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Sports Media and Athletes as Male Role Models

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Abstract

This study examined the link between sports, masculinity, and body image in adolescent boys. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 10 adolescent boys aged 14 to 17 years. A thematic analysis of qualitative data illustrated that ideas present in the "Televised Sports Manhood Formula" discussed by Messner (2000), were evident in responses. Responses also add to the body of evidence which suggests that media has an impact on adolescent male body image, especially in the form of a drive for muscularity. This qualitative data may lead to the development of a quantitative scale which will measure adherence to the "Televised Sports Manhood Formula."

Research Question

• Does an attraction to a "Televised Sports Manhood Formula" involving the glorification of muscularity and aggression relate to one's own drive for muscularity or leanness?

• Larger Question: Do all adolescent boys agree with the "Televised Sports Manhood Formula"? What is the link between the formulation of masculinity among adolescent boys and sports media? How does sports media impact gender development?

Literature Review

• The Televised Sports Manhood Formula (Messner, Dunbar & Hunt, 2000). Sports programming and accompanying advertisements present a very narrow image of masculinity.

• The authors identified 10 themes that were present, the four that were most important for my research were:

- 1) Aggressive players get the prize, nice guys finish last.
- 2) Giving up your body for the team, or playing through pain.
- 3) Sports is war.
- 4) Show some guts!

• Smolak and Stein (2003) found that males have a distinct drive for muscularity in order to meet culturally defined body ideals. Smolak and Stein thought that these pressures came from peers, parents, and the media.

• Ricciardelli, McCabe and Ridge (2006) found that a majority of the boys they interviewed only talked about body image concerns within a sporting context. This implies that it is socially acceptable for boys to talk about body image when it is tied to sports and that male body image is inextricably linked to functionality as much as, or even more than, aesthetics.

• Daniels (2007) found that male non-athletes reported feeling more pressure about appearance from media than male athletes.

Methodology

• 10 interviews, with adolescent males from the ages of 14-17, all are from rural Ohio.

• Interview questions covered body image, reactions to a scenario, and reactions to three internet advertisements for Under Armour, Nike and, Vitamin Water.

