Attitudes towards athletes: Media influences

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Abstract
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ATTITUDES TOWARD ATHLETES: MEDIA INFLUENCES

A DISSERTATION

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY

OF

SCHOOL OF PROFESSIONAL PSYCHOLOGY

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ABSTRACT

The present study aimed to explore whether media consumption influenced participant attitudes toward athletes. Although there are numerous research studies on attitude formation and media, a gap in the literature exists between media influences of attitudes toward athlete populations. Three hundred and forty-seven participants (122 males, 222 females) completed demographics, media exposure, and prototypical athlete questionnaires. The data indicated that there were significant gender and athlete status differences in sports-related media exposure. Results also revealed a pattern of participant attributions of prototypical athlete ratings. Specifically, male athlete participants consistently rated their prototypical athlete as possessing the most favorable personality characteristics. Male non-athlete participants typically attributed the least favorable ratings. Hypotheses for these patterns and limitations are also discussed.

*Keywords:* Attitudes, Athletes, Media Influences
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Introduction

In 2011, the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) released a public service announcement attempting to dispel the “dumb jock” myth about collegiate student-athletes (Porter, 2011). The public service announcement was a video that aired during the televised NCAA basketball tournaments and football bowl games. The video consisted of professional- and collegiate-level athletes exercising and practicing their sports while recent statistics in support of academic success among college athletes were verbally presented. Near the end of the video, one of the athletes looked directly into the camera and asked, “still think we’re just a bunch of dumb jocks?” as a direct challenge to the stereotype. This video is a recent installment of the decades old debate regarding academic performance of student-athletes. This has served as a controversial topic with research both supporting and opposing the dumb jock stereotype (Adler & Adler, 1985; Bowen & Levin, 2003; Pascarella, Bohr, Nora, & Terenzini, 1995; Pascarella, Truckenmiller, Nora, Terenzini, Edison, & Hagedorn, 1999; Richards & Aries, 1999; Umbach, Palmer, Kuh, & Hannah, 2006).

Since the 1980s, student-athlete academic success has increased in comparison to non-athlete peers (NCAA, 2010). In 1995, the NCAA initiated the Graduation Success Rate (GSR) to improve the accuracy of assessing academic success of student-athletes (NCAA, 2010). Results of the GSR demonstrated that student-athletes nationwide and across all NCAA division levels have comparable or higher graduation rates than the general student body. Yet, research indicates that the dumb jock stereotype still exists, warranting a televised public service announcement (Baucom and Lantz, 2001; Engstrom and Sedlacek, 1989; Engstrom and Sedlacek, 1991; Engstrom, Sedlacek, and McEwan, 1995; Leach and Conners, 1984).
It is clear from the research that the dumb jock stereotype persists, but what is relatively unclear is how this stereotype has become so widely held. Athletic events generate billions of dollars in revenue every year, and are accessible to millions of viewers through television, the internet, and other multimedia presentations. Because we live in the age of ever improving technology, the mass media is capable of delivering vast amounts of information to its consumers. Logically then, the mass media holds the power to drastically influence the ideas, beliefs, attitudes, and values of its consumers. Is it merely coincidental that athletic events are highly televised and the dumb jock stereotype exists, despite contrary evidence? Before this question can be answered, a review of the relevant literature regarding attitude formation, mass communication theories, media influence on attitudes, and media portrayal of athletes is necessary.

**Literature Review**

**Attitude Formation**

Bartlett (1932) is largely known for his contributions to cognitive psychology, particularly his theory regarding memory. Specifically, Bartlett (1932) hypothesized that people remember details of an experience through use of categorization of information into “schemata,” which are structures used for information processing, organization, and interpretation. However, this process is vulnerable to biases, making recollections of memories subject to distortion:

“Remembering is not the re-excitation of innumerable fixed, lifeless and fragmentary traces. It is an imaginative reconstruction, or construction, built out of the relation of our attitude towards a whole active mass of organized past reactions or experience and to a little outstanding detail which commonly appears in image or in language form. It is thus hardly ever really exact, even in the most rudimentary cases of rote recapitulation, and it
is not at all important that it should be so” (p. 213).

When new information is presented and perceived, certain schemata become activated, which influences the way information is processed, stored in memory, and recalled in the future. Therefore, Bartlett argued that memories are not stored and recalled with absolute precision and accuracy, but rather in terms of our previous experience. This process of categorization is the basis for attitude and stereotype formation.

Allport (1954) outlined this process further by suggesting that categorization leads to generating certain expectations, which guide our behaviors toward others based on those expectations. The process also involves assigning certain characteristics to categories of people, thereby allowing us to view people as belonging to certain groups. These groups can be referred to as in-groups and out-groups. According to Allport, an in-group is any cluster of people that can use the term “we” with the same significance. An out-group, therefore, is the group that does not belong to one’s own group. The tendency to maintain the distinction between the in-group and out-group leads to categorization and stereotyping of the out-group. Discrimination and prejudice toward the out-group can manifest as preferential treatment to one’s in-group.

Although hostility towards out-groups can strengthen one’s sense of belonging to the in-group, it is not required. As an example of the power of in-group loyalty, Allport stated, “school spirit is never so strong as when the time for an athletic contest with the traditional ‘enemy’ approaches” (p. 41). Athletes know this concept very well in practice, but it becomes a different game when media takes an in-group stance (consciously or unconsciously) against out-group athletes.

Expanding Allport’s (1954) theory, Triandis (1971) suggested the simplest explanation for attitude development is the need to understand the world around us, the need to protect the self-esteem, and the need to express our fundamental values. Attitudes can be defined as “an idea
charged with emotion which predisposes a class of actions to a particular class of social situations” (Triandis, 1971, p. 2). Attitudes are conceptualized as involving three overlapping and mutually influencing processes: cognitions (beliefs), affects (emotions), and behaviors (actions). The cognitive component of attitudes involves categorization. This process helps to alleviate the heavy workload placed on our brains by constant bombardment of information every day. Naturally, our tendency is to think efficiently and solve problems in the simplest, easiest manner possible. Categorization is a useful tool for this process but is susceptible to oversimplification, and inevitably, inaccurate perceptions of the world. Allport (1954) described a stereotype as, “whether favorable or unfavorable, a stereotype is an exaggerated belief associated with a category. Its function is to justify (rationalize) our conduct in relation to that category” (pg. 191). As the definition implies, stereotypes are often more rigid than beliefs we develop purely on our own because of the social investments and categorization inherently tied to stereotypes. Allport (1954) suggested that the majority of attitudes that people hold develop from the interactions among friends and family.

Asch (1946) is best known for his development of the theory of impression formation. Asch was concerned with the cognitive process one goes through forming an impression about an individual’s personality. Specifically, he was interested in understanding how different personality characteristics are perceived and ordered, and how they interact to form a unified impression of a person. The groundbreaking study included 167 university students who were instructed to listen to a list of adjectives describing a person and then asked to form an impression about that person. There were two experimental conditions: Group A and group B both received an identical adjective list with exception to the words “warm” (group A) versus “cold” (group B). Each participant was then asked to write a description of the person and then
select the word that best described the person from each of 18 bipolar adjective pairs. Results indicated that overwhelmingly, the person in group A (“warm”) was described much more favorably than the person in group B (“cold”). In a subsequent experiment using the same methodology, Asch (1946) substituted the “warm”-“cold” adjective pair with the words “polite” and “blunt.” Results indicated that the extreme differences in personality descriptions of participants in group A and group B from the previous study disappeared. Discrepancies did exist between the groups but they were much less pronounced for the polite/blunt traits compared to the warm/cold traits. Asch (1946) concluded that a) people judge personality characteristics to function as either central characteristics (e.g., warm vs. cold) or peripheral characteristics (e.g., polite vs. blunt) that operate very differently in the cognitive process of impression formation and b) the various interaction between individual personality characteristics (traits), rather than the simple summation of them, governs how individuals arrive at an impression. Congruent with Asch’s (1946) study, people can develop drastically different impressions of others based on seemingly trivial differences in description. Based on this evidence, one can imagine how stereotypes can easily emerge and propagate via media influence. For this reason, the process of media influence on its consumers deserves ample exploration.

**Mass Communication Theories**

The process of developing and assimilating attitudes and stereotypes involves first utilizing information at hand, analyzing the information, and then developing an opinion about it. There are many sources from which a person can derive information, including the mass media. The process of information dissemination by the media and its acquisition by the consumer requires adequate consideration. Miller and Dollard (1941) proposed that the process of learning behaviors is dynamic and involves deriving information not only from personal agency but also
environmental cues. They theorized that if a person were motivated to learn a behavior, the person would learn the behavior through observation. Further, by imitating the observed behavior, the person will be reinforced, thus solidifying the behavior and increasing the likelihood of performing the behavior in the future. Rotter (1954) expanded on this concept and developed social learning theory. Rotter ascertained that behavior is reinforced not only by psychological factors, but also by environmental contexts.

Bandura, Ross, and Ross (1961) put this theory to the test with the first of many famous “Bobo doll” experiments. The experiment included a total of 72 children (36 girls and 36 boys) with an average age of approximately four-and-a-half years old. The study included two experiment conditions: aggressive and nonaggressive. For both conditions, the child was brought into a room and situated in a corner with neutral toys (stickers, etc.) and an adult was situated in another corner with a toy set that included a mallet and Bobo doll. The child was instructed that the adult toys were only for adults. For the aggressive condition, the adult started playing with the mallet and eventually engaged in aggressive behavior towards the Bobo doll. For the nonaggressive condition, the adult played with only the toy set and ignored the Bobo doll completely. After 10 minutes, the adults were instructed to leave the room and the children were taken to a separate room with different toys. After a brief period of time, the children were told they could no longer play with the toys and were taken back into the original room with the aggressive and nonaggressive toys. They were then told they could play with any of the toys. The experimenters then evaluated the child’s play over a 20-minute period. Results indicated that children exposed to the aggressive modeling condition engaged in significantly higher aggressive behaviors toward the Bobo dolls than compared to the children in the nonaggressive condition. Additionally, gender effects were found (same-sex adult model was associated with significantly
higher aggressive imitative behavior in children), demonstrating that higher similarity to the person being observed leads to higher imitative potential by the observer. The authors concluded that observation of cues produced by the behaviors modeled by others could provide reinforcement, strengthening the probability for imitative behaviors in the future.

In a follow-up study, Bandura, Ross, and Ross (1963) conducted an experiment with similar methodology, but this time adding videos of adults and cartoons as models for aggressive behavior as the conditions. There were three experimental conditions for the study: real-life aggressive condition (same method as Bandura, Ross, and Ross, 1961, experiment), aggressive video condition, and aggressive cartoon video condition. The study also included a control condition in which children had no exposure to aggressive models. For the aggressive video condition, children were instructed to play with nonaggressive toys while watching a 10-minute video of an adult engaging in the same aggressive behaviors towards a Bobo doll as in the real-life aggressive condition. In the aggressive cartoon video condition, the children watched a 10-minute video of a cartoon woman dressed as a cat perform the same aggressive behaviors towards a Bobo doll as in the two other experimental conditions but in a fantasyland setting. The fantasyland setting was designed specifically to stray as far as possible from reality. The children then were observed playing in the same experimental environment as the Bandura, Ross, and Ross (1961) study. Results indicated that total aggression of children for all three experimental conditions were significantly higher than compared to children in the control condition. Additionally, the researchers found that out of the three experimental conditions, the video of adults engaging in aggressive behavior was the most influential in eliciting and determining aggressive behavior in the child participants. Bandura, Ross, and Ross (1963) concluded,
“pictoral mass media, particularly television, may serve as an important source of social behavior” (p. 9).

