

ATHLETES AS A ROLE-MODELS FOR ADOLESCENCE

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ABSTRACT

Specifically, the first section of this work is concerned with theoretical concerns about the significance of role models and idols in general, and for young people specifically. Following that, the findings of existing research are discussed. According to studies, the vast majority of idols, particularly sports heroes, are males, and it is boys who are most enamored with sports players. In the second section of the paper, we report the results of a pilot research in which we questioned both female and male students about their role models. A significant proportion of males identified sports heroes or 'action stars,' whom they admired for their power, aggressiveness, and ability to get things done in a fast and efficient manner. Contrary to this, for the females who were questioned, athletes did not serve as role models in their lives. They were envious of the movie and music industry's stars and leading ladies. Ending with a discussion on the possible consequences of these orientations is followed by the issue of what type of solutions teaching may provide in this situation.

KEYWORDS: *Athletes, Idols, Role Models, Sports, Sports Heroes.*

1. INTRODUCTION

People need heroes and heroines to look up to as role models. They're a lifeline for kids and teens in need of guidance and direction. Stars and idols, who are continuously created and presented in the media as role models, are a good example of this. They're the stuff of dreams; they enliven and enlighten the world, and they add a little glitz and glitter to the daily grind. As a result, idols and models serve to maintain gender identities and hierarchies by symbolizing and reinforcing the values and norms prevalent in a society or among a particular group. The following questions are addressed in this article based on existing research as well as the findings of a pilot study:

1. Who are the female and male role models and idols in your life?
2. The gender roles associated with well-known and famous cult figures and the gender of these characters are of interest to both girls and boys.
3. Is there a place in society for role models like athletes?

1.1 Basic Concepts and Theories:

Learning by imitating or learning from a role model is referred to as "learning by imitating" in the psychology of learning. Imitating others helps people learn both discrete knowledge and

complex behavioral patterns. Individuals may be led by orientations and acceptable ways of acting without needing to evaluate their own behaviour in a variety of circumstances and adapt to changing surroundings by learning from a role-model[1].

Social and ecological environments are thought to be in a dialectical relationship, with each one being perceived and processed (and thus having an effect on the other) while also being able to be influenced and changed by each individual. This idea is part of a socioecological approach to socialization. When we talk about a socio-ecological environment, we are referring to the three facets of human life: social, cultural, and material. This interweaving of micro- and macro-ecological settings implies that specific circumstances individuals are faced with have society values, conventions, and interpretive patterns influencing them (i.e. hierarchies of gender), which in turn affect broader contexts of interaction. There are a few variables that play a role in the creation of gender that researchers have identified. One of these aspects is called "the social reproduction of gender" and it explains how people carry out gender norms and expectations in real life. Women, men, and politics are all part of the same social system, which is why academics say gender is a system that "sets expectations for people, organizes day-to-day social processes," and is "built into key social structures of society" such as the economy. Gender is something we create and do, not something we are or have. There is a lot of interest in the way gender is constructed and reconstructed via human contact and social life, and academics believe that everyone is continuously performing gender in order for that social life to have a certain texture and order[2].

Children's 'doing gender,' their 'active hand in the construction of gender, and how communal behaviors e.g. line-forming, seat-choice, teasing animate the process,' are topics academics discuss in their research papers. She does not, however, discuss the significance of role models in this process. Assuming that the above-mentioned ideas are applied to the process of "learning using a role-model," not only are behavioral patterns and "doing gender" transmitted and learned, but also clusters of orientations, attitudes, and values that fit into the image and identity a person has of himself or herself, can be assumed. People choose their own role models and look for characteristics and patterns of behaviour in those they like. On the other side, individuals look for role models who 'suit' them. This assumes that the processes are reciprocal. Role models, on the other hand, may have a positive impact on a person's self-image and future goals.

Individuals are encouraged to recognize and replicate patterns of interpretation and behaviour by role models and idols. Since of this, they are especially important throughout childhood and adolescence because they provide children tools for navigating their surroundings and navigating society as a whole. This helps young people deal with the normal difficulties of adolescence while also helping them seek for standards and values. Women and men both benefit from having role models to look up to as they establish their own gender identities[3].

Developing a positive self-image, maintaining a healthy balance and presenting one's identity, as well as the presentation of gender – or "doing gender" – are all under threat today due to the lengthening of adolescence, a time of transition, increased individual freedom, and an increase in the variety of lifestyles available. Newspaper articles, books, and empirical research all attempt to identify and characterize today's youth-centered society. 2 Most scholars agree that role models and heroes are important in shaping young people's self-image, strengthening their connection with the "group," and helping to define who is "in" and who is "out" of the group.

1.2 An Overview of Literary, Film, and Television Models:

1.2.1 The World of Disney Princesses and Marvel Super Heroes:

Role models for children may come from a variety of places. It's not uncommon for children to take after people from the people in their close family and circle of acquaintances. Children's and teenage literature is another important resource for finding role models since it exposes girls and boys to a broad range of characters with whom they may identify. There are a plethora of heroes and adventurers in German boys' fiction, as exemplified by the "successful man," a strong, aloof, and self-reliant figure who "does his thing."

