

## CHAPTER 12

# The Sport of Shafting Fans and Taxpayers: An Application of the Propaganda Model to the Coverage of Professional Athletes and Team Owners

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This paper applies Herman and Chomsky's Propaganda Model (hereafter called the 'PM') to the media's coverage of sports team owners vs. professional athletes, hypothesizing that the media will use more negative terms (e.g., 'greedy') to describe the *athletes* than to describe the *owners*. This hypothesis reflects the predictions of the PM, which posits that the dominant classes will tend to receive favourable coverage while workers' interests will tend to be excluded from the debate. While it is true that professional athletes are typically privileged workers with high salaries and influential public profiles, the main role they are expected to perform is to generate massive profits for team owners, sponsors, and TV networks by providing non-controversial entertainment. Furthermore, these athletes may suffer serious injuries such as ACL tears or even brain trauma, which may eventually lead to arthritis or chronic traumatic

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encephalitis (CTE) respectively. As former NFL player and present Noam Chomsky enthusiast John Moffitt put it, in explaining why he abruptly gave up the fame and fortune of pro football, ‘I think it’s really madness to risk your body, risk your well-being and risk your happiness for money. He added, ‘Once you tear away the illusions of it, it’s hard work. And it’s dangerous work. And you’re away from your family.... It’s very tough on families’—sentiments that would characterise any number of professional sports.<sup>1</sup>

## 12.1 Summary of Empirical Studies Using the PM

There has been ample empirical evidence for the PM with respect to the coverage of such issues as the North America Free Trade Agreement, anti-globalization protests, the environment, regulation of the chemical industry, US foreign policy, union-management skirmishes, etc. from studies in the US, UK, Canada, Australia, and Spain.<sup>2</sup> Yet this author could find no test of the PM vis-à-vis sports coverage. Since Chomsky argues that critical theorists should consider a wide range of cultural artefacts, not restricting themselves to elite subjects,<sup>3</sup> it would be useful to content-analyse the coverage of professional athletes vs. that of sports team owners to determine *quantitatively* the extent of the hegemonic biases predicted in the PM. Such a content analysis may enable sports enthusiasts to recognise and resist manipulative coverage. As Kellner puts it,

Cultural studies shows how media culture articulates the dominant values [and] political ideologies ...of our era and provides tools that enable us to read and interpret our culture critically, empowering us to resist media manipulation, increase our freedom and individuality, and strive for alternative cultures and political change.<sup>4</sup>

To achieve that end, this paper will conduct a key word analysis of the media’s coverage of professional athletes vs. that of team owners in major US sports, with a particular focus on what is widely viewed as America’s national sport, NFL football.<sup>5</sup> Specifically, the paper will analyse coverage by both the elite *New York Times*, which represents what Herman and Chomsky call the ‘agenda-setting’ elite press that determine what issues and events are deemed newsworthy by the lower-level media and establish the parameters within which debate and interpretation can occur<sup>6</sup> and Google.com, which represents a more universal source of sports news that includes newspapers, magazines, blogs, etc. If Herman and Chomsky’s claims are true—that the media frame issues in a way that favours elite interests—we should find that players are rarely described in positive terms (as, say, generous), whereas team owners, by contrast, are rarely described in negative terms (as, say, greedy or lazy or overpaid).

## 12.2 Context of the Study

Ironically, while Herman and Chomsky point out that it is taboo for media organizations, as corporate entities that depend on other corporate entities (advertisers), to mention socialism in a positive light,<sup>7</sup> one type of socialism seems to receive a free pass: that which benefits powerful interests. Namely, major cities across America have socialised the profits of multi-millionaire sports team owners at the expense of those cities' taxpayers. Indeed, owners of teams in the four largest sports leagues (the NFL, MLB, the NBA, and the NHL) received nearly \$20 billion in taxpayer subsidies for new arenas from 1990 to 2011, even though 'urban planners and economists have argued that building facilities for private sports teams is a massive waste of public money.'<sup>8</sup> Yet Easterbrooke notes that this economic injustice has earned little coverage by the media—local or national—whereas the free agencies of Robinson Cano (in baseball), LeBron James and Carmelo Anthony (in basketball) and Terrell Suggs (in football) have received considerable coverage<sup>9</sup> (e.g., James has been a free agent for just two days, yet a Google search on June 26, 2014, yielded 3,670,000 'hits'), much of it negative—focusing on how overpaid the players are.<sup>10</sup>

