

**Presentations of the 29th Annual SW/Texas
Regional Meeting of the Popular Culture
and American Culture Association**

Presentations of the 29th Annual SW/Texas
Regional Meeting of the Popular Culture
and American Culture Association:
Gender

Edited by

Gypsy Elaine Teague

CAMBRIDGE
SCHOLARS

P U B L I S H I N G

Presentations of the 29th Annual SW/Texas Regional Meeting of the Popular Culture
and American Culture Association: Gender, Edited by Gypsey Elaine Teague

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INTRODUCTION

GYPSEY TEAGUE, CHAIR, GENDER, SW/TEXAS ACA/PCA

When I was asked to edit these papers I jumped at the chance, even though I had sworn after the last time I edited an anthology that I'd never do it again. Now that the project is finished and going to press I am glad that I changed my earlier judgments. Gender is an often misunderstood subject area, even within the discipline and to those who teach and write about it. One of my presenters, when she first approached me to present at the conference, asked, "what does my paper really have to do with gender?". To that the answer was obvious, at least to me. 'Everything has to do with gender.'

Gender is everywhere. It begins when we are born with the color blanket we are wrapped in, all the way to the grave, to the clothes we are buried in. We are bombarded with advertisements specifically targeted at our gender, either male, female, or somewhere in between. We are judged by our gender, which is often synonymous with our sex, although in many of the presentations through the years it is becoming evident that more and more people understand the difference. Our clothing, food, entertainment, and reading material are all tied to gender, in one form or another. Gender, to me, is like the air. It is all around us, seldom thought of, but always present.

I am fortunate enough to have the opportunity to be the Chair of Gender for the Southwest and Texas Region of the American Cultural / Popular Culture Association. Our annual regional conference is heavily attended and I usually have between three and six panels of four presenters each. The conversation is lively, the presentations thought provoking, and the presenters themselves are far from the stuffy academicians that one often times expects to find at such conferences.

I have tried to keep the subject areas somewhat close to each other but in an area that spans literature, politics, sex, religion, and personal choices it is hard to get finite and clear cut chapters arranged. Rather I have let the presenters be the main focus and I have just been the ringmaster of this

incredible circus of ideas. Without them this could never have gone to press and it is all our hopes that you enjoy the volume and take something away from it that you did not anticipate.

MARKETING THE NFL (NATIONAL FOOTBALL LEAGUE) TO WOMEN: SELLING A “MAN’S GAME”

LISA WAGNER

Abstract

According to the latest marketing data published by Scarborough Research (<http://www.scarboroughresearch.com>) approximately 43.4 percent of Americans are “loyal” football fans who also identify themselves as being “very or somewhat interested” in the NFL. Of this 43 percent of “very or somewhat interested” fan base, 69 percent are male and 31 percent are female (Harrow, 2005). However, when one considers that women make over 85 percent of product purchasing decisions (Harrow, 2005), corporate America sees dollar signs! Thus, in its quest to expand its fan base and net worth, the NFL has identified and targeted society’s female population as a viable market group. While profit is the bottom line, the NFL also hopes to improve its image. Female fans may be the NFL’s golden ticket to reaching these two goals. In this paper, I briefly discuss several popular strategies (“visible”, “transparent”, “think pink”, and “hybrid”) that marketers use to target women audiences. Next, I highlight current NFL marketing campaigns directed towards the female audience, as well as several electronic promotional texts and online communities female football fans have created for other women. Finally, I categorize the marketing of these commodities and communities in terms of the theoretical approaches mentioned above, and suggest some possible trends for future successful NFL marketing campaigns towards the female audience.

Introduction: Popular Marketing Approaches to Women

Today, the business and marketing sectors of most US companies, corporations and enterprises recognize women as great economic

contributors to society. However, there are many different theories as to how to best target women as a viable group whose consumer potential remains unfulfilled. Three of the most widely used approaches to marketing to the female gender include: 1) the visible approach; 2) the transparent approach, and 3) the 'think pink' approach (Barletta, 2003; Johnson and Learned 2004). In the subsequent sections, I discuss the basic components of these marketing approaches show how they have been used to target women audiences. Next, I will explore the techniques the NFL and related brands have utilized in marketing their products to the female audience and will attempt to define their approaches. Finally, I offer thoughts on the type of approach the NFL might consider in future marketing campaigns.

The Visible Approach

Many products on the market, by default, demand marketers and advertisers use language and imagery that is directed to women. For example, the Gillette Company has the Venus Razor. While both men and women use razors, the Venus is specifically designed and packaged with the female consumer in mind. Its name is metaphorically feminine, and its shape is sensuous. The female consumer is invited to treat herself like the goddess that she is. In fact, the tagline reads: "Venus. Reveal the goddess in you." (<http://www.gillettevenus.com>). The Venus razor is curved for esthetic and practical reasons. Its shape suggests the anatomical curves of a woman's body, and it is designed to glide over a woman's skin, while facilitating grip amidst the soap and water of the shower. It also comes in bright colors, with each color having its own name and specific features. For example, the green Venus Breeze is "For the goddess who wants life to be easy." It includes shaving gel in the shaver. The original cerulean blue Venus is "[f]or the goddess who's an original. Get the classic that never goes out of style" (<http://www.gillettevenus.com>).

