

Tayler Huntley

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Final Draft

Lower Class Socioeconomic Stereotypes of Athletes Portrayed in Fictional Sports Films

Literature Review

Most films are created to tell a story and to grab the attention of the audience through the telling of that story. When it comes to telling a story through the use of film, there can be some ideas that are construed falsely, these false ideas can also be referred to as stereotypes.

Stereotypes are often portrayed within films in an attempt to fix or in other words attach meaning to an individual, idea, situation, etc. (Hall). When the media attempts to fix meaning to a message, they are trying to fix this meaning into a representation of something that is shared within a culture's conceptual map (Hall).

In his lecture, critical and cultural studies scholar, Stuart Hall mentions that society's conceptual maps are a shared understanding of ideas that individuals utilize to organize and understand the world (Hall). If the media consistently portrays the same stereotypical representations, society, and cultures will understand the stereotypes as normal and potentially true (Hall). It is important to note that every individual can interpret a meaning of something differently than another, this can be because of societal and cultural factors, so it is not guaranteed that the media attempting to fix meaning to stereotypes works. However, the more that they continue to do it, the more individuals are likely to conform to it (Downing et al).

Stereotypes in Sports Films

There are a variety of fictional sports films that have been directed and produced throughout the United States. Sports films are a popular movie genre and can be understood to be successful with the general populace. Sports films just like any other film portray certain stereotypical portrayals of individuals or situations, particularly focusing on the sports team and its athletes. Most sports films are not representative of athletic activity in the real world (Crawford, 1988) Rather, they tend to use films to portray America as America wants to see itself rather than how America actually is (Crawford, 1988). Stereotypes are used to sculpt the ideal American experience (Crawford, 1988). This relates to the idea of conceptual maps and fixed meanings, that are portrayed through films in general (Hall).

It also promotes the idea that directors of movies partake in a choice every time that they choose to display stereotypes within their films. American author Bell Hooks, in one of her books, brings up the issue of producers straying off the beaten path of producing non-stereotypical films (Hooks). Director Spike Lee attempted to represent an accurate representation of Malcolm X in his film, however, all he received was pushback and ended up conforming to the fixed meanings that the media wanted to portray (Hooks). Every decision a director makes from casting to producing a movie that enforces stereotypes, is a choice that they are choosing to make (Crawford, 1991). There are several stereotypes portrayed in the television show, *Friday Night Lights*, which will be the text analyzed in this paper.

Introduction

Individuals being identified and criticized by their socioeconomic status is an issue that occurs throughout the United States. This criticism affects individuals in a variety of ways. In the

world, individuals in certain socioeconomic classes can be viewed to portray certain qualities. Individuals who are known to be classified in a high socioeconomic class can be seen as successful. They are successful because most of these individuals have a college education, good social lives, or are wealthy. Individuals who are known to be classified in a low socioeconomic class can be seen as unsuccessful. These individuals are in a low class because they might have poor education, social standing, or finances. The qualities listed come to mind when we think of socioeconomic classes and standing within a society, and ultimately the qualities of these classes could be considered stereotypes. The socioeconomic lower class is heavily stereotyped in *Friday Night Lights*. Tim Riggins portrays several stereotypical aspects of how a lower-class individual lives their day-to-day life.

One stereotype that the film portrays about lower-class living is that individuals who live in this class typically do not have traditional families. Another stereotype that the show portrays about lower-class living is that those who live in this class have no support system. Those who live in this class are often seen to be poor because they do not have a job, or in the least can't keep one. These individuals are also seen to consistently struggle with drug and alcohol addictions. There are several other stereotypes that the film portrays as well.

When the producers created this television show they were choosing to accept the expectations of how the media thinks Americans want to see themselves (Crawford, 1988). They chose to portray the lower class in a way that is not accurate in the real world. However, because of films like this, when most individuals hear the term poor or lower class, they immediately think about the qualities listed above. Overall, they think negatively about this social class, and unfortunately, this class is one that a lot of individuals live in or classify themselves to live in.