What's more, whereas team owners have been demanding socialised profits, free agent players are merely exercising their free-market right to play for the highest bidder, after 5–7 years of being required to play for the team that drafted them—in violation of free-market principles and, arguably, anti-trust laws. In light of such ironies, were Herman and Chomsky's PM to be *inaccurate*, we would expect to see professional athletes covered in a fairly sympathetic light—given that they were compelled to play for a team not of their choosing for many years (via a draft)—and sports team owners covered in a more critical manner, given that their tax-payer-subsidised profits would seem to be the sort of scandal that a vigilant press, dedicated to acting as the public's watchdog, as Thomas Jefferson advocated, would pounce on. On the other hand, if the PM is accurate, we would expect to see neutral or favourable coverage for team owners and more negative coverage for professional athletes. For, to paraphrase the two scholars, hegemonic ideas favouring powerful elites are internalised by beat journalists and presented to news consumers as 'common sense.'<sup>11</sup>

## 12.3 Methods Section

To test the prevalence of various stigmatizing terms describing athletes vs. those describing team owners in both the internet at large and America's so-called 'paper of record,' the *New York Times*, I typed such terms as *spoiled athlete*, *spoiled owner*, etc. into the search engines of Google, as well as that of the *Times*' site, which searches issues of the *Times* all the way back to the first edition in 1851. I chose to pair the *Times*, a so-called 'liberal' paper, with Google.

com because the latter gives a more macro-oriented perspective, including blogs, the professional news media, and fan posts. Thus, in using Google, I'm implying a broader definition of media, which is what one encounters when one accesses Google.com as so many do each day.

Due to the imprecision of Google searches as a methodological tool, however, the study also includes quantitative dimensions, checking websites to see what they actually say and whether they are commercial outlets or fan blogs. This added check is important because, as Pedro notes, Google search results are not website neutral:

A review of specialised literature suggests that . . . the selection and ordering of the results respond to hierarchical criteria which tend to favour sites belonging to established, dominant institutions, at the expense of new and less well-established sites, and thus for innovation and diversity.<sup>12</sup>

Key words and phrases examined by the study include '*greedy athletes*' and '*greedy team owners*'; '*spoiled athlete*' and '*spoiled team owner*'; '*selfish athlete*' and '*selfish owner*'; '*unmotivated professional athletes*' and '*unmotivated team owners*'; and "*inflated salaries, players*" vs. '*inflated salaries*' owners. Pedro, however, notes that the order of the keywords affects the search results, with the first words carrying more weight than later terms, so this study uses various permutations of keyword phrases (e.g., '*lazy owner*' team; '*lazy owner*' sports team; etc.).<sup>13</sup>

#### 12.4 Financial Information on the *New York Times* and Google.com

The *New York Times* has a market capitalization of \$2.35 billion, as of 3 July 2014.<sup>14</sup> It also owns 40 per cent of a paper company and in recent years has owned nine television stations, the *Boston Globe*, Boston.com, 16 other daily newspapers, and more than 50 web sites, including About.com, an online digital information provider, according to *NewYorkTimes.com*.<sup>15</sup> As a multi-billion-dollar enterprise, the *Times* shares common interests with such dominant institutional sectors as the banks (from which the *Times* acquires loans) and other major corporations (from which the *Times* seeks its large-dollar advertising revenue) and thus would be expected to view issues such as union-management skirmishes through a corporate-friendly prism. Google, by contrast, is worth roughly 350 billion dollars, as of 2013.<sup>16</sup> Celebritynetworth.net adds that Google is an 'international corporation' based in the US that offers internet services and products, such as advertising techniques, cloud computing, and internet searches.<sup>17</sup> Note, then, that Google, not even 20 years old, is worth more than one hundred times what the 'Gray Lady,' as the 163-year-old *New York Times* is

nicknamed, is worth—for precisely the reasons that Herman identifies in updating the filters: that the ascendance of the internet and the corresponding decline of the newspaper industry has meant that newspapers are ever more dependent on senior beat sources and corporate public relations departments and less able to deploy investigative reporters that may, for example, run an exposé on the trend toward government subsidization of sports stadiums and other incentives given to prevent team owners from moving their teams.<sup>18</sup>

Below, I've listed the results of the key-word analysis, bold-facing key findings. A brief discussion of the results follows each table.

One trend stands out in Table 12.1: Terms disparaging NFL players' salaries or just athletes' salaries drew vastly more hits than terms disparaging team owners' salaries. For example, the phrase *inflated athletes' salaries* (not in quotes) drew 567,000 hits and the term *inflated NFL salaries* drew over 423,000 hits. (A random check of 30 of the hits indicated that all referred to players' salaries, none to the earnings by owners.) By contrast, the phrase '*inflated salaries*' owners drew just 16,000 hits and perhaps 85 per cent of them referred to players' salaries. This discrepancy seems to underscore Herman and Chomsky's point that the common-sense view, expressed via the internet, reflects the interests of hegemonic forces, such as the extremely affluent team owners.

