes. The broadcast drew 60 million viewers (Deitsch 2011). When Denver faced Pittsburgh in a wild-card playoff game, CBS drew a 29.5 overnight Nielsen score. This was the highest result in 24 years for a wild-card game; a 38% increase over the previous year's highest rated wild-card game (Market Watch 2011). Tebow's impact on television ratings was clear. He drew mass audiences.

What *Forbes* called the Tim Tebow Economy were discourses that were enamored with Tebow's ability to drive multiple revenue streams. Through his ability to stimulate merchandise, advertising, jersey sales and television ratings, Tebow was constructed as a successful capitalist producer. The NFL "needed" Tebow as he was "important" for the NFL economy. If American capitalism was to return to prominence, it was men like Tebow who were going to lead. Tebow naturalized the gender division of labor and link between capitalist production and masculinity. Not surprisingly, Bob Kraft, the billionaire owner of the New England Patriots, praised Tebow for being "great for the NFL" (Reiss 2011). What is striking

though, instead of praising Tebow's profitability, Kraft reasoned Tebow's importance around the "kind of young man he was" and the values he possessed. 'Those values' Tebow represented were showcased in discourses surrounding his leadership and moral representation.

*Tebow as a Quintessential Leader: Soft-Boiled Masculinity on a Hard-Boiled Body*

Another aspect of Trujillo's hegemonic masculinity in sport discusses the relationship between patriarchy and male leadership. In this section, I discuss how Tebow's sport star identity was described as a quintessential leader to reproduce the common sense notion that men are natural leaders. There was much criticism of Tebow's throwing motion, so, to make sense of how Tebow was leading Denver to victory, mainstream discourses drew upon "the intangibles". Leadership being one of them. NFL scouts look for players with "intangibles" when their physical ability is lacking. In Tebow's case, his leadership ability was what set him apart from other NFL players. I argue that how Tebow's leadership was described naturalized the common-sense, patriarchal notion that men are better leaders than women in family, business and government. In so doing, I draw upon a critical study of the gender-based Christian fundamentalist Promise Keepers Movement to understand Tebow's masculine leadership style.

Melanie Heath (2003) argues that the men in the Promise Keepers Movement embodied a broader a shift from a "hard-boiled masculinity" of traditional, authoritarian male leaders into a gentler, "soft-boiled masculinity" of the "New Man". Heath argues that men in the Promise Keepers movement were reestablishing their dominant positions on top of family, business and politics (423). According to

Heath there are shared cultural understandings of what the New Man looks like:

He is a White, college-educated professional who is a highly involved and nurturant father, “in touch with” and expressive of his feelings. This notion of hegemonic masculinity is juxtaposed against the “traditional, sexist, and macho” masculinities attributed to some men of color and working-class men. The concept of the New Man refers to how white, class-privileged men perform a masculinity that incorporates traditionally feminine characteristics, such as emotionality and sensitivity (436).

Tebow represented this juxtaposition or intersection of traditional forms of masculinity and “new”. Tebow was considered a quintessential leader because he offered both the traditional masculine qualities of conviction, strength, hard work, and the feminine qualities of the New Man who was in touch with his feelings, showed sensitivity and expressed emotion.

Tebow was first described as a leader because of how he showed conviction. Tebow showed conviction in his religious beliefs, and he showed conviction in his heavily scrutinized football skills. Tebow did not waver in his world-view or faith, nor did he ever “slip-up” to make us question his authenticity (Klosterman 2011). He exercised non-conformity when facing critics. Jake Plummer, former NFL quarterback, criticized Tebow’s religiosity by wishing he “would just shut up” and “trust that we know he loves God” (Smith 2011b). Tebow offered a retort to Plummer’s criticism:

If you’re married, and you have a wife, and you really love your wife, is it good enough to only say to your wife, I love her, the day you get married? Or

should you tell her every single day when you wake up and have the opportunity? And that's how I feel about my relationship with Jesus Christ. It is the most important thing in my life, so every opportunity I have to tell him I love him, or I'm given an opportunity to shout him out on national TV, I'm going to take that opportunity (Smith 2011b).

And Tebow was motivated when people criticized his quarterback play (Powers 2012):

I'll tell you this, just my own nature; I am very much a people pleaser. I like making people smile. I like making people laugh. I like pleasing people – whatever, coaches, teammates. So when I hear criticism... it motivates me, not that I necessarily need more motivation... If anything I appreciate it. I really do (Jones 2011).

Aside from displaying conviction, Tebow's leadership was described as an embodiment of hard work. His physique alone was evidence of this hard work. Religious studies guest blogger for *Sociological Images* Donovan O. Shaefer (2012) analyzed an image of Tebow's body: "This is a body I would not want to fight... dense muscle lines, the sheer evidence of physical strength, reach, and an intricately arranged posing that suggests bodily self-awareness and sharp muscular intelligence..." Alternatively, central to my interpretation of this image of Tebow is an embodiment of hard work. The evidence of physical strength is provided by a life of grueling, physical work. This body was forged out of daily crunches, pushups, benchpresses, tire flips, sprints, and farm labor (Tebow and Whitaker 2010). Tebow's body was V-shaped, defined by a bulky, thick upper body, scored with

sharp lines and deep crevices, a broad and burly back, bulging triceps and biceps, protruding chest, ripped six pack abs, a fatless waist, and a powerful base made of huge calves and thighs. These features were the result of vigorous bodily labor, an obsession with the corporeal curbed on mind/body dualism of masochist desires to push the physical body till its mental companion gave in (Antrim 2012 [photographs by Liebovitz]; Bishop 2011 [photograph by Edmonds]; Shaefer 2012). This was not your Every Man's hard work or the rugged individual pulling boot straps. Tebow represented the sedentary, white, corporate young professional, who spends hundreds of dollars for gym memberships to get "ripped" and rebuild muscular losses of a day's work in a desk chair. Corporate culture desires Tebow's "country strong" body because farm labor is "old school", "natural" and representative of simpler, past-times. Tebow focused on "getting better" during every breathing, fleeting second. This meant endless physical training to develop the body into a bastion prepared to withstand the grueling physicality of the NFL (Flint 2012; Tebow and Whitaker 2010).

Lastly, Tebow was described as a quintessential leader because he was able to rally teammates from his heart, charisma, and compassion. Tebow inspired people, instilled hope and faith. Denver linebacker Wesley Woodyard recalled after game versus Chicago, "Tebow came to me and said, 'Don't worry about a thing because God has spoken to him'" (Kiszla 2011a). This, just moments after Woodyard made a game winning play. Tebow always preached "not giving up, believing in our teammates, just believing in everyone on the field" (Kiszla 2011a). A *Fox* letter to the editor rhetorically asked, "Why not believe in the man who inspires hope in Denver

and in sports fans who like their stars warm and fuzzy?... He's a winner. He's inspiring. He has *it*, whatever *it* is" (Floyd Engel 2011).

