

Spring 5-10-2009

Children's Perceptions of Male and Female Athletes as Presented in Sports Illustrated for Kids

Brittany Perotti

University of Connecticut - Storrs, tigerlily5763@aol.com

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.uconn.edu/srhonors_theses



Part of the [Journalism Studies Commons](#), and the [Mass Communication Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Perotti, Brittany, "Children's Perceptions of Male and Female Athletes as Presented in Sports Illustrated for Kids" (2009). *Honors Scholar Theses*. Paper 82.

http://digitalcommons.uconn.edu/srhonors_theses/82

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Honors Scholar Program at DigitalCommons@UConn. It has been accepted for inclusion in Honors Scholar Theses by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@UConn. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@uconn.edu.

**Children's Perceptions of Male and Female Athletes
as Presented in *Sports Illustrated for Kids***

Brittany Perotti, University of Connecticut
Dr. Jennifer Bruening, University of Connecticut (advisor, Kinesiology)
John Borland, Springfield College (advisor, Kinesiology)
Maureen Croteau, University of Connecticut (advisor, Journalism)

Acknowledgements

I would first like to thank the community center and especially its assistant director for helping me to recruit children for the focus group and for hosting the site where it took place. In addition, I want to thank the Journalism and IMJR departments for providing the educational foundation that gave me confidence to conduct my own project, as well as the Honors Program for providing funding to purchase the issues of *Sports Illustrated for Kids* and incurring costs. And a special thank you goes to Dr. Bruening, Professor Croteau, and John Borland for dedicating time throughout the past three semesters to help guide me through various steps of the research process. Without your aid, the final product of a year of research would not have been nearly the same. Thank you all for your support.

Abstract

Despite gains made by Title IX in the past 36 years, including increased female participation in high school and collegiate sport, there is evidence that gender equity in sport is not fully achieved. Researchers target the media because they tend to shape social values and disseminate information to the masses (Kane, 1978, in Fink & Kensicki, 2002). As sports become more pervasive, framing theory has become particularly relevant. The purpose of this study is to build on the Hardin et al. (2002) study by examining the relationship among media sports coverage, gender equity in sport and the perceptions young sports fans begin to form about gender and sport based on media consumption. The researcher hypothesized that since women face discrimination in sport starting from the time that they choose to participate, children will perceive male athletes and their sports as more legitimate. Additionally, the media play a major role in shaping the views of audiences, so the way that they represent male and female athletes, including juxtaposing them, may have an impact on children. The researcher conducted a content analysis of 24 *Sports Illustrated for Kids* issues from 1996 to 1999 and 24 issues from 2006 to 2007. The researcher analyzed the content of photographs (N=3219) and of headlines (N=762) by using the definitions determined by Hardin et al. (2002). We found that there is a disproportionate amount of coverage devoted to male athletes and that the discrepancy between media representation between men and women in sport has grown since the mid-1990s. This study also includes a focus group conducted with three children from a community swimming program in a northeastern town and found that those children were acutely aware of the differences between men and women in sport based on the discussion. The researcher does not attempt to find a causal relationship between these children's perceptions and the way media represents them, but rather uses the focus group to complement the content analysis. As children become sports consumers in later life, future research exploring the relationship between children's perceptions and the media's representations need to be done before causality and the significance of media effects are determined.

Table of Contents

| | |
|--|----|
| 1. Acknowledgements..... | 2 |
| 2. Abstract..... | 3 |
| 3. Introduction: Gender Equity in Society..... | 5 |
| <i>The Problem</i> | 7 |
| <i>The Purpose</i> | 10 |
| <i>The Significance</i> | 10 |
| <i>Research Questions</i> | 11 |
| 4. Literature Review..... | 12 |
| <i>Media Effects Theories</i> | 12 |
| <i>The Media and Sport</i> | 14 |
| 5. Methods..... | 21 |
| <i>The Sample</i> | 21 |
| <i>The Instrument</i> | 22 |
| 6. Results..... | 25 |
| <i>Photographs</i> | 25 |
| <i>Headlines</i> | 26 |
| <i>Decade Comparison</i> | 24 |
| <i>Photographs</i> | 24 |
| <i>Headlines</i> | 26 |
| <i>Focus Group</i> | 31 |
| 7. Discussion..... | 36 |
| <i>Limitations</i> | 41 |
| <i>Suggestions for Future Research</i> | 42 |
| 8. References..... | 45 |

Gender Equity in Society

Gender equity has been a major topic of debate during the past 400 years, especially in the United States, as people have argued over whether or not women should have equal rights and privileges when compared to men. Indeed, society dictated exactly what was expected from women and men without much room for interpretation (Fausto-Sterling, 2000). Traditionally, women were to be the homemakers, to raise the children and pass down the gender expectations for each individual (Saxton, 1994). They were to be submissive to their husbands, serving his every need and catering to his demands. Women who did not have a husband by a certain age were looked down on because of their independence, often labeled old maids or spinsters, forced to lower levels of status in society and often subject to male relatives' commands (Kent, 1997). Men, on the other hand, were to be strong, rough-and-ready individuals who were those of power status (Saxton, 1994). Those women who broke boundaries in some way were considered radicals and a threat to society, forced out of the community or burned at the stake as a witch in the fear of their independence (Pelka, 1992). As a result, people in positions of power – men – maintained social control and prevented criticism on the matter (Pelka, 1992).

Things began to change in the late 1800s, as the country moved toward equal rights for people of all colors after the passage of the 13th, 14th, and 15th amendments. Women, dependent on their husbands' income and required to do the chores in the home and raise the children, reached the breaking point of being disenfranchised (Anderson, 1998). Leaders such as Susan B. Anthony, Lucretia Mott, and Elizabeth Cady Stanton encouraged women to break free of the shackles imposed on them at the expense of facing social mockery (Dassori, 2005; Cady Stanton, 1868). In fact, the Seneca Falls

Convention of 1848 marked the real beginning of the fight for equality, bringing women and men together who questioned the status quo (Anderson, 1998). The struggle lasted until the early part of the 20th century, when the U.S. Congress passed the 19th amendment granting women's suffrage in 1920.

The middle of the 20th century brought along the Feminist Movement, another opportunity for women to speak out against inequity. It began in 1963 after the controversial publishing of *The Feminine Mystique* by Betty Friedan, a work postulating that women bought into a system of dependency that made them believe that they could only accomplish something through their children (O'Connell, Curran, Hayes, Garvey, Miller-Lemore, Wiley, Fox-Genovese, Osiek, & Austine Pierce, 1994; Westfried, A. H., 1997). Friedan turned the conventional wisdom on its head, attempting to open women's eyes to the endless possibilities of accomplishments that could be gained outside of the home (Pollitt, 2006). Indeed, from just 1970 to 1975, women's attitudes about their social positions gained more support for women's rights (De Boer, 1977). Since that time, women's opportunities expanded outside of the home into the workforce; some females are now the primary provider in terms of household income.

The sports arena is no exception, as it plays an integral part in society. For years, people believed that women's bodies could not physically take the amount of stress and activity that was placed on them when they exerted themselves during exercise (Duffy, 1999). Society – men in particular – claimed that the exclusion of women in sport protected their well-being. Once people realized that this was not true, opportunities slowly opened for female participation in sports with one major stipulation: only if they were “ladylike” (Woods, 2007). By behaving as ladies, women kept their femininity,

considered so important that sports sometimes held beauty pageants for the female athletes along with sporting events (Worsnop, 1997). Even today, females struggle to find a balance between being seen as a woman and being taken seriously as an athlete with the stigma of homosexuality and masculine women (Ross & Shiness, 2008). As the 20th century progressed, more women recognized that the ability to play a sport of their choosing was as much a right of theirs as it was for their male counterparts. This created tension in schools and universities as opponents to female participation claimed sport was not a woman's place (Woods, 2007).

Nevertheless, the passage of Title IX legally recognized a woman's right to play and opened up new varsity opportunities (Woods, 2007; Suggs, 2005; Messner, 1988). It explicitly states that "No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance," providing women in college some legal protection for playing sports (Title IX, 1972). This legislation may be the main reason for the explosion of female participation rates in sport today from 1:27 to 1:3 (Conniff, 1998). At the same time, Title IX outraged many people, who claimed that the idea of proportionality resulted in a quota system that eliminated male sports while favoring female sports (Worsnop, 1997).