It should be acknowledged, however, that '*inflated sports ticket prices*' drew 12 million hits but fans may not hold team owners directly responsible for such inflation; in fact, it is just as likely that they would blame players' inflated salaries, since owners' team related earnings do not appear much on the web,

Google.com, 1/6/2014	No. of 'hits'
Inflated athletes' salaries	567,000
Inflated sports ticket prices	12,000,000 (but at least half refer to 'ticket scalping' in Europe)
Inflated NFL salaries	423,000
Inflated NFL ticket prices	837,000
'inflated NFL salaries'	53 (but all refer to players' salaries)
'inflated NFL players' salaries'	0
'Inflated NFL owners' salaries'	0
'NFL owners' inflated salaries'	0
'Inflated salaries' players	<b>20,100</b>
'Inflated salaries' owners	<b>16,000</b> (but perhaps 80% of the hits refer to players' salaries)

**Table 12.1:** Keyword search on Google.com Focusing on 'Inflated' and 'Salaries'.

<b>Google.com 6 January 2014</b>	
Overpriced NFL tickets	131,000
'overpriced NFL tickets'	8590
Overpriced NFL players	46,000
'Overpriced NFL players'	2
Overpriced professional athletes	29,900
Overpriced NFL (athletes OR players)	131,000
'Overpaid NFL players'	<b>9670</b>
'Overpaid NFL owners'	4 (and 3 of the 4 are from fans' blogs/web-pages; only 1 is from a media organization)
'Overrated NFL players'	<b>46,400</b>
'Overrated NFL owners'	1 (a blog-post from a fan)
'Lazy professional athletes'	703
'Lazy professional athlete'	85
'Lazy athletes'	5460 (but many don't refer to professional athletes)
'Lazy athlete'	450 (likewise, many don't refer to professionals)
'Lazy owner' sports teams	894
'Lazy NFL owner'	0
'Unmotivated NFL owner'	0
'Lazy owner' team	28,200 (but the vast majority seem to refer to fantasy football or baseball owners; motorboat owners; or dog-owners. An examination of the first 20 hits showed that just one of them referred to an NFL team owner: the Philadelphia Eagles owner. And this is a fan's blog post speculating that the Eagles' owner might be lazy or might not.)
'Unmotivated professional athletes'	<b>963</b>
'Unmotivated professional athlete'	35
'Unmotivated owner'	829 (but I didn't see any hits related to sports team owners)
'Unmotivated owners' sports teams	<b>41</b> (but none refer to sports team owners)
'Unmotivated owner' sports teams	7 (only two refer to sports team owners)

**Table 12.2:** Keyword Search on Google.com Using 'Overpriced', 'Lazy,' and 'Unmotivated?.'

relative to players' earnings. Nor does the media tend to provide much analysis of owners' influence on pricing, further insulating them from the fans' ire. Sample quote: 'Sports fans hate nothing more than lazy, unmotivated athletes. By that standard, Albert Haynesworth...'<sup>19</sup>

Note the stark contrast between the number of hits for '*overpaid NFL players*' (9,670 hits) and that for '*overpaid NFL owners*' (4—and just one came from a media organization). So, as Herman points out in a different context, the issue of inflated salaries is framed in terms favourable to elites—despite a massive increase in NFL owners' income relative to players' in recent years.<sup>20</sup> Specifically, over the past ten years, the NFL TV contract, which is paid to the owners, has more than doubled in value,<sup>21</sup> as has NFL parking prices,<sup>22</sup> and ticket prices have risen over 50 per cent.<sup>23</sup> By contrast, NFL players' salaries have only risen 40% during those 10 years and most of that money is unguaranteed.<sup>24</sup> What is more, there seems to be hardly any recognition that team owners and high level management receive handsome salaries. NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell, for example, earned \$29.5 million in 2011, according to Bleacherreport.com—even though the NFL is classified as a non-profit organization and thus can secure public funds for building stadiums and tax subsidies for the land on which the stadium is built, so that the public is effectively subsidizing much of Goodell's considerable salary.<sup>25</sup>

In addition, ticket and parking price hikes affect the fans more directly than players' salaries do, since the team owners can offset higher player salaries by reducing their own salaries. Finally, the trope of the overpaid NFL athlete, which appears to be perpetuated by the media and fans alike on Google, belies four facts: (a) that NFL players make 30 to 70 per cent less than their counterparts in professional basketball and baseball and, unlike the latter two, tend to have unguaranteed contracts;<sup>26</sup> (b) that they also make far less than each of the 32 NFL owners (17 of whom are billionaires), whose teams have an average worth of over a billion dollars<sup>27</sup> and tend to be family-owned, so that many of the owners, like those that inherit newspapers, have not needed to work for a salary;<sup>28</sup> (c) that the players 'play' a sport so violent that the league recently settled a class action lawsuit involving thousands of players who retired with debilitating brain injuries apparently due to the many concussions they suffered while playing professional football; (d) that the players are considerably underpaid for the first five to seven years of their career due to a draft that artificially deflates salaries.<sup>29</sup>