"It" was Tebow's ability to attract attention, compel audiences, instill faith, and inspire "teammates to pull together for one another and achieve beyond their physical gifts" (Johnson 2011). To motivate others, Tebow wore his emotions outwardly. He cried and yelled on the sidelines, he hugged teammates and coaches, he bent down on one knee in submission to God to prove that he was not above anyone or any *thing* (Bishop 2011; Ryan 2011; Walker 2011). The *Denver Post* called this "affirmation for the nice-guy style of management" (O'Connor 2011). Tebow did not use authoritarian or "bossy" tactics. Instead, Tebow relied on positive reinforcement, second chances, communication, and leadership styles normally learned in higher education.

In review, Tebow was described as possessing traditional leadership qualities of brute strength and manliness, and New Man leadership qualities of compassion, sensitivity and emotion. This combination meant Tebow was a quintessential leader as he represented both "progressive" culture and reverence for past, simpler times. Mainstream media described Tebow's leadership as transcendent of sport. Tebow's leadership was paragon for leadership of family, government and business (O'Connor 2011). Ultimately, Tebow represented quintessential leadership in contemporary U.S. society, the type of leadership desired by conservative Americans. Tebow's leadership was patriarchal because it celebrated male dominance, and normalized the common-sense notion that men are "natural" leaders. Tebow's hegemonic masculinity was affirmed through discourses



of capitalist production and leadership. With a commitment to intersectionality, Tebow's masculinity is not understood in isolation. The next section focuses on how Tebow's whiteness was produced by the mainstream media to construct Tebow as a celebrated white male athlete.

### *Tebow's Whiteness: the Cultural Politics of Morality*

Mike Kiszla (2011b) of the *Denver Post* said of Tebow: "in this era of sports scandals... I think fans are drawn to a player whose jersey you can wear and not worry about wanting to burn it tomorrow." What are the meanings associated with burning an athlete's replica jersey? Burning a jersey is a powerful metaphor and malevolent act to destroy the symbolic and material relationships between sport star representation and consumer. In the Summer of 2010, LeBron James went on national television to make "The Decision" where he declared, "I'm going to take my talents to South Beach" (sign a contract with the Miami Heat). This meant he was leaving his hometown of Cleveland for a more lucrative deal and opportunity to join NBA stars Dwayne Wade and Chris Bosh in the much trendier South Beach, Miami, Florida. Cleveland fans were in an uproar. In a display of hatred (and possibly racism) over 'the hometown kid "betraying" his roots, city and people for more money', Clevelanders took to the streets and burned their ex-hero's jersey.

Kiszla's argument about Tebow's appeal to fans and, by extension, American culture is a comparison of Tebow's "good" morals with others athletes' "bad" morals. This made evident by how James's decision was demonized for being greedy and unloyal; and the (burnings of the jersey) aftermath was not questioned as

unjust by mainstream media. In contrast to James, according to Kiszla, consumers who buy a Tebow jersey are safe from being tempted to destroy the jersey because his decision making and behavior is guided by “good” morals. These morals supposedly shield Tebow from the type of deviance that makes NFL headlines such as drug and gun possession or PED use. While Tebow may never live up to athletic expectations, somehow consumers “know” that they will not be disillusioned by Tebow “tomorrow” because it is beyond Tebow’s purview to betray his sport, roots, city or religion for more money or illicit activity.

Kiszla’s quotation that argues for Tebow’s appeal to NFL fans is typical of how many white male sport stars are handled in the media. Though Kiszla never mentions race, or James, Tebow’s whiteness contrasts James’s blackness through a contextually bound moral spectrum. In this section, I discuss the various ways in which Tebow’s moral values were racialized white by the mainstream media. I argue that Tebow was positioned as a white racialized Christian moral exemplar, a role model for America. I show how discourses of Tebow’s law abiding behavior, humanitarianism, humility and performance of corporate culture were coded in whiteness and constructed relationally to deviant others. To understand whiteness I borrow from critical whiteness scholars Douglas Hartmann and Eric Tranby (2008). I also draw upon Samantha King’s (2006) work on the politics of philanthropy as I Tebow’s whiteness is structured around his charitable practices.

According to Hartmann and Tranby (2008) whiteness is the white racial identity that is inextricably linked with subtle forms of structural and cultural dominance (see also Doane 1997; Frankenberg 1994). Among the cultural elements

are “the recognition of the white Anglo-American culture as the normative cultural status and thus the equivalency of whiteness with the mainstream” (347).

Strengthened by the “economically superior position of whites” for maintaining power, the equivalence of whiteness with the mainstream works to conflate white cultural interests with national interests (“white cultural nationalism” (Kusz 2007a)). Mainstreamization gives whiteness an element of “taken for grantedness”, rendering it an *invisible* racial identity. Furthermore, the hidden nature of white racial identity allows for a conflation of whiteness with existing social norms, values, structures, and institutions, in short, with the status quo” (347). Processes in the (re)production of the racial status quo includes the normalizing effects of moralizing “Christian iconography” [popular cultural texts that are meant to teach moral lessons, which are produced by and productive of a culture of whiteness (McDonald 2005:246)] and discourses of charitable practices that measure one’s “character” (King, 2006). I turn now to NFL “character issues” to understand the articulation of Tebow’s white racial identity.

The NFL seeks to employ players “with character” who can benefit and properly represent the NFL brand. Ideal players are respectful, socially responsible, humanitarian, hard working and law abiding. The NFL is also apt to forgive those “without character”, if there are signs of good faith through humanitarian efforts, philanthropy or community volunteerism (e.g. Ray Lewis (King, 2006)). Players without character are said to be or have “character issues”. Character issues are the alleged propensity of NFL players to criminality, which reinforces the “sport-gang dyad” (Cole 1996) – the linkages between the social categories of “sport” and “gang”.

The sport-gang dyad has (re)produced popular racist understandings of urban space, crime, violence and black masculinity where African American athletes are always potential criminals (King:19). Negative NFL press coverage around social deviance has reinforced “popular anxieties about crime and character [issues] in the NFL” (3). In contrast, negative headlines of social deviance accentuate the ways in which player volunteerism and charitable practices have become measuring tools of “good” character. Thus, NFL talent evaluations and public relations have become mechanisms for the racialization of giving (both of time and money) and the production of ideal citizenship that embrace bourgeois, humanistic, and white cultural values (King 2006).

Philanthropy is often taken for granted and understood as inherently good. The broader socioeconomic and political implications of charity networks normally go unquestioned while they are used to measure character in sport. King (2006) argues that the proliferation of, and meanings associated with, charity are reflective of broader shifts in neoliberal governmentality. Neoliberal governmentality has led to the cutting of public expenditures, corporate philanthropy has co-opted the social safety net, and the lines between “business strategy and political ideology” have been blurred. A relatively new reliance on corporations for public service “points to the ways in which participation in giving, of time or money, is viewed not simply as a preferable way to fund public services, but as a vehicle for instilling civic and self-responsibility in the American people” (King:xxvi). Tebow’s morals were racialized white and articulated through his involvement in charity. Charitable practices underpin the moral discourses of humanitarianism, humility and displays of

corporate ideals that represented Tebow as a good man and moral exemplar for America.