The media has fixed the meaning of the lower class to a negative image and *Friday Night Lights* is a film that condones the stereotype.

Thesis

Those in control of mainstream media use stereotypes to attach a meaning to a subject, in most cases this meaning is negative. Fictional sports films often condone these negative stereotypes. The first season of the television show, *Friday Night Lights* condones negative stereotypes surrounding socioeconomic lower-class athletes and other individuals. The show uses Dillion Panther athlete, Tim Riggins, to portray lower-class stereotypes. These stereotypes include these athletes growing up to have a problem with substance abuse, and from this abuse other stereotypes such as individuals coming from non-traditional households, having no support system, having a lack of work opportunities, having alcohol and drug problems, having a lack of or poor education, and having poor athletic success arise. The attachment of negative stereotypes to lower-class athletes and other individuals is an issue because it portrays these individuals in a false light.

Friday Night Lights

The television show *Friday Night Lights* was directed by Peter Berg and was inspired by the novel *Friday Night Lights* by H.G. Bissinger (Wikipedia, 2024). Season 1 of *Friday Night Lights* premiered on NBC on October 3, 2006, and ended on April 11 the following year. After the first season, the show was approved to create and stream four more seasons (Wikipedia, 2024). This show was a popular show that received good ratings during its time (Wikipedia, 2024). The film did not have a high viewership however it did grow a big fan base which helped

grow its popularity (Wikipedia, 2024). This show also jump-started the careers of many current popular actors, for example, Michael B. Jordan starred in the later seasons and now is a very popular actor in other films. The prominence that this television show had for its time, and its big fan base were a contributing factor as to why this is the text being used to talk about lower-class stereotypes portrayed in fictional sports films.

General Social Class Knowledge:

There have been several individuals who have researched social class identification in the United States. Some research has concluded that there is significance and meaning to the five social classes that individuals in the United States use to classify their social standings, finances, and occupations (Jackman). Even though social class standing may not come up in most individuals' casual conversations, or be prominent in most individual's everyday lives, most people have an idea of what social class they are classified to live in, and they know the characteristics of their lives that implicate their social class standings. In a research study that was conducted to analyze the subjective meaning of social class identification in the United States, most individuals understood the characteristics of each of the five social classes (Jackman). Most individuals can identify social class occupation, education status, financial situation, along with other factors (Jackman).

This research indicates that even though there is not much consistent communication about social classes, most individuals know what social class they stand in and what classes other individuals stand in. This proven community understanding of social class indicates Hall's idea that human beings have a shared conceptual map (Hall). The way that society functions and the culture of the United States encourages individuals to understand the idea behind social classes

and learn to live their lives identifying as part of a social class, and identifying and judging others by the social class that they live in.

Some social classes have more positive representations compared to their counterparts. Occupation, family situations, finances, even feelings and beliefs all contribute to the representations of the social classes (Jackman). Most mainstream media like to use classes with a better reputation. The classes with higher reputations are typically portrayed because the individuals who live in these classes portray the ideal image of America. The ideal image of America is created to portray how most Americans want to see themselves (Crawford). It portrays all the great aspects of typical American life, all aspects that Americans want to achieve by the time they pass. Social classes with negative representations are typically not shown in mainstream media because most Americans do not want to be a part of these social classes. If people are classified to live in these social classes, it can be a signifier that they are not living a good life and that they are unsuccessful.

As mentioned previously, the television show *Friday Night Lights* portrays families who live in all five social classes. Is it unique that this show highlights all five social classes, but, interestingly, they choose to portray a lower-class family so heavily throughout the show.

Lower Class Stereotypes in *Friday Night Lights*

Given the name of this social class, it is a clear indicator that the lower class, also referred to as the poor, has a negative representation in the United States (Jackman). Those who live in the lower class in the United States are seen as unsuccessful. There are several stereotypes that mainstream media use to portray this social class. These people are shown to have a hard time holding down a job and have troubling family dynamics, poor finances, and very little

support. It can be true that some lower-class households do have some of the above characteristics, or experience some similar struggles here and there, therefore making these stereotypes and portrayals of the poor mostly inaccurate.

