

**The Media and The Postmodern Athlete: A Political Economic Analysis of  
Mia Hamm and David Beckham**

by

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## **Abstract**

Sport has become so deeply engrained in Western culture that society's understanding of it has become permeated with common sense. Deromanticizing the idea of sport, researchers have recently come to study sport as a cultural formation, asking that it be understood as an institution with a complex historical background. At its core, sport can be understood as an institution that is problematic. This idea opens the door for researchers to critically analyze the structure of sport and the power relations at play in sport and consumer culture. The central focus of the project examines the political economic structures and processes that have led to the complex conditions of the commodification of the professional athlete in twenty-first century Western society. As such, this project will address how athletes, such as soccer stars Mia Hamm and David Beckham, have been utilized as commodities to reach niche markets, represent multiple identities, and to maintain normative ideas of sport and society. In its entirety, this project will address how social, cultural, and historical processes converge to shape twenty-first century Western sport.

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## **Chapter One**

### **Introduction**

Over the past twenty years there has been an expansion in the study of consumption and consumerism. This expansion links debates concerning globalization, postmodernity, identity and new forms of inequality (Horne 2006:1). Therefore, a researcher must approach an analysis of sport by considering the social, cultural and historical aspects of sport in a largely consumer culture. From this, it is understood that any study of sport needs to fully consider the people involved, and the institutions and social structures that affect sport experiences and processes that occur in conjunction with sport (Crossman 2008:3). The research project proposes to examine the political economic structures and processes that have led to the complex conditions of commodification of the professional athlete in twenty-first century Western society. An understanding of the social, cultural and historical aspects of the institution of sport, in relation to the media, is the subject of my Masters thesis, and as such this project will make a significant contribution to sport studies by addressing how social, cultural and historical processes converge to shape twenty-first century Western sport. Furthermore, by understanding these three processes the research intends to explore how meaning is generated to create a desire to consume products that purport to represent an identity and lifestyle.

As the literature illustrates sport is a cultural formation and is not a cultural universal. Contemporary sport needs to be understood as a historical moment. Sport has become so deeply ingrained in Western culture that our understanding of it becomes permeated with common sense (Hargreaves 1986:1). This idea opens the door for researchers to critically analyze the structure of sport because at its core sport can be seen

as an institution that is problematic. Understanding sport as a social institution, political economic theory and the postmodern concept of simulacrum will be used to understand the complex processes that have led to the commodification of the professional athlete. Furthermore, the theories allow for an analysis to examine the social, cultural and historical processes of a social institution, such as sport.

In maintaining that sport is a cultural formation, with a complex historical makeup, political economic theory and the concept of simulacrum are critical tools to accurately analyze sport, media, and the power relations at play. Political economy can be understood as the study of social relations, especially the power relations, which mutually constitute the production, distribution, and consumption of resources (Mosco 2009:24; Mosco and Lavin 2007:3). The goal of understanding social change and historical transformation is critical in political economic research. This goal is characterized by an interest in examining the social whole or the totality of social relations that make up economic, political, social, and cultural areas of life (Mosco 2009:3-4). Furthermore, Mosco and Lavin (2007:2) maintain that political economic theory rejects the view that all “explanations can be reduced to one essential cause, such as economy or culture”. Therefore, political economic theory, by not solely focusing on one essential cause, will become a critical tool for understanding how social, economic and historical processes impact the institution of sport.

Postmodern theory, specifically the concept of simulacrum, will be utilized in the analysis to illustrate how sport is used to present a ‘false’ reality. Simulacrum maintains that reality is comprised of multiple signs and symbols. These signs and symbols are devoid of any single concrete meaning. The sign has become the hidden source of the commodity. All the repressive and reductive strategies of power systems are present in

the internal logic of the sign (Best 1994:53). More generally, I hope to explore whether simulation is the highest, most advanced stage of capitalism. In all, I will utilize the research literature to gain an understanding of the field and to illustrate where the research needs to go from here.

The thesis is divided into four subsequent chapters. Chapter two consists of a literature review, focusing on the main concepts of sport research, political economic theory, and the postmodern concept of simulacrum. The detailed focus on these main concepts will allow the reader to gain an understanding of how these concepts have been discussed by past research and how my research will expand on these ideas. Chapter three consists of a discussion surrounding the theoretical frameworks used and the methodological technique chosen. A key purpose of this chapter is to demonstrate how both theories and methodological techniques become critical tools when considering the social, cultural and historical aspects of sport in a largely consumer culture. Chapter four consists of an analysis of two case studies and fourteen advertisements will be examined using content analysis to explore in detail two major figures in the world of soccer. Mia Hamm and David Beckham. A discussion of the outcomes and implications of the analysis in relation to political economic theory and the concept of simulacrum is presented. Chapter five concludes with a final summary of the research findings and discusses wider social implications and ideas for future research.



## Chapter Two

### Literature Review

Over the past twenty years the study of sport in relation to consumption has grown widely. There has been a significant growth in the social, cultural and historical analysis of sport in consumer culture. This chapter seeks to bring together past literature that focuses on sport as an institution and its relation to consumer society. This research will provide critical information and highlight where research needs to go. The institution of sport has grown out of a historical movement wherein the characteristics of consumer society have continually shifted. Society is constantly revolutionising the processes of production, distribution and consumption. This continual shift alters the characteristics and formation of the sporting world. Therefore, we must understand the ways in which sport manifests itself as an industry that has developed from the characteristics of consumer culture. Ultimately, the literature illustrates that sport is a cultural formation and is not a cultural universal. To understand the historical and present state of consumer culture and sport it is important to bring together the concepts of consumerism, consumption and commodification. In bringing these concepts together it is argued that the research is more complete and examines all the processes that contribute to the formation of sport. To completely understand the historical shifts in consumer culture and the sport industry it is critical to examine advertisements or the media's role. The media and advertising contribute to a particular social order, economy and belief system, the media operates as a form of capitalism that represents society according to the logic of capitalism. Furthermore, through the processes of globalization the span of influence the media has has increased tremendously. Lastly, postmodern theory is a critical component of this research. I will utilize this theory to illustrate how sport is utilized to present a

'false' reality. Postmodern theory maintains that reality is comprised of multiple signs and symbols. These signs and symbols are devoid of any single concrete meaning. In all, I will utilize these sources of past literature to gain an understanding of the field and to illustrate where the research needs to go from here.

According to John Horne (2006:1) there has been an expansion in the study of consumption and consumerism over the past twenty years. This expansion links to debates on "globalization, postmodernity, identity, and new forms of inequality" (Horne 2006:1). Within these debates sport and sport studies presents itself as a merging powerhouse, in terms of production, distribution, and consumption within twenty-first century Western society. Sport has become so deeply ingrained in Western culture that our understanding of it becomes permeated with common sense (Hargreaves 1986:1). This idea opens the door for researchers to critically analyze the structure of sport because at its core sport can be seen as an institution that is problematic. Sport sociologists study humans involved in sport, the institutions and social structures that affect their sport experience and the processes that occur in conjunction with sport (Crossman 2008:3). Before delving further into the cultural characteristics of the consumption of sports and sporting bodies, it seems appropriate to briefly trace historical research done on the growth and development of capitalism and consumer society.

### **The History of Sport and Consumer Culture**

Contemporary sport needs to be understood as a historical moment. The highly commercialized sport industry present in twenty-first century Western culture is not a cultural universal, it has been shaped by social, political, and economic forces operating on a global scale (Horne 2006:23). Many argue that sport was a modernist creation of the late nineteenth Century (ibid:3). Therefore, sport has its own cultural origins that need to

be examined to completely understand the consumption of sport. Karl Marx is one of the most famous intellectuals to have studied the processes of capitalism. In his study of capitalism, Marx noted that the “wealth of societies in which a capitalist mode of production prevails appears as an immense collection of commodities” (Morrison 2006:81). Marx’s critique of capitalism illustrates his admiration for capitalism’s revolutionary productivity, but also his recognition that capitalism’s success would create a crisis of over production (Horne 2006:73). The crisis of over production results from an inability to extract enough surplus value, therefore too much is produced for the capitalists to sell and make a profit. Following from Marx, Engels saw the bourgeoisie as a societal and historical achievement, which achieved nothing less than its own deconstruction (Tester 1992:173). Marx and Engels, in *The Communist Manifesto*, argued that the “bourgeoisie cannot exist without constantly revolutionising the instruments of production, and thereby the relations of production” (ibid:173). These intellectuals highlighted the processes of consumerism and consumption that were foreseen to arise throughout the next decades.

In the eighteenth century the mode of production had yet to develop to the point where there was a distinction between work and leisure (Hargreaves 1986:17). The period from the last decades of the eighteenth century to the mid-nineteenth century saw significant change to industrial capitalism. Hargreaves (1986:20) illustrates this shift as the spread of:

factory systems, an associated expansion of trade and commerce, a rapid rate of urbanization, an explosion in the population growth, the rise of the new class of industrial capitalists, the emergence of organized, combative working class movement and growing demands for political change.

This first phase in the development of consumer culture relates to production, promotion, and consumption practices. Radio, print media, and advertising assisted the creation of the consumer and associated ideology of consumerism (Horne 2006:73). Raymond Williams (2000) argues that modern advertising developed in the half century between 1880 and 1930 as a “part of the modern distributive system in conditions of large scale capitalism”. The advertising system manufactures desires and anxieties. In all, this shift to industrial capitalism saw a rigid separation of work from leisure time.

Furthering the growth of industrial capitalism, advertising began the process towards developed consumer capitalism. Following World War I the Olympics, and sport in general, gained momentum as a major international event with increasing press coverage and recognition (Wenner 1998:18). Advertising spending grew, production was increasingly concentrated, and globalization enabled sellers to target larger audiences. In the 1950s and 1960s the athleticisation of North American culture, and government legislation permitted professional sports teams to combine their broadcast rights in order to sell them to the highest bidder (Horne 2006:21). In the 1960s the annual meeting of the American Alliance for Health, Physical Education and recreation included a session devoted to the sociology of sport (Crossman 2008:3). In the 1970s Post-Fordism emerged, producing the uneven movement from a mass manufacturing base and assembly line practices to a flexible and deindustrialised pattern of employment. Horne (2006:27) argues that consumer capitalism has arisen because urbanised industrial societies with efficient transportation and communication systems, combined with a high standard of living have allowed people to acquire time and money that allowed them play and watch sports. Researchers found that the historical transformation between a capitalist system based on production to one based on consumption allowed for wants (desires) to be

turned into needs (essentials), suggesting a shift from the authentic to the inauthentic (Horne 2006:7; Jackson and Andrews 2005:2). The intrusion of late capitalism's commercialism into the media sport nexus, through television and sponsorship, signalled the economic shift from modern to postmodern sport (Wenner 1998:20). To discuss and focus on these ideas, in 1978 the society for studying sport sociology, the North American Society for Sport Sociology emerged (Crossman 2008:3). In all, sports in the age of mass media transformed from nineteenth century amateur recreational participation to a late twentieth century spectator centered technology and business (Wenner 1998:18).

Noting, in brief, the historical transition to consumer culture allows for researchers to understand the ways in which sport manifests itself as an industry that has developed from the characteristics of consumer culture. It also allows for researchers to deconstruct the power relations that are at play in the cultural formation of sport (Hargreaves 1986:1) and the consequences of these relations on consumption and consumerism in a twenty-first Century Western society. Sport is a cultural formation. It is important that we recognize that we have invented sport for our own purposes and according to what we value in our own culture (Crossman 2008:5). The institution of sport has become a highly neglected constituent of power structures and the reproduction of these structures is concealed in routine operations sport practices and culture (Hargreaves 1986:3). Therefore, we must understand consumer culture and its characteristics as produced in specific historical and institutional sites within specific discursive formations (Jackson and Andrews 2005:7).

### **Hegemony and Sport**

In relation to power, it is important to note Gramsci's idea of hegemony.

Hegemony is the "contest of meanings in which a class gains consent to the social order

and its rules by making its power appear normal and natural” (Miller 1998:431). According to Vincent Mosco (2009: 206) hegemony seeks to understand advanced capitalist societies by concentrating on their capacity to base control on consent more than on physical coercion. Society contains old cultural meanings and practices, making the notion of tradition a powerful instrument in the construction of hegemony (Miller 1998:431; Mosco 2009:206). The mythical status of tradition allows the hegemonic practices and meanings to be uncontested and sets it beyond empirical testing by historical and social scientists (Mosco 2009:206). Within sport, hegemonic masculinity arises allowing for subtle tactics of domination by the powerful elite. This leads to exclusion from sports teams and an unbalanced interest in the lives and bodies of men (Miller 1998:432).

### **Defining Consumerism, Consumption, and Commodification**

Because twenty-first century Western society is depicted as a consumer society, it seems appropriate to define consumerism, consumption, and commodification and their relation to the institution of media. Consumption within this culture becomes a means of personal empowerment, subversion, or resistance mediated by active consumers (Horne 2006:8). Horne (2006:11) further notes that a “consumer society is one in which discretionary consumption has become a mass phenomenon and consumerism has become a way of life”. Abercrombie and Warde illustrate that consumer society implies consuming things, usually buying them, including leisure goods, services, and experiences that become central to one’s life interest (ibid). A commodity, according to George Sage, is something whose value is defined in monetary terms (Horne 2006:71). Commodification is the process of transforming things valued for their use into marketable products that are valued for what they can bring in exchange, ignoring

historical, artistic, or relational added values (Mosco 2009:2; Horne 2006:71; Wenner 1998:21). With respect to the media and media images, commodification occurs when content is transformed into marketable products (Mosco 2009:133). Furthermore, commodification has a fetishistic quality in which commodities take on bloated psychological importance to the individual (Wenner 1998:21). In all, media content is a key tool in creating commodities, this allows for social relations to be drawn into the orbit of commodification, including labour, consumers, and capital (ibid:134).

### **Media and Sport**

There is a great need for the consideration of sport in consumer culture. Due to the significant growth in social, cultural, and historical analysis of sport in consumer culture over the past twenty years, there needs to be an attempt to bring this material together (Horne 2006:5). According to Jackson, Scherer and Martyn (2008:178) media advance is the circulation of information. Media distributes signs and symbols by means of an ordered system. In another article, Jackson and Andrews (2006:1) note that advertising, as a form of media, is a commercial tool, a social language, a genre of spectator-reader experience, and a technique of persuasion (Jackson and Andrews 2005:1). It has its own language, customs and history, and sets the tone and pace for a large part of individuals' daily lives. Communication and media are powerful commodities because they are able to produce surplus value and contain symbols and images whose meanings shape our consciousness (Mosco 2009:134).

Sport and the media have a significant relationship. The structures of power within sport rely heavily on the institution and characteristics of the media to disseminate sport as an accepted, cultural form. The foundations of the sport-media relationship were developed in the 1980s, when new urban cultural entertainment, such as sport press,

magazines and journals were formed (Horne 2006:41). Sport as a spectacle and commercialised institution is significantly connected to commercialised, commodified, and controlled behaviour. The interest in sport by the media arose from the predictable occurrence but unpredictable outcome of sports, thereby creating ideal news stories (Horne 2006:42). Also, sport attracts male audiences, which had been difficult to reach through the media.

Moving from the general to the specific, it is important to understand the context in which sport has become taken up by the media. Contemporary sport is understood as a historical moment (Jackson and Andrews 2005:9). As such, sport culture, as highly commercialized, is not a cultural universal and has been shaped by cultural, political, and economic forces that operate on a global scale (Horne 2006:3). The industry of sport parallels advertising in multiple ways. Both these institutions can be seen as constitutive of meaning in modern everyday life and part of a 'magic' system, which helps to promote and market goods in capitalist economies (Horne 2006:20). Neither of these industries sells an innocent product. The mass media are the primary vehicle through which cultural and sports texts are produced and disseminated. These texts affect society's "values, beliefs, and the way citizens see themselves and debate about society, culture, politics, and sport" (Horne 2006:2; Jackson and Andrews 2005:3; Jackson, Scherer, and Martyn 2008:17). Accordingly, advertising contributes to a particular social order, economy and belief system, operating as a form of capitalism that represents society according to the logic of capitalism.

Postmodern theory conceptualizes reality as being comprised of multiple signs and symbols, devoid of any single concrete meaning (Denzin 1986:195). As will be discussed in the theory chapter, postmodern theory, Jean Baudrillard, and the theory of



simulacra are important when considering twenty-first century Western advertising and sport studies. Sport is a critical conduit for the transmission of images, symbols, and meanings that are central to society. Consumer markets are not pre-existing entities in social reality, but are constructed (Jackson and Andrews 2005:7). The selection of the “advertising medium and the ways by which audiences are segmented are ways in which social categories become transformed into markets” (ibid:8). Goldman and Papson (1996) discuss the cluttered landscape of advertising as sign wars that continually seek out new markets. There is immense pressure to find newer, more desirable and spectacular images and representations of reality to enhance the value of products (Goldman and Papson 1996: v). Therefore, no meaning system is sacred because the realm of the “cultural has been turned into a giant mine” (Jackson and Andrews 2005:5). Culture has turned into a giant mine because there is pressure to find newer, more desirable images to enhance the value of a product, thus advertisers and the media invent new strategies and push into cultural territory, looking for uncut and untouched signs, similar to raw material mines (ibid).

Furthering this idea of signs as representations of reality, sport is an ideal arena for this appropriation. Sport is an ideal conduit for cultural promotion because it mirrors an idealized version of capitalism. Sport is based on, similar to capitalism, competition, achievement, efficiency, technology, and meritocracy (Jackson and Andrews 2005:10). New forms of media, allow for reality to be further displaced from signs and symbols presented for use by the media. Earlier forms of capitalism have been extended by new forms of media. These forms of media have opened new possibilities to turn audiences into saleable commodities (Mosco 2009:120). The process of digitization has allowed new media to expand the opportunities to commodify media content. This is because it

provides gains in the speed and flexibility of transmission, therefore entertainment and information are more likely to be measured and monitored, packaged and repackaged (ibid:136).

To further illustrate the effect of sports media on consumer culture it is important to identify key quantitative data. It is estimated that between 700 million and 1 billion individuals view large events such as the Olympic opening ceremony and the FIFA world cup final (Real 1998:17). Sports clothing and equipment accounts for forty percent of the total sales of sports goods and services (Horne 2006:22). Overall, the United States of America's sporting economy was worth one-hundred and ninety-four billion dollars in 2001, which puts it ahead of chemicals, electronics, and food (ibid:23). In 2007, sporting and leisure goods, as an industry, accounted for \$689.5 million of a total \$12,940.80 million commodities sold in Canada (Statistics Canada 2009). Furthermore, sporting goods, such as specialized clothing and exercise goods, totalled \$127.4 million of the \$689.5 million sporting and leisure goods sold (ibid). In retail stores, 4,265.5 million dollars worth of sporting goods was sold in 2008 (Statistics Canada 2010).

### **Media, Sport, and Globalization**

Through the processes of the mass media the globalization of sports and sporting goods has emerged. Globalization is a process, or set of processes, which embody transformation generating transcontinental flows and networks of activity, interaction and exercise of power (Silk and Andrews 2001:180). Globalization involves the development of a global culture. This global culture is not a homogenous, binding whole, but is a general discourse about a world as a whole and its varieties (Maguire 1999:4).

Confidence in the Fordist and Keynesian economic policies became prevalent in Western economies prompting the movement away from the nation state (Silk and Andrews

2001:185). Thibault (2009:2) argues that there are several key players in increasing the movement towards globalization. These include pressures from transnational corporations, international capital, neoliberal economies, right-wing governments where markets are deregulated and trade relations among countries increase. Out of globalization processes the global-sport nexus emerged. This nexus is argued to be made up of three key groups, “sports organizations, media and marketing organizations and personnel, and trans- or multinational corporations” (Maguire 1999:149; Thiabult 2009:10). This relationship is also termed the golden triangle or a love-match (Thiabult 2009:10). Most importantly, out of the global-sport nexus media, processes have arisen that have the expertise to produce sport into a package that is easily consumed by spectators (ibid:10).