Following these robust results, Bandura (1978; 1986) expanded on social learning theory by postulating that rather than people being automatically shaped solely by environmental forces or some internal impetus, there exists “triadic reciprocity” between a person’s behaviors, their personal factors (cognitions, emotions, physiology), and environmental (social) events. These three variables in which humans derive information are not mutually exclusive, but rather determinant of one another. This process of collective interaction of information sources leads to learning. Bandura (1986) dubbed this process “social cognitive theory.” Bandura (1986) postulated that as humans, we are constant observers of our behaviors, our environment, and ourselves. Most external influences indirectly affect behavior through cognitive processes, so it is important to understand what determines these cognitive processes.

Bandura (2001) applied social cognitive theory to the effects of mass media communication. He theorized that four subfunctions govern the way people learn through modeling or observation. These four subfunctions are attention processes, retention processes, production processes, and motivation processes. Attention processes govern to which modeled events (environmental stimuli) are attended. This is mediated by many variables such as salience of the information, accessibility, complexity, etc. Retention processes involve “an active process of transforming and restructuring information conveyed by modeled events into rules and conceptions for memory representation” (p. 272). This process is mediated by the cognitive ability of the observer, cognitive rehearsal, and symbolic coding. During the production processes phase, learned behaviors from observation are enacted. This process involves the mediation between how the person’s retained conception of the modeled event matches the
outcome of the person’s behavior. This can be assessed through the process of reinforcement, feedback from the environment, and self-monitoring. Last, motivation processes are governed by incentives to behave certain ways. According to Bandura (2001), people are more likely to imitate modeled behavior if the behavior generates positive and meaningful outcomes. In the same way, people will be less likely to engage in behaviors that lead to undesirable outcomes. Essentially, the higher the audience’s appeal to mass media messages, the greater likelihood the audience will assimilate the information.

This motivational process can be initiated through mass media messages, but it does not necessarily follow a direct media-consumer modeling process. Bandura (2001) also suggested that through the processes outlined in social cognitive theory, social diffusion of modeled behavior occurs. This diffusion follows three steps. The first step is gaining knowledge about the new behaviors. Next, these behaviors become adopted and enacted. Last, the behaviors are disseminated and supported through social networks. Bandura (2001) concluded that because of the complex processes of modeling, there is no single pattern of social influence by mass media. Rather, communications systems can directly influence consumers by teaching, motivating, guiding, and enabling people; and/or connecting people to social networks through which their modeled behaviors will be naturally reinforced and guided according to the values of the social network.

Bandura’s (1978; 1986) proposed triadic reciprocity model is further explained by Ball-Rokeach and DeFleur’s (1976) dependency model of media effects, which asserted that audience dependence on media information influences audience cognitions, emotions, and beliefs. The degree of influence media have on the audience varies depending upon several factors. The extent to which media employ unique information functions can determine how the audience is
influenced by the messages conveyed. For example, news companies have countless avenues for disseminating information that have effectively broadened their reach to maximal audience potentials. They have accomplished this by utilizing traditional modes such as newspapers and television, but also internet social networking sites, cellular phone applications, and even text messages. The greater the variety of ways to present information, the greater the media’s influence is on audience beliefs, emotions, and behaviors. The social centrality of information is also a key variable in determining media effects on the audience. The degree to which the information source is central, or meaningful, to the audience helps determine the influence of the message. For instance, an athletic shoe company whose television advertisements are aired on a sports-dedicated television channel will likely yield greater shoe sales than if it were aired on a politics-specific channel. The greater the salience of the message, the stronger the media’s influence is on audience beliefs, emotions, and behaviors. Last, the amount of conflict and change occurring within society also governs audience media dependency. Specifically, heightened media dependencies are correlated with high social conflict/change. This occurs because social conflict/change is thought to challenge an individual’s social framework. As insecurities about previously established social arrangements increase, the individual becomes eager for information as a compensatory function, which leads to increased susceptibility to media influence (Ball-Rokeach & DeFleur, 1976). The dependency model of mass media effects describes the mechanisms of cognitive, behavioral, and affective change among audiences.

The theories discussed thus far help to explain the mechanisms by which media can influence, alter, and transform audience perceptions. Cultivation theory (Gerbner & Gross, 1976) supplements these theories regarding mass media effects. Gerbner and Gross (1976) theorized the more time people spend watching television, the more likely they are “cultivated” to the
social realities portrayed on television. Additionally, the cultivation effect is thought to occur over long periods of time, with extensive exposure to media. This phenomenon takes place because learning via observation of environmental cues is an innate human process. Thus, media act as a powerful channel for acculturating and socializing people to societal norms and roles. An important concept associated with this theory is mainstreaming. Mainstreaming is the process by which people from different groups develop and share a common set of attitudes and values about the world (reality) through extensive exposure to some medium of influence (Gerbner, Gross, and Morgan, 2002). Media, particularly television, serves as a powerful source for mainstreaming information worldwide. Gerbner, Gross, and Morgan (2002) discussed the implications of mainstreaming, specifically media portrayals of various groups of people. The authors suggested, “underrepresentation in the world of television means a relatively narrow (and thus more stereotyped) range of roles and activities” (p. 31). Cultivation theory provides a schematic for understanding media influences on society’s perceptions of reality. However, the extent and kinds of media influence toward different groups of people are worthy of exploration.

Media Effects On Attitudes

According to social cognitive theory, people learn through observation of themselves and through observation and modeling of others; the question is—Are learned information, behaviors, and cognitions based in reality? We live in an age where technological advancement and innovation are growing exponentially and boundless quantities of information are available at hand, literally. This has obvious benefits, but also potential drawbacks, one being the diffusion of inaccurate information. Over time and with repeated exposure, media portrayals and diffusion of information to society can be interpreted as a reflection, albeit a potentially inaccurate one, of reality. Does this actually occur?
Throughout the research regarding the influence of media effects on its consumers, body image studies are the most well-known. Grabe, Ward, and Hyde (2008) conducted a meta-analysis of experimental and correlation studies to investigate the link between the role of the media and its effects on body image among women. The meta-analysis included 77 studies and 141 total effect sizes that the researchers averaged within three outcome variables: body dissatisfaction, internalization of the thin ideal, and eating behaviors and beliefs. The mean effect sizes for each outcome variable were small to moderate. Overall, results from the meta-analysis indicated that for women, media exposure is related to higher levels of body dissatisfaction, more frequent anorexic and bulimic attitudes and behaviors, and stronger internalization of the thin ideal. The authors concluded that the media appears to be related to general body image concerns among women across studies and outcome measures, and methodologies. Because research has demonstrated that media exposure can influence attitudes about body image, media must also carry influence over other attitudes.

Anastasio, Rose, and Chapman (1999) conducted a study regarding the influence of media portrayals on the formation of public opinion. The researchers designed a study to mimic the media coverage of a controversial event (e.g., O.J. Simpson murder trial, Bill Clinton’s impeachment trial, etc.) in the context of a university fraternity system. The participant’s fraternity membership status was used to designate in-group or out-group affiliation. The participants then viewed a video of a fraternity member who was accused of vandalism, followed by interviews of students who believed the defendant was guilty or innocent. Half of the interviewees were portrayed as fraternity members and the other half were portrayed as non-fraternity members. In the homogenous condition, opinions of the defendant’s guilt or innocence correlated with group membership (i.e., fraternity members believed defendant was innocent;
nonmembers believed defendant was guilty). In the heterogeneous condition, opinions of the
defendant’s innocence or guilt were evenly mixed regardless of group membership. Results
indicated that the homogeneity of in-group opinion significantly influenced participants’
opinions regarding the defendant’s innocence or guilt. However, this effect was mitigated by the
heterogeneous condition, suggesting that in-group membership largely influences the formation
of opinions. The authors concluded that people tend to align with in-group ideas, opinions, and
attitudes when forming their own opinions, rather than carefully considering the information at
hand. The media can substantially influence public opinion depending upon how information is
portrayed.

Felson (1996) investigated the media’s effect on its audience by conducting a literature
review on mass media effects on violent behavior. His literature review included laboratory,
field, and natural experiments as well as longitudinal surveys. Theoretical explanations of
cognitive priming, arousal, sponsor effects, socialization, reinforcement, and desensitization
were also explored. Felson (1996) found considerable inconsistencies in the literature overall, but
concluded that media likely has a small effect on violent behavior. His rationale for this
argument is that inconsistencies likely exist because the media has a small effect and/or only
affects a small percentage of consumers. Conversely, it is important to clarify the distinction
between violent behavior and violent thinking. Because behavior is more externalized and
therefore has more consequences, it is less likely to be expressed. For this reason, research
regarding media effects on violent cognitions or attitudes provides a better measure of media
influence on attitude formation.

Gilliam and Iyengar (2000) examined racial stereotyping in the media by investigating
the influence on people’s attitudes by the news media’s use of the “crime script”—crime is
violent and perpetrators of crimes are non-white males. The researchers designed an experiment in which 2331 participants viewed a 15-minute news report on a violent crime. They included four video conditions: African-American male perpetrator, Caucasian male perpetrator, no perpetrator pictured, and no video (control). All three experimental conditions contained the same news video clip with exception to the perpetrator picture. The participants then completed several questionnaires regarding crime-related attitudes and racial attitudes. Results indicated that exposure to the perpetrator’s race of the crime script increases support for punitive approaches to crime and heightens negative attitudes about African-Americans among Caucasian, but not among African-American participants. Gilliam and Iyengar (2000) concluded that the news media’s use of the crime script might influence and perpetuate viewers’ attitudes regarding race.

Similarly, Ford (1997) examined the effects of stereotypical television portrayals of African Americans on viewers’ perceptions. The study included 40 participants who were randomly assigned to one of four conditions. All participants watched either a neutral skit or a popular comedy skit that involved stereotypical African American character portrayals. Following the skit, participants were asked to rate the guilt of either an African American or Caucasian person who was accused of assaulting another person. Results indicated that Caucasian participants rated the African American perpetrator’s guilt significantly higher than the Caucasian perpetrator’s guilt only after watching the stereotypical portrayals of African Americans. The authors concluded that media portrayals of stereotyped groups of people could lead to priming and perpetuation of those stereotypes towards individual members of the groups.

**Media Portrayal Of Athletes**
Thus far, research has demonstrated that media can influence and affect peoples’ attitudes, beliefs, stereotypes, and values. This trend likely continues within the world of sports, as the popularity of athletic events in the media soars. Eastman and Billings (2001), examined racial and gender stereotyped language use among intercollegiate basketball sport commentators. The researchers taped and reviewed 66 nationally and regionally televised collegiate basketball games and recorded almost 1500 comments for analysis. While watching the videos, research assistants were trained to code the comments with regard to racial and gender-specific material. Two coders watched each game, which yielded an interrater reliability of 91 percent. Each coder coded factual/neutral comments as well as biased comments. For the purpose of this study, the factual/neutral comments were excluded from analysis. Results indicated that African American male and female basketball players were regarded as more “athletic,” “powerful,” and “quick” whereas Caucasian male and female basketball players were portrayed more for their “mental skill,” “hard work,” and “effort.” Additionally, Caucasian sports commentators/announcers provided the most racially stereotyped comments. Last, there were no gender effects, suggesting that sports commentators/announcers are less biased with regard to gender. Eastman and Billings (2001) concluded that even though gender stereotypes in sports commentary appear to be diminishing, racial stereotypes are still prevalent.

