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Female Athletes: Being both Athletic and Feminine

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ABSTRACT

Because athletics traditionally has been seen as incompatible with traditional roles for women, female athletes have been expected to experience gender role conflict as they attempt to identify with incompatible roles. However, while negative stereotypes of female athletes persist, research has found little such conflict. In this study, questionnaire and interview data from male and female college athletes and nonathletes suggest some explanations for this. The data showed: (a) Female athletes were accorded greater respect than were male athletes; (b) all groups' ratings of the femininity of female athletes were above the neutral point, though the ratings of men and nonathletes were significantly lower than those of women and athletes; and (c) consistent with the multiplicity perspective, female athletes reported experiencing their feminine and athletic identities as distinctively different aspects of self.

Introduction

Women's participation in college sports has increased dramatically since the passage of Title IX in 1972 (Women's Sports Foundation, 1998), but research over this period has failed to show that female athletes get the status, respect and approval that athletic participation brings to boys and men (Adler, Kless & Adler, 1992; Goldberg & Chandler, 1991; Williams & White, 1983). There are recent indications of some change in this regard (Finkenberg & Moode, 1996; Marsh, 1993; Suitor & Reavis, 1995; Weiss & Barber, 1995). However, Miller and Levy (1996) recently concluded, "Sports participation by females routinely carries a negative stigma" (p. 112). Because of this, and because traditional images of sports are seen as incompatible with traditional roles for women (Bunker, 1996; Desertrain & Weiss, 1988; Messner, 1988; Miller & Levy, 1996; Thirer & Wright, 1985), female athletes have been hypothesized to experience gender role conflict (Goldberg & Chandler, 1991; Holland & Andre, 1994; Miller & Levy, 1996), especially if they engage in sports traditionally regarded as more masculine (Koivula, 1995; Metheny, 1965; Sage

& Loudermilk, 1979). As Duquin (1988) explained over a decade ago, being feminine is incompatible with the "sado-asceticism" of aggressive sports, which are designed to prepare boys and young men for the physical sacrifices of adult competition, particularly war: "Females are expected to keep their feminine sympathies and values off the sporting field" (p. 37).

Thus, gender role conflict is purported to be generated by the dissonance of the female athlete's need to identify with two incompatible roles: the valued feminine role, and the unvalued, even stigmatizing, athletic role for girls and women. However, nearly two decades of research has failed to find much evidence of this role conflict in female athletes (Allison, 1991; Anthrop & Allison, 1983; Goldberg & Chandler, 1991; Miller, Heinrich & Cass, 1996; Miller & Levy, 1996; Sage & Loudermilk, 1979). Investigators have attempted to explain this apparent discrepancy by proposing that female athletes perceive either the feminine role or the athletic role differently than do female nonathletes (Desertrain & Weiss, 1988; Goldberg & Chandler, 1991; Miller & Levy, 1996; Sabo, 1988); that their superior psychological maturity and adjustment allow them somehow to overcome the conflict (Anthrop & Allison, 1983; Sage & Loudermilk, 1979); or that those who experience significant conflict withdraw from sports at an early age (Anthrop & Allison, 1983; Miller, et al., 1996; Sage & Loudermilk, 1979). These hypotheses are not well supported by consistent empirical evidence (Allison, 1991; Miller, et al., 1996; Sabo, 1988).

