

Question 1: Contemporary sport has taken on a significant and influential 'lifestyle' function and status. Explain & exemplify.

Through an analysis of Adidas' "all adidas" (All Adidas) video, this essay will argue that women have transitioned away from traditional female discourses and now increasingly use sport as a way of expressing their values and producing themselves as desirable individuals that people should aspire to.

Bourdieu's concept of habitus can be defined as "history naturalised ... the values and dispositions gained from our cultural history are part of who we are ... and how we do things" (Schirato et al. 193). Sport in earlier times was perceived as "unsuitable" to various societal groups, including women (Schirato 59). Hence, females were marginalised from sport, and women acquired as part of their habitus the knowledge that sport was a masculine domain. However, All Adidas reinforces the idea that women in contemporary sport illustrate a different habitus. Bourdieu argues that lifestyle is the product of habitus and is expressed in and through "taste" (Williams 590). The All Adidas women take part in various physical activities including tennis, ballet, football, and boxing. What they all have in common is their choice of using sport as a way of investing their body and expressing who they are.

According to the video's summary on *YouTube*, All Adidas "celebrates ... the women that dare go beyond their limits ... and go all in to achieve their goals." These limits could be referring to the limits of conventional female gender roles, as mentioned above, but also the physical limits of training the body. By challenging these limits, the women in All Adidas are able to accumulate capital, that is, the "power held by social agents" within a field (Thorpe 493). One form of capital is cultural capital, which can be defined as anything deemed to be valuable and exchangeable within a cultural field (Schirato et al. 72). In order to be successful, and therefore possess large amounts of capital, the women in All Adidas constantly develop their various physical skills, with the hope of gaining an advantage over others within the field of sport.

The human body itself can function as a form of capital and source of power. Williams points out that the body in contemporary society is increasingly becoming a source of symbolic value and can reflect, for example, the inner concern with health and “optimum” function (591). This idea is portrayed throughout All Adidas. Tennis player Caroline Wozniacki wipes sweat off her face, signifying her hard work, and women are present in the gym practising their boxing moves, including a slow-motion rendition of one female striking a punching bag. As part of their lifestyle, the All Adidas women engage in activities that function as a form of exercise, with the goal of improving their health and fitness levels.

In order to stand out, agents within a field need to understand what society values as “distinction” (Williams 590). Women can use sport as a tool to set them apart from others with knowledge of qualities that will give them an advantage. Adidas have incorporated figures such as Wozniacki and Katy Perry, not just because they are popular and successful, but because their bodies represent objects of desire. For male onlookers, the female bodies encourage sexual attraction and hopefully, for Adidas, the consumption of Adidas’ products. For female viewers, the benefits of sport as a lifestyle are showcased. Sport is a pathway for improving the body, giving women something to aspire to, and a beautiful body will lead to not only more self-esteem, but also attention and fame.

High cultural capital can also be reinforced through a “concern with appearance ... movement and control” (Williams 591). Confidence is expressed through a montage of shots as the All Adidas women are shown flicking their Adidas “hoodies” over their heads while walking towards the camera. In one case, they synchronously walk together in a straight line with determined looks on their faces, implying dominance. However, they also stroll on the beach in a casual demeanour, which shows that they are relaxed and feel in control of their bodies. Essentially, simple subconscious actions such as posture, facial expression and choice of clothing, can say a lot about a person’s lifestyle and self-esteem.

In conclusion, the experiences of the women in the All Adidas video illustrate that sport is increasingly being used as a lifestyle choice. These hardworking women participate in acts that will help achieve a healthy and sexy body, and in doing so give their viewers a template

that they should aspire to. Adidas is trying to influence other women to choose sport as a lifestyle, and in combination with the purchase of Adidas' products, they also can fashion themselves and achieve what is perceived by society as a perfect, beautiful body.

Question 2: Explain & exemplify how media interactivity & fantasy sport are changing the field of sport.

This essay will analyse DIRECTV's "Weekly Exclusive Fantasy Update" video (DIRECTV), to argue that media interactivity and fantasy sport have changed how people view sport and altered the relationship between the sports spectator and team.

Contemporary sport contrasts from the spectator-team relationship constituted in earlier accounts of sport. In late-nineteenth century Britain, team sports created a "powerful focus for group loyalty" by "imparting values of team spirit and cooperation," and these teams would then represent the values of the community (Holt 80; Schirato 51). Also, community members themselves were encouraged to participate in sport – with no economic incentive – in order to understand the importance of teamwork in improving morality, while additionally developing their levels of fitness.

However, this identification of the fan with the team has become lost since the development of fantasy sport, which has heightened the commodity value of sport and the focus on the individual. Schirato and Jutel note that participants in fantasy sport are effectively "virtual managers" because they take on the same functions as real team managers by drafting players, bidding, and forming squads (33). Yet the difference here is that the fantasy player, in order to increase their chances of success, will pick the best players from a range of teams, and in doing so, will relinquish their loyalty to the community or team. In other words, it is common to find fantasy players supporting real players from a range of real teams.

