

Gendered Heroism: An Analysis of the 2006 Winter Olympic Games

Abstract

This study analyzed the televised narratives of athletes shown during NBC's coverage of the 2006 Winter Olympic Games. The researcher applied three heroic archetypes of Campbell and Jung- the warrior, the altruist, and the orphan, to each athlete in order to determine whether or not the media portrayed male and female athletes differently. Findings suggest that male and female athletes were not portrayed equally. Male warriors were more likely to be celebrated only as warriors, whereas female athletes were celebrated using a combination of the three hero-types.

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The Power of Myth

Myths have existed in every society. Be it in a primitive or modern culture, myths are created in order to understand and give meaning to human life. According to Mark Schorer (1946) myths are

...the instrument by which we continually struggle to make our experience intelligible to ourselves. A myth is a large, controlling image that gives philosophical meaning to the facts of ordinary life...A mythology is a more or less articulated body of such images, a pantheon. Without such images, experience is chaotic, fragmentary and merely phenomenal (p. 355).

According to world renowned mythologist Joseph Campbell (1949), myths play a role in establishing the attitudes, values and beliefs of a society on two levels. Campbell (1949) describes myths as purveyors of a society's conscious and subconscious mind, and it is through this ability to transcend the collective conscious and subconscious that myths hold great power and importance within a culture. Foster (1984) explains the power of the myth by stating, "myths are parables that convey their deep meanings- directly through the subconscious. In myth, narrative is not as psychologically meaningful as are images or symbols or themes, although plot is the only element that many people retain in their conscious memory... The combination of subconscious messages and repetition make myth so powerful that it has been characterized as frightening" (p. 26).

According to Foster (1984) myths are shaped in the form of parables or stories that are continually repeated within a culture through a specific medium. William Wright (2005) states that myths take on the form of narratives because story telling is the primary

means through which mankind has communicated throughout time. Wright (2005) states, “stories are intrinsic to being human; indeed, they are essentially what make us human. Put another way, stories are intrinsic to language; they are the logical necessary extension of the human use of language” (p. 146). He explains that narratives or stories have the ability to “simplify and arrange aspects of the world (concepts) into connected, understandable sequences” (Wright, 2005, p. 146). Since myths attempt to teach or give deep insight into (be it consciously or subconsciously) the complicated values, attitudes, and beliefs, of a society to its citizens, it is necessary for them to take the shape of the narrative or story, the most understandable genre to the human mind. The mediums through which narrative myths penetrate society have changed, from primitive oral traditions, to print, and presently, to new visual technologies such as television (Foster, 1984). The power of myth in narrative form to create, reinforce, and reflect deep cultural ideology, however, has not decreased. It has merely evolved.

The Hero Myth

Campbell (1949) argues that while some myths are culturally exclusive, the myth of the hero transcends time and all cultures. Psychologist Carl Jung, known for his extensive work on archetypes, dreams, and the human unconscious, states that “The myth of the hero is the most common and best known myth in the world...It has an obvious dramatic appeal, and a less obvious, but nonetheless profound, psychological importance” (1983, p. 101). Both Jung and Campbell argue that the hero myth exists in all cultures because it serves a universal and necessary purpose in each: “hero myths are

found all over the world; and, from whatever culture they originate, show striking similarities” (Jung, 1983, p. 98). The hero myth establishes and reinforces the physical, intellectual, and emotional, attributes of the ideal human being. Society holds these attributes highest regard.

The hero myth provides an understandable human narrative that allows society to grasp and put a tangible face to what at times can be intangible concepts such as virtue, vice, struggle, love, and suffering. Wright (2005) notes, “it should be remembered that all heroes- the idea of the hero- are inherent in the structure of stories, so that any analysis of heroes, even popular heroes, concerns the basic issues of social explanation, not just transient issues” (p. 146). Pearson (1986) states that “heroes from the time immortal have lived for something greater than themselves...heroes have a transcendent function, bringing renewed life not only to themselves but to the world” (p. 123).

According to Jung (1983), the physical manifestations of mythic heroes may change and evolve simultaneously as societies and cultures evolve; however, certain core characteristics remain constant, forming what both Campbell (1949) and Jung (1983) describe as the ideal hero archetype. Jung states that this “archetype does not correspond to the actual manifestations produced by any particular culture... it underlies all manifestations produced by all cultures” (1983, p. 98). However, several different levels or stages of this archetypal hero exist and coincide with varying stages of a hero’s mythic journey, or as Campbell (1949) describes it, the various stages of hero transformation. For the purpose of this study, it is necessary to give a working definition of these archetypes and how they relate to gender roles.

The Warrior Hero

The most common and popular archetype in hero myths is the warrior hero. The warrior hero is the most recognizable hero in ancient myths for he is the well known dragon slayer, the tyrant killer, the brave warrior charging into battle, the champion of the Gods, or the defender of the people. The modern warrior hero however, has evolved and may be less recognizable by ancient standards, and yet, he is just as prevalent. In her book *The Hero Within*, Pearson (1986) writes

...the Warrior is the detective hunting down the criminal, the comic-book superhero fighting against evil (for truth, justice, and the American way), the soldier going off to war. The archetype is also expressed in competitive sports, the corporate jungle, political campaigns, liberation movements, labor unions, and power struggles between co-workers, friends, and lovers (p. 111).

The warrior hero exhibits specific characteristics that set him apart from all of mankind. He embodies the “sacred warrior virtues- courage, fortitude, and endurance” and seems to fight with a fierce spirit that only God’s seem to possess (Pearson, 1986, p. 101).

Campbell (1949) writes, “The stanza of the hero-bard resounds with the magic of the word of power; similarly, the sword edge of the hero-warrior flashes with energy of the Creative Source” (p. 337). Apparent in the name, the warrior hero is associated with battling, aggression, physical and mental superiority, and courage over all of his peers. The warrior was the ancient gladiator and the hunter; he is exalted in every culture despite varying visages. For example, the ancient Greeks exalted Aristides; the Romans hailed Hercules, and the English told tales of King Arthur and the Knights of the Round

Table. The warrior hero archetype follows a similar path in most myths; “the hero goes through a series of life threatening adventures, the more difficult the situations, the more fascinating the story. But the hero never gives up” and “triumphs over seemingly impossible odds” (Pearson, 1986, p. 100). It is important, however, to understand that this ideal warrior archetype, the most common and popular in all cultures, is traditionally a male figure. He embodies what patriarchal societies of the past, and perhaps, the present, have deemed ideal masculine characteristics.

Men have traditionally played the role of the warrior hero myths throughout time. The traits of the warrior hero are what most societies view as masculine in nature; aggression, power, strength, speed, skill, and courage. Pearson (1986) states that “historically, women, racial minorities, and the working class all have been culturally defined as inferior” (p. 103). If the qualities of a hero embody the characteristics that are most respected in a given society, and if nearly all societies are patriarchal and male dominated, then it is understandable that the warrior hero has for the most part, been portrayed in masculine form in the past. There have been female warrior heroes and myths, such as Joan of Arc, Artemis, and the Chinese warrior Mu Lan; however, they are few and far between, acting as mere outliers or exceptions to the male dominated role.

The Altruist

Campbell (1949) found that women throughout mythology played secondary roles in hero myths. Women acted in supporting roles such as the earth mother, victim (aka: damsel in distress), and temptress. However, one archetype, though much less common in

hero mythology, is the altruist hero. This hero archetype is considered feminine, and it juxtaposes the male warrior hero.

The characteristics of the altruist archetype, also referred to as the martyr archetype, are described by Campbell (1949) in the following passage:

Endowed with a pure understanding, restraining the self with firmness, turning away from sound and other objects, and abandoning love and hatred; dwelling in solitude, eating but little, controlling the speech, body, and mind, ever engaged in meditation and concentration, and cultivating freedom from passion; forsaken conceit and power, pride and lust, wrath and possessions, tranquil in heart and free from ego- he becomes worthy of becoming one with the imperishable (p. 354).

In this excerpt, Campbell identifies the altruist archetype using male qualifiers because his work defines the altruist archetype as another level or stage of the hero in a male dominated myth. Pearson (1986) argues, however, that the altruist has evolved to embody feminine heroic qualities. An altruist is defined as nurturing, self-sacrificing, humble, kind hearted, loving, and beautiful. These warrior and altruist archetypes are rooted in the myths and traditions of the earliest civilizations:

Hunters and gatherers provide the deep background for the Warrior and Altruist archetypes, which in turn, define why men and women often seem so different. Male culture is derived from the Warrior tradition (hunter) and female culture from the Altruist tradition (gatherer). Within these ancient gender roles, men organized to kill prey, which evolved into killing threatening or competing hunters, clans, or tribes. Women organized to care for children and each other as

they wandered over the plains or through the brush in search of food” (Pearson, 1986, p. 97).