An alternative explanation for this lack of gender role conflict can be offered by the multiplicity of selves perspective, an idea widely accepted recently by self-psychology researchers (Ashmore & Ogilvie, 1992; Gregg, 1995; Harter, 1990, 1996; Markus & Herzog, 1992; Markus & Wurf, 1986; Marsh & Shavelson, 1985; Rosenberg, 1997; Rosenberg & Gara, 1985). Applied specifically to athletes, the idea is that being an athlete is simply one piece of a larger, multidimensional self-system (e.g., Goldberg & Chandler, 1991; Marsh & Jackson, 1986). In considering this idea of multiplicity of selves, researchers from the self-psychology tradition focus on understanding the many different selves of a person, what these consist of, and how they relate to each other. Everyone has multiple roles and identities, some very closely related, others more disparate. To multiplicity researchers, the self is a multifaceted social construction depending at least in part on one's social environment (Deaux, 1992; Markus & Cross, 1990; Rosenberg & Gara, 1985). Furthermore, the social context is vitally important in determining which "self" is dominant at any given time. For example, when with her teammates at practice, a young woman may express her aggressive, competitive self. When with her nonathlete girlfriends, she may express her playful, sociable self, and when participating in a study group she may become her studious, scholarly self.

It is important to note that the self is also a dynamic concept, both guiding one's behaviors and being modified by the people and events around one (Markus & Herzog, 1992; Markus & Wurf, 1986). Thus, while it is possible to think of the self as having a strong, stable core that guides one's actions, it is also possible to conceptualize the self as changing as the people and events around one change. These multiple identities one holds do not exist in isolation from each other. Some selves may be very similar; others quite disparate yet still contained within the one person. Each individual integrates her roles into an overall sense of self in different ways. Thus it is possible to conceive of oneself as having multiple, disparate roles, behaving differently in different situations, yet still having an overall sense of a coherent, unified self. Expressing different aspects of oneself while in different roles - even if both roles are salient in one's life -

need not mean that one feels conflicted by these differences. Indeed, a young woman can have a strong, healthy sense of who she is, even while that self may be expressed quite differently when she is in her feminine role versus her athletic role. However, self-discrepancy can be problematic when different aspects of the self are felt to be in conflict or incompatible (Harter, 1990; Higgins, 1987; Higgins, Klein & Strauman, 1987). Much of this research has focused on discrepancies between actual selves and idealized versions of the self (e.g., Eells & Leavenworth, 1997; Katz & Farrow, 2000; Langens, 2001; Orellana-Damacela, Tindale & Suarez-Balcazar, 2002; Sanchez-Branardos & Sanz, 1992).

If conflict or incompatibility between highly valued identities is problematic, how is it that female athletes do not report conflicts between athleticism and femininity? While women's participation in sports has increased dramatically in the past three decades, certain sports are still perceived as "masculine" and others as "feminine" (Koivula, 2001). Just as femininity has stereotypically come to be associated with traits such as gentle, nurturing, compassionate, and graceful, sports labeled as feminine are those that are less aggressive and emphasize aesthetics (Koivula, 2001; Methany, 1965). Even more importantly as relates to self-concept, negative stereotypes (that they are "butch", "lesbian", or "manly") of female athletes persist, particularly for women involved in traditionally "masculine" sports (Halbert, 1997; Kolnes, 1995; Krane, 2001; Theberge, 2000; Young, 1997). Yet in the face of these stereotypes, female athletes do not report gender role conflict (Allison, 1991; Anthrop & Allison, 1983; Goldberg & Chandler, 1991; Miller et al., 1996; Miller & Levy, 1996; Sage & Loudermilk, 1979). Rather, it seems a common strategy is to engage in identity management behaviors. Female athletes, again especially those participating in "masculine" sports (e.g., ice hockey, boxing, weight lifting), often report that they purposefully emphasize their femininity when not engaged in sports (Halbert, 1997; Kolnes, 1995; Krane, 2001; Theberge, 2000; Young, 1997). Furthermore, many emphatically deny being feminists (Duff & Hong, 1984; Young & White, 1995), and this is particularly true for younger women, though it seems to be a negative stereotype associated with the feminist label, not the actual ideals of feminism that they are rejecting (Young, 1997). It should be noted, however, that most of the research on identity management has focused on women engaged in sports that traditionally have been viewed as the most deviant and least feminine and hence the most stigmatizing, such as weight lifting, boxing, wrestling, and ice hockey. These issues may be less salient for participants in more "acceptable" sports.