There are multiple features and characteristics of globalization. Some of these include the penetration of local cultures by the economics and imagery of global capitalism (Silk and Andrews 2001:180). This penetration represents the most sophisticated attempt by transnational corporations to control the largest possible market base and acquire the benefits derived from large economies (ibid). The corporate mission of the institutions and structures within the global-sport nexus speak to universal traits, experiences, and emotions in a manner designed to appeal beyond national cultural boundaries (ibid). Anthony Giddens discusses features of time-space compression that are prevalent in the processes of globalization. He defines this compression as a geographical stretching out of social relations and of our experience of all this (Bird 1993:60). It is also a growing network of interdependencies that involve economic, political, cultural, and technological dimensions. Jean Harvey and Francois Houle (1994:346) link sport to globalization and believe that it leads to an analysis of sport as an

emergent global culture. Sport contributes to definitions of new identities and to the development of the world economy. It is sometimes utilized as a commercially inspired reinvigoration of nation within the context of an increasingly global economy (Silk and Andrews 2001:183). Sport is therefore used within advertising as a de facto cultural shorthand delineating particular national contexts.

A further feature of globalization that plays a key role in the global-sport nexus are transnational corporations. In the early stages of corporate globalization, companies operated as if the world were a singular entity, with largely identical features. Corporations attempted to sell things in the same way everywhere (Silk and Andrews 2001:187). Corporations quickly realized the impracticability of treating global markets as a single, homogenous entity (Maguire 1999:12). Understanding globalization and sport as homogenous entities is erroneous and is seen as a threat to the idealized notion of what sport is (ibid). Transnational corporations provide sponsorship to sport organizations in exchange for the visibility of their products and buy advertisement space from the media to ensure the visibility of their products (Thiabult 2009:10). There is a pivotal relationship between production and consumption in the advertising industry. This industry plays a key role in constructing geographic boundaries of markets and thereby advancing the internationalization of consumer culture (Silk and Andrews 2001:181). Seeking to be rid of being equated with a homogenized view of the world and with an overtly American demeanour, companies, such as Nike, have begun to form relationships with national sporting heroes (Silk and Andrews 2001:193). Companies select national sporting heroes and national sporting pastimes and attach commodity signs to these potent national cultural signifiers (ibid). They focus on developing cost-effective

global campaigns that evade national borders by creating expansive global consumers who are linked by lifestyle values rather than by spatial location (ibid: 180).

In terms of participation, the World Cup, Olympics, and International Federation of Association Football (FIFA) offer platforms to all nations and individuals that are unrivalled by any other cultural body (Thibault 2009:2). With respect to the processes of globalization, the movement of performers, coaches, administrators, and sports therapists within and between nations and continents is a pronounced feature of elite twenty-first century sport (Maguire 1999: 89). Sport is probably the most universal aspect in popular culture and soccer is unique in its ability to bridge differences and overturn national prejudices (Thibault 2009:3-4).

Researchers, over the past twenty years, have begun to study the processes of globalization in relation to sports. An Adidas television commercial stated “Adidas makes you do better” (Silk and Andrews 2001:182). Athletes, such as Beckham, were utilized to sport their physical skills for the good of humanity as a whole. Adidas focused on universal moralistic and heroic traits. Also, the campaign transcends the nationalities of the athletes and the national cultural context within which the advertisement was consumed (ibid). Another Adidas ad pitted two identical teams against each other. This ad was campaigning their new shoe, Predator. The game was played in a nonplace, a vacuous stadium resembling an immense bank vault devoid of any signs, symbols or colours (Silk and Andrews 2001:197). This ad eliminates the physical place and replaces it with spatial ambiguity, that removes relational or historical attachment that consumers may have to a particular sports stadium (ibid).

## Representations of Beckham in Current Media Culture

Momin Rahman explored the representation and reception of Beckham in current media culture in 2002. Rahman (2004:220) discovered that Beckham is represented as a “working class boy made good, keeping it real by playing football but remaining humble, becoming rich in the process”. The media also constructs Beckham as a figure of controversy. He is the

captain of the English soccer team and an international model, fashion dandy and sarong wearer, and hailing from good working-class roots; represented as a doting father and downtrodden husband but also aggressive and petulant world-class soccer player (Rahman 2004:221).

Due to the multitude of representations Beckham has global appeal. It also allows for the media to explore him in terms of cultural shifts in public discourses (ibid). A desire to be like Beckham or with him is generated in advertisements through his unattainability, and acknowledgment of his extraordinariness based on his unbeatable talent (Sport in Society 2009:138). The media has brought Beckham into people’s homes in a way that is, at once, remote and intimate (Cashmore 2004:198). Beckham, through the media, has become a cultural icon with a god-like allure. Adoration for Beckham, even by those who know little about soccer, is attributable to the media displaying him as a heroic individual (Rahman 2004:221). Furthermore, Ellis Cashmore (2004:202) argues that Beckham would not be as popular in another era because contemporary celebrity culture is a product of the current commodification of society. Daniel Boorstin calls this the fabrication of fame (Sport in Society 2009:138).

The commercial industry which sells us these images of popular athletes to be consumed has grown and developed around trying to access our desires. Furthermore, they wish to shape and convert our desires into spending habits (Rahman 2004:220). For

example, Beckham is utilized as a commercial for this world. He personifies endless novelty, change and excitement (Cashmore 2004:207). He provides the stimulation to improve and upgrade through consumption, as effectively as mass marketing itself (ibid). Sport labour processes, which try to sell us these images, are bound in a complex political economy that is imbedded in a series of cross-cultural struggles that characterize the global sport system (Maguire 1999:104). Advertising companies cannot make claims of evidence about how meanings will be received and decoded by consumers, but they are able to discern assumptions about how meanings will be received. This is because these representations produced in a consumer context, with images and works about athletes are deployed to stimulate interest and convert that interest into economic transactions (Rahman 2004:222). Anything can be made into a commodity, including consumers and athletes. Beckham is evidence of this process and of the culture that has advanced it (Cashmore 2004:210; Rahman 2004:222)

With globalization and new forms of media, such as the Internet, there are few borders that help to define territory. As we become less definable in our groups we look for something to identify ourselves (Silk and Andrews 2001:183). Globalization is about creating a new global-local nexus and about the ability for transnational corporations to operate within the language of the local while also operating simultaneously in multiple locations (ibid:187). The global-sports nexus involves following the mechanisms of production, experience, and consumption (Maguire 1990:90). Corporations manipulate images which cross and re-cross linguistic frontiers more rapidly and easily than ever before (Silk and Andrews 2001:188). Corporate success in sports requires the identification and development of talent and its production on a global scale. Also,

success requires consumption by direct spectators or through the media complex, as participants in a global mass audience (Maguire 1999:90-91).

### **Gender and Sport**

Aside from the increasingly global aspect of sport, sport is and has always been largely divided along gender lines. According to Hall (2002:7) gender is a conceptual tool used to understand the social world and it is also a theoretical construct that requires careful analysis. Gender is one of the most constructed and dichotomous stereotypes in our culture (Knight and Giuliano 2001:219). According to the gender schema theory people are socialized into believing gender differences are significant (ibid). Structured inequalities of economic privilege, power, and prestige favour men over women leading to the believed sustained difference between men and women (Nixon and Frey 1996:241).

Anthony Giddens asserted that although there are

considerable variations in the respective roles of women and men in different cultures, there is no known instance of a society in which women are more powerful than men. The hierarchical relationship between men and women is a taken-for-granted construct (ibid).

In this way, gender differences mean that women are different from men, but rarely are men different from women (Hall 2002:7). Therefore, women's experiences are seen as deviations of men's experiences. In relation to sport, female athletes are bombarded with questions pertaining to their femininity, sexuality, fear, power, and sporting abilities compared with male athletes (Lenksi 2008:99). "Faster, higher, stronger" is the well known Olympic motto that inherently privileges male athletes (ibid:101). Sport, conceptualized as a social institution, produces these inequalities. For example, the swoosh logo on Nike products can be seen to represent capitalism, celebrity, hegemonic masculinity, power, and elite athletes (Lucas 2000:150). As such, these inequalities are



created and maintained by institutions and are supported by “particular beliefs and doctrines even though they are never entirely resistant to the ambitions of outstanding individuals” (Beamish 2008:61). Marx argued that inequality is tied to who owns and controls the means of production in society and all social history is characterized by class struggle (ibid:71). Mosley (1997:27) states, “if you think girls’ participation in sport is completely accepted, think again. The Women’s Sport Foundation receives more than five-hundred calls a week questioning the importance and appropriateness of sports in girls’ lives”. Therefore, it is important for a critical analysis of sport to examine the historical and present systemic barriers and how they work together to perpetuate longstanding, male dominated sporting practices.

After gaining a general understanding of the relationship between gender and sport, it is important to conceptualize how these gendered ideals are socialized into our society. Although human biology and behaviour is not fixed and unchangeable, we are presented with social forces that persist in differentiating the two and presenting them as unchangeable (Beamish 2008:69). “Socialization is a means through which society preserves its norms and perpetuates them (Crossman 2008:14)”. These social forces stem from childrearing practices and experiences. These experiences range from play and educational experiences to immersion within a larger cultural context (Beamish 2008:69). American concepts of gender is dichotomized as a distinction between care versus autonomy. Femininity is equated with care for others rather than oneself and masculinity is characterized by autonomy, self-reliance and achievement which requires asocial behaviour (Hall 2002:8). Organized sport was created in the late nineteenth century by and for white middle class men who felt the need to bolster a sagging ideology of natural superiority over women (Dworkin and Messner 2002:17). In recent years, sport has been

deemed either acceptable or unacceptable for women based on whether or not the sport conforms to traditional images of feminine behaviour (Jones et al. 1999:184). For the most part, sport is used as a socializing agent, wherein large, powerful, and violent male bodies are rewarded and serve as cultural symbols of exemplary masculinity and superiority over women (Dworkin and Messner 2002:18).

Drawing on the idea that the institution of sport represents male athletes as exemplary figures of masculinity, it is important to understand how these images form a collective memory that demeans female athletes and women in general. History has shaped our cultural events that fit into our collective memory (Billings 2000:415). Individuals within a culture will revert back to past experiences and biases when forming ideas and behaviours with respect to present day happenings (ibid). The dominant socio-cultural forces, spoke of above, prevent sport from being meritocratic, therefore not all participants are given equal opportunities to compete (Beamish 2008:71). Female athletes who have been partially accepted into the institution of sport are generally “able-bodied, white, heterosexual, young to middle-aged, and middle-class” (Lanski 2008:101).

By noting the complex conditions of the gendered body it is critical to illustrate movements and media representations that have fought for and depicted equality for female athletes. In 1972 the U.S Congress passed Title IX of the U.S Education Act (Dworkin and Messner 2002:19). This required all “federally funded programs, including athletics, to provide equal treatment and opportunity for participation for men and women” (Knight and Giuliano 2001:218). In 1971, approximately 300, 000 girls participated in high school athletics, in 1996 over 2.25 million girls participated in high school athletics (Knight and Giuliano 2001:218; Lucas 2000:151). Furthermore, females have come to represent 37% of high-school athletes, 33% of college athletes, and

represent 39% of the United States Olympic team (Lucas 2000:151). The influx of women in sport following the passage of Title IX was the key antecedent to the eventual development and recognition of a women's market in sport and fitness (ibid). Although there is no denying the movement towards equity in athletic programs, there is still need for improvement. Male athletes still have more opportunities, from peewee level through professional sports. Whereas, female athletes still struggle to access uniforms, travel money, and practice facilities (Dworkin and Messner 2002:19). Women's sport has become largely controlled by men and reflects the valued characteristics of men's sports, such as hierarchy, competitiveness and aggression (Dworkin and Messner 2002:20). Susan Birrell and Nancy Theberge (1994: 345) discuss how the ways in which the ideological control of women functions in sport:

In a patriarchal society, one of the primary mechanisms of power is the control of women through the control of their bodies... As physical activity, sport is also a site where struggle over the control of women's bodies can be publicly observed. In the past 20 years... men have been accepted as legitimate organizers of women's sport experiences, telling us how to play, when to play, where to play, and how to train our bodies.

With the rise in female athletes competing at the professional level the media has taken an interest in them. Sport as a cultural institution and commercial product, markets and constructs gender (Dworkin and Messner 2002:17). In so doing, the media preoccupies itself with the attractive female athletes (Lenski 2008:103). Media outlets refer to female athletes as women first and as athletes second. Therefore, the main focus is on their attractiveness, emotionality, femininity and heterosexuality (Knight and Giuliano 2001:219). Nike ads, addressing female consumers, came to represent personal experience and growth rather than a path to glory and physical power (Lucas 2000:152). Also, female athletes competing in male sports are described by the media using frequent

male-to-female comparisons and comments that have nothing to do with the athlete's performance (Jones et al. 1999:183). A study done by Knight and Giuliano (2001:220) explores how gender-consistent and inconsistent portrayals of athletes affect people's perceptions. They created a hypothetical Olympic profile designed so that the focal point of the article was either male or female athlete's physical attractiveness or athleticism. The study confirmed that people's perceptions of athletes are influenced by gender and by the type of media coverage provided in the article (Knight and Giuliano 2001:224). Individuals responded that female athletes whose attractiveness was the main focus were perceived as more physically attractive than female athletes whose athletic accomplishments were the focus (ibid). Similar results were not found for men. Therefore, people are more apt to rely on peripheral information to form impressions of female athletes. This study concluded that the media need to be cognizant of the damage that focusing on an athletes' attractiveness can have on people's perceptions and needed to realize that they are actively shaping public opinion (ibid:225).

A further scholarly example of how the issues surrounding female athletes have been researched is found in Reebok and Nike ads. These two corporations, through their ads, have purported to have made themselves champions of women's athletic participation (Dworking and Messner 2002:21). In one Nike commercial, Dworkin and Messner (2002:21) point out that images of athletic girls saying things like "If you let me play, I'll be less likely to drop out of school..." couch gendered information in language of individual empowerment. In these ads feminine empowerment and independence is displayed through wearing the Nike logo (ibid). Corporations have found profit in co-opting a quest, by women, for bodily agency and empowerment and challenging it toward a goal of physical achievement limited by its consumerist context. The product,

individual women's agency, is expressed in these ads as identification with corporate consumerism and this consumerism situates women's actions and bodies within a structural gendered order that once again oppresses them. In essence, corporations have taken feminist ideology of empowerment and independence and have sold it back to women without mobilizing around the collective concept of women (ibid:22).

Another scholar has focused specifically on Nike commercials. Shelley Lucas (2000:149) critically examines the ways in which Nike situates itself as a participant in current cultural conversations about women's participation in sport through television commercials. Similar to Dworkin and Messner, Lucas argues (ibid) that Nike's suggestion that girls are empowered through sport occurs within a framework appearing in commercials that constrain girls by representing them as lacking their own agency. Lucas (2000:157) examined the "girl being born in America" ad and noted that it was filmed just after the completion of the 1996 summer Olympic Games and Mia Hamm, a gold medal winner, narrates and appears in the commercial. This ad depicts action shots of girls playing team sports intercut with shots of girls playing with dolls and make-up. Athleticism and feminism are presented in paired opposition through the images and language used in the text (Lucas 2000:157). Mia Hamm comes to represent the unique women who can inhabit both the feminine world and the athletic world. She was voted the most popular athlete and was featured in People Magazines' 50 most beautiful people in 1997. Lucas (2000:156) concludes that this ad, through the use of Mia Hamm, illustrates the "cultural perception that only a few extraordinary women can exist in the juncture between athleticism and femininity". Most importantly, women's participation in sport is dependent on the decisions made by those who have power and influence in her

life. Thus, those powerful people are able to disassemble the barriers presented to women in sport (ibid: 157).

### **Postmodernism and Sport**

After considering the previous literature concerning the historical emergence and development of capitalist societies, media and commodification, globalization and sport, and gender and sport it is critical to review past literature on Baudrillard's concept of simulacrum. This iconic postmodern concept will become critical to my research when illustrating David Beckham and Mia Hamm as contemporary commodified professional athletes. Baudrillard noticed in postwar France there was a modernizing of economic and technological forces. Technologies of communication made it possible for the outreach of media sports, and the increasing commodification of everything associated with sports (Wenner 1998:21). These changes created new characteristics of a consumer society foregrounding the development of consumer goods, media, advertising and fashion (Merrin 2005:16). Out of these changes Baudrillard began to write about the production of meaning.

Baudrillard's early work, *System of Objects* (1968) and *The Consumer Society* (1970), provided examples of the processes of meaning construction. For Baudrillard, the postmodern world of simulacra, or simulations and representations, is a world made up of copies of which there is no original (Wenner 1998:22). By doing so, he described a world where signs and objects communicate, in addition to people (Merrin 2005:17).

Baudrillard also believed that there were no primary texts in mass culture, only repetitions (Wenner 1998:23). In emerging consumer societies individuals were integrated into a totalitarian code and engineered and manipulated "cybernetic communicational environment in which the goal was the perfect circulation of messages" (ibid). He

believes that consumer societies are driven by symbolic systems in which commodities are used as a means of differentiation (Chan 2008; Wenner 1998:22). Most importantly, Baudrillard wanted to illustrate how processed, produced, and profane meanings of semiotic and unilateral consumption replaced immediately actualized and exchanged meanings of the symbolic (Merrin 2005:17). In this way, an individual never consumes a product itself (use-value). Individuals are always manipulating objects as signs which distinguish them by affiliating them to a group of reference (Chan 2008). Technology and media has been defined as an extension of the human sensory apparatus, after we create them, they create us (Wenner 1998:21). In all, through contemporary capitalist culture a new relationship of signs and meaning has developed. Simulation challenges the distinction between real and fictional, allowing for notions of truth and reality to have been replaced by signs (ibid).

## **Conclusion**

My intention for this thesis is to expand on ideas of past researchers, especially the relationship between sports, media advertisements and the concept of simulacrum. The purpose of my thesis will be to examine the reformulation of the political economic theoretical approach and illustrate how tracing the conditions of possibility for the commodification of the athletic body through a historical lens advances this reformulation. This will include history in relation to society, politics, economics, and sports. Examining social phenomena through a historical lens is advantageous in understanding the relations of social structures and social beings. It should be cautioned that thinking of history as a linear, continuous process is erroneous. As a social researcher, I will engage with history as a complex, non-linear, contingent, discursive formation.

As opposed to other research I will illustrate that old structures and boundaries of national states and communities have not been dissolved by the globalizing processes of sport. Rather, society has been located in a historical moment wherein global advertising and sporting bodies play a significant role in the processes whereby nationhood and individuality become imagined, understood and experienced. In addition to the globalizing processes of sport, it is crucial to examine the sport media nexus as unique from culture to culture. Not all humans are involved in and affected by postmodern sports in the same way. This idea will lead to focusing on issues of how the present global sport formation has emerged out of the past and what are the structured processes involved. The overarching question becomes what functions, meanings and significance does the global sport media nexus have in people's lives across the world. A critical approach must be taken wherein I describe current trends and seek to explain why these conditions prevail, subsequently interpreting the meanings behind social relations of sport.

Most importantly, I seek to explore the field of postmodernism in relation to sport and its relation to the concept of simulacrum. The idea of sport as a postmodern phenomena is largely debated, but I wish to represent the sport-media relationship as one which presents itself as postmodern. Sport is thriving in late capitalist society, also known as the society of the spectacle or the image society, wherein postmodernism is a historical conception (Wenner 1998:23). I seek to dispute the argument that sport is a primary text, ultimately unpredictable by making it fundamentally a modern activity. I seek to explore how there are only repetitions of texts in mass culture and that the real has been subsumed with nostalgia assuming its full meaning. In all, my aim is to understand the relations of sport



and media and their affects on globalizing and gendering the professional athlete within a political economic and postmodern analysis.

## Chapter Three

### Theoretical Framework and Methods

Both theory and methods are integral aspects of sociological research. The combination of the two set the stage for data collection and analysis. All sociological research should be grounded in temporal and historical processes. In this instance temporality is not bound by a linear path or direction. It should be seen as flexible and contingent. Understanding temporal and historical aspects of sociological phenomena is crucial because theoretical perspectives are historically contingent and are continuously altered and manipulated. A combination of political economy and postmodernist thought will be utilized. I believe the combination of these two perspectives will strengthen the overall understanding of how athletes are produced, distributed, and consumed through media sources in twenty-first century North America. A rethinking of political economic theory will be utilized through this research, moving away from a neoclassic economic understanding, which focuses on how mainstream economics is applied to different kinds of social behaviour and neglects moral and political questions concerning social behaviour. The theoretical approach of political economy will therefore focus on an approach to knowing that accepts the reality of both concepts and observations and the social relations that affect the production, distribution, and consumption of goods. Postmodernism is understood as a theoretical framework wherein grand narratives are reconsidered and reality is conceptualized as being comprised of multiple signs and symbols, devoid of any concrete meaning. Furthermore, Baudrillard's idea of hyperreality or simulacrum will be considered throughout the analysis of media sources and the commodification of both David Beckham and Mia Hamm. When concrete objects or understandings of reality are replaced with signs and symbols a state of

simulacrum has been reached. In all, sport is a critical conduit for the transmission of images, symbols, and meanings that are central to society. By understanding the exchange of reality and signs or symbols through the lens of political economy and postmodernism I will be able to gain a critical understanding of the commodification of athletes in relation to sports media outlets.

