CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN SPORT, MUSCULAR CHRISTIANITY, LANCE ARMSTRONG, AND RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE

BY

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DISSEPTION

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation is an examination of muscular Christian themes in contemporary American sport culture and religious sensibilities. In this project I demonstrate that sport can be viewed in contemporary American culture operating as a culturally influential activity where athletes reproduce muscular Christian ideology in unique ways. To illustrate this thesis, I use American cyclist Lance Armstrong as a case study. This work displays how the media depicts particular muscular Christian themes through Lance Armstrong, which render his image in postmodern religious understandings.

I have three main objectives in this dissertation: (1) to show that contemporary American sport continues to reflect particular muscular Christian ideals; (2) to demonstrate through cultural examples how Lance Armstrong reflects such values in his media characterizations; (3) examine Lance Armstrong’s commercial image through the scholarship of radical orthodoxy which I suggest offers insight on how contemporary American sport can function as a religious experience. With increasing evidence that there is a decline in traditional religious participation, radical orthodoxy scholarship is useful in understanding why individuals search for God in new cultural activities, filling the void of traditional religious experiences. The ultimate goal of this project is to illustrate a condition of contemporary American culture and gain insight into the epistemological operations of sport and its figures in this context.
To my Mother, Father, Liz, and Renée: For Their Perpetual Support
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This project has been possible because of the unwavering support and encouragement of many people. Countless thanks to my advisor, Synthia Sydnor, who taught me the balance of life and academics is never easy. It was her positive feedback and unbiased guidance that pushed my work forward without hindering my scholarly creativity. Also, a special thanks to Melissa Littlefield who helped me conceptualize this project in new and interesting ways time and again. I thank my supportive committee members, Wojtek Chadzko-Zajko, Ann Reisner, and Monika Stodolska. Their guidance and genuine concern for this project help focus and come to clear understandings about the contributions this project has. I would also like to thank author John Wilcockson who took the time to discuss his experiences with Lance Armstrong and provided wonderful insights on the main case subject of this project.

Thank you to my friends and my family. To my mother who inspired me to dream big, pursue great things, and never let the barriers in the road stop me from achieving. To my father who taught me about sportmanship, gave me a love and appreciation of sports, and was the first to make me question the heroic-role model values examined in this project. To my sister who never let me doubt myself throughout the process and who, on a number of occasions was a crucial editor of my work. And to Renée whose genuine love and concern supports me every way someone can; pushing me to excel and accomplish great things.

This process began nearly ten years ago when John Kilbourne piqued my interest in sport and philosophy during my final undergraduate semester. Since that time he has
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LIST OF TERMS

Divine: Association with the presence of God.

Hero-role model: An individual that reflects certain characteristics ascribed by culture to be worthy of imitation, inspiration, and adoration.

Judeo-Christian: The historical values found in western culture that are based in the religious teachings and writings of Judaism and Christianity.


Media: The various forms of communication found in the world today that deliver messages, images, and information to culture and individuals.

Muscular Christianity: The historical physical movement, begun in Britain in the mid-nineteenth century that sought to blend Christian religious ideals with a philosophy of physical culture stressing manliness, morality, health, and patriotism: Understood participation in physical activities by young men to be inherently valuable for real world experiences.¹

Nihilism: The nihilist in post-modernity is someone who revels on the things the dead God once forbade: worshiping, in effect, a negative shadow of that God.

Postmodern: Cultural Studies: rejection of the certainties and social exclusivities of modernism: General: Cultural and social focuses on consumption (not production), production of information and “simulations” (not things), “disorganized” capitalism, focus on global (not national), and compression of and rejection of fixed notions of space and time.²

Radical Orthodoxy (RO): Scholarship that offers theological understandings about the social and political world in contemporary times.

Religion (Religious): Ritualistic beliefs, stories, images and pictures that answer metaphysical questions, give meaning in people’s lives, and that are commonly experienced through particular activities, lifestyles, and associations.

Sacred: Objects and activities associated with the supernatural or divine.

² Tony Bennett, Lawrence Grossberg, and Meaghan Morris (Eds.), New Keywords: A Revised Vocabulary of Culture and Society (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 269.
Savior: “One who has learned to penetrate the protective wall of those fears within, which exclude the rest of us.” A transformative individual understood to have saving abilities.

Sport: Any form of playful, rule-bound, competition that requires physical excellence, with governing bodies.

Tour de France (TDF): An annual France based three week cycling event that covers more than 2100 miles. The first Tour occurred in 1903.

Theology: The study of the nature of religion, religious values, and God.

Traditional Religion (Institutions): This refers to the institutions and organizations that have historically been understood to teach, experience, and live particular world-views.

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American cyclist Lance Armstrong overcame testicular, lung and brain cancer to win the Tour de France a record seven consecutive times between 1999 and 2005. In 2009 the Tour de France saw Armstrong return after a three year hiatus when he entered the starting time-trial gate in Monaco on a clear day in July. As the cameras flashed and the global media blitzed about his return, I sat and watched a rider who I never thought I would see ride again. Toted by the Versus Network as an “epic” race, the 96th Tour proved to be a fertile event for me because it supplied evidence illustrating how the media characterization of Armstrong includes ideologies that echo particular muscular Christian sport ideals.

The American public has come to know Armstrong through various media characterizations over the past decade. His books have been New York Times bestsellers.\(^1\) He has been the focus of many sport related magazine articles. *Sports Illustrated*, for instance, has done 285 articles on him and he has graced the cover for the magazine 11 times.\(^2\) Armstrong has also been the focus of a myriad of other periodicals, such as *People Magazine* which has done 105 stories about him since 1996.\(^3\) And his popularity

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on new social media networks is predominant, exampled by his over 2.4 million Twitter followers.⁴

There are two dominant themes I have observed in popular media descriptions of Armstrong; his athleticism, notably as the most decorated cyclist of the Tour de France (a “superman” as one Sports Illustrated cover put it)⁵ and the second, his survival over testicular, brain, and lung cancer. With allusions to his cancer survival and amazing athletic feats, more recently the media has included in their characterization of Armstrong a third theme; his continued philanthropy. The overwhelming majority of media portrayals avow that Lance Armstrong is a good person, a good family man, an inspiration, and a role-model. Andrew Miracle and Roger Rees suggest for more than a century “Americans are convinced that competition brings out the best in us, and when we win, we prove our moral worth.”⁶ This dissertation explores the ways in which Armstrong reflects particular muscular Christian values in his popular media characterization and how he comes to be described in religious and spiritually significant ways. In this dissertation I argue that the moral ideals upon which Armstrong’s character are based are muscular Christian, yet absent of any relation to a Christian God originally involved in the movement. Based on the more secular components of muscular Christianity Armstrong comes to be represented as a hero-role model in contemporary American understandings of sport.

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⁴ I am able to access this information because as of June 2009, I joined Twitter to follow Armstrong’s tweets. As of (2/17/2010) Armstrong has 2,439,843 followers, who are privy to information, pictures, videos, and information about him. See also Jessica Winter, “Tweet Styles of the Rich and Famous: How to Decide which Celebrities are Worth Following on Twitter” Slate.com (4/22/2009).
⁵ Sports Illustrated cover (8/5/2002).
His story is a compelling one: born to a young single mother near Dallas, Texas in 1971; an amazing young athlete in swimming, running, and triathlon; the third youngest World Champion in cycling at age 22 (1993); a professional cyclist before being diagnosed with testicular cancer that spread to his lungs and brain; after survival, the winner of the Tour de France a record seven consecutive times; the creator of a major foundation focused on cancer-related issues; and now a global A-list celebrity. Lance Armstrong has been a central athlete media figure over the last decade. His image has appeared in a multitude of commercials for Trek Bikes, FRS Energy products, Dick’s Sporting Goods, Michelob Ultra Beer, LiveStrong, and Nike. He has come under public scrutiny about his performances (especially in the foreign press), yet remains to date never having tested positive for any banned performance-enhancing substances.

Armstrong’s image in popular culture perpetuates and reflects the notions of his outstanding characterization as well. On June 26th, 2006 John Stewart, anchor of the Daily Show referred to Lance Armstrong as a “touchstone of inspiration.” Charlie Rose has said Armstrong is “blessed by the band,” (referring to the more than 70 million yellow bracelets sold for his LiveStrong cause). In a 2005 interview with Larry King and Bob Costas, when referring to charges of Armstrong’s use of performance enhancing drugs, the common sentiment about the cyclist was voiced: “There may be resentment toward you in France and other parts of Europe. But here in the United States you are one of the most admired athletes of – all time. People do not want to believe this [drug use] of Lance Armstrong.”

Armstrong has been recognized as one of Time Magazines most 100 influential people and is a four-time winner of the Associate Press’ “Male Athlete of the Year,” the
most in the history of the award. In the United States, he is commonly seen as a positive hero-role model, inspiring health/cycling/cancer awareness and physical activity, headlining many popular award ceremonies, and has become the face of America’s “War on Cancer.” His print, television, and Web commercialization reflect his individual and successful character, as well as a desire to get people to act (i.e. physically and politically).

The American sports environment in which Armstrong exists has taken his story and created a characterization that reflects qualities commonly associated with muscular Christianity, such as manliness, morality, health, patriotism, and a “give it everything” attitude. Biographer John Wilcockson says that Lance is a champion beyond any other because he excelled in an event so daunting, “so physically, mentally, and emotionally demanding it has even been called sadistic.” He references the perfection of Armstrong, that a “pure athlete can win the Tour, but to keep winning, year after year, demands a different kind of sporting perfection.” Wilcockson also suggests “those accomplishments, along with the utter confidence he displayed to overcome whatever stood in his way, resulted in Lance being a greater, more assertive champion.”

The American sport media has taken Armstrong’s cancer, cycling success, and philanthropy and molded an image that reflects a contemporary use of muscular Christian ideologies. While longtime cycling announcer Phil Liggett suggest “he is human after all” as Armstrong grimaced during the team-time-trials of the 2009 Tour de France, this

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8 See Miracle and Rees, 40.
10 Ibid.
11 Ibid, xii.
dissertation seeks to demonstrate the media’s characterization of Lance Armstrong is a case study to observe the continued operation of several muscular Christian values in contemporary American sport. And furthermore, using radical orthodoxy scholarship, provide a context to argue that sport can be understood as a religious experience today.

Popular cultural observances lead me to understand that Lance Armstrong has been characterized as a hero-role model constructed from muscular Christian ideals. This dissertation will contextualize and study the media creation of Armstrong’s character as I seek to lay a foundation and offer evidence for myself and others to use in studying the relationship sport, religion, and spirituality have in contemporary America.
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

There has been a consistent trend over the past twenty years in academic studies exploring connections between sport and religion. The literature typically focuses on the striking similarities and social roles that these two cultural activities play in human communities.¹ In his discussion on the relationship between sport and religion, Michael Novak states that “sports are religious in the sense that they are organized institutions, disciplines, and liturgies; and also in the sense that they teach religious qualities of heart and soul. In particular, they recreate symbols of cosmic struggle, in which human survival and moral courage are not assured.”² Whatever sports are today “they are not mere games, diversions, pastimes,”³ rather they are cultural activities that provide axiological meaning for contemporary American communities.⁴


³ Ibid.

⁴ Throughout this work, I mean sport to be a playful, rule-bound competition that requires physical excellence with governing bodies. I find Ellis Cashmore’s explanation of sport as a cultural and physical activity that is “learned” and “innate” for humans; part of our biology and our sociology. Ellis Cashmore, Making Sense of Sports 4th ed. (London: Routledge, 2005), 15: John Loy’s examination of sport is broken into four areas, again demonstrating the cultural and physical aspects: “sport as a game occurrence”, “sport
This dissertation explores how contemporary sport ideals manifest what John MacAloon calls a “certain hidden dependency on muscular Christian ideology”\textsuperscript{5} to provide many Americans religious experiences. Today, MacAloon suggests the “ethos” of muscular Christianity’s “reflections and representations are all around us and so normalized (usually but not always under secular rubrics) that it fails to stand out as anything unusual.”\textsuperscript{6} Evidenced of this hidden dependence is seen in a 2004 \textit{Newsweek} article where presidential hopeful John Kerry was described as demonstrating a “gentleman’s code of muscular Christianity” reflecting traits such ideals as “virtue of humility, the sin of pride, and the value of quiet service to others.”\textsuperscript{7} MacAloon comments that no context was provided in this article suggesting readers may think the term a “journalistic metaphor.”\textsuperscript{8}

Muscular Christianity was a movement begun in the middle of the nineteenth century when educators, politicians, writers, and physical education composed many works detailing a revised notion of manliness in Victorian Britain. In 1861 Thomas Hughes’ novel, \textit{Tom Brown at Oxford}, suggests muscular Christians “hold it to be a good thing to have strong and well-exercised bodies…that a man’s body is given to him to be trained and brought into subjection, and then used for the protection of the weak, the advancement of all righteous causes, and the subduing of the earth which God has given to the children of men.”\textsuperscript{9} This dissertation presents evidence specifically linking the contemporary media characterizations of Lance Armstrong to these muscular Christian

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\textsuperscript{6} MacAloon, 692.
\textsuperscript{8} MacAloon, 692.
\textsuperscript{9} Thomas Hughes, \textit{Tom Brown at Oxford} (London: Macmillan, 1861), 83.
themes cited by Hughes. My findings suggest that the media portrayal of Armstrong, using these muscular Christian themes, provide many contemporary Americans a sense of the sacred/divine, what radical orthodoxy would call a religious experience. These findings are examined in Chapter 5 using particular arguments of radical orthodoxy, a postmodern line of theological scholarship. Of course, as radical orthodoxy suggests, this sacred/divine/religious experience may be empty or false (lack a true experience of God in the world), but cultural evidence in Lance Armstrong’s case demonstrates the significant spiritual importance he has for many today. As one journalist stated, commenting on the positive reaction a crowd of over 100,000 had towards Armstrong at a race in 2009, “It’s as if Jesus Christ was going to cycle again.”

Muscular Christianity

It is widely thought that the term muscular Christianity was coined by T.C. Sanders in 1857 and was used to describe a new understanding that participation in sports encouraged moral education, manliness, and certain life-long Christian character building experiences. The value of sport in education was to encourage young British men to learn important values for adult life, including how to cope with defeat, falling short, and losing. The encouragement of competition was based “on the moral grounds that games were a preparation for the battle of life and that they trained moral qualities, mainly

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respect for others, patient endurance, unflagging courage, self-reliance, self-control, vigor, and decision of character.”

Much scholarship agrees that late-nineteenth century American sport ideology was premised on the British muscular Christian movement. New ideas about sport, body, and physicality originated at British public schools amongst the elite and wealthy classes of English society. James Mangan wrote that “from 1850 onwards, games were purposefully and deliberately assimilated into the formal curriculum of the public schools.”

In a recent article on gender in education, Rob Boddice (2009) explores the influence parents and students actually had on muscular Christian ideology in education. Boddice provides evidence that the sport ideology at schools such as Rugby, Eton, Marlborough, and Harrow grew from the desires of parents to have their sons learning Romantic masculine values. He also documents how the boys themselves pushed to keep games integral in their schooling experience. Boddice argues, “Hughes was really disseminating the parental vision of what public schools ought to be encouraging … It was parents, not masters, who subscribed to ‘the ethical value of games as the source of good sense, noble traits, manly feelings, generous disposition, gentlemanly deportment [and] comradely loyalty.’” This evidence suggests the positive sentiments of physical activity and sport existed prior to the popular writings of Hughes and others which spread muscular Christian ideals far and wide.

13 Freeman, 127.
14 Freeman, 127.
Sport historian Steven Riess examined the affiliation of religious institutions and 
sport, suggesting “muscular Christianity became very popular in both England and the 
United States in the late nineteenth century, the formative period of modern sport. It 
became the new definition of masculinity, broadened from the old job and family 
identities to include character and the physical self.” It is argued in this dissertation that 
modern American sport ideals, practices, and norms continue to echo particular aspects of 
Victorian muscular Christianity.

Contemporary theorists interested in sport have detailed the pivotal role the 
muscular Christian movement has had in shaping Western perceptions of sport and 
physical exercise. The blending of religion and sport philosophy in the nineteenth 
century created clear and justified connections between Christian theology and physical 
activity. Other religious sport movements are also documented during this time, 
illustrating shifts in Western conceptions of the body, physical activity, and how people 
understood their relation to God. In this current dissertation the conditions of 
contemporary American muscular Christian affiliations will be used to suggest that sport 
operates in certain ways, offering religious experiences.

While Christian views historically describe the sinful nature of the physical body, 
muscular Christianity challenged such notions, reflected in the work of Charles Kingsley,

who details a “healthful and manly Christianity” in his 1855 novel, Westward Ho! Connections between manliness and godliness involved notions of the healthy spirit, encapsulated in the phrase *mens sana in corpore sano* (a healthy mind in a healthy body). The connection between muscular Christianity and the progressive social movements of the times are well documented as, “muscular Christians, energized by a postmillennial view of progress, a sense of duty, and a concern for health, used the dynamic environment fostered by the technical revolution to engage the gears of the sports machine in culture.”

As mentioned above, one of the many authors involved in spreading the ideas of the movement was Thomas Hughes, who illustrated the muscular Christian attitude toward physical activity in *Tom Brown at Oxford* (1861). It is this conceptualization of muscular Christianity that I use to frame my dissertation. He states;

> The least of the muscular Christians has hold of the old chivalrous and Christian belief, that a man’s body is given to him to be trained and brought into subjection, and then used for the protection of the weak, the advancement of all righteous causes, and the subduing of the earth which God has given to the children of men.

While this dissertation specifically focuses on the muscular Christian themes mentioned by Hughes here, Charles Kingsley’s words are also helpful in detailing other important traits gained through a muscular Christian lifestyle. Writing in *Health and Education* (1874), Kingsley states

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22 Ladd and Mathisen, 27.
23 Hughes, 83.
games conduce not merely to physical but to moral health; that in the playing
fields boys acquire virtues which no books can give them; not merely daring and
endurance, but, better still, temper, self restraint, fairness, honour, unenvious
approbation of another’s success, and all that ‘give and take’ of life which stands
a man in such good stead when he goes forth into the world, and without which,
indeed, his success is always maimed and partial.24

The founders of muscular Christianity held as their “core ideology” manliness,
morality, and health, “focused on the transformation of society, assuming that
participation in games and sports by adolescent males had inherent value immediately
and in later life.”25 But while many scholars have examined the movement, Ladd and
Mathisen state in their work, no scholar has ever finalized a clear definition or meaning
of muscular Christianity.26

A muscular Christian Lens

This dissertation will focus on six themes of muscular Christianity used by
Thomas Hughes: 1) a man’s body is given to him (by God); 2) to be trained; 3) and
brought into subjection; 4) and then used for the protection of the weak; 5) for the
advancement of all righteous causes; 6) and for the subduing of the earth which God has
given to the children of men.27 These core values inherent to the nineteenth century
movement offer interesting insights on how muscular Christianity operates in American
sport today. My findings reveal only particular muscular Christian themes continue to

24 Cited in Ladd and Mathisen, 15. Scholars point to Kingsley and Hughes as benchmark authors of
muscular Christian ideology and thus are used in this dissertation.
25 Ladd and Mathisen, 16.
26 Ladd and Mathisen, 14.
27 Hughes, 83.
operate in the case of Lance Armstrong, and suggest an interesting cultural shift with regards to sport and religion today. I divide each of the six themes into three categories: themes common to all athletes, themes not found in Armstrong’s case, and themes found in Armstrong’s case. Each of the six themes are examined briefly in this introduction and then described at length in Chapter 4 using evidence of Lance Armstrong. By examining these six themes, I feel we can better understand how sport icons can come to operate as spiritual figures.

The first part of Hughes’ remarks indicates the historical ideals his muscular Christian description was to reflect. In Britain the “old chivalrous” and Christian belief that Hughes is referring to stemmed from an equally pressing worry that young men were not being taught Victorian manliness values in their education. What “Victorian parents…looked to in the case of public schools was…a powerful institution capable of generating alternative values,” and “the emergence of a powerful new value in Victorian society which the family was itself powerless to generate: manliness (emphasis in original).”28 Hughes and others of the time developed these values as they published works calling for activities that fostered manly characteristics in young British boys. Those who have written about muscular Christianity recognize the cultural conditions from which the movement emerged. Lucas and Smith wrote about the poor health of city dwellers, stating “many educators, writers, and medical practitioners offered advice to a generally dispirited city dweller,” where “pure air, cleanliness, and universal exercise

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seemed an imperative need." And Ladd and Mathisen identify the romanticism of the
times a cultural indicator of the renewed sense of strong Christian ideals. They state,

Throughout Western literature a strong historical connection was drawn between
the idealized knightly soldier and the athlete as Christian. And the societal agents
significant in the emergence of muscular Christianity in the United States were
the same ones that effected (sic) the rise of sport in the nineteenth century –
industrialization, immigration, education, and capital development.

Lucas and Smith also offer insights on the effectiveness of the written work by Hughes
and others to popularize notions about muscular Christianity. *Tom Brown's Schooldays*
undeniable overemphasis on the role of athletics strongly influenced Americans of
the period – not educators and intellectuals only but large numbers of so-called
average people. Very quickly there arose a kind of mysticism about robust
competitive athletics – a peculiar proneness to emotionalism and a fondness for
romantic hero figures.

Americans today still look to athletes like Lance Armstrong for examples of morality,
manliness, and character reflecting the continued need to understand muscular
Christianity as foundational to contemporary sport ideology.

Hughes’ first theme suggests is that a man’s body is given to him by God. The
notion of a “given” body underscores the Judeo-Christian nature of the movement.

Adam’s body was given by God and thus the descendants of Adam are also understood to

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30 Ladd and Mathisen, 17.
31 Lewis and Smith, 109.
32 This dissertation does not focus on discussing the term “Judeo-Christian.” While I recognize and
appreciate the vast differences between these two faiths, I do use the term as the basis of western political
and social tradition, that “beneath all other contributing factors…modern democracy is rooted in the
Hebrew-Christian heritage of faith in God.” In Luther Weigle, “The Religious Background of Democracy”
*Science, Philosophy and Religion* 2 (1942), 541.
have been given by God.$^{33}$ Lance Armstrong’s media characterization repeatedly suggests his body is his and that he can do what he wants with it, essentially lacking this God-give component of the muscular Christian ideology.

Secondly, the given body is to be trained. This theme reflects common Western notions of sport and athletics; that for any physical activity a body must be conditioned, shaped, and trained for purposes of competition. While Armstrong’s image and characterization does reflect a trained body, the ways in which his training is portrayed through the media is understood to be extraordinary, reflecting a unique condition of his trained muscular Christian body.

The third theme of Hughes’ muscular Christian characterization involves the body brought into subjection. As a result of the previous theme, Armstrong’s body has come to be popularized as subjected. As a result of his media characterization continually mentioning his survival of testicular, lung and brain cancer, Armstrong’s image portrays an individual who was able to bring his body into subjection. It is in this imagining that Armstrong comes to be seen as a savior figure as well having an athletic body that can accomplish arduous physical feats.

The fourth theme, a unique and interesting aspect of Armstrong’s media characterization is that he uses his well trained subjected body for the protection of the weak. The various philanthropic endeavors and 2009 Nike/LiveStrong advertisements involving Armstrong’s image clearly display this fourth theme of Hughes’ description.

The fifth theme, another clearly observable one in Armstrong’s case is the advancement of all righteous causes. While the term “all” is understandably difficult to satisfy, Armstrong’s media characterization does involve a dominant and ubiquitous

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connection with cancer related issues today, as well as several smaller causes that are constructed by the media to be righteous and good. Through his Lance Armstrong Foundation, yellow bracelets, and the slogan LiveStrong, he has become synonymous with fighting for causes, apparent in his athletic events, charitable clothing line, and return to cycling in 2009 to globally spread cancer awareness.

In the sixth theme, subduing of the earth which has been given to the children of men again reflects the erasure of God from modern constructions of muscular Christians in sport. I understand the media portrayal of Armstrong as someone who does subdue the earth through his cycling performances. His ability to ride up mountains at maximum physical output reflects this component of the muscular Christian characterization. He is shown to be an individual that can subdue the environmental limitations of the earth through his athleticism. The ways in which he is described in the cycling world will be used as evidence for this. His survival over cancer also reflects a subduing of the earth. Yet in his subduing of the earth, God does not factor in. Similar to the erasure of God in the first theme, this condition apparent in Armstrong’s case exhibits contemporary religious configurations of American culture and will lead to discussions in Chapter 5 with regards to radical orthodoxy.

In the evidence gathered for this dissertation I have discovered that muscular Christian themes survive in the commercialized image of Lance Armstrong. While most of the muscular Christian themes can be observed without much difficulty, the most obvious theme that has not continued into present culture involves the association of the body or earth with God. I believe this reflects the decrease in traditional religious affiliation and increase in secular activities operating as surrogates for religious and
spiritual experiences. It also reflects the desire of contemporary American sport culture to be viewed as a social activity where positive social traits can be learned and observed. While muscular Christian values are still embedded in American sport ideology there has been a significant shift in how these themes operate in media characterization of athletes today, such is the case Lance Armstrong.

Radical Orthodoxy

There exists a scholarly body of work that I feel helps to understand the emerging concept of a decline in traditional religious affiliations in this study. As stated above, media characterizations of Lance Armstrong are premised on particular values that manifest a muscular Christian sport ideology that I understand to be at work in contemporary American sport. Premised on these values I also observe instances of contemporary Americans embracing a spiritual, even religious opinion of sport and athletes, what radical orthodoxy scholars would label a postmodern religious experience. Yet Graham Ward and other radical orthodoxy scholars would understand such instances as religiously empty. Ward believes an important project of the radical orthodoxy scholarship is “the recovery of what might be termed ‘theological textuality,’”34 which is a recognition and description of a “divine reality” in theologically empty cultural texts.35

Within the last 20 years radical orthodoxy scholars, including British authors Graham Ward, John Milbank, Catherine Pickstock sought to bring theological language back into critical academic debates. Those involved in this movement,

35 Ward, 8.
Develop a drastic critique of secular assumptions in order both to recover and develop the most authentic Christian thought of the past. Arguing that it is no longer acceptable to accommodate theology to prevailing wisdom and fashion, they reject both humanism and postmodernism, in favour of a theological construal of the radically indeterminable.³⁶

To clarify, radical orthodoxy identifies contemporary times as postmodern, but wishes to move beyond the postmodern cultural experience; it is in this understanding that they “reject” postmodernity. “These thinkers point to the world not as a secularised object of knowledge, but rather as a God-given mystery. They search for the God that the academy attempts to erase, and their scholarship is aimed at journeying toward a higher wisdom of God...”³⁷

In an attempt to simplify the radical orthodoxy scholarship I utilize three of their assumptions in this current project. First, these scholars view the condition of contemporary culture as postmodern.³⁸ Second, in postmodernity scholars such as Ward believe individuals have become nihilistic, experiencing the divine through “cultural metaphors” which can “become ambiguous” without the appropriate theological understanding.³⁹

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³⁸ Radical orthodox scholars such as Graham Ward understand postmodernity to be “when the incredulity toward metanarratives becomes a pervasive cultural skepticism, when the worldview of modernity no longer becomes believable, then the postmodern characterizes a socio-historical and economic period which we call ‘postmodernity’. I emphasize this because I understand postmodernism as always with us, whereas there are indications which suggest ‘postmodernity’ as a particular cultural emphasis is over.” Graham Ward, *The Postmodern God: A Theological Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd., 1997), xxv.
Ward specifically forwards that such longings for pseudo holism and faux contact with the divine (as seen in many contemporary films’ resurrection scenes) are escapes from actuality of embodiment and rejections of corporeality, and that although these are ‘shot through with theological colouring,’ and ‘re-enchant the world,’ these vacant practices are ‘not towards or away from anything,’ but an ‘erotic ontology founded upon absence.’