Tebow is the founder of a global charity network called the Tim Tebow Foundation. The foundation's mission is "[T]o bring Faith, Hope and Love to those needing a brighter day in their darkest hour of need. The Foundation utilizes the public platform that God has blessed Tim Tebow with to inspire and make a difference in peoples lives throughout the world" (retrieved from *Timtebowfoundation.org*). The foundation is comprised of the Wish 15 program, Timmy's Playroom, Tebow Cure Hospital, Orphan Care Tim Tebow Foundation, and Team Tebow. The foundation is partnered with coprorations such as Denver Mattress Co., ARS Rescue Rooter, Fiction, Nike, Jockey, Soul, FRS, Auntie Anne's, Circle K Furniture, NIMNICHT, and TIVO.

Tebow utilized the Tim Tebow Foundation to spend time with disabled and traumatically injured teens and children. Indicative of the wider credit Tebow received for these efforts, one interviewee in the documentary *Tebow on a Mission* (2012) praised Tebow:

He supports so many charitable events, puts his time and effort to help other people, and if that's going to be his [modus operandi] M.O., well, I'm gonna [sic] put my arms around him and say 'congratulations Tim Tebow' 'cuz [sic], you're doing good things for other people (Tebow on a Mission 2012).

During the 2011 season, the Tim Tebow Foundation and CURE International teamed up to build a children's hospital in the Philippines that cost around \$3 million that was to serve underprivileged children (Associated Press 2011). Tebow is known for

giving time and money to communities in the Philippines. That is where his parents have been doing missionary work since the 1980s. In addition, Tebow often brought suffering children onto the football field before games where they would enjoy whatever activities their ableness permitted – playing catch, running around, or talking and laughing. For instance, Tebow gave time to a child “who suffered a traumatic brain injury playing football in 2008” (Saraceno 2011). “Giving a warm embrace and words of encouragement to those in need” was most important and “put everything into perspective” (Sareceno 2011) for Tebow.

Tebow was also described as willing to spend extra time with fans and admirers who requested photographs and autographs. This portrayed him as a humble sport star. Commonly, sport stars place time constraints on fan interaction. Tebow, however, enjoyed these opportunities to give back to fans. Socioeconomic and celebrity status did not interfere with Tebow’s perspective of everyday fans. *ESPN The Magazine* described a story of Tebow when he attended the Junior Denver Broncos Cheerleader brunch on Sports Authority Field at Mile High Stadium (the Broncos home stadium).

It began with an adult requesting a photograph... Security stepped in and forbade it, for photographs with Tebow were deemed an opportunity for children only, so the adults were waved off. But Tebow calmly said... “It’s okay. As long as everyone stays cool, I will take photographs.” And so Tebow posed for photos with all who wanted them. And the picture-taking lasted for quite some time (Keown, 2011).

When picture-takers were satisfied Tebow was not finished. Tebow decided to pick

up a football and play catch with the cheerleaders. “Soon an adult wanted Tebow to throw the ball to him, and the security man stepped in a second time, shaking their heads and declaring the receiving and throwing of passes off-limits to adults” (Keown 2011). Tebow calmly disagreed with security and insisted that playing catch with the adults was “cool”, too. The onlookers described Tebow as “an amazing person” and explained, “I’m more into what he stands for than what he is as a football player” (Keown 2011).

Tebow’s whiteness was portrayed through his ability to perform corporate cultural ideals. McDonald and Togli (2010) remind us that corporate ideals, policies and practices are subject to, and built upon, the codes and logics of whiteness and capitalism. “It’s not that [Tebow] he usually says the right things; he *only* says the right things, all the time” (Klosterman 2011). Tebow deflected credit for success onto God, teammates, coaches and fans. He shouldered responsibility for failure. On top of that, “despite the extraordinary scrutiny and adulation he generates, Tebow is barely cognizant of the mania” (Battista 2011). By not recognizing his own phenomenon or status he reaffirmed his humble representation.

Tebow navigated public speaking forums with articulate speech, confidence, respect and humility that reflected both NFL corporate ideals and his privileged white, middle class upbringing. As part of his evangelical Christian background, Tebow grew up sermonizing in front of large audiences. He was not fearful of public speaking and it was evident by how comfortable he was in front of cameras. Tebow navigated press conferences as if he was pulling a public relations or job interview

manual out of his invisible knapsack (McIntosh 1989). Sport stars who display the ideals of the NFL are more likely to “get ahead” by being chosen for more exclusive interviews, press conferences, and exposure. Which means they will receive more endorsements and opportunities outside of the NFL. This gave Tebow a comparative advantage over other NFL players who could not perform whiteness or corporate culture as such.

To bring the discussion of Tebow’s whiteness full circle, I show another prominent example of how Tebow’s morals were discussed and constructed relationally to deviant others. Tebow was often described in conversation with NFL players who have been criminally charged such as Ben Roethlisberger, Michael Vick, Cam Newton, and Plaxico Burress (Bruni 2011; Kang 2011; Klosterman 2011). In line with how Kiszla used the LeBron James situation to describe Tebow’s morals, *Chill Magazine* (McCarthy 2012:20) offers a more explicitly racializing proposition about Tebow. The article asks about what most likely “jumps to mind” when fans think about relatively recent NFL stories. The author anticipates:

Michael Vick’s arraignment and subsequent conviction in 2007 for his role as a financier and active participant in an illegal dog fighting operation is likely to be something that jumps to mind. How about Plaxico Burress inadvertently shooting himself in the thigh at a New York nightclub in 2008 while carrying an illegally owned firearm, a stunt that ultimately landed him in jail for two years? Perhaps they think of Ben Roethlisberger’s 2010 six game suspension for violating the NFL’s personal conduct policy after facing a string of sexual assault allegations (20).



The article urges the media to focus more attention on white players such as Drew Brees, Peyton Manning, and Tim Tebow. The article argues that because these athletes are heavily involved in charity and live with “integrity and dignity”, that they are more likely to create the “feel good stories” the NFL fan deserves. The article also prompted the media to focus less on morally “bad” NFL players because this type of coverage tarnishes the NFL’s image and fans do not deserve the “off-field” negativity. The article uses acts of deviance performed by, what the *New York Times* referred to as this “league full of blithe felons” (Bruni 2011), to reaffirm Tebow’s good morals and whiteness. Tebow’s whiteness was not so much defined by what he did to act so virtuously, as it was about what he did *not* do in relation to the deviance of others.

In sum, I outlined the discursive construction of Tebow’s white racialized good morals. I borrowed from critical race scholars to understand the meanings of whiteness in the NFL. I showed how mainstream media constructed Tebow as a white racialized moral exemplar or role model for America. I argued that Tebow’s whiteness was defined by his humanitarianism, humility, and performance of corporate culture in relation to deviant Others.