### **Theoretical Framework**

C. Wright Mills (1959:3) states that “neither the life of an individual nor the history of a society can be understood without understanding both”. This declaration calls for social inquiry to seek an understanding of both individual actions and historical processes that have lead to the formation of a particular society. The nature of temporality and history has been an interest of scholars for centuries. Scholars including Aristotle, Plato, Hegel, and Mead have all examined temporality in relation to social phenomena. Despite this, many scholars argue that in the past there has been a sociological neglect of temporality and argue that social research has come to have only one understandable meaning or interpretation (Maines 1987:303). The underlying dominant methods and theories of past social research tend to explore social phenomenon by conceiving of time in a linear fashion, opposed to reflexive conceptions (ibid).

A theoretical perspective is seen as a given body of knowledge derived from, and a continuation of, a long process of past knowledge and is to be explained as a wider part of societies where knowledge develops (Maguire and Young 2002:5). Therefore, a paradox exists. Temporality has been a less central concern to the sociological enterprise while inquiry into the nature of temporality has long been of interest to many scholars.

Thus, as a social researcher about to engage in an act of sociological inquiry I must

commit myself to an investigation of temporality. Without temporality there are no phenomena to inquire about, past or present. Time drives society. It is the basic mechanism through which social acts, organizations, institutions, cultures, and social structures exist and operate (Maines 1987:303). In my research, I will utilize political economic thought and postmodernism to consider and analyze how historical processes have changed the structure of media and sport institutions. Furthermore, I will analyze the consequences of these processes for the production, distribution, and consumption of professional athletes, such as David Beckham and Mia Hamm. As such, I feel that it is important to consider the concepts of history and temporality in relation to the social institution of sport and sporting bodies to better understand the relations and forces of power at play between individual, institution, and society.

Emile Durkheim argues that theory can act as a form of data. As such, theory allows the reader to learn by restating systematically what specific theorists argue (Maguire and Young 2002:3). This process, Durkheim purports, involves a dialogue between the past and present, and a re-imagining of the future. It is important for my own research to take into account past theoretical frameworks and also note the developments of those frameworks and how they have contributed to the enhancement of knowledge regarding consumer culture and the institution of sport. To study sport without theory is to simply describe and reproduce the status quo, a taken-for-granted understanding of the social institution of sport (ibid:2). The sociological analysis of sport must bring together theorising about the nature of society, social action and the generation of such knowledge. Therefore, it is the goal of sport researchers to describe events, search for patterned recurrences and variations, and identify causality (ibid:14).

The theoretical framework of political economy will be the focus of this research, combined with theoretical ideas from the postmodern perspective. Political economy is the study of social relations, especially power relations, which mutually constitute the production, distribution, and consumption of resources (Mosco 2009:24; Mosco and Lavin 2007:3). Political economic intellectuals are preoccupied with understanding how the dynamics of capital accumulation and class power manifests in the capitalist mode of production, institutional structures, organization, and the production processes of media industries (Calabrese 2004:2). The goal of understanding social change and historical transformation is critical in political economic research. This goal is characterized by an interest in examining the social whole or the totality of social relations that make up economic, political, social, and cultural areas of life (Mosco 2009:3-4). These goals lead to political economy to characteristically focus on the ideas of moral philosophy and social praxis, as opposed to neoclassic economics which avoids these concepts.

Moral philosophy encompasses the interest in values that help create social behaviour and those moral principles that should guide efforts to change it (Mosco and Lavin 2007:5). Past researchers have taken up the idea of moral philosophy in various ways. Adam Smith, in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, purports that the understanding of values like self-interest, materialism, and individual freedom contributed to the rise of commercial capitalism (Mosco 2009: 4). Karl Marx discussed the ongoing conflict between viewing human labour as a source of individual fulfillment and social benefit or as a marketable commodity (ibid). Also of concern to political economists is social praxis. Social praxis is defined as the unity of thinking and doing (Mosco and Lavin 2007:5). It views intellectual life as a means of “brining about social change and social intervention as a means of advancing knowledge” (Mosco 2009:4).

With these ideas in mind it is important to note that there has been a shift in political economic thought. Political economic thought has been challenged by neoclassic economic theory, wherein mainstream economics are applied to different kinds of social behaviour (Mosco and Lavin 2007:2). This theory stresses the sharing of power among individuals, rather than concentrating on the power held by dominant social classes (ibid). Furthermore, neoclassic economics reduces labour to one among many factors of production, which is valued solely for its productivity and ability to enhance the market value of the final product (ibid:7). Neoclassic economic theory tends not to explicitly engage in moral considerations and political questions that are historically central in political economic thought (Calabrese 2004:2).

For these reasons I have chosen to utilize the theoretical approach termed the rethinking of political economy. This approach is appropriate in the present circumstance because of the drastic changes in the sphere of communication. The rethinking of political economy raises fundamental challenges to past notions of neoclassical economics. The rethinking of political economy, which from here on will solely be termed political economy, calls for an approach to knowing that accepts the reality of both concepts and observations. There is a rejection of the view that all “explanations can be reduced to one essential cause, such as economy or culture” (Mosco and Lavin 2007:2). Vincent Mosco (2008:20) contends that:

political economic thought tends to give attention to describing and analyzing capitalism, a system which turns resources like workers, raw material, land, and information into marketable commodities that earn a profit for those who invest capital into the system.

For the purposes of this research political economic thought will also be considered in relation to communication practices. As such, there will be a focus on how the media,

information, and audiences are conceptualized as resources and the ways they are packaged into products for sale.

North American research in the new framework of rethinking political economy was influenced by the contributions of two founding figures, Dallas Smythe and Herbert Schiller. Dallas Smythe is one of four generations of scholars to be linked to the political economic tradition. He taught the first political economy of communication course at the University of Illinois (Mosco and Lavin 2007:10). Herbert Schiller followed Smythe at the University of Illinois and later influenced several generations of political economists. Both intellectuals drew on institutional and Marxist traditions. They were concerned about the “growing size and power of transnational corporations and they had an interest in social class and media imperialism” (ibid). From these influences, North American research produced a large literature on industry and class specific manifestations of transnational and corporate power (ibid:11). Smythe and Schillers’ research is distinguished by their concern to participate in ongoing social movements and oppositional struggles to change the dominant media and create alternatives (Mosco and Lavin 2007:11).

Following from this, Smythe and Schillers’ work influenced how political economy examines how workers, information, and raw material are turned into commodities and also focuses on the globalization processes of communication and commodification. Presently, political economic theorists are working together on common projects across the world. It is no longer atypical to see research from one region taking up themes that were once prominent in another region (Mosco 2008:2). Current research addresses the profound integration of global political economy and the media system (ibid:5). Therefore, there is an intense focus on the integration of

corporations, states, and classes across nations. There is no longer a focus on how one nation or corporation dominates weaker nations and promising economies (ibid).

Political economists do not solely focus on the globalizing processes, but they also focus on culture. Garnham states that there is a strong link between the political economy of communication and the political cultural that it enables (Calabrese 2004:7). There would not be a complete conception of culture in the modern world if it fails to take into account the space occupied by the media and how this has shifted through globalizing processes (ibid:2).

With a basic understanding of political economy in hand, it is now important to discuss the epistemological and ontological considerations of this theoretical approach. Mosco and Lavin (2007:17) maintain that political economic thought needs to be grounded in a realist, inclusive, constitutive, and critical epistemology. Realism recognizes the reality of concepts and social practices. Inclusiveness does not reduce all social practices to a single political economic explanation, thus rejecting essentialism (ibid). Concepts are therefore utilized as entry or starting points into social fields. Political economy is constitutive and thus recognizes the limits of causal determination. Therefore, social life is viewed as a set of mutually constitutive processes, acting on one another in various stages (Mosco 2009:128). Critical epistemological views argue that knowledge is a product of comparisons with other bodies of knowledge and social values (ibid). Political economy's ontological view approaches meaning as that which distinguishes between seeing things as structures or processes with an emphasis on social change, social processes, and social relations (Mosco and Lavin 2007:18). Research therefore starts from the view that social change is everywhere, structures and institutions are constantly changing (ibid). Therefore, it is more fruitful to develop a starting point



that characterizes the processes rather than only identifying the institutions (Mosco 2009:129).

Vincent Mosco (2009:66) views the systems of communication as integral to fundamental economic, political, social, and cultural dimensions. As political economic theorists we must consider how communication practices construct social and cultural life. Mosco developed a substantive map of political economy with three entry processes: commodification, spatialization, and structuration. Placing these processes in the foreground of political economic thought does not replace structures and institutions, rather they are used as entry points that constitute the substantive theory of political economy (Mosco 2009:1; Mosco and Lavin 2007:18). In my research these three processes will be utilized as starting points of media analysis and it will be used as a preferred choice among a range of possible means to understand the social field.

Although these entry points are not in any sequential order, I will first discuss commodification, than spatalization, and finally structuration. The first of these three entry processes is commodification. Commodification is the “process of transforming things valued for their use into marketable products that are valued for what they bring in exchange” (Mosco 2009:2). For the purposes of this research, the process of commodification will be examined in print and television advertisements, leading to an analysis of how professional athletes are produced, distributed, and consumed as commodities. Communication and information practices and technologies contribute to the general commodification of processes in modern society. Researchers place a notable emphasis on describing and examining the significance of the institutions responsible for the production, distribution, and exchange of communication commodities (Mosco and

Lavin 2007:19). More generally, the process of commodification serves as an entry point to understand specific communication institutions and practices (ibid).

Coinciding with the process of commodification, or the transformation of use to exchange value, is digitization (Mosco 2004:215). Digitization is defined as the “transformation of communication, including words, images, motion pictures, and sounds, into a common language” (ibid). This process deepens the commodification of labour involved in the production, distribution, and exchange of communication and the expansion of markets. Furthermore, it expands the commodification of content by extending opportunities to measure and monitor, package and repackage information (ibid:216). The process of digitization is central to my research when considering that the advertisements chosen to analyse are from the Internet and easily accessible worldwide. I will consider the process of digitization and how it affects the process of commodification on a local and global scale via the advertisements of David Beckham and Mia Hamm.

The second entry process is spatialization. Mosco (2009:2) defines spatialization as a process of overcoming constraints of geographical space with the mass media and communication technologies. He goes on to note that this is not the sole process in overcoming those constraints, it is one among many. Present day corporations, aided by the developments in communication and information technology, transform space (Mosco and Lavin 2007:23). Therefore, the location of people, products, and messages is undergoing significant change and are of great interest to political economists.

Spatialization examines the integration of corporations, states, and classes across national, regional, and even developmental divides (Mosco 2009:106). Anthony Giddens discusses features of time-space compression that is prevalent in the processes of globalization. He defines this compression as a geographical stretching out of social relations and our

experience of all this (Bird 1993:60). Giddens examines the decline of our dependency on time and space. This process allows for the increase in availability of time and space as resources for those who can utilize them (Mosco and Lavin 2007: 24). This process encompasses processes of globalization and a worldwide restructuring of industries and firms (ibid). It is also a growing network of interdependencies that involve economic, political, cultural, and technological dimensions. Opposed to neoclassical economic theory this research addresses the profound integration of a global political economy and its media systems (Mosco 2009:106). My research will examine how the subjects of my case studies, David Beckham and Mia Hamm, are constructed as global commodities through time and space and the shifting uses of time and space have contributed to this.

The third, and final, entry process is structuration. Structuration is a process of creating social relations, particularly those organized around social class, gender, and race (Mosco 2009:2). Political economic research that examines the structuration process is critical. By focusing on ideas of agency, social processes, and social practice, research that focuses on structuration reduces the tendency for political economic analysis to concentrate on structures (Mosco and Lavin 2007:24). An important characteristic of this process is how it broadens the concept of social class. Social class not only examines what some people have and others lack, but also takes into account relational and constitutional areas of the term (ibid). Another characteristic of structuration is its role in analyzing the process of constructing hegemony. Hegemony is defined as that which comes to be incorporated and contested as taken-for-granted, common sense, and a natural way of thinking (ibid:31). Structuration purports to bring to light the lived network of mutually constituting meanings and values, which are experienced as practices in our every-day life, and appear to be mutually confirming.

In all, these three entry processes illustrate how political economic thought addresses agents as social rather than individual actors. It seems appropriate to include a quote from Marx's text *Grundrisse* (1973), wherein he presents a critique of political economy and discusses the undialectical tendency to treat production and consumption as binary opposites. I feel that this is appropriate because this quote will continually serve as a force in my analysis, and will reiterate the need to view both production and consumption as separate processes, with separate histories, but will also illustrate how they converge and shape one another. Furthermore, I will utilize the analysis of a commodity to foreground my representation of capitalist production and how I must deconstruct the commodity to determine what appearance means, to uncover the social relations that congeal in the commodity form. Marx (1973:91) writes:

Production, then is also immediately consumption, consumption is also immediately production. Each is immediately its opposite. But at the same time a mediating movement takes place between the two. Production mediates consumption; it creates the latter's material, without it consumption would lack an object. But consumption also mediates production, in that it alone creates for the products the subject for whom they are products. The product only obtains its last finish in consumption... Consumption produces production in double way, (1) because a product becomes a real product only by being consumed; (2) because consumption creates need for new production, that it creates the ideal, internally impelling cause for production, which is its presupposition.

When considering the rethinking of political economy it is crucial to also consider a historical approach. A general reading of political economy serves to remind us that whatever our entry point or focus of analysis, it is inextricably bound up with a long history (Mosco 2009:25). Current political economy research demonstrates that the media systems in place today are a result of a contested history. This history involves duelling capitalist and their allies in governmental positions, labour unions, citizens groups, consumer cooperatives, and social justice organizations (Mosco 2008:9).

Garnham states that there is a historically unequal distribution of surplus product between capital and labour which requires an explanation; it is historically contingent and is a result of a specific structure of mode of production (Calabrese 2004: 2). Presently, historical research within political economy has begun to emphasize resistance and not just the powerful dominance of certain groups over others (Mosco 2008:14). This shift illustrates a less significant focus on capital, dominant corporations, and elites to alternatives that draw from feminist and labour research. In the past political economy focused on the production and reproduction of invariant structures. This focus made it hard to integrate a historical understanding into political economic analysis because history enters theory as something added on to the basic cycle of structural reproduction (Mosco 2009:27). Theory should therefore acknowledge the constant possibility that a structure will be constituted in a different way because social structures are constituted rather than produced (ibid).

The second theory that I wish to include in the analysis of my research is postmodernism, specifically Baudrillard's theory of simulacrum. Postmodernism is defined as that which follows the modern state of society, wherein new forms of information, knowledge, and technologies develop (Kellner and Best 1991:1). Postmodernism is also characterized as rejecting the totalizing grand narratives of society and history that are taken up by modernists (ibid: 4). Postmodern theorists argue that the contemporary technological media society and subsequent processes of change and transformation produce a new postmodern society. For Baudrillard, postmodernity marks a stage where the modern dynamics of growth have reached their limits and have begun to draw inward and absorb themselves (Best 1994:51). This new postmodern society constitutes a "novel stage of history and sociocultural transformation, which requires new

concepts and theories” (Kellner and Best 1991:3). Baudrillard, Lyotard, and Harvey are all postmodern theorists who claim that technologies, such as computers and media, create new forms of knowledge and changes in the socioeconomic system (ibid). Postmodern theory also critiques the modern idea that theory mirrors reality. This theoretical perspective takes a perspectivist and relativist stance that understands theory as providing partial perspectives on objects and social phenomena. Also, all representations of the world and social phenomena are historically and linguistically mediated (ibid:4). Not only are social phenomena seen as historically and linguistically contingent, they are also understood as multiple, fragmented, and indeterminate (ibid). This theory, along with political economic theory, allows for me to analyse and understand social phenomena as being constituted through multiple processes and are contingent on historical and linguistic practices of a specific culture.

Following a basic understanding of the characteristics of postmodernist theory, it is significant to note that Baudrillard firmly believed that he had nothing to do with postmodern theory. He believed his kind of theory was “not really an aesthetic, it’s not a philosophy, it’s not sociology, it’s a little volatile” (Zurbrugg 1994:227). His claim is rich with irony and nevertheless Baudrillard’s theory of simulacrum is largely viewed as being under the postmodern theoretical framework. I believe it is important to bring to light Baudrillard’s conception of hyperreality and simulation in relation to sport because it offers a critical tool to understanding the relationship between the social institution and the processes of production, distribution, and consumption. Twenty-First century Western society is characterized by mass amounts of consumption and communication processes, leading to the advancement of communication processes. Individuals within this society strive to attain large quantities of products and are surrounded by

advertisements purporting to signify reality. With this said, I strongly believe Baudrillard's idea of hyperreality and simulation can provide an in-depth and critical account of how meanings are made through the consumption of products, while at the same time providing an illusion of false reality.

In the early 1970s, Baudrillard's use of Marx's work evolved into a critique of materialist conceptions of needs, use, and exchange values. This led to Baudrillard's theorization of symbolic exchange (Giulianotti 2004:226). In 1976, he developed his theory of simulacrum. This theory was first presented in his book, *Symbolic Exchange and Death*. The theory of simulacrum did not gain the attention of social theorists until his publication of *Simulacres et Simulations*, in 1981. In this text, he argued that "simulation no longer refers to a simulated reality or copied original encompassing a metaphorical relation of map to territory" (Levin 1996:196). Throughout his works readers gain an understanding of his fragmentary style, which reflects his distrust of orthodox sociological grand-narratives (Giulianotti 2004:226). Also, Baudrillard illustrates a "reality"-based analysis of the changes in daily life that are facilitated by "changes in material culture and their relation to symbolic images of consumption" (Gottdiener 1994:25). Furthermore, these writings illustrate Baudrillard's anticipation of postmodern theory, for example, that knowledge will be presented in sound-bites or musings rather than long narratives (ibid). Noting this difference, it can be stated that he was intensely interested in the effect of cultural change under the era of modernity which he sees as a pervasive shift to the commodification of all cultural objects (Gottdiener 1994:27).

From these foundations arose Baudrillard's theory of simulacrum and hyperreality. Hyperreality involves an intensification of reality. Through this

intensification of reality, the world is understood as a simulacrum. The world is both simulated and realer than real, characterised by excessive attention to detail (Giulianotti 2004:233). The theory of simulacrum postulates that simulation is a situation created by a system of signs, when this system becomes sophisticated and autonomous it abolishes its own reference and replaces it with itself (Levin 1996:196). The age of simulation belongs to a post-industrial, telematic age, to an era of digitization and operationality, where real is already reproduced in simulated form before it can materialise (Giulianotti 2004:234). Cultural hegemony, therefore, is characterized by the way use values and exchange values are exploited by the postmodern culture of consumption which privileges the image over substance (Gottdiener 1994:36). The confusion of real and models of real reflect a sense of historical suspense. Therefore, we live through post-history that is simulation. Most importantly, the simulated and hyperreal constructs are now determining how music, sexuality, and consumer environments are represented to us and how they should be evaluated (ibid: 234). It seems appropriate to now quote L.

Feuerbach, from his book *The Essence of Christianity*:

But certainly for the present age, which prefers the sign to the thing signified, the copy to the original, fancy to reality, the appearance to essence... illusion only is sacred, truth profane. Nay, sacredness is held to be enhanced in proportion as truth decreases and illusion increases, so that the highest degree of illusion comes to be the highest degree of sacredness.” (Best 1994:41).

This quote illustrates the transition cultural life has made into the postmodern era.

Wherein individuals are content to live a life where objects no longer signify concrete “reality”, instead we consume and hold sacred the signified illusion.

