

THE WARRIOR SELF: RISK TAKING AND INJURIES AMONG NFL ATHLETES

Emma Grace Yackley
Creighton University

The warrior is disciplined and determined. He is primed for impact, hostile, aggressive, dominating. Most importantly, the warrior is prepared to battle toward victory regardless of personal safety. He eagerly sacrifices his well-being for his brothers and the hierarchal structure. The warrior is a patriotic man and possesses great sense of pride in his endeavors. He knows what it means to 'give' for his team. The groan of a F-15 fighter aircraft rings through his ears as the starting drive is initiated. The warrior has been trained by physical and tactical force experts all his life for moments like this. He barrels forward to meet his target alongside 'missiles', 'shields', 'rockets' and 'trained killers'. His fellows are trained in the same art as him, valorized for their physicality and aggression. As the confrontation begins, he braces himself for the violent exchange of momentum as he collides with a warrior from the opposing squad. He is smothered by the crushing, rib-cracking force of the tackle. The sound of a whistle pierces the air. The warrior pulls himself up from the ground with a grimace; a dull ache reverberates inside his helmet. He must carry on and perform his duty: he must 'shake it off' for the next play. The warrior is a 24-year-old tight end in the NFL.

As described in the scene above, the legitimized use of force serves as a common thread that links the seemingly disparate institutions of sport and military. The intimate relationship between the NFL and the United States military is an artifact of the institutionalization of patriotic solidarity and military engagement in the aftermath of 9/11. The events surrounding 9/11 were largely of

military and patriotic concern; therefore, patriotic solidarity and military initiative set the precedent. While at a premium, expression and expectations of American unity crystallized as the status quo, and have continued to linger within America's cultural fabric nearly 20 years later.

In the wake of 9/11, sports served as a crutch in the bulwark of the established social sphere in America. Sporting venues, specifically the NFL, became a collective site of grief and mourning – arenas for the expression of patriotic unity.¹ Accordingly, with military knowledge also at the helm of America's cultural response to 9/11, the juxtaposition of armed forces and patriotic solidarity appears appropriate. Choreographed fighter-jet flyovers, productions of the anthem, flag unfurling, and dramatic color guard ceremonies blur the lines between sport and military as they materialized as household fixtures in the NFL. The proliferation of military jargon, sports-metaphors, and imagery of athletes adorned with 'stars and stripes' have become normative features in public discourse.

Patriotic sentiment increasingly dominates the narrative of national solidarity and healing, recasting hegemonic masculinity and sporting militarism as sources for national recovery.² Effectively, patriotism has become embedded in American culture and the military machine has been quick to take advantage of the advertising opportunity the NFL platform offered.³ For instance, a joint oversight report released by Arizona Senators in 2015 revealed that nearly \$5.4 million taxpayer dollars had been paid out to 14 different NFL teams from 2011-2014 for displays of 'paid patriotism'.⁴ The US military

¹Steve W. Pope, introduction to *Patriotic Games: Sporting Tradition in the American Imagination*, (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2007), iv.

² Pope, *Patriotic Games*, iv.

³ Adam Kilgore, "For Decades, the NFL wrapped itself in the flag. Now, that's Made Business Uneasy," *Washington Post*, September 6, 2018, https://www.washingtonpost.com/sports/for-decades-the-nfl-wrapped-itself-in-the-flag-now-thats-made-business-uneasy/2018/09/06/bc9aab64-b05d-11e8-9a6a-565d92a3585d_story.html.

⁴ Andy Mach, "Report: Defense Dept. Paid NFL Millions of Taxpayer Dollars to Salute Troops," *PBS Newshour*, May 10, 2015,

markets militaristic virtues such as violence, power, and risk taking as necessary values in the realm of sports – a style of ‘sport-militarism’ – specifically in American football – a site where these values appear both ordinary and germane.

