The Dallas Cowboys: America's (Media) Team

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Abstract

The Dallas Cowboys often refer to as America's Team is often tossed into the spotlight of the NFL. Why is one team so important and how can they have such a giant impact on the thoughts and actions of the viewing public and regular people? The answer to this lies all within the Psychoanalytic Theory and approach to media. In this paper we will describe how the various elements of the Psychoanalytic Theory apply to The Dallas Cowboys and how the view on masculinity will come into play. Stuart Hall and his Encoding and Decoding theory will also be tied into The Dallas Cowboys. With all great football teams there are cheerleaders and none can hold a candle to the cheerleaders of The Dallas Cowboys. Within this paper you will learn just how influential America's Team is and how much you never even knew about them.

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CMDA 210

Haines

12/02/15

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The Dallas Cowboys, formed in 1960, are said to be one of the most influential and greatest football teams in NFL history. Residing in Dallas, Texas, hence the name Dallas Cowboys, the team has had many nicknames over the years. Some nicknames include the Doomsday Defense, The 'Boys and The Big D. However out of all these nicknames there is one that has struck a place in American history and remains plastered to the team today, and that nickname is America's Team. The Dallas Cowboys, America's Team, can truly be connected with the psychoanalytical analysis of media and the spotlight of male masculinity.

The nickname came about in 1978 in the Cowboys highlight film where the narrator opened with the following introduction, "They appear on television so often that their faces are as familiar to the public as presidents and movie stars. They are the Dallas Cowboys, "America's Team"." Soon after many media outlets began to recognize this team as a symbol of patriotism and American power and soon the Cowboys found their way onto major media outlets such as ESPN, HBO Sports, Yahoo!, and Sports Illustrated magazine. Today, the Cowboys find themselves on national TV and the "Fox America's Game of the Week" more than any other team.

America's Team is the moniker that has stuck with this team, for an array of deeply psychological perspectives that we can associate with the minds of modern football fans - particularly those residing in Texas, a state which, to put it subtly, has a deep history of masculinity.

How many American kids grew up idolizing cowboys, going as far as to don a cowboy costume on Halloween - successfully idolizing a symbol of masculinity. Now, how many kids did the exact same thing with football players. Particularly, the quarterback. No source is needed to justify that every kid playing backyard football dreams of throwing the game winning touchdown, and not being the right tackle making the block that allowed for the touchdown to happen. There are likely even kids who went through both phases, in subsequent Halloweens, dressing as a cowboy and then a football player.

Born are the Dallas Cowboys, a name and symbol so easily marketable to this massive audience that it was only a matter of time that they would become, indeed, America's Team.

Now one may think to themselves, how this one team could have any effect on the population and what its significance is to mainstream media. The answer lies deep routed in the psychological minds of the American population. When one pictures America they picture a country of great power and strength. Now, vision a stereotypical American male. He has a strong build, is very muscular and prides himself on driving a big American made pickup truck with an ice cold can of Budweiser in his hand. This man is also likely very popular amongst women, drawing envy from other men.

Now here is where the mass media effect comes into play. Being a major and extremely popular American football team The Dallas Cowboys have their fair share of commercials, video games, and even memorabilia, which carry along with it the encoded message of America's

Team. Mass media portrays the Cowboys as being extremely masculine, and almost every American man wants to show off how masculine he is. Commercials feature scantily clad women dressed in the infamous Cowboys blue and white and portray the players as big, macho, touchdown scoring machines.

This gives our average male audience something to idolize when viewing the Dallas Cowboys, who become something much greater than just a football team that plays on Sundays.

Looking deeply into the many analyses of media we can see that the Dallas Cowboys share a lot in common with the psychoanalytic analysis of media. Within this analysis we see Laura Mulley's "Male Gaze" come into play and almost every aspect is tailored toward the masculine viewer.

Within every man's mind there are "drives" to become this macho and extremely sexy, well-built figure who snatches up all the good looking ladies. We see how the body transforms these psychological drives into motivation just by watching ourselves progress or watching a younger child grow up into adulthood.

Men seek out to achieve these drives and in doing so are able to achieve what Sigmund Freud called the Pleasure Principle. In American society there is almost nothing more macho and masculine than good old fashioned football. In rooting for America's Team, The Dallas Cowboys, many men find themselves sucked into a state of mind in which they are achieving satisfaction and achieving the maxim which is known as the Pleasure Principle.

Jacques Lucan, in his developmental theory, stated desire as being the unquenchable yearning for love or recognition that no one else could ever perfectly or absolutely fill. All men have some degree of desire, weather it's having the hottest girlfriend, being the most muscular, or being successful and well known, this desire ties directly into a man's thirst for

masculinity. A man is on a never ending quest for masculinity and the feeling of pleasure and accomplishment that comes with it.