The Transparent Approach

While it is obvious that the 'think pink' approach is quintessentially target towards women, and one can readily see how visible approaches to marketing target their female audience, it becomes slightly more of a challenge to see how transparent marketing campaigns meet the target customers' needs. Transparent campaigns involve companies tailoring their message to meet women's needs without labeling the product or marketing the service specifically for women. Johnson and Learned

(2004:16-17) cite recent in-store design changes by Home Depot and Loews. These two home-improvement stores have wider aisles and utilized lower shelving techniques so as to encourage women to browse more in their stores. While they do not overtly specify that these changes are for women, their techniques are not entirely gender neutral in that their decision makers acknowledge a difference between female and male shopping preferences. In addition to attracting more women shoppers, these two companies have managed to increase their male customer base by making their shopping environments friendlier for the general public and duplicating a non-threatening mixed-gender interactive space.

While it may seem easy and feasible for companies such as Procter & Gamble (P & G) to tailor to its sampling, websites, product designs, etc. towards women, historically male-focused industries such as financial services, automobile manufacturing and sports are still in the process of trying to find the best ways to focus on women throughout their organizations. Transparent marketing involves a narrow focus, getting to know the customer intimately, gathering and working with customer feedback, and projecting an authentic and trustworthy image. Johnson and Learned (2004) cite Wachovia as a prime example of how internal support is a crucial factor in determining how well companies connect with and serve women. At Wachovia, Debra Nichols, Senior Vice President of Wachovia's Women's Financial Advisory Service, conducts frequent audits of all company departments to see how well they are doing with their current and prospective female client bases. Not only does Nichols occupy an executive-level position, she also has the complete support of Wachovia's top leaders. This type of infrastructure and interpersonal relations assures Nichols that personnel take her seriously and are committed to the company-wide policy of including women in their target audience. In the following sections, I profile the female NFL fan and explore recent and current marketing campaigns that target women.

The 'Think Pink' Approach

In recent years, one of the most popular and arguably most profitable of current marketing approaches has been the "think pink" approach. This approach exploits traditional gender stereotypes and assumptions of what women want. The 'think pink' approach manifests itself in the overabundance of the "pretty", the "feminine", and the esthetically appealing: pastel colors, feminine scents, ribbons, flowers, and lighter versions of the original. Pink thinking is not a single attitude or action: It is a combination of mindsets and practices including dated assumptions

and data, stereotypes, internal resistance to change and new ideas, fear of alienating male customers and costing the company millions, the use of feminine iconicity, and the ultimate belief that all of the above gives women what they want. Although feminists have opposed and ridiculed this approach to marketing, one cannot argue with its financial success. The quintessential goddess of the pink campaign, breast cancer awareness and prevention, pioneered on a national level by Estée Lauder in 1985 (<http://www.elcompanies.com>) has generated billions of dollars in company profits along with a more modest sum for this cause. There are pink license plates, pink Campbell's soup cans and pink dog leashes to fit a 150 lb. Great Dane. New 'think pink' products emerge daily, and they will continue to do so as long as the practice is profitable.

The Hybrid Approach

The 'hybrid approach' to marketing is exactly what its name indicates: It is an eclectic approach to marketing that utilizes components from one or more approaches.

An interesting example of hybrid marketing can be seen in the multimedia giant ESPN. Traditionally, ESPN has appealed to the interests, preference and priorities of men without calling their shows "ESPN News Radio for Men", and just calling it "ESPN News Radio". Johnson and Learned (2004) cite the Entertainment and Sports Programming Network (ESPN) brand as one of the best examples of effective visible and transparent marketing, and hence one may consider the approach "hybrid" for it combines two approaches in its campaigns. This brand thrives on delivering sports content with just the right pitch to their largely male audience. However, in doing so it has managed to charm both male and female sports fans. ESPN's target audience is beyond a doubt, relatively young (members of generation X and Y), male and affluent. In line with the principles of visible marketing, they zero in on appealing to and delivering goods to their core market: athletes or wannabe athletes. What are some of the techniques ESPN employs to appeal to its audience? First, it strives to establish a personal relationship with its customer base. To do so, ESPN uses a variety of techniques. ESPN exploits a phenomenon popular culture commonly refers to as "eye candy": It begins its show segments with loud, dramatic music and flashing, colorful graphics. It also has several female sportscasters who most would consider attractive and / or playful: Suzy Kolber, Bonnie Bernstein, and Pam Oliver, to name a few. It is very interesting that these same reporters get face-to-face contact and personal time with star players

and coaches, through the spotlight segments and interviews they conduct on Sunday and Monday Night Football broadcasts. When Tom Brady smiles at Bonnie Bernstein, lots of men would love to be Tom and lots of women would love to be Bonnie. ESPN also uses great photography and camera shots. Appealing visuals, such as webcam shots of flying dirt and spraying sweat, help to bring the physicality of the game of football to life. Commercials from sponsors such as Gatorade and Armor wear glamorize hard work, strength and technique. In addition to establishing a personal relationship with its fan base through the techniques highlighted above, ESPN has capitalized on opening and maintaining ongoing dialogue with fans. On their talk shows, they encourage live phone calls from listeners, and even include email questions and comments into their commentaries. Therefore, ESPN markets itself as an interactive community for viewers, and a community is a very appealing concept for women.

