TIM TEBOW AND “TEBOWMANIA”: AN EXAMINATION OF THE COVERAGE OF TIM TEBOW IN THREE MAJOR U.S. NEWSPAPERS

A Thesis

Presented to

The Graduate Faculty of The University of Akron

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

Vaughn L. Myers III

August, 2013
TIM TEBOW AND “TEBOWMANIA”: AN EXAMINATION OF THE COVERAGE OF TIM

TEBOW IN THREE MAJOR U.S. NEWSPAPERS

Vaughn L. Myers III

Thesis

Approved:

Advisor
Dr. Yang (Young) Lin

Faculty Reader
Dr. Val Pipps

Faculty Reader
Dr. Heather Walter

Accepted:

School Director
Dr. Elizabeth Graham

Dean of the College
Dr. Chand Midha

Dean of the Graduate School
Dr. George R. Newkome

Date
DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this study to my mother and father. They taught me the value of hard work and to always chase after your dreams. They raised me to treat everyone the way that I wanted to be treated and to always be kind, because everyone that you come across is fighting some kind of battle. I want to thank them for always being there for me no matter what the circumstance was. I love you both!
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to first and foremost thank my advisor and chair of my committee Dr. Lin. He dedicated his time and hard work to guide me through my thesis. I will be forever grateful for his guidance and assistance.

I would also like to thank my other committee members, Dr. Walter and Dr. Pipps. They were both very helpful and gave me great guidance during this process. I am grateful that they were willing to take the time out of their schedules to serve on my committee.

Lastly, I would like to thank my sister, Stephanie. She encouraged me to seek a graduate degree and follow my dreams of doing what I love and to love what I do. She was helpful in giving me an extra person to share my thoughts and research about my thesis with. I am grateful to have such a caring sister who has pushed me to strive for success.
ABSTRACT

The sports industry is an arena that offers scholars many different areas to explore and research. News framing by the sports media is prevalent and relevant within the sports industry. This qualitative study attempts to ascertain the coverage of the ultra popular yet polarizing N.F.L. football player, Tim Tebow. Three major U.S. newspapers were analyzed in their coverage of Tebow to see if he was framed in particular ways. Four dominant themes were found in the analyzing of the newspapers; Tebow’s Christian faith, his social media and television popularity, his overall marketability, and how he is portrayed as an N.F.L. football player. Understanding the role of the sports media in the formation of certain perceptions of sports issues as well as athletes is of utmost importance.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER

I. INTRODUCTION .................................................................................................. 1
   Background of Tim Tebow .......................................................................... 4
   Importance of the Study ............................................................................ 5

II. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE .............................................................................. 7
   Framing Analysis ........................................................................................ 7
   Media Framing of Professional Athletes ..................................................... 11
   Religion in Sport ......................................................................................... 16
   Media Coverage of Religion in Sports ......................................................... 21
   Research Question ..................................................................................... 28

III. METHODOLOGY ................................................................................................ 29

IV. RESULTS ........................................................................................................... 34
   Faith: A Devout Christian............................................................................ 34
   In the News: Social Media and Television Sensation ................................... 38
   Marketing: The “TebowMania” Phenomenon .............................................. 40
   Football: A Backup Quarterback ................................................................. 43

V. DISCUSSION ....................................................................................................... 47
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The sports industry offers communication scholars numerous areas to explore and research. Many of the relevant issues in sports happen off the field rather than on the field of play. The sports media plays a very powerful role in the sporting industry and new technologies and issues allow it to choose the specific details that it wants the public to see or hear. These details are often times news about particular athletes or specific events (Coakley, 1994). The sports industry is a money-making enterprise in which the media use a select version of what it wants to include in its coverage to capture and keep the audience’s attention. The messages that the media emphasizes in its coverage of sports are edited to fit the apparent perceptions and interests of its audience.

Successful, yet controversial, professional athletes are always a unique media spectacle. Professional athletes have the inherent interest of many people at one time. Furthermore, because a large number of people follow and watch professional sports in person or through various media outlets, when a successful athlete who is outspoken about a controversial topic such as faith, we, as society, tend to pay attention to what
According to Goethals (1997), in contemporary American society, faith and religion is considered to be a very private and individual subject, thus making it an easy topic for controversy.

When Tim Tebow became the starting quarterback for the Denver Broncos in 2011, many people did not know what to expect from the successful collegiate quarterback. In that respect, Tim Tebow built himself up as a winner, receiving numerous awards and leading his collegiate team to a number one ranking. In day-to-day retrospect, position changes occur very frequently in the National Football League (N.F.L.). However, the change to Tebow as starting quarterback would have a great significance on the N.F.L.

Sports journalist, talk show host and television personality, ESPN’s Stephen A. Smith believes that Tebow does not possess the skills needed to be a successful quarterback in the N.F.L. The media coverage of Tebow has helped bring to life the spectacle known as “TebowMania.” Tebow has grown to be one of the most polarizing athletes in all of sports. It is not because of what he has done on the football field or the collegiate records that he has set and it is more so for how he has become a celebrity figure (Smith, 2012). A transition from the college level to the N.F.L. can be difficult and Tebow learned firsthand that his quarterback skill set does not translate well to the N.F.L. According to the Associated Press (2011) Tebow did not fit the mold of a prototypical professional football passer. Despite his accolades of winning
championships, awards, and trophies throughout his collegiate career, Tebow did not come close to beating out Kyle Orton for the Broncos’ starting quarterback position in 2010 or 2011 (Associated Press, 2011). Also, the only playing time that Tebow saw as quarterback was when he started the last three games of the 2010 season, where he led the team to a record of 1 win and 2 losses. Smith (2012) suggests that Tebow being newsworthy is well deserved, but not because of how he plays football. He has a rock-star appeal and his cordiality and decency are what make him newsworthy.

Nevertheless, it seems that there are two main factors that help shape the focus on Tim Tebow and how he would be covered by the media and viewed by society. The first factor is that Tebow was a very successful collegiate quarterback, but critics believe that he cannot be a successful N.F.L. quarterback. The second factor is that Tebow’s Christian lifestyle and beliefs are very firm and have never faltered. Tebow is very outspoken about his Christianity no matter what the circumstance is.

Given the importance as well as influence of professional athletes, especially the successful and polarizing athletes such as Tebow, the current thesis attempts to ascertain how Tim Tebow is framed in the coverage of three major U.S. newspapers. A qualitative content analysis was conducted to see how Tebow is identified: As a successful or unsuccessful professional football player and/or as a devout Christian who uses football as a platform to show and promote his Christian lifestyle.
Background of Tim Tebow

Tebow was born on August 14, 1987, in Makati City in the Philippines. His parents at the time were serving as Christian Baptist missionaries. According to Extra TV (2012) Tebow was actually considered a ‘miracle baby’ because doctors told his mother to not go through with the pregnancy due to the fact that it could result in life threatening complications. However, his mother refused to listen to the doctors and went along with the pregnancy, eventually giving birth to Timothy Tebow.

Tebow’s mother has played a significant role in his life in helping to shape his lifestyle choices. Tebow was homeschooled by his mother who wanted to be able to instill the family’s Christian beliefs in him (Extra TV, 2012). Even though Tebow was homeschooled, he played high school football because of a law that allowed homeschooled children to play for the team in the local school district in which he lived. Through this opportunity, he would rise to be one of the nation’s most highly recruited college quarterback prospects and in 2005 he accepted an athletic scholarship offer to attend the University of Florida from 2006 to 2009. Tebow attended the University of Florida and played quarterback for the Gators. He won an unprecedented amount of awards along with his National Championships. According to www.timtebow.com, he is a winner of two National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) National Football Championships and he was the first-ever sophomore to win the nation’s most coveted college football award, the Heisman Trophy. Tebow was the winner of the Davey O’Brien award as the nation’s best college quarterback and he was a two-time winner of
the Maxwell award, which goes to the nation’s overall top college football player.

Finally, while at the University of Florida, Tebow was the winner of the James E. Sullivan award as the nation’s most outstanding amateur athlete in any sport.

Even though Tebow has always been criticized about the way that he plays quarterback, he certainly proved his critics wrong by winning all of the above mentioned awards and leading the Florida Gators to two NCAA National Championships. Though critics believed Tebow would never be a successful N.F.L. quarterback, Tebow was a first round N.F.L. draft pick. The Denver Broncos selected Tebow with the 25th pick of the 2010 NFL draft (http://www.nfl.com/draft/2010/tracker#dt-by-round-input:1). He signed a five year contract with the Broncos that had a base value of $11.25 million (Extra TV, 2012). When Tebow took over the starting quarterback position for the Denver Broncos in 2011, he led the struggling football team from the bottom of the AFC West division to a record of 7 wins and 4 losses and they clinched a spot in the NFL Playoffs (http://www.denverbroncos.com/schedule-and-events/schedule.html). Tebow will always have the attention of the media for his performance on the football field. He just may have more attention from the media for what he does off of the football field.

The current thesis examined the mainstream United States newspaper coverage of Tim Tebow and how he captivated a nationwide audience with not just his winning ways on the football field, but how he impacted and influenced American society with “TebowMania.” The thesis focused on the construction of Tim Tebow by mainstream U.S. newspapers and how they position Tebow in their coverage. The thesis makes an
attempt to uncover how Tim Tebow is more often constructed not as a winning
quarterback in the N.F.L., but as a devout Christian who uses football as a platform for
what he truly wants to be known for, his Christian faith. The idea that journalists have
an impact on the perceptions that society forms of athletes is something that cannot be
ignored. With the plethora of nationwide media attention that Tebow has received to
this date, a qualitative content analysis of U.S. newspaper coverage of Tim Tebow
helped bring this subject to light and provided pertinent findings.
Framing Analysis

Framing defines how news coverage shapes mass opinion. In the case of this paper, Tim Tebow is considered the controversial issue or subject. Controversial issues are what make the news, and for the news we as the public look to the press (Kuypers, 2002). Gamson (1989) suggested, “A frame is a central organizing idea for making sense of relevant events and suggesting what is at issue” (p. 157). Frame analysis helps us to solve the problem of what visual signs are significant and evocative. The graphic content, such as words, takes on meaning from the framing setting. Framing can also refer to the manner by which people develop a particular conceptualization of an issue at hand or reposition their rational or thinking about an issue (Chong & Druckman, 2007). Chong and Druckman (2007) suggest, “Strong frames are those that emerge from public discussion as the best rationales for contending positions on the issue. These frames strike opinion leaders and audiences as being more compelling than alternative arguments” (p. 116). Covering and framing a controversial and polarizing athlete like Tim Tebow is a great example of this. According to Robert Entman (1993),
Framing essentially involves selection and salience. To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described. (p. 52)

Framing includes those events or subjects that the media need to be more salient or noticeable to the public. A great example of this is how Tim Tebow chooses to be outspoken about his Christian lifestyles.

