

Social Role Theory and the Perceived Gender Role Orientation of Athletes

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In this research we examined the influence of athletic roles upon the perceived gender role orientations of male and female athletes. Participants were 148 students who read a bogus newspaper article that described either a male or female athlete who had successfully competed in an athletic event. The type of sport (football, basketball, and cheerleading) was manipulated. Female football players and basketball players were perceived as higher in agency than female cheerleaders. Male cheerleaders were perceived as higher in communality than male football players and male basketball players. Participants made external attributions concerning the motivations of athletes who competed in gender traditional sports. They made internal attributions concerning the motivations of athletes who competed in gender nontraditional sports. These findings are examined in relation to social role theory.

KEY WORDS: social role theory; gender role; athlete; sport.

The recent 30-year anniversary of the passage of Title IX of the Educational Amendment of 1972 that prohibits discrimination against women in federally funded educational programs, including athletic programs, has sparked a renewed interest in research on male and female athletes (Parsons & Betz, 2001). Because there has been an 847% increase in girls' participation in high school varsity sports since the passage of Title IX (National Coalition for Girls and Women in Education, 2002), it is important to understand how people think about female athletes. The present study expands our understanding of this as we examined whether the perceived gender role orientations of male and female athletes are influenced by their involvement in stereotypically feminine or masculine athletic roles. In addition, we examined whether approval rates and attributions concerning athletes are affected by whether athletes participate in gender traditional or gender nontraditional sports.

Social Role Theory

According to social role theory, behavioral sex differences spring from the differential social roles inhabited by women and men, especially those concerning the division of labor (Eagly, Wood, & Diekmann, 2000). Historically, because of economic, ecological, social, and technological pressures, women and men were assigned to labor tasks that were consistent with their physical attributes. Thus, men were more likely to fulfill tasks that required speed, strength, and the ability to be away from home for expanded periods of time. Conversely, because women were primarily responsible for childbearing, women were more likely to fulfill tasks related to home and family. As a result of the differential social roles inhabited by men and women, based upon this division of labor, gender roles developed concerning expectations about the characteristics and behaviors of women and men. Thus, men are expected to fulfill the masculine gender role that reflects agentic qualities and women are expected to fulfill the feminine gender role that reflects communal qualities (Wood & Eagly, 2002).

Descriptive and injunctive social norms help to maintain adherence to traditional gender roles. For

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example, descriptive norms provide people with information about how similar people behave in specific situations (Cialdini, Kallgren, & Reno, 1991). Thus, people look to the behaviors of same-sex others to determine the appropriate way to behave in specific situations, especially situations that are ambiguous or confusing (e.g., what gender appropriate clothing should be worn to a barbeque). Although deviations from descriptive norms may not lead to explicit social disapproval, they often elicit surprise from others, which may threaten social interactions. Conversely, injunctive norms are expectations about how people are supposed to behave. Thus, they provide guidelines as to behaviors that are likely to elicit disapproval or shame (Cialdini et al., 1991). Men and women who violate injunctive norms concerning gender role behavior (e.g., men should provide for their families) are likely to experience social disapproval. Together, descriptive and injunctive norms work to help maintain individuals' adherence to traditional gender roles because deviations from these are likely to produce unpleasant social interactions.

Today, more women and men are violating traditional gender role norms as they take on social roles that are traditionally held by the other sex (e.g., male homemakers, female leaders). As predicted by social role theory, their perceived gender role orientations (masculine or feminine) become linked to the social roles they occupy rather than to their sex (Eagly et al., 2000). Thus, women and men in leadership roles are more likely to be perceived as agentic (i.e., masculine gender role orientation), whereas women and men in nurturing roles, such as homemakers, are more likely to be perceived as communal (i.e., feminine gender role orientation). Support for social role theory comes from research that shows that perceptions of the gender role orientations of women are influenced by the social roles they fulfill. For example, married women are perceived as more communal than unmarried women (Etaugh & Poertner, 1991), and mothers are perceived as more communal than women without children (Etaugh & Poertner, 1992). In addition, research indicates that employed women and men are generally perceived as being equally agentic, whereas unemployed women and men are generally perceived as being equally communal (Riggs, 1997). Because of descriptive and injunctive norms concerning how most men and women do behave and how they should behave, such shifts in gender role orientations may lead to negative attitudes toward individuals who deviate from traditional gender role norms.