Similar racial stereotype results were found when analyzing language use by television commentators during coverage of English soccer games (McCarthy & Jones, 1997). Specifically, African American players were stereotypically ascribed with primarily physical prowess whereas Caucasian players were ascribed more psychological talents. This tendency has been relatively consistent over the past couple decades based on similar research (Davis & Harris, 1998; Denham, Billings, & Halone, 2002; Murrell & Curtis, 1994; Rada & Wulfemeyer, 2005).
Eastman and Billings (2001) argued that commentator messages are “repeated hundreds of times…and the conceptual frames adopted by announcers readily get transferred to many fans” (p. 185).

It is clear that media commentator portrayals of racial stereotypes in athletics exist, but do these portrayals actually influence their audience? To answer this question, Buffington and Fraley (2008) conducted an experiment in which 78 participants were provided with ten actual televised men’s basketball commentary statements that generally fell within two categories: physical skill and mental skill. The participants were then asked to pair each statement with one of four pictures. The pictures were of two African American and two Caucasian male college basketball players. The participants were then asked which picture coincided with each commentary statement and why. Results indicated that African American athletes were consistently considered as having greater physical skills (e.g., athleticism, strength, and speed) compared to Caucasians. Conversely, Caucasian athletes were considered as having greater mental skills (leadership, effort, and cognitive abilities) and a much broader scope of abilities outside of athletics when compared to African American athletes. Buffington and Fraley (2008) concluded that people use media portrayals as part of the complex process of constructing meaningful interpretations about the people they encounter and the society in which they live. In this case, the media influenced the social construction of stereotyped attitudes toward African American athletes.

Media portrayals of athletes are not limited to racial differentiations, however. The frequency and amount of media coverage that women’s sports receives is far less than the media coverage of men’s sports (Messner, Cooky, & Hestrum, 2010). The investigators conducted a study in which they reviewed major televised sports news and highlights media
sources (e.g., SportsCenter) from 1989 to 2009. The researchers reviewed televised episodes and counted the amount of men’s versus women’s sports media coverage. Results revealed that in 2009, the disparity between men’s versus women’s sports media coverage was the greatest, with men’s sports accounting for 96.3% of airtime while women’s sports only consisted of 1.6% of airtime. Additionally, the researchers revealed that the coverage of men’s sports was mostly limited to the “big three” sports (basketball, football, and baseball), regardless of whether they were in season or not. The researchers concluded with hypotheses for the incredible disparity of sports coverage, such as media networks specifically targeting a predominantly male audience. However, they also encouraged others to pressure media outlets for change so that the gap between men’s and women’s sports coverage will begin to decrease. Jones (2003) conducted research on men’s versus women’s sports coverage in printed materials, specifically Sports Illustrated (SI), and found similar results: female athletes/sports received significantly less coverage than male athletes/sports. The researchers compared sports coverage from 1980 to 1996 and revealed that coverage of women’s sports in SI decreased over time. For example, photographs of women athletes comprised 12.1% of the total SI photographs in 1980, but this number decreased to only 4.4% in 1996. Photographs of men athletes, however, comprised nearly 91% of all photographs in 1996.

Even when the media covers women’s sports, it is often done so in a marginalizing and sexist manner. Many researchers have argued (Duncan & Hasbrook, 1988; Kane & Parks, 1992; Kane & Snyder, 1989) that stereotyped media portrayals marginalize and limit female athletes, which confines them to much lower levels of prestige, power, and status than male athletes frequently experience. Messner, Duncan, and Jensen (1993) studied this occurrence by analyzing and comparing the verbal commentary of the televised 1989 women’s and men’s NCAA “final
four” basketball tournament and U.S. Open tennis tournament. The researchers recorded and analyzed the verbal commentary using a standardized approach with multiple raters. Results indicated that overall, the presence of overtly sexist language was minimal. However, a significant difference between commentary about males and females was found regarding a hierarchy of naming. Specifically, commentary for both basketball and tennis tournaments revealed that female athletes were usually labeled as “girls” or “young ladies” and more often referred to by their first names as compared to male athletes. Conversely, male athletes were generally labeled as “men” or “young men” and more often referred to by their last names. This discrepant language use for gender among commentators portrays female athletes as infantilized, further perpetuating male dominance in sport. Additionally, the commentators’ use of first names for female athletes and last names for male athletes alludes to males being considered as dominant and females as subordinates (Wolfson & Manes, 1980). The results from this study demonstrate how stereotyping media can be towards female athletes. This study emphasized the effect of verbal commentary in media, but because media is largely visual do the same stereotype effects endure in solely visual athletic presentations?

Buysse and Embser-Herbert (2004) conducted a longitudinal study regarding gender stereotypes portrayed in the media guide cover photographs of collegiate athletic programs. The study examined media guide covers of Division I National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) university athletic programs in 1990 and again in 1997. The researchers observed the athletes in the photographs were participating in active/passive poses, on or off the playing surface, in or out of uniform, and the overall theme of the photographs. Results indicated that in 1990 media guide photographs, female athletes were less likely portrayed in active poses, in uniform, and on the playing surface compared to male athletes. Additionally, 1997 media guide
photographs evidenced an underrepresentation of female athletes being portrayed in action or on the playing surface as compared to male athletes. In fact, there was a decrease in female athletes appearing on the playing surface between 1990 and 1997 media guide photographs. Buysse and Embser-Herbert (2004) concluded that despite the passing of Title IX and the influx of female athletes into university athletic programs over the past couple of decades, university media guide cover photographs still appear to promote sexist ideologies regarding female athletes. This is surprising in part because media guides are supposed to be promotional. The effects of the popular mass media seem to pervade university-created media. Finally, Buysse and Embser-Herbert (2004) stated, “the media have the power, and, we would argue, the responsibility to act as social agents in the transformation of athletic images by reflecting the reality of the female athletic experience” (p. 80). However, the problem is just that—media portrayals have the potential to be perceived as reality for consumers, regardless of how accurate (or inaccurate) the portrayals are. This process makes it possible for the perpetuation of sexist stereotypes (often unintentional) through media guide photographs that are intended to be promotional.

**Research Question**

Research has shown that negative stereotyping of athletes, particularly the dumb jock stereotype, exists across demographic characteristics of the athletes (race, gender, type of sport), and across NCAA division levels. Additionally, research concerning mass media portrayals of athletes has exposed rampant stereotyping, objectification, and denigration by commentators and through images. Allport (1954); Bandura (1978; 1986; 2001); Ball-Rokeach and DeFleur (1976); and Gerbner and Gross (1976) provided theoretical frameworks to understand the process of media’s facilitation of attitude formation in its consumers. Essentially, the more an individual is exposed to media, the more their conception of reality becomes aligned with the reality portrayed
by the media. The portrayed reality may be inaccurate, therefore leaving the individual susceptible to adopting similar conceptions about the world. This effect is compounded when the media is personally salient to its consumers. Athletes are often idolized for their athletic ability, status, and prestige in society. The popularity of athletics in our society makes media coverage extremely salient to consumers. Consequently, media portrayals can have a significant influence on the audience’s perception of reality. Stereotypical media portrayals of athletes, even if covert, can be easily transmitted to consumers, further fortifying and perpetuating the stereotypes and attitudes people hold about athletes.

Do the media influence athlete attitudes among consumers? I propose that media messages about athletes do, in fact, influence attitude and stereotype formation among consumers. However, the extent to which media influence attitudes and the characteristics of attitudes people hold about athletes is unknown. To test this idea, I conducted a study that was exploratory in nature to determine a) whether or not media influence athlete attitudes among consumers, and b) the characteristics of the attitudes.

Method

Participants

Participants for this study were recruited to complete an online survey via utilization of the popular social networking sites Facebook and Twitter. The purpose of using this dissemination method was to achieve a large sample representative of various demographic variables, intended to bolster external validity. Additionally, because the purpose of this study was to explore media influence on perceptions of athletes, using a popular media source as a dissemination instrument was thought to likely recruit participants who have varying demographic characteristics and ranges of media exposure. The initial sample consisted of a
total of 371 participants, but after excluding incomplete data and participants who were younger than 18-years-old, the final sample included 122 males (35%), 222 females (64%), 2 participants who identified as transgender, and 1 person who designated “other” as their gender for a total of 347 participants ($M_{age} = 30.5; \ SD = 11.6$). The racial/ethnic breakdown of the study sample revealed that most participants identified as Caucasian (78%). Nine percent of the sample identified as multi-racial; five percent identified as Asian/Pacific Islander; while participants who identified as Black/African-American, Hispanic, Native American/Alaska Native, and Other comprised 5% of the sample collectively. Lastly, two percent of participants declined to respond.

Materials

The study materials included online survey software (www.surveygizmo.com) that allowed participants to respond anonymously. Also, SPSS statistical software was used for data analysis.

Measures

The online survey included three measures: a demographics questionnaire, a media exposure questionnaire, and a prototypical athlete questionnaire (see Appendix). The demographics questionnaire inquired about demographic characteristics of the participant (e.g., race, ethnicity, sex, etc.). This allowed the researchers to control for any potential moderator/mediator variables among the participants. The Media Exposure Questionnaire (MEQ) was used to invite participants to disclose the frequency and types of media they consume. This involved inquiring about general media exposure such as television and radio, but also sports-specific media exposure. This questionnaire is essential to measure the exposure levels participants have to the media. Lastly, the Prototypical Athlete Questionnaire (PAQ), which was designed by the author, was used to solicit participants to provide their own
conceptualization of the various characteristics of an athlete. This involved participants choosing from a list of physical, characterological, and emotional attributes to literally construct their conceptualization of an athlete.

**Design and Procedure**

This study utilized a quasi-experimental design with convenience and snowball sampling strategies. Participants were solicited to participate through popular social networking websites. The participants were provided with an online link to the survey and notified that the survey would take approximately 10 to 15 minutes to complete. Participants were informed about the voluntary and anonymous nature of the survey. Last, participants were encouraged to share the survey link with others, generating a snowball sampling recruitment process.

**Results**

Prior to conducting any statistical analyses, the data were screened for missing values and outliers. The data for participants who completed at least 75 percent of the MEQ and PAQ portions of the survey were included in the analyses. Outliers were also examined for each variable of the MEQ and PAQ, but because the items on these questionnaires involved five- and seven-point Likert scales, the influence of any outliers on the overall statistical analyses was determined not to be excessively influential. This is because each item for the scenarios was measured on a seven-point Likert scale. Therefore, item means for the variables in each questionnaire had limited differences, minimizing the effect of outliers on the statistical analyses. Lastly, because many different statistical comparisons were made, the use of statistical adjustments to control for Type I errors were required. The researchers chose to utilize the Bonferroni method, which is a highly conservative adjustment method. The benefit of this approach is a minimized risk of falsely rejecting the null hypothesis. However, this also means
that the hypothesis tests are susceptible to Type II error, which essentially represents the failure to recognize true statistically significant differences. Because the current study is exploratory in nature, the measures are not psychometrically validated, and the related literature on the subject is sparse, the researchers opted for a more conservative approach.

**Overall Sample Comparisons**

We were interested in determining if significant relationships existed between three sports-related media consumption variables and the 26 personality characteristic ratings of the PAQ for the overall sample.