The NFL's Growing Female Fan Base

The NFL reports that 375,000 women attend NFL games each week. More than 45 million female viewers are tuned into the NFL on TV, and 33 million women watch three or more games per week (Llovio, 2007). A 2006 report from Scarborough Sports Marketing (NY) surveyed 224, 583 residents in 75 US markets about the NFL. The survey showed that 35% of women in the Pittsburgh metro area described themselves as "loyal football fans". A "loyal fan", according to Allyson Mongrain, Director of Marketing and Communications for Scarborough is someone who "...is 'very or somewhat interested in the NFL'. Green Bay was second with 29%, of the women surveyed identifying themselves as pro-football fans, and Milwaukee was third with 27%. The national average of women identifying themselves as fans in the 75 US markets polled was 16%.

What is behind the surge of female interest in the NFL? While there does not appear to be one independent variable that one can directly associated with an increase in female pro-football fans, there are several factors that seem to contribute positively to this growth pattern. First, women have more opportunities than ever before to participate in organized sports at all levels of play. Today's evolving definition of being female must therefore include athleticism as a possible attribute, a quality often contrasted with past notions of femininity. Second, busy lifestyles leave many women feeling the need to connect with their mates and family members through shared activities, such as watching or participating in sporting events. Beyond contemporary adaptations of gender roles and behaviors, is the emergence of football as a defining cultural element in

U.S. society. Today, American football is not only an athletic event, but it is a social event that unifies many different community sectors that do not otherwise interact with one another. Marketing trends have shown that women favor products and campaigns that successfully link them as consumers to a social community of like-minded individuals.

Thus, the purchase of a given commodity is not just about the product, but also about the lifestyle it indexes and the experience and connections that result from becoming part of this group of consumers. In follow-up comments to their ranking as the top female fan base, Steelers fans responded with comments and reasons why they are number one in this area. In the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette article "Women here lead the league in loving Steelers" (2007), Dan Majors includes a few of the responses: Kathy Graden wrote, "The Steelers have the most female fans because we're passionate about our families and because we come from Pittsburgh, part of family life is enjoying the great football...the Rooneys [Steelers' owners] have given us over the years". "It doesn't matter what gender you are," wrote Cheryl Kremer, "If you're from Pittsburgh, you love the Steelers because you understand the meaning of home and loyalty. You root because your family roots together." Ann Williams adds, "The caliber of men chosen for this team always seem[s] to have high standards not only for themselves as teammates but as human beings and contributors to society. Women love the Steelers because they are a team with no divas, just great determination and teamwork. Women are all about teamwork." These statistics and comments show that women have come a long way from the days when their involvement with pro-football was limited to serving as sex symbols in cheerleader uniforms, preparing food for their mates and their football buddies, and making themselves scarce at game time. What are the NFL and its affiliates doing to appeal to their growing female fan sector? In the following sections we will explore several of the campaigns and events organized for women NFL fans.

Special Events for Women NFL Fans

The NFL created "Football 101" in 2001 to initiate women into the game of football and to instruct them in all aspects of the game, from rules to strategy. The "Football 101" program is clearly a visible marketing approach. According to the NFL, 18 teams currently participate in the "Football 101" program, which draws more than 10,000 female fans a year to its events around the league. Some teams, like the Denver Broncos, the Indianapolis Colts and the Pittsburgh Steelers offer female fans advanced

courses beyond "Football 101", which are aimed at educating them on more technical aspects of the game (Llovio, 2007).

Of the 14 teams that do not participate in the "Football 101" program, several host their own events in which they target their female fans. For example, the Baltimore Ravens held a ladies festival in 2005 where women could come to the stadium, meet players, go onto the field and participate in hands-on football events, and talk to coaches. "Our research showed that females wanted to feel a part of something, to have access," said Andi Goodwin, Manager of Advertising and Research for the Baltimore Ravens, "So we...tried to figure out how we can allow them to feel a part of it" (Llovio, 2007). In addition to participating in the "Football 101" program, The Pittsburgh Steelers have a special ladies-only day during their training camp. Female fans are able to watch a training camp practice, attend a taping of a local Steelers' show, meet their favorite players and acquire autograph pictures of them.

In the summer of 2007, the Baltimore Ravens created "Purple", a club dedicated to female fans, whose goal was not to attract fans, but to do a better job of involving the current women fan base (Llovio, 2007). "Purple" is free for female Ravens' fans to join, and membership includes updated information on the team, fitness tips from strength and conditioning coaches, nutrition tips from the team's nutritionist and discounts from sponsors. There is also a higher-level club called "Lavender Ladies" for female Baltimore Ravens fans that don't mind paying a yearly membership fee of \$250.00. In addition to the perks that "Purple" members receive, "Lavender Ladies" receive private autograph sessions with current and former players, a special day at training camp and gifts such as wine glasses (Llovio, 2007). Like "Football 101", Purple and Lavender Ladies are visible marketing campaigns. However, they do include a couple of arguably "think pink" characteristics. First, purple and lavender are colors that have been socially linked to femininity for both women and gays. Second, women don't receive gifts such as autographed footballs, but rather they receive wine glasses and other decorative items with team logos.

