“Meatheads” Redefined:

Analysis of the Union College Football Team

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis explores the experiences and representations of the male football player. It provides an anthropological study of Union College football players and a film analysis of the sports film genre, revealing critical insights about relationships among bodies, diet preferences, and gendered stereotypes. These insights move beyond the "meathead" stereotypes that society constructs for the male football player. This thesis combines Anthropology and English to reveal that questions about hegemonic masculinity arise in the minds of the very athletes who embody the stereotypes of 'the man.' Moreover, sports films' popularity lies in themes that entice men to acknowledge their emotions. Through the utilization of literary skills, I deeply analyze the men in my ethnographic research and question how they speak and act. Furthermore, the paper demonstrates how the two disciplines merge to create a cultural analysis of the men of the Union College Football Team and, by extension, of the hegemonic constructions of masculinity more broadly.

INTRODUCTION

This thesis examines the men of the Union College Football Team's experience and their conceptions of manhood. I am conducting my literature analysis on my ethnographic research on the Union College Football Team, along with analyzing film and representation of football players in popular culture. My fieldwork comprises interviewing thirteen Union College Football players of diverse races, ages, socio-economic status, and sports positions. The fieldwork and findings result from three small focus group sessions with these men.

The thesis is an interdisciplinary study between the two fields, Anthropology and English. My unique interdisciplinary approach offers a distinct form of research that utilizes examining literary texts and culture to create a holistic argument. I combine my anthropological fieldwork with a close-reading literary analysis approach to the football players' words and body language. My first chapter is a literature review, a compilation of published literature regarding representation, self-presentation, meat consumption, and body image that supports the argument of the tensions the UC football players face in regard to their gender identity. Following this introduction to the existing literature, my second chapter is a fieldwork analysis of the relationship between body image and sports among men. My third chapter focuses on the relationships the men have with diet preference: specifically, with meat consumption. Subsequently, the fourth chapter is a media analysis of the sports film genre and the film *The Game Plan* to investigate how film mimics men's lives. Finally, my final chapter analyzes the tension between stereotypes and manhood then (in the recent past) versus manhood now.

Through my findings, I discover that there is an ongoing tension between personal wants and societal pressures regarding the definition of masculinity. The focus group discussions

determine that body image causes anguish to each man, and the familiar concept of 'sacrifice' wreaks havoc with their self-perceptions of their appearance. Furthermore, the men have a positive relationship with food due to the ritualized practice of team dinner that allows the men to have candid conversations that release the burdens placed upon them, and meat is a symbol of the kinship they experience during this time. Although the men are open about their suffering of body dysmorphia, they contradict this act of defiance of stereotypes – by strongly associating eating meat with being manly. Moreover, the media that the men consume, specifically the sports film genre, illustrate that the men enjoy these films because of several key characteristics. Namely, the films highlight the championing of an underdog, the engagement with one's emotions, and the idea that men can be more than their sport. Finally, my thesis reveals that the most stereotypically "macho" men on the Union College campus yearn for more than the mold placed upon them. By reading the representation of the male football player in sports films, and reading *the experience of this representation* in my interviews with the UC Football Team, I not only bring together my two subjects of study –literary analysis and ethnographic research – under the shared rubric of representational analysis, I also reveal that hegemonic masculinity is on the brink and that hegemonic masculinity is a concept that is detrimental to even those who supposedly conform to it.

CHAPTER ONE

A Literature Review of Representation, Meat, Male Bodies, and Stigma

Investigating the Union College Football Team's experiences as men reveals the importance of accurate representation in media and films. Examining the literature regarding unique facets of masculinity – representation, self-presentation, meat consumption, and body image – suggests that hegemonic masculinity is complex. In this chapter, I first examine Stuart Hall's collection of essays *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, which provides the tools to analyze institutions, media texts, and images critically. This book defines representation and analyzes the importance of representation to a culture; furthermore, the book also provides tools to understand how representation and culture are inseparable. I next look at Smith and Cook's article "Gender Stereotypes: An Analysis on Popular Films and TV," which examines film's social influence on its audience, stressing the importance of proper gender representation for children. I end this section with Bussey and Bandura's work *Social Cognitive Theory of Gender Development and Differentiation,* which is essential to understand gender typing and gender development. Comparing representation to self-presentation, I examine Gofman's work *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life,* which uses the imagery of theater as an explanation for social interaction. I next move to meat and masculinity, beginning with Carol Adams' *The Sexual Politics of Meat: A Feminist-Vegetarian Critical Theory,* which provides the foundation to understanding the relationship between meat and the patriarchy. Furthering this analysis, I look at Modlinska et al.'s "Gender Differences in Attitudes to Vegans/Vegetarians and Their Food Preferences, and Their Implications for Promoting Sustainable Dietary Patterns – a Systematic Review." This text provides a review of all literature published on gender and food choices, examining the ongoing relationship between men and their diet preferences. I next turn

to Nakagawa et al.'s "Where's the Beef? How Masculinity Exacerbates Gender Disparities in Health Behaviors," a study examining the extent to which masculine ideals are rooted within food preference. My final section begins with Susan Bordo's *The Male Body,* a candid analysis of male bodies, and the close study of how society dictates body ideals. Next, I move to Chris Wienkes' "Negotiating the Male Body: Men, Masculinity, and Cultural Ideals," an ethnographic study of men's relationship with the male body ideal and their coping mechanisms for achieving or living up to this ideal. Finally, I look at Michael Messner's *Boyhood, Organized Sports, and the Construction of Masculinities,* a study of how relationships between masculinity and bodies begin in childhood sports. I end my work with Goffman's *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity,* providing insight into the life of a stigmatized person and into how a man may fit into this category. These texts are a canon for understanding the depth of masculinity and masculine ideals within society, and they provide me with the foundation to further analyze masculinity within the Union College Football Team and popular culture.

The Importance of Representation and Self Presentation

Lived experiences reflect how a given culture is presented in media, popular culture, and language. An essential text on representation, and its effects, is Stuart Hall's edited collection *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices,* which comprises essays written by multiple authors. The literature suggests that we present/see/perceive ourselves because of the shared meanings of our culture; thus, identity is a typical product of the perceived representation of the ideal self.

Hall et al. ask the question: How does language construct meaning? And reply with the answer that language operates as a representative system. Hall asserts that thoughts, ideas, and

feelings are represented in culture because language is a mode of "media." He recalls that representation through language is central to the process.

Hall introduces the concept that language is a representational system because of the way culture and language interact with one another: "To belong to a culture is to belong to roughly the same conceptual and linguistic universe, to know how concepts and ideas translate into different languages, and how language can be interpreted to refer to or reference the world" (Hall 22). Hall determines that discourse is the path to acquiring knowledge and that it is through communication with others that knowledge arises. Discourse attempts to overcome the traditional distinction between what one says – language – and what one does – practice. Drawing on Michel Foucault, Hall asserts that language influences the practice of ideas and regulates the conduct of others because it produces our knowledge, shaping the ways that a topic is reasoned. Foucault's understanding of discourse is that discourse arises as a result of referring to the same objects and patterns; thus, discourse is a result of common understandings. Ultimately, Foucault determines that discourse creates meaning.

Adding to the concept of common understandings, Marianne Fulton, in her essay "Eyes of Time", asks the question: How do popular culture and the mass media represent people and places that are significantly different from us? She asks the audience to question the photos presented in advertising and to acknowledge that the published works come with preferred meanings: "Which of the many meanings in this image does the magazine mean to privilege? Which is the preferred meaning?"(228). She furthers this by acknowledging that preferred meanings arise from stereotypes. Stereotyping as a representational practice, and how it works can be caught in the play of power (hegemony) and can have unconscious effects, such as fantasy and fetishism. A strategy to combat hegemony in the media is through transcoding:

applying new meanings to negative images. This intervention showcases an ongoing struggle over meaning within the 'politics of representation'(277).

Moreover, Sean Nixon's "Hard Looks" analyzes imagery across menswear shops and examines the impact of representation on self-presentation. Nixon argues that spectatorship has produced the 'new man' imagery regime and engages with how consumer institutions have impacted the 'new man' era. Rather than reflect the masculinity of living men, Nixon finds that these images play an active role in changing the narrative on masculinity. Nixon asks the question: "Does it reinforce dominant scripts of masculinity, or does it disturb these dominant strips?" (301). Through examining models' "looks," Nixon finds a display of masculine sensuality due to casting models that combine both boyish softness and harder, assertive masculinity.

Nixon finds that clothes and poses of the models emphasize a broad-shouldered and solid body shape. These two qualities combined indicate the essence of narcissistic self-absorption and independence. Nixon finalizes his investigation by examining the design and display techniques by menswear retailers, finding that, along with contemporary images, the ads play a vital role in constructing the regime of masculinity as men "buy into the look."

Hall et. al's examination of representation aids in understanding the importance of accurate representation in film. Smith and Cook's essay "Gender Stereotypes: Analysis of Popular Films and TV" studies the implications film has on children aged thirteen and below. They find that film does have social influence over an audience by representing gender; and healthy, proper representation is essential to children, who are actively, and subconsciously, forming their worldview and social attitudes. Smith and Cook state: "Females take up half the space in society, yet, especially in films aimed at children, they appear much less frequently than

do males. Nevertheless, when they do make it on screen, their portrayals can undermine their presence by being 'hyper-attractive' or 'hypersexual' and/or passive"(Smith and Cook 676). Their research finds that films must shift away from creating female characters through "adornment, enticement, or with inclination to romance as the main or exclusive personality trait or motivator"(Ibid.). Although their research stresses the importance of the representation of women, their work also touches on men's expectations and perceptions of women, along with men's perceptions of themselves.

In discussing gender roles, Bussey and Bandura's "Social Cognitive Theory of Gender Development and Differentiation" studies gender role development and functioning. They discuss the importance of gender development in how people conduct their lives, such as how they develop their talents or conceptions of themselves, resulting from the heavy influence of society's gender typing. Their analysis argues that there are different forms of social influences that affect multiple aspects of gender-role development. Social influence can affect the outcome of gender-linked knowledge and competencies. The four major sociocognitive regulators of gendered conduct include expectations of gender, gender roles, self-evaluative standards, and self-efficacy beliefs. In conversation with the social influence of developing gender, Behm-Morwatiz and Mastro, authors of "Mean Girls? The Influence of Gender Portrayals in Teen Movies on Emerging Adults' Gender-Based Attitudes and Beliefs" argue that individuals adopt gender characteristics in part by monitoring the rewards and consequences associated with others' behavior. Thus, the representation of female characters in the media plays a role in viewers' perceptions regarding gender identity, which may ultimately influence attitudes and beliefs about appropriate gender roles"(Behm-Morawitz and Mastro 132). Behavior, specifically regarding gender, is mimicked; thus, the portrayals of gender in the media

will be mirrored by the specific gendered audience and expected from the opposite gender based on the social cognitive theory and how social influence affects the development of behavior. This research is essential in understanding how films mimic society, and how society will mimic films.

An examination of the presentation of the self can showcase the ways representation impacts a person. Goffman's work *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* portrays the importance of human social interaction using theater imagery. Goffman introduces the concept of the 'social stage,' which recognizes that social interaction is influenced by ideas of setting or context – thus shaping a person's performance, like performing on a theatrical stage. People perform social life in three places: 'front stage,' 'backstage,' and 'off-stage.' Goffman's imagery of theater as a way of understanding human interaction and behavior recognizes that time, place, and 'audience' influence social interaction -- also, cultural values and norms of the social group impact the presentation. The two main theories of Goffman are 'front' and 'backstage'. Goffman's theory states that 'front stage' behavior is behavior performed when people are aware that others are watching. This front-stage behavior results from a social script shaped by cultural norms and reflects the expectation for behavior shaped by appearance, setting, and role. Examples of front-stage behavior are waiting in line, exchanging pleasantries, and shopping -- high routine and scripted performances. During front-stage behavior, people are aware of how others perceive them, telling them how to behave, dress, and present their manner of behavior. Comparatively, 'backstage' behavior is free from the expectations and norms of front-stage behavior. As a result, people relax and behave as their 'true' selves. Examples of backstage behavior are changing from work clothes to loungewear, composing their body differently, or changing their speech. In this state of relaxation, there is an opportunity for the person to practice

their front-stage behaviors -- such as practicing conversations, their handshake, or smile. The expectations that separate frontstage and backstage behavior influence people to keep these realms separate.

The extensive analyses of representation by Hall, Bandura, et al., Smith et al., Behm-Morawitz, and Goffman determine that gender development and social-cognitive development result from the gender portrayal in the mass media; furthermore, their examinations find that representation in the media is vital to not only development but also to how the audience interacts with gender.

Gender and Meat (BROAD GENDER IDEOLOGY)

Is there a relationship between food and the patriarchal views of masculinity? Simply put, yes. Authors such as Adams, Modlinska, et al., and Nakagawa et al. study this relationship extensively. In conjunction, their works determine how perceptions of masculinity impact diet preferences and how people of different genders think about meat consumption.

Adams' work *The Sexual Politics of Meat: A Feminist-Vegetarian Critical Theory* "argues that to talk about eliminating meat is to talk about displacing the aspect of male control and demonstrates how animals' oppression and women's oppression are linked together" (Adams xxxv). In the first part of the three-part book, Adams relies on defining patriarchal texts of meat and the notion of what constitutes a text. She asserts that texts are recognizable messages, and that, through repetition, the same meaning gets reinforced, building coherence. Thus, in part one, the recognizable message is that meat is a nutritious item of food. She finds that texts of meat are often not closely examined and that the recognizable meaning of meat

includes “the association to the male role, its meaning recurs within a fixed gender system; the coherence it achieves as a meaningful item of food arises from patriarchal attitudes including the idea that the end justifies the means [. . .]” (Adams xxxv). Analyzing texts of meat, Adams references examples of when meat supply is low in society: men receive the meat, while their female counterparts receive the vegetables. Adams also cites the myth of Zeus’s consumption of Metis, within which Zeus first sexually assaults Metis and then consumes her. Adams’ work analyzes cultural references to illustrate an ongoing bewildering relationship between meat consumption and violence towards women.

The second part of Adams' work, “From the Belly of Zeus,” focuses on the era from 1790 to the present in Great Britain and the United States. She continues to reference the myth of Zeus and Metis by examining how women’s and vegetarians’ voices can be free from the sexual politics of meat and patriarchal interpretation. This section tries to answer the question, “what characterizes texts that challenge the sexual politics of meat?” She explores the relationship between women’s texts and vegetarian history through literary texts, such as Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*.

The oppression of women and animals, to Adams, is interdependent. As a result of Adams' feelings of dismay at the failure of feminists to recognize this relationship, she titles her final part “Eat Rice, Have Faith in Women,” wherein she describes the women who challenge the sexual politics of meat. She references feminist theorists Aphra Behn, Charlotte Gilman, Alice Walker, Marge Piercy, and Audre Lorde, as they all have insights into the oppression of humans and animals.

Adams’ work concerns itself with ethical vegetarianism, which was not popular when she was writing. Ethical vegetarianism results from the decision that meat-eating is unjustifiable

because of the exploitation of other animals. The popular version at the time of her publication is the motivation to stop meat-eating for personal health benefits. Although this was an unpopular view, Adams writes from the ethical vegetarian perspective and explores how attitudes about meat are ingrained in society– even in the minds of vegetarians. Her work explores how feminism should embrace vegetarianism because humans who are vulnerable to exploitation can empathize and thus help nonhumans who are also vulnerable.

