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Watching the games: Critical media literacy and students' abilities to identify and critique the politics of sports

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree in Doctor of Philosophy

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WATCHING THE GAMES:
CRITICAL MEDIA LITERACY AND STUDENTS' ABILITIES TO IDENTIFY AND
CRITIQUE THE POLITICS OF SPORTS

(Spine title: Critical Media Literacy and the Politics of Sports)

(Thesis format: Monograph)

by

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Graduate Program in Media Studies

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

The School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies
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THE UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN ONTARIO
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Watching the games:
Critical media literacy and students' abilities to identify and
critique the politics of sports

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Abstract

Sport can be the source of fitter, healthier and better lifestyles. However, sport can also be a vehicle for the reproduction of problematic notions of gender, race, nationality, industry, among other issues. If people who consume and participate in sport are unequipped to identify and question these issues, they will continue reproducing these conceptions uncritically. As a proponent of Critical Media Literacy (CML), through this dissertation I encourage educators to teach students the skills and knowledge to recognize and critically assess these and other problematic discourses in sports media. In this dissertation, I set out to discover if adolescents possess these skills and knowledge.

Two main questions drive this research: First, what type of knowledge do the participants have about the socio-cultural, political and economic implications of sport in our societies? And second, can the participants identify socio-political issues (e.g. gender, race, nationality, political economy) in sports media texts as they consume them? To answer these questions, I first attempted a study with youth and later I recruited 20 first year university students to participate in a 90 minute session where I showed them three sports clips and asked them to complete a short qualitative questionnaire and partake in a focus group discussion. Using Qualitative Content Analysis (QCA), I examined both the questionnaires and the transcripts from the discussions leading to a critical analysis.

I found that the participants had a limited knowledge of the general and critical media issues we discussed. Though the students demonstrated some understanding of the way the sports media operates, they consistently drew from stereotypes and common sense tropes when analyzing issues of race, nationality and gender in sports. I also found that students were generally unable to identify and/or critique problematic representations

present in the videos. There were only 5.6% of instances where the participants questioned these problems in the clips. Most of the time (86.23%) the participants were either unaware of the issues or saw them as normal and saw no need to resist or critique. These findings support the idea that students would benefit from receiving a critical media literacy education that teaches them to identify and question hegemonic discourses in sports media.

Keywords: *Media Literacy, Critical Media Literacy, Gender, Race, Nation, Sports Media Industry, Sports, Critical pedagogy, Televiewing, Qualitative Content Analysis*

To my parents Lianny, José Raúl, and my partner Mariena
For your unconditional love, your insight, and your incommensurable support.

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List of Abbreviations

AED – Assistant Educational Director

CML – Critical media literacy

ED – Educational Director

FSU – Florida State University

HC – Hockey Canada

IOC – International Olympic Committee

ML – Media literacy

MLB – Major League Baseball

MMA – Mixed martial arts

NAMLE - National Association for Media Literacy Education

NBA – National Basketball League

NCAA – National Collegiate Athletic Association

NFL – National Football League

NHL – National Hockey League

OHL – Ontario Hockey League

PCs – Personal computers

PE – Physical education

QCA – Qualitative Content Analysis

RD – Recreational Director

SG – Student Government

TML – traditional (conventional) media literacy

WNBA – Women’s National Basketball League

YMCA – Young Men’s Christian Association

Chapter 1: Introduction

Sports in America should be viewed as an escape, a temporary pause from the serious and often life-changing issues that dominate our news...Sport is sport. Politics are politics. When the sides meet and the lines get blurred, so does our ability to escape. – Ed Graineey, columnist for *Las Vegas Review Journal*¹

“Let’s not bring politics into this” is a popular mantra that is often brought up whenever there is an event that mixes sports and politics². But “Bringing politics” into sports or “mixing politics and sports” suggests that sport is by nature an apolitical realm of reality. Sport, like any other cultural product, is not natural. It is produced and reproduced in society, by society, using social norms, values and notions. There is no such thing as a pure sport that gets muddied with politics. Sport is political.

Far from preserving the purity of sport, considering sport as an apolitical space (the myth of apolitical sport) has aided the perpetuation of problematic politics within its culture: politics that are based on “attitudes and behaviours toward nature and our fellow humans that are socially destructive” (Burstyn, 1999, p.13). In this introductory chapter, I discuss the myth of apolitical sport further and demonstrate with clear examples the real consequences sport participants and consumers suffer by letting this myth remain unchecked. I contend that educators need to disrupt this myth by teaching young people

¹ Ed Graineey (2010). “Sports, politics don’t mix – at least not in America”. *Las Vegas Review Journal*. May, 19, 2010. Retrieved from <http://www.lvrj.com/sports/sports--politics-don-t-mix----at-least-not-in-america-94233834.html> on August 12, 2010.

² According to critical journalist Dave Zirin (2011): “Howard Cosell [famous American sports journalist] once said that rule number one of the jockocracy was that sports and politics don’t mix.”

to notice, question, and critique these politics in the media³ sport⁴ they consume.

Educators can do this by adhering to a critical media literacy (CML) education. In the final pages of this chapter, I present the concept of CML and introduce my two dissertation projects, both of which contribute important knowledge and information for scholars and practitioners who wish to endeavor down this path.

The myth of apolitical sport

It is not difficult to come across commentary in the sport pages claiming the separation of sports and politics⁵. Inherent in this claim is the notion that sport is a quasi-ideal space where participants can bracket their differences, enter and compete on a level playing field. Brian Martin (2000) describes this conception:

One of the important characteristics of games is that they are worlds unto themselves, with rules to define behaviour and an explicit separation from outside concerns. To be sure, many games in practice are marked by racial prejudice,

³ I use the word media conscious that it does not have a singular meaning, but rather connotes a plurality of means of communication. Because I position myself as a critical media literacy advocate, when I use the word media, I use it in the same sense as Silverblatt (2004): mass media as a social institution (p. 35). Silverblatt comments that a social institution “is an organization that is critical to the socialization process; it provides a support system for individuals as they struggle to become members of a larger social network” (p. 35). Furthermore, Silverblatt offers a set of functions each social institution performs. Media fulfills many of these functions. For the purposes of this dissertation I understand that media: 1) defines or affirms values, 2) establishes rules of behaviour, 3) furnishes role models, 4) presents information about the past, the present or the future, 5) establishes a sense of order, and, most importantly in my estimation, 6) educates (pp. 36-37). I am aware that there are many different media that work in different ways. However, following these functions that Silverblatt explains, I view media, in plural, as a set of means that together can create and reproduce discourses. In this chapter, for instance, I quote examples from many different media, but they all serve a similar purpose: to demonstrate discourses about identity politics in sport that circulate throughout. Though they may have different characteristics, they all contribute to the creation and maintenance of these discourses. For the purposes of my research, I am interested in how young people receive and negotiate these discourses.

⁴ I use the concept of “sport media” to designate the sports/media industry or complex, and use the concept of “media sports” to designate the object of study, the mediated sport texts.

⁵ For some examples of this see: http://espn.go.com/blog/collegebasketballnation/post/_id/13548/calipari-learns-sports-and-politics-dont-mix, <http://blogs.forbes.com/sportsmoney/2010/07/14/bud-selig-right-to-leave-politics-out-of-all-star-game/>, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/sport/2008/feb/19/athletics.sport1>

gender discrimination, economic inequality, and numerous other social dynamics. *But the ideal of the game involves a bracketing or exclusion of these factors*, with all attention on abiding by the artificial reality of the game itself. It is this that makes games such a valuable escape from the oppressive realities of people's lives. (p.20) [Emphasis added]

The issue here is twofold. On one hand, believers in the myth construct sport as an escape from “serious and often life-changing issues” (Rainey), meaning that sport is nothing but a diversion to keep people from becoming engaged and active citizens⁶. On the other hand, supporters of this notion believe that viewers and fans are suspended in an apolitical state while consuming sport. However, that supposed apolitical state actually hides the reproduction of *status quo* and hegemonic discourses and politics. John Hargreaves (2006) writes

The institutionalized separation of sport from the rest of ‘reality’ in the media encodes that notion with which we all are familiar, and which begs the question of the relation between sport and power, namely, that sport has nothing to do with politics. Under the auspices of the ‘no politics in sport rule’, media sport as we shall see, can accomplish much ideological work (p. 176).

Simply claiming that sport is a separate and apolitical space does not make it so.

In fact, this claim actually disguises sexism, racism, ethnocentrism and other problematic politics as natural and unquestionable imperatives in the world of sports, ideas that are so

⁶ For a good discussion of the problems associated with this perspective read Andrew Blake's *Body Language* (1996)

common sense that there is no need to discuss them⁷. Balbier (2009), using the Olympics as an example, explains:

...this belief in the apolitical status of international sport proved to be an illusion.

The strong national rituals, the long-lived aristocratic exclusivity and the internationalism played out in the media have always rendered the Olympic movement unavoidably political. (p. 540)

In reality, this myth is so ingrained and pervasive in contemporary Western societies that it has even become the official discourse of institutions and governments. For instance, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) “defined sport as ‘apolitical’ and its rules prohibited political interference” (Balbier, 2009, p.540). While the IOC crafted this definition to avoid direct political interference by governments or political parties, what has happened is that it has become the mantra used whenever any type of political issue arises in or around the playing fields. This discourse has become the official way to

⁷ Clifford Geertz (1983) explains what is common sense and the importance of analyzing it: “There are a number of reasons why treating common sense as a relatively organized body of considered thought, rather than just what anyone clothed and in his right mind knows, should lead on to some useful conclusions; but perhaps the most important is that it is an inherent characteristic of common-sense thought precisely to deny this and to affirm that its tenets are immediate deliverances of experience, not deliberated reflections upon it. Knowing that rain wets and that one ought to come in out of it, or that fire burns and one ought not to play with it (to stick to our own culture for the moment) are conflated into comprising one large realm of the given and undeniable, a catalog of in-the-grain-of-nature realities so peremptory as to force themselves upon any mind sufficiently unclouded to receive them. Yet this is clearly not so. No one, or no one functioning very well, doubts that rain wets; but there may be some people around who question the proposition that one ought to come in out of it, holding that it is good for one's character to brave the elements—hatlessness is next to godliness. And the attractions of playing with fire often, with some people usually, override the full recognition of the pain that will result. Religion rests its case on revelation, science on method, ideology on moral passion; but common sense rests its on the assertion that it is not a case at all, just life in a nutshell. The world is its authority” (p.75). As Geertz eloquently explains in this quote, common sense is a body of knowledge made up of unquestioned assumptions. These assumptions inform what we know about the world and how it operates. Media literacy and critical pedagogy believe that people *should* question these assumptions because they may betray cultural biases (as Geertz explains in his example of hatlessness), privileged positioning, and hegemonic knowledge. All these things may combine to turn certain beliefs into an unquestioned and unexamined knowledge that takes on the character of Truth. I position myself with Geertz and the critical pedagogues and see common sense assumptions as problematic and worthy of critical scrutiny.

silence and render invisible all the obvious political problems that are inherent in contemporary sports culture. As a matter of example, Mayagüez, a small city on the west side of Puerto Rico, celebrated the Centro-American and Caribbean games in 2010. Prior to the inauguration of the games, activists, students and labour leaders discussed the possibility of protesting the governor's speech. The governor of Puerto Rico, an extremely conservative figure both socially and politically, is not particularly popular in the island at the time of this writing. He laid off more than 25,000 public sector workers, has the economy in a particularly bad state, and is following a very aggressive program of privatization. His administration has clashed with students, with women, with gays, with labourers and even with people from his own political party (American Civil Liberties Union, 2011). Furthermore, there is a precedent on the island of booing governors in the inaugurations of regional games (*Primera Hora*, 2010). However, several prominent voices in Puerto Rico spoke out trying to convince people not to protest and not to boo. Their argument was based solely on the separation of politics and sports. The mayor of the municipality of Las Piedras, Miguel López, who is a member of the same political party as the governor, said while the Olympic torch made its way through his town:

Los Juegos Centroamericanos van a desviar la atención de las cosas negativas de nuestro pueblo. Todos debemos unirnos para que sean los mejores que se hayan realizado en la isla...para las marchas o protestas todo tiene su espacio y su tiempo...El deporte une voluntades. Para eso (las protestas), hay tiempo luego⁸.

El Nuevo Día, the biggest daily newspaper on the island, also joined the voices raised against the protests. On July 9th, 2010, *El Nuevo Día* published an editorial that was

⁸ Translation: "The Centro American Games will shift our attention away from the negative things happening in our country. We must all unite so that they may be the best games ever...rallies and protests have their time and place...Sport is for uniting people. People can protest later." Edgar Torres (2010).

entitled “Cero protestas en Mayagüez 2010” [Cero protests in Mayagüez 2010] where the editor wrote:

Mayagüez no debe ser escenario de protestas, ni debe ser utilizado para adelantar causas que empañen la celebración de este grandioso encuentro deportivo... Sería lamentable que esta magnífica jornada deportiva que comienza el próximo 17 de julio se convierta en un reavivamiento innecesario de conflictos que nada tienen que ver con el deporte.⁹

These two quotes offer examples of the two main discourses I discussed: sport as an escape and sport as a separate reality. The problem, of course, is that claiming that these games were apolitical or that they should be seen as a separate reality actually provided the government with a credible excuse to use the games for their own purposes and still escape political backlash. Brian Martin explains:

Ironically, because games are experienced as separate realities, they are ideal for exploitation by groups that would like to use them for their own purposes. Any enterprise that is perceived as autonomous and apolitical - sport, science, art - is all the more effective as a political tool when it can be subtly tied to vested interests. (p. 20-21)

This is exactly what happened in these games. While Puerto Rico is currently going through one of the worst economic crises in recent history, the government spent more than \$450 million readying Mayagüez and nearby towns for the Games. Also, many people were forced to abandon their homes so that the new facilities could be built.

⁹ Translation: “Mayagüez should not become the stage for any protests nor should it be used to further causes that will overshadow the celebration of this wonderful sporting event...It would be a shame if this great sporting event that begins on July 17th were to, unnecessarily, dredge up conflicts that have nothing to do with sport.” El Nuevo Día (2010)

Furthermore, these games were an opportunity for the administration to showcase itself to the international community. It was such a political event that during the inauguration, several athletes from the Puerto Rican delegation carried an enormous banner that read “Red card for the Puerto Rican government”^{10, 11} and the PRTV, the state run TV station in charge of broadcasting the games, chose not to cover it during their telecast. Instead, they showed images of the governor and his wife dancing to the tunes of native Puerto Rican music and waving Puerto Rican flags all throughout the broadcast. Citing the myth of apolitical sport, the government was able to successfully use the games to their advantage and put on a media show for the international community.

While this example shows the purposeful manipulation of a sporting event by a government, this is not the only type of political problem I mean when discussing the politics of sports. The myth of apolitical sport also disguises the problems of identity politics involved in the world of sport (i.e., discrimination and prejudice based on race, gender, ethnicity, nationality, disability) and the issues of the political economy in the sports media industry, among other concerns. In most of these cases, there is no single overarching entity that is looking to impose its political agenda on the rest of the world as in the previous example. But there are often ideological factions at odds. In most of these conflicts, sport becomes another battleground in the wider cultural wars between progressive, conservative, radical or fundamentalist world views. In these cases, the myth of apolitical sport usually serves the interests of the *status quo* by hiding the disparities

¹⁰ In reference to the red cards given in soccer when a referee deems that a player has committed such a flagrant foul that he/she deserves to be kicked off the game.

¹¹ Importantly, the athletes were penalized by the Puerto Rican Olympic Committee for displaying a banner that “era alusivo a asuntos no deportivos” (Translation: Alluded to non-sporting issues). The Committee said that Puerto Rican athletes, in general, should be on their best behaviour and not promote manifestations that “en lugar de unirnos resulten divisivas” (Translation: instead of uniting us, divide us). (González, 2010)

that demonstrate that not all competitors are created equal and some are far from being able to compete on a level playing field as the media constantly stress. In this upcoming section, I will consider some examples of these types of issues within the world of sports. Later on, I will demonstrate how these issues are not merely theoretical but how they have practical consequences that perpetuate the disparities I will discuss in these examples.

Identity politics in sports

I. Gender

Nicholson (2006) argues that “sports media texts often privilege the position of hyper-masculine sports, while at the same time tending to marginalize female athletes and sports” (p.106). There are multiple ways in which sport serves to obstruct the equality of women and maintain the hypermasculine stronghold. I will examine three examples of this obstruction in this section.

Firstly, sport can function as the keeper of traditional gender roles and behaviours. For an example of this, I turn to the Vancouver 2010 Olympics. On February 25, 2010, the Canadian women’s national hockey team won Olympic gold by beating Team USA 2-0. After their medal presentation, the elated players stayed on the ice and had an impromptu celebration. During this celebration, they drank beer, champagne and lit cigars. The pictures of the players drinking, smoking, and lying on the ice circulated in the national media and created an outrage that led to a public apology by Hockey Canada (HC), the body that oversees Olympic and international hockey in the country, and an investigation by the IOC (Crary, 2010). Supposedly, the reason for the outrage was the

fact that one of the team's members, Marie-Philip Poulin, was 18 at the time and thus, not old enough to be drinking in the province of British Columbia. However, I would suggest that the main reason was the visibility of the players' behaviour and how that behaviour was not congruent with established gender roles. Gilbert Felli, IOC executive director of the Olympic Games, said: "*It is not what we want to see... If they celebrate in the changing room, that's one thing, but not in public. We will investigate what happened*" (Bryant, 2010 - Emphasis added). ESPN columnist Howard Bryant (2010) reacted to these comments by saying: "There is more than a hint of sexism here. I can't imagine Sidney Crosby [Pittsburgh Penguins' star player and leader of the Canadian male national hockey team] puffing on a cigar after winning a gold medal turning into an international incident." There is an underlying notion that this is not ladylike behaviour. Thus, having images of women wearing uniforms that, not only do they fail to highlight their feminine attributes but also hide their bodies completely, and behaving in a traditional male manner is too big an affront. The discussion implied that if women want to act outside of their gender role, they need to do it when nobody is watching. According to this way of thinking, crossing gender lines should not be done in public.

Secondly, sport can also serve to maintain myths about the female body and its limits. On August 13th, 2009, the IOC announced that women's boxing would be included in the 2012 Summer Olympics in London, England (Goldsticker, 2009). While many praised the inclusion as a step forward, there were also many who insisted that women should not be hitting each other. One of the most outspoken critics of this decision was powerful British boxing promoter Frank Warren. Warren, who has a column in the conservative British paper *The Sun*, wrote two pieces in which he criticized the inclusion

of women's boxing in the Olympics. In both columns he claims that women will never be as good as men in the sport. He writes: "I admire the endeavour and commitment shown by women boxers, but to suggest they are as technically proficient as men - or even more so - is nonsense" (Warren, 2009a). He adds in his second column, entitled "Let women fight – I won't watch": "But no one in their right mind could ever say women boxers are the equal of their male counterparts in any department. It's just a stupid argument because women will never have the same skill levels" (Warren, 2009b). Both statements are problematic for a number of reasons, but for the purposes of this chapter, suffice it to say that Warren is working under the common sense assumption that women are physically inferior to men and that this is not a social matter, but a biological imperative¹². The connotation of Warren's argument is that women were just not blessed with the same physical gifts as men. Warren uses the myth of apolitical sport to justify his views. In both instances he claims that his position has nothing to do with chauvinism or sexism, but is rather a matter of personal preference.

Finally, sport can also serve as a way to belittle and ostracize men who cross gender barriers. During the Vancouver 2010 Winter Olympics, American skater Johnny Weir made some commentators and fans uncomfortable with his seemingly feminine outfits and manner. Among those who felt uncomfortable by Weir's femininity, were Australian commentators Eddie McGuire and Mick Molloy and Québécois commentators Alain Goldberg and Claude Mailhot. Both sets of commentators made headline news around the world for continuously making jokes about Weir's outfits and masculinity

¹² Jennifer Hargreaves (1994) writes: "The concern about whether or not women will ever equal the sporting achievements of men has become an obsession in sports. Because the biological gap underpinning male and female performances has been used to discriminate against women and explain their supposed inferiority, it has masked the fact that differences may be more social than biological" (p. 285).

during their broadcast of the figure skating competitions. *The Daily Telegraph*, an Australian newspaper, described the exchanges as follows:

As the pair discussed the men's figure skating, Molloy said: "They don't leave anything in the locker room these blokes do they", before a sniggering McGuire interjected, adding "they don't leave anything in the closet either do they."

Molloy was quick to jokily reprimand McGuire, warning him he could get into trouble.

The network then cut to an image of a skater wearing a tuxedo-style costume, which Molloy described as something even singer Prince would not wear.

The footage then showed a skater wearing a costume of overalls and a flannelette shirt with McGuire suggesting it was "a bit of broke back".

Molloy agreed saying: "A bit of *Brokeback Mountain* exercises, you can't wear that." (Wotherspoon, 2010)

However, judging by their comments, the Québécois commentators seemed even more threatened by Weir's manner, outfits and behaviour. *The Canadian Press* reported their exchanges:

"This may not be politically correct," Mailhot said during the segment, in which Weir ... was shown sporting a semi-sheer, pink-and-black costume he designed himself.

"But do you think he lost points due to his costume and his body language?"

Goldberg replied that Weir's feminine style may reflect badly on other male figure skaters.

"They'll think all the boys who skate will end up like him," he said. "It sets a bad example."

"We should make him pass a gender test at this point," Goldberg said, and Mailhot then jokingly suggested Weir should compete in the women's competition. (Sager, 2010)

While both exchanges suggest the outward hostility towards difference, it is the second exchange that demonstrates how the crossing of gender lines in sport (and in life) really threatens some elements of society. The purpose of the tactics utilized by the commentators is to highlight Weir's deviance and ostracize him and cast him outside of the realm of male sports. Furthermore, by acknowledging that their comments might not be "politically correct", these men are consciously making a statement about what they think should be appropriate displays of masculinity, even if it exposes them to possible backlash.

As these examples show, sport sometimes serves to maintain the myth of a natural correlation between body, sexuality and gender; "men" and "women" are seen as static categories that have specific characteristics that flow naturally from them. This notion of a biological imperative is also present when the discussion turns to race in the world of sports. I consider that next.

II. Race

Gender and race issues sometimes follow similar patterns. One such pattern is dismissing claims of racism or sexism utilizing the biological imperative. In both areas, the body of the individual is the basis for the expectations of skills, behaviours, and

limits. In the case of biological racism in sports, athletes are separated into categories based on the stereotypes attributed to their racial makeup. A good example of this is the division of labour in American football (in its College and Professional incarnations).

Since the days of integration, the number of African Americans in football and basketball has skyrocketed. In fact, scholars and reporters describe NBA basketball as a predominantly black sport (Stempel, 2006). However, Brooks (2002) explains that this is not the case with professions that do not require physical or athletic ability. These facts have led people to believe in what Brooks terms “biological racism”. Biological racism is the idea that black people have better genes for athletic abilities than whites. When African Americans triumph in the NBA or the NFL, many assume that it is thanks to genetic traits that purportedly allow them to perform better¹³. But when a white athlete excels, the story goes, it is due to hard work and dedication. The fact that many blacks are overrepresented in sport and not in other endeavours of society affirms this “fact” for people who cling to this stereotype (Grainger, Newman and Andrews, 2006, p. 452). The world of football, which has historically segregated the “thinking position” (quarterback) and the “physical positions” (runners and defences) complicates this matter even further.

Traditionally, white men play the position of quarterback. Lapchick (2003) explains, “For years, whites have played the ‘thinking positions’. The controlling position in baseball is the pitcher; in football it is the quarterback” (p.307). In fact, there is only one black quarterback in the Hall of Fame of professional football and he was elected in 2006 (Pezzullo, 2006). Furthermore, between the early 60’s and 1986 only seven black

¹³ This is such a commonly held belief that even mainstream TV shows like *Friday Night Lights* have explored the matter.

quarterbacks even made it into the top ten candidates for the Heisman trophy¹⁴. None of them won it (Lapchick, 2003).

The most troubling aspect of this notion can be seen in the division of labour in football teams. Lapchick (2003) argues that the separation of blacks into “physical” positions and whites into “thinking” positions is akin to the division of labour in society in general. He says, “In 1995, white men and women were twice as likely to hold executive, administrative and managerial positions as black men. At the same time, blacks were twice as likely to hold positions of manual labor as whites” (p.306). He suggests that these patterns of discrimination continue in the realm of sports. What is important to understand is that the quarterback is the leader, the thinking one, and the other players are the brute strength, the labourers.

Another example of this separation of manual and intellectual labour between whites and blacks is the low numbers of black and racial minority coaches in American collegiate football. According to the Institute for Diversity and Ethics in Sport at the University of Central Florida, 1997 marked the year with the highest number of black coaches at NCAA Football Bowl Subdivision (FBS) universities (Formerly Division 1A) with 8 out of 119 for a meager 6.7%. From 1996 to 2008, only 12 black coaches were hired for 199 jobs available (6%). In 2007, racial minorities filled only 2 out of 22 (9%) available coaching positions. Interestingly enough, that same season, 55% of the football players of the FBS universities were racial minorities (Associated Press, 2008). These numbers are important because coaching is not only intellectual labour but it is also quasi-managerial as the coaches get to decide tasks, roles, plans, in some cases punishments, and so on.

¹⁴ NCAA football’s highest individual award.

Most team owners or school boards would never, openly and/or consciously, concede that their decisions are based at least partially on race. This could simply be the unconscious product of vestigial forms of racism and media stereotyping. However, not all racism in sports is as complicated as that. While many would like to think that institutional bans on racism have put an end to overt and obvious racism, racial harassment and discrimination is far from over. Racist incidents against non-white European and non-white non-European players abound, for instance, in European football. Ramón Llopis-Goig (2009) explains:

Until only a few years ago, racism was considered an issue that had been overcome in European football. However, the incidents that have occurred recently in various stadiums show that the reality is quite different... In reality, the anti-Semitic chants, the emission of monkey noises toward black football players, who are also thrown peanuts and bananas, *and even the use of racist symbols and slogans more commonly employed by extreme right wing groups*, show that the problem exists in the majority of European countries, especially in Spain and Belgium, countries where the situation has more alarming characteristics. [Emphasis added] (p. 39)

There are several disturbing issues behind this reality. First, as it is clear from the emphasized portion of the passage, these acts of racism are not being done by extremist or white-supremacist groups. These acts are being perpetrated by the general football going public in these countries. In a particularly nasty incident in a so-called friendly game between Spain and England at the Santiago Bernabeu Stadium in Madrid, an estimated 80% of those present yelled racial slurs and insults at black English footballers

(Llopis-Goig, p. 36). Secondly, Llopis-Goig also mentions that “[t]hese types of incidents are not a novelty in Spanish stadiums” (p. 36). It is particularly worrisome that these incidents are so widespread that they are not even considered a novelty. Spain and other European countries have only begun to see this as a problem recently when there has been increasing international pressure to put an end to this type of harassment.

As these examples show, the construct of race is still a major roadblock for many non-white peoples. The examples further demonstrate how overt racism still exists within the culture of sport and how in some cases it takes external pressure to bring about some sort of awareness or change. But the politics of sports are not confined to identity or governmental politics. There are other power relations at work that directly affect how the games are played, presented and constructed. I will discuss these relations next.

Political economy of the sports media industry

The union of media and sports is so far-reaching that journalism scholar Robert Bellamy Jr. (2006) thinks that it does not make sense to speak of sport as a separate entity from media. According to Bellamy, this marriage is so powerful because “Sports content allow[s] media to reach desirable and otherwise difficult-to-reach audiences, while the publicity and money from media [help] sports to become consistently more profitable and culturally important” (p. 63). Ultimately, both areas are a business and the bottom line is maximizing profit. Understanding the political economy¹⁵ behind these businesses is

¹⁵ In my desire to look at how industry shapes and controls sports and its participants, I am influenced by the critical pedagogues’ notion that the current economic system would like to turn everything into a sellable commodity and its underlying logic is that of neoliberalism. For instance, Giroux (2003), which I view as one of the pillars of contemporary critical pedagogy, writes: “...the market-driven consumer juggernaut continues to mobilize desires in the interest of producing market identities and market relationships...” (p.8). This logic can be seen in the examples I tackle in this section and later on in the consequences section.

imperative to understanding the trajectory of media sports. While both sides of the marriage make demands, for my purpose in this chapter it is more useful to describe some of the changes media conglomerates have caused in sports. After all, these are the changes the fans see, but sometimes do not understand fully. Furthermore, this also provides insight into the role of media in these issues.

The media enters this marriage of convenience because it needs something from sports (and vice versa). Television needs audiences that it can deliver to advertisers.

Boyle and Haines (2000) explain:

Where sport becomes of crucial importance in terms of a channel's portfolio, however, is in its ability to either deliver a small, but advertisingly [sic] lucrative group of viewers to the screen... or to entice committed television sports fans to subscribe to a dedicated channel... At other times... advertisers will pay a premium to reach the young males who generally watch little television. (p. 68-69)

Television owes its allegiance to the advertisers who are responsible for their profits. As such, television will try to mold their programming to fit the advertisers' needs. This includes pressuring those in charge of sports to create a format that is friendlier for generating ad revenue.

Two examples of how television affects sports can be found in Major League Baseball (MLB) and NCAA Basketball (NCAAB) in the United States. Both had to alter scheduling and the actual structure of the games in order to please advertisers who wanted a different audience and more space for ads. Before 1971, all the games of the "World Series", MLB's final series where the winners of both divisions meet to

determine an overall league champion, were played during daytime. However, by 1971, advertisers wanted a premium audience – an audience with higher purchasing power- for their products and the television networks forced the MLB to schedule all World Series games at night. It turned out to be the lowest rated series up to that point, but it also provided Fox Sports (the broadcaster) more ad revenue than ever before. From 1985 on, all World Series games were televised at night (Schultz, 2005, p.183).

While the pressure of television forced the MLB to alter its scheduling, it forced the NCAA to change something even more fundamental: the rules of their basketball games. Television executives thought these changes were necessary to accommodate more advertising, to make the game more exciting and therefore draw bigger ratings. Schultz (2005) explains:

College basketball added television time-outs at predetermined intervals to make sure the networks could get in all their commercials. Even today, several coaches complain that the unnatural time-outs create a different and often difficult game. In the 1980's, the NCAA added a shot clock and a three-point line, in reality because slow downs and stall tactics had threatened to hurt television ratings. (p.183)

What is interesting in these two cases is that the changes had nothing to do with making the game better for the athletes who are actually playing it; they all came down to economic decisions made purposefully to increase revenue and profit. In this sense, athletes are mere labourers who have little say in these negotiations. As pointed out in the quote, even the coaches complained about the changes made by television.

However, the story of the marriage of media and sports is not exclusively about profit; it is also about control. In a world where technology threatens to democratize the control of content, media conglomerates are firing back and are aggressively pursuing extensive control of this content. One clear example of this is the Entertainment Sports Programming Network's (ESPN) decision to issue a set of strict guidelines regulating their employees' use of social networking tools. These guidelines are mostly about maintaining absolute control of the sports content and not permitting their own employees to manage any of it without the network's expressed consent. Some of the most salient guidelines are:

- Personal websites and blogs that contain sports content are not permitted
- Prior to engaging in any form of social networking dealing with sports, you must receive permission from the supervisor as appointed by your department head
- If ESPN.com opts not to post sports related social media content created by ESPN talent, you are not permitted to report, speculate, discuss or give any opinions on sports related topics or personalities on your personal platforms
- The first and only priority is to serve ESPN sanctioned efforts, including sports news, information and content
- Confidential or proprietary company information or similar information of third parties who have shared such information with ESPN, should not be shared

Any violation of these guidelines could result in a range of consequences, including but not limited to suspension or dismissal. (Rosenthal, 2009)

While ESPN is definitely not the only media company to have created these types of guidelines for their employees, it is, nonetheless, important as the network is one of the

major players and trendsetters in the sports media industry. This means that, more than likely, other media conglomerates will soon follow suit and will strive to control the information even more than they already do.

The world of sports is molded and affected by the political and economic pressures of the media conglomerates. Players, coaches, reporters and staff members, among others, are sometimes mere employees with no real decisional power over what happens in their respective workplaces. From this vantage, power rests in the hands of entrepreneurs and managerial staff who are not necessarily loyal to the sport or game itself, but rather to revenue and profit. In this world, athletes are both a commodity and a salesperson. They are only useful insofar they can a) win and thus b) bring the audiences. This pressure has very real effects on those involved in sports. As I will show in the next section, the politics discussed in this section are not simply abstract in their implications, serving only as fodder for theoretical discussions; such politics and their implicit attitudes have a practical and physical impact.

Political effects

Prejudices about the quality and worthiness of women's sports (based on stereotypes about gender roles and the body) are related to disparities in the allocation of resources for men and women. The Vancouver 2010 Olympics provide a compelling case.

Many people in Canada watched the Vancouver Olympics. As of February 2010, the five most watched television programs in all of Canadian history were telecasts of the Vancouver 2010 Olympics. However, out of the top ten most watched events in that two

week span, only **one** was a women's event (women's hockey) and it only drew half the viewers men's hockey did (*Digital Home*, 2010). This means that even though Canadian women earned almost 60% of the Olympic medals, men's events still stole the television spotlight (*Olympic.org*, 2010). These numbers reflect a vicious circle. Women's sports do not get enough viewership so investors do not provide the same amounts of money, resources and broadcast time which in turn affect the interest people have in these sports. Mary Louise Adams (2006) explains, for example, the "gendering" of ice time in her native Kingston, Ontario:

In terms of organized youth sports in 2002-03, boys' minor hockey got 278 hours (there would have been a few girls on these teams), girls minor hockey got 53 hours per week, ringette got 12, and other skating organizations (speed, figure, synchro) got 60. There are no policies in place to assess gender or other forms of equity in terms of the allocation of recreational services in our community. (p.77)

And while I could probably brush these statistics aside as an anomaly in a conservative town, this is apparently the case in many municipalities across Canada. Julie Stevens (2006) explains:

Several legal and policy challenges have targeted municipal governments that manage public ice facilities, but, according to Elizabeth Etue and Megan Williams, female hockey advocates have not fared well in getting city councils to increase the proportion of ice time allotted to girls' and women's teams, despite overwhelming evidence of unequal access. Even when municipal governments have revised their facility-use policies, too often this has had little effect because there have been no repercussions for those who fail to comply. (p. 87)

Stevens also points out that this disparity in ice time has some very real repercussions for girls and women's hockey programs. She writes,

Unequal ice time affects the quality of a female hockey program in a variety of ways, including the hours available for games and practices and the length of travel time. Unsatisfactory ice times undermine the sport's appeal to girls, and also to their parents who pay significant registration fees for their daughters and want convenient ice time in return. (p. 87)

It is obviously problematic that women still need to engage in legal and civil rights battles for equal time in recreational facilities. If girls and women are not allowed equal resources and time, how can they ever achieve parity in quality, audiences, and opportunities? It is a cyclical problem.

But the effects of the politics of gender can affect men as well as women. As I discussed earlier in this chapter, a context of hyper masculinity and fear of femininity gave birth to contemporary North American sports. Therefore, it is not surprising that men in sports are continuously measured and valued by their perceived masculinity. This masculinity – which some scholars dub *hegemonic masculinity* – “idealizes the male who is stoic, self reliant, athletically rugged, strictly heterosexual, and void of complaint” (Denham, 2010, p.144). Adhering to this conception of what a ‘man’ is puts enormous pressures on the shoulders of sporting (and non-sporting) men. Denham (2010) explains:

When injuries occur...players are expected to stay mum and stoic, “sucking it up” and “taking one for the team.” Players who violate these implicit rules may find themselves belittled in front of their teammates or compared unfavorably to the tougher, less egocentric players of yesteryear, “when men were men.” (p. 147)

This type of thinking leads men to put their health and, in some cases, their lives in jeopardy; such was the case of University of Central Florida wide receiver Erick Plancher. Plancher collapsed on March 18th, 2008 during one of the football teams' workouts. He was taken to the hospital and pronounced dead half an hour later.

According to four players who spoke to ESPN on condition of anonymity, Plancher had shown signs of distress during the workout and the coaches interpreted it as weakness on the part of the athlete. The players stated that coach George O'Leary cursed at Plancher and told people around him "He's better than that." One of the players said that as the receiver was trying to catch his breath the coach kept on yelling at him. Even when "[h]is eyes got real dark, and he was squinting like he was blinded by the sun" and "[h]e was making this moaning noise, trying to breathe real hard", the players contend that Plancher tried to continue partaking in the workouts. Quitting might have saved his life, but his conformity to the norms and standards, his adherence to "male authority" and his willingness to prove he could withstand pain, led him literally to his death (*ESPN.com News Services*, 2008).

These gender troubles can also work in combination with the political economy issues behind sports to create disastrous consequences in the long run for athletes themselves. It is no secret that athletes' livelihoods usually depend on their ability to perform at optimum levels, among other things. This means that in contact sports like football or boxing, being more *macho* than the opponent is not only a social expectation, but it is also a financial expectation that the industry places on them. However, that same industry is sometimes quick to toss them aside when their productivity decreases or

disappears. This may be part of the reason why the world is seeing an explosion in doping and cheating cases in sports.

It looks like every day the public discovers that another one of their athletic idols is involved in some sort of cheating scandal. From using performance enhancing drugs to loading boxing gloves with plaster of Paris, athletes are taking the meaning of “competition” to a whole different level. One of the most recent, and vocal, examples of this trend is American cyclist Floyd Landis. Landis, who was supposed to take the reins from seven time Tour de France winner Lance Armstrong, won his first (and only) Tour de France in 2006 but was stripped of the title several months later after testing positive for synthetic testosterone. The cyclist maintained his innocence for four years before finally confessing on May 2010. His case is particularly interesting because Landis, like José Canseco did in Major League Baseball a few years ago, not only admitted taking performance-enhancing drugs but actually denounced an entire culture of cheating within the world of professional cycling. In his confession to ESPN.com, Landis said:

I don't feel guilty at all about having doped...I did what I did because that's what we [cyclists] did and it was a choice I had to make after 10 years or 12 years of hard work to get there, and that was a decision I had to make to make the next step. My choices were, do it and see if I can win, or don't do it and I tell people I just don't want to do that, and I decided to do it... The whole entire process of doping in the entire sport and the evolution of it all wasn't my fault, but when it came down to it, me being there, I made the decision to do it. It wasn't anyone else telling me to do it. I'm not blaming anyone for that. (Ford, 2010)

While many have denounced Landis as trying to put the blame elsewhere instead of accepting all the blame himself, it is important to understand that there are many factors that can drive an athlete to cheat. Professional athletes, specifically in countries like the United States of America where the “eat or be eaten” ethos seems to be embedded in the national discourse, are not above doing whatever it takes to survive. Professional sportspeople, more than many other professions, have to take into consideration that their careers are, normally, extremely short. Most professional athletes (especially in higher profile sports like hockey, baseball, football, boxing, basketball) finish their productive lives in sports before they turn 40 years old. Many of them do not have a backup career or the education necessary to find a skilled job, especially those who chose sports as an escape from poverty and crime ridden lives. Furthermore, if the problem is systemic as Landis and Canseco assert, then individual athletes may feel at a disadvantage if they do not participate in this culture of cheating; natural talent and hard work may not be enough if the playing field is not level. A good example of this trend is the Bob Goldman Dilemma. Chicago physician Bob Goldman created the following scenario for high-performance athletes:

A scenario, from a 1995 poll of 198 sprinters, swimmers, powerlifters and other assorted athletes, most of them U.S. Olympians or aspiring Olympians: You are offered a banned performance-enhancing substance, with two guarantees: 1) You will not be caught. 2) You will win. Would you take the substance?