Chapter 5 and chapter 6 are directly related. These chapters provide an overview of the multiple ways in which Tebow’s sport star identity was described during Tebow Mania. I began chapter 5 by showing how Tebow’s privileged background created an ideal situation for him to prosper in school and sports in the United States. Tebow’s family background influenced his choice to attend UF where he first became a national icon, and an eventual first round NFL draft choice. Tebow

began the 2011 NFL season as a back up quarterback. It was not until week 5 that he received the opportunity to start. Once in position though, Tebow flourished at the helm of Denver's offense by leading his team to an improbable playoff victory.

Tebow Mania developed over a four month period that put Tebow and the Broncos in the media spotlight. The cultural phenomenon swept across the United States and honed in on Tebow's muscular Christianity and exceptional character. Borrowing from religious studies perspectives, I argued that mainstream media polarized and criticized Tebow's muscular Christianity because he disrupted isolationist views of the NFL, posited truth-claims of religious exclusivism, and, through muscular Christianity, promoted a conservative rightwing agenda. The negativity surrounding Tebow's evangelism and unorthodox throwing mechanics produced an adverse situation for Tebow. It was seen as an obstacle for him to overcome if he was to succeed in Denver. And he did. Leading Denver to the playoffs was proof enough that Tebow possessed the type of character to overcome his own physical limitations and scrutiny from the media.

Chapter 6 is dedicated to understanding the counter-narrative to the polarization and criticism of Tebow's sport star identity. It is about the ways in which Tebow was described as he overcame adversity to lead his team to the playoffs. It was said that Tebow would not succeed because of his throwing mechanics, and many did not want him to succeed because of his evangelism. To make sense of Tebow's success, this counter-narrative emerged to describe Tebow's praiseworthy character traits, "the intangibles". Since Tebow did not possess the physical tools to succeed in the NFL, mainstream media reasoned that he must

possess the intangible qualities necessary. Borrowing from gender studies and critical whiteness studies, I showed how capitalist production, quintessential leadership and his position as a moral exemplar repackaged Tebow into a culturally exalted white male athlete.

## **Chapter 7 Concluding Remarks: Tebow's Sport Star Identity in the Tea Party Era**

To bring the discussion of Tebow to a close, I return to Stuart Hall, Doreen Massey and Michael Rustin's (2013) assertion that "the [neoliberal] economic model that has underpinned the social and political settlement of the last three decades is unraveling, but the broader political and social consensus apparently remains in place" (3). I argue that Tebow's sport star identity provides insight into how the broader neoliberal political and social consensus has been reinforced through sport in the era of The Tea Party Movement. The sheer explosion in corporate media coverage and politicization of Tebow signaled that powerful elites mobilized around "the Tebow thing" to "(re)affirm of power by those who already hold it in contemporary American society" (King-White 2010:183). In this thesis, I outlined the various levels of class, racial, gender and religious power and privilege operating around Tebow's sport star identity. I have reasoned why it is entirely inadequate to think of Tebow as merely an evangelical born-again Christian warrior. I described how his muscular Christianity polarized and provoked criticism to foster an American Dream-type counter-narrative of overcoming the odds. Meanwhile, I showed how these narratives were rife with conservative ideologies of race, gender and class to construct Tebow's sport star identity. In "Chapter 2 Theory and Method", I discussed how I read Tebow as a cultural text to show how his sport star identity enters into processes of ideological naturalization. In "Chapter 3 Literature Review", I located Tebow's sport star identity within two bodies of literature, whiteness in sport and sport stars. In "Chapter 4 Contextualizing Tebow: Muscular Christianity in the Tea Party Era", I contextualized Tebow's sport star identity

within broader historical, social, political and economic contexts of muscular Christianity, ideological shifts of the Right, and the Christian Right and The Tea Party Movement social movements to explain how Tebow's sport star identity articulated in context. In "Chapter 5 Empirical Evidence: Discursive Construction of Tim Tebow", I discussed the various ways Tebow was described as polarizing to show how his form of evangelism provoked criticism and polarization in the fabrication of an adverse situation. In "Chapter 6 Repackaging Tebow's Sport Star Identity", I outlined the ways in which Tebow was described as a culturally exalted white male as he overcame adversity. I conclude my thesis by re-emphasizing the importance and significance of reading Tebow in the era of The Tea Party Movement. Tebow offers an important site of how the logics and discourses of rightwing Christian fundamentalism and rightwing libertarianism operate together to provide the language and cogency for the broader ideology of neoliberalism to prevail.

At one time neoliberalism provided rhetoric to sell free-market capitalism, individualism, small government and freedom to its citizens. It still does to a degree. But it has become more and more obvious that federal and state financial deficits, predatory greed, consumer debt, military spending, deep systems of surveillance and massive inequalities of wealth are more in line with how neoliberalism conducts business (Giroux 2004; Harvey 2005). Consequentially, (global) political unrest and resistance to neoliberal regimes have been unfolding in late social movements such as Occupy Wall Street and The Tea Party Movement (Hall, Massey and Rustin 2013). The Tea Party Movement has reinvigorated a strain of American

rightwing libertarianism that appeals to many young, white, class privileged American men and boys. On top of the racial and gendered politics of the movement, The Tea Party Movement combats current, neoliberal forms of government while also reinforcing the underpinning ideologies that helped erect neoliberalism in the first place. The Tea Party clamors for individualism, freedom, free-market capitalism and social conservatism in discourses that resist big government, federal government spending, public schooling, drone attacks, overseas military endeavors, universal healthcare and state surveillance.

The Christian Right played an important role in ushering in neoliberal discourses of the 1980s and 1990s Reagan and Bush eras. A simplistic association would be to connect Tebow with the Christian Right. Through Focus on the Family, his born-again Christian identity and innumerable cultural linkages, Tebow has ties to Christian-based conservative political groups in the U.S. Feezel (2013) even argues that Tebow's moral world-view aligns nicely with the Christian Right, not necessarily The Tea Party. The Tea Party Movement has played a different role in reproducing neoliberal ideology. Not a far cry from the John Birch Society, The Tea Party Movement is known for its romanticization of freedom, individualism and free market economics in a radical stance against an imagined American communism.

To locate power operating on Tebow's sport star identity, it is necessary to emphasize the meanings of the Tea Party Era, over the politics of Christianity, because, I would argue, that The Tea Party Movement was more influential on broader socio-political discourse than the Christian Right during the height of Tebow's public attention. This may also signal that the Christian Right is giving way

to younger generations of conservatives in the Republican Party who value more liberal, market-centric forms of conservatism. I argue that Tebow's muscular Christianity and born-again fundamentalism were negotiated through the socio-political rationalities and logics of The Tea Party Movement that celebrated Tebow as a conservative white male. Besides, Tebow was hardly benefitting from a consensus acceptance of his born-again identity as witnessed in his polarization. Rather, Tea Party conservatism privileged Tebow's white racial identity and religiosity, not necessarily his religious or political beliefs, per se. The obvious rightwing Christian fundamentalism became overstated on Tebow's sport star identity in a way that overshadowed the rightwing liberal undertones his brand of muscular Christianity offered American viewers. In short, Tebow's moral world-view, or promotion of it, obscured the powerful narratives of individualism in The Tea Party era. A closer look at the Tea Party's understanding of individualism shows how Tebow's muscular Christianity resonated nicely with Tea Party culture in America.