Using the Bonferroni approach to control for Type I error across the correlations a \( p \) value of less than .0001 (.05/406 = .0001) was required for significance. The results of the correlational analyses indicated that of the correlations, 22 were statistically significant.

A significant positive relationship was found between prototypical athlete approachability rating and frequency of watching sports on tv, \( r(298) = .25, p < .0001 \), sports-related internet use, \( r(334) = .23, p < .0001 \), and listening to sports on the radio, \( r(296) = .26, p < .0001 \). A significant positive relationship was also found between prototypical athlete cooperativeness rating and watching sports on tv, \( r(296) = .26, p < .0001 \).

A significant positive relationship was also found between prototypical athlete courageousness and frequency of watching sports on tv, \( r(294) = .25, p < .0001 \), and sports-related internet use, \( r(331) = .23, p < .0001 \). A significant positive relationship was found between prototypical athlete family importance and frequency of watching sports on tv, \( r(298) = .27, p < .0001 \), sports-related internet use, \( r(335) = .26, p < .0001 \), and listening to sports on the radio, \( r(297) = .24, p < .0001 \).
A significant positive relationship was found between prototypical athlete friendliness and frequency of watching sports on tv, $r(297) = .22, p < .0001$, sports-related internet use, $r(334) = .24, p < .0001$, and listening to sports on the radio, $r(296) = .24, p < .0001$. A significant positive relationship was also found between prototypical athlete maturity and frequency of watching sports on tv, $r(297) = .27, p < .0001$, sports-related internet use, $r(335) = .31, p < .0001$, and listening to sports on the radio, $r(296) = .28, p < .0001$. A significant positive relationship was found between prototypical athlete responsibility and frequency of watching sports on tv, $r(293) = .22, p < .0001$, sports-related internet use, $r(330) = .21, p < .0001$, and listening to sports on the radio, $r(292) = .21, p < .0001$. A significant positive relationship was found between prototypical athlete toughness and frequency of watching sports on tv, $r(296) = .25, p < .0001$, sports-related internet use, $r(333) = .27, p < .0001$.

A significant negative relationship was found between prototypical athlete rudeness and frequency of watching sports on tv, $r(296) = .25, p < .0001$. Lastly, A significant negative relationship was found between prototypical athlete selfishness and frequency of watching sports on tv, $r(296) = .20, p < .0001$.

These results indicate that for the overall sample population, increases in sport-specific media consumption is related to more favorable participant prototypical athlete characteristic ratings for several of the variables on the PAQ.

**Gender Differences**

We first wanted to explore the relationship between types of media consumption and participant gender. Eight independent sample t-tests were conducted to evaluate differences in media consumption among participants who consider themselves as “males” and “females” based on scores on the dimensions of the MEQ. To control for Type I error across the eight
univariate tests, a Bonferroni adjustment was conducted and alpha was set at .006 (.05/8) for each. The analyses revealed that of the eight tests, three were significant. For the variable of “frequency reading about sports,” homogeneity of variance could not be assumed because the result of Levene’s Test was significant, meaning that equality of variance cannot be assumed (p > .05). However, after this was accounted for, the differences were still significant. For the variables of “frequency of watching sports on tv” and “frequency of sports-related internet use,” homogeneity of variance could be assumed, as Levene’s Test was not significant, indicating that variance among the two groups was equal.

Male participants ($M = 3.41, SD = .90$), compared to female participants ($M = 2.79, SD = 1.02$), reported a significantly higher frequency of watching sports on tv $t(302) = 5.40, p < .006$. The 95% confidence interval for the difference in means ranged from .40 to .85. There was a medium effect size, as the eta square index indicated that 9% of the variance in frequency of watching sports on tv was accounted for by participant gender.

Additionally, male participants ($M = 3.03, SD = 1.03$), compared to female participants ($M = 1.81, SD = 1.02$), reported a significantly higher frequency of sports-related internet use $t(338) = 8.82, p < .006$. The 95% confidence interval for the difference in means ranged from .84 to 1.31. There was a large effect size, as the eta square index indicated that 19% of the variance in frequency of sports-related internet use was accounted for by participant gender.

Male participants ($M = 2.37, SD = 1.06$), compared to female participants ($M = 1.48, SD = .81$), reported a significantly higher frequency of reading about sports $t(167) = 6.08, p < .006$. The 95% confidence interval for the difference in means ranged from .53 to 1.04. There was a large effect size, as the eta square index indicated that 18% of the variance in frequency of reading about sports was accounted for by participant gender.
Lastly, there were no significant differences found between male and female participants regarding frequency of listening to sports on the radio \( t(250) = 2.55, p > .006 \); hours of daily TV use \( t(336) = .94, p > .006 \); daily internet use \( t(337) = 1.82, p > .006 \); daily reading \( t(342) = 1.53, p > .006 \); and total hours of daily media consumption \( t(323) = 1.16, p > .006 \). These results indicate that participants who identify as males consume similar amounts of overall media compared to females. However, male participants appear to spend significantly more time consuming sports-specific media than do female participants.

Next, we wanted to explore how male and female participants differed in the way they constructed their prototypical athletes. To achieve this, we conducted 26 independent sample t-tests to evaluate differences in how males and females rated different personality characteristics on the PAQ. To control for Type I error across the 26 univariate tests, a Bonferroni adjustment was conducted and alpha was set at .002 (.05/26) for each. The analyses revealed that of the 26 tests about personality characteristics, only one was significant. Homogeneity of variance can be assumed because the result of Levene’s Test was not significant, meaning that equality of variance can be assumed (\( p > .05 \)). A significant difference was found regarding the personality characteristic of “emotionality” \( t(332) = 3.99, p < .002 \). Specifically, males (\( M = 4.38, SD = 1.36 \)) attributed significantly higher emotionality to their prototypical athlete than did females (\( M = 3.78, SD = 1.27 \)). The 95% confidence interval for the difference in means ranged from .30 to .89. There was a small effect size, as the eta square index indicated that 5% of the variance in ratings of emotionality was accounted for by whether the participant identified as male or female.

The independent samples t-tests for ascribed aggression \( t(332) = 2.16, p > .002 \); agility \( t(334) = .65, p > .002 \); approachability \( t(334) = 2.51, p > .002 \); arrogance \( t(333) = 2.73, p > .002 \);
attraction $t(333) = 1.57, p > .002$; cooperativeness $t(332) = 2.45, p > .002$; courage $t(330) = .80, p > .002$; determination $t(333) = .36, p > .002$; dishonesty $t(332) = 1.41, p > .002$; extraversion $t(332) = .92, p > .002$; family importance $t(334) = .99, p > .002$; friendliness $t(333) = 1.93, p > .002$; hostility $t(332) = .92, p > .002$; insecurity $t(330) = 1.86, p > .002$; introversion $t(331) = 1.83, p > .002$; laziness $t(332) = 1.53, p > .002$; maturity $t(333) = 1.54, p > .002$; motivation $t(333) = .85, p > .002$; power $t(333) = .44, p > .002$; responsibility $t(329) = 1.34, p > .002$; rudeness $t(332) = .97, p > .002$; selfishness $t(332) = .12, p > .002$; stubbornness $t(334) = .60, p > .002$; toughness $t(332) = 2.40, p > .002$; and wealth $t(330) = 1.67, p > .002$, were not significant.

These results indicate that aside from the personality characteristic of emotionality, there are no significant differences in how male and female participants ascribed personality characteristic ratings to their prototypical athletes.

**Athlete Status Differences**

Next, we wanted to explore the relationship between types of media consumption and participant athlete status. Eight independent sample $t$-tests were conducted to evaluate differences in how participants who consider themselves as “athletes” and “non-athletes” scored on the dimensions of the MEQ. To control for Type I error across the eight univariate tests, a Bonferroni adjustment was conducted and alpha was set at .006 (.05/8) for each. The analyses revealed that of the eight tests, four were significant. For the variable of “frequency of sports-related internet use,” homogeneity of variance could be assumed because the result of Levene’s Test was not significant, meaning that equality of variance can be assumed ($p > .05$). For the variables of “frequency of watching sports on tv,” “frequency reading about sports,” and “frequency of listening to sports on the radio,” homogeneity of variance could not be assumed,
as Levene’s Test was significant, indicating that variance among the two groups was not equal. However, after this was accounted for, the differences were still significant.

Athletes ($M = 3.40, SD = .84$), compared to non-athletes ($M = 2.48, SD = 1.03$), reported a significantly higher frequency of watching sports on tv $t(238) = 8.30, p < .006$. The 95% confidence interval for the difference in means ranged from .70 to 1.13. There was a large effect size, as the eta square index indicated that 22% of the variance in frequency of watching sports on tv was accounted for by whether the participant identified as an athlete or not.

Additionally, athletes ($M = 3.03, SD = 1.03$), compared to non-athletes ($M = 1.81, SD = 1.02$), reported a significantly higher frequency of sports-related internet use $t(343) = 10.80, p < .006$. The 95% confidence interval for the difference in means ranged from .99 to 1.43. There was a large effect size, as the eta square index indicated that 25% of the variance in frequency of sports-related internet use was accounted for by whether the participant identified as an athlete or not.

Athletes ($M = 2.37, SD = 1.06$), compared to non-athletes ($M = 1.48, SD = .81$), reported a significantly higher frequency of reading about sports $t(303) = 8.35, p < .006$. The 95% confidence interval for the difference in means ranged from .68 to 1.10. There was a large effect size, as the eta square index indicated that 19% of the variance in frequency of reading about sports was accounted for by whether the participant identified as an athlete or not.

Lastly, athletes ($M = .34, SD = .82$), compared to non-athletes ($M = .09, SD = .41$), reported a significantly higher frequency of listening to sports on the radio $t(305) = 3.75, p < .006$. The 95% confidence interval for the difference in means ranged from .12 to .39. There was a small effect size, as the eta square index indicated that 4% of the variance in frequency of
listening to sports on the radio was accounted for by whether the participant identified as an athlete or not.

There were no significant differences found between athletes and non-athletes regarding hours of daily tv use \( t(341) = .38, p > .006 \); daily internet use \( t(342) = .92, p > .006 \); daily reading \( t(347) = 1.28, p > .006 \); and total hours of daily media consumption \( t(328) = .55, p > .006 \). These results indicate that participants who consider themselves as athletes consume similar amounts of overall media compared to non-athletes. However, athletes appear to spend significantly more time consuming sports-specific media than do non-athletes.

These results indicate that participants who identified as athletes reported similar amounts of overall media consumption to participants who identified as non-athletes. However, athlete participants reported significantly higher sports-related media consumption than non-athlete participants.

Next, 29 independent samples t-tests were performed to explore the differences, if any, between participants who identified as athletes and non-athletes and how they ascribed personality characteristics to the prototypical athlete they constructed using the PAQ. To control for Type I error across the 29 univariate tests, a Bonferroni adjustment was conducted and alpha was set at .002 (.05/29) for each. The analyses revealed that of the 29 tests, 11 were significant. Of these tests that were significant, the homogeneity of variance for the variables “athlete intelligence” and “toughness” could not be assumed, as Levene’s Test was significant. This indicates that the variance between the two groups was not equal. However, after this was accounted for, the differences were still significant. Homogeneity of variance could be assumed for the following variables because the result of Levene’s Test was not significant, meaning that equality of variance can be assumed (\( p > .05 \)): “approachability,” “arrogance,”
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“cooperativeness,” “courageousness,” “family importance,” “friendliness,” “maturity,”
“responsibility,” and “rudeness.”