Drawing from Adlers’ theory of the glorified self⁵, I describe the emergence of what I call the “warrior self” as a result of a potent military presence in the NFL, intense media, and ardent fan attention. I intend to explore the emergent sport-militarism perpetuated by the media and the US military in relation to the potential formation of a ‘warrior’ self, as perceived by athletes. A particular public persona, created by the media and the United States military, has been assigned to NFL athletes, casting them as soldiers or warriors. The warrior mentality that players may adopt under this role amplifies two characteristics of interest: tolerance to greater risks and willingness to play while injured.

The warrior self is a product of the exaggeration of values inherent to the game of football; American football is a naturally aggressive and physical sport. Thus, the exaggeration of values valorized in football such as the acceptance of risk, hegemonic masculinity, and the ability to ‘shake it off’, often goes unnoticed. Accentuation of these values in player behavior is often times identified as ‘passion’ and ‘intensity’. Whereas I argue an emphasis of these risky behaviors within the broader context of sport-militarism, produces a new set of expectations particular to the warrior self. Due to the alignment of athletes’ inclinations to behave in agreement with some of the values promoted by the military, NFL players are predisposed to the warrior self role. Institutions that favor and benefit from the promotion of these values, such as the US military, then look to actors – NFL athletes, as performative beacons of their patriotic message. NFL athletes are cast as exemplars of America’s strength that serve to legitimize the military’s cultural relevancy and hegemonic methods. Therefore, NFL athletes are prone to adopt the warrior self more so than other sports due to the fact that there is a preexisting overlap of values between football and war. Such an intersection of values allows for greater public acceptance and

<https://www.pbs.org/newshour/nation/defense-department-paid-5-4-million-nfl-honor-troops>.

⁵ Adler and Adler, 1989.

complacency surrounding the emphasis of sport-militarism within the NFL than in other leagues such as the MLB, NBA, NHL, and MLS.

After examining why the NFL serves as the primary setting for the creation of a warrior self, we need to examine the propagation of the warrior self figure. Knowledge exploring athletes' tendencies to play while injured highlights the role of sports ethic, athletic identity, the culture of risk, and the influence of others.⁶ While these factors are interconnected, I am primarily interested in the culture of risk generated and informed by a compelling military presence, and by the influence of others – peers, coaches, fans, and media on NFL athletes' behavior. Similar to soldiers, athletes are socialized into the 'culture of risk', a set of beliefs that encompasses the acceptance of risk, pain, and injury.⁷ Engaging in risky behavior that would otherwise be considered unwise and dangerous may become normative in many male and female sport environments, especially in professional football.

The socialization process through which playing injured becomes an accepted behavior in the NFL mirrors a similar process in the military. Interactions among members create a shared acknowledgement of risk, injury, and pain as mere formalities that are simply 'a part of the job' – known occupational hazards. While the perceived degree of risk in football is less severe than that of an active-duty soldier, the potent military presence within the NFL has led players to adopt increasingly similar notions of risk and their conception of what qualifies as a 'sensible risk'. Sensible risks vary depending on a host of factors such as circumstance and predicted benefit; they describe potentially negative outcomes that are worth the reward. For a soldier, the conception of what qualifies as a sensible risk will look very different from that of an athlete. When the stakes are higher, and the reward is greater, sensible risks increase in potential danger and injury. One player may understand an injury such as a dislocated shoulder as a risk where the potential benefits of

⁶ Robert Hughes and Jay Coakley, "Positive Deviance Among Athletes: The Implications of Over Conformity to the Sports Ethics," abstract, *Sociology of Sport Journal* 8, no. 4 (1991): 307, <https://doi.org/10.1123/ssj.8.4.307>.

⁷ Howard L. Nixon, "Accepting the Risks of Pain and Injury in Sport: Mediated Cultural Influences on Playing Hurt," *Sociology of Sport Journal* 10, no. 2 (1993): 183, <https://doi.org/10.1123/ssj.10.2.183>.

playing through it are not worth the risk of further injury. A second player may sustain the same injury but determine that the risk of playing with the injury is sensible in relation to the predicted rewards. At the professional level, athletes who do not interpret playing with an injury as a sensible risk or who do not share normalized conceptions of pain essentially forfeit coveted playing time or a roster position.⁸ The athlete who plays with a dislocated shoulder will retain their position whereas the athlete who decides otherwise risks losing theirs.