Frames are very powerful in the sense that they have a direct influence on how the public thinks about a certain issue. Frames do this by defining the issue, showing who or what is the cause of the issue and by proposing what should be done about the certain issue (Kensicki, 2004). According to Scheufele (1999) by emphasizing particular values and facts, news media frame all news items, providing only those particular values and facts with greater relevancy for making related judgments. News media promote specific definitions, interpretations, evaluations and recommendations for the certain issues at hand. Frames can even have an impact on a cultural mindset and the sociological ideals held by individuals and groups in society.

The analysis of framing sheds light on the specific way in which a great deal of influence is utilized to affect the human consciousness. Affecting the human consciousness is done through the communication of information from one specific location to another. Framing relates to two elements of human cognition: salience and selection. Things such as a speech, utterance, novel, or in this case a news article communicates the information to the human consciousness (Entman, 1993).
Goffman (1974) believes that frames have implicit cultural roots. Goffman calls this cultural resonance. Goffman believes that frames have an implied, inherent meaning and significance in our culture and society. Goffman (1974) suggests that social frameworks provide background understanding for many events that include the controlling effort of intelligence. Intelligence is considered a live agency; the lead agency being human beings.

News framing can be applicable on three different levels. Framing can work solely to offer new beliefs about a certain issue. Framing can make specific beliefs about a certain issue accessible. Finally, framing can make certain beliefs pertinent or important in people’s evaluations of news narratives (Chong & Druckman, 2007).

News framing falls under the umbrella of agenda-setting and pertains specifically to agenda-extension. Agenda-setting is more than the traditional assertion that news tells us what to think about. By using agenda-setting, the news is able to not only tell us what to think about, but how to think about it. Agenda-extension falls under second level agenda-setting. Second level agenda-setting suggests that the news media can center attention on specific features within a particular subject or issue (Kuypers, 2002). The selection of frames for thinking about those particular objects plays a very powerful role in agenda-setting. There is strong evidence that the way an object or issue on the agenda is framed can have a quantifiable behavioral impact. The features of an issue that are highlighted in the news coverage can, and will have a direct influence on the public opinion about the issue (McCombs & Shaw, 1993). Agenda-setting primarily
serves to focus the public’s attention on an issue, but agenda-extension happens when the news media moves beyond simply an unbiased, impartial reporting of issues or events (Kuypers, 2002). Framing raises the salience of some ideas over other ideas. Framing can also make some ideas basically invisible to a certain audience.

In the case of Tim Tebow and “TebowMania,” human interest frames bring an individual story or an emotional angle to the presentation of a particular concept, specifically faith in the athletic arena. Framing news in human interest terms is a great way to personalize, dramatize, and emotionalize the news. The news media frames particular issues in order to capture the interest and minds of their audiences (Valkenburg, 1999). If a certain person or subject is considered breaking news and it is talked about first or for the longest amount of time it is a salient and trending topic that people will continue to reference.

Frames exist in the particular properties of certain news narrative that inspires those observing and thinking about events to ascertain and establish specific understandings of the news narrative. Frames may repeat and reinforce key words and visual images that give some orientation of the idea to the audience and some less so and at the same time leave some ideas invisible (Entman, 1991). Entman (1993) suggests,

By emphasizing specific values, facts, and other considerations, news media frame all news items, endowing those particular values, facts, and other considerations with greater apparent applicability for making related judgments and they might otherwise have been given, promoting particular definitions, interpretations, evaluations, and/or recommendations for the described items. (p. 53)
Frames highlight some pieces of information about a certain item or issue therefore elevating those items or issues into salience. Things such as key words, metaphors, notions, signs, and even visual images in news may be constructed as well as exemplified in a news narrative. A way to distinguish frames can be by searching for specific words that regularly appear in a news narrative. These frames should express thematically persistent undertones throughout the media (Entman, 1991).

*Media Framing of Professional Athletes*

In controversial issues in sports, the media is able to choose the details that it wants to give to the public about certain athletes or events and what exactly will be emphasized. Coakley (1994) suggests that the media provides a selective version of sports. Media are privately owned in societies and financial profits keep them running. Sporting events may be selected for coverage because they have a high entertainment value. Certain message and even images are emphasized in this specific coverage and are the perceived interests of not just the audience, but the sponsors as well.

Grochowski (2004) suggests that the media during the O.J. Simpson trial framed Simpson in terms of his race and used his race as a way to portray him to society. Grochowski (2004) concluded, “Race was a central factor in the trial and that portrayal of Simpson in the media was used against him as a central means to understand the murders” (p. 158). This heeds to the idea that this case as can be spun in a negative fashion where race can be a dominant frame used by the media to construct the identity of athletes.
Vincent and Crossman (2012) conducted a content analysis to compare the amount of newspaper coverage devoted to the men’s and women’s Canadian and U.S. ice hockey teams in the 2010 Winter Olympics. They concluded that four themes emerged from their content analysis of The Globe, Mail, and The New York Times. The four themes that emerged from their qualitative research are the future of hockey at the Winter Olympic Games, postgame celebrations, gendered discourses, and the importance of the gold-medal games. Their findings also concluded that the coverage of men’s teams was more than twice as much than the coverage of women’s teams. Gender is the dominant theme of their research they showed how it can play an important role in the portrayal of professional athletes by the print media.

Kim, Walkosz, and Iverson (2006) examined the USA Today’s coverage of the top three professional women golfers: Se Ri Pak, Annika Sorenstam, and Karrie Webb. A total of 649 articles were selected for the sample in their study. Their intention was to determine how the print media covered a top female athlete from Asia compared with top female athletes from Europe and Australia. Kim, Walkosz, and Iverson (2006) concluded, “A major newspaper reported on an Asian female athlete, differences existed in terms of both the amount and type of coverage” (p. 317). They also concluded that Pak not only received less coverage when she won, but she received more negative comments. The researchers believe that Pak received this type of coverage compared to the European and Australian golfers because she is from a
minority culture. They concluded that the media not only framed the women professional golfers using gender, but also using their ethnicities.

In analyzing the print media coverage of Mike Tyson and his rape case, Sloop (1997) concluded that the sports media directly connected Tyson’s actions to his performance in the boxing ring and the fact that he is an African-American male. Sloop suggests that many of the articles that were written about the trial appeared in the sports section of newspapers and the case itself was often positioned as a sporting event. Sloop advocates that the media ultimately portrayed Tyson as being aggressive outside of the boxing ring because of the way he fought in the boxing ring. The dominant frames found in this study portrayed Tyson’s aggressive behavior as well as his race.

In a qualitative content analysis conducted on Barry Bonds, Ventresca (2011) concluded that the discourses surrounding Barry Bonds while he was in pursuit of the all time homerun record were multidimensional and had various contradictions and inconsistencies. The sports media portrayal of Bonds included positive and negative discourses highlighting his physical as well as mental characteristics. The dominant themes that arose from the sports media coverage of Bonds during this time include the negative aspects of the representation of his character and his alleged steroid use. Positive dominant themes that were found include his family and youth values and his hard work. Only a small number of articles highlighted Bonds’ positive representation of character (Ventresca, 2011). This research article shows how an athlete can be
portrayed in both a positive and negative light and physically as well as mentally all while pursuing one of the most cherished records in all of sports.

Marie Hardin, Julie Dodd, Jean Chance, and Kristie Walsdorf (2004) examined the racialized depictions of U.S. Olympic athletes in the 2000 Olympic Games. Conducting a content analysis of five daily U.S. newspapers, they found that the newspapers overrepresented black athletes and more specifically, black males were overrepresented in strength sports. These representations reinforced the hegemonic notions of Black primitive athleticism and racial differences (Hardin, Dodd, Chance, & Walsdorf, 2004). The dominant themes that were found in this study are how the Olympic athletes were constructed and portrayed based on their race.

Fernando Delgado (2004) analyzed the media coverage of superstar boxer Oscar De La Hoya. Delgado conducted a content analysis of television media coverage as well as print media coverage of De La Hoya when he was known as “The Golden Boy” and was an athletic and marketing phenomenon. Delgado (2004) argues that there was a complicated relationship between De La Hoya and the popular boxing media on the issues of De La Hoya’s ethnicity, masculinity and public image. Delgado (2004) suggests, “In short, he (De La Hoya) has accomplished what other great champions of the recent past have done, most notably Sugar Ray Leonard: he has crossed over into the mainstream US media and entertainment culture” (p. 199). From the analysis of television and print boxing media, Delgado concluded that De La Hoya’s path to success and that he wanted to be accepted by mainstream society hurt his relationship with his
hometown community. De La Hoya’s rise to stardom hurt his relationship with his hometown community because of how he was a cultural icon in the United States complicated the way in which his hometown community viewed him as not only a boxer, but as a Latino male. Delgado ultimately found that De La Hoya was framed by the media as a cultural phenomenon and he concluded that De La Hoya’s ethnicity and his masculine hegemony are dominant themes in the way De La Hoya was portrayed by the boxing media.

In a qualitative research study conducted about the media coverage of Tiger Woods, Giacobbi and DeSensi (1999) discovered that media portrayals of Tiger Woods were typified by not only racist, but sexist and classist philosophies. Giacobbi and DeSensi (1999) examined televised media portrayals of Woods including an interview with Barbara Walters and a broadcast of the ESPN news show *Outside the Lines* titled “The Tiger Woods Effect.” The researchers found that the media portrayals of Tiger Woods during the televised events in reality reinforced past notions and common stereotypes of the sport of golf (Giacobbi & DeSensi, 1999). Athletes may not only be portrayed by the sports media on the basis of race, but also on the basis of sex as well as the basis of social or economic status.

These athletes and their separate situations and issues provide evidence that framing can be shown through various controversial and trending sports topics and news events. Often times, professional athletes’ out-of-sport antics and behavior receive much more attention than their accomplishments and activity in each of their
sport. The media as well as the public thrive for sporting issues and events like the
before mentioned cases. There are many ways including race, gender, and ethnicity in
which athletes can be constructed and framed by the sports media. The frames arise
from the many situations and events that professional athletes create.