Thus, it may well be that most female athletes in "acceptable" sports experience little or no gender role conflict because they psychologically separate supposedly incompatible roles as the multiplicity perspective suggests. Or, it may be that the two foundations of the gender role conflict idea--that the athletic role is not valued or respected for girls and women, and that female athletes are perceived as unfeminine--are not valid, at least for women engaged in the more "mainstream" sports commonly played in American high schools and colleges. Of course, these two propositions may not be mutually exclusive. Indeed, we first hypothesize that the role of athlete now is respected for women, by both women and men, as it traditionally has been for men, and that female athletes are not perceived by their peers as unfeminine. Furthermore, as predicted by the multiplicity of selves perspective, we also hypothesize that it is possible for a female athlete to be seen as both feminine and respected for her athletic roles because the issue of her femininity often is separated from the issue of her role as an athlete, thus allowing her to manage stereotypically incompatible identities without conflict. To investigate these hypotheses athletes

and nonathletes at a NCAA Division I university were questioned about these issues by both questionnaire and interview.

Method

Sample

Data were collected at a private university in the western USA which has a NCAA Division I-AAA (i.e., no football) athletic program. At the time of the study the university sponsored men's and women's teams in soccer, basketball, tennis, cross-country, and track, men's teams in golf and baseball, and a women's team in volleyball. The university is small for a NCAA Division I school (approximately 3000 students). It is located in a metropolitan area of approximately 1.5 million and draws students mostly from the western USA. Most students are of traditional college age (18 to 23 years of age), white, middle and upper-middle class, and live on campus in dormitories or in the neighborhoods surrounding the campus. Even though the athletic program is relatively small, the teams have been competitive in Division I. The majority of athletes in the program, and the large majority of those receiving athletic scholarships, were recruited by multiple Division I universities out of high school.

For quantitative measures, the sample of 565 students included 182 of the university's 189 athletes (109 men and 73 women, excluding only 7 athletes who worked on the study) and 383 nonathletes (153 men and 230 women). The nonathletes were selected using a purposive sampling technique. Questionnaires were distributed to students in 25 courses across the curriculum. This technique resulted in the inclusion of a diverse cross-section of the student body according to academic year, major and sex. Participants were predominately white (79%), with a minority of African Americans (3%), Asian Americans (6%), Hispanic Americans (3%) and other ethnic backgrounds (9%). Freshman constituted 33% of the sample, sophomores 14%, juniors 26%, seniors 26%, and graduate students 1%. The average age was 20.8 (range 17-72) with 92% of the sample falling into the traditional college student age range (17-23).

Qualitative data were obtained from interviews of 33 randomly selected athletes and 31 randomly selected nonathletes, 38 women and 26 men (85% of those invited agreed to be interviewed). Their average age was 20.4 (range 18-53) with 97% of them between 17 and 23.

Measures

A written questionnaire was administered which included basic demographic information (sex, age, year in school, major), questions about the sports played in college and in high school, and several questions about attitudes toward and perceptions of athletes and sports. The questionnaire was developed with the assistance of seven athletes and three non-athletes from the undergraduate programs, and one female graduate student who was also an assistant coach for the women's basketball team. This group assisted in the conceptual development of the questionnaire, suggested questions and the rewording of questions, and served for initial pilot testing of the questionnaire. Additional pilot testing was done by administering the questionnaire to students from other universities.