Advancing the conversation about the relationship between the patriarchy and meat consumption, Modlinska et al.'s "Gender Differences in Attitudes to Vegans/Vegetarians and Their Food Preferences, and Their Implications for Promoting Sustainable Dietary Patterns – a Systematic Review" investigates the relationship between gender and diet, using a literature review system. Modlinska et al. introduce the idea that veganism is not only safe for consumers but is optimal for the environment; despite this knowledge and efforts to reduce meat intake, "meat-based diets remain the dominant nutritional system in the Western culture"(Modlinska et al. 2). They also emphasize the fact that men report more positive attitudes towards meat consumption than do women. The two most prominent reasons for vegetarianism are dietary motivation and dietary adherence. Modlinska et al. find that vegetarian women report being more prosocially motivated, less likely to cheat on their diet and eat meat than their male counterparts. Modlinska et al. conclude that by understanding the differences in how men and women construct vegetarian diets, investigators can generate more profound insights into the gendered nature of eating behavior. Also, there are differences regarding masculine and feminine diets. Thus, "how an individual is perceived largely depends on the perception of their gender and compliance of their choices with what is considered typical of that gender"(Ibid.). The authors'

hypothesis is “That men and women differ significantly in their preferences for plant products and in their attitudes toward meat consumption”(Modlinska et al. 3).

The method for this study follows the PRISMA systematic literature review model. This study measures variables directly or indirectly related to inter-sex differences concerning the vegan/vegetarian diet and studies written in English. As a result, they look at 29 articles on sex/gender differences in attitudes towards veganism/vegetarianism. This systematic literature review utilizes three inclusion criteria: “(a) studies should focus on vegetarianism and/or veganism, (b) studies should show sex/gender differences, (c) studies should be published in English” (Ibid.). Also, this study utilizes three exclusion criteria: “(a) relevance, (b) review and conference papers were ignored, (c) duplicate studies”(3). Two categories result from the collection of this data: perception of vegans/vegetarians by meat-eaters, depending on their sex, and differences between vegan/vegetarian men and women.

Through analyzing differences in the literature on veganism/vegetarianism, Modlinska et al. find that “women are twice as likely as men to be vegan or vegetarian”(7). In addition, they examine differences in attitudes towards meat consumption, in preference for plant-based products, in motives, and in the perception of diet in terms of femininity and masculinity. In conclusion of this section, Modlinska et al. suggest that vegetarian men may experience a conflict between their intrinsic preferences and gender norms, and they tend to forgo their intrinsic preferences to conform to the masculine gender identity. Ultimately, Modlinska et al. find that societal perceptions may be the significant barrier for becoming a vegetarian, exposing the prominent perception of meat-based diets as having better nutritional value. Modlinska et al. conclude that cultural factors and attitudes towards vegetarians and their motives may differ in different communities. However, the Western world follows a dominant model where “meat

consumption is linked to wealth, high social status and dominance"(8). They suggest that food preferences and eating habits in the earliest stages of life may be worth investigating, along with the psychological obstacles that arise when a person is changing their diet.

Masculinity: Anxieties and Fears

The works of Goffman and Nakagawa et al. introduce the concepts of anxieties and fears surrounding the ideals of masculinity. Goffman's research, *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity,* defines and analyzes the attribute that conveys devalued stereotypes. As a result of society maintaining hierarchies and the social structure of being "normal," individuals who are stigmatized suffer from (sometimes internalized) social disapproval, hostility, isolation, and even ostracism.

Goffman defines *stigma* as "an attribute that is deeply discrediting," and examples include having mental health problems, an "undesirable" skin color, non-binary sexuality, or a criminal record. The deeply discrediting attribute, the stigma, is a crucial aspect of how stigmatized individuals live within the social structure and participate in social life. Society builds a social structure based on creating categories for the way of life: "Society established the means of categorizing persons, and the complement of attributes felt to be ordinary and natural for members of these categories" (Goffman 2). These categories stigmatize individuals to uplift the success of the "normals." In addition to creating categories of people, by normals, there are also categories of stigma: "abominations of the body" (i.e., physical deformities), "blemishes of character" (i.e., homosexuality, addiction, and mental illness), "tribal stigmas" (i.e., race, ethnicity, religion). These categories determine that stigmas can be both visible and invisible.

These categories further the support of normals. Pertaining to my research, men who are vegetarian or vegan can be susceptible to stigmatization by peers and by society at large, as the diet falls into the category og “blemishes of character”.

Goffman identifies that shame is a central possibility in the perception of oneself as a stigmatized person. Thus, he explores multiple ways a person can cope with stigmatization. “Solutions” to the aspect of stigmatization are making direct attempts to correct failings: undergoing plastic surgery, remedial education for illiteracy, or homosexual psychotherapy. These objective responses are often the result of the victimization of the stigmatized individual. Their response often is secret because it risks exposure, drawing more attention or ridicule to the shameful attribute. Another solution is compensating with external skills, such as skiing or mountain climbing, as a tool used to draw attention away from the stigma and towards another area of themselves, whether a physical attribute or a re-learned skill. This person can use their stigma for “secondary gains,” excusing their lack of success rather than acknowledging their differences. The last solution is that the stigmatized individuals can turn to other stigmatized individuals: “Among his own, the stigmatized individual can use his disadvantage as a basis for organizing life, but he must resign himself to a half-world to do so”(Goffman 21). Thus, groups may bring either a sense of belonging or focus on the “problem”. The variety of responses to stigma is vast, and a stigmatized individual tends to respond in multiple ways in different social settings. Goffman’s analysis of the life of a stigmatized individual pertains to the conversation of masculinity, as he illustrates what life may look like for a person who deviates from society’s norms and expectations.

Goffman’s work focuses on the life of a stigmatized person, thus creating the framework for the examination of why men face anxieties surrounding the presentation of masculinity. In

regard to pressures men feel to exhibit masculine ideals, Nakagawa and Hart's paper "Where's the Beef? How Masculinity Exacerbates Gender Disparities in Health Behaviors" argues that men's daily enactment of masculinity contributes to adverse health outcomes -- as a result of men's diets focusing heavily on meat consumption. Overall, their work shows that efforts to maintain masculinity cause a preference for meat-intensive diets that can have lasting adverse health effects, and addresses gender differences in preferred diet.

While prior research focuses on the place of meat in performing masculinity and its effect on women, Nakagawa et al. focus on the negative impact on men. Nakagawa et al.'s research "Where's the Beef? [...]" focuses on the future rather than the present to examine gender differences in health-related meat, diet, and exercise preferences. Also, this investigation explores how perceived threats to masculinity and femininity shape diet choices. The primary independent variable is gender, while the study controls for family income, age, race, ethnicity, education, marital status, parental status, and employment. Consistent with previous work, their first study finds that men are "significantly more resistant to the idea of reducing red meat consumption and are significantly less willing than women to consider becoming vegetarian in the future"(Nakagawa and Hart 7). In their second and third studies, they raise the concern that masculinity plays a causal role in gender inequity amongst preference of diet. This indication is essential because Nakagawa et al. reference that the increase in consumption of red meat leads to adverse health effects, such as heart disease and cancer. They hypothesize that "proving one's masculinity through meat-based diets may exacerbate men's greater vulnerability to negative health outcomes related to excess meat consumption"(Nakagawa and Hart 10). The hypothesis determines that when men feel that their masculinity is threatened, they express less interest in diet or exercise.

Regarding health disparities, “Where’s the Beef? How Masculinity Exacerbates Gender Disparities in Health Behaviors” provides an analysis of the relationship between meat-based diet and health concerns. Furthermore, “this article seeks to further our understanding of how the micro-level process men enact in maintaining their masculinity can help explain the macro-level tendency for men to die earlier than women from preventable causes related to diet”(10). This argument asserts that meat consumption is ingrained in expectations of gender, primarily masculinity and has detrimental effects on health, identity, and the environment.

The Male Body: Anxieties and Fears

Examining the male body aids in the understanding of male anxieties and fears. As this research pertains to the relationship between men and their stereotypes, it is essential to investigate how society presents male bodies and men’s internalization of male body ideals. Authors such as Bordo, Wienke, and Messner deeply examine the ways representation affects the male audience, the coping skills men develop/need to deal with the anxiety of the represented masculine ideal, and how the masculine ideal embeds itself into men at a young age.

Susan Bordo’s *The Male Body: a New Look at Men in Public and in Private* candidly analyzes the culture of bodies and where body ideals come from. Her work aims to dismantle the patriarchal ideas of male bodies and to illuminate those similar societal pressures that apply to men’s and women’s bodies. Bordo’s analysis begins with a discussion of the “invasions of territory”(Bordo 16) of women’s bodies; that the Western World invites society to be bombarded with access to women’s bodies but not to male bodies. This discrepancy is in film, literature, magazines, and advertisements, as these media forms overwhelm audiences with access to viewing the female body. The overwhelming emphasis on access to the heterosexual exploration

of only female bodies results in women-only education on how men will access women. She reflects on this anxiety: “my girlfriends and I were so preoccupied with proper management of this male education (for it seemed to be in our hands) that we often forgot about our own” (Bordo 20). There is anxiety around acknowledging male genitalia in culture as well as anxiety around men regarding their performance and looks. She explains the anxiety around aesthetics: “A common source of shame among men is the fear that their sexual impulses, written inescapably and unambiguously on the erect form of the penis, will be unwanted”(Bordo 20). Furthering the examination of anxiety, Bordo acknowledges that there are associations, regardless of age, that the penis is ugly and there is something “primitive” about the existence of a penis. Bordo notes, along with other scholars, that the introduction of the naked penis in Hollywood results in anxiety about the presentation of bodies and the notion that the penis is the most powerful cue for deciding gender. Slowly, there is a ‘bringing to light of the penis.’

Body language becomes a tool for manhood in the late 1990s—advertisements begin to direct the audience’s attention to male genitalia. Rap musicians begin to ‘crotch grab,’ making the gestures a cultural code for sexual power and virility. Also, surgical phalloplasty becomes a mainstream business. Bordo analyzes thinking about the body with historical and cultural variability: “It also suggests that we need to think about the body not only as a physical entity -- which it assuredly is, but also as a cultural form that carries *meaning* with it”(26). Bordo acknowledges that there is no equality in states of undress for the genders. In the cultural context, the imagery of women is that they are undressing for men's pleasure, exposing themselves to men; because of discrepancy in the media, Bordo asks her audience to understand that interpretation is a tool to use when viewing any forms of media. She states: “Representation of

the body has a history, but so too do viewers, and they bring that history -- both personal and cultural -- to their perception and interpretation. Different viewers may see different things"(29).

How do films shape the audience's perceptions of the male body? Bordo analyzes public images of the male body, critically engaging with her perceptions of male bodies as an adolescent and the portrayal of male bodies in the films she grows up watching. In examples like *Father's Little Dividend*, Bordo examines that films are equally stereotypical towards men as they are to women: "Our culture is only beginning to pay attention to stereotypes of men and what they say about masculinity. The fact is that every female stereotype usually has a male stereotype in tow"(115). Bordo argues that the popular movie ideals of women are Hollywood concoctions rather than documented facts about the American family. Bordo calls upon Ellen Goodman's comment on disparities between the actor and the character:

> It isn't just women who go about our daily lives with Harriet Nelson looking over our shoulders . . . If women watching these shows wondered how these high-heeled, apron-clad mothers kept their houses so clean, did men wonder how these fathers solved all these family problems? If the girls fed on these images still carry them, so do the boys. (119)

This analysis, along with her candid examinations of fifties films, concludes that representation in films affects the female *and* the male mind.

Bordo candidly reflects on the masculine ideals she experiences in high school and how none of her male friends embodied any of the movie-star ideals; instead, they mimicked a folk singer who slouched. However, the male students are unaware that the folk singer copied the look of Marlon Brando and James Dean, the masculine style that Dean later becomes known for "from Brando's voice, walk, gestures, and clothing to his iconoclastic opinions"(130). Actors reflect that Brando's transformation "fucked them all"(133), as the male image completely changed, demanding the alteration of masculine ideals. This quick shift from elegant, classy men

to rebels with white t-shirts determines that the male body is a tool that constructs itself to stay current with trends and ideas of the masculine and feminine gaze.

Bordo also identifies how, along with the shifts in masculine body ideals, there is a continuous shift in masculine emotional ideals. Films arise where women state that men are tender and kind, creating a thin line between balancing more "feminine" qualities and the new era of male rebellion. This thin line of what is considered masculine creates anxiety around how to balance oneself, and few men can shift their qualities quickly in real life. Moreover, with the rise of the Calvin Klein era, men begin to be the subject of media. This shift from male models in jeans to male models in underwear contrasts with the feelings of the average man. Bordo quotes her uncle explaining the male attitudes towards onlookers: "get out of sight, not to let others' eyes catch you"(173). This quotation highlights that the rise in Calvin Klein media is to contrast with the feelings of the general population. Along with, noting introduction to male subject photography as Klein turns jeans from utilitarian garments to erotic second skins and later men's underwear. The rise of fashion and the industry of male models results in the era of objectifying men.

Bordo connects this rise in the objectification of men to sports – football, to be exact. She asks her audience to think about how the aggression of the player's body as a force of nature, is a result of instruction and encouragement. Comparatively, Bordo begs her readers to think of that same young boy being told not to use his body as a force in regard to date rape. This constant push and pull of expectations beg the question: "Now, which is this young man supposed to be . . . an animal or gentleman?"(234). She reflects on society's acceptance and adoration of aggression in sports and the negative impact that adoration has on women and society's view of men. With topics of sexual assault and the example of the O.J. Simpson case, Bordo states that

society's adoration of aggressive men in aggressive spaces leads to discrepancies on how to be a man outside of the sport. She reflects on society's encouraging football players as "heroes," and thus, the acceptance of the aggressive acts of one man is due to his success on the field. Bordo argues, "And we can let little boys play rough-and-tumble, compete with ferocity, even knock each other to the ground, without acknowledging some 'urge to conquer' implanted in their genes"(264). Bordo's forthright analysis of male bodies and the conflicting expectations aids in understanding the collective consciousness of masculinity and what it means to be a 'real man.'

Furthermore, Wienke introduces the concept of hegemonic masculinity, emphasizing that masculinity is a dynamic rather than a static process in "Negotiating the Male Body: Men, Masculinity, and Cultural Ideas." Although hegemonic masculinity exists, the one aspect of masculinity that remains static is the muscular body. Wienke's work is the attempt to explore the extent to which "body image has significance in men's lives"(Wienke 2). Wienke cites cultural examples and empirical evidence to support the dominant cultural idea of the muscular body type. He furthers the conversation on male bodies by stating that "prior research has neglected to study the meaning of body image from the perspective of men's everyday lives and therefore provides an incomplete assessment of men's views of body image"(Ibid.). Wienke's work suggests that men use complex strategies to find meaning in their bodies, adjust to comply with ideals, and to understand how men normalize their bodies.