Perceptions of Female and Male Athletes

It is not surprising to find that as early as grade one, stereotypes concerning the gender-appropriateness of athletics influence perceptions of and participation in athletic activities. A longitudinal study of kindergarten, first, and third graders, (Eccles & Harold, 1991, Study 2) demonstrated that young boys are more likely than young girls to believe they are good at sports, that it is important to do well in sports, and that sports are a constructive activity. Furthermore, boys are more likely than girls to enjoy sports. Subsequent research provides evidence that these gender differences persist over time. For example, Kane (1988) studied male and female high school students and investigated whether individual students preferred to be remembered as an athletic star, a brilliant student, the most popular student, or as a school leader. They found that boys were more likely to wish to be remembered as an athletic star, whereas girls were more likely to wish to be remembered as a school leader. Only 9% of the girls, in comparison to the 36% of boys, wished to be remembered as an athletic star. Similarly, Sagaria and Sagaria (1984) found that although most sports-related college activities were likely to be perceived as masculine, or both masculine and feminine, fewer women than men intended to participate in sport-related activities that were classified as masculine.

Research on athletes' self-perceived gender role orientation suggests that there is a relationship among athletic participation and perceived masculinity and femininity. An earlier study showed that female athletes perceived themselves as lower in femininity, but not higher in masculinity, than their college peers (Colker & Widom, 1980). However, results of a more recent study by Lantz and Schroeder (1999) suggest that students who participate in and identify with sports are more likely to have a masculine or androgynous gender role orientation, whereas students who do not participate or identify with sports are more likely to have a feminine gender role orientation. Yet, there is evidence that female athletes often experience significant conflict with the negotiation of their identities as both athletes and women. For example, a focus group study found that female athletes had difficulties reconciling their big, muscular, fit bodies with the small feminine body that is usually considered to be culturally ideal. Likewise, they were bothered that they differed from "normal girls" in terms of looks, clothing, social attention,

and dating. However, they simultaneously expressed pride in their strong, fit bodies and their athletic abilities. These female athletes struggled to maintain a feminine identity that often clashed with stereotypical masculine characteristics such as competitiveness and aggression that made them successful in their sport (Krane, Choi, Baird, Aimar, & Kauer, 2004). Thus, it is apparent that sports participation influences athletes' self-perceived gender role orientations, and female athletes often struggle to reconcile their identity as women and athletes. Likewise, there is evidence that athletic participation influences how others perceive the gender role orientation of female athletes.

Just as athletic participation influences athletes' self-perceptions it also influences others' stereotypes and judgments of athletes. For example, women and girls who participate in athletics often suffer from negative judgments fueled by gender stereotypes concerning athletic participation. For example, Bird and Williams (1980) had students read stories about male or female athletes who either succeeded or failed in a sporting event. The students were asked to judge the reasons for the athletes' performance. The researchers found that 16–18-year-old students were likely to attribute the performance of male athletes to their effort, whereas they attributed the performance of female athletes to luck. They also found that these stereotypical attributions appear to persist over time. Messner, Duncan, and Jensen (1993) examined the attributions that sport commentators made about male and female athletes who were participating in national sporting contests (i.e., basketball and tennis). Although there was little evidence of blatant sexist remarks by the commentators, there were differences in how the contests and the individual athletes were identified. Specifically, the commentators' attributions concerning success and failure were influenced by athlete gender. Commentators were more likely to attribute male athletes' success to internal factors, such as hard work and strength. However, they were more likely to attribute female athletes' success to external factors such as luck or family. Conversely, the failures of male athletes were discussed in terms of external attributions, such as their opponents' dominance and strength. However, the failures of female athletes were discussed in terms of internal factors, such as nervousness or lack of confidence. In addition, the women's games were overwhelmingly marked as contests played by women (e.g., NCAA Women's National Championship), whereas the men's games were discussed in universal

terms (e.g., NCAA National Championship). More recent research (Billings, Halone, & Denham, 2002) has shown that commentators continue to describe female athletes in terms of nonathletic characteristics, such as personality, background, looks, and appearance, whereas male athletes are most commonly described in terms of their physicality and athleticism.

