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Monstrosities, Money, & Machines: A Metaphoric Analysis of Fantasy Football as a Social World

Arthur Alexander Aguirre

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**MONSTROSITIES, MONEY, & MACHINES:
A METAPHORIC ANALYSIS OF FANTASY FOOTBALL AS A
SOCIAL WORLD**

by

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DISSERTATION

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of

**Doctor of Philosophy
Communication**

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my loving and supportive family, most especially my mom who showed me how to love, my grandma who showed me how to laugh, and my dad who taught me that no one can ever take away my education.

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ABSTRACT

In this study, the world of fantasy football is examined through the lens of the ethnography of communication and the utilization of metaphor/cluster analysis. Fantasy football has emerged as a highly popular sports-related activity and has become a multi-million dollar industry. By analyzing two popular fantasy football podcasts, I explore the use of metaphors within the social world of fantasy football. Through an examination of these metaphors, 11 defined metaphor categories emerged. I explored the context in which these metaphors were used to determine the premises needed to employ these terms and meanings. Finally, by analyzing these premises, terms, and meanings, 15 rules for communicative conduct emerged from the data and were found to be integral for shared meaning and understanding within the fantasy football speech community. The findings of this study have implications for the examination of fantasy football as unique culture, for the examination of language use on podcasts, and for those aspiring to understand and participate within the fantasy football speech community.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

My grandfather was a huge sports fan, and he paid particular attention to baseball (the Padres) and football (the Cowboys). He instilled that love of sports into his children, including my mother. In fact, while she was pregnant with me, she admits to consuming an unhealthy amount of the World Wrestling Federation. This background information is important to note because seven years ago, in keeping with the family tradition of handing a love of sports to later generations, my mother told me that she was going to be joining a fantasy football league. In 2008, I had no idea what a fantasy football league was, and more importantly, how she managed to get into one. She later explained she had overheard her boss talking about it and she asked him what it was. After explaining it to her, she told him that it sounded like fun and that she would like to play. He chuckled and said that it was not a game for girls. This was a huge mistake. My mother became indignant, because from her perspective, there is not much a man can do that she cannot do better. He laughed it off. However, he let her into the league, and invited her to his league's draft—the day when fantasy football players select the NFL players that will be on their team.

Although many people draft their team by themselves, my mother liked taking someone with her for moral support. For that first draft, she arrived with my aunt (who also did not know what fantasy football was) and drafted her team based on the players she liked and which college players her brother said would have a good rookie season. That said, she drafted a team comprised mostly of older players and rookies and was given a hard time about it because the typical strategy is to have a team comprised of

rookies, players in their prime and a few older players. I wish I could say she won the league, but she did not. However, she *did* make the playoffs. She played in the same league the year after, this time taking her best friend's husband to the draft.

The following year, 2010, she did not have a partner for the draft, so she asked if I would go to accompany her; this would be the beginning of my venture into fantasy sports. Although I did not know then what fantasy football was nor had taken the time to follow what was going on in real life football, I knew she needed my support, so I agreed to go. I did some last minute research to understand what the point of this whole game was, arrived with her on draft day, and ended up drafting my first fantasy football team. I was hooked. The excitement of the draft, the camaraderie of the league, and the ability to participate in some way in a sport that was taken away from me because of an injury I sustained in high school, all drew me into this thing called fantasy football. Since then, I have gone from playing in one league my first year to playing in seven the following year and even writing my own fantasy football advice column.

Although I have only been playing for a short time, I have witnessed the popularity of fantasy football, and fantasy sports in general, increase over those few short years. In 2010, the year I began playing, there were approximately 31 million fantasy sports players in the United States and Canada, many of which were specifically playing fantasy football. By 2014, that number jumped to 41.5 million with 33 million people worldwide specifically playing fantasy football (Fantasy Sports Trade Association, 2014; Steinberg, 2014). Moreover, this participation in fantasy sports, more specifically fantasy football, has resulted in an increase in people accessing National Football League (NFL) related content through a variety of means including phone and tablet applications, sports

and fantasy websites, and radio and podcast programming (Drayer, Shapiro, Dwyer, Morse, and White, 2010). Part of the strategy in playing fantasy football includes reading fantasy football articles, visiting fantasy football websites, and listening to fantasy football podcasts hosted by fantasy football experts; often these different fantasy products are found through larger sports conglomerates like ESPN, Yahoo! Sports, and the NFL. This participation through online, in-person, and audio resources has shaped fantasy football into a community composed of fantasy football players and fantasy football analysts, with communication creating the system through which this community is (re)shaped.

In a sense, fantasy football has emerged as a community of members whose communicative practices are intelligible to one another. Having become a member of that community, I began to notice the way these fantasy football experts talked about NFL players. Although there is an understanding that these podcasts are created for both entertainment as well as information, the way in which these experts discussed NFL players was completely based on the players' performance and productivity. It became clear that while the personhood of NFL players was valued, it was not for their human nature, but rather for how well they produced on the field for their NFL team and on the statistics board for their fantasy football owners.

Moreover, I became aware of the fact that in order to explain and justify how these experts described each fantasy-relevant player in any given week, they used a particular type of communicative tool—figurative language. Sometimes they used metaphors, and other times metonyms. As a means of communication, the use of figurative language was contributing to the construction of NFL players' identities as

well as a construction of the fantasy football community as a social world. The way this figurative language was working in fantasy football was the catalyst for the present academic inquiry.

Before delving into my research problem, assumptions, rationale and research questions, it is necessary to explain what fantasy football is and how it is played, particularly given its relative “newness” as an academic topic. I will begin by discussing the origins of fantasy football. I will then give a succinct description of how to play fantasy football. I will also provide an explanation of daily fantasy football, as it is necessary to understand daily-fantasy-specific metaphors.

Fantasy Football

The Evolution of Fantasy Football

Fantasy sports have evolved tremendously over the past 50 years. Although football and baseball were the sports of choice when fantasy began, an individual can now participate in anything from fantasy mixed martial arts to fantasy golf. According to the Fantasy Sports Trade Association (2014), there were approximately 41.5 million fantasy sports players in the United States and Canada, which is up from the 35.9 million who participated in 2011. Of those 41.5 million fantasy sports players, 33 million specifically participated in fantasy football (Steinberg, 2014). There are also incredible financial implications involved with the world of fantasy football. Approximately \$800 million is spent annually on fantasy football, both through advertising and player engagement, and an estimated \$14 billion is lost in productivity because of the time workers are spending at work maintaining their fantasy teams (Challenger, Gray & Christmas, Inc., 2014; Heitner, 2014). There has also been a recent emergence of daily

fantasy games, including daily fantasy football, which has grown into a \$330 million a year business (Bond, 2015). Clearly this growing community of fantasy sports, specifically fantasy football, is having a significant social and financial impact, and it is important to know the history of this phenomenon in order to understand how it has evolved into its current state. Although the history of fantasy sports routinely begins with rotisserie baseball, or fantasy baseball, the focus of this study, as well as this section, is on the inception and growth of fantasy football.

While there is debate about who started fantasy baseball, there is a clear-cut origin for the establishment of fantasy football. In 1962, the NFL team the Oakland Raiders began their season poorly and ended up finishing with one win and thirteen losses. However, in the middle of that season, three men got together and created what would eventually become fantasy football merely because they wanted to find a way to make a wasted Raider season into something entertaining (St. Amant, 2005). Wilfred “Bill” Winkenbach, an Oakland-area businessman and limited partner in the Oakland Raiders, *Oakland Tribune* writer Scotty Stirling, and Bill Tunnell, the Raiders public relations director, got together in a New York hotel room and began creating rules for a new game that would mimic rotisserie baseball. Winkenbach had been playing rotisserie baseball for years, and eventually it would lead to the development of modern fantasy baseball.

Winkenbach, Stirling, and Tunnell adapted the game to football, called their league the Greater Oakland Professional Pigskin Prognosticators League (GOPPPL), and during that first meeting, created rules for drafting a team, rules for maintaining the league and scoring points, and decided on awards for both the winner and the loser. Once they finished, they offered this whole new creation to former *Oakland Tribune* editor

George Ross, who immediately joined and became one of the first players in this eight-man league. They continued to draw from their own community and added Oakland-area bar owner and restaurateur Andy Mousalimas who owned and operated the local bar, the King's X. This bar was often frequented by players and management from the Raiders as well as reporters from the *Tribune*, and with so many of the GOPPPL routinely in attendance watching the Raiders play, the rumors and stories surrounding their league and what eventually became known as fantasy football began spreading. Later, Mousalimas would be responsible for the performance scoring system that would include both touchdowns as well as yardage (Harris & Kadlec, 2003).

Since then, there has developed a standard for the rules and scoring systems for many other fantasy football leagues. There are a number of fantasy football sites, and while each site may differ in their scoring, generally the rules remain the same. For the purposes of this study, an extensive explanation of how fantasy football is played is not necessary, but a description of the general rules will be given to establish the context for my later analysis and discussion.

How to Play Fantasy Football

Much like the real NFL Draft, owners in a fantasy football league begin their season by drafting their team. Often, one league member serves as the league commissioner, and it is their job to set up the league on whatever host website the league uses. This person also serves as a decision maker in terms of trades that go on throughout the league, although often, most commissioners leave those types of decision to the discretion of the league via a majority vote. After the commissioner sets up the league, a date for the fantasy football draft is set. As stated previously, there are a number of

fantasy football sites that host fantasy football leagues. However, given the focus of my study and the texts I will be analyzing, I will use the rules and scoring system of ESPN standard leagues in my explanation of how to play fantasy football. Generally fantasy football leagues are comprised of eight to twelve teams, with 16 total players, seven bench slots, and nine starting slots. Each week, a team will start one quarterback, two running backs, two wide receivers, one tight end, one kicker, and one defense/special team, and there is a flex slot which an owner can fill using either another running back, wide receiver, or tight end. Some people outside of the fantasy football community think players are all selected from the same NFL team, but that is not the case. Given the NFL rosters for the 2014-2015 season, a standard league fantasy football team's starting lineup would look something like table 1.1

Table 1.1

Position Slot	Player	Team	Conference & Division
<i>Quarterback</i>	Tom Brady	New England Patriots	AFC East
<i>Running Back</i>	Giovani Bernard	Cincinnati Bengals	AFC North
<i>Running Back</i>	Andre Ellington	Arizona Cardinals	NFC West
<i>Wide Receiver</i>	Jordy Nelson	Green Bay Packers	NFC North
<i>Wide Receiver</i>	DeAndre Hopkins	Houston Texans	AFC South
<i>Tight End</i>	Travis Kelce	Kansas City Chiefs	AFC West
<i>Flex</i>	Odell Beckham, Jr.	New York Giants	NFC East
<i>Defense/Special Teams</i>	Buffalo Bills	Buffalo Bills	AFC East
<i>Kicker</i>	Cody Parkey	Philadelphia Eagles	NFC East

As you can see, these players are not all from the same team or even the same division or conference. You have the ability to draft whichever player is available.

In order to construct this team, the league will have sixteen rounds in their draft where each owner will draft one player per round. Typically the order of the draft will be randomized electronically or by random selection via the rules of the league (i.e. drawing numbers out of a hat). Once the draft order has been determined, owners will make their selections using serpentine drafting. For example, in a ten-team league, drafting will go from one to ten and then from ten to one. This way, while the person selecting last is at a disadvantage, they receive an advantage by being able to draft two players, back-to-back. This continues all the way through to the sixteenth round when each owner has drafted his or her entire team.

Once the draft has been completed, the fantasy football competition begins on the first regular NFL season game. Owners will compete in head-to-head weekly competitions, and the teams with the best record will then compete in the playoffs to determine who wins. With regard to scoring, each NFL player on a fantasy football team is given points determined by their real life production in an NFL game. Using the example team from the previous section, if Giovanni Bernard ran for 90 yards and a touchdown, he would receive nine points for the yards (one point for every ten rushing yards) and six points for the touchdown, for a total of 15 points. For a complete breakdown of ESPN standard scoring, please see Appendix A.

In addition to drafting, there are two other ways of making changes to one's fantasy team throughout the season: trading and free agency. Trading routinely occurs when two fantasy football owners will agree to swap one or more players from their

respective teams in order to improve their team and enhance their chances of winning. Trading is encouraged, but comes with a risk, as an owner is routinely forced to give up one or more good players to receive what they feel is a better player or set of players. The more common and less risky method to improve a fantasy team is by picking up free agent players off the waiver wire—the pool of available NFL players who were not drafted. Because there are limited spots to fill in a fantasy league, there are NFL players who are not selected and available to be picked up. If one player in the free agency pool begins producing better than one of your current players, you can add that free agent player and drop your current player. In sum, fantasy football owners are selecting real life NFL players whom they feel will produce more on the field, which will in turn, score more points for them in fantasy football. The primary goal is to construct a winning team, for each week of the NFL regular season, through whatever means are necessary.

Although the primary focus of my current study is with standard fantasy football leagues, as previously discussed, there has been a strong emergence of daily fantasy leagues, and it is necessary to understand how this type of league is played given some of the metaphors that were coded. Although they are labeled as “daily,” they are simply leagues where a fantasy football player constructs a team for one day or weekend but is not tied to them long term. If that team does not perform well that weekend, a fantasy football player can construct an entirely different team the following week. Another distinguishing characteristic of these leagues is the fact that nearly every type of daily fantasy league has some type of monetary risk involved. Players pay an entrance fee for a particular contest, construct a team, and based on where their team ranks once all games have been played, they receive a certain portion of the winnings.

One last unique characteristic of this type of league is how NFL players are valued/drafted. In order to construct a fantasy football team, fantasy football players are given an imaginary \$50,000, and NFL players are valued at a certain price based on their talent, prestige, and recent production. Thus, a consistent, talented quarterback could have a draft price of \$10,000, while a poorly performing rookie quarterback may only cost \$5,000 to draft. Fantasy football players cannot exceed \$50,000, so they must draft the right combination of expensive players and those NFL players priced at a lower level that they believe will perform beyond what is expected. With this understanding of how both standard and daily fantasy football are played, it is clear that language use and the communicative conduct within fantasy football is an integral part of this community. Keeping that in mind, I will now discuss the various tenets of the research problem guiding this study.

Research Problem

The relationship between metaphor use, personhood and the fantasy football speech community is where I situate my academic inquiry. More specifically, the financial and social impact of fantasy football warrants a specific type of analysis; it is imperative to understand this community on their terms. There is a vast amount of literature surrounding the way in which NFL players are talked about. Work exists that focuses on the way in which NFL players are subjected to the male gaze during the draft (Oates, 2007) and how masculinity is defined and quantified during the draft (Oates & Durham, 2004). With regard to fantasy football, there has been work centered on the racial implications of fantasy football (Hill, 2010), the way in which NFL players are commodified and Othered by fantasy football players (Kellam, 2013), and the way

masculinity is reinforced through fantasy football (Davis and Duncan, 2006). However, in these academic endeavors, there was a prioritization of static media, like fantasy football magazines, that are carefully re-worked and edited, as well as an analysis of one satirical fantasy football sitcom (*The League*). Moreover, these academic examinations prioritized a critical approach that sought out issues of power imbalance and control.

While these provide a valuable set of findings and conclusions for scholars seeking insight into the power imbalances that can be found in fantasy football, there remains a dearth of literature seeking to describe fantasy football as a community (re)created and (re)shaped by community members. Given that fantasy football players not only listen to fantasy football podcasts, but also purposefully listen in order to receive and heed the advice of fantasy football experts, there is an intrinsic connection strengthened through communication between the expert and the fantasy player. Moreover, because fantasy football analysts are also fantasy football players, they speak to, but are also part of, the fantasy football speech community. This study aims to discover the means for communication within the fantasy football speech community, the rules of metaphor use within the fantasy football speech community and how metaphor use is integral in constructing the social world of fantasy football.

Researcher Assumptions

I enter this academic endeavor into fantasy football from a cultural communication perspective (Philipsen, 2002), which is couched in the interpretive approach to communication. This approach assumes that communicative acts provide unique insight into underlying systems of meaning for a particular speech community (Carbaugh, 2005; Hymes, 1962, 1972, 1986, 1974; Lindlof & Taylor, 2011; Philipsen &

Coutu, 2006; Philipsen, Coutu, & Covarrubias, 2005; Covarrubias, 2009a; Covarrubias, 2009b). I examine this topic using Hyme's (1974) definition of a speech community, "a community sharing knowledge of rules for the conduct and interpretation of speech" (p. 51). I also enter this study with the assumption that culture and communication are inextricably joined, mutually informing one another (Carbaugh, 2005; Hymes, 1962, Philipsen, 1992; Philipsen, Coutu, & Covarrubias, 2005).

Given these assumptions, I use Carbaugh's (2005) work as a guide to define communication. He understands that communication is a cultural practice, and in that practice, speech codes and discourse, are at the heart of mutual understanding. That said, I define communication as the shared creation of meaning through signs and symbols, informed by communal rules, premises, and codes. Thus, for this study, I am focused on the creation of shared meaning within the fantasy football speech community and seek to define and understand what signs and symbols are used and how they shape the communal rules, premises and codes of fantasy football.

Research Rationale

Practical

The literature surrounding fantasy sports is growing but is still in its infancy, and the literature specific to fantasy football is even more lacking. Because there is a strong social aspect to fantasy football as well as a special relationships created between the NFL player and the fantasy football player, the language use that defines this culture is essential to understanding the community. Those academic inquiries focused on fantasy football have taken a critical approach to understanding how power, control, and race manifest within this growing community (Hill, 2010; Kellam, 2012; Kwak, Lee &

Maham, 2013). The current study aims to contribute to the field of communication by employing an interpretive approach to determine how the discourse within fantasy football can be used to shape it as a speaking community. Thus, future studies can first understand nuances from which the fantasy football culture is expressed before commenting on the social issues that are at stake from a critical approach.

Methodological

Because of the novelty surrounding podcasts, previous academic efforts were centered on the development of podcasting and the difference between podcasting and other media (Berry, 2006; Meserko, 2014; Uricchio, 2009). They were not focused on language use within podcasts. Future studies seeking to understand the use of language on particular podcasts, particularly ones that feature one or more primary analysts, will benefit from the method I employed in this study. By extending the metaphor/cluster analysis described by Foss (2009) and couching it in the ethnography of communication (Phillipsen, 1992; Philipsen, Coutu, & Covarrubias, 2005; Covarrubias, 2009b), I provide a method with which to organize, categorize and analyze language use on podcasts.

Research Context

The research context I examine in the current study consists of two popular fantasy football podcasts that serve a large number of fantasy football players. It was difficult to determine how many actual listeners each podcast yields because one podcast airs five times a week (*ESPN: Fantasy Focus Football*) and the other only airs twice a week (*Fantasy Feast: Eatin'*). The other factor that made it difficult to determine was the fact that iTunes and other podcast-downloading software allow users to download a podcast, but that is not an indication that the user actually listened to it. Despite the

unknown number of listeners, both podcasts have a large following of fantasy football players, and each podcast is hosted by analysts who work for corporate fantasy football institutions (ESPN and Rotoworld). Both podcasts function as sources of advice and information for fantasy football players and follow a particular format in each episode.

With regard to the terminology involved with the study, it is necessary to explain the pertinent terms as some are used on both podcasts and are common in the social world of fantasy football. I use the terms *fantasy football player* and *fantasy football owner* interchangeably to discuss individuals who participate in fantasy football. I also use the term *fantasy football expert* and *fantasy football analyst* interchangeably. These terms are used throughout the world of fantasy football. If I am discussing an actual player in the National Football League (NFL), I will use the term *NFL player*.

Research Questions

Despite the increase in popularity within fantasy sports participation, specifically fantasy football, there is still a lack of interpretive scholarship that seeks to understand the fantasy football speech community. During the football season, three of the top 30 podcasts in the “sports and recreation” section of iTunes podcasts are fantasy football related. In fact, one of them is consistently a top ten podcast in that category throughout the majority of the NFL regular season (August to December). Given the sheer number of fantasy football players in 2014 (33 million), this speech community warrants an interpretive examination with regard to speech acts and communicative conduct (Hymes 1974, 1986; Tracy, 2002). My study examines the means of speech for fantasy football experts, specifically metaphors, and the rules for metaphor use common among these experts. This in turn provides insight into how the discourse used by fantasy football

experts serves as a site for the construction of fantasy football as a social world. I do this by answering the following research questions:

RQ1: What are the means of speech for fantasy football experts to discuss NFL players, teams, and coaches that contribute to the fantasy football culture?

This question focuses on the specific communicative tools that are employed by fantasy football experts that can be used to characterize and define the fantasy football speech community. More specifically, this question focuses on the terms and meanings used and employed throughout the fantasy football community. While figurative language emerged as a vital communicative tool, this question allowed for a more specific examination of language use by fantasy football experts.

RQ2: What are the rules for metaphor use in terms of communicative conduct for fantasy football experts?

This question focuses on defining the premises for communicative conduct within the fantasy football community. Figurative language, specifically metaphors, is used throughout the podcasts that were analyzed, and it was necessary to understand the premises needed for the utilization of these terms and meanings. This questions also serves as a bridge between *RQ1* and *RQ3*.

RQ3: How does the discourse used by fantasy football experts serve as a site for the construction of fantasy football as a social world?

Given the scope of *RQ1* (terms and meanings) and *RQ2* (premises), this final question centers on defining the rules for communicative conduct within the fantasy football speech community. The patterns of language use that emerge will constitute the

rules of communicative conduct, which in turn will define and construct the fantasy football speech community as a social world.

Preview

This chapter has provided an introduction to the topic at hand. I have described what fantasy football is and how it is played. I also outlined my problem statement, the assumptions I have accounted for, and the research questions that guided this study. Finally, I presented my entry point as a researcher, explaining my stake in the study and how my interest in this particular locus of study manifested.