Third, radical orthodoxy offers a solution to this nihilism which is to understand the conditions of postmodernity as “the unfolding of the revelation of God” by narrating “the theological reading of the world from within grammar of the Christian faith.” It is on these three points that I use radical orthodoxy to inform my dissertation.

Chapter Overview

In Chapter 2 of this dissertation I review the literature on the nature of sport and religion in academic discourses, specifically focusing on understanding the history of discussions regarding sport and religion, their commonalities and differences and clarifying how this current project makes a contribution to conceptualizing sport, religion, and contemporary American culture.

Chapter 3 will explain the methodology of my data collection, including an overview of qualitative research and why I have used certain materials for my study. I will also discuss how I organized the materials once they were collected into categories for analysis.

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Chapter 4 focuses on American cyclist Lance Armstrong. I claim that over the past decade Armstrong has emerged in popular American media as a central figure of sport morality. I provide evidence that Lance Armstrong reflects positive notions of hero, inspiration, and savior (mirroring particular muscular Christian ideals) and perpetuated by the media. Chapter 4 will be constructed to clearly discuss observable or missing muscular Christian themes found in Armstrong’s case.

Chapter 5 of my dissertation analyzes the data presented in Chapter 4 using the radical orthodoxy scholarly framework. This recent school of thought is involved with exploring Christian theology in postmodern culture. Radical orthodoxy scholarship is premised on the notion that modernity became essentially nihilistic and experiences seemingly spiritual are actually empty because science, philosophy and humanism (from modernity) erased theological language to understand worldly experiences. Coupled with the increasing evidence of a decline in traditional religious participation, radical orthodoxy scholarship is useful in placing the spiritual conditions, observable in American sport through Armstrong’s case, in a theological framework for clearer understanding.

Exegesis

When I look at the American sporting world, I am often struck by the frequent moral and ethical discussions that emerge today. My work seeks to understand the ideas

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that inform American culture about our athletes, how they should behave, or their status as role-models. I continually observe matters of moral behavior, ethical dilemmas, and related notions of success ideology occurring within the American sport context; issues that, when studied, I feel clearly demonstrate a “hidden dependency” on muscular Christianity as MacAloon suggests. Contemporary American sport, I claim, has become a new “site”\(^{44}\) for spiritual experience, ethical discussion, and successful ideology formation.

While muscular Christianity is no longer widely discussed or understood by a majority of Americans, the ideological structures that it established over 150 years ago in Britain is still observable in the contemporary American sport landscape. For instance, Lance Armstrong is heralded for his grit and toughness (a highly important muscular Christian ideal). The true muscular Christian was to “fight it out until he could not see” if the cause was righteous.\(^{45}\) MacAloon argues that one of the central efforts for muscular Christians was to prove that “Jesus was a tough guy,”\(^{46}\) and we still see our sport ideologies, such as with Armstrong, reflect this today.

MacAloon’s work is important to understanding that while contemporary notions of sport grew from the British muscular Christian movement in the mid-nineteenth

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\(^{44}\) Using the term site, in this sense, is meant to be understood as the physical and liminal spaces in which the contemporary American sport motif is found to be occurring. The terms “space” and “place” will be terms used throughout my work. I will discussion their various uses and academic understanding as they work in cultural studies and community studies. I will be relying on the work John Bale, *Sport Geography 2nd ed.* (London: Routledge, 2003).


century, such ideals are still entrenched in modern sport ideology that they are commonly taken for granted, assumed to be secular, and seldom critiqued. MacAloon states:

Many new developments – from British reaction to the world takeover of cricket by South Asia, to racial integration in British football, to winning the London 2012 Olympic bid that combined classical game – ethic themes such as youth moral development, urban renewal and class peace through sport with the more historically American theme of immigrant integration and multiculturalism – all suggest a renewed significance and even a certain hidden dependency on muscular Christian ideology.

Recognizing the continued influence of muscular Christian ideals in contemporary American is important for any further discussions or understanding about the function of morality or role-model characterizations in sport. This dissertation examines contemporary American sport operating in new and unique ways. Wuthnow argued that between the 1970’s and 1980’s in America, “the New Religious Right shifted the ‘symbolic boundaries’ by redefining issues that previously had been matters of personal morality. These redefinitions reflected the distinction between private and public morality as well as the relationship among morality, religion, and politics.” Ladd and Mathisen suggest “these private-public moral boundaries were redefined within sport” as

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47 MacAloon, 690. “In the United States, where, it can be argued, the ethos had even greater impact in building institutions of civil society than in Britain, the term muscular Christianity is not today widely familiar, even in scholarly circles. Those who know it as such tend to inhabit the marginalized fields of education, religion, and sport studies.”

48 MacAloon, 690.

This work offers specific examples of how this dependency on muscular Christian ideology continues to exist and evolve in commercial figurations of Lance Armstrong.

Used in this project are popular cultural artifacts, including books, online media, and the ways in which people display and identify with Armstrong, that I demonstrate his portrayal as a cancer survivor and cycling champion reinforces the notion that he is an exemplar of muscular Christian themes. As a result, Armstrong represents positive notions of self (including strength, perseverance, and redemption), which are transmitted to the general public. Other sites of ideology production are also involved in my analysis. For example, the role of non-profit Lance Armstrong Foundation (LAF) implicitly serves to perpetuate positive “love thy neighbor” notions of Judeo-Christian morality. Additionally, the large and diverse amounts of information and support make the Foundation a primary source for cancer related issues. Recent Foundation programs have been published on the Web site that involve story-telling, creating a virtual community of other cancer survivors. This virtual community also becomes a physically experienced community at LAF sponsored walks, runs, and bicycle rides.

I see sport as universally entwined in culture. I fully appreciate the powerful meanings sport has for millions of Americans fan, from a diverse range of backgrounds (socially, economically, and culturally). While not all Americans may specifically identify with the inherent values of contemporary sport, I argue it is difficult to escape

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50 Ladd and Mathisen, 208.
51 Kyle Kusz, Revolt of the White Athlete: Race, Media and the Emergence of Extreme Athlete in America (New York: Peter Lang Publications, Inc., 2007).
52 “Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against one of your people, but love thy neighbor as yourself. I am the LORD.” Leviticus, 19:18. The Holy Bible, New International Version (Grand Rapid MI: The Zondervan Corporation, 2001), 64.
them completely. The ubiquity of sport in American today touches every American at some level regardless of their social, economic, or cultural situation. Within this dissertation I seek to explore how muscular Christianity persists in American sport culture and how these themes offer many a sense of community, ethics, and value systems. This work assumes that sport, premised on muscular Christian themes, satisfies the metaphysical needs of contemporary American secular society.
CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

Sport, Culture, and Religion

Many works have attempted to construct, describe, and understand the essence of sport as a modern cultural activity including Allen Guttmann and Michael Novak.\(^1\) Also Roger Caillois’ work *Man, Play and Sport* discusses the importance and function of sport and games, providing theories and ideas about the role of both in culture. Guttmann and Caillois each combine philosophy, sport, and study of the sacred throughout their works. Johan Huizinga, one of the founding thinkers of cultural history and author of *Homo Ludens*, is also essential in developing a cohesive understanding of the nature of humans at play and the role of sport in human communities.\(^2\) Huizinga informs my understanding of the relationship play and religion share as he states “play consecrated to the Deity, the highest goal of man’s endeavour – such was Plato’s conception of religion.”\(^3\)

My dissertation project grew from the apparent cultural condition of a decline in uniform religious affiliation today. I wondered about the influential role sport icons have as examples of ethic education in American culture today. In the late nineteenth century,


Theodore Veblen discussed this condition was due to merging concepts of industry, individualism, and leisure which became solidified in Western ideology. Sport and religion scholarship also discusses the emergence of religion and spirituality as a result of Humanistic philosophy and industrialization. According to Nietzsche’s famous proclamation in 1882, the historical Judeo-Christian God associated with Western religious theology had died. Interpretations of what Nietzsche meant by his famous statement “God is dead” has long been debated and used to serve varied purposes in different contexts. Although communities traditionally associated with religion, such as the YMCA (premised on muscular Christian themes) have used sport for social and religious purposes, the concept of a supreme being, one that created humans in His image and likeness, the “One” who has a vested interest in the universe and all its contents, does not play sport.

More recently, authors such as Karl Barth, Paul Tillich, Thomas Altizer, and William Hamilton have written about the effects of Nietzsche’s claim that modern society killed God. Peter Williams and others have discussed the Humanistic secular turn during the seventeenth century and the effects of the philosophical struggle with “God’s death” in contemporary times. Williams states “Eventually people starved for religion

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(and therefore for gods) and unable to accept substantially weakened conventional faiths would begin to create other, less sublime pantheons because archetypes remain an essential part of human nature.”¹¹ In Chapter 4 I discuss Joseph Campbell’s formative hero archetype theories in light of my dissertation.¹² The point here is that if Americans need transcendent figures and the old icons have been killed or are lost, new characters such as hero athletes could emerge from new cultural spaces (other than religion) to fill these roles.

Metaphorically speaking, the “religious” shift in modern sport started over 100 years ago when artificial light illuminated the sporting fields of Northeastern prep schools, as Axel Bundgaard described.¹³ His historical account provides documentation about the manner in which programs at Amherst, Phillips-Exeter, and Andover included muscular Christian ideas about sport (football), aligning with the Protestant social values of elite New England families. Today, these traits are still observable on the field, in the audience, and in the ways that moral and ethical dilemmas in sport are framed.

More recent social condition of “post-Baby Boomer” generations in America, discussed in the works of Robert Putnam and Martin Marty also reflect this shift of Western culture away from traditional religion.¹⁴ Other scholars have explored related conditions of secular Western culture such as the increase of individual religious experience, detailed by Thomas Altizer and William Hamilton; the increase of sport

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¹¹ Peter Williams, The Sport Immortals: Deifying the American Athlete (Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1994), 9.
fandom in popular culture explored by John Fiske and David Bender;\textsuperscript{15} and how sport operates in certain ways like traditional religions, as discussed by Joseph Price, Shirl Hoffman, Richard Giulianotti, James Mathisen, and Tony Ladd.\textsuperscript{16}

Grant Jarvie published an introductory book in 2006 titled *Sport Culture and Society: An Introduction*,\textsuperscript{17} in which issues about the relationship of sport and religion are discussed. Jarvie’s chapter discusses the historical and contemporary relationship of sport and religion, providing case studies of faith orientated sport organizations. He also critically examines the dangers of fundamentalism as an approach to sport and religion, explores the Islam/gender and physical activity dynamic, and critiques the better faith/better ethics/better sport assumption (a foundational muscular Christian theme).\textsuperscript{18} In his summary, Jarvie returns to the notion that sport fans have particular allegiances that are almost “religious-like.”\textsuperscript{19} One final point he makes is applicable to my dissertation’s aim, as I seek to reveal the muscular Christian ideals operating in American sport, is when he suggests “the influence of religion on sport may have declined but it certainly has not disappeared and…the potential influence of faith of different varieties does not necessarily mean better sport or a more acceptable world to live in today.”\textsuperscript{20} As I will argue, the moral codes and values of muscular Christianity continue to operate deep within the ways American sport ideologies are constructed.


\textsuperscript{17} Grant Jarvie, *Sport, Culture and Society: An Introduction* (London: Routledge, 2006).


\textsuperscript{19} Jarvie, 263.

\textsuperscript{20} Ibid, 264.
Joseph Price and Shirl Hoffman have both edited compilations on the various relationships that sport and religion share. In Joseph Price’s work, *From Season to Season*, the most popular sports in the United States are discussed by chapter, with authors examining how religious motifs appear in the sports, including basketball, hockey, football, and baseball. Some themes include ritual, athletes as martyrs, sport as folk religion, God in sports, and the cultural and religious significance of the Final Four basketball tournament. Shirl Hoffman’s text, *Sport and Religion*, includes chapters on ritual, how to define sport as a religion (civil, folk, or natural), arguments against sport as a religion, muscular Christianity, and the role of ethics in sport and religion. These two volumes alone display the variety of topics involved in discussion about sport and religion. In reading these texts one comes to appreciate the unified assumption by most scholars that sport and religion are related; however the debate lies in how they are so.

The importance of other scholars’ explanations of relationships between sport and religion is vital to understanding how these two social spheres function in contemporary times. Yet, my work is designed to explore what are the values that operate beneath the various discussions about sport and religion mentioned above. I argue that the values many scholars premise their discussions on when writing chapters about the role of sport in religion, or the function of God in the stadium, are muscular Christian. For example, American popular culture continually reinforces a belief that physical exercise is a beneficial activity and should be done to live a better life. I ask why our culture accepts

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this without much question and what are the ideas behind such claims? Not only are the physical benefits seen in popular American assumptions about sport, there are also less tangible benefits. For instance, Tony Dungy, professional football player and coach believes “sport” is “vital to building character.”23 One study from 2006 found that “increased levels of sports participation had a positive relationship with aspects of emotional and behavioral well-being, particularly self-concepts.”24 Other research has focused on the effects of physical activity being correlated with a “moral crusade explicitly linked with a war on fatness.”25 While these issues seem important, I argue that in fact a muscular Christian ideology operates behind all American notions of fitness, health, sport, and physical activity that past scholarship often fails to full acknowledge.26

Muscular Christianity

Authors who do include muscular Christianity like Guttmann, Jarvie, Hoffman, and Price allude to the muscular Christian ideal of mens sana in corpore sano (a sound mind in a sound body).27 In the second half of the nineteenth century, British authors began to write about Christian religious ideals as being applicable to the philosophy of physical culture. In doing so, physical activities were infused with Christian morality,

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26 For instance, in a book examining the paradoxes of the values in sport today in 2009 neglects muscular Christianity as a basis for sport values throughout the entire text. D. Stanley Eitzen, Fair and Foul: Beyond the Myths and Paradoxes of Sport 4th ed. (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2009).
27 David Young, The Modern Olympics: A Struggle for Revival (The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002). David Young complicates the use of this term by muscular Christians and the Modern Olympic Movement in this book. This term is commonly understood to be derived from Satire X of the Roman poet Juvenal (10.356) essentially answering for his readers what should be desired in life (90-91).
establishing a cultural ideology stressing the importance of sport participation and physical prowess that remains in Western sport today. Authors Thomas Hughes and Charles Kingsley are credited with spreading the popularity of the muscular Christian movement, as they wrote on “the prevalence of weak and effeminate men in Victorian society. Hughes and Kingsley merged traditional Anglicanism with a form of manliness that favored physical and moral strength, courage, and aggression above sentimentality, reflection, and gentility.” Contemporary theorists interested in sport have detailed the pivotal role the muscular Christian movement has had in shaping Western perceptions of sport and physical exercise, but neglect its persistence today. The blending of religion and sport culture created clear and justified connections between the norms and values of Christian theology and physical activity. Religious sport movements, such as muscular Christianity offer evidence of shifting cultural conceptions of the body, physical activity, and the fundamental way human beings perceive themselves in the world.

John MacAloon is one scholar that does call attention to muscular Christians continued presence. He states that while many articles about the American sport ethos may nod to muscular Christianity as the movement from which it was born, many never focus on the influence it still maintains today: “Writers and editors might not have noted that… US (sic) prep schools were direct consequences of the imported muscular

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Christian ethos,” yet when these authors discuss positive examples found in sport, they mention the “‘moral character, military strength, and certitude’ built upon Christian faith.”  

Although muscular Christian values are widely embedded in contemporary American sport ideology, suggests MacAloon, there is a lack of public understanding of where these values came from and their Judeo-Christian morality. In one particular Newsweek article that mentions the muscular Christian movement, MacAloon suggests “Most readers probably took ‘muscular Christianity’ as a one-off journalistic metaphor, scarcely suspecting that a determined historical object of very great significance was evoked here. As with most mainstream journalism, no context was provided.”

It is here that my work adds to MacAloon’s call to provide context for the exploration of assumed muscular Christian themes in contemporary American sport ideology. MacAloon is right to recognize that when most Americans have little to no knowledge about how these values operate in culture and the increasingly popular sport context. Kyle Kusz has even described Lance Armstrong’s “white masculinity” as being “encoded as the ideal embodiment of the human spirit,” never once mentioning where these notions of “ideal” and “human spirit” come from in our culture. This dissertation seeks to provide an exploration of these notions.

With a global community continually broadcasting commercialized American sport ideals, I feel it necessary to explore muscular Christian themes that demonstrate

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33 MacAloon, 692.

34 Kyle Kusz, Revolt of the White Athlete: Race Media, and the Emergence of Extreme Athletes in America (New York: Peter Lang, 2007), 159.
how American’s makes meaning and value judgments in our lives.\textsuperscript{35} This dissertation, thus seeks to provide an example in popular sport culture of the operation of muscular Christian themes operating today. While they have changed somewhat since Hughes’ writings, I argue in this dissertation that the values observable in the instance of Lance Armstrong add to the evaluation of culture provided by MacAlloon. What I lend to his work is a contemporary example of what he calls an “ethos” that is “all around us and so normalized…that it fails to stand out as anything unusual.”\textsuperscript{36} In doing so, I provide clear evidence of MacAlloon’s argument about the role and function of muscular Christianity operating in culture today.

While many authors mention muscular Christianity in large volumes about modern sport or sport development in the United States, others have devoted books to the history of the movement. Miracle and Rees have written about myths about sport in American schools, mostly high school, and discuss the role of muscular Christianity in developing these myths. The purpose for their book was to examine the story of the American sport myth; that many believe “sport competition is good for children because it teaches them to strive to do their best, it reduces delinquency, and it is likely to bring the family together.” By examining these myths embedded in American cultural ideology Miracle and Rees suggest that “three out of every five Americans surveyed agree that athletes are often the best role models a child can have.”\textsuperscript{37} My work seeks to provide

\textsuperscript{35} The idea of hegemony will play an important role in discussing why others have argued so adamantly against sport fully being like a religion, because of the importance many put on the value of religion as a social institution. Some may even see my work as blasphemous and anti-religion.

\textsuperscript{36} MacAlloon, 692.

context; to understand if athletes are good role models and what the values undergirding
media characterizations of such individuals.

Another work on the history of American sport by Lucas and Smith discusses the
characteristic of sport to reflect “social themes in American society.” They admit the role
of sport “has not been primarily demonic; neither has it been all good.” Lucas and
Smith also nod to the spiritual role sport has for millions of Americans stating “the need
for sport, vicarious and participatory, seems a felt need for millions; it fills a void; it will
likely not go away and may even increase significantly in these last decades of the
twentieth century and into the next.” These authors discuss muscular Christianity in the
context of discussions of American sport before and after the American Civil War. They
understand muscular Christian ideology to have answered questions for late nineteenth
and early twentieth century American debates about the relationship between sport and
religion (especially Protestantism). They suggest “to many Americans, who had for
generations questioned in a religious vein the place of sport in education or even in a
leisure setting, this English belief gave some justification for accepting the natural
tendencies of youth to organize its sporting activities.”

Authors Ladd and Mathisen discuss the historical progression of muscular
Christianity, related conversations about the development of American sport, and how
Evangelical Protestants understand muscular Christian values through the 1990’s. Their
discussion of contemporary uses of muscular Christian values is particularly informative
to my work, for their analysis ends where mine begins. They suggest “perhaps not so
obvious…is the difference between how past Christians and current muscular Christians

40 Lucas and Smith, 137-139.
approach…athletic metaphors.” In their conclusions Ladd and Mathisen discuss the 140 year history of muscular Christianity and the changes the ideals encountered (every 20 years or so). Most recently, Ladd and Mathisen suggest there was an “unexpected rediscovery,” in the past 30 years “of the sports appeal by the fundamentalists who had turned their collective backs on sport,” in the 1960’s. These authors also support a connection I make in this dissertation that “as the myth of muscular Christianity in its original Tom Brown…the evangelical muscular Christian myth of the late twentieth century has devised a supporting folk theology that provides its adherents with a,” legitimate religious “vocabulary and rhetoric…” Most applicable to my use of radical orthodoxy, Ladd and Mathisen suggest “most recently, this myth has become a basis for the new muscular Christian moral crusaders entering the contemporary culture wars on the side of orthodoxy…” These authors detail the history of the values Thomas Hughes and other muscular Christian writers of the mid-nineteenth century and how these values remain important in American sport today.

*Radical Orthodoxy*

The radical orthodoxy writings of Graham Ward, John Milbank, and Catherine Pickstock suggest that beginning in the seventeenth century, Western culture began to rely on science and philosophy instead of theology to arrive at answers of truth. Religious adherence became an individual matter and ethical lessons were debated in

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41 Ladd and Mathisen, 223.
42 Ibid, 232.
43 Ibid, 233.
44 Ibid, 233.
philosophy rather than theology. Important to their writings are the notions that as a result of this historical secular turn, individuals today claim to experience the divine in other cultural activities and not through traditional religions.

Described as a new theology, the introductory literary work *Radical Orthodoxy* include chapters in which various authors relate their theological analyses to issues of knowledge, language, friendship, erotics, the city, bodies, and music. Ward and Milbank offer extensive evidence for their line of reasoning, yet I point out that sport, a major site of popular culture is never considered in their scholarship. Through their analysis of such cultural activities, radical orthodoxy seeks to inject theological understanding into their analysis to rediscover the divine in the world. Radical orthodoxy scholars seek to bring theological language back into critical academic debates. Those involved in this movement,

Develop a drastic critique of secular assumptions in order both to recover and develop the most authentic Christian thought of the past. Arguing that it is no longer acceptable to accommodate theology to prevailing wisdom and fashion,

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they reject both humanism and postmodernism, in favour of a theological construal of the radically indeterminable.\textsuperscript{54}

\textit{Sport as a “Type” of Religion}

Much scholarship of sport and religion has focused on how sport is a “type” of religion. Works of this nature are based on an assumption that sports are culturally ubiquitous and that each activity reflects similar elements that can sometimes be seen as interchangeable. For example, James Mathisen has argued that sport was once a “civil religion” (what Phillip Hammond described as religion happening in America’s nonreligious organizations) and has now become a “folk religion.”\textsuperscript{55} Mathisen states a folk religion “is a combination of shared moral principles and behavioral customs that ‘emphasize[s] the common religion of a people as it emerged out of the life of ‘the folk’…[plus] those religious ideas, values, symbols, ceremonies, and loyalties which the overwhelming majority of the people of any state or nation hold in common.’”\textsuperscript{56}

Catherine Albanese’s work argues that sport operates as a “cultural religion.”

Cultural religion, as she describes, began in the late nineteenth century. According to Albanese, cultural religions include three themes: millennialism as a form of dominance and innocence, quests for ecstasy, and the creation of communities. These themes of moral and ethical discussions carry into less openly “religious” settings, such as sport.\textsuperscript{57}

If sport today operates as a cultural religion, the examination of muscular Christian

\textsuperscript{54} Milbank, Pickstock, and Ward, (1999), i.
\textsuperscript{56} Mathisen, 401. In Hoffmann. \textit{Sport and Religion} (1992), 19.
themes (particular to Lance Armstrong) through participant responses at LiveStrong events and the positive feelings they experience could employ this conception of sport and religion.

In my studies, I see an underlying assumption by authors, such as with Mathisen and Albanese, for sport to be associated with some “type” of religion. These labels can be confusing at times, for the relationships between sport and religion are conditionally premised on the authors’ definition(s) of what they mean by religion. Sport, too is a fluid and changing term, further complicating a clear comparison of the two. I hold no allegiance to naming sport as a “type” of religion, per se. Emerging from readings of sport as a “type” of religion, my perception of the conditions of contemporary American sport and specifically how muscular Christian athletes like Armstrong can come to be seen in religiously and spiritually significant ways, remained unclear. Defining sport as a “type” of religion, I feel does not answer questions of why many individuals come to see Armstrong, through his media characterization, reflecting positive cultural values.

George Herbert Mead’s work on the universal experience of religion more closely informs my position. Mead’s concept of the postmodern community would explain sport as a universal form of faith that is socially situated in contemporary American culture, an argument taken up by Corwin Smidt. Mead and Smidt argue that the space in which a religious experience occurs is informed by cultural definitions and thus provide insights on how these experiences socially come to be deemed religious. Based

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58 Albanese, 322.
61 Marty, 80.
on this understanding of sport and religion, my work provides evidence on the ways in which muscular Christian values apparent in sport today offers a value framework for many to see Armstrong as good and “righteous.”

Sport, Religion, and Cultural Artifacts

A high percentage of scholarly literature about sport and religion mentions the 1982 British film *Chariots of Fire.* This seems to be a common starting point from which scholars make an argument about the relationship sport and religion have had over the past two centuries and is an example of muscular Christian themes (religion) closely associated with modern sport. The films’ use by scholars also demonstrates the cultural significance of popular media (film) to understand such values. The codes, norms, and doctrines of muscular Christian ideals are clearly depicted in this film, yet never explicitly mentioned.