Wienke interviews twenty men, based on multiple factors: body build, age, socioeconomic status, and race. The group is comprised of working- and middle-class men, all of whom are Caucasian. Wienke uses a narrative interpretation approach with his interviewees, building upon the previous question and analyzing the experiences within the stories. He focuses

on key phrases and narrative styles to attempt to reveal the means that organize the subjects' experiences.

Wienke finds three coping skills to make sense of male bodies in view of the muscular ideal. The first strategy: The Reliance Strategy, works as a way of rationalizing the benefits; this is the strategy the participants use most. This strategy is for men who meet the body ideal; "they reap from fitting the ideal"(7). These men use this strategy to help naturalize their privilege and reproduce the standards they benefit from. Comparatively, some men use the Reliance Strategy when it feels like a part of their body does not fit hegemonic masculinity ideals. These men seek compensation or overcompensation for their internal feelings of inadequacy, which obscures their insecurities. The second strategy: The Reformulation Strategy: some men recognize their own inability to meet the body ideal, so they modify the masculine ideal to conform to their abilities, reaching an agreement with the hegemonic masculine ideal. This strategy distances itself from hegemonic masculinity. However, since they adopt an alternative route to attain the same standards, they also benefit from hegemonic masculinity's cultural conservation. Wienke's interviews find that the reformulation strategy results from a turning-point experience, drawing on examples of maturing processes, educational opportunities, and health conditions. The final strategy: The Rejection Strategy. This strategy is the expression of opposition to the hegemonic male body ideal. Wienke finds that a handful of men view the societal conception of the body ideal, rather than their own bodies, as problematic. The Rejection Strategy finds that these men learn to deny the importance of body image in their lives, attempting to resist viewing their bodies in light of the muscular ideal. Wienke's interviews find that there is an alternative within this strategy, which is creating one's own bodily standards, rather than conforming to the ideal.

Wienke finds a commonality between the men who utilize The Rejection Strategy: they often fault the media and popular culture.

Wienke's study finds that men do, and can, negotiate the meaning of cultural ideals. This negotiation is done by strategically adjusting their perceptions. Wienke concludes that men who receive compliments on their bodies are more likely to identify and share the body's cultural meaning than their counterparts who do not receive positive feedback. Those who are in the stigmatized group reject the ideal. Furthermore, Wienke finds that the men whose bodies are 'average', modify the ideal to fit their strengths.

The strategies that men implement to cope with the masculine ideal begin in boyhood. Michael Messner's *Boyhood, Organized Sports, and the Construction of Masculinities* explores the meanings that "males themselves attribute to their boyhood participation in organized sports"(116). Messner asks two questions: (1) In what ways do males construct masculine identities within the institution of organized sports? (2) In what ways do class and racial differences mediate this relationship and perhaps lead to the construction of different meanings and perhaps different masculinities? (Messner 3) Messner's work uncovers that male bodies and the success of what the male body can do are highly criticized and tailored to organized sports rather than the self.

Messner interviews thirty former male athletes between 1983 and 1985, most of whom are former football, basketball, baseball, and track athletes. The interviews speak of four broad areas about the interviewee's life: "(1) his earliest experiences with sports in boyhood, (2) his athletic career, (3) retirement or disengagement from athletic career, and (4) life after the athletic career"(Messner 116). Messner's goal is to explore how masculinity develops as boys interact within organized sports. Messner quickly finds that phrases like 'it was a natural instinct' and 'I

was a natural' explain men's earlier attraction to sports. Messner recalls Connell in his analysis of these phrases, saying that using the word 'natural' is the result of Connell's 'collective practice' that constructs masculinity, that sports and exhibition athleticism are the means of being masculine. Furthermore, Messner finds that the development of masculine identity results from interaction with people, social institutions, and even more importantly, from an emphasis on relationships with family and community.

Furthermore, when speaking about relationships with family members, the men, as a group, spontaneously mention only their male family members. Their focus is on older brothers and uncles as role models. The relationship with the father is "key to the emotional salience of sports in the development of masculine identity"(118). Messner finds that an added powerful emotional charge to these early experiences is a result of being introduced to organized sports by fathers who may otherwise be mostly absent. This profound relationship between father and son ingrains itself into ideals of the male body. Interviewees speak of their fathers' presence and build. A commonality between interviewees is that they reflect on their adolescence and speak on as an adolescent, not being able to bring themselves to admit that they may be physically more significant than their fathers due to the notion of "living up" to the power and status of their fathers. The boyish need to bond with the father then connects to the need to impress their peers and, therefore, to reaffirm their own strength and masculinity

Moreover, Messner's interviewees also claim that it becomes "natural" to equate masculinity with competition, physical strength, and skills because adults create sex-segregated activities that provide the context where separate "gendered cultures" develop and appear natural. Messner draws on Gilligan, who suggests that the difference between boys' and girls' sports is "based on the fact that early developmental experiences have yielded and deeply rooted

differences between males' and females' developmental tasks, needs, and moral reasoning"(121). Girls, in competition, feel as though there is a threat to relationships, while boys gain their sense of self through separation. Although personal identities do not seem to develop within young men in sports, there is a need for human intimacy; organized sports can offer a safe place to seek non-intimate relationships and clear boundaries.

Although it can provide unity, sports structure is incredibly hierarchical: the goal is supremacy through competition – to "be number one." Messner mentions a basketball camp, where the young boys, eight years old, line up in front of the older boys in the stands. The coach then places a hand on each boy, and the older boys cheer louder or softer depending on how well the young boy plays. Messner analyzes that working to 'be better' than teammates is the main way to social acceptance. As a result of this primary means to connect, men become disappointed in themselves when reflecting on these moments: "this conscious striving for achievement became the primary means through which they sought connection with other people" (122).

Messner's work finds that organized sports are a "gendering institution" that constructs itself by gender relations. Messner states that this "is accomplished through the 'masculinizing of male bodies and minds" (125). Boys who experience early athletic success find that organized sports create a bond between masculine ideals and intimacy. Messner finds that this intimacy results in boys developing a "conditional self-worth" that leads them to construct instrumental relationships that are goal-oriented and an instrumental rationality that creates difficulties with intimate connection and expression.

Reviewing the literature suggests that representation impacts the cultural perceptions of masculinity, which then affect the consumption of meat and diet, related to the perception of, and

the use for, male bodies. However, even more, the literature provides proof of what may happen to men who are worried about being stigmatized in any category of not "being a real man." In the following chapters, I will focus my work on the Union College Football Team. I will examine the experiences, attitudes, and implications of the patriarchy on these men and use the sports film genre as a tool to understand the importance of adequate representation of men. The key concerns with the forthcoming chapters are to understand how hegemonic masculinity is represented in film, and as a result, how hegemonic masculinity is experienced by the most stereotypically masculine men.

CHAPTER TWO

Meat and Protein: Union College Football Team

"His heart astir he pushed in the door of the Burton restaurant. Stink gripped his trembling breath : pungent meatjuice, slops of greens. See the animals feed.

Men, men, men.

Perched on high stools by the bar, hats shoved back, at the tables calling for more bread no charge, swilling, wolfing gobfuls of sloppy food, their eyes bulging, wiping wetted moustaches. A pallid suetfaced young man polished his tumbler knife fork and spoon with his napkin. New set of microbes. A man with an infant's saucestained napkin tucked round him shovelled gurgling soup down his gullet. A man spitting back on his plate : halfmasticated gristle : no teeth chewchewchew it. Chump chop from the grill. Bolting to bet it over. Sad booser's eyes" (Ulysses 216-217).

—James Joyce, <u>Ulysses</u>

James Joyce's *Ulysses* follows the life of Leopold Bloom as he travels through Dublin and engages in his day-to-day actions. The novel utilizes the stream-of-consciousness narration that includes the audience in Bloom's interior monologue. The quotation above, derived from Episode eight, *Lestrygonians*, of the novel, focuses on the imagery of men eating as though they are animals and the distaste that Bloom holds for the men in the scene. *Lestrygonians* itself is a tribe of man-eating giants; thus, the title foreshadows the imagery of cannibalistic men. Men and meat is the theme of this section of Joyce's novel, which configures representations of brute masculinity through a configurative scene of savage meat-eating.

The scene unfolds in slow motion; as Bloom looks around the room, he examines the interactions between men and meat. The comparison of men and animals derives from the men's performance in the Burton Hotel. The men no longer look like men sitting in a restaurant, but a pack of animals scavenging for prey. He describes the scene as, ". . . swilling, wolfing gobfuls of sloppy food, their eyes bulging, wiping wetted mustaches" (Joyce 215). This imagery of a man hunched over his plate, inhaling his food, and quickly cleaning himself, showcases brute animalism, similar to a lion or other animal. Furthermore, Bloom's disdain for these men in the scene is evident: "A man with an infant's saucestained napkin tucked round him shovelled gurgling soup down his gullet" (Ibid.). The infantilization of them highlights the self-reflection Bloom has as he realizes that men, as they shovel their meat, do not mimic the stereotypes heavily produced in the patriarchy, but are reflections of children (who have no table manners). This infantilization of men acknowledges a grudging disdain that men exhibit in regard to the notion of giving up meat. This comparison of "infant" and "gullet" demonstrates the lack of self-awareness the men have regarding the performance of masculinity they are demonstrating. On

the one hand, a man exhibits infantile qualities, while on the other, he can also exhibit animalistic qualities: shoving food down the esophagus rather than chewing.

Moreover, another animalistic image arises when Bloom is revulsed by "A man spitting back on his plate: halfmasticated gristle"(Ibid.). The image of a man regurgitating the inedible tissue of meat to put on his plate compares to that of a mother bird regurgitating her food to feed her hatchlings. Bloom recognizes the lack of self-respect that these men have and has a distaste for the group mentality, as they all exhibit this behavior as a unit. The scene of team behavior determines how men as a group perceive the performance of masculinity; and that is through. This ongoing representation of men paralleling animals demonstrates the notion that eating meat reinforces masculinity by creating dominance similar to predatory animals'.

Bloom's language and use of speech become more distasteful as he observes the pack of men eating. As the scene progresses, he describes the men with more animalistic adjectives, such as "gullet" and "half masticated." This increase in distasteful terms to describe meat-eating men is linked to Bloom's disgust of masculinity; he shortly leaves the restaurant and goes to a bar and has the vegetarian lunch of a cheese sandwich. Bloom's use of terms like "gripped," "pungent," "slops," "perched," "swilling," "wolfing," "pallid," "shoving," "gullet," and "half masticated" not only places stress on the parallel between men and animals, it also highlights the lack of humanity that these men exhibit. In this chapter of *Ulysses*, the lack of human empathy is linked to constructions of masculinity: masculinity is critiqued through an association with meat. Bloom, the novel's narrator, is configured in the novel as the "womanly man" and represents the novel's ethical and compassionate center.

Perceptions of Protein & Protein Intake

Joyce's representation of brutish meat-eating is not, thankfully, the type of encounter I have with the Union College Football Team. However, there are some parallels, and Joyce's highlighting the connection between a love of meat and physical masculinity is observed in my interviews. Across disciplines, literature showcases that men consume more meat, particularly red meat, and that the consumption of meat is deeply ingrained in patriarchal society and culture. To investigate this further, I examine the perceptions regarding protein itself and the justification for protein intake.

Posing the question: "How do you all get your protein?" is usually a rebuttal to those who identify as plant-based eaters. The delivery is usually one of shock or distaste for the particular diet. I ask this question because I receive this question, particularly from men, when I say I am vegetarian—the body language and facial expressions that the men exhibit are of discontent, amusement, and bewilderment. The man's immediate response is that I must be joking. This response is discussed in the existing literature, like Modlinska et al.'s work: "Gender Differences in Attitudes to Vegans/Vegetarians and Their Food Preferences, and Their Implications for Promoting Sustainable Dietary Patterns–a Systematic Review." The men I interview show a distaste for not eating meat. The quick reaction finds that the men feel that their outside appearance determines the diet they must follow– a diet heavily influenced by a protein intake of meat.

As a result of their discontent with my question, I probe the men for more information. I ask the groups the same question: "Has anyone ever asked you that?" Only one person answers 'yes' to the question. Across the groups, the general population states 'no,' some shake their head 'no,' and some still look stunned by the original question. This shock, along with the

majority of the men stating ‘no,’ showcases how social perceptions impact the notions of the nutritional value of meat-based diets. Once the men’s awkwardness fades, phrases such as: “Mainly meat” dominate the answers for how they receive their protein. Men in each group bring up other forms of protein, such as eggs or yogurt, but the discussion of protein continually circles back to meat. This round-about conversation exposes that men need to feel validated by being seen by others as men, and need to exhibit stereotypical masculine features, specifically within their diet.

These two simple protein questions determine cultural factors and attitudes towards vegetarian diets, in this case, the mere perception of a vegetarian diet. The UC Football Team supports Modlinksa et al.’s analysis that the dominant model in the Western world is meat consumption, and that “meat consumption is linked to wealth, high social status and dominance” (Modlinska et al. 8). The UC team’s indifference towards questioning their protein intake exhibits that those men equate meat as the given diet, particularly male athletes of their stature. Determining that the UC Football Team’s innate reaction to protein intake as meat examines how the patriarchy grips its men.

Understanding the magnitude of the societal perceptions of meat is vital to understanding how they perceive protein. I ask the groups: “Do you think protein is important for your athletic success?” purposefully using the term ‘protein’ to examine how they interpret the term. Although they establish that protein is meat, I ask to mention it further. Phrases such as: “Yes.” “No doubt.” and “Definitely” immediately echo around the rooms, along with head nods. The indication that protein is vital furthers the argument of meat equating to dominance. Overall, the groups decide that protein is essential to the sport. An explanation for this is from focus group two, where Person two states: (Without hesitation)Definitely. Because I feel like that's really

what our muscles feed off, that is what our muscles really feed off of while we are playing. And I feel like it's important to get a lot of protein in our bodies. Just because we lose so much throughout the day, throughout the week".

Knowing how their bodies utilize protein and other macronutrients leads to the theme of awareness of one's body. The phrase: "Just because we lose so much throughout the day, throughout the week" indicates that this knowledge of one's body and how it works translates into the ways that the men feel towards food -- in this matter, protein is a source that compensates for the loss of weight. Protein is a means to keep their weight up for their position. Along with this notion, there is a repetition of the phrase "feed off": the body is a biological machine, which is not unlike Joyce's representation of the mechanical aspects of eating above.

Overall, the groups agree that protein is vital to their diet, but focus group one has unique reasoning compared to the others.

Person three explains: "Yes. There are studies that show, you know people who are protein deficient, their muscles weaken, and you know they're more likely to have diseases- (Person one interrupts to say: 'like vegans') and then like, you know, they're more likely to just be disabled when they're older."

Unlike the other groups, focus group one raises the term 'vegan,' along with the negative connotations of lacking protein in one's diet. The language of this explanation is stern as if a lesson is being taught, but there is also disgust – "and then like, you know, they're more likely to just be disabled when they're older." Deeply analyzing these emotions, this explanation stems from a place of fear: a fear of being less than, a fear of being stigmatized by his desired group, and a fear of finding justification for themselves. His claims are also deeply discriminatory. This "frontstage" behavior, explaining this to a female interviewing the Football Team, justifies the

need to play the role to fit into the mold that is made for them. The performance, especially the "mansplaining" is designed around building himself into a dominant position that exudes confidence and knowledge: the "big man", one that is better than anyone else.