Marketing the Game as more than a Sport

In 2007, the NFL introduced a new player image campaign to both counter the off-season negative behaviors of several high-profile starters, and to introduce players in a way that they would appeal to a broader audience. In one television ad, Seattle's Quarterback Matt Hasselbeck is shown reading his playbook to two of his children as a way of putting

them down for bed. He is depicted as a family man, who despite the roughness and demanding nature of his job still finds time to share tender moments with his kids. He is humanized and viewers are made aware that Matt is much more than a NFL Quarterback: He is a man, a husband and a father with a whole life that happens off of the football field. Lisa Baird states, "I think that the stories, the insights about [the players'] lives definitely draw in the women's audience" (Powell, 2007). In commenting on how the Baltimore Ravens have stepped up their campaign to target their female fan base, Gabrielle Dow, the team's Senior Director of Marketing stresses that efforts are not financially driven. "Here it is more about the experience and making it a way of life. I'm not trying to sell you a ticket. I'm trying to allow you to be a part of something that is special and unique (Powell, 2007). Lisa Baird, Senior Vice President of Consumer Products and Marketing Integration at the NFL expressed that "...teams are trying several marketing outreaches aimed at women including highlighting players' involvement in community activities which appeals to women who are active in their own communities..." Following the 2007 September report that the Pittsburgh Steelers have the highest percentage of female fans in the NFL, The Pittsburgh Post-Gazette published a letter titled "Our Caring Steelers", written by a local library director, Sharon McRae. In her letter, Ms. McRae lends support to Baird's claims that linking the NFL to community service is an important one. Ms. Beard lauds the Pittsburgh Steelers, not for their 5 Super Bowl Championships, but for their unselfish community service, "I enjoy watching the Steelers play, but more important, it is the Steelers' actions and their values off the playing field that make me proud to be their fan." (McRae, 2007).

The NFL has featured many television ads over the years in their partnerships with the United Way. These ads show players reaching out to the less fortunate in their community and volunteering their time with community projects such as building playgrounds and visiting sick children in hospitals. These nurturing profiles have done an amazing job of humanizing these larger-than-life sports' figures and endearing them to women everywhere. These sort of campaigns may be considered transparent, for they provide viewers with intimate player portraits, pride themselves on being authentic and manage to fulfill women's needs for community without specifically targeting women.

Women in Leadership and Visual Positions in the NFL

According to an article published by James A. Fussell in [nextnc.com](http://www.nextnc.com/index2.php?option=com_content&do_pdf=1&id=17575) (http://www.nextnc.com/index2.php?option=com_content&do_pdf=1&id=17575) in 2007, NFL teams employed 52 female executives at the vice president level or above. In addition, women have become an increasingly visible part of game-day broadcasts and other football programming. The honky-tonk man who for several years brought us the "Are you ready for some football?" night-time football kick-off song on NBC, was replaced by a female vocalist. In 2006, recording artist, Pink was featured on the segment, and in 2007, Faith Hill took over the spot. Finally, female broadcasters overwhelmingly conduct the sideline broadcasts of NFL prime time shows and high profile games, placing them in a highly visible role.

Communities and Venues Targeting the Female Football Fan

Currently there are many online sites written by women for women on the topic of American football. These sites are largely examples of visible marketing approaches, although some contain various "think pink" elements. Although they include a variety of content, they do share some common features. First, many sites introduce women to their site and to football through the telling of an anecdotal tale of their own personal experience with the game of football. They trace both their interest and their knowledge of the game and personalize their accounts by identifying their favorite team.

Following this introductory section, most websites include an instructional component often titled "Football 101", designed as a brief overview of the game. Authors discuss how the game is divided, the number of players on the field, offense vs. defense, and specific parts of the game such as the coin toss, challenges, and possible overtime. Most sites also contain additional links and references where viewers can find additional sources and information about football. They list books which explain football to women (Berns, 1994; Bohnert, 2007; Dickerson, 2007, Robinson-Peete, 2005 and Strout 2004, to name a few), movies with football themes (*Remember the Titans*, (2000); *Rudy* (1993); *The Longest Yard* (1974), etc., and TV shows which center around football (*Friday Night Lights* (2007-NBC), *Football Wives* (2007-ABC), *Coach* (1989-ABC) and *1st and 10* (1984, HBO). There are often fun football graphics related to the game and to the female fan. In her blog, Chloe Cavanaugh

includes a caricature of a female football player and the caption "Let's go girls, and kick some butt!" (<http://www.squidoo.com/football101ladiesonly>),

In addition, many websites not only contain content that targets the game itself, but also rather include sections that focus on the overall culture of football and female fan interests. This content reflects a variety of marketing approaches. For example, Betsy Berns' pages (<http://femalefan.ivillage.com/entertainment/2006/08>) contain an interactive section in which female fans are asked to vote on the sex appeal of high-profile NFL football players. This portion, called "Sunday Night's Sexiest", has players go head-to-head in rounds for the title of the "sexiest", and a winner emerges for each round based on viewer's votes. Chloe Cavanaugh's site ("Love Him, Love Football" <http://www.squidoo.com/football101ladiesonly>), contains recipes for halftime "game food", and a special section called "Time to Shop", where ladies find links and advertising for a number of commodities for them and their mates including Mr. Beer Home Micro- Brewery, Collectibles of the Game Calendars.com, the ESPN shop, etc.