One hundred and ninety-five athletes said yes; three said no.

Scenario II: You are offered a banned performance-enhancing substance that comes with two guarantees: 1) You will not be caught. 2) You will win every competition you enter for the next five years, and then you will die from the side effects of the substance. Would you take it?

More than half the athletes said yes. (Bamberger and Yaeger, 1997)

Additional evidence that athletes feel extra pressured by their industry came in 2009 when Connor and Mazanov tested the Goldman Dilemma on non-athletes. According to their results “[o]nly two of a sample of 250 reported they would take the bargain offered by the dilemma” (p. 871). Connor and Mazanov concluded that “[a]thletes differ markedly from the general population in response to the dilemma. This raises significant practical and ethical dilemmas for athlete support personnel” (p.871). From these studies, I suggest that many athletes are so invested in these matters that they choose their careers over their lives. That is the most serious consequence of all.

Sport and critical media literacy: Teaching young people about the politics of the game

The examples in this chapter demonstrate the political dimensions of sport and the real consequences these politics can have for the people involved in the culture of sport. From traditional governmental politics to politics of identity and economy, sport cannot, and should not, be separated from the ideological work that it does. Doing so is to perpetuate a culture where women have the short end of the stick when it comes to resources and men put their health and lives foolishly at risk for outdated notions of masculinity and/or for economic security or fame. Far from trying to keep sport “pure” and free from the influence of politics, educators need to bring these topics to the

forefront of discussions. Scholars in different disciplines have begun to do so, but I suggest that this is not enough. Educators could strive to take those discussions and bring them to the communities, the schools, and the spaces where people consume and participate in sport. As I argue in this dissertation, critical media literacy (CML) education could be an appropriate way to do so.

Wyatt and Silva (2007) explain the concept of CML:

Media education is not only about the analysis of messages but an awareness of why those messages are there. Therefore, the critical media education movement integrates textual analysis along with questions of production and reception... For critical media education scholars, the movement “is a way of extending democracy to a place where democracy is increasingly scripted and defined”... an understanding of both texts and the production of texts within sets of social and political relations... (p.4)

CML scholars believe in teaching students the political, social, and cultural ramifications of the media they consume on a daily basis. It is an explicitly political pedagogical approach that allows its adherents to look at the politics of its subjects of study. Another important feature of CML is that it encourages the democratization of both media and knowledge (p. 4). In other words, CML educators understand the value of teaching all citizens, not just those who attend universities, about the political, social and cultural contexts of the media messages that circulate daily. In my estimation, all of this makes CML the perfect approach for delving into political discussions of sport outside of the scope of university classrooms.

As an advocate of CML, and a firm believer that consumers of sport need to look at the games with a critical eye, I designed two research projects that bring together sports and critical media literacy. For the first project, I created a CML intervention where participants would choose a sport, a team or a sporting figure and create a tribute or highlight video for the subject they chose. Then, I planned to teach them key media literacy concepts so that they could critique their own videos. With this intervention I hoped to accomplish four things. First, I wanted to explore the feasibility of using sports as an object of analysis in media literacy programs. Second, I wanted to create a framework for other educators who may want to incorporate sports into their media literacy lessons. Third, I hoped to learn about the kind of knowledge students bring with them when they consume sports. Finally, I looked to see if my intervention engendered some kind of change in the students. Unfortunately, I was unable to finish this project. I experienced many setbacks that impeded my progress and decided to suspend it indefinitely.

Once I ended the first study, I took a step back and looked at my objectives and concluded that I needed to focus simply on one of these objectives. Even if I could not complete that first study at the moment, it is still something I will hopefully pursue in the future. Therefore, before I create any frameworks for other educators, I needed to know how students think about sports and how they consume sports. With this objective in mind, I created a second study. In this second study, I showed participants three sports clips, asked them some questions about the clips in a questionnaire and discussed the clips further with them in focus groups. With this study, I wanted to answer two main research questions: 1) “What type of knowledge do the participants have about the socio-

cultural, political and economic implications of sport in our societies?” and 2) Can the participants identify socio-political issues (e.g. gender, race, nationality, political economy) in media sport texts as they consume them?

In this dissertation I present both of these studies. I have placed my main focus on the project I finished, but I detail and explain the first project as well. In the second chapter, I present the theoretical underpinnings of critical media literacy, the debates that surround it, and my own positioning within these debates. Furthermore, I also explore the work of other scholars and practitioners who have addressed both media literacy and sports analysis. In the third chapter, I detail the first project entirely. I examine it from conception to its early termination. I focus, specifically, on the challenges that I faced throughout all the process. I also look at the important lessons I learned from this research attempt. In chapter four, I turn my attention to the second study and its methods. I explain the rationale for choosing questionnaires and focus groups and I detail the process of recruitment, execution and analysis of data. In the fifth chapter, I answer my two research questions. I present all my findings and prepare the way for the last chapter. In the sixth and final chapter of this dissertation, I discuss my findings and its implications. I look at the trends I found and their meanings. Furthermore, I also tie in the lessons I learned from both studies and their meaning to the overall field of critical media literacy. Finally, I provide some future directions for other researchers.

Chapter 2 – Literature review

My position regarding media literacy education is not free from challenges. These assumptions come from a particular approach of media literacy that is part of a larger debate. While there may have been indicators in the previous pages about my own positioning within this debate, I will use this chapter to outline the main approaches to media literacy and clearly locate my research projects within one of those approaches. In this chapter, I will provide the theoretical foundations of these studies and present the main arguments for and against this type of approach. I will also place the studies within the more specific research on media literacy and sports.

Foundations

Media literacy has developed as a discipline in the last 25-30 years and it borrowed heavily from other areas, such as cultural studies, feminist studies, and political economy, on its way to becoming a separate field of research (and action). Contemporary ML can be traced to early work by academics that referred to the field simply as “media education”. British educator Len Masterman (1990) was one of the first scholars to create a general set of guidelines to shape the process of media education. These guidelines, known simply as the Eighteen Basic Principles of Media Education, laid down the foundation for what it is now known in North America as media literacy. Researchers in Australia, Canada and the United States adapted these principles to fit the growing needs of the field in these particular countries (Hobbs, 1998). Out of these eighteen principles, one stands out: “The central unifying concept of Media Education is that of representation. The media mediate. They do not reflect reality but re-present it... Without

this principle no media education is possible. From it, all else flows” (Masterman, 1990, p.1). These proved to be prophetic words by Masterman. In the Media Literacy National Leadership Conference of 1993, educators created five basic concepts that would guide media literacy in the United States and three of them are directly related to Masterman’s basic principle¹⁶. The eight basic Canadian concepts of media literacy follow this same pattern. At least five of those eight are directly related to the construction and representation of the media¹⁷.

While these principles provide a manner of common ground amongst the practitioners and researchers of media literacy, in reality there are epistemological and ideological differences that shape the diverse views of the practice and research of media literacy. These differences have led to different approaches to media literacy education. Kellner and Share (2007) identify four main approaches that place emphasis on distinct areas of media literacy education.

Before I survey these four approaches, I would like to point out that even though there are several good accounts of the split in the media literacy movement, Kellner and Share’s account is, in my opinion, the most useful one for my purposes in this chapter. Many other accounts divide the field into two main camps and do not really discuss the more conservative or less political approaches. As I will show later in this chapter, the approach I favour contains elements from the other three approaches Kellner and Share

¹⁶ 1) media messages are constructed, 2) media messages are produced within economic, social, political, historical and aesthetic contexts, 3) the interpretative meaning-making processes involved in message reception consists of an interaction between the reader, the text and the culture, 4) media have unique 'languages,' characteristics which typify various forms, genres and symbol systems of communication, and 5) media representations play a role in people's understanding of social reality (cited in Hobbs, 1998)

¹⁷ 1) All media are construction, 2) The media construct reality, 3) Audiences negotiate meaning in the media, 4) Media contain ideological and value messages, 5) Media have social and political implications, 6) Media have commercial implications, 7) Form and content are closely related in the media, and 8) Each medium has a unique aesthetic form (cited in Duncan et al, 1989)

mention. Furthermore, Kellner and Share are really two of the main figures of the Critical media literacy movement. Therefore, I ask for the reader's indulgence in this next section while I describe these approaches borrowing from Kellner and Share's analysis.

The first approach they explore is the "protectionist approach" (p. 6). This approach "...aims to protect or inoculate people against the dangers of media manipulation and addiction... [it] posits media audiences as passive victims and values traditional print culture over media culture..." (p.6). Educators who subscribe to this view of media literacy, see the mass media as inherently evil and as the cause of many societal problems.

A second approach Kellner and Share mention is "media arts education". In this approach, students are "taught to value the aesthetic qualities of media and the arts while using their creativity for self-expression through creating art and media" (p.7). The emphasis in this approach is the self-expression and the identity of the individual over the collective.

The media literacy movement in the United States represents the third approach, "conventional [or traditional] media literacy". The media literacy movement works to provide students with the tools to "access, analyze, evaluate and communicate" and to expand the concept of literacy to include multiple forms of media (p. 7).

Finally, the fourth approach Kellner and Share outline is "critical media literacy". According to the authors, critical media literacy

...includes aspects of the three previous models, but focuses on ideology critique and analyzing the politics of representation of crucial dimensions of gender, race, class, and sexuality; incorporating alternative media production; and expanding

textual analysis to include issues of social context, control, and pleasure...Critical media literacy thus constitutes a critique of mainstream approaches to media literacy and a political project for democratic social change.

This is the approach to which I subscribe because it includes aspects of the three previous models but discards other aspects which it considers problematic. For instance, critical media literacy educators do not view the mass media as inherently evil. They see it as a space that necessitates questioning but that can also serve to educate and produce pleasure (Zanker, 2007). Also, CML scholars are wary of approaches like the media arts approach that can lead to what Masterman (1985) calls the “technicist trap” (Cited in Jhally and Lewis, 1997, p. 26). The trap, according to him, is when media literacy becomes just a means of teaching students to use the technical tools for their own individualistic self-expression without any conscious critical analysis. It becomes technology for technology’s sake. Finally, CML scholars eschew approaches like conventional media literacy that insist on “political neutrality” (Ferguson, 1998). I will discuss this last point at length in the next section, but it is important to understand that the objectives, research questions, and the general positioning of this study are purposefully political. In this study, as I will demonstrate in the following chapters, I want to find out whether students have the skills and the knowledge to access, analyze and evaluate media sports. But I also want to discover whether these students can resist or critique the underlying problematic notions of sexism, racism, nationalism and neo-liberalism present in the construction of sports. Of course, these postulates can be challenged as well. For instance, National Association for Media Literacy Education

(NAMLE) leading figures Renee Hobbs and Amy Jensen (2009) have said about educators who practice critical media literacy:

There are media literacy educators who push their political agendas onto students, offering their critique of capitalism as gospel and orchestrating student ‘voice’ in a mandated form of ‘service learning’, coercively enrolling students into a political action project, telling them what to think instead of encouraging them to think for themselves. (p.4)

The main fissure between conventional and critical is the conception of education as a political or apolitical endeavour. This is an important point of contention that I will develop further. Before exploring the split however, I want to address the critical pedagogy roots of both conventional and critical and map the cause of the split.

Paulo Freire and critical pedagogy

Media literacy is influenced by the work of progressive educators like Paulo Freire. Though the field is also influenced by other important academic schools (Cultural Studies, Feminist and Gender Studies, Audience Studies, among others), the libertarian education of Paulo Freire constitutes the main structure behind media literacy.

In the foundational *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire lays out what he calls “libertarian” (p.54) or “problem-posing” education (p.78). He counterpoises this type of education to what he terms the “banking” concept of education (p.72). In the banking mode, a teacher deposits knowledge into a student and the student “patiently receive[s], memorize[s], and repeat[s]” (p.72). This concept recreates hierarchies and imbalances of power; the teacher is all powerful and all knowing, and the student is ignorant and empty,

waiting to be filled with the knowledge of the master. Freire sees this type of education as an oppressive form that devalues the student and negates his/her knowledge and human potential. Freire says:

The capability of banking education to minimize or annul the students' creative power and to stimulate their credulity serves the interests of the oppressors, who care neither to have the world revealed nor to see it transformed... Indeed, the interests of the oppressors lie in "changing the consciousness of the oppressed, not the situation which oppresses them"; for the more the oppressed can be led to adapt to that situation, the more easily they can be dominated. (p.73-74)

Though certain sectors will probably be wary of the dichotomization of people into oppressed and oppressors (scholars who adhere to a conception of power as multidirectional and fluid, for example), the notion of empowerment present in Freire's support for a more liberating pedagogy remains vital for advocates of CML.

On the other hand, Freire presents a problem-posing education. He argues that people who are truly committed to the cause of liberation "must abandon the educational goal of deposit-making and replace it with the posing of problems of human beings in their relations with the world" (p.79). This call to problematize the relationships between humans and their environment is the main thrust behind critical pedagogy. It is a call to understand that the information people receive constantly is not unproblematic, that it is constructed, that it has meanings, and that it is ideologically charged. Freire continues, "Liberating education consists in acts of cognition, not transferrals of information. It is a learning situation in which the cognizable object (far from being the end of the cognitive act) intermediates the cognitive actors – teacher on the one hand and the students on the

other” (p.79). In media literacy, that cognizable object becomes the media product itself. The media object serves as the starting point for the dialogical relations that occur between the participants in a media literacy program. Ideally, students and teachers work together in deconstructing the meanings and values of these objects and in solving (or working through) the problems that arise with that deconstruction.

But these are not mere extrapolations of Freire’s work. Freire himself explicitly advocated an incorporation of media within problem posing education. While he explains the methodological details of this educational program he writes, “after the thematics has [sic] been codified, the didactic material (*photographs, slides, film strips, posters, reading texts, and so forth*) is prepared” [Emphasis added] (p.121). Later, he proposes,

Another didactic resource ... is the reading and discussion of magazine articles, newspapers and book chapters... This practice helps develop a sense of criticism, so that people will react to newspapers or news broadcasts not as passive objects of the “communiqués” directed at them, but rather as consciousness seeking to be free. (p.122-123)

It is this emphasis on using media as a didactic resource that has made Freire so influential in the formation of both conventional and critical media literacy. However, Freire also believes in this type of education as a political project, and this, I think, is where critical and conventional part ways. Conventional media literacy educators believe that education should be politically neutral. Critical pedagogues like Freire do not.

Carlos Alberto Torres (2007) has said that Freire’s main objective was to address a fundamental “dilemma of democracy: the constitution of democratic citizenship” (p.

242). It follows then, that he directed his pedagogical approach at an integral education of citizens. As Torres says,

The notion of democracy entails the notion of a democratic citizenship in which agents are *active participants in the democratic process...* These are not only political but also pedagogical practices because the construction of the democratic citizen implies the construction of a pedagogic subject. Individuals are not, by nature, ready to participate in politics. They have to be educated in democratic politics in a number of ways, including normative grounding, ethical behaviour, knowledge of the democratic process, and technical performance. (p. 243)

[Emphasis in the original]

This is how critical pedagogy becomes a political project. It is not simply about educating for technical performance, but also about understanding the political world in which we live and in which we are supposed to partake.

Part of this education, which Torres calls a “Freirean approach” (p.243) to transformative social justice learning, is understanding language (visual, textual, oral) and how language can both oppress and liberate. Torres comments that “language works through narratives and narrations, themselves the products of individuals and institutions” (p.244) and these narratives and narrations constitute the structures and systems of power in society. These structures have the power to oppress but also to liberate human agency. They can only be liberating however if the “conditions of alienation and exploitation in society” (p. 244) are unveiled using a critical and transformative pedagogy.

The premise of critical pedagogy is the notion that if educators do not unveil the current conditions of oppression in society, then education becomes a part of that oppression. Henry Giroux (2003) explains:

Within the discourse of neo-liberalism¹⁸, issues regarding schooling and social justice, persistent poverty, inadequate health care, racial apartheid in the inner cities, and the growing inequalities between the rich and the poor have either been *removed from the inventory of public discourse* and public policy or factored into talk show spectacles that highlight private woes bearing little relationship either to public life or to potential remedies that demand collective action (p.8).

If educators do not bring these issues to the forefront in the classroom, then they are accomplices in the silencing of these already marginalized voices. Furthermore, educators also fail to provide students with an alternative discourse that allows them to view the world differently. This means that students will only receive hegemonic discourses which, according to critical pedagogues including Giroux, are part of the corporate culture. Giroux writes,

Schools are no longer considered a public good but a private good and the only form of citizenship increasingly being offered to young people is consumerism. More than ever, the crisis of schooling represents, at large, the crisis of democracy itself and any attempt to understand the attack on public schooling and higher education cannot be separated from the wider assault on all forms of public life not driven by the logic of the market. (p.7)

¹⁸ A resurgence of economic and political beliefs associated with classical liberalism of the early 19th century. Aspects of this philosophy include: acceptance of an unregulated market economy; a minimal role for government; suspicion toward the welfare state; a view of citizens as motivated only by self-interest; a commitment to the central value of individualism. (Drislane and Parkinson, n.d.)

Giroux also makes it clear that it is important for educators not to equate democracy with capitalism or neo-liberalism. When educators do this, students are left with the impression that democracy is incompatible with other economic systems and other forms of wealth distribution.

Finally, even though Giroux is explicitly political and radical, he understands, as Freire did before him, that educators should not become propagandists. Giroux explains that even though a class and system analysis needs to be at the forefront of critical pedagogy, it cannot exclude other important issues of oppression. He writes,

...while class analysis should always be a crucial part of studying how oppression works in schools, they should not take place at the expense of analyses of other forms of domination rooted in racism, sexism, and homophobia. In addition, educators need to be clear without being doctrinaire, about the political project through which we give meaning to our roles as teachers and the purpose of schooling itself (pp.8-9).

As certain postmodern scholars¹⁹ have pointed out, approaches that focus solely on class and economy tend to gloss over or miss many other important sources of oppression including those that Giroux mentions above. However, he heeds the warning of those critics and understands that oppression does not come solely from one place. It is the responsibility of critical pedagogues to take their students on a journey to discover any and all sources of oppression, even those that educators themselves may be a part of.

As I have explained throughout this section, Freireian critical pedagogy is really the basis for the critical media literacy approach. Critical media literacy educators utilize

¹⁹ For a good review of postmodern concerns that Marxists and radicals should include in their critiques see Dyer-Witford (1999), especially Chapter 7.

media to unveil the “conditions of alienation and exploitation” that worry critical pedagogues. They dissect the language of the media (in various manifestations) to bring important discussions into the classrooms. Of course, there is another camp that feels that this approach is problematic and that educators who pursue this approach push their own agendas onto the students. This is the main debate within the media literacy movement but it is by no means its only one. In order to understand the positioning of my own project, I think it is necessary to explore this and other debates further.

The great debates

In “The Seven Great Debates in the Media Literacy Movement”, Hobbs (1998) poses seven questions that represent the main divisions in the field of media literacy. I will address some of these questions here in order to better situate my research. I have already mentioned the main point of contention: “Should media literacy have a more explicit political and ideological agenda?” (p.22) asks Hobbs. The sides in this debate do not necessarily correspond to traditional Left and Right politics. There are progressive scholars who view ML as part of a political project “that links the creation of critical citizens to the development of a radical democracy” (Aronowitz & Giroux cited in Hobbs, 1998, p. 22). There are also conservative scholars who view ML as a way to combat the so-called liberal biases of the press, as a way to promote individualism, as a way to teach “values” and “moral issues” or as an alternative to “excessive” government regulation of media conglomerates (Tauzin, 1997 and Lemish & Lemish, 1997 cited in Hobbs, 1998, p. 23). On the other side, there are scholars of both persuasions who agree that an explicit and political agenda amounts to nothing more than propaganda.

My study rests firmly within the tradition of critical media literacy. Here I try to find out if the students have the skills and knowledge to interpret media messages in sports broadcasts, but I also look to see if they can resist and subvert these messages. The idea for this project came from my own understanding that television sports broadcasts reproduce many problematic assumptions and discourses that serve to oppress many different types of people. Nonetheless, as a future educator, I understand the apprehensions posited by adherents to traditional (conventional) media literacy (TML).

There are several warnings that practically all CML projects need to take into consideration. First, traditional media literacy educators are concerned that an explicitly political approach to media literacy becomes propagandist and students will be the injured party in this process. David Buckingham (1993), for instance, says:

Students may respond to the propagandist approach of...teachers in one of two ways. Either they will choose to play the game in which case they may learn to reproduce the 'politically correct' responses without necessarily investigating or questioning their own position. Or they will refuse to do so, in which case they will say things they may or may not believe, in order to annoy the teacher and thereby amuse themselves. (Cited in Hobbs, 1998, p. 22)

Secondly, TML educators also caution CML proponents against selecting media texts that exclusively serve their political purposes. Faith Rogow (2009) comments:

...specific recommendations for how one creates critical thinkers, including a reminder to require students to apply critical thinking skills to all media (*and not just those that the teacher doesn't like*), a caution not to let the presentation of

works by media critics supplant training students to think for themselves...

[Emphasis added] (p. 72)

And thirdly, TML scholars also fear that discussions in critical media literacy might feature single and dominant voices. Paul Mihailidis (2009) notes that “While such ideas and opinions [openly radical] should be part of any discussion on media relevance and news selection, they should not be the dominant and lone point of a discussion on the media’s relevance to society” (p. 58).

CML educators cannot dismiss these genuine concerns simply as the product of a difference in ideological positions. These warnings serve a purpose for those who believe in the CML proposition: it requires keeping biases in check and promoting transparency in the classroom. Giroux’s (1994) notion of “emancipatory authority” can assuage some of those fears Buckingham and Mihailidis present:

And what we often find is that people on the Left who are progressive often believe that the only route to progressive pedagogical action lies in giving up authority. Of course, my argument is that to give up authority is to renounce the responsibility of politics, struggle, and commitment as educational projects.

(p.162)

Here Giroux argues that it is not about giving up authority at all, but rather assuming the responsibility for creating the conditions in which students might be able to theorize, assess their relationships to the world in a critical manner, and negotiate the contradictions in their lives. Furthermore, it is also about rendering the authority one has as a teacher visible as an ethical, political, and social construct so that it will not be taken for granted (by the students or by the teacher him/herself) and seen as unquestionable like

in the banking concept of education (p.162-163). The educator opens his/her authority up as fair game for questioning (p. 162-163). It is not about hiding one's own ideological leanings, but rather the complete opposite: laying them out and letting students know that these are also social constructs.

If the educator truly believes in liberation pedagogy, he or she will be transparent in his/her role in the classroom like Giroux mentions. However, this does not mean that he or she will forfeit the opportunities to present students with alternative visions to the hegemonic discourses that students consume everywhere they go. And this is really the crux of the matter: alternative discourses are not consistently present in education. Giroux (2003) voices his concerns as well,

We should remind ourselves in this time of rapacious capitalist mergers and downsizing that market-driven knowledge should not be the only discourse that schools offer to young people, that citizenship is not an entirely privatized affair, and that capitalism and democracy are not the same thing (p. 12).

Seen through this optic, pursuing neutrality is also a political decision: not providing students with alternatives to what they consume on a daily basis and thus letting them continue consuming just one side of the equation. Pursuing neutrality not only works *against* the forces that are trying to stop oppression and prejudice but might actually work inadvertently *for* the oppressive forces.

Presenting alternative world views and not yielding to political neutrality is especially important when discussing the media in our media saturated world. Silverblatt (2004) comments that the media is now a social institution that fulfills many functions that were usually the responsibility of traditional institutions like the family, the church

and the school (p. 39). If the media now fulfills this role, then educators need to make sure that students have the opportunity to resist the hegemonic constructions that circulate constantly in the media. The main issue here is that the media often serve to create and maintain problematic myths that help to socialize people with oppressive views. For instance, Torres and Mercado (2006) identified four main myths that serve these purposes:

The myth of ideological diversity in mainstream media, when actually there are merely slight variations of the same underlying ideology... The myth of objectivity by claiming and adherence to the ‘facts’... The myth of political neutrality by avoiding taking an overt stance, and by assuming that if one is not dealing with controversial issues, or one is only dealing with facts, one is apolitical. The myth of balanced information: On a given issue, when alternative views to the mainstream ones are brought up, many people think that a certain ideal type of balance has been broken... However, when corporate media ignore completely the alternative views of a given story, those same people do not notice their absence (p.543).

Torres and Mercado here echo Giroux’s words: the default knowledge people receive from these institutions is knowledge that serves certain interests that continuously oppress people. If educators commit to an education that serves a liberation purpose, then it is imperative that they actively present students with alternative views that they may not otherwise see or find: views that will challenge the oppression and domination.

The notion of emancipatory authority should also assuage Rogow’s concern that some educators might “stack the deck”. Basically, educators who believe in a Critical

media literacy geared towards liberation should always be transparent in their dealings. Nonetheless, theory might not always work out as well in practice. Rashmi Luthra (2007) provides some practical advice that may help in curbing these potential biases that Rogow and others fear. Luthra comments on her own experience in the classroom that she includes many opportunities for her students to apply the theories and methodologies she teaches for themselves (p. 204). She writes, “[b]y doing this, I’m communicating...that they don’t have to take my word for any of this; they can try out the glove for themselves and see if it fits” (p.204). Luthra also provides concrete examples of how she manages this in her classroom. She notes,

...students conduct an original analysis of advertising after they’ve grappled with the basic principles of political economy, the Frankfurt school, cultural studies, feminism, and postmodernism as applied to the context of culture and communication. Last semester they also had the extra credit option of creating a subvertisement and explaining in what sense their practice was resistive. (p.205)

Luthra demonstrates how CML can work in the classroom without becoming propagandist. On one hand, she exposes the students to concepts they will probably not find out in mainstream media or traditional pedagogy. She shows them that there are other alternatives to the hegemonic discourses by presenting them with the concepts from these disciplines she mentions. However, she does not negate the opportunity to contest and resist these alternatives. She allows them the space and the freedom to 1) choose any piece of media they desire (not just the ones she wants to show them) and 2) to create their own media production and put their own stamp on things.

I understand the concerns outlined by educators who adhere to traditional media literacy. Students might be less receptive if they perceive that the teacher is trying to force his/her own ideological views on them. Rather than openly asking students to embrace progressive social values, I prefer to create a space they can question assumptions, authority and traditional values. I cannot guarantee how students will make their decisions, but I can strive to give them the opportunity to view things in a different light and make well-informed decisions. As Giroux said, educators must take responsibility for creating the conditions in which students might be able to theorize, assess their relationships to the world in a critical manner, and negotiate the contradictions in their lives (p.162).

In the end, however, I gravitate towards a critical media literacy that views ML as a political project focused on creating socially active and thoughtful citizens. Media literacy programs cannot become simply a “safe space” where people go to talk freely, without direction, about the media. As Kathleen Berry (2007) writes, “The age of liberal pluralism, a construction of the modern era, where ‘anything goes’ and everyone’s individual opinion is heard yet left as a mere opinion, is not applying a critical analysis of media texts, whether single or multiple” (p. 690). The underlying project of ML (questioning the assumptions and myths (re)produced by the media) does not permit it.

Some TML scholars (e.g. Hobbs and Buckingham) think media literacy is primarily about creating this safe space where students can feel free to express themselves. But what good is this safe space if there is no action to follow it? If there is no change? Lewis and Jhally (1998) question this approach: “We argue that such avoidance of thorny political territory sidesteps widespread citizen concerns and misses

an opportunity to demonstrate the valence and necessity of not merely understanding the world, but of changing it” (p. 1). Masterman (1997) backs Lewis and Jhally in this argument:

The democratization of institutions, and the long march toward a truly participatory democracy, will be highly dependent upon the ability of majorities of citizens to take control, become effective change agents, make rational decisions (often on the basis of media evidence) and to communicate effectively perhaps through an active involvement with the media. (Cited in Lewis and Jhally, 1998, p.1)

Of course, I maintain that it is important not to fall into the propagandist trap. My goal, as a teacher and an authority figure, should not be to create ideological carbon copies of myself. What I can do is encourage participants to be informed, to deconstruct and to take action if they feel something needs changing. That way I do not sidestep the “thorny political territory”, but I avoid, at the same time, becoming a walking propaganda leaflet.

Another one of the great debates discussed by Hobbs is whether ML should strive to protect children and young people from negative media influence (p.18). According to her own account of the two camps, my study falls on the side of those educators who answer “yes” to that particular question. I think this needs some clarification considering CML is wary of the “protectionist approach”.

I should mention that while critical media literacy distances itself from the protectionist approach to media literacy, Kellner and Share also comment that CML “includes aspects of the three previous models” (p.8), including the protectionist model. Second, I would like to clarify that CML proponents do not see the media as the root of

all evil as most protectionists do. CML educators are concerned with the lack of alternative discourses in mainstream media. These worries are consistent with the position I explain above. Hobbs, for instance, mentions some of the issues that preoccupy those who adhere to a liberation education program: “confronting issues of race, class, and gender inequalities”, “improving attitudes towards democracy, citizenship, and political participation” and “inspiring awareness of materialism and the commodification of culture” (p. 19). Essentially, CML educators want to ensure children and young people will be exposed to other world views and will not be subject only to dominant discourses.

Scholars and educators who side with this stance believe that ML is a way to provide citizens with multiple tools to deconstruct the constant barrage of messages they receive from the mass media. As James Potter (2004) said in his *Theory of Media Literacy*, people are constantly exposed to media messages whether they are conscious of the influences or not. People have different degrees of awareness and it is precisely these differences in awareness that can have an impact in the amount of control the media have over people’s thought processes. In order to increase alertness and elevate the degree of media literacy, people require certain tools that they cannot always acquire by themselves. According to Potter, a person must have sophisticated “knowledge structures”²⁰ in five areas: media content, media industries, media effects, real world information, and the self (p.75). To acquire these knowledge structures, however, the

²⁰ Potter defines “knowledge structures” as different from what he terms “schema”. He says, “The differences between the two are in how people construct them and how the information is organized in them. Schemas are constructed quickly and efficiently by linking a pair of elements...In contrast, knowledge structures are carefully constructed in a conscious and systematic manner. Their goals are accuracy and utility rather than efficiency” (p.54).

person must have highly developed “skills”²¹ that permit him/her to obtain knowledge and filter information consciously and construct meaning responsibly (p. 117). Finally, the subject must have a strong “personal locus”²². Put another way, he/she must know how to use these tools (p.97). Educators who champion this stance believe that people are not born with these knowledge structures and that even though they may have certain innate skills, those skills need development. Only by acquiring these knowledge structures and refining and developing these skills will people be able to make responsible and informed decisions and negotiations regarding the media content they receive on a daily basis.

According to the opponents of this perspective, “[m]any teachers at both the K12 and university levels have found that students are unresponsive to the idea that they are helpless victims of media influence who need to be rescued from the excesses and evils of their interest in popular culture” (Hobbs, p. 19). Moreover, there is also the preoccupation that this stance may lead back to the “banking concept of education”. Finally, David Buckingham (1998) argues that by focusing on the “evils” of media protectionists ignore the genuine pleasure that people experience when they consume media products.

As a scholar I understand and agree with these criticisms even though I situate my project on the side of those who view ML as a vehicle for empowering citizens to make informed and responsible choices regarding the material they receive from the media.

First of all, I want to be clear and say that the purpose of ML programs is not to enter into

²¹ Skills he defines as “tools that people develop through practice...people’s skill ability can be plotted along a wide continuum...The skills most relevant to media literacy are analysis, evaluation, grouping, induction, deduction, synthesis, and abstraction” (p.55).

²² According to Potter, the personal locus refers to “the place in a person’s mind where decisions get made about information processing tasks” (p.97).

a debate on high culture/low culture or to demonize the media as the root of all evil. After all, I am not only a scholar, but I am also a sports fan and an avid consumer of media sports. Rather, the purpose is to create a conversation about certain problematic representations, constructions and myths perpetuated in and by the media as “normal” or common-sense. This does not mean the end of pleasure or the end of enjoyment, but rather the beginning of a new, more informed and contextualized viewing. In fact, critical media scholars Donna Alvermann and Margaret Hagood (2000) also share Buckingham’s concern:

An important premise in teaching critical media literacy is that teachers focus on respecting the pleasures adolescents experience as fans while simultaneously engaging them in a deeper understanding (through various reading, writing, speaking, and listening activities) of what it means to be a fan of a certain person, group or object (p. 437).

Alvermann and Hagood point towards a more sophisticated understanding of what it means to be a fan. They argue that being a fan cannot blind audience members to the sometimes problematic connotations that come with those things they enjoy. However, they also acknowledge that this does not mean that people simply stop watching or consuming, but rather that they become better equipped to enter into a about problematic representations.

Second of all, it is very important to avoid looking at students as “empty vessels” waiting to be filled with the information presented to them. Freire tackles this problem himself in his description of the liberating pedagogy. As mentioned earlier, and worth reiterating here, Freire writes,

Liberating education consists in acts of cognition, not transferrals of information. It is a learning situation in which the cognizable object (far from being the end of the cognitive act) intermediates the cognitive actors – teacher on the one hand and the students on the other. (p.79)

Furthermore, Freire also writes about the role of the teacher:

Through dialogue, the teacher-of-the-students and the students-of-the-teacher cease to exist and a new term emerges: teacher-student with student-teachers. The teacher is no longer merely the-one-who-teaches, but one who is himself taught in dialogue with the students, who in turn while being taught also teach. (p.80)

These two passages constitute a warning to any educator who wishes to participate in liberating pedagogy. In order to avoid the pitfalls of thinking that the people who participate in ML programs are there just to receive knowledge from the teachers, teachers should shift their focus from “information transferral” to “information sharing”. In “information transferral”, the information moves unidirectionally from one vessel to another. In “information sharing”, the information circulates back and forth amongst the vessels. Teachers, instructors, or educators cannot let themselves think that they have a monopoly on the “Truth”. They possess knowledge that has been acquired through years of study and needs to be shared. Nonetheless, the students or other participants in the program or class also possess knowledge that educators lack and need. It has to be clear, both in theory and in praxis, that this is an education process and all are simultaneously students and teachers.

This is not to say however, that the two types of knowledge are the same. As a CML educator, I must acknowledge that not everybody is familiar with the concepts and

language of political economy, of feminist or gender studies, of race studies, and so on. I also have to acknowledge that sometimes I lack the proper knowledge or information to reach students and that no one can demonstrate this better than the students themselves. Finally, I have to accept that these knowledges are different and their acquisition helps in doing different things. Learning the concepts and language of media studies, for example, can lead to heightened knowledge structures, more developed skills and a more informed and responsible personal locus. Learning how people enjoy, negotiate and respond to media messages might help further understanding of media pedagogy and teaching popular culture without demonizing it. This is the only way in which this conversation can move out of the academic sphere without being paternalistic and condescending.

There are other important debates in the field of media literacy. Nonetheless, I have chosen to focus and discuss these two because they allow me to situate this study within one of the sides of these debates. These are the two most pertinent questions regarding my own work here. Other debates such as the appropriate place (within the confines of school or in afterschool programs?), the appropriate vehicle (a media literacy course or integrated with other courses?) or whether media production should be a part of media literacy education were pertinent questions in the previous incarnation of this project, as will become apparent in the next chapter, but are not really applicable now.

In this first section, I explained how my project fits within some of these larger and more general debates in the media literacy field. Of course, there is also a very specific area of concern in this project: media literacy and sports. Has there been much work done in this area? If any work has been done, what has been the focus thus far and how does my project fit in this panorama? I will answer these questions next.

Media sports and media literacy

I am not the first one to realize the potential of sport for ML programs, but I will show that only a few scholars and media educators have explored this link further and that this work has important limitations. Alvermann, Huddleston and Hagood (2004), for instance, used professional sport as a way into the broader realm of critical education and media literacy. Although Alvermann *et al* subscribe to CML, their incursion into the world of sports and media literacy has a more limited conception of literacy that focuses on how to use media sports to help children with traditional book-based literacy. This is likely a product of the fact that their priority in the study is not sport itself as an object but rather as a vehicle towards helping kids learn to be better readers. In the article they write: “Donna and Margaret’s lack of familiarity with the Discourse [sic] of professional wrestling made thinking up potentially rich connections between it and school-sanctioned literacies difficult” (p.537). In fact, the connection to professional wrestling was brought up by the subject’s interests, not the researchers’ (p.533).

The Media Awareness Network of Canada (2010) has also created a few lesson plans for teachers regarding sport. However, the scope in these plans is limited to advertising and alcoholism. I see the same limitations in James Potter’s chapter on sports in his book *Media Literacy*. Potter (2010) dedicates an entire chapter to the discussion of sports in media literacy. But Potter seems to be concerned exclusively with the political economy of the sports conglomerates. These two purely prescriptive texts exclude race, gender, nationality and sexuality completely.

There is one program in Oakland, California that tries to get youths to dissect controversial topics in sports. According to the Media Education Lab's²³ web site, "This new program engages young men of color in critical inquiry and reflection around a number of controversial topics in sports. The program uses principles of media literacy to address specific health-related issues with young men of color, including relationships, body image and sexuality" (para. 3).