Athletes ($M = 3.50, SD = .78$), compared to non-athletes ($M = 3.17, SD = .72$), ascribed a significantly higher intelligence to their prototypical athlete $t(324) = 4.15, p < .002$. The 95% confidence interval for the difference in means ranged from .18 to .50. There was a small effect size, as the eta square index indicated that 5% of the variance in ascribed athlete intelligence was accounted for by whether the participant identified as an athlete or not.

Athletes ($M = 6.13, SD = .93$), compared to non-athletes ($M = 5.70, SD = 1.02$), ascribed a significantly higher rating of toughness to their prototypical athlete $t(284) = 3.98, p < .002$. The 95% confidence interval for the difference in means ranged from .22 to .65. There was a small effect size, as the eta square index indicated that 5% of the variance in ascribed athlete toughness was accounted for by whether the participant identified as an athlete or not.

Athletes ($M = 4.89, SD = 1.55$), compared to non-athletes ($M = 4.28, SD = 1.37$), ascribed a significantly higher rating of approachability to their prototypical athlete $t(339) = 3.75, p < .002$. The 95% confidence interval for the difference in means ranged from .29 to .93. There was a small effect size, as the eta square index indicated that 4% of the variance in ascribed athlete approachability was accounted for by whether the participant identified as an athlete or not.

Athletes ($M = 3.94, SD = 1.77$), compared to non-athletes ($M = 4.61, SD = 1.73$), ascribed a significantly lower rating of arrogance to their prototypical athlete $t(338) = 3.47, p < .002$. The 95% confidence interval for the difference in means ranged from .29 to 1.05. There was a small effect size, as the eta square index indicated that 3% of the variance in ascribed athlete arrogance was accounted for by whether the participant identified as an athlete or not.
Athletes ($M = 5.21, SD = 1.29$), compared to non-athletes ($M = 4.70, SD = 1.27$), ascribed a significantly higher rating of cooperativeness to their prototypical athlete $t(337) = 3.61, p < .002$. The 95% confidence interval for the difference in means ranged from .23 to .79. There was a small effect size, as the eta square index indicated that 4% of the variance in ascribed athlete cooperativeness was accounted for by whether the participant identified as an athlete or not.

Athletes ($M = 5.51, SD = 1.25$), compared to non-athletes ($M = 4.94, SD = 1.16$), ascribed a significantly higher rating of courageousness to their prototypical athlete $t(335) = 4.22, p < .002$. The 95% confidence interval for the difference in means ranged from .30 to .83. There was a small effect size, as the eta square index indicated that 5% of the variance in ascribed athlete courageousness was accounted for by whether the participant identified as an athlete or not.

Athletes ($M = 5.24, SD = 1.28$), compared to non-athletes ($M = 4.72, SD = 1.43$), ascribed a significantly higher rating of family importance to their prototypical athlete $t(339) = 3.54, p < .002$. The 95% confidence interval for the difference in means ranged from .23 to .81. There was a small effect size, as the eta square index indicated that 4% of the variance in ascribed athlete family importance was accounted for by whether the participant identified as an athlete or not.

Athletes ($M = 5.20, SD = 1.31$), compared to non-athletes ($M = 4.76, SD = 1.22$), ascribed a significantly higher rating of friendliness to their prototypical athlete $t(338) = 3.11, p < .002$. The 95% confidence interval for the difference in means ranged from .16 to .71. There was a small effect size, as the eta square index indicated that 3% of the variance in ascribed athlete friendliness was accounted for by whether the participant identified as an athlete or not.

Athletes ($M = 4.90, SD = 1.45$), compared to non-athletes ($M = 4.19, SD = 1.42$), ascribed a significantly higher rating of maturity to their prototypical athlete $t(338) = 4.49, p < .002$. The 95% confidence interval for the difference in means ranged from .40 to 1.02. There was a
medium effect size, as the eta square index indicated that 6% of the variance in ascribed athlete maturity was accounted for by whether the participant identified as an athlete or not.

Athletes \( (M = 5.62, SD = 1.36) \), compared to non-athletes \( (M = 5.16, SD = 1.28) \), ascribed a significantly higher rating of responsibility to their prototypical athlete \( t(334) = 3.17, p < .002 \). The 95% confidence interval for the difference in means ranged from .18 to .75. There was a small effect size, as the eta square index indicated that 3% of the variance in ascribed athlete responsibility was accounted for by whether the participant identified as an athlete or not.

Lastly, athletes \( (M = 2.84, SD = 1.52) \), compared to non-athletes \( (M = 3.40, SD = 1.59) \), ascribed a significantly lower rating of rudeness to their prototypical athlete \( t(337) = 3.25, p < .002 \). The 95% confidence interval for the difference in means ranged from .22 to .89. There was a small effect size, as the eta square index indicated that 3% of the variance in ascribed athlete rudeness was accounted for by whether the participant identified as an athlete or not.

The independent samples t-tests for ascribed aggression \( t(337) = 1.28, p > .002 \); agility \( t(339) = 1.45, p > .002 \); attractiveness \( t(338) = .89, p > .002 \); determination \( t(338) = 2.69, p > .002 \); dishonesty \( t(337) = 2.64, p > .002 \); emotionality \( t(337) = 1.48, p > .002 \); extraversion \( t(337) = .50, p > .002 \); hostility \( t(337) = 2.01, p > .002 \); insecurity \( t(335) = .67, p > .002 \); introversion \( t(335) = 2.57, p > .002 \); laziness \( t(337) = .92, p > .002 \); motivation \( t(338) = 2.26, p > .002 \); power \( t(338) = .95, p > .002 \); selfishness \( t(337) = 1.88, p > .002 \); stubbornness \( t(339) = 1.26, p > .002 \); and wealth \( t(335) = 1.43, p > .002 \), were not significant.

These results indicate that participants who identified as athletes themselves attributed significantly higher ratings of desirable characteristics (Intelligence, toughness, approachability, cooperativeness, courageousness, family importance, friendliness, maturity, and responsibility)
and significantly lower ratings of undesirable characteristics (rudeness and arrogance) to their prototypical athlete as compared to their non-athlete participant counterparts.

**Combined Gender and Athlete Status Differences**

Thus far, we have explored differences in participant gender and differences in participant athlete status separately. Most of the significant differences found have been between participants who consider themselves athletes versus participants who consider themselves non-athletes. However, the researchers wanted to gain a more precise idea of what variables account for the variance in group means and we wanted to explore whether there were any differences between participant athlete/non-athlete status and participant gender for the MEQ and PAQ. To accomplish this, the researchers created a dummy variable with four levels: male athlete, male non-athlete, female athlete, and female non-athlete.

Next, eight one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) tests were conducted to evaluate the differences, if any, between participant athlete status and gender on frequency of media exposure using the MEQ. To control for Type I error across the eight univariate tests, a Bonferroni adjustment was conducted and alpha was set at .006 (.05/8) for each.

Homogeneity of variance could not be assumed for the “frequency of watching sport on tv,” “frequency of sports-related internet use,” and “frequency of listening to sports on the radio” because the result of Levene’s Test was significant, meaning that equality of variance cannot be assumed (p < .05). For this reason, Tamhane’s T2 post hoc comparison was used to evaluate pairwise differences among the group means. After this was accounted for, significant group differences were still found for each variable. The one-way ANOVA for frequency of watching sports on tv was significant, $F(3, 300) = 28.30$, $p < .006$, $\eta^2 = .22$. The effect size was large,
indicating that participant athlete status and gender accounted for 22% of variance in the average frequency of watching sports on tv.

Pairwise comparisons revealed that male athlete \( (M = 3.61, SD = .75) \) participants reported significantly higher frequencies of watching sports on tv compared to male non-athlete \( (M = 2.78, SD = 1.05) \), female athlete \( (M = 3.19, SD = .87) \), and female non-athlete \( (M = 2.42, SD = 1.01) \) participants. Female athletes also reported significantly higher frequencies of watching sports on tv compared to female non-athletes. There were no significant differences between female athletes and male non-athletes, or between male and female non-athletes.

The one-way ANOVA for frequency of sports-related internet use was significant, \( F(3, 336) = 62.19, p < .006, \eta^2 = .36 \). The effect size was large, indicating that participant athlete status and gender accounted for 36% of variance in the average frequency of sports-related internet use.

Pairwise comparisons revealed that male athlete \( (M = 3.55, SD = .78) \) participants reported significantly higher frequencies of sports-related internet use compared to male non-athlete \( (M = 2.17, SD = 1.21) \), female athlete \( (M = 2.57, SD = 1.02) \), and female non-athlete \( (M = 1.73, SD = .96) \) participants. Female athletes also reported significantly higher frequencies of sports-related internet use compared to female non-athletes. There were no significant differences between female athletes and male non-athletes, or between male and female non-athletes.

The one-way ANOVA for frequency of listening to sports on the radio was significant, \( F(3, 330) = 4.98, p < .006, \eta^2 = .04 \). The effect size was small, indicating that participant athlete status and gender accounted for 4% of variance in the average frequency of listening to sports on the radio.
Pairwise comparisons revealed that male athlete ($M = .44, SD = .73$) participants reported significantly higher frequencies listening to sports on the radio compared to male non-athlete ($M = .11, SD = .32$), and female non-athlete ($M = .08, SD = .43$) participants. No significant differences were found between male athletes and female athletes ($M = .25, SD = .89$), female athletes and male non-athletes, female athletes and female non-athletes, or male non-athletes and female non-athletes.

Homogeneity of variance could be assumed for “frequency of reading about sports,” “hours of daily tv use,” and “hours of daily internet use,” “hours of daily reading,” and “total hours of daily media consumption” because the result of Levene’s Test was not significant, meaning that equality of variance can be assumed ($p < .05$). Because of this, Tukey’s HSD post hoc test was used to evaluate pairwise differences among the group means.

The one-way ANOVA for frequency of reading about sports was significant, $F(3, 299) = 28.31, p < .006, \eta^2 = .25$. The effect size was large, indicating that participant athlete status and gender accounted for 25% of variance in the average frequency of reading about sports.

Pairwise comparisons revealed that male athlete ($M = 2.82, SD = 1.01$) participants reported significantly higher frequencies of reading about sports compared to male non-athlete ($M = 1.64, SD = .91$), female athlete ($M = 2.04, SD = .97$), and female non-athlete ($M = 1.45, SD = .79$) participants. Female athletes also reported significantly higher frequencies of reading about sports compared to female non-athletes. There were no significant differences between female athletes and male non-athletes, or between male and female non-athletes.

The one-way ANOVA tests for hours of daily tv use, $F(3, 334) = 2.22, p > .006$; hours of daily internet use $F(3, 335) = 1.85, p > .006$; hours of daily reading $F(3, 340) = 1.64, p > .006$; and total hours of daily media consumption $F(3, 321) = .47, p > .006$, were not significant.
These results indicate that all four participant groups reported similar amounts of overall media consumption. However, male athlete participants reported significantly higher sports-related media consumption than the three other participant groups. While reporting significantly less sports-related media consumption than male athlete participants, female athlete participants reported significantly higher sports-related media consumption than male and female non-athlete participants.

