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Small Town America Under the “Lights:”
Contemporary Images of Rural America in the Series *Friday Night Lights*

A Thesis
Presented to
the Faculty of Social Sciences
University of Denver

In Partial Fulfillment of
the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

by
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August 2015
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Title: Small Town America Under the “Lights:” Contemporary Images of Rural America
in the Series *Friday Night Lights*
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ABSTRACT

What is Small Town America? The answer to this varies based on a person’s experiences. This is not always from real-world exposure, but often vicariously through television. For some, television is the only opportunity to create a perception for such areas. For others, television could reinforce or sway their perceptions of Small Town America. Therefore, a comprehension of the identity for Small Town America broadcasted through the small screen is important. This research utilized the theory of semiotics to analyze cinematography and mise-en-scene in the opening credits of *Friday Night Lights* to unearth the themes and overarching ideology for Small Town America conveyed by the series. A modern depiction of rural America that played on considered “traditional values” arose. Unexpectedly, the research also unveiled the inability for an “authentic” or cohesive identity for Small Town America, or any person, location or group for that matter, to exist.

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CHAPTER ONE

SMALL TOWN USA AND RURALITY IN THE MEDIA

Introduction

What comes to mind when we think about “Small Town USA?” A secluded little city surrounded by farmland? Somewhere where everyone knows each other? Perhaps the rural South or maybe the Midwest?

Undoubtedly, each person’s interpretation of what identifies Small Town America will vary. For one, our personal knowledge and experiences help create our perceptions about America’s little towns. It is possible this comes from real-world exposure. This could include living in or visiting such a locale. Our interpretations are also influenced vicariously, and perhaps even subconsciously, through the opinions of others or through facets of the media such as photography, texts, film or television.

Television has been and still is a pervasive means through which an identity is created for Small Town America. Today, more than 95% of American households have a television, in addition to the use of streaming technologies from the Internet such as Netflix or Hulu (Stelter, 2011). This media facet is the dominant source of imagery for us to develop an understanding of not only towns, but also entire regions or cultures. For some, this may serve as the only point of contact with such an area and as the only opportunity to create a perception of these locales. For those with prior experience to

such areas, this could reinforce or perhaps sway their perceptions of what constitutes Small Town America. Therefore, a comprehension of the themes and images associated with such areas broadcasted through the small screen is important.

Before delving into this topic any further, disclosing my personal interest in this subject is paramount to maintain the credibility of this research. Hailing from a town of 1,200 in the rural Midwest and an interest in mass communications led to my intrigue with the media's depictions of Small Town America. Based on my own viewing experiences, I felt the televised depictions of Small Town America were inaccurate. I interpreted the portrayals as feeding into negative stereotypes, such as the small town residents being uneducated, uncultured and ignorant, with the ultimate goal of the characters being to get out of such an unpleasant area. For me, such illustrations overshadowed what I considered more positive representations of what I felt truly reflected rural America. Rural America was safe and clean, the residents were friendly and the area had just as much to offer as any urban locale in my opinion. To understand if my feelings on the matter were justified, I began looking into research on televised portrayals of rural America. However, very few media studies relating to these rural areas exist. No comprehensive review of the televised themes or imagery associated with these locales is available, meaning we have little grasp of the identity being created for these regions. Regardless of my personal affiliations, the lack of relevant studies on this topic warrants its research.

This specific research focuses on the series *Friday Night Lights* (2006-2011). Set in contemporary West Texas, the series gathered a dedicated following. This included an audience of those presumed to have an association with America's little towns, and

viewers with little or no personal experience with Small Town America. For both of these audiences, the portrayals in *Friday Night Lights* may have served as a basis of what Small Town America, more specifically, rural West Texas, is like. Hence, an understanding of the themes and images presented in the series is a relevant and important topic for research. From this, it will be possible to unearth the identity the series helps create for Small Town America.

As noted earlier, each person's perception of Small Town America differs. Before moving forward, a grasp of the common definitions of and related to Small Town America is necessary. The following section provides an overview of its defining elements based on population, values, modernity and geography.

Small Town USA: A Definition

The definition of Small Town America is quite vague. Many associate "rural" with a low population. However, the exact population size is unclear. Some consider it settlements with less than 2,500 residents (John, 2008). Others coin it as anything that is not metropolitan, perhaps with populations of 50,000 or more (John, 2008). Ergo, defining Small Town America solely based on population is highly debatable. Instead, additional factors must be taken into consideration.

Along with population, the evolution of values associated with the rural identity in contrast to those of the industrialized, urban populace creates an identity for Small Town America. Perhaps a key descriptor related to this is the notion of "modernity." Modernity, according to Sturken & Cartwright (2009), refers to the rise of

industrialization in the nineteenth century with the movement of the population from rural communities into cities. The result was distinct, differing elements amongst urban and rural areas, particularly pertaining to architecture and a step away from the agrarian lifestyle.

Cities such as New York or Chicago are considered modern partly due to architecture. Consisting of high-tech materials like metal and glass, skyscrapers are a common symbol for technological innovation and industrialization (Sturken & Cartwright, 2009). Rural areas lack such tall, looming buildings, but instead may be connoted with other more agrarian buildings such as barns or silos. Additionally, writings and films of the nineteenth century increasingly focused on the feeling of “being lost in a crowd.” This was symbolic for a general loss of security and social connectedness typically associated with the rural lifestyle as industrialization progressed (Sturken & Cartwright, 2009). Instead of a rural “tight-knit” community, the city is viewed as crowded, yet lonely all at once. Hence, crowds and architecture represent urban modernity, while a sense of community and perhaps even nostalgia of “what once was” connote rurality.

Further complicating the definition of Small Town America is its association with certain traits based on geographic regions. The rural South and the rural Midwest, for instance, have very different identities. When thinking of the Midwest, one may think of rolling plains or farms with fields of wheat and corn, with the occasional tiny town in between. On the other hand, the rural south may play more into the stereotypical images

of secluded areas of Louisiana, such as swamplands and traditional Creole cooking. Hence, what defines Small Town America depends upon the particular region of the United States.

“Rural America,” “Heartland,” “Small Town USA” and “Middle America” are often used interchangeably, further confounding the definition of Small Town America. The denotative meaning of “Heartland” is that of, “... the central geographical region of the United States...in which mainstream or traditional values dominate (Merriam-Webster, 2011). This is quite similar to the definition of Middle America, which refers to “the Midwestern section of the United States.” Perhaps these definitions best fit the idea of rural Kansas, the Dakotas or Nebraska. Of course this fails to include low-populated areas of the South and South West United States. Additionally, there is no clear distinction of exactly constitutes “traditional values.” While similar, these definitions open up even more room for speculation.

For the purpose of this research, the terms Middle America, Rural America and Small Town America will be used interchangeably to identify the fictional city of Dillon, the locale of *Friday Night Lights*. These terms will not be used to pervasively describe all of the rural United States, but specifically the region of West Texas. The geographic location of Dillon fits into the realm of Middle America because of its location in the central United States. Rural America refers to Dillon’s seclusion, located more than 300 miles from Dallas in a vast, open area surrounded by similarly sized towns. Additionally, Dillon’s population, less than 10,000, also corresponds with the previously discussed definitions of Small Town America.

The descriptors noted above are very general in nature. While suited for use as terminology in this paper, these definitions are not meant to play a role in understanding the identity that a specific television series, such as *Friday Night Lights*, creates for Small Town America. This, instead, should be done through an analysis examining the narrative organization of *Friday Night Lights*' story and characters, the formal moving image techniques of cinematography and shot editing as they contribute to the ideological connotations we associate with rural areas. This will be discussed in further detail deeper in this research. Beforehand, a background on the series is necessary. This includes *Friday Night Lights*' premise, viewership and promotional strategies, all of which are outlined in the following sections.

Friday Night Lights: More Than Just Football

On its face, the title *Friday Night Lights* gives the impression of a series premised on high school football, perhaps a spin off from football-centric movie favorites like *Varsity Blues* (1999), *Wildcats* (1986) or *All the Right Moves* (1983). However, *Friday Night Lights* aired more than two-a-day practices, coveted college scholarships and a state championship game in an overly football-obsessed little town. In its five seasons spanning from 2006-2011, *Friday Night Lights* focused on the every-day lives and challenges of the coach and players, their families and friends and many other members of the small, fictional community of Dillon.

Friday Night Lights was progeny of the *New York Times* best selling book by investigative reporter H.G. Bissinger, *Friday Night Lights: A Town, A Team, A Dream*. (Bissinger, 1990). Bissinger had a profound interest in the idea of high school football uniting (and perhaps dominating) Small Town America. He left his job with the

Philadelphia Inquirer and moved to rural West Texas to turn his infatuation into research. In the town the small town of Odessa, he received permission to monitor its renowned high school football team, the 1988 Permian Panthers.

Bissinger's work of nonfiction to some, in particular the residents of Odessa, proved to be more of an exposé of the town's shortcomings and football obsession than a book about football uniting Small Town Texas. (Curledup.com, 2011). Bissinger chronicled the extreme favoritism given to the team and its members over other youth or members of the community. This includes lavish spending on the football stadium, players who managed to pass classes without opening a book and the celebrity status given to the boys on the team. Furthermore, Bissinger's book depicts issues involving racism, politics, education and economic stability in a town once prosperous from oil. In 2000, a film based upon the book, also named *Friday Night Lights*, premiered. In 2006, the televised series, based on the fictional town of Dillon, appeared on NBC. The series continued focusing on the Panthers, but like the book and movie, also touched on the contemporary social issues facing the residents of rural West Texas.

The Little Series That Could: Studies & Criticism

Even though the representation of Small Town America has not been the focus, the film and television series *Friday Night Lights* have been the subject of several media studies and reviews. This includes studies focused on the film's depiction of racism and the promotional strategy developed for the series.

Duru (2007) criticizes the film for deemphasizing the issue of racism, a major area of focus throughout Bissinger's book. According to Duru, the film gave "...scant attention to the substantial racial discord and discrimination at the core of the 1988

Permian Panthers' experience.” The film not only downplayed the racism, but also portrayed the Black and Latino characters as the antagonists, the complete opposite of the scenario recorded in Bissinger’s book. Bissinger focused heavily on Black team member Boobie Miles. While he was the most valuable player of the Permian Panthers, the color of Miles’ skin was not an issue. But after losing his athletic luster due to a leg injury, Miles lost the support of his team and Odessa and quickly became a target for racism. However, the film neglects Miles’ post-injury struggles and instead portrays him as highly supportive of and supported by the team the rest of the season. It is important to note that Duru’s cultural critique of the film was not meant to be an analysis of Small Town America. The representation of racism in the book and its lack in the motion picture version for *Friday Night Lights* does, however, hint towards racism as potential theme that may be derived from a thorough analysis of the series’ narrative and cinematic elements.

Perhaps the most interesting study involving the series is Victoria Johnson’s (2010) research focused on *Friday Night Lights*’ original promotional strategy. Johnson describes how NBC used “place-based understandings” to promote the show in its early seasons. She describes this as a “...cultural and conceptual lag that imagine the American...viewer...as divided according to red state versus blue state identifications and their corresponding imagined capital relations.” Hence, NBC had a “presumed audience” for the series in mind, along with an assumed geographic understanding of where these viewers resided. Johnson considers these understandings and associations as part of what constitutes “common sense” knowledge of particular regions or cultures within the United States.

According to Johnson's (2010) coined common sense and place-based understandings, the original promotional plan for *Friday Night Lights*' focused on broadly held notions of the tastes and characteristics of the U.S. Heartland, particularly, the "flyover states" (i.e. Nebraska, Oklahoma, North Dakota, South Dakota, Wyoming, New Mexico, Iowa, and Arkansas). Such areas are known to consist of the political red with conservative right-wing views. NBC presumed that residents of these states had a geographical and cultural taste for football, and, given the football aspect of the show, would naturally take to *Friday Night Lights*. However, this strategy failed immensely, forcing *Friday Night Lights* to face cancellation in its second season.

Friday Night Lights audience was much more diverse than anticipated by NBC. The series' viewership took a completely unexpected twist, invalidating location-based promotional campaigns. Instead of politically red men from the flyover states, *Friday Night Lights* gathered a following of young, professional women from the politically blue coastal regions and what Johnson (2010) refers to as "stylish" and "upscale" early adopters. Less interested in the football aspect, these viewers were intrigued by the personal challenges faced by the families and individuals in the series (Johnson, 2010). This included characters Jason Street coping with paralysis after a football injury and Matt Saracen taking head-of-household responsibility for his family (in particular his grandmother) during his father's deployment to Iraq.

Critics spanning across major publications spoke out on behalf of series. This included not only sports-centric cultural barometers such as *ESPN Magazine* (Simmons, 2007). *Friday Night Lights* also won the approval of critics from *USA Today* (Bianco, 2006), *The Hollywood Reporter* (Goodman, 2006) and *The Chicago Tribune* (Ryan,

2007). These critics touched on the allure of the series, specifically the relationships amongst and the daily lives of the characters that Johnson (2010) noted attracted the coastal young, female viewership.

Television critic Maureen Ryan of the *Chicago Tribune* (2007) wrote a series of articles encouraging the continuation of *Friday Night Lights* ' on behalf of its surprisingly dominant fan base of women. She inadvertently touches on how the first impressions of the series due to its promotional strategy had hindered the series by catering to the wrong audience. Ryan notes how, "By focusing on the football aspect of the show...ads for "FNL" made women feel the show was not for them." She writes further that, "...some weeks there's no football at all, and the Texas drama can be every bit as relationship-driven as anything on ABC's roster." This supports how by using common sense geographic assumptions, NBC had unsuccessfully defined the gender that would take to the series.

NBC shifted gears to further entice *Friday Night Lights* ' newly found professional and liberal female viewership from the urban coasts. This included big strategic moves. At first, NBC began airing reruns of *Friday Night Lights* on its highly successful Bravo channel even before the first season had ended (Johnson, 2010). Bravo attracted more urban, highly educated and upscale audiences, a large portion which was female (Johnson, 2010). This made Bravo a perfect medium to further reach its surprise fan base. By the third season, NBC was striking a deal with DirecTV. DirecTV shared production costs for *Friday Night Lights* with NBC and, in turn, was granted exclusive rights to the

first run of the episodes, which appeared on NBC at a later date (Johnson 2010). This “crossplatform” approach further catered to the urban audience of the series. Those who paid for services like DirecTV fell into higher socioeconomic status associated with the female viewership of the series.

The efforts by NBC and the critics’ campaigning proved successful. Rising above its botched first season, *Friday Night Lights* became known as “the little series that could” (Goodman, 2011). By the end of the 3rd season, NBC had renewed *Friday Night Lights* for two more seasons, still airing on NBC, Bravo and DirecTV throughout its tenure (Johnson, 2010).

As a background on the series and its related research has been performed, the following sections will provide a detailed look at a major topic repeated in the prior sections: the use of so-called common-sense understandings. The upcoming sections delve further into the use of common sense interpretations in understanding a region or culture, including the role of both positive and negative stereotypes.

Literature Review: Media Stereotypes, Common Sense, Ideology and Small Town America

America developed a love for the shenanigans of the simple-minded country folk from series like the *Beverly Hillbillies*, *HeeHaw* and *My Name is Earl*. When we think small town America, we think “Jed Clampett,” “Daisy Duke” and “Earl Hickey.” These characters and the fictional little towns in which they dwell constitute a niche depiction of Small Town America. Such portrayals may perpetuate assumptions based on our common sense of what defines rural America and its inhabitants. Eventually, these assumptions help feed into what is referred to as an ideology. This literature review will

begin with a brief history and description of key research focused on stereotypes and other themes in the televised media and will gradually transition to the larger scope of the role of media in our understanding of what is of common sense and its construction as part of an ideology.

Analyses of themes involving televised stereotypes of certain groups, cultures, or regions overflow the field of mass communications. Most focus on what the researcher, even though often not directly stated, perceives as negative stereotypes. These studies traverse a variety of topics. This includes portrayals of success (FisherKeller, 1999), ethnicity and race (LaCroix, 2010) and even the association of specific geographies with crime and violence (Matie et al, 2008; Grabe & Crew, 2007). Research on televised media stereotypes covers all genres, whether newscasts, fictional narratives, dramas or reality television.

Researchers often focus on how media portrayals affect viewers' interpretations of a particular group or region in the real world. As noted, it is impossible for us to observe every region or culture throughout the world on our own. Instead, we create images or ideas of these "unknowns" based on social networks, books, television, movies, news, etc. In specific regards to television, Appel (2008) writes, "...viewers tend to learn what they interpret as 'facts' about the world from the narratives shown on the small screen." Gorham (1999) explains this further, describing our dependence upon other people and the "social world," including the media, to teach us what is "fact" and "true." Images rendered by television provide us with what eventually develops into our conception of the vast groups and regions of the world from which we would otherwise be sheltered.

Of particular concern to mass media researchers is the repetition of a stereotype or particular theme to an audience. As we witness certain traits repeated over and over, these representations become ingrained in our minds. This strengthens our association of the images with the groups or regions portrayed. This is especially true if the audience has no prior experience or ties to the groups or areas stereotyped. As media stereotypes hold the potential of becoming world beliefs, they could pose harm to the groups depicted. Gorham (1999) notes "...stereotypical images in the media can...convey messages about what are not only appropriate thoughts for members of particular social groups, but also what are appropriate actions and roles." Thus, repeated televised stereotypes could foster inaccurate or constrained perceptions of a social group or culture in its entirety. A possible example is the series *My Name is Earl*, in which the characters from the rural South are portrayed as uneducated. Those not associated with Small Town America, for example, might interpret *My Name Is Earl* as a true illustration of the rural South and its inhabitants in general. For those with experience with such an area, this could still influence their perceptions.

Studies that analyze media stereotypes and portrayals typically employ the theoretical framework of semiotics, even though not often directly stated. Semiotics analyzes the signs within a particular cultural text, be it a photograph, film, article, television show or so forth, and reviews how it produces meaning and becomes part of the construction of ideology (Sturken & Cartwright, 2009). These ideologies, repeated often enough as Gorham's (1999) studies point out, take on the aura of common sense,

becoming a natural part of our lives and understanding of the world around us, even the nooks and crannies in which we have never ventured. This common sense encompasses an array of themes, such as gender, race or class and other social categories (Sturken & Cartwright, 2009).

Gorham's (1999) research on ideology focused heavily on the use of language in media texts, and though unstated, semiotics, in enforcing stereotypes through what is arguably very thorough research. However, much more than language in texts perpetuates certain themes or stereotypes. Narrative structure and the cinematic elements are also often considered. For example, Sebel K. Norman (2009) reviewed the narrative structure of the films of Mike Leigh to analyze how the speech and behavior of his characters depicted the lower class. Douglas Heil (1996) performed a similar analysis in his assessment of racism in the movie *Letters*. Heil took his research a step further, detailing not only the discourse between characters, but also the color of the costumes and cinematic elements such as camera movement tracking, lighting, shadows, zoom/camera range, close up and focus.

By utilizing a theoretical approach based on semiotics, it is possible to analyze even the most minute of nuances in *Friday Night Lights* that may outwardly, or perhaps subconsciously, build into the ideology of Small Town America. This includes a review of cinematic techniques, which can be summed up into the elements of mise-en-scene. Mise-en-scene consists of aspects such as setting, lighting, screen space, costumes and makeup and the behavior, movement and performance of the characters (Bordwell & Thompson, 118). When taken into meticulous review, one is able to interpret how these elements build an identity for rural America. For example, by analyzing the costumes one

might surmise the fashion style, while paying attention to the setting may create an understanding of the architecture associated with rural identity. By considering both of these elements, it is possible to unearth a pattern that creates a unique representation. An example of this could be the social class dominant in this area. For instance, what might it tell us if the characters are adorned with what appears to be expensive, lavish jewelry, or more basic clothing such as jeans and t-shirt? Also, are their homes what we might consider mansions, or smaller, one-story houses? Pending on the answers to each of these questions, we could surmise the characters as either upper or lower economic class. Hence, studying mise-en-scene as part of a semiotic analysis is essential in grasping the identity a series such as *Friday Night Lights* paints for Small Town America and the ideology of rural America into which it feeds.

Research Techniques

Commonly, media studies utilizing semiotics engage in qualitative methods to examine media portrayals. Researchers frequently analyze media depictions of particular groups or regions through the constant comparative technique. This technique categorizes incidents pertaining to specific occurrences in each episode, series, etc., which are then refined until a system of themes can be deduced (Wimmer & Dominick, 2011). In other words, after review, the researcher notes the repeated occurrences of certain images or representations. Those repeated frequently ultimately form themes.

Many studies utilize a technique similar to that of random sampling to chose which sequences, episodes or series to analyze. Wood & Todd (2005) reviewed episodes throughout the history of the “Simpsons” to identify the setting of Springfield as an Omnitopia, specifically as an ubiquitous, ever-present continuum that seems to fit in

everywhere, yet appears to be nowhere all at once. Others span research throughout a variety of series to uncover themes. This is evident in the research by Lacroix (2011). Lacroix viewed specific instances on *Chappelle's Show*, *South Park*, *Saturday Night Live* and other popular series that televised Native American stereotypes, particularly those portraying the group as uneducated and stuck in the era of the late 1800's and early 1900's. Based on both of these studies, neither each episode of a series nor every appearance of a particular image or representation in the history of television is reviewed meticulously. Instead, researchers select a portion of episodes or series from which to perform a detailed analysis.

Attempting to analyze every episode of a series or to research every occurrence of a theme throughout a particular genre, while thorough, would prove overwhelming for a thesis project. One television series alone may include more than 100 episodes. In the case of *Friday Night Lights*, the series ran for five seasons, the first season alone consisting of 25 episodes. The time and resources necessary to review each episode of each season would be far too extensive, in addition to creating an inundation of data. Due to this, a method similar to that used by Wood & Todd (2005) and LaCroix (2011) could be used in researching the cultural themes in *Friday Night Lights*. By only reviewing specific episodes or sequences, deducing the ideological representation of Small Town America from the series will be succinct with a feasible pool of data. However, another method, though not typically referred to as a technique to effectively narrow down a text for research, exists. This is an analysis of the opening credits.

The opening credits provide the first glimpse of a series. More specifically, the title sequence sets the framework for what to expect for the series, including the characters, genres, themes, relationships, and general subject matter (Gray, 2010). Gray (2010) performed research on what he refers to as paratexts, specifically ads, promo trailers and opening credit sequences, to determine how each can generate meaning prior to viewing the full text. His research touched on the opening credits of a number of television series, including the *Simpsons* (1989), *Lost* (2004), *Heroes* (2006) and *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* (1979) to name a few, and how each laid out the characters, tone and style of the show for the audience (Gray, 2010).

Gray (2010) found that the title sequence of a series provides a “proper” and “preferred” interpretation of a series. This aligns with Johnson’s (2010) research. As noted, NBC had originally, and inaccurately, focused its promotional strategy for *Friday Night Light’s* on the presumed audience of men from the politically red states of Middle America based on place-based understandings and common-sense assumptions about this group’s tastes (Johnson, 2010). While not directly stated, this promotional strategy undoubtedly included the opening credit sequence. According to Gray (2010), the title sequence is a tool used by distributors and producers to convey the themes and tones of the series to the demographic they feel constitutes the audience and/or the audience they want to attract to the series. As *Friday Night Lights* progressed, the promotional strategy was changed to cater to the primary female audience (Johnson, 2010). And again, while not blatantly stated, this included a shift in the credit sequence. Gray (2010) touches on how other series, such as *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (2003), successfully altered credit sequences to cater to the more upscale viewership that had become attracted to the series

as it progressed. In short, a seventy-five second title sequence provides a thorough overview of what to anticipate from a series, and is constructed with a specific viewership in mind.

Based on Gray's (2010) research, we can surmise it is possible to analyze the opening credits to determine the identity it constructs for a series overall. Hence, by performing a semiotic review of the title sequences of *Friday Night Lights*, looking specifically at elements of mise-en-scene and cinematography,, a clear and thorough glimpse into the series' entire seventy-six episode run is possible. This provides a succinct, yet thorough means to identify the themes that not only help construct an identity for the series, but perhaps even the ideological construction *Friday Night Lights* builds for rural America. Furthermore, it can be done from two distinct audience conceptions: the initial target audience for the first season of Red State males based in such a locale, and the apparent target audience of professional urban women for seasons two through five dwelling in areas arguably the distinct opposite of Small Town America. Comparing shifts from season one's opening credit sequence to that of season five provides a unique, well-rounded depiction of the ideology the series builds into for Small Town America.

The previous paragraphs provided a background on stereotypes, themes, ideology, semiotics and the research methodologies in media studies. As it was not the focus of these prior sources to review the themes related to Small Town America, a literature review of academic research involving rural America follows to provide a more in-depth and sound understanding of the current place it holds in televised media. For the most part, even though often not directly noted, these studies utilize similar theoretical

frameworks and methodologies as those described above. A detailed review of recent and past studies including rural America follows.

Rural America and Media Research

As discussed earlier, Small Town America receives very little focus in academic research. However, the field of mass communications recognizes that certain rural representations do exist in the media.

Of the limited research focused on rural America and the media, much pertains to common-sense representations of the South, often in a negative light. Harris (2009) discusses how old-time classics like *HeeHaw* and the *Dukes of Hazzard* depict “good-ol’ country folk” as uneducated and uncultured. Cooke-Jackson and Hansen (2006) centered their research on stereotypical “Appalachians,” “hillbillies” and “rednecks” as one of the few American subcultures considered perfectly acceptable to ridicule, using CBS’ failed reality TV series, *The Real Beverly Hillbillies*, as their basis. Harris (2009) describes how what many consider stereotypical “southern” traits are often lumped with the rest of rural America by the media. For example, regardless of the location of the small town depicted, albeit Montana or Kentucky, Harris argues that the characters typically speak with a Southern drawl. With a wide array of studies focusing on what could be considered unsubtle stereotypes, it is important to note that these studies do not take into account positive portrayals depicted by the televised media (which will be discussed further on in this section). This may, however, be a potential theme that could be unearthed with a thorough review of the cinematic elements in the title sequence of *Friday Night Lights*.

Another common research topic is that of ethnicity. For example, Park (2009) reviews how the long-running reality-television series *The Real World* is known for casting a white, sheltered, small-town “kid” in direct contrast to an urban minority. Usually, some type of conflict arises due to the rural cast member’s either blatant racism or ethnic ignorance. Recent studies by Flanagan (2009) and Vaughn (2009) review the lack of racial diversity in the considered utopian city of Mayberry from the *Andy Griffith Show*. To Vaughn, the fact that all of the characters are white is a major deterrent to Mayberry being a true utopia. While the series certainly did lack diversity, Flanagan believed it was not meant to portray that a utopia need be of the rural white. Even though few studies on this topic exist, what we may surmise from the research available is a televised emphasis of Small Town America as homogenous, specifically “white,” and possibly racist.