Face validity and pilot testing suggested 16 items to be potential indicators of students' degree of respect for male or female athletes and of their views on the femininity of female athletes. Anchors for the 1-5 response scale were "strongly agree" and "strongly disagree". To construct the respect and femininity Likert scales these items were subjected to factor analysis (principal components extraction and varimax rotation). Three scales emerged from this procedure: Respect for Male Athletes, Respect for Female Athletes, and Perceived Femininity of Female Athletes. Items were included in a scale if they had factor loadings above .40 and item-total scale correlations above .40. The Female Athlete Respect scale consisted of four items: "I have especially high respect for female athletes", "Female athletes receive more attention (from the media, fans, the university, etc.) than they should", "A female athlete should receive no more financial support from the University than any other woman on campus", and "Female athletes are very popular on campus". The Male Athlete Respect scale contained four items identical to these but with "male" replacing "female" in each item. The Perceived Femininity of Female Athletes scale contained two items, "Female athletes are not very feminine" and "Physically strong women are feminine". As we were interested in respondents' own perceptions of femininity as it relates to athletes, we did not provide a definition of femininity. Negatively worded items were recoded so that high scores on the scales indicate greater respect or femininity. Six items did not meet the scale construction criteria and so were dropped from the analysis. For the respect scales scores could range from 4 to 20; for the femininity scale, scores could range from 2 to 10.

In order to provide methodological cross-validation of the questionnaire data and to hear participants' explanations of their attitudes, interviews were administered by a group of trained and closely supervised student research assistants. Interviewers asked open-ended versions of selected questions from the questionnaire and used probes to encourage respondents to elaborate and explain their responses. Of relevance to the issue of multiplicity of self identity are two items: "Do you consider physically strong women to be feminine?" and "Respond to this statement: 'Female athletes are not very feminine.'" To enhance rapport, research assistants who were also female athletes interviewed female athletes; male non-athletes were interviewed by male non-athletes, and so on. This interview schedule was also pilot tested on students from outside the university. Interview responses were coded independently by two of the authors; discrepancies were resolved by discussion and consensus by these coders.

Procedure

The questionnaires were administered to the athletes by the researchers at a meeting of each team and to the nonathletes in the selected classes during class times. Interviews were individually scheduled and conducted. Participation was voluntary with written informed consent.

Results

Questionnaire

Table 1 presents descriptive statistics for the Female Athlete Respect, Male Athlete Respect, and Perceived Femininity of Female Athletes scales. For the respect scales, all group means are above the scale's neutral point of 12, indicating that respondents generally do respect both male

and female athletes. For the Perceived Femininity of Female Athletes scale, all group means are above the scale's neutral point of 6, indicating that respondents generally do see female athletes as feminine.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for Respect for Female Athletes, Respect for Male Athletes and Perceived Femininity of Female Athletes by Gender and by Athlete Status of Participants.

Participant Group	Respect for Female Athletes			Respect for Male Athletes			Perceived Femininity of Female Athletes		
	<i>m</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>m</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>m</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>
Women	14.9	2.8	297	13.3	2.6	297	7.0	1.4	297
Athletes	17.2	1.9	72	15.3	2.4	72	7.4	1.2	72
Non-Athletes	14.1	2.6	225	12.6	2.3	225	6.9	1.5	225
Men	14.6	2.3	257	14.1	2.7	257	6.4	1.5	257
Athletes	15.4	1.8	105	15.6	2.1	105	6.6	1.5	105
Non-Athletes	14.0	2.5	152	13.0	2.6	152	6.2	1.5	152
Total	14.7	2.6	554	13.6	2.7	554	6.7	1.5	554

For the respect scales, a 2 (gender of participant) X 2 (athlete status of participant) X 2 (respect for male/female athletes) ANOVA with repeated measures on the third variable (Table 2) showed that female athletes ($M = 14.7$) were accorded greater respect than were male athletes ($M = 13.6$), $F(1, 550) = 149.8, p < .01$. Athletes gave higher respect scores than did nonathletes, $F(1, 550) = 143.1, p < .01$. There was no significant gender difference, $F(1, 550) = 2.2$. All interaction effects were statistically significant but much smaller in magnitude than the two significant main effects. These interaction effects are not relevant to the issues being addressed and so are not described.