I hope to utilize Baudrillard’s theory of simulacrum to illustrate how the media are integral to hyperreality’s confusion of reality and simulation. I also want to illustrate that



there is a tension between communication and experience. Individuals are not able to choose from communication and experience, with the increasing assimilative power of these communication systems, the social dimension of experience has been progressively squeezed out. Also, I wish to use Baudrillard's theory in relation to political economic thought and understand how the logic of capitalism has come to not solely rely on the acquisition of objects, but also on the manipulation of signs. Therefore, as Baudrillard postulates, consumption has become a system of signs that no longer refers to use-value, but to circulation (Baudrillard 2005:9). The sign has become the hidden source of the commodity. All the repressive and reductive strategies of power systems are present in the internal logic of the sign (Best 1994:53).

When thinking about consumption, it is important to also examine the process of digitization. In postmodern thought digitization is seen by theorists as offering a division within experience that has opened up in human culture. This has made way for a gap between time and space, thought and perception, language and body (Levin 1996:183). Lastly, I hope to utilize Baudrillard's theory by illustrating that our relationship between work and consumption has greatly changed. Our relationship to everyday objects has altered the ways we understand the relationship between work and ownership (ibid:197). It has been argued, that individuals are less likely to experience the commodity as representative of the result of work or the labour process. Consumption itself has become a form of productive labour, financed by capital.

The combination of the iconic theories of postmodernism and political economy will become critical to my research when illustrating David Beckham and Mia Hamm as contemporary commodified professional athletes. Technologies of communication have made it possible for the global outreach of media sports. This global outreach has

brought about an increasing commodification of everything associated with sports (Real 1998:21). Baudrillard's theory of simulacrum describes a world where signs and objects communicate, rather than people (Merrin 2005:17). In emerging consumer societies individuals are integrated into a totalitarian code, which is an engineered and manipulated "cybernetic communicational environment in which the goal was the perfect circulation of messages" (Real 1983:23). He believes that consumer societies are driven by symbolic systems in which commodities are used as a means of differentiation (Chan 2008; Wenner 1998:22). This symbolic system will allow me to illustrate how the processed and produced, profane meanings of semiotic and unilateral consumption replace the immediately actualized and exchanged meaning of the symbolic. In this way, an individual never consumes a product itself (use-value). Individuals are always manipulating objects as signs which distinguish you by affiliating you to a group of reference (Chan 2008). In all, through contemporary capitalist culture a new relationship of signs and meaning has developed. The theory of simulation and hyperreality challenges the distinction between real and fictional, allowing for notions of truth and reality, which are signified in cultural forms of objects, to have been replaced by signs. Simulation and hyperreality alter consumer culture significantly.

I will identify and focus on the new characteristics of a consumer society foregrounding the development of consumer goods, media, and advertising. I want to focus on how we might believe we live in some sort of reality or original, but this reality has become the exception and through the consumption of goods, which now represent an illusion of reality; it is no longer a question of who I am, but when, where and how I am. Identity in this sense, even in the realm of sport, becomes a critical tool, a position from which we can think of our own identities differently. We need to understand the

complexity of circumstances that have lead to the distribution of hyperreal representations via media, the social structures behind them, and the larger implications for individuals. How does the state of simulation of media representations affect how we understand the commodification of Beckham and Hamm? I believe that we are not able to answer any of these questions without understanding the historical processes that make the conditions of possibility for the commodification of the athletic body possible through economic and media representations. In all, a critical approach to understanding the relations of production, distribution, and consumption will be tackled by utilizing political economic, postmodern theory, and Baudrillard's idea of simulacrum.

### **Methodology**

Following a discussion of theoretical frameworks, a discussion and justification of methods proposed to be used is integral to the research process. Content analysis and two case studies will be utilized to examine the processes of production, distribution, and consumption of the institution of sport and the professional athlete. The case studies are representations of how twenty-first century professional athletes are produced, distributed and consumed by media outlets. Communication is at the heart of Western civilization. Analyzing the processes and products of communication is integral to understanding history, behaviour, thought, art, and institutions (Holsti 1969:1). I will examine advertisements, via internet sources, from January 2000 until August 2009, to understand how athletes are produced, distributed, and consumed. Specifically, I will be analysing two athletes and their relation to sport and consumer culture. The first athlete I have chosen to focus on is David Beckham. I will examine how his image, through

advertisements, is produced to be continually shifting through time and space and how his image is sold on a global scale. The second case study I have chosen to focus on is Mia Hamm. This female soccer superstar will allow me to analyze consumer culture in relation to gender. I want to explore how Hamm's image has been exploited to sell a 'safe' image of sport. This safe image assures consumers that sport is still largely a masculine arena. I hope to find that images constructed of Hamm perpetuate patriarchal culture and illustrate masculine power in sports through the control of women's bodies. Overall, through content analysis I want to critically analyse how the media represents, produces, and distributes professional athletic bodies to understand how meaning is created to generate a desire for the athlete as a commodity and for a complex lifestyle within which the consumer is situated.

The usage of content analysis has greatly expanded over the past twenty years. There is an extensive history wherein the characteristics and usages of content analysis have changed. In using any method, I believe it is important to understand these historical processes which have formed the method to ensure a multi-faceted, nonlinear understanding of the data. Following World War II content analysis spread to numerous disciplines. In 1955, the United States Social Science Research Council's Committee on Linguistics and Psychology sponsored a conference focusing on content analysis (Krippendorff 1980:19). Although a rather new area of interest, many intellectuals contributed to the development of content analysis. These contributions appeared in *Trends in Content Analysis*, a volume edited by Pool in 1959. Pool writes that this conference developed a sophisticated concern with the problems of inferring from verbal material to their antecedent conditions. Content analysis focused on counting internal contingencies between symbols instead of counting the simple frequencies of symbols

(ibid). From 1955 onwards eminent social scientists have utilized content analysis in their research. These social scientists have brought with them rich theoretical frameworks that characterize and mould the characteristics of content analysis as a methodological tool. Detailed concepts began to be defined and recognized in data sources. Attitudes, stereotypes, styles, symbols, values, and propaganda devices were some of the concepts examined (ibid:16). The progression of content analysis has brought with it better statistical tools to bear on analysis. Overall, content analysis has become a part of larger research efforts in the social sciences.

After noting the historical processes and moulding of content analysis, it is important to understand how this method is defined and characterized for the purposes of this research. There are multiple characteristics and styles for utilizing this method; therefore careful consideration was given to the appropriate concentration of tools and techniques used. Krippendorff (1980:21) states that content analysis is a research technique that is characterized for making replicable and valid inferences from the data to their context. Furthermore, this research method is understood as a phase in information-processing. Communication content is transformed, through objective and systematic application, into data that can be summarized and compared (Holsti 1969:2). I will be taking an interpretive approach to content analysis, wherein social action will be treated as text (Berg 2001:148). “Human action will be seen as a collection of symbols expressing layers of meaning” (ibid). An interpretive approach provides a means for discovering the practical understandings of meanings and actions. Furthermore, the purpose of content analysis is to provide knowledge, new insights, a clear representation of facts, and a practical guide to action (Krippendorff 1980:21). The overall objective of content analysis is to provide a systematic and objective description of the attributes of

communication sources (Holsti 1969:127). Therefore, it is characterized as a method of inquiry into the symbolic meaning of messages. These messages do not have a single meaning; there are numerous perspectives which need to be teased out of the media sources (Krippendorff 1980:22). Because there will always be numerous understandings and interpretations of communication sources it is integral to make clear my goals, intentions, and categories of interest. With this said, content analysis needs to be performed relative to and justified in terms of the context of the research project and data (ibid:23).

The main focus of content analysis focuses on a special entity, person, idea, or event. Researchers focus on one or more of these entities and attempt to find out how they are depicted or conceptualized in the communication sources and what are the symbolic meanings behind the physical entities (Krippendorff 1980:112). Therefore, researchers focus on attributes, frequencies, distributional properties, and associations to form meanings and analyse the data appropriately. In all, content analysis is understood to be a nomothetic approach. This means that content analysis seeks to generate generalizable conclusions rather than focusing on full and precise conclusions about a particular case (Neuendorf 2002:15). One advantage of the nomothetic approach is that it is economical. Therefore, instead of isolating and limiting one's research to one case, the nomothetic approach explores a few explanatory factors that span across several cases. By focusing on several cases and exploring a few explanatory factors, instead of one cause, it allows the researcher to generalize their conclusions to the larger social institutions and society that they are focusing on. Like every research method, the nomothetic approach has some limitations. This approach only provides partial explanations and is inevitably probabilistic.

The method of content analysis in my research project will be unobtrusive, objective, systematic, and generalizable. These four concepts are crucial to assuring that my research outcomes are reliable and valid. Content analysis is an unobtrusive technique. As social scientists we know that acts of measurement which interfere with the behaviour of a phenomena being assessed can create contaminated observations (Krippendorff 1980:29). Content analysis accepts unstructured material, thereby keeping the research process from imposing undue constraints on the subject and their responses, and impeding the validity of responses. Furthermore, one is unable to predict all categories of analysis and forms of expression before the material has been obtained and examined. Content analysis is also context sensitive and has the capability of processing symbolic forms. Thus, as a researcher you cannot ignore the historical processes and features that have converged to shape the data. Content analysis is objective. Each step of the research process should be carried out on the basis of explicitly formulated rules and procedures (Holsti 1969:2). Objectivity requires the researcher to make decisions about the data. With explicit sets of rules in place and decisions guided by formulated procedures the possibility that findings will reflect a researcher's subjective predispositions, rather than the content of analysis, is minimized. Content analysis also contains subjective elements. The inclusion and exclusion of content categories is done through applied rules and procedures. This eliminates the propensity for using material that only supports the researcher's hypotheses. Finally, content analysis is generalizable. This requires that findings have a theoretical relevance (ibid:5). Purely descriptive information about content, unrelated to larger institutions or phenomena, is of little value to the research process.

The use of unobtrusive, objective, systematic, and generalizable research, in relation to content analysis, is justified in my research in several different ways. Unobtrusive measures allow the researcher to study complex social behaviour and institutions without affecting it. This type of research seldom has an effect on the research subject being studied. Furthermore, these research techniques provide the researcher with economy of both time and money. There is minimal cost to access the data and data can be collected and analysed quickly (Holsti 1969:15). One requirement for the economic efficiency of content analysis is that the researcher has access to the material being studied. In the case of my research, the majority of data will be collected from the Internet, which is readily available and inexpensive. Finally, the method of content analysis permits the researcher to focus on data and processes that have occurred over a long period of time. In all, these benefits of content analysis allow me to advantageously and sufficiently analyse the data to come to a clear and concise conclusion.

After illustrating the essential components of content analysis, it is important to consider the framework when employing this methodological process. The conceptual framework for content analysis is simple and general, employing a few basic concepts (Krippendorff 1980:25). First, it must be made clear which data are to be analyzed, how they will be defined, and from which population they are drawn. Second, the context relative to which the data is being analyzed must be made explicit (ibid). This therefore defines those boundaries which the analysis does not extend beyond. The context constructed by content analysis must include all the surrounding conditions, antecedent variables, coexisting variables, and consequent variables. Thirdly, the aim of the inferences must be clearly stated. Finally, researchers must make inferences about the



relationship between the data and the context, and clearly state them (ibid:26). This step allows for the data to become understood as symbolic or rendered as informative. In all, this framework holds validity, the degree to which the method of measurement measured what it intended to, as the criteria for success (ibid). Furthermore, this conceptual framework is intended to serve three larger purposes. The framework is perspectival because it serves to guide the conceptualization and design of content analysis. It is analytical because it facilitates the critical examination of the results and it is methodological because it directs the growth and systematic improvement of methods for content analysis (Krippendorff 1980:26).

Aside from the importance of the conceptual framework for content analysis, it must be clear which data are to be analyzed, how they will be defined, and from which population they are drawn (Krippendorff 1980:26). The researcher must clearly define the variables they are dealing with and specify the indicators which determine whether given content falls within emerging themes (Holsti 1969:95). For the proposed research open coding procedures will be utilized. Open coding is considered the “initial, provisional work done on an unrestricted basis to produce concepts that seem to fit the data” (Powell and Connaway 2004:156). The central purpose of open coding is to widely inquire about the data, wherein interpretations, questions, and possible answers that emerge should be seen as tentative conclusions (Berg 2001:154). From this technique the coding of major categories and themes emerge from the data (Powell and Connaway 2004:156). Strauss (1987) presents four basic guidelines when conducting open coding. First, the researcher must ask the data a specific and consistent set of questions (Berg 2001:154; Powell 2004:156). These questions will keep the original study aim in perspective and will remain open to unanticipated results. Second, the researcher must

analyze the data minutely (ibid). Therefore, research begins with a broad statement, a narrower statement emerges, and finally a refined conclusion statement is made. Third, one should frequently interrupt the coding to write a theoretical note. This means taking a break from data collecting and coding and writing down notes about something in the data that triggers an idea (ibid). This proves fruitful later on in the analysis process of research. Finally, a researcher must never assume the analytic relevance of any traditional variable until the data shows it to be relevant (ibid). A researcher must never assume that a variable contributes to a condition. By doing this the research insures precision and reliable judgements.

One final component of content analysis to consider is whether one is examining latent or manifest content. Neuendorf (2002:23) claims that the majority of content analysis is focused on the manifest content of data. Manifest content is considered to be the elements that are physically present and countable (ibid). In my research I will examine both the manifest and latent content to reach a deeper, more critical understand of the advertisements at hand. Latent content is represented as the unobservable concepts that cannot be measured directly but can be represented or measured by one or more indicators (Berg 2001:150). Furthermore, latent content allows the analysis to extend to an interpretive reading of the symbolism underlying the physical data (ibid). To substantiate latent claims, researchers must offer detailed excerpts from the data that serve to document the researcher's interpretations (ibid). In doing so, I will be able to make valid inferences and generalizations of how the media represents professional athletes and the institution of sports. Furthermore, I will be able to demonstrate how historical processes of societal and economic evolution have shifted the social institution of sport and media, therefore affecting our individual agency.

In all, content analysis as a method of critical analysis is considered to be the most appropriate for the proposed research question. Communication is at the heart of Western society and therefore it only seems appropriate to gain a critical and in-depth understanding of the manipulation of the processes of the production, distribution, and consumption of the professional athlete through media outlets and larger sporting institutions. By choosing several media advertisements of David Beckham and Mia Hamm, as examples of these processes, content analysis allows the research to provide knowledge, insights, representation of facts, and a guide to action. Most importantly, I will be able to provide a systematic and objective description of the attributes of these media sources. Furthermore, although content analysis has multiple limitations I believe it is a superior method to use with respect to my research because it provides a systematic, unobtrusive, and generalizable technique to analysing the media sources chosen. Also, content analysis provides the opportunity to not only focus on the manifest content of the data, but also gain an understanding of the latent content. In all, through the usage of content analysis I will be able to understand how individual agency has shifted in Western society, through the historical processes of societal and economic change and the impact on the social institution of sport and media and the formation of the professional athlete.

### **Justification of Sources of Data Chosen**

Following a discussion of the methods being used it is important to consider why the sources of data chosen are most appropriate for this particular research. A total of seven advertisements will be utilized, per athlete, to analyse how they have been constructed, as a professional athlete, through sporting institutions and the media. All fourteen sources will be taken from the Internet and include a diversity of magazine and

television advertisements. The data set has been chosen to represent a population of cases. The data set was chosen to represent how professional athletes in the twenty-first century have been produced, distributed, and consumed through mass media markets. When considering where to find the sources of data and whether or not these sources were appropriate to utilize, I considered the society which I am focusing on. Western society has been consumed by the importance and usage of the Internet in everyday life. Therefore, utilizing data sources from the Internet seems appropriate and will allow me to critically analyse how historical processes of change have altered the form of media used to disseminate larger social messages and norms. These changes will largely focus on the forms of consumption, how athletes are produced and distributed, and the role of the institution of sport in relation to how the media produces and distributes professional athletes.

As well, the method of content analysis discusses the notion of accessibility. One advantage of content analysis is the minimal cost and time commitment required to collect the data. This allows the researcher to sufficiently analyse the data in a timely manner. Furthermore, by using Internet sources I am able to analyse data that spans a long period of time. I will be examining media advertisements that were published between 2000 and 2009. Not only am I using these sources because they are easily and inexpensively accessible to me, as a researcher, but these advertisements and the usage of the Internet are accessible to the majority of the wider public. I would argue that the majority of the population will have a greater opportunity to view these advertisements via the Internet because of the accessibility of these advertisements on the Internet. Individuals are not only able to view recent advertisements, but they can find advertisements depicting the two athletes that span a long period of time. Furthermore,

not only will Western society be able to largely access these data, but through the processes of globalization more individuals, worldwide, have the capability and easy access to Internet sources where these images can be found. This idea is important to my research when considering the globalization processes of the media and sport institutions in relation to my theoretical frameworks, and how these relations have altered societal dependence on media, sport, and consumption. Due to the global dissemination of these sources via the Internet the likelihood of individuals viewing these advertisements is large and therefore I will be able to discern or generalize the effects of these sources on the wider population.

## **Conclusion**

The rethinking of political economic thought discusses the shift from old to new media forms. I wish to discuss the integration of old media into new media. Therefore, it seems appropriate to understand how and why print media and television advertisements have been made available on the Internet and the impact this has on individuals' understandings of the production, distribution, and consumption of the professional athlete. The approach to theory and methods that I am taking acknowledges the constant possibility that a structure will be constituted in a different way because social structures are constantly constituted rather than produced once and for all (Mosco 2009:27). A final justification for the use of my sources is the idea of the mass message created by the Internet. The Internet, as a relatively new medium, allows for mass messages to be disseminated. There is a creation of messages that are intended for a relatively large, undifferentiated audience (Nuendorf 2002:22). Through the analysis of these advertisements I hope to gain an understanding of the impact of advertising on

individuals and societies. I want to illustrate how media sources tend to be governed by institutional rules, which prescribe conditions under which they are disseminated. In all, by choosing these data sources my research will offer an analysis of the representation of both athletes in multiple, divergent ways. These divergent representations are made possible by the accessibility and breadth of the Internet.

When academics begin doing research they must critically consider theoretical frameworks and appropriate methodological techniques. For the purposes of my research, it is imperative to take into consideration the historical and temporal processes that have lead to the formation of a particular society. This in turn allows for a social researcher to understand phenomena as not being the outcome of a single event or in a linear time of fashion, but that which can have multiple origins and paths of understanding. These processes heavily impact the formation and usage of theoretical frameworks. In my research there is a combination of two theoretical frameworks being used. The rethinking of political economic theory is the first theoretical framework considered. This theory departs from neoclassical perspectives and aims to understand how social change and historical transformation have impacted economic and social structures. Furthermore, political economic theory focuses on the dynamics of social relations and how they mutually constitute the production, distribution, and consumption of resources. Political economy is grounded in a realist, inclusive, constitutive, and critical epistemology. Most importantly for my research, I will utilize the concept of commodification to foreground my representation of capitalist production, through media advertisements, and deconstruct the commodity to determine what social relations are congealed in the commodity. The second theory I utilize is postmodern theory.

Postmodernism rejects the totalizing grand narratives of society and history. This theory

argues that contemporary technological media and the subsequent processes of change and transformation produce a new postmodern society. Baudrillard's concept of simulacrum, within a postmodern framework, illustrates how reality has now been replaced by signs and symbols. In this type of society use and exchange values are exploited and the image is privileged over the substance. Finally, the methodological technique utilized will be content analysis. Content analysis allows for a researcher to look at multiple data sources and explore various factors that span several cases, instead of limiting oneself to one case. This allows for an unobtrusive, generalizable account of how both case studies have been constructed, as professional athletes, through media outlets and on the Internet. Furthermore, I will be able to focus on both the latent content and manifest content, which will provide a deeper, critical understanding of the data. We need to understand the complexity of circumstances that have lead to the distribution of hyperreal representations via media, the social structures behind them, and the larger implications for individuals. How does the state of simulation of media representations effect how we understand the commodification of David Beckham and Mia Hamm?

## **Chapter Four**

### **Content Analysis**

This chapter explores how the professional athlete has increasingly become commodified in twenty-first century Western society. The processes of commodification will be understood as occurring through production, distribution, and consumption of media sources. Furthermore, my research proposes to illustrate how athletes have increasingly become a part of the postmodern concept of the simulacrum. Not only will I examine professional athletes in general, but my research will specifically look at two professional athletes who have attained iconic status through the complex relations of media and sport. These two athletes are Mia Hamm and David Beckham. The purposes of examining these athletes, through the use of content analysis, is to illustrate that through the production, distribution, and consumption phases of media each of these athletes are moulded into different symbols and signifiers in a twenty-first century consumer society. Beckham's image is constructed to be that of a global sports icon, whereas Mia Hamm is constructed to create a 'safe', gendered image of sport. I will analyze seven media advertisements per athlete, accessible on the Internet, through a political economic and postmodern theoretical lens. This approach will allow me to illustrate how both athletes have become commodified products in twenty-first century Western society.