The Problem

Researchers continue to look at the issue of true equity, often examining the media for trends in public opinion because of the widespread dissemination of ideas. Athletes are shown on television promoting the newest product, on magazine covers, and even on cereal boxes. Some young people, the future of the industry, now aspire to be

athletes but not all may understand what implications specific roles for male and female athletes have on others. Furthermore, advertisers use celebrities and the superstar athletes that are idolized in popular culture as a strategic move to sell a product (Thomaselli, 2006). This is evident by going to a mall and asking people why they are wearing a certain brand of clothing (Boden, 2006).

Yet, the argument about how much gender equity exists in sport for this paper and other studies is based on evidence of the contexts and the exposure of female athletes in the media. For example, after the 1996 Olympics, several popular magazines had female athletes on the covers in celebration of their accomplishments (Fink & Kensicki, 2002). It was believed that this marked the dawn of a new era for women, for they would no longer be viewed as inferior athletes nor as primarily sex symbols (Fink, 1998; Lopiano, 1997; Women's Sports Foundation, 1997; in Fink & Kensicki, 2002). Shortly after, media coverage expanded both on television and in magazines (Carty, 2005) and provided optimism that things would indeed change, though that did not necessarily mean equal coverage in terms of depiction (Fink & Kensicki, 2002). In fact, many women were compared to their male counterparts more often than not (Jones et. al, 1999 in Fink & Kensicki, 2002).

Less than a decade later, however, some studies found that female athletes were once again thrown in the spotlight not for their athletic achievements, but for the appeal that they had to male readers in publications. The media maintained the image of the ideal woman by downplaying the strengths of a female, a balancing act that is difficult for many young athletes (Christian, 2004). For example, female athletes are still marketed as sex objects to older male fans, going so far as to pose nude for magazines such as

Playboy in the off-season (Drape, 2004). These photographs sparked a debate about the appropriateness of posing for adult entertainment magazines while still being a role model for children. While Dominique Dawes, the president of the Women's Sports Foundation, argued that the action did not compromise the athletes' achievements, other athletes such as Jenny Finch and Lisa Fernandez said they wanted to be noted for what they did on the field (Drape, 2004). Additionally, many organizations aimed at increasing the awareness of women's sport say that the media have done much less than they can to help the state of females in sport (Bishop, 2003). As illustrated above, the reality is that many of the same issues of equality in society are raised when examining sport in today's world (Coakley, 2007).

Children are especially influenced by sport stars' behaviors and even their fashion styles, leaving them vulnerable to imitating the purchasing patterns of their idols (Boden, 2006). They try to imagine themselves as actually being similar to their favorite sports stars or may even believe that they look just like them when they follow their lead. Elliot and Lenard (2004) suggest that this allows children to have an easy way to figure out how to fit in with their peers (in Boden, 2006). This may explain why children pick a favorite sports team, e.g. the Yankees, if others around them root for the same team. The media also play a role in telling the public, including children, the correct way to behave, passing down the ideas of generations past of what it means to be a male or a female, and who and what deserve attention (Messner, 1988). Thus, the media define an athlete by specific standards, regardless of intention, and present those attributes to the public.

In reality, sports are a microcosm of society as a whole and the issues that develop in sport are related to current political and social issues. The major issues of gender

equity and the power relationships within sport, inherent in the way that sport is organized today (Chung, 2003 in Boden, 2006), are also problems outside of sport. Women's sport has increased tremendously in both participation and consumption, at least in part because of the media attention (Bishop, 2003). But there is still a disparity between the treatment of male and female athletes in the media, even though American society and sport have come far from the days before Title IX.

The Purpose

The purpose of this study is to determine the relationship between gender equity in sport and the media targeted toward young sports fans. It builds upon the study conducted by Hardin, Lynn, Walsdorf, & Hardin (2002) and examines a sample of issues of the popular children's magazine, *Sports Illustrated KIDS*. It includes a content analysis of *Sports Illustrated KIDS*, a magazine that became immensely popular in the 1990s and has since been distributed in elementary schools and can be found in many libraries (Jensen, 1997). As a result of wide-spread dissemination, it is not unreasonable to believe that many children have spent time reading the stories and looking at pictures, learning from the magazine ideals of what it means to be a female athlete versus a male athlete.

The Significance

Those involved in the sport industry have a significant need to know what consumer perceptions are of their product. In this case, it is important for those in women's sports to try to market to potential fans in a way that is appealing. Thus far, many female athletes have been marketed through the use of their physical appeal and the attraction males have to them. This study may provide people with information that they need to develop different marketing strategies and to be successful. If they are able to

understand the opinions of younger fans, arguably the future fan base for the sport, sport managers can adapt to children's attitudes about women's sport and work to enhance a positive image. Eventually, this may create a positive change in the way that women in sport are marketed.

Furthermore, this study attempts to gain a sense of how children perceive individuals through media. It is crucial for parents to understand what their children pick up on in messages directed toward mass audiences. This may help parents develop techniques to counter attitudes against women's sports involvement. It is also important for researchers and those in the media to understand the impact that articles and photographs have on young people who are still developing. The study aims to uncover socialization factors in the media pertaining to children-directed sports magazines, which one hopes will make editors more aware of the power they have in shaping public opinion. If children have biases that correspond to what they see in magazines, there may be available and practical options to change whatever negative perceptions of athletes, especially female athletes, exist and instead breed understanding and acceptance.

Research Questions

RQ 1: Is there a relationship between young fans' perceptions of women in sport and the way that the women are marketed to the public?

RQ2: Are female athletes marketed as athletes first and women second?

RQ3: Do marketers highlight the attractiveness and grace of women, while emphasizing the strength and aggression of men in sport?

Literature Review

Media have historically been the record keepers for popular opinion, showing trends in culture through the decades due to their influential role in forming public views. In other words, they are the gatekeepers for deciding what is covered and what is not. As a result, researchers look at effects the media may have on people, especially children, who lack real-world experience to discriminate between what is realistic and what is not.

Media Effects Theories

One of the major theories in media effects is cultivation theory, which postulates that people who are heavy viewers of television are more likely to believe that what is shown in the media is reflective of the real world (Gerbner, 1969, in Nabi & Sullivan, 2001). Studies are conducted to find the correlation between information in the media and people's perceptions about the world, exploring how violent people believe the world is after watching television (Hetsroni & Tukachinsky, 2006; Romer, Jamieson, & Aday, 2003) or how many people they think use cigarettes (Gutschoven & Van den Bulck, 2005), for example. These studies found that there exists a correlation between people's perceptual changes of the world around them and what was shown on television, supporting the cultivation theory (Hetsroni & Tukachinsky, 2006; Gutschoven & Van den Bulck, 2005; Romer, et al., 2003). As a result, people tended to believe that the world was more violent and that more people were smokers than was the case. This can be an issue for children, who are developing as individuals while at the same time forming morals and an understanding of their world. Children are impressionable, and as such, this effect has been one of concern for researchers.

Social learning theory has also been extensively studied by many researchers since its development in 1963. This theory postulates that people who see an individual act aggressively toward another person will likely imitate the action of the person if there is a reward or absence of negative consequences and the person is attractive or similar to themselves (Bandura, 1986, in Fireman & Kose, 2002). Bandura used a Bobo doll, an inflatable punching bag shaped like a clown, as his way to test the theory. He had researchers kick and punch the Bobo doll. They were then rewarded or punished for their actions, or there were no consequences shown. Children were split into three groups and were shown one of the conditions. They then played in a room with the doll. Those who had seen the person rewarded or a lack of consequences hit the doll more often than those who had seen punishment for the action. Since that time, many researchers have used it to support their findings that children can learn from observation of others and direct experience.

Other studies use social learning theory to find solutions for the ease at which children learn bad behaviors and attitudes through watching others. One study used this premise to counter gender stereotypes in the media (Nathanson, Wilson, McGee, & Sebastian, 2002). The researchers found that children who did not have conversations with parents about stereotypes in the media and did not have viewing regulations were particularly vulnerable to developing a gender schema that had stereotypical ideas of males and females. On the other hand, those who lived in homes with parents who had conversations about the content of television programming and those who were given mediation in a laboratory setting were more likely to view the media critically and were less prone to developing stereotypes. This was more effective in younger children than

older children because they had not yet reached the age where they had developed stereotypes of males and females (Nathanson et al., 2002). This may serve to help counter the stereotypical images that are presented to children by television programming.