The contrast between immediate responses for why protein is crucial shows a stark difference between how men on the same team, on the same schedule, on the same routine, and in the same position can process and understand a topic differently. While focus groups two and three examine how protein is a positive for their lives, focus group one justifies the importance of protein with negativity – a warning against a potential enfeeblement and disability. Despite the difference in storytelling, there is a repetition of the interest in the term 'muscle' among the groups; this image of a 'built' man is an image that the men believe to be the imagery of a 'real man,' as they repeat this term over and over again. Overall, this conversation analyzes how frontage behavior differs and how the Western world's dominant meat diet impacts the men who live within the society.

Perceptions of Consuming Meat:

In regard to the consumption of meat in the Western World, Carol Adams' states: "the association to the male role, its meaning recurs within a fixed gender system; the coherence it achieves as a meaningful item of food arises from patriarchal attitudes including the idea that the end justifies the means. . ." (Adams xxxv). The men of the UC Football Team equating protein to meat confirms that meat is the dominant diet of the Western world that impacts men to a much higher degree than women.

This need for meat determines that the UC Football Team is just as susceptible to patriarchy than any other group of men. Acknowledging this redundant theme of confirming

masculine tropes with the preference of meat, I ask the question, “Does there need to be meat on your plate to feel successful?”. In each room, a conversation erupts among the men. Phrases such as “Yes” and “Of course,” along with head nods and inside jokes, fill the atmosphere. As the men smile at one another, they all are in sync, the question seems obvious, and they all have a reason or story to share. The lack of hesitation and immediate replies determine that the men do not question the food they put onto their plates and into their bodies. The language of the phrase “of course” is vital to understand that these men do not question how they conform to the patriarchal stereotypes placed upon them. This blind following of the patriarchal standards showcases how deeply rooted cultural stereotypes engrain themselves, and their responses confirm this. An example of this blind following is an explanation from person one in group two. He shares, “Yeah. If somebody says we’re having dinner, like before I came to school, I’m like: ‘so what type of meat are we having?’ It doesn’t feel like a complete meal without meat for me.” The expectation of meat on their plate determines that meat plays a role in the stereotypes of the football “man”, as meat is used as a tool to demonstrate dominance along with the sport. “It doesn’t feel like a complete meal without meat for me” acknowledges the stereotypical relationship between men and meat, that they are complementary of one another.

Even after their athletic careers end, this ingrained preference to eat meat follows these men. To understand the magnitude of the relationship between meat and men, I pose the following question: “When you are done being athletes, would you consider eating less red meat?” The consensus is that the men believe that lessening their red meat intake is possible, but their silence says they would not commit to doing so. An example of a reaction to this hypothetical possibility of quitting red meat is from focus group three:

Person three: “I don't think I would have an issue cutting it out of my diet. I felt like most of my consumption of red meat was a lot of ground beef, which I don't like. I’ll have a steak if I go out to a nice place, but I don't think it would be hard for me to cut it out.”

Person four: “I’m in the same place. I’m honestly more like a fish guy. If red meat is on sale, that might be the determining factor but eh.”

Person two: “I would take salmon over a steak.”

Person one: “Yeah.”

(Awkward silence followed by giggles)

Person one: “I wouldn’t take salmon over meat. Yeah, I wouldn't take it over it. Like I'm a big hamburger guy. But if you take steak out of my life, like more than like, once every two weeks, I'm not really a happy dude.”

Person four: “I agree.”

In one breath, the men claim that they could easily change their diet, but then contradict their claims with an explanation of their love of meat. Furthermore, the acknowledgment of “I’m not really a happy dude” regarding the frequency of eating meat exhibits the strong connection between meat and ideas of successful masculinity. This roundabout conversation determines that although the men could eat less meat, they cannot fully acknowledge this to themselves, as meat plays a large role in a sense of their masculinity. Rather than state that they prefer to keep their diet the way it currently is, groups two and three remain silent. This silence indicates that the prospect of eating less meat is a topic that does not resonate with them and is something that they do not care to give much thought to. Rather than make the idea of eating less red meat a reality, the men speak of the prospect in hypotheticals.

Compared to the apparent avoidance of discussing the prospect of lessening their meat intake, focus group one makes their feelings on the topic clear. One by one, the men say 'no' to my question. Person three, however, begins the discussion by stating, "Not even a question. I'll probably increase my red meat intake." Person three states this matter-of-factly, his chin held high, as he makes eye contact with me. This interaction feels tense, as though he is directing his answer towards me, along with feeling as though his views are being challenged.. Person three's phrase "not even a question" feels invalidating, first to the prospect that reducing red meat may be an intelligent decision, but also invalidating because he deems consuming less meat as "less than." The quick reflex to shut down the idea determines the character he has conjured up; he decides to check off the stereotypical boxes of a "meathead," but more importantly, of a man. The lack of time to offer a hypothetical, like the other groups, or to pause to consider the prospect, determines that reducing meat intake ruins person three's perception of what it means to be a man.

Furthermore, the apparent need to invalidate the question, along with the person asking, confirms that he feels his masculinity is threatened. Pushing on this reaction, Person three explains that the reason he can never imagine lessening his intake is that "I'm gonna get shredded."Person three's reasoning is to conform to societal standards placed on men due to social pressure– admitting that social pressures play a major role in why he does not consider eating less meat.. The need to express how he is willing to comply with standards and the confidence he has in his masculinity confirm how the Western World's perception of men engrains itself so deeply that a person wholeheartedly believes that meat is the key to looking like a man, but more importantly, to being a man.

The UC football men confirm that there is a fixed gender system founded upon the patriarchal attitudes of food and that meat consumption is the proof and badge of masculinity. The men consistently believe that they can lessen their meat intake, but rather than admit that they will do so, they circle back to why they love meat. This omission of a concrete answer examines how men justify their actions and the justification for how they conform to even the potentially harmful masculine tropes. Although many of the men take the time to consider the idea, Person three of group one ignites a passion between himself and his group to stand against the thought. Ultimately, the groups showcase that the men believe that men who do not consume meat or even reduce their meat intake, are less strong and less masculine than those who do..

The quotation: “Upon what meat does this our Caesar feed/ That he is grown so great?” -- Julius Caesar (1599) Act 2, scene 2, line 146 perfectly conjures up the exuberant love that the UC men have for the product of meat. “That he is grown so great” acknowledges that the construction of robust, leading men results from the meat they are eating. Like the imagery in *Ulysses*, there is the portrayal of infant hostility with their attitudes towards meat consumption; they are very unwilling to give up what is comfortable to them. The conviction that meat forms strong men is a notion that resides in the UC men, as they are incapable of imagining manhood without it. The findings that arise from the discussions regarding meat and masculinity set up the framework for analyzing men’s attitudes towards body image and their sport.

CHAPTER THREE

Body Image and Sports: Union College Football Team

"It's not all bad. Heightened self-consciousness, apartness, an inability to join in, physical shame and self-loathing—they are not all bad. Those devils have been my angels. Without them I would never have disappeared into language, literature, the mind, laughter and all the mad intensities that made and unmade me."(Fry 73)

—Stephen Fry, Moab Is My Washpot

Moab Is My Washpot is an autobiography of Stephen Fry's first twenty years of life. Fry's title is from verses Psalm 60 and Psalm 108 that reference the necessity, for those who wear sandals, of washing their feet before entering a home. Fry sees this idea as a metaphor for the cleansing of his early years. He honestly reflects on his life, which inspires his other works. However, in *Moab Is My Washpot*, rather than use his life to inspire another story, Fry candidly shares his tumultuous early years. He shares his experiences at boarding school, where, at the mere age of seven, he first attempts suicide, then gets a criminal conviction, and experiences the feeling of being a stranger in this world.

Despite the tumultuous first decades of life, Fry reflects otherwise positively on his experiences prior attending his first year of university. First, however, Fry describes the pain that he feels during his adolescence, in regard to the outside world and himself, and then his perspective shifts to gratefulness. His early suffering, as he repeats twice, is "not all bad." The first is a warning that the descriptions he presents are agonizing; the second is a sign of reassurance that these moments eventually lead to peace, despite the hurt.

Furthermore, this notion of pain turning into peace examines the ways that one's perception of life changes with age. Fry states: "Those devils have been my angels"(73). He acknowledges that the heightened awareness of oneself, the agony of body shame, and the fear of not belonging, finally result in self-acceptance and inner peace. Moreover, he states: "Without them, I would never have disappeared into language, literature, the mind, laughter and all the mad intensities that made and unmade me." The use of "disappear," the indication of ceasing to be visible, examines how Fry, along with others, cope with the struggles of adolescence. As a result of his struggles, Fry eventually finds himself and his true strengths: he becomes an actor, a writer, a director, and a presenter. As his "devils" ignite a passion, a need, to disappear into

something that can vanquish those same devils: that can be salvation. As a stigmatized person, Fry has to reject the heteronormative "jock" ideals of masculinity and find his own way of self-actualization.

This need to submit to something other than the devils that plague men are a theme that follows the Union College Football Team, the men who offer their bodies and minds to a game of war and submit their devils to gain angels. The sport of football, to these men, is the “mad intensities that made and unmade me.” Without the sport, the devils, of insecurity and loneliness, will consume them; this activity allows these men to share their deepest thoughts and subdue their tumultuous feelings of selfhood through control: they submit to a rigorous training routine, with a strict mealtime schedule and an exacting diet.

Despite demographic differences between Stephen Fry and the Union College Football Team and the unconventional pairing of the two, the men of the UC Football Team also struggle with heightened self-consciousness, shame, self-loathing, and an inability to join in with the community outside of their team. This recognition highlights that, despite differences, men of all backgrounds are experiencing tremendous pain and tension regarding self-perception and that this is a factor that connects all men.

Studying the experiences of men, specifically the Union College Football Team, calls for an examination of diet and sports, as the literature supports that there is a struggle with body image and shame among the men who submit themselves to other things, as Stephen Fry does. Analyzing the topics of mealtime, diet, and body image helps to understand how sports impact men. I ask thirteen men in three different focus groups the same questions and find similar answers regarding these topics among different races, ages, and sports positions. Ultimately, the men cultivate their team culture through mealtime, when they feel most free to communicate.

Moreover, I find that diet is always on the mind of each man and that the sport impacts self-presentation and self-perception.

Team Culture and Meals

Examining the relationship between team culture and meals, specifically dinner, determines that the activity of eating offers more than sustenance: it offers comfortable communication between men. Focusing on the activity of eating meals offers insight into the male perspective on the importance of collective bonding and the way athletes do so. I find that the team culture is built upon a daily routine that the men follow and execute as a united entity—and dinner is explicitly the dedicated time of day when most of the ninety-nine-person team can unite to enjoy one another's company. Body language, silence, and rhetoric are key to this collective bonding and communication.

Focus group one is the only group that expresses disinterest to the question, "Why do you eat your meals together?" Their body language indicates that they feel as though the answer is obvious, as they do everything together: they roll their eyes, give side glances to one another, and sigh. Furthermore, their eyes drifting away from mine imply that they choose not to discuss their feelings and thoughts on the subject; they do not want to explain that they enjoy each other's company in a ritualized format. This decision to not speak demonstrates that the men in this group want to keep their image of masculine men intact rather than open up to me about the deeper meaning of eating meals with one another and that this desire to keep their image intact prohibits self-awareness that something deeper is going on.

By contrast, focus group two finds that the team is together because of friendship and comfort. Rather than show disinterest, focus group two elaborates on the idea of why they eat

together. Person three in focus group two states: “And so, we like to stick together when we do anything. It’s always the football team together.” Like focus group one, focus group two finds that the football team is always “together”; therefore, eating meals together makes perfect sense. Moreover, person three states, “eating together builds a sense of camaraderie,” which implies that the scheduling of mealtime unites men — the act bonds them and leads to candid conversations. Overall, the repetition of the word “together” demonstrates that the group of freshmen view the football team as a unit rather than a cohort of individuals, and they also view themselves as teammates over the idea of individuals on a team. This example shows that the football team creates a collective identity early into their college years and that meals are part of this bonding.

The recurring theme of routine also extends into the third focus group, as they too believe that they eat together because they already do everything else as a group. Person four of focus group three states: “Yeah, pretty much. We take trips together, eat together, do everything together.” Like focus group two, focus group three happily speaks about the “why” of eating together rather than avoiding the topics as the first focus group does. Overall, the groups find that eating meals together results from routine and convenience. The repetitive yet straightforward responses from the focus groups show that dinner is ritualistic and a routine; it is a tradition that is continued each year and is an implicit rule; the men do not question their regular meals together.

As a result of discovering that these men do everything together, I dive deeper into the importance of solidifying their team culture with meals. I find that the men thoroughly enjoy doing everything together, so I press on this notion. Focus group two is the first group to share the relationship between the team and mealtime.

Person three: “Eating together builds a sense of camaraderie. And so, we like really stick together, when we do anything. It's always the football team together.”

Person four: “It’s like brothers.”

Person two: “It’s like a family.”

Person one: “Right when we got here it felt like a family. Everybody welcomed you, even the older people.”

Person three: “There was no sense of hazing, nothing like that. It was like open arms. We came into a family. They accepted us. And now we're a big family.”

The use of the terms “brothers” and “family” highlights that this group feels as comfortable with the other men on the team as they do in their home, especially during meals. The repetition of the phrase “it is as if” recognizes the ways the team operates as a metaphor for family. The team is fictive kin -- a family away from home. Similarly, in focus group three, I find that the ideas of “family” center around dinner specifically. I mention that the football team usually combines tables at dinner to sit most, if not all, of the football team together and am told that dinner is the football team’s “one moment of peace.” The conversation is as follows:

Person four: “We're stuck with each other for like six -- practically six weeks by ourselves. Another thing too is that like the position somebody is in, they usually don't get to see their other teammates, so it allows seeing others. Like I don't get to see __ as much, I see __ all the time.

Person two: “Yeah. I see _ and _ (pointing to person 1 and 3) so dinner allows me to see _ (pointing to Person four).

Person one: “Yeah. It is very segregated by position. So, when they watch a film (pointing at other people in the room) they watch the defense. But, in watching the defense, __ might go with the wide receivers, he might go with linemen, and these two are linemen. For defense, it's

separated by position. The O line or the D line will watch film on their O line. We will watch film as linebackers, their wide receivers O line quarterback, and then the secondary will watch film by themselves each. It's all segregated, so the defense will watch the wide receivers, and they will gameplan the secondary. So, each individual piece has to go watch their own film so that when you get onto the field, then you can work together so we don't have time to talk to them. We don't have time."

Michaela: "So meals are the one time where the whole team is together?"

(All start talking)

Person two: "It's the one time where we all sit down together and talk to one another. It's our one moment of peace."

Person two's statement, "it's our one moment of peace," is said with emphasis, and an ounce of exhaustion. These emotions showcase that these men rarely find moments of peace in their life, and when they do find peace, it is over a meal with their teammates. This is important because the men feel free to execute their 'backstage' behaviors when they are together as a team.