Unlike the latter two themes discussed, not all media research on rural America has focused on what one might consider more negative topics. While few, some studies have reviewed the media’s depiction of rural America as a utopia or in a sense of nostalgia. Commonly, this is accomplished by portraying rural America as superior to its urban counterpart by making a mockery of urban life and the characteristics associated with it such as capitalism, big business, pollution and class division (Magoc, 1991), along with undesirable traits, such as self-absorption and superficiality (Marc, 1984). In such studies, rural America is glamorized, emphasizing human values such as integrity and honesty amongst the inhabitants depicted in the *Andy Griffith Show*, *Green Acres* and the *Beverly Hillbillies* (Magoc, 1991; Marc, 1984). Perhaps this perspective is best surmised by Vaughn on the *Andy Griffith Show*:

The peaceful, rural setting of the town of Mayberry, its structure and sense of community, and the always resolvable problems Mayberry would encounter contrasted sharply with the anger, vast anonymity, and chronic fear that characterized my Los Angeles environment (2009)

Similar to those focused on more negative traits, these studies are of importance to this research as each may hint towards themes that may be unearthed from a thorough semiotic review of the title sequence *Friday Night Lights*. Specifically, this refers to the idea of Small Town America as moral, safe and picturesque.

It is not just academic researchers who have taken notice of themes related to Small Town America on the small screen. The population of rural America has noticed these images as well. However, it has been the negative, stereotypical images that have caught their attention. The following section reviews Small Town America's rejection of its negative portrayal in the media.

Hillbillies Forbidden: Rural America's Backlash

It was not until recently that the population of rural America fought back against negative media stereotypes. This backlash targeted CBS' attempt to cast a family for the reality television series *The Real Beverly Hillbillies*, a spin-off of the classic comedy. CBS planned to place an "Appalachian family" in a luxurious mansion in Beverly Hills. The Center for Rural Strategies, a nonprofit organization established in 2001 in Kentucky, launched a public awareness campaign against the proposed series. The center focuses on presenting "accurate" and "compelling" portraits of rural lives and cultures. The nonprofit accused CBS of going too far with its "misunderstanding" and "intentional stereotyping."

Rallying thousands of people and organizations across the country, the Center for Rural Strategies expressed concerns for not only the harm of perpetuating stereotypes, but also a hamper on public policies to address the issues facing rural America (Rural Reality vs. Reality TV: Anatomy of a Public Awareness Campaign, 2003). As a part of the campaign, the late writer Rudy Abramson (2002), a long proponent of rural America and its heritage and a former resident of small town Alabama (Abramson, 2008), reasoned that using “real-life Clampetts” outwardly displayed the complete disregard of the mass media for rural America and a lack of interest in rural issues.

The casting call for the family received the brunt of the criticism. The search for the perfect “hillbillies” proved quite extensive. Critics quickly deduced why. Cooke-Jackson and Hansen (2008) note former Georgia Senator Zel Miller’s letter to the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*. Miller (2006) stated “Seems they are having a hard time finding the family they had in mind: toothless illiterates with hookworms and an old man who has impregnated his barefoot, teenage daughter.” Columnist Fenton Johnson, originally from rural Kentucky, further depicts the outrage of rural America against the show’s hunt for the quintessential Clampetts when he writes:

CBS has yet to locate its perfect family, but I can predict what they will look like. I know that they will be white -- we have made some progress since the blackface days of vaudeville. I know that they will speak with an accent, the stronger the better, and that they will have little or no education. (2003)

Eventually, CBS called an end to its “hick hunt” and cancelled the development of the show. Even though there does not appear to be actual supporting documentation that this was due to the campaign, it is possible that it did play a role in its cancellation.

The campaign by the Center for Rural Strategies showcased the frustration of rural America with its portrayals on the small screen and its concern about the potential effects of this imagery. This further demonstrates the value of academic research on Small Town America and its place in the media.

While the comedic portrayals of hillbillies received criticism, the images in *Friday Night Lights* earned praise. Perhaps *Friday Night Lights* provides a portrayal of Small Town America that would resonate more positively with the Center for Rural Strategies? Initial critical and cultural responses to *Friday Night Lights* offer a starting point from which to conduct a more thorough examination of the ideological construction of Small Town America in the series.

Initial Common Sense and Stereotypical Reaction to *Friday Night Lights*

Even though Johnson's (2010) research focused on geographic-based "common sense" tastes and values, specifically the presumed red-state and low capital affiliations of Middle America, used to promote *Friday Night Lights*, she inadvertently showcases traits that are often associated with certain regions of the United States. Johnson writes about "broadly shared mythologies," which could be interpreted as ideologies, of specific areas. This includes assumptions that the rural working class finds joy in aggressive sports, holds conservative "red" values and has a "low" market culture. Based on this, the rural Texas setting and emphasis on football would have made politically red men from Middle America the prime target for the series. Johnson describes the shared mythologies that differentiate the Heartland from urban America as:

... a region *necessarily* presumed to share a taste for physically aggressive sport culture (specifically hunting, NASCAR, and football), “low”-culture market dispositions (associated with, e.g., Wal-Mart and GM vs. IKEA and Prius), and conservative political affiliations (George W. Bush’s presidency and radical right-wing movements outside the Beltway)... (2010)

One cultural critique explores what is considered “authentic” aspects of Middle America portrayed in *Friday Night Lights*. Tim Goodman in the *SF Gate* writes:

....“Friday Night Lights” manages to be everything you don't expect it to be... a portrait of small town life instead of a cheesy back-lot fantasy, and even a sports story with real authenticity, from the preparation to the game action. (2006)

As discussed, it was the often described “stylish,” “upscale” intellectual female viewers from the urban coasts who took to the series. Per the review in previous sections, the twist in the presumed fan base to female urbanites is perhaps due to the fact that *Friday Night Lights* delved into the lives and relationships of those in the town. This includes a focus on social issues, particularly those of race, gender roles and class relations.

Television critic Nancy Franklin (2007), a member of the surprise female fan base, reported a particularly shocked response to her predilection for *Friday Night Lights*. Franklin, who referred to herself as keeping her “urban-coastal intellectual allegiances,” wrote the following about the series:

I took a wait-and-not-see approach to “Friday Night Lights” last year, until an unlikely friend recommended it—a young filmmaker who had grown up in Manhattan in a literary and theatrical milieu and had no interest in sports. We were in the Museum of Natural History when we had this conversation, and when she told me that she and her husband were “addicted” to the show, even the animals in the dioramas were so stunned that they froze in their tracks. The following week, I watched an episode, and went from ignorance to bliss. (2007)

From Franklin's statement, one might interpret a sense of her own common-sense notion of what constitutes rural America. One might surmise from her statements that Small Town USA was not part of her "intellectual" allegiances. This is reinforced by her need to emphasize her friends' "literary" and "theatrical" associations. However, it is possible that Franklin's original opinion of the show was due to the original promotional emphasis on athletics, and perhaps not in specific regards to the series' locale. Either way, *Friday Night Lights* won her self-defined sophisticated, intellectual approval. Franklin became part of the unexpected professional, coastal female fan-base of the series.

What we may surmise from the failure of *Friday Night Lights*' original promotional plan and Johnson's research is that common-sense assumptions are problematic when evaluating a media text. In the case of *Friday Night Lights*, the iconography that appeared as part of the strategy, based on the presumed tastes of politically red men, built into an ideology that turned off the emergent audience of blue professional women to the series. This had serious repercussions for *Friday Night Lights*, almost leading to its cancellation.

Perhaps *Friday Night Lights* engendered the "elite" and "intellectual" female fan base because it strayed from the common-sense assumptions associated with Middle America. According to some critics, *Friday Night Lights* created an authentic feeling for viewers. For example, the series received praise for shooting in actual rural areas and homes in Texas as opposed to a studio in Los Angeles (Ryan, 2007). Nancy Franklin further notes:

Watching it, you have a feeling of total immersion—in the (fictional) town of Dillon, in the lives of the football players and their parents, and in all the elements that determine people’s fates in that dry, desolate, and depressed part of the country. (2007)

Important to note here is Franklin’s association of this portion of rural America as dry, desolate and depressed. While not one of the common-sense assumptions described above, part of the “authentic” feel is accredited to this. Similar to the associations above, it will be of interest to determine if these are traits that could arise during an analysis of *Friday Night Lights*.

Writer John Weisman (2007) went as far as to refer to the series as one of the most realistic televised images of the small-town South. However, evaluating a series on its “realistic” features is problematic. Perhaps best worded by Bordwell & Thompson (2010) “notions of realism vary across cultures, over time and even among individuals.” Hence what Weisman considers “real” about the small-town South, may differ greatly with someone else. Further building on this, one might take Weisman’s interpretation of “realistic” in this matter with a proverbial grain of salt.

From the review of past studies and criticism and praise for the series, we have been able to analyze how vague concepts of realism and common-sense assumptions about small-town values and other traits have often been misdirected at the wrong audiences. This study will counter these misconceptions. Instead of focusing research on what is currently considered common sense (Johnson, 2010), this research focused on *Friday Night Lights* will use a metaphoric “clean slate.” It will not revolve around pre-determined themes derived from place-based understandings. Instead, this research will focus on how the title sequence of the series participates in constructing an ideology of

Small Town America. The themes will be derived based on a semiotic analysis with particular attention paid to cinematic elements and mise-en-scene.

Research Questions:

Given the praise and surprise fanfare for *Friday Night Lights*, is it possible the series strayed away from past common-sense notions of what defines Small Town America? Perhaps the series created a new portrayal that made rural America more appealing to the urban fan base and its own assumptions about such locales. If not to the typical standards of Small Town USA, we must wonder what image of rural America and its inhabitants *Friday Night Lights* created. This depiction managed to break and possibly even create new ideological assumptions held by an audience consisting of those with no true affiliation with Small Town America.

To determine the type of image *Friday Night Lights* gives Small Town America; I propose a study to unearth the dominant themes of the series. The theory of semiotics will unveil the ways ideology is constructed by elements of mise-en-scene and cinematography in the opening credits of the series. The research will attempt to answer the following questions:

1. What themes about Small Town USA are portrayed in the opening credits of *Friday Night Lights*?
2. Do the themes and constructed meanings in the opening credits change from the first season, which targets a Red State male viewership, to the last season, which targets an urban professional thirty-something female viewership?
3. Based on the opening credits, does *Friday Night Lights* construct new meaning and associations for the classic Small Town America identity?

The Study

This study will review how *Friday Night Lights* constructs meanings and associations around Small Town America. The purpose will not be to identify if common media stereotypes of rural America exist or are excluded in *Friday Night Lights*, but rather to determine the unique themes portrayed that may be the source of the series' dominant viewership of blue, professional young women from the coasts. To decipher these themes, a semiotic analysis of the signs and symbols within the series' opening credits of seasons one and season five will be performed. This will result in an in-depth ideological review, including the characters and setting, as depicted through elements of mise-en-scene and formal cinematic techniques.

The credit sequences are a strategic choice. This is because the opening credits introduce the series, creating an understanding of the content and structure of the series overall (Gray, 2010). This includes the ideological themes portrayed, and how they are constructed to attract specific audience. Hence, by analyzing semiotic elements present in the title sequences, specifically cinematography and mise-en-scene, it is possible to see how the series creates an identity for rural America based on how it conveys certain themes and therefore, builds into the ideology of Small Town America.

Each season was also strategically chosen. Season one originally focused on the inaccurately preconceived male fan base for *Friday Night Lights*, while season five catered to the primary viewership of women. We can anticipate differences, even if slight, in the ideological depictions in each season credit sequence due to catering to the different genders from different locales. As noted by Gray (2010), the opening credits are a means for show distributors and producers, such as NBC for *Friday Night Lights*, to

convey what they want they want audiences to interpret about the series. Therefore, the opening credit sequences of these two seasons will provide a well-rounded analysis of the themes in the series.

To move forward with this research, we will begin with a semiotic analysis of the title sequence of the first season of *Friday Night Lights*. From there, a similar review of the final season credit sequence, including its differences from those of season one, will be performed.

CHAPTER TWO
THE INITIAL CONSTRUCTION OF SMALL TOWN AND RURAL IDENTITY IN
THE SEASON ONE OPENING CREDITS

When watching the opening credits of a television series, we typically consider it no more than a progression of names and images giving credit to the actors and creators involved. However, the credit sequence also assists us in creating an understanding of the specific themes, relationships, genres and general subject matter (Gray, 2010). Based on this, a semiotic analysis of the elements *mise-en-scene*, and the cinematography enhances these elements, creates an identity for the series as a whole, specifically the dominant or preferred meanings that the producers, creators, or networks wish to convey.

The following is a thorough semiotic analysis of the season one title sequence of *Friday Night Lights*. From this, a first glimpse of the key themes, and in turn, ideological depiction for Small Town America will be unveiled. This begins with a review of one of the most dominant themes in the sequence: ethnicity.

Ethnicity

Bissinger's (1990) book on which *Friday Night Lights* is based focused largely on the impact of ethnicity in Odessa, the real-life version of Dillon. Thus, it is not surprising that an analysis of the opening credits unearths this theme. This is emphasized by the

quantity of shots in which the ethnicity of the main characters is discernible. In season one, eleven of these include Caucasian characters. Smash Williams, the sole African American lead character, appears in just one.

The quantity of inclusions of characters of nonwhite and Caucasian characters is just one indicator of ethnicity as key theme based on the title sequence. Cinematic elements, such as framing, further emphasize its importance. Framing is a very important element in deriving meaning from an analysis such as this. Bordwell & Thompson (2010) note how this technique makes it possible to isolate a narratively important detail. For example, the use of close ups in credit sequences often signifies the importance of a character (Gray, 2010). The exact function framing performs, however, varies upon the context of the shot. This is analyzed in further detail below.

Framing in the season one credits accentuates the lack of diversity in Dillon. As noted, Smash Williams is the sole nonwhite character featured. But this isn't the only manner in which his role as a minority is depicted. Being featured in a shot alone, in the form of a close up, or being placed strategically in the center of a shot often signifies the importance of character. Unlike his Caucasian cast mates, Smash has no solo screen time. Nor is he in the center of the visual frame. Instead, he is at the left middle and is surrounded by supporting actors. Furthermore, he is the only character shot from a high angle, making it appear that we're looking down at him. These elements combined give a feeling of having to "look for him" or "find him." Or, given the camera angle, connote that he is not just literally below us, but even metaphorically of less importance.

Smash's role in season one of *Friday Night Lights* is actually very extensive, but his presence is heavily downplayed in the credits through cinematic tactics. This demonstrates the lack of recognition or representation he, and perhaps even his ethnic group, faces. It also insinuates the Caucasian ethnicity's influence and dominating presence in Dillon. The absence of any nonwhite characters other than Smash Williams, and the de-emphasis of him through framing, connotes a general lack of diversity in Dillon and perhaps rural America overall. Smash's struggles as a minority in a predominately white small town are conveyed as a main point of conflict; racism, and how it is handled, is cued to be a recurring issue.

Ethnicity is not the only theme from Bissinger's (1990) book to warrant itself a place in the first season opening credits of *Friday Night Lights*. Nor is it the only theme with a distinct tie back to Johnson's (2010) research on place-based understandings. Another important focus is on gender.

Gender

As previously noted, NBC predicted *Friday Night Light's* audience would consist of politically red, conservative men located in the fly-over states (Johnson, 2010). Due to this, the credit sequence of this season caters to a male audience. This is portrayed with the cinematic use of framing and a strategic use of the quantity of inclusions of male as opposed to female characters in the title sequence.

In *Friday Night Lights'* first season credit sequence, leading male characters warrant almost twice as much screen time as women. Men are in nine shots; women are

in five. This could have a very simple connotation - the male population of Dillon is larger. Ergo, more men appear in the credit sequence. But, taking framing into account suggests more.

As discussed in the section on ethnicity, framing, and in particular the use of close ups, signifies an important narrative element (Bordwell & Thompson 2010). In the title sequence, six shots of male characters are in the form of full to medium close ups. Only three shots feature women in this manner. Two of these shots, those of main characters Julie Taylor and Tyra Collette, only display their side profiles, each heavily shadowed. This hints at each of their reduced importance in the series. The shadowing across the only visible portions of their faces essentially de-emphasizes them. Hence, while close-up does single each women out as an important character in *Friday Night Lights*, the lighting insinuates they are both figuratively in the shadow of their male counterparts. Tyra and Julie, and women overall for that matter, hold less significance in the series, as the opening credits for season one indicates.

What does this use of cinematography in the season one title sequence suggest? It could be perceived that men are the dominant, or perhaps even superior gender in Dillon. This may, however, not be an attempt to negatively devalue women and their role in Dillon. Instead, the cinematography just showcases them in “supporting roles.” Male actors were likely anticipated to resonate more with the anticipated fan base of men. Men would be easier to relate to or understand for the presumed male viewership of the series. Hence, through framing and shadowing, the credits depict male characters as the most integral to the main narrative plot. Women, in contrast, are signified to play smaller parts. While not at the center of conflict, they would somehow be involved. It is not only the

framing and quantity in which the idea of women as supporting characters is portrayed in the opening credits. Another manner is through the facial expressions of the characters.

Analyzing the difference in demeanor amongst the lead male and female characters in the first season title sequence unearths an interesting recurrence related to gender. Male characters' moods visually change when the shot is shared with a woman. Framing distinguishes this unique element, with medium to full close ups enabling a clear view of characters' facial expressions. For instance, there is a close up of Jason Street. The proximity of the shot showcases how distraught he is. There is sweat on his temple and wrinkles in his forehead from his tensed muscles; his mouth is open in a frown and his eyes move back and forth frantically. He looks frightened and stressed. His mood in a later medium close-up shot of him with Lyla Garrity is the opposite. This time, he wears a wide smile, his entire face is relaxed and his eyes are bright, almost sparkling. Hence, when Lyla is present, his anxiety and anguish are not.

Tami Taylor is conveyed as a pillar of support for her husband, Coach Taylor, in the season one credits. The example of this is a shot inside of Coach Taylor's office. A cluttered image density provides a feeling of chaos or disarray. Papers are scattered amongst his desk, and the items pinned to the bulletin board behind him are crooked. He himself looks jumbled, wearing a deep frown, his hair sticking up in places, stubble on his chin and his brows furrowed. His eyes are squinted and there are wrinkles in his forehead, hinting at stress. But once Tami leans down behind him and puts her arms around him, he lets out a sigh of relief and closes his eyes. His entire face relaxes. Her presence and her touch alleviate his anxiety.

Tami Taylor's soothing role with Coach Taylor in the title sequence has multiple connotations. One is likely the portrayal of Tami as the loving, yet strong woman. This, in compilation to all of the signs and symbols related to football in the shots, however, also hints that the game has certain implications on Coach Taylor's life. Given his demeanor, those implications are negative, such as stress and pressure from the game of football and the team that never quite seem to leave him. As just touched on, his family, including Tami Taylor, serves as a calming element for him. More specifically, his family is needed to overcome the day-to-pressure from the role of football in his life. These specific concepts are reviewed further into this analysis of the credit sequences.

Why the change in mood by male cast members with their female counterparts present? This could be looked at in a more negative light of traditional American gender roles: The purpose of women is to bring men happiness. They are the submissive gender, or compliant to the men's needs and desires. Or, this again, ties back to the original perceived audience of men. These portrayals in the first season depict the particular struggle or stress of the male characters, and the women play supporting roles in how the men overcome their challenges. However, the demeanor of the women when portrayed alone challenges each of these interpretations.

Unlike the men, the women are content when captured solo. Close ups of Tyra Collette and Lyla Garrity in season one embody calmness and happiness. Each wears a big smile, their faces are relaxed and their eyes are almost sparkling. Hence, the women do not require a man to bring out their joy, nor do they need to be serving men to be content. Instead, each of the women is just fine, if not more than fine, on her own.

Reviewing the credits in season one unearths gender as a theme in *Friday Night Lights*. From what is discernible from the credit sequences, the role women play in Dillon and their status with their male counterparts will be key. Just how this is portrayed differs slightly due to the viewership being catered to in each season. This will be discussed more in the next chapter.

While quantity of inclusions and framing played the largest roles in themes of ethnicity and gender, the strategic use of specific denotative elements enhanced through cinematography reveal another theme in *Friday Night Lights*' title sequence: Social class.

Social Class

Interpretations of what exactly constitutes social class will undoubtedly vary. By definition, the working class consists of those employed for wages, especially in manual or industrial work often referred to as “blue collar” work (Oxford Dictionaries, 2014). It is essentially one of the “lower” rungs for the middle class, including those bringing in less-than-average incomes. To help put this into perspective, the median income was \$48,451 (Webster and Bishaw, 2007) during the initial airdate of *Friday Night Lights* in 2006. This means that those of the working class made under this amount, often considered a meager living for a single person, if not an entire family.

A number of denotative elements in the opening credits play on our natural understanding of what is associated with the working class. This includes the state of the homes, yards and nearby buildings displayed.

Homes and Buildings

Two examples of homes and yards in the title sequence that connote a lower economic status are those of main characters Matt Saracen and Tim Riggins. A series of

denotative features and cinematic effects exemplify this through the state and size of the buildings and the yards.

In the season one opening credit sequence, Matt Saracen's home and yard are introduced in a trucking shot to the right. The camera moves the view from the side to the front of the home. Depth of field is not used. Instead it is essentially a close up of the home and yard that gives a distinct and clear view of each. This first provides a clear view of the cluttered image density that emphasizes the disarray of Matt's yard. Many of the items are indiscernible. Those that can be made out appear to be flowerpots, all of which are empty. Additionally, there is a shrub at the front of the house with the leaves and branches untrimmed. Overall, this connotes the yard is unkempt, with little being put into its upkeep.

Along with emphasizing the state of the yard, the shot accentuates the small size of the home. It takes less than a second for the shot to pass the entire width of the one-story building. Furthermore, the close frame of the shot allows us to see how the white paint on the home fades in areas. It is almost a yellow hue, with chipping paint scattered across the building. The discoloration and diminishing paint connote the home is old and worn, and similar to the yard, overdue for maintenance.

The shot of Matt Saracen's home cuts into a trucking shot moving in the opposite direction past Tim Riggins' house and yard. Different framing and image density than that of Matt's home reveal more signifying elements. There is a medium depth of field, strategically chosen to showcase Tim's yard not for its length, but its physical state. A very low image density and full focus add to this, providing a clear view of the lawn. The

grass has more patches of brown than green. A long line of weeds borders the bottom of the patio. Similar to Matt's home, this connotes little care going into the yard.

Very little is actually in Tim Riggins' lawn, but there are a number of elements visible on the front porch. Instead of lawn chairs, there are raggedy looking recliners. While difficult to see, their brown color fades in certain areas, showcasing the wear and tear of the furniture. There is also something hanging off the patio, which appears to be a belt as it is so slim, long and black. These are not typical items one would expect to see on a porch. Instead, it appears messy, and its décor simply "thrown together," once again showing a lack of upkeep or frequent care being taken.

Again, a trucking movement showcases the small size of the home. Similar to Matt Saracen's house, Tim Riggins' is one story. While it takes slightly longer for this trucking shot, the entire width of the home is passed in a matter of moments. Tim' house is also an off-white color. A number of the bricks are either chipped or missing from the trim at the bottom. Just as with Matt's home, this connotes the house is worn and rundown without much effort going into its maintenance.

Other buildings around the town displayed in the title sequence are in similar states. The building across the street from Matt Saracen's home is a key example. There is a shot of Matt throwing a football outside of his home in season one. In the background, a portion of the building across the street can be seen. Certain elements make it appear rundown. Again there are chipped bricks. Additionally, there is what resembles sheet metal at its foundation. With the light from the sun, it is possible to make out red rust covering it. Broken panes of glass cover one side of the building, while the

other windows are blacked out. While it isn't possible to determine what the building is, we can connote from its appearance that it is not well kept, and perhaps, even abandoned.

Cinematography and iconography in each of the aforementioned shots create repeated connotations of the buildings and yards in Dillon being rundown, disordered and small. But how does this correlate with the working class? These appearances do not tie into what is undoubtedly many people's understanding of wealth and prosperity. It is the opposite, perhaps even hinting towards poverty to some extent with elements like the broken glass and rust taken into account. To truly grasp this and the distinction of Dillon as a working-class town, it is important to note signs and symbols typically associated with the upper class lacking in the credits. Instead of "lush" multi-story mansions, the homes are small, just one story. There are no freshly painted, white-picket fences or elaborately gated yards. The lawns are not bright green; there is no fancy landscaping, no intricate rock or flowerbeds (or flowers at all for that matter), no trimmed shrubbery, etc. Nothing appears even remotely new; the siding, the trim, the paint is all wearing. What we see are homes, yards and buildings that are old and worn – something much more typical of a lower socio-economic status.

States of the buildings and yards in the opening credits help build an identity of social class in Dillon. Yet, to truly decipher the dominance of the working class, additional elements must be taken into consideration. This includes the automobiles portrayed in the credit sequence of season one.

Automobiles

There are certain automotive choices that are typically symbolic of rural America. One of the more obvious is a pickup truck. The opening credits of *Friday Night Lights*,

however, provide a much more detailed look into the makes and models of vehicles associated with Small Town America. Interestingly enough, these depictions align with Johnson's (2010) research on place-based understandings, specifically the market disposition of the Heartland.

Johnson's (2010) research focuses on the failed promotional strategy of *Friday Night Lights*' first season. She describes the assumption that emphasizing the football aspect of the series would resonate with the "low market" culture of its assumed audience: conservative men in Middle America. She notes this low market culture included not only a predilection for, of course, football, but GM products and Wal-Mart, too. Regardless, Johnson's depiction of the "low" market culture for Middle America corresponds with the credit sequence of season one, specifically through the inclusion of GM automobiles.

In season one, a trucking shot moves past the parking lot of a common location in the series, the E2 restaurant. This provides a quick, yet deliberate glimpse of the makes and models of an array of vehicles, all of which are GM products. This includes a Pontiac Sunfire, a Chevy Minivan, an assortment of Buicks and Chevy trucks.

Often advertised for their affordability and dependability, GM products have a reputation of being good "family" or "work" vehicles. They are by no means fancy, luxury vehicles. Johnson's (2010) research inadvertently frames these vehicles as Small Town Americans' preferences or taste, which combined with costs of these vehicles, signifies social class. For example, a new Porsche can cost anywhere from \$50,000 to \$200,000 (Porsche.com, 2014). This is more than the yearly median income noted at the beginning of this section. However, a new Chevy truck is estimated at \$25,000

(Chevrolet.com, 2014). Hence, GM products are likely the more prominent, and perhaps sensible, choice for the working class not due to taste, but financial circumstances and functionality. Further supporting the vehicles as a descriptor of social class is that even the luxury vehicle from GM's product line, the Cadillac, is missing from the credits. While less pricey than other luxury cars, Cadillacs are still a steeper price than other models, costing as much as \$44,000 to \$75,000 (Chevrolet.com, 2014). Taking all of this into account, the makes and models of vehicles in the title sequence exemplify the economic status, specifically the lower and working class, of the characters in the series and perhaps Small Town America in general.

