

**THE IMPACT OF SPORTS FANSHIP ON
PERSON PERCEPTION**

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Abstract

Do young people use expressed sports preferences to form impressions of others? Concentrating on previous research involving the framework of impression formation theory, this study was designed to explore the impact of expressed sports preferences on perceptions of peers. Respondents ($n=332$) were presented with a questionnaire depicting male and female peers in various sports tee-shirts to examine how well young people can judge others on the basis of very limited information. The findings reveal that the perceptions formed of peers are often mediated by the specific sport preference expressed by the target person. This study suggests that young people do make quick judgments of others based on sports preferences. Implications of these findings and suggestions for future research are discussed.

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DEDICATION

For Mom.

No need to elaborate, because you already know why.

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INTRODUCTION

In today's society, nothing is slow-paced. Pizza chains boast their delivery will be prompter than their competitor, one-hour photo development is now the norm, over-the-counter drug companies advertise immediate relief with their latest medicinal products, and even procedures such as teeth whitening, which used to take months of dentist visits, are now completed over night. With twenty minute doctor visits, get-rich-quick schemes, drive-thru pharmacies, and same-day government tax returns, American culture truly encompasses the ideology of *time is everything*. Likewise, most Americans in today's fast-paced society are also hasty in formulating impressions of others, utilizing stereotypes and other schemata to make snap judgments of a peer's overall personality make-up based on minimal suggestive stimuli.

In everyday life situations, besides the common lack of cognitive motivation, individuals also limit stimulation overload and salvage valuable time by formulating impressions of others without the tedious and time-consuming effort needed to thoroughly evaluate another person. While occasionally snap judgments are completely legit and accurate, negative stereotypes and judgmental preconceived notions are often unfairly utilized during the impression formation process.

While most adults are accustomed to this learned cultural behavior, making snap judgments of others based on minimal stimuli is often detrimental to adolescences. Especially during the high school years, teenagers try to create their own identity while still fitting in with the in-crowd. Because being accepted by their peers is extremely

important to most teenagers, the impression formation process is imperative to research involving this age group.

Building friendships and finding one's niche in a school environment is one of the most stressful situations young Americans face. While teenagers are biologically evolving, many are also confronted with psychological changes, as well. Often times, teens try to disassociate themselves from their parents, wanting autonomy and independence. During this transition period into adulthood, young people often look to pop-culture, and occasionally a specific sport, to shape their self-image and to project their personality traits to their peers. As one sport preference may be the popular choice and open doors for an individual, his or her judgmental peers may be less inclined to accept another. This displayed sport preference embodies an individual's overall style, value system, and personality, allowing it to be utilized as a means to formulate a more elaborate impression.

With the impression formation theory as a directional guide, this study was designed to research the consequences of promoting a specific sport preference on the perceptions of opposite sex peers. Accordingly, respondents were asked to complete a questionnaire that included photos of opposite sex peers with mock interviews illustrating the target person's favorite sport. Respondents were asked to judge the target person using a 16-item person perception inventory. The findings are expected to document the powerful influence an individual's sports preference is on the impression formulated by an opposite gender peer.

THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Jackie is a leggy, slender, blond bombshell. The only thing more flawless than her beautiful smile is her idealistic measurements. While she wears the most stylish clothes, Jackie is also never caught dead without her makeup on. Jackie's looks define perfection. She also must have flirted her way up the corporate ladder; there's no way there is a brain hidden in all that beauty.

Being one of the top computer geniuses in the country, Andrew loves nothing more than his science fiction novels and programming his latest technological gizmo. Because his frail frame, skinny legs, and wimpy physique deterred him from playing sports as a child, Andrew is extremely timid and even shy. Nonetheless, Andrew excelled in every academic category while achieving his PhD. He also must have a lot of money in his bank account; there's no way he could date someone as beautiful as his girlfriend.

Impression Formation Theory

While it usually occurs automatically, effortlessly, and typically unconsciously, formulating an impression of another individual or group of people is one of the first and most in-depth phenomena social psychologists have explored. Even though the advent of impression formation was decades ago, current research continually provides novel aspects involving the theory. Because stereotyping is a common outcome of impression formation, psychologists as well as communication scholars realize the vast ramifications and social impact this process possesses. Before exploring current means of measuring impression formation processes, it is first important to review previous research.

Asch (1946) first introduced the idea of impression formation in the mid-1940s, focusing on the organization of person impressions. Asch (1946) concluded:

Out of the diverse aspects of an individual we form a view of him as a particular kind of person, with relatively enduring properties. It is with persons who have identity that we establish significant relations.

Ordinarily our view of a person is highly unified. Experience confronts us with a host of actions in others, following each other in relatively ordered succession. In contrast to this unceasing movement and change in our observations we emerge with a product of considerable order and stability. Although he processes many tendencies, capacities, and interests, we form a view of that person, a view that embraces his entire being or as much as is accessible to us. How do we organize the various data of observation into a single, relatively unified impression? (p. 258)

Social psychologists Ito, Thompson, & Cacioppo (2004) claim that it is the combination of personality traits a person allows another to gather that creates an impression. An individual undergoes an affective reaction towards another individual while processing his or her personality traits, utilizing these emotions to create predictions regarding other and future aspects of the person. Inferences about the individual's other personal attributes and how he or she may behave in the future are also predicted by compiling a mental list of his or her personality traits. The judgments people create based on one's first impression usually stem from past experiences that are similar to the situation at hand.

While formulating impressions seems quite simple and automatic compared to other human cognitive behavior, it is actually an impressive process. Asch's (1946) theory involved the person perception process as the formulation of an integrated and complex impression derived from any stimulus provided. True, some individuals are much more accurate and exact with their impressions of others, while some situations need more information to be divulged to facilitate a more precise impression. Asch (1946) truly believed that creating an impression based on an individual's personality traits is a critical human skill. "This remarkable capacity we possess to understand something of the character of another person...is a precondition of social life" (Asch, 1946, 258).

Asch (1946) created a very simple experimental technique to measure and to analyze his impression formation theory. A hypothetical person is introduced to a subject with a list of adjectives describing him or her. The theoretical person can be "funny," "intelligent," "ambitious," "extroverted," "classy," and "clever" for example. Next, the subject is asked to predict other personality characteristics the hypothetical person will probably portray. The results are conclusive: individuals would consistently group certain personality traits together. If the imaginary person were characterized by being smart, for example, subjects would also claim that he was motivated, wealthy, and gifted, as well.

Because certain personality traits were organized together, it can be concluded that human beings appreciate order and stability. Asch's experimental technique provides results that solidify the cognitive processes, which underlie the impression formation theory. When encountering another person, individuals perceive this stimulus

and automatically organize this information into a pre-existing cognitive schema, which then allows one to suppose other closely related personality traits belong to the person. Adjectives such as “wealthy,” “smart,” and “powerful” are typically categorized together, since one’s cultural and social experiences continually reinforce this grouping of personality traits. According to researchers Ito, Thompson, & Cacioppo (2004), “...social cognition is based on a distributed set of neural mechanisms for perceiving, recognizing, and evaluating stimuli, which are then used to construct complex central representations of the social environment” (p. 1267).

Furthermore, current impression formation research also strongly focuses on the interaction between the stimuli presented by one individual and the perceiver’s prior knowledge and experience with similar situations. Following the perceiver’s initial impression, incoming stimuli may either strengthen his or her intuition or alter it. The new information is automatically selected, abstracted, interpreted, and integrated to create a more complete mental representation of the individual. Often times, future information processing and judgments are based on this integrated impression rather than the original personality trait that was demonstrated. Because someone demonstrated his or her intelligence, for example, an individual is extremely likely to remember him or her as successful, as well, even if the latter personality trait was never confirmed. This implies a form of selective cognitive processing has occurred.