Some television shows and films are subtle with their depictions of the poor, *Friday Night Lights*, however, portrays these stereotypes heavily (Newitz). Some television shows portray the poor with the “white trash” stereotype. This stereotype portrays the poor to be racist, sexually aggressive, trashy, etc. (Newitz). The poor are also portrayed to be both aware of their social status and the steps that they can take to improve their lives and move up to a different social class, but they are considered to be lazy and unmotivated to take steps to become “successful” (Newitz).

Friday Night Lights condones several negative stereotypes of the poor. The television show has one singular overarching stereotype of the poor and that stereotype is that lower-class athletes and individuals have a problem with abusing substances, specifically alcohol. From this overarching stereotype, the film then portrays five other stereotypes that either stem or relate to substance abuse. Because the film condones so many negative stereotypes surrounding lower class individuals it is easy to see that the show was indeed not subtle with its depictions of the poor.

Substance Abuse

As mentioned above *Friday Night Lights*' negative overarching stereotype surrounding the lower class is that the athletes in this class tend to have an issue abusing substances. The show directs the class's substance abuse more towards alcohol abuse rather than drugs, however,

it can be implied that overall substance abuse is the stereotype that the directors were attempting to attach a negative meaning to.

Throughout the show, Tim Riggins is almost consistently drinking and if he isn't drinking, he is hungover. Yes, the other high schoolers in the show drink and do drugs but not as frequently as Riggins does and not for the reasons that he does. Riggins drinks with his friends as a social thing, but he also drinks at home alone. When Riggins drinks it is not just a few drinks, it is often more than three or four drinks which is considered binge drinking. Riggins doesn't just drink on the weekends.

There are multiple ways that the film uses the character of Tim Riggins to portray this stereotype. Tim Riggins and his family, Billy Riggins, are perceived to condone drinking. Throughout the show's first season, Riggins is featured with a beer in his hand most of the time. His older brother Billy Riggins is aware of Riggins's bad drinking habits but does not do anything to punish or enforce him to stop drinking, therefore condoning heavy drinking. Riggins and Billy Riggins are also seen multiple times throughout the show throwing parties, drinking at bars, or drinking socially in other places. The portrayal of Tim Riggins drinking with other individuals shows that not only do lower-class individuals condone drinking, but they encourage drinking to be done as a social activity.

Another way that Tim Riggins's character portrays this stereotype is by showing that individuals in the lower class turn to substances as an escape. When they are facing hardships in their lives they turn to substances to numb the pain. The use of substances allows them to feel something good rather than negative feelings. When Tim's best friend, Jason Street, becomes paralyzed and ends up in the hospital because of a football injury, Riggins blames himself for messing up a play during the football game. He also becomes upset because he slept with Lyla

Garrity, Street's girlfriend, while Street was in the hospital. After sleeping with Riggins, Garrity still chooses Street over him. It can be seen in episode seven, that Riggins is using alcohol to deal with the sadness and anger he is feeling towards the situation with Street and Garrity. Garrity notices that Riggins is upset and is drinking to escape the emotions that he is feeling, she utilizes an opportunity to confront Riggins about his problem with drinking to cope with his emotions when he strikes up a conversation with her.

[Lyla:] What do you wanna talk about, Tim? The fact that you're sleeping with your paralyzed best friend's girlfriend? [Tim:] The three of us together can get through anything. Anything at all. (MAN WHOOPING) (ALL CHEERING) Waste of friggin' time, huh? [Lyla:] Look, I know you hate me right now, and I understand... [Tim:] I don't hate you, Lyla. [Lyla:] It'd be a lot easier if I did. [Tim:] I don't know how to talk to you when you're like this. I mean, God, it's not even 7:00 and you can barely stand. You can blame me if you want, Tim. You can blame the whole world for all I care. But if you think being drunk all the time is gonna make this any easier, you're wrong. It's not cool or charming. It's just pathetic and gross and I feel sorry for you. I really do. (TV show transcripts)

As mentioned above this scene shows how much Riggins drinks and one reason behind his drinking. Every other character in the show is aware of Tim Riggins's alcoholism and comments on it often, these characters commenting on his drinking is showcasing to the viewers that Riggins is not consuming alcohol like a normal individual would but instead abusing it.