Ellis Cashmore has written about the film’s attraction to British audiences, due in part to the cultural conditions of the time. The film provided British viewers a sense of

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63 Martyn Bowden’s work “Jerusalem, Dover Beach, and Kings Cross: Imagined Places as Metaphors of the British Class Struggle in *Chariots of Fire* and the Loneliness of the Long-Distance Runner” cited above, speaks on the heterotopic landscape of the film *Chariots of Fire* with regard to the imaged-events and semiotic codes of British class struggle. More applicable to my work, with regard to religious motifs within films such as *Chariots of Fire*, in Margaret Miles, *Seeing and Believing: Religion and Values in the Movies* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1997).
pride in the history of their country as they sensed the growing individualism, a condition of the modern world. As Cashmore says, “The film unfolded amid a culture of individualism in which British patriotism, while strong, is both conditional and instrumental.”64 Cashmore continues, further illustrating Mead and Smidt’s argument; “Every member of society drives his or her identity from membership in a ‘people’ of some kind, whether a group, an organization or several different kinds of collectivity.”65 The film demonstrates “the comprehensive stabilizing force of the nineteenth century no longer in evidence and the traditional ties of geography and occupation weakened, people were released to explore other affiliations; affiliations they believed were central to their being.”66 Cashmore says about *Chariots* that many of the subplots “add to the film’s ethereal qualities: its plot may have been rooted in this world, but the main characters embody otherworldly characteristics, including fortitude, fervour, and redemptive powers more typically associated with gods.”67 Cashmore is describing what Pauline Marie Rosenau and other postmodern scholars have identified as a move away from traditional structural associations to more fluid, individual ones.68 This will be further discussed in Chapter 5. What we can take from this here is recognition and a celebration of sport, individualism, and alternative affiliations providing personal fulfillment that reflect muscular Christian themes that are also observable in the Armstrong case today.

I include authors who discuss visual artifacts as culturally significant because my dissertation includes media examples of Lance Armstrong. In her book *Seeing and*

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64 Ellis Cashmore, “*Chariots of Fire*: Bigotry, Manhood and Moral Certitude in an Age of Individualism” *Sport in Society* 11 (2008), 159
65 Ibid, 160.
67 Ibid, 164.
Believing (1996) Margaret Miles affirms the use of film analysis to explore the relationship between religious ideals and society. She states “exploring media images tells us something about the preoccupations of our society. Media images are one of the most pervasive means by which Americans receive representations of identity and diversity, relationships, and social arrangements and institutions.”

She specifically deals with Chariots of Fire, and the theological implications of the film.

Fans learn moral and ethical lessons through the dialogue that often occurs when such incidences arise through media outlets. Authors Miracle and Rees state, “The social values epitomized by sport are the ones that ‘make America great.’” Miracle and Rees suggest the values inherent to contemporary American sport are a condition of social values in the American ethic and are evidenced in the words and slogans used in sport culture today. For instance they cite the slogans “Winning isn’t everything, it is the only thing;” “No one ever drowned in sweat;” and “There is no I in team,” echoing Protestant work ethic, emphasis on success, and the good of the group.

These slogans reflect muscular Christian ideals which are found in contemporary American sport ideology and are involved in American cultural discussions of what athlete-role models should be.

69 Miles, 3.
71 Miracle and Rees, 13-14.
72 Ibid, 14.
In my analysis of online media, I am informed by the work of David Silver, Sonia Livingstone, and Henry Jenkins who all discuss the creation of culture in cyberspace. Because this was a new area of study for me, Silver was important because he reviews important foundational literature involved in the study of online content. Livingstone examines how mass communication is no longer a unilateral relationship between sender and receiver online. Rather she details the complex relationship because of modern internet capabilities to create communities of a growing and diverse “many-to-many” relationship. And Jenkins was informative because he elaborates on Livingstone’s point, extending these relationships to larger entities, such as corporations (appropriate for my use of Nike commercials). These works inform my use of online media content and online social communities to explore the spiritual roles Armstrong may have in people’s lives.

Most recently, scholars have begun to evaluate the use of online cultures for research. In discussing work on virtual ethnographies, and specifically reacting to Christine Hine, danah boyd states “the internet is increasingly entwined in people’s lives; it is both an imagined space and an architecture place… what makes the internet so confounding for research is that the fundamental architecture also changes rapidly.” With regard to the use of blogs for data, boyd again suggests the duality of using them for data. “What complicates analyses of blogs,” she states, “is that they are both the product

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of blogging and the medium through which the blogger produces their expressions.”

Using online material for cultural analysis in this dissertation was informed by boyd and others as data that is new and emerging. I use this data to demonstrate how people today are consuming and producing the imaging of Lance Armstrong in cyberspace.

I understand muscular Christian ideology to be expressed in the contemporary American sport context, which is the result of a long historical and social relationship. This is always under construction and the cultures that create and consume the values in certain activities dominate how we engage with them.

**Sport Fandom**

John Fiske has informed my understanding of sport as popular culture with relation to fan studies. He states that “popular culture is produced by the people out of the products of the cultural industries: it must be understood, therefore, in terms of productivity, not of reception.” Popular culture, conceived in this way provides inside views of sport and religion in that the meaning of these social activities is created by fans. The “sport product” includes everything that is sport, from apparel, to sport figures, to sport narratives, real, virtual, and fantastical; religious products too are woven into the fabric and dialogue of culture. Norm Denzin states an interactionist view of culture, and the aspects of it, including sport, “requires a framework that analyses… apparatuses that reproduce and present society back to itself.”

Examining the symbolic meaning

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77 Fiske, 37.
produced in products, such as those surrounding the image of Armstrong, offer insight on the hegemonic operations of muscular Christian themes in sport and culture today.

Authors around the world have recognized sports’ appeal for fans and the cultural ideals that are involved in that appeal, some of which are coupled with religious meanings. Reverend Cannon Richard Pengelley has observed in Australia the powerful role of the media in “creating myths and heroes (often through the extensive use of religious metaphors in sport journalism).” 79 Sociologist Harry Edwards identifies certain elements in sport that are reminiscent of religion. 80 Pengelley, picks up on these in his article, stating “sport has a body of formally stated beliefs; is accepted and followed with great passion by masses of people; ‘saints’ or heroes from the past who manifest the values of the game; ruling ‘patriarchs’ or coaches; ‘gods’ or superstars who influence those who watch the games…” 81 Pengelley’s exploration was observable, for example, when Lance Armstrong entered the 2009 Tour Down Under, in Adelaide, Australia. An estimated 138,000 people turned out to see him ride professionally for the first time in more than three years. One article about the event states, “On his arrival in Adelaide, he was assigned two bodyguards and a full police escort for training rides…Armstrong never had to stop for a red light either. They turned all the lights [to green]…Madonna was here and she requested the same treatment, but they didn’t give it to her.” 82 It was also at this event that a reporter compared Armstrong to Jesus Christ, saying “it’s as if Jesus Christ was going to cycle again.” 83 The overwhelming popularity of athletes can

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81 Pengelley, 2.
83 Ibid.
certainly appear to emulate fandom most commonly associated with religious devotion, as Pengelley illustrates. The elements of devotion are comfortable for the contemporary sport fan because they reflect elements of muscular Christian ideology.

Fiske divides the production of fandom within popular culture three ways: semiotic, enunciative, and textual productivity. The semiotic productivity of fandom operates on a broad scale; how people come to be fans of a product and, in my project, how a culture comes to be a fan of a sport. A semiotic focus on fan production facilitates an understanding of how individuals, with no interest whatsoever in sport, can still be caught up in a cultural understanding of the activity. Someone may have no interest in sport (say cycling), sport events (like the Tour de France), or sport issues (such as Armstrong’s Tour performances). Yet the cultural environment, especially in American culture, is set up in such a way that does not easily allow someone to escape a sense of sport. For instance, sport and general media outlets cover Armstrong’s performance during the Tour and broadcast results to the world. Semiotic productivity defines how members of any culture are continually reminded of what is popular through the dominance of these images and activities in the cultural discourse, even if they have no specific interest or involvement with such events. As a result, the values of sport are continually observable in culture. For instance, when I ask some of my students why they wear a LIVESTRONG yellow bracelet, some have no idea why they do. They have no interests in cycling and have not been influenced by cancer. Rather, the semiotic production of the bracelet was “signed” as “cool” and so they wear it. 84

Enunciative production operates on a smaller scale to understand how individuals come to be fans of sport based on overt cultural symbols. Fiske’s suggests enunciative fan productivity happens “when the meanings that are made, are spoken and are shared within a face-to-face or oral culture… take a public form.” I understand the enunciative production of fandom, for example the Lance Armstrong Foundation, or of Armstrong himself, to occur in the processes by which people make meaning of LiveStrong, or Armstrong. The enunciative process is observable in how individuals have taken a symbol like the LIVESTRONG yellow bracelet and through face to face oral culture made meaning of the rubber band. This process also occurs as Armstrong’s media characterization continues to change and be understood in different ways. The meaning-making process of sport fan cultures is dispersed to the public through various media (television, internet, blogs, newspaper columns, t-shirts, computer games, rubber bracelets, charity events, etc.). In this sense, fan productivity occurs first on an individual or community level, for instance at Armstrong’s for-cause events, and then dispersed to a larger audience as to the meaning of popular cultural activities.

being with, Armstrong is regarded by many as a hero, after overcoming a disease that kills hundreds of thousands of people a year. Then the man won one of the most grueling cycling races. Six times. Who wouldn’t be inspired by him? In addition, the bracelets were skillfully marketed and priced…they quickly became recognizable and give the wearer a trendy status symbol.”

For example, in sport television programming, meaning is made about the importance of certain events, such as Michael Vick returning to professional football after his incarceration. The meaning of his return was discussed and given certain meaning by media outlet, including ESPN desk reporters, sports writers, and commentators. Religious meaning is made similarly, on religious media sources such as CTN (Christian Television Network) and Sky Angel (Christian Family-Friendly TV and radio), which discuss how cultural examples fit into their world view.
The final description of fan productivity, which I see applicable to my work is Fiske’s “textual fandom production.” Through textual productivity Fiske states that “fans produce and circulate among themselves texts which are often crafted with production values as high as any in the official culture.” Fiske suggests that semiotic and enunciative productivity is often turned into textual production, where fans maintain and circulate characteristics important to them, defining the fan community. In this sense the fans in Armstrong’s community define the parameters of the community in various ways such as wearing the yellow bracelet, participating in the Lance Armstrong Foundation events, donating to his Foundation, and generally supporting Armstrong as an athlete and celebrity (i.e. following his tweets on Twitter, buying products he endorses, and reading his material). These interpretations of fan productivity will be used in Chapter 4 as I discuss current examples that illustrate how Lance Armstrong’s media characterization perpetuates muscular Christian ideology in contemporary American sport.

Conclusion

Reviewing the previous literature on sport, religion, contemporary culture, and muscular Christianity informs my current study and distinctly situates my work in a line of previous scholarship. I have suggested the muscular Christian themes observable in contemporary American sport are historically and socially situated, yet reflect modern notions of sport, athlete, role-model, morality, religion, divinity, spirituality, and inspiration. As I will provide examples of in Chapter 4, Lance Armstrong and his media

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87 Fiske, 39, 43.
88 Fiske, 39.
characterization, perpetuates a particular muscular Christian ideology, one that must be critiqued in a contemporary context.\textsuperscript{89}

The case of Lance Armstrong’s media portrayal offers examples of muscular Christian ideals that participation in games and sports has inherent value in life,\textsuperscript{90} provides physical control over the body, protects the weak, and promotes righteous causes.\textsuperscript{91} In the next chapter, I overview my research methodology and highlight other important scholars that inform my project.

\textsuperscript{89} While the construction of masculine and feminine ideologies is not a focus in this dissertation, many works on sport sociology include discussions of gender ideology construction in sport. See for example: Jay Coakley and Anita White, “Making Decisions; Gendered Sport Participation Among British Adolescence” \textit{Sociology of Sport Journal} 9 (March, 1992); Also Sheila Scranton and Anne Flintoff, \textit{Gender and Sport: A Reader} (London: Routledge, 2002).

\textsuperscript{90} Paraphrased from Ladd and Mathisen, 16.

\textsuperscript{91} Hughes, (1861), 83.
CHAPTER 3

METHODS: ON SPORTS, RELIGION, AND CULTURAL STUDIES

My dissertation methodology is qualitative, built upon the description by Norman Denzin and Yvonna Lincoln on qualitative research. They state

Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world. They turn the world into a series of representations, including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings and memos to the self. At this level, qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. This means qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them.¹

Sport sociologist David Andrews also informs my research methodology. Defining cultural activities as “particular sets of complex social, economic, political, and technological relationships that compose the social context,”² this dissertation understands sport operating in such ways. My work incorporates a multidimensional interpretive qualitative approach, involving the collection of data available on the Internet, as well as other easily accessible media outlets. The qualitative scholarship of Norman Denzin, David Andrews, Michael Silk, Chris Gratton, and Ian Jones, as well as authors within a school of thought known as radical orthodoxy, including Graham Ward,

² David Andrews has written explicitly about cultural studies usefulness for the study of sport as a culturally contextualized activity. See for example - David Andrews, “Coming to Terms with Cultural Studies” *Journal of Sport and Social Issues* 26 (2002), 110-119.
John Milbank, and Catherine Pickstock inform the methodology of my dissertation research.³

David Andrews uses the foundational work of Norm Denzin to elaborate on the nature of qualitative research specific to sport studies. Andrews discusses the variety of theories, or “lenses,” qualitative sport research has available for critical interrogation stating,

A contextual sport studies that places sport within the material context of everyday life can become an important site for critical conversations… that address the imperatives of consumption, the dynamics of the marketplace, commercial space, the sweeping reach of neo-liberal ideology, power and influence, the production of knowledge and identities, nation-states, globalization, freedom and community.⁴

The data I used in this dissertation reflects several of the material contexts Andrews mentions above; including consumption with regards to the yellow LIVESTRONG bracelets and athletic gear, commercial space in my analysis of Nike commercials, production of knowledge and identities as I examine what values people come to see Armstrong as being a good person, and community as I explore his “for-cause” events as emerging moral communities premised on muscular Christian themes. My work studies

⁴ Andrews, Mason and Silk, 4.
popular renditions and images of Lance Armstrong and the Lance Armstrong Foundation in regard to muscular Christian notions of physical training and subjection of the body, body and earth given by God, protection of the weak, and advancement of righteous causes. One aim of my research is to point out how these muscular Christian themes are observable today.

In conducting this research I examined texts about and by Armstrong and highlighted excerpts that related to the six muscular Christian themes mentioned by Thomas Hughes. I also conducted internet searches for Nike commercials that utilized Armstrong’s image and evaluated the presence of muscular Christian themes. Lastly I evaluated aspects of the LiveStrong logo, his Lance Armstrong Foundation, and the yellow LIVESTRONG bracelets again in an attempt to evaluate how Hughes’ themes operated in such cultural sites. These reflect a sampling of cultural materials through which many come to know and consume Armstrong’s image as a muscular Christian.

Through my own experience, I have come to know Lance Armstrong in a certain way, which I believe to be similar to millions of others. In my senior year of undergraduate schooling, I was asked to review a book for my history and philosophy of sport class (Appendix B). This book represents Armstrong’s first step towards an audience outside the world of cycling. This book remained a top-15 seller for more than six months. The contents of the autobiography focused mainly on Armstrong’s rise in the sport of cycling, his diagnosis and battle with cancer, and his eventual return to the sport. The book also included a discussion of his 1999 TDF victory, how he felt about it, and what the victory meant for him and for the millions of others living with cancer.

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For this project I also evaluated the most recent (2009) biography.\(^7\) Written and published before Armstrong’s 2009 return to the Tour de France, this text offers a deep look at his life through a very recent lens, giving information on his experiences over the past decade. This book includes interviews with many figures throughout Armstrong’s life and seeks to support how Lance is the world’s greatest champion. This biography offers not only a retrospective of his life, but an argument that he is the world’s greatest champion. This book, I feel perpetuates the notion that Armstrong is a remarkable athlete, worthy of praise and admiration. Wilcockson suggest that while Armstrong spends time with friends and family, he also “spends a large part of his life giving support and inspiration to others.”\(^8\) I used this book lastly for the insight it provided about Armstrong’s motives to come out of retirement in 2008. In discussing qualitative research’s use of written texts, Ian Hodder illustrates their importance because of three reasons; “access can be easy and low cost, the information provided may differ from and may not be available in spoken form, and because texts endure and thus give historical insight.”\(^9\)

With regard to the advertisements I focused my use of Armstrong commercials to those produced by Nike because they are the most abundant in popular culture. Douglas Harper has discussed the relevance of using visual cultural evidence in qualitative research, stating “visual sociology is primarily a subfield of qualitative sociology;”\(^10\) a qualitative research project that includes such cultural material relies on the researcher’s ability to draw conclusions -- “each project must be considered individually, and the

\(^8\) Wilcockson, 363.
\(^9\) Ian Hodder, “The Interpretation of Documents and Material Culture” In Denzin and Lincoln (1998), 111.
researcher must apply all he or she knows from his or her own understanding of fieldwork methods to the visual project…each solution must be made individually.” It is my objective to point out that muscular Christian themes are evoked in the selected books, Nike commercials, and Armstrong related cultural evidence.

The commercials selected span from 1999 to 2009 (from the earliest Nike/Armstrong commercials to the most recent). To my knowledge Nike produced 15 advertisements (if not more) using Lance Armstrong either as the central focus or as a figure among other athletes. In this dissertation I specifically discuss seven Nike advertisements that specifically center on Armstrong because it is his image I am evaluating in this work. I selected the Nike because of their popularity and longevity in sport culture. In addition Nike is involved with the Lance Armstrong Foundation and the corporation produced the yellow LIVESTRONG bracelets for his foundation in 2004.

The emergence of using online data in sociological research is an emerging area for cultural studies. In this dissertation I attempted to examine such evidence, and hope to explore these methods in future research. The meaning communicated through virtual can be highly informative as new forms of communication emerge in cyber space. The cultural messages expressed and used in this dissertation reflect an up-to-date reflection of sentiments being aired about Armstrong. I examined blogs, used Google searches, and followed his Twitter updates to gain a clear understanding of how he is imagined in cyberspace. Because the artifacts are posted on the Web, viewers have the ability to make

11 Harper, 137.
12 Not included in this dissertation, but an area I see ripe for studying the personification of Armstrong as religious and spiritually inspiring is with Online Data Sentiment analysis. Nancy Spencer has done this with online sentiment about tennis star Serena Williams’ foot fault at the 2009 US Open. See Nancy Spencer, “Footfault! Reflecting on Social Media Coverage of a Controversy” The Tennis Prof Chronicles (9/27/2009). <http://tennisprofchronicles.blogspot.com/>.
comments about the ways in which they consume his image and bolster the communication between producer and viewer. From this it is clear that to study the communicative power of online data is a highly important artifact for my present dissertation.

I implemented six guidelines to help understand the internet data I collected for this project. In discussing the difficult of using internet culture for research danah boyd states the researcher should 1) read ethnographies; 2) begin by focusing on a culture; 3) get into the field, hang out, observe, document, question, analyze; 4) never get too comfortable; 5) understand the boundary construction is a social process; 6) understand that making meaning is an interpretive process. I implemented all six themes as I collected data. For instance, when I read that Lance Armstrong was a heavy user of Twitter, I joined to follow his tweets and understand how this one social networking site may be a locale for the construction and dispersal of contemporary American muscular Christian themes. Never becoming too comfortable using Twitter, I was able to hang out and observe Armstrong’s posted comments and pictures, as well as how others reacted to his postings. It was in these ways that boyd’s six guidelines helped structure my collection and understanding of the data collected.

With regards to using Armstrong’s Foundation as evidence, I include this in my analysis because the Foundation’s Web site includes much information about its function and purpose; the foundation’s Web site and the yellow bracelet can be interpreted as cultural artifacts. In this way, Ian Hodder states “it appears that people both experience and ‘read’ material culture meanings.” As with the Foundation’s Web site and yellow

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bracelet “material culture is durable and can be given new meanings as it is separated from its primary producer,” and I will demonstrate in the next chapter, that the Lance Armstrong Foundation Web site and the yellow bracelet reflect the “temporal variations in meaning” that are “related to changes in meaning across space and culture” described by Hodder.14

The qualitative research methodology of this dissertation aims to provide readers with a textual analysis. I understand that language, semiotic production and artifacts function to create something in culture. As a sport scholar, my critique of the modern American sport landscape makes an argument that postulates not a fixed and definite position of sport, but rather offers an argument that is meant to become part of the continuing conversation on the effect sport has in people’s lives. I acknowledge that “the ‘undecidable’ or the uncertainty in meaning that arises from changes in context is an irreducible and a given in all texts.” As such I have accepted “the difficulty of reading intentions from speech acts or texts and eschew final answers through philosophical analysis.”15 In Nike advertisements, Armstrong’s image is semiotically created to have some meaning, and my analysis argues these meanings reflect particular muscular Christian values embedded in contemporary American notions of sport.

My situatedness as a sport scholar is crucial for any claims my work might “reveal.” I see this dissertation as a foundational work from which to begin future studies and projects. My overall aim is to illuminate muscular Christian ideals that live on in today’s world and to provide an explanation as to why this occurs in our times. I have other personal aims as well, being an athlete who deeply loves sport. I grew up with sport

14 Hodder, 119.
15 Peter Manning and Betsy Cullum-Swan, “Narrative, Content, and Semiotic Analysis” In Denzin and Lincoln (1998), 255.
as a learning environment, competed at high levels, and continue to push myself to train as a multi-sport athlete. I strongly believe that sport works in culture to promote positive moral values, and thus wanted my research to center on this topic.¹⁶

Qualitative research is often criticized because of the lack of “truth” that can be derived from such methods. My scholarly assumption -- with regards to social interaction and human communities -- is that claims of universal truths often fall short, neglect, or reiterate false assumptions. Thus, my dissertation implements an interpretive ontology.¹⁷ Interpretative qualitative research is “founded upon the premise that the social world is complex, that researchers and subjects are fundamentally and subjectively attached to the world, and that people define their own realities.”¹⁸ My resulting discussion of the analysis will be indicative of the fluid and flexible nature of qualitative research.

Essentially, the production of knowledge in my work is likely to emerge as my project unfolds and circulates, recognizing “that all truths are ‘partial’ and ‘incomplete.’”¹⁹ As a researcher I understand that this dissertation does not include all available materials, “because culture itself is not precisely boundaried and continually evolves.”²⁰ I selected examples that best illustrated how I understood muscular Christian values to be apparent in several cultural materials involving Lance Armstrong. As I collected materials in print, online, and in print I organized the subject topics into nine categories.

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¹⁶ E.g. of journal articles about sport and culture: Joe Taylor, “A Guide for Sports Parents: Making Sure Sport Really Does Develop “Character”” The Fitness Report 9 (Nov. 2000), 21-22. See also James Higham, “Commentary – Sport as an Avenue of Tourism Development: An Analysis of the Positive and Negative Impacts of Sport Tourism” Current Issues in Tourism 2 (1999), 82-90; Russell Pate, et al, “Sports Participation and Health-Related Behaviors among US Youth” Archives of Pediatrics and Adolescent Medicine 154 (September 2000), 904-911. I work in parallel with scholars who sought to understand the nature of play, sport, and games such as Allen Guttmann, Roger Caillios, Johan Huizinga, Bernard Suits, and Jean Paul Sartre. The philosophical work of these scholars involves a search for the essence of what sport is for human communities and all use supportive evidence to demonstrate their claims.

¹⁷ Ontology is understood to be the study of the nature of reality as it relates to human beings in the world.

¹⁸ Andrews, Mason and Silk, 7.

¹⁹ Andrews, Mason and Silk, 9.

Beginning in September 2008 through March 2010, I studied news articles, journal articles, blog entries, and opinion pieces about Lance Armstrong and the Lance Armstrong Foundation and then categorized their content into nine subject areas. In early September 2008, Lance Armstrong announced his return to professional cycling. This marked the beginning of my data collection period. In an effort to collect the most recent data for this project, I decided to stop data collection in March 2010 as I finished the final draft of my defended dissertation. The nine areas are representative of these major themes: 1.) Pro-Armstrong; 2.) Anti-Armstrong; 3.) Doping and Physiology; 4.) Ubiquity of Armstrong (i.e. Armstrong outside of sport/cycling); 5.) The LIVESTRONG bracelet; 6.) Armstrong’s 2009 comeback to cycling; 7.) Academic journal articles on Armstrong; 8.) Cancer and the Lance Armstrong Foundation information; 9.) Other examples of religious discussions surrounding athletes (including Tony Dungy, “The Jewish Jordan”, and Bode Miller).

My findings demonstrate a particular snapshot of the American sport culture, what Andrews refers to as the “central importance of human action and meaning in the construction of the social world.” To reinforce the trustworthiness and reliability of my work, I implement ten guidelines of qualitative research described by Michelle Fine. These theoretical guidelines provide a loose schematic framework for qualitative research that offers credibility to my work.

22 Andrews, Mason and Silk, 6.
23 In Andrews, Mason, and Silk, 9-10.
24 Michelle Fine, Lois Weis, Susan Weseen, and L. Mun Wong, “For Whom? Qualitative Research, Representations and Social Responsibilities” In Denzin and Lincoln (2000), 126-127. See concise list in Appendix A
1.) “Have I connected the voices and stories of individuals back to the set of historic, structural and economic relations in which they are situated? (Is the sporting empirical addressed in context?).” This dissertation uses contemporary materials and connects them to historical notions of masculinity, morality, and sport involved in muscular Christianity. Lance Armstrong is then used as a case study in which to examine these notions. I then use the lens of radical orthodoxy to give context to how sport and religion operate today.

2.) “Have I deployed multiple methods so that very different kinds of analysis have been constructed?” I use various forms of available cultural media of Lance Armstrong to support my argument. The multitude of methods of analysis stems from the differing materials used in this work.

3.) “Have I described the mundane (as opposed to the unique and startling)?” Because I argue that muscular Christian ideals are embedded without much notice from scholars or the public in American sport today. The purpose of this project is to offer insight into what is otherwise considered mundane.

4.) “Have some informants/constituencies/participants reviewed the material with me and interpreted, dissented, challenged my interpretations? And then how do I report these disagreements in perspective?” The majority of dissents and challenges have come from my primary advisor on this work as well as from dissertation committee members. Their critiques and nuance interpretations have helped shape the evolution of this project by honing arguments, clarifying methods, and offering challenges to my premises.

5.) “How far do I want to go with respect to theorizing the words of informants?” While my work is involved much with the written and printed word, as well as edited
commercial words, my interpretation of them extends as far as I see instances of particular muscular Christian values.

6.) “Have I considered how these data should be used for progressive, conservative, repressive social policies?” While I see this work as progressive in understanding how sport and religion functioning in contemporary America, I understand the data collected to be of a socially conservative and potentially repressive nature.

7.) “Where have I backed into the passive voice and decoupled my responsibility for my interpretations?” I tried to keep a strong voice throughout the document.

8.) “Who am I afraid will see these analyses? Who is rendered vulnerable/responsible or exposed by these analyses?” While I feel as the researcher and interpreter/philosopher of this project I am the most vulnerable and responsible, those who do not feel sport is or can be a religion may not understand the exploratory nature of my work at first. I have tried to be mindful of the ways in which others feel about traditional religion attempting to be as clear as possible in my evaluation that this is not a criticism of religion, but rather a cultural evaluation of contemporary American sport and culture. I am also concerned that some will see this project as an attack on Lance Armstrong the person. This also is not my focus, but rather on how he has been characterized in popular media and how his image operates in contemporary American culture.