Next, 27 one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) tests were conducted to evaluate the differences, if any, between participant athlete status and gender on ratings of personality characteristics the participants ascribed to their prototypical athlete using the PAQ. To control for Type I error across the 27 univariate tests, a Bonferroni adjustment was conducted and alpha was set at .002 (.05/27) for each.

Homogeneity of variance could not be assumed for “athlete intelligence,” “approachability,” “introversion,” and “toughness” because the result of Levene’s Test was significant, meaning that equality of variance cannot be assumed (p < .05). For this reason, Tamhane’s T2 post hoc comparison was used to evaluate pairwise differences among the group means. After this was accounted for, significant interaction effects were still found for athlete intelligence, approachability, and toughness.

The one-way ANOVA for athlete intelligence was significant, $F(3, 335) = 6.50, p < .002, \eta^2 = .05$. The effect size was small, indicating that participant athlete status and gender accounted for 5% of variance in the average rating of intelligence ascribed to the prototypical athlete. Pairwise comparisons revealed only one significant difference between the four groups: male athlete ($M = 3.57$, $SD = .81$) participants ascribed significantly higher intelligence ratings to their prototypical athlete compared to female non-athlete ($M = 3.15$, $SD = .73$) participants.
The one-way ANOVA for athlete approachability was significant, $F(3, 332) = 7.72$, $p < .002$, $\eta^2 = .07$. The effect size was medium, indicating that participant athlete status and gender accounted for 7% of variance in the average rating of approachability participants ascribed to the prototypical athlete. Pairwise comparisons revealed two significant differences between the four groups: male athlete ($M = 5.18$, $SD = 1.40$) participants ascribed significantly higher approachability ratings to their prototypical athlete than male non-athlete ($M = 3.96$, $SD = 1.23$) and female non-athlete ($M = 4.34$, $SD = 1.38$) participants.

The one-way ANOVA for athlete toughness was significant, $F(3, 330) = 8.43$, $p < .002$, $\eta^2 = .07$. The effect size was medium, indicating that participant athlete status and gender accounted for 7% of variance in the average rating of toughness participants ascribed to the prototypical athlete. Pairwise comparisons revealed only one significant difference between the four groups: male athlete ($M = 6.31$, $SD = .80$) participants ascribed significantly higher toughness ratings to their prototypical athlete than female non-athlete ($M = 5.73$, $SD = 1.00$) participants.

Lastly, the one-way ANOVA test for athlete introversion, $F(3, 321) = .47$, $p > .002$, was not significant. Because this test was not significant, exploration of the pairwise comparisons was unnecessary.

Homogeneity of variance could be assumed for the remaining personality characteristics because the result of Levene’s Test was not significant, meaning that equality of variance can be assumed ($p > .05$). For this reason, Tukey’s HSD post hoc comparison was used to evaluate pairwise differences among the group means.

The one-way ANOVA for athlete arrogance was significant, $F(3, 331) = 4.98$, $p < .002$, $\eta^2 = .04$. The effect size was small, indicating that participant athlete status and gender accounted
for 4% of variance in the average rating of arrogance participants ascribed to the prototypical athlete. Pairwise comparisons revealed only one significant difference between the four groups: male athlete \((M = 3.75, SD = 1.78)\) participants ascribed significantly lower arrogance ratings to their prototypical athlete than female non-athlete \((M = 4.69, SD = 1.76)\) participants.

The one-way ANOVA for athlete cooperativeness was significant, \(F(3, 330) = 4.93, p < .002, \eta^2 = .04\). The effect size was small, indicating that participant athlete status and gender accounted for 4% of variance in the average rating of cooperativeness participants ascribed to the prototypical athlete. Pairwise comparisons revealed only one significant difference between the four groups: male athlete \((M = 5.30, SD = 1.31)\) participants ascribed significantly higher cooperativeness ratings to their prototypical athlete than female non-athlete \((M = 4.64, SD = 1.32)\) participants.

The one-way ANOVA for athlete courageousness was significant, \(F(3, 328) = 6.12, p < .002, \eta^2 = .05\). The effect size was small, indicating that participant athlete status and gender accounted for 5% of variance in the average rating of courageousness participants ascribed to the prototypical athlete. Although the between groups difference was found to be significant, no pairwise comparisons were statistically significant. This may be a result of using a Bonferroni adjustment, which is rather conservative in nature.

The one-way ANOVA for athlete emotionality was significant, \(F(3, 330) = 5.70, p < .002, \eta^2 = .05\). The effect size was small, indicating that participant athlete status and gender accounted for 5% of variance in the average rating of emotionality participants ascribed to the prototypical athlete. Pairwise comparisons revealed only one significant difference between the four groups: male athlete \((M = 4.44, SD = 1.35)\) participants ascribed significantly higher
emotionality ratings to their prototypical athlete than female athlete ($M = 3.75, SD = 1.31$) participants.

The one-way ANOVA for athlete family importance was significant, $F(3, 332) = 5.51, p < .002, \eta^2 = .05$. The effect size was small, indicating that participant athlete status and gender accounted for 5% of variance in the average rating of family importance participants ascribed to the prototypical athlete. Pairwise comparisons revealed only one significant difference between the four groups: male athlete ($M = 5.41, SD = 1.32$) participants ascribed significantly higher family importance ratings to their prototypical athlete than male non-athlete ($M = 4.48, SD = 1.01$) participants.

The one-way ANOVA for athlete friendliness was significant, $F(3, 331) = 5.37, p < .002, \eta^2 = .05$. The effect size was small, indicating that participant athlete status and gender accounted for 5% of variance in the average rating of friendliness participants ascribed to the prototypical athlete. Although the between groups difference was found to be significant, no pairwise comparisons were statistically significant. This may be a result of using a Bonferroni adjustment, which is rather conservative in nature.

The one-way ANOVA for athlete maturity was significant, $F(3, 331) = 8.78, p < .002, \eta^2 = .07$. The effect size was medium, indicating that participant athlete status and gender accounted for 7% of variance in the average rating of family importance participants ascribed to the prototypical athlete. Pairwise comparisons revealed two significant differences between the four groups: male athlete ($M = 5.09, SD = 1.43$) participants ascribed significantly higher maturity ratings to their prototypical athlete than male non-athlete ($M = 3.71, SD = 1.58$) and female non-athlete ($M = 4.31, SD = 1.38$) participants.
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The one-way ANOVA tests for aggression, $F(3, 330) = 2.98$, $p > .002$; agility $F(3, 332) = 1.19$, $p > .002$; attractiveness, $F(3, 331) = 1.71$, $p > .002$; determination, $F(3, 331) = 2.34$, $p > .002$; dishonesty, $F(3, 330) = 3.43$, $p > .002$; extraversion, $F(3, 330) = 1.16$, $p > .002$; hostility, $F(3, 330) = 2.51$, $p > .002$; insecurity, $F(3, 328) = 1.74$, $p > .002$; laziness, $F(3, 330) = 1.13$, $p > .002$; motivation, $F(3, 331) = 1.92$, $p > .002$; power, $F(3, 331) = 1.11$, $p > .002$; responsibility, $F(3, 327) = 4.28$, $p > .002$; rudeness, $F(3, 330) = 4.73$, $p > .002$; selfishness, $F(3, 330) = 1.58$, $p > .002$; stubbornness, $F(3, 328) = .75$, $p > .002$; and wealth, $F(3, 328) = 2.18$, $p > .002$, were not significant.

These results indicated that most significant differences occurred between male athlete and female non-athlete participants on their ratings of various characteristics. In general, male athlete participants appeared to ascribe higher ratings for positive personality characteristics and lower ratings for negative personality characteristics to their prototypical athlete when compared to female non-athlete participants. Group means for significant MEQ and PAQ variables are found in Table 1.

Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Means for significant sports media types and personality characteristics among four participant groups.</th>
<th>Male Athlete</th>
<th>Female Athlete</th>
<th>Male Non-athlete</th>
<th>Female Non-athlete</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Watch Sports on TV</td>
<td>3.61</td>
<td>3.19</td>
<td>2.78</td>
<td>2.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sports Internet Use</td>
<td>3.55</td>
<td>2.57</td>
<td>2.17</td>
<td>1.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sports on Radio</td>
<td>.44</td>
<td>.25</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Athlete Intelligence</td>
<td>5.09</td>
<td>4.70</td>
<td>3.71</td>
<td>4.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approachability</td>
<td>5.18</td>
<td>4.60</td>
<td>3.96</td>
<td>4.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arrogance</td>
<td>3.75</td>
<td>4.12</td>
<td>4.26</td>
<td>4.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooperativeness</td>
<td>5.30</td>
<td>5.12</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>4.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Courageousness</td>
<td>5.54</td>
<td>5.45</td>
<td>4.67</td>
<td>5.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotionality</td>
<td>4.44</td>
<td>3.75</td>
<td>4.15</td>
<td>3.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Importance</td>
<td>5.37</td>
<td>5.11</td>
<td>4.32</td>
<td>4.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friendliness</td>
<td>5.41</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>4.48</td>
<td>4.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maturity</td>
<td>5.09</td>
<td>4.70</td>
<td>3.71</td>
<td>4.31</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Discussion

This was an exploratory study designed to attempt to determine a) whether or not media influence attitudes about athletes among consumers, and b) the characteristics of these attitudes. Significant differences were found among different participant demographic groups and hypotheses aimed at explaining these differences are detailed below.

Gender Differences

The results of this study indicate that there were significant differences between male and female participants in terms of frequency of sports-related media consumption, with males consuming significantly more. However, when exploring the outcomes of how male and female participants ascribed personality characteristic ratings to their prototypical athletes on the PAQ, only one significant difference was revealed. The only difference was on the personality characteristic of “emotionality,” with male participants reporting significantly higher emotionality ratings for their prototypical athlete as compared to the ratings provided from female participants.

One interesting similarity between male and female participants was the gender that they ascribed to their prototypical athletes. The majority of both male participants (84%) and female participants (69%) assigned their prototypical athletes as males. This result is to be expected, as research about the gross disparity between men’s and women’s sports media coverage (Messner, Cooky, & Hextum, 2010; Jones, 2003), as well as research about attitude formation (Allport, 1954; Triandis, 1971; Rotter, 1954; Bandura, Ross, & Ross, 1961) and media influence (Anastasio, Rose, & Chapman, 1999; Grabe, Ward, & Hyde, 2008; Gilliam & Iyengar, 2000; Gerbner & Gross, 1976) indicate. Mass media constantly and consistently bombard audience
members with primarily men’s sports. The effect this has on audience members is for them to adopt the attitude (implicit or otherwise) that sports are equated with men. This same process appears to have influenced the participants of the current study, which explains why the majority of males and even the majority of females think of athletes as male.

Cultivation theory offers an additional explanation for this phenomenon (Gerbner & Gross, 1976). The more time people spend consuming media messages, the more likely they are “cultivated” to the social realities portrayed in these messages. Because women’s sports are virtually non-existent in terms of media coverage, audience members likely adopt this lopsided view. The result is equating men and masculinity with what it means to be an athlete.

**Athlete Status Differences**

The results of this study indicate that there are greater significant differences among athlete status (athlete versus non-athlete) than among gender (males versus females) when comparing sports-specific media consumption and certain personality characteristics participants ascribed to their prototypical athlete. Specifically, the results indicated that there is a positive correlation between frequency of sports-related media consumption and favorable ratings of personality characteristics ascribed to the prototypical athletes.