The normalization of pushing through pain and injury is informed by a number of factors. Although, before exploring the nuances of the NFL's risk culture, athletic identity and financial reward must be acknowledged as powerful internal drives to grit out an injury. Robinson defines athletic identity as "the level of maturity and understanding an athlete has in his/her efforts to maximize opportunities"; maximizing opportunities encountered while in the role of an athlete is crucial for personal, social, and professional development.⁹ Professional athletes, such as NFL players, possess an intimate connection to their athletic identity concept due to their long-standing participation in sports – their life experience is settled in and around the sport realm. To maximize athletic opportunities then, Coker-Cranney and colleagues reported from their study of collegiate athletes that participants felt they "must push boundaries in order to find success, they cannot go too far".¹⁰ In other words, these athletes did not fear the negative bodily consequences of their athletic endeavors. Furthermore, athletic identity holds significant personal and social meaning in regard to pushing through pain and injury as it determines athletic goals and conceptualizes a motive to look past pain and injury. Financial reward is also particularly important when understanding NFL athlete behavior. Without going into the

⁸ Curry, Timothy J. "A Little Pain Never Hurt Anyone: Athletic Career Socialization and the Normalization of Sports Injury." *Symbolic Interaction* 16, no. 3 (1993): 284, <https://doi.org/10.1525/si.1993.16.3.273>.

⁹ Mark Robinson, *Invincible and Invisible, the Personal Development of the Athlete* (First Edition Publishing, 2015), chap. 3, EBSCOhost.

¹⁰ Ashley Coker-Cranney et al., "How Far is too Far? Understanding Identity and Overconformity in Collegiate Wrestlers," *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise, and Health* 10, no. 1 (2017): 92, <https://doi.org/10.1080/2159676X.2017.1372798>.

technicalities of NFL contracts, athletes' salaries are based primarily upon their athletic ability, and if they cannot play, there will be less pay. Thus, the incentive to play can be financially driven, especially when athletes feel a pressure to support their families.¹¹

Athletic identity and financial reward are key aspects to understanding the influences acting upon athletes; however, identities are not formed in isolation. Individuals are inextricably intertwined with the broader cultural context that they inhabit, and in this way their identities are shaped by the encompassing societal and cultural values at large. In the case of NFL athletes, I argue that the institutionalization of patriotic unity and military engagement in response to 9/11 have continued to exert influence—particularly in those sites where they were most forcefully introduced—sporting arenas. Therefore, athletes acting within these venues, specifically NFL athletes, are primed for the ideals and expectations of a militaristic risk culture.

NFL athletes and active-duty soldiers possess distinct responsibilities and occupy different realms—the latter sacrifices himself for his country while the former for his team. However, despite these individuals' disparate responsibilities, the football stadium operates as a site for an unnatural intersection: soldiers and veterans are celebrated for their sacrifices, strength, and bravery in the face of great risks, at the same place and moment where players will face particular risks of their own. The temporal and spatial gap between sporting field and battlefield has been bridged. The distinction between the two risk cultures may become blurred as pressures for athletes to perform are increased by social comparisons to honored soldiers. Players may perceive a silent expectation to maintain the standard of fearlessness and bravery set by the individuals praised beforehand, to act as warriors. In short, one does not want to appear weak after the opening act has just been applauded by the same crowd for their acceptance of risk and display strength.

In addition to a skewed notion of expectations resulting from a temporal and spatial overlap of soldiers and athletes, the media also casts athletes into particular roles that tend to create new dimensions of their selves, and in this case, a warrior self that I articulate. Draped in the stars and stripes, clad in their padded armor and distinctive

¹¹ Mark Robinson, *Invincible and Invisible*, chap. 3.

helmets, these ‘missiles’, ‘shields’, and ‘rockets’ have been presented to the public as individuals possessing ‘super-power’ strength and physicality. Illustratively, the NFL advertised that “professional football players have evolved from everyman to superman.”¹² The American media and the military have cast NFL players as warriors and the public has overwhelmingly believed in them. The athletes, then, cast into these roles created by the media, feel as if they ought to live up to these portrayals.¹³ Superman would not take a day off for a broken rib, neither will these players. Accordingly, it is important to note the discrepancy between the capabilities of ‘everyman’ and what is expected from ‘superman’.