Athletic participation also influences others' perception of athletes' gender role orientation and very often, athleticism is equated with masculinity. For example, Die and Holt (1989) examined college students' perceptions of athletes and found that female athletes were perceived as having both masculine (i.e., active and aggressive) and feminine characteristics (i.e., tactful and sensitive), but male athletes were only perceived as having masculine characteristics. Likewise, when Hoferek and Hanick (1985) surveyed a community sample in Iowa they found that participation in sports such as basketball, gymnastics, tennis, and track did not enhance or detract from the perceived feminine qualities of female athletes. However, this might have occurred because gymnastics is often perceived as feminine and basketball and tennis as gender-neutral (Koivula, 2001). This may also be explained by a more recent study (Royce, Gebelt, & Duff, 2003) that showed that femininity and athleticism are generally perceived to be different constructs. Because female athletes are perceived as playing different roles on and off the athletic field, perceptions concerning the femininity of female athletes are more likely to be influenced by their behavior when they are not playing sports than their behavior when they are playing sports. Thus, athleticism may increase perceptions of masculinity in female athletes without directly reducing their perceived femininity.

Taken together, the studies described above suggest that the perceived gender role orientation of female athletes is related to their athletic role (although the nature of this relationship may be unclear). However, most researchers have neglected to determine if perceptions of gender role orientation are influenced by whether athletes participate in sports that are stereotypically feminine or masculine. Perhaps some of the conflicting findings from the above research are related to stereotypes and judgments concerning participation in different types of sports. In the present research we examined whether perceptions of athletes' gender role orientation are influenced by athletes' participation in stereotypically feminine or masculine sports.

The Present Study

In the present study, we examined whether social role theory can explain the perceived gender role orientations of male and female athletes who participate in either stereotypically feminine or masculine sports. Participants read an article that described a male or female athlete who was a football player, a basketball player, or a cheerleader. Next, they completed the Bem Sex Role Inventory (BSRI) (Bem, 1974) to evaluate the perceived masculine gender role orientation (i.e., agency) and feminine gender role orientation (i.e., communality) of the athlete. In addition, participants rated their approval of the athlete and indicated whether they believed the athlete's motivation to participate in his/her sport was due to internal factors or external factors. According to social role theory, because specific social roles are typically constraining, they should have an important influence on the perceptions of the athletes. Therefore, athlete gender should be less influential than the athletic role fulfilled by the athlete. We had five major predictions for this research.

Hypothesis 1. We expected that athlete gender would not singularly influence perceptions of agency and communality, because athletic roles would exert more influence on perceived gender role orientations than would athlete gender.

Hypothesis 2. We expected that type of sport would singularly influence the perceptions of agency and communality because of the influence of athletic roles.

Hypothesis 3. We expected that perceptions of agency and communality would be mutually influenced by athlete gender and type of sport. Thus, we predicted that male athletes who participate in a stereotypically feminine sport would be perceived as higher in communality than male athletes who participate in stereotypically masculine sports. Type of sport was not expected to influence perceptions of the communality of female athletes. Conversely, we predicted that female athletes who participate in stereotypically masculine sports would be perceived as higher in agency than female athletes who participate in a stereotypically feminine sport. However, type of sport was not expected to influence perceptions concerning the agency of male athletes.

Hypothesis 4. Because deviations from gender role norms often elicit social disapproval, we expected to find higher rates of approval for athletes who participate in gender traditional sports than for

athletes who participate in gender nontraditional sports.

Hypothesis 5. We anticipated that athletes' participation in gender nontraditional sports would influence attributions made about their motivations for participating in a particular sport. As perceivers attempt to make sense of deviations from gender role norms they may be more likely to attribute athletes' participation in gender nontraditional sports as due to their intrinsic love of the sport rather than external rewards. Therefore, we predicted that greater internal attributions would be made to athletes who participate in gender nontraditional sports than to their counterparts who participate in gender traditional sports.