Football amongst men is greatly popular because it is seen as being extremely masculine. The Dallas Cowboys are considered to be the most masculine because of their status as America's Team. This great American sports team serves as a source of nourishment for the desire on man to achieve masculinity. By being a Dallas Cowboys, fan one can lose themselves in the unconscious and quench their desire for masculinity.

Another aspect to Jacques Lacan and his psychoanalytic approach is the symbolic, or the "cultural order of meaning maintained through words or symbols" (Ott & Mack, 2014). The Dallas Cowboys have a special piece of history that makes them symbolic to being America's Team, The Lone Star. The Lone Star happens to be the Cowboys logo, cast in their infamous blue and silver. The Dallas Cowboys' logo has deep symbolic roots in the history of America and the state of Texas. Their logo has stood proudly without change for over 50 years because of its symbolic heritage to the state of Texas and American history. Julie Gordon stated that, "Representative of Texas as the "The Lone Star State," the Cowboys' logo is a symbol that pays homage to Texas' history and unifies all citizens of the state. The lone star is a great example of the power of symbolism in logo design: it resonates with a large market and rallies those people together around a shared vision. Rooted in history, it is a symbol that is both timeless and relevant for all generations, ensuring that it can withstand another 50 years to come" (Gordon, 2014).

Of course, national football writers and media members treat the star for the polarizing figure it is, giving the team and, secondhand, anyone that sports the star on Sundays special attention. It is widely and deeply understood that media content that draws readership and sparks

a discussion is gold to advertisers - and the media's dependency on advertising revenue is as long standing a relationship as we have in this industry. Any comment, tweet, or slightly out of line thing a member of the Dallas Cowboys does draws a flurry of absurd headlines - often times dismissed by Cowboys fans themselves for being refutable pieces of journalism.

However, as George Cohan once said, "I don't care what you say about me, as long as you say something about me, and as long as you spell my name right". For as long as writers have been able to spell the simple two words "Dallas" and "Cowboys", they have added coals to the fire in growing the mythic aura around this team - leading up to the creation of America's Team.

The quarterback of any American football team is one of the most, if not the most important player on the team. Tony Romo, the Dallas Cowboys' quarterback will be the main focus on the next part of the psychoanalytic analysis – Phallocentrism. Ott and Mack define Phallocentrism as "a social condition where images or representations of the penis carry connotations of power and dominance" (Ott & Mack, 2014). Tony Romo, being the quarterback, is centered in the spotlight of The Dallas Cowboys. Being in such a prestigious position comes with great power and dominance. Although not directly inferred in advertisements or media coverage, Tony Romo can be considered to be phallocentric because of his dominant position as the Cowboys' quarterback. When you really put thought into it Tony Romo can be considered the phallus of the Dallas Cowboys, this inference can be portrayed in any American football team with a quarterback.

Stated above the quarterback of any team holds a prominent position and is regarded in high standards. Tony Romo has been seen in many forms of media coverage such as commercials. Looking from a media network perspective they would want to feature a player

who is not only well known, in a positive manor, but is greatly recognized as being an influential person. With the media featuring Tony Romo in non NFL material we can clearly observe that Tony Romo holds a prominent stance in the American media world. Quarterbacks are a major sign of masculinity amongst American men. Collin Cowherd, Fox Sports radio host, in his podcast referenced quarterbacks as being "cool" and "good looking guys". He stated that they are the alpha-males and they are the big and strong guys leading the team. Quarterbacks in Cowherd's eyes are not nerds but extremely masculine men. He states that you don't see nerdy guys leading the pack you see the Alpha-Male at the front of the pack.

Cowherd went on to say that, "you can see in the imagery they have tried to glam up his hair, he had a leather jacket on last night", pointing out things that should be all for purposes meaningless to the outcome of a football game. They would also likely never be brought up if not in context to the quarterback position.

Within the Dallas Cowboys there is a deep rooted sense of Scopophilia which refers to pleasure that comes from the process of looking. Sigmund Freud identifies Scopophilia as one manifestation of the sexual drive. Now whether at the stadium or watching the game from the comfort of your living room, men get great pleasure from watching their favorite team play and win. Rooted within a man's masculinity they get great pleasure from also watching the cheerleaders cheer in their scantily clad uniforms.

Sigmund Freud also proposed the aspect of voyeurism, or "the process of experiencing pleasure by watching a desired object or person from a distance" (Ott & Mack, 2014). Either watching the Dallas Cowboys as a whole, focusing on a specific player of the team, or even just watching the cheerleaders dance, one can experience great pleasure from simply the sight of it unfolding in front of you. When men watch The Dallas Cowboys play they may seem like they

are only interested in the team, but deep in their unconscious they are watching because it is what masculine men do. So in turn the Voyeurism and Scopophilia both increase the sense of masculinity in the American male.