Adoring fans that idolize the athleticism of NFL players along with coaching staff and peers that reward the repression of weakness and pain further reinforce the image of a warrior self. Player behavior then transforms from mere role-playing to habitual role-making, emphasizing and accentuating behaviors inherent to the player’s core self, such as strength and masculinity.¹⁴ Therefore, pressed for legitimacy and acceptance, the athletes continue to embody warriors, a role that is threatened by injury, pain, and weakness.

Further, the authority behind the ‘ought’ for athletes to personify warriors is manifested as a sense of patriotic duty that can be derived from a past patriotic cultural precedent exerted on particular individuals and populations. External pressure from media, fans, peers, and coaches, has been informed by the patriotic narrative that the military has marketed can be redefined as a *duty* inasmuch as players coaches, and fans hold each other accountable. In the warrior self figure, displays of weakness or injury compromise one’s ability to act as an exemplar of American strength, for to appear weak is to “fall

¹² “Evolution of the NFL Player,” National Football League Operations, National Football League, accessed March 31, 2021, <https://operations.nfl.com/inside-football-ops/players-legends/evolution-of-the-nfl-player/>.

¹³ Patricia Adler and Peter Adler, “The Glorified Self: The Aggrandizement and the Constriction of Self,” *Social Psychology Quarterly* 52, no. 4 (1989): 302, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2786993>.

¹⁴ Ralph H. Turner, “The Role and the Person,” *American Journal of Sociology* 84, no. 1 (1978): 6, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2777976>.

short” though “such failure may be more than individual.”¹⁵ Returning to the origin of the post 9/11 narrative, healing was an action of national solidarity – and a version of that solidarity remains intact.

The story of Pat Tillman, a NFL athlete who left his team to enlist in the U.S. Army in 2002 and was later killed in action in 2004, sheds some light on this continuation of patriotic solidarity.¹⁶ Tillman literally embodied the intersection of patriotic expression and military in the NFL, and regardless of his true intentions or personal opinions of the war on terror, he was cast as a national hero by popular media and reified as an exemplar of patriotic duty and American grit. Cultural understandings such as Tillman’s narrative carry symbolic distinctions that can be “tied down” and sewn into the fabric of how society categorizes actions.¹⁷ Tillman’s narrative has been fitted to set an example for other NFL athletes in regard to behavioral expectations. A patriotic undercurrent remains alive in media, fans, peers, and coaches’ expectations for athletes to play through pain and injury to maintain their individual and group position as exemplars of American might. I argue that the influence of sport-militarism proliferated by the media and advertised by the US military has imbued strength and toughness with duty, as a consequence of the reinigorated patriotic solidarity in post 9/11 America.

Players may feel pressure to meet masculine norms promoted through competitive sport for the sake of their personal reputations and identities as it is personally advantageous to do so.¹⁸ However, the emergent sense of duty that is characteristic of the warrior self is reflective of an internalized societal conviction to promote patriotic

¹⁵ Michael Schwalbe, “Identity Stakes, Manhood Acts, and the Dynamics of Accountability,” *Studies in Symbolic Interaction* 28, (2005): 70, [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0163-2396\(04\)28010-3](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0163-2396(04)28010-3).

¹⁶ “Pat’s Story,” Pat Tillman Foundation, accessed September 17, 2021, <https://pattillmanfoundation.org/the-foundation/pats-story/>.

¹⁷ Michael Schudson, “How Culture Works: Perspectives from Media Studies on the Efficacy of Symbols,” *Theory and Society* 18, no. 2 (March 1989): 170.

¹⁸ Emily Kroshus et al., “Concussion Under-reporting and Pressure from Coaches, Teammates, Fans and Parents,” *Social Science and Medicine* 134, no. 2 (2015): 67, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2015.04.011>.

solidarity. Players may understand a moral responsibility to maintain and cultivate traditional American-made strength and toughness. Such moral imperatives expose the threads tying persisting post-9/11 military and patriotic ideals to present moral obligations. Just as a soldier dedicates himself for the cause of his nation, so too does the warrior self.