Based on these results, it can be hypothesized that sports-specific media consumption leads to more favorable ratings of athletes. This is supported by Rotter’s (1954) social learning theory, which was expanded upon by Bandura, Ross and Ross (1961; 1963) and Bandura (1978; 1986) and called “social cognitive theory.” Based on this theory, people learn by integrating information from their behaviors and cognitions, and observing and modeling others. Bandura (2001) applied social cognitive theory to mass media communication. He theorized that most external influences (media) indirectly affect behavior through cognitive processes, so it is
important to understand what determines these cognitive processes. Hypothesizing that higher sports media consumption leads to more favorable ratings of athletes is a step in the right direction, but is incomplete. The cognitive processes that take place need to be explored to have a better understanding of how media exposure affects sports-specific attitudes.

Another important variable to consider is the influence of participant athlete status in how attitudes towards their prototypical athlete were expressed. Participants who identified as athletes themselves provided higher ratings of positive personality characteristics to their prototypical athlete compared to non-athletes. Additionally, athlete participants provided significantly lower ratings of negative personality characteristics to their prototypical athlete compared to non-athletes. These results can be explained through two reciprocal processes: Allport’s (1954) theory on attitude formation based on in-group/out-group membership and Ball-Rokeach and DeFleur’s (1976) dependency model of media effects.

Allport (1954) described the social process of developing in-groups and out-groups, which is derived from our natural need to belong. His in-group and out-group distinction is the basis for categorization and stereotype formation. Triandis (1971) expanded on Allport’s theory and explained that one of the simplest explanations for attitude development is the need to protect the self-esteem. For the current study, we can consider participant athlete status as two distinct groups: athletes versus non-athletes. Using Allport and Triandis’ theories, each group is motivated to preserve the distinction between the two groups. This motivation can be to preserve self-esteem as well as maintain a sense of group and societal belonging.

In this study, participants who identified as athletes may be motivated to establish and/or preserve a positive and favorable impression of what it means to be an athlete. The projective quality of the PAQ was thought to encourage participants to reveal their implicit understanding
of what it means to be an athlete. Because of this, the prototypical athletes that participants constructed can be viewed, in part, as a reflection of the participants themselves. An athlete providing negative or unfavorable personality characteristic ratings to what it means to be an athlete would likely hinder one’s self-esteem as well as cause considerable cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957). Therefore, it is not surprising that athlete participants rated their prototypical athlete as having significantly more favorable personality characteristics than non-athlete participants.

Additionally, this process distinguishes athlete and non-athlete participants (in-group versus out-group), which helps to maintain group affiliation and a greater sense of belonging. Non-athlete participants were likely motivated to maintain differences between athletes in order to preserve the in-group/out-group distinction. Non-athlete participants’ consistently less favorable ratings of athlete personality characteristics is likely a function of this process. Maintaining these group differences is understandable given the considerable amount of research on the matter, but further analysis is needed to understand what mediates the content of the attitudes people hold towards athletes. Specifically, we are interested in the role media play in this process.

Ball-Rokeach and DeFleur’s (1976) dependency model of media effects outlines a process whereby a person’s dependency on media information leads to changes in beliefs, attitudes, and emotions that align with the information being presented by the media. There are several variables that determine the strength of this influence: unique media functions, centrality of information, and societal conflict/change. These variables may explain why participants who considered themselves athletes assigned more favorable personality characteristics to their prototypical athlete. Specifically, athlete participants reported significantly higher frequencies of
sports-related media consumption than non-athlete participants. This illustrates the potential influence of unique media functions on the audience because participants reported multiple sports media sources used (tv, internet, reading, and radio). The more ways sports-specific information can be disseminated to audience members, the greater the chance audience members will begin to align their personal beliefs, attitudes, and emotions with the message being conveyed.

Additionally, the participants who identified as athletes likely assigned more favorable personality characteristics to their prototypical athlete because of the centrality of information principle. This principle indicates that the more salient the information is to audience members, the more likely the audience members will attend to and be influenced by the message being conveyed. Based on this principle, it makes sense that athletes would consume greater amounts of sports-related media and have more favorable ratings of athletes in general.

Lastly, Ball-Rokeach and DeFleur (1976) mention societal conflict and/or change as a catalyst to audience susceptibility to media influence as a compensatory reaction to a challenged social framework. Although it is not clear whether the participants in this study experienced great influence from societal conflict or change, it can be argued that the constant bombardment of controversy in the media that is directly related to sports may serve as this function. For example, in recent years, many idolized professional athletes have been exposed as criminals from Michael Vick’s dog fighting charges, to Lance Armstrong’s doping controversy. These events are highly publicized and could challenge peoples’ previous attitudes, beliefs, and emotions about athletes in general, increasing the opportunity for media influence.

**Combined Gender and Athlete Status Differences**
To gain the most accurate understanding of underlying processes that occurred for the current study, it is important to examine how the different factors affect the results. Specifically, the researchers chose to analyze the data while accounting for participant athlete status and gender together. The results revealed some interesting response patterns among the different participant groups. For all of the sports-related media types on the MEQ (tv, internet, reading, radio), Male athletes showed the highest frequencies, followed by female athletes, then male non-athletes, with the lowest frequencies coming from female non-athletes (see Table 1). Male athletes reported frequencies that were higher than all other groups for all of the sports media types. Female athletes followed with frequencies significantly higher than the remaining non-athlete groups.

When exploring the personality characteristics that yielded significant differences on the PAQ, a similar pattern was revealed with one difference—male non-athletes typically provided the least favorable ratings compared to the other groups (see Table 1). While these differences are not always significant, the consistent pattern is still worthy of exploration. The majority of statistically significant differences in mean personality characteristic ratings were between male athletes and female non-athletes, despite male non-athlete participants consistently having the lowest mean ratings. This is likely explained by a disproportionately small sample of male non-athlete participants (18) compared to the other groups (50+). However, there were many significant differences between male athlete and male non-athlete participants as well. Lastly, there were several personality characteristics that revealed significant differences between female athletes and non-athlete groups.

What accounts for these differences and these patterns? Although this current study is far from comprehensive and specific enough to provide a thorough answer to this question, it is
worthwhile to provide some hypotheses to consider when thinking about future directions and research. One question that these results have elicited is why do male non-athletes typically provide the least favorable ratings of athlete personality characteristics? One explanation to explore could be that lower frequencies of sports-related media consumption lead to less favorable ratings of prototypical athletes. However, female non-athletes reported the lowest frequencies of sports-related media consumption, which means that (although not to a statistically significant degree) male non-athletes consumed higher frequencies than female non-athletes. Yet, male non-athletes reported the least favorable ratings of their prototypical athletes. To account for this conflicting result, other possible explanations should be entertained.

One hypothesis is that the pattern of results for the current study represents a perceived power hierarchy among the participants. Undoubtedly, professional men’s athletics have the most media coverage of all sports, and yield substantial monetary profits. Additionally, professional athletes, especially male athletes, frequently earn seven- or even eight-digit annual salaries. These athletes are also often idolized and become aspirational figures in the eyes of other people. These qualities and circumstances likely represent a considerable amount of power. Messner (1993) described the intricate ways power influences, and is influenced by, sports, athletes, and society. He explained that sport was designed by and for men, who also happen to be the ones who possess power (e.g. corporations, mass media, etc.). It is difficult to argue otherwise, especially in the face of research that confirms such a notion (Messner, Cooky, & Hextrum, 2010). One result of the existence of sports, according to Messner (1993), is the hypermasculinity of athletes, who learn to promote and maintain the values of a highly competitive culture that encourages the pursuit of power and dominance over others. Essentially, identifying as an athlete and participating in sports likely increases a person’s potential for
power. This appears to have happened with female participants who identified as athletes, as they often attributed significantly more favorable ratings to their prototypical athletes than compared to male and female non-athletes. By ascribing favorable qualities to their prototypical athlete, which is also how the participants identify, they are essentially attributing those favorable qualities to themselves and therefore protecting the power that is associated with being an athlete. This may indicate that the power associated with athlete status is greater than the power associated with gender.

This power hierarchy likely causes the greatest conflict among male participants, as there may be an inherent battle for power and dominance over who is the most masculine. One means of coping with the threat of feeling emasculated is to devalue the person or group that threatens the power you hold. This may be the reason for the disparity between male athlete and male non-athlete ratings. Male athletes, in a perceived position of power, assigned significantly more favorable personality ratings to their prototypical athletes. This can represent a way to maintain the power associated with being an athlete. However, this can also be seen as threatening to non-athletes. As a potential response to their threatened power, male non-athletes typically assigned the lowest ratings to their prototypical athletes. From a psychoanalytic perspective, this leveling of the playing field can be explained as the acting out of unconscious envy. First, it is imperative to emphasize that this is a completely unconscious process. Klein (1957) theorized that unconscious envy is experienced when a person’s ego is weakened by a perceived deprivation of some kind by another object (person) withholding something that is desirable. The result is the desiring of something that you cannot possess (unconscious envy). To cope against the experience of envy and therefore the weakening of the ego, the envious person unconsciously
employs the ego defense of devaluation. The devaluing of a desirable object renders the object less desirable, thereby resolving the psychically painful experience of envy.

The male non-athlete participants may have felt less masculine and less powerful—qualities that are considered quite desirable—when compared to athletes. The manner in which the male non-athlete participants rated their prototypical athlete may represent a compensatory devaluation response to threats to power—a power that is constantly perpetuated by mass media through the highly publicized world of sports.

**Limitations and Directions for Future Research**

There are several limitations that may affect the interpretation of results for the current study. First, the researchers accidentally omitted an important dimension of the PAQ, which was that of prototypical athlete race/ethnicity. This error was realized only after the majority of participants had already completed the survey. This limits the interpretation of the results because race/ethnicity may be a mediating factor that can better account for and therefore better explain the phenomena under question. Race/ethnicity is an important demographic variable that is well researched within the field of sport psychology and mass media portrayals of different racial groups, and future research should be sure to incorporate this variable into the research design.

Another methodological limitation was the limited variability in demographic characteristics of the study sample. First, the majority of participants identified as “Caucasian,” which meant that the sample sizes for other racial/ethnic identities were too small to include in the analysis. Additionally, the dissemination method for the survey employed snowball sampling through social media websites. While this garnered a relatively large overall sample size from a variety of locations across the United States, the sample was not random. This is important
because the people who participated in the research may have some motivation or investment in the research subject. Despite having considerable variability in the amounts and types of media participants consumed, the lack of random assignment reduces the generalizability of the results. Future research should address this issue and attempt to utilize random assignment as an approach to method design.

The current study was also limited because of the virtually nonexistent amount of similar research in the literature. While this sets the current study apart from other research concerning athletes and media influence, it is also limiting in terms of adequate and established methodology and measurement strategies. Specifically, we found no measures about frequency and type of media consumption that specifically included sports media. Additionally, the PAQ was constructed specifically for this study and used single-item dependent variables (personality characteristics) that were rated using a seven-point likert scale. One limitation of this approach is that a single item may not accurately represent the construct under investigation. For this reason, future research should address these issues by developing psychometrically sound and well-researched measurement instruments for assessing sports media consumption and attitudes toward athletes.

The possibility also exists that participants completed the survey in a manner that was not truly representative of their true behavior and/or beliefs. The subjective quality of the anonymous self-report survey method makes it very difficult to control for such possibilities. Nevertheless, this may have influenced the results in a way that rendered them as misleading or unrepresentative of the true phenomena in question. Future research should consider methods, if possible, to control for and protect against inconsistent responding by participants.