9.) “What dreams am I having about the material presented, what issues am I pulling from my own biography, and what emphasis have I given these?” I acknowledge several times in the dissertation that I have been a fan of Lance Armstrong, am inspired

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by several of the popular commercials with him, and have a connection with 
contemporary American sport as a product of youth, high school, and collegiate sports as 
well as a continued adult athlete. As a philosopher and sport scholar I must be mindful of 
these conditions but also must not exclude them from my analysis because my experience 
is important to how I understand the conditions I am evaluating.

10.) “To what extent has my analysis offered an alternative to the common-sense 
or dominant discourse? What challenges might very different audiences pose to the 
analysis presented?” While this dissertation specifically suggests that what I am 
describing is an attempt to expose the common-sense and dominant discourse in a certain 
way, I am speaking only to the conditions of contemporary American sport. If I were to 
include Eastern religion and sport I would have to assume the separation of sacred and 
profane to be different in those cultures. Even common European understanding of sport 
differs from American. Thus I attempt to be as clear as possible on the fact that my 
evaluation is of contemporary American sport, and only use Armstrong as a case study to 
evaluate it.

There are “many methods and approaches that fall under the category of 
qualitative research,” state Norm Denzin and Yvonna Lincoln. This dissertation is 
situated within what Denzin labels the seventh moment of qualitative research and is 
concerned with the moral discourse of contemporary American sport, with the 
development of sacred textualities of modern sport, and how they perpetuate Judeo-
Christian ethical frameworks.

In sum, my overall methodological approach to this project is interpretive 
analysis. I offer an analysis of how I, a scholar of modern sport culture, interpret codes of 

meaning between sport, religion, and community. My qualitative research includes a case study, an analysis of the ethical foundations of contemporary American sport, and textual and visual analysis of the relationship between sport and religion. My work reflects several of the methods and approaches of modern qualitative research detailed by Denzin and Lincoln. I am engaged with my project because I see it as a way to better understand the relationship that sport and religion share in contemporary American culture, appreciating that culture is fluid, socially, and historically situated. I am adding to the understanding of how cultural spaces such as sport and religion serve as moral and socializing sites, where human beings learn what it means to be part of their community.
American cyclist, cancer survivor, and philanthropist Lance Armstrong is a media icon that reflects muscular Christian themes today. Comments made about Armstrong at a mountain bike event he held at his ranch in 2009 reveal the overwhelmingly positive view many people have about the cyclist based on his athletic achievements, cancer survival, and continued efforts to raise awareness about cancer related issues.

Remembering that one of the critical notions of muscular Christians in the nineteenth century was that being a good athlete meant being a good person, the following comments were aired by Mart Smeets in documentary about Armstrong’s experiences during his 2009 season. The question posed to all interviewees was, roughly “what does Lance Armstrong mean to you?” Respondents stated:

“Gives people so much inspiration for fighting cancer.”
“Inspires people to be the best and kinda go the extra mile.”
“It means like power, fortitude, integrity.”
“I got prostate cancer myself, and going through the radiation myself and he’s quite an inspiration to me.”

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“Giver, giving back, supporting this race, giving to his cancer foundation. Uh motivation, motivates me to come out and destroy my body and to have fun to push myself.”
“Admiration”
“I dream to be like him one day.”
“Really an inspiration and never giving up.”
“Perseverance, success, stand-up guy. Someone that these kinda folks can live up to.”
“Good role model about getting through adversity.” ²

This chapter specifically seeks to explore and provide commentary on the ways in which Lance Armstrong’s image is constructed through various forms of media to reflect six particular muscular Christian ideals found in the written work of Thomas Hughes.³ As evidence, I will use two books, a variety of Nike television commercials, blog comments, online news articles, and examples from the Lance Armstrong Foundation (including the LiveStrong label and yellow LIVESTRONG bracelet). The material collected for this dissertation suggests Armstrong’s media persona as a hero-role model is representative of particular, contemporary American muscular Christian values. Remember John MacAlloon’s statement with which I opened this dissertation – MacAlloon wonders how muscular Christianity continues to predominate in American culture. I believe Armstrong to be an illustrative example and applicable case study to examine the continued presence of muscular Christian themes in contemporary American sport culture.

The earliest goals of muscular Christianity focused on the development of manly character through sport participation to develop well-rounded Christian men. With regards to this current project, Robert Feeney, citing Pope John Paul II suggests, “perhaps today we need to question ourselves on how our physical fitness and athletic

³ Thomas Hughes, Tom Brown at Oxford (London: Macmillan, 1861), 83.
competitions influence our spiritual development.”

Feeney says Pope John Paul II believed “all sports can and must be formative; that is, they can and must contribute to the integral development of the ‘human person.’” In nineteenth century British muscular Christianity, the “most prominent goal was to make the ‘good of society better.’” At the same time in the United States, muscular Christians operated within an evangelical Protestant ethos that emphasized “involvement in sports as common grounds for evangelism, as a means to manliness, as a method of character development,” and “as a basis for socialization into competitive society.”

My work here reflects Pope John Paul II’s call to understand how these values operate today.

This chapter will focus on six aspects Thomas Hughes used in his description of muscular Christianity: 1.) A man’s body is given to him; 2.) To be trained; 3.) Brought into subjection; 4.) And then used for the protection of the weak; 5.) For the advancement of all righteous causes; 6.) For the subduing of the earth, which God has given to the children of men. These core values inherent to the nineteenth century movement offer interesting insights to the operation of muscular Christianity in American sport today. I divide each of the six aspects mentioned by Hughes into four categories as sub-headings: themes common to all athletes, a theme not found in Armstrong’s portrayal, a theme of dual relation to Armstrong’s case, and themes observable in Armstrong’s case.

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5 Feeney, 206.
7 Ibid, 18, 21.
8 Hughes, 83.
Acknowledging, “sport functions as a primary reinforcer of social values and goals”\textsuperscript{9} today, Brian Aitken details the “North American belief that achievement, success, hard work and discipline are chief ways to godliness.” Spiritually, “sport helps to define our personal identity by supplying us with an appropriate image of what it means to be human.”\textsuperscript{10} Aitken’s description of sport operates in Armstrong’s case through particular muscular Christian values. As I will detail below, Armstrong has come to be, via his commercialized image, a character of achieved success through notions of hard work, discipline, and helping others to reflect a muscular Christian ideal for others to follow.

Jane Iwamura also helps inform the spiritual function of sport in contemporary American culture. Along with changing notions about spirituality in “non-Christian religions” Iwamura observes a cultural shift in the “events of the 1960’s, which embodied a refreshing challenge to the American Christian establishment (in the form of ‘alternative’ lifestyles and spiritual experimentation)...”\textsuperscript{11} As a result of this “transformation emerged the archetype of the American religious subject as a ‘spiritual seeker’ who journeys in search of new religious ground for reconciliation and healing.”\textsuperscript{12} I argue Armstrong’s popular characterization functions in spiritually meaningful ways for those who come to see him as reflecting muscular Christian ideals, reproduced in examples about his lifestyle and athletic achievements which will be further detailed in Chapter 5. I will begin Armstrong’s muscular Christian analysis with themes that are involved in popular Western understandings of sport.

\textsuperscript{10} Aitken, 237.
\textsuperscript{12} Iwamura, 31.
MUSCULAR CHRISTIAN IDEALS COMMON AMONG ATHLETICS

Hughes’ description of muscular Christianity is essentially about the function and use of the male physical body. All six themes are premised on the focus of “a man’s body” in the world. Hence, the first two of Hughes’ themes detail the means to gain and display a muscular Christian body. With this bodily focus of Hughes’ description, the training of and bringing his body into subjection are easily observable in Armstrong’s case.

I wish to qualify why “trained” and “subjected” are not considered the same theme in the current discussion. I understand the former term to be goal oriented while the second is a condition of one’s body. A trained body is one that sustains various external hardships designed to make the physique react to attain desired outcomes. A weightlifter uses various methods, such as a bench press to challenge the pectoral muscles so that they will develop in certain ways. A track sprinter uses various training methods to train her body to develop quick twitch reactions for speed and power. Lance Armstrong trains in the off season on mountains so that when he encounters these stages in the Tour de France, his body will perform the way he desires it to.

It is at this point the second theme of muscular Christianity enters my understanding. Once the body is trained in certain ways for specific outcomes, it has been brought into subjection. The athlete trains his/her body in an effort to achieve certain physical outcomes. Once these goals are achieved, the body has been brought into subjection. It is in these ways that I understand these two themes to be common among all athletes, inherent to any understanding of contemporary American sport. Let us

13 Hughes, 83.
examine how Lance Armstrong has been characterized in the media to reflect these two themes of muscular Christianity.

Body: To be Trained

Much evidence exists suggesting Armstrong began his intense training routines as a teenage triathlete. Wilcockson states “he had to develop an extreme self-discipline to achieve his athletic goals.”14 Armstrong’s teenage friend John Boggan agrees that in terms of training, “Lance was very disciplined and driven.”15 Armstrong admits in his autobiography that “every day after school,” he would “run six miles, and then get on his bike and ride into the evening.”16 In these examples it is clear that a central aspect of Armstrong’s muscular Christian characterization has always included intense training regimes.

As a professional cyclist, Wilcockson also discusses the training Armstrong engages in. After winning the 1999 Tour de France, his first since his cancer diagnosis, rumors he used performance enhancing drugs (EPO) abounded. Wilcockson states “what Lance was achieving in his comeback Tour was not surprising, considering his months of

15 Ibid, 40.
strenuous training, meticulous preparation, superb form coming into the race, and strong
desire to pull cycling out of the doping morass…”\footnote{Wilcockson, 270.} In a pressroom conversation, after
one reporter stated he was convinced that Armstrong was a cheat, Wilcockson reminded
him that Lance was the first “man to ride all the Tour’s climbing stages as training for the
race.”\footnote{Wilcockson, 272.}

Online articles discuss the intense training Armstrong is understood to submit his
body to. Neal Pollack writes that his gym in 2005 dedicated an entire wall to show
Armstrong’s training routines. “Under the heading ‘The Making of a Legend’ were
dozens of photographs of Armstrong…line-by-line breakdowns of his workout
regime…and a history of his life…”\footnote{Neal Pollack, “Lance Armstrong Ruined my Gym” \textit{Slate} (7/1/2005).} Also well publicized are examples that Armstrong
continuing to train while he underwent chemotherapy. Doug Ulman, president of the
Lance Armstrong Foundation reflects the training ethos of Armstrong in a medical
journal article that “at the LAF we encourage all cancer survivors who contact us to
exercise as much as they can during and after treatment.”\footnote{Douglas Ulman, “Exercise and the Rehabilitation of the Cancer Patient: Celebrating Survivorship through ‘Extreme Exercise’” \textit{Urologic Oncology: Seminars and Original Investigations} 26 (2008), 213-214.} In 2004 when Armstrong was
named one of \textit{Time Magazine’s} 100 Heroes and Icons, author Bill Saporito states “Right
now, though, the Tour is everything, and Armstrong the training fanatic is pedaling away
furiously in the hills near his home in Girona, Spain.”\footnote{Bill Saporito, “Lance Armstrong: A Commitment to Winning” \textit{Time Magazine: The 2004 Time 100 Heroes \\& Icons} (4/26/2004).} And more recently, during the
media frenzy that surrounded his 2009 comeback, his training is again well documented.
In a \textit{Vanity Fair} article, the author highlights a portion of his interview was conducted
while the cyclist worked out in his own garage. He states, “I sit in on an Armstrong
workout session in his two-and-a-half-car garage…its 100 degrees…Free weights all around. Dressed in baggy green Nike shorts, Armstrong, shirtless, runs through a sick set of pull-ups, medicine-ball exercises, and crunches, all executed in a rapid pace…”

Written accounts such as these demonstrate a small sampling of how Armstrong is depicted in the media portraying his trained muscular Christian body.

Nike television commercials also reflect Armstrong’s dedication to training. A 2001 commercial focuses on defending his first two TDF victories (1999 and 2000). Many critics, mostly French, believed the success of the cancer survivor to be the result of drug induced performance (a serious and rampant issue in the cycling world and a large part of the Lance Armstrong story). Over his career Armstrong has adamantly denied ever taking any drugs to enhance his athletic performance and he has never tested positive for any banned substances, wearing “his drug test results as a badge of honor, almost as much as all those yellow jerseys.” The 2001 Nike commercial played on this denial, claiming that everyone else thinks he is a “doper,” but really he is a true athlete, dedicated to training pure and clean.

This particular commercial uses Armstrong’s voice as he is seen in several situations; a pressroom with doctors extracting vials of blood and cameras flashing, riding his bike on the open road, in a wind tunnel, in his bed sleeping, and finally returning home after a ride in the rain. In a voiceover, Armstrong states “This is my body. I can do whatever I want to it. I can push it, study it, tweak it, listen to it. Everyone wants

to know what I’m on. What am I on? I’m on my bike, busting my ass six hours a day. What are you on?”25

The background electric sitar ends as Armstrong pulls into his garage in the rain, with the tag-line *Just Do It* appearing on the screen. This advertisement seeks to reinforce that Lance Armstrong does what any pure athlete does, exemplifying notions of his muscular Christian dedication to training. We see him giving blood throughout the commercial, with the media surrounding him snapping pictures, yet every other scene in the commercial shows him training on his bike. This particular commercial establishes the image of Armstrong as someone who engages in the amount of training necessary to perform so well and seeks to reinforce this theme of the muscular Christian ideology.

Performance enhancing drugs do not fit into the contemporary American sport ideology,26 and are not a part of what Nike seeks to exemplify in any of their commercials. Andrew Miracle and Roger Rees focus on the moral and ethical value of using performance enhancers, discussing the “clean-living ethic” among athletes.27 Nike characterizes Armstrong as just doing what he is supposed to do, adhering to the fundamental ethos of muscular Christianity athletic ideology of training hard; these images are then consumed by millions of sport viewers through their commercial depictions of Armstrong which take on muscular Christian meanings.

Several Web sites are dedicated to providing evidence of Armstrong’s superior physiology. The *Discovery Channel* did a five part series on Armstrong’s body as he

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27 Miracle and Rees, 113.
prepared for the 2005 Tour de France. Dr. Edward Coyle is considered the leading expert on Armstrong’s physiology. Most all the related articles I read mention Dr. Coyle’s multi-year testing of Armstrong, from age 21-28. Coyle claims that Armstrong’s long-term training and fat loss during the seven year study helped maximize his natural potential. What Armstrong does posses physiologically is a big and strong heart that “can pump an exceptionally large volume of blood and oxygen to his legs.” While some have questioned Coyle’s testing methodology, many still base their claims of Armstrong’s physiology on Coyle’s results. Several other Web sites result when “Lance Armstrong Physiology” is entered into a Google search. Lance Armstrong’s long time training coach Chris Charmichael also has several YouTube videos that people can watch where he shows videos of Armstrong during competition as his clients work out on stationary bikes. He says to one female on a bike as he asks her to push harder “and when you watch Lance on TV, in the time trials, that’s what he’s doing, he’s just kinda going into himself, he’s focusing on one particular aspect. He’s hurting just as bad as you are, absolutely as bad, absolutely. He’s just going a little bit faster.” Also, during Armstrong’s comeback in 2009 to cycling, several of his workout videos were posted on

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*YouTube* as well. These videos show the 37 year old doing various weight training exercises, wearing only a black pair shorts set to hard rock music.\(^{33}\)

Examples such as these demonstrate the constructed media image of Armstrong reflecting the muscular Christian theme of training the body. While training the body is a common element of all athletic pursuits, Armstrong’s case is unique in how the media expresses his training. Because of the nature of his sport, and the history of drug use, Armstrong has to overtly defend his image as a clean athlete by explicitly demonstrating the training regimen he engages in. His athletic accomplishments are thus shown to be a demonstration of his training efforts, and observable in the ways the media portrays how his body has been subjugated.

*Body: Brought into Subjection*

A body that has been brought into subjection is evidenced almost on a constant basis in the world of sport. Every day hundreds of athletes compete in physical competitions with bodies that react to the demands of the athlete. Lance Armstrong is no exception. His case does however raise an interesting way in which the muscular Christian theme of the subjection of the body is observed in his characterization. Not only is Armstrong’s body subjected physically, but also medically. As a result of his survival over cancer, Armstrong is an interesting case to examine how a disease process can function with an athlete’s body and be conceived of as subjugated.

In the final pages of his autobiography, Armstrong describes the subjection of the body one may need as they experience cancer; “So if there is a purpose to the suffering

that is cancer, I think it must be this: it’s meant to improve us.”

He then gives a prescription, for how someone should courageously deal with a cancer diagnosis, “I think we are supposed to try to face it straightforwardly, armed with nothing but courage. The definition of courage is: the quality of spirit that enables one to encounter danger with firmness and without fear.”

Controlling and facing a fear of death certainly reflects a body that has come under subjection. This perspective gives readers a way to understand Armstrong is someone who has subjected his body because he deals with harsh training, overcame cancer, and eluded death.

Sport sociologist Kyle Kusz has also written about the way in which the media has depicted Armstrong’s subject body using his victory over cancer as an example. Kusz focuses on the wounds Armstrong’s image is labeled with as he continues to pursue athletic achievements. He details the manner in which one notable sportswriter implicitly differentiates Michael Jordan and Lance Armstrong as subjecting their bodies through physical hardships to attain athletic success. “The comments of sportswriter, Jack McCallum, provide a glimpse at how these sorts of comparisons get made when he unfavorably compares Michael Jordan’s laudable performance in his last NBA Finals with Armstrong’s recovery from cancer to win the Tour, ‘We remember Jordan fighting off the flu to play heroically during the playoffs. Armstrong? He fought off death!’”

In this example Armstrong’s victory over cancer denotes a highly subjective theme. He fought off death to become a cycling champion.

34 Armstrong, 273.
35 Armstrong, 272.
36 Kyle Kusz, The Revolt of the White Athlete: Race, Media and the Emergence of Extreme Athlete in America (Intersections in Communications and Culture) (New York: Peter Lang Publications, Inc., 2007), 151.
The physical subjection of Armstrong’s body is reflected in comments he has made as well. After winning his twenty-second Tour de France stage (clinching his seventh consecutive overall victory) Armstrong states “For me, there was no pressure for the victory. It was just something I had within myself. As a sportsman I wanted to go out on top. And so that was the only incentive and the only pressure.” Armstrong had just ridden 2100 miles throughout France, and on the final stage, Armstrong decided he wanted to win and his body accommodated. Armstrong has also demonstrated the control he has over his body to others. Teammate Levi Leipheimer states, during a particular mountain stage of the 2005 Tour, “I was on the limit and I’m sure I wasn’t the only one. We couldn’t pull through at his pace, when he said ‘what are you guys doing? This is ridiculous’…it was clear he was barely breaking a sweat.” Wilcockson further elaborates on Armstrong’s ability to control his physical body as he writes about the cyclist first professional cycling race. He writes “Too scared, too fatigued, or too demoralized to continue, ninety-six men pulled out of the race. But Lance, riding solo well behind the other survivors, plowed on through the stinging rain.” Such instances characterize Armstrong as having a subjected physical body. Coupled with his well publicized training regimes, his ability to push his body beyond normal limits displays the second theme of Hughes’ muscular Christian.

It is also in the subjection of Armstrong’s body that is marked by his triumphant success over death and where I claim his image comes to take on certain spiritual and religious themes. Armstrong’s return to the sport of cycling has been marked by many as a “resurrection.” In the 1999 Tour, Armstrong began his seven year stint as the champion

37 Wilcockson, 351.
38 Wilcockson, 350.
39 Wilcockson, 111.
of this event. In a short *Sports Illustrated* article titled “Strong Enough: American Lance Armstrong wins Tour de France,” we observe his image as a resurrected athlete because of his subjected body:

In one of the biggest comeback stories in sports, cancer survivor Lance Armstrong won the Tour de France Sunday. Armstrong, who started his victory ride three weeks ago by winning the prologue, became the first American since Greg LeMond in 1990 to win the Tour. The 27-year-old Texan withstood the mountain stages, drug accusations and the burden of the yellow jersey to reach Paris.  

As a hero Lance Armstrong had to prove himself again and again, and as this article points out he was able to excel with highly competitive challengers, drug accusations, and the harsh natural environment. The subjected body of his media image clearly depicts Armstrong to be reflecting muscular Christian values to the American cultural imagination.

Also with this subjected mentality, the Lance Armstrong Foundation has come to be an entity that provides resources designed to help others believe they have control over their bodies when dealing with cancer. Joseph Campbell suggests that when a hero overcomes limitations, their vision, ideas, and inspiration are seen as more valuable by those who have not been through such a journey. Campbell states, “His second solemn task and deed therefore is to return then to us, transfigured, and teach the lessons he has learned.”

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learned of life renewed.” Armstrong’s survival of cancer makes him such a character, and his lesson involves subjecting the body to survive cancer as illustrated in the Foundations public statement:

We believe in life. Your life. We believe in living every minute of it with every ounce of your being. And that you must not let cancer take control of it. We believe in energy: channeled and fierce. We believe in focus: getting smart and living strong. Unity is strength, knowledge is power, and attitude is everything.

This is the Lance Armstrong Foundation.

Functioning in similar ways to the Nicene Creed, this statement further solidifies notions of having control over one’s destiny is an essential element of the Foundation. In reading this statement what is observable is that the LAF places the responsibility of cancer survival on the individual, and to be successful one must have control over the disease.

Armstrong is reflecting the return of a hero to his community, characterized by his ability to subject his body to physical pain and endure (both on the bike and through his dealings with cancer.) Again this portrays the particular muscular Christian values of subjecting one’s body. While some have critiqued the ways in which cancer “battles” have been problematic, one aspect is clear of the LAF; God does not factor into the equation. While Armstrong explicitly and obviously portrays the two themes of a trained and subjected body, essential in Hughes’ description of muscular Christianity, all notion of God (Christian or otherwise) have been erased/removed. Let us now look at how

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certain muscular Christian themes are not observable in this contemporary American
sport example.

A THEME NOT OBSERVED IN ARMSTRONG’S MEDIA CHARACTERIZATION

*Body is Given to Him*

As I alluded earlier, the notion of a God given body does not figure into the
muscular Christian characterization of Lance Armstrong in contemporary American
media. In fact just the opposite is observed as his body is portrayed to belong to him, and
if anyone gave it to him it was medicine and science. In Nike’s 2001 commercial,
discussed above, Armstrong states “This is my body. I can do whatever I want to it.”44
Without any question Armstrong believes his body belongs to him, it is not God-given.

In his biographical works, Armstrong states that it was science and medicine that
he believes saved his life from cancer. Armstrong states in his autobiography that the
night before his brain surgery he did not believe in praying to God, saying, “I had never
prayed a lot. I hoped hard, I wished hard, but I didn’t pray hard.” Admitting a “certain
distrust of organized religion” Armstrong states that he “believed in belief” and believed
in himself, in his doctors and in his medical treatment.45

Armstrong’s muscular Christian character continues to exclude notions of God as
he places a heavy focuses on science and technology to help him succeed in cycling.
Wilcockson suggest that “using cutting-edge technology to get the fastest bike was the
first step to Lance’s time-trial success; the next was a tough training regimen to get the

45 Armstrong, 116-117.
best out of his body." As I explained above, training is obviously an essential part of Armstrong’s muscular Christian image, but as we see here technology has replaced the God-given body found in Hughes’ description of a muscular Christian.

A THEME OF DUAL RELEVANCE TO ARMSTRONG

Subduing Earth: Which God has Given to the Children of Men

While a subdued earth God-given earth is a second theme in Armstrong’s case that removes God from his muscular Christian description, I make the claim that Armstrong in a non-God-given understanding can be seen to subdue the earth. As we saw above with regard to Armstrong’s trained and subjected body not including a notion of God, subdues the earth through his physical achievements (such as climbing mountains in record times) and his victory over cancer. In this sense Armstrong reflects this theme of muscular Christianity as part of modern sports’ control over the earth for our sporting pleasures.

While he was sponsored by the United States Postal Service, between 1999 and 2004, Armstrong did a series of Nike commercials that further solidified his image as something of an anomaly, laden with super athleticism and the power to subdue the natural world. In one of Nike’s ads titled “Magnet” (representing the notion that people are attracted to Armstrong like a magnet), the cyclist is depicted in a variety of natural settings. This commercial has no dialogue but a soundtrack that can only be described as inspirational. With an angelic voice humming, and a guitar repeating the flowing

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46 Wilcockson, 261.
47 Prior to his 1999 TDF, Lance broke the climb-time record up the Col de la Madone. Wilcockson, 264-265.
chords, a piano is added to give further depth. Finally a beat is introduced pushing the viewer into a further connection with the images on screen. Throughout this commercial Armstrong rides alone through various environments: he rides with, and then surpasses a motorcycle gang, a herd of charging bison, and rides up to a hospital cancer ward where children rush to a window to cheer him on. At this moment Armstrong looks over his shoulder, up at the children, and raises his clenched fist in a defiant salute to winning (i.e. beating cancer). He rides through a rain storm while vehicles sit parked beneath an overpass. He emerges from a dark tunnel to find himself on city streets with several other cyclists following in his path. The final scene of the commercial is of a young boy on a small bike, pulling right up to the rear tire of Armstrong. Lance takes a glance over his shoulder, and the two tires come into the same frame suggesting that this young boy is aspiring to be close to Armstrong. Lance leads all these scenes on his bike as if gravity, speed, and exhaustion are meaningless. In this sense it can be argued that Armstrong is portrayed as master of the earth and has thus subdued it.

Another Nike commercial involving his ability to subdue the earth is titled “Enjoy the Weather,” again demonstrating Armstrong’s ability to triumph over nature. This commercial further reinforces the idea that he is a man of super natural athleticism and maintains control over the natural environment. This commercial begins with Armstrong leading a group of cyclist on a ride. He looks back as if to say, “I don’t want these riders following me,” and sets off through the woods eventually pulling away from all of them. All the other riders are thrown off, tripped up, or up-ended, while Armstrong maneuvers unscathed; he returns to the road, zips up his jersey and continues on alone. The tag line “enjoy the weather” appears just before the Nike Swoosh logo.