I suggest that the warrior self has health and wellbeing consequences for the players. The decision to play through injury and to accept greater risks is expressed and measured in player injury management. As players embody the role of the warrior self, they tend to express strength, masculinity, power, and aggression while they suppress behaviors associated with softness, compassion, and vulnerability. Therefore, tolerating physical risk carries great symbolic importance in the exhibition of sport-militarism. In fact, athletes are ranked according to the extent of risk acceptance, a hierarchy that manifests itself in terms of the lengths to which a player will “sacrifice” his body for his team and the encompassing patriotic tradition.¹⁹ Because the player’s sense of legitimacy may be influenced by his ability to carry out and express these behaviors, he may be unwilling to exhibit pain or injury. Therefore, when managing injuries, players resort to ‘shaking it off’ until they are unable to operate at the level required by their coaches or teammates. NFL retirees Nolan and Larry express these sentiments:

If I pull my hamstring playing football, you know, I’m playing that week [...] You’re just expected to play through pain, and you’re supposed to push yourself a lot harder physically.²⁰

I played with broken fingers, broken toes. Two games in Canada, I had broken three fingers on my right hand, but I still did the snapping. I learned how to snap to the quarterback left-handed...And then I started snapping punts

¹⁹ David Morgan, *Discovering Men* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 85.

²⁰ Katie Rodgers, “I Was a Gladiator: Pain, Injury, and Masculinity in the NFL,” in *The NFL*, ed. Thomas Oates and Zack Furness, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2015), 150. The names of the NFL athletes were pseudonyms assigned by Rodgers.

with one hand because you weren't going to sit on the bench.²¹

Nolan and Larry understood the nature of playing with these injuries as sensible risks – playing with pain and injury outweighed sitting on the bench. Shaking it off must bear greater rewards for these players. These NFL retirees demonstrate the ideology of a risk culture in the 2010-2012 NFL that expects and encourages players to look past injury, and their personal health for the sport. Larry recalls that he was “expected to play through the pain”, as he faced external pressures such as peers, coaches, fans, and the media. Players are expected to push themselves physically and surrender to the notion that pain and injury are the inevitable consequences of playing sports. NFL running back Ricky Williams provides a glimpse into the reality of player pain management in 1999: “The measure of a football player isn't how well he performs on Sunday but how well he performs in pain.”²²

Williams's statement assumes that the tendency to play through injury, and therefore in pain, pertained to the sweeping majority of his peers in the NFL in 1999. This claim is a nod to the long history of playing through pain in sports. In fact, a strong association of pain and excellence in sports possesses deep roots.²³ Pain need not impede an athlete's realization of success. Rather, the experience of pain can serve as 'proof' of an athlete's hard work and effort. For example, body builders hold a special appreciation for pain as it signals that muscle is being broken down and rebuilt – stronger than before.²⁴ As aerobic icon Jane Fonda famously claimed, “no pain, no gain”, and in the context of a football game, if a player is working hard, they are playing physically and aggressively – both inflicting pain and receiving it.

²¹ Rodgers, “I Was a Gladiator,” 151.

²² Ricky Williams and Dan Le Batard, “Everything Hurts,” *ESPN Magazine*, December 6, 1999, <http://espn.go.com/magazine/vol2no25ricky.html>.

²³ Curry, “A Little Pain Never Hurt Anyone” 287.

²⁴ Keith Ewald and Robert Jiobu, “Explaining Positive Deviance: Becker's Model and the Case of Runners and Body Builders,” *Sociology of Sport Journal* 2: no. 2 (1985): 144-156, <https://doi.org/10.1123/ssj.2.2.144>.