Similarly, young women's literature portrays female characters in more or less stereotypical ways. While there are a few impudent and rebellious female characters in German novels for younger girls, adventurous female characters are entirely absent in literature for older girls. Typically, female characters' rebellion is soon overtaken by their acceptance of traditional gender norms. Only Pippi Langstrump and Red Zora are true heroines in the sense that they have their own lives and do "heroic acts" in their youth. Female readers are denied the dream of connecting with a female character as they grow from infancy into maturity since there aren't any mature heroines in literature. Kehlenbeck's rare 'adventurous women,' unlike many of the male heroes, didn't depend on physical strength or athleticism. For example, one person stood out: 'Lady Alanna of Trebond,' who took pleasure in her athletic accomplishments and enjoyed physical exercise and sports training much[4].

1.2.2 Idols of the Sport:

Sport as we know it now evolved in England throughout the 18th and 19th centuries, with its emphasis on competition, outclassing one's opponent, and breaking records. It's no secret that throughout history, the stuff of heroes has been athletic prowess and accomplishment. In sports, you'd find all the elements for a good story: intrigue, thrills, success, and superhuman achievements. Sport continues to satisfy young people's need for thrills and identity-affirming experiences.

Sports stars of today aren't only in the news; they're often the focus of serious current affairs stories as well. 'Sisyphus, live,' published by the German news magazine Der Spiegel, started with the following: 'The late-nineties superstars are known as Boris and Jan, Michael and Frank. In Germany, millions of people watch television to keep up with heroes' great acts. Sports heroes like Michael Schumacher, Boris Becker, and Steffi Graf are well-known to the general public, according to an Emnid survey. Having athletic heroes as role models goes hand in hand not just with media competition being so fierce, but also with the advertising industry's aggressive marketing tactics as well as with the commercialization of sports in general and the athletes that play them. Because of this, athletes not only appear on television sports programmes, but they also promote a wide range of goods, from chocolate to automobiles to insurance firms.

Sports stars have long been seen as role models for young people of all ages. Generations of youngsters have fantasized of becoming Pele or Beckenbauer while playing football on the street. With the discovery of these age groups' athletic interests by the mass media comes the publication of a special issue of the teen magazine Bravo titled Bravo Sport, which features the latest on children and adolescent sports heroes[5].

1.2.3 Existing Research On Children, Adolescents and Their Role Models:

As a result, the importance of role models is frequently ambiguous and difficult to grasp. In a society that is growing more complicated and diverse, real-life idols, who are respected, copied, and even worshipped, seem to have lost some of their significance. The results of research on

role models show that they vary considerably and that no accurate information is therefore available regarding how often and to what degree role models are embraced, much alone about the impact they have on people's lives. According to the 'Shell Youth Studies,' the number of teenagers who say they have a role model is decreasing with time. When it came to religious instruction, however, a research conducted by the Salzburg religious educator Bucher in 1996 revealed an entirely opposite pattern. According to his findings, 59% of teenagers cited their mother as a role model, 54% cited their father as a role model, and 25% cited Jesus Christ as a role model. Eighty percent of 10- to 11-year-olds said a family member helped them become oriented. Pop stars were mentioned by less than 10% of those polled in Bucher's study. The research found that as children got older, so did the quantity and importance of role models in their lives.

UNESCO's global research, however, painted a quite different picture: Action heroes were identified by 30% of boys and 21% of girls, while pop idols were named by 19% of youngsters interviewed: 'Terminator' star Arnold Schwarzenegger was recognized by a whopping 88% of the students. He served as a role model for 51% of children in "violence-prone" nations, while just 37% of youngsters in more peaceful areas of the globe saw him as a role model. It's a shame that these findings don't account for gender. Role models were not explicitly mentioned when students were polled[6].

Only a few research on role models take gender into account when asking and interpreting questions. Because male idols are more prevalent and more visually appealing, it's no surprise that in the aforementioned "Shell Youth Studies," more teenage boys (18%) reported to have an idol (14 percent). Many more East German teenagers than their peers in West Germany said they had a role model usually someone in their own family. The eastern states had a higher percentage of females who said their mother was their role model, compared to the western states, which had a lower percentage. Only 10% of teenagers cited athletes as role models, compared to 40% who cited a film or tele-vision star. When it comes to teenage boys, athletes are the most common role models; when it comes to adolescent girls, actresses and artists are the most common.

In spite of the disparities, which may be explained in part by questions asked and variations in samples, there are obvious overall patterns as well as trends unique to ages and genders in the findings of the study. Male role models and idols predominate; women, too, prefer male idols; and almost no guy would choose a female role model as a role model for himself. Even among adults, this is a common propensity. According to an Infratest poll in Germany, which surveyed people aged 16 to 79 in the former Federal Republic, Mother Teresa came out on top among the 20 men's and women's idols. Women nominated just six idols, all of whom were male. There were no other female idols mentioned by the males, with the exception of Mother Teresa[7].