In the second chapter I review the literature that is pertinent to understanding what previous scholars have accomplished and proven, what gaps exist in the literature, and how this dissertation adds to the communication discipline. I begin by delving into the cultural communication literature, paying particular attention to the ethnography of communication and speech codes theory in order to clarify my ontological perspective and how personhood is defined and employed for this study. This is followed by a review of metaphor theory and the way in which metaphor theory has been employed in recent literature. I then explore some of the avenues others have taken to examine the field of sports communication; I explain the merits of these works as well as how they have guided my study both in terms of what they accomplish and what still needs to be addressed. Finally, I describe the academic endeavors that center their attention on the increasingly popular phenomenon of fantasy sports/football.

The third chapter provides a substantive look at my methodology; I explain my theoretical and methodological frameworks as well as my method for analysis. I begin by discussing how I combine my theoretical and methodological approaches, justifying the

selection of my frameworks, ethnography of communication/speech codes theory and metaphor/cluster analysis, followed by an explanation of each, how their basic tenets guide my study, and how I employ them. I follow this with an explanation of the texts of analysis as well as how and why they were selected. I detail how I collected my data as well as my process of analysis. This includes a discussion of any and all preliminary work as well as tables that present sample data.

The fourth chapter presents all the major metaphor categories that emerged from the data as well as the themes within those categories. I provide context for these metaphors as well as examples of each in order to clarify how and when certain metaphors are used. This is followed by an explanation of the rules/patterns of metaphor use that manifested in the data as well as how they manifested.

The fifth and final chapter details the contributions of these metaphor themes, categories and rules and the characteristics of the fantasy football speech community that emerge from these. This chapter also includes a discussion of the limitations of the study and suggestions for future research.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

To examine metaphors as a means of communication within fantasy football, one must examine the intricate patterns of speaking within that speech community. This includes the context of sports entertainment, specifically fantasy sports. Throughout this chapter, I will review literature in the areas of communication, metaphor theory, and sports communication to illustrate how they have influenced my approach to fantasy football as a social world. Before examining the fantasy sports literature, I will review the gendering of male athletes in sports, as sports culture is the world from which fantasy football is constituted. This literature is integral because the vast majority of the literature I review focuses on language use involved with sports communication, personhood, and sports entertainment.

The Ethnography of Communication

Theorists whose work sits at the intersection of culture and communication have understood the two as being inextricably linked (Carbaugh, 2005; Covarrubias, 2002; Hymes, 1962; Philipsen, 1992). Covarrubias (2002) describes culture and communication as being “constitutively and reflectively interdependent” (p. 10). This interdependent relationship means the two are both reliant on and inform one another. This approach to cultural communication lies at the heart of the ethnography of communication. As a theory and method, the ethnography of communication (Hymes, 1962; Hymes, 1974; Philipsen & Coutu, 2005) and speech codes theory (Phillipsen, 1992; Philipsen, Coutu, & Covarrubias, 2005) provide a thorough theoretical framework that prioritizes the voice and communicative behavior of a particular speech community. It is this prioritization

that drew me toward this theoretical approach, and it is an approach I will utilize in this examination of fantasy football. By detailing these theories and explaining how I intend to use them, I will highlight how the ethnography of communication and speech codes theory compliment my work.

Dell Hymes (1962; 1974) created and developed the ethnography of speaking, which eventually became known as the ethnography of communication. The underlying assumptions behind the theory of the ethnography of communication is a focus on language use within a given community, and more importantly how a distinctive culture and community maintain its own rules and patterns for speech. Hymes (1974) explains that the ethnography of communication extends the ideology and methodology behind ethnography. There is still a focus on thick description (Geertz, 1973) gathered from observation. However, rather than analyzing the description haphazardly, there is a focus on communicative conduct in hopes of ascertaining whether a specific speech pattern or patterns can be found. If a pattern(s) can be found, then the use of speech by that specific community can be used for understanding and predicting the beliefs and values embedded in discourse.

Philipsen (1992) eventually incorporated this work into his larger examination of the ethnography of communication. In his book *Speaking Culturally: Explorations in Social Communication*, Philipsen added a focus on culture with regard to the ethnography of communication, but also implemented the notion of speech codes. He defined a speech code as a historically transmitted, socially constructed “system of symbols, meanings, premises and rules pertaining to communicative conduct” (p. 131). Thus, the inextricable

link between the ethnography of communication and speech codes theory was created and solidified.

Continuing the work on speech codes, Philipsen, Coutu, and Covarrubias (2005) created six different propositions of speech codes theory. The first proposition of speech codes theory states that when there is distinctive culture, there is a distinctive speech code. This first proposition is an integral part of Hymes' work on the ethnography of communication, and paves the way for what I examine in the communicative conduct of fantasy football experts. The second proposition states that in any given speech community, multiple speech codes are deployed. This proposition highlights the definition of speech community, a community that shares a mutually intelligible speech code. However, it also emphasizes that although a speech community shares at least one speech code, often multiple speech codes will be deployed. The third proposition states that a speech code implicates a culturally distinctive psychology, sociology, and rhetoric. This proposition enforces the notion that each speech community is unique, and that the speech code(s) found in one speech community cannot be applied to a different speech community, regardless of their similarities. The fourth proposition of speech codes theory states that the use of a speech code is dependent on the importance placed on speech by interlocutors. This underlines Hymes's prioritization of emic analysis, one discussed by Carbaugh (1991) in which he emphasizes that the focus of the ethnography of communication and speech codes theory should be on the situated talk and meaning within a given speech community.

The fifth proposition states that the terms, premises and rules of a speech code inextricably are woven into communicative conduct. The ideology behind this

proposition is the framework for how I conduct my analysis. First, you must find a rule within the communicative conduct of a given speech community. Once you find a rule, you must determine a premise for the rule. Finally, once you have found a number of rules and premises that can predict a certain aspect of communicative conduct, you can then define the speech code created by these rules and premises. The sixth and final proposition of speech codes theory reinforces Philipsen's (1992) definition of a speech code and the framework for speech codes theory. It states that the artful use of a speech code is sufficient for explaining, predicting, and understanding the discourse with regard to the intelligibility, prudence and morality of communicative conduct. Although it is evident the ethnography of communication and speech codes theory are inextricably linked and should thus be implemented together theoretically, there is also a way in which to utilize them as a methodology.

While communication theories act as a tool for explaining and/or understanding communicative behavior and language use, most require the use of various methodologies in order to apply them to a given study or research project. However, Hymes understands the need for a methodology that coincides with the ethnography of communication as a theory and most efficaciously explains, analyzes and predicts communicative conduct. Hymes's (1972) work includes what is known as the "SPEAKING" heuristic, which is a methodological framework, used when utilizing the ethnography of communication. Hymes created this framework in order to provide a system for data collection and analysis. He determined that when studying a specific communication event, there are 17 different items involved with that event that must be described, defined and analyzed. Although there are 17 different items, he uses the

mnemonic device “SPEAKING” to categorize all these items into a manageable framework ethnographers can use for data collection and analysis.

Other scholars have employed the ethnography of communication and speech codes theory in various contexts to understand the communicative conduct and norms of a particular speech community. Carbaugh (1996) emphasizes the construction of personhood through the situated communication of a particular speech community. I employed the ethnography of communication in a similar fashion to construct the personhood of NFL players within the fantasy football speech community. Bassett (2011) utilizes this theoretical and methodological approach to look at the notions of identity, society and rhetoric between scientist and engineers working in nanotechnology.

Witteborn (2004; 2007) conducted similar research but focused her efforts on the situated expression of Arab collective identities in the United States as well as the identity of Arab women before and after the terrorist attack of September 11, 2001. Her work on the identity of Arab women highlights the notion that collective identities are constructed on various levels through language and are driven through politics, religion, sociology, sexuality, and race. This connection between language use and the construction of collective identities is paramount to understanding the connection between the communicative conduct of fantasy football members and the creation of a fantasy football speaking community. Carbaugh, Berry, and Nurmikari-Berry (2006) utilized the ethnography of communication and speech codes theory to understand how personhood was coded in Finland, explaining how silence and quietude are not only socially accepted, but were a “natural way of being.” Similarly, I examined how personhood, language use and communicative conduct within fantasy football establish it

as a speech community. One key figure of speech that emerged from the language use on the podcasts is the metaphor.

Metaphor Theory

In studying the communicative conduct of the fantasy football speech community, metaphors were heavily relied on to create shared meaning. Burke's (1945) position on metaphors and figurative language differs from that of many of his contemporaries. "I refer to metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, and irony. And my primary concern with them here will be not with their pure figurative image, but with their role in the discovery and description of 'the truth'" (p. 503). Burke understood what many at that time were choosing to ignore—figurative language serves a larger purpose than simply adding color to language. It provides a glimpse at the truth behind a particular message. While I could focus on figurative language in general, the focus of this study is on metaphor use as a central distinguishing facet of the fantasy football speech community. Metaphors have been examined for their ability to convey a message and create understanding (Lakoff, 1970; Lakoff 1996; Lakoff and Johnson, 1980; Ricouer, 1977), and this study extends that scholarship by applying it congruently with the ethnography of communication to understand the communicative conduct of the fantasy football community.

It is crucial to understand and define what a metaphor is and does. Lakoff (1986) explains, "The metaphor involves understanding one domain of experience...in terms of a very different domain of experience" (p. 216). In Lakoff's work with Johnson (1980) they explain that metaphors are a linguistic tool used to make sense of one system by conceptualizing it with a different type of system. We do this so often in our everyday language that metaphor use has become an integral part of how we make sense of the

world. Foss, Foss, and Trapp (2014) discuss metaphors, arguing, “The metaphor is powerful because it allows for the transfer of insights on several levels. At the most fundamental level, metaphor is the basic process of human thinking: it involves grasping the similarities between two unrelated things” (p. 66). Whether we are discussing our romantic relationships as being on a path or whether we talk about arguing as war, the way we approach these topics via our metaphor use is indicative of how we will behave in our relationships and during an argument. However, metaphors also serve a different purpose.

In addition to helping us make sense of the world around us, metaphors also provide an extended meaning for the subject at hand. In her work on metaphors and illnesses like tuberculosis and cancer, Sontag (1978) explained how a metaphor transports or instills a type of personality to the subject. Tuberculosis is seen as a disease of passion while cancer is seen as a disease of repression. These traits are only ascribed because of how these diseases are talked about and the metaphors used to talk about them. In their work with war metaphors, Steuter and Willis (2008) buttress this relationship between the transportation feature of metaphors and the meanings they create. They explain that when certain metaphors are used frequently, as they are in the media, they carry meaning that ultimately become normalized and expected. Thus, while the metaphor is the transporting vehicle of meaning, it also transports an identity onto the original subject. Some scholars have extended the effect of metaphors even further.

For many scholars, metaphors are not just tied to language. If that were the case, we would have different meanings for the different metaphors we use for a particular subject. For example, Lakoff (1986) uses the “love is a journey” metaphor to highlight

the relationship between metaphor and thought. If metaphors were only a linguistic tool, then each of the associated “love is a journey” metaphors (i.e. “we can’t turn back now,” “we’ve hit a dead-end street,” etc.) would each have a different meaning or would employ a different metaphor. But they are all centered on the same theme, which ties metaphors to both language and thought.

It is this relationship between metaphors, language, and thought that can and does facilitate the transmission of identity and community through the use of metaphor. Thus, as Gudykunst (1988) argues, language is a critical component of the transmission and shaping of the social identity of a particular group or speech community. Moreover, Lakoff and Johnson (1980) argue that cultural coherence is reliant on metaphorical structures. This cultural coherence reinforces the importance of metaphor use in fantasy football; the shared meaning within this speech community is reliant on metaphors for cultural coherence. However, there is one last aspect of metaphor that is critical for this study.

In addition to the use of metaphor for cultural understanding, on an individual level, people use metaphors along with categorization to understand the social world around us. Lakoff (1987) explores our use of categorization in his work *Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things*. In his discussion of prototype theory, Lakoff explains that categorization sits at the intersection of human experience (perception, motor activity, and culture) and imagination (metaphor, metonymy, and mental imagery) (p. 8). He uses the metaphors associated with emotion to highlight this interdependent nature of metaphor and categorization. Anger is routinely categorized as heat, and thus metaphors associated with heat are used to make sense of others’ feelings (i.e. he lost his cool, you

make my blood boil, she's just letting off steam). However, a significant aspect of this categorization is mutual understanding. Metaphors, then, enable mutual intelligibility between members of a community in ways that might not otherwise be possible. It is at this juncture where metaphor theory and the ethnography of communication cross paths in my work.

The Ethnography of Communicating Metaphors

The linkage between these two theories lies in labeling metaphor use as a speech code of the fantasy football community. The sixth proposition of speech codes theory (Philipson, Coutu & Covarrubias, 2005) states that “the artful use of a shared speech code is a sufficient condition for predicting, explaining, and controlling the form of discourse about the intelligibility, prudence, and morality of communicative conduct” (p. 63). However, what is key is what this proposition answers. Philipson, Coutu, and Covarrubias (2005) posit that this proposition explains that (1) social actors use speech codes to shape their own and others’ communicative actions, and (2) shared speech codes are effective in shaping the responses of others. But it is the third product of this proposition that creates a linkage with metaphor theory. They argue that proposition six proves the “rhetorical force of speech codes is contingent on the coherence, social legitimacy, and rhetorically artful use of the code so employed” (p. 63). Thus, metaphors serve as code elements for a particular speech community, and the shared meaning of that code is what gives the “rhetorical force” to the metaphor. This phrasing echoes the cultural coherence discussed by Lakoff and Johnson (1980). Mutual intelligibility is a common linkage between speech codes theory and metaphor theory, but not the only one.

Carbaugh's (1988) notion of personhood also has a strong linkage with metaphor theory. Carbaugh, Berry and Numikari-Berry (2006) explain that personhood "draws attention to two kinds of metacommunicative phenomena: (a) cultural terms used to identify communicative action and (b) the communicative actions referenced and related to those terms" (p. 206). They continue, explaining that a researcher coding for personhood is examining the indigenous practices of communication by "identifying cultural terms for them; observing routine enactments of the practices so identified; and investigating the various meanings, premises and rules for these events" (p. 205). Thus, in order to code for personhood in a particular culture like fantasy football, it is necessary to find and understand the cultural terms of that culture and how they are enacted. This type of framework pays particular attention to terms of conversation and meanings, both literal and metaphoric.

What is of interest in terms of the link between speech codes theory and metaphor theory are the two types of metaphoric meanings Carbaugh, Berry, and Numikari-Berry discuss, specifically, sociality (social positions, social relationships, social institutions) and personhood (beliefs about persons, loci of motives, sites of consciousness, link to history). Because the fantasy football community is comprised of fantasy football players and NFL players, the metaphors that are used by fantasy football experts often speak to the sociality and personhood of the community and its members. Tracy (2002) also argues for the connection between talk and identity, saying, "speech acts and identities are tied in multiple ways, each both affecting and being affected by the other" (p. 65). Moreover, when discussing the principles of speech acts, her second principle centers on how doing speech acts builds relational and personal identities. This buttresses the

previous discussion on how the shared metaphor use within the fantasy football community acts shapes the relational and personal identities of its members.

Fitzgerald's (1993) work rests on the intersection of metaphor, identity, culture and communication. He proposes a discussion of identity through metaphor and argues that "identity helps to establish a sort of metaphoric bridge in comprehending culture and communication" (p. 13). This intersection of speech codes theory and metaphor theory is the foundation for understanding, predicting, and constructing the social world of fantasy football. However, before delving into my methodology, it is necessary to review some of the literature that has been produced in the realm of sports and sports entertainment as well as fantasy sports. This discussion has a focus on language use in sports, specifically in terms of identity or personhood (Carbaugh, 1996). I follow that with a discussion of some of the current fantasy sports and fantasy football literature.

Sports Communication

Within the study of sports communication, much of the literature has focused on issues of race, gender, and masculinity. The literature on racial issues within sports, particularly within American football, focuses on race as a key identity marker.

Hoberman (1997) looked at the social discourses surrounding black athletes and how damaging these discourses have been on African Americans as a whole. At the time of his analysis, the identity of the black athlete was constructed through a prioritization of the physical to the extent that it was used to denigrate African Americans and their intelligence.

Long and Hylton (2010) looked at personal identity, specifically "whiteness" within the context of sport events. They focused on the relationship between sports and

social networks, arguing that the way language is used in sports is a direct reflection of how it is used in other social networks and practices. This also serves as an entry point for this study, as the language use on fantasy football podcasts are indicative of language use by fantasy football players in other social networks and practices. However, according to Long and Hylton, the language used in the realm of sports and sports entertainment is indicative of the “oppressive character of a society structured on racial lines” (p. 100). They acknowledge that although some individuals involved with sports might find reason to ignore these racial tensions and racism in general, they wanted inequalities and privilege caused by Whiteness and Blackness to be critically examined. Moreover, they wanted to challenge these differences and power inequalities.

In addition to these critical approaches to sports communication, there have been many interpretive examinations within sports communication. There has been a focus on the rhetoric used to construct the identities of Black and White NFL quarterbacks (Mercurio & Filak, 2010). Mercurio and Filak (2010) found that Black quarterbacks were talked about with a focus on their physical gifts and their “lack of mental prowess” while White quarterbacks were discussed as being less talented physically, but better suited for the game mentally and less prone to mental mistakes. Moving from the player to the fan, Brenner, Burns, and Ewald (2014) looked at a family of four men (one father and three sons) and how they “talked about” football. They found that while watching football on television; these fans talked to the TV as a fan or coach; for the TV as if they were commentators calling the game; and about the TV as fan, coach, and commentator. Their study reinforces the link between communicative conduct and the (re)shaping of a community.

Serazio (2010) looked at the relationship between players, fans, and journalists through his examination of the New Orleans Saints and their role in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina. He argues “that sports journalism invoked and negotiated the memory of Hurricane Katrina through coverage of the team” (p. 156). Moreover, he argued that after the Saints’ great season in 2006, the city was still in dire need of assistance, but the story of the city’s need was largely ignored because it had been aligned, through metaphor, with the team return to glory. Following this vein of metaphor analysis, Watts (2014) conducted a rhetorical analysis looking at metaphoric clusters and associated meanings surrounding former Florida Gators and Denver Broncos quarterback Tim Tebow. She found that the use of metaphors, specifically those that conceptualized Tebow as a savior and a hero, served as “a sense-making function for sports enthusiasts in contemporary U.S. culture, allowing them to gain perspective through the juxtaposition of Tebow as tough and aggressive on the field and gentle and warm-hearted off the field” (p. 13-14). Watts’s metaphorical analysis of Tebow’s personhood provides an entry point into my connection between metaphor and fantasy football as a social world. However, given the lack of academic fantasy football literature, I will review the extent literature of identity construction in sports, followed by a look at football players and fans and the connection between language use and identity/community construction. This will provide a foundation for understanding the relationship between language use and personhood in sports and sports entertainment, which is central given the relationship between real life football and fantasy football.

The Gendering of Male Athletes

Because of the competitiveness involved, gender is often used as a communicative tool to explain the way identity is employed within sports. One example of this that is prevalent within sports is the way in which men and women are gendered. In some of her early work, Komisar (1980) provides a thorough explanation of this phenomenon, arguing that the primary difference between boys and girls is determined through violence. While girls are continually taught to be gentle, graceful, and “lady-like,” boys are expected to be aggressive and to play with reckless abandon. Often, boys are encouraged to fight with one another to settle their differences, and if one should avoid fighting, they are ridiculed for not being a “man.” Foss, Domenico, and Foss (2013) reinforce this gendering in sports through their discussion of snowboarding. Men are valorized in snowboarding while women are routinely left out of snowboarding coverage, despite suffering similar injuries as the men in the sport.

This gender binary is also evident in sports through commentators’s discussion of male athletes. Aull and Brown’s (2013) work on the NBA and WNBA focuses on the different types of coverage with regard to altercations in each sport. They found that although some coverage in the NBA is gendered, instances like that are rare. Rather the sports coverage primarily focuses on what took place during the altercation, who is at fault, and creating a link for the viewer with regard to the impetus for the altercation. For the WNBA, the altercation is “treated as an exceptional event to be scrutinized in far larger terms, reconstructing the event as a signifier alone. It is not an event to be understood on its own terms, or even placed within the purview of reader’ ordinary feelings, judgments and experiences” (p. 49-50). In the WNBA, altercations are

examined and thoroughly discussed as aberrations, but in the NBA, altercations happen without much discussion because male athletes are expected to be violent. They are expected to use aggression to show their emotions.

Part of the emotional appeal for the male athlete also includes talking like a male athlete. Adams, Anderson, and McCormack (2010) discuss the way in which athletes, specifically British football (soccer) players talk about their masculine personhood using what the authors call masculinity-establishing discourse. “Here, athletes use familiar expressions invoking masculinity, denying weakness, and/or using femphobia or homophobia to “motivate” others. Putting this discourse into action serves to establish/reestablish football [soccer] as a masculine sport. Through a process of regulating, disciplining, and policing it defines the perimeters of warrior behaviors and attitudes that constitute hegemonic masculinity” (p. 154). Thus, given that athletes need to perform, compete, and behave like male athletes, it is clear being a male athlete is their identity, and the language they use reinforces this identity.

For male athletes, there is this pressure to perform, compete, behave, and talk like a “man,” which is routinely synonymous with being violent, brutal, uncaring, insensitive, and so on. Anderson and Kian (2012) focus their attention on how head trauma in the NFL is addressed in the media. During their discussion of player identity, they explain that, “Of the multiple masculine scripts promoting professional players’ hegemonic masculine status, sacrificing one’s body for the sake of sporting glory is a key tenet” (p. 153). Although their focus is on head trauma, it lends credibility to the notion that these players must be violent to the point of self-sacrifice in order to be a “real man” in the NFL.