A third theory, gender schema theory, explains the way that children learn certain behaviors. According to this theory, children create ideas of people based on their gender that influence the way that they think and act (Martin & Ruble, 2004; Cherney, 2005). They develop these beliefs using the cues that they have been given by their parents and society as to how males and females act. When a male or female dresses or acts in a way that does not match a child's gender schema, that child tries to find the things that do make the person fit into the assigned schema. In this way, a female dressing as a male would be less memorable to children than a female dressed as in traditional feminine clothing (Cherney, 2005). This could explain why female athletes in dresses may be more recognizable to children than those in uniforms that are undistinguishable from male athletes.

The Media and Sport

Popular shows and celebrities are not the only ones that have mass appeal, however, as the sport arena developed into one of entertainment and mainstream consumption. Consequently, researchers testing conditions of the sports world focus on the way that females are portrayed in mainstream media targeted toward adults. According to Kane (1978), researchers target the media because they have the ability to shape social values and disseminate that information to the masses (in Fink & Kensicki, 2002). Based on this, an examination of either print or broadcast media coverage of athletes would be the most accurate way to gauge public opinion of athletes at a specific

time. As Hardin, Chance, Dodd, & Hardin (2002) state, “Media researchers have criticized newspaper and magazine sports coverage on the basis of gender for decades and for good reason: Multiple studies demonstrate a consistent bias toward males on sports pages” (p. 64). Bishop (2003) also found that the gender bias is obvious in *Sports Illustrated*, whose readership is predominantly male, with no less than 80% of the features during a six-year period centered on a male athlete. During this same time, women’s sport participation and consumption were on the rise. Additionally, the number of photographs with female athletes, one of the first things that catch a reader’s eye, is diminishing (Bishop, 2003).

Studies conducted found that often media outlets focus on the physical appeal of female athletes rather than their accomplishments within the sport arena (Carty, 2005; Fink & Kensicki, 2002), sending a strong message to the public as to what is most important about women in sport. One study did find that this was not the case during the 2000 Olympics (Vincent, Imwold, Masemann, & Johnson, 2002), possibly because of the number of female viewers during that time. The study did find, however, that there were more color photographs in USA Today of women than men and that the paper’s readership is 72% male (Vincent et al., 2002). Placement in the paper does determine whether or not color is utilized in particular photographs, but at the same time there may be an unintentional emphasis on attractiveness rather than accomplishment for women at a time when body image is an issue among teenagers in the United States, especially female athletes (Muscat & Long, 2008).

The emphasis on physical appearance and the ideal thin woman creates many problems for women, feeding into the idea of their bodies as objects (Muscat & Long,

2008; Beals & Manore, 1999). Muscat and Long (2008) found that the more critical comments are about a woman's size, the more likely she is to have an eating disorder. This means that women are sensitive to the feedback that they receive, which can be especially damaging if their weight is discussed publicly on television by announcers or in magazines. Additionally, eating disorders are more common among women who participate in sports that emphasize grace and aesthetic values, such as gymnastics and figure skating, rather than those sports that do not, such as soccer (Sundgot-Borgen & Torstveit, 2004). If the media continue to place significant coverage on sports of this kind, it may have implications on the health of the athletes.

Indeed, television is a main part of many people's lives, as they use it to unwind after a long day at work. People sit down and use it as a form of entertainment without critically analyzing the messages contained within the context of a program. For example, an examination of television shows on the Fox network illustrates that the status quo of masculinity in sports such as wrestling is maintained even when portraying females in this normally male area of sport by downplaying it as fictional (Walton, 2007). By doing so, this may discourage females from participating in sports that require more strength and competition against males such as football and wrestling. Another study reported that currently, women lean toward aesthetic sport and shy away from strength sports because there is a lack of role models, and those women who do try to play strength sports fight to find a balance between playing sport and maintaining femininity (Thomsen, Bower, & Barnes, 2004). In fact, the most popular women's sport that is televised is figure skating (Bishop, 2003), one that highlights the beauty and grace of a competitor rather than her strength and athletic ability and reaffirms the masculine hegemony in sport. This may

suggest that the media are repressing females' desire to do what they would like to do by implying that breaking boundaries threatens women's femininity.

Moreover, the media present a specific view of the sport that is aired on television, allowing those in control to determine what is and is not shown. As a result, it is important to examine how women are viewed. Parker and Fink (2008) found that the more positive attitudes were about female athletes, the higher the number of women involved in sport. They also found that the concept of a feminine athlete was influential in determining whether or not a woman would participate, as the more feminine a female appeared, the more likely a woman was to compete in the sport. Additionally, studies have found that the way that commentators discuss female athletic ability differs from that of their male counterparts (Billings, Angelini, & Eastman, 2005; Billings, 2007), which gives people a specific image of the ideal female athlete. These studies have shown how influential television is on public opinion.

Magazines are another form of mass media that are a source of reinforcing gender roles. When looking at popular magazines, one study found that appearance has been a major theme of headlines in those publications targeted toward young women and that they may not be reflecting changes in gender-equity attitudes (Davalos, Davalos, & Layton, 2007). Though many people feel that society progressed, Davalos et. al's study (2007) showed that the media are still pushing ideals of femininity onto growing women and that the ideas has remained stable since the 1970s. The same can be said for women's sport and fitness magazines, as the women in the photographs in the publication were viewed by adolescent volleyball players as unrealistic and trying to get men's attention rather than playing the game (Thomsen et. al, 2004).

Even sport magazines, which focus on an area of life that people feel has moved toward equity, are no exception. When looking at *Sports Illustrated*, a leader in American sport magazines, women still tend to be marginalized and photographed in non-athletic settings more than athletic settings (Fink & Kensicki, 2002). Few are even on the covers of these magazines. Research on the coverage of women during the 1996 Olympics in popular children's magazines concluded that "studies of images in popular children's sports magazines revealed inequitable coverage for female sports and an adherence to gender stereotypes," though a later study showed close to equal coverage (Hardin et. al, 2002b). Due to the fact that the Olympics come only once every two years and last for two weeks, the coverage dedicated to sports for the rest of the time, approximately 98% of sports seasons, may not have the same results.

Few studies, however, examine children and the sports media targeted toward them. One did analyze the advertisements within the magazine *Sports Illustrated for Kids* to see whether the marketers reinforced gender norms while selling products to children (Cuneen & Sidwell, 1998). This is relevant to the current study in terms of the ability of children to interpret information that they see as images rather than words because they are more able to process and comprehend those things (Sulzby, 1985, in Cuneen & Sidwell, 1998). Communication researchers argue that children are particularly affected by social learning theory in terms of what they see in the media and as a result are more likely to engage in behaviors deemed appropriate for male or female children (Schwartz & Markham, 1985 in Cuneen & Sidwell, 1998). As a result, the media can be seen as major tools in shaping children's perceptions of a typical female – one who is not necessarily strong and powerful. Specific behaviors reserved for one gender were also

depicted in the actual photographs in the magazine that related to athletes, both male and female, and women were often in more passive roles (Cuneen & Sidwell, 1998).

Another study, conducted by Hardin et al. (2002b), examined editorial photographs in *Sports Illustrated for Kids*. Pictures are particularly influential in shaping children's ideas of an athlete because looking at a picture does not require the same set of skills as reading. Therefore the child who is exposed to these images may take away more than the information from the article, though they may not know how the photograph was manipulated. The study included coding for specific genres of sport, breaking them down into four categories: high risk, strength, aesthetic, and neutral (Hardin et al., 2002b). The researchers found that overall, men were the main focus of editorial photographs 76.3% of the time. Males were also more likely to be in team sport photographs than women, as leaders, and in active poses more often than their female peers (Hardin et al., 2002b). The study found that women were underrepresented 19:1 in strength sports as well, which may demonstrate the effectiveness of the media in shaping what sports women choose to pursue. Additionally, Hardin et al. found that the media's coverage of women had actually regressed, with fewer female athletes being represented (2002b).