Does this concept of gendered heroism apply to the heroes of modern American culture today?

Jung (1983) argues that the myths of heroes evolve as society evolves and that they will reflect the dominant ideology of the time period. What type of heroes does modern American society embrace and where do these heroes lie along gender lines? Is our concept of the hero still formed from a patriarchal “man’s world” or has the women’s emancipation and liberation movement begun to change the deep rooted male hegemony of traditional society? The answers might suggest a great deal about beliefs, attitudes, and values of gender roles in our society today. Before one begins to evaluate a gendered concept of heroism, however, one must first understand how these modern hero narratives reach the modern masses today.

Other Mythic Archetypes

While this research focuses specifically on conflicting nature of the warrior and altruist archetypes, Campbell also discusses several other archetypes that represent various stages of the hero’s mythic journey. Pearson (1986) states that six archetypes exist: the innocent, the orphan, the wanderer, the altruist, the warrior, and the magician. When the hero first begins his journey, he exhibits characteristics similar to the innocence of the child; Pearson likens this archetype to the “developmental stage in growing up” (1986, p. 37). The innocent is void of negative feelings of grief, pain, hatred or

disappointment. At this stage the hero is in a child-like state, where he lacks life experience, and depends on others for guidance and care. Pearson (1986) exemplifies the innocent archetype in the story of Adam and Eve. Before their fall from grace, Adam and Eve are innocents; they know only positive human experience; they are sinless, and they are parented by God. Therefore, characteristics of the innocent include dependence, immaturity, and youth. The innocent archetype marks only the beginning of the hero's journey and archetypal evolution. At some point, the mythic hero will experience a fall from this virginal or childlike state and move to a different archetypal state, such as the orphan or the wanderer.

The innocent, the orphan and the wanderer archetypes all share similar characteristics. The orphan archetype follows the innocent and is characterized by some form of abandonment, victimization, or realization that the world is a cruel and unforgiving place. The wanderer archetype occurs when the hero figuratively or literally begins his journey to greatness. According to Pearson (1986), the wanderer archetype is "exemplified by stories of the knight, the cowboy, and the explorer who set off alone to see the world. During their travels they find a treasure that symbolically represents the gift of their true selves" (p. 66).

The last two archetypes must also be addressed: the magician and the lover. To Campbell (1949) the lover archetype is not representative of a stage or level of the hero's mythic journey. Instead, the lover archetype is a character role that plays an important supporting character role in the hero's journey. The lover archetype represents the well known damsel-in-distress figure or victim of evil in hero myths. Campbell (1949) writes,

She is the Maiden of the innumerable dragon slayings, the bride abducted from the jealous father, the virgin rescued from the unholy lover. She is the ‘other portion’ of the hero himself- for ‘each is both’: if his stature is that of the world monarch she is the world, and he is the warrior, she is fame. She is the image of his destiny which he is to release from the prison of enveloping circumstances” (p. 342).

Females have played the part of the lover throughout traditional hero myths for centuries.

The magician archetype is extremely powerful. The magician is symbolic of the final transformation of the hero. Throughout the hero’s journey, it is common for him to be aided, guided, or protected by some higher power. Common examples of magician myths are the Gods which protected ancient Greek heroes, King Arthur’s wise and powerful teacher, Merlin, or various religious leaders of the past that perform miracles. At some point in the hero’s journey, he moves from depending on these other higher powers, and instead focuses inward to the higher power and strength within himself that existed all along. Essentially he becomes an all powerful magician. With his new found wisdom and power, he reaches a near god-like state.

Television: The Modern Purveyor of Myth

The myths of mankind have been passed on to citizens of a particular culture through various mediums throughout the ages through mediums such as paintings, songs, and literature. However, since the 1950s, some scholars argue that television and the mass media have replaced traditional mythology as “the major source of the mythological

nourishment most people require” (Foster, 1984, p. 26). There are striking similarities between functions of myths of the past and functions and purposes of the mass media in modern American society. Myths provide ways for which society can organize and simplify complicated, intangible concepts. Wahlstrom and Deming (1980) state that “from within culture, myths do not appear to be myths, but rather expressions of accepted ideals. Functionally, myth organizes our perceptions; it is a coherence for our beliefs, values, and behaviors” (p. 413). The ability of myths to perpetuate, reflect, and maintain a dominant ideology is strikingly similar to the purpose and effects of the mass media, and more specifically, television.

Several theories on the effects and purpose of the mass media in modern American society suggest that mass communication serves the function of transmitting traditional myths, and in some ways, the mass media may be more influential than past channels. The mass media’s stories, specifically those seen on television, may be traditional myth “transfigured” or “reborn” to fit a technologically advanced, modern society. In the following passage Koivula (1999) describes the power of the mass media:

Mass media is a powerful factor which influences our beliefs, attitudes, and the values we have of ourselves and others as well as the world surrounding us.

Media does not merely communicate and reflect reality in a more or less truthful way. Instead, media production entails a complex process of negotiation, processing, and reconstruction. It not only offers us something to see, but also shapes the way in which we see by creating shared perceptual modes. Media messages are used and interpreted by audiences according to their own cultural, social, and individual circumstances (p. 589).

Like the traditional definition of myth, Koivula suggests that the mass media may have a powerful influence on both the individual as well as society's collective psyche, to create, teach, perpetuate, and reflect accepted ideologies. Leverette (2005) suggests that myths ask questions that mass media today has the ability to answer. According to Leverette (2005), "Myths provide answers to four great questions. Who am I? Why am I here? Where am I going? How ought I to live" (p. 6). Working under the assumption that mass media today is the modern purveyor of myth as well as the answer to yesterday's traditional concept of the myth, the following sections give a brief theoretical framework into mass media effects research. For the purpose of this study, it will concentrate on the theories behind one specific medium of the mass media- television.

Social Cognitive and Modeling Theory

Like the ability of myths to teach and organize concepts, communication scholars have studied the ability of television to teach and reinforce behaviors, attitudes, and beliefs of its viewers. The earliest of these theories was Albert Bandura's social cognitive theory of media effects. Social cognitive theory works under specific assumptions of human development. Bandura's (2001) social cognitive theory, also referred to as social learning theory, operates under the assumption that human nature

...is a vast potentiality that can be fashioned by direct and observational experience into a variety of forms within biological limits. To say that a major distinguishing mark of humans is their endowed plasticity is not to say that they have no nature or that they come structureless (Midgley, 1978). The plasticity,

which is intrinsic to the nature of humans, depends upon neurophysiological mechanisms and structures that have evolved over time (p. 266).

Bandura (2001) focused on the unique ability of human beings to evolve and mold behavior through both direct and indirect experience. Bandura (2001) argues that the media serve as a medium through which human beings may learn behavior by indirect means.

Bandura (2001) does not believe, however, that human beings learn behaviors, attitudes, values, and beliefs solely from the mass media. There are several other factors that influence what he views as extremely malleable human behavior. Bandura (2001) does note that as modern society becomes more reliant on technology and the mass media, instead of direct human interaction and tangible social networks, human behavior will more likely frequently be molded by what they see on the television screen, than what they directly experience:

In some instances the media both teach new forms of behavior and create motivators for action by altering people's value preferences, efficacy beliefs, outcome expectations, and perception of opportunity structures. In other instances, the media teach, but other adopters provide the incentive motivation to perform what has been learned observationally. In still other instances, the effect of the media may be entirely socially mediated. That is, people who have had no exposure to the media are influenced by adopters who have had the exposure and then, themselves, become the transmitters of the new ways. Within these different patterns of social influence, the media can serve as originating, as well as reinforcing, influences (p. 267).

While the level and extent to which the mass media may influence or teach behavior differs depending on the individual and amount of media exposure, Bandura's social cognitive theory is a driving force in communication research today, especially in the realm of gender studies.