METHOD

Pilot Study

We conducted a pilot study to determine which sports are perceived as masculine and feminine. Sixty-six participants were asked to rank order the three sports they believe to be the most masculine and the three sports they believe to be the most feminine. Football was the most frequently listed masculine sport, which is consistent with previous research (Koivula, 2001). We also found that basketball was perceived to be a masculine sport, but less so than football. Cheerleading was the most frequently listed feminine sport. Thus, for the present study, football and basketball were labeled as masculine and cheerleading was labeled as feminine. These participants did not take part in the subsequent study.

Participants

Participants were 148 students (116 women, M age = 21.16 years, SD = 4.81 years; 32 men, M age = 21.06 years, SD = 5.15 years) from a northern California university, who volunteered to participate in order to fulfill a research assignment for their undergraduate psychology courses. The sample contained 71 White, 6 Black, 34 Asian, 22 Hispanic, and 15 "other-race" participants.

Procedure

A female experimenter conducted the research in multiple sessions at a university laboratory. Each

session contained 1–15 participants. Participants were led to believe that the research concerned person perception. After signing consent forms, the experimenter randomly assigned participants to read a bogus newspaper article that described an interview with a successful high school athlete. The bogus newspaper articles varied the athlete's sex (masculine name or feminine name) and the sport played (football, basketball, or cheerleading). Thus, there were a total of six articles constructed for this study, three describing a female athlete playing one of the above sports and three describing a male athlete playing one of the above sports. Next, participants completed the dependent measures described below. Afterward, the participants were thoroughly debriefed about the nature of the study and thanked for their participation.

Materials

Newspaper Article

Participants read one of six newspaper articles that presented an interview with a high school athlete who had successfully competed in an athletic event. The articles varied the athlete's gender and the sport played. One version of the article is below.

"Victory for Local High School"

An incredible day for sports fans ended with an exciting local victory last weekend when Jake, a football player for Dayton High School, gave a winning performance in the last few moments of the competition. Jake's outstanding performance did not go unnoticed as his coach, classmates, and family shouted with delight when it was announced Dayton High School's football team was the winner.

Jake has been a part of Dayton's football team for the last 3 years and will continue to participate next year for the varsity High School team. In his words, "Football is my life . . . I get out there every day with the hopes of becoming the best football player ever." Practicing an average of 25 hr a week, Jake has been working on that dream since an early age and has been diligently focused on football for years. Anticipate more thrills next week when Dayton High School's football team competes at the finals!

Communality and Agency

The 40-item BSRI (Bem, 1974) was used to measure the perceived communality and agency of the athletes. The BSRI contains 20 items that may be

used to measure agency as well as 20 items that may be used to measure communality. All items were measured using a 7-point scale ranging from *never or almost never true* to *always or almost always true*. Higher scores indicate higher levels of the attribute. Scores for the individual agency items were combined to form an Agency index. The internal reliability for the Agency index was acceptable (*Cronbach's alpha* = .88). Likewise, scores for the communal items from the BSRI were combined to form a Communality index. The internal reliability for the Communality index was also acceptable (*Cronbach's alpha* = .87). Higher scores on each index indicate higher communality and agency.

Approval Ratings

Participants completed five Likert-type items that measured their approval of the athlete. These items examined whether participants admired the athlete, thought the athlete was likeable, thought the athlete was well-adjusted, whether they had a favorable impression of the athlete, and whether they respected the athlete. These 5 items were combined to form an Approval index. The internal reliability for the Approval index was acceptable (*Cronbach's alpha* = .76). All items were measured using a 7-point scale ranging from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree*. Higher scores indicate greater approval of the athlete.

Attribution Items

Participants completed five Likert-type items related to the athlete's motivations for participating in the sport. Three of these items were related to external motivations for sport participation (i.e., participate because of family and peer pressure, to seek financial gain, and to seek glory). Two items were related to internal motivations for sport participant (participate because of a love for the sport or because of a natural ability for the sport). Each item was examined individually. All items were measured using a 7-point scale ranging from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree*. Higher scores indicate more of the attribute.