This identity of the male athlete centers on masculine personhood, violence, and the expression of that masculine personhood.

This aggressiveness and masculine personhood reified through talk and behavior is not just limited to the players but to the entire NFL speech community, just as language use is constitutive of the fantasy football speech community. Thus, NFL fans must also act and talk in ways that fall in line with their speech community. Veri and Liberti (2013) explain that these aggressive perspectives of masculine personhood found in the NFL and college football are also found in football-related activities, much like the television show *Tailgate Warriors*. However, if this sexist and overly masculine sensibility is found in a show about a football-related activity, it must also be a factor for males who watch football. In their own examination of televised professional football, Bryant, Comisky, and Zillman (1981) find that enjoyment of televised football play was found to increase with the degree of roughness and violence. Even more, through their research, they found that this relationship was reliable specifically for male viewers only.

The identity of sports fans is also shaped by their social media habits. Sanderson (2013) explores the dynamic between sports fans, social media, and social identities. He argues, “these media outlets have become prime avenues for expressing social identity and mitigating social identity threats that arise from an athlete or sports figure voluntarily leaving the team” (p. 505). This progression, from merely watching to participating online, represents a critical juncture in sports research. Sanderson’s work presents the transition from a passive fan to an active one who participates online and makes connections to the football community. This transition will be further examined through the entry point of fantasy football.

Fantasy Sports in Academia

The majority of nonacademic literature produced on fantasy football has focused on giving a brief overview of its inception followed by strategies on how to be successful (Bales, 2013; Bales, 2014; Barmack & Handelman, 2006; Berry, 2014; Mass, 2011; St. Amant, 2005); however, given the drafting and strategy practices as well as the significant growth in the industry, academia has turned its attention to a number of issues at stake within and around fantasy sports. In their work on fantasy sports, Davis and Duncan (2006) took a pro-feminist approach in their attempt to understand the identities that are privileged through fantasy sports. Through their mixed-methods approach of observations, textual analysis and focus groups, they argue that fantasy sports maintains the hegemonic ideologies that are inherent within sport spectatorship. They also find that fantasy sports emphasize sports knowledge, competition, male-bonding, and traditional gender roles. Though this approach to fantasy sports is fruitful, the changing landscape of the industry calls for a more specific analysis, given that there are now leagues for a multitude of sports. Moreover, their focus on the participants removes the onus from fantasy sport experts who, I propose, (re)create the discourse in the fantasy football speech community along with the fans.

Another focus in the fantasy football literature is on the virtual control of NFL players by fantasy football owners. In her doctoral dissertation, Hill (2010) reads fantasy football through the lens of critical race theory. By looking at/analyzing a fantasy football article, a fantasy football documentary, a fantasy website community, and the FX television show *The League*, she argues that fantasy sports, specifically fantasy football, allows white sports consumers to extend virtual control over the black bodies of NFL

players. This process reveals “socio-cultural dogma of racialized masculinity with psychosocial links to fetish” (p. 7-8). Hill’s work buttresses the fact that fantasy football can serve as a site to study and understand control. Using an approach like Hill, Kellam’s (2012) dissertation focuses on the colonial rhetorics of fantasy football, as well as the illusion of control. By looking at two fantasy football publications, conducting a visual analysis of a fantasy football website, and deconstructing the FX television show *The League*, Kellam is able to examine fantasy football and explain how it otherizes, commodifies, and dehumanizes NFL players. He also argues that these colonial representations serve to influence black and white relations in the United States.

This focus on power and control within fantasy football has been examined from a variety of perspectives. Kwak, Lee, & Maham (2013) focus their attention on the illusion of control as well. They find that participation was very much affected by the emphasis on control heuristics and expert knowledge in promotional information. When there was a strong emphasis, consumers believed they would have more control over the outcome and would thus be more likely to participate. Kwak, Lee & Maham’s work clearly shows that perception of control plays a pivotal role in fantasy sports, and in turn, prioritizes the role of power in fantasy sports.

There are a number of other issues at play within fantasy football that relate to the notion of control. Lee, Kwak, Lim, Pedersen & Miloch (2011) continued work on gender within fantasy sports and focused their efforts on the personality, attitudes, and intentions of fantasy game participants. They looked at a number of factors including the role of gender, sensation seeking, locus of control, and recognition in hopes of predicting attitudes and intentions with regard to participating in fantasy sports. Through their

quantitative analysis, they found that for males, sensation seeking and locus of control, combined with perceived football knowledge, were all related to both attitudes and intentions towards fantasy games. Thus, while entertainment does play a role in male participation, there is a function of control that also appeals to them. While these critical and quantitative approaches to fantasy football have provided a tremendous amount of useful data, there have been few academic inquiries into fantasy football that provide an understanding of the various facets that constitute the social world of fantasy football.

However, some work has been done that provides insight into the fantasy football community. McGuire, Armfield, and Boone (2013) found fantasy football fan were more interested in winning in fantasy football than in the success of their favorite NFL team. Similarly, Billings and Ruihley (2013) look at the relationship between fantasy sport fans and non-fantasy sports fans. After surveying 1,261 traditional and fantasy sports consumers, they determined that “in the majority of measures, fantasy sport users represent the core fan: the uberfollower who lives and breathes sport media” (p. 22). The critical connection between Billings and Ruihley’s work and Kwak, Lee, & Maham’s work is that the level of fanship and the role of power involved in fantasy sports facilitate the transference of fantasy discourse into the construction of identity and community. Martin and Nelson (2014) conducted one of the most recent studies on fantasy sports. Their focus was on the relationship between fantasy sports participation and gambling-related problems. Although the gambling aspect of fantasy sports does not have a direct relationship with this study, the real life ramifications of fantasy sports are legitimized through Martin and Nelson’s work. Clearly, the popularity of fantasy sports has yielded new scholarship—scholarship that is fruitful and provides an entry point for this study.

These projects highlight the connection between fantasy football and real life, but they do not provide a sufficient description of the fantasy football community they are studying.

In order to describe this speech community, I will employ a method that combines the necessary theoretical and methodological frameworks to answer my research questions. I approach this study as an ethnographer of communication and ground my work in the theoretical framework of speech codes theory. Methodologically, I employ an adaptation to the metaphor/cluster analysis outlined by Foss (2009). I will provide a more thorough description of my methodology in the next chapter.

Chapter 3

Methodology

Method Overview

In order to adequately answer my research questions, it was necessary to ground my work in a suitable theoretical and methodological framework. Given the scope of my questions, I will be using the ethnography of communication and speech codes theory as my theoretical framework in order to effectively examine the fantasy football speech community. I will first begin by detailing the preliminary study that led to my current investigation. I then provide a brief overview of speech codes theory and how it is situated within and informs my methodology. This will be followed by a discussion of metaphor analysis and the specific way it was employed for my project. I will then discuss the specifics of my data collection and analysis, followed by a sample data display for the reader to review.

Preliminary Theorizing

Prior to formulating my research questions and problems, I conducted a generative critique on the September 5th episode of the *ESPN: Fantasy Focus Football* podcast. I listened to the podcast following Foss's (2009) process of generative criticism. She describes this process as essential in generating units of analysis without utilizing a previously developed method. Moreover, this criticism followed the foundational approach of the ethnography of communication that prioritizes the speech community and the data that emerges from the community.

After encountering the artifact, I coded it in general by entering any figure of speech or phrase that was directed toward a player, team, position group or coach. It was

during this coding that figurative language emerged as being an integral theme throughout the episode. More specifically, three major themes emerged (animals, war, and machines), and figurative language was used to discuss players, teams, position groups and coaches. From this preliminary inquiry, I gained insight into the communicative conduct of fantasy football experts, specifically their rampant use of metaphors. This allowed me to formulate the research problem and questions for the current study, and also led to my selection of metaphor criticism as my primary method. Thus, whenever I discuss the methodology and methods used, I am referring to the current study that followed my preliminary coding

Theoretical Framework

Ethnography of Communication

This study is couched in the theoretical frameworks of the ethnography of communication and speech codes theory. This theoretical and methodological approach to cultural communication is grounded in the interpretative paradigm (Philipsen & Coutu, 2005). Philipsen's (1992) theoretical scheme establishes the notion that in order to "understand speaking in a particular speech community, one must come to understand how it is culturally shaped and constituted" (p. 7) With regard to the communication acts and behavior that will be analyzed, speech codes theory (Philipsen, Coutu, & Covarrubias, 2005) provides a suitable framework for my theoretical and methodological assumptions. Philipsen, Coutu and Covarrubias (2005) explain speech codes theory in the following:

Grounded in the observation of communicative conduct in particular times,
[speech codes theory] posits a way to interpret or explain observed

communicative conduct by reference to situated codes of meaning and values, and provides a general understanding of communicative conduct. (p. 56-57)

Although the ethnography of communication and speech codes theory typically are applied to face-to-face communication, specifically observation, both theories establish a framework for exploring and understanding the communication acts and behaviors occurring and co-occurring in media, specifically podcasts. Moreover, given the interdependent relationship between fantasy football analysts and fantasy football players, these two theories provide a substantial set of standards for observing this communication in a way that reflects the cultural communication in fantasy football. Finally, the ethnography of communication and speech codes theory are concerned with communicative conduct and the terms and meanings, rules, and premises that characterize this communicative conduct. In terms of the fantasy football speaking community, metaphors emerged as a primary linguistic tool used in communicative conduct, and thus, I decided that I would also employ metaphoric criticism to answer my research questions.

Metaphoric Criticism

In order to answer *RQ2*'s aim of outlining the rules of metaphor use and *RQ3*'s focus on the construction of fantasy football as a social world, it is necessary to understand how and when metaphors are used and to what end. In order to answer these questions surrounding metaphor use in fantasy football, the method employed to determine the intended message(s) or tenor (Foss, 2009) of these metaphors was a variation of a metaphor/cluster analysis. Metaphoric analysis seeks to understand the

primary message in an artifact by understanding the reality being addressed through the metaphor.

The fundamental tenets of a metaphor are the tenor and the vehicle as outlined by Richards (1936). The tenor is the primary subject being addressed and the “vehicle is the mechanism or lens through which the topic is viewed” (p. 96). In his criticism of Richards’s work, Douglass (2000) also praised some of the stronger points behind the model in the following statement:

The great strength of Richards’ [tenor-vehicle] model, ambiguities notwithstanding, is that it represents a pragmatic perspective, one that encourages inquiry into how metaphor means... Richards’ model directs our attention to linguistic and conceptual interplay, the step-by-step process by which metaphors are experienced. In this capacity, it serves as a link between the theory of interactionism and its application in criticism. (pp. 420-421)

Because metaphor use was an integral element of the podcasts, I utilized a more detailed method for metaphor categorization that extended beyond the vehicle-tenor model proposed by Richards (1936) and followed more closely to that outlined by Foss (2009).

Guided by Foss, the initial step was an examination of the artifact to understand the context and “dimensions.” The second step entailed isolating the metaphors present throughout the podcasts. Once the metaphors present in the podcasts were found, the next step called for them to be sorted “into groups according to vehicle or tenor.” The final step and end result of this process is the discovery of the explanation for the artifact. However, as I will discuss later in this chapter, because of the subject matter, I found it necessary to categorize the metaphors in more detail, particularly given how often

analysts were using metaphors in their discussion of players, teams, and coaches. In addition to this metaphoric analysis, I used a particular tenet of cluster analysis to categorize the metaphors that were used.

Kenneth Burke (1957) explained that each communication act serves as an indication of an individual's motives. Thus, to assess these motives, a researcher can examine a communicative act to derive understanding of motive. Cluster analysis seeks to understand the link between ideas and the concepts of the artifact that are interdependent upon each other. However, the only facet of cluster analysis that was used for this study was employed during my data analysis and is connected to the first step of cluster analysis.

The first step in the cluster analysis process is to identify the key terms in the artifact. Foss (2009) argues that the most crucial elements to use are frequency and intensity. Foss argues that, if a word or phrase is used often in an artifact or if it used in a forceful way or critical moment, it is most likely a key term for the speaker. The second step involves identifying the words that cluster around the key terms. Finally, the third step seeks an explanation for the artifact or the meaning behind the artifact. For this study, the frequency and intensity functions of a cluster analysis were used on the 1,836 metaphoric entries that emerged from the 32 podcast episodes. However, in order to better clarify this notion of intensity, I use Carbaugh's (1988) value of something being "deeply felt." Carbaugh defines something deeply felt as something that must "enact, invoke, or create, an ethos that is felt intensely" (p. 38). By utilizing this variation of a metaphor/cluster analysis, the explanation for the artifact, or the overall meanings, as well as metaphor use patterns were found.

Data Selection

With the dearth of literature surrounding fantasy football, I felt it was necessary to approach the text in a way that would allow for understanding and constructing fantasy football as a social world. While there would be a benefit to studying the rules and premises that govern communicative conduct in fantasy football by observing an actual league, the slight variations that can occur from league to league make it difficult to approach the study of this speech community in that way. Given this dynamic nature of the fantasy football speech community, I decided the most effective way to examine this community was to focus on fantasy football experts. Rather than looking at static texts like magazines or television parodies like *The League*, I elected to focus my examination on two popular fantasy football podcasts, particularly because these analysts are also part of the fantasy football community and because of the large audience they communicate to and with.

Is This the Real Life? Is This Just Fantasy?

“ESPN: Fantasy Focus Football Podcast” as a Text for Analysis

This media text was selected for its popularity, which was determined by its ranking on Apple’s iTunes media application. These rankings are determined by the number of downloads a podcast receives. The podcast rankings are somewhat flawed because some podcasts have five to six episodes per week while others only have one or two. Moreover, there is the possibility that some individuals simply download the podcast and do not listen to it. However, after much consideration, the iTunes ranking was the one of the best criteria to use for determining which fantasy football podcast would be the best text for analysis.

The first podcast that was selected was *ESPN: Fantasy Focus Football Podcast*, an ESPN podcast that has been airing since 2007. At the time of my text selection, October 2014, not only was this podcast the highest-ranking fantasy football podcast on iTunes, but it was also the seventh most downloaded podcast in the “Sports & Recreation” section of iTunes podcasts. This podcast is co-hosted by Matthew Berry and Nate Ravitz, and there is one podcast hosted by Berry and ESPN football analyst Field Yates. Daniel Dopp produced the specific podcast episodes I analyzed. On some episodes, Stephania Bell, a licensed physical therapist, also participates and provides updates and insights on injured NFL players. The podcast airs Monday through Friday from August to January except for holidays, and the hosts cover a variety of topics throughout the week. However, they cover the same topics on Fridays and Mondays each week. On Fridays, they review the performances by players during the Thursday night game and preview all the games for Sunday. On Mondays, they review the games played on Sunday and preview the Monday night game. In addition to the podcasts they air during the NFL and fantasy football seasons, they also air throughout the year after key NFL events, such as NFL free agency and the NFL draft.

“Fantasy Feast: Eatin’” Podcast as a Text for Analysis

After coding one episode of *Fantasy Focus*, I determined this study required a deeper examination of the fantasy football speech community and decided to add another text for analysis. I wanted to select a podcast that differed from the *Fantasy Focus* in order to obtain a broader segment of the fantasy football speech community. The *Fantasy Feast: Eatin’* podcast differed for a number of reasons. First, while the *Fantasy Focus* has been on for eight years, *Fantasy Feast* was in its first year of production. Second,

Fantasy Feast is not affiliated with any of the major sports websites/companies (i.e. ESPN, Yahoo!, NFL, etc.). They are sponsored by the daily fantasy website Draft Kings, but are not regulated by a larger entity like the NFL or ESPN. Finally, it is the only non-affiliated fantasy football podcast that has a former NFL player as well as a fantasy football analyst.

The hosts of the show are Ross Tucker and Evan Silva. Tucker is a former NFL offensive lineman, and labels himself a journeyman, which means he was an average to slightly above average player who played for a number of teams. He is also a first time player of fantasy football. His co-host is Evan Silva, the senior football editor for Rotoworld, a popular fantasy sports website responsible for providing articles and rankings on a number of fantasy sports. The podcast airs twice a week every week, and typically air every Wednesday and Thursday. One episode entails previewing all the fantasy relevant players from AFC teams, and the other episode discusses the fantasy relevant players from NFC teams.

Data Collection

Because there are different segments/topics, it was necessary for me to select episodes that were dedicated to both how the experts expected players to perform and the discourse they used to describe a player and his performance. Moreover, I wanted to ensure that I had the same number of episodes for each podcast. Because *Fantasy Feast* only uploads two episodes every week, I had to select two episodes of the *Fantasy Focus* to examine for my analysis. For that reason, I decided to listen to the Friday and Monday episodes as they present the most thorough discussion of NFL players, teams and coaches.

In addition to the selection of podcasts, I had to determine which episodes I should code and analyze. After my preliminary coding, I decided the most beneficial episodes would come from week eight, the midpoint of the NFL regular season, to week 16, which is typically the week of the fantasy football championship for most leagues. This would allow for some players to have a reputation with the analysts given their performance and would allow for an analysis of metaphor use during the regular season of fantasy football and the playoffs.

Data Analysis

In order to analyze the data, I chose to extend the process of metaphoric criticism to account for the pertinent information surrounding each metaphor. Thus, rather than simply gathering the vehicle and tenor for each metaphor, I chose to include the following information: (1) metaphor, (2) player, (3) player's position, (4) player's team, (5) which analyst was speaking, (6) the context of the metaphor, (7) whether the metaphor was intended to be positive or negative for that player, (8) the episode date, and (9) which week of the NFL season the episode aired. This information allowed for a thorough analysis of metaphor use by applying the cluster analysis function of frequency and intensity. For an example of how the data looked in a chart, I have provided tables 3.1, 3.2, and 3.3.

Table 3.1

	Animals
Metaphor	Stud
Player	Arian Foster
Position	Running back
Team	Houston Texans
Analyst	Evan Silva
Context	Discussing the way Foster has been playing throughout the season; metaphor for a player who plays exceedingly well on a consistent basis
Positive/Negative	Positive
Episode Date	October 30
NFL Week	Week 9

Table 3.2

	Monstrosities
Metaphor	Athletic freak
Player	Latavius Murray
Position	Running back
Team	Oakland Raiders
Analyst	Matthew Berry
Context	Discussing Murray's physique, natural abilities and skills (speed, size, and strength)
Positive/Negative	Positive
Episode Date	November 21
NFL Week	Week 12

Table 3.3

	Fire
Metaphor	Dumpster fire
Player	Washington team
Position	Team
Team	Washington
Analyst	Evan Silva
Context	Metaphor for there being no fantasy relevant players on the team; also for a team that is just overall a bad team
Positive/Negative	Negative
Episode Date	November 20
NFL Week	Week 12

Role of the Researcher

In terms of the subject of study, I admit my affinity for fantasy football. As I previously stated, my participation in fantasy football has extended beyond being a casual user. I participate in a number of season-long leagues, enter in weekly contests, and provide fantasy football advice through my own website. It is for this very reason why I was so drawn to delineating the communicative conduct that defines the social world of fantasy football. While many have taken on the academic endeavor of searching for the power differences in the way fantasy football owners “use” NFL players, there has not been a communicative examination to determine what actually constitutes fantasy football as a social world. With 33 million people participating in fantasy football, it seems careless to ignore this large of a speech community. Thus, despite my interest in the hobby of fantasy football, this scholarly endeavor is focused on understanding the means of communication of fantasy football as a social world so that future studies on the subject may benefit.

In terms of my approach as a scholar, I consider myself an ethnographer of communication. As a scholar, I feel the only defining voice of a community is that community itself. That is, a community should be understood on its own terms (Philipsen, 1992). Whether it is through direct communication or the intrinsic speech codes utilized, there is no better way to understand, predict and explain a particular community than by allowing that community to explain and express itself. It is this emic analysis (Carbaugh, 1991) that drives me towards the ethnography of communication and speech codes theory as my preferred theoretical and methodological approaches, and why I consider myself an ethnographer of communication. It is why, despite the variety of

methods I may use (i.e. metaphor analysis), I still approach my research as an ethnographer of communication.

Finally, in terms of my discussion and analysis, I should preface each by noting that when necessary, I provide the city and mascot of the NFL team discussed. However, this is different when speaking about the Washington football team. I feel the team's mascot is offensive, racist, and, should be changed, so thus, I refuse to use it in this academic endeavor. Some may argue that this decision breaches my stance as an ethnographer of communication given my responsibility to accurately represent and share the communicative behavior of the community. However, because I elected to code for metaphors rather than conducting a full transcription of the podcasts, I am not removing the terminology from the speakers I am analyzing (the fantasy football experts). Rather I use my own voice to describe the NFL football context needed to understand the fantasy football context and metaphors used by the fantasy football analysts. This provides me with the agency to maintain my position on the Washington name and mascot. Given this position, I will simply call them Washington in this paper.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I created a method comprised of an adaptation to metaphor/cluster analysis couched in the ethnography of communication and employed it to analyze 32 total podcasts comprised of 16 episodes from two different fantasy football podcast series. In terms of the context provided in my analysis, all statistics, player information and game information were found through the NFL's official website (National Football League, 2015). Whenever I discuss a player's productivity (i.e. rushing yards, receiving yards, touchdowns, etc.), unless otherwise noted, I am referring to the 2014-2015 NFL

season. This combination of theories and methods were utilized to determine the rules for metaphor use in terms of the communicative conduct for fantasy football experts. This in turn was used to discover how the discourse used by fantasy football experts serves as a site for the construction of fantasy football as a social world. I hope the findings of this study will serve a dual purpose of 1) establishing fantasy football as a relevant speech community and thus a crucial locus of study and 2) uncovering the communicative codes of conduct that define an aspect of this speech community.