Tebow's religiosity was laudable according to Tea Party beliefs because, on the one hand, Tebow offered a form of social and moral conservatism that has been historically shared by many rightwing conservatives and, on the other hand, Tebow's world-view was unwavering. By not compromising his world-view, or his desire to share it, Tebow presented a form of leadership, authenticity and conviction that The Tea Party Movement desired from its leaders and president. The Tea Party Movement would take pride in an "outstanding", morally sound, white individual such as Tebow as he fits into the patriotic, color-blind, traditional, and individualist

constructions of their imagined America. Furthermore, Tebow's unapologetic religiosity was paradoxical as it mimicked a belief of the self rooted in Enlightenment, American individualist thought. This form of individualism reflects thinkers such as Ralph Waldo Emerson *Self Reliance* and the Founding Fathers. This ideology of the self is based in rational thought and religiously-inspired moral codes meant for people to prevail against the "negative", dogmatic influences of culture and government oppression on the self. Despite the appearance of question and criticism toward Tebow's muscular Christianity, there were serious limitations to the mainstream media's efforts. The pervasiveness of Tea Party conservatism (celebration of individualism, freedom of (religious) expression, anti-government, etc.) obstructed viewers/readers from serious, critical discussions about religious exclusivism, Christian fundamentalism, whiteness, masculinity and rightwing conservatism during Tebow Mania. Thus, Tebow's sport star identity implicitly served as affirmation for Tea Party beliefs and neoliberal ideology. In a way, the mere appearance of debate or criticism may have depoliticized Tebow because the debate itself was framed or constrained within neoliberal systems of thought. Hence, the goal of this thesis was to create a counter-discourse to popular representation of Tebow, and to shine light on the various levels of power and privilege operating around his sport star identity in 2011.

Since the early stages of this thesis, Tebow has been traded to the New York Jets, released by the New York Jets, signed by the New England Patriots, and released by the New England Patriots in a two-year span. Tebow's football prospects are looking grim after New England most recently cut him from the roster in August



2013. As Tebow has bounced around the NFL over the last two years there has been discussion about him forgetting about football to enter politics.

In April 2012, Tebow gave a famous “Easter on the Hill” sermon to thousands of evangelical Christians in Texas. Tebow’s on-stage charisma in front of the large audience resembled that of a politician. The media started to wonder whether it was time for Tebow to exit the NFL platform for “doing good” to establish a political platform (ABC News 2013). These prospects have frightened some and excited others. Liberal website *Deadspin.com* warned, “Lets stop portraying Tebow as some aw shucks-y charmer. He is a savvy evangelist with the world at his fingertips” (Newell 2013). Rightwing conservative members of the media described Tebow as a good candidate and a natural political leader (Cohn 2012). In 2013, a year and a half removed from Tebow Mania, Tebow was voted by *Forbes Magazine* to be the most influential athlete in America (Van Riper 2013). Tebow was the first back-up football player to be voted America’s most influential athlete. Is this more proof that “the Tebow thing” was more about white privilege and politics than sporting merit? There is no way to know what kind of public life Tebow will seek in the future. He may find employment in the NFL, possibly playing a new position, he may go the politics route or continue to serve as a missionary abroad. One thing is certain though: regardless of where Tim Tebow ends up, the American viewing/reading public will be most likely be informed, and, hopefully, the politics of race, class, gender, religion, and conservatism will be discussed more thoroughly the next time around.

## References

- ABC News. (2012, September 20). "Tim Tebow in Politics? Jets' QB won't say 'No'". Retrieved July 25, 2013 (<http://abcnews.go.com/blogs/entertainment/2012/09/tim-tebow-in-politics-jets-qb-wont-say-no>).
- Abdul-Matin, Ibrahim. (2011, December 14). "If Tim Tebow Were Muslim, Would America Still Love Him?" Retrieved May 6, 2013 ([http://www.huffingtonpost.com/ibrahim-abdulmatin/if-tim-tebow-were-muslim-b\\_1148115.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/ibrahim-abdulmatin/if-tim-tebow-were-muslim-b_1148115.html)).
- Andrews, David L. (2000). Excavating Michael Jordan's blackness. In S. Birrell & McDonald (Eds.), *Reading Sport: Critical essays on power and representation* (166-205). Boston: Northeastern University Press.
- Andrews, David L., and Jackson, Steven J. (2001). *Sport Stars: The Cultural Politics of Sporting Celebrity*. London: Routledge.
- Andrews, David L., Mason, Daniel S. and Silk, Michael L. (2005) *Qualitative methods in Sport Studies*. Oxford; New York: Berg.
- Associated Press. (2011, October 20). "Tim Tebow may help Dolphins sell out." Retrieved July 25, 2011 ([http://espn.go.com/nfl/story/\\_/id/7124264/miami-dolphins-ticket-sales-get-boost-tim-tebow](http://espn.go.com/nfl/story/_/id/7124264/miami-dolphins-ticket-sales-get-boost-tim-tebow)).
- Associated Press. (2011, December 13). "Rick Perry likens himself to quarterback

- Tim Tebow, says he's starting debates." Retrieved June 28, 2012  
(<http://www.foxnews.com/politics/2011/12/15/rick-perry-likens-himself-to-broncos-quarterback-tim-tebow-at-iowa-debate>).
- Badenhausen, Kurt. (2011). "The Tim Tebow Economy." Retrieved July 24, 2013  
(<http://www.forbes.com/sites/kurtbadenhausen/2011/10/24/the-tim-tebow-economy>).
- Badenhausen, Kurt. (2012). "The NFL Signs TV Deals Worth \$27 Billion." Retrieved July 27, 2013  
(<http://www.forbes.com/sites/kurtbadenhausen/2011/12/14/the-nfl-signs-tv-deals-worth-26-billion>)
- Baker, William J. (2007). *Playing With God*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Battista, Judy. (2012). "Tebow Stretches Field and Maybe His Limits." Retrieved July 25, 2013 (<http://www.nytimes.com/2012/01/11/sports/football/tebow-stretches-field-and-maybe-his-limits.html>).
- Birrell, Susan and McDonald, Mary G. (2000). *Reading sport: Critical Essays on Power and Representation*. (Birrell, S and McDonald, M. G. Eds.) Boston: Northeastern University Press.
- Bishop, Greg. (2011). "In Tebow Debate, a Clash of Faith and Football." Retrieved July 25, 2013 (<http://www.nytimes.com/2011/11/08/sports/football/in-tebow-debate-a-clash-of-faith-and-football.html>).
- Bourdieu, Pierre. (1984) *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (Nice, R. (trans.)). Cambridge, MA: Columbia University Press.
- Brown, Wendy. (2006). "American Nightmare: Neoliberalism, Neoconservatism, and