RESULTS

Analyses were performed to examine how athlete gender and type of sport influenced the

dependent measures (Agency, Communality, Approval, and Attributional items).

Effects of Athlete Gender on Perceived Communality and Agency

Hypothesis 1. We predicted we would not find a main effect of athlete gender on the perceived gender role orientation of athletes. In order to test this hypothesis we conducted an ANOVA for the Agency index and the Communality index. As predicted, there were no significant differences in the perceived communality of male ($M = 4.00$) and female ($M = 4.00$) athletes, $F(2, 133) = .10$, $p = .74$, $MSE = .43$. In addition, there were no significant differences in the perceived agency of male ($M = 4.62$) and female ($M = 4.64$) athletes, $F(2, 133) = .25$, $p = .61$, $MSE = .48$.

Effects of Type of Sport on Perceived Communality and Agency

Hypothesis 2. We predicted we would find a main effect of type of sport on the perceived gender role orientation of athletes. As we expected there was a significant main effect of type of sport for the Communality index, $F(2, 133) = 8.16$, $p < .001$, $MSE = 3.58$, $\eta^2 = .10$, and the Agency index, $F(2, 133) = 4.37$, $p = .01$, $MSE = 1.79$, $\eta^2 = .06$. Follow-up analyses using LSD tests indicated that cheerleaders were perceived as higher in communality than football players, $p = .004$. In addition, football players and basketball players were perceived as higher in agency than cheerleaders. Overall, the findings support the notion that perceptions of athletes' gender role orientations are influenced by the type of sport they play.

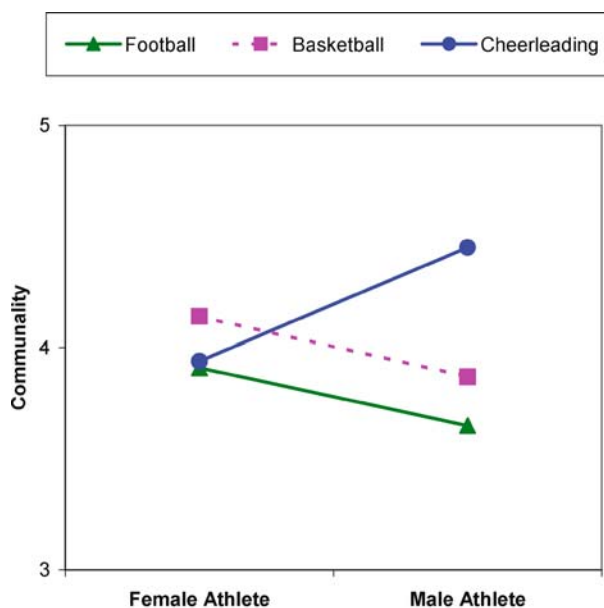
Effects of Athlete Gender and Type of Sport on Perceived Communality and Agency

Hypothesis 3. We hypothesized that participants' perceptions of athletes' agency and communality would be mutually influenced by athlete gender and type of sport. Specifically, we predicted that male athletes who participate in a stereotypically feminine sport would be perceived as higher in communality than male athletes who participate in stereotypically masculine sports. Conversely, we predicted

that female athletes who participate in stereotypically masculine sports would be perceived as higher in agency than female athletes who participate in a stereotypically feminine sport. Thus, we expected to find a two-way interaction of athlete gender and type of sport for the Communality and Agency indices.

To test our hypothesis, we conducted factorial ANOVAs on the Communality and Agency indices. The expected interaction on the Communality index was found, $F(2, 133) = 5.61$, $p = .001$, $MSE = 2.16$, $\eta^2 = .08$. We conducted post-hoc LSD tests so that we could further examine the interaction. We found that male cheerleaders were perceived as higher in communality than male football players and male basketball players, $p = .001$. However, type of sport did not significantly influence the perceived communality of female athletes, $ps > .22$. See Fig. 1.

As expected, the ANOVA on the Agency index revealed a significant interaction of athlete sex and type of sport, $F(2, 133) = 3.06$, $p = .05$, $MSE = 1.31$, $\eta^2 = .04$. The post-hoc tests indicated that female football players and basketball players were perceived as higher in agency than female cheerleaders, $ps < .002$. However, type of sport did not significantly influence the perceived agency of male athletes. See Fig. 2.