This is a widely shared viewpoint in the field of social psychology (Rydell & McConnell, 2005). Brewer (1988) furthered Asch’s findings by combining society’s influences on the creation of these mental schemas and categorizations. Social groups provide labels that are utilized to categorize individuals. If a person belongs to a certain

race, carries himself in a certain way, attends a certain religious gathering, or even drives a certain car, people automatically formulate an impression based on the social group he is likely to be a part of. Placing an individual into a social group illustrates the fact that human beings prefer to create organization and categorization within their cognitive processes (Rydell & McConnell, 2005).

Categorizing an individual into a social group label is an automatic process for most people. Because these social categories are stored permanently in our long-term memory, one does not need motivation to process a great deal of information; stereotyping is an effortless process. According to Ric (2004), most people do not even acknowledge that they have placed an individual into a social category, as most are completely unaware of the process when it is occurring. Stereotyping and categorizing people both aid in the organization of our thought processes and eliminate stimulus overload.

Researchers Rydell & McConnell (2005) outlined a two-step process first introduced by Fiske & Neuberg in 1990. In their research involving group classification, Rydell & McConnell (2005) claim that the process of formulating an impression is first based on categories, and then when the motivation to cognitively process is high, attribute-based processing takes place. While other researchers claim that the perceiver's affective state determines whether or not categories or social groupings are utilized to judge someone, these scholars believe it is due to the perceiver's motivation. If the person fits easily into a social category and the perceiver is not highly motivated to process more of his personality traits, then the information processing will end.

Nonetheless, Rydell & McConnell (2005) also state that the processing will continue if the perceiver is motivated to gain more information to either confirm the original category or to determine a new category for placement. Obviously, traits that are incongruent with a specific category will often motivate individuals to formulate an impression based on attributes, not on preconceived stereotypes or social categorizations. The motivation is to alleviate the inconsistency.

Furthering research regarding what motivates individuals to mentally elaborate on another's personality traits, Ric (2004) also claims that many individuals utilize social categories based on their affective states. When an individual is in a content or happy state of mind, he feels that his environment is safe and that there is no need to engage in extensive processing. This allows a person to rely on general knowledge structures, such as stereotypes (Ric, 2004). In contrast, when an individual is in a saddened or uneasy affective state, he feels that the environment is unsafe and will not rely on general knowledge structures to formulate impressions of others. This theoretical perspective reiterates how simplistic stereotyping and categorizing truly are.

While it is extremely important to research the actual cognitive process and the initial motivation behind impression formation, it is equally prevalent to study the outcomes or the consequences of categorizing others based on preconceived mental schemata. Current research suggests that there are both positive and negative consequences of categorically judging individuals. Even though the majority of current research designs explores the detrimental effects of stereotyping, it is interesting to first note a more optimistic result.

First, as was previously stated, basing impressions on preconceived schemata alleviates information overload (Rydell & McConnell, 2005). If an individual were forced to cognitively evaluate every single person he came into contact with throughout the day, it would be time-consuming and mentally exhausting. Stereotyping allows for effortless and rapid impression formation, especially when the perceiver does not need to know each and every aspect of a certain person, which occurs more often than not.

Nonetheless, there are numerous research studies that have explored the negative consequences of immediate impression formation and utilizing social categories to judge individuals, as well. Most of these studies have a common thread: cultural stereotypes often allow for some individuals to be incorrectly classified into a mental category with less prestige than deserved. Stereotyping sets back mostly racial minorities and women as society has depicted these groups less worthy of esteemed personality traits such as wealth and success in the business world (Iremen & Robberg, 2004).

Iremen & Robberg (2004) gathered data involving how grammatical gender and gender stereotyping influence the way impressions are formulated. After reading scenarios, which were denoted with gendered nouns, participants were then asked to describe the fictitious person. When masculine nouns were read, the participants described the person as a male. The feminine words had a weaker influence on the subjects compared to the masculine words, yet the results were also conclusive. For example, the word “astronaut” was typically associated with masculine traits and the word “secretary” was often associated with feminine traits. There are obvious and considerable negative ramifications to these stereotypes: the celebrated career of an

astronaut, much like many other highly distinguished professions, should not be secluded to males only.

Mullen (2004) focused his research involving impression formation on the effects of media portrayals of youth. His significant results illustrated that children also categorize fictitious storybook characters based on stereotypes. When the children were asked what type of pet a little boy character should own, the participants answered “a dog.” When asked what type of pet a little girl character should own, the participants answered “a cat.” When asked which animal was a better pet, the overwhelming answer was a dog accompanied with predominantly masculine adjectives describing the dog’s appeal, such as “He’s fast/strong,” “He is a good buddy to have,” and “He’s loyal.”

It should be questioned why the little girl’s pet isn’t viewed as strong or as loyal in the eyes of these young children. Mullen (2004) demonstrated how automatic impression formation occurs. None of the children, male or female, hesitated when answering that a dog is the best type of pet for a storybook character to own. “There seems to be ample evidence to support the premise that the stories, pictures, and music to which children are exposed can exert significant and enduring effects” (Mullen, 2004, 251).

Paralleling with this study and the gender entity of impression formation, Sczesny & Kuhnen (2004) concluded that when assessing leadership competence, participants were meta-cognitively aware of a gender-based bias towards men and for the most part fought the temptation to fall victim to the stereotype. The participants did not, however, indicate a meta-cognitive pattern regarding the biases based on the fictitious leaders’ physical attractiveness. When the leader was portrayed as an attractive person, he or she

was rated higher on leadership competence (Sczesny & Kuhnen, 2004). “We suggest that the effects of physical appearance might be quite robust because people are not aware of such a bias and can, therefore, even if they are highly motivated to make fair and unbiased judgments, fall prey to this stereotype” (Sczesny & Kuhnen, 2004, 20).

Richetin & Croizet (2004) also studied impression formation involving gender and physical attractiveness and found that women more than men needed to cosmetically enhance their outward appearance to be considered business-worthy. Participants were shown portraits of both men and women who were touched up with make-up and portraits of both men and women who went to work with a natural, bare face. These people had small blemishes, uneven skin tones, freckles, and other skin issues that make-up is used to hide. The natural men were rated just as high as the men who had supposedly perfect skin. The natural women, however, were rated much lower than the other make-up wearing women regarding their abilities in the business world.

Furthermore, Richetin & Croizet (2004) determined that make-up also influenced the participants to describe the target people with positive personality traits compared to the more negative traits designated for those not wearing any make-up. In a follow-up study, this research team also asked the participants what type of professions the people belonged to. The results were conclusive: the people donning perfect skin and make-up were assigned higher status careers compared to those who were not wearing make-up. These impressions are based on the stereotype claiming that attractiveness is associated with success and positive personality traits.

Taken together, contemporary impression formation suggests that perceptions of others are frequently formed through an automatic cognitive process. This ordeal relies

primarily and extensively on the classification of the stimulus into a well-established category. Furthermore, most people, when given only limited information about another individual, will generally form numerous inferences about other related or future characteristics and personality traits of the person that he may or may not actually demonstrate.

For the purpose of this investigation, two important questions remain. First, are young people's sports preferences among the cognitive categories that are frequently employed in the impression formation process? And secondly, if sporting preferences do serve as categories in the impression formation process, what are the person perception consequences that result from endorsing different genres of sports?