As afore mentioned, women enjoy the sense of community and welcome safe and fun places to talk football. A number of female web bloggers, such as Betsy Berns, encourage women to "tell me what is on your mind" and "let me know what you would like to know" (<http://femalefan.ivillage.com/entertainment/2006/08>). Bloggers like Chloe Cavanaugh encourage viewers / readers to comment on her site and to make suggestions for future content ("Love Him, Love Football", <http://www.squidoo.com/football101ladiesonly>).

Online is not the only place where female football fans are finding a community to call their own. Many TV and radio shows have programs that encourage female callers or specifically target them in visible marketing campaigns. For example, the Pittsburgh-based talk show *Sportsbeat*, hosted by Stan Savran, has a special evening it devotes to female callers. While this opportunity is not a weekly occurrence, it does show women that the media values their viewership and their opinions on the Steelers are valuable. While women are able to call at all other times during the interactive segment of *Sportsbeat*, "ladies night" is limited to women only and enables many women who many feel intimidated about communicating their thoughts on a traditionally regarded male subject matter in a mixed- sex venue.

Apparel for Female Fans

In 2007, Reebok, the official outfitter of the NFL, launched a full line of football clothing and accessories designed exclusively for women. Since launching their exclusive line for women, Reebok reports that NFL orders are up 78% (from 2006 to 2007) (http://www.nextnc.com/index2.php?option=com_content&do_pdf=17575). In fact, women's apparel is the NFL's fastest growing business sector, for it has shown double-digit growth during its five years of existence (http://www.nextnc.com/index2.php?option=com_content&do_pdf=17575). Jeff Hennion, Chief Marketing Officer for Dick's Sporting Goods, exemplifies this recent trend in commenting on the Pittsburgh Steelers' female fan response to apparel designed for them:

The response from women and girls for Steelers-licensed apparel has been very strong. The growth is through out football, but the Steelers are especially [popular]....Black and gold jerseys, t-shirts, everything from car flags to blankets. Anything that is associated with the Steelers is extremely popular with women and is growing much faster than it is with men.

Both *Reebok* and *m&dash* (another outfitter) borrow style from street wear inspired by throwback jerseys. Many NFL fashions targeted to women come in tapered satin and varsity styles and feature glitter and rhinestones. One of the biggest sellers among women fans of the NFL are pink replica and jersey style t-shirts of their favorite team. Jerseys in this style are tapered and come in pastel colors such as light blue, pink and yellow. In addition to figure-flattering team gear in traditionally feminine colors, there is also a plethora of accessories, ranging from dangling earrings and belly-rings to handbags, headbands, scrunchies and do-rags. This type of marketing is clearly an example of the "think-pink" approach.

Marketing Trends for the Future: Selling the NFL

The female body and the male body are shaped differently, and in turn, these physical differences have obvious ramifications for beauty and fashion. While lots of women reject the notions of pink jerseys and glitter motifs, most women want their clothes to be flattering and comfortable. Adult sized authentic NFL jerseys are just too big for some women and some may argue that smaller women who wear these items literally look as if they borrowed their husband's or their boyfriend's jersey. Besides looking unnatural, this idea does nothing to legitimize them as fans. At the same time, the average American woman just cannot fit into a boys'

XL-sized jersey. Although some women love the color pink and the femininity it signifies, many other women embrace this color for its social association with largely female breast cancer disease. As a result of the economic success of the pink breast cancer campaign, pink as a color has become a general social signifier for women, especially in the area of cause marketing. I suggest that one recognize the socioeconomic and cultural significance of cause marketing as an area that may continue to influence marketing approaches, especially to women.

From the types of marketing strategies discussed in this article, it appears that visible marketing is currently the most widely used approach to marketing the NFL to women. However, if through attending programs such as "Football 101", reading books which explain football, and viewing pro-football games more frequently and actively, women become more knowledgeable and interested in the game, it may no longer be necessary to directly target them as fans. Transparent and hybrid approaches such as marketing football as a family and a community event, and marketing sports as a culture resonate with female fans, without alienating male fans, and may prove to give the NFL and companies with related products more bang for their buck.

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“DANCING AIN’T SISSY STUFF”: GENE KELLY’S CONSTRUCTIONS OF MASCULINITY THROUGH CHOREOGRAPHY AND CHARACTER

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Abstract

In three films from his “peak” years, Gene Kelly constructs an almost *overly* masculine image of his dancing male characters. In George Sydney’s *Anchors Aweigh* (1945), Vincente Minnelli’s *An American in Paris* (1951), and Stanley Donen and Kelly’s own *Singin’ in the Rain* (1952), all three of Kelly’s characters are portrayed as girl-chasing or women-obsessed, and have a charming ability to win over any woman. In a seeming attempt to combat the societal stigma of effeminacy placed on male dancers, Kelly has often referred to his own dancing style as “athletic,” and has been quoted as saying that “dancing ain’t sissy stuff.” The overt masculinity of both Kelly’s characters and choreography create an unquestionable heterosexual identity for both Kelly and his characters, despite the fact that Kelly’s characters are often surrounded by, dance, and perform with men.