It is also interesting to note that '*overrated NFL players*' [46,400 hits] and '*unmotivated professional athlete/athletes*' [998 hits] receive vastly more hits than '*overrated owners*' [just one hit—from a fan's blog post] and '*unmotivated owners' sports teams*' [only 2 of the 48 'hits' for "*unmotivated owners' sports teams*" refers to sports team owners]. While it is true that some players may not live up to their athletic potential, they did manage to reach the elite league in

their given sport, which means they are among the top 600 players in the entire country (if one is referring to the NBA) or 1,200 players in the country (if one is referring to the NFL). Conversely, while some owners made their own fortunes, many of them inherited their wealth (e.g., the current Rooney ownership in Pittsburgh, Jimmy Haslam in Cleveland; Mike Brown in Cincinnati) and thus may be considered both ‘overrated’ (in that their financial power is not correlated with how hard they worked for it) and unmotivated (in that they have little incentive to work hard). Finally, many owners do not invest their team revenue in acquiring expensive free agents, preferring to pocket the revenue—yet another sign of a lack of motivation.

Note the vast gap between *spoiled athletes* or *spoiled players* [about 40,000 hits altogether] and *spoiled team owners* [about 820 hits]—a gap even more pronounced *vis-à-vis* NFL owners and players. Yet it is the players who must stay in shape, practice almost daily during a gruelling season (162 games in baseball, 82 in the NBA and 16 in the NFL, plus four pre-season games) in which they are away from their families for long periods, and endure relatively short professional athletic careers that which can end suddenly, due to injury or nonrenewal of contract; conversely, the owners cannot be cut or fired—except under extremely unusual circumstances (as San Diego Clippers owner Donald Sterling discovered), generally remain team owners for

<b>Google.com, 11 January 2014</b>	
‘spoiled athlete’	<b>34,800</b>
‘spoiled owner’	<b>2,860</b> (but virtually none concern sports team owners)
‘spoiled team owner’	<b>8</b>
‘spoiled owner’ team	<b>809</b>
‘spoiled player’ team	3,470
‘spoiled player’	6,230
‘spoiled NFL player’	<b>1,290</b>
‘spoiled NFL owner’	<b>3</b> (including a blog spot from a fan)
‘greedy owner*’ sports team	101,000
‘greedy player*’	103,000
‘greedy player*’ sports team	2,450
‘greedy athlete*’	67,400
‘greedy athlete’ sports team	15,100
‘greedy professional athletes’	3,470
‘greedy professional athlete’	943

**Table 12.3:** Keyword Search on Google.com Using ‘Spoiled’ and ‘Greedy’.

many years (e.g., the Rooney family in Pittsburgh has owned the Steelers for over 50 years), and can hire *others* to manage and travel with the team, while they may remain home with their families. This public misperception of players being more spoiled than owners may stem from the fact that the public identifies with the players, most of whom come from working or middle-class backgrounds, but accept as ‘the natural order’ that team owners are fabulously wealthy. Herman and Chomsky note that such a ‘common sense’ perspective—akin to the public’s disdain for affirmative action that benefits historically underrepresented classes while feeling neutral about the legacy affirmative action that benefits the children of elites—serves the interests of hegemonic groups.<sup>30</sup>

Now that the keyword search of Google.com has been performed, the study will search for keywords from NYT.com.

Note that ‘lazy player’ significantly outnumbers ‘lazy team owner,’ in that only two of the latter refer to a sports owner—and this is the same article listed twice. By contrast, ‘lazy player’ or ‘lazy players’ appears a total of 18 times. This

<b>8 January 2014, NewYorkTimes.com</b>	
‘Unmotivated professional athlete’	0
‘Unmotivated professional athletes’	0
‘Unmotivated athletes’	0
‘Unmotivated owners’ sports teams	0
‘Unmotivated owner’ sports teams	0
‘Unmotivated owner’	0
‘Lazy athletes’	0
‘Lazy athlete’	0
‘Lazy players’	7
‘Lazy player’	11
‘Lazy owner’	0
‘Lazy owners’	7 (none refer to sports owners)
‘Lazy team owner’	3 (One refers to fantasy football owners; another refers to the ‘Princess Vampire’ fan site; the third refers to Michigan’s ‘Dash for Cash,’ which involves small-time race cars, not multi-millionaire team owners)
‘Lazy NFL owner’	0
‘Unmotivated NFL owner’	0

**Table 12.4:** Keyword Search on NYT.com Using ‘Lazy’ and ‘Unmotivated.’

is ironic in light of the inherited wealth of many sports franchise owners, particularly NFL owners, vs. players who, in reaching the top 500–1,000 or so in a sport played by millions, most likely polished their skills for thousands of hours even as children, so that they were good enough to make the pros by their late teens (in basketball and baseball) or early twenties.<sup>31</sup> By contrast, even owners who did work hard to earn their vast fortunes do not have to work particularly hard as team owners; they generally hire general managers, team presidents,