Casual (Work) Clothing

The choice in clothing, or costume, in the title sequence of *Friday Night Lights* also signifies a narrative focus on the working class. Clothing is a common indicator of where a person resides or has roots. Connoting New York City, we think "high fashion," clothing you'd see coming off of a runway, or perhaps the pristine business suits of Wall Street. What we'd expect in a state in Middle America, such as rural Texas, is different. This is not an area many naturally associate with expensive business suits and fashion. Instead, and as it is portrayed in the opening credits, the clothing choice is more casual and suited towards a working or lower social class.

In the season one title sequence the clothing is almost all comprised of collared shirts, t-shirts, long sleeve shirts and jeans. It is most often of neutral, even bland, shades of blue, green, tan, white or grey. For the most part, this is visible through straight angle close ups and medium close ups of the main characters.

One of the first glimpses of such costumes in the opening credits occurs in a series of match-on-action edits displaying Matt Saracen and Landry tossing around a football. Each boy is in a medium close up, providing a view of the front and back of his attire. Both wear a pair of jeans and grey t-shirts. Later in the sequence appears a medium close up of Lylla Garrity sitting on the lap of Jason Street. He wears a dark blue collared t-shirt. She wears a white collared t-shirt. Each wears jeans. A medium close up of Coach Taylor and Tami Taylor showcases his blue jacket, and on her, a long tan jacket. While his legs are not visible, we can see that Tami, who is standing, is wearing a pair of jeans.

Other than the close ups of the series' stars in the title sequence, a trucking shot past the E2 restaurant gives a glimpse of the attire of Dillon's other residents. A distinct, very sharp zoom focuses in on and provides a full body shot of about seven people. Of these seven people, all wear blue jeans. One boy wears a green collared t-shirt, another a tan jacket. The girls all wear shirts with long sleeves, at least to their elbows. Two wear light blue, one wears very light red, another dark purple. All of which appear to have on tennis shoes. Essentially, the clothing mirrors those of the main characters: informal and casual with general colors.

The type of clothing worn by the main and supporting characters further connotes Dillon's population as part of the working class. None of the characters wears what appears elegant or formal. There are no gowns, no business suits or anything that resonates as high fashion or expensive. Instead, it is casual, every-day wear typically associated with the middle and working classes. Also key to note is that, there are no brand names or iconography associated with expensive designers or high fashion present. There is nothing flashy or eye-catching about the clothing, and there is also no elegant

jewelry or accessories. There is nothing at all that makes it stand out. Instead, the clothing is basic, casual day-to-day wear expected in informal settings.

Another interesting element of the clothing in the season one title sequence is its state. The clothing is all in good condition. There are no holes or stains visible. Given that the type of clothing portrays the working class, we might expect to see at least a bit of tatter or tear on a few of the characters from manual labor. Instead, while casual, all of the clothing looks nice. This does not negate or solidify the socio-economic status of the characters. Instead, it is a measure to retain an attractive and appealing appearance for the characters. Hence, there are no blatant depictions in the clothing to convey poverty, as this could be displeasing. This could also be because clothing is a consumer good. While clothing and fashion are arguably not overly intriguing to the presumed male audience (discussed more in the upcoming chapter), it could be assumed that the attractive appearance of the costume would be more appealing or eye catching. This is something important to television, which is driven on advertising revenues, some of which come from the marketing of clothing. Run-down clothing, which one would assume to see with the lower socio-economic working class, is therefore missing. Too much 'realism' might have kept the Red State males and the professional urban females from watching the series.

While the clothing in the season one title sequence of *Friday Night Lights* is an indicator of social class, it signifies much more. In compilation with other elements of costume, such as hair and makeup, it also unveils two characters in the series that will be

the basis of ideological conflict. The following section further touches on clothing as a signifier for the working class, but also Tyra Collette and Tim Riggins as key series antagonists.

Tyra Collette and Tim Riggins: Key Working Class Characters Revealed Through Costume

As noted above, the common clothing choice in the opening credits of the first season of *Friday Night Lights* is often those associated with the working class: blue jeans, baseball hats and t-shirts. But taking a deeper look into the choice of costume, including hair and makeup, unveils more than just a correlation with socioeconomic status. Throughout the credits, the characters are all dressed and groomed in almost the exact same manner, creating a sense of homogeneity. Tim Riggins and Tyra Collette are the exception. While the differences in costume of these two characters are subtle, they do exist and set them apart from the rest of the cast. To understand what makes Tyra Collette and Tim Riggins stand out, it is necessary to analyze the attire and physical appearance of the other characters in the title sequence in contrast to each.

There is one close up of Tyra Collette in the season one credit sequence. We can see only a sliver of clothing below her shoulders. But, the little that is visible distinguishes her. As discussed, almost all of the characters wear t-shirts or long-sleeve shirts of similar, neutral colors. Tyra, however, has visible shoulders and shows skin from the collarbone up. Perhaps it is a tank or halter-top. Regardless, her clothing is more revealing than the others. This may be an attempt to play up on her sexuality. It is also noteworthy that she is the only major character wearing such dark clothing. Specifically, she is the only one in black, possibly connoting a “dark nature” to her character, sadness

or some type of struggle. These are not the only elements about her that stand out. Her hair, jewelry and make-up differentiate her from the other female characters, too.

For the most part, the female characters in the title sequence have a very “natural” look. This is again made evident in a series of close ups and medium close ups of the main characters and full body shots of those outside of the E2 restaurant. These women have shoulder-length hair or longer. This is specifically showcased in straight angle close ups of Tami Taylor and Julie Taylor and the medium close up of Lyla Garrity. All of the characters also have natural hair colors; Tami light red, Julie blonde and Lyla dark brown. The female characters in front of E2 again mirror the main characters. Each has long, natural-looking dark hair that goes past their shoulders. The close ups and medium close ups of the female leads also reveal subtle makeup, specifically mascara and natural colored lip gloss. Only one of these characters, Lyla Garrity, wears jewelry. Her necklace would not be visible at all, if it were not for her being framed in a close up and tugging on it to draw attention to it. The chain is very thin and almost not visible to the naked eye. As before, there is nothing “out of the ordinary.” All of the characters’ clothing choices look alike. But, Tyra Collette once again differs.

While her hair, shoulder length and blonde, fits in with the norm of the other characters, Tyra Collette models different makeup and jewelry. This is highlighted in the close up of her. While not excessive or overbearing, her makeup is much darker and heavier than the others. Her mascara and black eyeliner are very evident and her lip gloss is a shade or two darker than a considered a natural hue. Compared to the other women, specifically Lyla Garrity, Tyra wears gaudy jewelry. Long golden hoop earrings almost

reach the entire length of her neck. They move back and forth in the shot. Their size and movement draws our attention to them, making them nearly impossible to miss.

It is as though Tyra is trying to stand out through her appearance. The extra hint of flair from her earrings and make up and more exposed flesh set her apart from the others. But, like the other women, there is nothing about her attire that hints towards wealth and prosperity. It is unlikely she is part of a different socioeconomic status, though it is possible she could be on a slightly lower rung within the same social class (touched on later in this analysis). While she is part of such a defining characteristic of Dillon's population overall, she still manages to differentiate herself. This signifies a desire to not be a part of the typical Dillon norm.

Just as Tyra Collette's makeup and attire in comparison with the other female characters in the first season title sequence of *Friday Night Lights*, the same can be said for Tim Riggins and the other men. For Tim, it is not particularly his clothing choice, but instead his hair. The leading male characters are all "clean cut." All have very short hair, not even reaching a full inch in length. The close ups and medium close ups of Matt Saracen, Landry Clarke, Smash Williams and Coach Taylor reveal this. Furthermore, the framing allows us to see that all have their hair combed, laying neatly on their heads with no cowlicks or hair sticking up in a messy manner. The two boys in front of the E2 restaurant wear baseball hats, but it can be deciphered that they have short hair as well. There is no hair visibly poking out from under their hats. The little that we can see is laying flat and neat.

Unlike the other men in *Friday Night Lights'* title sequence, Tim Riggins has long, tousled hair past his chin. This is showcased in a medium close up of him in the

locker room. Much of his hair is falling in front of his eyes or covering other portions of his face. Given his placement in the locker room and the fact that he's wearing football gear, the disarray of his hair could simply be from practice or a game. His hair, however, may have more symbolic connotations than this. Perhaps he simply doesn't care about how his hair looks. Maybe this is his attempt to stand out. Or the fact that he allows his long hair to hide his face signifies his attempt to hide himself from others. Also important to note is that Tim is very unhappy, wearing a very deep frown, burrowed eyebrows and his eyes directed at the floor. Perhaps not just his hair is in disarray, but his life in general. Regardless of the exact reasoning for it, he is noticeably different from the other male characters due to his appearance.

The use of costume, hair and make up in the first season credits of *Friday Night Lights* emphasize that Tyra Collette and Tim Riggins each do not fully fit in with the social norm of Dillon. The two have been identified as key characters and as part of the working class. But these two characters fit into a particularly lower social realm of the working class when it comes to Dillon. Tyra lives with a single mother with an alcohol problem and a stripper sister. Tim is fully supported by an older brother and neither of his parents are part of his life. Other characters are a bit more financially well off, such as Lyla Garrity. Hence, the different symbols used with Tyra and Tim further aid in referencing poverty and financial need. While not just showcasing the two as different from the other characters, this hints that these two provide a clearer look into the lives of the lower rung of the working class.

Given the differences in prosperity conveyed by the first season credits, it is likely that conflict will arise between the “haves” and “have nots” of Dillon, with the likes of Tim Riggins, Tyra Collette and Lyla Garrity as representatives for each. Additionally, issues from financial stress and strain in general are cued to occur. This could be in relation to making money to get by day-to-day, securing work to support family members, funding college, and so forth. To truly understand how the lives of those in this social class are represented in the series, and what in turn this portrays for Small Town America, further research within the episodes of the series should be conducted.

While an array of icons and elements of mise-en-scene depicted social class in the first season title sequence of *Friday Night Lights*, other themes are presented much more subtly. This pertains to religion and militarism.

Religion

Another theme regarding rural America depicted in the opening credits of season one of *Friday Night Lights* is that of religion, particularly Christianity. More than half of rural small town residents acknowledge an affiliation with Christianity, specifically as Protestants (Dillon and Henly, 2008). Only eight percent of rural Americans report an affiliation with a non-Christian religion (Dillon and Henly, 2008). Based on these statistics, it is evident that Christianity is a key aspect of rural life and, not surprisingly, warranted itself a spot in the opening credits of *Friday Night Lights*. This theme is portrayed in the credits of season one through a shot of leading character Smash Williams.

Smash Williams is kneeling in a medium close up. The shot zooms and dissolves into his action of grabbing hands with the boys to the right and left of him. All of the

boys bow their heads and close their eyes, very common approaches to prayer in Protestant religious beliefs and behavior. The camera movement and dissolve strategically draw our attention towards these actions. Furthermore, lighting adds a layer of religious symbolism to the shot. The shot is very dark, the boys' faces and background heavily shadowed. But there is one, very bright white ray of light piercing through, specifically over the boys' clasped hands. "The light" is commonly associated with religion, usually as some form of comfort, passage, or hinting at the presence of something "greater" around us. All of these elements taken together provide a calm, and spiritual feel to the shot. Based on the shot's inclusion in the opening credits and the cinematic elements used to highlight it, we can anticipate Christianity playing an important role in the lives of the characters.

Militarism

A common association with rural or Small Town America is militarism. This is perhaps derived from rural areas' openness and affiliations to the army or other armed forces. The National Priorities Project (2008), which monitored military recruitment from 2004 to 2008, found that more than forty-four percent of military recruits came from rural areas as opposed to urban and suburban areas. This suggests a large portion of the rural population has some tie to the military, whether serving himself or herself or through a close friend or family member. According to a 2007 article by the *Associated Press* based on a report from the US Department of Defense, residents of rural areas are generally more open to the idea of joining the military. This is perhaps due to exposure to military entities, including the Army National Guard, which host civic events that put military groups at the center of attention in little towns. Given the influence of and openness to

the military in these areas, it isn't surprising it is hinted at in the opening credits of *Friday Night Lights*.

A specific icon, while subtle, connotes support of the military in *Friday Night Lights* first season title sequence. This image appears at the shot of the E2 restaurant in season one, previously analyzed as an indicator of social class via the appearance of specific automobiles. The Chevy minivan in the parking lot has a yellow ribbon bumper sticker on the back. This is the "Support our Troops" sign, symbolizing support and perhaps even an affiliation with the United States military. Its inclusion is likely deliberate to hint at the role of the military in the series. Given the timing of *Friday Night Lights*, this may tie to the US military presence in the Middle East. Possible portrayals include a glimpse of the lives of local residents affected by the war: those who have loved ones overseas, high school students choosing to join the forces after graduation, and so forth. The focus on the military could also provide a means to touch on politics in Small Town America, perhaps as a point of conflict amongst characters.

The previous sections analyzed more subtle themes derived from the *Friday Night Lights* opening season one credits based on iconography and mise-en-scene. The following will detail what is arguably the most evident theme stemming from a review of the credit sequences: football.

Football: More Than A Game – It's Life

The fact that football is a significant part of the series is evident just by its name: *Friday Night Lights*. But, analyzing the opening credits of season one reveals much more about its role in Dillon and in Small Town America. Keeping true to the accounts depicted in Bissinger's book (1990), the opening credits reveal the magnitude of

importance placed on, and perhaps even an obsession with, the team and the game of football by the town. To illustrate this, this section has been broken down into three sub categories: graphic signs, camera angle, and consequences.

Graphic Signs: A Showcase of Football Pride

The use of graphic signs in the credits of season one of *Friday Night Lights* highlights the importance of football in Dillon. A prime example is the city sign. It is in the shape of Texas, building on common stereotypes of Texans' pride in their state. The words "Home of the Dillon Panthers" are written across the top. Additional pieces, noting championship winning years, hang from the bottom. The sign is simply massive, standing taller and wider by a few feet than both of the men working on it. Further assisting in demonstrating its sheer magnitude is its placement at the far left of the visual frame. All around it is vast countryside. This is enhanced through a very sparse image density and a long shot completely in focus of the open fields in the visual backplane. We could look at this symbolically, connoting how football and the team are giant, dominating entities in not only the town, but also the state of Texas or perhaps even Middle America in general. It could also be a means to introduce Dillon as a "football town," something in Texas considered a key signifier or status.

Pride in Dillon football is demonstrated through the text and color of the sign. The sign is completely comprised of Dillon Panther blue and gold, not the standard green of average city signs. All around the sign, the shot is immersed in green, the color of the vast fields dominating the rest of the visual plane. This makes the blue and gold stand out even further and catches our attention. Also, instead of noting population or elevation under the town name, it reads, "The Home of the Dillon Panthers," along with the list of

the championship years. This sign is the first taste we are given of Dillon, and, as mentioned in the previous paragraph, it steers our attention immediately to the Panthers. It is almost as though it is not meant to welcome newcomers or passerbys, but as a means for the town to introduce its most prized possession, the football team, and to brag of its proudest accomplishments, state football championships.

The city sign is not the only sign demonstrating football's significance in Dillon in the first title sequence of *Friday Night Lights*. The trucking shot past one of the homes in season one shows another large blue and gold sign. Stuck directly in the yard, it advertises it is the home of a football player. Specifically, it is the home of main character and star athlete Tim Riggins.

While the appearance of Tim Riggins' house in the season on credit sequence was described in detail to identify social class, the home is not meant to be the primary focus of the shot; the sign is. This sign includes Tim's name and player number, in addition to the emblem of the school mascot, the panther. It is emphasized heavily by elements of mise-en-scene. Placed in the foreground of the shot, the sign appears massive compared to the house, which is situated in the back visual plane. Its colors, blue and gold, overpower the bland greys of the home and splotchy green grass of the yard. Furthermore, there is nothing else in the yard, creating a sparse image density that draws our attention to the sign even further. Even as the shot moves, our attention is drawn back to the sign. Tim's house blurs a bit, and a slight camera pan forces us to maintain our focus on the sign as long as possible.

When analyzed in correlation with elements of mise-en-scene, the sign makes Panther football the literal and metaphoric centers of the shot. While this emphasizes the

significance of football, it also connotes the importance of the team and those affiliated with it within the social setting of the narrative as portrayed by the title sequence. As noted, the sign advertises it is the home of a Dillon football player, Tim Riggins. Hence, this house and Tim are each something to which we should pay attention, something we should know about. Perhaps this even makes a celebrity of Tim to an extent. Hence, due to his affiliation with the team, he is essentially a “famous” resident in Dillon. With the tracking shot, it is as though we are going on a tour through Dillon, and Tim and his home are spectacles in that tour.

Residential areas are not the only locales adorned with football signage in the season one credits of *Friday Night Lights*. A trucking shot in season one passes by the Frosty Freeze, an ice cream shop shaped like a cone. A hand-made poster in the window reads “closed for the game.” The camera pans slightly to maintain focus on the sign as the shot moves. This movement shows the Frosty Freeze is not only closed by revealing a lack of workers and lights in the building, but displays that there is no one around it at all. While just one business, this connotes the town essentially “shuts down” on game day. This may also signify the owners are die-hard fans who give up an evening of profit to watch a high school football game. Or, it could be that the games are so highly attended by the town that there is no reason to be open on game day. Regardless of its exact connotative meaning, the sign and the cinematic focus on it stress the importance of football once again.

In addition to the use of graphic signs in the first season title sequence of *Friday Night Lights* to depict the impact of football in Dillon, the specific use of cinematic

elements, particularly framing, connote the importance of the team and the game for Dillon even further.

Panther Pride: Camera Angles

As noted in the analysis of ethnicity, framing, specifically the use of camera angle, is a powerful method to add meaning to a shot (Bordwell & Thompson, 2010). In the opening credits of *Friday Night Lights* in season one, both straight and low angles creatively depict the power of the town's football team.

One example of framing demonstrating the power of the team in the title sequence of *Friday Night Lights*' first season is the medium close up of Lyla Garrity practicing a cheer. The top of the blue and white cheerleading uniform blatantly associates her with the team. But the low camera angle hints towards more. We are looking up to her, not just literally but figuratively. Her affiliation with the team, or the team in general, is symbolically "above us." Furthermore, even though the shot is a close up emphasizing Lyla, the background is still slightly in focus. As the camera tracks from her side to the front, an array of trophies scattered in the back of the room becomes visible. These are strategically placed to add a feeling of the team's success and triumph. Not only are we looking up at Lyla, but we are essentially getting a metaphoric glimpse of Panther glory at the same time. Hence, it is an impressive source of pride.

Straight angle shots emphasizing the power of Dillon football in the first season opening credits of *Friday night Lights* include those of the helmets being raised in the air near the close of the sequence. This is some sort of impromptu, spur of the moment celebration, something many of us have witnessed watching sporting events in the past. While the helmets are being raised in the air, they are shot at a straight angle situated off

of the ground. To make this level possible, either the camera or cameraman must be placed on or standing on something high off the ground. This can be looked at symbolically: football and the teams are “put on a pedestal.” Hence, we must be “elevated” to be at their level. The background eventually fades to black, making only a line of helmets visible. This symbolizes that the helmets, and more specifically the team, is the center of everything. Everything else, literally and figuratively, is pushed aside.

Consequences of a Football Obsession

The importance of football to Dillon is obvious, even more so after looking in-depth at the elements of mise-en-scene in the opening credits of the first season of *Friday Night Lights*. There is no debating it; the town is football-centric. But what effect this has on Dillon, or what a sports obsession like this has on any small town, for that matter, is not clear. This could be looked at on a positive note. The football team institutes a sense of pride in and creates an identity for the town. Dillon is not only a “football town,” but a winning, or championship town. However, this could be negative, too, with unrealistic expectations and pressure placed on the team’s success. This is discussed more below.

Bissinger’s book (1990) exposes not just pride and unity in the little town of Odessa, the inspiration for *Friday Night Lights*’ Dillon, but also an unhealthy obsession with football. He details an array of negative consequences resulting from the unrealistic and unrealized expectations placed on the team. This includes immense pressure placed on the coaches to win, portrayed in the opening credits of the first season through the depiction of Coach Taylor.

By analyzing the elements of mise-en-scene, the theme of unrealistic and unrealized expectations that fuel stress and frustration experienced by Coach Taylor is

unearthed in the season one title sequence of *Friday Night Lights*. This, coupled with the symbols included in each of these shots, ties it to his affiliation with the team.

The pressure on Coach Taylor to lead the team's success never leaves him. This is creatively depicted through the use of a shot dissolve in the credit sequence of *Friday Night Lights* in season one. Coach Taylor walks down the football field, a medium close up focused on the back of his jacket. It is blue with gold font that reads "Dillon Panthers." This use of framing emphasizes his role with the team. In what feels like a split second, the shot begins to dissolve into another. This is a line of uniformed football players running. The dissolve makes it appear as though they are running directly into and through Coach Taylor. While the players never become fully in focus, Coach Taylor remains in focus the entire time. It is as though the football players are a ghostly, lingering entity. The team is essentially engulfing him. Taking all of this into consideration connotes the team as an omnipresent element in his life, something that is always with him or a part of him.

Coach Taylor's relentless pressure from the team is also indicated in the shot of his office in the first season credits of *Friday Night Lights*. This shot was also described earlier in the section on gender as example of Tami Taylor's ability to comfort her husband. Based on the following description, his need for comfort it is likely due to the stress from his role with the team. He sits at his desk almost completely in the center of the shot, making him and it the main focus of attention. The desk is in a state of disarray. Paperwork is scattered across it with no apparent means of organization. A large bulletin board behind the desk is in a similar state. While a large calendar with a photo of the team is pinned neatly in the bottom corner, other pieces of paper are pinned crooked or

overlapping one another. Like his office, Coach Taylor himself appears jumbled. His short black hair is messy, sticking up in spots. Dark rings rest under his eyes and just below this, a five o'clock shadow bordering a deep frown. Also important to note is that the Panther blue is all around him, essentially smothering him. It is the color of his jacket, some of the papers, the calendar and the paper trays on his desk. This use of cluttered image density, combined with the team color and Coach Taylor's appearance, connote his own state of disorder and stress due to his affiliation with football.

As with ethnicity, gender and the dominance of football in Dillon, framing in the first season title sequence of *Friday Night Lights* is also an important tool in showcasing pressure and unrealistic expectations from the town and team on Coach Taylor. There is the shot in the credits that begins with a close up of the side of Jason Street's face. A straight angle view and the close up give a clear glimpse of his panicked expression, emphasized by beads of sweat rolling down his temple. There is then a quick pan up to the right, now making Coach Taylor the focus of the shot. He wears a Panther blue jacket, showing his affiliation to the team, and wears a concerned expression on his face. His eyes are fixed on Jason. The camera stays at a low angle, giving the perception that we are looking up at Coach Taylor, just as Jason would be. This strategic use of framing, combined with the facial expressions of the characters, gives the perception that a panicked Jason is looking to Coach Taylor for help or comfort. It is as though Jason and we are waiting for Coach Taylor to do or say something to alleviate the situation.

The aforementioned shots represent the stress felt by Coach Taylor due to his role with the team. But, perhaps this stress is due to his being looked to as force of stability because of it. In one sense, this refers specifically to characters involved with the team,

such as the players. This is conveyed through the dissolve of players and the close up of a distressed Jason Street, who happens to be the star quarter back of the Dillon Panthers. In the series, the team members look to Coach Taylor for guidance, on and off the field, during their tenure with the team and time at Dillon High School. Coach Taylor also holds a similar responsibility for the rest of the town's residents. Based on his appearance in the shot of his office, we could assume the townspeople also look up to Coach Taylor. In this instance it is as a means of happiness and accomplishment experienced vicariously through the success of the team. For example, if games are lost, the coach is held accountable for the town residents' displeasure. In retrospect, if the state championship is won, Coach Taylor is viewed as the champion of the town. Overall, due to his leadership of the team, Coach Taylor could be considered Dillon's go-to-source for guidance and happiness, or even as the scapegoat for their unhappiness.

Based on the above analysis, the dominance and power of football and the team is a key theme based on the portrayal in the title sequence of *Friday Night Lights* in season one. But how this plays into the larger social obsession of Dillon's population and the influence it has on the residents of Small Town America, particularly Coach Taylor, is not completely unclear. It is evident there will be a sense of pride, but also high amounts of stress and pressure to succeed. But to what result? Bissinger's (1990) book records an array of ramifications the obsession with football, which could likely be used interchangeably with any other popular high school sport, can have in small towns. To determine exactly how this is depicted in *Friday Night Lights*, a deeper look is necessary to pinpoint and analyze the specific ideological conflicts that arise and how this correlates

with the construction of ideological meaning for Small Town America overall. A review of the credit sequence of season five will assist with this.

Theme Music

Semiotic coding consists of more than the visual imagery reviewed thus far in this analysis of the opening credits of *Friday Night Lights*. A show's genre and content can also be conveyed through the theme music.

Davison (2013) studied the extent to which opening credit sequences are watched or skipped by viewers. She found this depends on a variety of factors depending up on the individual viewer. But, what can be surmised from her research is that the music in the credit sequence can assist in drawing or deterring audiences to a show. Theme songs can actually come to represent an entire television program (Gray, 2010). Hence they are an important element in building an identity for a series.

While no specific studies on the theme song of *Friday Night Lights* exist, it is possible to surmise the music did play a role in the uptake of the series. An article written by Caitlin Penzy Moog in *A.V. Club* (2015), an entertainment website published by *The Onion* website (though in contrast to its mother publication, the articles in *A.V. Club* are factual) praises the theme music of the series. Moog, while not based on the coasts, could be considered one of the surprise female audience members of the series. Supporting this idea is the fact that she actually notes in her article that she "...started watching *Friday Night Lights* despite the football premise and stuck around because it was so much more than a show about sports" (2015). She describes what she considers a general fondness of the music of the opening credits. Moog describes how the theme song, "Friday Night Lights Theme," created by composer W. G. Snuffy Walden resembles the

music of rock band *Explosions in the Sky* (EITS), specifically the instrumental rock song “Your Hand in Mine.” EITS actually turned down the opportunity to provide a song to the series, due to which Moog hints that the EITS was used as inspiration by Walden’s composition. Of the theme music, she writes:

“Like the show, a few beats quickly turn into something deep and profound, a dry Texas landscape giving way to an abundance of rich stories. Most of that opening sequence doesn’t even show football, rather the town of Dillon and the people in it.” (2015)

She also notes:

“So even though technically EITS didn’t do the opening song, through the misconception and the Internet I still discovered and loved “Your Hand In Mine” and the band that made it. Its stirring drums and cascading guitar crescendos and decrescendos are still the sounds I associate with Dillon, Texas, rolling in waves of teenage heartbreak, complicated family relationships, and high anticipation for Friday’s game.” (2015)

While just one article, this does showcase the effect that the theme music had on the viewership of *Friday Night Lights*. It also demonstrates how the music convey what the primary female audience felt enticing about the series, specifically the town, the lives and relationships of the residents of the series’ setting in Dillon. However, there is not analysis to gauge the effect the music had on the presumed audience of men from Middle America in the first season. In this aspect, we are only able to use the theme music as another enticing feature for the female audience. This is discussed in deeper detail in the next chapter.