<u>Table 2. ANOVA of Respect for Male and Female Athletes by Gender and by Athlete Status.</u>			
Source	<i>df</i>	<i>F</i>	η^2
Gender of Participant	1	2.2	.00
Athlete Status of Participant	1	143.1**	.21
Respect for Male/Female Athletes	1	149.8**	.21
Gender X Respect	1	58.2**	.10
Status X Respect	1	5.1*	.01
Gender X Status	1	5.8*	.01
Gender X Status X Respect	1	21.0**	.04
Error	55	(1.7)	-
<u>Note.</u> Value enclosed in parentheses represents mean square error. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$.			

For the Perceived Femininity of Female Athletes scale, a 2 (gender of participant) X 2 (athlete status of participant) ANOVA (Table 3) showed that women ($M = 7.0$) perceived female athletes as more feminine than did men ($M = 6.4$), $F(1, 555) = 31.8$, $p < .01$ and that athletes ($M = 6.9$) perceived female athletes as more feminine than did nonathletes ($M = 6.6$), $F(1, 555) = 9.3$, $p < .01$. The interaction of gender and athlete status was not significant, $F(1, 555) = .02$.

<u>Table 3. ANOVA of Perceived Femininity of Female Athletes by Gender and by Athlete Status.</u>			
Source	<i>df</i>	<i>F</i>	η^2
Gender of Participant	1	31.8**	.05
Athlete Status of Participant	1	9.3**	.02
Status X Gender	1	.02	.00
Error	555	(2.1)	-
<u>Note.</u> Value enclosed in parentheses represents mean square error. ** $p < .01$.			

Another indication of respondents' perceptions can be seen in their responses to the one item in each scale that most directly refers to the constructs of respect and femininity. Only 4% of

respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed with the item, "I have especially high respect for female athletes", while 68% agreed or strongly agreed. Only 8% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the item, "Female athletes are not very feminine", while 62% disagreed or strongly disagreed.

Interviews

Analysis of interview responses to the statement "Female athletes are not very feminine" suggested five categories of response: (a) agreement; (b) disagreement without explanation; (c) disagreement, but it depends on the individual's presentation of self; (d) disagreement because athleticism and femininity are separate issues; and (e) other. Intercoder reliability was 94%. Table 4 presents these responses by gender and shows that only 5% of respondents agreed that female athletes are not feminine. For hypothesis testing, response categories a, b, c and e were collapsed and contrasted with response category d, which seems to represent the separation of roles that the multiplicity perspective suggests. A 2 (gender of participant) X 2 (athlete status of participant) logistic regression analysis showed that more women (40%; 44% of female athletes and 36% of female nonathletes) than men (15%) disagreed because they believe that athleticism and femininity are separate issues, Wald's $X^2 = 4.02$, $p < .05$. Athlete status was not significantly associated with these responses, nor was there a significant interaction.

Table 4. <u>Interview Responses to "Female athletes are not very feminine" by Gender.</u>					
	Agree	Disagree	Depends	Separate	Other
Men	2 (8%)	7 (27%)	12 (46%)	4 (15%)	1 (4%)
Women	1 (3%)	9 (24%)	13 (34%)	15 (40%)	0 (0%)
Total	3 (5%)	16 (25%)	25 (39%)	19 (30%)	1 (2%)

Analysis of responses to the interview question "Are strong women feminine?" suggested four categories of response: (a) no, they are not; (b) yes, they are; (c) it depends on their physique; and (d) it depends on their behavior or presentation of self. Intercoder reliability was 100%. Table 5 presents these responses by gender and shows what while most men stated that strong women are not feminine, women were most likely to state that femininity depends on one's physique (42%) or to state that strong women are feminine without offering an explanation (34%). For hypothesis testing, response categories b, c, and d (all of which at least partially endorse the femininity of strong women) were collapsed and contrasted with response category a. A 2 (gender) X 2 (athlete status) logistic regression analysis showed that more men (54%) than women (8%) perceived strong women not to be feminine, Wald's $X^2 = 13.19$, $p < .01$. Athlete status was not significantly associated with these responses, nor was there a significant interaction.