Another way that the film uses Riggins to portray this stereotype which will be talked about more later in the paper is that the abuse of alcohol can lead to lower-class athletes growing up not being able to hold a job, receiving a poor education, having troubled family dynamics, no

support and overall being a poor athlete. Overall, the film shows Riggins and his family, Billy Riggins, to be alcoholics. Riggins peers from other social classes are seen drinking but not enough to be considered alcoholics. The film shows and condones the stereotype that those who live in the lower class are alcoholics and that their alcoholism is creating struggles in their lives.

Non-Traditional Households

The abuse of substances can play an impactful role in another stereotype that the film uses to represent how lower-class individuals live. In the first season of *Friday Night Lights*, Tim Riggins is shown to have a nontraditional family dynamic.

Most households have traditional family dynamics. There is usually a mother and a father in a home together when there are children in the family. However, in the television show, Tim Riggins lives with his older brother, who is hardly ever present in the home, as previously mentioned. There is no indication of where his mother is or if she will ever come back to the household. His father, Walt Riggins, appears once or twice throughout the first season, when he appears in the show he is caught stealing a camera from the Dillion Panther football team. When he is not shown, characters talk about him as being an alcoholic who is not financially stable.

This scene from episode 14 of the television show showcases how characters from the show, specifically Walt Riggins's two sons, talk about him when he is not shown. In this scene the Riggins brothers talk about how their dad has not been a fatherly figure in their lives and that bringing him back into their lives will not be beneficial to them but could be destructive. Billy Riggins is trying to be a good brother and adult figure by warning Riggins about their father because he does not want him to gain false hope of getting his father back in his life. This scene exhibits the stereotypes of a non-traditional home and how complicated it can be.

[Billy:] Tim, just let me sign the stupid paper, man. [Tim:] No, Billy. I can't risk it. It's my license. [Billy:] What is this? Some sort of "work out my stuff with Dad" thing? [Tim:] What are you talking about? [Billy:] Tim, how... We haven't even seen the guy in two years, man. We don't even know if he still lives here. [Tim:] I'm sure it'll be fine, Billy Riggins. All right. I'm good. [Billy:] Hey. Come here. Do not believe a word that that man says, okay? Because he is a total liar. And do not get drunk with him, because he is a mean son of a bitch when he's loaded. [Tim:] Billy. It's a signature. That's all I'm getting. All right. [Billy:] All right. [Tim:] All right. [Billy:] You got money? [Tim:] Yeah, I got money, Billy Riggins. I'm fine. [Billy:] Here, take that. Whatever you do, do not under any circumstances give that money to him. [Tim:] I understand, Billy. [Billy:] All right. (TV show transcripts)

In summary, Tim Riggins's parents are out of the picture, and his brother is not classified as his legal guardian. Riggins faces many struggles as both an individual and an athlete because he does not live in a traditional home and his legal guardians are not in the picture.

Yes, some lower-class families have nontraditional households. Sometimes these families can struggle with this dynamic, but just because they are a nontraditional family doesn't indicate that the family is in a constant struggle. Families have non-traditional households for a plentiful number of reasons. Sometimes, a parent must live somewhere else for work, and sometimes one parent passes. Non-traditional families are not always nontraditional because the parents are split and have alcohol or drug addictions.

The show is stereotyping, through Tim Riggins, that all nontraditional households are super complicated and that all nontraditional households face hardships and struggles. It

indicates that lower social class families struggle with split parents leaving the house and children having to learn how to take care of themselves and each other.