Even though I agree with the intentions of the creators of this program, the program has a few limitations that affect its potential impact. First, it is completely closed off to girls and women. Though the creators argue that this is to make the young men open up and feel more comfortable, this is a serious restriction especially when they try to discuss gender roles (which, according to Johnson and Sakamoto, is something they do on a weekly basis). For instance, their discussions on the murder of boxer Vernon Forrest and whether hypermasculinity played a role in his untimely death, questions certain assumptions about masculinity but leaves others unchecked²⁴. Second, their main focus is to provide a "safe space" where young men can feel free to express themselves and talk. Though this is certainly a noble and important goal in and of itself, I have already discussed the drawbacks of this approach in the previous section. There has to be a serious and systematic attempt to question myths and stereotypes (re)produced in the discourse of these participants. Perhaps this was the product of the lack of training

²³ Erik Sakamoto and Patrick Johnson, coordinators of the program, participated in a one day workshop sponsored by the Media Education Lab which at the time resided in Temple University in Philadelphia, PA. I was present at this workshop. The Media Education Lab is now located at the University of Rhode Island.

²⁴ They analyze the construct of "courage" as a male quality and though they mostly demystify it, other assumptions like the patriarchal notion that is the responsibility of the man to "protect his family" are left untouched. Traditional family values and patriarchy permeate the thought process of the participants and the leaders do not really engage these constructs. This was evident from the example discussion in the room and the audio examples they brought from their participants in Oakland.

Johnson and Sakamoto have in feminist, gender or cultural studies²⁵ or maybe they have consciously decided to not make it their priority²⁶. Either way, this omission limits the program.

In my estimation, the most interesting and pertinent research on the topic is not being done within the media literacy field. The examples that I will discuss next come from the fields of kinesiology and pedagogy. Jan Wright (2004), in her work on pedagogy, has provided a framework for other educators to use media sports texts in their classrooms. Her point of departure is very close to my own. She says,

In general, however, sport and other forms of institutionalised physical activity (such as dance, aerobics, adventure education) tend to be more conservative institutions where stereotypes are reproduced rather than challenged. This is particularly the case in media coverage of sport, although again the possibilities for challenging dominant social values still remain. (p. 183)

She presents and discusses several exercises she does with her students so that other educators might adopt or adapt them to their own classrooms. These exercises include asking the students to collect quantitative data about media sports coverage (p. 187) semiotic analysis of images and story construction in newspapers, and employ discourse analysis of the texts. Though she does present a specific example of these exercises using actual students, she focuses mostly on the text rather than on the students' interpretations and development of media literacy skills. The chapter is more oriented to the process of teaching in the classroom.

²⁵ Sakamoto stated that he possesses a B.A. in Psychology and Johnson has a B.A. in broadcasting.

²⁶ This is within the realm of possibility especially considering that Johnson and Sakamoto were brought in by NAMLE.

Millington and Wilson (2010), on the other hand, have done research that focuses specifically on how youth consume, interpret, and negotiate the meanings of particular sports images. As in Wright's case, Millington and Wilson's motivation for conducting this research is very similar to my own. They explain, "The key rationale for conducting this research is that few studies have considered empirically how youth interpret and use media images of gender – a notable gap in the literature considering the wealth of studies examining how gender is depicted in the media" (p. 1670). In this investigation, the authors use three complementary methods (interviews, focus groups and naturalistic observation) to see how male students consume and interpret images of masculinity and then compare it with how they perform their own masculinities. The first part of their study is similar in structure to my own research: They conducted sessions with high school students, showed them a video montage, and then engaged them in a discussion about the images. In the second part, they follow the subjects for three months and observe them in their physical education courses to compare and contrast the students' discourses regarding masculinity with how they performed that masculinity in those courses. In their results, they found that

Although the students decoded media texts in somewhat contradictory ways, they nonetheless displayed a sophisticated ability to be critical of hegemonic masculinities prominent on television and in movies. Their critiques, however, were limited to their immediate experiences, as the boys played a role in constructing an inequitable PE culture that favoured strong, aggressive, and competitive masculinities, while marginalizing many male and female students. (p. 1685)

Millington and Wilson conclude that the students they researched did have good media literacy skills, but they were unable to bring that critique into their own performance of masculinity because of other factors that are not really pertinent here. What is important, though, is the fact that they found their students able to critique hegemonic masculinities while watching the images presented to them. Here is where their research differs from mine. The video montage the authors made for the students contained dichotomized and exaggerated representations of masculinities. In a personal correspondence with Brad Millington, he clarifies this point:

To answer your question, I would say yes, many of the images we showed were not subtle in their depiction of masculinity. A number of them showed male characters as physically empowered, such as men in action films or combat sports (e.g., a hockey fight, or the build-up to a mixed martial arts fight). Though these are somewhat exaggerated gender portrayals, we selected them because much of the literature we were working with described them as hegemonic and as constructed for young males specifically (e.g., Messner's research on the Televised Sports Manhood Formula). We did, however, insert a few clips that could be described as 'alternative' or 'atypical', such as portrayals of men partaking in domestic chores or talking about the importance of charitable work.

(Millington, personal correspondence)

For their purpose, this was probably the most effective way to compare and contrast what the students said and how the students acted. Nonetheless, for my own research this would not work. As I will explain later in the methods section, I purposefully looked for images that had no overt indications of political problems. The main objective of my

research is to find out if young people are equipped with the appropriate tools to understand, interpret, and negotiate the everyday images that they receive while consuming sports, and while some of those images are, indeed, exaggerated and overt, there are many more that seem natural.

Furthermore, Millington and Wilson's research project focuses solely on masculinity. Again, for my own purposes, this does not work. Traditional and hegemonic masculinities are not the only problematic representations present in media sports. As I explained in the first chapter, there are many other important issues that can be reproduced simultaneously. This means that it is important to know whether students are equipped to handle all these diverse and (sometimes) conflicting messages.

I situate my own research within this limited literature. It is born out of the important and little researched question of whether young people see, understand, and negotiate the constructed nature of media sports. The research I present here tackles some of these issues, but does not really ask this question. With the exception of Millington and Wilson, none of the sources I mention here tried deciphering what young people see when they consume sport and what kind of knowledge they use to interpret what is happening on the screen. Before moving on to discuss the methods of my particular research project, I will examine what others have said in regards to how effective (or ineffective) media literacy programs are at equipping students with these skills and knowledge structures.

Evaluations of media literacy programs

In an academic context of systematic and scientific inquiry any new practice will come under scrutiny. After all, it would not be very responsible or ethical to advocate a practice, especially one as sensitive as a pedagogical practice like media literacy, without trying to find out what works, what does not, and how to improve upon it. As I will demonstrate in later chapters, my research adds to this growing body of scholarship by trying to find out if the participants, who are supposed to have taken media literacy courses, have acquired the necessary skills and knowledge structures to identify and critique socio-political and cultural discourses within media sports. Here I examine what has been said with regard to the effectiveness of media literacy and how this project can add to this body of work.

The literature that examines the effectiveness of media literacy is conflicting and inconclusive. There are stories of success, half successes and complete failures. For instance, Yamamiya, Cash, Melnyk, Posavac, and Posavac (2005) did an experimental research project in which they compared groups of women who had been exposed to images of “thin-and-beautiful” models. According to their results, the exposure to these types of images “adversely influenced the state body image of participants with high-internalization levels” (p. 74). Nonetheless, they also studied whether this adverse effect could be curbed with media literacy. One of the groups received a media literacy conference (which the researchers presented as an evaluation of “new educational programs”, not explicitly as media literacy education) and the other group received control information. According to their results, the media literacy information the participants received “significantly” reduced the adverse impact for those women who

were considered to have high-internalization levels. These results should be taken carefully however, because in this case media literacy works as an immediate vaccination. The experimental nature of the research does not allow for an analysis of any long term impact.

Coughlin and Kalodner (2006) provide similar results to Yamamiya *et al.* Like Yamamiya *et al.*, Coughlin and Kalodner study the effects of media literacy in the self-image of women. They divided the groups into high-risk and low-risk for eating disorders. They offered the experimental groups of each category (high and low risk) two media literacy lessons totalling three hours. According to their results, the media literacy lesson worked partially on those women who were categorized in the high-risk for eating disorders group. They explain,

The most important finding was that, 8 weeks after participating in a media literacy program designed to reduce factors commonly associated with eating disorders, college women at high-risk for eating disorders reported significant reductions in body dissatisfaction, drive for thinness, feelings of ineffectiveness, and internalization of societal standards of beauty in comparison to high-risk control participants. High-risk college women did not report significant reductions in perfectionism, physical appearance comparisons or awareness of societal standards of beauty after participating in ARMED [the media literacy program] (p. 40).

These results demonstrate the main problem with Yamamiya *et al.*'s investigation: after a longer waiting period, the effects of the short media literacy program begin to wear off. Yes, it is interesting that the media literacy intervention affected many aspects.

Nonetheless, other researchers should test the impact of a long term media literacy program. As Masterman (1990) explained clearly, “Media education is a lifelong process.”

Duran, Yousman, Walsh & Longshore (2008) offer several critiques of these evaluation type studies that deserve attention. They discuss that most of the studies done focus on a very limited range of topics that mostly subscribe to a protectionist approach-- topics like alcohol, tobacco and junk food advertisements, body image problems, and crime and violence. However, media literacy programs that focus on other more diverse issues remain under-researched (p.52). Another essential critique is how these studies conceptualize failure and success. For instance, they note that many studies (like the ones described above)²⁷ report media literacy success stories in helping students analyze media texts. However, when Duran *et al* examined these studies, they found that the manner in which these studies characterize success tends to be rather superficial. They use a television comprehension study to illustrate their point:

So, for example, when Singer and Singer (1998) note that elementary school children who were exposed to a specific curriculum performed better on tests of television comprehension, they do not discuss exactly how television comprehension was conceptualized in their curriculum or their study. It could be defined as simply the ability to understand the plots of television programs, but that is a far cry from what proponents of a more contextual, critical, media education would argue is crucial to media literacy. (p.52)

²⁷ For more examples, see Gonzalez, Glik, Davoudi and Ang (2004), Scharrer (2006), Wade, Davidson and O’Dea (2003) or Hindin, Contento and Gussow (2004).

Furthermore, the authors also argue that there should be studies that assess the effects of long-term media literacy programs (p.65).

My research here differs from these others in some of the ways Duran *et al* have mentioned. First, my project does not offer any type of media literacy program or quick fix to students. In this regard, I follow Masterman's thoughts that media education needs to be something long-term and continuous. Fortunately, Ontario is a province that has made media literacy part of its academic objectives, at least theoretically. This means that there is no need to provide the subjects with media literacy; they should have already received it during their formative school years. In essence, I wonder whether the media literacy curriculum in Ontario is creating more media literate students. Second, I am evaluating students' abilities to understand, negotiate and critique messages present in media sports. As I explained in the previous section, this is a topic that has not been well studied, especially in this evaluative form. Third, I am primarily interested in students' critical skills. Can they detect and critique the hegemonic discourses present in media sports? Do they have the knowledge structures and the skills necessary to do so? While I also investigate whether they can follow narrative threads or spot inconsistencies, I am primarily interested in notions of gender, race, nationalism, and political economy. This, of course, is also consistent with the objectives of critical media literacy.

Finally, this is a small, mostly qualitative study. This means that the results are not generalizable. What this project will offer is an opportunity to take a harder and deeper look at the kind of media literacy offered to these students. The outcome, though not generalizable to the entire school-aged population of the province, will in fact shed

some light onto potential problems with the way the Ministry of Education conceptualizes media literacy education.

Concluding remarks

In this chapter, I have situated and positioned both studies within a concrete strand of media literacy. Even though TML adherents present some important concerns, I remain a proponent of CML as the most appropriate approach for teaching students to navigate the messages of the media. Giroux's approach to critical pedagogy and Kellner and Share's concept of CML in particular allowed me to take these concerns into consideration and develop two politically active research projects.

In this literature review, I also delineated some of the most salient debates and explained how both of these studies will contribute to the discussion of the important issue of whether media literacy needs to be explicitly political. Additionally, I tackled the limited number of projects and research that unite media sports with media literacy. I contend that this is further evidence of the particular importance of these studies. Finally, I brought to the fore some important points regarding the conceptualization of success or failure in media literacy programs in order to provide some context for the discussion of the results in subsequent chapters. In the upcoming chapter, I will focus on the first project from conception to early termination.

Chapter 3 – Initial study design

The media literacy movement has not paid too much critical attention specifically to the culture of mediated sport. While there are a few ML lesson plans that foster some critical analysis of the world of sports, the topic has not garnered as much scholarship as it should. I found no lesson plans in manuals, books or articles designed specifically for the use of mediated sport in the classroom or in ML programs. In my literature review, I found almost no scholarly research that tackles whether media literacy provides the appropriate tools for students to critically consume media sports or on whether this is even a desirable and necessary endeavour. I think that such scholarship is necessary. With this goal in mind, I designed a research project geared towards answering, or at least attempting to answer, some of these questions.

The project that I envisioned originally as my doctoral research was very different from what I will describe in the next chapters of this dissertation. Scholars like Goodman (1996) who focus on the production aspects of media literacy (p. 2) influenced me in this first study. At the same time, however, I also heeded the advice and warnings of scholars like Lewis and Jhally (1998) who understand that ML should not be content with just providing technical skills to students, but rather it should aspire to teach them to take political stances and assess their own work critically as well (p.1). In this vein, I designed a media literacy project where the participants would have the opportunity to create their own media sports product, learn about key media literacy principles and then analyze their work in light of those same key concepts.

I was unable to bring this project to term. While I secured permissions, ethics approvals, a research site and potential participants, I also faced multiple obstacles that,

in the end, proved to be too complicated to overcome. Nonetheless, this first research attempt provided many lessons that I would like to address and discuss further. In this chapter, I will describe the project in more detail focusing first on the methodological aspects that undergird it, and turning secondly towards the practical considerations and obstacles that finally forced me to suspend the project indefinitely. I should mention however, that while I will make some preliminary assessments of the lessons I learned during this experience (considerations that were present in the creation of the second study), I will not analyze them in their entirety in this chapter. I would like to tie these lessons to the conclusions of this second study, in the bigger context of the field of media literacy and its future directions.

Structure

The original project was based on two main elements: 1) production and 2) critical analysis. Using these two elements as a guide, I designed a project that called for participants to create their own sports video. I had planned that participants would work, ideally, in groups of threes and they would go through the entire process of amateur video production. This meant that they would collectively choose a sport, a sporting figure or a team, find appropriate media –images, video clips, music clips- related to their sport or sporting figure, and create a highlight – or homage – type of video. As facilitator, it would have been my job to place certain restrictions on them – time and content, for instance – in order to motivate them to make difficult choices about the material they could include in their final products. They would record the production process, including their creative choices, in journals. Later on, they would look at each other's products and

offer constructive criticism. Finally, I planned to provide lessons in order to explain key media literacy concepts and the students would have had a second opportunity to analyze their own work. As will become clear through the discussion, some of this occurred but most did not.

My goal in this project was to address four questions that media literacy scholars have not studied adequately thus far. With these questions I wanted to discover how feasible and how important it would be to combine the critical analysis of sports with the objectives and tenets of the media literacy movement. Given that the ML movement has not paid close attention to the use of sport in media literacy programs, the first question I asked addressed whether the critical analysis of sports is compatible with the overarching goals of the media literacy movement.

RQ1: Will the use of sports in ML courses or programs help the participants achieve the ML goal of developing “the ability to access, analyze, evaluate and create information in a variety of print and non-print media formats” (National Telemedia Council, 2004 cited in Vande Berg, Wenner & Gronbeck, 2004)?

If the findings of this project determined that this is, in fact, something that researchers and practitioners need to address, I think it would be appropriate to create a flexible framework that educators could mould and use to their own liking in their courses or programs. With this in mind, the second question I asked was:

RQ2: Does the intervention²⁸ proposed in this study provide a proper framework for other educators to follow in the future?

These first two questions focused on the ML movement and how I could contribute to filling the gap that exists in using sports and media literacy. However, I had two additional questions that dealt directly with the knowledge structures, skills and personal loci of the participants involved in this study.

RQ3: What type of knowledge do the participants have about the socio-cultural, political and economic implications of sport in our societies?

RQ4: What changes, if any, can be perceived in the attitudes, knowledge structures, skills and/or personal loci of the participants throughout the duration of the intervention?

The answers to RQ3 and RQ4 would have helped me answer the first two research questions, as these two questions would tell me if this intervention helped participants develop their skills and knowledge structures and if the intervention was a feasible and pragmatic way to address these concerns.

Research methods and intervention

I designed this study not only as media literacy research, but also and more importantly as a particular form – action research. A.J. Pickard (2007) describes action

²⁸ Though the intervention was summarized in the beginning, please see the “Research Methods and Intervention” section for further details.

research as "...an interventionist approach to research taken with the explicit intention of improving practice, and understanding that practice and the situation in which it takes place" (p.134). This is what I was looking to do with this project. The purpose of the media literacy intervention was twofold: 1) improve media literacy practice by providing a flexible framework for educators who might want to critically analyze mediated sports, and 2) to observe and better understand how adolescents currently consume mediated sports. These objectives made action research the appropriate research method for this original project.

Though sociologist Kurt Lewin coined the term "action research" in 1948, contemporary action research owes its present form to the work of Paulo Freire. In Lewin's basic conception of the model, the researcher, according to Pickard, "remained very much an outsider" (p.134). Even though Lewin's method called for change, it still asked the researcher to withdraw from the process of investigation. The new model, based on Freire's emancipatory pedagogy, placed the researcher inside the process. Stanley and Plaza (2002) explain Freire's theoretical position: "Freire argues that problem-posing requires the resolution of the teacher-student contradiction so that both are simultaneously teachers and students who learn together in a partnership where they become jointly responsible for a process in which all grow...no one teaches another, nor is anyone self-taught" [emphasis in the original] (p.90). Using this theoretical model as a springboard, current action research requires the researchers to get involved in the process so that they may influence the participants as much as the participants will influence them.

According to information studies scholar Rory O'Brien, there are 6 key principles of action research:

- 1) Reflexive critique – Refers to the need for people to reflect on their biases, interpretations, assumptions, etc. and how this affects their lives and work.
- 2) Dialectical critique – The assumption here is that social phenomena are constituted by language. This means that in order to understand the relationships between the phenomena, the context, and the constitutive elements there needs to be dialogue.
- 3) Collaborative resource – As Paulo Freire states, the process of learning moves in both directions, thus, participants become co-researchers.
- 4) Risk – Action research threatens to change the ways in which knowledge is conceived. Some participants may not be ready for this experience.
- 5) Plural structure – Many opinions and experiences, some even contradictory, will guide the research forward.
- 6) Theory, Practice, Transformation – This is the cycle of knowledge produced in action research. (O'Brien, 2001)

All of these principles embody the underlying theoretical positions of Lewin and Freire. The “action research cycle” is born from these basic tenets.

The action research cycle is the way the research unfolds. According to Pickard (2007), the cycle consists of five basic steps: 1) Identifying problems, 2) Action planning, 3) Implementation, 4) Evaluation, and 5) Reflection.

In the first step, the researchers focus on one problem or issue that they would like to solve. Usually, researchers pinpoint a problem even before they conceive the idea. This step combines literature review with actual data collection. The purpose of this stage is to

identify what the necessities are (Pickard, p.135). For this study, the literature review and a discussion with media literacy leading figure Renee Hobbs²⁹ showed me that media literacy scholars were not studying the use of sports in media literacy programs.

The second stage refers to the design of the “intervention”. The intervention is the activity that stimulates the change or the “solution” to the problem. The researchers create the intervention using the information they gathered in the first stage of research. There is no strict set of guidelines that mandate a specific intervention; it could be a single action (i.e. a lecture) or a series of events (i.e. seminars and workshops) (Pickard, p.136). Because this was not a quantitative and experimental research project, there was no way to isolate the intervention as the variable that affected change. However, generally in interventions, participants provide constant feedback to the researchers in each step. This helps to determine whether the changes, if any, can be attributed primarily to the intervention or to other non-related factors.

For this study, I created a media literacy intervention where participants would create sport fan videos, analyze their own production process and finally reflect on their end-product. The participants were supposed to choose a sport, a sporting figure or a sporting event and create a video collage using video editing software (like Microsoft’s *Windows Movie Maker*) or online mashup sites such as the *CBC Hockey Night in Canada Mashup*. I created strict guidelines to encourage the participants to make choices regarding the content that they included in the video. They were supposed to record these choices in journals to help in the later reflection stage³⁰.

²⁹ I had a chance to speak directly with Dr. Hobbs in the “Youth Radio” workshop in Philadelphia, PA and she confirmed the need for this type of research.

³⁰ For more details regarding the intervention please see Appendix E.

In the third phase, the researchers implement their intervention design. This stage in particular is what differentiates action research from other methods (Pickard, p.136). The evaluation phase, the fourth step, is where the researchers examine the success or failure of the intervention. They can do this in several ways: collecting documents (some researchers keep journals throughout the entire process and ask their participants to do the same), organizing focus groups or conducting interviews with the subjects. For this research project, I planned to conduct special sessions where they would discuss and critique their videos. I also planned to video record these sessions so that I could analyze them later on. Furthermore, the participants were supposed to keep a record of their production process in their journals. I planned to collect this information to move on to the next step of the research circle.

The fifth stage of action research may or may not be the final step. Because action research works in cycles, the “reflection” step can be a beginning of a new cycle of study. This is the moment when researchers think about the entire process (the pre-assessment, the intervention, and the evaluations) and go through a process of self-examination. It is here that the researchers’ journals become absolutely essential (Pickard, p. 138). In my case, this is where I was supposed to reflect on the information I collected with the video camera, the journals and the fan videos themselves to determine the success or failure of the intervention.³¹

Action research places a lot of its emphasis on “change”. It is that emphasis on change that made it the ideal method for this project. However, there were several other reasons why I chose action research for this type of investigation. Not many research methods provide allowances for the type of self-reflection that action research provides.

³¹ As I conceptualized it in the literature review chapter of this dissertation

Not only can the researchers be an active part of the process, but also they can continuously reflect on their practice and how this practice can be made better. There is a clear space for tweaking interventions to reach the desired goal of changing or improving practice. This is not anti-ethical or devious; on the contrary, it is practical and necessary. Furthermore, action research is flexible and can be adapted to become quantitative, qualitative or mixed. It gives the researchers the opportunity to do one full cycle or to complete as many action cycles as they deem necessary. Finally, Grundy (1994) explains a very important strength and a major reason for using action research in media literacy research: “action research challenges the separation of the researcher and the researched” (p.28). She continues on to say that by bringing together these concepts, the method challenges notions of control. In action research, the researchers are not seen as “all knowing” but rather a part of the process of learning (p.29).

This is the methodological approach I chose for this first project. It is a method that allowed me the flexibility to teach the students video production and, at the same time, important critical media literacy lessons. Unfortunately, I experienced several important roadblocks along the way that impeded the progress of this project. In these next sections, I detail the process and these roadblocks.

Approaching an organization

My supervisors and the Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Information and Media Studies at the University of Western Ontario approved my proposal for the research project I described above. Once the Ethics Committee approved my protocol³², I had the proper permissions to approach youth groups and organizations. I chose the local

³² See Appendix A – Ethics Approval

branch of an international youth centre that works with disadvantaged teens and children. I chose this particular group because their objectives and resources were congruent with my objectives and my resource needs. According to their public promotional materials, they had the population I desired (teenagers from 15 to 18 years of age), the resources I needed (they mentioned having computer labs equipped with web connections), and they provide educational programs designed to help disadvantaged youths and their families gain a sense of self worth. This youth centre looked like the ideal testing ground for my media literacy intervention.

I first approached the centre via email and Canada Post. I received an almost immediate response from the head of the board. She had forwarded my proposal³³ to the Recreational Director (RD); he was the one who was going to make the final decision. The RD contacted me to schedule a meeting because he was interested in participating in the project and wanted to clarify a few points.

While he was definitely interested, the RD had a few concerns regarding the organization's capacity to host the kind of project I was proposing. His two main concerns were: 1) the technological resources needed for the program and 2) finding a group of committed participants who could complete the project. According to him, even though the centre did have a computer lab with internet connection, the computers were old and obsolete and it was possible that they could not serve the purposes I explained in my proposal. Furthermore, given his knowledge of the participation patterns of the group members, it was his opinion that while many teens might be attracted to the project in the beginning, it would be very difficult to keep them coming back for six to twelve weeks. These concerns notwithstanding, he promised to consult with the Educational Director

³³ See Appendix B – Letter to the Youth Centre

(ED) before making a decision. A few days after I met with the RD, he emailed me to schedule another meeting. This time, I met with the Educational Director and presented the program to him.

The ED had a different outlook on the entire situation. He thought the two concerns raised by the RD were not going to be an impediment for the development of my project. He argued that they had hosted a multimedia project previously and the group members had been very enthusiastic about it. They had been willing and engaged participants. Furthermore, he also argued that even though the computers they had were indeed old, they possessed the minimum requirements I had specified. He also mentioned the possibility of using some donated laptops that the organization had received recently. With these concerns assuaged, we agreed to proceed with the project.

Recruiting participants

One of the first challenges that I encountered was getting the teens to sign up for the project. The original arrangement was that we would put up posters³⁴ and signup sheets in the centre installations so that the members would sign up voluntarily. The ED was supposed to be in charge of monitoring the situation. However, after a few weeks, he summoned me to come and talk directly to the teens in an attempt to recruit them for the project. I went to the centre two nights in a row to talk to some teenagers who had already shown some interest in the program. I introduced myself, explained the projects, showed them examples of what they would be doing and asked them if they were interested. If they were interested, I provided them with a Letter of Information and Consent³⁵ for them

³⁴ See Appendix C – Youth Centre Recruitment Posters

³⁵ See in Appendix D – Letter of Information and Consent First Study

to take to their parents or legal guardians. By the time I was done, I had 10 teenagers who had signed up. The ideal number of participants for this study was 12 because they would work in groups of 3s and 4 groups seemed like a manageable number for only one researcher. Nonetheless, the ED and me decided to approach more than 12 just in case some of them could not commit to the project or decided, last minute, to drop out.

Structure of the program

Originally, I structured the intervention so that it consisted of 12 weekly sessions that lasted about 1 hour³⁶. However, because there were some delays³⁷ that pushed the start date to middle of October, I decided to shorten the program to 6 weekly sessions of approximately two hours. The ED agreed that this was probably the best alternative because many of the participants would be unable to come to two sessions in the same week. This meant that I had to compress all the information and activities.

In my original schedule for the intervention, there were two introductory sessions. In the first session, I planned to provide the participants with an overview of the project: I would go over what they were going to do, and I would read the Letter of Information and Consent to them just to make sure they understood their rights. In the second session, I was supposed to teach them how to use *Windows Movie Maker* and show them how to create their videos using the software.

I allocated three sessions for the participants to create their videos and set one week aside so that they could view each other's finished products. However, the most important part was the four sessions I reserved for the media literacy lessons and their

³⁶ See in Appendix E – Intervention Details

³⁷ I will explain these in more detail in the “Challenges” section of the chapter.

discussion of the videos. Finally, I had marked one session for conclusions and wrapping up the project.

The time constraints forced me to re-structure the project in the following manner:

- One introductory session – I was supposed to give both the general overview of the project and the instructional tutorial of *Windows Movie Maker* in the same session.
- Two sessions for the participants to create their videos.
- Four sessions for the participants to view the videos, learn about media literacy and discuss the videos. There was no explicit session for conclusions.

Nonetheless, not even this re-structuring could save the project.

Challenges

The two main obstacles that eventually led me to abandon this Youth Centre project were the two concerns the RD mentioned in our first meeting: resources and commitment. These were not the only issues, but everything else basically stemmed from these two.

I. Resource issues: Technological impediments

The educational branch of the centre is located on the third floor of their building. There are a few small offices, including the main offices, and then there is a large room that encompasses the rest of the floor. In this room there is a “sitting area” where there are a few couches. This area is sometimes used for special events that include all the members of the educational program. Next to that area, there are many desks where the students can study individually. In some of those desks there are some newer

computers with flat screen monitors. Unfortunately, these computers are not the ones connected to the internet. The “computer lab” is next to this big room. The lab holds between 10 and 12 old PCs that are all connected to the internet via Ethernet connections. All of the computers had the minimum requirements: Windows XP with *Windows Movie Maker*. Because this is an organization that caters to children and teenagers, the computers are also equipped with software that filters content the organization deemed inappropriate.

This last element was one of the biggest obstacles to the entire project. As soon as I approached the ED and described the program, he asked me to give him a list of the websites we would use. Of course, this was problematic because part of the objective of the program was to let the students explore video websites to find the appropriate clips they wanted to include in their videos. Apart from this, Canadian copyright laws forced me to guide the participants toward material that was either not copyrighted or had a Creative Commons licence. This meant that I was constantly trying to find additional sites for the participants and it was quite cumbersome to have to get each site approved by the administration.

The internet filter was also an impediment in other ways. Even though I sent the ED the list of all the sites I thought I was going to use, there were some sites that I simply could not access on these computers. For example, every time I tried to visit Vimeo.com, a video site where people post original content and some of it is available for legal download, the filter would block my access. This was a major blow as Vimeo had some of the best Creative Commons sports material available.

Nonetheless, the internet filter was not the only difficulty. The actual capacity of the PCs was problematic as well. Sometimes, the computers crashed. They consistently froze whenever the participants tried to download some videos or save them to the jump drive that I brought with me. Furthermore, the *Windows Movie Maker* software routinely crashed in the middle of a project.

Both the RD and the participants themselves foresaw all these problems. Many students seemed interested in the project right up until the moment I told them that we would be using the PCs from the “Computer lab”. Their enthusiasm decreased notably once they found out this information. Interestingly enough, they were all correct in their assumptions that the PCs available would not be able to handle the simple tasks I described in my project. Every week I went to the club, I was met with a different problem regarding the computers. I tried every possible alternative I could think of. I tried getting them to connect the other, newer computers to the internet and they said they did not have the human resources needed to do that. I tried to get them to use the laptops they had announced in the beginning and they said that they could not do that because the laptops would need to be connected to the internet and the only way was to connect them through the Ethernet connections and those were not available. Finally, I decided to bring my own computers to the centre. I brought my personal laptop and I asked my faculty for one laptop I could borrow for the duration of the program, but this did not save the project either.

The internet filter kept causing problems even with the new computers. I plugged in both of the laptops and they both worked fine for a few moments. As soon as the participants tried to log on to the sites I had listed for them, they encountered the

same problems they had with the other computers: pages not loading, pages that did not appear, and computers freezing as a result. Naturally, all these technological problems demotivated the participants and me. This, of course, did not help in being able to get people who would be committed to the project.

II. Commitment issues: Working with busy teens

The ED's optimism in finding participants for the program proved to be misguided. The first clear sign that it was going to be difficult for me to find enough teens that were willing to spend 6 or 12 weeks with this program was the ED's inability to get a single teen to sign up. As I mentioned earlier in this chapter, we had agreed that he would find the participants for the project. Nonetheless, I had to go to the centre and talk to each teen individually and essentially try to "sell" the project to them. During these sessions where I tried to convince them to join me, I noticed, and ignored, the second warning sign: almost all the teens that signed up had done so conditionally. Every time one of them told me that he/she was interested, they would condition their participation: how long would it last? What days would it be? Would it conflict with their multiple activities? Would they have to come on extra days to the centre? All of these questions should have let me know that this was certainly not a high priority for these participants; they had busy, ongoing lives and they could not, or would not, commit unconditionally to the program.

I would not be able to ignore this issue much longer, however. Once I had 10 participants signed up, I decided to begin the sessions. The ED and the Assistant Educational Director (AED) called each participant and reminded them that they had

made a commitment to the media literacy project. On the day of the first session, only 4 out of the 10 participants showed up. This was quite problematic considering the fact that I had to compress twelve sessions into six and this meant that more than half of the participants would miss the introduction and the tutorial on *Windows Movie Maker*. At that point, I decided to cancel the first session, try to recruit more participants and re-group for the next week. I talked to the ED and explained the situation. He concurred with me and tried to find other interested teens. I was only able to get one more which brought my theoretical total to 11.

After that first session, I talked to my supervisors to alert them to the possibility that I might not be able to have enough interested participants in the group. We agreed that I would return the next week and I would begin with whoever was present at that time. I returned to the centre various times and tried to accommodate the sessions to fit the participants' needs. I even tried to schedule two identical sessions in one week so that they could choose which day suited them better. Nonetheless, none of this worked. Apart from that second (first) session when I had 5 participants, I never had more than 3 or 4 teens per session and the teens were not always the same ones so there was no continuity and no progress. This, coupled with the technological issues explained in the previous section and other miscellaneous problems that I will explain next, left me with no other choice but to talk to my supervisors and cancel the project.

III. Other issues

Though certainly the technological and commitment issues were the primary reasons for the early termination of the project, those were not the only problems I

confronted in this process. I also had to contend with several other obstacles that impeded any kind of progress I could make with the participants. For instance, the physical space of the computer lab was not an appropriate working environment.

The computer lab was a small room with no windows. Even though the lab housed the oldest computers available, it seemed that this was still a very valuable space for the members because these computers were the only ones connected to the internet and, likewise, they were the only computers connected to a printer. This, of course, made my job a lot more difficult. When I first made the arrangements with the ED, he promised that I would have complete control of the computer lab for the duration of each session. This meant that I would be able to close the door and have the participants focus on my instructions and their work. Nonetheless, this was not the reality of the situation. Once I started working with the teens in the lab, it was very difficult to keep other people from coming and going. Many of the centre members needed access to the internet and to the printer for their various school projects. This was a very big distraction for participants of my study. Many of their friends, who were not participating, approached them during the sessions and began conversations that were unrelated to the work. Although I was officially a volunteer of the centre, I did not really have the power or the legitimacy to order people to leave my participants alone. The only people who could have done that for me were the ED and the AED and the few times I asked them to do this they told me that there were some extenuating circumstances that could not be avoided. For example, one particular time, all the other computers (the newer ones that were not connected to the internet), were having a systematic problem and could not be used. That left only the computers in the lab available. Another time, an ex-volunteer that came to visit the

students interrupted me in mid-session. This ex-volunteer did not even introduce himself or ask for my permission; he simply came in and interrupted the participants in their work. These are only two examples of many. Truthfully, in order to manage the learning environment properly I needed additional powers which I did not have.

Another issue was the structure of the educational branch of the centre itself. The educational branch is governed by the ED and the AED. Below them are several tutors who work as volunteers for the centre. These volunteers are the ones in charge of tutoring the teens in whichever areas they need. Nonetheless, not all the adolescents work with tutors all the time. Many actually go to the centre for overall supervision, but they do their homework and they study individually. This means that whenever they run into an issue or they have some sort of complication, they go directly to the ED and the AED. I observed this pattern throughout all my days visiting the centre. Every time someone needed anything, they would immediately go talk to the ED and the AED. Many times I had to wait for more than half an hour to talk to one of these two people because they would, literally, have line-ups of people who wanted to ask or tell them something.

The ED and the AED were terribly overworked. As much as they wanted to help me, the truth of the matter is that sometimes they just could not keep up on top of everything. They had to track the progress of each teen, they had to tend to crises, they had to track the teens down when they failed to come to the centre, and so on. Furthermore, the centre members were not the only ones who needed them. Every time a tutor had a problem, they immediately turned to the ED and the AED again. And, of course, I would have to count myself amongst the many that depended on these two

individuals for everything. Even though they were very good at their job (they were amazingly patient and caring) the truth is they could not be everywhere at the same time.

The warning signs were there from the outset. However, because I was not familiar with the dynamic of the centre, I did not clearly understand the depth of the problem until it was too late. Every time I had a meeting with the ED, whether it was in person or via the telephone, he would always ask me the same questions: how many people do you need? How many computers do you need? What are the sites you need to access? Furthermore, after I had submitted my application to become a volunteer (this was one of the conditions for them to let me come and go freely from the centre), I received an email from the AED (whom I had not met at that point) asking me when she could expect me to come in and start “tutoring”. This was a sign of gross miscommunication between the ED and the AED. At first, I took it as a sign of lack of interest or lack of caring. Nonetheless, as I grew familiar with their work environment, I quickly understood that all of the repetition, the miscommunications, and the misunderstandings were simply an inevitable part of the job; they were, quite simply, overworked.

Finally, another issue that hampered my ability to complete the project successfully was the notion of “fair dealing” under the Canadian copyright laws. According to the Copyright Act of Canada, teaching is not included under the provisions for fair dealing. This means that while in the United States “Fair use for the purpose of teaching permits the use of portions of any work, including a work on the Internet, and includes posting portions of a work on a restricted access Web site for students” (Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada & Copyright Consortium of the

Council Ministers of Education, 2005), Canadian educators do not have the same rights. If my participants wanted to use copyrighted material in the creation of their own highlight-type videos, I would have to ask for permission from the copyright owner for each and every clip they wanted to use. Obviously, that was not a practical option. As such, the issue of fair dealing presented a few practical obstacles that I needed to overcome in order to continue with the project.

The very concept of highlight videos necessitated the use of previously existent material. This meant that the idea I sold to the teenagers of making their own tribute videos was essentially misguided. Once I found out that my responsibility was not only telling them about copyright, but actually policing every clip they included in their videos, the project turned into something completely different. The idea that begat this project was the notion of the fan-video created and uploaded by fans for other fans. These videos are one of the more recent expressions of fandom that have appeared in the environment of the web 2.0. Given the symbiotic relationship between the sports organizations and television, it is not surprising to see that the vast majority of the clips used in these fan videos are copyrighted and owned by a corporation or a conglomerate. If the participants came into the project expecting to be able to create a fan video, a highlight video, for their favourite team or player, they obviously expected to use copyrighted material. Once I explained to them that they could only use material that 1) they owned (meaning they shot themselves) or that 2) was under a Creative Commons licence, that eliminated most of the material that they wanted to use for their videos. This created several problems.

Firstly, it meant that I needed to provide them with a viable alternative for the creation of their videos. They needed sources of material they could use because they could not actually shoot footage themselves (I did not have the permission nor the resources available for a project of that magnitude). For this reason, I conducted an online search and came up with a list of sites where they could go to obtain open source, non-copyrighted video and audio material. However, as I mentioned earlier, many of these sites were blocked by the internet filter of the organization. The ones that were not blocked contained a lot of amateur-looking material (videos shot with handheld cameras that were shaky, blurred or too far away from the subject) that did not really appeal to the participants.

Secondly, the vast majority of the non-copyrighted material was footage of athletes and teams that were largely unknown to the participants. They could not make a tribute video of people they did not know. The consequences of this was that the participants that actually came every week to continuously gravitated to YouTube videos that were, for the most part, copyrighted videos.

Thirdly, the participants seemed uneasy when I encouraged them to be creative. It occurred to me that maybe they needed some guidance so I created my own highlight video with Creative Commons materials. As a fan of boxing, I decided to create a highlight video of amateur boxers. When I was unable to find enough usable material about boxers, I decided to turn the video into a general combat sports highlight reel. Using mostly Vimeo.com and Flickr.com, I was able to create a video that included clips and images that were either not copyrighted or under a Creative Commons licence. For the music, I used Jamendo.com, a site dedicated to free and legal downloadable music.