#### **The Commodification of Sport and Athletes**

An integral part of this research project is to gain an understanding of how sport has and is becoming an increasingly commodified entity and the implications this has on the institution of sport and subsequently the athletes and fans. This means taking into



consideration the historical transitions that have taken place in the realm of media and sport, including historical transformations and shifts that have shaped contemporary consumer society. There is no doubt that sport has become increasingly commodified, and as researchers begin to examine the processes of sport and their relations to consumerism and media it has been noted that to study sport properly one must simultaneously examine all the people, institutions, and social structures involved. In my attempt to understand the processes that have brought about growth and change in the commodification of sport I will examine the processes of globalization, postmodernity and identity-formation. These three processes are necessary to consider when debating issues of consumerism. Also, it must be kept in mind that these processes and the subsequent impact they have on consumerism are not cultural universals. The unique set of processes that have led to the increased commodification of sport in Western society is distinct and shaped by Western cultural values and norms.

To examine how sport has become a more commodified institution through the media, it is critical to define four key concepts. These definitions are crucial to understanding the relations between the production, distribution, and consumption of goods in twenty-first century Western society. Furthermore, these definitions will serve as reference points for the remainder of the chapter and the discussions that will ensue. These critical concepts are consumption, consumer society, commodity and commodification. Consumption within Western culture is understood as a means of personal empowerment (Horne 2006:8). Furthermore, Horne (2006:11) notes that a “consumer society is one in which discretionary consumption has become a mass phenomenon and consumerism has become a way of life”. Abercrombie and Warde illustrate that consumer society implies consuming things, usually buying them, which

become central to one's life interest (ibid). A commodity, according to George Sage, is something whose value is defined in monetary terms (Horne 2006:71). Commodification is the process of transforming things valued for their use into marketable products that are valued for what they can bring in exchange (Mosco 2009:2; Horne 2006:71; Wenner 1998:21). In relation to the media and media images, commodification occurs when its content is transformed into marketable products (Mosco 2009:133). Furthermore, commodification has a fetishistic quality in which commodities take on bloated psychological importance to an individual (Wenner 1998:21). In all, media content is a key tool in creating commodities. This allows for social relations to be drawn into the orbit of commodification, including labour, consumers, and capital.

One of the key forces that has led to an increase in the commodification of sport in twenty-first century Western society is the key distinction between work and leisure. Prior to the last decades of the eighteenth century there was not a clear distinction between work and leisure; this was because of the mode of production in place at the time. During the last decade of the eighteenth century and up until the mid-nineteenth century there was a change in industrial capitalism. This change brought about industrial advancements and a shift in the mode of production which ultimately changed the form of capitalism (Hargreaves 1986:17). From this a clear distinction between work and leisure was developed and resulted in a significant shift in the structure of consumer society. Both Marx and Engels discussed how these changes in capitalism and production would impact the larger society. Marx maintained that changes in the mode of production would result in the immense growth of commodities (Horne 2006:73). Furthermore, Engels stated the society is continually revolutionizing the instruments and relations of production (ibid:173). Society will always try to find new ways to sell products and

lifestyles, as demonstrated by the multiple shifts in the mode of production through history. From these shifts a consumer society has developed wherein almost anything is transformed into a product, which is then valued for what it can bring in exchange.

To elaborate on the historical shifts in capitalist society it is also important to discuss the growth of the media and sport. The growth of both media and sport within society has had a large impact on the commodification of sport. With individuals feeling as though they have more time to pursue leisure activities, the participation in sport and attendance at sporting arenas has grown significantly. Within the first phase of the development of consumer culture the media assisted in the creation of the consumer and the associated ideology of consumerism (Horne 2006:73). After World War I the amount of money spent on advertising grew, production became concentrated and globalization enabled sellers to target larger audiences (Wenner 1998:18). In the 1950s and 1960s the athleticisation of North American culture was a movement that signified a key transition of sport into the commercial world (Horne 2006: 21). Furthermore, government legislation permitted professional sports teams to combine broadcast rights in order to sell them to the highest bidder (ibid:20). This intrusion of late capitalism's commercialism propelled sport into the realm of advertising, wherein the sport media nexus developed. This development signalled the shift that sport was moving from the era of the modern into the postmodern. Postmodern sport exists in a state where the sport itself, sports products and athletes are only a representation or signifier of a reality which social institutions construct. Therefore, it can be said that reality has become largely symbolic. The products and subsequent identities that individuals buy are in fact a simulation of an original copy that no longer has an accessible origin. This construction and signification of identities and images leads to an increased desirability for the continual consumption

of goods. In all, sport has and still is an excellent conduit for sellers to promote and market their goods in a capitalist economy.

Through the processes of globalization the media's span of influence has increased tremendously. As stated in the literature review, globalization is a process, or set of processes, which embody a transformation generating transcontinental flows and networks of activity, interaction and exercise of power (Silk and Andrews 2001:180). Through this process the development of a global culture arises. Global culture is not a homogenous, binding whole, but is a general discourse about a world as a whole and its varieties (Maguire 1999:4). The processes of globalization have allowed for sport to become increasingly commodified because the reach of the media has grown exponentially. Through the availability of sport and sports media globally, there has become a global celebration of sport and athletes. The success of athletes or sports teams can now be celebrated across the globe regardless of where the event or individual is situated. Furthermore, the media constructs the sporting event or individual in a very particular way, therefore disseminating a similar message around the globe, which in turn perpetuates class power and the success of transnational corporations. The celebration and significance of sport as a social institution and success of individual athletes has been sold to society by the media. Sport in general has become increasingly commodified through the reach of the media globally and through the larger processes of globalization.

Under such transitions, companies, advertisers, and the media are continually seeking new, fresher products and images to sell to the public. These institutions have begun to utilize sport as an arena wherein anything can be sold, including the athletes. These institutions have exploited the role of sport in society, while still presenting a romanticized image of sport. Despite any deviance that may occur within sport, the

image of sport is serviceable to corporations and can be exploited by any company with something to sell. For example, for a typical individual to be as successful as an athlete, the corporations and the media encourage them to buy the products these athletes are wearing. In addition, to represent one's geographical pride or ethnic pride, they persuade individuals, through advertisements, to purchase the products of specific teams. As Cashmore (2002:77) maintains, the position of sport within Western society has changed not because of any internal shifts but because big businesses have awakened to the idea that products can be sold on the back of sport, just as products have been sold using celebrities. Never before have sports teams or athletes been held in such esteem and given such iconic status.

Following the idea that sport has become an increasingly commodified institution, it appears that athletes are becoming more and more a part of simulacrum. As noted earlier, simulacra creates a world wherein simulations and representations exist as a world made up of copies of which there are no originals (Wenner 1998:22). In a state of simulacrum there is an intensification of reality, wherein the world is both simulated and realer than real. Individuals are provided with sound-bites rather than long narratives. Calling attention to this aspect of simulacrum illustrates Baudrillard's point that individuals need to pay close attention to the effect of cultural change in the era of modernity. Furthermore, the simulacrum has caused a pervasive shift to the commodification of all cultural objects. Therefore, simulacrum challenges the distinction between real and fictional, allowing for truth and reality to be replaced by signs and symbols. The replacing of truth and reality with signs and symbols greatly impacts the type of sport we consume and the identity of athletes that we come to love. Therefore,

these signs and symbols ultimately lead to a society that consumes distorted and unattainable images of reality, thereby creating divergent perceptions of life.

Under the state of simulacrum consumer societies are driven by symbolic systems in which commodities are used as a means of differentiation (Chan 2008; Wenner 1998:22). In a consumer society individuals will try to differentiate themselves through the acquisition of commodities. According to Baudrillard, the system of capitalism within a consumer society is unable to meet these demands (Chan 2008). A desire is created through media outlets that can never be met. Therefore, the differentiation through commodities, which individuals seek, is based on desire which is never completely fulfilled (ibid). Baudrillard (1998) maintains that individuals are never consuming the object in itself; individuals are continually manipulating objects as signs which distinguish them either by affiliating them to a group or marking them off from a group.

For example, companies and the media construct identities of athletes in order to target groups to whom they wish to sell their products. They construct an identity for these markets, in which individuals desire to be included and consequently consume. Therefore, these constructed identities become signifiers of a larger group and a specific way of life. The processes produce profane meanings of semiotic and unilateral consumption, and as a result replace the immediately actualized and exchanged meanings of the symbolic (Merrin 2005:17). In twenty-first century Western society, viewers of sport are not merely offered the opportunity to watch athletes but they are also encouraged to continuously consume the line of products associated with them. For example, advertisements in the stadium, the clothing worn by athletes, the commercials during the games can all be considered a part of the overall marketing strategy that target

sports fans. In all, through viewing athletes playing sport, the media illustrates an image to be consumed that simultaneously promotes specific desires that can be achieved by obtaining the image. But, as these desires are never completely satisfied and are continually shifting, these individuals continue to consume products on a large scale. This leads to the mass consumption of products and a non-existent reality, which encompasses false identities.

To draw further on the idea that athletes are becoming more and more a part of simulacrum, it is important to note that Baudrillard believed that there were no primary texts in mass culture, only repetitions (Wenner 1998:23). As stated earlier, individuals within a consumer society will seek out products that symbolize a reality that is represented to them through repetitions of media images; products that come to represent signs and symbols of an original signifier. In twenty-first century Western society, technologies of communication have made it possible for the outreach of media sports, and the increasing commodification of everything associated with sport. Through the growth of technologies of communication, transformations in daily life are facilitated by “changes in material culture and their relation to symbolic images of consumption” (Gottdiener 1994:25). Therefore, as shifts occur within material culture so too do the images and products associated with athletes. Although the athlete does not personally change, the symbolic image of the athlete does. This leads consumers to believe in an identity with no direct relation to the athlete, therefore they believe in an identity with little concrete meaning or substance. The shifts in material culture may be attributed to capitalism and the media’s continual need to find fresher, newer images to sell to individuals.

In all, as Baudrillard (2005:9) postulates, mass consumption in the realm of sport has become a system of signs that no longer refers to use-value, but to circulation. The sign has become the hidden source of the commodity. The athlete is no longer glorified for his or her personal excellence through hard work and labour, but is glorified for his or her success through the usage of certain products. Therefore, athletes' identities are no longer tied to their successes or failures but to the successes and desirability of the products and advertisements. Athletes have a largely symbolic identity that is constructed for them through products and the media. Their identities and success as athletes are repressive and reductive strategies of power systems. These strategies and systems create the signified athlete who is desirable and continuously altered. This process leads to the sustainability of mass consumption and the contained growth of capital accumulation.

### **From Mia Hamm to David Beckham: Constructing Athletes as Commodities**

Both Mia Hamm and David Beckham are well known athletes in North America and around the world. Both Hamm and Beckham have made extraordinary contributions to the development of soccer and to sport in general. These two athletes are ideal case studies for the purposes of this research as they have been celebrated among the most successful athletes of the twenty-first century, and they both have distinct histories associated with sport in relation to consumer society. As such, it is important to note that corporations with no particular interest in sport began to express interest in signing up athletes to endorse their products in the early 1990s (Cashmore 2002:78). By using athletes as endorsers of products corporations were able to advertise on spots that were popularized by televised sport competitions and in turn gave advertisers a chance to reach new markets (ibid). Therefore, corporations have realized and exploited the fact that



sports and athletes sell. Athletes, as celebrities, have replaced political figures, scientists, and philosophers as heroic figures. Athletes have become the “most watched, admired, privileged, and imitated people” of Western culture, taking on a heroic and iconic status (ibid:79). Athletes in twenty-first century Western society are not only famous but have a kind of exemplary authority, and it is this power that is used to sell commodities.

By examining a combination of seven commercial and print advertisements compiled from the Internet, I will analyse how both case studies have been constructed by differing media sources and the impact that this construction has had on their overall marketable desirability. For purposes of accessibility, advertisements that appeared on the television were compiled from the free video uploading website, [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com). In order to assure that my research is recent and relevant, I have chosen advertisements that were published between 2000 and 2009. In addition, this time period allows me to explore the two athletes during highpoints of their careers. In order to understand the progression of both athletes’ image and identity, I will analyse their unique advertisements in chronological order which will create a timeline of their careers. However, while searching for advertisements via the Internet, I experienced difficulty when trying to locate advertisements pertaining to Hamm. Unlike Beckham, Hamm tried to keep a low profile and has been classified as a retired athlete since 2004. With these factors in mind, I was unable to find seven advertisements, including both print and television commercials, that depicted Hamm in the given time range. As a result, I utilized advertisements starting from May 1997 to the spring of 2009. I believe these sources are still suitable and sufficient to use when analysing my data because they were published in the recent past and they are largely accessible to those who have Internet access. As well, because the Internet archives past material these advertisements were

easily accessible to the larger public. Therefore, individuals still have an equal opportunity to view advertisements of each athlete.

### *Constructing Mia Hamm*

Mia Hamm, formally Mariel Margaret Hamm, was born on March 17, 1972 in Selma, Alabama, United States. Hamm was the daughter of an Air Force pilot, having to relocate frequently with her family throughout her childhood. From a young age, Hamm found success through sports. At age fifteen, Hamm was the youngest soccer player in history to play for the United States National Women's Team, and in 1991, when the Women's American National Team won the FIFA Women's World Cup for the first time, Hamm became the youngest American woman to win a World Cup championship at the age of nineteen (Latimer 2001:18). Hamm also found success at the University of North Carolina where she received a degree in political studies (Latimer 2001:24). While attending University, Hamm helped take her school's soccer team to four consecutive NCAA women's championships, and she was named the NCAA 'Women's Player of The Year' in 1992 and 1993 (Latimer 2001:22). She continued her soccer career and was named the 1997 'Sportswoman of the Year' by the Women's Sports Foundation, and she achieved the all-time international goal record with her one-hundred and ninth goal in a game against Brazil on May 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1999. Later that year, Nike named the largest building on their corporate campus after Hamm, furthering her success and continuing to associate her name with success in the sports industry. Before being inducted into the Texas Sports Hall of Fame on March 11, 2008 (U.S Soccer 2007), Hamm was named the Women's FIFA 'World Player of the Year' in 2001 and 2002. In March 2004, Hamm was one of

only two women, and only two Americans, named to the FIFA 100, and to the list of the 125 greatest living soccer players as selected by a soccer legend, Pele (Millward 2004).

Also in 2004, Washington Post columnist Michael Wilbon stated that Hamm was “perhaps the most important athlete of the last 15 years” (Zirin 2005:190), a comment that further highlighted her success in all areas of soccer. For example, in 2000 Hamm, alongside other female soccer greats, founded the Washington Freedom, a women’s soccer club associated with the Women’s United Soccer Association (King 2009). Through her involvement with the Washington Freedom, Hamm earned a maximum salary of \$85,000 per year. While this salary represents a low earning in the world of professional sports, Hamm and others opted to earn these lower salaries so that the league could flourish (People in the News 2001). The league disbanded in 2003 due to cumulative losses of approximately \$100 million (King 2009). Although her salary was low, Hamm would receive multiple endorsements boosting her salary. On May 14<sup>th</sup>, 2004, Hamm announced her retirement effective after the 2004 Athens Olympics (U.S Soccer 2007). In what would be her last tournament, Hamm helped lead team USA to a gold medal at the 2004 Summer Olympics.

As stated earlier, advertisements, including both print and television commercials, depicting Mia Hamm were difficult to find. Therefore, advertisements analyzed in this section will range from 1997 to 2009. All advertisements were compiled from Internet sources; these include four television commercials and three print advertisements. Print advertisements were supplemented with online articles from popular media sources, which further depicted the image and identity being constructed. First, I will describe all of the advertisements, followed by an in-depth analysis. Through these advertisements I will explore how Hamm’s identity is constructed in a consumer society and the impact

this construction has on her fans and the larger institution of sport. I believe it is important to begin by noting that Hamm has not and does not completely embrace her celebrity status. For example, Hamm has a shy demeanour and prefers to focus on her athletic achievements rather than on signing commercial and corporate deals. Also, in each advertisement she is largely depicted as preferring little to no make-up and a casual, simple appearance. These qualities will be assessed at the end of the section when I explain how they are interpreted and depicted by the media.

The first advertisement was published on May 12, 1997 and is the 47<sup>th</sup> volume and 18<sup>th</sup> issue of People Magazine. This issue of the magazine depicts the fifty most beautiful people of 1997, as chosen by the magazine. The magazine article includes a brief description of Hamm and her recent accomplishments, set alongside a large image of Mia Hamm with her feet in the sand. The image depicts Hamm in a complacent, welcoming stance with minimal make-up applied. The way Hamm is positioned clearly shows her wedding ring, illustrating to the reader that she conforms to the institution of marriage. Alongside the image, the synopsis depicts Hamm as an average woman who feels “weird getting attention”. Julie Foudy, a teammate of Hamm’s, states that Hamm has “natural beauty”. Furthermore Foudy maintains that beauty is not something Hamm spends thousands of dollars on, which is then affirmed by Hamm’s first husband, Christian Corey. The magazine further depicts her simplicity by maintaining that Hamm does not wear much make-up. She does not take a lot of time to get ready because she would prefer to get to places easily and on time. By focusing on the simplicity of Hamm’s style and beauty choices the advertisement reinforces the stereotype of female athletes as less feminine than women who do not participate in sports. In essence, it makes the point that the majority of female athletes care less about their physical appearance. Furthermore,

these depictions pit the strong, muscular and masculine qualities that female athletes are purported to have against the “normal” feminine standards of beauty, values and norms associated with being a woman in a twenty-first century Western society. By clearly showing Hamm’s wedding ring and including her husband in the article I believe the magazine attempts to ease the tension between her athletic identity and a required feminine identity.

The second advertisement selected is a Gatorade commercial aired in 1999. This commercial pits Mia Hamm against Michael Jordan. With the song “anything you can do, I can do better” playing in the background it seems as though Hamm puts to rest the slogan “you play like a girl”. Both athletes are depicted as experiencing a surge in athletic superiority and strength after drinking a Gatorade beverage. They are shown sweating out orange and blue sweat because the Gatorade beverage has run through their veins providing them with a superior athletic experience, wherein they are both unstoppable. As the athletes transition through sports, each beating one another, Hamm leaves behind her feminine expressions and appearances for a strong and powerful image, wherein little elegance is depicted. Although Hamm is depicted as being equal to and as successful as a male athlete I believe this depiction is skewed. Hamm is competing against an African American athlete who faces similar discrimination. African American athletes are depicted by the media through racially charged images. Through images and reports Black athletes are depicted as savage and primitive, they are given a beastly vibe which perpetuates racial stereotypes. White athletes are subsequently portrayed as smiling and laughing (USA Today 2008). Through the media, Black athletes can also be depicted as deviant. They are depicted as having uncontrollable, addictive and excessive qualities (Harris and Davis 1998:160). Similarly, many female athletes have been viewed

as being deviant for participating in sports and taking on “masculine” qualities and characteristics. Therefore, this Gatorade advertisement may not be as liberating as is shown because Hamm is positioned against another subjected, stereotyped athlete.

The third advertisement was aired in 1999. The television commercial is depicted as being a celebration of female athletes by Nike. Mia Hamm is positioned behind a megaphone-like object. She seems uncomfortable and apprehensive. She proceeds by listing her athletic accomplishments, including the fact that she is the all time leading international goal scorer, male or female, for the United States of America. Furthermore, she notes that she has never won a bake sale. I believe this situates her identity on the border of the feminine and masculine boundary. The commercial identifies Hamm as a female, but makes sure to clearly note that she has not won a bake sale, which in turn questions her femininity and calls into question her ability to maintain the characteristic female expectations of motherhood and being a wife. Furthermore, Hamm is dressed in a grey t-shirt with the word athlete written across the chest. Because Hamm has on make-up and is wearing a form fitted t-shirt, the corporation feels that it is necessary to explicitly identify Hamm as an athlete. Therefore, by wearing the t-shirt, the audience is sure to know that Hamm is both a woman and an athlete. I believe this advertisement provides mixed messages to the audience. While celebrating women in sport, the commercial also pits proper feminine activities and appearances against those of the female athlete who borders male and female characteristics.