Along with his athleticism, I see the theme of subduing the earth in Armstrong’s portrayal as he is shown to be someone who subdued cancer. Kyle Kusz illustrates this highly important component of Armstrong’s image that I believe portrays his subduing nature through his wounded body. Seldom was Armstrong portrayed in the media as suffering from cancer, or victimized by cancer. Rather he was, and continues to be a “survivor” of cancer. While this sense of Armstrong is perpetuated in the media, he becomes someone who “transcended” a disease that claims the lives of millions. Kusz states “interestingly, Armstrong’s cancer wound further enables the subsequent celebration of him as a survivor and as a white male that embodies a “human spirit” that can purportedly transcend and social limit.”\(^{50}\)

Examining the muscular Christian themes of God-given body and subduing the God-given earth reveals one particular trend in Armstrong’s muscular Christianity; God has been erased/excluded. The ways in which Armstrong is represented in various media characterizations, and even by his own admission portrays an individual who has control over his life and body. When he didn’t (during cancer), he turned to science and medicine for salvation, not God. While the previous sections relate to themes common to sports and athletes, or concerned with showing how God is not included in Armstrong’s muscular Christian depiction, I next focus on the muscular Christian themes that overwhelmingly define Armstrong’s image.

THEMES OBSERVABLE IN LANCE ARMSTRONG

As a result of his cancer survival, highly successful cycling career, and philanthropic endeavors, Armstrong reflects protecting the weak and advancing righteous

\(^{50}\) Kusz, 157.
Based on media constructions, Armstrong, the sport of cycling, and “for-cause” events have become increasingly popular in America. Seldom is Armstrong described in negative or ill-natured ways. Rumors in America of Armstrong’s use of performance enhancing substances, though prolific in non-American media, are adamantly downplayed, having never been proven to be factual. For example, when Lance Armstrong rode in the 1999 Tour, he was heralded by *Sports Illustrated* as the man who would erase the drug scandals of the past. Over the past ten years, Armstrong’s media characterization has literally been a two sided tale; with Armstrong and the American media mostly in his corner about doping allegations, and the European media (more specifically the French) taking the accusatory side. What has emerged, especially in the American context, is a story of Armstrong’s purity and

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perpetuated notions of his desire to help others.\textsuperscript{54} This work argues that Armstrong’s inspirational image, global celebrity, cancer-research philanthropy, and athletic prowess serve to perpetuate muscular Christian themes in American sport today. To clarify, this dissertation is not of Armstrong the person, but rather of his media characterization in savioristic and spiritually significant ways.

\textit{Body: Used for the Protection of the Weak}

Armstrong’s global impact as a figure who is understood to be a champion of those who are in need of protection, most specifically cancer patients is well evidenced.\textsuperscript{55} In this sense I will discuss the inspiration value of Armstrong as he is depicted using his body for the good of others, to protect them, and to offer hope. His image has been overwhelmingly constructed as a figure of inspiration for those who need it; from inspiring American soldiers overseas,\textsuperscript{56} to articles about “Heroes & Icons” in \textit{Time}


These depictions involve his giving nature in terms of giving hope and inspiration though his effort on his bike. Armstrong has appeared on the covers of *Success* and *Fortune* magazines, and he was a featured guest of Michael J. Fox on an ABC (American Broadcast Company) special titled “Adventures of an Incurable Optimist.” Armstrong’s inspiration and message has been captured in the PBS (Public Broadcasting System) children’s animated television series, *Arthur*, as well as on popular adult sitcoms. Armstrong has also been the muse of modern artists who use his likeness as they plaster large murals on the sides of buildings, accompanied by words of inspiration like “defiance”, “courage”, “action” and “hope rides again.”

![Shepard Fairey](http://crapwelike.wordpress.com/category/becko/)

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58 Armstrong appeared on the cover of *Success* magazine accompanying an article by Darren Hardy, “Winning the Race of Life” *Success* (5/5/2009). On a related note, *Success* magazine’s cover claims that it is “What Achievers Read.”
59 Armstrong was featured on the cover with fellow cancer survivor Mike Milken. The cover read “Beating Cancer: Why Leaders from Lance Armstrong to Rudy Giuliani Have Joined Mike Milken’s Crusade – and How it’s Changing Medicine” *Fortune* (12/6/2004).
In the initial *Sports Illustrated* magazine coverage of his Tour victory in 1999, Karl Haussmann, director of the LAF at the time said “this is a guy who we saw with no hair, lying in bed barely able to move after brain surgery, and now he’s won cycling’s greatest race.”63 Local Austin fans left messages at his Foundations door after he won the 1999 Tour, one of which read “Keep rolling Lance, You are an inspiration.”64 On spirituality focused Web sites Armstrong’s example is highlighted. Mike Adams of naturalnews.com says it was “Armstrong’s undeniable power of positive mindset” that was key to his survival over cancer. Spiritual growth expert and teacher James Ray says that it is “extremely doubtful” that “Lance would have defeated the disease without his optimistic outlook.”65 And fitness expert Greg Ryan uses Lance as an inspiring example of how to train efficiently, saying that “Armstrong had it right – every second does count” when you are designing and sticking to an exercise regime.66 The evidence displays the way in which Armstrong has taken on certain inspirational traits. But specifically the theme of protecting the weak is clearly observable through the efforts of his Lance Armstrong Foundation.

64 CNN/SI, “Austin power” (7/26/1999).
Armstrong describes in his book that when he learned of his cancer he decided he wanted to launch a Foundation.\textsuperscript{67} He says, “All I knew was that I felt I had a mission to serve others that I’d never had before, and I took it more seriously than anything in the world.”\textsuperscript{68} A friend says to Lance “I think you were fated to get this type of illness. One, because maybe you could overcome it, and two, because your potential as a human was so much greater than just being a cyclist.”\textsuperscript{69} This again reflects the muscular Christian theme of using a trained body for goodness in the world and for protecting the weak.\textsuperscript{70}

The words in Armstrong’s book are also similar to part of his Foundation’s manifesto. Posted on the LAF home Web page, the words “We believe unity is strength, knowledge is power and attitude is everything.”\textsuperscript{71} In Armstrong’s various Foundation endeavors, he uses the terms “fight against cancer.” “By fighting,” he says, “I mean arm yourself with all the available information, get sound opinions, third opinions, and fourth opinions. Understand what has invaded your body, and what the possible cures are. It’s another fact of cancer that the more informed and empowered patient has a better chance of long-term survival.”\textsuperscript{72}

\textsuperscript{67} Armstrong, 155.
\textsuperscript{68} Ibid, 156.
\textsuperscript{69} Ibid, 156.
\textsuperscript{70} “Muscular Christians focused on the transformation of society, assuming that participation in games and sports by adolescent males had inherent value immediately and in later life.” Ladd and Mathisen, 16.
\textsuperscript{72} Armstrong, 273. To further reveal this muscular Christian theme of protecting the weak, another passage of Thomas Hughes’ books, \textit{Tom Brown’s School Days} about fighting helps make this clear: “As to fighting, keep out of it if you can, by all means. When the time comes, if it ever should, that you have to say ‘Yes’ or ‘No’ to a challenge to fight, say ‘No’ if you can – only take care you make it clear to yourselves why you say ‘No’. It’s a proof of the highest courage, if done from true Christian motives. It’s quite right and justifiable, if done from a simple aversion to physical pain and danger. But don’t say ‘No’ because you fear a licking, and say or think it’s because you fear God, for that’s neither Christian nor honest. And if you do fight, fight it out; and don’t give in while you can stand and see.” Thomas Hughes, \textit{Tom Brown’s School Days} (New York: Puffin Books, 1857; reprint 1983), 232.
The description provided here, is very reflective of Armstrong’s persona and media characterization. In his Nike commercial, he is portrayed as an intense fighter; a fighter for his life (over cancer), a fighter in his sport to be the best, and a fighter for others (through his Foundation). We see in Armstrong’s media characterization his willingness to continue to fight for others. The LAF, the Web site, and “for-cause” charity events all stem from his desire to help those who need it; to protect the weak.

In addition to the overall mission of the LAF, there are three other LAF links with various types of information to the millions of visitors the site receives every day. In the “Learn about Cancer” page, patients can get one-on-one support, see current clinical trials, find information on making cancer treatment decisions, and hear survivor’s stories. There is also a section of this page for medical professionals to gather information to better discuss cancer with their patients. On the page for “Advocacy,” information about the LiveStrong Challenge and Team LiveStrong is available, as well as information about volunteering at events and “for cause rides.” The final page is labeled “Community Program,” in which the LAF provides information on the National Action Plan (for cancer), advertises their national partnerships, discusses more research and its role in it, lists survivorship centers, and offers a link to the Young Adult Alliance which is specifically designed to talk about cancer with young adults. Also under this particular

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73 On (12/2/2009) an estimated visit per day to the LAF homepage was 11,932. As a way to gauge how important the LAF website is for cancer information the National Cancer Institute receives 44,705 visits per day. <www.statbrain.com>

74 LiveStrong Challenge is a multi-city organized event that includes bike rides, runs and walks. The objective of this aspect of the LAF is to aggressively fight against cancer through exercise. Individuals can participate as individuals or become members of Team LiveStrong. Philadelphia hosted the event (8/23/2009) (following Seattle and San Jose in 2009), with 6500 participants raising $3.2million. The final LiveStrong Challenge occurred in Austin TX., (10/24- 25/2009).

75 LiveStrong Day first occurred in 2003 in an effort to bring change to public policy about cancer to Washington DC. By 2006, events were organized across the country to commemorate the day. By 2007, 260 events were organized, and by 2008, 640 internationally. On these annual days the LAF encourages individuals around the world to organize events and wear yellow to raise awareness of cancer. The 2009 LiveStrong Day is (10/2), Armstrong’s anniversary of being diagnosed with testicular cancer.
page is information about the awarding of grants and “programs that make a difference in the lives of people affected by cancer.” What one learns from a single visit to this website is that the LAF offers a wealth of cancer information, links, and programs. It stands as a reminder that Lance Armstrong is the figure who is central in a fight against cancer and reinforces his public image as a muscular Christian who offers protection to the weak.

This theme is also observable in Lance Armstrong Foundation and LiveStrong commercials. Usually (but not always) Armstrong is the spokesperson in the ad with a focus on the support the Foundation provides and providing inspirational images that give meaning to the term “LiveStrong.” In 2009, accompanying his return to professional cycling and the Tour De France, Nike produced a television commercial focused now on his LiveStrong image. Nike and LiveStrong are synonymous in the commercial titled “Driven” where the text voices Armstrong’s purpose for his return. The commercial is premised on the notion that Armstrong is not returning for himself but is riding for others, reflecting the muscular Christian ideology of protecting the weak. This commercial sought to bring awareness to his Foundation and deny the selfish reasons some in the media had apparently claimed about his return.76

76 Kevin Blackistone says because his name is Lance Armstrong “and because of all he’s been through, what he’s accomplished and how many people he continues to inspire, we aren’t going to call him what he has unquestionably become: selfish.” Kevin Blackistone, “Ultimately, Lance Armstrong Pedals for 1” fanhouse.com (7/15/2009). <http://www.fanhouse.com/2009/07/15/ultimately-lance-armstrong-pedals-for-1/>; Bill Gifford says of Armstrong, before reacting to this commercial, that like Sarah Palin “they demonize their enemies while at the same time cultivating nonstop melodramas that keep them in the news.” Bill Gifford, “JerkStrong: How Lance Armstrong is like Sarah Palin” Slate.com (7/7/2009). And fearing for his physical safety before 2009, The Guardian printed an article in which Armstrong states, “They’re some aggressive, angry emotions [in France]. If you believe what you read, my personal safety could be in jeopardy.” Donald McRae, “Armstrong Fears Tour de France Attack” The Guardian (11/18/2008).
The background images in this commercial focus on cancer patients either in treatment or rehab, all filmed in black and white, while Lance is interjected riding his bike in brilliant color. His voice is accompanied by a slow playing piano and he pronounces: “The critics say I’m arrogant, a doper, washed up, a fraud, that I couldn’t let it go.” As the music becomes faster, and the patients are shown to be moving out of bed and into active rehab he continues. “They can say whatever they want. (pause). I’m not back on my bike for them.”77 The commercial ends zooming in on Lance’s determined face as he rides, and the words Just Do It flash up followed the Nike Swoosh. This commercial reinforces the notion that Lance Armstrong is no longer on a personal quest for victory, but is involved in an effort to continue to bring attention to his Foundation and cancer awareness to help others. The statement of his selfless sacrifice and riding for others themes are deep and pronounced. Not only is Armstrong going to suffer physically by undertaking such a feat, but he does so willingly to inspire and help give hope and protection, reflecting a clear muscular Christian value.

Armstrong continues to reflect this theme as a highly visible public figure. Every few days, either Armstrong or the LAF Twitter page posts an individual’s name and sentimental comment about someone who has passed away or has succeeded in surviving cancer. Wilcockson states that

Ever since he has won his own battle with cancer, Lance has quietly helped hundreds; maybe thousands, of people cope with cancer through his visits, phone calls, e-mails, letters, and signed photos. Most of these people are strangers to him, who have on their own or through friends reached out for his help. And no matter how demanding his schedule, he always finds time to talk at length to a

patient with terminal cancer or write an inspirational message that will be read at a memorial service for someone he’s never met.\textsuperscript{78}

Lance Armstrong said of his Foundation in 2003, “The idea of living strong is more than a few words in a mission statement…” It is “supporting innovative community programs to funding cutting edge research to focusing public awareness and public policy on the needs of millions of cancer survivors.”\textsuperscript{79} It also seems that Armstrong’s efforts to protect others are working. Elizabeth Edwards states,

Go to a LiveStrong summit and you’ll see how important he and his organization are to people across the country. This is their lifeline, where they go for information, where they go for support; and if you’re going for wide and deep impact, I think he’s really found the perfect match with his skill set and his appeal.”\textsuperscript{80}

Armstrong provides an image of support and inspiration for the millions who consume his image. In his efforts to protect others, he has become the beacon of hope and inspiration for others. Elizabeth Edwards speaks again to the inspiration of his return for others,

I think that the thing that really means a lot to people like me who have a cancer is what he’s doing right now, training and racing again, we each try to get over our own little anthills of problems, and his man just goes searching for mountains. It makes it a little harder to complain, whatever it is you’re facing… He keeps on

\textsuperscript{78} Wilcockson, 359.
\textsuperscript{80} Wilcockson, 362.
doing these *impossible* things when we’re faced with really possible tasks, tasks that are possible compared with what he’s going thorough.\textsuperscript{81}

Prior to the 2009 Tour De France, the LAF Web page aired several personal stories about others who have dealt with cancer. Fourteen short video clips of personal stories were available on the LAF homepage, and could also be accessed when visiting Nike’s home Web page. Written accounts are continually updated and come from individuals who add their story to the site.\textsuperscript{82} The theme of these stories is to illustrate how the LAF helps individuals deal with, beat, and succeed in life after cancer, connected to Armstrong as a protector of the weak.

Each short film takes a particular view of cancer. One story is about a young boy with cancer, Jack Hoenger, and his segment is titled “Get to Know Jack.”\textsuperscript{83} This segment is designed to inspire viewers to learn as much as they can about cancer. Jack’s segment is interspersed with images of him now, his head devoid of any hair and strikingly pale, with images of his childhood before cancer. The segment ends with Jack saying “if you don’t know cancer, you don’t know jack.” This video is accompanied with a song “Maybe Tonight, Maybe Tomorrow” composed specifically for the LAF by a local Austin band *Wideawake.*\textsuperscript{84} Most segments have a similar storyline to Jack’s. For

\textsuperscript{81} Wilcockson, 363.
\textsuperscript{82} Part of the personal stories come from the *Chalkbot*, a robotic street marker, made popular during the 2009 TDF, where LiveStrong supporters could have a message or family/friends name chalked onto the course. This large scale chalking was supported by the LAF and allowed for by the TDF organizers. (Chalking the course with slogans and messages of inspiration for the riders has a long history in the TDF.) John Sutter, “Robot Chalks Tweets on Tour de France Route” *CNN.com* (7/14/2009). \(<http://www.cnn.com/2009/TECH/07/14/tour.france.chalkbot/index.html>\).
\textsuperscript{84} rmacon, *Wideawake* - “Maybe Tonight, Maybe Tomorrow” *YouTube.com* (8/25/2006). \(<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XoPb_KS39u8&feature=related>\). The band describes themselves on their web page as ‘The group’s sensibilities attain a personal connection while reaching for something bigger, something more epic than the everyday. ‘We all need something bigger than ourselves to hold our heads high’ croons Leger, reaching an assured epiphany on ‘Bigger Than Ourselves’. In doing, Wideawake
example, the title for Laurel and Rebeccah Wassner, twin professional triathletes’ segment is titled “It’s about going through it together;”

85 television and film actor Patrick Dempsey’s segment is titled “It’s about how I can help;”

86 actor and leukemia survivor Evan Handler says “It’s about telling your story;”

87 four time Iditarod champion Lance Mackey’s segment is titled “It’s about doing what you set out to do;”

88 and founder of his own foundation for young adults with cancer and partner with the LAF Doug Ulman claims “It’s about creating your own luck.”

These stories on Armstrong Web site are clear depictions of other inspiring stories of cancer survival and success to sustain a community of hope and inspiration in an effort to protect the weak. Although these stories are personal accounts of a particular struggle with the disease, they are the way many experience the protection Armstrong has provided. By listening to the stories of others, many can feel safe in a community of cancer patients, a community created by Armstrong. Within the context of all these stories it is observable that Armstrong operates as the figure that inspires and gives hope, offering protection for the weak and reflecting this theme found in muscular Christian ideology.

reminds us that faith in a better tomorrow is justified…Each thump of the bass drum and each tingling guitar chord resonates with the thoughts of inspiration; of turning pain into an element of hope, of encouragement. In short, it's music to make you feel alive.”


85 Laurel and Rebeccah Wassner, “It’s About Going Through it Together” Nike (2009).


<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UpmLujmgC50>.

87 Evan Handler, “It’s About Telling Your Own Story” LiveStrong video (2009).


<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DKD3Eblbuyg>.


As stated above, Armstrong decided he wanted to launch a Foundation while he was battling cancer himself.\textsuperscript{90} He says, “All I knew was that I felt I had a mission to serve others that I’d never had before, and I took it more seriously than anything in the world.”\textsuperscript{91} Armstrong’s continued media characterization has perpetuated the muscular Christian theme of advancing cancer causes as well as others since this time.

Wilcockson states that in 1999 Armstrong was determined to save, not cancer patients, but the drug tarnished image of the Tour de France.\textsuperscript{92} In 1998, the Tour before Armstrong’s return, the top two winners of the race had been found to have doped during the race, negating their victories. Again, an initial \textit{Sports Illustrated} article about Armstrong’s 1999 Tour victory allude to his “savior-like” image for the sport and the Tour’s drug image. The article discusses that “many feared the drug scandal that haunted last year’s Tour would emerge again. Fans had grown weary of the corrupted sport. And then came Lance Armstrong. The American’s comeback captivated the world, and saved cycling.”\textsuperscript{93} In an odd twist of irony, Armstrong, who wanted to save the race from being associated with performance enhancing substances, became the lightning rod of those allegations since his initial victory in 1999.\textsuperscript{94}

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\textsuperscript{90} Armstrong, p.155.
\textsuperscript{91} Ibid, p.156.
\textsuperscript{92} Wilcockson, 270-71.
\textsuperscript{93} “The Tour’s Cure: Armstrong Helps Erase Memory of Drug Scandal” \textit{CNN/SI} (7/26/1999).
\end{flushright}
Armstrong has been able to capitalize and use his celebrity for the advancement of other human and environmental beneficial causes. Armstrong does advance athletic endeavors; there has been a substantial rise in cycling popularity during his career. Armstrong’s support of more bike lanes helped change the landscape of many American communities, and Armstrong has exemplified that physical activity is a way to stay healthy, even during cancer treatment. And because of his spiritually significant image Armstrong inspires people to go into the world and make a difference.

Armstrong’s leadership beyond cycling is well evidenced, yet he has mainly sought to effect positive social change through his cancer Foundation. After Armstrong’s retirement from cycling in 2005, he turned his efforts “to the high-profile life he led as an icon in the cancer community and as an A-list celebrity…Lance focused on promoting cancer awareness: He spoke at fundraisers; participated in charity bike rides and marathons; visited with cancer patients; and even courted presidential candidates to advocate for more research dollars for cancer.” Armstrong certainly became a leading

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95 For instance, Versus network saw a 77% increase in viewership in the first 10 stages of the 2009 Tour over the same time of the 2008 race because of the return of Lance Armstrong to the TDF. Mike Reynolds, “Versus Soars with Tour de France, Armstrong” multichannel.com (7/17/2009). <http://www.multichannel.com/article/315644-Versus_Soars_With_Tour_de_France_Armstrong.php>.


98 Wilcockson, 4.
advocate for cancer issues because of his successes in his sport.\textsuperscript{99} At first it was his LiveStrong slogan that came to be meaningful in a variety of ways for the advancement of cancer-causes.

LiveStrong:

Since its introduction to mass audiences, the LiveStrong campaign has been broadcast in a myriad of commercial and personal manifestations. 

Facebook, the online networking server, includes a page dedicated to what ‘LiveStrong’ means to those who belong to the “LiveStrong and the Lance Armstrong Foundation” group. This group was created on (2/27/2009). As of (1/25/2010), nineteen posts had been made. Some of the sentiments include:

To me, LIVESTRONG is about attitude. It's about living live to the fullest, making the most of the opportunities, always being positive even during the bad times & when you are faced with a challenge in life you face it head on & fight to very the end. LIVESTRONG is... when things get hard in sport or in sickness that you can't stop, won't stop, never stop.

LIVESTRONG means everything. It's an attitude, a philosophy, a feel-better-cause. It keeps me on my bike, and on my own life-track, in every situation in life! The yellow bracelet is my everyday fellow and I am happy to be a healthy person who can give some of my energy to others! It keeps me thinking and stops me from being blinded by illusions. I really appreciate all LIVESTRONG supporters and the Foundation itself goes for and would like to thank you! Carpe Diem!

LiveStrong is to live thru cancer, and if possible, beyond. To grablife by the balls and live it to the full. To appreciate all that is good in life and not dwell on the bad stuff, as, as a survivor, i know i shouldn't be here. Thats what LiveStrong means to me.

(Evidence of the international scope of LiveStrong):

Hi, I live in Venezuela. My English is not very good. I’m sorry. I am surviving of cancer. I think one should live life strongly in honesty, helping people who need it and be well with itself. Thinking and thank God for allowing us see the light of each day

(One high school student elaborates in depth):

What does LIVESTRONG mean to me? I’ve been a fan of Lance for a long time. He burst onto the circuit when I was a kid and I can honestly say, I wasn't that big of a fan growing up. I heard about his cancer and read It's Not About The Bike. I watched all of the Tours in person to see the man I called my hero and my inspiration to live as strong I possibly could.

LIVESTRONG means so much to so many. For some, it's a label, just another thing to wear when you get ready for the day. For those who suffer from cancer or those who help those with cancer, it represents so much. I can't explain the inspiration people feel from it. I never take my wristband off. My previous one i wore until it literally fell off my arm one day.

LIVESTRONG is hope, motivation and inspiration. It keeps people alive and not only that, it helps us workers feel it too. I feel naked without a LIVESTRONG wristband on. It makes me feel stronger when I wear it. It's something I cannot possibly explain.

LIVESTRONG is LIVESTRONG. When I wear that wristband, I feel almost invincible. I know that nothing bad can ever happen when I wear it. Somedays, I wake up wishing I had cancer so I can know how it feels to those who suffer from the bastard. It means so much and so many different things to people, one cannot possibly explain it's full meaning.  

In these responses we see the strong emphasis on advancing goodness in the world and display how others view Armstrong and understand the term LiveStrong in their lives.

The LAF call those who follow and participate in their cause The LiveStrong Army. This ‘army’ includes the thousands of volunteers that help organize and run LiveStrong events such as annual LiveStrong rides for cancer awareness (The Ride for the Roses). Lance

has inspired his fans to be like him; to go out into the world and inspire others, to help others, and to continue whatever they decide LiveStrong means in their lives.

The term LiveStrong has taken on new meaning as people purchase the bracelet and live out the words as they see fit. Close friends to Armstrong acknowledged that people have reinterpreted the slogan to fit their own purposes, regardless of their connection to cancer. Bill Stapleton said in 2009 some people buy the wristband “because their uncle has cancer, but there was this broader group that wanted to quit smoking, wanted to exercise, wanted to be a better parent – and the band reminds them of that.\textsuperscript{101} For example, on a Facebook “Discussion” of ‘How many LIVESTRONG bracelets have you gone through?’ one woman replies:

I'm still wearing my original bracelet that I got from a Nike store when they first came out, I'm proud to say. I don't take it off. I have purchased replacements but have ended up giving them to friends. I first got it to symbolize my drive for fitness, but have since had to deal with a loved one who has cancer, (RCC) so when I look at this yellow band, I know he can beat this. It gives me hope.\textsuperscript{102} Another respondent said “I am on my second one in 4 years . I never take it off never it keeps me going when i feel tired i look at it and it reminds me to LiveStrong and never give up.”\textsuperscript{103} LiveStrong, now observed in a athletic clothing line, reflects the efforts of Armstrong to advance righteous causes. Another highly successful artifact of the LiveStrong effort is the yellow rubber bracelet.

\textsuperscript{101}Tripp Mickle, “Five Strong Years: How a $1 Bracelet Turned Into Sports’ First Commercial Philanthropic Brand” \textit{Street & Smith’s Sports Business Journal} (9/14/2009).
\textsuperscript{102} Shelby Neff Haley, \textit{Facebook.com} (posted 2/9/2010).
\textsuperscript{103} John Sulouff, \textit{Facebook.com} (posted 2/13/2010).
The Yellow LIVESTRONG Bracelet:

In May of 2004, Nike and the Lance Armstrong Foundation launched a campaign that took the LiveStrong message and sold it directly to the consumer. The yellow bracelet with the word LIVESTRONG etched into it has sold over 70 million bands. In an effort to raise money for his Foundation, the $1 yellow bracelets were sold individually in Nike Stores around the world starting the summer of 2004. In addition to raising $25.1 million within six months for cancer research, the bands became a symbol of cancer awareness and have come to be a symbol and mantra encouraging people to live life to the fullest. In 2009 Tripp Mickle commented on the success of the bracelet, exploring its usefulness for logo recognition and inherent meaning. “A study commissioned by the foundation in 2005 showed that 53 percent of adults were familiar with the name LiveStrong and 96 percent of those were aware of its connection to Lance Armstrong. Of the people familiar with the brand, 80 percent associated it with inspiration, 70 percent with cancer and 41 percent with living each day to the fullest.” Initially intended to raise money and cancer awareness, the yellow bracelet has evolved to become a highly recognizable cultural symbol for those living with the disease, those who have been touched by the disease, or those in support of finding a cure. By

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105 Tripp Mickle.

wearing the yellow rubber band, an individual can directly support Armstrong’s advancement of righteous causes.\textsuperscript{107}

The yellow LIVESTRONG “for cause” band, introduced in 2004 began an avalanche of replicas for all kinds of causes, from the war effort in Iraq, to green pro-environment bands. John Kerry, democratic senator from Massachusetts and 2004 presidential hopeful sported his yellow bracelet on the campaign trail, having battled prostate cancer himself in 2003.\textsuperscript{108}

The yellow bracelets and the slogan LiveStrong, both associated with Armstrong, have come to take on a variety of righteous cause meanings for the millions of band wearers. In this sense Armstrong’s advancement of the cancer-cause has influenced other causes. As a result, Hughes’ original line of advancing ALL righteous causes may be seen by some as an accurate way to understand Armstrong’s muscular Christian description.