However, even though the participants liked my video and were a little bit more open to the idea of using this type of material, the internet filters discouraged them from trying it. In general, they seemed more comfortable always going back to YouTube and what was already familiar for them no matter how many times I insisted that they could not use that type of material.

Ultimately, I think the copyright issue, compounded with the technological issues mentioned earlier, was the main factor in their decreasing interest in the project. They tried to find usable clips and they were usually met with some type of restriction from me. I had to tell them constantly that the clips they wanted to use were not fair game and that we could get in trouble for using them. This left them without any idea of what to do.

I find it interesting that they would not know what to do because after having explained the issues of copyright to them, I handed them a journal and a sheet with questions that would help them brainstorm their video. This was the portion of the project where they were going to think about what kind of video they were going to do and what were the choices they needed to make; in essence, even before they actually began having technological problems I had explained that they needed to brainstorm their video without the use of copyrighted material. Nonetheless, they likely ignored this piece of information. Once I actually started policing their video choices, the reality of the situation sunk in and they did not have a backup plan.

Termination of the project

After exploring all the possible ways to save this particular project, I met with my supervisors and explained to them that I was seriously considering terminating the

project. I had provided them with continuous updates so my decision did not fully surprise them. They had helped me brainstorm the different possibilities I had to try and salvage what we all thought would have been a very interesting dissertation research project. Nonetheless, finally we all agreed that it was probably time to cancel the rest of the sessions at the organization.

We brainstormed possible locations where I could begin the project anew. However, I was genuinely concerned that beginning the project again at a different site might come with similar issues (issues that are surely not confined to this particular organization, but are probably symptomatic of the precarious situation in which many of these organizations operate) and that would take time that I could not afford to waste.

After discussing these concerns, I proposed a second study (the main topic of this dissertation) to my supervisors. I pointed out that while it was a different project, it still tackled one of the original research questions and would probably be even more effective in finding out certain types of information. They agreed and I finally laid the original project to rest. While I was disappointed that I could not continue with this first study, I think it provided me, and future media literacy practitioners with a lot of valuable pragmatic information about the obstacles educators face in the field and how to avoid or overcome them. I will certainly come back to these lessons in the final chapter, but I would like to summarize some of the key points now.

Concluding remarks

I began this project with the idea that media literate people need to be able to analyze amateur media as well as media produced by large media conglomerates.

Currently, there is some blurring of the lines between media producers and consumers. Of course, that does not mean that the average computer user has as much input into what people watch as large media conglomerates do, but it does mean that there are amateurs that produce alternative material every day. While a lot of this content is a re-working of already produced, and copyrighted, material, the choices these producers make (What clips do they choose? What music? How do they order the sequences?) are also worthy of scrutiny and critical analysis. These choices are also representative of the ideological leanings and world views of the creators, same as with traditional media. This is why this is a project worth pursuing again in the future. It just was not the right time for me.

I would like to point out certain lessons I learned from this project. For instance, I think it is imperative to recognize the signs of trouble and adjust beforehand or choose a different direction. I cannot say that the collapse of this project was completely unexpected. Truthfully, the signs were there from the beginning. The RD warned me and it turned out he was right. The participants themselves warned me and in my zeal for completing the data collection, I refused to acknowledge these warning signs. To be fair, the well meaning, but misguided ED, the person who knew the centre best, convinced me to ignore those warning signs. He reassured me that the participants and the resources would appear. In the end, he acknowledged that he got caught up in the promise of the program and he had been overly optimistic. He confessed that they had always had problems with attendance at the centre. They were constantly battling with parents and legal guardians to make sure that their sons and daughters kept the commitments that they had made. He also acknowledged that he probably underestimated the amount of work and dedication that the project required.

I also wonder if media literacy is a priority for anyone, apart from those of us involved in the field, at this point in time. Getting these adolescents to set aside two hours a week to do something that is related to their own leisure activities was very difficult. They all had something more important to do. They had “Cadets”, they had “Keystone”, they had homework, they had exams, etc. And while some of these commitments are obviously important (after all, I did not want them to neglect their schoolwork), I wonder if they are so committed to schoolwork that they have no time available for doing something that for all intents and purposes is fun as well as educational. Moreover, even though the centre supported me, whenever my needs conflicted with those of the traditional mandate of their educational branch (preparing them for school), those needs won out.

Additionally, I might have been overestimating these teens’ ability to expand their horizons. While they were all interested in learning how to create these videos, they were not equally interested in learning to use different video and audio resources. They continuously went back to looking for familiar material on a familiar site: YouTube. Even after showing them what they could do with new material, they still dragged their feet and, at the slightest provocation, went back to what they knew.

Finally, it is important to consider Hobbs’ question of whether media literacy belongs in the classroom or in after school programs. The centre I chose is part of a big, international organization that has a presence in many countries. If that organization is unable to maintain the proper resources for a small scale project like mine, are these after- school programs really suitable for this type of education? After all, this organization had two people who basically oversaw everything that happened in the

educational branch. There were clearly not enough human resources either. Does this type of education belong somewhere with bigger financial backing?

Future researchers and practitioners should take into consideration these questions in their planning and execution of research projects and programs. I will return to this and other questions in the final chapter of this dissertation, but now it is important to turn to the current incarnation of the project and the methods, logistics and obstacles I encountered.

Chapter 4 – Second study: Research questions and methods

Once I moved on from the youth centre study (First study), I took a step back and looked at my objectives in that study. Though I could no longer answer these first four research questions, I decided to focus on one of them: “What type of knowledge do the participants have about the socio-cultural, political and economic implications of sport in our societies?” Even if I could not complete that first study at this point in time, it is still something I would like to pursue in the future. Therefore, before I create any frameworks for other educators to use in a sports and media literacy program, I would like to know how students think about sports and how they consume sports. Using these ideas as a springboard, I created a second research project.

Participants, first year students at a large university in Ontario, Canada, signed up for one of five focus group sessions (depending on their scheduling and availability). The subjects came to the sessions they had signed up for and I asked them to do three things. First, they watched 3 short media sport clips. Second, they answered a written questionnaire with open-ended questions. Finally, they discussed the clips they had just seen in a focus group setting. The clips I showed to them reflected a variety of politically significant issues, including racial and gender disparities, sexist stereotypes and archetypes, and commercial branding, among others. Both the questionnaire and the group discussions provided a setting for the subjects to demonstrate their awareness and their ability to critically assess the issues described above. In this chapter, I will describe this new project in more detail, focusing on the methods, population, logistics and obstacles.

Research questions

Because of the scarcity of ML projects that involve the analysis of sports, there is almost no quantitative or qualitative data³⁸ assessing the skills and knowledge structures (Potter, 2005) that adolescents and young adults possess to watch, interpret and negotiate the meanings of media sport. With this study, I looked to bridge that gap by understanding what kind of knowledge adolescents and young adults bring with them when they consume sport. Given this objective, the first research question of this project was:

RQ1: “What type of knowledge do the participants have about the socio-cultural, political and economic implications of sport in our societies?”

Here I was trying to get a feeling for the participants’ general knowledge of the politics of sports. This question helped me to understand what they know and how much knowledge they have to draw from when they consume sport. However, I also wanted to discover whether they are able to access that knowledge when they are actively watching sports and are aware of the performance and display of politics in and out of the field. It is one thing to have a theoretical and abstract knowledge of how things work, it is another to apply these concepts and to recognize and point out those things as they happen. Because of this, the next research question was:

RQ2: Can the participants identify socio-political issues (e.g. gender, race, nationality, political economy) in media sport texts as they consume them?

³⁸ I am only aware of one study that provides some data like this: Millington & Wilson (2010).

Taken together, these research questions yielded important information regarding the capabilities of students to analyze sports critically. This knowledge will be essential in the path towards developing critical media literacy programs that include sport in the future. To acquire this information, I combined two research methods that complement each other and allowed me to get more detailed answers from the participants—personal questionnaires and focus group discussions.

Methods for obtaining the data

In order to answer the research questions, I provided the participants with an opportunity to watch sports videos and questioned them about what they had just seen. I wanted to do a qualitative study that allowed me the freedom to do two things: 1) to get individual responses from the participants but, at the same time, 2) to see if the group interaction had any effect on their positions or answers. To achieve these two goals, I designed a mixed methods approach that incorporated focus groups and questionnaires.

Focus groups

Bruce Berg (2009) defines a focus group as “an interview style designed for small groups of unrelated individuals, formed by an investigator and led in a group discussion on some particular topic or topics” (p.158). Stewart, Shamdasani and Rook (2007) posit that focus groups are a flexible research method that can be used in many types of different research studies but are most useful in exploratory research projects when there is not a lot of information about the studied phenomenon (p. 41). This is the main reason

why I chose it. Another important reason I chose this approach is that, as Berg says, in a focus group, the researcher learns “through discussion about conscious, semiconscious, and unconscious psychological and sociocultural characteristics and processes [of participants]” (p.158).

Researchers in various disciplines use focus groups because it is a versatile and flexible research method. According to Stewart *et al* “focus groups are often used because they provide useful information and offer the researcher a number of advantages” (p.42). The interaction between moderator and participants can provide important insight into topics that are not well researched or understood. Furthermore, focus groups are usually a less expensive way of getting detailed information from groups of people. They allow researchers to follow up, probe or clarify questions and to explore unanticipated topics. They allow respondents to qualify or contextualize answers. Additionally, the fact that the participants are able to express themselves in their own words adds another rich layer of meaning. Finally, focus groups also allows respondents to play off each other and to recall information and answers that they might not have otherwise remembered (Stewart et al, 2007, p.42-43; Berg, 2009, p.165).

Like all research methods, focus groups have some limitations or disadvantages. For instance, both Stewart *et al* and Berg believe that the data may not be generalizable. However, this was not the objective of this study. Instead, I wanted to delve deeper into the thinking processes of these particular participants. My findings here can serve as building blocks for other researchers to develop a larger scale project that may, indeed, have more generalizable results. Furthermore, in this instance, the depth of each participant’s answer balances out the lack of generalizability. Another possible problem

is that, as Stewart *et al* suggest, “the moderator may bias results by knowingly or unknowingly providing cues about what types of responses and answers are desirable or seeking to achieve group consensus on particular topics” (p.44). While there is no guaranteed way to avoid this, there are certainly strategies that the researcher can use to minimize the possibilities that this might happen. For instance, it is important for the moderator to have an interview guide, especially if s/he is a novice moderator. Having a guide³⁹ makes it easier for the moderator to be consistent throughout each focus group session. Furthermore, the moderator can explain before beginning the session that there are no right or wrong answers and that all answers are equally valuable. Though this may not completely eliminate the pressure from the participants to “say the right thing”, it serves to establish the tone and create confidence between the moderator and the group (USAID Center for Development Information and Evaluation, 1996). I tried to follow all these guidelines during the focus group sessions.

Finally, according to Beck and Manuel (2008), another drawback of using focus groups to gather data is that there is the “possibility of groupthink” (p. 79). Wildemuth and Jordan (2009) see this dynamic not as a weakness, but rather as strength. They argue that this makes it better for the researchers because instead of “...having to infer similarities and differences in the participants’ views from their individual statements, [researchers] will be able to directly observe them...” (p.242). My own view falls somewhere in between: while I do think that there is value in observing the dynamics of interaction between participants, I also wanted to have access to unaffected participant opinions. That is the reason why prior to the discussion in the group setting, I decided to provide the participants with a “printed self-completion questionnaire” (Deacon,

³⁹ See script in Appendix F – Focus Group Guide

Pickering, Golding and Murdock, p.66, 2007). Even Wildemuth and Jordan accept that focus groups “...are a much stronger research tool if used in combination with other methods” (p.243). The questionnaire allowed me to get data from the participants prior to our group discussions.

Questionnaires

Questionnaires are part of “structured interviews”. According to Bernard (2006), In a structured interview, each informant or respondent is exposed to the same stimuli. The stimuli are often questions, but they may also be carefully constructed vignettes, lists of words or photos, clips of music or video, a table full of physical artifacts, or a garden full of plants. The idea in structured interviewing is always the same: to control the input that triggers people’s responses so that their output can be reliably compared (p.251).

This was my goal when I gave the participants the printed self-completion questionnaire⁴⁰. The stimuli in this particular study were the three sport clips. With this questionnaire I wanted to record their reactions to these three videos before they could speak to each other about what they saw. This allowed me the possibility of comparing their answers and seeing if their opinions and positions changed according to the direction in which the discussions flowed.

Deacon et al. (2007) define printed self-completion questionnaires as “printed documents that people complete on their own” (p.66). According to them “[t]his is the most structured form of questioning because no intermediary is involved in presenting the questions and recording the answers” (p.66). This last characteristic is also one of the

⁴⁰ See Appendix G - Questionnaire

reasons I chose it to complement the focus groups. As I commented before, there is no foolproof way of eliminating the possibility of moderator bias in focus groups so it is a good idea to have another method of data collection that is free from an intermediary. Bernard says “All respondents get the same questions with a self-administered questionnaire. There is no worry about interviewer bias” (p. 244).

Self-completion questionnaires also have other strengths that make them a good complement to the focus groups. Bernard, for instance, writes that “you can ask more complex questions with a self administered questionnaire than you can in a personal interview” (p. 244). This is because participants may have problems following complex oral questions. Furthermore, a researcher can also ask “long batteries of otherwise boring questions” that s/he could probably not ask in a face-to-face interview (p.244).

Most of the disadvantages of the self-completion questionnaire arise when these are 1) the only method of data collection and, 2) administered remotely. Considering these were not the conditions for my project, most of these disadvantages do not apply. Bernard does mention one drawback that applies in this particular context. He writes, “[i]n some cases, you may want respondents to answer a question without knowing what’s coming next” and this is impossible to do in a printed questionnaire (p.246). This is an important drawback and it did affect the way I crafted my questions. I did not want the participants’ responses in the focus groups to be biased by the questionnaire. This is why I did not write any questions about gender, race, nationalism or industry issues in the questionnaire. I carefully worded the questions in the survey to assess the thought process of the students and let them answer, in their own words, what elements from the videos caught their attention or made them uncomfortable or which elements they would

emulate if they were to create a sports video. Using these types of questions, I was able to obtain valuable information from the students without alerting them to the material we would discuss in the focus group session.

Finally, before moving on from the discussion of the methods, I would like to note that both methods depend on the crafting of questions to access information. As such, it was important to make sure that the questions I asked were written properly so as to engender the most reliable answers possible. In order to do this, I followed the advice of several scholars when writing the questions. I stayed away from double-barrelled, loaded, emotional, leading, and ambiguous language. Furthermore, I also stayed away from jargon and technical words, but I did not turn to patronizing and infantilizing language either (Hank, Jordan, and Wildemuth, 2009; Deacon et al, 2007; Bernard, 2002).

Selecting a population

Sports Canada, in its 2005 study on Canadian participation in sports, found that teenagers between the ages of 15 to 18 had the highest participation rates in the nation. According to their results, more than half of this population participates in sports (Statistics Canada, 2008). At the same time, given that Canada has a nationwide media literacy mandate, these students should have received media literacy lessons to teach them how to receive, understand and negotiate the meanings of the media messages they receive on a daily basis. Of course, the great caveat here in Ontario at least is that the Ministry of Education while calling for critical thinking in both its Media curricula and its Health and Physical Fitness curricula, does not have a specific strand for critical

analysis of media sport (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2000). It is this caveat that made this population attractive for study. Could these students, who are so immersed in the culture of sport, detect and critique socio-political, economic, and cultural issues present in media sport?

Furthermore, given that the Ontario Ministry of Education and the Media Awareness Network deem topics like race, gender, and nationality appropriate for students of these age groups, asking them to identify these issues within sports was within the realm of what these institutions expect of students in these grades (Media Awareness Network, 2010b). All of this, added to the fact that participation rates are lower in other age brackets (both up and down), made this bracket the ideal population for this study.

I focused on the upper echelon of that age range: first year university students (mostly 18 year olds⁴¹). Focusing on this group has practical advantages. First, like high school students, first year students have not yet been exposed to much of the specialized education of university. This means that most of the knowledge they possess comes from what they learned in high school. However, unlike their high school peers, first years could consent freely to participate in the study without the need of a parent or a guardian. This was supposed to make it easier to find participants because they did not depend on bringing consent forms signed by their parents or guardians. Moreover, the pool of possible participants was substantial considering the sheer size of the undergraduate population of the university. Finally, there was no need to depend on administrators to

⁴¹ Although the rationale called for 15 to 18 year olds, I did not automatically discard older first year students if they still complied with the other criteria: no other formal education apart from high school and interest in sports.

find participants for me; I could advertise all over campus for prospective participants. I chose this population carefully to avoid many of the pitfalls I suffered in the first study.

Recruiting participants

After the Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Information and Media Studies approved my addendum to the original project, I began the process of recruiting the participants. I had a multipronged approach for recruitment: 1) contacting individual faculties, 2) putting up flyers around campus, 3) visiting colleagues' classrooms, and 4) mass emailing the undergraduate population of the university. Each of these approaches came with a set of obstacles that I will discuss later. For now, I will focus solely on explaining what constituted each approach.

I began my recruitment trail by contacting each individual faculty and sending them a PDF version of my recruitment flyer⁴². In each case, I asked the contact if they could either forward my information to their first year students or put up a copy of the flyer on key areas where they knew students would see them. Apart from the administrative departments of each faculty, I also contacted student associations and faculty student councils.

The second part of my recruitment process was to obtain the proper permits to put up posters around campus. The Student Government has bulletin boards in almost every building of the university. I obtained permission from them and put up posters in all their bulletin boards. This included multiple boards in the student centre and other areas where the undergraduates gather frequently.

⁴² See Appendix H – Second Study Recruitment Poster

Afterwards, I asked a few colleagues if I could visit their classrooms in order to talk directly to their first year courses. According to the Ethics Committee, professors and teaching assistants could not advertise the study themselves, but they could (if they chose to) offer me a brief period of their class so I could present the study and, potentially, sign up some participants.

Finally, I sought approval to send a mass email to all undergraduates from the main campus and the affiliated colleges. I crafted a similar email to the one I had sent to the individual faculties and included a copy of the PDF so that all undergraduates had an opportunity to be informed about the project and contact me if they wanted to participate.

The end product of this recruitment campaign was that I received over 50 emails from interested students. After weeding out the ineligible (non first-year students), I had 38 students signed up for the 5 sessions I had scheduled. Because of time constraints, I had to schedule the sessions around the university's midterm break. Also, because I am the only researcher, scheduling revolved around my own availability. This meant that I scheduled three sessions in the week prior to midterm break and two afterwards. As I will show later on, this had an impact in the total number of participants I had in the sessions.

The sessions

After recruiting the participants, I emailed them individually to provide them with practical details of the meetings. I sent one email detailing the time and place they had signed up for and another one reminding them the day before their sessions. Once they

arrived, I provided them with the letter of information and consent⁴³ and began at the time specified for the session. We never went above the allotted time.

In the sessions, the students watched three short video clips (total time was less than 10 minutes). After watching the clips, they answered a 5-page questionnaire that had some background and demographic questions and some open ended questions about the clips. This took, approximately, 20-25 minutes. Finally, after handing in their questionnaires, they participated a focus group discussion that I video recorded. In this discussion, I asked them some questions about themes and topics relating to the sports videos.

The videos

As an avid follower of boxing, I routinely go to YouTube to look for old fights or to check out highlight videos of boxers before a match. Fans sometimes create these types of videos and post them for others, like me, to enjoy. My own familiarity with this genre gave me the fundamental idea for both of these research projects. Highlight videos posted on the web are one of the most common ways in which contemporary sports fans interact. Mahan III and McDaniel (2006) explain this phenomenon:

...one could argue that the evolution of the sport-mass media relationship has given rise to a fourth communication community. Distinct from the sports readers or sports viewers who use the Internet in similar to traditional media (i.e., one-way communication), there exists a group of consumers who take advantage of the more interactive aspects of the new medium. These consumers are

⁴³ See Appendix I – Letter of Information and Consent Second Study

characterized by their use of two-way forms of communication found on the Web including both synchronous...and asynchronous... technologies. (p.427)

The rise of sport fan videos is part of this “fourth communication community” which Mahan III and McDonald describe above. These fans not only receive information, but they also create and disseminate new information. In many cases, they demonstrate their allegiance to a particular athlete or team by creating videos of what they feel are the best moments of their preferred players or teams.

As with any social creation, these videos have socio-political implications. Henry Jenkins (2009) argues that

YouTube’s utopian possibilities must be read against the dystopian realities of a world where people have uneven access to the means of participation and where many are discouraged from even trying. If YouTube creates value around amateur content, it doesn’t distribute value equally. (p. 124)

While many praise participatory culture for its democratizing potentials, it is important to remember that the people with access to these media are still relatively few. The voices that speak on YouTube or other internet video-sharing sites are predominantly those of privileged individuals. John McMurria (2006) writes that “A glance at the top 100 rated, viewed, and discussed videos, and most subscribed channels reveals far less racial diversity than broadcast network television” (cited in Jenkins, p. 124). Furthermore, as scholars like Lewis and Jhally (1998) point out, creating videos and being proficient in digital technologies is not necessarily equivalent to being critical or subverting hegemonic notions. In fact, in many cases, amateur video producers repeat trends and styles they see in mainstream media. John Hartley (2009) argues that “The downside of

the YouTube model (of learning by doing and random copying) is that people don't necessarily learn what they need to express what they want" (p. 128). I would add that an additional, more serious problem with this type of production is that when users learn simply by copying, there is an embedded potential lack of reflexivity about the techniques, the messages, and the content that hinders any kind of subversive or critical approach to the creative process. This is why I chose to use YouTube highlight videos in this research.

Choosing the videos

I conducted a search through YouTube trying to find sport fan videos created by the users themselves. Originally, I chose six videos which had enough socio-political and economic implications to provide a basis for discussion in the focus group sessions.⁴⁴ With the help of my supervisors, I finally decided to use three videos. The videos I chose had an aggregate length of five minutes and fifty-six seconds.

I also followed other criteria to choose the clips. First, I wanted to show fan videos. This meant that I would try to minimize the possibility of using professional highlight reels from big conglomerates such as TSN or ESPN by making sure I did not find these videos in official media conglomerate YouTube channels. Furthermore, I eliminated any videos that had media logos watermarked throughout the entire clip⁴⁵. These measures, of course, were merely preventive. There is no real way to eliminate the possibility of using a professional clip altogether as I will explain later on. Second, I

⁴⁴ I will discuss these in the next section.

⁴⁵ Because highlight videos are bound to use material from other sources, occasional watermarked logos did not, automatically, disqualify a video. Continuous watermarked logos, however, usually signal authorship by a single entity.

wanted videos that would hold the participants' attention. Because of this criteria, I disqualified a few slideshow-type videos, where creators designed a video using solely still photo shots. Some of these videos, though ripe with issues to discuss, were too long and repetitive to maintain the participants' attention. Third, I wanted a diversity of videos. I chose three videos which depicted several different sports and different types of athletes: men, women, white athletes and athletes of colour. Furthermore, there was also a mix of amateur and professional sports. And fourth, I wanted the videos to have socio-political and economic connotations to observe whether the participants picked up on these issues. Accordingly, I wanted these images to be subtle. For instance, a video of Kobe Bryant calling a referee "fag" after being reprimanded or a video of a race riot in sports did not fit this criterion. I found videos showcased everyday events and representations without anything that could be considered "extreme" behaviours like the ones I just mentioned.

Clips

After carefully inspecting all the videos I had seen in my YouTube search, I chose three that complied with all the criteria: 1) a Canadian winter Olympic tribute video, 2) a boxing video, and 3) a football video. Taken together, these three videos showcased many of the issues I discussed in the second chapter of this dissertation: gender, race, political economy, and nationalism⁴⁶. Each video offered the participants a chance to

⁴⁶ I would like to note that none of these videos deal with the disability experience. This was an oversight on my part that demonstrates the pervasiveness of the ableist perspective. According to Duncan and Aycock, ableism is the "perspective in which nondisabled experience and point of view is central and dominant." (p.136-137) The authors further suggest that, accordingly, most people privilege the nondisabled experience. Though this was not intended in this study, by not including disabled athletes, the study is essentially done from a completely ableist perspective.

demonstrate their media literacy skills. Finally, I contacted each video uploader to get their perspectives about the purpose for uploading and/or creating these videos.

I. “Canada Vancouver 2010 Winter Olympics Tribute”

All three videos fell under the category of tribute videos. In a tribute video, the video creator makes a video to pay homage to a particular athlete or team. One of the most common ways to do this is by creating a pastiche video using highlight clips that show the athlete or team during their best performances. In the “Canada Vancouver 2010 Winter Olympics Tribute” (henceforth known as “Olympic Tribute”), the author chose clips from what he believed were “the most amazing Canadian moments and athletes of Vancouver 2010.”⁴⁷ The video showcased Alexandre Bilodeau, the mogul skier from Quebec who won Canada’s first gold medal in an Olympiad celebrated in Canada; Joannie Rochette, a French-Canadian skater who earned a bronze medal despite her mother’s death a few days before the competitions; Tessa Virtue and Scott Moir, an ice-dancing duo from Ontario who won a gold medal; and the Men’s and Women’s hockey teams which won gold medals beating the United States in their respective championship games.

Issues present in this video:

Branding – A 24 year old male who uses the nickname “TheJammingYam” on YouTube created this video. According to his description, he created the clip as “part of [his]

⁴⁷ Video description taken from <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7EbEP2xnAk4> on May 16th, 2011.

university projects.”^{48, 49} Nonetheless, the video had a very corporate feel to it. It began with an official image designed for the Vancouver 2010 Olympics and zoomed in on the right hand side where the official logos of the Olympics and Paralympics become the main focus of the screen. Soon after, CTV’s official song for the Olympic broadcast, Nikky Yanofsky’s “I believe” (CTV, 2010) begins playing in the background. Furthermore, the author incorporated the original audio of all the clips into his video. That means that the spectator can hear the narrations of the CTV commentators throughout the entire duration of the video. If not for the disclaimer in the description, someone could confuse this video with one of CTV’s advertisements for their limited edition DVD box sets (Bell Media, 2010).

Gender – At first glance, it looked like the video was well balanced when it came to gender. It had several athletes of each gender, and they were all participating in different sports. However, the video reproduced several problematic assumptions about gender. For instance, the video repeated the notion of “appropriate femininity”. According to Wensing and Bruce (2003) there is a tendency for the sports media complex to focus on “traditionally feminine physical and emotional characteristics or behaviors (e.g. small, weak, beautiful, graceful...)” (p. 388). Furthermore, Wilson (2007) contends that one of the recurring themes in the literature on female sports coverage is that the “female athlete coverage that does exist is focused on gender-appropriate sports such as gymnastics, tennis, and figure skating” (p. 218). In the video, most of the clips followed this pattern.

⁴⁸ IBID.

⁴⁹ In a personal correspondence with the author, he explained: “It was an English course where we were asked to analyze a modern equivalent of theatricality. We were encouraged to be creative and to look for something that accessed our deeper emotions.”

The men, with the exception of Scott Moir, are all represented in sports that are fast, action packed, and violent. The women, with the very insignificant⁵⁰ exception of the women's hockey team, are all represented in sports that are graceful and beautiful. Neither exception is truly significant in balancing out the gender order. In the case of Scott Moir, he was shown in the typical male role of doing the "power" moves while Virtue did the "graceful moves". Also, Scott Moir's unquestioned heterosexuality added to the heteronormativity of the video. And, furthermore, pairs as well as ice dancers are assumed to be part of the 'couple' on and off the ice regardless of accuracy of that assumption.

The inclusion of the women's hockey team did not balance out the gender disparity either; it probably deepened it. First, the disparity of clock-time was glaringly obvious. There was a total of 12 seconds of footage of women's hockey versus an overwhelming 63 seconds of footage of men's hockey. Given that the duration of the video was 3 minutes and 18 seconds this means that almost one third of the footage in this video came from men's hockey. There is no denying that men's hockey enjoys a privileged position both in the mind of the author and in the collective imagination of the nation⁵¹. Furthermore, the type of footage used in both cases also reinforced stereotypical notions of gender representation. In those 63 seconds, there were sequences from all three goals scored by the Canadian men's hockey team and the final celebration after the "golden" goal scored by Sidney Crosby. By contrast, the footage of the women's hockey team was completely passive. There was a five second clip of a female hockey player

⁵⁰ I have chosen this word purposefully and I explain next why this exception is not really significant in terms of balancing the gender problems of this video.

⁵¹ The men's hockey final drew 16.6 million spectators, while the women's final drew 7.5 million. (<http://www.digitalhome.ca/2010/03/record-numbers-watch-canada-win-hockey-gold/>)

sitting down in her locker room. The other seven seconds of the women's hockey coverage showed the women celebrating their victory. Not a single second of those 12 seconds showed a woman in an action shot, scoring a goal or hitting an opponent.

These disparities are consistent with the literature findings on female sports. For instance, Mary Louise Adams (2006) conducted a coverage analysis of *The Globe and Mail*, *The Toronto Star* and *Maclean's*, three of Canada's most visible print outlets, in the aftermath of the gold medals won by the men's and women's hockey teams in the Winter Olympics of Salt Lake City in 2002. In it, she found that even in equal circumstances (both teams won the gold medal against the US teams, same as in 2010) the men still garnered exponentially more (and better) coverage than the women. For example, the *Toronto Star* coverage of both events is quite telling. For the men,

The Toronto Star ran three pages of coverage in its front section, six-plus pages in the sports section, two and a half pages in the "Greater Toronto" section, and a full-page colour poster of the victorious team in a special Olympic review section. "O Canada!" sang the paper's front page. (p.72)

For the women, however,

In *The Toronto Star*, the women's team was featured in a quarter-page photo on the first page of the special Olympic section. A story on their final game received half a column on the first page and less than a third of a page on page four. A column by sports journalist Randy Starkman also appeared on page four. Photos and articles about men's hockey [who had not yet played their final game], in contrast, took up all of pages two and three, portions of pages four and five, and

half of page seven. The women were covered in two stories, the Canadian men in five, other men in three. (p. 73)

The situation Adams described in these passages is akin to what happened in the video: even though the events were almost identical, there was an overwhelming bias in coverage and exposure towards the men's game. Finally, I would like to note many scholars have also documented the meaning of passive shots for women. Hargreaves (2009) explains: "The shots of the women tend to be more passive or they are sexualized and objectified (Cuneen & Sidewell, 1998; Duncan & Sayaovong, 1990; Hardin, 2003) because it allows the media to portray the women in other ways besides athletic." (np) While there was no overt sexualisation of the women in this video, the passiveness was definitely present.

Nationalism – The entire Olympic Tribute was steeped in nationalistic visual discourse. In fact, the purpose of the video was precisely to bolster national pride in Canada. As the author wrote, this is a tribute to these "amazing Canadian moments and athletes". From the selection of the athletes to the multiple shots of waving Canadian flags throughout the clip, there was a pervasive sense of national pride in this video. While popular opinion may consider national pride an important and often positive part of sports, many scholars have also noted how these nationalistic discourses in sports can become problematic. Such nationalistic discourses in sports are sometimes problematic because they might: 1) create a static image of the nation (in this case, a static image of what it means to be Canadian), 2) be used as political propaganda or as an artificial means of "uniting" a country, and 3) be accompanied by "othering" and the creation of an "us" vs. "them"

mentality (Goksøyr, 2010; Billings, 2008). These issues make it important to question or critically assess nationalistic discourses in media products like these.

II. “MiamiQueen”

Like the previous video, “MiamiQueen” was a tribute-highlight type of production. However, unlike the Olympic tribute, this was a professionally done video. As I suggested earlier, there is no foolproof way of telling which videos are professional or corporate products. I applied all the necessary precautions, and only found out that a corporation created the video after I had finished with the data collection. I contacted the uploader, a 31 year old Norwegian male, and in a personal correspondence he told me that the “Video is made by norwegian [sic] TV2 to promote Cecilias [sic] fight in Miami in 2008.” Interestingly, the video contained no official TV2 logos, slogans, or promotional dates. Because of this, the clip could pass (and in this instance did pass) as an amateur tribute video equal to the other two I showed to the participants.

“MiamiQueen” is a video that showcased Colombian-born, Norwegian boxer Cecilia Braekhus. It began with a spoken portion of LL Cool J’s boxing classic “Mama said knock you out”. The soundtrack was soft and did not overwhelm the visuals at this point. While the soundtrack was playing, the spectator could see Cecilia in a sequence of scenes that are unrelated to boxing: she was shown relaxing on a boat, stepping out of a luxurious car, swimming recreationally in a pool and, finally, tugging on the bottom of her swimsuit and putting on pants by the side of the pool. The soundtrack then changed abruptly into the more strident parts of LL Cool J’s song and Braekhus appeared, posing for a weigh in, presumably, before a fight. Afterwards, there were a series of clips where

she was literally knocking out opponents. At the end of the video, the song ended and the voice of famous ring announcer Jimmy Lennon Jr. said: “Introducing Cecilia Braekhus”. As with the previous video, there were various issues present in this short 45 second tribute:

Race – Cecilia Braekhus was born in Cartagena, Colombia and adopted by Norwegian parents. She is of Afro-Caribbean descent and her skin is black. While she is not African-American, she was being portrayed in this video in a manner consistent with the televisual representations of African-American athletes. For instance, all the shots of Cecilia riding on a boat, driving a luxurious car and swimming by a pool connote the notion of “conspicuous consumption” that plagues the representation of black athletes. Ronald Bishop (2009) argues that “African-American athletes are typically portrayed as self-centered, arrogant, and overly concerned with making money” (p. 57). This representation of black athletes as people who like to flaunt their money is also compatible with another element in the video: hip-hop. Kevin Johnson (2009) says “Many scholars have articulated the way NBA athletes perform the cultural signs of hip-hop and how such signs are circulated within larger cultural industries. For example, Boyd examined the way basketball and hip-hop changes the signs of the ‘American Dream from the perspective of the young, Black, rich and famous’” (p. 197). Although, Braekhus is not part of African-American culture, she is still circumscribed by the same parameters as black athletes in the United States⁵². This suggested that Braekhus, like other black athletes, experience what Grainger, Newman, and Andrews (2006) have

⁵² It is interesting to note that the uploader of the video claims that this was a promotional ad for an upcoming bout in Miami. It would not be farfetched to believe that the producers thought this would be the appropriate image to portray for Cecilia in her American soil debut.

termed the “impossibility of transcendence”. According to Grainger *et al.* studies of race in sports suggest that various media often portray black athletes in stereotypical manners that emphasize conspicuous consumption, violence, arrogance, and sexualisation. For a black athlete to shed these attributes, he/she must, in essence, shed his/her “Blackness” (p. 457). In other words, the only way to stop being seen as deviant is to become “colour neutral”.

Gender – Contrary to the Olympic tribute, this video focused on a female athlete who participates in a sport that is not stereotypically related to femininity. Boxing is a violent, aggressive and tough sport and the spectator could see those attributes in this video. Cecilia Braekhus pummelled and beat her opponents in this video. In that sense, the video did go against the standard of “appropriate femininity” explained by Wensing and Bruce (2003). However, the video utilized two other strategies to gender mark the sport: 1) compulsory heterosexuality and 2) non-sport related aspects. Wensing and Bruce explain that in many cases, female athletes are presented as sex objects for the consumption of the male gaze (p. 218). While this was certainly not the main feature of the video, there was a brief moment where the camera was fixed on Braekhus’s wet body as she exited the pool. The camera focused clearly on her buttocks as it showed how her swimsuit stuck to her buttocks (prompting her to adjust and tug on it). Furthermore, beginning the video with many visuals that are unrelated to the world of boxing suggested that sports performance is secondary to Braekhus’s persona (p. 218).

Branding – The video was filled with “zap-proof” advertisements. According to Bellamy Jr (2006), sport is an ideal medium for advertising precisely because it provides a lot of space for product placement that is inescapable when the spectator consumes the games. This video continued this trend offering exposure for Ford Mustang, Hard Rock Café, Schwartzhog Krauter Liqueur, Nike, Adidas, Everlast, Vitae Pro, among others.

III. “Florida State Football 2010”

The final video I showed to the participants was a tribute video dedicated to the football team of Florida State University. The video was created by a 22 year old woman presumably⁵³ from the state of Florida. Like “MiamiQueen”, this was also a “promotional” video; it showcased the best moments of the 2009 football season in preparation for the upcoming 2010 season. The creator wrote in the description: “Get some goosebumps for the 2010 FSU football season”⁵⁴ However, unlike MiamiQueen, this was an amateur video.

“Florida State Football 2010” (henceforth known as “FSU tribute”) began with two fighter jets from the US Air Force flying across the air space above Doak Campbell Stadium (FSU’s football stadium). It continued with a sequence of images that represent the customs and traditions of the program. It showed Chief Osceola, the mascot of the FSU Seminoles, the band, the logo, and the flags. The beginning sequence also presented the traditional protocol of Chief Osceola riding in on his horse and planting his fire spear in the middle of the playing field before each game. The fanfare of the “Marching Chiefs”, the official FSU marching band, accompanied all these images. There were

⁵³ Unlike the previous two uploaders, this uploader did not return my messages.

⁵⁴ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zqaKSQSGBew>

variations of this sequence throughout the first minute of the video. At the minute mark, the spectator could actually see some images of the Seminoles playing football. The rest of the video was mostly a collection of highlights of the previous season: touchdowns, field goals, runs and hits. Like the two previous videos, this tribute contained many issues for discussion.

Militarism – Football has long been associated with war. Nick Trujillo (1995), in his now classic essay “Machines, Missiles, and Men”, explains:

Some researchers have argued that militarism is a structural trait in football itself (Arens, 1976; Guttman, 1978; Real, 1975). "The similarity to war is unmistakable," wrote Phillips (1969): "Each game is a battle with its own gameplan, each season is a campaign, the whole thing a series of wars. . . . There is even a general draft" (p. 48). Others have pointed out that because of football's inherent militarism, it has actually been used by military and educational institutions to teach military concepts to young men... (p. 410)

What Trujillo explains in this passage is that scholars have actually noted both the literal and metaphorical connections football has to war. On one hand, football can be seen as a metaphorical war, but on the other hand, it can actually contribute, literally, to the creation and maintenance of soldiers and military institutions as Trujillo points out.

Interestingly, both of these concepts could be seen within the FSU tribute video.