**Implications**
Although there are several methodologically based limitations of generalizability for the current study, the results are nonetheless noteworthy. These results have several implications for recognizing how the media influence peoples’ attitudes toward athletes. First, these results revealed that a relationship exists between gender and athlete identification in terms of attitudes toward athletes. Additionally, media consumption for these groups differs considerably, which likely produces varying directions and degrees of influence on peoples’ attitudes toward athletes.

Second, these results confirmed prior research about the sizable disparities in men’s versus women’s sports media coverage and how this inequity affects held attitudes about what it means to be an athlete. This is particularly salient for female athletes and women’s sports. Despite the recent 40-year anniversary of Title IX’s inception, women are still grossly underrepresented in media sports coverage, and accordingly, underrepresented in what it means to be an athlete.

Finally, the results of this study provide the groundwork to beginning to understand the underlying mechanisms of action specific to attitude formations about athletes. Further, these results inspired hypotheses concerning how mass media may encourage power dynamics among men and women, and athletes and non-athletes, as well as possible compensatory processes. Although these are only hypotheses, they may inspire and guide future research in this sparsely investigated area of academia.
References


ATTITUDES TOWARD ATHLETES


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Appendix

Survey

Instructions

You are invited to participate in a research study examining sports in the media. This study is intended for individuals who are 18 years or older.

If you decide to submit the survey with your anonymous answers, the data will be used in the study. If at any point you wish to cancel the survey, NO Data will be submitted. You may feel free to cancel the survey at any time. Further, the security of information transmitted through the internet cannot be guaranteed.

At the end of this survey there is a “certificate of participation” page. If you print out this page you can put your name on it and submit it for research participation credit in Psychology or other courses that may require it if you are a university student.

By proceeding with this survey, I acknowledge and agree with the previous terms listed above.*

( ) AGREE
( ) DISAGREE

Participant Demographics

1) What is your AGE?

2) What is your GENDER?

( ) Male
( ) Female
( ) Transgender
( ) Other: ________________
3) What is your SEXUAL ORIENTATION?

( ) Straight
( ) Gay/Lesbian
( ) Bisexual
( ) Other: ____________________

4) What is your RACE?

[ ] Asian/Pacific Islander
[ ] Black/African-American
[ ] Caucasian
[ ] Hispanic
[ ] Native American/Alaska Native
[ ] Multi-Racial
[ ] Decline to Respond
[ ] Other

5) What is your EDUCATION?

( ) 12th grade or less
( ) Graduated high school or equivalent
( ) Some college, no degree
( ) Associate degree
( ) Bachelor's degree
( ) Post-graduate degree

6) Do you consider yourself an "athlete"?

( ) Yes
( ) No

What athletic event(s) do/have you participate(d) in?

( ) Non-organized/Non-official (e.g., running/cycling on your own, etc.)
( ) Intramural/City League
( ) High school sport(s)
( ) College sport(s)
( ) Professional Sport(s)
( ) Other: _________________

Media Exposure Questionnaire

7) Do you watch TELEVISION?
( ) Yes
( ) No

How many HOURS in a normal DAY do you spend watching television?

Indicate how often you watch the following types of television broadcast:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Rarely</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Often</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adult Content</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Children &amp; Family</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Comedy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Documentaries/Non-fiction</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fiction/Drama</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Home Shopping</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lifestyle</td>
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<tr>
<td>Movies</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multicultural/International</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Music</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>News</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reality Television</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Religious Broadcasts</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sports</td>
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<tr>
<td>Talk Shows</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other(s)</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If you suddenly didn't have ACCESS TO TELEVISION, how would it affect you emotionally?

( ) Very Negative Affect
( ) Slightly Negative Affect
( ) Neutral/No Affect
( ) Slightly Positive Affect
( ) Very Positive Affect
How often do you watch each of the following SPORTS?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sport</th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Rarely</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Often</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Auto Racing/Motor Sports</td>
<td>()</td>
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<tr>
<td>Baseball</td>
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<tr>
<td>Basketball</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cycling</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gymnastics</td>
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<tr>
<td>Football</td>
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<tr>
<td>Golf</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lacrosse</td>
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<tr>
<td>Skiing/Snowboarding</td>
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<tr>
<td>Soccer</td>
<td>()</td>
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<tr>
<td>Softball</td>
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<tr>
<td>Swimming</td>
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<tr>
<td>Track &amp; Field</td>
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<tr>
<td>Volleyball</td>
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<tr>
<td>Watersports</td>
<td>()</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other(s)</td>
<td>()</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If you suddenly didn't have SPORTS ON TELEVISION, how would it affect you emotionally?

( ) Very Negative Affect
( ) Slightly Negative Affect
( ) Neutral/No Affect
( ) Slightly Positive Affect
( ) Very Positive Affect

8) Do you access the INTERNET?

( ) Yes
( ) No

9) How many HOURS in a normal DAY do you spend on the internet?

10) Indicate how often you visit the following types of websites:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Rarely</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Often</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adult Content</td>
<td>()</td>
<td>()</td>
<td>()</td>
<td>()</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business/Finance</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dating</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education/Research</td>
<td>()</td>
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<td>()</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### ATTITUDES TOWARD ATHLETES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Rating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fashion/Lifestyle</td>
<td>( )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Games</td>
<td>( )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jobs/Employment</td>
<td>( )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Music</td>
<td>( )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>News/Politics</td>
<td>( )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online</td>
<td>( )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Movies/Television</td>
<td>( )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious/Inspirational</td>
<td>( )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shopping</td>
<td>( )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sports</td>
<td>( )</td>
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<tr>
<td>Travel</td>
<td>( )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weather</td>
<td>( )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other(s)</td>
<td>( )</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

11) If you suddenly didn't have ACCESS TO INTERNET, how would it affect you emotionally?

( ) Very Negative Affect
( ) Slightly Negative Affect
( ) Neutral/No Affect
( ) Slightly Positive Affect
( ) Very Positive Affect

12) If you suddenly didn't have SPORTS ON THE INTERNET, how would it affect you emotionally?

( ) Very Negative Affect
( ) Slightly Negative Affect
( ) Neutral/No Affect
( ) Slightly Positive Affect
( ) Very Positive Affect

13) Do you read BOOKS, MAGAZINES, and/or NEWSPAPERS?

( ) Yes
( ) No

14) How many HOURS in a normal DAY do you spend reading magazines, books, and/or newspapers?
15) Indicate how often you read the following types of books, magazines, and/or newspapers:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Rarely</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Often</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Business</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Cooking</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fashion</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fiction &amp; Literature</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>News/Politics</td>
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<tr>
<td>Non-fiction (e.g., Biographies)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Religious/Inspirational</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>School/Textbooks</td>
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<tr>
<td>Self-improvement</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sports</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other(s)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

16) If you suddenly didn't have ACCESS TO BOOKS, MAGAZINES, and/or NEWSPAPERS, how would it affect you emotionally?

( ) Very Negative Affect
( ) Slightly Negative Affect
( ) Neutral/No Affect
( ) Slightly Positive Affect
( ) Very Positive Affect

17) If you suddenly didn't have access to SPORTS RELATED books, magazines, or newspapers, how would it affect you emotionally?

( ) Very Negative Affect
( ) Slightly Negative Affect
( ) Neutral/No Affect
( ) Slightly Positive Affect
( ) Very Positive Affect

18) Do you listen to SPORTS on the RADIO?

( ) Yes
( ) No

19) How many HOURS in a normal DAY do you spend listening to sports on the radio?
20) If you suddenly didn't have ACCESS TO SPORTS the radio, how would it affect you emotionally?

( ) Very Negative Affect
( ) Slightly Negative Affect
( ) Neutral/No Affect
( ) Slightly Positive Affect
( ) Very Positive Affect

21) Please provide any additional information regarding your MEDIA EXPOSURE TO SPORTS not addressed in the previous questions:

Prototypical Athlete Questionnaire

When you think of an 'ATHLETE,' what qualities do they have? Describe YOUR IDEA of an "ATHLETE" using the characteristics below:

ATHLETE DEMOGRAPHICS

22) What is the athlete's AGE?

23) What is the athlete's GENDER?

( ) Male
( ) Female
( ) Transgender
( ) Other: _________________

24) What is the SEXUAL ORIENTATION of the athlete?

( ) Straight
( ) Gay/Lesbian
( ) Bisexual
( ) Other: _________________

25) What is the EDUCATION LEVEL of the athlete?

( ) 12th grade or less
( ) Graduated high school or equivalent
( ) Some college, no degree
26) **What is the athlete's SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS?**

- ( ) Working Class
- ( ) Middle Class
- ( ) Upper Class

27) **At what COMPETITIVE LEVEL does your athlete participate?**

- ( ) High School
- ( ) Community College
- ( ) Division III College
- ( ) Division II College
- ( ) Division I College
- ( ) Professional
- ( ) Other: _________________

28) **What SPORT does your athlete play (If more than one, what is the primary sport)?**

- ( ) Auto Racing/Motor Sports
- ( ) Baseball
- ( ) Basketball
- ( ) Cycling
- ( ) Football
- ( ) Golf
- ( ) Gymnastics
- ( ) Lacrosse
- ( ) Skiing/Snowboarding
- ( ) Soccer
- ( ) Softball
- ( ) Swimming
- ( ) Track & Field
ATTITUDES TOWARD ATHLETES

( ) Volleyball
( ) Watersports
( ) Other: _________________

29) What is the INTELLIGENCE of the athlete?

( ) Low
( ) Low Average
( ) Average
( ) High Average
( ) High

30) What is the HEIGHT of the athlete?

31) What is the WEIGHT IN POUNDS of the athlete?

32) What BODY TYPE/BUILD is the athlete?

( ) Lean
( ) Muscular
( ) Overweight

ATHLETE PERSONALITY

33) Please rate the athlete on the following CHARACTERISTICS:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Low</th>
<th>.</th>
<th>.</th>
<th>.</th>
<th>.</th>
<th>.</th>
<th>High</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aggression</td>
<td>(   )</td>
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<td>(   )</td>
<td>(   )</td>
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<tr>
<td>Agility</td>
<td>(   )</td>
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<tr>
<td>Approachability</td>
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<tr>
<td>Arrogance</td>
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<tr>
<td>Attractiveness</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cooperativeness</td>
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<tr>
<td>Courageousness</td>
<td>(   )</td>
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<tr>
<td>Determination</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Emotionality</td>
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<tr>
<td>Extraversion (Outgoing)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Family Importance</td>
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<td>Hostility</td>
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<tr>
<td>Insecurity</td>
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<tr>
<td>Introversion</td>
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<tr>
<td>Laziness</td>
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<tr>
<td>Motivation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Power</td>
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<tr>
<td>Responsibility</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Stubbornness</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wealth</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

34) If your athlete has any OTHER CHARACTERISTICS that were not mentioned, please list them below.

______________________________________________________________

Thank You!

Certificate of Participation

________________________(name) participated in an online survey for a Dissertation regarding “media influence of athlete stereotypes.” This may be submitted for research participation credit in Psychology or other courses that may require it.

Ross Bartlett, M.S., Primary Investigator
Tamara Tasker, Psy.D., Faculty Supervisor
Pacific University
School of Professional Psychology
tasker@pacificu.edu
190 SE 8th Ave.
Hillsboro, OR 97123

Thank you for taking our survey. Your response is very important to us.
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****SHARE THIS SURVEY ON TWITTER****