Growing from Bandura's social cognitive theory, is the concept of modeling. Emerging from his famous "Bo Bo Doll" experiment, in which children were found to mimic violent behavior after what they viewed on television, Bandura posed what is known as the modeling theory of media effects (Sayre and King, 2003). This theory proposed that "modeling may occur either through direct imitation, where individuals directly replicate behavior they observe in the media, or through identification, where individuals do not directly replicate behavior, but they behave in ways that reflect and relate, generalized responses" (Sayre and King, 2003, p. 109). In its basic form, both the social cognitive theory and modeling theory argue suggest "people model behaviors after what they see in the mass media" and that "observers can acquire or learn behaviors from the media in the same manner that they can learn from observation in any other context" (Sayre & King, 2003, p. 99).

Cultivation Theory

Through his research on both television violence and the cultural indicators project beginning in America in the early sixties, George Gerbner (1998) theorized that television had the ability to reinforce or teach societal values. Gerbner (1998) found that television, cultivates "...through a set of coherent messages and images" (p. 177), the

overall cultural values, beliefs and attitudes about the real world based on the world they view through the media, specifically on television. Gerber (1998) states

Television is a centralized system of storytelling. Its drama, commercials, news, and other programs bring a relatively coherent system of images and messages into every home. That system cultivates from infancy the pre-dispositions and preferences that used to be acquired from other primary sources... Transcending historic barriers of literacy and mobility, television has become the primary source of socialization and everyday information. (p. 177).

Our cultural environment today is shaped not by traditional cultural forces, but rather by marketing and the powerful conglomerates within our society, and if “broadcasting is the most centralized, homogenized, and globalized medium,” then one can conclude that the media has played a large role in our society’s culture (Gerbner, 1998, p. 176).

Gerbner studied the extent to which the mass media has permeated the American household. His research on the mass media can be directly applied to the evolution of the traditional myth in societies before the mass media age. Gerbner would argue that today’s myths and narratives are not told by traditional, responsible sources that have a deep seeded commitment to human society. Modern myths instead are told by the mass media. Gerbner (1998) writes,

For the first time in human history, children are born into homes where mass produced stories can reach them on the average of more than 7 hours a day. Most waking hours, and often dreams, are filled with these stories. The stories do not come from their families, schools, churches, neighborhoods, and often, not even

from their native countries, or in face, from anyone with anything relevant to tell
(p. 176).

What is a more basic definition of myth than a “mass produced story” told through a variety of respectable sectors of a culture or society? Myths are no longer told by traditional sectors of society; they are told by television. This according to Gerbner, and many other television critics, can be detrimental to modern American society because the mass media lack the social conscience of traditional sources. The last theory discussed in this section elaborates on both Bandura’s and Gernber’s media effects theories and will serve as a segue into the critical feminist perspective of myth, media, and the modern hero.

Framing Theory

Tuchman states that “Television coverage is a frame, a window on the world, through which we learn of ourselves and others (1978, cited in Tuggle, et al., 2002, p. 362). These frames into the world, according to framing theory, help build our perception of reality in the real world through the simplified process of passively viewing television. Sayre and King (2003) summarize framing theory by stating:

Framing theory argues that people use expectations to make sense of everyday life and that our expectations are based upon previous experience derived from media communications. Mass media are a social agent framing our expectations about a dramatic worldview of consumption....Mass media influence us to believe in a

dramatic structure that drives the conflicts and resolutions of our private and public lives (p. 11).

Framing theory proposes that the mass media decide what the public sees and how they see it. According to Tuggle, et al. (2002), it is a matter of media selection and salience. However, this ability of the mass media to select what to present and how to present it, especially in the forms of narratives, can have deleterious effects on the public's actual perception of reality. Through the lens of the framing theory, some scholars suggest that the media perpetuates stereotypes that may serve to oppress or harm specific groups or sectors of society (Holstein, 2003). According to the majority of critical feminist scholars, women have suffered from media framing and ensuing gender stereotypes. They have accused the media of perpetuating male hegemony on all levels of society.

The Critical Feminist Perspective- Media and Myth

Pearson (1986) states that myth is a powerful force in human society; however, she notes that myths can have both a negative and positive influence on a culture. While myth can maintain, teach, simplify, and reinforce positive and valuable community ideology, she also recognizes mythology's "historically oppressive downside" (p. 115). Feminist scholars also recognize the oppressive nature of the mass media. Himmelstein (1984) writes:

Television, through its uses of a powerful language comprising images, words, gestures, clothing, settings, music, and sounds, has become one of our society's

principle repositories of ideology. Ideology is a constructed belief system that explains economic, political, and social reality to people and establishes collective goals of a class, group, or in the case of a dominant ideology, the elite society (p. 3).

Frith (1997) would argue that the mass media perpetuates patriarchal and male dominated ideology. This is the idea that men comprise the “elite society”. Since the women’s liberation movement, the theory emerged that in “patriarchal cultures a hierarchy exists in which men are at the top and women and animals are similarly positioned as inferior”. Furthermore, the feminist scholars suggest that the media support and uphold this hierarchy (Frith, 1997, p. 13). Research by critical feminist and gender studies scholars is vast and delves into these issues in nearly every sector of the mass media- advertising, radio, film, print, and television.

Previously, this research discussed the theory that heroism, through its mythic conventions, may be a gendered concept. This study is an attempt to test this concept of gendered heroism using one specific and prominent type of hero in American society today- the mediated, athlete hero. It has been suggested that viewers closely identify with and emulate sports figures (Daddario, 1998, Cowan, 2000, and Koivula, 1999), and according to Beck and Bosshart (2003) “television has clearly become the leading medium in the context of sports” (p. 10). This research focuses on whether or not gendered concepts of heroism and mythic hero archetypes are portrayed in sports broadcasting today. If the media covers these athletes in a sexist way, viewers may be internalizing negative perceptions about gender roles and gender stereotypes. If true, this would hinder the progress made towards gender equality in American society today. The

results of this study hope to provide a deeper insight into how sports may teach or reinforce certain ideas, values, and beliefs about gender. Even more significantly, these hero depictions may tell us more about gender roles and beliefs of American society as whole.

Rationale: Why Study Sport?

This study focuses on mediated sport because of the important function it serves in American culture today. According to Creedon (1994), sport is "...the pure spirit of America. It sums up this country; it's what we're all about" (p. 5). To many scholars, especially in the field of sport sociology and gender studies, sport represents a microcosm of American culture that reflects beliefs, attitudes, and values of society at large (Wenner, 1989) .

Wenner (1989) argues that American ideology and character is directly mirrored in the ideology of sports. American culture is rooted in ...achievement and success, activity and work, morality, humanitarianism, efficiency and practicality, progress, material comfort, equality, freedom, external conformity, science and secular rationality, nationalism, democracy, individual personality, and group superiority (Wenner, 1989, p. 23).

Sport culture and ideology bares a striking resemblance to these core American values. Edwards' *American Sports Creed* states that sport "...pinpoints the values of character, discipline, competition, physical fitness, mental fitness, religiosity, and nationalism" of American society as well (as cited in Wenner, 1989, p. 23).

Eitzen and Sage (1978) discuss the relationship of sport and societal values as “reciprocal” and “interdependent” (p. 55). This relationship is discussed in the following passage:

The relationship is interdependent because societal values affect the kind of sports that are played, the way they are organized, the way in which they are played, and the motivations for participation in them. But the converse is also true- sport affects values. Sport, like all institutions, is conservative primarily because it reinforces certain values (Eitzen and Sage, 1978, p. 55).

The theory that sport not only reflects and transmits societal values but also has the ability to reinforce and teach them, is significant given the degree to which mediated sports are followed in this country. Elite sporting events receive a large amount of coverage in nearly all media channels- in radio, magazines, newspapers, film, and on television (Wenner, 1989). Gerbner (2001) sees television and its programs, as the new cultural indicators and transmitters of beliefs, attitudes, and values, within American society. Wenner (1989) argues that televised sport, due to its popularity among viewers, exemplifies Gerbner’s theory, for “mass communicated and highly commercialized sport culture is easily related to myriad issues concerning socialization, interpersonal communication, value formation, racial and gender assessments, and the balance of political and economic power” (p. 16). How does sport project these value systems? Research suggests that it is the unique way in which viewers relate to athletes as role models, and more specifically, as heroes.