'Spoiled athlete'	14
'Spoiled player'	4
'Spoiled player' team	3
'Spoiled owner' team	0
'Spoiled owner'	0
'Spoiled team owner'	0
'Spoiled NFL owner'	0
'Spoiled NFL player'	584
'Spoiled NFL athlete'	0
'Selfish player'	105
'Selfish owner'	5 (but none are about sports—e.g., dog owners are discussed)
'Egotistical athlete'	1
'Egotistical owner'	1
'Egotistical player'	4
'Ungrateful owner'	1
'Ungrateful player'	2
'rich player'	8
'rich athlete'	17 (16 are related to sports)
'rich owner'	90 (over 2/3 are not related to sports owners)
'overpaid athlete'	19
'overpaid player'	10
'overpaid owner'	0
Inflated NFL salaries	125 (but at least one sides with the players, noting that the owners were accused of inflating salaries and capping contracts)
'Inflated salary' player	10 (2 are used as metaphors—e.g., a stockbroker is deemed 'a player')

**Table 12.5:** Search on NYT.com Using 'Spoiled,' 'Egotistical,' 'Lazy' etc., 11 January 2014.

'Inflated salary' owner	30 (but none are related to sports team owners—in fact, 5 are related to players' salaries)
Inflated NFL owners' salaries	55 (but most concern inflated players' salaries. In fact, when the limiter '-players' was added to the search, no results appeared.)
Inflated NFL owners' salaries -players	0
'undeserving player'	3
'undeserving owner'	0
'greedy athletes'	10
'greedy athlete'	1
'greedy professional athlete'	0
'greedy professional athletes'	0
'greedy owner' team	6
'greedy owners' team	38
'greedy owner' sports	13
'greedy owners' sports	61
'generous player'	4 (only one is related to sports players)
'generous athlete'	3
'generous owner'	42 (only 13 are related to sports owners)

**Table 12.5:** Continued.

coaches, etc. to do the work for them. Finally, it is ironic because owners tend to receive hundreds of millions of dollars in subsidies from cities desperate to keep a given team from moving to another city.<sup>32</sup>

Sample quote: 'I think the vast majority of players in the N.F.L. have guns,' former Giants ... He's just one more spoiled egocentric prima donna who is being ...'

As Table 12.5 shows, the *New York Times* uses the phrases 'overpaid athlete' and 'overpaid player' a total of 29 times but never uses the phrase 'overpaid owner.'<sup>33</sup> On the other hand, the *Times* does use the phrase 'rich owner' 90 times vs. 'rich player' or 'rich athlete' a total of 25 times, but only about 20 of the 90 are related to sports owners. The search term *inflated NFL salaries* appeared 125 instances in the *Times*, whereas the *Times* much more rarely referred to the inflated salaries of owners. On the other hand, the *Times* did refer to the term 'greedy owners' and 'greedy owners' sports about six times as frequently as 'greedy athletes' but they referred to the quoted term 'generous owner' four times as often as 'generous player' or 'generous athlete'.

Why then aren't *New York Times* and other professional writers pointing out how *underpaid* professional athletes are relative to the owners that drafted them? Herman and Chomsky's third filter—involving journalists' sourcing and beats—offers a plausible explanation for this discrepancy. To understand how, consider that sports writers routinely rely on the teams they cover to provide press releases, press conferences, interviews with the press secretary of a given team, etc. Indeed, every NFL team has a public relations office that facilitates the sports beat of the press in the given city. By contrast, the NFL players, or the players of any league, for that matter, have only one union headquarters and no union offices in given cities. Furthermore, if a beat reporter starts asking players about the issues mentioned above (e.g., the draft), that reporter can be denied access to the team's players and press conferences, and thus be rendered unable to perform his/her job as a beat writer, a privileged position that pays a healthy salary and affords him/her access to superstar athletes and a pass to all of the team's games.

Another reason might be more subtle. Journalists, like fans, don't identify with owners the way they do with professional athletes, many of whom suddenly ascended from impoverished backgrounds (especially in the NBA) to earn annual pay checks the average American won't accumulate in a lifetime, often despite having little education, poor articulation skills, and gang-like attire. By contrast, journalists and fans generally see owners like Jerry Jones wearing a dark business suit, articulating their thoughts well, and avoiding the kinds of reckless behaviour that seems to plague so many young athletes. What is more, as Gramsci's interpreter notes, fans and journalists alike tend to grow up in a city where a family like the Rooneys (in Pittsburgh) or the Hunts (in Kansas City) have owned the team for generations, so that this ownership dynasty becomes internalised as our common sense idea of how things ought to be, just as it doesn't strike us as undemocratic that presidents predominantly come from the upper middle and upper classes and attended Ivy League schools.<sup>34</sup> Moreover, since sports journalists interact with corporate elites far more so than fans do, they may gradually take on the hegemonic perspectives of those elites, seeing a player like Alex Rodriguez as vastly overpaid but not noticing that 'A-Rod' was denied his true market value until eight years into his career or that the league itself is a monopoly. In taking on such perspectives, journalists are acting in accordance with Herman and Chomsky's fifth filter: they are reinforcing the dominant ideology that social inequality, as exemplified by the monopolistic practices of billionaire owners, is beyond questioning or even examining.<sup>35</sup>