- De-Democratization." *Political Theory*, 34 (6), 690-714.
- Bruni, Frank. (2011). "Tim Tebow's Gospel of Optimism." Retrieved July 24, 2013, (<http://www.nytimes.com/2011/12/11/opinion/sunday/bruni-tim-tebows-gospel-of-optimism.html>).
- Butryn, Ted M. & Walton, Theresa A. (2006). "Policing the Race: U.S. Men's Distance Running and the Crisis of Whiteness." *Sociology of Sport Journal*. 23, 1-26.
- Cederstrom, Marcus. (2012). "What if Tim Tebow were Muslim?" Retrieved July 24, 2013 ([http://www.salon.com/2012/01/12/what if tim tebow were muslim](http://www.salon.com/2012/01/12/what_if_tim_tebow_were_muslim)).
- Cherner, Reid. (2011). "Would a Jew or Muslim get similar treatment?" Retrieved July 24, 2013 (<http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/sports/story/2011-11-29/broncos-qb-tebow-stirs-debate-on-religion-and-sports/51663956/1>).
- Cohn, Alicia M. (2012). "Tim Tebow: Politics 'possibly' in his future." Retrieved July 25, 2013 (<http://thehill.com/video/campaign/208795-tim-tebow-says-politics-possibly-in-his-future>).
- Cole, Cheryl. (1996). "American Jordan P.L.A.Y., Consensus and Punishment." *Sociology of Sport Journal*. 13, 336-397.
- Connell, R.W. (1995). *Masculinities* (2nd Ed.). Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- Connell, R.W. and Messerschmidt, James W. (2005). "Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the concept." *Gender & Society*, 829-859.
- Crenshaw, Kimberle. (1991). "Mapping the margins: Intersectionality, identity

- politics and violence against women of color." *Stanford Law Review*, 43 (6), 1241-1299.
- Darlington, Jeff. (2011). "Dolphins roll out red carpet for Tebow on 'Gator Day'". Retrieved July 25, 2013 (<http://www.nfl.com/news/story/09000d5d82301140/article/dolphins-roll-out-red-carpet-for-tebow-on-gator-day>).
- Day, Denise. (2011). "How President Obama Can Get in the Red Zone." Retrieved June 4, 2013 ([http://www.denverpost.com/business/ci\\_19561745](http://www.denverpost.com/business/ci_19561745)).
- Deitsch, Richard. (2011). "Tebow joining LeBron and Tiger as stars moving the sports needle." Retrieved July 25, 2013 ([http://sportsillustrated.cnn.com/2011/writers/richard\\_deitsch/12/16/tebow.needle/index.html](http://sportsillustrated.cnn.com/2011/writers/richard_deitsch/12/16/tebow.needle/index.html)).
- Diamond, Sara. (1995). *Roads to dominion: Right-wing movements and political power in the United States*. New York: The Guilford Press.
- Doane, A.W. Jr. (1997). "Dominant group identity in the United States: The role of hidden ethnicity in intergroup relations." *Sociological Quarterly* 38:375-97.
- Dyer, Richard. (1997). *White*. New York: Routledge.
- Douglas, Delia D. (2002). "To be young, gifted, black and female: A mediation on the cultural politics at play in representations of Venus and Serena Williams." *Sociology of Sport Journal*. 5, 2.
- Edmonds, James. photograph in The New York Times. (2011). "In Tebow Debate, a Clash of Faith and Football." Retrieved July 25, 2013 (<http://www.nytimes.com/2011/11/08/sports/football/in-tebow-debate-a->

[clash-of-faith-and-football.html](#)).

Eagleton, Terry. (2007). *Ideology: An Introduction*. London: Verso.

Erzen, Tanya. (2006). *Straight to Jesus: Sexual and Christian conversions in the ex-gay movement*. Los Angeles: University of California Press.

ESPN Chicago. (2011, December 9). "Charles Barkley makes plea to Bears."

Retrieved June 16, 2013

([http://espn.go.com/chicago/nfl/story/\\_/id/7335841/stop-tim-tebow-madness](http://espn.go.com/chicago/nfl/story/_/id/7335841/stop-tim-tebow-madness)).

Feezell, Randolph. (2013). "Sport, Religious Belief, Religious Diversity." *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport*. 40, 1, 135-162.

Floyd Engel, Jane. (2011). "Time to believe in Tebow's passion." Retrieved July 25, 2013 (<http://msn.foxsports.com/nfl/story/Tim-Tebow-has-right-stuff-to-succeed-in-NFL-believe-it-or-not>).

Frankenberg, Ruth. (1994). "Whiteness and Americanness: Examining constructions of race, culture, nation in white women's life narratives." Pp. 62-77 in *Race*, edited by S. Gregory and R. Sanjek. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

Friedman, Adam. (Director). (2012). *Tebow on a Mission*. [Documentary]. USA: Anchor.

Foucault, Michel. (1980). *Power/Knowledge*. New York: Vintage Books.

Geuss, Raymond. (1981). *The Idea of a Critical Theory: Habermas and the Frankfurt School*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Giardina, Michael D. (2001). "Global Hingis: Flexible citizenship and the

- transnational celebrity". In D. L. Andrews, & S. J. Jackson, *Sports stars: The cultural politics of sporting celebrity*. London: Routledge.
- Giardina, Michael D. (2005). *Sporting pedagogies: Performing culture & identity in the global arena*. New York: Peter Lang.
- Giardina, Michael D. and Newman, Joshua. I. (2011). *Sport, spectacle, and NASCAR Nation: Consumption and the Cultural Politics of Neoliberalism*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Giroux, Henry. (2004). *The Terror of Neoliberalism: Authoritarianism and the Eclipse of Democracy*. Boulder, Colorado: Paradigm Publishers.
- Greenberg, Jon. (2011, December 8). "Doubters Fueling Tebow's Success." Retrieved July 24, 2013 ([http://espn.go.com/chicago/nfl/story/\\_/id/7329359/tim-tebow-faith-ability-leading-plenty-wins](http://espn.go.com/chicago/nfl/story/_/id/7329359/tim-tebow-faith-ability-leading-plenty-wins)).
- Hall, Stuart, Massey, Doreen. & Rustin, Michael. (2013). "After Neoliberalism? The Kilburn Manifesto." *Soundings: a journal of politics and culture*. 1, 4-19.
- Hartman, Rachel Rose. (January 3, 2012). "Michele Bachmann and Rick Perry Compete for the Tim Tebow Vote: Scenes From the Caucuses." Retrieved July 23, 2013 (<http://news.yahoo.com/blogs/ticket/michele-bachmann-rick-perry-compete-tim-tebow-vote-031316975.html>).
- Hartmann, Douglas. (2007). "Rush Limbaugh, Donovan McNabb, and "A Little Social Concern": Reflections on the Problems of Whiteness in Contemporary American Sport." *Journal of Sport & Social Issues*. 31, 1, 45-60.
- Hartmann, Douglas and Tranby, Eric. (2008). "Critical Whiteness Theories and the