Jutel and Schirato argue that contemporary sports spectatorship exists within a different visual regime than earlier accounts of sport (33). The current visual regime of sport is based on the logics of capitalism, where value is determined by the market, and rather than simply taking in reality, “we produce and read the world by way of different forms of mediation” (Schirato et. al 31-32). In the case, sport has incorporated media technologies in order to allure a wider audience and potential market, and as a result, sport has been transformed into an intense site of consumption.

Contemporary sport has taken on a significant interactive function and is further becoming oriented towards the spectacle. One purpose of the spectacle is to hold attention, and Schirato and Jutel believe that the logic of spectacle involves the inscription of fans and allowing those fans to decide what they want to see (31). The end of DIRECTV involves a pair of miniature fairies trying to convince an individual to sign up to DIRECTV’s “NFL Sunday Ticket Max.” The viewer is initially watching his single-screen television, but the fairies throw various lights at the screens of his laptop and television to create a multi-screen environment. Essentially, the viewer now has multiple choices and is being encouraged to consume at an unprecedented level. If his attention begins to wander in one game he now has the added option of watching a different game of football.

Baudrillard argues that the spectator is now integrated into “a world of generalised hysteria” characterized by a “flight from one signifier to another” (77). Building on this, Schirato and Jutel argue that media involvement in sport produces a “hystericized form of watching ... with the promise of returns” (33). The viewer of DIRECTV becomes immersed in signs of success as graphics appear on the screen, displaying the names of top players in various football positions and categories. Host of this particular video, Andrew Siciliano, promises triumph for the individual consumer by stating “we are here to help guide you to victory.” Put simply, the individual is being catered for and the unifying component of sport-as-community is becoming lost.

Fantasy sport gives viewers more reasons to watch sport. For example, “the real game may be decided by halftime,” but the fantasy player will stay interested throughout the game’s

entirety to see if the players in their team play well enough to earn fantasy points (Schirato and Jutel 6). However, Schirato and Jutel also point out that fantasy sport has turned the world “upside down” (36). In other words, the loyalty factor in sport has been lost because fantasy players only care about themselves, and on occasions will support multiple, rival teams.

Due to the influence of the media and capitalist ideologies, sport has increasingly become oriented towards the spectacle through the arrangement of vision, maintenance of attention, and encouragement of consumption. Sports viewers have been given further incentives to consume, and DIRECTV shows that the community imperatives of sport have disappeared with the individual consumer targeted. This has diminished the community imperatives of sport and connection between the loyal fan and team.

*Question 3: In contemporary media texts (film, television), sport is represented as a form of value, and as something that does significant socio-cultural work. Explain and exemplify.*

Through an examination of the movie trailer for the 2005 film *The Longest Yard*, this essay will argue that sport, when portrayed in media texts such as film, is an ideal site for the representation of socio-cultural values. In *The Longest Yard*, the sport of American football illustrates certain American myths based on the ideas of equality, hard work, and overcoming obstacles.

Crepeau quotes Hofstadter who gives the following definition: a myth is an idea that “so effectively embodies man’s values that it profoundly influences their way of perceiving reality and hence their behaviour” (23). Crepeau then states that the power of the myth “outstrips the significance of the truth or falsity of the claim” (26). In other words, myths are fictional, but their power lies in their ability to tell stories that reinforce all that is good about a given society. In doing so, myths provide individuals with models of behaviour and inspiration to succeed.

Sport reinforces the myth of meritocracy, that is, hard work will lead to success, and is a place where even the impossible can become a reality (Kaufman and Wolff 162-163). The imprisoned footballers in *The Longest Yard* take part in tough, physically-draining tackle sessions. According to Crepeau, “will” is evident in American myths and involves the display of “mind over matter” and character strength: “success will come to the strong of will” (25). Essentially, sport has the ability to teach individuals the significance of conquering limitations. Although the prisoners will feel tired at times, their determination to succeed will eventually allow them to accomplish their goals and overcome pain. Put simply, their will is asserted through football.

The myth of equality is also portrayed through sport. Kaufman and Wolff point out that a “prevailing sentiment” in sport is the idea of the “level playing field,” which contrasts with the real world where success is dominated by wealth and “access to resources” (164-165). In essence, sport critiques the real world where the poor are given few possibilities to succeed. In *The Longest Yard*, Warden Hazen offers Paul Crewe the chance to establish a football team comprising of prisoners that will take on the prison guards. Therefore, through the use of sport, the prisoners are given similar rights and are put on par with the guards – an unlikely situation in the real world. Sport provides an opportunity for those who would otherwise be marginalised or worse off in the real world, to have a voice.

Related to this is sport’s use of the triumphant “underdog,” that is, the team or individual who “surpass[es] all expectations” and overcomes the “dominant powers” (Kaufman and Wolff 165). In the movie trailer, Nate Scarborough states that “we [the prisoners] might not have the most talented team, but we will definitely have the meanest.” Sport showcases the idea that even those who have little power in society can succeed. In this case, the prisoners defeat their superiors, the guards, on the football field.