Verily Magazine, a source of media that primarily women consume, discusses the "why" regarding of the male obsession with sports. "Gentlemen Speak: Don't Get Why He's So Excited About Sports? Let A Guy Explain" interviews Gabriel Huss to unearth the positive implications of sports for men. The Union College Football Team feels eating meals is a bonding experience, and Huss confirms this idea:

> Sports is essentially a communal thing. You watch games on TV *together*, you go to games *together*, you play pick-up games *together*, you do fantasy leagues *together*. People who normally wouldn't have anything else in common can often bond over sports. And believe it or not, having a game to watch can help dudes converse, rather than get in the way of it.

The use of italics for the word "together" – echoing the conversations of the UC Football Team – showcases not only that Huss stresses the word as he speaks, but that those sports and sports

games are about community. Huss describes that sports offer a solution to lack of communication and unite those who otherwise may seem to have nothing else in common. The emphasis on "together" foregrounds both the watching and the conversation. He says:

> The point here is that many women are perfectly happy to sit around a table and talk. Dudes…not so much. Sure, we can do it, but it gets awkward. Psychologists point out that conversation is easier for men when we don't have to look at each other. Having the white noise of a ball game on in the background, even if nobody's paying much attention to it, really can make guys feel more comfortable in conversation. Not to mention that games usually provide conversations starters for just about anyone. (Huss)

The psychological findings that men communicate easier without eye contact support the comfort that the Union College Football Team feels when consuming dinner together. They are among men who all have one thing in common, football, which will unite them in conversation and provide conversation starters. But also, the act of eating food relieves the stress of looking one another in the eye. The answer "Sure, we can do it, but it gets awkward" suggests that in order to have authentic conversations, men feel most at peace when there is an activity and topic that is in place, much like sports and food.

The team culture and meals for the Union College Football Team are inextricably linked. Eating dinner together offers a time of day when their minds are at peace, and they are allowed to open up about their days, but, most importantly, about their feelings, even if they do not acknowledge it. The men reflect that the team is open and welcome, that mealtime allows them to congregate as a large unit and be one entity, offering a chance to comfortably bond. This finding is important because it showcases that the men are primarily comfortable sharing when it pertains to sports. Although these men are not only football players, the notion that sports will be the uniting factor among their teammates and other peers illustrates that men's sharing opportunities are otherwise limited.

Acknowledging that the men feel most free to discuss with one another in the context of sports or food highlights how men are neglected in the normalization of open conversation. The Union College Football Team, at dinner, all seated together, talks about "Everything, anything." They further elaborate on this statement by explaining that they talk about football. "Like whatever happened at practice that day if somebody said something. If Coach just flips out for no reason. Like we all talk about it after practice." As Huss notes, sports is a form of communication that alleviates the stress of having to look another man in the eye and conjure up a topic. Therefore, sports provide both the context and the opportunity for men to share their lives, meals, and conversation. Mealtimes are a time for bonding, relaxing, and community.

Impact of Sports on Diet

While analyzing the team culture and their relationship with mealtimes, I explore the football players' relationship with food: primarily how athletics impact their diets. I find that athletics affects food through body image, but also there is an impact on day-to-day diets. This awareness is the consciousness of themselves and the recognition of how diets impact every position on the team.

I pose the same question to each focus group: "How does being an athlete affect the food that you eat?" Despite different avenues that each focus group takes to discuss this question, quotes like "It also varies on position," "But, in football season, I eat like crap," "It's position-wise," and "I eat anything that I can get my hands on" are consistent among the thirteen men. They state that food depends on the position in the sport, and in turn, sports dictate how one person eats compared to another. Across the focus groups, the men share stories of putting on weight, their struggles with food, and the importance of size.

The discussion of how athletics impact the food athletes consume determines that the men are very aware of what they are putting into their bodies. A common explanation for how football players consume food is that defensive players need to be bigger for their position, and thus they have to keep weight on to be larger and more robust. As a result of this, defensive players can eat, more or less, whatever they want, because of the need to gain weight. By contrast, the offensive linemen and people in skills positions need to be more careful with their intake. Across all three focus groups, the men know what they need to have in their diet to reach their physique goals. They can also clearly describe the why and the how for their diets. The overwhelming awareness of how food impacts their bodies is daunting, but for them this high level of awareness is normal. Close attention to food is a direct result of the sport they are playing; without eating, they cannot play— they are thinking about food more often than an average person does, and diet is their lifeline for their football career.

Impact of Sports on the Body

Football weaponizes the body, creating the notion that the body is a machine. Bodyweight and food intake vary depending on the position, but what is consistent among players is the awareness of the body and the impact the sport has on body image. The following is a sampling of what players say in this topic: “You just have to throw like the way you look out the window in the season,” “After the season you usually see a lot of guys drop weight immediately,” “I barely gain weight. So I just try to eat more to gain weight”, “So I mean, like, ideally, you want to have, like, you know, like, you get low body fat and like you have abs at the beach and whatnot.” “Yeah, but it’s different. Like you go to the gym: you feel like the man.

Like pushing weight, you know what I mean? Like the 'masculine man.''' The constant awareness of one's body is striking.

The ways the men discuss weight with me, and with one another, are in the framework of football. They feel more masculine, and more confident about themselves in the context of the sport, whether it is in the gym or during the season. On the other hand, during the off-season and post-graduation, the men feel insecure and quickly lose weight -- it is at this point that the men feel most out of tune with their looks. This is important because their language highlights the ways they have to balance not only societal and football ideals, but how debilitating it is to be conscious of how one's body can easily become stigmatized depending on the social group or setting.

This awareness of one's body creates turmoil in the minds of players. I find mixed results with how the football players express this inner conflict, but the answer is the same: there is a struggle with self-perception and the presentation of the self. Like Stephen Fry's reflection in the epigraph, the UC team unearths the feelings of heightened self-consciousness. When I address the topic of body image with focus group one, silence fills the room. This silence mimics the silence that fills the room when the group hears the question about eating as a team. I am met with an overwhelming feeling that the answer is obvious -- that body image is strongly impacted by their sport. The group reflects on body weight, but when trying to address the impact of the sport on their body image, they become quiet. In focus group one, the only person to address inner conflict is Person one: "You're always gonna have those thoughts in the back of your mind. But to me, football's like one of those things where, like, you have to sacrifice a lot." As person one says "sacrifice," the others move their gaze to the floor, and there is silence. Despite the notion that usually sacrifice for the collective is a truly manly pursuit, the men's awkward

reaction to the phrase indicates that there is a notion of "too much" sacrifice. The stillness of the men confirms that the message is valid to all of them – they do not object, but they do not verbally agree. Instead, the awkwardness is palpable because they do not want to acknowledge the idea of sacrificing one's self-perception, seeming weak rather than confident in themselves. Person one furthers this by excusing the potential conflict and sacrifice of negative inner thoughts in regards to body image:

"So I mean, like, ideally, like you want to have, like, you know, like, you get low body fat and like you have abs at the beach and whatnot. But like, I and _ are linebackers. We are the bigger guys like, so. I mean, a lot of guys just have to keep packing on weight, like keep getting bigger and bigger."

The rest of the group does not do anything: they do not nod, speak, and all make a point not to look me in the eye. The lack of eye contact is telling; before this moment, the men make a point to look at me, even when nodding in approval or disagreement; they want me to see them, but at this moment, their body language says the opposite. Here, the term "stigma" comes to mind. The men's effort to look away determines that they do not want contempt for their feelings, whatever they may be. The men try to control the narrative on their "front stage" performance as they hope that their image as masculine, strong men will stay intact when discussing the potential mental turmoil of balancing conflicting ideals.

Similarly, in the third focus group, the concept of balancing football body ideals and societal ideals arises. However, instead of overwhelming silence, focus group three is more inclined to share their moral dilemmas. For example, Person four, a senior, says:

> And also, like it gets conflicting. How you were like 'does it get tough on you to put on or lose?' Because like, at certain times, like how __ said, like every like six or so weeks they'll give you an idea of what you want to do. So for us, it'd be like before and then after spring ball, that's spring term. And then they tell you to

> either gain or lose weight, and then what does that kind of conflict with? And when you look at the bigger picture, like society. You're gaining weight for spring term, what comes after spring term, summer. Like you might be on the beach and like you got your football body on– not looking the best. You have to like kind of like deal with that. Like, for me this summer, I felt disgusting everywhere. Because I was like trying to do what __ said: gain ten to keep that four or five, six. I had that extra 10 instead of the six. And actually, I felt like that made a difference because, during the summer, I don't know, I just felt gross. (Person 2: You do feel a little gross.) (Person 1:Yeah.) When you're not in the football room, you feel a little gross.

Drawing on Goffman's work *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life,* this story, along with the echoing silence among the groups, determines that the football players are having difficulty balancing their 'social stages.' Here, Person four acknowledges an ongoing battle between his "front stage" and his "backstage" behavior. Person four acknowledges that his front stage performance is to be larger, to pack on weight when needed for the viability of his position and that his backstage performance is that: "I felt disgusting everywhere". However, when looking at this man, who radiates confidence, one will never guess that he is second-guessing himself and his role outside of his sport during backstage performances. Therefore, based on both moments, Goffman's analogy of theater to express the self accurately reflects these men's dilemma.

Football plays a powerful role in the presentation of the self, and more importantly, in the perception of the self. The men are repeatedly subjected to bodily objectification, and as a result, they learn to objectify themselves. As the stories show, the men learn to notice almost everything about their bodies, judging themselves continuously – even on summer break. An example of this continuous self-conscious loop is that all the men in focus group two report that they often think about their bodies. The men quickly respond to the question,"Do you think about your bodies a lot?":

Person four: (Immediately says) "Yeah. I'd say a lot."

Person 3: "Yes."

(All nod in agreement).

The lack of hesitation to acknowledge the abundance of thinking of one's body reflects the stigma and stage behaviors the men experience. There is a constant fear of being stigmatized, whether that is within sports or society more generally. As a result, there is a constant battle of balancing each stage of behavior.

The objectification of football players results in the mental battle of body image. Despite the differences in willingness to speak about it, all focus groups showcase that body image is not an afterthought in their lives, but rather preoccupies each person's thoughts daily. Furthermore, acknowledging "sacrifice" for the sport supports the claim that these men view one another as brothers and are willing to sacrifice a part of themselves for their teammates. Interestingly, there are positive and negative reactions to body image and diet. There is a positive sense of community and eating, and there are negative aspects of diet and body image. The verbal language and body language indicate the ways the men feel like they are able to discuss these topics, and that is in the framework of the sport rather than their own feelings or opinions.

The framework of only speaking about such issues regarding sports, again, acknowledges the ideas of front stage versus backstage behaviors. Rather than speak about their feelings or opinions towards the issue of body image, they use the context of sport to discuss with one another– continuously falling back on football as the reason for their mental turmoil. This performance, of staging these feelings of anguish on the football platform, highlights a front-stage behavior that determines that the men feel it is most acceptable to discuss mental anguish and body image by using the football context. Because of the stereotype of confident, strong men, discussing their feelings towards their bodies goes against their conditioning. Thus, this fine line of balancing their front stage behaviors and backstage behaviors is prevalent as they can

only discuss the things that plague them in private when it fits the model of front stage actions. This notion of leaning into their sport rather than addressing their feelings connects to Stephen Fry's recollection of shame and self-consciousness being used as a tool to lean into the pain, which ends up being his savior. In the context of the UC Football Team, the men lean into the physical pain of sports that saves them from battling their demons alone.

CHAPTER FOUR

Sports Film Genre and "The Game Plan" Media Analysis

Investigating the concept of masculinity and the lived experiences of the men on the UC Football Team, I examine how representation implements itself in a generation heavily influenced by media and portrayal and aim to understand the relationship between representation and the football player self. The UC football players heavily consume sports-related media, primarily sports films. Thus, analyzing the genre of Sports Films, the UC Football Team's commentary, and a media analysis of the film 'The Game Plan' showcases how media mimics how the UC Football Team views life and vice versa.

Media Analysis: Sports Film as a genre

To understand how masculinity engrains itself in men, I focus on the historically most "masculine" athletes: football players. When meeting with the Union College players, I ask each group what films were vital to their childhood -- what did they love to watch? Overwhelmingly the answer was a list of sports films, primarily centered around football. The most influential is the 2008 film "The Game Plan," with Dwayne "The Rock" Johnson. The men are ecstatic to remember that film and are eager to include it on their most essential movies list. I am in awe at how vital they find this film to be; of course, I, too, grew up watching this film, but the eagerness from the players to talk about it was something that takes me aback. I begin to wonder why sports films? I asked each group if they watched other forms of media, but they shrugged the question off and went back to discussing the sports films. So what is it about sports films that are vital to their identity? This question is what I aim to answer.

Sports films as a genre are "those that have a sports setting (football or baseball stadium, arena, or the Olympics, etc.), competitive event (the 'big game,' 'fight,' or 'competition'), and/or athlete (boxer, racer, surfer, etc.) that are central and predominant in the story" (filmsite.org). This genre of film, focusing on the main character, an athlete who faces a critical event that affects his/her career, continues to increase in popularity. Sports films become vital to contemporary cinema due to their relatability and dramatic subjects. To understand the allure of sports films, Seán Crosson examines Bruce Babington's book *The Sports Film, Games People Play,* in his own work, *The Sports Film.* Crosson references Babington, finding that sports films have a basic plot: the overcoming of the odds by an individual or a team. Also, examining that sports films present validation that anybody can choose to be what they want in America -- thus, athletes in the films showcase moral authority. So what makes these films compelling? AP News' article: “Why We Watch: Sports Movies' Emotional Connections Resonate” analyzes why sports films "no matter how old, are ripe for watching and re-watching”(Fendrich). In this article, The Associated Press presents its Top 25 sports movies, which represent the films that seventy writers and editors worldwide voted on that they love and help explain their love of sports. Fendrich references Angelo Pizzo, who wrote the screenplay for the film “Hoosiers,” when explaining why audiences watch sports movies:

> When sports films work, they work because the audience connects emotionally to the protagonist,” Pizzo said. “When people talk to me about ‘Rudy,’ if that movie works for them, it’s because they see themselves in Rudy. They see themselves as someone who is not appreciated, is not seen, is not valued. And by sheer force of will and belief and faith, they manage to break through. It’s not just about achieving the dream -- it’s about going on the journey to achieve the dream.

Thus, sports films can be entertaining or educational, but just like sports, sports films help audiences build communities, speak to how people empathize with those who lose, and fill

audiences with emotion. The themes that movies and sports share are the heroine/hero, the underdog, good versus evil -- it is because of this overlapping of realms that people watch. Pizzo says:

> The world that sports creates has a couple of appealing things going for it. Unlike life, there are definable rules. There's a way of scoring. There's a way of declaring winners and losers. And it's an escape from the rigors of our own day-to-day lives. While sports are gone now, people who are sports fans -- or even partial sports fans -- are noticing how much of a role sports play in their lives.

Thus, the genre of sports films provides escapism and reliability. There is a love for the journey, that anything is possible, that these films illustrate.