Though the focus is on women being underrepresented in general, Hardin et al. (2002b) found that the same was true for males in aesthetic sports. This may suggest that the media are also trying to frame children's beliefs of masculinity – being strong and powerful. This could potentially be a barrier to entry for males who would like to participate in sports that are being depicted as feminine (Coakley, 2007; Fields, 2005; Messner, 1992).

Either way, previous studies demonstrate that females are underrepresented in general in the media and that males are underrepresented in some sports that go against the grain of fitting in the societal mold of feminine and masculine. These studies show that this practice is not limited to magazines with adult readership.

Methods

The Sample

This study examined 24 issues of *Sports Illustrated KIDS* during 2006 and 2007 and 24 from 1996, 1997 and 1998 to compare the state of female athlete portrayals as it developed through the past two decades in the form of a content analysis. Since the magazine is a monthly magazine, this gives an accurate depiction of the trends during the 1990s and this century.

The focus group consisted of three children between the ages of nine and 12. These children were selected from a local community center because they are children who participate in recreational sport. There was no specific race or ethnicity targeted, but the location of where the research was conducted is more than 90% Caucasian. They were also middle-class children who attended suburban schools. The children had both parents in their lives, as their parents were still married. This group an incredibly small portion of American children's views of the magazine, but it provides a starting point for feedback, as this population does not have much of a voice in the literature and studies done so far on *Sports Illustrated for Kids*. Thus, the focus group gave children an opportunity to express their opinions in a comfortable and familiar location without fear of punishment or mockery from peers. This allowed for open answers and dialogue.

Children were in an informal setting in their community center with the permission of the parents or guardian, and answered questions that helped determine whether these kids are in fact being socialized by the magazine. This complemented the content analysis findings. It may also give a more practical approach to determining

whether there is a correlation, though causation cannot be determined, between the children's opinions of athletes and sport and the magazine's promotion of sports.

The Instrument

The study tested for gender biases in the magazine's representation of female athletes by using a combination of coding definitions from Cuneen and Sidwell's study of *Sports Illustrated KIDS* advertisements (1998) that define prominent, supporting, team, individual, and recreational depictions of people. There was one coder used for this content analysis. Though using another coder was considered, based on the researcher's physical distance from the university campus during the coding, finding willing participants was extremely difficult. Cuneen and Sidwell define a prominent figure as the one that is the first to gain a reader's attention because of the position that he/she is relative to other people (1998). A supporting figure is defined as those other individuals in the pictures that are secondary figures. Cuneen and Sidwell (1998) defined team sports as those that "require more than two people to complete tasks such as baseball, soccer, basketball, etc" (p. 43). The current study uses that conceptualization. Individual sports are those that can be accomplished with one or two people and recreational sports are defined as those that are for "leisure and not competition" (Cuneen & Sidwell, 1998, p. 43) though skateboarding and snowboarding will be included in this study as an individual sport because of the popularity of extreme sports today.

Additionally, each of the feature articles in the magazines were coded for their depiction of type of sport as described by Hardin et al. (2002b), which were based on definitions given by Duncan and Sayavong (1990; in Hardin et al., 2002b). Strength sports are those that require one person to dominate over another in order for a winner to

be declared and those that require stamina of athletes, while aesthetic sports are those that highlight the poise and grace of an athlete (Hardin et al., 2002b). Hardin et al. (2002b) also defined high risk sports, those that threaten the safety of an athlete based on the nature of the competition itself, while neutral sports are those that do not fit into the other categories – but that would most likely fit into the team sport category as stated above. With these seven categories, the pictures used can be coded into specific areas that give a clearer description of where males and females fit.

Articles were also coded to determine the subject matter. As this content analysis looks at not just photographs, but the way that the articles are presented and the actual content of the stories, it is important to break down the types that are present. A story that focuses on the professional accomplishments of the athlete is categorized as those that devote most or all of the space to the discussion of the athlete's performance and talent within the sport arena. This is broken down into the language that is used to assess the performance; one that stresses the talent of the athlete based on strength versus one that stresses the grace/form of the athlete. Special interest stories are those that discuss athletes in terms of a project or achievement they work on outside that are not sports related and that highlight the athlete for accomplishments outside of sport. They are also categorized by language that is more feminine or masculine in terms of the description of the athlete – for example, saying that the athlete is caring, kind versus strong, competitive. The headlines of the articles were also coded for certain themes that emphasize a particular aspect of the athlete.

For the focus group, children's responses were coded for either positive or negative statements of an athlete. Positive responses are those that compliment the athlete

and focus on the individual's strengths. Such responses would be "He is really talented and has won a lot of games" and "He is someone that I want to be like." Negative responses, on the other hand, are those that are critical of the athlete and focus on weaknesses. For example, a response such as "He does not look very strong, so I don't think he could really be that good of an athlete" would be coded as negative.

In addition, children's responses on participation and consumerism will be evaluated for influences of family or peers.

Results

Photographs

During the course of two months, 48 issues and 3,219 photographs were analyzed and coded by the researcher. In total, 81.7% of all photographs had only male subjects. Additionally, 84.6% of dominant photographs had males as their subjects and 79.7% of supporting photographs had male subjects. Of the 72 posters in the magazines, 90.2% were those of male athletes.

Athletes who played team sports were most frequently photographed (70.5%). The estimated median age for female athletes in team sports was 22.23 years of age. Male athletes, however, had an estimated median age of 26.26 years of age. In general, those who played recreational sports and fans were most often between the ages of 10 and 14. Athletes, however, both for individual and team sports were most often between the ages of 19 and 26.

Further, most photographs throughout the 48 issues were action shots of athletes taken during a game. Indeed, 74.1% of all photographs were of athletes during an event. Males composed 82.7% of these event-oriented photographs, which accounted for 61.3% of all types of photographed settings in the magazine. Yet, of all of these photographs, being shot in front of a crowd was not a persistent theme. In fact, only 7.4% of all editorial photographs had athletes shown in front of a large group of people. Only 2.7% of photographs with female subjects had a crowd, whereas only 8.4% of male subject photographs showed a crowd.

In general, 94.4% of all photographed subjects were prominent figures. Specifically, females who were the subject of the photograph were the prominent figure

97.3% of the time. Likewise, 94.7% of all male-oriented photographs had the male subject as the prominent figure.

The nature of the sport that was most often photographed was the neutral setting. In fact, 45.3% of the time, the sport was one such as baseball or basketball. Male athletes in these neutral sports were the subjects of photographs 47% of the time. Females, too, were predominantly engaged in these neutral sports in photographs, 38% of all female athletes photographed. A close second for males were strength sports, most often football or hockey, which were 30.1% of all male athletes' photographs. Compared with this, females in strength sports, most often hockey, composed 6.3% of all photographed females and 1.1% of all photographs. Females, on the other hand, were photographed participating in endurance sports, such as running and swimming, more than aesthetic sports, 20.1% compared with 15.8%, respectively. Men in aesthetic sports, such as figure skating or gymnastics, comprised only 0.7% of all male photographs, and only 0.6% of total photographs throughout the 48 issues.

Headlines

The researcher coded 762 total headlines from 48 issues of the magazine during the content analysis, including those used on the cover. Additionally, the researcher made note of the gender of the author of the stories to gain a general sense of the trends not only in coverage, but also with the newsroom itself. Based on these data, it was found that 49.2% of all articles were written by one male, whereas 12.9% were penned by one female reporter. On the other hand, 35.3% of all stories either credited no one with writing it or the gender of the author was unclear.

There are two types of story headlines that were analyzed: those of cover stories and those of supporting stories. Based on the content analysis, 61.5% of headlines pertained to male subjects. Conversely, 12.0% of headlines had a female as a subject and 18.9% were about both male and female athletes. In total, 59.1% of headlines had professional athletes as their subject, 73.0% of which pertained to professional male athletes. Specifically, 66.5% of headlines were cover stories, 65.9% of which were dedicated to one male and 12.6% dedicated to one female. Stories that covered both male and female subjects composed 15.0% of the issue's cover stories.