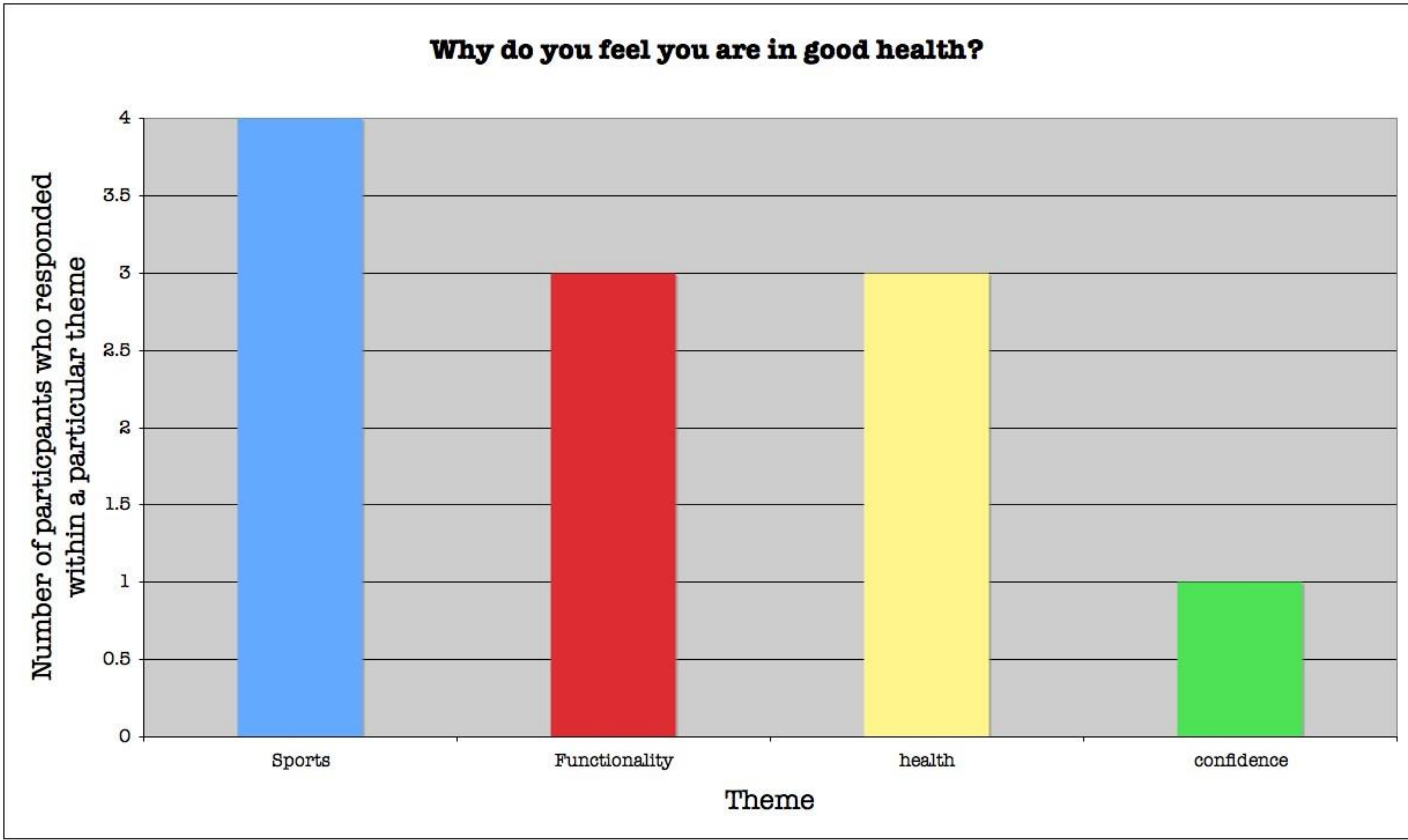
Qualitative Analysis

• Thematic Analysis: Once interviews were transcribed, coded interviews for themes.
 • Looked for themes that were present in the "Televised Sports Manhood Formula," and looked for possible counter themes.



Definition of a "Real Man" from the Televised Sports Manhood Formula (Messner, 2000).

"What is a real man? A Real Man is strong, tough, aggressive, and above all, a winner in what is still a man's World. To be a winner he has to do what needs to be done. He must be willing to compromise his own long-term health by showing guts in the face of danger, by fighting other men when necessary, and by 'playing hurt' when he's injured"



Findings and Results

Awareness of "Televised Sports Manhood Formula"