No Support System

The abuse of substances also plays a role in lower class individuals living their lives with little to no support. Because substance abuse often leads to athletes growing up in nontraditional households, they often grow up with little to no support system. These athletes are portrayed as living their day-to-day lives by themselves, with everyone rooting against them. They are going to face all their struggles alone and often will lose the friends that they do have amid these struggles.

Tim Riggins lives in a nontraditional home and is not in contact with his parents and because Riggins also has a spotty relationship with his brother he is portrayed as having no support system at home. He has no one to go home to and express how school and football are going. He has no one at home to turn to when he is having financial, academic, or social problems. He is portrayed as going home to nothing. At the beginning of the season, Riggins is shown to have a best friend, Jason Street, who supports him. Street was there for Tim, he helped keep him on the right track in life, and Street's family even had him over for dinner once a week to show they supported him. However, after Street got hurt and Riggins was dealing with the pain of almost losing his best friend, he made a mistake that caused Street to not support him anymore.

In episode 8, Street finds out that Riggins slept with his girlfriend Lyla Garrity when he was in the hospital recovering from his spinal injury. Street did not find out about Garrity and Riggins's affair through them but rather through figuring it out himself. Street becomes very

upset with Riggins for sleeping with Garrity and breaks off their friendship, leaving Riggins without the only true friend and support that he had to help keep him on the straight and narrow path.

[Tim:] You didn't suck, man. (TIM CLAPPING) That is the Six I know. Man, I tell you, those hits... I gotta take some notes. Great game, man. Tell you what, man... (GRUNTS) [Jason:] Get up, Riggins. Get up and fight me, huh? Come on, you coward. Come on, hit me! No. Steal my girl and you're not ready to fight me, huh? [Lyla:] Jason! [Jason:] Don't you dare, Lyla. Don't you dare. Come on. Look me in the face. I want you to. Come back here. Come back here! [Lyla:] Jason! [Jason:] You gonna steal a cripple's girl but you won't fight a cripple, huh? You're a coward! You're a coward, Riggins! Always will be! (TV show transcripts)

Therefore, in the midst of the struggle, Tim Riggins lost the only support that he was portrayed to have. This happens to Riggins consistently throughout the first season.

The show is stereotyping that athletes classified to live in the lower class have no support. They are living life by themselves. They have very little family and friend's support. They have very little support from their community, along with little government support. These individuals are expected to figure out things on their own. They are expected to embrace the struggle and learn from it. This is how they are portrayed because it encourages viewers whether they are part of this class or not to learn to deal with struggle and to encourage the poor to move up a social class because then maybe they will gain a support system in their life.

Lack of Work Opportunities

When lower-class individuals abuse substances, other repercussions can occur to these individuals outside of young athletes growing up in nontraditional households without little support. Another repercussion from substance abuse is that athletes and individuals in the lower class who abuse substances have a struggle to maintain an occupation.

Lower-class individuals are seen to be financially unstable. Most families in this class live in very awful houses that are constantly falling apart, and most are portrayed to drive awful vehicles that are constantly falling apart. Often these families live paycheck to paycheck and can barely afford groceries let alone other commodities. These families are seen to be financially unstable because the parents can't keep a job, or simply just don't have one. They are portrayed to be lazy and unmotivated, and that is why they can't keep a job and often have a difficult time finding a new one.

Tim Riggins himself does not have a job. However, that doesn't mean that Tim Riggins couldn't get a job if he didn't try. There are several other football players his age who go to school, practice, work, and have other commitments. In the first season, Riggins lives off of his brother's income, which is spotty. His brother is portrayed as not being able to keep a job. He is in a constant job search and struggles to buy himself and Riggins groceries. The show briefly mentions that Tim's dad is supposed to send the Riggins brothers monthly checks to live off of, but they never receive these checks.

The show is condoning and contributing to the negative stereotypes that poor people cannot keep a job. The show indicates that Tim's brother is struggling to keep a job and is in a constant state of struggle to find a new one. But there is potential for Riggins himself to get a job and help his brother out. Or at least get a job to support himself. But the kicker is that the other kids that have the job come from higher social classes.