Examining the connotation and language used in headlines is another story. In general, 57.2% of headlines were positive. In fact, 38.6% of all headlines had a positive connotation and used language that was gender-neutral. An additional 37.4% of headlines had both a neutral connotation and used gender-neutral language. On the contrary, only 3.2% of all headlines had any type of negative connotation, such as one that called athletes a "Spoilsport." Furthermore, 24.9% of those headlines that were in fact positive did use masculinized language to promote the athlete, using words such as "strong" or "king." There were also positive headlines that used attributes often associated with femininity, 6.6% or 3.8% of total headlines. Conversely, there were equal occurrences of negative, feminine language as there was negative, masculine language: 0.3% or two headlines each out of 762.

The topics of the headlines were broken down into professionally related stories and special interest stories. Based on the operational definitions created by the researcher, 78.6% of all stories, and thus headlines, pertained to the subject's professional work. The

other 21.1% of stories were special interest stories, most often ones highlighting characteristics of sportsmanship or helping out others in a community.

For the fonts used in the magazine, the most common one was a traditional font, such as Times New Roman or Arial. These fonts were used in 58.1% of all headlines throughout the 48 issues. The second most commonly utilized font was a boxy font, ones that are bold and large, such as **COPPERPLATE GOTHIC BOLD**, used 28.5% of the time. Handwritten fonts, those used most often to emulate females' writing, counted for 7.4% of all fonts, while script fonts constituted 4.1% of headlines. Color was also analyzed in conjunction with the fonts chosen by editors. The findings show that the top three most commonly used colors for fonts throughout the years are red, white, and orange, respectively. Red fonts were chosen 21.9% of the time, whereas white fonts were used 21.3% by the magazine. Orange fonts, either the only color or the predominant color, were used in 13.8% of all headlines. Blue fonts were a close fourth, 12.9% of all colored fonts.

Decade Comparison

Photographs

In general, the number of photographs in issues from 2006 and 2007 decreased from the previous decade, as the number of pages in an issue declined. Yet, the number of males represented decreased by 31 photographs in 24 issues. Thus, females in these magazines diminished significantly, going from approximately 26.38 % to 7.80 % in 10 years – or 477 to 110 total photographs. In both the mid-1990s and 2000s, females often ran in supporting photographs with no crowds as the only figure in the shot (53.5 % of pictures in the 1990s and 41.8 % of pictures in 2006 and 2007). It is important to note

that males were also most frequently found in this particular category of photographs. The dominant photograph with no crowd came in as the second most common depiction for males and females through both decades. Female athletes on pullout posters remained in the minority; only one of the 24 issues from 2006 and 2007 had a female athlete as the subject of the poster, whereas five of the 24 posters from the 1990s centered on a female athlete. The remaining posters – 87.5 % – were those of male athletes.

In terms of the type of sport in which an athlete participated and the setting of the photograph, an overwhelming number were those of male athletes playing a team sport while in action on a consistent basis. For example, in 1990 732 pictures could be defined in this way. This number increased to 843 total pictures in this particular category. In the mid-1990s, females playing individual sports in action were most often photographed – 183 of the 477 pictures. This was followed closely by female athletes in team sports at an event, with 153 total pictures. This number became closer in 2006 and 2007, when 34 pictures of female athletes in team sports and 33 of women in individual sports in action were printed.

One specific item remained relatively constant throughout the decades, and that was the estimated age of the athletes in pictures. In the mid-1990s, the average came out to approximately 25.06 years of age for both males and females. This number decreased slightly by 2006 and 2007 to 24.26 years. When broken down by gender, however, females covered are typically about four years younger than their male counterparts in the magazines. This also remained moderately steady during the past decade. Whereas females were estimated to be between 20 and 21 years of age on average, males were believed to be between the ages of 25 and 26.

Headlines

By the mid-2000s, 76.8 % of all headlines in the issues – 262 of 341 – covered articles about a single male athlete. An additional 11.4% of the stories had at least one male subject, compared with 5.9% of female-only stories. When looking at the written word, coverage appeared at least more balanced in comparison to latter years. In the first 24 issues analyzed, 49.2% of headlines covered stories dedicated to one male subject and an additional 24.9% dealt with at least one male and one female. Coverage of a single female athlete, however, has remained consistently unbalanced; only 9.0% – 38 of 421 – of stories dedicated space to women only in the mid-1990s. This number showed a decreasing trend in the coverage of women and girls in sports in written word, along the lines that photographs also fell. In fact, the increase in the number of male athletes nearly doubled what it was from 1996 through 1999, even though the number of pages decreased by nearly 20 pages an issue in less than a decade – or approximately 480 pages in total.

The number of articles composed by female writers also diminished and the topics covered limited. In the 24 issues from the 1990s, 133 of the 421 articles (36.1%) had male authors and were strictly about a male athlete. By 2006 and 2007, this increased so that 174 of the 341 were written by men about men, 51.0% of all stories. On the other hand, women wrote 71 of the 421 articles from the mid-1990s sample, approximately 16.9% of all stories. Of these, 32.4% were about male athletes, whereas 45.1% involved a single female athlete. In the 24 issues from the 2006 and 2007 publishing years, 4.7% of all bylines were credited to females – 16 of 341 – an equal number dedicated to a female athlete as a male athlete: five.

Focus groups

A small, suburban community center played host for the focus groups, comprised of three children in the demographic targeted by *Sports Illustrated for Kids*. Of them, two were boys – brothers – and the third was a girl. The three knew each other from swimming classes attended during several months. As such, they appeared comfortable to speak their minds.

One major theme that emerged was the influence of males, even though participation in sports for these three children varied. Claire, for example, emphasized playing recreational and unorganized sports with her friends. When talking about football, in fact, she pointed to male peers and her father as the reason for her interest. Likewise, Derek and Paul mentioned their father's involvement after prompted for their interest in sports and with whom they played. Derek, the older of the two, also acknowledged that he and his father spent much time watching sports together when Paul was in another state swimming. All three mentioned ping-pong as a sport that they enjoyed playing, and often referred to their recreational use of sports as what they enjoyed doing rather than adult-organized sports. In addition, they responded that they liked to play sports because "it's fun." Further, Claire and Paul both justified sports participation as in some way to stay healthy and get exercise.

On the other hand, Claire often gave generalized statements when asked about a specific player or team. For example, she pointed to stories she heard from her mother about stellar athletes, but could not recall the name. She also said that the reason why she watched sports was "I kind of just watch them because my dad's watching them." Derek, however, clearly stated his position on sports, saying "I kind of like the competitiveness

and if you follow the newspaper, the statistics, you're always knowing that this team has to get up or this team has to stay in first place to get to the playoffs or whatever. I like that." Paul also highlighted competitiveness as a reason for following sports.

Another theme that emerged during the focus group discussion was the prominence of certain athletes. Major leagues, such as the NBA, MLB or even MLS, could spur at least one of the male children to name a player – and it was always a male. Contrarily, the children struggled to name a gymnast who was not someone with whom they grew up, even though Derek declared that he did watch the sport during the Olympics. The same was true for figure skaters.

In terms of the magazine, both Derek and Paul had subscriptions, whereas Claire never picked up an issue prior to the focus group. After approximately 10 minutes spent skimming issues, the children were asked questions about the content in the magazine. The researcher did not assign a specific issue to a child, but did select three magazines with a male on the cover, two with at least one female, and one with a male and a female athlete on the cover. The issues were a mixture of those from the 1990s and from 2006-07. When asked why the children selected their issues, all said that the athlete drew them to that particular magazine. Both Derek and Paul picked issues with males on the cover (Michael Jordan and Derek Jeter, respectively), whereas Claire selected a magazine with gymnast Dominique Moceanu on the cover, though she never heard of her beforehand. Paul initially skipped over the issue with Boston Celtics players Paul Pierce, Kevin Garnett, and Ray Allen because he had already seen that particular one.

The children were also asked to describe the cover athletes of the magazine they chose. In their descriptions, the children gave deeper answers to their opinions of the

athlete, digging up sociological issues. Derek defined Jeter as follows: “I think that he’s skilled, but he – as most players do these days – he doesn’t take steroids. He doesn’t cheat to get skills. He doesn’t feel pressures to be a better player... by taking steroids. So he’s an honest and good player.” Claire described Moceanu as someone who looked successful judging by “the medal around her neck.” She also said that she thought she was a pretty athlete when asked whether she agreed with the statement. Claire suggested that she might have watched Moceanu compete because based on what she had seen and read in the feature article, “she looks like she can do amazing tricks and I was looking, and she could do... she could flip herself in the air without hurting herself.”