Both athletes and non-athletes provide responses consistent with the TSMF

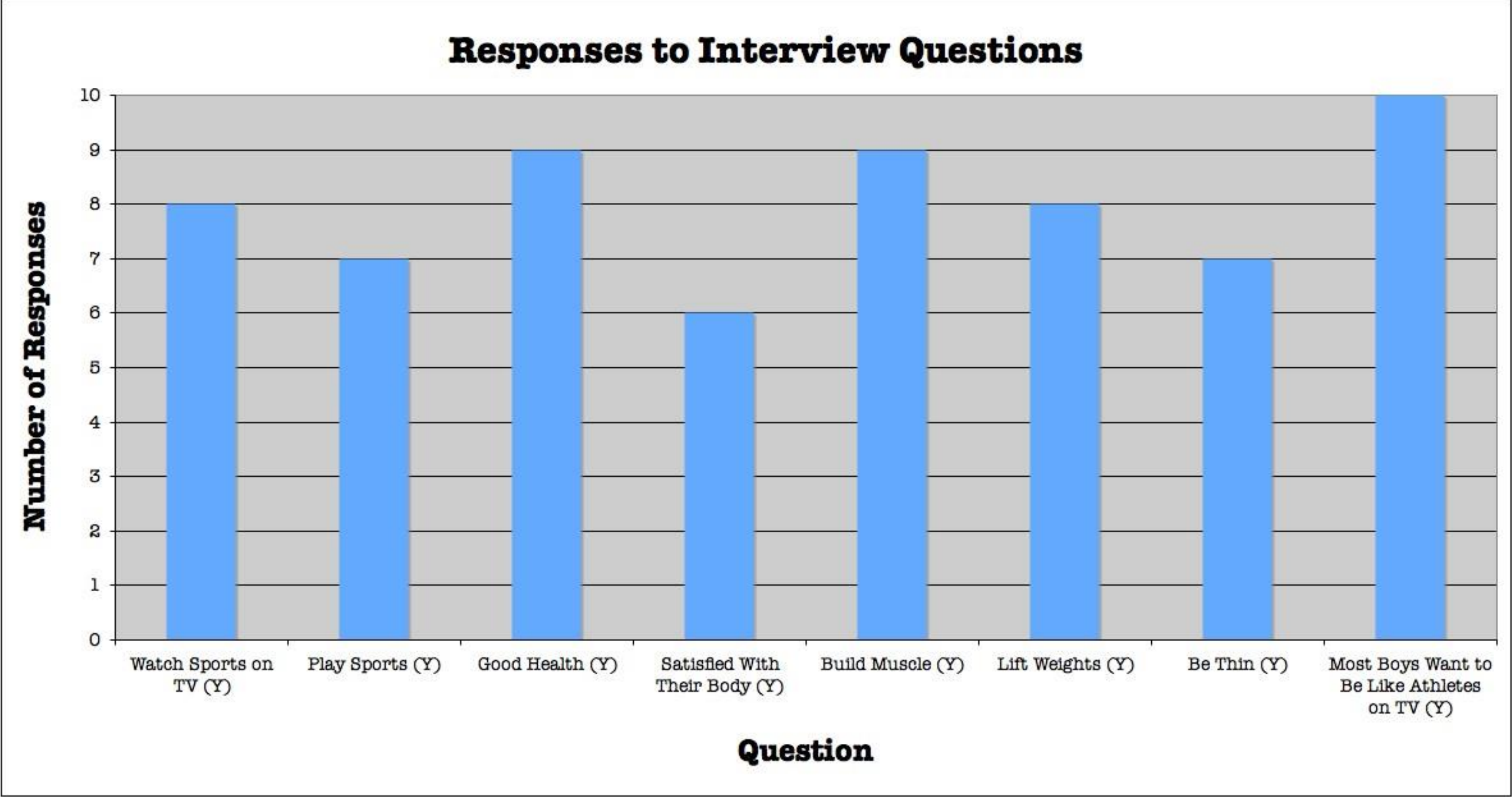
- 1) Aggressive players get the prize, nice guys finish last.
 - "You want to be pumped, it's what you need to win games."
- 2) Giving up your body for the team, or playing through pain.
 - "[Paul Pierce] might be messing up his knee right now, it might be permanent. But his team also needed him right now and not later, he was putting his own knee at risk so everyone else could succeed."
- 3) Sports is war.
 - "It's a really good saying for sports, like protecting your territory or your team."
- 4) Show some guts!
 - "I broke my wrist halfway through the football season and still played without a cast. Some people say work through it."

New Themes

- 1) An athlete's muscularity is directly tied to his status as a role model.
 - "Everyone wants that fit, lean look," "want to have those ripped six packs," "try and be in shape like everyone that's on TV," "everyone I know pretty much lifts, no one wants to be small or thin."
- 2) Participants recognize the pitfalls of trying to look like professional athletes.
 - Brought up "starving yourself," "steroids," "serious if you get hurt," "may be better just to be yourself rather than to try and be someone else,"

Findings in Perspective

- 1) Media impacts male, as well as female, adolescent body image.
 - Body ideals may be passed through the idolization of professional athletes.
- 2) While Daniels (2007) found that male non-athletes feel more pressure about appearance from media than athletes, athletes may be at higher risk for adopting the values and narrow image of masculinity presented in the "Televised Sports Manhood Formula."
 - If you view professional athletes as role models, you automatically accept the notions of masculinity associated with a successful male athlete.



Directions for Further Research

• Development of a quantitative scale, which measures adherence to the Televised Sports Manhood Formula and see how it impacts behaviors such as materialism, drinking, aggression, and promiscuity.

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