## 12.5 Conclusion

Following Herman's call for using the PM to understand how the mainstream US media works, this paper has tried to sensitise readers to the subtle ways in

which media discourses on sports strive to legitimate an increasingly unequal economic system by characterizing professional athletes in largely negative terms and sports team owners in relatively more favourable terms.<sup>36</sup> Specifically, the quantitative analysis found that stigmatizing terms such as ‘spoiled,’ ‘greedy,’ ‘unmotivated,’ ‘overrated,’ ‘egotistical,’ ‘overpaid,’ ‘rich,’ and ‘lazy’ are used far more often to disparage professional athletes, particularly NFL players, than to describe team owners; by contrast, the benevolent term ‘generous’ is used far more often to describe team owners than to describe players. This finding holds not only for a Google search of the internet in general but even for reporting in the august and ostensibly ‘liberal’ *New York Times*. In fact, ironically, the *New York Times* was even slightly more favourable to NFL team owners than Google.com was—at least in characterizing players, but not owners, as spoiled. Whereas Google.com had 1,290 hits for ‘spoiled NFL player’ vs. 3 for ‘spoiled NFL owner,’ (a ratio of about 400 to 1), the *Times* had 594 hits for ‘spoiled NFL player’ vs. none for ‘spoiled NFL owner.’ And whereas Google had 3470 hits for ‘spoiled player’ team vs. 809 for ‘spoiled owner’ team (a 4 to 1 ratio), the Grey Lady had 3 hits for ‘spoiled player’ team and 0 hits for ‘spoiled owner’ team.

That even *Times* journalists display this hegemonic bias reinforces the micro-level theory of media sociologists such as Tuchman and the Langs that reporters over time tend to reflect the views of their senior beat sources (in this case, team management/ownership, which has a public relations department, instead of the players, who, although having a union, lack a centralised public relations office, in the city in which they play), who would naturally see themselves as generous and the players whose salaries they hope to hold down as greedy. Yet the findings also reflect what Mullen and Klaehn call the more macro-level perspective of the PM, which focuses on power and social class, theorizing that constraints inherent in the social system—such as the dearth of labour reporters vs. the proliferation of business journalists—incline journalists to internalise as common sense ideas and language that favour the powerful.<sup>37</sup> What is more, the findings show a correlation between the biased, hegemonic sports coverage in an elite, well-respected publication, the *Times*, and the biased, hegemonic sports coverage on Google.com, which includes online versions of news publications (e.g., *USA Today*), public comments posted on those sites, and *personal* blogs or websites. Thus, we can posit that the team-owner-friendly perspective of prestigious papers like the *Times*, America’s so-called ‘paper of record,’ may influence the perspective of both less prestigious publications/websites and news consumers that post comments online.<sup>38</sup>

Finally, as Klaehn notes about the PM in general, the findings in this study do not imply that journalists are *consciously* favouring team owners over professional athletes but merely that ‘awareness, perception and understandings are typically constrained and informed by structures of discourse.’<sup>39</sup> Yet paradoxically, Herman argues that this more subtle bias enhances the media’s propaganda effects *all the more*, as the public presumably attaches more credence to the ‘objective reporting’ of papers like the *Times* than it does to

explicitly ideological sources like Rush Limbaugh.<sup>40</sup> Thus, as Herman argues, it is incumbent on researchers to use the PM to show how the mainstream media frame issues and events and ‘allow debate only within the parameters of the elite perspectives. . . . When ordinary citizens are not aware of their own stake in an issue or are immobilised by effective propaganda, the media will serve elite interests uncompromisingly.<sup>41</sup> And as Kellner adds, it is incumbent on researchers using the PM to focus not only on ‘serious issues’ but on low-brow subjects like sports, in order to show how voices and struggles are ‘omitted from mainstream views,’ thus preserving the existing power structure.<sup>42</sup> For by becoming more aware of this double standard in media coverage, sports fans can more easily resist such hegemonic values and begin to challenge the increasingly undemocratic system that has given rise to them.