Chapter 4

Findings

By employing an adaptation of metaphoric/cluster analysis couched in the ethnography of communication, I examined two fantasy football podcast series to determine the means of speech for fantasy football experts. By determining these means of speech, the rules for metaphor use can be outlined, which will allow for the construction of the social world of fantasy football. In order to find these means, premises, and rules, I coded 32 total podcasts for metaphors. In my effort to be as comprehensive as possible, I coded for any type of figurative language that could potentially be labeled as a metaphor. There were 1,836 total entries of figurative language between the two podcasts. There were 818 entries for the *ESPN: Fantasy Focus Football* podcast and 1,018 entries in the *Fantasy Feast: Eatin'* podcast. Then, based on frequency and intensity, I extracted 11 defined categories of metaphors from the data. I labeled these categories based on the content that emerged, and they include (1) zoomorphic metaphors; (2) fire metaphors; (3) commodity metaphors; (4) war metaphors; (5) monstrosity metaphors; (6) machine metaphors; (7) chaos metaphors; (8) container metaphors; (9) medical metaphors; (10) agricultural metaphors; and (11) sports metaphors. Finally, in terms of metaphor rules, 15 rules/patterns of metaphor use emerged from the data and will be discussed in the final chapter. Given the popularity and success of particular players in the NFL and fantasy football, any one player can and was mentioned in more than one category. In terms of the experts referenced throughout the chapter, please use table 4.1 as a guide.

Table 4.1

ESPN: Fantasy Focus Football	Fantasy Feast: Eatin’
Matthew Berry	Evan Silva
Nate Ravitz	Ross Tucker
Stephania Bell	
Field Yates	

Zoomorphic Metaphors

Zoomorphic metaphors, those that conceptualized players as animals, comprised the bulk of metaphors used in both podcasts. In the 32 podcasts I coded, there were 121 zoomorphic metaphors used to discuss players, teams, or the actions of players. In addition to being the most salient metaphor category, the most widely used metaphor was also a zoomorphic metaphor—“stud.” Although many people think of lions, tigers, bears, and similar ferocious animals when they think of American football and the mascots for various NFL teams (i.e. Detroit Lions, Cincinnati Bengals, Chicago Bears), these were not the predominant animals used to describe players. For the most part, the zoomorphic metaphors that were used centered on livestock or beasts of burden—possibly harkening back to a time when animals were a vital resource for maintaining land, transportation, and food.

With regard to the relationship between zoomorphic metaphors and player position, running backs were far and away the position group that was most often discussed using these metaphors. Out of the 119 instances where a zoomorphic metaphor

was utilized, 55 of those were used for running backs. Of those 55, the most commonly used metaphors were “stud,” “workhorse,” and “bell cow.”

Studs

In the 2014-2015 season, the Broncos were favorites to win their division and once again repeat their trip to the Super Bowl. In terms of fantasy football, quarterback Peyton Manning, wide receiver Demaryius Thomas, and tight end Julius Thomas were all viewed as great fantasy players at their respective positions. However, there was one other player from the Broncos who was expected to have a good season—running back Montee Ball. Entering his second season in the league, he was expected to begin the season as the starting running back. However, a combination of injury and poor production forced Ball out of the starting position, and back up running back Ronnie Hillman was given the start. Hillman did have some success in his games as the starting running back, but in week ten, third-string running back CJ Anderson was given the ball 17 times (carries/receptions) and produced 163 total yards and a touchdown. From that point on, Anderson was the starting running back for the Broncos, produced great NFL and fantasy football numbers, and was a reliable starter in fantasy football, which is the context needed to understand why fantasy football experts, Field Yates (Dopp, 2014, November 26) and Evan Silva (Tucker, 2014, December 4) referred to him as a “stud” in their discussion of his performances and production.

In terms of the actual word, *stud* is routinely used when discussing animal breeding (horses, dogs, ewes, etc.). Typically, the owner of a stud animal receives payment for allowing others to use that animal for breeding, which can be fairly profitable, depending on the quality and rating of the stud. This often occurs in certain

canine breeds like English bulldogs. The better quality animal, or the animal that can reliably produce will produce the higher fee for breeding. That said, fantasy football analysts are conceptualizing star NFL players as studs because of the profit (fantasy points) they can bring to their owner. The NFL player who has be the best talent/skills or the player who has been producing the most consistent number of high-scoring fantasy games will be classified as a stud.

This metaphor was predominantly used for running backs, but it should be noted that “stud” was also used for a number of other NFL positions. Three different fantasy analysts used this metaphor to talk about different players at different positions, including defensive players who are not typically included in standard fantasy football leagues. In each instance, the zoomorphic metaphor was used to essentialize the player by their skill, talent, abilities, and most importantly, reliability. The term *stud* also alludes to a sense of virility, further gendering these NFL players by how they perform as men, highlighting the physicality, aggressiveness, and brut strength of a player over their intellect.

In fantasy football, while it is important to look for underrated NFL players who have the potential to have a fantasy game that yields a high number of fantasy points in a single given week, it is much more sound to have players who consistently produce high fantasy numbers week-to-week based on their animalistic skills, talents, and abilities. In terms of what this metaphor means for the fantasy football community and constructing a winning team, this one-word term is loaded with context and provides fantasy football players with direction as to which players have a good combination of skill, talent, and consistency.

Bell Cows

While “stud” can and was used for more than one position, the “bell cow” metaphor was used exclusively for running backs. As previously mentioned, CJ Anderson became the primary back for the Broncos. In addition to being called a “stud” for his performance, Silva also said the Broncos had “ a big time, bell cow running back in CJ Anderson” (Tucker, 2014, December 17). Similarly, Silva discussed this season’s running back situation for the St. Louis Rams. Throughout the season, they struggled to find a reliable running back, which Silva found odd because in the 2013-2014 season, Zac Stacy had emerged as the primary running back for the team. In discussing that situation, Silva said Stacy was a “bell cow running back” last season (Tucker, 2014, November 12).

With regard to the term, a *bell cow* is defined by the bell it wears around its neck. This cow wears the bell because it is the one who leads the entire herd. The “bell cow” metaphor is used in a similar fashion—to define the leader of a group. Running backs have earned this metaphor based on the importance they have with regard to the success of their team. Each NFL team runs their own specific offense based on the talent and qualities of their offensive players, primarily their quarterback, running backs, wide receivers, and tight ends. Some teams use two or three different running backs equally because they each do a particular thing well (i.e. run, receive, block). However, for some teams with a talented and multidimensional running back, like the Denver Broncos, they allow one running back to get the majority of touches (carries and receptions) because they can do all things well. In this case, like CJ Anderson, these running backs are

referred to as “bell cows” because they are leading the running back group in playing time.

For the fantasy football community, knowing that a player has been deemed the “bell cow” is particularly important because there is a correlation many fantasy owners make between playing time and fantasy points. The longer an NFL player is on the field, the more opportunities he has to score fantasy points. Although the majority of running backs who have earned this metaphor are some of the best at their position, there are some who have earned it because of injury to other players on the team. Thus, if a sub-par running back were to become the starter because of injury to another player, they might receive the majority of playing time. By default, they would become the *bell cow* of the team, which would inform fantasy football owners that they should acquire that player.

Horses

As previously discussed, for NFL teams who have a strong, reliable running back, the offensive focus centers on that running back and the team getting the ball to that player as much as they can. For this reason, fantasy football analysts label these running backs as “horses” or “workhorses” because they are often the primary contributors on the offense, and they are the players who do most of the work in getting an offense from one side of the field to the other. For example, on the *Fantasy Feast* podcast, Silva and Tucker each took turns using zoomorphic metaphors to discuss Seattle Seahawks running back Marshawn Lynch in week 9, 10, and 11. In week 9, Silva argued the Seahawks should focus on winning through “feeding Marshawn Lynch” (Tucker, 2014, October 29). In week 10, Tucker referred to some of the struggles the Seahawks offense had, and

said Lynch was “still a horse” (Tucker, 2014, November 6). Finally, in week 11, Silva explained that the reason Seattle had been winning was because the team had “put the offense on the back of Marshawn Lynch” (Tucker, 2014, November 13). Tucker and Silva each spoke about Lynch as a horse that the team fed and then used for their benefit.

This is not the only time analysts discuss players in terms of how they can carry their team. In addition to the actual metaphoric labels used to discuss running backs, metaphoric verbs were often used that reified this burden-carrying beast quality. On a number of occasions, Silva discusses the fact that coaches need to “feed” the “rock” to a particular running back, a metaphor for giving the player the ball. Moreover, he and other analysts talk about running backs “carrying the load,” “carrying their team,” “eating yardage,” and teams “riding” a particular running back. In terms of the ramification for the fantasy football speech community, these metaphors, as well as the metaphors “stud” and “bell cow” were and are used to highlight the importance of having a good running back on a fantasy football team.

Vultures

In addition to the “stud,” “bell cow,” and “workhorse” metaphors, another common zoomorphic metaphor centered around the vulture. There was a frequent use by analysts on both podcasts of the phrase “vulture” as well as their own construction of the verb “vulturing.” For example, Trent Richardson began the season as the starting running back for the Indianapolis Colts. Unfortunately for him and the Colts, he did not perform well, and eventually, veteran running back Ahmad Bradshaw became the starter. As the starter, the Colts coaching staff would allow Bradshaw to run with the offense all the way until they got near the goal line and then substitute in Richardson, who would score the

touchdown. In their week 11 against the Patriots, Bradshaw was injured and left the game. In his place, the Colts began giving the rushing attempts to third string running back Dan Herron. Herron did a great job getting the ball down the field throughout the game, but the coaching staff stuck with their pattern and would substitute in Richardson, who would score the touchdown. While discussing this game, Berry said, “Richardson vultures the touchdown” (Dopp, 2014, November 24). A similar situation occurred with Philadelphia Eagles running back LeSean McCoy, who in week 15, was substituted out a number of times, allowing back up running backs Chris Polk and Darren Sproles to each score a touchdown. In recap of the game, Berry said LeSean McCoy got “vultured not once, not twice, but three times” (Dopp, 2014, December 15).

Vultures are often thought of as scavenger birds. They are known to wait until after a predatory animal has attacked, killed, and eaten their fill of another animal before approaching the dead carcass to pick at the scraps that are left. In a sense, they allow the stronger animal to do all the work, and then swoop in and get their reward. It is this characteristic that allows fantasy football experts to conceptualize NFL running backs as this type of bird.

As previously mentioned, good running backs are often coveted by both NFL and fantasy football teams. One reason for this is that often, when teams get in the red zone (20 yards from the end zone), they prioritize their run game. Moreover, teams rely on their running backs when they get even closer, particularly at the goal line. In fact, Goldner (2014) explains that, “teams on the 1-yard line have run the ball 73.97% of the time since 2000 and are successful 53.88% of the time. Teams passing from the 1-yard line have posted a 48.34% success rate” (para. 7). Thus, not only do teams run the ball

more often when they are on the goal line, but they are also more likely to score a touchdown if they run the ball than if they pass in the same situation.

Given this, there are some instances where one running back is used from the beginning of a drive and helps move the offense from one end of the field to the other. However, once the running back gets to the goal line, the coach will put in a different running back—often one that is bigger/stronger—and use that running back to score the touchdown. Using the second example from above, LeSean McCoy was used as a “workhorse” and was “vultured” by Chris Polk and Darren Sproles.

In terms of what this means for fantasy football players, this metaphor is used to explain a particular context associated with a certain running back. LeSean McCoy was still a good fantasy running back, and his owners were still starting him on their teams. However, this metaphor serves as a warning that owners should not expect touchdowns to always go to the player who continually gets “vultured.” In addition to these animal-specific metaphors, there were also some relevant action metaphors that also had animalistic traits.

Zoomorphic Action Metaphors

As the categories highlight, many successful NFL players are conceptualized as animals using specific metaphors. As previously mentioned, the use of metaphors often creates a connection between the metaphor used and the identity of a thing or person for which the metaphor is used. Similarly, their actions are discussed using zoomorphic metaphors, buttressing the gendered identity constructed through strength and virility, and maintaining the conceptualization of NFL players as animals.

Given that many NFL teams are focusing their offensive efforts on passing the ball, it has become difficult for NFL running backs to rush for 100 yards, a feat that came much easier even a decade ago. However, in week 11 of the 2014-2015 season, the Pittsburgh Steelers played against the Tennessee Titans. In that game, Le'Veon Bell ran the ball 33 times for 204 yards, averaging 6.2 yards-per-carry, and scored one touchdown. Two weeks later, Evan Silva discussed Arian Foster and his upcoming game against the Titans. In his recommendation for starting Foster against Tennessee, he explained that in week 11, "Le'Veon Bell shredded them" (Tucker, 2014, November 27). In week 10, Matthew Berry explained that Tennessee Titans quarterback Zach Mettenberger could have a good game against the Baltimore Ravens because Pittsburgh Steelers quarterback Ben Roethlisberger "took 'em apart" in week 9 (Dopp, 2014, November 7). In advising fans to start Philadelphia Eagles running back LeSean McCoy in week 15, Evan Silva explained that McCoy "ripped up Dallas on Thanksgiving" (Tucker, 2014, December 10). Another example of this is in week 15 when Silva predicted Peyton Manning (QB) to have a good game against the San Diego Chargers. He said, "I think Manning picks them apart" (Tucker, 2014, December 10).

These types of metaphors allude to the violent behavior of a wild animal. In some cases, these fantasy analysts conceptualize a player's success as an animal attacking a weaker species and having its way with it, and other times, particularly with quarterbacks, player success is conceptualized as a vicious animal that is picking apart its prey, piece by piece. These verbal metaphors maintain the conceptualization of NFL players as animals and communicate to fantasy football owners both the success of some players and the potential poor performance by others.

Intensity Over Frequency

While the previously mentioned zoomorphic metaphors were used routinely, and for similar situations and players, there were some zoomorphic metaphors used that were more intense, or struck me differently than some of the others.

Fantasy Goat

One metaphor that is specific to the *ESPN Fantasy Focus Football* podcast is “fantasy goat.” It is even included on the show’s glossary, which they have and maintain on their website. On the website, it is defined as “a player who is either underperforming or is the lone person on a team to not perform in a big game.” Although this metaphor was not used often, in week 13, it was used by Matthew Berry to conceptualize one of the best tight ends in the league, Jimmy Graham (Dopp, 2014, December 1). The New Orleans Saints faced the Pittsburgh Steelers, and in that game, the Steelers focused their defensive efforts on Saints tight end Jimmy Graham. Their strategy worked, and not only did Graham not score, he was not even targeted by quarterback Drew Brees who threw for 257 yards and five touchdowns. In this case, while the majority of the Saints offensive players had some fantasy success, Graham scored zero fantasy points. This warranted the use of the “fantasy goat” metaphor created by Berry and Ravitz.

Insects

The other two metaphors that were different in their intensity used insects as the conceptualization tool. In his explanation of which Patriots wide receiver would have the most success in week 13 against the Packers, Silva explained that the larger receivers and tight end Rob Gronkowski would most likely be more productive. He then called Julian Edelman a “5 foot 9 little jitterbug” (Tucker, 2014, November 27). This metaphor

focused on Edelman's size, speed, and the fact that he is often used in specific ways in the Patriots offense. Silva also used an insect metaphor in week 14 to discuss Chris Johnson (RB), a polarizing player who had three successful NFL seasons followed by three inconsistent ones that made him difficult to rank in terms of fantasy football. The 2014 season was his first with the New York Jets, and he never established himself as a reliable fantasy option. Thus, when discussing Johnson's 105-yard rushing game against Miami in week 13, Silva said, "the cockroaches come out at night," explaining that this type of production came at a time when fantasy owners were not paying attention and not expecting it (Tucker, 2014, December 4). This particular metaphor was one of the most intense given the conceptualization used for the player. Cockroaches are seen as the lowest of the low in societal terms, and the term conceptualizes the player as being gross, disgusting, and an overall unnecessary vermin.

Fire Metaphors

There were 86 metaphors that alluded to fire in some fashion. Evan Silva of *Fantasy Feast* utilized these types of metaphors more often than any other expert on either podcast, and the primary metaphor in this category was conceptualizing a player lighting up either a person or a team/defense. The other most commonly used metaphors conceptualized players in relation to heat. Players were discussed as being hot, on fire or torching an opposing defense.

Lighting or Torching

In week 14, the Baltimore Ravens faced the Seattle Seahawks. On the *Fantasy Feast* podcast, Evan Silva and Ross Tucker discussed the fantasy relevance of Seattle quarterback Russell Wilson. Silva advised fantasy owners to start Wilson, and to justify

this opinion, he discussed the Ravens' defense. He referred back to when the Ravens played the Pittsburgh Steelers—a game where Steelers quarterback Ben Roethlisberger threw for 340 yards and six touchdowns. Rather than referring to statistics, Silva said, “Ben Roethlisberger lit them up” (Tucker, 2014, December 4). This metaphor is not position specific. In week 15, Silva discussed the poor performance by the Green Bay Packers' defense/special teams against the Atlanta Falcons and their number one wide receiver, and stated, “Julio Jones lit them up” (Tucker, 2014, December 11).

It is also used in terms of predicting how well an analyst thinks a player will perform. While previewing the games in week 13, Silva and Tucker discussed the match up between the Indianapolis Colts and Washington. During their discussion, Silva advocated for Colts quarterback Andrew Luck as a strong fantasy quarterback start, saying, “I think Andrew Luck lights them up” (Tucker, 2014, November 27). Similarly, Silva uses the phrase “torch” to discuss when a player performs well against a defense or a particular player. In week 15, in determining whether Seattle Seahawks quarterback Russell Wilson would have a good fantasy game against the San Francisco 49ers, Silva explained that in the previous week, the 49ers “just got torched by Derek Carr [quarterback for the Oakland Raiders]” (Tucker, 2014, December 10).

When something gets lit or torched, this often leads to its destruction. Similarly, this metaphor was used when an NFL player performed so well against a player or defense, that that player or defense was essentially destroyed. Within the fantasy football speech community, these terms are indicative of how well a player has performed in the past as well as how that analyst feels they will play in a given week. However, they also speak to the play of a particular defense. Although three of these examples are specific to

Roethlisberger, Jones, Luck, and Wilson, as the last one illustrates, it also indicates that Baltimore, Green Bay, Washington, and San Francisco have defenses that play poorly against quarterbacks (Baltimore, Washington, and San Francisco) and wide receivers (Green Bay). This has ramifications for fantasy football owners in terms of which NFL players they will start, and which they will add to their team for future games against poor defenses.

He's Hot and On Fire

Mark Ingram, running back for the New Orleans Saints, was entering his fourth year in the season. He was a first round draft pick by the Saints in 2011, but was never given the role as the primary back in the Saints offense. However, in the 2014-2015 season, he was given the opportunity and exceeded expectations. He averaged over four yards per carry and would have easily rushed for over 1,000 yards had he not been injured and missed three weeks. He rushed for at least 100 yards in two straight games, from week eight to week nine, and had scored six total touchdowns since the beginning of the season. Silva discussed Ingram's production on the field and his outlook for week ten, and said, "He's been so hot" and advocated for owners to start Ingram (Tucker, 2014, November 6). In week ten, Ingram rushed for 120 yards and caught three passes for 19 yards, so when Silva discussed Ingram's outlook for week 11, Silva called him "one of the hottest running backs in the league" (Tucker, 2014, November 13). Silva conceptualized Ingram in terms of fire or heat and used these metaphors to speak positively about his performance and production.

Matthew Berry also conceptualized success and productivity in terms of someone being hot or on fire. In week ten, he explained that Ben Roethlisberger was "red hot"

(Dopp, 2014, November 7) and used the same phrase to discuss Aaron Rodgers, quarterback of the Green Bay Packers, in week 13 (Dopp, 2014, November 26). These metaphors are indicative of a player who is playing well on a consistent basis. However, there was an exception to the rule. In week 12, Houston Texans quarterback Ryan Fitzpatrick threw for 358 yards and six touchdowns, one of the best games of his career. Following this game, Berry said Fitzpatrick was “on fire” (Dopp, 2014, December 1). However, Berry’s tone and the laughter that followed indicated the metaphor was used to mock Fitzpatrick, as it is not a type of game to regularly expect. Aside from exceptions like this, these metaphors served as a recommendation to continue starting an NFL player in fantasy football given their production and consistency.

Burning, Smoking and Roasting

There was one other pattern with regard to fire metaphors within the podcasts—conceptualizing one player setting fire to another via their performance on the field. This was often between a wide receiver and the defensive cornerback who was covering them, or between a quarterback and an opposing defense. For example, in week ten, the Tampa Bay Buccaneers faced the Atlanta Falcons. Silva discussed that game and explained that Buccaneers wide receiver Mike Evans was primarily covered by Falcons cornerback Robert Alford. In that game, Evans caught seven passes for 125 yards and a touchdown, so when Silva talked about the game, he said Robert Alford “got smoked by Mike Evans” (Tucker, 2014, November 13). Similarly, when Silva discussed the week nine game between the New Orleans Saints and the Carolina Panthers, Silva said Kenny Stills was “burning up Antoine Cason [cornerback for the Carolina Panthers]” (Tucker, 2014, November 6). Finally, Evans discussed the collegiate performance of Minnesota Vikings

wide receiver Cordarrelle Patterson to justify starting him against Washington. He argued that even in college, Cordarrelle Patterson “roasted David Amerson” (Tucker, 2014, October 29). Berry also used similar metaphors. When he discussed the performance of Tennessee Titans cornerback Blidi-Wreh Wilson, Berry advised fantasy owners to start their wide receivers against the Titans because Wilson “gets burned so much” (Dopp, 2014, December 5)

This type of fire metaphor follows the pattern in highlighting both the talent and performance of an offensive player like a wide receiver or quarterback, while simultaneously criticizing the performance of a defense or defensive player. For the fantasy football community, this metaphor provides insight into players who would not normally start on your team, but could potentially have value given the recent performance of a particular defense or defensive player.