Williams's testimony is of particular interest to understanding NFL athlete behavior because it provides a point from which to compare how ideas of pain and injury management have changed in the past 20 years. Drawing from quantitative reports of injury occurrence and injury reserve lists from the NFL, a measurable change in injury management has transpired in the past decade. In the 2010 NFL preseason, 65 players were on the injured reserve, 88 in 2005, 210 in 2010, and 225 and 2020.²⁵ An increasing trend of players entering the injured reserve is significant as it appears more players are not willing to play through injury. While at face-value this trend contradicts the notion of a warrior self determined to play through injury and pain, I believe that it illustrates a particular flexibility in regard to how the goals of the warrior self are expressed.

Traditionally, the body could conform freely to the will of the mind: an athlete could play while injured if they wanted to. However, since 2002 alone, the NFL has created and implemented over 50 rule changes intended to reduce injury risk and eliminate dangerous tactics.²⁶ With these rule changes, the NFL has inserted itself within the dialogue of player injury management and bodily autonomy. While these rules pertain mainly to game time tactics and illegal tackles, an emphasis has been put on the players' bodies. Along with these rules, the NFL's Player Safety Advisory Panel now analyzes all injuries impacting players, including concussions and ACL/MCL tears.²⁷ In the past years, corresponding with the trend of increasing

²⁵ "NFL Reserve List by Month," National Football League, accessed September 21, 2021, <https://www.nfl.com/transactions/league/reserve-list/2005/9?after=c2ltcGxILWN1cnNvcjc0>.

²⁶ "NFL Health and Safety Related Rule Changes Since 2002," Equipment and Innovation, National Football League, accessed September 21, 2021, <https://www.nfl.com/playerhealthandsafety/equipment-and-innovation/rules-changes/nfl-health-and-safety-related-rules-changes-since-2002>.

²⁷ "Player Health and Safety," National Football League Operations, National Football League, accessed March 31, 2021. <https://operations.nfl.com/inside-football-ops/players-legends/player-health-safety/>.

injured reserve list numbers, a new authority has emerged to police and regulate the bodies of athletes as seen in the rule changes and initiatives enforced by the NFL. As a result of a new external authority – NFL health and safety initiatives, players’ bodies cannot conform to the internal drive of the mind. In light of this new authority, athletes must adapt their performances and develop new strategies to maintain their patriotic obligations.

In regard to the warrior self in the absence of an external bodily authority, to manage a sustained level of physicality to perform and carry out their ‘duty’, players must develop strategies of how to cope with constant pain and injury. A particular method employed by players is to externalize the conception of their body from their mental self to understand their body as a tool.²⁸ Athletes objectify their bodies as machines with the purpose of maximizing output – to cause harm and to be harmed.²⁹ By instrumentalizing the conception of their body to cope with pain and injury a disconnect grows between the emotional and physical self. From this disconnect a polarized ‘mind over matter’ comes to light. The body as a separate entity is to be conquered by the mental self. An insight into this physical disconnect from the mental self is expressed in the account of retired NFL respondent Percy:

Well, pain is nothing that I can’t overcome with the way I think and chose to, you know, deal with it. [...] we have power in our thoughts [...] if the body tells me it wants to hurt, I just tell it I ain’t got time for it.³⁰

In his statement, Percy refers to his body as “it”, which is of great significance as it reflects a conception of his body as a separate entity from his personal self. Percy feels as though he “ain’t got time for it [his body]” to be in pain. A body in pain is understood as a barrier that his mind “I”, can overcome. In the absence of an external authority policing injury management, players such as Percy were able to overcome the body barrier to achieve the will of the mind.

²⁸ Rodgers, “I Was a Gladiator,” 144.

²⁹ Kevin Young, Phillip White, and William McTeer, “Body Talk: Males Athletes Reflect on Sport, Injury and Pain,” *Sociology of Sport Journal* 11, no. 6 (1994): 178.

³⁰ Rodgers, “I Was a Gladiator,” 147.

While these strategies certainly exist in the presence of an policing authority, I believe they are greatly limited in the extent of what they are allowed to overcome.