The Series vs. the Sequence: The ideological Dissonances

Gray (2010) describes how the opening sequence provides a framework of a series by portraying what the show’s distributors and producers wish to convey to the audience. In the case of *Friday Night Lights*, there is dissonance in what is depicted in

the season one title sequence and the narrative structure of the series' early season. While it is not the focus of this research, the narrative structure of the series is still important to note as the differences between it and the credits are relevant. As discussed frequently in this research, NBC focused its original promotional efforts on a presumed audience of Middle America men, yet the primary audience became young, professional women from the urban coasts (Johnson, 2010). From this, and the detailed semiotic review of the season one title sequence in this chapter, we can surmise that the opening credits were developed to have an appeal to the aforementioned male audience. However, the content within the series attracted the female audience.

Taking a look at the ideological dissonances between the opening credits of *Friday Night Lights* and the narrative in the series provides a glimpse of what attracted the female audience as opposed to the anticipated male audience to the series. Hence, this provides a prelude of the shifts in portrayal in the title sequences of the later seasons to coincide with NBC's altered promotional strategy of the series. Specific dissonances occur in the depictions of ethnicity, gender, religion, militarism and football.

Just as the role of Smash Williams is downplayed in the opening credits of season one, so is the theme of ethnicity. Specifically, this refers to struggles involving racism. Bissinger's (1980) book heavily depicted the racism that occurred in Odessa, the real-world version of *Friday Night Lights*' setting of Dillon. Like the book, racism is a central focus of the early seasons of the television series. This is specifically portrayed through the struggles of Smash, who is not only the victim of racism, but looked to by other members of his ethnic group as an example of upward social mobility. This not only makes racism a central theme, but also portrays the character of Smash as central to the

series narrative. So then, why is this downplayed? Perhaps this is due to the place-based understandings by NBC (Johnson, 2010). It is possible that the network assumed that an audience of what would have been predominately Caucasian males of Middle America would not be enticed by ethnicity as a theme. It is possible it was presumed that this group would not have interest in this, or even that this group fit into rural stereotypes of being racist and ignorant.

Gender is also conveyed quite differently in the opening sequences of season one in opposition to the narrative within the episodes. This specifically refers to the portrayal of Tami Taylor. In the credits, she is portrayed as no more than the supporter and doting wife of Coach Taylor, but she is much more. Unlike what is hinted at in the credits, Coach Taylor and Tami are equals. Neither fully holds the reins of “head of household.” It is true that Tami, in the beginning, is a stay-at-home mom and Coach Taylor is the sole breadwinner. But shortly into the first season, she begins working as a guidance counselor at Dillon High School. By season three, her successful tenure as a guidance counselor is recognized and she is promoted to principal and therefore Coach Taylor’s boss.

If Tami Taylor is so pivotal to the series in the first season, then why is her portrayal in the title sequence so dissonant? Once again, it is due to the presumed audience of men. While speculation, we could assume a presumed audience of men who dwell in areas commonly referred to having “traditional values” would not take to the notion of a woman as progressive as Tami. Ergo, a challenge to traditional gender roles would not be appealing. This is discussed in deeper detail in the next chapter.

Not only does Tami Taylor have a bigger role in *Friday Night Lights* than indicated by the opening credits of the first season, but other lead female characters are also downplayed in the credit sequence. This specifically refers to Julie Taylor, Lyla Garrity and Tyra Collette. While one could argue that in the first season their roles begin as solely a supporting element of the storylines of the male characters, this does change. At first, it is as though Julie Taylor is simply the daughter of the Coach Taylor and girlfriend and conquest of Matt Saracen. She is essentially a point of conflict between the two male characters. Lyla Garrity is the object of affection for both Jason Street and Tim Riggins, causing a rift in their relationship. Tyra Collette is portrayed as promiscuous, fooling around with Smash Williams at the displeasure of her previous love, Tim Riggins.

Deeper into the first season of *Friday Night Lights*, the focus begins to shift more into the daily lives of the female characters and how their relationships affect not just only those around them, but the women themselves. A prime example is Lyla Garrity in the season one episode "It's Different for Girls." In this episode, we follow Lyla's struggle at school after it is exposed that she cheated on Jason Street with his best friend Tim Riggins. She takes the full brunt of the ridicule for the indiscretion, but Tim, who is Jason's best friend, suffers no repercussions. Important to note, Lyla is not depicted negatively in the episode. The fact that she, as a woman, is being held to a different standard than Tim and how she must overcome this is the central focus of the episode.

Once again, perhaps such portrayals were thought to not appeal to the presumed male audience of *Friday Night Lights* and therefore left out of the credit sequence. It is possible NBC felt the male audience would be more interested in the day-to-day lives and

challenges of the male characters, as this is the demographic to which they could more easily relate. Take the aforementioned episode featuring Lyla Garrity, for example. One could argue that a male audience (presumably heterosexual), would not feel empathy for Lyla's ridicule. Instead, they would likely side with the male characters.

Religion is another theme portrayed differently in the credit sequence of season one as opposed to the actual narrative of *Friday Night Lights*' first season. Smash Williams is by no means the only character that has a strong religious faith. All of the main characters, sans Tyra Collette and Tim Riggins, appear in Protestant church services in season one. Lyla Garrity is actually one of the strongest portrayals of the role of Christianity in the series. Religion becomes a key part of her character's storyline as the series progresses, with her abandoning cheerleading and instead leading bible study groups to cope with her breakup with Jason Street and the divorce of her parents. Furthermore, prayer is a key element portrayed in relation to football. It is common for the team to pray before games, while the entire stadium prays on behalf of Jason Street after his paralyzing injury in the first episode. Regardless of all of this, it is only Smash that is conveyed in a religious manner in the title sequence.

Again, we can only speculate as to why religion is portrayed in this manner in the first season title sequence of *Friday Night Lights*. Considering much of the population of rural America is of the Protestant faith (Dillon and Henly, 2008), one would assume it be appealing to the presumed audience based on this area. Perhaps NBC felt this audience would have a desensitization to religious iconography. As it was already such a big part of their day-to-day lives, there was no need to broadcast it heavily in the title sequence.

Perhaps the most surprisingly dissonant theme portrayed in the first season credit sequence of *Friday Night Lights* in opposition to the series narrative is that of militarism. Militarism plays a distinct role in the story lines involving character Matt Saracen. Matt is responsible for taking care of his grandmother, who becomes diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease, while his father is deployed in Iraq. His father, Henry, does eventually return home in the first season to help out; however, it is soon realized that Henry cannot handle life as a regular civilian, and he chooses to return overseas.

The fact that militarism plays such big role in *Friday Night Lights*' plot lines involving Matt Saracen in the first season is not the only reason its minor role in the title sequence is surprising. As noted earlier in this research, more than forty-four percent of military recruits came from rural areas (The National Priorities Project, 2008). Given this, one might assume the emphasis on the military might be enticing for the originally presumed audience of men. Also, when the series first aired media hype around the Iraq war was at its peak. One could easily argue given its timely tie, militarism would have been a key topic of interest, regardless of the audience.

Perhaps the fact that the Iraq war was such a hot-button issue is why it is downplayed in the title sequence of season one of *Friday Night Lights*. Based on the statistics above, members of the presumed male audience from the Heartland could very well have loved ones serving overseas. Hence, it is possible NBC felt this demographic would avoid watching a series with too strong of a tie to the military at this time. Specifically, the network feared the military imagery would cause them to worry about their loved ones currently deployed, making the series unappealing.

The depiction of football in *Friday Night Lights*' first season is also different from the portrayal in the title sequence. As noted countless times in this research, the original promotional strategy of NBC pushed football as the primary focus of the series to attract the presumed audience of men from flyover states (Johnson, 2010). However, the series was about much more, specifically the relationships and day-to-day lives of the characters, which is what attracted the primary audience of young women (Johnson, 2010). This is perhaps the only theme in which we can adequately surmise NBC's reasoning behind the portrayal in the title sequence. The title sequence of season one was used as a means to introduce the series and what the network wanted to convey as the main themes to its target demographic. Ergo, football was conveyed heavily to go with the network's place-based understandings and common-sense assumptions of the tastes of politically red men located in Middle America. So, even though not the true focus of the series, football in the credit sequence was meant to be the "foot in the door" to garner the male audience.

This chapter provided a detailed review of the semiotic coding of the first season title sequence of *Friday Night Lights*. This provided a first look at the themes conveyed based on the presumed understanding of the tastes of men based in politically red rural America. The next chapter will focus on the title sequence of season five, focused on what became the primary audience of blue state, professional urban young women. This will further decipher the themes portrayed in the series that help construct an ideology for Small Town America.

CHAPTER THREE

SEASON FIVE: IDEOLOGICAL SHIFTS FROM THE PRESUMED TO PRIMARY AUDIENCE

From a semiotic analysis of *Friday Night Lights*' fifth season title sequence, it is possible to decipher similarities and changes in foci from the series' first season opening credits to go along with the shift in audience. This includes the recurrence of the themes of ethnicity, gender, social class and football, but with differing ideological references, the elimination of the themes of religion and militarism, and the addition of a theme of rurality.

The fact that the themes of ethnicity, gender, football and social class once again arise in the season five title sequence of *Friday Night Lights* is the only true similarity with the credits of the first season. Mise-en-scene and cinematography give each of these themes a different ideological perception of Small Town America in the last season credits. This time, we see a heavy influence of black culture as opposed to primarily Caucasian roots, along with a rise of the female gender, countering the male dominance portrayed in season one. The tone of football changes from an intense competition and game to a source of joy, personal accomplishment and a means to overcome personal barriers on and off the field. The cast still appears to be of the working class, however, a lack of signifiers for this theme suggests little importance on socioeconomic status in the last season. Other changes are more distinct. Religion and militarism disappear completely in

the last season title sequence, and rurality, though nonexistent in season one, is heavily emphasized in the last season credit sequence. All of this changes tie back to Johnson's (2010) research on place-based understandings and the correlating audiences of each season.

Johnson's (2010) research on the blundered promotional strategy of the first season of *Friday Night Lights* is referenced throughout this research. As noted, the original perception that a show premised around football would resonate with politically red men in Middle America proved highly inaccurate. Once the primary audience of politically left, young, professional women from the urban coasts was identified, the series altered to cater to their interests. It is this reason we see not only a shift in the themes conveyed, but in the ideological picture painted by those that recur as the series progresses. Comparing the two title sequences, therefore, provides a unique ideological depiction of Small Town America based on the ideals of two distinctly different demographics.

The following is a semiotic analysis of the season five opening credits of *Friday Night Lights*. This builds the similarities and describes the differences amongst the themes unearthed in season one that together assist in creating an ideology for Small Town America from the perspective of differing social groups. The first theme we will review is rurality.

Rurality

Given the Small Town setting of *Friday Night Lights*, one would think that the opening credit sequences would emphasize ruralness as important defining characteristic. Yet, all of the signs and symbols for rurality appear only in the sequence of season five.

The symbols showcased and the cinematic features emphasized all contribute to our common-sense assumptions of what constitutes rural America, or “rurality” in general. Particularly three areas of meaning, perhaps best described as sub-themes, arise: isolation, serenity and agriculture.

Isolation

A common association with rural America or Small Town America is often that of its isolation. This refers to its displacement from the rest of society or, in what could be considered a more negative tone, its placement in the “middle of nowhere” or being surrounded by “nothingness.” This association is not missing from the season five title sequence of *Friday Night Lights* and is strategically connoted in the opening credits.

A number of cinematic elements in the opening credits hint at the isolation of *Friday Night Lights*’ setting Dillon. Perhaps the shot with the most distinctive features is the opening shot of the sequence. This is a tracking aerial view of a lone road with a car driving down it, surrounded by green pastures and fields. It is an exterior establishing shot, showcasing the outskirts of the little town. The wide, broad angle gives an extensive view of the area, and more specifically, the lack of anything around the car. Further exemplifying this is the rhythmic movement of the shot. The shot moves upward, exposing more of a vast, open countryside. The sparse image density increasingly becomes visible from this angle accentuating the “nothingness” in the area. While there is a series of other roads intersecting in the form of a grid, there are no other cars. It is almost impossible to fully make out the handful of tiny squares that are likely homes or other buildings. Lighting and focus are used to further connote a feeling of solitude. For example, the entire shot is in a deep focus. The depth of field is extensive with no

shadowing, giving a perfect view of the wide, open scenery. Taking all of these cinematic elements into account, we surmise this shot was placed strategically at the beginning of the credits to signify the extensive isolation of Dillon's rural locale.

Another unique signifier of Dillon's isolation in the season five credit sequence is the repeated appearance and emphasis on telephone wires. The literal, denotative meaning behind the wires is simple: making telephone calls, hence communication, possible. However, there is a unique, connotative element to the wires. The telephone wires symbolize the route into civilization from the open country that isolates Dillon from the rest of society.

While the telephone wires appear in the opening credits of each season, this signifier is best distinguished in season five. The aerial shot and series of tracking shots at the beginning follow the wires from the countryside into Dillon. First, the wires can be seen near the sides of the roads, under which the lone car travels through the aerial shot. As noted above, this shot displays the extreme vastness of the countryside with its deep field of view and sparse image density. Then, the credits cut into a trucking shot of two men adding another marker for a football championship to the Dillon city sign. Again accentuating the extreme openness around the city is sparse image density with a deep field of view completely in focus. However, this shot is more condensed and cluttered than the one before. In addition to the men and the sign in the foreground, there are cattle and what appear to be buildings speckled amongst the background. The telephone wires are still visible, near the front of the focal plane above the men's heads. As the credits fade into the next trucking shot, the image density again increases. A parking lot of cars and pickups on what might be considered the "outskirts" of town appears. The telephone

wires are extremely dominating, crisscrossing amongst the rows of cars and pickups and highlighted by the early morning light. The poles are also a looming entity, with a straight angle accentuating their height and width. There is now only a medium depth of focus, exposing less of the land outside the town.

The increased image density and diminishing depth of view as the shots progress decreases the focus on the openness and vastness of the area. Instead, a shift into “civilization,” emphasized by the vehicles and dominance of the wires, occurs. Taking all of this into account, the wires can be considered a connotative feature, the element that connects Dillon to others beyond the expansive countryside.

While the elements noted above illustrate isolation in the title sequence of season five of *Friday Night Lights*, they also exemplify another sub-theme of rurality: serenity.

Serenity

Serenity, by definition, refers to calmness or peacefulness. The opening aerial shot in the title sequence of season five, in addition to the following trucking shots leading into the city, emphasize the wide, open plains surrounding the town. While these denotative and cinematic effects could connote a feeling of loneliness or seclusion, others may interpret this as serene.

When reviewing serenity as a theme, it is important to consider not just what is present in each shot, but what each lacks. There are no denotative elements in the title sequence of season five of *Friday Night Lights* that we might associate with the “hustle and bustle” of a city. For example, there are no tall buildings built in close proximity to one another, or hardly any buildings at all for that matter. Instead, there is an open view of the land and the sky, both idealistic associations commonly revered about the

countryside. As opposed to multilane freeways, there are two lane roads with just one car travelling down them. This signifies little traffic, for one thing, but also minimal travel down these roads in general. Furthermore, the first few shots lack any people, connoting a low population. Less people equal less congestion. Ergo, the lack of these elements gives the perception of Dillon as a stereotypically slow-paced, tranquil little town, or possibly as an example of the serenity of rural America overall.

As noted, the idea of serenity based on these visual elements could be interpreted as signifiers for isolation. Isolation tends to have a more negative connotation, which perhaps corresponds more accordingly with the notion of stress described in the pervious section on football expectations in the previous chapter of this research. Just which of the elements, isolation or serenity, is more heavily conveyed in *Friday Night Lights* requires a deeper look into the series. The credit sequence simply unveils the possibility for either serenity or isolation as part of the theme of rurality.

Agriculture

Analyzing certain denotative elements lacking from the opening credits of *Friday Night Lights*' fifth season derive the sub-theme of serenity. Another area of meaning for rurality, however, is revealed by focusing on the appearance of specific symbols and the elements of mise-en-scene that enhance them. This is the role of agriculture in the series. Agriculture is cultivating the land, raising crops or rearing livestock (dictionary.com, 2013). More simply put, this refers to the practice of farming or ranching. Three specific denotative icons symbolic of this appear in the credits of season five: cattle, a hay bale and a silo.

Arguably, a cow or cattle is one of the most identifying icons of rural America. This animal appears twice in the opening credits in season five of *Friday Night Lights*. This includes a trucking shot down a Dillon town road. The shot simulates driving through Dillon and eventually, passing a truck carrying a longhorn bull. The background is out of focus, accentuating the animal. Additionally, the camera pans slightly to maintain focus on it. A sight like this is something out of place in most heavily populated urban roadways, but not odd for an agricultural community. The second shot takes us past the Dillon city sign. Even though extremely quick and almost no more than a black blur, we catch a glimpse of three cows in a quick dissolve. While certainly not the focus of the shot, the cows are included. The repetition of this symbol connotes a correlation with Dillon and livestock, and hence agriculture.

While more subtle, the hay bale also creates an agricultural identity for Dillon. In the season five title sequence of *Friday Night Lights* there is a shot of Luke Cafferty, an important series character, outside picking up and moving a hay bale. He's quite dirty, with specs of dirt on his white t-shirt, dust all over his faded, tattered greyish-blue baseball hat, thick work gloves on his hands and a sour expression on his face. A medium close up emphasizes his worn, tired appearance. All of this gives the impression that his labor is tiresome, tedious physical work. The added element of the hay bale connotes that this tedious work is agricultural. We may surmise that Luke either works for a farmer or lives and works on a family farm. The fact that this is strategically included in the credits hints at this being a common profession in Dillon.

A silo also appears in the season five opening credits of *Friday Night Lights*. In this shot, Coach Taylor looks out a window in a tracking close up. The background

beyond the window is moving quickly, giving the feeling that he is travelling, possibly by car. The plane of view is extremely deep, yet all in focus as far back as visibly possible. While difficult to make out due to its position, a grain silo eventually emerges at the far back visual plane of the shot. All around it are rows of dirt, stretching from the back visual plane to the window. Long, distinct rows like this signify planted crops. This, in combination with the grain silo, connotes farmland and once again, agriculture.

The use of signifiers and cinematic elements detailed in this section were a strategic decision made to “set the stage” for the rural locale of Dillon in the title sequence of *Friday Night Light’s* fifth season. Hence, rurality, specifically its isolation, serenity and agricultural background, are a key theme and subthemes in the series. Based on this, we can expect ideological conflicts often associated with Small Town America and agriculture to arise. Perhaps this is an idealization or degradation of secluded little towns, a focus on so-called “good ol’ small town values,” or stereotypical rural ignorance and lack of culture, or possibly a portrayal of the blue-collared worker as the hardworking backbone of the country or as the poverty-stricken farmer struggling to make it.

Rurality as a theme is evident in the credits of season five of *Friday Night Lights*. But this leaves an interesting question: why was the rurality of *Friday Night Lights’* setting in Dillon, Texas not emphasized in the credits of the first season? The locations of the first season’s perceived audience of men and the fifth season’s female viewership are key in answering this question.

During *Friday Night Lights’* inception, the perceived audience was that of men based in Middle America (Johnson, 2010). Much of Middle America is rural and

associated with the countryside, farming or ranching. Hence, an audience of Middle American men did not need rural iconography in the opening credits to assist them with building an understanding of the setting for *Friday Night Lights*. Rurality is something with which they were already arguably familiar. Furthermore, while a rural setting is something to which this audience could relate, it would not be considered unique or intriguing. Therefore, the credit sequence of season one did not emphasize rurality through iconography and cinematography. This differs greatly once the audience focus is shifted to women from the coasts in season five.

Another term for Middle America, though disparaging, is “flyover states”. “Flyover state” derives from the notion that many only experience the states comprising Middle America while flying between metropolitan hubs on the coasts (dictionary.com, 2015). Hence, these are considered less than desirable travel locations, hinting at the assumption that there is less to see or do than in the coastal regions of the country. It is for this reason, perhaps, that flyover states often are stereotyped with a lack of culture. Based on the credit sequence of season five, the audience of young, professional women from the coasts, however, did not hold this stereotype. For the female audience, *Friday Night Lights* provided a look at a part of the country and a way of life foreign to them. Specifically, the series was a window providing a view of rural culture. Unlike the anticipated viewership of men, rurality was something new and unique for the women. Hence, rurality further drew the audience of women to the series. For this reason, cinematic techniques emphasizing Dillon’s isolation, serenity and agricultural iconography are key in the credits of season five. This cues rurality to be a main theme in the series’ final season.

Ethnicity

Johnson (2010) mentions how the female viewership of *Friday Night Lights* held a keen interest in the relationships amongst and the day-to-day lives of the characters. This, combined with an intrigue for rural culture, may be the reason behind the changed portrayal of ethnicity in the opening credits of season five.

Analyzing the open credits of *Friday Night Lights*' fifth season reveals that the cast becomes more ethnically diverse as the series progresses. While Caucasian characters dominate season one, characters of color appear much more frequently in season five. Two African American characters, Jess Merriweather and Vince Howard, are featured in multiple shots. Becky Sproles is shown repeatedly as well. Her character could be considered "racially ambiguous." While her skin tone is lighter than that of Jess and Vince, it is darker than her distinctly Caucasian cast mates, such as Luke Cafferty. She models a more bronze tone, in addition to brown hair and eyes. As she has no distinct features making her an obvious fit into any specific ethnic group, she could be considered to represent the minority. Taking this into consideration, thirteen shots in the season five credit sequence show Caucasian cast members, while Jess, Vince and Becky combined appear in seven. Even if not including Becky, the number of appearances for non-white characters is still five times as many than the title sequence of season one.

In the season five title sequence, framing also accentuates the diversity of Dillon as opposed to its lack. In contrast to Smash Williams in season one, African American characters Vince Howard and Jess Merriweather each have two solo close ups in the opening credits. Becky Sproles has one. Hence, unlike in season one, pinpointing leading characters of this ethnic group is quite simple. Also in direct opposition to Smash

William's portrayal in the first season, straight camera angles are used with Vince and Jess, connoting them on an "equal level" to us as viewers. In another shot, a low camera angle is used with Vince. This insinuates his dominance as opposed to the high angle that essentially lessened the importance of Smash in the first season credits. Hence, framing not only showcases the minorities' increased dominance in the fifth season, but also their increased importance in the series and perhaps as residents of Small Town America overall.

A more evenly weighted ethnic cast and framing in the season five title sequence to emphasize nonwhite characters Jess Merriweather and Vince Howard also suggests a deeper look into black culture in Dillon and rural America. Additionally, the increased close ups on a variety of nonwhite characters connotes not only each as an important series character, but also emphasizes each person as an individual. From the credit sequence, the female viewership of season five is left with an impression that *Friday Night Lights* will heavily focus on these characters and their lives in rural America. More specifically, it is a look at their personal lives as minorities in Small Town USA. This provides the audience with not only an understanding of the culture of a specific ethnic group, which is potentially unique for some, but of that group in an area commonly stereotyped as Caucasian.

Further exemplifying the increased diversity of season five credit sequence of *Friday Night Lights* are shots of leading characters of differing ethnicities interacting with one another. As noted, there is not a single shot from the first season credits showcasing Smash Williams with any of his Caucasian teammates. There is actually no depiction of the different ethnic groups intermingling at all. However, this occurs twice in

season five. This specifically includes Luke Cafferty in separate shots with Becky Sproles and Vince Howard. The focus on these characters, emphasized through close ups, not only connotes the importance of each character's role, but also the importance of the relationships amongst the characters.

The shot of Luke Cafferty and Vince Howard in the season title sequence clutching hands and smiling on the sidelines of a football game suggests friendship across the ethnic groups. The cinematography of this shot attracts our attention specifically to the boys and this motion. The way the shot is framed only provides a glimpse of the faces of Luke and Vince. All other characters in the shot can only be seen from the shoulders down. Additionally, all of the other bodies visible are moving up and down, while Luke and Vince each move sideways, towards each other. Further drawing our attention to this interaction is the dark skin tone of Vince's and light tone of Luke's exposed arms in direct contrast with the bright red football uniforms that surround them. Hence, the full focus falls on the boys and their display of friendship.

Luke Cafferty's interaction with Becky Sproles in the season five title sequence of *Friday Night Lights* hints towards a romantic relationship. With the background out of focus and their faces covering the majority of the shot from the center outwards, full attention falls on Luke and Becky. It is the look on Luke's face as he interacts with her that hints the two are more than simply friends. He looks at her with a long grin and eyes that follow her every move. This connotes he cannot take his eyes off of her, and this makes him happy.

As discussed in Johnsons' (2010) research, it is the relationships amongst the characters that were the most important aspects of the female viewership's predilection

for *Friday Night Lights*. The relationships portrayed amongst Vince Howard, Becky Sproles and Luke Cafferty in the title sequence of season five provide the possibility for conflict and misunderstandings between the ethnic groups. It also creates an opportunity to see each ethnic group learn from and grow with the other. Therefore, the inclusion of these shots was likely strategic to cater to the predominately female audience of the series' final season. Hence, we not only receive a glimpse of the role of diversity in *Friday Night Lights* and *Small Town America*, but also the bonds amongst the characters, regardless of ethnic boundaries.

This analysis of *Friday Night Lights*' opening credits in season five began with a detailed review of aerial and trucking shots leading into Dillon, along with rural icons (the hay bale, silo and cattle) that create a rural identity for the town. These shots are only included in the title sequence of season five. As just discussed, season five's opening credits also showcase increased diversity. The fact that the theme of rurality is so heavily emphasized in correlation with the increased display of ethnicity is not coincidence, but intentional. This relates back to Johnson's (2010) research on place-based understandings. As referenced throughout this research, Johnson (2010) reviewed how NBC at first inaccurately pinpointed the viewership of *Friday Night Lights* based on common-sense assumptions. Specifically, this included which region of the United States would take to the series due to a presumed taste for football. Originally, the network believed the flyover states, specifically conservative men, as opposed to the urban coasts would take to the series. This, however, proved the exact opposite, with NBC taking measures to accommodate to the series' predominately female fan base from the urban

coasts. NBC may have done the same to overcome place-based understandings based on ethnicity.