Note. Higher means indicate higher perceived communality.

Fig. 1. Effects of athlete gender and type of sport on the communality index.

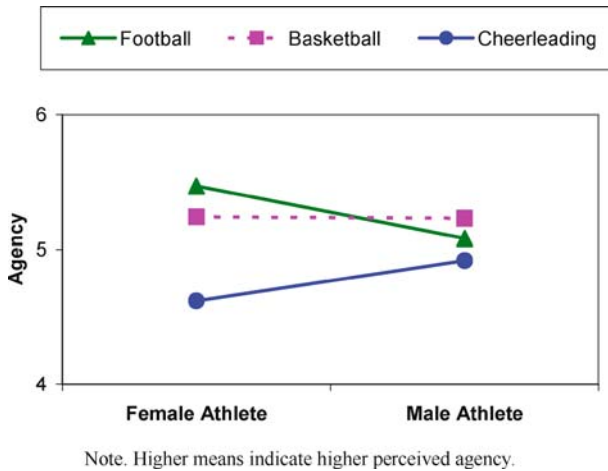


Fig. 2. Effects of athlete gender and type of sport on the agency index.

Approval Ratings

Hypothesis 4. We expected to find higher rates of approval for athletes who participate in gender traditional sports than for athletes who participate in gender nontraditional sports. In order to test this hypothesis, we conducted a factorial ANOVA on the Approval index. As expected we found a significant interaction of athlete gender and type of sport, $F(2, 133) = 2.98$, $p = .05$, $MSE = 3.27$, $\eta^2 = .04$. However, post-hoc analyses conducted using LSD tests indicated that participants approved less of female cheerleaders than of female football players and female basketball players, $ps = .001$. Conversely, type of sport did not influence approval of male athletes, $ps > .50$ (Fig. 3). Thus, contrary to our expectations, there was higher approval of girls who participated in stereotypical masculine sports than of girls who participated in a stereotypical feminine sport. However, approval ratings were equivalent for boys who participated in stereotypically masculine sports and a stereotypically feminine sport. See Fig. 3.

Attribution Ratings

Hypothesis 5. We anticipated that participants would be more likely to attribute athletes' motivation for sport participation to external causes, rather than to internal causes, if athletes participate in gender traditional sports rather than gender nontraditional sports. Conversely, we predicted that greater internal attributions would be made to athletes who participate in gender nontraditional sports

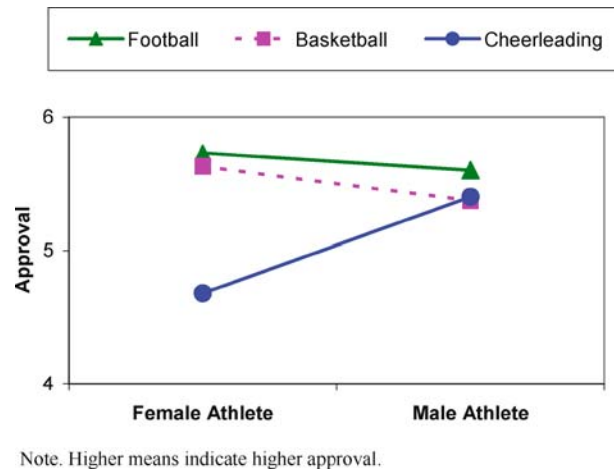


Fig. 3. Effects of athlete gender and type of sport on the approval index.

than to athletes who participate in gender traditional sports.

In order to test this prediction we conducted a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) on the five Likert-type items related to the athlete's motivations for participating in the sport. Three of these items were related to external motivations for sport participation (i.e., family and peer pressure, seeks financial gain, and seeks glory). Two items were related to internal motivations for sport participation (love for the sport and natural ability for the sport). Significant multivariate effects were analyzed with univariate tests and post-hoc analyses using LSD tests.