	No	Yes	Physique	Behavior
Men	14 (54%)	5 (19%)	5 (19%)	2 (8%)
Women	3 (8%)	13 (34%)	16 (42%)	6 (16%)
Total	17 (27%)	18 (28%)	21 (33%)	8 (12%)

Because the issue of physique figured prominently in the explanations of many women and because such responses, relating to body image rather than to strength, seem to speak to the issue of separation of feminine (body image relevant) and athletic (strength relevant) roles, a second analysis focused on this issue. All responses (not just those in category c, above) were recoded to identify all that alluded to body builders or to muscularity or bulk as causing women to be seen as less feminine. Intercoder reliability was 97%. These data show that 59% of female athletes mentioned this concern with muscularity compared to 38% of female non-athletes, 36% of male athletes, and none of the male non-athletes. A 2 (gender of participant) X 2 (athlete status of participant) logistic regression analysis showed that women mentioned this concern more than did men, Wald's $X^2 = 6.22, p < .02$, as did athletes more than non-athletes, Wald's $X^2 = 5.56, p < .02$. The interaction was not significant.

Discussion

These findings provide support for the hypothesis that collegiate female athletes are respected and are seen as feminine by men and women, athletes and non-athletes alike. Not surprisingly, athletes accorded more respect to female athletes than did non-athletes, but even the non-athletes' respect ratings were, on average, positive. Media coverage of women's sports may play a role in shaping these attitudes. Based on interviews of female college athletes, Duff, Hong and Royce (2001) concluded that media coverage of their sports increases the status of female student athletes among their peers. As one woman was quoted as saying, "The local paper devoted a whole section to our high school's sports. When the rest of the non-athlete student body sees that the athletes are receiving praise and attention from the community they may perceive them as more important" (p. 5).

Also of social significance is the finding that the non-athletes perceived female athletes as less feminine than did the athletes, suggesting that perhaps traditional stereotypes about female athletes are stronger in the non-athlete population. Similarly, men perceived female athletes as less feminine than did women, again suggesting that traditional stereotypes might be stronger in the "out group" than in the "in group" to whom the stereotypes are personally relevant. For both the role conflict hypothesis and for the multiplicity of selves perspective, it is, of course, what the female athletes themselves perceive that is most crucial. However, these results also suggest that female athletes still struggle with stereotyped perceptions of them.

Responses of the smaller interview sample are consistent with the questionnaire results and may help to understand these findings. Of those women who elaborated upon their reasons for disagreeing with the statement that female athletes are not very feminine, the most frequent

explanation was to explicitly point out that athleticism and femininity are separate issues. This supports our second hypothesis about multiplicity of selves. To quote one of the female nonathletes, "Femininity has nothing to do with athleticism." Expanding on this issue of separation of roles, are these statements by female athletes: "On the field I can be aggressive and tough, but when I step off the field I put on a dress. I can be athletic and feminine." "Players are players on the field, and off the field they are different people." "On the court, field, etc. [female athletes] are aggressive. Off the court they are regular women--gentle, kind, etc." "I make an effort to put on makeup and dress up after practice so people don't see a boy, but a girl." Consistent with the finding that they are perceived as less feminine by men and by female nonathletes, it seems that some women are engaging in identity management behaviors.

Not surprisingly, while some men did mention this idea of separation of roles, it was more commonly mentioned by women, to whom the issue of femininity is most personally relevant. While almost all of the men did say that female athletes are feminine, they often also stated that femininity is dependent upon the way women present themselves. While this can be thought of as alluding to the idea of different roles and the management of identity, it is not the explicit separation of roles mentioned by the women. However, while these results do speak positively toward the advancement of gender equality in terms of sports participation, it is important to note that stereotypes about femininity are still pervasive. To quote one of the male athletes, "I've seen women who are very aggressive on the court, but are the cutest, quietest little things off the court." While this man does appear to acknowledge the separation of role expectations, he does so in a stereotyped way.