King described the American frontier as a “mythic” place of “newly emerging community” where constraints are overcome” (35-41). The myth that sport allows people to overcome all differences and work as a team is presented in *The Longest Yard*. Even though the prisoners have racial differences, they dismiss their hostility in order to strive towards a common goal.

Sport has the ability to turn us into better people morally, while also demonstrating the benefits of collaboration.

The myth that sport allows the overcoming of all obstacles is further portrayed when Warden Hazen, at halftime during the match, issues prisoner Paul Crewe an ultimatum: lose or spend twenty-five more years in prison. Paul was initially sent to prison for purposefully losing a match, and now faces the conundrum of deciding whether to lose and have a lesser sentence, or continue to help his team to victory. Baker notes that sometimes the “ultimate sacrifice is necessary” to ensure success (8). Although Paul re-enters the pitch wanting to lose, he eventually sacrifices his freedom for the benefit of the team, essentially cleansing himself from his corrupt past life. In real life, there will be times when people tell you that you cannot achieve something, but sport teaches you to ignore their doubt, prove them wrong, and push even harder towards your goals.

The real world presents a series of struggles, however sport, as illustrated through American football in *The Longest Yard*, allows us to triumph over these barriers. Sport fabricates a mythical setting where positive cultural attributes are incorporated into cultural narratives, with promises of equality and guaranteed success.

Question 4: Sporting contests are increasingly being produced and experienced as media texts. Explain and exemplify.

This essay will analyse the “Sky Sports Premier League 09/10 Season Review” (EPL) video, to argue that sport has moved away from its amateur days, become immersed into the media, and inserted into the logics of commercialism and the spectacle.

Sport has become “totally” commercialised since the establishment of the “sport-media nexus” in the twentieth century (Kellner 66; Schirato 84). This was achieved through the involvement of media companies who realised that sport could be commodified. Schirato points out that one condition of the spectacle is the arrangement of vision within the

“hegemonic” visual regime of capitalism (104). The development of television and camera technologies allowed the producers of the event to control what is seen. In other words, our vision is being controlled under certain guidelines, and in the context of sport, television cameras direct our attention to prominent examples of capitalism.

Striving for profit is at the core of capitalism and Kellner states that consumer society and the spectacle are organised around the production and consumption of images (2). In essence, this EPL video is a collection of images that are either presented as rapid sequences, in order to give us little time to contemplate what we are seeing, or in slow-motion, for reasons that will be explained later. This saturation of images works because it constantly immerses its audience into a product that exists for the purpose of encouraging consumption.

Debord believes that “truth is a moment of falsehood” in the world of the spectacle (76). The 2009/2010 EPL season is produced as a media text because it covers up the reality of football. Generally, a football match will involve large amounts of inaction, and a whole EPL season lasts nine months. However, this video is only four minutes long, and exemplifies how a sporting event can be packaged into a series of highlights and an easily consumable product. Moments of idleness are non-existent in attractive media texts and in order to get the attention of viewers, this video incorporates instances of attacking football, players celebrating their goals, and managers displaying their disappointment. This is done in order to appeal to a wider demographic, including those who are not necessarily football fans, further provoking consumption.

Attention management is “all-important” in the spectacle and this is achieved by making each successive event “more dramatic and intense” than previous ones (Schirato et al. 150). In other words, the spectacle takes pleasure in presenting the extraordinary. In this EPL video, one shot of the scoreboard reveals that Tottenham scored nine goals in a single match, and commentators acknowledge Wayne Rooney’s 100 Premier League goals. These feats are accompanied with moments of controversy that could generate emotional responses and have been hyped-up in the media, such as when Wayne Bridge refuses to



shake John Terry's hand. As our attention begins to wander, another spectacle appears. This is reinforced near the end of this video because the background music contains the following lyrics: "don't want this to end just yet." This is accompanied with quick cross-cuts between Manchester United and Chelsea – the two teams vying for the trophy late in the season. Essentially, the spectacle wants to hold our attention throughout its entirety, and fulfils this function by drawing on climactic moments of the season.

Sports fans are emphasised in contemporary media texts and treated as commodities because their "passionate" attachment can help encourage consumption (Schirato 90). Hysteria is characterised by an "overreaction" to events and cameras tend to focus on those fans that display this quality of the spectacle (Schirato et al. 151). In this EPL video, success and failure are treated as more than just aspects of everyday life and fan montages illustrate both ends of the emotional spectrum. Some show their jubilation by cheering on their goal-scoring heroes, while others cry and express their emotional pain, such as the supporters of Hull City who face relegation. Still, what they all have in common is their deep concern and strong identification with their team. Through clever camerawork and the use of slow-motion, the media exploit fans' reactions by putting them at the centre of sporting events, with the aspiration of selling a passionate experience.

In conclusion, this EPL highlights video is a perfect embodiment of how the media distorts the reality of sporting events. This event has been transformed into a desirable media text that focuses our attention on what is exciting. By drawing on the logics of the spectacle and centralising the passion of those involved in the event itself, these texts are effectively disseminated to a large base of potential consumers. Ultimately, it is hoped that the audience will accept their invitation to consume and absorb what is in front of their eyes.