Popularity of Sports in Society

Sports and athletics are extremely predominant phenomena in today's society, as millions either participate in or watch competitive sports around the globe. In the fall of 2000, the National Football League boasted a new attendance record when more than one million fans attended a football game two weekends in a row; each game averaging 66,000 fans in attendance (Attner, 2004). Fans are more than willing to spend their hard earned money at sporting events, as reported in 2004, the average professional basketball ticket was \$55, while some seats cost as much as \$200 for one game (Hobgood, 2001). Further evidence of spectators' increasing interest in sports can be measured in media time allotted to sport programming. In 1960, the three major networks broadcast a total of 300 hours of sports, by 1988, that figure rose to over 1800 (Madrigal, 1995). "This 500 percent increase is even more dramatic when one considers that it does not include the Entertainment and Sports Programming Network (ESPN), which broadcasts sports

programming 24 hours a day...” (Madrigal, 1995, 206). And lastly, society’s addiction to sports is even illustrated through the amount of money advertisers are willing to spend during national sporting events. In 2004, a 30 second time slot aired during the Super Bowl cost an advertiser a record \$2.4 million (Attner, 2004), proving that corporations such as Pepsi Cola, Bud Light, and McDonalds trust the world is watching.

While these facts and figures undoubtedly illustrate our culture’s love affair with sports and athletes, other experimental research has also concluded much the same appeal through a research theoretical perspective known as basking in reflected glory. By simply being associated with a sports team, individuals are found to brag by saying *we won* and disassociate themselves, claiming *they lost*. Being associated with a winning team is the driving motivation behind this theory. Cialdini, Borden, Thorne, Freeman, & Sloan (1997) elaborated on this social phenomenon by concluding that when college sports teams were experiencing a winning streak, the student body tended to purchase and to wear more school-spirited clothing. Students wanted to be associated more and more publicly when their sport teams were beating the competition.

Accordingly, Cialdini, et al. (1997) also provided conclusive data, which claimed that students also reported higher appreciation for unrelated aspects of their campus life when their sport teams were winning games. The cafeteria food was rated higher, for example, while dorm life wasn’t reported as negatively as usual either (Cialdini, et al., 1997). Basking in reflected glory theory demonstrates the fact that sports play such an encompassing role in today’s society. When a favorite team is doing well, other aspects of one’s life are also viewed more positively. Again, this simply reiterates the strength of the fan-athlete relationship. “These studies suggest a way to understand how the fortunes

of affiliated sports teams can cause lavish displays of civic gratitude and pride in American cities...” (Cialdini et al., 1997, 374).

Others have quantitatively collected data involving the fan-athlete relationship and the intensity that individuals yearn to be associated with a winning sports team. Bernhardt, Dabbs, Fielden, & Lutter (1998) measured testosterone levels of both soccer team members and soccer enthusiasts. When the soccer players demonstrated aggressive, masculine traits and won a match, both groups’ testosterone levels significantly heightened. “These findings suggest that watching one’s heroes win or lose has psychological consequences that extend beyond changes in mood and self-esteem” (Bernhardt, et al., 1998, 59), which demonstrates the basking in reflected glory idea quintessentially.

Similarly, Boen, Vanbeselaere, and Feys (2002) conducted a study examining the consequences that occur when an athlete does not fulfill a fan’s expectation. In this research, when a soccer player refrained from performing aggressively, fans were noticeably distraught. When the soccer teams were winning, more fans traveled with the team to away games, while significantly less traveled during a losing streak. Again, this clearly demonstrates the fair-weather fan: one who wishes to be a part of a winning team, but denies loyalty to a struggling team. By reviewing this theoretical perspective, Boen, et al. (2002) clearly illustrated that sporting events are such prominent structures in today’s society that they define our culture and undoubtedly are utilized during the impression formation process.

Madrigal (1995) furthered the principles behind the basking in reflected glory theory by determining other variables that are integrated within its framework.

According to his research, Madrigal (1995) concluded that an individual's degree of expectancy discomfort, team identification, and the quality of the opponent are the motivation behind a fan's enjoyment of the sport and the strength of his basking in reflected glory. Each of these entities contributes to a sports enthusiast's overall satisfaction with the sporting event (Madrigal, 1995). While many might have once believed that basking in reflected glory relied completely upon affective states, it is now apparent that this phenomenon is more of a cognitive process than an emotional one.

While research surrounding basking in reflected glory provides proof that sports and athletics are such a prevalent structure in today's society, it is also important to determine whether or not sports is a reliable variable to study impression formation. Do individuals utilize various sports to categorize others and to form impressions? Do stereotypes stem from different sport genres? Questions such as these are easily answered by investigating current research involving impression formation theory and sports.

Sports and Impression Formation

While many may find it to be a cultural cliché, current research has consistently concluded that those who are associated with a certain sport are instantly placed into a mental category by another individual regardless of how well the two know each other (Verkuyten, 1990). So commonly, today's society categorizes football, hockey, and rugby players, along with others who enjoy full contact sports, as individuals who are extremely aggressive, competitive, ego-driven, and relentless (Cortese, 1997). A gymnast or figure skater is often stereotyped as feminine and graceful (Barbor, Eccles, & Stone, 2001), while those who are fond of more extreme sports such as windsurfing,

skateboarding, and mountain biking are often automatically viewed as risk-takers and rebels (Wheaton, 2000). Because sports are such a prominent and encompassing social structure embedded within our culture, formulating an impression based on a sport-related enthusiasm habitually occurs.

A high school setting is the quintessential environment to research whether or not individuals form impressions on others based on their affiliation with a sports team. Barber, et al. (2001) examined approximately 900 high school students, finding that being involved in a sport, or being a *jock* as they nicknamed it, was the most common label students used to categorize a fellow classmate, followed by *the brains* and *the princesses* classifications. Not only did the students place athletes into this category, a significant majority also formed elaborate impressions and stereotyped *the jocks*, as well. “Involvement in sports and school spirit activities and having a *jock* social identity were associated with a mixed pattern of outcomes-positive academic outcomes and high alcohol use” (Barber, et al., 2001). Because these student athletes were also considered to have high grades, but more reckless social lives, this research proves that individuals do form impressions based on categories stemming from sport involvement. It is also interesting to note that 40% of the participants believed being a *jock* was the overall best label one could achieve in high school (Barber, et al., 2001).

Australian research team Adair, Nauright, & Philips (1998) qualitatively explored the extent that those who partake in combative, full-contact sports are consistently stereotyped to be more masculine, brave, ruthless, and even heroic in the eyes of strangers. Men who were simply associated with this genre of sports were automatically placed in these categories regardless of other personality traits they possessed.

“Organized sports helped establish and reinforce concepts of masculinity in Australian social development. Male-dominated games such as cricket and rugby encouraged strength, endurance and aggression, and were considered true tests of courage and character” (Adair, et al., 1998, 51).

Accordingly, this research team believed that many individuals utilize team sports as a means of categorization while formulating an impression due to the basic concepts the sports themselves provide. Adair et al. (1998) claim that many individuals automatically characterized these cricket and rugby players to be manly and powerful, because these personality traits are necessary to compete in a full-contact sporting event. Paralleling with this notion, the timid and the weak cannot compete, strategize, or conquer the opponent in a sport such as football or hockey. According to Adair et al. (1998), because the sport itself boasts these traits, those who are associated with the sport, no matter to what degree, will automatically be personally categorized, as well. “Obviously, cricket and football codes shaped the definition of ‘manhood’ in so many types of environments. When one is ruthless on the playing field, he is also considered ruthless in other areas of his life, such as during his professional and leisure times” (Adair, et al., 1998, 65-66).