In 2003, Mia Hamm participated in a Gatorade commercial entitled *Defining Mia*. The commercial begins with a soccer ball being kicked in the air and women subsequently chasing the ball down. Music begins to play, as if to set the tone for an intense moment. Hamm and two other opposing team members jump to head the ball.

Hamm wins the battle. As the image slows down and flickers in and out, we are shown a sequence of X-Ray shots of Hamm. The commercial returns to actual time and the game continues. Hamm takes a sip of the Gatorade Ice product and it is as if her athletic senses and prowess have become superior. Somehow her body and athleticism have been enhanced. Hamm begins to talk about the defining moment of a game. She states, “when push comes to shove, to be strong or be gone, a test of will. When that moment comes will you have ice in your veins?” The defining moment for Hamm occurs after drinking Gatorade Ice which enhances her body and performance. With Ice in her veins she is able to score the winning goal. The camera pans back to Hamm who has icy sweat running down her face. Because of the drink Hamm is seen as outplaying these other weak women. She is given power and strength that she would not have otherwise. This illustrates female athletes as somehow less able and weaker than their male counterparts, needing a drink to enhance their bodily and athletic abilities. This illustration of Hamm greatly contradicts how she defines herself, as quiet and shy. Hamm’s identity is illustrated as changing as she begins to play the sport. It is as if the game changes her identity from shy and reserved, to strong and emotionally outgoing. In the end this drink is defining Mia as a female athlete.

The September 22, 2003 issue of Sports Illustrated magazine is the fifth ad to be examined. Gary Smith writes an article entitled “The Secret Life of Mia Hamm”. Alongside the article is a front cover image of Mia Hamm. Hamm’s image is in front of a blue, red and white backdrop, mimicking the colours of the American flag. Her image comes off as intense, yet innocent and vulnerable at the same time. On the left side of her image “everybody knows” is written and on the right side of the image “nobody knows Mia” is written. This hints at the idea that she has a dual life wherein multiple identities

are constructed for her through her fame. Within the article Smith provides an account of Hamm as a woman and athlete whose identity has shifted throughout her life. He maintains that Hamm is the greatest female soccer player, but also a shy, self-critical woman. Smith pits these duelling identities in what he calls “mortal combat”. The use of language here is critical. First, women are generally not associated with combat. The use of this language creates further tension between the masculine/feminine boundary that Hamm is illustrated as walking. Second, in Western society female athletes are continually challenged to choose between proper feminine norms and values or masculine characteristics. By choosing sport, female athletes enter the realm of masculinity wherein aggression, strength, and power are all acceptable qualities. They cannot be female athletes without calling into question their femininity. Multiple individuals believe Hamm has launched millions of girls across the nation onto soccer pitches. Whereas Hamm would prefer that you not fuss over her because she would then feel like a burden and agonize over what you thought about her. Smith proceeds to discuss how Hamm wanted to be a boy when she was a child and refused to wear make-up or enrol in dance lessons. Her appearance was so much like a boy that when she was playing on the pitch with boy acquaintances they did not realize she was “packing a pair of X chromosomes”. Furthermore, Smith discussed how Hamm preferred to play on boys’ teams because boys inherently know sports creates hierarchies, whereas girls have to decide if they like you before you fit into the team. As Smith writes, in the years before her proposed retirement, Hamm is described in a somewhat masculine way at the World Cup Final against China. As she takes the last free kick her facial expression is described as being never relaxed, eyes burning, and jaw clenched. The article closes with Hamm stating that she would now prefer to focus on her relationships, such as wife and mother. She notes that after



many years of athletic success she has come to the realization that medals and achievements are only temporary and they do not say “I love you”. This accentuates the tension between the acceptance of women in sport and their societal roles as wives and mothers. In noting these transitions through her life, it is as if the author walks us through her deviations and transgressions as a female athlete and illustrates how, in the end, all she wanted was to fulfill her societal role as woman.

The sixth advertisement, promoting the company ViaCord, was aired in 2008. This television commercial situates Hamm as a knowledgeable, well-known athlete, but also a concerned mother. The product being sold is a holding facility for your baby’s cord blood, which one day, upon illness, may be able to save his or her life. The company utilizes Hamm’s celebrity status and familiarity to reinforce the Western values of family and motherhood. The commercial pays little attention to her career other than to note that her career was an honour and important. But Hamm makes it clear that finding security in your family’s well being is much more significant.

The final advertisement to be examined is the Women’s Pro Soccer League logo. This logo can be found at [www.womensprosoccer.com](http://www.womensprosoccer.com). The meaning and interpretation of this logo was facilitated by outside sources, mainly major sports websites, such as ESPN. Mia Hamm was one of the founding partners of the first women’s professional soccer league in 2004. That first league did not succeed and in the spring of 2009 the new professional women’s league (WPS) was to kick off (Granderson 2009). As Hamm is identified as one of the most notable female players in the world, her silhouette was used for the logo. In multiple accounts, such as in the ESPN website and in SoccerAmerica (2009), Hamm is denoted as the most athletically gifted stay-at-home mom. Her silhouette was used to honour her legacy and celebrate her contribution to women’s

soccer. An article found on the ESPN (2009) website notes how this logo symbolizes her legacy and how Hamm inspired a generation of women to pursue their athletic dreams.

One article quotes Hamm's reaction to the use of her silhouette as the new logo:

I am extremely honored and humbled to personify the WPS brand, knowing full well that this league will be revered by generations of soccer fans around the world. Above all else, this league represents opportunity – not just for female soccer players, but for women everywhere. (Granderson 2009).

I believe much can be said about the usage of Hamm's silhouette in the logo. It perhaps represents the constructed identity of Hamm by the media and their attempt to market the league through her legacy and constructed identity. Furthermore, I believe this logo is a signifier of Hamm and intensifies the construction of multiple realities and symbols of her identity. Therefore, I believe this logo is utilized as a symbol of a nonexistent reality and identity which in turn is used for corporate goals and capital accumulation.

As C. Wright Mills (1959:3) maintained “neither the life of an individual nor the history of a society can be understood without understanding both”. A critical analysis of the advertisements presented must include a discussion of the historical processes and transitions that have occurred to allow these advertisements to be possible and successful. For many years there has been a struggle over the acceptance and ability for women to participate in sports. In 1972 the United States Congress passed Title IX of the United States Education Act. This required all “federally funded programs, including athletics, to provide equal treatment and opportunity for participation for men and women” (Knight and Giuliano 2001:218). Although there is no denying the movement towards equality in athletics, there have still been barriers and struggles to overcome that female athlete's face on a regular basis. This is no more apparent than through the example of Mia Hamm and her struggles to play sport and her reluctance to become a female soccer icon.

Mia Hamm, throughout her life, just wanted to play soccer. Hamm did not expect her success to catapult her to stardom. As illustrated in the Sports Illustrated cover story, the fifth advertisement, Hamm refused to embrace her feminine qualities and desires of her mother. Her hair was kept short, she did not wear make-up, she wore baggy clothes and hoodies, and refused to join a dance class. Hamm wanted to do what guys do “make friends and forget about herself by playin’ ball” (Smith 2003). Because of her appearance the boys assumed she was a fellow guy and allowed her to play a game of soccer. After beating them all, she walked off the pitch elated, but unwilling to show her emotions. As Smith (2003) notes, she was bordering the dividing line between two worlds. One where it is fine to erupt, explode, dominate, celebrate and be better than someone else and one where her emotions must be kept in check. From an early age Hamm was caught between two identities; the conformed and expected feminine role and one which borders both masculine and feminine qualities. In all seven advertisements there is a celebration of Hamm’s accomplishments and overcoming of societal restraints that include feminine appearance and demeanour. Despite this celebration, these advertisements create tensions between the multiple identities that the media sources have constructed of her and question which qualities a female athlete must maintain, such as appearance, motherhood, sexuality, and which characteristics can be left behind. The advertisements furthermore create a tension between physical characteristics such as strength, muscles, and fitness versus grace, agility, and elegance. These tensions illustrate the fine line female athletes still need to walk to be acknowledged as an acceptable female athlete. In 2010, I would argue, that there is a greater acceptance of women in sport. But, I do still believe that individuals have an obligation to be critical consumers and must not take these advancements for granted. There are still social institutions and forces at play that are

moulding these young female athletes into certain types of successful athletes. These athletes are constructed so that they still appear feminine and still compete under the controlling force of hegemonic masculine power. Therefore, we need to keep in mind that as social researchers we must understand time as a mechanism through which social acts, organizations, institutions, cultures, and social structures exist and operate (Maines 1987:303).

By understanding temporality and history as critical processes in the formation of social institutions and relations we can now discuss how Mia Hamm has become constructed through these advertisements largely for the purposes of mass consumption within a largely consumer society. As a political economist I am interested in understanding how the dynamics of capital accumulation and class power manifests in the capitalist mode of production, institutional structures, organizations, and the production processes of media industries (Calabrese 2004:2). As such, I believe that through the dynamics of class power and the goals of capital accumulation multiple identities were created of Hamm, which ultimately commodified her as an athlete. Moreover, these advertisements created conflict within Hamm herself. In many of the print advertisements it becomes clear that Hamm struggles to let go of her shy, emotionally reserved self for a more emotional, stronger image of herself. As the expansion of women's rights spread and more and more women have entered social spheres, society and social institutions have had to accept the presence of women. Through this implicit acceptance I believe social institutions have begun to exploit the presence of women in multiple social spheres, such as women becoming athletic consumers. This exploitation is apparent in the construction of Mia Hamm in multiple advertisements.

Mia Hamm is viewed as a pioneer in her sport and a role model for athletes and fans alike who believe in equal opportunity, Title IX legislation, and the love of the game. In combination with increasing accessibility for female athletes to compete and participate in sports, Mia Hamm's increasing popularity opened up a market for the mass production of female athletic goods. In 2000, it was estimated that more than 55 million women participated in recreational sports and fitness activities (Lapiano 2000:164). The increasing economic power of the active North American woman provided an incentive for manufacturers to meet their needs and begin sponsoring women's sports and female athletes (ibid:166). More than 80% of all retail purchases are made by women. Furthermore, women have purchased more athletic shoes and apparel than men since 1991 (ibid). Title IX, and the increase in the popularity of female sports stars like Hamm, have exposed a virtually untapped market. I believe that the advertisements of Mia Hamm illustrate the first true representation of female consumerism in sport and the recognition and opening of this niche market.

To accurately analyse these relations, there needs to be a focus on how the media, information, and audiences are conceptualized as resources and the ways they are packaged into products for sale. The media began to speak of Hamm as the representative of female empowerment. The media recognized the beginnings of a new niche market and began to construct images and identities of this group through Hamm. Hamm was constructed in such a way as to represent female empowerment, while at the same time, implicitly, was constructed to define and mould this group of female athletes and fans to fit the needs of a largely capitalist, male hegemonic society. Although individuals may marvel at the courage, skill, and success of female athletes and how they have altered the face of athletic culture, beneath the surface strong currents of resistance

persist (Cahn 1994:248). Women's involvement in competitive sport poses a critical challenge to the "maleness" of sport and undermines the masculinity of athletic skill and disrupts the notion that sport belongs to men (ibid:261). Corporations and manufacturers create obstacles to the liberation of female athletics because they focus on their concern to sell products. They decide that what sells is not a women's athletic ability but their sex appeal. So, at once these corporations recognize the increase of female sports participation and the niche market that opens up with this participation, but they also recognize that the taken-for-granted masculinity associated with sport is threatened. To counteract this threat, corporations, largely run by masculine figures, situate women in sport as sexual beings and sell this implicit sexual image of female athletes to female sports fans through products. Therefore, female athletes and fans around the globe are being liberated and repressed as represented in the construction of Hamm's image and identity in the advertisements. Therefore, as critical consumers we should not take for granted this notion of female athletic empowerment, but also recognize that the media still operates under class power and masculine, hegemonic control.

Coinciding with the processes of globalization is digitization. All seven advertisements illustrate how there has been a transformation of communication, including words, motion pictures, and sounds, into a common language (Mosco 2004:215). This has allowed for the expansion of the commodification of Hamm and the identities and images that are presented about her. Hamm is constructed so that all women around the world are able to understand and accept her image. This expansion is possible through opportunities to measure and monitor, package and repackage information. In a short span of time, Hamm can and is redeveloped, reconstructed, and sold as a symbol of female empowerment and female athleticism. With recognition that

women in society are becoming active consumers, companies have packaged information regarding Hamm and sport in general so that women will consume these products. While feeling empowered through these products and images of Hamm, they are also repressed by the goals of these companies who are largely still controlling social values and norms through a masculine hegemonic order.

In political economic thought, two key concepts include spatialization and structuration. The mass media has made spatialization apparent in the seven advertisements illustrated above. Spatialization allows for the constraints of geographical space to be overcome and this occurs through the use of mass media and communication technologies (Mosco 2009:2). The lifting of geographical constraints has allowed for an increase in the accessibility and ease of the distribution of advertisements, which depict both images and identities of key athletes. Hamm's image is able to be disseminated globally, at a quicker pace, and has become transformed into a more accessible form. Therefore, advertisers and corporations are able to reach many more individuals and sell a product and lifestyle globally which conforms to class power and the structure Western masculine, hegemonic power. Furthermore, through the advertisements of Hamm, the process of structuration is evident. In understanding how communication practices construct social and cultural life, the process of structuration creates social relations organized around gender. In constructing gender as a normal, binary division Western society has come to accept this division as a taken-for-granted concept. As evidenced in the advertisements of Hamm, individuals have become complacent with the idea of gender and the division has become a natural way of thinking. As noted in the tension of Hamm's image as a female athlete, these advertisements try to ease her defiance of gendered roles and place Hamm, and female athletes alike, back into complacent roles.

Therefore, as the process of structuration purports and as evidenced in the analysis of the advertisements of Hamm, we have brought to light the lived network of mutually constituting meanings and values concerning gender, which are experienced as practices in our everyday life, and appear to be mutually confirming. As a niche market, women are sold products and identities that are said to empower women and female athletes, but in fact we should not take for granted the fact that these products and images are being constructed largely by corporations run by masculine force. Therefore, as consumers we must not understand these advertisements or constructions of Hamm as based on concrete truth, but as perpetuating a gendered division that corporations and class power try to maintain. It is important to break away from this common, natural way of thinking and open our minds to consider whether these gendered divisions are accurate and if there is a possibility for more than just a binary understanding of gender.

The media have created multiple identities and symbols of Mia Hamm, which are apparent in the seven advertisements analysed. The tensions in her identities are clearly apparent and represent an example of simulacrum. As noted by Baudrillard, simulacrum is a concept that maintains that commodities have been turned into objects that are realer than realer. These objects no longer have a concrete reality. They shift through time and space and are continually transforming. This concept is a function of a postmodern society wherein corporations continually seek new and fresher images and symbols of culture to sell to the larger public. Individuals within this society strive to attain large quantities of products and are surrounded by advertisements purporting to signify reality. Therefore, as noted in the analysis of the seven advertisements of Hamm, her identities are continually shifting and constructed through the media to sell to the public. All of these identities are distortions of reality. They have become a copy, of a copy, of a copy,



all extending themselves further from the soccer player who has reluctantly become a star. Mia Hamm is sold as an image or sign of female empowerment in a postmodern society. Divergently, towards the end of her career the media construct both an athletic image of Hamm, but also reinforce the importance of females fulfilling their roles as mothers and wives. In the ViaCord and Sports Illustrated advertisements Hamm illustrates how being a wife and mother, also having the strong familial values of Western society, are important to fulfilling a complete and happy life. This leads to a state of cultural hegemony. Cultural hegemony, including masculine hegemonic practices, is characterized by the way use values and exchange values are exploited by the postmodern culture of consumption which privileges the image over substance (Gottdiener 1994:36). But, we must understand that these images and signifiers are constructed through largely masculine hegemonic institutions, whose end goal is profit, mass consumption and the reinforcement of cultural values and norms. We must question then whether or not Mia Hamm is indeed a figure of female empowerment or just another tool to be manipulated and a mechanism of capital accumulation by social institutions?

In all, it is clear that Mia Hamm has been commodified as an athlete to fulfill the goals of profit-seeking corporations within a consumer society. It is evident in the seven advertisements presented that Hamm's image is constructed over and over again to open new, fresher pathways to selling her image to a multitude of consumers. Hamm is at once a figure of female empowerment, an excellent example of a woman fulfilling her societal role as wife and mother, and a beautiful, natural woman. Signs and signifiers are used in these advertisements to present Hamm's identity in certain ways. Therefore, what Hamm stands to signify becomes a copy of a copy of a copy. Her image is no longer based on an

original, but has become a copy of what some corporation or individual believes Hamm's identity is. Although, these constructed identities may seem to fit together, the advertisements create tensions amongst these identities. Hamm is at once breaking the boundaries of womanhood, she is strong and empowered, and she is also illustrated as conforming to societal norms by feeling insecure with her stardom, by pointing out that she has a family and agrees with Western notions of family values and norms, and also by being described as beautiful. These identities of Hamm have been constructed by corporations to expose and profit from a growing consumer group, females. We must, therefore, understand these constructions of Hamm as not liberating her as an athlete, and the entire female athletic population, but as disempowering. These images and signifiers are constructed through largely masculine hegemonic institutions, whose end goal is profit, mass consumption and the reinforcement of cultural values and norms.

### *Constructing David Beckham*

David Beckham was born in Leytonstone, London, England on May 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1975. He grew up as the middle child in a working-class family. From his parents, Beckham inherited his love of Manchester United, one of the leading soccer teams in England with approximately fifty million fans worldwide, and his sporting passion for football (BiographyChannelUK 2009). At the age of sixteen Beckham left home to pursue his dreams and was recruited to play for the training division of Manchester United. Beckham made his first appearance for Manchester United on September 23, 1992, playing as a substitute, at a League Cup match against Brighton and Hove Albion (Cashmore 2002: 64). In 1993 he made the team, and in 1995, he made the starting line-

up for the first time. Upon signing his second contract with Manchester United he was earning 10, 000 pounds a week. His most notable season with Manchester United was in 1998-1999 when he helped the team win the Premier League, FA Cup and Champions league (DavidBeckhamNews.com 2009). In 1998, Beckham signed an endorsement deal with Adidas and he earned \$13 million in 1998 from endorsement deals (People 2007).

His leadership ability was recognized in 2002 when Beckham was given the opportunity to captain the England team. He captained the England side from the 15<sup>th</sup> of November in 2002 until the 2006 FIFA World Cup finals. In addition, in 2004, Beckham signed a 4-year contract with Real Madrid of Spain, a contract worth up to \$41 million in salary and endorsements (DavidBeckhamNews.com 2009). Over the next four years, Real Madrid sold \$600 million worth of jerseys and other soccer merchandise, increasing the club's merchandising profits by 137% (Maidment 2007). In 2004 Beckham became the world's highest paid soccer player; he earned \$27 million in the 2003/2004 season (rediffSports 2004). By this time, in addition to his salary, Beckham was earning approximately \$30 million a year from endorsement deals (People 2007).

After his four-year contract ended he was in discussions with the Los Angeles Galaxy, a team belonging to Major League Soccer (MLS) in North America. Already an owner of a soccer school in Los Angeles, the David Beckham academy, his move to Los Angeles was premised on the hope of catapulting soccer into the sports realm in North America (ibid). He signed a five-year contract with LA Galaxy on January 11, 2006, worth a total of \$250 million. On top of his annual earnings, Beckham was guaranteed 40-to-50 percent of all Galaxy jersey sales and an undisclosed share of ticket revenues (Wahl 2007). In comparison to his teammates, who earn between \$900, 000 and \$12, 900, a year Beckham was the highest paid Galaxy player and, at the time, his contract was

the biggest in sport history (Wahl 2009:89). After Beckham, the highest earner in Major League Soccer is Juan Palencia who earns substantially less at \$1.3 million a year, and therefore it is not surprising that Beckhams' salary tops the entire current Major League Soccer salary package (Wallace 2007). Furthermore, the overall earnings of Beckham are dependent on television and sponsorship deals that the league earns from his presence (ibid). The overall push to include Beckham in this league was to open the soccer market in North America and make Beckham a house-hold name in North American consumer culture, which in turn was hoped to increase product sales and endorsements (Wahl 2009: 59). However, controversy arose when Beckham stated his intent to join Inter Milan, an Italian soccer club, on loan from the 7<sup>th</sup> of January 2009. Despite speculation, Beckham made it clear the move did not signal his intent to leave Major League Soccer (BBC News 2008).