In light of new player health and safety policies, the rule of the mind is diminished, it does not have unchecked power over the body. However, the will of the mental self remains intact as the same external and internal pressures continue to exert influence. So how does the individual continue to perform in alignment with these pressures under the terms of a new authoritative structure? While the depth of this question demands further exploration, I argue that an emphasis of bodily maintenance and care strategies have arisen so that players can carry out their personal and social roles. In a continuation of instrumentalizing strategies, the physical self remains separated, but might now be seen as an entity requiring maintenance rather than something to be employed without moderation. In essence, to continue carrying out perceived obligations and duties including those of the warrior self, players must maintain the health of their bodies. This shift is illustrated in an increasing trend of self care and recovery strategies. Players are increasingly prohibited from play while injured, therefore they must avoid and mitigate injury so that they may continue performing in their roles. For instance, NFL star Russel Wilson stated in an interview in 2020 that he “spend[s] a million, if not more a year just on recovery”.³¹ Wilson is just one example out of a growing number of athletes focusing on the care of their bodies – a trend that conveys the adaptability of players in regard to carrying out the role of the warrior self and other pressures under new authorities.

The connections I have made consider athletes through a broad, systemic lens that focuses primarily on external influences. However, speaking personally from the perspective of a collegiate athlete, a large reason for wanting to dismiss injury is simply for the love of the game. Athletes want to compete, and no one wants to sit on the bench. Distinctions among individual athletes must also be taken into account. It is impossible to isolate confounding influences within the

³¹ Jade Scipioni, “NFL’s Russel Wilson Spends at Least ‘\$1 Million’ a Year on Health,” *CNBC*, November 4, 2020, <https://www.cnn.com/2020/11/04/nfls-russell-wilson-spends-at-least-1-million-a-year-on-health.html>.

ongoing dialogue between internal and external pressures. The ultimate decision to dismiss injury and pain is the product of a multitude of influences and factors. The new concept of a warrior self that I identify provides a more holistic understanding of why particular expectations are enforced by a superseding cultural narrative, how they are assigned to players by the media, and how those players engage with those portrayals. Consideration of the potential alienation from one's physical self and the following instrumentalization of the body may act as a guide for increased clinical awareness and education of underlying pressures exerted upon athletes. Exploring the warrior self can shed light on a silent duty influencing injury management.

NFL athletes may act as the metaphorical canary in the mines. The potential emergence of a warrior self illuminates a superseding cultural narrative that raises questions about what this 'patriotic' moment defines as *how* to be American and its resulting public health consequences. A deeper investigation into the mind-body disconnect would also be of interest in the context of new injury-management tendencies. Further, team physicians must also be considered as a primary external influence due to their intimate connection to athletes' physical wellbeing. How might team physicians engage with the patriotic narrative felt by their players—do they feel a particular duty of their own to allow injured athletes to perform?

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Adler, Patricia, and Peter Adler. "The Glorified Self: The Aggrandizement and the Constriction of Self." *Social Psychology Quarterly* 52, no. 4 (1989): 299-310. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2786993>.
- Coker-Cranney, Ashley, Jack C Watson, Malayna Berstein, Dana Voelker, and Jay Coakley. "How Far is too Far? Understanding Identity and Overconformity in Collegiate Wrestlers." *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise, and Health* 10, no. 1 (2017): 92-116. <https://doi.org/10.1080/2159676X.2017.1372798>.
- Curry, Timothy J. "A Little Pain Never Hurt Anyone: Athletic Career Socialization and the Normalization of Sports Injury." *Symbolic Interaction* 16, no. 3 (1993): 273-290. <https://doi.org/10.1525/si.1993.16.3.273>.
- Ewald, Keith, and Robert Jiobu. "Explaining Positive Deviance: Becker's Model and the Case of Runners and Body Builders." *Sociology of Sport Journal* 2: no. 2 (1985): 144-156. <https://doi.org/10.1123/ssj.2.2.144>.
- Hughes, Robert, and Jay Coakley. "Positive Deviance Among Athletes: The Implications of Over Conformity to the Sports Ethics." *Sociology of Sport Journal* 8, no. 4 (1991): 307-325. <https://doi.org/10.1123/ssj.8.4.307>.
- Kilgore, Adam, "For Decades, the NFL wrapped itself in the flag. Now, that's Made Business Uneasy." *Washington Post*, September 6, 2018, https://www.washingtonpost.com/sports/for-decades-the-nfl-wrapped-itself-in-the-flag-now-thats-made-business-uneasy/2018/09/06/bc9aab64-b05d-11e8-9a6a-565d92a3585d_story.html.
- Kroshus, Emily, Bernice Garnett, Matt Hawrilenko, Christine Baugh, and Jerel Calzo. "Concussion Under-reporting and Pressure from Coaches, Teammates, Fans and Parents." *Social Science and Medicine* 134, no. 2 (2015): 66-75. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2015.04.011>.
- Mach, Andy. "Report: Defense Dept. Paid NFL Millions of Taxpayer Dollars to Salute Troops." *PBS Newshour*, May 10, 2015, <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/nation/defense-department-paid-5-4-million-nfl-honor-troops>.
- Morgan, David. *Discovering Men*. New York: Routledge, 1992.
- National Football League. "Evolution of the NFL Player." National Football League Operations. Accessed March 31, 2021.