Religion in Sport

The institution of sport, more than any other aspect of American culture
thoroughly exhibits the values of its follower (Brody, 1979). In the United States as well
as the rest of the world, sports are very popular and people follow sports in some of the
same ways that people follow religion. The sporting arena has a large impact on the
formation and structure of culture. Sports, like religion, act as an arena or platform that
brings all different types of people together. Different races, ethnicities, cultures,
economic states and societies are brought together by athletic competition as well as
shared religious beliefs.

According to McCarron (2001) professional athletes in the United States are the
nation’s most passionate practitioners of the idea of articulating appreciation to God.
McCarron (2001) suggests,

In the televised post-contest interviews that constitute an integral part of the
world of mass-produced sports, the obligatory articulation of gratitude to the
deity has become one of the most common ways in which an account of the
day’s battle is prefaced. (p. 1-2)

Athletes thank God for their superb athletic performance after almost every event.

“Prayer huddles” and pre-game worshiping have become permanent routines at many
professional as well as collegiate football games. Open religiosity has been apparent and increasing since the 1960s in the locker rooms of all sports.

Sports and religion are two areas that have some of the same morals and principles. According to Eastman and Riggs (1994) “Sport is like religion because they share some of the same values and rituals. Rituals are usually intended to unite a group of members who might otherwise be competing or at least drawn apart by disparate interests” (p. 250). Beck (2003) believes that sport in the same sense as religion has become an institution that builds and brings communities together. Religion has always been known to unite Americans as well as other societies around a set of sacred values and beliefs. Religion unites people around a set of “sacred” heroes, documents, as well as ideals. Religion can be viewed and studied as the baseline of community (Butterworth, 2008).

Religion as well as sports is very powerful in the sense that they can act as mechanisms to bring a community and society together. In his book, Christianity and the Culture of Sports, author Shirl James Hoffman (2010) examines the relationship between religion and sports and goes as far back as the age of the Romans and Greeks in comparing the two. Hoffman explains that there is more to religion and sports than just coincidental things that they happen to have in common or players and coaches infusing prayer into athletic competitions. The rise of sports can simply be looked at as a cultural accommodation because religion must give in on its morals to remain relevant. However, there has been a massive invasion of Christian athletes and coaches
into entertaining and popular sports. There has also been and importance placed on sports in the programs of churches. Evangelical organizations have become thematically arranged around competitive sports. This is something much deeper than the simple mission for cultural relevance (Hoffman, 2010).

Sports can be seen as a constructive place for people to go and participate in and the structure and discipline of sports are similar to that of religion. Sports have the ability to have a cultural impact much like religion while having similar values and principles than religion.

In order to be a fan of sport or a certain sporting team or competition, one must first be a believer in that particular team. In religion, people share the same beliefs and are believers in their particular religion and/or God. Beck (2003) suggests that, “To be a fan - like being a believer - means that individuals are members of a network that shares the same value system” (p. 21). Sports just like religion have the ability to create feelings of inspiration, arousal and enthusiasm in all people. Sporting events can even be interpreted as religious performances because they are full of symbolic and ceremonial actions. Followers of religion can relate very closely to fans of sports. Beck (2003) states “Fan clubs can be seen as communities and sport events as happenings. And the experience of belonging together and witnessing outstanding performances can evoke at least quasi or vicarious religious feelings” (p. 22).

A great manifestation of the relationship between sports and religion is the idea of pregame prayers. According to Higgs (1995) the idea is that pregame prayers happen
often and that the content of them are very religious. The great boxer, Rocky Balboa as well as legendary professional football coach Vince Lombardi are great examples of how prayer was used pre-fight and pregame. The relationship between modern church and sports has become a mutual beneficial relationship. The relationship between the church and sports has become symbiotic. Churches now offer blessings on sports and sports bring attention to churches. Sports and religion have formed a relationship that have a direct effect on social circumstances and now play an important role in affecting the opinions of mass society (Higgs, 1995).

Sports can be looked at and viewed as having a religious liturgy that satisfies humans’ deepest cravings. Novak (1976) believes that sports not only provide an arena for freedom, but they also provide an arena for rituals as well as many symbolic meanings in the actions that take place. According to Novak, there are many shared characteristics of modern sport and religion. Some of the characteristics include; asceticism and dedication in preparation, fate in human existence, sense of awe for time and place of competition, surrogates (athletes and priests) perform ceremonies, heroic forms of ideals, and symbols and myths are used that embody the same ideals of excellence, beauty and imagination (Novak, 1976).

According to Edwards (1973) sport has adherents that fall within the ranks of traditional religious denominations. Edwards (1973) believes that sport is a worldly, quasi-religious foundation. Edwards also believes that socially significant secular values are infused in sports. These socially significant secular values have a large part in the
religious and moral arenas. The values that are disseminated through the arena of sport are more supplemental and complementary to religious principles rather than contradictory. Also, the values disseminated through sport apply more directly to the day-to-day secular anxieties of the members of society.

Sports, just like religion can provide an avenue for people to relieve stress and take a break from the everyday problems and issues that are in our lives. Religion is something that we as humans use to guide us and help us along the path that we call life. For many of us, sports are also something that we give ultimate concern to. Kellner (2003) argues that sports provide transcendence from the triteness and pain of everyday life, acting as an escape. During sporting events, the fans become part of something that is greater than them and their participation in the sporting event provides them with great meaning and significance.

Athletic competition has become a very popular public spectacle. Chidester (2009) believes that athletic competition has emerged as the ideal way through which humans can demonstrate and exemplify godlike qualities. Athletes in sport provide a great way to show the significance of religion in sport. According to Chidester (2009) “In a Christian faith system that conceived of the human body as a temple to God, athletes represented a given society’s most advanced and spiritually perfected members, figures worthy of respect and adulation precisely because of their success in the popular games of the day” (p. 358). The athletes of modern sports are the ones we as society look up to and they are worthy of our respect and praise because they are successful. These
athletes have shown that they treat their bodies as temples to God and they are society’s most progressive and achieved beings.

It is noted that sport and religion share many of the same characteristics. Like sport, people that are involved in religious activities are motivated by the fact that their actions have consequences. This is similar to sports, because in sport the outcome or result of the competition makes the ultimate difference. Also, the activities that are a part of religion are viewed by spectators who make the audience. Finally, Brody (1979) argues that just like sport, religion is institutionalized because it possesses an ongoing, organized atmosphere. Brody (1979) suggests “Sport appears to be quite similar in terms of form, style, and operation to various manifestations of ‘the civil religion.’ If nationalism or patriotism can be understood as religious, then so, too, can sport” (p. 25). Brody continues to say, “Sport occupies a highly revered place in the minds and hearts of the members of this society and may very well constitute a quasi-religion of profound impact and influence” (p. 25). The characteristics of religion and sports are similar to each other and provide an avenue in which religion becomes infused in sport.

Media Coverage of Religion in Sports

According to Butterworth (2013) Tim Tebow is just another athlete in a long list of athletes to be publicly outspoken about his Christianity. However, Tebow has received an unprecedented amount of condemnation because of it. Being an N.F.L. quarterback who is an outspoken Christian has incited so much attention, whether
positive or negative to Tebow. All of this attention discloses the debatable area that
religion makes up in American society (Butterworth, 2013).

Other popular athletes besides Tim Tebow have been known to be outspoken
about their religious faith. Tim Tebow is a recent professional athlete to become a
popular figure because of the way he carries himself and how he is strong willed about
his faith. There are other popular professional athletes who have made headlines and
became polarizing figures due to the fact that they are not or were not afraid to be
outspoken about their religious faith.

One of the more popular professional football players whose life was cut short
when he died from cardiac arrhythmia was the Hall of Fame defensive lineman, Reggie
White. White was nicknamed “The Minister of Defense” because of his deep Christian
faith. While he spent his time climbing the all-time sack list in the N.F.L., According to
Bleacherreport.com, White served as the associate minister at an African-American
church in Knoxville, Tennessee.

Two other well-known people in the N.F.L., retired head coach Tony Dungy and
star quarterback of the San Diego Chargers Philip Rivers are also very religious.
According to Bleacherreport.com, Rivers along with his wife speaks to young children
about having strong spirituality and the importance to abstain from premarital sex.
Tony Dungy is very religious and was even appointed by former President George W.
Bush to serve on his Faith Council. Dungy helps to mentor troubled N.F.L. players.
Retired cornerback and N.F.L. superstar Deion Sanders is very outspoken about God and his belief in God. In an article on Bleacherreport.com, even though Sanders was one of the biggest superstars in all of professional sports during his career, he claims that he was nothing until he found God. His well-known “Prime Time” nickname and persona left him feeling empty and he turned to God. Sanders now helps organizations such as The Boys and Girls Club of America where he often mentors troubled youth.

Perhaps the most famous professional athlete that was a devout religious person and was not afraid to let everyone know is Muhammed Ali. Ali converted to the Nation of Islam in the 1960s. In 1975, Ali converted to the more mainstream Sunni Islam and in 2005 he decided to support the spiritual practices of Sufism. Ali was always criticized about his religious beliefs and was also criticized because he took conflicting positions on matters such as the civil rights (Bleacherreport.com).

The National Basketball Association’s (NBA) superstar and New York Nicks forward Amare Stoudemire is outspoken about his Jewish heritage. He claims that it has played a very significant role in his development as not only a basketball player, but as a human being. To further explore and study his heritage, Stoudemire has visited Israel. Stoudemire also hopes to open a Hebrew school (Bleacherreport.com).

Retired NBA star, Dikembe Mutombo is a devout Baptist. Mutombo was born in the Democratic Republic of Congo. According to Bleacherreport, He has dedicated much of his time to humanitarian work in the Congo. Mutombo has done work for the
United Nations Development Program and he is a spokesman for CARE, the international relief agency.

Another controversial athlete who is still playing today is Josh Hamilton of Major League Baseball (MLB) and left fielder for the Texas Rangers. Hamilton has a history of drug and alcohol abuse and he has called his recovery from this “a God thing.” Hamilton takes every opportunity that he has to share his stories about how Jesus brought him back and helped him recover from alcohol and drug abuse. Also, Hamilton says that his belief in Jesus is the thing that keeps him moving forward in baseball and in life (Bleacherreport.com).

Finally, more recently, American track and field Olympian Allyson Felix is also outspoken publicly about her faith. Felix is the daughter of a Christian pastor. Many had expected Felix to meet or exceed her multiple 2008 Beijing Olympic gold medals at the 2012 London Olympic Games. According to Bleacherreport.com, Felix believes and insists that her main goal in life is to become more “Christ-like” and that everything else in life is secondary to that, including her gold medals.