According to Goodman (2002) “The media allow their audiences close association with successful sports figures, and according to social learning theory,

provide powerful, symbolic models for the public to emulate” (p. 375). Mediated sports effects research stems from traditional media effects research of audience participation and personal investment in television characters. Brown, Basil, and Bocarnea (2003) describe viewers’ personal investment and identification with mediated athletes as an extremely strong “parasocial relationship”. It is this “parasocial relationship with an athlete regarded as a public role model [that] likely leads to audience identification with that person, which in turn promotes certain attitudes and beliefs” (Brown, et al., 2004, p. 43). Brown, et al. also (2001) suggest that the popularity of sports figures in American media, allows this “parasocial relationship” to reach a large population of people:

Like the inordinate media attention given to royalty, famous athletes also draw extensive media coverage as televised sports expands its audience. Public knowledge of the personal lives of athletes is greater today than it has ever been in any point in history. News of professional athletes, their activities, their spoken words, and their lifestyles provide a means of social influence to large numbers of people (p. 43).

Athletes therefore, provide American society with a modern hero, for the “athlete hero in America is...the supreme role model” (Goodman, et al., 2002, p. 375). The power of mediated sports heroes to influence behavior may act as a double edged sword. While they serve to instill and reinforce positive values such as discipline, hard work, success, team work, and fitness, they have also been accused of teaching or reinforcing negative values, such as racism, sexism, and homophobia.

Numerous scholars have studied the power of mediated sports coverage to cultivate and reinforce both positive and negative attitudes, values, and beliefs about

gender in American culture today (Creedon, 1994, Beck and Bosshart, 2003, Daddario, 1998). This study builds on research that suggests male and female athletes are portrayed differently in televised media coverage.

Cowan (2001) suggest that sport perpetuates dominant patriarchal and masculine beliefs. For example, found that “masculine hegemony is reinforced in sport culture and that boys copy...sporting heroes” (p. 2). In *Boys, masculinity and television violence: what is the difference between superheroes and football heroes?*, a study on the effects of viewing violence and aggression in televised sporting events. Cowan (2001) states that

The actions of television characters such as superheroes are interpreted as interfering with social emotional factors associated with formation of gender identity at an early age. Interestingly what is being overlooked is the idea that little boys watching televised sporting violence are learning behaviors identified with masculine hegemony in the wider society (2001, p. 5).

The majority of scholars believe that sport is still a male dominated arena that rewards hyper-masculinity; therefore, female athletes, especially elite athletes, have yet to be portrayed as equals in the media (Daddario, 1994, Creedon, 1984, Cashmore, 1996, Koivula, 1999). According to Tuggle, et al. (2002),

The degree to which the media covers female athletes helps mold society’s view of female athletes and its perceptions of women in general. Sports media reflect, shape, and may even help create attitudes and values about what type of sports participation is appropriate and acceptable for females (p. 365).

In order to fully understand these claims, one must first discuss the history behind the rise of both the male and female mediated sports hero in American society.

The Athlete: America's Modern Hero

Goodman, et al.(2002), states that male sports figures in modern American society have evolved from Campbell and Jung's hero archetypes and myths of the past:

Cambell documents an archetypal hero who may have varying visages, but typically is male. Descriptions of male heroism are frequently found in Warrior tales of old and more recently, in media coverage of major sporting events. In particular, Farrell found the media celebrated 'the American dream' through the hero / anti-hero personas of *male* Olympic athletes (Goodman, et al., 2002, p. 374).

Within the athletic subculture of American society, elite male athletes represent just one of the modern manifestations of the hero archetype. Athletes are exalted in American culture, much like mythic heroes of the past, because "society commonly projects and personifies their cultural ideals into specific 'people-types'", and athletes provide ideal models (Leonard, 1993, p. 63). Athletes "manifest typically the major value orientations and symbols that a society holds in high regards" (Leonard, 1993, p. 63). Creedon (1994) found that because of the respect and admiration elite athletes will receive from their hero status, mediated sporting events have the ability to influence

...our language, clothing styles, and concepts of heroes and heroines. Its athletes and teams become our symbolic warriors defending the honor of our schools, towns, or nation. Its games and struggles become our symbolic representations of

personal and societal struggles for such things as property, fairness, honor, and economic gain (Creedon, 1994, p. 203).

The characteristics of the athlete hero are strikingly similar to the ancient warrior characteristics of heroes in the past. Elite male athletes are for their physical and mental strength and endurance, their personal ambition and determination, their handsome physique, their courage in the face of hardship, and their desire to fight and win against daunting odds.

Typical of the Campbell's archetypal heroes of the ancient past, however, the athlete hero represented in female form has been a minority. If athletics mimic society at large, the deficiency of the female athlete hero is not surprising. The ideal characteristics and attributes of the warrior hero are, for the most part, what society has deemed masculine in nature (Pearson, 1986). If the heroes of a culture reflect current societal values and ideals, it is logical, therefore, that the majority of sports heroes in the past have typically been male. The rise of the women's rights movement as well as equal opportunity legislation in the early seventies however, gave rise to the female elite athlete and subsequently the rise of the female athlete as a societal hero (Daddario, 1998).

The Rise of the Female Athlete

In 1972, Congress passed Title IX. This piece of legislation provided equal funding for female athletic programs. Lucas (2000) writes,

The number of young women participating in interscholastic athletics prior to Title IX was 300,000; by 1996, this number had grown to almost 2.25 million young women. Females now represent 37 percent of all high school athletes, 33 percent of

all college athletes and approximately 39 percent of US Olympic team members (p. 151).

In fact, Daddario (1998) argues that since Title IX, the female athlete has become a symbol of the progress women have made towards full emancipation, freedom, and equality in American society. While many feminist sports critics believe that elite female athletes have reached an unprecedented level of respect and admiration since Title IX, many argue that televised coverage of female sporting events as well as coverage of female athletes is still gendered and unequal to that of male coverage. (Daddario,1998, Creedon, 1994).

The Research Question

This study attempts to answer the following questions with respect to the televised narratives of athletes participating in the 2006 Winter Olympics.

R1: Are male and female athletes portrayed using identical hero archetypes?

R2: If these representations differ according to gender, could these narratives be negatively or positively influencing viewers, and what do they suggest about gender beliefs, the media, and American culture today?.

The following review of the literature discusses previous literature and research conducted on televised media coverage of female sports and the elite athletes within them.

A Review of the Literature

While there have not been many extensive studies conducted on gendered heroism in major televised sporting events, a variety of research has been conducted on both the quantity and quality of televised sports coverage. Studies have focused on how and why media coverage at nearly all levels of athletic competition seems to be gendered, from the air time allotted, to imagery and camera angles, to the language used sports commentators.

Sports and Gender Appropriateness

Eleanor Methany (1965), one of the first feminist sports critics, proposed that female athletic participation is grounded in traditional Victorian ideals such as physical limitations of the female body and societal norms of female inferiority. In order to be labeled acceptable for female participation, a sport could not challenge or defy these deep rooted beliefs held by both men and women of the time. From the beginning of human civilizations, sports and games served as a clear definition of the masculine, rewarding participants for aggression, strength, skill, courage, mental toughness, and speed. Clearly, women were not thought to possess these capabilities, for they were seen as passive, weak, and nurturing. Cashmore (1996) writes “Women, it was thought, were closer to nature than men: their duties should be confined to those nature conferred on them, like childbearing and rearing. Their role was to nurture” (p. 122). Despite the push of the women’s suffrage movement, the liberation movement, and equal opportunity legislation

in the twentieth century, many scholars would argue that media coverage still suffers from this traditional ideology. Daddario (1998) writes:

Most people would agree that institutional sports and media have been the patriarchal preserve of men. This is evident in the sports that have been adopted by high schools, colleges, and professional leagues, such as football, basketball and baseball, which are among the most popular sports on television. Tennis, golf, and most recently, figure skating and basketball, are the only women's sports to be aired with regularity on television (p. 1).

In their research, several feminist sports critics argue that while progress is being made, media coverage still adheres to the idea of male and female appropriateness (Daddario, 1998; Koivula, 1999, Creedon, 1994, McGinnis, et al., 2003, Cashmore, 1990).

Most scholars would agree that perceived physical and emotional differences of men and women have dictated what female sports were covered, the quantity of coverage, and lastly, the depth and quality of the coverage. In her book, *Making Sense of Sports*, Cashmore (1990) traces the history of female athletic participation. She describes these perceived differences applied to the sporting world in the following passage:

Snyder and Spreitzer write about the types of sport women have been encouraged or discouraged from pursuing. 'The 'appropriateness' of the type of sport continues to reflect the tenets of the Victorian ideal of femininity (1983: 156).