Beckham's general soccer accomplishments include being the twice runner up for the FIFA World Player of the year (LA Galaxy Player Bio 2009). In addition, Beckham was the first British soccer player to play in one-hundred Champions League matches, he was Google's most searched of all sports topics in 2003 and 2004. With such global recognition he had become an elite advertising brand and top fashion icon (Google Press Center 2004). Beckham played in the FIFA World Cup fifty-eight times and recorded his one-hundredth cap for England on March 26, 2008 against France (BBC News 2008).

Adding to his well-known name and stardom, Beckham is married to Mrs. Beckham who is a former member of the English pop group, the Spice Girls. They met in November 1996 and married on July 4, 1999. His involvement with Mrs. Beckham, or Posh Spice, catapulted him into multiple brands: he became associated with the brand Manchester United and by default he became part of another brand in the Spice Girls

(Cashmore 2002:98). Beckham and his wife had become the functional equivalent to royalty for many in England, and they have three sons who are also well known: Brooklyn Beckham born in 1999, Romeo Beckham born in 2002, and Cruz Beckham born in 2005 (ibid:94). Cashmore (2002:84) notes that it is easy for many to overlook Mrs. Beckham's importance in Beckham's success. However, Mrs. Beckham was largely responsible for leveraging him into culture, status, and a world of entirely new possibilities, for Beckham. Benefitting from these possibilities that were directly related to Mrs. Beckham's aptitude, know-how and diligence, Beckham was able to become an integral part of popular culture (ibid:99).

David Beckham is one of the world's most well known athletic stars. Although Beckham is largely associated with his success on the soccer pitch, he has also become recognized as a male model and designer. His resume and list of successes are quite large, which is evidenced all around, from the huge billboards bearing his image, to the multitude of commercials or print ads, to the many stories in newspapers and broadcast outlets focusing on the athlete (Cashmore 2002:2). As will be illustrated shortly, every move Beckham makes is closely monitored and minutely dissected by the media. Every gesture, mannerism, haircut, or tattoo becomes a subject of scrutiny and analysis. He is invested with a kind of significance typically reserved for rock or movie stars (ibid). The following discussion will describe and examine seven advertisements that include David Beckham. These include a mixture of television commercials and print advertisements ranging from 2003 to 2009. The material to be analyzed includes advertisements that were distributed globally, including advertisements that were aired primarily in countries outside of North America. These are important to include because Beckham is a worldwide icon and is well-known across the globe. Also, these advertisements, although

situated in different countries, are easily accessible for viewing purposes on the Internet to individuals living anywhere. It is important to note that when speaking of global appeal, this is not only suggesting across the globe, but it is also describing how Beckham's image and identity appeals across gender, ethnic, and age groups. These advertisements will be analyzed in chronological order, as a way to understand how Beckhams' image and identity have been constructed and transformed through the media over a span of six years.

The first advertisement was aired in 2003 in Japan and depicts a phone service by the company Vodafone. Vodafone is a global phone service whose slogan includes "bringing your world together". The Vodafone advertisement was developed a year after the FIFA World Cup in Japan and South Korea, and as a result Beckham was a well known and sought after athlete by many Japanese and Korean fans during this time. Therefore, since Beckham was still freshly on the minds of many Japanese and Korean individuals, Vodafone decided to include him in their advertising campaign. In choosing to utilize Beckham in their advertisements, shortly after the FIFA World Cup, the company implicitly acknowledges his global, iconic appeal. The advertisement begins by showing a group of young boys playing a pickup game of soccer. A young girl waits behind the goalie net, yelling something out in Japanese. As she anxiously waits to get her chance to play she turns around and David Beckham is behind her. He says to this young girl, "you can do it" and starts kicking the soccer ball around with the young girl. All the boys run over in awe and appear jealous of this young girl's interaction with Beckham. This advertisement speaks to the inclusive nature of sport and utilizes Beckham as a signifier of this belief. By Beckham telling the young girl she can do it and kicking the ball around her, the audience is to understand that Beckham and Vodafone

believe in female empowerment and participation in sport. Beckham appears in his athletic clothing, with medium length hair, pulled up in a half pony-tail, appearing with soft facial expressions. His image is important to note because during this time Beckham became associated with the concept of metrosexuality and his image, which is largely constructed via the media, came to be a signifier of metrosexuality. In Western America popular culture, metrosexuality often describes a man who is still tough on the inside, but softer on the outside (Simpson 2002). He defies the boundary between masculine and feminine physical appearance and indulges in hair care and fashion. Furthermore, metrosexuals are described as men with money to spend and have taken themselves on as love objects (ibid).

The second advertisement depicts David Beckham in a very different way than the Vodafone advertisement. The *Got Milk* print advertisement was published in 2006. Beside Beckham's image a slogan is written; "Goal by Beckham. Body by milk." Beckham's image, placed in the centre of the advertisement, appears tall and strong, with his legs set apart and his arms seemingly resting at his side. Although, his arms seem to be resting, with ease, at his side they are clenched just enough to exude a sense of strength. In the one hand he holds a soccer ball against his waist. Through this image there appears to be an ease to Beckham's strength. The advertisement depicts his strength through his shirtless, muscular torso, and simultaneously utilizes Beckham as an image of athletic success to represent a healthy, active lifestyle. Furthermore, this advertisement depicts what some may consider deviant acts and metrosexual style through the appearance of his multiple tattoos. Also, Beckham is wearing a necklace and bracelets, perhaps speaking to his metrosexual appearance. The publicists behind the *got milk* advertisements acknowledge Beckham's iconic status and worldwide appeal by stating

“having David Beckham as a face for the campaign is a huge result for both parties. Kids idolize Becks so there is nobody better to encourage them to drink the white stuff” (AceShowbiz 2006). Beckham is simultaneously a signifier of health and an active lifestyle and a role model to young, developing children, while also signifying the multitude of identities that are associated with his image and brand globally.

The third advertisement was aired in 2007 by Adidas. This advertisement was part of the company’s *Impossible is Nothing* campaign. This television commercial depicts Beckham as an average, white, middle class man who has overcome adversity. Beckham explains and draws out, on the screen, one moment where he had to overcome adversity. He begins by discussing the demons and public uproar when he failed to succeed at the 1998 FIFA World Cup. He discusses how similar circumstances can seem to “knock a person down”, but he continues to note his triumph at the 2002 World Cup Qualifiers where he won against Greece to secure England a spot at the tournament. His toughest critics, sports writers, stood up and celebrated his success. Beckham states that from this experience he has learned that “you will go through tough times; [but] it’s about coming through that”. The advertisement illustrates Beckham as a vulnerable, yet strong man. Alongside this story it is important to note the attire Beckham was wearing. Beckham appeared in an Adidas sweater and there were no visible signs of his tattoos or jewellery. The advertisement depicts Beckham as a stereotypical masculine figure who is able to overcome adversity through strength and ultimately success in sport. This illustrates that a man should overcome adversity through action, not emotion. Therefore, Adidas targets “average” men who have troubles in their lives but still enjoy sports and sporting goods. They utilize Beckham as a relatable product to sell the company’s goods.



In 2008 the Sharpie Corporation aired a commercial which included David Beckham, relating their product to the fact that Beckham's autograph is among the most sought-after in the world. Beckham signed on to be Sharpie's "global ambassador in a fully integrated global marketing campaign" (ArticlesBase 2008). The Sharpie Corporation acknowledges Beckham's iconic status and utilizes his global appeal to sell their product. Beckham is seen in a variety of different locations in the commercial, ranging from a coffee shop, to a gas station, to a neighbourhood, signing autographs in all locations. Individuals wanting an autograph let Beckham use their sharpie pen. Beckham 'discovers' these pens and thoroughly enjoys them. He then tries to keep each pen the fan lets him borrow, but he is never able to get away with it because the fans want their pens back. Finally, a middle-aged woman gives Beckham her pen. But, as he drives away with the pen hanging from his rear-view mirror, we see that the woman only gave her pen to Beckham because he signed and gave her the shirt off his back. At the end of the advertisement a voiceover states that "David Beckham has his, do you have yours?". The advertisement depicts Beckham as using and liking an 'average' product. Howard Hecks, Sharpie global business unit president, states that "like sharpie, Beckham embodies individuality and creative expression. He is a rare athlete who transcends nationality and sport to command worldwide attention" (ArticleBase 2008). By utilizing Beckham in this advertisement I believe the company is trying to set their product above all other similar products. The ad implicitly states that Beckham likes these pens, so they must be extraordinary. The advertisement pits Beckham as both a masculine and sexual icon. For example, men are posed as wanting his autograph because he is an athletic superstar, whereas the woman in the advertisement is more interested in Beckham because of his sex appeal. They also utilize Beckham as an individual with appeal that transcends

geographical borders, ethnicity, and gendered lines. In addition, Beckham further solidifies these ideas by noting that he has always “enjoyed signing autographs for people, especially since he used to love getting his heroes’ signatures... I love to use Sharpie markers, so it’s a natural choice for me to partner with them” (ibid). This further accentuates the fact that athletic stars have become synonymous with heroes, perhaps due to the increased recognition of their marketability from corporations and media outlets.

The fifth advertisement was published in December 2008 which was the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary edition of Gentleman’s Quarterly (GQ) magazine in the United Kingdom. This edition of the magazine was not exclusively sold in the UK, but was available in North America as well. He has clean cut facial hair, and a chiselled jaw. These images illustrate Beckham’s strength, while also showcasing his more feminine, metrosexual style. The cover story and accompanying spread discuss multiple aspects of Beckham’s life from his family, to his fame, to his easily recognizable tattoos. Most interesting in the article is the discussion of his tattoos and family. For many years adorning one’s body with tattoos was depicted as deviant, but, as Beckham illustrates, the definitions of deviancy are constantly in flux. Interesting to note here is that the article discusses how all of Beckham’s tattoos are religious in nature. Although, Beckham is not a religious man, he does believe “there is something out there that looks after you”. His tattoos may appear to be considered less of a deviant act, especially when being visible to a diverse population, because they depict religious images. Furthermore, the article discusses Beckham’s move from England to Los Angeles. When the author asks Beckham if he likes America, Beckham states that if his family is happy that is all he can ask for. “We’re happy here at the moment, that’s the biggest thing. When your family are happy,

that's all you can ask for." This depicts Beckham as a family man, a man who conforms to traditional family values and norms.

The sixth advertisement was published in 2009 and is an ongoing project. The advertisement is on the Adidas website, [www.adidas.com/ca/originals/](http://www.adidas.com/ca/originals/), and illustrates David Beckham's new line of clothing. Although the advertisement does not include an image of Beckham, it does construct an image and identity of Beckham through the clothing line and text which is associated with it. As stated earlier, the Adidas website is clear to note that Beckham is their official model. Alongside the clothing line, Beckham, the designer, is described as an international style icon and trendsetter. He is a loyal member of the Adidas family and thus it seemed appropriated for Adidas to include him amongst their talented designer team. The clothing line is described as being casual American streetwear, which reflects the Los Angeles lifestyle Beckham lives in. Through specific designs and styles, this clothing line celebrates the construction of Beckham as an icon, both athletically and style-wise, over the last decade. Furthermore, this clothing line opens up a new consumer base. This includes American males who admire Beckham and his fashion sense, therefore shifting Beckham's European style to a more American one. This furthers Beckham's worldwide appeal, once again constructs his identity, and further utilizes his image and identity as a commodity.

The final advertisement was published in 2009 and includes the 2010 Fall and Winter collection of Emporio Armani Underwear. Beckham signed a three year deal worth twenty million dollars to become the global ambassador of Armani. This deal includes Beckham receiving royalties of all sales and is a deal unlike any other for a sportsman, therefore cementing his status as world's best paid soccer player (MailOnline 2007). Two advertisements will be utilized to discuss Beckham within this company.

The first is a YouTube video of Mr. and Mrs. Beckham posing for photographs to be included in the Fall and Winter Armani campaign, in addition to the June 11, 2009 feature story by People Magazine covering Armani's new underwear line.

The YouTube video, which depicts Beckham and his wife taking photographs for the Armani campaign, strongly illustrates sexuality and strength. The focus here will be on David Beckham's appearance and how he is posed in relation to his wife. Make-up was utilized to enhance the appearance of Beckham's muscles and abs and his hair is slicked to the side. He poses, by himself, holding on to a rope on which he pulls. The pulling of the rope accentuates his muscular appearance. By focusing on his physical features and physically fit body the advertisement constructs Beckham in an ambiguous way. These physical features and subsequent image implicitly signify Beckham as a masculine, metrosexual, and gay icon. Because of the way his attire and physical appearance have been constructed by the advertisement he is able to coexist in these multiple, divergent identities. In relation to his wife, Beckham is posed as being in a satisfied heterosexual, monogamous relationship. When Mr. and Mrs. Beckham pose together there is a strong sense of sex appeal and intimacy. The music in the background repeats "you keep me satisfied", further enforcing his heterosexual, monogamous relations to his wife.

The People Magazine story depicts the controversy behind Beckham's appearance in the United States. The article discusses his fallout with Los Angeles Galaxy soccer fans, but notes that in his underwear advertisements he is still "driving crowds wild". The article utilizes the same photographs as the video did, showing a strong, muscular Beckham who fills out his underwear. This further illustrates how Beckham appeals to multiple groups of individuals. The article includes a quote from the Emporio Armani

Corporation which largely illustrates the ways Beckham has been constructed and how he is utilized as a commodity in a marketing strategy. The designer of Armani states that “David has a great sense of style and is an inspiring role model – this is what makes him the perfect partner for Emporio Armani underwear” (People 2009).

As many would agree, David Beckham is one of the most popular and successful athletes of twenty-first century sport. Although many would agree, few take the time to critically engage with the figure of Beckham and how he may be constructed by the media and the social institution of sport. Beckham has grown and evolved over time with the media’s influence. In the beginning of his career Beckham was solely recognized for his athletic prowess, but in 2007 Beckham was averaging \$43 million a year from endorsement deals (VanNevel 2007). Beckham is no longer just a soccer star, he is a family man, a male model, a designer, a sex symbol, a metrosexual symbol, and a gay icon. This shift illustrates how the celebrity and heroic status of athletes has increased with the growth of consumer society and through corporations acknowledging the saleability of sports. This evolution of the image and identity of Beckham has opened the door to an increasing number of marketable groups who want to consume products which denote his image and identity. These products may be consumed for multiple reasons, such as, but not limited to, consumers wanting to “bend it like Beckham”, wanting to exude a similar masculine aura, attaining similar fame and/or social power, or purchasing goods that can be related to Beckham as the ultimate sex symbol.

The seven advertisements that were described and analyzed illustrate how the media and the social institution of sport have both worked together to create multiple identities that construct and represent the image of Beckham. He has become the ultimate signifier of these identities and his image denotes a particular way of life. Out of these

productions, multiple, divergent consumer groups are able to be reached. Therefore, a larger portion of the population is reached and more product is sold. In addition, by appearing in the seven advertisements, Beckham appears to have embraced the multitude of identities formed for him. It is as if Beckham is willing to stand for all these identities and he is willing to be commodified. In doing so, Beckham is not only commodified, but the fans grouped into distinct categories are also being commodified for the purposes of expanding market value. The following analysis will examine how we can understand the seven advertisements in terms of temporality, political economy, and postmodern thought.

In understanding how an analysis of David Beckham, in relation to media images, needs to be considered in terms of temporality it must be understood that temporality is not a linear process. This means that the construction of Beckham's image and identity over time did not occur on a linear path, but multiple events converged and diverged to make these constructions possible. To begin, it is important to note that the commercialized sport industry is shaped by social, political, and economic forces operating on a global scale. As Engels notes, the bourgeoisie are constantly revolutionising the instruments and relations of production (Tester 1992:173). Radio, television, Internet companies and social institutions are constantly seeking new ways to sell products to consumers. As evidenced in the advertisements depicting Beckham, new, fresher images were created from him and therefore new identities were constructed. These images and identities were constructed by companies and advertisers to create products that would signify these identities of Beckham. This furthers the global reach of their products and their brand, thus they profit from the changing identities of Beckham.

With that being said, companies, advertisers, and celebrities are currently willing to accept niche markets, which include but are not limited to homosexual, divergent ethnic groups, and gendered groups. These niche markets were not acceptable markets in the past and were largely overlooked due to normative societal values. However, these niche markets have been accepted for the increase in capital they offer the companies, advertisers, and Beckham himself. This further speaks to the fact that companies are beginning to turn audiences into commodities. For example, in 2002 Beckham became the leading signifier of metrosexuality. Metrosexuality describes a man who is still tough on the inside, but softer on the outside. More specifically, he defies the boundary between masculine and feminine physical appearance and indulges in hair care and high fashion. Furthermore, they are described as men with money to spend and have taken themselves on as love objects (Simpson 2002). One author noted the rise of metrosexual soccer players during the European Cup in 2004, stating that:

Fashionable footballers and the ensuing discussions about gender and sexual identity are in fact the most visible manifestations of the metrosexual moment. Metrosexuality is not just about moisturizers, manicures, and matching colors. It problematizes our binary divisions based on gender (only girls wear nail varnish and earrings and carry handbags) and sexual categories (only queers buy Dolce & Gabbana underwear). Metrosexual footballers like Beckham, Ronaldo, Henry, and Ljungberg are tattooed, bejeweled stars who confuse and confront rigid categorization based on either/or binary logic. (Coad 2005: 126)

This quote speaks to the boundaries that are being transgressed and the niche markets that are being revealed through the transformation of celebrity and sport figures and identities. Furthermore, Beckham is described as a gay icon and is depicted as such in multiple advertisements. Beckham states that he is “very honoured to have the title of gay icon” and metrosexual icon (Yaqoob 2007). This creation of social relations leads to a process termed structuration. Companies have created social relations organized around social

class, gender, and race, and as stated earlier, perhaps these social relations are created to benefit the goals of capital accumulation and the continuation of class power.

Finally, as evidenced in the chronological set up of the advertisements above, Beckham's image has evolved over time. His image and identity have been constructed to fit with markets that are popular at the time and consequently exploit these markets for profit. This idea fits with the saying, "what's hot and what's not". Beckham began his career as a single, white, middle class youth. However, as his career evolved his social status rose, he married pop superstar Victoria Beckham, he became a father, and his career began to shift. He went from being solely a soccer star to a model and a clothing designer as well. As many companies began to notice his replacement as the leading soccer star, they began to exploit his other qualities, such as his ability to be a trendsetter and sexual icon.

Political economic thought distinguishes between seeing things as structures or as processes with an emphasis on social change, social processes, and social relations (Mosco and Lavin 2007: 18). Therefore, when discussing the social institution of sport, media, and Beckham, it is important to not only focus on these entities as solid and stable structures, but to also examine them as structures that change through social processes and social relations. Furthermore, political economic theorists aim to understand how the dynamics of capital accumulation and class power manifests in the capitalist mode of production, institutional structures, organization, and the production processes of media industries. As noted earlier, class power and the goal of increased capital accumulation has allowed for the growth of niche markets. Although these niche markets, including metrosexual, homosexual, ethnic, and gendered groups have been developed, the companies are able to depict these groups in certain and specific ways. The companies



are able to take an icon, such as David Beckham, construct him in such a way as to represent these divergent groups and to market and sell their products to them. The representations of these groups present a 'safe' image and may not illustrate these groups accurately. As a result, the companies and advertisements are at once liberating and repressing these marginalized groups for the purpose of capital accumulation.

As technology has increasingly evolved it is important to note how information and raw material have been utilized to construct meaning around the world. With the evolution of media sources and technology, the processes of globalization have intensified. Therefore mass meaning construction and information processing are able to reach across the globe and impact many more individuals and societies. Political economists examine how information and raw materials are turned into commodities and they focus on how the globalization processes of communication and commodification influence populations. When considering Beckham, it must be noted that although he is largely situated in Europe and the United States, his image, identity, and celebrity status still permeates across the globe and impacts many individuals and societies. Through media techniques and globalization processes, Beckham is able to be constructed and sold on a mass scale. Although the advertisement may be in different languages, his image is still similar. This is why looking at both Japanese and European advertisements in my analysis was critical to understanding how Beckham is constructed globally and whether these constructions correspond. Therefore, as a political economist it is important to take into consideration the integration of corporations, states, and classes across nations. I would not have come to a complete conception of culture in the modern world if I failed to take into account the space occupied by the media and how this has shifted through the globalizing processes.