“Rural” and “Caucasian” are often associated with one another, as are “diversity” and “urban.” This isn’t surprising, considering the statistics that support it. According to the Housing Assistance Council’s Rural Research Note (2012), almost eighty percent of rural residents were Caucasian in 2010. This may have been even greater during the run of the series. Ergo, viewers naturally tie the majority of characters in the season one title sequence of *Friday Night Lights* being Caucasian and the general lack of ethnicity with a rural area. But, once the cast becomes more diverse in the sequence of season five, the network took measures to prevent a subconscious correlation with an urban setting. Hence, the shots specifically highlighting the “ruralness” of the area discussed in the section on rurality were strategically included throughout the credits along with the increased inclusions and emphasis of the nonwhite characters. This helps to offset place-based understandings about ethnicity and prevent confusion regarding the series’ rural setting.

Cinematography, specifically the use of framing, provides different connotations for ethnicity in the season five credit sequence of *Friday Night Lights*. As discussed in Chapter Two, the use of framing and quantity of inclusions of nonwhite character Smash Williams connotes his ethnic group as neglected and hints towards racism. Framing and the quantity of inclusions of nonwhite characters Jess Merriweather and Vince Howard and racially ambiguous Becky Sproles connote not only an increased focus on ethnic characters in the fifth season, but a deeper look into the different ethnic cultures in Small Town America. It is not coincidence that this occurs in along side with the rise of the

female viewership. Ethnicity, however, is not the only theme to change distinctly from the first to last season title sequences of *Friday Night Lights* to cater to the interests and values of the female audience. Another theme is that of gender.

Change in Gender

Given the switch in focus from a male to a female audience, a change in the depiction of the female characters from the first to fifth season title sequences of *Friday Night Lights* is unsurprising. By season two, NBC shifted gears to further entice *Friday Night Lights*' newly found female viewership. This included big strategic moves, such as airing reruns on the female-centric Bravo Channel and striking a deal with that granted rights to the first run of the episodes to DirecTV which attracted the more upscale viewership that included the professional young women from the coasts (Johnson, 2010). Other initiatives by NBC were subtler, such as altering the series' depiction in the opening credits. A key alteration in the credits of season five was a shift in the roles of the male and female characters. Analyzing the credit sequences of the fifth season corroborates this, and furthermore, cues gender as a central theme in *Friday Night Lights*.

By the time season five of *Friday Night Lights* aired, the series had successfully catered to its primary audience of urban, professional women. How this season's credit sequence portrayed gender, therefore, highly differed from season one. Cinematography conveyed a larger narrative focus on women to resonate more with the female base. For example, the amount of gender inclusions is almost even. Twelve shots showcase male leads; eleven include main female characters. Furthermore, medium and full close ups span evenly across both genders. None of the close ups, in direct contrast to the close ups of Julie Taylor and Tyra Collette from the season one title sequence, include shadowing.

Instead there is a distinct, clear view of the full faces of all characters, regardless of gender, at some point in the title sequence. This may not just allude to a larger role for women in the series. A similar number of inclusions, use of framing and lighting illustrate that males and females in Dillon share a similar social status. Hence, the shift between the two seasons depicts the progression of the female gender, perhaps advancing to an equal position to men in the town. This caters to the shift in audience, with the change in symbolism appealing to the new-found and unexpected audience of young, professional, urban women.

A change in the quantity of inclusions and framing are not the only changes that occur in the title sequence of *Friday Night Lights*' fifth season. More subtle changes can be discerned by considering the progression and shift from the perceived male to the primary female fan base. A very unique change related to the quantity of inclusions and framing is the shift of the female characters from accessories to icons.

From Accessories to Icons

What purpose do the women of *Friday Night Lights* serve? The answer to this question depends on the season and audience. Based on the analysis in the original section on gender, the role of women in the first season was that of supporters to their male counterparts. The role of "supporters" can be interpreted in two different ways. It can be in a literal sense, in which women were simply portrayed in supporting roles. Or, this can be taken in a more figurative sense, with the cinematography and elements of mise-en-scene connoting women as men's source of happiness and support. Essentially, and perhaps in a more negative light, the women could be considered accessories. All of this would resonate well with the perceived male audience. The season five title

sequence, however, depicts women much differently; in a manner more suited for the audience of young, professional women. Specifically, the women of *Friday Night Lights* serve as a rural version of the confident, independent and beautiful women the audience of young females from the urban coasts aspire to become. Hence, as the series moves forward, the women of *Friday Night Lights* move from men's accessories to female icons.

A key manner in which the women of *Friday Night Lights* move from supporters to icons for the female audience of season five is through the use of costume in the title sequence. Little focus is placed on costume that is not football related in the credits of season one. This correlates with Johnson's (2010) research that football would be an attracting element for the presumed male fan base's interest in sports. In the credit sequence of season one, attire that isn't football related is actually almost impossible to see. Based on this, we can interpret little importance in the first season on fashion or style. This also ties back to Johnson's (2010) research. Fashion and style are not typically seen as high priorities for men in Middle America, making a lack of focus on costume in the first season credits understandable. However, this would stereotypically be considered important to young women. Due to this, the role of costume, specifically amongst the female characters, alters drastically in the fifth season credit sequence. This is best exemplified by comparing the title sequence shots of Tami Taylor, Julie Taylor, Tyra Collette and Lyla Garrity in season one with those of Tami, Julie and Becky Sproles in season five.

Framing and image density eliminate almost all visibility of women's clothing in the season one credits of *Friday Night Lights*. The shot of Tami Taylor leaning down to

hug Coach Taylor in his office is one example. In this shot, we see only the arms of a tan jacket on Tami, which blends in with the cluttered image density of the shot. Behind her is the bulletin board scattered with multicolored paperwork. Her jacket easily blends in with the array of colors. Coach Taylor's body and his desk cover the rest of her body along with any hint of her clothing from the neck down. In the close up of Tyra Collette, the shot is strategically framed to avoid a view of her clothes. We see only from the top of her shoulders to her head. On her shoulder, a thin black strap is visible, but nothing more. A similar method is taken with the close up of Julie Taylor. The visual frame is placed so close to her face it is impossible to see below her chin, once again eliminating any chance of seeing her attire. The only shot in which a female character's clothing is truly visible in the season one credits is that of Lyla Garrity being held by Jason Street. This frame allows a full view of Lyla, but his arms and her posture cover her costume to a large extent and therefore, deemphasize it. It is possible, however, to make out a brown and white collared shirt and a pair of jeans on her. Her attire is nothing that would turn heads or garner extra attention. It is basic and casual. Hence, the lack of focus on the clothing, and the fact that the only attire visible on a lead female character is more "run of the mill" supports the notion that fashion is not important in season one. Ergo, this caters to the assumed taste of the presumed audience of Middle America men.

Clothing is not the only portion of the women's costume downplayed in the credits of *Friday Night Lights*' first season. The use of shadowing and frame also deemphasizes makeup. For example, in the shot of Tami Taylor leaning down to hug Coach Taylor in his office, she is situated too far back in the visual frame to see any sign of makeup on her face. The same can be said of Lyla Garrity in the shot of her being held

by Jason Street. As noted in the section on gender from Chapter Two, the close ups of Tyra Collette and Julie Taylor are each heavily shadowed. Tyra's makeup is only visible because her eyelashes are thicker than average, hinting at the use of mascara, and her lips are shiny, signifying lip-gloss. Due to the shadowing, we cannot determine any unique colors. Instead, the shadowing makes most of the shot and her face merely shades of gray and black. The depiction of Julie is similar; with the close up making it possible to see her thickened eyelashes and glossed lips, but the shadowing prevents a true view of her makeup. Just as with clothing, cinematography de-emphasizes makeup in the interest of the presumed male viewership.

Considering what would stereotypically catch the interest of the anticipated audience of men from Middle America, clothing and makeup would not make the list. Therefore, the season one credit sequence of *Friday Night Lights* understandably neglects these elements. Clothing and makeup, however, would make the list of interests for a fan base of young women. Ergo, costume warrants a stronger role in the final season credits of *Friday Night Lights*. In opposition to the title sequence of season one, cinematography and mise-en-scene assist in emphasizing it.

Perhaps the most prominent example of *Friday Night Lights*' season five focus on style and fashion is the close up of Julie Taylor. This shot of Julie differs distinctly from her close up in the first season credit sequence. While only the side of her face down to her chin is visible in season one, the frame of the shot in season five shows her from just below the shoulders up, making it possible to actually see her attire. There is also no shadowing, allowing a clear view of her face and makeup. Additionally, her subtle

movements, combined with a background of highly contrasting color, draw us to her fashion and style further.

A quick shake of Julie Taylor's head in her close up in the credits of season five immediately draws our attention to her. Specifically, our focus falls on her long hair, which flows with her movements. Her hair really stands out, its platinum blonde color contrasting with the green foliage and light grey roads in the back of the visual frame. This differs greatly from her portrayal in the first season credit sequence, during which her hair is nothing more than another shade of grey, laying flat against her face. Come the title sequence of season five, it is styled with its extreme length emphasized by the fact that it goes past her shoulders and beyond what is visible in the visual frame. Another movement draws us to her face and eyes. She blinks, allowing us to see not only dark mascara and eyeliner around her eyes, but light green eye shadow on her lids. Julie also presses her lips together, honing our focus in on them. We can tell she is wearing lipstick; the bright pink of her lips is unnatural. As noted, there is not only a change in how Julie's makeup is portrayed, but also her clothing.

Unlike the title sequence of *Friday Night Light's* first season, the frame of Julie Taylor's close up provides a view of her clothing. It is some type of a low cut tank top, black and ruffled with specs of green. While we cannot compare the style of clothing to Julie's season one depiction, it is possible to compare it to that of Lyla Garrity. Lyla Garrity is chosen due to the fact that her attire is the most visible of any other female character in the first season credits.

The color and shape of Julie Taylor's clothes in the title sequence of the fifth season of *Friday Night Lights* make her attire appear "dressy." The dots and ruffles give

it a unique look as opposed to the common and basic cut of a casual t-shirt. This is a deep contrast to Lyla Garrity's casual brown collared shirt and jeans in the first season credits. Nothing stands out about this costume, not the color nor the cut. Further showcasing an increased emphasis on clothing in the season five credits is the color of Julie's attire. It contrasts with the background, drawing our attention to it as though it is meant to stand out. The black of the shirt stands out distinctly from the green foliage and grey roads in the back of the visual frame. Lyla's clothes, however, blend in with the background of her shot. The background in her shot is a dark shade of gray, specifically a night sky. Below Lyla is dark brown earth, behind her is Jason Street's dark blue shirt. Hence, the brown of her shirt and the dark blue of her jeans blend in with the rest of the shot, not demanding any special attention.

Based on the cinematography in the season five title sequence used to emphasize Julie Taylor's hair, makeup and attire in opposition to that of the sequence of season one, we can connote an increased importance on fashion and style in *Friday Night Lights*. This occurs alongside the shift from a focus on the interests of the presumed male to the actual audience of young women. The depiction of Julie, however, is not the only that shows such a change. Another character whose costume portrays this is Becky Sproles.

Becky Sproles' close up in the season five credit sequence of *Friday Night Lights* provides another glimpse at fashion and style in the series, and in turn, for rural America. Two inclusions of her in the credits help portray this. Similar to the close up of Julie Taylor, the use of frame and contrasting background colors emphasize her hair, makeup and clothing. This time, however, lighting is also strategically used.

The first solo close up of Becky Sproles appears near the middle of the credit sequence of season five. The frame is from slightly below her chin to a little above the top of her head. Her face takes up almost the entire visual frame, drawing our entire focus on it. The background is a light tan. This contrasts with her dark brown hair, making it stand out. It consists of big, full ringlet curls. No other female character has hair like this, connoting that Becky has a unique sense of fashion, or perhaps a different style from the other women of *Friday Night Lights*. Lighting draws our attention from her hair to her face. Two bright lights at the left of the visual frame cast a slight glow on her face. This helps illuminate the makeup she wears. The light makes the thick streaks of pink blush on her cheeks pop out against her bronze skin. Lighting, combined with the proximity of the close up, enable us to see the black eyeliner and mascara around her eyes. She blinks, providing a glimpse of white eye shadow on the lids. Like the pink blush, it also contrasts with her bronze skin, making it stand out. While this shot provides a clear view of her hair and makeup, it is her second inclusion in the credit sequence that depicts her clothing.

In Becky Sproles' second inclusion in the season five credit sequence of *Friday Night Lights*, the frame provides a glimpse of her clothing. This is the shot of her playing football with Luke Cafferty. Luke stands in the middle of the shot, with Becky behind him bobbing quickly back and forth to each side of him. Similar to the shot of Julie Taylor, Becky's movement not only draws attention to her, but also her style. Her attire is white, distinctively different from the background of bright green foliage behind her, making it stand out. She wears a blouse with puffy sleeves that go just beyond her shoulders. The blouse cuts down low, revealing another shirt, also white, underneath it.

Just like the attire of Julie Taylor analyze previously, Becky's clothing is meant to stand out. It is unique, not something typically referred to as casual or standard like the outfit worn by Lyla Garrity in the credits of season one. Becky's character, therefore, further supports the increased focus on fashion for the female audience of *Friday Night Light's* final season.

Costume, and the use of cinematography to accentuate it, exemplifies the transition of the women of *Friday Night Lights* from accessories to icons in the fifth season title sequence. This is just one change in the portrayal of gender catering to the move from a presumed audience of men to that of women. Another is a shift from women to men as objects of desire.

Eye Candy

Johnson's (2010) research touched on a number of things that were assumed to trigger the tastes of a male audience from the fly-over states. This includes a like of violent sports, such as football, and a low market culture, including a predilection for stores like Wal-Mart. While not mentioned in her research, there is something else in *Friday Night Lights* that would have interested a heterosexual male audience, regardless of the region from which they dwelled. This would be attractive women. Specifically, in season one, the women in the credit sequences serve as "eye candy" for the presumed audience of men. As the series progresses and changes gear to cater to the actual viewership of women, it is the men who become the eye candy in the title sequence. Different elements of cinematography in the opening credits of seasons one and season five support this idea.

Shadowing and lighting help convey a feeling of women as eye candy for men in the season one credits of *Friday Night Lights*. Close ups of Julie Taylor and Tyra Collette exemplify this. As noted previously in this and the original sections on gender, the shots of both Tyra and Julie are heavily shadowed. This almost provides a sense of “mystery” or intrigue to their characters. Bits of light breaking through the shadows bounce off each of their hair and lips. This draws us to these physical features, often considered a point of attraction for the opposite sex. Another important aspect in supporting the idea that Tyra and Julie serve as eye candy is their facial expressions. Tyra wears a big smile, creating an approachable and inviting feel about her. Her eyes are almost sparkling as she gazes at someone in front of her. It almost appears like a loving and admiring look, a look that would be highly appealing to someone attracted to her. Julie’s expression is solemn. Yet, her lips are pressed in a way in which it almost appears she is pouting. These expressions could each be considered favorable to an audience of men, perhaps adding to each of the female characters’ physical appeal.

Referring to Julie Taylor’s and Tyra Collette’s portrayal in the credits of season one as sexual is a stretch. However, the shadowing and lighting to pinpoint attention on specific physical features along with their facial expressions create a depiction arguably appealing to the opposite sex. Supporting that this was an attempt to cater to the presumed male audience of *Friday Night Lights*’ first season is that this type of portrayal is limited to solely Tyra and Julie. There is no unique use of shadowing and lighting in the season one credits drawing attention to any specific physical traits of men stereotypically appealing to women. Hence, the use of cinematography creates a sense of women as eye candy. Once the focus of the series changes to that of a female audience in

season five, this portrayal switches in the title sequence. However, it is depicted in a much subtler manner.

Framing and the decision of which male characters to emphasize in the credits of *Friday Night Lights* in season five support the idea of men serving as eye candy for a heterosexual female audience. This is best portrayed by the medium close ups of characters Luke Cafferty and Hastings Ruckles. Discussed in detail in the sections on rurality, the shot of Luke Cafferty is of him moving a hay bail. Like Tyra Collette's and Julie Taylor's shots from the first season title sequence, in which focus is placed on their hair and lips, cinematography draws our attention to a feature on Luke often appealing to the opposite sex: his arms. The frame makes him visible from the waist up, showing his upper body. He wears a t-shirt, exposing his arms. The camera moves with him as he transports the hay bail, keeping our focus on his biceps. They are very muscular, connoted by the toning visible in his upper arms and veins that can be seen in his lower arm. Hence, cinematography draws attention to his "big strong arms," arguably a point of attraction for the primary female audience of the fifth season.

Hastings Ruckles' medium close up in the fifth season title sequence of *Friday Night Lights* does not use any unique form of cinematography or mise-en-scene. It is the fact that he is included in the credit sequence at all that makes the shot of him unique and likely geared towards the female audience of *Friday Night Light's* fifth season. Gray's (2010) research on media paratexts, including the opening credits, frequently notes how the title sequence serve as an introduction to the characters. However, the character of Hastings is quite minor in the series. He appears only in season five and warrants very little screen time. This contrasts distinctly from all of the other characters featured in the

opening credits of both the first and fifth seasons. All of these characters, other than Hastings, play extensive roles in the narrative. Some characters highly important to the storylines of the fifth season receive no screen time in the opening credits at all, making Hastings' inclusion in the opening credit sequence even more of an oddity. This includes Buddy Garrity, a key character since the series' inception, and Billy Riggins, who also first appears in the first episode and whose role becomes increasingly important as the series progresses.

What was it that earned Hastings Ruckles a spot in the credits of season five, since it wasn't a leading a role in the series? Arguably, it is his looks. The medium close up provides a clear glimpse of his dark hair, dark eyes, strong chin and broad shoulders. All of these features are often considered appealing to the opposite sex. He is also dressed slightly differently from the other male characters in the credits, making him appear unique and making him stand out. For example, unlike the common baseball hat worn in the close up of Luke Cafferty, Hastings wears a beanie. Hastings also has shaggy hair that sticks out from underneath it. All other male characters' hair in season five is barely longer than a buzz cut. Luke Cafferty is a prime example of this contrast, along with the close ups of Vince Howard.

Similar to the shots of Julie Taylor and Tyra Collette in the first season credits, Hastings Ruckles' facial expression can also be considered a drawing element for the opposite sex. He's looking downward, his eyes hesitantly moving upward as a slight smirk emerges at the top of the left of his lip. This connotes a feeling of him being somewhat shy, or perhaps slightly awed by whoever he is looking at. Either way, these

are expressions inviting for an audience of young women who may find him attractive. Hence, it is Hastings's good looks, in along with the tastes of the female audience, that garner him a place in the credits of *Friday Night Lights*' fifth season.

Jess Merriweather's close up in the season five credits of *Friday Night Lights* holds the potential to contradict the notion that female characters are no longer portrayed as eye candy in accommodation to an audience of women. In this shot, Jess is dancing. First, it begins in a medium close up of her from the shoulders up. As she moves, the camera pans down her body. The baggy grey sweater she wears stops just below the top of her chest, exposing her entire stomach. Her stomach is flat, with slight intonation at her abs connoting she is in shape and muscular. One could argue the camera pan and exposed stomach are to attract heterosexual male viewers to her body. However, this specific use of cinematography and mise-en-scene may actually be to entice the female viewership.

The entire appearance and costume of Jess Merriweather in the title sequence must be taken into consideration when determining the true purpose of the shot. By doing this, we are left with a connotation of athleticism that makes Jess' sexual allure more complex. Specifically, while her appearance is something undoubtedly appealing to heterosexual males, her physique is emphasized more so as something to which the female audience could aspire to have as well. The beginning of the close up provides a thorough view of her face. Very little makeup is visible, other than her lips having a slight shade of pink from gloss. Her hair is sloppy, sticking up in areas, matted down in others, and being held back by an athletic band. Furthermore, unlike the pouty-lipped look of Julie Taylor or the inviting smile of Tyra Collette in the season one credits, Jess's

facial expression gives the perception that she is concentrating. Her mouth is slightly open, but tight. Her eyes are set on something ahead of her and do not wander as she moves. This makes her appear like a dancer or some type of an athlete. The camera pan, therefore, is not meant to show off a sexy feature, but to showcase how in shape and strong she is. This, perhaps, being something the audience of women would admire. Of course, this could arguably still be considered attractive to men. However, given the shift in focus from the presumed fan base of men to the actual audience of women, this shot of Jess is meant to cater, in part, to the interests of the latter. Hence, Jess is not eye candy, but yet another example of a female icon.

This section focused heavily on the credit sequence portrayals of female characters Julie Taylor, Tyra Collette, Lyla Garrity, Becky Sproles and Jess Merriweather. These characters, however, are not the only women in *Friday Night Lights* whose portrayal shifts in the title sequence to accommodate to the female viewership. In this instance, the most noteworthy woman of *Friday Night Lights* is Tami Taylor.

Tami Taylor: The Epitome of the Female Role Model

The strongest portrayal of the evolving female role in *Friday Night Lights* from the first to fifth season credit sequences is that of Tami Taylor. Her character's transition is very fitting for the change in focus on a presumed male to the primary female audience of young, professional women. It showcases her moving from a supporting character to series costar, one more relatable for an audience of the same gender than the original star, Coach Taylor. Tami also becomes the epitome of the female role model. Specifically, she

becomes the rural reflection of what a young female viewership could aspire to become. This could include not only those located in the politically blue coasts, but also females based in the red flyover states.

As noted, the role of women in the credit sequence of *Friday Night Lights* increases exponentially from the first to fifth season. It is Tami Taylor who wins the most screen time and close ups out of all the female characters. Of the twelve close ups of lead female characters, Tami is featured in six, emphasizing her prominent role in the series and likely the town of Dillon overall. The extent of this, however, is not truly evident without taking other elements of cinematography and mise-en-scene into account.

Analyzing both the quantity of inclusions and framing of Tami Taylor in the season one as opposed to season five credit sequences provides opposite depictions of her character in *Friday Night Lights*. In the title sequence of season one, Tami appears only once. This is in the shot of her with Coach Taylor in his office, in which she leans down to wrap her arms around him. She is barely visible in the shot. His body and the cluttered image density of the multicolored papers on the bulletin board at the back of the shot overpower Tami. The single inclusion and use of cinematography create a feel that she is barely there. It is as though she not only holds little importance in the series, but that she herself is of little significance. This changes drastically in opening credit sequence of season five.

In the season five title sequence, the quantity of inclusions and framing of Tami Taylor position her as one of the two key characters in *Friday Night Lights*. This also positions her as an equal to original key character Coach Taylor. In the season one opening credits, Coach Taylor is the evident star of the series. He is featured in the

opening credits four times, all of which close ups. These are more inclusions and close ups than any other character that season. More importantly, it is four times as many inclusions than that of Tami. By season five, Coach Taylor and Tami have an almost even playing field in the title sequence. Tami appears in six shots, while Coach Taylor is in seven. Each have two solo close ups. This alone signifies the equality of the two characters in the series and Tami's increased importance. However, these specific inclusions also unveil something else very interesting. In season five, more than half of the inclusions of Coach Taylor and Tami in the credit sequence are of the two of them together. This connotes that they are not only a couple, but that their relationship is an important aspect of the series and its storyline. Hence, it is not just the life of Coach Taylor or the life of Tami as individuals that is important in *Friday Night Lights*. It is how the two of them live with and support one another and their family.

In the original analysis of gender in Chapter Two, the women in the credits of *Friday Night Lights*' first season are portrayed as men's supporters. This includes the depiction of Tami Taylor as a pillar of support for Coach Taylor. One could consider this a portrayal of a doting, devoted wife. This would arguably be a portrayal that an audience of conservative men, and also some women, who favor traditional American gender roles may prefer. However, this could be interpreted negatively by the professional urban female fan base, for which such traditional roles may not resonate. An example is the shot of Tami and Coach Taylor in his office. He sits at his cluttered desk, with an exhausted, stressed look on his face. His beautiful wife is there to soothe him, helping him recover from a hard day's work. This shot is also included in the season five credits. As noted, the primary audience of young, professional women to whom this season caters

may not find such a portrayal appealing. However, taking this shot into consideration with the other depictions of Tami in the season five title sequence provides an interesting portrayal of her and Coach Taylor's relationship. While Tami is still playing the role of a supporter and comforter, Coach Taylor is depicted in this manner, too. This signifies that while Tami may still be interpreted as following traditional gender roles to an extent, she moves into a more equal role in the family hierarchy with Coach Taylor.

Strategic uses of cinematography and elements of mise-en-scene exemplify the idea of Coach Taylor and Tami Taylor as each other's supporters in the season five title sequence. From the shot of Coach Taylor's office, it is obvious that Tami is the caregiver. In the shot of Tami Taylor holding their daughter, Gracie Bell, while Coach Taylor's head bobs in for just a moment, we are provided with a sense that he also holds this responsibility. Specifically, this is an example of him bringing joy to Tami. In this shot, her eyes are set in the area of the frame in which his head appears. They do not leave him. The smile on her face becomes increasingly larger once he appears. Hence, he is what makes her happy. And, she looks to him specifically to bring out these emotions. Hence, we may consider Coach Taylor as a form of emotional support for Tami. One could also debate his look of admiration towards Tami and her reaction still lean towards traditional values. He is doing his duty by taking care of his wife, and she feels happiness and comfort due to this. However, considering this shot with those that follow hints at a more equal role for Tami with Coach Taylor in the season five title sequence.

Two other shots in the season five credit sequence also showcase Tami Taylor and Coach Taylor as a support system for one another. One is a shot of Coach Taylor entering the football stadium. He can only be seen from the waist up. The camera is at a

distinct low angle aimed sharply upward at his face. The sky above him is pitch black, but one bright light is visible near the top right of the visual frame. All of this draws our attention to him. That is until he moves forward and unveils Tami from behind him. She stands high above him on the bleachers. The bright light hits just above her head, making it nearly impossible for us to miss her. The distinct low angle provides a glimpse of how she is looking down on him, but could figuratively be interpreted as she is watching over him and hence, supporting him.