The MANOVA yielded a significant interaction of athlete gender and type of sport, Pillai's Trace = 3.60, $p < .001$. Univariate follow-up tests were significant for 3 items. The interaction was significant for the measure of whether the athlete was perceived as participating in the sport because of pressure from family and friends, $F(2, 133) = 13.87$, $p < .001$, $MSE = 33.01$, $\eta^2 = .17$. The interaction was also significant for a measure of whether the athlete was perceived as participating in the sport as a way to gain a financial reward, $F(2, 133) = 3.50$, $p = .03$, $MSE = 6.76$, $\eta^2 = .05$. Finally, the interaction was significant for a measure of whether the athlete participated in the sport because of an inherent love for the sport, $F(2, 133) = 6.71$, $p = .03$, $MSE = 12.75$, $\eta^2 = .08$.

As predicted, the follow-up tests indicate that participants perceived male football players ($M = 3.78$) as more likely than male basketball players ($M = 2.88$) and male cheerleaders ($M = 1.90$) to be

motivated by pressure from friends or family. Furthermore, participants perceived female cheerleaders ($M = 3.80$) and basketball players ($M = 3.30$) as more likely than female football players, ($M = 2.19$) to be motivated by pressure from friends and family.

The follow-up tests also indicated that male football players ($M = 3.47$) were perceived as more likely than male basketball players ($M = 2.57$) and male cheerleaders, ($M = 2.22$) to be motivated by financial reward. However, there were no significant differences between female football players ($M = 2.50$), female basketball players ($M = 2.65$), and female cheerleaders ($M = 2.80$) for this measure.

The follow-up tests also indicated that male cheerleaders ($M = 6.45$) were perceived as more likely than male football players ($M = 5.10$) and male basketball players, ($M = 5.50$) to be motivated by love for the sport. Furthermore, female football players ($M = 6.07$) were perceived as more likely than female cheerleaders ($M = 5.25$) to be motivated by a love for the sport. Female basketball players ($M = 5.46$) did not deviate significantly from female football players and cheerleaders on this measure

DISCUSSION

Based upon social role theory, it was predicted that athletic roles, rather than athlete gender, would primarily guide perceptions of athletes' gender role orientations. Overall, our research consistently supports this notion, inasmuch as we found that athlete gender did not significantly affect global perceptions of gender role orientation. However, we did find that athletic roles were important inasmuch as athletes who fulfill stereotypically masculine athletic roles (i.e., football and basketball) are likely to be perceived as having a masculine gender role orientation. Likewise, athletes who fulfill a stereotypically feminine athletic role (cheerleading) are likely to be perceived as having a feminine gender role orientation. Thus, our data suggest that the perceived gender role orientations of athletes are more likely to be affected by the athletic roles they fulfill than their gender. This research expands upon previous research that found people who fulfill traditional masculine social roles are more likely to be perceived as having masculine gender role orientations, whereas people who fulfill traditional feminine social roles are more likely to be perceived

as having feminine gender role orientations (Eagly et al., 2000; Etaugh & Poertner, 1992; Riggs, 1997).

We also predicted that athletic role and athlete sex would have a mutual influence upon the perceived gender role orientations of athletes. Specifically, we expected that the type of sport played would influence the perceived agency of female athletes, but not of male athletes. Conversely, we expected that type of sport participation would influence the perceived communality of male athletes, but not of female athletes. Our data support our hypotheses inasmuch as we found that female football players and basketball players were perceived as higher in agency than female cheerleaders, but type of sport did not influence the perceived agency of male athletes. Likewise, male cheerleaders were perceived as higher in communality than male football players and male basketball players, but type of sport did not influence the perceived communality of female athletes. Once again, our findings are consistent with the basic notions of social role theory. Although social roles, such as athletic role, have a powerful influence upon the perceived gender role orientation of athletes, this does not negate the influence of gender roles. Thus, athletes are not just perceived as football players or cheerleaders. Instead they are perceived as male and female football players or cheerleaders. Therefore, it appears that participation in gender nontraditional sports does not actually detract from the perceived femininity of female athletes and the perceived masculinity of male athletes. Instead, boys and girls who participate in gender nontraditional sports are likely to be perceived as having a more complex gender role orientation that consists of traditional masculine and feminine characteristics.