Entertainment and Sports Programming Network (ESPN) is one of the leaders in the sport media industry and covers many sporting events. There are numerous worldwide newspaper publications that are circulated on a daily basis and as I mentioned before, the sports section has become increasingly popular. There are numerous sporting events that take place on a daily basis in the United States that
involve commentators as well as broadcasters that provide media coverage. The media play a very powerful role in the portrayal and coverage of those sporting events.

Veteran commentator Bob Ley of ESPN referred to the NCAA Basketball Championship Tournament as the “Quest for the Holy Grail.” Also, CBS Sports, in their logo for the NCAA Basketball Championship Tournament has, “The Road to the Final Four” (Price, 1991). These two phrases being used in the coverage of the NCAA Championship Tournament act as metaphors for a sense of pilgrimage and ultimacy that can be related to religion. Price (1991) argues how the Final Four has come to be a religious experience. The Final Four has faithful followers from year to year and the terminology “Quest for the Holy Grail” and the collegiate teams being on a pilgrimage for a championship help make the Final Four seem as if it were a religious experience.

Butterworth (1993) argues that the media coverage of the Super Bowl, the championship for American professional football adds to the assertion that it can be seen as a “civil religion.” Fox Sports opening declaration to begin the coverage of Super Bowl XXXVI is a strong example of how the media can turn sports into a “civil religion.” When writing about the declaration and a scene during the declaration where there was an image of Independence Hall in Philadelphia and a panoramic view of a blue sky, Butterworth (1993) suggests “As if gesturing to the heavens, the image was an implied reminder of American exceptionalism, the mythic belief that God himself entrusted the United States with a mission to civilize and democratize the rest of the planet” (p. 320). A document like the Declaration of Independence is considered to be a cornerstone of
American civil religion. The example of Fox Sports opening declaration to Super Bowl XXXVI is how the media can portray sports as being a place that share the same values and can even take the same form as religion. Fox sports coverage of the Super Bowl also shows how religion has permeated into sport (Butterworth, 1993).

As mentioned earlier, religion can be seen as a way to bring a society together and sports using religion can help heighten the attention. After the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 the sport of baseball played a significant role in heightening the sense of national community. According to Butterworth (2005), each professional baseball organization made intricate religious-like plans to help bring the nation together. Video tributes, raising the American flag and the singing of “Proud to be an American” are some examples of what organizations did in honor of the terrorist attacks. The Boston Globe’s sportswriter Bill Griffith painted an image of broadcaster Joe Buck as a clergyman who invoked religious rituals. In an article that Griffith wrote he even referred to Buck as the Billy Graham of baseball. It also noted that Frank Deford, a writer for Sports Illustrated wrote how a sporting event such as baseball can provide catharsis for a nation. He even commented that a sporting event can serve a larger community as a wake or church service does for family members or friends. Butterworth’s article shows how sporting events can be portrayed by the media as religious rituals that can bring a large group of people together. Sportswriters and broadcasters portrayed the rituals at the sporting events to be similar to those of
religious events and Major League Baseball teams used religion as a part of sport to honor victims of the terrorist attacks.

Chen (2003) examined whether the media discourse of Mormons shifted during the 2002 Winter Olympic Games which was held in Salt Lake City, Utah. The study was done using an analysis of newspaper articles and news magazines. Chen believes that the 2002 Winter Olympics was a great opportunity to reshape the image of the Mormon Church. Chen (2003) used the Model Minority discourse in her research and ultimately found that nothing really changed. Chen’s research indicated that the media during 2002 Winter Olympic Games reinforced the past model minority stereotype of the Mormons. Chen used one of the largest worldwide sporting events of the Olympic Games to show how religion can be infused and studied through sports.

The sports media exert a very direct and powerful influence on the American Society. The media framing of professional athletes gives us insight into how the sports media has this direct influence and helps shape the opinions of mass society. Religion has certainly been infused into sport by professional athletes. Religion is a prime example of how the media may frame or portray certain professional athletes. In this study, I plan to examine the area of religion in sport, specifically the construction of Tim Tebow by the sports media. This will help fill the gap of literature that exists in the area of religion in sport.
Research Question

The following research question guided my content analysis of the 2011-2012 national newspaper coverage of Tim Tebow.

RQ: What are the dominant themes about Tim Tebow that emerge from the 2011-2012 newspaper coverage of Tim Tebow?
CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

According to Coakley (1994), in a majority of the North American newspapers, more of the daily coverage is given to sports than any other single topic of attention, including the likes of business and politics. In fact, newspapers as well as television in the United States have shown that they depend on sports as nearly as much as sports depend on them. According to ESPN Research, sports programming has seen an increase in ratings of 21 percent over the last five years compared to all other television ratings that have only seen a 6 percent increase over the same time period (Snowden, 2012). The sporting industry has become increasingly important in society and is threatening to move to the forefront of the print media in North America (Coakley, 1994).

Lever and Stanton (1993) believe that sports have not only gained a great deal economically from the media, but they have also gained a great deal culturally. Lever and Stanton suggest that “The mass media, more than anything else, were responsible for promoting organized sport from a relatively minor element of culture into a full-
blown social institution” (1993, p. 126). The mass media as well as the sports industry can have a profound impact on all aspects of society.

I examined the newspaper articles in order to make claims about the construction of Tim Tebow. My goal was to identify the newspaper articles about Tim Tebow to find specific themes that are used by the print media journalists in the coverage of Tebow. I conducted a qualitative content analysis of the newspaper articles that were chosen. The qualitative content analysis of this research paper examined newspaper articles about Tim Tebow from October 23, 2011 until August 31, 2012 using the LexisNexis Academic database as the sampling frame. This duration has been chosen, because it is the day that Tim Tebow made his first start as an N.F.L. quarterback with the Denver Broncos and it is up to the date to which Tebow’s new team the New York Jets finished their preseason schedule for the 2012 season. I conducted a guided search using the term “Tim Tebow” in the headline, lead paragraph, or body of the article. With recommendation from professional librarians, I used the search term “Tim Tebow” in the LexisNexis database and search for the newspaper articles using the “relevance” search option of the search term for each newspaper. Because of the inclusion of this criterion in the search, articles were ranked in terms of their relevance to the search term, “Tim Tebow.” That is, the higher the degree of “relevance,” the more relevant an article was to “Tim Tebow.”

I selected a purposeful sample of ninety articles about Tim Tebow, thirty from each newspaper, in three of the larger and more popular newspapers in the United
States. I used *The New York Times*, because of its regional proximity to the New York Jets and New York City as well as being the third most circulated newspaper in the United States. I used *The USA Today* because it is the most circulated print newspaper in the United States on a daily basis. Finally, I used *The Denver Post* because it is the local newspaper to the Denver Broncos, the team that Tebow started his NFL career with. *The Denver Post* is the ninth most circulated print newspaper in the United States (http://accessabc.wordpress.com). A total of the top ninety (thirty for each newspaper) articles were selected for my study.

After excluding letters to the editors and blogs as well as duplicate articles, I selected a total of 79 articles about Tim Tebow in the three major U.S. newspapers: 23 from *USA Today*, 27 from *The New York Times*, and 29 from *The Denver Post*.

Following Lindlof’s (1995) description of the constant comparative method, in the qualitative process, the articles were read as a whole, beginning with the general research questions about the issue and subject at hand. In the first stage of the analyzing of the newspaper articles I used the constant comparative method to assign certain key words, sentences, expressions, ideas, and whole paragraphs to text categories.

For the second stage of analyzing the newspapers articles, I analyzed the categories that I found in order to identify similarities between them. I analyzed the common key words, phrases, or ideas that I found to identify those similarities. If
needed, I read the article as a whole again to help clearly find the distinct categories and then continued to analyze the categories to find the connections.

Then I sorted and prioritized my notes from analyzing the articles in importance to the research question. Again, the research question used for this thesis is: What are the dominant themes about Tim Tebow that emerge from the 2011-2012 newspaper coverage of Tim Tebow? At this stage in the process of analyzing the articles, my main goal and focus was to see how the various characteristics or features of the articles were related to each other. The 79 articles were read more than three times each by me. I then determined the frames that were embedded in the newspaper articles by analyzing my notes about the articles and categories that I formed.

As I analyzed the articles and the notes that I had taken about the articles, I continued to put similar and related information and/or characteristics that I found into separate categories. The dominant themes of Tebow in the newspapers’ coverage became more apparent as I continued to analyze my notes about the articles. In order to categorize the information to find the dominant themes, I used a color coding scheme. For example, if I analyzed an article and the specific, dominant information in the article pertained to Tebow being a Christian, I categorized the information as blue. If an article’s dominant, important information contained characteristics about Tebow the football player, I categorized the information as green. By doing this, it allowed me to find themes that were clearly distinct from one another. I continued with this
process until four dominant and distinct themes emerged from my analysis of the newspaper coverage of Tim Tebow.
CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Four significant themes emerged from my qualitative content analysis of three major US newspapers coverage of Tim Tebow. The themes are: Tebow’s Christian faith, his social media and television popularity, his overall marketability, and how he is portrayed as a football player on the field of play. Among which, the most dominant theme that was revealed by my analysis is Tim Tebow’s faith and his devout Christian lifestyle. Different terms used to describe Tebow were absorbed by the different themes and thus used for evidence in the themes.

_Faith: A devout Christian_

The fact that Tim Tebow is a devout Christian who is outspoken about his religious beliefs was given a significant amount of space in the articles. Even though it may be a complex and problematic subject, Tebow has not waivered at all from standing up for his religious beliefs. Religion is a touchy subject, but this has not stopped Tebow from speaking out about his Christianity. Tebow has learned that it is not about whether he wins or loses football games and that there is more to life than just football. Tebow believes that God has a plan for his life and that football is just one step of his spiritual journey.
According to an article in *The New York Times*, Tebow has always been recognized based on his religious beliefs. Tebow has never been shy about showing his Christian faith publicly, even when he was at the University of Florida. During his college days, he was known for inscribing Bible verses on the eye-black that he wore during football games (Borden, 2012).

One of the more popular phrases that the articles used to describe Tebow and his Christian beliefs is referring to him as “a preacher in a football player’s body.” John Branch and Mary Pilon (2012) of *The New York Times* stated, “Tim Tebow may be the most popular Christian in sports. He is a cross-cultural phenomenon, a preacher in a football player’s body” (p. B11).