Once again, it could be argued that the aforementioned shot from the season five credit sequence still showcases Tami Taylor in a more traditional gender role. However, the camera angle and the facial expressions of Coach Taylor and Tami are what signify a sense of equality. The low camera angle showcases that Tami is literally higher above Coach Taylor. We could also look at this symbolically, as though she is a powerful, looming entity and this is why she is literally watching over him. She is positioned just close enough in the visual frame that we can see her facial expression. It is not one of compassion and concern, but of strength and determination. Her mouth is tight and eyes slightly slant as though concentrating. They do not leave Coach Taylor as he moves forward in the shot. Coach Taylor's face shows almost the opposite. His eyes are wide with eyebrows high. His mouth is open a tiny bit. A combination of these elements conveys a sense that he is scared or intimidated. All of this considered, we are left with the impression that it is Tami who is the strong one in the relationship. She is not just there to comfort and soothe him, as traditional gender roles may suggest, but to push him forward when he is weak. Also, the fact that Coach Taylor is even showing any hint of weakness demonstrates Tami becoming more of an equal to him.

Another shot that exemplifies Coach Taylor and Tami Taylor on a more equal level is that of the two of them standing on the empty football field. Paying particular attention to Coach Taylor's and Tami's movements showcases each as a pillar of support for the other. The shot is from behind the two of them. It is taken from a very high angle, with a long depth of field, emphasizing just how small the two are in comparison to the field around them. The dark shadowing around the edges of the visual frame adds to a perception that the field is engulfing them. As the shot zooms out, making the two appear even smaller, Coach Taylor wraps his arm around Tami, rubbing his hand up and down her arm. At the same time, she leans into him, putting her head on his shoulder. It's as though the two are soothing and comforting each other from all of the uncertainties and darkness around them. This connotes, once again, the supporting role of each of the characters for the other. It is important to note that this is occurring in the professional locale of Coach Taylor. This continues to build on traditional values, specifically with Coach Taylor as the hardworking husband who feels pressure from his work. However, it is hinted that the stress from Coach Taylor's work is not only a challenge due for which he needs support, but Tami must overcome hurdles within it, too. This is discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

Comparing the portrayal of the first to fifth season credit sequences of *Friday Night Lights* unveils a distinct shift in gender to accommodate to the emergent fan base of young, professional women. The use of mise-en-scene, specifically costume, conveys a shift from women as accessories to icons, focusing on elements like fashion and style to cater to a young urban professional woman's tastes and values. Additionally, a mix of framing, shadowing and the strategic decision of which characters are included in the

credit sequences shows a move from women to men as eye candy to speak to the targeted audience of each season. It is the depiction of Tami Taylor, specifically, that changes most distinctly in correlation with the shift in audience. She becomes somewhat of an equal to her male counterpart, Coach Taylor, forming into a figure to which an audience of women can relate. Given her dominance, Tami is a key character to follow in terms of deciphering a rural image for which *Friday Night Light's* audience of women can look up to and consider a role model.

Analyzing the first and fifth credit sequences of *Friday Night Lights* unveils an even greater importance for the role of gender in the series than anticipated in its first analysis in this research. This, however, is not the only theme that warranted further research after comparing its depiction in the first and final season title sequences.

Another important theme that already garnered a heavy focus and deserves another look is the role of football in Small Town America.

Football – From Series Focus to Series Backdrop

The first season title sequence of *Friday Night Lights* caters to the tastes of a presumed audience of rural men. This includes a predilection for violent sports like football (Johnson, 2010). But in season five, the emphasis of the series shifts to the interests of young, professional women. Specifically, the focus becomes the relationships and day-to-day lives of the characters. A key manner in which this shift is depicted is through the different portrayals of football in the opening credits of each season. In season one, cinematography and mise-en-scene in the title sequence create a perception that the central focus of *Friday Night Lights* is in fact football. In season five, the portrayals in the credit sequence leave a perception that the series is about a group of

people in rural Texas, of whom to have a strong association with a football team. Hence, cinematography and mise-en-scene still connote that football is an important part of *Friday Night Lights*, but not the main series focus. This change can be deciphered by analyzing three specific elements in the credit sequences: Costume, football iconography and the tone of the game.

Costume

In *Friday Night Light's* first season credit sequence, football uniforms or other official team clothing convey a sense that football is the main focus of the series. One way in which this is exemplified is through the quantity of shots of main characters portrayed in this type of costume. While the key focus of this chapter is an analysis of the credits of season five, it is necessary to review the relevant shots from the first season credit sequence as well.

Eight of the twelve shots that include characters in the title sequence of season one of *Friday Night Lights* feature them in football attire. This includes shots analyzed previously in Chapter Two, such as the close up of Smash Williams praying in his football uniform in the section on religion and Lyla Garrity doing a cheer with the top of her cheer uniform exposed in the chapter on football expectations. Another shot not previously reviewed in this analysis is the close up of Tim Riggins. First, the shot starts as a close up of two legs in football pants, pads and cleats. A quick pan upward exposes Tim's torso and face. We can now see a white t-shirt that fits so tightly to his body it creases around the muscles in his arms, meaning it could only be made from a material like spandex, popular in sports. A logo in the top right, Under Armor, is visible. This brand is associated with athletics. Hence, the Under Armor shirt, in combination with the

cleats, pants and pads, connote Tim is a football player. Uniforms worn in the close ups of Smash, Lyla and Tim are those commonly tied to football. However, to tie another character's costume to the game, his strategic placement in the visual frame is necessary. This is the depiction of Coach Taylor.

Five inclusions of Coach Taylor in the first season credits of *Friday Night Lights* have him strategically positioned to assure his costume associates him with the Dillon Panthers and, in turn, the game of football. Each shot shows him in his blue jacket and blue baseball hat. The color alone, which is one of the official team colors of the Panthers, ties him to the team and game. More so, however, it is the gold team logo visible in each shot confirming his role with the team. One example is the dissolve of football players running into Coach Taylor reviewed in the section on football expectations. As discussed, this shot is taken from the back of Coach Taylor. This was a strategic choice, so emphasis would be placed on the Dillon Panther football logo on the back of his jacket. It is so large it almost covers his jacket entirely, while the contrasting colors essentially demand our attention. Another example, also analyzed in the section on football expectations, is the pan in which Jason Street looks up at Coach Taylor. Just under the top left collar of Coach Taylor's blue jacket, it is possible to see a thick yellow "P," standing for "Panthers." The white background and the blue of his jacket make the gold logo stand out. This same logo is also visible in the series of match-on-action edits mimicking a play in the game near the end of the sequence. No matter Coach Taylor's position or the angle of the shot, the yellow "P" is visible. In these three inclusions, he is always strategically placed either straight or with his left shoulder slightly in front of him

so the “P” can be seen. Taking all of this into account creates a connotation that Coach Taylor is affiliated with the team and therefore, the game of football.

Of the nineteen inclusions of the main characters in the fifth season credit sequence of *Friday Night Lights*, just one shows characters in football attire. This connotes far less emphasis on the game in the last season, eliminating the perception that the main focus is on the game of football and implying instead that it is the community that grows from the game. The one and only shot of characters in football attire in this title sequence is that of Vince Howard and Luke Cafferty analyzed in the sections on ethnicity. Each boy wears the same red and white football uniforms while standing on the sideline amongst other unformed players. This includes white football pants and a red jersey that rests on top of shoulder pads. Neither wears the helmet, so that we are able to identify them. Hence, we are able to build an association with the boys and the team, however, it as noted, they are the only characters in season five depicted in such costume. Therefore, this builds on the idea of a lesser emphasis on the game of football itself. This is further conveyed by the season five credit sequence portrayal of Coach Taylor.

As in the season one credit sequence, Coach Taylor is portrayed in his typical jacket and baseball hat in the season five credit sequence of *Friday Night Lights*. This time his attire is red. Come the fifth season of *Friday Night Lights*, Coach Taylor has been removed from his position as Coach of the Dillon Panthers and given a new position with the East Dillon Lions, the rival school within the Dillon city limits. Red is the official color of this team. In contrast to the opening credits of season one, there are no specific logos visible that truly create a firm association amongst him and the team in the fifth season title sequence. Furthermore unlike the first season title sequence, he is also

portrayed in costume that has no tie whatsoever to the team or game. The shot of him dancing with his daughter, Julie Taylor, and the shot of him holding his wife, Tami Taylor, on the empty football field, are examples of this. In each of these shots he's wearing a suit. There is no red in his attire at all, and therefore, no hint of his role with the team or football. Hence, his role with the team, while still evident in the season five sequence, is downplayed in comparison to the first season opening credits of *Friday Night Lights*.

Comparing the portrayals of costume in the first and fifth seasons title sequences of *Friday Night Lights* shows a distinct link between the portrayal of football and the change in audience focus. Season one, of course, caters to the audience of men, with football-related attire dominating the credit sequence. The last season, instead, focuses on the interest of the true female audience, for whom the game itself holds little importance. Hence, in the season five title sequence, the fact that so few shots include main characters in football attire and little effort is made to create a firm tie between Coach Taylor's costume and the team changes how the series is perceived entirely. Specifically contrasting from the first season opening credits, football morphs into something that the characters simply do as source of bonding. It is not a defining element of who they are as people, nor is it the central focus of *Friday Night Lights*. Costume, however, is not the only element that assists in this change. While costume can be considered a part of it, specific iconography helps the change in depiction for football in the first and fifth season credits.

Iconography

The opening credits provide a glimpse of a series based upon the tone, genre and style the show's producers and distributors wish to create to attract the desired audience (Gray, 2010). Therefore, each shot in the credit sequences of *Friday Night Lights* was strategically chosen to assist viewers in deciphering the specific themes they should expect to see. Due to this, once the audience focus shifted from men from Middle America to young, professional women from the coasts, the types and quantities of specific inclusions of football iconography, in the first as opposed to last season credit sequences, changes drastically.

One key shift to accommodate to the tastes of the female as opposed to the presumed male fan base of *Friday Night Lights* in the first to final season credit sequences is the quantity of shots with football iconography. Season one sees a high quantity of this iconography. Of the twenty-one shots in the season one credits, fifteen include some type of signs related to football. This is roughly seventy-two percent. Examples include the costumes worn by Smash Williams, Tim Riggins, Lyla Garrity and Coach Taylor mentioned in the previous section. Symbolism other than attire makes an appearance, too. This includes the football thrown by Matt Saracen with Landry Clarke reviewed in the section on social class and the Dillon Panther signage analyzed in the section on football expectations. Other examples, however, were not yet included in this analysis.

In addition to those discussed above, three additional inclusions of football iconography appear in the season one credits of *Friday Night Lights*. One is an extended long shot of the exterior of a football field. The straight angle combined with the deep

focus of the shot makes the stadium appear a giant, looming entity, immediately drawing attention to it. Another example is a close up of a fully uniformed football player. His body is visible from the knees up, providing a clear view of his attire. This is not the only symbol in the shot. The football player's arm is stretched out long and straight, leading to a football in his hand. A shot of uniformed adults and children playing football with one another also appears in the first season credit sequence. All of the players, big and small, create a cluttered image density of football iconography making it nearly impossible to think of anything other than the game. Finally, the last set of shots touting football iconography is a series of match-on-action edits depicting a play in a game. This includes an array of uniformed players, the football one of them carries and the white-striped field of grass below them, emphasized by the bright lights hitting the ground in contrast to a black night sky.

From costumes, to footballs, to stadiums, to fields, the inclusion of these symbols in the credit sequence of *Friday Night Light's* first season builds anticipation that the game itself is the central focus of the series. This is a fitting perception, given the assumed predilection for football of the original target audience of men (Johnson, 2010). Season five iconography in the title sequence, however, differs drastically.

More than seventy percent of the shots of the first season credits include football iconography, yet this percentage drastically drops in the fifth season opening credits of *Friday Night Lights*. Of the twenty-six shots in the credits of season five, only eleven include football signifiers, equaling roughly forty-two percent. Instead of football-related signs, the season five credit sequence is filled with different types of iconography to help portray themes catered to the fifth season's primary audience of young females.

Specifically, these are symbols focused on the day-to-day lives of the characters. This includes shots with signs hinting towards the rural locale of the series. The longhorn bull, the silo beyond the close up of Coach Taylor, and the hay bail moved by Luke Cafferty all discussed in the section on rurality exemplify this. Another shot, not analyzed previously in this section, is a sign for Buddy's Bar and Grill. It is an exterior establishing shot of a local hang out frequented by the characters. Once again, this shot provides a glimpse of a part of the characters' day-to-day lives. Almost all of the other inclusions without football symbols are close ups of characters, connoting a focus on the characters as individuals. Overall, the use of these as semiotic signs in the season five title sequence serves to build an identity for the lives of the characters, including who they are, where they spend their time and the area in which they live.

Even though football iconography plays a lesser role in the fifth as opposed to first season credit sequences of *Friday Night Lights*, the role it plays is still important. The shots that do include football iconography are very subtle. Hence, they now serve as a gentle reminder of football being an important, though not the dominant, theme for the series. This includes an array of shots such as that of the Dillon city sign, the East Dillon Panther scoreboard, the close up of Luke Cafferty and Vince Howard shaking hands in full football uniform and Coach Taylor and Tami Taylor standing together alone in the center of an empty field. A second close up of Vince not previously analyzed in this analysis also contains football symbolism. While he is not wearing anything football related, the background of the shot is completely in focus, enabling us to see a high row of bleachers above a bright green and white-striped football field. The background of the shot ties him to the game, but it is Vince himself who is the focus, placed directly in the

center of the shot with a distinct low angle looking up at him. Hence in the credits of season five, the strategic choice of the shots places focus on the characters themselves and the setting for the series, aspects much more interesting to the primary viewership of young women than the game of football. Football, therefore, once again is portrayed as a part of the series, but not the central focus for which its viewers should be enticed.

Strategic use of costume and iconography shift the role of football in *Friday Night Lights* from the first to fifth seasons title sequences of the series. These changes, however, arguably are not the most defining when it comes to the different portrayals of the game. Instead, it is the use of cinematography to alter the tone in which the game is depicted.

Tone of the Game

Comparing the close ups of leading series characters in the first and fifth season credit sequences of *Friday Night Lights* unveils a distinct change in the demeanor of characters with an association with football. Close ups in the credits of season one showcase facial expressions full of stress and anxiety. In the season five title sequence, however, the shots display joy and happiness. The association with the team and game for the characters emitting these feelings in both seasons' credit sequences is portrayed through the inclusion of football iconography, be it costumes or items in the background of the shots. From this, we can deduce that the tone of the game altered to fit the tastes of Johnson's (2010) described primary, young, professional female audience of the series that arose in the later seasons. Instead of a series centered on an intense and demanding game and an immense need to win, geared to the predilection of the presumed male

audience, the fifth season builds on the idea of football as an empowering and binding force amongst the characters, ergo the joy and happiness.

Framing of Jason Street and Tim Riggins in the first season of *Friday Night Lights* conveys a sense of stress and anxiety from football and the team. First there is the close up of Jason Street, analyzed on multiple occasions in this analysis, including the section on football expectations in Chapter Two. Tying Jason to the game are the Dillon Panther blue jacket and hat worn by Coach Taylor, who appears in the shot after a pan follows the glance of Jason's eyes. Coach Taylor, therefore, is a symbol for the team and game. And, with the pan mimicking his point of view, it can be interpreted that it is his affiliation with the team that is the reason behind Jason's dismay. A close up of the side of Jason's face provides ample view of his expression and, therefore, his emotions. Giant beads of sweat pour down his temples. His eyes dart frantically, with furrowed eyebrows adding to a distressed look. All of this combined conveys a feeling of stress and concern.

It is important to note the exact reasoning behind Jason Street's frantic expression in the title sequence of season one. In this specific instance, his panic is a result of his inability to play the game or be part of the team anymore due to an injury. Hence, the thought of not being involved in the sport causes him extreme anxiety. This showcases the importance of the game emphasized in *Friday Night Lights*' first season to cater to the presumed audience of men. Hence, football is important, and something in which Jason feels he needs to participate. The close up of Tim Riggins in the first season credit sequence also demonstrates stress. However, in this instance, it is due to the need to win and succeed with football to meet the expectations of others.

Tim Riggins' close up is one of the strongest portrayals of the demands and stress created by the game of football based on the title sequence in the first season of *Friday Night Lights*. First, there is a close up of his knee, dressed in football pads and pants, creating a tie between him and the game. His knee bobs up and down quickly, with movement like this often associated with nerves. The frame pans up, displaying his clenched hands. They are held together so tightly that the muscles can be seen in his hands and the skin is turning red. Again, this adds to the idea of him being nervous. The shot then pans up to his upper body and face. The frame gives a thorough view of his posture. His shoulders are hunched over and his head slightly facing downwards, almost as though he's trying to hide himself.

The look on Tim Riggins' face adds to the notion of his dismay. His facial expression is the telling sign of the stress based on the intense importance to win the game conveyed in the first season sequence. His mouth is tight and his lips are pressed together intensely. A big wrinkle spans across his forehead, conveying he is scrunching his face as though thinking too deeply or too hard. Furthermore, his eyes slant in a thick squint and his nostrils are flared. This almost makes Tim appear angry. The shot even zooms in a bit to emphasize these features. Lastly, his hair builds on the idea of him being anxious or nervous. It is extremely messy, full of knots with parts of it covering his face. It is as though his nerves prevent him from appearing put together. All in all, Tim appears a mess of nerves and stress, with his football-related attire insinuating this is at least partly due to the expectations to succeed for the team and its fans.

As noted, in the title sequence of *Friday Night Light's* fifth season it is possible to see a shift in the emotions conveyed in association with the team and game. Vince

Howard is perhaps the strongest portrayal of the shift in demeanor. This is first portrayed in a medium close up of him in a locker room. We know it is a locker room due to the red, metal mesh lockers in focus behind him in the background. The color, that of the East Dillon Lions, ties him to the team. He looks almost ecstatic. His smile is so big it spans almost his entire face. Dimples that appear bigger than quarters cover almost the rest of his lower face. Slight lighting off to the left of the visual frame hits his big toothy grin, drawing our attention to it even more. Vince's eyes are almost sparking, that is, what can be seen of them due to the squishing of his face from his massive smile. Unlike his predecessors in the season one title sequence, Vince seems not only at ease, but thrilled due to his affiliation with the team. Additional portrayals of Vince showcase this further.

Another example of football bringing joy in the credit sequence of season five in contrast to the stress portrayed in the title sequence of the first season is through a close up of Vince Howard on a football field. The shot is a medium close up, providing a view of Vince from the waist up. The shot is from a low angle, providing a distinct view of the high rows of bleachers and goal post behind him. It makes it appear as though football is some type of a big looming entity. However, Vince's actions and facial expression do not convey football stress or anxiety as displayed in the first season title sequence. Instead, he's pumping his arms up and down, as though in celebration. A big smile once again crosses his face. Bits of light from the sun pierce down from the top of the shot, hitting Vince slightly and drawing our attention to him further. Taking all of this into consideration, football is a source of happiness for Vince.

The final shot in the season five title sequence of Vince Howard in which he conveys happiness due to his affiliation with football is that in which he shares the screen with Luke Cafferty. This particular shot is discussed in great detail in the original section on ethnicity in this chapter. The two boys are dressed in red East Dillon football uniforms, sans helmets, so that we may see their faces and affiliate them with the team. The background consists of other uniformed players; however, their faces are not visible, making Luke and Vince stand out more. The two boys clutch hands, signifying unity and bonding between them. Vince is smiling lightly, while biting down on his lip. Luke is smirking a bit. Taking all of this into consideration, not only happiness is conveyed. Additionally, a sense of bonding is created. The team and the game, therefore, are a source of pride and unity.

The portrayals of Jason Street, Tim Riggins and Vince Howard in the title sequences of seasons one and five all display how the tone of the game changes in *Friday Night Lights*. This correlates with the shift in audience from that of conservative men from the flyover states with a predilection for football to young professional women from the coasts more enticed by the characters and their lives. Based on the title sequences, the series moves away from a focus on the game and the need to win, to the characters themselves and how they use football as a source of joy and unity. While this section focused heavily on the boys who actually play the game, this concept is actually portrayed most strongly by *Friday Night Lights* original leading character, Coach Taylor.

As touched on in the section on gender, the majority of shots in the season five title sequence including Coach Taylor portray his melancholy. Only two show him otherwise. This is previously credited to the presence of a specific element, a female

character, more specifically his family. These are the shots of him in season five dancing with his daughter, Julie Taylor, and in which his head appears momentarily in the shot of his wife, Tami Taylor, holding their daughter Grace. In each of these shots, he smiles deeply. While we can connote that his daughter and wife are positive influences in his life based on his uplifted mood with them present, there is more to consider. His mood not only alters with their presence, but from a specific element lacking in the shots: signifiers of the team or football. Not only are these the only shots of him smiling, these are the only shots of him that lack football iconography. Hence, this builds on the idea that the expectations of his role with the team and game cause him stress and anxiety.

The effect that football has on the demeanor of Coach Taylor is perhaps best conveyed through two different series of shots mimicking a play in the game. This includes a sequence from both the season one and season five title sequences. Two distinctly different sets of emotions by Coach Taylor, and overall tone for the game, are conveyed.

In the season one credit sequence of *Friday Night Lights*, the depth of view and shadowing help create a feel for the intensity of football through the shots mimicking a play in the game. The series begins with an exterior establishing shot of a football field. A slight low angle near the end of the field off to the side of one of the goalposts demonstrates the massive size of the field in its entirety. Everything is in focus, with a long depth of view spanning as far as the eye can see. No other buildings are present, creating a sparse image density without the field taken into consideration. All of this combined creates a dominating feel; the field, or it symbolically as the game of football, appears as though it is the only thing around. The use of shadowing adds to this. The far

back right and front of the visual frame is dark and shadowed like a night sky. In contrast, the field itself and the bleachers are bright and dominating. This is due to the massively bright stadium lights, essentially piercing through the night sky and casting a glow on the field. Hence, the game is already given an intense, dominating feel even before actual play begins.

In this series of shots in first season title sequence, Coach Taylor is portrayed as a stern, fearless leader. First, there is a medium close up of Coach Taylor's back. He is at the far left of the shot, assuring an open view of the field and players on it. Coach Taylor's arm moves in a circle with fingers held up as though communicating a play to the players on the field. The strategic use of contrasting colors draws us to Coach Taylor and his actions. He wears his usual bright blue Dillon Panther jacket, with the massive yellow Dillon football logo spanning almost the entire back. This contrasts distinctly with the pale green grass near the back of the visual plane and the pitch-black sky above him. Furthermore, the visual plane beyond him is slightly out of focus, just enough that Coach Taylor and his movements are emphasized further. Hence all of our attention is on him and his motions, serving as the leader of the team.

A second shot of Coach Taylor in the title sequence of season one uses camera angle and a close frame to emphasize his dominance and leadership. We are at a distinct low angle, sharply looking up towards him as he pushes a player onto the field. The angle makes him appear like a looming, massive entity, someone we not only literally, but perhaps metaphorically look up at. Coach Taylor is in a medium close up. His face and upper body are the obvious main focus of the shot. While the torsos of other characters are visible, his is the only face within the visual frame. He is positioned right in the center

of the shot, further drawing attention to him. The close up provides a clear view of his face, which portrays confidence and determination. Coach Taylor's eyes fixate on the field, without faltering. His lips are pressed firmly together. He appears as though he is concentrating heavily. There is nothing about him that appears nervous or unsure. Instead, he seems in complete control.

What we see from the shots in the first season title sequence builds on the idea of football as a dominant force, with Coach Taylor as strong and fearless leader. Season five's opening credits, however, convey almost the opposite. Football is not portrayed as a looming entity. Additionally, Coach Taylor is shown in a manner that is almost vulnerable.

Two key changes in the sequence in the first as opposed to last season opening credits of *Friday Night Lights* convey a change in the tone of football. First, there is no exterior establishing shot of the football field that creates a feeling of dominance and importance for the game. Instead, the sequence begins with Coach Taylor entering the field. Similar to season one, he is viewed from a distinct low angle. This time, however, the purpose is to show his wife, Tami Taylor, standing high above him on the bleachers. Described in the section on gender, this metaphorically depicts her as "watching over him." Also unlike the shot from the title sequence of season one, he does not look determined. The frame, a medium close up, gives a clear view of his face. Instead he appears nervous and worn. We can see a five o'clock shadow, indicating perhaps exhaustion. The muscles in his face sit tightly, signifying stress. This does not portray the confident, strong leader from the sequence in the first season. Instead, it depicts a man who needs support and has a case of the jitters.

To fully understand how the demeanor of Coach Taylor changes, all of the shots depicting a play in the game in the season five title sequence must also be considered. First there is a shot of a football player catching the ball and running down the field. The shot then cuts to the player being knocked down, but scoring a touchdown just before it happens. A quick cut then reveals a close up of Coach Taylor's face. The background is black, with the exception of some red uniforms bobbing around beside and behind him. No other faces are visible, drawing us to him and emphasizing his face. Unlike his portrayal in the season one credit sequence, he does not wear a confident and stern look. Instead, he looks utterly relieved. His eyebrows are raised high, his eyes are wide and his mouth open as though he is sighing with relief. Also in opposition to the first season title sequence, he turns his face and eyes away from the field. It's as though he's glad the play is over, and doesn't want to watch anymore. Hence, in the opening credits of season five, there is no longer a determined and confident coach. There is instead a man who seems vulnerable and under pressure.

A change in tone for the portrayal of football depicted through the demeanor of the players and Coach Taylor is evident when comparing the first and fifth season credit sequences of *Friday Night Lights*. However, the shift that occurs with Coach Taylor is essentially the opposite of the other characters. Comparing the shots of Jason Street and Tim Riggins from season one with Vince Howard in season five displays a move from stress and anxiety to that of happiness for those associated with the team and game. All of this, even though it seems contradictory to each other, caters to the change in fan base for the series.

As noted, the shift in the football players' demeanor in the season five title sequence shows a change in how football is depicted in *Friday Night Lights*. Specifically, it is no longer the central focus of the series in the later seasons. In the first season title sequence, the stress and anxiety serve to showcase just how important football is, both on and off the field, along with how important it is to win and succeed. This caters to the perceived male viewership's predilection for the sport described in Johnson's (2010) research. Focusing on the happiness and joy football brings to Vince Howard in the opening credit sequence of season five caters to the primary audience of young women. Specifically, it showcases the role the game plays in the day-to-day lives of the characters and the relationships the team helps to nurture. Perhaps, though not directly hinted towards in this specific depiction of Vince, we could also go as far as to say that the success of the team is no longer solely weighed by wins, but by the relationships it is able to create and foster. It is this that attracted the female viewership to the series. But why, then, is Coach Taylor portrayed in the complete opposite manner?

The confident Coach Taylor, as opposed to his meek and nervous version, would, of course, resonate more strongly with the presumed male audience enticed by football in the first season title sequence. His more vulnerable doppelgänger, however, fits in better with the primary audience of women from the last season. Football obviously causes him stress as opposed to joy. This demonstrates the role and effect the game has on his day-to-day life. It is this that truly appeals the female audience. Specifically, this includes the inherent conflict the game causes between him and his team (and perhaps even the town), the effect it has on his relationship with his family and the personal struggles he goes through due to the expectations placed upon him. Hence, this showcases how the shift

moves from the need to succeed through football, specifically the need to win, to the effect it has on the life and relationships amongst the characters to accommodate to the interests of the fan base of women. Therefore, even though different, the portrayals of the players and Coach Taylor depict a distinct change in the tone of the game that caters to the emergent female audience.