The video began with an overt association to the military complex by showing two fighter jets. However, this was also the beginning of a metaphorical association with war. This is part of a whole series of pre-game rituals that simulate pre-war rituals. After

the flying jets, Chief Osceola appeared, essentially presiding over the meeting. There were also images of the football players (soldiers) marching hand in hand off to play (combat), but the game (the war) did not begin until the Chief threw down his spear in the middle of the playing (battle) field. That's when the players (soldiers) broke through the FSU banner (national flag?) and took the field of play (battle) to defend the honour of their university (country). Finally, the quarterback (field general) threw the first pass (began the hostilities) and the game (war) officially started. All of this happened with the background of the marching band, whose associations to militaristic rituals needs no reminder. The war narrative was clear and present in this video.

Race – Given the name and mascot of the Florida State Seminoles, it is not difficult to imagine that this video contained many instances of race representation that are problematic. Steinfeld, Foltz, Kaladow, Carlson, Pagano Jr., Benton, and Steinfeld (2010) explain that the practice of using Native American imagery for sports team is a very contentious practice that an estimated 118 organizations in the United States, including the American Psychological Association, denounce. They say,

In 2005, the American Psychological Association (APA) issued a resolution recommending the immediate retirement of American Indian mascots, symbols, imagery, and personalities in sporting endeavors. According to the resolution, this practice should be discontinued because it undermines the educational experiences of members of all communities, establishes an unwelcome and hostile learning environment for American Indian students, has a negative impact on the self-esteem of American Indian children, undermines the ability of American

Indian Nations to portray accurate and respectful images of their culture, and may represent a violation of the civil rights of American Indian people. (p. 363)

I would like to note that in the case of Florida State, the university sought and obtained permission from the Seminole Nation in Florida to continue using the mascot, nickname, and logos (Steinfeld et al, 2010, p. 366). This notwithstanding, the use of native and indigenous mascots, logos, names, and hand gestures, such as the “Tomahawk Chop” done by the FSU fans, in sports is an increasingly contentious issue. Researchers have found that these images do, in fact, affect the mental well being of Native American students⁵⁵, so permission from one group cannot overrule the real problems other members of different groups experience.

Gender – There is a very clear and obvious separation of gender roles within the sport of football. Collegiate football actually has no equivalent program for females. There is no such thing as female college football in the United States (or in Canada for that matter). In this video, therefore, all the athletes were men. The few women in this video were cheerleaders, band members or fans. They were nothing more than accessories in this battle of masculinity.

Challenges

As with any research project, I confronted several obstacles that limited the size and scope of my project. Even though I took steps to ensure a high percentage of participation in the sessions, I was unable to recruit as many students as I would have

⁵⁵ For a good discussion of these studies, see Steinfeld et al, p. 363.

liked. As with the limitations in the previous project, I think it is important to detail these obstacles so that future researchers may benefit from these insights.

One way I recruited students was by posting flyers all over campus utilizing the bulletin boards owned by the Student Government (SG). Though I was able to use most of the bulletin boards they owned, my recruiting period conflicted with the SG elections and that cut the available bulletin boards considerably. In every building, the SG had at least one bulletin board that was off limits to all other announcements because SG candidates were using it. While this was not a big impediment in some places that had multiple boards, other, smaller buildings only had one extra board that was overflowing with flyers from all other posters.

Secondly, I emailed many departments and faculties to see if they could forward my announcement to their students. Another obstacle I confronted was that many of these departments and faculties were not as cooperative as I had hoped. I received many emails from administrative assistants and secretaries telling me that they were unable or unwilling to either email their students or forward the email to someone who had the capacity to do so. Though some of them gave me options, most either did not reply or simply said that there was nothing they could do. The response was similar amongst the student organizations I contacted.

When it became evident that I would not be able to reach students through their faculties or student organizations, I applied to send out a mass email to all undergraduates in the university. Unfortunately, the process for sending out a mass email is not as efficient as it could be and the email had to be approved and handled by an officer. The original email I submitted contained a PDF attachment that provided the details about the

date, time and place of the sessions. However, when they sent the email to the undergraduate population, they either forgot or eliminated the attachment and the students did not receive it. Though I did get a good response from the email, and some students messaged me to ask to see the flyer (as I referenced it in the email, but was non-existent), it is not impossible to imagine that some potential participants were discouraged by the lack of information available in that electronic mail.

Regardless, the email proved to be the most effective way to recruit students. I did get a healthy response and wound up signing up 38 participants for the 5 scheduled sessions. Nonetheless, there were many other students who inquired and decided not to participate. Several were looking for some type of remuneration for participating in the study. Some wanted money, while others were looking for school credit. Some departments, like the Psychology department, require their undergraduates to participate in research projects as part of their program. These programs keep a list of “approved” projects that count for credit. When I told many of these students that my project was not part of their department, they declined to participate.

There were also several students who could not participate because the sessions did not fit in with their busy schedules. Even when they had expressed interested in participating, they declined when they learned the times and dates of the sessions. Another, more troublesome variant of this problem appeared during the actual sessions. Eighteen students who had signed up for these sessions failed to show up. Most of them did not offer any explanations or excuses for why they had not shown up. The session I scheduled for the Friday before the start of midterm break had 5 people and none showed up. While it is understandable that many students left early that week, it makes me

wonder why they signed up in the first place or why they did not try to change their scheduled time.

The final tally of students who came to participate in the five scheduled sessions was 20. However, in order to try to accommodate all those other students who were unable to sign up because of conflicts or those who had missed their scheduled sessions, I scheduled three extra sessions and contacted all those students. I put up flyers around campus again and I emailed these students again. I received three replies on that last round of emails and none of them could make it to the three new sessions. This time, there was no midterm break dividing the sessions in half and no after-break exams. Nonetheless, all the students were still either too busy or just not interested enough to participate or even reply.

Regardless, I went ahead with the 20 students who did attend the sessions. These 20 students (11 men, 9 women) went through the study as just as I designed it. They saw the videos, answered questionnaires and participated in focus group meetings.

Method for analyzing data

Once I acquired the data utilizing both questionnaires and focus groups, I needed to analyze the products of those two exercises. Stewart, Shamdasani, and Rook (2007) note that “the most common analyses of focus group results involve a transcript of the discussion and a summary of the conclusions that can be drawn” (p. 109). Even though not all researchers transcribe focus group sessions (marketing researchers, for instance, sometimes need to make fast decisions based on the data acquired), the kind of analysis that I wanted to do necessitated transcripts. According to Stewart *et al.* the “amount of

analysis and the level of detail and rigor ultimately depend on the purpose for which the research is carried out...” (p. 109). In this case, the purpose of the research was to explore something that has not been studied before; therefore, some deep analysis to search for tendencies, gaps, and lacks was particularly appropriate. The best way to do this was to go through several levels of analysis and having a transcript facilitated this process.

Bertrand, Brown, and Ward (1992) explain the advantage of transcribing the data: “The major advantage of the transcription method is its completeness. All details are recorded in the original language of the participants. The data remain fresh for analysis, even at a much later time” (p.201). According to Bertrand *et. al.* the major disadvantage of transcribing is the time it takes. However, as there were only five focus group sessions lasting no more than 40 minutes each, this was not a concern for this data set.

Stewart *et al.* offer some suggestions about how to best transcribe videos or audios of focus groups. For instance, the authors suggest that a good transcription will “faithfully pick up incomplete sentences, half-finished thoughts, parts of words, odd phrases, and other characteristics of the spoken word in a group discussion” (p. 111). Furthermore, they advise not to edit the text too much. They argue that some editing may be required to increase readability but the transcription must remain true to the character of the response (p.111). In my case, I transcribed as faithfully as possible trying not to edit or change anything. Some verbal hang-ups, such as the word “like”, may be missing on occasion, but most everything else was transcribed verbatim. I used “...” to indicate pauses and unfinished thoughts and noted incorrect words by using “[sic]”.

Stewart *et al.*, also talk about the importance of non-verbal communication. They argue that even though a transcript is probably the primary text of analysis, it does not

reflect the entire character of the discussion (p. 111). This is why I made some annotations in the transcripts that reflect the non-verbal cues that I noticed while conducting the discussion and then while looking at the videos. I marked non verbal cues such as one of the students smiling when another makes a comment, or a participant shaking his/her head at one of the questions in between the lines of the transcript.

After I transcribed the videos, the next step was for me to analyse the discussions and for this, I turned to what Bruce Berg (2009) calls “Qualitative Content Analysis” (QCA). According to Berg, QCA “is a careful, detailed, systematic examination and interpretation of a particular body of material in an effort to identify patterns, themes, biases, and meanings” (p. 338). Similarly, Hsieh and Shannon (2005) argue that qualitative content analysis is “defined as a research method for the subjective interpretation of the content of text data through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns” (p. 1278). Both Berg and Hsieh and Shannon discuss three different types of QCAs: conventional, directed, and summative. For this particular study, only the conventional type of QCA is relevant. According to Berg, “conventional content analysis involves coding categories that have been derived directly from the data itself, what some methodologists refer to as a grounded or grounded theoretical approach” (p.340). This is a particularly pertinent approach for a study like this one where there is not a lot of previous research into the matter. Hsieh and Shannon explain it best:

This type of design is usually appropriate when existing theory or research literature on a phenomenon is limited. Researchers avoid using preconceived categories (Kondracki & Wellman, 2002), instead allowing the categories and

names for categories to flow from the data. Researchers immerse themselves in the data to allow new insights to emerge (Kondracki & Wellman, 2002), also described as inductive category development (Mayring, 2000). (p. 1279)

In essence, this method allows the data to dictate the direction in which the study will go. The main purpose here is to obtain a better overall picture of the phenomenon being studied. In this study, I wanted to be able to see what the students knew about the socio-cultural aspects of sports and if they can apply that knowledge when they are watching media sports. Nonetheless, while I asked the data certain questions, the data also offered some other avenues that I did not foresee.

QCA is, as Berg says, “chiefly a *coding operation and data interpreting process*” (p. 339) [Emphasis in the original]. Because of this approach, it is important to understand how this process actually occurs and what steps I took to ensure a systematic and fair analysis of the data. After I identified my research questions, I began by developing what Berg calls “analytic categories”. Berg explains that “[t]hese analytic categories arise from reading the literature, links to the research question, or even directly from the interview questions” (p. 363). In this study, the analytic categories came directly from the probes used in the focus group discussions. Categories such as “Gender”, “Race”, “Nationalism”, and “Industry” (among others⁵⁶) were the main topics I used in the probes and they became the guiding categories in the analysis.

After developing the analytic categories, Berg suggests an initial reading of the data called “open coding”. This open coding is the moment where I read through the data and identified relevant themes and category labels. Some of these categories and themes

⁵⁶ I mention all categories in the Results chapter.

matched the analytic categories I developed in the earlier stages. Next, I moved on to what Berg calls “axial coding” which is coding done around each category in particular⁵⁷. Here I established some systematic coding rules or questions⁵⁸ to ask the data so as to try to curb my own biases while doing the axial coding. Finally, I sorted the data into their final form in the results chapter.

Concluding remarks

This chapter is a detailed account of how I conducted this research project. I explained the rationale for choosing the two different methods for acquiring the data, the rationale for choosing a population, for choosing the videos and for choosing a method for analyzing the data. I also detailed the steps I took and the considerations I made to secure participants. Finally, I explained the obstacles I faced while undergoing these processes and how they affected the final composition of the participants. Now I can turn to the heart of this project: the discussion of my results.

⁵⁷ I created a separate file divided by the categories I found in open coding: Nation, Gender, Industry, Race, Stereotypes, Narratives, Contextual Narratives, Common Sense, Text Awareness, Feelings/Emotions, and Production Elements. I populated each category with all the student exchanges that fit that particular category. Then, I did another round of coding in each category.

⁵⁸ What kind of knowledge is the student drawing from in this answer? Is s/he aware of the problematic political elements in the clip? Is s/he reacting to my question or someone else’s comment? Is s/he bring up something that I did not think about? Are there any non-verbal communications here that add to the verbal response?

Chapter 5 - Results

The questionnaires and the focus group transcripts afforded me the opportunity to get a glimpse into the knowledge and understanding of these participants. The findings in both of these documents allowed me to construct a picture of the type of knowledge these students carry around with them and how they use it in the exercise of sports consumption. In this chapter, I share these results and trace the trends and patterns I noticed in their thought processes. I will discuss the meanings of these trends and patterns in the final chapter.

Portrait of participants

I received 20 students in my sessions. However, not all participants completed both the questionnaires and the focus groups. Jada⁵⁹, a Muslim young woman from Saudi Arabia, informed me that she could not stay for the discussion because her religious convictions did not allow her to be filmed. I was filming the focus group discussions because I was the only researcher and it would have been very difficult for me to moderate the sessions and take extensive notes at the same time (most methodologists suggest that the moderator focus only on guiding the discussion and nothing else). Although theoretically I could have turned off the video camera at her request, in reality it was almost impossible to do so. Her session had 8 participants and was the biggest session of all 5. She did complete the questionnaire so I did get her background and demographic data plus her immediate reactions to the videos. It is important to mention

⁵⁹ I changed all participant names to pseudonyms.

this from the outset because when I discuss the focus group numbers, they will never add up to 20. Apart from Jada, however, everybody else went through the entire process.

The group of participants was mostly homogeneous and this is likely a reflection of the general demographic profile of the university⁶⁰. For instance, 14 out of 20 (70%) participants were born in Canada. The remaining six came from Hong Kong, Iraq, Mexico, Oman, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia. Their national heritage is a tad more diverse as 10 of those 20 participants (50%) reported having at least one parent who was born in another country.

The homogeneous trend continues when discussing the participants' age. Fifteen out of 20 (75%) of the participants were 18 years old at the time of the study. Two (10%) others were 19, and 3 (15%) were 20 or older. In terms of gender, the group was almost balanced. There were 11 males (55%) and 9 females (45%)⁶¹.

Eighteen out of 20 (90%) participants went to high school here in Canada; 17 out of those 18 studied here in Ontario. This piece of data is important because it means that most of the students in this project went to Ontario high schools and theoretically they should have been exposed to the media education elements of the Ontario educational

⁶⁰ Because of my stated goals in this study, I focused my background and demographic questions on matters of formal education. I did not, however, include socioeconomic status as a category and did not conduct analysis in that regard. Nonetheless, the results have given me reason to think that future studies might want to analyze the relationship between class, taste in sport, and critical media literacy abilities. Many students in my group admitted to not paying close attention to the last two videos I showed because they did not enjoy or follow the sports they depicted (boxing and football). Both of these sports have been associated to the working classes by scholars (Wilson, 2002, p.6). This notion comes out of Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital. Wilson writes: "According to Bourdieu all cultural consumption including sports consumption requires the appropriate preferences and tastes as well as skills and knowledge, which he terms cultural capital...In contemporary America, the upper classes tend to avoid sports that stress physical contact, toughness, asceticism, and hard manual labor, the so-called "prole sports" (p.6). It would be interesting to find out if there is a relationship between the socioeconomic status of people, their tastes in sport and if this affects their media literacy skills regarding sports consumption.

⁶¹ Although the group seems almost balanced, there is a discrepancy between the proportions in this study and in the university in general. In the general undergraduate population of the university, women comprise almost 55%. See Appendix J – University Documents.

curriculum. Interestingly, only one participant out of all 20 (5%) said that she had taken a media course before. Furthermore, when I asked them if they had at least taken a media strand in any other courses, only five out of 20 (25%) said yes. Of those five, four of them said that they had only taken one course that had a media strand; the other student took two courses with media strands. I will discuss the possible implications of this disconnect between the official curriculum and what the students report in the next chapter.

Regarding the area of study of the participants, there were representatives from all 5 areas in the university. Nine out of 20 (45%) students reported having a science-related major. Four out of 20 (20%) wrote that they were in the undergraduate business program (BMOS). Three out of 20 (15%) were enrolled in arts and humanities programs and another 3 (15%) were enrolled in social science programs. One student (5%) reported studying engineering.

Another area of almost complete homogeneity is the participants' involvement in sports. All subjects reported either participating or watching sports. This is not surprising given that I was explicitly looking for students who had an interest in sports and media. Nineteen out of 20 (95%) of the respondents claimed that they play sports. Of those 19, 16 (84.2%) mentioned playing sports both in a competitive and recreational setting while the remaining three (15.8%) said they had participated recreationally in sports. While the degrees of length and frequency of participation varied, most of them said they participated multiple times per week in sports and had done so for several years. For instance, 12 out of the 19 (63.15%) that claimed to participate in sports said that they had been playing sports for more than ten years. Five (26.31%) said that they had been

involved in sports between five and ten years and two (10.52%) said they had been playing sports between two and five years. This means that all of those 19 students have been actively participating in sports at least two years and many more have been actively involved for more than a decade. Apart from the fact that most of them have been participating for a long time, they also participate in sports quite frequently. For example, 15 out of those 19 (79%) said that they played sports multiples times a week: some (five) as many as four to five times a week, and others (nine) two to three times per week.

The study subjects were also avid sports watchers. Eighteen out of 20 (90%) wrote that they watch sports consistently. At least 14 of those 18 (77.7%) said that they watch sports at least once per week, with six of those watching sports everyday and two others who watch sports two to three times per week. Finally, all 18 students have been watching sports for at least one year. Nine of those 18 have been watching sports for over 10 years and another six have been watching sports between five and 10 years.

Research question 1

One of my main objectives in this project was to find out what kind of knowledge these participants bring with them when they sit down to watch media sports. Before learning what they see when they watch media sports, I wanted to be able to understand the well of information from which they draw. Meaning negotiation and interpretation does not happen in a void; it is informed and driven by the knowledge each person accumulates throughout his or her socialization and education processes. Given the importance of this endeavour, the first question I wanted to answer was:

RQ1: “What type of knowledge do the participants have about the socio-cultural, political and economic implications of sport in our societies?”

Though there were two sources of data in this study, the focus group discussions provide the answers for this particular question. As I explained in the previous chapter, I avoided writing prompts in the questionnaire that were directly related to socio-cultural, political and economic issues in sport so as to not warn the participants of the discussion that would take place in the focus groups.

For the focus group sessions I used a guide that helped me tackle the same topics in all five sessions. In that guide, there were two distinct sets of questions or probes.⁶² In one group of questions, I strived to understand their general thoughts on a particular topic in sport. For example, the probe for learning about their general knowledge of issues of gender in sports was: “Some people say gender plays a part in how athletes are represented in the media. What do you think about that?” In this question, I did not ask anything specific about the clips I showed them, but rather I asked the participants to tell me what they read, noticed or learned in other places about that specific issue. I posed a second set of questions to determine if they were able to take that abstract knowledge and use it to detect the issues present in the clips I showed them. Using the same example of gender, I asked them if they could identify these issues in the clips I just showed them. In this first section of the chapter, I will concentrate in presenting the findings of the first set of questions. I will tackle the second set in the next section when I discuss research question number two.

⁶² See Appendix F

During axial coding of the transcripts, I detected three main patterns from the data regarding this first research question. When asking the data “what do they know about...?” the answers varied by theme, but I classified them all under three main categories: 1) Stereotypes or Common Sense Assumptions⁶³, 2) General Unawareness or 3) Basic knowledge. Under the first category, Stereotypes of Common Sense Assumptions, I classified moments when the participants relied on popular sports stereotypes (or social stereotypes) to construct their answers to questions. I used the second category, General Unawareness, for moments when the participants seemed to lack the knowledge about the politics of the media and sports world. And I reserved the final category, Basic Knowledge, for statements which indicated that the participant had, at least, partial correct knowledge about the politics of the sports media world.

The patterns varied by topic. I interpret this to mean that participants demonstrated that they were better informed about some areas of the politics of the sports media world than others. I will present the findings by area for the four areas I discussed in each of the focus group sessions

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1. Race

In order to get a general sense of what the participants knew about the politics of race in contemporary sports, I asked: “Some people say race plays a part in how athletes are represented in the media. What do you think about that?” The students’ answers fluctuated mostly between a general unawareness of the differences in race representation

⁶³ Drislane and Parkinson (n.d.) define stereotype as: “In sociology the stereotype (the plate or cast) is always a social construction which may have some basis in reality but is a gross generalization (eg: women like romance novels). To stereotype is to apply these casts, or gross generalization, to people or situations rather than seeing the individual variation.”

in sports and using stereotypes to explain these possible differences. For example, some instances where the students seemed openly unaware:

I don't know. I would tend to disagree with that. Once upon a time, yes, obviously. But today? [Shakes his head "no"] – Jason⁶⁴

Um, I don't, I don't think that that's... I don't know, that doesn't really, like for me, like I don't feel any difference seeing whatever colour's on the screen, like it doesn't do anything for me, but like the gender roles is definitely something, and race isn't, I don't think it's...I don't think they do anything different with that. And even if they did, I wouldn't catch on. – Emily

...but then in the NBA you look and there's not too many white people playing basketball, there's a lot of black people and in baseball there's a lot of Hispanic people, so there are sports where it seems to be dominated by a race, but I don't know if that's, I don't really think the media is representing it differently, it's just the way that it is in that sport. – Abraham

Also, there were several instances where the students thought there might be some difference in representation, but they looked towards common sense explanations or stereotypes to account for these differences. For example,

Anwar – Maybe it comes back to those racial stereotypes that, you know, some races are better at certain sports than others... that dominate. Because they say

⁶⁴ I cite differently in cases of individual quotations and dialogues. When presenting individual quotes, I left the name of the participant at the end. When presenting dialogue, I put the participant's name at the beginning so as to make it easier for the reader to follow the order of the dialogue.

like Europeans are really good at soccer or like Asian people are really good at cricket [chuckles] or something...

Nell – Or badminton.

Anwar - ...or like African Americans are really good at football. Because we did see a lot of African Americans in the third one, scoring most touchdowns and taking everybody out [Wesley nods].

This exchange is interesting because Anwar acknowledged directly using a stereotype to explain a complex process and Nell added to it. Instead of using this moment to critique the stereotype, he drew from it and legitimized it at the end by saying “because we *did* see a lot of African Americans in the third one” (Emphasis mine). Furthermore, Wesley’s nod in approval signals that Anwar has not only convinced himself but others that these stereotypes explain the complex processes of race representation in sports.

I think it depends on the sport, like for Asians probably not as much team sports like in terms of the NBA finals, not that many Asian teams, but like, otherwise, I don’t know, badminton that’s probably an Asian sport and, um, otherwise mostly other people, like other races... – Vanessa

Here Vanessa, herself a person of Asian descent, painted a simplistic and general picture of Asian participation in sports. Like Anwar, she used stereotypes to explain the differences in racial representation of sports.

There were only two moments when the participants showed that they were aware of some of the problems of race representations. When I asked Jessica’s group if they thought race played a part in the representation of athletes, Jessica mentioned black

athletes were overrepresented in sports that required “natural athleticism”. She explained: “Sometimes, African Americans in like track and field, they’re overrepresented [as] being faster or better long distance runners or better jumpers. You see that in commercials and stuff.” Then, in another group Linda asserted that white athletes in general were overrepresented in the media. She said: “I don’t know, I feel like the white races tend to be portrayed more than any other cultural background.”

2. Sports media industry

Another topic we discussed in the focus group sessions was the business of the sports media complex. To get a better sense of what the participants knew about this topic, I asked: “It has been said that athletes are products to be sold. What do you think about that?” The findings for this particular theme are drastically different from the findings in race. Here, most of the participants who spoke showed some knowledge, even if limited or basic, of how the business of sports works. Out of 15 instances I coded in this topic, 13 of them demonstrated some sort of understanding of the industry. For example,

Since the media doesn’t believe, of course that’s stereotypical, that females should be involved as much in sports, it doesn’t get promoted as much in media, so that means, basically that almost every time you turn on Sportsnet, you turn on TSN or something, you see a lot of males playing sports, but there’s always, there’s actually many female leagues in the background that don’t get promoted as much, so I guess that causes them to have a decrease in wage and stuff but I guess that’s the discrimination. – Trevor

Even though Trevor's explanation is an oversimplification of a complex process, and he seemed aware of this when he called his own explanation a "stereotype", basically he understood the pattern of discrimination female athletics face in resources allocated, wages, and overall prestige of the leagues.

...sometimes I think that people may go out to attract athletes, usually with money, large amounts of money to not necessarily get a better player but to bring a personality that really, I would say, gets the fans interested, gets them excited, kind of like, I don't know, like creating a good advertisement. It's the equivalent of spicing up your promotion campaign and like offering coupons or something at a store by purchasing, in some cases, like especially I think in professional soccer, like players are bought with money from other clubs. I think really athletes are sold between teams on an individual basis, they're sold to the people for entertainment, definitely I agree with the statement that athletes are products to be sold regardless of whether they intend to be or not. – Arthur

In this passage, Arthur explained in plain language the commodification of the professional athlete. He was aware of how teams and leagues are managed and that the bottom line in the business is making more money. He explained how this process happens and how athletes are treated as commodities in order to achieve this bottom line.

Essentially, you are selling a product because like, especially with the major leagues, like with the NBA, the NHL, MLB, NFL, that kind of stuff that the organizations are making like *a lot* of money and that's because of the athletes that they put out there for the fans to see and essentially yeah the athletes are

products because they're making the organization's money and the minute that they're defective then the organization loses money, so for example, Lebron James leaves Cleveland, and Cleveland goes down in the dumps because they don't have that product to make the money because they can't put him on the floor for their fans so, in that sense they are a product. – Malik

Though Malik and Arthur were not in the same session, Malik expanded upon Arthur's explanation of the commodification of athletes. Here Malik explained how athletes are not only products but also sometimes particular athletes are the only element owners have to offer their fans. Their ability to make money depends on the performance of one superstar as he explains using the case of Lebron James.

3. Nationalism

When we were discussing the issues of nationalism and national pride, almost all of the participants who spoke about these issues drew from a series of generalizations that are in line with hegemonic discourses offered by the institutions surrounding events like the Vancouver Winter Olympics. In six out of seven instances, this was the prevailing discourse.

Yeah, I think a source of national pride in sports is important. I think it really helps sometimes people of a nation, connect. There are a lot of differences between people in whatever country you're in, whether it be socioeconomic, class, it doesn't really matter. What's important is that sports can really, in events like the World Cup, in events like the Olympics, or I guess even in a sport as a whole, like baseball or football in America, it can really bring people together, it

can really help people understand similarities between each other, and it just makes people proud to be Canadian, American, British, whatever it may be. It really puts everyone on the same level; you're either an athlete or a fan and, hopefully, you're proud of your nation and I think sports does a good job of doing that. – Arthur

I don't know if anybody watched the movie *Invictus*. It's a rugby movie. They kind of used the sport to bring the nation together as one. Like it wasn't just a sport but, like, it allowed all the people in that country to mesh together and I guess, yeah, sports really do bring people together. And like the athletes themselves have so much respect and focus towards representing their country well, I guess, or just whatever jersey that they are wearing. – Nell

Arthur adhered to the same discourse repeated by official institutions. In his answer, he sees sports as a sort of national and international panacea that can bring people together. His answer glossed over the potential problems with sports nationalism: the creation of a static and inflexible national identity, the exclusion of alternative groups within the nation, and so on. Furthermore, Arthur also demonstrated some naiveté in claiming that sport has the power to put “everyone on the same level”. Nell followed the same line of thought in her remarks. Like Arthur, she adhered to the discourse of sports as national unification vehicle. She brought in an example that, while relevant and on target, glossed over the problematic assumptions in this discourse.

... football is their [Americans'] national pastime, you know everybody loves football, you don't even have to play football, but depending on where you live in

the States, the local football team is like the team to watch. It's taking pride in what, in where you come from, and that's basically it. – Jason

Here Jason demonstrated the perils of following the discourse Arthur and Nell reproduce. By grouping everybody together under the banner of “national pastime”, Jason created a static and inflexible national identity for an entire country. He also makes generalizations about what it means to be an American.

4. Gender

In terms of gender, the participants were balanced between being aware and understanding some of the problems faced by female competitors and drawing from stereotypes regarding the body and gender. For instance, in this next example, Joy demonstrated that she understands the double standard women face when they choose sport as a professional avenue. She also demonstrated knowledge, seemingly augmented by her own experience as a female sports participant, of the stereotypes attached to the female body and constitution.

I think that stereotypes are incredibly true in sports, because I know a lot of woman [sic] don't get exposure for their sport, and like professional sports they don't get paid nearly as much [A few heads nod in agreement]. Like hockey, for men, I know (I just play hockey so that's my example) it's always on TV and I barely, ever, ever see women's hockey online, I didn't mean online, I mean on TV. And also with hitting and stuff I know like men are like: “oh, girls can't hit, girls can't hit” or “you should be playing ballet” or like [laughs] something like figure skating. And it's like, “why?”, it's the same if two girls are like hitting each

other into the boards or two guys are hitting each other into the boards. So I think there's a lot of stereotypes within sports...[trails off] – Joy

Similarly, Sonia also explained that even though women have made some advances throughout the years, there are still some big economic disparities that do not allow women, in most cases, to pursue athletics as a full time endeavour.

I think there are huge differences and disadvantages for females, you know, in sports. I think there are also females doing sport nowadays. It's not like before, you know, that just stay home and take care of the family. Now the females have more options, but it's the economical factor that is not equal, so therefore you have to get a job to maintain yourself to play the sport. Males, most of the time, professional athletes don't do that. – Sonia

Finally, Daniel noted the particular disparity found in contact sports like boxing or mixed martial arts.

Actually, the first thing I thought of when I saw the female boxing video, I was thinking how like, little, there's almost no like female MMA people only in like a few of the institutions that have like female things. So I was thinking like, when the next, when the female MMAs could become mainstream, or when the female boxing could become more popular when compared to like male boxing. That's what I just thought of when I saw that video. – Daniel

On the other hand, other participants, like the ones in the next exchange, tried to explain the differences in gender representations drawing from a set of stereotypes about the capabilities of women athletes.

Malik - People might not agree with this but I think that one of the reasons for that is that you don't, like there's *one* female in the WNBA that can dunk, so I don't know, the stuff that makes the actual game exciting to me, like speed, explosiveness, power, that kind of stuff is more like [unintelligible] to the male games. That's just what I see. But if you look at it from like a figure skating perspective, a guy figure skating isn't as beautiful to me as a woman figure skating, so, in that sense that's why the females are big in that, I guess.

Vanessa – Yeah, I was thinking about Volleyball games, yeah, female games aren't that fun to watch...

Anthony – I think that, mainly on your [Malik's] line of thought, it's just that people want to see the best competitors out there, and this is going to sound pretty controversial, but usually if a male team were to compete against a women's team, most likely, the male team would win, again very controversial, but like if you take the 100 meter dash, just as a main example, in the males' category all the best in the world are running in under 10 seconds, and I'm not quite sure, but I don't think any female has broken the 10 second... This might be really wrong but just if you want to see the best in the world it usually tends to be a male, so women's sports can still be very competitive but if you can only buy one ticket to one game just, it seems like most people would want to go to the male game.

In the first comment, Malik used traditional gender roles to divide sports. He reproduced stereotypes about the attributes inherent in each gender. He used “speed, explosiveness,

power” to describe male athletics while calling women’s sports “beautiful”. Here, Malik demonstrated a lack of knowledge of how television production affects how individuals perceive games. Scholars⁶⁵ have demonstrated that smaller resources lead to worse production values in female athletics. This tends to make female athletes look slower and less dynamic than their male counterparts. Additionally, he constructed static genders in which women are not powerful or fast and men cannot be beautiful. Vanessa then continued the trend by agreeing with Malik’s assessment and offering an example that supposedly legitimized Malik’s position. Finally, Anthony made the claim that men are, in fact, superior to women. His characterization of his position as “controversial” posits that he was aware of his own sexism. However, I would like to note that while he believed what he said was “controversial”, not a single one of the other four participants in that particular group offer any counterargument or voice any disagreement with his position. This suggests to me that either the participants agree with what he has just said, they do not know how to argue against his points or they do not believe the point is important enough for them to engage in a discussion.

Emily presented another example of common sense attributions. In this next example, she explained why she liked the video of the Vancouver Olympics. However, to explain this, she drew from gender stereotypes:

I don’t know, I feel because you’re a guy [Arthur], like you don’t really feel like, I don’t know, I guess it’s just girls who get that emotional connection more than guys do, because I even wrote down [in the questionnaire] honestly, by the end of the first one I had tears, like, every time, I know I’ve seen it a million times, like that, with that music, and those kinds of clips, I don’t know if I saw the exact one,

⁶⁵ See Billings, Halone, Denham (2002), and Messner, Carlisle, Duncan, Wachs (1990)

but like I get, like it actually has a physical effect on me, like I get shivers and I get tears. – Emily

What's particularly interesting to me about this comment is that my own findings contradicted Emily's argument. In fact, most of the participants, males and females, mentioned having some sort of emotional reaction to that first video, as I will show later on. More importantly, Emily used the traditional stereotype of emotional femininity to explain her connection to the video.

The patterns I have outlined here are important because this is the pool of knowledge that the participants drew from when analyzing the videos they saw. For example, when discussing the results of nationalism, I mentioned that most of the participants did not appear to be knowledgeable about the potential problems with sportive nationalism. It will be interesting to see if this trend holds true when they need to identify the issues directly in the clips. To that I turn now.

Research question 2

The results of the first research question provided me with a general picture of the knowledge these participants carry with them when they consume media sport. However, I also wanted to know if they draw from that knowledge to identify and explain what happens on the screen while they are consuming media sport. With this aim, the second research question was:

RQ2: Can the participants identify socio-political issues (e.g. gender, race, nationality, political economy) in media sport texts as they consume them?

Two separate, but complementary, places hold the answers: the questionnaire and the focus groups sessions. The questionnaires represent the participants' first and unaffected responses to the clips. The focus group sessions go deeper and ask more direct questions knowing that their first reactions have already been recorded.

Questionnaires

I designed the questionnaires to get a first reaction to the clips. However, I tried to avoid using questions that alerted the participants about what they were going to discuss in the focus group sessions. After all, the focus groups were the moment when they would go into detail about what they had just seen. This meant that I wanted to get a general assessment from the questionnaire without actually going into matters of race, gender, nationality and political economy. Because of this, I crafted open-ended questions that allowed the participants to bring these topics up themselves if they thought they were important. A majority of the students did not mention any of these issues.

1. First reactions

Questions 19 and 20 were the first questions that assessed their reactions to these videos (up to that point, all questions asked for background and demographic purposes). In question 19, I asked: "Which of these clips caught your attention?" and in question 20 I probed further by asking them to "Please explain why that video clip caught your attention". The response to this question was overwhelmingly in favour of the Olympic Tribute video. Eighteen out of 20 (90%) of the participants chose the first video as the

one that caught their attention. They mentioned two main issues when explaining why: 1) national pride and 2) music.

Eleven of 18⁶⁶ (61%) discussed the emotions surrounding the nationalistic elements of the Olympics. Some of them applied those emotions to themselves, while others generalized them to the entire country. The participants saw these emotions as a positive element.

This clip of Canadian teams or individuals winning a gold medal brought chills to me. – Abraham

It caught my attention because it showed the perseverance of the Canadian athletes at the Olympics and how they wanted to represent themselves and there [sic] country well and with respect. It was quite exhilarating to watch – Nell

Here, both Abraham and Nell explained that the combination of nationalistic elements with the success of the athletes provoked an emotional response in them. They saw this as the main reason why this video resonated with them. Jada, on the other hand, did not limit the emotional response to herself:

Because it showed amazing victories of Canadian; the video was a tribute to the Athletes who made our country so happy and proud to have Athletes like these. [Capital letters in the original] – Jada

She extended this emotion to the entire nation. In all three examples there was a sense of pride and positive emotional feelings regarding the nationalistic discourse embedded in

⁶⁶ Participants often mentioned more than one reason for their reaction, so the numbers in this section will overlap.

the clip. I would like to point out that all of the subjects who reported not having being born in Canada (with the exception of Anwar, who was one of the 2 who chose a different video) subscribed to this discourse as well.

Other participants (five out of 18 – 27.7%) pointed to the music as one of the reasons why the clip was memorable. As in the previous response, the participants here attached an emotional response. For instance,

The song is inspiring as well – Sonia

...the music also conjured some sense of emotion of the games – Arthur

Everything about it –the music (the lyrics and the instruments)... gave me shivers and I almost cried by the end – very touching – Emily

The participants also mentioned familiarity with the athletes or the events, and the thrill of the competition.

2. Uncomfortable elements

I designed Question 21⁶⁷ to determine whether there were any elements in the video that jumped out to the participants as being problematic. I constructed this question to provide the students a space to discuss anything that they thought should not have been in the clip or anything they thought they wanted to discuss or question further.

In the answers, 12 out of 20 participants (60%) saw nothing problematic in the clips. Eight out of 12 (40%) subjects did mention something that made them

⁶⁷ “Did anything in the clips make you uncomfortable? If yes, please explain what”

uncomfortable. However, with the exception of one student⁶⁸, all the others just mentioned one aspect that made them uncomfortable out of all three videos. The participants mentioned the following issues:

- Violence in boxing clip (3 participants)
- Sexualisation of female in boxing clip (1)
- Non-sport related aspects in boxing clip (1)
- Lack of diversity⁶⁹ in boxing clip (1)
- Inappropriate music in boxing clip (1)
- Native American mascot in football clip (1)
- Worshipping of athletes in Olympic and football videos (1)

Most of the problems they identified lie within the boxing video. According to these results, the participants had difficulty identifying problematic areas in the other two videos. Furthermore, as I noted above, only one student mentioned having more than one problem with the clips. The other 7 participants all mentioned only one thing that jumped out at them as problematic. To put it a different way, only one student out of 20 (5%) had a problem with the sexualisation of the female in the boxing clip or the third video showing a Native American as a mascot of a football team.

3. Imitation

I designed the last set of questions (Qs 22 to 24) to get a sense of what production elements from the videos the students liked and which ones they have either reproduced

⁶⁸ This is the reason why the numbers will not add up to 8.

⁶⁹ This is particularly interesting because the respondent is referring to the fact that there were no Caucasians in this video.

or thought that should be reproduced. In questions 22 and 23, I asked them whether they had made a sports video before and if they had which elements they considered while making the video. I designed question 24 for those who had never created a sports video before: “If you have never created your own sports video but were asked to do so, would it be similar to any of these? Which one would it resemble? Why yes or why not?”

Only four out of 20 (20%) of the students reported having made sports videos before. While I find no real tendencies in such a small number of participants, I did notice an interesting split down gender lines in terms of how they described their own videos. Males, for instance, focused on the action elements in their videos:

When making the video – I made sure to include a lot of action scenes ... I skipped the delayed parts. I made sure to add pump-up fast music to go with what was happening in the video. – Anwar

I included various highlights from the game - big hits, scores, tackles – and simply chose a heavy song to accompany it. – Albert

Females, on the other hand, merely mentioned the tools they used and did not get into specifics of content.