Metaphor Crossovers

There were three different fire metaphors that could also be categorized into another metaphor theme. One metaphor that was used routinely by Silva was his way of advising fantasy owners to start a particular NFL player. When he discussed an NFL player who should be started, he would say that you should or can “fire him up.” Outside of sports, this metaphor is typically used when starting an engine, and thus, could be categorized either as a fire metaphor or a machine metaphor.

Similarly, Ravitz and Silva both conceptualized a player having a high-scoring game as a player “exploding.” Ravitz said this of Dallas Cowboys wide receiver Dez Bryant after his three-touchdown game in week 14 (Dopp, 2014, December 15). In his discussion of tight ends who could do well in week 13, Silva said Kansas City Chiefs

tight end Travis Kelce “is an explosive player” (Tucker, 2014, November 27) something he also said about Houston Texans wide receiver DeAndre Hopkins (Tucker, 2014, December 4) and Arizona Cardinals wide receiver John Brown (Tucker, 2014, November 26). This type of metaphor was clearly categorized as a fire metaphor given the connection between fire and explosions, but could have also fallen into the war metaphor category given the connection between battle and explosives. This conceptualizes players as weapons, and the particularly talented ones can be used as a fiery explosion served to destroy an opponent.

The final fire metaphor I want to highlight was unique because of its potential categorization into two categories as well as the intensity of the metaphor itself. In week 12, Silva discussed the match up between Washington and the San Francisco 49ers. At this point, Washington’s record was 3-7 going into the game, and running back Alfred Morris was the only fantasy relevant player on the team. Even then, his production had diminished as the season went on. This led Evan Silva to label the team a “dumpster fire” (Tucker, 2014, November 20). Not only is the imagery of that metaphor intense, but it could also be categorized as a fire metaphor and as a chaos metaphor. It takes an already desolate metaphor like a dumpster and amplifies it with the imagery of fire.

Commodity Metaphors

One metaphor category that was expected to emerge from the data was that of a type of commodity (i.e. money, gambling, stocks, etc.). Given some of the previous critical fantasy football scholarship by Hill (2010) and Kellam (2012), I was expecting to find metaphors that conceptualized player and player performance in terms of value and resources. There were 67 total commodity metaphors throughout the 32 podcasts, and

two primary themes emerged within the category—gambling and stocks. Players were either conceptualized as something you would wager on or as a stock that fantasy owners invest, trade, and/or dump.

Gambling and Wagering

Throughout the season, the Detroit Lions had established themselves as a team/defense that defended well against the run. In week 13, they faced the Chicago Bears whose running back, Matt Forte, was on his way to another 1,000-plus yard rushing season. In terms of fantasy, Forte, despite his sporadic low-scoring games, had established himself as a top running back. Nonetheless, the matchup against the Lions was a difficult one. On the *Fantasy Focus* podcast, Ravitz asked Berry if owners should try trading Forte given he was going to face the Lions in week 13 as well as week 16, the fantasy football championships for many leagues. Berry responded, saying, “I’m gonna roll the dice with him in week 16” (Dopp, 2014, December 1). Oddly enough, Berry used the same metaphor for Lions running back Joique Bell that very week. However, he was not worried about the opponent, but rather which Lions running back would receive more carries and receptions, Bell or Reggie Bush. Based on what he knew and how they had performed up to that point, Berry said he would “continue to role the dice with [Bell]” (Dopp, 2014, December 1).

Silva also used gambling metaphors when discussing players, but he conceptualized players and their potential for fantasy football in terms of bets being wagered. In week nine, the Kansas City Chiefs played the New York Jets, who had been one of the worst teams in the league at defending tight ends. That said, when Silva discussed this game, he said that Chiefs tight end Travis Kelce was a “good bet to score”

(Tucker, 2014, October 30). He also discussed Jaiquie Bell in week 13 as Berry did, saying that Bell was a “good bet for 18-plus touches” (Tucker, 2014, November 26).

Ravitz used gambling metaphors, but rather than focusing on the potential of a player and their expected production, he used these metaphors to express his confidence in a particular player and his belief that the player was emerging as a reliable option for fantasy football purposes. For example, in week eight, Oakland Raiders tight end Mychal Rivera caught seven passes for 83 yards. In week nine, he caught eight for 38 yards and two touchdowns. Based on these two performances as well as the opponent the Raiders were facing in week 10, the Denver Broncos, Ravitz explained to Berry that he was “all in on Mychal Rivera” (Dopp, 2014, November 7). Similarly, Minnesota Vikings wide receiver Charles Johnson had put together good to great performances in weeks 11 through 13, which allowed Ravitz to say that he “was all in” on Johnson as a legitimate fantasy relevant wide receiver (Dopp, 2014, December 8).

With the act of gambling, there is a certain amount of risk and reward at play. People wager their money on something they believe will benefit them financially. Similarly, when a fantasy football owner decides to wager on a particular player, they are making a decision based on what they feel will benefit their fantasy team the most. In the fantasy football speech community, these types of metaphors either warn owners that certain NFL players come with both risk and upside (rolling the dice and good bets) or that fantasy football owners can start believing in the reliability of a particular NFL player (being all in). These metaphors are of particular importance given that often fantasy football leagues have some type of monetary prize at stake for the winner of the

league. Thus, fantasy football experts are using gambling metaphors to discuss players they are using to gamble.

Are You Buying or Selling?

In addition to the gambling metaphors that are being used, analysts also conceptualized players as stocks or bonds that fantasy football owners can buy, sell, or trade. This was particularly evident on the *Fantasy Focus* podcast where they routinely used the metaphors “sell-high” or “buy-low.” For example, New Orleans Saints running back Mark Ingram started off the season with 60 rushing yards and two touchdowns in week one and 83 rushing yards and one touchdown in week two. He broke his hand in week two and missed the next three games. When he returned, he had a poor game against a tough Detroit Lions defense but followed that with a 172 rushing game with one touchdown against the Green Bay Packers in week eight. This led Stephanie Bell to label Ingram a “sell-high” based on his high-perceived value combined with his injury history (Dopp, 2014, October 31). In other words, given the combination of production and injury, Ingram’s value was at its highest, which meant fantasy football owners could get the most via trade at that point in the season.

The opposite of a *sell-high* is a *buy-low*. Baltimore Ravens running back Justin Forsett’s value in week nine is a prime example of what scenario would facilitate the use of the buy-low metaphor. Forsett’s production in terms of rushing yards and touchdowns had been inconsistent up to week nine. However, he had a few above average fantasy games, particularly in weeks six and seven. Given his potential for success as well as the poor performance he had in week eight, Ravitz deemed Forsett a “buy-low” (Dopp, 2014, November 3). His perceived value was such that a fantasy football owner could acquire

Forsett via trade with another team without having to trade away a high-value player to get him.

The “sell-high” and “buy-low” metaphors serve a vital purpose within the fantasy football speech community. The primary objective in fantasy football is to construct a winning team each and every week. In addition to the draft, trades and the waiver wire are the only avenues owners have to construct the best possible team. When an analyst labels a player as a “sell-high” or a “buy-low,” it provides some owners with sufficient evidence to either trade away or acquire a player.

Daily vs. Weekly Commodities

The majority of metaphors used are specific to standard fantasy football leagues that have teams compete for the first 12 weeks of the regular season, followed by the fantasy playoffs between weeks 13 and either 16 or 17, depending on the league. However, there was one metaphor used by Evan Silva that was specific to a different type of fantasy football league—daily. As previously mentioned, the key to daily fantasy football is to find a combination of high-priced NFL players and NFL players that are priced much lower but who have potential to exceed their perceived value.

This information is necessary to understand why Silva discussed an NFL player’s ability to “pay dividends.” For example, in week 15, the Baltimore Ravens played against the Jacksonville Jaguars. Silva explained that the Jaguars defense had performed poorly against the run, and that Jaguars quarterback Blake Bortles had turned the ball over to opposing defenses at least once per game. Given this information, he advised daily fantasy owners to start both the Ravens defense as well as Ravens running back Justin Forsett. Given the price of each one on daily fantasy sites, if they had big fantasy

performances, Silva claimed it “could pay big dividends” (Tucker, 2014, December 11). In other words, the profit (fantasy points) based on the Ravens’ defense and running back’s combined performance would exceed the price paid to use them in daily leagues. Silva used the same metaphor to encourage the use of Philadelphia Eagles wide receiver Jordan Matthews in daily leagues in week ten (Tucker, 2014, November 7) and discuss Oakland Raiders tight end Mychal Rivera’s performance in week 11 (Tucker, 2014, November 13).

This metaphor is specific to fantasy football owners who compete in daily fantasy leagues and essential given how much some fantasy football owners have invested in these contests. Entry fees run as high as \$5,300 and can pay first place upwards of one million dollars. For this speech community, understanding which players can “pay dividends” has ramifications that exceed beyond friendly competition. Thus, this metaphor holds a significant value for those within the speech community who participate in this type of fantasy football league.

War Metaphors

There were 61 metaphors that were categorized as being related to war in some fashion. Within this category, three primary themes emerged—strategy, weaponry, and battle. Some were specific to a team, while others were focused on individual players.

The Art of War

One of the most common metaphors within this category is not specific to a player but rather is used when discussing how one team might scheme or strategize against an opposing team given their strengths and weaknesses. Analysts on both podcasts discussed teams and defenses in terms of the way opposing teams might

“attack” them (either by running or passing the football). For example, in week 16, the Philadelphia Eagles faced Washington for the second time in the season. Silva explained that throughout the season, offenses had not had success running the ball against Washington given how strong their rush defense had been. That said, most teams that faced Washington either strategized for or eventually turned to passing the football more than rushing. Silva addressed this by saying most teams “attack [Washington] with the pass” (Tucker, 2014, December 18). When Silva discussed the Dallas Cowboys and the Chicago Bears in week 14, He explained that the “best way to attack the Cowboys is on the ground” (Tucker, 2014, December 3). He used this metaphor to advise fantasy owners to start Bears running back Matt Forte.

These scenarios highlight the way these metaphors are used. While analysts use certain metaphors to emphasize a player’s talents or a team’s weakness, these metaphors are used to create context for the opinions and rankings of the analyst. In week 15, Berry advocated for starting Buffalo Bills running back Fred Jackson in the Bills’ game against the Green Bay Packers. He believed Buffalo would run the football often with Jackson, so he argued, “That’s the way to attack Green Bay” (Dopp, 2014, December 12). While Berry’s experience as an analyst should suffice for his rankings of Jackson, he used this metaphor to create justification for his rankings and confidence in Jackson.

Weapons of Fast Production

Another primary theme within this category is the conceptualization of NFL players as weapons. For example, when Berry of the *Fantasy Focus* podcast discussed the Philadelphia Eagles’ week 13 game against the Dallas Cowboys, he advocated for starting Eagles quarterback Mark Sanchez by saying he had “a lot of weapons” (Dopp,

2014, November 26). He then listed wide receivers Jeremy Maclin and Jordan Matthews, tight end Zach Ertz, and running back LeSean McCoy. In that same week, Silva of the *Fantasy Feast* podcast discussed the exact same game, advising owners to start Mark Sanchez because “he’s got good weapons” (Tucker, 2014, November 26). These two analysts used the exact same metaphor to discuss the same player and the same context, both advocating for Sanchez as a viable fantasy option.

While the weapon metaphor is impactful, analysts were often more specific when discussing certain players. Berry discussed the Baltimore Ravens’ week ten game against the Tennessee Titans and began discussing the match up between the Ravens’ speedy wide receiver Torrey Smith, and the Titans defense that had struggled against the pass. He then said that Smith was a “threat to catch a deep bomb,” meaning that there was always a chance that Smith could race down the field, outrun the defense and catch a long touchdown pass (Dopp, 2014, November 10). Similarly, Silva discussed the Cleveland Browns’ primary receiving options, wide receiver Josh Gordon and tight end Jordan Cameron, and called them “the Browns’ big guns” (Tucker, 2014, November 27). Finally, while Berry discussed the Pittsburgh Steelers’ strategy against the New Orleans Saints in week 13, Berry explained “the Steelers intended to keep Jimmy Graham from going off” (Dopp, 2014, December 1). He conceptualized Graham as a weapon, specifically a bomb that could “go off” and destroy the Steelers defense.

This type of metaphor is indicative of the competitive nature of the fantasy football speech community. These players are discussed as weapons that NFL teams use against one another. In turn, fantasy players begin conceptualizing these players as weapons they use themselves in their own match ups.

War on the Gridiron

The final theme within this war category is battle itself. In week ten, the San Francisco 49ers faced the New Orleans Saints. Silva predicted this to be a high-scoring game because of the productivity of the offenses, calling it a “shootout” (Tucker, 2014, November 6). Similarly, Berry expected a “shootout” from the Chicago Bears and the Tampa Bay Buccaneers in week 12, but for a different reason. He reasoned that both teams had such poor defenses that the offenses would be able to have success in scoring points (Dopp, 2014, November 21).

In both these examples, the metaphor of a “shootout” was used to conceptualize the game as two armies exchanging fire on the battlefield. For the fantasy football community, a shootout is viewed as something positive because if teams are scoring early and often, players on each team have a strong likelihood of scoring fantasy points.

There are other metaphors surrounding a battle or fighting that were used during the podcasts. In week 12, Silva discussed Minnesota Vikings rookie quarterback Teddy Bridgewater and explained that after getting sacked a number of times, Bridgewater often looked scared and hesitant when throwing the football, claiming Bridgewater looked “shell-shocked” (Tucker, 2014, November 20). When Berry discussed the week 14 game between the Atlanta Falcons and the Green Bay Packers, he discussed the Falcons, saying, “They’re going to get destroyed” (Dopp, 2014, December 8). Finally, Silva discussed the Dallas Cowboys’ game against Washington in week eight where Cowboys running backs DeMarco Murray and Lance Dunbar each put up good rushing yards. However, rather than focusing on the Cowboys, Silva discussed Washington saying their defense “got gashed” (Tucker, 2014, October 29).

These metaphors are indicative of a particular characteristic of the fantasy football speech community. Teams are in shootouts, running backs are gashing defenses, and receivers are catching bombs. These are not soft, subtle or delicate metaphors. The speech used to communicate within this community is aggressive and violent, similar to the gendered communication used to discuss the violent nature of men in sports.

Monstrosity Metaphors

One metaphor that nearly each analyst used throughout the 32 podcasts conceptualized players as possessing qualities of a superhuman or monster. There were 48 monstrosity metaphors found in the data set, and the three primary themes within this category were “beasts,” “freaks,” and “monsters.”

Beasts

The “beast” metaphor was used routinely in a similar fashion as “stud” and for a similar effect. As mentioned in previous categories, Saints running back Mark Ingram had high-scoring games, both in real life and in fantasy, in weeks eight and nine. He had more than 100 all-purpose yards in each game and scored three touchdowns over those two weeks. Given his production, Berry discussed Ingram’s potential for week ten, and in that discussion, he called Ingram a “beast” (Dopp, 2014, November 10). In that same two-game stretch, Philadelphia Eagles wide receiver Jeremy Maclin caught 18 total passes for 345 yards and four touchdowns, which led Berry to call him a beast as well (Dopp, 2014, November 3). In these examples, the combination of an NFL player’s talent, production, and reliability was conceptualized as an animal/human hybrid.

Ross Tucker also used the “beast” metaphor, but for a different reason. In week 13, Tucker discussed the New York Jets and their running backs. He discussed running

back Chris Ivory and labeled him a “beast” (Tucker, 2014, November 27). In this instance, he used the metaphor to conceptualize the running style of Ivory. He explained that Ivory runs aggressively and often runs over opposing defenders. As mentioned before, this metaphor is used to emphasize a player’s talent, production and reliability. However, what is different with this metaphor than the “stud” metaphor is the way in which Tucker conceptualized Ivory and Ivory’s running style. Ivory was not viewed as a particularly reliable player. While he did have a good fantasy game in the game Tucker referenced, the “beast” metaphor was used to conceptualize his skills, and not so much his talent or consistency.

Freaks

In week 13, the Atlanta Falcons faced the Arizona Cardinals. In that game, Falcons wide receiver Julio Jones caught 10 passes for 189 yards and a touchdown. He followed that in week 14 by catching 11 passes for 259 yards and a touchdown against the Green Bay Packers. This led Evan Silva to call Jones a “freak of nature” (Tucker, 2014, December 10). He used that same metaphor for Tampa Bay Buccaneers wide receiver Mike Evans after Evans caught 21 passes, for over 450 yards and five touchdowns over a three-week span (Tucker, 2014, November 20). Berry tweaked the metaphor when he called Oakland Raiders running back Latavius Murray an “athletic freak” (Dopp, 2014, November 21) and Houston Texans wide receiver DeAndre Hopkins a “physical freak” (Dopp, 2014, November 26). In addition to the production these four players had on the field, they also share a few other qualities. They are all over six feet tall (in fact most are 6’3” or taller), and each weighs over 200 pounds (National Football League, 2015).

The term *freak* is typically used to discuss something that is not human, and is often used to speak negatively about a particular person or being. However, for the fantasy football speech community, the term *freak* does not hold a negative connotation. This metaphor is indicative of a player whose combination of size and talent make him abnormal. In this case, it is an abnormality that is celebrated and welcomed. It is a characteristic fantasy football owners are looking for from NFL players.

Monsters

“Monster” was the most commonly used metaphor in this category and was used for a similar effect as “beast” and “freak.” The distinguishing factor between the “monster” metaphor and the “freak” and “beast” metaphors is that size is not a requirement. For example, Indianapolis Colts wide receiver T.Y. Hilton is 5’9” and weighs 178 pounds. However, he had six games of over 100 yards receiving, two of which were over 150 yards. Thus, in week 15, when the Colts faced the Houston Texans, Berry explained that Hilton was a “monster play” given his recent production and the poor performance of the Texans’ passing defense (Dopp, 2014, December 12). Analysts used this metaphor when discussing a player having an incredibly productive game or to discuss a player who had been performing well and producing large numbers on a consistent basis.

There was also an instance of metaphor use similar to how Tucker conceptualized Chris Ivory as a “beast.” In week 15, Cincinnati Bengals running back Jeremy Hill rushed 25 times for 148 yards and two touchdowns. However, when Evan Silva discussed Hill’s outlook for week 16, he did not focus on Hill’s production but rather on his aggressive style of running, leading Silva to call him a “monster” (Tucker, 2014, December 17).

For the fantasy football speech community, metaphor use centered on beasts, freaks, and monsters is indicative of a player who is talented and produces good numbers on a consistent basis. A player performing in a way that exceeds human expectations is viewed as a positive characteristic. However, there were some “monster” metaphor uses that strayed from the norm. For example, one *Fantasy Focus*-specific metaphor is a “fantasy zombie,” a term that can be found on the podcast’s website. It is defined as a once-great fantasy player who returns to relevance after a prolonged period of being completely worthless. While this metaphor signifies a player having a productive fantasy game, it also speaks negatively of their typical fantasy production.

Machine Metaphors

There were 48 metaphors throughout the podcasts that conceptualized players as machines. One of the most commonly used metaphors by Evan Silva was the term “machine.” The second most common theme was discussing players as having qualities of a machine. Finally, often players were labeled as a specific type of machine or given a particular label that has machine-like qualities.

Man or Machine

Much like the “stud,” “beast,” and “monster” metaphors, the “machine” metaphor was used to conceptualize a player who is talented, had been producing strong fantasy numbers, and was reliable. For example, Houston Texans running back Arian Foster had a great fantasy football season, averaging 95 yards per game and almost five yards per carry. Despite some injuries that held him out of three games and hindered him from two others, he was one of the most reliable running backs in fantasy football. This led Silva to call Foster a “machine” in week nine of the NFL season (Tucker, 2014, October 30).

Similarly, Chicago Bears running back Matt Forte also had a great season, averaging over 100 total yards per game, and scoring ten total touchdowns. His continual success by rushing and/or receiving led Silva to label him a “machine” in his discussion of Forte’s game against the Vikings in week 11 (Tucker, 2014, November 13).

In addition to this machine metaphor, analysts also specified what type of machine some players were based on their performance. From week seven to nine, Pittsburgh Steelers rookie wide receiver Martavis Bryant scored at least one touchdown in each game. This led Silva to call him a “touchdown maker” leading up to the Steelers game against the New York Jets in week ten (Tucker, 2014, November 5). Similarly, Detroit Lions running back Joique Bell scored two touchdowns in weeks 13 and 14. In turn, when Silva discussed Bell’s outlook for week 15 against the Minnesota Vikings, he called him a “touchdown-scoring machine” (Tucker, 2014, December 10). However, not every player was conceptualized as a machine with a positive connotation.

If a player performed poorly on a consistent basis or followed a particular negative pattern for an extended period, this often lead fantasy football analysts to use the “machine” metaphor negatively. Jacksonville Jaguars rookie quarterback Blake Bortles played well during the preseason, but did not play in a regular season game until week three. Although his performance in terms of yardage and touchdowns varied throughout the season, Bortles turned the football over at least once either by fumble or interception in every game but one. In turn, Silva labeled him a “turnover machine” in week 12 (Tucker, 2014, November 20).