Comparing the opening credits of seasons one and five of *Friday Night Lights* provided a detailed look into how the role of football shifts to reflect the audience's interest in the series. While cinematography and elements of mise-en-scene provide many opportunities to analyze the game and the team, other themes previously discussed in this analysis begin to dwindle in the title sequence as the series progresses. This includes social class, religion and militarism.

Social Class

The original section on social class in Chapter Two discusses three key elements as signifiers for the working class in the opening credits of *Friday Night Lights*: houses and buildings, cars and clothing. While all of these appear in season one, only clothing as a sign for social class is included in the credits of the fifth season. This hints at a change in the depiction of social class in the series in its last season.

The season one title sequence of *Friday Night Lights* includes a series of shots of buildings and automobiles that help build an identity for the working class. This includes the trucking shots past the homes of Tim Riggins and Matt Saracen discussed in detail in Chapter Two. The states and sizes of the homes and yards signify them as owned by someone from a lower socio-economic standing. No structures, specifically homes, like this appear in the credit sequence of the fifth season. Furthermore, the only time in which

automobiles are truly visible is in the credits sequence of season one. As discussed, these cars, Chevy vans, trucks and the Sunfire, are associated more commonly within a price range feasible for the working class.

The casual attire from the first season title sequence does continue into the season five opening credit sequence. Originally analyzed in Chapter Two, this consists of basic jeans and t-shirts when the clothing is not football related. Luke Cafferty, in the shot of him moving the hay bail, is a prime example of this in season five. He too wears a baseball cap, a grey t-shirt and blue jeans. As discussed in the section on gender, it is important to note an increased importance on fashion in the last season title sequence of the series.

The attire, while more fashionable, still does not signify wealth and prosperity based on the title sequence of season five. Similar to the opening credits of season one, no logos or any other items connoting wealth appear on the clothing worn by Julie Taylor or Becky Sproles. Hence, we are still left with the idea that the characters are not part of an upper socio-economic class. However, the change in their attire does signify these characters are of higher rung within the working or middle class.

The clothing and makeup worn by Julie Taylor and Becky Sproles in the season five title sequence hint at a slightly higher socio-economic status that portrayed in the opening credits of season one. As noted, there is nothing that showcase extreme wealth. Neither Julie nor Becky wears luxurious jewelry with diamonds or sparkling gowns. Yet, their clothing, hair and make up are more intricate and fancy. It is a move away from the basic collared shirts, t-shirts and jeans of the title sequence of season one. More unique clothing typically comes with at least a slight disposable income. Hence, while we cannot

lump their clothing choice into that of the upper class, it may be possible to assume that these characters are at a slightly higher rung within the working class or middle class.

This is also portrayed in one of the shots including Coach Taylor and Tami Taylor.

Coach Taylor and Tami Taylor are the only characters in either the first season or last season credit sequences that dress in formal wear, hinting at their position on a higher rung of the working class. This is shown in the shot of Coach Taylor and Tami standing on the empty football field in the Chapter Two section on football expectations. While we can only see Coach Taylor and Tami from behind, we have a clear view of their attire.

Coach Taylor wears a black suit. Tami wears a shiny green dress down to her knees with a pair of high heels. The two look elegant. This is not what someone would consider casual attire, especially for Dillon. This is supported by not only the fact that these are the only two dressed in such attire, but it also the only shot in which the two are dressed this way. Hence we can assume this attire is not normal. Instead, this is some sort of a special occasion. While not frequently worn, the fact that Coach Taylor and Tami can afford such attire hints to at least some form of disposable income for such an expense.

Therefore, this shot, taken into account with all of the others of Coach Taylor and Tami, connote that the two are still of the working class or middle class, but rest on a higher rung within it.

The key question is why are two of the three defining elements of social class missing from *Friday Night Light's* fifth season title sequence. Once again, it ties back to the presumed, as opposed to actual primary audience, of the series. Season one's opening credits focused on what was later identified as NBC's incorrectly anticipated audience of men from Red State America. Including certain signs and the use of cinematography and

mise-en-scene to assist in the portrayal of an identity for the working class serves as a means to essentially make the Red State male audience feel “at home,” as this audience is often associated as part of the middle and working classes. Therefore, the buildings and automobiles are signs already common to their everyday lives, something to which they could easily relate. By the fifth season, the credits catered to the primary audience of young, professional women from the coasts. These are women that would often be bucketed as either part of or closer to the upper class by the network. Hence, for this audience, symbolism for the working class is not likely something to which they could easily relate.

It is important to note that we cannot truly say that symbols connoting the middle class in the title sequence would deter the young, professional female audience from *Friday Night Lights*. However, it is something to which they may not as easily relate as the presumed audience of Red state men. Even so, social class is obviously an important element in *Friday Night Lights*, comparing the first and last season credit sequence reveals its portrayal changes as the series progresses.

Religion

Another theme that warrants less focus in the opening credits in *Friday Night Lights* as the series progresses is that of religion. Appearing in season one’s opening credit sequence, cinematography and mise-en-scene emphasize Smash Williams and his teammates praying. Season five’s title sequence includes no signifiers whatsoever hinting towards religion. It is possible this is due to the shift in audience. Red states are often associated with religious, specifically Protestant, ties. For example, Texas, the locale of the series, ranks first in the nation for the state with the most Evangelical Protestants (The

Texas Almanac, 2015). Hence, religious symbols represent an element of familiarity to which the originally perceived audience of the series could relate. Religion, however, is not something frequently correlated with the actual audience of young, professional women on the urban coasts to whom season five caters. Furthermore, urban areas are known for diversity, consisting of populations from varying religious backgrounds. Smash's religious beliefs, conveyed as part of Christianity, could differ distinctly from many of the series' actual primary audience. This is not necessarily a deterrent, but is likely not a top enticing appeal for the primary urban, female audience of the series. Therefore, nothing in the opening credits of the last season depicts religion, as it would not resonate as strongly as it did with the perceived viewership in the first season credit sequence. Just as with social class, the title sequence portrays that religion plays an important role in the series, but garners less focus in the final season. The same can be said of militarism.

Militarism

Based on the analysis in the previous section on this topic, very few signs create a connotation for militarism in rural America in the title sequences of seasons one and five of *Friday Night Lights*. However, the slight hint of the "support our troops ribbon" on the car in the shot of the E3 restaurant in the first season does signify the military has a role in the series. Just as with religion, however, there are no signs or icons for militarism in the credits of the last season. Likely, its role actually decreases as the series progresses. It is possible this is due to the shift from a perceived male audience from the flyover states to that of coastal, young professional women (Johnson, 2010).

Possibly, the military resonated more with the presumed male audience of *Friday Night Lights*, as it is men that predominately serve in the armed forces. Women only make up about fifteen percent of those on active duty (CNN, 2013). And, as noted, more than forty-four percent of military recruits came from rural areas (The National Priorities Project, 2008). Therefore, the military and its iconography catered to Red State men. Given the statistics, militarism would not resonate heavily with the audience of young, professional women. Militarism, therefore, has a lesser role in the credits of the last season. However, the shift in the role of military in the credit sequence may actually have nothing to do with the presumed as opposed to primary audience of *Friday Night Lights*.

When *Friday Night Lights* first aired in 2006, the war in the Middle East was a hot-button issue. Most individuals who joined the military during the time period that *Friday Night Lights* aired came from rural and lower socio-economic backgrounds, not middle-class and affluent social groups. The military conflicts in both Afghanistan and Iraq depended on individuals who had joined the military as a means to better their education and social status, but instead found themselves fighting in the Middle East (CBS News 2010). This would undoubtedly include members of the assumed male audience of the first season, who fit this demographic. During this time, various reports on the war, including the rising death toll of US soldiers and the trial of Saddam Hussein, permeated the media. By the series' end in 2011, the United States-led war in Iraq had ended. Hence, the media hype had died down and the war, and in turn the military, as a key issue became subdued. It is possible that due to this, not the shift in audience, the depiction of militarism was removed in season five. But, the military remains a

significant part of rural life, even though perhaps urban females have seen it slip from view. This again reflects what the network presumed about the audience.

From the comparison of the first and fifth season credit sequences of *Friday Night Lights*, distinct changes to cater to the presumed as opposed actual primary audience of the series arise. Specifically, both evident and subtle changes occur amongst the seven themes visible in the credits: rurality, ethnicity, gender, football, social class, religion and militarism. Based on this, we can readily assume the title sequences were strategically altered from the tastes of NBC's presumed audience of politically conservative red men of the flyover states to the values and interests of the primary audience of blue state, professional women from the urban coasts (Johnson, 2010). This provides a view of rural America from two unique standpoints, creating a thorough and encompassing preliminary depiction of the picture the credit sequences of *Friday Night Lights* paint for Small Town America.

Theme Music

The theme music stays the same throughout the entire run of *Friday Night Lights*. Unlike changes to other aspects of the opening credits to cater to the shift in audience, the music does not falter. We could surmise from this that perhaps both the presumed audience of men from the Red States of Middle America and the primary audience of young professional women shared an affinity for the music. But, the opening credit music could have also been one of the Red State men's reasons for shying away from the series. Perhaps, music more in the then-popular country music vein would have better attracted those men to the series. However, this is simply speculation. What we may deduce based on the article by Moog (2015) and the fact that the music remains the same in each

season is that the primary audience of women found pleasing. Furthermore, based on the commentary in Moog's article, we may assume it helped convey the style and tone of the series, specifically the ebb and flow that came along with the relationships and day-to-day lives of the characters in rural Texas. Hence, the theme music played a key role in creating an identity for the series and in turn, building into the ideological identity of Small Town America.

The Series vs. The Sequence: Ideological Dissonance

Through the opening credits, a series' distributors and producers create a framework for a television series (Gray, 2010). Similar to season one, what is perpetuated in this framework differs in part from what is shown in the narrative of *Friday Night Lights*. In season five, cinematography in the opening credit sequence showcases the seclusion, or perhaps isolation, and agricultural nature of Dillon in the opening credits of season five. This depiction is extensive, hinting that rurality is key to the series. However, it is not as high a priority in the narrative of *Friday Night Lights*.

Rurality is not portrayed as frequently as one would expect in season five based on the title sequence. In the narrative, we see scenes of Luke Cafferty working on and other characters visiting his family farm, confirming the tie to agriculture connoted in the opening credits. Interestingly, he is the first and only character in the series in all of its seasons portrayed as a farmer. This is particularly surprising, because Texas is a leading farm state, with agriculture bringing in about \$40 billion in the 1990s (Texas State Historical Society 2015) and with some 248,000 farms and ranches spanning the state (Texas Department of Agriculture 2015).

The exact reason as to why only Luke Cafferty is portrayed in an agricultural manner is not known. It is surprising how small of a role agriculture plays considering its importance in Texas. Furthermore, very few story lines or conflicts revolve around Luke's farm life. His family is not portrayed as the stereotypical struggling farmer, or as the hard-working backbone of the country. The closest thing to conflict involving rurality is when Luke gets caught up in a fence while herding cattle, injuring him prior to a big game. Another, though more comedic event, is the infatuation that teammate and friend, Tinker, has with Luke's family pig, Mirabelle, which Luke actually trades with Tinker for Becky Sproles to be his rally girl. Hence, while emphasized in the credits, agriculture does not have a strong role in the series narrative.

Along with agriculture, the seclusion or serenity of *Friday Night Lights*' setting plays a smaller role than conveyed in the opening credits of season five. As noted in the original section on rurality in this chapter, whether Dillon's seclusion is portrayed as isolated or serene depends on its depiction in the series. Isolation stems from a negative portrayal. An example is *Varsity Blues* (1999), which showcases the characters' dedication and dreams to get out of their little town in Texas where there is nothing, other than football, and to go on to bigger and better things. The idea of serenity would come from considered positive depictions. In this instance, *The Andy Griffith Show* (1960) is an example. Nothing seems to ever go awry in the peaceful and picturesque Mayberry that seems to be disconnected from the rest of the world. It is calm, clean and clean, and the residents have no real worries.

Based on my own viewing experience, Dillon's seclusion is never conveyed as unpleasant. While a number of the original cast leave to go to college, none express

disdain at Dillon or rural Texas for that matter. Some characters actually portray the exact opposite. Tim Riggins desires to be nowhere else, with his dream to build a house on a few acres of land in the vast countryside outside of Dillon realized in the last episode. Considering this, I surmise that the depiction of rurality is positive. However, it being a major theme is debatable. No conflict or distinct story lines, or even any conversations at all, for that matter, specifically relate to the rurality of the series setting arise.

While not the central focus of the series, the credit sequence of *Friday Night Lights*' fifth season does convey football as an important aspect of the series. However, the magnitude of its importance in the lives of the characters is missing. While this could be argued on behalf of all of the characters in the credit sequence, those for whom this is most true are Coach Taylor and Vince Howard.

Coach Taylor is not only expected to drive success for the team through wins and state championships. He is also responsible to use football to guide the members of his team through life and grow them as individuals. His interactions with Vince Howard are a prime example. Prior to joining the East Dillon Lions, Vince is a delinquent with an extensive criminal record. He lives with a drug addict mother and his father is incarcerated. Vince's life turns around when he joins the team. His mother kicks her addiction, with her new drug of choice pride in Vince's athletic luster. And, after some prodding from Coach Taylor, Vince's father renews his relationship with his son by attending the championship game in the final episode.

It is important to note that Vince Howard did not join the team through his own free will. Instead, two police officers dropped him off on the football field and left him with Coach Taylor as an alternative to "juvie." Coach Taylor, even once Vince's natural

athletic ability was realized, was not focused on using Vince to win games or make it to the state championship for his own career. Instead, Vince became an example of how Coach Taylor was dedicated to the personal happiness and success of the members of his team. In the case of Vince, this included not only keeping him out of trouble, but includes giving him the opportunity to attend college through a football scholarship, something he would never have the financial backing to realize otherwise. Hence, Coach Taylor used the team and football as a means to mold the youth of Dillon as individuals and provide them opportunities for the future.

Football as a means for personal growth and success, specifically as the tool used by Coach Taylor for those on his team, is perhaps the most important aspect of *Friday Night Lights*. Then why is this not distinctly emphasized in the opening credit sequence? After all, given their interests in the relationships and day-to-day lives of the characters, this is undoubtedly a key part of the allure for the primary audience of young professional women. While this cannot be corroborated, perhaps this wasn't showcased in the season five credit sequence simply because this was the last season. Credit sequences not only provide series familiarity for an audience, but also can be used as a promotional tool to attract new audiences (Gray, 2010). During this season, it was not a goal to attract new viewers, as the series would not continue. Instead, the title sequence would cater to the loyal fans still watching the series up until its finale. In this case, it was not necessary to emphasize the role of football in this manner because it was already something of which the audience was very familiar. No introduction or reminder was needed, and therefore, this was not portrayed in the title sequence.

One of the most distinct ideological dissonances between the title sequence and the series narrative in season five is that of social class. As discussed, the costume portrayed in the opening sequence does convey the characters are part of the working class, though some from an upper rung. However, it fails to showcase just how extensive a role social class plays in the series. In season five, Coach Taylor leads the football team of the East Dillon Lions. This is essentially Dillon's "poor school" or school from the "poor side of town." Almost every character in the series that attends this school lives in poverty and experiences the troubles typically associated with this level of the social class. For example, Vince Howard is raised by a single, drug addict mother and his father is incarcerated. Becky Sproles is raised by a single mother and has an estranged father, who only emerges to take care of Becky upon request of her mother who must take a job out of town. Billy Riggins was the sole caretaker of his younger brother Tim Riggins, who ends up in prison in the early part of season five due to a scam the two attempted running a "chop shop" to make money. Building on this, Billy's wife is a stripper, not typically a stereotypical career path of the upper classes. Almost the entire East Dillon Lion football team has a juvenile criminal record, unveiled on a website as an attempt to distract them leading up to a game against the cross-town rivals the Dillon Panthers.

Social class plays a dominant a role in *Friday Night Lights* as football. Yet, this is not adequately conveyed in the title sequence of the series' last season. One would assume the struggles and conflict that arise due to the characters' socioeconomic status would be intriguing for the female audience. Perhaps similar with football, social class is not conveyed in the season five title sequence because the audience already knew of its

importance. As noted, it was not the network's goal in the fifth season to attract new viewers, but to wrap up the series for its devoted fans. Therefore, little emphasis on this theme is made in the title sequence.

CHAPTER FOUR

A NEW IDENTITY FOR SMALL TOWN AMERICA

What is “Small Town USA?” The answer to this question varies. Many factors play a part in creating an identity for Small Town America. Not only does this include real-world experience with such a locale, but also vicarious experiences that can be garnered through facets of the media, such as television. By analyzing the opening credit sequences of *Friday Night Lights* first and last season, we have been provided with a glimpse of how a television series created an identity for Small Town America not only for those with personal ties to such an area, but for those with little to no experience with such an area.

Utilizing the theoretical framework of semiotics to review the title sequences of the first and last season unearthed signifiers and signifieds constructed through elements of mise-en-scene and cinematography that conveyed specific themes, and taken in combination, a glimpse of the overall ideological structure of *Friday Night Lights*’ depiction of Small Town America. The portrayal of these themes arguably does not create a “brand new” identity for Small Town America. Instead, it depicts what could be considered a more modern or even “urbanized” view of what we typically consider “traditional” perceptions of rural America. This itself ties into an interesting notion. Specifically, that no single small town “true” identity currently or ever will exist.

An identity for Small Town America is created by much more than actual or vicarious experiences through a facet of the media like television. For example, our specific societal ties, such as gender, race, economic class, political affiliations and sexuality, play a key role in the definitions and the distinctiveness of certain traits that constitute rural America. The change in portrayals of the credit sequences of *Friday Night Lights* to cater to affluent, democratic urban women as opposed to lower class traditional men is a prime example of this. The unique societal ties of each viewership, which includes much more than their urban as opposed to rural backgrounds, were considered when developing the different title sequence to assure a pleasing depiction of the series. In turn and identity for Small Town America was created for the desired and what became the primary audience.

Culture is a commodity in our society, with television a key means to how this commodity is sold. Schedulers, creators, producers, networks and so on each have their own agenda. This agenda likely doesn't include making an objective or ideal identity for a specific region, social group or so forth. Instead, and as exemplified by *Friday Night Lights*, the focus is on creating an ideological identity that correlates with the interests and values of the target audience. Hence, in *Friday Night Lights* we witnessed the shift in marketing campaigns, specifically with the title sequence as a tool, to suit the interests of a liberal female fan base as opposed to the presumed viewership of conservative men. The fact that this switch in gears by NBC worked, procuring another four seasons for the series after its near cancellation after season one, corroborates this point even further.

This is simply how our capitalist economic system works. The identity for Small Town America, and anywhere or anything else for that matter, is fluid. We cannot expect a true, or even what we may construe an ideal identity that appeals to all societal backgrounds to exist.

This study has analyzed how a conceptual shift in defining the audience for *Friday Night Lights* can be traced by comparing the similarities and, more importantly, the differences in the opening credit sequences of the first and last season of *Friday Night Lights*. Season one of *Friday Night Lights* failed to resonate with the target audience of Red State males, but it did connect with the values of young, urban professional women. This connection was enhanced by the credit sequences as a marketing tool as the series progressed. Based on the analysis of both the first and last season title sequences in the previous chapters of this research, the following values came to define the ideological identity of Small Town America in *Friday Night Lights*.

What themes about Small Town USA are portrayed in *Friday Night Lights*?

From the analysis of the first and fifth season credit sequence of *Friday Night Lights*, seven themes about Small Town America arise. This includes rurality, ethnicity, gender, football, social class, religion and militarism. By comparing the credits of each season, we see a distinct change in the portrayal of all of these themes and their constructed meanings to go along with the shift from the perceived audience of politically conservative males from the flyover states to young, liberal blue state professional women based in the urban coasts. A review of the themes and the changes that occur in correlation with the shift in audience is detailed in the next section.

Do the themes and constructed meanings change from the first season, which targets a red state male viewership, to the last season, which targets an urban professional thirty-something female viewership?

As noted, a change in the themes and the constructed meanings portrayed in the credit sequences of *Friday Night Lights* occurs along with the shift in the makeup and perception of the audience. However, the magnitude of these changes differs based upon the theme. The themes and constructed meanings that change most drastically in *Friday Night Lights* are those of rurality, gender, ethnicity and football. First let's discuss rurality.

The signs and symbols connoting the rural locale of the setting of *Friday Night Lights* are restricted to the fifth season title sequence. I argue this is due to the perception about the presumed audience. As noted, the anticipated male audience of *Friday Night Lights*' first season would need no assistance in understanding the rural setting of the series. Given this target audience was based in Middle America, known for its ruralness, many of these viewers likely had personal, real-world experiences with rurality. These viewers could very well dwell in one of America's little towns nestled in the rural regions of the Heartland. Hence, based on the title sequence, it may be presumed that NBC felt the male audience would need little assistance developing an understanding of the series setting.

Along with rural iconography being unnecessary for the perceived male audience as a basis for understanding the series setting, it is possible it was not perceived as pleasing or enticing for this viewership either. While the network may have presumed the setting could be something to which this audience could relate, it would not be perceived

as highly engaging. For this reason, other aspects of the series were highlighted in the opening credits of season one instead. This, specifically, includes the role of football and its purported ties to success, the original element of *Friday Night Lights* anticipated to attract a male audience. While rurality may not have been a top theme of interest for the anticipated male audience of the series, it could, however, be a key point of intrigue for the female fan base of the later seasons.

Given their residence in the highly populated urban coasts, it is possible that the network presumed the female audience of *Friday Night Lights* had little or no actual experience with rurality. Therefore, the rural setting would be something perceived as foreign to this group and, in turn, a point of intrigue. For this audience, the sub-themes of serenity, isolation and agriculture portrayed in the opening credits provided a glimpse at a part of the country NBC assumed the audience did not know.

Based on the female audience's predilection for the series, the portrayal of rurality in *Friday Night Lights'* final season title sequence was something they likely found desirable. Perhaps this audience saw beauty in the fields of lush green grass displayed in the aerial shots that opened the sequence. Maybe it was the calmness depicted through the lack of clutter and openness. Or, possibly, the audience was infatuated by the area's agricultural background, an industry lacking in the urban coasts. Regardless of the exact symbolism that piqued interest, the emphasis of the rural setting showcases it was an important element that catered to the female fan base of the series. Rurality is just the first of the four themes that drastically altered in the title sequences as *Friday Night Lights* progresses. Another is that of gender.

Gender experienced arguably the most distinctive change in thematic construction in the title sequence due to the shift in audience between *Friday Night Lights*' first and final season credit sequences. Framing and quantity of inclusions in each season convey very different depictions of both male and female characters. In the season one title sequence, we are left with the impression that not only the role of, but also the importance of women is less. Female characters are showcased as not only supporting actors, but as men's supporters in general. This season's title sequence even goes so far as to depict the women as eye candy. While not of great appeal to women as viewers, the network's original audience focus of conservative men holding traditional values from Middle America would presumably find a pleasant appeal to this imagery. What could be more, though stereotypically, enticing to a male audience than a cast of beautiful women? Hence, a depiction of the male as dominant, and the female as submissive, could have been presumed appealing for this audience. As the series progresses through season five, however, we see a rise in the role of the female characters and a leveling of the importance each gender holds in the series based on the title sequence.

By season five of *Friday Night Lights*, women are integral to the narrative of the series. Due to this, no longer do cinematography and mise-en-scene in the title sequence only emphasize their good looks and position the roles as that of supporters. These characters instead have become what the network presumed rural icons or role models for the series' female fan base. First of all, the women of *Friday Night Lights* are no longer portrayed as few, but many. Specifically, they appear to be at an equal number to their male counterparts based on inclusions in the credit sequence. Furthermore, the women are no longer depicted as eye candy for men. Instead, the women of season five are

portrayed as fashionable, athletic, confident and independent. The change in depiction is most heavily conveyed by lead female character Tami Taylor.

Tami Taylor is the *Friday Night Lights* version of the woman who has it all. She has a handsome, supportive husband, two beautiful daughters and a career. Not to mention, she has an impeccable sense of style and amazing hair. However, in the season one credits, little allusion to any of this is conveyed. We receive one quick view of her, comforting her husband. She is simply showcased as the supporter of season one's key (and male) character, Coach Taylor. From the fifth season title sequence, we are left with the notion that Tami is not solely Coach Taylor's doting wife and caretaker, but his equal. For example, Tami's quantity of inclusions, including close ups, in the opening credits almost equals his. This demonstrates her movement within the series from not only a supporting character to sharing the title of lead character with him. Tami's portrayal in the later season of *Friday Night Lights* is certainly something the network could imagine would be more enticing to a progressive audience of young women than that of the first season.

Ethnicity's portrayal in the title sequences of *Friday Night Lights* also morphs in correlation with the change in audience focus. Comparing the first and final season credit sequences provides two different depictions for ethnicity in rural America. From season one, the lack of nonwhite characters reflects NBC's decision to suggest a lack of diversity as part of the small town identity. This is further conveyed in the opening credits through what is essentially the de-emphasis of the only nonwhite leading character, Smash Williams. This may be due to the networks' presumption that the target audience of Red

State males would not be particularly interested in ethnic differences. This reflects a presumption of ignorance, or even racism, on the part of the audience by NBC.

In season five, the cinematography and mise-en-scene of the opening credits showcase a different portrayal for ethnicity in Small Town America. As *Friday Night Lights* progresses, the role of nonwhite characters increases exponentially. This is conveyed through an increase in the quantity and close ups of nonwhite characters in the opening credit sequence from season five. From this, we are left with an interpretation that while sparse, diversity in the series setting of Dillon, and in turn, Small Town America, does exist. But again, why make this shift in season five?

As I have noted, Johnson (2010) believes the key interests of the female audience of *Friday Night Lights* by season five were the day-to-day lives of and relationships amongst the characters. This is the reason for an increased role of nonwhite characters in not only the title sequence, but perhaps the series overall. Perhaps the network believed its urban female audience would appreciate a unique look into the lives of the ethnic minority in rural America, or believed it was more acculturated to the diverse ethnic makeup of their own urban environment. The increased diversity in the season five opening credit sequence reflects that the later part of the series allows a look at the interactions and relationships amongst characters of different ethnic groups. The title sequence suggests that these interactions are not limited to points of conflict between the groups due to ignorance or racism. Given the portrayals of characters such as Vince Howard and Luke Cafferty in the title sequence at this point in the series shows that different ethnic groups learn from and grow with one another. It is depictions such as

these that the NBC seemed to believe were of high interest to the female audience, and therefore, the possible reasoning behind the increased role of nonwhite characters in *Friday Night Lights*' final season and the title sequence promoting it.