Editing only includes some cutting/trimming and adding background music, not much [sic] special effects. – Vanessa

The elements that were included were transitions between photos, and music helped to make the finish [sic] product look and feel better while watching it [Verbatim]. – Joy

I think it is also noteworthy that 19 out of 20 (95%) of the students said that they would imitate one or more of the videos that they saw. This suggests to me that they are not critical enough to notice the problems in these clips. Most of their answers provide additional insights into what they liked about these videos or what they would reproduce themselves. For example,

It would be similar in the fact that I want to catch the audience's attention with fancy highlights and upbeat music. This would make the video more exciting and thrilling to watch. Watching others get excited or "pumped up" in the video will make the audience feel excited. – Trevor

It would be similar to these videos b/c it gave only the 'good' parts about the sport, it would also include music to go along with the theme of the video. – Joy

My video would be similar to all of them in some regard. All 3 videos were highlight reels so to speak. All 3 videos also portray an image for the viewers to want to dominate at their particular sport. All 3 were motivational and inspirational and I think that is what you want in a video about sport. – Jason

I think Joy's quotation is the most illuminating one of the three because she said something explicitly that is latent in the other two and other comments written in the questionnaires: they only see the good things in these videos. They are focused on the technical aspects, on the competition aspect, but they do not seem attuned to the political aspects of these clips. In fact, only two out of 20 students (5%) critiqued something in these videos and mentioned they would do some things differently. Wesley said that he

would focus less on the “glorification theme” and Melissa said that she would add clips of “young children or elderly playing a sport”. However, interestingly, Melissa thought the video was not “corporate” enough because it lacked the logo of supporters “(ex. Tim Horton’s)”.

Focus groups

While I think there are trends and patterns present in the responses above, I would not feel comfortable drawing conclusions from such limited material. I created the questionnaire to get a first reaction, an unaffected response to the videos. Furthermore, it gave everybody the opportunity to express themselves on any of the possible topics. Group settings can be intimidating for some people and this may discourage them from saying everything they think; getting each individual on record is definitely an important matter. However, those results would be incomplete if I analyzed them by themselves. The focus group sessions allowed me to go deeper and ask more direct and pertinent questions. Here, we discussed similarities between clips, narratives, gender, race, nationalism, and industry. I asked them general questions (discussed in the first part of this chapter) about sports and these topics and I asked them specific questions that directly addressed these problems in the clips. After I presented my findings in this part of the study, a more comprehensive picture of what the participants were able to see and how they responded to these issues will emerge.

1. General awareness and critique

As Berg (2009) explains, content analysis in all its variations is chiefly a coding operation (p. 339). In order to be able to get some general tendencies and patterns, I created a scale to code the instances of awareness and critique of each participant in the focus group sessions. I coded the instances from zero to five depending on how critical and aware I perceived them to be.

- 0 – Does not speak about topic – I assigned a 0 to a participant in a topic if s/he did not speak at all when we discussed that particular topic.

- 1- Does not notice – I assigned them a one in cases where they spoke about the topic but either outright admitted to not seeing any problem or spoke about the general topic (ex. gender) but simply did not mention the problematic issue (ex. Gender disparity in football video).

- 2 – Notices and assumes normal or follows dominant discourse – I assigned a two in moments where the participants noted one of the issues (ex. Gender disparity in football video) but did not interpret it as problematic. They saw it as normal or agreed with the dominant discourse.

- 3 – Notices and assumes normal or follows dominant discourse even if someone else critiques it – I assigned a three to moments where participants were aware of the issue because someone else brought it up and critiqued it, but they continued to see it as normal or continued agreeing with the dominant discourse. Their position did not change because of group dynamics.

- 4 – Notices and critiques only after someone else has brought it up – I assigned a four to instances where participants noticed an issue and critiqued it but only after

someone else brought up the topic for critique. This could mean that the group dynamic influenced their position.

- 5 – Notices and critiques – I assigned a five to moments where participants noticed a problematic issue and made some sort of critique of it. They were not influenced by others. They initiated the topic and the critique.

I assigned a number to each participant for each one of the 13 issues I identified in the three clips. This allowed me to get a general sense of which areas were easier for the students to grasp and which were more difficult. It also allowed me to take into account important factors like silence and group influence. I would not feel comfortable or responsible, for instance, grouping moments where a student simply did not say anything together with instances where participants did not notice the issues in the videos. A person may decide not to say anything simply because someone else has already said what they wanted to say or because they were afraid of sounding out of place. However, when a participant does address the topic and either does not notice or noticed but assumed it was normal then that is an important piece of information that helps me construct a more comprehensive picture about their media literacy levels and skills.

The 13 issues I identified in the videos are: Olympic video – 1) Branding, 2) Racial composition, 3) Gender roles, and 4) Nationalism; Boxing video – 5) Conspicuous consumption and race, 6) Hip-Hop and race, 7) Compulsory heterosexuality of the athlete, 8) Non-sports related aspects, 9) Zap-proof advertising, and 10) Promotional style; Football video – 11) Militarism, 12) Native American mascot, and 13) Traditional gender disparities. I categorized each one of these issues under one of the big four categories I mentioned earlier: race, gender, industry, and nation.

As figure 1 demonstrates, the instances coded with a number 1 are the most common occurrence in these results. This means that there were 166 out of 247 (67%)

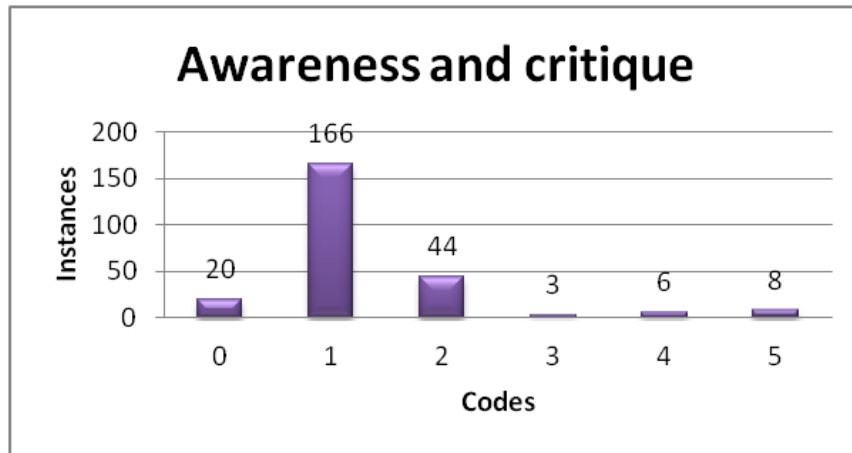


Figure 1 – General Awareness and Critique

moments when participants had the opportunity to demonstrate that they were aware of these problematic issues and could not do so. In some cases, as I will show later on, the participants themselves admitted to not seeing anything that stood out regarding the topics. I would also like to point out that the instances where participants were able to notice an issue and critique it (either by themselves or after someone else had already mentioned it) were quite scarce: only a combined 14 out of 247 (5.6%).

While I will go more in depth into each main topic, I want to mention briefly which topic was easier to identify for the students and which one was the most difficult for them to see. According to these numbers, the participants were quite aware of the nationalistic rhetoric present in the Olympic videos. Seventeen out of 19⁷⁰ (89%) students mentioned the national pride elements. Only two did not speak about this topic at all. The militaristic rhetoric in the FSU video, however, was the other side of the spectrum. Eighteen out of 19 (94%) students simply did not mention the open militaristic overtones

⁷⁰ The count here is 19 because Jada, as mentioned previously, did not participate in the focus group sessions.

of the football clip when discussing issues of nation and sport. Only one student made a remark about it, and nobody brought it up again at all.

2. Awareness and critique: Gender

There were four main issues that involved gender disparities or gender discrimination in the clips I played: 1) Traditional gender roles in the Olympic video, 2) Compulsory heterosexuality in boxing video, 3) Non-sport related aspects in boxing video, and 4) Traditional gender disparities in football video. I aggregated the results for each one of these 4 issues into a single table. The results from that aggregated table are:

Gender Issues Aggregated by Code	
Code	Instances
0	0
1	58
2	9
3	2
4	3
5	4

Table 1 – Gender Aggregate

Figure 2 shows the same results in percentage form to facilitate comparison across the four main areas:

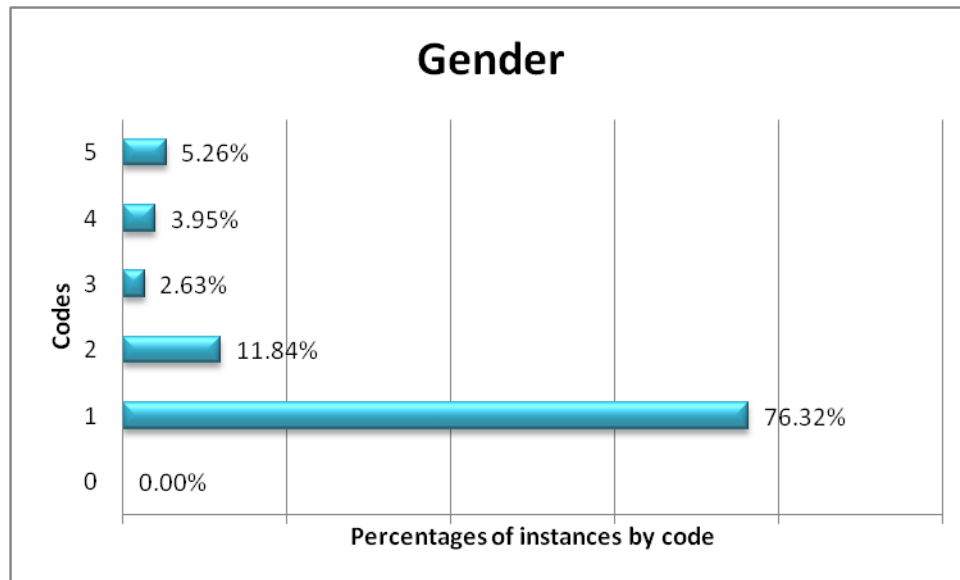


Figure 2 – Gender Percentage

As Table 1 and Figure 2 illustrate, the participants demonstrated a general lack of awareness in the four issues that constitute “gender”. Here I coded 90.76% of the instances as a 1, 2 or 3. This means that it was very difficult for these students to step out of the hegemonic and traditional discourses regarding gender. In the great majority of the cases, the students simply did not acknowledge anything as noteworthy in these videos. I would like to point out, however, that I found half of the total instances of awareness and critique right here in this discussion: I coded seven instances as either 4 or 5. Considering that I only found 14 of these instances in the total study, this is significant in comparative terms.

Some examples are pertinent to better understand these patterns. These are some instances I coded as 1, where the participants demonstrated not being aware of the gender issues present in these clips:

I didn't really see how gender stereotypes in sports were represented here, because it showed men figure skating, and women playing hockey and women boxing... – Abraham (coded: 1)

Well, I think you didn't show like stereotypes because you actually added the female boxer there and you had the figure skaters like he said, so yeah... – Jessica (coded: 1)

Definitely, the second video went against the regular kind of representation of female sports. It was supposed to show, you know, certain ferocity, a certain passion, you know, a kind of intensity that people just assume are in male sports, rather than female sports. It kind of seemed like it was trying to break barriers, kind of break misconceptions. – Arthur (coded: 1)

I coded the first two as 1 because both Abraham and Jessica completely ignored the problems with these representations. While there was, in fact, a man (singular) figure skating and women playing hockey in the Olympic video, these representations remained stereotypical and problematic as I detailed in the previous chapter. There was still an enormous disparity in clock-time between the men's hockey and the women's hockey teams. Moreover, Scott Moir's presence⁷¹ did not really break gender roles given that he exhibits traditional male characteristics of force and strength while Tessa Virtue adheres to traditional female elements of grace and beauty. Finally, while Jessica mentioned the

⁷¹ Furthermore, the rules of the International Skating Union, the governing body of international Ice Dancing has clearly stated that "The composition of a pair must be one Lady and one Man" (p. 11) in their 2010 special regulations & technical rules for single & pair skating and ice dance. Scott Moir's presence is mandated by a heteronormative regulation.

fact that there was a female boxer, she did not address the problematic gender representations in that video either.

I could have coded the last example differently, but I chose to code it as 1 because even though Arthur presented some critique of general sexist world views, he also demonstrated that he was not aware of the sexualisation of the boxer or the presence of non-sport related aspects. In this case, he was not able to pick these themes out of the video, a key tenet of media literacy.

There are also some examples that show how the students noticed the issues but assumed that it is normal:

I think for the second clip, the female boxer, it was a highlight reel type of clip, I would say, but it also showed, you know, she's an elite boxer in the ring, but outside the ring, you know, she's a good looking girl. So, you know, it kind of, it showed both sides of who she is, I guess. – Jason (coded: 2)

Watching the videos I wouldn't really pick out gender as a big issue for me. The first one, I think, I did notice the women hockey players. There was actually a scene at the very end, where they were on the ice, and they were celebrating at the end of the gold medal game, and they were cheering. – Wesley (coded: 3)

In the first quotation, Jason saw the sexualisation of the athlete, but did not think it was problematic. He in fact saw this as a positive quality of the clip. Two plausible explanations for this are that either he is accustomed to seeing female athletes sexualised or that he believes it is a good thing because it negates the common stereotype that females who participate in contact or tough sports must be butch and/or lesbians. In the

second quotation, Wesley spoke after a few participants critiqued the lack of balance regarding the representation of the men's and women's hockey teams. Wesley contended that the women were there and that there was no such disparity. Of course, given that there is a glaringly obvious disparity in clock-time between the men and the women (63s for the males and 12s for the females) there is the possibility that he simply assumed this is the normal order of things in sports.

Finally, I would like to show at least one example of the few instances where the students noticed something problematic in the gender representation of these clips:

I actually noticed at the very beginning, you know they were showing, well, the first video, they show a few females, but I kind of noticed the difference when they showed a female hockey player that was sitting on the bench, but they didn't show her playing, and it was just very fast. And in the third video they didn't show any female players, at all, just men. So it just shows you how the domination of the games is always male oriented [trails off] – Sonia (coded: 5)

Sonia pinpointed two key disparities in the way women were portrayed in these videos. First she noticed how the female hockey player was represented in a passive position and never active. Secondly, she noticed the complete lack of female players in the football video. Finally, she made a remark about how these videos are male oriented.

3. Awareness and critique: Race

There were four main issues that dealt with race stereotypes or disparities between the three videos: 1) Racial composition of the athletes in the Olympic video, 2) Conspicuous consumption in the boxing video, 3) Hip-Hop in the boxing video, and 4)

the Native American mascot in the football video. As in the previous section, I aggregated the results for these four issues. Table 2 shows the results from that aggregation:

Race Issues Aggregated by Code	
Code	Instance
0	4
1	61
2	5
3	1
4	2
5	3

Table 2 – Race Aggregate

Figure 3 shows the same results in percentage form to facilitate the comparison between general areas.

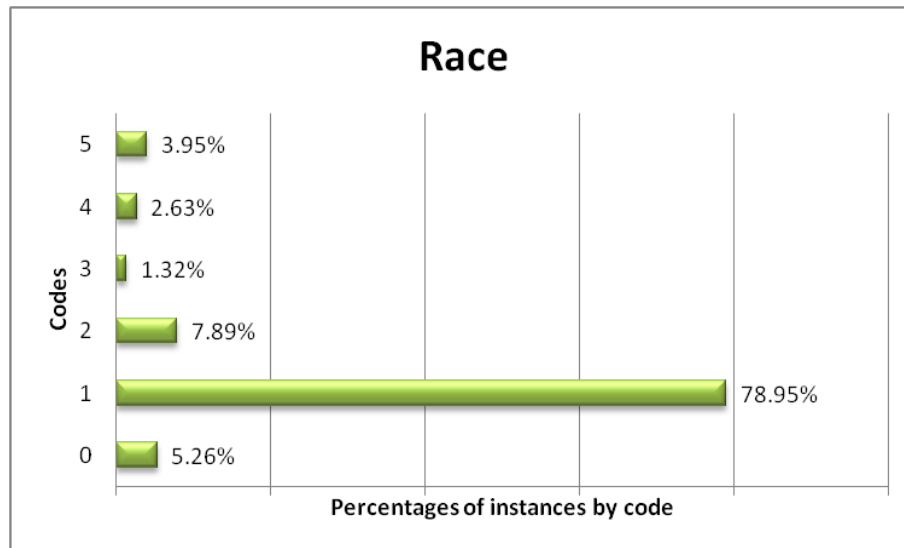


Figure 3 – Race Percentage

The results here follow a similar pattern to the results in gender. There is a great lack of awareness and critique present in these results as well. I coded 88.16% of the instances as

1, 2 or 3. I only coded a small 6.58% of the instances as moments of awareness and critique of the issues.

There are some interesting examples when it comes to seeing and understanding problematic notions of race. Most students either outright said that they did not see anything regarding disparities of race in the video, or they would only focus on identifying the races of the players without paying any extra attention to their representation. For instance:

In the first clip it was, I don't think that there was [sic] many people of any culture other than white or any race other than white and in the second clip you saw any race but white, I think, I don't think I saw a single white boxer in that clip and then in the third film there was a good mix in the football team itself but in the fans I didn't exactly see many other people than white people, I recall... –
Eddie (Coded: Simultaneously 2 and 1)

I decided to give a multiple code to this passage because here Eddie seemed aware that there was a disparity in the races in the clips, but he did not offer any kind of critique nor did he problematize how this affected the representation of the races. Even when I prodded further, he simply did not offer any critique. In essence, he noticed but either saw it as normal or did not think this is a problem. That explains the Code 2. However, while he assessed the racial composition of the clips, he failed to acknowledge the presence of Chief Osceola in the football video.

In this next example, I see the difficulty some students had with being able to pinpoint problematic issues regarding race while watching the clips. Here, Jason outright negated the possibility that race was an issue in the videos. What is more mystifying,

when he seemed to find something to mention, he confused race with gender so he is unable to say anything about race in the videos:

I don't know, I can't really think of any racial issue, at least in my opinion, in my estimation, maybe the only kind of gray area would be the female boxer. Like people may argue, do females, like should they, be boxing, you know? But in my opinion, yeah, anybody has the right to do whatever they want. If they're good at it, go ahead. But yeah, I wouldn't say that race had anything to do with it. – Jason (coded 1)

Finally, this last example demonstrates yet another failed opportunity to bring up these race issues:

Concerning the clips, yeah, anybody... I think race wise there isn't a race issue in who could participate in sports, but for like those who get to that level, I'm guessing it wouldn't matter, because considering, like Asians, you wouldn't really see that many Asians playing in like the Major League sports, I don't know if it's just that they're not good enough or anything or all because we're in Canada and they're probably playing overseas or something, like Asian baseball or something.

I know there's big leagues over there but it's not so much as popular over here... - Trevor (coded 1)

Trevor seemed to not be able to pinpoint any specific issue in the clips so he moved into a general discussion of racial presence in sports. He did not mention whether he saw this happening in the clips, or whether the lack of Asians in the clips was troubling to him. Furthermore, he also ignored all the issues discussed previously. Lastly, Trevor actually contributed to problematic notions of race representation by claiming that race has no

place in sports if you are good enough: “but for like those who get to that level, I’m guessing it wouldn’t matter”.

There are also examples of moments where students noticed the issue of race but either assumed it was just normal or agreed with the dominant discourse. For instance, this next exchange between Arthur and Emily is revealing:

Emily – For the second one, what if it was a white girl? [She asks Arthur] Like, would it, I feel like, I don’t know, I guess you kind of expect it to be a black girl, because they’re like tough, I don’t know.

Arthur – It went well with the music, I thought, like I don’t know, it seemed to fit with the video. I don’t know if it would have worked with a white woman, necessarily.

Emily – Yeah, that’s what I’m saying.

Arthur – Yeah, I agree with you on that.

Emily – So like before I thought that the race thing there it didn’t matter as much as the gender but I think it kind of did. Now that I think about it. Because if it was a Whi..., Caucasian woman I wouldn’t, yeah, I don’t think it would have fit as well with everything else in the clip, like the music, and the shots... (Coded: simultaneously 2 and 3)

In this passage, at first it seemed like Emily was on the path of critiquing the stereotype that boxes black athletes within the confines of hip-hop music. Nonetheless, as the dialogue progresses I see that she was not critiquing this and, in fact, she believed that this is the *only* way the video “works”. Furthermore, she used additional stereotypes to justify her belief by saying that “you kind of expect it to be a black girl, because they’re

like tough...” Arthur, then, was given the opportunity to bring up the problems in this representation, but he failed to do so as well. He ended up agreeing with the problematic discourse.

In the next passage, Anwar mentioned Chief Osceola but does in no way notice the problems of racial representation in the mascot:

I also noticed in the third clip there was that mascot on the horse. He was going around chucking that thing into the ground a bunch of times, so I thought that was good for spirit. – Anwar (coded 2)

Not only did Anwar not critique the representation of Native Americans present in Chief Osceola, but rather he saw it as “good for spirit”. Supporters of racist team names and mascots, like the Redskins of Washington for instance, use this same argument to defend their desire to keep these intact (Steinfeld, Foltz, Kaladow, Carlson, Pagano Jr., Benton, and Steinfeld, 2010).

Finally, here is an example where a participant noted and critiqued one of the issues in the videos:

I thought in the first one was kind of interesting because it was like Canada and we’re supposed to be multicultural [several nods in agreement] but um, every athlete, I’m pretty sure was white [several chuckles including the speaker] so that was kind of interesting to see. There was supposed to be diversity but there was no diversity at all in those Canadian athletes. – Joy (Coded: 5)

In this quote, Joy managed to make the connection between what she saw on the screen and the bigger official discourse of Canadian multiculturalism. She juxtaposed the fact that Canadians are constantly told how multicultural their country is, yet those that are

representing that same country all seem to be white. She noticed how that promise or that discourse seems to have failed in that particular clip.

4. Awareness and critique: Nation

Nation only comprises two issues in the clips: 1) Patriotism in the Olympic video, and 2) Militarism in the football video. The pattern here is somewhat different from the previous two areas. Although I still categorized the majority of instances between 1, 2, and 3, there is almost an even split between the instances of 1 and 2. Table 3 presents the results of the aggregation of both issues:

Nation Issues Aggregated by Code	
Code	Count
0	2
1	18
2	17
3	0
4	0
5	1

Table 3 – Nation Aggregate

There is a small difference of one instance between Code 1 and 2. Figure 4 presents these results in percentage form. There is only one instance of critique, a very small 2.63%.

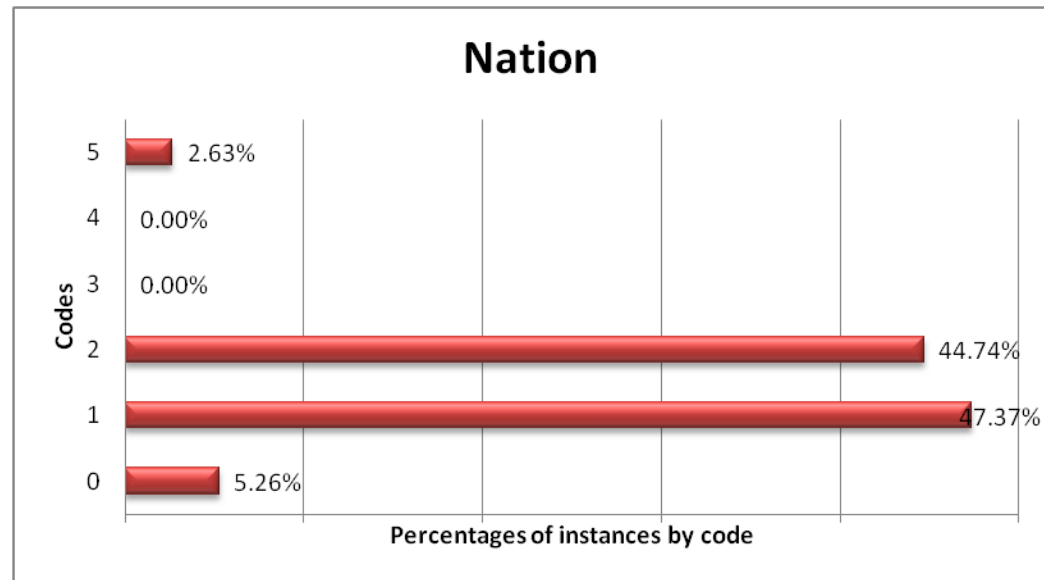


Figure 4 – Nation Percentage

I can explain the even split in codes 1 and 2 with the fact that these two topics were both the easiest and the most difficult for students to identify. As I explained in the general assessment, 17 out of 19 participants noticed the issue of patriotism in the Olympic video, but only one out of 19 noticed the militaristic rhetoric in the football video. This led me to code many instances 1 and 2 simultaneously as I will show next.

In most instances, when discussing the representation of sports and nationalism in the clips, the students automatically thought about the overt displays of patriotism in the Olympic video. There were definitely many obvious moments of Canadian national pride in the video because this was precisely the objective of the creator. However, all but one student failed to take into account the overt displays of militarism present in the FSU video, including the fighter jets which introduce the clip, and the subtler, more metaphorical representations. For example,

I think you are definitely able to see that because like after they won like a game or a medal or whatever you would see the Canadian flags kind of like floating in the air or amongst the crowds and also like even at the Florida game there were flags and cheers that people were doing so...I know that's not *national* but it's like a school kind of thing so it's a large crowd still. - Joy [Emphasis in original transcript] (Coded: Simultaneously, 2 and 1)

In this quote, Joy succinctly demonstrates my argument. She noticed the patriotic elements of the first video and, in another related quote, participated in the official and hegemonic discourse by claiming that the games “bring people together”. She also mentioned the football game but did not talk about the militarism elements at all. I think it is interesting that she talked about the football game and patriotism without making explicit reference to the militaristic elements because there were no overt displays of nationalism in the video that are unrelated to the militarism. The only US flags present were in the scene where the fighter jets flew over the stadium. The rest of the flags the fans waved throughout the video were FSU school banners. The student herself admitted that what she was talking about was not national. However, it does not mean that there were no national elements in the video; they were just presented in the language of militaristic rhetoric.

The same pattern holds true in other examples:

Definitely in the first and last one you saw huge amounts of national pride especially for the Olympics, I mean, and hockey was overrepresented in that film because it's pretty much Canada's national sport, I mean, you know, almost everybody in Canada follows it and then for the football you saw a whole bunch

of people gathered for that and just, you know, enjoying it and they're completely enthralled by that kind of stuff and in the US, most people love football in Canada, but it's more or less a US sport than Canada. – Eddie (Coded: Simultaneously, 2 and 1)

I guess in the first one, there was like a focus around Canadian nationalism it seemed. Like they were skating around lakes and stuff like that, so that was the thing that I, the thing that pointed out for me. And I think the first one and the second one, I don't remember about the third one really, but they relied a lot on the music side to the video; that was like a big influence on it. Um, yeah. – Daniel (Coded: Simultaneously, 2 and 1)

Like the previous example, these two quotations follow a similar model: recognize national issues in the first clip, and fail to recognize it in the third clip. Eddie, like Joy, talked specifically about a supposed nationalistic element in the video but could not pinpoint it or tie it to the militaristic discourse present. Daniel, on the other hand, simply noticed the nationalism in the first one, without offering any kind of critique or questioning, and then could not even discuss that element in the third video.

5. Awareness and critique: Industry

The industry area comprises three topics: 1) Olympic branding, 2) Promotional nature of the boxing video, and 3) Zap-proof advertisements in boxing video. The biggest change in tendencies here is that instances I coded with a 0 increased significantly: they accounted for almost 25% of the total. This means that there were a lot of silences when

discussing the topic of the industry of sports and media. Nonetheless, all other trends hold true here as well. Those instances I coded with a 1, 2, and 3 account for almost 74% of the total. There was one instance of critique and that came only after someone had already brought up the issue (thus coded 4). Table 4 shows the aggregate numbers and Figure 5 shows the percentages.

Industry Issues Aggregated by Code	
Code	Count
0	14
1	29
2	12
3	1
4	1
5	0

Table 4 – Industry Aggregate

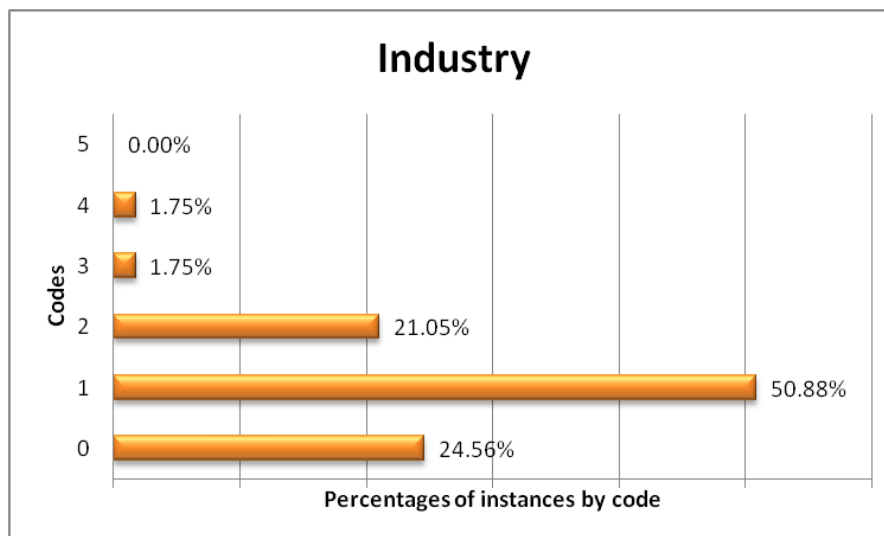


Figure 5 – Industry Percentage

In this area, I coded several instances simultaneously 1 and 2. Many students noticed one aspect of the business of sports and ignored others completely:

Not really. Not in the first one, maybe in the second one because you could see the woman was wearing an Adidas logo. But in the first clip there wasn't any product placement that I can remember. Maybe I took it in subconsciously, but consciously I wasn't aware of it and not in the third clip either, because some teams are all sponsored by one company so they have their logo on their jersey and they have like the boards or the flags or something that have the product on it but I didn't really see that in any of the clips. –Abraham (Coded: Simultaneously 1 and 2)

Here I had just asked Abraham directly if he could see the business aspects of sports in the clips. He answered with a clear no. He, then, mentioned that the boxer was wearing Adidas sportswear. It is important to mention that even though there was no advertising in the Olympic video, there was still branding. There were official Vancouver 2010 images, logos, and song present in that video. His conception of business, then, was limited to advertising. Furthermore, Adidas was not the only brand present in the boxing video. As I mentioned previously, there were a series of brands displayed throughout the video.

There may have been advertising on the boards when they were figure skating but I didn't really notice them either. The lady was definitely wearing Adidas. And the players were too far away to actually see any logo. - Jessica (Coded: Simultaneously 1 and 2)

Jessica's answer here followed the same train of thought as Abraham's. She mentioned seeing the Adidas brand, but she could not really articulate any other examples of the business of sports in these clips. Like Abraham, she limited her conception of business to advertising.

There were also several instances where the students notice the elements but saw them as being completely normal or just part of the culture of media sports and offered no questioning or critique whatsoever.

They are all highlight reels, so they're all showing, basically, the best part of the sport, like if you got the goal in time, punch the person in the face, or got like the field goal to make winning game, so all are highlight reels I'm guessing, they're basically trying to promote sports, show that that's the great thing about sports -

Trevor (Coded: 2)

I think the videos were advertising either to gain support or spirit for a specific team or a person. So the middle one was the boxer, the first one was Canadian Olympic teams and the last one was a high school or university football team. –

Anwar (Coded: 2)

It seemed like the boxing one was more of an advertisement and the other two were more of like a tribute kind of, in a sense... – Malik (Coded: 2)

In these quotes, all three participants mentioned that at least one of these videos looked like an advertisement. Nonetheless, none of them offered a critique or questioned this. To them, it seems, this is a completely normal part of the sports system. I would like to note

that in the general discussion of sports media industry, there were a few students who did question the business culture in sports. Given this context, it is strange that almost no one tried to question the representations of that culture in these videos.

6. Miscellany

Apart from the big four areas that we discussed in the focus groups, I have other findings that can shed additional light on the degree of media literacy these participants have. For instance, many participants struggled when trying to answer questions about themes and narratives in the clips. First of all, they seemed confused at the notion that the clips might have an inherent storyline that did not depend on outside context for it to work. For example, when I first asked them if they thought the videos were telling stories, many of them went directly to stories they had read or seen during the broadcast of the Olympics: Joannie Rochette's mom dying before she was supposed to compete, the story of how Scott Moir and Tessa Virtue have been skating together since they were little kids and this was their big crowning moment. It was very difficult for them to see the actual storyline or thread the video was trying to tell. Some examples:

If you know the athletes, like in the commercials or whatever they are, in the clips, sorry, then you would know that there is sort of a story behind it, like especially for the Canadian athletes because we were really exposed to them, like we know the stories behind them, but like I am not really familiar with the Florida State football team so I wouldn't know if there is a story being told in that clip. – Nell

I definitely, well I'm not too familiar with the culture behind the second and third clip, but like for the first one, the Olympics, this kind of brings back the whole thing of how Canada started really slow and they started picking up, kind of like a week or week and a half in, and really started piling up the big wins that culminated with that big hockey game, so that was kind of like "We did it, yay!" – Albert

Trevor – Okay, well, I guess I'll talk about the first one. Basically, they're showing inspirational stories. Joannie Rochette, having her mother die, like a few days, just before the final competition, that's showing the motivation and how she overcame that. Having Sidney Crosby score the, like the Golden Kid of hockey, Canadian Hockey, and he scores the winning goal in overtime and yeah, how the two ice skaters, forgot their names, how they were like, how they've been dancing for like since they were a very young age, and like this was their first Olympics, I believe, that they were qualifiable [sic] to participate and they won gold and so there's a lot of motivational stories behind the Olympics, basically. And that's in our home country so that's basically, like, promoting the Olympics and how [unintelligible].

Interviewer: Okay. What about the other two?

Trevor – Can't say too much about the other two. I don't know the female boxer as well.

Interviewer: But just by what you saw in the clip? Do you think there's a story in that clip?

Trevor – Oh. [Looks to Jason] Got anything?

In all three examples the participants simply depended too much on context to be able to decipher the clips. They were all able to discuss the first video because they were over exposed to information about the Olympics. However, when faced with unknown athletes or teams, they could not even form an opinion about what might be taking place in the clips.

In contrast to this, some participants were able to find similarities and common threads between clips. For example,

It's all like victory stories to me, you know, like it's all just highlight how, you know, this group triumphed over another group. In the first one it was just Canada dominating the Olympics with all their wins and, with all the big ones anyway, and the boxing one shows, I'm not sure if it was focusing on the one boxer, I don't know, but then the third one was focusing on the football team, their victories and whatnot. – Eddie

It was all sort of a graduate [sic] build-up from the start of their career, to their end goal, all of them, kind of did that. – Jessica

A similarity that stood out for me through all the videos is that I would say that each filmmaker had the main goal of glorying athletes [Daniel nods] and presenting them in the best light possible. Showing their best moments. I would say that's the biggest similarity I saw. – Wesley

All three participants were able to see things these video clips had in common. Interestingly, they were also able to explain what they thought were the stories or the narrative threads in the clips. These same students had problems before when I asked them directly if they thought people who didn't know the back stories of these athletes would understand the videos.

Another element that I want to comment on is the emotional awareness of the participants. Many of the students mentioned having some type of emotional reaction to the videos. They were very aware of how these videos had made them feel (and of the indifference they felt for other videos as well). Many of them mentioned these emotional reactions as a pre-condition for them to be paying attention. Some instances:

...honestly, by the end of the first one I had tears, like, every time, I know I've seen it a million times, like that, with that music, and those kinds of clips, I don't know if I saw the exact one, but like I get, like it actually has a physical effect on me, like I get shivers and I get tears. That, I guess, it just put my expectations higher for the other videos that like I didn't feel anything for... I was, like, interested in like what the video was trying to tell me because I knew the first one was such a big message and like you said [Arthur] it was really "grand" and it really had like a definite message that it was sending, but the other two I just, I don't know, I was expecting it to be similar and they weren't. – Emily

The first one was pretty exciting. Because you feel you were a part of it, since it was in Canada and everything. The other two didn't have that much of an effect

on me. I started losing interest in the third one. It just started showing things over again that I have seen before. – Trevor

For the first one I definitely thought: inspirational, motivational, you know...top Canadian athletes, being Canadian myself, you know, I admire them and look up to them, and to see them triumph on an Olympic stage is pretty spectacular. And then for the second and third one, you know, I'm not the biggest fan of boxing... and the third one it just shows the American craze they have towards football and to me it's kind of, I don't know, they take it to a whole 'nother level, kind of over the top. – Jason

The three quotations show the tendency that the students admitted to not observing the other two videos carefully because they did not have any emotional reactions to them. Furthermore, two of the three quotes mentioned how their emotional reaction is related to their Canadian identity and while Emily does not mention it in this particular quote, she does make this clear elsewhere in her discussion.

Concluding remarks

In this chapter I have presented the results gathered in the questionnaire and in the focus group sessions. I have also shown the tendencies and patterns that emerged from the coding of the data. In the next chapter, I will examine these tendencies and try to see what these results tell me about this group of students. Furthermore, I will also discuss how these results fit in with Ontario's media education objectives and what they say about media literacy in general.

Chapter 6 – Discussion and conclusions

These results provide me with information with which to construct a picture of the knowledge and media literacy skills of these students. After analyzing and paying attention to these findings, I think that there are many important lessons for all those interested in critical media literacy education. In this final chapter, I will first provide some general observations regarding the results. These general observations have led me to consider three main explanations for the nature of these findings. In the second section, I will present those three main explanations and segue into a discussion about the role of critical media literacy education in light of these results. Finally, I will provide some future directions and final considerations.

General observations

My main objectives in this study were to find out the kind of knowledge that these students possessed regarding the sports media complex and the sociocultural and political issues present in it, and to see if they could draw from that knowledge in order to identify and critique problematic representations in sports videos. In this regard, I feel confident in saying that most of their knowledge mimics hegemonic notions of gender, race, nationalism and political economy. The students routinely drew from stereotypes and used generalizations in order to discuss the topics I presented to them. Furthermore, I also feel confident in saying that in regards to gender and race, the students were often unable to identify and critique the issues present in those videos. With regards to nation and industry, their ability to identify was better, but they were still unable to resist or critique the dominant discourses embedded in these texts.