For the fantasy football speech community, this machine metaphor speaks both to the perception of the player as either positive or negative as well as the potential match

up a fantasy defense may have. For instance, in the previous example with Bortles, Silva called Bortles a “turnover machine” and then proceeded to advise fantasy football owners to start the Indianapolis Colts defense given Bortles’ propensity to turn the ball over.

These metaphors are also indicative of a certain pattern. Just as one expects a machine to function, as needed, each time it is used, fantasy football owners know what to expect from certain players.

Machine-Like Action

Some analysts used specific machine metaphors to conceptualize players; others used machine-like action metaphors for a similar effect. The St. Louis Rams defense and special teams served as a suitable example of this type of action metaphor. In week nine, they held the San Francisco 49ers to ten points. In week 11, they only allowed the Denver Broncos to score seven points, and in weeks 13 and 14, they prevented the Oakland Raiders and Washington from scoring any points at all. This streak of success led Evan Silva to discuss the Rams’ defense multiple times on the podcast between weeks 12 and 15. During that time, he said they had “shut down Peyton Manning,” “shut down Carson Palmer,” “crushed Colin Kaepernick,” and “shut down Alfred Morris and CJ Anderson” (Tucker, 2014, November 19; December 3; December 10). In each of these examples, Silva discussed the Rams as a machine that was used to crush or shut down other players. In fact, given that Silva used the “shut down” metaphor for Peyton Manning, CJ Anderson and Alfred Morris (players who were often ranked in the top 10 at their position), it could be argued that the Rams defense were discussed as a machine used to shut down the opposing team’s “touchdown machine.”

This type of action metaphor was also used for individual players. After starting the season by going over 100 receiving yards in four out of the first six games, Baltimore Ravens veteran wide receiver Steven Smith's production started to dwindle. In fact in the remaining ten games, he only came close to 100 yards twice, so when Ravitz discussed Smith in week 10, he said that Smith was "running out of steam" (2014, November 10). By week 16, when Smith was no longer a receiver fantasy owners could rely on, Ravitz claimed the decrease in production was because Smith "ran out of steam" as the season progressed (Dopp, 2014, December 22).

These metaphors gave machine-like qualities to players, and were used both positively and negatively. In some cases, a machine-like metaphor conceptualized an NFL player or a defense as a machine that both dominated opponents and also did so on a consistent basis. Other times, it was used as a way to discuss how a player, much like a machine, can still fall apart. Silva used this type of machine-like metaphor when he discussed Cincinnati Bengals running back Giovani Bernard. After being used as the Bengals's primary running back for the first eight weeks of the season, Giovani Bernard was injured and missed three games. During that time, backup rookie running back Jeremy Hill took over as the starter and kept that position even when Bernard was healthy. Silva agreed with this use of the Bengals running backs, and in week 14, when he discussed this situation, claimed Bernard was "not built to withstand 20 to 24 touches a game" (Tucker, 2014, October 30). He was arguing that Bernard was too small to handle as many carries and receptions as he was given and would be better suited as a back up used in specific situations. To prove this point, he used a machine-like metaphor to discuss Bernard's limitations, much like how machines come with certain

specifications in terms of weight and use. This type of metaphor draws a comparison to machines, allowing fantasy football owners to use the proper machine for each given week.

Gadgets and Gizmos

There were four specific metaphors used in the podcasts that conceptualized players as a specific type of machine or mechanism—ones that differed from the “turnover machines” and “touchdown making machines” previously discussed. One of the most commonly used machine-specific metaphors merges the first two metaphor types in this category—a “shutdown corner.” This metaphor was used so often, I was able to define it based on the context of the metaphor. I define it as a cornerback that can completely cover an opposing team's best receiver and prevent that receiver from being productive in terms of yards and scoring. Not every cornerback in the NFL is considered a “shutdown corner,” and it was a metaphor typically reserved for elite cornerbacks. For example, Berry used it to discuss Indianapolis cornerback Vonta Davis in weeks 11 and 15 and Minnesota Vikings cornerback Xavier Rhodes in week 15 (Dopp, 2014, November 14; December 12). This metaphor is of particular interest for the fantasy football community, because if the wide receiver of an owner's team is playing against a “shutdown corner,” that might be enough motivation to place that player on the team bench and start a different NFL player.

The other metaphor that was used by multiple analysts was the term “handcuff.” This is a fantasy football-specific metaphor used primarily to discuss running backs. As previously mentioned, having a productive and reliable running back is key in both NFL and fantasy football. That said, if a fantasy football owner happens to have one of the

better running backs on their team, it is wise to have the second string running back from that team as a precaution should the starting running back get injured. For example, as previously discussed, Houston Texans running back Arian Foster was one of the better running backs in the league. However, he missed three games and was hindered in two others because of injury. In the games he missed, Texans back up running back Alfred Blue was the starter and received more carries than any other running back on the team, which led Silva to label him Arian Foster's "handcuff" (Tucker, 2014, November 27). Berry said the same about Philadelphia Eagles running back Chris Polk. Polk had been receiving an increased workload as the season progressed, which in Berry's opinion, led to him being the "handcuff" to starter LeSean McCoy (Dopp, 2014, November 3).

Handcuffs are most commonly associated with law enforcement as a tool or machine used to "lock up" a perpetrator. Similarly, in fantasy football, a handcuff is used to "lock up" a particular team's top wide receiver or running back position. For example, if a fantasy football player were to own Texans running back Arian Foster, and Foster were to get injured, they would need his back up in order to "lock up" the Texans running back position. In this case, that player is Alfred Blue, making Blue the Arian Foster handcuff. In the podcasts that I analyzed, fantasy football analysts often used these metaphors as a warning to those fantasy football owners who had a reliable starting running back. Analysts who used this metaphor often used it congruently with a message, heeding owners to acquire the handcuff to their starting running back, whether it was by free agency or trade. Knowing which player serves as a handcuff is essential in constructing a good fantasy football team given how often NFL players get injured.

Intensity Over Frequency

The last two metaphors in this category are listed because of their intensity rather than their frequency. The first came in week nine when Berry and Ravitz were discussing how the Philadelphia Eagles coaching staff were using running back Darren Sproles. Sproles had a few productive games, but nothing reliable. Moreover, despite being a running back, he was often used more as a wide receiver or in other unconventional ways. This led Berry to label him a “gadget guy” (Dopp, 2014, November 3). In this instance, the use of “gadget guy” is not to allude to Sproles’ affinity for technology. Rather, Berry is using the metaphor to label Sproles a gadget—a tool you only use for a specific job. Berry used this metaphor as an argument for why Sproles was no longer a fantasy relevant running back, because the coaching staff was only using him for specific situations.

There was also a metaphor used exclusively on the *Fantasy Focus* podcast for football players who sporadically had a great game but typically did not perform very well—“fantasy Whac-a-mole,” taken from the arcade game Whac-a-mole where a player uses a padded mallet and attempts to hit the moles that pop up from the game board. This metaphor was created based on the difficulty some have in determining when a player will “pop up” and have a good game and when they will “disappear;” it was used to highlight a player who could potentially be good and have a productive game, but who could equally put up zero to few fantasy points. These final two metaphors are used to conceptualize players in a way that highlights their role and (in)consistencies. In the fantasy speech community, these high-context metaphors have larger implications in

terms of team construction and weekly lineups as neither metaphor conceptualizes an NFL player as being a reliable fantasy option.

Chaos Metaphors

Throughout the 32 podcasts that were analyzed, analysts used metaphors that alluded to some type of mess or disaster 42 times. I have labeled these types of metaphors as “chaos” metaphors. The analysts on *ESPN Fantasy Focus* mostly used them, but there were some used on *Fantasy Feast*. Three of the primary chaos metaphors that were used are specific to *ESPN Fantasy Focus*. They include the following: “fantasy quagmire,” “fantasy wasteland,” and “welcome to Dumpsville.” Despite being used frequently throughout the podcasts, these metaphors are not listed in the *Fantasy Focus* glossary and thus require further explanation.

Welcome to Dumpsville – Population: You

The 2014-2015 season marked Marques Colston’s ninth year in the league. While he had some success as the primary receiver on the New Orleans Saints, his productivity had trailed off in the 2013-2014 season. During the 2014-2015 season, Colston never re-established himself as a reliable fantasy wide receiver. In fact, in the second game of the season, he did not catch one pass. Colston’s below average productivity, along with his poor week nine performance, led Matthew Berry to say the following: “Welcome to Dumpsville” (Dopp, 2014, November 10). Berry and Ravitz used this phrase as a metaphor for when a player had performed poorly on a consecutive basis, creating a pattern. Based on that pattern, that player was no longer worthy of being on a fantasy football team roster and could be dropped to make room for a free agent player with more upside. Berry repeated this exact phrase the following week after Colston caught two

passes for 36 yards in week ten (Dopp, November 17). Colston was not the only wide receiver to have this metaphor used more than once in reference to their relevance in fantasy football.

Michael Crabtree of the San Francisco 49ers was entering his sixth year in the league and coming off a season that was plagued with injury. Although he was hoping to reassert himself as a productive and reliable NFL wide receiver, he never recorded a 100-yard receiving game all season and averaged only ten receiving yards per game. This led to Berry welcoming Crabtree to “Dumpsville” in week nine as well as week 10 (Dopp, 2014, November 3; November 10).

The importance of this metaphor lies in its meaning to listeners of the *Fantasy Focus*. While other metaphors were used to conceptualize the physique or talent of a particular player, this metaphor was indicative of both the value of the player for fantasy as well as what fantasy football owners should do in terms of their roster. When Berry or Ravitz used this metaphor about a particular NFL player, they were advocating for fantasy football owners to drop that player and look for one with more potential. Other metaphors might highlight the talent and skill of an NFL player, while others conceptualize the poor performance of players or teams, but this metaphor holds a stronger connection with regard to roster construction. Because owners often hold on to players to see if they ever become productive, this metaphor had a stronger meaning for owners, as it served as the final motivator to drop that player from their team.

Fantasy Wasteland

Based on their record, the Tampa Bay Buccaneers and the Tennessee Titans were the two worst teams in the league. However, what separated these two teams in terms of

fantasy football was the number of fantasy relevant players on each team. Tampa Bay had two wide receivers, Mike Evans and Vincent Jackson, who could be relied on consistently. In addition, throughout the season, depending on injury, you could start one of their running backs, such as Bobby Rainey or Doug Martin. However, the Titans' only fantasy relevant player was tight end Delanie Walker, and even he only had some weeks where he had good fantasy numbers. Thus, when discussing the fantasy relevant players for each game, Ravitz brought up the Titans, and Berry said the entire team was a "fantasy wasteland" (Dopp, 2014, November 10). He used this same metaphor in week 13 to discuss the Arizona Cardinals after their starting quarterback and running back were out for the season with injury (Dopp, 2014, December 1).

This metaphor was not just limited to teams. In some situations, due to injury or lack of reliable fantasy options, there were entire games that were labeled "fantasy wastelands." In week 11, the San Diego Chargers played the Oakland Raiders, and given the lack of production by offensive players on both teams, Ravitz determined there were no viable fantasy starters in the entire game and labeled it a "fantasy wasteland" (Dopp, 2014, November 14). Similarly, when the Vikings played the Panthers in week 13, Ravitz also deemed that game a "fantasy wasteland" (Dopp, 2014, November 26).

Much like the previous metaphor, the gravity of this metaphor lies in the effect it has on fantasy owners. Although some owners may have reliable starters for their team, others, due to player injury or bye weeks (the one week during the regular season when an NFL team does not play) are scrambling and struggling to find quality starters for their team on any given week. So when an analyst claims that an entire game is a fantasy wasteland, for many listeners of the podcast, it negates any of the players in that game as

relevant fantasy options. Thus, for the fantasy football speech community, this two-word metaphor strongly impacts what potential actions will be taken on any given week.

Fantasy Quagmire

After week one of the season, Adrian Peterson, starting running back for the Minnesota Vikings, was indicted on a felony count of reckless or negligent injury to a child. After the team conferred with the league, Vikings owners, brothers Zygi Wilf and Mark Wilf, placed Peterson on the NFL exempt list, which barred him from all team activities until the case was resolved (Werder, Goessling, & Associated Press, 2014)¹.

From a team standpoint, the Vikings were left with veteran running backs Matt Asiata and Joe Banyard and rookie running back Jerick McKinnon. Later in the season, the team signed Ben Tate. These four running backs each have a different style of running, and each running back had some type of success throughout the season. That said, in a standard fantasy football league, fantasy football owners need to start at least two running backs, and if an owner were looking for the best Vikings running back to start, it became more difficult as the season went on. This sequence of events led to Berry calling the Vikings running back group a “fantasy quagmire” in weeks 13 and 14 (Dopp, 2014, December 1; December 5).

¹ There were and are clear social and moral implications to this situation. I do not want to casually gloss over this incident, as it deserves attention for a variety of reasons. However, it is not the focus of this study, but it is necessary to understand these events to know the effect on the Vikings as well as what this meant for fantasy football.

The actual term *quagmire* is used to describe a muddy area that is so dense, that if someone were to fall into this quagmire, it would become difficult to move and/or get out. Similarly, fantasy football experts use this term to discuss how difficult it is to “make a move” with regard to a particular position on an NFL team. The metaphor “fantasy quagmire” is used to describe a position group (wide receivers, running backs, tight ends, etc.) on a particular NFL team where the distribution of passes and/or carries makes it difficult to determine which player is the most fantasy relevant. In other words, because the number of passes or carries changes for each player in that position group, it becomes difficult to decide which player to start on your fantasy team. Often, Berry and Ravitz discussed a position group as a “fantasy quagmire” and reiterated it by then calling that same group a “mess.”

Container Metaphors

Throughout the 32 podcasts I analyzed, the fantasy football experts often used container metaphors. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) explain people use container metaphors to “impose boundaries—marking off territory so that it has an inside and bounding surface” (p. 29). There were 29 total container metaphors used, and while the majority of these instances were on the *Fantasy Focus* podcast (23), Evan Silva from *Fantasy Feast* used container metaphors as well. A container, by its definition, contains something—it is used to hold something in or to keep something out. There were two primary uses of the container metaphor, and each was unique to the podcast in which it was used. Berry and Ravitz of *Fantasy Focus* often used container metaphors to discuss their player rankings, while Evan Silva used container metaphors to discuss a player or team’s talent.

Sneaking Into The Rankings

At the beginning of the NFL season, Toby Gerhart, running back for the Jacksonville Jaguars, was the expected starter for the team. However, he started the season off slowly, never rushing for more than 50 yards and only scoring one touchdown in the first half of the season. He was injured in the fifth game of the season and was forced to sit out weeks six and seven. In week six, Jacksonville started rookie running back Storm Johnson, but he did not have much success, rushing ten times for only 21 yards. However, in week seven, they tried back up running back Denard Robinson and gave him the majority of running back touches (carries/receptions). In that game, Robinson rushed the ball 22 times and ran for 127 yards and a touchdown. The following week, they started him again, and he responded with 18 carries for 108 yards and 10 receiving yards. He continued this streak all the way through the team's bye week in week 11 (National Football League, 2015).

Some games, Robinson scored his fantasy points by rushing, others by receiving, and in some, the only fantasy points he scored were from scoring a touchdown or multiple touchdowns. As each week passed, Robinson continued to move up in the running back rankings among fantasy football analysts, and in week 13, on the *Fantasy Focus* podcast, Ravitz discussed Matthew Berry's rankings and explained that Robinson had "sneaked into [Berry's] top 15" (Dopp, 2014, November 26). As previously discussed, a container is meant to keep something in or to keep something out. In this case, Berry's top-15 running backs ranking is a container meant to only hold the top 15 NFL players in that position. Because Robinson was not expected to start for the Jaguars,

let alone become a top-15 running back, Ravitz uses this metaphor to describe how Robinson got into this container.

This type of metaphor was used often on the *Fantasy Focus* podcast, particularly because Berry is the only analyst on either podcast who ranks players on a weekly basis. That said, Berry and Ravitz both discuss these rankings in terms of a container—one that some earn their way into, and others earn their way out of. For example, after Berry had Robinson in his top-15 for week 13, Robinson had a below average performance that week. The following week, Ravitz and Berry discussed the Jaguars’ game against the Houston Texans, and Berry explains he has Robinson “outside of [his] top 20” (Dopp, 2014, December 5).

This type of metaphor is specific to experts who rank NFL players based on how well they think that player will perform each week. If a player is ranked high, it means the analyst believes that player will score a high number of fantasy points. For some analysts, rankings are essential given that each fantasy football owner is attempting to start the best possible team they can each week. Moreover, rankings can be crucial given the financial implications often associated with fantasy football. Because every fantasy league has a certain number of owners, it is important for fantasy football owners to know where NFL players on their team rank so they know who would be a better player to start. Ravitz and Berry discussed the various tiers of Berry’s rankings as different containers. If a player is in his top-10, they often accompany that tier with the phrase “must-start.” Thus, for the fantasy football community, they are hoping that the NFL players on their team find their way into the higher tiers of the rankings (containers).

This is not only relevant for the top NFL players in fantasy football. Because a fantasy owner must start multiple players at the running back and wide receiver positions, depending on how many owners are in the league (standard leagues have ten), there are at least thirty to forty running backs and wide receivers started in any given week. Thus, an NFL player who moved into the top-30 wide receiver container is still relevant for fantasy purposes. For example, New York Jets wide receiver Eric Decker dealt with injuries throughout the season, which affected his fantasy number. Despite this, he still managed to produce average to above average fantasy numbers multiple times throughout the season. He was coming off of a week 13 game where he put up poor fantasy numbers due to injury, but was playing against a Minnesota Vikings' defense that had performed poorly against the pass for much of the season. In the preview podcast leading up to week 14, Ravitz began discussing Decker's health. He argued that if Decker were healthy, that he "would creep back into [Berry's] top 25, certainly [his] top 30" (Dopp, 2014, December 8). Although Decker was not a top 10, or even top 20 player, the container he was in was still relevant for the fantasy football community. In addition to this type of container metaphor use, Silva of the *Fantasy Feast* podcast provides a different type of container metaphor.

Holding It All Together

As previously discussed, Seattle Seahawks running back Marshawn Lynch was called the "horse" of the team and a "beast" on the field. Lynch had a successful 2014-2015 season; he rushed 280 times for 1,306 yards and 13 touchdowns, and caught 37 passes for 367 yards and four touchdowns. However, as the season went on, a pattern began to develop—Lynch scored the majority of his touchdown in home games. This

prompted Silva to discuss this pattern on the *Fantasy Feast* podcast leading up week 16, a week where many fantasy football teams are in the championship game. When he discussed Lynch's lack of touchdowns in away games, Silva said, "his touchdown rate, the bottom falls out on it in road games" (Tucker, 2014, December 18). For Silva, Lynch's production of touchdowns was conceptualized as a container. During home games, Lynch was able to pull touchdowns out of that container at will, but when he was playing an away game, "the bottom fell out" on the container, and there were no more touchdowns for Lynch to pull out.

Silva also used this type of container metaphor to discuss the success of defenses. Jon Beason is a middle linebacker for the New York Giants. He was injured in week 7 and was then placed on the injured/reserve list, meaning his 2014-2015 season was over. This had an effect on the Giants' rushing defense, in that, running backs from opposing teams were rushing for more than 50 yards, and often closer to or surpassing 100 yards. This led to Silva saying in week 11 that the "bottom [had] fallen out" on the Giants' defense (Tucker, 2014, November 13). In this example, a container metaphor was used to describe the function of the Giants' defense. Before Beason was injured, the defense was able to "hold" opposing running backs to a certain capacity within their container (rushing yards and touchdowns). However, once Beason was out for the season, the "bottom" had fallen out, and opposing running backs were finding success against the Giants.

The way in which this type of container metaphor was utilized served the fantasy football community by providing insight into the dynamics of team construction. This type of container metaphor can be used as an indictment of a particular NFL player or

team and also serve as a suggestion to fantasy football owners. In the case of Marshawn Lynch, owners were warned to not expect a touchdown from Lynch in week 16 in their game against the Arizona Cardinals, and with regard to the Giants, fantasy owners were advised to start their fantasy running backs if they were facing the Giants.

Medical Metaphors

Another category that emerged from the data was medical metaphors. There were seven total metaphors that centered on the medical field, and the two subcategories that emerged were surgical metaphors and metaphors associated with a type of mania. In each case, medical metaphors were used to positively discuss NFL players.

Surgical Metaphors

In week nine, Pittsburgh Steelers quarterback Ben Roethlisberger threw for 522 yards and six touchdowns against the Indianapolis Colts. Following this game, Evan Silva called him a “surgeon” (Tucker, 2014, October 30). Silva used another medical metaphor in his discussion of Denver Broncos running back CJ Anderson. In week 15, Silva explained the advantage Anderson had in playing with a quarterback like Peyton Manning. He argued that a great quarterback like Manning forces opposing defenses to spread out to cover as many receivers as possible. Often this allowed running backs to have more success when running the ball. In this case, Evans claimed Anderson had “more room to operate” (Tucker, 2014, November 12).

Surgeons are often associated with being intelligent, detail-oriented, and able to perform difficult procedures that many other people cannot do, even other physicians. In both these examples, a surgical metaphor was used to highlight the precision of a player, conceptualizing their performance as a surgeon carefully operating on a patient. These

examples also echoed the sentiments of the zoomorphic metaphor where an animal rips and shreds apart its prey. However in this case, the player was a surgeon, carefully operating in all the correct areas, using the most efficient techniques.