For girls and women, male idols have a different meaning than for boys and men, so keep that in mind. For example, just because females become enthusiastic about soccer and create fan clubs doesn't guarantee they'll want to participate in the sport. Girls want their partners to be like the football stars they adore, not the other way around. Soccer stars are no different from other celebrities when it comes to girls 'having a crush' on them: they 'fall in love' with the players. 'I truly fell in love with him during the 1992 European Cup, when he played for the Danish national team,' said Melanie, a Flemming-Poulsen fan.

2. DISCUSSION

For the most part, the young people we spoke with looked to popular culture for role models and idols. They looked to television and film stars and singers as well as sports personalities to find their heroes. People in their immediate social surroundings had just a little influence on their decision to use them as role models. Boys favored their role models because of their dominance, power, and courage, while females preferred their idols for a variety of reasons. The girls' choice of idols, on the other hand, was mostly determined by characteristics like physical attractiveness and social behaviour.

The bottom line is that girls and boys choose role models that uphold conventional gender norms. An important element of many boys 'male socialization' is their fascination with superheroes, warriors, and super-men, as well as sportsmen. This fascination stems from their exposure to masculinity modelled on aggression and supremacy. One thing to keep in mind, however, is that a significant number of young women and men tend to reject models that are overtly based on gender stereotypes (e.g. Barbie, Rambo). There's a chance this means youngsters reject conventional gender norms and ideals because of their dysfunctional characteristics and limitations on their freedom of expression. Other studies have shown that androgyny may appeal to both girls and boys depending on their age group. While only a small percentage of the boys we spoke with cited sports stars as role models, many more cited their heroes' "sporting" attributes such as endurance and fighting power as attributes they aspired to have. When it comes to role models, women athletes have a unique set of challenges since they are seldom selected as role models[8].

That said, how does this impact youth athletic interest and participation? What are the long-term implications of this? Is the high 'drop-out' percentage of females in sports, as well as the wide fluctuations in their participation, linked to the absence of visually appealing female athletes? Sports heroes and athletic achievements seem to have an impact on the general public's interest in and involvement in sports. The popularity of various sports has risen in Germany as a result of athletic successes. For example, Steffi Graf and Boris Becker helped launch the tennis craze, while Henri Maske popularized boxing. Finally, soccer is huge in Germany, thanks in part to the country's legendary footballers. For example, in Schuler, a student describes admiration for NBA players and his attempts to emulate them in daily life and in the gym. This is an impressive description. According to a young girl in the film *Flash Dance*, after seeing Alex perform, gymnastic dance became their favorite activity in physical education classes. Empirical research on the role-modeling effects of Mila, the protagonist of the animated television series, found that she became an inspiration to 73 girls (aged 7 to 15). Mila returns to volleyball after a lengthy absence due to sickness. She progresses from being a member of the school team to being the greatest player in the world. Mila was well-known among the females questioned, and many of them admired her and assessed her as "good," "cool," or "amazing." Some of the girls were even inspired to join a volleyball team as a result of Mila's influence and encouragement[9].

Despite the fact that there are female role models and heroes out there, it's safe to conclude that a dearth of female role models is a direct result of girls and women showing little interest in sports. Furthermore, as a result of this reciprocity, women's sport has received little public interest and therefore has been neglected by the mainstream media as well. In turn, this implies that women's sport is at a financial disadvantage because of a dearth of sponsorship and/or advertising agreements. There are thus no funds available for finding fresh talent, training and growing in sports - the conditions for athletic success. High levels of athletic performance and victory, on

the other hand, create idols. Women's soccer, which is still a neglected sport in Germany, exemplifies these interdependencies. The players quickly acquire the moniker "viragos," are only known to a tiny group of ardent supporters, and the general public is uninterested in them. It's understandable that soccer isn't a popular choice among female athletes. Though it's unclear whether sports personalities can inspire individuals to participate in a sport for an extended length of time, they can certainly "market" athletic activity. A significant element in the complicated structures of active participation in sports, at least to us, seems to be models and idols.

Watching the development of celebrities in the entertainment industry particularly bands teaches us that stars may be created according to certain recipes based on collective symbols and messages tailored to a specific audience. Players of both genders may be marketed as stars, but sportswomen must contend with the fact that the competitive sport they play has its drawbacks as well, and that marketing athletes as heroes is a logical outgrowth of the market. The impact of sports stars being used as models, as previously said, is often ambiguous. Even if you're a competitive athlete, you should still strive to be seductive[10].

3. CONCLUSION

This paper does not address the important issue of how negative signals of competitive sport may be dealt with in a pedagogic setting (e.g., the unconditional primacy of performance and success). However, in our view, schools must help familiarize young females with positive role models in sports. An initiative in Baden-Württemberg, Germany, is presently collecting data on women who have made significant contributions in a variety of areas, including sports. Amelia Earhart, Valeska Glen, and Lili Henoch, a Jewish track and field star who perished in Nazi-occupied Europe, are just a few of the lesser-known women from history. A prominent position and public recognition for the school's successful female athletes may be provided to today's competitive sportswomen and even today's successful school girl athletes. It's not certain whether such measures will encourage females to seek for role models in sports and incorporate sports into their everyday life more often, but it's worth a shot.

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