- <https://operations.nfl.com/inside-football-ops/players-legends/evolution-of-the-nfl-player/>.
- National Football League. "NFL Health and Safety Related Rule Changes Since 2002." Equipment and Innovation. Accessed September 21, 2021.
<https://www.nfl.com/playerhealthandsafety/equipment-and-innovation/rules-changes/nfl-health-and-safety-related-rules-changes-since-2002>.
- National Football League. "NFL Reserve List by Month." Accessed September 21, 2021.
<https://www.nfl.com/transactions/league/reserve-list/2005/9?after=c2ltcGxILWN1cnNvcjc0>.
- National Football League. "Player Health and Safety." National Football League Operations. Accessed March 31, 2021.
<https://operations.nfl.com/inside-football-ops/players-legends/player-health-safety/>.
- Nixon, Howard L. "Accepting the Risks of Pain and Injury in Sport: Mediated Cultural Influences on Playing Hurt." *Sociology of Sport Journal* 10, no. 2 (1993):183-196.
<https://doi.org/10.1123/ssj.10.2.183>.
- Pat Tillman Foundation. "Pat's Story." Accessed September 17, 2021.
<https://pattillmanfoundation.org/the-foundation/pats-story/>.
- Pope, Steven W. Introduction to *Patriotic Games: Sporting Tradition in the American Imagination, 1876-1926, iv-xxviii*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2007.
- Robinson, Mark. *Invincible and Invisible, the Personal Development of the Athlete*. First Edition Publishing, 2015. EBSCOhost.
- Rodgers, Katie. "I Was a Gladiator": Pain, Injury, and Masculinity in the NFL." in *The NFL*, edited by Thomas Oates and Zack Furness, 142-159. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2015.
- Schudson, Michael. "How Culture Works: Perspectives from Media Studies on the Efficacy of Symbols." *Theory and Society* 18, no. 2 (March 1989): 153-180.
- Schwalbe, Michael. "Identity Stakes, Manhood Acts, and the Dynamics of Accountability." *Studies in Symbolic Interaction* 28, (2005): 65-81.
[https://doi.org/10.1016/S0163-2396\(04\)28010-3](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0163-2396(04)28010-3).
- Scipioni, Jade. "NFL's Russel Wilson Spends at Least '\$1 Million' a Year on Health." *CNBC*, November 4, 2020.
<https://www.cNBC.com/2020/11/04/nfls-russell-wilson-spends-at-least-1-million-a-year-on-health.html>.

- Turner, Ralph H. "The Role and the Person." *American Journal of Sociology* 84, no. 1 (1978): 1-23.
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/2777976>.
- Williams, Ricky and Dan Le Batard. "Everything Hurts." *ESPN Magazine*, December 6, 1999, 2,
<http://espn.go.com/magazine/vol2no25ricky.html>.
- Young, Kevin, Phillip White, and William McTeer. "Body Talk: Males Athletes Reflect on Sport, Injury, and Pain." *Sociology of Sport Journal* 11, no. 6 (1994): 175-194.
<https://doi.org/10.1123/ssj.11.2.175>.