Mania Metaphors

The second medical metaphor theme that emerged was conceptualizing a player's great fantasy game as a form of mania. In week four, the New England Patriots faced the Indianapolis Colts, and in that game, Patriots running back Jonas Gray ran the ball 37 times for 201 yards and four touchdowns. In reviewing the game, Matthew Berry discussed how the Patriots often run the ball effectively against the Colts. During this discussion, Berry referenced the previous season when the Colts went against the Patriots in the playoffs. Ravitz and Berry recalled how Patriots running back LeGarrette Blount had a great running game. Berry explained this by saying Blount "went absolutely nuts" (Dopp, 2014, November 17). Silva discussed New Orleans Saints wide receiver Kenny Stills' good fantasy performance in week 13 in a similar fashion, saying he "went berserk" (Tucker, 2014, December 3). Silva used a similar metaphor in his discussion of the Saints' game in week 11 against the Cincinnati Bengals who had struggled against opposing running backs all season. That said, Silva argued, "Mark Ingram could go nuts" given how well he had performed to that point and how poorly the Bengals defense had been against the run (Tucker, 2014, November 12).

Typically when one thinks of this type of mania, it is associated with an individual's inability to have control or be controlled. Mania is often associated with mental institutions where individuals need to be medicated in order to maintain a sense of control. Similarly, this type of mania metaphor was used to highlight a player who

performed or could perform so well and score so many points, both fantasy and real-life, that they were/are uncontrollable. For fantasy football purposes, this is a good trait to have as it always an indicator of an NFL player having a high-scoring fantasy game.

Both of these medical metaphors were used to emphasize the performance and production of players, both in recalling previous performance and future production. For the fantasy football speech community, these metaphors are indicative of players who could be an integral part of a winning fantasy football team. Additionally, as in the case of Ingram against the Bengals, this metaphor can also reiterate what position group fantasy football owners should start against a particular defense (ex. running backs against the Bengals.)

Agricultural Metaphors

Another small category that emerged from the data was a collection of metaphors associated with agriculture. Analysts from both podcasts used these types of metaphors, and agricultural metaphors were used to discuss NFL players both positively and negatively. Within this category, two subcategories were identified—water metaphors and plant metaphors.

Water Metaphors

Atlanta Falcons wide receiver Julio Jones had established himself as a premier wide receiver in the NFL given his receptions, receiving yards and touchdowns over the past three season. The 2014-2015 season was no different as Jones recorded 104 receptions for 1,593 yards and six touchdowns. However, after scoring three touchdowns over the first three weeks of the season, Jones had a streak of seven games without catching a single touchdown. Despite this streak, Evan Silva argued he still had

confidence in starting Jones as top receiver, and said that he did not care that Jones “had a drought where he went five or six games without a touchdown” (Tucker, 2014, December3). Silva used a similar metaphor to discuss Arizona Cardinals wide receiver Michael Floyd. Floyd was expected to have a good season, but was radically inconsistent. He had over 100 yards receiving in week one, followed by 19 yards in week two, 114 yards in week three and seven yards in week four. However, after this seven-yard performance, he put up back-to-back games of over 40 yards and a touchdown. After those performances, Silva told Tucker Floyd had not “evaporated” from the offense (Tucker, 2014, October 29).

With regard to agriculture, water is viewed as vital resource. The success of an entire crop is predicated on the amount of water it receives. Similarly, the receptions, yardage and touchdowns of NFL players are vital resources for fantasy football players. If an expert states that an NFL player is going through a “drought” or has seemingly “evaporated” from the offense, this leads fantasy football players to search for alternatives to those players.

Plant Metaphors

Another agriculture metaphor used by Silva that falls in this category came from a week ten podcast where he predicted Miami Dolphins quarterback Ryan Tannehill to turn “back into a pumpkin” in the Dolphins game against the Detroit Lions (Tucker, 2014, November 5). Although this was another inanimate object, it harkened to the Cinderella fairytale where a girl had the opportunity to live the life she desired for a short amount of time, but was subjected to her old life as soon as the clock struck midnight. Similarly, in week nine against the San Diego Chargers, Tannehill threw for 288 yards and three

touchdowns and also ran for 47 yards, scoring 25 fantasy points. Given how good the Lions' defense had been up to that point, Silva predicted Tannehill to revert back to the average number of fantasy points he typically had been scoring, the metaphorical clock striking midnight. This was not the only negative plant metaphor used to describe a player. Ronnie Brown is a running back and has played for four different NFL teams in his career. However, in recent years, he mostly had been used as a second- or third-string running back, and in terms of fantasy football, had been called a "vulture" on more than one occasion. He began the 2014-2015 season with the Houston Texans, was cut midway through the season, and signed by the San Diego Chargers. After getting signed, Berry called Brown "the weed that just won't get away" (Dopp, 2014, December 15).

Each of these metaphors was used to discuss both the talent of a player as well as their reputation in fantasy football. In terms of the fantasy football speaking community, the use of this type of agriculture metaphor informs fantasy football players of what to expect from certain NFL players, despite what type of production they may have on a given week. Moreover, as is evident in both instances, often the player is discussed as a nuisance or annoyance. However, there was one type of plant metaphor that was used positively.

There were two instances in which a specific plant metaphor was used to conceptualize the actions of an NFL player. In week 13, San Diego Chargers quarterback Philip Rivers threw for 383 yards and three touchdowns against the Baltimore Ravens. In recapping the game, Silva discussed the Ravens' defense and said, "Philip Rivers kind of carved them up" (Tucker, 2014, December 4). Silva used the same phrase twice when discussing the Eagles' performance against the Dallas Cowboys. He said it specifically

for Eagles running back LeSean McCoy who ran for 159 yards and a touchdown, and he also used it for the entire Eagles offense that racked up 464 total offense yards and 33 points.

The action of carving is often associated with carving pumpkins, but could also be associated with carving a turkey. In either case, the carver has complete control of the object it is carving. In this case, Silva used the metaphor much like the “burning” metaphor in which one player is praised for his success while another player or defense is criticized for his or their poor performance. For the fantasy football speech community, this type of metaphor was most often indicative of a poor performance of a defense. In each of the examples I provided, Silva was discussed a team’s defense before employing the “carving” metaphor. Thus, if a particular NFL player “carved up” another team, fantasy football owners are encouraged to start their players against the defense that was “carved up.”

Sports Metaphors

The final category that emerged was sports metaphors, specifically ones that were not football-related, and it consists of six entries. Unlike the other ten categories, this category did not allow for subcategories, and there was only one metaphor that was repeated. However, there were still enough metaphor entries around this central theme to create this final category.

In week seven of the 2014-2015 season, the Seattle Seahawks traded wide receiver Percy Harvin to the New York Jets. In his first game with the Jets in week eight, Harvin caught three balls for 22 yards and ran the ball four times for 28 yards. In their discussion of Harvin for week nine, Ravitz and Berry determined that Harvin was not a

good player to start, and Berry explained that Harvin did not “have a puncher’s chance to score” (Dopp, 2014, October 31). In this case, Berry used a boxing metaphor to explain that Harvin did not have a good chance of scoring a touchdown. Although he used this sports metaphor to prevent fantasy owners from starting Harvin, Berry also used sports metaphors to advocate for other players.

Midway through the 2014-2015 season, New York Giants wide receiver Odell Beckham, Jr. emerged as the most productive wide receiver on the team in terms of receptions, yards, and touchdowns. However, he was not the only fantasy football relevant receiver on the team. Over weeks 11 through 13, Rueben Randle caught 13 total passes for 200 total yards. This led to Berry calling him a “cheap dart throw” in his week 14 preview. He used the same metaphor to discuss Baltimore Ravens wide receiver Kamar Aiken in week 15. In the sports of darts, players are often skilled enough to hit their intended target. However, in this metaphor, Berry is alluding to people who play darts casually, whereby a player may be aiming at the entire board but might coincidentally hit a bullseye. Similarly, this metaphor was used to highlight NFL players who can be started in fantasy football and who could potentially have a great game. Given that so many running backs and wide receivers are started each week, Berry used this metaphor to provide some insight for those fantasy football players who are desperately seeking a wide receiver to start. In addition to discussing the potential upside of an NFL player, Berry also used sports metaphors to discuss the physicality of NFL players.

In their discussion of the week 12 game between the Tampa Bay Buccaneers and the Chicago Bears, Ravitz and Berry discussed the tight end and primary wide receivers

for the Buccaneers. In this discussion, Berry said the Buccaneers' receiving options could "lead the league in rebounding" (Dopp, 2014, November 24). This basketball metaphor was used to discuss the physical characteristics of these NFL players. Rookie-wide receiver Mike Evans is 6'5" and weighs 231 pounds. Veteran-wide receiver Vincent Jackson is also 6'5" and weighs 230 pounds. Finally, rookie-tight end Austin Seferian-Jenkins is 6'5" and weighs 262 pounds. This metaphor was used to highlight the fact that these receivers are built more like basketball players. Although this metaphor does not necessarily mean that all three players will be great for fantasy football owners, the metaphor was employed positively during the discussion to advocate specifically for Evans and Jackson as they were the two players from Tampa Bay who had any type of success both in terms of NFL production and fantasy football point production. Berry used sports metaphors often to buttress his opinion of NFL players, and he was not the only fantasy football analyst to use sports metaphors in this way.

In week 9, Evan Silva discussed the Carolina Panthers and their game against the New Orleans Saints. During this discussion, Silva highlighted the fact that the Panthers had an easy second-half of the season in terms of which teams they were playing. He felt Panthers quarterback Cam Newton would eventually start playing well and would be, "swinging for the fences" (Tucker, 2014, October 29). Silva used this baseball metaphor to advocate for Newton to fantasy football owners. Silva believed Newton would eventually become a good quarterback to start in fantasy football and decided a baseball metaphor that alludes to a player attempting to hit a homerun would best relay his opinion of Newton's potential.

The final entry for this category is a metaphor that is routinely used by fantasy football experts to conceptualize running backs as a specific inanimate object—a bowling ball. In week 11, Evan Silva used this metaphor for Denver Broncos running back CJ Anderson (Tucker, 2014, November 12). Silva said this as a conceptualization of Anderson’s height, speed, and strength. Bowling balls are round, small in terms of height, are heavier than they appear given their size. They are also thrown with great speed and used to knock over pins. These details are important to know because this metaphor was and is used for running backs with similar characteristics. If an expert employs the “bowling ball” metaphor, they are characterizing the player as being short, stout, fast, as well as having the ability to run over and through opposing defenders (the pins). For fantasy football owners, this metaphor provides a description of what the running back looks like and how he is expected to perform. While some running backs may be small and weak in terms of how easily they are tackled, this metaphor informs owners that a particular running back strays from the norm.

These sports metaphor were used both positively and negatively. Moreover, aside from the “darts” metaphor, each entry had its own contextual premise. However, the commonality shared by all these entries was the fact that the fantasy football experts who used these metaphors felt that a sports term or phrase was the best vehicle to convey their message/opinion.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have thoroughly discussed my findings. In doing so, I have determined the presence of and defined the terms and meanings for speech within the fantasy football community, metaphors. In addition to these metaphors, I have provided

the context needed for them to be employed by fantasy football analysts as well as what they mean for the fantasy football community. In the following chapter, I will use these metaphors and their premises of use to define the rules for communicative conduct for the fantasy football speech community. This will be followed by a description of the social world that is created through the use of metaphors. I will then provide an explanation of the contributions of this study, its limitations, and suggestions for future research.

Chapter 5

Contribution, Limitations, and Future Research

Using the ethnography of communication (Hymes, 1962; Hymes, 1974; Philipsen & Coutu, 2005), 32 podcasts revealed 11 categories of metaphors used by fantasy football commentators or experts to create particular sociocultural meanings. As my analysis in the previous chapter showed via the presentation of context and discussion, the particular uses of metaphors implicate particular shared premises—particular beliefs and values about how NFL players should be talked about in and through the use of metaphors. Further, these premises point to the social ramifications metaphoric usage holds for this particular community, for example, how the use of metaphors by the very influential fantasy football experts help shape particular identities about NFL players. Moreover, the sociocultural premises the data suggested, in turn, informed the more specific rules about talking, metaphorically, that characterize the unique social world of fantasy football participants. The abstraction of the particular rules for metaphorical use offer additional evidence for the nuanced sociocultural meanings that give the fantasy football community its unique way of being as constructed by its unique way of speaking. I now turn to the presentation of 15 rules for metaphor usage as enacted in the fantasy football social world.

Rules Pertaining to Communicative Conduct

1. Fantasy football-specific metaphors are used routinely to convey an opinion or position on players, coaches, and sometimes, entire teams.

Analysts on both podcasts relied heavily on metaphors to convey their analysis on a particular player or team for a given week. They also used metaphors to describe a

player's outlook for the remainder of the season. *Fantasy Focus* analysts Berry, Ravitz, and Bell have even developed certain metaphors that are specific to their podcast, including: "welcome to Dumpsville," "fantasy wasteland," "fantasy zombie," "fantasy Whac-a-mole," and "fantasy goat." Based on the number of consistent listeners and downloads during the NFL season, these analysts lean on metaphors to convey multiple messages. As previously mentioned in chapter four, the use of positive metaphors on a player can also register as an indictment of poor performance by the opposing team or defense.

2. A metaphor can be used simultaneously to praise one NFL player while criticizing another.

In addition to metaphors serving as a key symbol in the fantasy football community, they can also serve a dual purpose when they are employed. Often, when a metaphor is used positively to discuss an NFL player or team, it serves a dual purpose in that it also negatively conceptualizes the performance of a defensive player or team. For example, in week nine, when Evan Silva said Minnesota Vikings wide receiver Cordarelle Patterson "roasted David Amerson," he simultaneously praised Patterson and criticized Amerson (Tucker, 2014, October 29). Similarly, a metaphor used to discuss a defense or team negatively can also serve to praise the performance of an offense or offensive player. For example, in week 14, Silva discussed the Baltimore Ravens' defense, and said "Ben Roethlisberger lit them up" (Tucker, 2014, December). In this case, the initial use of the metaphor centered on the poor performance of the defense, but also praised the performance of Ben Roethlisberger.

3. The majority of fantasy football experts focus their discussion and metaphor use on players who are performing well.

Fantasy football experts focused the majority of podcast time discussing fantasy relevant players, specifically those players who are at the top or near the top of their specific position (i.e. quarterbacks, running backs, wide receivers, etc.). Because there is such limited time on these podcasts, and because the focus for fantasy football players is to construct a winning team, experts focus their attention on those players who have been performing well and producing a high number of fantasy points. This, in turn, will dictate which NFL players fantasy football owners will start, trade for, or pick up for their team.

4. If an analyst wants to emphasize their positive feelings about a player or defense, they will routinely use consecutive metaphors to highlight that player or defense.

A pattern that manifested throughout the podcasts was the difference in metaphor use between positive and negative metaphors. There was a pattern where analysts used multiple metaphors when they felt strongly about a player, particularly when they felt that a player's success would extend beyond one week. Evan Silva's discussion of running backs CJ Anderson of the Denver Broncos and Jeremy Hill of the Cincinnati Bengals served as an example of how an analyst will employ multiple metaphors in one sequence to emphasize their feelings on a player. In his week 14 preview of the Broncos' game against the Buffalo Bills, Silva used five metaphors in succession to discuss Anderson's abilities and advise fantasy owners to start him on their teams (Tucker, 2014, December 4). Similarly, he used seven consecutive metaphors when discussing his opinion on Bengals running back Jeremy Hill in week 16 (Tucker, 2014, December 17).

Not often is this strategy used when discussing the negative opinion of a player or team. Most analysts used one metaphor, sometimes two, then moved the discussion to a different player. There were some exceptions, such as Berry and Ravitz's discussion of Jets wide receiver Percy Harvin in week nine (Dopp, 2014, October 31). Ravitz used two metaphors to speak negatively about Harvin, and Berry followed with one of his own. This would account for three total instances of negative metaphor use, but as I mentioned, this is not the norm.

5. Although some analysts may deem a player irrelevant early in the NFL season, they will often reiterate their disdain for that player through metaphors.

Fantasy football analysts focused the majority of podcast time discussing fantasy relevant players, but there were moments where they found it necessary to declare a player or a team as being irrelevant in terms of fantasy football. This is particularly interesting when it comes to players who at one point in their career were good or great in terms of their value in fantasy football. As mentioned before, Berry and Ravitz deemed Michael Crabtree and Marques Colston as being irrelevant for fantasy football a number of times because they are well-known players who used to have value in fantasy. This season, both Crabtree and Colston were inconsistent and often had poor performances, but were still owned on a number of fantasy football leagues because of their notoriety. This led to Berry and Ravitz welcoming them to "Dumpsville" on more than one occasion during the 16 episodes of the *Fantasy Focus* that were coded.

6. There are particular yardage and touchdown thresholds that lead to positive metaphor use for NFL players.

Based on the context that was discussed for each of these metaphors, as well as what emerged from the data, I concluded that each position has a certain numerical threshold that, if met, will yield the use of a positive metaphor. For example, if a quarterback throws for 300+ yards, often a fantasy football expert will use a metaphor to describe that performance. This yardage number is often the condition necessary for the use of a metaphor. Similarly, if a wide receiver were to accumulate 100+ receiving yards or a running back were to rush for 100+ rushing yards, those numbers would also invite the use of a metaphor to describe that player and/or their performance. Lastly, touchdowns can often lead to metaphors. A wide receiver who catches three passes for 50 yards and a touchdown, is just as likely to earn a metaphor during a game review as a wide receiver who caught seven passes for 120 yards.

7. There are particular yardage and touchdown thresholds that lead to negative metaphor use for opposing players and teams.

As discussed in rule #6, there are certain numeric thresholds that often lead to the use of metaphors. However, these numbers, as well as some others will often lead to negative metaphor use to describe a team or defense. For example, if a quarterback were to throw for 300+ yards, this may lead to a metaphor that positively describes the quarterback, but also a metaphor that would negatively describe the defense or a specific defensive player. Moreover, if a team's offense were to accumulate over 400 total offensive yards, often a metaphor will be used to discuss the poor performance of the opposing defense. For example, as discussed in the agricultural metaphors, when the

Philadelphia Eagles played the Dallas Cowboys in week 13, Evan Silva used the “carving” metaphor to describe Eagles running back LeSean McCoy as well as the entire Eagles team (Tucker, 2014, December 3). The first metaphor was used to positively conceptualize McCoy’s performance while the second was more of an indictment of the Cowboys’ defense and special teams.

8. The metaphors used in fantasy football often have an opposing connotation than they do outside of the world of fantasy football (i.e. being “freak” or being a “cow”).

Many of the metaphors used by fantasy football experts hold an antonymous meaning to what they typically mean outside of fantasy football. Many metaphors that are used are terms that typically hold negative connotations in contexts outside of fantasy football. For example, most people would not want to be labeled a *monster* or a *freak*. Similarly, setting someone on fire or burning someone is not seen as a good thing. However, in the world of fantasy football, these are terms, actions, and behaviors that are valued and sought out. Moreover, the way in which fantasy football experts discuss these metaphors in relation to the statistics and performance of NFL players values a behavior and way of being that is not readily accepted outside of fantasy football society. In this world, it is acceptable for a running back on a fantasy football team to “crush” or “shred” someone. But if one were to take those actions outside the realm of fantasy football, they would be received much differently.

9. The most common metaphor to use within fantasy football is the zoomorphic metaphor.

Zoomorphic metaphors were used more often than any other category. Out of the 1,836 total entries of figurative language, 121 of them were zoomorphic metaphors. The

next largest category was fire metaphors with 86. These zoomorphic metaphors were used to conceptualize players based on their size, talent, role within the offense, performance, and reputation. Another contributing factor for how routinely they are used is the fact that these types of metaphors and action metaphors could be used to conceptualize players both positively and negatively. Moreover, because fantasy football is primarily concerned with successful NFL players, the most successful players were often labeled as “studs,” which was one of the most commonly used metaphors.

10. Chaos metaphors are used exclusively to discuss players, teams, and coaches negatively, and are used when a particular position group (team or league-wide) does not have a primary/reliable starter(s).

Fantasy football analysts and players tend to look for consistency in the performance and fantasy point production of NFL players. Many of the metaphors that were used for positive conceptualizations were based on a player being able to consistently perform well. In the NFL, consistency is only guaranteed when players perform well enough, for a certain period of time, to earn a starting role on the offense. However, there were some teams who lacked at certain positions throughout the season, which yielded the use of chaos metaphors to discuss those positions and/or the entire team. The Buccaneers and the Titans were a constant source of chaos metaphors, particularly by the analysts of the *Fantasy Focus*. Out of the eight weeks coded and analyzed, chaos metaphors were used to conceptualize the Titans in four of the eight weeks, and three out of the eight weeks for the Buccaneers. Some of the metaphors that were used were “fantasy quagmire,” a “total mess,” and an “atrocious.”

11. Nonhuman, living-being (animal and monstrosity) metaphors are most often used as a positive conceptualization of a player.

As discussed in the zoomorphic and monstrosity sections of the analysis, analysts most often used these types of nonhuman, living-being metaphors to positively discuss a player. They conceptualized a player as being too good to be human. These types of non-human metaphors differ from other categories like war or fire in that players are still conceptualized as living beings. The linkage between the nonhuman, living-being metaphors lies in the fact that they are used to discuss a player's talents, abilities, physicality, and consistency. Describing Julio Jones as a "freak" or Broncos defensive end Malik Jackson as an "animal" conceptualizes these traits positively and in way that separates them from an "average" human being.

12. The "bell cow" and "workhorse" metaphors are used exclusively to positively discuss a running back and their role in the offense.

While many metaphors are used for a number of different players and positions, the "bell cow" and "workhorse" metaphors are used exclusively to discuss running backs. The "bell cow" and "workhorse" metaphors are used to discuss the role of the player. If a running back has become the starter for a team and/or is getting more playing time and touches (i.e. carries and receptions) than the other running backs on the team, the "bell cow" and "workhorse" metaphors will often be employed to emphasize the importance of that running back to his NFL team and his fantasy football owners.