- Evangelical "Race Problem": Extending Emerson and Smith's Divided by Faith." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 341-359.
- Harvey, David. (2005). *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press Inc.
- Heath, Melanie. (2003). "Soft-Boiled Masculinity: Renegotiating Gender Ideologies in the Promise Keepers Movement." *Gender & Society*, 423-444.
- Hiestand, Michael. (2011). "Networks Look to Cash in on Tebow-Mania. Retrieved July 25, 2013 (<http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/sports/columnist/hiestand-tv/story/2011-12-07/hiestand/51749572/1>).
- Higgs, Robert J. (1995). *God in the Stadium*. Lexington, Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky.
- Hoffman, Shirl J. (1992). *Sport and Religion*. Champaign, Illinois: Human Kinetics Books.
- Hopson, Ronald E. and Smith, Donald R. (1999). "Changing Fortunes: An Analysis of Christian Right Discourse within American Political Discourse." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 38 (1), 1-13.
- Jamieson, Katherine M. (2000). "Reading Nancy Lopez: Decoding representations of race, class, and sexuality." Pp. 144-165 in S. Birrell and M. G. McDonald, *Reading Sport: Critical Essays on Power and Representation*. Boston: Northeastern Press University.
- Johnson, Roy S. (2011, December 15). "Tim Tebow and Matters of Faith." Retrieved



- July 24, 2013  
([http://espn.go.com/espn/commentary/story/\\_/id/7352973/tim-tebow-matters-faith](http://espn.go.com/espn/commentary/story/_/id/7352973/tim-tebow-matters-faith)).
- Just, Richard. (2012). "Political Football: Tim Tebow vs. New York." Retrieved July 25, 2013 (<http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2012/09/08/political-football-tim-tebow-vs-new-york.html>).
- Keown, Tim. (2011). "Tebow 10:23." Retrieved July 25, 2013  
([http://espn.go.com/nfl/story/\\_/page/hotread-Tebow/nfl-tim-tebow-was-denver-broncos-best-only-choice-quarterback-espn-magazine](http://espn.go.com/nfl/story/_/page/hotread-Tebow/nfl-tim-tebow-was-denver-broncos-best-only-choice-quarterback-espn-magazine)).
- Kimmel, Michael S. (1987). *Changing Men: New Directions in Research on Men and Masculinity*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications.
- King, Samantha J. (2005). "Methodological Contingencies in Contextual Sport Studies. Pp. 21-38 in D.L. Andrews, D.S. Mason, and M.L. Silk. *Qualitative Methods in sports studies*. Oxford: Berg.
- King, Samantha J. (2006). *Pink Ribbons, Inc.: Breast Cancer and the Politics of Philanthropy*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- King, Samantha J. and McDonald, Mary G. (2007). "(Post)Identity and Sporting Cultures: An Introduction and Overview." *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 1-19.
- King, Samantha J. and McDonald, Mary G. (2012): "A different contender? Barack Obama, the 2008 Presidential Campaign and the Racial Politics of Sport." *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 35:6, 1023-1039.
- King-White, Ryan. (2010). "Danny Almonte: Discursive Construction(s) of (Im)migrant Citizenship in Neoliberal America." *Sociology of Sport Journal*,

27, 178-199.

Kintz, Linda. (1998). "Clarity, Mothers, and the mass-mediated national soul: A defense of ambiguity. Pp. 115-139 in L. Kintz, and J. Lesage, *Media, Culture and the Religious Right*. Minneapolis, MN, USA: University of Minnesota Press.

Kintz, Linda and Lesage, Julia. (1998). *Media, Culture and the Religious Right*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Kiszla, Mike. (2011a). "Tebow has Broncos Believing They Can't Lose." Retrieved July 25, 2013 ([http://www.denverpost.com/broncos/ci\\_19527521?source=bb](http://www.denverpost.com/broncos/ci_19527521?source=bb)).

Kiszla, Mike. (2011b). "Broncos' Tebow More Than a Quarterback." Retrieved July 25, 2013 ([http://www.denverpost.com/sports/ci\\_19174689](http://www.denverpost.com/sports/ci_19174689)).

Klis, Mike. (2011). "Broncos QB Tim Tebow Caught in Love-Hate Relationship." Retrieved July 24, 2013 ([http://www.denverpost.com/broncos/ci\\_19303064](http://www.denverpost.com/broncos/ci_19303064) [http://www.denverpost.com/broncos/ci\\_19303064?IADID=Search-www.denverpost.com-www.denverpost.com](http://www.denverpost.com/broncos/ci_19303064?IADID=Search-www.denverpost.com-www.denverpost.com)).

Klosterman, Chuck. (2011). "The People Who Hate Tim Tebow: On the Most (Curious, Complicated, Downright Strange) Polarizing Athlete of Our Age." Retrieved July 24, 2013 ([http://www.grantland.com/story/\\_/id/7319858/the-people-hate-tim-tebow](http://www.grantland.com/story/_/id/7319858/the-people-hate-tim-tebow)).

Krattenmaker, Tom. (2010). *Onward Christian Athletes: Turning Ballparks into Pulpits and Players into Preachers*. Lanham, MD: Rowan and Littlefield Publishers, Inc.

Krattenmaker, Tom. (2012, January 15). "When Tim Tebow Loses, Does God, too?"

Retrieved May 15, 2012

(<http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/news/opinion/story/2012-01-14/tebowlost-broncos-patriots-god-religion/52566104/1>).

Kusz, Kyle. (2001). "Andre Agassi and Generation X: Reading White Masculinity in 1990's America." Pp. 51-69 in D. L. Andrews, and S. J. Jackson, *Sport Stars: The Cultural Politics of Sporting Celebrity*. New York: Routledge.

Kusz, K (2007a). From NASCAR Nation to Pat Tillman: Notes on Sport and the Politics of White Cultural Nationalism in Post-9/11 America. *Journal of Sport & Social Issues*, 27, 77-88.

Kusz, Kyle. (2007b). *Revolt of the white athlete: race, media and the emergence of extreme athletes in America*. New York, NY: Peter Lang.

Ladd, Tony and Mathiesen, James A. (1999). *Muscular Christianity: Evangelical Protestants and the Development of American Sport*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books.

Lakoff, George. (March 12, 2012). "The Santorum Strategy." Retrieved July 23, 2013, (<http://www.truth-out.org/news/item/7218:the-santorum-strategy>).

Larson, Carin and Wilcox, Clyde. (2006). *Onward Christian Soldiers? The Religious Right in American Politics* (3rd Ed.). Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

Leibovitz, Annie. Photograph in Vogue Magazine. (2012). "Superman Returns: Tim Tebow Touches Down in New York." Retrieved July 25, 2013 (<http://www.vogue.com/magazine/article/superman-returns-tim-tebow>).

