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Senior Essay

**NFL’s Damaged Image**

Sports provide the rest of society a time to get away with the negative aspects going on in their life. The chance to sit down and watch your favorite team or favorite player perform at his or her best is a moment that so many people cherish. Society holds these players to such a standard because of the light they are put in on television and by the media. That light is built from a combination of many things, but none more important than the money these athletes make both on and off the field. Through both their respective teams and their own name, they create a brand for themselves that builds with the success they have on the field. David Carter brings to life the idea that high profiled athletes build up a certain image and brand that is going to benefit both themselves and their teams financially.[[1]](#footnote-1) That will then lead to fans of that player purchase items associated with his or her, which shine that player’s light even brighter. Money is such a tremendous factor, really the driving factor, in something being successful, and that is no different with the National Football League. Essentially, there are three stakeholders in the NFL being successful: the players, the fans, and the media. Each hold a specific role in making the NFL what it is today, which happens to be the most profitable sports organization in the country. The fans part comes into play when they purchase a jersey with the players name on the back or a sweatshirt with the NFL logo plastered on the sleeve. The players are the ones who produce well enough that encourage those fans to head to the stores and purchase such items. The media builds those players up to be larger than life, which entices the fans even more to show support them and the league. The problem with building these players up so large, it is that much higher of a fall when the media brings them down. But it is not always because of the media that these players fall faster than they grew.

Football is one of the most violent sports this country has ever seen. The athletes that participate in football on a daily basis are considered some of the most physically gifted and strongest athletes any where in the country. However, it is essential that these players separate their play and violence on the field from how they act in society, around there family and significant others. Playing the game of football may force a sense of hyper-masculinity, which leads to off the field issues. In recent months, several players have fallen victims of their own hyper-masculinity, and have forgotten to leave their violent side on the football field. It is not just that these men take their violent streak home with them, their social status, as professional athletes seem to allow them to believe they are above the law. Michael Welch agrees wholeheartedly that there is a correlation of hyper-masculinity and social status. [[2]](#footnote-2) The childhood that a football player had can also relate to their violent temper off the field. It just so happens that these players at the heart of the NFL’s issue right now are all black. Two of these players had childhood’s where the significant black male was absent and therefore, was raised by a single mother.[[3]](#footnote-3) Even though it is a stereotype that has been associated with black athletes, it is hard to ignore the effect a father would have had on Adrian Peterson and Ray Rice. The NFL devalues black masculinity because of the expectations of the league for its players on the field. Along with these two players, Greg Hardy and Jonathan Dwyer are the other two members that have become part of the NFL’s darkest hour due to domestic violence. As the media picked up one case, a second would follow and from there, would become a domino effect at the hands of the players, the league, and the media. **NFL players are held to a higher standard because of the sports popularity and the money they make; so when they attract negative attention, in the case of hyper-masculinity, it provides the media with enough ammunition to give the NFL a black eye.**

1. David Carter, *Money Games*, (Stanford University Press, 2011), 86 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Michael Welch, “Violence Against Women By Professional Football Players,” 1997 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. David Picker, “Ray Rice – like mother, like son” *ESPN*, <http://espn.go.com/espn/e60/story/_/id/7147473/baltimore-ravens-ray-rice-maintains-special-bond-mother-e60> (accessed October 16, 2014) [↑](#footnote-ref-3)