With globalization in mind, it is critical to understand how Beckham and his fans have become commodified. As noted earlier, commodification is a “process of transforming things valued for their use into marketable products that are valued for what they bring in exchange” (Mosco 2009: 2). Through the analysis of advertisements it is clear that Beckham, although partially willingly, has largely been constructed and transformed into a marketable product. The commodification of Beckham is immensely apparent in his contract with the LA Galaxy. Beckham was offered \$250 million over a five-year period to move to the United States of America. The end goal of this contract was to widen the reach of Major League Soccer in North America. Galaxy capitalised on the interest of Beckham by immediately increasing ticket prices from \$21.50 to \$32, which helped their revenue for the 2007 season increase to \$7,436,529. This increase accounted for 21% of the entire league’s revenue (BBC News 2009). Furthermore, in 2008, 2 years after Beckham’s arrival, LA Galaxy’s average home attendance was 26,009, an increase of 24.9% (ibid). Not only does his salary denote the fact that the league is utilizing him as a means to increase sales and market their product, but the fact that he receives a large portion of jersey and merchandise sales speaks to how his image and identity have been commodified. In general, his image and identity are constructed and sold with the end goal being mass consumption and accumulation of capital. The companies have been able to exploit Beckham’s success on the soccer pitch and have constructed him as not only a successful athlete, but also as a signifier of multiple identities and lifestyles. In signifying multiple lifestyles, Beckham and the media have been able to promote a way of life which multiple individuals want to have and want to buy. Also, by exploiting niche markets and defining them the corporations have turned these groups of individuals into commodities themselves. They have been able to

transform these communities and individuals into marketable products, which are valued for what they bring in exchange.

As shown in my research, individuals around the world are able to access the same advertisements of Beckham, via the Internet, because of the overcoming of geographical space. As Anthony Giddens maintains, this compression has allowed for the geographical stretching out of social relations and our experience of this (Bird 1993: 60). Therefore, individuals are no longer dependent on time and space and this allows for the increase in availability of space and time as resources for those who can utilize them (Mosco and Lavin 2007: 24). As a result, I believe corporations and the media are able to utilize the increase in time and space and use this availability as a resource towards an increase in capital accumulation. Corporations are able to reach many more individuals and societies because of the overcoming of the constraints of geographical space, and they are able to do so around the clock.

David Beckham is a primary example of how athletes are becoming a larger part of simulacrum. Postmodern thought, which simulacrum is a part of, critiques the modern idea that theory mirrors reality. Instead, simulacrum is the idea that there is an intensification of reality. The world is both simulated and realer than real, and is characterised by excessive attention to detail (Giulianotti 2004: 233). As seen in the advertisements of Beckham, he has come to signify a reality which no longer has an accessible origin. These constructions of Beckham are based on a copy of reality, which companies believe they are representing. Therefore, Beckham only becomes a signifier of masculinity, homosexuality, metrosexuality, etc. If one were to look for the origin of these identities one would not be able to find it. Beckham's image and representation of group identities is therefore just an image with no substance. This process leads to

cultural hegemony which is characterized by the way use values and exchange values are exploited by the postmodern culture of consumption that privileges image over substance (Gottdiener 1004: 36). As these advertisements depict, simulated and hyperreal constructs are determining how sexuality, sports, masculine/feminine norms, and consumer environments are represented to societies and how they should be evaluated.

In all, David Beckham represents an image and identity that has been constructed of him for the purposes of mass consumption and capital accumulation. Beckham is presented as a modern day icon because his fame extends well beyond the realm of soccer. He represents modern masculinity, a sports hero, a husband, a father, a gay icon, a trendsetter, and much more. It is evident in the seven advertisements presented that Beckhams' image is constructed and continuously reconstructed as a way to open newer and fresher pathways to selling his image to a multitude of consumers. Furthermore, this is made apparent in the recognition of his saleability and the fact that he is offered millions of dollars to be the "face" of a product. In essence, Beckham becomes a brand that all advertisers want to get their hands on. Advertisers want this brand because Beckham sells. Through the construction of his image and identities, the processes of globalization are clear. The media and companies utilize the availability of time and space to disseminate the image of Beckham and products that distinguish his lifestyle. The desire to have products associated with Beckham and to be like him reflects the contemporary world, wherein wealth, fame, and glamour are highly valued. In the end, by desiring these things individuals play into the hands of corporations turning themselves into mass consumers who are never satisfied.

## **Limitations**

Two of the main limitations of my methodology include concerns over sample size and non-random sampling. Although neither of these limitations undermines my research it is important to note and discuss the impact of these limitations. To begin, Neuendorf (2002:88) maintains that there is no universally accepted set of criteria for selecting a sample size. A large sample size, with respect to my research, would have presented coding challenges due to time constraints. Therefore, a small sample size was determined that would be inclusive. To be inclusive my research included a variety of advertisements and these advertisements represented key variables identified during the initial stages of the research proposal.

A second limitation of the methodology implemented in my research was a concern over non-random sampling. Non-random sampling occurs when the sample being used is not selected by any kind of procedure; therefore not all cases in the population are given an equal chance of being part of the sample (Babbie and Benaquisto 2010:182). Purposive sampling, a type of non-random sampling, was utilized to gather my sample. As a researcher I made an educated decision as to what units of analysis were appropriate to include in my sample (Neuendorf 2002:87). Furthermore, key variables were identified and a sample was collected based on these variables that included gender, being a soccer player, the society being focused on, being a global icon, etc. This was done due to time and financial constraints of the research project. One effect of non-random sampling is that the outcomes of my research are unable to be generalized to the larger population. Considering these limitations, I was careful to limit my conclusions to the content being studied, although there is always an implicit desire to infer characteristics to sources and anticipate outcomes. Therefore, the analysis conducted for

the fourteen advertisements regarding the case studies solely apply to the theories and purposes of my research.

## **Conclusion**

Through the fourteen advertisements it is clear that the sports industry is a media-made phenomenon. Advertisements are able to manufacture stars, sell products, alter lifestyles, and commodify audiences. Therefore, the media alongside the goals of corporations and class power have made spectator sports an element of mainstream culture. Both athletes were both utilized as commodities to sell products and reach niche markets that were once unable to be touched. Historical processes and developments have allowed for marketing to expand and penetrate multiple individuals, groups, and societies. In doing so, the value of the consumer has risen and has shifted to a point where audiences are being turned into commodities as well. The processes of globalization have allowed for images and identities of each case study to be constructed and dispersed globally. This not only increases capital accumulation but it constructs group identity and belonging in ways that coincide with capitalist and masculine hegemonic goals. Furthermore, these advertisements are a representation of reality that simulates our identities and unsettles the concepts of the virtual and real. “We might believe that we exist in the original, but today this original has become an exception for the happy few. Our own reality does not exist anymore... So we have all become ready made” (Schreven 2003). The question therefore is no longer ‘who am I’, but when, where, and how am I. As absorbent and porous beings we take on these notions of reality and our identity becomes nothing more than collections of perceptions and representations. This becomes problematic because these representations of reality are utilized to the advantage of masculine, white, heterosexual desires. In this way, male

athletes have been and always will be higher, faster, and stronger than their female counterparts. Identity in this sense, even in the realm of sport, becomes a critical tool, a position from which we can think of our identities differently.

## Chapter Five

### Conclusion

There has been an expansion in the study of consumption and consumerism over the last twenty years. This expansion links debates concerning globalization, postmodernity, identity and new forms of inequality (Horne 2006:1). This has led to the growth in the social, cultural and historical analysis of sport in consumer culture. Therefore, any study of sport needs to fully consider the people involved, institutions and social structures that affect sport experiences and processes (Crossman 2008:3). As evidenced throughout the research, to put these changes into action the concepts of consumerism, consumption and commodification are necessary to accurately examine the multitude of processes that contribute to forming sport. The research project proposed to examine the political economic structures and processes that have lead to the complex conditions of commodification of the professional athlete in twenty-first century Western society. By using a political economic theoretical framework I was able to understand sport as a part of broad processes of social and economic change. These broad processes needed to be explored in depth and critically to gain an accurate understanding of the relations at play. In combination with political economy, the postmodern concept of simulacrum was utilized to further analyse how athletes' identities were represented by sport institutions, the media and corporations, including especially sponsors. Simulacrum purports that there is an intensification of reality. The world becomes both simulated and realer than real through the intensification of reality (Giulianotti 2004:233). Therefore, the original signifier is no longer accessible and reality becomes distorted. To examine these theories, two case studies were chosen and analysed using the methodological



approach of content analysis. Mia Hamm and David Beckham, both twenty-first century soccer stars, were chosen as case studies and seven advertisements were analysed for each athlete. Advertisements ranged from print to television advertisements, all of which were found on the Internet. Furthermore, the advertisements ranged in date from 1997 to 2009. Overall, by analysing the advertisements through the method of content analysis I was able to critically analyse how the media represents, produces and distributes professional athletes as commodities. Furthermore, this method enabled me to understand how meaning is generated to create a desire to consume products that purport to represent an identity and lifestyle.

The reformation of political economic thought was utilized as the driving theoretical framework. This theoretical framework enabled me to consider and analyze how historical processes have changed the structure of media and sport institutions. By understanding the historical processes, I was able to examine the totality of social relations that make up economic, political, social and cultural areas of life (Mosco 2009:3-4). Furthermore, this allowed me to analyse and understand how these forces shape consumer identities and the ever present need to consume products. Of key interest to my research project was how political economic thought critically describes and analyses capitalism, a system, which Mosco (2008:20) maintains, turns resources like workers, raw material, land and information into marketable commodities that earn a profit for those who invest capital into the system. In combination with the theory of political economy, I utilized Baudrillard's postmodern concept of simulacrum. Advertisements were utilized to examine how the athletes' identities were created to depict each athlete in a particular way, when in actual fact these identities were stretched so far from the truth they no longer had an accessible origin. Therefore, images of Hamm

and Beckham were utilized as signifiers of a specific lifestyle. In all, the theoretical perspectives in relation to my methodological approach aimed to understand how the historical processes of societal and economic evolution have shifted social structures and the ways they impact our individual agency. Furthermore, I gained an understanding of how a complexity of circumstances have led to the distribution of hyperreal representations via media sources, the social structures behind them, and the larger implications for individuals.

Throughout my research sport was understood as an institution. The institution of sport was viewed as a cultural formation and could not be understood as a cultural universal. This means that the features and characteristics of the institution of sport were largely reliant on the values and norms of the society in which it exists. In addition, the history of the institution of sport and the media was critical in my research project. Noting historical transitions allowed me to understand the ways through which sport manifested itself as an industry that developed from the characteristics of consumer culture. Furthermore, it allowed for the deconstruction of power relations at play in the cultural formation of sport (Hargreaves 1986:1). Therefore, the institution of sport was understood as having grown and evolved out of multiple historical movements. In twenty-first century Western society, the institutions of sport were seen as being significantly affected by the structure and characteristics of consumer culture and capitalism. As evidenced in my analysis, the media and advertising contributed to a particular social order, economy and belief system. The media and subsequent representations of athletes operate as a form of capitalism that represents twenty-first century Western society according to the logic of capitalism.

My research explores how the professional athlete has increasingly become commodified in twenty-first century Western society. To begin, it was noted that corporations with no particular interest in sport began to express interest in signing up athletes to endorse their products in the early 1990s (Cashmore 2002:78). Through the usage of athletes as endorsers of products corporations were able to advertise on spots that punctuated televised sport competitions, which gave advertisers a chance to reach a new market (ibid). Corporations realized and exploited the fact that sports and athletes sell.

Mia Hamm was the first case study chosen and examined. Through the use of seven advertisements I explored how Hamm's identity was constructed in a consumer society and the impact this construction has on her fans and the larger institution of sport. By situating Hamm in time and space I was able to critically analyse her impact on society and the media's impact on Hamm through the use of a temporal understanding. Although Hamm would have preferred to relish in her athletic successes, the media depicted her as bordering the line between masculinity and femininity. All seven advertisements created tension between the identities of female athletes and traditional female roles in twenty-first century Western society. Hamm is depicted as wanting to burst with emotion, celebrate her strength and success in a sport largely associated with power, strength, muscle, grit and masculinity. She is also depicted as feminine, motherly, beautiful and elegant. In creating this tension advertisers create a 'proper' feminine identity that has become a taken-for-granted notion. Through advertisements depicting Hamm we can see that there are still social institutions and forces at play that are moulding young female athletes into certain types of successful athletes. These athletes

are constructed so that they still appear feminine and still compete under the controlling force of hegemonic masculine power.

In combination with increasing accessibility for female athletes to compete and participate in sports, Mia Hamm's growing popularity opened up a market for the mass production of female athletic goods. The media began to speak of Hamm as the representative of female empowerment. Hamm was constructed in such a way as to represent female empowerment, while at the same time, implicitly, was constructed to define and mould this group of female athletes and fans to fit the needs of a largely capitalist, male hegemonic society. Despite the acknowledgment of the courage, skill, and success of female athletes and how they have altered the face of athletic culture, strong currents of resistance persist beneath the surface (Cahn 1994:248). Due to their focus on and concern to sell products, they create obstacles to the liberation of female athletics. They decide that what sells is not a woman's athletic ability but her sex appeal. So, at once these corporations recognize the increase of female sports participation and the niche market that opens up with this participation. They also recognize that the taken-for-granted masculinity and power associated with sport has become threatened.

The second case study examined was David Beckham. Many individuals around the world would agree that Beckham is one of the most popular and successful athletes of twenty-first century sport. He has grown and evolved as a skilled athlete and marketable product of time through the influence of the media. It is evident here that corporations have recognized his appeal, on and off the soccer pitch, and are willing to pay Beckham portions of their profit to be able to utilize his image. His success on the pitch has made him a rare brand and commodity used by corporations to advertise, sell and package their products.

The seven advertisements analyzed illustrate how the media and the social institution of sport have worked together to create multiple identities that represent Beckham. He has become the ultimate signifier of these identities and his image denotes a particular way of life. His images have come to signify multiple identities, such as metrosexuality, homosexuality, masculinity, sexuality, and family man. The images and identities that denote a particular way of life associate one with a particular group and social status. Individuals desire products that represent these identities so that they can belong to certain groups. Out of the construction of these identities and products, multiple, divergent consumer groups can be reached. These niche markets perhaps have been accepted for the increase in capital they offer the companies, advertisers, and Beckham himself. This further speaks to the fact that companies are beginning to turn audiences into commodities. Finally, as evidenced in the chronological set up of the advertisements analysed, Beckham's image has evolved over time. His image and identity have been constructed to fit with markets that are popular at the time and to exploit these markets.

Political economic theory distinguishes between seeing things as structures or as processes with an emphasis on social change, social processes and social relations (Mosco and Lavin 2007:18). Therefore, as seen in the advertisements of the case studies it was critical to examine social structures as structures that change through social processes and social relations. This was largely taken into consideration when understanding the dynamics of capital accumulation and the manifestation of class power through production, institutional structures, organizations, and the production processes of media industries. In the fourteen advertisements class power and the goal of increased capital accumulation were evident. These goals allowed for the media to construct

identities of both athletes that recognized niche markets and exploited the desirability of these identities. These niche markets, including metrosexual, homosexual, and gendered groups have been developed, with corporate goals in mind and to depict these groups in specific ways. The representations of these groups present a 'safe' image and may not illustrate these groups accurately. Therefore, the companies and advertisements are at once liberating and repressing these marginalized groups for the purpose of capital accumulation.

Similar to recognizing niche markets and exploiting athletic fans, political economic theory focuses on how the processes of globalization have allowed for corporations to exploit these markets on a global scale. Harvey and Houle (1994:346) link sport to globalization and believe that this leads to an analysis of sport as an emergent global culture. This global culture is not a homogenous, binding whole, but is a general discourse about a world as a whole and its varieties (Maguire 1999: 4). As technology has increasingly evolved, information and raw material have been utilized to construct meaning around the world. Spatalization has allowed for corporations to overcome the constraints of geographical space through the use of the mass media and communication technologies (Mosco 2009:2). As shown in my research, individuals around the world are able to access the same advertisements of Hamm and Beckham, via the Internet, because of the overcoming of geographical space. Individuals are therefore no longer dependent on time and space and this allows for the increase in availability of space and time as resources for those who can utilize them. Corporations and the media are able to utilize the increase in time and space and utilize this availability as a resource towards an increase in capital accumulation. Out of these processes a global-sport nexus developed through the media. Out of this, processes have arisen that are capable to

produce sport into a package that is easily consumed by spectators (Thiabult 2009:10). Therefore, a global economy is created wherein the reach of advertisements and products expands exponentially and individuals are packaged and repackaged into consumer groups by the media.

Furthermore, political economic theory is interested in understanding how the dynamics of capital accumulation and class power manifest in the capitalist mode of production, institutional structures, organizations, and the production processes of media industries. As evidenced in the advertisements of Hamm corporations, on a global scale, have recognized that female buying power has increased tremendously. Through processes such as spatialization and structuration corporations have been able to overcome geographical constraints and disseminate messages of masculine empowerment and female subordination globally through the use of products. The advertisements of Beckham illustrate how corporations have furthered his success by not only constructing him as an athletic superstar, but also as an individual with multiple identities and as a symbol for multiple lifestyles. Similar to Hamm, corporations have successfully disseminated these images of Beckham across the globe because of the ease with which the advertisement can reach worldwide audience.

From my research it is clear that both athletes have been turned into commodities for the purpose of capital accumulation. Both athletes had multiple, divergent images and identities constructed of them. These images and identities were later sold with the end goal being mass consumption and accumulation of capital. The companies have been able to exploit Hamm and Beckham's success on the soccer pitch and have constructed them as not only successful athletes, but as signifiers of multiple identities and lifestyles. In signifying multiple lifestyles, corporations and the media have been able to promote a

way of life which multiple individuals want to have and buy. Also, by exploiting niche markets and defining them the corporations have turned these groups of individuals into commodities themselves. They have been able to transform these communities and individuals into marketable products, which are valued for what they bring in exchange. Therefore, Hamm and Beckham only become signifiers of these identities, where there is no accessible original to be found. Hamm and Beckham's image and representation of group identities are therefore just an image with no substance. This process leads to cultural hegemony. Cultural hegemony is characterized by the way use values and exchange values are exploited by the postmodern culture of consumption that privileges image over substance (Gottdiener 2004:36). As these advertisements depict, simulated and hyperreal constructs are determining how sexuality, sports, masculine/feminine norms, and consumer environments are represented to societies and how they should be evaluated. Identity, even in the realm of sport, becomes a critical tool, a position from which we can think of our identities differently.

Wider social implications of the research include a broader understanding that sport is becoming more and more commodified and identifying an increase in female sport participation and sport consumption. Through historical processes and transitions an increase in the interconnections between the institution of sport, the media, athletes and fans has occurred. These interconnections make apparent that sport is playing an increasing role in our daily actions and lifestyle. This increasing role in our daily lives leads to an increased desire to consume products, relating to sport and specific lifestyles and identities, that the media creates. This enables corporations and the media to package and repackage products relating to sport and athletes, continuously disseminating particular messages and characteristic, normative lifestyles and identities. In utilizing



athletes as representations of specific identities corporations are able to mould deviant, threatening identities to fit into normative ideas of gender and identity. In doing so, the corporations are able to alleviate the threat that is posed by certain groups and maintain corporate, masculine hegemonic control. Furthermore, the research illustrated that there has been an increase in female athletic participation. Not only are females more interested in participating and watching sports, but they are also consuming sport products more-so now than ever before. Lastly, the research points to the fact that sport has become a crucial element in the development of Western society and culture. Sport largely impacts desires of consumers, spending habits, and ways in which people exist. Sport has influenced how corporations decide to produce and distribute athletic products. It also influences the ways by which consumers consume these goods.

Research is needed to further examine the role of female athletes in sport and their relations to the media. Although briefly examined in this research, an in-depth analysis is needed to fully highlight the ways by which the media constructs identities of female athletes, the ways through which this construction impacts the larger female population, and how hegemony is constructed and achieved through these representations. Furthermore, research is needed to examine athletes on a larger scale. This will allow for a more generalizable account of the impact sport and the media have on twenty-first century Western society. Lastly, more research is needed to understand the general effects the commodification of sport has on the fans and how the fans in turn are commodified by the production, distribution, and consumption of athletic products.

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