To the question "Are physically strong women feminine?" a clear gender difference again emerged, with far more men giving an unqualified "no." Women were more likely to give either an unqualified "yes" or to state that it depends on the woman's physique. In particular, female body builders and other women with bulky muscles were mentioned by many, especially by the female athletes, as being not feminine. For example, one female athlete said, "Body builders are not feminine. That is gross!" Another stated, "Tone is good but bulging muscles are not."

There is a strong perception that athleticism and femininity are separate issues and that being an athlete does not preclude a woman from also being feminine: she simply expresses her feminine side outside of her sport. Interview responses suggest that it is not athletics specifically but one's physique and one's self-presentation that may affect perceptions of femininity, which is consistent with other research (Duff, Hong & Royce, 1999; Kolnes, 1995; Krane, 2001; Maguire & Mansfield, 1998; Markula, 1995). Men are not the only culprits; the women in our study express similar stereotypes about what it means to be feminine. This particularly emerged in women's negative attitudes toward body builders. Perhaps it is these seemingly pervasive stereotypes about femininity that drive the need for women to separate their athletic and feminine roles and to take steps to emphasize their femininity "off the field" (Krane, 2001; Young, 1997). Men do not need to do this because masculinity and athleticism traditionally are seen as compatible. Perhaps femininity no longer needs to pervade everything a woman does. While the definition of femininity per se may not have changed substantially, it is possible for a woman to engage in highly competitive sports (as long as she is not too muscular, like a body builder) without losing the perception that she is also feminine because multiple role identities can be

maintained without conflict (Deaux, 1992; Rosenberg & Gara, 1985).

It appears from the interviews of the female athletes that they do perceive themselves as having both a feminine and athletic identity and that each can be salient at different times. Few report a purposeful adoption of a more feminine profile. While some do relate their femininity to presentation issues (for example, wearing make-up and a dress), these typically are reported as indicators of that feminine self, not as purposeful strategies to make others acknowledge their femininity. Rather, it appears that these collegiate athletes have been able to integrate these distinctly different identities into their sense of self and are not conflicted by differences between them. Rather than manage their "off-court" presentation in response to stereotypes and discrimination, they seem comfortable with both identities.

Of course, these results may not apply to all female athletes or throughout our culture. Our sample of NCAA athletes is a rather elite group, and younger or less successful female athletes, or those engaged in more stigmatizing sports (Halbert, 1997; Krane, 2001; Young, 1997) may experience these issues differently. Similarly, older, younger, or less educated nonathletes may have less positive perceptions of female athletes. Still, these findings call into question the bases of the proposition that female athletes must experience conflict between incompatible role expectations by being both a woman and an athlete. If the athletic role for (at least some) women is highly respected and also is seen as not detracting from the feminine one, and if female athletes can maintain a psychological separation of the athletic self from the feminine self, there would appear to be no basis for dissonance, and hence no reason to expect female athletes to experience gender role conflict because of their athletic participation. It may well be that, as Giuliano, Popp and Knight (2000) concluded, "the gap between the 'typical female athlete' and the 'typical female' is narrowing" (p. 177).

The role conflict idea once may have made sense, but perhaps it no longer does, given today's high female participation rates in sports throughout the school years and the high profiles and media coverage in the USA of female athletes in Olympic and World Cup soccer and Olympic and professional league basketball, traditional bastions of male athletes. Although stereotypes of the femininity of female athletes persist (Halbert, 1995; Krane, 2001; Kolnes, 1995; Young, 1997), it seems that many female athletes are able to maintain strong identities as both athletic and feminine by psychologically separating these two aspect of self. While this strategy may perpetuate the socially constructed athletic versus feminine discrepancy (Krane, 2001), it may also help many female athletes reconcile potentially conflicting roles. At this point, research might most productively be directed at trying to understand the psychological processes used by female athletes to manage potentially conflicting roles and identities. Further, it would be interesting to investigate how these processes compare to those used by women in other traditionally masculine roles (e.g., construction worker, business executive) and by men in traditionally feminine roles (e.g., nurse, homemaker).

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