### Notes and Bibliography

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- <sup>4</sup> Douglas Kellner, Cultural Studies, 'Multiculturalism, and Media Culture,' (nd) accessed 1 July 2014. <http://pages.gseis.ucla.edu/faculty/papers/SAGEcs.htm>.
- <sup>5</sup> For example, the NFL's annual revenue is now about \$10 billion a year, \$7 billion from its TV contract alone. Brent Schrottenboer, 'NFL Takes Aim at \$25 Billion a Year.' *USA Today*. 5 February 2014. <http://www.usatoday.com/story/sports/nfl/super/2014/01/30/super-bowl-nfl-revenue-denver-broncos-seattle-seahawks/5061197/> (Accessed 1 July 2014). NFL teams earn, on average, \$286 million annually, vs. \$152 million dollars annually for NBA teams and \$236 million dollars for Major League baseball teams and \$88 million dollars for NHL teams, according to Businessinsider.com. Chart: NFL and MLB Teams Top Premier League Teams When It Comes to Making Money. 14 May 2014. <http://www.businessinsider.com/chart-nfl-mlb-premier-league-revenue-2014-5> (accessed 1 July 2014).
- <sup>6</sup> Herman and Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media*, 1–2.
- <sup>7</sup> Ibid; Edward Herman (2000), 'The Propaganda Model: A Retrospective,' *Journalism Studies*, 1, no. 1, 101–112.
- <sup>8</sup> Neil Demause (2011), 'Why Do Mayors Love Sports Stadiums?' *The Nation*, 27 July 2011. <http://www.thenation.com/article/162400/why-do-mayors-love-sports-stadiums> (accessed 29 January 2014).
- <sup>9</sup> Gregg Easterbrook (2013), 'How the NFL Fleeces Taxpayers,' *The Atlantic*, 18 September. <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2013/10/how-the-nfl-fleeces-taxpayers/309448/> (accessed 8 January 2014).
- <sup>10</sup> Here is an illustration of the vituperative coverage of free agent athletes. Several leading football analysts confirmed Wednesday that most NFL teams are just one or two ridiculously overpriced free agent signings away from a Super Bowl victory. Giving out a bloated contract to an aging pass rusher or promising a ton of guaranteed money to a declining wide receiver with a history of injuries is all it takes to push a franchise over the top, said ESPN NFL analyst Bill Polian, adding that even the worst team in the league

would become an instant contender for the Lombardi Trophy by wasting most of their salary cap on a couple of unproven or overhyped defenders (<http://www.therichest.com/sports/10-of-the-most-overpaid-athletes-in-sports/10/>). Note that the reporter made no attempt to interview a player or union rep but only the ESPN analyst, who was the former general manager of the Indianapolis Colts football team and thus is not unbiased on the issue of free agent players.

- <sup>11</sup> Herman and Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media*, 2.
- <sup>12</sup> Joan Pedro, 'A collection of samples for research in Google: Design and application of a sample selection method. Results and problems of research.' *GMJ: Mediterranean Edition*. 2012; 7 no.1: 29–40, accessed 18 June 2017, [http://globalmedia.emu.edu.tr/images/stories/ALL\\_ARTICLES/2012/Spring/4.\\_Joan\\_Pedro.pdf](http://globalmedia.emu.edu.tr/images/stories/ALL_ARTICLES/2012/Spring/4._Joan_Pedro.pdf)
- <sup>13</sup> Pedro, 'A collection of samples for research in Google: Design and application of a sample selection method. Results and problems of research.'
- <sup>14</sup> 'The New York Times Company,' Google Finance, accessed 3 July 2014, <http://www.google.com/finance?cid=407690>
- <sup>15</sup> 'The New York Times Company: Company: Business Units,' The New York Times Company. Accessed July 3, 2014. <http://investors.nytc.com/investors/stock-and-debt-information/default.aspx>
- <sup>16</sup> 'Google's Net Worth -- How Much Is Google Worth?', accessed 4 July 2014, <http://www.theirnetworth.com/Businesses/Google/>.
- <sup>17</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>18</sup> Herman, 'The Propaganda Model: A Retrospective,' 3.
- <sup>19</sup> David Whitley (2011), 'It Doesn't Take Much Effort to Dislike Albert Haynesworth,' *SportingNews.com*, 9 November) accessed 4 July 2014. <http://www.sportingnews.com/nfl/story/2011-11-09/it-doesnt-take-much-effort-to-find-albert-hayesworth-unlikable>
- <sup>20</sup> Herman, 'The Propaganda Model: A Retrospective,' 3.
- <sup>21</sup> Daniel Kaplan (2013), 'Can the NFL get to \$25 billion?' *SportsBusinessDaily.com*, last modified 28 January, <http://m.sportsbusinessdaily.com/Journal/Issues/2013/01/28/In-Depth/NFL-revenue.aspx>.
- <sup>22</sup> Melanie Hicken (2013), 'The high cost of being a football fan,' *CNN.com*, last modified September 7, 2013, <http://money.cnn.com/2013/09/07/pf/football-prices/index.html>
- <sup>23</sup> Easterbrook, 'How the NFL Fleeces Taxpayers.'
- <sup>24</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>25</sup> Alex Dunlap (2013), 'How Much Money Do NFL Front Office Executives Make? Last modified 15 May, <http://bleacherreport.com/articles/1638485-how-much-money-do-nfl-front-office-execs-make> Dunlap notes that these 'non-profit' organizations 'make money hand over fist' by designating themselves as non-profit organizations and thus receiving the aforementioned public subsidies.