When exploring the Hollywood musicals of the 1940’s and 1950’s, it is impossible to ignore the influence of Gene Kelly. Kelly’s athletic style of dance distinguished him from hoofers like Fred Astaire. With the societal stigma of effeminacy looming over the heads of male dancers, Kelly seems to have purposely created a distinctly masculine dancing style. In three films from his peak years, Kelly constructs an almost *overly* masculine image of his dancing male characters. In George Sidney’s *Anchors Aweigh* (1945), Vincente Minnelli’s *An American in Paris* (1951), and Stanley Donen and Kelly’s own *Singin’ in the Rain* (1952), all three of Kelly’s characters are portrayed as girl-chasing or women-obsessed, and have a charming ability to win over any woman. The overt

masculinity of both Kelly's characters and his choreography create an unquestionably masculine and heterosexual identity for his characters, despite the fact that Kelly's characters are often surrounded by, and dance and perform with other men. Kelly's characters' brand of heterosexual masculinity is constructed through his masculine and athletic dancing style, dialogue, phallic imagery—mainly during dance sequences—and ultimately his heterosexual coupling at the end of each film. These aspects push out of the picture any ambiguity that may have been emerged as a result of Kelly's characters' strong ability to dance, leaving no questions regarding his sexuality or masculinity.

For men, becoming a dancer has long carried the societal stigma of effeminacy. In her article, "Death to the Prancing Prince': Effeminacy, Sports Discourses, and the Salvation of Men's Dancing," Mary Louise Adams points out that in order to validate the masculinity in dancing, "many dance writers have borrowed heavily from discourses of sport and male athleticism" (64). In 1958, near the end of his film musical dance career, Kelly hosted a segment entitled "Dancing: A Man's Game" on NBC's *Omnibus* series. In the program, Kelly explores the idea that dancing is simply an extension of standard sports moves, like swinging a baseball bat. Ann Barzel's 1958 review of the program in *Dance Magazine* describes a segment featuring five male ballet dancers who

went through the clean-cut exercises of classic ballet. Eventually they took the competitive movements of the athletes, abstracted them, and distilled them into economical, straightforward, beautiful movements of dance. They were uncontroversially virile (30).

Much of Kelly's career seems to have centered on the ideas of uncontroversial virility and unquestionable heterosexuality. Between the societal perception of male dancers as effeminate and, the homosocial buddy pairings in the vein of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Kelly seemingly felt the need to express his masculinity as often as possible. Steven Cohan claims that the "Kelly image" had a "strong potential for camp affect: the eroticized spectacle of a male performer whose dancing 'with balls' exceeded heterosexual regulation yet without his ceasing to appear manly" (151). While this is a valid point, Cohan does not really mention the extent that Kelly's characters go to in order to make sure he is coded as masculine and heterosexual. He also does not really touch on the visual aspects of Kelly's films, like the phallic imagery. Throughout the three

films below, these aspects play a very important part in Kelly's construction of masculinity and heterosexuality.

Sidney's *Anchors Aweigh* immediately establishes Kelly's character, Joe Brady, as "the best wolf in the whole Navy." This title comes from Joe's vaguely effeminate sidekick, Clarence "Brooklyn" Doolittle (Frank Sinatra), whose shy and mild demeanor help to illuminate Joe as ultra-masculine. The distinction of Joe as masculine and Clarence as effeminate begins in the first scene of the film, in which we learn that that Joe recently saved Clarence's life when Clarence was blown overboard by an explosion". This continues throughout the film, as Clarence follows Joe around begging Joe to help him find a woman and "get started." It becomes apparent early on in the film that Clarence holds great admiration for Joe, and the other sailors seem to feel the same way.

Joe's first bit of dialogue in the film showcases the admiration the other sailors have for his masculine brand of heterosexuality. As he discusses Lola, the Hollywood dame he plans to visit during his three-day leave, the other sailors gather around him, ogling him in an almost sexual way. Although the men are probably ogling the idea of Lola and not Joe himself, watching this scene without dialogue creates a tone that could easily be coded as homosexual. The sexy jazz music throbbing under Joe's lines frame his next move as overtly sexual as he proceeds to lie down on a nearby table, and the other sailors crowd around him, staring down at him longingly. The camera, placed at Joe's feet, completes the circle of men surrounding him, inviting us to gaze at his reclined body from the ankles up. Clarence kneels submissively on the floor at the right of the frame, his folded arms resting on Joe's side as he stares longingly at Joe's face, beginning a pattern of "loving" glances directed from Clarence toward Joe which continue throughout the film. The other sailors gathered around him have their arms around each other, but Clarence is the only one actually touching Joe. Joe's only "saving grace" in this case is that he is talking about a woman, which drastically changes the tone of the scene from homoerotic to heterosexually charged. With the dialogue, we can view these men as straight, masculine Navy guys talking about dames.