There is no limit to how far LiveStrong extends into other righteous causes and thus he may actually advance many more than intended.

The yellow bracelet is also an indicator of contemporary American consumptive culture where individuals think that by purchasing and wearing the bands they have the sense of helping a cause. They deem certain activities (usually because of popular media coverage) worthy of financial and personal investment. But just giving this is not enough in contemporary America; something needs to reflect that you gave. Radical orthodoxy scholars discuss postmodern nihilism as a widespread cultural condition, and one example I have discovered of this is the consumption and display of the yellow bracelet as an outward symbol that someone feels they truly gave support. Other examples of this include pink ribbons for breast cancer, red ribbons for AIDS, and “Jesus fish” car decals. The purchasing of the bracelet allows many to feel as if they are “doing good” for others. They support a cause, an ideal and this makes them feel good about themselves and about others who they see wearing the bracelet. They see themselves living a certain life that gives them identity and meaning. Ladd and Mathisen also suggest the American view of muscular Christianity in the late nineteenth century, because of a “succession of revivals that propelled the social phenomenon of sport


beyond the character-development ideology to take on the added goal of making the ‘bad of society good.’” The yellow band makes individuals feel connected to others in their community and creates a belief that they are acting in accordance with the prescribed actions of bettering themselves and those around them; advancing righteous causes.

The bracelets are also highly popular at athletic and for-cause events. The popularity of “for cause athletic events” has certainly increased over the last decade. Samantha King documents in her 2006 book Pink Ribbons, Inc. that “since the mid-1980’s, physical-activity-based fund-raising events (or “thons”) for breast cancer have sprung up across the United States.” This is also evidenced with LiveStrong events and associated with the yellow bracelet. A marketing officer for a nationwide athletic apparel store has said of the LIVESTRONG bracelet, “it’s not an apparel and footwear brand. It’s a movement and a cause around which people have great passion.”

In the summer and fall of 2009 I competed in two endurance events (neither for causes). One was a half-Ironman in central Illinois and the second was the Marine Corps Marathon in Washington D.C. I have included some pictures from these two events. The purpose of the following pictures was not to capture examples of LIVESTRONG bracelets (if I had done this I would have had countless images to include in this document). However, their inclusion is to demonstrate the bracelets prevalence at sporting events, especially at triathlons and marathons. By sheer happenstance my

113 Ladd and Mathisen, 13.
115 King, 29.
116 Mickle.
117 A half-Ironman triathlon consists of 1.2 mile swim, 56 mile bike, and a 13.1 run in that order. A marathon is 26.2 mile run.
photographer was unknowingly able to capture examples of the yellow bracelet as I competed.
Also in the summer of 2009 The LiveStrong Challenge – literally a tour of physical-activity events to raise awareness and money for cancer -- hit the cities of Seattle, San Jose, Philadelphia, and Austin. Combined, these events included thousands of participants, volunteers, and organizers. Along with these specific events dedicated to the LAF, the bracelet can be seen at thousands of sporting events nationwide and on the global scale. Part of Nike’s aim at launching the bracelet during the summer of 2004 was to get Olympic athletes to wear them at the Athens games. As an avid triathlete and distance runner, I am privy to events that foster a culture of the Living-strong mentality, and I see many endurance athletes wearing their yellow bracelet in their daily lives, as they train, and when they compete. The vast number of bracelet wearers and the connections between athletic participation and success is hardly disguised. While some may wear them to be “cool,” the majority of bracelet wearers see them as positive cultural symbols and signs of the “good-cause” they are associated with; a sign ultimately connected with Lance Armstrong.

The Lance Armstrong Foundation:

The Lance Armstrong Foundation (LAF) is a non-profit organization that was created while Armstrong was still recovering from testicular cancer. When Wilcockson interviewed Linda Armstrong, Lance’s mother, in his biography, she states that it was Lance’s immediate desire after hearing of his disease to create a foundation for others. He specifically wanted to increase the amount of information available for others suffering

\[ ^{118} \text{In 2009 alone, the LiveStrong Challenges included more than 20,000 participants and raised more than} \ $10 \text{ million for cancer research. <http://www.livestrongchallenge.org/site/?c=frKP11PAloE&b=3920225>.} \]
\[ ^{119} \text{Tripp Mickle, “A Brand Built Around a Band: Already Steeped in Pop Culture, Livestrong Concept Branches Out”} \textit{Austin Business Journal} \textit{(9/18/2009).} \]
from the disease. \textsuperscript{120} Armstrong’s desire for the foundation was expressed before he knew if his own cancer would take his life. In his desire to give back, Armstrong admitted a lack of information about cancer available to those diagnosed with the disease. He used his experience as a platform to create his Foundation. The establishment of this Foundation again portrays Armstrong as reflecting the muscular Christian ideals of fighting for others and advancing righteous causes.

Beginning with a charity ride to raise cancer awareness, the inaugural “Ride for the Roses” began with a $25,000 donation from a local office supplies company. In its second year (1998) the LAF received a check from Sprint for $100,000 to support the ride. By its third year the ride alone raised $1 million for the Foundation. That was 1999; the first of seven consecutive years Armstrong would win the Tour de France.

Armstrong’s desire to create his own Foundation reflects his competitive nature. He was not willing to give the money to national organizations, but rather felt he could provide a better resource center for cancer related issues. \textsuperscript{121} This would be an attractive component to anyone who knows that competition is an essential element of American sport ideology, and again, is in fact, an essential element of the muscular Christian ideology. Ladd and Mathisen again support his by saying that in the United States muscular Christian ideals were helpful for the “socialization into competitive society” which assumes “the presence of activists who pursued innovation and change.”\textsuperscript{122} Armstrong’s actions reflect this “activist” characterization of muscular Christian ideology. In the American ethos, hard work and competition on the field is also considered valuable off the field. Muscular Christian values are at play as we often hear

\textsuperscript{120} Wilcockson, 233.
\textsuperscript{121} Wilcockson, 236.
\textsuperscript{122} Ladd and Mathisen, 18.
of athletes like Armstrong being competitive in other, non-athletic activities and suggest
that competitiveness is a positive trait learned through sport and transferable to other life
activities.\textsuperscript{123}

The use of Armstrong’s public battle with the disease has made him the poster
child for advancing successful for-cause efforts. The Lance Armstrong Foundation has
had a real world impact as well, when on July 29\textsuperscript{th}, 2008 as a result of the work done by
the Foundation and other organizations the “Caroline Pryce Walker Conquer Childhood
Cancer Act”\textsuperscript{124} was passed by President George W. Bush which significantly increased
the amount of federal dollars spent on childhood cancer research. With Armstrong
persistently advocating for cancer research funds, and taking bicycle rides with Presidents
to push this legislation, it is clear that Armstrong embodies the advancement of righteous
causes theme of muscular Christianity.

FINDINGS:

Lance Armstrong represents the iconic figure that embodies several muscular
Christian themes observable in contemporary American sport. His story as documented in
media examples, his is a universal tale of struggle, disappointment, near-death
experience, victory, and triumph. His bout with cancer is a well documented and
inspiring story that has influenced the way he has been characterized in popular media.
His desire to ride again, and inspire others to do great things has become his

\textsuperscript{123} Thomas Hughes, \textit{Tom Brown’s School Days} (London: Macmillan, 1857), 232. “And if you do fight,
fight it out; and don’t give in while you can stand and see,” suggesting in this passage that it is not
Christian to back away from a fight. Also discussed in Miracle and Rees, 16 and 42.
\textsuperscript{124} House Resolution (H.R.) 1553: Caroline Pryce Walker Conquer Childhood Cancer Act of 2008. Enacted

104
commercialized image. I observed three overall findings in my analysis of Lance Armstrong in this dissertation.

_Cancer makes him unique_

First, Armstrong’s battle with cancer that nearly claimed his life is a story that reflects cultural notions of resurrection, inspiration and spirituality. As Kyle Kusz detailed the example of a sports writer who was awed that Armstrong had “fought off death,” Armstrong’s story of cancer survival makes him an attractive character. Specifically, his resurrection takes on a powerful theological and heroic meaning. Joseph Campbell has identified resurrection as an important element of the hero monomythic cultural stories.\(^\text{125}\) To live after death is very much a spiritual notion and Armstrong’s story comes to be infused with spiritual meaning primarily because the American media has publicized his resurrection, both as a person and an athlete. As a cancer survivor Armstrong has a unique view of facing death and overcoming it. While overcoming death is not a theme of muscular Christianity, his success over cancer is a highly attractive theme in contemporary American culture. As this aspect of his story gets told over and over again, through different media, and continues to be intimately tied to his story, the relevance of overcoming death has set Armstrong apart from other athlete hero-role models. As I have shown Armstrong to reflect a contemporary form of muscular Christian sport icon, his victory over death reflects another highly relevant theme that people find meaning in today.

\(^{125}\) Joseph Campbell, _The Hero with a Thousand Faces_ (New York: Pantheon, 1949), 213.
Wishy-Washy religious guy as a Contemporary muscular Christian

It has been said about Armstrong that he is an atheist (does not believe in God), \(^{126}\) that as a youth he was “‘really tough-minded, didn’t have excuses, didn’t believe in God, didn’t need this or that, didn’t need his father…’”\(^ {127}\) Yet in reading Wilcockson’s biography of Armstrong many comments may reveal a more open mind related to spiritual experiences on and off the bike. When Armstrong rode an amazing stage of the 1995 Tour in honor of his fallen teammate Fabio Casartelli he said “‘this is it, nobody sees me anymore.’ I just rode to the finish with…call it a state of grace”\(^ {128}\) Also reflecting Armstrong’s broadmindedness toward emerging spiritual experiences, he has recently picked up Yoga as a part of his physical training practices posted on his Twitter pages on November 28\(^ {th}\), 2009 and December 11\(^ {th}\), 2009.\(^ {129}\)

Armstrong has also been described as having a spiritual rebirth or awakening after his recovery from cancer. After a bike event sponsored by Armstrong to help raise money for cancer research in 1997, his friend Adam Wilk said, “‘There was a party afterward at Lance’s place. We were sitting and talking with him in front of his house when a couple of kids walked up, bald heads, cancer kids – and Lance was so different. My wife said to me, ‘My God, has he changed!’ People have to touch him now, like Jesus… They’re mesmerized by him.’”\(^ {130}\) Armstrong himself stated “‘I’ve said that if I was good to my family, true to my friends, if I gave back to my community or to some cause, if I wasn’t a

\(^{126}\) Just recently, Armstrong posted an article on his Twitter feed about the Texas legislative body deciding what items to keep in the proposed changes to a new social-studies curriculum. Armstrong posted “Seriously – scary” to Russell Shorto, “How Christians Were the Founders?” New York Times (2/14/2010).

\(^{127}\) Wilcockson, 79.

\(^{128}\) Ibid, 187.


\(^{130}\) Wilcockson, 237.
liar, a cheat, or a thief, then I believed that should be enough. I think that’s a very spiritual approach because that’s why people often go to church, to learn all those things.” Wilcockson says about Armstrong’s comments here, “These were the values that now sustained Lance.” Armstrong’s bout with cancer was a life altering and spiritually altering experience for him.

Yet it appears that his public image has never included a concept of “God” or organized religion. In this sense, he is wishy-washy when it comes to religion, which is telling of the contemporary sport culture. Muscular Christian values can be associated with an individual who has no religion, Christian or otherwise. Also interesting is the fact that Armstrong operates as a spiritual icon for many who follow his example and believe in his efforts. This will be discussed further in Chapter 5.

While Armstrong is not Jesus, his commercial image has depicted spiritual and religious motifs (as well as muscular Christian themes), like the cancer patients who need to touch him. His real life religious convictions are wishy-washy (not unique in contemporary American culture) but his media characterization perpetuates themes inherent to muscular Christianity.

Removal of God in Contemporary American Muscular Christianity

One final finding that informs this dissertation is related to the erasure or exclusion of God in contemporary American muscular Christian characterizations. The success and growing popularity of the Lance Armstrong Foundation perpetuates

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131 Wilcockson, 282-283.
Armstrong’s image, not only as a cyclist, but also as a philanthropic human being. Yet he pursues these efforts because he feels the need to, not because of religious convictions involving faith in God. Millions are diagnosed with cancer every year around the globe, and billions are affected. Armstrong has designed a widely successful foundation and has been highly successful in attracting supporters. His continued efforts, coupled with the commercialization efforts of Nike and his Foundation, along with his continued cycling successes, keeps his agenda popular, acting to reinforce Armstrong’s own image as savior. His efforts reflect his beliefs and ideas which do not include God (Christian or otherwise).

Jeffrey Mahan, in describing what most American “intuitively” understand to be religion (organized devotional practices focused on a concept of God or gods), suggests that cultural studies scholars will continue to “discover a variety of relationships between religion and popular culture.” 134 Participants in modern forms of popular culture “write themselves into” events, “through their activity…wearing costumes, belonging to fan clubs, attending conventions, memorizing lore, and even creating and enacting their own tales.” 135 This is evidenced in Armstrong’s case with the yellow bracelet, reading his books, following him on the Tour de France, his various social networks (Twitter), and giving to and attending his for-cause events. Armstrong’s story and philanthropy perpetuated in the media, reflects a larger condition of contemporary American culture that has removed notions of God from daily activities, as radical orthodoxy suggest. This may be one reason why Armstrong’s image could fill a spiritual and religious role in

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contemporary times. Milbank states religion fulfills certain social and personal needs for all humans and “given this more complex picture, one has to revise the presentation of the way in which ‘religion’ intervenes in ‘society’ for American sociology.”

It appears that millions, through contemporary media outlets (television commercials, internet blogs, YouTube fan productions), based on muscular Christian themes and social assumptions, deem the actions of Lance Armstrong to be “good” and reflect positive social elements. Although the muscular Christian themes Armstrong’s positive image relies on historically included notions of God, cases such as his reveal a larger condition of contemporary American culture. Radical orthodoxy will help construct an understanding of this condition in Chapter 5.

Conclusion

If contemporary Americans overwhelmingly view sport as a universally positive social activity it becomes a cultural site where lessons of morality can be aired. Lance Armstrong’s media character represents a figure continually described with savioristic and spiritually inspirational value ideologies that are infused with religious meaning. In American culture today there exists the need for millions, on the society level, to look to athletic icons as examples of moral value. Lance Armstrong reflects this, exemplified by his nearly 2.5 million Twitter followers who keep up with his daily activities and interests. For instance, when Lance Armstrong posts a new song he likes, millions

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137 See for example Miracle and Rees, 104, 213, 228.
138 Kusz, 144.
139 As a point of reference, Vice President Joe Biden has 31,000 followers and the White House has 1.7 million followers on Twitter.
concurrently find that song and listen as well, thousands flock to his LiveStrong events, wear his yellow bracelets, and have spiritually altered their lives to reflect his. In an interview with a couple at a LiveStrong event, one wife claimed, about her husband “He’s (Armstrong) changed his (husbands) life, he’s living strong and he’s lost sixty pounds, and just been inspired by him (Armstrong) to get out and get off the couch and keep going.” The following chapter seeks to provide an understanding of this condition of contemporary American culture using radical orthodoxy scholarship. In doing so, I hope to offer some rationale on how Lance Armstrong, a sport icon that reflects several muscular Christian themes comes to represent an example of how sport can be understood as a religious experience today.

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141 The LiveStrong Challenge of 2009 claims to have had over 20,000 participants that raised more then $10 million for cancer research. <http://www.livestrongchallenge.org/site/c.frKPI1PAIoE/b.3920225/>. Not part of my current project, but interesting to note in order to participate in a LiveStrong Challenge event, the cost is $250. To race in other events for the LiveStrong Team the donation minimum is $2000. <http://www.livestrong.org/site/c.khLXK1PxFM/f.b.5612027/k.7211/TEAM_LIVESTRONG__Home.html>.
CHAPTER 5

LANCE ARMSTRONG, CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN SPORT, AND RADICAL ORTHODOXY

After Buddha was dead, his shadow was still shown for centuries in a cave - a tremendous, gruesome shadow. God is dead; but given the way of men, there may still be caves for thousands of years in which his shadow will be shown.¹

Contemporary popular conceptions of athlete hero-role models, such as Lance Armstrong, are shaped by media characterizations, which I claim reflect muscular Christian value system to sell sport ideology. As detailed in my introduction, I also make the claim that though examples like Armstrong, contemporary American sport can function as a religious experience. To make this argument, I am influenced by the radical orthodox scholars who argue contemporary (postmodern) culture yearns for a missing divine presence. These scholars suggest that today people seek out the sacred in new and emerging cultural artifacts. For example, Graham Ward finds an “angelic hosts”² motif predominant in contemporary literature and film (e.g. vampires, angels, aliens, messianic figures such as Neo in The Matrix). Ward argues that this angelic host motif “re-

enchants”\textsuperscript{3} the world with a “theological imaginary” that is “revisited as a marketable product.”\textsuperscript{4} And while he describes the structure of cities as having “a theological role to play in the economy of redemption,”\textsuperscript{5} I focus on Armstrong as a sport figure that comes to fill the yearning Ward describes. For Ward, these pseudo experiences are empty, “religion without religion;”\textsuperscript{6} and his specific project is to re-insert a particular reconfigured version of Christianity and theology into national and world views. Armstrong is not of course a real “savior” nor is he “divine” yet he offers popular culture an easy fulfillment, as Ward says “ontologically soft” of the “longing for transcendence.”\textsuperscript{7} Ward believes an important project of the radical orthodoxy scholarship is “the recovery of what might be termed ‘theological textuality,’”\textsuperscript{8} which is a recognition and description of a “divine reality” in theologically empty cultural texts.\textsuperscript{9}

In this dissertation, the theologically empty text would be contemporary American sport. Ward suggests that these “historically located symbols of any culture” are only pointers to, but are “not participating in that divine reality.”\textsuperscript{10} The evaluation of Lance Armstrong’s media depiction informs the radical orthodoxy project and may support its perception of contemporary culture. Ward says, “Christian theologians can learn from the social anthropologists and critical theorists not only what they themselves read into the signs of the times, but the ways in which they set about producing their readings.”\textsuperscript{11} Decoding Lance Armstrong, as I have done in Chapter 4 and using a radical

\textsuperscript{3} Ward, (2000), 214.  
\textsuperscript{4} Ibid. 224.  
\textsuperscript{5} Ibid, 205.  
\textsuperscript{6} Ibid, 224.  
\textsuperscript{7} Ibid, 223.  
\textsuperscript{8} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{9} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{10} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{11} Ibid, 9.
orthodoxy framework provides an understanding of sport as not reflecting a “type” of religion but rather a religious experience due to cultural conditions in contemporary America. The aim of this chapter is to provide examples of how the radical orthodoxy framework can be useful in understanding how contemporary American sport and its representations and practices are sometimes framed with imagery and labels traditionally familiar in religious settings. This chapter will highlight more contemporary examples that make clear the claims of radical orthodoxy with relation to Lance Armstrong and I will discuss why these circumstances are unique to contemporary American sport.

Over the past several decades cultural polls suggest affiliation with traditional religious membership numbers have declined in the United States.12 In Bowling Alone, Robert Putnam examined the trends of shifting traditional affiliations with religious communities in American culture.13 Using the “classical sociological theory of secularization,” Putnam demonstrates with substantial evidence that religious participation has decreased, with church attendance and church involvement in a slow but marked decline.14 Putnam, among others, argues the “Baby Boomer” generation is particularly responsible for this shift from strong-tie to weak-tie communities. Putnam states,

As the new century opened, the younger generation felt less connection to civic communities – residential, religious, organizational… Much of the decline in

14 Putnam, 79.
civic engagement in America during the last third of the twentieth century is attributable to the replacement of an unusually civic generation by several generations (their children and grandchildren) that are less embedded in community life.\textsuperscript{15}

As a result of the “Boomers” emphasis on self-identity,\textsuperscript{16} it can be argued that contemporary Americans are maintaining fewer “strong ties” to any one organization, including traditional religious organizations. Karen Armstrong has also written about the contemporary American religious climate, stating “indeed, our current secularism is an entirely new experiment, unprecedented in human history… It is also true to say that our Western liberal humanism is not something that comes naturally to us… it has to be cultivated. Humanism itself is a religion without God – not all religions, of course, are theistic.”\textsuperscript{17} Radical orthodoxy also focuses on the effects of Humanism in shaping theological understandings in western culture. As John Milbank suggests one of the failures of a humanistic approach is that it is devoid of the divine. Humanism, “shows that the human will is ‘never equal to itself’, or never finds any satisfactory resting place in any of its natural intentions or actions.”\textsuperscript{18} This supports the findings in Chapter 4, that God has been removed for the muscular Christian construction of contemporary athletes in American media. My dissertation offers an explanation in order to understand a cultural condition by which Americans today use sport and its icons to fill the religious and spiritual needs historically satisfied by traditional religious experiences. Radical

\textsuperscript{15} Putnam, 275.
\textsuperscript{16} Gerard Delanty, \textit{Community} (New York: Routledge, 2003), 146.
\textsuperscript{17} Karen Armstrong, \textit{A History of God: The 4,000-Year Quest of Judaism, Christianity and Islam} (New York: Ballintine Books, 1993), xix.
orthodoxy offers an apt theological lens to gain insights on this condition and offers a framework to understand how athletes can come to fulfill the spiritual needs of contemporary Americans.

Karen Armstrong, Putnam, and radical orthodoxy scholars however are not the only to have identified a cultural shift where religious meaning is apparent in other areas of popular culture. Robert Jewwett and John Lawrence have worked with religion and popular culture and said of the American monomyth, “The supersaviors in pop culture function as replacements for the Christ figure, whose credibility was eroded by scientific rationalism.”  

As I previously demonstrated Armstrong’s commercialized image often functions as a Christ figure for many. While Jewwett and Lawrence examine examples of Christ in popular culture, other scholars have focused on the dual experience of the divine in new cultural spaces. Discussing the rise of mass media’s effect on religion, Duncan Forrester states, theologians today “either see the media as the new Moloch, the modern idol to which faith, truth and human values are being sacrificed; or, alternatively, they treat the media as a powerful and theologically neutral instrument which can be used to…communicate Christian truth to millions around the world simultaneously.”

Radical orthodoxy scholars take the second approach offered by Forrester as they understand their project to offer a theological evaluation of culture in the postmodern world. Ward states the contemporary secular world “does not really want what it thinks it wants; but, on the other hand, in order to have what it thinks it wants, it would have to recover the

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theological.” It is in this particular way that I use the radical orthodoxy scholarship to assist in understanding the conditions of contemporary American sport and the media representations of athlete heroes like Lance Armstrong as religious.

In discussions about this project, one committee member agreed that framing athletes as religious heroes may solely be a condition of contemporary American sport as he pondered the ways non-American athletes are characterized abroad. He could think of no examples to support the claim that athletes in non-American settings come under the same religious or spiritual scrutiny as American athletes. I discovered for instance, when the American professional soccer team L.A. Galaxy bought British footballer David Beckham, one of the most recognized names in soccer today, American headlines stated Beckham was a “savior” for a floundering American Major League Soccer (MLS). Yet, I found no evidence of similar religious descriptions in European media outlets when Beckham quietly went back to Europe to play in 2009. However, at this same time on American blogs Beckham was referred to as a “false prophet.” This is not to say that non-American countries do not hold their athletes in high regard and perceive them as heroes. In fact David Beckham was one of Time Magazine Europe “Heroes of 2003.” Rather, I am suggesting that American sport media uses religious terms to refer to athletes more often than non-American media sources.

22 “Beckham Hailed as League’s Savior by U.S. Media” Reuters (1/12/2007).
25 While this may be an interesting area for future research, I have not conducted extensive comparisons between American and non-American portrayals of hero/icons. I mention this here only to illustrate that American fascination with infusing moral ideals into the way sport stars are characterized is a unique condition of the American sport landscape, and may be a result of the Puritan foundations of the country.
Returning to the ways in which radical orthodoxy scholarship fits the current project, Synthia Sydnor has written two essays about the ways in which ideas from radical orthodoxy might be utilized by sport historians. She states “radical orthodoxy leads one to envision sport as a cultural site that may have transformative sacramental qualities in which the effort and discipline of sport can be experienced as purification, sacrifice and immolation.” While fans do not know if Armstrong himself practices sport for such reasons, the popular imaginary sometimes views Armstrong in such ways. For example this was found in the 2009 Nike Driven commercial where Armstrong claims he is returning to cycling for the benefit of others; that he is going to train, sacrifice, and endure physical hardships for the benefit of cancer patients. Bruce Forbes writes that one “approach is to notice that popular culture and traditional religions function in similar ways, providing meaning and helping people cope with life’s problems.” This certainly reflects the aims of Armstrong’s Foundation as well as reflects the certain way his media image functions in inspirational and meaningful ways.

Described as a new theology, the introductory literary work Radical Orthodoxy includes chapters in which various authors relate their theological analyses to issues of knowledge, language, friendship, erotics, the city, bodies, and music. Ward

and Milbank offer extensive evidence for their line of reasoning, yet I point out that sport, a major site of popular culture is never considered in their scholarship. Through their analysis of such cultural activities, radical orthodoxy seeks to inject theological understanding into their analysis to rediscover the divine in the world. Again here the function of Armstrong as a spiritual inspiration character relates to the conditions described by Ward and Milbank. If Putnam is correct, Americans are seeking to engage in soft ties with communities and in this way, the strong social ties of participants that can be observed at LiveStrong events can be read as such soft communities. As a result, Ward’s argument would be that individuals don’t want to remove all strong-tie social structures like government, business, and religion, so they find alternate places to fulfill these certain needs. This perspective is helpful in showing how sport can be seen as a site of religious meaning and more specifically how Armstrong’s for-cause events have taken on spiritual meaning for participants.

Resting on four main assumptions, radical orthodoxy first claims that the secular world is the result of a perverted theology, a result of past decisions, actions and writings within the field of theology (especially Christianity).