Others have furthered this notion by studying more atypical sports, such as popular extreme sporting events like windsurfing. Wheaton (2000) explored the impression formation theory from a different angle, claiming that the sport of windsurfing has created a subculture that others utilize to build impressions of windsurfing enthusiasts. Just as other more conventional sports offer a cultural lifestyle, extreme sports may to a more significant degree. According to Wheaton (2000),

“Windsurfers have developed a complex subculture identity...that is based on physical ability, commitment to the sport, investment in equipment, and risk-taking behaviors” (p. 254).

Intensively focusing his attention to the risk-taking aspect of the sport, Wheaton (2000) found that others generally perceived extreme sportsman as rebellious and blasé regarding conventional cultural standards. Individuals belonging to this subculture were often stereotyped as untraditional nonconformists to educational or business expectations and principles (Wheaton, 2000). Obviously, if an individual has personality traits that motivate him to take such risks as windsurfing, then it is common for others to assume this personality trait will also be expressed in other aspects of his life outside of the sport, as well.

Cortese (1997) also studied impression formation and role-identity through his research involving the Notre Dame University boxing team. Again, much like the research previously mentioned, these athletes were stereotyped as being extremely masculine, aggressive, and even hostile at times (Cortese, 1997). This researcher, however, found that individuals actually want a boxer to fulfill these stereotypes, which is the main motivation behind their automatic impression formation.

According to Cortese (1997), “Tharp [a Notre Dame boxer] gave the crowd what it was asking for—excitement in and out of the ring. Publics are served by amateurs and make active demands on them; they provide role-support. The boxer-audience relationship is functionally interdependent” (page: 352). Similarly, Cortese (1997) concluded that fans stereotype athletes to be volatile and hot-tempered because they yearn for these personality traits to be portrayed during competitions. Coincidentally, most

embellish these characteristics, broadening them to all aspects of an athlete's life: "Deep self-feelings and intense emotionality are linked to the athlete" (Cortese, 1997, 352).

It is extremely apparent that individuals use someone's sport-involvement to formulate impressions. Nonetheless, before focusing on the research method, it is imperative to discuss how shirts are linked with self-expression in today's society. Yes, sports and impression formation are interrelated; however, are tee shirts a valid symbol of one's sports affiliation?

Tee-Shirts and Impression Formation

Many pop-culture and fashion experts alike claim that a tee shirt is the most common pieces of apparel used to express one's feelings towards a group, an opinion, or a movement (Browne, 1995). From anti-war slogans to a favorite rap musician's face to a successful racecar driver's number, tee shirts allow individuals to express themselves and their associations to a group. "Rock tee-shirts do more for the wearer than simply document concert attendance. Shirt fashions and logos help people establish self-identity" (Browne, 1995, 108). It seems logical that tee shirts are also utilized to form impressions of others, as well.

Freitas, Hall, Kim, Kaiser, Chandler, & Hammidi (1997) took this theoretical perspective a step further by researching the impressions individuals create of others when typical apparel is not being worn. In asking about least favorite clothes and about groups who avoid dressing like the norm, the meaning and importance of clothing is illustrated. Freitas, et al. (1997) explored "How we use clothes to negotiate tenuous fragile, and elastic self/other, past/present, and present future relationships" (page: 323). In this qualitative research design, Freitas, et al. (1997) determined that youth formulate

stereotypes of others who do not wish to wear the current, popular apparel item. These students were viewed as odd and unordinary in the eyes of strangers simply because of their choice of clothing (Freitas, et al., 1997).

Gender differences are also interesting to explore regarding the use of tee shirts to form associations and categories. Pertaining to their tee-shirts, men take a more self-oriented approach to clothes, stressing their use of expressive symbols of their personalities and their functional benefits, while women have other-oriented concerns, choosing to use clothes as symbols of their social and personal relationships with others (Cox & Dittmar, 1995). Along the same vein, women are also more likely to feel the need to purchase new clothes more often than men due to social pressures and peer relations (Cox & Dittmer, 1995), proving that clothing is such an intricate entity in one's self-concept. It can be assumed from this research that females are more likely than males to formulate an impression based on clothing.

Other researchers claim that different genres of clothing go beyond group association or basic illustrations of an individual's personality traits, and actually reveal more intricate, subconscious characteristics about the wearer. Levene (1996) set out to prove that males who don their monogram on their shirt pockets actually have a low sense of social security. Because they are continually displaying their initials on their chest, men who monogram their clothing are more insecure in their self-concept. Future research should divulge whether or not others formulate impressions to match these results.

Even if there are not complicated, subliminal messages blaring at us from our neighbor's tee-shirt, research has illustrated that clothing is a practical means of

categorizing others. Marriott (1990) studied African Americans who wore the black version of the popular cartoon character Bart Simpson on their shirts and how others perceived them. Those who donned the dark-complected Bart Simpson were viewed as unruly and rowdy as the cartoon character (Marriott, 1990). According to Marriott (1990), "...this presence of the Black Bart tee-shirt says there is an association with the underdog, a need to fight the establishment" (page 1). These African Americans were stereotyped based on their choice of tee-shirts.

Because current research involving today's culture and both tee shirts and sports-affiliation is so conclusive, it is realistic to assume that these two entities are reliable and valid categories used through impression formation. The only question remaining is how individuals perceive others wearing a sports tee-shirt. What other or future personality traits are assumed based on someone's sports-association?

Research Expectations

Given these theoretical considerations, this experimental design was created to explore the impact of an individual's sport preference on the impression formation process of an opposite gender peer. The essential question addressed in this study is: Do young people utilize expressed sport preferences to automatically categorize other individuals?

Consistent with previous research, it is assumed that males who express a liking to rugby and football will be viewed as more aggressive than males who enjoy swimming. Because the game of rugby embodies the rough-and-tumble, hard-hitting mentality and is one of the most physically demanding contact sports in this country, common sense tells us that females will judge male target persons who enjoy this game

as the most aggressive of the three sports. Similarly, swimming is not a full contact sport, and while it is very competitive and cut-throat at times, this sport does not convey the brutality of rugby or football.

It can also be expected that females will view males who favor football as the most popular. According to Barber et al. (2001), nearly half of high school students polled believed that belonging to the football team is the most prominent indication of an individual's high popularity status among other students. In today's pop-culture, it is consistently reiterated that football team members, or jocks as they are often times labeled, are the most popular students in a high school environment, therefore, it can be assumed in this research that target males with a football preference will be deemed popular, as well.

Nonetheless, along with this positive stereotype of popularity, football players are also often times presumed to be unintelligent, as the over-used *dumb jock* label has even become a cliché in pop-culture. Accordingly, it can be assumed that males who enjoy football and rugby will be considered less intelligent than those who prefer swimming. Because the sport of swimming carries an air of elitism and sophistication, females in this study are assumed to find these male target persons as more intelligent than those who prefer the other two sports. Along this same vein, it can also be assumed that males will view female target persons who enjoy swimming as the most intelligent, as well.

While it is assumed that females who prefer each of these sports will also be stereotyped in the same manner as the males are expected to be, it may possibly be to a lesser degree as most females are viewed as fans rather than participants. Because this study did not specify whether or not the target persons of both genders actually played

their favorite sport, most males would assume that the female target person was more of a fan than a competitor. Therefore, it can be expected that females who enjoy rugby will be perceived as the most aggressive; however, if it was determined that she actually enjoyed playing the sport (as this assumption is more automatic for a male target person), she would then be viewed as even more significantly aggressive.