They go on to identify three types. The categorically unacceptable includes combat sports, some field events, and sports that involve attempts to subdue physically opponents by body contact, direct application of force to a heavy object and, and face-to face opposition where body contact may occur. Generally

not acceptable forms of opposition include most field events, sprints, and long jump; these strength-related events are acceptable, the authors believe, only for the 'minority group' women, particularly, we presume, ethnic minorities. Sports that involve the projection of the body through space in aesthetically pleasing patterns or the uses of light implement are generally acceptable for all women; no body contact is possible in sports such as swimming, gymnastics, figure skating, and tennis (Cashmore, 1996, p. 123).

Televised coverage of the Olympics games seems to adhere to this concept of gender appropriate sporting events. In her book, *Women's Sport and Spectacle: Gendered Television and the Olympic Games*, Daddario (1998) states that certain female competitions receive large amounts of coverage, even more at times, than male coverage. Events such as women's figure skating and gymnastics "continue to be dominated by female athletes, despite male athletes' full participation. These sports tend to be perceived and identified as 'feminine sports' because they emphasize the grace, movement, and beauty of the female body" (Daddario, 1998, p. 58). Male coverage of these events exist, but female coverage far exceed it. However, several studies on Olympic coverage show that sporting events which do not fit the feminine ideal are rarely covered.

Vincent's (2003) study on newspaper coverage of female athletes during the 1996 Olympic Games focused on the articles and photographs of four female team sports and four female individual sports in the Olympic Games. The researchers coded for several descriptors such as physical appearance/ attire, psychological characteristics, physical strength/ athleticism, and family role, which were coded either positively or negatively. Page and section prominence was also coded for. Most significantly, Vincent (2003)

found that “female athletes are under-reported or trivialized compared to their male counterparts, and female athletes competing in the traditionally ‘GA’ [girl appropriate] individual sports are over-represented compare to their peers competing in ‘GI’ [girl inappropriate] team sports” (p. 3).

Studies focusing on televised coverage show similar results. Tuggle, Huffman, and Rosenguard’s (2002) study, *A Descriptive Analysis of NBC’s Coverage of the 2000 Summer Olympics*, recorded a total of 42.9 hours of Olympic broadcasting coverage. The footage was then coded for

...sport, length of the segment, the type of presentation, the gender of the participants, the role of the quoted sources, whether the segment was presented live or edited in condensed form, whether the competition involved physical power or hard body contact as a primary component, and whether the individual or team medals were at stake (p. 367).

As predicted, results show that “women received proportionally less coverage in 200 than they did in 1996 on the US network, and that coverage focused on individual events, with women competing in team sports receiving relatively little coverage. As was the case in 1996, women who competed in 2000 in sports involving power or hard physical contact received almost no attention” (p. 361).

Wilson’s (1996) historical analysis, *The IOC and the Status of Women in the Olympic Movement: 1972-1996*, traces the female Olympic movement from 1972-1996, and analyzes both the failures and successes female athletes have obtained within the context of media coverage. Wilson (1996) states that while the IOC’s media coverage has made significant progress over the past twenty-years in terms of equitable gender

coverage, significant gains are still necessary: “To say, however, the growth of the women’s program represents a wide range of sports events is not to deny that the Olympic program in its present, for it reflects longstanding gender constructs” (8); Wilson (1996) also notes that by the 1996 Olympics games, “three of the six remaining men-only sports are quintessentially ‘male’ by any traditional definition” (p. 8). Furthermore, two of the most popular events of both the Summer and Winter Olympics games for decades have been figure skating and gymnastics; both sports traditionally involve younger, aesthetically pleasing women, competing in graceful and artful positions (Wilson, 1996, p. 8).

Critical sport literature shows that a very small percentage of air time is allotted for those sports in which the female athlete’s body does not fit the feminine ideal such as weightlifting, field events, and various team sports. In her book, *Sporting Females*, Hargreaves (1986) states that for sportswomen,

Performance must be compatible with what is taken to be feminine and deviant cases are treated very critically from a conventionalist standpoint. The first way this accomplished is in the routine practice of commenting on the attractiveness of sportswomen. Attention drawn in linguistic and visual presentation to the face and body shape, size, deportment, dress, hair style, and so on (p. 152).

According to Hargreaves (1994) “The particular favorites of the media- more likely to be photographed for the press or appear on TV to be interviewed- tend to be the conventionally pretty, or more sexually attractive sportswomen” (p. 52). Guttman (1991), also states that “the most popular female athletes in the Olympic past were women who fit the feminine mold, such as Nadia Comaneci, Mary Lou Rentton, and Katerina Witt,

for these girls were ‘everybody’s teenage daughter, not ‘masculinized’ symbols of an ideological challenge” (p. 244). While here it is shown that the type of sport plays a large role in the media coverage women receive, several studies focus on the verbal commentary given during female competition compared to their male counterparts.

Gendered Commentary: Media Coverage and the Olympic Games

Sports commentary is gender biased, in many instances, women not only receive less coverage than men, they also receive poorer quality coverage (Daddario, 1998). This lack of equal coverage, according to some scholars may breed and reinforce a sense of inferiority in female viewers and perpetuate superiority in male viewers. According to Angelini (2005), “...despite the fact that there is an increased amount of women’s sports being telecast, there are inherent differences in both the way the sports commentators speak about the female athletes, as compared to their male counterparts, and in the production techniques used in broadcasting each” (p. 2). Using this logic, Angelini (2005) used self reports of both male and female sports viewers and to conclude that “male and female subjects experience different levels of dominance while watching sports featuring male and female athletes” (p. 1).

Other scholars argue that several different themes within sports coverage and commentary may, intentionally and perhaps at times, unintentionally, serve to marginalize women and understate their athletic performance and abilities as competitors. These strategies include: the understating of athletic ability, stereotyping, infantilization of female athletes, trivialization, attributing athletic success to other forces, and

portraying female athletes in other identifying roles. These themes culminate into what Duncan and Brummet (1993) argue is a trend of sexist ideology within female sports coverage.

Passive Women and Active Men

Several studies suggest that female sports coverage portrays women in passive emotional roles it portray men in active, mentally tough roles. Duncan and Messner (1998) found that women are more likely to be shown crying or being consoled by others when compared to their male counterparts when failure occurs. Furthermore, Duncan and Messner (1998), claim that female athletic success is often attributed to other forces rather than the sheer athletic ability of the female athlete. Failure is often attributed to a female's emotions. For example, Hillard found that in women's tennis, emotional vulnerability was the primary explanation for failure" (cited in McGinnis, et al., 2003, p. 10). Other scholars focus on the passive versus active portrayal of women in televised coverage of the Olympics. Daddario (1998) argues that female success is often attributed not to a woman's individual strengths, but rather to the abilities and power of her coaches (often men). For example, Guttman (1991) discusses how the media frame the famous gymnastics coach Bela Karolyi as the "the magician who transformed little girls into athletic heroines" (p. 248). Bela Karolyi was responsible for his athletes' success, not the individual "girls". This phrase "little girl" refers to the next theme of gendered sports commentary- the infantilization of female athletes in sports commentary.

Infantilization and Condensing Descriptors

Daddario (1998) trivialized and demeaned using strategies of infantilization and condescending descriptors. Daddario (1998) states that in the 1992 Albertville Olympics, the media used descriptors that “diminished the sexuality of some athletes by reducing them to adolescent, often prepubescent, status, despite the fact that some athletes were their in their mid- and late- 20s at the time of the Games” (70). Daddario (1998) cites the identifiers and coverage of speed skater Bonnie Blair as well in the following passage:

Olympic gold-medal speed skater Bonnie Blair is referred to as “America’s little sister” and “America’s favorite girl next door.” In a videotaped Valentine’s Day tribute, one announcer objectified Blair further: “Someone once wrote of Bonnie Blair, she’s the kid sister of all America, as genuine as peanut butter and jelly. Here at Albertville, she’s as smooth as peanut butter on ice and as sweet as jelly off ice (p. 70)

Blair is not the only athlete subject to such condescending descriptors. For example, speed skater Kathleen Turner was 29 years old in her prime and was labeled “Tinkerbell” (Daddario, 1998, p. 70). Female athletes, especially in female appropriate sports are depicted as “little girls”, “ladies”, and “pixies” in the mediated sports world.