Union College Football Team Analysis: Sports Film as a Genre

In focus groups with the Union College Football Team, the question of favorite movies is hotly debated. Overall, three groups (a total of thirteen, mixed-race, mixed-age, and mixed socioeconomic status) agree that sports films are their favorite genre to watch -- especially in their childhood. When answering about the relevance of sports films in their lives, Person one in focus group one states: "I feel like it's just a team. Like, just like, overcoming I guess like, I think a lot of the same thing". Person two and Person four both say, "Yeah" while everyone also nods their head in agreement. Referencing the popularity of sports films and the reason behind why this group feels as though sports films are vital to their identity, Person four states: "I think like many kids like they like there is almost like a mentor, but like they're like role models and like sports figures. Especially nowadays because they're (sports films) so prevalent in like, media and stuff. Yeah, so I'd say that is kind of definitely like a gravitational pull towards that". Focus group one, a group of White sophomores, focuses on the plot of the films, all in agreement that the plot is most important. Focus group two (freshmen, Black football players) also respond

that sports films are vital to their identity. However, rather than overcoming obstacles, focus group two addresses the characters within sports films. Person three speaks about the imagery of football coaches helping players find the sport and find the right path. When speaking about the importance of sports films, person three references the film "Gridiron Gang." Person three says: "The movie is about how he transformed people, kids our age that was not necessarily focused on the wrong thing, like games and things like that. And he got them on a football team out of trouble. And he became in love with the sport, and I just thought that that was kind of relatable based on where I'm from. I guess a lot of I'm around a lot of gangs and things like that back home. And so sports can really save lives, and see it through that movie; as a kid, I really liked it." The three other players nod and murmur in agreement with Person three's analysis of the importance of sports films in their lives. Unlike the first focus group, who comes from families where being an athlete is prevalent, the second focus group is from families where sports are not prevalent, most of the group being the first ever to play a sport in their family. The second focus group enjoys sports films because of the emphasis on the coaches' attributes that build positive relationships and identities between players and themselves. Focus group two, unlike focus group one, does not discuss the theme of overcoming obstacles but discusses the transformation of the self when introduced to the sport of football. Similar to group two, the final group (three seniors, one junior, one freshman, one LatinX man, one Black man, and three White men) centers their discussion on the emotional side of sports films. Rather than discussing the plot, focus group three examines how films use imagery to create football characters and, in turn, how these films make them feel. Person one, a senior, says: "It's so funny though. Everybody's like these football guys are just these big hardos, but the reason that these movies do so well is that they interact with the feel-good side of football". The group nods, acknowledging this analysis. I

ask, “What is the feel-good side of a football player?” Person one quickly replies, “Just like brotherly, family and then, ya I’d say family.” All begin to murmur in agreement. Finally, Person four says: “It’s like a brotherhood.” To this, Person three quickly says:

“It’s like one of those things where you put so much effort into it on and off the field. So it’s like, you get reward whether it be like It’s almost like you put so much into it. Right? So it’s like, you get reward whether it be like, like physically winning or whether it’s like the relationships that like what drives you and like movies like that, like, do a good job of that because like, it sways you emotionally. Like it’s like you know the player, and then like some of you lose, you feel bad for me. It’s something good happens like, you feel good. It’s like, Dwayne and his daughter like you feel for them” (referencing “The Game Plan”). The whole group nods in agreement.

Compared to focus group two, focus group three is the most similar in their beliefs on why sports films are vital. Both groups feel an emotional attachment to these films, primarily focus group three, who express great interest in talking about the emotions the films evoke. The striking differences between the first group and the latter showcase how films resonate in others differently. Despite differences as to why each man begins football, the men agree that sports allow them to escape from reality and offer them an outlet. Ultimately, sports films appeal to boys and men because the themes are relatable: overcoming hardships, rising up from humble beginnings, personal triumph, and forging a bond with other team members. These themes are similar to those that the UC Football Team share when referring to reasons why they enjoy eating meals together and why they feel attached to one another.

Union College Football Team - “The Game Plan” Analysis

When probing the groups about sports films they loved, “The Game Plan” is a film that each group finds vital to their childhood, but more importantly, they all are excited to remember and talk about the film as a group. To quickly summarize the film: “There’s nothing surprising about “The Game Plan,” in which a quarterback named Joe Kingman, played by Dwayne (The Rock) Johnson, learns to love the young daughter, Peyton (Madison Pettis), he never knew he had” (Seitz). I closely examine focus group three, as they were the most chatty. Both focus groups one and two perk up when “The Game Plan” is mentioned, and they all excitedly say “yes” in agreement or “I remember that one” in a positive tone, like how could they have forgotten about such a great film. When I ask ‘why’, the less chatty groups explain why sports films are great in general, which I analyzed previously. Asking focus group three questions about what films are vital to their childhood and some of their favorite films, I find comfort in how excited they are to talk to me about the film. Person three responds to my question with: “What was that one? ‘The Game Plan’! (All murmur and nod in agreement). We all watched ‘The Game Plan’ last week and were just like ‘Dwayne is so good’”. As person three recalls the film’s name, his eyes widen, he stands from his chair, and he puts his hands out to motion for the rest of the men. It is a “c’mon” motion, “like of course, it’s this film.” They all start to talk over each other, and I have to ask them to slow down. Person four declares: “But I would say definitely, ‘The Game Plan.’” In response, the freshman, the more shy voice in the group, says: “‘The Game Plan’ is top three.” I look around, and all five are nodding their heads with smiles on their faces, clearly reminiscing about the film. The men all seem to be entranced by it, forgetting I am in the room as they talk and seem to slip into their minds, remembering why they love the film so much. I go to ask why, when Person one speaks. He says,

“It's weird because for a bunch of football dudes who watch the movie goes to the like fatherly side. Yeah. It's about a dad who didn't know he had a daughter. He’s this big football shot and then he's like this macho guy that has a soft spot for this little daughter and transforms -- So it's like these big grr like football guys who show they can be more than just football players.” (Person four interrupts:) “Doing ballet and shit.”

I look around the room, and the rest of them are smiling; some are laughing because they know that it is true -- and they relate, in the contrasting of a hard exterior to a “soft” interior in a football player, they see themselves. They enjoy that the film breaks down barriers, the portrayal of complex men; not just stereotypes of football players, but football players with layers, with different interests and facets. This film makes them feel seen, heard, and represented because they feel as though they can be more than just football players. I probe them after I let them laugh a bit and ask, “So what I’m hearing is feel-good types of movies were vital to your childhood?” Person four responds: “feel good or funny,” everyone nods, some chuckle. Person one interjects, clearly deep in his thoughts: “It’s so funny though. Everybody’s like football guys are just these big hardos, but the reason that these movies do so well is that they interact with the feel-good side of the football player”. Person four says, “Yeah,” as Person two looks and nods, and Persons three and four nod to themselves. After seeing this collective agreement, I ask, “What is the feel-good side of a football player?”. Person one, who poses this analysis of the football player, says: “Just like brotherly, family and then, yeah I’d say family” (All begin to murmur in agreement). Person four says over him,“Yeah” (Looking at me and pointing at Person one). Person five adds, “it’s like a brotherhood.” Person four brings back the conversation to his thoughts:

“It's like one of those things where you put so much effort into it on and off the field. So it's like, you get reward whether it be like- it's almost like you put so much into it. Right? Whether it's physically winning or the relationships that like what drives you and like movies like that, do a good job of that because it sways you emotionally. Like it's like you know the player, and then some of you lose, you feel bad for them. If something good happens, you feel good. It's like, Dwayne and his daughter like you feel for them.”

These men all agree with this analysis as they try to speak over one another. I find that this film provides more than entertainment for themen. It illustrates how they feel for one another and how the sportsmanship of the sport invokes empathy– this film evokes emotion. I finalize the conversation by asking if they all relate to “The Game Plan” and “feel-good” sports films; they all begin to speak over each other and laugh. Person four ends this segment of our conversation by saying: “some of them are cheesy, but a good cheesy,” and they all start laughing and joking with each other. “The Game Plan,” to them, is a film that provides adequate representation that showcases that men can be more than stereotypes, and is a form of media that they feel reflects them. That precisely, men who play football are more than what society assumes as face value, and they love the film because of this.

Media/Movie Review Analysis

Matt Zoller Seitz, in a short review of “The Game Plan” for *The New York Times*, acknowledges the complexity of the main character, Joe Kingman. He describes Joe’s character as: “The screenplay, by Nichole Millard and Kathryn Price, establishes Joe as a man-boy who talks about himself in the third person and has a separate room for his trophies.” Steitz explains that Joe’s character develops; he enrolls in ballet classes to please his daughter, he enjoys the

company of family, and shows empathy for his teammates. He notes that the director contrasts these two identities of Joe with the use of montage:

"And it lets Mr. Fickman stage some lively sequences, including an endearing montage that cuts between ballet and football practice, and a dance recital in which Joe, who's been pressed into service as a tree, plays his role with such sincerity that he brings his burly teammates in the audience to tears."

Steitz's review acknowledges the very same complexity that my focus group did; the film shows a man who is more than what is expected of him. This review is optimistic, as Steitz states how likable the film is at the piece's beginning. It seems that this film is likable because of the juxtaposition between the stereotypical meathead and the adoring father. Similarly, Marielle Sabbag's review on "GEEKS" examines the film with a feel-good lens. Opening up her review, Sabbag acknowledges that she was wrong in being skeptical of the film when it was first released. "*The Game Plan* is a heartwarming story with a beautiful message. I love the development in character and its nice mixture of comedy and drama"(Sabbag). Once again, the development of the stereotypical football player is acknowledged. In addition, she details her thoughts on the directing of the film, stating:

> It's a simple story that's been used often but the director, Andy Fickman, chose a more unique approach. I liked his dynamic on how he paid attention to character growth. The story takes its time to develop Joe and Peyton's relationship. It would have been unrealistic if Joe was okay with the idea that he had a daughter all this time. Johnson and Pettis created such a genuine relationship.

Acknowledging that the overall storyline is familiar, Sabbag reviews that the character growth and the development of the close relationship between father and daughter make this film unique– the evoking of emotion through the reasonable imagery makes this film superior to others like it. Sabbag's raving review acknowledges a person's complexity and addresses how the

film evokes empathy from the audience. Furthering the discussion on positive film reviews, “Parent Reviews for *The Game Plan*: Common Sense Media” by Heather Boerner finds that Disney does a great job at including “cuteness.” She states: “The other thing Disney does perfectly in *The Game Plan* is squeeze every last bit of cute from every scene. The Rock clearly has fun with all of his character's funny faces, funny voices, and tantrums -- and so does the audience”(Boerner). While she does criticize the film, she follows this by saying: “Still, this is a film with a great message. Joe learns to share -- share success, share his house, share his heart. And what child doesn't need to learn that lesson?”. Overall, Boerner proclaims that this is a good film that both children and parents can enjoy. Her review invites others to leave reviews also, and on average, parents rate this film a four out of five stars, and so do their children. Overall, the positive reviews in the media showcase that this film is enjoyable because of the character development, emotional appeal, and the positive representation of a “macho” man/football player.

“The Game Plan” Movie Analysis

The introduction of the character, Joe Kingman, focuses on the stereotypical portrayal of professional athletes, primarily football players. The film's intro begins with an overview of Joe Kingman’s apartment, a thirty-second overview of trophies, photos, signatures, gold footballs, and his dog in a stadium dog bed. Joe then wakes up to his apartment filled with a home gym, a pinball machine dedicated to him, and his pajamas embroidered with “The King.” Next, the introduction moves to a pan over fresh greens and a smoothie, to him working out with close shots of his muscles hard at work. Ultimately, the first three minutes of the film are a construction of hypermasculinity and play into the stereotype of a socialite NFL player. By

minute seven of the film, the director has Joe's foil appear: the doting father who tries to sneak out of the party to see his wife and kids. When Joe notices Sanders trying to leave, he says: "Woah, Sanders, where you goin? Is this past your bedtime?" (6:36). After Sanders explains that he wants to see his family, Joe pretends to be empathetic, but as Sanders leaves, Joe grabs Sanders' wallet from him. Opening the wallet, looking for a card, Joe says: "I'm looking to confiscate Sanders's man card, but his wife, Maria, has already done it" (6:57). The phrase "man card" indicates that having children, a wife, but most importantly, spending time with family is deemed "unmanly"— one cannot be a man if he prioritizes his family. Once the party ends, there is a glimpse of somberness to Joe's otherwise perfect life. He looks around the room for anyone's reaction to his dog catching a treat and realizes that he is left alone. New Year's morning, Joe watches the new ESPN segment on his interview with the television program when the newscaster states: "If nothing really matters, why does that championship ring elude Kingman?"(9:34). As a result of this comment, Joe cannot handle himself– he grows frustrated. His smile turns into a frown, and his eyebrows sink as he listens to "Some of the experts say it's because he's too selfish"(9:39). Joe immediately grabs the remote and starts fast-forwarding through the segment, mimicking the newscaster, and retaliating with, "Blah, blah, blah. You come talk to me when you have your own action figure, Stuey"(9:58). This heightened, immediate reaction to criticism determines that Joe is a man who does not see any flaw in himself and has trouble with any adverse reaction; thus, this moment unearths the magnitude of Joe's ego. When his daughter arrives at his doorstep, a young girl whom he has never met; he introduces himself with: "Look, kid, I don't do Girl Scout cookies, okay? You don't get abs like these (rubbing his stomach) eating Peanut Butter Patties, you know? Go ahead, hit me. Come on! Give it a shot, come on!"(10:48). This self-absorption exhibits the self-obsessed lens Joe has

when looking at the world; he genuinely perceives the world in terms of himself. As his daughter introduces herself, she says: “You were married to my mom, Sara. Sara Kelly? My name is Peyton. I'm your daughter”(12:43). The camera focuses on his reaction; he looks up, brows furrowed, as the camera moves inward to his face, and daunting music plays. Joe seems to have an internal crisis as a reaction to the idea of him being a father -- this reaction showcases negativity around becoming a father– that he fears what may become of him. Just six minutes prior, Joe mentions ‘man cards’ for fathers on his team; now, he himself is a father. As Joe reads a note from the mother, trying to muster up some excuse for how he is not the father– Peyton takes to herself to explore his apartment. She looks at his trophies and photos, proclaiming: “You sure got a lot of pictures of yourself in here”(13:35). Even a child notices the toxicity of Joe Kingman – the self-absorbed athlete who has nothing but his sport. After reading the birth certificate and critically thinking about it, Joe realizes that he is the father; he yells: “This isn’t happening to me”(15:17). The idea of having a child is so horrendous that he yells and leaves the room, acting much like a child himself. As the two get to know each other, Peyton poses the question: “If you could only save one thing in a fire, what would it be?” Joe’s proud response is, “My limited edition Joe Kingman sneakers”(18:56). Within the first twenty minutes of the film, Joe Kingman is portrayed as a self-absorbed man whose goals and aspirations revolve around football. His entire dialogue focuses on the subject of the sport.

By contrast, after twenty minutes of the film, Joe begins to mature. His foil character, the father, Sanders, engages Kingman in a personal conversation.

(The camera is looking at Peyton as if it is Joe’s point of view)

Sanders states: “Big surprise, eh Kingman?”

Joe Kingman: “More like a safety blitz”.

Sanders: “Yeah, well, you should be happy. I remember how happy I was when my kids were born”.