The Dallas Cowboys have one of the most well-known cheerleading squads out of every other National Football League team. They are so well known and popular they had their own Television series called Dallas Cowboys Cheerleaders: Making The Team. This show aired on CMT Network and was widely popular amongst Dallas Cowboys fans. Cheerleaders, usually fit, sexy and seductive figures, are widely popular amongst male fans. Now tie in the cheerleaders of America's Team, The Dallas Cowboys, and you have yourself a prime example of Laura Mulvey's "Male Gaze". Women who are cheerleaders are greatly objectified for their looks and their sex appeal to the male population.

The Psychoanalytic analysis of media brings in the concept of fantasy or the mental representation of conscious or unconscious wish fulfilment. There and many ways for one's fantasy to be satisfied. Fantasy and masculinity can both be achieved in the activity of playing football and imagining you are Tony Romo, starting quarterback of the Dallas Cowboys, throwing the winning touchdown at the Super Bowl. Football has become so popular in the fantasy of males that there is an entire sub-genre of football called fantasy football. With this type of football gambling, players can be drafted so you have the ability to create and captain your own virtual team, and depending on the real-life stats of the players you choose determines whether your fantasy team is successful or ends up in the loser's corner. Once again masculinity comes into play with fantasy and with the ability to fantasize the male can grow his masculinity and become the captain of his own imaginary team and relate it to the Dallas Cowboys. Fantasy

football is also a great tool for the NFL to draw interest from fans across the league, as they are inclined to follow every game that features a member of their imaginary team.

Stuart Hall had his famous theory of Encoding and Decoding in Mass Media. He states that "messages have a complex structure of dominance because at each stage they are imprinted with institutional power-relations." (Hall, 1973). Putting it into simple terms, messages are encoded and engraved in media and then interpreted (decoded) by the public. Every person has their own way of decoding the messages that were encoded prior to them being released.

We can tie Stuart Hall and his encoding and decoding model into The Dallas Cowboys and the media coverage that they receive. It is a given fact that encoded into football and its commercials is a great sense of masculinity, power and dominance. But now toss America's Team, The Dallas Cowboys, into the mix and even more gets mixed into the encoded messages that are put out into the public. Being "America's Team" brings with it feelings of great patriotism, masculinity, strong power and dominance.

In the decoding portion of Hall's model is where there can be different interpretations of the encoded messages. For one, from a fan of The Dallas Cowboys perspective, he will surely be rooting for the team and hoping the win and succeed which would in turn give the fan feelings of patriotism, masculinity, and dominance. However, if you look at the same encoded messages from the fan of an opposing team you will surely see that the method of decoding changes greatly. Since this is not the team the fan wants to see succeed he will view all the encoded messages of patriotism, dominance and masculinity as being minimal because in the fan's eyes the team is not one he wants to see succeed. With these two perspectives, one of a fan and one of an opposing fan, we can see the differences in the methods of how the messages which were inscribed into the team were ultimately decoded and put into perspective for the given person.

Members of the national media who branch out to cover the Dallas Cowboys often treat their iconic star helmet as a target on the player's back. Every slight move this team makes is readily blown out of proportion, knowing that fans from around the league will flock to the slightest news coming out of the league's symbol of power and patriotism.

The Dallas Cowboys are truly an important figure in the present day media world. With their growing amount of popularity and the widespread coverage of the team both on-field and off-field we can see how the various aspects of the psychanalytic approach applies to the team. Also prominent is the topic of male masculinity and how it plays a major roll within America's Team.

From the coinage of the nickname "America's Team", the emphasis on the idolization of masculinity and patriotism is clearly visible. From the influence of kids playing football in their back yard and imagining throwing the game winning touchdown the effect on our unconscious is greatly visible.

From the commercials featuring the buff players and scantily clad women surrounding them we can see the psychological drives which are the major driving force behind the popularity of America's Team. Males are in search of achieving the maximum amount of masculinity and ultimately reaching the Pleasure Principle. In the search to achieve maximum pleasure the channeling of desires becomes visible as well.

The psychoanalytic perspective and its various components such as symbolism, Phallocentrism and the male gaze allow us to summarize a semester's worth of analysis towards the National Football League – a deeply complex media empire that has several preferred meanings which vary by audience.

For myself, this study has allowed me to think differently about the way I take in football – expanding past the surface value of an entertaining game while rooting for the Dallas Cowboys year after year. For Nick, it has allowed him to understand why something like the NFL has the following that it does, and that its significance can be felt across the country. While he may not enjoy and understand the game of football, he can appreciate as a media consumer the elements behind its "Media Team" residing in Dallas.

When put into perspective one can see how much was looked over when looking at The Dallas Cowboys. America's Team is truly so much more than just a simple nickname, with its deep historical roots and psychoanalytic characteristics we can visualize just how influential America's Team truly is.

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