Though Derek asserted that he did watch gymnastics, Paul appeared somewhat resistant to the idea of being a spectator or participant in the sport. At first, he struggled with voicing his opinion of the sport, but ultimately said that he did not like it because he could not do the tricks, smacking his forehead in disbelief at the thought.

As the children discussed the magazines, they spent time looking through much of the stories and pictures. Yet, it was the jokes section that the kids mentioned was their favorite part of the magazine. Derek also expressed excitement after spotting the “What’s the Call?” section where readers can learn rules of a specific sport given a scenario. Additionally, he said he was most interested in the baseball and basketball features. When asked to compare specific athletes, Claire remained relatively silent on the issue. Paul and Derek, on the other hand, were not short on words when it came to how they felt about superstars. Both boys agreed that they liked Derek Jeter more than Kobe Bryant because to them, Bryant appeared “mean to his teammates.” Derek chalked it up to being too competitive. Even though the kids did not really know much about Mia Hamm, other

than a clarification that she played soccer, they still discussed her abilities as an athlete in comparison with David Beckham. Paul said that he thought Beckham was the better player, though he admitted never seeing Hamm play before. Derek chimed in as well. “I mean, David Beckham is a pro. There’s really nothing to say about that. I mean, if they went [against] each other, you’d be able to tell,” he said.

A third major theme that surfaced was the importance of children in the magazine. In fact, the children who participated in the focus group in the suburban community all emphasized that they were the future of the sports industry. As a result, they said that the subjects that most interested them were children. To them, the child athletes gave new information. “Well, this actually shows the kids playing,” Paul said. “Like what they do instead of like the pros. So if you know about the pros, you know a lot about them. But with the kids you don’t know anything.” Claire and Derek agreed, saying that the kids in the magazines were fresh and it was not the same thing that they could get anywhere else.

Finally, all three children agreed that boys and girls and men and women should be able to play sports together. Derek said that there were varying levels of ability, but there were advantages that women had over men in some cases and others where men had the advantage because “If they [women] work harder, if they want to, they can both be equal in sports.” Claire, who quietly munched on her Goldfish crackers and chocolate chip cookies, now had much to say on the topic.

Well, I think like usual, girls should play sports because almost everyone... everyone thinks that girls, just sometimes, not everyone, but um, some people think that girls should be house...housepeople. Like they just sit around and do the sweeping and dishes and dinner and don’t go very far. But I think they should do sports because that shows that they don’t need to just sit around the house.

Paul also thought that girls could play along with boys in sports, but when Claire asked why girls do not play football, he suggested that it was because they could get hurt. Claire said that “Because I’m tougher... I have a friend named Alex and we played football together and I practically won every single time!” Ultimately, Derek said that it was difficult to tell how well either would succeed because of the lack of opportunity to play co-ed sports at a high level. In fact, he compared it to segregation in baseball in the early 1900s and Jackie Robinson breaking the color barrier.

They’re people that... that people thought were completely different. But... you knew that, well once it was proved, you knew that if they played together they could do the exact same thing as each of them could. So I think that it would be good if girls played sports.

Discussion

Based on the data, there is clear evidence that in terms of equal coverage of female and male athletes, a declining trend is present. If one looks at the percentage of space, both in photographs and headlines of females, males are a clear majority of subjects, a reflection of the findings of Bishop (2003) in *Sports Illustrated*. The findings also support those of Hardin et. al (2002a, 2002b) in that males in aesthetic sports and females in strength sports is severely lacking. This has serious implications for readers of the magazine (Messner, 1992). If taken from a social learning theory, the fact that women are subjects only 19.3% of the time sends a message to children. Indeed, the absence of women may signal to young readers that this group is unimportant or insignificant in terms of athleticism. As boys comprise the majority of readership for this magazine, this only perpetuates a cycle of not taking female athletes and their accomplishments seriously, especially when compared with male counterparts (Billings & Eastman, 2002). In addition, boys may continue to be steered away from sports such as figure skating or even gymnastics, as Paul alluded to in the focus group, because of the framing of these sports as those for women.

To address the first research question, that of whether there is a relationship between young fans' perceptions of women in sport and the way that the women are marketed to the public, it appears that there is a connection. The boys in the focus group chose athletes in sports that were most often covered: basketball, baseball, and football. The girl in the group picked gymnastics, a sport dominated by women in terms of coverage by *Sports Illustrated for Kids*. The representation of female athletes in certain sports and males in others may direct children toward the sports that have role models

similar to themselves and who receive rewards – in this case media coverage and fame – from achieving success within these realms (Fireman & Kose, 2002). In addition, children who are heavy readers of the magazine may come to believe that all boys want to play sports such as baseball, football, and basketball, cultivating a worldview that sees men dominate the professional world (Gerbner, 1969, in Nabi & Sullivan, 2001). Furthermore, the adjectives used to describe athletes highlight their strength and thus frame the way people think about and discuss athletes' achievements.

Yet, the children also voiced opinions that challenged the norm, recognizing that what they saw in the magazine was not always how they looked. The parents' influence in shaping those beliefs was evident, as Claire discussed talking with her mother about women in sports. This may suggest that a parent's influence may override the marketing campaign of an athlete when it comes to children defining athletes and what makes one good or bad. In this way, parents may be essential to helping their child develop schema and perceptions of athletes in general, and specifically for female athletes. In this way, gender stereotypes can be counteracted, as was found in a previous study (Nathanson et al., 2002).

The overhaul of the magazine's design from the 1990s is another sign of the changing times. Indeed, the graphics make the issues nearly indistinguishable from their parent issues of *Sports Illustrated*. One can only speculate as to why the changes were made. It may have been for aesthetics; it may also have been to make readers feel more grown up. The magazine itself cut back on pages, a sign of the changing time for print media, which as of late have been suffering and have been made to make layoffs. It is hardly a secret that with the development and growing popularity of television and the

Internet come the decline of the printed word and image. This can be seen in the number of writers in general, and specifically the number of female writers. The fact that this number, too, has declined may send a message to readers about career aspirations as serious sports journalists. With the lack of role models for girls, it will be important to pay attention to female sports writers in the coming years.

What is surprising is that even with the loss of pages, the proportion of male to female athletes being covered did not change. In fact, the total number of stories and photographs dedicated to men decreased by less than one percent in 10 years. The question is what message is being sent to children about a woman's place in sports; this suggests that women are expendable when it comes to sports. Or maybe it signals what is popular. If this is the case, a conundrum of sorts persists because if people do not care about a certain sport then there is no reason to cover that sport. Yet, if that sport is not covered, readers' exposure to that sport will continue to spiral downward, lessening the popularity of that sport even more. At the same time, if media continue to cover a specific event, then the notoriety of those athletes can grow and the sport itself can develop. Indeed, where a story is placed tells the reader its importance. Thus, following a cultivation theory framework, it is possible that a following for a sport is contingent upon how much coverage media give it (Nabi & Sullivan, 2001). In the earlier issues of the magazine, there were special interest topics in each issue, such as stories of sportsmanship and helping others out in some way. These types of stories fell to the backburner in more recent issues of the magazine, giving way to professional sports. Due to the disparity in terms of the number of professional leagues for male and female

athletes – with male sports considerably outnumbering options for women – this may explain the reason for the increase in the coverage of men’s sports.

The way in which male and female athletes were depicted, however, is encouraging. To answer the second research question, are female athletes marketed as athletes first and women second, the response is yes. Though unequal in terms of the number of stories and photographs, the subject of them was overwhelming about women as athletes first and foremost. This may be due to the fact that children are young and parents attempt to keep them away from any kind of sexualized messages or photographs (Kotrla, 2007) – which are more often targeted to adults as in the swimsuit issue of *Sports Illustrated*. In any case, it does show that when depicted, the magazine frames females in such a way that there exists respect for them as athletes, which promotes positive change in attitudes of children toward women. The more important issue, however, is that relating to the third question.