Commentators also refer to female athletes more often by their first name while they refer to men by their last names (McGuinness, et al., 2003, p. 13). This suggests that females play the role of subordinates, while males play the role of dominants in sports commentary. Furthermore, “Dworkin and Messner describe media framing of Olympic

men gymnasts and women athletes as vulnerable, powerless, and in the hands of their coaches or superiors, also suggesting infantilization” (McGuinness, et al., 2003, p. 10).

Other condescending descriptors used in sports commentary involve the comparison of female athleticism or skill to the ideal male ability, or rather the ability of a woman to mimic or match male athletic skill levels. Daddario (1998) highlights examples from the 1992 Winter Olympics, “Swiss slalom skier Vreni Schnieder was compared directly to male skiers: ‘Schnieder is one of the first women in the world to ski like the men with such direct line, taking full advantage of the armor and padding that they wear these days’” (p. 66). In general, “descriptors applied to female athletes engaging in ‘masculine’ sport tend to resemble descriptors applied to male athletes rather than to descriptors applied to female athletes engaged in more ‘feminine sport’ (Daddario, 1998, p. 67).

Other Identifying Roles

Many scholars also argue that the media portray female athletes in “other” identifying roles. White (1995) and Daddario (1998) agree that commentary for female athletes is more likely to emphasize roles other than that of athlete and competitor, such as mother, wife, sister, and daughter. Placing emphasis on situations and roles outside of the athletic realm takes away from the athletic skill and ability of the athletes. Graydon argues that these findings show a need by the media, and perhaps society in general, to “...render them [female athletes] as nonthreatening. If an accomplished athlete is also portrayed in roles that are valued in patriarchal society, such as wife and mother, then she

cannot threaten sports hegemony” (as cited in Daddario, 1998, p. 25). Furthermore, Horne, Tomlinson, and Whannal (1999) state that “commentators...focus on personalities as opposed to athletic abilities which covering women’s sports” (p. 172). This literature indicates a gender divide in media coverage of female athletes; however, it is important to note, most would agree that, gradually, coverage is improving on many levels (Beck & Bosshart, 2005).

The coverage of female athletes shows a striking relationship to mythic heroic archetypes proposed by Campbell and Pearson. Coverage that identifies female athletes in other roles such as mother, wife, daughter, and sister, directly correlates to the altruist archetype of traditional mythology. Similarly, the tendency of media commentary to focus on the emotional weaknesses and personality of the athlete instead of her physical capabilities and skill, also suggest that elite female athletes may serve to fill the position of the altruist: the hero that sacrifices, that nurtures, and that loves. Lastly, infantilization of female athletes also suggests a relationship to the mythic archetype of orphan and innocent. The warrior hero archetype seems to typify the coverage given to most male elite athletes since coverage emphasizes “masculine” combat sports, aggression, strength, active roles, individuality, courage, perseverance, and skills; however, little research exists that studies the direct correlation of male and female athletes and mythic hero archetypes despite the important role our heroes and myths play in society today.

Goodman, et al. (2002) study, *Olympic Athletes and Heroism in Advertising: Gendered Concepts of Valor*, focuses on the ways in which televised commercials featuring Olympic athletes are portrayed according to Jung and Campbell’s hero archetypes and whether or not a trend exists by gender. The authors conducted both a

semiological study and qualitative content analysis from forty, six hour tapes of the 2000 NBC Summer Olympics. The commercials were coded using the characteristics of the six hero archetypes laid out by Pearson (1986): the innocent, the orphan, the wanderer, the martyr/ caregiver (altruist), the warrior, and the magician.

The study examines advertisers' use of jungian-based concepts of heroism and gendered concepts of heroism. Goodman, et al. (2002) suggests that Olympic athletes serve as a perfect subject for a study on gendered heroism, since

Olympic athletes, particularly winning ones, are de facto 'hero/ heroines'. Oriard argues that contests like the Olympics are particularly well suited to the manufacture of heroes because they are created in an 'apolitical, asocial, amoral, even timeless, placeless quality of the athletic contest itself (p. 375).

The researchers apply the stages of the archetypal hero to athletes featured in Olympic commercials and found that "male and female athletes were equally portrayed as Warriors", however, "male athletes were more likely to be portrayed as preparing for and doing battle successfully while female athletes were more likely to be celebrated for their athletic skills and achievements" (Goodman, et al., 2002, p. 374).

This research attempts to build on Goodman's study of gendered heroism and Olympic athletes. It focuses on Olympic coverage of athletes outside of the commercial sector, and instead, analyzes a sample of Olympic narratives from coverage of the 2006 Winter Olympic Games in Torino, Italy.

Methodology

The data for this research was collected based on a convenience sampling of the televised coverage of the 2006 Winter Olympics in Torino, Italy. The author conducted this study for a single semester honors thesis in the communication department of a New England university. Only U.S. coverage by the NBC network and its affiliate stations were utilized for this study.

The 2006 Winter Olympics featured fifteen events: alpine skiing, figure skating, bobsleigh, skeleton, snowboarding, speed skating, Nordic combined, cross country skiing, biathlon, luge, ski jumping, short track, ice hockey, and curling. Because of the number of events during the Winter Games, combined with the limited resources and time constraints of the study, I selected and narrowed the coverage that would be used. Since this research aimed to study Olympic coverage using gender criticism, I began by narrowing the sports coverage to two Olympic competitions: the individual figure skating competitions and the men and women's skeleton competitions. The two sports were chosen for the following reasons. Both competitions feature single athletes competing one at a time. This is desirable since this research focused on how athletes were portrayed as individual heroes. Coverage for sports such as ice hockey or bobsleigh for example, would more likely focus on a collective form of team heroism and would not prove appropriate for answering the research question of this study.

Figure skating and skeleton were also selected based on the characteristics and specific elements each sport, one is female appropriate and the other is male appropriate. Since success in figure skating and skeleton was based on contrasting elements of athletic

performance, narrowing the focus to these competitive events allowed the researcher to study how both male and female athletes are portrayed in a stereotypically masculine and a feminine arena. Optimally, this selected footage would create a more complete and comprehensive analysis given the researchers time and resource constraints.

I primarily studied the narratives of individual athletes highlighted during the Olympic coverage. These vignettes or narratives were selected for several different reasons. First, the narratives give the initial introduction of the athlete outside of the actual athletic competition. The narratives briefly told the athlete's story- their rise to glory, fall from grace, their obstacles, their personality, their hobbies, or their family. These athletes may be the crowd favorites, the most well known, those that are anticipated to medal, those whose life stories prove most inspiring or most interesting, or even the athletes the public loved to hate. The narratives featuring both male and female competitors were video taped over the course of the sixteen day Olympic spectacle which began on February 10th, 2006 and ended February 26th, 2006.

The original research design changed after the recording sessions were viewed. I found that a disproportionate amount of coverage time and a disproportionate number of narratives existed between the two selected sports. While there were an adequate number of narratives featuring both male and female figure skaters, there were very few narratives featuring the skeleton. It would be difficult to compare the two different narratives. I did find, however, that during the recording sessions, many other Olympic sporting events were covered. There was a wide variety of narratives featuring both male and female athletes in events such as snowboard cross, speed skating, and skiing. I therefore altered the original methodology and I decided to code all of the narratives that

I found during the recording sessions. I felt that a larger number of narratives in a wider range of winter sports would provide more information for an in depth analysis of the research question.

I conducted a qualitative textual analysis of the narratives videotaped. I categorized each athlete as one major archetype: warrior, altruist, or orphan/innocent by developing a coding system (*table 1*) that incorporated the major characteristics and elements of each archetype using guidelines from the Goodman, et al (2002) study. Each athlete was categorized as a warrior, an altruist, an orphan/innocent, or a combination of all three. This was based on whether or not the athlete exhibited one or more of the characteristics and elements developed for each specific archetype. Additionally, I used a secondary set of coding of characteristics (*table 2*) that provided basic information such as gender, age, and medal contention of the athletes.

(Table 1)

	Code	
Warrior	W	Skill, Discipline, Strength, Struggle (or lack of)
Skill	S	Physical skill level and master of sport, speed, agility, talent, creativity, technique, and performance
Discipline	D	Emotional and physical discipline, commitment, rigorous training schedule, high intensity level.
Strength	SG	Physical and emotional strength or power, force, fight, will, muscle, aggression, physical and mental toughness, control, courage, mental and physical superiority in the sport.
Struggle	ST	Obstacles, past or current injury or illness, past competitive losses or disappointments, familial hardships, financial hardships, death or loss of a loved one.
Altruist	A	Sacrifice, Compassion (or lack of)
Sacrifice	SF	Personal sacrifices for their sport, their country, and their loved ones.
Compassion	CO	Selfless, friendly, mature, passionate, motherly/fatherly, generous, kind, compassionate, displays good sportsmanship.
Orphan	O	Interdependency, Innocence, Victimization/ Abandonment (or lack of)
Interdependency	I	Success is attributed a third party, such as a family member, a coach, friends, or a higher power (God).
Innocence	IN	Youth, inexperience, or immaturity
Victimization / Abandonment	VA	A victim of an unfair or unjust situation or event, lack of support or abandonment.