In episode 12, Julie Taylor talks to her parents about how hard quarterback Matt Saracen works as a student-athlete. Matt Saracen is another athlete who is portrayed to live in the class right above Tim's. Matt is a student-athlete, who works part-time at a restaurant all while being the man of the house and taking care of his grandmother while his dad is on a tour in Iraq.

[Julie:] There's no adult looking out for him. I mean, it's crazy. He's just by himself. Doing the cooking, and the cleaning, the shopping. He takes care of his grandma. His dad's been home for two weeks and there's still a table full of insurance forms for his grandma. And he has school and work and football. I just... I feel like it's just going to crush him. [Eric:] Nothing's gonna crush Matt Saracen. He's like a little stink bug. You can't crush him. He's tough. He'll be fine.

[Tami:] Well, I do think it is an awful lot for one 16-year-old to have to handle. I might be able to do something. I don't know. Have him come see me at school.

[Julie:] Okay. Thanks, Mom. (TV show transcripts)

This scene showcases that if Matt can work with a multitude of other responsibilities on his plate then Riggins, who has fewer responsibilities than Matt, could get a job if he wanted to. This scene indicates that if Tim Riggins and his brother Billy Riggins were to stop drinking as much as they do then they would both be able to get and keep a job, and if they were to be able to get and keep a job then they would be more financially stable and be seen as motivated individuals that want to better themselves.

Poor Education

Substance abuse plays a huge role in the stereotype that lower class athletes and individuals tend to receive a poor education and are less intelligent than those individuals in the

classes above them. Lower-class individuals receiving a poor education is impacted by substance abuse because while lower-class students are in school they tend to ruin their education because they spend the hours outside of school socializing with friends in the form of partying and drinking, along with often showing up to school hungover, recovering from their night of socializing. The poor education stereotype can also contribute to the stereotypes mentioned above.

Having a poor education coincides with the idea that poor families and individuals cannot receive employment at good jobs because they do not have the proper education or intelligence to be successful within that workplace. Poor families can be seen to struggle with staying in school and are typically known to not receive a college education or in some cases not even graduate with their high school diploma.

In episode 11, Tim Riggins is portrayed to be an athlete who only has decent grades so that he can play football. It is blatantly clear that the only reason that Tim Riggins even has good grades is because he has the rally girls do all his homework for him. Within the show, Riggins is never seen doing homework or engaging in academic activities outside of school. However, there is one point on the show that shows the viewer that Tim Riggins is indeed intelligent. When Mrs. Taylor the school counselor finds out that Riggins has not been doing his homework, she makes it her mission to ensure that he is engaging in scholarly activities and completes an assignment for English class.

[Tami:] Miss Levine told me that you're in real trouble in her English class.

/Yeah, well, why don't we just put me into an easier class? That's not really the problem, is it? I hear you got an oral report due this week. You started reading that book yet? No, I haven't. But I am looking forward to it. You get help on your

homework, Tim? Maybe from the rally girls sometimes? No. Never? Not once. You know, that Scarlet Letter paper that y'all wrote. I mean, Julie was up all night long writing that one. Did you write that one? Oh, yeah. You did? Yep. Oh, could I see it? Wow. "Modern Themes in The Scarlet Letter. " A-minus. Look at that. What's [i]The Scarlet Letter about, Tim? You know what it's about. I do know. Yeah. What's The Scarlet Letter about? It's about... A gal that... Named Scarlet, obviously. (SIGHING) Tim! You did not write this paper. What's the big deal? Well, the big deal is that it's part of my job to make sure that you don't grow up stupid. It's bad for the world. That's not funny, Tim. That is not funny. So you know what? I'm making it my personal responsibility to make sure that you don't get any more free passes from your teachers. From here on in, you're gonna sink or you're gonna swim, based on you. Based on your work. You get me? We're two wins away from playoffs, Mrs. Taylor. I appreciate that. I certainly can appreciate that. The timing of this couldn't be worse. Well, I'm sorry. I don't pass, I don't play. (TV show transcripts)