It is interesting to first consider cultural biases before determining the expectations regarding female target persons' popularity and intelligence. In their research involving gender and the impression formation theory, Irmén & Robberg (2004) found that males prefer their opposite gender peers to demonstrate more stereotypical feminine qualities than portrayals of masculinity. In saying this, one could venture that males would not find females who demonstrate aggressive sport preferences, which are stereotypically masculine past times, to be likeable or popular. Because swimming is more graceful and refined, this sport defines femininity and encompasses the attributes that a majority of males find attractive in females.

With this mentioned, however, the overall popularity of football may override these trite judgmental notions, allowing for females who enjoy this sport to also be presumed most popular by their opposite gender peers. One reason for this expectation involves the idea that the female target person may enjoy the sport because she is supporting and cheering for her boyfriend or is attracted to the male athletes. This easily demonstrates the feminine side of a masculine sport, as most males appreciate this type of fanship from a female, making her desirable and overall popular.

METHOD

Respondents

Respondents were 161 male and 171 female undergraduates at a large Southeastern university. They received extra credit for their participation.

Questionnaire

Within each respondent sex, a self-administered questionnaire depicting opposite sex target persons, which was labeled a “Survey of Person-Perception Skills,” was completed as part of an in-class exercise. The cover sheet of the booklet was color-coded by respondent sex and included an introductory commentary that asked the respondents “How skilled are you in forming quick but correct impressions?” This section also explained that the brief questionnaire was designed to examine “how well young people can judge peers on the basis of very limited information about them,” specifically their appearance and choice of leisure activities. The respondents were instructed to “inspect the photograph of each person in the booklet and carefully read the information from an interview with that person.” Next, the respondents were asked to report their perceptions of each person by responding to a 16-item person perception inventory.

Within each respondent sex, two photographs representative of opposite sex peers of moderate appeal were used. The individuals depicted in the photos were randomly assigned as either the neutral, baseline, swimming, rugby, or football target person. The neutral photo showed the target person wearing a generic Auburn tee-shirt and the swimming photo showed the target person wearing an Auburn swimming tee-shirt. Rugby and football target persons also followed suit. The baseline target person, who described his favorite foods, wore a grey tee-shirt with a small frog emblem on it.

The questionnaire was designed so that a 3 by 8 inch photograph of each target person was located in the upper right hand corner of an 8 ½ by 11-inch page. Adjacent to the photographs were brief statements, presented in interview format that detailed the purported leisure preferences of the portrayed persons. The lower half of the page contained the 16-item person perception inventory.

Person Perception Ratings

The person perception inventory involved 16 adjectives and descriptive statements. In the order of presentation, the items were: “fun to be with,” “rebellious,” “friendly,” “contentious,” “charming,” “aggressive,” “good-looking,” “pleasant,” “popular,” “logical,” “sensible,” “intelligent,” “appealing,” “engaging,” “combative,” “and “analytic.” For each item, the participants were asked to indicate their opinions using an 11-point scale that ranged from “not at all” (0) to “extremely” (10).

In order to reduce the person perception ratings to a more workable number, the inventory items for the baseline persons were subjected to a principle components factor analysis with oblique rotation to simple structures. This analysis yielded three factors, which accounted for 67% total variance. The first factor, labeled Popularity (eigenvalue = 6.61), was defined by high loadings on the following items: “popular” (0.823), “good-looking” (0.799), “fun to be with” (0.777), and “appealing” (0.828). Factor 1 accounted for 41.3% of the variance. The second factor was labeled Intelligent (eigenvalue = 2.09) and accounted for 13.1% of the total variance. This factor was derived from high loadings on four items: “sensible” (0.882), “logical” (0.855), “analytic” (0.774), and “intelligent” (0.857). Factor 3 accounted for 12.4% of the variance and was labeled Rebellious (eigenvalue = 1.98). The final factor was defined by high loadings on the

“rebellious” (0.821), “aggressive” (0.829), and “combative” (0.811) items. The items “friendly,” “charming,” “contentious,” “engaging,” and “pleasant” were dismissed as they did not significantly load into one distinct factor.

Examination of the interfactor correlations revealed a moderate, positive link between the Popularity and the Intelligence factors ($r = 0.43$, $p < 0.001$). Weaker associations were also evident between Popularity and Rebelliousness ($r = 0.25$) and Intelligence and Rebelliousness factors ($r = 0.15$), as well.

Manipulations

Baseline Person. The brief statement about the leisure preferences of the baseline persons focused on their favorite foods. For example, the interview excerpt accompanying the baseline person photographed stated:

Q: What about food?

A: Oh, I like food all right.

Q: What are your favorites?

A: My favorites...I'd say pizza, hamburgers, and chocolate.

The ratings by the respondents of the baseline persons were used to remove individual differences in perception ratings.

Sport preference manipulation. In addition to a controlled condition in which no preference was stated, conditions were developed to represent three different sports. Specifically, the narrative statements in the control condition indicated that the individual enjoyed sports, but not one in particular. For example, the interview excerpt accompanying that photograph stated:

Q: Do you like watching sports?

A: Sure, I do!

Q: What's your favorite?

A: Oh, I don't know. I'm a big Auburn fan...and really don't have one favorite.

In each of the remaining sport preference conditions the interview excerpts included a set of statements in which the individual stated a preference for one of three sports. The interview text for the football fan was scripted as:

Q: Do you like watching sports?

A: Sure, I do!

Q: What's your favorite?

A: Football! I really enjoy the excitement of a football game.

Accordingly, for the rugby fan, his final answer was:

A: Rugby! I really enjoy the roughness of a rugby match.

Finally, for the swimming fan, his final answer was:

A: Swimming! I really enjoy the elegance of a swimming meet.

The different adjectives used in the dialogues, such as the word *excitement* in the football target person's response, were selected from the results of a previous study conducted by Sargent, Zillmann, & Weaver (1998). Sargent, et al. (1998) found strong correlations between certain adjectives and the sport that they are most often associated with; therefore, the descriptors were utilized within this study as well.

RESULTS

The three dependent measures (Popularity, Aggressiveness, and Intelligence person perceptions) were subjected to a 2 x 4 analysis of covariance. Target sex (female and male) and the four levels of sport preference (none, swimming, rugby, and football) were independent measures. The Popularity, Aggressiveness, and Intelligence person perceptions for the individuals expressing an interest in food rather than a sport content preference (i.e., the baseline persons) were included as covariates.

Popularity Person Perceptions

The univariate analysis of covariance for the Popularity person perception factor index yielded a significant target sex main effect [$F(1, 331) = 220.17, p < 0.0001$] and a significant target sex by condition interaction [$F(3, 331) = 2.71, p < 0.0452$]. Inclusion of the covariate also produced a significant effect [$F(1, 331) = 146.28, p < 0.0001$]. All other effects fell outside the conventional level of significance.

Examination of the means associated with the target sex main effect revealed that the female target ($M = 7.33$) was rated significantly higher on the Popularity factor index than the male target ($M = 5.09$).

The means for the target sex by sport fanship interaction are displayed in Table 1. As can be seen, male targets wearing a Swimming tee-shirt ($M = 4.65$) were rated significantly lower in Popularity as compared to males wearing a Football tee-shirt ($M = 5.44$) or Rugby tee-shirt ($M = 5.31$). Wearing an Auburn tee-shirt, indicating no sport preference, ($M = 4.96$) produced Popularity ratings for male targets intermediate to these

extremes. In contrast, Popularity ratings for female targets did not differ significantly across the different sport preferences or even no preference.