Another article from *The New York Times* mentioned that Tebow and his outspoken Christian beliefs are an inspiration to many people. Tebow was a guest at an Easter church service in Georgetown, Texas, and spoke to the worshipers about sharing their Christian faith publicly. A follower of Tebow was interviewed in the article and said, “He (Tebow) doesn’t care if he gets made fun of. He cares about how good a Christian he is. He never gives up” (Alexander, 2012, p. D2). Another Tim Tebow follower and lifelong Denver Broncos fan stated, “It’s not just about being an athlete. It’s about being a decent human being. That’s not so common nowadays” (Alexander, 2012, p. D2).

The subject of faith in sports is very complex and touchy. In my analyzing of the articles, the journalists bring Tebow’s religion into light and provide society with a different way to look at sports. In the *Denver Post* article, “Play on,” Patton Dodd, the
managing editor of Patheos.com, a Denver-based online forum on religion stated in his new e-book,

Like no other athlete today and no athlete before him, Tim Tebow crystallizes the complex relationship between faith and sport. “The Tim Tebow mystique.” Tebow, in part because of his charisma and in part because of the uncanny nature of recent Broncos wins, might be the ultimate religious phenomenon in sports. (Draper, 2012, p. A-01)

Often times when Tebow was covered in regards to his faith and Christian beliefs, the articles noted how Tebow is a stand up guy and has great character. In the Denver Post article, “Being Tebow,” Tebow was quoted saying,

As a Christian, you should be kind and turn the other cheek, but at the same time you need to be the toughest one, you need to be the one setting an example, you need to show character, you need to be the one working hard. (Klis, 2012, p. 1A)

Another article from The New York Times talks about how Tebow and his Christian ways in football cannot be broken. Douthat (2012) claims that every human life is a story and that human is the author and a genuinely Christian life should make the authorship manifest. Douthat also claims that as Tebow’s journey in the N.F.L. continues with unexpected twists and ups and downs, then his credibility in believing in his faith can only be strengthened.

In The New York Times article “Football and faith: Confluence or divide?” Greg Bishop (2011) writes about TebowMania and how it has caused a full-blown debate about religion and its place in sports. Former N.F.L. All-star quarterback and outspoken Christian himself, Kurt Warner was interviewed in the article. Warner stated,
The role religion plays here is enormous. When somebody professes their faith, and I was that guy for a long time, people automatically think when you praise God it’s because He makes passes go straighter or help win games. When you lose, they say, your faith doesn’t belong here. Your God’s not helping you win. (Bishop, 2011, p. B14)

An article from *USA Today* also highlights how the story of Tebow has turned him into a cultural icon. Tom Krattenmaker says in regards to Tebow’s heroic season, “What a ride it was: a faith-fueling story that instigated and renewed many a fan’s interest in pro football while leaping the bounds of the sports world and entering the wider realm of popular culture” (Krattenmaker, 2012, 7A). Krattenmaker also notes that people in the U.S. society have ridiculous views of Tebow and believes that some people think that Christianity’s validity in the U.S. society rests on Tebow’s padded shoulders (Krattenmaker, 2012).

Finally, another article from *USA Today* talks about how Tebow has had a great impact on the religious aspects in the U.S. society. Michel Medved (2012) believes that important members of the religious clergy should not target athletes for criticism such as Tim Tebow, Jeremy Lin, or Josh Hamilton because they flaunt their Christian devotion. He also believes that Tebow should not be criticized or looked down upon for his religious beliefs and the fact that he is committed to his Christianity. Tebow has even repeatedly denied that he believes God arranges miraculous victories for favored Christian athletes (Medved, 2012).

It is very clear that his faith and religious beliefs are something that Tim Tebow is very comfortable with. Tebow, using football as his platform can be much more than a
football player. He could be a preacher, politician, or even philosopher (Paige, 2012).

Tim Tebow has regularly contributed everything in his life to God and believes that football is secondary when it comes to God. Tebow’s religious beliefs and Christian faith are a very critical aspect to Tebow’s journey in the N.F.L. and more so to his journey of life (Branch and Pilon, 2012). This is brought to the forefront of Tebow’s story in a majority of the articles that were analyzed.

*In the news: Social media and television sensation*

A great example of TebowMania and how it turned New York City into media frenzy can be found in the *USA Today* article, “Tweets fly during Tebow’s Jets Q&A.”

The article claimed,

> “Tebow takes Manhattan” trended nationally on Twitter during a 32 minute, 47-second introductory question-and-answer session in which the New York Jets quarterback/Swiss army knife was christened in the shark-infested New York news media waters. (Klemko, 2012, P. 3C)

Tebow commanded the attention of at least 10 New York-area television stations and media outlets and Tebow’s answers to the media were broadcast live on ESPN and ESPN2. Tebow’s popularity hit all time highs with him being traded to the New York Jets and it caused a media circus. Another article from *The New York Times* claimed that Tebow would be at the center of the highest attended news conference in N.F.L. backup quarterback history (Battista, 2012, p. D1).

After Tebow’s game winning touchdown throw against the Pittsburgh Steelers in the 2011 N.F.L. playoffs, Tebow’s popularity on social media sites such as Twitter was astounding. In the a *Denver Post* article, “So glad I’m back for Tebow time,” John
Hendrickson (2012) wrote, “In the moments following Sunday’s game-winning touchdown, Twitter marked a new record of sports tweets per second with an astonishing 9,420” (p. 1D). This shows how Tebow’s popularity and TebowMania has had a great affect on the social media aspects in society.

A great example of Tebow’s popularity can be seen by the coverage that Tebow received from ESPN, The Worldwide Leader in Sports. In the article, “In the end, it’s about execution,” Dave Krieger of the Denver Post writes that Tim Tebow has been the two most popular words on ESPN programming (Krieger, 2012). ESPN as well as other sports stations across the country had continuous coverage of Tebow during his breakout season in Denver and the following offseason when he was traded to the New York Jets. Dan Barry of the New York Times noted that Tebow’s popularity on ESPN’s Flagship show, Sportscenter was growing on a daily basis after leading the Broncos to a playoff win against the Pittsburgh Steelers (Barry, 2012).

Another great example of Tebow’s popularity with the television media is looked at in a New York Times article titled, “Goodbye and Hello.” When Tebow was traded to the New York Jets, the media circus in New York City followed. When Tebow spoke for the first time in his new locker room it was apparent just how popular he was. Zach Schonbrun (2012) says, “There were dozens of reporters, rows of cameras and enough flashbulbs to brighten a Manhattan city block” (p. B9). The article also mentions how Tebow’s new teammates on the New York Jets were amazed the whole afternoon and watched Tebow with a combination of shock as well as amusement (Schonbrun, 2012).
As for Tebow being the backup quarterback in New York, he still drew more media attention than any player. At Tebow’s introductory press conference for the New York Jets, more than 200 news media members were in attendance and the press conference had to be moved to the Jet’s field house which was the only area large enough to accommodate such a crowd (Shpigel, 2012). The press conference basically turned into more of a news conference. There were members of the news media in attendance from CNN and Fox Business Network, his hometown of Jacksonville, Florida as well as his birthplace, the Philippines. At the press conference there were lines of cars trying to gain entry at the security booth, drive-through stations for media members to get their credentials and many satellite trucks, a dozen in all representing various media outlets (Shpigel, 2012). This shows just how big the scope was at Tebow’s introductory press conference. It was a sport and news media frenzy and a very popular event for a backup quarterback in the N.F.L.

Marketing: The TebowMania phenomenon

Tim Tebow’s rise to stardom and his celebrity status among society was highlighted in a number of the articles. Tebow’s marketability as a football player and a celebrity is a dominant theme found in the analysis of the articles. From t-shirt making companies groups using his “Tebowing” pose to make t-shirts to sell, to the N.F.L. merchandising his jersey and bringing in large amounts of revenue, Tebow’s marketability is second to none. For this paper, “TebowMania” is described as the
excitement that has come from the rise in popularity of Tim Tebow. One of the articles in the USA Today, for example, claimed,

If his (Tebow) success continues, he could become God’s gift to marketing. His current corporate partners include Jockey, Nike and FRS Energy drinks. Jockey has launched a $1 million “Super” challenge, offering $1 million worth of Jockey products to 40,000 fans if Tebow leads the Broncos to a Super Bowl XLVI victory. (Grossman, 2012, p. 1A)

The articles used different terms to describe Tebow’s popularity. Some articles referred to him as polarizing, some regarded him as fascinating, while other articles considered him to be inspirational. No matter how popular Tebow becomes while he is in the N.F.L., the significance of Tebow being so popular is the fact that he is a backup quarterback and will most likely never be a starting quarterback in the N.F.L. again. American society often expects to see star players who are productive on the football field and are the best players make the headlines and grab the media spotlight.

However, TebowMania had taken society by storm. For example, in The Denver Post article, “Marketing TebowMania,” the journalist emphasized just how popular Tebow had become. Jones (2011) said, “There is Tebow the humanitarian, a corporate pitchman and inspirational public speaker with a combination of charisma and collegiate success that has turned him into a celebrity whose fame transcends sports” (p. CC-01). In a Denver Post article Vuong (2012) stated, “…The Tebow effect runs the gamut in terms of the quarterback’s financial impact on the National Football League, the Denver Broncos, area businesses and budding entrepreneurs” (p. A-17).
Even though all of these articles may seem to have a difficult time to use one specific term to describe Tebow, all of them were not afraid to provide their breakdown and opinions of how a backup quarterback’s success in the N.F.L. became a societal craze and how it swept across the United States taking football fans and non football fans by storm. A clear indication of this was presented in the articles that were analyzed. It is not every day that you see in professional American sports that a backup player with inadequate skills has such a large impact on American society as well as the professional sports league that he/she is part of. Many of the articles note that what Tebow has done is something that is truly special and something that is unique. Paige (2012) in his article in the *Denver Post*, “We will never see the likes of Tebow again,” claimed that Tebow is an amazing fellow who led the Broncos back to the playoffs in a Shakespeare-like theatre fashion. Tebow seems to be everywhere at once having All-American boy qualities and making appearances at Hollywood awards shows, or signing his best-selling autobiography and participating in the Disney World Make-A-Wish for teenagers program.

A majority of the articles attempted to contribute Tebow’s success to his characteristics as a humanitarian and not that of a football player. For example, in *The New York Times* article, “He’s a quarterback, he’s a winner, he’s a draw, he’s a verb, Dan Barry wrote, “Tim Tebow has made more than a few people think about life beyond the gridiron” (Barry, 2012, p. A1). Barry also writes how Tebow has become a cultural touchstone who according to an ESPN poll became the country’s favorite active athlete.
Tebow’s popularity rose to new heights and many people in the country made Tebow out to be the best our country has to offer because of his humility, tenacity, and his human decency (2012, p. A1). It is clear that no matter how successful Tebow is on the football field he will always be looked at in a way that fascinates and incites us to think about how and why he is so popular.