After this scene, Riggins completes the assignment that Mrs. Taylor assigns to him. Even though Riggins does not complete the required reading himself he completes the writing portion of the assignment and receives a decent grade on it, indicating that he is indeed intelligent and can receive good grades if he applies himself to his studies. It is frequently mentioned throughout the show that Riggins needs good grades in order to play college football in the future. Tim Riggins is seen as a student who might not graduate high school unless he has other students do his work for him, but Mrs. Taylor's assignment proves to us that if Riggins applied himself he could graduate by doing his own work, however after this scene, he is never seen doing school

work and there is not anymore mention of his education, indicating that his education is not a priority in his life.

This television show condones the stereotype that the poor class is unintelligent and receives a poor education. It does however give the poor class a look of hope by showing that Riggins is smart when he applies himself, but he chooses to not apply himself therefore he will likely receive a poor education. Those who live in the lower class can barely receive a high school education so how are they going to hold a good, steady job after that?

Poor Athletic Success

The stereotype surrounding lower class athletes and individuals abusing substances is very prominent in *Friday Night Lights* because as mentioned above Tim Riggins is constantly seen drinking throughout the show. It is also prominent because it is a stereotype that contributes to other stereotypes. One significant thing that *Friday Night Lights* does is it portrays and combines all of the stereotypes listed above to create another stereotype: those who come from a poor social class are deemed less likely to have great athletic success.

Athletes who live in a poor social class are deemed less likely to be successful in their sport and are unlikely to exceed in it further because they don't have the financials to make it to college or even at times afford to keep playing the sport further. These athletes are also deemed to have difficult family dynamics and households that provide very little support to the athlete when playing their sport and the possible continuation of their sport. The athlete is frequently portrayed as struggling in school and having a hard time getting good grades to play their sport, or they barely get by and are predicted to struggle when playing their sport outside of high school. Alcohol and drug abuse is another big stereotype that contributes to the creation of this

stereotype. Athletes who have a problem with drinking or doing drugs can be seen to hinder their athleticism.

Tim Riggins's character portrays all the above stereotypes. As an athlete who lives in the lower social class, he is stereotyped to be an athlete with little room to become successful in his sport. As an athlete who struggles enough in high school football, Tim Riggins is perceived to have little chance to go to college and play college football because those around him see the path that he is going down and can see the potential for him to ruin his life rather than take the steps to excel in it. It can be perceived that children who come from higher social classes are likely to have a higher chance of being successful athletes.

In episode 8, former quarterback Jason Street and Coach Eric Taylor have a conversation about the Riggins brothers having a conversation with Coach Taylor about the possibility of Tim Riggins going to college. They talk about the potential that Riggins has for going to college, however, given the life that he lives, Street doesn't question his athletic talent to play college football, but rather his current lifestyle choices and struggles.

[Eric:] You know, the Riggins boys came over for dinner last night. You and Tim, you're still best friends, aren't you? [Jason:] Yeah, I guess so. [Eric:] Guess so? Well, the parents did a number on those kids, that's for sure. [Jason:] Yeah, well, everyone's got a sad story. Doesn't excuse anything. [Eric:] He played a hell of a game Friday. I'll tell you that. [Jason:] He'll make something of himself if he doesn't become his own worst enemy. (TV show transcripts)

This scene showcases that an athlete's social class can influence the outcome of their athletic career. Riggins could very well have the talent to play and exceed in college football, however because of the struggles he faces as a lower-class individual his talent may be

overlooked. It can be perceived that children who come from higher social classes are likely to have a higher chance of being successful athletes.

The Issue

Socioeconomic stereotyping is an ongoing issue that occurs in most mainstream media. The football television show, *Friday Night Lights*, is just one show that showcases how many negative stereotypes can be portrayed about one social class. Of course, there were stereotypes within the film that portrayed the other four social classes that the United States uses to define individuals' socioeconomic status. However, it is interesting that the show chooses to portray the lower social class heavily because the lower class is not the ideal class that individuals would like to live in. It is the class that most individuals want to avoid or build their way out of. Therefore, it is very interesting that this television show chooses to heavily portray the poor class and chooses to do so with multiple negative stereotypes.