(Table 2)

General Characteristics	Code
Male	M
Female	F
Teen (-17)	T
Young adult (18-25)	YA
Mature adult (26+)	MA
Medalist	MD

After categorizing each athlete as a warrior, orphan, or altruist, I attempted to determine whether or not a pattern or trend existed in the coverage of hero-athletes based on gender. These findings and implications of the data were then used answer and begin a discussion of the initial research questions.

Findings

A total of twenty-seven narratives were recorded over the two week Olympic spectacle. Thirteen narratives featured female athletes and fourteen narratives featured male athletes. The following table (*table 3*) gives a summary of what hero archetype each athlete was categorized as.

(Table 3)

<u>Athlete</u>	<u>Warrior</u>	<u>Altruist</u>	<u>Orphan</u>
Female			
<i>Tugba Karadamir</i>			X
<i>Rosey Fletcher</i>	X		
<i>Irina Slutskaya</i>	X	X	
<i>Sylvia Fontana</i>		X	
<i>Sasha Cohen</i>	X		X
<i>Svetlana Zhurova</i>		X	X
<i>M. Wang</i>			X
<i>Lindsey Jacobellis</i>	X		
<i>Courtney Kennedy</i>	X		X
<i>Sara Parsons</i>	X		X
<i>Diana Sarton</i>		X	
<i>Lindsey Jacobellis</i>	X		
<i>Maya Pederson</i>		X	
13	Total: 7	Total: 5	Total: 6
Male			
<i>Jeret Peterson</i>	X		
<i>Joey Cheek</i>		X	
<i>Johnny Weir</i>	X		
<i>Benny Reich</i>		X	X
<i>Bodey Miller</i>	X		
<i>Ted Ligety</i>	X		
<i>Yevgeny Pleshenko</i>	X		
<i>Bodey Miller</i>	X		
<i>Seth Wescott</i>	X		
<i>Graham Wantanabe</i>	X		
<i>Nate Holland</i>	X		
<i>Seth Wescott</i>	X	X	
<i>Evan Lysceik</i>	X		
Apollo Anton Ohno	X	X	
14	Total: 12	Total: 4	Total: 1

The trends of the data suggested that male and female athletes were depicted differently using traditional hero archetypes. Perhaps the most striking trend in the data set was the number of males (10) depicted only as warrior heroes when compared to the number of females (3) depicted only as warrior heroes. Warrior traits for the most part, were characterized as the norm in male narratives, while for female athletes, warrior traits were characterized as an exception to the norm. For example, gold medalist figure skater, Yevgeny Pleshenko, was described as “unbeatable”, “flawless”, “calm”, and “disciplined”. Snowboard cross champion, Seth Wescott, was described as “fearless”, “competitive”, and “focused”. Bodey Miller, an athlete who failed to live up to his Olympic gold medal aspirations, was described as “aggressive” and “fast”. He failed not because of flawed athleticism, but rather because of bad luck. Miller had simple “bad luck” in one event and flawed skis in another. At one point in the narrative, the commentator did comment on Miller’s athletic ineptitude, but he managed to frame this flaw in a positive light. The commentator stated: “Failure is bound to happen when you are skating that fast and that aggressive”. These portrayals were similar to the Campbell’s depictions of warrior heroes in myths of the past. The commentary focused on physical dominance, skill, aggression, and strength.

The female warrior athletes did share similar characteristics with their male counterparts; however, certain qualifiers were used in female coverage that were absent in male coverage. The data showed that female athletes were described more as outliers or exceptions to the female standard of athleticism. For example, two of the three narratives featured the snowboard cross medalist Lindsey Jacobellis. This athlete was described as “a fighter”, a girl that is “ready for action”, “fearless”, and a “fierce

competitor”. The narrator even comments on her mental strength: “When is comes to pressure, this girl says bring it on”. At first, these depictions seem to suggest that both male and female coverage in this category is similar and fairly equal; however, as the narrative continued, the coverage shifted.

The commentator stated that “she [Lindsey Jacobellis] loves to train with the guys... it helps to build her confidence”. She was then described as having “stunning looks”. In the last section of the segment, Jacobellis stated: “Its fun to be doing a guy sport but still maintain being a woman and just being graceful about it”. In the last sound bite, the narrator suggested that “times have changed” and that Jacobellis helped girls everywhere realize “that women can be great athletes”. Jacobellis was initially praised for her aggression, confidence, and skills, yet, this seemed to be offset by the reference to her good looks and acknowledgement that she was a visitor in a male dominated and owned sport. Furthermore, she was depicted as a role model and a heroin to aspiring female athletes. This narrative seemed to imply, that the female warrior hero is rare, acceptable, and admirable as long as the athlete maintains her grace, femininity and “stunning looks”. Commentary for the male warrior athletes did not consist of these qualifiers even in popular “female appropriate sports” such as figure skating. Narratives for skaters such as Johnny Weir, Yevgeny Pleshenko, and Evan Lysceik did not include a defense or reminder of the athletes’ masculinity. Furthermore, at no point did the commentary suggest that figure skating was owned or dominated by the female gender; it was not depicted as a “girls” sport.

Female athletes were more often depicted using characteristics of the altruist hero, the orphan hero, or a combination of both archetypes. Three female athletes, Slyvia

Fontana, Diana Sarton, and Maya Pederson, were depicted using solely altruist characteristics. Fontana's commentary focused on her dedication and love for her country, not on her figure skating skills. Diana Sarton's commentary solely featured commentary on her family life. Commentators focused on her pregnancy, stating that it was her last Olympic games because she was "excited to start a family"; commentators also mentioned her boyfriend, a doubles luge competitor. Commentary for Diana Sarton also concentrated on her altruist role as mother, for she "put her sliding career on hold to give birth to her daughter named Miriam who turns two in just four days". Only one male athlete, speed skater Joey Cheek, was depicted using solely altruist characteristics. Narrators focused on his kind nature and good sportsmanship.

Three female and one male athlete were depicted only as orphan heroes. For example, figure skater Tugba Karadimir was characterized by interdependence and innocence. The commentators attributed her success to the success and sacrifice of her parents, it was "not the sacrifice of the athlete" since her "father and mother sacrificed their whole lives for her and moved to Canada". Narrators also commented on her innocence and youth: "for she [Karadimir] is young and twenty and can't understand". Speed Skater, M. Wang was also portrayed as an orphan hero. The narrative focused more on the merits of her coach. The commentary explained Wang's rise to greatness because her coach gave her a second chance when no one else would. Wang's success in the upcoming race was described as her coach's first gold medal. No male athletes were depicted solely as orphan archetypes.

Five female athletes were depicted through a combination of hero archetypes as opposed to four males athletes depicted in combination roles. Three narratives portrayed

female athletes as a combination of both the warrior and orphan archetypes. Silver medalist figure skater Sasha Cohen was both a warrior and an orphan. The commentary discusses her struggles to find the right coach for her [interdependence] and also discusses her personal journey to find herself. Commentators stated “She [Sasha] left as a young girl and she came back as a young lady”. The narrative also depicts Cohen as warrior hero by stating that she finished her “personal journey and emotional struggle” and come back as a “strong”, “powerful” and “committed” athlete. Hockey star Courtney Kennedy was also depicted using characteristics of both the warrior and orphan archetypes. The narrator praised her prowess, confidence, and aggression on the ice, yet simultaneously discussed her dependence on her family for support and guidance. Similarly, hockey youth Sara Parsons was depicted as both a warrior and an orphan. The narrators referenced her youth, her dependence on her family, her skills and her struggles, simultaneously. For example, the narrators state that she is a “great young lady” and “despite her age she has established herself” even though at times, “the road was tough”. Narrators also note that she is “a big fan of Kenny Chesney and the OC....she is a young woman with great taste....she is fiercely bright”. No male athletes were depicted as both warrior and orphan heroes.