We also expected to find higher approval ratings for athletes who participate in gender traditional sports than for their counterparts who participate in gender nontraditional sports. However, our findings did not support this notion. Approval ratings for male athletes were equivalent, regardless of their athletic role. Conversely, there was lower approval of female athletes who participate in a gender traditional sport than of female athletes who participate in a gender nontraditional sport. It is unclear why the approval ratings for cheerleaders were so low. Previous research with adolescents suggests that girls' participation in cheerleading is associated with increased popularity and status, although this is moderated by resentment toward popular girls (Eder & Kinney, 1995). Likewise, research suggests that cheerleaders

are accorded a high level of prestige among high school students (Holland & Andre, 1994). Based upon our pilot study we deliberately chose this sport because of its overwhelming association with femininity. In addition, most high school cheerleading squads demand a high level of athleticism and competitiveness, which are also integral to most other sports. However, it has been argued that cheerleading is often not perceived to be a sport in the same manner as activities such as basketball and soccer (Grindstaff & West, 2000). Thus, it is possible that although cheerleading is a popular activity that lends status to its participants, it is simultaneously devalued as not being a true sport. Previous research suggests that sports such as gymnastics, synchronized swimming, and figure skating are also perceived to be stereotypically feminine (Koivula, 2001). It would be useful to investigate whether similar findings can be replicated with these traditionally feminine sports.

Our last prediction was that motivation attributions would be influenced by athletic roles. Internal attributions were expected to be made concerning the motivations of athletes that participate in gender nontraditional sports, whereas external attributions were expected to be made concerning the motivation of athletes who participate in gender traditional sports. We found some support for this notion. Specifically we found that male football players and female cheerleaders were perceived to be motivated by pressure from friends or family. Accordingly, it is feasible that many people believe that many athletes participate in gender traditional rather than gender nontraditional sports in order to achieve social approval from friends and family. In addition, we found that male football players were perceived to be motivated by financial reward, a finding that is understandable inasmuch as professional football players receive extremely high incomes. Thus, people may attribute athletes' participation in gender traditional sports as due to external factors because there are specific external factors (e.g., social approval, financial reward) that may result from participation in gender traditional sports. Conversely, we found that male cheerleaders and female football players were perceived to be motivated by a love for the sport. It may be that there is an intuitive understanding that male cheerleaders and female football players violate injunctive social norms concerning sport participation which could lead to social disapproval from others. In addition, it is unlikely that male cheerleaders or female football players receive significant financial reward for participation in their sport. There-

fore, people may attribute athletes' participation in gender nontraditional sport as due to some internal factor, such as a love for the sport, because there appears to be few external motivations for participation in such sports.

Social role theory suggests that perceived gender role orientations are primarily dependent upon the social roles we fulfill (Eagly et al., 2000). Previous research has shown that social roles related to sex-typed divisions of labor, both inside and outside the home, have a strong influence upon perceived gender role orientations (Etaugh & Poertner, 1992; Riggs, 1997). Thus, people who fulfill stereotypically feminine roles are more likely to be perceived as having feminine gender role orientations. Likewise, people who fulfill stereotypically masculine roles are more likely to be perceived as having masculine gender role orientations. The present research expands our understanding of social role theory by demonstrating that athletic social roles also influence perceptions of athletes' gender role orientations.

Overall, the present study supports the notion that athletic roles influence college students' perceptions of gender role orientations, as predicted by social role theory. However, because only a few sports were investigated, further research is needed to determine whether these findings can be generalized to other athletic endeavors. Likewise, because we did not collect data on participants' athletic identification future researchers could examine whether the findings are consistent for athletically identified people and nonathletically identified people. In addition, although the present study was not designed to investigate participant gender it would be useful for future researchers to examine whether participant gender influences perceptions of athletes who participate in gender nontraditional sports. Finally, it would be interesting to for examine this line of research with a noncollege population. It would be particularly useful to examine whether similar findings would be found among a younger population, especially elementary school children. Nonetheless, the present research lays the groundwork for a more expansive examination of how athletic roles and other social roles unrelated to sex-typed divisions of labor influence perceptions and judgments of gender role orientation.

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