Intelligence Person Perceptions

The univariate analysis of covariance for the Intelligence person perception factor index yielded a significant target sex main effect [$F(1, 331) = 60.00, p < 0.0001$]. Inclusion of the covariate also produced a significant effect [$F(1, 331) = 81.44, p < 0.0001$]. All other effects fell outside the conventional level of significance.

Examination of means associated with the target sex main effect revealed that female targets ($M = 6.42$) were rated significantly higher on the Intelligence factor index than male targets ($M = 5.26$).

Aggressiveness Person Perceptions

The univariate analysis of covariance for the Aggressiveness person perception factor index yielded a significant target sex main effect [$F(1, 331) = 30.82, p < 0.0001$] and a significant condition main effect [$F(3, 331) = 30.88, p < 0.0001$]. Inclusion of the covariate also produced a significant effect [$F(1, 331) = 131.49, p < 0.0001$]. All other effects fell outside the conventional level of significance.

Examination of the means associated with the target sex main effect, displayed in Table 1, revealed that female targets ($M = 5.84$) were rated significantly higher on the Aggressiveness factor index than male targets ($M = 4.99$). Examination of the means associated with the sports fanship main effect revealed that targets, regardless of sex, wearing a Swimming tee-shirt ($M = 4.68$) were rated significantly lower in Aggressiveness as compared to those wearing a Rugby tee-shirt ($M = 6.59$). Those

wearing a Football tee-shirt ($\underline{M} = 5.37$) and those wearing an Auburn tee-shirt, indicating no sports preference, ($\underline{M} = 5.02$) were rated intermediate to these extremes.

Table 1

Perceptions of Peers as a Function of Sports Fanship

Perception	Gender of Target	Sports Fanship			
		None	Swimming	Football	Rugby
Popularity	Combined	6.14 _{ab}	5.87 _a	6.45 _b	6.41 _b
	Male	4.96 _{ab}	4.66 _a	5.44 _b	5.31 _b
	Female	7.39	7.40	7.45	7.08
Aggressiveness	Combined	5.02 _{ab}	4.69 _a	5.37 _b	6.59 _c

Note: Comparisons are across sports fanship conditions only (horizontal). Means having different lower-case superscripts differ at $p < .05$ by the Student Newman-keuls test.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study clearly illustrate that individuals utilize expressed sports preferences while formulating impressions of others. Also consistent with previously stated theoretical expectations, because the individuals' formulated perceptions were significantly mediated by the targets' sports tee-shirts, it can be suggested that most people create "snap judgments" of others based on their appreciation towards a certain sport.

Furthermore, the results also reveal the significant importance of expressing a sports preference in order to come across as either Popular, Intelligent, or Rebellious in the eyes of others. While males did judge females as more popular overall, there were no significant differences between the various sports enthusiasts. Nevertheless, females utilized males' sports preferences to a much more significant degree when formulating impressions regarding popularity personality traits. Accordingly, females, for example, judged males wearing a Swimming tee-shirt as much less popular than those wearing a Football or Rugby tee-shirt. Even males who were wearing the neutral Auburn tee-shirt and neglected to offer a favorite sport genre were viewed as more popular than those wearing the Swimming tee-shirt. Consistent with research expectations, it was also determined that males wearing the Football tee-shirt were viewed as the most popular by their female peers, as well.

Regarding a male's popularity based on his sports preference, these conclusive results mirror those of previous theoretical expectations. Typically, females find males who enjoy stereotypically and traditionally masculine sports to be much more desirable,

and therefore more popular, as well (Barber, et al., 2001). Due to social expectations and learned stereotyping, females tend to be attracted to males who fit into the manly, adrenaline-filled, testosterone-pumping genre of sports. This defines the norm in today's society, and those males who enjoy football and rugby are viewed by the opposite sex as more appreciated and more worthy of a Popular label.

Formulating an impression involving football and popularity begins at an early age. According to Barber, et al. (2001), children as young as grade-schoolers begin to associate popularity with belonging to the football team. Again, this stems directly from cultural stereotypes. In a high school setting, these jocks are presumed to be the happiest, have the most active social lives, and experience sexual intercourse more often than non-football players (Barber, et al., 2001). In a traditional high school, popularity and football team membership go hand in hand.

In present pop culture, the movie industry validates this correlation as well. The football player is always viewed as the beloved popular stud in movies such as Varsity Blues, Friday Night Lights, and Any Given Sunday. Even when a movie's plot is not focused around a football team, the football player is still the most popular character, as demonstrated by the jocks' roles in the teen thrillers I Know what you did Last Summer and Scream, who portrayed both dynamic social lives and sexual activities. Finally, even satire and spoof-driven movies, such as Revenge of the Nerds, have poked fun at how popular and desired by the opposite sex football players truly are.

At the far end of the spectrum, it is less obvious why females judged males as the least popular due to their fascination of competitive swimming. True, Hollywood has not released a movie portraying a swim team member as a Homecoming King nor does

competitive swimming have a large fan-based following, as sports television channels such as ESPN fail to promote or to attract attention to swimming. As football jerseys are sold around the country, enticing football worship, the Speedo simply is not, making swimming a much less exciting and much less popular sport in today's society.

However, the 2004 Summer Olympic Games, which were held in Athens, Greece, attracted a vast swimming fan base nation-wide as world record holder Michael Phelps quickly became a household name and the latest sports hero (Ginsburg, 2004).

Attractive, congenial, and bright, Phelps donned the covers of Sports Illustrated and Time magazines and was listed as a member of People's Top 25 Most Beautiful People's elite few. Nonetheless, while this young competitor demonstrated all that popularity in sports begs for, his fame was fleeting, as swimming is only enjoyed in this country every four years. "You're much more of a recognized swimmer with an Olympic medal, for sure," Phelps has commented" (Ginsburg, 2004, 1). Away from the Olympic games, competitive swimming is simply not a popular sport in today's society and social structures.

Besides the fact that swimming lacks a strong fan base and national coverage, as football is privy to, it is also interesting to scrutinize why females view the sport itself as less popular. Rugby is also neglected by ESPN and the average American does not even know how the game is played. Furthermore, rugby in America does not even have a Michael Phelps equivalent to invoke a fan base, yet females still found this sport to be more popular than swimming. Because this is an oddity and a deviation from what is expected, future research should examine this particular pattern involving the Swimming target person.

The person wearing the swimming tee-shirt in the study, for example, claims to *really enjoy the elegance of a swimming meet*. The word “elegance” especially should be further explored. Again, as previously mentioned, females are typically attracted to males who follow the stereotypical and traditional unwritten rules regarding their sports preferences (Harrison & Lynch, 2003). Today’s culture teaches us that a manly sport does not involve the word elegance at all; instead competition, aggressiveness, and beating his opponent is what males should, based on cultural stereotypes, enjoy most about a sport. According to Harrison & Lynch (2003), this traditional, masculine mindset is what draws females to males, and is possibly why the word “elegance” subconsciously turned off so many females in this study, making this the least popular target.