One female athlete and two male athletes were depicted as both warrior and altruist heroes. Speed Skater Apollo Anton Ohno was characterized by his compassion and good nature. The narrators focused on this athlete’s dedication to the youth of the sport: “He makes the time to teach the next generation of skaters about the sport he loves so much”. The narrators, however, also discuss his passion and love for the sport and dangerous nature of the event. These sound bites focus on Ohno as the warrior hero. One

female athlete was depicted as both a warrior and altruist hero. Russian gold medal hopeful, Irina Slutskaya, was depicted using altruist and warrior hero characteristics. The narrative focuses on the struggles and sacrifices she has faced in her life and in her sport. For example, the narrators discuss how she struggles with her mother's illness. They describe her as a loving and committed daughter. Commentary also focuses on Slutskaya's own illness, vasculitis, that nearly caused her to quit the sport. She is described as a determined "fighter" that overcame these obstacles. The narrative ends with Slutskaya stating: "If I will do my best, I will do it for my mom and my parents, and my family".

Two athletes, one male and one female, were depicted as both altruists and orphans. Commentary for skier Benjamin Raich focused on altruist characteristics by describing "Benny" as good natured and humble, and a family man that leads a "simple a quiet life". Commentators spoke of Benny's relationship with his father as an essential part of his success [interdependence]: "Benny uses his [father's] wisdom" to succeed in his sports. Female skeleton great, Svetlana Zhurova, was depicted as both an altruist and an orphan hero. Narrators focused on the interdependent relationship between her and her new born baby: "motherhood is the key to her resurgence...her sister is home taking care of him...when asked when she would be back to see him, she knew exactly when as if she was counting down". The focus on Zhurova's motherhood, good nature, and interdependent relationship categorized her as both an altruist and an orphan archetype.

Discussion

The findings of this study seem to support many arguments of the critical feminist perspective of sports in America today. The narratives feature near equal numbers of male and female athletes, yet they do not share similar proportions of archetypal attributes. The number of narratives featuring male athletes only as warrior heroes is disproportionately higher than those narratives featuring female athletes solely as warrior heroes. This finding may support the feminist theory that it is more socially acceptable for male athletes to be portrayed in hypermasculine roles, such as warriors, while it is less acceptable for women to do so. If sports do in fact serve as a microcosm of society at large, then it is possible that our culture in general still views women, for the most part, as unacceptable warrior heroes.

The findings show that female athletes in this study are more likely to be portrayed using a combination of the warrior, altruist, and orphan archetypes. This finding supports feminist literature that suggests female athletes are commonly viewed in roles other than athlete. For example, several narratives portrayed female athletes as altruist heroes, focusing on their roles as mothers, daughters, and wives in combination with their role of athlete and competitor. This may suggest the need for the media, and perhaps society, to reaffirm a female's traditional caregiver role and femininity. Fewer male athletes were depicted in these altruist hero roles. Furthermore, more female athletes were depicted as orphan heroes in combination with other archetypes. This supports the claims by scholars, such as Daddario (1998), that women are infantilized in sports media coverage. In the findings, narrators comment on the physical appearance of female

athletes more often than the male athletes, and they refer to females more often using condescending descriptors such as “young lady” or “young girl”.

In a society where sporting heroes are considered manifestations of archetypal heroes, the differences between male and female athlete portrayals may provide a deeper insight into how our society views larger gender issues. Scholars such as Horrock (1995) suggest that a deep gender divide has existed in the sporting world throughout time, and it reflects a male dominated society:

This split has encouraged feelings of superiority amongst men. No woman could ‘take it like a man’ on the rugby field or the football field. Men continue to be seen as active, women as inert; men are proactive, women inactive (p. 151).

This gender divide, however, may be breaking down:

...women have fought back against the masculinism of sport: the women’s movement in the late nineteenth century campaigned on sport for women, and certain activities became intensely symbolic areas of contestation (Horrock, 1995, p. 152).

The findings of this research however, may just suggest that in the sporting world and perhaps society at large, women have not completely broken down traditional gender roles, and that the media may play a large role in how society constructs these ideas, values, and beliefs.

Bandura’s (1998) theory of cultivation analysis suggested that television is the new storyteller for our generation, and that viewers, especially younger audiences cultivate their own reality by the messages and images on television. Similarly, framing theory suggests that television may also influence the way in which a viewer constructs

his reality. The media have the ability to pick and choose what messages to portray and what framework to portray them in. In the narratives of this study, what messages, ideas, values, and beliefs, could the media be cultivating or framing?

The findings suggest that in these narratives, the media, like traditional mythmakers of the past, are perpetuating a subordinate role for women in our society. Heroes act as role models; they embody the characteristics a society views as most valuable. The narratives suggest that the televised media are cultivating two separate ideals based on gender. Female athletes are respectable and talented athletes; however, they are not acceptable as warrior athletes alone. They must have supporting roles and characteristics of the altruist and orphan hero. It is completely acceptable, if not expected for male athletes to embody only warrior hero attributes. What framework does this message provide for the millions of people that watched these narratives this winter; how might it influence how viewers construct or frame their own realities? The media are sending messages that men are still the dominant, both physically and mentally, gender, and that females still don't measure up. The media's framework in these narratives, like the critical feminist perspective suggests, is still one of patriarchy and male hegemony.

Social cognitive and modeling theories suggest that viewers, especially young viewers, learn behaviors and values from the mass media. Through these narratives, the media may be teaching their younger viewers, especially young women, that they can be great athletes, but they must maintain their femininity and caregiver place in society for these roles are more important. Perhaps, it is still unacceptable to portray athletes such as Lindsey Jacobellis, as fierce, strong, and aggressive, without reminding viewers that she has "stunning good looks". Perhaps, it is more acceptable to admire a female athlete hero

not only for her physical and mental strength, but for her ability to raise a family simultaneously. Sports act as microcosm of society; therefore, one could look at this message in a larger context and apply them other spheres of society, like in the workforce. These narratives might be inadvertently suggesting or perpetuating the message that women are still expected to maintain their altruists and caregivers roles and characteristics despite other identifying roles they hold in society.

It is important to acknowledge the limitations of this study. The sample size of the study was small, and one researcher recorded, viewed, and coded all of the narratives. I also became interested in this work after I had participated as a division one collegiate athlete for four years in a “male appropriate” sporting event. At times, I experienced sexism in athletics first hand. It is important therefore, to acknowledge that possible biases may have existed when conducting this study, for I began this research with a good idea of what I was looking for in these narratives. A more comprehensive sampling of coverage during future Olympic Games is necessary to provide deeper insights into the theories and suggestions of this research study.

Conclusion

The research in this study does show that male and female athletes are portrayed as different forms of archetypal heroes in this sample of the narratives 2006 Winter Olympic coverage. Therefore, the question must be raised: could these media portrayals be influencing viewer ideals, values, and beliefs about gender roles? Are they perpetuating traditional gendered concepts of heroism?

Myths serve to teach and reinforce important societal values. In modern American society today, the mass media replace traditional sources of myth. Television, according to Gerbner (1998), is the most influential channel of this mass media takeover and therefore, it has the ability to teach and reinforce values and beliefs of its viewers. However, media effects research has shown that television may prove even more powerful than traditional sources of myth.

Theories such as social cognitive theory, modeling theory, framing theory, and cultivation theory suggest that mediums such as television have a powerful way of influencing viewer behavior due to the high quantity of television consumed and the unique way in which television allows viewer identification with and imitation of its characters. Sporting events today are primarily transmitted to fans through the mass media, and more specifically, through television. These facts create a disturbing formula since elite athletes today provide one manifestation of the important hero myth in our society. Heroes serve as the personification of those attributes and qualities of human beings that a specific culture holds in highest regards; therefore, elite athletes such as the Olympians in this study should, theoretically, embody these qualities.

The differences found in the narratives of this study might suggest that the media is teaching or reinforcing negative societal values through its portrayals of athletes. Women are acceptable heroes only when they maintain a sense of femininity or when they hold a dual role as caregiver. The findings also suggest that men are still considered the ideal warrior hero that Campbell, Jung, and Pearson, lay out in their research.

It is difficult to pinpoint how these mediated narratives might be affecting their viewers. It is disturbing to think however, that somewhere, a young girl is suiting up for a

soccer game. She is preparing for an aggressive and taxing battle of athleticism yet, before she pulls up her shin guards and ties up her cleats; she makes sure her hair is in place and reaches for some pretty pink bows.

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