13. “Monstrosity,” “medical,” and “bowling ball” metaphors are used exclusively to discuss NFL players positively.

Out of the 11 categories that emerged, there were four categories that were exclusively used either positively or negatively. The “monstrosity,” “medical,” and “bowling ball” metaphors are the three categories exclusively used to conceptualize the primary players and primary players’ performance positively. All three categories and their five subcategories are used to positively conceptualize a primary player and/or their talents, abilities, and recent performance. As mentioned before, a metaphor of praise for one player often indicates a criticism for a secondary player or team, but for these three metaphor categories, the primary player(s) were being conceptualized positively.

14. Skill players (wide receivers, running backs, tight ends) are discussed through both machine metaphors and fire metaphors for their talents as well as their role as a “weapon” on fantasy teams.

Most of the metaphor use that I coded focused on players’ abilities and their role for their team. However, for skill players like wide receivers, running backs, and tight ends, fire and machine metaphors were utilized in a way that not only described them as weapons for their NFL teams, but also described them as weapons to use against opponents in fantasy football. This is relevant because the war metaphors that I coded often did not conceptualize players as weapons to be used in fantasy football, only as weapons for their NFL team. Silva consistently discussed players who either “lit someone up” or who would “light someone up.” He also used the metaphor of “firing” someone up as a way to advise fantasy owners to start a player in a similar way as you would hear some ask for missiles to be “fired up” and ready.

15. Container metaphors are commonly used and almost always to discuss an analyst's rankings.

Berry and Ravitz from the *Fantasy Focus* often discussed players getting in or out of Berry's rankings and used container metaphors to make that judgment. In fact, when Ravitz discussed Berry's rankings, Ravitz often made comments like, "He barely cracked your top-20 at wide receiver?" (Dopp, 2014, November 26). These metaphors are used to create containers that only allow in certain NFL players, and thereby keep others out. Thus, those players that are allowed in are discussed positively, while those who are outside of these metaphoric containers are often left out of the discussion altogether. These container metaphors are crucial in that they provide information regarding the ranking of a player, which is information many fantasy football owners seek out while attempting to construct a winning team each week. This rule, in addition to the 14 others, characterizes and defines the communicative conduct of the fantasy football community.

Moreover, the metaphor categories that emerged as well as the rules for communicative conduct that I have outlined above facilitate the construction of the social world of fantasy football. Much like a movie, this social world is not limited to one scene or one participant; rather, the scenes and characters involved are unique and dynamic, changing depending on the language/metaphors used. Given that this study was couched in the ethnography of communication, I will utilize Hymes's (1972) SPEAKING heuristic as a guide to create and describe this world based on the metaphors used by fantasy football experts.

The Social World of Fantasy Football

Fantasy football players and experts are the creators, (re)shaping this world and changing the scenery depending on the context. In this world, the participants are NFL players, position groups, coaches, and teams. Their role in this world is dynamic and constantly changing depending on their performance on the field. Considering the metaphors used, the settings of this social world are comprised of a number of different locations that change just as often as the roles of the participants.

In this fantasy football social world, the first scene is a war, a battlefield. However, this is not just any war; it is a shoot out. In this war there are weapons, machines, monsters, freaks, and beasts. In this science fiction-style battle, weapons are used to set fire to enemies. They are burning, roasting, and toasting them. Machines are fired up and engage in combat; shutting down enemy machines. Beasts, freaks and monsters run furiously around the battlefield. In this war, there is violence, destruction, and chaos.

Another scene in this world takes place on a farm. On this farm, there are cows, horses, goats, and studs. Horses are being fed and used to carrying 52 men across a 100-yard field. Studs are prized for their virility and ability to (re)produce. These animals are relied upon and needed. They are the central source of life to the farm and the farmer. In addition to these animals, there is a pumpkin patch where pumpkins lay and wait for carving. And on this farm, like many others, water is a vital resource that is sought out and preserved in case of a drought.

The scene changes slightly as fantasy experts move the listener from the farm to a savanna, where predatory animals are shredding and ripping apart their prey. In this

world, these vicious animals are prized and valued for their actions and behaviors. However, not all animals are valued and wanted, and these vicious animals are not the only ones looking for food. Off in the distance, a dead carcass lies in the middle of the road, and a vulture swoops down to pick off the remains, reaping the benefits of another animal's hard work.

The scene changes again. This time, the scene is a stock exchange trading floor filled with stockbrokers furiously attempting to make a trade. In this scene, the participants act as the stock. They are being sold, traded, and dumped; stockbrokers do anything they can do to take advantage of the people around them and get a stronger return on their investment. It is a selfish, cut-throat environment, and these stocks are only valuable if they are producing good numbers.

The final scene is set at a hospital, and the participants serve as surgeons. These men take their time, assess their patients, and only cut what is necessary. It harkens back to the scene where animals were ripping and shredding their prey; however, this scene is different. These surgeons operate with precision, only cutting in the necessary areas at the necessary moments. Given their skill and acumen, these are high-priced surgeons. Not everyone has one, but everyone is hoping to find one. On the other side of the hospital, patients are the focus of the scene. Unlike the doctors, these patients are uncontrollable. They are crazy and running over anyone and anything that gets in their way. Oddly, these patients are just as wanted as the surgeons. While the surgeons are valued for their precision, these patients are valued for their recklessness and abandon.

While it may not seem immediately obvious that war fields, farms, savannahs, stock exchange floors, and hospitals share a commonality, they do. This is the world of

fantasy football. It is not subtle. It is not peaceful or calm. It is chaotic and unpredictable. It is always changing, and of course, it is masculine. Although fantasy football players are not held to a particular gender, the participants (NFL players) are, and only men can be participants in this world. However, these men do not participate as men. They participate as animals, monsters, weapons, commodities, and machines. They are aggressive, destructive, and mad. However, in this fantasy football world, these traits do not hold the same negative connotations they hold outside of this world. NFL players are valued for their aggression. They are prized for their destructive nature. They are wanted for being monsters, beasts, and freaks. Their ability to burn, crush, rip, and shred are not only welcomed, but hoped for. These metaphors, their meanings, and this world are aggressive and antonymous.

Moreover, this world is also antithetical. NFL players work hard—like animals, machines, freaks, beasts, and monsters—but are also willing to take advantage of others like vultures. Players are valued for their precision as surgeons, but are also wanted for their ability to lose control—going crazy and berserk—as long as they can to destroy and damage like fire. Players are discussed as financial commodities that are sensitive and could fluctuate at any time, but are also discussed for their hypermasculine behavior that is consistently aggressive. NFL players are valued for their success in football, but are both criticized and praised using the standard of other sports.

These aggressive, antonymous, and antithetical characteristics create a world that is almost completely reliant on the physical nature of NFL players. The primary value of these NFL players, for fantasy football owners and analysts, lies in their ability to use their bodies, not their minds. Moreover, these characteristics produce an environment

where the discourse is abrasive and harsh. These NFL players are judged, ranked, and valued by their ability to live in the contradictions of this world. This world is aggressive and antonymous and antithetical. This is fantasy football.

Theoretical Contributions

In this study, I employed an extension of a metaphor/cluster analysis (Foss, 2009; Lakoff & Johnson, 2009; Ricoeur, 1977), couched in the ethnography of communication (Covarrubias, 2009a; Hymes, 1962; 1974; Philipsen & Coutu, 2005) and speech codes theory (Covarrubias, 2009b; Phillipsen, 1992; Philipsen, Coutu, & Covarrubias, 2005). Through an analysis of my data set, I answered *RQ1* and determined that metaphors were a primary means of speech for fantasy football experts to discuss NFL players, team, and coaches. In terms of *RQ2*, eight defined metaphor categories emerged as well as one that was comprised of metaphors selected for their intensity that did not fit into the other eight categories. Finally, from these categories, I was able to answer *RQ3* and outline some of the patterns and rules for metaphor use that contribute to construction of fantasy football as a social world.

By answering these three research questions, I have established fantasy football as a culture-rich space where community members create, through communicative interaction, the elements that characterize their culture. One of these elements includes the system of values with regard to NFL players and their relevance to fantasy football. Another element inherent within the cultural ethos of fantasy football is the value of NFL players' personhood for other-than-human qualities. Although the personhood of NFL players is valued, it is not valued for the intrinsic nature of them as human beings. Rather their personhood is valued for the functions they perform in this fantasy football society

and culture. It is reminiscent of Philipsen's Teamsterville men (Philipsen, 1975; 1992), as NFL players are valued, not for their abilities to use intelligence to problem-solve via discourse, but for what they can accomplish through the violent use of their physical bodies.

Other elements that emerged from the data that facilitate the (re)shaping of the fantasy football community are the ways of speaking that create mutual intelligibility, and they are best explained through the lens of the ethnography of communication. Fantasy football is a social space/community that has its own terms, premises, and rules. As discussed in my findings, there are specific metaphors that are used throughout the fantasy football community. Moreover, there are premises for when and how these metaphors are employed, and there are effects throughout the social world of fantasy football when a fantasy football expert utilizes a metaphor in a particular context. Finally, this metaphor use was indicative of communicative conduct, and allowed for the creation of rules pertaining to the communicative conduct of members within the fantasy football community. Through my analysis, I have taken the ethnography of communication to a context that is just now starting to emerge (fantasy football), and was able to locate the rules of communicative conduct that form a system of shared meanings and values for the fantasy football culture and community.

Methodological Contributions

I began my data collection process by extending the method of metaphor analysis, which requires the identification of the vehicle and tenor, by instead entering every instance of figurative language. Although my focus was on metaphor use, I wanted to ensure that I had accounted for each instance and thus entered each instance of figurative

language. With regard to the specifics of the entries, I entered the following information: 1) metaphor; 2) NFL player name; 3) NFL player position; 4) NFL player team; 5) Analyst who said the metaphor; 6) context surrounding the metaphor; 7) whether the intent behind the metaphor is positive or negative; 8) date of the episode (for my study, this was divided into two columns—NFL week and episode date). These eight data categories accounted for all the information needed to determine the who, why, and to whom with regard to language use, specifically metaphor use.

Following the metaphor/cluster analysis process outlined by Foss (2009), I categorized the entries by frequency and intensity, or those that were deeply felt (Carbaugh, 1988). This allowed me to turn almost 2,000 entries into 11 defined categories. This combination of data collection and analysis provided a thorough method for identifying, organizing and categorizing the metaphors used on two different podcasts series, on a total of 32 episodes.

Methodologically, this study presents a novel tool to employ when examining the language use in podcasts, particularly those podcasts hosted by analysts of a particular field (i.e. sports, politics, fantasy sports, etc.). Podcasts emerged in 2004 and provided a new medium for reaching large audiences (Berry, 2006). Because it is a medium that has only been in existence for the past decade, previously conducted studies on podcasts have had to employ methods created and intended for other mediums. Given the scope of this dissertation, future studies on podcasts will benefit from the method I utilized, particularly if the focus is on language use. By extending the metaphor/cluster analysis method through couching it in the ethnography of communication/speech codes theory and adding to the data collection and analysis processes, I have constructed a method that

successfully accounts for language use within podcasts that can be used on a small to mid-level scale.

Practical Contributions

Academic

The practical contributions this study makes will greatly affect future studies that focus on fantasy football. At the time of this study, there was a strong critical focus within the realm of fantasy sports and fantasy football. While these studies have provided substantial findings in terms of the social issues that are at stake within fantasy football, there was still a lack of understanding in terms of the communicative conduct that define this culture. Given how popular it has become, the financial and social impact of fantasy football, and the growing interest within academia in just the past three or four years, it was necessary to examine the communicative conduct within fantasy football in order to define it as a specific community and culture. It was necessary to understand the nuances from which culture was expressed within the fantasy football community before others could comment on that culture.

Nonacademic

In terms of practical contributions outside of academia, this study is of particular interest for those seeking the tools necessary to provide advice and analysis within the world of fantasy football. As outlined in the previous chapter, there are certain rules that one must and/or can follow that fall in line with the fantasy football rules of language use. While some people may stray from these rules, the advice and analysis one gives will be more successful if these rules are followed.

Although providing advice and analysis is the primary aim for a fantasy football analyst, each analyst differentiates himself or herself by the language they use to deliver their message. Despite the differences in tone, one unifying figure of speech that was apparent for each analyst was the use of metaphors. Every analyst used metaphors to discuss players, coaches, position groups, and teams. The frequency with which metaphors were used was completely dependent on the analyst, but for those individuals interested in pursuing a career in fantasy football analysis, even at an amateur level, it would be wise to use metaphors as a supportive linguistic tool to communicate with their intended audience. Given that the *Fantasy Focus* and *Fantasy Feast* are part of a larger fantasy football community, aspiring fantasy football analysts should follow these same rules and utilize these tools for speech that have (re)shaped this growing community and culture.

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

Although much insight emerged from the data, the study was not without its limitations. First, the study was somewhat limited because of the method of data collection. Although my adaptation of metaphor/cluster analysis yielded a profound amount of data, a full transcription of each episode may have produced even more data for analysis. That said, a full utilization of the ethnography of communication and speech codes theory would be fruitful with a full transcription of each episode. This is one of the avenues I intend to pursue in future research. I want to further extend my theoretical approach that merged the ethnography of communication and metaphor theory by conducting a multilevel examination of fantasy football. First, I want to produce full transcriptions of the podcasts that were coded, and code them based on the SPEAKING

heuristic of speech codes theory (Hymes, 1974). This may produce additional information that is necessary for coding other aspects of the speech community of fantasy football and for additional inquiries into this particular sociocultural context.

Moreover, I would like to follow the metaphor work of Fernandez (1986) who argued that the first requirement in studying the use of metaphor is “detail in ethnographic description” (p. 60). To do this, I would employ a method similar to Brenner, Burns, and Ewald (2014) but on a larger scale, observing fantasy football players and conducting a complete ethnography to observe the communicative conduct of different sectors of the fantasy football speech community. There are three potential events that could be observed for this type of study. One could observe a fantasy football draft, as often, this is the only time during the fantasy football season where all the members of the league meet in one physical location. This would allow for a coding of an event of initiation, particularly if there is a new member playing for the first time.

The second type of event that could be observed would be if a particular league gets together regularly during the regular season to watch the NFL games and keep track of their fantasy team(s). This would allow for a comparative analysis with the data from this current examination of fantasy football discourse. Finally, another option would be to conduct interviews after all games in a given week have been played and ask fantasy football players what their thoughts were on the games and their opinion on NFL players in relation to their fantasy relevance. This would also lend itself to a comparative analysis with the current study.

Another limitation to the study was a function of its interpretive approach. Issues of power and control that were previously studied by Hill (2010) and Kellem (2012) were

left untouched aside from some of the gendered metaphors that were discussed. Future studies would benefit from conducting a mixed-methods approach that includes a critical examination of the data. Following the work of Covarrubias (2008), who employed an interpretive analysis with a critical discussion, this would be the most fruitful approach given the demographic make up of NFL players as well as the demographic make up of fantasy football players. This type of analysis would allow for coding the speech community as well as addressing some of the power imbalances that influence that community and its discourses.

Another avenue of inquiry that would be fruitful would be to focus on how metaphors evolve over time in fantasy football. Given the compact schedule and structure of the NFL season (16 regular-season games per NFL team) and the fact that season-long fantasy leagues are focused on competitions that occur on a weekly basis, future researchers could code a podcast series through a full season or possibly through multiple seasons. This would allow for a better understanding of how these metaphors and metaphor categories evolve as the season(s) goes on. After conducting a season-long or multiple-season examination of fantasy football, future studies could then conduct a comparative analysis to understand how metaphors change as various social issues become relevant within the NFL (i.e. the Ray Rice incident, the Adrian Peterson incident, the focus on head trauma, etc.).

From a feminist perspective, it would be beneficial to focus on the female voice, or lack thereof, within fantasy football. Stephania Bell from *Fantasy Focus* was only coded twice throughout the 16 episodes that were analyzed. That said, a thorough examination of her role on the podcast and/or an examination of another female fantasy

football analyst/podcaster would be beneficial in applying feminist theory and approaches to the social world of fantasy football.

In addition to these fantasy football-centered endeavors, future studies would also benefit from focusing on the violent and aggressive nature of fantasy football and applying their research efforts on NFL players. More specifically, from a sociological perspective, it would be substantially useful to understand the relationship between the aggression of NFL players on the field and their aggression at home (i.e. Aaron Hernandez, Ray Rice, Bruce Miller). This type of analysis would be beneficial for both studies on the NFL and fantasy football in terms of why and how this type of aggression is fostered, facilitated, and maintained through discourse.

Finally, future studies may also benefit from examining what role, if any, collective memory plays in the fantasy football speech community. Following the work of Aden et al. (2009) and Serazio (2010), an academic inquiry into the collective memory of fantasy football players and analysts could provide a unique insight into this speech community. Given the fact that much of the language use is based on a combination of talent, past performance, recent performance, and consistency, I think the collective memory of fantasy football players about NFL players would lead to an even deeper understanding of this growing speech community.

Conclusion

Fantasy football continues to emerge as a relevant locus of study given the growing size of its participants as well as its complexity. More than 30 million people played fantasy football last year, and hundreds of millions of dollars were spent in fantasy football, creating the need for a better understanding of this growing community.

While some academic efforts have taken a critical examination of fantasy football as a site of power imbalance and racial inequities, there had not been a thorough interpretative examination to solidify a foundational understanding of fantasy football as a speech community. As an ethnographer of communication (Covarrubias, 2009a; Hymes, 1962; 1974) I seek to understand a speech community by examining the communicative conduct within that community. Thus, I decided to employ the ethnography of communication and speech codes theory (Philipsen, 1992; Philipsen, Coutu, & Covarrubias, 2005) in my investigation of fantasy football as a social world. After analyzing two popular podcast series using an adaptation of metaphor/cluster analysis, 11 metaphor categories emerged. In addition to these categories, 15 rules for communicative conduct were identified based on both the total entries in the data set as well as the 11 categories that emerged. Through my methodology and subsequent analysis, I have explained the system of speech employed within fantasy football, which works to create the culture of the fantasy football society. Knowing this system of terms, premises, rules, and meanings allows for predicting and better understanding the fantasy football speech community.

Reflections of the Researcher

Because of a back injury I sustained in high school, my ability to play football ended earlier than expected. However, the handed-down tradition of sports and sports entertainment that started with my grandfather has allowed me to maintain an intimate relationship with a sport that my family loves. Moreover, my involvement with fantasy football has opened up a number of avenues I would have otherwise not been able to pursue. What started as moral support for my mother has turned into a passion that I have

extended into a number of areas in my life. In addition to this academic inquiry, I have used fantasy football to bring my family together before the beginning of the school year to have our family draft. Given the hectic nature of daily life, as well as the busy schedules that are created with a family that has two six-year-olds, a five-year-old and a two-year-old, our family league has allowed us to take a break from our daily struggles and enjoy our time together. Of course, it helps that my family can be incredibly competitive.

What I am most proud of in terms of my relationship with fantasy football came in this last year of my doctoral program when my five-year-old niece was diagnosed with kidney cancer. I used fantasy football to gather support and raised \$2,400 to assist my sister's family with the medical bills associated with my niece's cancer treatment. Despite the fact that my sister and her family had registered themselves on an online fundraising website, the camaraderie, intimacy, and entertainment involved with fantasy football allowed members of the fantasy football community, from all over the United States, to turn their passion for the game into a tool that could be used to help others. Even some outside of the fantasy football community were involved. People donated prizes that included a flat-screen television and round-trip airline tickets, and all 12 members of the league were willing to donate \$200 to participate.

For me, this is why fantasy football should be examined and understood. Some players play for fun, some have made a career out of playing daily and season-long fantasy football, and others enjoy competing against their family and friends for bragging rights. But what connects fantasy football players together is the culture that has been

created—a culture that can bring together twelve people from all over the nation to help a little girl who is fighting for her life.

As I mentioned in my introduction, my mother did not win her first year playing fantasy football. In fact she still has not won the championship of her boss's league. However, this year, she was the champion of the First Annual Annabelle Marie Berry Fantasy Football League.

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Appendix A

ESPN Standard Scoring

Passing		Rushing	
Touchdown Pass =	4 points	Touchdown Rush =	6 points
25 Pass yards =	1 point	10 rushing yards =	1 point
2 point conversion =	2 points	2 point conversion =	2 points
Interception thrown =	-2 points		
Receiving		Miscellaneous Offense	
Touchdown Reception =	6 points	Kickoff Return Touchdown =	6 points
10 receiving yards =	1 point	Punt Return Touchdown =	6 points
2 point conversion =	2 points	Fumble Recovered for Touchdown =	6 points
		Each fumble lost =	-2 points
Kicking		Team Defense/Special Teams	
Field Goal Made (50+ yards) =	5 points	Kickoff Return Touchdown =	6 points
Field Goal Made (40-49 yards) =	4 points	Punt Return Touchdown =	6 points
Field Goal Made (0-39 yards) =	3 points	Interception Return Touchdown =	6 points
Each PAT Made =	1 point	Fumble Return Touchdown =	6 points
Field Goal Missed =	-1 point	Blocked Punt/Field Goal Return for Touchdown =	6 points
		Each interception =	2 points
		Each fumble recovered =	2 points
		Blocked Punt, PAT, or Field Goal =	2 points
		Each safety =	2 points
		Each sack =	1 point
		0 points allowed =	5 points
		1-6 points allowed =	4 points
		7-13 points allowed =	3 points
		14-17 points allowed =	1 point
		18-27 points allowed =	0 points
		28-34 points allowed =	-1 point
		35-45 points allowed =	-3 points
		46+ points allowed =	-5 points