- <sup>26</sup> Joe Dorish, 'Average Salaries in the NBA, NFL, MLB, and NHL,' Yahoo.com, last modified 12 November 2011, <http://sports.yahoo.com/nba/news?slug=ycn-10423863>; 'Are NHL Players Overpaid?' Stats Professor, last modified 29 November 2012, [http://www.statsprofessor.org/2012\\_11\\_01\\_archive.html](http://www.statsprofessor.org/2012_11_01_archive.html). Stats Professor points out that the 2011-2012 NFL contract is worth nearly twice as much as those of the NBA, MLB, and NHL combined.
- <sup>27</sup> Kaplan, 'Can the NFL Get to \$25 Billion?', 3.
- <sup>28</sup> Easterbrook, 'How the NFL Fleeces Taxpayers.'
- <sup>29</sup> That journalists have internalised this anti-free-market idea so utterly can be seen in this analogy: suppose that press owners proposed a draft of aspiring journalists, so that these journalists could only negotiate and work for one company for the first seven years of their career and, if they couldn't reach a contract with that employer, would have to leave journalism. Would journalists view such a situation from management's perspective?
- <sup>30</sup> Herman and Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent*, 1-2.
- <sup>31</sup> Malcolm Gladwell (2008), *Outliers: The Story of Success* (New York: Little, Brown and Co).
- <sup>32</sup> Easterbrook, 'How the NFL Fleeces Taxpayers.'
- <sup>33</sup> One interesting exception to this rule of deferential treatment toward sports team owners is the following letter to the editor of the *New York Times*, published in 1981: 'To the Sports Editor: Many feel that the grossly inflated salaries paid to professional athletes are justified because sports fans are paying the tab by purchasing tickets. This appealing and seemingly logical free enterprise rationalization is wrong. We live in an economically complex society. The fans who attend games are not the only ones paying for the astronomical salaries. Many professional athletes have refined the skills that command high salaries at public expense while attending public universities on athletic scholarships. Most professional teams play in stadia built and, in some cases, maintained with tax dollars. Because the owners do not have to provide their place of business, they can pay higher salaries. For tax purposes, owners are able to depreciate the value of their players and charge the expenses of their sports holdings against the earnings of their other business enterprises. Thus, they are able to reduce significantly their tax liability. Many high-priced season tickets are held by other businesses and are charged as business expenses for tax purposes. One man's tax deduction is another man's tax. When the rich avoid taxes, the rest of us pay higher taxes. A large portion of the astronomical salaries are financed with television revenue. The demand for increased television revenue to pay the ever-increasing salaries results in higher prices to consumers for the products advertised on television. The owners of professional teams are counting on increased revenue from cable television to pay the huge deferred salaries of their athletes. You can bet that this will drive up the future cost of cable service. There are other, more subtle ways in which society pays for the huge salaries of sports stars. The salaries fuel the fires

of inflation. The salaries cruelly lead our youth, especially our inner-city youth, to believe that sports are the only way to financial success in our society. All Americans, including those with no interest in sports, are paying directly or indirectly for the obscene salaries paid to some professional athletes. CARL OLSON.<sup>34</sup> But note that this insightful critique of team owners as well as players was written not by a *Times* reporter or op-ed writer but a fan. Note also that it was written in 1981, well before the ascendance of spectator sports to meteoric heights, in terms of TV contracts, player salaries, etc. Carl Olsen (1981). 'Mailbox; Inflated Salaries For Pro Athletes Are a Public Tax,' *New York Times*, 1 March 1981, accessed 4 July 2014. <http://www.nytimes.com/1981/03/01/sports/mailbox-inflated-salaries-for-pro-athletes-are-a-public-tax.html>

<sup>34</sup> Gwyn A Williams (1960), 'The Concept of Egemonia in the Thought of Antonio Gramsci.' *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol 20 no. 4, 586-599.

<sup>35</sup> Herman and Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent*, 2.

<sup>36</sup> Herman, 'The Propaganda Model: A Retrospective,' 3; Kellner, 'Cultural Studies, Multiculturalism, and Media Culture,' 4.

<sup>37</sup> Mullen and Klaehn, 'The Herman-Chomsky Propaganda Model: A Critical Approach to Analysing Mass Media Behaviour.'

<sup>38</sup> True, the causal relationship can just as easily be reversed—the *Times* reporters may be influenced by the public discourse on the internet. Most likely, there is a discursive relationship between *Times* articles and internet postings: each influences and is influenced by the other.

<sup>39</sup> Jeffery Klaehn (2003), 'Model Construction: Various Other Epistemological Concerns: A Reply to John Corner's Commentary on the Propaganda Model.' *European Journal of Communication* 18: 377-383.

<sup>40</sup> Herman, 'The Propaganda Model: A Retrospective,' 5.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid*, 5.

<sup>42</sup> Kellner, 'Cultural Studies, Multiculturalism, and Media Culture,' 4.