Future research involving the popularity of swimming should utilize different rhetoric in the supplemental dialogue. The word “elegance” leaves an impression of a docile, passive sissy, which, as Hollywood has demonstrated time and again, is not what females look for in a male sports fan. Having a male claim it’s the fierce competition of a swim meet or the adrenaline-filled anticipation at the finish line that excites him might lead to a more popular impression in the minds of females. Competitive swimming does demonstrate many traditionally masculine traits found in both football and rugby. It would be interesting if future research included some of these attributes and observe whether females find that target person to be much more desirable and much more popular, as well.

While the female targets were all viewed as more popular than the males, it is also interesting to discuss why each individual target female was not significantly judged as more or less popular than the next, as this contradicts research expectations. Why aren’t

females who enjoy swimming viewed as less popular than those who enjoy the rough and tumble of football? Again, society has created learned stereotypes that may have influenced the males in this study similar to how predisposed the females were, as well.

According to Harrison & Lynch (2003), because our culture allows females to enjoy more artistic and graceful activities, such as ballet, gymnastics, and synchronized swimming, it is also more socially acceptable for a female target to proclaim that she is intrigued by the elegance of swimming. Because this very feminine phrase parallels with how society frames a traditional female persona, the males in this study obviously found the swimming fan to be just as popular as the football and the rugby fan.

Future research should explore why the target females donning the more masculine sports tee-shirts, who are obviously deviating from society's norms of femininity and demureness, are still viewed as popular. One would expect that because these females enjoyed more aggressive activities, they would in turn annoy members of the opposite sex who would formulate more negative impressions. There may be two sound reasons behind this finding, which future research should more deeply develop.

First, in today's culture, it is more acceptable for a female to enjoy a male-dominated facet than for a male to enjoy a female-dominated aspect of society (Freitas, et. al., 1997). Females, for example, are viewed as powerful, strong, impressive women if they enter the work force as doctors, lawyers, business owners, and politicians; all careers that are more often occupied by males. Yet, it is typically still socially unacceptable for a heterosexual male to style hair, give pedicures, or offer fashion advice. Males are questioned as nurses and flight attendants, and are hardly ever found in day cares or as nannies. Even out of the workplace, females are able to wear a man's tee-shirt

while running errands, but if a man is spotted in a female's apparel, he is viewed as a sexual deviant and a taboo cross dresser. And lastly, females are considered sexy if they can change a flat tire, drive a nail, or rattle off random sport statistics. Yet, if a male uses nail polish, enjoys antiquing, or wants to rent a romance movie rather than a thriller, he is considered bizarre and even at times ridiculed.

This cultural double standard also relates to females and their sports preference. When ABC hired journalist Melissa Sparks to co-host Monday Night Football in 2000, ratings were at an all-time high. Because today's culture allows for females to enjoy more masculine sports, males formulate impressions of these females as cool, fun-loving, and enjoyable to be around; or as this study demonstrated: popular.

Secondly, another possible reason behind males viewing the Rugby and Football target females as equally popular as the Swimming target female is because they are simply fans of the masculine, aggressive sports and not actual participants. If the dialogue of the Football and Rugby female targets illustrated how much they loved to play the sports, then males might be either intimidated by these aggressive females or turned off by their culturally-deviant behavior (Harrison & Lynch, 2003). Thus, there is a promising possibility that males would dislike a female football player and view her as unpopular.

In this study, it can be assumed that the male targets participated in each of the sports at some competitive level, while the females did not and were simply fans. It would be interesting and beneficial to study in future research how males formulate impressions based on a female's actual participation in a sport. According to Harrison & Lynch (2003), it can be expected that males would view females who actually play

football and rugby as less popular than those females who compete in gymnastic events and dance competitions. Just as the WNBA is much less popular than the NBA, in a future study, it could possibly be concluded that while it is acceptable for a female to enjoy a masculine sport, it is less attractive for her to participate.

While sports and popularity go hand in hand, sports and intelligence are often disassociated with one another, which is why this study is a novel approach to finding a correlation between the two. It was theoretically expected that most effects would fall outside the conventional level of significance. Stereotypically, in the past, the traditional sports jock was also very unintelligent, air-headed, and completely dense, as illustrated over and over in pop cultural television shows such as Saved By the Bell and The Fresh Prince of Bel Air.

This overdone and very trite stereotype has dissolved somewhat by today's standards, as more and more sports heroes are actively promoting the importance of a strong educational background. It is also more obvious now than ever that in order to compete at the highest level in any of America's favorite pastimes, it takes much more than hefty muscles and physical strength. Legendary football player Emmett Smith very publicly obtained his college degree while playing for the Dallas Cowboys, while NFL brothers Tiki and Ronde Barber jumpstarted their own company's literacy awareness campaign (Duda, 2004). Not to be outshined by football, the NBA also impresses upon their fans the importance of a strong mind during its National Basketball Association's Read to Achieve reading campaign held every October (Ehren, 2002). Olympic hopefuls have a team of private tutors for their young athletes and professional sports heroes even

hire speaking coaches to perfect their interviewing skills, which proves that in order to be taken seriously in American sports, one must also portray intelligence and astuteness.

Nonetheless, past stereotypes of dumb jocks and air-headed cheerleaders may still affect individuals as they formulate an impression based on one's sports preferences. This may be why this study's results involving the Intelligence target persons were not significantly differentiated. Trying to escape past misconceptions, while not wholeheartedly ready to accept the current trend of the intelligent sports figure, it is understandable that one may be ambivalent while making this judgment.

A variable that also possibly contributed to the insignificant results regarding the Intelligence target persons, involves the fact that this study took place on a college campus. Because both the participants and the target persons were obtaining their college degrees and were probably reared in a household where education is valued, the targets could have been viewed as more intelligent than less. While this third variable is commonly over-looked, it occurs more often than not, as college students are frequently utilized in experimental research.

This possible limitation in the study's design may also be the motivation behind why males were viewed as less intelligent overall than females. Again, no matter a college-aged male's sports preference, this gender is typically viewed as less diligent and less committed than female students (Chang, Watkins, & Banks, 2004). College males tend to party more often and spend less time stressing about final grades than college females do (Poltavski & Ferraro, 2003), which could easily play into why this study also found males to be the less intelligent sex.

The results surrounding the aggressiveness of target persons parallel with common sense more apparently than the two prior targets. Along with theoretical expectations, it is also common sense to assume that enjoying a very hard-hitting, uncompromising, intense sport such as rugby would result in others formulating impressions, which elaborate on the very personality traits one utilizes in this full-contact sport. In other words, rugby, which was rated the most aggressive of the three sports, entices only the spirits of very forceful, powerful participants and fans, as it is one of the country's most physically demanding sports. Those who are timid, meek, or submissive would typically not be drawn to rugby, only strengthening the stereotypical ruthless, aggressive fan even more significantly. Obviously, when formulating an impression of a rugby fan, an individual will also extend the fierceness demonstrated on the playing field to other personality traits, as well.

Why, however, are the Swimming target persons viewed as the least aggressive, even falling below the neutral Auburn tee-shirted targets? Again, one can conclude that the rhetoric used in the target's dialogue suggests that he or she is more artistic, sophisticated, and even refined. The word "elegance" suggests an appreciation for the serenity and beauty of the sport, which is clearly a polarization, if not the exact opposite of aggressiveness. A fan who admires a sport's grace and of course "elegance" does not suggest that he or she is forceful, ruthless, or aggressive.

Mirroring the previous discussion involving the rhetorical analysis of the Swimming target persons' dialogue, future research should also explore how individuals formulate impressions involving the aggressiveness of target persons who claim it is the cut-throat, heart-pounding competition of swimming that wets their appetite. If the word

“elegance” was substituted with adjectives that are commonly utilized to describe other sports, such as football or rugby, would this alter the Swimming target person’s image to be more aggressive?