The type of sport covered by the magazine, the answer to RQ3, shows what female athletes and male athletes get face-time. In the mid-1990s, the magazine took much more of a focus on recreational and youth sport relative to the amount of coverage spent on these activities in 2006 and 2007. As a result, the scope of sports covered included female hockey and basketball players and male gymnasts and figure skaters. Since that time, though, the focus has shifted from participant to consumer for readers. Consequently, the professional athletes covered are most often males in the “big four” sports: football, hockey, baseball, and basketball. Of these sports, football and hockey require physical force and domination of an opponent. Thus, aggression and strength are highlighted for these men. On the other hand women are more often covered when they

are involved in swimming, basketball, figure skating, or gymnastics. Two of these four sports require grace and elegance. This reaffirms the findings of Hardin et. al (2002a, 2000b) in that there is a void in terms of the acceptance of males in aesthetic sports and of females in strength sports. It also supports critical feminists' argument that sports are gendered activities and that favor certain types of men over both women and other types of men (Coakley, 2007). One possible explanation for this lack of coverage for males and females in certain arenas is that they cross traditional gender boundaries (Coakley, 2007; Fields, 2005). Indeed, society defines masculinity and femininity as binary opposites rather than a spectrum, making a complex issue too simplistic (Hoffman, Borders, & Hattie, 2000). In the sports media world portrayed in *Sports Illustrated for Kids*, there is little grey area surrounding this issue. As a result, any challenge to the social constructions of acceptable male and female behaviors disrupts the idea that men and women are completely different; in effect, it is a challenge to the schema children develop from observing and learning through their parents (Martin & Ruble, 2004; Cherney, 2005).

An important note needs to be made about increasing bias favoring male athletes in the past several years. The mid-1990s were a time of progress for women's sports, including the development of the ABL in 1996 – which folded after only three seasons – and the WNBA in 1997. In addition, 1996 marked a historical time for the Olympics. In fact, people often remember the women's gymnastic team, dubbed the “Magnificent Seven” by the media due to their tremendous success. These athletes became high-profile stars overnight and coverage of these events dominated the older magazines. In 2006 and 2007, however, there were no such national or international events with such prestige.

Though the Winter Olympics did take place in 2006 in Torino, Italy, there was little coverage of female athletes outside of figure skating.

At the same time, this may speak to the number of options deemed popular by American standards in the respective Olympics. It may also be a function of the success of athletes at the Games. If an athlete wins a gold medal, that individual is likely to gain more coverage by mainstream media. As pages become numbered, there is less room for negotiation. Conversely, if there are few other athletes who are covered, the perpetuation and obsession with winning will continue. A surprising finding within the focus group came from the fact that the children expressed fatigue with reading the same information. They prefer to read about kids their age, ones whom they can relate to and learn about, than hear or see facts about those professional athletes who have consistent mainstream coverage.

Socialization of children by male figures – fathers, brothers, peers.

Masculinized language used, positive tone impacts

Children's role in the future of the sports industry

Children's perceptions of women as having equal ability to that of male athletes.

Limitations

There are some caveats when interpreting these data. First, the researcher did all of the coding and thus, there was no comparison for intercoder reliability. Though the researcher tried to remain objective to find the most accurate data possible, the way that the issues were coded is based on the definitions the researcher developed. As a result, further studies are needed to attempt to repeat results based on these definitions.

Second, focus groups can only serve as a way to present some opinions held by children. These cannot be generalized to the entire population or even the readership of *Sports Illustrated for Kids* because the sample is not representative. The researcher recruited children between the ages of 9 and 12 from a local community center who were involved in sports. One of these children had not read the magazine before; the others were exposed to it because of subscriptions to their home. Furthermore, they all came from a middle-class, suburban area in the Northeast, a region considered to be more liberal than other areas of the nation. Their environment may therefore largely shape their opinions and attitudes. What these children had to say about the magazine is telling, but it does not present the views of all readers.

Lastly, based on the nature of this study, it is impossible to rule out other variables as a cause of children's beliefs about athletes. Since there are many facets to socialization, this particular study could not rule out preconceived notions that children had coming into the focus group, especially their parents' role in defining their worldview. Though they were answering questions specifically about the magazine and their beliefs about athletes, these opinions cannot be solely attributed to the content in the magazine.

Suggestions for Future Research

The importance of media in a child's life has been studied for decades. This particular study examined gender portrayals of athletes in *Sports Illustrated for Kids* and went to the consumers to get a reaction. Though this research may provide a foundation for future studies, it does in no way pretend to answer all of the questions. In fact, there

are now more questions without a solution and more research needed to be done to find just how significant this trend is in a child's development.

One way to do this would be to do a large-scale study based on a longitudinal panel design of consumers of the magazine to gear their perspective, starting with preadolescence through early adulthood, and to determine if there is a media effect on people's perceptions of male and female athletes. This study could draw from populations throughout the country, rather than one small town. It could allow for comparisons between those who are wealthy and those with higher incomes with those attitudes of the middle- or even lower-income populations. In addition, the sample could vary based on setting where one lived, for example suburban versus urban, or rural areas. With statistical manipulations, it may be possible to find if there are certain factors that can attribute for a child's opinion on sport.

Another study could examine why there has been such an increase in professional sport coverage in this magazine. Though it appears that more and more children are heading into sports and that sports are integral to many American children's upbringing today, the magazine does not reflect this trend. It would also be interesting to see if there has been a change in perceptions of athletes in general as a result of increased exposure to those who are professional participants as opposed to those who play solely for fun.

In addition, yielding results from a comparison between children who have only been exposed to the earlier magazines with those who have consumed only recent additions may determine if their perceptions of male and female athletes vary as a result. Of course, there are many variables that can impact a child's socialization, including school, peers, and especially family. If a study could control for these variables, this

could shed some light on the power of this medium in helping children develop schema and expectations for athletes.

References

- Anderson, B.S. (1998). The lid comes off: International radical feminism and the revolutions of 1848. *NWSA Journal*, 10(2). Retrieved March 2, 2008, from EBSCOhost database.
- Beals, K.A. & Manore, M.M. (1999). Subclinical eating disorders in physically active women. *Topics in Clinic Nutrition*, 14(3). Retrieved April 14, 2008, from Academic Search Premier database.
- Billings, A.C. (2007). From diving boards to pole vaults: Gendered athlete portrayals in the “Big Four.” *Southern Communication Journal*, 72(4). Retrieved April 14, 2008, from Academic Search Premier database.
- Billings, A.C., Angelini, J.R., & Eastman, S.T. (2005). Diverging discourses: Gender differences in televised golf announcing. *Mass Communication & Society*, 8(2), Retrieved April 14, 2008, from Academic Search Premier database.
- Billings, A. & Eastman, S. (2002). Selective representation of gender, ethnicity, and nationality in American television coverage of the 2000 Summer Olympics. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, 37 (3/4). Retrieved April 26, 2009, from Academic Search Premier database.
- Bishop, R. (2003). Missing In Action: Feature Coverage of Women’s Sports in Sports Illustrated. *Journal of Sport and Social Issue*, 27(2). Retrieved January 30, 2008, from EBSCOhost database.
- Boden, S. (2006). Dedicated followers of fashion? The influence of popular culture on children’s social identities. *Media, Culture & Society*, 28(2). Retrieved October 28, 2007, from EBSCOhost database.
- Cady Stanton, E. (1868). The male element is a destructive force. *Essential Speeches* (2003). Retrieved March 3, 2008, from EBSCOhost database.
- Carty, V. (2005). Textual portrayals of female athletes. *Frontiers: A Journal of Women’s Studies*, 26(2). Retrieved April 26, 2009, from Academic Search Premier database.
- Cherney, I.D. (2005). Childrens’ and adults’ recall of sex-stereotyped toy pictures: Effects of presentation and memory task. *Infant and Child Development*, 14(1). Retrieved April 13, 2008, from Academic Search Premier database.
- Christian, S. (2004). The radical potential of women in sports. *Off Our Backs*, 34(7/8). Retrieved March 3, 2008, from EBSCOhost database.