Football also drastically changes in terms of the role it plays in the first as opposed to final season title sequences of *Friday Night Lights*. Originally, football, and its role in small town life, was anticipated to be the key point of interest for the series' anticipated following of rural men. However, this was not the case for the female audience that actually took to the series. From a market standpoint, young professional women are not typically associated with a deep love of football. Once the audience of young, urban female viewers was determined, the network, unsurprisingly, sought to appease them. Due to this, a distinct shift in the emphasis on the game and its tone occurs. The role of football in the title sequences shifts from the epicenter of *Friday Night Lights* to a backdrop of the lives and relationships amongst the characters. Additionally, those not directly associated with the team, such as Becky Sproles, Tami Taylor and Julie Taylor, take on more central roles.

As discussed, it is the characters and their lives that attracted the female viewership of *Friday Night Lights* (Johnson 2010). Therefore, in the season five title sequence, football iconography is still present but is depicted in a manner that portrays its function as part of the lives of and relationships between the characters as opposed to the central focus of conflict in the series. Football becomes a uniting and bonding element. An example of this is the shot of Luke Cafferty flirting with Becky Sproles by holding a

football just out of her reach. Another example is the shot of Luke and Vince Howard happily shaking hands in football uniforms. Hence, football, as conveyed for the female audience, is a force that brings the residents of the town together and builds the relationships amongst them.

In relation to this, the tone of the game of football alters in the title sequence of *Friday Night Light's* final season. Season one showcases football as an intense, serious sport of competition. The pressure to not only win, but to be part of and a skilled player on the team is high. This makes sense, considering the presumed male audience from Red State America would take highly to such a portrayal. By season five, this pressure subsides to an extent. Instead of assuring a winning record and a championship trophy, the key role of football is providing a sense of joy and happiness. Furthermore, the triumphs and personal successes of those on the team, no matter how big or small, are often sources of coping in the midst of personal challenge. The shot of Vince Howard celebrating in the opening sequence of season five conveys this. As discussed, his natural talent and role with the team helps get him and his mother out of a life of drugs and poverty and provides the possibility of a scholarship he needs to attend college. Even though not conveyed in the title sequence of the first season, football is portrayed in this manner extensively in the series narrative. It is likely missing from the title sequence of this season as it challenged the interests of the presumed audience of men, who would have been more intrigued by the intensity of the game as opposed to the obstacles and personal success and struggles of the characters. In direct opposition, it heavily permeates the title sequence of season five, catering to the young women attracted to exactly that.

In contrast to the title sequence, the narrative threads of season one portray the Coach and athletes as the town “MVPs.” In season one, we see the stresses of economic hardship amongst the residents of the town. The pressure to win and succeed with the game in the first season was not merely for the glory of the team and town, but to help the players overcome their financial hardships and provide better lives for themselves and their families. For example, there was no potential of college for Smash Williams without a football scholarship. He dreamed of going professional so he could have the money to provide a new home for his mother and sisters. The greatest pressure, however, was placed on Coach Taylor, who was not only expected to win for the pride of the town, but took it upon himself to push the members of his team to achieve the best they possibly could both on and off the field. As discussed, this pressure on him is more strongly conveyed in the credits of the last season, as in the opening credits of season one he is simply showcased as the stern and determined coach. With all of this taken into account, the actual construction of small town identity in the series narrative as opposed to the title sequence was arguably much more appealing to the relationship-centric female audience of the series. Hence the emergence of the surprise female fan base that outshined the presumed male audience led to the shift in the title sequence.

All of the above solidifies the idea that by season five, football was no longer depicted as the focal point of *Friday Night Lights* in the title sequence. Instead, it became a part of the relationships of the characters. It was no longer a goal and measure of success in and of itself. Therefore, football became more of a series backdrop. It is not simply a game in Small Town America. It’s key part of the lives of the residents in one form or another.

Similar to the themes discussed above, social class, religion and militarism also evolved in the title sequences of *Friday Night Lights* as the series progressed. Unlike those discussed above, however, these themes disappear or lessen in the last season credit sequence. This reflects an important change in the series, and in turn, in the way that it adds to the ideological portrayal of Small Town America.

Emphasis on social class shifts with the audience focus from the title sequence of seasons one to five of *Friday Night Lights*. In season one, we may surmise that the setting and the cast are from the lower or working classes. This is due to emphasis on architecture, the types of automobiles present and the clothing. However, during the fifth season's opening credits, the architecture and automobiles disappear and the clothing changes drastically. While the symbols of social class are lacking in the last season credits, so are any signs connoting the upper class. The clothing in the season five credits is more fashionable, which hints at higher income, but still does not convey wealth or prosperity. Hence, we are still left with the notion that the series is based on those of the lower socioeconomic status. However, such a distinct decrease in symbolism hints that social class is dropped or sidestepped as an important theme for the series. But this is actually not the case in the narrative of the last season.

The financial struggles and hardships of the lower class in *Friday Night Lights* were arguably a key point of interest for the female audience. The majority of the characters in both the first and last seasons are of the lower class. Many characters, such as Tim Riggins, Smash Williams, Matt Saracen and Vince Howard were depicted as what would often be considered poor. Then why leave this out of the credit sequence of the fifth season? As discussed, this is most likely due to the fact that season five was the final

season. Therefore, it was not the goal of the network to attract more viewers. Instead, the title sequence was developed to cater to the already existent and loyal fan base of women. This audience was already well aware of the social class and economic status of the characters. No reference in the credit sequence was needed to prove this point and was therefore left out.

Religion is depicted in a similar manner to social class in the last as opposed to first season credit sequence of *Friday Night Lights*. In the first season, there is only one reference to religion. This showcases that religion, specifically Protestant Christianity, plays a role in the series and therefore, for rural America. The fact that this portrayal is done through Smash Williams is also strategic. Not only is Smash the only character demonstrating a religious affiliation, he is also the only nonwhite character represented in the opening credits of season one. From him we may presume that the network sought to establish a strong tie between black culture in rural America and religion that would be observable.

Once season five comes around, any notion of religion is removed from the opening credits of *Friday Night Lights*. It is likely that NBC perceived that religion in Small Town America is not something highly appealing for the professional urban female viewers, and believed that emphasizing Protestant Christianity may not have resonated strongly for this audience. However, religion does still play a key role in the narrative of the series, with prayer before games and meals a common practice. Regardless of its lack in the last season credits, what we can surmise is that religion is cued as a part of the identity of rural America only in the season one opening credits, and for whatever reason, it is deemed less appealing by season five.

Militarism, similar to social class and religion, is initially cued as a theme in the series' first season title sequence, but not as *Friday Night Lights* progresses into its final season. The symbolism conveying the role of the military is quite minute. As noted, this is done in the first season through a very quick, yet deliberate view of a "Support Our Troops" ribbon on the bumper of a car. Season five lacks any such iconography. Why is this theme touched on during the first season in which the perceived audience is comprised of men but eliminated once the series focuses on a viewership of women? It could be that NBC presumed an urban female audience would be less interested in the military. Or, as discussed in the previous chapters, it is due to the fact that the war in the Middle East was much less of a hot button issue near the series end in 2011. No matter the exact reasoning, militarism nearly disappears as a theme and part of the identity for rural America created by *Friday Night Lights*.

Comparing symbolism conveyed through cinematography and mise-en-scene in the opening credits of the first and fifth seasons of *Friday Night Lights* not only unearths the themes most dominant in the series, but demonstrates them from two marketing conceptions about two unique target audiences: that of a conservative Red State males and that of a professional urban coastal professional females. Based on this, we are left with insights into the fissures that are an inherent part of the ideology of Small Town America.

Does *Friday Night Lights* construct new meaning and associations for the classic Small Town America identity?

What is the identity that the title sequences of *Friday Night Lights* create for Small Town America? As noted, it fits in with both traditional perceptions and modern-

day notions of what comprises America's little towns. From a traditional standpoint, we are left with the notion that Small Town USA is rural and working class. This plays on our traditional sense of nostalgia often held in regards to America's rural areas. In terms of rurality, Small Town America is isolated; it is serene; it is agricultural. Whether Small Town America is isolated in a negative or lonely form or serene in terms of peace and beauty depends on the perspective of the individual viewer. What is for sure is that rurality as conveyed in the title sequences comes from a distinct separation of rural America from highly populated or urban areas busy with people and buildings. Hence, rural America is disconnected from the hustle and bustle of the city, a frequent portrayal of televised depictions of Small Town USA.

Based on the depiction in the title sequences of *Friday Night Lights*, there is no massive economic disparity or massive wealth in the setting of the series. This builds on the idea of rural America as part of the working class, home to more blue than white-collar workers. What is depicted is a group that fits into the same economic realm, a realm that while not extravagant, shows no economic instability or perhaps even mobility for that matter. The fact there this no sign of poverty is misleading, as a number of members of this socioeconomic status would undoubtedly experience some form of financial hardship. In contrast, such struggles, indeed are a key part of the series narrative. Solely based on the credit sequence, however, *Friday Night Lights* creates an identity for rural America as part of the working class but void of financial struggle and stress. This is reminiscent of depictions like Mayberry from the *Andy Griffith Show* (1960). Combined with the depiction of rurality, this plays on the traditional idea of Small Town America having a "slower," "calmer" way of life. Consequently, rurality

and social class as depicted in the season one and five opening credits of *Friday Night Lights* align with earlier television portrayals of Small Town America.

Other themes provide Small Town America with a more modern ideological identity. Based on the changes in the opening credit sequences, ethnicity becomes a stronger focus in the last season, a season targeted toward urban professional women who most likely experience ethnic diversity as part of their everyday lives in large cities. Whether or not such ethnic diversity actually exists as part of the identity of Small Town America, it certainly does in the semiotic world of *Friday Night Lights* based on the credit sequence. This is a distinct difference from the emphasis on Caucasian characters in earlier rural-based television series, *The Waltons* (1971) and *Green Acres* (1965) being examples.

Also unlike earlier televised portrayals, the role of women in *Friday Night Lights*' television version of rural America has progressed. By season five, the series redefined women. No longer were women stay-at-home wives who excelled at cooking and taking care of the family as conveyed through characters such as Aunt Bee from *the Andy Griffith Show* (1960). The women of *Friday Night Lights* were men's equals, not only in terms of quantity, but also status.

High school sports dominate America's little towns according to *Friday Night Lights*' credit sequences. This is not a new portrayal in the media. However, its differing depictions in the first as opposed to final season credits of *Friday Night Lights* shows a shift away from previous portrayals and its role in the identity for Small Town USA. Of course, there is the intensity of the game, in this instance football, including the high expectations to win and excel as part of the team, along with the unique social status

given to those involved with the team. However, *Friday Night Lights* also demonstrates the pressure and anxiety experienced by not only the players, but by the coach. From the credits alone, this seems like pressure to win to appease a sports-centric town. However, the narrative of the series depicts how the stress arises from the need to use football as a means to better one's life. It is also a means to form new bonds and friendships and strengthen relationships with those on, and even those not officially part of the team. It is the coach who is responsible for making all of this possible. Hence, we see football, or on a larger scale high school sports, as not only what could be considered an unhealthy obsession from the town as commonly portrayed in the media in films like *Varsity Blues* (1999), but also portrayed as a means for someone to grow as an individual and have a better life, for which there is little portrayal in the media. Based on this, we have a slightly altered identity of what high school sports mean for Small Town America.

Commonly, a tie between religion and militarism with Small Town America is made. Each is cued as theme in the first season credit sequence. Yet, emphasis on these themes disappears from the opening credits by season five. In contrast to previously cited studies that suggest that both of these are important values that define Small Town America, it is clear that NBC presumed these themes did not correlate with those of the urban professional female viewership of the final season. Therefore, based on the credit sequences, even though quite different than what is portrayed in the series' narrative, we are left with an identity for Small Town America in which religion and militarism are very minute and not the defining aspects.

While the findings in this section are based on a commonly used and trusted theoretical framework and research methods, it is possible to argue against them as an overall, new construct and embodiment of the Small Town identity. This research was very thorough and methodologically performed. However, when it comes to the small town identity, or any other identity for that account, the makeup of the audience and the goal of the network will always result in different versions and interpretations.

A Coherent Small Town Identity: Does it Exist?

No true cohesive, non-contradictory and un-conflicted small town identity in the media currently or ever will exist. An individual's personal experiences or even the cohesive feelings and understandings of a specific social group, be it based on gender, social class, sexuality, ethnicity or so forth, will always play a role in the construction of the identity for a particular audience. The different depictions in the title sequences of *Friday Night Lights* to cater either to an audience of politically red men from the flyover states or eventually the young, urban, politically blue professional female audience exemplifies this. NBC felt it necessary to alter the title sequence as a promotional tool to cater to the perceptions of the newfound audience. Hence in season one, we have a small town identity that is built on the idea of a sports obsession, is primarily Caucasian, consists of traditional gender roles and has religious and military ties. But by season five, we see an ideological setting that is rural, agricultural, ethnically diverse, and progressive in terms of gender and have no military or religious affiliation. From this, we may deduce that different versions of the small town identity will always exist, at least in part, due to the conceptions by cultural commodity producers of the perceived values of target consumer audiences.

I went into this research hoping to find a “true” or “authentic” portrayal of Small Town America. However, I’ve realized a so-called “unproblematic” or ideal depiction of the identity of Small Town USA will never permeate the small screen. This is due not only to differing perceptions of the audience’s values. To some degree, the problem also arises from the lack of a coherent and unchanging social identity found in actual small town environments. Despite the mythologizing of small town life as defined by more traditional and conservative attitudes about gender, race and ethnicity, social class and sexuality in various media content, those living in small town environments hold a variety of values, attitudes and behaviors about these very social categories. Certainly, some members of small town communities will hold traditional and conservative values. But, other individuals will be more progressive in their values or even hold a mixture of traditional and progressive values. This is explored more fully in the later discussion about my own experience growing up in Small Town America. Consequently, any coherent, unchanging definition of Small Town America is impossible to pin down. Any attempt to define Small Town America will always fall short of an ideal.

Using the theoretical framework of semiotics, this research provides a thorough analysis of the depiction that NBC worked to convey for *Friday Night Lights* through the series’ opening credit sequence to fit two distinctly different audience demographics. It also showcases more. This research demonstrates the ability of certain social groups to challenge and redefine the meanings and ideological associations portrayed in popular culture. For example, and as I have noted repeatedly through this research, NBC first attempted to push what I have argued as a more traditional rural identity fitting for conservative men from the flyover states in the title sequences. But this depiction was

not well taken, exemplified by the fact that the series did not resonate with the values and interests of this target demographic. Instead, NBC shifted the focus of the series to cater to the young, coastal-based audience of liberal, professional women that took to the series. Its promotional efforts, including the title sequence, had to be revamped to fit into the ideological construction most appealing for this viewership. Hence, *Friday Night Lights* not only showcases the perception about different audiences' unique views for rural identity. It demonstrates the power certain social groups, in this case young, affluent liberal women who had more consumer power than their rural male counterparts, have to challenge and influence what is conveyed in popular culture.

A cohesive identity for Small Town America will never exist, as the goals of the institution, in this case television, and the perceptions of the social groups that make up the viewership will always alter the ideological depiction. This leads me back to the initial reasoning behind this research.

As a former resident of Small Town America in the flyover states, turned a young, politically blue professional female living in a metropolitan area, I'm almost an exact embodiment of the two different social groups targeted in the opening sequences of *Friday Night Lights*. I originally started this research out of a personal frustration and the opinion that televised depictions of Small Town America was negative. I hoped that my research of *Friday Night Lights* would provide me with a depiction of rural America that "actually got it right." Now complete, this research, in my opinion, did unveil what I argued a traditional, yet new modern version of the small town identity, one that I myself found appealing. However, this research also changed my perception of the overall portrayal of Small Town America in the media.

Rural America: From A Viewer that Fits Both Audience Demographics

To fully understand my viewpoints, it is necessary to dive deeper into my personal background than originally touched on at the beginning of this research. This starts out with an overview of my rural upbringing, and how I feel it correlates with the themes unearthed in the analysis of the title sequences of *Friday Night Lights*.

Similar to what is conveyed in *Friday Night Lights*, my small town of 1,200 residents was primarily of a lower socio-economic status. I was raised by working-class parents. My mother was a secretary, or an administrative assistant, whichever word choice resonates more with those of you reading this research (another example of how societal ties play a role in our perceptions). My father was a sheer operator, meaning he ran machinery that cut out metal road signs at a factory in our town. While I never noticed, likely because everyone else seemed to be of a similar economic standing, we certainly weren't what one would consider wealthy. This is not to say I was impoverished. But, what I considered wealthy was probably more "average" or even "below average" in the minds of those in more populated and affluent areas like the urban coasts. Like in *Friday Night Lights*, the architecture exemplified this. A number of the homes and buildings in my hometown are a bit run down (to say the least). Of course, urban areas also have their share of old homes. My point is that I never noticed this prior to moving away and coming back to visit. It's as though my eyes were opened to the fact that my town and its residents were not as "well off" as I had originally thought. I'd never really considered anyone in my town poor, but poverty was definitely there if you looked for it. And those run down buildings are an example. Also, what I considered a "big, expensive house" in

my hometown doesn't hold a candle to the homes in gated living areas in the city I live in now. This is not the only sign of social class that rung true for me in the credit sequence of *Friday Night Lights*.

Like what is conveyed in *Friday Night Lights* as a sign of social class, we all tended to wear casual clothing. The day someone wasn't wearing jeans and a t-shirt was a special occasion. Furthermore, business attire was more "business casual" with items like suits a rarity. The fact that "higher pay-grade" brands from department stores like Macy's were not only hundreds of miles away, but also likely too expensive for the average salary in our town, probably influenced this to an extent. This is not to say the clothing was sloppy or unfashionable, I just wouldn't consider it "high fashion." I could also argue that the clothing isn't entirely a depiction of social class, but perhaps just part of the slower, peaceful way of life often associated with rural America. Hence, comfy, down-to-earth clothing for people who live calmer lifestyles. It just goes back to individual perception. Regardless, it does showcase a lower overall socioeconomic status.

In her research, Johnson (2010) describes the flyover states as having a lower market culture. The GM vehicles in the opening credits of *Friday Night Light's* support this, and also remind me of home. Growing up, I had hardly seen anything other than American-made Chevys, and also Fords, on the road. Most everything else just seemed a bit out of place. Perhaps this had to do with social class, or maybe it is mainly due to taste. Either is speculation, the point being it matched my rural experiences.

Friday Night Lights' depiction of rural America also matched my experiences with agriculture as a defining aspect of rurality. That is for the most part. Agriculture is a key industry in South Dakota, bringing in more than 20 percent of the state income

(South Dakota Department of Agriculture, 2015). What I would have considered a more accurate depiction for rural America would have been for this to be emphasized even more in the credit sequences of both season title sequences. While I was not raised on a farm or ranch, there is what you could consider a “family farm” on my mother’s side that she grew up on and now my uncle and his children run. Furthermore, what had to be at least half of my classmates either lived on or worked on a farm. All of this considered, it is my opinion agriculture was downplayed in the credits.

Also similar to the season one portrayal, but in contradiction to the fifth season title sequence of *Friday Night Lights*, my hometown had little diversity. Let’s compare it to the population of South Dakota in general. About 85 percent of the residents are Caucasian, with Native American constituting almost 9 percent and Asian, Hispanic and African American ethnicities each only constituting about 1 percent (The United States Census Bureau, 2015). Hence, diversity was almost nonexistent. My personal experience contradicts heavily with the credits of the last season, which had such a strong African American presence.

What South Dakota lacked in ethnic diversity, it made up for in military presence. In 2010, the state housed some 72,000 veterans (South Dakota Department of Veteran Affairs, 2010). My family is part of this statistic. For example, all of my uncles and grandfather on my father’s side had served overseas or as part of the National Guard. This wasn’t a makeup unique to my family. I grew up thinking the military was a very common career path after high school, with members of each graduating class as far back as I can remember having one if not a handful of members heading off to basic training. Not only until I branched out did I meet people who had no personal affiliations, even if

not direct, with the service. And, I was surprised to learn the military wasn't just a "natural" option they had explored after high school. As discussed, this is under emphasized in the credits. This surprised me not only because it was a key part of the series narrative, but something of which I personally correlated with my perception of rural America.

Christianity, also similar to what was conveyed in *Friday Night Lights*' first season credit sequence, was a big part of not only mine, but the lives for the majority of those in my hometown. The town predominately consisted of a mix of Lutheran, Methodist and Catholic backgrounds. Exemplifying just how pervasive these religious beliefs were is the fact that the public, and I should mention state funded, schools, would not allow any after-school activities on Wednesdays in junior high. This was the day of the week and the years reserved for confirmation classes after school by the churches. Furthermore, each Christian holiday was recognized as a vacation day by the school. Due to this, I was a bit surprised religion wasn't showcased in the last season credit sequences.

Gender is an interesting topic. Looking back on my youth, I feel traditional gender roles were followed in my rural community. The types of careers each gender primarily held are an example. When I was young, there were no male nurses in my hometown, nor had I ever met a female doctor. The majority of the teachers were female, especially in the elementary school, but the school administration was all male. All of the bank tellers were women, but management was men. Granted, as I aged, most of this changed. By the time I hit high school a woman was in one of the top positions at my bank, a woman had been hired as a doctor at the hospital and my former (female)

kindergarten teacher spent a stint as the elementary school principal. However, I still have yet to meet a male nurse or bank teller in my hometown. Hence, while I feel the gender roles have been and are shifting, similar to the portrayal in *Friday Night Lights*' first and last season title sequences, the roles still lean more towards the "traditional" side.

Just as is in *Friday Night Lights*, high school sports did indeed dominate the town. What seemed to be the majority of the town's residents were on the football field on Friday nights in the fall and in the gymnasium for basketball games in the winter. While I cannot prove it, it is safe to assume everyone in the town probably owned some piece of clothing with the school colors, maroon or gold, or with a picture of the mascot, a bulldog, on it. And, our city sign, just like that of Dillon, boasted the team, reading "The Home of the Bulldogs" with state championships listed below it. Almost everyone was involved in high school athletics in some shape or form, including myself. I was a football and basketball cheerleader all throughout high school. And, similar to the portrayal in *Friday Night Lights*, it was those involved in the team who always seemed a bit more popular and well-known throughout not only the school, but the town as well. I actually knew the names and backgrounds of most of the exceptional high school athletes in the neighboring towns and schools, too, exemplifying the almost "celebrity" status that was indeed given to those on the teams.

The stress and intensity to win in *Friday Night Lights* does not map back to my own personal experiences. While it was by all means quite a big deal for someone to receive a college sports scholarship, I never experienced an account of someone not being able to attend college without one. And, while our winning the football state

championship my senior year is one of my strongest memories from high school, I don't recall the boys on the team being pressured immensely to make it to state and win the title. Also, my school certainly had its share of losing seasons. While I did not play sports, I do not recall any coach being fearful of losing his or her job at the school or having the pressure of an entire town on their shoulders. While the town did get hyped up when the team had a successful season (and there was certainly celebration), there was by no means the intensity experienced by the Coach Taylor or the Dillon Panthers to always maintain a winning record. Hence, while certainly important, the level of intensity, at least from my own personal experience, was not the same.

Given the detail noted above, for me the small town identity of *Friday Night Lights* rang true. It was quite "authentic" in my eyes. However, I am one person, with a unique personal background and who fit into a specific social group. Also, one could argue that comparing rural South Dakota to rural Texas is the equivalent of comparing apples to oranges. As noted above, this affects just how someone interprets, and even has the potential to create a different version of Small Town America based on the same exact television content. That said, let's go back into my own view of the rural identity in the media.

First I feel it necessary to say that while I am proud of and still love my small town roots, I doubt I will ever live there again. Even though I was born and raised there, I always felt I did not completely fit in. My moving around after college corroborated this. First I joined the AmeriCorps VISTA and moved to Phoenix, home to more than 1 million residents. Then I moved to my current location, Denver, home to some 600,000 inhabitants. From this, I realized that while I have nostalgia for my rural upbringing, my

preference lies in the hustle and bustle of the city and all that is associated with it. I like the skyscrapers, I gave up my Chevy Monte Carlo for a Honda Fit, I've become a pescetarian (formerly vegetarian), I celebrate a wide-array of religious holidays (though I still describe myself as Christian, specifically Lutheran), I have a white-collar job doing public relations for tech companies and honestly, I hate football.

Sans being male, in my early life I fit into the original target demographic of *Friday Night Lights*. I was from the flyover states. Even though I didn't really consider them conservative at the time, I did lean towards the political right. In my adulthood, I become part of the actual audience of the series. While I do not live on the urban coasts, I do live in a highly populated urban area, and I am a young, professional and liberal female. And, once again, though ironically ringing true to Johnson's (2010) research, I avoided watching *Friday Night Lights* due to the football aspect of the series. It wasn't until this research that I first watched the show, which, just like the rest of the surprise female fan base, I grew to love.

I provided the extensive overview of my background and current life to illustrate how a change in perspective about the representations of Small Town America in the media shifts from one audience target and their societal ties to another. Prior to beginning this research, I held the opinion that most representations of rural America were negative and inaccurate. After this research, and as I moved into new social groups due to my dwelling in urban areas, my viewpoint altered. What I once considered a positive as opposed to negative, or accurate as opposed to inaccurate, portrayal of rural America is not the same as now. Granted, I still cringe at the depictions of low educated, bumbling characters in *My Name is Earl* (2005), but I also now question the utopian depiction of

Mayberry in the *Andy Griffith Show* (1960). While I still consider rural America to be part of a slower, calmer and peaceful lifestyle, and consider the countryside beautiful and serene, there are challenges, such as poverty and racism, that can't be ignored. Hence, as my personal life changed, so did my views, and so evolved my opinion of the media's portrayals of Small Town America.

As a defining characteristic of my changing perspective, I now understand media representations are complex, even porous, depending heavily on the individual watching the series and how their personal and social contexts help them to interpret the imagery, typically well thought out by the creators and network, being displayed on the small screen. Hence for me, *Friday Night Lights* provided a small town identity that I enjoyed watching and made me a bit homesick. But for others, this may not ring true. What is, what was and what is to come from the media's depiction of rural America will always vary.

While the opening credit sequences of seasons one and five provide our first ideological taste, and therefore, understanding of *Friday Night Lights* and the identity it creates for Small Town America, this research can be taken much further. To truly decipher the ideological picture *Friday Night Lights* paints for Small Town America, a deeper look into the episodes of each season is needed. Regardless, this research provides a preliminary look into the themes and what one may expect to see in regards to Small Town America identity in *Friday Night Lights*.

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