When the term polarizing was used to describe Tebow, it was most often associated with New York City. Tebow was traded to the New York Jets in March of 2012 and Tebow turned the large New York media market into frenzy. An article from *The New York Times* claimed, “One of the most popular and polarizing athletes in the country was sent to the N.F.L.’s most prominent city” (Shpigel, 2012, p. A1). The article also pointed out that with the past success of N.B.A. player Jeremy Lin in New York City, the New York society has already seen a superstar Christian athlete.

*Football: A backup quarterback*

A few of the newspaper articles portrayed Tebow as simply a football player. Most of the articles that portrayed Tebow as a football player, more specifically portrayed him as a bad football player or one that would never be successful in the N.F.L. Many of the articles that talked about Tebow as a football player noted that he does not have the skills to be an N.F.L. quarterback, but he is a winner who can help a team succeed. In an article, former N.F.L. player and ESPN football analyst Merril Hoge was interviewed. Hoge stated, “He (Tebow) is so unsure of his accuracy – you can tell he has no confidence throwing the football” (Saraceno, 2012, p. 1C). Hoge also believed
that Tebow and his throwing flaws have been exposed to the N.F.L. and that he does not throw with anticipation. Hoge thinks that Tebow waits for his receivers to get open and you cannot be a successful quarterback in the N.F.L. if you do that (Saraceno, 2012).

Another article from the USA Today called “Colts’ Manning would rate high as TV analyst” mentions the unorthodox style of play that Tim Tebow has. The writer, Michael Hiestand mentions what hall of fame quarterback and four time Super Bowl champion Terry Bradshaw said about Tebow. Bradshaw believed that the Denver Broncos should have focused on replacing Tebow at the end of the 2011 season. Bradshaw said, “I think Denver at the end of the year, if there is a quarterback available, will definitely draft a quarterback. Tim Tebow’s delivery is extremely slow. He’s actually a fullback playing quarterback (Hiestand, 2011, p. 3C).

Many football analysts believe that Tebow lacks the passing skills to be a successful N.F.L. quarterback. Greg Cosell, executive producer of ESPN’s “N.F.L. Matchup” show who watches hundreds of hours of game film every year believes that Tebow does not throw the ball very well at all. Cosell thinks that Tebow’s throwing mechanics are very poor and his arm speed is very slow. In order to be a successful quarterback in the N.F.L. you must be able to release the football very quickly. Tebow does not have a conventional throwing motion and that is why he is not a very accurate thrower (Tanier, 2012).

When talking about Tebow playing quarterback in the N.F.L., Mike Klis of The Denver Post thinks that he will never be able to play quarterback. Klis (2011) stated,
“Tebow can’t play, won’t play, will never be able to play quarterback in the National Football League” (p. C-01). Klis also mentions in his article about Tebow how people either love him or hate him. He says that Tebow can handle the pressure of love and hate from fans, but it will be hard for him to handle the harsh criticism that he receives about playing quarterback in the N.F.L. (Klis, 2011).

A few articles mention Tebow’s talents in a positive manner and they all talk about how he is a good running quarterback. An article in *The New York Times* mentioned that the New York Jets have not used Tebow to his full potential. The article mentions that Tebow has speed and power and can run the football well, but the Jets are not using him. The Jets original plan after trading for Tebow was to use him on running downs, but the Jets did not do that (Shpigel, 2012). Many fans and followers of Tebow believe that his talents are being wasted as he sits and rots away on the bench. It remains to be seen how the Jets will use Tebow, if at all. However, it is clear that the articles that were analyzed favor the idea of using him as a running quarterback rather than a passing quarterback.

In the article “Old School,” written by Mike Klis of the *Denver Post*, Klis says that Tebow is not a conventional Sunday quarterback so the Denver Broncos made Tebow play as if he were playing in college on Saturdays. The Broncos ran a read-option offense, one that is very rare in the N.F.L. Tebow ran it to perfection and the Broncos had 299 rushing yards and beat the Oakland Raiders 38-24 (Klis, 2011). His passing game did not improve much at all during his run with the Denver Broncos in 2011, but
his effectiveness in running the ball was undeniably a great thing about Tebow the football player.

It is clear to see that Tim Tebow undoubtedly has his critics when it comes to playing quarterback in the N.F.L. Whenever Tebow is talked about as a quarterback on the field of play, it is usually not very good. He has ex-professional football players and N.F.L. quarterbacks who believe that he will never be a starting quarterback because he simply does not have the skill level that is needed. Journalists believe that Tebow will never be able to start at the quarterback position and football analysts believe that his mechanics are too poor to be successful in the N.F.L. One thing that they do agree on is that Tebow can run the ball better than he can pass. Maybe Tebow should look at changing positions in the future to perhaps fullback where he would be able to run the ball and would not have to throw it. For now, as long as Tebow tries to play quarterback in the N.F.L., he will be doubted and will always have his critics.
My analysis reveals that four dominant themes exist in the three major US newspapers’ coverage of Tim Tebow, the popular and polarizing N.F.L. backup quarterback. The themes specifically focus on Tebow’s faith, popularity, and on-field football performance. I argue that these themes help me understand the social implications of “TebowMania” as well as help construct the identity of Tim Tebow.

According to Merriam-Webster’s Dictionary (2013), mania means excitement manifested by mental or physical hyperactivity, disorganization of behavior, and elevation of mood. In October of 2011, N.F.L. fans, especially Denver Broncos fans became part of “TebowMania” after watching their backup quarterback play unconventionally and lead the Denver Broncos to the N.F.L. playoffs. We have not seen the likes of “TebowMania” throughout the history of sports and we will most likely never see anything like it again. The reality of what the fans witnessed during “TebowMania” was in fact a type of mania. On the other hand, the social implications and meanings of TebowMania would later become clear and be defined by the views of the media.
The media, most notably the three US newspapers, The Denver Post, The USA Today, and The New York Times defined and portrayed “TebowMania” during their coverage of Tebow during his climb to popularity. I argue that on the football field and off the football field define “TebowMania” in two separate and distinct ways. Tim Tebow being a quarterback on the field is defined by one theme – how he is not a very good quarterback but continued to win football games for the Denver Broncos. Tim Tebow off of the field of football is defined by two dominant themes – his Christian faith and his celebrity like popularity.

Tim Tebow and “TebowMania” transcended the N.F.L. into new heights of popularity among its followers. Being a fan or a believer puts individuals of society into a network that share and believe in the same values (Beck, 2003). If “TebowMania” was just about Tebow’s performance on the football field, the only dominant theme that would exist is how Tebow is not a very good quarterback and how he amazingly won football games. This is not the case though. The other two themes - his Christian faith and celebrity like status were covered in a majority of the articles that were analyzed and were more prominent than his football performance. According to Brody (1979) sport occupies a very highly revered place in not only the hearts but in the minds of society and have a religious like impact and influence on society. I argue that it is “TebowMania” beyond the sport of football has had a deep and significant impact on our society. This is important, because sport just like religion has become an
establishment that unites Americans as well as builds and brings societies together (Beck, 2003).

Lever and Stanton (1993) believe that the mass media is responsible for promoting organized sport from a minor element of culture to a whole social institution. More so, according to framing analysis, controversial issues are what make the news and the society looks to the media for that news (Kuypers, 2002). Tim Tebow has been heavily covered by the national media for his stance on religion and how he is an outspoken Christian athlete. The dominant theme of Tebow’s Christian faith and lifestyle can have significant cultural implications because faith is commonly viewed as a personal matter that is usually a topic of controversy (Goethals, 1997).

The cultural implications of the newspaper articles that were analyzed on the coverage of Tim Tebow can have an important impact on the views and opinions of the US society. Sporting events and athletes allow fans to become part of something greater and the sporting event or athlete provides them with great importance and impact (Kellner, 2003). Because faith is commonly viewed as a personal matter and is not usually discussed openly, society may think that Tebow is a phony because of the coverage he receives for being outspoken about his faith. Edwards (1973) argues that sport is a quasi-religious foundation that has a world-wide effect on society. Edwards also believes that significant spiritual values are infused in sports (Edwards, 1973). Because Tebow is sometimes covered simply for being outspoken about his faith, some people may think that Tebow is arrogant or cocky and does not care about the notion
that religion is not usually openly discussed. This is a great example of what makes Tebow so beloved, but at the same time, resented.

Media framing can and does have a direct influence on the public or society thinks about an issue. The media outlets do this by defining an issue and who or what is the cause of the issue and then finally proposing what should be done about the issue (Kensicki, 2004). An example of this is how some of the articles that were analyzed portrayed Tebow as a celebrity through his impact on social media and television. The articles did not frame him as a football player or Christian, but as a celebrity whose popularity trumps everything. The articles go into depth about how Tebow is a celebrity, not only because of “TebowMania” on the field of football, but also off of the field of football as well. The articles mention how Tebow has dated A-list celebrity actresses and other athletes, made appearances on television award shows and how he is a paid spokesperson for Jockey and TiVo. Since some of the articles portrayed Tebow as a celebrity more so than a football player or Christian, some people in society may view him as simply a celebrity. The media can frame news or issues that they believe are relevant by providing only particular facts and values as well as promote specific meanings and recommendations for a particular issue (Scheufele, 1999). This can cause society to lose sight and the meanings of what Tebow really stands for. He is an outspoken Christian who happens to be a professional football player. Therefore, one consequence of these newspapers’ coverage of Tim Tebow and the way they portrayed
“TebowMania” is the reinforcement of the societal stereotypes of outspoken faith driven athletes as well as celebrities.

The findings in this thesis are consistent with the literature that was reviewed about media framing. Tim Tebow is an outspoken Christian athlete as well as a very popular backup quarterback in the N.F.L. This makes him a very polarizing figure. According to Kuypers (2002) more often than not, controversial or polarizing figures are what make the news. The public then looks to the press, in this case, the newspapers for information about those issues (Kuypers, 2002).