The television show choosing to condone stereotyping of the lower class shows that all parties helping in the production of the show are agreeing to follow the mission of the media. Those in the media who have power are attempting to fix the meaning of the poor. In an attempt to fix meaning to this social class, they are choosing to do so in a negative way, therefore making the fixed meaning a stereotype rather than a true accurate meaning of the class (Hall). This is an issue for a multitude of reasons.

When the media stereotypes individuals in the lower social class they are presenting them to be unhappy, unsuccessful, and living meaningless lives that will never allow them to amount to anything. Therefore, when individuals who live in this class try and live their lives in the real world, members of other social classes will look at the lower classes and think of all the negative

stereotypes associated with the class. This could potentially inhibit a lower-class individual's ability to conduct certain actions in life. It may also inhibit the number of opportunities that may be presented to a lower-class individual. If a poor individual is only seen by their stereotypes they are being seen in a false image. Yes, some poor individuals struggle with some, or all of the stereotypes listed above, however, the extent of that struggle could be less exaggerated than the media portrays those struggles to be. Alternatively, some poor people do not face any of the struggles listed above and are just barely considered to be in the lower social class.

This negative image of individuals in the lower social class is a result of the mainstream media's mission to fix an image of them. The more the media portrays these negative images and stereotypes of the lower class, the better universal understanding of what it means to live a lower-class life will be shared with the individuals who live in the United States conceptual map. The issue is that the universal understanding of the lower social class, will not be accurate and a false idea will be shared, meaning that lower-class living will never fully be understood and properly recognized by the other four social classes.

Conclusion

Stereotyping is an issue that has been happening in media for decades and one that is not stopping soon. Stereotyping is an issue because it distorts the image of American society. They highlight the differences between groups of people (Harvard). Stereotypes are what individuals think of when they think about a specific group and these stereotypes are usually general and most representative distinctions of these groups (Harvard). Stereotypes become the idea that people refer to when talking about a group when that stereotype is confirmed there tends to be an overreaction by individuals (Harvard). However, when these stereotypes are contested or

contradicted there is an underreaction to them (Harvard). Stereotypes have become normalized, or have become fixed in the United States, and most of these stereotypes are false and should not be the normalized image of a group, person, or situation.

It is clear to see that the mass media has created an issue when it comes to stereotyping athletes. There are several types of stereotypes that those in the media play off to create stories about sports teams and individual athletes. As mentioned above there are a plentiful number of issues that arise from the media's inclusion of these stereotypes within mass media formats. Most sports films condone the mass media's mission to fix meaning to athletic stereotypes, along with several others. Lower-income or social class stereotypes are seen frequently within sports films because how an individual grows up and live their lives, is a prominent part of the storyline and is crucial for character development.

There are several critical and cultural studies scholars however who understand the negative consequences that arise with stereotyping in the media and provide their readers and audiences with a couple of ways to avoid or disregard falling into or fixing those stereotypes into society's conceptual map. Bell Hooks, Stuart Hall, and John Downing all have their own way of stating that stereotypes should be contested and not condoned. Producers and directors should not follow in the footsteps of those in charge of the mass media. They should not condone fixing a meaning to a subject, especially a meaning that is negative. Rather they should contest stereotypes and start accurately portraying subjects.

Producers and directors choosing to accurately portray subjects is not an easy task because it is something that will receive a lot of backlash. Because the media has been condoning stereotypes for so long, contesting these stereotypes will also contest an individual's conceptual map. Contesting an individual's conceptual map will be challenging because it will

introduce change into the world, and change is difficult. However, just because change is difficult doesn't mean it is bad. Change is good, and more individuals in the United States, specifically those who are producing mainstream media, need to realize that they can contest current norms and make more accurate, truthful content.

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Friday Night Lights

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