Joe's first phone conversation with Lola features a similar sexualization of Joe. As Joe speaks to Lola in his best bedroom voice, Clarence leans in as close to the receiver as possible, all but resting his chin on Joe's shoulder. The look on Clarence's face is reminiscent of his longing gaze from the previous scene. When the camera cuts to the other sailors standing in line behind Joe, many of them again have their arms around each other. Although they are supposedly in awe of Joe's ability to smooth-talk Lola, many of their expressions reflect an almost romantic

longing as they watch Joe. Much like the previous scene, Joe is the object of Mulvey's male gaze, several times over. The next shot reveals a profile close-up of Joe, his lips nearly caressing the rather phallic phone receiver as his fingers stroke the receiver erotically, making it very difficult to read this scene as heterosexually coded without the dialogue, unless it is read as masturbatory. Once again, the dialogue comes to Joe's "rescue." The other sailors even cheer for his performance once he gets off the phone, affirming that their longing gazes were nothing but awe over Joe's incredible heterosexual masculinity. To highlight Joe's manliness, the camera lingers long enough to let us see Clarence as he pretends to call a lady friend, but really only calls the operator.

The first major dance sequence of the film, preceded only by the short "We Hate to Leave" number, features Joe and Clarence as they display virility through song and dance. At this point in the film, it has become ambiguous as to whether Joe is actually teaching Clarence how to be a "wolf," or just how to *pretend* to be one. Joe begins the masculine charade, covering up for Clarence telling the other military men that they "picked up a little kid." In a reflection of an earlier scene, the other military men, very few still in full uniform, crowd around the still fully-dressed Joe in a circle as he reclines back on a bed, and the camera resumes its position at Joe's feet. The fact that Joe and Clarence are still in full uniform, including hats, makes them appear as more "complete" men than the men in undershirts with bare heads standing around them. Clarence assumes his usual position at Joe's side, but just when we expect Clarence and his longing gaze to get swept aside with the other men, he joins in Joe's song to confirm the escapade Joe recounts. Interestingly, Clarence tells his own story, which, in opposition to Joe's, includes the woman begging *him* for a kiss. While Joe's story comes off as a conquering of heterosexuality in which he has the ability to strong-arm any woman into giving him what he wants, Clarence's can be read in two different ways. First, Clarence can be read as being so desirable that women beg *him* for kisses. Or, the more likely option, Clarence can be seen as so weak that a woman can force him to do something he does not want to do. After all, Clarence performs the same actions as the woman in Joe's story, and is therefore associated with a female character, even if that female is a figment of Joe's imagination.

Joe's major dance sequences—created by Kelly himself—are mainly solos, and create a sort of spectacle of masculinity. Steve Neale, drawing on Mulvey, makes note that when male bodies are made the object of the gaze, they become "feminized," which he sees as "an indication of the strength of those conventions which dictate that only women can function as objects of an explicitly erotic gaze" (14-15). But must the male body

always be feminized if it becomes the object of the gaze? Steven Cohan does not see this as the rule in his discussion of "The Worry Song," in which Joe performs a dance number with the animated Jerry Mouse. In Cohan's words: "Far from making Kelly seem effeminate when turned into such a spectacular object, 'The Worry Song' celebrates his virility and directs appreciation of it to viewers of any gender [...]" (171). Joe's tight, white sailor pants and form-fitting striped shirt allow for full view of his muscular physique. The costume alone is enough to keep Joe from seeming effeminate, but he also proves his masculinity through his dance. There are only two cuts during the entire number, and the camera never allows Joe to stray far from the center of the frame. The first cut seems to serve both as a way to get a fuller shot of Joe's body and to give the characters more freedom of movement from the background to the foreground. The second cut gives us a medium close up of Joe as he bounces Jerry Mouse from side to side by flexing his biceps. The sole purpose of this cut seems to be to give us a better shot of Joe's very masculine, well-developed muscles. This "celebration of virility" seems to continue through Kelly's other solo numbers in *Anchors Aweigh* as well.

Most notable of these solo numbers is the soundstage fantasy number, in which Joe proves his masculinity and heterosexuality once and for all. With the "Princess" Susie on a balcony above, Joe appears from the shadows below in a swashbuckler costume. He holds his sword in clear view, making sure that both the audience and Susie can see the obvious phallus he will use to establish his masculinity before he begins to dance. Of course, the most obvious way to prove his manliness in this situation would be dance with the present female and object of desire, Susie, but Joe opts to take the symbolic route. As Susie gazes down at him longingly, Joe becomes the object of a female gaze. Though this sequence begins and continues with an eroticization of Kelly's body, he once again evades Neale's idea that the male body as spectacle is feminized. In fact, this sequence seems to display, however symbolically, both Joe's masculinity and heterosexual desire for Susie. At this point, he begins to remove articles of clothing one by one in a style vaguely reminiscent of a male stripper. The tight, brightly colored costume he wears only adds to this effect. In what could be likened to sexual foreplay, he begins by taking off his hat, then removes his mask and flings it nonchalantly to the side. He tosses a red rose—presumably a yonic symbol—up to Susie. He then proceeds to remove his red cape, a color very similar to that of the rose he just tossed to Susie, and before setting it down, he thrusts his sword under the fabric before draping it across the bench. As he does this, the camera remains at a high angle, giving us Susie's point of view and asking us to