The newspapers in this thesis emphasized particular values and characterizations about Tebow in all aspects of his life. Scheufele (1999) believes that the news media emphasizes particular values and facts with greater relevancy for the public to then make judgments. Most notably, the newspapers emphasized the particular values of Tebow being an outspoken Christian over the fact that Tebow is a professional football player. This falls under second level agenda-setting, where the media centers the attention on certain features within a certain subject or issue (Kuypers, 2002). The newspapers bring to salience that Tebow is a horrible N.F.L. quarterback over the actuality that he has proven to be a winning quarterback. Tim Tebow being a great humanitarian and having high character as a human being was also prevalent in the newspaper articles. Another issue that was emphasized by the newspapers is the fact that Tim Tebow’s parents are missionaries. The newspapers also frame Tebow as
having celebrity-like popularity, which is very unusual for a backup quarterback in the N.F.L.

The newspapers that were analyzed also play a critical role in the public’s assessment of the news narratives. Framing makes certain beliefs or viewpoints important to people and those beliefs or viewpoints are used to create an assessment of the news stories (Chong & Druckman, 2007). In the themes that were found, it is clear that the way the newspapers framed Tebow had a direct influence on the viewpoints of society. Tebow was often portrayed as a decent human being and humanitarian. He was also portrayed as a phony or fake person whose Christian stance is just an act. Tebow was portrayed as a celebrity that is great for marketing and at the same time a horrible N.F.L. quarterback. These different frames have given society the opportunity to form opinions and viewpoints about Tebow the football player, the celebrity and the Christian. Some people that were interviewed in the newspaper articles liked Tebow because he is considered a decent human being and humanitarian. Some people also liked Tebow for what he does off of the field and not on the field of play.

The news media uses human interest frames to bring an individuals’ story or a particular emotional angle to the forefront. To frame in human interest terms is a way for the media to personalize and dramatize the news (Valkenburg, 1999). The three newspapers in this thesis clearly used human interest frames in covering Tebow. Tebow’s Christian faith is where human interest frames were used the most. Faith and religion is considered to be a very private and individual matter and it is an easy topic
for controversy and debate (Goethals, 1997). Butterworth (2013) suggests, “Without exception, sports media have referred to him (Tebow) as “nice,” “polite,” “sincere,” and other similar terms” (p.24). A majority of the articles in this thesis referred to Tebow as a “nice young man,” or a “decent human being.” The newspapers and journalists were able to reach their audiences for example, by framing Tebow as a preacher in a football player’s body or as an evangelical, decent human being. By focusing on Tebow’s faith and religion, the newspapers were able to connect both emotionally and personally with their audience.

If you are a fan of Tim Tebow the football player, you more than likely have an emotional connection with him. The newspapers were able to connect with the football fans of Tim Tebow on a personal level by framing Tebow as a bad N.F.L. quarterback. If you are a fan of Tebow the football player it is likely that you often hear or see the sports media criticizing Tebow’s playing skills. This may make you mad or upset, because you have a personal and emotional connection as a fan of football to Tebow. Journalists often called Tebow a horrible quarterback and said that he lacks the skills to be a successful N.F.L. quarterback. The newspapers framing of Tim Tebow in this way connects the fans to Tim Tebow.

Tebow has been central in sports media because he is always presented as a great human being, not only a great athlete. He is always hailed as a great leader with model character and is given praise for the way he carries himself (Butterworth, 2013). A majority of the newspapers that I analyzed framed Tebow in this way. Also,
Butterworth (2013) believes that Tebow has received a great deal of both positive and negative attention because of his Christian ways. The newspapers that I analyzed portrayed Tebow mostly as a great humanitarian and Christian ambassador. A majority of the articles that I analyzed had a positive tone and only a select few of the newspaper articles were written in a negative fashion when portraying Tebow as a Christian.

New framing raises the salience of certain ideas over other ideas (Kuypers, 2002). The newspapers that were analyzed in this thesis raised the salience of the dominant themes that were found. News frames may also reinforce or repeat key words that help raise the salience of certain issues over other issues (Entman, 1991). Describing Tebow as a preacher in a football player’s body, a humanitarian, a terrible N.F.L. quarterback and a polarizing athlete are all examples of how the newspapers in this thesis raised the salience of the dominant themes. These phrases or words regularly appeared in the newspapers narrative and that is what made them distinguishable and particular to the themes.

It is clear that the dominant frame in my analyzing of the newspaper articles was Tebow’s Christian faith. Even though some articles framed Tebow based on his performance as a football player and his celebrity-like status, his Christian lifestyle was the prevailing frame. Some sport media direct their attention to the football playing Tebow, but it is fair to determine that Tim Tebow framed in the religious sense is the most prominent frame (Butterworth, 2013). Butterworth (2013) suggests that with all of the sport media coverage Tebow has received, it has established Tebow as a valiant
character of devotion to faith and an impeccable leader, all while having great religious significance.

It is important to consider that the sports media plays a very powerful role when it comes framing athletes. The sports media certainly has a strong influence on the opinions formed by society about an issue. Grochowski (2004) concluded that O.J. Simpson was framed based on his race during his murder trial. He suggests that the media coverage of O.J. Simpson’s murder trial created ideas of knowledge production, an awareness of media construction of Simpson as well as the notion of political and economic discourses that create public knowledge and perception (Grochowski, 2004). Sloop (1997) concluded that Mike Tyson was framed during his rape trial based on his race as well as his aggressive behavior in the boxing ring. He believes that Tyson was essentialized based on his race and profession as a boxer (Sloop, 1997). Delgado (2004) suggests that Hall of Fame boxer Oscar De La Hoya was framed by the sports media based on his ethnicity and his celebrity-like public image outside of the boxing ring. De La Hoya trying to be accepted into the mainstream sporting audience complicated his home town’s reaction and position on De La Hoya as not only a boxer, but a media icon and Latino male.

The sports media portrays these athletes in the before mentioned ways. The sports media cannot specifically be blamed for the perceptions towards these athletes, but they definitely play a significant role in making the characterizations of these athletes better known to society. Tebow is framed based on his religion and celebrity-
like popularity, as well as being a professional football player. Butterworth (2013) suggests that the public animosity and/or praise that Tebow receives can be justified as an outcome of the sport media coverage of Tebow. The sports media has played an important part in the framing of Tebow and the other athletes that were mentioned. The frames have a direct influence on the perceptions and opinions that society forms of the athletes.

Tebow can be compared to Jeremy Lin and the notion that “Linsanity” was constructed through the newspaper coverage of Jeremy Lin. Lin’s intentions were to combine his success in the NBA with his Christian Faith in an attempt to reach out and connect to more people (Bradsher, 2009). Jeremy Lin took New York City by storm during his rise to stardom as he led the New York Knicks to an amazing win streak and turned around their N.B.A. season in 2011. Tebow was actually an inspiration to Jeremy Lin because of the non-profit work that Tebow has done as well as the way that he impacts people while he is not playing football (Shuster and Zillgitt, 2012). Tebow and Lin are both professional athletes who have had a direct effect on the U.S. society with the coverage “Linsanity” and “TebowMania” on and off the field of play.

The similarities between the coverage of Lin and Tebow cannot be ignored. The newspaper coverage of Jeremy Lin has reinforced the ethnic discrimination in sports while the newspaper coverage of Tim Tebow has reinforced religious discrimination in sports. The newspapers each function in bringing about and reinforcing the specific discrimination. The newspaper journalists often disseminate information about Lin’s
and Tebow’s personal lives rather than their professional athletic lives. It is also important to consider that both Lin and Tebow played their respective sports in New York City, which is one of the largest media markets in the world. This only adds to the excitement and the amount of news coverage that they receive.

My analysis of the newspaper articles also revealed terms in which the journalists used to describe Tebow. While there were numerous terms used to describe Tebow, the football player and Tebow the human being, a few stood out. Each of the following terms were absorbed by the dominant themes and are used as evidence to help construct the themes.

The term that was most often used to describe Tebow in the newspaper articles was Tebow being popular or having a great amount of popularity. During “TebowMania,” Tebow was voted the nation’s favorite active athlete according to a poll conducted by ESPN (Barry, 2012). Barry (2012) also believed that Tim Tebow, during his rise to fame, became a cultural touchstone and had celebrity-like popularity. Many of the articles mentioned how Tebow became so popular and described him as many celebrities would be described. Tebow made appearances at Hollywood Award shows all while staying true to his mantra and helping sick children in the Disney’s Make-A-Wish program (Paige, 2012). A majority of the journalists framed Tebow as not only a very popular public figure for a short amount of time, but one that would have a very large impact in the sporting arena. Tebow was called a celebrity whose fame would transcend sports into new heights (Jones, 2011). It is important to consider the context
in which the newspaper articles described Tim Tebow. They did not describe him first and foremost as a football player. They described him more significantly as a celebrity, leaving the football playing Tim Tebow in the background.

It is also important to consider the fact that some of the newspaper articles used the word polarizing to refer to Tebow. According to Merriam Webster Dictionary (2013), polarizing is to cause people to adopt extreme opposing positions. He is considered to be polarizing because he often times vindicates the idea that he is in possession of a life-altering truth and because of the way that he conducts himself. He is kind, chaste and guileless, and these characteristics make him polarizing to many people (Douthat, 2012). The article written by Douthat (2012) is based on Tebow being an outspoken Christian athlete.

Tebow is considered to be polarizing, because of his stance on religion and him being an outspoken Christian. Many of the newspaper articles that were analyzed referred to Tebow as some type of Christian, rather than an athlete or professional football player. Bishop (2012) called Tebow an outspoken Christian in a New York Times article. For example, Tebow was called the ultimate religious phenomenon in sports (Draper, 2012). Another article referred to Tebow as the most popular Christian in sports and a preacher in a football player’s body (Branch, Pilon 2012). In another article Tebow was called a fervid evangelical who has more devotion to his religion than his downfield quarterback passing skills (Grossman, 2012). Tebow was even mentioned in
an article as being a prophet to the likes of Jonah and St. Paul and the Gideon of the gridiron (Douthat, 2012).

Another set of terms that was often used to describe Tebow was him being a good humanitarian or having high character. Tebow was also described as being inspirational. Tebow is mentioned as an inspiration to fellow professional athlete Jeremy Lin, simply because of the non-profit work and Tebow’s impact off of the field of play (Zillgitt, 2012). In one article Tebow was described as a humanitarian, corporate pitchman and an inspirational public speaker (Jones, 2012). Mike Lopresti (2012) of The USA Today believes that Tebow is a very bad quarterback, but he is popular because he is seen as a celebrity and mostly because he is such a great humanitarian.