- Coakley, J. (2007) *Sports in society: Issues and controversies* (9th ed.) New York: McGraw-Hill
- Cuneen, J. & Sidwell, M.J. (1998). Gender portrayals in Sports Illustrated for Kids advertisements: A content analysis of prominent and supporting models. *Journal of Sport Management*, 12(1). Retrieved January 31, 2008, from EBSCOhost database.
- Dassori, E. (2005). Performing the woman question: The emergence of anti-suffrage dramas. *ATQ*, 19(4). Retrieved March 2, 2008, from EBSCOhost database.
- Davalos, D., Davalos, R., & Layton, H. (2007). Content analysis of magazine headlines: Changes over three decades? *Feminism & Psychology*, 17(2). Retrieved January 31, 2008, from EBSCOhost database.
- De Boer, C. (1977). The polls: Women at work. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 41(2). Retrieved April 30, 2009, from Academic Search Premier database.
- Drape, J. (2004, August 14). Lost of skin but not much fuss as Olympians strike pinup pose. *The New York Times*. Retrieved October 22, 2007, from the Proquest database.
- Duffy, M. (1999, April 27). Frailty myth haunts women in sports. *The New York Times*. Retrieved March 2, 2008, from EBSCOhost database.
- Fausto-Sterling, A. (2000). *Sexing the body: Gender politics and the construction of sexuality*. New York: Basic Books.
- Fields, S. (2005). *Female gladiators: Gender, law, and contact sport in America*. USA: University of Illinois Press
- Fink, J.S. & Kensicki, L.J. (2002). An imperceptible difference: visual and textual constructions of femininity in Sports Illustrated and Sports Illustrated for Women. *Mass Communication & Society*, 5(3). Retrieved October 28, 2007, from EBSCOhost database.
- Fireman, G. & Kose, G. (2002). The effect of self-observation on children's problem-solving. *Journal of Genetic Psychology*, 163(4). Retrieved April 25, 2009, from Academic Search Premier database.
- Gutschoven, K. & Van den Bulck, J. (2005). Television viewing and age at smoking initiation: Does a relationship exist between higher levels of television viewing and earlier onset of smoking? *Nicotine and Tobacco Research*, 7(3). Retrieved March 26, 2008, from EBSCOhost database.

- Hardin, M., Chance, J., Dodd, J. E., & Hardin, B. (2002a). Olympic photo coverage fair to female athletes. *Newspaper Research Journal*, 23(2/3). Retrieved October 20, 2007, from EBSCOhost database.
- Hardin, M., Lynn, S., Walsdorf, K., & Hardin, B. (2002b). The framing of sexual difference in SI for Kids editorial photos. *Mass Communication & Society*, 5(3). Retrieved October 20, 2007, from EBSCOhost database.
- Hetsroni, A & Tukachinsky, R. H. (2006). Television-world estimates, real-world estimates, and television viewing: A new scheme for cultivation. *Journal of Mass Communication*, 56(1). Retrieved March 26, 2008, from EBSCOhost database.
- Hoffman, R., Borders, L., & Hattie, J. (2000). Reconceptualizing femininity and masculinity: From gender roles to gender self-confidence. *Journal of Social Behavior & Personality*, 15(4). Retrieved April 26, 2009, from Academic Search Premier database.
- Jensen, J. (1997, April 7). "SI for Kids" readies packs of samples for schoolkids. *Advertising Age*, 68(14). Retrieved October 28, 2007, from Academic Search Premier database.
- Kent, K. (1997). 'Single white female': The sexual politics of spinsterhood in Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Oldtown Folks*. *American Literature*, 69(1). Retrieved March 2, 2008, from EBSCOhost database.
- Kotrla, B. (2007). Sex and violence: Is exposure to media content harmful to children? *Children & Libraries: The Journal of the Association for Library Service to Children*, 5(2). Retrieved April 25, 2009, from Academic Search Premier database.
- Martin, C.L. & Ruble, D. (2004). Children's search for gender cues. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 13(2). Retrieved April 13, 2008, from Academic Search Premier database.
- Messner, M. (1992). Power at play: Sports and the problem of masculinity. Retrieved from <http://www.netlibrary.com/Reader/>
- Messner, M. (1988). Sports and male domination: The female athlete as contested ideological terrain. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 5(3). Retrieved May 2, 2009, from <http://www.humankinetics.com/eJournalMedia/pdfs/9489.pdf>
- Muscat, A.C. & Long, B.C. (2008). Critical comments about body shape and weight: Disordered eating of female athletes and sport participants. *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology*, 20(1). Retrieved April 14, 2008, from Academic Search Premier database.

- Nabi, R. and Sullivan, J. (2001). Does television viewing relate to engagement in protective action against crime?: A cultivation analysis from a theory of reasoned action perspective. *Journal of Communication Research*, 28(6). Retrieved March 23, 2009 from Academic Search Premier database.
- Nathanson, A., Wilson, B.J., McGee, J., & Sebastian, M. (2002). Counteracting the effects of female stereotypes on television via active mediation. *Journal of Communication*, 52(4). Retrieved March 26, 2008, from EBSCOhost database.
- O'Connell, M., Curran, D., Hayes, D.L., Garvey, M., Miller-Lemore, B.J., Wiley, J.L., Fox-Genovese, E., Osiek, C., & Augustine Pierce, G.F. (1994). Is feminism building a better society? *U.S. Catholic*, 59(6). Retrieved March 2, 2008, from EBSCOhost database.
- Parker, H. & Fink, J. (2008). The effect of sport commentator framing on viewer attitudes. *Sex Roles*, 58(1/2). Retrieved April 14, 2008, from Academic Search Premier database.
- Pelka, F. (1992). The 'women's holocaust.' *Humanist*, 52(5). Retrieved March 3, 2008, from EBSCOhost database.
- Pollitt, K. (2006, Feb. 27). Betty Friedan, 1921-2006. *Nation*, 282(8). Retrieved March 2, 2008, from EBSCOhost database.
- Ross, S. & Shinew, K. (2008). Perspectives of women college athletes on sport and gender. *Sex Roles*, 58(1/2). Retrieved March 2, 2008, from EBSCOhost database.
- Saxton, M. (1994). Bearing the burden? Puritan wives. *History Today*, 44(10). Retrieved March 2, 2008, from EBSCOhost database.
- Suggs, W. (2005). Introduction. *A Place on the Team: The Triumph and Tragedy of Title IX*. Retrieved May 2, 2009, from <http://press.princeton.edu/titles/7930.html>
- Sundgot-Borgen, J. & Torstveit, M.K. (2004). Prevalence of eating disorders in elite athletes is higher than the general population. *Clinical Journal of Sport Medicine*, 14(1). Retrieved April 14, 2008, from Academic Search Premier database.
- Thomaselli, R. (2006). Athletes sign up double agents. *Advertising Age*, 77(3). Retrieved May 2, 2009, from Academic Search Premier database.
- Thomsen, S.R., Bower, D.W., & Barnes, M.D. (2004). Photographic images in women's health, fitness, and sports magazines and the physical self-concept of a group of

- adolescent female volleyball players. *Journal of Sport & Social Issues*, 28(3). Retrieved October 22, 2007, from EBSCOhost database.
- Title IX of the education amendments of 1972 §1681, 20 U.S.C. §§ 1681 – 1688 (1972). Retrieved March 1, 2008, from <http://www.usdoj.gov/crt/cor/coord/titleixstat.htm>
- Vincent, J., Imwold, C., Masemann, V., & Johnson, J.T. (2002). A comparison of selected 'serious' and 'popular' British, Canadian, and United States newspaper coverage of female and male athletes competing in the centennial Olympic games. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, 37(3/4). Retrieved April 14, 2008, from Academic Search Premier database.
- Walton, T. (2007). Grappling with dominant ideologies: Fox network weighs in on girl/boy wrestling. *The Journal of Popular Culture*, 40(4). Retrieved January 30, 2007, from EBSCOhost database.
- Westfried, A.H. (1997). The emergence of the democratic Brazilian middle-class family: A mosaic of contrasts with the American family (1960-1994). *Journal of Comparative Family Studies*, 28(1). Retrieved March 2, 2008, from EBSCOhost database.
- Woods, R. (2007). *Social Issues in Sport*. Champaign, IL:Human Kinetics Publisher.
- Worsnop, R.L. (1997). Gender equity in sports. *CQ Researcher*, 7(15). Retrieved March 3, 2008, from EBSCOhost database.