Lipsitz, George. (1998). *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: How White People*

- Profit from Identity Politics*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Lundskow, George. (2012). "Authoritarianism and Destructiveness in the Tea Party Movement." *Critical Sociology*, 529-547.
- Magdalinski, Tara. and Chandler, Timothy J.L. (2002). *With God on Their Side*. New York: Routledge.
- MarketWatch. (2012). "Tebow Sparks Blow-out TV Rating for CBS Commentary: Tebow-mania is, Again, Apparently Alive and Well. Retrieved July 25, 2013 (<http://www.marketwatch.com/story/tebow-sparks-blow-out-tv-ratings-for-cbs-2012-01-09>).
- Markula, Pirkko and Silk, Michael L. (2011). *Qualitative Research for Physical Culture*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Matuszewski, Erik. (2010). "Tebow Sets Jersey Sales Record for NFL Draftee." Retrieved July 24, 2013 (<http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2010-04-27/tim-tebow-sets-jersey-sales-record-for-nfl-draftee-topping-jets-sanchez.html>).
- McCarthy, David. (2012, January special edition). "Nice Guys Finish First: Redefining MVP." *Chill*. 20-24.
- McDonald, Mary G. (2005). "Mapping Whiteness and Sport: An Introduction." *Sociology of Sport Journal*. Vol. 22, 245-255.
- McDonald, Mary G. and Toglia, Jessica. (2010). "Dressed for success? The NBA's Dress Code, the Workings of Whiteness and Corporate Culture." *Sport in Society*. Vol. 13, No. 6, 970-983.
- McIntosh, Peggy. (1988). *White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack*. In *White*

Privilege and Male Privilege: A Personal Account of Coming to See  
Correspondences through work in Women's Studies.

Grossberg, Lawrence, Nelson, Cary and Treichler, Paula. A. (1992). *Cultural studies: An Introduction*. New York: Routledge.

Newell, Sean. (2012). "Tim Tebow's Sermon on the Hill." Retrieved July 25, 2013, (<http://deadspin.com/5900156/tim-tebows-sermon-on-the-hill>).

NFL. (2011, October 20). "Dolphins buy tickets to avert blackout vs. Tebow, Broncos." Retrieved July 25, 2013 (<http://www.nfl.com/news/story/09000d5d8234fd11/article/dolphins-buy-tickets-to-avert-blackout-vs-tebow-broncos>).

NFL. (2011, November 24). "Local Chargers' Blackout Lifted for Game vs. Tebow's Broncos." Retrieved July 25, 2013 (<http://www.nfl.com/news/story/09000d5d82472b15/article/chargers-local-tv-blackout-lifted-for-game-vs-tebows-broncos>).

O'Connor, Chris. (2011). "Could Tebow's Style Make Business Friendly?" Retrieved July 25, 2013 (<http://www.forbes.com/sites/ciocentral/2011/12/19/5-leadership-lessons-from-tim-tebows-game-time-audio>).

O'Connor, Ian. (2011). "Tim Tebow's Magic Doesn't Make Sense. Retrieved May 29, 2013 ([http://espn.go.com/new-york/nfl/story/\\_/id/7249302/he-was-once-again-awful-most-game-mattered-tim-tebow-came-yet-again](http://espn.go.com/new-york/nfl/story/_/id/7249302/he-was-once-again-awful-most-game-mattered-tim-tebow-came-yet-again)).

PolitiClips1. (2010). Focus on the Family Super Bowl Commercial with Tim Tebow. You Tube web site Retrieved July 23, 2013 (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xqReTDJSdhE>).

- Powers, John. (2012). Tebow takes lumps, but his faith not bruised. Retrieved July 25, 2013 ([http://www.boston.com/sports/football/patriots/articles/2012/01/15/tebow\\_takes\\_lumps\\_but\\_his\\_faith\\_not\\_bruised/](http://www.boston.com/sports/football/patriots/articles/2012/01/15/tebow_takes_lumps_but_his_faith_not_bruised/)).
- Reiss, Mike. (2011, December 13). "Kraft on Tebow: 'Great for NFL'." Retrieved July 25, 2013 ([http://espn.go.com/blog/boston/new-england-patriots/post/\\_/id/4712199/kraft-on-tebow-great-for-nfl](http://espn.go.com/blog/boston/new-england-patriots/post/_/id/4712199/kraft-on-tebow-great-for-nfl)).
- Ryan, Chris. (2011, November, 18). "Tim Tebow and the Miracles." Retrieved July 25, 2013 ([http://www.grantland.com/blog/the-triangle/post/\\_/id/10128/tim-tebow-and-the-miracles](http://www.grantland.com/blog/the-triangle/post/_/id/10128/tim-tebow-and-the-miracles)).
- Saraceno, John. (2012). "Tebow: The Man Behind the Mania. Retrieved July 25, 2013 (<http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/sports/football/nfl/story/2012-01-11/tebow-exclusive/52518122>).
- Shaefer, Donovan O. (2012, January 30). "Tebow and The Religious Body (Politic)." Retrieved July 25, 2013 (<http://thesocietypages.org/socimages/2012/01/30/tebow-and-the-religious-body-politic>).
- Shafer, Axel. (2011). *Countercultural Conservatives: American Evangelicalism from the Postwar Revival to the New Christian Right*. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press.
- Smith, Michael D. (2011a). Jake Plummer wishes Tim Tebow would cut down on the religion talk. Retrieved June 4, 2013, from

<http://profootballtalk.nbcsports.com/2011/11/22/tebow-to-plummer-ill-take-every-opportunity-to-praise-the-lord>.

Smith, Michael D. (2011b). "Tebow to Plummer: I'll take every Opportunity to Praise the Lord." Retrieved July 25, 2013

(<http://profootballtalk.nbcsports.com/2011/11/22/tebow-to-plummer-ill-take-every-opportunity-to-praise-the-lord>).

Tebow, Timothy R. and Whitaker, Nathan. (2011). *Through my eyes*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers.

The Denver Post. (2012). "Denver Post Readers Laud Tim Tebow as Source for Inspiration but Remain Cautious." Retrieved July 24, 2013

([http://www.denverpost.com/sports/ci\\_19123750?IADID=Search-www.denverpost.com-www.denverpost.com](http://www.denverpost.com/sports/ci_19123750?IADID=Search-www.denverpost.com-www.denverpost.com)).

Trujillo, Nick. (2000). "Hegomic Masculinity on the Mound: Media Representations of Nolan Ryan and American Sports Culture." Pp. 14-39 in S. Birrell, & M. G. McDonald, *Reading Sport: Critical Essays on Power and Representation*. Boston: Northeastern University Press.

Van Riper, Tom. (2013). "Tim Tebow Tops Forbes' 2013 List of America's Most Influential Athletes." Retrieved July 25, 2013

(<http://www.forbes.com/sites/tomvanriper/2013/05/06/americas-most-influential-athletes-2/>).

Walker, James. (2011). "The myth and legend of Tim Tebow." Retrieved July 25,

2013 ([http://espn.go.com/blog/afceast/post/\\_/id/33102/the-myth-and-legend-of-tim-tebow](http://espn.go.com/blog/afceast/post/_/id/33102/the-myth-and-legend-of-tim-tebow)).

Williams, Raymond. (1977). *Marxism and Literature*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Zeskind, Leonard. (2011). "A Nation Dispossed: The Tea Party Movement and Race." *Critical Sociology*, 495-509.

Zirin, Dave. (2012) *Bad sports: how owners are ruining the games we love*. New York: New Press.