In the first research question⁷² the only area where the participants almost unanimously showed some basic understandings of the inner workings of the system was in the sports media industry area. This is compatible with the critical pedagogues' assessment that the default education students receive in schools is from the vantage point of the neoliberal order⁷³. It furthers the notion that schools are training them to fit within this order. They possess basic knowledge about this system but cannot turn that knowledge into a critique of it. Moreover, and in sync with the previous matter, I did not code a single participant as a 5 (autonomous critique) in the second research question⁷⁴ when discussing the topic of industry. When I asked the participants to share their thoughts regarding the business of sports media, most of the students who commented were able to explain basic notions of how the sports media industry works, including issues like the strategies used to attract attention and audiences, the way athletes are bought and sold between teams, among other issues. However, apart from this general knowledge that they demonstrated, they were unable to turn this into a working critique of the neoliberal order. In the second question, I expected them to notice these issues in the videos and offer any type of critique and they did not do so. I did not code a single student with a number 5 here either. This result suggests to me that while they are beginning to understand how the industry works, this knowledge is superficial and not tied to a deeper assessment of the problems that come along with it. Also, this area that had the most silences of all four areas. The jump of instances I coded with a 0 is

⁷² RQ1: "What type of knowledge do the participants have about the socio-cultural, political and economic implications of sport in our societies?"

⁷³ The neo-liberal order is characterized by: acceptance of an unregulated market economy, a minimal role for government, suspicion toward the welfare state, a view of citizens as motivated only by self-interest, and a commitment to the central value of individualism. (Drislane and Parkinson, n.d.)

⁷⁴ RQ2: Can the participants identify socio-political issues (e.g. gender, race, nationality, political economy) in sports media texts as they consume them?

significant, from a highest of 5% in nationalism and race to the 25% in industry. This is certainly worth highlighting especially considering the circumstances. Nobody in this area offered any critique. Even though I gave them same time and space to discuss and talk about the topic, more people chose voluntary silence; they did not use this space and time for critique and awareness, but rather they used it to keep quiet.

I see similar results in the area of nation. I only coded a single instance with a 5 in the two topics that comprise nation. Only one participant even questioned whether the celebratory nationalistic discourse surrounding the Olympics was something that necessitated further discussion⁷⁵. This is also compatible with the concerns of the critical pedagogues. The discourse of sportive nationalism has proven immensely useful to both the state and capital. On the one hand, the state has benefitted from promoting sportive nationalism as a unifier. On the other hand, the market has capitalized on that same discourse in order to produce profit.⁷⁶

My findings with regards to race are particularly disheartening. Race is the area where students had the most difficulty, both in terms of general knowledge and of awareness and critique of the videos. I found that their discussions of general representations of race in sports were littered with stereotypes; this means that their starting point on these issues was already troublesome. This starting point translated perfectly into an overwhelming lack of awareness and critique. I coded almost 89% of the instances as a 1, 2, and 3 and that included an 80.26% for code 1. These results are

⁷⁵ And it is interesting to note that this was only after having previously adopted the same celebratory tone as his peers.

⁷⁶ For a good example of the collusion between State and Industry in the use of the nationalism discourse surrounding the Vancouver 2010 Winter Olympics see the research by Ipsos-Reid, one of Canada's leading market research firms: http://www.historica-dominion.ca/drupal/sites/default/files/PDF/Downloadable%20Poll%20Factums/HDI%20Post%20Olympic%20Pride%20Factum_FINAL_EN.pdf

particularly concerning for me if I put them in the context of a country that has multiculturalism as one of its official staples and discourses. According to Environics Institute's study (2011) Focus Canada 2010, 56% of Canadians believe multiculturalism is one of the key elements of Canadian identity (p.17). However, these results may not be as surprising as they appear at first glance. Adams (2006) in her analysis of the discourse of hockey as a marker of Canadian identity explains,

Narratives about hockey as the 'glue that holds us together' ...as our 'national religion', help keep whiteness central to dominant notions of Canadian identities. These are narratives that evoke small -town and rural Canada--Canada at its whitest. These stories link hockey with the Canadian landscape and the Canadian past, both realms in which people of colour, though present, have been marginalized. As Ruth Frankenberg has written, whiteness is a structural advantage and a standpoint from which white people see the world. More important to this discussion, it is also a 'set of cultural practices that are usually unmarked and unnamed.' (p.75)

Although Adams directs these words at the discourse of hockey, they are also applicable here. She writes that while Canada is supposed to be a multicultural, multiracial state, the privileged point of view remains decidedly white and male. One of the participants of this study sums up this position when he tried to discuss issues of race in the videos:

Um, the first clip, there was *really nothing about race in my opinion*, it, surprisingly was all Caucasian, um... I'm pretty sure. I feel like it was. That's just a feeling I got from the video at the time. – Arthur [Emphasis added]

Even though Arthur did also say that Canada is a diverse country later on, this is the key moment that summarizes what Adams is talking about. According to Arthur, there was no issue regarding race in this clip because everyone was white. Whiteness is not an issue. It is the standard. He also said that the race in the second video “was evident”, because the boxer is black. Scholars have examined this practice of seeing whiteness as the norm and colour as the other. Bruce (2004), for instance, has made similar annotations regarding North America in general. Analyzing commentary practices in North American basketball games, Bruce found that

...there is strong support for the existence of a form of marking the boundaries of the ‘normal’ within a dominant white culture... The ‘playful’ use of first names becomes part of an ‘Othering’ process which emphasizes names that do not fit the normalized (white) culture – names that are carried more often by African American players. (p. 875)

The problem with this is that elements that conform to the notions set by this dominant culture are seen as “normal”, and elements that may not fit within these parameters are either othered or labelled deviant. In Arthur’s case, he was unable to see that precisely the fact that there are no people of colour in the clip *is* problematic. He was unable to notice that the video producer is constructing a vision of what Canada is and that Canada is completely white.

The findings concerning gender are not that much better. In fact, if I look strictly at the numbers of the second question (identifying and critiquing gender issues in the clips), the results are more problematic than the ones seen in race. However, there are a few small reasons to be more optimistic in this region. First, even though the results of

the awareness and critique were not optimal, this was the area where I found the highest percentage of codes 4 and 5 with a combined total of 9.21%. This is no reason to celebrate, but considering that the percentages in the three other areas combined make up roughly the same percentage, I can see this as positive. Furthermore, when the students answered questions about general knowledge (RQ1) they used fewer stereotypes and common sense tropes discussing gender (58%) than they did when discussing race (72%).

One possible explanation for this is that while women are continuously invisibilized in television coverage, some people of colour now dominate certain sports. Grainger, Newman, and Andrews (2006) comment on this: "...it could even be argued that, as Carrington (2001/2002) suggested, far from being marginalized, African-American athletes are now hyper-visible in the contemporary sport media" (p. 449). Two of the most prominent leagues in North America, the NFL and the NBA, are predominantly black. These two leagues receive enormous amounts of promotion and media coverage. Seeing black men in prominent positions in sport provides people with a sense of multiracialism and multiculturalism. Grainger *et al* further comment,

In a similar fashion to the way in which they may serve to validate the myth of an American racial meritocracy, successful Black athletes are also often seen to symbolize American liberal, racial inclusiveness... Several authors have suggested that, implicitly at least, the media portray sport as a space devoid of racial discrimination; the mere presence of African-American athletes is 'readily perceived as evidence of integration.' (p. 451)

However, we cannot say the same for female athletes. Scholars have consistently found that female athletes remain underrepresented in media (Jones, 2010; Wensing and Bruce,

2003; Duncan and Messner, 1998). In terms of these results, it is possible that the hyper-visibility of certain racial minorities in prominent North American sports has operated in the way Grainger *et al* comment: this hyper-visibility has created a myth of inclusion and equality. On the other hand, because women are not as present in media coverage, it might be easier for some people to point to the disparities.

The narratives these clips present also merit further discussion. One of the key tenets of media literacy, in both its traditional and critical incarnations, is that citizens must learn to *read* the messages present in the media products. However, the participants in this study had a very difficult time answering my questions about the stories present in these clips. Many of them immediately went to the stories they had read or seen about the Olympics, and seemed confused when I asked them to talk about the stories in the other two videos. They routinely mentioned that they had no prior knowledge of the athletes or teams in the boxing and football videos. This, in my view, is something that deserves attention. Part of what makes a media literate citizen is his/her ability to draw meaning from images and text. While additional context is useful in the analysis of a text, audience members do not always have that luxury. They are constantly bombarded with ads, with shows, stories, broadcasts, and many cannot wait to receive background information on each one to begin interpreting and negotiating meanings. In fact, advertising routinely uses decontextualization as one of its strategies (Schroeder and Borgerson, 2002), so to me, this means that being able to read these messages as they come is an important part of media literacy.

Moreover, sometimes society is the best context for understanding these texts. The students are asking for facts that are not really essential to understanding the social messages present in those clips:

... but like I am not really familiar with the Florida State football team so I wouldn't know if there is a story being told in that clip. – Nell

Trevor – Can't say too much about the other two. I don't know the female boxer as well.

Interviewer: But just by what you saw in the clip? Do you think there's a story in that clip?

Trevor – Oh. [Looks to Jason] Got anything?

They should be able to pick out themes and narratives without these kinds of facts. They do not need to know who the female black boxer is or what her career has been like to see that she conforms to a stereotypical construction of blackness. They do not need to know if the Florida State Seminoles won their division or a national championship to know that that video is an allegory for war and that the representation of the Native American responds to deep seated social prejudices.

The students' inability to identify the embedded stories or narratives in these clips is attuned to their general difficulties in identifying and critiquing the issues discussed thus far. It is not complicated to imagine that if they cannot see a story being told in these clips, they would also have trouble understanding that the video is a presentation of someone's world view. Booth (1998) said it best: "I can think of no published story that

does not exhibit its author's implied judgments about how to live and what to believe about what to live" (p. 353). The narratives in these videos are not only about triumph and sporting careers, but also about the role of women in sports--and in society--about the places of race in different sports, about the construction of a nation, and about the type of economic system in North America, among other things.

I would also note that the students were more adept at finding the stories when I asked them to look for similarities between the clips. I was not expecting to provide a strategy for them, but rather to understand what they saw when they watched the clips. However, by encouraging them to look at the three clips and see if there were any commonalities, some of the participants were able to detect threads that they had not seen when they were looking at the clips separately. This suggests to me that prompting them to consider larger connections is a strategy that might work in future media literacy projects when trying to get students to understand narrative threads within the text.

Another issue that I want to consider is the students' admissions that they paid more attention to the Olympic video because they felt an emotional connection to it. There are two important elements here that have merit for me. First, when I asked them in the questionnaires to explain if there was anything that made them uncomfortable, only one person mentioned an element present in the Olympic video. All others mentioned the boxing video as the one that had the most "problematic elements". However, as my own analysis of the videos demonstrates, the Olympic clip had a similar number of problematic representations and omissions as both the boxing and football videos. A possible explanation is that the emotional connection actually makes it harder for them to

detach and critique⁷⁷ the texts. However, it also concerns me that, according to their own accounts, their attention decreased in the next two videos because they did not feel that emotional connection. As Potter (2004) has said, people are constantly exposed to media messages whether they are conscious of this fact or not. They process these messages with different degrees of awareness and it is precisely these differences in awareness that can have an impact on the amount of control the media has over people's thought processes (p. 75). Potter also understands that it would be impossible for people to be 100% aware all the time, so he argues that people must develop sophisticated knowledge structures and hone their media literacy skills so that the media don't control their thinking patterns.⁷⁸ Of course, this does not seem to be the case in these results. If these students missed the problematic representations because they were not paying enough attention (which seems unlikely considering that they did not really fare any better in the critique of the Olympic video) then it still points to underdeveloped knowledge structures and media literacy skills.

Apart from these observations, I cannot detect any additional patterns that can be drawn from demographic or background information. All these observations situate this study closer to other investigations that present examples of students being unable, or unwilling, to step out of the dominant paradigms rather than projects that have presented instances of students having sophisticated media literacy skills and being able to resist dominant representations. As I explained in the literature review, Millington and Wilson

⁷⁷ I tackle this issue further in the next section called "Immersion"

⁷⁸ Similar arguments have been put forth by proponents of the concept of AIME (Amount of Invested Mental Effort). According to Singer and Singer (1998), our AIME increases when we receive messages that break our paradigms or our moulds, and decreases when we receive messages that easily fit into those patterns (common sense knowledge, stereotypes, etc.) Of course, learning occurs when AIME increases, so if we just consume media messages without paying critical attention and do not have the appropriate knowledge structures to filter the messages we just continue receiving confirmation of beliefs that fit within our own paradigms.

(2010) found that, “Although the students decoded media texts in somewhat contradictory ways, they nonetheless displayed a sophisticated ability to be critical of hegemonic masculinities prominent on television and in movies” (p. 1685). The findings in my project are far from these results. Part of it may be that I decided to use subtler images than the ones Millington and Wilson used in their own research. Students in their investigation were able to critique images that presented an exaggerated notion of masculinity. However, the images I showed in my study were deliberately mundane in order to determine whether the students could notice the problems in these everyday messages.

My findings are closer to the ones Pombo and Bruce (2007) present in their classroom project where they asked students in a media production course to create a media journal detailing their creative and production processes. The researchers wrote that one of the major problems with their project was that students seemed unable to resist mainstream media, regardless of some other minor successes. Bruce writes,

Another shortcoming was our expectation that student projects would demonstrate resistance to mainstream media. Here we were both disappointed. Although Monica and I felt that their projects showed an awareness of media literacy principles, we saw little resistance to media issues. (p. 160)

The lack of resistance is certainly my major concern in this study. However, I would argue that these results are concerning for any media literacy educator precisely because the students showed almost no awareness either. While traditional media literacy educators may not agree with the CML’s emphasis on political change, in most cases

within this project students even failed to identify the issues, which is one of the core tenets of conventional media literacy as well.

The observations I presented above do not paint an optimistic picture. In general, I suggest the students lacked the skills to properly identify and critique the socio-cultural, political, and economic issues present within the videos they saw in their respective sessions. I can also say that many of them used stereotypes as their source of information to discuss complicated matters of gender, race and nationality.

The students' replies themselves point to several overarching explanations that may have played a part in this general lack of awareness and critique. First, the complete immersion these students have in sports culture, both as active participants and as fans, can contribute to an inability to detach and critique. Second, perhaps there was unwillingness by the participants to step out of their comfort zone. And finally, students' focus on an education that is predicated on ready-made schemas and paradigms and media literacy approaches that reproduce this. These are the three main topics that, in my opinion, encircle these results.

Immersion

Marshall McLuhan (1972) wrote, "Fish don't know water exists till beached" (p. 191). This aphorism (or variations of it) is often used to explain that when people are immersed in a certain environment, critical distance may be harder to obtain. The environment seems so natural that people do not really stop to consider it or critique it; it's just the way it has always been. Instead, people continue to reproduce the

characteristics or elements of these environments and they become entrenched as “normal.”

This theme of immersion is certainly applicable here. According to the students’ questionnaires, 95% of them played some sports; 79% of them reported playing sports multiple times per week. Also, 90% of them said that they watch sports consistently; almost 78% of those said they watch sports multiple times per week. Most importantly, all 20 participants (100%) said that they had some involvement in sport whether as a player or as a spectator. It is appropriate for me to conclude that this is an area that these students value and enjoy. I will come back later to the theme of enjoyment. For now, I wanted to note that these participants are exposed constantly to the culture and the discourses that are present in the world of sports.

This sports culture, the same as any other, is ripe with problematic issues. As a socially constructed object, it reproduces and reinforces societal values that have become “normal” but may be quite troublesome. Burstyn (1999) comments,

Most people use words such as ‘games’, ‘fun’, or ‘entertainment’ to describe sport and consider sports to be apolitical. As a society we give little thought to the ideological valences of sport and its culture. Its triumphs and virtues we describe as essential and normative; its failures and flaws we dismiss as secondary and anomalous... Implied in this popular assessment is the belief that sport is a mere byproduct of more important phenomena...But from the point of view of the actual constitution of civil society and political power... the institutions of sport, as the guardians of masculinist ritual, are among the most important regenerating

sources of individualist, competitive, and coercive values and behaviours today. I see these as antisocial qualities... (pp.7-8)

From this perspective, people who are immersed in sport and do not see it as political may be unconsciously reproducing and reinforcing these anti-social qualities that Burstyn mentions.

A good example of this phenomenon concerns the students' complete inability to critique or even notice the militaristic rhetoric in the FSU video. Only one participant made a comment regarding the overt military associations present in that football video. He said:

The music for the third one like reminded me of like they're trying to make it into a battle, it's really classical, war type, like marching or going at it, to support the boys, going out there to try to bring back the victory or whatever. – Albert

This is the extent of any mention of the military construction of that third clip. He offers no critique, no questioning; it is simply an acknowledgement that this is what the clip conjures up. Furthermore, the language he uses to describe this militarism also makes use of other common sense notions like the link between masculinity and war when he talks about supporting “the boys”. Finally, I would also like to note that no one else reacts to this comment or develops the link even more.

In my estimation, immersion plays a big role in why 95% of the participants do not even acknowledge this link between the armed forces and sports. Observers have argued that sports and war have often been intertwined both discursively and practically (Trujillo, 1995; Zirin, 2005). However, in moments of war the links become even more pervasive. Zirin (2005) comments:

But it is during periods of actual war, like the one we are in now, when the synergy of sports and war takes center stage. A typical pro game includes F-14 bombers buzzing the stadium, multiple national anthems, everything but a mandatory loyalty oath and bombs bursting in air (although the fireworks come close) (p.129).

As avid sports watchers, the participants of this study are likely very used to seeing these elements in almost every game. They are so immersed in the military culture present in big-time sports today that they do not see anything out of the ordinary about this connection. In the city where the study took place, the hockey games of the local OHL team feature celebrations during Remembrance week in which there are all sorts of military paraphernalia in display, including a military tank right in front of the arena. If this is seen as common place, it is understandable for people in this environment to miss it completely as something worth mentioning or worth noting. This is of course troublesome as all of these students are involved in sports and they are probably reproducing all, or most, of these problematic assumptions because they are not even aware that these issues *are* problematic. If they saw most of these issues as normal or simply did not even notice, I feel comfortable in assuming that this is the environment they are accustomed to and lack the skills and the knowledge to do anything about it. For me, it is even more concerning if television, for instance, actually confirms their own prejudices and biases. It is a cyclical problem: these children and adolescents are taught certain beliefs, broadcasts confirm those beliefs, they understand that there is no problem and continue believing and reproducing these problematic assumptions. Of course,

critical media literacy aspires to be that moment where the fish are beached and they can then notice the ocean.

Comfort zones

While immersion certainly plays a part in these results, even when I confronted the students with alternative interpretations or different paradigms they presented resistance to change. This is an attitude that I noted both in the second and first studies as well. Essentially, I thought both groups of students seemed conservative, not necessarily in political terms (although many of the responses of the focus group students can, indeed, be categorized as politically conservative), but in the sense of sticking to traditional wisdom or knowledge.

In the youth centre project, I had a series of roadblocks that forced me to find alternatives so that I could continue. Instead of finishing the program when I was told that I simply could not let the students use copyrighted material, I chose to turn that into a “teachable moment”. I used those roadblocks in my favour, trying to expose the students to alternative sources of information. After all, that is precisely one of the main ideas behind critical media literacy. Nonetheless, my efforts did not engender the change in attitude I predicted. The participants seemed annoyed at having to turn to alternative sources. They did not see it as an opportunity to explore new and different content. They saw it as yet another problem in a series of obstacles that plagued that first project. I even tried to show them the possibilities of using this alternative material in the construction of videos by making my own video and playing it for them. While this did get them somewhat excited, as soon as they saw that they would have to sift through piles of

unusable material, they went back to YouTube and to traditional media sources looking for corporate owned material. Although the technology in the youth centre certainly did not cooperate, the participants did not seem too adept at trying new things either.

This attitude the students in the youth centre study showed is compatible with the results in this second study. Nineteen out of twenty (95%) students in the current research said that they would imitate one or all the videos if they were to create their own. Fourteen out of 20 participants saw nothing wrong with these videos. This suggests to me that they are comfortable with these paradigms and these structures and do not wish to step out of them.

I think this unwillingness to change is dangerous because it can lead to adults who cannot step out of the structures they have come to know. And I think this is, at least partly, what I saw in the students of this second investigation. In this case, I was not trying to teach them anything; I was merely trying to see what they knew and how media literate they were. However, their need to use stereotypes and common sense tropes to explain many of the problematic representations present in media sports in general and in the videos specifically suggest that part of the problem may be unwillingness on their part to re-evaluate power relationships in the world. Although I will argue in the next section that they are most likely not receiving the appropriate type of media literacy they need to in order to resist and critique these images, I would also like to suggest now that any type of media literacy education might prove ineffective if educators cannot find a way to break through this unwillingness to see the world differently. There were a few moments in this project that provided evidence of this trend. For instance,

Maybe it comes back to those racial stereotypes that, you know, some races are better at certain sports than others... that dominate. Because they say like Europeans are really good at soccer or like Asian people are really good at cricket [chuckles] or something... or like African Americans are really good at football. Because we did see a lot of African Americans in the third one, scoring most touchdowns and taking everybody out [Wesley nods]. – Anwar

People might not agree with this but I think that one of the reasons for that is that you don't, like there's *one* female in the WNBA that can dunk, so I don't know, the stuff that makes the actual game exciting to me, like speed, explosiveness, power, that kind of stuff is more like [unintelligible] to the male games. That's just what I see. – Malik [Emphasis placed by the speaker]

I think that, mainly on your [Malik's] line of thought, it's just that people want to see the best competitors out there, and this is going to sound pretty controversial, but usually if a male team were to compete against a women's team, most likely, the male team would win, again very controversial, but like if you take the 100 meter dash, just as a main example, in the males' category all the best in the world are running in under 10 seconds, and I'm not quite sure, but I don't think any female has broken the 10 second... – Anthony

In these three examples, all the students knew there was an alternative version to how they viewed these phenomena and they purposefully chose to disregard it. First, Anwar acknowledged that he was drawing on stereotypes. This means that he understood that

this was a lazy and facile explanation for a complicated matter, but he chose to continue on with it precisely because it fit the schema and the paradigms. Second, Malik and Anthony pre-emptively claimed that their statements were controversial or that people might dislike them. By doing this, they acknowledged that this is just one opinion and that there are other alternatives. But they chose this one because it is the one that fit within the parameters and the schema they have always known: men are faster and stronger than women. This is not a difficult interpretation; it's the one they have probably always heard. However, the fact that they acknowledged that their points might be controversial means that they were also aware that others have challenged these parameters and schema; they just have been unable or unwilling to give credibility to any of these other alternatives because this is the one that conforms to their current beliefs about gender.

This tells me that it is not enough to simply inform students of alternative views. As an educator, I must strive to first break down the walls and the resistance of students to change. This is no easy task, however. Barcan (2005) describes it best, "Many students reach... [tertiary]... study unused to critical or analytical thinking and thinking which they may experience as baffling or an unwelcome intrusion into their everyday pleasures." (cited in Zanker, 2007, p. 38). Critical thinking is a hard and painful task that not everybody is comfortable doing. Zanker (2007) found this out in an episode in her classroom when she showed a McDonald's ad with the intention of criticizing it and found that the students had a deep emotional attachment to the ad. She explains,

As I collected myself after the chorus [of students singing along], in order to embark on the serious business of dissecting how and why this global company

wished to position itself in heartland New Zealand, a student interjected. She argued that I was “picking to bits” precious childhood memories of birthday parties at McDonald’s, summertime Happy Meals and Disney collectibles. She didn’t like me ‘putting down McDonalds.’ (p.38)

But, as Zanker argues, critical media literacy must walk a fine line (p. 53). On one hand, it has to acknowledge the emotional connections and the enjoyment that students get from these products. On the other hand, this cannot be a deterrent in tackling these issues. Critical pedagogues cannot be afraid to engage these things in a critical manner for fear of destroying the enjoyment felt by students.⁷⁹ One strategy that I have adopted in my own work is always to deconstruct the things that I enjoy and I explain this attitude to the students. As a completing Ph.D. candidate, I taught an undergraduate course, while my data collection was ending. In my course “*After Further Review*”: *Sports, Media, and Society*, where I discussed socio-cultural, political and economic aspects of sports, I began by confessing to students that I was an avid sports fan. I explained to them that I watched many games, that I went to the stadiums and participated in the spectacles, and I that I even had emotional attachment to the players and the outcomes. In my limited experience, this seemed to make them more comfortable because they knew I had probably felt the same struggles they felt when I was confronted with all these issues about gender, race, nation, and so on for the first time. As Spickard Prettyman (2011) notes,

⁷⁹ As a student myself I can certainly relate to this notion. I remember telling one of the professors of my Master’s program, half jokingly, that they had ruined animated movies for me. Every time I wanted to watch television for pleasure I could only think about the implications of the text. And this was a painful, but necessary experience in my view.

...adopting a critical approach to sport means that we critique the way sport is constructed and enacted. This does not imply an anti-sport perspective, only that we ask questions about and examine taken-for-granted assumptions about the way the sport operates in our lives and in our world. (pp. 3-4)

Developing emotional attachments to things people grew up with is understandable and human. However, love and emotion cannot become blinders. Critiquing and evaluating things each person values is a difficult endeavour, but it is one s/he must undertake. As Spickard Prettyman says, it is not about becoming cynical or turning that love into hate, but rather trying to separate those things that make people better human beings from those that harm other members of society. It is about trying to engender change to take the things people love and turn it into something better.

Education

People often ask me why I chose Canada to pursue a graduate degree. It is not considered normal for a Puerto Rican to travel further north than the United States to study. Apart from ideological reasons, which are many but not really pertinent at this moment, I chose Canada because I had learned that media literacy education and scholarship in this country was very advanced. Share (2009), for instance, explains:

One of the countries in the forefront of media literacy education is the US's neighbor to the north, Canada. The close proximity to the dominant global creator of media messages is one of the motivators for Canada's strong media education movement [...] John Pungente, Barry Duncan, and Neil Andersen (2005) write that "all provinces in Canada now include media literacy in the curriculum".

Canada is one of the world leaders in media education for many reasons, not the least because Canadian educators have been involved in these issues since the 1960s. (p. 43)

Furthermore, not only has Canada as a whole been highly touted as a leader in media literacy, but also Ontario is the province where it all began. Ontario was the first province to include media literacy in its curriculum more than 20 years ago. For 10 years, it was the only province with a media literacy mandate with the following structure:

In 1998, Ontario introduced a new curriculum for Grades 1-12. In Grades 1-8, media components are included throughout the Language curriculum, especially within the Oral and Visual Communication strands. At the secondary level, in Grades 9-12, the media studies component comprises one quarter of the Language curriculum, and students may earn a Grade 11 media studies credit. (Media Awareness Network, 2010c)

Given this context, I was really quite surprised when I first got to Ontario and many people simply did not know what I meant when I used the term “media literacy”. Routinely people would ask me: “what do you mean by that?” A few times, some of my peers who went to primary and secondary school here in Ontario asked me where I had read that Ontario had a media literacy mandate in its educational curriculum. Having attended schools in Ontario, they were unaware that such a mandate existed.

I have seen this experience replicated in this study. Only six out of 20 students mentioned having taken a media course or a media strand in another course during their primary and secondary education. Considering that 18 of the participants studied here in Canada, this is a puzzling figure. Nonetheless, the questionnaire and focus group results

support the notion that these students have not been exposed to much media education, or at least not critical media education. In general, the results demonstrated that most of the participants were either completely unaware of the problematic politics reproduced in the videos or, in the few topics that they seemed moderately aware, they agreed with the prevailing and dominant discourse; in effect, the majority of the time they saw nothing problematic in the videos from a socio-cultural, political and economic perspective.

In three of the four main areas we discussed in the focus groups, students used stereotypes to answer the questions I posed to them. When discussing race and nationalism, the participants had a static conception of their own racial and national identity and a simplified and almost caricatureseque conception of the other. The only area where the students had some knowledge of the inner workings of the system was the sports media industry. These results suggest a few possible explanations. The first possibility is that these students have not received any type of critical media education. The second possibility is that they have received a watered down, superficial version of what media education should entail. And the third possibility is that even if they have received critical media education, these conceptions represent their own autonomous values. They are, in essence, overwhelmingly conservative.

Though the last option is certainly within the realm of possibility, the participants' own comments led me to think that one of the first two possibilities is more likely. Of course, it is probable that some students will always believe that these stereotypes and common sense assumptions are the truth. But many of the students who managed to present some sort of critique of one of these topics were unable to maintain any consistency throughout all four topics. For example, Daniel who was the only one to

notice the racial problems in the representation of Native Americans in the football video was unable to articulate any other critique of any other video. Similarly, Eddie who was one of only two people I coded as 5 on two occasions (one issue in gender and one issue in race) was unable to present any sort of critique or resistance in the areas of nationalism or sports media industry. Eddie's case is quite revealing because even though he managed to see some problems, he clearly missed most of the issues present in the videos. Rather than pointing to clearly articulated conservative values, this points to a person who has not been taught to identify and critique these issues. In fact, Eddie was one of 14 people who stated that he had not had any prior media education.

If I accept what the students report, then it is possible to conclude that the schools are not complying with the media literacy mandate of the Ontario Ministry of Education. The curriculum includes media studies as one of the four *compulsory* strands in the English curriculum. Seventeen students reported having graduated from Ontario schools. One additional student reported graduating from a high school in West Vancouver. Out of those 18 students, only six (35%) said they had received any media education. This means that 65% of the study subjects went to schools that are not offering them any type of media literacy education. In a country that is known internationally as one of the pioneers and leaders of media literacy, this is not acceptable. Not only that, it is a mystery that deserves further scholarly attention.

If I doubt the students' own self reports and argue that maybe they did receive media education⁸⁰, they just could not identify it, this is still troubling. The possibilities here do not present a better outlook than the one above. If students are receiving media

⁸⁰ This is certainly a possibility because though there is a separate, optional media studies course in the high school curriculum, compulsory media education is embedded within the Language curriculum in elementary school and within the English curriculum in high school.

education and 1) they cannot identify it as such and 2) it is not helping them become more critical and aware, then this type of media literacy education is not the type of education they need to receive. I think that this is the crux of the matter.

One possible explanation could be found in the critical pedagogues' belief that the default education that students receive in their schools may be based on hegemonic and dominant discourses. For instance, Coté, Day, and de Peuter (2007) explain that,

...it is clear that education is central to the production of well-trained producer-consumer-citizens who will dutifully take up their assigned roles in this [neoliberal social] order. The importance of this function is observable in the ongoing colonization of public school systems at all levels... The questions thus become: Can education be saved from neoliberalism?... (p.12-13)

Coté *et al* also explain that this same neoliberal social order maintains control by atomizing the population:

It is important to add that neoliberal societies sustain state domination and capitalist exploitation by dividing populations along multiple lines of inequality based on race, gender, sexuality, ability, age, and region... (p.12)

Essentially, the authors elucidate that neoliberalism has appropriated education and that this social order uses these divisions of gender, race, region, among others, to maintain itself. Though the data in this study is insufficient to conclude that this is what is happening in Ontario schools, it is one possibility to consider.

These findings suggest other problems as well. For instance, all but one of the students who claimed to have received some sort of media education came from the Greater Toronto Area. With the exception of one student from Sudbury, all other students

received their education in the metropolitan area. I think other researchers should investigate this matter further and more systematically to determine if there is a pattern here.

The students who did receive some type of media education did not fare better than their counterparts. I can actually argue that as a group they fared worse. I did not code any of the six students who reported having media education as 4 or 5 in any topic. In reality, they were amongst the least resistant and critical of all 20 students. This does not seem like a failure of media literacy education in general to me, but of a particular way of teaching media literacy.

In my opinion, researchers should examine the curricula of these schools to better understand what type of media literacy they are providing to the students. Though I do not have access to that particular information, I do have the students' account of what they learned in those media education classes. Because the number of students is so low, I would like to quote all of their descriptions here to get a better sense of what they learned in these classes:

Computer science gave the technical background to media presentation and graphic design. Film studies gave a theory and psychological approach to visual presentation. – Albert

Logos – symbolic meaning of shapes and colours. Advertising – different components of it. – Jessica

How music affects the message among other things like colours and how there is always a target group. – Emily

How the media effects [sic] kids/teenagers and their work ethic, violence and body satisfaction levels. – Linda

Sports media in Exercise science where steroids and drugs were talked about and how they were used by famous athletes. It showed the negative effects of how winning over all costs was more important than their health. – Trevor

It was a Family Studies course in high school and media was a huge part of the course – Melissa

A few things jump out at me from these descriptions. First of all, when the students explained their media courses none of them mentioned any media education that focused on the topics I discussed with them in the sessions. The closest one is Linda's mention of "body satisfaction levels" which is a well known issue studied by researchers who focus on gender. Nonetheless, the student descriptions did not mention any element of critical media literacy. There were no discussions of the economic system, political institutions, or of the politics of difference and identity. Second, at least one person received media education in sports and exercise, but he does not go into detail into what he learned in the course. Third, there's an emphasis in colours, visual presentation and music. For instance, in Q20 of the questionnaire I asked them what caught their attention from the videos.

These are some of their answers:

The victories, fans, colours, people's expressions caught my attention from this video – Melissa

Music also played a factor...– Trevor

Also, the song in the clip was the 'anthem' for the 2010 Olympics so I recognized it right away. – Linda

Everything about it- the music (the lyrics and the instruments), the moments that were captured were so epic... – Emily

...the music also conjured some of the emotion of the games. – Arthur

These comments, in my view, represent their own focus when watching these clips. After reading their description of these courses, I can understand why they looked for and fixate on these elements. They were not purposefully looking for problematic representations and when I confronted them with questions about gender, race, nationality and industry, they probably had not thought about it. They did not seem equipped to do think about these things.

A possible explanation for this could be that the education they received was based on readymade schemas that provide a cookbook of sorts for people to “interpret” media messages. This is certainly within the realm of the possibility. This is a problem that has also plagued teachers of language and literature. Cassany, Luna and Sanz (2007) have explained that a traditional approach to reading simply focuses on a set of facts that

looks mostly to teach the student how to identify the genre, the literary movement where it belongs, and the stylistic choices of the authors. And while this in itself is not *wrong*, if this is not coupled with a larger goal of fostering the awareness and critique of these important notions, it might limit the critical ability of the students (pp. 502-503).

Quintana (2010) further elaborates on this by saying that within this traditional approach the teacher merely tells the students how to look for the meanings s/he deems important (p.9). This is similar to teachers telling students to just look at colours, music and the visual presentation of images without making the connections to the elements of power relationships.⁸¹ There is no emphasis on understanding the bigger issues present within these texts. This conception of education fosters passive students and ignores the critique of world views. The students' approach to the question of race representation in the video is another manifestation of this type of education. When I asked the students if they could see how race played a part in the representation of the athletes in the videos, many decided to count or number the races.

All the people in the first clip were white, all the Canadians, the hockey team was all white, Alex Biladoux, the skier, the three figure skaters, and then in the second one, the boxer, the woman was black and maybe more gritty or tough, street, and the third was kind of hard to tell the race of the football players. But most of the fans seemed to be white, in Florida, which isn't too uncommon – Abraham

In the first clip it was, I don't think that there was many people [sic] of any culture other than white or any race other than white and in the second clip you

⁸¹ There is also the possibility that the teachers did try to make connections between these elements and power relationships and the students simply missed the point. However, all their descriptions point to a rather "safe" approach to media literacy.

saw any race but white, I think, I don't think I saw a single white boxer in that clip and then in the third film there was a good mix in the football team itself but in the fans I didn't exactly see many other people than white people, I recall... – Eddie

Well, the three videos were focused on like for particular audiences. Like the first one I thought it was just for, um, whites, especially when you started showing the second one. The second one only shows, um, coloured people. [There aren't really any obvious reactions from the students when this remark is uttered]. So therefore it looks like it's just for that particular group. And the third one it was just for, um, football fans – Sonia

In these three examples, all the students reacted to the question of race simply by counting the races. As I wrote in the results chapter, there is nothing beyond that counting. They noticed who is where, but they did not discuss why the numbers look like that or what the implications of these divisions were or how these authors portrayed the races. The only discussion about these divisions happened in the final focus group. This was the extent of the exchange:

Nell [responding to Sonia's argument about colour and audiences] – I guess it did, just because like, based on the different sports that were presented it kind of targeted the different races as well [unintelligible] and it just kind of exposed what actually, well what sometimes occurs, I guess. Like “colored people” being more present in football and stuff like that [Sonia nods] and... I guess it all depends on the region as well, because like in Canada...

Anwar – Snows more...

Nell – Yeah

Anwar - ...so they would be better at winter Olympic games like in the first video.

Nell – Yeah, and like down south they're playing football because it's hot and...

I think this exchange, taken together with the quotes above, provide some support for the notion that these students did not seem to be accustomed to looking at texts critically.

When I confronted them with questions that encouraged them to look at an issue like race, something that maybe they had not even considered before I asked the question, they tried to turn it into something manageable like numbers. It is similar to looking for key colours or just focusing on the emotional aspects of the music: numbering elements without moving forward to a deeper discussion about the underlying causes for these disparities or thinking about how they are each being represented in the different videos. Additionally, this last exchange here was particularly enlightening because the moment they tried to take that further (they were at least considering the roots of these disparities), they fell back on facile and stereotypical explanations.

This research also provides further evidence that a technician or a media arts approach, the approach that fosters individual expression without any self-reflection, will not engender critical students. I noticed this in the fact that 95% of the participants of this project said that they would imitate one or all the videos if they were to create their own. Fourteen out of 20 participants saw nothing wrong with the videos. Merely teaching young people to produce their own videos or multimedia messages is clearly not enough. The danger in this is that by simply imitating uncritically, these students will probably

reproduce all the issues present. In fact, the two home-made videos I chose for this study follow that same pattern: they used professional highlight techniques and simply reproduced the same hegemonic discourses and visions that they learned from mainstream media. This does not mean that media production is not a valid tool for media literacy. In fact, Barry Duncan *et al* (1989), in the Media Literacy Resource Guide they wrote for the Ontario Ministry of Education, consider media production as one of the 10 valid approaches to media literacy. However, they also state that educators should use this approach together with formal media analysis. In other words, they should not teach media arts simply as an exercise of uncritical self-expression. Kellner and Share (2007) explain, “When this approach [media arts] moves beyond technical production skills or relativist art appreciation and is steeped in cultural studies that address the issues of gender, race, class, and power, it holds dramatic potential for transformative critical media literacy” (p.7).