It could be theorized that this remote rhetorical alteration would significantly change the impression formation process in this study. One could easily conclude that competitive swimming would be viewed as more aggressive than the neutral Auburn tee-shirt target person. True, swimming is not a full contact sport, and therefore should still be expected to be viewed as less aggressive than both football and rugby. Nonetheless, by removing the word “elegance,” impressions formed involving a swim fan’s aggressive nature should intensify.

Along this same vein, it is very interesting that overall, females were viewed as significantly more aggressive than males in each of the sport categories. One can easily conclude that this is directly correlated to society’s norms and stereotyping. Today’s culture demonstrates that males, for example, must enjoy more aggressive activities than females. This is illustrated through toy companies creating playtime toys for little boys that promote rough-and-tumble horseplay and are more physically demanding than toys created for little girls. While marketing ploys sell sweet, docile, adorable plush dolls and cuddly stuffed animals to little girls, little boys are being sold wrestling action figures, tough-looking army men, and mutant robots that are designed to conquer their enemy. Even youth clothing lines demonstrate how males are considered more aggressive than females, as boy clothes are decorated with bold reds and hard blues, while little girls’ clothes are often softer pinks and pastel greens, lavenders, and baby blues.

Today's society does not stop at this young age when reinforcing male's aggressiveness, however. Even school-aged children are being inadvertently subjected to this stereotype. According to Espinosa, Sigman, Neumann, Bwigbo, & McDonald (1992), during recess at an average elementary school, young boys are much more likely to participate in aggressive, contact, organized activities such as dodge ball and kick ball than girls. Young girls, on the other hand, enjoy less combative activities such as hopscotch, swinging with friends, and jumping rope, while boys find these pastimes to be more of a bore (Espinosa, et al., 1992).

Accordingly, males and females react to aggression on the playground in two very divergent ways, as well. While boys actually bond over aggressive sports, respecting their opponents' talents and intimidating aggression, girls report that their feelings get hurt more easily and their self-esteem weakens when opponents act in threatening ways (Cunningham, Cunningham, Martorelli, Tran, Young, & Zacharias, 1998). While slogans such as "If you don't want to run with the big dogs, then stay on the porch," teach young boys to be tough and to react to their rival's competition in equally aggressive ways, they also instill the belief that competitive sports are defined by aggression, and if an individual does not believe in this mantra, then he cannot enjoy the sport. According to Cunningham, et al. (1998), for girls, however, the taunting and the cruelty of recess competition is not isolated on the playground, as so many take the antagonism to heart, lowering their self-worth at times.

Because society instills aggression into males at such a young age, it can be concluded that when formulating impressions of males, individuals already expect this sex to be aggressive to some extent (Barber, et al., 2001). During the snap judgment

process, the scale is set higher, so no matter the sport preference he promotes, being aggressive is simply assumed. When a male enjoys the full-contact sport of football, it does not surprise many females, as, stereotypically speaking, most males are implicitly assumed to revere the sport. True, an avid football fan may strike some females as more aggressive than a swimming fan. Yet, as previously discussed, males who enjoy a variety of sports are often subconsciously viewed by females as aggressive by nature.

Research tells us, however, that females are not assumed to be the more aggressive sex (Harrison & Lynch 2003), making the target females in this study a quintessential illustration of how unexpected it is when she enjoys an aggressive sport. Because a male's expectation of how aggressive a female will be is typically much lower, when a target female claims she loves a full-contact sport, his opinion of her aggressiveness will significantly heighten due to its unexpected nature. Since females are not stereotyped to appreciate rough-and-tumble play, when one does, she is judged as significantly more aggressive than a female who enjoys more docile, feminine activities. This study clearly provides accurate results that illustrate this assumption, as every female target was viewed as more aggressive than each male target; even the neutral sports fan.

Future research involving impression formation and perceptions of female aggressiveness should also involve the difference in judging those females who are simply fans of the rough-and-tumble sport and those who actually compete. Common sense suggests that males would formulate impressions of the females who participate in sports such as rugby and football as significantly more aggressive than those females who watch from the sidelines.

Beyond theoretical implications, the results of this study also suggest practical applications, as well. Primarily, the advertising industry could greatly benefit from this study's conclusive results. True, sports figures are often poised in television commercials flaunting their celebrity status. However, for years, companies selling products from tennis shoes to fast food chains to cars to, more recently, even beer have used the actual sport itself as a marketing tool. The intensity of a soccer match reminds the team to drink Gatorade to refuel their dehydrated bodies, preparing for the Olympic downhill ski team reminds a competitor to start her day with Folger's coffee, and crossing the finish line of a triathlon reminds the winner to choose Bayer for muscle relief. Even when there is no logical correlation between a sport and a product, such as a recent Coke advertisement, in which a basketball star finishes up the game with a long sip from his soft drink, the message is clear: sports sell products.

Accordingly, what can the advertising industry take from this study's results? If a manufacturer wishes to portray a certain vehicle as powerful, intense, unyielding, and aggressive to market to the average male twenty-something, casting a rugby team in the commercial would send a subliminal message to consumers that the product will valiantly surmount any type of obstacle it may encounter. According to this study's results, individuals formulate impressions surrounding rugby fans of both sexes as aggressive and steadfast, much like a vehicle manufacturer may wish to promote his or her product.

This ideology extends to the other two targets of this study, as well. If the same vehicle manufacturer wished to create an advertisement, which claimed the car is the most intelligent choice in order to market to middle-aged consumers or to those with families, a swimmer's sophistication and refinement would subliminally strengthen this

claim. And lastly, if the vehicle's marketing team wished to demonstrate how driving this car allures popularity to market to a younger demographic, a cast driving to a football game should be utilized.

The sport that scored the least in Popularity, the least in Aggressiveness, and the least in Intelligence should also be considered in advertising, as well. Swimmers do not promote popularity and should not be depicted in commercials for the latest teen apparel, just as football players do not promote intelligence and should not be depicted in financial advisory or investment firms' advertisements.

Secondly to the advertising industry, the business realm of society may also draw inferences from this study, as well. Because this study provides significant results claiming that individuals formulate judgments of others based on minimal information, it can be concluded that people in the workforce also create stereotypes and biases based on one's first impression. Consider this scenario: a young man who is proud of his four year, record-breaking college football career, decides to boast this on his resume. A company may find a member of a swim team, while possibly less successful than the football player, to be more intelligent and therefore hire him instead. The ex-football player may come across as more popular, but less intellectual, logical, or academic than the ex-swimmer, even though the employer's quick perception was based on one slight characteristic on his resume.

This study demonstrated how only one distinguishable character trait, the admiration for a certain sport, is utilized to elaborate to other personality aspects of that individual. Do women overlook a member of the swim team because they feel he will be too timid and meek on the dance floor? Do men trust female football fans' opinions on

how they should dress due to their appreciation for popular activities? Do parents distrust rugby players to nanny their children due to their wild, untamed demeanors? The ramifications of this study stretch well beyond the practical implications, such as those seeking profits and monetary gains in the business and advertising industries, and infiltrate society each and every day.

In conclusion, the results of this study suggest that sport preferences play a very important role throughout today's culture. The findings also illustrate that youth use these sports preferences to quickly categorize and judge others. Indeed, the perceptions formed in this study were strongly mediated by the specific sport preference expressed by the target persons. This suggests that individuals formulate quick judgments of others based solely on their expressed sports preferences.

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