Joe: “Yeah, well you knew that they were comin’”.

Sanders: “Yeah, well, either way, she’s here now.” (Walks away)

Joe: (Joe looks down and away from looking at Peyton. He inhales as he rests his head on his arm in contemplation)(22:32-22:48). This scene, with calming music, foreshadows the character development that will take place throughout the rest of the film. Joe begins to relax, the tension over the fear of being a father subsides, and he has a chance to reflect and take in the notion of having a daughter. His demeanor is calm, relaxed, and empathetic as he speaks– rather than his usual direct, blunt, and self-absorbed manner. It is in this scene that Joe begins to soften and grow. Similarly, as Peyton and Joe eat their first meal together, Joe has pasta sauce on his chin. The scene is: (Peyton’s perspective: camera angled below Joe, looking up at him, as he sips a glass of water with pasta sauce on his chin)

Peyton: “You got a little…” (Motions her finger to her own face) “A little something right here.”

Joe: (Looks down to Peyton and puts his glass down) “What?”

Peyton: (Licks her thumb)

Joe: “I got what?”

Peyton: (Brings her licked thumb to Joe’s chin and wipes away the sauce)

Joe, as Peyton cleans his chin: (Looks down, confused, his expression softens as he realizes her caring action, then furrows his brow) “I’m going to go and wash the dishes. You can eat.” (Looks around flustered) “And finish eating.” (Joe gets up from the table, with wide eyes)(24:40-25:36).

This small, simple act of kindness confuses Joe– 'The King'. As a spectator, I notice how he begins to get confused by his newfound emotions of empathy, and love; it is a bit awkward seeing how flustered he gets when these emotions stir. I, too, can feel the overwhelming sensation of not understanding the new feelings he is having– the audience connects with Joe as he begins to grow.

This character development of Joe Kingman becomes more solidified over halfway through the film, as he showcases the paternal side of himself to his friends. As they watch a basketball game, one of them has nacho cheese on his chin. Once Joe notices this, the scene parallels the one earlier.

Joe: (Looks at his friend next to him, double-takes when he notices the cheese on the friend's chin.) (Joe looks at his friend, uses his finger to motion that something is on the friend's chin) As he goes to lick his own thumb, "Hold on, hold on…" (Joe begins to clean off the cheese, as the friend glares back at him) "Wait a second. Wait a minute. A little bit more." (Joe uses a napkin to clean the rest of the cheese from his friend's chin.)

Friend: (Growls as Joe cleans the cheese off.)

Joe: "Oh, stop growling. Hold on. One, two, three" (Joe smiles proudly to himself).

Friends: (Look at each other, frozen in shock as a result of the interaction.)

Joe: "What did I do?"(44:40-45:01).

This interaction is the pivotal moment in Joe's character development. Previously, the audience saw a change, a confusing moment for Joe, where he tries to figure out what is happening to him. This moment, surrounded by hyper-masculine men, solidifies that Joe has confidence in his newfound self. In addition, this moment showcases the power of received love; Joe can now

reciprocate feelings of empathy and caring about others without second-guessing his masculinity. Joe takes Peyton to a store revolving around her favorite doll, within which she finds nail polish.

Peyton: (Approaches Joe, jumping up and down) “Joe, they’ve got Camille fingernail polish!”

Joe: “No way.”

Peyton: “Way!”

(The scene moves to Joe’s hot pink fingernails wrapped around a football at practice)

Football player/Friend: “Nice shade. What is that? Powder-puff pink?” (Rest of team laughs).

(Joe stares back with a blank expression).

Another Football player/friend: (Raises his hand) “I got a question. Do your toes match?” (All laugh).

Sanders: “Hey. Hey, relax. Relax. Cut it out. He can’t help it. Someone stole his man card” (All laugh, including Joe)(1:08:45-1:09:05).

Joe does not try to argue or form a rebuttal. Instead, he listens and laughs at the irony of his own character development. For the audience, there is a sense of pride watching this scene unfold, pride in the progress Joe Kingman has made since the beginning of the film. There is also a sense of happiness for Joe at this point in the film; compared to the beginning, now he is often seen smiling and laughing, seeming to show that the love he has received from Petyon and the love he shows her has made him an overall happier man. This theme continues as montages show Joe and Peyton’s relationship evolve at football practice, at Joe’s ballet practices, and pranks in the gym; ultimately, the viewers see a flourishing relationship between the father and daughter but also between Joe and himself as he evolves. Finally, this confidence turns into pride as Joe brags about Peyton’s artwork in his locker:

Sanders: “Look at this. Look at this. Artwork in the locker, huh?”

Joe: (Laughs and cocks his head proudly)

Sanders: “I’d definitely say she has breached the final frontier.”

Joe: (Looking at the drawing with a smile on his face) “That’s our game plan.”

Sanders: “See, I especially like the Xs and Os down there.”

Joe: “Oh, no, those are hugs and kisses.”

Sanders: “Hugs and kisses. (Smile widens) Alright. Alright.(He points and giggles at Joe.) (His mood changes to serious as he stares closely at the drawing) “Is Spike (their dog) wearing a tutu?”

Joe: (Laughs and shakes his head no) “No, no. No that’s one of those… that’s one of those doggy supports”(1:12:20 - 11:12:36).

Joe’s exuberant pride for his relationship with Peyton solidifies his development as a man. The viewers see a sliver of his old self remain as he makes excuses for his dog wearing a tutu, but overall they see a humane, proud, and kind version of Joe due to Peyton’s presence. This new humane, heartfelt self of Joe is summarized in one scene:

Joe looks out behind the curtain before his performance in Peyton’s ballet recital:

Joe: (turns his back to the curtain with his eyes closed, grimaced at the thought of his football team seeing him in ballet tights) “Don’t panic. No panic. Power of the father. Power of the father. Power of the...You’re panicking”(1:15:28). Joe now finds strength in being a father rather than what he thought of as a prior weakness. As he becomes more secure in his role as a father, he becomes more secure in his masculinity.

As the film continues, Joe is a success in Peyton’s ballet recital, and Joe begins a romantic relationship with the ballet teacher, he eventually learns the truth about Peyton’s mother. Peyton’s mother died; her sister has been Peyton’s legal guardian– Peyton has lied about

how she ended up at Joe's apartment in the first place and the whereabouts of her mother. Threats are also made about Joe being ineligible for full custody. Finally, in the last ten minutes, when all seems lost for Joe's football team, he is given the strength to win the game with Peyton's aunt granting custody to Joe. The team wins, and Joe is victorious as a father and football player.

Ultimately, the film is everything that makes a sports film great. Joe Kingman, at surface level, is not the underdog, but he is the underdog in regards to fatherhood. The viewers yearn for his success, dwell on his losses, and celebrate his victories. It is understandable why this film is loved based on the character growth of Joe. The most important thing that I notice, compared to the Union College football players, is that the more growth and confidence Joe gains as he becomes comfortable with being a father and being in tune with his feelings, the happier he is. His transformation from cynical and blunt to kind and empathetic showcases how men are suppressed from expressing positive emotion and are primarily given the opportunity to, and the leeway to do so, when a daughter or female romantic partner is in a man's life. I noticed this and analyzed the Union College Football players' comments. Moreover, the film showcases that men are, and can be, more than their sport. Furthermore, it stakes out the case that masculinity is something that one determines for themselves.

CHAPTER FIVE

Masculinity and Manhood: Union College Football Team

"Back home, Connell's shyness never seemed like much of an obstacle to his social life, because everyone knew who he was already, and there was never any need to introduce himself or create impressions about his personality. If anything, his personality seemed like something external to himself, managed by the opinions of others, rather than anything he individually did or produced. Now he has a sense of invisibility, nothingness, with no reputation to recommend him to anyone." (Rooney 73).

— Sally Rooney, Normal People

The novel *Normal People* by Sally Rooney published in 2018, follows the lives of Connell and Marianne as their lives consistently draw each other in. The story explores first love, complex relationships, and how people try to save one another. Connell, the once star athlete, turned uncertain and insecure, and Marianne, formerly the lonely girl turned confident young woman, are inextricably connected as they continue to travel into one another's orbitAs Marianne struggles to find her identity among her wealthy, abusive family, Conell is self-conscious of his low-income origin and is shy, despite his popularity. Their romantic relationship turns private as Connel wants to protect his social status and also because he wants to keep their connection to himself. Despite their messy breakup in high school, the two meet again at university, rekindle their relationship, and ultimately break up once again because of Connell's insecurity. Their relationship thrives when in pain, leading to their self-destructive behaviors.

Reflecting on who Connell once was, the star athlete, this description produces the imagery of a man whose life is consumed by the judgments and opinions of others rather than himself. The notion of performing a "front stage" or public behavior, conforming to societal standards and expectations of a man, leaves Connell with an overwhelming sense of nothingness. Rather than create his identity through growth, Connell's identity is given to him: ". . . because everyone knew who he was already, and there was never any need to introduce himself or create impressions about his personality"(73). The lack of self-growth highlights how society projects standards onto individuals and the unconscious susceptibility of these standards. Connell recognizes, once away from home, that he never indeed is given a fair chance to invent himself – acknowledging that it is because others knew him before he learns to know himself. As a result,

Connell is an extension of society rather than an individual. The narrator describes: “If anything, his personality seemed like something external to himself, managed by the opinions of others, rather than anything he individually did or produced.” The lack of Connell’s creation of himself leads to the recognition that it is easier to look outward than inward; that the overwhelming opinion from others can be louder than the opinions of the self, thus creating the identity of others perceptions rather than his own. As a result of years of lacking individuality and self-presentation, Connell’s insecurities consume him. The term ‘nothingness’ reflects this: “Now he has a sense of invisibility, nothingness, with no reputation to recommend him to anyone”(Ibid.) The lack of opinions and societal molding that arise in college unearth the issue of the manipulation by others Connell faces as a young adolescent. As a byproduct of the societal molding he experiences, Conell is left with nothing when he is alone. This lack of identity leads to the disappearance of the self.

The terms describing Connell’s identity showcase how little control Connell has over his life thus far. Terms like “External” and “managed” determine how his identity is predetermined for him without his consent. These words indicate how an outside force controls Connell’s identity, stressing his lack of control. Furthermore, describing the aftermath of this external management of his identity, the words that describe Connell are “invisibility” and “nothingness.” The term “invisibility” indicates that he feels as though he cannot be seen– stemming from the notion that his external manipulation ceases to exist, thus feeling as though he is no longer visible to the outside world. Similarly, “nothingness” refers to the absence of existence, which depicts the aftermath of continuously conforming to others’ standards. This general use of adjectives that indicate an out-of-body experience indicates Connell’s insecurity because of a lack of awareness of oneself. His insecurity also reveals that he is self-reflective and armor

masculinity. The male athlete figure does not give him security -- he is vulnerable and self-reflective -- disrupting the stereotype.

The UC Football Team also indicates that the pressures from the outside world regarding manhood are overwhelming. I aim to discover the stereotypes that implement themselves into the daily lives of these men, along with how they combat or struggle with the standards of masculinity. Furthermore, to understand how these men experience and feel about masculinity, I address the differences between their parents' generation and the present. Overall, there is a widespread acknowledgment that the expectations of manhood, especially relating to the football player, profoundly affect each member of the focus groups. Along with this, there is an acknowledgment that there is a shift in societal expectations towards masculinity.

Misconceptions about “Meatheads”

The film “The Game Plan” portrays the typical stereotypes and misconceptions about “meatheads” (jock-like men), specifically through Joe Kingman. Like many other films, “The Game Plan” showcases qualities of selfishness, lack of emotional connection or awareness, and obsessive awareness of one’s body. However, as the movie continues, the “meathead” stereotype begins to move away, and Joe embraces other qualities regarding family. This film’s use of stereotypes examines how men grow away from the harsh misconceptions of masculinity, usually revolving around a female or family -- rather than showcase a man who defies stereotypes for himself. Investigating how representation mimics experiences of manhood and vice versa, I find that the stereotypes of football players and “meatheads” are harmful to those most affected: men.

The most prevalent stereotype amongst the UC football players is the notion of stupidity or lack of intelligence. Phrases such as “CTE heads,” “that we’re dumb,” “that nothing’s working upstairs,” and “meatheads” are widespread among the groups. As the men say these phrases, rolling eyes, slouched bodies, scoffs, and monotone voices fill the room. These minor body reactions indicate the hostility towards stereotypes, and determine that the men feel that they are inaccurate. Along with feelings of hostility, there is the notion that these phrases are familiar, an all too familiar memory that they would rather get rid of. This sense of hopelessness indicates that the men among the groups feel powerless against these words, that they have lost control over the narrative, and it has become a new normal to be perceived as less than what they are. This initial moment of hopelessness and hostility passes as the men turn to justification, offering up passionate displays as to why they are intelligent men who do not fit these harmful molds. Furthermore, this need to indicate their worth resonates with Connell from *Normal People*, as the UC men search for their own identities similar to his struggles with his self-image and identity.

This turn towards justification verifies this concept of public versus private values. At face value, the thirteen men seem to not care about these phrases, performing in a way that shows that they are comfortable with the terms and seem to let the harmful tropes roll off their backs. However, this need to justify and explain themselves to me showcases that, privately, they do value other people's thoughts and that the stereotypes of men, specifically football men, bruise their egos and self-perception. Despite different stories, each group’s narrative is the same: they are not some “meatheads.” Focus group one explains:

Person four: “We also know that we are at this school for a reason. Like it’s a good school -- it wasn’t only athletics that got us here.”

Person one: “I can guarantee you some of the most stereotypical meatheads on our team are probably some of the smarter guys in this school.” (Person four: “Yeah, definitely”). “I can name a bunch.”

“We also know that we are at this school for a reason” illustrates a sense of confidence that contradicts the hostility that arises when first mentioning stereotypes; this newfound pride in themselves unearths a false sense of identity. They act as though other people's words do not impact them, but they do because of their initial reaction. Person one, who embraces his love for football continuously throughout the discussion, again, embraces his identity as a football player. Person one grips his identity as a football player so tightly that it becomes clear that his conception of manhood and masculinity is centered around his perception of football. Although he states: “it wasn’t only athletics that got us here.” The term “only” and his eyebrows raising, and his hands opening to the group as he says so, demonstrate that football is a key value and a key reason why he (and the other men) is here: their intelligence is a plus to their athleticism. Furthermore, Person one defends his and his teammate's intellect by using the stereotype of “meathead” to his advantage. Person four concludes that if a face value example of stereotypes is needed, he can supply that, but those “meatheads” are also the most academically driven. This tactic to justify his intelligence betrays this fear of being perceived as less than. Person four confirms that there are men who embody a stereotype but quickly adds that although they look a certain way, they talk and think differently. This explanation ties back to the notions of private versus public values, along with backstage versus front stage behavior. Person four explains that publicly the men confirm stereotypes, which confirm the Western world’s perceptions of masculinity. However, in a private/backstage manner, the men are some of the most brilliant and non-stereotypical men on campus.

Similarly, focus group two is quick to explain how they break the stereotypical mold of the football man in regard to intelligence. Although they are quieter and less forceful in their justification, their narrative is the same. The conversation unfolds:

Person three: "The first thing they assume is that when you're good at football, and you come here and things like that, that you're just, you're just here for your sport. It's not true. At all. I know many people who are good at their sport and good at school as well. But it's a common misconception, especially for football players, that we are dumb."