Other considerations

Renee Hobbs summarizes in her “great debates” of the media literacy an issue that crops up in both of the studies I presented in this dissertation: Should media literacy educators focus on a school-based K-12 educational environment? Both studies provide seemingly contradictory answers to this question. For instance, when I look at the obstacles I faced trying to complete the first project, I would answer this question affirmatively. One of the main problems I had in completing the first project was precisely the setting. I decided to go to the youth centre because, in theory, they were a great fit with for my intervention. The centre had the educational goals, the resources, and

the students to make my media literacy project work. Nonetheless, in practice all these elements turned into drawbacks. First, there is a clear hierarchy of priorities within the structure of the centre. Even though my intervention was educational, whenever there was a conflict between traditional schooling and media literacy, traditional schooling took precedence. Students seemed unable, or unwilling, to accommodate their lives once a week to include a project that was supposed to be both fun and educational and would provide concrete benefits to both their schooling and their future careers.

Secondly, the centre lacked the appropriate technical resources to conduct a basic media production program. The project I proposed was the most basic media production course possible: it required free software that either comes as a default with the Windows operating system or can be downloaded legally at no cost from the internet. However, the technical resources of the centre could not meet even these modest requirements. The youth centre is a national and international entity. If it cannot procure the necessary materials or resources for media education, what chance do other after school programs or clubs that may not be as big have? In this context, I wonder if media literacy belongs within the confines of school as a compulsory element within traditional education so that it may receive the appropriate attention it deserves.

Of course, the findings in the second study complicate the picture. The students in this project came from an educational system that *does* provide for compulsory media education within the English language curriculum. Nevertheless, according to the students' own testimonies, most of them did not receive this education. Also, those few who did mention that they had indeed received some form of media literacy courses, could not demonstrate that these courses had had any lasting impact on them. Moreover,

the students' descriptions of what they learned in these courses points to an insufficient and limited approach to media literacy. In this case, I also wonder if schools have any type of advantage over after-school programs. While they may have the technical resources (this would also have to be investigated further), they may lack the human resources necessary to implement an appropriate media literacy program. There may not be a clear cut answer to this debate.

What seems clear to me is that media literacy is currently not a priority for the institutions involved. The students I approached in the centre were students that I would consider underprivileged. Many of these students go to this centre because they receive benefits that they would not otherwise receive in their homes. In contrast, the participants in the second study have access to one of the top Canadian universities with all its resources and its privileges. Based on the school's student survey⁸², it is likely that many of them also come from privileged homes. However, it was very difficult getting either set of participants to commit to either of the studies. In the case of the students who attended the centre, the commitment was longer and more intrusive. Nonetheless, while I was there I witnessed that the teens are not tied exclusively to traditional school work. They participate in optional after-school programs like Cadets, Keystone and others. To me this suggests an inability or an unwillingness to accommodate media education. In the case of the first year university students, the commitment I asked of them was quite small: one 90 minute session. Even then, only 38 people registered originally and there was a big drop-off of 18 students.

This may be representative of a more widespread problem: anti-media bias or an inability to look at popular and media culture as a serious object of inquiry. For instance,

⁸² See Appendix J – University Information

Jenkins (2004) remarked in a column for the Technical Review of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, that “[I]ast month, a reader questioned my use of the term, ‘media culture’, contending that most media content has little or no cultural value” (p.2). Similarly, Kemmitt (2007) found resistance amongst 12-13 year olds to bring popular culture into the classroom (p. 174). Even more interesting are Beaudoin’s (2010) accounts of how his own peers in the course *Culture, Race, and Media* were wary when he asked them to update the curriculum to include more elements from the Internet:

A decision to change our curriculum to include more Internet samples, especially YouTube videos, was initially met with resistance. When another instructor and I created an online assignment where students were asked to present their photos and pages from Facebook or MySpace to their class sections for deconstruction by peers, some instructors believed this was a ‘weakening’ of course material. (p. 103)

If there are even misconceptions about the importance of the material taught in media education within the field itself, how can CML educators expect students to take this material seriously? Before media literacy becomes a priority, there needs to be a change in attitude towards the media as an object of study. For instance, Hobbs asks “instead of reading eight classic novels in the 10th grade, how many communities will accept the practice of students reading four books, studying two films, and analyzing a news magazine and a website?” (p. 24).

And this is a serious matter. Yousman (2007) argues that media literacy education needs to start as soon as people are exposed to media. There is no sense in waiting decades to begin media education because people today are born into media rich

environments (p. 93). He comments, “If we are careful to teach our children to be wary of strangers long before they ever encounter a stranger, why are we not as vigilant when it comes to surrendering them to the strangers who control the world’s media and cultural industries?” (p. 93). In this respect, institutions should make media literacy education a priority always, beginning with the home and continuing throughout elementary and secondary school and throughout adult years as well. The answer may be that media literacy cannot be exclusively confined to the K-12 curriculum, but it also needs to be a part of that environment as well, especially if children and teenagers are going to begin seeing it as an important set of tools and skills to have at their disposal. As Jenkins says, “In truth, schools should have always taught students how to assess information rather than taking for granted that what appears in print must be true. The new media culture makes critical reading practice even more urgent” (p.2).

Final comments and suggested future directions

The urgency Yousman and Jenkins express above is the same kind of urgency I would like to channel in these final pages of this dissertation. While the study I presented here is very small, it consists of 20 students who attend a top-tier research intensive university in a developed country, and therefore non-generalizable, it does provide several important warnings for educators who are interested in critical media literacy here in the province of Ontario.

First, I think my findings provide additional support for critical media literacy educators who believe like Kellner and Share (2006) that

The critical component of media literacy must transform literacy education into an exploration of the role of language and communication media in order to define relationships of power and domination because below the surface of that iceberg lie deeply embedded ideological notions of white supremacy, capitalist patriarchy, classism, homophobia, and other oppressive forces. (p.8)

What these results have shown me is that these students are not receiving the education they need in order to be able to detect and critique these issues in media sports.

Effectively, this means that 70% of the students I talked with in this investigation have not been exposed to *any* kind of media literacy education: traditional, superficial or critical. But the other 30% have not fared that much better. They lacked the critical component in the media literacy education that they did receive.

Why is this important? Why should anyone care? In the first chapter of this dissertation I documented the troubles associated with static notions of gender and race, and uncritically accepting the current economic order of things. While maintaining the *status quo* might be useful and practical for those who reap its benefits, the truth of the matter is that these notions affect many different sectors of society. Static conceptions of gender are responsible for the disparities in media coverage between male and female athletes. This disparity is at the same time symptomatic of and constitutive of other inequalities like money, respect, resources, among others. These same static conceptions of gender place undue pressure on people to live up to certain ideals of masculinity and femininity.

Stereotypical conceptions of race, on the other hand, are responsible for the inability of certain athletes to transcend barriers unless they adopt a mainstream (read:

white) behaviour or lifestyle. Stereotypical race perceptions also translate into a limitation of possibilities. For example, Grainger, Newman and Andrews (2006) comment, "...the media promote two common tropes of Black culture in America: black youths redeemed by following the right path (sport) or, alternatively, the failed black family leading to the wrong path (gangs and drugs)..." [Capitalizations in the original] (p.455). This leads to many black men and women focusing all their energies on a career in sport only to be disappointed and left without any opportunities when the small window of opportunity for fame and fortune in professional sport closes.

Similarly, celebrating nationalism uncritically can lead to stereotypical constructions of nations. Scholars have noted that sport has been described as "war without weapons". Many times it has been used as a sublimation of tensions between nations or sometimes as the beginning of the eruption of fully fledged violence (Goksøyr, 2011). The problem here, apart from the obvious violence short term of course, is that this can further ignite hatred, stereotypes, and passions that can bleed over into other areas of society. Othering is never okay, even when it is done in "friendly sports rivalry".

Finally, participating in the "dog-eat-dog" world of sports without questioning its assumptions has led many athletes to self-destructive behaviours such as drug abuse, cheating, and abusing their own bodies. Furthermore, the bottom-line is that industry commodifies and trades athletes as replaceable products and throws them away when they are not useful anymore. Many athletes today have given their productive years to a sport only to find themselves broke, sick, and without a helping hand⁸³. As Sage (1997) writes,

⁸³ For examples of this phenomenon, see the story of former boxer Iran Barkley http://www.nypost.com/p/news/local/bronx/ex_champ_is_down_for_the_count

By teaching capitalist values and meanings and by legitimating the existing system of societal rewards and privileges, movement activities “prepare young men [and increasingly young women] to take for granted the norms of the capitalist workplace; and central among these is that every aspect of the process is necessarily geared to the ‘natural goal’ of increasing productivity.” (p. 23)

Those are just some examples of the consequences of reproducing these problematic notions uncritically. As Jhally and Lewis argue (1998), a media literacy education that does not set about to change these issues misses its true responsibility. They write, “We argue that such avoidance of thorny political territory sidesteps widespread citizen concerns and misses an opportunity to demonstrate the valence and necessity of not merely understanding the world, but of changing it” (p. 1). Under this measure, education has failed these 20 students. As it stands right now, it would be quite difficult for any of these students to do their part to change the system because they either do not know what needs to change or even that it needs change.

Another lesson I have gleaned from these results is that physical educators could use a more critical approach in schools. Millington and Wilson (2010) provide an important insight here,

Despite the frequency with which Vancouver High boys actively scrutinized media portrayals of gender, it was evident that dominant masculine traits were not viewed through the same critical lens in PE [Physical education]. Characteristics such as strength, toughness, and the ability to intimidate were in fact valorized in

PE, permitting students who most obviously embodied and displayed these traits significant cultural power. (p. 1679)

But physical education does not have to be this way. It can be a space where students learn alternative discourses of the body, of gender, of health. It can be a place where instead of reproducing the traditional hierarchies of power, students go to perform a different manner of movement activity (Tinning, 1997, p.105). Physical educators should acknowledge the fact that their students are constantly surrounded by the hegemonic discourses they consume while watching mass mediated sport. As I have shown in this research, it is probable that students reproduce (unknowingly in many cases) these issues and these educators are in a position to provide a space for change. Tinning (1997) comments:

In my view, human movement professionals have a responsibility to try to identify the ways in which our professional practice affects, and is affected by, social issues such as violence, sexism, racism, or other forms of injustice, and that with such an identification, we have a moral responsibility to attempt to change our practice in socially responsible ways. (p.105)

Furthermore, physical educators could also embrace critical media literacy education as part of their practice. Using the same broadcasts, the same multimedia images that bombard avid sport fans with sexist, racist, classist, among other, discourses is invaluable to helping these students understand where these discourses come from and how they are maintained and reproduced. Again, physical educators are in a position to provide the space for students that allows them to question the environment they are immersed in.

Following these observations and findings, I think there are many things that future scholars should investigate. For instance, I think it is important to investigate the media studies components in Ontario schools. Are the educators teaching media literacy in their courses? Also, on that same note, it would be worthwhile to examine the curricula of the schools that *are* providing media literacy education to find out, in a more comprehensive manner, what they are teaching the students and how they are teaching it.

I would also recommend a bigger study that manages to mix both quantitative and qualitative data to determine if there are generalizable patterns in terms of the students' degrees of awareness and critique. A larger study that uses a bigger sample and is able to generate generalizable trends might be useful in determining the course of the Ontario Ministry of Education's media literacy components.

Furthermore, I would argue that more researchers could focus on media literacy and sports. For instance, future scholars could observe the curricula of P.E. courses and see if physical educators in Ontario have begun to notice the need for media literacy or if they continue with traditional physical education. Other researchers might also want to study the degree of media literacy professional sport stars demonstrate as well. Are they aware of how they are performing gender, race, and other identity issues? Are they aware of how the media constructs the games they play?

My own research is modest, but presents many angles that provide building blocks for other researchers. I sincerely hope that the results in this project, far from creating a cynical environment, actually stimulate further conversation and demonstrate the need for further scholarship in this topic. I have already outlined several directions in which the conversation can continue. Nonetheless, I would also like to point out various

glimmers of hope in this research that can further alleviate any cynicism the reader might detect in these results and conclusions.

First, I think it is clear from the patterns in the gender discussions that these students were, at least, aware on a general level of the challenges female athletes face to acquire parity and equality with their male counterparts. In the discussion of gender, both trends pointed to an acknowledgement of these challenges: basic knowledge and stereotypes. Although one of those two trends was that the participants used stereotypes to explain these problems, I think that by acknowledging that there is a gap, the students are halfway there. It may be a matter of creating the appropriate situation for them to see that these problems are more complex than mere stereotypes admit. A good starting point may be to provide access for them to materials that document the disparities in resources, in production values, and other issues that contribute to the creation of these notions that female sports are somehow less impressive or competitive than male sports. This may also help them to notice these issues when they are in the process of consuming sport.

Second, in the last focus group session I conducted, I noticed a very promising dynamic: students who taught each other. The fifth focus group session was the largest one of all sessions and had more diverse opinions than other groups. In this session, I saw a few moments where one student would notice a problem in the clips and others would at least acknowledge it as something they had not noticed before, but could now see. I wish this had happened more often in the groups, but at least it did give me the opportunity to see that sometimes just introducing a different direction in the conversation might be enough for students themselves to take ownership of the discussion and bring up topics that may not have otherwise surfaced. Maybe the mere

mention of questions about gender, race, nation, and industry helped one or two of these youth to look at the clips a little differently. In an educational setting, that might be enough to at least open a difficult topic up for discussion.

Third, and finally, I was pleasantly surprised by the students' abilities to see narratives in the clips when I asked them to look for similarities. An educator might be frustrated if their default approach for tackling a topic or a theme does not work, but it might be just a matter of looking at the problem from a different angle. This small episode allowed me to see that students themselves will tell us, directly or indirectly, what is the best way to reach them.

These last two takeaways also provided me personally with a very powerful lesson. Freire calls critical educators to adopt a "liberation pedagogy" where the student is not seen as an empty vessel, but rather an active participant. This is a proposition that I can easily understand in theory. However, in practice this may be a little more difficult, especially for a novice educator like me. These last two lessons I have discussed here, let me understand what Freire means: there is no need to treat students as if they do not know anything. Students are active and valuable participants in the pedagogical process, and they need teachers as much as teachers need them. That is how we become student-teachers and teacher-students. It is my hope that these directions and lessons, prove valuable for future researchers that may want to continue treading these important and interesting waters.

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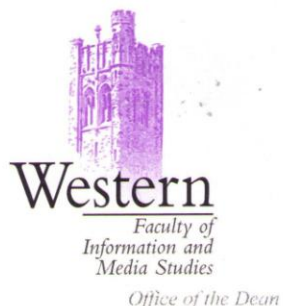
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Appendix A – Ethics approval



Ethical Review of Research Involving Human Subjects

All non-medical research involving human subjects at the University of Western Ontario is carried out in compliance with the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council Guidelines (2002). The Faculty of Information Media Studies (FIMS) Research Committee has the mandate to review FIMS student research proposals for adherence to these guidelines.

2009 – 2010 FIMS Research Committee Membership

- | | |
|-------------------------|----------------------|
| 1. K. Asquith | 6. A. Quan-Haase |
| 2. G. Campbell | 7. J. Ripley (alt) |
| 3. H. Hill* | 8. D. Robinson (alt) |
| 4. P. McKenzie* (Chair) | 9. S. Smeltzer |
| 5. D. Neal | 10. L. Vaughan (alt) |

Research Committee members marked with * have examined the research project **FIMS 2010-012** entitled:

Critical Analysis of Sports in Media Literacy Programs

as submitted by: Carole Farber (Principal Investigator / Supervisor)
Raúl J. Feliciano-Ortiz (Co-Investigator / Student)

and consider it to be acceptable on ethical grounds for research involving human subjects under the conditions of the University's Policy on Research Involving Human Subjects. Approval is given for the period **June 25, 2010 to December 31, 2010**.

Approval Date: June 25, 2010

Pamela McKenzie, Assistant Dean (Research)
FIMS Research Committee Chair

Appendix B – Letter to youth centre

Dear Mrs. Mikula:

I am a Ph.D. student in the Faculty of Information and Media Studies at The University of Western Ontario interested in learning about the use of sports in media literacy programs. As part of my doctoral research, I have designed a project which will utilize sports media to teach adolescents (15-18 years of age) important practical and theoretical media literacy concepts. I am very interested in bringing this project to the Boys and Girls Club of London.

It is no secret that today's youth, in Canada and other developed countries, grow up exposed to mediated messages everywhere they go; from the ubiquitous advertising in public places to their own use of computers, mobile phones, MP3 players and so forth, our kids and teenagers are in the constant presence of media products. Media literacy, as a field of study, aims to empower our youth with the necessary tools "...to access, analyze, evaluate and create information in a variety of print and non-print media formats" (National Telemedia Council, 1993).

Here in Canada, media literacy has been part of the educational curriculum since 1989. The Ontario Ministry of Education includes in its high school curriculum a section devoted entirely to "media studies". However, even though most sport is mass mediated, almost no attention has been paid to the use of sports media in these media literacy programs. I intend to help bridge that gap.

I have designed a project (also called "intervention") that has a two-pronged goal: 1) to hone and develop the media literacy skills of the participants using sport media and 2) to create a flexible framework that will allow future educators to incorporate this into their media literacy courses and programs. This intervention calls for the participants to produce their own sport media and also to reflect critically on their products and production processes. They will choose a sport, a sporting figure or a sports team and create a fan video for their subject/s. They will be held to strict guidelines of time and content thus encouraging them make choices of what to include and what to leave out. The participants will also have journals to record these choices and their responses to these processes. Finally, when the products are complete, they will watch and discuss other participants' videos. This will be the entry point into a wider discussion of media literacy concepts.

The entire project consists of approximately twelve, one and a half hour sessions. This could be done weekly or twice a week depending on your availability. I have checked your Youth Events Calendar for this fall and there seems to be some space between September and November where we could, probably, fit this project.

I have looked at several youth groups in the area, but I am writing to you first as the Boys and Girls Club of London is, by far, my first choice. Your organization holds several competitive advantages, in terms of my project, over other youth organizations. First, the Boys and Girls Club of London is inclusive, meaning it caters to both males and females. Second, it has the appropriate resources for the program proposed here. As noted in your website, your facilities include

"...a 25 meter competitive swimming pool complete with ramp, a spa, large gym offering *extensive sports programs and leagues*, rock wall climbing, large ball and foam rooms, craft room, *three computer labs*, small library, games room with air hockey, pool, pop-a-shot basketball, ping pong, small group games room, Tween room for youth 10 - 12 years" (Emphasis mine).

You already have programs that are focused on the practical aspects of sports so why not provide the kids with a chance to reflect on its socio-cultural aspects? Also, the fact that you have computer labs in site is particularly appealing because this project cannot be done without the use of computers. Finally, the main advantage is your expressed purpose in the community,

“Our program services are planned to provide fun with a purpose. We offer recreation, social interaction and *educational programs to build confidence, independence, self-esteem and self-respect for individuals and families in need*. The Boys' & Girls' Club deals directly with the disadvantaged youth of our community. The Club gives children and teens of all abilities a place where they can learn and play away from the worries of the street” (Emphasis mine).

These goals go hand in hand with what ML programs aim to do. For all these reasons, it seems that the Boys and Girls Club of London is the most appropriate venue for this study.

It is important to let you know that this project is an integral part of my doctoral dissertation research. This means that I will be using the knowledge gained from this intervention in the write-up of my dissertation. Because of this, my proposal has had to go through two strict rounds of reviews before I could approach you. I am delighted to say that my proposal has met the approval of both my Dissertation Committee and the Faculty of Information and Media Studies' Ethics Committee. The latter committee in particular is in charge of making sure that my project is both safe and ethical for the participants.

I understand that you will probably have more questions about the details and logistics of this project. I am attaching a copy of the Intervention Outline so that you can get a better grasp of what I want to do. Furthermore, I would also like to meet with you to answer any additional questions you might have and to, hopefully, discuss the particulars of scheduling and recruitment of participants. Feel free to email me _____ at or call me directly at _____.

Thank you in advance for taking the time to read this and for considering my proposal.

Raúl José Feliciano-Ortiz, M.A.
Ph.D. Candidate
Faculty of Information and Media Studies
University of Western Ontario

Appendix C – Youth centre recruitment poster

Sports and Media



- ✓ Do you enjoy watching or participating in **any kind** of sport or physical activity?
- ✓ Would you like to create sport-related videos?
- ✓ Would you like to learn more about sports broadcasting and media in general?

If you answered “yes” to these questions, and you are between the ages of 15-18, you might consider participating in this program. **Both girls and boys** are welcome. It does not matter how long you have been practicing or watching sports. It does not matter if you like hockey, gymnastics, football, running or aerobics; sport fans of all kinds are welcome!



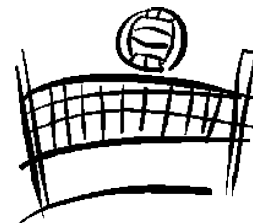
What’s it about and how much time will it take?

You will attend one or two sessions (between 1 and 2 hours) per week for 6 or 12 weeks, depending on availability. In each session you will learn to create your own sport videos with cameras and editing equipment. As we progress, you will also learn about the process of sports media in general.

So, who am I?

I am a doctoral student in Media Studies interested in learning about the use of sports in media literacy programs. I am also a big sports fan and an avid watcher. This program is part of my doctoral research at The University of Western Ontario.

If you are interested or want more information, please see CH, Program Director



Appendix D – Letter of information and consent - First study

Letter of information and consent for the study: “Critical analysis of sports in media literacy programs”

➤ Introduction

I am a Ph.D. student in the Faculty of Information and Media Studies at The University of Western Ontario and the information I am collecting will be used in my doctoral dissertation. You are being invited to participate in a research study looking at the usefulness of sports for media literacy. The purpose of this letter is to provide you with the information you require to make an informed decision about participating in this research.

➤ Research procedures

If you take part in this study, you will be asked to choose a sport, a sporting figure or a sports team and create a fan video for that particular figure, team or sport. You will learn about the decisions and considerations involved in the production of sport broadcasts and videos. You will also get a chance to write about your experience creating the video in a notebook that I will provide you. Afterwards, you will be asked to look at and think about your own creation and those of other kids participating in this study. Finally, there will be a discussion about the videos and the images used.

➤ Length of research and participant assignment

The participants in the study will be assigned at random, that is, by a method of chance, to one of the groups. You will have a 1 in 4 chance of being in group a, b, c or d. You will attend meetings for this study once every week for 12 weeks. Each meeting will last between 1 and 2 hours. The meetings will be held at the Centre.

➤ No risk

This study poses no additional risks to subjects than they would encounter on a normal basis if they were already involved sport either as a spectator or as a participant.

➤ Benefits

Your participation in this study will allow you to learn about the video production process. Also, it will give you the opportunity to think about sports in different ways that could be pertinent to your own school work or your own participation in organized sport. Furthermore, your participation may help me get new knowledge that may benefit future students and athletes.

➤ Voluntary participation

These forms are routinely given to children enrolling in this project, and may be done even if you do not participate in this study. Participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate, refuse to answer any questions or withdraw from the study at any time with no effect on your future or mine.

You have the right to be given all important information about the study and what you will be asked to do. You should only agree to take part if you feel happy that you know enough about these things. You do not have to take part in the study if you do not want to. If you decide to withdraw from the study, or if you are withdrawn from the study before it is completed you may be asked to complete an exit interview.

➤ Anonymity and confidentiality

Your research records will be stored in the following manner: locked in a cabinet in a secure office; video tapes will be viewed only by members of the research team and they will be destroyed after 5 years. If the results of the study are published, a fake name, decided by yourself, will be used and no information that discloses your identity will be released or published without your specific consent to the disclosure.

Your confidentiality will be respected. No information that discloses your identity will be released or published without your specific consent to the disclosure. Besides me, Dr. Carole Farber and the Research Ethics Board at The University of Western Ontario may require access to your records for the purpose of monitoring the research.

The Research Ethics Board at The University of Western Ontario may contact you directly to ask about your participation in the study. If I find information I am required by law to disclose, I cannot guarantee confidentiality. I will strive to ensure the confidentiality of your research-related records. Absolute confidentiality cannot be guaranteed as I may have to disclose certain information under certain laws.

➤ Other pertinent information

It is important to mention that you do not waive any legal rights by signing the consent form.

If you have any additional questions about this study please feel free to contact me by email at _____ or via phone at _____. You can also contact the study sponsor Dr. Carole Farber at _____ or via email at _____.

I have read the Information/Consent document, have had the nature of the study explained to me and I agree to participate. All questions have been answered to my satisfaction.

Guardian

Participant

Researcher

Appendix E – Intervention details

1. Subjects will create a “fan video” using editing software (eg. Microsoft’s *Windows Movie Maker*) or a site that provides for “mashups” (eg. *CBC Hockey Night in Canada Mashup*)⁸⁴. Participants will be grouped in threes.
2. Before creating the actual video, participants will need to brainstorm. This means that they will create an outline that explains what sport they are interested in, what figure in that sport (if someone in particular), and what is the purpose of the video (ex. Is it to show the athletic prowess of the sportsperson?). They will write these things down in the journals provided to them by the researcher.
3. Participants will also receive a handout with additional guidelines for the brainstorming process. The handout will include the following things:
 - What sport are you choosing?
 - What is the purpose of the video?
 - What is your audience? Who are you making this for?
 - What type of shots do you need? Are you using still images? Are you using video? Are you mixing both?
 - Will you have a narrator? Will you write text instead of using a narrator? Will you have any words at all?
 - What kind of sound do you want to use? Do you want loud music or soft music that will permit the use of a narrator? Do you want complete silence?
 - What is the tone of the video? Is it positive (reinforcing the achievements) or is it negative (challenging those achievements)? Is it argumentative or celebratory?⁸⁵
4. The duration of the video will be strictly limited; they cannot go below or above 5 minutes. The purpose of this is to ensure they will make choices regarding content that they have to add or eliminate. They should think about those choices. Participants will record their answers, in their journals, to the following questions:
 - How do you feel about what you had to drop?
 - What were some of the hard decisions?
 - What insights does this give you into the production of televised material?⁸⁶

⁸⁴ It is important to mention that participants will use the resources made available to them in their club or on campus, therefore, it is not necessary that they have their own computer, internet connection or software.

⁸⁵ Questions inspired by Lesson 1c of the *CML Media LitKit* (http://www.medialit.org/pdf/mlk/02_5KQ_ClassroomGuide.pdf)

⁸⁶ Questions cited directly from Lesson 1c of the *CML Media LitKit*

5. Create the actual video using publicly available non-copyrighted material. Participants should record every step of the process in their journals. One of the participants within the group could be selected specifically for this task.
6. When the final product is done, they will exchange and critique videos. This process will begin by getting a preliminary assessment from the participants without mentioning any media literacy concepts to gauge the knowledge they bring with them to the classroom. Afterwards, I (the researcher) will introduce basic media literacy concepts outlined in lesson plans 2a to 2d in the *CML Media LitKit*. After these concepts are explained and examined, we (the participants and I) will enter a broader discussion of gender, race, nationality and political economy in sports (and any additional topics brought by the participants themselves).
7. The entire process, from beginning to end, should take no more than twelve sessions between one and two hours each.

Appendix F – Focus group guide

Topic: General Observations

- What did you think of the clips
- What stood out for you in any of the clips?

Topic: Themes

- Did you find any similarities between the clips?
- Did you find any links between the clips?

Topic: Narratives

- Are there any stories being told in these clips?
- What kind of stories?

Topics: Gender and Race

- Some people say (gender) (race) plays a part in how athletes are represented in the media. What do you think about that?
- Do you see it in these clips?

Topic: Nationality

- Some people say sports are part of the national pride of a country. What are your thoughts on that?
- Can you see it in these clips?

Topic: Sports Media Industry

- It has been said that athletes are products to be sold. What do you think about that?
- Can you see the business side of sports in these clips?

Appendix G – Questionnaire

Name: _____ (only for the investigator's knowledge)

Demographic details

1. Age: _____
2. Sex: _____
3. In which country were you born? _____
4. In which country were your parents born? _____
5. Where did you go to high school? (town, province/state, and country)

Background questions

6. What is your major? _____
7. Have you ever taken a media education or media literacy course?
Yes _____ No _____
8. If you answered “no” to question 7, did you have a media education or media literacy component in another course?
Yes _____ No _____
9. If you answered “yes” to either question 7 or 8, how many of these courses have you taken?

10. If you answered “yes” to either question 7 or 8, please describe what was taught in that/those course/s?

11. Do you participate in any kind of sport? (If you answer “no”, skip to question 15)

Yes _____ No _____

12. Do you participate recreationally or competitively?

_____Recreationally

_____ Competitively
 _____ I have participated in both types

13. How long have you been participating in sports?

_____ Less than a year
 _____ 1 – 2 years
 _____ 2 – 3 years
 _____ 3-5 years
 _____ 5-10 years
 _____ 10 + years

14. How often do you participate in sports?

_____ Every day
 _____ 4-5 times a week
 _____ 2-3 times a week
 _____ Once a week
 _____ Once a month
 _____ Other (please specify) _____

15. Do you watch any kind of sport?

Yes _____ No _____

16. How long have you been watching sports?

_____ Less than a year
 _____ 1 – 2 years
 _____ 2 – 3 years
 _____ 3-5 years
 _____ 5-10 years
 _____ 10 + years

17. How often do you watch sports?

_____ Every day
 _____ 4-5 times a week
 _____ 2-3 times a week
 _____ Once a week
 _____ Once a month
 _____ Other (please specify) _____

Media related questions

18. Provide a brief summary of what you saw in these video clips.

19. Which of these video clips caught your attention?

20. Please explain why that video clip caught your attention.

21. Did anything in these clips make you uncomfortable? If yes, please explain what.

22. Have you ever made a sports-video using video editing software on your computer?

Yes _____ No _____

23. If you answered “yes” to question 20, what elements did you take into consideration when creating that video? Is it available for public viewing through the internet? (please specify the title)

24. If you have never created your own sports video but were asked to do so, would it be similar to any of these? Which one would it resemble? Why yes or why not?

Appendix H – Second study recruitment poster

PARTICIPANTS NEEDED FOR RESEARCH IN SPORTS AND MEDIA

We are looking for **first year students** interested in sports (either as a participant or as a fan) to take part in a brief study of sports and media.

As a participant in this study, you will be asked to watch short sports video clips, complete a short questionnaire, and answer some questions in a focus group session.

Your participation would involve 1 session of approximately 1 hour and 30 minutes held here on campus.

In appreciation for your time, you will receive free lunch (or dinner, depending on the schedule) during the session.

To sign up for **one** session, or for more information, please contact Raúl Feliciano
Faculty of Information and Media Studies at:

There are 6 sessions available on February 16th, 17th, 18th, or 28th. You can choose the one most convenient for you.

Sports and Media

Sports and Media

Sports and Media

Sports and Media

Sports and Media

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Sports and Media

Appendix I – Letter of information and consent - Second study

Letter of information and consent for the study: Sports and Media

➤ Introduction

I am a Ph.D. student in the Faculty of Information and Media Studies at The University of Western Ontario and the information I am collecting will be used in my doctoral dissertation. You are being invited to participate in a research study about sports and media. The purpose of this letter is to provide you with the information you require to make an informed decision about participating in this research.

➤ Research procedures

If you take part in this study, you will be asked to do three things. First, you will view different sports media texts (may include video clips and images). Second, you will be asked to answer a questionnaire with open-ended questions. Finally, you will be asked to discuss the media you just saw in a focus group session. The discussion in these sessions may be video or audio recorded for further analysis.

➤ Length of research and participant assignment

You are attending the focus group session that you indicated you could attend. The first part of the session - viewing the clips - should last no longer than 10 minutes. The second part – answering the questionnaire – will last between 15 and 20 minutes. The final part – the focus group discussion – could last up to 60 minutes. The entire session will last no longer than 1 hour and 30 minutes. All of this will be carried out in the room assigned.

➤ No risk

This study poses no known additional risks to subjects.

➤ Benefits

You will receive free lunch (or dinner, depending on the scheduled session) and a non-alcoholic beverage during your session.

➤ Voluntary participation

I am giving these forms to people who have signed up whether or not they finally decide to participate in this study. Participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate, refuse to answer any questions—in the questionnaire or in the focus group— or you may choose to withdraw from the study at any time.

You have the right to be given all important information about the study and what you will be asked to do. You should only agree to take part if you feel comfortable that you know enough about these things. You do not have to take part in the study if you do not want to do so.

➤ Anonymity and confidentiality

Your research records will be stored in the following manner: locked in a cabinet in a secure office; video or audio tapes recorded in the discussion will be viewed only by members of the research team and they will be destroyed after 5 years. If the results of the study are published, a fake name, decided by you, will be used and no information that discloses your identity will be released or published.

In addition to me, Dr. Carole Farber, Dr. Romaine Smith Fullerton, and/or the Research Ethics Board at The University of Western Ontario may require access to your records for the purpose of monitoring the research.

I will strive to ensure the confidentiality of your research-related records. Absolute confidentiality cannot be guaranteed as I may have to disclose certain information under certain laws. It is also important to note that while I will do everything in my power to ensure your anonymity and confidentiality, other participants may not.

➤ Other pertinent information

It is important to mention that you do not waive any legal rights by signing the consent form. If you have any additional questions about this study please feel free to contact me by email at _____ or via phone at _____. You can also contact the study sponsors Dr. Carole Farber at _____ or via email at _____ and Dr. Romyne Smith-Fullerton at _____ or via email at _____.

Study: Sports and Media

I have read the Information/Consent document, have had the nature of the study explained to me and I agree to participate and to be audio or videotaped. All questions have been answered to my satisfaction.

Participant's name

Participant's signature

Researcher's name

Researcher's signature

Date

Appendix J – University information

In order to preserve the confidentiality of the students, I have separated bibliographic material that can contribute to the identification of the university.

The gender composition of the University can be found at:

http://www.ipb.uwo.ca/documents/2011_faculty_gender.pdf

The University Student Survey can be found at:

http://www.ipb.uwo.ca/documents/2010-11_Survey_of_Graduating_Students.pdf

Curriculum Vitae

RAUL JOSE FELICIANO-ORTIZ

EDUCATION

The University of Western Ontario; London, ON
Ph.D in Media Studies

Universidad del Sagrado Corazón; Santurce, P.R.
M.A. in Communications with a Major in Media and Contemporary Culture, July 2007
GPA: 4.0 in a 4.0 scale, Thesis Approved with Honours

University of Puerto Rico, Mayagüez Campus; Mayagüez, P.R.
B.A. in Political Science, June 2003
GPA: 4.0 in a 4.0 scale, Magna Cum Laude (Institution did not grant Suma Cum Laude at time of graduation)

Center for Applied Social Research, UPRM; Mayagüez, P.R.
Certificate in Applied Social Research, May 2002

RESEARCH AND TEACHING EXPERIENCE

The University of Western Ontario; London, Ontario
Instructor, Winter 2011

- Proposed, developed, and taught Special Topics Course: “After Further Review”: Sports, Media, and Society

The University of Western Ontario; London, Ontario
Teaching Assistant, Fall 2008 – Fall 2010

- Led and prepared tutorials
- Held office hours
- Marked papers and exams
- Attended lectures

The University of Western Ontario; London, Ontario
Research Assistant, Winter 2008

- Literature review
- Information retrieval
- Proofreading and editing
- *In Vivo* Coding (Nvivo)

The University of Western Ontario; London, Ontario
Marking Teaching Assistant, Fall 2007

- Held office hours
- Marked papers and exams
- Attended lectures

Center for Applied Social Research, UPRM; Mayagüez, Puerto Rico
Research Assistant, 2001-2003

- Led research project analyzing and describing the televised political campaign for the 2000 general elections in Puerto Rico

- Assisted in research project analyzing campaign finance reform in P.R.
- Revised related literature; codified, input, and analyzed data using SPSS
- Wrote a paper based on the findings; presented it at the ASA Annual Convention and in the Social Sciences Symposium at the UPR, Mayagüez.

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

- Feliciano Ortiz, R. (Upcoming). Sporting Sovereignty and the Nationalism Mirage in Puerto Rico. Peer reviewed chapter in *Sports and Nationalism in Latin America* anthology. Ed. Héctor Fernández L'Hoeste, Robert McKee Irwin, and Juan Poblete
- Feliciano Ortiz, R. (2010). Lecciones del cine hispanoamericano. In Ed. Estela García Cabrera, *Español Práctico*.
- Feliciano Ortiz, R. (2010). Online Struggles for Professional Jurisdiction and Cultural Authority: An Analysis of Professional Association Websites in Ontario. *Horizontes*, Journal of the Catholic University of Puerto Rico.
- Feliciano Ortiz, R. & Feliciano Arroyo, S. (2009). Ngugi wa Thiong'o: Creyente en el multilingüismo (original title: Breaking linguistic hierarchies: An Interview with Ngugi wa Thiong'o – in Spanish – changed by editorial board). *Diálogo*, agosto, 14.
- Feliciano Ortiz, R. (2008). Identidad en *forward*: Resumen. *Miradero*, year 1, number 1.
- Feliciano-Ortiz, R. (2002). Re-defining sovereignty. *Politikon*, Peer reviewed Journal of the International Association for Political Science Students, 5, 20-23.

PRESENTATIONS

- 2012, Sports and Nationalism in Latin/o America Symposium. Center for Latin American and Latino/a Studies. Georgia State University. “Sporting Sovereignty and the Nationalism Mirage in Puerto Rico”
- 2011, 43rd Annual Conference of the International Visual Literacy Association in Galloway, New Jersey. “After Further Review: Utilizing Sports Media to Assess Visual Literacy”
- 2008, 22nd World Congress on Reading: Reading in a Diverse World in San José, Costa Rica. “Léanlo que está chévere: Una lectura crítica de los forwards humorísticos puertorriqueños”. *Abstract accepted; unable to attend conference*.
- 2008, Segundo Congreso Blogfresores in Mayagüez, Puerto Rico. “Seguramente no sirven: Blogs políticos femeninos y limitaciones estructurales en el ciberespacio”.
- 2007, Universidad del Sagrado Corazón in Santurce, Puerto Rico. Thesis defence: “Identidad en *forward*: Construcción del puertorriqueño en los chistes re-enviados a través del Internet”.
- 2003, 11th Symposium of Social Sciences in Mayagüez, Puerto Rico. “The Dynamics of the Televised Political Campaign in Puerto Rico”.
- 2002, Convention of the American Sociological Association in Chicago, Illinois. “The Dynamics of the Televised Political Campaign in Puerto Rico”.