Increasingly throughout the seventeenth century, this autonomy of the world (and the autonomy of human observation and reasoning which creates and reflects it)

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had no need of spiritual properties; it was self-sustaining, self-defining, immanent system. The secular was divorced from the sacred. Only as such could the world become an object of human knowledge – rather than a God-given mystery to be lived in and respected – subject to investigations into the causal nexus of laws which determine and maintained existence.\(^\text{38}\)

Even popular culture figures such as Armstrong reflect the continued assumption that human knowledge and our understanding of existence rests in the hands of science and technology. For instance, as he was about to undergo surgery to remove the cancer that had spread to his brain Armstrong believed “in the doctors and the medicine and the surgeries” (drawing a line between spiritual belief and science).\(^\text{39}\) Those who believe in Armstrong because of his story, where he is commercially perpetuated to be a savior, look to science and medicine to help their cancer, yet interestingly are also looking to the human spirit surrounding Armstrong’s image. This blurring of sacred and scientific (profane) is supported by Jewett and Lawrence. They help my understanding of why the image of Armstrong as the popular culture hero is still important even within a culture heavily faithful to science and technology. They suggest the hero’s “superhuman abilities reflect a hope of divine, redemptive powers that science has never eradicated from the popular mind.”\(^\text{40}\)

Jewett and Lawrence inform a better understanding of Armstrong’s savior characterization. Armstrong has been shaped to reflect an example of what it means to be


\(^{40}\) Jewett and Lawrence, xx.
human, suggested to be part of a cultural need that science inherently lacks. I see
Armstrong’s image blurring distinctions between science and sacredness, allowing for a
uniquely contemporary characterization of him as a spiritual ideal. As a cyclist,
Armstrong is just another athlete, reliant and fully dedicated to science and technology to
make him ride faster and longer.\(^41\) Yet because of his story, and the media’s role in
perpetuating him as a transcendent figure, the secular (scientific) has become entwined
with a sacred depiction of Armstrong where he becomes a source of human knowledge
and an earthly figure for others to believe in and follow. While he may be an empty
religious figure, Armstrong reflects the first assumption of radical orthodoxy; that a
complete faith in science leaves the human experience devoid of religious and spiritual
fulfillment.

Secondly, radical orthodoxy assumes the opposition to divine revelation in the
world as a modern corruption resulting from the nihilistic turn away from theology for
matters of human truth. To rescue humanity from this nihilism Milbank wants to
demonstrate that the Church theology “as the theory of a new practice… can position
itself as a gaze at once above, but also alongside, (with or against) other, inherited human
gazes.”\(^42\) In this superior and embedded perspective, radical orthodoxy “seeks to define a
Christian Sittlichkeit,” which is “a moral practice embedded in the historical emergence
of a new and unique community.”\(^43\) Ward states that the project of his book Cities of God
is “concerned, sociologically, with communitas, communion (Eucharistic),

\(^41\) For example, Armstrong invests large amounts of time and money to assist his cycling goals. E.g. John
Virata, “Designing Lance Armstrong’s Racing Bike: StudioTools and SolidWorks on AMD Workstations
\(^42\) Milbank, (1993), 248.
\(^43\) Ibid, 381.
communication and *ecclesia.* This project of radical orthodoxy involves the recovery of the Church (Christian) as a voice on matters of social concern, while offering a position designed to lift culture from its nihilistic ways and provide a community where the world is clearly demonstrated as a god-given mystery to be lived in and respected.\(^{45}\)

Radical orthodoxy admits that because of the Humanistic secular turn during the seventeenth century, the age of science and enlightenment, moral practices were divorced from theology and placed in scholarly discourses like philosophy and science. Therefore, Milbank argues, “to think a Christian theology, and at the same time to think theology as a social science... one must describe the ‘counter-ethics’, or the different practice, which emerges.”\(^{46}\) Ward says academic discussions must come to see theology as offering a valid perspective on social issues where “the theological is also implicated in a social and political account of being,” and that only a “theological or analogical account of bodies safeguards the concreteness of communities.”\(^{47}\) Radical orthodoxy desires to include theology in social studies and use theological understandings to describe the “counter ethics” that may be seen in these other social activities.

Lance Armstrong’s case can again be used to understand this radical orthodoxy perspective. As he has become spiritually idealized in the American media, radical orthodoxy’s project would be to understand the “counter-ethics” that emerge at, for instance, LiveStrong cycling events. Radical orthodoxy “counter-ethics” may provide answers to questions such as; “how do individuals that participate in these events safeguard their community in spiritually and religious ways?;” “have all participants

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\(^{44}\) Ward, (2000), 22.


\(^{46}\) Milbank, (1993), 381.

dedicated their bodies to training and does this perhaps reflect an ascetic mentality (immolation as Sydnor suggests) to bring the practitioner closer to ‘truth’?” or “how do the yellow bracelets signify an identity within this community?” The second assumption of radical orthodoxy is useful in understanding Armstrong’s characterization, where perhaps a Sittlichkeit (Christian moral practice in the emergence of a new community) can currently be observed at Lance Armstrong Foundation events. Explaining the ways muscular Christian themes operate in contemporary American sport I feel clarify this goal of radical orthodoxy.

As a result of the turn toward humanism, the third assumption of radical orthodoxy is that western culture has increasingly excluded theological understandings of the world and has ultimately become nihilistic. Ward and others argue that in postmodernity, culture has become so nihilistic that we have lost a “true” connection with the divine and have widely displaced our understanding of the supernatural in culture; Ward uses movies and cyberspace as his examples. Lance Armstrong’s media characterization is filled with religious and spiritual descriptions reflecting this view of contemporary culture. We can also see this in the way millions turn to sport and athletes in times of crisis or tragedy. For example if someone is diagnosed with cancer today individuals no longer turn solely to God and prayer for comfort and answers. Instead they put their faith and belief in doctors, medicine, and technology to provide comfort and answers. They log onto WebMD, livestrong.org, buy a yellow bracelet, and perhaps look...

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48 Nihilism, or the “nihilistic voice” according to Milbank: “offers a historicizing critique, seeking to show that every supposedly objective reasoning simply promotes its own difference, and disguises the power which is its sole support.” Milbank, (1993), 5.
49 Rick Bernstein, Ross Greenburg, and Joseph Levine, Nine Innings from Ground Zero (HBO Sports, 2004). This HBO documentary is about the function and place of baseball in reconstructing the American psyche after terrorist attacks on the United States in September, 2001.
to Lance Armstrong as an icon for inspiration and hope. For example, on a YouTube video not discussed in Chapter 3, Armstrong is again the focus of a video put to the music “He Lives in You” by Tina Turner.\(^\text{50}\) Posted comments read: “lance, you are a legend, a warrior, and idol – God bless you”, “Lance I love you!!! you are a riding miracle”, and “superb editing and content. thnks for the inspiration” (all original text and punctuation).\(^\text{51}\) Cultural examples like these reflect what radical orthodoxy would suggest is evidence of displaying empty religious experience because there is no theological understanding of the video.

In this sense the radical orthodoxy project is not to erase individuals’ experiences of the divine in sport, but rather to offer a theological framework to understand the experience as an example of “God in the world.” Ward says, “I wish to argue that with postmodernism God emerges from the white-out nihilism of modern atheism and from behind the patriarchal masks imposed by modernity’s secular theology.”\(^\text{52}\) If we understand the values that operate in contemporary American sport (i.e. muscular Christian) observable in characters like Armstrong, Ward’s and the radical orthodox argument may be supported.

John Wiley Nelson further offers some interesting insights to support my claim that Armstrong’s image may be an example of an emerging divine experience for some. He suggests, “Popular culture is to what most Americans believe worship services are to

\(^{50}\) Tina Turner “He Lives in You” Return to Pride Rock: Songs Inspired by Disney’s The Lion King II – Simba’s Pride Walt Disney Records, (1998).


<http://www.youtube.com/comment_servlet?all_comments&v=uVA8D0LCAew&fromurl=/watch%3Fv%3DuVA8D0LCAew>.

\(^{52}\) Ward, (1997), xxi.
what the members of institutional religions believe.” Nelson states “those institutions normally called ‘religions’ are explicit in announcing precisely what they believe and in scheduling the ritual dramas of reaffirmation,” but that American cultural religions are not as clear on values or timely about rituals. In this current project I must disagree with Nelson, who wrote during the 1970’s. I have already stated I do not argue sport to be a “type” of religion. The popular culture of American sport today displays explicit beliefs and maintains highly scheduled rituals. For example, the beliefs of the Lance Armstrong Foundation are found in their motto which states “We believe unity is strength, knowledge is power, and attitude is everything.” Lance Armstrong and the activities that surround his image reflect a shift from popular culture lacking certain central beliefs and occurring un-ritualistically in the 1970’s when Nelson wrote, to contemporary times where specific values (reflecting muscular Christian themes) and established rituals historically associated with religious institutions are observable. Again the radical orthodoxy lens makes clear the ways in which Lance Armstrong’s “erotic ontology founded upon absence” occurring in postmodern “white-out nihilism” is infused with “theological colouring” re-enchanting contemporary American popular culture. Because Armstrong is a hero in the contemporary American sport context, and muscular Christian themes observable in his commercialized image, it

54 Ibid, 196.
55 Ibid, 19
56 <http://www.livestrong.org/site/c.khLXK1PxHmF/b.2660611/k.BCED/Home.htm>.
is possible to conceive of him as a figure that rescues postmodernism from nihilistic tendencies.

Fourthly these scholars argue that the modern structures of material and temporal realms of bodies, sex, art, and sociality, which postmodernity has done away with, can only be recovered through an acknowledgement of the transcendent in these spaces. Radical orthodoxy seeks to reclaim the world and offer “truth” by situating its scholarly discussions within a Christian theological framework, using cultural evidence to support instances of the divine emergence in the world. Milbank says,

A postmodern theology has to understand that both the objects of Christian faith – insofar as they are imagined, and articulated – and the modes of Christian experience, are derived from a particular cultural practice which projects objects and positions subjects in a conjoint operation, relating the one set to the other. If anything refers to reality here, then it must be, as Lindbeck says, the entire practice, with all its signs, images, and actions, and not just a set of propositions taken in isolation.\(^58\)

As Milbank is suggesting, we may understand how symbolic hero/icons such as Armstrong have come to be viewed as savior figures especially when sport ideology is premised on muscular Christian ideals. If viewed in this way, the hegemonic function of contemporary American sport is to reinforce muscular Christian values deemed to be important in contemporary culture only without recognizing God. To explore how Armstrong can offer contemporary culture a spiritual figure, I next offer a discussion of how sport and religion function similarly in popular culture.

Sport: Not a “Type” of Religion

Sport and religion have historically shared common elements of human communal needs. Allen Guttmann focuses on ritual, for instance, suggesting the sport activities in pre-modern cultures “were often – perhaps usually – embedded within or aspects of religious ritual.”59 Other scholars have focused on the participation with nature,60 or the formation of community bonds in both sport and religion.61 The argument that sports could be a “type” of religion has been the topic of several academic pieces over the years as well. For example, Michael Novak discussed that sport “is not a religion in the same way Methodism, Presbyterianism, or Catholicism is a religion.”62 Novak affirms however that “these are not the only kinds of religion” and that sports generate a form of civil religion.63 Highlighting an important aspect of my current work which seeks to move beyond defining sport as a “type” of religion, James Mathisen argued that if sport is a form of civil religion, as Novak suggests, then sport has a folk religious core because civil religions have the tendency to come and go with passing popularity.64 Using Robert Linder’s definition, Mathisen says “folk religion is a combination of shared moral principles and behavioral customs,”65 and these principles and customs “emphasize the common religion of a people as it emerges out of the life of ‘the folk.’”66 Also important to this perception is the understanding of what Durkheim called a “moral community.”

61 Samantha King, Pink Ribbons, Inc. (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 44.
63 Ibid.
65 Mathisen, 19.
66 Robert Linder, “Civil Religion in Historical Perspective” Journal of Church and State 17 (1975), 401
Members of a folk religion “affirm their beliefs and practice their rituals” making up a “collective conscience.” It was clear in Chapter 4’s discussion of the community created around the Lance Armstrong Foundation that a “collective conscience” of certain communal values (such as “unity is strength”, “knowledge is power”, and “attitude is everything”) based on muscular Christian ideals (trained and subjected bodies, protection of the weak, and promotion of just causes) does exist. Rather than “civil” or “folk”, Catherine Albanese suggests a third view of sport as a “cultural” religion. Such “religious forms include sacred stories, rituals, moral codes, and communities…” In these works, the authors make arguments as to why they define sport in relations to the particulars, of civil, folk, and cultural religion.

The discussion of sport as a “type” of religion has dominated the ways in which sport and religion have been studied, yet I offer a particular view of how contemporary culture has come to shape a way in which we can understand sport, not as a “type” of religion, but as a social activity where religious and spiritual meaning has emerged in the American context. I argue that in the current cultural conditions American notions of sport can take on and fulfill the various roles that Novak, Mathisen, Albanese discussed above. Sport can thus become a religious and spiritual experience, with moral and ethical values, hero-role models who display the ethos of the system, and a continuing dialogue of what it means to be good, right, and true.

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69 Several programs exist that discuss the moral, ethical, and religious issues that surround the world of contemporary American sport, such as *ESPN: Outside the Lines* and *Real Sports with Bryant Gumble* on HBO. For example, Outside the Lines ran a story of Tony Dungy, previously the head coach in the National Football League and who close personal friends call “a messenger of God…one born of God…and the moral compass of American sports.” Howard Bryant, “Higher Calling” *ESPN: Outside the Lines*
My argument is supported in part by Clifford Geertz, who identified the way in which the comparative study of religion suggests an emergence of certain cultural conditions that identify social elements and experiences as being “religious.” My previous chapter sought to demonstrate various examples from an array of popular media outlets that portray Armstrong as an individual imbued with qualities typically associated with muscular Christian ideals, such as a trained and subjected body, perpetuating righteous causes, and protecting the weak. Geertz states that the “aim of the comparative study of religion,” includes “the description of the wide variety of forms in which it appears; the uncovering of the forces which bring these forms into existence, alter them, or destroy them; and the assessment of their influences, also various, upon the behavior of men in everyday life.” Using Geertz, radical orthodoxy, and others who have written about religion in popular culture I interpret Armstrong as having religious and spiritual meaning for millions of Americans because the current cultural conditions necessitate a need for examples like him to fill a void left by the secular world. Armstrong’s image comes to be religiously and spiritually meaningful because there is a cultural need for him to be seen this way. My work provides an examination of the values that operate in American sport today. With this said, I now consider what athletic religious figures means for contemporary American culture.

70 Gertz’s work focused on religious developments of Islam in Morocco and Indonesia.
Religion in Sport: Armstrong in Popular Culture

Several academic articles in the areas of body studies, health, environment, economics, and philanthropy have focused on issues other than Armstrong’s media portrayal as a hero-role model. Armstrong’s media representation as religious has, in my search, only been covered by Kusz, who alludes to his portrayal as an “ideal embodiment of the human spirit.” Kusz discusses this ideal embodiment as he focuses on Armstrong’s whiteness and masculinity (the topics of his research). While my focus in this project is not on race or gender issues with regards to Armstrong, I would be interesting to consider how such constructs work in the community that has grown around his image.

Religious conversations about Armstrong, however, enter the space of sport quite frequently, especially in American popular media. For instance in an interview during the 2009 Tour Down Under, one journalist referred to Armstrong as a savior, stating “It’s as if Jesus Christ was going to cycle again.” Armstrong retorts “I’ve been called a lot of


74 Kyle Kusz, The Revolt of the White Athlete: Race, Media and the Emergence of Extreme Athlete in America (Intersections in Communications and Culture) (New York: Peter Lang Publications, Inc., 2007), 159.
things (pause), I don’t know that He rode.”75 A 2006 Details Magazine article describes Armstrong’s dedication to “his self-proclaimed war on cancer” not being as easy as he thought it would. The author states “But now that he’s a mortal again, he has to reacquaint himself with words like no and wait.”76 In 2004 Armstrong was one of Time Magazine’s “Heroes and Icons” and the author described Armstrong’s ability to accomplish seemingly insurmountable challenges, stating “given Armstrong’s insane commitment to winning, cancer had better watch out.”77 And in 2002, USA Today ran an article about Armstrong’s status as a spiritual inspiration, citing his coach and friend Chris Carmichael, who said “People believe that Lance is a tough guy: He beat cancer, he willed it away. They think he left this Earth and is invincible.”78

These examples reflect the sentiments I read in so many other popular media characterizations of Armstrong. The following excerpt describes one family’s dedication and commitment to Armstrong and his cause and displays the religious nature of Armstrong’s media figuration.

The Greenes are cancer survivors and members of the Lance Armstrong Foundation’s fundraising Peloton Project. They were among 202 members who earned a short visit with Armstrong by raising more than $5,000 in the past year. The meeting was billed as an autograph session, a chance to get a signature on a yellow Tour de France replica jersey. But for the participants, it was almost a spiritual encounter.79

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79 Ruibal.
Popular descriptions surrounding Armstrong like this display the ways in which Armstrong is personified in religious terms through popular media outlets, resulting in others seeing him as a spiritual figure.

One problem that Jim McDonnell observes in the way media shapes discussions and understandings of religion, and what I feel has come to be a part of Armstrong’s media image, is that these religious values are “strongly individualistic.”80 In the beginning of Armstrong’s career, the media’s focus was on him, at least until 2009 when his Lance Armstrong Foundation commercial and public reasoning for returning to cycling was for the cancer community. McDonnell states, “The popular media myths are built around individuals – not around communities.”81 As I suggested above though, when discussing Armstrong’s image, a balance seems to have been reached with regards to science and technology on the one hand, and an ideal spiritual human form on the other. In this case, Armstrong is the individual who funds scientific research to cure cancer, but so many also find the man religiously and spiritually meaningful. Individuals experience Armstrong and his image in their own personal ways, making this an example of what McDonnell suggests “an individual spiritual experience.” The same blurring also occurs between the icon of Armstrong and the community that is growing around him. The experience of Armstrong happens within a community created by him that fosters a unity of shared experience through his LiveStrong events. William Fore supports this in his analysis of the religious relevance of television, stating “if the religion is to survive, much of their communication must be focused outward – to interact with the culture in which the religion finds itself, to testify, to engage in public testimony, education and

81 Ibid.
mission.”\(^82\) The shift of Armstrong’s public image, one that is both representative of the individual as well as directed away from him and toward a community, is one reason Armstrong and experiences at LiveStrong events may include religious sentiments.

Andrew Miracle and C. Roger Rees have also written that “it is the force of public ritual that gives sport the kind of cultural power usually attached to religion.”\(^83\) As an example of Miracle and Rees’s “public ritual” Eric Bain-Selbo of Western Kentucky University explored “the possibility that” college football in the American South “functions religiously to the extent that it provides opportunities for fans to have religious experiences.”\(^84\) The Bain-Selbo study concluded that “it should not surprise us when people decide that it is appropriate and perhaps necessary to use religious language more accurately to describe the experience of the sporting event.”\(^85\) When participants use terms like communitas, ecstasy, faith, flow, and belongingness “perhaps they (Southern college football fans) have come to believe that the” experience of athletic public ritual “is similar to if not identical with those experiences described by religious leaders (for example, mystics).”\(^86\) The only difference it seems is that these emotions and experiences occur at sporting events and not in a traditionally recognized place of worship.

This evidence supports the radical orthodoxy claim that theological understanding is necessary to discuss these “counter ethics”. Contemporary American sport reflects the postmodern conditions of religious experiences Ward and others have identified. Sydnor states “radical orthodoxy thought also allows sport historians to ask what in

\(^82\) William Fore, “The Religious Relevance of Television” In Arthur, 55.
\(^85\) Ibid, 26.
\(^86\) Ibid, 26.
postmodernity allows for social, cultural, historical and personal systems of belief that popularise and commodify things such as bodily holism propelled by consumer products and practices. As I provided examples in Chapter 4, bodily holism can then be transferred onto “sport celebrities” through their association with products and practices. We saw a product evidenced in LIVESTRONG yellow bracelets and practices in his for-cause events. Placing the media characterization of Lance Armstrong in the context of radical orthodoxy theory, and paying attention to Ward’s question of “how we account for this resurfacing of the Christian imaginary in postmodern culture,”

I argue Armstrong’s image has come to be consumed holistically by many. Ward suggests that a condition of the post modern city, “is the manufacture of new urban mythologies, a longing for transcendence, the fabrication of new cosmologies, a desire to become divine…”, all which are involved in Armstrong’s media characterization. While Lance Armstrong is not divine, his popular image has portrayed him as a human ideal, one who approaches transcendence, and accomplishes miraculous feats. Ward says, and I agree, that as suggested by Nietzsche “In the culture of the death of God, we replace him.” For example Armstrong stated in 2002 that when people bring sick children to see him hoping he will talk to them or touch them and “change cancer’s cruel course” he feels he does have an “obligation of the cured.” As the image at the beginning of this chapter reflects, Armstrong has come to be characterized with divine traits, such as savior, revealing the divine shadow Nietzsche said would persist for thousands of years.

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87 Sydnor, (2002), 26
88 Ibid.
90 Ibid, 223.
91 Ibid.
92 Ruibal.
As I have stated, the view offered here speaks to the hegemony of sport in contemporary American culture. The American sport landscape today becomes a site for many to recover the religious and spiritual meaning lost in the secular turn. Miracle and Rees, when considering Geertz, note that religion is a system that acts to “establish powerful, persuasive and long lasting moods and motivations” by “formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and clothing the conceptions with such an aura of factuality that the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic.”\(^{93}\) American sport media exploits this with characters like Armstrong to sell products and ideologies and premised on muscular Christian themes. To further detail the condition of a longing present in contemporary sport, Charles Springwood has discussed the nostalgic reclaiming of divine interaction, stating “In the contemporary world, nostalgia has emerged as a paramount cultural semiotic.”\(^{94}\) This informs my last section for this chapter as I explore the contemporary American sport landscape as postmodern.

**Modern versus Postmodern: Sport, religion, and spirituality:**

As I have suggested, the religious and spiritual experiences are a unique condition of the contemporary American sport context and apparent in the case of Lance Armstrong. Radical orthodoxy further frames the contemporary cultural conditions of today. Ward states

On the basis of an analysis of cyberspace as a cultural metaphor for postmodernism, is that modernism is linked to specific conceptions of time, space, and substance, and that postmodernism explodes the myth and ideologies

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\(^{93}\) Miracle and Rees, 20.

constructing these conceptions…If we wish to apprehend the postmodern God, we have, then, to investigate the project of modernity with reference to the shapes it gave time, space, and bodies. For these shapes portrayed the face of modernity’s god – the god whom Nietzsche (following a suggestion by Hegel) pronounced dead.95

Ward describes time in a modern sense as an “endless series of distinctive now’s” which must be grasped if one is to enjoy them.96 Shear ecstasy of the moment is how time is judged in modernity. Ward also suggests that modern time is “commodified” with limited access to these moments of ecstasy relegated to economic status.97 Pauline Marie Rosenau suggests however, that the postmodern view of time “rejects any understanding of time as chronological or linear.”98 She also states that modernists “consider conventional tight definitions and categories” while postmodernity seeks to break through these boundaries.99

Space is another term that differs between modern and postmodern understandings and is interesting with respect to Lance Armstrong. Ward discusses a modern concept of space as having definitive lines that can grow and “shrink.”100 As with the elimination of structured temporal sequence of modernity, postmodernity erases concepts of definitive spaces as well. Rosenau states “without linear time” space is

99 Rosenau, 7.
impossible to construct “because temporal priority must be established so as to separate one from the other.”**101**

My concern here is not a deep investigation of modernity’s formation of time, space, and bodies. What is important to my work is that postmodernity has erased definitive boundaries in time and space which allows bodies, such as Armstrong’s, to be constructed as omnipotent and universal, able to exist in undefined and timeless spaces (namely the Internet). For example, Armstrong’s *Twitter* messages (*tweets*) can occur from anywhere in the world at any time. I have watched Armstrong *Tweet* as he traveled from training in Hawaii, to training in Texas, to traveling to London, and ending up at baptism in Spain within a ten day period.**102** His *Twitter* posts erased a sense of specific locale of Armstrong’s body, and were posted at all times of the day. Yet the messages still emanated from one source, Lance. Nietzsche pronounced the death of God, but stated “given the nature of men, there may still be caves for thousands of years in which his shadow will be shown.”**103** Armstrong’s temporally displaced image is omnipresent through the use of new cyberspace technologies (*YouTube* and *Twitter*), television commercials, and a global news media. Armstrong’s displaced body reflects the postmodern cultural conditions radical orthodoxy scholars seek to understand in theological ways to uncover a divine presence in the world.

**101** Rosenau, 71.
**103** Nietzsche, 167.
The ubiquity of Armstrong’s image in the media as savior, the popularity of his cause events and spontaneous rides,\textsuperscript{104} and widespread sightings of the yellow bracelet reinforce his image as awesome and inspirational. For example, after Armstrong won his fourth Tour de France, \textit{USA Today} ran an article profusely using religious wording, such as “The faithful stood in line for hours”, “with well-worn copies of The Book” (capitalization in original referring to \textit{It’s Not About the Bike}), “tears welling in their eyes”, “the final steps in a pilgrimage”, and “Then there he was, dressed in the simple garments of blue jeans and a white t-shirt, with bare feet and close-cropped hair: Saint Lance.” The article also suggests, “he is a global source of inspiration and courage that boarders on beatification.”\textsuperscript{105} Popular descriptions like this are highly prevalent in the American media, establishing a savioristic image of Armstrong. With new forms of media, such as Twitter and YouTube video productions, Armstrong’s image production lacks boundaries in time and space, and reaches audiences to come.

Clifford Geertz addresses the flux of human understanding and culture which may lend some further insight on how Armstrong reflects elements of a postmodern divine image. He states: “the conception of human culture as consisting not so much in customs and institutions as in the sorts of interpretations the members of society apply to their experiences, the constructions they put upon the events though which they live; not just how people behave, but how they look at things.”\textsuperscript{106} If we understand our culture to be looking for divine experiences in new and emerging cultural space, as radical orthodoxy suggests, a view of sport operating in a religious and spiritual way for contemporary


\textsuperscript{105} Ruibal.

\textsuperscript{106} Geertz, 90.
Americans is conceivable. Using Armstrong as a case study exemplifies many of the themes tied historically to organized religion, only now they are evident in a sporting context. Understanding the operation of muscular Christian themes in this context thus becomes highly relevant for social science.