Person one: "That's why we call ourselves student-athletes.

Person three is calm in his delivery, sounding well-rehearsed in his rebuttal. Despite Person three's overall calmness regarding the matter, he does stress some phrases. He stresses, "It's not true," "At all," and ". . .especially for football players that we are dumb." Person three's use of stress indicates that he wants the message to get across to me, but more importantly, he wants to be heard. The indication of wanting to be heard is crucial in examining how we perceive and understand stereotypes. Although, a person may conform to stereotypes at some level, such as these men enjoying their "meatheads" sport, does not mean that people are solely their stereotype. As Person three stresses these phrases, he looks at me, his body leaning forward, and his fingers interlocked: the image is quite similar to someone pleading or begging. In this instance, Person three is begging for the notion of lack of intelligence to cease to exist regarding football men, and he feels most comfortable sharing this in the private setting.

Furthermore, focus group three exhibits an annoyance towards the preconceived notion that football men have less intelligence than others, especially on the UC campus. This annoyance results from experiences that justify their concerns, which is people outwardly being surprised by the "meatheads" being smart. The conversation is:

Person One: “Like I cannot tell you how many times you have a conversation with somebody and be stereotyped. (Person two nods) You have a conversation with somebody, and they go: “Oh, like how did you do on that exam?” And you say, “Oh, I got a _,” And they’re like: “Oh, you’re actually smart.”

(All begin to talk in agreement and nod heads).

Person four: “Just as a freshman, I’ve already gotten that. My first midterm, I got an A on it, and the professor was like, “How’d you do it?”

(All begin to get irritated)

Person two: “I am not surprised.”

(All nod in agreement)

The general agreement that this is a conversation that they all experience, even as first-year students, indicates the pressure placed upon this specific group of men. The group feels as though they have to live up to expectations and that they want to exceed them. However, when they do exceed, rather than be met with encouragement and praise, these men are left to second guess themselves and second guess how they pursue relationships because of the harmful tropes. Overall, the emotions flooding the room were of annoyance, as they all rolled their eyes and talked over each other, sharing their stories of being misjudged. The overlap between experiences and feelings determines that the only way these men genuinely feel like they belong is with one another.

Universally, these groups feel the most comfortable discussing the harmful ways stereotypes have impacted their experiences of manhood because of the concepts of private versus public and backstage versus frontstage. I have been part of private conversations with candid responses and candid body language because these small conversations are made within

the companionship of their "brothers." Thus, these feelings of anger, hopelessness, annoyance, and bitterness are understood because they are performing masculinity as a collective. They are addressing the issues of stereotyping towards men collectively. Thus, this analysis is of how men create a collective identity around their sport, and they find that the stereotypes of their athletes do not fit their collective identity.

Manhood Then Versus Manhood Now

Engaging with the concept of masculinity comes with the understanding that our patriarchal society roots itself deeply into all men. Although the patriarchal expression of manhood is entrenched within the Western world's culture, amongst Generation Z, there is a push and acknowledgment to reform how the Western world views manhood, especially regarding men labeled as 'meatheads.'

Overwhelmingly, the conversation surrounding masculinity and manhood is met with positivity. However, in my conversation with focus group one, they are passionate about sharing their distaste for the current state of our society. The question is: "How is being a man today different from our parent's generation?". Amongst focus group one, the men have a united front against the current climate of the Western world's take on masculinity. Person three, without any hesitation to the question, states, "Masculinity is not as expressed." This phrase is spoken with anger; angry at the notion that there is a shift in expectations of masculinity. I look at all the other men in the room, and they are nodding their heads and adding on to the discussion. The men define masculinity as, "Like, being a man is not- it's about being a leader and doing the right things. It's about being confident in what you are doing." This group of men fears, and feels, as though these qualities of manhood are vanishing from today's culture. Elaborating on

this fear, the term “snowflake,” a common synonym for sensitivity, is thrown into the discussion. Furthering this notion of sensitivity, a distinction, “Well, society now is just much softer than it was back then,” is made by Person three. The word choices “softer” and “snowflake” are deliberately used to promote what these men are not; they are not sensitive. Instead, they are the opposite, solid and hard-willed. This hostility towards the notions of vulnerability contradicts their attitudes towards the film, *The Game Plan,* as they showcase appreciation for the film based on sensitivity and emotional growth. Although they appreciate the vulnerability in the film, they see the story as fiction, and seeing the acceptance of masculine vulnerability in the real world scares them. The need to explain this to me, to use these words, is to promote whom they want to be perceived as; they want me, a female, to see them as these strong leaders who fight rather than whine. This performance, the hostility of the ideas of sensitivity, determines the lack of control they feel in their lives; they cannot fathom a shift in the perspective and expectations of what being a man is.

There is a slow shift away from this hostility and fear with focus group two. Towards developing the meanings of masculinity and how manhood is experienced. Rather than express outward anger towards the new concept of masculinity, focus group two is more silent. They exhibit an awkwardness regarding sharing their opinions on the topic. When posing the same question of “How is being a man today different from our parent’s generation?” I am first met with silence. The men do not want to speak on it. All their eyes shift to anywhere in the room but me. From all four men, this body language indicates that the question, or the subject matter of the conversation, is taboo amongst this group of men. That masculinity is a loaded question and that it is not discussed. This immediate stillness exposes that discussing topics of manhood is inaccessible to men. The ability to speak on how they connect and experience life and struggle is

inaccessible and unprecedented. After some silence, Person four opens the discussion: “I feel like it’s a lot more open for men to be to show feeling, I’d say.” This statement opens the floodgates for the other men to join in. Person four, who has been relatively quiet during the entire conversation, makes this comment, and the rest of the men relax their bodies; the room is filled with air again as all the men breathe and feel the relief of tension. The statement comes out awkwardly; Person four looks in my direction but does not make eye contact; it is clear that this is the first omission of truth, that he is verbalizing something that he has been feeling for the first time. The rest of the men all nod their heads, some with more vigor than others, but it is clear that Person four speaks an unsaid truth about being a man today, first, that men can have feelings and secondly, that men are given the freedom to show those said feelings. This comment leads to an omission from all men that they feel that “people are a lot less judgmental,” “especially men towards each other.” The men will not answer the why to these statements. But when, “especially men towards each other” is said, their facial expressions when they hear why flickers with some memory or feeling. Each man recalls a moment in time where the most crucial judgment they receive is from other men, which stays with them today. The group finds that society has grown to be more inclusive and accepting, which is why men can be more expressive. Also, this notion of inclusivity is prevalent amongst their team. Person three explains why he feels that the UC Football Team practices inclusivity by stating:

> Anyway, okay, as brothers, you know, we're all men. We make jokes. But it's never anything serious. We definitely are accepting of- because, in the sport of football, it's all different types of body types. You have the linemen who are like 300 plus pounds. You have people like us, like me, who's like 175 pounds half of that weight, you know? So it's like- and then there are people in between. So it's like, you can't really judge.

Person three's perspective results from lived experience; so far in his young career as a UC football player, the team's environment is one where everyone is accepted. It is essential to acknowledge that rather than stick to expressing feelings, he uses the example of body image. This reiterates that body image ideal are deeply ingrained in each person and that they cannot expect another person to judge when they are all experiencing the same struggles; thus, through shared experiences, the men acknowledge their kinship. Overall, the second focus group meets the change between their parent's generation, and now with gratitude. The idea of expressing oneself, or acknowledging having feelings, is a prospect that offers this group of men peace, rather than discomfort like focus group one.

Excitement over the prospect of liberation from rigid gender roles, especially regarding men, fills the room when speaking to focus group three. There is positivity and a willingness to share their feelings on every subtopic of masculinity. The mixed-age and race group is the least timid group and holds the slightest animosity for changing perceptions and expectations of masculinity. Although at first, the men joke about people caring about hitting heads, the conversation turns to cover serious issues. Person four opens the conversation with: "The masculine role is still there, but it's definitely a little bit less in terms of like, I guess, the toxic side of it. Like 'be a man.' You get called pussy sometimes like that's still there, but it's a little bit less prevalent than it was back then." Introducing the issue of toxic masculinity showcases a basic understanding of what the issue is and how it affects not only women but also men. This acknowledgment is vital to understanding how these men, historically the "most" masculine men because of their sport of choice, understand and recognize how the Western world implements patriarchal practices. Person one explains that the notion of working, primarily amongst men, is changing, that there the idea of a working man is fizzling. He explains that:

> I would definitely say the American dream of like, get on your work boots and go work in the factory and move around eight and do stuff like that isn't as like prevalent as we thought. I would say because like, we have things like social media now in which like, there are other avenues in which like people go to work every day and actually put in an effort. So that idea of like, "the masculine man" needing to go work a factory job or like have some runt job. Like guys as nurses, like that's such a stereotype for people to be like, why is the guy the nurse? Like stay-at-home dads are more of like a prevalent thing now. Versus like, the mom is the breadwinner in the family.

The men are passionate to change the narrative that men love and desire to work. The use of "the masculine man" showcases an excitement for it and indicates that this former trope is slipping away from society - the man speaking, along with the group, is excited to get rid of the rigid casts that once were placed onto men. They are inspired to talk about their distaste for the previous stereotype of manhood. The prospect of the increase in acceptability for stay-at-home dads overjoys the group. At the mention of the prospect, they all begin talking, smiling, and laughing, all trying to compete over who will be the better stay-at-home dad. The scene unfolds with such excitement compared to the anger from the first group towards the changing of rigid molds, that the scene is overstimulating. There is a sense of freedom within the air. The notion of being a stay-at-home dad is the new American Dream. There is a sense of hope that this will happen for all of them. There is also the realization that they all believe this to be true, that they are not alone in their dreams of remolding the idea of what it means to be a father. The first year, Person five seems to relax his body at the mention of this prospect, a smile creeps upon his face. He feels as though he belongs. This discussion continues as:

Person 2: "I will happily stay with the kids all day and do all those things. I am happy to stay home. You tell me what you want for dinner tonight, and you give me a thirty-minute heads-up as to when you're home, and I'll have it all ready. I'll have the shower on for you. You let me know. (Phrases: "I would love that" "hell yeah," "that's all I want," "that's the dream" fill the room).

The story, met with such positive phrases, indicates that this group wishes that it will be acceptable for all men to choose not to work and prioritize their families and selves one day. Rather than create the narrative that men are now soft, in a derogatory way like focus group one, focus group three illuminates hoping that there is a change coming for men. The conversation ends with:

Person 2: “Everyone’s like” Oh, you got to wear the pants in the relationship,” and you gotta be the one that brings in all the dough.” Like, HELL NO. (All begin to say hell no with him) If she wants to go to law school and wants to do all this stuff and needs me to stay home with the kids for a year, say less, I got you.”

(All are laughing out of the agreement)

The camaraderie and community built during this discussion unearth this notion that men feel most comfortable speaking about “taboo” topics in the space of teammates and sports. These men have a foundation already laid as brothers on a field, so having these moments where they acknowledge the ideas of rewriting the narrative on masculinity and sharing their exhaustion from the current stereotypes is easier because of their existing relationships. Also, the common thread of sports, and that they are all related by the thing they love most, allows them to feel free when having these conversations because there is no fear of judgment- they already know the other person's values.

CONCLUSION

This thesis aims to examine the experiences of masculinity amongst the most stereotypical masculine men, observing how men conceive of themselves and the importance of accurate representation. As the research shows, men face a unique tension between their perceptions of masculinity and societal expectations. I find that men face an unfathomable amount of stress concerning 'living up to being a man. The Union College Football team faces obstacles in regulating their masculinity in multiple facets: body image, diet preference, and stereotypes.

When preparing myself for the study of masculinity and manhood, I struggled with the idea of how to harness a collective group of men who experience masculinity in a heightened form. Choosing the topic, the football players came to mind because of the U.S.'s long history in putting football players on a pedestal compared to other men. I was interested in seeing how decades' worth of societal stereotypes and pressures engrained themselves in Generation Z football players and to understand how they conceive of their role as men.

The unique facets of body image, meat-eating, and manhood now arose because of the men I spoke with– initially, my research focused on the relationship between meat and masculinity. Meeting with these groups of men, they created the narrative that is now my research. As a collective, they felt that these topics needed to be discussed to capture the essence of manhood as a football player.

The groups make a Durkheimian argument regarding the ritualized practice of eating their dinners as a team. Durkheim argued that 'sacred' objects represent the community; in the manner of the team's community, meals are a space where the entire group comes together in bonding, and meat comes to represent this bonding. As a result of meat being the 'sacred' object,

it is easy to understand that giving up, even just lessening, red meat intake is seen as giving up commitment to the group.

The tensions of the definition of masculinity are prevalent in discussing their bodies. The men collectively view that the body is a 'machine' and a 'weapon' in one instance, but the emotional bonding around meals does not conform to this image of the man. Likewise, the ideas of family or brotherhood are very different from a weapon or machine. Along with the tension of emotional connection versus machinery, the ongoing battle of body dysmorphia denies the stereotypical portrayal of the confident large man. Similarly, the notion of sacrifice is usually deemed the masculine urge and most general characteristic. However, the Union College football players face the obstacle of sacrificing too much and losing their sense of self-perception. This apprehension of stereotypical masculine roles regarding bodies and families indicates that the Western World's notion of manhood is debilitating to even the most masculine men.

The men are continuously in a cycle of balancing the stereotypes placed upon them and balancing when to execute their front and backstage behaviors. The men express anger towards the notion of being 'meatheads' but are also willing to play into that collective identity. Contradictory, the men also express a willingness to shatter the career expectations placed on men, and excitement towards prioritizes the self. These findings show a desire to expel the current American Dream forced onto men and fear of what that might look like.

Although it is easy to empathize with the men and their ongoing tensions between expectations and self-perception, it is crucial to recognize how toxic masculinity has impacted these men in an inwardly and outwardly harmful way. Despite the verbal excitement for change in expectations of masculinity, there is a performance aspect to their discussions with me. As a female sitting in and observing, each man is playing a role that they believe executes the proper

definition of masculinity and performs a ‘front stage’ behavior that they believe will ‘convince’ me of who they are as men. I experienced stereotypical– textbook– ‘front stage’ masculine performances: those of which contained anger, assertiveness, strength, leadership, and even instances of ‘mansplaining.’ I also experienced the ‘newer version’ or the ‘female version’ of masculine behaviors such as kindness, sensitivity, openness, and warmth. This mix of performances illustrates how these men perform to comply with societal pressures; therefore, it is essential to acknowledge that although they speak in confidence about the prominent issues they face with small groups and me, these issues may be subdued when confronted with collective consciousness.

The theme of collective consciousness and identity is a central concept in this thesis. There is a collective consciousness in two forms: they sit in the room with a team and sit in a room with me, a woman. These different portrayals of collective consciousness can capture the struggle between front stage and backstage behavior and decipher between the more progressive and conservative ideologies of the men– these findings capture differences in the collective. My close reading of the men in the focus groups, and the thoughtful analyses of the sports film genre, reveal the complex structuring that underpins my analysis of the contradictory experiences of hegemonic masculinity from those said to inhabit its structures.

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