identify with her gaze. Just in case his heterosexual masculinity has not been thoroughly established, Joe twirls around holding his sword vertically, then thrusting it in Susie's general direction before tossing it into the bench behind him, and beginning to dance. This last view of the phallus is necessary in preserving his masculinity, as he is about to do something often coded as effeminate. The camera remains at this high angle as he begins to dance, and slowly, seamlessly comes down to eye-level as Joe dances across the stage. The number predictably ends with Joe making his way across the rooftop to Susie's balcony, and his heterosexuality confirmed by his kiss with Susie. The film ends by pairing Joe and Clarence with Susie and the waitress Clarence calls "Brooklyn," respectively. With Joe safely in a heterosexual relationship, the film can end, and Joe's masculinity remains intact.

Although *An American in Paris* does not offer the extreme admiration of Kelly's Jerry Mulligan's masculinity, nor the same kind of homosocial buddy bond featured in *Anchors Aweigh*, the film still does its best to be sure that Jerry Mulligan's masculinity and heterosexuality are unquestionable. In the first two shots of the film, the camera pans slowly across several phallic Parisian landmark buildings, establishing Jerry's masculinity before he even begins to speak, much like in *Anchors Aweigh*. Jerry's opening voice-over declares that he is an ex-G.I., another overtly masculine career choice in the same vein as Kelly's Naval character in *Anchors Aweigh*. However, he now resides in Paris doing what he loves: painting. Although painting may not carry the same societal stigma of effeminacy for a man that dancing does, male creative artists in general seem to be labeled as less masculine than "normal." Jerry's previous career as a G.I. carries enough masculine clout to allow him to remain "manly," however.

Jerry's attempts to preserve his masculinity can also be seen in his choice to pursue Lise (Leslie Caron) rather than Milo (Nina Foch), when Milo shows obvious romantic interest in him. Two particular elements of power relations come into play here. First, Milo's money, and Jerry's lack thereof, gives her power over Jerry. Adam even asks Jerry about Milo, "When you marry her, will you keep your maiden name?" This comment strips Jerry of his masculinity, which in turn supports his lack of attraction to Milo. Also, Milo's eagerness to enter a relationship with Jerry removes the challenge of "winning over" a woman, which is precisely what he has to do with Lise, who rejects him at first. Kelly's characters seem to revel in the ability to win over any woman: Joe is so charming in *Anchors Aweigh* that Susie falls in love with him instead of Clarence, and Kathy despises Don at first in *Singin' in the Rain*, posing a challenge to the one

with Lise. Because he does not have to charm Milo into being with him, he holds no power over her. So, Jerry decides to pursue Lise to fulfill his heterosexual destiny as she poses no threat to his masculinity. The dance numbers in the film also provide interesting commentary on Jerry's sexuality and masculinity.

In Jerry's first dance number, "By Strauss," he briefly takes on a feminine role, only to come back with much masculine gusto by the end of the number. As Adam Cook (Oscar Levant) plays the piano, and an elderly woman looks on with great amusement, Jerry drapes a tablecloth over his head and takes the traditionally female part, allowing Henri Baurel (Georges Guetary) to lead. The dance sequence is mostly shot in medium-long shots to allow us to see the bodies of the dancers. The two waltz around the floor of the café, Henri singing and Jerry maintaining the "girly" look on his face, as another older woman joins the first woman in gazing at this spectacle. With Henri dressed in a suit and Jerry clothed in a tight white sweater and form-fitting beige pants, this masculine/feminine pairing does not seem so farfetched. However, just before the dance sequence, Jerry tells one of his fellow apartment tenants that the only thing that can make his depressing and destitute situation better is "women and wine," so we are less likely to question Jerry's masculinity here. After dancing with Henri, Jerry takes it upon himself to prove his masculine heterosexuality by asking the thinner of the two elderly women to dance. Just in case dancing with a woman is not enough to prove his manliness, the two dance toward the front of the café where some very phallic baguettes are sticking up out of two baskets. Jerry dances directly behind the baguettes, which, with the camera position, conveniently appear to be right in front of his crotch. If Jerry was castrated by his dance with Henri, he has certainly re-obtained his manhood here. Just to make sure there can be no ambiguity surrounding Jerry's sexuality, the dance number ends with Jerry dancing with *both* women, taking one in each hand.

"Tra-La-La" showcases an interesting balancing act as Jerry bounces between heterosexually and homosexually coded actions and masculine and feminine coded actions. Similar to Joe's relationship with Clarence in *Anchors Aweigh*, there are several "questionable" actions between Jerry and Adam in this number, but because Jerry is singing about his love for a woman, his heterosexuality remains intact. The song begins as, with his arm around Adam, Jerry sings, "This time it's really love, tra-la-la-la," then proceeds to kiss the back of Adam's head. This visual could easily be coded as homosexual, but as Jerry skips into the other room, flinging off his jacket and unbuttoning his shirt, he sings, "*She* fills me full of joy, tell me papa" (*italics mine*). Now he has clarified that he is singing about a