As Rosenau suggests, postmodern views tend to break the structural boundaries of cultural activities like art, film, music, and even religion (among many others). As Geertz suggest “religiousness” is not only “knowing” what it means to live truthfully, but rather “embodying” and “living” the life you see as being good and true. Many individuals have come to understand Armstrong’s story and his Foundation’s activities, embodying an attractive way of life, one that includes physical activity, *communitas*, and spiritual meaning. As I explained in Chapter 4, contemporary American sport has created new examples of muscular Christian athletes which echo historical themes in new ways. This reflects the condition of individuality and reinterpretation in postmodernity described by Ward and others. As demonstrated in Chapter 4, millions of Americans today are following Lance Armstrong’s example by donating to his foundation, following his activities through new media outlets, wearing his bracelets, and participating in his events. The re-articulation of muscular Christian themes have emerged in contemporary American sport, and Lance Armstrong reflects this shift in a real and dynamic way.

As Ward suggests above, while sometimes wholly distinct ideologies are constructed, more often new ideologies emerge from an alteration of previous ones. Ward also mentions the modern ideologies of the recent past shaped the perceptions of those of the present time, and now are being expressed in a postmodern understanding, as

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107 Rosenau, 7.
108 Geertz, 16-17.
described by Rosenau. Lance Armstrong is portrayed in certain muscular Christian themes because they reflect the values that underlay American sport; ideologies that reflect the traditional religious institutions in American culture.

While some may feel that my work suggests a critique of organized religion, I reply only that humans experience a world of continual change to the social and cultural environment. In distinguishing modern and postmodern understandings of culture, a shift in how American sport culture has come to involve religious and spiritual meaning is observable in the media characterizations of athletes. Radical orthodoxy offers a Christian theological framework to place conversations of how millions of Americans come to describe a divine/spiritual presence in Lance Armstrong by incorporating the American cyclist’s image into their own lives, offering them an example of a meaningful human existence.109

Conclusion

I attempt to illustrate a cultural condition and capture some sense of sport today. The radical orthodoxy framework is a useful lens for understanding occurrences in contemporary American sport where athletes have become models of how others come to understand what is good, meaningful, and desirable in their lives. The popular media characterization of Lance Armstrong demonstrates what radical orthodoxy scholars have described as a condition of postmodernity in which individuals create new cosmologies and mythologies of the divine in emerging cultural spaces.

109 Future studies may center on specific populations who claim to have spiritual or religious experiences through experiences with hero/icons like Lance Armstrong. I hope in future research to attend these events and gather data on how religious and spiritual meaning is being experienced.
This project is designed to observe what radical orthodoxy describes as the postmodern condition of contemporary culture, the involvement of muscular Christian values in emerging cultural spaces. Media and individuals make sport sacred and perpetuate religious overtones within it. In the language of radical orthodoxy, “The significance of what we do, what we say, somehow permanently escapes us, such that our constant quest for new, more adequate, actions is matched by an attempt to grasp, intellectually, the full import of what we have already done…”\textsuperscript{110}

I suggest the embedded muscular Christian value in contemporary American sport provides a cultural space for individuals to encounter familiar experiences of transcendence. In this understanding, sport has become a new, more adequate place to fulfill certain metaphysical needs. While Ward suggests the transcendent experiences in new cosmologies and mythologies are “distorted, misunderstood, and ontologically soft,”\textsuperscript{111} I argue that these experiences are nonetheless real, and that people do come to find spiritual meaning in figures like Armstrong.

In the contemporary American sport context, because of a decrease in traditional religious adherents, many are finding the spiritual and religious messages in sport and sport figures that have operated for over a century.\textsuperscript{112} In their understanding of the nature of postmodern theology radical orthodoxy thought supports the claim that alternate areas of culture today are operating in spiritual and religious ways, because of contemporary cultural conditions. As such, sport has become a self sustaining entity with diverse media outlets, becoming an organic whole that disseminates values which are specifically tied to

\textsuperscript{110} Milbank, (1993), 210.
\textsuperscript{111} Ward, (2000), 223.
\textsuperscript{112} Dean Nelson, “‘Holy’ Moments Surround Us: You Don’t Have to be Religious to Know That There’s Something Bigger Out There, Often in Plain Sight” \textit{USA Today} (10/26/2009), 11A.
muscular Christian themes. As a result of this organic and ubiquitous contemporary role, sport has come to be a site of religious and spiritual meaning, where athletic hero/icons come to reflect the hegemonic moral and ethical values deemed important today. As I have described throughout this project, these values specifically reflect muscular Christian ideals, such as training and subjection of the body, protection of the weak, and advancement of righteous causes. Understood in these terms, contemporary American sport is not a “type” of religion, but rather a cultural activity of religious and spiritual meaning in the lives of many. As Sydnor suggests “our studies and conclusions… we might boldly answer that the developed world’s obsession/fascination with… sport-related productions and representations is the result of individual and societal emptiness that is only fulfilled by God.”

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CHAPTER 6
CONCLUSION

This dissertation explored the function of muscular Christian themes in American sports that are perpetuated in the case of Lance Armstrong’s media characterization today. Furthermore, my project explored how the values in contemporary American sports can demonstrate a spiritual and religious condition. The cultural conditions that have emerged in contemporary American culture allow for individuals to perceive sport and its icons as reflecting religious and spiritual qualities. While sport is not included in the current radical orthodoxy scholarship, I argue that with an understanding of the muscular Christian values embedded in it, scholars can engage in clearer conversations about sport and religion.

Using American cyclist Lance Armstrong as a case study for this project, several of the characteristics most often associated with muscular Christianity can be observed. In Chapter 4 I detailed that example of his muscular Christian trained and subjected body are observable in media represents of his athleticism, athletic accomplishments, his survival of cancer, and his control over the natural world. Somewhat dubious is the theme of subduing the earth. But I suggested again, the ways the media has portrayed his image as highly athletic, survivor of cancer, and resurrection in the sporting world offer examples of subduing the earth.

The two most obvious and well evidenced themes are Armstrong’s portray of protecting the weak and advancing righteous causes. Similar examples were used to demonstrate these somewhat overlapping themes. Cultural artifacts such as LiveStrong
apparel, the yellow LIVESTRONG bracelet, the Lance Armstrong Foundation and “for-cause” events, his Nike advertisements, and other online materials suggest Armstrong is overwhelmingly depicted as protecting the weak and advancing righteous causes.

The findings in this chapter also reveal the role his cancer has played in making him an attractive figure in the first place, the fact that a religiously wishy-washy figure can embody muscular Christian values today, and the elimination of notions of God in muscular Christian themes in sport today. As argued by John MacAlloon, while the historical muscular Christian influence on sport ideology is well documented, examples of its lasting influence in contemporary sport go unrecognized. I have unveiled in the dissertation how muscular Christian ideals are observable in various media characterizations of Lance Armstrong since his recovery from cancer and successful athletic career. Revealing such values lead me to evaluate contemporary American sports’ operation as a site of religious experience through the lens of radical orthodoxy.

Armstrong reflects a moral character based on the muscular Christian themes in the way the media portrays him, fulfilling various spiritual and religious voids in people’s lives. With a decline in traditional religious affiliation, I understand contemporary American sport values and the characters that embody them to offer a substitute cultural activity for religious experiences.

As a culture, Americans have placed religious significance and meaning in cultural activities outside traditional venues. Sport fulfills certain religious needs of Americans today in their social relations because of other cultural circumstances; including lack of participation in traditional religious organizations, a desire for many to experience alternate spiritual experiences, and innovations in technology (virtual
communities) rendering strong-tie institutions non-essential for socialization. In chapter 5 I examined how radical orthodoxy can help inform these cultural conditions.

Resting on four main assumptions, radical orthodoxy first claims that the secular world is the result of a perverted theology, a result of past decisions, actions and writings within the field of theology. As demonstrated in Armstrong’s case, he reflects the continued reliance of human knowledge and understanding in science and technology. His cancer survival, athletic accomplishments, and ability to further his Foundation’s impact globally reflect his appreciation of science in the world. Secondly, I discussed how radical orthodoxy assumes the opposition to a divine revelation in the world resulted from and continues to perpetuate nihilism. John Milbank suggested that radical orthodoxy could revive a theological community as an effort to reverse this nihilism. The Lance Armstrong Foundation and its various entities, including online discussion boards and “for-cause” events reflect the communities Milbank refers to, only they are not Christian.

The third assumption of radical orthodoxy is that Western culture has increasingly excluded theological understandings of the world. Yet, as I suggested, Lance Armstrong’s media characterization is filled with religious and spiritual descriptions reflecting a reversal of this assumption in contemporary American sport culture. Yet radical orthodoxy scholars may suggest that while Armstrong is described in theological terms, his image still only displays an empty religious experience because there is no theological understanding of his portrayal.

The fourth assumption I discussed in Chapter 5 related to these scholars, suggested the modern structures, which postmodernity took apart, can only be reaffirmed by acknowledging God’s presence in them; that is God in the world. God in the radical
orthodoxy scholarship is the Christian God. Understanding the function of muscular Christian themes in contemporary American sport hero/icons, such as Armstrong, offers interesting conclusions about the role these characters play as savior figures. Based on an understanding of the operation of muscular Christianity today, the Christian hegemonic function of contemporary American sport becomes clearer. This suggests, that while Armstrong himself is wishy-washy when it comes to religious convictions and “God” has been removed from muscular Christian themes today, the influence of Christian themes continue to persist, only not as clearly as they once did.

As the media also plays on these notions, again seemingly without the audiences’ acknowledgement, characters like Armstrong come to be described and perpetuated as attractive cultural examples. Overwhelmingly, positive sentiments about athletes saturate popular media, and when an athletic icon falters in their actions, the media spends weeks deliberating the circumstances. The media portrayal of Armstrong in such positive ways, reveal a value system premised on a muscular Christian ideology.

This dissertation presented evidence specifically linking the contemporary media characterizations of Lance Armstrong to muscular Christian values embedded in contemporary American sport. Perpetuated by the media, Armstrong reflects a continued Christian influence through his characterization of a trained and subjected body, a protector of the weak and subdue of the earth, and an advocate for righteous causes. This dissertation uniquely implemented one aspect of radical orthodoxy to observe that Armstrong’s persona reflects a condition of contemporary American sport culture operating in religious and spiritually significant ways, providing an increasingly secular culture religious experience.
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Posts Lacking Certain Categorical Information


APPENDIX A

Michelle Fine et al. Ten Qualitative Guidelines:

1. Have I connected the voices and stories of individuals back to the set of historic, structural and economic relations in which they are situated? (Is the sporting empirical addressed in context?)

2. Have I deployed multiple methods so that very different kinds of analysis have been constructed?

3. Have I described the mundane (as opposed to the unique and startling)?

4. Have some informants/constituencies/participants reviewed the material with me and interpreted, dissented, challenged my interpretations? And then how do I report these disagreements in perspective?

5. How far do I want to go with respect to theorizing the words of informants?

6. Have I considered how these data should be used for progressive, conservative, repressive social policies?

7. Where have I backed into the passive voice and decoupled my responsibility for my interpretations?

8. Who am I afraid will see these analyses? Who is rendered vulnerable/responsible or exposed by these analyses?

9. What dreams am I having about the material presented? (What issues am I pulling from my own biography and what emphasis have I given these?)

10. To what extent has my analysis offered an alternative to the common-sense or dominant discourse? What challenges might very different audiences pose to the analysis presented?

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American cyclist, Lance Armstrong, wrote a book in 2000 titles *It’s Not About the Bike*. This is a book about Lance’s bout with testicular cancer and his miraculous recovery back to health and his path to winning the Tour de France. This fantastic account was not only inspirational but also informational as to the wonders of modern science to help the human body. Co-written with Sally Jenkins, this book describes a tale of bravery and dedication of this strong willed human being.

There were many themes that this book touched upon. One theme was the sport of cycling and the determination needed to succeed. Armstrong tells of how cycling is a sport of mind, of body, of maneuvering, and of guts. He tells of the countless hours of practice to get to the point in one’s career that you become a world-class racer. I too know what it is like to sacrifice many hours in an attempt to gain a goal in sport. My countless laps and hours in the pool were in hopes of standing on a podium, for only a moment, at championships. The hard work, described by Lance, was a familiar recantation of what sport is to me and how is how I would describe my athletic endeavors, if I were to write a book about training to be the best. I could relate to his way of thinking when he discussed how he was very focused on his training, and it made me feel brotherly to him as an athlete.
A mild comparison to society, the determination Lance described can be seen as what people in everyday life should try to attain. He describes how one needs to be smart as well as tough to be the best and to win. This was the case for him both on and off the bike. This can be compared to society, because as individuals we need to be smart about the world around us and informed about what influences us, to make gratifying decisions about our lives.

Another theme discussed in the book is survival. When Lance was diagnosed with cancer he researched his plague to the point of exhaustion. At some points he was asking the doctors to put his diagnosis into medical terms because he understood them better than the layman’s terms. Lance was diagnosed with testicular cancer in 1996. His case was extreme from the onset, and doctors later told him they felt he has about a 3% chance to live. He made it. He researched the disease that was threatening his life and fought it not only with the science and medicine, but also with knowledge of his aggressor. He went to the best places for treatment, not because he was a celebrity, but because he was dealing with his life, and wanted the best treatment. His knowledge of the disease and his advanced treatment saved his life. He wrote that everyone should be AWARE of what affects their life, whether it is cancer or commercials. He insisted we be aware of the world around us and to be informed to make the best decisions possible.

On a personal note, I lost an uncle to testicular cancer and he was not informed about his disease. His case was similar to Armstrong’s, he was an athlete, professional skier, and felt the same about his body as Lance. In his writing, Lance describes a denial that there was anything wrong in the first instance, when signs were showing. This denial stemmed from a preconceived notion that an athlete shouldn’t have anything wrong with
Athletes are continually numbing their pain as they push their bodies harder and faster. My uncle denied the fact that he was sick and it cost him his life. Lucky for Armstrong the denial was short lived and he was saved. The determination in sport and survival were just two of the major themes of this book.

*It’s Not About the Bike* is a beautifully written book. Lance talked to ME. His writing was organized, bringing in major points when appropriate. The highlight of the book to me was when he was describing his comeback training. He had flirted with the idea of making a comeback after his cancer had remised. But he was scared. He was insecure about his body and his ideas that he was a temple of athleticism had been destroyed. He was unsure of his physical limits, and always weary of the cancer returning. Thus, he was reluctant to come back to the sport of cycling. He took a training trip to Boone, North Carolina, in the Appalachian Mountains, where the drive and determination of the sport he loved so much, returned to his heart and found his strength again. It was a beautifully written part of the book and it gave me chills as I read it. I couldn’t get to the next page fast enough. As I read along with the description, I felt what he felt, because I have strived like he strived. I know what it’s like to have a lack of faith in your physical capacities, and to reach a point when it just flows. You get to the top of that hill, and you know you’re good. His description of the Tour, his use of all the names of the riders, his elaboration of the fundamentals of the race, all allow the reader to be right there with what he is saying. There were no low points of this book. His focus of the book was on cancer and survival. The racing and ‘the bike’ were secondary. I feel like I know Lance Armstrong better after reading this book.
It's Not About the Bike was written by American cyclist Lance Armstrong about his battle with cancer and his comeback to the world of athletics. It is a story with many personal and social connections. His story had aspects that I could relate to so well that it was sometimes scary. He lived through the worst imaginable aspect of life, and fought his way back to life, and capped it off by winning the Tour de France. He is a remarkable athlete as well as a remarkable human being.
APPENDIX C

YOU TUBE TRIBUTE VIDEOS

You Tube Video: May it be, Enya (Roma Ryan): 3:23 min

You Tube Video: Yellow, Coldplay: 4:20 min
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pao4gdjC0fc&feature=related>.

You Tube Video: Message, Coldplay: 4:41 min
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kif_S8wwRRs&feature=related>.

You Tube Video: He Lives In You, Lion King 2 (Tina Turner): 4:40 min
<http://www.youtube.com/comment_servlet?all_comments&v=uVA8D0LCAew&fromu rl=/watch%3Fv%3DuVA8D0LCAew>.

You Tube Video: Open Your Eyes, Snow Patrol: 6:38 min
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9vR4CQq4HMg>.

You Tube Video: Requiem for a Dream, Clint Mansell: 5:59 min

You Tube Video: Sandstorm, Darude: 8:57 min

You Tube Video: Sandstorm, Darude: 6:43 min
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1QjYx6drVaA>.

You Tube Video: Greatest Day, Take That: 4:02 min
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AbspVtju1X8>.

You Tube Video: Believe, Dima Bilin: 3:23 min
S2jelaHh, “A Tribute for Lance Armstrong” YouTube (2/18/2010)
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Blnc-EH3ZQg>.
You Tube Video: Movie Sporza made into a tribute to Lance Armstrong: 3:12 min
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ddCxTxjui4k>.

You Tube Video: Chopin?: 4:09 min
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PUzuJzU7kEU>.

You Tube Video: Choral Chant: 2:16 min
Teraldsvik, “Lance Armstrong Tribute – The King is Back!” YouTube (7/6/2009)
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3SOKW0XlPo0>.

You Tube Video: I Take you There, Techno: 3:26 min
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rz3XWxf2f9s>.

You Tube Video: Waster Years, Cold: 3:19 min
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=73ltjSG4lTQ>.

You Tube Video: Techno: 8:57 min
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I_uRt-SGr2A>.

You Tube Video: Drum/Guitar music: 1:54 min
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RvjD5ubXQhg>.

You Tube Video: Beautiful Day, U2: 4:08 min

You Tube Video: Let’s Go, Techno: 4:15 min

You Tube Video: Music?: 3:02 min
Rolfkok, “Lance Armstrong Just Keep Going” YouTube (1/30/2009)
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hk3jomOxKKk>.

You Tube Video: El Mañana: Gorillaz: 3:53 min
Antoinelecorse, “Lance Armstrong Tribute” YouTube (6/29/09)
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6IW5rsX6k_w>.
Andrew Richard Meyer, MS

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Department of Kinesiology and Community Health
University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign
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Urbana, IL 61801
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Email: armeyer2@illinois.edu

A. EDUCATION

Graduate:

PhD University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, Department of Kinesiology & Community Health
Major - Kinesiology
Cognate - Cultural, Pedagogical, & Interpretive Studies
Dissertation: CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN SPORT, MUSCULAR CHRISTIANITY, LANCE ARMSTRONG, AND RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE
Proposal submission: May 12th, 2009
Dissertation defense: April 1st, 2010

MS University of Montana
August 2003 Major - Philosophy
Concentration - Teaching Ethics
Thesis: Moral Requirements for Today’s Professional Athletes

Undergraduate:

BS Bridgewater State College, Bridgewater, MA
May 2001 Major - Philosophy
Graduated Cum Laude

1997 Xaverian Brothers High School, Westwood, MA
Xaverian Gold Theology Award Recipient

B. CHRONOLOGY OF PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Instructor, Teaching Assistant, and Graduate Assistant
Department of Kinesiology and Community Health, University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign 2006 – Present
Instructor
Department of Natural Science, Parkland College
2009

Academic Tutor: The Institute for Achievement and Learning
Lynn University, Boca Raton, FL
Fall 2005

Tutor: The Student-Athlete Center for Academic Excellence
Florida Atlantic University, Boca Raton, FL
Fall 2005

Instructor
Department of Movement Arts, Health Promotion & Leisure Studies, Bridgewater State College, Bridgewater, MA
2004 – 2005

High School Teacher
Department of Theology, Saint Raphael Academy, Pawtucket, RI
2003 – 2004

Teaching Assistant
Department of Health and Human Performance, University of Montana, Missoula, MT
Spring 2003

Teaching Assistant
Department of Philosophy, University of Montana, Missoula, MT
Fall 2001

Tutor: Student Learning Center
Bridgewater State College, Bridgewater, MA
2000 – 2001

C. PROFESSIONAL PRESENTATIONS


Meyer, Andrew. R. (2007). “Dialogues about Community” Symposium. Panel presentation by The Cultural & Interpretive Studies Concentration, Department of Kinesiology & Community Health, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign


C.1 Invited Guest Lectures

**November 2009**

University of Illinois Urbana – Champaign. Presenting on the emerging concept of sport as a religious experience central to my dissertation work. KIN 249, Melissa Littlefield, PhD (Instructor).

**October 2009**

University of Illinois Urbana – Champaign. Presenting/leading a discussion on drug abuse in sports as a form of ethical deviance. CHLH 243, Marco Boscolo (Instructor).

**October 2006**

University of Illinois Urbana – Champaign. Presented information on the social connections between sport and religion. KIN 249, Melissa Littlefield, PhD (Instructor).
March 2005  Bridgewater State College
Presented on the philosophical, cultural, and social aspects of the profession of Kinesiology, as well as provided a perspective on being a young scholar in the field. PHED 571 Psychological and Sociological Issues in Sport, Jan Harris, PhD (Instructor).

C.2 Presentation Funding

October 2007  Department of Kinesiology Travel Award ($100.00) for Inaugural International Conference on Sport and Spirituality, York, England.

October 2006  Graduate College Travel Award ($400.00) & Department of Kinesiology Travel Award ($200.00) for North American Society for the Sociology of Sport Annual Conference, Vancouver, BC.

February 2003  Practical Ethics Center Travel Award ($200.00 for 9th Annual Conference for the association of Practical and Professional Ethics, Charlotte, NC

D. SCHOLARLY ACTIVITY

D.1 PUBLICATIONS


D.2 Review Service

Peer reviewer Journal of Sport and Social Issues
  o 2006 – Present

D.3 Manuscripts in Preparation


Meyer, Andrew. R. Radical Orthodoxy: Shedding Light on Sport as Religious Experience
Meyer, Andrew R. T.K. Cureton’s Tip: How the Kinesiology Department Founder and Professor at the University of Illinois Led Roger Bannister to Break the Four Minute Mile

E. TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Spring 2010  Lead Instructor. University of Illinois Urbana – Champaign. Contemporary Issues in Sport (Kinesiology 142)
              Teaching Assistant. University of Illinois Urbana – Champaign. Sport, Culture, and Society (Kinesiology 249).

Fall 2009     Lead Instructor. University of Illinois Urbana – Champaign. Contemporary Issues in Sport (Kinesiology 142)
              Teaching Assistant. University of Illinois Urbana – Champaign. Sport, Culture, and Society (Kinesiology 249).
              Lead Instructor. Parkland College. Health Education (Kinesiology 181)
              Lead Instructor. Parkland College. First Aid & CPR (Kinesiology 183)

Summer 2006, 08, 09  Lead Instructor. University of Illinois Urbana - Champaign
                      Sport, Culture, and Society (Kinesiology 249)

Spring 2009   Teaching Assistant. University of Illinois Urbana – Champaign
              Sport, Culture, and Society (Kinesiology 249)
              Teaching Assistant. University of Illinois Urbana – Champaign
              Social Science of Human Movement (Kinesiology 140)

Fall 2008     Lead Instructor. University of Illinois Urbana – Champaign
              Contemporary Issues in Sport (Kinesiology 142)
              Teaching Assistant. University of Illinois Urbana – Champaign
              Sport, Culture, and Society (Kinesiology 249)

Spring 2008   Lead Instructor. University of Illinois Urbana – Champaign
              Contemporary Issues in Sport (Kinesiology 142)
              Teaching Assistant. University of Illinois Urbana – Champaign
              Sport, Culture, and Society (Kinesiology 249)

Fall 2007     Lead Instructor. University of Illinois Urbana – Champaign
              Contemporary Issues in Sport (Kinesiology 142)

Summer 2007  Instructor. University of Illinois Urbana – Champaign
              Weight Conditioning (Kinesiology 100)
              Instructor. University of Illinois Urbana – Champaign
              Volleyball (Kinesiology 109)
Lead Instructor. University of Illinois Urbana – Champaign
Sport in Modern Society (Kinesiology 249)
Teaching Assistant. University of Illinois Urbana – Champaign
Political History of the Holocaust (History/Religious Studies 199)

Fall 2006
Lead Instructor. University of Illinois Urbana – Champaign
Contemporary Issues in Sport (Kinesiology 142)
Teaching Assistant. University of Illinois Urbana – Champaign
Sport in Modern Society (Kinesiology 249)

Spring 2006
Lead Instructor. University of Illinois Urbana – Champaign
Contemporary Issues in Sport (Kinesiology 142)
Lead Instructor. University of Illinois Urbana – Champaign
Sport in Modern Society (Kinesiology 249)

2004-2005
Lead Instructor. Bridgewater State College. Historical and
Philosophical Foundations of Sport and Physical Education (PHED
117)
Lead Instructor. Bridgewater State College. Road Running
(PHED 188)
Lead Instructor. Bridgewater State College. Water Polo (PHED
254)
Lead Instructor. Bridgewater State College. Field Experience in
Physical Education(PHED 498)

Spring 2004
High School Theology Teacher. Saint Raphael Academy,
Pawtucket, RI. World Religions & Christian Lifestyles

Spring 2003
Teaching Assistant. University of Montana. Legal and Ethical
Issues in Health and Human Performance (HHP 475E)

Fall 2001
Teaching Assistant. University of Montana. Foundations In
Philosophy (Philosophy 105)

E.1 Academic Courses Taught or Co-taught

Contemporary Issues in Sport
Sport in Modern Society (Sport, Culture, and Society)
Social Science of Human Movement
Health Education
Historical and Philosophical Foundations of Sport and Physical Education
Legal and Ethical Issues in Health and Human Performance
Foundations in Philosophy
Political History of the Holocaust
World Religions
Christian Lifestyle
Jogging and Road Running
Water Polo
Volleyball
Weight Conditioning
First Aid/CPR

F. PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

April 2008  “Megacities: Agglomerating Culture, Media, and Infrastructures” Unit for Criticism and Interpretive Theory Seminar Series. University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign

September 2007  “Affect Theory” Unit for Criticism and Interpretive Theory Seminar Series. University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign

January 2007  “Where are We? New Work in Critical Theory and Cultural Studies” Unit for Criticism and Interpretive Theory Seminar Series. University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign

September 2006  “New Materialisms” Unit for Criticism and Interpretive Theory Seminar Series. University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign


January 2006  “Rethinking the State” Unit for Criticism and Interpretive Theory Seminar Series. University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign

G. PROFESSIONAL MEMBERSHIPS

American Federation of Teachers, AFL-CIO, 2008- Current

GEO-6300 University of Illinois Graduate Assistant Union, 2006- Current

Massachusetts Teachers Association, 2004-2005

Massachusetts Association for Health, Physical Education, Recreation, & Dance (MAHPERD) 2004-2005

Association for Practical and Professional Ethics, 2003 & 2005
H. SERVICE

H.1. University Service

James Scholars Program Mentor, University of Illinois, 2006-current.

H.2. Professional Officer/ Committee Appointments


Served in creating and participating in An Evening of Ethics; The Humor of Ethics University of Montana Practical Ethics Center, 2003.


I. HONORS AND AWARDS


Theology Gold Award, Xaverian Brothers High School, 1997.