Finally, the term or phrase that was used to describe Tebow in a majority of the articles has to do with him being considered a bad N.F.L. quarterback. Terms such as horrible and bad were often used when the newspaper journalists talked about Tebow’s skill set as an N.F.L. quarterback. For example, Tebow was described as a bad quarterback and the Broncos’ head coach even said that he was not a conventional N.F.L. quarterback (Klis, 2011). A majority of the articles describe Tebow as a terrible quarterback, who needs to improve his skills if he wants to play quarterback in the N.F.L. One article even mentioned how Tebow is a great teammate, but that does not take away from the notion that he is a horrible quarterback (Klis, 2012). Tebow was covered because of how he won football games for the Denver Broncos and at the same time was still described as a bad N.F.L. quarterback (Gardner, 2011).
An important facet to consider in analyzing Tebow is the location in which Tebow resided in and played football. When he was traded to the New York Jets, he became even more of a polarizing public figure. He was traded to the New York Jets and New York City would be his new home. Tim Tebow in New York City seems like he would be out of place because he is an outspoken Christian athlete who would now be playing in a unique city that is known for its extensive night life (Shpigel, 2012). However, with Jeremy Lin already thriving in the New York City market, New York City was already a proven place for a Christian athlete to succeed (Shpigel, 2012).

It is clear that a majority of the articles that were analyzed believed that Tim Tebow is polarizing based on the idea that he is an outspoken Christian who happens to be a professional football player. Some of society thinks that Tebow is phony and they do not believe Tebow when he speaks openly about his religious beliefs or feelings. Tebow does have a very polarizing openness about his Christianity and he is very truthful and candid about it (Hiestand, 2011). The important aspect here is the connection between religion and football. Tebow’s polarizing religious ways caused a full-blown national discussion or debate about religion and its place in sports (Bishop, 2011). Whether you believe in Tebow or not, or whether you think he is a phony or speaks the truth, he is a polarizing figure that gives society something to think about and to discuss the controversial issue of religion in sports.
Implications

It has been argued that media portrayals of Tim Tebow can be characterized by an underlying classist ideology shrouded by different views of sport. As a result of this qualitative content analysis, implications have been revealed that need to be considered. Sport has often been seen as or thought of a challenge or setting free of discrimination, but it is in fact not. The results reveal that the newspaper media outlets may have played a role in perpetuating such discrimination. Therefore, understanding the role of media in the formation of discrimination and specific perceptions is of the utmost importance in our society. This is predominantly in relation to sport.

In the modern era of sports media and the coverage of sports and athletes, the personal lives of athletes have become increasingly more popular. This is much different compared to the older eras of baseball with stars such as Joe DiMaggio and Babe Ruth, when sports reporters often ignored what they heard or saw about players’ personal lives (Skolnick, 2008). When talking about what society wants to hear or see from professional athletes, former M.L.B. all-star Luis Gonzalez believes that the “playing” part of sports has gotten boring for people so they all turn to what is going on in the athletes’ personal lives (Skolnick, 2008). It is also important to consider the media market that some athletes play in. For example, New York City is one of the largest
media markets in the whole world and media journalists will look for any edge to simply create a story that no one else has. This is important to look at in terms of this paper, because Tebow now plays in New York City and his personal life outside of football is always in the media’s scope.

It is very important to consider that we cannot assume all broadcast or print media is neutral in their coverage of sports and athletes. If we assume that sports media outlets are neutral in their coverage of sports and athletes then we are making a big mistake. Media bias is a critical issue when talking about the coverage of sports. For example, media companies often pay for the rights to show certain sporting events and only the real popular sports get the most attention on television as well as in newspapers. Certain messages as well images are accentuated specific coverage and these messages contain the interests of not only the audience but the sponsors as well (Coakley, 1994).

The newspapers in this analysis often described Tebow as a preacher in a football player’s body. It is worth considering the broader theoretical implications of the analysis that was undertaken here. Sports can be seen as at least quasi-religious and sport has become increasingly popular in American society (Beck 2003). We must consider whether or not sport can serve the same functions for its followers as religion does for its followers. Beck (2003) believes that fan clubs can be classified as communities and sporting events as activities. The coming together and seeing the outstanding athletic competitions suggest explicit religious feelings. Sports much like
religion can provide grounds for rituals and symbolic meanings (Novak, 1976). There is however an advantage of sociology of religion analysis as it relates to sports. The analysis can give us a better understanding of the uniquely popular and insidious aspect of social life.

Sports occupy a very highly revered place in the not only the hearts, but in the minds of members of the American society (Brody, 1979). Sports also have a profound impact and major influence on the way society shapes their opinions and the views that they have. The sport media plays a very significant role in the way sports are portrayed to the American society and ultimately have the ability to influence and shape opinions and viewpoints.

This study is limited because the print media is the only media type that was analyzed. Future studies in media framing and media portrayals of popular athletes should also examine electronic media outlets such as television stations and internet websites. Technology has allowed the American society to view and follow sports from virtually anywhere and at any time. Another suggestion for future studies is to analyze the use of social media outlets such as Twitter and Facebook and how the media uses these outlets to cover Tim Tebow.

Tebow’s popularity on social media sites has been nothing short of amazing. Tebow trended nationally on Twitter for over 32 minutes during an introductory press conference in New York City (Klemko, 2012). Tebow also set a new record of sports tweets per second of 9,420 after his win versus the Pittsburgh Steelers in the 2011 N.F.L.
Playoffs (Hendrickson, 2012). That night Tebow hit more than 1 million mentions on Twitter (Grossman, 2012). For the underwear brand Jockey, signing Tebow as their spokesperson in 2010 was a no brainer. After signing Tebow in 2010, the number of Jockey’s Facebook fans and Twitter followers quadrupled (Horovitz, 2012).

It is very apparent that Social Media has a direct influence on what consumers see on television and what consumers read in newspapers. Social media outlets as well as television media outlets are going against the old fashioned ways of how newspapers disseminate information. Newspapers are facing the strongest competition from 24-hour television news, news services on mobile telephones, internet news websites, bloggers, and podcasters (Franklin, 2008). With the ease of access to and ease of use, these sources of information are now using social media sites such as Twitter and/or Facebook to relay information to consumers throughout the world.

The sort of critical cultural implications found in this study thus help us expose the media culture and provide insights into our contemporary communication of society and culture. This study suggests that ultimately Tim Tebow reminds us that religion in sport can be central to aspects of American society, which is constructed largely in media culture. The media culture is the arena in which our societal conflicts are brought about and where reality is constructed.

Tim Tebow today

Tim Tebow is still making headlines in the news today for reasons that involve football and for reasons that do not involve football. On the football side of things,
Tebow’s career in the N.F.L. is in jeopardy. Tebow was released by the New York Jets on Monday, April 29, 2013 (Cimini, 2013). The Jets made a statement and said that they have a great deal of respect for Tebow, but things just did not work out the way they hoped. They said that Tebow is an extremely hard worker and they wish him the best in the future. Tebow’s N.F.L. career is definitely in jeopardy, because the Jets looked for teams to trade Tebow to and so did Tebow’s agent, but no teams were interested (Cimini, 2013).

Tebow has only spoke once publicly since his first season with the New York Jets ended in December of 2012. Tebow stated that he does not know what his future holds in regards to football, but he is at peace and comfortable because he knows who holds his future, being the Lord (Waszak, 2013). N.F.L. analyst and former Dallas Cowboys executive Gil Brandt said, “Tim Tebow is an extremely popular individual – or, he was. I think his popularity has waned significantly the last three or four months” (Waszak, 2013, p. 1).

Just recently Tebow was named the most influential athlete in sports in 2013, according to Forbes.com. Forbes used a survey to see which athletes have the most influence among fans in the United States. 29% of the respondents in the survey found Tebow to be influential. Olympic Gold Medalist swimmer Michael Phelps finished in second with 25%, Olympic sprinter Usain Bolt finished with 23%, New York Yankees Shortstop Derek Jeter finished with 22%, and N.F.L. quarterback Peyton Manning finished with 21% (ESPN News Services, 2013).
Tebow is also in the news for religious purposes. Tebow recently canceled a scheduled appearance at the First Baptist Church in Dallas, Texas, because senior pastor Robert Jeffress made controversial remarks about Mormons, Muslims, Jews, Catholics, gays and lesbians (Strauss, 2013). Tebow decided to cancel his appearance because of the new information he received about the comments that Jeffress had made. Tebow also said that for professional as well as personal reasons he did not want to be in any sort of controversy as of now, but will continue to use his celebrity-like platform to bring “faith, hope, and love” to anyone that needs a brighter day (Strauss 2013).

Tim Tebow is “TebowMania” and it represents the identities of outspoken faith driven athletes. This study demonstrates how three major U.S. newspapers through their coverage of Tim Tebow and “TebowMania” construct these identities and reveal them to the American society. The media’s coverage of athletes of a faith driven background can help clarify how the identities of faith-driven athletes as well as the social meanings of these athletes are developed and are relevant in American society.
REFERENCES


67


Grossman, C.L. (2012, January 10). It’s Tebow time; his playoff heroics have the nations abuzz, and not just in the fourth quarter. USA Today, pp. A1.


Medved, M. (2012, July 9). War on religious gestures; some church leaders find public displays of praise to God offensive. But a victor doesn’t claim supernatural favor but gives thanks for his gifts. USA Today, pp. A11.


Vuong, A. (2012, January 1). Tebow is money out of the pocket off the field, the QB has brought bucks to Denver. *The Denver Post*, pp. A17.


APPENDIX

ARTICLES ANALYZED FOR THIS THESIS

A list of all of the 79 newspaper articles used in this thesis; categorized by newspaper.

USA Today

Bell, J. (2012, March 21). Tebow on trading block. USA Today, pp. 8C.

Bell, J. (2012, March 22). Jets land Tebow but Jags were better fit. USA Today, pp.4C.

Bell, J. (2012, March 23). Tebow, Jets hoping to avoid Big Apple circus. USA Today, pp. 9C.


Davis, N. (2012, May 18). Company’s t-shirt design riles up Team Tebow. USA Today, pp. 3C.

Davis, N. (2012, June 14). Tebow shapes up, adds weight. USA Today, pp. 9C.


Grossman, C.L. (2012, January 10). It’s Tebow time; his playoff heroics have the nations abuzz, and not just in the fourth quarter. USA Today, pp. A1.


Pedulla, T. (2011, October 24). New QBS have their ups, downs. *USA Today*, pp. 1C.


*The New York Times*


*The Denver Post*


Vuong, A. (2012, January 1). Tebow is money out of the pocket off the field, the QB has brought bucks to Denver. *The Denver Post*, pp. A17.